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Networks of Resistance: Black Virginians Remember Civil War Loyalties

by

Amanda Kleintop

Honors Thesis

in

History  
University of Richmond  
Richmond, VA

May 2, 2011

Advisors: Dr. Robert Kenzer and Dr. Carol Summers

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first people I need to thank are on the front cover: Drs. Robert Kenzer and Carol Summers of the History Department. Dr. Kenzer has worked with me since the beginning of this project, from suggesting my source material until the final presentation. It is safe to say that I would not have conceptualized or completed this project without his guidance. As head of the honors department in history, Dr. Summers has often understood what I was trying to communicate better than I have. Despite her constant assertion that she has “no idea” about the Civil War, her fresh insights and global perspective on the topic pushed my own analyses further.

Of course, there are also those professors who have no official, but nonetheless essential, roles in this project. For that, I thank Dr. Rob Nelson, head of the Digital Scholarship Lab. Thanks to participation in his research projects, and his tutorials, emailed from Africa, I conceived of using network analysis and eventually understood the software. For their advice and time, I thank Drs. David Brandenberger and Melissa Ooten. Both professors have gone above and beyond for me, and I value their participation in this last project.

It seems strange to leave out the other half of my college career: the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. Jepson’s professors served as my role models, and the classes I took as a Leadership Studies major introduced me to group dynamics and social movements, placing my historical interests in a modern context and inspiring my thesis topic.

Finally, to my friends and family. Thanks to Leigh Ann, Katie, and Colleen, whose distractions from work were always well timed and necessary, while their support for me never wavered. I am grateful for the challenges and encouragement we have provided for each other. Lastly, I thank my parents, William Kleintop and Lisa Laury-Kleintop. Who I am and what I have done is wholly a reflection on them, and I hope I have lived up to their examples.

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## INTRODUCTION

On June 22, 1877, William Charity explained his neighborhood's Civil War loyalties to special commissioner Isaac Baldwin of the Southern Claims Commission (SCC): "The colored people were mostly all for the union." Charity, a free black Virginian, recognized that "mostly" did not mean all. He went on to suggest: "some of them were blind." As a self-identified Unionist, Charity had difficulty envisioning a black man who was not loyal to the Union cause and emancipation during the Civil War. Current debates, however, have seized on those black Virginians Charity called "blind," taking the "mostly" Unionist majority for granted. Like Charity, these black Virginians were loyal to the Union and emancipation, actively resisting the Confederacy and supporting the Union cause.<sup>1</sup>

Almost 150 years later, the question over black loyalty during the Civil War remains elusive to historians, even while it was strenuously debated in public. This question was called into contention by a recent controversy over a Virginia fourth-grade textbook's claim that "thousands of Southern blacks fought in the Confederate ranks, including two black battalions under the command of Stonewall Jackson." This statement upset the accepted definition of black loyalty and the ensuing debate challenged perceptions of black loyalty in public history.<sup>2</sup>

Historians like Bruce Levine spoke against the "Myth of the Black Confederate" at the Virginia Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War Committee's 2010 Signature Conference on "Race, Slavery, and the Civil War" and quickly voiced their disapproval in the mainstream media. Shortly after the textbook's publisher issued a corrective policy, a Hampton historian, Veronica Davis, filed a lawsuit to halt the deletion of the passage. "Information about African

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<sup>1</sup> Testimony of William Charity, Allowed claim 20400, June 22, 1877, Charles City County.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Sieff, "Virginia 4th-grade textbook criticized over claims on black Confederate soldiers," *Washington Post*, October 10, 2010. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/19/AR2010101907974.html>.

American soldiers deserves to be in there,” she asserted after filing the suit. “To eliminate the passage totally was wrong. To not consult an African American scholar and form a committee to revise the passage was wrong.” Not only was the accuracy of this history debated for the sake of public memory, but the black Confederate is also significant to African American and Confederate heritage identities in Virginia today.<sup>3</sup>

Defining African-American loyalty had more at stake in public and historiographical debate than accurate historical representation. Regardless of identities and interests, the political connotations of black Confederates were used to support the idea that slavery was not the central issue of the Civil War. Without mediation or historical method, proponents of black Confederates suggested that a distinctive Southern heritage inspired both black and white southerners to fight for the Confederacy, often overlooking the limited choices of African Americans during the war.

Academics generally refused to define black Confederate body servants, cooks, and laborers as soldiers, but many black Virginians after the war contradicted these academics. They described themselves as having “served” in the Union Army, though they served less as combatants than as cooks, guides, spies, or laborers. By historians’ definitions, these men should not be considered soldiers despite their personal identification as such. The difference between choice and coercion separated these self-proclaimed Unionists from those African Americans who were compelled to work on Confederate fortifications. But given emancipation in 1863 and

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<sup>3</sup> Dan Parsons, “Hampton author files suit to stop revision of controversial history textbook,” *Newport News, Virginia Daily Press*. October 28, 2010. <http://www.wtkr.com/news/dp-nws-textbook-lawsuit-1029-20101028,0,7783739.story>.

the prospects of a new social order, African American participation in the Union Army could have been very self-interested, meant to further the cause of emancipation rather than the army.<sup>4</sup>

Understanding black loyalty during the Civil War is difficult because there is no single definition of it. To better understand the loyalties of African Americans during the Civil War, historians must examine the interplay between an individual and his or her community. This can be accomplished through the SCC papers, which contain claims some African Americans filed with the federal government. The SCC papers provide witness testimony that can reveal how African Americans worked together during the Civil War and defined loyalty.

The United States Congress established the Southern Claims Commission in 1871 to investigate the compensation claims of southerners who remained loyal to the Union throughout the Civil War. Southerners claimed wartime property losses resulting from acts of Union forces in Southern states. Claimants filed claims from March 3, 1871 until March 10, 1879. The three Commissioners, Asa Owen Aldis of Vermont, Orange Ferriss of New York, and James B. Howell of Iowa, were Radical Republicans. Congress gave them wide discretion for determining claimants' loyalties by allowing or disallowing claims. The Commission reimbursed an allowed claim, though not necessarily in full. A disallowed claim received no money and could be rejected for various reasons, especially if loyalty or property ownership were not fully proven. The Commissioners did not interact with every claimant, and instead sent special commissioners to distant localities to collect claimants' and witnesses' testimonies.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Testimony of Ephraim Wynn, Allowed claim 5527, February 6, 1873, Dinwiddie County; Testimony of Edward Whitehurst, Allowed claim 10817, July 31, 1877, Elizabeth City County; Testimony of Joshua Foulk, Allowed claim 576, September 7, 1871, Nansemond County; Testimony of Warren White, Allowed claim 530, September 8, 1871, Norfolk County; Testimony of William Charity, Allowed claim 20400, June 22, 1877, Charles City County.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Klingberg, *Southern Claims Commission*. (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 55-56, 68-70.

Although claimants hailed from many southern states, Virginia was notable for its large population of free blacks: approximately 58,000 at the eve of the war. Free people of African descent submitted nearly one-in-seven of Virginia's allowed claims. The Tidewater region and the counties surrounding the cities of Richmond and Norfolk provided a glimpse into the activities of black Virginians during the Civil War because they held the greatest number of free black inhabitants in the state. Additionally, because Richmond was the Confederate capital, the Union Army marched throughout the area, creating much opportunity for the army to appropriate goods; thus, many inhabitants filed claims with the SCC.<sup>6</sup>

The four Virginia counties examined in this study were Charles City, Henrico, Nansemond, and New Kent. In 1860, these counties had a proportion of free blacks to the total population that was double the Virginia average, resulting in more claims than other Virginia counties.<sup>7</sup> Henrico County was a largely rural area surrounding the City of Richmond. Given its geography, its farms became battlefields during the war. Charles City and New Kent, two other rural counties, occupy the northern end of the Virginia Peninsula and were part of Virginia's "Black Belt." Many free black families in Charles City and New Kent traced their ancestry in Virginia as far back as the late seventeenth century. War reached these counties as early as May of 1861, when Union troops reinforced Fort Monroe in Hampton Roads. In spring of 1862, Union General George McClellan launched the Peninsula Campaign, crossing approximately

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<sup>6</sup> James H. Brewer, *The Confederate Negro: Virginia's Craftsmen and Military Laborers, 1861-1865* (Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 3; Dylan C. Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinsfolk: African American Property and Community in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 76; *Encyclopedia Virginia Online*, "Free Blacks During the Civil War" (by Susanna Michele Lee), <[http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Free\\_Blacks\\_During\\_the\\_Civil\\_War](http://www.EncyclopediaVirginia.org/Free_Blacks_During_the_Civil_War)> (accessed October 10, 2010).

In order to describe claimants, I deferred to Susanna Michele Lee's descriptions of race. I referenced "free people of African descent" as free blacks for brevity, despite the problems with the classification. These classifications referred to slaves who gained freedom before the war and free people of color.

Although Tidewater, Virginia has been defined differently by many, for the purpose of this study, I defined all counties east of Richmond as tidewater counties.

<sup>7</sup> For a breakdown of the race and slave status of each county and Virginia as a whole, see Table 1 in Appendix 2.



100,000 soldiers through New Kent, Charles City, and Henrico counties. Constantly shifting Union and Confederate lines characterized warfare in these three counties.<sup>8</sup>

Nansemond was a county in the Hampton Roads area that has since been incorporated into the City of Suffolk. In 1860, free people of African descent accounted for one-fifth of Nansemond's population, the greatest concentration of free blacks in this study. During the Civil War, Nansemond surrounded the City of Suffolk and neighbored the Cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth. From May 12, 1862 until July 3, 1863, Union forces occupied Suffolk and the surrounding area. Between April 11 and May 4, 1863, Confederate General James Longstreet unsuccessfully besieged Suffolk, forcing many inhabitants of Nansemond to leave. Many black Nansemond claimants fled behind Union lines and worked for the Union Army during this time.

A large majority of the black claimants in this study were free before the war, though not all were born free. This study included one enslaved man, Marshall Bryson from New Kent, and Richard Tynes, Jr. from Nansemond, who was freed before he was ten years old. Claimants' prewar property ownership followed patterns similar to the average free black Virginian. Most claimants owned the property on which they lived and worked. Many attained their land by purchasing it; fewer inherited their land. In addition to subsistence farming, claimants were often tradesmen: they worked as blacksmiths, carpenters, oystermen in Nansemond County, and occasionally as brick makers. Claimants were also laborers who owned tools and horses later appropriated by the Union Army. While most skilled free African Americans lived in Richmond or the areas surrounding it, free African Americans in rural areas were unskilled.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Edna Greene Medford. "'I Was Always a Union Man': The Dilemma of Free Blacks in Confederate Virginia," *Slavery and Abolition* 15 (1994): 1.

<sup>9</sup> Luther Porter Jackson, "The Virginia Free Negro Farmer and Property Owner, 1830-1860," in *Free Blacks in a Slave Society*, ed. Paul Finkelman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), 249-263; Latimore, Carey H. IV. "Always a Minority: Richmond Area Free Blacks in the Civil War," (Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 2005), 84.

The claimants ranged in age from 23-77, with an average age of 49 years, though many claimants estimated their age. One claimant, William James, was deceased, and his family filed the claim. Only two out of 54 claimants were women. Of those 54 claims, the Commission disallowed nine. In comparison, of the 2209 total claims reported from Virginia, only 48% were allowed, confirming the Commissioners' tendency to allow claims made by African Americans. The average claim in this study was \$1005.55, with the Commissioners allowing on average \$215.35 and disallowing \$769.47. The Commissioners rarely allowed a claim in full, confirming a general trend among studies of the claims: the Commissioners doubted black claimants' property ownership, but not their loyalty.<sup>10</sup>

Financial reimbursement from the federal government motivated claimants. Every horse appropriated by the Union Army became "a very good horse," worth top dollar. In addition to the quality or quantity of property, claimants could exaggerate the extent of their loyalty. Every claim, nevertheless, was subject to this doubt, and each post-war story of loyalty to the Union was just as significant as the remembered wartime act. Furthermore, the Commissioners themselves ordered extensive investigations for claimants whose stories they doubted to ensure that claimants did not cheat the federal government.

These claims were Reconstruction documents that told a particular story of the Civil War. Memories and motivations changed with time, and the claims reflected the politics of black Virginians during Reconstruction as much as the struggle of Union versus Confederacy. Essentially, definitions of Civil War loyalty depended upon the interpretation of the war itself. Although Republicans in Congress had the final say in granting a claimant "loyal," there were many definitions of loyalty. Because the SCC claims were Reconstruction documents, the meanings of loyalty and Unionism must be discussed carefully in the context of the war through

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<sup>10</sup> Klingberg, *Southern Claims Commission*, 174-275.

the actions accounted in the claims; and they also must be discussed in the context of Reconstruction through the rhetoric of the claimants and commissioners.<sup>11</sup>

The claims made it clear that black Unionism was not “Unionism” per say, but rather a community-oriented drive towards emancipation. Within many counties of Virginia, distinct networks of black Unionists existed. Social networking analysis software such as Network Work Bench created a visualization of the social network of the claimants and witnesses named in each claim. By using this software to analyze the networks of Virginia counties, patterns across race, gender, and age emerged to complicate how these networks function.

Once the social networks of black claimants were established, larger questions about black Unionism within these networks could be answered. The networks answered questions about hearsay, rumor, and public knowledge. In essence, they showcased how word traveled among a minority group within Confederate Virginia, and how black Virginians publicly used terms like Unionism both during and after the war. The activities of these networks, from meetings to active forms of resistance against the Confederacy such as piloting a Union gunboat, were no longer seen as isolated incidents by individuals, but as group efforts.

The networks recounted by the claimants and witnesses of the SCC revealed that organized networks of black Unionists and their families existed, and these networks included both free blacks and enslaved African Americans. Chapter 1 of this study investigated the historiography of black loyalty during the Civil War. Studies of New Kent County and Charles City County allowed an elaboration on organized networks and acts of resistance in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 examined the significance of kinship ties and how they affected networks as compared to those relationships of resistance discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 considered the presence of

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<sup>11</sup> Susanna Michele Lee, “Contested Unionism: William Pattie and the Southern Claims Commission,” in *Virginia’s Civil War*, edited by Peter Wallenstein and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, 201-215. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005.

white claimants and witnesses in a network, which greatly affected not only wartime interactions within a network, but also the Commissioners' perceptions of black claimants. As a whole, these networks disclosed how black Virginians resisted the Confederate war effort and both furthered and shaped the Union cause.

## CHAPTER 1:

### “I WAS ALWAYS A UNION MAN”: AFRICAN-AMERICAN LOYALTY AND COMMUNITY IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Most scholarship on African-American resistance to slavery and the drive toward emancipation stressed the agency of African Americans and the role of black communities, but strained to connect communities' loyalties and their actions. To understand this, it was important to look beyond assuming communities' existence. Instead, individuals' actions and statements must be examined together for their ability to delineate real communities of the past, as opposed to historians' analytic constructs. Emancipation was clearly driven by communities, but it was less clear what those communities looked like and who led that drive. Through the SCC papers, this study revealed how claimants and witnesses functioned within a community's various networks. Studying networks rather than a large community reveals the diversity of claimants' communities and their individual loyalties.

Loyalty and motivation were difficult to define, making them evasive to historians. Many sources could not explicitly explain African Americans' sentiments during the Civil War, either. Instead, political motivations were often symbolized in the actions of most individuals. Furthermore, a broad definition of community, shaped by such historians as Brenda Stevenson, has been imposed upon enslaved African Americans. This monolithic community supported Steven Hahn's assertion that African Americans organized and worked together while still enslaved to make emancipation the second rebellion of the Civil War. These conclusions ignored the possibility that African Americans regularly behaved in ways that would suggest loyalty to both the Union and the Confederacy. They also ignored how individuals defined loyalty and

worked within networks when besieged by opposing armies. The questions the Commissioners posed to claimants and witnesses directly tackle why black claimants were loyal to the Union cause and what that loyalty looked like in action, addressing networks of witnesses and claimants whose wartime actions could be followed as a group. This interplay underscored the complex exchange between loyalty, interests, and political motivations among wartime black Virginians.

As historians would later, the Southern Claims Commissioners assumed free blacks and slaves in Virginia were loyal to the Union cause. It was not uncommon for the Commissioners to report a black claimant's case to Congress: "Like most of her race, she unquestioningly sympathized with the federal cause." When the Commissioners denied African Americans' claims, they usually doubted the existence of all or some of the property claimed, not the claimants' loyalty.

