

Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation's Capital

By Chris Myers Asch and George Derek Musgrove

Reading and Discussion Guide

Developed for use at the Foundry United Methodist Church and the Edlavitch DCJCC by Will Ed Green, Sonya Weisburd, and Chad Kinsman



CHAPTERS 3-4

Additional Resources: [Chocolate City Interactive Map](#)

Chapter 3: Our Boastings of Liberty and Equality Are Mere Mockeries: Confronting Contradictions in the Nation's Capital, 1815-1836

Chapter Overview: This chapter details the juxtaposed stories of political, social, and religious oppression that black Washingtonians faced, as well as the ways they organized against that oppression and claimed space for themselves and their families to thrive.

Comprehend

- What were the incentives to protecting and promoting the domestic slave trade in the District? What benefits did local white residents otherwise committed to abolition, such as Francis Scott Key, receive from protecting the slave trade or promoting gradual emancipation or colonization?
- The “Snow Storm” riot of 1835 revealed deep, racialized economic divides in the District that were often encouraged by pro-slavery leaders. What might some of the benefits have been to promoting racial hatred between the “mechanics” and the freed and enslaved blacks?
- The authors highlight growing tensions around class, race, and political autonomy in the region and the nation at large, such as Thomas Carbery’s defeat in the mayoral elections of 1824 and 1826. What connections do you notice between economic and racial oppression in this chapter? How were they mutually reinforcing?

Respond

- In what ways did the colonization movement, which the authors note was a uniquely Washingtonian response to slavery, function to preserve white dignity, erase black experience, and/or reinforce racist thoughts and attitudes toward free and enslaved black persons? What modern-day policies or movements can you think of that do the same?
- This period was marked by the growth of black-led congregations and mutual aid societies, leading to greater autonomy, access to education, and self-reliance. White leaders responded with increasingly sharp attacks about the nature and character of black persons and laws which restricted their access, movement, and socio-economic mobility. In what ways does this pattern of white reaction to the social and economic success of black persons continue today, either consciously or unconsciously? What do you think is at the source of this reaction, and how can we combat and prevent this response?

Reflect

- How do the ways we tell stories or reflect on ourselves or our city/cities erase the struggle and strength of others? In what ways might we more equitably tell our stories, and the story of our city, to fully reflect the diverse realities it embodies?

Key Terms, Names, and Definitions

Chapter 3: Our Boastings of Liberty and Equality Are Mere Mockeries: Confronting Contradictions in the Nation's Capital, 1815-1836

Franklin & Armfield: Originally located in D.C. (prior to the retrocession of Alexandria in 1846), Franklin and Armfield was the nation's largest and most profitable slave trading firm in the 1820s and 1830s. Originally taking up an entire block, Franklin and Armfield's operation sold over 1,000 enslaved persons annually.

Colonization movement: A political movement of the early 1800s, led by the American Colonization Society, predicated on the idea that white and black persons could not live equitably or peacefully together and that freed black persons should be "returned" to the African continent. Colonization attempted to leverage public (Congressional) and private support to 'repatriate' freed black persons to the African continent and founded the colony (later country) of Liberia to receive them. Early proponents included Presidents Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, Francis Scott Key, Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington (nephew of President George Washington) and many other elected officials. Very few freed blacks wanted to move to the African continent and only a small number of people moved – some under duress. The failure of the colonization movement spawned and energized the abolitionist movement.

American Colonization Society: The American Colonization Society (ACS), founded by Presbyterian minister Robert Finley in 1816, led the charge to encourage the emigration of freed black Americans and emancipated enslaved persons to the West Coast of Africa. The ACS argued that black and white Americans could not live side-by-side and relied upon a variety of arguments (including the moral and physical inferiority of black persons) to justify "unburdening" the United States of its "slavery problem". Although the ACS reached the zenith of its power in the era immediately after the American Civil War, it did not close its doors until 1964.

Abolitionism: A movement, emerging first in Britain, to end slavery. Abolitionism was not monolithic, and various schools of thought and movements (some directly opposed to the other) emerged over the early decades of the 1800s.

Immediate abolition: Branch of the American anti-slavery movement that favored immediate abolition of slavery and the full investiture of rights for formerly enslaved persons. Supported by William Lloyd Garrison and others.

