

REFORMING CHARM CITY: GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM, POLITICS, AND THE
MAKING OF MODERN BALTIMORE, 1877-1920

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Reforming Charm City: Grassroots Activism, Politics, and the Making of Modern

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“Reforming Charm City: Grassroots Activism and the Making of Modern Baltimore, 1877-1920” uses Baltimore as a case study to explore the ways that race, class, and gender shaped the urban experience in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States. This dissertation examines the Progressive Era from the bottom up. Far from being quiescent subjects of reform, working people built the foundations for equality between 1877 and 1920. Their efforts complicate our understandings of an era too often depicted solely as the triumph of middle-class and elite conceptions of order. Using court records, memoirs, vice reports, newspapers, and government documents this project examines the multiple ways in which Baltimore’s disenfranchised residents challenged entrenched powers, altered political debates, helped establish policies on vice, and reshaped the city’s residential landscape. In so doing, it uncovers a largely neglected history of African-American reformers who laid the foundation for the twentieth century civil rights movement and defeated the nation’s first housing segregation ordinance. Similarly, it documents how workers and other non-elites mounted campaigns to end

political corruption and economic exploitation, and how women from all of these groups addressed a range of urban woes.

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Introduction: The View from Monument Square, 1870

In 1870 most Baltimoreans did not need to be reminded just how much their city had changed over the previous decade. In short order, residents witnessed the fall of the Confederacy, and with it, the end of slavery. Nevertheless, on May 19th, black Baltimoreans demonstrated just how different life was going to be in the city. On “one of the brightest day of the seasons” African Americans streamed into the streets to take part in a grand procession. *The Baltimore Sun* reported that some of the participants had been preparing since the early hours of the morning. In truth, the celebration was decades in the making.¹ The profundity of the moment was certainly not lost on those participating in the parade. The day’s featured speaker, Frederick Douglass, Maryland’s native son and hero to many black Americans, captured the moment best. “When toiling on the plantation we slaves desired to talk of emancipation,” Douglass recalled, “but there stood the overseer and a word would ensure a flogging. To talk about emancipation without being discovered we invented a vocabulary,” Douglass continued, “and when the overseer thought we were talking of the most simple thing we were really speaking of emancipation but in a way that was Greek to him.”² Now Douglass stood in Baltimore’s Monument Square, flanked by thousands of African Americans, some proudly brandishing firearms and openly discussing freedom. Subterfuge was no longer necessary; times had changed indeed.

¹ “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870, 1.

² The newspaper accounts of Douglass’ speech are not written verbatim in any surviving accounts. I used both the reports from *The Baltimore Sun* and the *Baltimore American* to try to reconstruct the speech. The American’s account mixes in what appear to be quotations with summaries. Using the two papers it is possible to be reasonably certain to reconstruct Douglass’ speech, yet the possibility still remains that the quotes attributed to him are imprecise. See: “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870, 1 and “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 May 1870, 1.

On May 19, 1870 African Americans in Baltimore publically celebrated the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, which provided black men with the right to vote. All along the parade route black women and children staked out positions, while whites crowded into doors and windows to take in the spectacle. In total, an estimated 20,000 people participated in and/or witnessed the procession. The spirit of the event was summed up nicely from the opening steps: trailing a phalanx of police officers, a chariot drawn by four horses carried a large bell that constantly rang under a banner emblazoned with “Ring out the old, ring in the new, ring out the false, ring in the true.”³

The parade included among its ranks laborers, bands, community leaders, and beneficial associations. Many hoisted banners with all manners of sayings and illustrations. One group carried a dual-sided picture. On one side Abraham Lincoln appeared accompanied by the words “Our Liberator” and on the other Ulysses S. Grant with a caption reading “Peacemakers.” Others displayed blunt political messages. One marcher exhibited a portrait of Thaddeus Stevens which read, “No government can be free that does not allow all its citizens to participate in the formation and the execution of her laws.” Another cart distributed handbills that reproduced the Fifteenth Amendment, advertised the Freedman’s Savings Bank, and promised, “Every colored vote in Maryland would be cast for the radical ticket.”⁴

Of course, there were also the special guests and featured speakers. At Monument Square, the procession’s terminus, the assemblage was treated to a number of speeches to mark the occasion. Among those who spoke that day were local leaders, like

³ “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870, 1 and “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 May 1870, 1.

⁴ “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870, 1 and “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 May 1870, 1.

Dr. H.J. Brown and Isaac Myers, as well as national figures including the dean of Howard's Law school, John M. Langston, and the Republican Senator from South Carolina, Frederick A. Sawyer. Letters from Charles Sumner and William Lloyd Garrison were also read that afternoon. But as the assembled crowd stood in Monument Square they were surely impatient to hear Douglass' speech.⁵

That afternoon, Frederick Douglass stood before a crowd that the *New York Times* estimated to be between 8,000 and 12,000 strong.⁶ For Douglass, this day represented a new beginning, a theme that he emphasized repeatedly. Although African Americans had taken a monumental step toward equality, Douglass intoned, they had not finished the journey. There was still work to be done. He told the crowd that blacks first received the "cartridge box" shortly followed by the "ballot box." Now they needed to obtain the "jury box" and the "knowledge box" to ensure that future generations prospered. Standing in Baltimore on that late spring afternoon the future looked bright indeed. "I am no orator," Douglass proclaimed. "The orators who are to come up in the hereafter from the colored race will throw me and Langston far into the background. We have a future everything is possible to us."⁷

The early 1870s proved a transitional moment for the people of Baltimore and the United States. As significant changes swept the nation—including the transition from slavery to freedom, urbanization, industrialization, and a boom in population—Baltimore felt each transformation sharply. Located on the precipice between North and South, and using its port to welcome and speak to the wider world, Baltimore sat a political, social

⁵ "The Fifteenth Amendment," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870, 1.

⁶ "The Fifteenth Amendment," *The New York Times*, 20 May 1870, 5.

⁷ "The Fifteenth Amendment," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870, 1 and "The Fifteenth Amendment," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 May 1870, 1.

and cultural crossroads. It was in many ways a northern, industrial city, with a diverse economy, a government dominated by a Democratic machine, and more importantly a rapidly expanding population. Between 1860 and 1920 the total number of Baltimore's residents tripled from 212,418 to 733,826. Fueling these changes in demography were the many people migrating to the city. In 1860, Baltimore's black population (both free and slave) stood at 27,898, but by 1890 it had nearly doubled to 53,715; between 1890 and 1920 the city's African-American population doubled once more to 108,322. Jewish immigration made the city even more diverse. In 1880, Baltimore boasted approximately 10,000 Jewish residents. Ten years later that population increased more than twofold to 24,000 and by 1920 it had ballooned to 65,000.⁸ But if Baltimore seemed northern in some respects it also exhibited marked southern traits. Not surprisingly, many residents and government officials had strong sympathies with the South before, during, and after the Civil War. Baltimore was a place that had exploited slave labor until emancipation, and although its slave population was small, slavery's legal status exerted a disproportionate influence on the city's life.

Baltimore existed as an urban borderland that seemed to offer both promise and peril in equal measures. African Americans, who made up much of Douglass' audience on May 19th, looked forward to the opportunities of which they could now avail themselves following slavery's demise. However, they surely realized the indelible legacy left by the institution and the racism that still permeated the region's politics and

⁸ Population statistics for the African-American population in Baltimore taken from Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985): 62 and from Historical Census Browser. Retrieved 03/12/09 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>. Statistics for the Jewish population retrieved from the Historical Census Browser.

culture. They were not the only ones facing an uncertain future. Immigrants arriving in Baltimore hoped to build new lives in a foreign land. White laborers tried to find their place in a world of dizzying industrialization and increased competition for jobs. Everyone in the city had to adjust to a new existence in a rapidly urbanizing world where society, culture, and law had seemingly turned upside down.

Still, from the vantage point of May 19, 1870 it is difficult to fault Douglass for his optimism. It was an intensely hopeful moment for many reasons. As Douglass noted at the outset of his speech, “When we remember how slavery was interlinked with all our institutions, it is amazing that to-day we witness this demonstration.” If nothing else the question of slavery had been settled and there was reason to hope that the future held much promise.⁹ Unfortunately, the wave of optimism generated at the Fifteenth Amendment celebration crashed hard on the turbulent reality of the 1870s. As historians have documented in great detail, the first full decade following the Civil War was wracked with violence, economic depression, and labor turmoil.¹⁰ Baltimoreans were not immune from these problems. Labor strife, racial tensions, fraudulent elections, and industrialization marked urban life throughout the decade, especially for non-elites. Then in 1877, economic and labor frustrations came to bear when bedlam broke out across the city as the Great Uprising commenced.

⁹ Others had a similar level of optimism. When J.A.J. Creswell, the Postmaster General spoke, he proclaimed that whites should also rejoice for now the promises held in the Declaration of Independence have finally been fulfilled. “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 May 1870, 1 and “The Fifteenth Amendment,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870 1.

¹⁰ The literature is vast. See, for example: David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001); Heather Cox Richardson, *West from Appomattox: The Reconstruction of American After the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Michael A. Bellesiles, *1877: America’s Year of Living Violently* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Robert V. Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence* (New York: The New Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1959); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction, Race, Labor, and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); George C. Rable, *But There Was No Peace: The Role of Violence in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2007).

“Reforming Charm City: Grassroots Activism, Politics, and the Making of Modern Baltimore, 1877-1920” begins with the 1877 railroad strikes and ends with the early twentieth century battles over residential segregation. As such, this study works at the nexus of labor, urban, and African-American history to examine the ways that race, class, and gender shaped the urban experience in the nineteenth and twentieth century United States. “Reforming Charm City” argues that we cannot fully understand the Progressive era without accounting for the vital roles played by African Americans, laborers, women, and immigrants and the dynamic and contested relations among these groups and white authorities. Using court records, vice reports, newspapers, and government documents this study demonstrates the multiple ways in which Baltimore’s disenfranchised challenged entrenched powers, altered political debates, remade the law, helped establish policies on vice, and reshaped the city’s residential landscape.

The scholarship on the Progressive era is voluminous. However, this study is primarily in conversation with the vein of this historiography dealing with social reform and urban order. The bottom-up approach to the study of the past has ushered in a vast rewriting of much of the history of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, unlike the historiography of Reconstruction, the New Deal, and the post-World War II civil rights movement, scholarship on the Progressive era has been, on the whole, less successful in incorporating this approach.¹¹ Even recent works that broaden the

¹¹ A general lack of cohesion in the historiography of the Progressive era contributes to this weakness. Historians have long debated the question of what, if anything, constituted progressive reform. To simplify a vastly more complex debate, some historians argue that the term “Progressive” (as a descriptor for reformers, movement, and epoch) is no longer useful as a historical concept. Scholars, like Peter G. Filene, contend that it is impossible to view the progressive movement as a cohesive set of goals or ideologies. In Filene’s estimation then, the concept of progressivism has become too amorphous to possess any true meaning. In answering Filene’s critiques, historian Daniel T. Rodgers contends that historians should cease looking for a cohesive Progressive ideology or movement. Instead, Rodgers argues that scholars should instead recognize progressivism as the “surroundings of available rhetoric and ideas—akin

traditional narrative of the period by incorporating female activists and transnational intellectual exchanges maintain a top-down focus.¹² This elite-centric interpretation cannot account for interactions that occurred across race, class, and gender lines.

One approach to broadening the historical view of the Progressive era is to better synthesize strands of scholarship that are too often treated in isolation. This is particularly true in regards to African-American history. By incorporating black activism, “Reforming Charm City” contributes to the literature concerning the nadir of race relations and the history of the long black freedom struggle. Since the publication of

to the surrounding structures of politics and power—within which progressives launched their crusades, recruited their partisans, and did their work.” Rodgers’ arguments map out a framework that embraces diversity and opposition, providing scholars of the Progressive era a way to reconcile the seemingly incongruent ideas, reform agendas, and people who tapped into the spirit of reform circulating throughout the United States between 1870 and 1920. Peter G. Filene, “An Obituary for ‘The Progressive Movement,’” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring, 1970) 20-34 and Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 10, No. 4, The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects. (Dec. 1982) 113-132. Quote taken from page 123. Despite the wide-ranging possibilities opened by Rodgers’ proposed framework, Progressive era historians have only begun to realize the full potential of its implications. The major interpretations offered by Rodgers and Michael McGerr now include the activities of white, often middle-class, women reformers in their analyses of progressive reform. Yet, African Americans, the working class, and immigrants, to the extent that they appear in these books, often enter the discussion only as the targets of reform initiatives. Although they differ on specifics, most of the books on Progressivism agree that its reformers were largely white and middle class, and in some instances male. See, for instance: Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 2003); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

¹² Throughout the Progressive era, women of various backgrounds participated in prohibition, municipal reform, settlement house movements, environmental campaigns and other “progressive” movements. Scholars studying the ways that gender intersected with race and class have made important steps in reevaluating the dominant narrative of the Progressive era. By examining the life and activism of labor activist and writer O. Delight Smith, historian Jacquelyn Dowd Hall traces a distinctive brand of progressive reform fashioned by labor feminists in the early twentieth century. Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “O. Delight Smith’s Progressive Era: Labor Feminism, and Reform in the Urban South,” in Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 166-198. African-American women also participated in, and advanced their own, progressive reforms. In her book, *Gender and Jim Crow*, historian Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore argues that while white reformers intended progressivism to be racially exclusive, black women often “surveyed progressive white women’s welfare initiatives and political style and found that both afforded [them] a chance to enter the political.” See: Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996): 147-150. Quote appears on page 150.

Rayford W. Logan's classic, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901*, historians have debated the utility of his terminology. While few scholars deny the violence and repression that marked this period, the "nadir" paradigm leaves the impression that there was a dearth of black activism in this period. Yet historians have uncovered a rich history of activism, including church-based efforts and movements led by women.¹³ African-American activism in Baltimore further complicates the history of this period. The period between 1880 and 1900 witnessed a proliferation of African-American protest movements in Baltimore that included women and men, long-time residents and recent immigrants, middle-class professionals and laborers.

It was during the final two decades of the nineteenth century that the tenor of the black freedom struggle in Baltimore became more militant and radical. Baltimore possessed a deep history of black protest prior to the 1880s that focused primarily on the overwhelmingly male realms of electoral politics and organized labor.¹⁴ This would soon change through the efforts of recent migrants. The men and women who moved to Baltimore following the Civil War, hailed from the Maryland and Virginia countryside, where many had been born into slavery. The migration of African Americans north in the late 1860s and early 1870s infused Baltimore's black communities with a host of new

¹³ Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought, the Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954). For some works that complicate the concept of the nadir, especially its implication that this was a low point in black activism, see: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*; William George Paul, "The Shadow of Equality: The Negro in Baltimore, 1864-1911" (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1972); Jeffrey R. Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War: A Supplement to the Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co. Printers, 1890); and Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital* (New York: The University Press of America, 1982).

ideas and strategies for combating inequality. Eschewing partisan politics, these new residents targeted the legal system as the best avenue to achieve change.¹⁵

When radical black activists shifted the battlefield from the male dominated worlds of labor unions and political parties to law, education, and social inequalities they also broadened the city's activist base. These new strategies paid enormous dividends, first in Baltimore and eventually throughout the nation. By the early 1900s, black activists laid a foundation to thwart white efforts at disfranchisement and residential segregation in the city. Baltimore's activists were among the earliest members of the Niagara Movement in the early 1900s, an organization that eventually became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). At the same time, their use of "test cases" to challenge and further define the legacy of Reconstruction set the course for black activism that lasted until 1954's landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.

An investigation of grassroots reform and activism in the Progressive era also opens up new ways of understanding political history. The people and institutions this study follows had varying degrees of staying power. At times they appeared briefly and then faded away. In other cases, they persisted for decades. Regardless of their longevity, they all had an impact on Baltimore politics and a variety of city policies, including those dealing with vice, housing segregation, and a host of Jim Crow laws. It is in this sense that focusing on non-elites opens up the possibility of rethinking the roots and dialectics of Progressive reform. Throughout the period between 1877 and 1920,

¹⁵ Historians have traditionally identified the period beginning in 1914 as the Great Migration of African Americans from the South. But recent works, by scholars like Steven Hahn, have demonstrated that blacks began to move north immediately following emancipation. See: Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, esp. Part III.

non-elites authored their own reform agendas, agitated for and against city policies, and in some cases appropriated middle-class reform initiatives to shape their city. Even if they were ultimately unsuccessful, these people—black and white, men and women—altered political discourse.¹⁶ Moreover, they consistently challenged political machines, workplace exploitation, and racial injustices. They also questioned a host of what more elite activists (and many historians) have termed “progressive” reform. What emerged at the end of this period was shaped, in large part, by the obstinacy, dedication, and ingenuity of non-elites.

Certainly, not all of the reform efforts undertaken by Baltimoreans between 1877 and 1920 fit the progressive reform mold. In fact, some of the movements examined here presented starkly different solutions to the problems afflicting urban life and society. It is important not to simply add African Americans, working-class peoples, and immigrants to a progressive melting pot or squeeze their movements and activism into a rubric if they do not fit. Yet, it is still imperative to analyze the multiple ideas being articulated by diverse groups to fully understand the Progressive era.¹⁷ Doing so opens up questions concerning some of the widely held assumptions we have about this period, especially the tendency to see it as an inexorable march toward social order and middle-class

¹⁶ See: David Scobey, “Boycotting the Politics Factory: Labor Radicalism and the New York City Mayoral Election of 1884.” *Radical History Review*, 28-30 (1984) and Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976).

¹⁷ In this sense, this project adds to the growing list of scholarship, including works by Nancy A. Hewitt, Sarah Deutsch, and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (among many others), examining social activism and reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries from the vantage point of the working class, immigrants, African Americans, and women. Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Victoria W. Wolcott, *Remaking Respectability: African American Women in Interwar Detroit* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

ascendency. In many respects, this is not a story that ends with a more ordered, structured, modern metropolis. Nor is it a purely a declension narrative where life became progressively worse for non-elites. It is incontestable that laborers, immigrants, African Americans and women bore witness to crushing defeats and disappointments. But they also experienced their share of triumphs that made a material difference in their lives. This study presents a picture of a political era that was marked by successes and failures, victories and defeats; it was not the triumphant ascendancy of the middle class but rather a much more complicated series of struggles that led to a more complex, social, economic, and political order.

Employing a grassroots approach ultimately alters the periodization of late nineteenth and early twentieth century history in crucial ways.¹⁸ For African Americans and white segregationists, Reconstruction did not end in 1877. Throughout the early 1880s and 1890s, city and state governments, as well as everyday citizens, grappled over the meaning of Reconstruction. In fact, black activists in Baltimore spent a majority of the early 1880s attacking a host of injustices—collectively referred to as “black laws”—which had roots in the antebellum era. Similarly, the neat periodization of the Progressive era’s end point at 1920 is too simplistic. For working peoples of all

¹⁸ Historian Heather Cox Richardson argues, in her 2008 book *West From Appomattox*, that Reconstruction not only concerned the federal policies that dealt with remaking the South and ensuring African Americans’ rights, but was also part of a larger process that occurred throughout the country between 1865 and 1901. In Richardson’s account, Reconstruction encompassed westward expansion, the incorporation of America, the triumph of a “free” labor system, and the remaking of the middle class; these developments, the groundwork for an urban and industrial dominated society, fueled the problems that progressive reform targeted. By examining the entire United States and extending her study to 1901, Richardson effectively erases the geographic and temporal boundaries that historians have erected between the Reconstruction and Progressive eras. Although Sara Evans focuses on the 1960s, her work *Personal Politics* also serves as a model. Evans persuasively argues that the women’s liberation movement in the late 1960s and 1970s had roots in the 1960s civil rights movement. Many of the women who participated in the Civil Rights Movement used their experiences (which included troubling encounters with sexism in the movement) to catalyze their later grassroots activism. Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women’s Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

backgrounds, Progressive era problems, strife, and debates persisted well beyond 1920. Workers—which by the early twentieth century included many women—still contended with unfair labor practices, a lack of political representation, and paltry wages. African Americans continued to face housing segregation and legal inequalities that were passed in the name of preventing racial tension. Moreover, Baltimoreans still could not agree upon the best way of dealing with prostitution and vice districts. Citizens, reformers, and government officials debated all of these issues throughout the Progressive era, yet by the 1920s their solutions remained illusive and the problems, in many respects, seemed more vexing.

Finally, “Reforming Charm City” provides a critical analysis for a crucial but largely neglected period in the city’s history. Historians have produced fascinating studies of revolutionary, antebellum, and twentieth-century Baltimore.¹⁹ Yet for a city of

¹⁹ On various aspects of Baltimore’s past, see: Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes, Linda Zeidman, eds., *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991). There are a number of important books that analyze Baltimore during the post-Revolutionary and antebellum eras. See: Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*; Christopher Phillips, *Freedom’s Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Diane Batts Morrow, *Persons of Color and Religious at the Same Time: The Oblate Sisters of Providence, 1828-1860* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); and T. Stephen Whitman, *The Price of Freedom: Slavery and Manumission in Baltimore and Early National Maryland* (New York: Routledge: 2000). For a comparative analysis of Baltimore, with Guayaquil, Ecuador, during the antebellum era, see: Camilla Townsend, *Tales of Two Cities: Race and Economic Culture in Early Republican North and South America* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2000). A host of other articles and books have been written about various aspects of Baltimore. On black protest and African-American communities see: Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American, 1892-1950* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998); C. Matthew Hill, “‘We Live Not on What We Have’: Reflections on the Birth of the Civil Rights Test Case Strategy and its Lessons for Today’s Same-Sex Marriage Litigation Campaign,” *National Black Law Journal* 19: 175, 2006-07:175-202. Also see: David S. Bogen, “Precursors of Rosa Parks: Maryland Transportation Cases Between the Civil War and the Beginning of World War I,” *Maryland Law Review*, 63:721 (2004): 721-751. On housing segregation see: Garrett Power, “Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913,” *Maryland Law Review* 42 (1983): 248-349; Carl H. Nightingale, “The Transnational Contexts of Early Twentieth Century American Urban Segregation,” *Journal of Social History*, 39 (Spring 2006): 667-702. See, also: Gretchen E. Boger, “The Meaning of Neighborhood in the Modern City: Baltimore’s Residential Segregation Ordinances, 1910-1913,” *The Journal of Urban History*, 35 (2) (January 2009): 236-258; Samuel Kelton Roberts, Jr., *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Antero Pietila, *Not in my Neighborhood:*

its size, importance, complexity, and compelling geographic location, Baltimore's history from the end of Reconstruction through the Progressive era remains understudied. Baltimore offers an ideal setting to further explore the connections between these two crucial eras and to highlight the role of grassroots activists, institutions, and initiatives. The city's complicated social realities and politics in the years between 1877 and 1920 were in a sense a microcosm of the nation at this time. Therefore, it has much to tell us about how the United States changed, adapted, and grew after the Civil War.

In telling the story of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Baltimore this dissertation moves through the places in the city that became crucial points of contestation: the streets, courtrooms, meeting halls, vice districts, and residential neighborhoods. It also analyzes the more conceptual city spaces of newspapers and electoral politics. Chapter one begins with the outbreak of the Great Uprising, a crucial turning point in the city and nation's history. Rather than focusing solely on the riot however, it tells the longer story of the revolt and its aftermath. Following the outbreak of violence, workers attempted to gain a greater say in city politics through the formation of the independent Workingmen's Party and its mayoral candidate, a local blacksmith named Joseph Thompson. This chapter pays particular attention to both the reform

How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2010). For a look at the segregation ordinances in Baltimore and other locations throughout the South see: Roger L. Rice, "Residential Segregation by Law, 1910-1917," *Journal of Southern History* 179 (1968): 179-199. For works examining Baltimore in the twentieth century see: Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See, Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940-1980* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* (University of Kentucky Press, 1997); David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000): esp. ch. 8; and Jo Ann E. Argersinger, *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). Also see: Jessica I. Elfenbein, *The Making of a Modern City: Philanthropy, Civic Culture, and the Baltimore YMCA* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2001) and James B. Crooks, *Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968).

measures advocated by the group and the possibilities for cross-racial cooperation that emerged in the riot's aftermath. The second chapter moves into the meeting halls and political campaigns conducted by black activists in the late 1870s and early 1880s. This period is crucial in the history of African-American reform movements in Baltimore. During these years, black activists engaged in heated debates over the scope, direction, and strategies for addressing inequalities. The contestation marked a leadership shift that had profound repercussions in the city for the next thirty years. By 1885, black radicals wrested control from the more conservative community leaders who came to prominence at the end of the Civil War. With the shift in leadership came a shift in strategy as these new leaders, often-prominent church officials, largely abstained from partisan politics in favor of a legal strategy that attacked injustices through the courts. Chapter three picks up at the moment when chapter two ends: the founding of the United Brotherhood of Liberty. The organization's members laid a foundation that enabled them to undertake legal campaigns in the 1880s. The chapter examines four of the Brotherhood's most important initiatives—amending the state Bastardy Act, challenging the laws prohibiting intermarriage, agitating for improved education, and the Navassa Island trial—to document how black activists sought to further define the implications of the Fourteenth Amendment, draw the wider community into activism, and seek redress for various injustices. The Brotherhood's use of test cases became the boilerplate for much of the early twentieth century African-American freedom movement.

Chapters four and five move out of the nineteenth century into the first two decades of the twentieth century. Chapter four shifts focus from courtrooms to the city's residential neighborhoods and vice districts. While historians have analyzed Progressive

era anti-vice reformers they have rarely paid attention to their opponents. In Baltimore, many opponents of the vice crusade proposed maintaining a system of segregation that had been the city's policy throughout the nineteenth century. Though rarely organized, nor consciously identifying as a social movement, vice segregationists erected numerous obstacles and managed to keep anti-vice crusaders at bay for much of the 1910s. This examination also suggests important connections between vice segregation and the concurrent effort to impose race-based residential segregation that is the subject of this dissertation's final chapter.

Although historians have examined Baltimore's West Segregation Ordinances—the nation's first attempt to impose legal residential segregation—they have almost exclusively written about these laws from the view of government officials and politicians. While this is an important part of the story, this chapter instead focuses on events at the street level and thereby highlights aspects missing and/or downplayed in previous accounts. It emphasizes the violence and racism—often elided in top-down analyses—that were central to the push for legalized segregation. Finally, it demonstrates the importance of grassroots activists in this story. The movement to impose residential segregation was both promulgated and opposed at the grassroots. Ultimately, black resistance to the laws triumphed. Utilizing the foundation built by black reformers in the 1880s and 1890s, African-American activists successfully challenged the West Segregation Ordinances in the streets and the courts. In the process they reshaped the city's racial geography.

This dissertation recasts the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by centering the analysis on non-elites. One of its consistent themes is the exploration of the

ways that non-elites encountered, challenged, and undermined the new regulatory regime of the Progressive era. As government officials and reformers increasingly limited—through laws, the police, and social custom—who had access to the streets and for what purposes, who had the right to live or be in certain sections of the city, and who had the right to participate in the political process—non-elites made certain to register their voices. Through their own reform movements, resistance, and determination, non-elites challenged developments at odds with their best interests. In fact, the extent to which mainstream progressives failed to see their reforms come to fruition is in large part due to these challenges from below.

What was radical about these years was not the middle-class reform agenda but rather the audacity of non-elites. The years between 1877 and 1920 were profoundly violent and contested, a fact downplayed in many accounts of the period. Labor violence, lynching, political repression, and police brutality were just a few of the many dangers non-elite activists faced in these years. Yet, despite the risks to their own well-being, they pushed their city and country to live up to its founding ideals. Many of the changes they sought—including the end to Jim Crow, government oversight of workplace conditions, and the cessation of vice crusades—would not be accomplished for decades; some of these issues continued to be contested to this day.

If Joseph Thompson—the mayoral candidate of the Workingmen’s Party—and Frederick Douglass had lived long enough to look out from Monument Square in 1920 they would have surely been disappointed in many respects. However, they also would have likely recognized the ways that non-elites—facing long odds—profoundly shaped what they saw in Baltimore. This side of the story of the late nineteenth and early

twentieth century has been neglected for far too long. Everywhere one looked, from the voting booth to the jury box, in neighborhoods and vice districts, to churches and schools, working peoples left their footprints. Although they did not accomplish all they set out to achieve, their efforts served as a crucial foundation—and a vital linkage in the long history of social movements—for changes yet to come.

Chapter 1: An "Unhealthy and Dangerous Agitation in our Midst": The 1877 Great Uprising and the Baltimore Mayoral Campaign

On the evening of July 20th 1877, Baltimore changed. At approximately 6:35 PM the city's alarm bell rang out "1-5-1," the code summoning the state militia. Instantly, citizens filled the streets and waited for the troops, projectiles in hand. Within an hour a bloody and chaotic scene unfolded in South Baltimore. One observer reported that, "The shouts and cries, cursings and prayers of that maddened throng, composed as it was of every class, but most largely of reckless, idiotic, drunken, imbecile, poverty-stricken, unwashed, grimy men, seamed with every line which wretchedness could draw or vicious habits and associations could fix on human faces, presented a spectacle that made one feel as though it was a tearful witnessing in perspective of the last day, when the secrets of life, more loathsome than those of death, shall be laid bare in their hideous deformity and ghastly shame."¹ By the next morning the eyes of the nation suddenly turned to Baltimore as the Great Uprising had begun, and with it, the city's disenfranchised forcibly inserted themselves into a political arena marred by racial and class divisions.

The Great Uprising lasted only two days in Baltimore, yet it marked a watershed in the city's history. In the wake of the Civil War, and at the dawn of the Progressive era, Baltimoreans grappled with new political, social, and legal realities. In the span of a decade, residents watched as their system of order, built upon slavery, collapsed in the wake of emancipation. As politicians and the elite desperately clung to the fiction of an inclusive polity, the Great Uprising brought into sharp focus fissures in the city's body politic

¹ J.A. Dacus, *Annals of the Great Strike in the United States* (Chicago: L.T. Palmer & Co, 1877) 70.

along class and racial lines.² Just months after the riots, laborers formed the Workingmen's Party in an effort to capture Baltimore's mayoralty. This movement sent shivers down the collective spines of elites who viewed workers as threats to public order rather than partners in reform. Beginning with the Great Uprising, and culminating with the 1877 mayoral race, competing visions of the city's future collided head on in three physical and conceptual spaces that assumed new importance in the post-Reconstruction, industrial urban center: the streets, electoral politics, and the daily newspapers.³

The riots and the election did not fracture old political alignments and alliances on their own. However, they did bring the smoldering problems of post-Civil War America to the surface. An examination of the longer history of the Great Uprising—including the subsequent 1877 mayoral election—exposes not only the changing landscape of city politics, but also the increasing instability of class and race relations in the late nineteenth century.⁴

² Using the events of 1877 as a lens, I contend, allows the historian to undertake “a social history of politics.” David Scobey, “Boycotting the Politics Factory: Labor Radicalism and the New York City Mayoral Election of 1884” *Radical History Review* 28-30 (September 1984): 280-325. Scobey is borrowing the term from Victoria De Grazia. De Grazia described the social history of politics as the study of how political participation “illuminates not only the social and cultural experience of twentieth century working classes but also the operations of mass party politics.” See: Victoria De Grazia, “For a Social History of Politics” *Radical History Review* 23 (Spring 1980): 3-4.

³ My thoughts on newspapers serving as public space are influenced by David M. Henkin, *City Reading: Written Words and Public Spaces in Antebellum New York* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 124-26 and also Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). As Nell Irvin Painter pointed out, “Fear of working-class violence explains much of what has been called progressive reform.” See: Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987), xii.

⁴ The Great Uprising of 1877 exists in a peculiar place in US historiography. Some historians, including Eric Foner, have identified the riots as the endpoint of the Reconstruction era, the moment when the nation turned its collective eyes away from the plight of freedmen to the problems of free labor. Labor historians have generally agreed with the watershed framework. However, they have often treated 1877 in isolation, only hinting at the ways in which these events paved the way for workplace reforms and organizations like the Knights of Labor. Historians of the Progressive era have been even less helpful. Most of these accounts hardly discuss the Great Uprising, even when their analyses begin in 1877. The current historiography helps us better understand the riots' historical context but questions remain about its legacy. See: Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: HarperCollins

While the Great Uprising was destructive in the short term, it marked the long-term emergence of the politically marginalized as vital actors in reform efforts. Historian Herbert G. Gutman once noted that working people have often been at the vanguard of movements that historians have attributed to subsequent middle and upper-class reformers.⁵ This is especially true of the Progressive era. In the wake of the violence, the Workingmen's Party created, however fleetingly, an organization that offered white workers, African Americans, immigrants, and women a chance to chart a new course for their city.

Publishers, 2002). For labor histories, see: Phillip S. Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877* (New York: Monad Press, 1977) and Robert V. Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence* (New York: The New Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc. 1959). For a wider examination of the year 1877, see Michael A. Bellesiles, *1877: America's Year of Living Violently* (New York: The New Press, 2010). Although they differ on specifics, most of the books on Progressivism agree that its reformers were largely white and middle class, and in some instances male. See, for instance: Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: The Free Press, 2003); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1960); Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967). In so doing, they have largely written out the violence that has categorized the era. A recent work that has sought to add some balance to this debate is the work by Andrew Wender Cohen, *The Racketeer's Progress: Chicago and the Struggle for the Modern American Economy, 1900-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Also see: Painter, *Standing At Armageddon*. For some recent revisions of the Great Uprising, see: David O. Stowell, ed. *The Great Strikes of 1877* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008) and David O. Stowell, *Streets, Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999). For local studies concerning the Progressive Era in Baltimore see: George Bache Du Bois, "The Search for a Better Life: Baltimore's Workers, 1865-1916" (PhD diss., 1995); James B. Crooks, *Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore, 1895 to 1911* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968); Samuel Kelton Roberts, Jr. *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes, Linda Zeidman, eds. *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

⁵ Gutman notes that, "the modern 'welfare state' was not just the child of concerned and sensitive early twentieth-century upper- and middle-class critics of industrial capitalism. A generation earlier, working-class leaders, including radicals like [Joseph] McDonnell, had helped give birth to a premature 'welfare state.' They had arranged a marriage between the industrial city's workers and immigrants and their political representatives. Such men, not the Progressive reformers of a later time, were the founding fathers of modern movements to humanize industrial society." I would further contend that African Americans and women also contributed much to the "premature 'welfare state' that Gutman describes. Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 290-91.

Examined as discreet events, the Great Uprising and the subsequent mayoral election appear to have left a minor imprint on Baltimore's history. The riots were over in a matter of days, the campaign in just a few short months. However, the ramifications of that year continued to reverberate throughout the next decade. The Great Uprising changed the way that city officials, the police, and the newspapers perceived the working classes. Moreover, the advent of the Workingmen's Party proved to workers—white ones at least—that they were a political force in the city. The Workingmen's Party also ignited public debates, often played out in the pages of the city's dailies. Years before middle and upper-class crusaders seized the mantle of progressive reform, the Workingmen's Party submitted ideas ranging from the restriction of child and convict labor, to sanitary reforms, to government regulation of business. Considered radical at the time, over the next three decades these same ideas became the tenets of mainstream reform. In many respects, the events of 1877 laid the foundation for the Progressive era, a period shaped as much by the disenfranchised as by the middle and upper classes.

If there was one thing that most contemporary observers agreed on it was that the Great Uprising was a sudden, unexpected, and terrifying event.⁶ Although the country had experienced large-scale strikes before, this seemed different in both scope and in intensity. "We have had strikes and riots," an editorial in *The Baltimore Gazette* explained,

⁶ "Long periods of immunity from popular outbreaks and scenes of turbulence and violence are apt to make people forgetful of the slumbering elements that lurk in large communities," a report from the Baltimore Police Commissioners noted. See: The report of the Police Commissioners is reprinted in De Francias Folsom, ed. *Our Police: A History of the Baltimore Force from the First Watchman to the Latest Appointee* (Baltimore: J.M. Beers, 1888): 95. Others expressed similar feelings. See: Edward Winslow Martin. *The History of the Great Riots: Being a Full and Authentic Account of the Strikes and Riots on Various Railroads of the United States and in the Mining Regions* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1877), 3. Maryland's governor, John Lee Carroll, thought the riots were a threat to civilization itself. See: John Lee Carroll, "Message of John Lee Carroll, Governor of Maryland to the General Assembly at its Regular Session, January 1878" (Annapolis: Geo. Colton, Printer to the General Assembly, 1878), 17.

“but never has anything been known of the compass and violence of this outbreak.”⁷ The fear spreading throughout the country was palpable. In his contemporary history of the riots, Edward Winslow Martin wrote, “The danger was terrible and real, and for a moment the American people stood appalled, not knowing how far the revolt might extend, or what character it might assume.”⁸

Expressions of shock and fear, often conveyed through apocalyptic imagery, abounded in the days following the Great Uprising. While not unique to 1877, this discourse was decidedly middle and upper class in origin and outlook. In the 1870s, violence became a daily part of American lives whether in the form of industrial accidents, lynching, or homicide. For elites, this carnage remained an abstraction, something read about or perhaps discussed, but not usually experienced firsthand. Yet for workers it was a sad but commonplace aspect of life in an industrializing nation. In some instances, the violence of working-class life made national headlines; during the 1870s the Mollie McGuires and the Tompkins’ Square Riot were thrust into the national consciousness.⁹ More often, the bloodshed was less sensational and visible as industrial injuries and economic deprivations mounted in a time where workers were afforded almost no workplace protections.¹⁰ From the vantage point of the working classes, the Great Uprising was anything but sudden. Instead, it had roots in the violence and economic conditions of the 1870s.

⁷ “A National Calamity,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 2.

⁸ Martin, *The History of the Great Riots*, 4.

⁹ Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*. See also: Bellesiles, *1877*. For conditions in Baltimore see: “Fresh Labor Troubles,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 7 July 1877, 1.

¹⁰ For one local example of the violence workers faced see: “A Talk with the Strikers,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 20 July 1877, 4.

Even still, on the morning of July 20th, the Baltimore dailies reported that the city exuded a remarkable level of calmness despite the strikes erupting along the Baltimore and Ohio (B&O) rail line. However, the papers were ignoring the storm clouds gathering over the city. In the weeks before the strike, relations between the B&O and its employees had become frayed as the company began laying off some and cutting the wages of others.¹¹ *The Labor Standard*, the leading working-class weekly of the era, termed this decision a “new piece of despotism and act of legal robbery.”¹²

The B&O’s miserliness had devastating effects on South Baltimore. The *Baltimore Sun* noted that, “One by one the shops have become wholly or partly silent, and very many men, especially in South Baltimore, are without work or the means of providing for their families.” To further complicate matters, the city’s sawyers, can makers, and box cutters conducted successful strikes in the previous weeks. This made officials at the B&O justifiably worried. The successful struggle conducted by these laborers gave railroad workers hope that they could also improve their lot.¹³

There was plenty of room for improvement and workers were becoming increasingly restless. On average, laborers working the B&O line made \$200 less per year than their peers, worked fewer hours, and could not earn overtime pay. Perhaps this is why

¹¹ DuBois, “Search for a Better Life,” 60-61. Nor were these the first wage cuts. Beginning in 1875, the company instituted a series of wage cuts. With the 1877 reductions, engineers employed by the B&O complained that “half of the fireman” working the railroads only brought home ten dollars a month after they paid their boarding expenses. See: Jacob Frey, *Reminiscences of Baltimore* (Maryland Book Concern, 1893): 182

¹² “War!!!” *The Labor Standard*, 28 July 1877, 1.

¹³ For more information on conditions leading up to the strike see: “Labor Troubles and Disturbances,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 July 1877, 1 and Gillett, “Camden Yards and the Strike of 1877,” 1-3. Also see: “Untitled,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 4 August 1877, 4. For more information on the strikes conducted by the sawyers, can makers and box cutters see: Allen Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives* (New York: G.W. Carlton, 1878), 165; Gillett, “Camden Yards and the Strike of 1877,” 1-3. The quote by Charles A. Malloy appears in: “Recalls Thrilling Features of Riot Nearly 50 Years Ago,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 June 1927, 4. Pinkerton agreed with Malloy’s assessment, saying that by the morning of the 20th there was a general feeling of apprehension in the city that had temporarily arrested the day’s business. See: Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives*, 167.

Charles A. Malloy, a soldier with Maryland's Fifth Regiment, remembered that in the days before the riot all was not calm. "The feeling not only in Baltimore but all over Maryland was intensely bitter," Malloy recalled, "and the sympathy of the greater part of the working people was with the strikers." By the afternoon of July 20th, "little groups gathered at street corners indulging in comments" as newspaper offices began to post disturbing bulletins concerning escalating tensions on the nation's rails.¹⁴ One author also alleged that groups of Germans, Bohemians, and Poles gathered in various meetings across the city to foment revolution.¹⁵

Then at 6:35 PM—the moment when many workers were filing out of their workplaces—military officials lit the powder keg when they issued the call to arms over Baltimore's fire bell.¹⁶ "As the notes of the two powerful bells rose and fell over the city," *The Baltimore Gazette* reported, "the excitement began perceptibly to increase."¹⁷ With the ringing of the alarm, members of the Fifth and Sixth regiments stationed in the city headed to their respective armory buildings. Their mission was to quell the disorder in nearby Cumberland, Maryland.

The exact chronology of what happened next remains uncertain and in the months following the riots the narrative of the Great Uprising changed in marked ways. Never-

¹⁴ "Mob Spirit Abroad," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1. *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* noted that, "The general impression, however, seemed to be, looking at the quietness which had pervaded the city for the last few days, that the defiant spirit existing elsewhere would not show itself in our midst."

¹⁵ The alleged meetings of Germans, Poles, and Bohemians is problematic. I have not been able to corroborate these meetings in other sources. Furthermore, the author J.A. Dacus clearly sided with the B&O and the government. See: Dacus, *Annals of the Great Strikes in the United States*, 66.

¹⁶ "The Call to Arms," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1.

¹⁷ "A Call to Arms," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1. Even though some Baltimoreans were surely confused, as the *Baltimore American* later contended, others probably knew exactly what the alarm meant. On the morning of the riots *The Baltimore Gazette* published a short article in which they stated that, "Should their services be needed the alarm (151) calling out the militia, will not be sounded on the fire-alarms for fear of creating an unnecessary excitement." See: "Maryland Military Under Waiting Orders," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 20 July 1877, 4.

theless, the events that occurred outside of the Sixth Regiment's armory established one of the cornerstones of the narrative of the Great Uprising: the crowds were the aggressors and the blame for the bloodshed. This version of events was best encapsulated in an illustration published in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. The drawing, with the caption reading "The Mob Attacking the Soldiers at the Armory," depicted a maddened throng of strikers pummeling the Sixth. (See *Figure One*) The soldiers, although armed do not have their rifles lowered and are clearly getting the worse of this exchange. Many of the workers are wearing expressions of excitement, if not outright joy.¹⁸

Because contemporary narratives quickly blamed the crowds for the disorder it is easy to overlook the fact that many observers initially raised serious questions concerning the actions of government officials, the militia, and the B&O. The *Baltimore Gazette*, for instance, admonished the railroads for exposing their employees to life-threatening work conditions while whittling away their meager pay. "While paying handsome dividends to

¹⁸ "The Mob Attacking the Soldiers at the Armory," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 4 August 1877, 1. A number of historical works have shaped my interpretations of the riots. The literature on riots and resistance is vast; this list is only but a portion of the works covering these topics. E. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," in *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1987); Robin D.G. Kelley "We Are Not What We Seem": Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South" *The Journal of American History* 80:1 (June, 1993): 76. Kelley builds upon the framework, articulated in James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), by focusing on the experiences of African Americans during the Jim Crow era. See, also: James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985). Steven Hahn also uses many of these ideas, but focuses more on political participation. See: Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003). Finally, also see Tera Hunter's book: Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) for more instances of the kinds of resistance that Kelley and Scott discuss. For an exploration of everyday resistance in the context of slavery see: Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Another recent work is a model for presenting the complexities and multiple viewpoints of civil disturbances, see: James Goodman, *Blackout* (New York: North Point Press, 2003).



THE MOB ATTACKING THE SOLDIERS AT THE ARMORY.

Figure 1.1: *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, August 04, 1877

the shareholders,” one editorial read, “they cut down the pay of those who have charge of their property to the point of despair.”¹⁹ Most observers also agreed that the decision to ring the alarm was at best unnecessary and at worst foolhardy. Maryland’s governor recognized the alarm’s danger and tried to urge the military brass to forgo sounding the bell, fearing that it would send a wave of panic through the streets. Shoemaker and local labor activist, Jas. P. Wright, felt that if the bell was not struck the riot might never have happened. Cephas Sheckles, a striking railroad worker surmised, “there would have been no innocent blood shed if the military had not been called out.”²⁰

¹⁹ “The Lesson of the Strike,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 2. *The Baltimore American* also published a searing indictment of the railroad companies. See: “Railroad Troubles,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 2. *The Baltimore Gazette*, further recognized that the riots were the outgrowths of larger problems. See: “A Night of Sorrow,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 2 and “A National Calamity,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 2.

²⁰ Account is taken from: “Untitled Editorial,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 4 August 1877, 2. Nor were laborers the only ones to question this decision. The Baltimore coroner’s jury found the ringing of the alarm unnecessary and felt that there “should have [been] a police force at the armory sufficiently large to protect the assembling soldiers from the assaults.” For Cephas Sheckles, see: “Workingmen’s Movement—A Meeting at Rechabite Hall,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 July 1877, 4.

With the decision to ring the alarm the military commanders ignited the passions of a restless city populace. Then they compounded their problems by marching the militia through the economically depressed, working-class neighborhoods of South Baltimore. In creating this volatile atmosphere it was only a matter of time before the soldiers and the crowd clashed. For Baltimoreans, the ringing of the bell signaled the government's intention to not only protect the B&O but to do so at the expense of laborers.

Far from being directionless or crazed—as later accounts contended—the crowd felt justified and were determined to stop the militia from traveling to Cumberland. *The Baltimore American* reported that by this time, “It appeared as if every man and boy in the crowd had a missile in his hand which he intended throwing at the members of the regiment.”²¹ One militiaman was seized by the crowd and nearly hoisted over the railings of the Fayette Street Bridge. Another testified that he was greeted by a group of men who surrounded him with shouts of “Kill him!” and “Take his uniform off!” before assaulting him.²² Eventually a majority of the Sixth Regiment found their way into their armory; but the night's mayhem was far from over.²³

Although newspapers and city politicians later claimed that the militia only fired out of necessity once they emerged on the streets, witnesses told different, often-contradictory stories, of what happened. One witness, David Dobler, claimed that mili-

²¹ “Fifth and Sixth Regiments,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1.

²² Fortunately for the soldier hoisted over the bridge, he was able to grab a hold of one of the beams and escape almost certain injury, or even death. “The Armory Mobbed,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1. For other accounts of the first moments of the disorder, see: “Court Matters of Interest,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 14 November 1877, 4.

²³ Holed up with the Sixth Regiment, John A. Murray, a reporter with *The Baltimore Sun*, claimed that “there was considerable apprehension inside” the armory. Accounts taken from: “The Armory Mobbed,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1. “Fifth and Sixth Regiments,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1. Quote appears in *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* article.

tiamen fired from the windows of the armory before mustering out; Alexander Mandelbaum and Charles B. Feldhaus agreed with Dobler's recounting of events. Charles Russell, an officer at Baltimore's penitentiary, also claimed that shots were fired from the armory but not at the armory. Others remembered it differently. John A. Murray, a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* trapped with the Sixth in their armory, "Was surprised to hear witnesses say they remembered firing from the third story;" Charles Smith, a soldier in the Sixth Regiment claimed that the militia could not have fired first as they were ordered away from the windows and the windows shut."²⁴

When the soldiers—even if only a few—opened fire it not only further fanned the flames of hatred but also provided the crowd with the justification to unleash their frustrations. Within a half hour, the gathering surged towards the armory. The meager police force and sentries—numbering four in total—guarding the armory provided little resistance. Overwhelmed, outmanned, and ineffective, the four guards retreated into the relative safety of the besieged armory. The crowd, now emboldened by their apparent success—and enraged by the actions of the soldiers—began to bombard the armory with renewed vigor. Shouts of "Give it to them!" and "outcries to the effect that it was the duty

²⁴ Accounts taken from: "The Armory Mobbed," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1. "Fifth and Sixth Regiments," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1.; "The Sixth Regiment Armory Riot," *The Baltimore Sun*, July 31 1877, 4. Quote appears in *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* article. There was as also much confusion over whether the soldiers were ordered to fire. Murray claimed that no orders were given to the soldiers to fire, yet Thomas Brady, an otherwise unidentified citizen, remembered that he heard Captain Trapper exclaim, "Shoot them boys, kill them" before the soldiers opened fire. See: "The Twentieth of July," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 2 August 1877, 4. In the weeks after the riot, Baltimore's coroner's jury found that the soldiers were guilty of firing without being given orders. In addition, the report found that "being demoralized, they did a great deal of unnecessary firing on Baltimore street, specially west of Gay street." Account is taken from: "Untitled Editorial," *The Baltimore Bee*, 4 August 1877, 2.

of every citizen and workingman to prevent the soldiers from coming out” complimented the dull thud of bricks and stones crashing into the armory’s walls.²⁵

The scene outside the two armories was chaotic. When Colonel Clarence Peters, of the Sixth, peered out of the armory’s window he discovered “that the ground, in every direction was black with turbulent humanity.” The *American* reported that an “impenthrable mass of humanity extended along Front street, all the way from Baltimore to Gay on the north and south, and High and the bridge on the east and west.” The Fifth encountered similar numbers across town. Malloy recalls that by the time they set out for Camden Depot the “streets were teeming with strikers and strike sympathizers.”²⁶ This was surely an intimidating spectacle that certainly contributed to the violence committed by both sides, but also testified to just how popular the uprising was in the city. But these descriptions also leave open the question of who, exactly, made up these crowds.

In many ways it is difficult to reconstruct the crowd with any degree of certainty; the identities of many of the participants are simply lost to the historical record.²⁷ Even if precise renderings are impossible, surviving records establish a broad picture of the participants. It is evident from various reports that whites made up most, if not nearly all, of

²⁵ “Court Matters of Interest,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*. 13 November 1877, 4.

²⁶ Peters is quoted in: Pinkerton, 167. For the crowd awaiting the Sixth, see: “Mob Spirit Abroad,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, July 21, 1877, 1. Quote from Malloy is from: “Recalls Thrilling Features of Riot Nearly 50 Years Ago,” *The Baltimore Sun* 6 June 1927, 4.

²⁷ The arrest records give the most detailed accounting individuals on the streets that night. However, of the thousands of people gathered that night—as participants, spectators, or both—the police only arrested a relative handful between July 20–24th. See: “Records of the Middle District Police, for the City of Baltimore July 21,–24 July 1877.” *The Baltimore Sun* placed the arrest count at forty-eight, but it is unclear if this number included people arrested for defying the city’s mandate to close saloons. See: “Riot Cases in the Criminal Court—Who are Rioters in the Eyes of the Law, &c.” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 July 1877, 4. *The Baltimore Gazette* on the other hand reported that over 300 people were arrested. See: “Untitled,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 2.

those who rioted.²⁸ The decision by African Americans to sit out the riots likely reflected a number of developments in the city during the 1870s. First and foremost, the railroads seemed to be a largely white occupation in 1877. The demographic figures for Baltimore are unavailable, but in nearby Philadelphia, black workers accounted for less than one percent of the railroad workforce.²⁹ There is little reason to believe Baltimore was markedly different. Secondly, Baltimore's black and white laborers shared a troubled history. In the late 1850s, and throughout the 1860s, white workers successfully pushed black caulkers out of the trade. This action capped off almost a decade of white laborers pushing African Americans out of various employment opportunities. In addition, Baltimore's black population was dispersed throughout the city and did not constitute a significant proportion of South Baltimore.³⁰ For many reasons then, African Americans had little incentive to aid white workers in their rebellion.

While relatively homogenous racially, the crowd was diverse in other ways. It is clear, that at least initially, the uprising benefited from the support of numerous Baltimoreans, not just those of the working classes. Delineating class in the crowd was—and still is—an exceedingly difficult task.³¹ However, enough anecdotal evidence survives that makes it clear that this was a multi-class affair. In part, this can be explained by the ani-

²⁸ By almost all accounts Baltimore's African-American population did not participate in the riot, a fact borne out by the arrest figures that only included two black men arrested for firearm possession. The only other story with any credibility that identifies African Americans participating in the riots occurred when two black men arrested for possessing firearms. See: "The City Last Night," *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 July 1877, 1.

²⁹ Walter Licht, *Working for the Railroad: The Organization of Work in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983): 222.

³⁰ For more information on the caulkers see: Dubois, "The Search for a Better Life," 40-2 and Shopes, "Fell's Point: Community and Conflict in a Working-Class Neighborhood" in *The Baltimore Book*, 125-5, 128. On the Black population: "Old West Baltimore," Olson in *The Baltimore Book*, 56-59.

³¹ The sheer size of the crowd provided rioters with a degree of anonymity, assuming that they avoided arrest. Moreover, the increasing affordability of material items, like ready-made clothing, destabilized material markers of class. This idea is brilliantly explored in: Brian Luskey, "Riot and Respectability: The Shifting Terrain of Language and Status in Baltimore During the Great Strike of 1877" *American Nineteenth Century History* Vol. 4, No. 3 (Fall 2003): 61-96.

mus against the B&O. One newspaper report noted that, “The prejudice against the Baltimore & Ohio road among the working classes, and to some extent among people in the higher walks of life, furnished at the beginning a strong fund of sympathy to sustain the strike.”³² In his contemporary history of the riots, author John Scharf noted that, “Men and boys of all ages and conditions congregated in front of the armories, and their conduct and actions showed that the majority were in sympathy with the strikers.” This proved problematic for the police. Jacob Frey, a marshal with the Baltimore Police Department admitted to being hesitant to intercede in with deadly force for fear of incurring the criticism of the population.³³

Women also made up a sizeable contingent of the crowd. It is difficult to determine precisely how many women participated. The daily newspapers and various other accounts, with few exceptions, failed to even note their presence. But the women rioters—like their male counterparts—came from diverse backgrounds and participated in a number of ways. Allan Pinkerton, of the infamous detective agency that bore his name, noted the presence of bar-room keepers, shopkeepers’ wives, and women who owned small businesses.³⁴ Some of the women thronged to the streets to urge the men in the crowd to renew their assaults; others, threw stones at them from windows. On one street, a report claimed that women “taunted the soldiers and cheered for the strikers.” On Lee Street near Camden Station, a group of women, “almost unassisted by the males,” dramatically held their ground as a phalanx of police approached, before finally retreating.

³² Martin, *History of the Great Riot*, 61-63.

³³ See: John Thomas Scharf, *History of Maryland: From the Earliest Period to the Present Day* (Baltimore: John B. Piet, 1879): 734. Jacob Frey, *Reminiscences*, 185. Other articles made passing reference to the widespread support of the community. See: “The Tragedy of Yesterday,” *The Baltimore Sun* 21 July 1877, 1.

³⁴ Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives*, 190-91, 193, 195.

Numerous illustrations further confirmed the presence of women during the riots. In an illustration depicting the march of the Sixth on Baltimore Street, a woman is seen hurrying away from the battle while another is either fainting or succumbing to her injuries. At the same time, a third woman at the front of the crowd is screaming at the soldiers as she prepares to hurl a large stone at them.³⁵ (*See Figure 2*)

Of course among the crowd were also workers, but contrary to popular perception, they were not exclusively railroad employees. “There was the hardy mechanic, on a strike; the railway fireman, on a strike;” reported Pinkerton, “occasionally an engineer, on a strike, because he had nothing else to do; butcher-boys with their aprons, armed with cleavers and big knives to aid the strike; cartmen, with load whips; coal-drawers, with their wagon-stakes and grimy features; firemen, from the nearest engine-house...”³⁶ The list of dead further testified to the variety of laborers present in the crowd. Among the ten killed during the first day of the riot were an Arabber (Baltimore street merchants), a laborer, a newsboy, and a fresco painter. As Martin pointed out men “in various occupations, who have suffered a reduction of wages of late, are in a sullen temper with their employers and with capitalists in general.” Other anecdotal evidence pointed to the fact that the crowd had working-class origins. On Saturday evening a contingent of strikers gathered at Camden Station where they serenaded the guarding officers with chants of “give us bread.”³⁷

³⁵ “The Attack on the Fifth,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* 21 July 1877, 1. Reports also claimed that women at Camden Station joined the assault on the station in both word and gesture. See: Dacus, *Annals of the Great Strike*, 65.

³⁶ Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives*, 171.

³⁷ The list of people was published in: “The Desperate Strikers,” *The New York Times* 21 July 1877, 1. Martin, *The History of the Great Riots*, 61. The occupations and list of the dead were pulled from: “Mob Spirit Abroad and *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* 21 July 1877, 1. “At the Central Station,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* 21 July 1877, 1. For the chants see: “The City Last Night,” *The Baltimore Sun* 22 July 1877, 1.

