Introduction

Between 1870 and 1905, African Americans in Baltimore and Maryland saw both new opportunities and difficult reversals. After the Civil War, the Thirteenth (1865), Fourteenth Amendment (1868) and Fifteenth Amendment (1870) to the U.S. Constitution laid out a promise of freedom, equal protection, and political power for African Americans. In this period, Baltimoreans saw the first African American lawyer join the Maryland State Bar, the first hospital established by African American doctors, the first black teachers work for Baltimore's segregated black public schools, and the first African American elected to the Baltimore City Council.

But in this same period, local, state, and federal elected officials often failed to protect the rights of black Baltimoreans or actively worked against their interests. Unlike in those states that joined the Confederacy, Maryland never experienced a period of Reconstruction under direct federal control after the Civil War. The state's Democratic Party, led by some of the same individuals who had supported or fought on behalf of the Confederacy during the Civil War, controlled most of the elected offices in the city and state. Even white Republicans, who sought support from black voters, often promoted racist policies. The difficult reversals prompted Frederick Douglass to remark at a speech in Baltimore in January 1894:

> I hope and trust all will come out right in the end but the immediate future looks dark and troubled. I cannot shut my eyes to the ugly facts before me.[1]

Such conditions forced black Baltimoreans to petition white-dominated institutions for equality when they could but increasingly focus on independent organizing to pursue their goals.

Notable individual advocates from this period include the religious leaders like Dr. Harvey Johnson (1843–1923) at Union Baptist Church who worked closely with his wife Amelia E. Hall (1858–1922), and Rev. George Freeman Bragg (1863 - 1940) at St. James Church. Leadership also came from individuals outside of the church, including businessmen like Isaac Myers (1835–1891); black lawyers like Everett J. Waring (1859–1914) and Harry S. Cummings (1866–1917); and educators like Roberta Sheridan (c. 1864–1918) and Joseph H. Lockerman (d. 1923). Others included John M. Murphy, Sr. (1840–1922) who founded the Afro-American newspaper and Martha Murphy (1846–1915) who helped to found the Colored YWCA in 1896. Influential Civil Rights organizations included the Equal Rights League, the Mutual United Brotherhood of Liberty (established 1885), and the Maryland Teachers' Association (organized in 1886).

Dr. Harvey Johnson of Union Baptist Church along with the men and women who created and supported the Brotherhood of Liberty, Baltimore's earliest Civil Rights advocacy organization, are credited with enabling a degree of freedom within Baltimore's black community that distinguished it from many other cities. Historain Dennis Halpin writes:

> The wave of racial repression that swept over the southern United States largely stopped at Baltimore's doorstep. Although black Baltimoreans and Marylanders did not wholly escape violence or racism, white attempts at disfranchisement and segregation floundered. This was not a

> coincidence. Black communities in Baltimore (and to an extent Maryland) were uniquely equipped to fight inequality and resist Jim Crow, largely thanks to Johnson and the many thousands who joined or supported him during the previous two decades.[2]

In this period, black activists were reacting to efforts by the state legislature to thwart civil rights advances. Between 1883 and 1905, the Maryland General Assembly passed a series of regressive measures to promote and enforce racial discrimination. These including an 1884 law banning interracial marriage (reaffirming a ban on interracial marriage from 1664), 1904 measures to require "Jim Crow" racial segregation on railroad coaches and steamboats, and a 1905 measure to disenfranchise African Americans (rejected at the polls by Maryland voters). The limited success of these efforts in Maryland in comparison to other Southern states is notable—reflecting both the size and the organization of Baltimore's African American community. Ultimately, Dr. Johnson's experience in Baltimore led him support the creation of the Niagara Movement and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), prefiguring the national significance of civil rights activism in Baltimore during the early twentieth century.

Within the city, the Civil Rights movement was also shaped by the early wave of suburban development in the late nineteenth century. Baltimore City's 1888 annexation of Baltimore County helped to encourage this growth. The annexation and the introduction of new electric streetcar lines in the early 1890s promoted significant changes in the physical development of the city and contributing to increasing racial segregation in the early twentieth century. Looking outside of Baltimore, the Civil Rights movement was shaped by the decades-long period of economic depression that followed the Panic of 1873 and by increasing European immigration into the United States.