Because the claims contained testimony describing various wartime events, they lend themselves to narratives that ignore the Commissioners' assumptions. For example, Edna Greene Medford's article on free blacks in Tidewater Virginia made extensive use of the SCC papers, but did not adequately consider the claims as Reconstruction documents narrating events during the war. Thus, her study disregarded the influences of the Commission on claimants' testimony, treating the claims simplistically and literally. Such studies grazed the surface of the stories of the SCC, recounting various acts and summarizing what was claimed without delving deeper into the meanings of loyalty to the claimants themselves.<sup>12</sup>

On the other side of the spectrum stood Susanna Michelle Lee's analysis of the SCC. Her study viewed the claims only through the lens of Reconstruction, demonstrating the different

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<sup>12</sup> Testimony of Lucy Green, Allowed Claim 18854, January 21, 1873, Charles City County; Medford. "I Was Always A Union Man': The Dilemma of Free Blacks in Confederate Virginia," 1-16; John Hammond Moore. "Richmond Area Residents and the Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 91. (1983): 285-295.

understandings of loyalty between the post-Civil War North and South and between various groups, including free blacks and former slaves. While imperative for understanding the claims as documents in and of themselves, this research did not explore the significance of certain wartime events described in the claims, though it did explain their effects on Reconstruction politics. By considering the claims in both their wartime and Reconstruction contexts, it was clear that black Unionism was a community-oriented drive towards emancipation that manifested itself in different ways within different communities. This approach avoided the pitfalls of lumping all black Americans from the Civil War into one overextended black community, examining particular counties and those self-selected “Unionists” who submitted claims.<sup>13</sup>

Analyses of the loyalties of wartime African Americans lacked complexity and close examination of motivations. In her study of Alabama claims, Margaret Storey highlighted the importance of family and neighbors to white Alabama Unionists. Storey discussed the few African American claimants in Alabama, but primarily focused on the many more white claimants. For these claimants, she argued that family was more trustworthy than acquaintances. Fidelity to the Union was often extended as a familial duty by tying a personal sense of honor to a family history of patriotism. As Storey explained, “Just as being a good son meant honoring one’s father, honoring one’s ancestor meant honoring the Union.”<sup>14</sup>

For black claimants, however, blood and informal ties of kinship were tied to property more than loyalty. Free and enslaved African Americans who agreed to share economic interests formed new social ties. The SCC papers and Commissioners did not engage with black wartime notions of property. For example, black husbands and wives would recognize separate interests

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<sup>13</sup> Susanna Michele Lee, “Claiming the Union: Stories of Loyalty in the Post-Civil War South” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Margaret M. Storey, *Loyalty and Loss: Alabama’s Unionists in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 39.

in property, though the federal government would not. Furthermore, male claimants sometimes revealed that their wives and children physically made or cultivated much of the property that they claimed, complicating definitions of who owned the property.<sup>15</sup>

Acquaintances and community networks were instrumental to Unionism and wartime loyalty. Storey pointed out that the claims particularly highlight the importance of local community because the Commissioners asked every claimant and witness to identify loyalist acquaintances in their neighborhoods. Nevertheless, most studies of the claims failed to follow up on these networks. Of course, because the Commissioners geared their questions towards white Unionists, it could be further argued that the stress on local networks was particular to white Unionism. This assertion was supported by black claimants' answers to certain questions posed to witnesses, such as question 17: "Who were the leading and best-known Unionists of your vicinity during the war? Are any of them called to testify to your loyalty; and if not, why not?" With the one exception of Charles Smith, a witness in Elizabeth City County, only claimants of New Kent County answered this question with an example of an African American. For the most part, black claimants did not view themselves or their witnesses as leading Unionists, and perhaps not Unionists at all.<sup>16</sup>

But this argument alone was not a satisfactory criticism of analyzing African American networks based on the claims. Claimants' rings, groups of men and women who would testify for each other, implied the volitional existence of these networks. Claimants saved money by uniting together in claimants' rings and created a large body of evidence for their own cases. These networks were not accidental, and they did not simply recount wartime ties. They were also contemporary connections that served practical purposes for people requesting compensation.

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<sup>15</sup> Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinfolk*.

<sup>16</sup> Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 43; Testimony of Charles Smith in claim of Edward Whitehurst, Allowed claim 10817, July 31, 1877, Elizabeth City County.



With these claimants' rings, claimants recounted their wartime experiences as a group, disclosing their connections and also the wartime activities they conducted together. As witnesses for the SCC, they revealed their remembered definitions of wartime loyalty.<sup>17</sup>

Storey also identified three different types of Unionist relationships for her study of mainly white Unionists: friendship similar to kinship; associations in semi-private settings like stores; and public displays from "bold and outspoken" people. Although they yielded useful comparisons, these categories were not entirely applicable to black Unionists in Virginia. While the first two categories certainly held true, black Unionists could not be "bold and outspoken" given their status as free blacks or slaves. Many black Virginians' shared the sentiment that "Of course all colored men had to keep very quiet but it was well-known to which side they leaned."<sup>18</sup> Black Unionists were perhaps in more danger than white Unionists given their standing in Confederate society. Despite the necessity to remain discrete, they managed to devise networks in which families and acquaintances supported each other's more political efforts as guides and spies for the Union Army or their attempts to become or remain free.

Another example of the lack of complexity of African American community in historiography was Brenda Stevenson's study on white and black community in the antebellum South. Her study sought to understand the familial and community dynamics within the black and white communities of Loudon County, Virginia. Stevenson asserted a community of individuals without explaining their interactions within it. She focused on issues like stability of the family, the role of family members, and family structure to describe community, using evidence such as household slave records and Federal Census records. Like the SCC papers themselves, white businessmen and bureaucrats who were outsiders to the realities of a black

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<sup>17</sup> Frank Klingberg, *The Southern Claims Commission* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978), 86.

<sup>18</sup> Testimony of W. A. Graham in claim of Thomas Jefferson Hill, Allowed claim 12407, March 14, 1872, King William County; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 43.

community before and during the war compiled these sources. The purpose of these sources was not to describe interactions within a community, but merely to document the existence of one. Furthermore, these sources did not necessarily span plantations or geographic regions, limiting analysis of slave interactions to an artificially imposed group.<sup>19</sup>

Stevenson did not seek to write a comparative study of Loudon County's black and white communities, but in avoiding this, she could only find broad generalizations to compare and contrast the two communities. These generalizations were not entirely useful without discussing how Loudon's black and white communities interacted. The degree to which Stevenson treated black and white communities as two separate spheres, never to interact, was best demonstrated in the structure of her book's two parts: "Marriage, Family, and the Loudon White Community" and "Black Life, Family, and Community." This dichotomy was misleading, and it dismissed the possibility that individuals within each racially defined community interacted for a common purpose. Without understanding pre-war ties, the motivations for cooperation between black and white Virginians during the war were much more difficult to grasp.

Historians like Steven Hahn have long stressed the role of community in emancipation. Hahn viewed emancipation as an act of resistance and a social movement dependent upon the agency of African Americans. He held that slaves transformed and resisted the institution of slavery while simultaneously sketching the framework for a politics of freed people after the Civil War. Slaves sensed the prospect of emancipation preceding the conflict and made a collective decision to frame the war as a fight for emancipation, turning one rebellion within the Confederacy into two. They did so largely "By contesting the wills of their owners, forging complex ties to each other, etching out time and terrain that they could claim for themselves,

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<sup>19</sup> Brenda Stevenson, *Life in Black and White: Family and Community in the Slave South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

turning privileges won into rights to be defended, and blending rituals of reciprocity into ostensible acts of deference and submission.” For Hahn, slavery was foundational to Reconstruction: freed people built upon the relationships and institutions they constructed as slaves in order to participate in the political culture of Reconstruction.<sup>20</sup>

Hahn’s argument raised questions about the various communities that participated in this movement: what they looked like and how they participated. These questions were central to understand resistance in the war years, when political acts were dependent upon relationships in a time of upheaval. While it was clear that individuals depended upon their communities in order to execute acts of resistance, we did not know how individuals interacted within the community. Through his sources, it was not possible to follow lines or methods of communication of enslaved people. Hahn’s argument also left out one significant group: free people of African descent. By viewing this massive resistance from a local level and including free blacks, the SCC papers complicated Hahn’s argument and move away from broad generalizations.<sup>21</sup>

Although Hahn addressed how slaves worked and lived together, and in turn, how they built reciprocal and kinship relationships, the mere existence and complexity of such a community did not explain motivations and loyalties. His analysis divorced slaves from wartime politics, ignoring issues of loyalty and the realities of living in a war zone. Instead, Hahn assumed a political consciousness in most slaves, citing moments such as escape to Union lines as acts of rebellion, not as the survival methods such acts could have been. Without a more complete understanding of motivations and loyalty in both enslaved and free blacks during the war, these acts stood as testaments to self-determination, but were hollow examples of rebellion.

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<sup>20</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 4, 33, 64; Brasher, “None More Meritorious,” 4.

<sup>21</sup> In this section of his book, Hahn’s sources were primarily secondary, and could not suggest how slaves communicated directly. Much of this was probably due to lack of primary sources as well.

The acts of everyday resistance discussed by Hahn and other historians of enslaved people in particular were difficult to define because black Virginians did not have the political or economic power to reveal their discontents. Anthropologist James Scott studied resistance in peasant communities, and although his subject largely applies to class resistance and solidarity, he acknowledged the applicability of his ideas to slavery: “The rare, heroic, and foredoomed gestures of a Nat Turner or a John Brown are simply not the places to look for the struggle between slaves and their owners. One must look rather at the constant, grinding conflict over work, food, autonomy, ritual – at everyday forms of resistance.” Because slavery oppressed an entire race, it also limited the class status of free blacks, creating another minority group limited to those “everyday forms of resistance.”<sup>22</sup>

Despite its original application, Scott’s definition of everyday resistance provided a blueprint to understand claimants’ acts. Scott defined different levels of everyday resistance. The first was de facto resistance, which took the form of passive noncompliance, subtle sabotage, evasion, and deception. Black Virginians from the Tidewater area exhibited de facto resistance by avoiding conscription on Confederate fortifications.<sup>23</sup>

Scott’s next level of resistance was routine resistance, classified by petty theft, class solidarity, malicious gossip, character assassination, nicknames, and rumors. Aspects of routine resistance were useful to this study because they could demonstrate how information flowed in each county network. In historiography, plantation slaves were renown for the “grapevine telegraph,” a channel of communication slaves used to pass news to each other. Code words carried conversations about the progress of the war, even in the presence of owners. This method was not entirely dependable while using the SCC papers because they were post-war documents,

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<sup>22</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), xvi.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

and memories fade with time. But when tracking answers to questions asking who were the leading and best-known Unionists in the area during the war, answers could be compared between claimants and witnesses in each county. This method explored the memory of the claimants and witnesses while providing information about routine resistance in a network.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, Scott's last level of resistance, "real" resistance, was organized, systematic, and cooperative. It was open, collective resistance encouraged by an explosive variety of change that interrupted the fabric of everyday life and threatened the livelihood of most of the population. Real resistance was also principled or selfless, two characteristics that were difficult to measure. Given the end-goal of emancipation and improved civil rights, no acts of resistance by black claimants would be entirely selfless, though they were probably principled and based upon a revolutionary ideal. Claimants did believe that the consequences of their actions were revolutionary. Support for this view existed in the sacrifices they made. For example, a Richmond court sentenced Charles City County claimant Sylvanus T. Brown, a free black, into slavery on suspicion of stealing cattle and ferrying Union sympathizers across Union lines.

Scott's model of real resistance negated ideological and institutional roots of domination. Because black claimants, free and enslaved, aided the Union Army within Confederate lines and owned property, they represented a challenge to the institution of slavery and system of white supremacy that otherwise controlled their lives. This idea was reflected after the war, when the Commissioners repeatedly commented on the "industriousness" of certain free blacks who overcame their expectations of what a black man could do and own in the 1860s and 70s. Furthermore, claimants enslaved at the time of the war often did not receive their full claim from the Commissioners, who doubted the extent of their claimed property. Clearly, claimants'

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<sup>24</sup> Bell Irvin Wiley, *Southern Negroes, 1861-1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 17. See page 12 for question 17 in full.

everyday resistance disputed the assumptions of the Commissioners about slavery and Southern blacks after the war. Claimants' actions and lifestyles were unique to both the Civil War and Reconstruction periods, challenging white supremacy in and of themselves.<sup>25</sup>

Like Hahn, Scott distinguished everyday resistance from the political: "Where institutionalized politics are formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains." Claimants sometimes found immediate gains in their resistance, carrying themselves and others behind Union lines or making a profit from either the Confederate or Union Army. Most of their behavior was covert, as necessitated by their presence in a war zone and place in southern society. Although institutional change was not immediate, claimants saw the changes occurring around them during the war and acted accordingly within their networks.<sup>26</sup>

Each definition of resistance would have furthered emancipation and the Union cause. In truth, any act of collective resistance from African Americans would have rattled the Confederacy. For example, by early 1864, a Confederate officer thought that slave activity on behalf of the Union Army had reached the point of "an omnipresent spy system, pointing out our valuable men to the enemy, revealing our positions, purposes, and resources, and yet acting so safely and secretly that there is no means to guard against it." The specter of insurrection would have been just as threatening to Confederate whites as the actual resistance itself.<sup>27</sup>

Scott's theory of everyday resistance implied the existence of an over-arching hegemony. Under his framework, a network resisted the dominance of one privileged group, but this was not the case for SCC claimants. As loyalists, claimants would have resisted the Confederacy for

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<sup>25</sup> Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 242, 282, 292.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>27</sup> Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 46,50.

another dominant order – the Union Army and the United States government. Claimants sincerely believed that with Union victory came emancipation, but they were also operating outside of either cause. The SCC networks stood outside of a hegemony, concerned more for their everyday survival, hard-earned property, kin, and long-term interest rather than Union or Confederacy.

Scott's template for everyday resistance could not interpret what or why claimants were resisting, only that they were resisting something. Motivation must be ascertained through claimants' and witnesses' testimonies. When juxtaposed with the various county networks, Scott's definitions of resistance clarified how each network functioned and how strong each network was. Where strong networks existed, the networks' members carried out more acts of real resistance. Claimants in these networks were the most supportive of the Union. They did not simply resist the Confederacy; they assisted the Union as spies, guides, and soldiers.

In order to understand claimants' networks, this study made extensive use of social networking software in order to visualize networks of resistance from the claimants and witnesses of the SCC. In order to prove his or her loyalty, each claimant provided information about his or her property, when it was taken, and who appropriated it. Most significantly, each claimant submitted a deposition and witness testimony as to the taking of the property and loyalty of the claimant.

Witnesses were often chosen among family members who testified for property, as well as neighbors and acquaintances who testified for both loyalty and property. The Commissioners did not often accept testimony to loyalty from family members alone, though within this sample, most claimants' property witnesses were family members. Along with their testimonies, the local special commissioner questioning the witnesses recorded their ages, towns of residence,

occupations, and relationships to claimants. The special commissioner also informally noted the race of each witness if he or she was an African-American, marking the witness as “colored.” This method was not entirely reliable, as Native Americans were also defined as colored by the Commissioners. When in doubt, missing information was matched with 1870 Census data.

Sometimes, witnesses were listed without a label, or their race or their testimony was missing. Some claims of African Americans were missing – merely one or two pages remain. In these cases, those claimants were omitted from the network graphs because there were no witnesses listed with which to create a network. Often, a witness with a missing claim would bolster his credibility while testifying for another claimant that he submitted a claim as well. If this was the case, he was not marked as a claimant in the graphs.

Network Workbench is software that modeled visual networks. Network Workbench’s graphs identified the relationships between claimants and witnesses in a given county. This was especially useful for counties in which witnesses were also claimants, and they testified for one another in claimants’ rings. In counties without claimants’ rings, these visualizations highlighted familial relationships, as well as biracial networks. Each person could be assigned various attributes, which included the demographic information listed above. Using these attributes, the program singled out each individual by race, age, gender, occupation, whether a claimant was free or enslaved, and other modifiers.

The visualizations in Appendix 1 provided a simple way to organize and interpret a group’s interactions. These graphs compared a group of claimants’ and witnesses’ self-declared actions during the Civil War with their relationships after the war. On the graph, a node represented a person, and a line represented two people’s relationship. An arrow at the end of each line meant that one person has testified for whomever the arrow points toward. A line with



two arrows showed that both people have testified for each other; therefore, they were both claimants and witnesses. Claimants' patterns of resistance and loyalty during the war were discerned from following the flow from person to person and the organization of the graph while matching these patterns with claimants' and witnesses' testimonies.

A major problem with this method was reflective of a concern noted above: not every self-proclaimed Unionist filed a claim with the Commission. This could be for many reasons, from an inability to pay for the claim to the fact that the Union Army did not take property from a Unionist involved in a network. As a result, the network visualizations were not necessarily complete, and there was no way of knowing from the SCC papers whether or not they were. The sources were also bound by county, and prone to conflate politically drawn boundaries with people's lived boundaries. Regardless, no claimant in this study asked a witness from outside of his or her county to testify. This research largely depended upon the claimants' relationships in 1870s more so than their relationships during the war. Nevertheless, the remembered descriptions of resistance were useful because they demonstrated how claimants' and witnesses' agency functioned through loyalty and community, as claimants wanted to remember it.

These network visualizations contributed to the current historiography by telling the stories of individual claimants through the interactions of the network. By following each claimant's connection to another, it was possible to examine simultaneously how claimants worked together during the war and, through their testimony, how they defined loyalty. Patterns across race were also revealed by this method to show how white and black Unionists worked together. The visualizations showed that ties of community and kinship both facilitated and hampered resistance against the Confederacy during the Civil War, suggesting that loyalty had its limits in self-interest for African-American Unionists.

