

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

My interest in Louisiana educational history began as I considered the condition of public schools in East Baton Rouge Parish. The great disdain directed at the schools from some segments of the public was exacerbated by the existence of a large number of mostly private parochial schools that served as an alternative for parents who wanted something different than what the public schools offered. Those observations led me to search for answers about the beginning of public education in East Baton Rouge parish and concomitantly to that of the entire state. My research revealed that although black Louisianans made significant contributions to education in Louisiana they were not always allowed to participate in the formulation of public education. My queries led me to the Reconstruction period for the beginnings of black education in Louisiana.

Black education cannot be studied without considering the social and political histories of Louisiana since education is intrinsic to Louisiana political history. The very definition of freedom by freedmen of the state was intrinsically tied to the right to a free public education. Black education efforts represented a small portion of the social upheaval that beset Louisiana. The end of the war brought to Louisiana changes in the political landscape that advanced the melodramatic antebellum era towards finality. Throughout Louisiana the survivors of the conflict determined the impact of the Civil War on the daily lives of the citizens. Numerous questions remained to be answered, such as the status of

the freedmen, voting participation, and racial interaction. The issues needed resolution, but no lucid solution quickly emerged. One of the most controversial yet reticently subtle issues of Louisiana's Reconstruction period was the subject of public education for blacks. James Anderson states that "[f]or a brief period during the late 1860's and 1870's as free laborers, citizens, and voters, the ex-slaves entered into a new social system of capitalism, Republican government, and wage labor."¹

There is no monolithic historical piece by any one author that deals specifically with black education in Louisiana. Nevertheless the works of numerous authors over many decades help the astute historian to garner a better understanding of the period. One of the earliest works that specifically dealt with black education in general was W.E.B. Dubois's, *Black Reconstruction in America: 1860-1880*. Dubois' book, revolutionary for the time it was written, provided numerous examples of black educational progress in Louisiana during Reconstruction. Public education, a contentious issue in Louisiana before the war remained a controversial enterprise for many Louisianians. For a significant portion of Louisiana citizens, public education held the potential to drastically alter the social fabric of Louisiana. The legislature, the U.S. Army, newspapers, and individuals across the state vehemently fought over the purpose, significance, and implementation of black education in Louisiana. The education of the freedmen generated great attention and formidable opposition from numerous groups in Louisiana after the war. These groups consisted of Democrats, Republicans, free blacks, plain folk, state legislators both black and white, military personnel, and Congressmen. National figures such as Abraham Lincoln and other

¹ John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana's Sugar Parishes 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 33. James D. Anderson *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2.

leaders involved themselves in shaping public policy and its implementation. Every level of government during the Reconstruction era became involved in some facet of the education of the freedmen. The issue became an important bargaining tool for freedmen and planters attempting to shape the emerging free labor market economy that surfaced before the war's conclusion. E. Merton Coulter's book *The South During Reconstruction* continues and represents the last remnant of the Dunning school and its pessimistic view of Reconstruction policies. The Dunning school of historians, students of the historian William Archibald Dunning, according to John Hope Franklin argued "Negroes and Scalawags...had set the South on a course of social degradation, misgovernment, and corruption." Eric Foner refers to the black quest for education as "the most striking illustration of the freedmen's quest for self improvement."² A small number of scholars attempted to assess the significance of black education in America during the Reconstruction period, but the number of full length studies of the subject remains largely limited, leaving a dearth of information on the subject. Existing studies that focus on Louisiana are mainly of article length, but each article does add new insight to the subject.

James D. Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South*, provides the foundation to understanding the development of black education in the South. His book, a comprehensive study of the education of blacks in the South studies the reasons for the struggle and examines the results achieved by blacks and whites throughout the south and the attempts to educate a significant portion of the race. The first significant article focused on black education was Ronald Butchart's "Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of

² Gerald N. Grob and George Athan Billias,, *Interpretations of American History:Patterns and Perspectives*,(New York: The Free Press, 1992), 146. Eric Foner, *Reconstruction America's Unfinished Revolution 1863-1877* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002), 96.

the World””: A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education.” Butchart provides an extensive bibliography of the study of black education by historians and an examination of the methodologies used to assess the subject. For instance, he claims his purpose is to “assess the historiography of African American education in terms of its appraisal of the black struggle for learning and its ability to contribute to action for the emancipation of black America.”³ The article traces some of the earliest assessments of black education from the late 19th century well into the late 20th century. The author delineates the evolution and proliferation of scholarship within the field of black education. He separates the types of histories and the periods in which they were written and by schools of historical thought. In this manner Butchart ably demonstrated the proliferation of scholarship in this area. The article provided a roadmap of critical sources that any scholar conducting research in this field should consult to get an overview of the subject matter.

Some full length studies concerning education in Louisiana during Reconstruction do not focus primarily on black education. Charles Vincent’s *Black Legislators in Louisiana during Reconstruction* explains the 1868 Louisiana legislature’s attempts to expand education in Louisiana. He focused on the attempts by the first elected black legislators to pass legislation urging the educating of all Louisiana children. C. Peter Ripley’s *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* focuses on the beginning of education in the state, especially in New Orleans. He produced a synthesis of the early private efforts by citizens of New Orleans to bring education to blacks that led to private

³ Ronald E. Butchart, “Outthinking and Outflanking the Owners of the World”: A Historiography of the African American Struggle for Education” *History of Education Quarterly* Vol.28, No.3 (Autumn, 1988): 334.

action by groups like the American Missionary Association and eventually the Union Army's involvement under the leadership of General Nathaniel Banks. William Messner's *Freedman and The Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865* provides an examination of the early military efforts to bring education to blacks for the expressed purpose of creating a "free labor society." John Blassingame's classic *Black New Orleans: 1860-1880* generally focuses on New Orleans but especially on the city's black education system. Blassingame used statistics to indicate the achievements of blacks in New Orleans during Reconstruction. He argued blacks being " [l]argely debarred from the schoolhouse as slaves, and perceiving that all of their efforts at political, economic, social, and racial progress were crippled by widespread illiteracy, New Orleans Negroes invested education with an almost magical quality." Devore and Logsdon *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans 1841-1991* provide a detailed military style history of the military's early efforts to bring education to blacks in New Orleans. This study focused strictly on New Orleans whereas other examinations provide details on educational progress in other parts of Louisiana. Howard Ashley White's *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, examined the role of the Freedmen's Bureau in the education of Louisiana's black population. White provided keen insight into the numerous obstacles that stood between the freedmen and the agency's initial attempts at bringing rudimentary education to the freedmen of Louisiana. Joe Gray Taylor's *Louisiana Reconstructed 1863-1877*, dedicated a small portion of his book to provide a general overview of education efforts throughout the state with some emphasis on the educational activities in the rural parishes of Louisiana. Taylor's study was the definitive study on Reconstruction in Louisiana.⁴

⁴ John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans 1860-1880*(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973) p.107

Scholars have produced a plethora of articles examining numerous topics related to black education. They examine rudimentary subjects such as educational activity, types of pedagogical methodologies, and the sociopolitical repercussions of educating blacks during the antebellum and postbellum eras. Many of the articles made the South its area of focus. Although examined by a number of books, the topic of education seems to be a subject consistently worthy of at least a chapter's length of discussion. All of these studies began by examining the beginning of education in New Orleans.

One must examine the antebellum period of Louisiana to understand the early quest for black education and black involvement during the early settlement of Louisiana. One book that outlines early African protest is Gwendolyn Midlo Hall's, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteen Century*. She also examined the formation of black creole culture and the source of the culture's protest tradition. Caryn Cosse Bell's *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana 1718-1868*, provided insight into how Creole protest became more organized and assertive especially in the area of black education. Nathalie Dessens' book *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Immigration and Influences*, examines the immigration of Creoles from Saint Domingue by revealing how immigrants helped influence and transform the Creole culture of Louisiana. She likewise highlights how these people specifically advanced black education in Louisiana. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon provide a detailed study of race relations and the transformation of Creole culture in Louisiana in their book *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*. Hirsch and Logsdon explored the political maneuvering and the development of the Creole community

from the early American period of governance through the early 20th century. Their book highlighted some of the accomplishments of the Creoles in their fight for education.

There is no question that the U.S. military played a significant role in the formation of black education. One of the best examinations of this subject is found in James G. Hollandsworth Jr.'s, *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During The Civil War*. Hollandsworth explored the Louisiana Native Guard's role in the war and did an excellent job of explaining how education became a large part of the Native Guard's military program for the members of the unit. He also examined the life of arguably one of the most central figures in black education in Louisiana in his book *Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks*. In this book Hollandsworth intensely examined the life of General Banks and his command of the Gulf Department during his tenure in Louisiana. Hollandsworth provided critical insight into the life of General Banks which helps readers to understand the challenges Banks faced as he tried to govern the state in the early post Civil War period. Hollandsworth illustrates quite successfully one of Butler's main successes, his institution of a new public school system.

Since there are no monolithic examinations of Louisiana's educational evolution, the historian's task is to piece together as much of the past as possible. Joe M. Richardson's *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890*, provided insight into the American Missionary Association's activities across the South but he especially provided vivid examples of how the organization worked with the military in Louisiana. Heather A. Williams' *African American Education in Slavery and Freedom: Self Taught* is one of the latest studies that explored Black education from the perspective of African Americans. She provided numerous examples of the

determination of African Americans to gain access to education. Such studies contribute to our efforts to piece together an understanding of the emergence of education for Black Louisianans, but they are not definitive. This thesis is designed to advance the process by revealing the various phases of educational development, the principle challenges in each phase, and the players involved. It is hoped that by discussing Black education as it progressed, a more comprehensive understanding of the priorities of African Americans in Louisiana and the challenges that confronted them will emerge.

