Stepping into Freedom: African Americans in Hillsborough County, Florida, during the Reconstruction Era

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The end of the Civil War ushered in the Reconstruction era which brought new realities to Southerners, both black and white. For blacks, emancipation marked the beginning of freedom; for whites, an end to uncontested control. Conservative whites who had previously dominated society would have to compete for power with white Unionists and those they had once enslaved. What emancipation ultimately meant for all was dramatic change. While much of this occurred in high profile battles at the state and federal levels, the process of change was also highly contested in local confrontations that pitted blacks against whites in communities across the South. African-American resistance to white attempts to limit the independence of freedpeople appeared in everyday struggles as blacks formed their own households, negotiated new labor relations, sought education, and wielded the vote. The outcome of these contests varied from community to community, and this study highlights developments in Florida’s Hillsborough County, a rural frontier locale where Reconstruction unfolded in ways that varied from those experienced in areas dominated by the plantation economy.

Most Reconstruction scholarship deals with “cotton belt” blacks rather than their counterparts residing in developing areas like Hillsborough County. These studies can mislead, implying that the process of Reconstruction followed the same course regardless of the setting. For example, in North Florida counties, large black populations accentuated white fears, bringing determined efforts to control freedpeople. Hillsborough County, by contrast, was sparsely populated and underdeveloped. The entire population in 1860 was only 2,981, with blacks contributing 566 of that number. So while African Americans made up about 44 percent of the state’s populace and several northern counties had large black majorities, Hillsborough County’s black population averaged from 18 to 20 percent of the total throughout the Reconstruction era from 1865 to 1877.

The smaller black population in Hillsborough County undoubtedly explains why the area experienced less overt violence toward blacks during Reconstruction. Thus, a study centered on Hillsborough County makes it easier to gain an unobstructed view of routine psychological and verbal battles that accompanied change, phenomena easily overlooked in the face of high-profile violence that took the lives of over 200 blacks elsewhere in Florida during the Reconstruction period. In Hillsborough County, confrontations between whites and blacks occurred, but most often in subtle daily interactions, which involved struggles over who should control the household, labor, political activities, educational matters, access to courts, and a host of other areas.

Understanding the dynamics of change during Reconstruction requires examining both the black and white communities, because first slavery and then emancipation inevitably tied the two together. In Hillsborough County most African Americans, first as slaves and later as
freedpeople, lived in or very close to the county seat of Tampa, and they were concentrated in an area called the Scrub. Bounded by Scott Street on the north, Cass on the south, Central Avenue on the west, and Nebraska on the east, the Scrub was described by a Tampa newspaper as an area that was “impenetrable and serves to remind one of a walled city.”

During Reconstruction, black and white Southerners also had to deal with white Northerners who played a role in shaping the new society, especially as U. S. soldiers and officials of the Freedmen’s Bureau, the federal agency that was created in 1865 to assist ex-slaves in the transition to freedom. The views of both southern and northern whites can be found in surviving newspapers and government documents which they wrote, but few African Americans left written records. While this complicates analysis, we can learn much by examining official documents, the press, and the reactions of whites to what transpired. Given the general absence of records actually written by ex-slaves, we must infer their attitudes largely from their actions which often spoke loudly about their beliefs.

After emancipation, some of the fiercest battles between blacks and whites were over the household. The very act of forming families fundamentally challenged the prevailing view of elite whites that they were the rightful regulating agents in society. Slaves could not contract for themselves, control their families, or express themselves within the body politic. Emancipation changed this and offered freedpeople the right to form their own households and represent themselves in the public arena. Their attempts to exercise these rights were not uncontested, however, as many whites still assumed their control over blacks was necessary to assure social

In 1882, Tampa (as viewed here from the county courthouse) was still sparsely settled with a population of less than 1,000 people.

Photograph courtesy of Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library System.

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order. Nevertheless, blacks forced changes, as evidenced by the way they ordered their domestic life.

After the war, Hillsborough County blacks gathered their kin around them, as did freedpeople throughout the South. For those ex-slaves separated from relatives, reuniting families proved a major challenge. The drive to unite with family was not a product of emancipation, however. Rather it was played out countless times even before the Civil War began. Such was the case in Hillsborough County when the local newspaper ran an advertisement in 1858 for a 26-year-old runaway slave named Pierce who was “probably heading for Columbus Georgia to join his wife.” After the Civil War, attempts to reunite families accelerated. Throughout the North and South, family members advertised for information about loved ones. In 1867, Ann Wells was still seeking information about her daughter, “Maria Adeline, formerly a slave of Dr. Lively, [who] was taken from Tampa during the war by some colored people and carried to Key West. When last heard from she was in Apalachicola, Florida.”

Black families maintained contemporary visions of males as heads-of-household, yet they did not mirror the patterns of the middle-class white community. Rather, they more closely approximated poor white households. The poor of both races were more distinctly committed to a communally based experience that valued cooperation over individualism. In an example of cooperation, African-American families sometimes took in orphaned children after the war and raised them as their own. In 1880 two black families in Hillsborough County listed orphans
among household members. Other households included grandparents and young nieces and nephews who could contribute only marginally to the economic power of the family unit. In assisting those less fortunate, particularly the young and the old, blacks themselves helped keep ex-slaves away from white control. In this sense household formation represented an act of resistance to old social structures that tried to keep blacks dependent on white guardians.8

When blacks constituted their households based on kin and community ties, the implications went far beyond family. Households may seem the embodiment of the private sphere, but in reality it is where private and public spheres meet. Households, created by marriage, were the foundation of social organization, connecting the individual to the state by law. Independent households allowed black patriarchs to represent their dependents in the public realm and to make decisions about the character of employment for wives and children, thus limiting whites’ ability to make these decisions.

In Hillsborough County, most African Americans quickly formed households independent of white control. Within five years of emancipation, blacks headed seventy-one households which included nuclear and extended families, as well as single-person households.9 Not all blacks left white households right away, however. Forty-two adults and thirty children still resided with whites in 1870. By 1880, the number of black households grew to 178 of the county’s 1,182. Of these, ninety were male-headed nuclear families, a household pattern established soon after the war. Among the other eighty-eight non-nuclear black households, there were twenty-three extended families, thirteen husbands and wives, thirteen households with apparently unrelated members, twenty-seven single person households, and twelve households headed by women.10 The predominance of male-headed households indicates that blacks, like whites, generally adhered to prevailing patriarchal structures.

