

CIVIL RIGHTS, RACIAL PROTEST, AND ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISM

IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1850-1865 by Albert S. Broussard

The State of California was a hotbed of civil rights and antislavery activity between 1850 and 1865, and the political activism and commitment to eradicate the “peculiar institution” was shared by African Americans and whites alike. African Americans throughout the entire state, however, took the lead in rallying the nation against slavery as well as calling attention to numerous examples of overt discrimination and racial inequality that they experienced. The center of this emerging political activity was San Francisco, a relatively small but politically active African American community of approximately one thousand individuals, the majority of whom had migrated to California during the gold rush era. African Americans, however, also organized protests in Oakland, Sacramento, Stockton, Marysville, and Los Angeles.

This essay will examine racial activism, civil rights, and antislavery activity throughout the state in the decade and half prior to the Civil War. It will attempt to illustrate how black and white Californians, through a variety of strategies and protest campaigns, contributed to the development of an emerging national consciousness that ultimately came to view the enslavement of another human being as inconsistent with the principles of a democratic, egalitarian nation. Similarly, the essay will demonstrate how black and white activists in California used the state as an important symbol of the resistance to slavery that swept the nation. Finally, these antislavery activists, through their words as well their deeds, should be viewed as part of the national Underground Railroad, that vast network of roads, stations, routes, and safehouses that assisted enslaved people in their escape to freedom. As the historian C. Peter

Ripley writes, “As a formal term it [the Underground Railroad] refers to the movement of African-American slaves escaping out of the South and to the allies who assisted them in their search for freedom.”¹

By the early 1850s, the State of California had attracted an impressive African-American leadership class. Although less than 1,000 African-Americans were recorded in the 1850 census for the entire state, one undetermined resident reported that the influence of African-Americans could be gleaned in part by the “original naming of at least thirty-odd geographical features either Negro or Nigger.” The African-American population grew rapidly during the state’s first decade, a sign that economic opportunity was available and not totally restricted because of race. Approximately 4,000 blacks resided in California in 1860 and the majority settled in San Francisco, Sacramento, and in the mining districts in the northern part of the state.²

¹C. Peter Ripley, “The Underground Railroad,” in *The Underground Railroad* (Washington, D.C.: Division of Publications, National Park Service, 1998), p.45.

²Hardy Frye, “Negroes in California from 1841-1875,” San Francisco Negro Historical and Cultural Society Monograph, vol. 3 (April 1968), 1-2; *Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census, 1860* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 2, 130; An excellent account of the California Gold Rush is J. S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981); Delilah Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California* (Los Angeles: 1919; reprinted, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969).

California's famous Gold Rush attracted fortune seekers of all races and nationalities from around the entire world, and a small number of African-Americans, both slave and free, migrated to the Golden State. By 1852 an estimated three hundred slaves worked in California's goldfields, a pretty good indication that southern slaveholders did not fear bringing their human chattel into California despite the antislavery provision that legislators had adopted in the 1849 state constitution. California, in fact, had the largest number of slaves of any state or territory west of Texas.³ Alvin Aaron Coffey, born a slave in Macon, Kentucky, accompanied his master to California in search of gold in 1849. Coffey and his master left Kentucky in April 1849 by wagon train and encountered many obstacles during the long and arduous journey including wolves, icy roads, the steep terrain of the Rocky Mountains, and a cholera epidemic. Yet after five difficult months of travel, Coffey's party finally reached California.⁴

³Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York, W. W. Norton, 1998), 78.

⁴Philip Montesano, "A Black Pioneer's Trip to California," *Pacific Historian* 13 (Winter 1969): 58-62.

Coffey's fate was not unique, for a number of other African American bondsmen traveled to California in search of gold. A slave owner named George McKinley Murrell, born into a comfortable slaveholding family in Bowling Green, Kentucky, brought a trusted slave named Rheubin out to the California gold fields in 1849 and established his base of operations on the north fork of the American River. "California is not the country that it had been represented to be, but there is plenty of gold here from what I have seen," he wrote back home to his family in Kentucky. Murrell spent two unsuccessful years in the mining fields, and, like the overwhelming majority of fortune-seekers, never managed to strike it rich. Yet his slave Rheubin proved to be invaluable to him in a number of respects. In addition to serving as a cook, laborer and body servant for his master, Rheubin was hired out as a cook and laborer to provide an additional source of income for his master. Hiring out slaves had been a common practice in the southern states, for it afforded African-American slaves a degree of freedom and autonomy that was absent on the plantation. It was also a lucrative practice for slave owners, for slaves worked in a wide array of service, skilled and semiskilled jobs, and their labor was always in demand. Although George Murrell returned to Kentucky in 1854, never having struck it rich, Rheubin died while hired out in the California gold fields in 1851. His employment as a cook in California mining towns increased his susceptibility to cholera and a number of infectious diseases.⁵

Whether slave or free, early African American settlers who migrated to California were seeking, above all, economic opportunity, and a number of these individuals, despite

⁵Albert S. Broussard, "Slavery in California Revisited: The Fate of a Kentucky Slave in Gold Rush California," *Pacific Historian* 29 (Spring, 1985):17-21.

considerable prejudice against African Americans, did remarkably well. One African-American migrant referred to San Francisco as the “New York of the Pacific,” when he sized up San Francisco’s economic opportunities for members of his race.⁶ Many others apparently agreed with his conclusion. The African American carpenter Mifflin Gibbs migrated to San Francisco with the desire to pursue his trade as well as pan for gold, and discovered that white carpenters threatened to strike rather than accept an African American co-worker. The resilient Gibbs then established the Pioneer Boot and Shoe Emporium, which specialized in the sale of fine boots and shoes, and was quite profitable for many years. Gibbs was one of only three African-American merchants listed in the 1852 census for San Francisco.⁷

⁶*Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, October 30, 1851 and December 11, 1851.

⁷Mifflin W. Gibbs, *Shadow and Light: An Autobiography* (Washington, D.C., 1902, reprint ed., New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1968), 44-45.

Similarly, Mary Ellen Pleasant, a black boardinghouse keeper and influential member of San Francisco's African American community from the time of her arrival in 1849, owned property in San Francisco and Oakland prior to her death in 1904 and accumulated an estate valued at \$300,000.⁸ Pleasant's name was also linked intimately to the antislavery movement in California, for she contributed unspecified sums to the campaigns to hide fugitive slaves. The fugitive slave Archy Lee resided at the boardinghouse of Mary Ellen Pleasant. And although it has never been verified, Pleasant allegedly served as one of the principal financial backers of the white abolitionist John Brown's abortive raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859.⁹ It is highly probable that Pleasant and other free African-Americans contributed modest sums to assist John Brown, but unlikely that she gave Brown the sum of \$30,000, which she alleged late in her life.