CHAPTER II

GRASSROOTS EDUCATION: A COLLABORATION OF INTERESTS

According to historians William Cooper and Thomas Terrill, “education was never a central concern in the colonial South.” Terrill and Cooper further state that “[d]uring the antebellum era no statewide public school system existed.” This assumption, long accepted by historians concerning matters of education in the South is problematic since Louisiana, presents a different picture. Even as many white citizens of the South remained uneducated, many black citizens created their own opportunities for schooling. As Louisiana’s free black population sought educational access, they actually laid the foundation for black education for many freedmen decades later. The process of educating blacks in Louisiana spanned over a century and involved different groups seeking different goals and their collective labor resulted in the creation of a public school system.⁵

Prior to and during the Civil War, black education flourished in spite of stiff opposition and a lack of resources needed to make the undertaking a reality. One place where education flourished for both blacks and whites was New Orleans, which naturally became the focal point of black educational activities in Louisiana for over a century. One historian argues that “[s]ince 1822, private schools had flourished in New Orleans for freeborn Negroes,” and black efforts towards education only continued to increase and

⁵ Cooper and Terrill, *The American South: A History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) ,259.

become more concerted and focused. By “ the 1830s ... free blacks attended private schools such as St. Baete, Pension des Demoiselles des Coleur, and the Institution des Orphelens. Opelousas blacks boasted of the Grimble Bell School which had 125 pupils.” The Reverend James Flint of Massachusetts testified to a cultural atmosphere in New Orleans that afforded him the privilege of “learning [blacks] to read.” Noted historian Carter G. Woodson claimed that many of the free blacks of New Orleans so intensely desired an education that some “educated themselves.” A number of blacks of this social class went as far as starting schools that were “accessible to both races.”⁶

In the minds of white Louisianans the free black community posed a grave threat for potential unrest. Nathan Wiley in Harper’s New Monthly Magazine stated “In spite of all the laws and edicts of the State and municipal authority, the free people would sometimes secretly teach the slaves and these would teach one another when they had an opportunity.” Black education was taken very seriously. By 1830 the Louisiana legislature acted to prevent potential unrest by passing a law that provided that “persons who should teach ... any slave to write, should be imprisoned not less than one month nor more than twelve.” The law signaled the disapproval of opportunities for free blacks and black Creoles that continued up to the Civil War. The passage of the 1830 law nonetheless failed to stop either the free black community or the slaves who came to New Orleans as runaways from seeking both freedom and education.⁷

⁶ Howard Ashley White, *The Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 166. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 126. Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of The Negro Prior to 1861* (Salem : Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 1968),119-120, 128-129.

⁷ Nathan Wiley, “Education of the Colored Population of Louisiana,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 33, (July 1866): 249. Heather Williams, *Self Taught: African American Education in Slavery and*

With the passage of laws such as the Louisiana legislature's anti-literacy law of 1830, the free people of color continued to struggle to secure access to educational activities, and their fight continued to contract and expand until it eventually included the enslaved people of Louisiana. Education for free blacks and Creoles in New Orleans allowed them to function as did no other blacks in oppressive antebellum America. Having an education permitted free blacks and black Creoles to follow legislative maneuvers against their interests, protect their businesses and personal property, and labor in occupations closed to most people of their race in antebellum America.⁸

The education of blacks in Louisiana required significant involvement from the Creoles and free blacks of New Orleans and they participated vigorously. The free black population consisted of people primarily of African descent, generally the descendants of slaves, or former slaves themselves, freed through purchase, manumission, or some other act of liberation. The Creole people and their origin is no less complicated, and they too possessed a rich history vital to the settlement of Louisiana. Although the initial goals of the free blacks and Creoles of New Orleans followed their self interest, their efforts providing access to education for their children ultimately opened the door for freedmen both during and after the Civil War. Free blacks and Creoles constantly engaged in small

Freedom (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 14. Carter G. Woodson, *The Education of The Negro Prior to 1861* (Salem : Ayer Company, Publishers, Inc., 1968), 161.

⁸ Nathan Wiley, "Education of the Colored Population of Louisiana," 246-250.

skirmishes over the vision, authority, and the implementation of black educational activities in Louisiana.⁹

The term Creole possessed different meanings during the various eras of Louisiana's history. According to Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, the term "derives from the Portuguese word *crioulo*, meaning a slave of African descent born in the New World. Thereafter it was extended to include Europeans born in the New World... [and] in eighteenth-century Louisiana the term Creole was used to distinguish American-born from African-born slaves; all first-generation slaves born in America and their descendants were designated Creole. The Latin American elite born in the Americas were called the Creole elite and they were accused of being incapable of self rule [but] ... the Creole elite of Latin America redefined the word Creole to mean people of exclusively European descent born in the Americas."¹⁰

The seeking of education by free blacks and Creoles as a concept of self interest ultimately spread to other black groups. They did not immediately impact the enslaved population, but essentially came to view the enslaved people as potential allies in advancing their ideas of education in Louisiana especially after the Civil War ended. The unique settlement patterns of Louisiana's African, free black, and peoples of mixed ancestry helped significantly in shaping the state's society in ways producing a lasting cultural impact on Louisiana's social patterns and race relations. The cultural settlement of

⁹ Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 87-88. Sybil Kein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana's Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 29-30.

¹⁰ Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 60.

the state often blurred the lines of racial distinction in Louisiana, especially in New Orleans, when compared to other areas. These settlement patterns helped influence the availability of education to other blacks in Louisiana.¹¹

A signal event for the free black population in advancing their educational interest was the arrival of black and white refugees from the Caribbean islands, especially St. Domingue. This infusion of peoples significantly changed the free black community and race relations between blacks and whites in Louisiana and changed as well the relationships between peoples of mixed African, Caribbean, and Creole descent. One of the first results of the refugees' arrival was an increase in the numbers of free blacks, a number which continued to increase dramatically "after the revolution in Saint Domingue a great number of free people of color came to New Orleans to reside." The presence of larger numbers of free blacks created problems for Louisiana officials. They feared the importation of a slave insurrection to Louisiana from Saint Domingue since the slave revolt on the island resulted in the destruction of white authority. But ironically many of the free blacks from St. Domingue were property owners and slaveholders themselves. A number of those who had come from St. Domingue "were men of wealth and culture ... who had received their education in France." Holding viewpoints very similar to white property holders of Louisiana, they made immediate distinctions between themselves and the slaves of Louisiana. This distinction demonstrated that they neither allied themselves with the slaves nor sympathized with their plight. These free blacks became a guiding force in the push for education because they continued the tradition of educating their children thus increasing

¹¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, (New York: The Free Press, 1962),154.

the number of blacks seeking access to an education in New Orleans. Surprisingly, a significant number of whites especially of “French and Spanish” origin are said to have been “desirous of having their [mixed race children] educated” in Louisiana as well.¹²

With the arrival of the refugees from St. Domingue according to historian Natalie Dessens the social, political, and cultural characteristics of New Orleans changed forever. Blacks coming from St. Domingue to New Orleans brought with their culture certain expectations, such as having their children educated, a normal function on Saint Domingue. Dessens argued that the number of schools in New Orleans increased because of the numbers of refugees arriving from St. Domingue. She also asserted that, particularly in New Orleans, “the cultural life was less developed than it had been in Saint Domingue. Schooling was limited.” She claimed that education in general was more common on St. Domingue for blacks and whites. The refugees “vitalized several specific fields ... launching newspapers and opening a number of schools, theaters, and opera houses. They became ...teachers, journalists, lawyers, and shopkeepers.” Dessens states that the “refugees... strongly stimulated education which had been until then primitive in Louisiana.” She asserted that “refugee[s] even opened schools for free people of color, testifying to a different perception of race differences and race relations, when teachers were white and a stronger enterprising spirit when free people of color themselves opened the school.”¹³

¹²Nathan Wiley, “Education of the Colored Population of Louisiana,” 246.

¹³ Nathalie Dessens, *From St. Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences*, 39-40, 68, 87-88.

As the free black community established itself, it became an undeniable force with which to be reckoned. The class of black property and business owners arising in New Orleans after the influx of refugees from St. Domingue expanded opportunities for interracial relationships, primarily between white men and black women. As more interracial liaisons between white men and women of mixed black and African heritage produced offspring, a significant number of the resulting children gained almost instant access to education. According to John Martin, “[t]he cause of white male /black female relationships in the colony was the gender imbalance, which cut across racial and class lines.” This gender imbalance provided the access to education for more blacks as these unions produced offspring. This practice was called placage. Placage was known as “the tradition of unions (not legally sanctioned but perfectly official) between free women of color and white men.”¹⁴

The white refugees from St. Domingue involved in those unions inadvertently supported relationships that ultimately increased the opportunities for blacks to become educated, especially in New Orleans. According to historian Caryn Cosse Bell, “in placage a representant (the young woman’s mother or a close relative) would investigate the financial stability and social standing of the white suitor. If the man was found acceptable, the representative would then negotiate a contract with the parents of the young woman of color... In the contract, the prospective ‘husband’ would agree to provide financial support for the young woman and any offspring of the ‘marriage.’” These unions produced a class of mixed race natives in Louisiana many of which came to inherit property, education, and

¹⁴ Sybil Kein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 62-63. Nathalie Dessens, *From Saint Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* 104

wealth from their fathers. One historian notes that “[r]eal estate was owned by free Negro women to a far greater extent than among their white sisters ... more important under the placage system free Negro women were rewarded with land and homes.”¹⁵

The immediate goal of placage was certainly not to educate more blacks, but access to education became an important byproduct of many of these unions. The access to an education provided a number of these children with an escape not only from Louisiana, but from the United States as well. Many of them studied in New Orleans “in institutions like Saint-Barbe Academy or the Couvent School...After graduation many colored youngsters from among this group were sent by their wealthy parents to pursue their education in France.” Not all Creoles readily accepted placage, but enough Creoles and free blacks participated in these arrangements to provide an opportunity for the ascendancy of future generations of their families. The educational benefits they received helped to advance them as a group. “Some white fathers ... exerted their influence to place their racially mixed children in private schools of the city or more often, to send them outside the state to Northern or European institutions.” A few of “the most notable were Edmond De’de’ who conducted a classic orchestra... Louis Roundanez, who graduated with honors in medicine from the University of Paris; and Victor Se’jour, who became a playwright and personal aide to Napoleon III.” But beginning around the 1830s a general repression of rights started that continued to increase and caused some “sensitive free Negroes ...