Class—more so than any other factor—contributed to both the chaos and violence erupting on the streets. However, it did so in rather unexpected ways. For the police and military, class identification complicated efforts at confronting the crowd. Marshal Frey admitted that his men were reluctant to draw their weapons on “neighbors and friends.” Class was even more problematic for the militia, especially the Sixth Regiment. The Sixth was comprised of many working-class citizens and marching through South Baltimore must have conjured up a host of conflicting emotions for them and the crowd. Some evidence suggests that the intense violence directed at this regiment could in part be due to the militia’s mixed-class roster. Outside of the armory, a man identified as one of the riot’s ringleaders indignantly asked one soldier, “You’ll go to fight workingmen, will you?”³⁸ Devoid of their context, utterances like this can be interpreted in a number of ways. It is possible that the men saw the riot in terms of a class-based rebellion and were simply castigating the soldiers for attacking their brethren. The possibility also exists that the men were shaming the militiamen from working-class backgrounds for siding with management and the state.³⁹

Other evidence also suggests Sixth’s mixed-class roster ratcheted up the violence. One crowd member recognized a soldier on his way to the armory, called him out by name, and proceeded to verbally harangue him. The next day members of the Sixth had to don civilian garb and furtively escape to their homes or risk “being torn to pieces.” Even weeks after the riots, the mention of the militia among workers drew heated denunciations, as J.P. McDonnell, the editor of *The Labor Standard* found out when he visited

³⁸ Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives*, 175.

³⁹ Luskey, “Riot and Respectability.” Luskey’s contention is backed by Maryland’s House of Delegates who criticized the use of regiments “composed to a great extent of the very lawless element, which produced the trouble.” See: *Journal of Proceedings of the House of Delegates of Maryland, January Session, 1878* (Annapolis: George Colton, Printer to the General Assembly, 1878) 1408.



Figure 1.2: From Allen Pinkerton's *Strikers, Communists, Tramps, and Detectives*.

city workers. When McDonnell related the story of militiamen siding with rioters in other cities, the meeting hall in Baltimore erupted into “hisses for the Sixth Regiment.”⁴⁰

The ill temper of the crowd, coupled with the militiamen’s nerves, made further violence almost a certainty at this point. Captain Lannan, of the Baltimore Police Department, knew they were in trouble. Huddling with the Sixth’s commanders, he explained that, “No number of available policemen would be powerful enough to disperse the crowd.” The soldiers had two choices: they could wait out the disturbance in the relative safety of the armory or attempt to move out.⁴¹ Within fifteen minutes the militia brass split their troops into three companies and ordered them to “load their muskets and present a bold front to the enemy in case of attack.” “Keep your heads down, boys!” one of the officers hollered as the men stepped onto the streets and into the crowd’s barrage of projectiles.⁴² “Give it to them,” Edward Crane, later identified as one of the riot’s ring-leaders, shrieked as he rushed toward a pile of bricks for fresh ammunition. Others yelled out, “Come on boys” and “Hurrah for the Strikers!” as the soldiers filed past.⁴³

What happened next, the *Baltimore Gazette* reported, “baffles all description.”⁴⁴ This time there was no doubt that the soldiers opened fire. Company F, the second company to leave the armory, immediately shot two people, wounding a fifteen-year old boy and killing one of the militiamen’s brother.⁴⁵ On the corner of Holliday and Baltimore streets, Cornelius Murphy took a bullet to the chest; Otto Manneck was shot in the cheek;

⁴⁰ Luskey, “Riot and Respectability, 87” and “Maryland,” *The Labor Standard* 19 August 1877, 3. See also Daclus, *Annals of the Great Strikes in the United States*, 75.

⁴¹ Quote taken from “Fifth and Sixth Regiments,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1. Accounts of the riot are also taken from “The Armory Mobbed,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁴² “The Armory Mobbed,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 21, 1877, 1.

⁴³ “Court Matters of Interest,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 November 1877

⁴⁴ “The Armory Mobbed,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁴⁵ “Mob Spirit Abroad,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1.

and W. Hourand, an eleven year-old newsboy received a bullet in the forehead. All three died moments later despite the efforts of a doctor who arrived to treat their injuries. As the soldiers continued on their path the body count mounted. On Baltimore Street, Patrick Gill and Lewis Sinnewitch fell victim to the soldiers' bullets; J.H. Frank and Mark J. Dowd each were shot in the head. Then as the soldiers walked past the Carrollton Hotel they encountered an elderly man urging on the rioters. Apparently one of the soldiers took offense to the man's exultations. Stepping out of the line, the soldier approached the man "took deliberate aim and fired." The *Gazette* dryly noted that, "The man in white clothes dropped dead."⁴⁶

Across town, the Fifth Regiment encountered their own set of problems in the form of a crowd of 1,000 waiting outside of Camden Station. From somewhere word reached the gathered masses that the Fifth had set out for the station and the crowd moved with determination to meet them. "Don't allow the sons of b--- to go;" someone exclaimed, "they are going to shoot strikers." Another screamed, "Don't let them go on, you strikers."⁴⁷ With that the crowd was off, moving north to arrest the soldiers' progress. Down Eutaw Street the militiamen marched and as they did so onlookers pummeled them from seemingly all directions.⁴⁸

The early evening battle between the crowd and the Fifth reached its climax moments later in southwest Baltimore. Reaching the corner of Eutaw and Camden streets the soldiers came face-to-face with a contingent of "rough looking men." The militia's

⁴⁶ "Fifth and Sixth Regiments," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1; "The Desperate Strikers," *The New York Times*, 21 July 1877, 1; and "The Riot in Baltimore," *The New York Times*, 22 July 1877, 2.

⁴⁷ "Court Matters of Interest," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 November 1877, 4.

⁴⁸ "The Attack on the Fifth," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1.

captain, W.P. Zollinger, looked back to his men and repeated his order not to fire. He then drew his sword and ordered the crowd to move aside. As if to convey the seriousness of his intentions, Zollinger used the blunt edge of his bayonet to strike a “brawny man” who had refused to give ground. Incredibly, the crowd stood down as the soldiers began to file into the station. As they disappeared into the darkness, those gathered began to call out the names of railroad officials accompanied by shouts of “Shoot them!” and “Hang them!”⁴⁹

By 7:30 PM, the Fifth was safely ensconced in Camden Station. They had endured verbal and physical assaults—twenty-five militiamen were reported injured—but they resisted the urge to open fire.⁵⁰ The Sixth, who arrived shortly thereafter, had also endured abuse but meted out some of its own. Their march was so chaotic and frightening that a number of troops took the opportunity to furtively duck into buildings—including a police station and cigar shop—to change clothing, and escape the bloodshed that surrounded them. Others succumbed to a host of injuries. By the time they reached the station, one company lost half of its thirty-six men and another lost three out of its original thirty-eight to “different casualties.”⁵¹ For those who made it to the station, it seemed that perhaps the worst had passed. But the battle in Baltimore was not yet over; it had just reached a temporary lull.

The rioters next sought to ensure that the militia would not be leaving for Cumberland. Down the tracks, small groups gathered to sabotage the rails while others con-

⁴⁹ Quotes taken from “The Attack on the Fifth,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1. Supporting information also culled from “The Fifth’s March to Camden,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁵⁰ Sylvia Gillett, “Camden Yards and the Strike of 1877,” *The Baltimore Book*, 7

⁵¹ “Mob Spirit Abroad,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* 21 July 1877, 1; Pinkerton, 185.

spired to destroy a bridge spanning Gwynn's Falls. Around the same time a passenger train had the misfortune to arrive from New York. As the travelers quickly disembarked, rioters set both the cars and the platform on fire. Others quickly forced two conductors off their trains and sent the engine cars barreling into abandoned passenger cars. With the rails made impassable they next endeavored to cut off the B&O's communication. Seeking out the company's dispatch and telegraph office, the rioters burned the building and cut down the telegraph wires. By one estimate, the crowd had now grown to include 15,000 people.⁵²

As the Camden Depot burned, Governor Carroll and Baltimore's mayor, Ferdinand C. Latrobe, huddled with district police officials, military commanders and the B&O's vice president to chart their next course of action. The governor and mayor agreed that the militia needed to stay in Baltimore, rather depart for Cumberland, a victory for the strikers. Carroll also telegraphed Rutherford B. Hayes with a request for reinforcements, which the President obliged by dispatching nearby troops and advising him to call upon neighboring states for help.⁵³

Meanwhile, the police struggled to maintain order. Having tried to quell the riot by arresting men they determined to be the ringleaders, a course of action that bore little fruit, they opened fire on the crowd gathered around Camden Station. Initially the officers fired low but soon targeted the crowd with more precision until "the groans of the

⁵² The retelling of this event is pulled from numerous newspaper stories from the July 21, 1877 issues of *The Baltimore Gazette*, *The Baltimore American*, and *The Baltimore Sun*. Throughout the night, small groups of rioters also targeted watch boxes all along the rail line, destroying a number of them, furthering ensuring that the troops would not be leaving via rail. See: "Riot at Camden Depot," *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁵³ Carroll also issued an edict urging all citizens to return home and "calling upon all law abiding citizens in Baltimore to aid in the maintenance of quiet." See: "The Fifth Regiment on a War Footing," *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 July 1877, 1 and "Another Proclamation by Governor Carroll," *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 July 1877, 1.

wounded were soon the only sounds that took the place of the challenges to which [the police] had so recently listened.” For the next few hours the police scuffled with people on the streets, arresting a number of men but also falling victim to the crowd’s indignation. By the end of the night, *The Baltimore Sun* reported that, “nearly all the policemen were struck by stones.”⁵⁴ Finally, by 1 AM most were able to leave the smoldering train station to the guard of the Sixth Regiment.⁵⁵ By 2:30 AM the city was largely peaceful, but no one could accurately predict what the next day would bring.

The next morning an eerie, tenuous calm settled over the smoldering ashes of the previous night’s riot. In spite of the tranquility, officials were not taking any chances. Baltimore’s police commissioners received reinforcements. On Saturday afternoon, 500 men were “drawn among the worthiest citizens of Baltimore” and sworn in as “special” policemen. If the class dimensions of the riot were not clear prior to this strategy they certainly became unmistakable after this move. Among the men who reported for volunteer duty, none were listed as working as laborers. It is perhaps not surprising then that throughout the day these volunteers were the butt of many a Baltimorean’s jokes.⁵⁶ *The Baltimore Gazette* observed that, “Some of the [men on the street] amuse themselves by dogging [the volunteer officer’s] steps and saluting them with such compliments as ‘Gay polices,’ ‘Look at them ole tramps,’ etc.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ “Riot at Camden Depot,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁵⁵ The Scene at Camden Station,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁵⁶ See: Frey, *Reminiscences*, 186; “The Special Policemen,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 3.

⁵⁷ “The Special Policemen,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 3.

Despite some minor dustups, and reports of unbridled inebriation, these measures seemed to work at first.⁵⁸ But as the day wore on more serious disturbances flared up. Near Camden Station a “mass of unruly men” and police officers exchanged shots, leaving a number of wounded on both sides and two dead in the crowd.⁵⁹ At another locale, a “several hundred men” attacked a squad of policemen; word on the street was that this group was composed of “South Baltimore roughs” and other disgruntled workmen from points along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.⁶⁰ When rumors circulated that rioters planned to attack nearby Mount Clare Station in West Baltimore the police converged in anticipation of the trouble. Once there the policemen stood their ground in the face of three charges by the crowd.⁶¹

By Saturday night it seemed that there was no solution to the disorder that plagued the city. It came as somewhat of surprise then that the skirmish at Mount Clare Station proved to be the last major act in the violent drama. In an instant, it seemed, it was over. The newspapers were hesitant to decree that the riots had ended on Monday but when that day passed with no further violence they confidently declared that order had returned to the city. “Peace reigns once more and order has again resumed her sway,” *The Baltimore Gazette* proudly claimed. In the end, the riot left at least twelve citizens dead, saw countless more wounded, filled the jails with over 200 arrestees, and

⁵⁸ “Fresh Arrival of U.S. Troops,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 3. One of the only day-time skirmishes occurred when three companies of United States engineer corps arrived at the President Street depot. The soldiers received a welcome from a contingent of 500 “men and youths” who bombarded them with “showers of missiles.” It seems the most frequent crime was committed by bar owners and their patrons who disregarded the police order to close until the disorder ended. See: “Drunkenness,” *The Baltimore American*, 23 July 1877, 1.

⁵⁹ “Camden Station,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1877, 1.

⁶⁰ However, the crowd did smash “nearly all the windows of the shops” and damage a number of boxcars. “Camden Station,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1877, 1.

⁶¹ “How Mount Clare Was Protected,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1877, 1.

cost the city approximately \$85,000 in damages. In addition, Camden Depot lay in fiery ruins while the Sixth's armory looked as if "it had passed through heavy siege."⁶²

With the dust settling, the only thing left to do was try to make sense of the riot and finger its culprits; a job for which journalists gladly volunteered. If the newspapers could agree on anything, it was that the police had performed admirably. Conveniently ignoring, or downplaying, police violence the papers heaped praise upon their bravery, efficiency, and skill in dealing with the riots. Three days after the initial outbreak of violence *The Baltimore Gazette* argued that the police were superior to the military in dealing with civil unrest. "It is the function of the soldier to fight; it is the business of the policeman to capture," *The Baltimore Gazette* surmised, "he is the minister and the visible representative of the CIVIL LAW, and lawbreakers are accustomed to respect his office and to fear his power."⁶³

The press also cleared railroad and government officials of most responsibility. Initially, the press was willing to rebuke railroad officials for their treatment of their employees and the role this played in the tumult, but these criticisms were often fleeting.

⁶² "There were no midnight alarms, disastrous conflagrations or riotous demonstrations in the city last night," the paper continued, "and Baltimore was comparatively tranquil during the day." "The City Quiet," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 24 July 1877, 3. On the Sixth Regiment's march from their armory during the first day of riots, at least ten people died. See: Scharf, *History of Maryland*, 735. In addition, the newspapers reported that at least two others died. For the financial expenditures, see: *Journal of Proceedings of the House of Delegates of Maryland, January Session, 1878* (Annapolis: George Colton, Printer to the General Assembly, 1878) 1406. For number of arrested at Camden Station see: "Rioters Under Arrest," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 1. For the last quote, see: Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives*, 186.

⁶³ "Police and Military," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 2. *The Baltimore American* also touted the police's abilities over that of the militia in quelling the riots. "One policemen," the paper boasted, "was equal to a dozen soldiers." See: "Making Arrests," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1. Governor Carroll also did his part in shaping a narrative that excused police misconduct. Shortly after the riots' conclusion, Governor Carroll penned a letter that read, in part, "The untiring activity of the [police], and their bold assaults upon the lawless crowds assembled, have excited the admiration and gratitude of our citizens, and have carried convictions to the minds of all that peace and order will be restored without the effusion of blood." No mention was made of the blood that had already been spilled. See: Carroll's letter is reprinted in: Scharf, *History of Maryland*, 742.

Similarly, some of the papers were initially critical of government officials. *The Baltimore American* castigated the authorities by noting that they were “slow to move, and fail[ed] to use measures of prevention which are so essential to the preservation of peace and good order.”⁶⁴ Journalists made similar short shrift in their examinations of the militia. Only *The Sun* tackled the issue of military violence—albeit tepidly—in their coverage. In their first editorial after the Friday riots, *The Sun* wondered, “What provocation, if any, the soldiers had for an apparently indiscriminate firing on the people who followed their steps and the innocent bystander on the sidewalks.”⁶⁵ For the most part though, the papers never bothered to probe these questions with any depth.

In exonerating city and state officials, along with the police and military, journalists laid the blame squarely on the shoulders of the rioters. However, they did not blame workers. Rather, most accounts went out of their way to accuse the “vicious and criminal classes” for fomenting the riots.⁶⁶ In certain respects, commentators were walking various tightropes in describing the crowd. Left unsaid in many of the accounts, was the fact that whites were the most prominent participants. Here, depictions of the riots ran headlong into ideas of race, class, and criminality current in the late nineteenth century. As

⁶⁴ “A Perilous Night—Fire—Riot—Murder,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁶⁵ “The Tragedy of Yesterday,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 July 1877, 1. Both the *American* and *Gazette* recognized that the soldiers’ appearance on the streets served to antagonize the crowds, yet said very little about the soldiers’ use of violence that day. Although it was never clear if the soldiers had to fire, or if they fired first, the papers generally excused their actions without much deliberation. See, for instance, “Police and Military,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 1 and “The Attack on the Fifth,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 21 July 1877, 1. *The Gazette* seized the opportunity to commend the Fifth Regiment, and those in the Sixth who did not fire, for their restraint, while saying nothing of the role of military violence in increasing tensions. “Untitled Article,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 24 July 1877, 2. “Police and Military,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 2.

⁶⁶ “The Strike,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1877, 1. In fact, the papers seemingly went out of their way to avoid blaming workers for the Great Uprising. *The Baltimore American*, for instance, made it a point the day after the riots ended to contend that of those arrested, none were employees of the B&O. Instead, the rioters consisted of “rowdies, loafers and half-grown boys who were never engaged in running railroad trains or any other honest employment.”

historian Khalil Gibran Muhammad noted, the late nineteenth century gave rise to a new discourse that linked crime with blackness, but also excused white crime as an “individual failure.”⁶⁷ Faced with this realization, editorialists, journalists and observers sought ways to explain what happened, without indicting the white working classes.

The easiest way to do this was to draw on rapidly changing notions of poverty. By the 1870s, as historian Joshua Brown noted, newspapers helped shape a new discourse concerning poverty. The “tramp,” and its various synonyms, became a character type of the “undeserving poor,” despised equally by the middle and working classes.⁶⁸ Aimless, shiftless, and predatory, the “tramp” stalked the countryside waiting for the opportunity to strike. The “tramp” was almost invariably male and was made all the more dangerous by his ability to bandy about the country on the very rails which the strikers targeted. Using the character of the “tramp,” the middle and upper classes constructed a discourse that blamed poverty on personal and moral failure.

For various reasons then, the tramp became the ideal scapegoat, and the focus of local reports. *The Gazette*, for instance, classified the rioters as “roughs” “tramps, and “criminals,” or blamed the episode on “sharpers” who prey upon the honest workman.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010): 4-5.

⁶⁸ Joshua Brown, “The Great Uprising and Pictorial Order in Gilded Age America,” in *The Great Strikes of 1877*, David O. Stowell, ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008): 15-54. *The Baltimore Gazette* even reported a rumor contending that “tramps” were pouring in from surrounding areas in search of “plunder.” See: “Tramps in Search of Plunder,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 3 and “Mob Spirit Abroad,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1877, 1.

⁶⁹ “A National Calamity,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 21 July 1877, 2; “The Strike,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* 23 July 1877, 1; “Dangerous Symptoms,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 24 July 1877, 2; “Not to be Postponed,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 6 August 1877, 2. Allen Pinkerton, in wrote that, “From the lowest, vilest dens, the petty gambling halls, the drinking cellars, the houses of ill-repute, the thieves issued, the very scum of the slums, having no other idea than to plunder, steal, and if occasion offered, cut throats, and murder.” See: Pinkerton, *Strikers, Communists, Tramps and Detectives* 189.

Other reports harkened on similar themes. They blamed the riots on “the vicious element...mostly composed of ruffians out of employment.”⁷⁰

With the tramp established as the show’s headliner, journalists could then draw upon other ideas concerning race, class, and gender to further drive home their interpretations. Although African Americans did not participate in the riots in large numbers, *The Baltimore Gazette* attempted to blame blacks for spreading the disorder. With the police otherwise occupied, the paper reported that a group of African Americans felt free to insult a white woman at Perkins Square, a park in West Baltimore away from the main disorder. This was the occasion for “a general assault by the negroes upon the white people in the square.” During the alleged melee the paper reported that, “Firearms were freely used” and the “pleasant residence section was rudely disturbed.” The paper, of course, drew upon some of the main elements of late nineteenth century racialized discourse to demonstrate what it surely thought was the worse outcome that the riot was capable of producing. However, there was one glaring problem for the *Gazette*: the disturbance did not happen the way the paper reported it. The next day the *Baltimore American* took the *Gazette* to task for blaming blacks, when instead it was “white rowdies who come to that locality on Sunday evenings.”⁷¹ *The Gazette* never retracted the story.

Journalists frequently utilized ethnicity and fears over immigration to even greater effect. Often, the papers avoided blaming specific groups of people; rare was the assertion, made by Dacus, that Germans, Bohemians and Poles were fomenting the rebellion. Instead, the papers drew on various tropes to get their points across. For instance, city

⁷⁰ Martin, *The History of the Great Riots*, 67.

⁷¹ For the original article see: “Untitled Editorial,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 24 July 1877, 2. On the American’s rebuttal see: “The Colored People and the Strike,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 25 July 1877, 2. In issuing their rebuttal the paper reported that African Americans would not riot for they were, “as a rule quiet, orderly, and well-behaved.”

dailies and other commentators linked the riots to “dangerous foreign ideas.” *The Baltimore American* likened the riots to the “excesses of the Paris Commune.”⁷² Martin’s, *History of the Great Riots*, published in 1877, claimed, “The worst elements of the Old World, that had been driven out of Europe, suddenly appeared in our midst, and proclaiming their terrible doctrines of destruction and rapine, endeavored to revive in our prosperous and peaceful land the horrors of the Parisian Commune.”⁷³

Whether poor, black, or immigrant, most of the journalists named men as the instigators of the riots, thereby highlighting the violence, anger, and destruction of the strikes. Even though the papers, especially locally, gendered the Great Uprising as male, they underscored their interpretations by deploying notions of femininity. While the local papers were reticent about discussing women rioters, national publications displayed no such hesitation. In some respects, these publications did an admirable job demonstrating the ways in which women participated in the riot. Among the illustrations published in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, one shows a woman, presumably a rioter, falling to the ground, brick in hand. The illustration highlighted the violence—although notably the militiaman or police officer that shot her is not pictured—of the riots but also demonstrated to the viewer that women were active participants. (See *Figure Three*) More often, the depictions were less balanced. In the story appearing in *Frank Leslie’s*, the author

⁷² “The Strike,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1877, 1. If there was any doubt, the paper also published another untitled editorial in the same issue that directly linked the riots to the “gaunt spectre of communism.” See: “Untitled Editorial,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 23 July 1877, 1.

⁷³ Martin, *The History of the Great Riots*, 4.



THE SCENE AFTER THE FIRST VOLLEY.

Figure 1.3: *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* August 04, 1877

notes that when the riot started “women and children ran screaming and fainting in every direction.” Similarly, journalist J.A. Dacus’, reported that, “Women screamed and fainted in the streets.”⁷⁴ The images and descriptions of fainting women painted the strikers as violent and lacking respectability.

The newspapers and commentators also used women and families to highlight the “tragedy” of the Great Uprising. For many of the papers and commentators, the tragedy of the strike was not the violence but the impact that strikers’ actions had on their fami-

⁷⁴ For the illustration in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* see: “The Scene After the First Volley,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* 04 August 1877, Cover Illustration. The *Frank Leslie* article can be found in: “The Great Railroad Strike,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 4 August 1877, 371. Also see: J.A. Dacus, 71.

lies. For instance, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* published an illustration weeks after the riots depicting a working-class family (including a mother and her two kids) watching as the club-wielding, knife-holding father is angrily destroying provisions, including coffee, flour, pork, tea and hams. The club the man is using has broken off at the handle. The barrel of the club (reading "riot") lies on the ground while smoke with the words "mob law" billows from the handle. The caption underneath pithily reads, "The Moral of the Strikes." (See *Figure Four*) Even more foreboding, was a *Puck* illustration entitled "The Rioters Railroad to Ruin." The drawing featured a train, complete with a skull and two skeletal hands, barreling past two fallen women, with strikers rioting in the background. Both of these drawings simplified women's roles and attitudes toward the strikes and strikers. In both cases, the women are seen solely as victims of the strikes and clearly not supportive of them, contentions that flew in the face of many reports. (See *Figure Five*)

The irony of these drawings of course, is that they said little about how the railroad companies impoverished working-class families. In fact, the "The Moral of the Strikes," pictures a family rich with provisions. Rather than destroying a small stockpile of goods, the worker is demolishing barrels of pork, flour, coffee, and sugar-cured hams. These images shifted the blame for the violence back on the strikers and away from the railroads, police, militia, and government. Whether through physical or economic violence, these periodicals crafted a discourse that demonized the poor and working classes. It is tempting to dismiss the commentaries about the rioters as simply a reflection of the various fears of late nineteenth century urbanites. However, to do so discounts

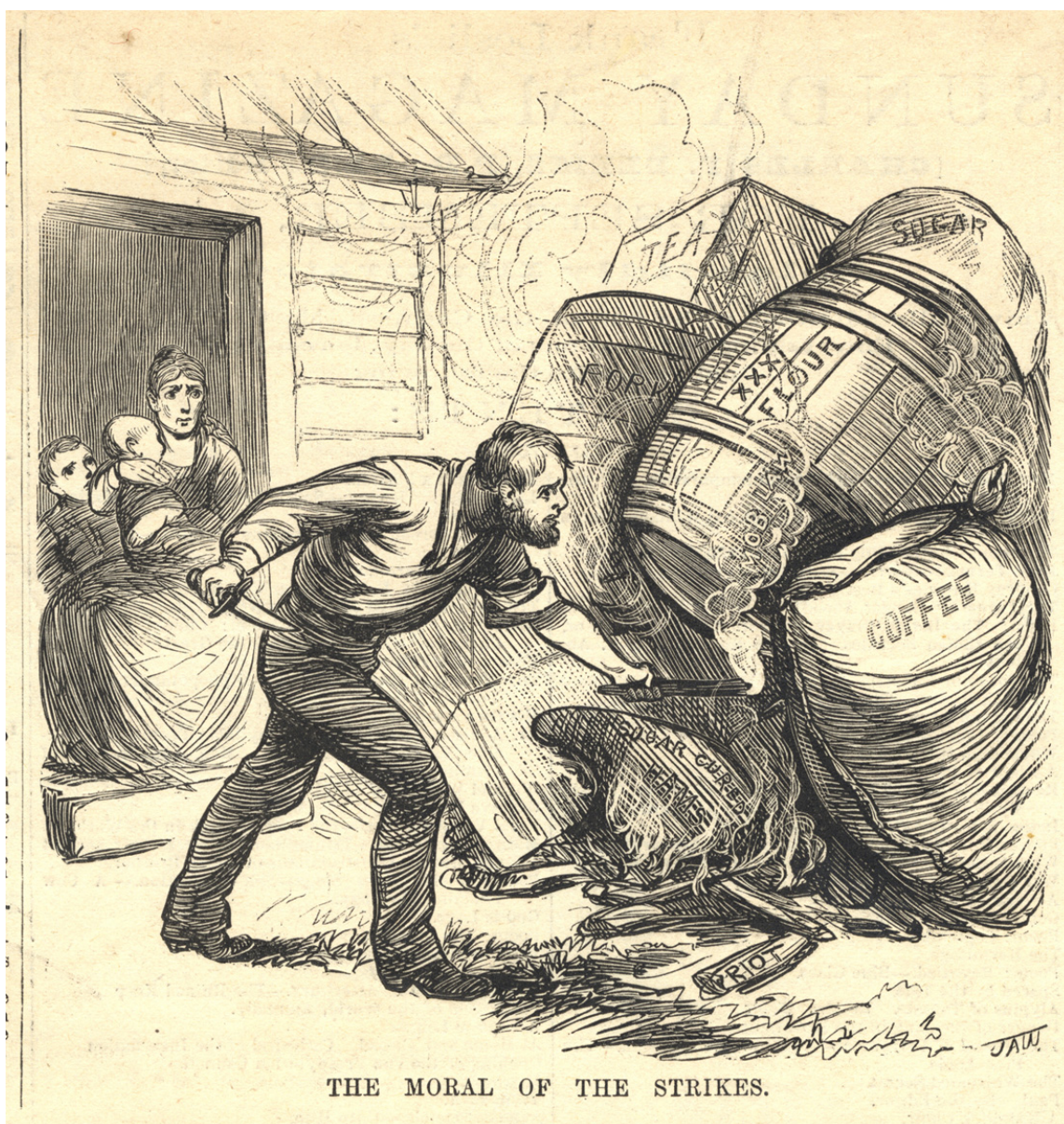


Figure 1.4: Illustration from *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* August 08, 1877



Figure 1.5: Illustration from *Puck* August 01, 1877

the power of the press in the late nineteenth century to shape public discourse and serve as space of debate. Newspapers communicated, in the words of political scientist James C. Scott, a “public transcript” of domination, “designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule.”⁷⁵ In an age prior to the advent of radio and television, the press held tremendous power in shaping the perceptions and expectations of its readership. For those not well versed in labor affairs, or who did not interact with the working poor on a daily basis, the portrayals of lawlessness, wanton destruction, and violence became a primary basis for understanding and interpreting the Great Uprising.

By blaming various “criminals” for the Great Uprising, journalistic accounts ultimately undermined the workers’ grievances against both the railroad companies and industrial capitalism. Instead, the papers contended that the riots were nothing more than the unjustifiable destruction of property by a disaffected, lazy, class of impoverished miscreants prone to crime. Conveniently, this interpretation also allowed commentators to reinforce the idea that respectable workers, while having some legitimate grievances, were largely contented with their lot in life. Faced with this narrative, railroad workers were put in the awkward position of having to disavow any part in the riots but at the same time asserting that the strikes had legitimacy. Three of the four major dailies all found workers who claimed that workmen did not take part in the riot but noted that the recent wage reductions made it difficult to live.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 18.

⁷⁶ The papers were particularly fond of finding workmen willing to venture out on this rhetorical tightrope. See, for instance: “The Strikers Plea,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 July 1877, 3; “Untitled Article,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 24 July 1877, 4; “The Strike,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 4 August 1877, 4.

At the same time, this discourse justified the use of state-sanctioned violence in the name of preserving law and order. *The Gazette* opined that the riots “must be stopped in the bud and by overwhelming force. We lay this stress upon heavy force,” the paper continued, “because our citizen soldiers ought to prefer an assertion of calm superiority of physical force to the necessity of fighting. Small bands of soldiers provoke resistance; heavy battalions silence it.” The use of force against this class of “miserable outlaws” even justified, for the newspapers, the killing of innocent bystanders.⁷⁷ *The Labor Standard* immediately recognized the potential power of this discourse, warning that it “sought to create the belief that the thousands of people who participate in this mighty struggle are thieves and tramps. The object of this is to more easily induce the militia to fire upon the people and to create a reaction in the public mind against the strike.”⁷⁸

Finally, local newspapers, affiliated with the major political parties, had additional reasons for wanting to avoid blaming the working classes. As a growing contingent of the city’s population, white workers were important as voters and played a vital role in the city’s economy. This helps explain the reasons why the local newspapers (even more so than the national papers) were so insistent on blaming the criminal classes for the riots. By doing so they could hold onto the fiction of an inclusive republican pol-

⁷⁷ “What Must Be Done,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 25 July 1877, 2; “The Duty of the Hour,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 24 July 1877, 4 and “Police and Military,” *The Baltimore Gazette* 23 July 1877, 2. *The Baltimore American* contended that the innocent men and women who mingled “with a crowd of roughs and vagrants” should “expect to suffer.” *The Gazette* fundamentally agreed with *The American*’s assertion when it explained that the soldiers could not be expected to discriminate between innocents and lawbreakers during the riots.

⁷⁸ “Labor in Arms,” *The Labor Standard*, 28 July 1877, 2.

ity, whereby grievances could be effectively handled through the current political system and class differences did not exist.⁷⁹

However, the editors could not escape the fact that this fragile unity was splitting apart at the seams. As the papers desperately clung to the hope that the city's white body politic would not cleave along class lines, the riots demonstrated just how wide the chasm had become. The editorials and articles in the local press functioned then as a last ditch peace offering of sorts to the city's working classes. While the papers were correct that most of those arrested were not railroad workers, they certainly knew that many in the crowds were of the working class. In the end, the newspapers longed for a return to peace and order in their city, and likely did not want to alienate workers further. As the strikes spread throughout the country, and became more violent, the last thing Baltimoreans wanted was a return to mayhem. Under normal circumstances the controversies surrounding those two nights would have probably slowly disappeared from the papers, their assertions and categorizations never challenged. Yet, 1877 was an election year in the city and workers were not willing to let it go.

Even before the riots, "two or three workmen" at Hill's Shoe Manufactory in Baltimore were exploring the idea of forming a workingmen's party. Soon, local labor activist John George Rieker began searching for space in the city where the new group could hold a meeting. In a case of unfortunate timing, their plans were disrupted on July 20th, when the riots gripped the city. After waiting patiently for two weeks while the hubbub

⁷⁹ After all, *The Baltimore Gazette* noted, "Any poor communist is as free as his employer, and has just as fair a chance to be President of the United States." "Dangerous Symptoms," *The Baltimore Gazette*, 25 July 1877, 2.

surrounding the riots faded, Rieker secured space at Rechabite Hall, “and from that small beginning [a] great movement had come” in the form of the Workingmen’s Party.⁸⁰

Workers had little time to spare if they hoped to mount a serious challenge to the other parties in Baltimore’s mayoralty race. Already two candidates had thrown their hats in the ring, each was well known and each had already made reform a key theme in the contest. The Reform party candidate, Henry M. Warfield, ran a popular campaign in the 1875 mayoral election, challenging Baltimore’s Democratic political machine. Amidst charges of Democratic fraud, Warfield barely lost the 1875 contest. In deciding to run again in 1875, his election committee half-jokingly nominated him for *re-election*, since “the [people’s] will was trampled under foot in 1875.”⁸¹ The Democratic nominee, George P. Kane, was also a widely known figure, both locally and nationally. *The New York Times* described Kane as “a most violent and bitter rebel” during the Civil War when he was arrested—while serving as Baltimore’s police Marshal—for his alleged part in the failed 1861 Abraham Lincoln assassination conspiracy.⁸² Even before the entrance of a potential third challenger, the stage was set for an interesting election.

1877 was not the first year that workers in Baltimore had attempted to create a political organization. In the waning years of the 1860s, laborers formed the Workingmen and Reform Party. Despite its name, this party sought to harmonize the interests of producers in the city, including laborers, merchants, manufacturers and farmers, excluding only professional occupations (like bankers and career politicians). In the 1869 election, the organization’s candidates failed miserably in their efforts to capture the city council,

⁸⁰ Workingmen’s Political Meetings,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 August 1877, 1.

⁸¹ Quote taken from: “Meeting of the ‘Warfield Campaign Committee,’” *The Baltimore Sun*, 26 June 1877, 4. Also see: Gillett, “Camden Yards and the Strike of 1877,” 12.

⁸² He became the sheriff in 1872. “Death of Baltimore’s Mayor,” *The New York Times*, 24 June 1878, 1.

sheriff's office, and a host of other positions.⁸³ However, 1877 was a different time and this was a different organization. Already, the wind was at workers' backs as the new movement drew on the heightened sense of class identity and solidarity that developed after the bloody riots. Unlike, the Workingmen and Reform Party, the 1877 organization organized around class, seeking to nominate candidates "so far as possible selected from the ranks of labor." The party also promised inclusiveness, welcoming all workers "without distinction of race, creed or color to unite their political interests."⁸⁴

Despite Workingmen's early calls for racial unity, the party encountered turbulence when it tried to create a bi-racial organization. On August 24th, the issue exploded during the party's convention. Sometime during that evening's meeting Thomas Snow, a representative of the Twentieth ward in North Baltimore, offered a resolution that the *Gazette* described as being "like a spark in a tinder box." Snow wanted to "recognize any honest body of colored workingmen in full accord with this movement." Suddenly, the mundane meeting devolved into bedlam. "Out of order!" someone angrily shouted in the hall. Others began to call out that they "do not want the colored men with us." Some of the representatives jumped to the defense of black workers. One white organizer described the city's black laborers as "the bone and sinew of the land, as well as the whites." Another delegate supported the inclusion of African Americans because "they were alike interested in the elevation of the social condition of the laboring classes."⁸⁵

⁸³ For information on the 1869 effort see: Dubois, "The Search for a Better Life," 32-40.

⁸⁴ "Baltimore Workingmen not Willing to Sell Out their Cause to Party Factions," *The Labor Standard* 16 September 1877, 3. "Workingmen Organized," *The Baltimore Bee*, 4 September 1877, 4.

⁸⁵ A number of newspapers reported on these events, see: "Workingmen's Convention," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 24 August 1877, 4; "A Germ of Discord," *The Baltimore Gazette* 27 August 1877, 2; "The Workingmen's Political Movement," *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 August 1877, 1; and "Workingmen's Party," *The Baltimore Bee* 24 August 1877, 4.

However, these voices of support were drowned out by the calls for exclusion. George Flaherty, the chairman of the First Ward Lyceum, was the most vituperative. Standing before the meeting he declared that he refused to associate with African Americans “as delegates or in any other way” and warned that the party risked losing the first seven wards in the city if blacks were incorporated. Another conferee, S.S. Henderson, who identified himself as a “life-long republican,” felt that blacks should be excluded because “the negro had been a drag to the [Republican Party].” At one point, the debate became so loud that the President could not be heard over the din.⁸⁶

Political expediency complicated both sides of the argument on the issue of racial inclusiveness. In a showdown with an entrenched Democratic machine it seemingly made practical sense for Workingmen to seek the support of the city’s black voters. Yet it was not as practical as it may have first appeared. Because the party did not enjoy the established roots of the major political parties, workers needed to convince potential voters to abandon their entrenched political identities.⁸⁷ The Workingmen tried to cobble together a coalition of voters who had for years identified themselves as Republican or Democrat; not an easy obstacle to overcome in the late nineteenth century.

In trying to woo Democratic voters in a border state, the organization walked a thin line when it came to race. As one observer pointed out, the Workingmen might more actively court black voters, “if they were not afraid they would loose [sic] the democrats

⁸⁶ “Workingmen’s Convention,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 24 August 1877, 4; “A Germ of Discord,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 27 August 1877, 2; “The Workingmen’s Political Movement,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 August 1877, 1; and “Workingmen’s Party,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 24 August 1877, 4.

⁸⁷ Although this intense identification with the Republican and Democratic parties was beginning to slowly exhibit cracks by the 1870s, parties still held substantial sway on citizens. See: Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986): 13.

who are working with them if they made too much of the colored men.”⁸⁸ On the other hand, there were—according to the *Baltimore Sun*—at least 12,000 registered black Republican voters in the city whose support was there for the taking. This was a fact not lost on everyone at the meeting. One unidentified member from the city’s sixteenth ward estimated that his ward had over 1,000 African-American voters, other attendees from the second and thirteenth ward also reported interest among black voters.⁸⁹

Although there was considerable support for allowing African Americans to join the party—opponents tried to table debate but lost by a count of 54 nays to 17 yeas—a mixture of hubris and white privilege won the day. These debates revealed a darker side of the movement and surely reminded African-American of the deep racial divisions amongst Baltimore’s working class. Undoubtedly, many of these attitudes were forged in the city’s workplaces where white workers blamed African Americans for lowering wages. Therefore, some Workingmen felt that an inclusive movement would diminish their status and respectability. Arguing against a bi-racial organization, George Flaherty took to the floor and proclaimed, “I be damned if I consider a nigger as good as myself, and I won’t mix with them.” Another man reportedly expressed similar sentiments before the meeting exploded into a cavalcade of catcalls and shouts. Others smugly felt that the conversation was not worth having since, as J.J. Ward pronounced, “The colored men would see which party was their friend, and would vote for it without any need of the resolution.” *The Baltimore Gazette* was at least partially correct when it noted that, “The workingmen wouldn’t have anything to do with cheap colored labor, but they are per-

⁸⁸ “The Workingmen’s Movement,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 October 1877, 1.

⁸⁹ *The Baltimore Sun* claimed that there were 12,000 black voters registered to the Republican Party alone. Other estimates of black registration have been difficult to locate. See: “The Republican City Executive Committee,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 September 1877, 4.

fectly willing to accept colored votes.”⁹⁰ By the end of the night, the meeting adjourned without resolving the issue, but race proved to have lasting repercussions.

With unresolved racial problems hanging over them, the Workingmen quickly drafted a platform, and a month later called a meeting to nominate their mayoral candidate. Five candidates were considered, but in the end the party unanimously decided on a blacksmith named Joseph Thompson. By 1877 Thompson was forty-one years old and had spent his life in Baltimore where he and his two brothers took over their fathers’ wheelwright and blacksmith business on Centre Street.⁹¹ Respected by all who dealt with him, he was particularly well esteemed in the working-class communities of Baltimore as an outspoken labor advocate.⁹²

Although articulate, and by all accounts an engaging public speaker, Thompson was not provocative or prone to emotional outbursts. He delivered his speeches in a style that *The Baltimore Sun* found to be “declamatory” rather than “argumentative.”⁹³ For these reasons, *The Gazette* thought it fortunate that the Workingmen’s Party chose “a man of such good reputation for capacity and honesty.”⁹⁴ That night, as Thompson ap-

⁹⁰ Flaherty is quoted in “A Germ of Discord,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 27 August 1877, 2 and the Ward quote is taken from: “The Workingmen’s Political Movement,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 August 1877, 1. For the last quote, see: “Untitled,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 October 1877, 2.

⁹¹ “Workingmen’s Mayoralty Convention,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 September 1877, 1.

⁹² For instance, Thompson was known for opposing convict labor. See: Gillett, “Camden Yards and the Strike of 1877,” 12.

⁹³ “Workingmen’s Speeches—Remarks of Mr. Thompson in the Tenth Ward,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 September 1877, 4. The Baltimore press made a host of other observations about Thompson as well. *The American* was impressed with his oratorical abilities, noting that his manner was unassuming, easy and natural, plain spoken and direct in conversation.” They also found his speeches, while “not always made in lines of grace...cannot be called inappropriate.” See: “Let Mr. Thompson Speak Out,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 8 September 1877, 2. “The Workingmen’s Party,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 12 September 1877, 4.

⁹⁴ “Workingmen’s Mayoralty Convention,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 September 1877, 1 and “Let Mr. Thompson Speak Out,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 8 September 1877, 2.

proached the president's desk, he looked out into the packed hall and told his supporters that, "Rather would I be an honest blacksmith than a dishonest mayor."⁹⁵

With their candidate selected the party channeled their energy into rallying potential voters. In part, the movement's political culture—and the pageantry of their rallies—attracted working-class Baltimoreans. Night after night, the party held gatherings—usually on a ward basis—on the city's streets and in various meeting halls.⁹⁶ In the years immediately preceding 1877, union membership plummeted across the country. In a wave of labor oppression, workers across the United States resorted to clandestine meetings and communications in lieu of open protest.⁹⁷ The open political rallies held by the Workingmen sent the implicit message that workers were stepping out of the shadows and reclaiming respectability. The speeches made this statement overt. "We see as [an organization] results [in] the fields of waving grain, and the laborer returning home to lay in his dear wife's lap the recompense of that day's toll," Thompson claimed, "the sunshine of peace and happiness about this home; the healthy babe, that draws the breath of life in liberty; a continued sense of prosperity, good will, happiness and virtue." Other speeches incorporated patriotic messages to claim respectability. At the movement's city convention, one speaker remarked that, "The fathers of our country were workingmen.

⁹⁵ "Workingmen's Mayoralty Convention," *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 September 1877, 1.

⁹⁶ In one speech, Thompson quoted Daniel Webster's contention that the government's duty was to protect labor and then implored his audience to follow in the footsteps of their working-class ancestors at Bunker Hill and Valley Forge." See: "The Workingmen," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 14 September 1877, 4. On patriotism and the Workingmen's Party see: "The Workingmen," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 29 September 1877, 4.

⁹⁷ For an excellent account of the state of labor and workers in the 1870s see: Foner, *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*; Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*. "Workingmen's Political Speeches," *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 October 1877, 1.

The mothers and their children worked.”⁹⁸ Combining images of patriotism, family life, and labor, the Workingmen’s Party legitimized workers as vital and respectable citizens.

Yet the party would not have been able to unmoor workers’ traditional political identities without a platform that addressed the practical concerns of its constituents. On the evening of September 3rd the Workingmen’s Party called a citywide meeting to set a reform agenda that would serve as the foundation for the fall’s political campaign. In an effort to remedy the plight of working families the Baltimore organization presented a platform that addressed work, community, and family concerns. It called for, among other things, an eight-hour day, greater sanitary inspection of shops, workplaces, and homes, the end to child and convict labor, the creation of a bureau of labor statistics, reforms in the area of criminal justice, and having employers held liable for workplace accidents. The most radical element of the platform called for the government to take control “railroads, telegraphs, and all means of transportation.” It also wanted other industries to be controlled by the government but operated through “free co-operative trade unions.” However, the organization emphasized the least controversial issues of convict labor, workday hours, direct city employment, and the repealing of a law that enabled landlords to evict tenants without a court order. The platform also sought to attract the support of women and proposed a plank that called for women to receive the same wages as men.⁹⁹

As Election Day approached, the Workingmen received an added boost. By September it was apparent that the campaign of the Reform candidate, Warfield, was mori-

⁹⁸ See: “Workingmen at Work,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 14 September 1877, 4 and “Workingmen’s Address,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 4 September 1877, 1.

⁹⁹ “Workingmen’s Political Meetings,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 August 1877, 1. *The Baltimore Bee* estimated the gathering to be somewhere between two and three thousand people. See: “Maryland Institute,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 7 August 1877, 4.

bund and the *Sun* predicted that a number of former Warfield supporters would now vote for Thompson.¹⁰⁰ The once three-candidate race was now down to two and the Workingmen's improved prospects made them a threat to the city's Democratic machine. The Democratic Party and press wasted little time in reframing the election as a contest between the order promised by Kane and the chaos assured by Thompson.

The more established Democrats should have been secure in their position against the long-shot Workingmen's Party; they were not. *The Baltimore Gazette*—the local Democratic paper—led the charge, revisiting and ramping up the rhetoric they introduced in the aftermath of the July riots. In an editorial published two days prior to the election, *The Gazette* pointedly asked whether voters would turn the city over to, “Those who sympathize with the rioters of last summer, and who now seek to get by ballots what they sought then to get by bullets?”¹⁰¹ Throughout October the paper also trumpeted the charge of communism against Thompson and the Workingmen's party, framing the election as a contest “not between Colonel Kane and Mr. Thompson, but a struggle between society and communism.”¹⁰² The Democratic Party amplified this rhetoric at their rallies. S. Teackle Wallis, of the city's Democratic Reform Party, categorized Thompson as a “clever man, of very considerable education, adroit in the use of words and has specious way of presenting and disguising his doctrines.”¹⁰³ As the campaign cycle drew to a close, the *Gazette* rarely missed an opportunity to portray the Workingmen's Party as a group of

¹⁰⁰ “Baltimore City Political Matters,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 September 1877 and “Deserting a Mayoralty Candidate,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 September 1877, 4.

¹⁰¹ On the issue of law and order, see: “Only One Issue,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 October 1877. On the linkages made between the riots and the Workingmen's Party see: “Who Were the Rioters?” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 22 October 1877. “Two Days More,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 22 October 1877.

¹⁰² “Democratic Mass Meeting,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 11 October 1877, 1. On the Workingmen's Party being a class-based organization, see: “Today's Duty,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 24 October 1877. Quote taken from, “A Communist Organ,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 19 October 1877.

¹⁰³ “Democratic Mass Meeting,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 October 1877, 1.

dangerous radicals. Perhaps its clearest statement came when it advised its readership that although “there are several parties in the field for this mayoralty contest ... there is only one issue: It is law and order versus Rechabite-hall [a reference to a popular, local meeting hall] communism.”¹⁰⁴

The improved fortunes of the Workingmen’s Party sparked an immediate change in the narrative that the *Gazette* and Democrats crafted to explain the riots. Initially, newspapers and politicians were reticent about blaming workers. Hoping to keep the city’s white working class in the political fold, avoid further unrest, and restore order, the press and city officials cast a wide net in an effort to ensnare suitable scapegoats. Few expected the Workingmen to be even a minor force in the campaign and because of this, the press treated them as a political novelty. Yet, by the stretch run, the Workingmen’s adversaries were faced with an organization showing surprising vitality. In response *The Gazette* struck back with fury; no longer would it equivocate by exonerating working people from the riots in July. The white working classes, once respected in public discourse and courted politically, became social pariahs. Now, the riots were not the machinations of troublemakers and tramps, but something much more serious. *The Gazette* charged that the riot was but the opening act of a revolution that would culminate in the workers’ triumphs at the polls and then asked its readership if they were “prepared to vote in favor of the programme of the rioters of last July?” The paper it seemed was doing everything it could to cast suspicion upon the party.

In their efforts to counter the *Gazette* and the Democratic Party’s charges, the Workingmen gained an unlikely ally: the *Baltimore American* newspaper. Although the

¹⁰⁴ “Only One Issue,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 October 1877, 2.

paper was initially suspicious of the Workingmen, by October the daily changed its tune. It is probable that the paper, affiliated with the Republican Party, endorsed the Workingmen because it loathed the Democratic machine and wished to spite the *Gazette*. Whatever their real reasons, the paper provided positive coverage to the party and Thompson, as well as exposing the party to a wider audience. The Workingmen also benefited from the coverage of the *Baltimore Bee*, an independent paper, who did not endorse Thompson, but did defend the party against charges of communism in the days leading up to the election.¹⁰⁵

Although workers rarely were given the chance to explain their views of the riots, the *American* and the *Bee* helped the Workingmen counter Democrat's charges. For instance, an *American* editorialist heaped praise upon Thompson by declaring that "In the election of Mr. Thompson there is the certainty of reform, and, what is still more important, a breaking up of organized corruption, which is using every means in its power to accomplish by fraud what it cannot accomplish by honest votes." Another editorial found that the Workingmen's leaders possessed "good, hard common sense, sterling honesty and integrity."¹⁰⁶

It is impossible to measure how much of a difference this made in the run-up to the election. Judging by the increased bitterness and frequency of the *Gazette's* attacks in the waning days of the election, it appears that it at least struck fear in the Democrats. One the eve of the election, the *Gazette* told its readership that, "A vote for Thompson is

¹⁰⁵ For *The Baltimore Bee*, see: "Untitled Editorial," *The Baltimore Bee*, 23 October 1877, 2. For the endorsement of Thompson in the *American*, see: "The Mayoralty—A Few Plain Words," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser* 22 October 1877, 1. The *Bee* also began to protest Democratic corruption by suggesting that they may have been in power for too long and made "popular suffrage in Baltimore...an obsolete thing, a mere name, a form, a shadow, without a reality."

¹⁰⁶ "The Mayoralty—A Few Plain Words," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 22 October 1877, 1 and "They Mayoralty Campaign," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 19 October 1877, 2.

a vote for the party that was born amid riot, bloodshed, and incendiarism; which justifies riot, and which avowedly seeks now to obtain by the ballot what it failed to obtain by the torch and the bullet.” The paper also began to refer to the riots as “the strike riots,” a subtle, but important qualification that blamed the working-class (and by inference) the Workingmen for the Great Uprising.¹⁰⁷ In the week before the election *The Gazette* also did not miss an opportunity to report on speeches that condemned “hell born capital” or other sensationalist details.¹⁰⁸

As the campaign season wound down, African Americans continued to discuss their options. Although little remains of these deliberations, is safe to say that many were probably angry or disenchanted with all of the candidates running for office. The Republicans had failed to offer a candidate. The Democrats, who already held little appeal to black Baltimoreans, offered up an outspoken Southern sympathizer. Warfield’s campaign was in shambles and regardless, he had been previously aligned with the Democrats. Given these unappealing options, African Americans likely decided to either vote for Thompson or stay away from the polls.

A meeting of African-Americans from the city’s nineteenth ward on October 19th encapsulated the tensions coursing throughout the city’s black community as voting day approached. The Workingmen sent a few representatives to speak at the meeting where they urged black voters to assert “their rights” by voting. Yet, the speakers did not address black voters’ concerns or offer any greater opportunities for participation. Not sur-

¹⁰⁷ “What Your Vote Means,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 24 October 1877, 2 and “Schoenecker and Thompson,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 24 October 1877, 2.

¹⁰⁸ For some examples of the paper’s allegation that workers supported a number of different riots and for the quote, see: “Mr. Thompson’s Followers,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 18 October 1877, 2; “Only One Issue,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 October 1877; and “A New Commune,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 20 October, 1877, 2.

prisingly, the reception to the party was tepid. Thompson received three cheers from the gathered crowd but when a resolution supporting the Workingmen's platform was offered it was quickly withdrawn. Thompson it seemed remained personally popular, one speaker noted that he respected him for his honesty and thought he would support the rights of all voters, "colored men included." However, since Thompson never made a public statement regarding race, black voters could go on faith and little more. And as one unidentified speaker pointed out, "The Workingmen's platform had ignored the colored men of the city."¹⁰⁹

For a party desperate for votes, the Workingmen should have felt fortunate that African Americans were still interested in their organization. Perhaps black workers grappled with their decision—despite the party's hostility—because in theory the organization offered at least some hope; certainly more than the Democrats. As one unidentified African American man pointed out, "The whole colored voting population were workingmen and could not help feeling a deep sympathy in that movement."¹¹⁰

Right up until Election Day, African-American voters wrestled with their decision. John H.E. Pinder, a laborer presiding over a meeting of black voters, determined that he would back the Workingmen, but his endorsement was also a qualified one. Pinder's mainly wanted to support William J. Hooper, a Workingmen's candidate for City Council, who "had stood by [blacks] in times of trouble." During a separate meeting at the Douglass Institute that night, another group of 100 African Americans were opti-

¹⁰⁹ "Colored Voters and the Workingmen," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 October 1877, 4.

¹¹⁰ "Colored Voters and the Workingmen," *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 20 October 1877, 4.

mistic that they could enact an eleventh-hour movement “to support Joseph Thompson for mayor.”¹¹¹

These late efforts notwithstanding, the truth was that for African Americans, the fall election offered little in the way of a real choice. Because of the Workingmen’s stance on race, it appears that blacks decided to distance themselves from the party. One black worker castigated white workers’ attitudes toward race in a letter published in the *Baltimore American*. The writer, who used the pen name “Justice,” implored white workers to “please stop and reason a while with themselves, and see if they are not equally as tyrannical with the capitalists?” He then furnished the paper with a compelling list of reasons—including the racial exclusivity of white unions and the fact that white workers often barred blacks from obtaining employment—for why African Americans should not support the party. He closed the letter by imploring African Americans “to remember the caulkers” and “and keep out of this dangerous party.” Another black letter writer offered similarly compelling reasons. The letter writer reminded readers that the during the Workingmen’s convention delegates were “overwhelmingly against the recognition of the colored man.” He ended the letter by asking if any African Americans “see anything in this party for colored men to gravitate to?”¹¹² Unfortunately, the answer was a resounding “no.”

On Election Day, African Americans did not vote en masse for the Workingmen’s Party. Both the *Sun* and the *Gazette* claimed that blacks largely voted for Kane. *The Gazette* even celebrated the election as progress for African Americans and prematurely announced that the “‘color line’ is broken here, probably forever.” The official returns were

¹¹¹ “The Workingmen’s Movement,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 October 1877, 1.

¹¹² “Letters from the People,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 13 August 1877, 2. For the second quote, see: “The Colored Vote,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 October 1877, 2.

not delineated by race but is doubtful that blacks voted for the former Southern sympathizer. Eventually, *The Gazette* changed course and admitted that in many wards African Americans simply did not vote. Protest probably was one reason but fraud was probably another. *The American* counted some 6,000 black voters that did not cast their own ballots because of official and unofficial intimidation. Regardless, the Workingmen's Party received far less than the 6,000 black votes it was allegedly counting on, a disappointment that was at least partially of its own making.¹¹³

The experience of black voters was but one of many problems that plagued the Workingmen on Election Day. Without the infrastructure of the established parties the Workingmen did not have the get-out-the-vote apparatus of their competitors. This made the party particularly vulnerable to fraud, as the Workingmen were not permitted to have judges overlooking the polling places.¹¹⁴ Whichever way the Democrats achieved electoral victory, the results showed that Thompson and the Workingmen's Party were trounced. When the votes were tallied on the evening of October 24th 1877, Thompson captured a little over thirty-four percent of the vote to Kane's nearly sixty-five percent majority; in the end the Workingmen failed to put anyone into office in 1877.¹¹⁵ Finally,

¹¹³ For information on the participation—or lack thereof—among black Baltimoreans see: “The Color Line Broken,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 26 October 1877, 2; “The Municipal Election Result,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 10 October 1877, 2; “Fraud Triumphant,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 25 October 1877, 1. See also: “The Shriek of Fraud,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 26 October 1877, 2. The quote about disparities between concerning dead voters is found in: “The Municipal Election,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 19 October 1877, 2. In fact, Thomas V. Byrne, one of the first killed during the riots remained eligible to vote.

¹¹⁴ On the charges of fraud see the following articles: “Untitled Editorial,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 20 October 1877, 2; “Untitled Editorial,” *The Baltimore Bee*, 23 October 1877, 2; “The Shriek of Fraud,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 26 October 1877, 2; “Fraud Triumphant,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 25 October 1877, 1.

¹¹⁵ Dubois, “The Search for a Better Life,” 77. They still had slate of candidates running for the House of Delegates and the State Senate but the defeat of Thompson took the wind out of their sails.

it seemed, the tumult and disorder of 1877 could safely be put to bed. But things are never that simple.