Since households formed the core of social organization, the act that formed them – marriage – provides insight into the struggle for control between blacks and whites. Despite the lack of legal recognition for slave marriages, both the white and slave communities had recognized the legitimacy of many such unions. Before emancipation, elders of the First Baptist Church of Tampa, which included both blacks and whites, expelled Franklin Branch’s slave George for “living improperly with a woman as his wife.” Since the law did not recognize this union as legal, it is clear that the legitimacy of the “marriage” lay within the social mores of the community. Church officials instructed him to provide evidence of his marriage, and after repeated requests went unanswered, the church withdrew its fellowship. Within weeks George provided proof “evidencing to the church that he is married” and the congregation welcomed him back. Whites held the decision-making power within the church, and so it was the very group which denied the legality of the marriage that demanded proof of its legitimacy.11

Once emancipation came, legal marriage became important to both social and political policy since it created households. Whites assumed formal marriages were necessary to create legal obligations, while blacks saw informal marriages as sufficient to claim rights attendant with that status. This struggle found its way into southern legislatures in the form of marriage statutes, but black resistance showed that actions, much less attitudes, could not always be legislated. Based on racial stereotypes and social myths, many whites believed blacks’ nature unsuited to the stable, monogamous relationships whites thought necessary, and middle-class whites clung to
This poster was marketed to former slaves seeking to establish their families as the foundation of freedom.

Illustration from *Reconstruction* by Eric Foner.
this view, despite evidence that many former slaves remained within the “families” formed during their bondage. A Freedmen’s Bureau official reflected northern views on the issue, observing “the principle of fidelity in the marriage relation is necessarily of slow growth among these people, who from force of circumstances and common custom, have so long been taught to disregard it.”

After emancipation, the Florida legislature mandated marriage by black couples. In 1866, the state passed a law requiring “all colored inhabitants of this State, claiming to be living together in the relation of husband and wife, and who have not been joined as such, within nine months to appear before some person legally authorized to perform the marriage ceremony, and be regularly joined in the holy bonds of matrimony.” The marriage ceremony would legitimize the couple’s offspring retroactively. The state could penalize non-compliance through charges of adultery or fornication, a misdemeanor carrying a penalty of $1,000 and/or three months in jail.

The law notwithstanding, the incidence of blacks formalizing their family relationships appears to have been uneven, especially in Hillsborough County where few followed the law. It was not until Richard Runnels married Easter Clay on Christmas Day in 1869 that Hillsborough County registered its first legal black marriage. Between 1866 and 1872, only six black couples married within the county. It is unclear why Hillsborough County blacks declined to marry formally, but they did form family units. During the same general timeframe, census records document about fifty black “married” couples living within the county. This indicates that whites could control the legislative process but not black behavior. Compliance rates such as those in Hillsborough County concerned state officials, but apparently not local whites. The low prosecution rate in a community where so many black couples met the legal criteria for adultery suggests officials singled out only those not meeting legal responsibilities to support their families.

When white politicians realized the law was not creating a rush to the courthouse, Florida’s Governor David Walker recommended that the legislature extend the marriage deadline of October 1866. Lawmakers shared his concern, but found a different solution. In December 1866 the legislature automatically legalized unions between those who have “lived together as husband and wife and have before the world recognized each other as husband and wife as if the marriage had been solemnized by a proper officer legally authorized to do so.” This same law extended parental responsibility toward offspring by legitimizing children and making them heirs of their parents.

Just as whites tried to dictate household relations through marriage laws, they tried to shape economic relations through labor laws. Race-based legislation represented conservative white efforts to define the economic role of African Americans in postwar southern society. This was particularly onerous since Florida courts sometimes heavily fined convicted freemen and hired out their time. During the first years of Reconstruction, Florida’s Black Codes criminalized vagrancy in an effort to force blacks back to the plantations. Under the 1866 vagrancy law, “every able-bodied person who has no visible means of living and shall not be employed at some labor to support himself or herself, or shall be leading an idle immoral or profligate course of life, shall be deemed a vagrant, and may be arrested.” This law did not distinguish between white and black, ostensibly holding them to the same legal requirements and penalties. However,
enforcement was more strict for blacks, who were assumed by elite whites to be naturally “idle, immoral, or profligate.” The law reflected white elite fears about free black workers and, as historian Eric Foner argues, aimed at “resurrecting as nearly as possible the old order with regard to black labor.”

Many whites in Hillsborough County had doubts about blacks moving into a less controlled labor market. Praising federal and state efforts to control the mobility and labor of blacks, a local newspaper editor saw no contradiction in using these methods against free citizens. Instead, he opined that “the results of this year’s experiment confirm the forebodings of planters who distrust the reliability of black labor.” Another newspaper article expressed common white southern sentiments in dismissing the idea that blacks were whites’ equal in the workforce. The author argued against labor policies that threw “the whole black race into direct and aggressive competition with the laboring classes of the whites,” and he used a telling analogy to drive home his point.

The horse hired for a day may be fed or not fed, groomed or not groomed, when returned to the stable. The horse owned by us, and for which we have paid a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars, is an object both of pride and solicitude. His grooming, stabling, and feeding are cared for. If sick, he is doctored, and cured if possible – when at work it is the owner’s interest that he not be over tasked. The attainment of political equality by the Negro will revolutionize all this. It will be as if our horses were given the right of intruding into our parlors, or brought directly into competition with human labor, no longer aiding it but as rivals.

The analogy expressed a recurring theme – that blacks were not on the same level of humanity as whites. The “horse” had no business being in the parlor or placing himself “into competition with human labor.”

Under the labor law’s provisions, all contracts with blacks had to be in writing and, once signed, severe penalties faced blacks who broke them. Here, too, the law made distinctions between black and white parties to contracts. Failure of blacks to abide by the terms of a contract was a criminal offense punishable by incarceration or court-ordered forced labor. If the white party to the contract reneged, it was a civil matter and a jury of whites decided the amount of monetary damages due. Although southern whites and the Freedmen’s Bureau supported contracts as mutually advantageous to white employers and freedpeople, the advantage lay squarely with the landowner.

Despite the legal requirement, labor contracts were not universally used throughout Florida. By the Freedmen’s Bureau’s own accounting in 1867, there were few contracts and little in the way of coercion against black laborers in Hillsborough County. Noncontractual labor relations generally satisfied whites in Hillsborough County, because of the lack of plantations and prevalence of food crops, which generally did not require the intensity of labor needed on plantations. Since most of the food crops did not require year-round attention, landowners did not want to contract with laborers for an entire year, which would have necessitated providing rations even during slack times. Therefore, it benefited landowners to hire workers as needed on a wage basis. This arrangement also benefitted black farm workers who could take advantage of the local labor shortage and change employers based on wages offered.
In 1870 Hillsborough County’s black men were still commonly employed in agriculture. While a few may have labored under contracts, most either rented land that was already under cultivation, worked as wage laborers, or took advantage of the Homestead program. Census figures show farm labor provided sixty percent of employment opportunities for black males. Despite the predominance of agricultural labor in the postwar period, whites were quick to suggest that freedpeople were inappropriately moving away from their “native element” – the fields. This probably reflects concern that increasing black independence would threaten whites’ own ability to find farm laborers.