## CHAPTER 2:

### “I NEVER DID ANYTHING TO HELP THE REBELS”: NETWORKS OF RESISTANCE

Organized networks of free blacks and enslaved people carried out most acts of resistance in the historical record. Even those acts that would otherwise appear to be committed by a single individual, such as breaking tools and feigning illness on the plantation, needed the cooperation of a group to be effective. Although running away from either Confederate fortifications or masters was often an individual act, some runaways traveled in well-organized and armed contingents, and others traveled in family groups. Like slaves and free blacks fleeing from Confederate fortifications, these people were mainly young men, and they depended upon knowledge about local geography, temporary safe havens, and desired destinations. Leaving one's master was an individualized act, self-centered in its hope for a life without slavery, but it also affected the institution of slavery, forcing masters to replace or do without a fugitive slave. Running to Union lines only weakened the Confederacy, giving the Union Army a work force that Confederates would otherwise have taken advantage of, a fact well-acknowledged within Union forces. With communication channels and support, slaves and free blacks could assist each other in localized acts of defiance against the Confederacy.<sup>28</sup>

On a larger scale, there were also suspicions of a “bootleg ring” in Richmond that would run slaves and free blacks through to Union lines. The ring supposedly had a white man at its head who prepared false passes and furnished a four horse wagon for transportation. Meanwhile, William, a slave and proprietor of a black barbershop, transported the slaves, all for two to three hundred dollars. Such networks were not uncommon. In New Kent County, William H. Brisby, a farmer and blacksmith, ferried slaves and free blacks across Union lines. Thomas Fox, Brisby's

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<sup>28</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 21, 41, 69, 72; Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long*, 52.

black neighbor and business connection, assisted him, and their activities were seemingly well known by the county's blacks, some of whom confirmed these actions as witnesses for his claim. Assisting Union prisoners and blacks to escape landed Brisby in Castle Thunder, a civilian prison in Richmond where many Union sympathizers were incarcerated. All of these acts represented the actions of organized Virginia blacks, reflecting if not their loyalty to the Union, their defiance against the Confederacy.<sup>29</sup>

Virginia blacks organized local networks of resistance, many of which occurred in Tidewater Virginia.<sup>30</sup> A claimants' ring of four black men in New Kent County, all freemen before the war, managed to successfully petition the Commission for reimbursements despite the attacks against William H. Brisby by his political enemies. During the war, New Kent County networks supported Lynda J. Morgan's assertion that free blacks and slaves who were hired out had greater mobility, and thus represented the front line of resistance for African American Virginians. Geography and neighborhood also strengthened claimants and their networks. Black Unionists came together in their neighborhoods to form strong networks based on Unionism.

Figure 4 showed a claimants' ring constructed from William H. Brisby, Warren C. Cumber, Joseph Brown, and Beverly Dixon, as well as an unrelated claimant, Marshall Bryson, a former slave whose claim was disallowed. Unlike most of the claimants in the claimant's ring, who lived around St. Peter's Church, Bryson lived near Dispatch Station during the war. The 1870 Census placed him and his family in Henrico County. Although his claim was rejected, with his property destruction labeled as degradation, Bryson's physical estrangement from the

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<sup>29</sup> Wiley, *Southern Negroes*, 10; "Running Negroes Through the Lines." *The Richmond Daily Dispatch*, March 10, 1864; Testimony of William H. Brisby, Allowed claim 19204, February 27, 1877, New Kent County.

<sup>30</sup> Though regional definitions of Virginia vary, for my purposes, Tidewater Virginia encompassed the counties east of Richmond, including New Kent County and Charles City County.

network during and after the war could not have helped his cause, especially when the strength of the claimant's ring had such a large impact on each claim, but especially that of William H. Brisby.

At the center of the network, Brisby's claim created much controversy within New Kent's county politics. Brisby himself was a freeborn black man who, at the time of the war, owned 50 acres of property, which was supplemented by another 50 acres in 1864. Brisby exemplified a successful free Virginian. His occupation as a blacksmith gave him an edge in economic standing, as free rural blacksmiths who owned subsistence farms often rose higher economically than free black farmers in Virginia. Brisby's loyalty was largely motivated by his dissatisfaction with his social status as a free African-American man. Brisby was driven, but denied the education he wanted in southern society. He was alarmed by the idea of Confederate victory. A local magistrate, Edward Pollard, threatened Brisby during the war, telling him that he intended to own him when the Confederates won the war and free blacks were enslaved. This prospect represented Brisby's lack of control over his life on his terms.<sup>31</sup>

A political rival challenged Brisby's claim during Reconstruction, questioning his loyalty and property ownership. Brisby's did not choose the white witnesses who testified for him; rather, they testified on behalf of Newton W. Brooks, an agent of the Freedman's Bureau in New Kent. Brooks and his cronies warned the Commissioners that Brisby had served as a blacksmith for a Confederate cavalry legion, the "Holcombe Legion." He shod the legions' horses and received pay, supporting Brooks' claim that Brisby's conduct was voluntary.

John Pearman and John D. Christian, both white witnesses, revealed the intricacies of judging claimants' loyalties during the war. Brisby served the Holcombe Legion at Pearman's

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<sup>31</sup> Testimony of William H. Brisby, Allowed claim 19204, February 27, 1877, New Kent County; Jackson, "The Virginia Free Negro Farmer and Property Owner, 1830-1860," 282, 284.

blacksmith shop. Pearman believed that Brisby joined the Legion to avoid working on Confederate fortifications because “if he stayed in the county he had to do one or the other.” Given the amount of property Brisby owned, it would have been against his interests to leave the county and his property unattended. As a blacksmith for the Confederacy, he could remain nearby while avoiding what he saw as the worst option: working on fortifications. Christian’s testimony, on the other hand, painted a completely different picture of Brisby’s loyalties. Christian fought in the Holcombe Legion while Brisby served as blacksmith. As a witness, he confirmed that Brisby’s service was completely voluntary, without the allowance that Pearman gave Brisby. He also affirmed that the Legion regarded Brisby as a Confederate.

In his defense, Brisby explained the political rivalry between Brooks and himself. He told the Commissioners that their relations soured when he was nominated over Brooks as state legislator in a Republican Party convention on September 11, 1871. When approached by Brooks to refuse the nomination and support him, Brisby declined the offer, angering Brooks. Brooks later swore that he would never see Brisby receive any money from his claim. As deputy agent of the Freedman’s Bureau, John D. Christian was privy to Brooks’s grudge. Brisby charged him with corrupt dealings within the Freedman’s Bureau and bribing others to testify against Brisby’s claim. Congress returned the claim to the Commissioners for a second review and additional testimony from Brisby and witnesses. The Commissioners eventually ruled in favor of Brisby, recognizing in a rare case the conflicting social pressures on black claimants throughout the war and Reconstruction over loyalty to the Union.

The Commissioners’ based their final decision on Brisby’s well-proven acts demonstrating loyalty to the Union. Despite his business dealings with the Confederate Army, Brisby had a large network to attest for his loyalty and became a reputable witness for other

claimants. Warren C. Cumber, who had an allowed claim himself, testified that Brisby carried at least 100 Union prisoners through rebel lines, crossing via boat into Yorktown and behind Union lines. Confederate authorities arrested Brisby twice, sending him to Castle Thunder on suspicion of smuggling people across the lines in July of 1863 and again in November of 1864. The authorities released Brisby in both cases because nothing was proven against him. Finally, Brisby gave information as a guide for General Terry of Michigan in July of 1863.<sup>32</sup>

One witness in particular strongly substantiated Brisby's claim. Thomas Fox, a 40-year-old black farmer not only proved Brisby's property ownership, but also revealed the intricacies of their smuggling network:

I remember on one night we brought out from Richmond in three carts 9 prisoners which we carried to Wilson's Landing after traveling all night. In this way we brought out a great many persons during the war. We would not leave Richmond until after dark. They would have to lie down in the cart and we would cover them with something. Claimant was arrested with me in Richmond one night while we were waiting for some persons to go with us. I was allowed to go and he was put in Castle Thunder.<sup>33</sup>

Those who Brisby and Fox smuggled across the lines were Union prisoners, white women whose husbands had already escaped, and black men escaping from the Confederacy. Neighbors and other witnesses monitored their activities, and observed Brisby stowing people in his home before his carts passed by their homes in the night. Without the support of his witnesses, the Commissioners would probably have rejected the claim after Congress returned the case.

With such testimony, the Commissioners again submitted the claim to Congress for approval. They noted in their remarks that "Upon the whole evidence and especially that furnished since the case was sent back to us by Congress we are satisfied that he was loyal and

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<sup>32</sup> "Committed to the Castle." *Richmond Daily Dispatch*. November 21<sup>st</sup>, 1864.

Although there was a Union General Alfred Terry from Michigan, he was not in Virginia in July of 1863, but in South Carolina. He was, however, in Virginia in July of 1864. This discrepancy could be confusion with the date on the part of Brisby.

<sup>33</sup> Testimony of Thomas Fox, witness for William H. Brisby, Allowed claim 19204, February 27, 1877, New Kent County.

that his horse shoeing for the rebels was forced.” The Commissioners seemed to acknowledge Brisby’s difficult decision. Brisby endangered himself while staying behind. Without a family or household responsibilities at the time of the war, he could easily have smuggled himself across Union lines; instead, he chose to transport Unionists across Union lines after his time working with the Holcombe Legion, imprisoned twice during the war as a result.

Another important aspect of the Commissioner’s decision was their language describing Brisby. Brisby was the first representative from his county in the Virginia legislature during Reconstruction. The Commissioners found him to be “industrious and thrifty and unusually intelligent for a colored man.” This was unique, considering the Commissioners often disparaged former slaves’ intelligence, and their low expectations of former slaves extended to all black claimants, whether enslaved or free. Brisby’s claim was unusually well organized: he included receipts and proof of land ownership. Brisby followed white understandings of property ownership, and along with his network, he alleviated the Commissioner’s doubts, overcoming their distrust of black witnesses for the strength of the network and its actions. Thanks to Brisby’s wartime sacrifices and his post-war success, the Commissioners approved his claim despite the challenges made against him.<sup>34</sup>

Within New Kent’s network, Warren C. Cumber depended upon other connections to retain his freedom in wartime. Cumber’s strongest evidence for loyalty, besides his membership in this network, was an act of defiance. Cumber told the Commissioners that Confederate soldiers arrested him in June or July 1862, when McClellan’s army fell back from Richmond, for asserting: “I thought the northern army would win the day.” Interestingly, a connection with a Captain Archer led to his release, though the Commissioners did not question his association

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<sup>34</sup> Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinsfolk*; Lee, “Claiming the Union,” 320-322.

with a Confederate officer. The Commissioners' unperturbed attitude toward Confederate association showed an unexpected understanding of the realities of living in Confederate territory.

The support of a lawyer named Branch furthered this recognition. In the month of June 1862, Confederate authorities arrested Cumber and carried him to Yorktown to work on Confederate fortifications. While in Williamsburg, Cumber appealed to his old friend Branch to represent his case. Branch argued that Cumber's crops would be entirely lost if he could not return to tend them. The Confederates released Cumber and he returned home. Confederate authorities ironically aided Cumber's defiance toward Confederate arrest and impressment, demonstrating Cumber's ability to manipulate the system upon which the Confederate Army depended for hard labor. Although the network of New Kent claimants did not assist in this manipulation, Cumber's high status within St. Peter's black community allowed him to build relations with the white officer and lawyer who would help him during the war.<sup>35</sup>

Joseph Brown was another claimant with connections outside of St. Peters. William Wilkerson acted as a witness for Brown though he was from New Kent Court House, in the middle of the county. Wilkerson and Brown met on Confederate fortifications and ran back home together. Wilkerson was explicit on both his own and Brown's views on the Union, and stated that Brown "was in favor of the northern army and didn't want to work down there. Said he wished the northern army would take Richmond. And I hoped so too. We hoped if the northern army overcame that we colored people would have some liberty here." The relationship between this claimant and witness showed that the Confederate Army unintentionally enabled African Americans to build alliances that would eventually undermine the Confederate war effort.

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<sup>35</sup> Testimony of Warren C. Cumber, Allowed claim 19208, February 1, 1873, New Kent County.



Working on and running away from the fortifications formed a relationship between Wilkerson and Brown, who would act on their loyalties and self-interest to return home.<sup>36</sup>

In New Kent, SCC claimants recounted strong wartime ties, aiding each other in their resistance to the Confederacy and, later, their petitions to the United States government. Geography and community strengthened these ties – free black neighbors with friendships resembling kinship ferried Union sympathizers behind Union lines and executed other acts of resistance. When these ties were not enough, claimants like Joseph Brown used their high status within St. Peter’s free black community to take advantage of connections with white acquaintances and navigate the legal authority of the Confederate government. If these entreaties did not spare a claimant from impressment, alliances made away from home supported those escaping fortifications. The Commissioners regarded claimants more favorably when claimants paired strong relationships with evidence of real resistance.

The importance of these relationships was evident in the Harris network of Charles City County. The network consisted of two claimants, Peyton B. Harris and Ferdinand Wynn, who highlighted the significance of self-perceived identity as motivation for loyalty to the Union. Problematic to this conclusion was that the Commissioners disallowed Ferdinand Wynn’s claim as a fraudulent claim. Wynn was entitled to half of the crop on a local family’s plantation if he secured it from the Union Army. Based on his need for a claim, he did not secure the crops, and the Commissioners rejected his claim, calling it an attempt to “swindle” the government and destroying “all confidence in his honesty and veracity.” Regardless of the Commissioners’ final judgment, Wynn’s claim was useful when considered with the same skepticism as any allowed claim, which could also have been fraudulent despite the Commissioners’ ruling.

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<sup>36</sup> Testimony of William Wilkerson for Joseph Brown, Allowed claim 18499, March 13, 1874, New Kent County.

The harsh language from the Commissioners reflected the misunderstanding of property claims between black claimants and the Commissioners described by Penningroth. Black claimants often downplayed property ownership disputes throughout the SCC papers, and the Commissioners searched for proof of property ownership like ledgers and receipts. The Commissioners gave more importance to the property claims of former masters and white tenants than the enslaved and free blacks who filed their claims with the SCC.<sup>37</sup>

Ferdinand Wynn's background was very different from other Charles City claimants. Wynn's father was a Native American who served in the Revolutionary War for seven years. Unlike other claimants, Wynn had travelled in the North considerably. From his experiences in the North, he learned "what liberty was," and told the Commissioners that he did not "like the way southern people treated the colored folks." For this reason, he "was a Union man in the beginning," and throughout the war, he claimed he was "constant in my attachment to the United States." Wynn's words were supported by his deeds. In 1862, Wynn sheltered a sick Union prisoner of war who had escaped. Wynn allowed him to stay until Confederates had left the area and showed the prisoner the way to the James River at night to signal a Union gunboat. Wynn fed Union soldiers throughout the war and provided information about area roads and the Chickahominy Swamp to the Union Army.

According to his testimony, Wynn was certainly a Unionist, partaking in acts of real resistance, undermining the Confederate war effort, and acting selflessly and stubbornly refusing to aid the Confederacy. In his claim he stated: "if the rebels had troubled me in [the] least or taken one of my boys, I would have gone to the Yankees immediately." But this pronouncement provoked considerable doubt in the Commissioners: If Wynn had a reputation as a Unionist, Confederates would have troubled him. Wynn determined his identity as a Union man based

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<sup>37</sup> Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinsfolk*, 32, 134

upon his family history and experiences. Although both Native American and African American, two groups otherwise marginalized by the United States government, he distinguished between North and South to identify with the Union as a nation without slavery.<sup>38</sup>

Peyton B. Harris, a free black man with an allowed claim, was the second claimant in the Harris network. He recounted how both the Union and Confederate armies browbeat him throughout the war. “During 1862 I was arrested by the Confederate soldiers and made to guide them for about 10 miles. I then escaped from them and returned home. In 1864 I was at James River when Genl. Butler’s troops landed at Wilcox’s Wharf. They arrested me and carried me with them about a quarter of a mile and then turned me loose.” Perhaps because of his multiple arrests, Peyton strayed away from any resistant activities. Nevertheless, in his claim he spoke to his loyalty as a free black man: “In the beginning and throughout the war I was a Union man as I considered I was under bondage although a free man. I thought I would be willing for the Yankees to take every thing I had if it would enable them to gain the victory.” Peyton’s notion that he was enslaved by society proved his motivation and loyalty to the Commissioners.<sup>39</sup>

Witness Zebedee Harris connected these two claimants rather loosely. As far as the SCC papers could tell, the claimants did not interact during the war, but Zebedee Harris was the son of Peyton and worked with Wynn. Zebedee knew Wynn for over twenty years and considered him to be a Union man, but his testimony gives no further information about a possible connection between Peyton Harris and Wynn. Peyton’s other son, Erasmus Harris, acted as Peyton’s second witness. Wynn’s witnesses were his son, Winslow, and neighbor James H. Harris, who worked with Wynn and considered him loyal, “as other colored people.”

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<sup>38</sup> Testimony of Ferdinand Wynn, Disallowed claim 19374, February 6, 1873, Charles City County.

<sup>39</sup> Testimony of Peyton B. Harris, Allowed claim 7592, February 6, 1873, Charles City County.

There was much doubt surrounding the Harris network, whether it was Wynn's loyalty or the strength of the network. Although both claimants demonstrated strong personal motivations for loyalty to the Union, the loose ties between the claimants and witnesses exacerbated the apprehension of the Commissioners. Most of the witnesses were family members, but unlike New Kent's claimants, they did not relate their support of the Union to each other, nor did they relate their wartime experiences to their witnesses. The strength of relationships within the New Kent network worked both to reinforce Union sentiments during the war and demonstrate loyalty to the Southern Claims Commissioners after the war. Without kinship ties, these relationships and connections to resistance were rare, and were subject to the Commissioners' interpretation.

## CHAPTER 3:

### “MY FAMILY WERE ALL FOR THE UNION”: LOYALTY AND KINSHIP

Of the sampled Virginia counties, more claimants' kin acted as witnesses than any other acquaintance. In many cases, kin and members of a claimant's household would have been the first witnesses for property claimed. But families also supported black Unionists ideologically. In some cases, claimants' kin made great sacrifices for the war effort, arguably out of their loyalty to the Union or to ensure their freedom and liberties. These kinship ties were often quite different than the Commissioners could acknowledge or understand. Kinship ties and households of Virginia claimants reflected those of slaves and free people of African descent before the war, which were incongruous with the Commissioners' idea of kinship.