On the morning of October 23 workers surely read the election returns with a sense of disappointment. If they consulted the *Baltimore Gazette*, they also encountered a curious editorial. After all the vitriol directed their way, the paper extended an olive branch to the Workingmen. The editorial began by making a parable out of the story of Wat Tyler, the fourteenth century “honest blacksmith” who led a peasant rebellion against Richard II in England. For his actions, the Mayor of London killed Tyler, creating “profound consternation in the ranks of the insurgents.” In their moment of distress, Richard II approached the rebels and implored them to rejoin the fold. At this, “the communists accepted him with joy and acclamation,” leading the King to pardon all involved. This, according to the *Gazette*, should be the course of events in Baltimore. The Workingmen were “misguided, but many of them were honestly mistaken. But their place,” assured the *Gazette*, “is in the Democratic party, which has always been rooted in the affections of the bone and sinew of the country.”¹¹⁶

Immediately after the riots, Baltimore’s newspapers employed a similar gambit in an attempt to solder the city’s fractured body politic. The papers blamed the riots on various scapegoats to deflect criticism away from the honest workman, heal the wounds caused by the riots, and maintain the fiction of an inclusive polity. This maneuver did not achieve the desired results, and when it failed, the *Gazette* turned on the workers by branding them as dangerous radicals. Now, once again, the *Gazette* attempted to call

¹¹⁶ “A Change of Leaders,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 October 1877, 2.

these wayward children back to their “old parent, the democracy, [who] still extends to them the arms of welcome.”¹¹⁷

However, this reunion was not to be. The events of 1877 left the city’s body politic fractured along class and racial lines. Even though Thompson lost the election, he still garnered over 17,000 votes, an impressive showing for a new party. The party also returned to workers a sense of pride in who they were and the roles that they played in the nation. On a number of occasions, Thompson proudly claimed his identity as a worker, at times using his workmen’s uniform and his vocation as a point of pride.¹¹⁸ After a decade in which the labor movement had been pushed underground, the party was a welcome return to respectability for workers.

For African Americans the legacy of 1877 was different. Very few African Americans participated in the Great Uprising in Baltimore and whites excluded them from the Workingmen’s Party. For black Baltimoreans the latter was particularly disheartening. This failure on the part of the Workingmen’s Party served as a fitting capstone to a decade of troubled race relations among Baltimore’s working classes.¹¹⁹ Yet, exclusion also highlighted the need for blacks to create their own independent reform movements in the next decade. On the eve of the election John H. Murphy attended a meeting for black voters interested in the Workingmen’s Party. Interviewed later by *The Baltimore Sun*, Murphy described the election as a no-win situation for blacks, but thought that if the Workingmen had succeeded it would at least shatter the local machine and open up political space in the city. Yet, at the same time, he knew “not to expect to

¹¹⁷ “A Change of Leaders,” *The Baltimore Gazette*, 23 October 1877, 2.

¹¹⁸ See, for instance: “The Workingmen’s Movement,” *The Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser*, 14 September 1877 and “Another Speech by the Workingmen’s Candidate,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 September 1877.

¹¹⁹ DuBois, “Search for a Better Life,” 40-41.

derive any special benefit whether Kane or Thompson was elected.”¹²⁰ Murphy’s sentiments were surely shared by other black voters. During the 1880s and 1890s, Murphy and other black leaders looked to build their own activist foundation to challenge inequality.

¹²⁰ “The Workingmen’s Movement,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 October 1877, 1.

Chapter Two: Building a Radical Activist Foundation in Baltimore, 1870s-1885

On the evening of September 30, 1885 members of the Colored Advisory Council crowded into Baltimore's Douglass Institute for a night of political discussion. At the top of the meeting's agenda: the upcoming mayoral election. "We have upon us a political campaign," the organization's president, Joseph E. Briscoe intoned, "the most important for years. Our action," he continued, "will determine our political status for many years to come."¹ The Colored Advisory Council first organized in 1878, in the early days following Reconstruction. Although its founders meant the group to be non-partisan, they had heretofore largely supported the Republican Party. This made sense for a number of reasons. In the wake of the Civil War and Reconstruction, African Americans across the nation invested their hopes in the party of Lincoln. But by 1885 things had changed in Baltimore, changes that were years in the making.

Black Baltimoreans had long been clamoring for more than token recognition by the Republican Party but their pleas had largely fallen upon deaf ears. Now, the collective patience of an ascendant group of black radicals had run thin. The events of late September 1885 were the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. During the Republican primaries, African Americans attempted to gain representation in the party's state committee. Even by late nineteenth-century Baltimore standards, the 1885 Republican primaries were a debacle; they managed to combine deceit, violence, incompetence, and corruption into one evening of political pandemonium. Reporters covering the second ward told of a "a row" when one candidate's supporters endeavored to use a ballot box with a false bottom and a Democrat attempted to vote on three separate occasions. In

¹ "Revolt of Colored Voters," *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 October 1885, 6.

fact, Democrats attempted (or were alleged to have attempted) to vote in a number of the city's wards that evening.²

However, most of the bedlam at the Republican primaries surrounded the thorny issue of race. After a black man defeated a white candidate in the ninth ward, the white aspirant quickly re-nominated himself in a different precinct, challenging another African-American hopeful. Although *The Baltimore Sun* played coy, it appears that white primary attendees intimidated the beleaguered black candidate into withdrawing from the contest. In the sixteenth ward, African-American voters had to scrap tooth and nail for representation. When one African-American attendee declared blacks to be equal with whites, and then demanded representation on Maryland's Republican central committee, he triggered a prolonged verbal battle. After much debate, the party leadership finally assented. Yet, many whites fled the hall in protest. Nor were white Republicans reticent about employing a bit of subterfuge. In the city's fifth ward, party loyalists shifted the primary's location to an "obscure corner of the Seventh Ward," to limit black participation.³

A little over one week after the primaries, Briscoe looked over his audience at the Douglass Institute and railed against the party that had consistently failed black Baltimoreans. "Our political condition has grown from bad to worse," Briscoe exclaimed, "until the treatment of the colored people by the so-called republican party of Maryland has become a byword and a reproach which can no longer be tolerated by any intelligent or self-respecting colored man." For Briscoe the time had come to look beyond existing political parties in the hope of bringing amelioration to the plight of African-Americans. Many

² "Republican Primaries," *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 September 1885, 4.

³ "Republican Primaries," *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 September 1885, 4 and "Extract: From a Speech Delivered by Isaac Myers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 26 October 1885, 1.

shared his sentiments. By the end of the speech, Briscoe told his audience that, “I am, as I have always been, for my race against all political parties.” That evening the Colored Advisory Committee ordered their members to break with the party of Lincoln by organizing clubs “with a view of rebuking the republican bosses.”⁴

In 1885, a group of loosely affiliated black radical activists in Baltimore not only rebuked the Republican Party but also broke with the city’s established African-American leadership.⁵ This chapter traces the emergence of radical African-American activism in Baltimore between the late 1870s and 1885. As such, it functions first as a collective biography of the formation of radical black thought and activist strategies in the city.⁶ As frustrations mounted throughout the 1870s and 1880s, black radicals finally split with the city’s established leaders in 1885. In doing so, they set an agenda for black activism that would reverberate throughout the country for the next sixty years. The chapter then concludes by examining three trials that both solidified the new leadership’s commitment to pursuing change through the legal system and also broadened the parameters of African-American activism by incorporating the concerns of women, children, and men into a program of racial uplift. The scope of these efforts, in turn, opened up politi-

⁴ “Revolt of Colored Voters: The Advisory Council Repudiates the Republican Primaries,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 October 1885, 6. Even Republican loyalists, like the venerable reformer Isaac Myers, could see the writing on the wall and temporarily split with Republicans. Myers later gave his assent to the idea of black voters turning their backs on the Republican Party after witnessing the trickery evident during the primaries. See: “Extract: From a Speech Delivered by Isaac Myers,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 26 October 1885, 1. Myers noted that, “The colored voters are justified in the course they are taking. It is a new departure, and one very far-reaching in its results. Injustice in the recent primaries by white Republicans makes us the victims of treachery in our brother’s house.”

⁵ Willard B. Gatewood briefly examines some of the “black aristocrats” who led reform efforts in the 1880s. See: Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990).

⁶ The descriptor of “radical” is used advisedly. Although when viewed in hindsight the vision and work of these activists might seem tepid, at the time their activism was a sharp departure from previous programs of racial uplift.

cal space to women who would figure prominently in many black activist efforts in Baltimore, as elsewhere.⁷

For black Baltimoreans, the late 1870s and early 1880s represented a crucial transitional period. Despite its formal end, the legacy and meaning of Reconstruction still hung in the balance. Baltimore's black radical activists, many of whom had recently arrived in the city and had experienced the horrors of slavery in their youths, disavowed a gradual approach to change. Instead, they agitated for far-reaching transformations that they felt were promised as a result of Reconstruction. Men like Harvey Johnson, Joseph S. Briscoe, H.J. Brown, and P.H.A. Braxton pushed Baltimore's black community in new directions. Rather than pursuing a path of reform that relied wholly on self-improvement, unionization, and fealty to the Republican Party, black radicals attacked inequality through independent political action, the pulpit, and eventually through the courts. The fight for representation in electoral politics—heretofore the focus of most black activism in the 1870s—would henceforth be only one aspect of a larger fight. Indeed, it became a minor part of the struggle.

In many ways, this is the story of the intellectual and political fracturing of Baltimore's black community in the early 1880s; by the beginning of the next decade the *New York Age*, a widely-read black weekly, lamented that the city's African-American popula-

⁷ Gatewood describes uplift programs in the 1880s, especially those coordinated by black elites as consisting of day schools, free kindergartens, beneficial societies, and relief efforts for poor African Americans. In some cases, elite black women ran organizations like the Empty Stocking Circle and the Fresh Air Circle. See: Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 76. On political reform activities, including those by Myers see: William George Paul, "The Shadow of Equality: The Negro in Baltimore, 1864-1911" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1972). For an examination of women's activism, and various forms of stratification in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century black communities see: Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008). Brown effectively argues that this stratification actually sparked activist initiatives and greater participation.

tion had a “serious lack of unity.”⁸ This is an important development that deserves more historical attention. In too many instances, the “African-American community” is treated as a monolithic bloc—especially in discussions of politics—in both historical analyses and modern political discourse. In fact, it is much more accurate to describe Baltimore’s black population as politically, economically, generationally, and religiously stratified. By the early 1880s, a number of black activists battled over the direction and strategies of change. The ruptures in Baltimore’s African-American community developed slowly and in many cases, unspectacularly. There were no dramatic riots nor, in most cases, were there physical altercations. Instead, grievances and disappointments simmered over time and remained mostly political in nature.⁹

The immediate post-Reconstruction period remains the subject of intense debate in African-American history. Rayford W. Logan famously termed the years between 1877 and 1901 as the “nadir” of race relations.¹⁰ Few historians contest the fact that the immediate post-Reconstruction period bore witness to a general decline in race relations, marked by wanton violence, oppression, and the beginning of *de jure* segregation. Nevertheless, the idea of the “nadir” has remained problematic for a number of reasons: it is a categorization that is often too vague, too broad, and potentially misleading. On the one hand, the concept of the nadir makes Jim Crow segregation appear monolithic. Yet

⁸ Quoted from Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 78. Original quote appears in: *New York Age*, 18 July 1891.

⁹ While class and religious differences existed in the city, activists often collaborated across socioeconomic and denominational lines. For instance, Isaac Myers, who married into one Baltimore’s elite families and had amassed a sizable fortune, was more conservative than most of his peers. However, Dr. H.J. Brown, also from a wealthy Baltimore family, remained a radical reformer and split with Myers. There is little doubt that Baptists engaged in more political agitation on the whole, yet the organizations they organized and participated in were non-denominational. For instance, as an Episcopalian, Brown also collaborated with Baptists, like Harvey Johnson and William Alexander. See: Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 7-80.

¹⁰ Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought, the Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954).

scholars have demonstrated that the advent of Jim Crow occurred unevenly and was often shaped by local conditions. More importantly, the term also suggests a dearth in black activism during this period. In recent years historians, like Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Steven Hahn, Paul Ortiz, Leslie Brown, and Elizabeth Glenda Gilmore, have called into question this assertion by demonstrating that this era witnessed a proliferation of black activists, especially women. Others have recovered the roles that African Americans played in community uplift programs, politics, and resistance.¹¹ Indeed, historians have established that this period, especially the decades between 1880-1900, were a period of strong community activism and intellectual development among African Americans. Like Higginbotham, Gilmore, Ortiz, Brown, and Hahn one of the chief arguments in this chapter is that the “nadir” actually produced a proliferation of African-American activism. At the same time it attempts to complicate this era by paying closer attention to the debates, schisms, and arguments within the black community. The 1880s not only marked a time of increased protest. This decade was particularly important for developing an activist foundation that moved in new directions and attempted to secure more far-reaching results.

The history of race relations in Baltimore between the end of Reconstruction and 1920 further complicates discussions of African-American activism by examining events in a former Border State. While Maryland was an antebellum slave state, it did not secede from the Union and therefore did not undergo federal Reconstruction. Instead,

¹¹ See, for instance: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005); Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham*.

Marylanders (and by definition Baltimoreans) were largely left to their own devices when deciding the plight of African Americans.¹² This borderland status persisted into the 1880s, producing complicated race relations. Black Baltimoreans experienced racism and discrimination in Baltimore yet it did not match the institutional levels found in states further south. Nevertheless, the absence of federal Reconstruction left a mixed legacy. Black Baltimoreans found it particularly difficult to forge political alliances with whites. Many white laborers resented black workers and competition for jobs often produced hostile relations between the two groups. More importantly, because Confederates did not have to relinquish political power in Maryland, the city's Democratic machine was able to maintain power almost exclusively throughout the 1870s and early 1880s. Yet if Baltimore's peculiar political environment possessed inherent disadvantages for blacks, it also opened up political possibilities for activists. In the 1880s, many white Baltimoreans, especially in newspapers like *The Baltimore Sun*, and even some mayoral administrations began to publically assert, and fashion, an image of Baltimore as a city reborn after the Civil War. In part, this refashioning included a reassessment of race relations that exposed contradictions in the city. Although whites still crafted discourses of black inferiority, they also publically condemned inequities in the political, social, and legal system as relics of a barbaric past that the city had overcome.¹³

¹² Barbara J. Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985) and Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997). Also see Paul, "The Shadow of Equality."

¹³ A number of works have covered the circumstances that African Americans in Baltimore faced following the Civil War. See: Paul, "The Shadow of Equality," 181-82 and Jeffrey R. Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War: A Supplement to the Negro in Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery* (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co. Printers, 1890): 9. Also see: Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital* (New York: The University Press of America, 1982); Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Harvey Johnson and the Baltimore Mutual United Brotherhood of 1885-1910," in Kenneth L. Kusmer, ed. *Black Communities and Urban Development in America, 1720-1990*,

Frederick Douglass cast a long shadow in Baltimore throughout the 1860s and 1870s. Although the famous abolitionist had long since left, his legacy continued to influence black reformers both in scope and in style. As black Baltimoreans attempted to secure their rights, and adjust to post-Civil War realities, Isaac Myers rose to prominence as the city's leading African-American activist. Born in Baltimore in 1835, Myers spent the early part of his life working as a caulker on the city's waterfront. Myers' experience as a free black waterfront laborer in a slave state shaped his political beliefs and social activism. From at least the 1850s, Myers steadfastly believed that unionization and self-improvement provided the path to citizenship and racial uplift. After the Civil War, Myers added loyalty to the Republican Party as another important aspect of his reform agenda. In the wake of emancipation, he helped organize an African-American labor conference that eventually led to the formation of the National Colored Labor Union. Myers spearheaded alliances with white laborers and the Republican establishment, as well as promoting a series of ideas to advance the black community economically.¹⁴ In a statement that neatly encapsulated Myers' point of view, he once told an audience, "The colored man will not enjoy equal rights with the whites until they are mechanics and merchants of means. Then the men put their prejudices in their pockets."¹⁵

Throughout the latter half of the 1860s and into the 1870s, black activists in Baltimore followed Myers' lead by primarily seeking amelioration through the Republican

Volume 4, part 1 (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1991) 214-28; On labor relations see: Bettye C. Thomas, "A Nineteenth Century Black Operated Shipyard, 1866-1884: Reflections Upon Its Inception and Ownership," *The Journal of Negro History* Volume LIX, No. 1 (January 1974): 1-12 and George Bache Dubois, "The Search for a Better Life: Baltimore's Workers, 1865-1916" (PhD Diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1995).

¹⁴ For information on Myers' most famous venture see: Collier-Thomas, "A Nineteenth Century Black Operated Shipyard, 1866-1884," 1-12. More information about Myers' life and activism can be found in: Graham, *Baltimore* and Paul, "The Shadow of Equality," esp. Ch. 5.

¹⁵ "Local Matters," *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 March 1879, 4.

Party. This strategy hinged on the belief that steadfast loyalty, and black male votes, would ensure that Republicans served their community.¹⁶ However, in Baltimore the Republican Party remained impotent and disorganized; the Democratic Party wholly uninterested in representing African Americans.¹⁷ Even if the Republicans had been organized in Maryland, they showed little inclination to fully incorporate African Americans into the political, social, and cultural life of the city. Aside from a few token positions in the Republican Party hierarchy, and a scant number of federal positions, the two major parties in Baltimore effectively blunted the power of blacks without resorting to discriminatory legislation.¹⁸ Despite these shortcomings, Myers and many black activists steadfastly clung to this strategy. While Myers counseled patience and conciliation during the 1870s a burgeoning group of black activists was becoming increasingly impatient.

In 1872, a young minister named Harvey Johnson moved to Baltimore and changed the shape of black activism. Unlike Myers, Johnson was born into slavery in Fauquier County, Virginia in 1843. It is unclear when he was manumitted; when asked about his life as a slave Johnson only replied “I can only think of it with a righteous indignation.” He would say very little else about his bondage. In 1868 Johnson found his calling in the church and he enrolled in Wayland Seminary in Washington, D.C. After four years at Wayland, Johnson moved to Baltimore to accept a pastorate at the small Union Baptist Church. With a congregation of 250 members, Johnson’s move hardly at-

¹⁶ Collier-Thomas, “Harvey Johnson and the Baltimore Mutual United Brotherhood of 1885-1910,” 215.

¹⁷ The best source of information about African Americans relationships to the Republican and Democratic Parties can be found in: Paul, “The Shadow of Equality,” esp. Ch.5 + 6.

¹⁸ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 19-20. For more information on partisan politics and the black voter see: Paul, “The Shadow of Equality,” ch. 6.

tracted notice.¹⁹ However, within the next decade his influence became a driving force in Baltimore's radical black activist community. One contemporary biographer perhaps captured Johnson's energy and determination best. "I have met with men more learned and of longer experience," wrote A.W. Pegues, "but I can recall no one more earnest, more thoroughly devoted to what he believes to be his duty, more aggressive, broad-minded, and fearless than Rev. Harvey Johnson."²⁰

It did not take long for Johnson to step into the spotlight and articulate his frustration with the glacial pace of civil rights reform. At a meeting in 1874 to discuss Republican mismanagement of the Freedman's Bank, which cost numerous black Baltimoreans their savings, he exclaimed, "When the commissioners talked to the colored men who had been duped, telling them to have patience, it was sheer nonsense on their part." He then complained of the inaction of the black community in the city. "No people on the earth could make more fuss than his race," The Baltimore Sun reported Johnson saying, "But when the time for action came they were nowhere."²¹

Under Johnson's watch, the small Union Baptist Church grew exponentially. By 1875 Union Baptist's membership nearly quadrupled to 928 and by 1887 it exploded to some 2,200 parishioners, which made it the largest black church in Maryland. More importantly, Johnson's church became the epicenter for a proliferation of black churches across the city and state in the 1870s and 1880s. Johnson and Union Baptist established four Sunday Schools, sent four members to Seminary and established a mission at West-

¹⁹ A. Briscoe Koger, "Dr. Harvey Johnson: Minister and Pioneer Civic Leader" (Baltimore: A. Briscoe Koger, 1957): 1. Quote taken from: Plebeian, "Progress of the Emancipated Race," *The Phrenological Journal of Science of Health*, February 1887, 86.

²⁰ A.W. Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools* (Springfield, MA: Willey & Co., 1892): 291.

²¹ "Local Matters," *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 September 1874, 4 and Paul, "Shadow of Equality," 199.

minster, Maryland.²² In early February 1878, for example, twelve members of Union Baptist formed Calvary Baptist Church. A little more than a year later, Calvary's parishioners called on Patrick Henry Alexander (P.H.A.) Braxton to serve as their pastor.²³ William Moncure Alexander helped build Sharon Baptist Church in 1882 after being inspired by Johnson's example and enrolling in Wayland Seminary.²⁴ In total, at least fourteen churches and eleven ministers sprang from Union Baptist and Johnson's mentorship.²⁵ This network of Baptist churches—staffed by key Johnson allies like Braxton and Alexander—furnished important public spaces in which African Americans could congregate, plan, commiserate, and carve out a collective identity in the city.²⁶ In the years following the Civil War, Baltimore was a city of migrants and strangers. This was especially true for African Americans. According to one estimate, Baltimore's black population swelled by 12,000 during the 1860s, added another 14,000 in the 1870s, and then 25,000 during the 1880s. By 1890, the African-American population in the city stood at approximately

²² Koger, "Dr. Harvey Johnson"; George F. Adams, *History of Baptist Churches in Maryland Connected with the Maryland Baptist Union Association* (Baltimore: J.F. Weishampel, Jr, 1885) 131, 184; A.W. Pegues, *Our Baptist Ministers and Schools*, 89, 291; Plebeian, "Progress of the Emancipated Race," 85. Maryland State Archives, "Rev. William Moncure Alexander: Personal Life" in *The Road from Frederick to Thurgood, Black Baltimore in Transition*. <http://www.msa.md.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/6050/html/26141000.html>; Paul, "The Shadow of Equality," 198.

²³ Like Johnson, Braxton hailed from Virginia and was born into servitude during the dying days of the antebellum South. With the fall of the Confederacy, Braxton worked in the "stave business" before becoming a county constable. In the meantime, he began to study law, which eventually landed him a job in the United States Custom House in Low Cedar Point, Virginia. It was here that Braxton converted to the Baptist church and was commissioned to preach. When he arrived in Baltimore he took over the reins of a small church that met in a carpenter shop and consisted of only ten members. Within two years, however, he began to collect funds to build a proper church and increased the membership to 125 members. William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland: Press of W.W. Williams, 1887): 1049-50 and Adams, *History of Baptist Churches in Maryland*, 188.

²⁴ "Funeral of Reverend Wm. M. Alexander on Monday," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 11 April 1919, A1 and "Sharon Baptist Church," *Baltimore Afro-American*, 17 February 1912, 7.

²⁵ Koger, "Dr. Harvey Johnson—Pioneer Civic Leader," 3.

²⁶ As Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham notes, for African Americans in the late nineteenth century, the church "functioned as a discursive, critical arena—a public sphere in which values and issues were aired, debated, and disseminated throughout the larger black community." Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 7.

77,000; up from the 28,000 blacks who lived in the city just three decades earlier.²⁷ As African Americans poured into the city from the Virginia and Maryland countryside, there is little doubt that the church served as a space to meet neighbors, become acquainted with the city, and seek assistance (financial as well as spiritual) if necessary.

The churches also helped broaden the reach and appeal of Johnson's more radical agenda. By the 1880s, Baptist churches in Baltimore augmented the political space that was offered through the black owned and operated Douglass Institute. The Union Baptist Church, for instance, hosted temperance meetings, political gatherings, and celebrations to honor legal triumphs.²⁸ Sharon Baptist Church furnished the location for the first African-American school in the city and in the 1890s began to publish the *Baltimore Afro-American* newspaper.²⁹ At Calvary Baptist, blacks gathered for meetings and to hear speeches about a variety of different topics. Calvary also hosted rallies for public education, political agitation, and women met there to plan mission work.³⁰

Just below the surface the political climate was changing as activists like Johnson, Braxton, and Briscoe laid the groundwork for a more radical form of political agitation in the 1870s. African Americans in Baltimore were already making their first halting steps at either bolting the Republican Party or building independent organizations to agitate for equality. In 1868, 1876, and 1877 a sizeable contingent of black voters either sought new

²⁷ In many ways, the church's ministry reflected the changing demographics of the city: Johnson, Braxton, and Alexander all hailed from nearby Virginia. See: Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 26.

²⁸ On the Douglass Institute see: Karen Olson, "Old West Baltimore: Segregation, African-American Culture, and the Struggle for Equality," in Fee, Shopes, et al, *The Baltimore Book: New Views on Local History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991): 63-4. On black churches' multiple uses, see, for instance: "For Prohibition," *The Baltimore Sun* 14 July 1886, 6; "Rights of Colored People," *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 November 1887, 6; "City News in Brief," *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 June 1889, 4.

²⁹ Wanda L. Dobson, "Sharon Baptist Church: A Hub of Black Cultural Heritage in Baltimore," *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 January 1977, SM5.

³⁰ "The Colored People," *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 May 1887, 6; "A Political Sermon: What a Colored Minister has to Say on Government and Parties," *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 August 1887, 6; "Women's Home Mission Society," *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 May 1888, 1.

political solutions by organizing independently or by forging alliances with other political organizations, including the Democratic and Workingmen's parties. African Americans, including Myers, also made concerted efforts to reform public education and gain employment for black teachers.³¹ It was during these years that Johnson began his first forays into political and social activism. In 1876, James H. Wolff and Charles S. Taylor, two aspiring black attorneys, attempted to open a practice at the Douglass Institute. While impossible to say with certainty—not much is known of their motivations—it is likely that they hoped to force a trial to challenge Maryland's law prohibiting African Americans from the state bar. Not surprisingly, the two men soon attracted notice and the state courts prohibited them from practicing. It is not clear whether the men knew Johnson or coordinated their actions with him, but he immediately jumped to their defense and began a fund-raising effort to obtain a hearing before the court of appeals. Although Wolff and Taylor eventually lost their case, Johnson continued his efforts to get black men admitted to the Maryland Bar.³²

By the end of the 1870s, political tensions in the black community were becoming increasingly public. On March 26, 1879, black Baltimoreans gathered at the Douglass Institute to discuss how best to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the Fifteenth Amendment and its legacy. In many ways the meeting offered a glimpse into the new

³¹ See Chapter 1 for more information on the move by African Americans to gain acceptance in the Workingmen's Party. On the 1868 and 1876 efforts, see: Paul, "The Shadow of Equality", ch. 5-6. On black education reform see: Bettye C. Thomas, "Public Education and Black Protest in Baltimore, 1865-1900," in Kenneth L. Kusmer, ed. *From Reconstruction to the Great Migration, 1877-1917, Volume 4 part 1* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1991): 203-13.

³² Not much is known about this case. Occasionally it is referenced in the *Baltimore Afro American*, but only in broad outlines of Johnson's life and work. After the case, Wolff left to practice in Massachusetts and Morris in New York City. See: "Forty Years Pastor of Union Bapt. Church," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 19 October 1912, 7. It does seem that Wolff at least kept up with Johnson's activities. Ten years later when Johnson helped successfully challenge the Maryland Law prohibiting black attorneys, Wolff wrote him a letter of congratulations. See: Harvey Johnson, *Nations from a New Point of View* (National Baptist Publishing Board: Nashville, TN 1903): 22.

political realities emerging in Baltimore's black community. One of the items on the agenda was a resolution asking the city's black churches to help celebrate the anniversary of the amendment's passage. During the discussion, someone objected to the proposal on the grounds that it was too political. This objection opened up a wider debate on the floor. One of the more outspoken attendees that evening was Dr. Henry Jerome (H.J.) Brown. Unlike Johnson, Braxton, and Alexander, Brown hailed from Baltimore and had deep roots in the city. A self-described radical, Brown was an uncompromising advocate for equality throughout his life.³³

The debates surrounding the commemoration of the Fifteenth Amendment had to have special resonance for Brown. During the late 1860s he struggled to ensure that African Americans gained voting rights after the conclusion of the Civil War. Brown also took a leading role at the Colored Border States Convention that sought to organize black Republicans in Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Missouri in the fight for racial equality.³⁴ Now, however, Brown was wondering if the promise of Reconstruction had been squandered. After listening intently to the debates concerning the Fifteenth Amendment he rose to speak. Brown informed the gathering that he did not want to celebrate the adoption of the amendment because it had not been, according to *The Baltimore Sun*, "practically carried out in the Southern States, where

³³ "Young Men Need More Backbone," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 27 December 1913, 2.

³⁴ Brown was also involved in various political meetings to ensure that black Baltimoreans supported Reconstruction efforts. By the end of the decade, Brown's efforts paid off. In 1870 Brown served as one of the principal organizers, and the master of ceremony, for the enormous parade (which attracted over 20,000 spectators and participants) celebrating the fifteenth amendments' ratification in 1870. "Border State Colored Convention in Baltimore," *The New York Times*, 5 August 1868, 1; "Border State Negroes," *The New York Times*, 7 August 1868, 2; "Colored Border State Convention," *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 August 1868, 1; and "Colored Border State Convention," *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 August 1868, 1. On Brown's other political activities, see, for instance: "Maryland Radical State Convention," *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 May 1867, 1 and "Political Meeting of Colored Men," *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 August 1869, 4. On the Emancipation Day parade see: "The Fifteenth Amendment," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 May 1870, 1.

even in his native Maryland he and men of his race cannot go to the polls without risk of assault and violence.”³⁵

Brown’s remarks ignited a firestorm. George Myers rose in response to caution patience, noting that, “What is delayed is not lost.” Others echoed Myers’ sentiments. One attendee, Leonard Trehorn complained that Baltimoreans should not hold off celebrating because blacks in the South could not vote. Finally, Lemuel Griffin felt it appropriate to celebrate the amendment two days after Easter, crediting the amendment with resurrecting the political fortunes of African Americans. As debate died down the resolution to commemorate the amendment was adopted, with one dissenting voice (most likely that of Brown).³⁶

The debate concerning this resolution reflected not only the growing split in Baltimore’s black community but also the beginning of a transition in African-American activist leadership and thought more generally. On the one hand, men like Myers counseled patience and fealty to the Republican Party despite years of disappointment. On the other hand, activists like H.J. Brown, were increasingly vocal about their frustration with the lack of progress toward true equality. Brown and his supporters were quickly running out of patience, and they were less willing to wait on the sidelines in hopes that white political parties would advance the cause of equality. Then in January 1880 a group of “dissatisfied Colored Republicans”—including Brown—held an indignation meeting at the Douglass Institute to protest their status in the Republican Party and the lack of any patronage jobs. Brown in particular railed against the party and African American’s lack of equality. At one point in his speech, Brown claimed that black voters, who he asserted

³⁵ “Local Matters,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 March 1879, 4.

³⁶ “Local Matters,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 March 1879, 4.

made up two thirds of the party, were relegated to the status of “dromedaries and pack-horses for their white allies.” By the end of the evening the atmosphere became so tense that a fight almost broke out when one member of the audience tried to interrupt Brown several times.³⁷

The next year black Baltimoreans, including Harvey Johnson, Brown, and representatives from various churches, continued to apply pressure by calling a statewide convention to demand that some offices in the Republican Party be reserved for African Americans. If the convention in January 1880 was heated, it proved to be just a prologue to the excitement that took place in March 1881. From the outset, the tension was palpable. After nominating a temporary president, the floor exploded into a cavalcade of commotion as some attendees began to loudly clamor for full representation in the Republican Party. The more radical contingent also demanded that at least half the jobs in the state government be awarded to blacks and that the current state department heads be removed from office. For a short while things seemed to calm down but then Brown’s supporters began clamoring for him to make a speech. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that, “So much excitement ensued that speech making was declared to be ended.”³⁸

By the end of the evening the schism developing in the black community became even more apparent. During the convention the “committee on resolutions” had retired to formulate their platform. When they finally returned to the stage it became clear that they could not reach an agreement and instead presented “minority” and “majority” reports. The “minority” report, which was ultimately rejected, called on the convention to

³⁷ “Dissatisfied Colored Republicans—They,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 January 1880, 1.

³⁸ “Colored Men Wanting Office,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 March 1881, 1 and “Colored Republican Convention—Claims of Colored Men to Office—Little Harmony and Much Confusion,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 March 1881, 1.

appeal to President Garfield to make “competency rather than color the test for office.” It further recommended that any current officeholder who did not adhere to such a policy be removed at once and replaced with “men who are free from race prejudice.” By contrast the “majority” report, delivered by Myers, was much more tepid. It read, in part, “That we renew our fealty to the great national republican party, and that our thanks are due to this Excellency James A. Garfield, President of the United States, for the liberal policy toward our race as expressed in his inaugural address of March 4, 1881.” While the majority statement complained about the lack of federal jobs granted blacks in Maryland, it hedged by claiming that this state of affairs was local in nature.³⁹

By 1882 Baltimore’s radical black activists had gathered significant momentum. Although they had as yet been successful in forcing substantive change in the Republican Party—and indeed faced substantial pushback from more conservative blacks—they continued to organize and force issues about inequality into wider discussion. Throughout the year, Johnson, Brown, and Briscoe organized political meetings to discuss a variety of issues and form organizations to affect change outside of the traditional parties. In May, at a meeting that Johnson presided over to “discuss the conditions and grievances of the colored people of Maryland, to put them on guard against the tricksters who have duped them for twenty years past, and to organize in strength and unity” African Americans formed the Order of Regulators.⁴⁰ That August, black radicals also formed the “colored advisory council” to “promote the interests of colored people politically and in other respects.” In both cases, the organizations only existed for a short time and experienced

³⁹ “Colored Republican Convention—Claims of Colored Men to Office—Little Harmony and Much Confusion,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 March 1881, 1.

⁴⁰ “Development of the Colored Race,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 May 1882, 1.

limited successes. However, their advent marked radical black activists' initial efforts to incorporate a wider vision of equality that went beyond political parties.

1882 turned out to be an important transitional year for African-American radicals. With the formation of the "Order of Regulators" and the "colored advisory council"—along with the emergence of new leaders like Johnson, Brown, and Briscoe—radical activists took a step away from Myers and the Republican Party. Across the city, many African Americans were similarly questioning the efficacy of partisan politics. Given the Democratic Party's dominance in the city government, disaffected whites and blacks also tried to undertake an "independent judiciary movement" in an effort to wrest control of the courts from the Democratic political machine.⁴¹ Seemingly everywhere, changes were afoot in Baltimore.

Historians of Baltimore have focused almost exclusively on the split between black radicals and conservatives.⁴² Certainly, the divisions were important and real. The occasional, vocal arguments that punctuated African-American political meetings testified to this fact. Moreover, many—both white and black—opposed to the emerging Af-

⁴¹ Given the relationship between Democrats and black voters, African-American radicals had plenty of reasons to support the independent movement. The Colored Advisory Council noted the need for drastic change since "colored citizens have been murdered with impunity by roughs, who were allowed to escape punishment by the patent process of 'packed juries.'" Briscoe further pointed out, "We have not been able to obtain justice in the present courts of the city, for when a person enters these courts as an alleged criminal his very color has more than once sealed his doom." Finally, H.J. Brown also weighed in, claiming that the independent movement represented "an exciting and impending public crisis" and a "fight of the people against the corruptionists." "The Colored Advisory Council," *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 October 1882, 1; "Colored Citizens on the Issues," *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 November 1882, 4; "Mass-Meeting of Colored Citizens," *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 November 1882, 1.

⁴² While significant schisms developed in Baltimore among African Americans it was always a matter of degree. Both sides—the conservatives and radicals—essentially wanted the same thing: equality. Both sides talked about self-improvement and self-determination as the key to gaining equality. Neither side disavowed the other nor generally engaged in vicious attacks. Even Briscoe, one of the most outspoken radicals never completely disavowed the Republican Party. Instead, he took a more nuanced position. In the midst of the independent movement Briscoe declared that, "I am a republican, have been and always will be." However, Briscoe also was willing to move beyond parties. Instead, in his words, he was there not "as the tool of either the democratic or republican parties, but of the colored men of this state." See, for instance, Graham, *Black Baltimore*, ch. 6 and Paul, "Shadow of Equality," ch.6.

rican-American leadership felt threatened by both their message as well as their actions.⁴³ Even Frederick Douglass initially criticized the leaders of the black radical faction in Baltimore. In a speech delivered in Denton, Maryland, he chastised the radical activists for abandoning the Republican Party. Denigrating them as men who “strutted around with cigars in their mouths” he told his audience that, “Ingratitude would be a dangerous thing, for when we cut loose from the party that gave us freedom we give notice that whatever the democratic party should do would excite in us no gratitude whatever.”⁴⁴

However, there was a larger import of what was happening in the early 1880s. Myers’ program of self-improvement was essentially two pronged: political advancement through fealty to the Republican Party and economic progress through entrepreneurship and unionization. While he recognized structural inequalities in the law and in social relations, he counseled patience and respectability. Myers also narrowly focused on traditional understandings of families that envisioned men as the breadwinners and the sole means of racial uplift. He rarely discussed gender inequity and likely assumed that women would be uplifted along with their menfolk.

But across Baltimore, community activists and their supporters were laying the groundwork for a more expansive activism that reached beyond partisan, electoral politics. These new efforts encompassed men and women, community and politics, churches and fraternal organizations to help with community uplift. African Americans across the city also established a series of newspapers that helped build a sense of an “imagined

⁴³ Whites, for instance, responded by funding an opposition newspaper to counteract the influence of the newly minted black publication, the *Vindicator*. See: “Politics in Maryland,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 August 1883, 1.

⁴⁴ “Fred. Douglass on the Stump,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 November 1883, 1.

community.”⁴⁵ Newspapers like the *Vindicator*, one of the earliest examples, spread political news written by black journalists. By the mid-to late 1880s a number of other short-lived newspapers existed in the city, although they rarely survived more than a few years of publication. Nevertheless, the papers—both secular and religious—were read and probably shared and discussed in workplaces, churches, and homes throughout the city.⁴⁶ Together the building of community institutions, newspapers, and churches helped engender a sense of cohesion in a city that had become home to vast numbers of newcomers. It also helped establish a black political voice free from the influence of white editors.

Unlike Myers, the rhetoric espoused by radicals went far beyond political representation and unionization. Most of the radicals were unafraid to address structural inequalities and level critiques at white authorities regardless of political parties. For instance, in 1883 at a convention of independent Republicans, Briscoe told the attendees that they did not owe “allegiance to any party that would not advance the educational and political welfare of the colored men.” He then listed ways in which black voters had helped the Republican Party but received little in return for their allegiance. In other cases, Briscoe reminded his audience that what was at stake was not simple partisan politics but the rights of African Americans. At one convention Briscoe remarked that they

⁴⁵ For the use of the term “imagined community” see: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006). Higginbotham has argued that this term can apply to African American communities in the late nineteenth century. See: Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, 49.

⁴⁶ In fact, many African Americans joked that the city was a “grave-yard for colored newspapers.” Baltimore had a number of short-lived newspapers in the early to mid-1880s, including the *Vindicator*, the *Star*, *The Colored Citizen* (edited by Isaac Myers), and the *Baltimore Beacon*. Unfortunately, no extant copies exist. *The Christian Recorder* reported of the founding of the *Baltimore Beacon*. See: “Baltimore is to Have a New Paper, Published in the Interest of her Colored Citizens,” *The Christian Recorder*, 12 January 1882. Isaac Myers also briefly edited a paper called *The Colored Citizen*. See: “The Colored Citizen of Baltimore, Isaac Myers, Editor-in-Chief,” *The Christian Recorder*, 13 September 1883. A brief description of the short-lived black newspapers can also be found in: Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 241-2.

were not “called in the interest of the republican or the democratic party but in the interest of the colored race.”⁴⁷

Yet, by far the biggest difference in the radical’s agenda was in the ways in which they attacked issues affecting the entire community, not just working and voting males. By 1883, some in the radical faction were already casting a wider net. One of their earliest targets was the Maryland “Bastardy law.” With roots reaching back to 1781, the law originally protected all “free women” from abandonment by giving them the right to bring criminal charges against a child’s father and force him to pay an \$80 a year stipend. But in 1860 the Maryland legislature amended the law to exclude African-American women.⁴⁸ At a convention in August 1883, Briscoe, according to *The Baltimore Sun* “denounced” the law for failing to “protect the virtue of colored females.”⁴⁹ Others went even further. The Reverend P.S. Henry not only assailed the Bastardy law but also denounced the city’s policy of not admitting black lawyers and not hiring black teachers in the public schools. For Henry, the answer to these problems existed outside the realm of partisan politics. Henry noted, “The churches are taking hold of the question, and soon it will spread to every section. I do not counsel secrecy in our manner of dealing with this subject, but if oath-bound societies are necessary to its success let us have them. Again, I repeat,” Henry finished, “we want to have our sons admitted to the bars of our courts, we want colored teachers in the colored schools of this city, and we want the virtue of the colored women protected equally with that of the white.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ “A Colored Convention,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 September 1883, 5 and “The Colored Convention,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 August 1883, 1.

⁴⁸ Henry J. McGuinn, “Equal Protection of the Law and Fair Trials in Maryland,” *The Journal of Negro History*. Vol. 24, No.2 (April 1939): 146-150.

⁴⁹ “The Colored Convention,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 August 1883, 1.

⁵⁰ “Development of the Colored Race,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 May 1882, 1.

Whether he knew so at the time, Henry charted the course for black radicals in the coming years. Having laid the groundwork between 1880 and 1884, black radicals embarked on an ambitious program that marked the beginning of the first full-fledged, independent movement for equality in post-Reconstruction Baltimore. Already black radicals had begun distancing themselves from the Republican Party, creating their own organizations, and examining a host of issues affecting the community at large. The question that loomed large was what steps to take next. Up to this point black radicals had spent most of their time and energy building churches and organizations that helped deliver their message to the public. However, they had not yet undertaken any reform efforts nor directly challenged the white power structure. The time may not have been right in 1882 or 1883, but it was in 1884.

Black radicals first turned their attention to reforms in the city's legal structure. It was a prudent decision. If they were going to move beyond electoral politics they needed to have advocates in a court system rife with prejudices and inequalities. Since 1867, African Americans were not only barred from practicing law in the state but also found it difficult, in some cases impossible, to serve as jurors. When the courts in Maryland selected jurors they did so from two separate lists: "white male taxables" and the poll books. Since the poll books contained the names of many African Americans, counties simply used the former list to populate their jury pools.⁵¹

In 1884 and 1885 three court cases demonstrated both the efficacy of using the courts to address inequality and also the perils of a discriminatory justice system. The

⁵¹ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 68. Henry J. McGuinn puts the date for the statute excluding African American attorneys at 1876. See: Henry J. McGuinn, "The Courts and the Occupational Status of Negroes in Maryland," *Social Forces* Vol. 18, No. 2 (December 1939): 256.

first of these cases stemmed from a day trip aboard the “Steamer Sue,” which plied the waters between Maryland and Virginia during the late nineteenth century. In August 1884, four black Baltimorean women, Martha Stewart, Winney Stewart, Mary M. Johnson, and Lucy Jones, purchased first-class accommodations on the “Steamer Sue” for a trip to Kinsall Landing, Virginia. As the evening progressed and the women grew tired they attempted to retire to the first-class sleeping cabin that they reserved. As they made their way to the rooms, the steamer’s employees refused to allow the women entrance, instead offering them “first class” accommodations reserved for blacks in another part of the ship. The women refused and instead decided to encamp in the ship’s saloon for the duration of the night in protest.⁵²

At the time, the incident on board the Steamer Sue received little in the way of public attention in Baltimore. Similarly, the resulting lawsuit has become a forgotten footnote in the historiography of the fight for equality in the United States. When mentioned, historians have been content to note the case’s similarities to *Plessey v. Ferguson* and acknowledge its forerunner status in relation to later civil rights’ cases.⁵³ This retelling of events, while basically correct, downplays or neglects the complexity of the case, the motivations of the libellants, and the shrewdness of Baltimore’s black activist community.

⁵² The *Sun* did not report the incident nor did the black community forge large-scale public protests against the steamboat company. Only during the trial did the *Sun* report on the specifics of what happened that August night. Accounts of the Steamer Sue case taken from: “District Court, D. Maryland. The Sue,” *Westlaw* 2 February 1885 22F.843; Koger, “Dr. Harvey Johnson,” 9-10; “Colored Passengers,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 February 1885, 6. For information on *Hall v. DeCuir* see: Joseph R. Palmore, “The Not-So-Strange Career of Interstate Jim Crow: Race, Transportation, and the Dormant Commerce Clause, 1878-1946,” *Virginia Law Review*. Vol. 83:1997, 1773-1817.

⁵³ See, for instance: Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 70-1; Koger, “Dr. Harvey Johnson,” 9-10; Paul, “The Shadow of Equality,” 205-207.

From the extant evidence, it is clear that the actions of the four women were deliberate and it is possible, even probable, that Harvey Johnson was involved in the case from the outset. The women arrested were all parishioners of Johnson's Union Baptist Church, Baltimore's premier black activist institution. They also knew from experience that they were likely to be barred from the white first-class cabin. In the summary of the trial's verdict, the judge in the case noted that, "On previous trips on the same steamboat, [the women had] been denied access to the after cabin." They therefore also knew that the conditions in the "colored" first class cabins were not comparable to the white cabins, a key point in their eventual lawsuit. In their testimony the women noted that the cabin, "Was offensively dirty; that the mattresses in the berths were defaced; that the sheets were wanting or soiled, and that there were no blankets and no conveniences for washing." The women further claimed that access to the colored first class cabin was obstructed by the presence of cattle. In light of these facts, their actions were particularly interesting in the ways that they manipulated categories of race, gender, and respectability. Throughout the ordeal they remained demure and respectable, a fact noted by the judge in the case. Rather than loudly protest their treatment the libellants simply refused to relocate to the "colored" first class cabin, and took up quarters in the ship's saloon. As black females, their presence in the white male space of the saloon must have been remarkable. They likely knew that their femininity and respectable manner would make for a stunning contrast in the rougher, male space of the ferry's saloon.⁵⁴

Johnson—and presumably the women and other black activists—also recognized that the case spoke to the foundations of black equality in the post-Reconstruction pe-

⁵⁴ District Court, D. Maryland. "The Sue," *Westlaw* 2 February 1885 22F.843; Koger, "Dr. Harvey Johnson," 9-10; "Colored Passengers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 February 1885, 6.

riod.⁵⁵ Although Johnson was not a trained attorney he read widely, especially tracts concerning the Constitution and the Reconstruction amendments. Johnson firmly believed that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were of paramount importance to the prospects of achieving equality. The problem, in Johnson's estimation, was not with the laws as written but with the interpretations of the statutes on the books, especially the controversial "Slaughter House Cases" and the case of *Hall v. DeCuir*.⁵⁶ For Johnson, the "Steamer Sue" case struck at the heart of this misappropriated legacy of Reconstruction.

In the "Steamer Sue" case, the contested legacy of *Hall v. DeCuir* figured prominently. In 1870, a steamboat company operating in Louisiana and Mississippi denied an African-American woman named Josephine DeCuir the right to sit in a "white dining hall." DeCuir sued the ship's captain, John Benson, for violating an 1869 Louisiana state law that ensured equal accommodations. When the case eventually reached the Supreme Court, the Chief Justices ruled that the state law was, in the words of one scholar, "an inappropriate regulation of interstate commerce." The ruling, in effect, denied states the right to pass laws that prohibited racial segregation on interstate carriers. Nevertheless, questions still remained. In delivering his concurrence to the Court's verdict, Justice Nathan Clifford ruled that since Congress had not passed legislation dealing with segregation on interstate travel the carriers needed to rely upon a common law understanding of "reasonableness."⁵⁷ The verdict, especially Clifford's justification, limited the fourteenth

⁵⁵ Historian C. Vann Woodward has pointed out that race relations immediately following Reconstruction "were an unstable interlude before the passing of these old [slavery] and new traditions [legal equality] and the arrival of the Jim Crow code and disfranchisement." See: C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 32. Palmore, "The Not-So-Strange Career of Interstate Jim Crow," 1773-1817.

⁵⁶ Koger, "Dr. Harvey Johnson: Minister and Pioneer Civic Leader," 9-10.

⁵⁷ Palmore, "The Not-So-Strange Career of Interstate Jim Crow," 1773-1817 and Barbara Young Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 337-42.

amendment's Equal Protection Clause against racial discrimination and set the stage for further attempts at segregating public transportation.

The "Steamer Sue" case was most likely designed to challenge the implications of *Hall v. DeCuir*.⁵⁸ On the one hand, the case concerned a simple question of "fact": whether or not the ship's operators provided accommodations to the women in the "colored" first class cabin equal to those enjoyed by whites. The second, and thornier, issue concerned the question of law. At this point the case became more muddled. Since, as the court noted, the steamer plied waters between two states the jurisdiction in the case defaulted to the federal government. In 1884, Congress had still not acted on legislation regulating segregation on public transportation. This inaction left ship operators free to impose "reasonable" restrictions, an outgrowth of *Hall v. DeCuir*. However, "reasonableness" was still an unsettled legal matter. Black radicals thought they had a solution. In their book, *Justice and Jurisprudence*, the Brotherhood of Liberty pointedly asked, "how can that proposition (reasonableness) be determined otherwise than by ascertaining, whether or not the rule or regulation complained of conforms to the organic laws of the nation?" For the Brotherhood, it was unquestionable that racial segregation on public

⁵⁸ Baltimore's black radicals had not forgotten the verdict in *Hall v. DeCuir*, especially Justice Clifford's concurrence opinion. Five years after the events on the Steamer Sue, the Brotherhood of Liberty, a black activist group founded by Johnson, published a book entitled, *Justice and Jurisprudence*. The book lowered its sights at the case and Clifford's interpretation. "Under the Bensonian 'Reasonable Rule' seven millions [blacks] of the traveling public were and are to be forcibly dis severed from the other sixty millions [whites]," the authors inveighed, "and on all public and private occasions to be assigned to separate and exclusive apartments, where dignity of mind and a feeling of individual respectability cannot be maintained; as if they were not citizens, but rather outcasts, the base objects of civil contempt and reproach." See: Brotherhood of Liberty, *Justice and Jurisprudence: An Inquiry Concerning the Constitutional Limitations of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1889): 215.

conveyances was not reasonable since it violated the Fourteenth Amendment's Equal Protection Clause.⁵⁹

The court's decision in the "Steamer Sue" case turned out to be a mixed bag for black radicals. However, it ultimately must have been disappointing. African-American activists almost certainly hoped that the case would challenge *Hall v. DeCuir* and restore the protections against discrimination proscribed in the Fourteenth Amendment. Instead, the judge noted the difficulty in determining the "reasonableness" of regulation and deferred to previous rulings on the question of whether segregation violated the Constitution. The judge then issued a narrow ruling by only deliberating on whether this particular steamboat provided the women with equal accommodations. "The separation of the colored from the white passengers," the judge wrote, "goes to the verge of the carrier's legal right, and such a regulation cannot be upheld unless bona fide and diligently the officers of the ship see to it that the separation is free from any actual discrimination in comfort, attention, or appearance of inferiority." The court, in other words, reaffirmed the right of the steamboat operators to provide separate accommodations but only if they were equal. The only salvation was that in this regard, the judge found the Steamer Sue to be lacking. Therefore, on the grounds that the accommodations provided the women were unequal in this instance, he ruled that the steamboat operators could not enforce separation of the races; a narrow ruling that fell far short of challenging *Hall v. DeCuir*.⁶⁰ Despite the disappointment, the case provided black activists with a legal victory and a way to directly challenge segregationist policies. It was a first step but bigger victories remained on the horizon.

⁵⁹ Brotherhood of Liberty, *Justice and Jurisprudence*, 297.

⁶⁰ District Court, D. Maryland. "The Sue," *Westlaw* 2 February 1885 22F.843; "Colored Passengers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 February 1885, 6.

Although the Steamer Sue decision proved to be bittersweet for black activists, the verdict in a second case (delivered just weeks later) was decidedly more favorable. For over a decade, black radicals had been intermittently fighting to see an African-American attorney admitted to Maryland's Bar. However, the issue was seemingly forgotten by the mid 1880s.⁶¹ Then in March 1884, a Baltimorean named Richard King unsuccessfully petitioned the state senate on the grounds that the exclusion of black lawyers was in violation of the Constitution.⁶² Like efforts to bring suit against the Steamer Sue, the quest to get African Americans admitted to the Maryland Bar had wider implications for the black community. In presenting his petition before the state senate, King linked the exclusion of black lawyers with other injustices occurring in the city and state. He noted, for instance, that trade unions were also excluding black men and women and that Baltimore's public schools refused to hire black teachers. Because of this, The Baltimore Sun reported that King surmised, "The colored people are not treated as American citizens in Maryland."⁶³

Although King ultimately failed to be admitted to the bar, he did succeed in reintroducing the issue of black legal inequality into the city's consciousness. King's efforts received a positive hearing from The Baltimore Sun who strongly supported him. In an editorial that playfully poked fun at lawyers' lack of morality, and congratulated Mary-

⁶¹ After Harvey Johnson's efforts in 1876, another black lawyer named Charles Taylor, who had already been practicing in Boston, unsuccessfully applied to the Maryland Bar the next year. Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 74; "Colored Lawyers in Maryland Courts," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 February 1885, 2. The court decided that the legal profession was limited to white males over the age of twenty-one and that admission to the Bar was not a right but a privilege to be bequeathed by State Legislatures.

⁶² "Colored Men as Lawyers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 March 1884, 5; "From Washington," *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 May 1884, 1. It is unclear whether the two events were related, but apparently the Maryland State Senate had a bill before them that would allow African Americans to become lawyers. The editorial urged the senate to pass the law.

⁶³ "From Washington," *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 May 1884, 1.

land's progress since Reconstruction, the paper stated that, "The law has no right to keep a colored man from earning his bread in any honest way he may see fit, provided that he shows himself able to meet the requirements imposed on all other classes of citizens." The *Sun* then remarked that, "The law as it stands formed only one part of a system that has passed away, and which no one wishes to bring back."⁶⁴

Despite the *Sun*'s optimism, the "system that has passed away" had hardly vanished from Baltimore. Black radicals knew that the courts were the lynchpin supporting the state's structure of inequality. In February 1885, Charles S. Wilson sought to gain admittance to the Maryland Bar.⁶⁵ There is no doubt that the Wilson case was important to black radicals. Wilson and his supporters cobbled together more than \$200 to try the case.⁶⁶ After Wilson appeared before the Supreme Bench of Baltimore in a preliminary hearing, a number of prominent Baltimoreans in the legal community voiced support for the admittance of black lawyers. Baltimore's Mayor, Ferdinand Latrobe publically supported Wilson by proclaiming that, "all restrictions on the freedom of citizenship should be removed." Latrobe was far from alone in this matter. Judge Charles E. Phelps termed the exclusion of African Americans from the Bar as a "relic of barbarism."⁶⁷ Wilson also received support from many of the city's daily newspapers. Once again, The Baltimore *Sun* led the charge, calling on the state to end the exclusionary practice. "Sooner or later all restrictions on the freedom of citizenship must disappear, and there is no reason why

⁶⁴ "Colored Men as Lawyers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 February 1884, 2.

⁶⁵ Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court. Including the Navassa Case," 6.

⁶⁶ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 76.

⁶⁷ "Colored Lawyers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 10 February 1885, 5; "Local Matters," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 February 1885, 6.

the legal profession should be the last to recognize the inevitable.” *The Baltimore American* also backed Wilson’s efforts.⁶⁸

On February 14, 1885 Wilson’s attorney, Alexander H. Hobbs, appeared before the Supreme Bench of Baltimore to argue the case. Hobbs’ opening statement revealed what was at stake. Hobbs told the judges that the Maryland law excluding African Americans from the Maryland Bar was in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Specifically, Hobbs cited the first section of the amendment which read, in part, “no State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or amunities of the citizens of the United States, nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty or property without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” Since the amendment placed the races on an equal footing, Hobbs maintained, blacks could not be excluded from liberties—including the right to pursue any vocation—enjoyed by whites. Hobbs also pointed out that states could not pass laws in conflict with federal policy.⁶⁹

In many ways, the implications of Wilson’s case mirrored the importance of the Steamer Sue trial. Wilson’s suit served as a test case to determine whether the courts offered a viable vehicle to reshape race relations in the city. Already, the Steamer Sue case demonstrated that direct action through the courts at least held the potential to affect legal change quickly and more efficiently than political agitation. If the judges decided that state laws could not discriminate against blacks because of the protections laid forth in the Fourteenth Amendment, black radicals could also begin to chip away at other social

⁶⁸ “Colored Lawyers in Maryland Courts,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 February 1885, 2. Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 74-5.

⁶⁹ “Can Colored Men Be Lawyers,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 February 1885, 6. Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 76.

injustices. At the same time, the entire black community would benefit from the representation of African-American attorneys dedicated to fighting inequality.

On March 19, 1885 the court announced their verdict in the Wilson case. Citing numerous precedents, the court sided with Wilson. The decision read, in part, that “To deter any class of citizens from its membership is not only to prevent their engaging in a lawful calling, but, in the language of the Supreme Court, tends to degrade and stigmatize the whole class by depriving them of a privilege which all other citizens possess and of the equal protection of the law.” *The Baltimore Sun* immediately celebrated the verdict in an editorial published the next day as “in keeping with the progressive sentiment of the age.”⁷⁰ For black radicals, the verdict was a heartening victory. It established that direct action through the courts could potentially affect legal change quickly and more efficiently than political agitation. The strategy also provided a way for activists to more easily control the process of reform. Rather than appealing to white politicians who either brushed aside their concerns, disregarded the black community, or simply pandered to African Americans for votes, black activists now had a way to spearhead their own efforts.

