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CHARLESTON'S FREE AFRO-AMERICAN ELITE: THE BROWN FELLOWSHIP SOCIETY AND THE HUMANE BROTHERHOOD

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The Brown Fellowship Society and the Humane Brotherhood were undoubtedly the two most important organizations extant among Charleston's free Afro-American elite during the 1840s. Because of this prominence, many scholars have cited these two voluntary associations as examples of color consciousness and caste distinctions between free blacks and mulattoes. For Ira Berlin, they institutionalized complexional differences that were magnified by mulattoes who settled in South Carolina, among other southern seaboard states, after the revolution in Saint Domingue.¹ Nathan I. Huggins has written that mulatto Saint Domingue refugees "flocked into the southern port cities of Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and New Orleans, bringing with them both the anxieties of a violently displaced people and expectations that a social system of three castes—white, black, and mulatto—would continue."² Charleston's mulattoes, according to E. Horace Fitchett, formed exclusive associations that separated them from other free Afro-Americans in that city. He explained that "they came to occupy a position between the masses of Negroes, on the one hand and the white inhabitants on the other hand. Their accommodation to such a position seemed to protect them from some of the most oppressive techniques of control. Hence, this treatment tended to give this group a superior conception of itself."³ Moreover, Marina Wikramanayake has informed us that the mulatto elite practiced caste

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¹ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974), pp. 57-58, 312-13.

² Nathan I. Huggins, *Black Odyssey: The Afro-American Ordeal in Slavery* (New York, 1977), pp. 190-191.

³ E. Horace Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston, South Carolina," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1950, pp. 1-2, 163.

discrimination as rigorously as whites in Charleston.⁴ Eugene D. Genovese, however, has suggested that scholars have characterized these free mulattoes as an intermediate caste because they have become "entranced with the Brown Fellowship Society."⁵

A careful analysis of the Brown Fellowship Society and the Humane Brotherhood raised enough doubt to question whether color consciousness was the prime variable in social relations among Charleston's free Afro-Americans. Although the mulatto elite enjoyed some economic success, they suffered such significant disabilities in education, mobility, occupation, and legal matters to contradict the idea that Charleston approximated the three-tiered model of race relations. By judiciously scrutinizing the two voluntary associations' membership we can gain greater insight on the status of Charleston's free Afro-American elite. We can also appreciate the complexity of color, caste, and class distinctions, especially the problems inherent in rigidly applying those categories to antebellum free Afro-American communities.

Rosters of the Brown Fellowship Society in 1844 and the Humane Brotherhood in 1843 have been used for this essay. The latter association was organized in 1843 and its printed constitution includes a list of its members for that year. The former organization had been incorporated in 1790, but its rules and regulations were not published in pamphlet form until 1844, possibly in competition with the rival society. Appended to the by-laws is an inventory of its members, when they joined from 1790 to 1844, and whether they had died, resigned, or had been expelled from the group. With this information, an index of fifty-two active members of the Brown Fellowship, although it was supposed to be limited to fifty men, and forty-two members of the Humane Brotherhood was compiled. These men were traced in the 1850 and 1860 federal manuscript censuses for Charleston, the 1848 city census, city directories, and the 1859 and 1860 city taxpayer rolls. Those sources yielded data on age, occupation, value of real estate, slaveholding, place of birth, and complexion. Such information makes possible comparisons be-

⁴ Marina Wikramanayake, *A World in Shadow: The Free Black in Antebellum South Carolina* (Columbia, 1973), pp. 78-83.

⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, "The Slave States of North America," in David W. Cohen and Jack P. Greene, *Neither Slave Nor Free: The Freedmen of African Descent in the Slave Societies of the New World* (Baltimore, 1972), see note no. 54, p. 271.

tween the two associations and with Charleston's broader free Afro-American population.⁶

Five charter members established the Brown Fellowship Society on November 1, 1790. It had admitted one hundred and thirty-one men to its ranks from 1790 to 1844. During that fifty-four year span, forty-eight of its members had died, twenty-five were excluded, and six resigned, leaving an active membership of fifty-two men. The most prominent case of exclusion from the society occurred in 1817. George Logan, who had joined the Brown Fellowship on October 2, 1800, was expelled when the association discovered and confirmed his collusion in having a free black man named Robinson sold as a slave. The society labelled Logan's conduct "base and notorious," but granted him a hearing at which he failed to defend his conduct to its satisfaction. It subsequently banished him and nullified any claims or benefits for himself or his heirs.⁷ This particular action in reprimanding one of its own indicates the organization's concern for the rights of all free Afro-Americans in Charleston and not just the welfare of its ingroup. Although the mulatto elite was relatively secure in its status as free men, it could

