



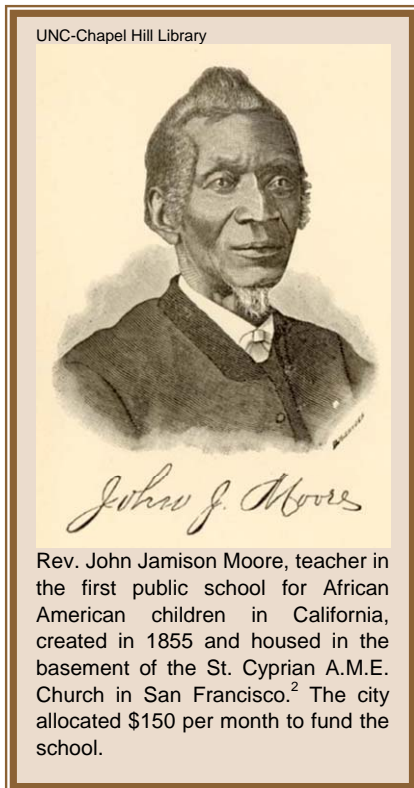
The Anglo-African Magazine

Two reports on the pursuit of equal educational opportunity
for African American children in New York and California, 1859

THE ANGLO-AFRICAN MAGAZINE [New York City], MARCH 1859

REPORT OF J. HOLLAND TOWNSEND ON THE "STRUGGLE FOR OUR RIGHTS" IN CALIFORNIA

The struggles for our rights, in the Common Schools of the State of California, have been attended also with many interesting incidents. In the village of Grass Valley, Nevada Co., a school was opened in the year 1854. The supervisors, after taking the census of the children, found that three of the white children had colored parents; but as these children were as white as themselves, they very wisely determined to leave them in the school. This action greatly offended the feelings of some of the parents, who petitioned the supervisors to remove these children from the school. But they refused to do so, informing these sensitive parents that there were no colored children in the school, and that they intended to keep all the children that were at present there, until they should see good reason to expel them.



These F.F.Vs.¹ finding themselves thwarted in their attempts to deprive these poor unfortunate children of the benefits of the common school, applied to the State Superintendent, who immediately ordered the supervisors to exclude these children, or he would deprive them of the State Funds belonging to that District; but all honor to the people of Grass Valley, who refused to obey the mandate of a man who would compel our children to grow up in ignorance.

The Common Council of Sacramento City, in the year 1855 made an appropriation for the education of colored children. Hon. J. L. English, who was Mayor at the time, vetoed the Bill upon the ground that a majority of the inhabitants of that city were Southerners, and opposed to the education of colored children; yet the Common Council, satisfied of the justice of the ordinance passed the Bill over the Mayor's veto, and it became law.

The first Public School for colored children in the State of California, was established in the city of San Francisco in 1855. . . .

The character and rank was that of a mixed school for colored children. Prosperity attended the inauguration of this new enterprise, and the average attendance was about 40 scholars, yet a school of this grade was not destined to meet the wants of a flourishing and an increasing community, like San Francisco; families continued to migrate from the East, with their children who had received the

National Humanities Center, 2008: nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/. In Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of The Negro People in the United States* (New York: Citadel Press, 1951), pp. 398-402, 416-418. Copyright © 1969 by Herbert Aptheker. Permission pending. Some paragraphing added and some text emboldened for clarity by NHC. Image of the magazine standard from the Black Abolitionist Archive, University of Detroit-Mercy; permission pending. Complete image credits at nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/imagecredits.htm.

¹ F.F.V.: First Families of Virginia, a society whose members are descendants of the earliest English colonists of Virginia.

² Richard M. Lapp & Rudolph M. Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* (Yale University Press, 1995), p. 167.

advantages of the common schools, and were far in advance of the studies pursued in a mixed school. The result was that a few of the more advanced children were admitted into the Grammar Schools, in the Districts where they resided.