However, African-American activists hardly had a moment to revel in their recent legal victories; 1885 also demonstrated the perils of an inequitable legal system. On April 2, 1885, a twenty-two year old white woman and daughter of a prominent farmer, Catherine Gray, walked her sister Susie to a nearby train station in rural Baltimore County. After seeing her sister off, Catherine began the approximately one mile journey back to her home. During her homeward voyage, she passed a twenty-four year old Afri-

⁷⁰ “Admitted to the Bar,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 March 1885, 1 and “Admission of Colored Lawyers to the Bar,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 March 1885, 2.

can-American man named Howard Cooper who greeted her by name as the two crossed paths. According to Gray, the exchange did not end there. Cooper, who had previously been arrested on “various charges,” allegedly followed the young woman into “the thickest part of the woods” and attacked her with a piece of wood. Gray fought off her attacker, wounding him with a stone before being rescued by the family dog. Gray escaped with a cut lip and some bruising on her breasts, face, and neck. Four days after the alleged assault the police arrested Cooper near Rockland, Maryland and brought him to Baltimore to protect him from lynching.⁷¹

On the surface it appeared that the case against Cooper was strong. However, in nineteenth century rural Maryland (or in Baltimore for that matter) there will always be doubts concerning an African-American male arrested for assaulting a white woman. The only eyewitness in the case was Gray, and though her father stated from the outset that he would not allow her to testify, she eventually bore witness in the courtroom. To make matters worse for Cooper, he would not be able to hire a black attorney and he would almost assuredly be tried before an all-white jury.

Cooper immediately had trouble securing a court-appointed attorney. His first court-appointed attorney recused himself for unspecified reasons, prompting the judge to issue an open request to the Maryland Bar. At first, he had no takers. Finally, the judge assigned an ex-congressman, Fetter S. Hobiltzell to defend Cooper. Yet, Hobiltzell immediately expressed his reluctance, telling *The Baltimore Sun* that unless compelled to serve by the judge he would not defend Cooper. Luckily for Hobiltzell, the Judge re-

⁷¹ “Miss Gray’s Brave Struggle,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 April 1885, 4. On Cooper’s capture see: “Telegraphic Summary, Etc.” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 April 1885, 1; “Howard Cooper’s Crime,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 May 1885, 1.

lented on his assignment and released him from duty.⁷² With all that was against him, the last thing that Cooper needed was trouble obtaining competent counsel. Finally, the judge found two men, George Weld and A. Robinson White, who were willing to defend Cooper. Not much is known about Weld and White but it should be noted that they were at least the third option in this case. When *The Baltimore Sun* described the men, they did so as “young members of the Baltimore bar.” In a high-profile, capital case, it is likely that Weld and White were not the best possible options for Cooper.⁷³

Cooper also had other problems to contend with, some of which were self-inflicted. Chief among them were the confessions that he made after being captured. Cooper allegedly told another black man, Moses Sheridan, that he assaulted Gray. Then after his apprehension, Cooper gave an interview to *The Baltimore Sun* where he admitted assaulting Gray “to gratify his desire for ‘devilment.’” However, Cooper denied sexually assaulting Gray, stating that he “did not assault her after she was helpless.”⁷⁴ Because this was a capital case, this was an important point. Cooper faced the death penalty because of the alleged sexual assault not for physically attacking Gray.

Because of the animosity against Howard Cooper the judge moved his trial to Baltimore city. Nevertheless, it was a foregone conclusion that he would be found guilty. Even prospective members of the jury admitted that they had formed an opinion of the case before the trial, although most added that this “would not interfere with the rendering of an impartial verdict exclusively upon the evidence.” The only question remaining was whether Cooper would be convicted of the more serious crimes of rape and at-

⁷² “Howard Cooper’s Case,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 May 1885, 4. On Hoblitzell see: “Telegraphic Summary, Etc.,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 May 1885, 1; “Cooper’s Counsel,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 May 1885, 4.

⁷³ “Counsel for Cooper,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 May 1885, 4.

⁷⁴ “A Talk With Cooper,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 April 1885, 5.

tempted murder or of some lesser charges. On the day of the trial, a large crowd assembled to witness the quick, one-day proceedings. What the assembled crowd saw that day was a slight, young 16-17 year old who, according to *The Baltimore Sun*, “looks like a boy who had never been disciplined to any hard work.” The most dramatic moment of the afternoon was the testimony of Catherine Gray who described an assault that lasted approximately two hours. It is difficult to decipher whether Gray alleged an attempted sexual assault. Nineteenth century courtroom decorum made her testimony ambiguous. She claimed that she resisted Cooper’s attacks twice and the family’s dogs interrupted the third attempt. In her testimony she recalled physical trauma but did not directly accuse Cooper of attempted rape.⁷⁵

Following the presentation of the prosecution’s case, the defense entered a brief argument. Without calling any witnesses, Cooper’s attorneys asked the jury to convict him of the lesser charge of attempted assault. With that, the only thing left was the jury’s verdict. They did not need long. Without even leaving the box, the jury took less than a minute to find Cooper guilty of the more serious charges arrayed against him. As the jury foreman read the verdict, a distraught Cooper yelled out, “I am guilty of beating her, but of nothing else.”⁷⁶

For Harvey Johnson, the Cooper trial represented an injustice on both an individual (for Cooper) and societal level. African Americans in Maryland, like Cooper, could not expect to be tried in front of any black jurors. At the same time they could not hire the services of an African-American attorney. These deficiencies alone were often a death sentence. It is clear that Cooper did not receive a fair trial and, at best, had inexpe-

⁷⁵ “Howard Cooper’s Crime,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 May 1885, 1.

⁷⁶ “Howard Cooper’s Crime,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 May 1885, 1.

rienced representation. At worst, his defense team may have been incompetent. Under these circumstances Cooper not only stood little chance of receiving a fair hearing but also of being acquitted. In this sense his experience mirrored that of other black Baltimoreans.

Johnson was intent upon aiding Cooper and, in the process, using his appeal to expose the inequities that plagued Maryland's courts. Following the trial's conclusion, Johnson and his congregation spearheaded an effort to secure the necessary funds for Cooper's appeal since his attorneys refused to pay the filing costs.⁷⁷ Johnson and his supporters hoped to bring the case before the Supreme Court by arguing that Cooper received an unfair trial since African Americans were excluded from the jury pool. However, the Cooper case presented black radicals with a dilemma. Cooper hardly qualified as a sympathetic victim. That Cooper received little compassion from whites is not surprising but his confession that he assaulted Gray also made some African Americans unwilling to support him. Some, like a local black minister named P.G. Walker, recognized the distinction in helping Cooper because of inequalities in the justice system but others were not willing to parse the specifics of the case. For example, Reverend Robert Steele, of the city's Centennial Church, refused to give money because he thought Cooper was trying to escape his sentence.⁷⁸

From the extant evidence it appears that Johnson's congregation had difficulty raising the necessary funds. Nevertheless, their efforts eventually bore fruit: the \$50.00 court fee to get a hearing before the United States Supreme Court was delivered on July

⁷⁷ "Howard Cooper's Case," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 June 1885, 4.

⁷⁸ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 68; "Cooper's Counsel and Friends," *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 July 1885, 1; and "Howard Cooper's Case," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 June 1885, 4.

12, 1885. But by this time reactionary whites had had just about enough of Cooper and his legal plight. Just before midnight on July 12th, the same night that black activists delivered the filing fees to the court, “little squads of men” wearing masks and disguises congregated in Towson, Maryland where Cooper was jailed. One of the men had a small bundle under his coat and openly joked that it was a “cravat” for Cooper. After some exploratory forays a group of approximately seventy-five men set out for the jail. As they reached their destination the men demanded admittance but were denied. However, the woman working that night, who the *Sun* identified as the sheriff’s daughter, informed the men that they could force open a back door. Once inside the vigilantes found Cooper and led him to the nearest tree. As they prepared to lynch him, Cooper reportedly told the mob,” Well, you have got Cooper haven’t you? Good bye.” With that the lynch mob pulled the rope and hoisted Cooper to his death.⁷⁹

When the dust settled at the end of 1885 it became clear the stage was set for new directions in black protest in Baltimore. The three trials—“Steamer Sue,” Charles S. Wilson’s suit, and Howard Cooper’s conviction—pointed black activists in the direction they would pursue through the remainder of the 1880s and early 1890s. While the Howard Cooper trial brought into sharp relief the inequities in the Maryland justice system and the dangers such injustices posed, the other two trials revealed the potential in pursuing equality through the legal system. With their two legal victories in the “Steamer Sue” and Wilson cases, Baltimore’s black radicals intended to capitalize on the momentum they had built to insure that African Americans would at least have a chance at obtaining

⁷⁹ “Howard Cooper Hanged,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 July 1885, 1.

a fair hearing in the state and city's courtrooms. The only thing remaining was establishing an organization that could effectively pursue this strategy.⁸⁰

On the afternoon of June 2, 1885, Harvey Johnson called upon four of his fellow clergymen (and veterans of civil rights agitation in the city) William M. Alexander, P.H.A. Braxton, J.C. Allen, and W.C. Lawson to meet at his home. By the end of the evening the men had formed the United Mutual Brotherhood of Liberty, formulated a constitution, and devised a strategy to expand the rights of African Americans and ensure that the legacy of Reconstruction would not be one of failure. Given its members' backgrounds in the church, it is not surprising that the Brotherhood combined a Christian vision of justice with the ideals of the United States. In the preamble of their constitution, they proclaimed that, "It is a Scriptural truth that God has made of one blood all nations of men" and then added "it is equally true, according to the Declaration of American Independence, that all men are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." The formation of the Brotherhood of Liberty would prove to be a pivotal moment in the history of black activism in Baltimore and throughout the United States.

⁸⁰ "The favorable termination of these important cases," William M. Alexander later wrote, "prompted and hastened the organization of the Brotherhood of Liberty, as the most effective medium through which the laws in Maryland and other States repugnant to the interests of the colored people could be most speedily expunged." Rev. W.M. Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court. Including the Navassa Case" (Baltimore: Printing Office of J.F. Weishampel, 1891): 6.

Chapter 3: “Is not politics in some form connected with even the production of the very bread we eat and everything else we enjoy in this life?”: The Brotherhood of Liberty and the Formation of Black Community Activism, 1885-1891

It was, in the words of the *Baltimore Sun*, “an unusual spectacle.” On November 15, 1889 eighteen men were ushered into the United States Circuit Court in downtown Baltimore, Maryland. The stakes were high. “An unusual feature of this spectacle,” the *Sun* reported, “was that against each of the eighteen men were five indictments, and death the penalty of a conviction upon any one of them.” Aligned in two rows, the defendants waited to answer for their alleged crimes. Then, one-by-one each raised their right hand, “lowered their heads,” and listened as the judge read the charges arrayed against them. “Here and there in the ranks, however,” according to the *Sun*, “a scowling, brutal face could be discerned.” When it came time to enter their pleas, the men’s voices ranged “over the whole gamut of the human voice.”¹

The eighteen defendants arraigned on November 15, 1889 did not answer for crimes committed in Baltimore. Rather, their alleged offences transpired many miles away on the uninhabited island of Navassa. Since 1854, the Navassa Phosphate Company, with offices in Baltimore, had owned the island, exploiting both the land and its black employees. Located near Haiti, Navassa was, in the words of the *New York Times*, “a barren island, of no value except for its phosphates.”² Aside from the guano and limestone, gum and palm trees, the island’s only other inhabitants were 137 black laborers and eleven white officers.

¹ “All Said ‘Not Guilty.’” *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 November 1889, 5.

² For the quote from *The New York Times*, see: “Driven to Desperation,” *The New York Times*, 21 October 1889, 2. Background information also taken from: “Americans Slain at Navassa,” *The Washington Post*, 20 September 1889, 7.

The white officers ensured that the working conditions on the island matched the harsh landscape. African American workers toiled on the island lasted at least fifteen months at a time. Stooped over, the hot Caribbean sun unrelentingly bearing down upon their backs, they wielded picks and shovels to separate the valuable bird dung from the limestone. Upon completing the backbreaking collection process, the bare-footed men loaded their harvest onto a car that they pushed across the island to the harbor. The laborers subsisted on a single bucket of water per day that one investigator described as “brackish, not fit to drink.” Adding to the overall misery and isolation was the paltry pay, a sum that equaled \$8.00 per month. The measly wage was only part of the exploitation. With no other commercial outlets, the laborers were beholden to a company store that often left them indebted. The Reverend John H. Collett, who wrote a scathing investigation of the island’s working conditions reported, “No man upon the island ever received a cent for his labor.” It is no wonder then that the *New York Times* noted that “black laborers” was a misnomer in this case, the more appropriate descriptor for the Navassa Phosphate Company’s employees was “slaves.”³

³ For instance, the Navassa Phosphate Company charged its workers for items including the pans they ate from, their pillows, mattresses, blankets, and netting to ward off the island’s mosquitoes. Furthermore, if a worker required medical treatment, they paid fifty cents for each day they spent at Navassa’s hospital. The living conditions were equally brutal. The laborers’ diet consisted of “hard tack, boot-leg coffee, tainted corn beef and beans.” Some background information gleaned from George A. Gipe, “The Navassa 18 Murder Trial,” *The Baltimore Sun Magazine*, 22 October 1972, 14, 16,36-37. For the quote from *The New York Times*, see: “Driven to Desperation,” *The New York Times*, 21 October 1889, 2. On the Navassa Phosphate Company, see: “A Riot at Navassa,” *The New York Times*, 20 September 1889, 1; “The Navassa Rioters,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 October 1889, 1; and Reverend John H. Collett, “The Navassa Island and its Inhabitants,” Rev. W.M. Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court. Including the Navassa Case” (Baltimore: Printing Office of J.F. Weishampel, 1891): 27-8. Jeff Davis, a former employee who moved to Wheeling, West Virginia agreed, telling *The Washington Post* of “shocking cruelty to the ‘slaves’ who are held in bondage in Navassa.” The quote from Davis appears in: “He Predicted a Massacre,” *The Washington Post*, 22 September 1889, 1.

On the afternoon of September 14, 1889 Navassa exploded in a spectacular outbreak of violence and death.⁴ After a series of confrontations, the African-American employees struck back at their oppressors, killing six white overseers and wresting control over the island. Yet beyond these basic facts, confusion lingered over the day's events and many questions remained unanswered even months later. Was there a plot? How did unarmed black workers overpower armed white guards? Were the employees' actions justified? Two months after the riot, the district court of Baltimore was to decide the fates of the eighteen men.⁵

The defendants surely realized the long odds they faced in a country (and city) with a long history of racism. However, there was a sliver of hope. For the previous five years, a group of black Baltimoreans had been diligently building a foundation of activism to attack social and political injustices in the city. Foremost among the activists was a group of lawyers and religious officials who formed The United Mutual Brotherhood of Liberty in 1884. On the evening of November 11, 1889, activist W.H. Barnes, hastily called a meeting to discuss the Navassa case. The Brotherhood decided to throw their full support behind the accused by assigning two of their brightest legal minds, E.J. Waring and Joseph S. Davis, to the case.⁶

The Navassa murder trial represented the nascent group's biggest test. Members of the Brotherhood painstakingly constructed their own means of protection and an activist foundation as they sought to define freedom for their community by utilizing the legal

⁴ National Grand Tabernacle, Order of Gallican Fishermen, Baltimore, Md. "The Navassa Island Riot" (Baltimore: The American Job Office, 1889): not paginated; and "Driven to Desperation," *The New York Times*, 21 October 1889, 2.

⁵ A number of different sources give descriptions of what happened that day on Navassa, see: George A. Gipe, "The Navassa 18 Murder Trial," *The Baltimore Sun Magazine*, 22 October 1972, 14, 16, 36-37; "Driven to Desperation," *The New York Times*, 21 October 1889, 2; Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 22-6.

⁶ Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 23-4.

system to expose the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of Jim Crow. Thanks to the Brotherhood's efforts, black Baltimoreans could now contract the services of black attorneys to actively push their reform agenda. They only needed a qualified candidate. In 1885, Everett J. Waring had just graduated from Howard Law School in Washington, DC at the age of twenty-six. The Brotherhood of Liberty's founder, Harvey Johnson, convinced Waring to move to Baltimore and on October 10, Waring became the first African-American legally licensed to practice law in the city. A few months later, Waring was joined by a fellow Howard graduate, Joseph S. Davis.⁷

This chapter examines the Brotherhood of Liberty's activism by analyzing four of their key efforts in the late 1880s and early 1890s: amend the Bastardy Act, challenge Maryland's prohibition on intermarriage, reform public education, and defend the Navassa Island mutineers. In pursuing a legal strategy, the organization not only changed the tenor of black activism in the late 1880s, they altered its scope and its goals in numerous ways. The Brotherhood did not haphazardly pick their battles. Instead, they chose their cases for both their overt and symbolic importance. Indeed, their efforts were aimed at the twin legacies of slavery and Reconstruction, still actively being fought over in the city. As Joseph S. Davis observed, "The old States rights sentiments are as alive to-day as they were in the days of John C. Calhoun and we often find the curious anomaly of persons who are citizens of a State, who are yet for many practical purposes, not citizens of

⁷ For unknown reasons, Wilson did not pursue a practice in Baltimore. Instead, the Brotherhood turned their attention to two other candidates. See: Plebeian, "Progress of the Emancipated Race," *The Phrenological Journal of Science of Health*, Number 2 (February 1887) Whole No. 758, 79. "There are many wrongs to be righted and grievances to be redressed," Davis remarked, "which can be successfully accomplished in no other way than by organized effort. The Brotherhood of Liberty shows that the spirit of agitation on behalf of justice and liberty is neither dead nor sleeping among the colored people of Baltimore."

the United States.”⁸ Eschewing partisan politics, the Brotherhood also chose to focus on universal injustices that opened up activism to the entire community, especially women. In so doing, they broadened the definition of political agitation to include matters of education, marriage, and workplace abuses. As one of its founding members, H.A. Braxton, explained in response to critics of their education reform efforts, “Is not politics in some form connected with even the production of the very bread we eat and everything else we enjoy in this life? This cry of politics! Politics! Is only a scheme by white men to frustrate the work of this union.”⁹

In 1886, the newly formed Brotherhood of Liberty targeted Maryland’s Bastardy Act. The law, as it was originally conceived in 1781, was designed to allow women the right to force their child’s father to provide financial support in cases of abandonment. Although it originally applied to all women, in 1785 lawmakers had narrowed its provisions to free women, regardless of race. Then in 1860, legislators made the act racially exclusive when they inserted the word “white.” From this point forward, African-American women no longer enjoyed the protections afforded to white women.¹⁰

Although black activists had rhetorically targeted the Bastardy Act throughout the 1880s, they had never formally challenged it.¹¹ Indeed, the law presented many pitfalls. In order to dispute the Bastardy Act, the Brotherhood would by necessity have to file suit against an African-American male, running the danger of further splitting the black community and reinforcing negative stereotypes about black men. Already racialized

⁸ “Brotherhood of Liberty,” *The New York Freeman*, 4 December 1886, Issue 3, col. A.

⁹ “The Colored Teachers Issue,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 June 1887, 6.

¹⁰ For more information on the history of the Bastardy Act, see: Henry J. McGuinn, “Equal Protection of the Law and Fair Trials in Maryland,” *The Journal of Negro History* Vol. 24, No. 2 (April 1939): 146-147 and Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 14-5.

¹¹ Scattered references to the Act can be found throughout the 1880s. See, for instance, “The Colored Convention,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 August 1883, 1 and “Meetings of Colored Voters,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 October 1883, 3.

constructions of black depravity and hypersexuality had reared their head in the *Baltimore Sun*. Although the paper supported the Brotherhood's efforts, they still opined that the law "ought not exempt from its provisions the very class who, as they are on the average poorer, less educated and less influential than the others, are accordingly proportionately more exposed to temptation and are less well fitted to resist it."¹² Nevertheless, when Lucinda Moxley, an African-American woman, sought the Brotherhood's assistance in prosecuting her child's father, James Smith, who was also black, the organization found their opening.¹³

The Brotherhood's challenge to the Bastardy Act demonstrated the expansive ways that the organization was thinking about its activism. Certainly, the fact that the law discriminated along color lines motivated the members of the Brotherhood as it had other black activists throughout the 1880s. The Brotherhood highlighted this reason in many of their public pronouncements. "The most degrading of all [the state's Black Codes] is the 'Bastardy Act', which was passed in the days of Slavery, and was so worded to protect *white women* only [emphasis in original]."¹⁴ But the all-male membership of the Brotherhood also used the occasion to articulate a positive notion of black

¹² "The Color Question," *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 January 1886, 2.

¹³ Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 14-5.

¹⁴ In this regard, the case bore a striking resemblance to the Brotherhood's efforts to gain African-American lawyers admittance to the bar. Like that case, the Brotherhood based their objections on the qualification of the word "white." Since, the Brotherhood concluded, the state found that laws could not limit professional occupation based on race, the state legislature also would overturn a law that also discriminated on the basis of race. *The Baltimore Sun* quickly repeated this reasoning when they came out editorially against the Bastardy Act. "The Legislature is the representative of all the people of the State, without respect to color," the paper surmised, "and it should have responded favorably to the perfectly reasonable request of the colored people that the law should know nothing of color." "The Bastardy Law Sustained," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 July 1886, 4 and Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 11. For the *Sun*'s editorial, see: "An Unjust Law," *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 May 1886, 2. The secondary literature on the fight against the Bastardy Act mainly confines itself to this explanation. See: McGuinn, "Equal Protection of the Law and Fair Trials in Maryland," 146-150 and William George Paul, "The Shadow of Equality: The Negro in Baltimore, 1864-1911" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1972): ch. 6.

masculinity in a world where white society consistently tried to emasculate African-American men.¹⁵ The Brotherhood portrayed themselves as the defenders of black womanhood since “no law existed” to punish men for their sexual transgressions. The organization argued instead that the law actually allowed “villainous men” to “destroy the happiness of homes of colored people without fear of being legally punished.”¹⁶

The Brotherhood realized that the fight against the Bastardy Act continued to open political space for black women in numerous ways. It is also likely, or at least possible, that Harvey Johnson’s wife, Amelia, pushed the Reverend to fight the Bastardy Act. Johnson married Amelia E. Hall in 1877. Not much is known about Amelia’s nineteenth-century activism; during the 1880s, it seems that she had not yet taken a public activist role. However, circumstantial evidence makes it likely that she worked behind the scenes during this time and, at the very least, supported her husband’s political endeavors. It is clear that Amelia was an active reader and editor of her husband’s writings. In addition, the Johnson household was quickly becoming a center of political activity in Baltimore. Amelia’s later work as a political activist and author also suggests that she was already engaged in resisting inequality, especially given the politically-charged environment in the Johnson home and throughout the city.¹⁷

The legal strategy pursued by the Brotherhood also invited wider participation by women. As literary scholar Gabrielle Foreman perceptively points out, “Legal spheres

¹⁵ For discussions of this, see: Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). For a deeper exploration of the conflation of whiteness and masculinity, especially as it pertained to political power, see: David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso Press, 1991).

¹⁶ Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 11.

¹⁷ Koger, “Harvey Johnson,” 23 and Gabrielle Foreman, *Activist Sentiments: Reading Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009): 146. Foreman perceptively points out, the Johnson home served as the meeting place for numerous political gatherings, including the founding meeting of the Brotherhood of Liberty.

were more fluid and flexible than a political arena defined by the franchise and by municipal, state, and federal political representation.” Indeed, women had already been active participants in the “Steamer Sue” case where they served as activists and plaintiffs, both defying white authorities and laws and then testifying in court. The Brotherhood needed women to revive both of these roles if they were going to have success challenging the Bastardy Act.¹⁸

The effort to amend the Bastardy Act was certain to demand attention from black women. While the Steamer Sue suit had practical benefits for women, it was a case based upon racial discrimination, not gender bias. The Bastardy Act was different. The law specifically penalized African-American women by denying them legal protections. If the Brotherhood’s challenge was successful, it could also help mitigate the stigma attached to black women abandoned by their partners. By excluding African-American women, the measure implicitly indicated that they did not possess the honor accorded to white women. Indeed, the law functioned not only to protect white women’s economic well-being but also to construct a discourse that portrayed them as the victims of men’s devious machinations. By allowing white women legal redress it sent the message that black women were not worthy of such protection.¹⁹

¹⁸ Foreman, *Activist Sentiments*, 151-2. The 1880s represented a flourishing of women’s activism, especially black women’s activism throughout the United States. The secondary literature is voluminous but for the best examples see: Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001); and Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ “Maryland’s Bastardy Law,” *The New York Freeman*, 23 January 1886, Issue 10; col A. Some circumstantial evidence points to the fact that African Americans did indeed perceive their exclusion as contributing to a stigma. See: Jeffrey R. Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War: A Supplement to the Negro In Maryland: A Study of the Institution of Slavery* (Baltimore: Publication Agency of the Johns Hopkins University: 1890): 80

Black activists soon gained the rhetorical support of a few whites, including some in the city's daily press.²⁰ Newspapers were particularly adept at hashing out the law's peculiarities and providing a novel interpretation. *The Baltimore Sun* thought that the Bastardy Act needed to be overturned on the issue of simple fairness. "If it is a good thing for white people, it is no worse a thing for colored people," the *Sun* opined, "If it is a bad thing for colored people, it is no better a thing for white people." Then, however, the paper explained why it really detested the act: it victimized white men. Since black women could not bring suit against black men (and white women with black paramours was, for the paper, unspeakable), the law effectively applied to white males only. "Indeed, it might be argued with some force that if there is any reason to hold that the statute is unconstitutional," the *Sun* argued, "it is because it imposes upon white people penalties to which colored persons are not liable, and in so doing denies not to the colored persons but to the white the equal protection of the laws."²¹ Baltimore Criminal Court Judge Edward Duffy used a similar logic when he noted that only white women could be arrested if they could not economically support their illegitimate children. Since black women were denied from the law's protections they were also excluded from its penalties.²²

Although black and white Baltimoreans opposed the Bastardy Act for different reasons, white opposition highlighted another of the central reasons why African Ameri-

²⁰ In fact, white politicians in Baltimore had already lent their support to ending the distinction in the Bastardy law during the political campaigns of 1885. Even with the support of Baltimore's politicians, however, state legislators failed to amend the bill because they could not corral the support of representatives from the Maryland "country." "The Color Question," *The Baltimore Sun* 11 January 1886, 2 and "The Color-Line Test," *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 April 1886, 6. The accusation that representatives outside of Baltimore blocked the Legislature from amending the bill was made by Waring. In reporting the failure, *The Baltimore Sun* did not provide reasons. See: "Maryland Legislature," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 March 1886, 4.

²¹ "An Unjust Law," *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 May 1886, 2.

²² The judge found fault with the law because it "denied to a white women equal protection to a colored woman in this respect, that it made a white woman who had in illegitimate child liable to arrest and prosecution, when no such proceedings were provided against a colored woman." See: "A Bourbon Law Blasted," *The New York Freeman*, 11 December 1886, 1.

cans targeted the law: it could further define the still contested Fourteenth Amendment that prohibited racial discrimination. At the first hearing in Baltimore's Criminal Court, Waring capped off his presentation to by noting that the law violated the "United States constitution, the civil rights act of 1866, and the decisions made in interpreting those amendments and laws." In a sense then, white and black opponents of the law were in agreement: the law should apply equally to both races.²³ While whites focused on the inequality in this one particular instance, African Americans hoped that removing the word "white" from the Bastardy Act might also pave the way to abolishing other racially-exclusive laws.

Unfortunately, the early returns did not appear promising for the Brotherhood of Liberty. The defense attorney in the trial demurred on the grounds that since the law only applied to white women, Moxley's case was without merit. In choosing to pursue a demur, Smith's lawyer effectively ended the trial. Baltimore's Supreme Bench felt that they had no other choice but to grant the demur and make no further comment on the constitutionality of the law.²⁴ The decision made an important statement on race, gender, and the law. A year earlier, the Supreme Bench ended the prohibition on black attorneys since it explicitly limited practice to whites. However, they felt that this Moxley case was different. *The Baltimore Sun* reported that in the effort to open up the Maryland Bar to African Americans "the object was to confer a benefit," while the effort to amend the Bastardy Act only "sought to impose a penalty on the colored man."²⁵ This was at best a narrow interpretation; at worst it was disingenuous. Certainly, the law potentially penalized

²³ "To Protect Colored Women," *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 June 1886, 6.

²⁴ McGuinn, "Equal Protection and Fair Trials in Maryland, 148.

²⁵ "A Bastardy Law Sustained," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 July 1886, 4.

black men, but it also would have directly benefitted African-American women by extending protections already afforded to white women.

In the end, both Moxley and the Brotherhood walked away disappointed. The Brotherhood did not get the courtroom hearing they wanted and Moxley did not get any redress. However, shortly after the conclusion of the Moxley test case, the state's courts became flush with new bastardy cases. Each of these trials brought renewed discussion of the constitutionality of the law in the press and in public discourse. In Baltimore and nearby Washington County, judges declared the law unconstitutional because it did not provide equal protection of the law. During the latter trial, Judge H.W. Hoffman explicitly ruled that the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment, most likely because its punitive measures only applied to white men.²⁶ Then, the following spring, another case involving a white man, Pius L. Plunkard, was heard before the Court of Appeals in May 1889. On June 22, the court ruled in a five-to-one decision that the Bastardy Act should be left in its current form. Nevertheless, this decision was not without controversy. The lone dissenting member, Frederick Stone wrote of the law that, "If the fourteenth amendment to the constitution of the United States means anything it means that there shall not be in any State one law applying to the white race and another and different one applying to the black."²⁷ It was a strong public rebuke of Maryland's plainly discriminatory law.

²⁶ Hoffman's ruling sparked a public debate with his counterpart on the circuit court, Judge Andrew K. Syester. The newspapers do not provide a specific reason for the ruling but this would be consistent with other objections that whites had with the law. "Telegraphic Summary, etc." *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 December 1886, 1; Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 15. "Items from Hagerstown," *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 December 1886, 6 and "Judge Syester on the Bastardy Law," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 December 1886, 6.

²⁷ "Court of Appeals Decisions," *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 June 1887.

Following the Plunkard case, black activists again hoped that the state legislature would act to amend the law. Once more they were disappointed. The legislators did not provide a reason for their inaction. However, by this time it was becoming increasingly clear that removing the word “white” held ramifications beyond the functioning of the Bastardy Act. Already at least one case, tried before the Circuit Court in Hagerstown, Maryland, hinted at the possible implications. Sometime in 1886, Joseph T. Woods and his wife were arrested for violating Maryland’s ban on intermarriage. In light of the rulings made in Baltimore’s lower court that the Bastardy Act violated civil rights law, Woods’ defense team crafted a new strategy. They now argued that the intermarriage law was also unconstitutional, since it similarly failed to extend the “equal protections of the law” promised by the Fourteenth Amendment to all regardless of race.²⁸ The strategy ultimately failed but it surely terrified segregationists throughout the state who would be even less wont to amend the law.

African-American activists realized that their best chance to amend the law was to bring new cases before the state’s Supreme Court. This time, their agitation received its greatest level of community support. In short order, the Brotherhood called on the black community to help defray legal costs. Meanwhile, other activists began exerting pressure of their own. In Frederick and Alleghany counties, protesters delivered petitions to the state assembly.²⁹ Women also became even more actively involved. By 1887, black women from the African Methodist Episcopal Church formed an organization to bring public attention to the law. A year later, the organization included 250 members and began to raise funds of its own. After the state legislature failed to amend the law in early

²⁸ “Washington County Matters,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 December 1886, 6.

²⁹ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 78-9; Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 16.

1888, the women called an indignation meeting at the Samaritan Temple. At the meeting they lodged a formal protest and, more importantly, organized themselves into a “Sisterhood” to serve as a female auxiliary to their male counterparts.³⁰

Then in rather unspectacular fashion the controversy over Maryland’s Bastardy Act abruptly ended. As attorneys representing both sides of the matter prepared their briefs for another legal showdown, the obstinate state assembly suddenly sprang into action. For reasons unknown, John Poe—who the legislature had appointed to codify the state’s laws—“omitted the word white in the Bastardy act.”³¹ The decision caught black activists off guard. As a loyal Democrat, Poe was not a friend to the African-American community. In fact, later in his career he would attempt to disfranchise African Americans through a constitutional amendment that bore his name. Yet, for whatever reason, Poe effectively killed the controversy by omitting one word from Maryland’s legal code. When asked about the law’s demise, Bishop A.W. Wayman of the African M.E. Church remarked that he was “agreeably surprised” that the law had been amended. The Brotherhood proudly credited black women with helping “to correct the obnoxious” law.³²

Even before the controversy over the Bastardy Law ended, African-American activists were already beginning to turn their attention to a state law banning intermarriage.

³⁰ Not much is known about this female auxiliary. The group apparently had roots in another activist organization that had been formed in 1885 to promote black women’s occupational opportunities, known as the Women’s Protective Association. See: Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 15 and “Our Baltimore Budget,” *The New York Age*, 7 April 1888. It is possible that the organization came to be known as the Women’s Protective Association. See: “Bishop Wayman Agreeably Surprised,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 May 1888, 4. Information about the women is also gleaned from: Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 79-80.

³¹ Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 16.

³² “Bishop Wayman Agreeably Surprised,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 May 1888, 4 and Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 16.

There were few issues more explosive in the post-Reconstruction South.³³ Unlike the Bastardy Law's deep historic roots, the act that forbade intermarriage in Maryland was of much more recent provenance. According to Harvey Johnson, Maryland's state legislature hurriedly passed the measure in 1884 after Fredrick Douglass married Helen Pitts. The act labeled intermarriage "an infamous crime" and carried a maximum ten-year prison term.³⁴

In January 1887, the Baptist Ministers Conference convened at Pastor Baptist Church in Baltimore. That evening, H.A. Braxton, one of the founding members of the Brotherhood of Liberty and a close confidant of Johnson, delivered a speech that made waves throughout the city. Entitled "Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage," Braxton intended his remarks, "For the sole purpose of remedying a moral wrong and injustice which is being practiced upon the poor colored people of the South and such other States, if there be any, where laws exist forbidding white and colored to intermarry." Braxton's speech was stunning in its stridency. Within the first paragraph, Braxton laid out the stakes in his speech. "I am striking at an evil and injustice," Braxton intoned, "which is being done to 7,000,000 of people, therefore, I hope my motive may not be misunderstood. Somethings in this paper may be hard to hear," he continued, "but they are harder than that for us to bear."³⁵

³³ Some recent historical works have done an excellent job of exploring interracial marriages and sexual relationships. See: Charles Frank Robinson, *Dangerous Liaisons: Sex and Love in the Segregated South* (Fayetteville, AR: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003); Rachel Moran, *Interracial Intimacy: The Regulation of Race and Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Martha Hodes, *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History* (New York: NYU Press, 1999); Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) and Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

³⁴ "The Intermarriage Question," *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 February 1887, 6.

³⁵ The meeting was reported in the *Baltimore Sun*, see: "Ministers' Meetings and Mixed Marriages," *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 February 1887, 4. The quotes from Braxton are from the pamphlet version of

Braxton delivered a trenchant assessment of inequality, white hypocrisy, and the misuse of religious tenets by states solely concerned with enforcing segregation. He noted that sexual relations between whites and blacks had been occurring “for years,” and were hardly a secret. However, while black men risked lynching for their sexual relationships with white women, white males could “debauch as many women as [they] choose, provided that they are (colored) negro women. [*sic*]” Braxton also noted that both public sentiment and laws supported this state of affairs.³⁶ He then pushed this rhetoric one step further by using Christianity to lend credibility to his argument and also further critique inequality. According to Braxton, marriage was a “divine institution ordained of God” and states had no right to amend it. He used this point to make the larger argument that racial difference was a product of mankind. Braxton contended that God did not differentiate people based upon skin color and that states that instituted laws against intermarriage were at odds with God’s will. In his estimation, these laws contributed to a host of moral consequences—including illegitimacy, white sexual avarice, and economic inequality—by devaluing marriage and leading to inequitable relations among the races. They also, Braxton concluded, “Enslave one class of its citizens to the lascivious will of the other and that under the guise of Christianity.” This was particularly true for black women, he contended, who had to deal with both white sexual advances and the consequences of illegitimate pregnancies.³⁷

his speech. See: H.A. Braxton, “Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage” (Baltimore: Unknown Publisher, Speech Delivered 31 January 1887): 4, 9-11.

³⁶ Braxton, “Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage,” 10.

³⁷ Braxton, “Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage,” 12. Using an example from Richmond, Virginia, Braxton retold the tale of a white man who had fathered nineteen illegitimate children with a black woman. Since the laws did not protect the children—and indeed the mother was forbidden to bring claims against their father—the mixed race children had no hope of an inheritance or legitimacy in the eyes of the law.

Yet Braxton was not done. He also focused on the legal effects of the prohibition. He maintained that in the eyes of the state, marriage was a contract, in many ways no different than other contracts dealing with land and property. Since Reconstruction ended legalized discrimination, he contended that states could not disallow a contract on the basis of race. “There is not a Court in the land that will say,” Braxton noted, “that a contract between a white man and a negro woman, or a white woman and a negro man, to buy a house, or farm is void. Marriage is a contract,” he continued, “and is so regarded by constitutional and common, national and States’ laws the world over.”³⁸

Braxton’s speech assailed intermarriage laws and white hypocrisy with alacrity. The rhetoric that he deployed reversed the discourse rampant in the pages of newspapers throughout the nation—including Maryland—that portrayed black men as hypersexual and prurient. For white audiences, Braxton’s speech was discomforting on a number of levels but probably mostly for what it suggested about racial equality and social relations. Throughout the speech Braxton repeatedly pointed out that laws attempting to enforce segregation had failed. In courtrooms, in streets, in bedrooms, and in day-to-day life African Americans and whites consistently interacted with one another. In fact, Braxton argued that the races were already so “deeply amalgamated”—because of social and sexual intercourse—that there was no longer any such thing as a white or black race. Rather, there was but one race and that was American. Like his counterparts in the Brotherhood of Liberty, Braxton also connected intermarriage laws with the other antebellum “black laws” which, he argued, “belong to the past, and ought to be buried deep, deep down in the grave with all of the other GARMENTS OF SLAVERY.”³⁹

³⁸ Braxton, “Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage,” 21.

³⁹ Braxton, “Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage,” 23.

Despite the speech's contents, *The Baltimore Sun* chose to narrowly focus, at least initially, on the least controversial aspect of Braxton's ideas. In their brief coverage of the Ministers' Conference, the *Sun* simply reported that Braxton argued that marriage was a contract that no state could prohibit. They simply ignored his broader claims about how laws prohibiting intermarriage had deleterious effects on black women in particular, and African Americans more broadly.⁴⁰ Regardless of the press' reception, Braxton did get the attention of African Americans in Maryland who wrote to express their support for his ideas. Joseph S. Davis exclaimed that the laws against intermarriage were "barbaric relics of other days, which both church and state should unite in wiping out forever." S. Q. Sanks, another African-American activist in Baltimore, told Braxton that he had heard people about town favorably discussing his speech. The ultimate confirmation came two weeks later when several hundred black men and women gathered at Braxton's church to build the movement to overturn the intermarriage laws.⁴¹

The controversy over Braxton's speech soon ignited interest in the case of John F. Wood and Annie Nicodemus. In December 1886, authorities sentenced the interracial couple to eighteen months in jail for violating the intermarriage law. Wood, who was of mixed race, met Nicodemus, who was white, through acquaintances that worked for her family. For some reason—perhaps skin tone—Wood claimed that he did not know that

⁴⁰ "Ministers Meetings and Mixed Marriages," *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 February 1887, 4.

⁴¹ Joseph S. Davis, "Untitled Letter," rpt. in Braxton, "Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage," 7. Davis' letter was one of many that Braxton had reprinted in the foreword to the publication of his speech. For Sanks' letter see: S.Q. Sanks, "Untitled Letter," rpt. in Braxton, "Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage," 5. In addition to the speeches in support of Braxton's sentiments, those gathered decided to publish Braxton's speech in pamphlet form to distribute to "lawyers and judges all over the country." See: "Intermarriage Discussed," *The Baltimore Sun* 16 February 1887, 5. Various letters to the editors also began to appear in the pages of the paper, both for and against the intermarriage law. For the letters to the editor, see, for instance: "Letters from the People," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 February 1887, 6; A. Parlett Lloyd, "The Intermarriage Question," *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 February 1887, 6; "Letters from the People," *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 February 1887, 6; and "The Intermarriage Question," *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 March 1887, 6.

Nicodemus was white, though surely he knew before marrying her.⁴² In most cases, the public would have quickly forgotten the couple's story as the headlines faded from local newspapers. However, with the fight over intermarriage once again occupying the public spotlight, the couple's plight received new attention, especially after Braxton used their story to illustrate the unjust laws against intermarriage.⁴³ In the days following his speech, a group of black activists embarked for Annapolis to try and convince the state's governor to intervene. With a petition in hand, which included the signatures of some white ministers, a group of African-American ministers from across Maryland met with Governor Henry Lloyd. In addition, to presenting the petition, the ministers told the governor that at least some of the original jurors favored granting Wood and Nicodemus clemency.⁴⁴ Despite these protests, the couple served all but three months of their sentence. When they were released early for good behavior, they proudly left the prison "arm in arm" before promptly boarding a train to Philadelphia.⁴⁵

By mid-1887, the fight against the intermarriage law had lost its momentum. Yet its importance transcended its brevity and the failure to achieve concrete results. The movement built a critical mass of concerned citizens and united Baltimore's African Americans throughout the city and state. The issue of intermarriage spoke to both sexes and it was clear that the Brotherhood was purposefully aiming their message at women.

⁴² Although her circumstances are not clear, Nicodemus apparently had a troubled life until she met Wood. She told *The Baltimore Sun* that "her own race" had "discarded her" and when she met Wood she was both "disgraced and friendless." However, Wood "treated her kindly" and provided her a home. At some point the two became romantically involved, having "several children" together, before Wood decided that he wanted to marry Nicodemus. Information culled from three sources. "Prisoners Sentenced," *The Baltimore Sun* 18 December 1886, 6; "Wood and his Wife Released," *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 March 1888, 4; and "The Intermarriage Question," *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 February 1887, 6.

⁴³ Braxton, "Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage," 14.

⁴⁴ "The Intermarriage Question," *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 February 1887, 6. The Governor told the petitioners that he could not act until he received the "record of conviction."

⁴⁵ "Wood and His White Wife Released," *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 March 1888, 4.

The reverend consistently advanced the argument that a prohibition against intermarriage especially victimized black women because it did not afford them legal redress. Without legal protection, white men could engage in sexual dalliances—and rape—without fear of repercussions.⁴⁶

Activists hoped to use the momentum and sense of unity they built in the fight against intermarriage laws to begin attacking the state of public education.⁴⁷ Public schooling was highly inequitable for African Americans both as an institution and potential source of employment. Since 1867 Baltimore exclusively hired white teachers even if a school served African-American children. At the same time, facilities for black students in the city were either dilapidated or non-existent. In 1886, the *New York Freeman* reported that, “The building in which the colored High, Grammar and No. 1 Primary schools meet is in a miserable location” where some students had to “walk at least three miles a day to attend.”⁴⁸

Black Baltimoreans had been agitating for changes in the education system for decades.⁴⁹ Because these efforts spanned generations of local African Americans, the issue brought together activists who had followed separate paths after the ascendancy of the Brotherhood of Liberty. Although his political star had faded after the mid-1880s,

⁴⁶ Braxton, “Southern Law vs. The Sanctity of Marriage,” 18.

⁴⁷ In fact, on at least one occasion black activists discussed education during a meeting concerning intermarriage. See: “Intermarriage Discussed,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 February 1887, 5.

⁴⁸ See: Paul, “The Shadow of Equality,” 303 and “Baltimore Colored Schools,” *The New York Freeman*, 20 February 1886, Issue 14 col. F.

⁴⁹ At the Brotherhood’s first meeting, in 1885, they assigned Dr. Benjamin Weaver and Reverend William Alexander to attend to educational matters. By the mid-1880s, the Brotherhood had only experienced limited success in forcing the miserly city government to appropriate funds for black education. In 1886 and early 1887, activists pressured the city council into agreeing to fund a new high school at a cost of \$25,000 but only after the mayor vetoed an appropriation that would have funded three schools. See: Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 16 and Paul, “The Shadow of Equality,” 238-40. The fight for black education after the Civil War had roots reaching back into the 1860s. See: Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital* (New York: University Press of America, 1982): 208-23; Paul, “The Shadow of Equality.”

Isaac Myers had long been an advocate for educational reform as part of his campaign for self-improvement. But he had found little common ground with the goals and methods of the Brotherhood. Nevertheless, education drew Myers into a coalition with black radicals even if he often served as a voice of moderation, cautioning more militant activists to temper their reform agenda.⁵⁰ By bringing a measure of equality to education, the Brotherhood hoped to not only end discriminatory practices but also provide black Baltimoreans with the means to pull themselves up socially and economically. In this sense, the group combined their own emphasis on fighting discrimination with Myers' older program of self-improvement.

Education reform also held special relevance to women. When black activists attacked the legal system for prohibiting black attorneys it broadened the job prospects of black men. Opening up the teaching profession would similarly have direct benefits for black female professionals, a fact that activists were quick to highlight. In one report on the conditions found in black schools, reformers emphasized that "young women" in other cities, including Richmond, Washington, and Atlanta have been of "incalculable value to the race." Moreover, the activists noted, the influence of these female teachers extended far beyond the classroom. Women "go, not only into the class-room, but into the homes of the people, and teach them, not only the lesson of books, but what is better, the lesson of life."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Myers attended meetings conducted by Braxton and Alexander in 1887. Myers disagreed with the platform that explicitly pushed for black teachers at African-American schools, fearing that its racial basis violated the laws of the United States. This reservation notwithstanding, Myers was careful to note that he was "heartily with you, however, in this movement to secure colored teachers in our schools." See: "Colored School Teachers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 May 1887, 4.

⁵¹ "Baltimore Colored Schools, *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 May 1887, 6.

There is little doubt that black women were ready to assume this role in Baltimore. Ironically, the city was home to a “Colored Normal School” which trained African-American educators. Throughout the 1880s the graduation lists were overwhelmingly female.⁵² But because blacks could not teach in Baltimore, graduates of the Normal School often worked at public schools in the surrounding counties. However, some found employment at private schools and kindergartens maintained in churches and teachers’ homes throughout the city.⁵³ For example, Henrietta Hucless and Ida Johnson operated a school housed in the Patterson Avenue Church that alleviated overcrowding in the rapidly growing black enclaves of Northwest Baltimore. It was a remarkable achievement in self-sufficiency and racial uplift. In two years of existence, 350 students, who supported the endeavor by paying ten cents per week, had passed through its halls.⁵⁴ Nor was the Patterson Avenue Church school alone. In fact, the commitment to education in black Baltimore was a community affair after the Civil War. The private schools in existence included those run by Adele Jackson, another administered by a “Miss Mahalla”, one conducted in the Douglass Institute, and another that operated in one of the city’s alleys. According to Joseph S. Davis, by 1887 the network of private African-American schools in Baltimore educated more than 500 children, representing more than

⁵² The school was a particular point of pride for black Baltimoreans, both because it trained young black professionals but also for its historical roots as a Freedman’s Bureau initiative. See: Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 84 and “What Baltimore City was Like When Morgan was Founded Here 100 Years Ago,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 3 June 1967, 12. For the lists of graduating classes, see, for instance: “The Colored Normal School,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 Jun 1887, 6; “Normal School Exhibition,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 December 1886, 4; “School Commencements,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 June 1887, 6.

⁵³ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 84.

⁵⁴ The school’s superintendant was William Alexander of the Brotherhood of Liberty. “Colored Educational Work,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 July 1887, 4 and Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court, 17.

half of the population of school-aged black children.⁵⁵ The success of these schools demonstrated African Americans' competence as educators and showed that black children thrived under their guidance.

The yeoman work being done by the private schools notwithstanding, Davis was correct in terming the situation in Baltimore an "educational crisis." In the minds of many activists the time had come to form a permanent organization to tackle the problems in the city's education system. At a meeting held on April 6, 1887, reformers inaugurated the Maryland Educational Union (MEU).⁵⁶ From the outset, the group was determined to take a more militant path than previous reformers. Members elected H.A. Braxton to fulfill their vision. In his opening remarks, Braxton connected children's education to the "highest rights" of being American citizens and promised that they would "continue to labor and wait until our right is recognized and enjoyed."⁵⁷ The MEU began to organize immediately, collecting reports from city wards and recommending that "auxiliary unions" in each ward be constituted to assist in the effort.⁵⁸ The education reform movement quickly picked up steam in the city. By May, the organization attracted 900 people at one of their meetings held at Braxton's Calvary Baptist Church.⁵⁹

Initially, it appeared that the fight to open public school jobs to black teachers would be a short one. In June of 1887, city schools, including the Colored Normal School, held their commencement ceremonies. The Normal School's president asked the mayor, James Hodges, to present the students with their diplomas and make a public ad-

⁵⁵ "The School Before the War," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 5 December 1914, 1. For the information on Davis and the numbers of black children attending private schools, see: "The Colored People," *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 May 1887, 6.

⁵⁶ "Colored Teachers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 April 1887, 6.

⁵⁷ "Colored Teachers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 April 1887, 6.

⁵⁸ "Colored Teachers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 April 1887, 4.

⁵⁹ "The Colored People," *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 May 1887, 6.

dress. Surprisingly, Hodges used the occasion to lend his support to education reform. The mayor told the audience that he fully supported the movement and reminded them that he proposed allowing “colored schools with colored teachers” in a previous address to the city council. Hodges was confident that his recommendation, which “rests on merit and rights,” would ultimately be adopted.⁶⁰ Hodges, however, did not hazard an estimate as to when the council might come around. As it turns out, this was a wise decision. In late June or early July, the council refused to authorize the hiring of black teachers. Although their reasoning was unclear, they apparently rejected a proposal by the lone Republican to hire African Americans to fill any new vacancies in black schools.⁶¹

Almost immediately, the Colored Teachers’ Association (CTA), a long-standing statewide organization that had heretofore avoided politics, rebutted the council. At their annual gathering—also held in the early days of July—the group announced, “We deplore and condemn the action of the city council of Baltimore” and called this discrimination a “disgrace” to the city. The meeting also revealed the frustration felt by black teachers. In a move that signaled their new political bent, the CTA changed its name (after some heated debate) to the “Maryland State Progressive Teachers Association.” Many members felt that the word “colored” “was inconsistent in view of the effort to have the word ‘white’ stricken out of the State laws.”⁶²

⁶⁰ “School Commencements,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 June 1887, 6. The message can be found in: “The Mayor’s Message,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 February 1887, 5. It turns out that Hodges had supported black teachers for some time, see: “Baltimore’s Honest Mayor,” *The New York Freeman*, 13 February 1886, Issue 13, Col. F.

⁶¹ I have been unable to locate any records of the actual vote. See: Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 89.

⁶² The extant evidence of this group is also scarce; the association, which was statewide, began to meet in 1880 but had not been a vehicle for protest. In many cases, it appeared the group met to discuss job matters and internal ways of improving education. See: “Colored Teachers and the City Council,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 July 1887, 4.

Like their counterparts in the Maryland State Progressive Teachers' Association, the MEU was also incensed by the city council's decision. After spending the spring and early part of the summer holding protest meetings, gathering information, fundraising, as well as organizing local unions and female auxiliaries, the MEU was ready to spring into action.⁶³ At a July 19th meeting tensions ran high. A teacher at the Normal School, Mary Saunders, addressed the audience, and through the medium of the *Baltimore Sun*, the city at large. Saunders railed against the inequity in public education. "The colored teachers of this city and State feel keenly the unjust treatment they have and are receiving at the hands of the school commissioners of Baltimore city. We are discriminated against," Saunders complained, "not on the ground of incompetency, but because of the color of our skin." Saunders was not the only one running out of patience. During the proceedings, Braxton announced that he had consulted attorneys who assured him that if the MEU wanted to pursue a legal solution they would meet with success. Perhaps knowing that *The Baltimore Sun* was present, Braxton made it clear that this was not just idle talk. "I have always been of the opinion," Braxton confessed, "that we will not get what we want until we take this matter into the courts." Braxton then offered \$50 as an initial contribution to fund the legal effort. Braxton's resolution was "unanimously adopted" but the MEU apparently never followed through.⁶⁴

⁶³ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People Since the War*, 88.

⁶⁴ "They Mean Business," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 July 1887, 6. It is not unreasonable to think that the members of the MEU knew of the *Baltimore Sun*'s presence at the meeting. Moreover, they were likely confident that they would get favorable coverage. At the time, the *Sun* and the members of the MEU enjoyed a strong relationship. See: "Colored Teachers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 April 1887, 4. Historian Paul Davis contends that the threat of legal action compelled the city council to cave. However, Davis does not provide attribution and the extant evidence is similarly silent about a direct correlation. Given the Brotherhood's previous successes, along with the participation of Braxton, Davis, and Waring, the city government most likely took the MEU's threat seriously. It is certainly not out of the realm of possibilities that Braxton's threat prompted the city to reconsider amending its laws. Still, the changes definitely did not happen overnight. See: Paul, "Shadow of Equality," 238-39.

As black activists continued to push the city their efforts began to bear fruit in early 1888.⁶⁵ City officials were mulling over the idea of incorporating some of the outlying suburbs in Baltimore County (known collectively as “the Belt”) into Baltimore proper. One of the issues in the proposed annexation revolved around the question of what to do with black public school teachers. Although Baltimore city did not hire African-American teachers, the county (including the Belt) had done so for years. As annexation was being debated, the city council finally relented. Perhaps as a gesture to ease some of the many controversies involved in the negotiations, and to appease the Brotherhood, the council officially adopted a motion that allotted \$25,000 dollars for the lot and building of a new school for African-Americans and agreed to hire only black teachers. Immediately, the *New York Age* celebrated this as a victory. “The ‘hard licks and steady blows’ of Rev. W.M. Alexander have been at last productive of much good,” the paper reported. “For some time he has been pressing the need of a colored school in the northwestern section, in a way so masterly and convincing that the City Council last week decided to build one in that section and put it under the control of colored teachers.” This also quelled some of the concerns of those in the Belt. At an annexation meeting in March, African Americans were assured that they would still be able to teach in Baltimore. In fact, it is possible that black residents in the proposed annexation areas threatened to vote against the measure unless black teachers kept their positions.⁶⁶ Finally, in May 1888 Baltimore’s new mayor Ferdinand Latrobe signed into law the ordinance that,

⁶⁵ For instance, the Brotherhood of Liberty repeatedly visited the city council’s educational committee in an effort to convince them to appropriate funds for a school in Northwest Baltimore. Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 18.

⁶⁶ “Baltimore Budget,” *The New York Age*, 31 March 1888, 1; “The City Council,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 March 1888, 6; “When the Belt Comes In,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 March 1888, 6; and “The Belt Campaign,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 March 1888, 4; “The School Before the War,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 5 December 1914, 1.

at least for African Americans, made sweeping changes in the city's education system. Not only did African-American teachers win the right to teach in the city they were promised the same pay as their white counterparts.⁶⁷

Within a year, the MEU had accomplished its goals of opening up the city's schools to black teachers and obtaining improved facilities. In a practical sense, these triumphs alone made an enormous difference. When the 1888 school year began, Roberta Sheridan, a teacher at a black school formerly located in the county became Baltimore city's first African-American teacher after her school was incorporated.⁶⁸ Then, on October 10, 1888 the new black high school formally opened, though only after white residents made a last-ditch appeal to block its construction. At the ceremony, E.J. Waring reflected on the fight for better education and what the future now held for black scholars. "There has not always been a satisfactory school provision for the colored people in Baltimore," Waring remembered, "and proper facilities have not been afforded for the education of their children." Nevertheless, with the new building and the agreement to employ black teachers, Waring was willing to let "the past be forgotten."⁶⁹ The words that Waring spoke that day were most likely heartfelt. It had been a decade-long struggle just to get this far. But the triumphs of 1887 and 1888 turned out to only be the first step, a prelude to a longer battle that played out in the 1890s. However, for those standing at the doorsteps of the city's new black high and grammar school these victories served as

⁶⁷ Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War*, 90 and "Approved by the Mayor," *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 May 1888, 4.

⁶⁸ "The School Before the War," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 5 December 1914, 1.

⁶⁹ "Colored High School," *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 October 1888, 6. On the efforts of whites to block the school see: Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 18.

recognition of the hard work done by African-American activists. The school proved to be an immediate success. Within three days of opening it was already overcrowded.⁷⁰

The temporary lull in the battle over education came at the right moment. Within a year, events in the Caribbean would command the attention of Baltimore's black activist community. In many ways, the work of the Brotherhood of Liberty prepared them for the Navassa Island case. Over the previous four years the group had gained valuable experience working in the city's courtrooms, had established two successful attorneys, and gained the trust of the wider black community. All of this would soon pay dividends.

In September 1889, news of the Navassa Island uprising began to slowly trickle back to Baltimoreans in the pages of the daily newspapers. The initial headlines indicated astonishment at what happened; but no one should have been surprised. Conditions on Navassa had been deplorable for years and the 1889 riot was not the first. At least one other riot occurred in October 1882 when black laborers formed a "society for the purpose of getting rid of the whites." After the workers rebelled, the navy dispatched an investigator to the island. The investigation revealed conditions not materially different from those existing on the island in 1889.⁷¹

Surprisingly, one of the earliest pieces of in-depth reporting in *The Baltimore Sun* described events from the vantage point of the workers still holed up in the island's armory. The paper published a letter from the laborers' "spiritual advisor," Wm H. Henson.

⁷⁰ Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 19. For information on the 1890s fight for equality in education see: Paul, "The Shadow of Equality," esp. ch. 9.