¹⁵ Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition In Louisiana 1718-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 112. Robert C. Reinders, “The Free Negro in The New Orleans Economy, 1850-1860”, *The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Society*, 6 No.3, (1965) :281

migrat[ing]- chiefly to France...[and] A decade later the emigration movement became more common.”¹⁶

Although laws existed in Louisiana to prevent black education, those same laws inadvertently helped create more opportunities for free blacks and Creoles in New Orleans, especially as they began to amass sizable amounts of property and wealth. While the laws specifically prevented slaves from reading or being taught, the law was less specific for free blacks who took advantage of the loopholes in the laws with their wealth. An estimate of tax rolls from as early as 1836 “records free Negroes ... owned property valued at \$2,462,470.” Many New Orleans free blacks owned businesses and worked as free agents to sell their labor. One instance where a free person of color accumulated wealth and used those resources in a direct attempt to advance black education can be found in “[a] will drawn up in 1832 by a New Orleans widow, Justine Firmin Couvent, [which] provided for the creation of a free school for destitute orphans of color” in New Orleans. Creole writer Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes states that “Madame Couvent herself had had no formal education.” Couvent wanted to provide for the education of people who were clearly less fortunate than herself. But she also understood the benefits of undertaking such an endeavor for the future of blacks in New Orleans. Madame Couvent’s request was directed at children “[who] were the illegitimate offspring of interracial liaisons.” Couvent wanted this new school “supervised by the Catholic clergy” and “named a family friend, free man

¹⁶ Sybil Kein, *Creole: The History and Legacy of Louisiana’s Free People of Color*, 179. Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, p.41,43. Robert C. Reinders, “The Free Negro in The New Orleans Economy, 1850-1860” 284.

of color Henry Fletcher, as executor of the will.” Madame Couvent’s wishes would not come true for “nearly twelve years.”¹⁷

As time passed between the writing of Madame Couvent’s will and its actual execution, state funded public education in Louisiana began making advances. Before the state instituted its public education system “the city of New Orleans had been operating a successful and popular system of free public schools for six years.” According to Sarah Lipscomb “[i]n 1841 New Orleans established a system of free public schools that continued to grow and prosper throughout the antebellum period.” She also added that “[i]n addition to parochial schools, private tutors provided education throughout the territory for those who could afford the expense. Wealthy families often employed an itinerant teacher ... to teach their children in their homes.” But Creoles and free blacks who paid taxes for public schools in New Orleans were upset that their offspring were “barred ...from attending” public schools. This became a catalyst encouraging free blacks to not only secure the means to education, but to also start their own schools.¹⁸

Free blacks and Creoles had an ally in the Catholic Church, an organization that played an important part in shaping Louisiana’s school system. “Catholics established schools not only in the urban center of New Orleans but throughout the [then Louisiana] territory.” The Catholic influence helped keep the Creole attempts at providing their own system of education under the repressive state laws alive throughout the antebellum period.

¹⁷ Robert C. Reinders, “The Free Negro in The New Orleans Economy, 1850-1860” 280. Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition*, 123. Rodolphe Desdunes, *Our People Our History Fifty Creole Potraits*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 104. Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition*, 123

¹⁸ Sarah E. Lipscomb, “A Crisis of Opportunity: The Example of New Orleans and Public Education in Antebellum Louisiana” (Master’s Thesis, Louisiana State University, 2005), 2, 8. Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition*, 124-125.

In spite of the fears the Couvent School caused for white leaders, it was somewhat protected by its “Catholic Church” affiliation and even received some support through the state legislature, nonetheless, most of the Couvent School’s support came from the “wealthy Creoles of color.” Madame Couvent was probably well aware that such a revolutionary undertaking as a school for blacks needed considerable support from a well respected and well established institution such as the Catholic Church in Louisiana. The Catholic Church gave free blacks some leeway by allowing them to attend their schools partly because of the commitment of the church to religious obligation. Creole women actively involved themselves in the educational advancement of members of their class as well as other blacks in the city. Sister Henrietta Dilille, a Creole woman of color, was the founder of the order of nuns called “Sisters of the Holy Family.” Delille “provided religious instruction... for free blacks and slaves.”¹⁹ After taking her vows as a nun, Delille’s “first priority was ‘the teaching of the poor slave children.’” According to one source, the nuns of the Catholic church in New Orleans “were usually foreign-born, [and] reached out to the free black community.”²⁰ Even though much of the nuns’ instruction to the poorer classes of blacks and the indigent of the city revolved around religious instruction, it was nonetheless educational instruction. Education was important to the nuns because they “took charge of a small parochial school on the Bayou in Faubourg Treme.”²¹ But even this support was

¹⁹ Sarah E. Lipscomb, “A Crisis of Opportunity: The Example of New Orleans and Public Education in Antebellum Louisiana”, 2, 8. Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition In Louisiana, 1718-1868*, 127-129.

²⁰ Ibid. p.131, Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, 41.

²¹ Ibid.41.

somewhat limited and conditional as the Catholic Church did not offer wholesale comprehensive support for desegregation.²²

In the 1840s the Creoles became more assertive in their efforts to maintain access to an education for their community. They argued eloquently against the oppression they faced in New Orleans. In the revolutionary Creole literary work of poems and short stories “*Les Cenelles* ... Armand Lanusse emphasized the value of education” arguing “[a] need for learning is being felt everywhere. We are beginning to understand that no matter what situation fate has placed us in, a good education is a shield against the spiteful and calumnious arrows shot at us.” Not long after the literary works presented in *Les Cenelles* were being disseminated, an advancement in the cause of black education came with the creation of the Couvent School.²³

By “1847 the state legislature passed a law enabling” Madame Firmin’s will to be “carr[ied] out.” Creoles had for decades opened schools in Louisiana by this point in Louisiana history. They established a “network of religious and secular institutions” for their community including establishing Madame Couvent’s school. Madame Couvent’s dream became possible because of the work of a Catholic priest named Father Maenhaut. Through “Father Maenhaut[‘s] ... br[inging] the widow’s legacy to the attention of Francois Lacroix ... [he in turn] informed other Creole leaders of the widow’s bequest ... enabling the carr[ying] out [of] the will’s provisions.” The school became known as “the Socie’té’

²² Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition In Louisiana, 1718-1868*, 127-131.

²³ Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition In Louisiana 1718-1868*, 115. Regina Latortue and Gleason R.W. Adams *Les Cenelles : a collection of poems by Creole writers of the early nineteenth century* xxxvii.

Catholique pour l'Instruction des Orphelins dans l'Indigence (Catholic Society for the Instruction of Indigent Orphans).” The determination of some Creoles to open this school exhibited their tenacity about the issue of education, but just as striking was their resolve to operate within the state law and use it to their advantage to bring Couvent’s dream into fruition. After gaining “control of the Couvent estate” Armand Lanusse, one of the contributors to Les Cenelles “directed business affairs, devised the school’s curriculum and organized the faculty.” The school attracted “[b]oys and girls from all sections of the city.” The instructors “taught classes in both French and English.” Even though formed under the auspices “of the Catholic Church,” the school allowed “children of all religious denominations.” Because the school operated as a bilingual, coeducational, multid denominational institution, it also provided a small organic example of Creole egalitarianism in 19th century Louisiana. That females attended the school was not unexpected as private schools or personal tutors educated many young girls during this period. The fact that non-Catholic children attended the school is striking when one considers the rigidity, not only of the Catholic Church in Louisiana but also the groups that benefitted from the church’s programs and resources. The small Creole community of New Orleans, carefully, maintained relationships with any potential allies in their struggle for education by allowing children of other denominations to attend the Couvent School.²⁴

The school moved forward after becoming operational but not without opposition to its existence. Those who feared potential slave insurrections and other destabilizing acts such as the writing of fake passes for slaves and teaching slaves to read and write, sought

²⁴ Caryn Cosse Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro Creole Protest Tradition In Louisiana 1718-1868*, 124- 125.

to severely limit if not shutdown the Couvent School. To address these concerns the state made an amendment to an earlier law that allowed the school to exist in the first place. The state legislature used “an 1850 amendment ... that [stated] ‘in no case shall the provisions of this act be construed to apply to free persons of color in this State incorporated for religious purposes or secret associations, and any corporations that may have been organized by such persons under this act for religious purposes or secret associations are hereby annulled and revoked.’”²⁵

New Orleans in the 1850’s, like the rest of the South, became more draconian towards black liberties and “the repressive mood grew worse” the closer the region moved towards Civil War. But the decade also saw some advances for blacks, especially in business. According to two historians “[m]ost free black children went to private and parochial schools.” Historian Robert Reinders notes that “[m]ost of the free 10,000 Negroes in New Orleans in the 1850’s were unskilled laborers... [t]hree fifths of the city’s free Negroes were women and were more likely to be unskilled than men.” He also argues that “[f]ree Negroes found the world of business less restrictive than the professions.” Because many of the free blacks of New Orleans owned businesses and worked as free agents to sell their labor, and since they could not enter the New Orleans public schools they started and maintained their own school. They also retained their ability “to buy and sell property” in Louisiana. The free black community continued to organize its own schools and some “small classes met secretly in private homes.”²⁶

²⁵ Ibid.126.

²⁶ Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 214. Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, 41. Robert C. Reinders, “The Free Negro in The New Orleans Economy, 1850-1860” 274,278, 283. Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, 42.