⁸Lynn M. Hudson, "When Mammy Becomes a Millionaire: Mary Ellen Pleasant, An African American Entrepreneur," Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1996.

⁹Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 100, 152; "Mary Ellen Pleasant," in Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston, eds., *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York: Norton, 1982), 495-96.

The majority of African-American workers were not as fortunate as either Gibbs or Pleasant, for they owned neither property nor worked in the skilled trades in San Francisco. Most found work as unskilled laborers or in domestic service, jobs which paid considerably less than skilled jobs and were not protected by unions. Small wonder that the majority of black San Franciscans, in tandem with their counterparts throughout the state, often linked their own struggle for civil rights and racial equality with the larger struggle against slavery. The two campaigns were inseparable. Organized black protest, therefore, to eradicate slavery and to eliminate racial discrimination were integral features of San Francisco's early history, and black leaders were in the vanguard of this movement. In 1851, African-American leaders, led by Jonas H. Townsend and Mifflin Gibbs, printed a resolution in the *Alta California*, a local newspaper, protesting the denial of the franchise and the right of blacks to testify in court cases involving whites. This campaign had broad-based community support and it also galvanized a small segment of white San Franciscans as well. The San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, a weekly black newspaper, wrote that African-Americans would be unable to protect either themselves or their property without the right to testify against whites in a court of law.¹⁰

¹⁰Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 54-65.

One case in 1861 illustrated this in a dramatic way. In that year a prominent and well respected black merchant named George W. Gordon was killed by a white man named Robert Schell, who had stolen money from Gordon's business. When Mrs. Gordon filed a complaint with the police, she was informed that because of her race she could not offer testimony in this case. The police conducted a perfunctory investigation, nevertheless, after which Schell returned to the establishment and caned Gordon in full view of black witnesses. As Gordon attempted to flee, Schell drew a gun and mortally shot Gordon in the chest. He then preceded to pistol whip the dead African-American in view of white witnesses. Schell was arrested and tried in a court of law, but escaped the more serious charge of first-degree murder because African-Americans who saw him shoot Gordon were prohibited under state law from testifying in court against a white person. Schell was convicted on the lesser charge of second-degree murder, but this case had a profound impact on the thinking of many well-meaning whites. First, it illuminated the stark and ugly reality that even the most industrious and respected African-Americans could not defend themselves in a court of law in California on the serious charge of murder as long as they were prohibited from testifying against whites. Second, Thomas Starr King, a Unitarian minister and one of the most respected ministers in California, officiated at George Gordon's funeral services. King's presence was a powerful symbol that many influential white San Franciscans had also come to the conclusion that the segregated testimony statute had long lived its usefulness.¹¹

But George Gordon's murder also casts an ominous shadow over San Francisco's veneer of good race relations throughout the nation. The Gordon family had originally moved from New

¹¹Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 280-9; *San Francisco Examiner*, July 29, 1968.

York, which contained one of the most politically active black communities in the nation. When news of George Gordon's murder reached this vibrant east coast metropolis, it casts an ugly pall over San Francisco, an image of bigotry and racial intolerance that many San Franciscans had worked hard to prevent. Quite the contrary, a committed minority of San Franciscans had worked to ensure that all San Franciscans, regardless of race, religion, or ethnic origin could succeed, provided that they were willing to work hard.¹² Small wonder that in the wake of George Gordon's murder and a petition drive by San Francisco's African American leadership, the California State Legislature granted blacks in March 1863, although not Asians or Indians, the right to testify against whites in a court of law. And although gaining the right to testify against whites did not bring about full equality for African Americans in San Francisco, it was a significant step in the right direction.

The campaign to secure the right of testimony was a biracial struggle, where black and white San Franciscans collectively attacked segregation and racial inequality. Yet San Francisco's African American leadership, many of whom had migrated to the west from east coast cities such as New York, Boston, or Philadelphia, took the lead in pressing for civil rights and the abolition of slavery. Thus men such as the Reverend Jeremiah Burke Sanderson, Philip A. Bell, William H. Hall, and John J. Moore, were not content with half-a-loaf, but pressed whites to grant African Americans full equality.

¹²Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 76-77.

Jeremiah Burke Sanderson was one of the most capable leaders of any race in early San Francisco. Arriving in San Francisco from New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1854, Sanderson pushed for antislavery and racial equality for free blacks both in his native Massachusetts and in California. Sanderson focused most of his considerable energy on the right of African Americans to gain the vote and securing an equal education for black children.¹³ The struggle to obtain the suffrage for black San Franciscans actually predated Sanderson's arrival in California, for black leaders had established suffrage associations such as the Franchise League as early as 1852. One of the most notable protests staged by African Americans to illuminate San Francisco's brand of taxation without representation occurred in 1857, when Mifflin Gibbs and John Lester, two black proprietors of a general merchandise store in San Francisco, refused to pay their poll tax. They vowed that they would "never willingly pay three dollars as poll-tax as long as we remain disfranchised, oath-denied, outlawed colored Americans." Their protest, however just, fell, on deaf ears, for the tax collector seized approximately thirty dollars of goods from their establishment to satisfy their debt.¹⁴

San Francisco's black population was too small during these years for the early suffrage associations to make much headway, but the momentum never ceased, and African Americans carried this struggle into the 1860s. By 1862 Philip A. Bell, who had migrated to San Francisco from New York, led the campaign to grant African Americans the vote. As editor of the San

¹³Rudolph Lapp, "Jeremiah Sanderson: Early California Negro," *Journal of Negro History* 55 (October 1968): 321-333.

¹⁴*The Liberator*, July 3, 1857.

Francisco *Pacific Appeal* and the San Francisco *Elevator*, both weekly black newspapers, Bell took the lead in pressing this issue before San Franciscans. He reminded African Americans that “we cannot expect our rulers to thrust favors upon us, unless we show that we desire them. We are neglectful in our duty to ourselves, to our country, and to posterity, if we do not appreciate our political rights enough to demand them.”¹⁵ Bell also rejected the racist argument that African Americans were not intelligent enough to vote in a responsible manner. Conceding that African Americans did not have the same educational opportunities as their white counterparts, he concluded, however, that it would not “require a generation to educate them [African Americans] to an intelligent use of the ballot.” Black San Franciscans, he maintained, would be as responsible in casting their ballots as any other group.

