SOUTHERN CITY, NATIONAL AMBITION

The Growth of Early Washington, D.C., 1800-1860

Editor: Howard Gillette, Jr.

Essays by: Mary Beth Corrigan
David R. Goldfield
Bernard L. Herman
Fredrika J. Teute

Anacostia Museum
The Octagon Museum
Kym S. Rice, Guest Exhibition Curator


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THE GROWTH OF EARLY WASHINGTON, 1800-1860

FOREWORD

This book and the associated exhibition are the culmination of a multi-year project to research and present the history of early Washington, D.C. To celebrate the District of Columbia's bicentennial in 1990, the Octagon initiated a research series composed of exhibitions, programs, and publications that focused on the early years of our nation's capital. The exhibition and book, "Creating the Federal City, 1774-1800: Potomac Fever," inaugurated this ambitious series in 1988 and were followed by "Building the Octagon" (1989); "The Taste of Power: The Rise of Genteel Dining and Entertaining in Early Washington" (1990); and "In the Most Fashionable Style: Making a Home in the Federal City" (1991). Each explored a particular aspect of life in the early nineteenth century by using the Octagon and the domestic history of its original owners, the John Tayloe family, as a departure point for studying the development of the capital city during the Federal period.

"Southern City, National Ambition: The Growth of Early Washington, D.C., 1800-1860" is the fifth topic in the series and the most comprehensive presentation in magnitude and scope. We are very pleased to have an opportunity to collaborate with two important Washington, D.C. institutions in realizing this exhibition and book. For the first time, the Octagon is partnering with another museum to organize and host an exhibition. The Smithsonian's Anacostia Museum will host sections of the exhibition detailing the various community groups and social networks of early Washington, D.C., and the Octagon will present sections on the development of the city's political and civic infrastructure. We extend our gratitude to Steven C. Newsome, the Anacostia Museum's director, for his unfailing support of the entire project.

We are extremely grateful to The George Washington University’s Center for Washington Area Studies and its director, Jeffrey R. Henig, for their role in publishing this volume. We greatly appreciate the fine work accomplished by this volume's editor, Howard Gillette. Professor Gillette and the authors of the essays, Mary Beth Corrigan, David Goldfield, Bernard Herman, and Fredrika Teute, have all contributed to a work that offers new research and fresh insights into the fascinating early development of Washington, D.C.

We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contribution of the exhibition's guest curator, Kym Rice, who has lent her considerable expertise in this capacity for the series' four preceding exhibitions. Our sponsors have served a vital function in enabling this project to take place. We offer our sincere appreciation to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, the District of Columbia Community Humanities Council, the Faulkner Catalogue Fund, the Freed Foundation, NationsBank, the SOM Fund, and the Clark-Winchcombe Foundation for their generous support. Our gratitude also extends to our exhibition lenders, the Octagon Committee, The American Architectural Foundation Board of Regents, and the staffs of the Anacostia Museum and the American Architectural Foundation's Octagon Museum, whose unstinting enthusiasm and cooperation have sustained the project. Finally, a special word of appreciation for the Octagon's former director, Nancy E. Davis, whose enthusiastic leadership and tireless dedication were instrumental in the conception, development, and implementation of the entire research series.

It is our belief that the material embodied in this series will be a valuable resource for the general public and of great benefit to scholars in the field for years to come.

Norman L. Koonce, FAIA
President, The American Architectural Foundation
Washingtonians sought and found self-definition through memberships in churches and other associational groups. In 1830 this Washington artisanal group published an address celebrating "the Mechanics and other Working Men of the country. They constitute the people."
INTRODUCTION

Howard Gillette, Jr.

From its inception, Washington, D.C. has been troubled by its dual identity as both city and capital. In the first instance, it has been expected to fulfill the standard urban functions of creating social, cultural, and economic opportunities. As the national capital, however, it has not just hosted the federal government but also assumed symbolic importance as the embodiment of new republican ideals.

Washington’s founders saw no inconsistency between its two roles. Indeed, the location and plan for the new capital was so intimately tied to the nation-building process — and all the hopes that went with it — that Washington necessarily carried the burden of realizing these high expectations. Settled only after long and often acrimonious sectional debate, the choice of a southern location nonetheless was cast in national terms closely associated with the effort to promote American commerce under the new Constitution. In carving the capital out of the slave states of Maryland and Virginia, the Residence Act of 1790 assured southerners anxious to defend their “peculiar institution” ready access to the new government. At the same time, key advocates of the site, most notably George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, could cast the decision in national terms. Utilizing its location on the Potomac River, strategically poised to exploit the rich agricultural hinterland to the west, the new capital, as George Washington put it, would serve as “the channel of commerce” for “the trade of a rising empire,” one that could serve the nation by forming a link to western rivers capable of “binding these people to us by a chain which can never be broken.”\(^1\) In such a manner the Founding Fathers immediately linked southern location to national ambition.

The French architect and engineer Pierre Charles L’Enfant’s plan for Washington embraced this bold vision of America. While it appears that George Washington pursued the practical goal of including in the new federal district land owned by a number of largely dispersed proprietors, L’Enfant, at least, conceived the unprecedented extent of his plan as fitting the broad scope of national ambition. Imbued with America’s revolutionary fervor out of his own participation as a military volunteer in the conflict, L’Enfant described to Congress as early as 1784 his hopes for a capital sufficient “to give an idea of the greatness of the empire as well as to engrave in every mind that sense of respect that is due to a place which is the seat of supreme sovereignty.”\(^2\) By adding to the street
grid pioneered in Philadelphia broad diagonal avenues, each representing an American state, L’Enfant invested his plan with the symbol of nationhood.

That symbolism — clearly rooted in the experience of the age — was thoroughly imbued with the spirit of republicanism.

L’Enfant arranged each of America’s state avenues to appear in his plan not just geographically but also according to their prominence in the nation-building process. Thus Massachusetts and Virginia, for playing such central roles in the Revolution, assumed preeminent representation in avenues located in the northern and southern reaches of the city respectively. Pennsylvania, as the site both for the Declaration of Independence and the Constitutional Convention, assumed the most important place at the heart of the city with a grand avenue connecting the two main branches of government, the presidency and the Congress. Other avenues representing states with key roles in forming the new government, notably New Jersey and Delaware, received prime locations not just at mid-city, befitting their mid-Atlantic location, but running to the Congress.3

Modern critics, echoing the commentary that greeted the early city, have stressed the terrible discrepancy between L’Enfant’s bold vision for Washington and the reality of a struggling community, more village-like in physical appearance and organization than that of the anticipated metropolis. Among scholars, James Sterling Young was especially critical, suggesting that the same republican principles that had inspired L’Enfant were responsible for the city’s retarded development. What stimulus could a new city built in virtual wilderness have expected from the presence of government whose powers were so limited that its main function was merely to deliver the mail? With only the most limited funds as well as staff, the new federal presence was hardly imposing in the early nineteenth century. Nor was its commitment deep to building up a capital that most government officials regarded at best as only as a temporary waystation for themselves.4

Young’s contention finds support in a host of contemporary commentaries, none more powerful than the 1820 address delivered on the occasion of laying the corner stone for a new city hall. Noting that the means adopted by despotic princes in the erection and embellishment of Constantinople and Petersburg were not compatible with republican principles, orator John Law nonetheless complained of the “ridicule and sneers of the petty wits of more populous towns” directed at Washington. Was it too much to expect of Congress, he asked, “that whatever was calculated to give confidence in the permanency of the location would have been adopted; that such institutions as were necessary for the operations of the government, or have always been considered the objects of legislative care, would have been established here?”5

Throughout Washington’s early years Congress withheld the funds believed necessary to modernize the city, a fact stressed in an 1835 report submitted by New Jersey senator Samuel Southard for the Committee on the District of Columbia. Noting that in the effort to promote development itself the city’s resources had become “perfectly exhausted,” Southard blamed the federal government for not investing funds commensurate to L’Enfant’s plan. “It is a plan,” he wrote, “calculated for the magnificent capital of a great
nation; but oppressive, from its very dimensions and arrangements, to the inhabitants, if its execution to any considerable extent is to be thrown upon them." Still, the committee's statement that the federal government "was bound by every principle of equal right and justice to pay a proportion of the expense incurred upon this subject, equal to the amount of the property which it held" went unheeded. 6

Fiscal conservatism, however, was only part of Washington's problem. Neither L'Enfant nor the Founding Fathers expected the city to grow from federal largesse alone. Trade, not government, was expected to fuel the engine of growth, and by the 1820s the chief constraint on the creation of a great metropolis lay in a shift of political ideology, away from George Washington's grand national vision towards states rights. In this environment, in which efforts to open commerce to the west came in the form of massive capital investments in internal improvements — first turnpikes, then canals, and finally railroads — it was the states and not the national government that took the lead. Saddled with a peculiar political culture that made Washington reliant on federal officials whose primary allegiance lay with their own states, Washington fell behind in the competition to exploit the rich western hinterland. As David Goldfield points out in this volume, Washington's late start in building a canal west put it at a disadvantage with Baltimore, whose fortune consisted not just in choosing a railroad over a canal system but in being able to influence its own state legislature to give its connection west priority over the canal. In Goldfield's analysis, it was faltering national ambition that prevented Washington from overcoming the obstacles to mature development that it shared with
other southern cities.

Most southern to the city’s identity, as Goldfield and others have pointed out, was acceptance of the institution of slavery at the national capital. This should offer no surprise, for as Gordon Wood so forcefully demonstrates, the American Revolution though fully constituting a dramatic break from past hierarchies, nonetheless fell short of instituting complete democracy. In the evolution from absolute despotism to republicanism, signs of democracy had appeared in the colonial era. But to national leaders who distrusted the passions that could be unleashed from levelling effects, some measure of hierarchy remained, even with independence.

Just as L’Enfant represented Washington as a hierarchy of states, so too Washington’s Founding Fathers assumed a social hierarchy in the city’s social relations. Once accepted under the Constitution, the institution of slavery logically continued to exist in the capital on land ceded by two slave-holding states. As Mary Beth Corrigan points out in this volume, African Americans, both slave and free, created a vibrant community in Washington, but they could do so only by overcoming considerable obstacles laid down by whites. Although abolitionists starting in the 1830s sought to utilize Congress’s power of exclusive jurisdiction over the city to end slavery, local residents, backed in Congress, tightened restrictions on free blacks while they staunchly defended the institutions of slavery in their city. Even as African Americans built powerful institutional relations around family, church, and school, they found their opportunities for movement and association as well as employment tightly circumscribed.

In addition to a strict racial hierarchy, other social gradations in gender and class permeated Washington’s daily life. According to Bernard Herman’s essay here, these were codified in the built environment. Washington’s pre-eminent homes may have assumed the material trappings of mercantile ambition, but they typically arranged space according to traditions set in southern plantations. Walls shielded inhabitants of these homes from the intrusions of street life. Access was carefully regulated, with those of lesser status gaining only limited and specialized access as their duties dictated.

Once it is recognized how profoundly influential republicanism, with all its limitations, was in shaping the character of Washington, the city’s early experience assumes new meaning. Instead of viewing Margaret Smith’s commentary as merely another voice expressing disappointment in Washington’s failures to live up to the high material expectations set for it, Fredricka Teute reveals here in Smith’s democratic sensibilities deeper contradictions in the American experiment. Not only were African Americans subordinate in the new city, so too were the poor and women of all classes. Teute helps bring Washington’s historiography into the modern age by a close reading of Smith’s unpublished work, and in so doing, reminds us that liberty was always circumscribed in republican ideology.

Despite its many shortcomings, Washington clearly urbanized in the ante-bellum period, shifting from a largely consensual village-like community to a complex city bounded increasingly by law. The elements of such a transformation contributed to lib-
MEETING OF THE CITIZENS OF WASHINGTON.

A very numerous and highly respectable meeting of the citizens of Washington, convened by the Mayor, in consequence of the extraordinary attempt made by the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, to interfere with the interests of this city before the Congress of the United States, was held at the City Hall, on Wednesday evening, February 20, 1833.

Gen. John P. Van Ness was called to the chair, and Peter Forse was appointed Secretary.

The following preamble and resolutions, submitted by R. S. Coxe, Esq., were read and considered; and the question being taken upon each separately, were unanimously adopted:

Whereas a memorial has been presented to the Congress of the United States, by and on behalf of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company, with the avowed purpose of inducing that body to withhold the aid which the urgent necessities of the city of Washington have compelled it to solicit: and whereas the failure, on the part of the city of Washington, to comply with the terms of its subscription to the stock of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal Company, may involve, as its direct and immediate consequence, the forfeiture of the instalments already paid on said subscription, to the amount of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and as the scarcely more remote or less certain result, the abandonment of that noble and magnificent enterprise, and thus involve the loss to the whole body of stockholders, including as well the State of Maryland and the United States, as the three corporations of the District of Columbia, and a large number of individuals, of the entire amount by them respectively paid; and whereas, in the opinion of this meeting, the controversies which have long subsisted, and still continue, between the Railroad Company and the Canal Company, are unnecessarily and improperly brought to bear upon the application which the city of Washington has presented for relief from its heavy pecuniary embarrassments: and whereas, this meeting feels an assured confidence that should it, at any time, please Congress to institute a full inquiry into the origin and causes of these controversies, and the manner and spirit with which they have been prosecuted by the parties respectively, the result will establish the fact, that gross injustice has been done to the Canal Company and its stockholders, by their antagonist, and exhibit the disingenuous and deceptive character of the charges again renewed in the memorial of the Railroad Company: and whereas, in consequence of the renewal of these accusations before the legislature of the Union, an opportunity has been afforded to that body to act as an impartial tribunal between the contending parties, to investigate the merits of the disputes which have unfortunately so long prevailed, and to adjust, upon terms of equity and justice, the pretensions and rights which either may have preferred: Therefore,

Be it resolved,

1. That the citizens of the city of Washington regard the course which has been pursued by the Railroad Company in this matter, as an unwar-
eralizing social constraints. Although the slave codes grew harsher in language, they were not fully enforced in practice. The city fathers initially instituted a strict building code requiring such dimensions and materials as to assure only the well-to-do could afford them. But such standards proved impractical and were quickly abandoned. As a consequence, as Bernard Herman points out, the city in accommodating a range of building types, sizes, and styles assured a diverse social mix. Women too managed to transcend some of the social limitations imposed on them, as Margaret Smith’s own life demonstrates. Yet even with these cracks in a stratified social system, the republican capital imposed tight social constraints on most of its residents, and in this Washington’s early history fully represented the national experience.

By the time Civil War convulsed the nation, Washington’s distinctive character had become clear. Deeded a southern location and the southern institution of slavery, it could not escape its sectional character or identity. As a creature of the federal government, however, the city remained subject to national ambition, whatever form that might take. Modern scholarship continues to wrestle with the peculiar elements of Washington’s regional identity, but even after almost a generation’s experience with limited home rule, the city remains subject to national ambition. As local citizens witness the advent of yet another prevailing political ideology in the federal government, they cannot help but recognize that the clash of sentiments between local identity and national ambition continues. Historically bound by a tension between regional and national identity, until truly free of federal control, Washington remains a city torn by conflicting impulses.
ANTEBELLUM WASHINGTON IN CONTEXT:

The Pursuit of Prosperity and Identity

FitzHugh Lane after Peter Anderson, View of the City of Washington. Lithograph, 1838. Library of Congress. In 1827 Washington visitor Frances Trollope marveled at “the appearance of the metropolis rising gradually into life and splendour.” Over the next decade Washington’s population grew to more than 43,000 people, and the city enlarged to include nearly four thousand buildings. On the right is the Potomac, or Long Bridge, built in 1836 and nearly a mile in length.

David R. Goldfield
GAIN! GAIN! GAIN! is the beginning, the middle and the end, the *alpha* and *omega* of the founders of American towns.”¹ The founding of Washington, D.C. in the early 1790s occurred at the start of a generation-long frenzy of town-building in the new nation. The American Revolution had opened half a continent to American enterprise, and eager speculators hoped to convert the national land rush into private gain. For as small a stake as two hundred acres, a shrewd speculator could concoct a town. Armed with a survey, a map, and promotional literature, the nascent entrepreneur hawked town lots to prospective buyers. Most of these enterprises failed. But the few successes — Cincinnati, Louisville, and Pittsburgh — fueled the hopes of speculators and buyers alike.

The architects of Washington, D.C. held grand visions for their project. Promoters like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson anticipated that the new capital would emerge as a national entrepôt, exploiting the rich hinterland of a growing nation beyond the Appalachian mountains. As Washington’s planner, Pierre L’Enfant proposed a national city that would set a national example through the beauty of its design and architecture. Merging economics and esthetics with the city’s political function ensured the identity of Washington as a national city in every sense.

Like many of the paper town promoters, Washington’s midwives located the city on a navigable body of water, the Potomac River. And like their colleagues in the trans-Appalachian west, they offered a map and a plan considerably more grandiose on paper than in reality. But they hoped that the town’s status as a national capital, its luminous backers, and an impressive plan that combined the grandeur of Baroque Europe with the practical bent of the new republic would stimulate the purchase of town lots to help finance the new enterprise.

No such luck. The sale of town lots proceeded so slowly that Congress had to resort to loans to enable the national capital to move from Philadelphia to Washington in 1800. The new capital’s inauspicious start portended more than a half century of struggle for prosperity and identity. Despite the effort to identify Washington as a national city belonging to all the people, few citizens of the United States embraced the concept or the city. As late as the 1830s, the Irish actor Tyrone Power commented that Americans perceived their capital with “utter indifference.”²
The indifference infected Congress. While state legislatures during the first half of
the nineteenth century typically granted substantial powers to urban corporations and
invested heavily in internal improvements, Congress failed to advance the prospects of
the capital city.

Sectional politics and fierce urban rivalry limited congressional involvement in the
capital city. Washington's very location resulted from a sectional compromise, a
geographic pact familiar to numerous officials who had negotiated similar agreements in
their respective states. During and after the American Revolution, many of the thirteen
original states abandoned their original capitals for sites more politically or economically
advantageous. The move from Philadelphia to Washington occurred during this era of
capital city migration. Richmond and Columbia, to name merely two examples, benefited
economically from their new status as state capitals. Washington, despite its multiple
parentage, grew up an orphan.

The Revolutionary generation equated economic prosperity with political independ-
dence, and the city of Washington bore testimony to the power of that equation. George
Washington and Thomas Jefferson viewed the capital as an economic development
project for Virginia and Maryland in particular and the South in general. Fearing the
North's economic gains, Jefferson hoped that the new city would draw "foreigners,
manufacturers and settlers" southward. The growth of cities in the Middle Atlantic and
New England states and the rapid expansion of towns and settlements in the Ohio River
Valley signaled a loss of economic and political power for the South. As early as the
1770s an "incipient urban core" appeared in North America, comprised of Boston, New
York, and Philadelphia. Each city "drew daily upon the trade and talent of three states
in its immediate hinterland." Merchants in those cities corresponded with each other,
conducted business together, and socialized; and their offspring married each other.

Southern ports drifted outside the core and became dependent on it. By the middle of
the eighteenth century, Philadelphia merchants, for example, had established a lucrative
carrying trade with Norfolk, Charles Town, and later Savannah, shipping tobacco, naval stores,
indigo, and rice from these places in exchange for manufactured products (domestic and for-

Vergarians understood the relationship between urbanization and the growing
regional imbalances during the Revolutionary era. In 1784, James Madison sponsored a
bill in the state legislature designed to confine maritime trade to one or two ports
(Norfolk and Alexandria), explaining that he was "sensible of the utility of establishing
a Philadelphia or a Baltimore among ourselves." Although Madison succeeded in
securing passage of his scheme, the legislature eventually repealed the act. The future president also recognized the connection between economic strength and political power. The provisions he recommended for the federal Constitution giving the national government the power to tax, regulate commerce, issue patents, and put down insurrections reflected that recognition. If the South should lose the economic contest with other sections of the new nation, its political influence would suffer as well. The new capital city provided one hedge against that future. Yet precisely because Washington’s economic future had been so closely associated with the South from its inception, growing sectionalism after 1820 prevented Congress as a whole from actively supporting the city’s economic projects.

In addition to sectionalism, a sometimes bitter urban rivalry enveloped nineteenth-century America. As whites pushed beyond the Appalachians to settle the continent, the contest for the riches of the new lands began in earnest. Urban entrepreneurs craved the commerce of the West as the elixir to ensure permanent prosperity. Failure to gain this commerce ensured urban doom. States and their cities furiously constructed canals and railroads to attain that objective. The nation’s capital occupied an anomalous position in this contest. Washington belonged to everyone and to no one. When Washington’s leaders turned to Congress for financial and technical support in economic development projects, legislators rarely responded positively.

The saga of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal stands as a metaphor for antebellum Washington’s problems with Congress and the city’s failed ambition of economic independence. It also reflects the growing sectional crisis of the nineteenth century and the fierce urban rivalry that swept across a nation moving from a pre-modern to a modern economic system.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, urban leaders in the new nation recognized that the first city to tap the trade of the opening West would reap untold rewards. Both Washington and Jefferson dreamed of reaching the West through one of the major river systems that ran through their home state of Virginia. George Washington looked to the Potomac as the potential thoroughfare

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John Sessford, Annual statement of improvements made within the city in the year, 1837. Engraving, 1838. Library of Congress. Without adequate funding, city services improved slowly. Despite John Sessford’s claims that “little has been done by the Corporation, beyond the casual repair of the streets,” water pipes were laid along Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and 15th Street in 1837.
The inauguration of rail service between Baltimore and Washington in 1835 dimmed the city's hopes for the C&O Canal's prospects. Following his first ride, Washington's mayor, Joseph Gales, admitted, "the Rail-Road possesses advantages over every other mode."

to the West. In 1784 he advocated clearing the river of rocks and constructing bypasses around the falls to draw "the trade of a rising empire." The effect would be more than commercial; it would secure a nation, "binding these people to us by a chain which can never be broken." Washington hoped that the selection of the Potomac River site for a capital city would expedite that dream.

The city of Washington never fulfilled that dream prior to the Civil War. Its peculiar political situation as a ward of Congress and sectional and urban rivalries doomed the proposed connection to the West. Also, the Potomac River site, which the city's namesake viewed as an advantage, ultimately turned against the capital. Antebellum cities grew initially not because of their connections to the West, but because of their ability to secure the trade of their own hinterlands. Washington's proximity to Baltimore precluded effective competition for the latter city's hinterland. Already by 1800, when the national capital moved from Philadelphia to the Potomac, Baltimore had emerged as a major milling center for the wheat fields of Maryland and southern Pennsylvania. Civic leaders believed that the construction of a canal across the city connecting the Potomac River at Georgetown (part of the new District of Columbia which included the capital city, Georgetown, and Alexandria) with the port on the Anacostia River would divert the
trade from Baltimore. Congress dug the canal, but it did not deflect Baltimore’s trade. The nascent capital city lacked the financial and manufacturing facilities to attract commercial farmers. More attractive prospects lay to the south in the untapped hinterlands of Virginia, but civic leaders would not turn in that direction until the 1850s. Up until that time their driving ambition remained a western connection.

Northern cities, especially New York, provided the first breakthrough to the West, and other cities, including Washington, tried to follow. The completion of the Erie Canal connecting New York City with the West through the Great Lakes in 1825, touched off a scramble among cities to duplicate this masterful engineering feat. Although rivals exaggerated the importance of the canal to boost their own chances for funding, the canal represented the first major breakthrough to the West. The same year that New York completed the Erie Canal, Congress granted the astounding sum of $1 million for the construction of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal that would link the capital city to the Ohio River. President John Quincy Adams had lobbied hard for the subsidy as the crown jewel in his efforts to use the federal government to promote internal improvements to tie the expanding nation together economically and politically.

Within two years of the opening of the Erie Canal, however, promoters scaled down the C & O proposal because of financial problems. Instead of stretching to the Ohio, the canal terminated in Cumberland, Maryland. Still, the rich coal resources and agricultural products of western Maryland provided an impetus to complete the canal as soon as possible. As workers broke ground for the canal in 1828, a similar and, for Washington, a fateful ceremony occurred in nearby Baltimore, where civic leaders watched the first rails set inaugurating the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Washingtonians scoffed at the idea of a railroad usurping the commercial functions of a canal, but by the time both projects reached western Maryland two decades later, the railroad’s superiority was clear. Not until the mid-1850s did Washington’s urban leaders organize to secure a railroad. The capital city hoped, instead, to connect with one of the railways under construction in neighboring Virginia that would tie Washington more closely to southern commerce. By then, however, the B & O had already pre-empted the Ohio Valley trade. The slow progress of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal doomed Washington’s chances to cut into the hinterland trade of the Northeast. Rivalry between the District of Columbia’s three cities — Georgetown, Alexandria, and Washington — hampered fund-raising efforts. After Congress’s initial stipend, the federal government stood aloof. The Jackson administration avoided internal improvement subsidies as a matter of principle. Baltimore’s merchants, flush with huge profits from the wheat trade, lined up to contribute more than $3 million in the late 1820s to support their railroad. Washington, a fledgling city in a region of mature urban places, lacked the diverse and prosperous economic base to compete with wealthier neighbors. In 1830, for example, Washington claimed 18,800 residents compared with more than 80,000 inhabitants each for Baltimore and Philadelphia.9
By 1840, a network of canals and railroads crisscrossed the northeast region, sustaining the major ports and smaller cities and towns along the way, but not Washington, D.C. The strong intraregional trade patterns and the capital generated from it were crucial to the next phase of urban economic growth — the joining of the cities of the West to the urban Northeast.\(^\text{10}\)

The growth of western cities paralleled the growth of the urban Northeast. Intraregional trade formed the foundation of economic prosperity and development. Canals linked fledgling western towns to the Great Lakes, stimulating rapid growth in Cleveland, Toledo, and Chicago during the 1830s. Later, railroads strengthened the commercial bonds among western towns. These western towns eventually confronted the dilemma of transportation technology that Washingtonians had faced: to build railroads or canals.