But “[l]ike the black creoles black Americans tried to protect their rights and dignity in a rising tide of racial discrimination during the 1850’s.” By “1855 a subsequent enactment extended the ban to all charitable, scientific, or literary societies.” By 1860 “out of state free Negroes were not ... permitted in the city.” The repressory nature of New Orleans laws reached extraordinary heights: “[i]n the 1850’s the process of manumission became more difficult- a freed slave had to leave the state – and in 1857 emancipation was made impossible.” These moves indicated the oppressive mood of the city for free blacks and the various endeavors in which they engaged, but also highlight the environment in which black educational advances existed in during the late antebellum period. Black schools in New Orleans were not the only educational institutions under a microscope of scrutiny in Louisiana at this time. Black schools also existed in places like Opelousas, with the largest free black community in Louisiana outside of New Orleans, and faced closure as well. These schools existed in such a precarious state that closure at any moment remained a stark reality for school administrators and students on a daily and annual basis. Robert Reinders calls this “a period of white hostility, restrictive laws and declining economic opportunities” for the free blacks.²⁷

The Couvent School represented only one part of an intricate system of schools and teachers in New Orleans, in which education had been important to the Creole and free black communities for almost a century. The addition of refugees from St. Domingue and their unique cultural heritage further expanded the ability of black Louisianans to bring education to their children. Over time the free black and Creole communities grew into a

²⁷ Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, 215. Robert C. Reinders, “The Free Negro in The New Orleans Economy, 1850-1860”, 273, 282,285.

burgeoning community of writers, musicians, artisans, skilled laborers, doctors, and business owners who made an impact on Louisiana and especially New Orleans. Through their unique settlement patterns these Louisianans built a network allowing them to pursue educational activities for themselves, their children and clandestinely to a small number of slaves in New Orleans. Opportunities for free blacks and Creoles came into existence through invaluable connections brought about through familial, social, and religious associations. Free blacks and many Creoles could not fully enjoy the benefits of citizenship because of their peculiar status. However, they successfully operated outside the governmental structure that- prevented them from using formal “democratic institutions” such as voting, serving on juries, and holding political offices. Out of necessity, they created their own system of schools, therefore successfully equipping their children with enough education to allow them to expand their protest traditions. The free black and Creole people maintained a long standing relationship with the Catholic church and used this organization to their advantage to maintain their access to education. As the conflict of the 1860s approached, southern society became more suspicious of free blacks and Creoles and actively moved to suppress their limited rights. Even under such circumstances, the free black community maintained its vitality through political activism, using the law and their status as weapons against those who sought to weaken their standing in the community. Through the aid of talented individuals such as the founders of the Couvent school, the free black and Creole communities disproved many myths about blacks and education.²⁸

²⁸ Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, 214-215.

The Creoles and free blacks of Louisiana were unique in their quest to gain access to education. By attending schools, sending their children to schools, and operating their own schools, they secured the necessary experience to aid in the creation of a public school system for the state, especially for its black inhabitants. Their unique history and infusion of Creoles from St. Domingue and their customs of placage helped to make education more accessible to other blacks in south Louisiana. One observer, when talking about Creole schools, noted that “they are silently exerting a great and beneficial influence on the free people of color.” The knowledge gained from these experiences gave the Creoles an advantage in providing the resources needed to implement a plan of black education in New Orleans. The Creole community in New Orleans used their political and social connections to organizations like the Catholic Church to challenge the existing state laws which sought to restrict their access to education and created a school for blacks at one of the most repressive times for black people in Louisiana. Although their activities would begin primarily in New Orleans it would create a model for areas outside of New Orleans and across the state.²⁹

²⁹ Nathan Wiley, “Education of the Colored Population of Louisiana,” 247.

CHAPTER III
MILITARY NEXUS: THE ROLE OF THE U.S. ARMY IN BLACK EDUCATION IN
LOUISIANA

The Creoles and free blacks set the stage for future educational activities for all blacks through their exceptionalism and their disagreement with Louisiana's educational policies. They struggled consistently to expand educational opportunities for other blacks through adopting customs from St. Domingue like placage, asserting educational independence, and by exploiting Creole political and social connections. These efforts were vital but would only started the process. To bring education to significantly large numbers of blacks required a monumental endeavor to provide the support necessary to create a sustainable system. The determination clearly existed in the black communities of Louisiana. The changes needed to provide more blacks with access to education resulted from conditions created by the Union Army. James Anderson declares "[i]n their movement for universal schooling the ex-slaves welcomed and actively pursued the aid of Republican politicians, the Freedmen's Bureau, northern missionary societies, and the Union Army."³⁰

The groundwork for an educational foundation for the newly freed people of Louisiana, laid, prior to the Civil War still required major work. The U.S. Army's initial

³⁰ James D. Anderson *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)p.4

foray into Louisiana produced several unexpected results, none more unplanned than its involvement in the education of the freedmen. The experiment in black education began in New Orleans and slowly accelerated across significant portions of Union controlled south Louisiana. As freedom expanded for the slaves, education mirrored the social change that accompanied the war. The military facilitated changes in post war Louisiana for the freedmen, and previous free blacks that made education a salient issue for all the inhabitants of the state. Some historians argue that the military did not initiate education for blacks in Louisiana. But without the military's intervention, the education of the significant numbers of south Louisiana African Americans might not have occurred. The U.S. Army built upon the foundation laid by the people of Louisiana and provided the necessary structure for the newly emerging school system.³¹

James Anderson notes “[b]lacks emerged from slavery with a strong belief in the desirability of learning to read and write.” The desire of African Americans for education provided only part of the impetus for the Army to bring a systematically biracial public educational system into existence. The military became interested in education because it presented an opportunity to use the freedmen's desire for education to their advantage. The army possessed the resources to provide the freedmen with the education they desired. Additionally they possessed the militaristic authority, the political legitimacy, and the systematic organization to swiftly respond to the vacuum left in the absence of Confederate governance to make education available to African Americans in south Louisiana. Education assisted the military in creating a new free labor system, an integral part of the

³¹ William F. Messner, *Freedmen and The Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865* (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1978) , 164-177. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 127.

plan by Union generals in New Orleans to restore economic vitality and some semblance of self governance to south Louisiana. The military adopted a policy that used education and free labor to implement the plans they had for south Louisiana.³²

In the Spring of 1862 Union forces massed in the Gulf of Mexico in preparation for an assault on New Orleans via the Mississippi river. After a daring run from the mouth of the river to New Orleans, led by U. S. Navy Captain David Farragut, the Union quickly took control of New Orleans in late April 1862. Captain Farragut turned the city over to her new commander, General Benjamin Butler. Butler was a politician before the war and “no abolitionist,” which made the role he later played in advancing black education quite fascinating. But his leadership signaled the application of a New England governmental philosophy to New Orleans.³³

General Butler did not initially concern himself with the needs of the freedmen, even as his forces began to occupy New Orleans and even though he had contributed to the Army’s rules on dealing with runaway slaves as contrabands of war. While serving in Virginia “General Butler . . .met three slaves walking into his camp from the Confederate fortifications where they had been at work. Butler immediately declared the men “contraband of war” and put them to work in his own camp.” Butler used a similar approach in New Orleans. According to Thomas Webber “[t]hose slaves who were able to gain a correct understanding of the war causes and potential ramifications believed that the Union

³² James D. Anderson *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935*, 5. John C. Rodrigue, *Reconstruction in the Cane Fields: From Slavery to Free Labor in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes 1862-1880* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963),33. William F. Messner, *Freedmen and The Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865*, 164-166.

³³ John D. Winters, *The Civil War In Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963). 56, 85-102 Robert Stanley Bahney, “Generals and Negroes: Education Of Negroes By The Union Army, 1861-1865 ” (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1965), 200. Devore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 47.

army were none other than the soldiers of Christ and that the Day of Judgment was at hand for the slaveholder and the Day of Jubilee for the slave.” Escaped slaves seeking safety approached the Union lines in large numbers after the initial appearance of Union troops in the region. This process continued throughout the occupation of south Louisiana. The runaway slaves forced Butler to deal with them. One Union Officer described a group of runaways seeking freedom inside the Union lines as a “large and constantly increasing number of blacks.” He later reported that “[i]n hours the number doubled from 75 to 150.” Some runaway slaves understood that if they reached Union lines they could obtain freedom. After General Butler established control over the city, he conceived a plan to deal with the large numbers of runaway slaves coming to New Orleans and the Union camps. This only increased the army’s responsibility for the freedmen’s welfare. Butler carefully followed orders from Washington regarding the slaves. He held the authority to free slaves previously used to support the rebellion against the states but had no authorization to free any and all slaves in the region. He accordingly put runaways to work cleaning New Orleans.³⁴

As Butler’s administration swiftly assumed control of the governmental apparatus of New Orleans, he appointed subordinate officers to manage the daily affairs of the city. He appointed “an acting mayor and a military governor” from his officer corps. The school system Butler found in New Orleans contained 16,862 students who attended school for

³⁴ DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 47. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, (New York: The Free Press, 1962) ,63. Ira Berlin and others, eds., *Freedom A Documentary History of Emancipation 1861-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 189. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, (New York: The Free Press, 1962) ,63. Thomas L. Webber, *Deep Like the Rivers: Education in The Slave Quarter Community, 1831-1865*, (New York: W.W. Norton, Co.,1978), 145. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 29. Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed 1863-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press) ,7.

about eight months. This public school system was for whites only. “Once Butler took over municipal operations, he found himself with the responsibility of running the local school system.” From a dual language entity of French and English Butler changed the system to an English only system. He also consolidated the city’s four school boards into one board with his “military order No. 6082,” which created a new board made up of five men with “offices in the military government.” Because of dual language requirements throughout the city, Butler’s newly created Bureau of Education began “accelerating the process of Americanization of the school system.” One visitor to New Orleans noted that “[i]n most of the schools the textbooks and all the exercises are in the French language, and English is taught as a separate branch.” The board accomplished the task of hiring a superintendent, James Butler Carter. Despite these efforts one historian argues that “General Butler accomplished little in the way of educating ... the mass of black contrabands.” While true that Butler did not regard black education as a priority, the consolidation of schools in New Orleans reflected the school system of Butler’s home city of Boston and paved the way for the next commander, General Nathaniel Banks, to make more significant reforms in education throughout south Louisiana.³⁵

General Butler’s effort advanced black mass public education through his centralization of the school system. That consolidation played a vital role in its later growth as a biracial education system. Butler’s Louisiana army provided structure, financial support, and teaching personnel to create a temporary yet thriving school system in New

³⁵ Leon Odom Beasley, “A History of Education in Louisiana During the Reconstruction Period 1862-1877” (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1957), 49-50, 56. Nathan Wiley, “Education of the Colored Population of Louisiana,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 33, (July 1866): 245. DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 47-48. William F. Messner, *Freedmen*, 166 Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 455.