⁶ Seventh Federal Census of the United States, Charleston, 1850 and Eighth Federal Census of the United States, Charleston, 1860, both on microfilm in the National Archives, Washington, D. C.; T. C. Fay, *Charleston Directory . . . for 1840 and 1841* (Charleston, 1840); John J. Honour, ed., a *Directory of the City of Charleston and Neck, for 1849* (Charleston); A. J. Burk, 1849); J. H. Bogget, a *Directory for the City of Charleston, for the Year 1852* (Charleston: Edward C. Councill, 1851); *The Charleston City and General Business Directory for 1855* (Charleston: David Gazlay, 1855); R. S. Purse, *Charleston City Directory and Strangers Guide for 1856* (New York: F. Trow, 1856); Leonard Mears and James Turnbull, *The Charleston Directory . . .* (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Co., 1859), W. Eugene Ferslew, *Directory of the City of Charleston* (Savannah: J. M. Cooper and Co., 1860); J. L. Dawson & H. W. De Saussure, eds., *Census of The City of Charleston, South Carolina for 1848* (Charleston, 1849); Frederick A. Ford, compiler, *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina for the Year 1861* (Charleston: Evans & Cogswell, 1861); *List of the Taxpayers of the City of Charleston, for 1859 to which is appended "Tax on Property Paid by Free Persons of Color"* (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Co., 1860); *List of Taxpayers of the City of Charleston for 1860 to which is appended "Tax on Property Paid by Persons of Indian Descent and Free Persons of Color"* (Charleston, 1861).

⁷ *Rules and Regulations of the Brown Fellowship Society, Established at Charleston, South Carolina, November 1, 1790* (Charleston: J. B. Nixon, 1844); and Theodore D. Jervey, *Robert Y. Haynes and His Times* (New York, 1909), pp. 68-69.

not afford the precedent of even a dark-hued free Afro-American being stripped of his freedom. Such an example might erode its own safety.

The Brown Fellowship Society was organized as a voluntary association with the motto "Charity and Benevolence" by free Afro-Americans who belonged to the white St. Philip's Episcopal Church, where they worshipped, were baptized and married but could not be interred in its burial ground. The preamble to its rules and regulations explained its existence because of "the unhappy situation of our fellow creatures, and the distress of our widows and orphans, for want of a fund to relieve them in the hour of their distress, sickness, and death." It is most likely that the founders of the Brown Fellowship Society selected that name to distinguish themselves from the "Fellowship Society," a white voluntary association formed some thirty years earlier. They were fully cognizant of similar white benevolent societies as their preamble also states ". . . and observing the method of many other well disposed persons of this state, by entering into particular societies for this purpose."⁸

The organization's name has been taken literally by many scholars as *prima facie* evidence of mulatto exclusiveness. They base this assumption in large measure on the association's membership certificate which stipulates "These are to certify that _____ free brown man of Charleston, was regularly admitted a member of the Brown Fellowship Society." Its regulation for membership simply states "any person desirous of becoming a member . . ." without any reference to complexion. Almost without exception, its members are indeed classified by the federal census as mulattoes. One of the twenty-four members whose color was determined, however, was categorized in the 1860 federal census as black. That was Malcolm Brown who joined the Brown Fellowship in 1828 and whose father, Morris Brown, had been forced to leave the state in 1822 after the Denmark Vesey Conspiracy. Malcolm Brown with his father and five other free Afro-Americans had been trustees of the African Society which purchased a lot in 1818 to erect a building for an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church. The congregation, both slave and free, had 1,848 members in 1818, making the Charleston A.M.E. Church the second largest

⁸ *Rules and Regulations of the Brown Fellowship Society*, p. 3; and G. S. Dickerman, "A Glimpse of Charleston History," *The Southern Workman* 36 (1907): 19-20.

in the United States, behind Philadelphia with 3,311, but ahead of Baltimore with 1,066, which also had a much larger free Afro-American population. Because several suspected leaders of the Vesey Conspiracy were officials in the A.M.E. Church, Charleston public authorities made the congregation disband and demolished its church building. This episode ended the city's independent black church movement until after the Civil War. It also made free Afro-Americans in general more circumspect in their activities to avoid suspicion.⁹

As delineated in more detail below, Brown Fellowship members were men of economic substance. Census-takers might have liberally applied the term "mulatto" to all Afro-Americans of considerable means, much like the practice in Brazil where money "whitened" a person of African ancestry. The terms "black" and "mulatto" were not even clearly defined for the 1850 and 1860 federal censuses. In 1850, enumerators were told in counting colored persons simply to write 'B' or 'M' in the column for race on the schedule, to indicate black or mulatto, and to leave it blank for whites. There were no specific instructions for the 1860 census. It was only in 1890 that the federal census attempted to classify individuals on the basis of African ancestry. Enumerators were instructed to categorize anyone with ten-sixteenths or more Negro blood as black, between six-sixteenths and ten-sixteenths as mulatto, from three-sixteenths and six-sixteenths as quadroon, and with three-sixteenths or less as an octoroon. As a rule, the general principle was that Negroes with any perceptible trace of white ancestry were deemed mulatto, all others were considered black. This imprecision left a wide range for interpretation, and by implication if the party interviewed for the census was mulatto, all other persons in the household might be so described.¹⁰

The mulatto tradition was not as strong or as firmly etched in Charleston as in New Orleans. The latter city was strongly influ-

⁹ *Rules and Regulations of the Brown Fellowship Society*, p. 8; Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, pp. 124-28; Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," pp. 229-32, and Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, 1921), pp. 77-8.