The western rivalry between St. Louis and Chicago demonstrates the far-reaching impact of transportation decisions. Chicago’s initial growth in the 1830s resulted from a planned canal that would link Lake Michigan to the Illinois River and ultimately to the Mississippi. But Chicago’s business leaders, led by upstate New Yorker William B. Ogden, were more interested in the potential of the railroad. If they could link Chicago to the growing railroad network in the Northeast, then the commerce that presently floated down the Mississippi River would flow eastward.

St. Louis leaders placed their faith in the Mississippi to keep attracting agricultural produce, but this was a great mistake. By 1870 Chicago had become a major rail terminus whose iron tentacles reached into the prairie to draw river trade away from St. Louis. During the 1860s, Chicago tripled its population while St. Louis’s increased less than twofold.

The railroad did more than secure Chicago’s dominance in the new West. It forged a national economy centered on the West and the Northeast. By the mid-1850s, the railroad had reoriented the continental trade pattern from a north-south to a west-east direction. In 1860, a U.S. Census Bureau official concluded that “as an outlet to the ocean for the grain trade of the West, the Mississippi River has almost ceased to be depended upon by merchants.”\(^\text{11}\) Blocked from developing a substantial hinterland trade by Baltimore, and cut off from the commerce of the trans-Appalachian west, Washington fell into an inferior position in the developing national urban system. The capital city looked instead to become the northernmost economic outpost of the South.

This ambition was not a prescription for success. The urban South fared poorly in the new national commercial order.\(^\text{12}\) New Orleans merchants suffered from the same delusion that afflicted their colleagues in St. Louis: they believed the Mississippi River bounty would roll in forever. But entrepreneurial shortcomings were only a part of the urban South’s problems.
Despite impressive railroad building, the urban South experienced relative decline after 1840. Southerners built railroads but not railroad systems. Chartering and appropriations requests so overwhelmed state legislatures that lawmakers responded expeditiously by funding virtually every scheme that came before them. Fierce urban rivalry scuttled long-distance rail lines in many southern states because competing cities could not agree on routes. This was especially true in Virginia.

But the major problem confronting the urban South, and Washington’s connection to it, was the South’s distinctive economic system. The South’s soil and climate were particularly conducive to the cultivation of its two major staples, cotton and tobacco. Since the colonial period, these crops had generated few urban activities because of their simple marketing requirements. The intimate relationship that evolved between countryside and city in the North was much looser in the South. And with the large labor force required to cultivate tobacco and cotton, plantation owners found it expedient to develop numerous urban activities on their own properties, further short-circuiting the connection with real cities.

The lucrative intercity trade that fueled the growth of towns in the Northeast and the West into urban regions was insignificant in the South. Richmond and Charleston, despite their geographic proximity, had no regularly scheduled shipping operating between them in the 1850s. What could these cities offer each other? Very little, because all southern cities served, more or less, as collection points only for cotton or tobacco.

The nature of southern agriculture also limited the value of the hinterland to the urban South. The hinterland was sparsely settled; plantation acreage was extensive, not only because of crop and labor characteristics, but because of the soil-depleting nature of those crops. Vast areas of the rural South were either abandoned or held for future cultivation. So when southern cities built their railroads, the tracks did not penetrate into fertile farms and villages as did those of the Baltimore & Ohio. By 1860, a national urban economy had emerged, an economy orchestrated by northeastern cities. Western cities, by virtue of their strong intraregional trade and fertile hinterlands, were almost equal partners in the national economic coalition. The South joined the national urban economy as well, but only as a junior partner. Southern cities served more as adjuncts of the northeastern regional economy than as cogs in an independent regional urban system.

Washington did not languish as a result of its growing economic association with the South. The city grew as a government center which in turn fueled other economic activities, including retail and banking services. But as a commercial entrepot, the city never lived up to the promise its founders had projected. In 1855, when civic leaders raised funds to build a railroad to link the city with the Orange and Alexandria Railroad across the Potomac, Congress not only balked at supporting the project financially, but northern lawmakers were incensed that workers had begun to lay rails in the city. A Michigan senator scolded that “Washington was not intended to be a great business mart.” Congressional hostility and bickering over the right-of-way buried the project.
Born as part of a sectional compromise, Washington could not escape sectional politics. Northerners perceived the city as a southern outpost. Indeed, the city’s civic leaders looked for economic opportunities in the South, especially in the 1850s, and almost two out of three permanent residents came from southern states or had strong southern familial connections.

What struck the first-time visitor most about Washington’s "southernerness," was the strong presence of blacks, both slave and free. Through most of the antebellum era, better than one out of four Washington residents was black. The demographic pattern more closely resembled a southern than a northern city. The particular mix of the black population, however, reflected Washington’s location as a border city, as free blacks comprised an ever larger proportion of the black population with each passing decade. By 1860, free blacks totaled 84 percent of the city’s black population.14

Washington’s free blacks experienced restrictions common to their brethren in other southern cities and, on one occasion, a riot more typical of the urban North. During the 1830s, in fact, most major northern cities experienced ethnic, religious, racial, and political conflicts that often (but not always) featured white Protestant working-class mobs venting their economic frustrations and religious or racial bigotry against Irish Catholics or blacks and their white abolitionist allies.15

On three separate occasions between 1834 and 1844, blacks and abolitionists were victimized by mob violence in Philadelphia. In 1835, a bumper year for riots — thirty-seven throughout urban America, mostly in the North and West — racial conflict touched Washington. A drunken mob of whites, provoked by the discovery of abolitionist literature went on a two-night rampage in the black community, burning several buildings including the restaurant of prominent free black, Beverly Snow, but fortunately killing no one.

The northern “pattern” of the Snow Riot reflected the dominance of free blacks among Washington’s population and the relative affluence of more than a few. But the relatively high proportion of free blacks in Washington did not obscure the fact that the capital city lay in slave territory. A cotton boom in the lower South after 1815 created a great demand for slave labor. The less affluent states of the upper South responded to this demand,

[Image: Endicott and Swett, Brown’s Indian Queen Hotel. Lithograph, 1832. Library of Congress. Reportedly the largest hotel in America, Jesse Brown’s Indian Queen Hotel numbered among the city’s finest establishments. Located on Pennsylvania Avenue near the Center Market, the Indian Queen included such amenities as a separate entrance for guests.]
and the interstate slave trade exploded, expanding slave market trading in New Orleans, Charleston, and Richmond, as well as in Alexandria and Washington. The jolting presence of the slave trade in the District of Columbia reminded citizens of the city’s ties to the South. The average slave could expect to be sold at least once in his or her lifetime. Breakup of families as a result of financial pressures on masters, division of estates, punishment, or migration occurred more frequently than southern slaveholders admitted. Yet, despite the slave trade, black codes, and periodic restrictions on the free black population, both slave and free black populations probably enjoyed more latitude in Washington than anywhere else in the urban South.

The southern tenor of Washington, reflected in the origins of its residents, the direction of its commerce, and the presence of slavery and the slave trade, emerged more subtly in the realm of urban services. Like many other American cities of the era, Washington underwent a transformation from a small village to a city between 1790 and 1860. More functions came under control or supervision of local government, and voluntary associations assumed responsibility for activities previously handled by families or neighborhoods, or not addressed at all. The city grew from a few hundred inhabitants in the 1790s to more than 61,000 by 1860. Rapid population growth and increased density generated new problems such as crime, disease, and poverty, all of which required new responses.

Since late in the colonial era, city government in urban America had increased its role as a provider of services. The scale of this role increased significantly after 1830 as residents, especially middle-class residents with a property and occupational stake in the city, looked to local government to address public health issues, organize police and fire departments, and provide some social services. In the process, city governments convinced state legislatures to amend civic charters to enhance their revenue-raising powers. The financial burdens for these new activities fell on property owners as the property tax became the great source of public revenue. Not surprisingly, the benefits of many of these services accrued to property owners as well. Paved streets and water and sewer services, for example, rarely penetrated poorer neighborhoods.

This should not imply that moral, altruistic, or other motives were absent. Evangelical fervor gripped cities, including Washington, during the 1840s and 1850s. Evangelical Protestantism spawned such movements as abolitionism and temperance. Its tenets provided justification for the expansion of social services, especially to the poor.

But southern cities tended to lag behind their counterparts elsewhere in the public provision of urban services. Local government, even in the newer western cities such as Cincinnati and Chicago, assumed certain services earlier and more completely than longer established southern cities. A comparative study of Boston and Charleston attributed some of this differential to the absence of a cohesive civic consciousness in the South Carolina port. Residents’ interests often lay more in the lowcountry plantations than in
the city. Many white residents fled southern cities in warmer weather, leaving civic affairs in the hands of caretaker regimes. Towns slept from late spring to early fall and awoke only with the arrival of the first cotton or tobacco shipments. "New Orleans," journalist J. D. B. De Bow wrote with some dismay, "about the first of June, begins to show evidences of waste. People inquire of steam and rail routes, and are buying trunks. The hotels look very shabby, and the parlors have lost their lustre."

Many residents left to escape the onset of yellow fever season.

The individualistic ethic seemed more prevalent in the South. If a city required services, the thinking went, then those in a position to pay for them — property owners — should provide the service and reap the benefits. The reliance on family, kinfolk networks, and church in times of crisis, distrust of government and its institutions, and the fatalistic acceptance of poverty, disease, or ignorance as religious judgments were important cultural characteristics that affected behavior and perceptions throughout the South. Because so many southern urban leaders, including Washington's permanent residents, had roots or residences in the countryside, the rural values of the region pervaded the area.

While Washington's mercantile leadership did not possess close ties to the plantation South, most came from that region. Like their counterparts in other southern cities, they left town from the late spring to the early fall. And, given the presence of a relatively large black population, a constricted tax base, and a stingy Congress, urban services in Washington lagged behind northern cities. Usually, if civic leaders made a good argument for the commercial efficacy of a public service, public funds supported that service, but only to the extent that it promoted commerce. If commerce and the general welfare coincided, so much the better.

Local government paved major business thoroughfares, yet still relied heavily on groups of private property holders to assist in funding residential paving. The result was that a majority of any city's streets remained stuck in the mud and filth throughout the antebellum era. Odoriferous mixtures of horse urine and manure, offal...
John Hollingsbury, paving brick, 1810-40. Alexandria Archaeology. Photograph by Lowell Snowdon Klock. Until 1860, Washington streets remained unpaved, although some like Pennsylvania Avenue were macadamized (covered with small stones), including gutters and brick sidewalks. The paving of Pennsylvania Avenue between the Capitol and the White House was completed during the Civil War.

from businesses, small factories, and residences produced unhealthful and unattractive living conditions. One foreign visitor found Richmond’s streets “the most dirty, rough, and disagreeable streets to walk on that are to be found perhaps in the Union.” Another traveler, this one in Mobile, disagreed, claiming that city’s streets were “worse than I have ever seen.” The typical pedestrian waded in mud or choked from the dust, depending on the season. Those patronizing public conveyances such as omnibuses usually received a severe jostling from the ruts and gullies in the street.

Washington’s streets offered no exception. While Washington’s public actions focused initially and most often on streets and street paving and cleaning represented the city’s single largest expense in the antebellum era, a local journalist noted of Washington’s streets in 1835: “if [a visitor] rides in an omnibus or carriage, the chances are against him but he will get his bones half dislocated or the vehicle upset, in one or the other of the enormous ruts with which the... road is disfigured.”

The condition of streets was a concern of local government because it also related to a city’s health. Medical experts of the era attributed the origins and spread of epidemic diseases, in part, to the woeful condition of some city streets. The southern climate — and Washington qualified — facilitated the spread of epidemic disease. Killing frosts came later to the South than to other regions, so the danger from epidemics lasted longer. Several cities assigned the bulk of the street-cleaning chores to animals. Pigs were the most popular scavengers. Foreign visitors to the nation’s capital, accustomed to Paris or London, found the livestock-littered streets appalling. By the 1850s, a new sense of public dignity and an overpopulation of greedy porkers led to a discontinuation of pigs as street scavengers. City councils contracted with private companies or with individuals to clean — or scavenge, as it was called — city streets. Unfortunately, these contracts were often political rewards rather than genuine performance agreements.

Washington established a board of health as early as 1822, but the city lacked specific powers or enforcement authority. A cholera epidemic in 1832 which struck many cities in the United States prompted growing concern over the city’s water supply. Population growth further threatened the quality of potable water, as few regulations governed the disposal of waste. The death of President Zachary Taylor in 1850, purportedly from typhoid, focused national attention on the
NUISANCES.

Office Commissioner of Health,

April 2, 1856.

TO HOUSEKEEPERS AND OTHERS.

The city of Washington having been divided into sundry sanitary districts, and arrangements having been made for the removal of the solid and fluid offal from the dwellings and places of business, your especial attention is requested to what the law requires of you. You are required to deposit "in proper and convenient vessels," all such accumulations of your premises, and to deposit the same in separate vessels, the solid in one, and the fluid in the other.

The sweepings of stores are to be collected in the same manner, and during the month of April, persons employed by the Corporation for that purpose will call three times a week, and daily thereafter, until the first day of December, and remove all such matter as may be so collected and kept in some place convenient, so that they can get the same readily. In all cases where there is an alley to the premises, these vessels must be kept within the lot, convenient to the gate or outlet, and where no alley exists they must be placed on the curb line; and every facility for the prompt performance of his duty must be afforded the slopman. It will be kept in mind that no improper substance must be cast into these vessels; in which case the contractors will refuse to take it away, and the parties offending will be held to the penalties of the law.

This heavy expense having been assumed by the Corporation with the view to the continued salubrity and health of the city, you are hereby cautioned against casting, placing, or laying, (or allowing the same to be done,) the sweeping of dwellings and stores, or any offensive matter or obstruction in any street, avenue, alley, open space or open lot, or elsewhere, so that the same may run into them or upon the premises of another, as it is the determination of this department, in all cases of violation of this law, to hold the parties so offending to its heaviest penalties.

ALEX. McD. DAVIS,
Commissioner of Health.

MAYOR'S OFFICE, April 2, 1856.

The Commissioners of Wards and the Police Officers are hereby required to execute promptly the provisions of the act "providing for a Board of Health, and for the abatement and removal of nuisances," in relation to the cleanliness of the city.

JNO. T. TOWERS, Mayor.
city's waste removal policies and the quality of its water supply. Following the institution of comprehensive aqueduct systems in northern cities — notably New York and Philadelphia — Congress responded with a grant to construct a water and sewer system to divert waste from the water supply. Despite these improvements, the Washington Canal, intended by L'Enfant as an aesthetic embellishment to the city as well as a functional link between port facilities in Georgetown and the Eastern Branch of the Potomac, remained little more than an open sewer. Many of the city's streets continued to lie in wretched condition, the result of the city's low-lying, swampy terrain that inhibited rapid run-off.

Washington's imperfect response to public health corresponded to the policies of southern cities generally. Poor whites and blacks most frequently comprised the victims of epidemic disease in the urban South. If, by 1860, enlightened opinion no longer adhered to the view that contraction of disease was a divine moral

judgment, there was still more general agreement that the profligate lifestyle of the poor made them more susceptible to disease and that public expenditures on their behalf would only encourage such behavior.\textsuperscript{21} Washington also responded weakly to poverty.

Such responses as existed in the South were largely private, the efforts of such programs as visitation, children's aid, and temperance societies. Typically middle-class urban women either initiated or led these organizations, offering with assistance a strong dose of middle-class morality and evangelical Protestantism in the 1840s and 1850s.

Middle-class reformers could well bring considerable efficiency to their relief efforts. The Norfolk Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor, for example, organized by young entrepreneurs in the 1840s, divided the city into districts, and its members made visits to the homes of the poor. These reformers were the forerunners of modern social workers. They sought to root out "artful mendicants" and "give to none who will not exhibit evidence of improvement from the aid afforded."\textsuperscript{22}

Still, southern cities lagged far behind their northern counterparts in public support for poor relief. Civic leaders expected private charities to provide assistance, though such organizations frequently worked with meager budgets. Poor relief tended to be seasonal (and private) — the needy received wood and food in the winter — and recipients were subjected to thorough screening. The Norfolk Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Poor concluded that "\textit{sound discrimination}, then, is the first principle of this Association."\textsuperscript{23} Throughout the antebellum era, Washington, as in other southern cities, relied heavily on churches and charitable organizations for the provision of relief for the poor.\textsuperscript{24} As early as 1802, before the city had a sufficient population base to develop private charities, the presence of poverty — probably caused by the sporadic nature of construction work that stranded workers between jobs — prompted the council to purchase clothing and room and board for the poor. That year, poor relief accounted for 42 percent of the city's meager
budget. The city constructed an almshouse in 1809, and a year later the first major private charitable institution appeared, the Washington Benevolent Society of Young Men, followed by the Washington Female Orphan Asylum in 1815. Thereafter, the proportion of public support for welfare declined significantly.

In 1824 federal officials residing in Washington formed a chapter of the Howard Society, a social welfare group common in other cities. The organization taught poor people basic skills to enable them to obtain jobs. But the depression following the Panic of 1837 and the general devaluation of artisanal work that occurred in all cities after 1830 overwhelmed the resources of the Howard Society, which folded in 1842. The city’s middle-class women once again stepped in and formed the Female Union Benevolent Society, which became Washington’s major charitable institution. Congress also provided some funds for the almshouse, convinced by arguments that some of the poor — military veterans and unemployed construction workers — had come to Washington as federal employees. Poor relief became an official part of local government in 1859 with the creation of a central board that distributed relief to the city’s poor. By then, poor relief comprised less than 6 percent of the city’s budget.25

The capital city’s handling of other consequences of growth — crime and the increase in fire hazards — demonstrates a mixed record shared by other southern cities. Local government in Washington assumed responsibilities in these areas, as all mid-nineteenth-century cities did. But the capital arrived late to public police and fire protection, and its involvement mirrored the more limited pattern of service provision in the South.

The switch from bucket brigades to hydrants in early nineteenth-century urban America was a major advance, but the prevalence of volunteer companies was not. These companies consisted of men’s clubs that met periodically for social purposes and occasionally to fight fires. They were fraternal organizations, primarily working class, whose hobby was fire-fighting. Fierce competition between the companies often erupted at the scene of the fire into a full-fledged melee.

Local governments gradually brought order to the chaos of firefighting by first bringing all volunteer companies under the supervision of one appointed public official, screening membership, and, beginning with Cincinnati in 1829, paying a modest salary. These regulations evolved to produce professional, independent fire departments in most cities by the 1860s. Firefighting, like disease prevention, required a systematic and professional solution.

Few southern cities possessed professional fire departments by the time of the Civil War. Some succeeded in developing a semi-public system of fire protection. In Alexandria, Virginia, for example, the city appointed a superintendent with five assistants to oversee the activities of various volunteer companies.26 Washington, too, lagged behind counterparts in northern cities.27 The initial layout of the city was so vast that,
Despite steady population growth, densities remained relatively low. The dispersed settlement pattern limited the potential destruction from fire and enabled the city to get by with inefficient volunteer companies consisting of teen-aged boys. These “gangs” often turned in false alarms or set fires themselves to revel in the ensuing commotion. Although personnel improved in the decade before the Civil War, it was not until 1864 under the press of war that the city established a salaried fire department.

As American cities organized to fight fires, they also developed the means to fight crime. Popular perception held that cities were becoming unsafe. In reality, crimes of personal violence had declined steadily since the late eighteenth century. The perception of crime had more to do with a general image of urban society than with the incidence of crime itself. The appearance of sensational sagas of urban depravity in the penny presses and in the popular pulp novels confirmed suspicions that the nineteenth-century city was a violent place.

But a series of ethno-religious riots in northern cities during the 1830s convinced civic leaders to control crime more systematically than with a night watch and a few day constables. The members of the night watch often held jobs during the day and used this tour of duty to catch up on their sleep. A Norfolk resident complained about his city’s night watch in 1850, “Our dwellings are fired by the heartless incendiary, and the privacy of our chambers invaded with impunity by the midnight burglar.” 28 Some watch members posed more menace than the criminals they reputedly sought. The day constables were not much of an improvement, primarily because there were so few of them. St. Louis was typical, employing fifty constables to protect a citizenry of 100,000 in the 1850s.

During the 1840s and 1850s, the cities most affected by mass violence — Philadelphia, Boston, and New York — consolidated their separate day and night police into one uniformed force supervised by an appointed, salaried official. Although politics often dictated the choice of personnel for several decades, the “cop on the beat” soon became a familiar sight in cities across the country.

Although Washington experienced its own mob violence in the 1830s — the Snow riot in 1835 — and earned a reputation as a lawless place, city officials did not establish a professional police force until the 1850s. 29 Even so, the city was considerably in advance of the urban South and thus more similar to northern cities in their attention to public safety. A uniformed, salaried police force was a rarity, and some southern cities did not possess even a day force. As one Louisville editor complained: “Think of the perfect absurdity of giving the peace of 75,000 people into the charge of eight men.” 30
The capital city’s image as a haven for criminals reflected the frontier nature of the community. Many who arrived in the city in the decades after 1800 came from more established communities where civilian surveillance augmented the weak crime-prevention policies of local government. Washington, on the other hand, was a transient city where government workers moved in and out and a sizable portion of the resident population left the city during the unbearable summer months. The boom and bust cycle of federal construction projects left hundreds of workers footloose at various times, contributing to the relative disorderliness of the city. Crime had become such a problem and an embarrassment by the 1850s that Congress launched an investigation in 1858 which concluded: “Riot and bloodshed are of daily occurrence. Innocent and unoffending persons are shot, stabbed, and otherwise shamefully maltreated, and not unfrequently the offender is not even arrested.”

Washington city government, hard-pressed for revenues, looked hopefully to Congress for policing assistance. As late as the 1840s, the city lacked even a night patrol, a situation Congress resolved in 1842 by funding a federal nighttime police guard but only for federal property. With a new city charter in 1848 that expanded Washington’s revenue-raising power, local government established a salaried police department in 1851 with twenty-seven daytime uniformed officers and a night watch of forty men to supplement the federal force of thirty. But, given the sprawling character of the city and population growth, the size of the force remained inadequate, as the 1858 congressional report pointed out. Baltimore, for example, a much more compact city than Washington, boasted a 400-member department, or one officer for every 850 residents compared with Washington’s one officer for every 1,050 inhabitants.

Most public expenditures in Washington, as in other cities, covered municipal housekeeping matters and infrastructure. Roughly one-third of the city’s budget in the 1850s related to public works projects such as sewer and water facilities. Despite a transient population, the general neglect by Congress, and the difficulties of building an economic base sufficient to generate public revenues, municipal government in Washington succeeded in moving many services from the private to the public sphere during the antebellum era. For some services such as social welfare, private organizations dominated, but for fire, police, and health, education, and public works, local government took on increasing if not total responsibility.
Although Washington shared numerous characteristics with southern cities, even as it pursued the dreams of all American cities, it was also *sui generis*. Few American cities ever attracted higher expectations and greater disappointments. For foreigners accustomed to the great capitals of the world, Washington looked like a backwater outpost, unworthy of its status as the capital of a great nation. The shocking presence of the slave trade for most of the antebellum period jarred sensibilities and conflicted with national ideals. For Americans who arrived in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the rude settlement on the Potomac compared unfavorably to the more established cities and even the newer metropolises such as Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Pittsburgh. Congressmen often came without their families — housing shortages and the expense of supporting dependents militated against family life. Often lonely, residing in a frontier environment, many carried back negative images of the city. In an era of fierce urban rivalry, where cities gleefully took advantage of their rivals' weaknesses and even of their tragedies, Washington's image did not command respect or investments. Orphaned by Congress for most of the antebellum period, Washington struggled for prosperity and identity. The queer vastness of the place swallowed its public buildings and lent a consistent air of incompleteness to the city. Washington’s glory lay ahead of it, but as a national capital, not as a city.
SOUTHERN CITY,
NATIONAL AMBITION:

Washington's Early Town Houses

John Plumbe, Jr., Patent Office. Daguerreotype, ca. 1846. Library of Congress. One of the city's earliest neighborhoods was selected in the 1830s as the site of the new federal Patent Office, located on 8th Street between F and G. Plumbe is considered Washington's first professional photographer.

Bernard L. Herman
Much has been written about Washington’s founding, not the least the political wrangling, acrimonious exchanges, strenuous inter-city competition, speculative greed, and occasional bureaucratic indifference that marked its arrival. Similarly, Washington’s first generation of domestic architecture has been ably described, and, in the case of John and Ann Tayloe’s Octagon, fully interpreted from both the perspectives of architectural history and the sociology of manners and material life. Yet beyond the particulars of Washington’s domestic architecture and the city’s urban landscape, lies an unresolved question of central importance. How did the development of Washington town houses fit into the larger context of American cities in the early decades of the nineteenth century? The town house architecture and material life of Washington provides compelling historical evidence with which to assess the dynamic relationship between southern city and national ambition.