In the following sections, this study highlights some of the places associated with the Civil Rights movement in this period. It also expands on three key themes, considering:

- African American efforts to secure opportunities for housing, education, and employment
- African American resistance to segregation and discrimination
- African American organizing to build political power and advocate for civil rights

Associated Places

Many historic places related to this period were demolished during the twentieth century. The Douglass Institute on Lexington Street, an important meeting place for political activism in the nineteenth century, was torn down sometime after 1890. Laurel Cemetery, a black cemetery established in 1851 that became a memorial site for veterans of the U.S. Colored Troops, was displaced in 1957 for the construction of a shopping center and parking lot. In a more recent example, the Harry S. Cummings Residence at 1234 Druid Hill Avenue was demolished by Bethel A.M.E. Church in October 2015 after years of vacancy.

Many historic places from this period still exist. Unfortunately, several some are threatened or partially compromised by vacancy and neglect. These include:

- Public School No. 111, 1024 N. Carrollton Avenue (1889)
- Public School No. 103
- Everett J. Waring Residence, 507 Mosher Street.

Examples of better preserved resources include:

- Douglass Place (1892)
- Mount Auburn Cemetery (1873)
- Public School No. 9 (1897), 1431 N. Carey Street
- Leadenhall Baptist Church (1872–1873)
- Saint Peter Claver Catholic Church (1888)
- Sharp Street Church (1892)

Pursuing opportunities in housing, education, and employment

After the Civil War, thousands of formerly enslaved black people moved from rural counties in Maryland and Virginia to Baltimore to seek work and protection from white violence. Between 1870 and 1900, Baltimore's black population grew quickly—39,558 in 1870 to 53,716 in 1880 to 79,739 in 1900.[3] These figures, based on the U.S. Census, likely understates the true scale of Baltimore's growing black community. Historian Richard

Paul Fuke looked at the growth in black households listed in Woods' City Directory noting that "the number of black householders listed in the Woods' City Directory tripled from 4,000 to 12,000" between 1864 and 1871.[4] The growth in Baltimore's black population was matched by a significant number of European immigrants arriving in the city during the same period.

Year	Total Population	Black Population	Percent Black
1880	332,313	53,716	16.16%
1890	434,439	67,104	15.45%
1900	508,957	79,739	15.67%
1910	558,485	84,749	15.17%

As Baltimore's African American population increased, activists turned their attention to pushing for opportunities for decent housing, public education, and fair employment.

Opportunities for housing

Many of the new migrants struggled to find housing in the immediate post-Civil War period, as Fuke noted:

> Within a month of emancipation, the Friends Association reported "many calls from women with children... who have neither food not shelter." "We find more suffering than we are able to alleviate," it added in January 1865, "They [are in] want of the most necessary food and clothing, and have crowded into alleys and callers."[5]

As African Americans neighborhoods grew around Courtland Street near downtown, Orchard Street in West Baltimore, and Hughes Street in South Baltimore, a number of the well-established black Baltimoreans, largely free prior to the Civil War, invested in real estate and prospered in the growing city. Historian Willard B. Gatewood described the character of Baltimore's "aristocracy of color" who were "relatively well-to-do":

> A black editor calculated in 1890 that about twenty individuals in the city's black community collectively represented a wealth of approximately $500,000. The wealthiest, John Locks, was said to be worth $75,000. Many of those included in Baltimore's black economic elite derived their wealth from catering, barbering, hod-carrying, brickmaking, and caulking. ... Many of these individuals invested in real estate, so that by the turn of the century their heirs were often among the wealthiest blacks in the city.[6]

Historian Jeffrey Richardson Brackett made a similar observation in his 1890 study, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War* writing:

> It has been said that in no city are there so many colored house-holders as in Baltimore. Many of the wealthy colored men have invested largely in houses [and] in a few cases, a whole row is owned by one man. The extent of the town, the number of alleys, and the great number of small houses, of two stories only, facilitate this for one must not suppose that... all expensive buildings or on valuable ground.[7]

