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SEEKING THE ONE GREAT REMEDY:
FRANCIS GEORGE SHAW AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY REFORM

A dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY
Acknowledgments

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## Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
1

**Chapter One:** "I am too much engaged in Worldly pursuits": The Family Fortune  
8

**Chapter Two:** "Humanity is before God as one man": Association  
47

**Chapter Three:** "Has not the President used a very sharp knife": A War for Freedom  
93

**Chapter Four:** "All on his country's red altar he laid": Creating a Myth  
139

**Chapter Five:** "What shall the harvest be": Reconstructing the South  
192

**Chapter Six:** "We must make land common property": The Last Great Remedy  
233

**Bibliography**  
268
INTRODUCTION

For a brief time during the Civil War, Francis George Shaw became a household name. His son, Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, died leading the 54th Massachusetts assault on Fort Wagner and lay buried in a common trench with his African-American soldiers. Frank Shaw's letter to Union commanders requesting that his son's grave not be disturbed glorified the burial and was reprinted widely in newspapers across the North. Symbolically, Shaw's letter linked black and white in a common cause, and northern commentators seized on Shaw's action as representative of the moral superiority of their cause. Historians have seen Shaw only through the lens of his son's death or have portrayed him as an active reformer and abolitionist whose main importance lay in the fact that he fathered two famous children: Robert Gould Shaw and Josephine Shaw Lowell.

In reality, Shaw's contributions to the American reform scene equaled that of his daughter and overwhelmed his son's moment in the spotlight. As a young man, born into one of the nation's wealthiest families, he rejected capitalism and its associated tenets of private property, free labor, and
class. Influential, well-respected, and an associate of leading intellectuals, Shaw used his wealth and position to advocate alternatives to America's dominant ideology. His presence in the inner circle of the major reform movements of the nineteenth century is a significant fact too long overlooked; within organizations commonly presented as completely coopted by free labor advocates, Shaw, a true radical, maintained his opposition to capitalism.

Historians have probably overlooked Shaw's contributions because he was not a public figure. Retiring and shy, he generally shunned speech making and public office. Neither did he leave behind volumes of material expressing his ideas -- short, cryptic letters were his rule. This extreme reticence, even with his closest friends, made him an unlikely candidate for biography.

A closer look at archival sources, however, reveals that Shaw was at the center of all the many reform movements with which he was associated. One of the earliest converts to abolition in the 1840's, his financial support sustained many of the movement's most important figures. Lydia Maria Child, William Lloyd Garrison, and Wendell Phillips counted on Shaw for money, advice, and support. As an advocate of Association, a French socialist movement that was the most popular secular communitarian movement of the antebellum period, Shaw wrote a series of important articles and
translated several books that gained influence among New England reformers. Again he was a financial backer and key advisor to Association's leaders. During the Civil War and Reconstruction, when Shaw devoted himself to Freedmen's Aid and the raising of a northern black regiment, his leadership directed policy in a more radical direction. After the war, his financial and moral support of Henry George was a key factor in spreading George's ideas and making *Progress and Poverty* one of the best selling books in American history.

Shaw was one of the most respected reformers of his time, and there were few major figures of the nineteenth century who were not acquaintances and correspondents of him and his wife, Sarah Blake Sturgis Shaw. Besides their influence on reform, the couple promoted literary and artistic development in the United States. Giving freely to struggling novelists, sculptors, and painters, the Shaws were important patrons of the arts. They counted among their admirers Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, and James Russell Lowell.

This dissertation intends to establish the significance of Frank Shaw's activism for nineteenth-century reform. Throughout his life, Shaw struggled to reconcile his transcendentalist belief in the primacy of the individual with his rejection of competitive capitalism and the quest
for a social order based on the common ownership of property. Many Americans of the nineteenth century felt a similar dilemma: they promoted Jeffersonian individualism but, remembering their Puritan heritage and the republican promises of the American Revolution, quested for community. There was an important tradition of communalism in American thought during the nineteenth century, reflected in the proliferation of communal experiments in the antebellum period extending to the radical labor movements of the 1880's and Progressivism. Frank Shaw was a vital link between this antebellum tradition and the late nineteenth century.

Before the Civil War, Shaw was an advocate of Association, a utopian reform that promoted a form of socialism. He introduced currents of thought outside the British tradition to the American reform scene through his translations of the French novelist George Sand and the French followers of Charles Fourier. Shaw applied these communal ideas to his efforts on behalf of the freedmen during the Civil War and Reconstruction. He advocated a common school system that would include blacks and whites and land redistribution as tools to remold southern society along egalitarian precepts. When Reconstruction failed and northern society experienced economic depression and labor revolt in the 1870's, Shaw believed that the flawed economic
structure of capitalism was to blame for both problems. After reading *Progress and Poverty* he sought to spread Henry George's ideas that poverty and other social ills were the result of private ownership of land and other resources. Most historians have placed Henry George squarely within the antebellum tradition of Jeffersonian individualism, but Shaw's support requires a re-interpretation of George's work. *Progress and Poverty* struck a balance between individualism and communalism: abolishing private property in land was intended to usher in a new state of society where common ownership led to communal administration of benefits for the entire society.

I often employ the term "social cooperation" in this dissertation. The word "cooperation" is used in both the literature of Association and in the final section of *Progress and Poverty*, when George lays out his vision of the benefits of common ownership of land. The term, I believe, represents the balance that both movements sought to achieve between individual freedom and opportunity and communalism. Cooperation implies a voluntary association between individuals, and both movements were anxious to avoid any implications of repressive government. Cooperation also implies the free, uncoerced, and equal sharing of work and an absence of competition -- again the goal of both reforms.
Although the most important meaning of Shaw’s life was his advocacy of social cooperation, there is a reason that historians, writers, and movie makers have focused mainly on his son as the great legacy of the Shaw family. Shaw and his wife set about to create a myth in the aftermath of Robert Gould Shaw’s death, one that would alter how Americans viewed the Civil War and African Americans. They were so successful that over one hundred and thirty years later the charge on Fort Wagner still captures the popular imagination. The Shaws were close friends and relatives of the leading poets, writers, and journalists of the day. Many poems and articles of the period imbued the events at Wagner with the meaning that the Shaws assigned to events and reflected an abolitionist interpretation of the war. Symbolically, the charge on Wagner represented the manhood of African Americans and proof that they deserved freedom. Robert Gould Shaw’s death was the archetypical example of a northern white man dying to free the slave and sacrificing all to the common good. And his burial in a common trench with his black troops was the embodiment of the brotherhood of all races. Through the use of these images in popular culture, the Shaws helped win acceptance of black troops and abolition of slavery as a war aim.

It is important not to forget, however, that Shaw in the end viewed the Civil War as a failure. It did not
accomplish what he had hoped either for African Americans or for society in general. Shaw ended his life demanding a reconstruction of American life on different principles than liberalism. Many Americans heeded this message, and it is time to reclaim Shaw's contribution to radical reform in the United States.
Chapter One

"I am too much engaged in Worldly pursuits":

The Family Fortune

"One of the most interesting and altogether effective speeches," wrote a reporter for the New England Fourier Society's first annual meeting, "was made by Francis G. Shaw, a young and successful merchant." Shaw was the eldest son of Robert Gould Shaw, one of the nation's wealthiest men in 1845, the year that Fourierite socialists gathered in Boston with the goal of totally restructuring American society. Shaw's "calm, clear statement" of his experience with the "evils of a competitive state" delighted his audience. He now sought in "agricultural employment a higher sphere of mental and moral culture." The reporter found Shaw's declaration to be "the more impressive from the tone of strong though repressed emotion which pervaded his remarks." In its edition following the speech, the official organ of American Fourierism, the *Phalanx*, rejoiced that the support of men like Frank Shaw would ensure "all that is needed - a thorough experiment of Association."\(^1\)

A few years earlier, Shaw had shocked the Boston establishment by retiring from his father's mercantile firm

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\(^1\) *Phalanx* 1 (February 8, 1845): 316.
while in the "full tide of success." Shaw could have been one of the richest men in New England, but he told a friend that "he has made money enough & he thinks a greater accumulation in his hands would be oppression & injustice to the poor!" Already active in abolition, Shaw's 1845 speech would inaugurate a lifetime devoted to broader social reforms.

Because of sentiments such as these, contemporaries enjoyed poking fun at Robert Gould Shaw for his unconventional son. A book detailing Boston's wealthy men even claimed that "His children do not all of them conform exactly to his notions of aristocratic propriety, nor seem to be entirely persuaded that the great art and duty of life is to make money and to keep it. One of them is an 'Associationist,' a great friend and supporter of the Brook Farm Phalanx." Close family friends and members of Boston's elite, however, knew that Robert Gould Shaw, the wealthy Whig merchant, fully supported, though he did not share, his son's unconventional attitudes. Frank Shaw's

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2 Edmund Quincy to Mrs. Henry G. Chapman, February 25, 1840, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms.A.9.2, V. 13, No. 26, Boston Public Library (BPL), by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.

3 "Our First Men": A Calendar of Wealth, Fashion and Gentility: Containing a List of Those Persons Taxed in the City of Boston, Credibly Reported to be Worth One Hundred Thousand Dollars (Boston, 1846), 41.
background was ideal for creating a reformer. Raised to
follow his own convictions, and educated with ideals of duty
and leadership, Shaw was well-positioned to develop a
critique of American society. Radical as he seemed, though,
he never fully abandoned the world of elite Boston that
shaped him.

Shaw's fortuitous position on top of the social order
was a product of his ancestors' hard fought quest for
security in a time of great change. The Shaw family had
long been prominent in Boston's elite circles, but the
family's shifting fortune was surely a legacy that
influenced Shaw's ambivalence toward competitive mercantile
capitalism. He would be the first eldest Shaw son in three
generations who did not have to recoup his father's losses.
The Shaw men before him had high ambitions and an
unrelenting drive for fortune, but the family experienced
numerous failures before his father placed the Shaws firmly
into a position of lasting wealth and power.

The Shaw quest for status began when Robert Gould
Shaw's great-grandfather Thomas came to America from
Scotland or Ireland in the late seventeenth century.
Thomas' eldest son, Francis, was born on March 29, 1721. In
1747 Francis married Sarah Burt, the daughter of Boston
silversmith Benjamin Burt. Francis and Sarah bought a three
story brick house facing Boston's North Square in 1754, on a
lot bounding Paul Revere's property. Over time, Francis gradually increased his investments in real estate and conducted an extensive mercantile business, becoming one of Boston's most successful West Indian traders. New England's growing economy depended largely on shipping, and Francis and one of his partners, Robert Gould, tapped this market by supplying large quantities of wood, especially pine, to other merchants in Boston. Francis associated with merchants whose families would control Massachusetts wealth for generations. His companions in Boston's 1764 Society for Encouraging Trade and Commerce included members of the Sturgis, Appleton, Lowell, and Hutchinson families. His descendants would intermarry with many of these families, thus joining wealth with family ties to preserve fortune and status.

Francis Shaw differed significantly from other members of the Boston elite. He was an Episcopalian, firmly

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4 Francis George Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 1776-1853 (Boston, 1941), 3. This is a family edition of the biography Frank Shaw wrote about his father in the Memorial Biographies of the New England Historic Genealogical Society, Vol. 2, 1881.

5 Article of agreement, December 4, 1766, between Thomas Apthorp, merchant of Boston, and Robert Gould and Francis Shaw, Dolbeare Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS).

6 Society for encouraging Trade & Commerce, Boston, 1764?, E. Price Papers, MHS.
committed to the Church of England, and an active participant in the Episcopal Charitable Society, an organization whose members paid annual sums for the relief of destitute persons known to be members of the Church of England. Believing poverty to be an inevitable part of a social order, the society recognized that "many Persons from being in very good Circumstances are by the Providence of God reduced to so great necessities as to need Charity," and it awarded relief only to those persons "whom this Society shall think meet," excluding "All Vagrants Idle and dissolute persons of notorious evil Fame."

Francis Shaw's allegiance to the Church of England did not, however, extend to the crown. Indeed, his allegiance to the patriot cause during the Revolution cost him the most important investment of his life. In 1770 he had embarked on a venture with Robert Gould that tied his family's fortunes to the province of Maine, a venture that cost his sons their fortunes. Eager to profit from their countrymen's desire for cheap land, Shaw and Gould joined with the London merchant banking firm of Lane, Son, Frazier, & Co. to speculate and improve land in Maine. After obtaining a township grant from the crown, Shaw, Gould, and Lane made a personal reconnaissance of the coast and picked

1 1758 Constitution, Episcopal Charitable Society, Boston Episcopal Charitable Society Papers, MHS.
the site of Gouldsborough for settlement. With a fine harbor located between two large rivers, the site seemed ideal for the investors' plan of exploiting the abundance of valuable timber in Maine. This would expand Shaw's participation in the lumber business.®

Shaw and Gould shouldered a large portion of the cost of equipping Gouldsborough. They transported horses, cattle, sheep, swine, settlers, and supplies to this handpicked location. Under the supervision of Francis Shaw, Jr. and Captain William Nickels, the agent for Lane & Co., settlers cleared farms, built houses, erected mills and began large lumbering operations. The partnership equipped the town with vessels, waiting to sail away loaded with the cargo that would make the investors' fortunes.®

The war for American independence ruined the Gouldsborough settlement. The Revolution stopped all business for Shaw. Suddenly his vessels were of no value, and there was no exit for the lumber churning out of his mills. The settlers of Gouldsborough, destitute and many of them starving, moved to more promising regions, and the proprietors bore the extra expense of supporting those who remained. Gould was ruined, and Shaw, having expended

® Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 4.
® Ib id., 5.
nearly the whole of his estate in the purchase and transportation of supplies, faced the same fate.\textsuperscript{10}

The Revolution brought great distress to the Shaw family at the very time that Shaw's sons began to itch for advancement. Francis' eldest son, Francis Shaw, Jr., was born July 28, 1748. Robert Gould educated young Frank, preparing him for partnership in the commercial world. Frank was twenty-one when his father began the Gouldsborough scheme and went there as his father's agent. He married Hannah Nickels, the daughter of William Nickels, Lane & Co.'s agent. Personally ruined by the war, Frank took part in the struggle for independence on the Maine frontier as a Colonel raising a force of Indians.\textsuperscript{11}

With the family finances in disarray, the third son, Samuel Shaw, born in 1754, joined the Continental Army. Samuel Shaw received national attention and recovered the family's fortunes through his contacts with George Washington and Henry Knox. Sam Shaw's exploits as an army hero and later as American Consul to China influenced the family self image for generations.

In the years around the Revolution, Shaw exhibited great personal sensitivity toward any slight. Surely this

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 7.
\end{flushright}
reflected anxiety about his family's precarious position which seemingly paralleled the fate of American independence. When British officers billeting in the Shaw home spoke of all Americans as "cowards and rebels," Shaw challenged both men to a duel, not relenting until he obtained a satisfactory apology. His letters home from the Continental Army are filled with vindictive attacks upon the pride of Great Britain, making note of every slight toward General Washington. He yearned for glory, both personal and national.

Sam Shaw joined the Continental Army out of patriotism but also with a belief that it would advance his career. The colonial world of hierarchy and deference influenced his thinking. Status came not only from money but from obtaining the polished manner of gentility. Elites exhibited certain qualities which set them apart from common people. Still firmly embedded in this world, which was rapidly crumbling under the onslaught of republican thought, the Shaw men strove to become gentlemen secure in the upper echelons of the hierarchy. Writing home from the army, Shaw informed his family that he was using his connections to obtain patronage for his younger brother Nathaniel. He

12 The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton, with A Life of the Author, by Josiah Quincy (Boston, 1847), 3-5.
advised his youthful brother that external appearances much influenced the world and that the first impressions made by a young man were critical. He insisted that his parents fully equip Nat, just as they had him (Shaw regularly received packages of lace, cloth, and trimmings from his parents, even though this was a financial hardship for them). Shaw filled his letters to Nat with advice on which books to read and how to use his time for self improvement.\textsuperscript{13}

The army provided the avenue for Shaw's promotion in the world. In 1779 he was aide de camp to Major General Henry Knox, a position he retained until the end of the war.\textsuperscript{14} Shaw allied himself with those nationalists who saw the future of America in a strong central government. He was rewarded with positions in the new federal government and special privileges when he returned to the world of commerce. At the close of the war, several merchants in New York and Philadelphia schemed to open U.S. commerce with China. Shaw sailed as their appointed agent on the \textit{Empress} in February 1784. This was the first U.S. ship to visit China, and Shaw reported all his activities to John Jay, the

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\footnotetext[13]{Samuel Shaw to Nathaniel Shaw, May 13, 1781 and January 11, 1783, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.}

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\footnotetext[14]{Certification from George Washington, November 3, 1783, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.}
Minister for Foreign Affairs. On his return, General Knox, now head of the War Office, secured patronage for Shaw as his first secretary. \(^\text{15}\) Shaw resigned this position to undertake another voyage to China, joining again with merchants in New York. He sailed on the Hope as part owner in February 1786, this time with Congress' commission as Consul at Canton. He received instructions from John Jay to report back on how best the U.S. could establish trade with China. Shaw carried on this voyage many letters of introduction which gained him valuable contacts in China, Calcutta, and Madras. \(^\text{16}\) Shaw returned to China in 1790, again as Consul, on the Massachusetts, a ship he personally outfitted for the trade. \(^\text{17}\)

Proud of his young nation and seeking to advance its position in the world, Shaw as Consul bristled at any perceived slight toward the United States. When he felt the English chief at Macao did not show proper attention to the Americans on their arrival, he refused their official invitations for the next season. Even after he came to know

\(^{15}\) Samuel Shaw to John Jay, May 19, 1785, and Journal of Samuel Shaw, 1784-1785, May 1785, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.

\(^{16}\) Journal of Samuel Shaw, 1784-1785 and 1786-1787, Letterbook of Samuel Shaw, January 1786, and Samuel Shaw to No Addressee, December 24, 1787, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.

\(^{17}\) Samuel Shaw to George Washington, January 2, 1790, Letterbook of Samuel Shaw, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.
the British chief's habitual absence of mind, he steadily adhered to his resolution "never to dine at the English table during his chiefship, unless some apology should be offered by him for the first inattention." \(^{18}\)

These China voyages, which included many stops in Africa, instilled in Samuel Shaw a horror of the slave trade. Privileged to witness Africans in positions of power relative to Europeans, Shaw's journals contain little of that condescension evident in other educated Americans' view of Africa. He became adept at pleasantries and diplomacy with a wide range of cultures. He noted in his journals encounters with the mulatto Viceroy of the Portuguese Islands, African interpreters for the Portuguese, and black Catholic scholars who spoke with him in Latin. He even witnessed a Catholic mass performed by a white priest and his black assistant. Upon observing a French ship boarding a cargo of slaves, Shaw filled his journal with a long diatribe against slavery. Can it be man, Shaw asked, "who thus trampling upon the principles of universal benevolence, and running counter to the very end of his creation, can become a fiend to torment his fellow creatures, and

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\(^{18}\) April, 1787, Journal of Samuel Shaw, 1786-1787, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.
deliberately effect the temporal misery of beings, equally
the candidates with himself for a happy immortality?"^{19}

Shaw achieved fame and success on his many voyages, but
he encountered numerous financial difficulties that hindered
his goal of securing his family's social position at home.
He was now in charge, since his father and Francis, Jr. had
died in 1784 and 1785. The family's fourth son, William,
struggled to save the concerns in Maine. Shaw intended to
use part of whatever fortune he made in his ventures to
rescue his brother's operations in Gouldsborough. But he
faced constant failures and struggles. He had outfitted the
Massachusetts specifically for trade with Batavia, but on
his arrival found that trade with the U.S. was now
prohibited because of smuggling accusations. In attempting
to recover, Shaw wrote to William of his disappointment in
finding the European market glutted with China goods.^{20}

Shaw scrambled for fresh schemes to overcome his
disappointments. He sought new partners, sold his ship in
exchange for new goods, and wrote home for his brothers to
send him furs. Shaw's constant quest was security, but he

^{19} March 1784, Journal of Samuel Shaw, 1784-1785,
Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.

^{20} Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 5-6; Declaration to
Governor General and Council of Batavia, September 4, 1790,
Letterbook of Samuel Shaw, and Samuel Shaw to William Shaw,
December 20, 1790 and October 26, 1791, Samuel Shaw Papers,
MHS.
recognized the insecurity of worldly pursuits. Letters home bemoaned his "ill luck" and his "many and heavy misfortunes." He resolved to "strike out on some plan which will amply recompense us for lost time, and enable us to live not only comfortably, but elegantly....I, in pursuit of our mutual fortune, will visit any part of the world where the fickle flower may be woed to the best advantage." 

This habitual striving with its attendant worries also plagued Robert Gould Shaw, but for neither man was it a selfish characteristic. The success of elite families depended on each member contributing to the fortune of all. Sam Shaw's concern was identical with his father and his brothers; his China fortune would be theirs and the salvation of Gouldsborough. Writing to William in 1783, with Gouldsborough draining all the family's resources, Shaw sympathized that "fortune has dealt rather hardly by you," but encouraged his brother to remain in Maine. "If heaven prospers my present undertaking, it will be in my power to help you...be assured that in me you have a brother who will cheerfully share with you his last penny." Referring to

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21 Samuel Shaw to Nathaniel Shaw, July 5, 1785, and Samuel Shaw to William Shaw, March 7, 1783, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.
William's troubles, he reminded Nathaniel that Fortune's wheel was "always going round." 22

The well-ordered hierarchical world that influenced Samuel Shaw encouraged each member of the family to function as part of a unit aimed at the success of all. Clearly defined expectations accompanied a set of roles -- upon his marriage Samuel Shaw wrote in his bible, "To the relations of Son, Brother, Friend, and Citizen, has lately been added that of Husband, and in the order of Nature may probably follow that of Father -- Beneficent Parent of the Universe!" 23 After the death of his father and Francis, Jr., Shaw wrote his other brothers that settling affairs must be "the business of one of you particularly and all of you generally." 24

This family network provided the start for the destitute eldest son of Francis Shaw, Jr. Robert Gould Shaw was born in Gouldsborough on June 4, 1776. He endured poverty during his early life, and received little

22 Samuel Shaw to William Shaw, December 24, 1783, and Samuel Shaw to Nathaniel Shaw, October 4, 1782, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.

23 Insert from a bible, October 2, 1792, Samuel Shaw, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.

24 Samuel Shaw to "My Dear Brothers," December 9, 1785, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.
education. His father died ruined when he was nine years old, and four years later Sam Shaw wrote to Gouldsborough begging Hannah to put both her boys "under my care, that I may be to them instead of a father." William brought both boys to Boston, and Robert Shaw never forgot the kindness of his uncle. As an old man, he wrote to Sam's biographer that "I will not undertake to describe the influence that his kindness had upon my mind." Later placed in the position of patriarch of a large extended family, Robert Shaw followed the example of his uncle in extending his protection and paternalism to his relations.

Sam Shaw intended for Robert to sail with him as midshipman on the Massachusetts, but Robert experienced such dreadful seasickness on the trip from Maine that he remained in Boston as William's apprentice. The wheel of Fortune had swung round for William by the 1790's. His mercantile business and counting house on Dock Square made him wealthy, and he was able to recover the family's interests in Gouldsborough. He then sold these rights for a handsome profit to William Bingham of Philadelphia, who wanted an

26 Samuel Shaw to William Shaw, July 12, 1789, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.
27 Quincy, Journals of Sam Shaw, 116.
28 Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 10.
outlet to the sea for his large Bingham purchase. Thus, between Samuel Shaw and William Shaw, the family recouped its losses, and when Sam died at sea in 1794 and William followed in 1803, Robert was at the helm, symbolized by his guardianship of William's surviving children. 29

Robert spent his childhood in the difficult role of poor relation. William was a hard master who beat his young apprentice and compelled him to render menial service in the house, store, and stable. Robert took his meals with the family, sleeping sometimes in the house, sometimes in the store. Robert's treatment was not unusual in a time when indentured apprentices were absolutely under their master's control. He expected no better. Robert hung around the wharves on Boston's North End with a rough crowd of boys who frequently fought. During these days he developed a "habit of using strong expletives," a habit he carried on without scruple until the end of his life. At the same time, the Shaws' numerous family connections took an interest in him and he was a guest in some of Boston's "best" homes. This early period critically shaped his relationship with an extended kinship group that was to support his eventual rise to prominence. His especial patron was Samuel Parkman, the

29 Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 6; Bradford Adams Whittemore, Memorials of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati (Boston, 1964), 544; Thomas Randall to Hannah Shaw, August 29, 1794, Samuel Shaw Papers, MHS.
husband of his Aunt Sarah and one of the wealthiest merchants in Boston. Robert would eventually marry Parkman's eldest daughter by his second wife.\textsuperscript{30}

As a young man Robert showed an aptitude for business that impressed his family and their connections. William sent the seventeen year old to manage the property at Gouldsborough and close out the family's interests there. When William retired, Robert Shaw succeeded to his uncle's business, and quickly outstripped any of the family's previous efforts. Shaw early gained a reputation that enabled him to command all the credit he wanted. He opened his own auction and commission business in 1799, at the age of twenty-three. Shaw continued in this direction with partners, forming Shaw, Barker, & Bridge in 1803, and then Shaw, Tuckerman, & Rogers in 1805. This latter firm did extensive business importing English goods.\textsuperscript{31}

Shaw also continued his family's long history of land speculation in Maine. During a two-year trip to England, from 1805-1807, Shaw bought 30,000 acres of land in the Kennebec valley from a Londoner who before Shaw's visit did not realize he possessed any lands in America. Shaw

\textsuperscript{30} Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 10-11.

\textsuperscript{31} Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 12-15; Thomas L.V. Wilson, The Aristocracy of Boston: Who They Are, and What They Were: Being a History of the Business and Business Men of Boston, for the Last Forty Years (Boston, 1848), 31.
conveyed half of his rights to James Bridge and Revel Williams of Augusta, Maine, who managed his interests until the land was sold. During the Revolution, land hungry settlers had poured into the backcountry, and squatters occupied large tracts of the land. When proprietors like Shaw renewed dormant claims to the land, settlers violently resisted in an armed conflict that consumed middle Maine. Ultimately courts confirmed the proprietors' title, while the legislature passed a Betterment Act guaranteeing the squatters' improvements. For proprietors like Shaw, the speculation was very profitable.  

The land conflict in Maine represented a larger struggle over the meaning of the Revolution. Revolutionary rhetoric and the prevailing ideology of republicanism encouraged an agrarian radicalism that took seriously the concepts of freedom and equality. In the aftermath of the Revolution the vision of a self-sufficient, land-owning small farmer dominated American culture. Such a farmer was independent and virtuous. More importantly, a countryside dotted with these yeoman farms ensured a land of equality amongst its citizens. Squatters argued that natural right gave them title to the land; they had settled on it first and had created its value through their labor. Proprietary

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32 Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 15-17.
claims undermined equitable distribution of the land, which was vital to personal independence for the mass of men and represented aristocratic attempts to live off the labor of others. The proprietors, men like Robert Gould Shaw, believed the settlers' revolt constituted a threat to sacred property rights. They envisioned a commercial world managed by a group of natural elites who would ensure stability and order.  

While Bridge and Williams oversaw his lands in Maine, Shaw continued to expand his operations in Boston. In 1810 he dissolved his co-partnership and continued on his own until his death, with four of his sons becoming co-partners. Shaw was a merchant, importer, and investor. His operations extended all over the world, and he traded in the West Indies, Asia, and the Mediterranean, benefitting from the contacts Samuel Shaw had established. The American Consul to Genoa commented that "more than half the vessels entering this port have been owned by Robert Gould Shaw of Boston."  

During the Federalist period, Boston merchant-shipowners like Shaw grew rich through their cheap handling and

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distribution of China goods to all parts of the world. Commerce in Massachusetts expanded and brought general prosperity in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{35}

Like other merchant princes of his era, Shaw invested heavily in real estate, railroads, and manufacturing companies, using his commercial capital to build New England's financial infrastructure. He developed the waterfront of the North End, forming Commercial Wharf and its parallel streets. Taking advantage of Boston's rapid economic growth, Shaw invested $50,000 to build wharves for the city's merchant fleet, crowned by a "magnificent block of solid granite warehouses" that housed the city's most successful firms. Robert Shaw received much credit for the harbor's "forest of masts and spars, and a wealth of snowy canvas such as no other city in the Union could boast of."\textsuperscript{36} He was also a prime mover behind the Boston Exchange and served as its financial director. From 1813 until his death he was a director of the Boston bank, serving as president from 1836-1841.\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35} Morison, \textit{Maritime History}, 50-64.

\textsuperscript{36} William S. Rossiter, ed., \textit{Days and Ways in Old Boston} (Boston, 1915), 55-56, 45.

America was changing rapidly in the 1820's and 1830's, when Shaw was making his money. Canals and railroads spread across the countryside, bringing more and more Americans into the market. The number of factories and large cities grew apace with the rising population. Increasingly Americans worked for wages. In older, densely settled areas of the eastern seaboard, city dwellers uncomfortably noticed a growing disparity of wealth. Americans responded differently to these changes. Those Americans bred on the Revolutionary heritage of agrarian republicanism, people like the Maine settlers, worried that this new society was betraying the ideals of the republic. Concentration of capital and wage labor was aristocratic oppression in another guise. They supported Andrew Jackson's Democratic party, with its promise to destroy the unnatural privileges that threatened equality, whether manifested in a national bank or in political candidates raised in the merchant mansions of Boston.  

Some embraced the commercial revolution in America, but were suspicious of the egalitarian society emerging along with it. Whigs, clinging to an older vision of society, believed in the benevolent leadership of an elite whose talents set them apart from the masses. Under the proper direction, a capitalist system would benefit all levels of society. Correlating capitalism and progress, they wanted active government intervention to promote manufacturing and finance internal improvements.\(^39\)

Robert Shaw shared this optimistic appraisal of the nation's economic destiny. Rejoicing over the proliferation of canals and railroads, he hailed the appearance of cities and villages where once there was forest. The bounteous natural environment of America provided enough for an abundant yield to anyone who was willing to look to his own resources and apply himself to the land. Shaw was an active Whig, believing the future of America lay in manufacturing. He promoted Congressional tariffs and worked behind the scenes and in public conventions to protect what he saw as both New England's interest and the national good.\(^40\)

\(^{39}\) For a full discussion of the Whig perspective, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979).

\(^{40}\) Robert Gould Shaw (RGS) to Jacob Townsley (JT), August 21, 1836, August 3, 1843, November 6, 1831, and RGS
By the 1840's, Robert Gould Shaw was one of the wealthiest men in the United States, and in 1851 he was worth over $1,500,000.* He had finally succeeded in the quest for a secure position for the Shaw family, achieving the dreams of his grandfather and uncles. But Shaw had not just reached elite status; along with others of his generation, he had transformed Boston's elite into a self-sustaining upper class.