The first generation of Washington dwellings dating from the 1790s to approximately 1830 provides the evidence for an urbanizing process reflecting two competing, but not incompatible design traditions: one regional, shaped through close ties to the surrounding countryside, the other cosmopolitan, informed by urban design traditions recognizable throughout the English-speaking cities of the north Atlantic rim. On the regional side stood the visually powerful image of the Chesapeake plantation and all the complex landscape relationships it entailed. The plantation landscape, as Dell Upton suggests, was both articulated and processional: “articulated in the sense that it consisted of a network of spaces,” and processional in the sense that those spaces were linked and “functioned as the settings for public interactions that had their own particular character but that worked together to embody the community as a whole.” The plantation countryside gained meaning through the many different ways in which people moved and interacted with each other, ways that charted, confirmed, and challenged hierarchies built on land, wealth, kinship, and race. Slavery distinguished the plantation countryside. The strategies through which slaves, white tenants, and great landowners interacted simultaneously affirmed and tested social relations built on privilege.
and inequality in the landscape. Essential to the communication of these relationships were the houses, barns, churches, mills, and the many other buildings and spaces known and affected by all who experienced that landscape. Similar architectural forms and sets of social relationships characterized the urban plantation. In the city, however, the highly competitive and cosmopolitan culture of urban mercantilism complicated the equation by adding other social relationships rooted in the trans-Atlantic world of trade. Thus the urban plantation admits the presence, actions, and voices of urban slaves, free African Americans, and poor and prosperted whites as actors in the organization of town house design and use. In the southern city their experiences and values linked the material and social forms of architecture to those of a broader urban culture.3

On the cosmopolitan side stood town houses steeped in the sociability and material language of mercantilism, for Washington’s founders incorporated trade as well as government in their plans for the new capital city.4 Trans-Atlantic and coastal trade represent one aspect of a broader array of exchange relations that infused the sociability of the Atlantic world and informed design choices from town house planning to the selection of dinner plates. A thoroughgoing competitive culture characterized the genteel world of exchange. The distance between the transactions of the counting house and those of the parlor was minimal in the minds of the actors who negotiated not only business dealings but their own social status in both arenas. But exchange relations were not just the province of the affluent. All material culture communication represents transactions based on the exchange of information and meaning. Thus, the conversation of the dining table resonated with muttering in the kitchen and haggling in the city’s markets. The domestic architecture of mercantilism expanded that field of communication between American cities and across the Atlantic. The red brick terrace houses of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Alexandria, Norfolk, and other American port cities were as familiar an architectural emblem to traders from Bristol to Edinburgh as were the arcaded market houses and warehouses that defined the working centers of the commercial landscape. Moreover, Washington’s early rowhouses presented an image that included in its compass the dwellings of affluent merchants and politicians and the back lot tenements inhabited by slaves or rented by artisans and laborers, both black and white. Like the plantation countryside, the domestic architecture of mercantilism influenced the whole of the urban landscape and not just a single class of wealthy city dwellers.

The architectural traditions of the regional plantation landscape and the trans-Atlantic world of mercantilism did not represent warring expressive systems in the new capital city. Rather, regional and cosmopolitan design alternatives were communicated and reconciled through overlapping social, economic, and visual connections based in the interactions of everyday experience. The unending visual negotiation between cosmopolitan and provincial cultures defined an urbanizing process that produced individual buildings and ultimately a city that effectively reflected the material life of both port
city and plantation. While Washington may have been distinctive in the particular details of this process, the process itself was one common to cities on both sides of the Atlantic. The melding together of diverse influences did not produce an urban landscape that was visually uniform or socially static. Instead, the opposite is true. The first generation of urban housing in Washington represents a fluid, variable, and dynamic expression of domestic architecture. As communication, architecture is contextually bound, often ambiguous in its expressive intent, and always conveying its messages on multiple levels. Even the physical attributes identifying an individual building's communicative context is variable. First, town houses can be interpreted in terms of how they individually contribute to the entirety of the urban landscape at a given point in time. Second, town houses can be understood on the basis of the visual relationships established between buildings in a common urban landscape. Third, town houses can be defined additionally by their relationship to a socially and economically constructed world of exchange steeped in traditions of hierarchy, acquisitiveness, and competitiveness. The element that unifies these three levels is communicative purpose. The town houses of Washington, like its new public buildings, were elements in an architectural language which symbolically enriched the whole of city life. The first step to understanding how Washington town
houses conveyed social distinctions and combined regional and cosmopolitan design influences requires a larger sense of the new city and its dwellings.

The architectural landscape of Washington at the turn of the nineteenth century presented a number of architectural tensions. The grand plan of the capital, conceived with streets designed as much for vistas as communication, filled with houses in a slow and uneven process of speculation and development. The houses themselves reflected a variety of architectural sources from the innovative and academic design that William Thornton produced for the Octagon to the simple forms of one and two-story wooden dwellings erected in the style of traditional housing found throughout the Chesapeake Bay country. Although the early houses of Washington presented an irregular appearance that caricatured the urban pretensions of the new capital city, they nonetheless resonated with every developing urban landscape in the new nation. The result was neatly summarized by Isaac Weld, a British traveler, who wrote, “Were the houses that have been built situated in one place altogether, they would make a very respectable appearance, but scattered about as they are, a spectator can scarcely perceive any thing like a town.” As for the houses themselves, Weld noted the contradiction between what was prescribed by statute and what was accomplished in practice: “By the regulations published, it was settled that all the houses should be built of brick or stone; the walls to be thirty feet high, and to be built parallel to the line of the street, but either upon it or withdrawn from it, as suited the taste of the builder. However, numbers of wooden habitations have been built; but the different owners have all been cautioned against considering them as permanent.”

Weld’s observations about the irregular appearance of the city are confirmed in early sketches and photographs of the city’s streets. An 1856 photograph, for example, illustrates houses situated southwest of the Mall. The buildings in this view captured more than a half century after Weld’s commentary represent a mix of urban vernacular house types. At the very center of the image stands a row of three two-story town houses. Several two and two-and-a-half story freestanding town houses occupy the foreground surrounded by considerably smaller town houses and outbuildings. Of particular note is the broken expanse of undeveloped land in the city. While the photographic impression of the mid-nineteenth century may have been increasingly uncharacteristic of the city as a whole, it did reflect an earlier reality depicted in numerous watercolors and sketches. Nicholas King’s view of Blodgett’s Hotel, executed about 1803 (Huntington Library Collection), shows a grand three-story building on a raised basement and elaborated with a pediment and engaged pilasters over an apparently rusticated entry. But Blodgett’s Hotel stands alone. Across open ground and sited on a low rise opposite the hotel is a one-and-a-half story frame dwelling and in the distant background are the tentatively rendered elevations of brick and frame gambrel-roofed dwellings. Similar views by Baroness Hyde de Neuville reinforce the image of a ragged urban landscape Her view of
E Street at Fifteenth Street, N. W., illustrates three large brick structures including the Treasury and two three-story brick buildings which combine elements of commercial and domestic design. Behind these buildings, however, the Washington landscape opened into a deforested and architecturally undeveloped countryside.10

The uncertain juxtaposition between urban aspiration and landscape reality that captured the eye of Washington’s early visitors and residents stands at the heart of understanding the city’s first generation of town houses from the comparative perspectives offered by other contemporary cities. That same juxtaposition also provides the means for interpreting Washington's early architecture as the product of the competing influences of regional architecture and cosmopolitan taste and sociability. How this tension was resolved in the early decades of the nineteenth century suggests the way Washington defined itself as a city of houses.

In establishing an architectural context for the Octagon, Orlando Ridout V draws a distinction between cosmopolitan terrace housing on one hand and freestanding dwellings, ranging from small frame cabins to country mansions typically reflecting more regional characteristics, on the other.11 Ridout’s observation of two dominant building traditions operating in Washington’s formative years can be broadly applied to American cities of the early republic, including established port towns like Boston and Charleston as well as the new cities of the West like Pittsburgh and Cincinnati. Terrace houses, a building tradition characterized by town houses erected in rows ranging from pairs to block-long development schemes, were associated with a trans-Atlantic urban culture rooted in trade and urban land speculation. Freestanding dwellings, particularly small weatherboarded frame and log town houses, served more as a product of regional design traditions. Thus, the frame houses of Washington occupied the lower rungs of the city’s architectural hierarchy on two counts: they were built of an inferior and flammable material and they were unabashedly backcountry. Of course not all free standing townhouses drew on backcountry precedent. Great urban mansions incorporating Palladian design values were erected in towns and cities throughout the north Atlantic world. Nonetheless, the visual authority they exerted over the surrounding streets found its strongest parallels in the architecture of pretentious country houses.12 Thus great urban mansions such as the Octagon drew in turn on the visual traditions of both the plantation and merchant city. Where the two alternatives may have reflected distinctive landscape traditions, one urban and the other rural, they found common ground in the communication of social and economic authority through private architecture that monumentalized, even if sometimes quite modestly, the worldly standing of their occupants.

Although separated by nearly two centuries, the commentaries offered by both Weld and Ridout recognize a common tension in Washington’s early urban landscape, an architectural negotiation between cosmopolitan taste and local culture that mirrored Washington’s unresolved identity as a southern city with national ambition. But what
architecturally constituted national or regional traditions, and how did the builders of Washington town houses reconcile these influences in fashioning the visual character of the city?

Despite its innovative plan and its intended function as the national seat of government, Washington occupied a place in a pre-existing plantation landscape interspersed with cities with established traditions of urban slavery: Norfolk, Richmond, Alexandria, Georgetown, and Baltimore. For wealthy town house builders in Washington and other southern cities, the plantation complex stood as a model for domestic organization. Even the more modest plantations of the Virginia and Maryland countryside were characterized by numerous work buildings and living quarters, including the house, kitchen, quarter, smokehouse, dairy, granary, barn, stables, corn cribs, tobacco barn, and various sheds. In a rural plantation setting these buildings could be laid out in an informal court or row with sufficient room between the buildings for work yards and, in the case of houses and quarters, a small but highly visible measure of social distance. Translated to the city, however, the plantation had to be compressed into much smaller lots. Moreover, the big house had to contend with nearby streets, with the result that owners had to rely on a strategy of physical enclosure to sustain the house's role in managing domestic order.

The urban plantation made use of many of the same buildings found in the countryside but with two key differences. First, the town house lot provided a much more compact setting for the arrangement and placement of outbuildings. Lots tightly packed with small work and storage buildings as well as private gardens produced a landscape with little physical distance between residents and between the formal precincts of the house and the dirty, often malodorous tumult of the yard. Second, the urban plantation jettisoned the agricultural buildings of the countryside. The plantation in the city was not an agricultural enterprise transplanted into an urban setting; rather, it was an architecturally articulated setting for a particular form of social organization. The urban plantation drew on a conceptual model which organized domestic life into a collection of functionally segregated buildings which emphasized both physical separation and formal unity.

Among the chief differences between a plantation countryside and a slaveholding city was the lack of physical distance between houses. In rural settings the plantation compound tended to look inward to the main house. The outbuildings placed as satellites to the seat of operations fell into two zones: domestic and agricultural. Closest to the house were kitchens, smokehouses, and other household related buildings. Further away stood the agricultural buildings. All these structures were unified in their orientation to a landscape dominated by the house. The urban plantation, although organized around the main dwelling and typically including domestic outbuildings and less frequently commercial buildings such as shops and store houses, looked out to the street. The urban plantation house, however, competed with a different authority: the privilege
of the street. Although the owners and principal occupants of the urban plantation each saw their own houses as the center of the urban landscape, the physical proximity between elite houses built as freestanding structures or in rows was such that the visual competition of the street constantly challenged the visual authority of the big house in its own intimate setting.

The urban plantation as a neatly divided and well-ordered environment often demanded the additional amenity of brick walls and tall board fences, especially where town houses were erected in close proximity to one another. With the visual authority of the big house compromised by the competitive arena of the street, urban plantation owners could no longer comfortably rely on the symbolic power of their houses to maintain domestic order. One response was to enhance the order of the urban plantation through a strategy of physical enclosure such as the walled compound developed at the Octagon. A brick wall enclosed the Octagon property and defined a lot which contained a two-story building for laundry and servant quarters, a two-story stable and carriage house, a brick shed, and a smokehouse. Enclosing the town lot with brick walls and board fences accomplished three goals: first, it visually screened the back lot from the street; second, it theoretically impeded the unregulated movement of slaves and servants in and out of the lot; third, it focused the view from the street on the well-ordered front of the house. Visual enclosure of the urban landscape through devices like walls, gates, and fences came to characterize the streetscapes of southern cities like Washington and Charleston. Privileged routes of access led from the sidewalk or down carriage ways to porches and piazzas and from there into dining rooms, offices, or parlors. Similar routes carried pedestrian traffic to back lot work spaces such as kitchens, wash houses, and stables. Urban enclosure produced an overall effect of social segmentation in a landscape characterized by constricted movement and socially and physically defined patterns of movement.

Baroness Hyde de Neuville’s 1821 watercolor of F Street illustrates the adaptive forms of the urban plantation. She depicts three gable-fronted houses, trim and well-finished in appearance, two of which possessed tidy front yards defined by picket fences fronting the street. The public face of Washington’s town houses represented in this view reflects the property and authority of the householders. The artist also provides a glimpse of the world behind the main house. The two-story brick building in the extreme right of the composition abuts the sidewalk. The absence of a front garden buffering the house from the street and other details suggest that this building may have served both commercial and residential functions. But what of the back lot? Access between F Street and the spaces behind the house took one of two paths, either through the house or down a narrow passage running beside the building and past a door opening directly into the back room of the main dwelling. In addition to a one-story ell extending from the rear of the house, the Baroness carefully depicted a long, low one-story frame structure with a single chimney and, behind that, the roofline of a second building with a centrally-placed chimney. The only suggestion of what lies between the two back buildings are the branches of two or three trees reaching above the roof tops. While the walkway
between the front house and the neighboring front garden is partitioned by a chest-high picket fence, the back lot and its buildings are screened from both the street and the neighbors by a tall, solid board fence.

Baroness Hyde de Neuville’s view suggests several defining features of the urban plantation. The principal building, whether entirely residential or incorporating mixed commercial and domestic needs, dominated the street and defined the public or outward face of the household. In this case the main building was of a type broadly associated with the Chesapeake region. Two-story gable fronted buildings, for example, were a favored form for the wealthy merchant families of Norfolk, Virginia. More often, though, these street fronts were associated with stores and dwelling-shop combinations and were found in small towns and major cities from the northern range of Chesapeake influence in central Delaware south to eastern North Carolina. In the Baroness’s watercolor the specific purposes served by the buildings behind the main structure are unclear, but their appearance and placement permit several observations. First, the narrow exterior walkway past the front building to the yard suggests that while the front of the structure may have served a commercial purpose, the back was clearly domestic. Thus the walkway connected the house part of the lot to the street even as the commercial spaces opened directly onto the sidewalk. Second, the back lot possessed a quality of density that illustrates the compact nature of the setting and reflects a planning framework predicated on multiple freestanding support buildings, including what are likely cooking, laundering, storage, and related household work spaces. Third, the tall board fence not only physically separates this property from its neighbor; it also screens the view from both the house next door and the street in a manner reminiscent of Charleston town house lots.

What makes the view of F Street particularly useful is the lack of uniqueness in its subject matter. At least two other Washington images confirm and enlarge a tentative visual understanding of the
urban plantation. A mid-nineteenth-century view of George Washington’s North Capitol Street town house built shortly before 1800 in the collections of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. adds to the sense of the back lot as a defining element of Washington as a southern city. Although the view of Washington’s town house dates well after its construction and after its occupancy by the former president, the details are consistent with the Baroness’s watercolor. The three-story double town house stood on a well-defined rise overlooking both the public street in front and the more private domestic world behind. All that can be seen clearly from the artist’s vantage point is the upper story, gable roofline, and multiple chimney stacks of an outbuilding running behind the full length of the town house pair. What screens the viewer from peering into the realm behind the house or the occupants from freely gazing outward is a tall board fence.

Similarly, Baroness Hyde de Neuville’s 1821 view of E Street at Fifteenth Street repeats elements of the back lot formula described above. The three-story brick house and commercial premise that occupy the right central portion of the composition possessed a full three-story ell often referred to in period town house descriptions as a “backbuilding.” Unlike many separate domestic support structures, the backbuilding typically contained informal family rooms and work spaces such as kitchen and laundry on the ground floor and multiple chambers for family members and servants above. Again, the lot is screened from the public by a roughly seven-foot tall brick wall with a single door opening into the passage leading to the rear yard. The social relationship between the street entry into the main building and through the door in the wall and into the back lot is reinforced by the people the Baroness associated with these thresholds. A pair of stylishly dressed white gentlemen greet each other on the stone stoop beneath the heavy keystone accentuating the principal entry into the building; two aproned and kerchiefed African-American women chat in the street while a market basket rests at their feet and bedding airs from a second story window in the background. What the Baroness benignly captures in her view is more than just a hierarchy of access; it is the personification of particular architectural paths affirming the status associated with race, gender, wealth, and freedom in the plantation countryside.

A sense of the town house lot for several Chesapeake cities can be gained from sources like tax records and fire insurance surveys. Georgetown, for example, was documented in the Federal Direct Tax Census that was implemented in 1798 as a steeply progressive real estate tax. The tax, which was levied nationwide, required physical descriptions of every standing building in the new republic, recording houses and work buildings by size, height, material, and function.

The Georgetown tax lists parallel the impressions received by visitors to Washington of a city composed of mixed building styles ranging from fine brick town houses to frame and plank tenements. The least expensive dwellings are represented by the frame, log, and plank houses scattered along all of Georgetown’s streets. William Williams, for example, rented a 20-by-18 foot two-story frame tenement on Falls Street. Well-lit with a total of eight windows, the Williams house likely contained only a single room on the ground floor and possibly two rooms above, including an unheated sleeping chamber. Henry Aubert’s one-story plank Olive Street dwelling with its 320 square feet of living space per floor and a total of only four windows represented a smaller, poorer version of a one-room town house. More wretched were John Atkinson’s one-story log Beale Street dwelling measuring a scant 16 by 12 feet and Jonathan Morrow’s 15 by 14 foot single-story house of wood. Morrow’s and Atkinson’s houses were each lit only by two small windows likely placed in the gable, with one each illuminating the ground floor and garret. Still, the worst houses fell below even this standard and are represented by the “old,” windowless, ten-foot square, one-story dwelling Charles Brown rented to an unnamed “negro.”

The houses of Georgetown’s urban poor, the “lower sort” as they were deemed in the eighteenth century, were a common fixture in every American city of the late 1700s. Town houses containing less than 300 square feet per floor, for example, lined the streets of Southwark in Philadelphia. Built either singly, in pairs, or as extended terraces, the Southwark houses were typically two stories in height with a cellar, constructed of brick or frame, and often provided with a dark and cramped cellar kitchen. One-story wood houses like those of Georgetown were more common in Baltimore’s Fells Point neighborhood. A range of such houses on Wolf Street contained 192 square feet with all the cooking and day-to-day living taking place in a single room. Further south in cities like Norfolk and Charleston, small, poorly-built wooden dwellings were a common element in the urban landscape, but the meanest dwellings were often those found in kitchens and work buildings located behind the big house on the street. The ordinary frame, log, and plank town houses of Georgetown and Washington as well as those of other American seaport cities were also the dwellings which most closely reflected the local vernacular building traditions of the neighboring countryside.

At the upper end of Georgetown’s architectural hierarchy stood houses like James Dunlop’s two-story brick dwelling on Bridge Street. With its 24 by 30 foot outline, the house likely consisted of a plan incorporating an entry and stair passage leading past two
rooms, one behind the other. The neatly finished two-story brick town houses of Georgetown and Washington presented a different face to the street than did their wooden neighbors. With their symmetrically organized facades telegraphing a typical interior arrangement based either on entry into a stair passage or first floor commercial premises, these houses drew on a building idiom where the general massing and plan were less closely identified with local practice. The local quality of the Dunlop house and its stylish neighbors, however, was in the details. Construction, for example, typically followed established local practice. Similarly, local custom was reflected in the design and arrangement of the outbuildings behind the house where what might be deemed provincial and unfashionable was also largely out of the public view. Behind the Dunlop house, for example, stood a two-story brick kitchen 18 by 48 feet, a one-story brick stable 18 by 24 feet, a frame smoke house 12 feet square, a small frame building “for corn” 12 feet square, a two-story brick store house 17 by 30 feet, and a brick counting house 18 by 22 feet. Although the tax list does not state if the kitchen is attached to the dwelling as an ell or standing fully detached as an outbuilding in the yard, the description does evoke the scene of an architecturally dense back lot with service areas for domestic work, stabling, and commerce.
Southern cities were not the only ones with back lots containing outbuildings and working yards. Francis Guy’s *Winter Scene in Brooklyn* (1818-1820) provides a remarkable view of the landscape behind the street. Guy composed his painting, one of several depicting variations of the same scene from his window, in such a way that the viewer sees only the hint of street elevations to either side or distantly in the background. The image that dominates the canvas depicts a jumble of household work spaces including leanto kitchens, stables, workshops, chicken coops, and other service structures situated in yards divided by low wooden fences. Similarly, Philadelphia tax lists for the oldest, most densely populated parts of the city enumerate houses with extensive ranges of backbuildings covering all but a small yard. The tiny open spaces behind row houses provided access to the backbuildings, served as rough work exterior spaces, and admitted some measure of light and air to the back of the house. Insurance plats from the 1830s indicate that many of the buildings behind Philadelphia town houses were two and three story tenements containing as little as 100 square feet per floor. Far from unique, Philadelphia’s back lot rental housing was a feature common to other towns such as eighteenth-century English seaports of Hull and Whitby. A different pattern of back lot building defined the town house mansions ranged along Pleasant Street in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where house owners built wood sheds and stables for the house, kept large gardens, and occasionally erected rental houses along the back lanes leading down to South Pond.

Still, the distinguishing quality of the southern city is not the presence of outbuildings in the lot behind the house or in their use of local building techniques. What made the domestic environments of Washington southern in the context of a city founded on the basis of national ambition was how the outbuildings in the back lot supported everyday life in the main house by relying on architectural strategies closely associated with a plantation landscape. Behind Washington’s earliest town houses, domestic architecture more closely approximated the urban plantation settings of a city like Charleston than Philadelphia. The streets of Charleston in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries offered residential vistas that drew on a limited number of basic town house types.18 Behind the Charleston town house builders placed kitchens, wash houses or laundries, work yards, private gardens, privies, stables, carriage houses, storehouses, slave quarters, and numerous other buildings. In their compressed city settings these back lot developments replicated the segmented hierarchical society of Low Country plantation life in the same way that the town house lots of Washington’s elite incorporated the forms and usages of the Chesapeake Bay countryside.

Visually the architectural hierarchy of the Charleston town house runs from high to low. At the high end of the scale is the best room in the house typically located on the second floor in the front of the house overlooking the street and physically above the office. The work spaces behind the house define the low end, running in descending order from spaces for food service to those for food preparation, washing, storage,
servant quarters, and privies. At the rear of more developed town lots, the descending order continues with stables, carriage houses, and store houses before abruptly reversing itself in a decorative garden divided by crushed shell or gravel walks and protected by a low fence.¹⁹ Formal gardens, often laid out in geometric patterns and planted with fruit trees and flowers, occupied the rearmost spaces of many Charleston lots. To gain these privileged green spaces behind the house, however, required family and visitors to walk through the work yard past the sights, smells, and sounds of domestic life. The physical distances and routes of communication between public and private, genteel and coarse, relied on both smooth transitions and harsh juxtapositions. As linked, symbolically rich points and counterpoints in the urban landscape, the nested urban spaces of the southern city expressed implicit hierarchies expressed in the environmental backdrop for physical movement and proximity. Two features characterized and connected the urban plantation ensembles of Washington to those of Charleston: until the antebellum period they were typically composed of physically separate buildings, and as an architectural grouping, they organized an urban domestic landscape dependent on slavery.

The southern quality of Washington back lots in the city’s formative years is reflected in room-by-room inventories for some of the capital’s larger houses as well as in the architectural organization of the extended dwelling complex. Both the presence of slaves and the practice of dividing domestic functions into multiple discrete outbuildings link these town house complexes to the plantation backcountry of the Chesapeake. When Thomas Turner’s Georgetown estate was inventoried in 1816, the appraisers found a two-story house containing a dining room, passage, and drawing room on the ground floor with sleeping chambers above and a wine cellar below.²⁰ Behind the house the inventory takers listed a milk house, chicken coop, and kitchen as well as implied the presence of a combination stable and carriage house. Two of the structures, the kitchen and milk house, are building types associated with the architecturally extended households of the Chesapeake Bay country.²¹ Turner’s milk house held a predictable array of earthenware butter pots, jugs, pitchers, and a wooden churn. The kitchen, which contained an expected range of pots, kettles, and cooking utensils, was also home to six slaves. Fifty-year-old John shared the kitchen quarters with three children, Robert, Jim, and Maria, and two young women, nineteen-year-old Kitty and ailing twenty-five-year-old Mary. Turner’s inventory, however, omits any mention of bedding or other amenities for the slaves who served the household.

In an arrangement similar to Turner’s, Walter Heller’s inventory itemizes the rooms of the house and their contents before turning to the back lot.²² In the yard behind the three-story town house stood a kitchen, carriage house, chicken coop, stable, smokehouse, and milk house. Heller’s rented warehouse and business office appear to have been located nearby but not on the house lot. Enumerating the contents of the kitchen, the inventory appraisers listed objects related to cooking, food storage, and domestic work.
Following the list of kitchen furnishings, the assessor recorded the slaves living on the premises and then turned their attention to the carriage house and its contents. The listing of slaves in the overall structure of the inventory suggests that if the kitchen was not the slaves' residence it was the building with which they were most closely associated. Crowded into the Hellers' kitchen were Jan and her two young children, Rachel and Spenser, along with three adult men, Basil, Ned, and Harry, a young woman, Kitty, and Charles, a boy of twelve.