Whites did correctly assess the fact that blacks were becoming more independent. By 1880 agrarian pursuits still dominated the male world of work, but census data also show an increase in the number of adult males who identified themselves as farmers rather than farm laborers. It is unknown, however, whether they were homesteaders or still working for whites under some form of tenancy or wage agreement. Even if they did not yet own their own land, they may have rented acreage where they could farm more independently. While the trend toward more independent working and living arrangements increased, some blacks continued to live with their employers, although the numbers gradually decreased. In 1870, 39 black adults and 22 black children lived with white families. A decade later, only 21 black adults and 11 black children still lived with their employers.

Labor was a highly gendered issue both in the way it was viewed and in how it was practiced. Laws governing vagrancy provide insight into the convergence of race and gender conceptions. Vagrancy laws required every able-bodied person to support himself or herself. Although seemingly paradoxical in a society where women’s place was considered to be in the home, this measure shows that gender roles contained a racial component. In practice only black women were required to work, subject to the sanctions for vagrancy. Despite the economic turmoil in the South after the war, no group suggested that white women should become wage earners. In contrast, however, neither law nor public policy accepted the role of black women as workers solely within their own homes. Race-based gender constructions were clear in the reactions of both northern and southern whites to black women’s withdrawal from the outside labor force. Assistant Commissioner Sprague noted with concern that the freedmen are “adverse to their women and children going into the field as common laborers and desire them to attend to the housework, as they express it, like white folks.” Whites attributed the new phenomenon of black women keeping house as a misplaced attempt to emulate white middle-class values or proof of blacks’ laziness. However, it was probably not coincidence that by staying home African-American women avoided the direct supervision by whites that was associated with slavery.

Nevertheless, the economic roles of black and white women differed significantly. In Hillsborough County, white women were overwhelmingly engaged in keeping house. In 1870, 98 percent of them listed no commercial work outside the home. In contrast to whites, only 50 percent of black women were keeping house in 1870. Keeping house undoubtedly included a variety of tasks that generated money and included helping their husbands in the fields whenever necessary. These activities often provided hidden income through the sale or barter of products such as produce, eggs, milk, or homemade goods. Even if not earning wages, freedwomen contributed significantly to the family economy through their own household endeavors and by
providing services and products that their families would otherwise have had to purchase. Since the economy in Hillsborough County at that time was highly dependent on barter, the food and goods produced by women were valuable for trade.24

Whites failed to understand that the social circumstances and legacy of slavery gave labor different meanings for African Americans. For black women, the meaning was deeply influenced by their desires to nurture their families and maintain their own households. They still assisted their husbands in the fields, but in ways that strengthened the family economic unit, instead of contributing directly to white employers’ profits. Their success in this is indicated by the fact that between 1870 and 1880 the percentage of black adult women keeping house or with no outside employment increased from 50 to 64 percent. When economic circumstances did dictate the need for freedwomen to earn wages, they created economic niches that added earnings without sacrificing care of their families or submitting themselves to the supervision of whites. A new occupation appearing in the 1880 census – laundress – illustrates this. Eleven female adults and one child reported this occupation, which allowed them to earn money while maintaining independence from white households by doing the work in their own homes.25

Illustration from America’s Reconstruction by Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney.

An 1865 cartoon by Winslow Homer depicted the question of free black labor from the point of view of a white southern planter who says to his former slave: “My boy, we’ve toiled and taken care of you long enough – now, you’ve got to work!”
In Hillsborough County’s rural setting, land provided the central avenue to economic independence. Access to land was enhanced by the 1866 Homestead Act, which opened government lands in Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida for settlement by small, independent farmers, both black and white. Homesteaders could later purchase the property for nominal fees. Opposition to black homesteading quickly developed among southern whites who did not want freedpeople to gain too much independence. As long as blacks could be kept under whites’ control economically, the latter could also influence other aspects of their lives. The Freedmen’s Bureau recognized this, and Bureau officials applauded the Homestead program which they felt would make freedpeople “self-reliant and better qualified to discharge the rights and duties of citizens,” a condition unlikely as long as freedpeople remained “in a great measure within the power of employers and landed proprietors.”

The full extent of homesteading in Hillsborough County is unknown, but an Army officer from Fort Brooke reported that it interested many freedpeople. There were obstacles, however, “since the government lands are worthless for any purpose whatever, most of them being barren sand hills with little or no vegetation upon them” or "sadly located in overflown and swampy lands." Despite these negative descriptions, by March 1868 the Bureau’s land agent serving Hillsborough, Hernando, and Sumter counties reported filing claims for eighty-six applicants, both black and white, testifying to a strong desire by the poor of both races to farm their own land. In practice, taking advantage of the Homestead Act proved difficult. Just filing a claim could be problematic. One Tampa official indicated he could get neither program information nor maps and would have to travel to Tallahassee to remedy the problem. He complained that the official in charge of helping blacks to apply for land “might as well have his headquarters in New York City, as at Tampa. He has no office or other place of business here that I know of where freedmen can obtain information.”

White opposition also interfered with the homestead program. Early on Tampa’s Florida Peninsular expressed derision by suggesting that officials call the homestead law “a Bill to Get Rid of the Laboring Class of the South, and make Cuffe a Self-Supporting Nuisance.” Many white farmers actively obstructed black homesteading through techniques that ranged from propaganda to outright fraud. One Bureau official reported “there is reason to believe freedmen have been intentionally misguided. Locating agents have found them settled on private land, through advice of neighboring white people ... [after] industriously cultivating the land, they were compelled to remove and lose their improvements.” In other cases, “after taking possession and most probably erecting his but and building his fences, a neighbor with gun in hand orders him to leave, that he is a trespasser.”

Some of the most visible confrontations between blacks and whites occurred in the public political arena, where African Americans sought to vote, hold public office, and join the state’s militia. As in other areas, changes that occurred in the public political arena were often the result of routine interactions in which African Americans refused to defer to whites. The framework for black political participation was imposed by the federal government during Reconstruction. Initially, southern states like Florida tried to gain readmission to the Union by simply outlawing slavery and ratifying the Fourteenth Amendment, while passing Black Codes that severely restricted the rights of freedpeople and excluded them from any political participation. This led
to Congressional Reconstruction legislation, passed in 1867, which gave African-American men
the right to vote and used federal troops to protect the new rights of freedpeople.