¹⁵San Francisco *Elevator*, September 20, 1867 and February 21, 1868.

Philip Bell's criticism of the racially restrictive suffrage law was shared by other African American leaders. William H. Hall, a respected black leader, called the right of African Americans to gain the vote "the most momentous issue ever addressed to public opinion, and [it] embraces the political prospective of all parties."¹⁶ The Reverend John J. Moore was even more critical of white San Franciscans, for he argued that denying African Americans the right to vote constituted taxation without representation, the sacrifice of a natural right, and a grievous infringement on the citizenship rights of blacks. The suffrage was a natural right, not a privilege, Moore argued, and it served as an important means of self-defense against foreign immigrants who discriminated against blacks. Moore pleaded with the state legislature to remove this stain from the body politic.¹⁷

¹⁶San Francisco *Elevator*, November 10, 1865.

¹⁷San Francisco *Elevator*, May 26, 1865.

The leadership of Bell, Hall, Moore, among others, galvanized San Francisco's black community. When African Americans organized a political conference in 1865, the right to vote was the most prominent issue. The black delegates who assembled based their argument on the contributions that African Americans had made to American society and the invaluable service that black soldiers had performed for the Union army during the Civil War. As numerous historians have shown, African American soldiers viewed the Civil War as largely a conflict to end slavery, and the union soldiers who liberated slaves in the confederacy could be black as well as white. The conferees formally petitioned the legislature, requesting immediate repeal of the discriminatory franchise law. California's white political leadership, although dominated by Republicans who had been more sympathetic to the political rights of African Americans than their Democratic counterparts, refused to budge on this issue. African Americans throughout the state of California were unable to vote until the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified in 1870. In a symbolic gesture, the California State Legislature formally ratified the Fifteenth Amendment in 1962.¹⁸

African Americans were just as passionate about the education of their children, despite a persistent pattern of segregation of public and private education throughout the nation before the Civil War.¹⁹ Even some of the most progressive cities such as New York, Philadelphia, and

¹⁸Brainerd Dyer, "One Hundred years of Negro Suffrage," *Pacific Historical Review* 41 (February 1968): 1-20.

¹⁹See Leonard Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 147-173.

Boston, provided separate schools for black children, and many American cities provided no educational facilities for black students at all. Yet African Americans had hoped that San Francisco would be different because California's earliest school laws made no specific mention of race. To their horror, they discovered that San Francisco offered African American children two choices: segregated schools or no schools at all. As early as 1854, black children attended segregated and inferior schools. The segregated school for black children, located near the corner of Jackson and Virginia streets, was housed in the basement of a black church, and it was described by a group of African American leaders who inspected its condition as "dark, damp, with only one small yard as a playground."²⁰

²⁰*Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 22, 1854.

The effort to integrate San Francisco's public schools dominated the African American press during the early 1870s. "The proper education of our children is paramount to all other considerations," wrote the San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*.²¹ Two black state conventions also made education one of the most important issues that black delegates considered. This issue finally came to a head in 1872 when Noah Flood, the principal of the Broadway Grammar School, was sued by the parents of Mary Frances Ward, an African American student, who had been denied admission because of her race. This "test case" was the kind of challenge that black leaders had prayed for many years. And to the delight of black leaders, John W. Dwinelle, a prominent white local attorney, agreed to serve as Ward's counsel.

Dwinelle argued that the existing law, which prohibited black children from attending white schools, violated the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which provided African Americans equal protection under the law. He was optimistic therefore that the state supreme court would strike down California's segregated school law. Indeed, in 1874 the California State Supreme Court ruled that unless separate schools for black children were maintained, African Americans could not be legally excluded from white schools. This was not the opinion from California's highest court that either Dwinelle or African American leaders had hoped for, because it did not address the pivotal question of equality before the law. The segregated school for black children continued to operate for a brief period as it had before the parents of Mary Frances Ward challenged the legality of segregated schools in San Francisco.

²¹San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, November 25, 1871.

In 1875, the San Francisco Board of Education finally voted to end segregated schools for black children, the result of a declining state economy and the pressure of prominent white San Franciscans such as John Dwinelle and J. F. Cowdery, a local white assemblyman.²² The Board of Education reached the conclusion that the segregated school was more expensive to operate on a per pupil basis than were the larger white institutions, and many white voters resented paying taxes to support it during a depression. By 1880, segregated school facilities for African Americans were outlawed throughout California.²³ The ruling of the California courts, however, did not apply uniformly to all children. Asian and Mexican children continued to attend segregated schools in California throughout the first half of the twentieth century and African American leaders never made an attempt to link their struggle for racial equality with those of other racial minorities.²⁴

²²Charles M. Wollenberg, *All Deliberate Speed: Segregation and Exclusion in California Schools, 1855-1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 10-25; Ward v. Flood 48 *California Reports* (1874), 42-46.

²³Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 18-19.

²⁴Charles Wollenberg, "Mendez vs. Westminster: Race, Nationality, and Segregation in California Schools," *California Historical Quarterly* 53 (Winter 1974): 317-332.

Black San Franciscans also waged a concerted struggle to ride public transportation and to use public accommodations on an equal basis with whites. The rights of African Americans to ride public transportation was a persistent complaint in the black press and it affected African Americans from all social classes. The San Francisco *Pacific Appeal* reported in 1863 that “two of our most respectable females were denied seats in one of the city railway cars” even though no white passenger objected to their presence. William Bowen, an African American, sued the San Francisco Omnibus Railway Company for \$10,000 for injuries that he received after he was removed by force from a city coach, and James Brown sued the same company after his wife and daughter were not permitted to ride the coach. Mary Ellen Pleasant, one of the most distinguished African American women in San Francisco, and a person who commanded the respect of many white San Franciscans, was also refused transportation on several occasions. Pleasant also sued the North Beach and Mission Railway Company and attempted to collect damages.²⁵

²⁵San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, May 24, 1862 and March 4, 1863; *Pleasant vs. North Beach and Mission Railway Company*, California State Archives, Sacramento.