Several key details emerge from the Turner and Heller inventories. Both listings associate slave life with the kitchen, and both lack mention of a slave quarter. Neither inventory references slave bedding or other household furnishings. Several interpretations exist for the second observation. The Heller and Turner slaves may have owned some small portion of personal property, or the slaves' personal possessions (technically the property of the master) were of sufficiently little value that the inventory takers ignored those possessions. Quite possibly, the inventory takers did not enter the actual slave apartments — most likely located above the kitchen — and thereby failed to acknowledge the existence of a second separate household. The presence of urban slavery and its architectural setting as represented by the Turner and Heller estates identifies a key factor in a working definition of the urban plantation and the image of the southern city. Central to that image is a sense of reciprocity in the landscape: just as urban slavery informed the physical organization of the Washington town house and lot, that environment defined the common textures and shaped the day-to-day interaction between slavery, household, and city.

But if the architectural impression projected by the buildings and organization of the spaces behind the early Washington town house suggest a regional southern tradition of the urban plantation, the buildings at the front of the lot drew on a trans-regional, even trans-Atlantic image of the urban house. Although builders continued to erect freestanding wooden and masonry buildings that adhered to the practice of regional custom, the most ambitious projects clearly looked beyond the Chesapeake world. The town house terrace quickly assumed the status of the most modern and urban building option in the new city. Rows of brick houses built on a variety of plans provided an important medium for communicating the values of uniformity and regularity which knit the city together as a coherent visual whole. Terrace housing also made sense as a means for deriving the maximum use and profit from constricted urban lots. Houses erected in rows capitalized on every foot of street frontage. The continuous range of two- and three-story brick facades also had the effect of screening the working world behind the house from public view much more effectively than wood fences and brick walls.

Wheat Row, located on Fourth Street, S. W., best illustrates the design tradition of the uniform terrace erected on an ambitious scale. As a terrace, Wheat Row consisted of four separate houses visually unified through the regular and symmetrical placement of doors and windows, belt courses, and the use of a slightly projecting center pavilion.

capped by a pediment. With its attention to a uniform, fully-integrated design, Wheat Row represents the most stylish form of early American terrace housing. Comparable developments undertaken in other cities in both the United States and Britain reveal the decidedly nonregional character of this terrace tradition and suggest one of the architectural strategies through which Washington builders sought to reconcile the southern character of their city in a larger trans-regional context. Although the tendency for many design historians is to single out the most exceptional examples of terrace housing as potential sources, projects of comparable scale and finish provide a better comparative measure. Thus, instead of the elaborate houses of London's Bedford Square, a more modest development like Lisle Street in present day Soho illustrates parallel British developments.
Lisle Street gently curves along its length between Wardour and Little Newport streets. At Lisle Street’s approximate midpoint, a cross street runs in at right angles. To create the image of a uniform terrace, the Lisle Street developers designed a speculative row of modest two-bay town houses with ground floor shops and upper story residences. With its pedimented front bearing a carved stone plaque displaying the inscription “NEW LISLE STREET MDCCXCI,” the central building provided a unifying visual focus for the overall terrace. The values of symmetry, regularity, and uniformity for the overall terrace were reinforced through the use of consistent finishes, including the use of open balustrades above the cornices of the buildings flanking the central unit. A similar terrace was erected between 1803 and 1806 at the foot of Jarrett Street where it met Worship Street in the Yorkshire port of Hull. Like Lisle Street, the Worship Street terrace provided a visual anchor to close off the end of an urban streetscape; like Wheat Row, the Worship Street terrace made use of four separate residential and commercial units visually unified through the consistent use of architectural trim, symmetrical fenestration, and a central pavilion with pediment.

In 1800 Arnoldus Vanderhorst used a similar concept in the design of two blocks of terrace housing fronting Charleston’s East Bay Street and flanking the entry into Vanderhorst Street leading to the developer’s wharves. The surviving southern block makes use of a tripartite design with a slightly projecting central bay capped by a pediment. The unity of the three sections is reinforced through their symmetrical fenestration and the use of marble detailing. An 1806 plat of the southern terrace suggests that the central unit was planned with a completely open ground floor space while the flanking units partitioned front commercial rooms from back rooms with adjoining stairs. Despite differences in plan between the middle and flanking spaces, the three units drew on similar strategies for housing service in the back lot. While the street elevation of Vanderhorst Row expressed a sensibility based on a unified
design scheme, the back lots spoke to a much more segmented view of household organization. The area behind Vanderhorst Row contained three fully segregated yards, each separated from its neighbor by a fence or wall erected over a shared cistern or well. At the back of the yard stood the combination kitchen-quarters. A "passage" or alley terminated in a brick wall against which two privies were placed behind the service yards and kitchens. Behind the houses, private yards, domestic outbuildings and alley, Vanderhorst's development continued to the waterfront in rows of brick, two-story, cellared, tile-roofed storehouses.

The comparison between Washington developments like Wheat Row and those in other cities focuses the tension between southern city and national ambition on its architectural expression. Despite the regular brick fronts of planned developments like Wheat Row, the architectural evidence for national ambition remains allusive. Certainly town houses presenting symmetrical and uniform street elevations speak to broader patterns of urban development in the Atlantic world. On the exterior, the appearance of architecturally unified terraces epitomized by Wheat Row, Lisle Street, or Vanderhorst Row established visual connections reaching far beyond the immediate local landscape. The builders of single, individually commissioned town houses made use of similar plans and materials and thereby raised their voices in an architectural discourse that transcended the particulars of any given city. At the same time, however, those same builders could not and did not want to divorce themselves from their immediate architectural context. Even as Washington town houses found their visual counterparts in the planned rows of distant cities, their back lot character continued to express a parallel commitment to the maintenance of status and identity in a profoundly local context. The interior world of the town house, however, presented a far more definite emphasis.

On the interior of the terrace house, cosmopolitan culture and society found its fullest expression in the ornamentation, furnishings, and usages of formal spaces such as the parlor, dining room, and drawing room. At the street, the terraces of Wheat Row, Lisle Street, Vanderhorst Row, and Worship Street projected a common desire to
organize the urban landscape around the imagery of a well-regulated environment communicating the values of a particular segment of urban society, a portion of the population which defined its community not by place but by intellectual and commercial interest. Those interests were reflected in other examples of Washington’s earliest and best-built rows like Smith Row and Cox’s Row on N Street, N. W., in Georgetown or now the demolished Seven Buildings at Nineteenth and Twentieth streets, N. W., and The Six Buildings at Pennsylvania Avenue and Twenty-First Street, N. W., as well as in the innumerable, often plainer, terraces found in American and British cities. For all their similarities at the street, though, these same terraces grew more and more dissimilar as the distance between street and back lot increased. As we will see, the realm of household service and back lot was the one arena where even the most worldly builders and inhabitants could not easily transcend their local lives.

Design sources evident in the north Atlantic rim are well represented for Washington’s terrace housing in developments like The Six Buildings and Cox’s Row. Nicholas King’s 1798 plan and elevation of a new house and shop erected at the end of a terrace on N Street at South Capitol illustrates just how the spaces of one Washington town house, lot, and outbuildings worked as an extended space for multiple domestic and commercial purposes. Planned for client William Langley on a 30 by 100 foot corner lot, the house consists of a 30 by 36-foot main block containing on the ground floor a retail store with counter and shelving and an adjoining counting room facing South Capitol. The counting room occupies approximately half the floor space of the unheated sales room and is heated with a fireplace. A corner entry provides access to the commercial rooms and is flanked on both street elevations by large bow-front shop windows supported on simply executed brackets.

Behind the commercial front of the building are a compact entry passage and “Parlour.” The entry, gained through a compass-arched doorway, contains the principal stair and provides access to the front store, rear parlor, and a back garden outside. As the largest room on the ground floor, the parlor contains a gable fireplace with flanking cupboards or closets. A narrow passage runs behind the parlor and contains a back stair and internal access to a kitchen slightly less than fifteen feet
square. The proximity of the kitchen to the parlor and presence of cupboards or closets in the parlor indicate the use of this space as a downstairs dining room. The passage between the parlor and the kitchen containing a large gable end cooking fireplace is reminiscent of what Philadelphians often called a “piazza,” a constricted connecting space which effectively isolated the front of the house from the domestic service functions pushed to the back of the house. The kitchen in the Nicholas King plan fronted south N Street across a nearly square garden screened from the street by a low picket fence. The garden, bisected by paths leading to the rear of the main entrance passage and to the piazza, connected the house to the yard which contained an 18 by 20-foot, one-story frame warehouse and a roughly 12-foot square, three-stall stable.

The Nicholas King plan distinguishes between a number of household zones and suggests ways in which movement was channeled through the house. Depending on a person’s status and purpose, the Langley family’s buildings could be entered via a number of routes. Describing the individual paths of the shopkeeper, the slave cook, a clerk, and a customer on a hypothetical business morning illustrates how status and purpose likely directed movement and gave it significant texture. The shopkeeper’s journey to work began in an upstairs chamber. In houses with second floor parlors, the principal chamber stood behind the best room; in houses without a second story formal room, the best chamber occupied the front of the house looking out over the sidewalk and street below. From the best chamber above, the shopkeeper descended the main stair and entered the back parlor, possibly continuing on to the kitchen for the first meal of the day. From kitchen to dining room, the shopkeeper retraced his or her steps through the entry and into the store and likely the counting room behind. Even as the shopkeeper descended through the house from the main rooms above, the slave cook had already made her way from the garret over the kitchen and had begun the day’s domestic work, which started in the kitchen, but as the day went on continued through the house, garden, and public market. The slave’s path through the house began in the back or some other tertiary space such as a garret or cellar and continued up and down rear service stairs and back yard pathways. The interplay between inferior and superior spaces within the house and the ways in which residents moved and interacted between them represented an architectural codification of social authority. The material expression of that authority in Washington successfully merged the functions of urban plantation and townhouse.

The paths employed by the shopkeeper, clerk, and customers reflect similar hierarchical qualities. The clerk approached the building on foot and entered the shop either through the back carriage way, garden, and entry or, more likely, directly from the street through the side doorway, into the entry, and into the store itself. Although privileged over the slave cook by race, sex, and occupation, the clerk stood in an inferior position not only to the shopkeeper but also to the clientele, and his likely access into the
building affirmed his status. The customers enjoyed a very different pattern of access. Whether they arrived by foot or by carriage, the clientele entered the building through the main entry. Walking past the window displays and directly into the shop, the customers faced the shopkeeper or clerk as well as shelves displaying the goods across a counter which effectively created a lobby. Although customers entered the building through the main entry, they typically lacked the level of intimacy with the householders that permitted access to the parlor and service wing.

The distribution of domestic and retail space through the house illustrates the ways in which the Langley family or their tenants may have occupied Nicholas King's town house. The provisions for multiple pathways through, into, and out of the building provide the architectural evidence to raise questions of social intimacy and hierarchy. Each room in the house possessed multiple points of access which described hierarchies of entry. In their position and quality of finish, for example, doorways signaled both the rank and etiquette of admittance. The values articulated at the threshold echoed in turn in the functions, interior finishes, and furnishings of the rooms which lay beyond. The use of architecturally expressed social hierarchies within the house was not unique to Washington, but rather an essential part of town house and country house design throughout the north Atlantic world. What both distinguishes and relates Washington town houses to their contemporaries in other cities are questions of texture and the way things looked in very specific contexts. Thus, to advance the interpretation of Nicholas King’s design for the Langley’s house and lot at South Capitol and south N streets as well as the larger tension between regional character and cosmopolitan urban culture requires a look at the world inside the Washington town house.

A number of inventories survive that list the contents of Washington town houses room by room. These inventories present a sense of what people placed in their houses, but they do not provide much of a feel for space or texture. Inventories list objects by type, form, value, material — and sometimes color or condition — but they do not tell what something looked like or actually where it stood in a particular place (with the exception of china and glass in cupboards or textiles in chests). What inventories reveal, however, are furnishing strategies. People place certain types of objects in specific spaces with the intention that the objects best serve their multiple purposes. The analysis of a number of inventories suggests that rooms with different names such as parlor, drawing room, or front room upstairs actually may serve similar functions and communicate comparable sensibilities. Finally, where the contents of rooms seem similar, the house plans in which those rooms are located may exhibit significant variation. Continuity in room names and furnishings coupled with variability in house plans and elevations suggests how the tensions between regional architectural design traditions and cosmopolitan behavior might be mediated. For example, elite town houses like that of Dr. John Weems contained numerous rooms given specific designations according to a sense of assigned function. Weems's house, which contained a front parlor, dining room, and passage on the main floor as well as a “room back” and a kitchen, is likely the same.
building owned and occupied by "J Weems" on Bridge Street, Georgetown, in 1798 and assessed as a two-story, 26 by 38 feet, brick structure with a 42 by 15 foot backbuilding.\textsuperscript{31}

The inventory of William Radcliff reflects a plan similar to the functional arrangement illustrated in Nicholas King's town house plan.\textsuperscript{32} Radcliff's house consisted of a ground floor plan containing an office, back room, and entry. Also present was a kitchen, but whether the cooking spaces in the house were located in the cellar (a common urban feature associated with Philadelphia town houses) or in a rear wing or separate structure (common arrangements for southern cities like Norfolk, Richmond, and Charleston) is unknown. Radcliff's office in the front of his house contained a writing table and paper case, chest, several law books, and little else. Far more densely furnished was the room behind the office. The furniture in the back room included a dozen chairs, tea table, a pair of tables (likely for dining), sideboard, carpet, and fire rug. Associated with the major furnishings were objects specific to both tea and dining. Matched sets of dinner and tea ware suggest a certain stylish lifestyle borne out by decanters, candlesticks, pitchers, waiters, and emptied claret bottles. The mix of objects suggests a room given over to both household dining and formal entertainment.

The mixed use of the back room is made more evident in the workaday world of the kitchen with its large work table, iron pots, coffee mill, Dutch oven, jugs, and utilitarian earthenware ceramics. The upstairs rooms served only as sleeping chambers. The best chamber occupied the second floor front and contained the most expensive bed as well as toilet table and wash stand. Although this room was private and somewhat informal, it was not off limits to visitors, as revealed in the listing of six chairs and a pine table. The second floor back room contained much the same in terms of personal furnishings as well as a "Servants Bed." The presence of a servant's bed in one of only two sleeping chambers in the house reinforces the sense of day-to-day etiquette associated with an extended household. Other aspects of the servant's quarters in close juxtaposition to the householder's domain in Radcliff's dwelling is reflected in additional kitchen furnishings. Two chairs, a small table, four plates, a dish, and a tea pot were likely the objects set aside for the servant's use.

In houses of similar plan and scale without ground floor commercial rooms, some dwellings tended to possess a side entry opening into a ground floor front dining room and a second, more private room in back. Others dedicated the front room as a parlor and placed dining in the back with access to a kitchen placed either in a cellar below, an adjoining service wing, or freestanding building in the yard. Thomas Turner's and Hamilton Hamilton's houses, for example, both contained a dining room, passage, and drawing room. James Varmann, however, occupied a house with a "parlor" fully equipped as a dining room and a back sitting room furnished for less ostentatious occasions. The fluidity of the term parlor is found in other inventories such as Moses Young's, which specifies a front and a back parlor as well as a hall and library. The parlors were most
likely a pair of rooms divided by a partition containing a pair of doors. Thus, the two rooms could create one large space by opening the doors. Young's front parlor with its two sofas and dozen mahogany chairs was a space for seated conversation and the sociability of chess, backgammon, and other entertainments. The back parlor was clearly set up for taking meals with a dining table, breakfast table, chairs, and table settings.33

Still other inventories add to our understanding of how household spaces like the kitchen worked in the Washington town house. John Wiley, whose 1819 inventory reflects a legal career and a socially aspiring household, occupied a house composed of an office and dining room on the first floor with a back bedroom, small front room, and front bedroom on the second story.34 The inventory takers paid particular attention to the contents of Wiley's kitchen, which may have stood either as an outbuilding in the back yard or may have been located in an ell or leanto. Cooking required that servants stand over a table or crouch in front of an fireplace. A "tin kitchen" for roasting and Dutch ovens for baking required cooks to stoop in front of the fire; pot hooks, iron pots, and kettles hung from trammel bars forced the cook to reach through smoke and heat. Wiley's kitchen also contained "1 Bedstead and furniture for Servants," indicating both the location of servant quarters and the common practice of shared beds. The presence of flat irons and a clothes basket define the extended function of the kitchen as a laundry just as four kitchen chairs suggest informal dining and even some element of sociability in the life of servants. In the geography of Wiley's town house, the kitchen served as a multipurpose space cluttered with cooking utensils, ordinary dishes, laundry supplies, a bed and chairs, and provisions stored in earthenware jars, glass bottles, baskets, and wooden tubs and casks.

The town house in its architecturally extended sense describes a household geography where the specifics of social organization, class, and caste can be located in the interaction between people and domestic space. Multiple levels of overlapping interaction can be located, for example, between the front and the back of the house, between the house and the street, or between any set of domestic spaces that convey the tenor and texture of relationships such as those associated with domestic work and sociability. But are there distinguishing characteristics between the plan of the house and the types and placement of furnishings in it that conclusively reflect the quality of national ambition and suggest the usages of a southern city? On the basis of objects alone the answer is no. What materially defines the regional character of Washington's town houses lies in the realm of juxtaposition and comportment, the ways in which people, space, and objects stand in active relationship to one another.

Washington town houses communicated values on the broad basis of the experiences that residents and visitors brought to their encounters. For many visitors the neat, uniform street elevations of town house terraces visually connected the streets of Washington to those of Philadelphia, New York, and English port cities. Others who described the new city were struck more by its links to the backcountry of
the Chesapeake, a rural landscape characterized by often conflicting, sometimes startling visual qualities. Roughly built log and frame houses occupied the plantation countryside along with great manor houses served by a multitude of support buildings. The experience of moving through this landscape and the range of social possibilities that movement afforded depended on status and access. The architectural nuances of social rank, privilege, inclusion, and exclusion associated with the society of the countryside translated well into an urban setting steeped in an equally competitive and hierarchical tradition of urban mercantilism. In these relationships, we perceive the urban house as both public and intimate space resolving regional and cosmopolitan sensibilities in its architectural design and use.

The tension between the regional city and national ambition is far from unique to Washington. Other cities conveyed similar sets of juxtapositions in regionally specific ways. In Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the city's central square contained a two-story brick courthouse surrounded by two- and three-story brick buildings including a market hall, taverns, and town houses. Within a five minute walk of the courthouse were streets lined with decidedly Pennsylvania-German town houses one-story in height and built of log or decorative half timber. The heart of Charleston included town house rows side by side with the city's distinctive single houses which combined the architectural traditions of the mercantile city and the Low Country plantation in a distinctive urban form. Hundreds of miles to the north in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a similar process found expression. At the center of the city's commercial and administrative district, an area leveled by successive fires in the early 1800s, stood regular rows of brick warehouses and commercial premises all but indistinguishable from those in other Atlantic cities. Away from the town center, however, the architectural image acquired a considerably more local cast where builders erected variations on the center-chimney, lobby-entry dwellings most closely identified with northern New England village and farm houses. Their neighbors used similar technologies, but erected pairs of terrace houses. What distinguishes each of these cities, as it does Washington, is the facility with which regional and cosmopolitan values informed the character of the city as a whole. Each place clearly invested in the unifying architectural image of the mercantile city; each place drew on the existing architectural traditions of the backcountry. The fusion of the two traditions rendered each city visually distinct at the same time it demonstrated each city's participation in a larger Atlantic urban culture.

In Washington the interplay between regional and cosmopolitan cultures expresses the subtleties rooted in the very ways people from all different walks of life move through and make sense of a common environment composed of many uncoordinated individual and group actions. Ultimately the effort to separate what is southern and what is national in Washington's first generation of town houses misses the larger point. The private houses of Washington represent the interplay of two familiar architectural design
traditions. Those same houses also represent the diversity of individual choice, means, and intent. The plan and ornamentation of the house, the dining service in the cupboard, the market basket on the kitchen table, the outbuildings in the yard are all elements in a system of material communication. The evidence of town houses reveals the architectural strategies that enabled Washingtonians to articulate and comprehend the sense of their urban environment as both regional city and cosmopolitan center.
“A Wild, Desolate Place”

Life on the Margins in Early Washington

Robert Cruikshank, President’s Levee or all Creation going to the White House. Colored aquatint, 1841. Library of Congress. Cruikshank mocked the democratic nature of presidential events in his parody of Andrew Jackson’s 1829 inaugural. Traditionally on occasions like New Year’s day and inaugurations, nineteenth-century Washingtonians called on the president and his family.

Fredrika J. Teute
Early Washington did not impress as the capital of the new nation. One of its inhabitans sardonically observed that “the citizens build houses where there are no streets, and the corporation, (which is said to be as poor as a church mouse,) makes streets where there are no houses: and so, by figuring to yourself a parcel of streets without houses, and houses without streets, you will have a pretty correct picture of the Metropolis of the United States.”¹ The rural, riparian nature of the landscape, punctuated with signs of poverty, marked first appearances, and for many this rustic vision left a lasting imprint in their recordings of the place.

Women on first encounter found it inhospitable. Abigail Adams joined her husband in the autumn of 1800 to complete his final months as president of the United States in the new federal city. She gave a desolate view of the environs. Leaving cosmopolitan Philadelphia behind, she remarked, “Woods are all you see, from Baltimore until you reach the city, which is only so in name. Here and there is a small cot, without a glass window; interspersed amongst the forests, through which you travel miles without seeing any human being.” Margaret Bayard Smith, accompanying her husband Samuel Harrison Smith, editor of the Jeffersonian National Intelligencer, arrived by stagecoach a month before Abigail Adams. She had taken in the same scene. Leaving the woods, “among which a boundary stone, marked the beginning of the city, we entered a long & unshaded road, which arises a hill & crosses a vast common, cover’d with shrub oak & black berries in abundance. I look in vain for the city & see no houses, although among the bushes, I see the different stones, which here & there mark the different avenues.”²

Neither woman, accustomed to the amenities and relative sophistication of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, was much taken with the “city” proper. Adams observed that “there are buildings enough, if they were compact and finished, to accommodate Congress and those attached to it; but as they are, and scattered as they are, I see no great comfort for them.” She took up residence in the unfinished and drafty President’s House, where she hung her laundry in one of the empty rooms. Smith “at last... perceive[d] the capitol, a large square, ungraceful white building, approaching nearer I see three large brick houses, & a few hovels, scattered over the plain.” She took up lodging in one of the brick houses, “surrounded with mud, shavings, bricks, planks, & all the rubbish of building.”³
Other visitors were far more scathing in their denunciation of Washington's pretensions to housing the early republic's government. The Irish poet Thomas Moore penned an infamous poem, lampooning the site and its Republican inhabitants. Federalist in sympathy, Moore not only denigrated the physical appearance and cultural conditions of the nation's capital, but also wrote scurrilous lines suggesting illicit sexual liaisons between officials and African-American female slaves. After a visit in 1804, he burlesqued the city as

... this modern Rome,
Where tribunes rule, where dusky Davi bow,
And what was Goose-Creek once is Tiber now! —
This fam'd metropolis, where fancy sees
Squares in morasses, obelisks in trees;
Which travelling fools and gazeteers adorn
With shrines unbuilt and heroes yet unborn,
Though nought but wood and [Jefferson] they see
Where streets should run and sages ought to be.

The most explosive element of his critique, however, hinted at transgression of class and racial lines, portraying politicians as lascivious and immoral in their social relations with black females. Associating white men's freedom with black women's enslavement and subjection, Moore depicted

The weary statesman for repose hath fled
From halls of council to his negro's shed,
Where blest he woos some black Aspasia's grace,
And dreams of freedom in his slave's embrace!

Bothered by the displacement of civilized values, the poet contrasted nature's magnificence with the barbarism of its native inhabitants. He declared,

Oh! was a world so bright but born to grace
Its own half-organized, half-minded race
Of weak barbarians, swarming o'er its breast,
Like vermin gendered on the lion's crest?
Were none but brutes to call that soil their home,
Where none but demigods should dare to roam?
Debunking the United States's demigod, Moore accused George Washington of sacrificing loyalty to fame and of casting "off" their monarch, that their mob might reign." Worst of all was the inversion of rank and authority in America, as "the motley dregs of every distant clime, / Each blast of anarchy and taint of crime" discarded from Europe washed onto its shores. Their impact could be observed in the halls of Congress,

If thou canst loathe and execrate with me
That Gallic garbage of philosophy,
That nauseous slaver of these frantic times,
With which false liberty dilutes her crimes!