The distinctive Brahmin upper class was set apart from elites in other cities by its coherence and organization, as well as by its unique attitudes. The founding group of merchant princes used their post-revolutionary wealth to consolidate their families' position. They diversified and solidified their economic base through investments in transportation and manufacturing and by taking advantage of the unprecedented speculative opportunities created by the

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to Hannah Townsley, August 31, 1813, Letters of RGS, MHS; RGS to Nathan Appleton, August 1, 1842, Appleton Family Papers, MHS; David Sears to RGS, May 27, 1843, Sears Family Papers, MHS. Well known for his honesty and his fair dealings in business and in politics, Shaw was not a straight party man. During Jackson's administration, the Democrats appointed Shaw in 1836 as U.S. Commissioner and disbursing agent to build the new Custom House in Boston.

Revolution. As these elites gained control over the economic sector, they created institutions that spread their influence throughout society. From the 1820's to 1840's, Boston's upper class founded, endowed, or expanded their support for insurance companies, banks, Harvard, the Boston General Hospital, the Athenaeum, and a host of philanthropic endeavors. Men from about forty families directed these institutions that served both to fulfill ideals of leadership and to ensure their children's educational and economic advancement. Guided by an ethic that emphasized the public-servant ideal, elite families viewed themselves as leaders with a special call to raise the rest of society. The proliferation of educational and philanthropic institutions during the 1820's reflected this consolidating upper class' commitment to community.42

Central to elite Boston's success in perpetuating upper class cohesion was kinship and marriage. It was an interrelated set of families that pursued their collective

interests through shared membership in the main institutions of the city. Shaw's own rise from poverty took place within a web of family relations that supported his quest for fortune. His wealthy relatives reached out to the young man with so much potential, and Shaw married a daughter from one of Boston's wealthiest, most well-respected families, who brought money and position into the marriage.

Elizabeth Willard Parkman was the first child of Samuel Parkman and Sarah Rogers. Born in 1785, she first met Robert Shaw when she was four years old and he was thirteen. Eliza Parkman was all that an elite young lady should have been in the early nineteenth century -- accomplished, gay, fond of society. Robert and Eliza fell deeply in love, and married in February, 1809. The marriage was a happy one.\(^{43}\)

Robert and Eliza quickly began their family. They had eleven children in all. The eldest child, Francis George Shaw, was born in October, 1809, just eight and a half months after the marriage, and a child arrived every two years until 1828, when Eliza was 43. After Frank came Sarah Parkman (1811), Samuel Parkman (1813), Robert Gould (1815), Anna Blake (1817), Gardiner Howland (1819), Joseph Coolidge (1821), Elizabeth Willard (1823), Quincy Adams (1825),

\(^{43}\) Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 21-22.
William Henry (1827), and Marian (1828). Nine of these children married into other well-established New England families, creating a web of elite ties that extended through the Sturgis, Russell, Sears, Parkman, Lyman, and Agassiz families. Following the family tree is a difficult operation, since marriages to cousins were so common within elite Boston.

Francis George Shaw was born into a large, well-connected family at the pinnacle of the social order. This privileged life carried with it obligations and burdens, which young Frank learned from observing his father. The first lesson to be learned was that duty to family came before all else. Robert Shaw placed his highest value on family and believed that wealth carried with it a duty to assist those within the sphere of the family's influence. Robert Shaw was generous to those around him, possessing "the tender heart of a woman." One of his daughters said that her father "possessed a quality which I find rarely in man or woman; I mean pity: he was very tender-hearted toward man and beast." 

Reflecting perhaps on his own past and his current fortune, Shaw wrote to his step-father in 1829 that "God in

44 Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 29; Whittemore, Memorials, 545-546.
45 Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 26-27.
his goodness generally raises up some one of a Family to relieve the distressed and afflicted." Shaw acted as that providentially chosen individual. His mother had remarried Jacob Townsley and remained in Maine for the rest of her life. Consequently, Shaw handled business for his Maine relations and sent them a steady supply of cash and gifts, giving enough for them to practice charity. His letters reflected great concern for the comfort of all his relations, and he spent much of his valuable time executing business for relatives. His obligations extended far, and in 1825 he wrote Townsley that "since the decease of my Father Parkman, I have had much to do for some branches of the Family who depended on him." During a recession in 1839, which hit Shaw hard, he worried that "Many very many depend on me and I have furnished so much that I begin to lack myself." Shaw was the patriarch for a wide group of kin who relied on him to conduct their business affairs, offer advice, and provide financial support and patronage for the younger generations.

Shaw was extremely sensitive to any breach in reciprocity between family members. While in England, he wrote several letters to his mother bemoaning the fact that his brother had hardly written him since he left home. He

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46 RGS to JT, April 26, 1829, February 6, 1825, and December 18, 1839, Letters of RGS, MHS.
was "grieved" that "I have but one Bro! whose welfare is as
dear to me as my own and that he is void of affection for
me. I have repeatedly mentioned the subject." He would do
his duty to the family, telling her, "I again repeat that I
hope and request that you will not let any consideration
prevent your using what money you may want to procure all
the necessary comforts of life. I have the power to make
you happy as far as pecuniary aid will effect it, then allow
me to do what will afford me so much pleasure."47

On behalf of his children Shaw exerted every effort.
Frank remembered his father as a strict disciplinarian but
also as a tender and loving father. Perhaps the most
remarkable quality Shaw possessed as a father was the
confidence he placed in his children. He did not attempt to
influence his children's religious beliefs or interfere with
their convictions. This father "permitted" his children to
"devote themselves to such pursuits as were most congenial
to them."48 He tried to give them a larger view of the
world than the parlor society of elite Boston. He wrote,
"There is nothing so useful to young men as to let them mix
with the world and see how others live, it gives them ideas
of human nature which are not to be found in Schools and

47 RGS to Hannah Townsley, May 20, 1806, Letters of
RGS, MHS.
48 Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 23.
Colleges or in Theaters and Ball Rooms. I am anxious to
give my Boys the best Education that our Country affords,
and at the same time to give them a chance of obtaining a
little worldly knowledge with this."  

Shaw's willingness to give his children wide latitude
and his strong belief in family obligation became clearly
evident in his relationship with his son Joseph Coolidge.
Joseph converted to Catholicism during a three year trip to
Europe, becoming a priest in 1847 and entering the Jesuit
order in 1850 shortly before his death. From his journal,
it is obvious that he was anxious to spread his new faith to
all his family. On vacations and even on his sister's
deathbed, Joseph worked to convert his parents and siblings.
While this behavior was trying to Robert and Eliza, they
supported their son as best they could, attending his
ordination, and holding dinners for several Catholic
officials in Boston. When Joseph wrote his father of his
intention to join the novitiate, he recorded Shaw's response
in his diary. His father replied "that while he cannot
judge of the propriety of the course I have chosen, though
is inclined to think I shall be less useful in it, still if

\[49\] RGS to JT, April 22, 1824, Letters of RGS, MHS.

Priest, Jesuit": Diary of Fr. Joseph Coolidge Shaw, S.J.
(Published by the Editor, ND), ix-x.
I am convinced that it is my duty & that it will conduce to my happiness, he has no objection to make." Shaw was "unwilling to make an opposition to the wishes of his children, so long as they are in the path of virtue & hence of happiness; as he has no desire for his children but that they be virtuous and happy."[51]

Despite this assurance, a serious breach between father and son occurred in 1850, after Joseph decided to join the novitiate. Shaw had not granted Joseph a fixed allowance as he had his other sons, and Joseph attributed this to his father's fear that "I would throw away all the money I could possibly get hold of on the poor of our Church." Several times the two had clashed over money. Just before he left for Maryland, Joseph asked his father for a regular sum, and when his father refused, Joseph "told him that I had done nothing to deserve being treated so differently than my brothers, that I had a right to be treated like them, and to be allowed to spend what I had in my own way." Getting angrier as he spoke, Joseph continued, "my having given up my former expenses for horses, wine & cigars, to apply the money to charitable purposes was no reason for cutting off part of what he willingly granted me then; & that in fact to treat me as he was was laying a fine on my religious

[51] Ibid., 9-10, 30-31, 46.
convictions." Shaw exploded, calling Joseph a "most ungrateful, selfish, & grasping son," saying "that I had never done anything for the family, & that I had not a particle of consideration for him or for his family." 52

Interestingly, Eliza and his brothers supported Joseph in this case. Howland offered him whatever money he needed, and "Mother by the way has all along been opposed to Father's procedure & wished me to have whatever I wanted. So too, my brothers," especially Frank and Quincy. 53 After much soul-searching, Joseph wrote a letter to his father thanking him for past kindness and concluding that he would not in the future apply to his father for money. In response, Joseph received "a kind letter" inclosing a large sum of cash - "the pledge I trust of peace; & I dare say now he will send me more in the course of the year, than if no trouble had arisen; for he is really extremely generous at heart." Just shortly afterwards, Joseph died, in his will leaving his parents a crucifix with "gratitude for their unwearied kindness & liberality." 54

This incident also illustrated Robert Shaw's attitude toward duty. Joseph devoted his life to the church and "had

52 Ibid., 58-60.
53 Ibid., 60.
54 Ibid., 60-78.
done nothing for the family." While Shaw never questioned his son's beliefs or his right to follow his conscience, he did believe that, unlike his other boys, Joseph had abandoned his obligation to the family's mutual financial support. All his energies and resources belonged to the church, not his kin. Upon Joseph's conversion, Shaw had written to his step-father, "The course of life adopted by Him, will deprive me of Him. He has given himself to the Romish Church. He means to be a Teacher of that faith, in it He is most sincere and may and will no doubt do good. Good men are wanted in this as well as other Religions."\textsuperscript{55} Shaw viewed his son's conversion as a loss to himself and the family.

Such an attitude on his part was not difficult to understand. Compelled to work, overseeing every aspect of his business himself and unable to justify any type of relaxation, he had developed an unrelenting drive for wealth and obsession with business.\textsuperscript{56} His letters to his family in Maine reveal a deep inner compulsion, unrelated even to accumulating wealth. "I have not been East or West North or South One mile from my Counting Room or have I been absent from it half a day, Sunday, always excepted," he wrote. "My

\textsuperscript{55} RGS to JT, December 7, 1844, Letters of RGS, MHS.

cares accumulate and my labor increases they are indeed constant and oppressive. I am literally engaged day and night and sometimes feel that the constant toil and confinement is likely to be too much for me.  

But he could not stop. "You will probably ask me why I thus press myself with business and why I do not relax," he wrote his parents. "In reply I can only say that it is my nature to be active, that it seems that I was destined to labour for myself and others and that I am pushed on from day to day by the activity of my own mind and the urgent call of others."

Shaw struggled to control his need for activity, but could not. "I have for two or three years past promised myself that I would do less business but have not kept my word. It is not a desire to increase my property that drives me on I have no occasion for this, indeed I feel that I should accumulate property faster if I were to draw in my business." He attributed these feelings to "the propensity to Adventure, which is really a species of gambling, that after one has engaged he hardly knows how to stop. I never send a vessel off, but I promise to sell her when she

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57 RGS to JT, March 22, 1837 and May 31 1838, Letters of RGS, MHS.

58 RGS to "My Dear Parents," May 28, 1826, Letters of RGS, MHS.
returns this however never happens but I often buy another ere she returns."\\(^59\\)

Such activity caused Shaw to fret over his long hours. "I am too much engaged in Worldly pursuits is a truth that I cannot deny - my anxious days and sometimes sleepless nights will not allow me to deny it, still I go on tho' every passing day shows me the folly of this wearing out my body and mind." He admitted having not "an hour to devote to relaxation from business or to spend with a friend; it is now more than eight months since I have given even a half of a day to ride in the Country or take any amusement with my Wife and Children."\\(^60\\) And yet, even though he recognized the fleeting nature of worldly pursuits, the lure was too strong for him. "Nothing is truer in this world than the old remark that Ritches takes to itself wings and flys away, and with this old and true saying in our mouths we are all of us delving for this sordid lucre, this root of all evil and which by the by as you and I know its a great evil to be without."\\(^61\\)

For all his wealth and success, Robert Gould Shaw never adhered to an ostentatious style of life. He lived a life

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\(^{59}\\) RGS to JT, April 26, 1829, Letters of RGS, MHS.

\(^{60}\\) RGS to "My Dear Parents," May 28, 1826, Letters of Robert Gould Shaw, MHS.

\(^{61}\\) RGS to JT, February 6, 1825, Letters of RGS, MHS.
of personal simplicity, even while surrounding his family with luxury. His children remembered that he "protested always, and not only by words, but by his daily life, against self-indulgence and luxury of all kinds." He taught them that "wealth brings luxury, and luxury brings vice, and vice brings ruin." After Shaw's return to Boston after his two-year London trip, he wore the same suit of clothes in which he had left. At the same time, he participated in the fashionable social whirl of elite America, spending his few vacations at the famous Sharon and Saratoga Springs. Here the family rested in private cottages enveloped by vast grounds, selecting food from a breakfast table consisting of four hundred chickens, ham, fish, eggs, omelets, hot rolls, hot cakes, toast and butter. Eliza and the children enjoyed a Drawing Room Life, with dancing, music, whist, and billiard tables. Shaw's Beacon Street home "for Situation and elegance has few, if any superior to it in the City." This had not always been the case and Shaw well knew it. Even after gaining great success he worried about the state of his economic well-being. The Panic of 1819 hit his business hard, and he complained constantly of the "frequent

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63 RGS to Hannah Townsley, August 31, 1813, and RGS to JT, July 25, 1845, August 4, 1847, and August 16, 1838, Letters of RGS, MHS.
and unfortunate disappointments in business....I am at a loss to know what to do."

Even after accumulating massive wealth, fluctuations in the market worried him. In 1829 and 1839 money was scarce, and Shaw's investments in real estate and manufacturing took heavy hits.

Comparing his situation to a mill owner whose work of a winter was swept away by a storm, Shaw complained, "I have been at work the last five years harder than I ever worked before. I have got out my logs...and as I supposed seamed them safe with booms, etc. but deluge after deluge in the affairs of Trade have followed each other almost yearly and swept all away."

Shaw was just grateful that his "mills" still stood.

Shaw's material anxieties were not comforted by a deep religious faith. When he was twenty-two, he wrote his mother regarding his religious beliefs. "I endeavor to live a good and moral life, yet I am far from what our Eastern [meaning Maine] friends call a Christian," he told her. "I endeavor and do, as far as my ability will permit, live by [God's] laws and keep his commandments. All this I do

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64 RGS to Hannah Townsley, September 24, 1819, Letters of RGS, MHS.

65 RGS to JT, April 26, 1829 and September 14, 1839, Letters of RGS, MHS.

66 RGS to JT, November 15, 1839, Letters of RGS, MHS.
without pretending to any religion." Shaw regularly attended church, and he and Eliza raised their children in the Unitarian New North church, where Eliza's brother Francis Parkman was the minister. Shaw shared with other Unitarians a distrust of creeds and doctrines, as Frank recalled, "maintaining his own convictions and acknowledging in all the same right of private judgment which he claimed for himself."68

The centerpiece of Shaw's faith as it developed over his life was a deep belief in a Creator who provided "retribution attendant upon all good and evil affections and actions." He never accepted the orthodox Christian teaching of salvation through Jesus Christ for a sinful man, but instead saw universal salvation for a basically good mankind. Frank summed up this belief in the typical Unitarian style, by presenting his father's position as a "horror" of the Calvinistic "doctrine which teaches that God is less merciful than man, and that he created human beings solely for the purpose of plunging them into endless torments."69 Or as Shaw put it, "I believe that all will be

68 Ibid., 22-23.
69 Ibid., 23.
found at the last day in the enjoyment of the promised
happiness."\textsuperscript{70}

Toward the end of their lives, Robert and Eliza became
obsessed with the phenomenon of Spiritualism. He visited
mediums and wrote friends and relatives with accounts of his
mental conversations with a variety of spirits, from
deceased relatives to Martin Luther and Calvin. Shaw wrote
many elite Bostonians in an effort to convince them of the
truth of immortality and contact with the other "sphere."\textsuperscript{71}
Indifferent to the ridicule, Shaw felt compelled to spread
what he saw as the truth. After Eliza's death on April 14,
1853, he wrote his sister, "the sooner I follow my dear wife
the better." He had taken much comfort from Spiritualism.
"God in His goodness has recently opened my Eyes to a belief
that we can communicate with our Dear departed Friends and
Relatives. It is a Mystery and a stumbling Block to many.
such as Bigots, Worldly Rich Men and such as in the days of
Christ cried out Crucify Him, Crucify Him." Shaw was
compelled to speak out, he said, "Hundreds who believe,
fearing the world, will not publicly proclaim Their belief.
Not so with me. This world to me and the People of it are

\textsuperscript{70} RGS to JT, September 6, 1835, Letters of RGS, MHS.

\textsuperscript{71} RGS to Persis Lewis, April 15, 1853, Letters of
RGS, MHS; RGS to Nathan Appleton, April 7, 1853 and April
11, 1853, Appleton Family Papers, MHS.
but of little moment to me when set against proclaiming what I know to be a Truth." ⁷²

After Eliza's death, Shaw became very ill. He refused all food and never again left his bed. As friends and relatives gathered about his deathbed, the patriarch of this extended family gave blessings, instructions, and final wishes. A little less than a month after his wife's departure, on May 3, Robert Gould Shaw died, leaving to his clan as much wealth and power as a family in Massachusetts could enjoy. ⁷³ He was the founder of a family that for generations enjoyed a privileged position in American society. His success indeed was so great that he was able to pass on to all his sons, and to their sons, and their sons, elite status. He had accumulated more than enough for all his descendants to share.

⁷² RGS to Persis Lewis, April 15, 1853, Letters of RGS, MHS.

⁷³ Shaw, Robert Gould Shaw, 24.
Chapter Two

"Humanity is before God as one man":  
Association

Robert Gould Shaw was proud of his hardworking twenty-one year old eldest son, who travelled all over the world on behalf of Robert Gould Shaw & Co. Frank "has managed his business quite to my satisfaction and promises to make a Man," Robert bragged, "He is well liked by all who know him."1 In the 1820's young Frank Shaw had grown up like so many other eldest sons among Boston's First Families. He attended Boston Latin School, studied with private tutors for the Harvard entrance exams, passed them, and then left college early in 1828 to join his father's mercantile firm. Robert expected Frank to learn the trade and accordingly sent him abroad to conduct the company's business. Frank spent a great deal of time in the West Indies, particularly Havana, and in Europe, often stopping by the port towns of the South on his way home.2

1 Robert Gould Shaw (RGS) to Hannah Townsley, March 26, 1830, Letters of RGS, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS).

2 RGS to Jacob Townsley (JT), April 22, 1824, July 26, 1832, February 24, 1831, May 23, 1830, and RGS to Hannah Townsley, November 14, 1834, Letters of RGS, MHS; Richard M. Bayles, History of Richmond County, (Staten Island) New York, From Its Discovery to the Present Time (New York, 1887), 572; Bradford Adams Whittemore, Memorials of the
The quiet, gentle-mannered young man learned a different lesson from his apprenticeship than other Boston sons, however. What he saw in Havana and Charleston and the counting houses of Massachusetts deeply disturbed him. His trade companions in the West Indies appeared to him to be greed-driven men, who cared little about moral principles and were oblivious to the poverty, suffering, and human loss that he increasingly noticed around him in the streets of every commercial area he visited. Although he admired his father's personal honesty, he considered many of the company's business practices to be inherently unscrupulous, and his conscience began to gnaw at him. Shaw continued to work hard for his father's firm, but was unable to reconcile in his mind the misery and distress of African slaves and poor laborers with his father's relentless quest for wealth. Nor did Shaw enjoy the long hours -- pouring over his ledger was tedious and tiresome, sapping precious hours away from literature.

Whenever he was home, Shaw poured out his dissatisfactions into the willing ears of his sympathetic half first cousin Sarah Blake Sturgis. He had known her from childhood; they were both grandchildren of Samuel Parkman -- Shaw through Parkman's second marriage, and Sarah

Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati (Boston, 1964), 546.
through his first marriage to Sarah Shaw.³ Sarah, the
eighth of twelve, born August 31, 1815, was the daughter of
a successful merchant. Her family commanded much of
Boston's wealth through their participation in the lucrative
East Indies trade and were welcome in the nation's most
elite circles; Sarah as a little girl knew John Adams, and
had recently met Andrew Jackson in the White House -- "A
rough old fellow, wearing carpet slippers," she said.⁴
Intelligent and principled, Sarah understood Shaw's growing
discontent. Increasingly, he found he could talk
comfortably with her about his concerns.

The young people’s friendship deepened at Francis
Parkman's New North church, attended by both families, where
an occasional sermon from Emerson stirred Sarah's soul. In
discussing their thoughts after church, Frank and Sarah
found they had much in common, including doubts about
traditional Christianity. They shared similar interests,
delighting in literature, music, art, and European culture.

³ Roger Faxton Sturgis, Edward Sturgis of Yarmouth, Massachusetts, 1613-1695, and His Descendants (Boston, 1914), 53.
Sarah began to spend more time with Shaw's family, and early in March, 1834, she accompanied her Uncle Robert and some of her cousins on a pleasure trip to the South.5

By now Shaw was in love with Sarah; a good friend and companion, charming and beautiful, she liked the unconventional thoughts he shared with her and could envision life with a merchant's son who was not comfortable in the merchant's world. With the full approval of both families, they married on June 9, 1835, apparently cementing a traditional union between related members of Boston's elite. The happy relationship, however, reinforced Frank and Sarah's deviant attitudes toward the customary social practices of Brahmin Boston. Encouraging each other in a mini-rebellion, Frank and Sarah gravitated toward movements that undermined the conservative cultural beliefs of their parents.

Raised in the Unitarian environment of upper class Boston, in a family circle that included several liberal theologians, the couple's religious training was already unorthodox by the standards prevailing in America at the time. But for Frank and Sarah the Unitarian faith was stifled by its own orthodoxy, dominated by conservatives,

5 Sarah Blake Shaw (SBS) to Charles Eliot Norton, September 27, 1899, Norton Papers, Houghton Library (HL), shelf mark bMS Am 1088; RGS to JT, March 27, 1834, Letters of RGS, MHS.
and unable to grasp the radical implications of liberal thought. Conservative Unitarians in the early nineteenth century emphasized reason; they believed that through unassisted reason, a person could establish the essentials of natural religion, which were the existence of God and the obligations of morality. Thus Unitarians rejected creed and doctrine, claiming toleration within the church was essential to true Christianity. Unlike Deists, however, Unitarians insisted that natural religion had to be supplemented with a special revelation of God's will. The Bible was that special revelation, and much of its authority rested on the miracles of Jesus, who was a higher rank in creation than mere man. 

Around the time of Frank and Sarah's marriage, a controversy over Transcendentalism rocked the Unitarian church in Massachusetts. Ralph Waldo Emerson, who brought divisive issues into the open with his 1838 Harvard Divinity School address, rejected the conservatives' reliance on the miracles of Christ to support revealed religion. Claiming that miracles and supernatural assistance were irrelevant to

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real religion, Transcendentalists advocated man's ability to intuit all truth. In their minds God communicated directly with the individual soul.

The most radical Transcendentalist ministers, men like Theodore Parker and George Ripley, explicitly rejected revealed Christianity as a special revelation. All religions had some truth, and since the original source of truth was in the heart, faith was independent of the Bible. Transcendentalists worshipped God, but next they worshipped man, asserting the self-sufficiency and supremacy of each individual. Christ was merely a man who was more sensitive than others to intuition, but whose inspiration was no greater than that available to any other man; he had simply announced religious truths that would have been equally valid had someone else proclaimed them.¹⁷

Frank and Sarah Shaw were among the first to embrace this radical Transcendentalism. They attended Emerson's sermons and other lectures and brought Margaret Fuller within their family circle. Fuller became a close friend and tutor to Shaw's sister Anna, and also embraced Sarah.

Sarah participated in Fuller's conversations for women and extended frequent invitations for the radical-minded feminist to stay in the Shaw home.®

Like other Transcendentalists, Frank and Sarah sought inspiration in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Shortly after their marriage they joined the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem under the Reverend Thomas Worcester, a New Church congregation that embraced Swedenborg's doctrines. His elaborate descriptions of heaven complemented Transcendentalism nicely; there every person's true internal nature gradually surfaced, freed from external trappings, to seek association with like souls for perfect fellowship. This congregation provided Frank and Sarah with fresh alternatives to the stale orthodoxies of Boston Unitarianism and introduced them to free-thinking individuals such as Lydia Maria Child, Theodore Parker, and William Lloyd Garrison, who encouraged their intellectual curiosity.®

®  Margaret Fuller to Ralph Waldo Emerson, 9? November 1841, in Robert N. Hudspeth, ed., The Letters of Margaret Fuller, vol. 2 (Ithaca, 1983), 250; Margaret Fuller to Margaret C. Fuller, January 1 and January 15, 1842, in Ibid., vol. 3, 32, 39.

®  Bayles, History of Richmond County, 572-573; Marguerite Beck Block, The New Church in the New World: A Study of Swedenborgianism in America (New York, 1932), 107-111.
Child especially became a close friend to the Shaws, and helped draw Sarah and Frank into the ranks of Garrisonian abolitionism, which, like many other movements in America, including Transcendentalism, drew strength from the doctrine that salvation was open to all. Reformers seized on the concept that men were free agents with infinite potential for good -- if they pointed out the nation's sins, they could unleash a mass conversion that would eventually perfect society. Thus in the 1830's destroying slavery became a moral crusade, where everything depended on recognizing it as a sin. Accordingly, then, abolitionists directed their efforts toward personal agitation and demanded that slaveholders stop sinning, repent, and immediately emancipate their slaves. They also aimed to convince northerners not only of the great weight of sin the country carried, but of their own duty to testify against the slaveholders of the South.¹⁰

William Lloyd Garrison became the great crusader for immediatism, and those supporting his uncompromising approach founded the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. Garrison, arguing that the Constitution was a pro-slavery document, advocated disunion. Believing that American society was fundamentally immoral, Garrison demanded a

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thorough change in the nation's ideology and institutional structure. He opened his newspaper, *The Liberator*, to free discussion of women's rights, nonresistance, and anarchy. Those termed Garrisonian abolitionists may not have shared his position on all issues, but they agreed that an anti-slavery society should include members with all social views.¹¹

Garrison's critique of American society resonated with the disheartened Frank Shaw, who continued to toil for his father's firm while becoming ever more disillusioned with the nation's commercial institutions and moral foundations. In 1838, Frank and Sarah joined the Anti-Slavery Society, much to the delight of Lydia Maria Child, who praised them for their "moral courage" to stand "side by side with a despised band of reformers against the world of wealth and fashion to which they by position belonged." Newcomers to the movement, the Shaws were anxious to put their principles to effect in practical living, and they explored with their new circle of friends every sub-issue of abolition. They asked Child's opinion -- should they cut off association with a Virginia slaveholder? In other areas Shaw took a firm stand and debated Child. He did not believe in

avoiding the products of slave labor, since it was impossible to "force a man to do right."¹² Nor was Shaw an advocate of non-resistance, rejecting it on the grounds it made life "the one thing needful -- more sacred than principle -- more precious than truth."¹³ Shaw felt "justified" in taking a life "if it stood in the way of the spiritual and moral, as well as physical welfare of a whole race."¹⁴ Exploring these questions heightened Shaw's discontent with his life as a businessman. The self-interested scramble for wealth he witnessed everyday only reinforced his idea that the whole system was somehow flawed -- he could not reconcile the opulence of his own life with the oppression of African slaves and the poverty of northern wage laborers. "The problem of human society was by no

¹² Lydia Maria Child (LMC) to Francis George Shaw (FGS) and SBS, August 17, 1838, Shaw Papers, Folder 16-19, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Lydia Maria Child to Editor, New York Evening Post, in National Anti-Slavery Standard, August 15, 1863, in Patricia G. Holland and Milton Meltzer, eds., The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, 1817-1880 (Millwood, NY, 1979), 56/1498.

¹³ LMC to FGS, December 7, 1841, Shaw Papers, Folder 20-23, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University. In this letter and the one following, Child quotes Shaw's letters to her, so what is here quoted is Shaw's terminology and not Child's.

¹⁴ LMC to FGS, February 15, 1842, Shaw Papers, Folder 24-27, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
means satisfactorily settled for him," a friend recalled, "because in the lottery of life his ticket had turned up a prize." To accumulate more money now seemed outrageous; it would be "oppression and injustice to the poor," Shaw told his family. In February, 1840, therefore, he bought land in West Roxbury, a beautiful rural suburb of Boston, and later in the year retired from his father's firm.  

Shaw's action was not a sacrifice; his work was uncongenial to him anyway, and now he both soothed his conscience and found the freedom to pursue his real interests, scholarship and reform. Leaving the city, the Shaws, like so many other Transcendentalists, sought in nature a "real" existence in tune with the divine. Shaw, desirous of a life totally apart from what he had known in the granite warehouses on Boston's wharves, experimented with farming, and Child kidded him about his "hundred head of chicken." Sarah became a busy homemaker with three

15 Sydney Howard Gay, "Francis George Shaw," Staten Island Gazette and Sentinel, November 18, 1882, 2; Edmund Quincy to Mrs. Henry G. Chapman, February 25, 1840, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms.A.9.2, V. 13, No. 26, Boston Public Library (BPL), by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library. Shaw enlarged the original property in March, 1842. Deed of Sale, Cornelius Cowing to Francis G. Shaw, March 23, 1842, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms.Asc. 745, BPL.

16 George William Curtis, "Francis George Shaw. 1882," From the Easy Chair, vol. 3 (New York, 1902), 224; LMC to FGS, May 29, 1843, Collected Correspondence, 17/497.
small children, born in quick succession: Anna in 1836, Robert Gould in 1837, and Susanna in 1839.17

The family's removal to the country did not, however, mean withdrawal, and soon factional infighting among abolitionists required Frank and Sarah to make a public stand. After 1837, the movement fractured as conservatives like Lewis Tappan and Joshua Leavitt sought to dissociate the movement from the radical reforms Garrison advocated. Contending that America was a healthy but flawed society, they rejected Garrison's call for total revolution, and feared that openly espousing causes such as women's rights alienated the northern public and undermined popular support. Both sides prepared for battle at the American Anti-Slavery Society's 1840 convention, where the better organized Garrisonians carried the day, thus forcing conservatives to withdraw and create the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery society, based in New York.18

Frank Shaw stood with the Garrisonians. Totally discontented with American society and searching for new life, he welcomed exploration and would not curtail the

17 Sturgis, Edward Sturgis of Yarmouth, 57-58; Whittemore, Memorials, 546-547.

frank discussion of any idea or reform. Shaw signalled his rejection of mere tinkering with the structure by withdrawing from the Whig party and refusing to vote. He contributed money to Maria Weston Chapman as she prepared a rebuke to Leavitt and other conservatives. Sarah, too, maintained her close friendship with the radicals, but experienced doubts about making a public acknowledgment of her principles.