This type of racial indignity was all too typical, as Charlotte L. Brown, an African American woman, discovered, for she sued the Omnibus Railroad Company for \$200 after she was ejected from a streetcar in June, 1863. Charlotte, the daughter of James Brown, a respected black businessman and a member of San Francisco's social elite, reported that a white conductor refused to take her ticket after she boarded a streetcar and insisted that "colored people were not allowed to ride." Miss Brown noted, however, that "she had been in the habit of riding ever since the cars had been running," and had never been asked to leave a car in the past. Apparently, the conductor was not persuaded, for he forcibly removed the young black woman from the coach. With the solid backing of the African American community, Charlotte Brown sued the company and collected damages. The Omnibus Railroad Company's unsuccessful appeal of the case temporarily established the right of African Americans to ride local transportation. By 1864 the Twelfth District Court had abolished segregation on San Francisco's streetcars.²⁶ Apparently, a ruling of the district court was not enough to prevent transportation companies from discriminating against African Americans, for Mary Ellen Pleasant sued the Omnibus Railroad Company and the North Beach and Mission Railway Company in 1866 for refusing to stop when she hailed one of their cars. Pleasant stated later that the driver, a white male, not only refused to stop, but told her "we don't take colored people in the cars."²⁷ Pleasant's suit against the

²⁶San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, July 4, 1863 and July 18, 1863; *Charlotte L. Brown vs. Omnibus Railway Company*, April 17, 1863, California Historical Society.

²⁷*Pleasant vs. North Beach and Mission Railway Company, June 20, 1867, California State Archives.*

transportation company is intriguing for several reasons, not the least of which is that these racial slights were consistently leveled against African American women. But the legal action that Pleasant brought against the company also illustrates vividly that many white San Franciscans still perceived African Americans as racially inferior and as second class citizens in spite of an earlier court ruling which outlawed segregated public transportation. Nor did Pleasant's status as an influential African American woman ameliorate her situation in the least. Her skin color, as well as the skin color of every African American in San Francisco, set her apart, and assigned her a badge of inferiority.

Mary Ellen Pleasant was an example of the diverse and energetic leadership in San Francisco's African American community during the 1850s and 1860s. Although overwhelmingly dominated by males, strong and politically active African American women also asserted themselves in a variety of manners. Black women, however, were more inclined, as was the custom of the day, to work in predominantly female organizations such as women's clubs, literary societies, and churches. The Ladies Union Beneficial Society of San Francisco and the Daughters and Sons of the Zion Benevolent Association, for example, were dominated by black women. African American women also contributed significantly to San Francisco's black churches. They organized numerous bazaars and fund raisers, volunteered their services at the segregated colored school, and filed numerous suits before California's courts to protest racial discrimination.²⁸ African American men, however, dominated the leadership circle in San

²⁸*The Ladies Union Beneficial Society of San Francisco, Constitution, By-Laws, and Act of Incorporation*. February, 1861, California Historical Society; San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*,

Francisco as they did in other cities, but this does not mean that black women were either passive or uninterested in reform, politics, or racial protest. Societal pressure and nineteenth century cultural norms dictated that they frequently worked in separate spheres from African American men, but each worked to achieve similar goals.

April 5, 1862.

The church was the most significant institution in San Francisco's black community to speak out against slavery as well as to challenge racial inequality in the larger community. The earliest black churches appeared in San Francisco in the 1850s, and African Americans in San Francisco, like their counterparts throughout the nation, wished to exercise greater autonomy and independence within their own institutions. By 1860, the black church had emerged as an integral part of the community's social, political, and cultural life. The black church's influence was utilized effectively as a political pressure group. Local as well as statewide meetings, conventions, and rallies were led and sponsored by black ministers. Petitions to redress racial injustices often originated within the doors of black churches. The early black state conventions met at black churches and African American ministers were active participants. The A.M.E. Church recommended at its third annual convention that it expected the "minister of today to be a progressive man, a reading man." The convention's minutes also indicated that black religious leaders shared a deep commitment to antislavery. The delegates, for example, unanimously passed resolutions which favored the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the "annihilation of the Fugitive Slave Trade."²⁹ The African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Zion, and Third Baptist Church, in particular, provided leadership, education, fund raising, and served as a forum to attack slavery and other

²⁹San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, April 19, 1862; May 8, 1862 and June 7, 1862; *Journal of Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention of the Ministers and Lay Delegates of the African Methodist Episcopal Church held in Bethel Church in San Francisco*, September 4-10, 1863, California Historical Society.

issues that were vital to the welfare of the community.³⁰

Black religious leaders were important figures in political and civic affairs, and they managed both roles with great skill and facility. The Revered John J. Moore, for example, served as San Francisco's first African American teacher and was a frequent contributor to black periodicals. He established San Francisco's first black literary magazine, the *Lunar Visitor*, in 1862. The magazine's slogan exemplified the multifaceted role of African American ministers, as it was devoted to the "spiritual, political, and literary elevation of African Americans."³¹

³⁰San Francisco *Daily Bulletin*, September 16, 1856; *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 30, 1851 and September 22, 1854.

³¹*Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 22, 1854; San Francisco *Lunar Visitor*, February, 1862.

The Reverend T.M.D. Ward, a nephew of the noted abolitionist Samuel Ringgold Ward, was also an imposing figure in San Francisco. Described by his peers as having a “pure black complexion” with a “commanding form and stalwart frame,” Ward, in the tradition of the activist clergy in San Francisco, served on the California Contraband Relief Association during the Civil War, was active in the early state black conventions, and was appointed Missionary Elder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Yet Ward’s most significant contribution was his service as pastor of St. Cyprians Church, an A.M. E. church located on Jackson Street between Stockton and Powell.³²

One of the most impressive black clergymen of this era was Jeremiah Burke Sanderson. A learned man who also possessed a deep commitment to political issues, Sanderson was involved in a host of issues pertaining to the betterment of African Americans in San Francisco. He was keenly involved in the early educational efforts of black San Franciscans, and was placed in charge of the colored school in 1859. By 1864 he served as principal. But Sanderson was just as concerned with the political welfare of African Americans, and he played a pivotal role in the early state black conventions, writing the proceedings of the 1855 meeting.³³

³²San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, April 19, 1862 and June 6, 1863; Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 160.

³³*The Mirror of the Times*, August 22, 1857; *Minutes of the Colored Citizens of the State of California, State Convention, 1855*, California Historical Society; Rudolph Lapp, “Jeremiah Burke Sanderson: Early California Negro,” *Journal of Negro History* 53 (October 1968): 321-323.