Gradual emancipation: Branch of the American anti-slavery movement that favored the gradual relaxing of laws governing slavery and the slow investiture of rights and freedoms to those who were enslaved. Gradual emancipationists generally favored colonization and included Francis Scott Key, Benjamin Lundy, and others.

Ann Williams: Born into slavery in Bladensburg, MD, Ann Williams achieved notoriety when she leapt from the third-floor slave pens of George Miller's Tavern in D.C. in an attempt to flee being sold into southern slavery. Williams sued for and won her freedom 13 years later.

A Portraiture of American Slavery (Jesse Torrey): An 1817 anti-slavery tract - featuring the story of Ann Williams - which directly called for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in Washington, D.C.

Representative John Randolph: A congressional representative from Virginia, Randolph was both a slave owner and public defender of the institution of slavery who nonetheless fought to end the slave trade in Washington, D.C. Randolph, who later participated in the colonization movement, chaired a congressional committee which studied D.C.'s slave trade.

Emigration: Voluntary, black-driven migration to Haiti that was promoted as an alternative to colonization by black leaders. More than 8,000 black people chose emigration to Haiti in the 1820s.

Liberia: Now a country in Western Africa, Liberia was originally established as a colony by the American Colonization Society, to re-settle ("repatriate") free black and former enslaved persons. Colonization efforts received the financial support of the U.S. Congress and private donors. Liberia declared independence on July 26, 1847, which the U.S. did not recognize until February 5, 1862. On January 3, 1848, Joseph Jenkins Roberts, a wealthy, free-born African American from the U.S. state of Virginia who settled in Liberia, was elected Liberia's first president after the people proclaimed independence. Liberia was the first African republic to proclaim its independence.

Beverly Snow: A chef and formerly enslaved person who immigrated to Washington, D.C. following his manumission in 1829 and opened the Epicurean Eating House, a well-known D.C. restaurant in the 1820s and 1830s.

Lynch Wormley: Black entrepreneur and livery owner whose family became one of the city's most renowned free black families in Washington, D.C.

The Meeting House/The Little Ark/Mt. Zion United Methodist Church: The Meeting House was formed by 130 black members of Montgomery Street Church (now Dumbarton United Methodist Church) in 1813 and became D.C.'s first black church. In 1844, the congregation changed its name to Mt. Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, and further split in 1849 because of the Methodist Episcopal Church's refusal to ordain or appoint black clergy.

Resolute Beneficial Society: A black-led mutual aid society, founded in 1818, that helped community members deal with financial distress, medical emergencies, burials, and even a school for free black children.

Mulatto: mixed race; Many free black Washingtonians had white ancestry and identified (and were classified in the census) as mulatto. With closer connections to the white community, many mixed-race residents had greater access to education and employment than their darker-skinned peers, and they often enjoyed higher status.

James Barbour: white Secretary of War under President John Quincy Adams, Barbour believed that free people of color "are ignorant, insolent and, and demoralized" and earned their keep only "from prostitution, from theft, and from begging." Getting rid of them, he said in 1824, was "an object of our first desire."

1820 “Freed Man” Law: A law passed by the D.C. City Council in 1820 that gave “all free persons of colour, whether negroes or mulattoes,” thirty days to appear before the mayor with “the papers of freedom or evidence of freedom,” along with a certificate from three “respectable white inhabitants” who could attest that they “live peaceable and quite lives” and are “industrious and honest” souls unlikely to become wards of the city. If the mayor accepted this evidence, the free black applicant had to post a \$20 bond promising “good, sober, and orderly conduct.” Failure to abide by the provisions could lead to a \$5 fine, imprisonment, and forced departure from the city.

William Costin: Born sometime in 1780, William Custis Costin was the son of Ann Dandridge, a woman of mixed Indigenous, Black, and white ancestry, Costin was allegedly both the nephew and grandson of Martha Washington. Costin worked as a messenger for the Bank of Washington and served as a president of the Resolute Beneficial Society. Costin refused to obey the D.C. Council’s 1820 “Freed Man” law and, when he was arrested, argued the law violated the City Charter and Constitution. The ensuing “Costin vs. Washington” ruling resulted in an admission that the “Freed Man” law could not retroactively be applied to black D.C. residents and therefore did not apply.