⁷¹ The workforce was strictly divided along racial lines; 161 black workers toiled under the thumb of twenty-two whites. The black laborers had no means of redress and although the company claimed that they never mistreated workers, they admitted that they used "firm measures to keep them under control." Tensions certainly existed on the island before the riot. The superintendent remarked that many of the men were, according to the Baltimore police, "very dangerous people." Moreover, the geographic proximity of Haiti almost certainly added another layer of tension. When the riots broke out, the black laborers allegedly planned to escape to Haiti. These "firm measures" included occasionally locking up men in irons until they agreed to return to work. See: "Life at Navassa," *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 May 1883, 5.

Although Henson's letter omitted this information, the trouble on September 14 began after one of the white superintendants, Charles Wesley Roby, scuffled with his workers.⁷² Henson's account begins immediately after this fracas, when laborers requested a hearing with management to discuss what happened and their intolerable working conditions. Following a heated argument, the officers fired "promiscuously" at the workers. The laborers, "believing there was nothing between us and death" weathered the storm and managed to obtain weapons of their own. After wounding four whites, they seized the island's armory and took hostages. In the letter they noted they were treating their captives with "due courtesy" and implored the State Department to send immediate aid. This account provides at least some balance to the *New York Times*' and *Washington Post*'s coverage. The *Times* sensationally reported the events under the headline, "Hunted Down by Negroes," while the *Post* published a salacious account of the events under the headline, "A Horrible Butchery."⁷³ Nevertheless, the relative restraint exhibited by the *Sun* proved short-lived. Within a few days, the paper reported on the "butchered" men and published a "special report" that described the laborers as "fine a collection of scoundrels as could be gathered together in any jail in the country."⁷⁴

When the accused arrived at Baltimore harbor in early November, the Brotherhood immediately dispatched Waring and Davis to represent the laborers; a former United States district attorney Archibald Stirling, his son J. Edward Stirling, James D.

⁷² "Hunted Down By Negroes," *The New York Times*, 02 October 1889, 9.

⁷³ The initial reports were based on a cable dispatch that dryly noted a riot occurred in which a "number of Americans were killed." "A Riot at Navassa," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 September 1889, 1. For the laborers' account, see: Wm. H. Henson, "The Navassa Riot," *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 October 1889, 1; "Hunted Down by Negroes," *The New York Times*, 2 October 1889, 9. The *Post*'s story was based solely on the uncorroborated account of one of the white superintendants who told a tale of unrestrained violence, including dynamiting and black laborers "uttering fiendish yells that a Comanche Indian would have envied." "A Horrible Butchery," *The Washington Post*, 2 October 1889, 1.

⁷⁴ "Who the Butchered Men Were," *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 October 1889, 1 and "The Navassa Rioters," *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 October 1889, 1.

Cotter, and Robert Graham (all white) rounded out the defense team.⁷⁵ On the evening of November 11th, the Brotherhood of Liberty also called a meeting to discuss the pending trial and begin devising a strategy. At the gathering, the Brotherhood's president, A.J. Reed, appealed to black Baltimoreans for their support, claiming that unless African Americans supported the prisoners they would not receive a fair trial. That evening, activists agreed to support the workers by collecting funds for the men's defense.⁷⁶

While newspapers, including the *Baltimore Sun*, *Washington Post*, and *New York Times* narrowly focused on the events of September 14th, black activists took a more expansive view of what happened on Navassa. For the Brotherhood, the riot was a clear case where inhumanity bred the violence that swept over the island that hot September day. Moreover, it was a case where race, and racial discrimination, factored in multiple ways. In defending the workers, the Brotherhood noted that the trial was an opportunity to "bring out the facts in the case, and expose the Guano Company's method of conducting business on that lonely island, where poor laboring men were half starved and worked like brutes." They also attempted to humanize the rioters who were often portrayed with racially-coded terms like, "brutes," savages, and murderers. The organization was careful to emphasize the company's callousness and the difficult circumstances that the men faced on Navassa. This was particularly important given the widespread attention the case received throughout the nation. In addition to the coverage provided by the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, a number of other newspapers provided their own sensationalist, racialized coverage. The New Orleans' *Daily Picayune* described the rioters

⁷⁵ "This was the Motive," *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 November 1889, 6 and "All Said 'Not Guilty,'" *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 November 1889, 5.

⁷⁶ Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 22-3, 223 and "The Navassa Rioters," *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 November 1889, 6; "Baltimore Budget," *The New York Age*, 9 November 1889; Issue 5; Col. E; and "Some Baltimore Lawyers," *The New York Age*, 26 April 1890, Issue 31, Col. E.

as “a murderous gang of mutineers,” the *Galveston Daily News* termed them “Black Butchers,” and the *Milwaukee Daily Journal* as a “Mob Without Mercy.”⁷⁷

Under the best circumstances, the Navassa Island defendants faced long odds. Tried in a country, state, and city with a long history of racial prejudice, the men already stood convicted in the court of public opinion. Then things got even worse. Before the trial began, seven of the accused rioters “confessed” to their crimes. In exchange for immunity, the men promised to detail events from the “first whisperings” of insurrection to the actual riot.⁷⁸ In all likelihood, this prompted Waring to begin court proceedings on November 3rd by entering a *writ of habeas corpus* on behalf of Henry Jones, who had been identified as one of the leading conspirators. Waring hoped to convince the court that the United States did not have jurisdiction over Navassa. Perhaps, Waring reasoned, the only chance that Jones and the other defendants had of escaping with their lives was to avoid standing trial altogether. Still, the strategy was a long shot. Officials from the Department of Justice considered this possibility before the trial began and dismissed its validity.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Waring’s move was more than just a legal haymaker: the defense hoped to establish a foundation for an appeal before the Supreme Court.⁸⁰

Not surprisingly, the US district court did not grant Waring his petition for *habeas corpus* and the preliminary stages of the trial proceeded as planned. On November 9th,

⁷⁷ Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 223. For the nationwide coverage of events see: “The Navassa Riot,” *The Daily Picayune*, 19 October 1889, 2; “The Black Butchers,” *The Galveston Daily News*, 11 October 1889, Issue 168; Col E; and “Mob Without Mercy,” *The Milwaukee Daily Journal*, 1 October 1889, Col. A. The literature on constructions of race at the end of the nineteenth century is voluminous. See: Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁷⁸ “Navassa Rioters Confess,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 November 1889, 4.

⁷⁹ “Saturday’s City News,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 November 1889, 6.

⁸⁰ “Navassa Rioters Confess,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 November 1889, 4.

eighteen of the 124 rioters were indicted. Over the course of five indictments, the government charged seven of the eighteen men with murder. The remaining eleven were charged as “accessories before the fact,” a category used in conspiracy trials that carried a lighter punishment. When the defense challenged the legality of trying all of the defendants together, the judges decided to instead try each of the five murders separately.⁸¹ This meant that instead of one trial, Baltimore would host several Navassa riot trials.

Each of the eventual three trials unfolded in similar ways.⁸² In mid-November twenty-one year old George Singleton Key stood accused of shooting officer James Mahon. The courtroom, according to the *Baltimore Sun*, was so crowded that a “mass of standing humanity surrounded the benches.”⁸³ Over the course of the next six court sessions the prosecution portrayed the eighteen defendants as bloodthirsty murderers enmeshed in a wanton conspiracy. The district attorney, Thomas G. Hayes set the tone in his opening remarks. “If liquor had been accessible I should say that they were wild and reckless from drink,” he argued, “but not one drop of alcoholic liquor was on that island.” Nor, according to Hayes, were material conditions to blame. Instead, he deduced that the motive for the riots was simple: “the leaders in the conspiracy were tired of the hard work.”⁸⁴ The prosecutor’s remarks reeked of antebellum plantation lore: in the face of

⁸¹ In effect, the prosecution named one to three of the men as principals in each of the five murders; the remaining men were then charged as accessories. “Navassa Rioters Confess,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 November 1889, 4; “Navassa Rioters Indicted,” *The Washington Post*, 11 November 1889, 7. Eventually, the charges would be filed separately after the defense filed a demurrer claiming an “improper joinder of separate felonies in the same indictment.” See: “The Navassa Rioters’ Trial Postponed,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 November 1889, 5 and “Indicted on Five Separate Charges,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 November 1889, 4.

⁸² For unknown reasons, the courts consolidated the four remaining counts into two separate trials. See: “Their Third Fight for Life,” *The Washington Post*, 6 February 1890, 1 and “Key Guilty of Murder,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 December 1889, 3.

⁸³ “This Was The Motive,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 November 1889, 6 and National Grand Tabernacle, Order of Gallilean Fisherman, Baltimore, Md. “The Navassa Island Riot” (Baltimore: The American Job Office, 1889): 6-9.

⁸⁴ “This Was the Motive,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 November 1889, 6.

the beneficial treatment of their superiors and the company that they worked for—who provided discipline, provisions, and an honest living—these ingrate, evilly disposed and lazy black men resorted to savagery.

In the following days, the prosecution led a parade of witnesses through the courtroom to support Hayes' characterization. Witnesses claimed that the men were paid fair wages, provided good food, and had at their disposal a company store stocked with fairly-priced goods. Then the district attorney called William James, also known as "Richmond Shorty," to the stand. James, one of the laborers turned state's witness, told the jury that the conspiracy was hatched about a week before the riot. Two other black witnesses, Richard Evans and John Jenkins, related similar tales. The district attorney then called various witnesses to testify about the riot itself. Each communicated the same basic story. The laborers, for no apparent reason, were determined to exact bloody vengeance on their bosses.⁸⁵ By divorcing the events of September 14th from their wider context, the "Navassa rioters" appeared as reckless criminals while their overseers were either helpless victims or "plucky" heroes.⁸⁶ The only logical explanation for rebellion was that these were dangerous, violent men by nature. It was a carefully constructed portrait that played to the racism that permeated nineteenth century discourse.

The defense did not deny their clients part in the bloodshed but they wanted to show that the riot was precipitated by harsh working and living conditions. In fact, Waring's cross-examinations helped enter into the public record a strikingly different portrayal of life on Navassa. For instance, after Roby regaled the courtroom with tales of his

⁸⁵ "Story of Wm. James," *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 November 1889, 6; "That is the Man!" *The Baltimore Sun* 22 November 1889, 6; "Roby's Great Pluck," *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 November 1889, 8; "Saturday's City News," *The Baltimore Sun* and "The Navassa Island Murders," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 November 1889, 6.

⁸⁶ "Roby's Great Pluck," *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 November 1889, 8.

own bravery, Waring asked him why he thought the men rebelled. At first Roby tried to blame the rebellion on the dispositions of Key and another laborer named Edmund Francis. But then he posited another possible motive. Roby allowed that he had heard that seventy men were “indebted to the company” which “occasioned discontent.” Although the prosecution went to lengths to portray the company as being fair to their employees, the fact that over half of them were indebted seemed to suggest otherwise.⁸⁷

The prosecution’s carefully constructed portrait of conditions on Navassa began to crumble during the defense’s cross-examination of the state’s key witnesses. When the prosecution secured the dubious cooperation of seven black rioters they had done so with the idea that their testimony would bolster their case. In large measure it did. The men detailed a conspiracy that went back days, sometimes weeks. Nevertheless, their testimony also undermined some of the prosecution’s key points. It is difficult to blame the men for their decision to become prosecution witnesses. They likely realized that this was the most viable—maybe only—way to avoid the death penalty. While impossible to prove, it is plausible that the witnesses simultaneously tried to aid their peers by readily undercutting the state’s portrayal of conditions on Navassa. Indeed, from the outset they openly discussed the horrible conditions on Navassa with the press.⁸⁸ Then, when Waring cross-examined William James he readily detailed the rotten food, overwork, and exploitative prices in the company store. He also revealed that Mahon, who Key was ac-

⁸⁷ “Roby’s Great Pluck,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 November 1889, 8.

⁸⁸ The men noted the atrocious material conditions and violence that marked their lives as employees of the Navassa Phosphate Company. See: “Navassa Rioters Confess,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 08 November 1889, 4.

cused of shooting, incurred the wrath of many men because he made them work an extra week pushing cars, a particularly tough and dangerous assignment.⁸⁹

Under cross-examination even superintendent Smith admitted that he received complainants and personally witnessed mistreatment, although he was quick to dismiss these as aberrations. But how aberrant were they? Smith confessed that he witnessed Mahon “tricing”—which involved tying a person’s arms behind their backs, passing a rope through the handcuffs, and then hoisting the victim until his feet barely touched the ground—disobedient workers. In fact, Smith intervened on behalf of the worker, only to learn later that Mahon disobeyed his orders and “triced” the man again.⁹⁰ This incident, as it turns out, enraged the other laborers. One witness, Charles H. Davenport highlighted specifically mentioned this episode claimed it “caused much dissatisfaction.”⁹¹

When the defense presented its case they sought to build on the themes they broached during their cross-examinations. The defense argued that the company’s supervisors actively instigated the riot by first mistreating workers and then provoking hostilities on the day of the riot. By taking this tack they hoped that they could get Key’s charges reduced to manslaughter. After the assault on Roby the morning of the riot, one of the company’s employees directed the men to proceed to the superintendent’s office to hold an “investigation.” When one of the workers, Alfred Jones, also known as “Texas Shorty,” approached the superintendant to discuss working conditions Smith rebuked him. “What better treatment do you want?” the superintendant reportedly asked. “You

⁸⁹ After all, the men experienced the horrors of Navassa and most likely felt a level of camaraderie with the accused. In all of the reports about life and work on the island, there is nary a mention of tensions between the laborers. “Story of Wm. James, *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 November 1889, 6 and “The Defense Begins,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 26 November 1889, 6.

⁹⁰ See: “That is the Man!” *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 November 1889, 6. Interestingly, the United States Navy outlawed the practice of tricing up less than a year after the Navassa Trial when a ship captain triced up some of his sailors. See: “Terror of the Arctic,” *The New York Times*, 12 March 1890, 1.

⁹¹ “The Defense Begins,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 26 November 1889, 6.

have already killed one man,” he continued, “and if you don’t get away from here you black ----- I’ll blow your brains out.” When the superintendant leveled his gun at James Phillips—and it accidentally discharged—the melee began. In an instant, according to the laborers, their employers opened fire.⁹²

The defense also maintained that many of the defendants were not present during the riot or did not use firearms. For instance, Amos Lee, James Johnson, and Moses Williams claimed that they stayed away from the trouble, hiding out in various locations. Others, like Norman “Juggler” Wooster, admitted throwing stones during the fracas but denied that he or any of the rioters had any firearms or clubs. Indeed, defense attorney Stirling summed up their case by claiming that, “The claims of the district attorney that the whole eighteen men were principals in the killing have fallen to the ground. The deeds were the individual acts of individual men.”⁹³

“The accused tell a simple story and acknowledge what they did,” defense attorney Davis stated in his closing argument. “I would rather believe them than the colored witnesses who testified to save their necks,” he continued, “or the white officers who testified to hide their shame and hide their disgrace from the civilization of the world.”⁹⁴ The case was now in the hands of the jury, which, it should be noted, was composed en-

⁹² “The Navassa Murders,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 November 1889, 6. This account differed in key respects from Superintendent Smith’s own version of events. Smith claimed that when one of his men attempted to arrest “one of the ringleaders” he was knocked down before “a howling mob surrounded him.” See: “Hunted Down By Negroes,” *The New York Times*, 2 October 1889, 9.

⁹³ “The Navassa Murders,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 November 1889, 6; “Was There a Fix?” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 November 1889, 6.

⁹⁴ “Was There a Fix?” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 November 1889, 6.

tirely of white men. For the next forty-eight hours they deliberated. They had a lot on their plate. They could decide everything from acquittal to manslaughter to murder.⁹⁵

On December 2nd the jury was ready to announce their verdict. The men found Key guilty of murder, acquitted Moses Williams, and deadlocked on the remaining sixteen men. Given the circumstances, the defense considered the outcome a victory. It also proved to be the defense's highpoint in the Navassa trials. The next two trials produced diminishing returns. In the second trial, decided just a few weeks after the first, the jury found nine of the defendants guilty, two not guilty, and deadlocked on the remaining seven. Of the nine guilty, one was convicted of murder; like Key he faced an almost certain death sentence.⁹⁶ The third, and final, trial resulted in the biggest disappointment for the defense. The jury convicted three men—Key, Edward Smith and Henry Jones—of murder and thirty-seven others of crimes ranging from manslaughter to participating in a riot. When the judge asked Key if he had any final words, Key responded “Yes sir. If I had not shot the man he would have shot me. That is all I have to say.” The judge then sentenced the men convicted of murder to die on March 28, 1890.⁹⁷

All told, the verdicts were bittersweet. On the one hand, three men were sentenced to death and many others faced prison time. On the other hand, as the Brotherhood's president A.J. Reed pointed out, Baltimore's black community helped save “fif-

⁹⁵ Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court. Including the Navassa Case,” 25 and National Grand Tabernacle, Order of Gallilean Fisherman, Baltimore, Md. “The Navassa Island Riot,” 12-3.

⁹⁶ “Saturday's City News,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 December 1889, 4.

⁹⁷ “Fate of Navassa Rioters,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 February 1890 and Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 26. Formed shortly after the riot, the Central Bureau of Relief aimed to “assist in relieving the millions of our brethren in the South from lawless men, who openly and unblushingly set at defiance the Constitution and laws of our common country.” See: “To Relieve Colored People,” *The Washington Post*, 25 October 1889. The Group soon decided to support the Navassa defendants. See: “Aid for the Negroes from Navassa,” *The Washington Post*, 1 November 1889, 2; “Central Bureau of Relief,” *The Washington Post*, 8 November 1889, 4; and “Central Bureau of Relief,” *The Washington Post* 12 November 1889, 2.

teen of the doomed men from the gallows.” The Brotherhood also made inroads in swaying public opinion. As the organization noted after the first trial, “The general verdict of the public, so far as could be obtained, at the conclusion of this trial, was that the riot was the result of the cruel treatment which the men received, and not, a malicious conspiracy.”⁹⁸ How wide this feeling extended is difficult to say with certainty. However, it is apparent that the defendants were widely supported by African Americans in Baltimore and in Washington, D.C. Black beneficial groups, like the Order of Gallilean Fishermen in Baltimore and the Central Relief Bureau in Washington, raised money and/or awareness about the case. The Baltimore Federation of Labor also held a protest meeting in support of the laborers.⁹⁹ Nor was the Navassa Phosphate Company able to continue mistreating workers with impunity. In the years after the uprising, numerous instances of alleged abuse were widely reported in newspapers.¹⁰⁰ These complaints likely lent credence in the public’s eyes to the Navassa rioters’ charges of mistreatment and ultimately proved important as the defense exhausted all options to save the condemned men.

On October 29, 1890 the United States Supreme Court heard the Navassa Island case. Both Davis and Waring traveled to Washington on behalf of their clients. When Waring presented his argument he was the first black attorney to appear before the high court in “the past ten or twelve years.” The defense was not before the Court to argue the verdicts but rather to contest the constitutionality of the United States’ jurisdiction over

⁹⁸ Alexander, “The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court,” 26, 43.

⁹⁹ “The Baltimore Federation of Labor,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 April 1891, 6; “Opposed to any Pardon,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 December 1897, 8. Even years later in 1897, a petition hoping to obtain a pardon for Henry Jones was supported by men and women across the country. The supporters included men such as New York’s Lieutenant Governor, Benjamin F. Tracy, and two of the jurors who heard the case in 1889. See: “Do Not Advise Pardon,” *The Washington Post*, 31 December 1897, 3 and “Opposed to Any Pardon,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 December 1897, 8.

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance: “Navassa Sufferers,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 15 July 1891, 3; Issue 84; col. D; “Navassa Rascalities Again,” *The New York Age* 18 July 1891; Issue 43; col A; and “Treated Worse Than Slaves,” *The North American*, 6 December 1894; col D.

the island. Unfortunately, the Court decided against them. The only remaining avenue for redress was a Presidential pardon, an outcome that seemed unlikely. Nevertheless, it was the only remaining hope. The Brotherhood's secretary, most likely Reverend Alexander, began to gather signatures to present to President Benjamin Harrison.¹⁰¹

On April 1, 1891 a committee that included Alexander and Wayman personally delivered the petition to President Harrison. On May 18, the President announced his decision. What Harrison said must have come as a surprise. "The conditions surrounding the prisoners and their fellows were of a most peculiar character," Harrison explained, "They were American citizens under contracts to perform labor upon specified terms within American territory removed from any opportunity to appeal to any court or public officer for redress of any injury or the enforcement of any civil right. Their employers were," the President maintained, "in fact, their masters." Harrison also sharply criticized the Navassa Phosphate Company. He described the conditions on the island as resembling a "convict establishment without its comforts and clean linen" and felt that disorders would recur unless the company remedied these problems. With that, Harrison commuted the sentences of the three condemned men to life in prison.¹⁰²

The President's decision—and the favorable reaction of the press—was surprising. The commutation came in the midst of a wave of labor and racial oppression. The Navassa riots occurred three years after the Haymarket Square Riot in Chicago and only two years after four of the alleged ringleaders were hanged. They also occurred only two years after the Thibodaux Massacre in Louisiana that resulted in the deaths of a number

¹⁰¹ "The Navassa Trials," *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 October 1890, 6 and "Navassa Rioters to Hang," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 November 1890, 4. On the efforts to obtain a presidential pardon, see: Alexander, "The Brotherhood of Liberty or Our Day in Court," 36-7 and "An Appeal from Bishop Wayman," *The Washington Post*, 2 April 1891, 11.

¹⁰² "The Sentence Commuted," *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 May 1891, 4.

of black laborers. Harrison's decision also came in an era in which African-American rights were being trampled—often by violent means—in the name of Southern redemption. That the Brotherhood was able to win public and Presidential empathy was a testament to both their skill in the courtroom and the wretched conditions found on Navassa.

By the early 1890s the high profile battles waged by the Brotherhood of Liberty had produced a solid record of results. The most fundamental change occurred in the courtroom when black activists overturned the prohibition on black attorneys. By 1891, the city boasted five black attorneys committed to aiding the city's African-American community.¹⁰³ With a solid foundation established, reformers—most prominently the Brotherhood of Liberty—systematically challenged a wide range of injustices. Although efforts to overturn the ban on intermarriage, amend the Bastardy Act, and reform education ostensibly had little in common, activists realized that they each struck at the heart of inequality in post-Reconstruction America. Black Baltimoreans were not content to allow whites to determine the meaning of the Reconstruction amendments—particularly the Fourteenth; instead they sought to have a hand in defining them.

These victories had a noticeable effect on the city. When B.S. Pinchback, the former African-American governor of Louisiana, traveled through the city in 1891 he remarked that he was “at last in a free country.”¹⁰⁴ In addition to opening up professional occupations in the realms of education and law, black Baltimoreans also achieved some successes in politics. When the Democratic Party gerrymandered the city in the early 1890s, they unwittingly paved the way for Harry S. Cummings' election to the City

¹⁰³ “Some Baltimore Lawyers,” *The New York Age*, 26 April 1890, Issue 31, Col. E.

¹⁰⁴ “Colored Men Divided,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 October 1891, 6 and Paul, “The Shadow of Equality,” 253-54.

Council. Cummings became the first African-American to hold elected office in Maryland, beginning a nearly three-decade career as a black political activist in the city.¹⁰⁵

Black radicals' activism also held great symbolic importance, demonstrating that some amelioration was possible even under the most trying circumstances. The strategies employed by radical activists pulled in the wider community; especially in the ways they incorporated women. By popularizing their activism throughout the community, activists forged bonds that created a critical mass to support other community endeavors. For instance, on August 13, 1892 veteran activist, and one of the founders of the Brotherhood of Liberty, William M. Alexander published the first issue of the *Afro-American*. The paper reflected the values of its editor. *The Afro-American* stood as a potent counterweight to the often-prejudiced coverage in the city's white papers. At the same time, it became a platform for black businesses, churches, and individuals to reach a wider audience throughout the city. But, perhaps most importantly, it served to highlight racial injustices and the protests being carried out against them.¹⁰⁶

The activist foundation painstakingly built by radical activists became increasingly important as white politicians and citizens renewed efforts at blunting black political power. By 1895, African Americans found themselves on the leading edge of a political backlash against the city's Democratic Machine. As historian Grace Elizabeth Hale observes, "Whites created the culture of segregation in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of racial difference, to stop the rising."¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, this

¹⁰⁵ "Death Comes to Harry S. Cummings," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 8 September 1917, 1;

¹⁰⁶ Although the paper hit choppy financial waters in its early years, it managed to find a wider audience that at least partly could be traced to black activists' successes in the previous decade. As historian Hayward Farrar notes, the weekly's name carried political import since black radicals found the term "negro" to be offensive. For information on the publishing history of the *Afro-American* see: Hayward Farrar, *The Baltimore Afro-American, 1892-1950* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁷ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 21.

rang true in Baltimore. By the late 1890s and early 1900s, activists once again found themselves fighting against Jim Crow segregation in the realms of electoral politics and housing. Yet, this time, Baltimore's black community would be prepared to mount a strong resistance to these measures.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ On the efforts to disfranchise African Americans see: James B. Crooks, *Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968): 68-72.

Chapter Four: A “Society for the Suppression of Reformers:” Vice Segregationists, Commercial Sex and Progressive Reform in Baltimore, 1906-1916

The year was 1916 and people all around Baltimore had sex on their minds. In meeting halls, daily newspapers, government offices, theatres, saloons, tenements, suffrage meetings, and even churches, Baltimoreans could not stop talking about sex, who was having it, and where. Just prior to Christmas in 1915 the Maryland Vice Commission (MVC) delivered an early present in the form of a massive report on all things seedy in the city. “Baltimore has been cut to the quick,” journalist Winthrop D. Lane reported, and now was left “Gazing, amazed, incredulous, ashamed, at the sight of her own body, naked and exposed.” The MVC had “spent three years stripping the clothes off Baltimore,” Winthrop noted, apparently without irony, and now Baltimoreans were left to pore over its many findings.¹

Contrary to Winthrop’s belief, not all Baltimoreans were incredulous, amazed, or ashamed by the report. In fact many were not. Of those, the most notable was the famed Baltimore columnist H.L. Mencken. Although paying the investigation a backhanded compliment by noting that it went “at least one-tenth of the way” toward “the still distant truth,” Mencken contended that MVC kowtowed to the “prevailing sentimentality.” “What I mean is that no one in the least acquainted with the personnel of the commission,” Mencken elaborated, “expected it to shake itself free of what is sonorously denominated ‘moral’ influence—that is to say, of the influence of those booming and

¹ Winthrop D. Lane, “Under Cover of Respectability: Some Disclosures of Immorality Among Unsuspected Men and Women,” *Survey*, 25 March 1916, 746.

impudent charlatans, clerical and lay, who are forever posturing before the mob as specialists in virtue.”²

Chief among the “booming and impudent charlatans” in Mencken’s estimation was the MVC chairman, Doctor George Walker. In Walker, Mencken diagnosed two warring ideals: the religious and the scientific. Walker, Mencken quipped, was “A man, in brief, of scientific training and presumably of scientific habits of mind ... But a Methodist!” While Mencken had no qualms with Walker the scientist, he reserved plenty of vitriol for Walker the Methodist. “The Methodist,” Mencken believed, “is obsessed (almost, indeed, one might say haunted) by ideas of rightness and wrongness; his own life is one long self-examination and his conscience is never easy, and he views everyone about him with incurable suspicion, particularly those who show signs of being happy.” According to Mencken, George Walker the scientist recognized that it was impossible to rid the city of vice. However, at this point George Walker the moralist took center stage: the MVC ultimately recommended, “that all houses of prostitution be abolished.”³

In a sense, Mencken’s characterization of Walker’s inner conflict reflected the divergent feelings that Baltimoreans held about vice, especially commercial sex at the dawn of the twentieth century. In the years between 1906 and 1916, Baltimoreans engaged in heated debates about how best to deal with prostitution. Physicians, journalists, reformers, and government officials each weighed in on these deliberations. Everyday Baltimoreans also made their feelings known, at times overtly, but also tacitly,

² Mencken laid out his analysis of the MVC’s report in a series of three articles. The quotes in this paragraph are pulled from the first two articles. See: H.L. Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission,” *The Evening Sun*, 28 December 1915, 6 and Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission (Second Article)” *The Evening Sun*, 30 December 1915, 6.

³ Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission,” *The Evening Sun*, 28 December 1915, 6 and Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission (Second Article),” *The Evening Sun*, 30 December 1915, 6.

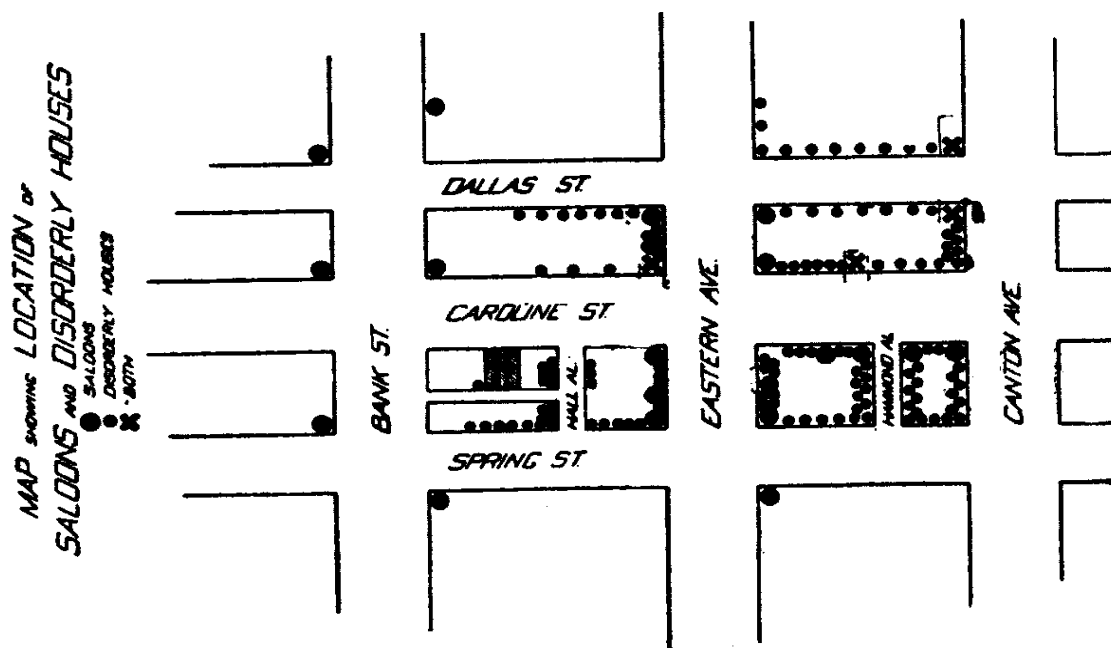
through their words and deeds. These discussions were also infused with questions over morality, criminality, women's suffrage, gender, class, race, science, religion, corruption, economics, free will, modernity, and the role of government. In short, these were the very questions that defined the Progressive era.

If, as historian Robert Wiebe famously explained, progressivism is best understood as the “search for order,” prostitution presented reformers with perhaps their most vexing problem.⁴ Although as much a capitalist enterprise as a personal choice, its legal status left it largely immune to traditional regulation. Throughout the first decade of the twentieth century Baltimore's government tried to contain commercial sex: segregating brothels in a network of red-light districts in exchange for a yearly “tax.”⁵ The city featured a bevy of potentially sexually-charged enterprises in the waning years of the nineteenth century located in red-light districts with a host of colorful names, including “The Meadow,” “The Tenderloin,” “The Block,” and “The Causeway.” By the twentieth century, vice flourished in various locales in Baltimore: the waterfront neighborhood known as “The Hook,” the city's largest black neighborhood of Druid Hill, the primarily African-American sections known as the “Rogers Avenue District” and “Caroline and Banks Streets District” as well as “The Block,” located steps away from the courthouse building (*See Figure One*). Then in the 1910s vice crusaders sought tighter controls as numerous investigations exposed complicated connections between the city government, police, business, and those in the vice trade, especially prostitution.

This chapter argues that the segregation of prostitution—and not prohibition—was consistent with progressive reform ideals of social separation and greater

⁴ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

⁵ City-Wide Congress of Baltimore. Committee on the Social Evil, “Report of the Committee on the Social Evil of the City-Wide Congress, Baltimore, 1911” (Unknown Publisher, 1911) 4.



Public School No. 105 surrounded by houses of prostitution and saloons.

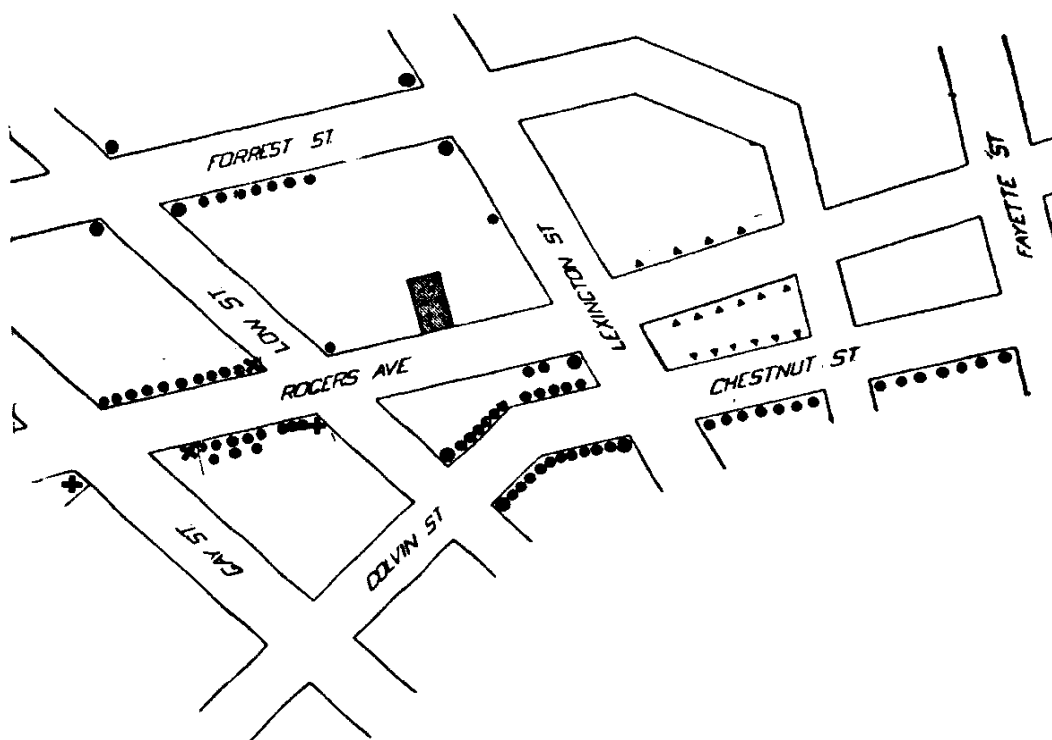


Figure 4.1: The Colored Law and Order League's survey of vice districts in the primarily African American sections known as "Caroline and Bank Streets District" (top) and the "Rogers Avenue District" (bottom). In the "Rogers Avenue District" map the large dots represented "disorderly houses," the small dots saloons, and the triangles "houses that are suspected."

government regulation. Unlike the existing historiography that examines the efforts of vice crusaders, I focus on “vice segregationists” who favored supervising prostitution and isolating it into red light districts as the best means to order their city.⁶ Vice segregationists did not affiliate into organizations, nor did they identify as a group. Their utterances, speeches, screeds, and exultations appeared intermittently in the pages of newspapers. Nevertheless, their idea—that segregating prostitution was the best way to maintain social boundaries—had ramifications beyond debates over prostitution: it also offered both a model and an intellectual justification for the concurrent efforts to segregate the city’s residential neighborhoods.⁷

Throughout this chapter I follow various groups and individuals to tell the story of early twentieth century battles over prostitution in Baltimore. Although most examinations of Progressive era vice reform start with white middle class reformers, Baltimore’s tale begins with the Colored Law and Order League. In 1906, this

⁶ While historians have long placed anti-vice crusades in the context of progressive reform they have said comparatively little about those who have opposed these efforts. This is a rather curious omission, since most historians agree that Progressive era vice reform achieved only limited success. Perhaps the best-known work on prostitution in the United States is: Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization Sex, 1790-1920* (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1992). See also: Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press 2003). See also: John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988).

⁷ On debates over the identities of Progressives and what constituted Progressive reform, see: Peter G. Filene, “An Obituary for ‘The Progressive Movement,’” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Spring, 1970) 23 and Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 10, No. 4, *The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects*. (December 1982); Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960). For works that take an approach from below, see: Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1987) and Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “O. Delight Smith’s Progressive Era: Labor Feminism, and Reform in the Urban South,” in Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993) 166-198.

organization of black reformers took aim at saloons and disorderly houses in black sections of the city. The organization argued that vice—including prostitution—was the font from which racial exploitation, police corruption, and neighborhood degradation emanated. Though racial exploitation did not worry most in the city, the police department's complicity in enabling disorder did. This was the opening that white vice crusaders needed. Determined to keep prostitution reform in the public consciousness, they pressured the police to abandon the system of segregating prostitution in favor of prohibition. However, Baltimore's anti-prostitution crusaders soon discovered that many in the city did not support their work. Instead, these vice segregationists were intent on maintaining the city's policy of regulation and segregation.

Throughout the 1890s and early 1900s, Baltimore was a city that, in a certain sense, was built on vice.⁸ The city collected revenue on the vice trade, neighborhoods were organized around vice, and a large (if uncounted) number of Baltimoreans made their livings off the city's pleasure culture. By 1911, The Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City—an offshoot of Anthony Comstock's Society for the Suppression of Vice in New York—alleged that the city possessed “more than 300 houses of prostitution...with an average of four inmates in each.”⁹

⁸ In the case of prostitution, prior to 1893, the city's Criminal Court issued “true bills” to local cops who would then either arrest brothel owners or, as was more often the case, collect fines from them. In 1893 the law changed slightly, when instead of empowering officers—a system as John C. Rose of the Society for the Prevention of Vice pointed out was “Liable to lead in practice to serious abuse”—brothel owners appeared in court to pay their fine or risk a trip to the hoosegow. However, this change was relatively minor in both intent and enforcement. Instead of the city receiving the funds from the fines, which could be as much as \$500, it split the proceeds with the state. Moreover, the Society for the Suppression of Vice found that a year later the law was plagued by lax enforcement. See: “The Offenders’ Parade,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 01 July 1893, 8. For more information on the Society for the Suppression of Vice in the early 1890s see: *Report of the Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City* (Baltimore: Press of Young and Seldon, 1893) and *Report of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, of Baltimore City* (Baltimore: John D. Lucas Printing, 1894).

⁹ The Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City, “The Abolition of the Red-Light Districts in Baltimore” (Baltimore: Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City, 1916): 3. These

In late 1906, Reverend John Hurst, of the city's African Methodist Episcopal Church, made the first step in the new movement against prostitution in Baltimore. Hoping to avoid the conditions that precipitated the bloody 1906 race riot in Atlanta, Hurst gathered some of the "best colored men of the city" and formed the Colored Law and Order League to address these concerns.¹⁰ The nascent organization soon began to document conditions in primarily African-American neighborhoods. In a report, published in 1910, the League plotted the locations of saloons and disorderly houses in a series of maps that denoted not only the location of vice, but also the race of the business' owners. The organization found "sections of the city, where the colored people in large numbers reside, infested with saloons kept primarily by white men of the lowest type; there were dens of vice in too large numbers scattered throughout the city." In fact, white saloons outnumbered black-owned bars in the largest African-American enclave, Druid Hill, at a ratio of nearly two-to-one (*See Figure One*).¹¹ Booker T. Washington, writing in *The Outlook*, explained the urgency of the problem. The southern portion of Druid Hill, he reported, had been invaded by no less than "forty-two saloons...numerous dance-houses, billiard-halls, and club rooms, where gambling was carried on, which frequently became places of assignation for girls and young women."¹²

reports, while problematic in some respects, nevertheless provide historians a rich text documenting vice and vice reform. Although it doubtlessly exaggerated particulars, and there is little chance of verifying its specific details in individual cases, the investigations nonetheless document a facet of life left largely unrecorded in newspapers, memoirs, correspondence, and etcetera.

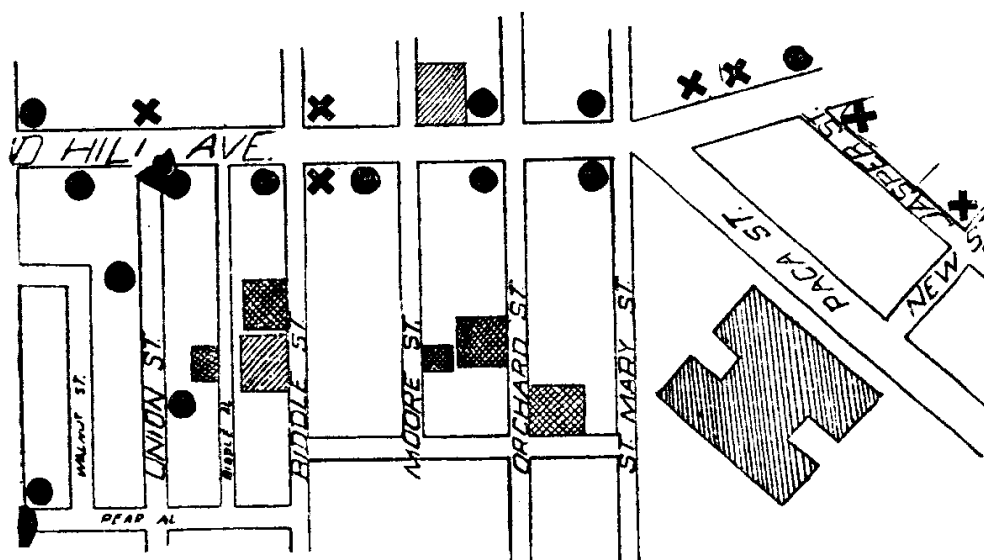
¹⁰ Washington, "Law and Order and the Negro," 547-555. On the founding of the group, also see: "For a Betterment of Race Conditions," *Afro-American*, 1 June 1907, 4. James H. N. Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, (Cheyney, Pa: Committee of Twelve: For the Advancement of the Negro Race, 1910): 5.

¹¹ Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, 3. In a petition delivered to Baltimore's liquor board in 1908 the League noted that, "In a district seven blocks long and two blocks wide, there are 43 saloons." See: "Where Saloons Thrive," *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 January 1908, 14.

¹² Booker T. Washington, "Law and Order and the Negro," *The Outlook*, 6 November 1909, 547.

MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF SALOONS

- SALOONS conducted by WHITE MEN.
- ✕ " COLORED "
- ▨ SCHOOLS
- ▤ CHURCHES.



A map of the lower Druid Hill Avenue District. In this district there were forty-two saloons, fifteen churches, twelve schools, one home for old people, one home for friendless children, the colored Y. M. C. A. and the colored Y. W. C. A.

Figure 4.2: The Work of the Colored Law and Order League, Map of Druid Hill

Reverend Hurst was not approaching vice abatement from a purely moral standpoint; discussions of race and vice in the early twentieth century always carried numerous pitfalls. Indeed, the effort to push saloons and disorderly houses out of black sections of the city came at a particularly precarious time and in an especially important place for African Americans. In 1904, blacks helped defeat a disfranchisement amendment but local Democrats had already begun to muster their resources for another attempt at instituting racialized voting restrictions.¹³ Moreover, Druid Hill was located at the border of Baltimore's rapidly shifting racial frontier and racial tensions were beginning to simmer.

For these reasons, black journalists and reformers were acutely sensitive to the ways in which the location of disorderly houses and questionable people lowered African American's standing in the wider city. Booker T. Washington immediately recognized this danger. "One of the questions that was frequently asked," Washington wrote, "was whether or not the saloons which they [black reformers] wanted suppressed, and the conditions of immorality surrounding them, were not due, for the most part, to the idleness and laziness of the colored people."¹⁴ Washington's concerns were not without merit. In fact, the *Baltimore Sun* demonstrated how important, and how fraught, the issue of vice was for African Americans when it reported on the activities of the League. Druid Hill "is a section which has not in the past had the best reputation for freedom from acts of violence and disorder on the part of Negro roughs and bad characters," the daily

¹³ For more on the disenfranchisement effort in Baltimore see: James B. Crooks, *Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore 1895 to 1911* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968) esp. ch. 3 and Gordon H. Shufelt, "Jim Crow Among Strangers: The Growth of Baltimore's Little Italy and Maryland's Disfranchisement Campaigns," *The Journal of American Ethnic History*, 19(4) (Summer, 2003): 49-78.

¹⁴ Washington, "Law and Order and the Negro," 549.

intoned, “and this is believed to be connected with the fact that in a comparatively small area there are as many as 45 saloons, of which eight are conducted by Negroes.” On the one hand, the *Sun* highlighted the levels of black-initiated violence, albeit with no evidence, caused by inebriation. But in the same breath, it then emphasized black ownership of saloons despite the fact that African Americans owned only eight out of the forty-five saloons in the neighborhood.¹⁵

By early 1908 the Colored Law and Order League was ready to remedy conditions in Druid Hill. The League delivered a petition asking Baltimore’s Liquor License Board to reduce the number of licenses granted in the neighborhood. While the board did not take immediate action, it did grant the League a second, more wide-ranging hearing on the matter. The second hearing drew a packed house, which included representatives from the League, members of the Liquor Dealers’ Association, and “interested white citizens and black citizens [who] vied with each other for standing room.” The League also managed to attract the written support of some notable white community leaders, including white church officials, a former mayor, and Charles J. Bonaparte, the U.S. Attorney General who had roots in Baltimore.¹⁶

At the hearing, the League dropped a bombshell: in the course of its probe the group found numerous instances of tacit and overt police involvement with the vice trade. For the first time in recent memory, the connections between vice and Baltimore’s police

¹⁵ For examples of the ways in which the Law and Order League characterized their efforts see: Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, 3-10. “Too Many Saloons in Northwest Baltimore,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 April 1908, 4. For an example of how saloonkeepers drew on this discourse to justify saloons in Druid Hill and also impugn the character of African Americans, see: “Board Hears Argument,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 April 1908, 12.

¹⁶ William Paret, a nearby resident and the Bishop of Maryland, wrote in support of the League’s efforts. White residents of McCulloh Street (which marked the dividing line between white and black residents) sent in a supporting petition that was endorsed by ex-Mayor Ferdinand C. Latrobe. See: Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, 21-5.

were exposed for public examination. The organization discovered that some “dens of vice in too large numbers scattered throughout the city” operated openly and enjoyed “quasi-police protection.” In a separate incident, investigators also witnessed a police officer receiving a payoff from a saloon owner. In addition to corruption, they found police indifference to be a problem. In one example, a mother who had found her twelve-year-old daughter in a house of ill repute approached the police to alert them of the place’s location. Rather than investigating, the officer threatened to arrest the mother for disorderly conduct.¹⁷

The Colored Law and Order League’s accusations were damning but difficult to prove. However, as it turns out, the organization did not need to provide evidence; the Baltimore Police Department did a fine job of incriminating themselves on the stand. In stark contrast to the findings presented by the League, the police, along with the “liquor interests,” “painted [Druid Hill] in glowing colors.” The testimony was of such a conflicting nature that the Board could not ascertain the truth. In order to resolve the discrepancies, the Board’s commissioners decided to inspect conditions in Druid Hill for themselves.¹⁸ What the commissioners found flew in the face of the police and liquor interest’s testimony.

During their tour, the commissioners became convinced that not only was there “an excess of saloons, a number of which were in violation of the law with respect to the placing of their entrances, but it also saw evidences of gambling and other forms of depravity.” The findings were in such stark contrast to the police officers’ testimony that the *Baltimore News* castigated the department in an editorial the next day. “The report of

¹⁷ Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, 7,12.

¹⁸ Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, 27-9.

the Liquor License Commissioners is a serious indictment of the credibility of policemen as witnesses in hearings of this character,” the paper opined “and suggests the need of a searching investigation to ascertain why the police are ignorant of conditions in the neighborhood in question, which are shown to be shockingly bad.” In fact, the Liquor License Commissioner’s investigation was so revealing that the incoming police board promised to take action against the perjured officers, although there is no record that the board actually punished them.¹⁹

The Colored Law and Order League’s investigation painted an astonishing picture of exploitation buttressed by a corrupt and/or indifferent police department. Their findings should have sent shockwaves through the city. However, aside from some coverage in the local press, the League toiled under the radar of most white Baltimoreans. In a city honeycombed with red light districts, the League’s narrow focus on three primarily African-American neighborhoods only scratched the surface of the labyrinth of vice in Baltimore. And many whites probably only paid scant attention to its work, figuring that vice was safely segregated in “negro” neighborhoods. So, despite the backing of black churches and the *Afro American*, along with the tepid endorsement of the *Baltimore Sun*, the League only enjoyed moderate success in suppressing the vice trade and failed to get the city to address the deeper concerns it documented.²⁰ Nevertheless, the city’s racial geography could only deflect attention away from the vice trade for so long. As citizens became more attuned to police corruption, the League’s investigation soon paid dividends.

¹⁹ *The Baltimore News* further accused the testifying officers of whitewashing their testimony “completely and comprehensively.” The editorial was reprinted in: Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, 27-9.

²⁰ By the end of 1910, it had managed to convince the Liquor Board to refuse eleven liquor licenses for saloons in Druid Hill. See: “Eleven Licenses Refused,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 May 1908, 14.

In August 1910, two seemingly disconnected events brought Baltimore's seedy underbelly back into the public spotlight, this time with greater consequences for all involved. Beginning in late 1909 a series of scandals rocked Baltimore's police department and exerted pressure on police Marshal Thomas F. Farnan. In January 1910, the Police Board dismissed one of Farnan's police captains, Bernard J. Ward, on charges of corruption. The accusations were wide-ranging but the most scandalous of them alleged that Ward accepted bribes from saloonkeepers. In addition, one of Ward's sergeants alleged that Ward allowed a disorderly house to operate in his district and that the house's madam had paid a bribe to a local politician.²¹

Although the *Baltimore Sun* never credited the work of the Colored Law and Order League, its members must have felt vindicated. The Northwestern District policed some of the areas that the League investigated and it was becoming increasingly apparent that the organization had been on to something. As the charges against Ward came to light, the *Sun* interviewed one Druid Hill madam, Marie Colder, who testified that patrolmen Frank J. Plum forced her to pay protection money. Plum had been one of the officers who perjured himself during the liquor board hearings the previous year.²²

The accusations against Ward and his charges opened the floodgates. Soon the city found itself in the midst of a full-blown scandal. These charges led to a grand jury investigation that found a department with little oversight under Farnan. In the wake of the findings, the city's police board had to determine whether it would retain the Marshall or force him to retire. In the days leading up to its judgment, the state's governor, Austin

²¹ For a sample of these allegations see: "Four Accuse Serg. Plum," *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 December 1909; "Capt. Ward Dismissed," *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 January 1910, 12;

²² "Plum Charges Framed," *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 January 1910, 14; "Four Accuse Serg. Plum," *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 December 1909, 12.

Lane Crothers, as well as the *Baltimore Sun* and *Baltimore Evening Sun* expected the latter. Nevertheless, after much deliberation, the board surprised the governor and the city's dailies by retaining Farnan. In response to this questionable decision, the governor immediately announced that he would begin his own investigation of the Baltimore Police Department.²³

In the meantime, Farnan came under more public scrutiny thanks to the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. A week after the board's decision, Baltimoreans encountered an article, entitled "Saloons in Full Blast," that chronicled a thriving "red light" district patrolled by unresponsive police officers, in open violation of the Sunday drinking law. Written in the vein of a slumming expedition, the reporter started near a church where "the earnest words of the minister rang in his ears as he turned off Fayette street down arch, two blocks below, a half square of which brings one into the heart of the tenderloin." Once there, the reporter encountered open drinking, racial comingling, and "liquor being consumed in large quantities" as indifferent and corrupt policemen stood idly by watching the proceedings.²⁴

In the weeks that followed, Governor Crothers' investigation exposed an interconnected world of police corruption, vice, and disorder operating with impunity in Baltimore. It is important to note that what angered residents and the governor was not the existence of vice, but rather the complicity of the police department. Indeed, the

²³ "Farnan May Retire," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 July 1910, 14 and "Governor to Inquire," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 August 1910, 12.

²⁴ "Saloons in Full Blast," *The Evening Sun* 15 August 1910, 10. There was no doubt that the *Evening Sun*'s expose was a black eye for the city's police department. Even still, the article's impact might have been minimized if not for the police's subsequent actions. Four days after the article was published, a reporter for the *Evening Sun* was summarily arrested as a means of revenge against the daily that tarnished the police department's reputation. See: "A Trumped-Up Charge," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 August 1910, 14.

details of the investigation were surprising and made great copy.²⁵ However, their veracity was difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty.²⁶ Yet that hardly seemed to matter in a practical sense because unlike the more thorough and documented Colored Law and Order League Report, the gubernatorial examination received widespread attention in the press. Each day, the *Sun* published lengthy descriptions of the day's proceedings, along with a smattering of letters to the editors.

Because of the investigation's focus on police corruption, 1910 proved to be exceedingly difficult year for Farnan who acutely felt the heat of the public gaze.²⁷ At first, he responded by going on the offensive, proactively defending his character and conduct. But he needed more than words to save face and his job.²⁸ On September 11, 1910, in the midst of the ongoing investigation, Farnan charged one of his underlings, Sergeant Jerome N. Oliphant, with organizing a "flying squadron" to put the "lid" back on the red light district. That night Oliphant and a large force, including men in civilian clothes, spread out over the city's seedier locales. The men, according to the *Baltimore Sun*, were given strict instructions "that if violations were found on their posts they would be held accountable."²⁹ For the next few months, the Baltimore Police Department

²⁵ "To Sift Police Work," *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 August 1910, 9.

²⁶ The Governor made the controversial decision early in the investigation to bar police attorneys from cross-examining witnesses, who had plenty of axes to grind. Throughout the next two weeks a parade of witnesses testified to widespread gambling and violations of various drinking laws. Like many vice investigations, Crothers' examination of police corruption and vice was populated by unsubstantiated rumors and accusations. See: "Cocaine in Light," *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 September 1910, 14.

²⁷ Clinton McCabe, *History of the Baltimore Police Department, 1774-1907* (Baltimore: Fleet-McGinley, Co. Printers, 1907 [?]): 56. The events of this year threatened to overshadow what had been to that point a storied career. By 1910 Farnan had accumulated forty-three years of service in the Baltimore Police Department. Ascending to Marshal in 1902, Farnan help shepherd the city in one of its darkest hours, the 1904 fire that destroyed much of the downtown.

²⁸ "A Lie, Declares Farnan," *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 September 1910, 14. When a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* approached him about the charges of corruption leveled at him, Farnan proclaimed his innocence and struck back at his critics. Farnan also proclaimed that he was "not guilty of any of the charges and I am being done an injustice, as well as my family."

²⁹ "Nailing Down the Lid," *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 September 1910, 14.

conducted a number of raids, mostly aimed at arresting violators of the city's Sunday Liquor Law.³⁰

While investigations, embarrassing revelations, and police misconduct dominated the headlines in 1910, their time in the spotlight did not last. In fact, for all the heat that Farnan took in 1910 he was able to weather the storm and keep his job.³¹ However, the Marshall's effort to deflect criticism away from his and his department's performance kicked vice investigations into high gear across the city. Between 1910 and 1912, Baltimore's police department pursued violations of the Sunday drinking law with new vigor and with increased sophistication.³² For anti-vice crusaders, the police corruption scandals of 1909 and 1910 represented a golden opportunity to finally get the city to pay attention to their concerns. Seizing the momentum that began with Marshal Farnan's increased vigilance, anti-vice activists began to push for prohibition against gambling, disorderly houses, and saloons; but many hoped to expand it to focus on prostitution.

³⁰ "Surprise for Police," *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 September 1910. But if Farnan had hoped to allay fears about his competence, and the efficiency of his force, he was surely disappointed. Although stories of the raid were recounted in the pages of the *Baltimore Sun* regularly, occasionally embarrassing details emerged alongside his officer's gallant efforts. For instance, police raided "The Kaiser," a saloon and "roof garden" they encountered two officers patronizing the establishment. This was not the only instance of police incompetence, or misconduct, uncovered by the raids. When police raided the bar of Henry Schoenewolf, Farnan also arrested two patrolmen charging them with incompetence for failing to uncover the bar's operation. The patrolmen were later exonerated but not before their names were dragged through the mud in the *Baltimore Sun*. See: "Policemen Exonerated," *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 August 1910, 14.

³¹ Farnan voluntarily retired in 1914 (amidst an investigation into yet another department scandal). "Farnan Says Farewell," *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 July 1914, 3 and "Farnan Prepares to Go," *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 July 1914, 12. Although we will never know the Marshal's true reasons, it seems apparent that his crackdown on vice in 1910 was an effort to both appease the public and deflect attention away from the scandals plaguing the department. Circumstantial evidence also seems to confirm this. In 1914, Farnan granted the *Baltimore Sun* an interview in which he discussed his service as a police officer. One of the questions that the reporter posed to Farnan had to do with vice. In response, Farnan replied that, "I think there's too much talk about vice." The Marshal continued by declaring that, "There's been a great deal too much discussion about it already. It puts ideas into young people's heads." See: "'Tom' Farnan Chats and Chuckles Over Ye Olden Police Days," *The Baltimore Sun*, 03 August 1913, LS7.