¹⁰ Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," p. 131; Ira Berlin, "The Structure of the Free Negro Caste in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History*, 9:3 (Spring, 1976), p. 300; Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915* (Washington, 1918), pp. 207-08.

enced by the French and Spanish who controlled it prior to its annexation to the United States. Moreover, there was a greater Caribbean presence as 1,978 colored inhabitants of Saint Domingue settled in New Orleans from May 19, to July 18, 1809. Louisiana presumed all persons of color to be free. The word "Negro" was applied to persons with noticeably dark complexions and was usually synonymous with "slave". Persons of color were known as 'gens de couleur' and were rarely referred to as Negroes. They occupied a very definite place in society between whites and blacks. This tradition was so ingrained that many years later on April 25, 1910, the Louisiana Supreme Court ruled that for legal purposes a mulatto was not to be considered a Negro. There is no evidence that these lines of demarcation were as pronounced in Charleston.¹¹

The Brown Fellowship officially confined its membership to fifty men over age twenty-one. The initiation fee was fifty dollars, which could be paid with an initial installment of ten dollars and two dollars a month thereafter, in addition to monthly dues. Any member who suffered a serious illness could claim a sick benefit of one dollar and fifty cents per week while incapacitated, if the infirmity was properly certified by one of the society's stewards. The association had to provide a decent funeral for any deceased member who did not leave in his estate sufficient funds for that purpose. Each member under penalty of a fine had to attend the funeral and to wear a black band on his left arm. If the deceased left children without adequate provisions for their education, the group was obligated to maintain and to educate the children until age fourteen, at which time they would be apprenticed for a trade. Indigent widows were entitled to an annuity of sixty dollars. Members for a time could borrow money with twice the value as collateral, until the organization rescinded this clause on October 7, 1824. To avoid controversy and internal conflict, no discussions of religion or politics could take place at business meetings.¹²

Although the Brown Fellowship's regulations speak mainly of assisting its own members, the organization also expressed com-

¹¹ Sister Frances Jerome Woods, *Marginality and Identity: A Colored Creole Family Through Ten Generations* (Baton Rouge, 1972), p. 21; Annie Lee West Stahl, "The Free Negro in Antebellum Louisiana," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 25:2 (April, 1942), pp. 301-04, and Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "People of Color in Louisiana," Part I, *The Journal of Negro History*, 1 (October 1916): 361, 367-68.

¹² *Rules and Regulations of the Brown Fellowship Society*, passim.

passion for other Afro-Americans, which implies that it was not strictly an insular group. Under the motto "Charity and Benevolence", its preamble includes the following verse from 2 Corinthians ix, 7, "Every man according as he proposeth in his heart so let him give, not grudgingly, or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver." There was a clause for relief to any poor, free, colored orphan or adult deemed worthy by the membership. The association stipulated that it could not support more than five persons from its treasury at any one time. In 1803, seven Brown Fellowship men started the Minor's Moralists Society to support and to educate indigent and orphaned colored children. It consisted of fifty patrons who subscribed five dollars to join and agreed to monthly assessments of twenty-five cents each. Daniel Alexander Payne, an orphan who later became an A.M.E. Bishop, benefitted directly from this benevolence. He attended the Minor's Moralists Society's school, and at age eighteen opened his own academy for free Afro-American youth in Charleston. At one point, he enrolled sixty pupils but had to close the school in 1835, after South Carolina prohibited any free person of color from keeping a facility to teach slaves or free Afro-Americans how to read and write. Payne left the state a month after this law took effect. Prior to leaving, he resided with the one free Afro-American, John Mishaw, who belonged to both the Brown Fellowship and the Humane Brotherhood.¹³

One of the Brown Fellowship's major activities was its burial plot operation "not only for themselves, but for the benefit and advantage of others." Payment of its fees and confirmation that the deceased had been baptized were its only requirements for interment. Members and their immediate families could be interred free, while subscribers had to pay one dollar and non-subscribers ten dollars. The association could also provide a horse, hearse, and pall for a funeral at a cost of four dollars.¹⁴

The Humane Brotherhood's origin is not as certain as that of the Brown Fellowship. James B. Browning claimed that free dark men organized their own society in 1791 because they were excluded from the latter group. Fitchett maintained that "The emphasis on color became so strong in the nineteenth century that the upper-

¹³ Ibid., pp. 3, 11; Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, p. 85; Daniel Alexander Payne, *Recollections of Seventy Years* (Nashville, 1888), pp. 11-13, 19-27, 39-41, and Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," pp. 201-204.