One of these pupils, and interesting young lady, from the City of Brotherly Love, the daughter of a respectable merchant, standing at the head of the list as a scholar, in one of the Grammar Schools, was after examination by a committee of the Board of Education, admitted to the High School, where she soon distinguished herself as one of the first scholars of the institution, and by her amiable disposition and lady-like deportment, gained the good will and esteem of both teachers and scholars, as well as the Board of Education.

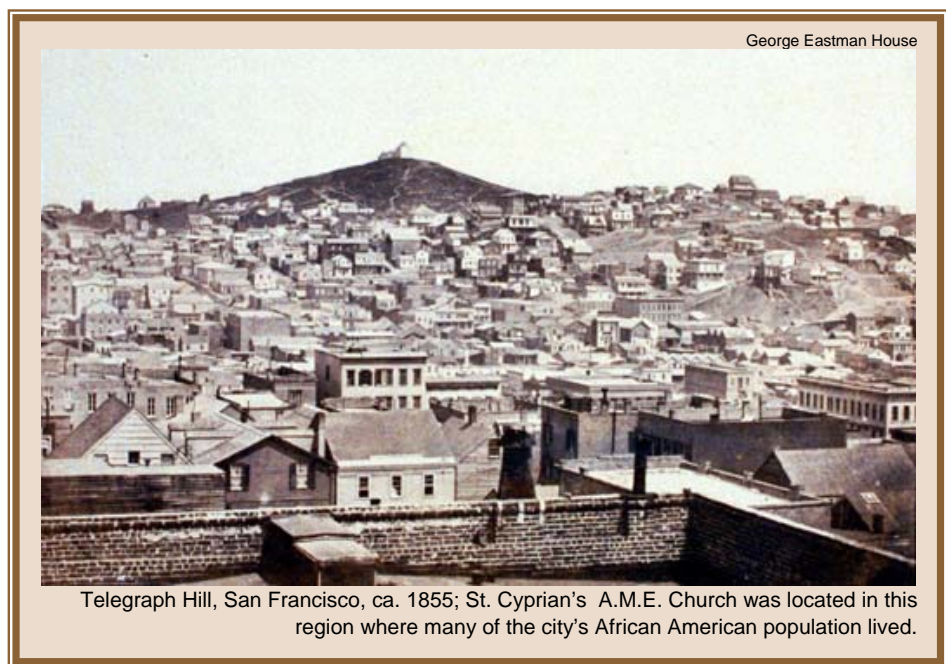
This was too much for a pro-slavery public sentiment, like that of California, quietly to submit to; the fact was soon heralded forth through the political press, that the children of the Negroes were admitted into the Grammar, and even into the High School of San Francisco. The Board of Education were denounced and stigmatized as Abolitionists, and called upon to exclude these children from the schools to which they had been assigned on account of their superior scholarship; all the lower and baser passions were appealed to by a corrupt political newspaper, remonstrances were sent to the Board, signed by the modern chivalry for the abatement of that great nuisance, the education of colored children in the same school with white ones . . .³

The pressure soon became so great that the Board were obliged to come out and define their position on the question. A resolution was adopted by that body which “directed all colored children to attend the school provided for them in San Francisco.” Another resolution was then proposed, directing the superintendent to carry out the first resolution. But the Board voted to lay it on the table, by a decided majority, thus leaving the whole matter stand as it was.

F.F.Vs. being now thwarted in attempts to deprive our children of the advantages of education, for which we had paid in common with others, appealed to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, a Tennessee gentleman, but he wisely declined, informing them that the people of San Francisco had elected a Board of Education to manage the affairs of Common Schools according to their own judgment, and he could not interfere with them in the discharge of their duties.

While this contest was going on, we were encouraged by the people who resided in the 12th District of San Francisco, who presented a petition to the Board of Education to admit into the Grammar School of that District, the children of all persons who resided within the District, without reference to their complexions.