³² Although still undertaking raids, the police also began to make greater use of undercover investigators to root out illegal drinking. See: "Disguised, Makes 'Raid,'" *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 February 1912, 9. A number of articles mention the "flying squadron" and its raids, see: "Tips Did Not Err," *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 March 1911, 16. On slumming expeditions and the efforts of private investigators see: "Clash About Hotel Law," *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 March 1911, 10.

Beginning in the early 1910s, a loose coalition of activists emerged to launch an assault on prostitution. The most prominent and vocal group of anti-prostitution activists were white males allied with churches as well as the burgeoning medical establishment. Dr. Howard Kelly, Dr. George Walker, Dr. Eugene Levering, and the Reverend Dr. Kenneth G. Murray, pastor of the Fayette Street Church, stood at the forefront of the campaign, providing individual and institutional support. By 1912, the four men had either led reform movements or spent time formulating ways to combat vice. Determined to rein in the city's sexual excesses, they formed, joined, or headed various reform groups—including the Committee of the Social Evil of the City-Wide Congress and the Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City—that studied vice and sent undercover investigators to suspected houses of prostitution.³³

A number of women joined these men in the effort to stamp out the “social evil.” Although they usually comprised only a minority in the large anti-vice organizations, women worked through their own reform associations to try to reign in Baltimore's vice culture. In February 1913, for instance, representatives of “nine of the most influential women's organizations in Maryland” filled Baltimore's Albaugh Theatre to formulate a strategy to combat vice. At the meeting, representatives from the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Baltimore Association of Jewish Women, the Daughter's of the American Revolution, The Catholic Women's Benevolent League, and the Maryland Women's Suffrage Association (among other organizations) rejected the idea to segregate

³³ Murray had been active in anti-vice work since at least 1907, when he was the pastor at South Baltimore Station, Methodist Church. By June of 1912 Kelly, a fundamentalist Christian, began brainstorming ways to combat vice in West Baltimore and then shortly thereafter embarked on a tour of Chicago, New York and Buffalo to study vice and possible solutions to the problem. On Murray see: “Liquor Board Scored,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 October 1907, 14.

vice, opting instead to support prohibition.³⁴ Other women, like Elizabeth King Ellicott, the President of the Equal Suffrage League, spoke out against vice and specifically prostitution. Finally, women under the rubric of the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Mother's Club undertook a letter-writing campaign to local authorities and started a petition drive urging the city to "suppress evil conditions as soon as possible."³⁵

Throughout these years black Baltimoreans continued to protest against vice, although without the same vigor as whites. There are a few factors that might explain this discrepancy. By the end of 1910 many black activists, including some involved with the Colored Law and Order League, focused instead on fighting housing segregation. Moreover, for many black activists, vice abatement was just one facet of a larger effort to improve their communities and end white exploitation; it focused less on issues of morality and more on neighborhood uplift.³⁶ Nevertheless, occasional protests emerged and groups, such as the Public Welfare Association and the Federated Charities, continued efforts to eliminate vice in Druid Hill.³⁷

Despite vice crusaders diverse backgrounds, middle-class white men came to dominate the movement and shaped its guiding principles. White professionals, like Kelly and Murray, advocated a robust and masculine Christian vision that would both underwrite laws and aid in the fight against "evil." For instance, Kelly wrote that

³⁴ "No Bargain With Vice," *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 February 1912, 12.

³⁵ "What Women Voters are Doing to Protect the Home," *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 May 1913, 6 and "Women Enlist Against Vice," *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 December 1912, 10.

³⁶ For instance, black Baltimoreans protested when white entrepreneurs hoped to convert a white-owned drugstore into another saloon in Druid Hill in 1910. Blacks became particularly incensed when the white saloon owner across the street told the drugstore owner that he should sell to whites because his corner "was too good a one for a 'nigger' to have." See: "Many Protests Against Saloon," *The Afro-American*, 29 January 1910, 4 and "Too Good for 'Niggers,'" *The Afro-American*, 5 February 1910, 4.

³⁷ See: "Public Welfare Association Starts Campaign To Close Saloons Near the Druid Hill Avenue School," *The Afro-American*, 1 March 1913, 1 and "To Improve Congested Conditions," *The Afro-American*, 17 January 1914, 6.

Christians “alone stand for law as a visible embodiment of righteousness god” and that Christians “are the proper guardians of the law.” For these men, Christian morality was the backbone of society and the key to ending vice. Kelly once observed that, “You can legislate men into righteousness the only difficulty is that if you let up on the pressure the people will lapse back at once into all their old evil ways,” so it was essential that people “learned to live righteousness for its own sake.”³⁸ Many vice crusaders also equated vice with a disease that disordered the civic body. In one of the most forceful examples, the Reverend E. Cookman Baker, who ministered the Bethel Seamen’s Mission, wrote “For over one hundred years this corrupt, inflamed, death-dealing cancer ate its way into the vitals of the city life, spreading disease and producing such excruciating agony of both body and soul that death alone could relieve.”³⁹

These men felt it was incumbent upon them to protect women and the young. Concerns about vice infecting youth often punctuated the writings of vice reformers. Male vice reformers were convinced that youthful girls would inevitably fall to the “the constant appeal to get easy money and have a gay glad life” while young men who daily passed through “the gauntlet of the painted sirens” would “rise no more to the things that are pure and good.”⁴⁰ The Reverend Baker perhaps best captured the anxieties that many saw inherent in the red light districts by relating a story—perhaps apocryphal—of a young girl. Spying the girl emerging through the gates of a cemetery, a man approached and asked, “Why child, where are you going?” The girl informed the man that she was simply passing through the graveyard. “But are you not afraid?” the man then asked of

³⁸ Howard A. Kelly, “Untitled” Howard A. Kelly Collection, Box 36.1 Clippings and Mementoes.

³⁹ E. Cookman Baker, *Victims* (Baltimore, 1916) Poor: Vertical File, Enoch Pratt Free Public Library, 12.

⁴⁰ Baker, *Victims*, 12.

her. “Oh, no sir,” the girl responded, “my way home lies through this graveyard, I live on the other side.” For this girl, the familiarity of the jaunt through the cemetery desensitized her to a normally chilling experience. Reverend Baker argued that this was akin to the ways in which a young person’s daily stroll through “The Hook” deadened their sense of danger to the “sin dwelling in the tombs of vice.”⁴¹ Reformers, like Baker, felt certain that vice districts served as an irresistible allure to impressionable youths.

While males set the tone for the vice crusade they were ultimately unable—and unwilling—to completely marginalize the concerns of white women.⁴² Female activists, particularly those involved in the suffrage movement, also saw their role as protecting the weak and those victimized by masculine society. Suffragists, in particular, viewed vice as a symptom of masculine oppression. In response, they favored more liberal marriage and divorce laws, sex education, and more open discussion concerning human sexuality. In their view, prohibition, which was the primary prescription of male reformers, was one part of a wider strategy that was equal parts prevention and suppression.⁴³ This was far from the prudery that Mencken associated with white male reformers.

Suffragists also advanced the argument that enfranchisement could help end prostitution and bring order to the city. In the February 7, 1912 issue of the *Maryland Suffrage News*, an illustration succinctly captured the sentiment of suffragists involved in the anti-prostitution campaign (See *Figure Three*). Under the caption reading, “In Exchange for Votes,” a man representing “public servants” is seen handing over a scroll to a “voter” which reads “Subterfuges, Nullifying the Law for Suppressing Vice.”

⁴¹ Baker, *Victims*, 12-13.

⁴² For another example of how men portrayed themselves, see: “Dr. Howard A. Kelly Points Out One of the Foremost Causes of Vice and Immorality,” *The Evening Sun*, 28 December 1915.

⁴³ “The Solution,” *Maryland Suffrage News*, 7 December 1912, 144.



Figure 4.3: *Maryland Suffrage News*, December 7, 1912, p. 1.

Meanwhile, a policeman stands idly by watching the exchange but doing nothing to stop it. On the other side of the illustration stands a woman, wearing a headband emblazoned with “womanhood” and holding open a book that read, “The Law for the Suppression of Vice.” The woman is pleading with the “public servants” to no avail. The drawing is interesting for a number of reasons. On the one hand, it clearly illustrates the way that suffragists connected the anti-vice campaign and their role as the city’s moral guardians. It also suggests that without women, the city stood little chance of purging itself of prostitution. The male “voter” seems all too eager to accept the “subterfuges” being offered by the “public servants.” At the same time, the drawing is noteworthy for the way it shows how women viewed themselves in the anti-vice coalition: as largely isolated and apart from their male counterparts. The men in the drawing are seen clustered on the left side, while the woman is alone on the right, her pleas ignored by all.⁴⁴

The fact that women in Baltimore did not possess the ballot in the early 1910s obviously affected their standing in the anti-vice movement and was a significant point of contention. In many cases, women (especially on the local level) rarely were featured speakers at anti-vice meetings. At the large gathering at Albaugh’s Theatre, for instance, all of the speakers, save Maud Minor (a figure of national prominence), were men.⁴⁵ In many cases, women instead found work (or were perhaps forced to work) behind the scenes, dealing with “fallen women” through “Visiting Committees” or running the day-to-day operations in rehabilitation homes.⁴⁶ From the scattered extant evidence, women

⁴⁴ “In Exchange for Votes,” *Maryland Suffrage News*, 7 December 1912, 142.

⁴⁵ Despite the fact that the women organized the event, males served as the featured speakers. See: “No Bargain with Vice,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 February 1913, 12.

⁴⁶ For information on the Society for the Prevention of Vice’s “Visiting Committee,” see: “The Abolition of Red-Light Districts in Baltimore,” Society for the Prevention of Vice, Baltimore City (The

did not fully relish their roles working behind the scenes in anti-vice organizations. “Unenfranchised [women] have struggled with [rehabilitation work] these many years, and now the wiser of them seek enfranchisement in the firm belief that reclamation,” an editorial in the *Maryland Suffrage News* insisted, “like all other ills, has a side of prevention as well as one of cure.” The editorial continued, “Without real power—the power of citizenship—they have been bailing a leaky boat, and now they propose in the wisdom of experience to stop bailing for a moment in order to obtain the power to stop the leak.”⁴⁷ Other times women were more direct. Elizabeth King Ellicott argued that the failure to end municipal corruption—including prostitution—was a product of men who “often fail to use the ballot fearlessly.”⁴⁸

Although the majority of women worked behind the scenes in anti-vice organizations, they were still able to shape public debates about prostitution in key ways. Male speakers invited to speak to women about the “social evil” were conscious about playing to their audience. At one such event, Stanley W. Finch, chief of the White Slave Traffic Bureau of the Department of Justice, and Senator Moses E. Clapp, highlighted the importance of women’s work and criticized men for their shortcomings.⁴⁹ During the large gathering of suffrage advocates at Albaugh’s Theatre, one of the invited speakers,

Society for the Prevention of Vice of Baltimore City: Baltimore, 1916): 12-14. On the Crittenton Homes, see: “Reform Home for Women,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 March 1913, 5 and “Rescue Homes for Women,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 January 1913, 6. According to the latter article, the board of managers was composed of 30 women, while the board of directors contained both men and women members. The “Visiting Committee,” of the Society for the Prevention of Vice of Baltimore, was (it appears) entirely composed of women, and women ran the Florence Crittenton Home that sheltered, and attempted to rehabilitate, former prostitutes.

⁴⁷ “Women and the Palliative Measures,” *Maryland Suffrage News*, 7 December 1913.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth King Ellicott, “What Women Voters are Doing to Protect the Home,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 May 1913, 6.

⁴⁹ “Ask Vote to Aid Men,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 February 1913, 12. For some other examples see: Reverend Murray’s letter see: “Letters to the Editor,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 April 1913, 6. Cardinal Gibbon’s quote taken from: “No Bargain with Vice,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 February 1913, 12.

Dean Walter T. Sumner, who represented both the Episcopal Cathedral of Chicago and also headed Chicago's Anti-Vice Commission, eviscerated men for their roles in perpetuating vice. Sumner explained to the women that, "Vice is a highly commercialized industry, not a woman problem at all ... in fact it is distinctly a man problem." He also called on department stores and factories to pay women enough "to enable them to live decently" and avoid prostitution. "This is a man problem from beginning to end," Sumner explained, "and until we approach it from the demand side instead of from a supply side, we will never reach even the fringe of the solution."⁵⁰ His speech closely resembled an editorial that appeared in the *Maryland Suffrage News*. That editorial proclaimed "the enfranchisement of women is fundamental to the solution of the problem, simply because 90 per cent of the adult male population is already sexually demoralized as a result of improper community conditions."⁵¹

Female audiences also helped dictate public discussions, and the press' subsequent coverage, by voicing their approval or disapproval of a speaker. At a 1915 meeting at Osler Hall, one man challenged Howard Kelly and his invited speaker, New York Judge Henry W. Herbert. The questioner stood before the two anti-vice luminaries and asked why men were not being punished alongside women in the war against vice. At this, the "great number" of women in the audience broke into "uproarious applause" that lasted for some time. The judge could not provide an adequate answer, other than to contend that vice could only be targeted if it was "commercialized" and in cases where men sold themselves they were punished more harshly than women. This did nothing to quell the restless audience. Instead questioners began to pepper Herbert with queries

⁵⁰ "No Bargain with Vice," *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 February 1913, 12.

⁵¹ "One Reason Why Women Should Vote," *Maryland Suffrage News*, 7 December 1912, 142, 144.

concerning women's suffrage, an issue that he refused to address. Then someone asked Kelly about a statement that the doctor made concerning women's paltry wages. When the judge attempted to disclaim any connection between low wages and prostitution, the man who helped start the ruckus proclaimed "If you say that I would not take any advice from you." In the end, the audience, including many women, became so unruly that the meeting had to adjourn early.⁵²

Despite their disagreements, anti-vice activists did agree on the solution: prohibition. In this, they managed to find a receptive audience in Baltimore's police department. In regards to prostitution, Baltimore largely followed a policy of toleration even though laws existed on the books prior to 1912, including a federal law against "White Slavery." Nevertheless, locally the laws seemed to be enforced capriciously. Then in 1912, under increased pressure from anti-vice activists, the police department began to follow a new policy that they termed "gradual abolition." This strategy involved several different measures. At first, it directed that, "No new women be permitted to become inmates in a house of prostitution." Later, the police began to issue warnings to houses of ill repute to close or risk arrest. Eventually, they hoped to rid the city entirely of commercial sex.⁵³

Almost immediately, however, the police ran into some major roadblocks. Most importantly, the city's judiciary was loath to pay much heed to the protestations of anti-vice activists. In 1912, after debating prostitution for months, the Supreme Bench issued

⁵² "Vice Meeting Is Jarred," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 March 1915, 12. The issue of a minimum wage for women had been one of the suffragists' key platforms. See: "The Working Girl's Problem," *Maryland Suffrage News*, 3 October 1914, front page; "The Solution," *Maryland Suffrage News*, 7 December 1912, 144. Also see: "Ask To Vote to Aid Men," *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 February 1913, 12.

⁵³ Abraham Flexner "Next Steps in Dealing with Prostitution," *Social Hygiene* (September, 1915 Vol. 1, No. 4) 534. Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City, "The Abolition of the Red-Light Districts in Baltimore," (Self-Published: Baltimore, 1916).

a minute dealing with the question of the social evil. Judge Henry Duffy remarked that while the court “realizes that keeping a disorderly house is a misdemeanor under our law” he found that the “character of this misdemeanor is somewhat anomalous and exceptional” and therefore recommended that no major changes be made in relation to it.⁵⁴ The Supreme Bench’s pronouncement was surely a stinging rebuke to anti-vice activists and the police.

Following the court’s pronouncement, vice crusaders continued to hold out hope that public pressure could induce politicians to reexamine the issue of prostitution. However, if anti-vice reformers expected to find a more welcoming reception from the general public they were largely disappointed. Clearly, some Baltimoreans already had their fill of moral reform. Assuming the *nom de plume* “Decency,” one Baltimorean wrote to the *Sun* to complain that the publicity given to vice reformers had a more deleterious effect on morality than vice itself. “The time has come,” Decency snidely remarked, “for the formation of a society or association of the decent people having for its purpose the suppression of self-constituted reformers.” By 1913, H.L. Mencken seemed to have made it his personal mission to discredit, or otherwise mock, anti-vice crusaders. In an article published the following year, he criticized the quixotic nature of the vice crusade:

How the deuce is the thing to be done? How is Baltimore to be purged of sin? By the Power of moral persuasion, the eloquence of evangelists? Pish! Persuasion will be doing well if it floors one sinner in 10,000. By force then—by the exercise of the police powers, now in moral hands—by the slaughter of sinners? Pish again: Sinners are born faster than they can be slaughtered.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ “Aiming at Social Evil,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 February 1912, 7.

⁵⁵ Decency, “Needed: A Society for the Suppression of Reformers—One Who Believes More Harm is Done by Infecting Innocent Minds than by Vice Itself,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 March 1913 and H.L. Mencken, “The Week in Review,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 October 1914, B1.

Mencken was not the only writer to lampoon the vice crusaders. In 1913, doctor, self-described Socialist, women's suffrage supporter, and part-time playwright, Joshua Rosett published his play *The Quandary*. While it was never performed on stage, *The Quandary* received attention in the *Baltimore Sun*. Rosett's melodrama revolved around a group of characters working for the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Throughout the play, Rosett repeatedly portrays "moralists" as out-of-touch, illogical, and hypocritical.

In one of the earliest scenes, Reverend Fielder, the president of the anti-vice society tries to convince a skeptical Mabel Hunter (who, it is later revealed, worked as a prostitute but is also the wife of one of the association's volunteers) of the righteousness of vice reform. In the society's office, Fielder shows Hunter a series of lithographs hanging on the walls depicting the nine steps of a woman's moral downfall. The first of the lithographs, which Rosett admitted was copied from an anti-vice book entitled *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls*, shows a woman and man seated at an ice cream parlor. Throughout the exchange Mrs. Hunter playfully teases Reverend Fielder and in the process mocks the leaps in logic taken by the vice reformers. For example, after Mrs. Hunter feigns naïveté in describing the scene in the ice cream parlor as innocent, Fielder asks her to look deeper to see if it had any sinister implications. With a tone of false anxiety, Hunter sarcastically asks if the ice cream was poisoned. Fielder then attempts to move the conversation ahead by revealing step nine, which shows the young woman's grave. Examining the stunning leap in logic from ice cream parlor to the grave, Mrs. Hunter, once again mockingly asks Fielder, if the "poor girl died from eating ice cream after all?" The exchange continues for a few more minutes, each time with Fielder

unwittingly playing the fool as he is forced to explicate his logic to the playful Hunter. Finally, Fielder shows her an illustration of a couple having sexual intercourse, which was supposed to demonstrate the turning point in the woman's fall from grace. In response, Mrs. Hunter remarks "The fellow is making love to the girl. Ah, well! It is going to turn out a prosaic affair. The man will marry the girl and live happy ever afterwards." Fielder then tries to painstakingly explain each of the steps on the path to the woman's downfall, Mrs. Hunter turns to her husband and playfully inquires if they should "cut out the ice cream tonight, dear?"⁵⁶

Beneath his obviously mocking tone, Rosett did offer a serious critique of gender and class inequities in vice reform. Near the end of the play, after Mrs. Hunter reveals herself as a former prostitute, she explains to her husband her reasons for not divulging her past. She claims that as a man his "position was a far more advantageous one than mine." Despite any skeletons in his closet, he could still make "a comfortable livelihood" and with the exception of losing the respect of vice reformers, "hypocrites," "fools," and a "few professional moralists" he would be forgiven by most in society. She then points out, "Not so with me—a women—whose transgression the world neither forgives nor forgets; before whose least misstep the bravest, the wisest and the most charitable join with the hordes of cowards and hypocrites and fools in the virtuous attempt of trampling her down in the mud!"⁵⁷

In another scene, Rosett criticizes both gender and class inequities as one of the causes of prostitution. While visiting the impoverished home of Sam Higgins, a young

⁵⁶ See: Ernest A. Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls: or War on White Slave Trade* (G.S. Ball, 1910): 1. Quotations taken from: Joshua Rosett, *The Quandary: Play in Three Acts* (Baltimore: Phoenix Press, 1913): 34-37.

⁵⁷ Rosett, *The Quandary*, 163-64.

working-class volunteer at the association, vice reformers converse with Higgins' father who has become an alcoholic after losing his daughter to prostitution (somehow, unbeknownst to Mr. Higgins, Mrs. Hunter is actually his long-lost daughter who has returned to Baltimore). When Mr. Higgins is asked if the "poorest home" is still better than a brothel, he is not certain. "How you know it's better if you ain't tried it?" Mr. Higgins exclaimed. "Decen! Well I don't see nothin' decen' about livin in a stuffy hole! And I don't see nothin' decen' about working' your body away for five dollars a week either." Mr. Higgins further explains that these conditions are only exacerbated because workingwomen do not have a good place to live or decent clothes to wear.⁵⁸

Rosett's arguments were frequently vague, and his weaving of politics into his fiction was often heavy handed, but he did push issues of class and gender into public forums. At the time of *The Quandary's* publication Rosett spoke with the *Baltimore Sun* about his play and his political beliefs. Rosett called vice reformers "persons of sublime selfishness, whose only concern is to do something which they believe will save their own souls." Rosett also castigated their efforts as harmful to women's health and noted that poor women entered the commercial sex industry because of the poor wages they received in stores and factories.⁵⁹

Suffragists often highlighted these same gender inequities but their writings and speeches only appeared sporadically in the local press. As local resident Courtney Abbott pointed out, echoing themes similar to Rosett, women who fell would never be able to rise again, while men fall "as frequently as he pleases [and] rises none the

⁵⁸ Rosett, *The Quandary: Play in Three Acts*, 125-26.

⁵⁹ "Flays Vice Crusaders," *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 August 1913, 3 and Rosett, *The Quandary*, 134.

worse.”⁶⁰ More importantly, vice raids and arrests disproportionately targeted women. In fact, in the extant evidence, there appears to be no arrests of men for frequenting prostitutes. It was rare for the press, or vice activists, to discuss these issues. In one of the few instances, the *Afro-American* took issue with both vice segregationists and prohibitionists. The paper remarked that both sides would prove ineffective because of a “double standard of righteousness, one for the man and another for the woman.” The paper further remarked, “If we have a real desire to get at the bottom of this awful evil...the way to do it is to commence with the young man.”⁶¹ In one other case, resident Isaac P. Shertzer wrote the *Baltimore Sun* to complain of the way vice crusaders treated women. Although men, like Kelly, often portrayed themselves as masculine guardians of the “weaker sex” Shertzer flipped this discourse. Instead, he argued, the vice crusades, by arresting prostitutes, heaped “injustice” onto “those unfortunate women” who are now ostracized by the community while the men, who were the “arch-debauchers” find themselves “the welcome and respected visitors to some of the best of homes.”⁶²

By 1913, vice crusaders had already gotten a bad rap in the city. When Mrs. William J. Brown, a “leader in the woman suffrage movement and in local civic affairs,” began a grassroots effort to patrol public parks she was quick to draw a distinction between her work and that of anti-vice activists. “I am not an anti-vice crusader,” Mrs. Brown told the *Baltimore Sun*, “nor I am a professional moralist, but I do think that it is the duty of grown people to do everything in their power to guide the steps of boys and

⁶⁰ Courtney Abbott, “Fallen Women and Fallen Men,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 November 1913, 10.

⁶¹ “The Social Evil,” *The Afro-American*, 20 September 1913, 4.

⁶² Isaac Shertzer, “Mr. Shertzer Commends the Grand Jury and Rebukes the Vice Crusaders,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 10 September 1913, 6.

girls away from the brink of immorality.” However, Mrs. Brown disavowed the work of vice crusaders who try to make the “world good by simply passing laws.”⁶³

Many others also objected to vice crusades that were solely based on morality. Standing in front of an audience at the Har Sinai Temple, the Rabbi C.A. Rubenstein told those gathered that the social evil “cannot be cured in a day either by act of Legislature or by a policeman’s club.”⁶⁴ Even the *Baltimore Sun*, normally supportive of vice reform, mocked the naïve idealism of Kelly and anti-vice activists. In an illustration, entitled “That Anti-Segregation Radium,” published in early 1913, the *Sun* caricatured Kelly standing over what is supposed to be radium (*See Figure Four*). Kelly had been an ardent proponent of the therapeutic properties of radium in treating cancer patients. The cartoon juxtaposed Kelly’s belief in radium as a cure-all with the idea that vice prohibition would miraculously cure the city of the moral disease of prostitution.⁶⁵

Despite lacking the support of many citizens, judges, and city officials, the vice crusaders’ persistence finally seemed to pay off in 1913. First, Maryland Governor P.L. Goldsborough announced the formation of a State-Wide Vice Commission to study commercial sex. This investigation promised to bring publicity to the work of anti-vice activists. More importantly, the commission was composed entirely of Baltimoreans and was chaired by one of the leading anti-vice activists in the city, George E. Walker.⁶⁶

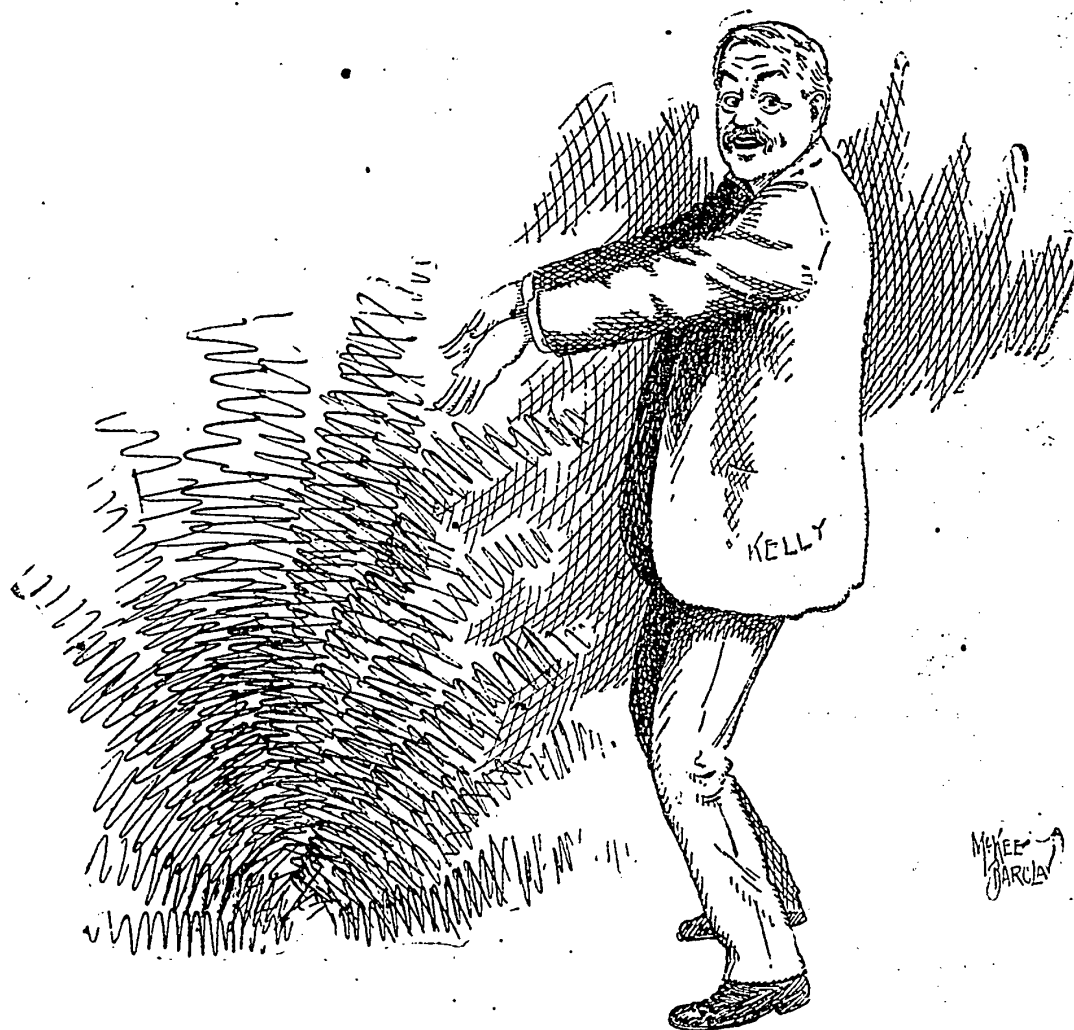
⁶³ “Mrs. Brown Sticks It Out,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 July 1913, 7.

⁶⁴ “On ‘Ideals of Womanhood,’” *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 November 1912, 5.

⁶⁵ “That Anti-Segregation Radium,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 February 1913, 12.

⁶⁶ “Vice Commission Named,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 February 1913, 3.

That Anti-Segregation Radium.



"Can't you see how powerful it is?"

Figure 4.4: *The Baltimore Sun*, February 5, 1913, p. 12

That same year, the Baltimore City Grand Jury also promised to reexamine policies toward prostitution. On the surface, both announcements were a coup for anti-vice reformers struggling to convince a recalcitrant legal system and public of the necessity of their work.⁶⁷

However, from the outset of its term, the grand jury voiced their skepticism concerning the suppression of prostitution. Talking to a reporter from the *Baltimore Sun*, one jurist who claimed to be expressing “the views of the majority of his colleagues” felt that former prostitutes were not being properly cared for and further expressed concern that they were now moving into “exclusive sections” of the city. Another told the *Baltimore Sun* that although the grand jury did not have the power to force the police to tolerate vice, it could “refuse to indict those women who are arrested and brought to us.”⁶⁸ It seemed that the grand jury had already come to its conclusions even before embarking on its investigation.

The grand jury ultimately decided against a policy of prohibition.⁶⁹ While their decision was not surprising, the level of condemnation expressed in their report surely caught anti-vice activists off guard. The grand jury found that the prohibition of prostitution was unrealistic, noting that Baltimore “is too large a city to be run like a country village.” It also concluded, “We cannot but feel that a campaign of suppression

⁶⁷ “Grand Jury has Doubts,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 July 1913, 16.

⁶⁸ For the quote from the member of the Grand Jury expressing doubts about prohibition see: “Grand Jury has Doubts,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 03 July 1913, 16. For the quote from the member of the Grand Jury who told the reporter that the body could refuse to indict women see: “Finds Evil Diffused,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 July 1913, 5.

⁶⁹ Numerous articles in the *Baltimore Sun* discussed the investigation of the Grand Jury. See, for instance: “Rev. O.W. Ziegler Tells,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 August 1913, 7; “Many Testify of Evil,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 July 1913, 10; “Police to Help Jury,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 July 1913, 12; “Studying Social Evil,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 July 1913, 3; and “Vice Inquiry Tomorrow,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 July 1913, 3.

such has been in progress is not only useless but also full of dangers.” Then it criticized the police for their actions toward suspected prostitutes, contending that police “hounded” the women instead of protecting them, making further reform difficult.⁷⁰

While anti-vice activists expressed anger and dismay over the investigations’ conclusions, they should have been more troubled by what the grand jury said in making its recommendations public.⁷¹ Although it is impossible to understand precisely how the majority of Baltimoreans felt, the grand jury concluded that the public widely opposed the system of suppression. They pointedly expressed the opinion that “the evidence we have heard and the letters we have received seem to show that the majority of our people found this system [segregated vice] satisfactory and that the agitation for a change is not general.” Even Baltimore’s Police Commissioner Alfred S. Niles admitted that much of the public did not view the fight against prostitution in a favorable light. Although arguing that the grand jury reflected the views of “five men” who studied the issue part time, Niles noted that, “He did not want to minimize the strength of sentiment in the community in favor of something like segregation.”⁷²

It was becoming clear that in the wake of the shift to “gradual abolition,” many citizens felt that prohibition, rather than eliminating vice, was instead dispersing it.

⁷⁰ On the Grand Jury’s findings see: “Segregation Urged; Crusaders Scored,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 06 September 1913, 3. At least one letter writer agreed with the Grand Jury on their point concerning the treatment of women. See: “Mr. Shertzer Commends the Grand Jury and Rebukes the Vice Crusaders,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 10 September 1913, 6. The grand jury also recommended that charges not be brought against anyone involved in the sex industry, but rather Samuel E. Pentz (and two of his detectives) the former Secretary for the Society for the Suppression of Vice. Pentz was accused of attempting to extort money from a hotel proprietor that had allegedly violated Sunday liquor laws. See: “The Conspiracy Charges in Brief,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 December 1913, 3.

⁷¹ For reactions to the Grand Jury see: Reformer, “Hopes the Good Lord Will Deliver Us From Another Such Grand Jury,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 September 1913, 6; Rev. S. Parker Cadman, “A New York Minister on a Visit to Baltimore Criticises the Grand Jury and Believes Its Report in Favor of Segregation Will Not Be Accepted by the Community,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 10 September 1913, 6.

⁷² The Grand Jury also concluded that Baltimore was “in a better condition” before the policy of gradual abolition began. “Segregation Urged; Crusaders Scored,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1913, 3.

Throughout the grand jury's investigation, the jurists consistently pointed to the diffusion of vice as the reason they disagreed with "vice crusaders." In their judgment, "All the crusade has done is to scatter [prostitution] and we believe that scattering it makes it more dangerous." Many Baltimoreans, according to the grand jury, concurred with this assessment. At the investigation's outset, the grand jury received 250 letters complaining that former prostitutes were spreading throughout the city. Other letters chronicled the proliferation of new "disreputable houses" in various neighborhoods. Ironically, then, what many Baltimoreans were discovering was that the very system that purported to better order the city, was in fact making it more disorderly.⁷³

During 1915, public sentiment continued to grow against vice reformers. Throughout the year, various sources suggested that after nearly three years of agitation many residents—and some government officials—disapproved of the work of anti-vice crusaders. Even as "drastic" reports of the MVC's findings began to emerge in the daily newspapers, many Baltimoreans seemed little convinced that changes needed to be made in the laws.⁷⁴ In September 1915, only months before the publication of the MVC report, another grand jury again endorsed the policy of segregation, unconvinced that suppression would materially improve conditions in the city. This new report claimed that, "While realizing that commercialized vice is an evil, still it is such a one as has existed from the beginning of time, and undoubtedly will be with us to the end. Rather than scatter this evil in every quarter of the city," the report continued, "in many cases to contaminate and corrupt innocent ones we believe the proper course to pursue is to

⁷³ "Segregation Urged; Crusaders Scored," *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1913, 3.

⁷⁴ "Vice Report Drastic," *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 March 1915, 14.

segregate.”⁷⁵ Other Baltimoreans echoed these sentiments. At a “spirited” hearing before the police board in April 1915, a number of men stepped forth to defend vice segregation. Chief among them was Frederick H. Gottlieb, who was the only dissenting member of the MVC. Gottlieb claimed that suppression only “serves to aggravate conditions and the scatteration of the inmates would only tend to extend their evil influence in private homes.”⁷⁶

Faced with growing public disapproval and/or indifference, coupled with judicial skepticism, anti-vice crusaders went about their work with the hope that the findings of the MVC, once published, would change people’s minds. Although it is impossible to know exactly what was going through the minds of MVC members, it is reasonable to expect that they felt public pressure. Of the thirteen committee members, at least four (including the commission chairman) were active in the anti-vice movement. If they hoped to prod a skeptical public and judiciary into action, their report needed to be detailed and shocking. However, that was the Vice Commission’s chief conundrum: if their report documented widespread prostitution it would undercut anti-vice activists’ claims that prohibition was working, but if their report showed prostitution was on the wane most outside observers would see no reason to expand the fight against commercialized vice.

It was under these unenviable circumstances that the MVC report, based on over two years of research, landed in the public’s lap. Published in five volumes, the investigation was the most thorough documentation of Baltimore’s seething underbelly of commercialized prostitution yet produced. The report detailed, mainly through the

⁷⁵ “Jury For Segregation,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 September 1915, 3.

⁷⁶ “Vice Hearing Spirited,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 April 1915, 14.

efforts of undercover investigators, a network of brothels, hotels, businesses, tenement houses, and leisure spaces connected with commercialized sex. It also profiled, interviewed, and described the men and women who worked in Baltimore's vice industry.

As historical evidence, the report is problematic in a number of ways. Not the least of which was the pressure that investigators were under to coerce a skeptical public into action. Indeed, some of the incidents appeared so clichéd as to stretch the limits of credibility. For example, in one case an undercover investigator interviewed a landlady, Mrs. B.E. In the course of their conversation Mrs. B.E. openly boasted that the “vice people and police” had as much chance as a “snowball in hell” of catching her. Even if they did, the landlady further crowed, they could “do nothing with me for I have strong political friends backing me—a city councilman is a very intimate friend and he always puts me wise to every thing.”⁷⁷ While it is certainly possible this exchange occurred, the stereotypical portrayals of the woman flagrantly thumbing her nose at the law and boasting of vague political backing, seems designed to engender outrage in a public that had become attuned to political corruption during the Progressive era.

The MVC also made the controversial decision to withhold the names of the people interviewed or the places visited, further damaging its credibility. If the goal of the reformers was to shine a light into the city's darkest corners, the decision to censor

⁷⁷ Maryland Vice Commission, *Report of the Maryland Vice Commission: Volume III: “Places of Assignment”*, 1916, 68. The MVC also detailed instances of police complicity in prostitution. In some cases, police officers—while not wanting official involvement—indicated that they would like to meet prostitutes themselves. See: Maryland Vice Commission, *Report of the Maryland Vice Commission: Volume I: “Commercialized Prostitution”*, 354. Although a matter of speculation, due to a lack of extant records, some of the evidence suggests that police were particularly apt to protect disorderly houses in African American neighborhoods. For examples, see: Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League*, 11-12, 24. In a separate case, investigators reported that a police officer testified that he received more trouble from a local church than from Druid Hill “disorderly” saloons. These findings are consistent with historian Kevin J. Mumford's work on Chicago and New York. See: Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

the names of witnesses, businesses, and police officers involved in vice was puzzling. When called before the grand jury, Dr. Walker only explained that he felt confident in the honesty of his investigators and that there was enough evidence to convict without naming names. At the same hearing however, Frederick H. Gottlieb had a different reason why the MVC would not divulge names. Gottlieb told the *Baltimore Sun* that he thought the evidence was based upon hearsay and that, according to the paper, he had “no confidence in the reports of the investigators.”⁷⁸

For a variety of reasons, a host of other Baltimoreans also refused to believe the MVC’s findings. At a December 1915 meeting of the Baptist Preachers’ Meeting, the members rejected the report stating that the accusations were too general in nature.⁷⁹ Baltimore Mayor James H. Preston also dismissed the investigation as “scandalous and untrue.” Then a few days later, he further attacked the report as “entirely indefensible.” The mayor continued his tirade by remarking that he was “utterly surprised that the men who have been named by the Governor of Maryland in the matter have been willing to give their names to this slander on the city.”⁸⁰ Perhaps realizing that the MVC’s findings, if true, reflected poorly on his job performance, Baltimore’s Police Marshal, Robert D. Carter, also denied that vice was rampant in the city. While noting that prostitution did exist, he termed Baltimore “as better off morally than it had been in years.”⁸¹ Other skeptical Baltimoreans joined in second-guessing the report. A “Mrs. Burke” wrote to

⁷⁸ “Halted on Vice Report,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 December 1915, 3.

⁷⁹ “Halted on Vice Report,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 December 1915, 3; “They Object To Vice Report,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 December 1915, 3. The grand jury was so incensed by Walker’s recalcitrance that it eventually called other members of the Commission to the stand before ending the investigation due to a lack of time. See: “Will Continue Vice Probe,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 December 1915, 7 and “Grand Jury Ends Vice Probe,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 January 1916.

⁸⁰ “Mayor Calls It Libel,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 Dec, 1915 and “Mayor Attacks Vice Report,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 December 1915, 8.

⁸¹ “Carter Defends City,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 December 1915, 14.

the *Baltimore Sun* suggesting that the vice report was a political ploy by Dr. Kelly, who had already “failed to ‘catch on’” as a politician. Another resident, R.J. Handly picked up Marshal Carter’s theme of civic pride when he maintained that despite the rapid increase in population “vice and immorality are actually on the decrease.”⁸²

In 1915 it became clear that many Baltimoreans had grown wary of vice reformers. Indeed, MVC investigators occasionally encountered flippant attitudes as they conducted their research. The words of one “brazen, leering bed-house keeper” perhaps captured many Baltimoreans’ feelings about vice crusades when he/she sneered that, “These vice reformers are a nine-days’ wonder, their craze soon blows over.”⁸³ The *Baltimore Sun* further noted that vice reform “can come only through the creation of a wholesome public sentiment with regard to it. There has been no public sentiment,” the story continued, “worth while in the past because there has been no public knowledge.” The last statement was confusing; the *Baltimore Sun* had reported at length about the various efforts of anti-vice activists in the three years prior to the MVC’s findings and yet public sentiment still did not exist.⁸⁴

Howard Kelly also repeatedly complained about public indifference. In the waning days of 1915, Kelly wrote the *Baltimore Sun* to express outrage over the state of affairs in Baltimore. Using a mixture of religious imagery and a discourse of “contamination” and “contagion,” he castigated indifferent city officials and citizens. Using a “true story” and two “allegories,” Kelly described the crisis he saw infecting the city body to the newspaper’s readership. In all three stories Kelly deployed a metaphor

⁸² Mrs. Burke, “American Talkers,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 December 1915, 6; R.J. Handly, “Moral Conditions in Baltimore Improving, Not Growing Worse,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 January 1916, 6.

⁸³ Lane, “Under Cover of Respectability,” 746.

⁸⁴ “The Vice Commission’s Report,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 December 1915, 6.

using smallpox and cancer to describe the ways in which vice infected the city body. In one “allegory” Kelly told a story of a man with “cancer disseminated through all his vital organs.” Kelly tells the patient:

‘Well, now, my good fellow, don’t pay any attention to what people say about your vital organs being diseased; take my advice, go out and buy yourself a spick and span new suit of clothes, get shaved and get your hair cut, and get a nice new pair of patent leather shoes, and a sporty cane and promenade down Charles street every day and show yourself off to your neighbors. If you look all right on the outside what more do you ask?’

Kelly also criticized city officials more concerned with installing “sewage and electric lights and asphalt pavements” while neglecting “the morals of the city.”⁸⁵

In part, the seeming public indifference to vice reform can be explained by the fact that many Baltimoreans became wary of using law enforcement to end prostitution. Even as the MVC investigators busied themselves gathering evidence, Mencken could not resist taking shots by undercutting vice crusaders’ self-definition as the city’s protectors. Rather than civil guardians, Mencken re-conceptualized them as the aggressors engaged in the “armed pursuit of miserable women.”⁸⁶ Mencken’s trenchant remarks became even more pointed upon the report’s publication. In a series of three “Free Lance” columns, Mencken alternately lambasted the “vice crusade,” MVC (both as an organization and as individuals), and their recommendation that prostitution be prohibited in the city. In addition to his attack on Dr. George Walker, the “scientific-Methodist,” Mencken accused the MVC of injecting morals into the medical problems of venereal disease, noted that the report’s documentation of widespread prostitution gave

⁸⁵ All three stories essentially reinforced Kelly’s main argument that by ignoring the city’s moral conditions politicians and residents risked the wrath of God. Howard A. Kelly, “Dr. Howard A. Kelly Scores Those Who Deny or Palliate or Attempt to Hide the Conditions in Baltimore Disclosed By the Vice Commission’s Report and Declares God Will Avenge the Death of the Innocents,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 26 December 1915, 6. Kelly’s complaints in his diaries date back to 1912. In one entry he wrote that, “Vice exists because people indiff. [sic] and that the “apathy of Xians a serious hindrance to the growth of public morals.” See: Howard A. Kelly Papers, Box 25 Folder 1 1912, June 11, 1912, not paginated and Howard A. Kelly Papers, Diaries, Box 25.1 Folder 1, 14 December 1914-17 February, not paginated.

⁸⁶ H.L. Mencken, “The Week in Review,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 October 1914, A1.

lie to the argument that prohibition was working, and argued that the campaign against commercial sex was doing more harm than good. Throughout the articles, Mencken derided anti-vice crusaders as “smutsuffers,” “sexomaniacs,” “snouters,” and “pornophobes.”⁸⁷

In the week that followed the MVC’s meeting with Governor Goldsborough a slew of sarcastic letters followed Mencken’s lead in humorously denigrating the vice commission. One citizen, taking the *nom de plume* of Le Diable Boiteux (“The Lamé Devil”) sarcastically wrote the *Baltimore Evening Sun* exclaiming that the MVC wasted three years, “many thousands of dollars,” and used extralegal means of investigation “with the net result being the announcement of the discovery of sex instinct in Maryland.”⁸⁸ Another letter writer suggested that if the anti-vice crusaders had their way a “new era” would begin where “our whole life, sexual and non-sexual is now to be regulated by law. Let us have a specific law for everything and everybody,” the writer continued, “to regulate every human need in love, hate, envy, greed: to regulate everything except the pernicious activities of the self-appointed sex experts.”⁸⁹ Others attacked Dr. Kelly, who in a letter to the editor of the *Baltimore Evening Sun* suggested that one way to correct the immorality uncovered in the MVC’s investigation was marriage. “Subscriber” pointed out that perhaps George E. Walker, a lifelong bachelor, should follow Kelly’s advice lest he be accused of being, in Kelly’s words, a “recreant

⁸⁷ See Mencken’s three articles published at the end of 1915 and the beginning of 1916: H.L. Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission,” *The Evening Sun*, 28 December 1915, 6; H.L. Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission (Second Article),” *The Evening Sun*, 30 December 1915, 6; and H.L. Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission,” *The Evening Sun*, 1 January 1916, 6.

⁸⁸ Le Diable Boiteux, “The Vice Commission’s Great Discovery,” *The Evening Sun*, 28 December 1915, 6.

⁸⁹ Subscriber, “Good Advice to Dr. Walker and a Prophecy of the Coming Millennium Under the ‘Morals Commission,’” *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, 1 January 1916, 6.

home-shirking man.” Solomon T. Shandy was even more derisive. “Marriage, c’est tout!” Shandy quipped, “Yes, toot, toot! All aboard for Dreamland!”⁹⁰

For many Baltimoreans then, commercialized vice reform became a proxy for debates over free will and modernity. Commentators—whether in letters to the editors, as members of the grand jury, or as editorialists—all found ways to connect the work of the MVC (and anti-vice activists) with old-fashioned ideas. Men like Mencken, Solomon, or “Subscriber” all propagated the idea that the values of modesty and propriety were bastions of a pre-modern sensibility. It was not surprising that in many cases, Mencken and others invoked Puritanism when discussing anti-vice activists and the MVC. In many cases, people warned that if the anti-vice activists had their way they would usher in an era of repression, either in the form of a “morals committee” or in government regulations meant to stifle personal liberties.⁹¹

Although many Baltimoreans were rightly skeptical of the MVC’s findings, it is doubtful that the report was entirely fictional, a fact that most Baltimoreans probably realized. Even Mencken, delivering a rare compliment to vice reformers, noted “Despite all the virtuous protests now going up, it [the report] is exceptionally accurate. Here and there, true enough one beholds the handiwork of the professional ‘investigator,’ to wit, romantic and impossible bosh. But, it must be said is not often. The description of the underworld, at least in its main outlines would be unhesitatingly ratified by any experienced newspaper reporter or police captain.”⁹² Perhaps then it is best to follow

⁹⁰ Subscriber, “Good Advice to Dr. Walker and a Prophecy of the Coming Millennium Under the ‘Morals Commission,’” *The Evening Sun*, 1 January 1916, 6; Solomon T. Shandy, “Marriage as a Cure for Immorality and Other Theories by Dr. Kelly et al. Discussed by One Evidentially a Backward-Looker, if Not Worse,” *The Evening Sun*, 1 January 1916, 6.

⁹¹ “Segregation Urged; Crusaders Scored,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1913, 3.

⁹² H.L. Mencken, “The Report of the Vice Commission,” *The Evening Sun*, 30 December 1915, 6.

Mencken's lead: as a picture of the broad characteristics of vice in Baltimore, it remains a valuable resource. Yet, even this fact likely proved a problem for the MVC and anti-vice activists: the MVC report unwittingly confirmed the worst fears of Baltimoreans that vice had dispersed in the face of suppression.

Indeed, the investigation is filled with prostitutes and commercialized vice appearing in the most unsuspecting city spaces. On a picturesque spring afternoon in Baltimore, an undercover investigator working for the MVC sauntered into an unnamed ice cream parlor. The investigator, spotting an open seat at the counter, sat down and promptly requested a "Chocolate Frappe." Upon overhearing his request, the woman sitting next to him playfully inquired of the investigator whether he was "imitating her." Swinging around to face his questioner, the man found "a woman with a set of gold teeth, grinning at him." Over two rounds of chocolate frappes the new acquaintances idly conversed, mainly about her life and circumstances, and with their thirst for sugar apparently slaked, they set off to a saloon "where they had a few drinks." There the couple's conversation became more salacious. The woman began to make thinly-veiled statements indicating she would have sex with the investigator; playing his role to perfection, he greeted her innuendo with feigned naïveté. Undaunted, the woman mischievously informed her acquaintance that he did not "look as innocent" as he pretended to appear. Then, dropping all pretenses, she bluntly asked him to "drop her a line" in the morning so that they could rendezvous between the hours of "12 and 5 PM" while her husband was away at work.⁹³

⁹³ Maryland Vice Commission, *Report of the Maryland Vice Commission: Volume 1: "Commercialized Prostitution"* 1916, 335.

There is reason to suspect the veracity of this tale of debauchery at the ice cream parlor. After all, as Rosett's play demonstrated, vice investigators had long suspected ice cream parlors as being more than just settings to enjoy sugary treats.⁹⁴ But, the MVC did not limit themselves to ice cream parlors. Indeed, according to the MVC, merchants of various stripes found the potential profits to be made in vice too alluring to resist. The report claimed that the degree of active participation in commercialized vice varied among businesses. In many cases, investigators found that merchants simply looked the other direction or furnished space where couples pursued their amorous passions.⁹⁵ Others participated more readily on the fringes. The MVC investigators discovered that department stores profited from commercialized prostitution in numerous ways. In some instances, department store managers allowed madams the opportunity to recruit from the ranks of their employees. In other cases, the MVC alleged that madams arranged deals with department stores to clothe their workers. In exchange for promised business, the department store managers allowed prostitutes from approved brothels to purchase clothing on the madam's credit.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ At least one other book talked about ice cream parlors being involved in prostitution. Bell claimed that, "The ordinary ice cream parlor is very likely to be a spider's web for her entanglement. This is perhaps especially true of those ice cream saloons and fruit stores owned by foreigners. Scores of cases are on record where young girls have taken their first step towards 'white slavery in places of this character.'" See: Bell, *Fighting the Traffic in Young Girls*, 71.

⁹⁵ Investigators found that movie theaters, for example, furnished a space where "the darkness in which the audience sits seems to have a far more evil result than the pictures shown on the canvas." Other proprietors, such as one bartender in Baltimore, tolerated prostitution in his establishment because it brought him business. John L. Cornell, "Report of Counsel: To the Board of Managers of the Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City." 14 January 1914, 4. Vice investigators from the MVC dedicated an entire volume of the vice report to conditions in commercial spaces. See: Maryland Vice Commission, *Report of the Maryland Vice Commission: Volume 3: "Places of Assignment"*, 1916. Example above can be found on page 124.

⁹⁶ See: The Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City, "The Abolition of The Red-Light Districts in Baltimore," (Baltimore: The Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City, 1916): 3 and Lane, "Under Cover of Respectability," 746.

Even if these stories were fabricated—in whole or in part—the fact is that, if true, the MVC had painted itself into a corner. Some skeptical Baltimoreans doubted the veracity of these tales, but others just as surely believed it. For the latter, this encounter hinted at the extent to which commercialized sex had become woven into the fabric of Baltimore's economic, governmental, social, and cultural atmosphere by the mid 1910s. For them, the MVC's report could be read as confirmation that two years of suppression did not end vice and worse, only managed to extend its reach to businesses not normally associated with prostitution.

Moreover, it was not just businesses that were participating in the vice industry. Given many Baltimoreans concern over how suppression could scatter prostitutes, the MVC report concerning apartments and “furnished rooms” must have been even more disconcerting. Not only had investigators found that 622 out of the 796 furnished rooms they investigated “cater in one way or another to immorality” but the allure of quick money through prostitution was breaking down social barriers. The story of “Mrs. M.T.” a self-described “good Christian woman” and owner of a boarding house and millinery shop aptly demonstrated how citizens came to reconcile their personal beliefs with the potential profits to be realized in the urban pleasure culture. Mrs. M.T. personally felt that prostitution was a sin and that “laying up” with a man would lead to damnation. Although she claimed to have “consecrated [her] house to God” she still knowingly rented rooms to prostitutes. While it appears that Mrs. M.T.'s beliefs contradicted her actions she reconciled her culpability by claiming it was a decision based upon economic practicality and rationality. “If I wait until decent people come along to fill my rooms,” she told the investigator, “[I] might wait a long time.” Therefore, Mrs. M.T. did not feel

that allowing prostitutes in her boarding home undermined her identity as a “good Christian woman” because she had a “living to make.”⁹⁷ Instead, she viewed prostitution as a facet of modern life and had accepted (or at least was resigned to) her place in facilitating its workings.⁹⁸

“Mrs. M.T.” was far from alone in benefitting in some way from the city’s vice industry, and this was the problem. One woman, described as “Mrs. B.M.” claimed to belong to a club that “bitterly opposed” prostitution yet still profited from it through the furnished room she rented. If people like “Mrs. M.T.” and “Mrs. B.M.” were willing to help facilitate the trade in vice despite their personal misgivings, it must have appeared inevitable that prostitution would spread throughout the city unless contained. Even some managers of “high class” apartments were willing to rent to prostitutes or at least rent to single women with no restrictions as to who they invited over.⁹⁹ Perhaps because of this, the Baltimore police scrambled to explain to the public that the conditions documented in the report existed prior to them following the MVC’s recommendation that the segregated districts be closed.¹⁰⁰ This statement by the police was interesting for

⁹⁷ Maryland Vice Commission, *Report of the Maryland Vice Commission: Volume 3: “Places of Assignment”*, 1916, 1, 10-11.

⁹⁸ Similarly, Mrs. M.T. acknowledged that for woman, prostitution “is better than working long hours in a factory day after day” and because of this circumstance she would pray for the woman’s soul. In this sense the decisions that merchants and landlord/landladies made shared some of the same characteristics idealized in the newly emerging, modern, managerial ideologies. Maryland Vice Commission, *Report of the Maryland Vice Commission: Volume 3: “Places of Assignment”*, 1916, 10-11. Other historians have also found that people who participated in non-traditional economies also shared many characteristics with their more “legitimate” counterparts. Boxing in particular, historian Elliott J. Gorn argues, exhibited characteristics closely akin to those valued by Victorian society. While bourgeois society derided pugilism and pugilists as savage, brutal, and the sport as a waste of productive energy, it also enabled boxers an upwardly mobile career path. Moreover, in preparing to fight combatants abstained from sexual intercourse, drink, and social outings, thus embodying Victorian ideals of personal behavior. As Gorn brilliantly points out however, “a boxer who trained assiduously in order to mutilate another man mocked the goals of a society that deemed itself earnest, productive and humane.” See: Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986): 139.

⁹⁹ Maryland Vice Commission, *Report of the Maryland Vice Commission: Volume 3: “Places of Assignment”*, 1916, 72, 155-56.

¹⁰⁰ “Police Board Explains,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 December 1915, 5.

two reasons. First, it ignored the fact that the police had been pursuing a policy of “gradual suppression” since 1912, thus the conditions reported by the MVC (if true) were at least partly a product of the police’s actions. Secondly, the fact that the police board had to make a public statement addressing concerns over the scattering of vice confirms that people read the MVC report as evidence that suppression caused dispersion.

While anti-vice crusaders had failed to convince the majority of Baltimoreans to support their efforts they had succeeded in convincing an important constituency to heed their warnings. Months prior to presenting their findings to Governor Goldsborough, the MVC (minus Gottlieb) persuaded the police board to once again suppress prostitution even as the grand jury remained committed to segregation. On April 12, 1915, the police board agreed to close all “vice abodes” by the new year. It was, in their words, “The logical conclusion [to] the process of gradual elimination which it commenced two years ago.” Then, in January 1916, the new grand jury overturned years of precedent and decided to throw its support behind prohibition.¹⁰¹ Because anti-vice crusaders did not enjoy popular support—and politicians did not feel pressure to act on the issue—it is unclear to what degree they experienced success. However, in 1916, the Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore confidently stated that as of September 12, 1915 no more disorderly houses existed in the city; a claim that is certainly not true.¹⁰²

As the goals and tactics involved in vice reform evolved many in Baltimore held firm in their opposition to the prohibition of prostitution. In most cases, opponents cited the fear of “scatteration” as their primary reason. In response, many of these people

¹⁰¹ “To Close Vice Abodes,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 13 April 1915, 16; “Against Segregation,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 January 1916, 5.