Costin v. Washington: an 1821 ruling by Judge William Crance that ruled D.C.’s 1820 “Freed Man” laws “must be construed prospectively, and not retrospectively,” and therefore did not apply to residents of D.C. who currently lived in the city. In his ruling, Cranch also stipulated that the city had the power to deny “to some of its citizens some of the political rights enjoyed by others,” as well as to require “security from good behavior from free persons of color, as well as from vagrants, and persons of ill-fame.”

Thomas Carbery: Elected Mayor of Washington, D.C. in 1822 following Congressional changes to the D.C. Charter allowing for a popularly elected Mayor, Carbery was a local white businessman and entrepreneur who championed voting rights for poor and un-propertied white men. His election resulted in a near-riot, with his opponents passing a “hundred-dollar law” that limited voting rights to white men assessed as having \$100 or more in property.

The Washington Canal: The Washington City Canal operated from 1815 until the mid-1850s in Washington, D.C. The canal connected the Anacostia River, termed the “Eastern Branch” at that time, to Tiber Creek, the Potomac River, and later the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal (C&O). The canal became disused during the late 1800s and the city government filled in various sections in 1871. Built in 1837, the canal’s Lockkeeper’s House remains — at what is now the southwest corner of 17th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW, near Constitution Gardens — as the oldest building on the National Mall.

White Manhood Suffrage: a movement to grant voting rights to poor and unpropertied white men.

Retrocession: The movement, begun in response to stagnating economies in Georgetown and Alexandria, to retrocede--or return--portions of D.C. ceded by Virginia and Maryland back to their original states.

Columbian Institute (later Union Seminary): A school, originally built by Henry Smothers and later administered by John W. Prout and John F. Cook, that educated young black Washingtonians. Under Cook's administration, the Columbian Institute became Union Seminary.

John F. Cook (1810-1855): John Francis Cook, Sr. was the nephew of Aletheia Browning Turner, student-turned-leader of Union Seminary (formerly the Columbian Institute) and founder of First Colored Presbyterian Church (later Fifteenth Street Baptist Church). A passionate activist and community leader, Cook founded multiple organizations to oppose the Colonization movement and provide education to black District residents.

Cook was forced to flee D.C. during the 1835 "Snow Storm" Riot when Union Seminary was attacked and destroyed by white rioters. Cook later returned to the city and re-opened the school.

Young Man's Moral and Literary Society: Debating society for young black men, founded by John F. Cook, that encouraged the free exchange of ideas and beliefs in D.C.'s black community. Anthony Bowen, who was later at the center of the 1835 "Snow Storm" Riot, was a member of the society.

1827 Black Code: A revision of earlier black codes which imposed higher fines for breaking curfew, required all black men above age fifteen and black women above thirteen to show evidence of freedom, and prohibited anyone from employing or harboring a black person who could not produce freedom papers. Those caught without papers would be assumed a runaway and could be jailed or sold into slavery.

Benevolent Society of Alexandria: one of many local abolitionist organizations that supported anti-slavery activity and funded or supported slaves suing for their freedom.

Society for the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia: one of many local abolitionist organizations that was founded in 1827.

Nat Turner's Rebellion: (also known as the Southampton Insurrection) was a rebellion of enslaved Virginians led by Nat Turner that took place in Southampton County, Virginia, in August 1831. The rebellion, coupled with a massive slave rebellion in Jamaica, triggered white fears and led to strengthened black codes, de-integration of churches, and further polarized a split abolitionist movement.

Anthony Bowen: a black man under the ownership of Anna Thornton, who was educated at Union Seminary (formerly the Columbian Institute) and was a member of John F. Cook's "Young Man's Moral and Literary Society." Following a night of debate and drinking, Bowen returned to Thornton's where he was accused of waking her with insisting that slavery was morally reprehensible. After being taken into custody, Bowen was prosecuted by Francis Scott Key and sentenced to death. Following Anna Thornton's appeal to President Andrew Jackson, Bowen's sentence was commuted and he was sold to a friend of the President who removed him from the city.