In Tampa, the presence of the U.S. Army at Fort Brooke proved critical for African Americans
seeking to exercise their freedom. According to one officer, “the people are outwardly loyal, and
will be so as long as there are any troops stationed here. The feeling toward the Union ... is not
very satisfactory.” Another Fort Brooke officer noted that “in Hillsborough and parts of the
adjoining counties that are easy of access and with daily communication with this place, where
any abuses or violations of law can be promptly attended ... the people are disposed to conduct
themselves well.” As a result, military authorities did not often interfere with local affairs in
Tampa, although an outburst of violence required the Army to intervene in January 1868, when
“heads and noses were smashed.” Incidents like this appear rare in Hillsborough County, as
federal troops in Tampa mediated disagreements and prevented widespread racial violence
against blacks.

Despite the presence of soldiers and the extension of the franchise to black men, southern
whites believed they could create a political world that kept blacks in their “rightful” place as
second-class citizens. When African Americans demonstrated a desire to participate fully in
politics, conservative whites explained this away by pointing to incitement by white Unionists
and the Republican Party. In Tampa the Florida Peninsular asserted that “if colored men
surrender their wills and freedom of political action... the shackles which they thus voluntarily
assume will be found more degrading to their minds than the slavery which the law once
imposed upon them.” Referring to the activities of white Unionists and the Republican Party, the
Peninsular decried “the very industrious effort going on to drag our colored people into a party
organization pledged to oppose the southern whites, as such, and chain them to the leadership of
a set of men... whose attempts to foster antagonism and hatred between the two races we deem
unwise, unnecessary, and of dangerous tendency.” In short, black votes were acceptable as long
as they were cast for conservative Democrats who sought to restrict the independence of
freepeople.

African Americans repeatedly demonstrated their eagerness to participate in the polity. During
Congressional debates over the vote, a Florida Freedmen’s Bureau official told his superiors,
“the political affairs of the country, particularly the discussions in Congress relating to Negro
suffrage, are well known here which creates much interest and causes the freedmen to look
forward to a revolution quite equaling the strife which brought about their freedom.” With the
extension of the franchise to black men in 1867, political meetings became common among
African Americans in Hillsborough County. These gatherings included speeches, marches, and
barbeques, which served a variety of purposes, including breaking up the monotony of work
while simultaneously showing the independence of African Americans. Even attending a
meeting involved the risk of sanctions since some employers refused to hire the politically
active. The threat of firing, if carried out, could place the ex-slave in danger of arrest for
vagrancy, which might mean incarceration and the break-up of the family.

Throughout the period 1865-1880, Tampa’s Democratic newspaper echoed the displeasure of
the conservative white community over local black political meetings, especially those held in
the Scrub, where many of Tampa’s blacks lived. One particularly pointed attack concerning
night-time meetings charged that if there was nothing to hide, black and white participants would hold their meetings in public during the daytime. The newspaper showed no similar concern, however, when it had previously advertised a Ku Klux Klan meeting and informed members “you will meet as usual at 2 A.M.” to discuss “the social, political, and moral condition of this community.” Unable to prevent interracial Unionist gatherings, conservatives ridiculed these activities. One press account observed that meetings in the home of a white Unionist featured “an awful shuffling, singing, and dancing on the piazza of the residence of C. R. Mobley by his colored brethren, every night or so, which of course annoys his neighbors.” In addition to private homes, African-American churches in Tampa were also a favored gathering place for political meetings.

Blacks’ confidence in their political power grew over time, as evidenced by their increased willingness to take public stands against Democrats. Such was the case in 1867, when the “Union men” of Hillsborough County presented a petition, signed by both blacks and whites, to military authorities in Tampa. They expressed dissatisfaction with a proposed roster of county political officials and recommended an alternative roster that included three blacks. At least one of these men, Cyrus Charles, did receive an appointment to the County Commission in 1868. Freedmen petitioned their government on a variety of issues. They complained when officials taxed them for schools but did not use the money for this purpose. They also petitioned the
governor to approve an African-American militia company in 1870.\textsuperscript{39} The black community’s use of petitions to make its feelings known documents the growing confidence of African Americans and their belief that the government was responsible to them as citizens.

Petitioning state officials was also sometimes the only recourse when local courts denied equal justice. This was the case when the African-American community of Hillsborough County rallied to the aid of Henry Clay, a farm laborer and first sergeant in the Tampa militia, who was convicted of altering a cattle brand and sentenced to three months in prison. Citing the injustice of Clay’s conviction because he “was induced to commit the crime by a designing and unprincipled white man who has escaped punishment,” they requested a pardon from the governor. The forty-three black petitioners did not contest Clay’s guilt, but demanded for him equality under the law. Since his white accomplice had not been punished neither should Clay. The governor apparently agreed since he issued a pardon.\textsuperscript{40}

When it came to the most visible sign of traditional political behavior – the vote – blacks were enthusiastic from the beginning. Voter registration “awakened the freedmen to a sense of his personal strength and importance,” according to a Freedom Bureau official. While Democrats tried to persuade blacks to vote for them, Bureau reports show that local African Americans actively mobilized against the Democratic Party and for their own interests.\textsuperscript{41} White Unionists and blacks rallied principally around two groups – the Union League and the Lincoln Brotherhood, which both supported the Republican Party. The Union League, formed in the North in 1862, pledged complete support for the Union and the franchise for black men. Its platform centered around debt relief and issues of interest to both poor whites and blacks. The Lincoln Brotherhood also sought to rally black support for the Republican Party in Florida. According to historian Jerrell Shofner, the primary difference between the two groups was the more strident rhetoric associated with the Union League, which became the most influential political organization representing Republicans in Florida and throughout the South.\textsuperscript{42}

The Union League was particularly popular in Hillsborough County and likely represented Tampa’s first integrated political group. In 1867, a captain from Fort Brooke reported on a League meeting held in Tampa. According to him, “the Refugees and Union men are jubilant, they are industriously at work perfecting their organization as a political party. They have entire confidence in their ability to elect loyal Union men to office when the proper time comes.”\textsuperscript{43} The freedmen anxiously joined in political debate by listening to speeches and discussing courses of action. Union League members pledged to “elect true and reliable Union men and supporters of the government,” and this included African Americans.\textsuperscript{44}

A major political battle between Democrats and Unionists during military rule involved electing delegates for Florida’s 1868 Constitutional Convention. Controversy began with voter registration preceding delegate elections. Blacks and whites of all political leanings were extremely active, since they recognized this as a crucial crossroad in the state’s political future. By April 1868, a Fort Brooke officer reported that feelings of hatred toward Union men were at their highest levels in two years. The only whites permitted to register were males over the age of twenty-one who signed oaths of loyalty to the Union or had received Presidential pardons. This increased the influence of the black electorate while eliminating the most radical Democratic
elements. In the end, registration of blacks was successful with a statewide black-to-white ratio of three to one.\textsuperscript{45}