The first black Baptist denomination in San Francisco was known as the Third Baptist Church, and it organized in 1852, the same year that the first A.M.E. church was established in San Francisco. Located on Dupont Street (now Grant) near Union, Third Baptist attracted few converts until the late 1850s. By 1857, however, the Reverend Charles Satchell came from Cincinnati to lead the church, and his leadership increased the size of the church's membership dramatically within the space of a few years. Third Baptist was also vocal in its opposition to slavery. The church noted in its 1857 minutes that it enthusiastically supported the San Francisco Baptist Association's struggle against slavery. Reverend Satchell apparently used his church as a forum to speak out against slavery in San Francisco, as he had done in his previous ministries in Louisiana and Ohio.³⁴ From these humble beginnings, Third Baptist Church emerged as one of the leading voices for justice and equality in San Francisco's black community, a role that it would continue to play in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well.³⁵

³⁴Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 162.

³⁵*Third Baptist Church. More Than a Century of Witnessing Through Spiritual Involvement* (San Francisco, 1967), copy in California Historical Society.

One important and often overlooked institution which provided leadership in the African American community and served as a forum to debate important political issues was the literary society. Literary societies disseminated knowledge through libraries and reading rooms, debates, orations, and literary productions. These institutions, which existed in every major city with a substantial black population, were also organized in San Francisco by the earliest African American settlers. The most successful early society, which also attracted the attention of the famed black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, was the San Francisco Athenaeum and Literary Association. Organized in 1853, the Athenaeum opened a two-story building which housed an impressive library and reading rooms. The organization maintained a library of 800 volumes in addition to magazines and newspapers from around the world. Jonas H. Townsend, Peter Lester, and Jacob Francis, the society's first president, played a major role in the affairs of the Athenaeum. Within its first year of operation, the Athenaeum reported a membership of seventy, presumably all African Americans, and receipts of \$2,000, an impressive total for a small black community the size of San Francisco's in the early 1850s. The Athenaeum was probably the first black circulating library established in the far west.³⁶

The Athenaeum as well as several other literary societies established by black San Franciscans, did not exclude women or nonmembers from their reading rooms. Quite the contrary, African American women assumed commanding leadership roles in some of these organizations, such as the Elliott Literary Society, as they had done in east coast cities such as

³⁶*Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 22, 1854.

New York or Boston.³⁷ Members were required to pay a small fee for the upkeep of the building and to purchase books, newspapers, and magazines, but nonmembers were also encouraged to attend performances or literary productions. These organizations encouraged African Americans of all ages to read and to ponder important social and political issues. By subscribing to national antislavery newspapers such as *The Liberator*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, or the *New York Anglo-African*, San Francisco's black residents were able to keep abreast of political issues of national importance as well as news from their hometowns.³⁸ Reading antislavery newspapers also permitted black San Franciscans to measure their antislavery activities and their quest for political and civil rights against the achievements of blacks in other cities. This must have been especially gratifying to the relatively small black population in San Francisco during the 1850s and 1860s, a black community that never exceeded 1,000 residents.

³⁷Dorothy Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846," *Journal of Negro History* 5 (October 1936): 556-66.

³⁸Official Program of the Elliott Literary Society, n.d., Bancroft Library; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 104-106.

Although the African American church and literary societies played a major role in supporting racial equality, as well as calling attention to the hypocrisy and immorality of slavery and freedom coexisting in the United States, the black press served as the most consistent and uncompromising voice of protest in the African American community. In addition to informing African Americans and whites about a wide breadth of issues and concerns, the black press was an essential mode of self-expression and assertiveness. San Francisco's black newspapers, beginning with *The Mirror of the Times* in 1855, featured articles on slavery, colonization, moral reform, abolitionism, and virtually every topic of the day. The city's first black newspaper, *The Mirror of the Times*, was published by the California state executive committee, an elite body of black leaders who were elected to represent the black community at the 1855 Negro state convention. Jonas H. Townsend and William Newby served as co-editors of the paper.³⁹

³⁹Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 188, 251.

Townsend, like many of San Francisco's early African American leaders, had migrated from New York, and emerged as a dominant figure in the political early leadership of San Francisco's black community. Nor was he a novice to black journalism. Prior to his arrival in San Francisco, Townsend edited the *Hyperion*, a short-lived New York black newspaper. His articles also appeared in the New York *Anglo-African* and *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. Townsend also served as a member of the influential state Executive Committee.⁴⁰ William Newby, Townsend's co-editor, arrived in California in 1851, and is considered one of the earliest black settlers. Described as "pure black and self-educated," Newby was a vigorous proponent of black journalism. He was a regular subscriber to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, an indication of the connection that he and other black residents maintained with national leaders and national issues despite their distance from the East Coast. Serving as a California agent, Newby enlisted nearly fifty subscribers to *Douglass' Paper*. The 1855 Negro state convention adopted *The Mirror of the Times* as the "official organ of the Colored People of California," thus securing its temporary publication. Like the majority of African American newspapers during the antebellum era, however, *The Mirror of the Times* had considerable difficulty from the start. A limited circulation, insufficient support, and a tenuous capital base caused the paper to cease publication within two years.⁴¹

⁴⁰*The Mirror of the Times*, August 22, 1857; *New York Anglo-African*, March, 1859, September, 1859, and October, 1859. On the travails of antebellum black newspapers, consult Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 84-89.

⁴¹San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, April 19, 1862.

After an interregnum of nearly five years, the San Francisco *Pacific Appeal* emerged. Devoted to the “moral, intellectual, and political advancement of Afro-Americans,” the *Pacific Appeal*, was edited by two outstanding black journalists, Peter Anderson and Philip Alexander Bell. These men, both respected leaders in San Francisco’s black community, strove to make the *Pacific Appeal* a true reflection of the community and a voice in national politics.⁴² Anderson, a native of Philadelphia, had played a central role in the Negro state political convention, and he believed that politics would level the playing field for African Americans. Accordingly, much of the *Pacific Appeal*’s editorial page was directed toward gaining basic political and civil rights for African Americans.

⁴²*Pacific Appeal*, April 5, 1862.

Philip Alexander Bell would emerge as the most influential black journalist in San Francisco during the nineteenth century and as one of the most respected black journalists in the nation. A native of New York, who had migrated to San Francisco in 1860, Bell was a longtime advocate of antislavery, civil rights, and racial protest. He has served as an agent for William Lloyd Garrison's militant antislavery newspaper, *The Liberator*, as well as co-editor of the *Weekly Advocate*, which later became the *Colored American*, the second black newspaper established in the United States.⁴³ Bell was respected in antislavery circles as an uncompromising abolitionist editor, and even Frederick Douglass acknowledged the valuable contribution of Bell's fiery journalism in San Francisco.⁴⁴ Similarly, the black abolitionist leader Martin Delany noted that Philip Bell "is extensively known in the business community, none more so, and highly esteemed as a valuable citizen." An African American female, while less laudatory than Delany, was probably just as accurate in her description of Bell when she described him as "an old gentleman of good mind and cultivation, of rough exterior, impulsive, slightly given to boasting of his vigor at sixty, fond of wit and wine, not fond of women, unforgiving to his enemies, loving his friends, [and] somewhat imprudent as an editor."⁴⁵

⁴³Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

⁴⁴San Francisco *Elevator*, June 5, 1868.