Orleans. In December 1862 General Butler turned his command over to General Nathaniel Banks the man who advanced black education to its contemporary apex in Louisiana.³⁶

General Banks assumed command at a critical moment in Louisiana history. By “January 1[st] of 1863 the slaves within the federal lines were freed by President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation.” This transformation in status presented both opportunities and problems in bringing education to the freedmen. As with his predecessor, education for blacks was not a primary concern for General Banks although it quickly became one. Banks almost immediately took action in dealing with the freedmen. The Emancipation Proclamation freed more runaways than ever and the government immediately became responsible for their care. By January 30, 1863, Banks issued General Order No. 12 creating the “Sequestration Committee,” organized “to propose and establish a yearly system of negro labor, which shall provide for the food, clothing, proper treatment, and just compensation for the negroes, at fixed rates, or an equitable proportion of the yearly crop as may be deemed advisable.” This order began to harness of black labor in a systematic manner and paved the way for the inevitable emerging free labor market in Louisiana.³⁷

Banks expanded the efforts initiated by Butler and encountered similar obstacles to success. Many of General Butler’s “white officers and enlisted men in the Union ranks... had difficulty accepting black soldiers under any circumstances.” A significant number of Butler’s soldiers “wanted no personal contact with Negroes” and were “as anti-Negro as many lower class southerners.” But blacks soon proved to be of great value to the Federal

³⁶ DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 54-55.

³⁷ Beasley, “A History of Education in Louisiana”, 57. Nathaniel Prentice Banks, *Emancipated Labor In Louisiana* (New York, 1864), 33.

war effort. Butler reorganized a former black Confederate unit, the Native Guards, into a Union regiment. These men were members of New Orleans free black and Creole community who approached Butler and asked about joining the Union cause to fight. The community of free black and Creoles consistently made attempts to demonstrate that their loyalty to the Federal government survived even under the repressive laws of antebellum New Orleans. They wanted to protect their property interests and ingratiate themselves with the Union Army. Butler, apprehensive at first, used this opportunity to recruit free blacks to serve as his need for more troops continued to rise. The success of his efforts with the free black community eventually led him to also meet his troop deficiencies by recruiting from the ranks of runaways that filled the Union camps. As more runaways entered the military, a critical need arose. Educating the vast majority of these former slaves arose as a result of their need to understand basic military drill and commands. Perhaps Butler's generals gave runaways the sense that education may accompany their participation in the Union army. General John W. Phelps "began to organize schools for [blacks]" Phelps also recruited black teachers that "included both French and English speakers." Some military leaders felt educated soldiers to be more valuable to the war effort. This critical need served as the fomenting impetus that led to rudimentary education for black soldiers.³⁸

The army, already actively engaged in recruiting black soldiers under both Generals Butler and Banks, initiated a new process which allowed more of the runaways to serve.

³⁸ James G. Hollandsworth, Jr. *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press),29. Joe Gray Taylor, *Louisiana Reconstructed*, 9 James G. Hollandsworth, Jr. *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press),17-22. DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 54.

Butler began the process with the defunct Native Guard, which included a large contingent of black officers and contained a significant number of free blacks. Banks “tried to soothe the anxieties of white New Orleanians by dismissing all the black officers from the army” and continued Butler’s process of reorganizing the Native Guard troops into units consisting of freedmen commanded by white officers. By May of 1863 General Banks issued General Order No. 40 which recommended “the organization of a corps d’armee of colored troops, to be designated as the “Corps d’ Afrique.””³⁹

General Banks “was a political general from Massachusetts” and Louisiana tested his political skills. Under the leadership of General Banks “the military began to develop a systematic program of black education.” Banks’ first attempts at black education sought to fill an intellectual void bequeathed by slavery to the black soldiers now fighting for the Union cause in the Native Guard. Banks argued that “speedy instruction and discipline” were essential to training first-class soldiers to fight for the Union. The preliminary military efforts for the education of the freedmen began with the black soldiers during the summer of 1863.⁴⁰

Military personnel like General Daniel Ullmann solicited the help of the “American Christian Association” to identify teachers. The American Missionary Association was a Christian organization that sought to operate in what its officials termed “one of the grandest fields for missionary labor,” offering the freedmen the rudiments of education. Ullmann’s efforts proved fruitful, for at least “five hundred soldiers learned to read and

³⁹ Hollandsworth, *The Louisiana Native Guards*, 16-22. DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 55. Banks, *Emancipated Labor In Louisiana*, 34.

⁴⁰ Tunnell, *Crucible of Reconstruction*, 34. Beasley, “A History of Education in Louisiana,” 57. Bahney, “Generals and Negroes,” 217. Messner, *Freedmen*, 166-167.

write in six months.” Historians Donald Devore and Joseph Logsdon claim that essentially “every regiment became a school” in Banks’ system of education for black soldiers.⁴¹

According to some reports, the “black soldiers were generally eager to begin their studies and zealous in their application to school work.” One historian claimed that “stories of black soldiers studying by moonlight and serving picket duty with a rifle in one hand and a school book in the other became standard fare in Northern press.” The strong desire exhibited by the black soldiers coincided with the Army’s plans to make them more useful in achieving Banks’ objectives. They also had the potential to be profitable after the war ended. These initial experiences of the black desire for education in the military helped reinforce Banks’ belief that blacks desired an education. The eager desire of the soldiers coupled with Banks’ aspirations must have seemed promising to him. This initial success provided General Banks with a successful model to be applied to the new educational system he organized for the civilian population of south Louisiana. Effective Army schools allowed men to learn the basics of “sign[ing] their names and ... reading the Constitution.” For the freedmen, gaining the ability to write and read, albeit basic, seemed to be monumental. The education received by soldiers pleased the army enough to continue the venture. In fact, the undertaking moved so successful that by December 12, 1863 General Banks requested that books used by the soldiers of the Corps D’ Afrique to be provided indefinitely. Teachers “C.B. Whitcomb and Thomas McMasters ...were sent to Port

⁴¹ Ibid., p.167. John W. Blassingame, “The Union Army as an Educational Institution for Negroes, 1862-1865”, *The Journal of Negro Education*, 34, (1965) :152-159. Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986) ,3. DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 55.

Hudson, Louisiana in early 1864 to instruct the Corp D’Afrique” at the behest of American Missionary Association.⁴²

The military schools provided the expansion of Banks’ educational program for the general public. In his first year of command, Banks allowed Butler’s plans to continue for the New Orleans school system. In January 1863, Banks initiated an act that ultimately helped found “the first Negro public schools under [the] Committee of Enrollment.” In August 1863 Banks used General Order No. 64 to create a Committee of Enrollment to “regulate the enrollment, recruiting, employment, and education of persons of color.”⁴³

In September of 1863 Banks used General Order No.72 to create the position of “‘Corps Instructor,’ whose duty ...[was] to superintend in garrison, and, as far as may be consistent with military duty, in the field, the education of men enrolled in the Corps d’ Afrique.” Banks used the military to proxy for more ambitious plans to be later used in the public school system.⁴⁴

C. Peter Ripley claims that “throughout the winter and summer of 1863 blacks in Louisiana made their educational aspirations known” to General Banks. A group of free African Americans, assembled by Banks, gathered information about the desires of the freedmen to obtain an education. They reported that “blacks would not labor on plantations as long as their children were uneducated.” Three men who supported Banks’ education

⁴² Messner, *Freedmen*, 167-168. Nathaniel Banks to Henry Stanton, October 15, 1863, 86. Nathaniel Banks Letter Press Book, Hill Memorial Library Louisiana State University, Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 25.

⁴³ Beasley, “A History of Education in Louisiana,” 60. Banks, *Emancipated Labor In Louisiana* , 35. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 127.

⁴⁴ Banks, *Emancipated Labor In Louisiana*, 36.

plan, George Hanks, George Hepworth, and Thomas Conway, voiced their concerns to the General about the importance of education for freedmen, noting it to “be in the best interest of the government” and, according to Hepworth, a strong desire of the freedmen themselves. By June of 1863 “Union Public School...had been open” by Enrollment Commission member George Hanks. The efforts soon paid off because “seven schools, twenty three teachers and 1,500 students ...in New Orleans” began the educational process from schools supported by the military. In October of the same year the military opened more schools for the freedmen and became directly involved in the educational process. Banks wrote to Secretary of War Henry Stanton about his new program, informing him that the superintendent of Negro Labor, George Hanks would be traveling “upon business connected with ...education” in Louisiana.⁴⁵

General Banks did not share abolitionists’ viewpoints, but he used public opinion whenever it made him look favorable. After he replaced Butler, Banks “resist[ed] all further demands from black leaders to take part in the new civil government.” He sought to satisfy the white desires while in New Orleans but discovered that the free black population continued to press for equality. A group of free black leaders traveled to Boston for “a dinner held in their honor [where] they met the governor of Massachusetts and almost every major abolitionist leader, including William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass.” The meeting resulted in sharp criticism of Banks’ labor plans for the freedmen, were called “oppressive serfdom.” Banks’ labor plans called for an education provision for the freedmen’s children allowing them to work consistently on the many idle plantations in

⁴⁵. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 127-129. Messner, *Freedmen*, 170. Nathaniel Banks to Henry Stanton, October 14, 1863, 53. Nathaniel Banks Letter Press Book ,Hill Memorial Library Louisiana State University.

south Louisiana. The educational provision also provided a shield from the criticism he received about his labor policy for the freedmen, but his educational program allowed him to identify areas of success in his management of Louisiana.⁴⁶

As Banks focused on the creation of a free labor system for south Louisiana he began to understand that education for the children of the free laborers was essential in order to have an efficient system of free labor between the freedmen and the planters. Banks understood the economic repercussions of unemployed freedmen not working on the many idle plantations in the area. Black labor was so significant to the success of Louisiana that Banks, estimated that black “labor ... [produced] nearly a quarter of a million of dollars for the year.”⁴⁷

By early 1864, Banks’ success in his south Louisiana education program encouraged him to advance educational activities in the remainder of Louisiana. By February 3, 1864 he issued General Order No. 23. This order, mainly concerned with labor issues, also called “for the establishment of a sufficient number of schools - one at least for each of the police and school districts - for the instruction of colored children under twelve years of age, which, when established, will be placed under the direction of the Superintendent of Public Education.” General Order No. 23 stipulated that part of an employer’s duty was to provide “instruction for the children” of the laborers. The opportunities for freedmen expanded as Banks found more reasons to push his plans forward in response to the political pressure from abolitionists in the North who encouraged

⁴⁶ DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 55-57.