However, once again the pattern in Hillsborough County varied, highlighting demographic differences between Hillsborough and northern Florida counties. According to the local press, 211 whites registered in the county, compared with only 87 blacks, making the voter ratio about two to one in favor of whites.\textsuperscript{46} Nevertheless, Hillsborough County blacks constituted twenty-nine percent of the electorate, a proportion somewhat higher than their twenty percent representation in the population. Local whites charged that fraud had artificially inflated black political influence. At one point, a \textit{Florida Peninsular} article claimed there were eighty-three black voters registered but only seventy-three adult male blacks living in the county. There is no way of determining the validity of this charge, since voter registration records for the county no longer exist.\textsuperscript{47} In spite of the fact that white voters outnumbered blacks in Hillsborough County, conservatives realized the vote would not take place along the color line. There were many white Unionists in South Florida, and they joined with blacks to elect the Unionist candidate, C.R. Mobley, who won by a small margin.\textsuperscript{48}

Following adoption of the 1868 constitution, the legislature passed laws to monitor future elections. These provisions reflected the changing status of freedpeople. Each county selected three men as Inspectors of Elections. In Hillsborough County, officials selected two whites and one black. The African-American inspector was Joseph Sexton, a former Union soldier who had settled in Tampa and served as minister to the congregation of Mt. Sinai A.M.E. Zion Church. Reverend Sexton was politically active in the community, particularly in the area of education. The county continued to have a black Inspector of Elections until October 1872, when a white man replaced Reverend Sexton.\textsuperscript{49}

Local political meetings indicate that blacks maintained a broad political discourse long after the new constitution was in place. One such meeting was organized by the Reverends Gibbs and Pierce and held at the African Methodist church. Several other black community leaders were present, as was C. R. Mobley. Another meeting in August 1868 included thirty black men, eight black women, and five whites. In preparation for elections that year, there were at least three more Republican political rallies with black participation, one featuring a black speaker. Following the last rally in October, participants formed a procession consisting of sixty blacks and at least one white man, M. P. Lyons.\textsuperscript{50}

Tampa’s African-American community also organized parades to celebrate special holidays. On January 1st and July 4th of each year, blacks marched through the streets to celebrate the nation's and their own independence. The African-American brass band, whose fourteen members practiced at the local school house on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, probably accompanied these marchers. These demonstrations of individual, community, and national pride brought together members of the community as well as members of Tampa’s “Negro Militia,” formed in 1870. When parading, participants usually followed a course traversing the small town and ending at the county courthouse, where they listened to political speeches, enjoyed the fellowship of their neighbors, and celebrated their freedom.\textsuperscript{51}
A drawing, entitled “The First Vote,” shows the variety of African-American men who cast their first ballots – an aging craftsman, a member of the middle class, and a soldier.

From America’s Reconstruction by Eric Foner and Olivia Mahoney.
The principal local office held by African Americans was county commissioner. Blacks served on the County Commission through at least the mid-1870s, but whites did not always accept their presence uncritically. Although commission records reveal no significant rifts, press reports suggested otherwise. Tampa’s Democratic newspaper often portrayed African-American officials as pawns of white Republicans. For example, when complaining about the commissioners reducing the number of precincts in the county, the paper said that black commissioners “should not be held responsible.” Instead, the editor pointed to local white Republicans as “the men who are responsible for this.”

While southern conservatives showed sensitivity to any political activity by African Americans, they were especially concerned by their participation in the militia. The conservative state leadership had revived Florida’s militia in its 1866 constitution but limited membership to “every able-bodied white male inhabitant of the State between the ages of eighteen and forty-five years.” Abuses by these groups throughout the South led the federal government to ban militias in 1867. They did not remain dormant for long, though. Once white radicals gained control in southern states, they petitioned Congress to allow them to form “loyal” militias. Perceiving this as another means of influencing events in the South, Congress allowed southern states to re-form militias. Florida’s militia law permitted membership by black and white men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five who declared their loyalty to the state. African Americans joined the militia in large numbers, but they never outnumbered white militiamen in Florida or any other state. Nevertheless, the organization was commonly referred to as the “Negro militia,” a term that spoke to the fears of whites about organized, armed black men in positions of power.

Tampa had at least three militia companies, one black and two white. Thomas McKnight, a laborer, headed the black company. Of the twelve officers in his company at least six were black, as were the eighty-five troops rounding out the muster. Even in Hillsborough County, however, blacks were not a majority in the militia, accounting for only 16 percent of the total according to state records. Despite a militia strength statewide that increased by 52 percent from 1869 to 1873, the size and racial make-up of the militia remained stable within Hillsborough County.

Conservative reaction to the Hillsborough County militia was swift and unambiguous. Tampa’s Democratic paper decried its formation “at a time when law and order is so much respected... [and] when the passions of the people are subsiding and the discontents and bickerings of the past give place to a sound and healthy public sentiment; and at a time too when constant work is indispensable to growing crops.” Over time, criticism in Tampa centered around militia participation in holiday celebrations. The local press described the militia’s 1871 New Year’s parade as “an interesting spectacle,” but claimed that in the aftermath there was “such fearful howlings, cursings groans, and yells... seldom heard from human throats.” Despite occasional problems, the relatively benign reaction toward the militia expressed by the local press probably reflects the fact that the governor never called the Hillsborough County units to active duty in maneuvers that pitted them directly against conservative white interests in the area. Officials did, however, use the militia to provide security at polling stations during elections. Other than this duty, the militia’s main activities centered around training.

It is difficult to assess the success of blacks in influencing the political discourse during Reconstruction. Certainly they had many victories, but they were unable to influence events to
the extent their numbers should have allowed. They never gained control over state politics nor were they able to prevent the later erosion of their rights. This does not minimize the importance of what they did achieve, however. They were able to elect Republican representatives to state government, gain appointments to local offices, and force whites to take them into account when making local policies. Perhaps the greatest political victories for blacks came in the area of education.

African Americans saw education as yet another means to first gain and then extend their autonomy. Education served as a way of improving blacks’ upward mobility, but perhaps most important of all, it was a powerful symbol since education for slaves had been against the law. As one official observed, the freedman “knows that it is now his business to climb, and he fully comprehends that education is the ladder.”

African Americans fought hard to gain access to education, often sacrificing the short-term economic benefit of more workers in the family to long-term goals of increased knowledge. Where schools were unavailable, African Americans often created their own, a task their black churches tackled with great enthusiasm. The story of education in Florida and Hillsborough County illustrates this process.