As the city's black population grew, it also became more concentrated and segregated from the city's population of native-born whites and European immigrants. Even as late as 1880, the city's black population could be found distributed evenly over three-quarters of Baltimore's twenty wards and eight districts. By 1890, however, African Americans began to concentrate in the 11th Ward (the neighborhood of Biddle Alley) where a little over 11,000 of the 21,2699 residents were African American (making the ward 51.74% black). By 1904, the city's Northwestern District (including the 11th Ward) held more than 40% of Baltimore's 81,381 African Americans.[8]

This movement of African Americans into west and northwest Baltimore to purchase and rent homes often represented an effort to seek better housing conditions. Anne McMechen, George McMechen's wife, later reflected on the universal character of their aspirations in their move to McCulloh Street in 1910, explaining, "we wanted to be more comfortable—a right I think everyone has to exercise."[9]

The movement of Baltimore 's black population to the northwest is clearly visible in the movement of African American congregations that followed (or sometimes led) their congregants out of the downtown area.

Year of move	Church	Prior location	New location
1888	St. Peter Claver Catholic Church	Calvert and Pleasant Streets	N. Fremont and Pennsylvania Avenue
1898	Sharp Street Church	Sharp Street and Pratt Street	Dolphin and Etting Street
1901	St. James Episcopal Church	Lexington and High Street	Park Avenue and Preston Street
1905	Union Baptist Church	Guilford Avenue	Druid Hill Avenue and Dolphin Street
1911	Bethel AME Church	Saratoga Street and Gay Street	Druid Hill Avenue and Lanvale Street

Just as African American residents in northwest Baltimore moved into houses formerly occupied by white households, many black congregations purchased churches from a white congregations moving out of the area (and often into another more distant building). This pattern of succession from segregated white to black ownership and use in houses, church buildings, and school buildings continued in the 1920s and resumed again

in the 1950s and 1960s. Notably, Sharp Street Church tore down a prior building on their property before erecting their existing building in 1898. Union Baptist Church is similarly built by the existing congregation for their own use.

Opportunities for education

As the African American population in Baltimore grew so too did the needs of black students. Immediately after the end of the Civil War, black Baltimoreans and their allies focused on the need to establish schools for black students and to create opportunities for black educators. In 1865, the Friends' Association opened an elementary school for African Americans at the corner of Calvert and Saratoga Streets (in the African Baptist Church).[10]

The Centenary Bible Institute, started at Sharp Street Church, and then began holding classes at 44 East Saratoga Street in 1872. The Institute, which developed into today's Morgan State University, graduated its first student in 1878: John H. Griffin. Crowded conditions soon forced the Institute to relocate and, in 1881, the school moved to the corner of Edmondson and Fulton Avenues in West Baltimore.[11] Persistent demands by Baltimore's black residents before Baltimore City school officials finally led to the creation of the Colored High School in 1882 at Holliday and Lexington Streets.[12]

In addition to advocating for schools where black children could attend, Baltimore leaders also began pushing the city to start hiring black teachers. As a result, in 1888, Baltimore school officials appointed Roberta B. Sheridan as the first African American teacher in the city's public schools.[13] In 1888, Sheridan began teaching at the Annex Colored School No. 1 in Waverly before moving to teach at School No. 9 at Carrolton and Riggs Avenue in West Baltimore the next year. Historian Leroy Graham reflected on the significance of the move:

> With the acceptance of black teachers and a publicly funded high school, the blacks of Baltimore could breathe a sigh of relief after such a long and difficult struggle.[14]

A decade later, the appointment of James H. Van Sickel, a school reformer Denver, as Superintendent of the Baltimore schools marked another major change as the city began hiring black principals and vice-principals.[15] By the 1902–1903 school year, there were over 10,000 students and 166 teachers in the eighteen segregated black schools—nine of which were staffed entirely by black teachers. And, by 1907, all of the teachers for the Baltimore City Division of Colored Schools were African American.[16]

Opportunities for employment

The movement by African Americans out of older neighborhoods into the northwestern part of the city was enabled, in part, by new opportunities for black Baltimoreans to earn money and acquire wealth. One example of the new opportunities was the founding of Provident Hospital in 1894 by Dr. J. Marcus Cargill and others, creating jobs for black doctors and nurses and expanding medical care for black Baltimoreans.[Jackson and Walden;[17] bean_upholding_2010]