⁴⁷Messner, *Freedmen*, 164, 166-167,170. Nathaniel Banks to Major General H.W. Halleck, October 15, 1863, 67 Nathaniel Banks Letter Press Book, 53 Hill Memorial Library Louisiana State University.

Banks to be more receptive to educating the freedmen. The plan provided a framework for a labor system that heavily emphasized the educational opportunities for the children of the laborers. By March of 1864 the labor system's continued existence relied on the creation of an education system acceptable to the freedmen.⁴⁸

The most comprehensive and sweeping piece of education policy issued by the military in the history of Louisiana was General Order No. 38. The order was issued "in pursuance of the provisions of General Order No.23" reflected Banks philosophy, that the army intended to "plac[e] within [the freedmen's] reach the elements of knowledge which gives intelligence and greater value to labor." The army's goal for this policy included, but was not exclusively centered on, the desire to allow the freedmen to eventually become more self-sufficient and independent of the army's authority.⁴⁹

General Order No. 38 was sweeping in its scope. It began by creating "a Board of Education, consisting of three persons." Under this order the Board held the power to create "common- schools in each and every school-district." The Board held the power to "acquire, by purchase or otherwise tracts of land, which shall be judged by the board necessary and suitable for school sites." The board could "erect... school-houses as they [might] judge necessary." Teachers were to be hired exclusively by the Board "from the loyal inhabitants of Louisiana." But the Board also held the responsibility to "purchase and provide the necessary books, stationery and apparatus for the use of such schools." The order also called for a sweeping move to "purchase and furnish and outfit... a well-selected library, etc. for each freed person in the several school-districts who is above the age of

⁴⁸ Banks, *Emancipated Labor In Louisiana*, 37-38. DeVore and Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools*, 56-57. William F. Messner, *Freedmen*,171.

⁴⁹ Banks, *Emancipated Labor In Louisiana*, 41.

attending school.” The books were to be paid for by the “laborer’s wages by his employer when such books are furnished.” These changes were radical considering the initial approach taken, but General Banks believed that educated free labor, and the good publicity that it brought, were essential to his rebuilding plans for post-war Louisiana.⁵⁰

Banks also bestowed tremendous fiduciary powers on the Board. General Order No. 38 gave the members of the Board of Education the “full power and authority to assess, and levy a school- tax upon real and personal property including crops of plantations, in each and every ... school district.” The reasoning for the taxes was “to defray the cost and expense of establishing, furnishing, and conducting for the period of one year the school or schools so established in each and every of the said districts.” The men named to the board were “Colonel H. N. Frisbie of the Twenty-second Infantry, Corps d’ Afrique, Lieutenant E.M. Wheelock, Fourth Infantry, Corps d’ Afrique, and Isaac G. Hubbs, [of] New-Orleans.” These men led the efforts to bring the new educational policy into fruition in Louisiana, marking the genesis of state-wide black public education.⁵¹

The army’s role in black education was unexpected and initially unintentional. Through the leadership of men like Generals Butler and Banks, black educational opportunities rapidly expanded. The initial centralization of the New Orleans school system under General Butler laid the foundation for his successor, General Nathaniel Banks. Banks expanded the role of the military in Louisiana educational policy by providing black soldiers with education and expanding that offer to the schools being established for the freedmen. General Banks combined his labor policies with the education

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Banks, *Emancipated Labor In Louisiana*, 42.

aspirations of the freedmen. The military acts with the greatest effect were the military general orders concerning labor and education for the freedmen. When Banks took over command of the Gulf Department, the Union expanded its recruitment of black soldiers beyond the free black population to the large numbers of runaways coming to New Orleans and the Union controlled areas. This population of soldiers, of whom the vast portions were illiterate, brought specific educational deficiencies that General Banks believed hampered their mission as soldiers. Banks, at the behest of some of his subordinate officers, attempted to address the problem of illiteracy among the ranks of black soldiers through the creation of schools. Banks' commitment to the idea led him to create a position within his command to guarantee the success of the army's new education program. General Banks' educational plans were motivated by political necessity as his labor program received staunch criticism, yet he used his success in educating the freedmen as evidence of the substantial progress that had been made under his command. Banks' goal was not to increase black rights any further than he felt necessary but, for labor. The initial thrust of Banks education plan would take place in the New Orleans area, but he used the experience to create a model for other parishes throughout the Union's controlled south Louisiana and his efforts went somewhat unchallenged.⁵²

⁵² Howard Ashley White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 167. Messner, *Freedmen*, 164-171.

CHAPTER IV

ADMINISTRATIVE CHAOS: CRISIS IN LEADERSHIP

The U.S. Army provided much of the material and structure that the fledgling education system in south Louisiana needed. Progress was made with the creation of schools. The centralization of the school system in New Orleans by General Butler, and the leadership of General Banks, along with the creation of schools, by the military through general military orders and the need to combine the labor and educational interests of the freedmen, all helped to advance education. But arguably the most important part of the educative process revolved around administrative organization. The relationships between the organizations providing education for the freedmen and the administrators heading those organizations had a major impact on the early progress of the mission to educate the freedmen. The personnel directly involved in the process comprised only one component in the overall success of the endeavor, but that one component was the most critical piece of the puzzle. Three major obstacles prevented the advancement of education for blacks in Louisiana, administrative conflicts, teaching personnel deficiencies, and a lack of stable financial resources.⁵³

The Army maintained its hegemony over education for the freedmen in Louisiana because education had become critical to its labor program. General Nathaniel Banks

⁵³ Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, (New Orleans: The Center for Louisiana Studies), 47-57.

remained reluctant to turn the military's authority over education to private organizations that spring up in New Orleans and throughout south Louisiana. Carter G. Woodson claims "[t]he idea of educating the Negroes after the Civil War was largely a prompting of philanthropy." The American Missionary Association was one of the organizations that became intensely involved initially because of General Banks' long term goals of restoring some semblance of order to south Louisiana and its new free market economy. George Hepworth suggested using "northern aid societies" to get black schools up and operating. His efforts, and those of men like Thomas Conway and George Hanks, proved invaluable towards the expansion of black educational opportunities for the freedmen in New Orleans. One of the first school administrators was "Army officer W.B. Stickney [who] was appointed Superintendent of Public Schools for Colored People in New Orleans. These private missionary school organizations seemed to be appearing throughout New Orleans and the U.S. Army was not the only operation in town vying for control of who would educate the freedmen. Hanks "and Conway were anxious for a northern tour to collect educational resources - funds, supplies and philanthropic assistance" for the new schools emerging throughout New Orleans.⁵⁴

The biggest problem the military faced was that, even though they controlled most school operations, they did not exercise or utilize their authority to bring a more extensive program of education to the freedmen. The leader coordinating school operations was none other than General Banks. Frequently his role proved duplicitous as he did things that

⁵⁴ Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of The Negro* (Chicago: The Associated Publishers, 1933), 9. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 127-129.

helped to advance black education in one sense while he simultaneously made decisions that ultimately hurt black education. For example, General Banks involved far too many organizations in the process of educating the freedmen. Many of the participating organizations did so because Banks and the U.S. Army, in their view, did not do enough to help advance the cause of the freedmen who wanted to gain an education, yet Banks helped fuel the infighting between the various groups. One historian states “he was a politician, and from the start many considerations in the Department of the Gulf required political skills, not military and certainly not philanthropic.” General Banks understood that disempowered blacks could not hurt his position as head of the Gulf Department so he worried little about their complaints or dissatisfaction. He was, however, vitally concerned with the white citizens of New Orleans and what they wanted. He remained ever mindful of white complaints and demands and frequently made black education subordinate to the desires of local whites. Indeed, one of Banks’ main concerns was preventing anything that may help promote black domination in New Orleans after the war. The fact that General Banks was at times weak on educational policy and unclear on how his plans for education should be carried out demonstrates the problems facing the school system for the freedmen. But it also demonstrates that Banks, despite all of his faults, provided the most support the freedmen had seen up to that point to help promote black education.⁵⁵

As early as “September 1863, Union officials acting upon the request of Negroes in the city appropriated \$3000 for the education of about 250 indigent children.” The first public schools for freedmen appeared in October of 1863. The initial efforts of men like Hanks, Stickney, and Conway, resulted in “seven schools, twenty-three teachers and 1500

⁵⁵ Ibid. p.134-135

students all in New Orleans.” One new participant in the process who maintained a significant role in the early stages of black education was Isaac Hubbs. Hubbs, a representative of the “American Missionary Association” wrote reports of “optimism” about the educational efforts taking place in New Orleans and his receipt of consistent support from the military. Hubbs secured material support “[f]rom the Enrollment Commission” to create more educational opportunities for the freedmen in New Orleans as well as the outlying “plantations.”⁵⁶

Hubbs’ organization “[t]he American Missionary Association [was] founded in 1846 to oppose slavery [and] was one of the most successful Northern societies involved with black education during Reconstruction.” The American Missionary Association “advocated education as an important step ... toward the process of gaining full citizenship and equal rights for blacks.” In 1863 the A.M.A. sent Dr. Hubbs and “Reverend Charles Strong” to support the efforts in education taking place in New Orleans. According to one historian “Hubbs [was] a middle-aged New Yorker with “large experience” in education.” The fact that Hubbs had some educational experience probably prompted General Banks and other military officials to employ his expertise to make education a reality for the freedmen. Hubbs, however, proved to be a curious man, characterized by some as “pompous, tactless, contentious, and paranoid.” This description of Hubbs demonstrates how, although well intentioned, he may not have been the best person for the task of leading educational policymaking. Dr. Hubbs’s counterpart, Reverend Strong, on the other hand, was described as “lazy and lacking in direction.” Dysfunction between the