Unlike other southern states which set up public school systems but barred blacks after the Civil War, Florida specifically chartered a public school system for blacks. According to one historian, conservative Floridians took this unique step in part to “create an effective and obedient working class and control their votes.” Toward this end, an 1866 law required the Superintendent of Public Instruction to “establish schools for freedmen, when the number of persons of color... will warrant.” This initial effort brought black public schools to larger population centers, but the people of smaller counties, such as Hillsborough, had to provide for themselves.

White conservative Floridians got the first opportunity to use the school system for socialization, implementation of military rule in 1867 shifted control to the Freedmen’s Bureau and Unionists. Aware of the potential for developing “good Republicans” through the education system, the Freedmen’s Bureau became actively involved in building schools and subsidizing teachers' salaries. Its efforts provided the first public school for blacks in Hillsborough County and eventually widened educational opportunities for whites as well. The Bureau had a genuine desire to see blacks educated since schools “once finished and advantageously located will be the central point for improvement.” Education was to be “the regenerator of the colored race, and if they can be brought in contact with the whites in an intellectual effort prejudices will subside and both races will be improved.” As one Bureau official observed, “it cannot be long before the white citizens will discard their prejudices, and parents overcome all scruples to secure for their children an education.”

Education in Florida got a boost when the 1868 state constitution provided for a public school system for both blacks and whites. The state did not mandate segregated schools, although they became the norm. By 1870, Governor Harrison Reed reported that there were more than 200 schools in the state. The Freedmen’s Bureau furnished eighty-seven of those. Statewide in 1870, schools taught 25 percent of white children, compared to just under 15 percent of black children, but during the next decade there were noticeable increases for both groups. By 1880, 41 percent of white and 49 percent of black children attended school in the state.
During Reconstruction, Army officers at Fort Brooke frequently commented on the need for schools in the Tampa area and the black community’s desire for them. There was apparently a school for black children operating in Hillsborough County as early as 1866, although it was not a public school. In 1867, a Freedmen’s Bureau official noted the school had closed the previous summer, and the following year another official suggested that a Tampa school be located at Fort Brooke, because “the white people are somewhat opposed” to black schools.63 The reasons for white opposition were not explicitly noted, but it is likely Hillsborough County whites, like their North Florida counterparts, were concerned that they would have little influence in such schools. It was common in southern communities for conservative citizens to discourage white teachers from working in black schools by denying them lodging and making them social outcasts. After a visit to Tampa in late 1867, the Superintendent of Freedmen’s Schools for the State acknowledged the need for a black school, but it was over two more years before officials established a black public school in Tampa.64

Meanwhile, blacks in Hillsborough offered their time and labor to raise money to purchase a school building and site. They asked only that the government pay the teacher’s salary. By December 1867, blacks in Hillsborough County had established “school societies” to organize their efforts. Before officials built a school, black students often met in church buildings, lodge halls, or wherever space was available and permission could be obtained.55 For the year 1867 the Hillsborough County Commission reported that a total of 687 whites and 92 blacks received some form of education. Since there were then no formal schools for African Americans in the county, these black students probably studied in Sabbath or night schools.

The program of the Freedmen’s Bureau to build public schools for blacks generally relied on freedpeople to first purchase land through their own contributions. Once clear title was secured, the Bureau provided construction materials. By the end of 1867, freedpeople in Hillsborough County had collected more than half the money necessary to purchase land for a school, but they were either unsuccessful in raising the remaining money or whites would not sell them land since they did not provide a suitable site until mid-1869.56 In June of that year the County Commission was finally able to inform the Freedmen’s Bureau that blacks now had clear title to land for a school. In August a Tampa newspaper announced that the Freedmen’s Bureau planned to get involved in establishing a school.67 At the end of 1869 the County Commission responded to a Freedmen’s Bureau inquiry requesting cost estimates for building materials for a school.68

After citizens adopted the 1868 state constitution, Republican officials wanted to institutionalize the school system. To do this, they established county Boards of Public Instruction in 1869. The state appointed members, who were responsible for managing all educational properties and funds in the county. They also established new schools as required and assured that they operated at least three months each year. The formal school system got a slow start in Hillsborough since the first board members selected by the state in 1869 refused to accept these non-salaried positions. The school board in Hillsborough County finally held its first meeting in 1871. By that time a black public school was already operating in Tampa, opening after the first public school for whites.69

By 1871 Hillsborough County had a total of seven schools, six for whites and one for blacks. The Board of Instruction appointed Thomas McKnight and Isaac Howard, both African
Americans, as two of the three trustees for the school. In December of that year, Isaac Howard
remained as a trustee while freedman Peter Bryant replaced McKnight. In 1870 there were no
black teachers in the county, but that was not uncommon. By 1875 the total number of schools
grew to twenty six, although there was still only one public school for blacks.\footnote{70}

In 1880, within the age group of four to twenty-one, forty-eight black children attended day
school, most with John Patton, who began teaching them in 1876. This represented about 14
percent of the populace in that age group, less than one-half the norm for blacks in the state.
Girls in the county made up 70 percent of the black school population, suggesting the continued
widespread need for the labor of male children. By 1880, children who attended school came
from families across the employment spectrum, indicating education was important to a wide
cross-section of the black community. Literacy increased dramatically for blacks during the
decade in all age groups, and many new readers were working adults who probably took
advantage of night and Sabbath schools to acquire highly prized literacy skills.\footnote{71}

In 1880, Hillsborough County had thirty-six schools for white children, but there was still only
one black public school.\footnote{72} This discrepancy did not go unchallenged, however. Reverend Joseph
Sexton, minister of Tampa’s Mt. Sinai African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, organized
meetings in the African-American community to discuss new schools for blacks and whom to
hire as teachers. Although he invited members of the Board of Instruction to attend, there is no
evidence they did. School Board minutes mention neither of these community meetings, nor did
board members discuss black concerns. The African-American community, however, appeared
undeterred by lack of support from the school board, having already established a pattern of self-
help. By 1880 there were two black teachers, Harriet Henderson and Catherine Hamilton, listed
in the county’s census, but neither received salaries from the county. It is possible these women
taught in Sabbath schools or some other forum that did not fall under the public school system.
Freedmen Thomas McKnight, Peter Bryant, Henry Brumick, and Isaac Howard reportedly
formed a committee to pursue increased educational opportunities within the African-American
community. Supporting these efforts, freedwomen organized clubs to raise funds, and their work
eventually provided the money needed to build Tampa’s Harlem Academy which opened in
1889.\footnote{73}

By the end of the Reconstruction period, politicians had institutionalized public education in
law and practice. The availability of public education for blacks existed, but the quality was
generally not the same as in white public schools. Blacks took advantage of those opportunities
that existed and continued to demand more, and better, education for themselves and their
children. For their part, whites still wondered aloud about the benefits and usefulness of
educating blacks. The previous decade, however, proved the ability and eagerness of African
Americans to learn. The State Superintendent of Public instruction himself acknowledged that
“the Negro, since the day of his citizenship, has shown large appreciation of the need, the uses,
and the blessings of education.”\footnote{74}

During Reconstruction the challenge for Florida’s African Americans was to assert themselves
in an economic, social, and political system that marginalized them. This was especially difficult
given the concerted efforts whites made to dominate the postwar social order. These efforts were
evident in the state’s Black Codes, as well as less formal practices, which reflected the belief of
“Is this a republican form of government?” asked Thomas Nast in this 1876 cartoon which depicted the end of Reconstruction as a failure of democracy.