The 1835 “Snow Storm” Riot: A riot and lynch mob of white “mechanics”, or low-income workers, that ransacked the Epicurean Eating House, destroyed Union Seminary (formerly the Columbian Institute), and lasted for several days before President Andrew Jackson intervened and quelled the riots.

1836 Black Code: Required black people to put up a bond of \$1,000 (signed by five white residents) guaranteeing they would not become a ward of the city, prohibited them from holding meetings after 10 p.m., and barred them from getting licenses for any trade except driving carts and carriages.

Pinckney Resolutions: A series of Congressional “gag orders,” passed in response to growing pro-slavery fears over the debate about slavery in D.C., insisting that Congress “ought not to interfere in any way with slavery in the District of Columbia,” and resolving not to take action on “all petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers, relating in any way, or to any extent whatever, to the subject of slavery, or the abolition of slavery.”

Isaac N. Cary: A free black barber and friend of Beverly Snow, who refused to abide by the 1836 black code. Cary was fined \$50 after his license to sell perfume was rejected by the Mayor but he continued to do so. Cary later sued the city and, in *Cary v. Washington* (1836), Judge William Cranch struck down the licensure requirement in the code.

Chapter 4: Slavery Must Die: The Turbulent End to Human Bondage in Washington, 1836-1862.

Chapter Overview: This chapter explores the opposing powers of pro and anti-slavery organizers in the years immediately before and during the Civil War, with particular attention to the socioeconomic and political forces which supported their efforts culminating in first the emancipation of enslaved persons in the District, and then by the abolition of slavery in D.C. altogether.

Comprehend

- What were the implications of the District's growing reliance on the federal government and federal projects for economic growth? How did this set the stage for the fight for District and national emancipation and black rights?
- How did increasing bi-racial partnerships in the effort to end slavery and secure rights for black residents help the cause for racial justice? How did it complicate it?

Respond

- The question of retrocession was at the forefront of District political dialogue during this time. In what ways does retrocession reflect continued attitudes, policies, and popular response to the work for racial justice and black rights in our community and nation today?
- Because of the complex relationship between Congressional and District lawmakers and the complete lack of District self-determination, debates about local policies and politics were often mirrored in or impacted by national debates about race and slavery. How does a continued lack of autonomy and self-determination impact the work of racial justice and equity in the District today?

Reflect

- We've seen so far that compromise for the sake of "national unity", like the Compromise of 1850, is often made to the detriment of the most marginalized and oppressed populations. Are there situations in which you think such compromise is necessary? If so, why and under what circumstances? Are there historical examples? Can such compromises be made without abandoning moral or ethical commitments?

Key Terms, Names, and Definitions

Chapter 4: Slavery Must Die: The Turbulent End to Human Bondage in Washington, 1836-1862.

The Blue Jug (D.C. Jail): D.C.'s city jail, derisively known as the Blue Jug for the light-blue color of its plaster walls, was used to hold fugitive (and suspectedly fugitive) enslaved people. Free persons who weren't able to prove their freedom under D.C.'s black code were often jailed and, if they couldn't produce papers or their owner did not come to get them, were sold to pay their jail fees.

Swampoodle: A former neighborhood along Tiber Creek (north of today's Union Station) that was a stronghold for the city's "mechanics" (Irish and Irish-American workers).

Murder Bay: D.C.'s former red-light district (now Federal Triangle). Center for extensive criminal activity and prostitution through much of the 19th century.

(House of Representatives) Gag Rule: A rule adopted to prevent or limit discussion on a particular topic. A gag rule adopted at the beginning of congressional sessions in 1837, 1839, 1841, and 1843 automatically tabled any petition or discussion related to slavery or its abolition in Washington, D.C. This came in response to the over 130,000 petitions and requests to end slavery in the District and other federally-controlled territories that were received in the late 1830s.

Thomas Smallwood: A formerly enslaved resident of Prince George's County, Smallwood was an anti-slavery activist who worked closely with white abolitionist Charles Torrey as part of D.C.'s growing bi-racial abolitionist movement. Together, with the support of Smallwood's wife Elizabeth and others, they planned and implemented secret escapes for enslaved persons using a clandestine network of safe houses.