Her struggle surfaced during the 1841 Anti-Slavery Fair, held every year by women of the American Anti-Slavery society to raise money for the cause. Organizers like Chapman, feeling that the Shaw name carried great influence in the community, were anxious for Sarah to sign their newspaper advertisement. Responding to the pressure of her friends, Sarah declared that, "The longer I live, the stronger grow my Anti-Slavery principles, & the more anxious I am to declare them; I hardly know myself why I should have this strong antipathy to putting my name to any advertisement for the public prints, excepting that it is against my taste & my nature which is decidedly retiring." Sarah searched her soul, for she felt if her objection had even the slightest foundation in the cause itself, "I should give my name, were it only in expiation of my sin." Despite

19 Deborah Weston to Anne Weston, ND, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms. A.9.2., V. 6, No. 53, BPL.
her disinclination to announce her principles publicly, she had already placed them above family loyalty, so important in elite circles. A year before, she "had a strong feeling concerning the opinion my Father might have of such an act; I am happy to say that the effect of a year's growth had done away with any such scruple."²⁰

Over the course of the next year, however, Sarah matured into a full devotion to the cause, her catalyst being the arrest of a fugitive slave, George Latimer, whom the courts denied a trial by jury. Sarah wrote Chapman, "All my numerous slight reasons for refusing my name to the advertisement of the 'Fair' are vanished since witnessing the miserable state of the public spirit in Boston concerning the poor slave now in prison, and I feel that there is no manifestation too slight to be made, in order to show that I favor the holy cause of love to all men." Sarah was glad she had not signed it before, "for if I had done so at that time, it would have been done with my head & not my heart & now I do it with real delight."

In a statement that marked her conversion, Sarah exclaimed that, "I see no other way of saying aloud that I for one do not value the wise laws of the 'Supreme Court of

²⁰ SBS to Maria Weston Chapman, December 3, 1841, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms.A.4.6A, V. 1, No. 13, BPL, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.
the United States,' more than I do my own conscience and the laws of God." Sarah would never again scruple to follow her own beliefs, and to profess that Truth took precedence over man's laws and society's false arrangements. Now willing to speak out, she became irritated with those who kept silent. "Why do not all good & true men exclaim at such enormities?" she asked. Basing her own actions purely upon high principles, she demanded the same from others.

Sarah's decision to place Truth above law reflected her continued fellowship with Transcendentalism -- the Shaws attended Theodore Parker's church in West Roxbury. Their association with the most radical of the Transcendentalist ministers would effectively entrench the couple's position on the fringes of Christianity. Shaw now wanted to combine his quest for religious truth with his search for alternative forms of social activism; he had early asked himself why the few had prosperity and almost all the rest were "sunk," and his heart believed that somewhere there was a divine law "whereby all men would become equal inheritors of the earth and its fruits."22

21 SBS to Maria Weston Chapman, November 2, 1842, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms.A.4.6A, V.1, No. 27, BPL, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.

Shaw's opportunity arrived when George Ripley decided to found his communal experiment of Brook Farm near the Shaws' land. Anxious to apply Transcendentalist philosophy in a social setting, Ripley resigned from the ministry in 1840, and began to recruit like-minded individuals. Ripley searched for an ideal combination of self-fulfillment and perfect social cooperation; he envisioned a society where each person would share equally in the menial tasks and labors so as to free each individual to cultivate fully the higher pursuits of life -- a "natural union between intellectual and manual labor." All would perform labor "adapted to their tastes and talents" and receive the full "fruits of their industry." Although all would labor, his communal farm would abolish "menial services by opening the benefits of education and the profits of labor to all." In the ideal world, every member of society would be "liberal, intelligent, and cultivated," living a wholesome and simple life apart from the "pressure of our competitive institutions."^23^ Ripley and his wife created a joint-stock company, and in April, 1841, they and seventeen others moved to Brook Farm, located near West Roxbury. Members bought

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stock, drew up Articles of Association, and elected officers
of the Brook Farm Institute of Agriculture and Education.\textsuperscript{24}

Shaw was deeply interested in the Ripleys' plan; it
appeared to offer a promising alternative to the commercial
lifestyle he despised. If the very structure of American
society created poverty and injustice, perhaps Brook Farm
would demonstrate the true basis for social relations.

After frequent visits to the Farm, Shaw decided to give it
his financial support. Convincing his two brothers-in-law,
George R. Russell and Henry P. Sturgis, to join him in the
venture, he became a trustee of the joint-stock company and
assumed a portion of the farm's mortgage. Privileged to
drop by the Farm at any time, Shaw's generosity to the
residents won him many admirers.\textsuperscript{25} John Codman warmly
praised Shaw's "kindness" and "gentlemanly manner and
bearing towards us all." "Wealth did not corrupt him," he
recalled, "He recognized his Maker's image in all men; the
garment he saw through; the color he saw through; and he

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Ibid.}, 17.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, 20, 203-206; see also Joel Myerson, \textit{The
Brook Farm Book: A Collection of First-Hand Accounts of the
Community} (New York, 1987); Marianne Dwight, \textit{Letters from
Brook Farm, 1844-1847} (Poughkeepsie, NY, 1928); George
Willis Cooke, ed., \textit{Early Letters of George Wm. Curtis to
John S. Dwight, Brook Farm and Concord} (New York, 1898);
John Van Der Zee Sears, \textit{My Friends at Brook Farm} (New York,
1912).
desired above all things the education, progress and culture of all the human family."\textsuperscript{26}

Frank and Sarah placed their children into the Institute's experimental school and attended lectures, dramas, and dances at the Farm. In the merry social environment of Brook Farm, the playful Shaw daughters enlivened many a party. At the popular fancy dress balls, the girls lent their fine things as costumes. The Shaw family adored these kinds of assemblies and once made a memorable appearance dressed as priests and dervishes. Anna, the eldest, was disguised as a "portly Turk in quilted robe, turban, moustache, and cimeter." The Shaws impressed one young girl by mixing freely with "lowlier residents" and sitting upon the floor when the chairs gave out.\textsuperscript{27} During these functions, the family befriended two young men in particular, George William Curtis and Francis Barlow.

Despite participating actively, Frank and Sarah formally did not join Brook Farm. Their commitment to family and the nature of their personalities inhibited any real inclination to join the communal experiment -- both

\textsuperscript{26} John Thomas Codman, \textit{Brook Farm: Historic and Personal Memoirs} (Boston, 1894), 106-107.

\textsuperscript{27} Georgiana Bruce Kirby, \textit{Years of Experience: An Autobiographical Narrative} [1887] (New York, 1971), 151-152; Ora Gannett Sedgwick, "A Girl of Sixteen at Brook Farm," \textit{Atlantic Monthly} 85 (March, 1900), 394-404.
were extremely private people. Lydia Maria Child wrote to Shaw, "Dear friend I cordially reciprocate your wish to have 'a long familiar talk.' But you never do talk familiarly. More than most men, I think you lock things up in your heart." As a man who cared deeply about individual freedom but also about maintaining a cultured environment for his children, Shaw was wary of giving up his carefully cultivated domestic sphere. As George William Curtis put it, "Kindly but firmly he protected his own seclusion, and he permitted no man, in Emerson's phrase, to devastate his day."

Manifesting the same concern for family ties that all their relations displayed, the Shaws placed their highest priority upon their children. Contemporaries reported Sarah to be a loving mother and the Shaw family to be close knit. Away from the long hours of the counting house, Shaw devoted time to his children -- time that his father never found for him during his childhood. The Shaw children, now numbering four with the addition of Josephine in 1843, were given wide latitude in self-expression and behavior, which created an attractive atmosphere of free gaiety. The Shaw home became

28 LMC to FGS, May 29, 1843, Shaw Papers, Folder 24-27, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

29 Curtis, "Francis George Shaw," 229.
a popular place to visit for this very reason. Margaret Fuller pleasantly recalled the "gay little troop, especially the opera dancer whose inventions it makes me laugh to recollect," and "Susy's monkey ways, and all the young uns tumbling head over heels on the bright green grass."^{30}

During 1843-1844, as Sarah managed her ever-growing family, Shaw expanded his leadership roles in West Roxbury. In this he was no different from other Boston Brahmins, who, like his father, held it to be the elite's duty to shepherd their community. Shaw served in typical ways: on the school committee, as overseer of the poor, as justice of the peace, and as president of the first common council of Roxbury. He was foreman of the jury for Norfolk County which proposed the establishment of the State Reform School for Massachusetts.^{31}

Shaw's service to West Roxbury and his interest in Brook Farm did not curtail his participation in the abolition movement, whose organizers were anxious to utilize the respected Shaw name. In 1843 he signed two petitions that reflected his desire to rid the nation of slavery and his belief in equal treatment for all races. The first

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^{30} Margaret Fuller to SBS, November 20, 1844 and n.d. (1844?), Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

^{31} Bayles, *History of Richmond County*, 572-573.
requested that Congress immediately outlaw the slave trade among the states and abolish slavery in Washington, D.C. and the territories. The other asked for the United States to recognize the Republic of Haiti — the Western Hemisphere's only independent black republic — and enter into normal diplomatic and commercial relations with it. The latter was something Congress had been reluctant to do since independence for Haiti resulted from a successful slave revolt. Shaw fully endorsed the petition's statement that it was "wrong to make a difference in color a reason for a departure from the invariable usage of this Government." He signified his support for the movement privately as well, by rescuing a financially struggling Lydia Maria Child from debts owed her printer. Shaw also frequently became the anonymous benefactor of poor abolitionists. Believing he would "not like me less for it," Child often requested his help.


33 LMC to FGS, November 28, 1843, Shaw Papers, Folder 20-23, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; LMC to James Munroe & Co., December 20, 1843, Collected Correspondence, 18/524.
During 1844, though, contact with reformers through Brook Farm inaugurated a new period in Shaw's life which completely eclipsed abolition. Many of his more radical companions became interested in a sweeping reform movement known as Association. Association intrigued Shaw; its advocates critiqued American society in a way that resonated with his past experience, and they promised a revolution that would abolish the poverty and unjust social relations which so concerned him. They denounced the same evils that tormented Shaw's conscience during his business days: crowded penitentiaries, numerous poor houses, inhuman slavery in the South, "drudging, oppressive, monotonous, unequal, and ill-requited" labor in the North, and a "spirit of caste pervading all social relations."\(^{34}\) Great disparities of wealth disturbed Shaw, and he found that these reformers equally decried "luxury the most unbounded, side by side with penury the most pinching."\(^{35}\)

Association attracted Shaw because it recognized that the root of these evils was a competitive society; Association rejected the system of free competition that most Americans embraced. "Association aims at a social reformation, at a reform which shall go to the root of the

\(^{34}\) *Phalanx* 1(February 8, 1845): 309.

\(^{35}\) *The Harbinger* 1(June 28, 1845): 34-35.
evils that affect the great body of mankind," its advocates declared. "Evils are far more social and industrial in their nature than political, particularly in this country." Shaw had found an ideology that demanded a total restructuring of American institutions. Suddenly the solution to the problems that agitated his mind had become clear.

Association was the American version of a French socialist movement known as Fourierism, after its founder Charles Fourier (1772-1837). Followers in America drew heavily upon the writing of Fourier and his circle of French disciples. Fourier's ideas crossed the Atlantic in the person of Albert Brisbane, who had met Fourier in 1832 during a trip to Europe. After his return, Brisbane published Social Destiny of Man; or, Association and Reorganization of Industry (1840) and proceeded avidly to peddle Fourier's ideas. He achieved a breakthrough in 1842, when Horace Greeley sold Brisbane a front-page column in the New York Tribune. Greeley converted to Fourierism and used the Tribune to publicize the movement, which attracted large audiences in New York. By 1843 Brisbane had garnered enough support to found an Associationist magazine, The Phalanx, and organize regional conventions. Association became the

36 The Harbinger 1 (June 21, 1845): 20.
most popular secular communitarian movement of the
nineteenth century, attracting perhaps as many as 100,000
followers.\textsuperscript{37}

These followers claimed that Fourier had discovered
mathematical laws of human nature that revealed a divine
plan for human society; the Frenchman's writings were a
social science that provided the blueprint for utopia.
Central to the system was the Law of Universal Unity, which
stated that everything functioned for the good of the whole
if humans were free to follow their "passional attractions."
Passional attraction was the human equivalent of gravity;
by following one's passions, each person was drawn to the
labor which best fulfilled his or her destiny and
contributed to the good of all.\textsuperscript{38} Through a series of
mathematical calculations based on twelve basic passions and
810 personality types, Fourier outlined a plan for the
perfect social organization, which he called Harmony. In
the ideal society, 1620 persons would live together in a
Phalanx, where all property was held in joint ownership.
Fourier's plan did not reject industrialization; machines
in factories remained necessary to produce all the goods

\textsuperscript{37} Carl J. Guarneri, The Utopian Alternative:
Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America (Ithaca, 1991), 2,
32-33, 60.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 17-18, 86-90.
modern man needed. However, all members cooperated in production by organizing work in groups and series according to each individual's passional makeup. Each person would have a small part of a particular trade to perform and would share the larger task with others by rotating through tasks in order to avoid repetition.

This organization of industry would ensure a free choice of varied occupation, friendly cooperation in the place of lonely isolation and antagonism of interests, and an equitable division of profits. Women would join in all labor, since child care and housekeeping would also be done in groups. All would participate in the rotation, and so all would have leisure for self-development. Association promised a life of infinite variety -- Phalansteries offered a range of choices for dining, entertainment, and culture; the possibilities were endless outside the limited single household.\(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\) This synthesis is taken from several French works translated by Shaw. Since he chose to present these to the American public, they must have been the works which represented for him the essentials of Association. Francis Geo. Shaw, trans., The Organization of Labor and Association. By Math. Briancourt. (New York, 1847); Francis Geo. Shaw, trans., The Children at the Phalanstery. A Familiar Dialogue on Education. By F. Cantagrel. (New York, 1848); Francis Geo. Shaw, trans., The Life of Charles Fourier. By Ch. Pellarin, M.D. 2nd Ed. (New York, 1848); Phalanx 1(February 8, 1845): 309.
Industry was cooperative in Harmony, and so was agriculture. Associationists rejected a central tenet of American republicanism — the private ownership of land. They mocked agrarian movements, such as the one organized by Maine settlers against Great Proprietors like Robert Gould Shaw, that sought an equal division of land to individuals, since over time the same disproportionate possession would emerge. Until the advent of Harmony, land should be jointly held, with the individual possessing full ownership of all the improvements his or her labor produced. Only this would guarantee to every individual both the opportunity to labor and the full reward for industry on the land.  

Fully believing that Fourier's discoveries revealed the only workable order of society, the Associationists' aim was to build the necessary Phalansteries and through example convince Americans of the truth. They thought the United States was the perfect "scene for this great work." Like other Americans convinced of the nation's special call, they emphasized its unique position relative to Europe -- the country enjoyed a grace period before the full onslaught of industrial capitalism. Between 1842 and 1846, Associationists founded twenty-four phalanxes in the United States.

40 Phalanx 1(February 8, 1845): 316.
41 The Harbinger 1(June 21, 1845): 31.
States, located in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Iowa. Brook Farmers, won to the principles of Association, wrote a new constitution creating the Brook Farm Association for Industry and Education in January, 1844.

Brook Farm's Association divided its members into groups within three series, Agricultural, Mechanical, and Domestic Industries. Residents worked at different tasks and under varying rates as they shifted from teams, partners, and buildings. Converting from a primarily agricultural enterprise, the Brook Farm Phalanx expanded its industrial program to include tailoring, shoemaking, and handicrafts. Now attracting blue-collar workers, Brook Farm in its Associationist phase had an artisan majority.

The experiment at Brook Farm thrilled Shaw, who felt that at last his quest for truth was to be fulfilled. By 1845 he had become a full convert to Association. Association balanced the individualism of Transcendentalism with communalism; a person followed his passional

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42 Guarneri, Utopian Alternative, 153-154.

43 Ibid., 57-58; Swift, Brook Farm, 279; Sterling F. Delano, The Harbinger and New England Transcendentalism: A Portrait of Associationism in America (London, 1983), 16.

44 Guarneri, Utopian Alternative, 170-193; Swift, Brook Farm, 44-46.
attractions and enjoyed leisure for self-fulfillment while cooperatively sharing property, labor, and land with the community. Fourier's ideas were especially attractive to Shaw because they claimed a basis in divine law, not human invention. Current relations perverted the natural order instead of reflecting it, just as Shaw had suspected. In a land dotted with Phalansteries, with men and women working in groups and sharing all labor, the injustices in American society would disappear.

In such a revolution he found "confirmed hope and faith." On January 15 he gave the speech before the New England Fourier Society outlining the evils he had experienced in commerce; at that same meeting he was elected one of four vice-presidents of the society. In April, Shaw attended a celebration of Fourier's birthday at Brook Farm as an invited guest along with Albert Brisbane. He delivered one of the many "speeches and sentiments of great brilliancy."

In Association Shaw combined his quest for the great social remedy with his interest in scholarship. In May

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45 Margaret Fuller to SBS, 1 July 1845, Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

46 *Phalanx* 1 (February 8, 1845): 309

47 *Phalanx* 1 (May 3, 1845): 336-337.
1845, Brisbane announced that the new Association journal, *The Harbinger*, published at Brook Farm, would take the place of the *Phalanx*. The list of contributors included Brisbane, Greeley, Ripley, Charles Anderson Dana, John S. Dwight, and Shaw.48 During the rest of 1845, Shaw produced several important works for the *Harbinger*, which began operation June 14, 1845.49 His initial contributions were small editorial pieces and book reviews. But in his writings Shaw reflected the most radical aspects of Association doctrine by repudiating other reformers’ fundamental assumption that personal regeneration preceded societal change. Change society and man changes, he responded.

In promoting this view Shaw attacked both conservatives and Transcendentalists. He denied that poverty and social distinctions were part of God's providential ordering -- a view espoused by his grandfather's Episcopal Charity Society in 1758. He could not "attribute to the all-loving and all-merciful God, who wills the happiness of all His creatures, those evils and miseries which are caused by the action of mankind." God gave mankind free will; in doing so, He necessarily placed on men the responsibility to "provide for their outward condition, and that of the individuals of the


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race." Poverty, immorality, and distress were products of faulty social and economic arrangements, not individual sin.

Shaw also qualified the Transcendentalist view that an individual soul, alone in communion with God, could purify itself. "Humanity is before God as one man," he wrote. Sin was a product of social evils -- "The miseries we suffer, are occasioned by the Lust of Evils, not in individuals but in Humanity," Shaw claimed. Evils external to man created his wrong behavior; only by changing that external world could one hope to purify the individual. Once removed from the crushing burden of social evils through the "application of science to our social relations," the individual soul could shed its environmentally induced shackles to sin.\(^{51}\)

Shaw's most radical offering came in October, 1845. In an essay addressed to the "Women of the Boston Anti-slavery Fair," he combined two key elements of the Associationist program. The first was the contention that all other reforms were meaningless without a total restructuring of American society. Shaw asserted the inadequacy of abolitionists who "earnestly endeavor to repair one rotten spot in the frame-work of society" without being clear-sighted enough to see "that the whole is so fastened

\(^{50}\) The Harbinger 1(August 23, 1845): 163-164.

\(^{51}\) Ibid.
together, and so far decayed, as to render partial remedies useless, and to require a thorough overhauling.\textsuperscript{52} In particular, \textit{The Harbinger} attacked the abolitionist blind spot for "white slavery," or the "slavery of capital" found in the North.\textsuperscript{53} Secondly, Shaw proclaimed women the full equals of men. In Harmony, women would receive complete education and equal access to all occupations and pursuits. His "Women" article railed against the insufficiency of conventional reform in addressing the real needs of women. He aimed his words at those abolitionists who were most accepting of women's public activities; these radicals had not gone far enough.

A list of women signing their names to the advertisement for the Anti-Slavery Fair struck Shaw forcibly. These were women "whom we know to be fitted for any position, and capable of any work, for which Society will open a sphere to them." They were women "perfectly competent to take care of themselves." Yet to Shaw they were slaves. Though equal before the law when unmarried, men closed off all other avenues of life; shut off from public life, a single women vegetated rather than lived. But once married, women were called by the names of their

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{The Harbinger} 1(October 4, 1845): 268-269.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{The Harbinger} 1(June 21, 1845): 30-31.
legal masters, confined to a state of perpetual minority, and unable to dispose of anything which belonged to them, even the products of their own labor.\textsuperscript{54}

Shaw's article was a call for women "who now use their efforts for the liberation of the chattel slave, to turn their attention to their own condition." Assuring them that they could do nothing "for the freedom of others until they are themselves free," he asked them to consider the true meaning of women's rights. Many of the women supporting the fair were advocates of "what is called 'women's rights,'" but Shaw felt they limited themselves "only to freedom to speak in public, to vote, or to do many other things which are of trifling importance in our eyes." True liberation for women was "social freedom," meaning "freedom from the bonds which do absolutely degrade them from the equal rank which is their right, and deprive them of their true position, their power to use the faculties which God has given them, for their own service and the service of humanity."\textsuperscript{55}

Shaw argued that women's condition was the gauge of social progress, "the pivot" for each advance. No real change was possible without an elevation of women's status.

\textsuperscript{54} The Harbinger 1 (October 4, 1845): 268-269.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 269.
For America to progress, women must assume their true and equal position. Only by assuming their true rank could women effect other changes such as abolition. Charging women with abandoning those who had dared to speak out, he demanded that they find the courage to stand by those willing to become martyrs. Had they supported and upheld each other, "the world would now be in a state different from its present wretched and miserable condition."^56

His own wife's situation must have influenced Shaw's treatment of the subject. Sarah at this time was almost overwhelmed with the burdens of housekeeping and rearing small children. With the last child, Ellen, arriving in 1845, Sarah had borne five children, three of them within four years.^57 Her correspondence with female relatives and friends made it quite clear that the constant requirements of keeping a large house and farm and caring for some very active young girls exhausted Sarah. She frequently poured out her burdens and anxieties to Margaret Fuller, who responded, "No doubt you were married too young and have got to bear a great deal in growing to earthly womanhood with

^56 Ibid., 269.

^57 Sturgis, Edward Sturgis of Yarmouth, 57-58; Whittemore, Memorials, 546-547.
your children." Sarah developed frequent headaches and had trouble with her vision. As these physical problems grew continuously worse, they curtailed her participation in reform. Consequently she became "more quiescent in the grand measures of social renovation." When Shaw wrote that the brightest part of a woman's life was before her marriage, he may well have been referring to Sarah's condition.

Shaw composed few other articles, and certainly none that were as forceful as "The Women of the Boston Anti-Slavery Fair." His major achievements were translations, which marked his greatest contribution to Association. He presented George Sand's novels Consuelo and The Countess of Rudolstadt, which the Harbinger ran serially in 1845 and 1846, The Journeyman Joiner, and her two articles "The Skepticism of the Age," and "Letters of a Traveller."

58 Margaret Fuller to SBS, September 1, 1844 and October 26, 1845, Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; Maria Lowell to SBS, November 4, 1842, James Russell Lowell Papers, MHS.

59 Margaret Fuller to SBS, February 25, 1845, Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

60 As Brook Farm's historian put it, "To think of the Harbinger is to recall Shaw's translations." Swift, Brook Farm, 269.

61 The Harbinger 1 (June 14, 1845): 11-12; Delano, Harbinger, 36.
Shaw was the first American to publish her three novels, and he gained considerable notoriety. Sand was a controversial figure whose questionable morals only increased critical suspicion of French novels. A feminist and critic of traditional marriage, she supported liberal French politics, socialistic and people's movements, the abolition of property, and worker's rights.\footnote{Paul G. Blount, \textit{George Sand and the Victorian World} (Athens, 1979).}

Shaw attributed the public outcry over Sand to prejudice arising from "the bold and uncompromising manner in which she has asserted and maintained the rights of humanity, and especially of her own sex," rather than "any offenses against the laws of society."\footnote{Francis G. Shaw, trans., \textit{Consuelo}. By George Sand. (Boston, 1846), ix. \textit{The Countess of Rudolstadt} was also published in two volumes by William D. Ticknor in 1847.} In translating her works, he flouted the conventional view of French novels and exposed Americans to French radical ideas which were outside the Victorian British and American traditions. \textit{Consuelo} turned out to be popular; in 1846 Lydia Maria Child commented on "the Boston wholesale enthusiasm about this book."\footnote{LMC to Lucy Osgood, June 28, 1846, \textit{Collected Correspondence}, 23/660.}
Shaw chose this novel particularly because it explored the origins of man's artistic nature, a subject that was his passion. He and his family patronized the arts in Boston, frequently attended symphonies and operas, and discussed the concerts extensively in their correspondence with friends and relations. They read as much as possible and sent copies of works that impressed them to their friends. As a lover of art, literature, and music, Shaw sought to embue high culture with deeper meaning. For him, *Consuelo* was perfect art because it united beauty with universal truths. One theme of the novel was that true art reflected God and Virtue within the artist. Consuelo, whose music reached perfection, turned inward to find the faith and divine love which were the sources of her art and beauty. *Consuelo* exhuded the Transcendentalist belief that God was in humanity and could be experienced directly without the trappings of "religion." In his many book reviews for the *Harbinger*, Shaw sought this same synthesis of high morality with art, believing true literature echoed the divine in man and reflected higher spheres of life.  

Shaw reviewed: *The Medici Series of Italian Prose*, Vol 1 (Vol 1, No. 11); *Gertrude: A Tale* (Vol 1, No. 14); Etzler, *Two Visions of J.A. Etzler* (Vol 1, No.14); Cheever, *Wanderings of A Pilgrim Under the Shadow Mount Blanc* (Vol 1, No.20); *The Medici Series of Italian Prose*, Vol 2 (Vol 1, No.22); Dix, *Remarks on Prisons and Prison Discipline in the United States* (Vol 1, No. 22); Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi* (Vol 1, No.22); Kirkland, *Western Clearings* (Vol 1,
society would produce great music, art, and literature, but more importantly, all men would have the education and culture to appreciate them.

Shaw's translation of The Journeyman Joiner, one of Sand's lesser-known novels, was an attempt to introduce Americans to the ideas of Association. Set partly in the secret world of trade unions, it was the story of a brilliant joiner who struggled with the injustices of society toward the worker. The novel concluded with a speech which denounced rivalry as the basis for societal order and protested against "that social science which does not place all men in a condition to have a bed." Shaw appended a note requesting all those who sought a solution to the problem occupying the novel's hero to read Briancourt's Organization of Labor and Association, a tract by one of Fourier's disciples. 66

Shaw did not limit his participation in Association to promulgating its literature. He was a key organizer for practical attempts to implement Association throughout the United States. Shaw's role was mainly financial but he did

serve in the national organization, where he advised the movement's leaders. Shaw held Brook Farm Phalanx's $2500 mortgage and enjoyed special access to the experiment's inner workings. In May, 1846, Shaw was elected treasurer of the American Union of Associationists (AUA), which proclaimed its intent to establish an order of society based on a "system of Joint-Stock Property; Cooperative Labor; Association of Families; Equitable Distribution of Profits; Mutual Guarantees...Unity of Interests."

Shaw's position as treasurer of the AUA was a difficult one, and came at a time when phalanxes across the country were collapsing. The movement was in deep financial and ideological trouble. Brisbane and Greeley had never provided clear direction, and when the AUA and the phalanxes suffered financial difficulties, leaders could not agree whether to fund existing phalanxes or work to properly finance a full scale community of 1620 persons. Of the twenty-four phalanxes founded in the United States, only five survived as long as three years. This rapid collapse created great disillusionment among followers; the phalanxes' failure finished Association as a social movement.

67 Swift, Brook Farm, 23.
68 Guarneri, Utopian Alternative, 238; Delano, Harbinger, 164.
in the United States. Brook Farm did not last much past 1846. Always lacking capital, the community was hard hit by a fire that destroyed its still unfinished Phalanstery. Shaw offered suggestions to continue under modified organization, but by the fall of 1846 most members had left.

Shaw did not give up hope. He remained firmly convinced that "man's paramount duty is toward his race," and for him the principles of Association lost none of their force, despite their practical failure. Renewing his commitment in January, 1847, he attended the founding meeting of the Religious Union of Associationists, a group that placed its faith in God's will to bring his kingdom to earth through Universal Unity. The Religious Union sought to unite Association with a Universal Church that would embrace all doctrines and creeds.

Despite his desire to help save Association, personal events in Shaw's life drew him away from the Brook Farm experiment at its time of greatest crisis. Sarah's physical

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69 Guarneri, Utopian Alternative, 268-276.
70 Sams, Autobiography of Brook Farm, 176, 201.
71 LMC to FGS, August 2, 1846, Shaw Papers, Folder 24-27, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
72 Religious Union of Associationists, Records, 1847-1850, January 3, 1847, MHS.
problems grew worse; she developed a severe lung illness and was nearly blind. Shaw sent her to Staten Island, New York, for treatment under Dr. Samuel MacKenzie Elliott, the first eye specialist in the United States. In 1846, the doctor had established Elliotsville, a residential treatment neighborhood that attracted a wealthy and distinguished clientele. In early 1847, Lydia Maria Child accompanied Sarah to Elliott's hospital for eye surgery while Shaw stayed in West Roxbury with the children.

Not only did Sarah regain her vision, but her overall physical condition improved in the bracing climate of Staten Island. As a result, the Shaws decided on a permanent move to the island. Sarah's health seemed to require it, and Shaw conceded there was nothing to keep him in West Roxbury. He realized that Brook Farm was dead; along with the other stockholders and creditors, Shaw authorized Ripley to rent the Farm in March, 1847. By August, the Board of Trustees voted to dispose of all the property. As the residents dispersed to lead lives of varying loyalty to the principles of Brook Farm, Shaw and his five children moved to New York,

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74 LMC to FGS, February 18, 1847, Shaw Papers, Folder 28-31, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417.

where they acquired a rental house in Elliotsville while Sarah remained under the doctor's care.

Shaw did not intend to abandon the cause of Association; he was convinced of its truth and he tenaciously clung to the dream which had saved him from despair. He had been so troubled, and Association had seemed to resolve everything -- it was the panacea for which he longed. Once in New York he redoubled his efforts to publicize the movement and to win converts. Shaw contemplated founding another "Associate Home" in New York, but his plans fell through. Anxious to broaden awareness of Fourier's ideas, however, Shaw and Edmund Tweedy of New York funded several Associationist tracts. Five of them were French books Shaw translated himself. He worked with the publisher William H. Graham of New York to produce Briancourt's *The Organization of Labor and Association* (1847), Cantagrel's *The Children at the Phalanstery* (1848), Pellarin's *The Life of Charles Fourier* (1848), and Constant's *The Last Incarnation: Gospel Legends of the Nineteenth Century* (1848). These works were among the last accomplishments of Association in the United States. *The Harbinger*, which had continued publication from New York,

76 Margaret Fuller to FGS, October 25, 1847, Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417.

collapsed in February, 1849. William Henry Channing tried another journal, The Spirit of the Age, but he discontinued it in 1850.