¹⁰² The Society for the Suppression of Vice of Baltimore City, “The Abolition of The Red-Light Districts in Baltimore,” 4-5.

proposed a system of vice segregation, not just simple toleration, as their critics often contended. This system of segregation, advocates believed, offered a reform agenda that actually tightened control of vice districts and focused the gaze of public officials more squarely on the city's urban pleasure culture. In fact, those who favored segregation did so in the belief that this policy would better order the city than the system of prohibition. This is an important point and is deserving of further examination. If, as Michael McGerr argues, progressives looked toward "the shield of segregation" as the best means "to halt dangerous social conflict that could not otherwise be stopped," then the fact that many opposed to the "war" on prostitution turned to segregation is actually more consistent with progressive values than the anti-vice crusade."¹⁰³

Vice segregationists repeatedly maintained that regulation could maintain and reinforce myriad barriers. Given the context, this makes sense for a number of reasons. As reformers, politicians, citizens, and journalists groped to understand and communicate their concerns over commercial sex they came to deploy distinct—but at times overlapping—discourses of "contagion" and "contamination." In the first sense, a discourse of contagion was used to describe the literal dangers of venereal disease transmission. In fact, Mencken took the vice crusaders—especially the medical doctors Kelly and Walker—to task for being complicit in spreading disease through their campaign of prohibition. Under segregation, Mencken argued, madams had a financial interest in containing disease lest their houses garner a reputation for being unhealthy.¹⁰⁴ Joshua Rosett also contended that segregation offered the city a cleaner bill of health. "The chief danger in the closing of the disorderly houses is a question of health," the

¹⁰³ McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 182-184.

¹⁰⁴ H.L. Mencken, "The Report of the Vice Commission," *The Evening Sun*, 1 January 1916, 6.

doctor explained, “In these houses at least some effort was made at rules of cleanliness. The women were in a position to fight against contracting disease, and the moral and physical disease that existed was segregated, located so that the public might beware.”¹⁰⁵

Segregationists believed that the best way to control the “disease” of prostitution was to quarantine or segregate it. In this respect, they were remarkably consistent. The 1913 grand jury contended that under segregation, “The brothel is constantly under the eye of the police” and “there was seldom a robbery in a brothel and criminal characters were not allowed to loiter there.”¹⁰⁶ Even Mencken touched on this point in his columns. “Under the old and immoral system of regulation,” Mencken wrote of prostitutes, “they are subject to constant espionage by the police—they must obey the rules laid down, conduct themselves with outward propriety, refrain from robbery, and give regular accounts of themselves.” Mencken contended, and many likewise believed, that “under the system of dispersion and hullabaloo—i.e. vice crusading—they [prostitutes] are pinned down by no such obligation.” They were, to quote Mencken, “*ferae naturae*” or “wild animals.”¹⁰⁷

Dispersion, and the breakdown of social barriers that it augured, was exactly what many Baltimoreans feared. When Captain John Logan, of the Volunteers of America, a group that worked to rehabilitate “fallen women,” spoke before the Eleventh Ward Democratic Club, he told the audience that since eliminating prostitution was unlikely in the short term, “we should do all in our power to minimize the danger. We must,” Logan proclaimed, “protect the residential sections.”¹⁰⁸ During the widely covered grand jury

¹⁰⁵ “Flays Vice Crusaders,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 August 1913, 3.

¹⁰⁶ “Segregation Urged; Crusaders Scored,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1913, 3.

¹⁰⁷ H.L. Mencken, “The Week in Review,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 October 1914, B1.

¹⁰⁸ “Women Asked to Leave,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 February 1913, 12.

investigation of 1913, jurists often remarked that they had received written protests by residents of “respectable neighborhoods” who now were living among prostitutes. Another member of the grand jury, the *Baltimore Sun* reported, complained that some prostitutes were now living in “exclusive sections of the city, and are now living in the same blocks with prominent families.”¹⁰⁹

By the 1910s Baltimoreans had plenty of reasons for looking to segregation as the best way to maintain social boundaries. Since at least the 1890s Baltimoreans had lived under a system of vice regulation, which segregated vice into red-light districts. By the 1910s, many had become not only accustomed to such a situation, but also found the idea of segregation to be effective. In fact, the idea of segregation as a solution to social “problems” makes even more sense when viewed in tandem with another reform movement shaking up the city. In the late 1890s, as African Americans began to move to better housing stock located in the Druid Hill section of Northwest Baltimore—the same neighborhood where the vice crusade began—white residents became alarmed. As early as 1898, whites began the process of fleeing in the face of “negro invasions.” Writing in the periodical the *Catholic World*, the Reverend John R. Slattery of St. Joseph’s Seminary, noted that, “Whenever a negro moves into a street the whites flutter away. They simply vanish.”¹¹⁰ But this was only a short-term solution unless whites wanted to flee entirely to the suburbs. Thus by the early 1900s many stopped fleeing and turned to legalized segregation as the last bulwark against the oncoming “negro invasion.”

¹⁰⁹ See, for instance, “Finds Evil Diffused,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 July 1913, 5; “Grand Jury Has Doubt,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 July 1913, 16; and “Grand Jury To Inquire,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 July 1913, 3; and “Segregation Urged; Crusaders Scored,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1913, 3.

¹¹⁰ Reverend John R. Slattery, “Twenty Years’ Growth of the Colored People in Baltimore, MD. January 1898,” *The Catholic World* vol. LXVI, No. 394, 521.

The effort to legalize residential segregation was both supported and propagated by many government officials, including two mayoral administrations. At the same moment that anti-vice activists were trying to convince Baltimoreans to denounce segregation as a means to contain vice, city officials were telling citizens that the only sure means of maintaining social barriers was, in fact, segregation. Vice crusaders then had a difficult time dislodging this understanding of ordering the city from the minds of Baltimoreans. Residents who worried that barriers of race, class, and respectability were crumbling before their eyes found in segregation a way to hopefully maintain them.

While racial segregationists warned of the impending chaos promised by the specter of African Americans, vice segregationists often relied upon the lascivious, predatory female to make their points. For instance, the 1913 grand jury reported that it discovered supposedly reformed prostitutes “practicing right under the very noses of the people who thought they had reformed them. Many reformers seem to be easily fooled by clever prostitutes.” The grand jury also received a letter that told of a sixteen-year-old girl who had become friendly with prostitutes, “without being aware of their character.” Even those sympathetic to the plight of “fallen women,” like Rosett, were not immune from this discourse, warning that prostitutes dispersed through the city posed a moral danger “immeasurably worse” than under segregation. Rosett warned that, “these women are scattered throughout the city, living alone, in pairs or small groups, and they patrol the streets, dressed in the same clothing as other women, coming into contact at all hours with young men and spreading abroad an insidious poison of immoral influence.”¹¹¹

¹¹¹ “Studying Social Evil,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 16 July 1913, 3; “Segregation Urged; Crusaders Scored,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 06 September 1913, 3 and “Flays Vice Crusaders,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 August 1913, 3.

In many cases, the language used by vice segregationists was strikingly similar to the rhetoric that racial segregationists employed in their efforts to keep white and black residents apart. Both racial and vice segregationists viewed physical separation as the best means of protecting the home and preventing disorder. At a hearing before the Police Board of Commissioners in 1915, Frederick H. Gottlieb warned Baltimoreans that suppression enabled prostitutes to “extend their evil influence in private homes. It would mean the intrusion of these women into respectable neighborhoods.”¹¹² Racial segregationists were making similar arguments; only they spoke of the dangers of racial mixing. Although not all vice segregationists were racial segregationists and vice versa, the idea of segregation had garnered such currency by the 1910s that many Baltimoreans looked toward it as the best means to order their city and maintain a host of social barriers.

¹¹² “Vice Hearing Spirited,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 April 1915, 14.

Chapter Five: "The Struggle For Land and Liberty:"¹ Segregation, Violence and African-American Resistance 1903-1920s

We do not know what George Howe was doing on the September 30, 1913 before the melee began. Perhaps he was enjoying time with his family or making repairs on his new house on a "fashionable street" in north Baltimore. His activities, whatever they were, came to a crashing halt when the angry shouts of men—accompanied by shattering glass—pierced the evening's tranquility. The problem began when a "large crowd" of white youths playing outside of Howe's door "suggested bombarding his house;" soon a crowd of men joined the fracas "and in a twinkling the trouble was on."²

Surveying the scene outside his home, Howe knew that he had to act with haste. He was dreadfully outnumbered. Different reports described the crowd as being anywhere between 50 and 200 people. Faced with these odds, Howe grabbed a shotgun to defend his family and property. From the second floor, he met bricks with bullets, wounding four youths in the process. This prompted some in the crowd to yell for his lynching. But finally the police arrived. While a few cops worked to disperse the mob their main goal was to disarm and arrest Howe. Meanwhile, another group of men directed their attention on James Nelson, an African-American bystander who happened upon the scene at precisely the wrong moment. Both Howe and Nelson, whom the crowd

¹ The title is taken from an article appearing in the *Afro-American*: "The Struggle for Land and Liberty" *The Afro-American*, 22 November 1913, 1.

² Nor, from all appearances, had Howe personally courted the trouble that landed at his front door; the *Baltimore Sun* reported that he "was not known to be offensive in his actions." The following descriptions were culled from various reports. See, "4 Shot in Race War," *The Washington Post*, 1 October 1913, 1; "Negro Wounds 4 Boys," *The Baltimore Sun*, 1 October 1913; and "Gets Jail Sentence for Defending His Home," *The Afro-American*, 4 October 1913.

severely beat, were lucky to escape with their lives. The only person the police arrested that night was George Howe.³

The disturbance at Howe's residence was a microcosm of the nearly two decade-long battles occurring in Baltimore's residential districts between the early 1900s and 1918. The confrontation demonstrated the precision with which whites sought to order their city along racial lines. The span of a single street raised the ire of white Baltimoreans. In 1913, Harford Avenue was divided into racially-exclusive sides: black residents occupied one side of the block and white residents the other. Howe violated this unstated arrangement when he moved to the all-white side of the street. The African-Americans who lived directly across from him on the all-black side escaped the attention and violence that he endured.⁴ Moreover, nearly all of the major players enacted the roles they played in other disturbances throughout this period. Howe—like many African Americans at the time—sought better housing in Baltimore's northern residential enclaves. Frustrated with the inability of the city government to halt what they termed the "negro invasion," white youths and men engaged in physical and verbal intimidation in order to compel blacks to move. Finally, the police served as the ultimate arbiters, in most cases arresting the African American at the center of the controversy.

Just as the debate over housing segregation was heating up, a letter writer who assumed the name "Republican" penned a letter to the *Baltimore Sun*. The letter read, in part, "Law is after all, only the crystallized will of the people, and if no warrant can be found in existing statutes to cope with the negro invasion of white sections, then a way

³ "Gets Jail Sentence for Defending His Home," *The Afro-American Ledger*, 4 October 1913, 1 and "4 Shot in Race War," *The Washington Post*, 1 October 1913, 1.

⁴ "4 Shot in Race War," *The Washington Post*, 1 October 1913, 1.

will be found to do it.”⁵ This passage touches on two important points that require further explication. On the one hand, “Republican” noted that laws are written in response to popular demand. Indeed, as black Baltimoreans moved into northern residential districts whites increasingly called on the city government to devise a way to keep them out. By 1910 city officials could no longer ignore their pleas. Named after Samuel L. West, the city councilman who sponsored the original bill, the “West Segregation Ordinances” were a series of four laws passed between 1910 and 1914, which became the nation’s first legal efforts to impose residential segregation according to race.⁶ On the other hand, “Republican’s” letter contained an implicit threat. If the legislation failed, angry white residents would resort to their own means to maintain racial separation. In other words, the maintenance of the color line would occur on the streets.

Using newspaper reports, letters to the editors, first-hand accounts, and mayoral papers, this chapter takes up “Republican’s” argument and provides a street-level analysis of the battles over housing segregation in Baltimore during the Progressive era. Doing so offers new insights into our understandings of the emergence of residential segregation. First, it expands the temporal boundaries of the history of residential segregation both locally and nationally, by revealing its roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁷ Secondly, it emphasizes the violence and prejudice at the heart

⁵ Republican, “From the People,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 August 1910, 6.

⁶ For more information on the West Segregation Ordinances see: Garrett Power, “Apartheid Baltimore Style: The Residential Segregation Ordinances of 1910-1913,” *Maryland Law Review* 42 (1983): 248-349.

⁷ The literature dealing with early twentieth century housing segregation is continually growing. See: David M. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Joe William Trotter, Jr. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Douglass Massey and Nancy Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); and David Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law, 1836-1948* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998). Other scholars have also made important contributions to our

of the movement to codify residential segregation. Finally, it argues that the significance of the effort to impose legalized segregation does not lay with the West Segregation Ordinances as a legal entity, but rather with the ways these laws helped legitimize the pernicious linkage between race and community degradation.

Historians of Baltimore have mainly organized their analyses of early twentieth century residential segregation around the legal lifespan of the West Ordinances that were in effect from 1910 through 1917. These accounts have given priority to lawyers, judges, politicians, and middle-class reformers.⁸ However, the campaign to legalize housing segregation in Baltimore did not originate in the hallowed halls of justice or council chambers.⁹ Instead, it was borne out of the successes of black activists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹⁰ The perceived threats to white political

understanding of segregation in the twentieth century and have influenced the entire field. They have also been keener to the role of violence in housing segregation. See, in particular, Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Michael McGerr has most effectively argued that housing segregation needs to be understood as part of progressive reform. See: Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920*.

⁸ Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style," 248-349 and Gretchen Boger, "The Meaning of Neighborhood in the Modern City: Baltimore's Residential Segregation Ordinances, 1910-1913," *Journal of Urban History*, Volume 35, Number 2 (January, 2009): 236-258. On the transnational dimensions see: Carl H. Nightingale, "The Transnational Contexts of Early Twentieth Century American Urban Segregation," *Journal of Social History*, 39 (Spring 2006): 667-702. For a look at the segregation ordinances in Baltimore and other locations throughout the South see: Roger L. Rice, "Residential Segregation by Law, 1910-1917," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (May, 1968) 179-199. See also: Samuel Kelton Roberts, Jr. *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1997). A recent study by a former journalist for the *Baltimore Sun*, Antero Pietila, provides a longer history of race-based segregation in Baltimore. See: Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010).

⁹ Delaney also recognized early twentieth century housing segregation as a grassroots movement. Delaney further argued that segregationists in Baltimore joined forces with progressive urban reformers. See: Delaney, *Race, Place, and the Law*, 105.

¹⁰ James B. Crooks, *Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore 1895 to 1911* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), ch. 3 and Gordon H. Shufelt, "Jim Crow Among Strangers: The Growth of Baltimore's Little Italy and Maryland's Disfranchisement Campaigns," *The Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Summer, 2000): 49-78.

hegemony, coupled with the specter of a “negro invasion,” pushed segregationists working at the grassroots level to clamor for legislation to codify racial lines in the early 1900s. When the city enacted the West Ordinances years later, the laws proved to be largely ineffective. By the end of the 1910s, black Baltimoreans resistance to the ordinances remade the city’s racial geography. Nevertheless, they struggled to challenge the strategies segregationists used in the wake of the laws’ demise.

The words and actions of white residents also revealed that prejudice and violence were central to maintaining the color line. Scholars have spent little time analyzing this aspect of the push for residential segregation.¹¹ While government officials publically insisted that the West Ordinances were peaceful measures designed to ensure racial harmony, white residents consistently justified them by using a host of racialized rationalizations. Citizens claimed that the arrival of African Americans created disorder, threatened white women, and lowered property values. Moreover, in many cases, the ordinances actually contributed to the violence on the streets. The laws provided official sanction to the fears of segregationists. By legitimizing their concerns, white residents had greater incentive to engage in acts of violence and intimidation to keep African Americans out of “their” communities. This would have an impact that long outlived the ordinances and continued to fuel efforts at restricting African Americans’ residential options well into the twentieth century.

¹¹ Historian Michael McGerr argues that progressives used segregation as a well meaning, but misguided, policy to stave off racial violence. See: McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, 182-184. While city officials—and some Baltimoreans—used this as justification, those personally affected by potential integration were not so charitable. Historians of Baltimore have not ignored the violence but it has not been at the center of their analyses. See: Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood* and Power, “Apartheid Baltimore Style.”

Although no one knew so at the time, the controversy over housing segregation in Baltimore began at the dawn of the twentieth century. In 1903 the Baltimore Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, alongside the Charity Organization Society, began an investigation of local housing conditions. By 1906 the two groups decided to focus on the “more congested and poorer quarters of the city.” Their report, hiding behind the veneer of scientific inquiry, amounted to a voyeuristic tour of Baltimore’s black and immigrant neighborhoods, but especially blamed African Americans for substandard housing conditions. Janet E. Kemp, an experienced investigator who conducted a similar inquiry in Washington, DC, led readers on an itinerary that included damp and dilapidated houses that lacked modern amenities like an adequate water supply. In these dwellings Kemp noted the “gregarious, light-hearted, shiftless, irresponsible alley dwellers.” She also documented the high rates of tuberculosis that saddled a section of Lower Druid Hill in the city’s northwest with the derisive moniker of “the lung block.”¹² While Kemp’s racial biases skewed her findings, her report aptly demonstrated through photographs and descriptions the overcrowded and substandard housing that many African Americans occupied in the city.¹³

The conditions that Kemp documented received more empathetic attention from black activists. In 1905, *The Survey* published an indictment of a wider set of social conditions plaguing Baltimore’s black communities. The article, written by J.H.N. Waring, a long-time physician and the principal of Baltimore’s Colored High and Training School, probed deeper into the root causes of poverty in black districts. Waring

¹² See: Janet E. Kemp, *Housing Conditions in Baltimore* (New York: Arno Press, 1974). Other investigations offered similar observations, without deeper reflection of the root causes of these problems. Also see: Pendleton, Helen B. “Negro Dependence in Baltimore,” *Charities* 7, No.1 (October 1905) 50-8.

¹³ For a critical review of Kemp’s research, see: Roberts, Jr. *Infectious Fear*, 128-130.

set his targets higher, not on the residents, but rather the owners of the alley homes and the American people who allowed these conditions to exist in the first place. Then in 1908, the Colored Law and Order League, headed by Waring, published their own investigations of Baltimore's black residential sections and the problems caused by substandard housing, vice, police corruption, and overcrowded conditions.¹⁴

Ostensibly, Kemp, Waring, and the Colored Law Order League all painted similar pictures of dilapidation, vice, and poverty among black Baltimoreans. However, Kemp's report, replete with stereotypical depictions of blacks, garnered a wide audience and surely startled white readers who were increasingly alarmed by the movement of African Americans into exclusively white residential sections. Soon, white residents decided to become proactive in combating neighborhood integration.

On the evening of September 27, 1907 nearly 100 white residents of northwest Baltimore gathered into the Whatcoat Methodist Episcopal Church. At the meeting, resident Mr. Frederick C. Weber, spoke to the audience about the challenges they faced. "Within the last few years," Weber remarked, "an undesirable element has come into the neighborhood, and as a result our property is being woefully depreciated. It seems to me that the resident of Northwest Baltimore is blessed," Weber sarcastically quipped, "with a superabundance of negroes." Facing the prospect of a "negro invasion," residents formed The Neighborhood Improvement Association. The organization was vague in intent and lacked enforcement powers but was an important first step in drawing the battle lines in Baltimore's grassroots mobilization against racial integration.¹⁵

¹⁴ J.H.N. Waring, "Some Causes of Criminality Among Colored People," *Charities* 7 October 1905, 46-7 and James H.N. Waring, "Work of the Colored Law and Order League: Baltimore, MD" (Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Negro Race: Cheney, PA, 1908)

¹⁵ "To Check Negro Invasion," *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 September 1907, 9.

In the coming months Weber, along with a representatives of a number of similar neighborhood associations, established for the public what they saw at stake, amplifying many of Kemp's observations about black depravity. At a meeting before the Harlem Improvement Association, another neighborhood organization, Weber hit upon common social dangers when he asked, "Shall we allow our toddling tots to associate with negro children? Shall we let them suffer the contamination that ensues?"¹⁶ Then, in a letter published in the *Baltimore Sun* less than a week later, he invoked the trope of the black male rapist. "The hundreds of assaults upon weak and defenseless womanhood in recent years from Texas to Maryland by the negroes," he remarked, "should cause any man to hesitate from coddling or truckling to these outcasts."¹⁷

Weber's remarks were just the tip of the rhetorical iceberg. Various popular and social scientific discourses converged in 1907 as white homeowners in northwest Baltimore attempted to arrest the "invasion" of African Americans. An ideal of the home and its centrality to white male political, cultural, and social identity lay at the heart of these discussions. Advocates of segregation envisioned white space as pure and respectable, while black space (and by inference African Americans themselves) was dangerous and uncouth. Several segregationists also tapped into discourses of civilization to portray African Americans as unworthy of the refinement offered by homes in some of the city's residential districts. At one of the Harlem Improvement

¹⁶ "To Keep Out Negroes" *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 November 1907, 9.

¹⁷ Weber's arguments can be found in: Frederick C. Weber, "Negro Invasion in Northwest Baltimore," *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 October 1907, 7.

Association meetings, J.J. McNamara protested that, “Negroes are but 400 years from savagery” compared to the 4000 years accumulated by the “Aryan race.”¹⁸

Since the early grassroots segregationist groups were entirely male, they perceived the defense of white space as a manly duty. This duty to protect white womanhood and the white family from savage, criminal, and undesirable elements fueled the early improvement organizations’ confrontational stance toward African Americans. On many occasions, speakers spoke of the duty that white property owners had to not cower at the “negro invasion” but rather to offer a spirited defense. For instance, Weber declared that the “pestilential black army... should be forced back to the alleys and obscure streets, and if necessary, even out of the city and its environments.”¹⁹

Notions of masculine duty were given added emphasis by political events in Baltimore. This has roots in the 1880s and 1890s when black activists used courtrooms to successfully attack inequalities, including discrimination on public transportation and policies prohibiting African Americans from practicing law. In the early 1900s, whites had also failed in their attempt to disfranchise blacks. In fact, as early segregationist groups were gathering momentum in the city’s northwest, local Democrats were once again engaged in a desperate second effort to disfranchise blacks.²⁰

Black political power was clearly on the minds of many white segregationists. Before the meeting of the Neighborhood Improvement Association, an attendee named

¹⁸ “To Keep Out Negroes” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 November 1907, 9. For more on discourses of civilization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century see: Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁹ According to Weber, the Neighborhood Improvement Association sought multiple ways to both keep African Americans out of “white neighborhoods,” and if blacks have already moved in, force them out. Frederick C. Weber, “The Negro Invasion in Northwest Baltimore,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 October 1907, 7.

²⁰ Crooks, *Politics and Progress*, ch. 3.

Colonel Winfield Peters railed against the city government's preference to "give the negro power over the white man." For his part, Weber felt that a "negro-ridden" Baltimore spelled doom to city and state politics as blacks, buoyed by their success in securing the best housing in the city, and reinforced by yet more southern migrants, would drown out the voices of the white taxpayer.²¹ Another member of the organization, W.J. Bracken chastised lawmakers who could have thwarted black mobility but instead "rested supinely in their easy chairs." The words of Peters, Bracken, and Weber illuminate the perceived threats posed by black mobility and migration. These activists all felt that African Americans were slowly wresting control of politics from white males. With African Americans primarily clustered into the city's seventeenth ward (in Northwest Baltimore), black political power was muted. If black Baltimoreans dispersed throughout the city, these men surmised, their political power could not be so easily contained.²²

Segregationists found it difficult to stop the movement of African Americans who had plenty of motivation to seek better housing. Like their white counterparts, African Americans realized that the fight over segregation was more than simply an

²¹ Colonel Peters is quoted in: "Called Blacks Undesirables," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 October 1907, 14. Quote from Bracken is in: Bracken, W.J. "Negro Invasion of Northwest Baltimore," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 October 1907, 7. Weber, Frederick C. "The Negro Invasion in Northwest Baltimore," *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 October 1907, 7. Both Peters and Weber also invoked Booker T. Washington's famed dinner with Theodore Roosevelt in 1901, and Peters, Weber, and Bracken all advanced the argument that city government was becoming the province of the black man. Weber accused blacks of spreading out over the city in an effort to not only vote but also demand "consideration" in political affairs. It was not surprising then when Colonel Peters combined the robust image of white masculinity and black dependence when he declared that, "A Southerner who was a 'baron' over 300 negroes was a man to admire."

²² Colonel Peters is quoted in: "Called Blacks Undesirables," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 October 1907, 14. Quote from Bracken is in: Bracken, W.J. "Negro Invasion of Northwest Baltimore," *The Baltimore Sun*, 03 October 1907, 7. Weber, Frederick C. "The Negro Invasion in Northwest Baltimore," *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 October 1907, 7. Both Peters and Weber also invoked Booker T. Washington's famed dinner with Theodore Roosevelt in 1901, and Peters, Weber, and Bracken all advanced the argument that city government was becoming the province of the black man. It was not surprising then when Colonel Peters combined the robust image of white masculinity and black dependence when he declared that, "A Southerner who was a 'baron' over 300 negroes was a man to admire."

effort to secure better housing. In his 1907 article, Waring contextualized the conditions of black housing by placing them into the wider orbit of corruption, public indifference, and ineffective government. Waring identified six areas that contributed to criminality among Baltimore's black population: substandard schools, the "alley home," saloons, "ill-advised arrests" of youths, reformatories that "do not reform," and black children born into poverty and inequity. Waring's article was an initial step in seriously addressing the causes of the most serious issues facing the black community in Baltimore, but it tempered its assessment of blame.²³

However, the results of the Colored Law and Order League's investigation, published in 1910, pulled no punches. Much of the report focused on the deleterious effects that poor living conditions had on children and women. It also mapped out the white-owned saloons that dominated black neighborhoods, as well as uncovering rampant police corruption and official indifference. It was for these reasons, not an inherent defect in African Americans, that the neighborhood in Lower Druid Hill was rife with disease, crime, and temptation. It was the only report of its kind to identify root causes of the problems plaguing the neighborhood, offer a solution, and place housing into the wider realm of equality. But it also highlighted the ways that corruption made reform and respectable family life exceedingly difficult.²⁴ For these reasons, middle-class blacks began to push out of Lower Druid Hill; it made little sense to stay if they could afford to leave. As the Reverend John R. Slattery observed in 1898, it was hard to blame African

²³ Waring, "Some Causes of Criminality Among Colored People," and Waring, "Work of the Colored Law and Order League."

²⁴ Waring, "Work of the Colored Law and Order League," 7.

Americans for “moving out of the alleys in the heart of the town and getting on good streets, pleasant to the eye, especially when the rent is about the same.”²⁵

The formation of neighborhood associations marked an important change in race relations in Baltimore. While whites had tolerated, even permitted, certain transgressions of “white” residential spaces in years past, they had always done so on their own terms. When African Americans occupied inferior domiciles or worked as domestics, whites remained confident in their superior social and political status. Now, however, African Americans were moving into neighborhoods not as domestics, but as professionals and neighbors, a development that triggered white political and social anxieties.²⁶ In the late nineteenth century whites reacted by fleeing but improvement organizations adopted a more confrontational stance.²⁷ On many occasions, orators spoke of the duty that white property owners had to offer a spirited defense against integration.²⁸ But, by 1910, it was apparent that segregationists had failed to halt black mobility. At the same time, their protestations had not resulted in any remedial legislation, despite calls to codify residential segregation. By the summer of 1910, Baltimore’s northwest was a powder keg waiting for a spark.

Then, in 1910, the racial tensions that had been simmering just below the surface in Baltimore suddenly exploded. In May, W. Ashbie Hawkins purchased a home in an

²⁵ Reverend John R. Slattery, “Twenty Years’ Growth of the Colored People in Baltimore, MD. January 1898,” *The Catholic World*, vol. LXVI, No. 394, 520.

²⁶ My thinking on this has been influenced by Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998). See also: Weibe, A Search for Order. For a theoretical discussion concerning the confluence of geography and race see Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004) es Introduction and Chapter 1

²⁷ Reverend John R. Slattery, “Twenty Years’ Growth of the Colored People in Baltimore, MD. January 1898,” *The Catholic World*, vol. LXVI, No. 394, 521.

²⁸ For one example, see: Frederick C. Weber, “The Negro Invasion in Northwest Baltimore,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 October 1907, 7.

all-white block on McCulloh Street in northwest Baltimore. Hawkins, for reasons that remain unclear, never occupied the house. Instead, he leased it to his business partner, another African-American lawyer named George W. McMechen, who moved in that June. Shortly thereafter, three more black families joined McMechen in integrating the neighborhood.²⁹ Measured by distance, the move onto McCulloh Street by the four black families was not significant. McCulloh Street was just a block east of, and ran parallel to, the primarily black Druid Hill Avenue. Yet to whites, Druid Hill Avenue was the boundary that African Americans dare not cross, a line that separated black from white.³⁰

In the coming months white residents in and around McCulloh Street welcomed their new neighbors by provoking verbal and physical confrontations.³¹ On his first night in his new home, McMechen reported that someone broke “the front windows and flung a brick through my skylight.” Shortly thereafter, M.J. Hammen, the president of a local neighborhood protective organization, happened upon William B. Hamer, who was black, busily moving furniture into his new home. Approaching the man, Hammen asked his new neighbor why he did not buy a house on “Druid Hill avenue or in some other negro district?” “I thought he was foolin’ at first,” Hamer told one reporter,” but when I saw he was in earnest I sent him on his way.” Actually, after arguing with Hammen for a few

²⁹ W. Ashbie Hawkins, “A Year of Segregation in Baltimore,” *The Crisis* 3 (November 1911) 27 and “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910, SM2.

³⁰ Historian Carl H. Nightingale pointed out, the Hawkins’ house sat in one of Baltimore’s more exclusive neighborhoods. Known as the “favored fan,” this area of northwest Baltimore once housed some of Baltimore’s wealthiest citizens. Nightingale, “The Transnational Contexts of Early Twentieth-Century American Urban Segregation,” 673.

³¹ “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910: SM2; “Negro Homes Stoned,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9, September 1910 14. In a few instances, white Baltimoreans attempted methods of persuasion, backed by cash, as they did when they tried to convince McMechen to find a new home. However, it was clear that McMechen was not moving. Although having paid \$800 for the house, he asked his white neighbors for nearly three times that amount if he were to move, before coming down to \$1500.

moments, Hamer lost his patience, grabbed a nearby chair, raised it and warned Hammen that either he moved on “or I will brain you with this chair.”³²

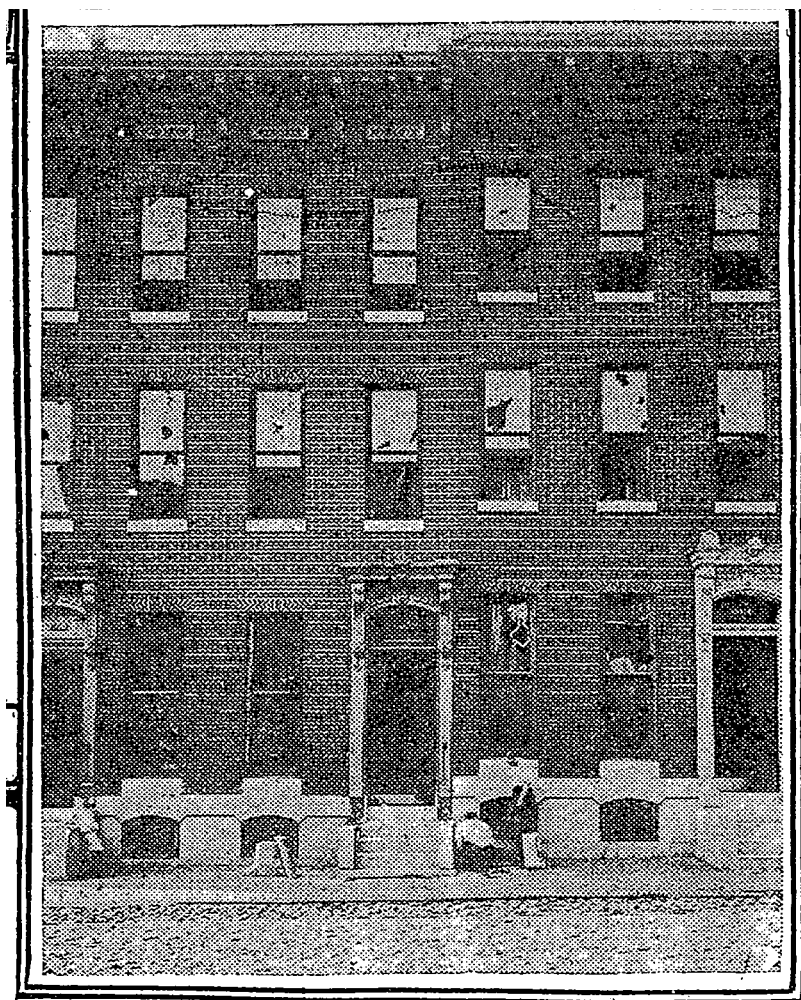
After the incident involving Hamer and Hammen, the *New York Times* reported that there “ensued more or less lawlessness on the part of small boys and hoodlums in the neighborhood.” These “small boys and hoodlums” vandalized the homes of their new neighbors by pelting them with bricks and assorted projectiles.³³ McMechen, Hamer and Hamer’s brother-in-law (who had also recently moved to McCulloh Street) all had their windows broken. In fact, Hamer complained that between his and his brother-in-law’s house only three windows remained unbroken.³⁴ (*See Figure One*)

The events on McCulloh Street signaled a new chapter in the battle over residential segregation in Baltimore. W. Ashbie Hawkins, the purchaser of the home on McCulloh Street was not just any buyer. Hawkins was well known by 1910 as a prominent civil rights activist. Hawkins began his career as a schoolteacher in Baltimore where he quickly became an advocate for better education funding for African Americans. In the course of his work, Hawkins met Harvey Johnson. In fact, Hawkins was one of the earliest beneficiaries of Johnson’s activism. Hawkins became one of the city’s first black attorneys in 1892, only seven years after Johnson opened up the bar to black applicants. Together with Johnson, Hawkins attended early meetings of the Niagara Movement, a forerunner to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP; soon after he helped establish the Baltimore Branch of the NAACP, and throughout his life served tirelessly as an attorney and activist. In other

³² Accounts taken from: “Negro Homes Stoned,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 and “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910: SM2.

³³ “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” SM2.

³⁴ “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” SM2. “Negro Homes Stoned,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9, September 1910 14.



**House 1,834 McCulloh Street in Which a Negro Lawyer Named McMechen
Moved in June, 1910, and Which Promptly Had Its Windows
Broken, as Shown in the Cut.**

Figure 5.1: Photograph and Caption from *The New York Times*, December 25, 1910

words, Hawkins personified the political and social advances that black activists had so painstakingly fought for over the previous twenty-five plus years.³⁵

With a firsthand knowledge of the city's race relations it is probable that Hawkins' purchase, at least in part, was a move to force a legal confrontation.³⁶ After all, black activists, like Johnson, used a similar strategy with great success throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Because of the foundation built by these activists, Hawkins was well equipped to mount a legal challenge to any potential law or defend African Americans who were victims of white-initiated violence. Segregationists must have found Hawkins' purchase especially discomfiting, perhaps knowing that it portended another battle for civil rights.

By the end of 1910, African Americans had a segregation law to challenge. White attorney Milton Dashiell—a man that Hawkins labeled as a “rampant negro hater” and a “briefless lawyer”—thought he found a way to combat integration by proposing a residential segregation law.³⁷ Dashiell (who lived near the disturbances on McCulloh Street) discovered that Baltimore's original charter, written in 1796, enabled the city to use “police power” for “preserving order and securing property and persons from violence, danger and destruction.” Since, according to Dashiell, African Americans who encroached upon “white neighborhoods” both lowered property values and also “tend[ed]

³⁵ Biographical information about Hawkins can be found in: “Ashbie Hawkins, Attorney for 50 Years, Dies at 78,” *The Afro-American*, 12 April 1941, 18

³⁶ In a 1911 article for *The Crisis* Hawkins outlined the history of black residential patterns in Baltimore where he recounted some previous attempts by African Americans to breach the city's unofficial color line. See: Hawkins, “A Year of Segregation in Baltimore,” 27. “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910: SM2; “Negro Homes Stoned,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9, September 1910, 14.

³⁷ Hawkins, “A Year of Segregation in Baltimore,” 28.

to the disturbance and destruction of the peace to a marked degree” the city was fully justified in legalizing residential segregation.³⁸

Dashiell was not the first Baltimorean to propose codifying residential segregation. The idea initially received a public hearing in 1907 at a meeting of the Harlem Improvement Association. Members passed a resolution requiring that African Americans seek the permission of a majority of those already in the neighborhood when purchasing a home on an all white block. Of course, this resolution was unenforceable as the organization lacked any kind of regulatory powers.³⁹

For the next three years the idea received little attention. But that changed when Dashiell revived the effort in 1910 and found a sponsor in councilman Samuel L. West. The proposed West Segregation Ordinance was vague. It forbade African Americans from moving into white majority blocks and whites from moving into black majority blocks, proscribing a \$100 fine for African Americans who violated it. The *Afro-American* sarcastically termed the bill as the “great measure which is to relieve the city of the great ‘scourge’ caused by thrifty, intelligent, law-abiding colored people getting better homes.”⁴⁰

Dashiell’s plan was in keeping with other reform ideas of the era. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city tried to isolate vice in recognizable red light districts, believing that segregation offered the best means to maintain social boundaries. The West Segregation Ordinance, was yet another front in this battle. Like

³⁸ “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910: SM2. See: Power, “Apartheid Baltimore Style,” 299. While he had a personal stake in what he saw as a move to protect his property values and rights he also wanted to keep African Americans out of McCulloh Street because of his own prejudices. Hawkins termed Dashiell a “rampant negro hater.”

³⁹ “To Keep Out Negroes,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 8 November 1907, 9.

⁴⁰ “Object to Living Near Respectable Negroes,” *The Afro-American*, 1 October 1910, 1. For the law’s enforcement see: “Signs Segregation Law,” *The New York Times*, 20 December 1910, 1.

vice segregationists, white residents saw in this strategy a way to rationalize and order the city, making neighborhoods legible in terms of race.⁴¹ Politicians and the *Baltimore Sun* further justified the proposed law by claiming that it promised the best means of assuring peaceful relations among whites and blacks. The *Sun*, for instance, claimed “the preservation of peace and goodwill between the white and colored people” was the law’s most important benefit.⁴²

However, other supporters of government-sponsored apartheid belied the notion that the West Ordinance was proposed out of altruistic concerns for racial harmony. In doing so, they demonstrated how entangled white privilege and property had become. As Edgar Allen Poe, city solicitor, ardent supporter of segregation, and grand-nephew of the author stated, “From my earliest recollection my feeling for the race has been one associated with affection; my old negro ‘mammy,’ my little nurse-girl playmate, all are among my happiest recollections. But the idea of their assuming to live next door to me,” Poe continued, “is abhorrent.”⁴³

Letter writers to the *Baltimore Sun* similarly contradicted claims that the ordinance was proposed out of a spirit of beneficence. A writer who signed his name, “1800 Block”—a reference to the site of the McCulloh Street disturbances—claimed that African Americans were now becoming the favored people in the city even though they have “certainly cost this country an immense amount of money and blood.” Another letter read, “Property in West Baltimore is not worth what it should be and solely on account of the negro invasion of white neighborhoods this time [in the] the best of

⁴¹ For an argument about how segregation fit into the progressive reform agenda, see: McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent*, ch. 6.

⁴² “A New York View of the West Ordinance,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 28, November 1910, 6.

⁴³ “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910, SM2.

Baltimore.” Finally, one writer vaguely hinted at violence if something was not done to prevent African Americans from “invading” the northwest section of the city. “The negro should know by this time that every attempt on his part to force himself into places where he is not wanted will surely react upon his race,” the writer intoned, “and the more surely forge the fetters of doom which seem to be closing upon him.”⁴⁴

Far from protecting both races through segregation, the West Ordinance was as much about power and control as it was about separation. The bill’s authors inserted a clause (which would eventually be found in all four versions of the ordinance) that read, “Nothing in the said ordinance shall be so construed as to affect the residences of white or colored or negro servants or employees.”⁴⁵ For whites, segregation operated as a theater of racial superiority and power. Domestic space was particularly important because it served as one of the primary sites where whites constructed and transmitted constructions of race. It was not just that African Americans and whites were separated, it was what this separation communicated.⁴⁶

The importance that whites placed on domestic spaces as classrooms of white superiority help explain why the movement of blacks represented such a threat. The intrusion of autonomous black actors on the carefully choreographed domestic stage

⁴⁴ Republican, “From the People,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 August 1910, 6. Others voiced their support at city council meetings. W.E. Wood, a homeowner, complained to the First Branch of the City Council that his property had lost value after blacks moved into his neighborhood; another man, W.J. Ogden, though he had three African-American servants, “objected to colored people living next door in or in same neighborhood.” “Object to Living Near Respectable Negroes,” *The Afro-American*, 1 October 1910, 1.

⁴⁵ This was the only exemption written into the four versions of the law. See: *Ordinances and Resolutions of the Mayor and City Council of Baltimore*, “Ordinance 654” 294. Hale, *Making Whiteness* and Jennifer Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 13-17.

⁴⁶ My thoughts on the nature of segregation have been influenced by Hale, *Making Whiteness* and Ritterhouse, *Growing Up Jim Crow*. See also: Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘We Are Not What We Seem’: Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South,” *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 80:1 (June, 1993) and Tera W. Hunter, *To ‘Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women’s Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

threatened to undermine the lessons that white Baltimoreans hoped to impart to the younger generation and the public at large. Partly out of convenience—and a tacit recognition of the importance of black labor in the functioning of the white household—this important exemption enabled whites to display and communicate their power over African Americans. The law made certain that white children would continue to learn the lessons of race by witnessing the power dynamics at work in their parent’s interactions with domestic laborers.

When middle-class black families, like the Hawkins and McMeachens, purchased houses in majority white neighborhoods they undermined the visual cues of supposed white superiority and complicated attempts to portray African Americans as an inferior race. The stated aspirations of these families further destabilized racial dynamics in Baltimore. McMeachen claimed that, “We did not move up there because we wished to force our way among the whites; association with them in a social way would be just as distasteful to us as it would be to them. We merely desired to live in more commodious and comfortable quarters.” When asked about her family’s move, Anne McMeachen—George McMeachen’s wife—universalized their aspirations by proclaiming that, “we wanted to be more comfortable—a right I think everyone has to exercise.”⁴⁷ The class and professional background of the Hawkins and McMeachens, along with their desire for a middle class life, made it difficult for segregationists to fall back on their time-honored tropes of black inferiority, difference, and disorder.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Hawkins, “A Year of Segregation in Baltimore.” For the McMechens’ quotes see: “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910, SM2.

⁴⁸ “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times*, 25 December 1910, SM2.

The proposed legislation did not go uncontested. In fact, it galvanized African Americans—and some whites—against the West Ordinance. At a city council meeting where Dashiell, West, and other segregationists attempted to put a friendly face on apartheid, black activists railed against the mandates. Jacob M. Levy, who identified himself as a socialist, denounced the legislation for putting “property rights above human rights” while Charles Kemper, the secretary of the Socialist party, argued that allowing segregating African Americans opened the door for similar efforts against other minority groups. J.H. Murphy, the publisher of the *Afro-American* and Reverend G.R. Waller, of the city’s Trinity Baptist Church, challenged segregationists’ specious claims that blacks lowered property values.⁴⁹ The *Afro American* also initiated a campaign against the ordinances. In a November editorial the paper denounced the proposed acts as “anti-American.”⁵⁰

Despite the controversies, Baltimore’s Mayor, J. Barry Mahool signed into law the first residential segregation ordinance in the country on December 19, 1910.⁵¹ Almost immediately the poorly designed law ran into a number of difficulties on the streets of Baltimore’s residential districts. A mere three weeks after its passage, six people were arrested for violating its mandates. By the end of January the *Baltimore Sun* reported, “About 20 cases of alleged violation of the ordinance have been sent to court and nearly every day the grand jury is acting on one or more of them.” A few weeks later, the Board

⁴⁹ “Colored Men Protest Against Passage of West Ordinance,” *The Afro American*, 8 October 1910, 4. For other protests see: “Monthly Meeting at Grace Presbyterian Church,” *The Afro American*, 22 October 1910, 8.

⁵⁰ “The Segregation Act,” *The Afro American*, 26 November 1910, 4. For other editorials critical of the law see: “Why?” *The Afro-American*, 17 December 1910, 4 and “Why Not Quit Treating Him as a ‘Problem’” *The Afro-American*, 10 December 1910, 4.

⁵¹ “Signs Segregation Law,” *The New York Times*, 20 December 1910, 1.

of Police Commissioners had to order their patrolmen, due to the large number of arrests, to stop apprehending people based on complaints.⁵²

Among the first arrestees, many expressed surprise, claimed ignorance, or were confused by the new law's mandates. For instance, when real estate agent George C. Sweeten agreed to rent a house to George W. Butts, who was black, Sweeten claimed that he was under the impression that the house was on a majority black block. Butts claimed that he never heard of the law.⁵³ Then in May 1911, D. Tong, a Chinese laundryman, posed a perplexing problem for segregationists. Tong purchased a home on North Fremont Avenue in a majority white block. Soon his neighbors approached the Harlem Improvement Association to complain. However, the association was unsure what action—if any—they could take in the matter. While some argued that Wong could not possibly be white, the ordinances' supporters had to admit that they draw a binary color line and were uncertain what to do in Wong's case.⁵⁴

Throughout its legal life the West Ordinance also produced a host of other unintended consequences. For instance, the West Ordinance had a negative impact on white business owners who served African Americans. Immediately after the passage of

⁵² "West Segregation Law Still Causing Trouble Among Baltimore's Solons," *The Afro-American*, 14 January 1911, 5; "Commissioners Halt the Police," *The Afro-American*, 4 February 1911, 5; and "West Test Case Saturday," *The Baltimore Sun*, 25 January 1911, 14.

⁵³ Louis Schmidt was also arrested during the early days of West for renting property to George Salchunas, a white man, in a majority black block. "West Ordinance Both Ways," *The Baltimore Sun*, 11 January 1911, 4. The first case that stemmed from the new law was dismissed, after Hawkins successfully argued that Catherine Dixon and her landlord agreed to a lease before the law went into effect. See: "First Blow Against The West Ordinance," *The Afro-American*, 31 December 1910, 1. The courts, for their part, threw out one of the first cases against an African-American woman because the law was so hastily drafted and conceived that it was impossible to define what constituted a block. "West Segregation Law Still Causing Trouble Among Baltimore's Solons," *The Afro-American*, 14 January 1911, 5.

⁵⁴ See: "West Law and the Chinese," *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 May 1911, 12 and "Chinamen's Color a Problem," *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 May 1911, 14. In the end, it is uncertain what happened to D. Wong. For other problems with the law's mechanics and enforcement, see: Daniel W. Shaw to Milton Dashiell, 16 January 1911, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore; Letter from Milton Dashiell to Goldsborough, 17 January 1911, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

the law, some blacks boycotted white-owned businesses whose owners did not speak out against the bill. *The Afro-American* noted that, “If the white people must have segregation, the colored people must keep somewhat in line with the sentiment by building up somewhat segregated community and commercial interests.”⁵⁵

In another case, an African-American family used the law against their white neighbors. In early 1911, white resident Kate Koller moved out of her residence of several years to the house next door, technically becoming a new resident of the area. Koller’s African-American neighbors complained to the Southwestern police district and had Koller and the home’s owner, Manuel Mandleson, arrested. There could have been any number of reasons that the unnamed black family reported Koller and Mandleson. Perhaps there was some personal animosity between the parties. However, it is also possible that the African-American family used the opportunity to make a mockery of a law clearly intended to only apply to black residents.⁵⁶

The law also precipitated at least one case of violence against black tenants who recently moved into a home on Stricker Street in northwest Baltimore. On the evening of March 14, 1911 a group of boys unleashed a furious bombardment that left the house in shambles. In all the boys destroyed nine windows and left visible damage to the home’s door and vestibule. The tenants also claimed that three shots were fired from the crowd. Fortunately, nobody reported any injuries.⁵⁷

Despite the law’s provisions, blacks continued to move to neighborhoods across the city against the wishes of their white neighbors. This fact pointed to another uncomfortable truth for segregationists: some whites were complicit in renting or selling

⁵⁵ “More Trouble with Segregation Law,” *The Afro-American*, 7 January 1911, 4.

⁵⁶ “Moved Next Door; Arrested,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 23 January 1911, 4.

⁵⁷ “Negro House Assailed,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 March 1911, 10.

houses to African Americans. From the outset, white landlords remained willing entertain the prospect of African-American customers. Just prior to the first bill's passage Charles S. Otto wrote to Mayor Mahool to register his dissatisfaction. Otto owned property in the city, and although he favored "keeping colored people to themselves" he worried that the law would make it difficult for him to rent his property.⁵⁸ John W. Rich wrote to register his disapproval on a number of fronts. He argued that the law would place a burden on all taxpayers who would pay the expense of defending it in court. He also contended that businesses would lose sales, that it was "inhumane" to "deprive a man of his rights to his home" and that neighborhoods had already been integrated in the past with no serious repercussions. Rich ended his letter by appealing to Mahool's Christianity, arguing that he had no right to "deprive the humblest citizen of his liberty and happiness."⁵⁹

Mahool also met considerable resistance from some of the city's real estate agents. John M. Hering, the secretary of The Realty Securities Corporation, wrote the mayor arguing that the law was unfair to both white and black Baltimoreans, particularly those who lived in "mixed neighborhoods." Hering worried that in sections where African Americans almost constituted a majority, whites would no longer buy homes and blacks would not be permitted to do so. Harry T. Geisendaffer, a real estate broker, lobbied Mahool against the law for many of the same reasons. In both instances, the realtors framed their objections in the language of property rights. While they were quick

⁵⁸ Charles S. Otto to Mayor J. Barry Mahool, 12 December 1910, J. Barry Mahool Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

⁵⁹ Another letter writer, Franklin F. Johnson made many of the same points in his letter to Mahool. John W. Rich to Mayor J. Barry Mahool, 17 December 1910, J. Barry Mahool Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore and Franklin F. Johnson to Mayor J. Barry Mahool, 12 December 1910, J. Barry Mahool Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

to note that they were not opposed to the principle of segregation, they contended that the law, in its present form, would work a hardship on homeowners because the market would be severely constricted. Left unsaid in both cases, was that both men, who managed properties in “mixed neighborhoods” also stood to lose money if they could not find customers.⁶⁰

At least one real estate agent was not so reticent to couch his objections in the language of capital. On the eve of the passage of the first ordinance, J.I. Goldstein implored Mahool to withhold his signature. “If this law would be put in operation,” Goldstein wrote, “it would manifestly work great hardship to the majority of owners of small property throughout the city, especially through East Baltimore, where the neighborhoods are mixed.”⁶¹ Although not all real estate agents lined up against the ordinances, it appears that a number objected. Because of this, and the opposition of some white landlords, African Americans had plenty of opportunities to find residences of their own choosing.

While the advent of the West Ordinance had an effect on the city’s residential spaces, historians have largely mischaracterized its importance. Although precedent setting, the legal life of the ordinance was fraught with confusion, resistance, court challenges, and overall ineffectiveness that hampered whites’ ability to keep blacks out of “their” neighborhoods.⁶² However, the West Ordinance did play an important role in ratcheting up racial tensions on the streets. By criminalizing the movement of African

⁶⁰ John M. Hering to Mayor J. Barry Mahool, 10 December 1910, J. Barry Mahool Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore; Harry T. Geisendaffer to Mayor J. Barry Mahool, 10 December 1910, J. Barry Mahool Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

⁶¹ J.I. Goldstein to Mayor J. Barry Mahool, 19 December 1910, J. Barry Mahool Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

⁶² “West Law Defective,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 February 1911, 12. The judges cited a number of problems with the law, including its vaguely stated purpose and its proviso that allowed African-American servants to be exempt from the law.

Americans into white neighborhoods, the ordinances heightened—perhaps created—a sense of panic among whites. For white Baltimoreans, the impending moves of African Americans were more than mere threats; such moves were invasions that foretold bedlam, a notion that the city government validated through the West Ordinance. This, above all else, would serve as the law’s most notable impact.

As the city labored to create a legally valid version of the West Segregation Ordinance between 1911 and 1913, whites continually fired off hostile letters to the editor and messages to Baltimore’s new mayor James H. Preston. In these missives one can sense increasing desperation in the tone of the writers. One indignant letter writer sarcastically wrote the mayor exclaiming that, “If this thing keeps up we will have a beautiful city, a lovely city, a picturesque city indeed. It will be our pleasure, our pride to show strangers what an attractive city we have, with its increasing dark spots.” In another letter, C.E. Stonebraker wrote Preston pleading with him to “lend your best efforts towards putting an end to this hideous negro invasion.” Then in July 1913 a writer named Donnelly reported to the *Baltimore Sun* that the failure of the laws to halt the progress of black Baltimoreans in the northwest led some to suggest that the city change its name to “Negromore.”⁶³ Another Baltimore newspaper published a letter bringing these fears to their zenith when the writer warned that the city was in danger of becoming “a second Darkest Africa.”⁶⁴

In each of the letters it is apparent that many segregationists were growing frustrated waiting for legislation to “protect” their homes. It had now been a full seven

⁶³ Donnelly, “The Segregation Outlook,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 July 1913, 6.

⁶⁴ Anonymous Letter to Mayor James H. Preston, 1 May Year Unknown, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore; A.J. Reilly to Mayor James H. Preston, 16 June 1913, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore; James L. Murrill to Mayor James H. Preston, 19 October 1913, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

years since segregationists in the late 1900s first sought to stop black Baltimoreans from moving into “white neighborhoods.” Although none of the letters directly called for violence, the sense of indignation and anger is apparent. For instance, J.L. Blake, who signed his screed as “A Property Owner and Sufferer,” wrote, “Too much valuable time has already been lost ‘waiting’, a la Mr. West, for the ‘decision of the Court of Appeals.’”⁶⁵

There were other signs that racial tensions were escalating to dangerous levels. White Baltimoreans increasingly emphasized themes of invasion and doom when describing integration. One Baltimorean wrote Mayor Preston asking if there was anything to stop the city from being “engulfed by the moves of negroes now pouring in upon her?” A letter to the *Baltimore Sun* claimed that African Americans “are simply swarming over this city and country like the black plague of old, and if we do not heed the signs of the times will soon be in possession of this city and country.”⁶⁶ Angry whites also connected black mobility to their larger frustrations with city politics, white’s place in the city, and property values. J.L. Blake, writing as “A Property Owner and Sufferer,” asked if, “The negro vote [was] such a tremendous factor that our beautiful city must be sacrificed?”⁶⁷ A meeting of the Harlem Improvement Association on June 12, 1913, then

⁶⁵ J.L. Blake Letter to the Editor of the *Sun*, Unknown Date, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore. This letter was eventually published in: “Letters to the Editor,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 August 1913, 6. For another example of citizens becoming frustrated with the lack of official action see: Hannibal, “Making the Map of Baltimore Look Like a Sheet of ‘Tanglefoot’” *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 September 1913, 6.

⁶⁶ A.J. Reilly to Mayor James H. Preston, 16 June 1913, 3-4, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore. Another letter writer thought that the failure of housing segregation foretold a when paraphrasing “The Ancient Mariner” there will be “Negroes, negroes everywhere and not a white man to be seen.” Indignant, “Letter to the Editor,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 14 June 1913. Reilly also wrote this letter, which she included to with her communication to the mayor. “Baltimore Doomed!” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 September 1913, 6. The rhetoric of invasion was further trumpeted by *The Baltimore Sun* who repeatedly referred to the mobility of blacks as the “negro invasion.”

⁶⁷ A Property Owner and Sufferer, “Letters to the Editor,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 17 August 1913, 6.

offered an ominous omen. The group contended that, “The time has come when conditions are such as to result in disorders, breaches of the peace, and riots.” Things were quickly coming to a head.

September 1913 turned out to be a violent and bloody month in northwest Baltimore. According to the *Baltimore Sun*, whites felt increasingly frustrated by the lack of legal protections against “negro invasions.” The paper reported that since “there is no law under which they can prevent further inroads, the white people openly declared that they will use their own methods in disposing of the unwelcome neighbors. They said they were tired of standing idly by and seeing their property depreciate in value because of the advent of the blacks.” On September 18th, a group of “men and boys” took matters into their own hands and pummeled a house on Stricker Street with a variety of brickbats. Stricker was the same street that experienced violence two years previous. As in prior incidents, the attackers severely damaged the property before the police arrived.⁶⁸

On the next morning, September 18th, Charles G. Guth, a prominent local candy manufacturer, killed his African-American chauffeur, George Murphy (who was also a local preacher), outside of Guth’s residence. That morning, Guth and Murphy apparently became embroiled in an argument. According to Guth, he approached Murphy about cleaning “the brasses in the house” after Guth’s wife complained that Murphy had failed to keep them clean. Guth’s wife also maintained that Murphy had ordered milk for himself and had it charged to her. When Guth confronted Murphy, the chauffeur launched into an angry tirade. Among Murphy’s invectives, he reportedly exclaimed that, “I wish to _____ I had been near that house when those white _____ threw stones at that house

⁶⁸ “Negro House Attacked,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 September 1913, 14.

on Stricker street. I would have killed some of the _____ had I been around.” Murphy, then “frenzied with rage” reportedly grabbed an ax and attacked his employer. After a long struggle, Guth shot Murphy, claiming that he did so in self-defense.⁶⁹

At first the story of Murphy’s murder seems only tangentially related to the residential segregation issue. However, both the details of the crime, and Guth’s explanation, spoke to the racial tensions exacerbated by the West Ordinances. Although Murphy was not residing in a “white neighborhood,” the altercation notably took place at Guth’s residence at Eutaw Place, a street that throughout the summer served as the setting for other “negro invasions.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, Guth’s first instinct was to blame Murphy’s zeal for equality for the violence. Guth claimed, “I verily believe that this race prejudice was at the bottom of the whole trouble. Murphy seemed possessed of the idea that there must be no discrimination between white and colored people; in fact, it had made him a crank on the subject.”⁷¹ If Murphy’s anger over segregation caused him to lash out like a “maniac,” the West Ordinances that reified these distinctions awakened this latent rage. This accusation, seemingly gave lie to segregationists’ oft-stated claim that the West Ordinances were the best means to maintain peace between the races.