Charles T. Torrey: A white abolitionist from New England who worked closely with Thomas Smallwood in D.C.'s abolitionist movement. Both Smallwood and Torrey preferred more direct and confrontational action than gradual emancipation or working with wealthy white funders to purchase individual enslaved peoples' freedom. Torrey was eventually arrested for abetting fugitive enslaved persons and died in prison in 1846.

The Underground Railroad: Originally coined by U.S. Representative Joshua Giddings of Ohio, the underground railroad was not a national network of coordinated abolitionists, but a collection of local networks and small cells of white and black abolitionists working to help enslaved persons reach freedom.

Joshua Giddings: A U.S. Representative from Ohio and prominent opponent of slavery. Giddings worked both publicly and privately for emancipation. Giddings was censured in 1842 for breaking the Congressional gag rule related to emancipation and abolition, resigned his seat, and was almost immediately re-elected.

Leonard Grimes: A local hack driver and free black resident of the District who served as a regional "conductor" on the underground railroad. He was arrested for his activity and served two years in prison.

Retrocession of Alexandria: Approved in 1846, local advocates successfully leveraged the growing fear of black power and anti-slavery organizing to approve the return of Alexandria to the State of Virginia. The decision decimated Alexandria's growing black population, which declined by almost 30 percent by 1850.

Daniel Bell: A free black carpenter who, in response to legal action by his former mistress to reclaim his family, participated in planning the nation's largest attempted escape of enslaved individuals on the ship "The Pearl".

William Chaplain: A local white abolitionist and lawyer who, along with Daniel Bell, arranged financing and support for Bell's planned escape on "The Pearl".

Daniel Drayton: A Philadelphia ship captain who sailed "The Pearl." He planned to unload his cargo in D.C., load the ship with fugitive enslaved persons, and sail them to freedom through the Chesapeake Bay.

"The Pearl": Ship captained by Daniel Drayton on which 76 enslaved Washingtonians, including 13 children, attempted to escape to freedom on April 15th, 1848. "The Pearl" encountered weather-related difficulty during the escape and was captured by an armed posse the next day. Within 10 days of capture, almost all of the fugitive enslaved persons on board were sold back into slavery with the exception of Daniel Bell's wife and two children, as well as the Edmonson sisters.

Abraham Lincoln: Republican lawmaker who served as a U.S. Representative from Illinois (1847-1849) and went on to become President of the United States (1861-1865). Lincoln was a proponent of gradual emancipation, compensated emancipation, and colonization. He initially proposed a bill abolishing slavery in the District (with an exemption for members of Congress), but abandoned it in favor of stopping the extension of slavery in western territories.

Compensated Emancipation: A model for emancipation that demanded or expected compensation to slave holders for the enslaved persons formally in their possession.

Compromise of 1850: Precipitated by California's request to enter the Union as a free state, this deal was meant to maintain the balance and power of free vs. slave states. Proposed by Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky, the compromise consisted of five laws that: allowed California to enter the US as a free state, amended and increased federal power to enforce the Fugitive Slave law, abolished the slave trade in the federal District, created a territorial government in Utah, and settled a border dispute between Texas and New Mexico that also established a territorial government in New Mexico.

Fugitive Slave Law (1850): Passed on September 18, the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was part of the Compromise of 1850. The act required that fugitive enslaved persons be returned to their owners, even if they were in a free state. The act also made the federal government responsible for finding, returning, and trying enslaved persons who had escaped.

Rev. Anthony Bowen: A formerly enslaved anti-slavery leader and activist in Washington, D.C. Bowen's home served as a center for organizing black resistance and power in the years immediately prior to the Civil War, as well as a safe home for fugitive enslaved persons. Among many of Bowen's lasting contributions are the nation's first black YMCA and St. Paul AME Church.

Ana Maria Weems: One of many local enslaved persons who suffered under the Fugitive Slave Act. Although she was purchased and emancipated by a white abolitionist, Weeks' owner refused to free her. She eventually escaped by dressing up as a white boy, "Joe Wright" and making it across the Maryland border into D.C.

School for Colored Girls: A private school, founded by white abolitionist and antislavery activist Myrtilla Miner, where free black girls learned both traditional subjects as well as politics. Miner's school is one example of growing bi-racial antislavery activism in the 1830s and 1840s. The school was eventually closed in 1856 in the face of white opposition to its expansion into secondary education.