Even as the movement disintegrated around him, Shaw clung to his lifeline. Perhaps hoping to reach a new audience in the group of commercial elites who did business with his father, Shaw wrote an article for *Hunt's Merchant Magazine* in 1849, proposing a mutual bank of discount and deposit. He tried to convince manufacturers and men engaged in commerce that they held antagonistic interests to capital because they had to pay interest. Shaw made two class distinctions, money capital and any kind of production and industry. "Our present banking system works for capital, and is, therefore opposed to the interests of the other classes," Shaw wrote. "What commerce requires, is a bank, the interest of which shall necessarily be identical with those of its customers; this can be obtained, only by the adoption of the mutual principle." With the article coming at the apex of the Boston elite's institution-founding, Shaw cleverly likened a mutual bank to insurance companies, noting that the same objections to a mutual bank had once been made regarding insurance. He noted, "Those who

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required insurance made the discovery they could do the business themselves and at much less cost."

Shaw's article did not make a deep impression on any of his father's commercial friends, of course, and it proved to be one of the final death rattles of Association. Shaw himself realized there was little left of the movement; he had hung on as long as he could, but there was nothing left to promulgate or support. Sadly, he turned away from his first great vision. He realized that Association was not the future of America. He tucked its principles into his heart, though, and began anew his search for some overarching cure.

In the meantime, he was free to socialize and spend more time with his family. Staten Island was the perfect place to refresh his spirits and soothe his disappointment. New York City's expansion had not yet marred its rural beauty. There were hilly wood-walks with striking glimpses of the sea and silvery sand that sparkled under the stars. Child wrote a friend, "Frank Shaw has been trying to coax me down to Staten Island, with a promise of moonlight boating." She declined, telling Shaw, "it is a dreadful thing to have to sit up at dinner in a gown." Shaw told her to bring a

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80 Shaw's article was reprinted as Francis George Shaw, "Mutual Bank of Discount and Deposit," *Spirit of the Age* 1 (November 10, 1849): 293-294.
petticoat and a sack. This response thrilled Child, who was very sensitive about her poverty. Although Frank and Sarah enjoyed the good life and dressed in "beautiful colors," they did not let their wealth affect them. Child considered them "very free from sham; for which they deserve the more credit, considering they are Bostonians and are rich."

Noting there were few people "so tolerant of mixed characters" as the Shaws, Margaret Fuller fully agreed.81

Life was pleasant for the Shaw children in this cultivated yet open home. Frank and Sarah wanted the best for them and gave generously in material and emotional ways. The couple encouraged serious intellectual aspirations in their daughters by sending them to private schools in New York, where they studied Latin, Greek, modern languages, philosophy, and political economy. Shaw's Jesuit brother Coolidge talked the Shaws into sending thirteen year old Rob to St. John's College in Fordham, New York, where he entered in the fall of 1850.

Rob hated the discipline of the Catholic school, which must have been quite a contrast to the teaching methods of

81 Margaret Fuller to SBS, July 1, 1845, Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University; LMC to Louisa Loring, June 24, 1849, *Collected Correspondence*, 27/753; LMC to Ellis Gray Loring, December 3, 1849, *Collected Correspondence*, 27/766; Margaret Fuller to SBS, March 18, 1849, Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417.
the Brook Farm institute. "I'm sure I sha'n't want to come here after vacation, for I hate it like everything," he wrote his mother. "I'm homesick whenever I go home, and I always feel ugly when I think of home. I wish you wouldn't want me to go away to school; I don't see why I can't study just as well at home." Although other homesick boys at the school improved after a few months, Rob continued to suffer. He wrote his mother that, "Whenever I think about home, it makes me feel like crying, and sometimes I can't help crying before all the boys." He ran away twice that semester, but each time Shaw took him back to the school. Rob's agony was short-lived, however, for the Shaws removed him from school at the start of 1851. They were taking their children abroad.\(^{82}\)

Shaw decided to regenerate his mind and Sarah's health with an extensive trip to Europe. Sarah's lingering coughs concerned the whole family, and travel abroad was the cure of choice among Boston's elite. Sarah may have used her illness to manipulate her family, or Shaw may have been unsympathetic to his ailing wife, but either way her symptoms created some discord between the two. "She thinks

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her condition worse than I do," Shaw confided to a friend.\(^{83}\)
Perhaps a long stay overseas would rejuvenate everyone's spirits. Shaw felt that he was once again searching, as he had been when he first left his father's counting house, only this time he knew what he was looking for — his basic reform principles were set. Intending to stay at least three years, they sailed for Europe on February 22, 1851, with all their children.\(^{84}\)

That same year, the American Union of Associationists held its last meeting. As Shaw crossed the Atlantic, his colleagues in Association abandoned the cause. Although a few joined other revolutionary movements, abolition absorbed most of the remnant, as it did so many other antebellum reformers. The threat of southern slavery overwhelmed everything else; the menace of the 1850's was not free competition but black slavery expanding into the West. The Shaws left an America growing ever more divided and more obsessed with the great question of slavery, and less concerned with the kind of reform Association represented.

\(^{83}\) FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, November 1, 1850, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

\(^{84}\) RGS to Persis Lewis, March 6, 1851, Letters of RGS, MHS.
Chapter Three
"Has not the President used a very sharp knife":
A War for Freedom

Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning met Sarah during the Shaws' extended stay in Italy, and the three developed an intimate friendship. The poets found that Sarah "struck a sympathetic note in each of us."¹ Frank and Sarah were always anxious to cultivate literary figures and they missed no opportunity while in Europe to meet the continent's great celebrities. Four years of travels across Italy, Egypt, Switzerland, Germany, and France also gave the couple ample opportunity to indulge their taste in literature, art, architecture, and music. Unfortunately the full record of their varied experiences is lost to history, since Sarah asked Lydia Maria Child to burn all the family's letters.

The Shaws, hoping the "balmy air of Italy" might prove beneficial, spent their first winters in the south for Sarah's health.² They put Robert into a boarding school in

¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Sarah Blake Shaw(SBS), October 14, 1854, Shaw Papers, Houghton Library(HL), shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

² Lydia Maria Child(LMC) to Francis George Shaw(FGS), September 5, 1852, in Patricia G. Holland and Milton
Neuchatel, Switzerland, where he remained two years, but kept all their daughters with them as they moved from place to place, thus providing them with a more casual education. In Rome, at the suggestion of Joseph Coolidge, Shaw's Catholic brother, Frank and Sarah put Susannah and Josephine into a convent school where the girls were the only Protestants. Noting Josephine's marked talent for languages, the Shaws encouraged her study of both modern and classical languages.

In Switzerland Rob thrived, and though he maintained his close relationship with his mother, he began to question whether his commitments matched those of his parents. Encouraging him to share the family's beliefs with his classmates at the school, Sarah admonished him not to be afraid of declaring his opinions. Rob refused this advice. "I'm sure I shouldn't be afraid of saying that we were Unitarians, if there could be any kind of use in it," he wrote. "But as it is, it would only bring up discussions and conversations which would be very stupid and tiresome;

Meltzer, eds., The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, 1817-1880 (Millwood, NY, 1979), 29/828.

and as I don't want to become reformer, apostle, or anything of that kind, there is no use doing disagreeable things for nothing."⁴ Rob signalled his parents that although he agreed with them that slavery was wrong, he was no abolitionist.

While Rob explored the depths of his opinions and Sarah and the girls visited churches and the Brownings, Shaw made several quick trips back to America. His responsibilities at home did not allow for such a long absence, especially after the death of his father in May, 1853. Shaw's retirement from his partnership in Robert Gould Shaw & Co. did not absolve him from his share in the family's financial support. His upbringing had successfully instilled the elite Bostonian kinship ethos -- his role as eldest son prescribed certain duties that he could not abandon. Shaw saw no contradiction between his belief in Association and his management of a great share of the company's stocks and property after his father's death; Robert Gould's will left Shaw a wealthy man in control of numerous investments in blatantly capitalistic enterprises. Shaw received substantial property of his own, but his father also required him to oversee some of his brothers' and sisters' assets. Shaw inherited $94,500, two stores on Commercial

Wharf, and a lease and shares of stock in three of his father's companies. Along with his brother-in-law George R. Russell, Shaw possessed deeds to real estate and buildings all over the city that the two men managed for equal division among the siblings. He and Russell also controlled stock in several manufacturing companies, banks, and railroads in order to pay dividends to Robert Gould Shaw's daughters (the money was made free from the control of their husbands). These responsibilities required Shaw to maintain buildings, invest money, collect rent, and make sure the income was kept in account to each family member.  

Shaw remained in Boston during the summer of 1853 to implement some of the provisions of his father's will, but he joined his family that fall in Sorrento, Italy, as did Rob. There the Shaws spent time with the notorious British actress Fanny Kemble, who had lived with her husband Pierce Butler, from whom she was now separated, on the largest plantation in Georgia. The Shaws listened with fascinated horror to her stories of atrocities on the Butler plantation, and Shaw, believing that such tales would open northern eyes to the evils of slavery, was anxious to spread

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5 Testamentary Papers of Robert Gould Shaw and Elizabeth Willard Shaw (Boston, 1854), 9-10, 28-33.
her accounts to the general public. Before the family left for a trip down the Nile in December, Shaw told Kemble that he would use his contacts in the publishing world to promote her memoirs in the United States.

After the Shaws' return from Egypt, Shaw and the girls remained in Italy while Rob moved to Hanover, Germany, where he lived with the Eisendecher family and studied under private tutors to further his classical education. Sarah and Frank "felt such confidence in his character and habits as to allow him to be his own master while in Germany," and the seventeen year old Rob enjoyed independence during his two years there. He spent most of his time pursuing pleasure. Rob did, however, develop an intense patriotism during his time abroad and became extremely sensitive to any slights toward America. At one party he chafed under the insulting remark of a German friend and fumed for days afterward. He was gradually coming to believe that slavery was the glaring blemish on an otherwise perfect nation, and he hated it more for embarrassing the country than for its

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7 FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, December 21, 1853, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
moral wrongs.® As he had announced in Switzerland, Rob showed no signs of becoming an abolitionist, taking little notice in his letters of the major events transpiring back home.

Frank and Sarah, however, kept well abreast of the situation in the United States, where frequent collisions between the North and South over newly acquired western territories created a volatile atmosphere. Abolitionists, joined by northerners who did not want to compete with slaveholders for land in the West, wanted Congress to outlaw slavery in the territories gained in the Mexican-American war. Southerners believed it was their constitutional right to take their "property" anywhere, and they viewed a ban on slavery in the territories as a direct threat to the survival of their way of life. Adding to the tense political landscape was Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, a novel whose popularity in the North convinced southerners that abolitionists dominated the scene.

The critical crisis came in 1854, when Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas decided to organize the Kansas-Nebraska territories. Under provisions of the 1820 Missouri Compromise, Congress had banned slavery in this area.

Douglas, needing southern support, introduced a measure that would allow states organized in these territories to enter the union under popular sovereignty, meaning that residents would decide by popular vote whether to come in as free or slave states. Believing that these territories were too far north to attract slaveholders, Douglas felt his measure appeased the South but held no real threat to northern interests. The Senator badly miscalculated popular feeling. When the Kansas-Nebraska Act passed, riots broke out all over the North.

Northern opposition to the act was expressed in 1854 with the formation of the Republican Party, whose platform called for "free soil, free labor, free men" in the West. Republican ideology emphasized that free labor could not survive alongside slavery. With slaveholders and their slaves in the West, the common laborer could not move there, buy land, and achieve independence. As Republicans prepared to fight the act on the political front, other northerners geared for physical battle. Heavily armed settlers from the North and South poured into Kansas, where numbers would now decide the fate of slavery there. Organizers in New England formed settlement parties and sent arms to Kansas under the guise of Bibles. Shaw's brother Howland joined many elite Bostonians in a subscription campaign to raise money for
guns and ammunition. Bloodshed soon followed as a guerilla war broke out in Kansas.

The Shaws received tidings of these ominous events and rejoiced. They would return home to a country aroused on the issue of slavery at last. If this opposition to slavery's expansion could be joined with moral righteousness through a deep sense of slavery's inherent wrongs, perhaps the nation could be saved. Frank and Sarah began making preparations for their return to Staten Island.

The couple had decided to build a luxurious home with part of their inheritance from Robert Gould Shaw. Shaw's close friend, Sydney Howard Gay, the abolitionist editor of the Anti-Slavery Standard, had arranged the initial land deals. The Shaws bought property between Bard and Davis Avenues, in West New Brighton, Staten Island, and hired a Parisian architect to draw up plans for the house. Shaw left Sarah and the girls in Paris for the winter of 1854-

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9 Subscription for Rifles for Kansas Settlers, 1855, Amos A. Lawrence Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS). Howland did not share Shaw's democratic principles. Lydia Maria Child wrote Sarah of him, "If I should encounter his Highness, Howland Shaw, ten chances to one I should break one of his ribs; and if I didn't, I should afterward reproach myself for having failed in my duty."
1855 and returned home to oversee the start of construction.\textsuperscript{10}

How could Shaw reconcile his plans for elegant living with his commitment to the principles of Association? Gay, who knew Shaw as well as anyone, suggested that Shaw considered his wealth as an estate in trust, but "he was too wise to suppose that the breakers in which the ship was tossing could be stilled by throwing overboard his little cask of oil." Shaw enjoyed his prosperity as an "unquestionable personal right, the sacrifice of which would not advance one jot the general good he had so much at heart."\textsuperscript{11}

Shaw used his time in New York to arrange publication for another of his translations. While in Europe, Shaw, a scholar at heart, had studied Swiss history. He felt a dearth of information on the subject existed in the United States, so he brought home his version of Heinrich Zschokke's popular work, \textit{The History of Switzerland, for the Swiss People}.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, May 7, 1854 and August 6, 1854, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

\textsuperscript{11} Sydney Howard Gay, "Francis George Shaw," \textit{Staten Island Gazette and Sentinel}, November 18, 1882, 2.

\textsuperscript{12} Francis George Shaw, trans. \textit{The History of Switzerland, for the Swiss People}. By Heinrich Zschokke. (New York, 1855), v.
Shaw had passed on his talent for languages to Josephine, but the Shaws wanted to cultivate this interest in all their children. Sarah wrote her admirer James Russell Lowell from Paris, "I stay here this winter, only that the children may learn a little French... early in the summer, I shall go sailing home with all my young Israelites, a female Moses." Sarah, her daughters, and the family's menagerie of pets and birds occupied a large suite of rooms overlooking the Tuileries gardens. Here Sarah met the English novelist Elizabeth Gaskell, on whom she made a great impression. Gaskell recalled that Sarah educated her daughters "not after the usual manner of wealthy people." Although glad for them to benefit from the advantages Paris offered for intellectual education, she was anxious "they should not be tainted by the worldliness and the love of dress so often fostered by residence there." Sarah spoke with pity to Gaskell of wealthy American girls who spent great sums on themselves, a habit that "always produced a self-indulgent character, and really often became

13 SBS to James Russell Lowell, October 9, 1854, James Russell Lowell Papers, MHS. Lowell wrote Sarah at the end of their lives that he had been in love with her for years, and certainly his letters to her are filled with flattery, to the extent that Sarah was embarrassed to show them to Shaw. In September, 1854, he had written her: "But you know very well how delightful the thought of you is to me, for you always seem to me to possess your nature as sweetly and unconsciously as a rose."
an obstacle to marriage of true love." Sarah said that she and Shaw "feared the adoption of riches as a comparative standard of worth," but Gaskell noted "she was fully alive to the real advantages that might be derived from wealth." Gaskell also learned how Sarah viewed Shaw's departure from his father's company: "Mrs. Shaw spoke of her husband as the true and faithful descendant of one of the Pilgrim Fathers who had left everything for conscience' sake."\(^{14}\)

Shaw returned to France in May, 1855, picked up his family, made a short excursion to England, then returned to America in June. The house was not quite ready, so they spent July in Newport, Rhode Island, before moving home.\(^{15}\) The new Shaw residence awed the Gays' young daughter, who marvelled at its "elaboration of detail quite foreign to us."\(^{16}\) The outside was simple, yet elegant, with a square front porch flanked by two large wings. Inside, a winding circular staircase dominated the entry, which opened into Shaw's large library and a drawing room. The latter faced a back piazza, as did Sarah and Frank's bedchamber (complete


\(^{15}\) FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, May 29, 1855 and July 20, 1855, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

\(^{16}\) Charles Gilbert Hine and William T. Davis, *Legends, Stories and Folklore of Old Staten Island* (New York, 1925), 50.
with two water closets). The second story was devoted to the children. The Shaws intended to share the home with their children's friends — Rob and the girls each had two bedrooms of their own that opened into private sitting rooms. Behind the house was a large stable, which was decorated with a small spire and arched doorway, housing the carriage, horses, cows, and hens.\(^{17}\)

The $80,000 Shaw home, filled with art treasures collected during five years of travel, was the second largest in the neighborhood of West New Brighton. Living with the family were five servants, all Irish: cook Catharine Divine, chambermaids Bridget Divine and Hannah Ryne, laundress Alice Healey, and waitress Bridget Kennedy.\(^{18}\) Bridget Divine had been with Sarah from the late 1840's, and the relationship had been rather stormy. In 1850 Sarah and Frank, returning briefly to Massachusetts from New York before their trip abroad, had allowed a young black man, whom they were helping find employment in Boston, to stay in their home. His presence so disturbed Divine and another servant, they threatened to leave. Sarah wrote that

\(^{17}\) Photograph of Shaw home, Box OS1, Folder 1, Architecture Survey, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences (SIIAS); Floor plan of FGS Home, Box OS1, Folder 1, Architecture Survey, SIIAS; Gaskell, "Robert Gould Shaw," 113.

\(^{18}\) U.S. Census, Eighth Census (1860), New York, Richmond County, Castleton, 152.
the incident had "made me dislike them both... It shows Bridget in quite a new light." The two women smoothed over this difference, but the memory of it colored Sarah's attitudes toward all her Irish servants.

Once the family had settled in, Rob expressed a strong desire to come back from Hanover. The family had just patched up a misunderstanding over Rob's finances, an episode that clearly showed Frank and Sarah's concern that none of their children learn extravagant habits and self-indulgent spending. Worried over the amount of Rob's expenses, they wrote him and questioned his activities. Astonished, Rob, who resented Sarah's strongly-worded letter, sent his father a list of his expenses and asked why his mother was so distressed. "She says the girls know nothing about it and so on, as if I had committed some awful crime," he complained to Shaw. Rob admitted he spent more than he thought, and Frank and Sarah were satisfied with his list, so the path was smooth for Rob's homecoming to Staten Island. He spent the summer studying for his Harvard entrance exams under the tutelage of Francis Barlow, a

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19 FGS and SBS to Elizabeth and Sydney Howard Gay, June 21, 1850, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

20 Robert Gould Shaw(RGS) to FGS, March 5 and 6, 1856, Robert Gould Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1910(28-58), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
friend from Brook Farm, and left for college in August. Susie joined him in Cambridge to attend a girl's school there, while Josephine studied at Miss Gibson's school in New York, later to join her sister in Boston.\(^{21}\)

The Shaws re-established their life much as it was before the trip. They joined the Unitarian church, where they continued their exploration of Swedenborgianism and spiritualism. Shaw stepped back into his role as civic leader.\(^{22}\) He and Sarah immediately plunged into their abolitionist activity, like so many of their friends abandoning their earlier opposition to political tactics.

Believing that the events of 1854 signalled a potential revolution against slavery, Shaw opted to join Republican politicians in their fight to keep slavery out of the territories. The cause he loved would have no chance of success if slavery spread outside the bounds where it currently existed, and the popular outcry against the South opened the door for abolitionists to link political opposition to slavery with their moral agenda. In addition,

\(^{21}\) SBS, "Robert Gould Shaw," 179-182; Burchard, One Gallant Rush, 19; Steward, Philanthropic Works, 7.

\(^{22}\) Receipt for rent of pew, Church of the Redeemer, Curtis Collection, SIIAS; LMC to Anna Loring, July 23, 1859, Collected Correspondence, 41/1115; Elizabeth Barrett Browning to SBS, April 1, 1858, Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417; Richard M. Bayles, History of Richmond County, (Staten Island) New York, From its Discovery to the Present Time (New York, 1887), 572-573.
Republican ideology, with its emphasis on cheap land for everyone in the West, resonated with Shaw in a way that Whig politics had never done. Although he could not accept Republican trust in wage labor and capitalism, the Republican vision of a free West, where every laboring man would eventually buy his own land and become his own master, recalled Association's dream of access for the common man.\(^{23}\)

Enthusiastically backing John C. Frémont as the Republican presidential candidate in 1856, Shaw was one of the delegates from Staten Island to the Republican convention that nominated the controversial explorer.\(^{24}\) Both Frémont and his wife, Jessie Benton Frémont, became friends of the Shaws and attended Anna's wedding on Thanksgiving Day of that year. James Buchanan won the closely-contested election, but the Shaws took comfort from the fact that over one million voters had bolted the regular parties to vote Republican.

Anna's wedding was a seminal event, for it brought George William Curtis, a young writer and orator with great ambition, into the Shaw family. Curtis as a young man had lived briefly at Brook Farm, but his devotion to Emersonian

\(^{23}\) For Republican ideology in the 1850's, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1995).

\(^{24}\) Bayles, *History*, 572-573.
individualism created a distrust of organized reform, and he never agreed with the principles of Association. Determined to make his career as an author, Curtis associated with Harper & Brothers, where he achieved fame writing sketches and social notes as an associate editor for *Putnam's*. In 1854 he began writing his famous Easy Chair column for *Harper's Monthly*.\(^{25}\)

Upon the Shaws' return to America, Curtis renewed his acquaintance with the family he had known at Brook Farm, and found love in the person of Anna and intellectual stimulation in the presence of Frank and Sarah. Anna, the shy, intelligent, athletic horsewoman, was twelve years younger than Curtis, but proved to be his intellectual equal. She, as much as Frank and Sarah, incited his zeal for the cause of anti-slavery. Under the family's influence, Curtis turned his talents to the cause, stumping for Frémont and embarking on a career as a persuasive orator. Curtis travelled the country, arousing crowds with lectures that articulated the aggressions of the slave power, proclaimed the need for Kansas to be free, and outlined the dangers slavery posed to a free civilization.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{26}\) Cary, *George William Curtis*, 102-104, 126-139; Milne, *Genteel Tradition*, 85-86, 130-131; Hine and Davis,
Shaw stimulated Curtis' awareness of social responsibility, and Curtis in turn spread the message as Shaw could not — he was too reserved and uncomfortable for public speaking.

Now an integral member of the family, Curtis built his and Anna's home, with Shaw's help, on the corner of Bard and Henderson Avenues, very near to the Shaws. The Shaws and the Curtises now formed the center of a small group in West New Brighton whose life work was devoted to abolition. Mostly New Englanders by birth and Unitarian by faith, these "Black Republicans" lived in a Democratic city where pro-slavery sentiment was rampant. The Shaws' closest friends, the Gays, whose home was a stop on the underground railroad, encountered ridicule and harassment for their public friendship with prominent African-American middle-class families.²⁷

Sarah faced the situation with her characteristic negative outlook. On hearing that Wendell Phillips was coming to New York for a lecture, she sent him a letter advising him to tone down his remarks. "I hope you won't think me a coward, or a fool, or what is worse than either, a traitor to the cause, if I tell you what the Staten Island Community is composed," she wrote. "It is not yet able to

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²⁷ Hine and Davis, Legends, 64–67.
hear strong sentiment, and will probably be sick at its stomach and throw off everything if it is offered too soon." Sarah wanted a "sweet, innocent" Lyceum lecture "to disappoint the rascals who long for an opportunity to insult you and to reassure the timid beings who are half afraid of you already....I am worldly wise and wish not to have any mobs and also for you to get the ear of the people and then another year, make them hear what we like." Sarah's request did not emanate from fear of standing up for her principles, as she proved when Phillips spoke in front of a large mob that threatened violence. After the speech, Sarah, Anna and Curtis calmly walked Phillips through the dense crowd and into the family's carriage.28

The Shaws worked to propagandize the cause in the face of this opposition throughout the late 1850's. Now that her children were older, Sarah increased her public activity and took on a more active role in the anti-slavery organization. Working with her old friend Maria Weston Chapman and her sisters-in-law Sarah Shaw Russell and Anna Shaw Greene, she helped organize the American Anti-Slavery Society's National Bazaar. The committee's purpose was to raise funds for the

28 SBS to Wendell Phillips, ND, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1953(1103), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

29 George William Curtis(GWC) to W.D. O'Conner, November 5, 1859, GWC Collection, Box 7, Folder 6, SIIAS.
"primary work of arousing and engaging the public mind; which, as fast as it awakens, never fails to find a way to work its will."30 Sarah and Maria Chapman also induced the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society to enter a public protest against France's scheme to export 10,000 Africans to its colonies in the West Indies.31 Sarah and her daughters set up a local fair on Staten Island, but Sarah considered it a failure -- she furnished over $100 of articles, but few of them were sold. In despair she wrote Chapman, "How do you feel about your country now? Shall we (this generation) live to see any change?"32

In their appeal for items for the fair, Chapman and her colleagues had embraced many avenues, including political and economic action, by which the public mind could work its will. They also endorsed "the protection of fugitives," a call that Sarah and Frank took very seriously. Shaw had long given money to Theodore Parker's Vigilance Committee in Boston, a group committed to protecting and aiding fugitive

30 The Liberator, July 17, 1857, 114.


32 SBS to Maria Weston Chapman, January 15, ?, Anti-Slavery Collection, MsA.9.2, V. 16, No. 62, Boston Public Library(BPL), by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.
slaves. Now in Staten Island the couple cooperated with the Gays in their efforts to channel escaped slaves further north. Sarah used her contacts with abolitionist women to find homes for African-American orphans.

Shaw continued his political activity with relish, although he avoided the prominent role sought by his son-in-law. Men like Curtis, who possessed great personal charisma, thrived on public attention, but Shaw's retiring demeanor made him uncomfortable in the spotlight. Shaw was no office-seeker or statesman, realizing that politics was no place for "speechless men like myself, who like to be looked at, but hate to talk." Part of his reluctance to thrust himself forward was a sincere modesty for which he was remarkable. Sydney Gay recalled that "it was said that there was in him a singular mixture of modesty and manliness, as if there were something incompatible in those qualities. Rather, it should be said, he was singularly modest because he was singularly manly." At times Shaw's

33 FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, November 1, 1850, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

34 LMC to SBS, December 3, 1857, Shaw Papers, Folder 52-55, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

35 FGS to Theodore Lyman, May 1, [1871], Lyman Family Papers, MHS.

modesty verged on a self-distrust that hampered his confidence, but few knew of this characteristic besides Sarah.

Shaw had to devote much of his time in 1857-58 to his own financial affairs and the local concerns of Staten Island. After an economic expansion in the early 1850's that helped to undermine Association's critique of capitalism, the nation hit a snag in the Panic of 1857, with few Americans escaping its effects. The Shaws' income was drastically reduced, perhaps by as much as half, while Curtis faced bankruptcy in the failure of Putnam's that year. Child consoled Sarah, "You speak of the confusion of Frank's affairs. How sorry I am! But he is only sharing the universal lot. Everybody seems to be in trouble."\\(^37\\) From Cambridge, Rob, still floating at sea in regard to his future, wrote his father, "I don't suppose that a man can make much money by farming even out West, but it seems better than running so much risk as you do in business."\\(^38\\) Shaw's cushion of wealth was enough to soften the blow for his family and Curtis'; he settled his son-in-law's affairs

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^37^ LMC to SBS, December 3, 1857, Shaw Papers, Folder 52-55, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1417, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

^38^ RGS to FGS, March 24, 1858, Robert Gould Shaw Papers, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1910(28-58), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
with the creditors to the sum of $70,000. Curtis lectured for years to repay the loan.  

Staten Island residents were in an ugly mood -- not only was the economy in turmoil, but a poorly run Quarantine Hospital on the island brought disease, death, and fear into local homes. The community had appealed several times for the state legislature to remove the hospital, but no action was taken, and after a deadly outbreak of yellow fever in August, the residents lost patience. On September 1, 1858, a well-planned, pre-organized mob, composed of many leading citizens, descended on the hospital, removed the patients, and set fire to the Quarantine compound. All the buildings were destroyed. The Governor declared Staten Island to be in a state of rebellion and ordered out the marines, but the mob had achieved its purpose. It is unknown whether Shaw participated in the mob action on the night of September 1, but he was a conspirator, and a few days after the incident signed a call for a public meeting to defend the action.  

His position was consistent with his philosophy regarding

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40 To the Legislature of the State of New York, Memorial of Citizens of Richmond County, ND, Box 2, Folder 1, Quarantine Collection, SIIAS; Clippings, Quarantine Hospital History, Box 2, Folder 42, Quarantine Collection, SIIAS; Public Meeting Notice, September 13, 1858, Box 2, Folder 26, Quarantine Collection, SIIAS.
abolition -- when laws created injustice, citizens had the right to take extralegal action to oppose the law. As a man who hid fugitive slaves in defiance of federal law, Shaw had no qualms about burning a dangerous hospital and flaunting state authority.

Rob was home during the turmoil of the fall. Not a scholar like his father, he disliked school and never rose above the lower half of his class during his three years at Harvard. Adrift in terms of his professional future, Rob was well-liked in Cambridge, where his pleasing manner won him many friends. Though his comrades admired his steady, strong moral sense, Rob still did not share his parents' passion, even if he agreed with their principles, and he complained to his mother, "Because I don't talk and think Slavery all the time, and because I get tired...of hearing nothing else, you say I don't feel with you, when I do."

That fall, Rob withdrew from Harvard and took a job with Henry P. Sturgis and Company at his uncle's insistence. Living back at home and riding the ferry into New York everyday, Rob became bored and fought depression. As Sarah recalled, "He did not love his new life in the office, feeling that he had not much talent for business."  