The households of slave and free blacks were not necessarily dependent upon blood ties. Virginia slave families were not nuclear in structure, and they did not derive from long-term, monogamous marriages. Considering the power of the slaveholder to break up families, nuclear families were not ideal; rather, a malleable extended family provided members with nurture, education, socialization, material support, and recreation. These households established values outside of slavery: The obligations of kinship protected members from the worst of slavery and built reciprocity where it would otherwise have been devoid in a system of master-slave relations. These families were diverse in structure, ranging from polygamy to single parenting, and all-male residences of blood to multi-generational households.<sup>40</sup>

Free blacks, on the other hand, had greater control over their kinship ties and domestic stability than the enslaved. Their free status allowed them the possibility of traditional monogamous marriages and a nuclear family that slaves could not have. Because of social

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<sup>40</sup> Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 160-161; Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 19.

rejection from white Virginians, free black households gathered in neighborhoods, and the family became the backbone of their community. Like slave households, free black households saw a high incidence of intergenerational and multi-surnamed members. This pattern provided an important survival mechanism for impoverished free men and women. Households became the “symbols, sources, and measures” of a free black person, demonstrating and providing the success and wealth of their enterprises. Free black families were often matrifocal, having women as heads of the family despite having an available male head. As a result, many of these families were poorer because of the lack of and type of occupations available to women.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the social pressures against slave and free black families, both groups were determined to maintain the integrity of their kinship ties before and during the war. During the war, the absence of kin tainted freedom, and the choice to flee behind Union lines was a family concern. Early on, most of the slaves who escaped to federal military camps like Fort Monroe had been men who were alone or in small groups. The kin that fugitives left behind often suffered the consequences of their escape, as slaveholders would retaliate with punishments against their families. But into the second year of the war, with increasingly friendly reception of runaways behind Union lines and the Emancipation Proclamation, slaves began to flee in family groups. Those slaves and free blacks who had escaped behind Union lines before the Proclamation ventured back to their homes to liberate their kin, spreading the word of freedom in the process. Sometimes these runaways would return with detachments of black Union soldiers,

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<sup>41</sup> Stevenson, *Life in Black and White*, 161-164; Paul Finkelman, *Free Blacks in a Slave Society* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), 390.

such as the military workers from Fort Monroe and Hampton Hospitals, who were escorted by a captain and 15 dismounted cavalry soldiers to recover their families in Smithfield.<sup>42</sup>

Even behind Union lines, black men and women collected information about loved ones left behind and worked to raise money for their households' well-being. Captain Charles B. Wilder, stationed at Fort Monroe as superintendent of contrabands, testified to the enduring kinship ties between runaways and their families before the War Department. He stated that refugees traveled up to 200 miles to return to their kin. Upon a visit to Suffolk, Captain Wilder learned that many black men planned to return to their families as soon as they had "earned a little money." He reported that, upon questioning, they were not afraid to risk returning, asserting "I know the way." Through running to Union lines, raising money, and returning to families, whether free or enslaved, the interests of kin both encouraged and inhibited what black claimants would later define as Unionist activity for the Southern Claims Commissioners.<sup>43</sup>

The definition of kinship relations among free blacks and slaves was not as significant as the obligations and responsibilities imposed upon them, as well as their endurance. After the war, however, the SCC's claimants faced misunderstanding from the Commissioners because they did not expect black southerners to file claims. The Commissioners did not and could not understand the ties of kinship in slaves and free blacks, especially in regard to property. The Commissioners undervalued kinship ties and did not consider relatives' testimony for the loyalty of a claimant as significant as their testimony for property. Very rarely in the claims was a member of a claimants' family asked about their relative's loyalties; the Commissioners preferred to depend upon assumingly unbiased sources in the form of outside witnesses for such information. This

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<sup>42</sup> Berlin, et al., *Free at Last*, 29, 98, 107; Ira Berlin and Leslie S. Rowland, *Families and Freedom: A Documentary History of African-American Kinship in the Civil War Era* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 22, 27, 47-48.

<sup>43</sup> Testimony of Captain Charles B. Wilder, May 9, 1863, Fort Monroe, Virginia, in Berlin and Rowland, *Families and Freedom*, 31-33.

devaluation was ironic, especially considering that African-American kin supported Unionist activity like running and working behind Union lines and bore the brunt of such actions' consequences. Concern for a family's future without slavery and a family's present in wartime would continually drive claimants toward and stop claimants from acting for the Union.<sup>44</sup>

The individuals of New Kent County's network were largely from St. Peters, where they lived, worked, and socialized together. Although not blood relations, many members of the network gained kinship status among each other. As a witness for his father, Joseph Brown, Jr. defined his relationship with Brisby thusly: "William H. Brisby is no kin to me though I call him 'Uncle Henry.'" Ties made during the war strengthened after its bloodshed. In 1869, "Uncle Henry" married Ann R. Cumber, witness and daughter of Warren C. Cumber. Even though he did not file a claim, Uncle Henry's brother, Matthew Brisby acted as witness for Joseph Brown. He himself served as an attendant to a Captain Wheat in the Union Army until he was taken sick and left behind at Yorktown. In February 1863, he left New Kent with the Union Army and a General Worster, colored troops. The ties within this network highlight the importance of building a stronger trust among those who would resist the Confederate Army in Virginia, just as Storey found with white Unionists in Alabama.<sup>45</sup>

While a kinship network in New Kent supported and encouraged claimants, households bound men in particular from Unionist activity. Brisby's brother, Matthew, joined the Union Army to follow familial Unionist sentiment, but responsibility to dependents prevented married claimants from enlisting, running themselves or others behind Union lines, or more pronounced acts of resistance. Joseph Brown maintained that, "All that I had any chance was to feed the

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<sup>44</sup> Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinsfolk*.

<sup>45</sup> Testimony of Joseph Brown, Jr. and Matthew Brisby for Joseph Brown, Allowed claim 18499, March 13, 1874, New Kent County; Storey, *Loyalty and Loss*, 43.



Yankee soldiers when they came. I did that and I helped one of the Union officers who had escaped from prison in Richmond to get into the Union lines.” Brown did not clarify what he did to help the escaped Union prisoner, but from his initial statement, it was dubious that he continually and actively ferried people behind Union lines like Brisby. Brown claimed that he never did anything of his “own accord to help the rebels,” and he “was willing at all times to do all in my power to help the Union.” But, he amended, “I didn’t want to leave my home. I had a wife and family dependent on me.” Resistance was easier for those without personal obligations.

On the other hand, where there was a strong free black community, claimants’ households found the support necessary for claimants to resist the Confederacy. Historically, Richmond area Quakers freed their slaves at Gravelly Hill in Henrico County, which would become a strong community of free African Americans. Many Henrico claimants lived in the Gravelly Hill community, resulting in strong community and kinship ties. Henrico County’s claimants made two distinct networks: the Atkins and Sykes networks. Henrico presented an interesting case because of this settlement of free people of African descent, who, in the words of one witness, were “all connected in one way or another.” As a result, kinship ties within this network were enduring, and rumors traveled fast within these ties. Claimants’ supported each others’ households, removing some of the burden family would otherwise put on claimants’ acts of resistance. Although these community ties helped claimants during wartime, kinship ties also hurt their claims during Reconstruction.<sup>46</sup>

The Atkins network was curious because one claim was allowed and one was disallowed despite the fact that the claims’ witnesses were virtually the same. Isaac Pleasants’ claim was allowed, and his loyalty was confirmed by his actions during the war. In 1861, Confederates

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<sup>46</sup> Testimony of Eliza Atkins in claim of Isaac Pleasants, Allowed claim 2040, February 24, 1873, Henrico County; Latimore, “Always a Minority?”, 29.

impressed him to work on the batteries around Richmond. After 26 days, he deserted and returned home. He frequently guided the Union Army. As a claimant, he articulated his loyalty for emancipation more than Union:

I was a Union man at the beginning and throughout the war. I thought it was to the interest of all colored people to be in favor of the Yankees as I had an idea that slavery was a good deal at stake in the conflict between the states and that the success of the North would improve the condition of the slaves, at least.

Pleasants described his motivations more explicitly than other claimants, though perhaps hindsight encouraged this interpretation of his own motivations. Either way, loyalty to the Union for Pleasants meant an improvement in his own condition.<sup>47</sup>

As a civilian, Pleasants' wartime experiences were made more difficult by his place as head of his household. Witness Emily Atkins described the wartime relationship she and Pleasants established to support each other and their families:

Isaac had a large family. . . . He had been obliged while the fighting was going on to dodge around in hole and keep his children the best he could. He didn't go away but it was mighty hard work to get anything to eat. We used to divide what we could get with each other. Sometimes we would eat once a day and sometimes not at all.

Atkins' testimony reflected one of Storey's white Unionist relationships: friendship similar to kinship, but on a larger, community-wide scale. With such a closely connected group of free people of color in Henrico County, such support was more easily established and undoubtedly a necessity. Through this network, Pleasants was able as a husband and father to assist the Union Army as frequently as he claims. Other families backed his acts of loyalty.

In contrast to Pleasants, the Commissioners disallowed Joseph Atkins' claim in doubt of his property ownership. The special agent on the claim described it as "bogus," and the Commissioners agreed, noting that the claim was "one of a score or more fraudulent claims from a free negro settlement in Henrico County." Nevertheless, the same witnesses whose testimony

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<sup>47</sup> Testimony of Isaac Pleasants, Allowed claim 2040, February 24, 1873, Henrico County.

the Commissioners accepted for Pleasants' claim, whose property they did not doubt, also testified for Atkins. Emily Atkins, who provided the above testimony for Pleasants, was the sister-in-law of Joseph Atkins. This kinship tie perhaps explains the Commissioner's distrust.

But the Commissioners did not doubt the stories Atkins told them regarding loyalty, which were similar to Pleasants' own experiences working on and running from Confederate fortifications, as well as acting as a Union guide. Atkin's own motivations were also similar to Pleasants'. Atkins described rumors that "the rebels meant to sell all free people of color into slavery." He continued in a celebratory fashion: "I thought the Yankees would give us our rights and they have done. I was always on their side and did all in my power for the Union cause." But while their motivations and witnesses were similar, and both claimants owned their own land, the Commissioners also doubted that Atkins' property, if existent, was taken for the Union Army's use. This doubt seemed to have finalized the Commissioners' decision to disallow the claim.<sup>48</sup>

Henrico's Richard and Isaac Sykes were prominent and important witnesses for other black claimants in their network. They were leading Unionists in the county, a position enabled by their relationships with other claimants. In his statement of loyalty, Isaac Sykes detailed many issues that surrounded the Henrico network:

I was always a Union man. I believed if Jeff Davis succeeded in the war, though I was born free, he would take away my land and put my children into slavery. I believed the Union would give me my rights. Of course I was for the Union. I never did anything to hurt it and I was willing to help it with all my heart. I always vote the Republican ticket and work for it too.

Although only Isaac, Richard Sykes, and John McDowell alluded to the Republican Party in their testimonies, many members of the Sykes network mentioned the same concern that Confederates would sell all free blacks into slavery if they won the war. This phrasing was significant, considering all claimants in the network recognized that their rights were at stake as free people

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<sup>48</sup> Testimony of Joseph Atkins, Disallowed claim 20414, February 24, 1873, Henrico County.

of African descent throughout the war, but fewer expressed the alarm that they and their children could be sold into slavery.<sup>49</sup>

The rumor distinctly flowed in Figure 2 through those black claimants who testified for Isaac Sykes and the claimants he testified for in turn. William H. James also repeated this rumor, while the Atkins network did not raise this issue once. And although Henry Sykes did not address the rumor to the Commissioners in his claim, Isaac Sykes testified for him thusly: “He thought as I did that the rebels were opposed to liberty and that if they succeeded no free colored man could live in the South and his children would always be slaves and have rights as freeman.” The alarm from these claimants was sincere, and could very well have acted as a motivating factor for the Sykes and their connections, who were, with a few exceptions, some of the most active Unionists within this network.<sup>50</sup>

Henry Sykes, for example, was the Sykeses’ nephew. Although he did not seem to act for the Union particularly, he expressed his inability to vote for secession as a reason for his lack of substantial evidence to loyalty. But with the Sykeses’ testimonies, Henry became a member of the Unionist network, and his credibility was also helped along with a letter from a white man named John Hughes, who called Henry “a respectable mechanic.”<sup>51</sup>

Isabella Atkins, the daughter of Isaac Sykes, was the only female claimant in this network. Her husband’s Unionism overshadowed her story although he had died after the war. Both Henry and Richard testified more on behalf of her husband, with Henry ignoring her loyalty altogether: “I have known Isabella Atkins and her husband Cornelius Atkins all my life. I lived near them and knew them well. They were both free born and always Union people. He belonged to the Union League during the war and there was no doubt about his loyalty.” Atkins’ claim also

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<sup>49</sup> Testimony of Isaac Sykes, Allowed claim 12429, March 20, 1872, Henrico County.

<sup>50</sup> Testimony of Henry Sykes, Allowed claim 12428, March 20, 1872, Henrico County.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

contrasted with Emily Atkins' testimony for Isaac Pleasants' claim. Isabella mentioned her seven children in her claim within her statement of loyalty, along with assertions that "We were not well treated. We had no education." Isabella used her children and lack of education to explain not only why she supported the Union cause, but also why she and her husband did not actively work for it. Isabella's kinship ties enabled her to acquire land in the first place: Isaac Sykes allowed Isabella and her husband to live on and farm fifty acres of his land. Although the land was legally her father's, Isabella claimed it as her own to the Commission.<sup>52</sup>

In Figure 2, the Sykes network branched, with William H. James connecting two groups of claimants and witnesses. James was related to Isaac Sykes, as they both married two sisters, and they lived on adjoining farms. During the war, however, James was forced to move his family to City Point in August of 1864 after Union troops took the property James would later claim. While at City Point, James worked with the Union Quartermasters Department until the end of the war. Before he moved, in 1862 James ran from Confederate fortifications in Chesterfield County after fifteen days of work. He also gave information to Union pickets. Although he was forced to break kinship ties in moving from the county, his kinship ties and nuclear family did not prevent him from moving behind Union lines. Once his property was taken, he felt no strong pull to stay in Henrico. James compared with New Kent's William H. Brisby, who worked for the Confederate Army rather than leave his property behind. Likewise, James left only when the Union Army appropriated his property, suggesting that securing property impinged more on Unionist activity than kinship ties.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Testimony of Isabella Atkins, Allowed claim 36925, December 6, 1872, Henrico County; Latimore, "Always a Minority?", 89.

<sup>53</sup> Testimony of William H. James, Allowed claim 12427, March 20, 1872, Henrico County.

While Henrico's free black community could support family groups, kinship ties in Charles City County not only unified claimants in their resistance against the Confederacy, but also gave them the identity of "Union men." The Brown network consisted of claimants Edmund C. Brown, Oscar Brown, Warren A. Brown, and witnesses Mary Brown, Sam Brown, and Harrison Tyler. At the center of this network, Sylvanus T. Brown, Warren A. Brown, Edmund C. Brown, and Oscar Brown formed a distinct but unconnected sub-network. Interestingly, it was a witness, Oscar Brown, who tied the other three claimants together. Every claimant lived around Tyler, Charles City except for Sylvanus T. Brown, who hailed near Wilcox Landing. This was a significant distance from Tyler, but Sylvanus was the son of Warren A. Brown, suggesting a strong kinship connection. As a witness for Sylvanus, Oscar Brown told the Commissioners that he was supposedly a distant relation, a third or fourth cousin to Sylvanus; he was also a cousin to Edmund C. Brown. Edmund Brown's witnesses, Mary and Sam, were his wife and brother, respectively. Finally, Sylvanus' witness, Harrison Tyler, was the only member of the network without a familial tie to another member.

Within this network, Sylvanus T. Brown provided a compelling case study. During the war, Confederate authorities impressed Sylvanus and, according to his words, "Once I was made to wait on some of the officers – three or four of them." Sylvanus' claim sketched dangerous stories of his Unionism. He guided a Union scout from Harrison's landing, across the Chickahominy swamp, through Confederate camps, up to Richmond, and back over a period of five days. Sylvanus also carried letters to Union men and women behind Union lines. Sylvanus told the Commissioners, "I was threatened with being hung by the Confederates for taking men

out of Richmond. They advertised me in the Richmond papers offering a reward for my head dead or alive.”<sup>54</sup>

On August 3, 1863, Sylvanus’ name was indeed published in the Richmond *Daily Dispatch*: He was charged with stealing two calves from Nathaniel Lawrence of Charles City County on July 30. Allegedly, Sylvanus stole the calves on his way to Richmond, where he sold them to a butcher, William Braner. Robert S. Brown, Sylvanus’ cousin and an allowed SCC claimant himself, as well as Sylvanus’ father, Warren Brown, would pay his recognizance fee, and Sylvanus pleaded not guilty to the charges on October 12, 1863. Through two witnesses, Sylvanus showed that he purchased the calves from a black man while on the road to Richmond, but neither Sylvanus nor his witnesses could prove who this man was.

The suspicion surrounding Sylvanus’ transaction was not uncommon. Given differences in social status, there was a risk of trading between whites and blacks, largely due to the uncertainty surrounding slaves’ property ownership, which legally went unrecognized, versus slaves’ marketing of property, which was often regulated. Black and white traders who worked together participated in both informal and illegal trading networks, necessary because trading with slaves and free blacks represented a shift in the social order. The uncertainty surrounding interracial trading laws also followed free black traders, whose social status was only slightly above that of an enslaved person’s. As a result, free black traders often risked being cheated without any sort of legal protection.<sup>55</sup>

Regardless of the mysterious transaction between Sylvanus and the anonymous trader, stealing cattle could also be considered an act of routine resistance. Stealing food supply in wartime was a subtle attack on the Confederate hegemony. A thief was selfish, but he ultimately

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<sup>54</sup> Testimony of Sylvanus T. Brown, Allowed claim 7724, July 31, 1877, Charles City County.