With honest scorn for that inglorious soul
Which creeps and winds beneath a mob's control,
Which courts the rabble's smile, the rabble's nod,
And makes, like Egypt, every beast its god,
There, in those walls — but, burning tongue, forbear!
Rank must be reverenced, e'en the rank that's there.⁴

Moore's linkage of corrupted politics with sex, race, and status adumbrated underlying tensions in early national society. Constructions of white male power were grounded in all three arenas. Their freedom rested on sexual and racial subordination of all women, African Americans, and Indians. The liberating potential of Enlightenment and Revolutionary ideals had destabilized traditional hierarchies that ranked men by class and placed white women and all enslaved African Americans under patriarchal authority. With enlightened and sentimental appreciation of human individuality arose the need to circumscribe desires for self-expression and independence. In the aftermath of the Revolution, the aspirations for personal autonomy among white women, propertyless white men, native Americans, and African Americans were both realized and, consequently, newly delimited. The founding generation firmly established political participation in society on the basis of property holding, excluding unpropertied white men, white married women, native Americans, and most African Americans. Over the following decades, expansionist, domestic, and paternalist ideologies evolved that empowered all white men and promoted new forms of deference and dependence for white females, Indians, and black slaves on those who claimed to be their superiors.⁵ The post-Revolutionary settlement made white male dominion in sexual, racial, or political relations inextricably dependent upon maintaining supremacy in the other two domains. Yet authority once questioned rendered power insecure in all its forms and made white men vulnerable in their assertions of dominance.

Moore's poem exposed the fault lines of early republican society. Racial and sexual anxieties lay hidden beneath the surface. Impassioned desires lurked in the shadows, threatening self-control and control over others. To foreign observers and denizens alike,
the capital seemed to embody the rawness of appetites and the corruption of passions let loose by expansive notions of opportunity and equality. British emissary David Baillie Warden portrayed Washington society as crude and ostentatious and its women as ambitious and independent. So telling were Moore’s and Warden’s barbs that indignation lingered for decades. Indigenous observers such as Samuel L. Knapp felt impelled to defend the city and its inhabitants from aspersions cast on its character and mores.

Other American writers manifested their own perceptions of shifting social relations in literary treatments of early Washington society. Two of the capital’s first novelists, George Watterston and Margaret Bayard Smith, each critiqued unstable power structures within the District of Columbia by refracting them through sexual and racial lenses. Watterston, appointed as the first professional Librarian of Congress by James Madison after the War of 1812, satirized politicians and placemen and citizens aspiring to become either. Although using his two novels *The L—— Family at Washington* and *Wanderer in Washington* as vehicles for depicting the rhetorical skills of congressmen and analyzing their styles, Watterston also toured readers through the Capitol and Washington society, satirizing individual ambitions along the way.

In his portrayal, Watterston equated political patronage with sexual favors and freedom with sexual and racial promiscuity. Prostitutes haunted the halls of Congress, which appeared as a labyrinthine den of seduction. In the epistolary novel, *The L—— Family*, the office-seeking son Richard visited the gallery in the House of Representatives. On the make in every way, he had an eye out for available young ladies. He was transfixed by a couple of beautiful young women [who] now planted themselves along side of us, and three strapping negro fellows hung over our shoulders. The ladies were dressed in the extreme of fashion, and were very lovely; their cheeks possessing a beautiful red, and the rest of the face a most delicate white, which I had never noticed before. It was not long before they began to eye me askance, and to be taken, as I thought, with my features and person. I god, thought I, I have made a conquest already.
Seeing that he could take advantage of the situation in several ways, Richard moved in for the kill. He initiated a conversation with one, eliciting answers from the fair one "without reserve, and with the most bewitching smile imaginable. The honorable members seemed to look up at us with surprise, and I thought, with some jealousy, but that was what I wanted, and so kept up a parley with them for some time to my great gratification as well as theirs." His delusions fell in on him with a shock when his companion informed him "that those damsels with whom I appeared so intimate, were 'filles de joie' and that it was not decorous to be seen thus publicly noticing them."

Precipitously departing, Richard was "mortified to the quick at having been caught publicly conversing with a species of cattle, Daddy has always told me to abhor. As I passed, I saw the three negroes, who had been hanging over us, grinning like monkeys, at my folly, I suppose; and could have knocked the rascals down, if I dared."\textsuperscript{10} Ignorant citizens pursuing public office could not discriminate between whores and ladies and were the objects of ridicule in the eyes of blacks. Women in public were indistinguishable from public women. By appearing in public, they entered a dangerous zone where appearances could be mistaken and improper sexual and racial encounters ensue.\textsuperscript{11} Blinded by ambition, Americans were duped by artifice. In aiming above their station, they became victims of the very inverted status hierarchies from which they meant to profit. Power coursed through Washington's corridors, but it was a corruptible amalgam. Politicians cavorted with prostitutes, and prostitutes gulled office seekers. African Americans appropriated the halls of liberty to their own diversions, freely mocking libertines whose freedoms they were denied.

Using the city's low life as a foil to his send-up of political ambitions and people out of place, Watterston ignored elite women and the lower classes when delineating Washington society. Virtually the only females appearing in the novel were women of ill repute. Their omnipresence in public and political spaces could be read as an attack by Watterston on the presence of women in the Capitol. In the 1810s and 1820s, they were increasingly frequenting the galleries to observe political debates. Watterston's lampoon was a warning to proper ladies that the halls of Congress were no place for them and the business conducted there no matter for their concern. A place holder himself, he identified the inhabitants in categories from high government positions down through bureaucratic levels, ending with clerks, for whose subordinate status and "scanty pittance" he sympathized and whom he deemed "the best and most agreeable society of Washington." Omitted from his scheme entirely were white working classes, enslaved African Americans, and free blacks. They did not constitute part of the city's official establishment and thereby were erased from the record.\textsuperscript{12}

In fact, African Americans constituted a substantial minority of the District of Columbia's population, and white mechanics and tradesmen had flocked to the city to take advantage of the initial building frenzy and burgeoning population. Between 1800
and 1830, free and enslaved blacks tripled in numbers and averaged one-third of the total population throughout the period. White inhabitation more than doubled in size, increasing from a little over 10,000 to about 27,500. Most notable was the dramatic increase of the free black population. By 1830 out of a total of slightly over 12,000 African Americans, half were free.\textsuperscript{13}

Other chroniclers did recognize the presence of working class and impoverished whites and blacks in the midst of the capital’s population. Their observations indicated economic competition and social contiguity between the two groups. In her sensationalist \textit{Black Book}, Anne Royall painted gruesome scenes of drunken violence and degradation among Washington’s lower classes. She suggested that the city’s African Americans, engrossing “all employment and all the cash and even our females,” were better off than “the poor starving white people.”\textsuperscript{14} David Baillie Warden in his description provided census figures and mentioned the various employment in the city, claiming much of the construction and manual labor was done by Irish immigrants and most of the domestic and field work was performed by slaves. His perception was that white laborers resented blacks as competitors and rejected situations placing them on the same level with blacks. Both authors depicted the capital as a setting in which the danger of racial amalgamation was omnipresent.\textsuperscript{15}
In the undeveloped northern section of the District composing Washington County, white tenants and a smattering of free and enslaved blacks lived. Warden noted that “the cabins of this district are far from being comfortable. They are rented from year to year with a spot of land.” Among these rural poor, Warden found Margaret Bayard Smith, living with her husband on their well-kept farm, Sydney, and assisting her less well-off neighbors. The Smiths’ home was “a beautiful retreat.” Nearby lived a poor woman in “a miserable hut, formed of rude boards, and just large enough to contain a bed and two old chairs.” Supporting herself by spinning and dying yarn, she refused Smith’s offer to place her in a family. She preferred “independence, however humble,” to the subservience that greater security entailed. From her personal experience with such neighbors, servants, laborers, and slaves, Smith described in her fiction the lives of the lower classes in the District. Out of her own sense of marginalization, she identified across class and racial lines with the plight of other disempowered groups and with their strategies for achieving self-determination.

Margaret Bayard Smith is best known as author of The First Forty Years of Washington Society, an edited collection of her letters to her sisters covering the period of her adult life spent in the newly created District of Columbia. The selection of her correspondence creates the impression of a vivacious woman fascinated with the social life and politics in the nation’s capital. An astute observer, her vignettes of society and her portraits of politicians have often been quoted in historical accounts of the period. Culled from a much larger corpus of her papers deposited in the Library of Congress, the letters in the published edition were chosen for their value in depicting the creation of a national, political society in Washington, not in portraying the full dimensions of Smith’s existence.

When the entirety of her papers and writings are examined, a very different person emerges from the pages of her manuscripts. Enamored she was of the elite circles and politics of the capital. Its dynamic life stimulated her intellectual ambitions. The social constraints placed on women, however, thwarted her personal aspirations and drove her to seek other avenues for fulfilling herself. Her own exclusion from the political center of Washington life engendered a sense of alienation, which she voiced through her published and unpublished writings. As well as participating in the construction of political culture in the early republic, Smith exposed the limitations of the society in which she lived.

From the time of her arrival in 1800 to her death in 1844, Smith enlisted in benevolent work and female associations. She and her husband hired slaves as domestic servants, and she concerned herself in their personal welfare. Slavery disturbed her. Enslaved blacks’ situation and humanity moved her to do what she could to ameliorate their conditions through her actions and her writings. She taught her black servant girl Matty to read and write along with her own children. By 1806 Smith was conducting a Sunday school for the neighborhood children, black and white. Keenly aware of female
vulnerability and economic dependence, she purchased produce and handwork from tenants' wives nearby, contributing to their income. The formation of the Washington Female Orphans Asylum in 1815 actively engaged her energies. Proceeds from the publication of her second novel, *What Is Gentility?*, were dedicated to the benefit fair for the asylum in 1828, as a new building to house orphans was being erected.²⁰

Besides this novel, which depicted genteel aspirations of the middling sorts in Washington society and promoted the importance of education, Smith published an earlier novel, *A Winter in Washington*, on the political life and professional classes in Washington; three children's stories, describing life at Sydney; and numerous articles for magazines. She left two unpublished novels, one of which, "Lucy," dealt with the lower classes in the District.²¹ For Smith writing was a solvent for her intellectual goals, political interests, and moral concerns. Suffering the intense isolation of domestic life as her husband spent long hours on his newspaper and with professional associates, she alleviated intellectual tedium and personal frustration by reading and writing.

Through her pen Smith directed attention on issues critical to keeping all white women, impoverished laborers, and all African Americans subordinate to the propertyed male power structure. Conflicted herself, in her writings she often appeared to support women's roles within the home as companions to men, to ratify the existing stratified social structure, and to endorse black deference to their masters. Yet, her own discontents, her own participation in forming Washington's political life, and her embrace of human nature's expansive potential informed all of her writings. Her voice ultimately was subversive, challenging the configuration of white male power in sexual, racial, and political dominion over those of dependent status.

By the 1820s when Smith published most of her fiction on Washington, the ideology of separate spheres was crystallizing its consignment of middle-class women to domesticity, even though — or because — women were asserting themselves outside of the home. In focusing concern on the lower classes, early nineteenth-century reform organizations provided genteel white women with outlets for exercising their authority and autonomy.²² Benevolence and moral reform associations recognized middle-class responsibility for uplifting the poor at the same time legitimating their degraded status. Antislavery sentiment still leaned toward meliorating the lot of slaves, rather than abolishing their enslaved status. Although elite women's involvement in these movements seemingly bore the stamp of noblesse oblige and benefited them more than the objects of their beneficence, at least some formed a transgressive identity with blacks and poor whites that impelled these movements toward female activism. Fueled by a sense of shared disempowerment and resentment of suppression, elite women moved from a Revolutionary generation who critiqued their situation to an antebellum generation of activists. Born in 1778, Smith was from the Revolutionary cohort who appropriated values of intellectual thought and individual improvement to themselves. As narrowing social conventions of the early nineteenth century constrained her, she perceptively analyzed the social realities that disrupted those conventions. She addressed these disjunctions in her novels.
On the surface *A Winter in Washington* was a novel portraying the social fashions and political manners of official and well-to-do Washington in the era of Thomas Jefferson’s administration.²³ Within this framework, Smith assessed women’s status and aspirations in the early republic. Although she focused primarily on upper-class women and their maneuvers for empowerment, she incorporated into her story a depiction of the city’s marginalized poor. Smith was more in sympathy with the lives of Washington’s working classes than many of her own station, for she believed that their habits and living conditions had more to do with the economic situation in which they found themselves than with their own degraded morals and irresponsibility. She disagreed with her husband over this issue and used *A Winter in Washington* as a vehicle through which to express her views and to broadcast a more accurate version of their state.

On a stormy, cold winter’s day, the protagonist, Mrs. Seymour, and her daughter Louisa ventured out in the inclement weather to experience the “real sufferings” of the poor and to “examine what their actual condition is.” In the first decades of the nineteenth century, poverty-stricken inhabitants were scattered about the District, residing in
undeveloped portions of the city, away from the center sections that had been subdivided, laid out in streets, and built upon. Common custom allowed disadvantaged people to squat on unclaimed ground and to build what habitations they could on condition that they vacated the premises when it was appropriated to public use or private sale. The commons to the southwest of Capitol Hill was dotted with tenements and hovels.24

The first family sought out by the Seymours illustrated the distress of the worthy poor. From respectable, artisanal status in New York, the Bertrands had fallen on hard times in Washington. Enticed by advertisements for mechanics and craftsmen, they immigrated to the city, the husband expecting full-time employment and double the wages elsewhere. Rather than “the great city we expected to see, it was a wild, desolate place, all covered with woods. There was not a house on the avenue between the Capitol and George Town, and only a few scattered about in other places. Capitol Hill, and the low ground below it, was covered with a wood, and that along the Tiber and the avenue was not even laid out. Oh, it was a desolate place, and except the Capitol and President’s house, looked more like a wilderness than a city.” Too many carpenters had preceded Bertrand, and he failed to find employment on the public works. Private builders employed him in constructing houses on Greenleaf’s Point, for which they could not pay his wages. Ill health and poverty befell the family; the husband was forced to abandon his trade and enlist in the marine corps. Their house, of their own building, “had once been a large and good one; but, although not of long standing, it was already in ruins; the fence round the yard had been pulled to pieces to supply the poor tenants with fuel; the entry door, having lost its fastening, was slamming backwards and forwards, and the broken windows were stuffed full of old clothes of every colour, and the shutters swinging in the wind.” Pride and self-respect had led the family to rely on their own resources, leaving them half-starved, “patched and ragged, but not dirty.” Impressing Mrs. Seymour with her well-bred manners, the mother informed her visitors that “unwilling to expose our poverty . . . I could not go to beg, and there are few who, like you, come in search of distress.” Sensible that “there are so many who want . . . assistance even more than we do,” the honorable woman would only accept succor when freely offered and exchanged for work.25

The speculative building boom of the 1790s attracted hundreds of workmen, and when it collapsed at the end of the decade, many were left under- or unemployed. Building in the city languished until after the War of 1812, creating an underclass of unemployed, skilled white laborers. Their situation was made worse by the pool of available enslaved and free black laborers. The system of hiring out slaves, especially on public works, decreased employment opportunities for free white labor, and the presence of increasing numbers of skilled free blacks probably undercut white laborers’ opportunities as well.26 Underemployment and competition exerted downward pressures on the economic status of all the working classes in Washington.
Moving on to the barren common between the Tiber Creek and the Potomac River, Mrs. Seymour and Louisa encountered a squalid hovel. Entering this doorless cabin of the “wretched” poor, they found “a stout, coarse looking woman, who was splitting up part of a bedstead with an axe, and three children, almost naked, sitting on the floor round the fire. There was no chimney; some broad flat stones were laid on the clay floor, and on these a fire, made of the pieces of the bedstead, was burning, filling the shed with a dense and suffocating smoke.” Hardened by a raw existence, this woman was self-sufficient, taking occasional day work, scavenging on the commons, living off nature’s providence, and selling the seasonal excess of strawberries, wild greens, and mushrooms to “the quality.” “Trouble and hard times” had brought her and her family to this state, but her “utter insensibility” to the “evils of her condition” and her indifference to self-improvement left Mrs. Seymour and Louisa unsympathetic. Contented with her subsistence existence, reducing her furniture to firewood, allowing her children, presumably illegitimate, to go naked, building a fire on stones, living off the land, this “wild-woman” seemed no better to them “than a savage;” they “could imagine no means of improving her situation.” The equation of a squatter’s lifestyle with native Americans’ consigned both to the lowest rung of civilization, that of hunter-gatherers who were incapable of advancing to higher levels of civilized life and of being improved by moral reformers.27

A chasm as wide as the ravine they traversed to find this hut separated the Seymours’ sensibilities from this woman’s utilitarianism. Even though Smith emphasized the rude circumstances of the “wild-woman[,]” life and her neglect of her children’s clothing and education, Smith embedded a counter-message in her depiction of the city’s poor. In the midst of the nation’s capital, seat of liberty, opportunity, and abundance, lived squatters of whose way of life and very existence the genteel “quality” and officials of the city were totally oblivious. For different reasons, pride and self-sufficiency, neither the Bertrands nor the squatters appealed to the overseers of the poor for relief. Here were impoverished segments of the population whose conditions middle-class benevolence could not perceive or comprehend.

Indeed, the “quality[s]” ignorance of the land’s bounty and the poor’s survival techniques evoked contempt and ridicule from the provident woman. In response to the Seymours’ queries of where she found fuel and food, she laughed, “‘Law’s miss, what a silly question that is; why, now only to think o’ such quality as you not to know… Why you quality must be queer folks, not to know nothing o’ such matters; why, poor folks, to be sartin must work, unless they’re all like me, content like, with what they can find, for God sends victuals too, for poor folks.’” Contrasting the crude circumstances of her family’s existence with that of the well-to-do, the woman asserted, “‘I’m sure all the quality as ever I know’d, had a sight more o’ aches and pains than poor folks, tho’ they have such warm clothes and grand houses, and rides in carriages for fear o’ getting the tip o’ their toes wet. Now, here’s me, and my brats there, if we’re out all day long in the
rain and snow with our bare feet, ...we’re not a whit the worse for it than them canvass-back-ducks be, that lives in the water.” Attuned to nature and what it had to offer, this poor woman’s pragmatism enabled her to subsist without assistance from the genteel and in ways inconceivable to the rich who were cut off from basic knowledge about life’s necessities.28

The rawest facts of existence in the District were hidden from view. To see them at all, Mrs. Seymour and Louisa had to cross the Tiber; “almost blinded by wind and snow,” they could barely discern the “little log dwelling, not much bigger than a pig-pen” to which a mulatto child led them. Here, in a cabin compared to pigs’ quarters, the Seymours found “a tall, brawny, athletic looking mulatto man, a pale, thin white woman, and three or four mulatto children.” The honest and compassionate husband, Joseph, had had a respectable place in a gentleman’s house until he had encountered the white woman Jenny and her illegitimate child. Jenny’s father had turned her out for her sexual indiscretion, and Joseph found her wandering “about without house or home, and must a perished in the streets, had’nt [sic] she a consented to ha’ married me.” Joseph had built the cabin as a home for his wife and racially mixed family and kept “a pretty bit of a garden” and livestock to feed them.29

Jenny’s hatred for her fellow whites was palpable. She shook her child, accusing him of “begging o’ white folks’” and insisting that no child of hers “shall be beholden to them.” She swore that just because she had “bemean’d” herself “to marry such a neger,” she would not “be beholden to them white trash, that with their hard hearted ways forced me to do the like.” Darting “a revengeful look at” the Seymours, she turned her back on them while Joseph politely explained the circumstances of their lives. Responsible and hard-working, he endeavored to support his ten children and wife, who “despised to work; and said, the least I could do was to maintain her like a lady, and as a white woman should be maintained.” When Mrs. Seymour suggested putting some of the children out to service, Jenny furiously exclaimed, “Put them out to service, indeed! Do you suppose they are slaves?” To Mrs. Seymour’s rejoinder that they might be better off as slaves than kept at home to starve, Jenny replied, “They had better be in their graves.” Her fierce independence was a rebuff to Mrs. Seymour’s meliorist stance for making wards out of excess children. For blacks and for poor whites, liberty was an absolute, not relative status. Being placed in dependence was threatening, especially for blacks because color and status, as Jenny indicated, were so closely correlated in nineteenth-century minds. Hating “her own colour” for demoting her standing, she fought to maintain her children’s freedom from erosion by white benevolent interference.30

Having violated white middle-class mores twice, Jenny was made into a doubly degraded woman. Her punishment for having slipped sexually was to cross into a no-man’s land where she was alienated from her own kind while she looked down on the black man who helped her when no one else would. Seeing the social results of racial
amalgamation, Louisa Seymour declared “such a connexion” of a white female marrying a black man “disgusting” and “revolting.” “Jealous and vindictive,” Jenny was presented as full of self-loathing for “the irremediable disgrace and degradation of her situation.” Because of her sexual liaison with a black man, she became more despicable in the eyes of white society than the prostitute sheltered in their cabin. Transgression of racial boundaries brought more opprobrium on white women than engagement in illicit sexual activities.31

Once the Seymours happened upon the mulatto child who led them to the cabin, the impure relationship between Jenny and Joseph was manifested to them in the physical appearance of their children. The moral implications of prostitution, however, were less obvious and easier to miss. Huddled in the chimney corner was an object that Mrs. Seymour could not make out and Joseph endeavored to hide. Asking him to move, she still “could not tell whether it was a man or woman, so completely was the figure wrapped up in a large dirty blanket.” Mrs. Seymour, demanding to know who it was, completely missed Jenny’s rejoinder. Under her breath Jenny declared that it was “another of the victims of the proud, hard-hearted whites! . . . What does she say?” asked Mrs. Seymour. ‘Oh, it don’t matter, mistress, what she says,” replied Joseph, dismissing his wife’s commentary on the evils of middle-class social values. Mrs. Seymour, focused on the moral lapses of the lower classes, was insensitive to Jenny’s accusation that rigid, class-biased values forced less fortunate humans into those very situations defined as retrograde by the genteel. The double standard in the case of prostitution was even more blatant, for middle-class men were complicit in the act.32

Embarrassed at the presence of the outcast in their house, Joseph explained that “that there poor creature in the corner, is only a street-walker, that got frozen to death like in the road last night; the poor soul was in liquor, and laid down in the mud; and it froze in the night so hard round her, that this morning when she came to herself, finding she couldn’t stir, she began a screaming.” Assisting her, he “couldn’t find it in the heart o’ me to let her die o’ cold and hunger,” for “it would not do to let a fellow creature perish like a beast in the streets; and as nobody would let her come in their houses,” he brought her home. When Joseph pleaded with Mrs. Seymour not to think badly of him “for having such a body in the house,” she praised him for his kindness. Indeed, she differentiated between the objects of his charity, ranking the prostitute as a more worthy recipient of his compassion than the woman he had taken as a wife. Preferring sexual to racial indiscretion, Mrs. Seymour seemed to legitimate the one over the other in terms of relative moral worth.33 In his humanity Joseph, on the other hand, rose above middle-class morality and rescued white women who were victimized by those values.

Smith in this episode inverted racial hierarchies and sexual subordination. The black man represented civilized values and humane behavior, and incivility and slatternliness
were connected with the white woman Jenny. The nameless, faceless prostitute was a “poor outcast,” pitiable for her physical misery and capable of reform, whereas Jenny’s character was permanently hardened through her violation of racial taboos. Of the three, Joseph was the only one with admirable character qualities, respectable, industrious, honest, kind, generous, polite, considerate, and grateful. Benevolent himself, he merited Mrs. Seymour’s benevolence earned by the deserving poor. Superior to the white woman Jenny in every way, Joseph nevertheless expressed gratitude for Jenny’s condescension to marry him, deeming “‘it an honour that she took me for her husband’” and determined that she not do any work as long as he could support her. Jenny, on the other hand, was tainted by the association, in spite of Joseph’s upstanding character. Her marriage to a black man magnified her earlier disgrace as a sexually loose woman.34

Reversing the racialized sexual equation required that the white woman be in charge but at the same time that she be placed beyond the pale. The story of Joseph and Jenny set sexual hierarchies in tension with racial codes. Smith upended norms that dictated
male authority over females, placed whites over blacks, and condoned only sexual contact between white men and black women. Joseph in his moral stance towered over all the white women in the story, yet his goodness was not allowed to transcend his blackness. He was kept in a subordinate relation to his white wife. Unlike the Biblical Joseph the black man’s tolerant kindness toward his fallen spouse was not repaid with virtue and godliness, but by venegfulness and vice. The problem was that Joseph’s virtue was the source of Jenny’s impurity that she could not transcend. His humility in conjunction with her ingratitude made him yet more admirable while containing him in his place. Jenny, not Joseph, was the object of Louisa’s disgust.

Mrs. Seymour, vessel of middle-class morals, suggested that Joseph’s compassion in taking Jenny as his wife was misplaced. He rebuked Mrs. Seymour’s insinuation with his own loyalty, avowing Jenny’s love for him and his appreciation of her. Chastened, Mrs. Seymour offered her assistance and rewarded him for his kind-heartedness. Joseph stood as a moral paragon in relation not just to those unfortunates he helped but to moral reformers like Mrs. Seymour. Her concluding moral can be taken as a judgment both on the viciousness of Jenny’s existence and on the middle class’s obliviousness to the underside of lower-class life. Reflecting on the more dreadful aspect of vice compared to physical evils, she observed that repugnance to the task of reclaiming the vicious made “us too often negligent of this duty.” The Seymours themselves had almost passed by the mulatto child crying from the cold and could not see the cabin where he lived. Mrs. Seymour could not make out what the prostitute’s form was bundled by the chimney and was deaf to Jenny’s commentary on whites’ indifference to the suffering caused by middle-class moral strictures. Elite whites were blind to the social realities surrounding them.