115
For the next two years there is little in the historical record that indicates what was happening with the Shaw family; it is almost as if, like Rob, they settled into a nondescript routine until the nation's greatest crisis called them to their duty. Events around them moved at a rapid pace, with the threat of war a reality that newspapers, politicians, and ordinary people discussed daily. John Brown’s infamous raid at Harper’s Ferry, while it convinced the South that the Union was no longer safe for slavery, galvanized abolitionists and gave them a martyr. The election of 1860 further separated the sections. The Republican candidate, Abraham Lincoln, was branded in the South, despite facts to the contrary, as a Garrisonian-type abolitionist, and several southern states threatened to secede if he were elected. Abolitionist or not, a victory for Lincoln and the Republicans would bring to power a party dedicated to halting slavery’s expansion and to spreading free labor into the West. Shaw, Rob, and Curtis did what they could to bring on the war by voting for Lincoln in November, 1860, then watched from December to February as eleven southern states fulfilled their threat.

In the atmosphere of extreme tension surrounding Lincoln's inaugural and the siege at Fort Sumter, Frank and Sarah took two of their daughters on a trip to Nassau. It was almost an escape from reality on their part -- Shaw
wrote Gay, "The climate is delicious and we are very idle. The fact that we have so seldom news from home is of itself an advantage." Shaw displayed an almost naive optimism from his retreat in the Caribbean, expressing the opinion that "all will come out right in the end, I am sure -- perhaps with much sorrow & suffering. In the meanwhile, emancipation works well here, as well as in the other islands & a colored nation is forming which will not be without its influence." 42

Just a few days later, on April 12, South Carolina's shore batteries under the command of Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard opened fire on Fort Sumter, and on April 15, Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers. Rob gladly answered the call, signing on as a private in the Seventh New York Volunteer Militia on April 19 and setting off for Washington before the Shaws got back from Nassau. Rob, with his strong sense of national patriotism, wanted to fight for the honor of the North, but he also went because he felt it was his duty. Somewhat worried about his parents' reaction, he left a note telling them that he had enlisted. He did not need to be anxious -- when Frank and Sarah returned at the end of April they rejoiced in his action. After the Seventh was quickly

42 FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, April 6, 1861, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University; R.W. Weston to D. Weston, February 19, 1861, Anti-Slavery Collection, MsA.9.2, V. 30, No. 47, BPL.
disbanded, Rob got a commission as a Second Lieutenant in the Second Massachusetts Infantry, which began training at Brook Farm in May.43

Now that the war had begun, almost all abolitionists, including Garrisonian disunionists, supported it; most saw in the conflict the imminent destruction of slavery.44 The Shaws were no exception. In the intensely patriotic atmosphere of their home, the war became an obsession within the family, with conversation revolving around little else. Sarah was in a state of constant anxiety about Rob, even before the Second left its training ground, for though he was not yet in danger of being shot, she worried about his health.

Rob fed the family interest with a steady stream of interesting letters relaying all his movements and his comments on the war. "We actually fell asleep standing up," Rob reported after the Seventh New York marched to Washington, where it was quartered for a time in the House of Representatives. Rob was pleased that "my desk is on the Republican side of the House." "We have a great deal of fun here," Rob told his mother, "but I have no doubt we are the


best-behaved Congress that has been in session for a good while.\textsuperscript{45} He thrived in the army, loving the discipline, the comradrie, and the adventure.

Frank and Sarah, living the war vicariously through Rob, cared not only about a Union victory, but about making sure the war was carried on with a righteous purpose -- the only purpose that could bring ultimate victory to the North. The Civil War was a battle between good and evil, destined to destroy slavery and purge the nation of its shameful sins. Young Josephine absorbed this message and reflected it in her own interpretation of the war. After the Union's disastrous defeat in the first Battle of Bull Run, she wrote in her diary, "No matter if everything isn't going on just right, 'Our cause can't fail,' because it's God's cause as well as ours." Like many older commentators of her day, Josephine thought that "this war will purify the country of some of its extravagance and selfishness, even if we are stopped midway."\textsuperscript{46} Josephine's diary shows her to be, at the age of seventeen, opinionated on politics and self-confident in her views, a characteristic all the women of the family shared.

\textsuperscript{45} RGS to SBS, April 26, 1861, DUNCAN, 79.

\textsuperscript{46} "Diary," August 9 and August 15, 1861, in Stewart, Philanthropic, 15 (hereafter cited as "Diary").
Because of the Shaws' desire to see the war made holy, they looked for any sign that the Union's efforts were linked to the abolitionist crusade -- signs that were hard to come by in the first months of the war. Lincoln made it clear that his goal was preserving the Union, with or without slavery, and freedom was not the administration's official policy. Anxious to placate border states whose support he deemed critical, Lincoln would not interfere with the slave property of loyalists, but his posture toward the slaves of rebels remained undefined.

African Americans, fleeing to Union lines wherever they had the opportunity, soon forced the issue on an unprepared army. The result was a haphazard policy entirely dependent on the character of the army's various subordinates. In places, officers returned runaways, ignoring the administration's unstated distinction between a loyalist's slaves and those belonging to rebels. In May, Benjamin Butler, commander of the Department of Virginia, demonstrated a way out of the administration's dilemma; he declared the slaves arriving in Fortress Monroe "contraband" of war, subject to confiscation, and refused to return them. This was a brilliant stroke in several ways: it struck a blow at the Confederacy, appeased conservatives in the North, and provided a new supply of laborers for the Union works in Virginia.
Searching for a consistent policy, Congress in July passed a resolution declaring that it was not the duty of soldiers of the United States to capture and return fugitives. After this, Rob and other officers of the Second, on a foraging expedition near Harper's Ferry, Virginia, encouraged some slaves they encountered to run away. "We told them a secessionist's slaves could go where they pleased without hindrance from Northern armies," Rob reported to his parents. Congress took more definite action a month later and passed a law that declared all slaves forfeit whose masters had used them in the military or naval service of the Confederacy.

These halting measures enraged the Shaws, who wanted swift, bold action that promised imminent abolition. Hoping for a flood of freedom, they lost patience as the government moved along at a glacial pace. Then in late August, John C. Frémont, commanding the Department of the West, declared martial law and issued an emancipation proclamation freeing the slaves of Missouri rebels. Already ardent admirers of the General, Frank and Sarah were overjoyed and shared with

47 RGS to SBS, May 19 and July 21, 1861, DUNCAN, 101, 116.

121
Harriet Beecher Stowe the jubilant assumption, "The hour had come, and the man!" 48

Their disappointment was extreme when Lincoln asked Frémont to revoke the decree and relieved him of command in November. The Frémonts arrived in New York the next month, where the radical wing of the Republican party gave them a warm welcome. 49 "Frémont is in town. Father went to see him on Friday & came home a more enthusiastic Frémonter than ever," Anna told her cousin. 50 Frémont's removal completely disheartened Sarah, who wrote a bitter letter to Lydia Maria Child in which she despaired that the nation would come out of the war a true republic. "I am sorely tried, as you are, by the mean and selfish passions I see at work," Child responded. "But you know, dear, that those who live in a crisis always see a great deal of meanness and selfishness." 51

48 Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the Civil War (Boston, 1953), 68.


50 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, December 1, 1861, Theodore Lyman Papers, MHS.

51 LMC to SBS, November 24, 1861, Collected Correspondence, 50/1350.
The end of 1861 was a trying time for the Shaw family; their disappointment in the government accompanied a difficult separation from their only son. Shaw went down to see Rob that August, but felt he was in the way, so the visit was cut short rather unpleasantly. Anna told their cousin, "It wears upon Mother terribly although I think that she tries hard to keep up her spirits. To be sure we ride & drive but always with a feeling as if we should find bad news when we get home." Although worried about her son, Sarah was also inordinately proud of him. Robert wrote to Susie, "It makes me perfectly ashamed to have my photographs 'toted' round as they are; and the idea of there being twenty-four in the house, and all Mother's friends having from four to six apiece, is rather strong."

Sarah and her daughters fought the war vicariously through Rob, and in their zeal for the Union cause, revered all the soldiers fighting in the field. The family had always placed the highest honor on duty and self-sacrifice for the common good; now they viewed death on the battlefield as the ultimate expression of those ennobling

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52 RGS to FGS, RGS to SBS, August 17 and 19, 1861, in Letters: RGS (Cambridge, 1864).

53 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, August 24, 1861, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.

54 RGS to Susanna Shaw, August 15, 1861, DUNCAN, 128.
impulses. Josephine longed to be a man, so that she could die gloriously for her country. Sarah, recognizing that death was not the only way to serve the Union, taught her daughters that women could also devote their souls to the cause.

Through letters from sons and husbands, northern women learned that the government was inadequately prepared to meet the demands of a large standing army and to handle the high flow of casualties from the battlefields. In New York, women formed an aid society to provide needed supplies for camps and army hospitals. All the Shaw women joined the Women's Central Association of Relief for the Army and Navy of the United States, and the subsequent national organization, the United States Sanitary Commission. Cooperating with the government, the Sanitary Commission supervised the distribution of relief for soldiers and provided nurses, hospital equipment, ambulance services, and inspection of sanitary conditions.\(^5\)

Sarah, Anna, Josephine, Susie, and Ellen worked diligently for the Sanitary Commission. They spent hours with their neighbors scraping lint and rolling bandages for

the hospitals at the front. Caring especially about the condition of Rob's men, the Shaw women donated many hours to the proper outfitting of his regiment. "We have sent Rob 98 pairs of mittens for his men most of which we have knit ourselves," Anna reported. "We five can knit 10 pairs a week. Nellie says Oh dear I shall be glad when I can conscientiously knit some thing besides mittens. It is tiresome I must confess." Sarah worked three days a week to cut shirts and give them out for local woman to sew for the soldiers. Anna described their schedule to Elizabeth Lyman: "On Thursdays she & I go to the Society at New Brighton & cut for three or four hours, tiresome work. On Fridays from sixty to seventy women come to the house to receive the work & be paid for what they bring home. You should smell the house after they leave. That takes two or three hours. When there are enough done we pack them in barrels & send them to the Sanitary Commission in New York." The work was draining and unexpected emergencies added to the hectic schedule. When 250 wounded and sick men arrived in New York from the front, local doctors contacted Sarah because they had insufficient provisions. "The ladies

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56 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, December 23, 1861, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.

57 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, February 16, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.
come to Mother's to cut & give out the work as fast as they can," Anna told Elizabeth.\(^5^8\) Volunteering had its social benefits as well -- when Susie went to Washington to work for the Sanitary Commission, she attended one of Mary Todd Lincoln's balls.\(^5^9\)

As the Shaw women did their part for the country, Shaw looked for ways to promote the good of African Americans affected by the war. Unwittingly, the military provided abolitionists like Shaw the opportunity by capturing the Sea Islands of South Carolina; now thousands of slaves, abandoned by their masters, were living in Union-controlled territory. Unprepared materially or philosophically to handle this presence, the army put the able-bodied to work and distributed food, but not clothing, to the rest -- women, children, elderly, and disabled. On hearing of this situation, Shaw opened offices in New York and advertised for clothing donations, which he sent to South Carolina, Fortress Monroe, and other places being inundated with runaway slaves. "It is a very serious question as to what

\(^5^8\) Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, May 18, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS; "Diary," May 9, 1862.

\(^5^9\) Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, February 16, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS; Jessie Frémont to Frederick Billings, February 7, 1862, in Herr and Spence, \textit{Letters}, 311-312.
is to become of all these poor people: of course the government cannot employ all of them," Anna remarked.60

Frank and Sarah zeroed in on that serious question, for the presence of thousands of slaves, freed by the fortunes of war, offered a great opportunity to prove their contention that African Americans would thrive under freedom and be capable of integration into American society. "It is trying to the patience to see so little advantage taken of our position at Port Royal," Child agreed with Sarah. "If they had welcomed the 'contrabands,' and stimulated them by wages..."61

Government greed soon prompted action from Washington. Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase sent Colonel William H. Reynolds to South Carolina as agent to collect cotton and plan for production on the abandoned plantations in 1862. Chase, an anti-slavery man, also sent Edward L. Pierce, a young Massachusetts attorney who had supervised contraband labor at Fortress Monroe, to investigate the contraband situation. Pierce and Mansfield French, a Methodist minister sent South to reconnoiter by the American

60 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, December 23, 1861, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.

61 LMC to SBS, December 15, 1861, Collected Correspondence, 50/1356.
Missionary Association (AMA), joined forces in recommending a plan for free labor and education for Port Royal blacks.\(^{62}\)

With Chase's support, the two men returned North to publicize the situation and recruit labor superintendents and teachers. At public meetings in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, abolitionists and philanthropists readily responded to the appeal. Shaw attended the meeting at Cooper Union on February 20 that formed the National Freedmen's Relief Association (NFRA), a body that boldly declared itself a national committee and invited associations in other cities to become auxiliaries. Shaw was elected one of the twelve officers of the association and served on the Home Committee, which collected commodities for distribution and worked with cooperating societies. The NFRA's stated purpose was "the relief and improvement of the freedmen of the colored race." It would "teach them civilization and Christianity," "imbue them with notions of order, industry, economy, and self-reliance," and

"elevate them in the scale of humanity, by inspiring them with self respect." 63

The NFRA joined forces with Boston's Education Commission in a loose affiliation, and in early March fifty-three men and women set sail from New York with Edward Pierce leading the way as head of contraband labor. The two Freedmen's Aid societies paid the salary of these teachers and labor superintendents, while the government provided free transportation and furnished rations and dwellings for the teachers. The NFRA was so successful in its efforts that by May it had sent South Carolina 148 more teachers. 64

"Gideon's Band," as historian Willie Lee Rose has christened them, faced immediate trouble on their arrival in Port Royal. From the start there was confusion of authority between Gideon's Band, the military, and Reynold's cotton agents. Many of the agents and officers in the army were unsympathetic at best with Pierce's plan; Reynolds himself thought the reformers unfit for the practical business of planting cotton. The missionaries were not exactly a united front, either. Religious differences between Boston and New

63 National Freedman's Relief Association, Organized in the City of New York, on the 22nd February, 1862 (New York, 1862), 3-10.

64 The National Freedmen's Relief Association Sendeth Greeting (New York, 1864), 6-7; Appeal to the Churches by the National Freedman's Relief Association (New York, 1862); Annual Report with Sketch, 1866, 10.
York quickly emerged. The Boston group, with its Unitarian background, was suspicious of the evangelical New Yorkers, whose roots were not with Garrison but with the evangelical abolitionism of Lewis Tappan, George Whipple, and the AMA.\textsuperscript{65}

Despite the obstacles, the plan got underway when Pierce eventually placed all the superintendents and teachers on plantations or groups of plantations. The African Americans of Port Royal eagerly embraced the school, but they were suspicious of the new white men who wanted them to work in gangs for low wages. They soon made clear their opposition to planting the old staple. On some plantations, the superintendents enforced the old gang system, but in other places they tried new incentives, such as giving each family responsibility for its own portion of land. The family planted cotton and food on the plot, but unlike sharecropping, the superintendent paid the family a daily wage based on assigned tasks for the cotton crop. Most of the Boston group thought that wage labor would replace slave labor when the war was over, but the evangelical New Yorkers dreamed of a future where blacks owned small farms.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{65} Rose, \textit{Rehearsal for Reconstruction}, 63-75.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 128.
Shaw was in an unusual position in the NFRA; he shared leadership with evangelicals whose zeal to preach Christ to the slaves made him uncomfortable, but who shared his goal of landownership for freed slaves. More akin in temperament to Boston's Unitarians, whose moral discourses to the contrabands centered on duty, truth, and cleanliness, he was still not one of them, for it often seemed they cared more about proving the profitability of free labor than of looking out for the contrabands' interests. Shaw was no free labor advocate; he had never promoted wage labor as a just system.

Shaw was most interested in the NFRA's educational work. One of the reasons he had been attracted to Fourierism was its promise that all people would have the opportunity for self-development through a varied combination of work, leisure, and education. He wanted societal benefits spread throughout the population and he recognized education as a levelling factor. Southern whites had denied blacks an education precisely for that reason; their monopoly on book learning was part of their class distinction.

With this idea in mind, Shaw journeyed to Washington with other committee members in April for a meeting with Lincoln. The Boston, New York, and Philadelphia associations wanted to persuade the administration to give
the experiment a more secure status by appointing a
government official to oversee contraband labor. Shaw hoped
that if the government took the matter in hand, the private
funds of the associations could be directed completely to
education.

Lincoln totally charmed Shaw, who came away from the
meeting with the feeling that the administration would take
a more active interest in the question of the contrabands.\footnote{"Diary," April 9 and 18, 1862; RGS to FGS, May 1,
1862, in \textit{Letters}:RGS.} The next month, when General David Hunter, Commander of the
Southern Department, issued an order freeing slaves in South
Carolina, Florida, and Georgia, Shaw assumed the action came
from Lincoln. "Has not the President used a very sharp
knife, in Genl Hunter's hands, to cut the knot?" he wrote
Garrison.\footnote{FGS to William Lloyd Garrison, May 16, 1862, Anti-
Slavery Collection, Ms.A.1.2., V. 31, p.122B, BPL, by
courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.}
Even after Lincoln rescinded the order, Shaw
maintained his confidence in the President. Josephine, as
always reflecting her parent's views, commented, "We feel
that he is earnest and means to do right."\footnote{"Diary," May 20, 1862.}
Shaw's faith in the President was not shaken even when
Lincoln took steps to halt Hunter's plans for a black
regiment. Shaw viewed this as one of the most important

\footnote{"Diary," April 9 and 18, 1862; RGS to FGS, May 1,
1862, in \textit{Letters}:RGS.}
projects of the war; he had wanted to arm African Americans as early as 1861. He recognized that in a war to end slavery, it was vital for the oppressed to strike a blow for their own freedom. Shaw also believed that after the war the North could not deny citizenship to men who had helped save the Union.

Hunter had been trying to recruit the contrabands for service since mid-April, but with little success. After his proclamation of freedom on May 9, he ordered all able-bodied males to Hilton Head and sent soldiers to the plantations to round up the contrabands. This forced conscription was terrifying for the African Americans on the islands and totally disruptive of Pierce's labor project. The First South Carolina Volunteer Regiment served for three months, but was never mustered in. Lincoln and the administration were not willing to sanction Hunter's action, partly because of protests from Pierce and partly because the government was not yet ready for black troops. Hunter disbanded the regiment, although one company remained on picket duty.  

The government did move forward on the question of contraband labor at Port Royal, as Lincoln had promised Shaw that it would. The administration turned black affairs over 

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70 Dudley Taylor Cornish, The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865 (New York, 1966), 37-55; Quarles, Negro in the Civil War, 108-110; Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction, 146-150.
to the War Department and appointed Rufus Saxton as Military Governor for the Southern Department. Saxton, a radical abolitionist, had full authority over the lands and the contrabands in Port Royal. The government now paid the salaries of the labor superintendents and district superintendents whom Saxton appointed. Saxton also supplied money for plantation equipment, clothing, and food.  

With its funds now released for the support of teachers, education became the NFRA's primary object. The association at the time had 34 female teachers in its employ, supported over 3000 pupils, and had sent 35,829 books, pamphlets, and papers into the South. Shaw oversaw the distribution of these materials into the South, ran the NFRA office, and corresponded with the Boston and Philadelphia societies over funds.

With the Port Royal project under government protection, Congress pushed the President toward a more radical definition of the contraband's status and their place in the war effort. In mid-July, it passed two important bills: the Second Confiscation Act and the Militia Act. The first measure liberated the slaves of all

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71 Rose, Reshursal for Reconstruction, 152-154.

72 Annual Report with Sketch, 1866, 10-11.

73 FGS to Edward A. Atkinson, August 7, 1862, Edward A. Atkinson Papers, MHS.
persons who committed treason or supported the rebellion and authorized the President to "employ as many persons of African descent as he may deem necessary and proper for the suppression of this rebellion." The Militia Act explicitly authorized black soldiers, granted such soldiers and their families emancipation if their former masters were rebels, and set their pay at three dollars below that of white privates.  

Shaw did not want the effort limited to contraband southern regiments; he wanted northern regiments as well -- ideally, integrated regiments -- not only as a matter of principle, but also to demonstrate the capabilities of black soldiers to as many northerners as possible. Rob had advocated raising black regiments since August 1861, but he saw them only as an instrument of finishing the war and punishing the South. "What a lick it would be at them, to call on all the blacks in the country to come and enlist in our army!" he told Sydney Howard Gay. "They would probably make a fine army after a little drill, and could certainly be kept under better discipline than our independent Yankees."  

74 Cornish, Sable Arm, 46.
75 RGS to Sydney Howard Gay, August 6, 1861, DUNCAN, 123.
Shaw wrote his son to gather information on the possibility of opening the regular white regiments to black recruits. He asked Rob how privates in the regiments would view such a step. "I think the men would object to it very strongly at first, but they would get accustomed to it in time," Rob replied. "I infer this from the fact that soldiers in our regiments, who are acting as officer's servants, make no objection to living and sleeping in the same tent with black servants. Still, there would undoubtedly be great dissatisfaction, if we should enlist blacks and put them in the volunteer regiments now." 76

The idea of integrated regiments was pure fantasy at that stage in the war, but as the Union battlefield effort faltered, support for the idea of raising black troops increased. In Kansas, where blacks were openly enrolled in white regiments, Jim Lane formed the First Kansas Colored Volunteers out of fugitive slaves and slaves "recruited" on raids into Arkansas and Missouri. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton sent Lane word that the President had given him no such authority, but Lane ignored any directives from Washington. Benjamin Butler, commander of the Department of the Gulf and ever the politician, listened to his wife's advice that the wind in the North was blowing in an

76 RGS to FGS, August 3, 1862, DUNCAN, 224.
abolitionist direction. He called on the free militiamen of Louisiana to enroll as volunteers in the Union and mustered three regiments into the service. He alerted Washington that he took silence as notice of approval. Now ready to take positive action, the War Department gave Rufus Saxton, a man Stanton viewed as far more suitable for the job than Hunter had been, direct authorization to raise volunteers in South Carolina. Saxton offered the colonelcy of the First South Carolina Volunteers to Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a Massachusetts abolitionist, who immediately accepted the challenge.  

The first black troops were enrolled on government authority, but what that would mean for the abolitionist cause was unclear in the early fall of 1862. The President had made no indication that he would fight the war for blacks as well as whites. The security of Port Royal and the black regiments was open to question. The interests of slaves, contrabands and free blacks were all subordinated to the war effort, which faltered at the Second Battle of Bull Run in late August. The Shaws had reason to fear that the government could not protect even the small gains made in

77 Cornish, Sable Arm, 64-93; Quarles, Negro in the Civil War, 113-120; Joseph T. Glatthaar, Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers (New York, 1990); Howard C. Westwood, Black Troops, White Commanders, and Freedmen During the Civil War (Carbondale, 1992).
the cause of freedom. The Union desperately needed a victory, and Rob for one was ready to fight to the bitter end. "My only prayer is, that our government won't be frightened into giving up," he told his worried mother. "I hope they will begin to draft all over the country, and take every available man, and then fight until there is no one left."\(^{78}\)

\(^{78}\) RGS to SBS, July 4, 1862, DUNCAN, 215.
"Slavery is the cause, and the whole cause, of this war," Sarah told her British correspondent John Elliot Cairnes. "It is kept up and carried on by the anti-slavery spirit of the North, and the pro-slavery democrats would now give up the whole struggle if they dared show themselves so ignoble... Slavery or freedom must now conquer - they can exist together no longer on the continent."¹ This sentiment was the heart of the Shaws' feeling about the war as the conflict moved into its second fall. With Lee preparing to invade Maryland after his victory at the Second Battle of Bull Run, nothing was more important to Frank and Sarah than securing once and for all an abolitionist direction for the war effort. This was a practical necessity as well as a moral one; the project at Port Royal and the drive for black regiments depended on it. The northern public must be converted to the view that the war's ultimate purpose was the destruction of slavery.

¹ Sarah Blake Shaw (SBS) to John Elliot Cairnes (JEC), July 31, 1862, National Library of Ireland, Microfilm Copy in Author's Possession (hereafter NLI-MC).
By the late summer and early fall of 1862, the Shaws had assigned the war a particular meaning that they sold to their acquaintances aggressively. Sarah, by personality more willing than Shaw to express her views aloud, was the family's best spokesperson. She laid out a full account of her views to Cairnes, an Irish political economist who was John Stuart Mill's greatest disciple. She described the war as a "struggle against the monster that had so nearly destroyed us." The monster was not only slavery, but the collective body of slaveholders who comprised the Slave Power, an aristocratic junto that tried to usurp all power and that had manipulated the government for its own ends. Sarah asserted that it had been "the Slave Power, and not the Northern Democracy which for half a century has been dominant in the Union." Throughout her life, even as a young girl, she heard around her "constant and severe hatred of the whole course of our Government towards foreign nations, as well as of our home policy, the Indian wars, the annexation of Texas, the Mexican Wars, all of them heartily disapproved by the North." The Civil War was democracy finally asserting itself against aristocracy.

Sarah portrayed poor whites in the South as little more than slaves. One reason that abolitionists in the NFRA and

2 SBS to JEC, July 12, 1862, NLI-MC.

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other organizations were so anxious to spread northern
civilization into the South was their belief that common
whites there were confined to a life of poverty with little
or no opportunity to rise. Sarah described southern whites
as "deprived of the natural means of rising in the scale of
humanity." They were "as much slaves as the negroes are,"
yet they "upheld and supported the institution."³ Sarah
believed a southern friend's story about "large pounds, as
for cattle, where during the three or four days of elections
the Southern Gentlemen keep those 'poor whites' enclosed &
in a state of constant intoxication, in order to secure such
votes from them as are desirable."⁴ Rob reflected and
reinforced his mother's prejudice against white southerners
as he travelled in the South, writing her, "They are a
nasty, dirty, ignorant race. A woman in Edinburg expressed
great astonishment that Massachusetts men spoke the same
language that she did. She called it the same, but I thank
my stars that I never learned such a patois as most of them
speak."⁵

³ SBS to JEC, July 12, 1862, NLI-MC.
⁴ SBS to JEC, November 18, 1862, NLI-MC.
Part of the Republican Party's ideology during the 1850's was this same contention that slavery undermined freedom for non-slaveholding whites and crushed opportunity for laborers; that was why the platform centered on keeping slavery out of the West. But Frank and Sarah were not just concerned about what slavery did to whites. Their main concern was black freedom, which could never come about unless the North won the war. Conversely, though, the North could not succeed and God would not act on its side, unless it pursued the destruction of slavery and welcomed African Americans into the Union as full citizens.

The Shaws were "getting dreadfully impatient here for the President to do something strong, to abolish slavery & such acts which will show that we are really in earnest." Sarah cried out to Cairnes, "I wish Mr. Lincoln would dare to do right, and trust that our Heavenly Father would see that no evil should come of it. We are as a nation, expiating dreadful sins of long standing, and we are being purified by fire, but the end will come." She refused to believe that the war had no moral end. Indeed, the war

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6 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, July 27, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS).
could not end "until should die with it the monster who had fed upon our vitals almost to our death."

The family's indignation against the Democrats stemmed from the importance of making the war about emancipating slaves. Throughout the war, Democrats were the conservative force, willing to make peace with the South after every defeat on the battlefield and always fighting against emancipation. Anna angrily denounced the Democrats' contention that it was unconstitutional to touch slavery: "The Government, the nation, may go hang but they will be damned if the inalienable right of selling black babies shall be infringed."

Sarah's letters also revealed a deep-seated prejudice against Irish-Americans based in large part on the group's habitual support for the Democratic party. "You must be aware of the great feature, evil as well as good, that the Irish population makes in this country," she wrote. "For some reason, I know not why, unless perhaps that all men in a low state of culture like to feel that there are others below them, our Irish have a most groundless, cruel, and malignant hatred of our poor colour'd race. Now they have adopted this insane idea that if the slaves are freed they

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7 SBS to JEC, July 31, 1862, NLI-MC.
8 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, November 30, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.
are to come North & take their work." Sarah attributed the political demoralization of the country partly to the "influence which the Dem. Party holds over the mind of our Irish population, without whom, it never could have retained its power." Sarah unwittingly disclosed how her Irish servants had learned to cope with her attitudes when she proudly told Cairnes that her servants, "having lived with us many years, have learned to feel as we do." They paid a price for their loyalty to the Shaws, for they were "insulted by their countrymen & called 'Woolly Heads.'"

Sarah struggled to reconcile her conviction that the North was God's army of justice with the fact that many northerners cared so little about the slaves. She wrote a friend, "Sometimes I feel despondent, when I see still so much pro-slavery sentiment at the North, but when I remember that ten righteous men were enough to save a city, I trust that ten thousand anti-slavery men will be enough to save our country." Admitting to Cairnes the "rotten" state of American politics before the advent of the Republican party, she rationalized that "where sin is, grace aboundeth, the

9 SBS to JEC, November 21, 1862, NLI-MC.

10 SBS to JEC, August 7, 1862, NLI-MC.

11 SBS to John Gorham Palfrey, 1862, Houghton Library (HL), shelf mark bMS Am 1704 (836), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
Apostle says, & the worse we grew, the better we grew, & now goes on the terrible fight between good and evil."

At times depressed over the amount of pro-slavery sentiment in the North, at other times Sarah rejoiced that so much moral progress had been made as a result of the war. "That dreadful curse of slavery has so permeated the people, &...has caused such a rot in society, that it still holds many in its horrid grasp." But God's hand still revealed itself: "Every defeat opens hundreds of blind eyes to the fact that slavery is at the bottom of all. It is almost miraculous, while we are defeated in the field, to see the moral victory gained by the North."\(^\text{13}\)

The Shaws did what they could in the fall of 1862 to further the moral victory and open more northern eyes to the necessity of destroying slavery. They were successful in promoting Cairnes' book, *The Slave Power*, to a wide audience in the United States. Sarah was the first American to find significance in the book and told him, "Your whole book is full of truth."\(^\text{14}\) Cairnes blamed the Civil War on the South, and argued that the slave power, needing to expand in order to compensate for its depletion of resources, was

\(^\text{12}\) SBS to JEC, November 21, 1862, NLI-MC.
\(^\text{13}\) SBS to JEC, September 10, 1862, NLI-MC.
\(^\text{14}\) SBS to JEC, July 12, 1862, NLI-MC.
aggressive against free societies. The book claimed that slavery retarded development and created a class of mean poor whites, who were left powerless in a system of political despotism.\(^{15}\)

Shaw used his contacts with major publishing firms to bring Cairnes' lectures and essays to a wider audience in the United States. That the *The Slave Power* did become an influential economic analysis and won its author fame on both sides of the Atlantic, was due in no small part to the efforts of the Shaws.\(^{16}\) Frank and Sarah were well placed to influence public opinion through their circle of friends and relations holding key positions in the publishing industry and in literary circles. The Shaws used their contacts in England as well; Sarah wrote Elizabeth Gaskell regularly with her version of events in the United States.