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many southern whites that blacks were inferior and in need of continued supervision. Blacks, on the other hand, refused to accept constraints on their freedom, and they resisted the disadvantaged role conservative whites envisioned for them. The conflict this engendered, as this study has shown, was characterized by daily resistance and a steady stream of low-level confrontations that forced whites to accommodate to new realities of African-American freedom.

The experience of Hillsborough County illustrates that the Reconstruction period was more complicated than either its participants recognized or historians have fully reported. Despite some similarities, Hillsborough County did not follow the well-documented patterns found in areas dominated by the plantation economy. Above all, this study shows that Reconstruction was not a monolithic process – it unfolded differently depending on local conditions. While southern and northern whites clearly affected the outcome, the fact that changes beneficial to freedpeople occurred over white protests shows that blacks’ influence was effective. As a result of their actions, African Americans in Hillsborough County enjoyed the benefits of heading their own households, gained the right to benefit from their own labor, took advantage of educational opportunities, and participated in formal politics. Freedpeople’s political activity included frequent meetings, organized rallies, and exercise of the ballot. All of these activities show that blacks had the confidence and fortitude to take public stands, despite the risk of retaliation from employers, townspeople, or perhaps even night-riders.

In 1877 the Reconstruction era ended in Florida with the withdrawal of the last federal troops. Conservative whites regained political control and instituted policies to erode African Americans’ gains of the previous decade. The magnitude of this retrenchment serves as evidence of just how much freedpeople had gained. During Reconstruction their increased autonomy resulted from conflicts and ongoing battles; it did not occur simply because of emancipation. Rather, a clash of visions, values, and goals precipitated it. The story of blacks in Hillsborough County and their quest for personal autonomy can tell us a great deal about the larger struggles of African Americans to make freedom meaningful for themselves and their descendants.

1 U.S. Census Bureau, Manuscript Census, 1860, Hillsborough County, Florida.

2 Ralph L. Peek, “Lawlessness, in Florida: 1868-1871,” Florida Historical Quarterly, 40 (October 1961), 164, 181. The worst areas of racial violence in Florida were counties in North Florida and West Florida. Jackson County alone recorded 153 deaths. There are no documented cases of Klan killings in Hillsborough County during the Reconstruction period.

3 Tampa City Directory, 1886; Florida Peninsular, February 15, 1868.

4 The Freedmen’s Bureau in Florida consisted of the Assistant Commissioner and four staff officers in Tallahassee and 13 Sub-Assistant Commissioners located throughout the state. Bureau officials also called on Army officers to provide local supervision on behalf of the Bureau.

6 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, Florida, 1880; Hillsborough County Commission, Minutes of the County Commission of Hillsborough County, Florida, April 15, 1867, March 3, 1868, Commission Book B, 46, 63, Hillsborough County Archives.

7 Nuclear families were those comprised of husbands, wives, and their children or stepchildren. Extended families represented a wide variation of related individuals including in-laws, aged parents, nieces, nephews, etc.

8 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880.


10 J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 14, 1867. Annual Report, Florida Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Letters Sent, Department of Florida, Volume 2, (hereafter referred to as LSDF).


12 Florida Genealogical Society, Marriage Records, Hillsborough County, Florida: 1866-1901, Book 3, Tampa Public Library.

13 1870 census data do not include the family relationships between household members. An analysis of the common surnames, adult ages, sexes, and the presence of children does allow an estimate of the number of adults living in a marriage relationship, however.


16 *Sunland Tribune* (Tampa), July 2, 1877; U.S. Census Bureau, *Eighth Census of the United States (1860), Agriculture* (Washington: GPO, 1864), 18-19; R. Comba to E. Woodruff, January 251867; R. Comba to C. Garrabee, December 31,1867, LRDF, Box 3. Hillsborough County’s African-American workers again seem to have benefitted from the county’s rural setting and differing work conditions. By July 1867, wages were higher than in other areas of the state.

17 W. Vance to T. Osborn, May 1, 1866, Florida Assistant Commissioner, RG 393, Part 1, U.S. Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Part 1, Department and District of Florida, 1865-1869, Letters Received, Box #3, National Archives, Washington D. C. Hereafter, referred to as LRDF.

18 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880.

19 *Florida Peninsular*, July 28, August 4, 1866.


21 *Florida Peninsular* (Tampa), April 24, 1858, December 7, 1867.
Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880. Adult females still made up the largest group of household servants, although their numbers, too, were shrinking. Children continued to work as servants, but now represented only about half of the servant workforce. Persons included in these numbers were those with occupations listed. Those residing with whites as a consequence of old age or coincident to their parent’s employment were not included.

J. Sprague to O.O. Howard, December 31, 1867, LSDF Volume 2.

Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870; Florida Peninsular, February 15, 1868.

The term middle-class did not mean the same thing in the North and South. In fact, the southern white middle-class, especially in rural areas like Hillsborough County was probably not too much better off than the poor. Because of this, middle-class in the rural South is more a social than economic category.

J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 1, 1867, Annual Report, LSDF.

Florida Peninsular, November 30, 1867; William Vance to A. Jackson, August 31, 1867, ULAR; J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, Monthly Report, February 7, 1868, LSDF.

Reports of W. Apthorpe to the Assistant Commissioner, September 1867-March 1868, in Assistant Commissioner, Land Agent Reports, RG 105, Box 7, National Archives, Washington D.C.; J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 14, 1867, Annual Report, LSDF, Volume 2; W. Vance to Assistant Adjutant General, October 5, 1866, LRDF, Box 4; W. Apthorpe to A. Jackson, March 31, 1868, Locating Agent Reports, RG 105, Box 7, National Archives. Statewide, by the fall of 1867 land agents had registered 2,012 homesteads.