¹⁴ *Rules and Regulations of the Brown Fellowship Society*, pp. 14-16.

class free dark people organized themselves into a society of their own." According to one of his informants, the descendant of a Humane Brotherhood founder, Charleston's free Afro-Americans socialized together at first without color distinction. Some of them tried during the late eighteenth century, however, to bar persons of questionable morals, especially those Afro-American women who openly consorted with white men. This problem allegedly caused a split, with the mulattoes joining together as the Brown Fellowship and the blacks combining as the Free Dark Men. Wikramanayake has identified Thomas Small, a dark-complexioned man of some financial means, as starting the latter association to avoid the color discrimination practiced by the Brown Fellowship.¹⁵

The stories about the Humane Brotherhood's genesis in 1791 are probably apocryphal because Thomas Small, who figures prominently in all of them, was not born until 1803 according to the 1850 federal census. The Constitution and Rules of the Humane Brotherhood make it quite clear that the group was organized on June 19, 1843. Its preamble, in a vein similar to the Brown Fellowship, explained its reason for being as ". . . alleviating the couch of pain, and helping a Brother when distressed." It further resolved "that we, free dark men of the City of Charleston, do form ourselves into a Compact Body for the purpose of alleviating each other in sickness and death." Although it also declared "that this Society shall be exclusively supported by any number of free, dark men,"¹⁶ seven of its fifteen founders, whose complexions could be ascertained from the 1850 federal census, consisted of four blacks and three mulattoes. Moreover, nine of its twenty members, whose color was identified, were classified as mulattoes. If, as many scholars have theorized, color was the engine of social relations among free Afro-Americans in Charleston, then why did these mulattoes, in particular, choose to join a "black" voluntary association?

The Humane Brotherhood's large mulatto presence also raises the question of why it emphasized the words "free dark men." On the most immediate level, it probably came into being because the

¹⁵ James B. Browning, "The Beginnings of Insurance Enterprise Among Negroes," *The Journal of Negro History*, 22 (October, 1937): pp. 422-24; Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," pp. 122, 301; and Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, pp. 82-3.

¹⁶ *Constitution and Rules of Humane Brotherhood, Organized June 19, 1843*, original in the Langston Hughes Memorial Library of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania.

Brown Fellowship had already exceeded its constitutional limit of fifty men by 1843. Several possible explanations can be offered for its use of the terms "free dark men" aside from contradistinction to the Brown Fellowship as a mulatto association. The Humane Brotherhood might have desired to identify itself clearly as an Afro-American organization. The former society, for example, had a mixed membership. Two men were categorized as Indians, Joseph Dereef and Richard E. Dereef, while one man, although classified in the federal census as mulatto, was actually white, Joseph Sasportas. He was a Frenchman who had married a mulatto woman from Haiti, was a butcher by trade, and possessed \$6,700 in real estate and five slaves in 1859.¹⁷ He probably attached himself to Charleston's free Afro-Americans because of his marriage and white social pressure, although interracial wedlock was not prohibited in Charleston until 1865.¹⁸ His situation implies that other white men might have belonged to the Brown Fellowship, because of their union with Afro-American women.

Another conceivable clue to its description as an association of "free dark men" was the deteriorating status of Charleston's free Afro-Americans in general. After the Vesey Conspiracy, they could not keep their own churches and had to worship in segregated pews or galleries in white churches. The 1835 South Carolina law made it illegal for them to operate schools. Furthermore, the legislature passed and enforced an act in 1822 which barred them from leaving and reentering the state.¹⁹ While some benefit ensued from identification with whites during the early nineteenth century, by the 1840s it had dubious value. The changing configuration of Charleston society along racial lines with no intermediate status for mulattoes made broader group consciousness more important than internal complexional differences.

The Humane Brotherhood provided a sick benefit of one dollar and fifty cents per week until an afflicted member could resume work. It also required each member to visit the ill during their infirmity. This was a key provision because the organization insisted on companionship as well as financial assistance in time of distress. The death benefit to a deceased member's family was twelve dol-

¹⁷ Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," p. 131 and *List of Taxpayers of the City of Charleston for 1859*, p. 400.

¹⁸ Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," p. 131.

¹⁹ Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, p. 58.

lars for a decent burial. Surviving members had to wear a mourning cloth for thirty days. Widows could collect a twelve dollar annuity while orphans were to be supported and educated until they were ready to take up a trade under apprenticeship to a Humane Brotherhood craftsman. The group also furnished a death benefit of twelve dollars upon the decease of a member's wife and five dollars to bury his child. In case of disability or imprisonment without personal fault, a member's family was entitled to the sum of one dollar and fifty cents a week. The treasurer's report for 1846 recorded expenditures of \$53.50 and a balance of \$162.40. In 1848, the treasury held \$177.50, while three years later, it had increased to \$230.²⁰

The Brown Fellowship and the Humane Brotherhood both kept burial plots on Charleston's Pitt Street, adjoining each other but separated by a fence.²¹ Although their sick benefits were identical at one dollar and fifty cents per week, there was a wide difference in widows' annuities. The Brown Fellowship provided sixty dollars for widows, while the Humane Brotherhood furnished only twelve dollars. This was due in large part to the former group's greater wealth. Both societies considered the care, education and apprenticeship of deceased members' children an important responsibility. The Brown Fellowship's provisions here were not as automatic as the Humane Brotherhood's and were based more on clear evidence of need. Moreover, the latter's burial plot operation was not as extensive as the former's, which included services for subscribers who did not belong to the organization. Finally, the Humane Brotherhood did not display the same sense of *noblesse oblige* as the Brown Fellowship, because its resources did not allow benevolence beyond its own members and their families.