Winning moral victory still depended on the battlefield. In September General George B. McClellan gave the Union its much needed victory, but at a terrible cost. Moving cautiously as always, he met Lee's invading Confederates near Sharpsburg, Maryland, on September 17. Rob, now a Captain in the Second Massachusetts, which was

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\(^{16}\) SBS to JEC, November 18, 1862, NLI-MC; Weinberg, *John Elliot Cairnes and the American Civil War*, 23-48.
devastated in the battle, had experienced the full horrors of the bloodiest day of the Civil War. As news of Antietam reached the Shaws, they experienced agonizing hours until it was clear that Rob was safe. Many relations and family friends did not escape, however, and the days following the battle were dark.

In reading Rob's accounts Sarah must have felt the full force of her earlier words, "we are being purified by fire." She wept over his letters, relating how his fellow officers walked "straight up into the shower of bullets, as if it were so much rain; men, who until this year, had lived lives of perfect ease and luxury." After the smoke cleared, Rob walked through a large open field, "and such a mass of dead and wounded men, mostly Rebels, as were lying there, I never saw before...many were mangled and torn to pieces by artillery, but most of them had been wounded by musketry fire. We halted right among them, and the men did everything they could for their comfort." Even though he was deeply moved by the scene, Rob was battle-hardened by now. He told his father that "the stars came out bright, and we lay down among the dead, and slept soundly until

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17 RGS to SBS, August 12, 1862, DUNCAN, 229.
daylight. There were twenty dead bodies within a rod of me."  

Technically Antietam was a northern victory, for though the battle was a draw, Lee retreated to Virginia. Lincoln seized the moment to issue the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, a step he had planned since the summer. The Proclamation freed, as of January 1, all the slaves in areas still under rebellion. This was the move the Shaws had been waiting for since the start of the war, for now the Union cause had been linked explicitly with the destruction of slavery. Josephine recorded that "Father and George think it's splendid and believe fully in its wisdom and effects, but Mother fears it won't be as well as if he had emancipated on the spot, although of course she rejoices in the step."  

Sarah wrote Cairnes, "we shall never rest until Slavery is entirely destroyed, & this is the first step towards it."  

Rob expressed his doubts about the practicality of the Proclamation and provoked a strong rejoinder from his

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18 RGS to Francis George Shaw (FGS), September 21, 1862, DUNCAN, 240-241.  


20 SBS to JEC, October 16, 1862, NLI-MC.
mother. Rob replied, "I believe, with you, that the closer we adhere to Right and Justice, the better it will be in the end, and that, if we want God on our side, we must be on His side; but still, as a war measure, I don't see the immediate benefit of it, and I think much of the moral force of the Act has been lost by our long delay in coming to it." 21 Rob was often impatient with his mother's insistence that every aspect of the war measure up to her principles. He especially disagreed with her tireless criticism of McClellan. "Why do you think it necessary that a general, whose business it is to obey orders, and carry out plans, should be inspired with the same faith in principles that you have?," he asked her. "It seems to me that if we have a man of military ability, we have what we need. I believe that the Right will conquer in the end; but we ought not to forget that able generals, a well-disciplined army, and a powerful navy, are the means to reach our end in this case." 22

The war created an emotionally charged atmosphere that made life seem surreal to those living through the crisis, but even for a family as involved as the Shaws, parts of life went on as normal. Frank and Sarah played with their

21 RGS to SBS, October 5, 1862, DUNCAN, 252.
22 RGS to SBS, October 14, 1862, DUNCAN, 253.
two grandchildren, whom they adored and fussed over in the ordinary way. Sarah and Anna loved children; the women of the family filled their letters with proud news of their babies as well as with the sad news of war.

In the fall, the women of the family experienced all the turmoil of a wedding and changed relationships after Susie got engaged to Robert Bowne Minturn, Jr. The latest scion of a merchant family prominent in New York's elite circles since the eighteenth century, Minturn owned the shipping firm of Grinell, Minturn & Co. Anna wrote her cousin, "Of course we feel that in marrying him, Susie will be taken into an entirely different set in New York, of which we know nothing. I cannot help wishing that he was from New England. But we cannot have it all our own way."23 From the aftermath of Antietam, Rob counseled his sister, "As you say, Mother will miss you very much when you go, and you will miss her; and I don't wonder at your feeling depressed and sad about it, at times."24 Shaw bought the young couple a house in New York, where Susie had always

23 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, September 14, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS; Robert Bowne Minturn, Memoir of Robert Bowne Minturn (New York, 1871).

24 RGS to Susanna Shaw, September 28, 1862, DUNCAN, 249.
wanted to live. Rob increased the family excitement with his presence at the marriage on October 30.\textsuperscript{25}

Even on the day of Susie's wedding, though, the war loomed over the Shaws and distracted them from the full enjoyment of their private lives. That morning, Sarah had ushered three delegates representing the Governor into Shaw's study, where they asked him to serve as Provost Marshal of Richmond, Queens, and Suffolk Counties. Shaw immediately succumbed to his own lack of self-confidence and refused the offer. The women of the family were devastated. "Mother, Nellie and I felt dreadfully because we thought of the great good he might do, and of the dreadful rascal who will probably be put it," Josephine lamented to her diary. "But he felt he couldn't do it well (of course he'd do it better than anyone else they gave it to), and I think, too, that Rob's advice had something to do with it, for he said that it required a military man and that he knew Father couldn't do it."\textsuperscript{26} The next day, however, "several gentlemen came & pressed so strongly that he has accepted it. We are to have 3000 paroled soldiers here & Father will

\textsuperscript{25} Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, October 12, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS; Letters: RGS (Cambridge, 1864), 208.

\textsuperscript{26} "Diary," October 30, 1862.
have to see that the camp is kept in order, arrest deserters etc."²⁷

Susie's was not the only romance in the Shaw family to blossom under the shadow of the war. Rob became secretly engaged to Susie's friend Annie Haggerty in the fall of 1862. The daughter of Ogden Haggerty, a wealthy New York City merchant, Annie split her time between the social world of the city and her family's summer home in the Berkshire Mountains at Lenox, Massachusetts.²⁸ Sarah, feeling pangs of jealousy at the presence of another woman in Rob's life, at first counseled him against an engagement, but eventually accepted the inevitable and welcomed Annie to the family. Rob's relationship with Sarah had so dominated him, that he wrote Annie, "I felt wicked when I told you I wanted to see you even more than Mother; for I have always loved her more than anyone else in the world, and I think she has me, from the sacrifices she has made for me, and for which I can never repay her."²⁹

From his winter camp Rob wrote to the women who loved him about the joy he found in war. "I never had a

²⁷ Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, November 2, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.


²⁹ RGS to Annie Haggerty, November 23, 1862, DUNCAN, 261.
pleasanter sensation than that of getting into bivouac after a hard march, having the blankets spread, a great fire built, a little supper and a comfortable pipe," he told his fiancée. Rob ended the year as fully committed to seeing the war through as he had been when it started. "I had rather stay here all my life (though, in this case, I should pray for a short one) than give up to the South," he confided to his adoring younger sister Josephine. His commitment to a crusade for freedom still did not match his parents, for now, even after the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, he thought the most satisfactory ending would be to "have them brought to their knees, and then kicked out, and allowed to set up for themselves within certain limits. I would have them hemmed in on all sides by free States, and not allowed a chance of extending."³⁰

Frank and Sarah thought of little else but the upcoming Proclamation. Their satisfactory ending was the total destruction of slavery and the establishment of a true republic in both North and South. "We are all waiting to see what will happen when the slaves are freed," Anna said. "In three days every slave in all the rebel states will be free that is as fast as we can get at them or they get to

³⁰ RGS to Josephine Shaw, December 23, 1862, DUNCAN, 271.
Sarah reported to Cairnes, "We do not apprehend any violent movement of the slaves after the 1st. I lately asked one who has been a slave if she thought there was a danger of any risings in consequence of the Proclamation. She said, 'Oh no, Ma'am; they were never so quiet & docile as now, for they have great faith that they are to be free, & are afraid to do anything wrong, lest the Govt shd think they were not fit for freedom.'"

On New Year's Eve the Shaws breathlessly awaited the dawn, when the Proclamation officially linked the northern cause with the destruction of slavery. They reflected back on the hard year of loss their family had sustained; nephews, cousins, brothers-in-law, and friends, had died in great numbers, and many more relations were encamped for the winter, awaiting the deadly spring. Sarah's tears flowed as she thought of Rob -- battlehardened by 19 months -- who had left behind "all that can make life happy, & desirable, simply to do what he thinks his duty."  

The first day of 1863 bringing no rush of southern surrenders, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation late that afternoon. Frank and Sarah had extra cause for

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31 Anna Shaw Curtis to Elizabeth Russell Lyman, December 29, 1862, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.
32 SBS to JEC, December 31, 1862, NLI-MC.
33 SBS to JEC, September 10, 1862, NLI-MC.
celebration; not only did the Proclamation liberate slaves in rebellious areas, it announced that "persons of suitable condition will be received into the armed services of the United States." Although the President was still cautious, making no call to arms for African Americans, he was in effect announcing the administration's support for black regiments. Frank and Sarah's twin concerns were united -- African Americans could fight for the freedom that was now officially a war aim.

January witnessed a flurry of applications for organizing black regiments. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton authorized four separate ventures, two in the South and two in the North. On January 26, he gave Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew, a radical Republican, permission to raise a black regiment in Massachusetts. The Governor selected his officers with great care. Devoted to the experiment of black regiments, he intended his project to be the model for the future. Although he knew of young men with more firm anti-slavery convictions than Robert Gould Shaw, he knew of no other with better family connections. The Shaws' long service to abolition and their influence among wealthy

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friends and relatives would serve the regiment well. They were at the center of that "educated Anti-slavery society, which, next to the colored race itself, has the greatest interest in the success of this experiment."  

On January 30, Andrew wrote Shaw and enclosed a letter offering Rob command of the 54th Massachusetts. In his letter to Shaw, Andrew appealed to the family's principles and pride. Not only did Rob's character recommend him for the position, but he was well-placed to gain support and cooperation because "true Republicans and friends of Liberty would recognize in him a Scion of a tree whose fruits and leaves have alike contributed to the strength and healing of our generation." Frank and Sarah were overjoyed, of course, and Shaw hurriedly made arrangements to carry Andrew's letter to Stafford Court House, Virginia, where the Second Massachusetts was stationed in winter quarters. He wrote Andrew, "the only fear I have is in regard to his opinion of his own competency. In all other points I know he is right and true."  

Shaw arrived in camp on February 3 and showed Rob Andrew's offer. He had judged his son correctly in his estimation.

36 Memorial: RGS (Cambridge, 1864), 2.
37 Memorial: RGS, 3; Pearson, John A. Andrew, 75.
38 Peter Burchard, One Gallant Rush: Robert Gould Shaw and his Brave Black Regiment (New York, 1965), 72.
letter to the Governor; Rob read the offer, and after a short pause, looked up at his father and said, "I would take it, if I thought myself equal to the responsibility of such a position." The magnitude of the decision was such that Shaw felt hesitant to press the matter; his son must judge by his own conscience and reach his own conclusions. He did encourage Rob to seek the advice of his fellow officers, who might ease any fears about his competency.

That evening, Rob indicated to his father that he would accept the appointment, but by the next morning he had changed his mind. Shaw soon left the camp, carrying his son's carefully worded letter of refusal. The issue still preyed on Rob's mind, however, and he unburdened himself to his fiancée. "If I had taken it, it would only have been from a sense of duty," Rob told Annie, "for it would have been anything but an agreeable task....I am afraid Mother will think I am shirking my duty; but I had some good practical reasons for it, besides the desire to be at liberty to decide what to do when my three years have expired." Much of Rob's hesitation stemmed from his love for the Second Massachusetts and his deep companionship with

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40 RGS to Annie Haggerty, February 4, 1863, DUNCAN, 283.
the other officers. Rob already had rejected commissions elsewhere, based on the difficulty of leaving friends who had seen him through so much.

From Washington, Shaw telegraphed Sarah of Rob's decision with the short statement, "Rob declines. I think rightly." Sarah, pierced to the heart, suffered the most bitter disappointment of her life. In an emotional state, she immediately poured out her dissatisfaction in a letter to Andrew. Rob was all that Andrew had thought, he did have the family's support, and this should have been the proudest moment of Sarah's life. "I do not understand it unless from a habit inherited from his Father, of self-distrust in his own capabilities," she lamented. This was the only moment in her life that Sarah publicly lashed out against her husband. She must have regretted it later that day when Shaw returned home. Quick on his heels was a telegram from Rob, "Please telegraph to Governor Andrew that I accept." Sarah's joy was tenfold what her despair had been. She wept over an entirely different type of letter, addressed to her son: "God rewards a hundred-fold every good aspiration of his children, and this is my reward for asking for my children not earthly honors, but souls to see the right and

41 Pearson, John A. Andrew, 77.
42 Memorial: RGS, 5.
courage to follow it. Now I feel ready to die, for I see you willing to give your support to the cause of truth that is lying crushed and bleeding."\(^{43}\)

Rob regretted his first decision almost as soon as Shaw left him. Once he had reversed himself, he felt "convinced I shall never regret having taken this step, as far as I myself am concerned; for while I was undecided I felt ashamed of myself, as if I were cowardly."\(^{44}\) Rob's sense of duty overcame his fears and doubts: "I have not wavered at all, since my final decision. I feel that if we can get the men, all will go right."\(^{45}\)

With the commanding officer in place, getting the men was now the task at hand. Andrew appointed a committee, composed of wealthy and influential men, to supervise recruiting. George L. Stearns, Amos A. Lawrence, and John Murray Forbes, a close friend and cousin of the Shaws, headed the "Black Committee" in Massachusetts; Shaw supervised the efforts in New York. It quickly became clear that there were not enough men in Massachusetts to fill the regiment, so Stearns sent agents to scour New York and the Midwest. The wealthy benefactors of the 54th saturated the

\(^{43}\) Burchard, *One Gallant Rush*, 74.

\(^{44}\) RGS to Annie Haggerty, February 8, 1863, DUNCAN, 286.

\(^{45}\) RGS to FGS, February 8, 1863, DUNCAN, 287.
newspapers with advertisements and personally contributed thousands of dollars; Shaw paid $500 to the subscription campaign and raised over $2500 in New York. The Committee engaged several prominent African Americans to help with recruitment, including Frederick Douglass, whose two sons enlisted, and William Wells Brown, who worked with Shaw out of New York City. The Committee was so successful it eventually filled the 54th, the 55th Massachusetts, the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, and was credited with 3,967 African-Americans serving in other regiments.46

Rob moved to Boston that February as recruits began trickling in. Sarah beamed over the prominent position that Rob occupied, but Shaw tried to be more circumspect. He wrote to Emerson, "It must necessarily be that greater prominence be given to individuals, to some than to others, when all are equally worthy, but I sometimes feel as if injustice were committed against his fellows, when our boy is brought so vividly into relief. Probably there is hardly

46 Subscription Paper for the 54th Reg. Mass, February 13, 1863, Amos A. Lawrence Papers, MHS; RGS to FGS, February 24, 1863, DUNCAN, 298; Luis F. Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment: History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865 (New York, 1894), 11; Pearson, John A. Andrew, 82.
a man among all those who saw as he did, but would also have acted as he did."47

From the training camp at Readville, Rob updated his parents and friends regularly on his progress. A competent officer, he fulfilled Andrew's expectations in his organization and training of the regiment. He knew what he intended to do in at least one respect -- form one of the best disciplined regiments in the army. In the early days of the war, Rob blamed the Union's defeats on a lack of discipline within the volunteer units. Discipline was especially important for the 54th, which in Rob's mind had to be above criticism. "One trouble, which I anticipated, has begun," he wrote Sarah. "Complaints from outsiders of undue severity. But I shall continue to do, what I know is right in that particular, and you may be perfectly certain, that any reports of cruelty, are entirely untrue."48

Rob would do his utmost to make the 54th succeed, but he still lacked his parents' moral vision; he still viewed black troops mainly as a tool to defeat the South. As Congress considered the nation's first draft, he told Sarah, "the passage of the conscription act makes the raising of

47 FGS to Ralph Waldo Emerson, February 16, 1863, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1280(2898), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

48 RGS to SBS, March 25, 1863, DUNCAN, 313.

161
coloured troops less important, I think." Rob had misgivings about the success of black troops and entertained doubts about their courage. When writing about his men, he sometimes referred to them as "darkies" and "niggers." While selecting white officers for the 54th, Rob found great humor in his cousin's inquiries as to whether a candidate had "enough nigger to him" and "heels long eno' for this work."

Rob's camp at Readville was the object of great curiosity -- thousands visited the camp to see if blacks could really make soldiers. Rob had done his work well, for the appearance and behavior of the regiment impressed the gawking spectators. "They marched well, they wheeled well, they stood well, they handled their guns well, and there was about their whole array an air of completeness, and order, and morale, such as I have not seen surpassed in any white regiment," reported one observer. As Rob gradually began to respect the abilities of his troops, his attitude changed. He told Annie that his regiment was more soldierly than white volunteers "because it is so easy to control and

49 RGS to SBS, February 20, 1863, DUNCAN, 290.
50 RGS to FGS, February 25, 1863, DUNCAN, 300; RGS to Charles Fessenden Morse, March 4, 1863, DUNCAN, 305.
51 RGS to SBS, February 20, 1863, DUNCAN, 290.
52 Memorial: RGS, 18-20.
discipline them...Their barracks are in better order, and more cleanly, than the quarters of any volunteer regiment I have seen in this country." To his mother, Rob wrote, "Everything goes on prosperously. The intelligence of the men is a great surprise to me. They learn all the details of guard duty and camp service infinitely more readily than the Irish I have had under my command. There is not the least doubt, that we shall leave the state, with as good a regiment, as any that has marched." By this time Rob had dropped the use of the term "niggers" from his letters.

Frank and Sarah proudly watched the progress of the 54th and felt confident that their predictions had been correct. Black men would fight bravely and in doing so would win a share in the rewards of victory. Their happiness in the spring of 1863 was greater than it had been for some time, for in addition to the rapid progress of the 54th, Josephine was engaged to a rising young man with great promise, Colonel Charles Russell Lowell. Lowell, the nephew of poet James Russell Lowell, was from an elite Massachusetts family, but his father had lost his fortune and so Charles had been raised in genteel poverty. His brilliance overshadowed his misfortunes, however, and now in

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53 RGS to Annie Haggerty, March 14, 1863, DUNCAN, 308.
54 RGS to SBS, March 25, 1863, DUNCAN, 313.
the third spring of the Civil War he was the Colonel of the
Second Massachusetts Cavalry, in training at Readville.
There he and Josephine became engaged, much to the delight
of Rob and the rest of the family.\textsuperscript{55} Proud of her
prospective son-in-law and anticipating the birth of two
more grandchildren, Sarah wrote James Russell Lowell, "We
are the luckiest and most blessed of all sinners -- I look
with wonder every day at our undeserved blessings."\textsuperscript{56}

Sarah's upbeat moods, as always, depended on her
perception of the moral state of the nation. All continued
well into May. The use of black troops was now a committed
administration policy -- Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas
was in the Mississippi Valley organizing regiments under the
orders of Stanton. The first effort initiated by the War
Department, it signalled that the government intended to
employ black troops on a large scale. After the War
Department established the Bureau for Colored Troops on May
22, black units were mustered directly into the federal
service.\textsuperscript{57}

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\textsuperscript{55} Edward W. Emerson, \textit{Life and Letters of Charles
Russell Lowell} (Cambridge, 1907), 4-63; RGS to Charles
Fessenden Morse, March 12, 1863, DUNCAN, 306.
\textsuperscript{56} SBS to James Russell Lowell, March 19, 1863, James
Russell Lowell Papers, MHS.
\textsuperscript{57} Cornish, \textit{Sable Arm}, 111-114, 130-131.
\end{flushright}

164
The raising of black troops was only part of the equation, however, since the experiment required that African Americans prove their manhood in the test of battle. Friends of the 54th were anxious to see the regiment placed alongside white troops in major campaigns. The opportunity came in May, when David Hunter, Commander of the Department of the South, requested that the 54th report to him at Hilton Head, South Carolina. Shaw hurried to Readville on the 18th for Governor Andrew's presentation of regimental colors to the 54th. A vast crowd of abolitionists, two thousand members of Boston's black community, and a host of others gathered around the men of the 54th as they stood at attention before the speaker's platform. Shaw, standing near the soldiers he had helped recruit, listened to Governor Andrew express the thoughts that were so near his own. The men of the 54th would strike the "last blow" and "rend the last shackles which bind the limbs of the bondsman in the rebel states."\(^58\) Rob, as uncomfortable with public speaking as his father, responded with a short statement: "May we have an opportunity to show that you have not made a mistake in intrusting the honour of the State to a coloured regiment."\(^59\)

\(^{58}\) Memorial: RGS, 11-12.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 15.
Sarah and her daughters, now including Annie Haggerty, whom Rob had married early in May, joined Shaw in Boston for the regiment's departure on the 28th. The women stood out on the balcony of 44 Beacon Street and waited for the regiment to pass, while Shaw, as a member of the Black Committee, took his place on Boston Common with the other dignitaries who would review the 54th. Robert led his men through the winding streets of Boston, which were thronged with spectators and draped with the national colors, as the band played John Brown's hymn. Thousands of people, cheering and waving flags and handkerchiefs, filled the streets, doors, and windows, to get a glimpse of the thousand African Americans carrying Enfield muskets. Emotions ran high in the largest crowd in the city's history. William Lloyd Garrison wept as he stood on Wendell Phillips' balcony, his hand resting on a bust of John Brown. A reporter for the Tribune lost his composure as the 54th crossed the ground where Federal Marshals had once led fugitive slaves back to the South: "History may be searched in vain for a contrast or a retribution, of which the poetic and religious justice is parallel to this."  

As the regiment passed by 44 Beacon Street, Rob raised his sword, kissed it, and glanced momentarily at his family.

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60 Memorial: RGS, 24-26; Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment, 31-33; Burchard, One Gallant Rush, 93.
His sister Ellen, not yet eighteen, thought "his face was as the face of an angel and I felt perfectly sure he would never come back."61 Sarah too had a moment of foreboding, but it was mingled with triumph. She wrote Cairnes that the 54th "conquered all prejudice by their manly soldierly bearing." And as for her son, "if I never see him again, I shall feel that he has not lived in vain."62 The praise for the 54th after its march was Sarah's compensation for her anxiety over Rob's fate, for generally, Bostonians acknowledged that it was as "fine and well drilled a regiment as had ever left the city."63

Rob and his men were headed for Port Royal, where Saxton operated plantations and Freedmen's Aid societies conducted the schools. The experiment had gained an interesting dimension in the spring of 1863, when Saxton and other friends of the freedmen were battling to keep the government from assessing the abandoned plantations for delinquent taxes and selling them at auction. Hunter, Saxton, and the Freedmen's Aid officials recognized that there would be no guarantee of the freedmen's security with the lands in private hands. In February, Hunter halted the

61 Burchard, One Gallant Rush, 93-94.
62 SBS to JEC, June 4, 1863, NLI-MC.

167
sales on the basis of military necessity, in order to give the project's advocates time to lobby Washington. After radicals in Congress reserved some of the land for government use and charitable purposes, the first land sale proceeded in March, with 60,926 of the 76,775 acres set apart for the government. A group of African Americans, acting cooperatively, purchased 2,000 acres, and Edward Philbrick, a Boston member of Gideon's Band, bought 8,000 acres for a joint-stock company he had formed. Philbrick was devoted to proving the superiority of wage labor over slave labor and had little sympathy for the land-owning aspirations of the islands' blacks. Land on the Sea Islands was now a conglomerate of private ownership, communal farms, and government-run plantations. Nearly all the plantations in the area operated on the system of allotting land to separate families and paying wages according to a daily task requirement.  

The tax sales brought the different goals of the Freedmen's Aid supporters into sharp relief. Outside of the Boston group, there was little emphasis on the free labor thesis. More than ever, to the New Yorkers, the need for the freedmen to become freeholders was apparent. Shaw used his influence as he could, circulating among his wealthy

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friends appeals to settle the freedmen on their own land. The government still controlled thousands of acres in South Carolina, and with Saxton and Hunter there as advocates, Shaw had reason to hope that most of it would end up in the freedmen's possession.

Shaw had his hands full with NFRA fundraising on behalf of its educational programs and relief efforts. He sent agents across New York and New England seeking donations. Appeals for aid generally focused on the pressing crisis of feeding and clothing the destitute freedmen thronging into Union lines in the months after the Emancipation Proclamation. As much as the NFRA wanted to intensify its educational outreach, the emergency needs of the freedmen were simply too great. "The proclamation of freedom frees, as rapidly as they can reach our lines, more than three millions," the association announced. "They are coming in. Those who suppose the proclamation inoperative, entirely misapprehend the matter."

The NFRA collected and disbursed clothing free, or sold it at low rates in the

65 FGS to John Jay, July 2, 1863, Jay Family Collections, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

66 FGS to Edward Atkinson, May 19, 1863, Edward A. Atkinson Papers, MHS.

67 National Freedmen's Relief Association (NFRA), Monthly Paper for May, 1863, Anti-Slavery Collection, Cornell University.
places where the freedmen had work, reinvesting the proceeds towards the relief efforts. It also provided the government with agricultural implements such as hoes and cotton seed. The NFRA’s education programs were not neglected, however, and they sustained forty-six teachers, six of them African-Americans, in Port Royal and Beaufort, South Carolina, and Fernandina and Saint Augustine, Florida.⁶⁸

Northerners in the 1860's were not fond of the word charity. In order to keep the funds flowing for outright relief, the NFRA did all it could to make the public aware of the unusual hardships the war brought on the freedmen. Shaw also sought to publicize the miseries of slavery as a way of generating sympathy and loosening the public's pocketbook. He contacted Fanny Kemble, as he had promised to do in Italy, about publishing an American edition of her *Journal of the Residence in a Georgian Plantation in 1838–39*. After Kemble authorized Shaw to take out a copyright on the work, he sold the rights to Harper Brothers, who issued the book in July.⁶⁹

Rob sent his own accounts of how the work progressed in South Carolina, since the 54th was stationed on St. Helena's

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Frances Kemble to FGS, May 1863, and Copyright transfer, FGS, June 8, 1863, Harper Brothers Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.
Island. He visited several plantations, including the former home of Fanny Kemble. "To-day I have been watching and talking with a good many of the negroes about here. Whatever their habits of life may be, they certainly are not bad or vicious," he wrote Annie. "They are perfectly childlike, it seems to me, and are no more responsible for their actions than so many puppies." Rob often took tea on a plantation where some of the teachers lived and in this way struck up a short but close friendship with Charlotte Forten, a young African-American from Philadelphia. Rob was quite taken with her, as she was with him, and he invited her to visit the family when the war was over. Forten took Rob to a praise-meeting, where this leader of black troops had his only contact with African-American slave culture.

Perhaps for the first time Rob began to understand his parents' zeal for anti-slavery. On Independence Day he rode to a great meeting of freedmen held at a Baptist church a few miles from his camp. "Can you imagine anything more wonderful than a coloured-Abolitionist meeting on a South Carolina plantation?" he wrote his mother. "Two years ago, their masters were still here, the lords of the soil & of them. Now they all own a little themselves, go to school,

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70 RGS to Annie Haggerty Shaw, June 27, DUNCAN, 360.
71 RGS to SBS, July 3, 1863, DUNCAN, 372.
to church, and work for wages. It is the most extraordinary change. Such things oblige a man to believe that God isn't very far off." As the crowd sang celebration hymns, Rob appreciated in a tangible way the meaning of his parents' struggle against the monster. "I would have given anything to have had you there. I thought of you all the time," he told Sarah. Forten promised Rob that she would write out the lyrics to the hymns for his mother. 72

Rob and the Shaws were getting anxious for the 54th to prove its courage and skill in battle. The regiment's first action in the South had been a disaster from Rob's point of view; in early June they had joined James Montgomery's Second South Carolina in a raid on Darien, Georgia. Although they met with no resistance from the civilians there, Montgomery had ordered the troops to burn the town. Rob found the action disgraceful and the ensuing negative publicity damaged the reputation of the 54th. He had moments of self-doubt after the incident and wrote his mother, "I am placed in a position where, if I were a man of real strength and ability, I might do a great deal, but where, under present circumstances, I am afraid I shall show that I am not of much account." 73 Adding to the frustration

72 RGS to SBS, July 5, 1863, DUNCAN, 373.
73 RGS to SBS, June 18, 1863, DUNCAN, 353.
was news that the government, despite promises Andrew and the Black Committee had made of equal pay, would give the 54th ten dollars a month instead of the thirteen that white volunteers received. Furious, Rob wrote Governor Andrew that the men should be mustered out or given full pay.⁷⁴ Although it caused their families great hardship, the men of the 54th refused to submit to this injustice and would not accept any paycheck less than thirteen dollars a month.

In early July, Rob wrote to General Strong asking for the regiment to be placed under his brigade. "I want to get my men alongside of white troops, and into a good fight if there is to be one," he told Sarah. "Working independently, the coloured troops come only under the eyes of their own officers and to have their worth properly acknowledged, they should be with other troops in action."⁷⁵ General Quincy A. Gillmore, who replaced Hunter as Commander of the Department of the South, thought he had use for the 54th in his grand scheme to conquer Charleston by capturing its protecting forts and batteries. He ordered the 54th to James Island as part of a diversion from an assault on Morris Island's Fort Wagner.

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⁷⁴ Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment, 47.
⁷⁵ RGS to SBS, July 3, 1863, DUNCAN, 374.
The 54th was on picket duty beside white soldiers when a Confederate force attacked on the morning of July 16. The 54th retreated in good order, holding ground for the other units to rally and repulse the attack. A Captain of the 54th recalled, "the dark line stood staunch, holding the front at the most vital point. Not a man was out of place." Rob was ecstatic at his men's performance, and wrote his wife, "We have at last fought alongside white troops...The Tenth Connecticut were on their left, and say they should have had a bad time, if the Fifty-fourth men had not stood so well." General Terry sent word he was highly gratified and Rob reported that "the officers and privates of other regiments praise us very much." 77

Word of the 54th's triumph was much needed news for Frank and Sarah; the Shaws had just survived personal danger during the New York City draft riots, a brutal reminder that racism and anti-war sentiments ran deep in the nation's vital city. At first a working class response to the start of the draft, which opponents claimed favored the rich, the violence soon turned into a chaotic melee that destroyed businesses and homes all over the city. In the center of an era of politicized social conflict, the draft

76 Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment, 61-61.
77 RGS to Annie Haggerty Shaw, July 15, 1863, DUNCAN, 385.
riots reflected basic fissures in New York City, both within and between classes, as the metropolis struggled with the vast changes of the mid-nineteenth century and an expanding individualistic society.78

The mobs, perceiving African Americans as unwanted competition for low wage jobs, targeted black men, women, and children for brutal assaults and lynchings. In some ways the riot was a backlash against the increased public acceptance of abolition during the war. Rioters attacked abolitionists and any other whites suspected of harboring friendly feelings toward the black race. On Staten Island, rumors flew that a mob was coming to burn out all the "Black Republicans" on the island. Curtis took Anna and their two children to Boston, while Shaw, arming his gardener and coachman, as well as himself, prepared to defend his house and family. The Shaws were not disturbed, but in those days of terror, they could hear the sounds of the mob as it wrecked havoc on the homes and lives of black families living in New Brighton.79 Afterward Shaw wrote Edward

78 Iver Bernstein, The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War (New York, 1990), 259-264; Ernest A. McKay, The Civil War and New York City (Syracuse, 1990), 195-205.