Through her delineation of an invisible society within the District’s boundaries, Smith evoked a world of lower-class existence and racial amalgamation from which the genteel in the nation’s capital averted their gaze. Smith demarcated the limits of middle-class cognizance of lower-class struggles over economic self-sufficiency and social respectability. Women were at the center of these struggles, and their status was most at risk. In two of the three households, no man was present, and in the third, a black man did the bidding of his white wife. Male authority was absent from these homes. In the marginalized strata of society, conventional power relations did not hold. Women on their own existed in desperate isolation, attempting social appearances, like Mrs. Bertrand, or in scornful hostility, eschewing middle-class expectations, like the wildwoman and Jenny. The price the latter two paid was exclusion from civilized society. To maintain their individual autonomy they had to claim an indifference to social respectability. Although seemingly unsympathetic to these women’s lives, Smith by placing them outside of the bounds of society illuminated the constrictions that society placed on women left to their own devices. These women had escaped dependent status through their transgressive sexual and racial behavior. By evading white male domina-
tion, they had created spaces of power for themselves, but at a large cost.

Smith tacked on these moral vignettes of the worthy, undeserving, and degraded poor at the end of volume one of *A Winter in Washington*.36 Her central intent in this novel was not to stir up social indignation at the conditions of Washington’s poor but to focus on upper-class women’s strategies for dealing with the social constraints of domesticity and the lure of political life in the capital. This passage appeared as something of a digression in the narrative, but it must have jarred those who read it for its blunt depiction of abject poverty, class hostility, and racial amalgamation on Tiber’s banks in the new Roman republic. As a disruption, it may have emanated from Smith’s own unease with prevailing constructions of poverty and slavery, and with women’s vulnerable status in the matrix of sexual, racial, and power relations.

The connection between her literary efforts and social concerns was concrete. She appropriated “the first fruits of my pen” from sales of *A Winter in Washington* to the support of three destitute women. Entwined in the themes of her writing were her lifelong preoccupations with women’s proper education and ability to support themselves. Without the resources to achieve economic independence, she recognized that all women were dependent on men and subject to inequitable power structures.

Smith intended to write a series of novels covering the range of female experience in high and low life. She drew from real life examples and tried to portray manners as she found them, drawing from nature rather than prescribing duty. Her family and friends criticized her for her naturalism and insisted that she must instill more moral prescription into her work. Although they found fault with incidents in the original manuscript of *A Winter in Washington* (what became volume two in the published novel), they reserved their severest criticisms for her favored writing project and the one that she most wished to see in print. This was her novel “Lucy,” composed about the same time that she worked on *A Winter in Washington*. Taking as her subject the fate of a fallen woman, she meant to dedicate the proceeds of the projected work to the support of a widowed friend, an objectification of Smith’s obsession with female economic dependency. Smith injected a social realism into this novel on lower-class white and black relations in Washington that led her advisers and publishers to proscribe its publication. Their veto of her work discouraged her, and their objections to it as improper reading for refined and polished society offended her. Her sister informed her that the topic was “indelicate” and would tarnish the purity of youthful minds; people would be ashamed to have read it. She revised the manuscript for several years, endeavoring to get it published but finally abandoned the project.38 In this novel Smith touched the pressure points in 1820s society by exposing the intersections of sexual desire, individual assertiveness, and cross-racial solidarity. In exploring the independent strivings of white women, lower-class young men, and blacks, she identified the sources of instability for patriarchal authority.
The setting for this story was the rural landscape to the north of the city in Washington County. Smith knew the area and its population well, for the Smiths' farm, Sydney, lay in the vicinity. She described this region at the northern boundary of the District as "a range of hills, sometimes bare, sometimes cultivated & often wooded. They form a verdant wall, at the foot of which the city lies, extending over a space varying from one to two miles, to the Potomac, its southern boundary." Scattered about were estates, freeholds, and tenant farms. One of these lived lovely young Lucy with her respectable family. Allan, the father, appeared the patriarch, "a fine, athletic figure of a man, his locks mingled grey, combed smoothly back from his high & open forehead, while his ruddy cheeks & bright blue eyes, belied the chronicle of his whitened hair. A small table was before him, on which was turned down the volume, he had been reading" and surrounding him were his wife, children, and servants. He was a yeoman farmer, who owned several slaves and worked tobacco on the land with the help of a young indentured servant, William. Intending to marry, Lucy and William became lovers. When Lucy's pregnancy was discovered, the father in a fit of rage threw them both out of the house.

Threatened by the younger generation male's challenge to his dominion over his family, Allan asserted his patriarchal authority with devastating consequences to the entire family. Grief-stricken, his wife died. The daughter, Lucy, driven out of the home and separated from William, sought her fate among strangers. Distraught by what his own actions had wrought, Allan sank into despondency. As he withdrew into helplessness, "everything in the farm now went wrong." He lost control over his slaves and his children. Running wild and uncontrollable, the younger children were put out as servants in other people's homes. The expulsion of both the young man and Lucy abrogated the possibility of new family formation, even as the father had destroyed the old. The foundations of his mastery were gone. Instead of ruling over property, wife, children, and dependents, Allan lost all the sources of his potency.

Once the bonds were loosened, the illogic of slavery revealed itself. To extract work from them,

slaves, require the hand of authority — too often that of severity. They have none of those motives to industry, which freemen have, 'toil & toil as we will,' say they, 'what more do we get by it but our victuals & clothes, & that master is forced to give us at any rate; for his own sake if not for ours, seeing as how he would lose a slave, if he didn't take care of him, but if I works my very bones to the skin, I gets no more?' It is thus they reason, & in its general application, the reasoning is alas too just. They labour then, only when forced to labour, & the moment the weight of authority is
removed, they are idle & negligent. When will the
slave-holder, discover his true interest, & be
convinced that one freeman will do the work of
four slaves? That willing hearts, make quick work —
And that self-interest, is a severer task-master,
than any over-seer? The slaves of the poor, are
generally as degraded in character, as they are in
situation. — little better in their condition &
worse in their tempers & habits than mere beasts
of burthen. Tho’ even in this class their [sic] are
noble instances, of generous masters & faithful
slaves; But Dick — & Milly were not of the number.
Allan had been a severe master, served only through
fear, & now released from this curb they neglected
their work.42

Slavery’s irrationality lurked just beneath the surface. A forced labor system, as soon as
coercion was removed, it collapsed, and the human face of slaves’ self-interests came into
play. No longer able to assert authority over them, Allan sold them. The illusion of obe-
dience was gone, and blacks’ independent will to be their own masters revealed.

Smith made this point more starkly through Lucy’s encounters with free blacks as
she sought her way to the city. She got lost in the Slashes, the territory between the hills
on the northern boundary and Pennsylvania Avenue where there

is little built on, but exhibits the vestiges of
former cultivation, or the remains of a once thick
& lofty forest. The trees have long since been
cut down, but from the roots which were left,
there has sprung a thick brush-wood, popularly
call’d the slashes, which covers the greatest part
of this waste-space. Here the poor find a scanty
supply of fuel, the criminal & vagabonds, a [grave?],
& the free-negro, as much ground as he chooses to
occupy, without title & without the price. Paths
made by the wood-gatherers or the sportsman traverse
these Slashes in every direction, where no human
habitation meets the eye, but the log-cabin, or mud
hovel of some poor negro.43
Having been cast out by her own father for sexual indiscretion, Lucy received assistance and protection from those who supposedly belonged under white subordination. Instead, Lucy fell under obligation to them. Drawn by the light and heat of a fire in the woods, Lucy came upon old Georgie, cooking his dinner in a broken-down chimney under a ramshackle lean-to. Terrified by the “wildness in the scene” and the sight of the black man, Lucy collapsed. Helpless, Lucy “lay scarcely sensible of his approach, & totally unable to offer the least resistance. After examining the form before him, & finding it to be that of a dead, or dying woman; the old negro lifted her in his arms, & carried her to the fire, — he sat her on the stone; from which he had risen, & supported her in his arms.” This sexually charged scene evoked images of rape and racial violation, which lent the subsequent turn of events all the more power. A kind and humane man, old Georgie shared what little food and drink he had with Lucy. He would have provided her with accommodations for the night, except that he lived in a hole in the ground.44 Quickly earning her trust, the old black man offered Lucy the protection and care of which her own father had deprived her.

A freed man,
the old negro was a short thick-set man; on his head he wore a fantastically shaped cap made of rabbit or cat-skin, which at a distance gave him a ferocious look, & had added to poor Lucy’s terror, when she first saw him, his garment was truely a coat of many colours, & of still more pieces; patches upon patches had completely hidden the original material, but still it had a comfortable look; round the neck was stitched a rabbit-skin collar, which rose above his ears, meeting his cap, from between which peep’d his good humour’d face, sparkling eyes, grey-beard & teeth white & sound, as a young negro’s.45

He lived off the land and the charity of residents in the city. Lucy asked him why he did not hire himself out instead of living “like a wild beast, out in the woods here.” His response confirmed what all whites knew but were loathe to admit. He cherished freedom above all else.46

He declared, “‘No, Missey, no, not the finest living & best victuals, the President himself would give me, gives me such hearts content, as liberty I was a slave most of my life & tho’ my master was good, as he was rich & great, & no slave was ever better-off, yet Missey I was a Slave & that spoiled all.’” He heard talk of freedom, but even more subversive was the effect of books. He had learned to read & write from his master, “‘but for the matter o’ that I wish as how I had never read a book in my life ‘cepting the Bible, because as how do you see, it give me such high notion[s?] of liberty & the like, that I
did nothing but pine & pine to be freed." He won his freedom during the Revolution by saving his master's life but chose to stay with the family until after his former owners' deaths. With that event, "the family was all broke up — the estate divided & all the people sold. Then I was right glad, to be sure I was, that I was free! I tried a good many places after that, but none would suit." He turned his attention to his soul and led a hermit's life of solitude and devotion in the woods.47

From old Georgie's shelter, Lucy passed to the protection of another black man, Uncle Richard. Unable to give Lucy a bed, old Georgie led her to a neighboring "negro-cabin," where poor friends of his gave her lodging and food. There she took up semi-permanent residence while she had her child and sought employment in Washington. Dependent on free blacks for her subsistence, Lucy experienced a range of characters in the people with whom she lived and worked. Impressed upon her was that quality was not determined by skin color or station. As Hetty, a free black servant, pointed out, "For all the quality hold their heads so high, I don't forget that quality blood runs in my veins

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too, & dont you be thinking Miss that poor people because their skins are white, are any better than a free coloured person.” Through her humility and William’s steadfastness, the two were reunited and family restored, but only after many trials and tribulations. Their sufferings were due to a patriarchal wrath out of proportion to their misdeed, portrayed as minor in light of their commitment to marry. In the view of the free blacks who took Lucy in, all her “distresses” were due to her “unnatural father” having turned her “out o’ doors.”

The entire novel conveyed twin messages of patriarchal authority’s destructive force and of racial amalgamation. White men’s manipulation of sexual, racial, and political power had explosive consequences for their dependents — white women, blacks, and younger generation white males. Those who escaped that dependence merged on the edges of society. The fates of blacks and whites became interdependent. As Lucy searched for a livelihood or patroness, outside support would benefit the blacks with whom she lived as well as herself. Lucy’s dependence set in relief blacks’ adamant preference for freedom and their fierce resentment of any slight to their self-respect. Through blacks’ assertions of liberty, Smith suggested the limits of paternalism. Both white women and blacks defined their identities against a core of patriarchal authority. What proved true by the 1820s was that their deference was neither automatic nor unqualified. Most worrisome in Smith’s novel was the threat that those marginalized by white male power might make common cause against it.

Early Washington was at base a raw city, “a wild, desolate place,” in which uncivilized manners and crude appetites pulsed beneath the surface of gentility. Observers of the scene depicted political liberty with metaphors of sexual lasciviousness. The dissolution of hierarchical bonds let loose passions in all arenas of power. Racial transgression in particular was a potent symbol of violating traditional rank in society. Thomas Moore graphically juxtaposed the realms of political freedom and racial power in the lines “The weary statesman for repose hath fled / From halls of council to his negro’s shed, / Where blest he woos some black Aspasia’s grace, / And dreams of freedom in his slave’s embrace!”

Two decades later George Watterston and Margaret Bayard Smith wrote about Washington society, he from the halls of Congress, she from the visitors’ gallery. A placeholder himself and sensitive to questions of status, Watterston critiqued political ambitions through the filters of sexual, racial, and social license. Although both Smith and he focused on individual desires released in the new nation’s burgeoning, democratizing society, Watterston buttressed the extant elite establishment at the expense of all women, blacks, and lower-class white men. Smith’s stance was different. Her perspective resided with people marginalized by white male definitions of power. She refracted the distortions of that power through the lens of personal aspirations for independence. In her novels she exposed the unstable foundations of patriarchal authority. By exhibiting blacks’ and white women’s resistance to subordination, she delimited the boundaries of white men’s power. With her words she challenged their dominance.
THE TIES THAT BIND:

The Pursuit of Community and Freedom Among Slaves and Free Blacks in the District of Columbia, 1800-1860

Titian Ramsey Peale, Columbus Scriber at his store. Stereograph, 1863. National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. A free African American, Columbus Scriber ran a flour and feed store located at 119 E Street, S.W.

Mary Beth Corrigan
DURING THE ANTEBELLUM PERIOD throughout the South, free blacks looked northward as they established communities. The cities along the Mason-Dixon line — most notably Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington — offered unparalleled economic and social opportunities, prompting free blacks to migrate to these locations in large numbers. Confronting white hostility in each of these cities, free blacks endeavored to build self-sustaining communities that promoted religious worship, literacy, and benevolence. Even in Philadelphia where slavery was abolished gradually during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, free blacks never forgot the enslavement of most African Americans. As they forged their communities and pursued freedom, the urban free blacks within the slave territories of Maryland and the District of Columbia benefited from the example and activities of the free black community of Philadelphia.¹

From the founding of the District of Columbia until the Civil War, the free black population grew by leaps and bounds, while the slave population languished. By 1860, free blacks outnumbered slaves by more than three to one. Compared to Baltimore, however, where free blacks outnumbered slaves by twelve to one, the nation's capital was a stronghold of slavery.² Yet despite the many limitations masters put on their activities, slaves in the District of Columbia formed families, prayed and worshiped, and learned to read and write with free blacks. Even with so many slaves present, this community achieved a modicum of independence from local whites as it pressed for the freedom of all its members. These activities inflamed resentment among local whites who, fearing the prospect of equality with blacks, took steps to curb the growth of an independent black community.³

Standing at the heart of the Chesapeake region, the District of Columbia originated in the wake of a profound transformation within African American society. At the outbreak of the Revolution, more than half of the blacks in the United States lived as slaves on the tobacco plantations of Virginia and Maryland. The war profoundly disrupted the slave system, opening up the possibility of freedom for a large number of blacks for the first time. Thousands of slaves took arms with either the British or
patriot armies, while some slaveholders abandoned their holdings. More important in the long run, the downward spiral of tobacco prices before and during the Revolution forced planters to diversify, thereby irrevocably transforming the economic base of the Chesapeake. Whereas tobacco required a year-round labor force, the workload on farms producing grains varied from season to season, with hardly any labor necessary during the winter, so that many slaveholders could no longer afford to maintain their holdings. Several of these planters provided for the freedom of their slaves either in their wills or with outright deeds of manumission. The nascent free black society bore a significance to slaves throughout the nation: it bolstered their hopes for freedom and thereby transformed their attitudes toward enslavement.  

The legacy of the American Revolution and its aftermath was mixed, as the demand for the labor of slaves heightened. Planters frequently took their slaves with them as they settled in the new western states such as Kentucky and Tennessee and, following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Alabama and Mississippi. Other planters sought new slaves so that, especially after the closing of the international slave trade in 1808, planters from the new western states participated in the brisk slave markets of the Chesapeake region.

At the same time, the slave hiring system perpetuated slavery by enabling slaveholders who could not employ their slaves continuously to retain them. Typically, masters found an employer for their slaves who, in turn, worked for a term, often for as long as a year, in a wide range of occupations such as farm laborer, construction worker, or domestic servant. Masters generally retained their slaves’ wages, but in some cases returned part or even all of the wages to the slave laborer. Slave hiring frequently separated slaves from their kin and community, but it offered a measure of mobility in exchange. A few slaves successfully bargained and secured the right not only to retain their wages but also to determine their own employer. Such privileges greatly enhanced a slave’s ability to save enough money to purchase their freedom.
The economy within the urban areas of the District of Columbia required a more flexible labor force than most forms of agriculture. From the time of its formation, the District included the tobacco ports of Georgetown on the Maryland side and Alexandria on the Virginia side of the Potomac River until it retroceded to Virginia in 1846. The newly-formed district also included the surrounding countryside from which planners designated Washington City as the hub of the new capital. The predominant economic activities of this small ten-square mile area shifted from agriculture to the provision of goods and services demanded by the workers and politicians who worked for the government. To a far greater degree than in the countryside, urban households depended upon the markets and shops for food, housing, clothing, and handicrafts, including tools and housewares. The supply and demand for goods were seasonal. As a result, many entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and household heads had little use for slave ownership.

Slavery nonetheless endured in the District, largely because of the demand for household servants in the cities and their relationship to the surrounding countryside. Most whites employed servants to clean, cook and perform other household chores. Generally, slaves provided continuous, live-in service to their masters' families who, in turn, valued their slaves' loyalty. The pervasive demand for household servants provided a safety valve for owners from both the countryside and the cities who could easily hire
out their slaves as servants to urban households for a term. At the same time, planters who
maintained residences both in city and country routinely transferred their slaves between
sites. Moreover, should economic necessity demand it, any slaveholder could easily sell
or manumit their slaves to reduce the size of their holdings.

As the District's cities grew, the presence of slavery diminished. In the decade after
1800, the population of Washington and Georgetown nearly doubled. Thereafter, the
growth of Washington continued unabated. Counted at close to 19,000 in 1830, this city's population was half of the District's total population. Thirty years later, Washington was home to four out of five of the 75,000 residents in the District. At the
same time, the slave population grew steadily, but at a rate far outpaced by the rest of the
urban population. In Washington one out of five residents in 1800 were slaves. This
proportion dropped by half by 1830, when slaves included one out of ten of the city's
residents. By the time of the Civil War, slaves constituted less than one out of twenty
Washington residents.8

The cities offered unparalleled economic opportunities to free blacks, thus accounting
for their high concentration there. With steady work difficult to find on farms, the
District drew free blacks from Maryland and Virginia. Meanwhile, District slaves granted
their liberty generally stayed. Free black women easily found work as domestic servants
in white households, whereas free black men took unskilled, low-paying, and temporary
positions that whites generally would not perform. Because the work was intermittent in
nature, many of these free black men labored as farm laborers as well and, therefore,
made frequent treks between the city and countryside to piece together a secure livelihood. As a result, between 1800 and 1830, the free black population grew at a faster rate
than either the white or slave populations and became larger than the slave population.
This growth was especially pronounced in Washington, where in 1800 there was only
one free black for every twenty residents. Thirty years later, slightly more than one out
of six of the city's denizens were free blacks. From that time on, this population kept
pace with the growth of the city as a whole. By 1860, four out of five of the District's
11,000 free blacks lived in Washington.9

As their numbers grew, slaves and free blacks of the District laid the foundation for
one of the most vibrant and cohesive black communities of the antebellum period, one that sustained a host of black schools and churches. Together, members of this community worked for the freedom of all of its members and bolstered the self-esteem of all slaves and free blacks as they challenged the animosity of whites.

Marriage provided the foundation of the family and, indeed, the entire community.
Men and women promised to provide necessary food, clothing, and shelter to each other
and their children. At the same time, marriage tied both husbands and wives to a system
of mutual and reciprocal obligations with their parents and siblings. Such commitments
also extended to their unmarried kin, including mothers and their children. These kin
networks buffered the impact upon their livelihood of illness, pregnancy, the vagaries of
the labor market, and the death of a spouse. In their struggle to secure the material base of their community, free blacks and slaves relied upon their extensive kin networks. Most families required the economic contributions of all able-bodied men and women as well as their children. Largely because of their hard work and the strength of kin relations, many free blacks earned beyond a basic competence and accumulated property. In addition, these families maintained relations with kin in the countryside, as the work of most men took them from the city to area farms so that they visited kin regularly, enabling them to pass on messages and gifts from relatives in the cities.

Although there was no legal recognition for marriage among slaves, they formed families with the same goals as free blacks. Frequently they married free blacks. By law, the children of slave women were slaves, but their parents, families, and community valued them as if they were free. Moreover, a family’s economic success benefited slaves as well as free blacks. Family members frequently supplemented the rations of slaves and contributed their earnings to purchase freedom for an enslaved family member.

The black community could not entirely erase the impact of enslavement, which imposed considerable obstacles on couples as they forged family ties. Family separation was a strong possibility in the urban areas of the District because of the frequent trading and hiring out of slaves. In addition, slaves had to negotiate with their owners to secure the right to travel and visit kin. Entertainment within a slave residence was a privilege that could only be conferred by owners. Some slaves won the right to maintain their own residence and thereby secured more privacy and control over their family relationships. Masters could abrogate these privileges at any time, however, and could easily upset the family ties of slaves. Because of the disruptions to slave families, the kinship networks of slaves were especially important. In particular, extended kin — usually grandparents, aunts, and uncles — stepped in to care for slave children when they lost their parents, whether because of death or separation.

The relatively good prospects for freedom in Washington, Georgetown, and Alexandria helps account for the close family ties between free blacks and slaves. Whether granting freedom by deed or will, masters largely determined if and
when their slaves received their liberty. Slaves frequently tried to secure their own freedom by purchasing themselves from their masters. But even for slaves who retained a portion of their wages, the purchase of freedom often remained an elusive goal. As a result, slaves had to rely on the cooperation of every member of their family, and the assistance of free blacks gave their slave kin a distinct advantage.\textsuperscript{10}

The efforts of Sophia Browning and her family suggest some of the strategies used by slave families. A slave in 1791, Browning tended her own market garden, sold her goods at the Alexandria market, and ultimately saved four hundred dollars. She used these earnings to secure the freedom of her husband George Bell whose earning power increased as a free person. After an illness lowered her own purchase price to a mere five pounds in Maryland currency, she bought her liberty and subsequently all but one of her three children. Browning's sister, Alethia Tanner, bought her own freedom for $1,400 in June 1810. In 1826 she purchased her older sister, Lauraena Cook, and her five children. By the time of her death in 1864, Mrs. Tanner had bought and liberated twenty-two friends and relatives.\textsuperscript{11}

During these years, slaves and free blacks established institutions that promoted their family goals. At first, they tried to work within the institutions established by whites, a large number of whom were Catholic. Black members of the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Georgetown were able to extend their family ties within the framework imposed by its white congregation. This church performed wedding ceremonies among slaves and thereby conferred public sanction, if not legal protection, to these couples. Marriages performed between free blacks, like David Thomas, and slaves, like his wife Phillis, were common. During the second decade of the century, these marriages accounted for half of the ceremonies performed for blacks. Slaves and free blacks also brought their sons and daughters forward for baptism. In addition to christening these children during these ceremonies, parents designated godparents who pledged to care for these children in the event of their parents' death, sale, or any type of estrangement. As such, the church formally supported and thereby extended the kin ties of its black congregants.\textsuperscript{12}

Black members of Christian churches necessarily deferred to whites who relegated free blacks and slaves to the margins of their congregations. Within Protestant and Catholic churches alike, whites separated free blacks and slaves from the rest of the congregation, assigning them to the upper galleries during services and offering separate Sunday School lessons. Whereas the Catholic Church at least conferred all sacraments to
its black members, Methodist ministers refused to hold black infants during baptisms, thereby insulting a large portion of their congregations.13

During the early decades of the century, free blacks and slaves identified with Methodism sought independence from whites. By 1810, blacks constituted nearly one-half of the congregation at Montgomery Street Methodist Church in Georgetown. After considerable discussion, six years later black congregants purchased land and built a small frame dwelling to house their own church, known as "The Little Ark," which later became Mount Zion United Methodist Church.14 From its foundations, this separatist congregation depended primarily upon the financial support of free blacks, yet its ministers who performed sacraments and its elders who disciplined church members were white. The black congregants of Ebenezer Church in Washington followed the example of the Georgetown congregation, erecting a log building for their congregation and, in 1820, forming "Little Ebenezer." Nearly twenty years later blacks who worshiped at Foundry Methodist Church formed Asbury Methodist.15

The establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in 1816 enabled blacks in the District to form their own congregations within a denomination freed from white control. Free blacks from Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore and other mid-Atlantic cities embraced the A.M.E. Church as a means of ensuring their dignity. By 1820, several free blacks from the District, following the lead of northern blacks, established Israel A.M.E. Its congregants first worshiped in a rope-walk, then in a school-house until they purchased an old church at the foot of Capitol Hill. Despite its humble beginnings, the Israel A.M.E. embodied the success of the black community, whose members contributed their property to sustain and develop their ties. Moreover, participation in the A.M.E. conference strengthened bonds with northern free blacks, who often provided material and emotional support to the District's black community.16

Whatever control whites might have over their governance, the economic independence of African-American churches enabled them to assume greater direction over key activities, particularly education. Within their Sabbath schools, every church took responsibility not only for instilling religious tenets, but also for imparting a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing. By offering such opportunities, black churches pressured other religious institutions whose congregations still included both whites and blacks. In 1819, Father John McElroy, the Irish pastor of Holy Trinity Catholic Church, decided to open a Sabbath school for the black members of his church. As he wrote, "The object of this school is 1st To prevent Cath. negroes from frequenting the schools kept on Sundays by Methodists &c. 2d to teach them their prayers & catechism at the same time they learn to spell and read."17

During the early nineteenth century, foreign-born whites supported the education of free blacks and, to a far lesser extent, slaves. These benefactors were not completely acculturated to the customs of District whites, who excluded blacks from the public schools from the time of their foundation in 1806. Four years later, English-born teachers Henry Potter and Mary Billings and Irish-born Maria Haley established schools for free blacks
By the Mayor of the City of Washington:

A PROCLAMATION.