Fighting segregation and discrimination

In Baltimore, new federal Civil Rights laws, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, provided a basis for African American to make legal and social demands for equal access and opportunity. For example, in February 1871, John W. Fields, a black barber visiting Baltimore from Virginia, was ejected from a Baltimore streetcar. Fields sued and won a judgement against the trolley company, a decision that forced the integration of municipal transit in Baltimore.[18]_

In 1880, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Strauder v. West Virginia* overturned Maryland's prohibition on black jurors. Black leadership played an important role in enabling further activism, as African Americans in Baltimore could legally hire black lawyers beginning in 1885, the date that Everett J. Waring was admitted to practice law in Baltimore. Another step came in 1890 when Harry S. Cummings was elected to the Baltimore City Council and the city's African American community had its first black city council representative.

In the 1880s, 1890s, and 1900s, however, action by African Americans was met with a strong white reaction, as historian Grace Elizabeth Hale observed, "Whites created the culture of segregation in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of racial difference, to stop the rising."[19]

Segregation as white reaction to black progress

Numerous examples of this reaction are found in Baltimore and Maryland. In 1884, the Maryland Legislature reaffirmed its opposition to interracial marriage. In 1904, the legislature acted again, this time to impose "Jim Crow" segregation on railroad coaches and steamboats. Many embraced the narrative of the "Lost Cause," which rewrote the history of the Civil War to celebrate the Confederacy. In Baltimore, Confederate supporters played a role in the national Lost Cause effort by erecting a monument on Mount Royal Avenue in 1903.[20]

Voting rights and efforts to enforce legal segregation dominated Maryland's civil rights work in the early 1900s. In 1904, voters across Maryland considered the "Poe Suffrage Amendment" that sought to disenfranchise black voters. The Poe Amendment was preceded by earlier segretation efforts including an influential pamphlet that Baltimore resident and Maryland Senator William Cabell Bruce published in 1891 entitled "The Negro Problem." In it, Bruce outlined a case for black disenfranchisement on a foundation of scientific racism. At the national level, effort to disenfranchise black voters won support from the U.S. Supreme Court decision in The Civil Rights Cases (1883) which ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional; the defeat of the Lodge Force Bill (thanks to the efforts of Maryland Senator and Bourbon Democrat Arthur Pue Gorman); and the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) which advanced the idea that segregated public facilities were legal under the doctrine of "separate but equal".

As part of the same backlash against voting rights, as early as 1907, some white Baltimore residents began advocating for municipal laws to enforce racial segregation.[21]

One consequence of this increasingly overt and public racism was the rising threat of lynchings in Maryland and across the south. Between 1882 and 1911, white people in Maryland lynched thirty-one African Americans. In Baltimore, black residents were deprived of equal protection by Baltimore's police and, if they were subjected to violence by white residents, they had great difficulty obtaining justice.

Even in Baltimore City when white residents attacked black men and women they had little fear of penalty. Historian Richard Paul Fuke noted the "fatal police shooting of Eliza Taylor, a black woman, in September 1867," quoting the *Baltimore American*:

> A colored woman was killed under circumstances which show the spirit of hate and oppression cherished toward that portion of the population by many of the police.[22]

The police officer involved in the shooting was acquitted of murder prompting criticism from a convention of black leaders in Baltimore, as the Baltimore American reported:

> The President [George A. Hackett] stated the object of the meeting, quoting the Declaration of Independence in proof of the fact that the colored people have no friends in Baltimore in the Governor or the police, and cited the action of the Grand Jury in discharging the Policeman Frey, charged with the murder of the colored woman, Eliza Taylor, as a specimen of the justice which is meted out to colored people in this city.[23]

Activist and journalist Ida B. Wells cited an example from Baltimore in *The Red Record* (her early 1890s study of lynchings in the U.S.), describing how a black woman in Baltimore "was out walking with a young man of her own race" when she was attacked by a group of white men who "held her escort and outraged the girls… The case went to the courts and they were acquitted."[24]