Brown Fellowship members were unquestionably men of greater financial substance. The average value of real estate held by fourteen of its members identified in the 1859 List of Charleston Taxpayers was \$8,910, while ten Humane Brotherhood men possessed an average of only \$1,832, a \$7,078 gap (see Table A). In addition, those of the former with slaves averaged four. Only

²⁰ *Constitution and Rules of Humane Brotherhood*, passim; Browning, "Beginnings of Insurance Enterprise Among Negroes," p. 425.

²¹ Browning, "Beginnings of Insurance Enterprise Among Negroes," p. 426.

Table A

Brown Fellowship Society Members

Name	Value of Real Estate	Number of Slaves
Brown, Malcolm	\$ 9,100	4
Deledge, John	2,000	1
Dereef, Joseph	16,100	6
Dereef, Richard	25,000	12
Hatt, James F.	2,700	
Holloway, Richard	7,900	
Holloway, Charles	5,000	1
Holmes, Thomas		3
Kinloch, Richmond	2,000	
Maxwell, James	1,000	
McKinlay, William	23,820	
Sasportas, Joseph	6,700	5
Seymour, William	1,200	2
Weston, Jacob	13,300	2
Totals	\$115,820	36

Humane Brotherhood Members

Name	Value of Real Estate	Number of Slaves
Anderson, Nelson	\$ 2,500	
Berry, Moses	220	
Berry, William	900	
Emmerly, William	500	
Jackson, William	1,000	
Mazyck, Peter	300	
Mitchell, William	400	
Poinsett, Paul	1,200	
Small, Richard	3,500	1
Small, Thomas	7,800	1
Totals	\$ 18,320	2

Compiled from *List of the Taxpayers of the City of Charleston, for 1859*, to which is appended "Tax on Property Paid by Free Persons of Color" (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Co., 1860), pp. 383-405.

two members of the latter had slaves, Richard Small and Thomas Small, with one each.

The average real estate holding of Humane Brotherhood men was lower than that for Charleston's free Afro-American males in 1859, at \$3,162. Only one man in the association had real estate valued more than the Brown Fellowship's median of \$6,700, and that was Thomas Small with \$7,800. What is more, Brown Fellowship men had more slaves than the mean of 2.8 for Charleston's thirty-six free Afro-American males who held a total of ninety-nine slaves. Carter G. Woodson's hypothesis that most free Afro-Americans owned slaves for benevolent purposes seems to be supported by the situation in Charleston.²² Richard Holloway, a Brown Fellowship member, assumed title to the slave Charles Benford so that he could enjoy a larger measure of freedom.²³ The number of slaves held by Brown Fellowship men in both 1830 and 1859 dropped from seventy-nine to only eighteen (see Table B). Not all prosperous free Afro-American men in Charleston belonged to the Brown Fellowship. Four of them had property valued higher than the society's average and possessed a mean of 4.5 slaves. They were John L. Francis, hairdresser, \$11,100; Elias Garden, butcher \$14,000; Robert Howard, wood dealer, \$33,900, and Francis St. Marks, hairdresser, \$11,350.²⁴

²² Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves* (Washington, 1924), p. v.

²³ Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, p. 40.

²⁴ *List of Taxpayers of the City of Charleston for 1859*, passim.

Table B

**Slaves Held By Brown Fellowship Society
Members In Both 1830 and 1859**

1830	Name	1859
10	Malcolm Brown	4
16	Richard Dereef	12
19	Richard Holloway	0
6	Richmond Kinloch	0
15	William McKinlay	0
6	James Maxwell	0
7	William Seymour	2
—		—
79	Totals	18

Compiled from *List of the Taxpayers of the City of Charleston, for 1859*, to which is appended "Tax on Property Paid by Free Persons of Color" (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Co., 1860), pp. 383-405 and Carter G. Woodson, *Free Negro Owners of Slaves* (Washington, 1924), pp. 27-31.

A major difference between the two associations other than complexion, wealth, and slaveholding was age and occupation. Humane Brotherhood members were 12.9 years younger than their counterparts. Their mean age in 1850 was 33.6 years as opposed to 46.5 years for the Brown Fellowship. Of the thirty-four occupations identified for the latter, most (nine) were tailors. The largest number of Humane Brotherhood members, of the twenty-three occupations determined, were carpenters (also nine) (see table C). The fact that most Brown Fellowship men were shopkeepers and small businessmen helps to explain their greater wealth. On the whole, Humane Brotherhood men were artisans in the employ of others. Apparently, the older men in the former group as petty capitalists had acquired a firm economic position in Charleston, during an earlier time when free Afro-Americans had more opportunity. For them, socio-economic status seemed to be a more significant variable in their association with each other than complexion. In other words, class outstripped color as a consideration in their interaction together. What is more, most Humane Brotherhood men probably could not afford to join the Brown Fellowship, especially with its fifty dollar initiation fee. One man, Abraham Jones, a mulatto carpenter, who had been expelled from the latter became a member of the former. The number of mulattoes in the Humane Brotherhood, nine of the twenty men whose complexions

were identified belies distinction primarily on the basis of color. In their occupational clustering, the two societies resembled trade guilds, which brought men with similar interests into closer contact.