<sup>55</sup> Penningroth, *The Claims of Kinsfolk*, 66.

hurt local trade and stole food meant to feed an army. Nevertheless, Richard Waddill, then sheriff of Charles City County and witness for the case, testified to Sylvanus' good character and also vouched for Sylvanus' free black witnesses. More pertinent to this case, George M. Waddill, an officer in the Confederate Army, stood for Sylvanus as an "honest man of good character" and "fully trusted," a reputation garnered from Sylvanus' sixteen-month-long service as Waddill's body servant in the Confederate Army. This length of service pales in comparison to Sylvanus' testimony for the Commissioners, when "once" he served as a body servant for three or four Confederate officers.<sup>56</sup>

The court convicted Sylvanus of the felony and sentenced him to be sold into absolute slavery on October 13, 1863, a punishment reinstated into Virginia law in 1860. Although such a severe sentence was uncommon, wartime scarcity of food and emotions undoubtedly played a part in the harsh sentence. Furthermore, the *Dispatch*'s next article about Sylvanus' conviction confirmed: "This is the same negro who, it is alleged, conducted the enemy in their raids through the county of Charles City." Although not mentioned in the court documents, this suspicion may have followed Sylvanus into trial.

A witness in Sylvanus' claim, Oscar Brown, confirmed the *Dispatch* article's allegations and how Sylvanus would run people through Union lines:

He used to help the union cause all he possibly could, he used to bring a good many out from Richmond and get them through the lines. That was his business a good deal of the time. He would go in with something to sell and bring back those who wanted to get through the lines.

Oscar Brown's description of Sylvanus' human smuggling system was similar to the situation in which Sylvanus was arrested. When reporting his arrest, the *Daily Dispatch* alluded to his

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<sup>56</sup> "Stealing Cattle," Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, August 3, 1863; Richmond Hustings Court Minutes, October 12, 1863, Richmond, VA; Richmond Hustings Court Causes, October 12-13, 1863; Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 31.



reputation as “an honest trader, or market man,” further highlighting the many contradictions in this case. Regardless of guilt or innocence, Sylvanus was tainted in Confederate Richmond as not simply a Union sympathizer, but one who actively worked against the Confederacy.<sup>57</sup>

Sylvanus’ wartime inconsistencies were striking, especially considering incredulous Commissioners allowed his case. The honesty with which Sylvanus’ Hustings Court witnesses credited him was certainly stretched in the SCC papers. In both his court case and his claim, freedom and financial incentive were probably stronger motivations for his Unionist acts than any inclination toward loyalty. Sylvanus described his time with the Confederate Army as forced, an experience that not few claimants experienced. But his acts for the Union Army as a guide were truly dangerous, demonstrating to the Commissioners a sincerity that would otherwise be lacking. On November 9, 1863, Sylvanus, “a very likely negro man,” was sold into slavery, perhaps paying a price for not only stealing cattle but for his reputation as a Union man.

Also within Sylvanus’ network was his father, Warren A. Brown. Warren Brown not only provided Sylvanus’ recognizance fee and served as a witness in Sylvanus’ trial, but he was a Union man in his own right. Warren, also a free black, worked on Confederate fortifications at Jamestown but ran away. When Confederate guards returned for him, he lived in the woods, returning home only at night for food. Witness Oscar Brown testified again, informing the Commissioners that Warren procured information for the Union Army at Wilson’s Landing and that Warren was “well known in the community as a Union man, especially by the colored

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<sup>57</sup> Richmond Hustings Court Minutes, October 13, 1863; James M. Campbell, *Slavery on Trial: Race, Class, and Criminal Justice in Antebellum Richmond, Virginia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 150-151; Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, “Hustings Court,” October 14, 1863.

<sup>57</sup> Testimony of Oscar Brown for Sylvanus T. Brown, Allowed claim 7724, July 31, 1877, Charles City County; Richmond *Daily Dispatch*, “Stealing Cattle,” August 3, 1863.

people, and was suspected by the whites.” The Commissioners accepted this testimony readily, proclaiming his loyalty proven.<sup>58</sup>

The last claimant in this network, Edmund C. Brown, followed similar patterns to Joseph Brown of New Kent County. Edmund was also a free man with family. Besides running from Confederate fortifications three times, a feat for which Confederates threatened to whip him, Edmund did not participate in covert actions for the Union Army like Sylvanus and Warren. Edmund was not entirely inactive, however. He and his wife would feed Union soldiers and provide them with shelter. Unlike Warren, Edmund’s acts of resistance were not separate from his household, but his wife was included in his less dangerous acts. Warren’s acts of resistance could not exist within the home considering he was passing information to the Union Army.<sup>59</sup>

Reappearing as a witness throughout this network was Oscar Brown. As stated, Oscar considered himself distant kin to Sylvanus, Warren, and Edmund. Although he was a claimant, his claim is missing, thus breaking the analysis of connections in this particular network. Nevertheless, it was clear that Oscar was an integral part of the network, as he connected Edmund to Warren and Sylvanus. In his testimonies, Oscar vocalized his Union sentiments more poignantly than his kin: “We had no more privileges before the war anymore, and not so much as some of the slaves. We were all Union people: we could not be anything else and be true to ourselves.” Oscar’s words were unique among the claimants in this study, expressing emotion that was rare to find in the SCC papers. His words also articulated a distinct identity – not only were he and his kin “Union men,” but they were so because they were free black men.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Testimony of Warren A. Brown and Oscar Brown, Allowed claim 7591, August 8, 1877, Charles City County.

<sup>59</sup> Testimony of Edmund C. Brown, Allowed claim 6468, August 3, 1877, Charles City County.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

A second Charles City County network centered around a very dedicated Unionist: William Charity. The second claimant in the network was Harris Miles, Charity's father-in-law. Considering Charity married Miles' daughter on June 18, 1863, it was logical that he and Harris Miles were in contact during the war. Geography certainly had a stronger influence in this Charles City network. Every witness was from either Roland's Mill or Harrison Landing except Joshua Miles, who lived in Tyler. But Joshua Miles was Harris Miles' son, giving him stronger ties to the Roland's Mill area. Of the witnesses in this network, only one was unrelated to Charity and Miles: William Turner, a neighbor and witness for Harris Miles.<sup>61</sup>

The two claimants in this network were of two different generations and thus represent two different loyalties. As a member of the younger generation, Charity joined the 184th New York Volunteers "as soon as General Butler came to Harrison's Landing" until the end of the war, serving under Captain James T. Outerson of Company G. Both Charity and Miles avoided conscription and the Confederate fortifications; Charity because of his enlistment in the Union Army and Miles for his age – he was over 50 years old during the war, while Charity was in his late twenties. Once married, Charity moved his young family closer to Union lines and away from Confederate forces.

Miles often referred to his post-war experiences as proof of his loyalty. Although he did mention his relationship to Charity, his son-in-law, as a regular scout in the Union Army, he otherwise alluded to his position as County Clerk with the Republican Party. In order to serve, Miles took the ironclad oath, a sworn statement for southerners to prove loyalty to the United States government. If one took an ironclad oath, one pledged that he or she had supported the

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<sup>61</sup> Testimony of William Charity, Allowed claim 20400, June 22, 1877, Charles City County; Testimony of Harris Miles, Allowed claim 20.399, August 1 and September 25, 1874, Charles City County; "Charity-Miles Marriage." June 18, 1863.

Federal government from secession to surrender and never aided the Confederate government. Based on the Commissioner's remarks for Miles' claim, this oath, along with Charity's service with the Union Army, was Miles' strongest evidence for loyalty. That the Commissioners approved his claim was unexpected – they usually did not accept post-war evidence to prove the loyalty of a claimant. But the connection between Charity and Miles complemented Miles' post-war loyalty, proving Miles' loyalty to the Commissioners given his older age.<sup>62</sup>

The Charity-Miles network lacked the supportive and revolutionary aspects of the Brown network. While family ties between the Browns seemed to have cemented a desire to resist the Confederacy and nurtured Unionism between family members as an identity, the Charity-Miles network used kinship selfishly during the war. Only William Charity resisted the Confederacy according to Scott's definitions of resistance by joining the Union Army. He moved his family away from his in-laws and closer to Union lines, an act that probably weakened ties between the two claimants. Harris Miles, on the other hand, demonstrated more loyalty to the Union after the war than during it, but could not act on his loyalty due to his age. Without a more diversified, larger network, the Charity-Miles network did not develop a sense of Unionism as identity.

Despite the Commissioners' unwillingness to associate kinship and loyalty, the claimants of New Kent, Henrico, and Charles City counties managed to articulate the significant influence of kinship on loyalty. While property concerns and old age could prohibit a future claimant from resisting the Confederacy and actively supporting the Union, kinship ties otherwise strengthened loyalty and Unionist identity, especially where a strong community existed to support a claimant's household. Kinship ties built during the war lasted well after, supporting claimants in their wartime resistance and their claims to the Southern Claims Commission.

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<sup>62</sup> Lee, "Claiming the Union," University of Virginia, 27, 29. For an in-depth discussion of the ironclad oath and its relationship to the Southern Claims Commission, see Lee.

## CHAPTER 4:

### “MOST ALL OF THE COLORED MEN WERE LOYAL”:

#### NETWORKS IN BLACK AND WHITE

Except for New Kent, each county’s network of witnesses and claimants contained at least one white witness. At the center of Nansemond’s network stood George W. Singleton, a white merchant who owned a grocery store where eleven black claimants met to discuss the war. By his own words, free black Union men “made my store their headquarters . . . they all knew that if the Union forces were successful the slaves would be liberated.” Although white men within these networks recognized black claimants’ resistance and views of the war, much like the Commissioners, they assumed “the old dogma of negro inferiority.” White witnesses and the Commissioners alike referred to a free black claimant who surpassed their low expectations of their race as “unusually intelligent,” “industrious,” and “thrifty.” Black and white claimants and witnesses distinguished between black Unionists and white Unionists within their community or did not identify black neighbors as Unionists at all, as if subtly identifying the differing motivations behind each other’s loyalties.<sup>63</sup>

Despite post-war racial assumptions, it was clear that black and white loyalists counted on one another for support. After all, secessionists did not frequent groceries run by Unionists, though black patrons clearly did, bringing business and benefitting from the use of the store as a safe space. Black claimants served as witnesses for white claimants and vice versa, although these relationships did not always pay off in approved claims. The presence of a white Unionist in a network did not guarantee strong support for acts of resistance, and the claimants of New Kent County managed to resist the Confederacy without a white Unionist in their network.

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<sup>63</sup> Testimony of George W. Singleton in claim of Jacob Holland, Allowed claim 12508, April 22, 1872, Nansemond County; Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 163.

New Kent County's claimants and witnesses stood out among other networks because they were the only group of claimants in this study that explicitly distinguished between white and "colored" Union men. The commissioners asked every claimant and witness to name other Unionists in their neighborhoods, and rarely did a black claimant or witness name another black man as a "Unionist." On the same line, self-proclaimed white Unionists did not often name black men as Unionists, either. But William Wilkerson named both William H. Brisby and Warren C. Cumber as Unionists in his testimony for Joseph Brown, further noting, "I don't know of any white union men in the neighborhood." In his testimony for Joseph Brown, Beverly Dixon informed the Commissioners the same. These distinctions demonstrated that, while the claimants of this New Kent network viewed themselves and their peers as Unionists, they intentionally stood apart from white Unionists.<sup>64</sup>

Within this network of solely black claimants, it was difficult to surmise how these claimants distinguished themselves from their white Unionist counterparts. But William H. Brisby and Joseph Brown's cases highlight the limitations of Unionism for black claimants. Brisby chose to aid Confederate cavalry rather than leave his hard-earned property, and Brown's responsibilities as head of his household restrained his ability to aid the Union Army. Perhaps these limitations would have been easier to overcome with a white Unionist to support the network, as Singleton seemed to do in Nansemond.

But the presence of white witnesses in a network did not guarantee wartime support for acts of loyalty. Charles City County's network did contain one white man: James Sharpe. In his testimony for William Charity, Sharpe did what many other white witnesses would, testifying for not only Charity, but for the network as a whole. "I know the claimant, his wife, and the witness

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<sup>64</sup> Testimonies of William Wilkerson and Beverly Dixon for Joseph Brown, Allowed claim 18499, March 13<sup>th</sup>, 1874, New Kent County.

William Jones as reliable, trustworthy people, whose statement is entitled to credit. I also know the witness Harris Miles a highly respectable colored man as such so as any in this county.”

White witnesses tended to support black claimants through post-war words rather than wartime actions, like Lemuel E. Babcock. Babcock was a white Unionist commonly referred to the Commissioners by Charles City claimants and witnesses. He was a lumber dealer in the county, originally from Massachusetts and a claimant himself, though no Charles City black claimant acted as a witness for him. Nevertheless, Babcock’s black neighbors knew him well because he purportedly read abolitionist papers to them. The lack of direct ties between Babcock and black claimants demonstrated a one-sided relationship between black and white Unionists in Charles City, breaking no barriers to the social order as acts of real resistance would.<sup>65</sup>

The kinship ties previously discussed in New Kent and Charles City acted as support for these black claimants and their networks. Whether or not kin substituted for white Unionist participation could not be surmised through the claims, but clearly kinship built united and dedicated networks. Where they existed, biracial networks created loosely connected ties largely, but not always, based on patronage. White witnesses could not always empathize with black claimants’ motivations during the war, but their real usefulness served in convincing the Commissioners of a black claimants’ loyalty as the Commissioners defined wartime loyalty. White witnesses confirmed the Commissioners’ perceptions of black southerners as oppressed – too much so to help themselves. Black witnesses usually hurt white claimants, as the Commissioners largely doubted a black witness’s comprehension of wartime loyalty. Both Civil War and Reconstruction racial assumptions interweaved throughout the claims. These prejudices

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<sup>65</sup> Testimony of Charles J. Major for Lemuel E. Babcock, Allowed claim 21.160, March 8, 1873, Charles City County.

colored the interpretation of biracial networks, often emphasizing their importance and intricacies. During the war, they prevented the development of strong networks.<sup>66</sup>

Nansemond County claimants created one of the most complicated networks in this study and provided another puzzle with a prominent white witness, George W. Singleton. Singleton owned a grocery and dry goods store in Suffolk, keeping it into the war, when he moved in April 1863 during General James Longstreet's siege against Suffolk. He moved to Norfolk, where he worked as city collector and served one year on the city council during Union occupation. As a storekeeper, Singleton traded with many free black Virginians, and his store became a central location for loyal customers to discuss their opinions about the war. As a result, eleven free black claimants from Nansemond County and one from Norfolk County called on Singleton to testify for them to the SCC.<sup>67</sup>

Singleton's testimony revealed several contradictions regarding Civil War memory. In his various testimonies, Singleton morphed from an almost disinterested outsider to a paternalistic patron. In his own claim, Singleton never once mentioned his interactions with the black claimants he testified for, but as a witness, Singleton presented himself as an enlightened anthropologist, one who had "talked with most of these colored people . . . . He [claimant Dempsey Reid] was in favor of the Union cause, there were very few colored people who did not incline that way." Nevertheless, he informed the Commissioners: "Of course they had not the knowledge of events well enough to discuss the merits of either side; but they all seemed to know that the downfall of the Rebels was freedom to their race." Singleton did not necessarily mention specific conversations or acknowledge reasons behind his black patrons' loyalty.

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<sup>66</sup> Lee, "Claiming the Union," 413.

<sup>67</sup> Testimony of George W. Singleton, Allowed claim 13913, September 25, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.



Despite this, he told the Commissioners “I do not think that any of the colored people who were free before the war could have established their loyalty to the rebel government.” In his conversations with would-be claimants, he heard their loyalties, but not their motivations, largely because of the divide between a white patron and free African Americans.<sup>68</sup>

Despite his assertion that he “exerted all my influence for the preservation of the Union,” Singleton later maintained that the black claimants he testified for knew the war was for “freedom for the colored race. As I always told them so.” As a former patron and current witness, Singleton assumed a leadership role among those black claimants he patronized. During Reconstruction, after the fact, he could safely assert that the war was about emancipation, though this was only relevant to black claimants at the time of the war. For Singleton himself, the war was about the preservation of the Union, and emancipation was a means to an end.<sup>69</sup>

Upon a closer look at the black claimants who Singleton testified for in Figure 3, only six were connected to other claimants in the Nansemond network. This revealed that there was not necessarily a strong network of black claimants working together, which was supported by the testimony and shape of the network itself. Although three smaller networks surrounded Singleton, the first was made up of only one claimant, Dempsey Reid, and his witnesses. Reid fit well outside the majority of Nansemond claimants, with Singleton as his only connection to the network. Reid was arrested by Confederate soldiers twice during the war, once in 1861 and again in 1863, and was imprisoned for only one night each time. He moved inside Union lines, and during Longstreet’s siege against Suffolk, he hauled provisions around the Union lines for three weeks. Besides Singleton, Reid’s witnesses were unconnected to the greater Nansemond network.

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<sup>68</sup> Testimony of George W. Singleton in claim of Dempsey Reid, Allowed claim 12507, April 23, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

<sup>69</sup> Testimony of George W. Singleton; Testimony of George W. Singleton in claim of James Read, Allowed claim 11855, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

Unlike other counties, kinship bonds did not tie Nansemond County's claimants together, nor did the claimants unite to resist the Confederacy. Without kinship ties or an empathetic leader to identify with during the war, the connections between claimants and witnesses were confined to Reconstruction, as witnesses merely confirmed claimants' wartime acts and behaviors without any previous involvement.