Black resistance to segregation and discrimination

Despite these challenges, African American activists succeeded in gaining a small measure of economic security, successfully defended the right to vote for black men, and continued to campaign for equality in education and housing. In contrast to a perception that change for African Americans in Maryland ended with the end of Reconstruction in 1877, historian Dennis P. Halpin writes, "black activists in Baltimore spent a majority of the early 1880s attacking a host of injustices—collectively referred to as "black laws"—which had roots in the antebellum era."[25]

In 1885, Rev. Harvey Johnson (1843–1923) founded the Order of Regulators, an early civil rights organization that Johnson renamed the Brotherhood of Liberty in 1887. One of the Brotherhood's efforts was to push for changes that would allow African Americans to become lawyers. Johnson emphasized:

> there must be Negro lawyers, men who have themselves suffered and who will fight the people's fight, because the people's fight will be their own battles[Collier-Thomas,[26] 222]

Such activist efforts led to key legal victories in 1885 when the Stewart Sisters successfully sued the Baltimore, Chesapeake, and Richmond Steamboat Co. for racial discrimination and when Charles L. Wilson succeeded in his suit to overturn the exclusion of African Americans by the Maryland Bar.[27] Under Johnson and others, the Brotherhood focused on defending the civil rights that Africans had already fought to secure during the CIvil War. Thompson continues to explain:

> The law was used to defend black civil rights against encroachments by whites. Never did the Brotherhood initiate proceedings to strengthen, re-establish, or expand black civil rights.[28]

In the 1880s, the Brotherhood of Liberty also worked to amend the state Bastardy Act, challenge laws prohibiting intermarriage, push for improved education for black students, and represent the rights of black workers prosecuted during the Navassa Island trial. Halpin observes that the group's efforts show "how black activists sought to further define the implications of the Fourteenth Amendment, draw the wider community into activism, and seek redress for various injustices." Most importantly, the strategy of using legal test cases became a model for successful legal activism by the NAACP in the twentieth century.[29]

This civil rights activism took place in parallel to independent political organizing where black voters worked both inside and outside of the Republican Party and established white institutions to create a platform for advocating for African American civil rights. Halpin writes:

> By the early 1900s, black activists laid a foundation to thwart white efforts at disfranchisement and residential segregation in the city. Baltimore's activists were among the earliest members of the Niagara Movement in the early 1900s, an organization that eventually became the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). At the same time, their use of "test cases" to challenge and further define the legacy of Reconstruction set the course for black activism that lasted until 1954's landmark decision in Brown v. Board of Education.[30]

Organizing for black political power

The ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870 added 39,000 new black voters to the total of 131,000 white voters registered in the state. This set the stage for decades-long struggles within and between the Democratic and Republican parties, and spurred the founding of political advocacy groups centered on civil rights. Despite African American men voting in support of Republican candidates, the Democratic Party candidate won the Governor's office in every election from 1866 to 1896. Similarly, the Mayor of Baltimore remained a Democrat (or a related party) from Mayor Robert T. Banks (the first elected under the new State Constitution adopted in 1867) up until the election of Republican Alcaeus Hooper in 1895.

At the federal level, the withdrawal of Union troops from the South marked the end of Reconstruction and, as the *NHL Civil Rights Framework* notes, "the concept of equal rights collapsed in the wake of legislative and judicial actions", continuing:

> The Republican and Democratic parties sacrificed civil rights in exchange for white southern votes. In the *Civil Rights Cases* of 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court found the statutory guarantee of equal enjoyment of public accommodations unconstitutional on the grounds that the equal

> protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment only applied to state activities and did not permit federal control of individual actions. This decision greatly limited the rights of blacks and strengthened Jim Crow laws in the South.[31]

The failure of the Republican Party to support the interests of black Baltimoreans led many to begin organizing new independent organizations. In February 1880, a convention of "colored delegates from each ward of the city" met at the Douglass Institute on Lexington Street to organize a new "Equal-Rights League." The meeting attendees heard speeches from Rev. John A. Handy, James Taylor, N.C.M. Groome, Isaac Myers and Jeremiah Haralson). Myers observed how in Maryland:

> Colored men cannot sit upon juries, colored children cannot be taught in the public schools by teachers of their own race, and colored people cannot get accommodations in hotels nor be admitted to practice as lawyers in State courts. By units of action the colored people will secure these rights and privileges.