Charleston's free Afro-American population nearly doubled from 1790 to 1800. Although their numbers may have been augmented by Saint Domingue emigrants, there is not much evidence to support the theory that West Indians pervasively influenced or produced color distinctions among them. Moreover, the South Carolina legislature in 1795 prohibited the immigration of foreign free colored people, particularly from the Caribbean. White South Carolinians feared that Saint Domingue refugees might spread unrest across the state.²⁵ Despite this restriction, some Caribbean immigrants might have surreptitiously entered the state, but of the forty-four Brown Fellowship and Humane Brotherhood men found in the 1850 census, none of their births was listed outside South Carolina. Further analysis of the census revealed that for Charleston, only forty free Afro-Americans (thirty-six mulattoes and four blacks) and fifty-nine whites were officially designated as from the Caribbean.

²⁵ Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, p.160.

Table C

**Occupations of Brown Fellowship
Society and Humane Brotherhood
Members**

Occupation	Brown Fellowship	Humane Brotherhood
Tailor	9	2
Carpenter	4	9
Shoemaker	5	1
Barber	1	3
Hairdresser	1	
Fisherman		2
Millwright	2	1
Tinner	2	
Wheelwright		1
Bricklayer		1
Drayman	1	1
Sexton	1	
Hotelkeeper	1	
Drummer	2	
Butcher	1	
Tavernkeeper	1	
Woodfactor	2	
Planter	1	
None		2

Compiled from references cited in note No. 5.

Table D

Population of Charleston

Year	Total	White	Slave	Free Negroes	% Free Negroes
1790	16,945	8,089	8,270	586	3.5
1800	21,497	9,630	10,843	1,024	4.8
1810	26,183	11,568	13,143	1,472	5.6
1820	26,255	10,653	14,127	1,475	5.6
1830	32,396	12,828	17,461	2,107	6.5
1840	30,819	13,030	16,231	1,558	5.1
1850	42,985	20,012	19,532	3,441	8.0
1860	48,409	26,969	17,655	3,785	7.8

From Dawson & De Saussure, eds., *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina for 1848*, pp. 2-10 and Ford, Comp., *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina, 1861*, pp. 8-9.

The Brown Fellowship and the Humane Brotherhood's combined membership included more than half of Charleston's adult male free Afro-American population in 1840. There were ninety-four men in both organizations in 1844 and only one hundred and sixty-nine free Afro-American males in 1840 above age twenty-four in the city.²⁶ Many free Afro-Americans had moved to an area north of Charleston known as the "neck" and this accounts for their drop in numbers from 1830 to 1840. This region was incorporated into the city, however, by 1860. In 1861, there were only six hundred and fifty-two free Afro-American males over the age of twenty.²⁷ The relatively small number of adult free Afro-American males made it almost impossible for Brown Fellowship members to isolate themselves. Charleston's free Afro-American population was concentrated in specific sections, with the largest number residing on Coming Street, where several members of the two associations also lived.²⁸ Furthermore, there was some interaction around St. Philip's Episcopal Church, where Abraham Jones, who had been expelled from the Brown Fellowship and had joined the Humane Brotherhood, was married in 1835. Paul Poinsett of the latter group was also married there, while his fellow member, Edward Logan, had his children baptized there. Not all Brown Fellowship men belonged to St. Philip's as several of them were Methodists, which also probably provided interaction with other free Afro-Americans. After the Civil War, at least four Brown Fellowship men left the white Methodist Episcopal Church which demanded that they continue to sit segregated in the gallery. They established Centenary Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866, while five of their cohorts had already left St. Philip's in 1865 to form St. Marks' Episcopal Church.²⁹

Race relations in antebellum Charleston did not sustain a three-tiered system similar to the Caribbean in which mulattoes occupied a safe position between whites on the top and blacks at the bottom. A white Charlestonian informed Captain F. C. Adams in 1852 that "We make no distinction between the colors, some are as white as you are; but the grades are so complex that it would be

²⁶ Dawson and De Saussure, eds., *Census of the City of Charleston, South Carolina for 1848*, p. 15.

²⁷ Ford, Compiler, *Census of the City of Charleston, 1861*, p. 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-20.

²⁹ Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," pp. 45-7, 51, and 258-62.

impossible to make a slidingscale law for any fixed complexions. The law which governs them is distinctive and comprehensive . . ." ³⁰ According to Herbert S. Klein, "To understand what role freedmen play in any particular slave society it is essential to determine their numbers, rates of growth, occupational mobility, life styles, and degree of integration into white society." ³¹ By each of these measures, Charleston's free Afro-Americans compare unfavorably with freedmen in Brazil, the Caribbean, and even in New Orleans.