⁴⁵San Francisco *Elevator*, July 3, 1868.

An experienced antislavery spokesperson and champion of black rights, Philip Bell pressed for full equality for African Americans through the pages of the *Pacific Appeal* and later, in the San Francisco *Elevator*, a weekly black newspaper that he established in 1865. Bell can best be described as a militant black editor. He was far more radical than Peter Anderson, his former co-editor at the *Pacific Appeal*, who had suggested in the wake of John Brown's raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry that free blacks should temporarily abandon the struggle against slavery, for the issue, at the moment, was "too heavy a load for us to carry at present."⁴⁶ Bell would have scoffed at such a suggestion in 1859 during the advanced stages of the sectional crisis, and he remained a militant champion of antislavery and racial equality throughout his life. He demanded emphatically that blacks share the "full rights, privileges, and immunities of citizens."⁴⁷ And even though Bell acknowledged that racial prejudice was pervasive against African Americans in San Francisco, he was equally confident that blacks would eventually eradicate these discriminatory barriers and that they could earn a decent livelihood and maintain their dignity if they remained in San Francisco.

⁴⁶Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 266; *New York Weekly Anglo-African*, November 26, 1859.

⁴⁷San Francisco *Elevator*, May 19, 1865.

Black activists made no secret of their disdain for slavery or their contempt for slaveholders in California. Peter Lester, a Philadelphian, invited black slaves into his San Francisco home to lecture them on their rights. “When they left,” he boasted, “we had them strong in the spirit of freedom. They were leaving [slavery] every day.”⁴⁸ On a number of occasions the African American community raised money in order to hire attorneys and to mount legal challenges to assist individual slaves. Such was the case in 1851 when the black community hired attorney Samuel W. Holladay to defend a slave named Frank, who was incarcerated prior to his return to Missouri. Nor were east bay blacks passive or uninterested in their brethren in slavery, for in 1859 Oakland abolitionists, posed a direct challenge to the institution of slavery in California when they rescued Hannah and Pete, two Berkeley slaves.⁴⁹

Yet neither the African American community nor white abolitionists could rely on the California courts to always render a favorable verdict in the case of fugitive slaves. In 1852 the California State Supreme Court, in a clear victory for slaveholders, ruled that no law could impair the rights to slave property guaranteed by the federal constitution, for this would violate the rights of the slave states. This ruling, which became known as the Perkins Case, had the result of returning three slaves to Mississippi.⁵⁰ These three men were not the exception. During

⁴⁸Quoted in Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 78; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, December 5, 1850.

⁴⁹Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 78-79.

⁵⁰Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 146.

the three years that the California Fugitive Slave Law was in effect (1852-55), many black men and women were returned to slavery from California.

The most dramatic fugitive slave case in California involved an eighteen year old slave from Mississippi named Archy Lee. Lee had come to California in 1857 with his owner, Charles Stovall, who settled in Sacramento and hired out Lee in order to earn a wage. Stovall taught school for several months, but as time passed he grew increasingly concerned about Lee's loyalty and the effect that residing in California, a free state, might be having on his bondsman. When Stovall attempted to locate Archy and send him back to Mississippi, he found, to his dismay, that his slave had disappeared. Lee had initially hid in the Hotel Hackett, a business owned by free blacks in Sacramento, which had, next to San Francisco, one of the most politically active black communities in the state. Stovall, however, eventually had Lee arrested and brought to trial.

Despite the previous support of the California Fugitive Slave Law, which had expired in April 1855, a number of white antislavery supporters came forward to defend Lee and attempted to prevent his return to Mississippi. Attorneys Edwin Bryant Crocker, a former abolitionist from Indiana and the brother of Charles Crocker, who founded the Southern Pacific Railroad, and John H. McKune represented Lee in a Sacramento County court. Additionally, the noted antislavery attorney Joseph W. Winans, and numerous African Americans supported Lee. When Lee's case came before Judge Robert Robinson's court, the judge ruled that the black slave was a free man. But Lee's freedom was short-lived, for Stovall's attorneys had Lee arrested immediately and brought before a new judge in the hope of receiving a more sympathetic verdict. The state supreme court agreed that Archy Lee should return to slavery, much to the horror of his

supporters.⁵¹

Neither black San Franciscans nor white abolitionists, however, had any intention of allowing Lee to return to Mississippi. Blacks and whites mobilized their resources. Blacks from every social and economic class contributed funds in earnest to support Lee's defense. The well-known Republican attorney, Edward O. Baker, the product of Quaker parents and one of the great orators of the day, headed Lee's defense. When Stovall attempted to sail back to Mississippi with his bondsman, Lee, in a daring rescue, was taken from aboard a ship in the middle of San Francisco Bay, where he was arrested and protected. Stovall, his owner, was served with a writ for holding a slave illegally in California. Archy Lee's capture set the stage for a legal showdown in San Francisco.

⁵¹Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 148-54.

In a brilliant defense, Colonel Edward D. Baker argued that the state supreme court had made a mockery of the constitution and pleaded, before a United States Commissioner, that Archy Lee be set free. Baker argued that Archy was not a fugitive across state lines, clearly in violation of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, but rather someone who had sought his freedom within the geographical confines of California. The federal commissioner agreed and declared Archy Lee a free man.⁵²

After the arrival of the slave Archy Lee in 1858, there is no record of other slaves brought into San Francisco. Despite the Compromise of 1850, a provision of which called for tougher federal enforcement of fugitive slave laws, as well as the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in the 1857 Dred Scott decision, which overturned the Missouri Compromise and allowed slaveholders to take their human chattel into any federal territory, southerners apparently thought better of risking their property in a region with strong abolitionist sentiment.⁵³ Perhaps this is what motivated a German migrant to write that "the wealthy California Negroes exhibit a great deal of energy and intelligence in saving their brethren."⁵⁴

⁵²Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 152.

⁵³Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

⁵⁴Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 78.