⁵⁶ John W. Blassingame, *Black New Orleans 1860-1880*(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973), 109. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 129.

personnel working to bring education to the freedmen, and the numerous organizations working for the same cause, was common and normal. The lack of strong centralized authority hurt the cause of black education in New Orleans and south Louisiana. But arguably the most daunting challenge for educators might have been that the educators had not fully accounted for the tumultuous nature of bringing education to blacks. The contentions between Dr. Hubbs, General Banks, the American Missionary Association and the army foreshadowed the inefficiencies that plagued the overall efforts of all the people attempting to advance black education in Louisiana.⁵⁷

Initially, the military under General Banks did not fully support the efforts of the A.M.A. or its representatives. The A.M.A. assigned its own cadre of teachers to schools started under Dr. Hubbs' direction. Dr. Hubbs began his relationship with the military shortly after arriving in New Orleans in early 1864. Even though Hubbs waited on support from General Banks, the slow response he received did not stop him from being productive. He established a school that demonstrated success in both its creation and in the students who attended. Hubbs created his school for freedmen and "[a]s the school grew he employed two young women as assistants Eva QuaiFFE an Ann Campbell."⁵⁸ Hubbs' position allowed him to play a critical role as liaison between the military, the free black community, and the A.M.A. A serious lack of resources limited his accomplishments. He did not enjoy a sustained level of support from either the A.M.A. or the military. By "February 1864 the military finally provided a confiscated building for the operation of a

⁵⁷ Patricia Brady, "Trials and Tribulations: American Missionary Association Teachers and Black Education In Occupied New Orleans, 1863-1864", *Louisiana History*, 31, (1990) : 6-7.

⁵⁸ Ibid p.8

large consolidated school.” Gaining a building allowed Dr. Hubbs and Reverend Strong to continue their efforts in earnest, despite a lingering lack of supplies and resources.⁵⁹

Even though men like Dr. Hubbs and Reverend Strong had the best intentions in wanting to start schools for the freedmen, they did not possess the necessary political skill to sustain efforts at maintaining their school. This deficiency revealed itself often, primarily at the most inopportune times when progress was being made in making education for blacks a reality. Hubbs’ most important work as a representative of the A.M.A involved beginning the process of recruiting teachers to the region. He recruited and hired personnel who taught the freedmen and their children. Many of his recruits were Christian females associated with the A.M.A. General Banks recruited Dr. Hubbs to serve on his newly created Board of Education. Hubbs remained in New Orleans for sometime but his role on the Board of Education became minimized and after serving with Benjamin Plumly and Edwin Wheelock, he found out he did not get along with either of them.⁶⁰

If any success occurred advancing education for blacks in Louisiana, the teaching corps would be a critical component of that success. Administrators worked diligently to find the right teaching personnel for the job, recruiting teachers called for the selection of specifically talented individuals because certain hardships would be associated with the job. One reason why teacher selection was so critical was “[a]t the heart of the Reconstruction effort in New Orleans was a determination to enforce Unionism and National Loyalty in the school system.” Banks felt this type of loyalty was critical,

⁵⁹ Ibid p.8-9.

⁶⁰ Ibid p.5-20

especially if Louisiana experienced any success in building a successful economy like the one in the North that he and others hoped to create in the South. Selection of teachers was also important because the teachers carried out the overall policies of the school board. Religious fervor was an important quality he looked for in hiring faculty. Other members of the Board, however had different philosophies as to the type and kind of people necessary to best serve in the new school system. “Recasting the teaching force caused the greatest controversy”⁶¹

Hubbs clearly identified of the type of individuals he believed to be the best teachers. According to one historian he “made it clear that exceptional sacrifices were required for services in the Louisiana field. Teachers needed sense, discretion, and a deep dedication to the moral and intellectual improvement of the Negro race if they were to succeed under difficult circumstances.” Hubbs also reminded potential teachers that their work would not be welcomed by some and they could expect long arduous hours. In a letter to Hubbs teachers who applied to the A.M.A.’s call consistently mentioned their religious devotion. As the school went into action he “spent most of his time in administrative work.” He allowed his younger protégé “Corydon Tambling, a twenty five year old graduate of Oberlin College” to operate the school. As teachers arrived some stayed in New Orleans and others went to outlying areas where they were needed. Some stayed to work at the “School of Liberty” that Hubbs started.⁶²

⁶¹ Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, (New Orleans: The Center for Louisiana Studies) p.52

⁶² Ibid.52. Patricia Brady, “Trials and Tribulations: American Missionary Association Teachers and Black Education In Occupied New Orleans, 1863-1864”, *Louisiana History*, 31, (1990) : 8-10.

The turbulence in the organization of the black schools offered a portent of what the teachers could expect when they arrived in New Orleans or other parts of south Louisiana. Even though the A.M.A. performed well in recruiting future teachers, they failed miserably at providing the supplies that the teachers needed to stay in the area for extended periods of time. Teachers who accepted the challenge of teaching in New Orleans received minimal support from the A.M.A and opposition from the white community for educating blacks. The initial wave of teachers, primarily from the North, played a critical role in filling a void until other teachers from the South also took up the challenge of teaching blacks. The conditions of the teaching environment, and the special circumstances of the students, required a tenacious group of people in order to make education a reality for the large numbers of freedmen seeking knowledge.⁶³

Hubbs' days were numbered almost from the beginning of his tenure with the A.M.A. and his interaction with the military. At his School of Liberty "Hubbs planned to upgrade the school, making it a model for the city, perhaps even developing it into a high school, as an example for other schools to emulate." Hubbs' goal seemed quite ambitious but it was probably misunderstood within his school as well as outside it. Upon being "ordered...[by Hubbs] to weed out the less able students... [Corydon] Tambling refused to do so on humanitarian grounds." Hubbs' probably hoped to show huge success with more capable students, thus justifying the need for more resources from both the A.M. A. and the military. Nevertheless it caused an irreparable rift between Tambling and Hubbs. This dispute put Hubbs in at least two different conflicts involving education for the

⁶³ Patricia Brady, "Trials and Tribulations: American Missionary Association Teachers and Black Education In Occupied New Orleans, 1863-1864", *Louisiana History*, 31, (1990) : 5-20

freedmen in Louisiana because “Hubbs was already at odds with the two military men who were his fellow [board] members.”⁶⁴ Accordingly, after being accused of financial impropriety in the case of some missing funds, Hubbs eventually was removed. “There were charges and countercharges brought against Hubbs of immoral conduct, corruption, fraud, and theft” to name a few. It was this type of infighting that kept administrators from working on the more acute problems of providing education for the freedmen.⁶⁵

School administration was just one challenge for educators trying to complete a daunting task. Teachers came to Louisiana from several different organizations such as “[t]he A.M.A. the National Freedmen’s Relief Association, and the American Freedmen and Union Commission.”⁶⁶ There were comparisons made about the abilities of the teachers selected by the A.M.A officials and the military board. “The A.M.A. teachers were well qualified, unlike the majority of the teachers at the military schools... A.M.A. teachers in New Orleans had pursued advanced studies at seminaries, normal schools, and colleges. Most of them also had previous teaching experience in Northern Schools.” Many of the A.M.A. teachers who came to Louisiana “were under thirty years of age and came from small towns in New England or upstate New York.” The fact that A.M.A teachers were from the region that had conquered the South made it difficult for them to accomplish the task of educating the freedmen on behalf of the A.M.A. Many of the new teachers who

⁶⁴ Ibid.14

⁶⁵ C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) p. 133

⁶⁶ Ibid., 137.

accepted the challenge were “largely young women.” E. Merton Coulter noted that “[o]nly in Louisiana did women teachers outnumber the men.”⁶⁷

Banks’ initial idea of using Northern teachers did not last long because “[t]he military had initially thought it would have to rely upon Northern teachers to staff its school.” Northern teachers were only part of the new strategy for creating a school system. When the school system needed a new superintendent in 1862 it was “administered ... Through a single superintendent, James Butler Carter.” Carter was sent “to visit ‘the northern cities and their public schools.’” It is believed that “Carter ... picked up on the new determination among Northern educators, particularly those in the National Education Association, to reshape Southern society by reforming and expanding systems of public education in the areas recovered from the Confederacy” especially in New Orleans.⁶⁸

However General Banks’ idea’s differed from the A.M.A.’s initial plans as to who should educate the freedmen. General Banks “believed that the wartime reconstruction program was best served by employing southern teachers.” When the Union army took over the school system there was concern about using the teaching force previously in place at the city’s prewar “thirty-nine grammar schools and eight high schools.” Some teachers were required to take loyalty oaths before being hired. But “[t]he loyalty oath posed no

⁶⁷ Patricia Brady, “Trials and Tribulations: American Missionary Association Teachers and Black Education In Occupied New Orleans, 1863-1864”, *Louisiana History*, 31, (1990) : 10. Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, (New Orleans: The Center for Louisiana Studies) 48-50. E. Merton Coulter, *The South During Reconstruction:1865-1877*(Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1947),326.