79 Charles Gilbert Hine and William T. Davis, Legends, Stories and Folklore of Old Staten Island (New York, 1925), 70-76.
Pierce, "The riots here and the hatred manifested towards the poor negroes show that we need still more suffering and purging."  

The Shaws may have feared the mob not only because of their abolitionist activity but also because of Shaw's membership in the Union League Club of New York, a nationalist organization that was an offshoot of the United States Sanitary Commission. Composed of patrician merchants who could trace their metropolitan roots back to the 1820's, members of the learned professions, and intellectuals recently arrived in New York, the club opposed New York's conservative elite who were generally pro-southern and supported localism and the Democratic party. Its several hundred members included George William Curtis, Sydney Howard Gay, Robert Minturn, Jr., George Bancroft, John Jay, George Cabot Ward, and members of the Van Rensselaer family. These men wanted conscription enforced at all costs. Viewing blacks as patriotic in contradistinction to working class immigrants, the club started a subscription campaign to aid African-American families injured in the riots and

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80 FGS to Edward Lillie Pierce, July 18, 1863, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1495(159-165), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.
moved forward on a plan to recruit a black regiment for the city.  

As New York City lay smoldering from its own battle, the shells of Union gunboats pounded Morris Island in preparation for another assault on Fort Wagner. Just a few hours after their battle of the 16th, the 54th withdrew from James Island and made a rain-soaked march across the mud flats of Cole Island to a waiting transport that took them to Morris Island. There, the exhausted, famished men waited on the beach while Rob reported to General Strong's headquarters. Strong's brigade would lead the assault on Wagner, which Gillmore assumed the Union bombardment had crushed. Strong asked Rob if the 54th would like to lead the charge on Battery Wagner. Rob leaped at the opportunity; this was the test that white supporters of the 54th longed for, and Rob knew what he had to do.

That afternoon, the 54th moved to the front, past thirteen white regiments, many of them cheering the men they had fought with on James Island. As the regiment moved into position, Rob calmly walked up and down the line: "his manner, generally reserved before his men, seemed to unbend to them, for he spoke as he had never done before. He said,  

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'Now I want you to prove yourselves men,' and reminded them that the eyes of thousands would look upon the night's work."\(^82\) Rob's mouth slightly quivered as he spoke, and as the formation was nearly complete, he said, "We shall take the fort or die there."\(^83\) As it neared dusk, time for the assault, General Strong, addressing the men, called the color bearer to step forward. "If this man should fall, who will lift the flag and carry it on?," he asked. Rob said quietly, "I will." The men loudly cheered as Strong rode away to give the signal for advancing.\(^84\) When the signal came at 7:45, Rob led, sword in hand, as the 54th moved at the quick step through the narrow straight leading to Battery Wagner. At that moment, "Wagner became a mound of fire, from which poured a stream of shot and shell."\(^85\) The bombardment had barely affected the fort. The Confederates inside, knowing what was coming, blasted the approaching regiment with cannon and musketry. The 54th was devastated, but they did not stop; the "only response the Fifty-fourth made to the

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\(^{82}\) Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment, 78; Duncan, Blue-Eyed Child, 51-52.

\(^{83}\) Memorial: RGS, 95; Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment, 77.

\(^{84}\) Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment, 77.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 79-80.
deadly challenge was to change step to the double-quick, that it might sooner close with the foe." The men charged on, with bowed heads, Rob at the front. In the flashes of light made by the bursting artillery, the men saw Rob gain the rampart, where "he stood there for a moment with uplifted sword, shouting, 'Forward, Fifty-fourth!' and then fell dead." 86

A correspondent for *Harper's Weekly* described the scene: "In the midst of this terrible shower of shot and shell they pushed their way, reached the fort, portions of the 54th Massachusetts, the 6th Connecticut, and the 48th New York, dashed through the ditches, gained the parapet, and engaged in a hand-to-hand fight with the enemy, and for nearly half an hour held their ground, and did not fall back until nearly every commissioned officer was dead." 87 The badly conceived assault had failed; the Union forces withdrew to begin a siege of Wagner. In the morning hours the toll on the 54th was a grim reality -- out of 600 men the regiment lost 256 casualties and fourteen of its officers. 88

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Although many had seen Rob fall into the fort, his death was not official. The 54th's surgeon, Dr. Lincoln Stone, a personal friend of the family, wrote Frank and Sarah, "I cannot tell you the sadness I feel at having to write you that your son is missing, - certainly a prisoner, wounded, - perhaps dead in the hands of the enemy."

Over the next few days the family received news that Rob was indeed buried in the fort and that his body could not be recovered. Although commanding Confederate General Johnson Hagood returned other officers' bodies, Rob was not among them. Soon the full story emerged: Rob's body had been stripped and robbed, and Hagood had told a captured Union surgeon, "Had he been in command of white troops, I should have given him an honorable burial; as it is, I shall bury him in the common trench with the negroes that fell with him."

Horrified by this blatant disrespect for the body of a Union officer, Stone and Edward Pierce wrote Shaw that they would make an effort to find Rob's burial site and recover the body. Shrinking from this thought, Shaw asked the men to stop any such efforts. "We would not have his body removed from where it lies surrounded by his brave and

89 Memorial: RGS, 52.

devoted soldiers," he wrote them. "We can imagine no holier place than that in which he lies, among his brave and devoted followers, nor wish for him better company --- what a body-guard he has!"

Despite the Shaws' stated wishes, when the Confederates abandoned Fort Wagner, Shaw received word that again efforts were underway to recover Rob's body. This time he wrote the Commander of the Department of the South, General Gillmore, that "such efforts are not authorized by me, or any of my family, and they are not approved by us. We hold that a soldier's most appropriate burial-place is on the field where he has fallen." Respecting Shaw's request, Gillmore ceased all attempts to disturb Rob's grave.

In the next few months, the correspondence between Shaw and Gillmore became public and was widely reprinted in northern newspapers, along with statements that Confederate General Hagood had said he would bury Rob "with his niggers." Shaw's action generated sympathy for the 54th and for black troops even beyond what their bravery at Wagner

91 FGS to Lincoln Stone, August 3, 1863, HL, shelf mark MS Am 1573, by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

92 FGS to Edward Lillie Pierce, July 31, 1863, HL, shelf mark bMS Am 1495(159-165), by permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

93 The Liberator, October 9, 1863; National Anti-Slavery Standard, October 3, 1863.
achieved; his letters became part of Civil War legend. The New York World, not a sympathetic proponent of black troops, editorialized that "there can be no two opinions as to the high and magnanimous temper with which the father of Col. Shaw accepts what was intended as an insult to his dead son, as an honor not lightly to be tampered with. The brutality which sought to wreak its vengeance on the senseless clay of what had been a fearless foe, could not be more nobly chastised than it is by this lofty and loving pride."\(^94\)

Shaw also received praise for his comments regarding a Robert Gould Shaw Memorial in South Carolina. Immediately after Wagner, privates in the 54th and the freedpeople around Charleston, in conjunction with Military Governor Rufus Saxton, collected over $2,832 for a monument on Morris Island. Shaw wrote Saxton, and in his straightforward way, requested that the men of the 54th share the honors: "It seems to me that the monument, though originated for my son, ought to bear, with his, the names of his brave officers and men, who fell and were buried with him. This would be but simple justice."\(^95\) He also suggested that the monument bear the motto of the Society of the Cincinnati -- "He forsook all to preserve the public weal," a simple statement of the

\(^{94}\) Ibid.

\(^{95}\) Memorial: RGS, 178.
philosophy that Shaw had tried to instill in all his children.\textsuperscript{96} The project was later abandoned because there was no confidence that the monument would be respected when Union forces withdrew. The money was used instead to establish the Shaw School, a free school for black children in Charleston, a use that the Shaws considered the best tribute to their son.\textsuperscript{97}

The Shaws' tragedy, and their subsequent response to Rob's burial, created a reverence for them among the general public that swayed opinion in favor of black regiments and abated prejudice among some. Many who had viewed the conflict as a white man's war, came to accept the Civil War as a struggle for black freedom. A few months after Rob's death Sarah wrote Cairnes, "the moral progress of the cause is more wonderful than the military. The change of feeling about the colour'd race seems nothing short of miraculous."\textsuperscript{98} The Shaws played a major role in shaping this change. After Rob's death they sought to publicize their version of the events at Wagner. They were well placed to do this, for their friendship with the literary elite of both America and England ensured that the essays,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{97} Emilio, A Brave Black Regiment, 229.
\textsuperscript{98} SBS to JEC, January 30, 1864, NLI-MC.
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poems, and newspaper articles about Wagner reflected the Shaws' opinion.

Frank and Sarah received hundreds of letters from common people who had never met them, yet were intensely moved by their son's death. Interest in Robert and the men of the 54th was high -- Harriet Martineau wrote the Shaws that people in Europe were more interested in him than in any other feature of the war. The fact that Rob and the 54th resonated with the public in this way created an opportunity to spread the abolitionist message. Frank and Sarah, even in the midst of their extreme grief, took up the work. Sarah published three pieces that memorialized her son's life: Letters: RGS, Memorial: RGS, and "Robert Gould Shaw," an essay for Harvard Memorial Biographies.

In these works, and in Shaw's letters and efforts on behalf of the 54th after Rob's death, the Shaws imbued the events at Wagner -- the charge, their son's death, and his burial with his men -- with symbolic meaning. The charge demonstrated that blacks had proved their equality on the battlefield; Rob's death was a sacrifice for the black man that proved northern whites righteous enough for victory; and the burial was a physical manifestation of the eternal

99 Memorial: RGS, 184.

184
brotherhood between blacks and whites that had to be realized on earth.

The Shaws were first concerned with making sure that the men of the 54th and the other black regiments gained the respect they deserved and were recognized as equal to white troops. In all three of her works on Rob, his mother excised his overtly prejudicial remarks and included only those excerpts from his letters that praised black troops and expressed utter confidence in their abilities. Although Sarah was partly motivated by a desire to present her son in the best light, and to see him as the abolitionist she always pretended he was, she also wanted to prove the abilities of black soldiers. Memorial: RGS included newspaper articles, letters, and stories about the privates of the 54th that presented them as the equal, if not the superior, of the average white regiment. Sarah devoted several pages to the 54th's flag bearer who never let the flag touch the ground. The following excerpt from the Atlantic Monthly is typical of the articles she included: "through the cannon-smoke of that black night, the manhood of the coloured race shines before many eyes that would not see, rings in many ears that would not hear, wins many hearts that would not hitherto believe."100

100 Ibid., 107.
Within two months, black troops had proved their courage and ability to fight in three separate actions: Port Hudson on May 27, Milliken's Bend on June 7, and Fort Wagner on July 18. But it was Wagner that changed northern minds and won the public's approval.\textsuperscript{101} By the end of July, more than 30 black regiments were organized. While they and the units to follow would face discrimination from the government, racism from other units, and ongoing debates about their abilities, Wagner had wiped out all question about the utility of black troops.

The battle to give African Americans a place in the army was won, but not so the quest for justice. Over the next year, Shaw worked hard to ensure that all black regiments received equal treatment to those of whites. His immediate concern just after Wagner was a Confederate order of May which stated that all blacks captured in Union uniform would be sold into slavery or executed and that captured white officers of black troops would be executed.\textsuperscript{102} Immediately after Wagner, with men and officers of the 54th held prisoner in Charleston, Shaw wrote Lincoln a strongly worded letter demanding that the government respond to the Confederate policy. When Lincoln issued an order for

\textsuperscript{101} Cornish, \textit{Sable Arm}, 142-156.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 163.
retaliation on July 30, Charles Russell Lowell wrote
Josephine, "It is a satisfaction to think that the
President's order is the result of your father's letter, --
one immediate good out of Rob's death and the splendid
conduct of this regiment."**103**

Shaw also lobbied the President and other members of
Congress to equalize the pay of black regiments and visited
Washington to push action on that matter in February,
1864.**104** At the end of April, Congress passed a bill to
grant equal pay to black soldiers, although it was
retroactive to the beginning of the war only for those
soldiers who were free men as of April 19, 1861.**105**

**Memorial:** RGS praised the act that "recognized the absolute
equality of all soldiers." Lauding the men of the 54th for
refusing pay until they received justice, Sarah paid tribute
to the valor and distinguished conduct that had finally won
"the full recognition of the equality of coloured soldiers,

**103** Emerson, *Charles Russell Lowell*, 289.

**104** FGS to Lincoln Stone, January 25, 1864, HL, shelf
mark MS Am 1573, by permission of the Houghton Library,
Harvard University.

**105** Cornish, *Sable Arm*, 192-195. Not until March 1865
did Congress make provision for full payment for all black
soldiers from the date of their original enlistment. Not
until the war was over did black soldiers recruited in the
South before January 1, 1864 draw their arrears in pay.
and the diminution, if not the ultimate destruction, of the monstrous and unfounded prejudice against their race." 

Besides their efforts to promote black equality through shaping the public perception of the 54th, Frank and Sarah wanted to redefine the meaning of the war for the white soldiers fighting it. In this they were more successful than in their efforts to promote black equality. Rob became the symbol of the elite, privileged white officer who sacrificed his life for the freedom of African Americans, and who in doing so, proved the righteousness of the northern cause and redeemed the country of its sins. Shaw expressed this symbolism in a letter to Garrison: "we do thank God that our darling was permitted to do what he did & that he was chosen, among so many equals, to be the martyred hero of the down trodden of our land." 

The theme that Rob died for the black race and not his own resonated in the essays and poems that the Shaws' friends produced in the year following Wagner, including the oft quoted Emerson's "Voluntaries" and Lowell's "Memoriae 

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106 Memorial: RGS, 195.

Positum R.G.S." The Shaws' relations thought of Rob "as the type of the Anglo-Saxon race, offering itself in sacrifice for the African." Rob's death was extolled as an example of the sacrificial spirit that guaranteed northern victory. Elizabeth Gaskell, the popular English author to whom Sarah had been expressing her version of the war since 1861, wrote an article for the British press that identified Rob as the archetypical northerner who gave up a life of luxury to die for the black man. Countless poems were created in the months after Rob's death. The Shaws personally knew almost all of these authors, who were clearly influenced by Frank and Sarah's feelings. Even where the writers did not know the Shaws, they drew on the meaning that the Shaws assigned to the event. Sarah collected some of these poems in Memorial: RGS, but significantly, they had been printed in such popular magazines as Harper's Weekly, the New York Tribune, the Christian Inquirer, the Evening Post, the Northern Christian Advocate, and the Atlantic Monthly.

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108 For an analysis of these "great" poems on Shaw, see Stephen Axelrod, "Colonel Shaw in American Poetry: 'For the Union Dead' and Its Precursors," American Quarterly 24 (October 1972): 523-537.

109 Memorial: RGS, 141.

The theme of Rob's sacrifice, which permeated these poems, appeared most prominently in a stanza from "The Martyr of Freedom:"

Fair in his manhood, an offering he made;  
Youthful ambition and talent so high,  
All on his country's red altar he laid,  
Battling for freedom, for freedom to die.111

The most widespread symbolism attached to Wagner emanated from Rob's burial and Shaw's response to it. This scenario blended nicely with the romantic poetry of the time and lent itself well to dramatic imagery. Bearing titles like "Buried with His Niggers!," "One Grave," "Together," "Colonel Shaw: On Hearing that the Rebels Had Buried His Body in a Trench, Under a Pile of Twenty-Five Negroes," these poems portrayed Rob and his men as co-martyred brothers:

"They buried him with his niggers!"  
Beside the throne they stand  
Side by side, as they lie there,  
In heaven, that deathless band.  
Brothers in death and glory  
The same palm-branches bear,  
And the crown is as bright o'er the sable brows  
As over the golden hair.112

Shaw's simple phrase that he imagined no holier resting place for his son than among that noble body guard, was recast time and again in these poems:

111 Memorial: RGS, 123.
112 Ibid., 76.
There rises o'er the sleeping Hero's head
A glorious monument of noble dead.
The bones of those black soldiers, who with him
Charged into Death, and met it, calm and grim,
Lie silent there above him, and the bones
More honour give than sculptor's graven stones.
Let marble rise there, also; but the dead
Form still a nobler pile above his head.\footnote{Ibid., 113.}

These images were possible partly because Sarah and
Frank painted their son as an idealized picture that did not
match perfectly with the real man. This is not to undermine
Rob's deserved place among the heroes of the Civil War: he
took on a precarious position that opened him to ridicule,
he had a strong sense of duty and displayed remarkable
courage at Wagner, he gave African Americans a chance, and
he was open to change through contact with them. But the
Shaws portrayed Rob as untainted by prejudice and credited
him with an abolitionist zeal he did not quite possess.
They created a myth, one that they believed in, which shaped
a generation's view of Robert Gould Shaw, the 54th
Massachusetts, and Fort Wagner. Rob's life and death did
assume the meaning that Frank and Sarah had hoped for it, if
not the one that Rob himself understood.
"Since Robert's death, Sarah Shaw writes very seldom, and her letters are intensely sad. I am afraid she will never, in this world, quite recover from the crushing blow," Lydia Maria Child told a friend. "A cold indifference to everything seems to have taken complete possession of her."¹ Frank and Sarah's work to memorialize Rob had its personal dimension as well as its public one; it helped ease somewhat the enormous weight of sorrow that Sarah and Frank carried in the years after Rob's death. Sarah confessed to Cairnes, "the cup of life for me is poisoned."² But everyday life, as it always does, soon intruded on their grief and called them back to the world of the living. On October 31, 1863, under the shadow of the Shaws' pain, Josephine and Charles Russell Lowell were married. The couple lived that winter in camp at Vienna, Virginia, where

¹ Lydia Maria Child (LMC) to Anna Loring Dresol, February 21, 1864, in Patricia G. Holland and Milton Meltzer, eds., The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, 1817–1880 (Millwood, NY, 1979), 58/1540.

² Sarah Blake Shaw (SBS) to John Elliot Cairnes (JEC), November 2, 1863, National Library of Ireland, Microfilm Copy in Author's Possession (hereafter NLI-MC).
Josephine spent her days reading to sick and wounded soldiers in the army hospital.  

Shaw found distraction in his work for the freedmen. Northern society -- partly because of the image of Rob's grave -- had accepted that blacks would be free, but few considered the great question of how millions of freed slaves could be integrated into American society. Shaw realized the importance of America's answer to that question. He would work toward a Reconstruction that demanded political and social equality for African Americans. His vision of social equality was rooted in his earlier communal vision of society. Ultimately, blacks should share in a more equitable division of wealth and participate fully in a community whose resources would be available to, and spread among, all its citizens. Shaw embraced two avenues, land and education, by which the resources of society could be redistributed to the masses of blacks. In his mind, these were the two things most needful for full participation in American society.

With two years of experience at Port Royal, Shaw knew that nothing could be accomplished for the freedmen without government intervention. As the new president of the

National Freedmen’s Relief Association (NFRA), Shaw's top priority was convincing Congress to create a government bureau to oversee freedmen's affairs. The American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, Lincoln's appointed task force, had already recommended this step, but the administration had not acted on the proposal. Shaw arranged with Lincoln for representatives from the various Freedmen's Aid societies in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati, to meet with him in late November. At this meeting, Shaw urged the President to consider the Commission’s plan; as a result, Lincoln sent Congress an appeal from the Freedmen's Aid societies that urged the creation of an emancipation agency armed with the full powers of government.⁴

Shaw had also used his friendship with Charles Sumner and other radical members of Congress to push action on that front, work that paid off in December, when Congressman T.D. Eliot of Massachusetts introduced a bill to establish a freedmen's agency. The bill stalled as the House wrangled over the question of whether the bureau should be placed

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⁴ Francis George Shaw (FGS) to James Miller McKim, November 28, 1863, Shaw Folder, Box 23, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell University; U.S. Congress, Senate. Message of the President of the United States Communicating a Letter Addressed to Him from a Committee of Gentlemen Representing the Freedmen's Aid Societies of Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati. 38th Congress, 1st Session. 1863. S. Exec Doc 1.
under the War Department or the Treasury. Shaw, one of the prominent lobbyists for the bill, spent much of the early winter of 1864 in Washington.⁵

As part of Shaw's efforts to enlarge the resources applied to freedmen's issues, he joined a movement to create a national Freedmen's Aid society that would encompass the local organizations in all parts of the country. On February 5 and 6, he attended the first meeting of the United States Commission for the Relief of the National Freedmen. Shaw was chosen president of the organization and James Miller McKim, the Philadelphia abolitionist, served as secretary.

The Commission's main objective was securing passage of the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and ensuring cooperation from the government to give efficiency to relief efforts. The Commission's first resolution bore the influence of Shaw's concern to get the freedmen true independence. In his quest for greater economic equality for African Americans, Shaw did not shy away from land redistribution — the Association had rejected private property in land as inherently unjust and as tending toward inequality. Now he expressed "earnest desire that measures be adopted to give the slaves made free by the power of the government, a legal and quiet possession

of adequate land for their residence and support, as rapidly and as early as the responsibilities of the Government shall render possible."\(^6\)

The resolution indirectly referred to events in Port Royal, where land belonging to the government was scheduled for sale. The administration's September, 1863, instructions reserved alternate plots within specific plantations for the freedmen at a preferred rate of $1.25 an acre. This was not enough for Shaw and other radicals in Freedmen's Aid, who felt that African Americans were entitled to all the land. Rufus Saxton, the Military Governor, tried to usurp the tax commission's orders and began telling freedmen that they were entitled to pre-emptive rights on the land they lived and worked on. Mansfield French, the NFRA's leading missionary in South Carolina, went to Washington, lobbied hard, and returned in late December with new instructions opening all the land to pre-emption at $1.25 an acre. Saxton instructed blacks to take up their lands, and during the month of January, freedmen swamped the tax commission office with pre-emptive claims. After an appeal from the tax commissioners, Chase reversed the December decision and ordered the sale to go forward. The freedmen could only apply for the limited

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\(^6\) *Freedman's Advocate* 1 (March 1864): 12.
amount of land. African Americans in South Carolina did not forget this betrayal; northern missionaries noticed a new level of discontent among blacks that was reflected in conflicts over wages and a desire to establish churches apart from whites.  

Noting the disastrous results of multiple jurisdiction over the freedmen, Shaw's main objective in his meetings with Senators and Congressmen in the spring of 1864 was to facilitate the transfer of lands to freedmen by ensuring that the Bureau was given authority over both. Also important to him was that the bill include education as a key part of the Bureau's work. Impressed with his efforts, Sydney Howard Gay and Horace Greeley tendered Shaw's name as a possible candidate to head the agency. "Why not?" Gay asked Massachusetts Governor John Andrew. He asked Andrew to urge Shaw's nomination and announced his own intention of writing several men in Washington with the suggestion. There is no evidence that Shaw was ever considered for the


9 Sydney Howard Gay to John Andrew, February 14, 1864, Governor John A. Andrew Papers, MHS.
post, but it was a position he never would have accepted were it offered.

Shaw returned to New York in March for the Union League Club's parade for the 20th Regiment, United States Colored Troops, which the Club had raised. Demonstrating the change in public sentiment since the draft riots, over one thousand citizens accompanied the regiment in a grand procession to its point of embarkation. In front of the Union League Club House, the 20th received its colors from the mothers, wives, and sisters of the Club, including Sarah, Susie, Josephine, and Annie Haggerty Shaw. Less than a year after the 54th's grand farewell in Boston, the event must have been an emotional one for the Shaws.  

From New York, Shaw continued to lobby for the Freedmen's Bureau bill and to raise funds from all over the world for the NFRA. In doing so, Shaw stressed that the experiment in South Carolina had proved African Americans capable of freedom. Portraying Sea Island blacks as contented and industrious, NFRA literature emphasized that some freedmen had bought their old masters' plantations and that very few still lived on public charity. Only two years

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free, African Americans under Saxton were self-supporting and required aid only for schools and churches, which they would soon maintain. Since most able-bodied men were fighting for the Union, this achievement reflected the efforts of women and children. That Shaw and the NFRA counted on the government providing land for the freedmen is evident; appeals for aid in the fall of 1864 assured the public that the contraband camps would clear as soon as land was provided for the freedpeople along the Mississippi and when such land was made secure from rebel raids.  

With Shaw away in Washington much of the fall, Sarah put the finishing touches on Memorial: RGS, which she hoped would serve as testimonial in favor of the freed slaves. Rob's death was fifteen months old when Sarah and Josephine received word that Lowell had died in battle; another son and husband had been sacrificed to the Union cause. A month later Josephine, a widow at twenty-one, "gave birth to a Fatherless little girl." "Truly," Sarah cried out, "the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children."  

It was a disheartening and frustrating time. The Freedmen's Bill was bogged down in Congress and the Senate

11 The National Freedmen's Relief Association Sendeth Greeting (New York, 1864), 7; Aid for the Freed People (New York, 1864).

12 SBS to JEC, December 27, 1864, NLI-MC.
had just rejected Charles Sumner's proposal that the new agency be its own department with its secretary holding cabinet rank. And just then came a harsh reminder of the great need for government planning and intervention. Over Christmas, General William T. Sherman captured Atlanta and began marching with his army through Georgia to South Carolina. Thousands of slaves, destitute, sick, and dying, followed the army and Sherman, unwilling to be Moses, sent them to Rufus Saxton in Beaufort. This was another great crisis for the Freedmen's Aid societies, all of which desperately appealed for help at home and abroad while Secretary of War Stanton traveled to South Carolina to determine what to do with these thousands that the army did not want. On January 12, he and Sherman met with a group of black leaders, who made clear the freedmen's desire for land. As a result, Sherman issued Field Order #15, which designated the Sea Islands and the coastal lands thirty miles into the interior exclusively for black settlement. Saxton did not want to implement the order because he remembered the administration's betrayal of the pre-emption policy and he feared the land was not secure. But Stanton

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13 McFeely, Yankee Stepfather, 22.
assured him that the claims would be honored, so Saxton began the process of settling 40,000 freedmen on the land.\(^\text{14}\)

Shaw had reason to hope that Stanton's promise was the forerunner of things to come when Congress passed the Freedmen's Bureau Bill in March, 1865. The bill created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands and placed both the land and the freedmen under the War Department. The bill directed the bureau, which had control of all lands in the South commandeered during the war, to divide abandoned lands into forty acre plots and lease them to freedmen for a period of three years at an annual rent of six percent of their 1860 value. Shaw's lobbying efforts on behalf of education had paid off; the bureau was authorized to provide superintendents, inspectors, quarters, rations, and transportation for the aid societies' teachers.\(^\text{15}\)

Congress' provision for the freedmen came not a moment too soon. A month later, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox and John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln at Ford's Theater. By May 26, the last of the Confederate

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\(^{14}\) H.G. Judd, *Appeal for Aid to the National Freedmen* (New York, 1865); *Appeal to the People of Great Britain and Ireland* (New York, 1865); Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 321-329; FGS to George Bancroft, February 23, 1865, Bancroft Papers, MHS.

armies had surrendered and the Union had a new President, Andrew Johnson. The war was over -- it was time to determine the destiny of the southern states and their millions of freedmen.

Shaw and the NFRA continued to advocate land for the freedmen and the extension of full civil rights to blacks in both the North and the South. Shaw wrote a letter to the *Evening Post* in which he expressed utter confidence in the future of the freedmen. "Given time and a little land, they will secure more than a good living from the soil," he assured readers. The freedmen were industrious "when working for themselves," a distinction he hoped was not lost on policy makers, and were presently destitute only because of the "theft of all the proceeds of their past labor."16 This letter subtly revealed Shaw's distrust of wage labor as a fair system to extend over the South; freedmen, *free men*, worked for themselves. The NFRA's organ, the *National Freedman*, recognized that segregation and discrimination in the North, as well as in the South, blocked progress for African Americans. It agitated for a constitutional amendment along the following lines: "No State shall make any distinction in civil rights and privileges among the naturalized citizens of the United States residing within

16 *National Freedman* 1 (June 1, 1865): 163-164.
its limits, or among persons born on its soil of parents permanently resident there, on account of race, color, or descent."\(^{17}\)

The future of the freedmen depended in large part on the new president, however, and Johnson quickly made a move that threatened their post-war status. From May to July, with Congress out of session, Johnson issued a series of Reconstruction proclamations that liberally granted amnesty to former rebels, recognized the governments of Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Virginia, organized provisional governments in the seven remaining southern states, and empowered constitutional conventions. Shaw was willing to give Johnson the benefit of the doubt and defended the new president's actions to John Elliot Cairnes. "From the best sources, I learn that he is as conscientious & honest a man as Pres Lincoln, & will, like him, endeavor to do the right as God gives him to see it," Shaw told the Irishman. "His action with regard to reconstruction is merely preliminary."\(^{18}\) Congress, "chosen at the time when the radical feeling was at its height," had the power to reject the state constitutions and would "require the greatest

\(^{17}\) National Freedman 1 (July 15, 1865): 201.

\(^{18}\) FGS to JEC, July 10, 1865, NLI-MC.
safeguards possible from the ex-rebel states."\textsuperscript{19} Shaw's own requirement for a southern state to be re-admitted was a constitution that secured to the freedmen all the rights of citizenship, including the vote, education, and the acquisition of homesteads. In the constitutional conventions held that summer, the southern states conformed to Johnson's requirement that they abolish slavery, though this was done with obvious reluctance. Despite Shaw's optimism, the presence in the conventions of many Confederate leaders boded ill for the interests of the freedmen.