The second and much more complicated network surrounding Singleton contained the only female claimant, Sarah E. Lawrence. The property Lawrence claimed was in her name, inherited from her parents and transferred to her by deed from her sisters and brother. Although usually leery about the property ownership of women, the Commissioners specifically approved of her right to the claim: "We regard as authority to the claimant to present the claim in her own name." Despite their approval, the Commissioners did not consider Lawrence's loyalty, but that of her husband and male relatives. In 1863, Lawrence and her family evacuated Suffolk for Portsmouth, where she worked as a servant. This information did not influence the Commissioners, but she also had a brother in the 1<sup>st</sup> Colored Regiment Cavalry.

Singleton's testimony for Lawrence's claim reflected the Commissioners' attitude towards Lawrence as a woman. Singleton stated:

I have known the claimant about 16 years. I saw her husband often during the war. I knew him to be a thorough Union man. She of course had her sympathies with her race. I believe she was truly loyal, they lived in Suffolk about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile from my place, both Sarah and her husband were free born.<sup>70</sup>

Like Isabella Atkins' experience in Henrico, little was expected from Lawrence for Unionist activity. But with the assurance that her husband and brother were both loyal, the Commissioners accepted that "The family were all loyal during the war." Lawrence's claim was approved.

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<sup>70</sup> Testimony of Sarah E. Lawrence, Allowed claim 12371, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

Exum White acted as a witness for Lawrence, testifying to the taking of the property. Exum was one claimant among a claimants' ring that depended upon each other for testimony, but not necessarily support for wartime resistance. This ring consisted of Exum White, David White, Richard Tynes, Jr., Benjamin Turner, and Edwin F. White. Notably, Singleton did not testify on any of these claimants' behalves.<sup>71</sup>

Each claimant in this subgroup strongly supported the Union. Exum's testimony provided unique detail about his conscription to work on Confederate fortifications:

In January 1862, the magistrate of Nansemond County summoned me and about a hundred other colored men to meet them at the Court House. When we got there they sentenced me to work on the railroad near Manassas for 60 days. They kept me there at work 70 days, and a good many of us got sick and they sent us home on sick leave. I never went back and never did another stroke of work for them afterwards. They gave me no pay for the work I did for them and that was done only because they drove me to do it and I could not help myself.

After his return from Confederate fortifications, Exum stayed true to his word and never again worked for the Confederacy. Instead, he worked on Union fortifications around Suffolk for two or three months. Interestingly, in his statement of loyalty, Exum professed, "My feelings, language, and conduct from the first I ever heard of secession to the present time have all been warmly on the side of the United States government." This distinct mention of the government was also unique, and reflects a greater pattern within this claimants' subgroup.<sup>72</sup>

Edwin White had a similar wartime experience to Exum White. He was first impressed by Confederates and later worked for the Union war effort. For almost six weeks in 1861, he cooked in a Confederate camp near Norfolk. After his release, he returned home and, in 1862, worked for Baird and McAlpine Sutlers for the 11<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Cavalry until the end of the

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<sup>71</sup> These claimants were more interconnected than Figure 3 would show. Some witness testimony was missing from their claims, including Exum White's, although notes by the Commissioners alluded to further testimony. Where this testimony was missing was not shown on network graphs, but was noted in discussion of the claimants' ring.

<sup>72</sup> Testimony of Exum White, Allowed claim 592, September 9, 1871, Nansemond Co., VA.

war. In his testimony, he expressed a common grievance of black claimants: “Among the colored people I talked my sentiments freely, but I was obliged to keep very quiet. My life would have been endangered by any public talk.” Edwin White was certainly not alone in these sentiments, but his removal from the direct network of claimants who could express their Union leanings in Singleton’s store could also have intensified this fear.<sup>73</sup>

Also a witness for Exum White, Benjamin Turner reminded the Commissioners that he had been “a strong Republican and Union man since the war commenced. In his own claim, Turner described his arrest by Confederate soldiers under General James Longstreet on suspicion of passing information to Union officers. The soldiers released him when they could not prove the charge. From May 1864 until the war’s end, Turner served as a teamster for the Union engineers corps. Richard Tynes, Jr., related to the Commissioners: “I have known Benjamin Turner about twenty years. We talked a great deal together about the war, before its commencement and while it was going on. He is as loyal a man as you can come across, and was from the start. He is a consistent Republican and always votes that ticket. He is one of our strong numbers.” Tynes provided such testimony for others in the network, including Edwin F. White.<sup>74</sup>

Throughout their testimonies, these claimants referred to each other’s strong Republican sentiments after the war. This was especially true of Richard Tynes, Jr., who never failed to mention a claimant’s Republican leanings as a witness, but did not express such sentiments for himself (although witness Benjamin Turner assured the Commissioners of Tyne’s voting habits). For Edwin T. White, Tynes informed the Commissioners: “His father and mother and all the family are Union people. Since the war I believe he always votes the Republican ticket. I never

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<sup>73</sup> Testimony of Edwin F. White, Allowed claim 532, September 9, 1871, Nansemond Co., VA.

<sup>74</sup> Testimony of Benjamin Turner, Allowed claim 523, September 9, 1871, Nansemond Co., VA.

saw him vote, for we vote in different places, but I have no doubt whatever that he was always loyal and that he is now a Republican.”<sup>75</sup>

Generally, the Commissioners were not concerned about post-war loyalties, and in their remarks for these claims, they did not mention the claimants’ professed Republican leanings. But the claimants’ emphases on their own purported loyalties after the war disconnected the Commissioners and these black claimants. As a witness for David White, Richard Tynes, Jr. declared that “He [White] and I were heart and hand for the Union cause from the first of the war until now.” This network considered their Reconstruction voting patterns to be extensions of their wartime loyalty; they voted Republican because of the war’s outcome – emancipation. But because the Commissioners did not define the war by emancipation, they did not find the same interpretation of loyalty in these claimants’ post-war political behavior.<sup>76</sup>

The Whites, Tynes, and Turner subgroup was not directly connected to Singleton, resulting in a lack of established support for their claims. The lack of a strong witness could also account for their stress on Republican politics. Exum White was a witness for Sarah Lawrence, and another indirect connection came through Benjamin Turner as witness for James T. Ayler. Ayler was the only claimant connected to Singleton whose claim was disallowed. On the surface, Ayler’s claim looked very defensible: in 1863, he took care of and fed Union soldiers, served on the gunboat “West End” on the Nansemond River, and worked on Union fortifications in Suffolk during Longstreet’s siege. His brother, William, died in 1863 fighting at Hill’s Point, having piloted gunboats throughout 1862 into 1863. By the end of the war, he worked in the federal Commissary Department in Portsmouth.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Testimony of David White, Allowed claim 535, September 9, 1871, Nansemond Co., VA.

<sup>77</sup> Testimony of James T. Ayler, Disallowed claim 12369, May 4, 1877, Nansemond Co., VA.

A special commissioner interviewed Ayler twice, and in an unusual aside, he shared his opinion of Ayler's loyalty. It appeared to this special commissioner that Ayler "Did not know or understand what was going on, sufficiently to make him to take any side, but did take Union side in 1861 when war commenced and did all he could to show it." In his second deposition, Ayler stated that "I always sympathized with the Union cause; but did not . . . always express my feelings, I had no vote. I was a free man of color." Such comments were typical of claimants. But Ayler continued to insist "I think the Government ought to pay me for the property, because I risked my life several times to give information to the Union forces." This opinion was quite strong for any claimant, whose claim was a subservient act demanding respect for the Commissioners. To make a claim was a privilege, not a right.

While this attitude and the interviewer's interpretation of Ayler's loyalty may not have directly hurt Ayler's case, the Commissioners saw only self-interest in his claim. Ayler's father, Shannon Ayler, acted as witness and revealed information that Ayler surely would have preferred to be left unsaid. Shannon told the Commissioners that his son's business in winters of 1861-1862 and 1862-1863 was "buying and selling to the Confederate army, foods, eggs, bacon, and everything he could find to buy." The Commissioners reacted strongly, stating that Ayler "might as well have been employed in the Commissary Department. He was in fact rendering aid to the Confederates." As a result, Ayler's claim was disallowed.

Ayler's wartime experience was not so easily ascribed to self-interest. Shannon Ayler also told the Commissioners about his conversations with his son, categorizing their talks about the war as discussions about "hard times, the loss of property by various people, and about his people [colored] 'going to the Yankees,' and about loss of claimant's things." Property loss was significant for free blacks, whose property was hard earned. Ayler did most of his business with

Confederates when the Union Army was not near his home in Suffolk in May 1862, and then again in the winter. During the fighting, Ayler's loyalty clearly stood with the Union. As a civilian living in the Confederate state of Virginia, however, business transactions with Confederates was not irregular or disloyal, but a way to make a living.

The experiences of members of the Whites, Tynes, and Turner subgroup were very similar, with the exceptions of Sarah Lawrence, due to her gender, and James T. Ayler, whose claim was disallowed. Each claimant resisted the Confederacy while more quietly supporting the Union. Because they were not directly connected to Singleton and his store, a welcome space for Unionists, they could not speak freely about their Unionist sentiments. As a result, their claims appeared more self-interested and were focused more on Reconstruction loyalties than wartime resistance. These claimants were, for the most part, aware of the governmental and political ties involved in the claims, viewing their own acts of loyalty during the war as favors to the United States government. While this view was certainly self-serving, the claimants perpetuated their wartime loyalties through active participation in the Republican Party.

The third network surrounding Singleton was the most complex visually, but not necessarily the most complex thematically. Interestingly, claimants within this network were connected not through each other, as with the previous network, but by witnesses other than Singleton. Witnesses Wheeler Artis, Moses Ash, and Solomon Hodges connected otherwise solitary claimants such as Jacob Holland, and a subgroup. These witnesses, however, did not appear to have been incredibly significant influences to any of the claimants they testified for. All of these witnesses answered solely property questions on behalf of the claimants. They were older men, especially Moses Ash, who was 90 years of age when he provided his testimony, and

Artis and Hodges were about 50-years-old at the time of their testimonies. They were not related to, nor did they work for the claimants. Unlike Singleton, these witnesses were older and respected men in their neighborhoods, continually reappearing to testify due to their consistent presence more than their known loyalties during the Civil War.

The claimants these witnesses testified for did not resist the Confederacy or demonstrate strong support for the Union cause, as would be defined by the framework established by Scott. Nevertheless, their claims were approved. Wheeler Artis connected Jacob Holland to the larger network with Daniel Bell, who had a brother in the Union Army but otherwise gave no strong evidence for his loyalties. Even the Commissioners remarked noncommittally, “We think he was loyal.” Similarly, Jacob Holland’s claim was approved, but rather weak. Singleton’s testimony, which Bell’s case lacked, probably helped Holland’s case. But even Singleton did not have substantial evidence in favor of Holland. Singleton acknowledged that Holland was present in his store when conversations were held between “the Union men,” but he could not “particularize as to each one I have testified today as to having had conversations with them in relation to the war.” Regardless, the Commissioners were much more receptive to his case than Bell’s, stating that Holland was “undoubtedly loyal to the United States,” but without any sort of follow-up describing why.<sup>78</sup>

Moses Ash testified for similar claimants. James Pearce spoke of no acts for or against the Union; rather, he expressed the need throughout the war to do whatever he could to support his family, as claimants in New Kent County did. Matthew Sawyer, who was about 50 years old at the start of the war, had two sons in the Union Army, but did nothing actively for the cause himself. Finally, James Read stands out in particular. He had two brothers in the Union Army,

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<sup>78</sup> Testimony of Daniel Bell, Allowed claim 4463, February 15, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA; Testimony of Jacob Holland, Allowed claim 12508, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.



but also gave the army no aid personally. Nevertheless, the Commissioners were satisfied that “He gave no aid to the Confederacy and there is no reasonable doubt that he adhered to the Union during the entire war.” This standard of loyalty was a far cry from the harsh judgment of ironclad loyalty the Commissioners usually held, and contrasts sharply from the skepticism the Commissioners had for Read’s property ownership. Again, the Commissioners black claimants’ property rather than their loyalties. Of course, Singleton probably strengthened these claimants’ cases, regardless of his shallow testimony.<sup>79</sup>

The only claimant who was actively resistant was Wiley Holland, who also connected a subgroup to this third Singleton network. The claimants in this sub-network resisted the Confederacy or worked for the Union in ways that other claimants in this third sub-network did not. Wiley Holland, for example, worked on Union entrenchments around Suffolk for three weeks without pay. Singleton also remembered significant details about his wartime loyalties:

I have known Wiley Holland about 15 years. I was intimate with Wiley during the war, he lived about 600 yards from me and I had frequent conversations with him in relation to the war. He always spoke strongly in favor of the Union and its adherents. He came into my store frequently to trade, and I saw him every day until the evacuation of Suffolk, when we both left with the Union forces.

Compared to his testimony for Jacob Holland, Singleton’s testimony for Wiley Holland was much more personalized, demonstrating either Wiley’s outspokenness, or perhaps a stronger relationship between Wiley and Singleton.<sup>80</sup>

Holland was loosely connected to a dedicated group of Unionists within this third network. This subgroup consisted of Wiley Holland, Thomas Baker, John Q. A. Reid, Alfred Gale, Ahab Holland, and witness James T. Joyner, a white Confederate sympathizer. These

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<sup>79</sup> Testimony of James Pearce, Allowed claim 12090, April 23, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA; Testimony of Matthew Sawyer, Allowed claim 11876, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA; Testimony of James Read, Allowed claim 11855, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

<sup>80</sup> Testimony of George W. Singleton in claim of Wiley Holland, Allowed claim 12091, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

claimants and witnesses lived together in Sleepy Hole, separate from other claimants in Suffolk. This sub-network actively supported the Union during the war, but the claimants did not necessarily do so together. Although they formed a distinct subgroup, the claimants were not tightly knit, and did not reciprocate by testifying for a claimant in turn. For example, Alfred Gale testified for Ahab Holland, but Holland did not testify for Gale. Not all claimants in this subgroup used Singleton as a witness, demonstrating perhaps that they were not as savvy in supporting their testimony with the Commissioners or that they did not patronize his store.

A local constable, Mr. Russell, carried Thomas Baker, who provided proof of property for Wiley Holland, to the courthouse, where a magistrate forced Baker to work on Confederate fortifications. When the Union Army arrived, Baker left Suffolk in April of 1863 to follow the Union Army to Norfolk. Thomas Baker also testified on behalf of John Q. A. Reid, who was only connected to this subgroup through his testimony. Reid worked for a Union officer in 1862 and at a sutler's store in Portsmouth and City Point from 1863 until the war's end. Ahab Holland, who testified for Thomas Baker, followed the Union Army as a laborer from June 1863 until well after the war on May 14, 1866. Like other claimants in this subgroup, Alfred Gale followed the Union Army in 1863, working as a laborer behind federal lines. He also cooked for officers of the 11th Pennsylvania Cavalry, with whom he remained until the end of the war.<sup>81</sup>

Although these claimants supported the Union in similar ways, they did not work together, and many left the area after 1863. These claimants' similarities did not end with their considerable acts of loyalty; the subgroup was strikingly affected by race. Race played a large

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<sup>81</sup> Testimony of Thomas Baker, Allowed claim 5087, February 15, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA; Testimony of John Q. A. Reid, Allowed claim 12087, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA; Testimony of Ahab Holland, Allowed claim 7038, February 15, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA; Testimony of Alfred Gale, Allowed claim 10881, February 15, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

part within the SCC as a whole, and within this network, wartime and post-war conflicts appeared both between claimants and witness as well as claimants and the Commissioners.

After the war, John Q. A. Reid made an astute observation about the manner in which the Union Army dismantled property. While explaining how his property was taken by the Union Army, Reid observed: “In June 1863 the 3rd New York Cavalry and other US soldiers were encamped in the vicinity of Suffolk and at that time took down buildings in the suburbs of Suffolk, chiefly belonging to colored people and removed the materials to their camps and from there constructed shanties or quarters.” Unsurprisingly, the Commissioners did not remark on this comment, but there were no other comments like this throughout the Nansemond County claims. Instead, racism was often part and parcel of the Commissioner’s analysis of a claim.<sup>82</sup>

Thomas Baker’s claim, for example, was littered with unusually explicit racism. Charles T. Barry, the special commissioner who interviewed most of these claimants, wrote to one Commissioner, Orange Ferriss, about Baker’s claim. The original testimony was apparently convoluted to the Commissioners, and Barry defended his work: “Baker is an ignorant Negro and like most others, would run off track to by the time I could get an answer out of him. . . . You are of course aware of the impossibility of taking darkey’s testimony in the identical language used although I try to do so.” Though these opinions likely existed among other special commissioners, it was atypical to come across them in a SCC file in such candid language. In dealing with black claimants and witnesses, the interviewer and the interviewed often understood the SCC’s questions differently, explaining why such emphasis was put on white witnesses’ testimonies as a witness for these black claimants.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Testimony of John Q. A. Reid, Allowed claim 12087, April 22, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

<sup>83</sup> Charles T. Barry to Hon. Orange Ferriss, Glens Falls, New York, September 17, 1872, Claim of Thomas Baker, Southern Claims Commission Papers.