R. Comba to C. Garrabee, October 31, 1867, LRDF;

Florida Peninsular, August 4, 1866.

W. Vance to A. Jackson, August 31, 1867, ULAR, Box 6; Florida Peninsular, October 13 1869, November 30, 1867; J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, June 5, 1867, October 14, 1867, Annual report, R. Comba to C. Garrabee, October 31, 186, LSDF, Volume 2.

Florida Peninsular, August 18, 1866; L. Smith to J. Lyman, November 1, 1867; R. Comba to C. Garrabee June 30, 1867, LRDF, Box 4.

Florida Peninsular, January 11, 1868; Monthly Inspection Reports, Department of Florida, RG 393, Part 1, LSDF, National Archives, Washington D. C. Fort Brooke troops would remain until August 1869 when the Army abandoned the garrison. During that period troop strength varied. In August 1867 there were 2 officers and 35 men. The number increased to high of 8 officers and 132 men in March 1869 and then decreased throughout the remainder of the period until only 3 officers and 77 men remained when the garrison closed.

Florida Peninsular, May 11, 1867; November 30, 1867.

J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, December 31, 1866, LSDF, Volume 2.

J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, December 10, 1867, Annual Report, LSDF.

Florida Peninsular, January 23, 1869, April 11, 1868.

Ibid., May 16, 1868 C.R. Mobley was white and his close political association with African Americans brought him much criticism in the local press.

Petition by Citizens of Hillsborough County, September 4,1867, contained in M. Lyons to R. Comba, September 4, 1867, LRDF; Roll of the Officers and Privates of the Company of Militia formed at Tampa, Florida August 27,
1870, Series 1140 Box 1, Florida State Archives. According to the August 29, 1868, Florida Peninsular, Mills Holloman, also black, was appointed as a County Commissioner.

40 Petition from the citizens of Hillsborough County to the Governor of Florida concerning Henry Clay, 1874, Office of the Governor, Correspondence of the Governors, 1857-1888, RG 101 Series 577, Box 4, Florida State Archives; Roll of the Officers and Privates of the Company of Militia formed at Tampa, Florida August 27, 1870, Series 1140 Box 1, Florida State Archives.

41 J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, October 14, 1867, LSDF; W. Vance to A. Jackson, June 30, 1867, ULAR.


43 R. Comba to E. Woodruff, May 31, 1867, LRDF.  
44 Fitzgerald, Union League Movement, 115-116.

45 J. Sprague to Howard, July 31, 1867; W. Comba to C. Garrabee, April 30, 1868, LRDF.

46 Florida Peninsular, October 26, 1867. There was confusion over actual ages and in all probability some blacks were registered who might have been younger than the legal age. The manuscript census from consecutive periods shows many cases where ages do not match those expected.

47 Ibid., September 3, 1867; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870. The local press reported both 83 and 87 black voters at different times. The true number of African-American voters remains unknown. The federal census in 1870 recorded 71 black males who were then over the age of 21, so it is possible conservatives were right. If they were, then this may have changed the election results since Republicans won by only a few votes.

48 Ibid., November 16, 30, 1867, April 4, October 3, 1868. The 17th District, which consisted of Hillsborough, Manatee, and Polk counties, was allowed one delegate to the Constitutional Convention.

49 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870; Notes on the History of Mt. Sinai A.M.E. Zion Church, Tampa Florida; Hillsborough County Commission Minute Book B, 83,102; Sunland Tribune, December 23, 1880; Records of the Hillsborough County Board of Public Instruction, 1880; Hillsborough County Commission Minute Book C, October 7, 1872, 40.

50 Florida Peninsular, August 22, October 3, 24, 31, November 28 1868.

51 Ibid., June 8, 1870.

52 Ibid., August 24, November 2, 1870 (quotation).


55 Florida Senate Journal, 1870, 88; Ibid., 1874, 201, 203; Singletary, Negro Militia, 15.

56 Roll of the Officers and Privates of the Company of Militia formed at Tampa, Florida August 27, 1870, Series 1140 Box 1, Florida State Archives; Florida Senate Journal, 1870, 88.

57 Florida Peninsular, January 4, 1871.
58 Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1876, in Florida Senate Journal, 1877.


60 “An Act Concerning Schools for Freedmen,” January 16 1866, Laws of Florida, Chapter 1,475 (Tallahassee, 1867).

61 J. Sprague to O. O. Howard, July 10, 1867, LSDF; O. O. Howard to J. Sprague, Monthly report, LRDF, July 10, 1867.

62 Address of Governor Harrison Reed to the State Senate, undated (1870); Florida Senate Journal, 1870, 14; Rosen, “Negro Education in Florida,” 226; Gile to Whittlesey, December 31, 1869, LSDF, Volume 4.

63 W. Apthorpe to A. Jackson, September 6, 1867, Assistant Commissioner, Locating Agent Reports, Box 7; R. Comba to C. Woodruff, March 1,1867, Volume 2; G. Hollister to C. Foster, September 15, 1868, LRDF.

64 George R. Bentley, A History of the Freedmen’s Bureau (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 182; Rosen, “Negro Education in Florida,” 113; R. Comba to Woodruff, December 31, 1867, LRDF.


66 R. Comba to E. Woodruff, December 31, 1867; Hillsborough County Commissioners to O.B. Hart, June 8, 1869 Florida Assistant Commissioner, LRDF.

67 Florida Peninsular, August 18, 28, 1869. Despite the lack of a black public school in Tampa, the Florida Peninsular reported one black school in the local area in April 1869. This school did not hold classes in a formal school house, however, since there was none available to blacks at that time, and it did not remain open long, perhaps because black citizens could not continue paying a teacher.

68 W. White to G. White, December 26, 1869, LRDF, Volume 3.


70 Minutes of the Hillsborough County Board of Instruction, August 28, 1871, Hillsborough County School System, Hillsborough County, Florida; Florida Peninsular, December 23, 1871; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870; Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1876, Florida Senate Journal, 1877, 111-116.

71 Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1880; Minutes of the County Board of Public Instruction, March 22,1872, September 2,1876. Discrepancies between census data and School Board records could be caused by a variety of reasons including the fact the census relied on self-reporting while School Board records probably reflect a definition based on regular attendance; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1880.

72 Florida Peninsular, December 23, 1871, October 30, 1879; Hillsborough County Board of Public Instruction Minute Books, 1871-1877.

73 Sunland Tribune, September 28, 1878, December 23, 1880; Manuscript Census, Hillsborough County, 1870 and 1880; Hillsborough County Commission Book D, August 31, 1879; Tampa Tribune, October 29, 1950.

74 Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, December 1876, in Florida Senate Journal, 1877.