Notwithstanding all these disabilities, we are rapidly progressing both in intelligence and wealth, in this new State of the far West; soon it is expected that the iron horse will thunder through the defiles of the Rocky



³ Ellipsis in Aptheker.

Mountains, and hasten away to the Pacific. California, Oregon, Washington, and New Caledonia [British Columbia, Canada], already send upon air the hum and tread of their busy thousands. China and the Isles of the Sea, hover like a dream in the western horizon. America will soon become the mid-way of the earth, the center and heart of the world, and with a common school system that shall educate all of her sons and daughters alike, her dominion shall be like that of "Julius" — terminate her boundaries by the ocean, and her fame by the stars.



THE ANGLO-AFRICAN MAGAZINE [New York City], JULY 1859

**REPORT ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF SCHOOLS FOR
AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN IN NEW YORK CITY**

including the 1857 report submitted by the New York Society for the Promotion of Education Among Colored Children to a state commission appointed to evaluate the city schools.

Although, nearly two years old, it is of intrinsic value as a record of what Caste Schools are, when left to the tender mercies of a Board of Education, whose members feel themselves little if at all responsible to colored voters. It is, nevertheless, one of the most effective documents ever issued by an association of colored men, for since it was written, and mainly in consequence of it, the School-house in Thomas street has been removed to the corner of Hudson and Franklin street, one of the finest locations in the fifth ward; the school-house in Mulberry street has been taken down, to be replaced immediately by a new and elegant structure, replete with all the modern furniture and equipments; and a handsome sum has been appropriated to re-model the school-house in Laurens street. Yet there are men among the colored people who say, that we cannot do anything in this land!

The following statement in relation to the colored schools in said city and county is respectfully presented by the New York Society for the Promotion of Education Among Colored Children [to a commission appointed by the legislature to evaluate the New York City public schools, 1857]:

- | | |
|---|---------|
| 1. The number of colored children in the city and county of New York (estimated in 1855 from the census of 1850), between the ages of 4 and 17 years | 3,000 |
| a. Average attendance of colored children at public schools in 1855 | 913 |
| Average do. in corporate schools supported by school funds
(Colored Orphan Asylum) | 240 |
| | 1,153 |
| b. Proportion of average attendance in public schools of colored children to whole number of same is as 1 to 2.60 | |
| 2. The number of white children in the city of New York in 1855 (estimated as above), between the ages of 4 and 17 years | 159,000 |
| a. Average attendance of white children in public schools in 1855 | 43,858 |
| Average attendance of do. in corporate schools supported by public funds | 2,826 |
| | 46,684 |
| b. Proportion of average attendance of white children in public schools to whole number of the same is as 1 to 3.40 | |
| 3. From these facts it appears that colored children attend the public schools (and schools supported by public funds in the city of New York) in the proportion of 1 to 2.60, and that white children attend similar schools in said city in the proportion of 1 to 3.40; that is to say, nearly 25 per cent more of | |

colored children than of white children attend the public schools, and schools supported by public funds in the city of New York.

4. The number of colored children attending private schools in the city of New York, 125.
 - a. The number of white children attending private schools in 1850, census gave 10,175, which number has since been increased by the establishment of Catholic parochial schools, estimated in 1856, 17,560.
 - b. The proportion of colored children attending private schools to white children attending same, is as 1 to 140.
 - c. But the average attendance of colored children in all schools is about the same as that of white in proportion, that is to say, as many colored children attend the public schools as do whites attend both public and private schools, in proportion to the whole number of each class of children.

Locality, capability, &c., of colored schools.