Harrison, a former Congressman from Alabama who had been forced by an armed mob to flee the state in 1878, remarked that the "colored people in Maryland are free compared with their race in Alabama and the far South, where they are now fleeing from ‘a second slavery that is more damnable than the first.'" The discussion continued past midnight before the meeting concluded with a resolution:

> They set forth that neither the republican nor democratic parties in this State accord equal rights to the colored man, and the organization is promoted to secure him his rights and the respect to which he is entitled as a citizen.

In addition to new efforts to push for change through electoral politics, black activists also worked to advance civil rights within the church. Under Rev. Johnson’s leadership, for example, Union Baptist Church withdrew from the Maryland Baptist Union Association in 1892 in response to discriminatory pay for black pastors and unequal privileges for black churches within the government of the association. In September 1897, Johnson delivered a speech in Boston, titled "A Plea For Our Work As Colored Baptists, Apart From the Whites," that criticized white churches for their failure to support black civil rights efforts:

> "Why is the proposition never made to us of the necessity of co-operating in the work of abating the many forms of legal and socially oppressive laws and customs now in vogue all over the country, both North and South?"

In 1898, Rev. Johnson organized the Colored Baptist Convention of Maryland. He also later played an active role in the founding of the Niagara Movement on July 1, 1905.

Finally, independent black newspapers were another key resource for building black political power in this period. Between 1856 and 1900, thirty-one black newspapers were established in Baltimore. In 1892, John H. Murphy, Sr. (1841–1922), a U.S. Colored Troop veteran, established the *Afro-American* newspaper by merging his own church newsletter *The Sunday School Helper* with two other publications, *The Ledger*, established in 1882 by Rev. George Freeman Bragg, rector of St. James Episcopal Church since 1891, and *The Afro-American*, published by Reverend William M. Alexander, Sharon Baptist Church. The *Afro* went on to become a significant voice documenting injustices and advancing a civil rights agenda in Baltimore and nationally, and is still in publication today.

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1. Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns*, 40. ↩
2. Halpin, “Reforming Charm City,” 244–45. ↩
3. U.S. Census, 1870; 1880; 1900↩
4. Fuke, *Imperfect Equality*, 112. ↩
5. Ibid., 115. ↩
6. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color*, 77. ↩
7. Brackett, *Notes on the Progress of the Colored People of Maryland Since the War.*, 39. ↩
8. Roberts Jr., *Infectious Fear*, 73. ↩
9. Halpin, “Reforming Charm City,” 219. ↩
10. Johnson, “The Strayer Survey and the Colored Schools of Baltimore City, 1923–1943,” 10. ↩
11. Ibid., 10. ↩
12. Ibid., 11. ↩
13. Ibid., 12. ↩
14. Graham, *Baltimore*, 222. ↩
15. Johnson, “The Strayer Survey and the Colored Schools of Baltimore City, 1923–1943,” 13. ↩
16. Ibid., 13–14. ↩
17. “A History of Provident Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland.”↩
18. Bogen, “Precursors of Rosa Parks.” ↩
19. Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 21. ↩
20. See our study on Confederate memory in Baltimore for more on this topic.↩
21. While the political movement in favor of housing segregation grew out of the late nineteenth century, we describe the subject in more detail in the following context study on the period between 1905 and 1929.↩

22. Fuke, *Imperfect Equality*, 131. ↩
23. Ibid., 131. ↩
24. Wells-Barnett, *The Red Record*. ↩
25. Halpin, “Reforming Charm City,” 11. ↩
26. “Harvey Johnson and the Baltimore Mutual United Brotherhood of Libery, 1885–1910.”↩
27. Halpin, “Reforming Charm City,” 94–96, 98–100. ↩
28. Thompson, “The Civil Rights Vanguard,” 28. ↩
29. Halpin, “Reforming Charm City,” 14. ↩
30. Ibid., 9. ↩
31. National Historic Landmarks Program, “Civil Rights in America,” 7. ↩