WHEREAS an Act did pass the Board of Aldermen and the Board of Common Council of the City of Washington, and was approved by the Mayor of the said City on the 1st day of May, 1827, which act is in the words following, viz:

AN ACT

Concerning Free Negroes, Mulattoes, and Others.

... It is hereby enacted, That every Free Negro or Free Mulatto resident or a resident of this City under the 1800-1860

Joseph Gales, Jr., A Proclamation, Broadside, August 20, 1827. Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Alarmed by the growing number of African Americans, local officials enacted stricter regulations and controls. Among other measures, this 1827 law prohibited free blacks — with the exception of back drivers — from traveling "at large" after 10 p.m. without a pass.
and slaves and educated several of the blacks who later taught in Sabbath schools and established day schools. Father McElroy’s successor as Holy Trinity pastor, Belgian Father John Von Lommel, encouraged a free black, Maria Becraft, to establish an academy for free black girls. A former student of both Henry Potter and Mary Billings, Becraft opened her own school at age fifteen. Seven years later, in 1827, she opened a boarding school and subsequently became a nun. Her academy suspended its activities shortly after her death in 1831. 18

With so little help available, free blacks and slaves relied upon their own resources as much as possible. Several free blacks attempted to build schoolhouses and hold classes, but the obstacles proved difficult to overcome. In 1807, former slaves George Bell, Moses Liverpool, and Nicholas Franklin built a school for slaves and free blacks, but they did not have the education to teach the classes. After commissioning a white teacher, these builders took classes, and George Bell later assumed pedagogical duties and ownership of the building. The venture expired within ten years, revealing the meager resources of the black community. Several years later, with Bell’s backing, the Resolute Beneficial Society took over the building to administer day, evening, and Sabbath schools for free blacks. The association actively sought funds from free black families to bolster Bell’s capital investment and the income from tuition. At times, more than fifty students attended the school. Following the retirement of its teacher only four years after its founding, the schoolhouse became a dwelling for Bell’s family. 19

Teachers, who were difficult to find, were as critical as financial capital to the success of these educational ventures. With only a few whites willing and a few blacks able to teach in these schools, the retirement of a teacher could hasten the death of a struggling school, as happened at the Resolute Beneficial Society after the resignation of its teacher John Adams, a free black shoemaker. In contrast, the endurance of a teacher promoted success. A free black widow from Prince George’s County in Maryland, Anna Maria Hall, sustained a school that she staffed herself for twenty-five years, even though she never owned her building and worked at three different sites. Unable to count upon white support, this generation of free blacks recognized the necessity of preparing their students to become black school teachers like Hall. 20

The hostility of most District whites towards the education of blacks shaped the institutions created by free blacks. After their initial success in establishing a school, organizers of black schools began to compromise some ideals. While the Bell Schoolhouse initially included slaves, the Resolute Beneficial Society, seeking to avoid the wrath of whites, declared that “No writings are to be done by the teacher for a slave, neither directly or indirectly, to serve the purpose of a slave on any account whatever.” 21
The resentment whites showed toward black religious and educational associations anticipated the backlash that began during the 1820s. As the free black population grew, whites used legal and economic means to curb its growth and to limit its associations with slaves. To discourage the migration of free blacks, in 1827 the corporation of Washington required free blacks to register with the mayor to gain a permit allowing them to reside and work in the city. That same year the Washington City government required free blacks to petition for the right of assembly and imposed a ten o’clock curfew. This ordinance thereby prohibited all kinds of large meetings of free blacks unless explicitly permitted by the city council, including parties, dances, and rallies. Several District residents further advocated that Congress encourage foreign immigration as a means of promoting the growth of “a laboring class of a different description, who are now discouraged from settling among us by the continual importation and influx of [slaves and free blacks] from the adjacent States.”

Anxieties among whites and the resulting attacks on free blacks escalated after Nat Turner’s Rebellion in 1831. Turner led an insurrection of more than seventy slaves who killed fifty-five whites. Although squashed, this slave rebellion in Southampton County, Virginia, terrified whites throughout the South. While only a few free blacks participated in the insurrection, whites throughout the Chesapeake believed free blacks to be its instigators. Fears of seditious tendencies among free blacks only added to lingering resentment among whites that free blacks and slaves were finding work and accumulating property at their expense.

The emergence of abolitionism posed a distinct threat to the whites living in the capital. William Lloyd Garrison’s publication of The Liberator in early 1831 initiated the agitation for the immediate end of slavery among northern whites. The capital bore tremendous significance to them, because it was the only jurisdiction under the direct control of the federal government. Accordingly, abolitionists, especially from Massachusetts, New York, and Ohio, demanded the end of slavery and, if not that, the slave trade in the District of Columbia. Regardless of their feelings towards slavery, local whites protested the interference of the federal government in their institutions and resented the scrutiny of outsiders. In petitioning Congress against such interference, local whites acknowledged the importance of slavery as a means of controlling the size of the free black population, as emancipation, they believed, would transform the flow of free black migrants from Maryland and Virginia into a flood. In 1836 District residents scored a major victory, as the House of Representatives refused to receive petitions relating to slavery in the District.

Fears of abolitionism inflamed hostilities towards free blacks and their institutions in the District. Tensions exploded during the Snow Riot, even though free blacks were not directly connected to the events that initially set off the convulsion. In August 1835, Washington residents received with horror reports that a slave had nearly murdered his mistress after she found him stealing. Several days later Washington police arrested
Reuben Crandall, a northern doctor, for distribution of abolitionist literature. On the day of Crandall’s trial, mechanics on strike from the Navy Yard so swelled the crowd outside the courthouse that the judge postponed the proceedings. Rumors that Beverly Snow, a free black whose restaurant and saloon catered to the well-to-do, had insulted the wives and daughters of many mechanics circulated outside the court-house. A mob of approximately four hundred mechanics, boys, and other onlookers seeking out Snow destroyed his property.26

Whites further retaliated at property-owning free blacks and the institutions of their community. The mob ransacked other black-owned businesses, churches, and schools. Perhaps its most sought after target was John F. Cook, a free black who had established a school in the early 1830s. After the mob destroyed Cook’s school, he and his family fled for Philadelphia. The rioters also stormed schools established by Mary Wormley and Henry Smothers and broke the windows of a black church.27

In response to the riot, the city government did not punish the white workingmen but placed further limits upon their prey, economically successful free blacks. The Washington City Council restricted the licensing of free blacks as independent proprietors, widened the scope of the city’s existing curfew, and increased the number of white sponsors necessary to gain a certificate of freedom from two to five. In November 1836, Isaac Cary, who operated a perfumery, successfully challenged the city’s new code and won the right to secure a license for his business. Circuit Court Judge William Cranch deemed these restrictions a denial of the right to property.28

Such measures thus failed to suppress the growth of an independent black community. During the late 1830s and 1840s, blacks formed several new churches intended to promote ties within the black community without the interference of whites. Among the congregations borne of the desire to hold their own meetings, select their own preachers, and control their own schools were the Union Bethel A.M.E. Church in 1838, the Wesley Zion Church in 1839, the First Colored Baptist Church in 1839, and John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church in 1847. The most celebrated of the churches created in this decade was the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church, founded by John F. Cook soon after his return to Washington. As pastor of this church and teacher in his own school, Cook raised the money to sustain one of the most dynamic black churches in the District.29

The expansion of black schools also continued, although all too often they depended on a combination of luck and determination for survival. Matilda and Alexander Hays, for instance, depended upon the exceptional largess of their slave owner, who not only educated his slave Alexander but also sold him a dwelling. In 1841, Matilda opened a school-house in this building. Within a year, Alexander Hays purchased his freedom and soon thereafter became its teacher. Until 1857, between thirty-five and forty-five students attended the school, which included a night school.30
Alexander Rider (after Alexander Lawson), Interviewing a kidnapped free black family in Washington. Engraving, 1822. Library of Congress. *Kidnapped freedmen made up a small but significant portion of Washington’s slave trade. Solomon Northup’s Twelve Years A Slave includes a detailed account of his 1841 kidnapping in Washington City.*

In addition to providing education within their Sabbath schools, churches also offered stable settings for day schools. From the late 1830s until nearly 1850, Benjamin McCoy ran a school out of the basement of Asbury United Methodist Church. From the time of its founding, the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church maintained close ties and supported the work of the Union Seminary first formed in 1835. John F. Cook, the church’s pastor, served as its teacher until his death in 1855 when his sons John and George assumed the leading roles in the school. For a decade, James Enoch Ambush ran a school in the basement of the Israel A.M.E. Church. In 1843 he built a schoolhouse several blocks away and renamed it the Wesleyan Seminary when he assumed responsibility to educate black students through the Civil War. Approximately ten years before its outbreak, Israel A.M.E. established another school in its basement, and Isabella Briscoe opened a school near Mount Zion United Methodist Church.31

Church members supported their activities through benevolent associations. Most churches employed aid societies to raise money for special purposes, including church buildings. Formed to assist free blacks displaced by the Snow Riot, the Asbury Aid Society preceded the foundation of the Asbury Methodist Church and, in turn, raised the
money for the church's building and schools. Churches encouraged benevolent associations to address the special needs of their congregations. The elders of Union Bethel A.M.E. supported its temperance society. The Female Union Band, a benevolent association formed by free black women, supported the members of the Mount Zion United Methodist Church. In the early 1840s, the Band purchased a cemetery plot for use of its church members and their families. The Band also alleviated the financial concerns of the families of deceased members, which could be especially acute after a long illness.  

Churches and benevolent associations also supported their members' efforts to secure freedom. Attracting support from northern whites and free blacks, these organizations were poised to assist slaves in ways that their families alone could not. In January 1846, a group of thirteen men secured a permit for a tea party, given by Alexander Taverns, to raise the funds to purchase his sister E.H. Bell of Alexandria. Tickets cost fifty cents, and "a band of sacred music" played at the occasion.  

Mount Zion United Methodist Church used a crypt in the Female Union Band Cemetery as a station on the Underground Railroad. In addition to runaway slaves, members of the Quaker Church and free blacks looking for a safe place hid in the crypt. Like the A.M.E. Church, the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church received small amounts of money from northern anti-slavery societies and churches. The Reverend John F. Cook fostered connections with anti-slavery activists by making frequent visits to Baltimore, Philadelphia, and central New York State. Among his friends were abolitionists Lewis Tappan, Gerrit Smith, and William Chaplin, all from New York State.
Maritime traffic also facilitated ties with anti-slavery agitators and the development of the Underground Railroad. Anthony Bowen, a founder of the Wesley Zion Methodist Church, used his home as a station of the Underground Railroad. Bowen frequently met runaways at the wharf and gave them a place to stay in his home before they became cargo upon a vessel sailing to a northern port. Slaves did not necessarily use the Underground Railroad as a mediator between them and boatmen, as slaves directly beseeched sailors from the North to transport them to freedom whenever these boats landed.

In 1848 seventy-seven slaves demonstrated the potential subversiveness of their community allied with sympathetic friends from the North. During the winter of 1848, Paul Jennings, a free servant of Senator Daniel Webster of Missouri, arranged with Daniel Drayton, a seaman from Philadelphia, for the transport of two families of slaves to the North. Drayton had earlier met a request of a free black man and transported his enslaved wife, their children, and a niece to Frenchtown. After commissioning the schooner Pearl staffed by Edmund Sayres and by Chester English, Drayton prepared to meet Jennings’s request and docked in Washington in mid-April. By that time, word of Jennings’s plan had spread, and the plot mushroomed. On April 15, the Pearl transported a cargo of thirty-eight men, twenty-six women, and thirteen children from Washington, past Alexandria, and toward the Chesapeake Bay which in turn led to their destination of Philadelphia.

The runaways did not come close to their final destination. The morning after the clipper’s departure, horsemen scouring the countryside, interrogated slaves and free blacks, and learned that the slaves had fled by ship. By mid-day, a free black, Judson Diggs, a hack who transported some of the escapees to the docks and reputedly curried the favor of whites, informed the slaveowners of the Pearl’s mission. The Georgetown tobacco merchant and slaveholder Francis Dodge sent out one of his steamships, and this posse captured the Pearl anchored in a shoal on the Potomac River one-hundred-forty miles from Washington.

Reaction to the news of the escape was immediate, violent, and national in its reach. Mobs of angry whites engaged in stone-throwing, pillaged the area around Center Market in Washington, and destroyed the offices of the anti-slavery newspaper *The National Era* published by Gamaliel Bailey. Before calm was restored on April 20, these mobs also brutally attacked abolitionist Representative Joshua Giddings of Ohio whose defense of Drayton and Sayres in Congress angered most white District residents. While the House of Representatives debated the immunity of its members following Giddings’s imprisonment, the Senate considered a bill prohibiting rioting in the District of Columbia.

The seventy-seven captured refugees were forced to await their sale in the Washington Jail. Some masters authorized the transfer of their renegade slaves to the Alexandria slave pens, while others sold them south without delay. Meanwhile, members of their families sought means of preventing their sale, but most of the prisoners were hardly able to visit and talk to their kin and friends before their transfer south. John I. Slingerland witnessed slave-dealers lead fifty of the fugitives onto a railroad car at a
depot for transport to Georgia. Many of the onlooking blacks were desperately trying to say good-bye and weeping:

Wives were there to take leave of their husbands, and husbands of their wives, children of their parents, and parents of their children. Friends parting with friends, and the tenderest ties of humanity severed at a single word of the inhuman Slave Broker before them. A husband, in the meridian of life, begged to see the partner of his bosom. He protested that she was free — that she had free papers, and was torn away from him and shut up in the jail. He clambered up to one of the windows of the car to see his wife, and, as she was reaching forward her hand to him, the black-hearted Slave Dealer ordered him down. He did not obey!

The husband and wife, with tears streaming down their cheeks, besought him to let them speak to each other. But no; he was knocked down from the car, and ordered away! The bystanders could hardly refrain laying violent hands upon the brute. . . .

Many never saw their families again.\footnote{41}

Publicly District whites held anti-slavery agitators responsible for the Pearl. Instead of accepting that the slaves acted on their own volition, whites branded captains Drayton and Sayres kidnappers and blamed them and other outsiders for disrupting their social order. A jury found both seamen guilty of larceny rather than assisting or enticing runaways. The court subsequently fined them a sum of nearly seventy thousand dollars, and they endured a four-year imprisonment.\footnote{42} Their sentence warned any interlopers, including other boatmen, who thought of assisting the escape of slaves that their help could be construed as kidnapping. In the meantime, whites punished the “stolen” slaves as if they were completely responsible for their actions.

Anxieties about the continual exposure of District institutions mounted as Congress banned the interstate slave trade in the District as part of the Compromise of 1850. Within the District, debate centered less on the ban than on the implications of federal interference. Under the terms of the ban, District residents still could trade their slaves privately, but public auctions were prohibited. More important, slave owners from other jurisdictions — Maryland in particular — could no longer enter the District to sell their slaves, so that the slave depots ceased their operations. District residents recognized that the ban would have little impact upon their ability to buy and sell slaves and that the depots of Alexandria were prepared to receive slaves on their way to other markets. Yet residents wondered when congressional interference in the District’s affairs would end.\footnote{43}

The animus towards free blacks and slaves rather than any abolitionist feeling led many white workers to favor the end of the District’s slave trade. White workers recognized that the survival of slavery in Maryland and Virginia was essential to control the
size of the free black population in the District. One working-class newspaper, *The Republic*, argued that the end of the District’s slave trade deflected attention from slavery and thereby strengthened the institution. Contending that northerners and foreigners, who seldom knew "of the comfort or content of the slave," had wrongly attempted to make the District’s trade an example for the rest of the South, the paper charged:

The neophyte of abolition is pointed to the slave jail as a miniature Bastile — 'whips, racks, and scorpions dance through his excited imagination.' He slinks by in silent horror, and departs from the District of Columbia with a soul as thankful as if he had just escaped from the coast of Barbary. His whole opinions of slavery are formed upon the imaginary cruelties of the slave trade in the District.

Noting an equal number of slave pens in the District and the entire state of Virginia, *The Republic* asserted that the District was hardly representative of the South as a whole: "The South should no more desire to expose this penal peculiarity of their institutions to misrepresentations and to censure...."43

Whatever their perceptions of the compromise measure, most District residents lashed out, not at slaves, but at free blacks. During the compromise debate, officials from Washington and Georgetown petitioned Congress to include within the legislation broad police powers to monitor free blacks and to prevent the enticement of runaways. Such an amendment did not pass. Soon thereafter, the Washington City Council more than doubled the size of the city's police force at least in part to control the activities of free blacks. Correspondingly, the council also required payment of fifty dollars for certificates of freedom to discourage the arrival of free blacks from Maryland and Virginia.45 Residents of Georgetown were as hostile as Washington residents, even though they did not pass the same type of restrictions to migration. Arguing in February 1851 that free blacks "flock to the District of Columbia, as to a city of refuge," Georgetown Mayor Henry Addison, as well as the members of the board of aldermen and common council, implored Congress to fund a line of ships to transport away free negroes who were "as a mass, neither honest nor serviceable." Congress never financed such a venture.46

Skilled and unskilled workers reacted to the growing numbers of free blacks by successfully pressing government employers to offer wages to whites instead of slaves and free blacks. In early 1852 approximately 250 laborers petitioned Congress, echoing the sentiment advanced by District whites since the mid-1820s, that the employment of free negroes and slaves on public buildings and elsewhere threatened to impoverish white men. These workers further contended that they were "the main support of the country in time or war or civil commotion that is ready upon all occasions to devote their energies in support of the country while these said negroes [were] exempt not only from the said duties but provided with a permanent office and at good salaries."47
The Black Codes, the constricted labor market, and the general hostility of whites inhibited the migration of free blacks into the city during the 1850s, when the free black population grew at a slower rate than it had during any other decade of the nineteenth century. Although Washington’s free black population grew by more than ten percent, the population as a whole increased at three times that rate. The foreign immigrant population, which nearly tripled in size, accounted in large part for this growth. Many of these new white residents blocked free blacks from jobs that typically went to them, thereby further discouraging their migration to the capital.

Although free blacks were not filling any new positions, their economic fortunes remained stable due largely to the plucky determination of all able-bodied adults. Two out of three black men took positions as unskilled laborers, petty marketers, or as drivers whose work frequently took them between the city and countryside. Of those who secured steady work within the cities, only one out of nine free black men worked in the skilled trades, while twice that number labored as domestic servants, positions shunned by whites. Free black women made up in part for the economic difficulties of men, as five out of nine free black women engaged in some form of domestic service. In contrast, only one out of five white women worked. Despite the obstacles, many households accumulated some property, as one out of nine free black adults held real or personal property worth more than $250. A handful of households held as much as $1,000 in property.

The black community maintained its resiliency and constituted a bulwark against white encroachments. Propertyholding free blacks augmented the resources of the community as a whole, as many of them invested in their institutions. Several churches, including Mount Zion United Methodist, Fifteenth Street Presbyterian, and Union Bethel A.M.E., constructed new buildings or added to existing structures. A manifestation of financial stability, these edifices, often well-adorned, displayed to District whites that free blacks were industrious, productive, and deserving members of society.

Churches and benevolent associations also countered the prevailing white images of free blacks and slaves by furnishing an aura of respectability to their activities. Local whites noted with pride the demeanor of free blacks from the District who attended the annual conferences for the A.M.E. church held in the capital during the springs of 1854.
and 1855. Some local whites even applauded the efforts of the Colored People’s Sunday School Union, a confederation of the black churches designed to promote their Sabbath schools. The Union distributed a pamphlet to demonstrate to District residents the range of their educational endeavors which impressed the editors of the Washington Star who twisted the success of the Union into a defense of the District’s labor system: “... a dozen flourishing churches and schools, sustained by the ‘poor oppressed colored race,’ in the midst of a slaveholding population, how dare any one taunt the South with ‘inhumanity?’”

On rare occasions, this pride translated into tangible benefits for these churches and benevolent associations. The Black Codes proscribed meetings of free blacks but provided for exceptions upon successful petition to the municipal governments of Washington and Georgetown. Of course, free blacks petitioned for sanction of their parties, dances, and other meetings. In mid-1853, the Washington Star announced that the enforcement of the curfew and restrictions on the assemblies of blacks would intensify. In December 1853 the Washington City Council authorized the mayor to issue permits to the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church for evening festivals. Approximately one year later, he granted permission to for a dance. Without a modicum of respect for these institutions, these sanctions would have hardly been possible, but the infrequency of such permits for assembly demonstrates how thin such esteem was indeed.

This regard depended in part upon the perception among whites that the threat of collusion between northern anti-slavery activists and free blacks was minimal. If their joint endeavors went awry, District blacks were all-too-aware of the consequences. In August 1850 William Chaplin, a well-known abolitionist from New York State, assisted two runaway slave men in their quest to reach the northern states. As they were travelling through Montgomery County, police captured them. Chaplin’s trial was nearly as sensational and well-publicized as the trial of Drayton and Sayres. Together, these trials instilled a sense of trepidation among free blacks, particularly in their open associations with whites. Thus Chaplin’s friend, the Reverend John F. Cook, responded coolly when Myrtilla Miner, an activist from New York, contacted him for advice as she began planning a high school for free black girls. Cook warned her of the dangers of any endeavor that smacked of abolition, declined to counsel her, and explained that in his own work he was “very particular to do nothing knowingly, that wouldn’t the least tend to disturb the public weal, or bring upon me and the cause in which I am engaged the indignation of the inhabitants.” In the fall of 1851, Miner’s school first opened in a classroom provided by Edward Younger, a free black. Despite the continual threat of arson, Miner’s persistence must have allayed some of Cook’s fears, as he enrolled his daughter Mary Victoria in 1852, months before the school moved into a new building financed by the Society of Friends in Philadelphia.
THE WASHINGTONIAN.

WASHINGTON CITY, Thursday Morning, September 15, 1866.

Publication Office Corner of 5th, Drain and 18th streets.
EXTRA PAPER PUBLISHED IN ANY QUANTITY.

FREE COLORED POPULATION.

We would again call the attention of our citizens to the article which follows, which was contained in our paper of yesterday, and continues in today's. It is one of those subjects which should engage the attention of every household, who values the honor of servants, and the peace and safety of their families. It is from the pen of an individual who has paid great attention to the subject, and whose remarks are well worthy the attention of all.

THE WASHINGTONIAN.

FREE PERSONS OF COLOR.—No. 11.

It is a fact, within the knowledge of almost every household in the city, that the character of the free negro is marked by intelligence, falsehood, and theft. There are some exceptions—they are, however, unfortunately, but few. This reference is made to the general characteristics of free persons of color, as found in our cities, not for the purpose of inducing any to suppose that the opinion entertained by them is entirely inexcusable, as moral improvements, or that they are incapable of moral obliqetion, but to enforce the truth that this latter, owing to the condition of the former, presents few obstacles to the indiscriminate indulgence by them of the grosser passions, which, we all know, invariability tend to promote poverty and disease. Hence it is observable, that during the severity of our long cold winters, when labor is not in requisition, these being no improvident to lay up in the summer for the imperious demands of the winter, a proportion of not less than five eights of those who are provided from the City Treasurer, or from the hands of the benevolent citizen, belong to the class of the inhabitants of the city.

The proceedings on the bill of the Board of Common Council, held immediately after the affair of August, 1865, in this city, on which occasion so much excitement was created, show the intense anxiety which then prevailed, not only in the Council, but, also, in the minds of the sober and reflecting portion of the community; and which indicated that branch of the City Council so adopt, so far as it was consistent with that body to adopt, measures, having for their object the prevention, by the exercise of the power conferred upon them by the charter, the dangerous, as well as unnecessary increase of the number of free persons of color within the city.

To show to the intelligent understanding of my fellow-citizens the wisdom of the measures contemplated by the action of the Board of Common Council, it will be necessary only to refer in

PRINTING, HEAVILY RESumed AT THE OFFICE.

A CITIZEN.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

We found lying on our table, a communication from Mr. Spectator; that because of two reasons, cannot obtain a place in our columns. The one considerate of which is its want of point and extreme length.

We have also another, signed "B." which we have inserted victoriously, and literally in all things according to copy, that those who write for the public may see how ridiculous they make themselves, who have not attended to the first principles of writing; that is, correct orthography.

And next, how futile is the attempt to enlighten the public mind, when an idea is not advanced, which has not been beaten to pieces by every tyro who first handles the pen. In this article we have dotted over the "S" and crossed the "e".

THE WASHINGTONIAN.