The Know-Nothing Party: A nativist, populist political movement in the US in the 1850s. The name was derived from their genesis as a secret society whose members would deny knowledge of the group when asked. Their policies were marked primarily as an anti-Catholic, Anti-Irish, anti-immigration, populist and xenophobic movement. It aligned with American progressivism in its stances on "issues of labor rights and the need for more government spending" as well as for its "support for an expansion of the rights of women, regulation of industry, and support of measures designed to improve the status of working people." (Taylor, Stephen (2000). "Progressive Nativism: The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts". *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*. 28 (2): 167-84.)

The Know-Nothing Party had particular power in the District, where there was an already simmering tension between a burgeoning Irish immigrant population and wealthy to middle-class white residents.

1857 Election Day Riots: After losing the 1857 mayoral election, a mob of Know-Nothing party members commandeered the streets armed with guns, knives, and a miniature cannon. Federal intervention--approved by President James Buchanan--was required to quell the protest, marking the first time since the Jefferson Administration that federal troops fired on American citizens. The riot marked the last time that the Know-Nothing Party exercised real power in local politics.

Doughfaces: Term for white, northern government appointees who supported the south and southern political causes.

Jacob Dodson: A free black Washingtonian who offered to mobilize a free black militia to protect the District in 1861. Dodson's offer was rejected by Secretary of War Simon Cameron, who refused to mobilize a black fighting force.

Elizabeth Keckly: A formerly enslaved black Washingtonian and seamstress who designed dresses for Washington's wealthy white elite. Keckly eventually became the primary seamstress for and close friend to First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln.

Benjamin Butler: A Union General who refused to follow Lincoln's order that Union forces imprison and return fugitive slaves.

“Contrabands”: The word used to name fugitive enslaved persons captured and held by Union forces during the Civil War. First used by General Benjamin Butler.

(The First) Confiscation Act: Passed in August 1861, this federal act allowed federal forces to seize and emancipate enslaved persons whose owners used them to assist Confederate war efforts. The law did not apply in “loyal” (Union) slave states or Washington, D.C.

Ward H. Lamon: The District's federal marshal and former law partner to President Abraham Lincoln who ran the Blue Jug. Lamon had pro-slavery tendencies and enforced the Fugitive Slave Act as hundreds of enslaved persons fled to the District for protection following the passage of the Confiscation Act.

Henry Wilson: A senator from Massachusetts, Wilson initiated an investigation into the conditions of the Blue Jug, leveraging the findings of abuse to draft a bill which would immediately emancipate enslaved persons in the District. The bill was passed--despite opposition from the local District government--on April 16, 1862.

“An Act for the Release of Certain Persons Held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia”: The federal bill, drafted by Senator Henry Wilson, which emancipated enslaved persons in the District. The bill did not use the words “slave,” “slavery,” or “emancipation,” and allowed slave owners who were loyal to the Union to make claims for compensation for enslaved persons in their possession who were now free. It also set up a fund of \$100,000 to help newly emancipated enslaved persons immigrate to Haiti or Liberia.

Federal Emancipation Claims Commission: A three-person board established by the Act for the Release of Certain Persons Held to Service or Labor in the District of Columbia to hear claims from Union-supporting slave owners whose enslaved persons had been emancipated. The Board was empowered to receive testimony without regard to a person's race and to compensate slave owners with payments of up to \$300 per enslaved person. The federal government eventually spent \$993,406 (equivalent to about \$17 million today) to compensate former slave owners.

The “Chiriqui” Plan: A plan, proposed by President Abraham Lincoln, to launch a settlement of recently emancipated enslaved persons in Chiriqui (present-day Panama). The plan eventually fell apart in the face of logistical difficulties and black opposition.

Rev. Henry McNeal Turner: The charismatic pastor of Israel Bethel AME Church during the Lincoln Administration, Turner was a proponent of Lincoln's efforts to create free black colonies outside the United States.

The Social, Civil, and Statistical Association (SCSA): A civic group, composed primarily of well-educated and wealthy black Washingtonians, that opposed colonization. Founded by John F. Cook, Jr., the group was especially opposed to Lincoln's “Chiriqui” Plan and met with him in 1862 to voice their opposition.