Charleston's free Afro-American population never exceeded eight per cent and was generally about six per cent of the city's total. Their numbers grew slowly from 1790 to 1860. Their occupational mobility was restricted as slaves held certain positions that did not include any free Afro-Americans such as sailors, plasterers, boatmen, wharf builders, and printers. Fitchett concluded that the occupational position of Charleston's free Afro-Americans was lower than that of New Orleans' mulattoes and about comparable to that city's blacks. New Orleans' free Afro-Americans enjoyed a wider range of positions. In 1850, there were nine brokers, one architect, four capitalists, sixty-one clerks, four doctors, five jewellers, one music teacher, and twelve schoolteachers. Moreover, there were ten overseers and four gunsmiths. None of these positions were officially held by free Afro-Americans in Charleston. In the area of social and personal relations, Fitchett wrote "The position of the Negro in Charleston was more delicate and marginal than the same class in New Orleans." ³²

There was a higher proportion of mulattoes in New Orleans than in Charleston with 2.6 times as many free mulattoes as blacks in the latter city but 4.3 times as many in the former. New Orleans probably received the bulk of colored refugees from the 1791 slave uprising in Saint Domingue. By 1806, there were as many free Afro-Americans in New Orleans as in Charleston by 1860.³³

³⁰ F. C. Adams, *Manuel Pereira; or, The Sovereign Rule of South Carolina* (Washington, 1852), p. 90.

³¹ Herbert S. Klein, "The Colored Freedmen in Brazilian Slave Society," *Journal of Social History*, 3 (Fall, 1969): p. 30.

³² Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," pp. 70-85.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 46; Laura Foner, "The Free People of Color in Louisiana and St. Domingue: A Comparative Portrait of Two Three-Caste Slave Societies," *Journal of Social History*, 3 (Summer, 1970): pp. 422-429.

A distinguishing feature of the three-tiered system of race relations was the ability of free colored men to bear arms. They constituted a significant part of the military in the Spanish and French Caribbean.⁸⁴ In Louisiana, free Afro-Americans fought in the War of 1812, and General Andrew Jackson commended them for helping to save the city in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans. They frequently served on patrols and the local police force in that city.⁸⁵ The situation in South Carolina was totally different. During the Revolutionary War, when the American colonists desperately needed men to bear arms, South Carolina steadfastly refused to let any Afro-Americans, slave or free, take up arms.⁸⁶ It was unthinkable in the antebellum era for South Carolina's free Afro-Americans to function as soldiers in the military.

The protection of legal rights was another characteristic of the three-tiered system. In Louisiana, free colored men could testify in court against whites, could bring legal suits against them, and were entitled to trials on an equal footing with whites. Slaves could not testify against them unless they were charged with insurrection. Free Afro-Americans also had the right to petition the state government. They could keep their own schools and even had access to the parochial schools.⁸⁷ South Carolina free Afro-Americans could not testify in court against whites, did not have the same entitlement to trials, and could bring suits only through white guardians. Their right to petition was vague and depended on the mood of the legislature.⁸⁸

Eugene D. Genovese has written that "New Orleans and Charleston both showed a marked tendency toward the formation of a three-caste system." Further, in a most cautious manner, he has referred to it as "incipient" or "circumscribed".⁸⁹ Although

⁸⁴ Gwendolyn M. Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (Baltimore, 1971), p. 114.

⁸⁵ H. E. Sterkx, *The Free Negro in Antebellum Louisiana* (Rutherford, 1972), pp. 182-86.

⁸⁶ Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1961), pp. viii, 60-67.

⁸⁷ Sterkx, *Free Negro in Louisiana*, pp. 171-77; Stahl, *The Free Negro in Louisiana*, pp. 315 and 335-36; and James E. Winston, "The Free Negro in New Orleans, 1803-1860," *The Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, 21 (October, 1938): 1081.

⁸⁸ Wilkramanayake, *World in Shadow*, pp. 59-60, 63-64.

⁸⁹ Genovese, "The Slave States of North America," pp. 269-70, 276.

New Orleans' free Afro-Americans were losing status during the 1850s under the pressure of increasing restrictions,⁴⁰ the evidence still suggests a greater "tendency" toward the three-tiered model there than in Charleston.

Because of their tenuous status, Charleston's free Afro-Americans became increasingly interested in emigrating to Liberia. They displayed this trend much earlier than their counterparts in New Orleans. In 1832, approximately fifty Charleston free Afro-American families prepared to leave the city. They were well-educated, owned property, and were skilled. They assembled together and agreed unanimously that emigration was their best alternative, with the hope that they could contribute positively to the "land of their fathers". Several months later a free Afro-American Charlestonian wrote to the *African Repository*, journal of the American Colonization Society which had fostered emigration to Liberia since its inception in 1817. He explained that prejudice against the color of Afro-Americans barred their mental improvement in particular and that European immigrants had settled in Charleston and prospered, while Afro-Americans languished. One of the major reasons for their reluctance to emigrate, he guessed, was the Liberians' darker complexion. He reminded them that this was no impediment for the many prominent white men and women who had settled in Africa. Afro-Americans could be free citizens in Liberia, he promised, and would not have to associate with anyone against their wishes. He urged them to leave with family and friends and thereby continue their own customs and habits. The primary reason for them to quit Charleston was that they would have no superiors in Liberia, where they could realize freedom, education, and prosperity.⁴¹

Thomas C. Brown, a Charleston free Afro-American, lived in Liberia for fourteen months from 1833 to 1834. A committee of the American Anti-slavery Society in New York City examined him on his experience abroad when he returned to this country. Born in Charleston around 1800, he had been a carpenter with three thousand dollars in real estate. He could trace his ancestry

⁴⁰ Charles B. Rousseve, *The Negro in Louisiana* (New Orleans, 1937), pp. 47-49; Robert C. Reinders, "The Decline of the New Orleans Free Negro in the Decade Before the Civil War," *The Journal of Mississippi History* 24 (April, 1962): pp. 90-96.