Mr. EDITOR.— Permit me through the medium of your paper, to offer a few views, relative to the Mechanic and Working Man of our country. A great aristocracy is arising, which threatens shortly to forget them and their children, sisters, who have no power of their own to defend. They are regarded by this aristocracy as a low, publicanseous order of beings, who are dependent upon them for their daily bread, and all the other wants of life. They spur the Mechanic from them as a lower order of being, and every man who gains his livelihood by the work of his hands, is the most contemptible sight. They are not rendering his services more dependent by the side of cooperation, which they are encouraging to flood our country with the outcasts of every foreign nation; men are imported into this country, whom crime and degradation, have banished from their own, and given employment to the prejudice of honest americans, because they can be employed at a lower rate—neither does the policy stand alone in the case of the Working Man. Our public offices are overactuated with those cases to our country, while hundreds of American citizens fit to discharge the duties, are rejected to give place to men, who, perhaps, never too abandoned to remain in their own country.—A foreigner needs no recommendation to public employment of the highest trust, and emoluments. In our country, they can be bribed, and their votes, are a sufficient equivalent for the offer which they hold. Neither is the evil of inducing foreigner to emigrate to our country, the only stand which this aristocracy has taken to oppress the Working Man. They are yearly growing from our Peninsulas; and States Persons, Mechanic of most every trade, thereby desiring, by placing the set of it in the same scale, with the honest and upright Mechanic, who has gained his trade by toil, honesty, and the vericle years of apprenticeship. These are few of the evils, for which the Mechanic has the right of redress. This redress is their right.

"Free Persons of Color" by a Citizen in The Washingtonian, September 15, 1866. Library of Congress. This editorial appeared in a short-lived newspaper published by Washington's "Mechanics and Working Men." The writer endorsed legislation intended to prohibit the "unnecessary increase of the number of free persons of color within the city."
While selective in their associations and activities, free blacks and slaves capitalized upon their ties with northern black and white abolitionists. Nurtured over the decades, such connections were often critical to free blacks and slaves who sought to purchase freedom for either themselves or family members. Earr Weems needed assistance as he prepared to buy his son Augustus from his master in Alabama for the sum of $1,100. In accumulating this sum, Weems travelled to Philadelphia, where he contacted the noted abolitionist William Still, and then to New York State, where internationally-renowned abolitionist Frederick Douglass assisted him. Before reaching his financial goal but confident of his ultimate success, Weems gave $500 to Henry Highland Garnett, a prominent black Philadelphian, to facilitate the purchase of his wife. As he awaited the return of his son, Weems wrote Still, “I am expecting daily the return of Augustus, and may Heaven grant him a safe deliverance and smile propitiously upon you and all kind friends who have aided in his return to me.”

Attempts to raise money for the purchase of a slave’s freedom entailed risks. In April 1855, the Washington police cited the Black Codes regarding public assembly in breaking up a meeting of twenty-four black men who formed a benevolent association to “relieve the sick and bury the dead.” This group had raised somewhat less than forty dollars for the purchase of Eliza Howard whose master wished to sell her for $650. The papers seized by the police indicated that U.S. Congressman Gerrit Smith was one of the contributors. In the end, these congregants paid a total of more than $110 towards their own fines, more than twice the amount raised for Howard. The sole slave participant endured a whipping instead.

The black community and northern anti-slavery activists likewise came to the assistance of Emanuel Mason and his family. A former slave belonging to Sarah Forrest of Prince George’s County, Emanuel had hired out his wife from Forrest, who also allowed their children to live with them until they were approximately ten years old. When his master arrived to pick up Emanuel’s youngest son, Ben, in May 1859, he took flight. Even without any corroboration, police arrested and imprisoned Emanuel for harboring Ben as a fugitive. Emanuel was sentenced to ninety days in prison for the alleged crime, remaining there even longer as he could not secure prison costs. In the meantime, Forrest sold Emanuel’s wife, and her new owner indicated a willingness to re-sell at $230, which the black community sought to raise. Northerners who read The National Era about the plight of the Mason family assisted the cause by contributing the funds necessary to buy Emanuel’s wife and petitioning for a presidential pardon of Emanuel. These agitators succeed on both counts: she won her freedom, and in March 1860 President James Buchanan cleared Emanuel of his alleged crimes.

As instrumental as northern backing was in securing Emanuel’s discharge from prison, the Mason family owed both the release of Emanuel and the safety of Ben to the support of the local black community. From the time of Ben’s escape through Emanuel’s ten-month imprisonment, members of the black community worked first to protect Ben
and then to secure Emanuel’s release. If captured as a fugitive, Ben could have been sold south so that silence concerning his whereabouts was imperative. It is possible that Emanuel himself knew where Ben fled and thereby never surrendered the information that would have cut his imprisonment short. Someone probably could have divulged the fugitive’s whereabouts to clear Emanuel, but no one did. More than likely, Ben hid with a member of his family or community. From there, he might have escaped to the northern states. The community successfully distanced itself from Ben’s actions and convinced the reporters of *The National Era* that neither Emanuel nor other members of the community cooperated with Ben. This posture of non-complicity helped convince northern readers that Emanuel’s imprisonment was a complete miscarriage of justice, and this sympathy helped in fundraising efforts for both Emanuel and his wife.

The desire for universal freedom permeated all levels of the District’s black community. Offering a haven for fugitives as well as money, northern free blacks and white abolitionists supported this quest. In many ways, District blacks emulated the institutions of northern free blacks which sought at once independence and respect from whites. The stability and wealth of African-American institutions bore additional significance in the District of Columbia, as they attested to the community’s readiness for universal freedom. At the same time, free blacks and slaves sought to mitigate the impact of slavery as much as possible. Property accumulation took on a distinctive meaning for the families of District blacks, as extra earnings augmented slaves’ rations and enhanced their ability to purchase freedom.

Violence, repressive Black Codes, and economic marginalization did not break the free black and slave community of the District of Columbia in its quest for freedom and community. Even in the most difficult times, these blacks invested their earnings in schools and churches, which in turn became increasingly self-sustaining. The independence of these institutions fortified blacks as they confronted the insults of whites, sought prosperity, and pursued freedom. For its efforts, this community earned loyalty among its extensive membership. This cohesion as well as dogged persistence created an insuperable threat to the social order. No wonder District whites so feared this community.
INTRODUCTION BY HOWARD GILLETTE, JR.


5. “Ceremonies and Oration at Laying the Corner Stone of the City Hall of the City of Washington,” August 22, 1820. Law Family Papers, Maryland Historical Society. I am grateful to Pamela Scott for making a copy of this document available to me.

6. 23 Cong., 2 sess., S. Rept. 97, February 2, 1835.


Antebellum Washington in Context: The Pursuit of Prosperity and Identity
by David R. Goldfield


3. Quoted in ibid., p. 7.


6. Quoted in ibid., p. 361.


12. For a full discussion of the South’s role in the antebellum national urban system, see ibid., chapter 2.


18. Quoted in Goldfield, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers*, p. 35.


23. *Ibid*.


29. See *ibid.*, pp. 215-17.


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**Southern City, National Ambition: Washington's Early Town Houses**

by Bernard L. Herman


14. Martha Zierden and Bernard L. Herman, “Charleston Townhouses: Archaeology, Architecture, and the Urban Landscape, 1750-1850,” in Rebecca Yamin and Karen Bescherer Metheny, eds., *Case Studies in Landscape Archaeology: Methods and Meanings*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, forthcoming, 1996); see also Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*, p. 59. Wade observes: “Overcrowded or not, the important thing about slave housing was the social view it embodied. Its basic objective was to seal off the Negroes from outside contacts. Not only were the bondsmen’s quarters placed close to the main building, but the plot itself was enclosed by high brick walls. The rooms had no windows to the outside and were accessible only by a narrow balcony that overlooked the yard and the master’s residence. The sole route to the street lay through the house or a door at the side. Thus the physical design of the whole complex compelled slaves to center their activity upon the owner and the owner’s place. Symbolically, the pitch of the roof of the Negro quarters was highest at the outside edge and then slanted sharply toward the yard — a kind of architectural expression of the human relationship involved. The whole design was concentric, drawing the life of the bondman inward toward his master."


19. This pattern is exemplified by the plat of “A Lot of Land situated on the North side of Queen Street, now known by the Number 84 in Ward 12,” (1792). Charleston County Recorder of Deeds, Deed Book G-6, plat following p. 478, and the many other land surveys entered in the Charleston County deed books. Many of these are reproduced in Poston, *Vernacular Architecture of Charleston*. 
20. Thomas Turner inventory (1816), Record Group 021, Records of the United States District Courts, Circuit Court for the District of Columbia, Entry 119, Inventories and sales, Inventory JH 3 (Dec. 6, 1815–June 25, 1818), pp. 35–39. The location of Turner’s house is based on his 1798 property assessment which records a two-story brick house measuring 32 feet by 37 as well as several outbuildings. Federal Direct Tax of 1798, District of Columbia, MS 807, MdHR M 3479, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland.


“A WILD, DESOLATE PLACE”:
LIFE ON THE MARGINS IN EARLY WASHINGTON
BY FREDRIKA J. TEUTE

Research for this essay was supported in part by a Stephen Botein Fellowship at the American Antiquarian Society. I wish particularly to thank Joanne Chaison, Research Librarian there, for her invaluable assistance in providing materials.


3. November 21, 1800, Adams to A. A. Smith (Adams, Letters, ed. by C. F. Adams, pp. 381-82); October 5, 1800, Smith to [Bayard family], MBS Papers, DLC.


10. Ibid., pp. 104-5.


13. Constance McLaughlin Green, The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation’s Capital (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), Table I, p. 33. This population chart is based on the U.S. Census and provides a breakdown of white, free black, and slave population for the District as a whole, Washington city, Georgetown, Alexandria, and Washington County. Proportions and numbers given in the text here are for the District as a whole. In 1800 free blacks totaled 783 and slaves 3,244
(T. = 4,027 out of a total population of 14,093); in 1830 free blacks equalled 6,152 and slaves 6,119 (T. = 12,271 out of a total population of 39,834). More people resided in Washington city than any other place and increasingly so, so that by 1830 almost half of the District’s population was in the city (18,826 out of 39,834). Figures for professional versus working class whites are not available for early Washington.


15. [Warden], *Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia*, pp. 25-27, 42-47, 60-68. Royall summarily dismissed “these mixed governments — let it be a white government or a black one at once — a white population or a black one” (The Black Book, vol. 3, p. 184).

16. [Warden], *Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia*, pp. 163-65. Washington County covered the area beyond the Eastern Branch of the Potomac and above Florida Avenue and R Street in Georgetown — the northern parts of what are now the Northwest and Northeast quadrants. In 1800 the county had a total of 1,941 inhabitants. No racial breakdown of the figures are given. By 1830 of a total of 2,994, 1,828 were white, 167 were free black, and 999 were slave (Green, *Secret City*, Table I, p. 33 and n. ‘c’). The Smiths’ farm was located on what is now the campus of Catholic University in Northeast Washington.


18. For a fuller discussion of the distortions of Smith’s life effected by Hunt’s edition of her letters, of Smith’s frustrations, and of her engagement in a political sphere within the home, see Fredrika J. Teute, “Roman Matron on the Banks of Tiber Creek: Margaret Bayard Smith and the Politicization of Spheres in the Nation’s Capital” in Donald R. Kennon, ed., *A Republic for the Ages* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, forthcoming).

19. July 4 [1806?], September 17, 1806, October 3, 1806, April 3, 1807, MBS Diary, 1804-1807; September 16, 1803, Smith to Jane B. Kirkpatrick; January 23, 1804, same to same; July 15, 1804, same to same; March 1807, same to same; May 31, 1807, same to same; August 12, 1807, same to same; April 20, 1813, same to same; January 30, 1820, same to same; January 6, 1804, same to Mary Anne Smith; November 22, 1820, same to Susan H. Smith, MBS Papers, DLC.

21. [Margaret Bayard Smith], *A Winter in Washington; or, Memoirs of the Seymour Family*, 2 vols. in 1 (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824); By a Friend of Youth, *The Diversions of Sydney* (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1805); [Margaret Bayard Smith], *American Mother; or, The Seymour Family. Part First. The Bees and American Mother; or, The Seymour Family. Part Second* (2 parts bound in 1; Washington, D.C.: Davis and Force, 1823). She published the majority of her pieces in Sarah Josepha Hale’s *Ladies’ Magazine* (Boston) between 1831 and 1836 and in Godey’s *Lady’s Book* thereafter until her death. Except for Smith’s series on presidential inaugurations, few of these articles explicitly were about life in Washington. The parallel in titles between Watterston’s novel *The L—— Family at Washington; or, A Winter in the Metropolis* and Smith’s *A Winter in Washington; or, Memoirs of the Seymour Family* is obvious, but the reasons for Smith’s mimicking Watterston, if that is what she was doing, are not evident. The working title used by Smith for the manuscript was “Desmond,” which referred to the principal character in what became volume II. In response to the book agent Charles Wiley’s suggestion that she incorporate more about Washington social circles, she wrote volume I, which dealt with drawing room society and political life in the capital ([July 9, 1823], Smith to Jane B. Kirkpatrick, MBS Papers, DLC). She published *A Winter in Washington* two years after Watterston’s; Wiley or the publishers, E. Bliss and E. White, may have suggested the change in title to capitalize on Watterston’s success. Or Smith may have intended her novel as something of a rejoinder to Watterston, who seemed to be attacking women’s presence in public, political places, especially in the halls of Congress, by equating them with whores. Although Smith expressed her own concerns about the dangers inhering in women’s discontent with domesticity and their expansive interests in politics and intellectual exchange with men in the nation’s capital, she provided a far more complex and complimentary picture of women in Washington society than Watterston did.


23. See, for instance, Knapp’s evaluation of her novels as “very clever” in portraying “the peculiar habits and manners of the fashionables, and of those who would be fashionables” (*Sketches*, p. 125).

24. [Smith], *A Winter in Washington*, vol. 1, p. 264.


28. Ibid., pp. 275, 276, 278.
29. Ibid., pp. 279-84 (quotes at pp. 280, 281).
30. Ibid., pp. 280-83.
31. Ibid., p. 284.
32. Ibid., p. 282.
33. Ibid., pp. 282-83.
34. Ibid., p. 283.
35. Ibid., pp. 279-80, 282, 283-84 (quote at p. 284).
36. Mrs. Seymour and Louisa's excursion into the poor sections of Washington covered the last twenty pages of *A Winter in Washington*, vol. 1, pp. 264-84.
37. [ca. March 13, 1824], Smith to Maria B. Boyd; November 12, 1824, same to same, MBS Papers, DLC.
38. Smith discussed her intentions for her literary works, application of profits from her publications, people and observed situations as sources for her characters and stories, and criticisms of her subject matter in her many letters to her family and friends. See, for example, June 28, July 2, 1824, Smith to Jane B. Kirkpatrick; November 4, 1823, same to Anthony Bleecker; ca. December [19, 1823], same to [?]; ca. March 26 [1823?], same to Jane B. Kirkpatrick; June 10, 1823, same to same; [ca. February 12] 1824, same to Maria B. Boyd; April 24, 1824, same to Jane B. Kirkpatrick; May 7, 1824, same to same; June 11, 1824, same to Maria B. Boyd; June 12, 1824, same to Jane B. Kirkpatrick; November 12, 1824, same to Maria B. Boyd; December 11, 1824, same to [?]; May 26, June 6, 1825, same to Jane B. Kirkpatrick, MBS Papers, DLC.
39. "Lucy" MS, f. 3328 verso, William Thornton Papers, DLC.
40. Ibid., chap. 1 (quote at f. 3308 verso).
41. Ibid., chap. 4.
42. Ibid., f. 3326.
43. Ibid., f. 3328 verso.
44. Ibid., f. 3329 and verso.
45. Ibid., f. 3330.
46. Ibid., f. 3330 verso.
47. Ibid., ff. 3330 verso-3331.
48. Ibid., f. 3331 verso.

50. "To Thomas Hume, Esq., M.D./ From the City of Washington" (Moore, Epistles, pp. 153-54).

**THE TIES THAT BIND: THE PURSUIT OF COMMUNITY AND FREEDOM AMONG SLAVES AND FREE BLACKS IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, 1800-1860**

**BY MARY BETH CORRIGAN**

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Sara Dunlap Jackson, who worked tirelessly to animate archival sources and enrich African-American history. More than her knowledge of the holdings of the National Archives and area repositories, her enthusiasm for my topic and confidence in my abilities have inspired me.

The research that supports this essay was undertaken for my dissertation, entitled "The Transformation of the African-American Family in the District of Columbia, 1850-65." Through his comments to the drafts of my dissertation and this essay in particular, Ira Berlin has sharpened my thinking in innumerable ways. I am also grateful to Cynthia Kennedy-Haflett for her comments on a draft of this essay.


7. In this article, Washington refers only to Washington City and does not include the surrounding countryside known as Washington County; the District refers to the capital as a whole.


12. Meg McAleer, “The Other Congregation: Patterns of Black Catholic Worship at Holy Trinity Church, Georgetown, D.C., 1795-1845” (unpublished seminar paper, Georgetown University, September 1986), 7, 21.

13. Although difficult to estimate the extent of religious participation of slaves and free blacks before the Civil War, most were members of the Methodist and Catholic

14. This white church was later renamed the Dumbarton United Methodist Church. "The Little Ark" was renamed in 1846.


17. Quoted in McAleer, "The Other Congregation," 11-12. The emphasis herein is mine.


20. Ibid., pp. 197-98.

21. Ibid.


24. Berlin, Slaves Without Masters, p. 188.


28. In 1836, the Corporation of Washington extended the ten o’clock curfew to include free blacks on their way to and from church and prohibited the mayor from granting licenses to free blacks with the exception of drivers of carts, drays, hackney carriages, and wagons. Cranch limited the implications of the Cary decision in a subsequent ruling, wherein he maintained that the Corporation of Washington rightfully restricted free blacks from owning saloons as that activity presented a danger to society. For copies of the Black Codes, see Sheahan, *Corporation Laws of the City of Washington* (Washington: 1853), pp. 245-50; Snethen, *The Black Codes of the District of Columbia*, pp. 38-39, 45-46; Cary v. Corporation of Washington, Cranch Circuit Court Reports, v. 5 (November 1836), pp. 13-23; *Negro Harriet Johnson v. Corporation of Washington*, Cranch Circuit Court Reports, v. 5 (March 1838), p. 434.


33. The Managers listed on the invitation to this tea party were: William Slade, Thomas Clark, J.T. Johnson, Andrew Foote, John Freeman, Charles Shorter, James H. Fleet, James A. Shorter, David Fisher, Anthony Bowen, Charles Datcher, John T. Costin, and Rev. S.S. Clark. The party took place on Thursday, February 5, 1846. Alexander and Jane Taverns Papers, Manuscript No. 277, Historical Society of Washington, D.C.


35. The John F. Cook Diary, January 1850-March 15, 1851, Box 20-1, Folder 7, Cook Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.

37. In large part because of his indifference to slavery, Drayton was reluctant to assist slaves until approached in Washington City by a free black man whose enslaved family raised and conveyed to their master the sum of money necessary for their purchase, but the master did not honor their previous agreement. Daniel Drayton, “Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton,” in Paul Finkelman, ed., Slavery, Race and the American Courts, Ser. 4: Slave Rebels, Abolitionists, and Southern Courts (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), pp. 490-93.

38. Daniel Webster purchased Jennings and subsequently freed him in March 1847. Expected to earn his purchase price, Jennings continued to serve Webster as a butler. Although dissatisfied with his lot, Jennings decided not to flee so that he was not one of the fugitives. National Intelligencer, April 19, 1848; John H. Paynter, Fugitives of the Pearl (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1930), pp. 20-36, 50-51.

39. According to John H. Paynter, some youth threw Judson Diggs off of his cart for his betrayal, and he subsequently lived as an outcast within the black community, “Fugitives of the Pearl,” Journal of Negro History 1 (July 1916), 247. Also see Drayton, “Personal Memoir,” pp. 33-34; City of Magnificent Intentions, pp. 102-07.

40. Giddings maintained that Drayton and Sayres exercised their constitutional rights in planning the escape. Mobs attacked him while he was visiting Drayton and Sayres in Washington Jail. National Intelligencer, April 21, 24, 1848; Congressional Globe Appendix, April 25, 1848, pp. 518-23; City of Magnificent Intentions, p. 109. After introducing anti-riot legislation, Senator Everett Hale provoked one of the most heated and pointed debates in Congress concerning slavery before the Civil War. At issue was the extent to which a propertyholder could use violence to protect his or her property rights. Congressional Globe, April 20, 1848, p. 656; Congressional Globe, Appendix, April 20, 1848, pp. 500-10.

41. “Captains Drayton and Sayres: Or, the Way in Which Americans are Treated, for Aiding the Cause of Liberty at Home,” in Slavery, Race and the American System, p. 440; see also Paynter, “The Fugitives of the Pearl,” p. 251.

42. Arguing that Drayton and Sayres were not guilty of stealing property, anti-slavery agitators campaigned and eventually won a presidential pardon. On the conditions of Drayton’s and Sayres’ imprisonment and the pardon, see Drayton, “Memoirs,” pp. 572-89, and National Era, January 29, 1852.

43. Senators Thomas G. Pratt and James A. Pearce of Maryland were among the most vitriolic opponents of the compromise measure. For the text of “An Act to Suppress the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia,” see U.S. Statutes at Large v. 9, September 20, 1850. Congress debated this bill for nearly seven months; see especially Congressional Globe Appendix, February 6, 1850, pp. 120-27; February 12, 1850, pp. 208-11; February 13, 1850, pp. 152-54; May 21, 1850, pp. 630-35; June 5, 1850,

44. *The Republic*, September 16, 1850.

45. The new code reduced the number of white freehold sureties required to receive a certificate from five to one. A separate certificate and a separate fee was required of each family member so that the high certificate fee presented a far greater obstacle to free blacks than securing white sureties. Free black servants of transient whites, such as Congressmen, were exempt. See Sheahan, *Corporation Laws of the City of Washington* (Washington, 1853), pp. 248-53. The Georgetown code of 1845 required no fee and two white sureties for a certificate; Snethen, *The Black Code of the District of Columbia*, p. 54.

46. “Memorial of the Mayor, Board of Aldermen, and Common Council of Georgetown, D.C.” Senate 31A-H4, Committee on the District of Columbia, January 8, 1850-July 8, 1850, Record Group 46, Records of the U.S. Senate, National Archives, Washington, D.C. During the 1850s, the Virginia and Maryland legislatures promoted removal. In 1850, the Virginia state legislature estimated that removal would run $30 per free black and thereby raised $30,000 every year. See Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, p. 355.


49. Raw data compiled from the free schedules of the 1860 census by the Afro-American Communities Project, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., under a grant from the Center for Washington Area Studies, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. and with the assistance of Lois Horton.

50. See the following records within the Manuscript Division of the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University: Union Bethel A.M.E. Minutes, Board of Trustees (Box 89-2, folder 30), Simms Family Papers; Union Bethel A.M.E. Minutes, July 14, 1850 (Box 70-2, folder 26), Metropolitan A.M.E. Church Papers; Subscription Book, 1852-55, Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church Papers. See also Mitchell, “Mount Zion Methodist Church and Mount Zion Cemetery,” p. 106.


53. In January 1854, the Council authorized the Mayor to issue permits for two dinners given to benefit Union Bethel Church. *Laws of the Corporation of Washington* (51 C) (1853-54), pp. 54-55, 61; *Washington Star*, January 10, 1855.

55. John F. Cook to Myrtilla Miner, July 31, 1851, Education/School Correspondence, 1851 & 1852, Reel 1, Container 1, Myrtilla Miner Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Emma D.E.N. Southworth, a novelist born in the District of Columbia, likewise discouraged Miner’s scheme. See Emma D.E.N. Southworth to Myrtilla Miner, August 23, 1851, Education/School Correspondence, 1851 & 1852, Reel 1, Container 1, Myrtilla Miner Papers.


NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS


HOWARD GILLETTE, JR. is Professor of American Civilization and History at The George Washington University, where he specializes in urban and social history. He is the author of Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning, and the Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C. and co-author, with Fredric Miller, of Washington Seen: A Photographic History, 1875-1965, both published by Johns Hopkins University Press in 1995. He is past editor of Washington History, the journal of the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., and a frequent contributor to other books and journals.

DAVID R. GOLDFIELD is the Robert Lee Bailey Professor at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where the urban South and southern history more generally have been his fields of research, writing, and teaching. He has written or edited ten books, including two award-winning works, Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region, 1607-1980 and Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present, both published by Louisiana State University Press. Each book received the Mayflower Award for non-fiction. The latter work also received the 1991 Gustavus Myers Center for the Study of Human Rights Outstanding Book Award. In addition to writing, Goldfield consults for a number of urban history museums and cities around the country and abroad and has served as an expert witness in voting rights cases. He is editor of the Journal of Urban History.

BERNARD L. HERMAN is an associate professor in the Department of Art History at the University of Delaware, where he also serves on the faculty of the Department of History, the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture, and the College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy. His books include Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware and The Stolen House, both of which received the Abbott Lowell Cummings Award for the best published work on North American vernacular architecture. He is currently working on a new book, Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City.
KYM S. RICE has organized history exhibitions over the past twenty years for museums, historical societies, and libraries, including “Before Freedom Came” for The Museum of the Confederacy, “Are We To Be A Nation?” at the New York Public Library, and “A Share of Honour: Virginia Women, 1600-1945,” sponsored by the Virginia Women’s Cultural History Project. She has served as the guest curator of all five Octagon Museum Research Series exhibitions on early Washington. Rice holds an M.A. in American Studies from the University of Hawaii.

FREDRIKA J. TEUTE is Editor of Publications at the Institute of Early American History and Culture in Williamsburg, Virginia. She has served as an editor on several documentary projects, contributing to the publication of volumes in the multi-volume series of The Papers of James Madison and of The Papers of John Marshall. She has published articles in the William and Mary Quarterly and the American Archivist. Teute is writing a book-length study of Margaret Bayard Smith in the early republic and is preparing a critical edition of Smith’s unpublished novel “Lucy.”
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