The quest for racial equality and antislavery in San Francisco was aided by a small but influential group of white residents who felt an abhorrence to the very idea of slavery in California, but were troubled equally by the disparity in treatment between whites and African Americans. True, many white abolitionists, as historians Benjamin Quarles and Leon Litwack have argued, did not fight for the rights of free blacks and, in some instances, were openly hostile to the concept of racial equality. And while this idea may seem strange to us today, the mid-nineteenth century was a radically different world, and rarely did the two races occupy an equal footing or interact as equals. Small wonder that a society of white abolitionists in Philadelphia devoted five sessions debating whether they should admit African Americans as members of their society. They decided to admit African Americans by a margin of one vote.⁵⁵

⁵⁵Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 218.

Yet a small coterie of white San Franciscans, which included the Reverend Thomas Starr King, Bret Harte, Edwin Bryan Crocker, the brother of Charles Crocker, the merchants Mark Hopkins and Caleb Fry, Edward D. Baker, and Jessie Fremont, among others, were openly hostile to slavery and secession. These individuals congregated intermittently at the San Francisco home of Jessie Fremont, known as Porter's Lodge. The Fremont's home, a small cottage, was located in a section of San Francisco known as Black Point, which is currently known as Fort Mason. After some clever remodeling, including the installation of a glass veranda and enlarging the parlor, Jessie Fremont, according to one writer, established "San Francisco's first literary and political salon."⁵⁶ A sophisticated, well read, and opinionated woman on virtually any subject, Jessie Fremont had developed a disdain for slavery. It is probable that her marriage to John C. Fremont, a prominent member of the Republican party and the Republican party candidate for president in 1856, played some role in her aversion to slavery in California. However, Jessie Fremont, like many American women, whose views have been of little interest to historians until recently, hardly needed the approval of a man, including her husband, to develop her own opinion of slavery or racial injustice. This sentiment and her desire to be part of a larger literary circle motivated Jessie Fremont to invite Thomas Starr King to her home at Black Point.

King, a transplanted New Yorker, migrated to San Francisco in 1859, and served as pastor of the Unitarian Church in San Francisco. Because of his liberal views and the power and uncompromising tenor of his oratory, King immediately became a highly respected figure in San Francisco's African American community. He was fervently antislavery, a fact that he made no

⁵⁶Lois Rather, *Jessie Fremont at Black Point* (Oakland: The Rather Press, 1974), 33.

attempt to disguise. In one instance, writes Delilah Beasley, the pioneering historian of blacks in California, reverend King traveled to a ranch near Napa, California and emancipated a number of slaves.⁵⁷ King also participated in several important activities in San Francisco's black community, a clear sign that he supported the struggle of free blacks for full equality as well. Shortly after he arrived in San Francisco, King spoke at the twenty-second anniversary of the British West Indies Emancipation Act before a large black audience at Pacific Gardens. "The almighty had a great mission for this nation. Here the church was to proclaim the equality of the races," stated King before an appreciative black audience.⁵⁸

⁵⁷Beasley, *The Negro Trail Blazers of California*, 91.

⁵⁸Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 257-58; *Daily Evening Bulletin*, August 1 and 2, 1860.

These were bold words for a white minister of any denomination to speak in 1860, but they were even more significant coming during the advanced stages of the sectional crisis that had split the North and the South into two warring camps over the issue of slavery. Yet King had taken the moral high ground in his 1860 speech by not only denouncing slavery and embracing racial equality, which was unusual even in antislavery circles, but by also noting that the British had abolished slavery in their colonies as a matter of principle. This point must have been particularly difficult for the sizable number of white southerners in San Francisco to swallow, some of whom were former slaveholders. The Reverend Thomas Starr King's views on antislavery, however, must have been especially gratifying for Jessie Benton Fremont to hear, for she shared many of King's views on the abolition of slavery herself. Regrettably, King did not live to see the end of slavery in the United States, for he died in 1864 of pneumonia and diphtheria at the age of thirty-nine. King's life, nevertheless, represents an important and persistent thread in San Francisco's history: the intolerance to the institution of slavery in California by an influential cadre of white activists.⁵⁹

⁵⁹Kevin Starr, *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 100-105.

Jessie Benton Fremont's influence on slavery was nearly as brief as King's, for she and her husband moved back east in 1861. That this "remarkable woman," as the Reverend Thomas Starr King had referred to her, played an important role in providing her Black Point home as a forum for antislavery activity, there can be no doubt. Like the famous Grimke sisters from South Carolina, the privileged daughters of a prominent white slaveholder and planter, who assaulted slavery directly and did not shy away from controversy, Jessie Fremont also left her mark.⁶⁰

Although not associated directly with Jessie Fremont's literary and political salon, Senator David C. Broderick also played an important role in this struggle. An Irish Catholic New Yorker from a humble background, Broderick rose rapidly through California politics. By 1857, he was elected to the United States Senate. And although a Democrat, Broderick had openly attacked the proslavery position of the Buchanan administration, such as favoring the admission of Kansas to the union as a slave state. Broderick spoke out boldly against slavery as well as any other matter that could advance his political career, much to the chagrin of David S. Terry, a proslavery State Supreme Court judge and a "fiery Southerner," who challenged Broderick to a duel in 1859 for his anti-Southern remarks and for referring to Terry as dishonest. Although dueling was illegal in California, Broderick, who had no experience in this area, accepted Terry's challenge. Terry mortally wounded Broderick, who is alleged to have stated in his final moments, that "they killed me because I was opposed to a corrupt administration and the extension of slavery." Baker died three days later in the Black Point home of his close friend Leonidas

⁶⁰Gerda Lerner, *The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Woman's Rights and Abolition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

Haskell.⁶¹

⁶¹Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, 122; John B. McGloin, *San Francisco: The Story of a City* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978), 77-82.

The connection between Black Point and David Broderick was no coincidence, for Baker, too, had undoubtedly come under the influence of the small group of San Franciscans who opposed slavery and gathered periodically in the Black Point area.. Nor was the fact that Broderick's eulogy was given by Senator Edward D. Baker of Oregon, a close friend and one of the leading orators of his era. Although born in London, Baker came to the United States at the age of four and grew up in Philadelphia, Indiana, and Illinois. By 1852 Baker moved to California, just two years after it received statehood, where he practiced law and gained a reputation as an outstanding orator. The politically ambitious man concluded that Oregon, however, would provide a more fruitful locale in order to launch a political career, and he moved there in 1859 and was elected to the United States Senate. Baker served as President Lincoln's advisor for Pacific Coast affairs during the Civil War, and was killed in October, 1861 while leading a volunteer regiment of Californians, Oregonians, and Pennsylvanians. Appropriately, the Reverend Thomas Starr King preached his eulogy.⁶²

The Civil War was a watershed in American history, for not only was the future of the Union at stake, but slavery, an institution that had existed for nearly two and a half centuries, also hung in the balance. Although California played a minor role in the conflict, in large measure because of its physical isolation, approximately five hundred volunteers served with the Second Massachusetts Cavalry, and others performed patrol duty or manned garrisons at home. But the war, more importantly writes Kevin Starr, "forced Californians, after a decade and a half of isolation and ambiguous relationship, to assert their loyalty to the Union, despite the thousands of

⁶²Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, 122-23.

miles between itself and the Atlantic states.”⁶³

⁶³Starr, *Americans and the California Dream*, p. 122.