1. a. The Board of Education, since its organization, has expended in sites and buildings for white schools \$1,600,000.
 - b. The Board of Education has expended in sites and buildings for colored schools (addition to building leased 19 Thomas) \$1,000.
 - c. The two school-houses in possession of the Board now used for colored children were assigned to same by the Old Public School Society.
2. The proportion of colored children to white children attending public schools is as 1 to 40.
 - a. The sum expended on school-buildings and sites of colored and white schools by the Board of Education is as 1 to 1,600.
3. a. **School-house No. 1**, for colored children, is an old building, erected in 1820 by the New York Manumission Society as a school for colored children, in Mulberry street, in a poor but decent locality. It has two departments, one male and one female; it consists of two stories only, and has two small recitation rooms on each floor, but as primary as well as grammar children attend each department, much difficulty and confusion arises from the want [lack] of class room for the respective studies. The building covers only part of the lot, and as it is the best attended, and among the best taught of the colored schools, a new and ample school building, erected in this place, would prove a great attraction, and could be amply filled by children.⁴
 - b. **School-house No. 2**, erected in Laurens street more than twenty years ago for colored children by the Public School Society, is in one of the lowest and filthiest neighborhoods, and hence, although it has competent teachers in the male and female departments, and a separate primary department, the attendance has always been slender, and will be until the school is removed to a neighborhood where children may be sent without danger to their morals.⁵
 - c. **School No. 3** for colored children, in Yorkville, is an old building, is well attended, and deserves, in connection with **School house No. 4**, in Harlem, a new building between the present localities.
 - d. **School-house No. 5**, for colored children, is an old building, leased at No. 19 Thomas street, a most degraded neighborhood, full of filth and vice; yet the attendance in this school, and the excellence of its teachers, earn for it the need of a new site and new building.⁶

⁴ Two years later the school had been torn down: "the school-house in Mulberry street has been taken down, to be replaced immediately by a new and elegant structure, replete with all the modern furniture and equipments" (*The Anglo African*, July 1859).

⁵ Two years later funds were set aside to renovate the school: "a handsome sum has been appropriated to re-model the school-house in Laurens street" (*The Anglo African*, July 1859).

⁶ Two years later the school had been moved to a new site: "the School-house in Thomas street has been removed to the corner of Hudson and Franklin street, one of the finest locations in the fifth ward" (*The Anglo African*, July 1859).

- e. **School-house No. 6**, for colored children, is in Broadway, near 37th street, in a dwelling house leased and fitted up for a school, in which there is always four feet of water in the cellar. The attendance good. Some of the school-officers have repeatedly promised a new building.
- f. **Primary school for colored children, No. 1**, is in the basement of a church on 15th street, near 7th avenue, in a good location, but premises too small for the attendance; no recitation rooms, and is performe both primary and grammar school, to the injury of the progress of all.
- g. **Primary schools for colored children, No. 2 and 3**, are in the rear of Church, in 2d street, near 6th avenue; the rooms are dark and cheerless, and without the needful facilities of sufficient recitation rooms, &c.

From a comparison of the school-houses with the splendid, almost palatial edifices, with manifold comforts, conveniences and elegancies which make up the school-houses for white children in the city of New York, it is evident that the colored children are painfully neglected and positively degraded. Pent up in filthy neighbor-hoods, in old and dilapidated buildings, they are held down to low associations and gloomy surroundings.