⁶⁸ William F. Messner, *Freedmen and The Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865* (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1978),171. Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, (New Orleans: The Center for Louisiana Studies) 48-50.

obstacle for obtaining teachers in New Orleans.” Once again General Bank’s political savvy came into play in determining who played a central role in the education of the freedmen. Banks desired personnel to fit his plan and purpose for the new school system. He also needed some local support to sustain his efforts. By bringing in local teachers he probably hoped to gain some of that local support for the schools for freedmen. By the Fall of 1864 General Banks informed Secretary Wheelock of the Board of Education “the supply of local teachers had increased to a point where there was no longer a need to send northerners to Louisiana.” Banks strongly “believed native teachers would make black education more palatable to southern whites.” Banks supported the idea that southerners made good teachers because he “believed that white southerners understood blacks and could deal more effectively with white opposition” that these new teachers would face. Yet, the transition to Southern born teachers only caused more problems because it made another change to a newly created and fragile school system. The constant personnel changes of the department did not promote stability in the system. Banks sought to eliminate controversy over black education through changing personnel and policy, but the transition to southern teachers failed to mitigate the opposition to black education by local whites.⁶⁹

According to one historian “some whites realized that an educated labor force was more valuable to them than an uneducated one, [but] the majority felt the emphasis should

⁶⁹ C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 135. Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education In New Orleans 1841-1991*, (New Orleans: The Center for Louisiana Studies),52-53 C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) 135- 137 James G. Hollandsworth, Jr. *Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 212.

be on providing vocational skills or on teaching freedmen to be good domestic servants.” Yet the vast majority of white Louisianans proved far from ready to accept those dedicated to educating blacks. Teaching outside of the city of New Orleans meant instructors stood a greater chance of facing some type of violence or harassment. Howard Ashley White claims “causes of white hostility to Negro schools were opposition to the tax that was levied for their support by General Banks... fears that the schools would become political instruments of the Republican party; and religious convictions.” For the most part “[t]he white population was generally hostile to the teachers, often refusing to take them in as boarders or to grant them credit.” Banks’ assumption that southern white teachers made black education better and more to the liking of Louisiana whites “could not have been more incorrect.” In fact “[s]outhern whites, rather than embracing black education ostracize[d] their own people who took up the cause.” No matter where the teachers came from there was strong opposition to black education in any form. The simple fact that they were working with a group that had been the underclass for so long not only angered but often offended many local whites.⁷⁰ Disrespect for teachers seemed to be without end “local whites managed to make life difficult for teachers in Louisiana.” One incident “[i]n Thibodaux ... [resulted] in destroyed books, and defaced furniture.” Some educators refused to take the abuse of the public and “numerous schools were broken up and various teachers left as a result of intimidation.” C. Peter Ripley notes that “educators were often pelted with mud and stones, verbal abuse and threats to life and limb.” In one incident “[i]n

⁷⁰ James G. Hollandsworth, Jr. *Pretense of Glory: The Life of General Nathaniel P. Banks* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998),211-212. Howard Ashley White, *The Freedmen’s Bureau in Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 183. Patricia Brady, “Trials and Tribulations: American Missionary Association Teachers and Black Education In Occupied New Orleans, 1863-1864”, *Louisiana History*, 31, (1990) : 13. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) ,137.

Thibodaux a woman received almost daily abuse, but remained at her job until the school was broken into and ‘excrement voided’ upon her desk.” Protection was needed for teachers and the freedmen at schools but the army seldom intervened. The “dismantling of black schools” typically resulted from a lack of military protection.⁷¹

Other issues in addition to hostility that hampered the new school system one was the lack of financial resources. To partially alleviate this problem, General Banks gave his Board of Education the power to tax the people of New Orleans. The lack of pay for teachers proved especially troublesome and critical because many of the teachers that came to Louisiana were “[o]ften short of funds and unable to obtain credit or housing.” Many found themselves struggling to survive in a hostile environment. These problems only compounded misery upon misery and took the teachers’ focus off the task before them. One “Malthide Victor was a teacher in the Seminary at Baton Rouge at the outbreak of the rebellion” who later sought much needed assistance for transportation back home to New York which General Banks graciously approved.⁷²

Initially “[i]n order to finance the system, the army had to rely on its own resources and utilized the money from the sale of confiscated property.” Banks gave the Board of Education the power to “acquire tracts of land and build schools...and assess property taxes.” General Banks understood the desire of the freedmen to gain an education but was unprepared for the scale of the required financing. Paying for the large numbers of teachers

⁷¹ Joe M. Richardson, *Christian Reconstruction: The American Missionary Association and Southern Blacks, 1861-1890* (Athens : University of Georgia Press, 1986),29. C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 139.

⁷² C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) p. 131,139 Nathaniel Banks Letter Press Book ,Hill Memorial Library Louisiana State University 200.

and supplies needed offered a staggering challenge for the new school system. In addition to these costs, a security force was needed just to keep hooligans and outlaws from disrupting the process. One historian says “[t]he expense involved in supporting a school system for freedmen presented government officials with a dilemma.” Banks initially depended on military funding as a temporary solution to his school financing problem because he was “[o]pposed to military funding of black education.” By allowing the Board to tax “all property, including crops in each of the [new] school districts...tax[es] effectively shifted the burden of financing black education from the military class to the planter class.” This might have been one of the most detrimental acts of Banks’ educational administration. In response to the new taxes “[b]oth native whites and government officials resisted Banks’ school tax.” Taxes, especially new taxes on the planters for the purpose of black education raised the ire of planters throughout the region still trying to recover from wartime losses. ⁷³

As opposition increased to the new tax, “Edwin Wheelock reported to Banks that a substantial number of planters were falsifying their tax returns” to avoid funding an endeavor they did not care to support. This made officials turn to blacks directly to fund their children, “several government officials favored placing at least part of the financial burden for black schools on blacks themselves. Wheelock suggested to the commanding general that a tax be imposed on all black males for the support of their schools.” This was a tremendous opportunity to secure untapped resources to help contribute to the education of the freedmen. Even if the planter taxes were not collected, Banks could collect some

⁷³ William F. Messner, *Freedmen and The Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865* (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1978) ,171-173.

funds from black males for the purpose of supporting the education plan. It was hoped that black women whose children would definitely benefit from the school system would likewise offer support. Banks also had the option of supplementing that income with military money to help defray some of the costs. But despite such hopes “Banks...opposed this plan.” This decision ultimately forced the military to continue funding an ever increasing enterprise, and work toward the detriment of the overall system over time, because military funding would not remain an option for paying for the new school system. Ultimately General Banks chose to seek support for black education from the very group that most opposed it and refused to seek similar support from the faction that stood to benefit the most. Banks continued to acquiesce to the demands of whites at his own expense, not to mention the expense of his programs. After relieving the military of its duty of administration of the schools, the federal government took a more active role in education of the freedmen.⁷⁴

The progress in black education because of military intervention came to naught due to the numerous administrative problems hampering the program. In spite of the advances made by the freedmen and the military, the administrative failure to create a clear plan for black education, intervention by a myriad of educational organizations, teacher misfortunes, and white hostility towards black education all worked to doom the effort. In addition to all those problems the chronic lack of financial and material resources did little to advance black education. What did remain consistent was the black desire to attain an education. W.E.B. Dubois states “[w]hen the collection for the general tax for Negro

⁷⁴ William F. Messner, *Freedmen and The Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865* (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1978) p.173 C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) p. 143

schools was suspended in Louisiana by military order, the colored people were greatly aroused and sent in petitions. One of these petitions, thirty feet in length, represented ten thousand Negroes who signed mostly with marks. They offered to pay a special tax, if the schools could be kept going.” At no period covered in this study did the black community’s desire to improve their quality of life through education ever falter. It is that one constant that offered a semblance of hope for the future of black education in south Louisiana.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976) p. 143 W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*, (New York: The Free Press, 1962) , 644.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

According to James D. Anderson “W.E.B. Dubois was on the mark when he said ‘Public education for all at public expense was, in the South, a Negro idea.’” As Louisiana’s free black population sought to gain access to an education, they laid the foundation for black education for many freedmen decades later. The process of educating blacks in Louisiana spanned over a century and involved numerous groups of people promoting various initiatives that resulted in the beginnings of a public school system that black Louisianans helped to establish. The Creoles and free blacks of Louisiana were exceptional in their quest to gain access to education in the state. They created independently operated schools and provided the necessary experience to aid in the creation of a public school system for the state but especially its black inhabitants. Their unique history and infusion of Creoles from St. Domingue and their customs of placage helped to make education more accessible to other blacks in south Louisiana. One observer, when talking about Creole schools, noted that “they are silently exerting a great and beneficial influence on the free people of color.” The knowledge gained from these experiences gave the Creoles an advantage in providing the resources needed to implement a plan of black education in New Orleans. The Creole community in New Orleans used their political and social connections to organizations like the Catholic Church to challenge the existing state laws,

which sought to restrict their access to education and created a school for blacks at one of the most repressive times in Louisiana history.⁷⁶

The U.S. Army did not come to Louisiana to educate freedmen. But with leaders like Generals Butler and Banks, black educational opportunities expanded rapidly. The initial centralization of the New Orleans school system under General Butler laid the foundation for his successor. General Banks changed Louisiana educational policy by providing black soldiers with opportunities for an education and extending that success to the schools being established for the freedmen. General Banks wed his labor policies to the educational aspirations of the freedmen. He also used military general orders concerning labor and education for the freedmen to expand educational opportunities. Banks addressed the problem of illiteracy among the ranks of black soldiers through the creation of schools within the ranks of black troops. His educational plan was a part of his overall political plan to make Louisiana a free labor market. Banks helped to advance black education further than any time in the previous history of Louisiana and created a model for other parishes in Union controlled south Louisiana.⁷⁷

Bickering and infighting plagued the progress of black education. The administrative woes of planning, plus intervention by numerous missionary organizations seeking to advance black education, continued to come one after another. Teacher demoralization and white hostility towards black education further undermined advances.

⁷⁶ James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988),6. Nathan Wiley, "Education of the Colored Population of Louisiana," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 33, (July 1866): 249.

⁷⁷ James G. Hollandsworth, Jr. *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press),86-87.Freedmen and The Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana 1862-1865 (Lafayette: The Center for Louisiana Studies, 1978),164-166.

In addition to all those problems, the chronic lack of financial and material resources did little to help advance black education. But what remained consistent was the black desire to attain an education. The Freedmen's Bureau picked up on the educational efforts of U.S. Army and one Bureau official "noted, that the continued attendance of nearly three-fourths of the students, in spite of cold or smoke-filled buildings, proved the reality of their thirst for knowledge." The tragedy of the whole black educational experiment was the fact that the collective desires of the freedmen were never fully harnessed and the system would continue to face problems that continued to follow the freedmen for generations.⁷⁸

⁷⁸Howard Ashley White, *The Freedmen's Bureau in Louisiana*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 183,195.

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