⁴¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, 8:3 (May, 1832), pp. 74-77, and 8:8 (October, 1832), pp. 239-43.

in South Carolina for four generations. With his wife, three children, his mother, brother, and two sisters, he had gone to Liberia to better himself and to raise his family without the weight of racial prejudice. He soon lost two children, his brother and a sister to the area's climate. He had a wholesale store, but became disappointed and left Liberia because of his health and inability to make a good living. In concluding his testimony, Brown warned that free Afro-Americans would not voluntarily go to Liberia if they knew the real situation there.⁴²

Despite that admonition, Charleston's free Afro-Americans remained interested in Liberia. Jehu Jones Jr., a tailor and Brown Fellowship member, asked his customers for financial assistance to take his family there.⁴³ They had been prominent partisans of Charleston's free Afro-American elite. His father, Jehu Jones Sr., had joined the Brown Fellowship Society in 1798 and was by reputation the city's best hotelkeeper. A white Charlestonian described him as "almost white—a fine, portly looking man, active, enterprising, intelligent, honest to the letter, and whose integrity and responsibility were never doubted." Jones' hotel was known throughout the country. International travelers counted a stop there as a must while visiting the United States, and South Carolina's governor would stay nowhere else while in the city.⁴⁴

A free Afro-American of Jones' high station still fell victim to South Carolina's racial restrictions. After one of his daughters married and moved to New York, her sister visited her but was not allowed to return to South Carolina, despite Jones's efforts to have some of his influential customers intervene on her behalf. Jones himself became entrapped in the law against free Afro-Americans leaving and returning to the state. He tried to see his daughters, one of whom had become gravely ill, by leaving the state in disguise to avoid detection and hoping to return unnoticed. His son-in-law told patrons of the hotel that Jones was ailing and confined to his room. Someone, however, spotted him in New York,

⁴² *Examination of Mr. Thomas C. Brown, a Free Colored Citizen of South Carolina, as To the Actual State of Things in Liberia in The Years 1833-1834, at the Chatham Street Chapel, May 9th and 10th, 1834* (New York: S. W. Benedict & Co., 1834), passim.

⁴³ Leonard P. Stavisky, "The Negro Artisan in the South Atlantic States, 1800-1860: A Study of Status and Economic Opportunity with Special Reference to Charleston," Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1958, p. 221.

⁴⁴ Adams, *Manuel Pereira*, pp. 94-5.

and Jones was forbidden to come back home.⁴⁵ By contrast, New Orleans free Afro-Americans could travel without restriction, especially if they owned property. Many of that city's elite sent their children abroad to be educated, and they encountered no problems in returning home.⁴⁶

A second Brown Fellowship man, John Lee, Jr., who had joined in 1844, was also barred from the state after visiting New York.⁴⁷ If these restrictions applied to prosperous men in the Brown Fellowship, they weighed just as heavily on the Humane Brotherhood. Samuel V. Mitchell of the latter association sold his property and took his family together with forty-five other South Carolina emigrants to Liberia in 1849. Twenty-two of them had been born free men and women.⁴⁸ From 1832 to 1860, four hundred and eighty-three Afro-Americans left Charleston for Liberia.⁴⁹ William E. Berry, also a Humane Brotherhood man, sought to change his life chances by going to Haiti.⁵⁰

The northern states in this country did not hold out any brighter prospects for Charleston's free Afro-Americans. A former Afro-American resident of that city wrote in the *African Repository* about his agony in trying to improve himself by moving North. He reported "Although I have visited almost every city and town from Charleston, South Carolina, to Portland, Maine, I can find no such home—and no respectable body of colored people as I left in my native city Charleston." In Philadelphia, where he had settled, he found that Afro-Americans could not even visit the museum. His sole advantage in living there and not in Charleston was that he could travel without having to carry a pass.⁵¹

Charleston's free-Afro-American elite were therefore caught in the vise of racism as tightly as Afro-Americans throughout the United States, with the exception of New Orleans. There were differences among free Afro-Americans in Charleston, but they were

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 96; Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, pp. 177-78.

⁴⁶ Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," pp. 70-85; Stahl, "The Free Negro in Louisiana," p. 331.

⁴⁷ Adams, *Manuel Pereira*, p. 100.

⁴⁸ Carter G. Woodson, ed., *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis, 1800-1860* (Washington, 1926), pp. 94-95; *African Repository*, 25:7 (July, 1849), p. 221.

⁴⁹ Wikramanayake, *World in Shadow*, p. 176.

⁵⁰ Fitchett, "The Free Negro in Charleston," p. 123.

⁵¹ *African Repository*, 15:11 (June, 1839), pp. 178-80.

based more on class than on color. The city reflected Berlin's model of Lower South characteristics in that it had a higher proportion of mulattoes and artisans than in the North or Upper South⁵² but its free Afro-American elite did not enjoy a more privileged position in race relations. The social structure, moreover, did not approach the three-tiered system of the Caribbean or Brazil.

⁵² Berlin, "The Structure of the Free Negro Caste," *passim*.