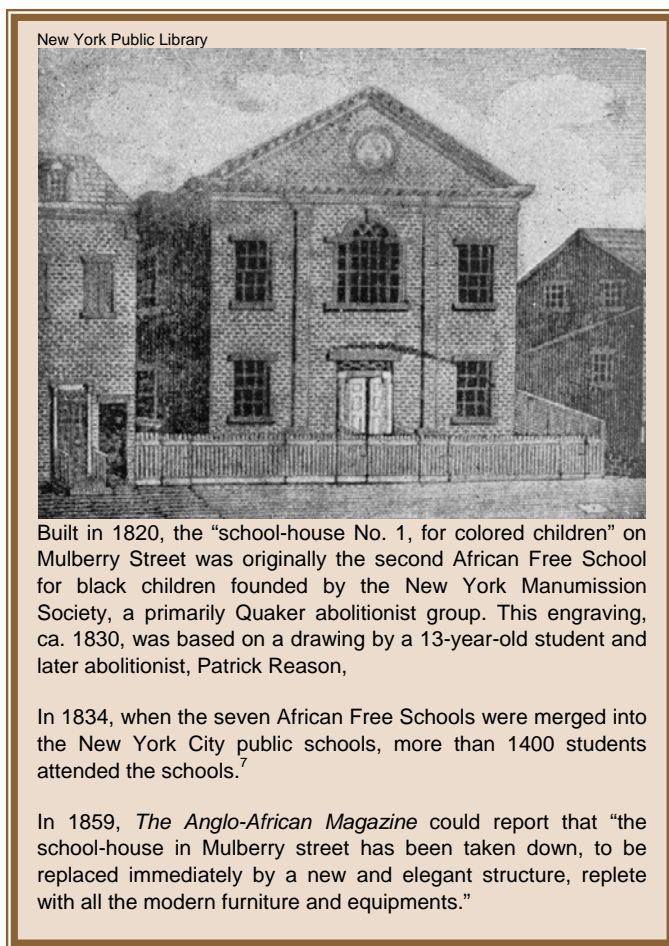
Yet Mr. Superintendent Kiddle, at a general examination of colored schools held in July last, (for silver medals awarded by the society now addressing your honorable body) declared the reading and spelling equal to that of any schools in the city.

The undersigned enter their solemn protest against this unjust treatment of colored children. They believe with the experience of Massachusetts, and especially the recent experience of Boston before them, there is no sound reason why colored children should be excluded from any of the common schools supported by taxes levied alike on whites and blacks, and governed by officers elected by the vote of colored as well as white voters.

But if in the judgment of your honorable body common schools are not thus common to all, then we earnestly pray you to recommend to the Legislature such action as shall cause the Board of Education of this city to erect at least two well appointed modern grammar schools for colored children on suitable sites, in respectable localities, so that the attendance of colored children may be increased, and their

minds be elevated in like manner as the happy experience of the honorable the Board of Education has been in the matter of white children.

In addition to the excellent impulse to colored youth which these new grammar schools would give, they will have the additional argument of actual economy; the children will be taught with far less expense in two such school-houses than in the half dozen hovels into which they are now driven. It is a costly piece of injustice which educates the white scholar in a palace at \$10 per year, and the colored pupil in a hovel at \$17 or \$18 per annum.



Taxes, &c., of colored population of the city.

No proposition can be more reasonable than that they who pay taxes for schools and school-houses should be provided with schools and school-houses. The colored population of this city, in proportion to their numbers, pay their full share of the general and therefore of the school-taxes. There are about nine thousand adults of both sexes; of these over three thousand are householders, rent-payers, and therefore tax-payers, in that sense of the word in which owners make tax-payers of their poor tenants. The colored laboring man, with an income of \$200 per year, who pays \$72 per year for a room and bedroom, is really in proportion to his means a larger tax-payer than the millionaire whose tax-rate is thousands of dollars.

But directly, also, do the colored people pay taxes. From examination carefully made, the undersigned affirm that there are in the city at least 1,000 colored persons who own and pay taxes on real estate

Taxed real estate in the city of New York owned by colored persons	\$1,400,000
Untaxed by colored persons (Churches)	250,000
Personal estate.....	710,000
Money in savings banks	<u>1,121,000</u>
	\$3,481,000

These figures indicate that in proportion to their numbers, the colored population of this city pay fair share of the school-taxes, and that they have been most unjustly dealt with. Their money has been used to purchase sites and erect and fit up school-houses for white children, whilst their own children are driven into miserable edifices in disgraceful localities. Surely the white population of the city are too able, too generous, too just, any longer to suffer this miserable robbing of their colored fellow-citizens for the benefit of white children.