James T. Joyner contrasted with Singleton as a white witness. Joyner was a Confederate sympathizer during the war. He testified for Holland's property and Baker's loyalty, assuring the Commissioners that both claimants were "Union men from the beginning." Because Joyner was a Confederate, he perceived Baker's loyalty differently than Singleton, who tended to lump many of the claimants for whom he testified into one, presenting similar testimony regarding their loyalty as free blacks. Joyner, on the other hand, did not classify Baker as a black man in his testimony, but as a Union man: "He [Baker] was a Union man from the beginning, he thought all men ought to be free, the causes of the war was for freedom of slaves, that the Union ought to be maintained." Joyner distinguished between emancipation and preservation of the Union as important factors in Baker's loyalty, which Singleton only did for himself. As a Confederate viewing Union loyalty from the outside, Joyner did not see emancipation as an effort to preserve the Union, but saw both undertakings as conjoined efforts of the Union cause.<sup>84</sup>

Nansemond County's network of claimants was diverse in race and ideology. Compared to other networks, Nansemond's claimants lacked the kinship ties that propelled resistance in New Kent or Charles City counties. The cohesion of Nansemond claimants resulted from a common patron: George W. Singleton, a white Unionist who could organize his clients in his grocery store through word of mouth, but could not bridge his experience and their own. The claimants surrounding him worked individually to resist the Confederacy, and by 1863 many had left Suffolk with Longstreet's siege. Some claimants returned after the war, remembering their wartime loyalties to become active members of the Republican Party, in their minds a logical extension of their wartime experiences and an enthusiastic embrace of their new civil rights.

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<sup>84</sup> Testimony of James T. Joyner in claim of Thomas Baker, Allowed claim 5087, February 15, 1872, Nansemond Co., VA.

Henrico County's biracial network was unlike Nansemond's, though it also consisted of two white claimants. These two claimants, James B. McCauley and John McDowell, had very different claims than Singleton in Nansemond County, and both were disallowed. Henrico County's claimants highlighted the inconsistencies of wartime loyalty and post-war judgments of loyalty. While Singleton united the claimants of Nansemond, two African American brothers, Isaac and Richard Sykes, united Henrico's network. The Sykeses and white claimant John McDowell formed their own triad, each testifying for the other. Their stories were at once unique to this network and also underlined various themes seen among black claimants.

Richard Sykes worked actively against the Confederacy. He was arrested in August of 1861 by Confederate pickets because he wore "a Yankee blouse," and he gave information to Union pickets. He opposed secession "in any and every form." After the war, Sykes pointedly noted that he voted and worked for the Republican ticket. Isaac Sykes was about 60 years old during the war, and thus did not do much for the Union. Nevertheless, he claimed that rebels threatened to kill his cows and burn his house, though he was spared. As a witness for both Richard and Isaac, John McDowell provided them with the same joint testimony. Although the Commissioners allowed their claims, they did not allow McDowell's.<sup>85</sup>

McDowell's relationship with the Sykeses sounds familiar: he owned a grocery store in Richmond, where the Sykeses traded with him. After the first year of the war, McDowell, a native of Ireland, sold the store at a loss and bought a farm about 12 miles from Richmond, adjoining the Skykeses' places, in order to avoid being forced into Confederate service. In his testimony for the Sykeses, McDowell confirmed that he had heard of the information they gave

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<sup>85</sup> Testimony of Richard Sykes, Allowed claim 12430, March 23, 1872, Henrico County; Testimony of Isaac Sykes, Allowed claim 12429, March 20, 1872, Henrico County.

to the Union pickets himself, and that they voted the Radical ticket. McDowell sharply differed from Singleton in that his claim was disallowed, largely due to his choice of witnesses.

McDowell's claim read like an allowed claim. After selling his grocery store, he lived near the Sykeses for about 18 months before he moved north, where he worked in Philadelphia and New Jersey. As a white man, he could do what black claimants could not: leave his wife, children, and home rather than help the Confederate cause. On March 23, 1865, he enlisted as a private in the 2nd New Jersey Regiment, Company D and was honorably discharged on July 11, 1865. From there, he returned to Trenton and moved back to Richmond. During his time in Virginia in 1861, Confederate detectives arrested him for one night. Isaac Sykes confirmed McDowell's reputation in the neighborhood, remembering, "The white people in the neighborhood abused and cursed him for it. He was regarded as a Union man by all, both white and black." Until a special agent investigated the claim, McDowell could have been called loyal to the Union.

Upon further investigation, the Commissioners learned that McDowell had volunteered with the Confederate service in a type of home guard unit in March or April of 1862, before the Confederate Conscription Act of 1862. Most likely, the special agent admitted, McDowell had done so to escape active service. McDowell remained with the unit for two months before he was discharged for disability. The special agent also had a neighbor testify to the reputation of the Sykeses, noting that they were "two honest colored men of . . . intelligence." With McDowell's Confederate service in mind, the Commissioners rejected his claim, noting that his enlistment in the Union Army at the end of the war did not prove his loyalty because no service was likely to be required. McDowell's witnesses, the Sykeses, buttressed this rather teleological argument. The Commissioners also remarked that "His only witnesses to loyalty and taking are Richard and

Isaac Sykes,” confirming an aversion to black witnesses despite the special agent’s assurance of their intelligence. Without the testimony of more trustworthy white witnesses, McDowell was not a Unionist by the Commissioners’ standards for white men.<sup>86</sup>

While the testimony of two black men was not satisfactory to prove the loyalty of a white man, a second white witness, James B. McCauley, testified for a black claimant, William James, without a strong relationship to him. William James was a deceased man who was presumably the father of William H. James. This deceased claimant certainly earned the recognition he received after the war. In 1863, Confederates jailed him for a week on the charge of assisting Union gunboats. His claim connected a second white witness to the network. James B. McCauley admitted to not knowing exactly when James died, suggesting a post-war estrangement, but said that he saw James often during the war and that he was known as a Union man among both white and black neighbors.<sup>87</sup>

McCauley’s place in the Sykes network contrasted with McDowell’s, although both claims were disallowed. Whereas McDowell mentioned his connection with prominent black Unionists, the Sykeses, and used them as witnesses, McCauley used black witnesses without mentioning any connection to them in his long explanation of loyalty. McCauley claimed not to have voted for the Ordinance of Secession – Confederate soldiers were at the polls, and no one could vote freely, so he did not vote at all. In 1863, McCauley was arrested for conspiracy and

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<sup>86</sup> Testimony of John McDowell, Disallowed claim 12426, March 20, 1872, Henrico County. For more information on the Commissioners’ treatment and expectations of southern white male claimants, see Lee, Chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>87</sup> Testimony of William James, Allowed claim 20405, February 19, 1873, Henrico County.

Doubt followed the identity of William H. James the claimant and William H. James the witness, who was entitled to William James’ claim. Because so many William Jameses were listed in the Census data, many around the same age, there was no effective way to pinpoint the identity of William H. James. The William H. James who testified for William James, however, was about 10 years older than William H. James the claimant. Additionally, William H. James the witness told a very different wartime story than the claimant. This witness was arrested by Confederates during the war and took the ironclad oath for the Union. Both details would have acted as strong support for loyalty that William H. James the claimant would presumably have mentioned in his own claim, but did not.

communicating with federal gunboats. He spent 26 days in Castle Thunder only to be discharged without proof. After his arrest in May 1864, he helped federal gunboats pick up torpedoes in the river. He also gave information to Union pickets and helped Union prisoners to escape, “especially when they dug that culvert out of Libby,” referring to a jailbreak of over one hundred Union prisoners who tunneled themselves out of Libby Prison in Richmond overnight from February 9 and 10, 1864.

In July 1864, McCauley was arrested again by Confederates and kept in Castle Thunder for about three months. He was charged for acting as pilot for federal gunboats. He did not take any oath to the Confederacy because he had already taken an oath of allegiance to the United States government. While in prison, he lost 85 pounds from illness and starvation. Although McCauley had a brother in the Confederate Army, McCauley persuaded him to desert, hid him in his home, and gave him directions north to avoid punishment.

On the surface, it was difficult to see why the Commissioners would disallow McCauley’s claim. Interestingly, they did not reject it because they doubted his loyalty, nor did they mention his sole use of black witnesses as they did with McDowell. Instead, they rejected his claim because they doubted that any property was taken from McCauley. What property they believed was taken was objects like carpenter and shoemaker’s tools, suggesting depredation rather than use as army supplies. In a way, the Commissioners treated McCauley very much like a black claimant, doubting his property rather than his loyalty and allowing only black claimants’ testimony. On the other hand, McDowell was held to the same standards as white claimants, with any reasonable doubt nullifying his loyal acts.<sup>88</sup>

Henrico County’s black claimants were supported by a settlement of free people of African descent, allowing claimants to resist the Confederacy and support the Union more

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<sup>88</sup> Testimony of James B. McCauley, Disallowed claim 19991, February 11, 1873, Henrico County.



effectively. Kinship ties were integral for this network, but so were relations between black and white Unionists. Unlike Nansemond County, however, the most prominent Unionists were not white, but black, such as Isaac Pleasants, Richard Sykes, and Isaac Sykes. The prominence these men may have shared within their own community, however, did not follow the white claimants they testified for: John McDowell and James B. McCauley. Claimants in this network were motivated largely by self-interest. Identifying as free blacks, they wanted to improve their situations and their futures. But the work these black claimants did to further the Union cause could not be ignored, and the Commissioners allowed their claims precisely because the claimants' acts fit the Commissioner's standards of loyalty.

While the Sykeses could not help McDowell and McCauley as witnesses, the presence of white witnesses within a network tended to favor black claimants during Reconstruction. During the war, however, white Unionists within an otherwise black Unionist network prevented the development of strong networks of resistance. As a patron in Nansemond County, Singleton could provide a safe, somewhat private setting in his grocery store for black Unionists to gather. But when Suffolk was under siege, such backing could not keep the network together, nor did it encourage black Unionists to collaborate as they did with their kin. Much like the Commissioners during Reconstruction, white Unionists could not necessarily empathize with their black Unionist counterparts, unable to conceptualize the differences in each other's wartime experiences.

## EPILOGUE

Historians have looked at African American loyalty and resistance during the Civil War through large communities. But this method described assumptions rather than analysis supported by historical sources. The recent public debate over black Confederates emphasized the importance of understanding African American loyalty during the Civil War, although the existence of such soldiers was the wrong discussion. Instead, historians needed to clarify, while not oversimplifying, the complexity of black loyalty, recognizing the distinct social and economic obstacles that African American Unionists, or even Confederates, faced during the war. “Unionism” itself was understood as a relatively self-interested drive towards emancipation.

With the sources available to historians, such questions regarding loyalty and motivation were difficult to answer. Through the Southern Claims Commission papers, however, historians could glimpse wartime loyalty through Reconstruction. This method was imperfect, prone to issues of memory and changes wrought by Reconstruction politics. But tempering an analysis of the claims with close readings could reveal both wartime motivation and postwar interpretations of loyalty. To anchor this study of wartime loyalty, I compared and contrasted claimants’ wartime loyalties with Reconstruction memories, interpreting African American’s Civil War loyalties and motivations through both their words and actions.

Given the precarious positions of Charles City, Henrico, Nansemond, and New Kent counties’ black claimants, it was no surprise that, while they were loyal to the Union, connections to property and people hampered loyalty. During the war, these 54 African American claimants acted not as Unionists or Confederates, but as husband and wives, fathers and mothers, friends and neighbors. Because their aspirations of emancipation and civil rights contradicted Confederate society but paralleled and, eventually, coincided with the interests of

the United States, the claimants became what the Southern Claims Commissioners would define as Unionist.

Digital tools allow historians to literally view history differently, and the network visualizations in Appendix 1 did not simply show links between claimants, but told stories of their united efforts to resist the Confederacy. Claimants in different counties, surrounded by different people and circumstances, faced different challenges but gained other support in their resistance. In New Kent County, where the free black population was knit by neighbors' long histories in the St. Peters community, strong relationships between claimants resembling kinship developed an ardent network of Unionists. When groups of claimants and witnesses verified that they had actively worked against the Confederacy together, the Commissioners were more likely to grant a claim. The sometimes life-threatening and incredibly risky acts of claimants like William H. Brisby and Thomas Fox, who smuggled Union sympathizers from Richmond to Union lines, were personally sacrificial and counter to Confederate interests. Often, these acts were to the Union's advantage, but these claimants were also working for their own benefit.

Sometimes claimants did not work for long-term goals of emancipation and civil rights, but for immediate concerns. More often than not, those concerns took the shape of family and household. With wives and children to support, free African American men like Joseph Brown often could not follow the example of Brisby and Fox, nor could they jeopardize the safety of their families, who could feel Confederate retribution in the absence of their household head. These limitations were exacerbated by a claimant's age. At over 50 years old during the war, Harris Miles did not actively resist the Confederacy or support the Union, but supported his son-in-law as a scout for the Union Army. Miles was instead loyal to the United States during Reconstruction, taking the ironclad oath and working with the local Republican Party.

Property was perhaps of more to concern to property-owning free African Americans. Given the perpetual movement of the Confederate and Union armies in and out of these four counties, leaving home and property unprotected could have been detrimental to a property owner's investments. William H. Brisby worked for the Confederate Army rather than leave his property behind. William James of Henrico left his home, moving his household behind Union lines, only after his property was taken and damaged by Union troops moving through the county. Once his property was gone, he felt no need to remain behind for the kinship or neighborhood ties that were so strong in Henrico.

While kinship and property certainly curbed Unionist activity, strong kinship ties within a network could also serve to build Unionist identity. For Charles City County's Brown network, Oscar Brown articulated his own and his fellow claimants' Unionist sentiments as a matter of fact. The Brown network consisted of Union men because they were free black men, and could not be anything else. This attitude related to that of New Kent's Peyton Harris, who considered himself in bondage although he was born free. Without full rights of citizenship, some free African Americans considered the Union Army to be their liberators as much as enslaved African Americans did. Their allegiance to the Union was, to them, common sense and closely linked to their identities.

This belief, among others, was something with which white witnesses could not always empathize. Although white men like George W. Singleton in Nansemond appeared to organize a network of black claimants, they could not effectively support such networks without an understanding of the pre-war and wartime experiences of the black claimants for whom they testified. Networks centered around white witnesses were loosely connected and not particularly active in real resistance against the Confederacy. White witnesses were, however, effective in

confirming the Commissioners' notions of oppressed southern African Americans, and thus the Commissioners allowed many black claims despite lack of Unionist activity.

White claimants like James B. McCauley and John McDowell testified for black claimants like Isaac and Richard Sykes, who testified for them in return. Disallowing both of their claims, the Commissioners treated McCauley and McDowell very differently, subjecting McCauley to the loyalist standards of a white southern male while treating McDowell similarly to a black claimant, questioning the taking of his property. Though a white witness could testify for a black claimant, the Commissioners distrusted a black witness for a white claimant, more often than not disallowed that white claim. White witnesses were advantageous for African American claimants during Reconstruction, playing into the Commissioners' stereotypes while simultaneously undermining their own claims.

The self-interested advantages claimants worked for and eventually received did not change the Commissioner's views of their loyalties, nor should they change historians'. While their examples of real resistance may not have been purely selfless, African-American claimants worked during the war for systematic change that would transform the face of southern society. Unionism was not a motivation, but a logical extension of claimants' desires for civil rights and political participation.

In the Southern Claims Commission, overseen by three white male Radical Republicans, claimants' definitions of their loyalties were no longer their own. Claimants who consciously played into the Commissioner's definitions of loyalty, as well as property ownership, were rewarded with allowed claims. As a result, all information from the claims was subject to the same limitations: the haze of memory and the guise of self-interest. Networks from the claims

remained broken because not every African American, property-owning or not, who resisted the Confederacy needed to or could afford to file a claim. The SCC papers could only chronicle the loyalties of property-owning African Americans directly in the Union's line of fire.

Greater geographic diversity could expand this study, examining Virginia as a whole in a manner similar to Margaret Storey's analysis of Alabaman Unionists. Where enough claimants filed claims, network visualizations could enhance our understanding of African American loyalty throughout Virginia. One complication with this was the small number of claims filed by African Americans in different areas, such as Southwest Virginia. Further research on prewar relationships within these communities could help explain the wartime and postwar ties of the networks discussed in this study, illustrating how these relationships were formed and why they were maintained. This glimpse into claimants' prewar lives would allow a comparison to their relationships as claimants and witnesses, clarifying whether or not these networks strengthened claimants' wartime loyalties or if wartime loyalties could work to strengthen networks.