⁶⁹ “Chas. G. Guth Shoots Negro Chauffeur,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 September 1914, 14.

⁷⁰ Guth’s residence is mentioned in “Chas. G. Guth Shoots Negro Chauffeur,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 19 September 1914, 14. This was a story that he stuck to a few days later when interviewed in the *Baltimore Sun*. “Threats for Mr. Guth,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 September 1913, 12.

⁷¹ Guth’s version of events was hardly credible. According to the only other witness to the killing, Guth’s cook Mary Moss, Murphy did not brandish a weapon. In fact, Moss contended that Guth fled to his home, retrieved a gun and returned to the garage to kill Murphy. Further supporting Moss’ claims, most people remembered Murphy as a peaceful man and the actions attributed to him by Guth seemed highly out of character. For Moss’ recollection of events see: “Dr. Algire’s Explanation,” *The Baltimore Afro-American* 23 October 1913, 1. For more information about Murphy see: J.W. MacDonald, “What the People Say,” *The Baltimore Afro-American* 23 October 1913, 6 and F.N. Cardoza, M.D. “Concerning the Guth Case,” *The Baltimore Afro-American* 1 November 1913, 4. In the *Baltimore Sun*, Guth also made accusations that echoed, in spirit, white fears of black ascendancy in the city. Guth claimed that he had received death threats after the killing. In one of the letters, he alleged that, “Murphy must have been a member of some secret organization,” that threatened to “arise and assert themselves.” See: “Threats for Mr. Guth,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 September 1913, 12.

On September 25, 1913 Mayor Preston hurriedly signed another version of the segregation ordinance in the vain hope that this would quell the passions of white Baltimoreans. Instead, it precipitated the greatest outbreak of violence yet.⁷² On the next day, a group of young men and boys marked their arrival at a house on Mosher Street with the now familiar bombardment of a house occupied by blacks. Despite the presence of a police officer, the gang managed to break every window in the front of the house. As the cops dealt with the disturbance on Mosher, the *Baltimore Sun* reported that a group of young African Americans seized the opportunity for revenge and began to pummel the houses of white residents. Whether this happened—the *Afro-American* did not report such an event—is open to speculation. It is entirely possible that it did occur but it is at least equally possible that the *Sun*, an ardent supporter of segregation, fabricated the episode. What is certain is that African Americans in the neighborhood gathered to insure that white youths did not resume their bombardment on Mosher Street. It is also apparent that as the night wore on the violence continued to spread over northwest Baltimore. At midnight another gang of youths and young men returned to the house on Stricker Street and smashed several more windows. By 12:45 blacks in the neighborhood had seen enough. According to the *Baltimore Sun* a large number of African Americans gathered and “out of their midst four pistol shots were fired.” Immediately, whites on the street fled in panic. This finally caught the attention of the Baltimore Police Department who dispatched twenty-five officers to quell the disturbances. In total the police arrested three men, two white and one black, and

⁷² According to supporters, a new measure would help ensure an end to the violence plaguing Baltimore. “To Demand Quick Action,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 20 September 1913, 16.

reported that four people were injured. *The Baltimore Sun* claimed that African Americans caused all of the injuries, with the exception of one.⁷³

On September 27th violence continued to spread across the city's northwest, leaving behind a trail of wounded. A black woman, Carrie Green, was shot in the knee, allegedly by a drunken African American who was amongst a group of blacks confronting hostile whites; another African American, George Stapleton, was stabbed by an unknown assailant who successfully alluded the police; then George Snyder, who was white, claimed that an unknown African American cut him with a beer bottle after the two had engaged in an argument over segregation. That same evening, *The Baltimore Sun* reported that white youths pummeled six houses occupied by African Americans. *The Sun* stated that "at least eight more or less organized gangs of whites" had formulated a strategy to divide the attentions of the police. Among their intended targets was Lillian List who, while holding her nine-month-old child, narrowly missed being struck in the head by a brick lobbed at her doorway.⁷⁴

If there was any doubt before that this was a concerted campaign to force African Americans out of northwest Baltimore none remained now. Following the outbreaks of violence "a committee representing those who live in the vicinity" began to offer to pay for blacks to leave the area. In the northeast section of the city, angry whites found another method of intimidation when they lobbed a brick through the windows of Arthur Tribull. Attached to the brick was a note that warned if he did not "get those negroes out of his house, 828 North Stricker street, we will not only destroy that house but every

⁷³ The accounts of these events were taken from: "Negro Homes Stoned; Four Persons Hurt," *The Baltimore Sun*, 26 September 1913, 14 and "5 Injured in a Near-Riot," *The Afro-American Ledger*, 27 September 1913.

⁷⁴ "One Shot; One Stabbed," *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 September 1913, 16.

house he owns; also do you and your family bodily harm.” Apparently this was a case of mistaken identity as Tribull claimed that he did not own any houses in Baltimore.⁷⁵

By the summer of 1913, segregationists had increasingly taken matters into their own hands to stop integration. Many viewed the failure of the ordinances as proof that blacks were ascending to a dominant position in the city and felt that they had no other recourse than violence. The failures of the law opened the floodgates, but waters in the city had been rising for some time. When the city government passed a new version of the West Ordinance in September 1913 it did little, if anything, to stem the oncoming deluge.

In fact, the law served to precipitate even more disorder by criminalizing black mobility and legitimizing the stigmatization of African Americans. This was the wave of violence that eventually crashed on George Howe’s doorstep. According to the extant evidence Howe did nothing to provoke the attacks on his house other than move into a “white neighborhood.” Howe was the victim in this case; as the *Afro-American* pointed out, it was only “after his windows had been broken and the brickbats showered against his house, [that] Howe pulled the trigger on a double barreled shotgun.”⁷⁶ Yet, according to the ordinance, Howe’s actions were criminal from the moment he purchased his home. Moreover, his arrival signaled neighborhood degradation and a decrease in property values.⁷⁷

The events of September 1913 also revealed a divergence in the strategies of middle-class black activists and those, like Howe, on the frontlines. For the middle class

⁷⁵ “One Shot; One Stabbed,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 September 1913, 16.

⁷⁶ “Gets Jail Sentence for Defending His Home,” *The Afro-American*, 4 October 1913, 1 and “4 Shot in Race War,” *The Washington Post*, 1 October 1913, 1.

⁷⁷ “Favors Segregation But Acquits Offender,” *The Afro-American*, 15 November 1913, 6.

and professional African-American community, the fight against segregation emphasized respectability and peaceful solutions. Hawkins early on advocated a legal solution to segregation, calling for the black community to use the courts as a means of redress.⁷⁸ Then in 1913, Oswald Garrison Villard—the grandson of William Lloyd Garrison—called for a “peaceful rebellion” at a mass rally in Baltimore protesting residential segregation and the violence of that summer. Villard remarked that, “The colored man or woman who would at this juncture resort to force or violence, would do the race an infinite amount of harm.”⁷⁹ *The Afro-American* also championed Villard’s plan. “Let us be careful to maintain peaceful lives and conduct,” an editorialist urged, “that can not be impeached.”⁸⁰

While passive resistance and respectability were easy in the abstract they proved much more difficult to maintain in the face of aggression. In fact, Howe’s decision to strike back at the white mob was not that unusual in Baltimore in the 1910s. In each of the confrontations in 1913, African Americans gathered on the streets and confronted whites individually or in groups. For African Americans on the frontlines, violence was not something that could always be avoided, especially when they were determined to resist the violence directed at them. Despite the risks to their physical well being, many African-American families dug their heels in and decided that they would not be intimidated. Even months after repeated incidents at his house, McMechen remained at

⁷⁸ In the wake of the 1910 disturbances outside his home, George W. McMechen challenged “the rest of the [white] block to show its superiority over those four colored families.” See: “Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation,” *The New York Times* 25 December 1910, SM2. Harry Cummings, a black city councilman who otherwise fought against the ordinances, went so far as to advocate that blacks respect the law. It is likely that he did so because of the outbreak of violence that blacks had faced. See: “Gives Advice to Negroes,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 September 1913, 16. On Hawkins see: W. Ashbie Hawkins, “Must Fight West Segregation Law,” *The Afro-American*, 24 December 1910, 4.

⁷⁹ Oswald Garrison Villard, “Segregation in Baltimore and Washington.” Published Speech, Baltimore: October 20, 1913.

⁸⁰ “A Peaceful Rebellion,” *The Afro-American Ledger*, 1 November 1913.

the same address and expressed no desire to leave. After John Blanchard's house was stoned, he told the *Baltimore Sun* that he liked the neighborhood and planned on staying as long as his white landlord would pay for repairs. Finally, William B. Hamer, who was the victim of repeated bombardments and threats, declared, "I expect to live here permanently" and "won't move out for anybody."⁸¹

Although those on the frontlines did not always acquit themselves in ways that middle-class black activists hoped, African-Americans were able to remain unified because of the capacious ways that they framed the issue of residential segregation. For many, this battle was understood as part of the wider fight for equality. This framing—especially by activists and the *Afro-American*—had its roots in the first black efforts at housing reform in the early 1900s, when Waring linked home environment to problems of vice, squalor, and disease. In the years that followed, African Americans continued to speak of the central importance of housing to full political and social rights. When the *Afro-American* interviewed a host of scholars, political officials, and religious leaders in 1913, they explicitly linked housing segregation to political and social repression. As one of the interviewees, Dr. C.V. Roman, the editor of the *Journal of the National Medical Association* asserted, "The fight against segregation is not only a fight for liberty but a fight for life."⁸² Then at a meeting in October 1913, Walter T. McGuin, a leading black activist in Baltimore, remarked that, "Physical slavery has been abolished, but its

⁸¹ "Baltimore Tries Drastic Plan of Race Segregation," SM2. On Blanchard see: "Negro House Assailed," *The Baltimore Sun*, 15 March 1911, 10. In one instance, a black family moved out after repeated incidents of violence. The family at 828 Stricker Street moved, but only after whites in the neighborhood paid their moving expenses, a month's worth of rent, and a fifty bonus. See: "Negroes Move Away," *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 September 1913, 3. On Hamer see: "Negro Homes Stoned," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9, September 1910, 14.

⁸² "Economic Results of Baltimore's Segregation," *The Afro-American*, 11 October 1913, 1.

subtler forms are still here. Disfranchisement, 'jim crowism' and segregation are but the subtler forms of race slavery."⁸³

The insistence that housing segregation was an issue of equal rights was most clearly articulated in a series of illustrations published by the *Afro American* at the height of the violence occurring along Baltimore's racial frontier. The first of these cartoons appeared shortly after the 1913 race riot and just a few days before the melee at Howe's residence. That week, *The Afro-American* published a drawing entitled, "Civilization as it is Understood in America." (See *Figure Two*) It depicted a crowd of angry whites pelting the "home of a colored citizen" with rocks as police officers casually ignored the events. Although whites often blamed the riots on the machinations of disreputable youths, the paper markedly depicted the instigators as middle aged, respectably dressed white men. Then the paper went a step further in its condemnation. Around the side of the home, a white man is seen shooting an African-American man at point blank range. On the other side of the building, the drawing illustrates another group of white males in the process of lynching a black man, hanging him from a nearby tree. This illustration was followed the next week by another with the caption, "They Will Want His Shirt Next; Five to One—Might Makes Right." (See *Figure Three*) The editorial cartoon portrayed a "colored citizen" seated as Councilman West and two unnamed men pull away a house representing property rights, a hat that depicted voting rights, and a streetcar that represented the right to travel. In the background, a man (or possibly a woman, it is not entirely clear) is about to club the "colored citizen." In the paper's next issue, a drawing was labeled, "Advertising Baltimore by the New Ad Club—City Council

⁸³ "Must Combat All Repressive Measures," *The Afro-American*, 4 October 1913, 1.



Policeman Watching to Keep Negroes Away While the Mob Gets in its Work
Figure 5.2: Illustration from *The Baltimore Afro-American*, September 27, 1913

THEY WILL WANT HIS SHIRT NEXT



FIVE TO ONE—MIGHT MAKES RIGHT.

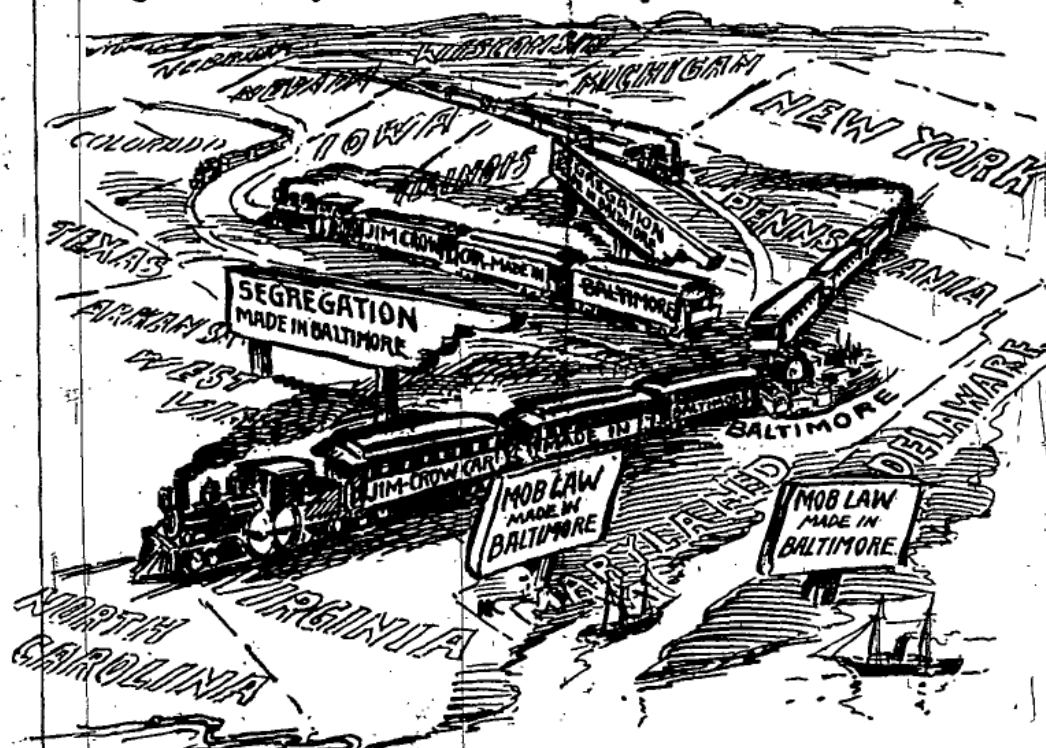
Figure 5.3: Illustration from *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 4, 1913

and Police Department; Mr. Business Man is this the best kind of Advertising for Baltimore?" (See *Figure Four*) In the illustration, a train—labeled "Jim Crowism Made in Baltimore"—is seen moving across a map of the United States. Near Baltimore, numerous signs read "Mob Law Made in Baltimore" and "Segregation Made in Baltimore." Then two weeks later, another cartoon, entitled, "He Will Eventually Break Loose and Reach the Top," depicted a white man (labeled "White Race") standing at the bottom of a set of stairs denoted as the "Pit of Ignorance—Mob Rule-Segregation." The white man is desperately holding onto the jacket of a black man (labeled "Colored Race") as he struggles to ascend to the "Temple of Higher Intelligence."⁸⁴ (See *Figure Five*)

The *Afro-American's* cartoons were powerful and blunt in their condemnations of segregation. The drawings stripped the West Ordinances of the niceties that segregationists had wrapped them in. By juxtaposing segregation with lynching, mob violence, the denial of equal rights, and oppression, the cartoons unequivocally shattered the notion that segregation was meant to protect African Americans or maintain racial harmony. In fact, the illustrations laid bare the violence, oppression, and racial prejudice that had always stood at the center of these efforts. At the same time, they undermined the discourse that depicted blacks as the cause of disorder. In portraying whites as the sole violent aggressors, and the police department and city council as aiding and abetting their actions, the cartoons produced a counter-narrative about the violence inherent in the actions of these supposedly respectable men. In each of the drawings, segregation was

⁸⁴ The cartoons were published beginning with the September 27, 1913 issue of the *Afro American*. In each instance the illustrations were given top billing on the paper's first page. See, in sequential order: "Civilization as it is Understood in America," *The Afro American*, 27 September 1913, 1; "They Will Want His Shirt Next," *The Afro American* 4 October 1913, 1; "Advertising Baltimore by the New Ad Club—City Council and Police Department," *The Afro American*, 11 October 1913, 1; "He Will Eventually Break Loose and Reach the Top," *The Afro American*, 25 October 1913, 1.

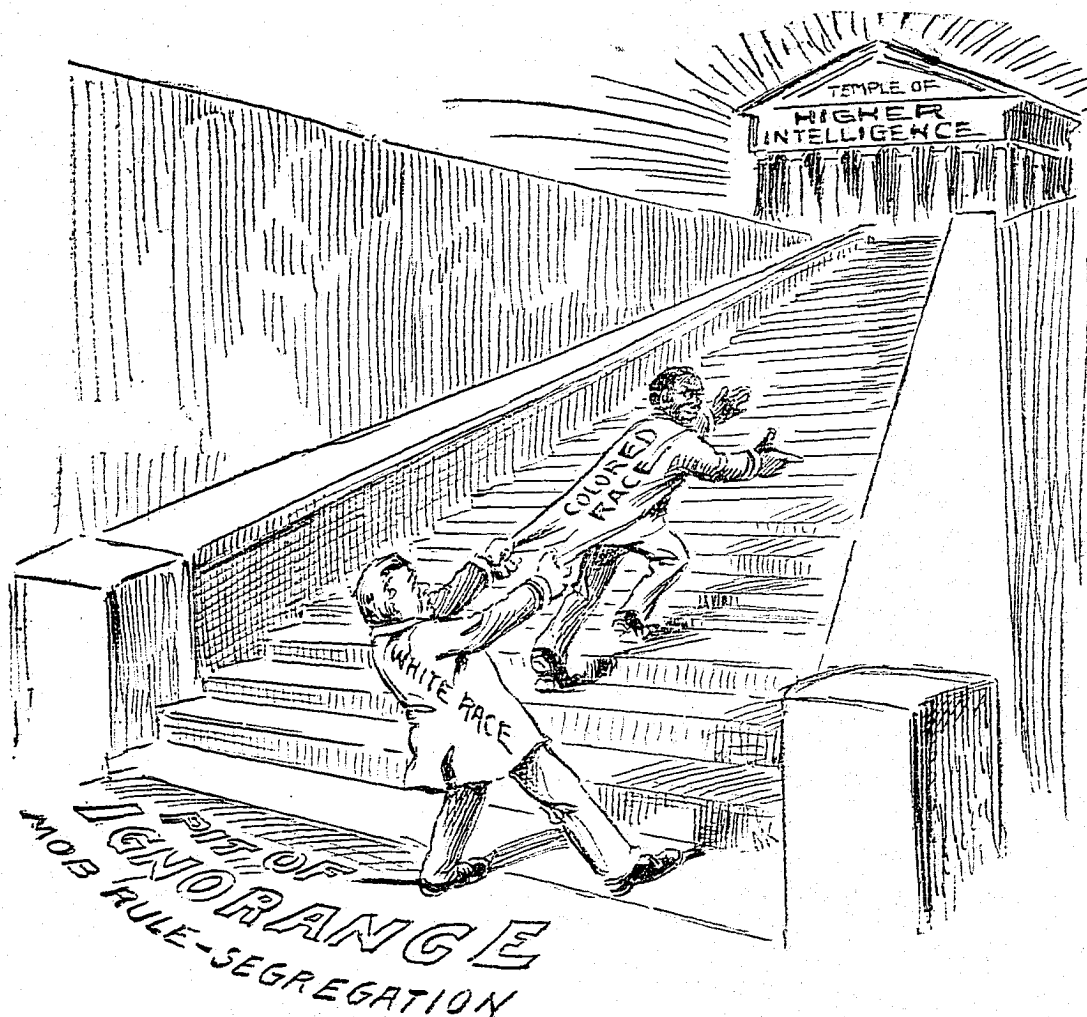
Advertising Baltimore by the New Ad Club—City Council and Police Department.



Mr. Business Man is this the best kind of Advertising for Baltimore?

Figure 5.4: Illustration from *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 11, 1913

HE WILL EVENTUALLY BREAK LOOSE AND REACH THE TOP



No man can keep another down in the ditch unless he stays down there with him—Booker Washington

Figure 5.5: Illustration from *The Baltimore Afro-American*, October 25, 1913

the font from which disorder spouted. The final illustration also delivered the message that African American progress was thwarted by the actions of whites, not racial inferiority.

Read in tandem, the illustrations underscore the ways that black activists framed the fight against housing segregation. African-American reformers sought to universalize the movement by demonstrating how it was intrinsically connected to other injustices. Therefore, even for blacks that could not afford to move to higher price “white” neighborhoods, the cause still warranted their support. It is difficult to precisely gauge the effectiveness of these messages; yet evidence suggests that the wider community was listening. For instance, the number of African Americans who gathered in defense of black homeowners was disproportionate to the amount of black residents in northwest Baltimore neighborhoods and to those personally affected by the ordinances. The importance of the measure to the wider black community was also reflected in the size of the crowd attending Villard’s rally against segregation in October 1913. The approximately 1500 people who gathered far exceeded those personally affected by the ordinance. All of this suggests that black Baltimoreans, even those not affected personally by the ordinances, nevertheless felt they had a stake in the fight against housing segregation.

In the years after 1913, Baltimore’s black community continued to disregard the West Ordinances while the city’s efforts to enforce segregation remained in legal limbo. The fourth version of the law, passed in the summer of 1913, enjoyed a dubious legal lifespan as it awaited challenges in the city’s courts. In the interim, the violence that plagued the city mercifully waned. It is unclear exactly why the bloodshed all but

vanished from the city's racial frontiers. One of the reasons may have been that African Americans were finding it more difficult to find housing. White real estate agents who were initially willing to violate the ordinances had changed their tune by the mid-1910s. At first, agents largely lined up against the segregation ordinances out of fear that laws would artificially circumscribe the city's housing market. However, by 1915 they had fallen silent on the matter.

In 1915, the *Afro-American* discovered the reason for real estate agents sudden reticence. The paper reported that African Americans were being charged "at least 20 per cent more rental than would be charged white families," a situation made possible because the law artificially inflated real estate values by confining blacks to designated areas.⁸⁵ By 1918, the Real Estate Board began to actively support segregation, going so far as to urge one landlord to not rent his property to African Americans.⁸⁶ Having found ways to profit from the ordinances, it is likely that agents, hoping to avoid the wrath of segregationists and thereby draw attention to their own profiteering, were more selective in renting or selling to African Americans. Unlike the years previous to 1915, blacks, it seemed had a more difficult time moving to "white" neighborhoods in the city.⁸⁷

Then in 1917, housing segregation as a legal reality ended. In the case of *Buchanan v. Warley*, the United States Supreme Court struck down a Kentucky segregation ordinance modeled on the Baltimore law. Less than a month later, in

⁸⁵ "Segregation a Boon to Real Estate Sharps," *The Afro-American*, 23 January 1915, 1. That African Americans were facing a more constrained housing market is also noted in a few interviews. See: Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style," 30-8.

⁸⁶ This incident is documented in a series of letters sent to Mayor Preston from the Real Estate Board. See: Real Estate Board to Mayor James H. Preston, 15 August 1918, Seg. 6, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore; Chas. Osborne to Mayor James H. Preston, 21 August 1918, Seg. 6, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore; and C. Phillip Pitt to Mayor James H. Preston, 22 August 1918, Seg. 6, James H. Preston Files, Baltimore City Archives, Baltimore.

⁸⁷ For a detailed account of what happened in the middle 1910s see Power's excellent summation: Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style," 306-10.

December 1917, District Court Judge John C. Rose ruled that the *Buchanan* decision applied in Baltimore. After seven long years, various court battles, outbreaks of violence, numerous protests and arrests, African Americans triumphed in Baltimore.⁸⁸ Given the local power structure and the city's persistence in enforcing residential segregation, this was a stunning victory.

Although the ordinances died a legal death, their impact outlasted their legal lifespan. By pursuing legalized segregation, the city government legitimized segregationists and racist neighborhood improvement associations. They also reinforced a host of racial stereotypes and untruths concerning integration. Most of these, including the trope of the black male rapist and the sexual dangers of integration, existed outside the housing segregation controversy; but the debate surrounding legalized segregation added legitimacy to these dubious claims. Moreover, the West Segregation Ordinances managed to effectively link African Americans with plummeting property values. Time after time, segregationists repeated this claim without proving its validity. Eventually, however, repetition made the contention true in the eyes of many in Baltimore. Politicians and newspapers (most notably the *Sun*) added a further patina of legitimacy. By consistently associating African Americans with a decrease in property values, the city, newspapers, and segregationists gave citizens added incentive to guard the color line vigilantly. Even if some white citizens felt little personal compunction about living next to blacks, the argument over property values conjured up fears that homeowners would lose their most valuable possession.

⁸⁸ For more on this case see: Power, "Apartheid Baltimore Style," 311-314. On the decision by John C. Rose, see: "Rules Out Segregation," *The Baltimore Sun*, 5 Dec 1919, 5.

Yet the legacies of the failed West Segregation Ordinances were not apparent at the end of the 1910s. While problems eventually developed, the activism and resistance of black Baltimoreans arguably did more to reshape the city's racial geography than any efforts by white segregationists. African Americans bravely stood in the face of discrimination and racial violence as they sought to better their own lives. Furthermore, Baltimore's black activist community left behind important legacies by scoring victories over segregationists who had sought to limit the franchise, circumscribe black mobility, and impose Jim Crow Laws on the city's transportation system.

Conclusion

On Monday afternoon, January 15, 1923, nearly two thousand black Baltimoreans mournfully gathered at Union Baptist Church. They were there to pay their final respects to Dr. Harvey Johnson. The ceremony, per Johnson's request, was simple. His close friend and fellow minister from Washington, D.C., Dr. Walter H. Brooks eulogized Johnson as a "preacher to fire the soul." "Without deceit of any kind," Brooks remarked, "he was ever ready to let his convictions be known. He was a fighter for the race."¹

Johnson's death, during his fiftieth year as pastor of Union Baptist, marked the end of an era in Baltimore. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that Johnson was a giant in his city. His Union Baptist Church became a "fountain-head" for other black churches throughout Baltimore, including Macedonia, Calvary, and Perkins Square among many others. Johnson also helped found Clayton-Williams University and other public schools for African Americans throughout the city.² In addition, Johnson's impact could be found in institutions that did not primarily serve blacks. Every time African-American men (and by the time of his death, African-American women) entered a voting booth, rented or bought a home in the city's northwest, or a black attorney stood in a courtroom they owed a debt of gratitude to Johnson's tenacity.³

Johnson's many initiatives, and the activist strategies that he helped develop, were ahead of their time. They also had an immediate impact on city life. The wave of racial

¹ "Dr. Johnson Buried," *The Afro-American*, 19 January 1923, 1.

² George F. Bragg, "One-Time Nearest Neighbors Pays High Tribute to Union Baptist Church Under Late Dr. Harvey Johnson," *The Afro-American*, 26 January 1923, 7; and "Rev. Harvey Johnson 68 Years Old," *The Afro-American*, 5 August 1911, 4. For a comprehensive list of the churches, and ministers, that sprang out of Union Baptist Church, see: A. Briscoe Koger, "Dr. Harvey Johnson-Pioneer Civic Leader" (Baltimore: Self-Published, 1957): 3.

³ Koger, "Dr. Harvey Johnson-Pioneer Civic Leader," 2- 3 and "Hundreds Pay Final Tribute to Late Pastor of Union Bapt." *The Afro-American*, 19 January 1923, 14.

repression that swept over the southern United States largely stopped at Baltimore's doorstep. Although black Baltimoreans and Marylanders did not wholly escape violence or racism, white attempts at disfranchisement and segregation floundered. This was not a coincidence. Black communities in Baltimore (and to an extent Maryland) were uniquely equipped to fight inequality and resist Jim Crow, largely thanks to Johnson and the many thousands who joined or supported him during the previous two decades. To be certain, all was not perfect. Yet, as Southern Democrats "redeemed" the old Confederacy, black Baltimoreans stood as a bulwark against Jim Crow.⁴

Johnson was the prime exemplar of African-American activism in Baltimore. Given his stature, it is telling that the *Baltimore Sun* did not deem his passing worthy of mention. Although the *Sun* had supported many of the causes Johnson championed in the 1880s, times had most certainly changed. So had the paper's editorial stance. By the 1910s, the *Baltimore Sun* backed segregationist causes, including the efforts to disfranchise blacks and legalize housing segregation.⁵ Nevertheless, the death of the city's foremost African-American activist should have garnered at least a brief obituary. Instead, Johnson was erased by omission.

For too long, the contributions of men and women like Harvey Johnson have been overlooked in accounts of the Progressive Era. In part, this is the unfortunate legacy of sources, such as the *Baltimore Sun*, that did not note or willfully omitted the ways that non-elites shaped their city. In other cases, non-elites failed to leave their own records.

⁴ For a more thorough account of the disfranchisement amendments see: Gordon H. Shufelt, "Jim Crow Among Strangers: The Growth of Baltimore's Little Italy and Maryland's Disfranchisement Campaigns," *The Journal of American Ethnic History*, 19(4) (Summer, 2000): 49-78 and James B. Crooks, *Politics and Progress: The Rise of Urban Progressivism in Baltimore 1895 to 1911* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1968): ch. 3.

⁵ For the *Baltimore Sun*'s support of disfranchisement see: Crooks, *Politics and Progress*, 68, 70-1.

The United Brotherhood of Liberty, the organization that Johnson founded, is a revealing case in point. Despite the group's prolificacy, and the longevity of some of its leading members, there are no extant collections documenting their activities. Instead, what remains are scattered sources—mainly newspaper accounts, pamphlets, and treatises—that provide important insights but not a complete narrative of the organization's efforts.

Nevertheless, historians have long since learned to overcome a paucity of sources. Scholars have cobbled together scraps and pieces of evidence to retell the story of eras, movements, and peoples that left behind little. It remains puzzling then, that the Progressive Era is still largely presented as the triumph of middle-class, mainly white reformers. When revisiting spaces in Baltimore, including workplaces, the streets, vice districts, and residential neighborhoods, it is apparent that non-elites, in large measure, forged the lasting legacies of the years between 1877 and 1920.

Baltimore's workers continued to be at the vanguard of the labor reform movement in the 1910s, inheriting a legacy bequeathed by groups like the Workingmen's Party and the Knights of Labor in the nineteenth century.⁶ Yet Baltimore's working classes had experienced a number of important changes in the interim. Once an important hub in the nation's rail network, the city had transformed into a vital center for the ready-made clothing industry.⁷ The demographics of Baltimore's working class also became dramatically more diverse. Immigrants from eastern and southern Europe—including Italians,

⁶ For a good overview of the history of work and unionization in Baltimore following the Civil War, see: George Bache Du Bois, "The Search for a Better Life: Baltimore's Workers, 1865-1916" (PhD Diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 1995).

⁷ At its height during World War I, there were more Baltimoreans employed in the garment industry than laborers working for Bethlehem Steel. Jo Ann E. Argersinger, "The City that Tries to Suit Everybody: Baltimore's Clothing Industry," in *The Baltimore Book: New Views of Local History* edited by Elizabeth Fee, et al (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991) ch. 5. For an examination of women in Baltimore between 1870 and 1900 see: Patricia Ann McDonald, "Baltimore Women, 1870-1900" (PhD Diss., University of Maryland, 1976).

Russian Jews, Bohemians, and Lithuanians—dominated the garment industry. The *Baltimore Sun* captured the diversity of the city’s garment workers during one strike in 1913. “There they were assembled, about 25 or 30 of them” the paper observed, “on the third floor of Bronstein’s Hall, East Baltimore Street, a veritable babel, and each apparently babbling in a different tongue.” The *Sun*’s reporter also noted the presence of several African-American laborers. But ethnic and racial diversity only told part of the tale. Already by the 1890s over half the employees of the garment industry were female. Whether working in the city’s factories or its numerous sweatshops, women had become an integral part of the city’s working class.⁸

Women were also lynchpins of the city’s active labor movement. Rather than forming political parties, many workers in the 1910s looked to radical and militant unions like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and especially the Amalgamated Clothing Workers (ACW), to bring about needed reforms. Although Progressive reformers had incorporated laborers’ demands to tackle child labor and address some of the most dangerous working conditions, workers continued to push reformers, government officials, and their employers to address the problems of industrial capitalism. Like their counterparts in 1877, workers used the streets as a public stage to articulate their grievances. In fact, labor strife rocked the garment industry—and occasionally the city—repeatedly in the 1910s.⁹ The protests and demonstrations of these workers demonstrated just how far Progressives were from achieving a more ordered city. Labor strife in the

⁸ The newspaper report on the strike can be found in: “The I.W.W. and Something of its Recent History,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 31 August 1913, B1. More in depth descriptions of the city’s changing working class can be found in: Argersinger, “The City that Tries to Suit Everybody: Baltimore’s Clothing Industry,” ch. 5.

⁹ For an excellent account of this period, including the outbreaks of labor strife, see: Jo Ann E. Argersinger, *Making the Amalgamated: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Baltimore Clothing Industry, 1899-1939* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

1910s also sharply reminded the country that three decades of progressive reform had not fully brought order to the nation's factories or its streets.

One of the most dramatic strikes of the 1910s occurred in February 1916 when clothing workers throughout the city either did not report to work or decided to walk out early. The laborers were supporting twenty women who were fired at the L. Greif and Brothers Clothing Factory, one of the largest in Baltimore, after advocating unionization. On February 1st a crowd estimated at 3,500—including nearly 2,000 “women and girls”—swarmed the Greif factory to display their displeasure. The *Sun* reported that the affair was non-violent, although “jeering, unfavorable comment and fist-shaking were freely indulged in.” By three o'clock the police became nervous. With approximately twenty men at his disposal Captain Harvey P. Morhiser decided it was time to disperse the crowd. “Don't stand any guff,” the captain directed his charges, “and if anyone kicks, run her in.” Workers met these orders with a cavalcade of rapprochements and condemnations. As the officers plucked strikers out from the crowd the masses surged forward. The potential for violence grew but luckily no further escalation was in the cards. Then, as the police hauled away their prisoners the crowd yelled out in support; a cacophony that the *Sun* reported soon “multiplied a hundredfold.” “That's all right. Betty: we'll get you out soon,” workers exclaimed, “Don't worry, Agnes; Don't worry. See you later, Josie.”¹⁰

By late afternoon the gathering outside of the Greif plant swelled to approximately 10,000. Overwhelmed, Captain Morhiser requested assistance to force the crowds away from the factory building. Still the strikers persisted. Sixty people squeezed into a

¹⁰ See: “Riot Call for Strike,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 February 1916, 14. A brief account of the strike can also be found in: Argersinger, “The City that Tries to Suit Everybody: Baltimore's Clothing Industry.”

house on east Madison Street—hanging out of windows and poring onto the vestibule—when one of the men began to chant, “We will never give up!” Morhiser ordered his men to apprehend the chanter. In the mayhem that ensued the police arrested more women before the crowd crammed back into the house and slammed the door shut. The women continued to harangue the officers from their perch on the second floor. Finally, the police moved in and dispatched the crowd for good. Eighty-seven strikers were arrested that afternoon. This would be the first of many dramatic confrontations during the walk-out. As the strike continued, workers alleged police brutality as the city clamped down on their demonstrations.¹¹

Eventually, the strike—which lasted throughout March—petered out. Unlike the 1877 Great Uprising, women were the main participants and the driving force in the strike that exhibited just how ethnically diverse the city and its working classes had become. Although the *Sun* did not report the names of those apprehended during the first walkout, subsequent arrests indicated a high concentration of southern and eastern European surnames.¹² The strike—like the many others that occurred throughout the early twentieth century—loudly registered the displeasure that laborers still had with working conditions. Laborers use of the streets as a public stage prompted public discussions of

¹¹ “Riot Call for Strike,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 February 1916, 14. The strikers enjoyed a short-lived victory. The management at Greif promised the Amalgamated Clothing Workers that they would rehire all employees recently fired and would not discharge workers for union activities. But by the end of February the agreement collapsed. Greif management once again dismissed vocal members of the ACW and quickly signed an agreement with the more conservative, craft-based United Garment Workers. In response, ACW workers again poured into the streets. Once again, the strikers—including many women—clashed violently with the police on numerous occasions. “Want Morhiser Fired,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 29 February 1916, 5; “Strikers Stone Police,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 March 1916, 16. Women were also accused of attacking replacement workers at the plant. See: “No Bail, Girls Go to Jail,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 February 1916, 12. See also: Argersinger, “The City that Tries to Suit Everybody: Baltimore’s Clothing Industry,” ch. 5.

¹² “No Bail, Girls Go to Jail,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 February 1916, 12 “Two Girl Strikers Held,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 February 1916, 4; and “Thirteen Strikers Arrested,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 4 April 1916, 1.

workplace conditions and police brutality—in many ways similar to the aftermath of the Great Uprising—that generated sympathy for the often-young men and women who toiled in the dangerous factories.¹³

Garment factory workers experienced only a modicum of tangible successes. However, they continued to build a groundswell of support for their efforts and won the support of many suffragists and elite Progressives. For instance, in 1913 police arrested Louise Carey and other prominent suffragists for disorderly conduct when they picketed in support of striking garment workers. Carey's father, attorney Francis K. Carey, defended his daughter in court. Rather than limit his defense to his daughter and her peers, Mr. Carey took the opportunity to also defend the striking workers during a twenty-five minute speech before the court.¹⁴ Another suffragist, Mina S. Hanaw, continually backed workers throughout the early 1910s by picketing, participating in settlement negotiations, and writing spirited editorials on behalf of workers.¹⁵ The actions of the Careys and Hanaw were commendable. They helped bring widespread publicity to the labor movement and dramatized the plight of those who often escaped the public eye. But they did not lead these reform efforts; rather they were supporting the initiative of striking workers. It was the laboring classes who not only dealt with the daily dangers of life in garment factories but also kept alive a spirit of resistance that would carry through the 1920s and 1930s.

¹³ Argersinger, "The City that Tries to Suit Everybody: Baltimore's Clothing Industry," 91.

¹⁴ "Miss Carey Arrested," *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 March 1913, 12.

¹⁵ See, for instance: "Strike Near End," *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 March 1913, 16; M.S. Hanaw, "Miss Hanaw Discusses the Threatened Clothing Strike and Appeals to the Public to Prevent It," *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 April 1913, 6; M.S. Hanaw, "Miss Hanaw Replies to L. Greif & Bro. And States the Position and Demands of the Strikers," *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 February 1913, 6.

Non-elite Baltimoreans also shaped the city's relationship to vice. African-American activists concerned with racial exploitation first called attention to problems caused by vice in predominantly black neighborhoods in the first decade of the twentieth century. However, they had little success in convincing the intransigent police department and city government to act. For years—dating back at least to the latter half of the nineteenth century—the city relied upon an often-inconsistent policy that essentially tolerated prostitution, unofficially taxing it through court fines.¹⁶ But in the early 1910s white reformers reenergized the anti-vice crusade. Eschewing the racial exploitation angle pushed by black activists, white anti-vice reformers instead attacked vice as a moral wrong and public health danger. With backing from religious and medical professionals, they sought to change the way that the city government dealt with commercialized sex by outlawing prostitution. Nevertheless, vice crusaders ran into a surprising amount of resistance and indifference from citizens, the city's Grand Jury, and even some in the police department. A significant number of Baltimoreans believed that vice—particularly prostitution—was best dealt with by segregating it into recognizable districts.

Despite the resistance they encountered, anti-vice crusaders managed to convince Baltimore's Grand Jury in 1916 to change course and begin prosecuting prostitution. But if the city found new motivation to "clean up" the city's morals this conviction proved short lived. In fact, Baltimore boasted of a thriving vice district for much of the twentieth century. Existing literally in the shadow of City Hall, and only a few scant blocks away from police headquarters, "The Block" first arose in the ashes of the 1904 fire that destroyed much of downtown Baltimore. Many Baltimoreans tolerated and supported "The

¹⁶ For a good overview of late nineteenth century female crime in Baltimore, see: McDonald, "Baltimore Women, 1870-1900," ch. 8.

Block,” enabling it to survive the efforts of Progressive reformers and the prohibition era. By the middle of the twentieth century, the district had become (in)famous throughout the United States and the world.¹⁷

At various points in the twentieth century city officials and reformers attempted to clean up “The Block.” They soon ran headlong into the same resistance that Progressive reformers faced in the 1910s. In early 1966, Baltimore’s mayor, Theodore Roosevelt McKeldin, told the *Baltimore Sun* that his personal inclination was to close the Block. However, he knew that the people he represented did not share this goal. “The people have never raised an outcry against it,” the mayor admitted, “The newspapers have never been against it. Some people are just in favor of sin.” Although the police made arrests over the years, enforcement was best described as inconsistent. Even after the construction of the Inner Harbor, a project spearheaded by McKeldin’s administration, razed a large portion of the Block the mayor seemed resigned to its resurrection in terms that would have resonated with vice segregationists in the early twentieth century. “Move it off Baltimore Street,” the mayor mused, “and it will spring up somewhere else.” A filmmaker documenting life in the red light district told a reporter that, “If the city phases out the Block completely, that’d be a big mistake. What goes on down here is a part of our culture and I’d much rather see it regulated in one zoned district than spread out all over the city.”¹⁸ The progressive goal of eliminating red light districts remained elusive well into the twentieth century.

¹⁷ For instance, in 1969, a Japanese diplomat told a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* that trips to Washington and New York often included visits to “The Block.” See: Thomas Pepper, “For the Visiting Japanese, The Block is a Must,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 6 April 1969, K5.

¹⁸ For some general histories of “The Block,” see: Maurice Cohen, “I Remember...family fun on Sunday afternoons on the Block,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 January 1971, SM2 and James D. Dilts, “The Block: By Day, By Night,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 7 May 1967, SM18. For the quotes from McKeldin, see: Scott Sullivan, “Mayor Declares He’s Against Sin,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 January 1966, C28. On the

Non-elites also reshaped Baltimore's racial geography. Ignoring the West Segregation Ordinances, and refusing to accede to violence and intimidation, African Americans continued to move to the city's northwest. By 1917, when the Supreme Court struck down municipal segregation laws in the case of *Buchanan v. Warley*, their legal status was a moot point in Baltimore. However, black victories over residential segregation—both in the courtrooms and on the streets—proved to be a double-edged sword. Their successes in combating segregation led whites to redouble their resistance to integrated neighborhoods. These battles set the stage for the discriminatory housing market—and the attendant problems of urban inequality and inner-city ghettotization—that plagued Baltimore throughout the rest of the twentieth century.¹⁹

In the aftermath of *Buchanan v. Warley*, white segregationists shifted strategies; or more precisely returned to the strategies they employed before the advent of the West Segregation Ordinances. However, this time they received tacit official sanction. On June 22, 1918, northwest Baltimore resident Alice J. Reilly wrote Mayor James H. Preston to vent her frustration over the continuing movement of African Americans into “white blocks.” In times past the mayor would have written back either extolling the virtues of the segregation law or promising enforcement. But he could do neither on this occasion.²⁰ Instead, Preston offered a different resolution to Reilly. Preston urged “the

filmmaker's view of “The Block,” see: Mike Giuliano, “The Block: The Movie,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 18 August 1986, 1B.

¹⁹ For an excellent and wide-ranging account of twentieth century housing segregation in Baltimore see: Antero Pietila, *Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2010). Also see: W. Edward Orser, *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story* (Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press, 1997). On black activism, particularly led by women in the realm of urban inequality see: Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

²⁰ “Letter from Alice J. Reilly to Mayor Preston,” Baltimore City Archives, James H. Preston Files, 22 June 1918. Prior to this response Preston had responded to other letter writers stating that, while in sympathy with them, he had no power to act. For a few examples of this see: “Letter from Mayor Pre-

white property-owners themselves” to formulate “restrictions on their property to protect it from negro occupancy.” Nor was this advice only given in private. At a biracial conference to chart the city’s plans in the wake of the failed ordinances, the mayor publically suggested this course of action as his favored solution. In many ways this was all Preston could do. As he well recognized, he no longer had “power to act” when African Americans purchased homes in white neighborhoods.²¹

Yet, Preston also made a calculated move. By encouraging white citizens to organize to “protect” their neighborhoods he invested new power in citizens and the many “neighborhood improvement associations” that sprang to life in early 1900s.²² The demise of the West Ordinances passed the burden of surveillance and enforcement from the police department to neighborhood residents. While the police were at times both overtly and tacitly guilty of corruption and brutality, they were also beholden to a stricter code of conduct. Their actions often attracted attention (sometimes a public outcry) and could bring unwanted attention to city officials. Now even that weak protection vanished, as neighborhood protective associations ascended to new positions of power. This would have important consequences in the coming years.

When Alice J. Reilly wrote her angry letter to Mayor Preston in 1918 she did so with the knowledge that the city’s racial frontiers were again shifting. She was not the only one. Others, like Bertha M. Gunther, also heard rumors that two African-American families would be moving to the block where she and her elderly mother had lived for

ston’s Office to Bertha M. Gunther,” Baltimore City Archives, Preston Files, 22 April 1918 and “Letter from Mayor Preston’s Office to Katherine Bald,” Baltimore City Archives, James H. Preston Files, 4 June 1918.

²¹ “Letter from Mayor Preston to Alice J. Reilly,” Baltimore City Archives, James H. Preston Files, 24 June 1918 and “Confer on Segregation,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 22 March 1918, 6.

²² For an excellent analysis of the power of neighborhood protective associations in Detroit in the post World War II years see: Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

“over seventeen years.”²³ Both Reilly and Gunther lived just east of McCulloh Street in a section of the city known today as Bolton Hill. Although African Americans had moved as far east as McCulloh Street they had not settled further. This began to change in 1918 and segregationists were determined to make a stand. When African-Americans moved to Bolton Street, white residents streaked the steps leading to the houses with tar and painted the pavement in front of the homes black.²⁴

Nor did segregationists stop at methods of direct intimidation. In 1919, approximately 300 residents signed covenants that barred property owners from renting or selling their homes to African Americans. They also planned to “oust such as already have secured a foothold in the community.” A year later, a group known as the “Neighborhood Corporation” won an injunction that forbade a black man from moving into a neighborhood dwelling.²⁵ In another case, a “white association” attempted to sell Reverend J.H. Green’s home while he was on vacation. Green, an African American, had been living in the house for approximately a month.²⁶ Segregationists, unhappy that African Americans had settled near the Fifth Regiment Armory building at the southern edge of today’s Bol-

²³ “Letter from Alice J. Reilly to Mayor Preston,” Baltimore City Archives, James H. Preston Files, 22 June 1918 and “Letter from Bertha M. Gunther to Mayor Preston,” Baltimore City Archives, James H. Preston Files, 20 April 1918.

²⁴ This report appears in a newspaper account found in the Preston Papers at the Baltimore City Archives that has no date and does not identify which paper it is from. However, it is reasonably certain that this event occurred in the beginning of May 1918 for several reasons. The clipping was sent along with an editorial appearing in the May 15, 1918 edition of the Baltimore Sun. Moreover, the New York Age, a weekly black newspaper, reported on these events using almost the same language. For the original report see: “Bolton Street Block Invaded by Negroes,” Unknown Newspaper, Unknown Date. Baltimore City Archives, Preston Files. For the editorial see: R. “Are the White People to be Driven out of Baltimore?” The Baltimore Sun, 15 May 1918, 6. For the New York Age article, see: “News Notes,” The New York Age 18 May 1918, 7.

²⁵ The contracts were based on recently codified restrictions used in the suburbs of Roland Park and Guilford See: “Bars Against Negroes,” The Baltimore Sun, 25 November 1919, 22 and “Home Owners Make Combine,” The Afro-American, 28 November 1919, A1. The Circuit Court in Baltimore upheld the contracts in 1924. See: “Segregation Case is Again in Court,” The Afro-American, 31 October 1931, 16 and “Segregation by Contract is Held Valid,” The Afro-American, 29 November 1924, A12.

²⁶ “Judge Stanton Scores Whites,” The Afro-American, 24 September 1920, 12.

ton Hill found another solution. As part of a “beautification” plan, a committee—which included William L. Marbury, one of the original crafters of the West Segregation Ordinance—proposed razing a number of “undesirable” houses approaching the armory. The group stated that the first benefit of the plan would be to “eliminate the negro residences which now line both sides of the street.”²⁷

Violence also returned to the streets of Baltimore. After Waltson Cooper moved his family to their new home in late 1917 the now familiar gang of “young men and boys” pelted Cooper’s house with an array of missiles. The *Baltimore Sun* interviewed Cooper’s neighbors and some admitted that they “knew of and approved of the methods being employed to oust the family.” Shortly thereafter the violence escalated. On March 29th white youths “stormed” Cooper’s house and showered it with bottles of white paint and stones. As soon as the attacks ceased, one of the house’s residents, William Powell, gave chase to the assailants, gun in hand. Catching up to his attackers, Powell shot one of the men, Carroll Frey, twice in the leg. In a separate incident four years later, another African-American family in east Baltimore slept in their kitchen to avoid being injured by a white mob. The family, recent émigrés from New York City, unwittingly moved into a “white” block where angry whites soon accosted them.²⁸

²⁷ The plan became a boondoggle; languishing before the city and state government before finally commencing in 1931. Nevertheless, its success—and the dogged determination of those living in Bolton Hill—set the stage for battles that lasted through much of the twentieth century. “Improvement of Approach to Armory Urged,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 September 1924, 24. On the battles over the proposition see, among many articles: “Plan for Armory Plaza in Muddle,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 March 1928; “Hearing on Armory Plaza Plan September 18,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 9 September 1928; “The Armory Plaza,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 February 1928, 8; “City Holds Up Plan for Armory Plaza,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 3 July 1929, 26. The plan finally commenced in 1931 but was still beset by problems, see: “More Funds Asked for Armory Plaza,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 June 1931.

²⁸ For the Myrtle Avenue violence see: “Negro Home Attacked,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 24 February 1918, 14 and “Shot in Race Fight,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 30 March 1918, 5. On the 1922 case see: “Terror-fied Family Sleeps Nights in its Own Kitchen,” *The Afro-American*, 20 January 1922, 6.

Real estate agents and landlords quickly grasped the import of a racially restricted housing market. “Whenever a white person complains of housing trouble in Baltimore,” began a 1924 article in the *Baltimore Sun*, “I feel tempted to congratulate him that he is lucky not to have been born black.” The article provided a blunt assessment of the financial costs of segregation to black Baltimoreans. “For the colored man renting is an expensive business,” explained the story, “His black skin marks him as a source of profit.” Published almost seven years after the end of *de jure* segregation in Baltimore’s residential neighborhoods, the paper took readers on a tour of the city’s racial frontier. It examined a “typical house” in a neighborhood that was “old” but “still white” where “conditions are brewing the spirit of change.” The exposé claimed that “speculators” convinced current owners to sell cheaply on the basis of the neighborhood becoming “black.” Once acquiring the property at a discount, the speculator offered the property at a reasonable price to black tenants. As African-Americans moved in whites fled and soon the speculators’ plans fully matured. Now a “black” block, the paper claimed that the new landlords increased rents fifty to sixty percent with increases of 75% “by no means extraordinary.” Landlords also frequently subdivided properties to maximize their profits; a problem compound when black tenants (probably in an effort to maintain their rent) soon took on boarders of their own at drastic markups.²⁹

The cruel irony of the African-American victory over the West Ordinances was apparent by the late 1910s. With the demise of the ordinances, it became more difficult for African Americans to target real estate companies, neighborhood improvement associations, and citizens who refused to sell them property. Because there were no laws out-

²⁹ “The Confessions of a Baltimore Landlord,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 July 1924, AT1.

lawing speculation, racism, or the racial ideologies of neighborhood associations, African Americans no longer had visible targets to attack. For example, when Baltimore enacted urban renewal plans during the early 1960s controversy arose over the “policy of open occupancy.” This policy—supported by the city’s urban renewal agency and a neighborhood improvement association—was designed to ensure that those with the means could rent or own any property regardless of race. However, the support was, according to critics, disingenuous; the only way to obtain federal funding was to accept open housing. Furthermore, the local variant of the clause rang hollow since it only prohibited written restrictions but not wider forms of discrimination. In any case, urban renewal officials only encouraged developers to open their properties to everyone regardless of race. But, if no developers agreed to this stipulation then the agency did not insist on this policy.³⁰ Just as critics—including the NAACP—feared, urban renewal often resulted in all white developments. This is exactly what happened during the Waverly renewal project in Northeast Baltimore. Even though black families could afford the apartments offered for rent, the unspoken rules of Baltimore housing meant that African Americans rented none of the 321 units.³¹

Throughout the 1910s, newspapers, segregationists, and government officials produced a discourse that linked African Americans with plummeting property values and neighborhood declension. Real estate agents helped make this a self-fulfilling prophecy by engaging in blockbusting and other scare tactics. Because of this, many

³⁰ *The Baltimore Sun* endorsed this plan by noting that, “Baltimore’s urban renewal agency is not in the business of changing racial attitudes.” “Renewal and Race,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 12 January 1961, 14. For more information about the debates surrounding the open occupancy clause, see: J. Anthony Lukas, “Mount Royal Council Urges Non-Bias Clause in Renewal,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 21 October 1960, 44; “Bid on Screen Reaffirmed,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 2 November 1960, 13; and J. Anthony Lukas, “Minor Difference? Race and Renewal,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 February 1961, 12.

³¹ J. Anthony Lukas, “Minor Difference? Race and Renewal,” *The Baltimore Sun*, 27 February 1961.

found it difficult to disabuse whites of the idea that African-American families lowered property values. This only served to ratchet up racial tensions on the streets. Even if whites held no racial animus toward their black neighbors they often feared losing their life's investment. By criminalizing the movement of African Americans into white neighborhoods, the West Segregation Ordinances validated this discourse. The laws helped instill a sense of panic among whites that played a pivotal role in racial violence and inequality in Baltimore's residential neighborhoods. This, above all else, served as the law's most notable impact. In 1918, Milton Dashiell, who authored the original segregation laws, found out firsthand how lasting this legacy had become. Although he did not explain his reasoning, Dashiell represented Waltson Cooper in the trial of the "young boys" who stoned Cooper's home. Standing before the court, Dashiell pointed his fingers at the juvenile defendants. "I drew the segregation," Dashiell exclaimed, "but now that the Supreme Court has ruled that segregation laws are invalid I bow as an American citizen. You boys who threw stones are not good American citizens."³² The problem was not that simple. As Dashiell surely knew, the Supreme Court could interpret law but had no power to enforce it, never mind change someone's mind. Segregationists opened a Pandora's Box when they convinced the public that the arrival of African Americans augured disorder, property value depreciation, and disease. It was difficult to put the lid back on.

Examining the history of the Progressive Era from below opens a number of questions about the ways we have understood the years between 1877 and 1920. For non-elites, this period was not the ascendancy of a more ordered existence. Middle-class led reforms—while at times well intentioned—were often ineffectual. Progressive efforts

³² "Father of Segregation Law Appears in Brand New Role," *The Afro-American*, 1 March 1918, 1.

aimed at controlling labor unrest, vice districts, and instituting Jim Crow segregation failed to order the city and in many cases led to the disorder it was intended to prevent. Non-elites did not remain passive in the face of these initiatives. Throughout the period, grassroots activists and everyday citizens—often facing long odds—pushed their own ideas or resisted reforms that they felt were not in their best interests. In so doing, they helped lay the foundation for some of the twentieth century's most important social movements. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the triumphs that labor, African Americans, and women experienced in the twentieth century were forged in the crucible of the Progressive Era. For non-elites, the period between 1877 and 1920 was not so much a search for order but a struggle to compel the nation to fulfill the promises upon which it was founded.

The view from below ultimately calls into question how we label and periodize the years between 1877 and 1920. Historians overwhelmingly refer to this time as the Progressive Era, a moniker that privileges elite actors at the expense of those working at the grassroots. Yet the modern iterations of movements for racial and gender equality, workplace protections, and vice reforms began to take shape at the turn of the century. At a minimum, non-elites participated in these struggles; in many cases they lead the reform efforts. The persistence of these battles into the present day illuminates the fact that the Progressive Era did not end completely. Narratives that mark the end of the Progressive Era at 1920 obscure how most people experienced life in the early twentieth century. To be sure, this narrative is neat and satisfying. The passage of the eighteenth (Prohibition) and nineteenth (women's suffrage) amendments augured a new era that promised moral order and an expanded democracy. Progressives, according to these

scholars, were able to exit the stage on a high note. However, for non-elites the struggles begun in the late nineteenth century persisted well into the twentieth century; the problems of segregation, economic exploitation, and inequality did not vanish. Baltimore and the nation are still dealing with the ramifications of this age. In order to better understand this period—and our own time—it is vitally important to examine grassroots activism and resistance alongside legal and political developments. Doing so helps elucidate the many social forces that clashed and came together to shape the legal and political realities of life in Baltimore, and in the United States more broadly, after Radical Reconstruction failed.

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