Black San Franciscans were cautiously optimistic that the war would not only eradicate slavery, but also eliminate a number of racial barriers that African Americans throughout the Bay Area had been forced to confront since their arrival. That not all African Americans had been uniformly optimistic about an immediate improvement in race relations was evident by the migration of several hundred blacks to Victoria, British Columbia in 1858. Mifflin Gibbs, a successful black businessman and community activist and one of the migrants, noted that “300 or 400 colored men from California and other states settled in Victoria, drawn thither by the two-fold inducement of gold discovery and the assurance of enjoying impartially the benefits of constitutional liberty.” Indeed, the economic and political status of these settlers improved significantly, as they “built or bought homes and other property,” Gibbs observed, “and were the recipients of respect and esteem from the community.”⁶⁴ Peter Lester, an African American bootmaker, corroborated Gibbs’s favorable portrait of life in Victoria. “I have never seen so large a number of people the bona fide owners of so much property.” African Americans also reaped some important political gains in Victoria that they had been unable to achieve, despite constant struggle, in San Francisco. Several African Americans, for example, were elected to the city council, and blacks also served in the first volunteer military organization on Vancouver Island.⁶⁵ African Americans would not be elected to local offices in San Francisco, despite its avowed

⁶⁴Gibbs, *Shadow and Light*, pp. 59-63.

⁶⁵Peter Lester to William Still, November 8, 1860, New York *Anglo-African*, January 5, 1861; James W. Pilton, “Negro Settlement in British Columbia,” M.A. thesis, University of British Columbia, 1951.

liberalism, for more than one century after the migration to Victoria.

African Americans in San Francisco also illustrated passive support for emigration as a means to call attention to their plight through petitions and public meetings. In one instance, a group of over 200 black Californians, which included some prominent San Franciscans, petitioned the United States Congress to colonize them in some other country where their race and color would not be a factor. Similarly, the editor of the San Francisco *Pacific Appeal* wrote as the Civil War was concluding that he was “in favor of every movement calculated to promote the emigration of our people to those countries where color is not considered a badge of degradation.”⁶⁶ And although emigrationist sentiment grew in San Francisco as well as in other cities during the 1850s and early 1860s, most African Americans leaders rejected it as impractical, and agreed with the position of the San Francisco *Elevator*: “The races will have to live together on this continent and all parties might just well make up their minds to it now as at any other time. This idea of colonizing, separating is *obsolete-dead-and* can never be resuscitated.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶U.S. Congress. 37th Congress, 2d Session, 1861-1862. *House Miscellaneous Document No. 31*; San Francisco *Pacific Appeal*, August 23, August 30, 1862, September 20, 1862.

⁶⁷San Francisco *Elevator*, April 7, 1865.

Despite the opinion of one historian that black Californians did not show the same vigor in fighting slavery as their counterparts in other regions of the country, African Americans in San Francisco, as well as their white allies, attacked slavery and racial inequality consistently between 1850 and 1865. Men and women alike boldly asserted their positions that slavery was morally corrupt and was tearing the nation apart. Through their petitions, political conventions, newspapers, churches, literary societies, public orations, and women's clubs, African Americans in the bay cities, with much smaller numbers, fought as tenacious a battle against slavery and racial discrimination as their counterparts in cities such as New York or Philadelphia. Similarly, African Americans kept connected to the national abolitionist movement by serving as correspondents to such papers as the *North Star*, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and the *Weekly Anglo-African*. These black newspapers permitted local black residents to keep abreast of national issues that were pertinent to the antislavery struggle. They also served to connect black San Franciscans to a movement for racial equality that was much larger than their own local struggle. Although San Francisco could never boast that it had a strong abolitionist movement within its environ, a small, but committed group of whites also opposed slavery. Jessie Benton Fremont used her Black Point home in Fort Mason as a literary and political forum to discuss slavery and a variety of important political issues. It was here that Thomas Starr King and Bret Harte circulated freely, both committed to the preservation of the Union and the destruction of slavery. Similarly, the young democratic Senator David C. Broderick, who died at the hands of David Terry, was widely respected for his antislavery views as well as his support of free labor. It came as no surprise, therefore, that a number of African Americans in San Francisco attended Broderick's funeral to pay their respects for his contribution to their

struggle.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*, 263.

Despite a persistent pattern of segregation and racial discrimination throughout the 1850s and 1860s, black San Franciscans remained optimistic that their status would improve in time and that every vestige of racial caste would eventually be stripped away layer by layer. They had every reason to be optimistic. Blacks and whites together had achieved a remarkable degree of progress in a relatively short time, although African Americans remained in the vanguard of the struggle for racial equality in San Francisco. By the close of the decade of the 1860s San Franciscans had shown the nation and the world that they detested the institution of slavery and that slaveowners would be wise to reconsider bring their human chattel into the bay cities. Similarly, blacks and whites had waged a relatively successful struggle against racial discrimination in public transportation, public accommodations, and the right to testify against whites in a court of law. These victories, however, were tempered with the harsh and ugly reality that San Francisco, like the majority of American cities during the nineteenth century, was still not willing to grant African Americans full equality. The black San Franciscan was certainly considered a man in the eyes of local whites, but he was hardly considered a brother.⁶⁹ Thus it took more than a decade before African Americans could vote and attend integrated schools in San Francisco, and considerably longer before they were permitted to join trade unions and work in occupations free of racial restrictions. Yet neither African Americans nor whites forgot that conditions had been much worse when the first black migrants arrived during the gold rush era of the 1850s. African American leaders trusted the next generation to continue the struggle to bring

⁶⁹George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).

about full equality and to mold San Francisco into a racially progressive city.⁷⁰

⁷⁰For an overview of the black struggle for racial equality in San Francisco during the twentieth century, see Albert S. Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence, KS:University Press of Kansas, 1993).