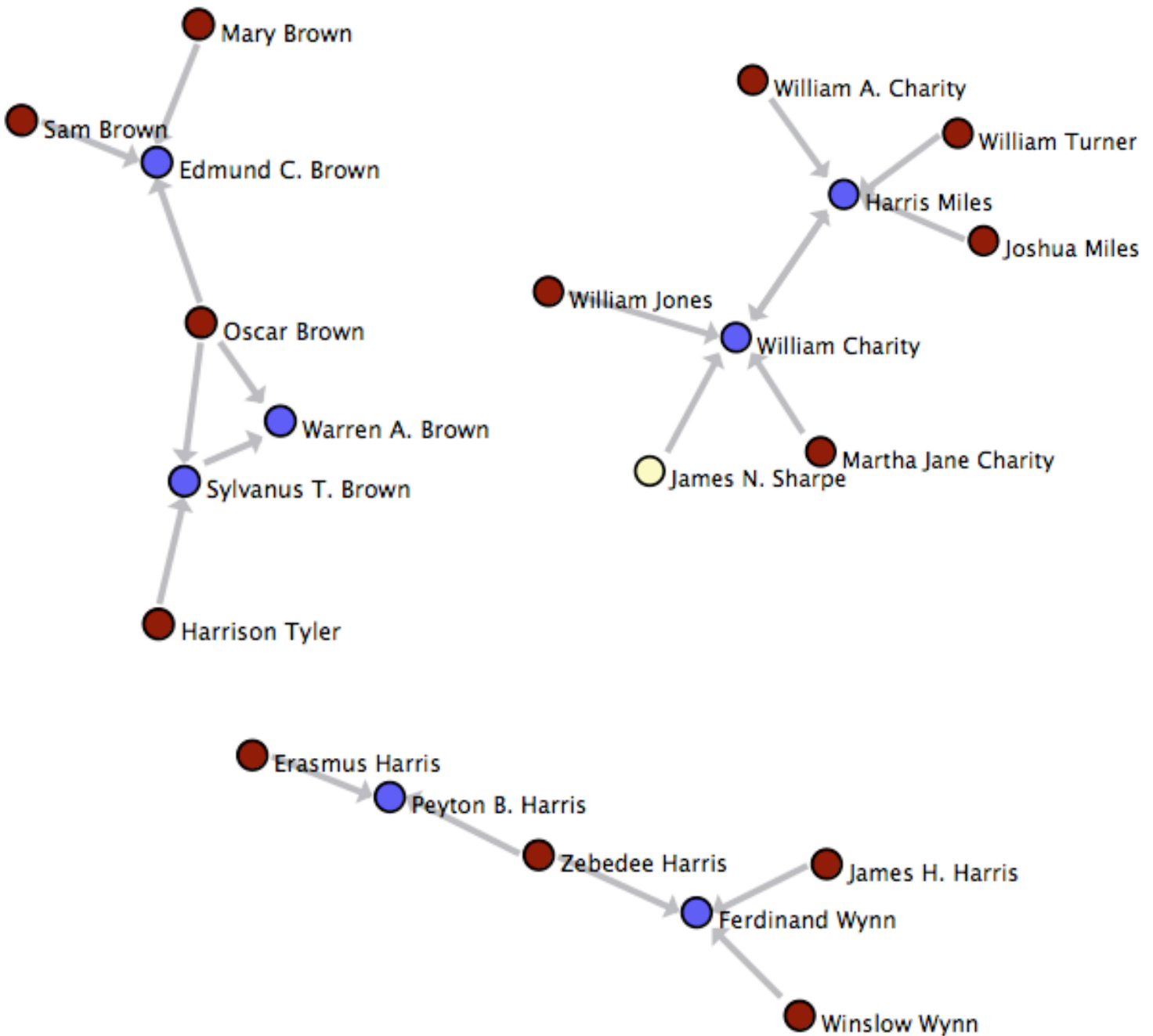
Knowledge about African American loyalty during the Civil War may not be expanded simply due to lack of sources. The evidence of an African American in a blue or grey uniform, whether free or enslaved, cannot resolve why he felt compelled to wear it. Any explanation for this occurrence alone is likely speculation – perhaps useful, but unsubstantiated nonetheless. Neither the 'politically correct' nor their critics can legitimately use such evidence to support a larger agenda surrounding current African American or Southern heritage identities. Moreover, historians cannot assume that wartime resistance of African Americans to the Confederacy amounted to loyalty for the Union. Instead, a new understanding of Unionism itself must be developed to include the sentiments of those African Americans who worked for the Union, such as the SCC's black claimants.

In different areas, black Unionists set themselves apart from white Unionists. As with Singleton, white Unionists worked for the preservation of the Union and very different interests than black Unionists. The African American claimants in this study redefined Unionism within their networks. Black Unionists understood the Civil War as an opportunity for emancipation before many white Unionists, and their unique circumstances regarding family and property required more caution in active resistance to the Confederacy or support of the Union. Any lack of Unionist activity on the part of a claimant must consider these impediments. Often, a claimant who was inactive during the war justly identified as a Unionist, while another claimants' acts of resistance could simply be self-interested. Although claimants worked within the Commissioners' bounds of loyalty, during the war, they created a distinct black Unionism through their Unionist activities in which self-interest and interests of a neighborhood intertwined to inspire Unionist activities.

The African-American claimants of Charles City, Henrico, Nansemond, and New Kent counties faced opposition from Confederate forces, Union forces, and the Southern Claims Commissioners from the Civil War to Reconstruction. Caught between two armies, they formed groups of active supporters and passive sympathizers to resist the Confederacy and aid what they would shape as the Union cause: emancipation. In their active support of the Union, Virginia's black claimants worked to free themselves and their children, merely to keep themselves free, for an education, or for full rights as citizens. These claimants would later define themselves as Unionists, possibly for the sakes of the Commissioners, but ultimately they redefined loyalty and Unionism through their wartime acts of resistance.

APPENDIX 1

Figure 1. The Charles City County network consisted of three sub-networks: the Brown network, the Charity network, and the Harris network. Blue nodes refer to black claimants, red nodes to black witnesses, and yellow nodes to white witnesses and claimants, as distinguished in text.





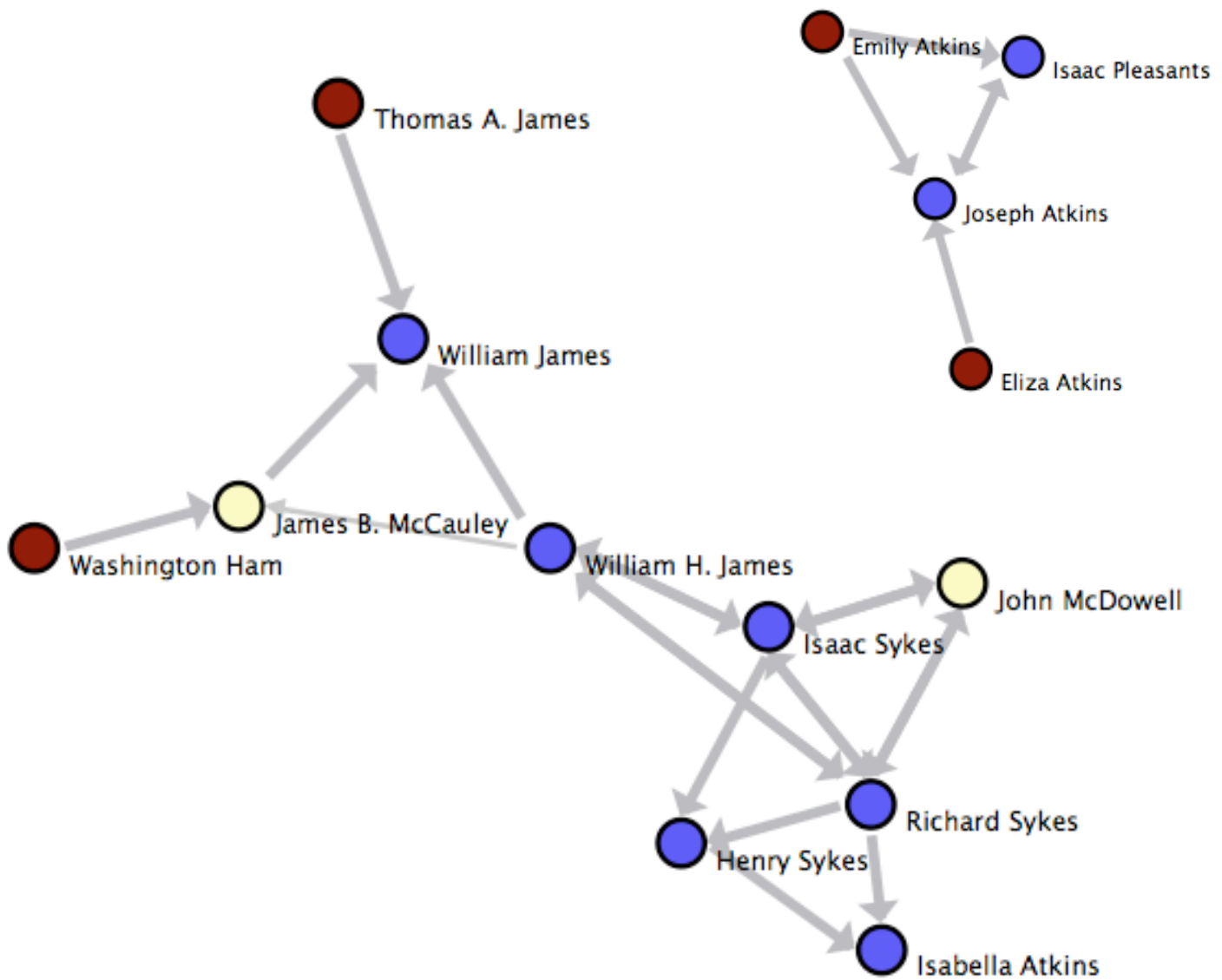


Figure 2. The Henrico County network consisted of two sub-networks: the Sykes network and the Atkins network.

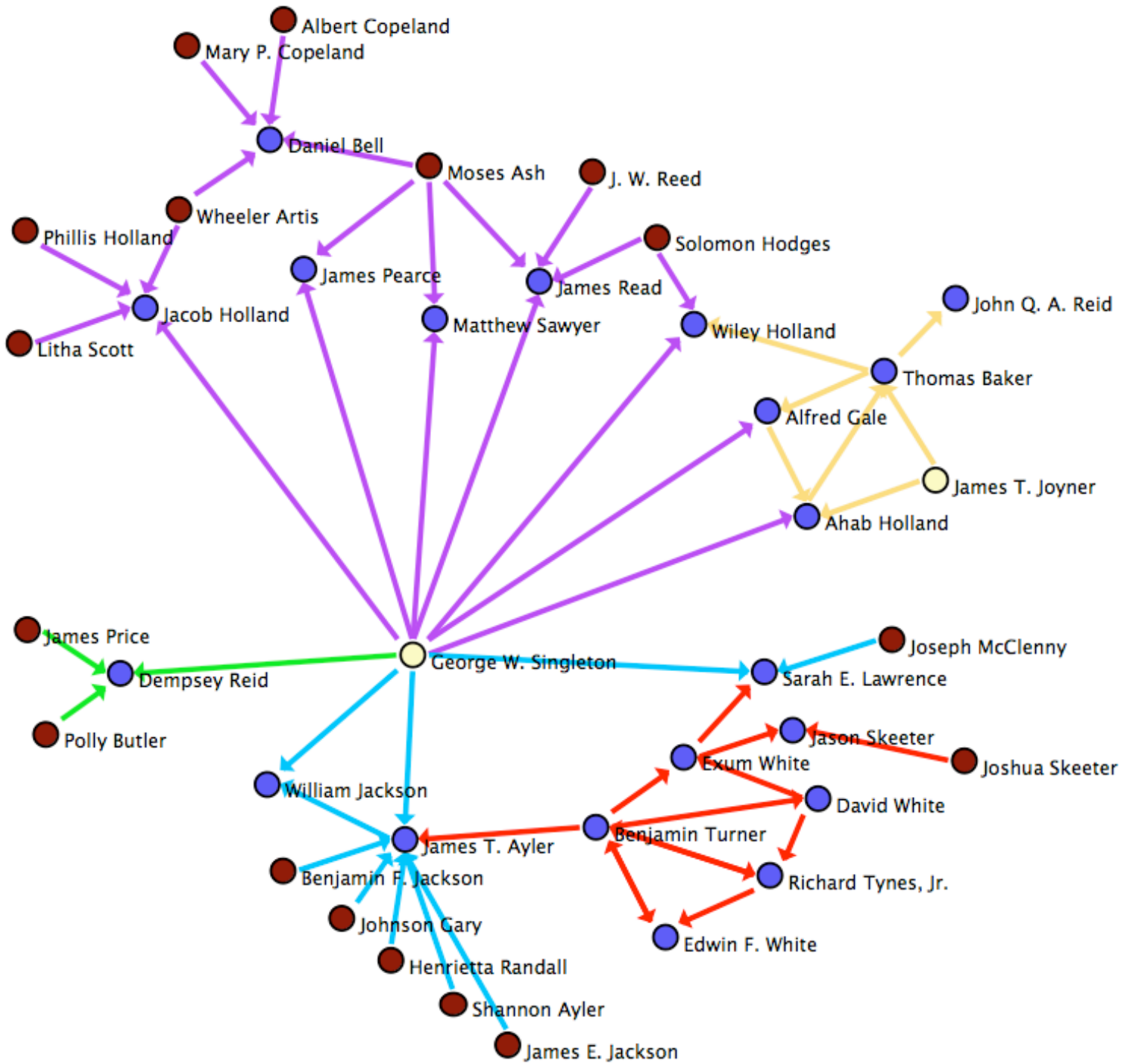
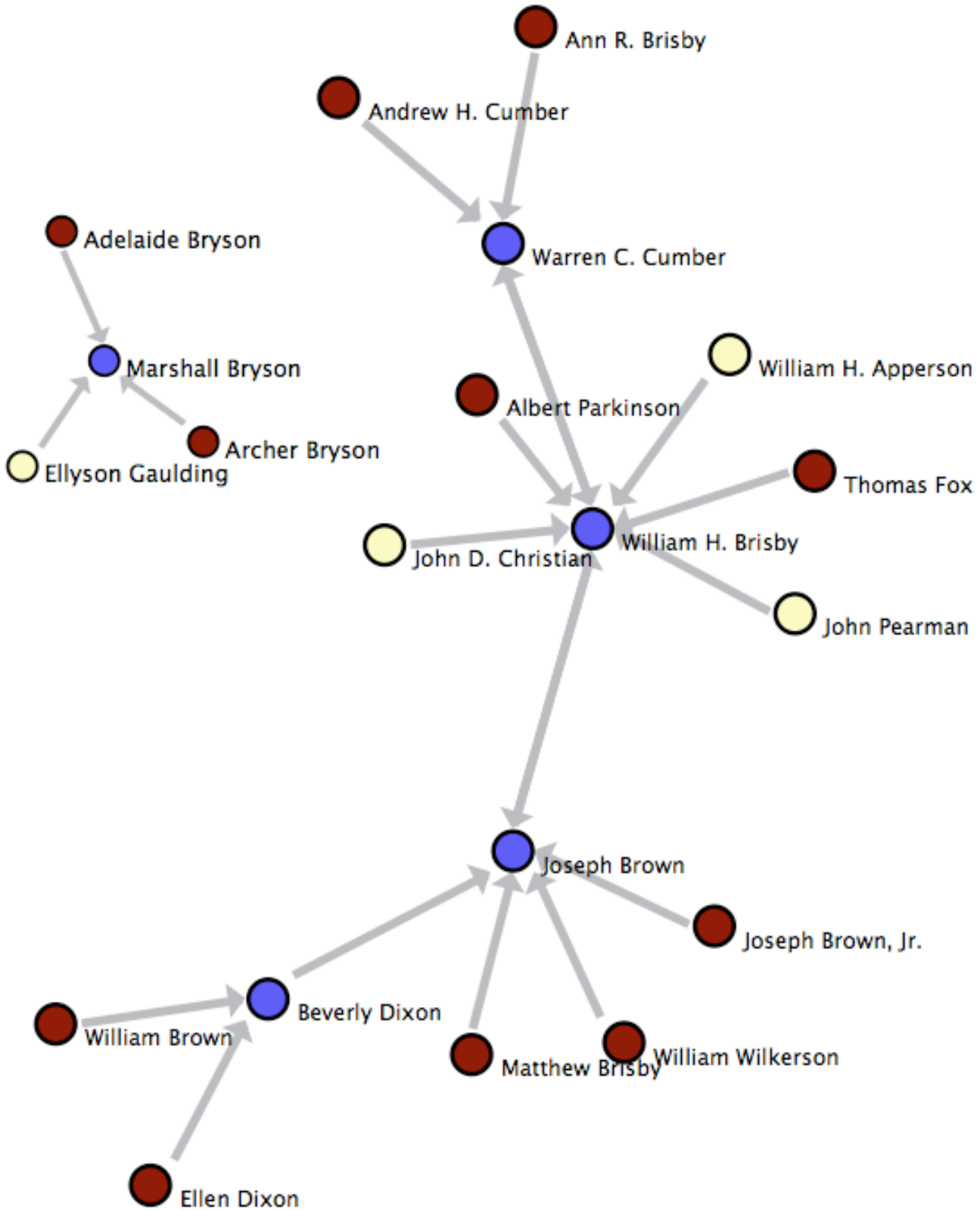


Figure 3. The Nansemond network consisted of three sub-networks, designated in green, blue, and purple. The blue sub-network consisted of a subgroup designated in red of the Whites, Tynes, and Turner. The purple sub-network consisted of another subgroup highlighted in orange of the Hollands, Gale, Baker, Joyner, and Reid.

Figure 4. The New Kent network consisted of two sub-networks. The Bryson sub-network consisted of one disallowed claimant, while the larger sub-network consisted of allowed claimants.



## APPENDIX 2

Population	Free black	Slave	White	Total Population
<b>Charles City</b>	856	2947	1806	5609
<b>Henrico</b>	3590	20041	37,966	61616
<b>Nansemond</b>	2480	5481	5732	13693
<b>New Kent</b>	364	3374	2145	5884
<b>Virginia</b>	58042	490865	1,047,299	1,596,318

Population	% Free black	% Slave	% Black Population
<b>Charles City</b>	15.3	52.5	67.8
<b>Henrico</b>	5.8	32.5	38.4
<b>Nansemond</b>	18.1	40.0	58.1
<b>New Kent</b>	6.2	57.3	63.5
<b>Virginia</b>	3.6	30.7	34.4

Table 1. Race and enslaved status in Charles City, Henrico, Nansemond, and New Kent counties, compared to Virginia. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Eight Census, 1860.

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