Freedmen's Aid officials recognized the importance of consolidating their efforts and presenting a united front through a national organization. There were three main groups operating schools and relief efforts in the southern field in the fall of 1865. The American Missionary Association (AMA) and the denominational societies representing various churches ran schools with a dual mission of education and evangelism; the denominational schools taught sectarian doctrine in the classroom. The secular Freedmen's Aid organizations, operating as local societies across New England and the Northwest, were split into two factions. The eastern societies, like the NFRA

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
under Shaw's leadership, followed an essentially secular philosophy of education, while the western groups generally employed evangelical teachers. In September, all of the secular Freedmen's Aid societies merged into the American Freedmen's Aid Commission. Under the AFAC constitution, local societies still operated their own schools and employed their own teachers. The AFAC board, on which Shaw served, would attempt to coordinate the work of the local societies to avoid duplication of effort and a squandering of resources.20

With AFAC business added to his workload as president of the NFRA, Shaw was occupied constantly with correspondence. In October, he asked women from the Central Relief Association, a branch of the Sanitary Commission, to form a Committee of Correspondence and Organization in connection with the NFRA. These women directed efforts to recruit new local societies and to hire teachers and support schools. This freed Shaw to deal with the business of coordinating the NFRA's work with the War Department and the Freedmen's Bureau. He was in regular contact with General O.O. Howard, the Freedmen's Bureau head, over buildings,

supplies, and complaints from his teachers in the field. Johnson's lenient policies had created numerous troubles for the teachers. In one instance, a pardoned Confederate tried to oust a group of teachers in Norfolk, Virginia, from his house, which they had occupied for the school. Shaw appealed to Howard to protect the teachers.\textsuperscript{21}

In November, representatives from the American Freedmen's Aid Commission, led by James Miller McKim, met with Lyman Abbott, the general secretary of the American Union Commission, about a merger. The Union Commission was an aid society that served whites in southern states who had been loyalists during the war. After forming a plan of union, McKim and Abbott asked Shaw to help write a constitution for the new American Freedman's Union Commission (AFUC).\textsuperscript{22}

The AFUC would oversee an educational operation that had grown incredibly during 1865. Aid societies had spent half of their annual income on physical relief, but still supported over 301 schools with 760 teachers and 39,894

\textsuperscript{21} FGs to O.O. Howard, November 6, 1865, National Archives, Freedmen's Bureau Records, Washington Headquarters; \textit{Annual Report with Sketch}, 14.

\textsuperscript{22} American Freedmen's Aid and Union Commission, \textit{A Conference Between the American Union Commission and a Committee from the American Freedmen's Aid Commission} (Washington, 1865); J.M. McKim to J.H. Chapin, December 20, 1865, McKim Letterbook, Volume 1, 212, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell.
pupils. There were schools in all eleven former Confederate States, plus Maryland, Washington, D.C., Kentucky, Kansas, and Missouri. Eschewing centralization, Shaw, McKim and Abbott decided that the AFUC's board would coordinate the work of local societies, who would pay their own agents and recruit, hire, and support their own teachers. Local societies would continue to divide their efforts along regional lines. Under the new merger, the NFRA concentrated, as it had under the AFAC, on Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.  

In late January, 1866, the AFUC held its first meeting in New York and adopted its constitution. With the machinery of what they hoped to be a truly national organization in place, Shaw and other AFUC leaders tried to implement a long term goal of establishing an integrated common school system in the South. The AFUC's stated purpose was to "aid and co-operate with the people of the South, without distinction of race or color, in the improvement of their condition upon the basis of industry, education, freedom, and Christian morality. No schools or supply depots shall be maintained from the benefits of which

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any person shall be excluded because of color." Shaw was
named to the executive committee and was elected chairman.
As part of the organization, the NFRA, now the New York
Branch of the AFUC, shared its office with the AFUC central
committee, so Shaw was well-placed to affect the AFUC's
direction.24

Shaw was an influential figure in the AFUC, though his
role was largely administrative. Twice a month he chaired
the executive committee meetings and every day he ferried
over from Staten Island, where he was a trustee for the
village of New Brighton, to spend a couple of hours in New
York at the office on 76 John Street.25 Correspondence
among central committee members reveals that Shaw was
especially active in directing the AFUC's spending and in
trying to liberalize the board's policies. Under his and
McKim's leadership, the AFUC became the most consistently
egalitarian of the Freedmen's Aid organizations. Shaw was
not afraid to explore possibilities that more conservative
AFUC members shunned. He tried to set up a Freedmen's

24 AFUC Executive Committee Minute Book (hereafter
AFUC-MBEC), January 31, February 15, 1866, Anti-slavery
Collection, Cornell University; J.M. McKim to FGS, February
8, 1866, McKim Letterbook, Volume 1, 326, Anti-slavery
Collection, Cornell University.

25 Richard M. Bayles, History of Richmond County,
(Staten Island) New York, From Its Discovery to the Present
Time (New York, 1887), 335.
Employment Bureau in New York that would have brought the freedmen north and found them employment, but the project never took off because of the incompetence of its agent.\textsuperscript{26} He channeled funds for the purpose of aiding the freedmen in purchasing land and invested donations in the Freedmen's Savings & Trust Co. for the Freedmen's Bureau's use.\textsuperscript{27}

True to the purpose stated in the constitution, the central committee worked both to establish a secular common school system in the South and to eliminate class and caste distinctions from the schools. The executive committee's philosophy was controversial and did not enjoy the wholehearted support of the western branches, which supported evangelical education and were either afraid that including whites in the efforts of the aid society would undermine work on behalf of the special needs of the freedmen, or were not supportive of integration.

The executive committee felt that if they were pledged to equal rights and "no distinction of race, caste, or color in the Republic," then "we ought not to have a commission

\textsuperscript{26} Oliver S. St. John to FGS, March 14, 1866, St. John Folder, Box 23, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell; MBEC-AFUC, March 28, 1866; J.M. McKim to Maj. Gen. O.O. Howard, April 14, 1866, McKim Letterbook, Volume 1, 597, Anti-slavery, Cornell.

\textsuperscript{27} MBEC-AFUC, October 24, 1866; J.M. McKim to Maj. Gen. O.O. Howard, November 27, 1866, McKim 1866 Folder, Box 20, Anti-slavery, Cornell.
founded on class in name or theory."²⁸ As the New York Branch's journal put it: "If we wish to secure the abolition of this distinction from our laws, we can not maintain it in our charities. Our exclusive recognition of the freedmen as a separate class confirms this injurious discrimination in spite of ourselves."²⁹ The committee's efforts to erase southern class divisions through the medium of schools was a failure, however. AFUC directives ordered teachers to admit white and black students in the same rooms and classes in the AFUC schools, but no system of integrated schools developed. Prejudice kept poor whites away from predominantly black institutions and many of the Freedman's Bureau school superintendents felt that mixed schools would endanger the whole plan of black education and did not support the AFUC's efforts.³⁰

The central committee's other concern was establishing a common school system in the South apart from the efforts of the denominational societies. Anticipating black enfranchisement, the committee stated that "popular education is essential to popular government." The task

²⁸ American Freedman 1 (April, 1866): 3; American Freedman 1 (June, 1866): 37.
²⁹ National Freedman 2 (March 5, 1866): 74.
³⁰ Morris, Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction, 224-225.
belonged to the people of the South, with the aid of secular freedman's aid societies. It was not possible to establish through the churches and religious bodies "what alone can afford popular instruction, the public school, which in the South, as in the North, must be wholly unecclesiastical." In a circular on religion and education, the AFUC told the "various religious denominations" to confine themselves to "religious instruction." The whole community must unite in a "common effort for the education of the masses, not only in secular knowledge, but in those precepts of morality and teachings of the Christian religion in which all agree." The common school was "the almost universal system of Protestant Republicanism." The AFUC emphasized that it encompassed people of all beliefs under its umbrella and was best qualified to found a free school system open to all.

The religion issue divided the AFUC into two factions, since the western groups, which were also unhappy with the "no distinction of race" clause, generally employed only members of evangelical churches as teachers. After calling a meeting in Cleveland for May, 1866, to try to address these issues, Shaw headed west with a delegation from the

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31 Thanksgiving Appeal. AFUC. Printed Circulars, Bound Volume, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell University.
32 Education and Religion. AFUC. Printed Circulars. Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell University.
executive committee that intended to secure the western branches' cooperation. In an effort to attract those aid societies refusing to ratify the AFUC constitution, the committee inserted a statement that the AFUC's object was the "relief, education, and elevation of the Freedmen of the United States." The two groups could not agree on the main issues at stake, however, and Shaw in his negotiations would not bend on the commitment to secular education. Eventually the Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Chicago branches switched to the AMA.\textsuperscript{33}

The western branches correctly judged Shaw to be an enemy of evangelical education. His presidency of the New York Branch, once dominated by AMA members, reflected an internal power struggle within that organization which had squeezed evangelicals out of leadership positions and had turned the NFRA toward the secular societies.\textsuperscript{34} An old time transcendentalist who viewed most denominations as narrow and unenlightened, Shaw wanted to purge traditional Christianity from the classroom. As chairman of the board of the AFUC, he was zealous in efforts to squeeze the evangelical societies out of the field. The AFUC planned to

\textsuperscript{33} MBEC-AFUC, February 15, 1866 and March 28, 1866; American Freedman 1 (June, 1866): 36-38; Morris, Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction, 13, 44-45.

\textsuperscript{34} Ronald E. Butchart, Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction (Westport, 1980), 81-82.
build a normal school in North Carolina, but had not yet raised all the funds necessary. An agent of the Episcopal Freedman's Association, the Reverend J. Brinton Smith, visited Shaw and McKim with a letter from General Howard asking the AFUC to vacate the field in favor of the Episcopal Commission, which had total funding and was ready to build. Shaw told Smith that the AFUC would vacate the field only if the school was a public school. Smith assured Shaw and McKim that the school would be free to all scholars without regard to creed or denomination, but it would be Episcopalian in teachers and management. Shaw replied that if the school's object was to inculcate the particular tenets of a single denomination, then the committee would not vacate the field. This reply brought a strong rejoinder from Howard, who stated that in his visits with Smith it was clear the school was not intended to extend the Episcopal church. "Please concentrate your efforts in other fields, and not undertake to establish two normal schools at Raleigh," Howard asked. "The friends of a great enterprise

35 O.O. Howard to J.M. McKim, June 22, 1867, Howard 1867 Folder, Box 15, Anti-slavery, Cornell.

cannot afford to waste their ammunition against each other."\(^{37}\)

Shaw's most important and successful effort on behalf of the freedmen during his tenure with the AFUC was establishing normal schools to train black teachers. He pushed several projects that organized and funded normal schools in several southern cities.\(^{38}\) The AFUC tried to employ black teachers where it could, but most committee members preferred white teachers from the North, who would "civilize" the southerners. The chairman of the teachers committee wanted "Northern schools, Northern men and women, down South, teaching, mingling with the people, and instituting the North there among the old populations."\(^{39}\) Shaw recommended black teachers and supported every request for funding from southern blacks who wanted to teach, even where they were ill trained; under his influence the number

\(^{37}\) O.O. Howard to Lyman Abbott, July 30, 1867, Howard 1867 Folder, Box 15, Anti-slavery, Cornell.

\(^{38}\) L.M. Hobbs to FGS, March 12, 1866, Hobbs Folder, Box 15, Anti-slavery, Cornell; MBEC-AFUC, March 14, 1866; H.H. Moore to FGS, April 18, 1866, Moore 1866 Folder, Box 20, Anti-slavery, Cornell; FGS and J.M. McKim to C.T. Chase, August 26, 1867, McKim Letterbook, Volume 3, 310, Anti-slavery, Cornell; J.M. McKim to O.O. Howard, May 18 and August 26, 1867, McKim Letterbook, Volume 3, 118, 310, Anti-slavery, Cornell.

\(^{39}\) Annual Report with Sketch, 1866, 20-22.
of black teachers steadily rose. By 1867 blacks made up a full third of the AFUC's teaching force.\footnote{Lyman Abbott to J.M. McKim, November 26, 1867, Abbott 1867 Folder, Box 9, Anti-slavery, Cornell; Morris, Reading, 'Riting, and Reconstruction, 85, 92.}

Shaw tried to implement his goal of a broad based teaching force, in terms of color and in religious belief, through the local societies with which he had the most influence. Josephine and Ellen both joined the women's committee of correspondence and education for the New York Branch. Josephine visited schools in Virginia in 1866 and returned to head the North Shore auxiliary of the New York Branch. The Shaws' local society supported at least two black teachers and an array of Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Swedenborgians.\footnote{AFUC Commission Book, 1867-8, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell; AFUC Auxiliary Societies Supporting Teachers, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell; American Freedman 2 (June, 1867): 227; William Steward, The Philanthropic Work of Josephine Shaw Lowell; Containing a Biographical Sketch of Her Life Together with a Selection of Her Public Papers and Private Letters (New York, 1911), 48-49.}

All of the AFUC's efforts were uphill battles at the end of 1866 and the start of 1867. The southern state governments organized under Johnson's proclamations proved disastrous for the interests of the freedmen. These governments, filled with Confederate officers and supporters, passed a series of "Black Codes" intended to
bind freedmen to the plantations and their former owners. These laws subjected African Americans to heavy legal and social disabilities and left the freedmen in a state of serfdom without civil or political rights. Violence towards African Americans and race riots in New Orleans and Memphis showed the precarious position of blacks and their northern friends in the South. Shaw appealed to the public: "No future can repair our neglect of this present opportunity. God's war has plowed our fields; now is our seed time. 'As we sow so shall we reap.' What shall the harvest be?"

Although northerners cared little for the freedmen, they cared about the fruits of their hard fought victory. State governments filled with secessionists that passed laws which practically recreated slavery made the Union victory appear meaningless. In November, 1866, northerners returned a Radical Congress to Capitol Hill. In March, that Congress divided the South into five military districts subject to martial law. In order to return to the Union, a state had to call a new constitutional convention based on universal manhood suffrage, guarantee black suffrage, and ratify the 14th Amendment.

42 The Results of Emancipation in the United States of America (New York, 1867), 10-12.
43 National Freedman 2 (September 15, 1866): 2.
But Johnson's policy had already done immeasurable damage to the radicals' cause. In the time between April, 1865 and March, 1867, southern attitudes had hardened. Rather than accept northern demands as a defeated people, they now marshaled all their resources to fight Congressional Reconstruction. The time lag had also defeated once and for all the dream of land ownership for blacks. Johnson's amnesty proclamation had restored property rights and forced the restoration of most of the Bureau's lands. Blacks on the South Carolina and Georgia coast who had been granted land under Sherman's Field Order #15 had been dispossessed in favor of white Confederate landowners. The Bureau, instead of actively promoting landownership for blacks, generally confined itself to enforcing labor contracts that kept the freedmen tied to the old plantations.44

The problem facing reformers like Shaw who were interested in land reform as part of Reconstruction was twofold: the true radicals of the Republican party never really controlled the process of Reconstruction, and the moderates and conservatives of the party adhered to a free labor ideology whose implementation undermined black

44 Rose, Rehearsal for Reconstruction, 357; Claude F. Oubre, Forty Acres and a Mule: The Freedmen's Bureau and Black Land Ownership (Baton Rouge, 1978), 31.

217
independence. With their emphasis on self-help, individual
initiative, and fear of government intervention, Republicans
balked at using too much federal power to aid the freedmen.
They considered paternalism a blight to initiative and
feared land confiscation as an attack on property rights,
while the business wing of the party saw blacks as a labor
pool for northern industry.\(^\text{45}\)

Although AFUC officials gave up on black landownership
on any significant scale, most of them, including Shaw, were
optimistic that time and Congressional Reconstruction,
especially its provisions granting civil rights to blacks,
would lead to integration in the South. "With the
disappearance of slavery must disappear all the local laws
and social usages which have grown out of slavery," the New
York Branch claimed. "Class legislation as toward the
negro, whether in political or humanitarian administration,
has had its day." The war had brought on a new order, which
southern whites would finally accept -- "the word white,
North and South, is to disappear from legislative

\(^{45}\) Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished
Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York, 1988), 517; Kenneth M.
Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (New York,
1965), 129-131; William F. Messmer, *Freedmen and the
Ideology of Free Labor: Louisiana, 1862-1865* (Lafayette,
1978). For the politics of Reconstruction within Congress,
see Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle:
Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863-1869* (New
York, 1974).
enactment." Proclaiming the progress of the freedmen "astonishing," the New York Branch announced that "his future status in this country is no longer a problem." Although many officials in the AFUC shared this view, Shaw's hope was certainly greatest, and his faith in Johnson lasted the longest. As McKim said of him, "Mr. Shaw is so good that he literally hopeth all things, believeth all things." 

The AFUC had made incredible progress in the two years after the war, and for those who had not the benefit of hindsight, there was room for hope. Congressional Reconstruction seemed to guarantee African-American rights, blacks were represented in the new state legislatures, and the number of schools had increased steadily. By April, the AFUC employed 494 teachers and taught 35,458 pupils. The New York Branch contributed 163 teachers (all seven of the Maryland teachers were black), and had over 12,000 pupils. Considering all the Freedmen's Aid Societies, including the AMA and denominational groups, in mid 1867 there were 1,399 schools, 1,658 teachers, and nearly one hundred thousand


47 J.M. McKim to Rueben Tomlinson, September 4, 1866, McKim Letterbook, Volume 2, 190, Anti-slavery, Cornell.
In many large cities, the freedmen's schools covered all grades, from primary to normal, and some school districts, particularly that of Washington, D.C., were acknowledged to be equal to any in the North. The average attendance in southern cities matched that of whites in northern cities.  

The ultimate goal of the AFUC and the New York Branch was to transfer all the schools to black control and this was accomplished as soon as practicable. Although no free labor advocate, Shaw still shared the nineteenth-century suspicion that aid fostered dependence and thwarted initiative. He wrote the Freedmen's Bureau about encouraging freedmen to support their own schools and demanded that blacks contribute to schools wherever they possessed the resources to do so. African Americans, eager to support their own schools and often initiating efforts themselves, showed remarkable willingness even where starving poor to find the money. More than half the schools

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48 The American Freedman's Union Commission, Freedmen's Pamphlets 3, No. 2, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell; Fifth Annual Report, New York Branch, 11; American Freedman 2 (December, 1867): 330; Results of Emancipation, 32.

49 Results of Emancipation, 30-31.
in the South were sustained in part or totally by the freedmen and 15,000 students paid some tuition.\textsuperscript{50}

Shaw's demand that the freedmen contribute to the schools even when nearly destitute seems ironic alongside his continued work for the elite Shaw family's interests in 1867. His sincere efforts to elevate the freedmen accompanied his participation in building New England's largest fortune for his youngest brother, Quincy Adams Shaw, who had lived the life of a Boston Brahmin to its fullest. After graduating from Harvard in 1845, Quincy traveled the West on a hunting expedition with Francis Parkman, who used the trip as the genesis for his famous work on the Oregon Trail. In 1860 Quincy Shaw married Pauline Agassiz, another member of Boston's elite. He and his brother-in-law Alexander Agassiz invested heavily in copper mines in northern Michigan. The snag came with the post-war depression that hit the country in 1867; the mines failed, Quincy's notes were discredited, and he faced financial failure.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Eliphalet Whittlesey to FGS, December 13, 1867, Whittlesey Folder, Box 26, Anti-slavery, Cornell; \textit{Fifth Annual Report, New York Branch, 8-9}; \textit{Results of Emancipation}, 31.

\textsuperscript{51} Cleveland Amory, \textit{The Proper Bostonians} (New York, 1955), 65; Marion Whitney Smith, \textit{Beacon Hill's Colonel Robert Gould Shaw} (New York, 1986), 191; William B. Gates, Jr., \textit{Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars: An Economic History of the Michigan Copper Mining Industry} (Cambridge,
Shaw, using the family property on Commercial Wharf and other real estate in Boston, came to his brother’s rescue. The eldest son who still managed much of his father’s fortune for a large extended family did not hesitate to apply the massive Shaw resources in aid of his brother -- the Boston Brahmin kinship network was there to preserve status, after all. Working with his cousin Theodore Lyman, he extended security to Quincy to cover part of his indebtedness and give him time to recover. Other family members also contributed, and Shaw hoped this aid would "enable him to build the bridge that is to carry him to success."52 Quincy not only recovered, but made a fortune with the Calumet and Hecla Mining Co., which he operated with members of the Russell and Higginson families. An interlocking set of elite and inter-related Boston families shared the company’s stock, showing that the antebellum lessons of Robert Gould Shaw were not forgotten.53

Shaw’s relationship with wealthy Bostonians and New Yorkers was sustained partially through his numerous reform activities in the late 1860’s. Through contacts made in the

52 FGS to Theodore Lyman III, August 24, 1867, Lyman Family Papers, MHS; FGS to Theodore Lyman, March 13, April 9, April 17, July 17, 1867, Lyman Family Papers, MHS.

53 Gates, Michigan Copper and Boston Dollars, 44.
Union League Club, Shaw became vice-president of both the Personal Representation Society and the American Free Trade League. The Personal Representation Society was dedicated to changing electoral practices in the United States. Members of the Society believed that a winner-take-all system was not representative, since those who had voted for the losing party in a district were not represented in the legislature. They proposed a plan whereby all candidates with a certain number of votes would be elected. Shaw's support for the American Free Trade League was based on his concern for American workers. The League's pamphlet of 1869 emphasized that protection granted prerogatives to capitalists above other producers and workmen, who had to pay a high cost for the "protection" of American industry. A busy manufacturing center with humming factories was not an indication of universal welfare -- "faulty legislation may have forced thousands of poor consumers to contribute their painful share to create this pleasing hum."  

54 Simon Sterne, Report to the Constitutional Convention of the State of New York, on Personal Representation (New York, 1867), 12-40; Francis Lieber, Notes on Fallacies Peculiar to American Protectionists, or Chiefly Resorted to in America (New York, 1869), 15-16; Iver Bernstein, The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War (New York, 1990), 335. David Dudley Field was president of both the Personal Representation Society and the Free Trade League; Robert Minturn and Sydney Howard Gay joined Shaw in the Personal Representation Society.
The centerpiece of Shaw’s reform activity remained freedmen’s issues, but just a year after the AFUC’s optimistic proclamations about the future of its work in the South, the Commission was in trouble. With blacks participating in southern governments and efforts being made in reconstructed states to establish public school systems, interest in freedmen’s education in the North waned and there was a drop in financial support. The depression of the late 1860's was an important factor; economic problems and government corruption at home distracted northerners from the ongoing problems of the South. The major problem, however, was the fissure within the Freedmen’s Aid movement; the AFUC simply lost out to the denominational societies and the AMA in the competition for public funds. General Howard and other officials in the Freedmen’s Bureau generally favored the AMA in decisions over funding. The AMA and the denominational societies had a fund-raising advantage with the public as well: for most northerners, the AFUC’s egalitarian ideology, which stressed black dignity and rights, did not fit with their beliefs as well as the evangelicals’ stress on schooling for control, docility, and spiritual conversion. Racism in the North undermined any real support for sustaining programs to aid the freedpeople in their transition to freedom. The revolutionary nature of the war had brought support for freedom and for limited
rights for blacks in the South, but once the 14th and 15th amendments were in place, few northerners cared to hear more about African Americans.\footnote{Butchart, \textit{Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction}, 89-95, 204-205; Although Shaw was one of the more egalitarian reformers, he was willing to make compromises with other elites in order to make small gains for the cause. He wanted African Americans to enjoy full political equality, but in debates over the question of black suffrage in the South during 1869, Shaw apparently considered a proposal that based voting qualification on those who currently possessed the franchise, those who had served in the United States army or navy, and those who had property to the amount of $250 and who could read the Constitution. Proposed Constitutional Amendment, FGS, December 13, 1869, Shaw Folder, Box 23, Anti-slavery Papers, Cornell University.}

Sarah wrote Cairnes "Our own country I suppose is taking the backward step that follows all great movements."\footnote{SBS to JEC, February 8, 1868, NLI-MC.} Shaw's New York Branch of the AFUC struggled to meet its expenditures and the other societies suffered similar financial reverses. As the Board of the New York Branch met in July, 1868, to address its deficit, Abbott reported to McKim, "they are now discussing whether to go on another year...if we abandon the work it will be abandoned all together...the denominational societies will not & cannot do our work."\footnote{Lyman Abbott to J.M. McKim, July 29, 1868, Abbott 1868 Folder, Box 9, Anti-slavery, Cornell; FGS to J.M. McKim, July 11, 1868, Shaw Folder, Box 23, Anti-slavery, Cornell.} Two months later, Shaw and McKim
were the only two members of the executive committee present at the board meeting. They included in the minutes the statement that it was the unanimous conviction of the secretaries and board that the AFUC would terminate its existence at the end of the school year. The committee held its last meeting in the spring of 1869 and the AFUC officially disbanded in July.58

A few local branches continued operating individual schools into 1870. Shaw and Josephine served on the New York Branch's continuing committee, which endeavored to maintain a few key schools until other branches, the local freedpeople, or the county governments could operate them. Their priorities were evident in their choice of emergency support: of 55 teachers continued into 1870, 42 were black, most of these teachers at country schools removed from the major cities, and the rest of the funds went to normal schools. "We wished to leave nothing undone that could make them efficient in their noble task of preparing young colored people as teachers for their race," the committee's report stated.59

58 MBEC-AFUC, September 21, 1868 and March 29, 1869; American Freedman 3 (July, 1869): 1.

59 Report of the Continuing Committee, for the year ending July 1st, 1870 (New York, 1870), 3-4; FGS to J.M. McKim, September 8, 1869, Shaw Folder, Box 23, Anti-slavery Collection, Cornell.
Frank and Sarah's wartime efforts to convert the American people to abolition had failed after all. They had won freedom for African Americans, but not the inner conversion of the northern heart. Child summed up the situation well: "All our troubles originate in the fact that the American people, North or South, never really felt the enormous wickedness of slavery. They never emancipated the slaves; events too strong for them to control accomplished it."  

She consoled Shaw, "It seems too bad that we should be cheated out of the benign results of emancipation. But, after all, we could not reasonably expect things to work more smoothly, in the beginning. When such a malevolent disease as slavery had lasted for generations, it must unavoidably produce disastrous effects on the character of both masters and slaves."  

Blacks in the South would soon be tied to the land as sharecroppers, working for whites in the condition of forced laborers; with Redemption would die abolitionist hopes for even a modicum of civil rights for blacks. Shaw's work with the AFUC had not been in vain, however, for the rudiments of an

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60 LMC to SBS, December 28, 1879, Collected Correspondence, 93/2486.

61 LMC to FGS, October 26, 1879, Collected Correspondence, 93/2475.
educational system for blacks remained that would produce great fruit in the future.  

With the end of the AFUC, Shaw resigned from his service as U.S. Marshall for New York and withdrew into the privacy of his home for a time. Ellen, the youngest daughter, had married Francis Channing Barlow in 1867 and now the large house seemed big and lonely to Frank, Sarah, and Josephine. In December, 1869, Shaw sold the house to his son-in-law Robert Minturn and moved to a smaller house on Richmond Terrace and Davis Street on the shore of the Kill Van Kull River. This still ample home had a large screened porch looking out over the water. Shaw's study, covered with book cases from floor to ceiling, dominated the lower level. The drawing room, carpeted with thick red velvet, Sarah decorated with old family furniture. The family preserved the memory of their Civil War sacrifices in the house and grounds: Rob's sword and furniture adorned the guest room and Red Berold, Charles Russell Lowell's war horse, roamed in the back pasture. The property had

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63 George William Curtis to FGS, September 26, 1869, Shaw Family Letters, New York Public Library; Bayles, *History of Richmond County*, 574.

64 Interview of Mrs. W.G. Willcox by Mabel Abbott, July 6, 1929, Mabel Abbott Papers, Box 7, F30, Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences (SIIAS); LMC to John B.
stunning views that reminded Lydia Maria Child of "the best old Dutch sea-pictures," and she described the shore as "being all alive with sea-gulls, sloops, and steam-boats."65

The Shaws retained several servants even though their number was reduced to four. On a visit to Frank and Sarah, Child complained, "If I could wait upon myself more, it would be better suited to my habits and my inclinations." There were "seven domestics, well drilled in their various departments."66 "I smiled to see you class yourself, and Mrs. Barlow, and Mr. Curtis, with the middling class," Child told Sarah. "Certainly none of you have aristocratic airs; but all of you have luxurious habits, and are unaccustomed to wait upon yourselves. If you were to find yourselves suddenly in the surroundings of the middle class, you would be like fishes out of water."67

The family's days were now occupied with "household superintendence, calls, and innumerable charitable missions

Wright, December 12, 1874, Collected Correspondence, 84/2204; Stewart, Philanthropic Work of Josephine Shaw Lowell, 49; Charles Gilbert Hine and William T. Davis, Legends, Stories and Folklore of Old Staten Island (New York, 1925), 53.

65 LMC to John B. Dwight, December 12, 1874, Collected Correspondence, 84/2204.

66 LMC to Emily F. Damon, December 22, 1874, Collected Correspondence, 84/2206.

67 LMC to SBS, August 25, 1877, Collected Correspondence, 88/2338.
(to which they devote a vast deal of personal attention, as well as money).  "68 At the start of every month, Shaw went to Boston to take care of Shaw family business.  "69 When home, he returned to the scholarly pursuits he had enjoyed before the war and published in 1870 another translation of George Sand's work, *Monsieur Sylvestre, A novel.*  "70 He also engaged in real estate transactions on Staten Island, buying land in the neighborhood of West New Brighton and building small rental cottages.  "71

The Shaws continued their regular attendance at the Unitarian Church on Staten Island, which did not have a minister in the 1870's, so Curtis read the congregation sermons of the best English and American preachers.  "72 In his spiritual quest, Shaw sought inspiration from many sources. Although he still looked for "peculiar spiritual

68 LMC to Martha Wright, February 24, 1874, Collected Correspondence, 85/2223.

69 FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, November 1, 1871, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.


71 FGS to Sydney Howard Gay, March 1, 1871, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University; West New Brighton Property Map, 1874, SIITAS; LMC to SBS, December 6, 1875, Collected Correspondence, 86/2250.

72 LMC to Emily F. Damon, December 22, 1874, Collected Correspondence, 84/2206.
significance in the Bible" and believed "portions of the Old Testa
tment too devout and sublime to be omitted in any Bible for the
human soul," he turned to other sources than the Bible for
truth. "I can understand your liking for the grand utterances of
devout & wise men in Psalms & Proverbs," he told McKim. "But many modern books seem to me much more 'profitable' than the Epistles." Every Sunday, all the Shaw daughters with their children gathered at Frank and Sarah's house for lively reunion and play on the lawn. By 1875 Frank and Sarah had thirteen grandchildren, six of them provided by Susie. Despite these regular visits, the couple experienced the melancholy of increasing age that brought with it the death of many of their friends. "Our circle is closing fast," Shaw sadly told Elizabeth Gay. "We shan't last much longer at that rate - when the places that have known us will know us no more & will be filled with others." Many of the Shaws' friends had left Staten Island and "our dear old house is still empty - I am afraid that our days of travel

73 LMC to FGS, December 6, 1870 and May 25, 1875, Collected Correspondence, 74/1964 and 80/2104.

74 FGS to J.M. McKim, February 20, 1873, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms. A. 1.2, V. 37, P.28, Boston Public Library, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.
for pleasure have passed & that Sarah & I are henceforth fixtures, to be displaced only by sad necessity."\textsuperscript{75}

The world had changed -- friends were gone, the house was empty, and life beyond the family circle was undergoing rapid transformation. Shaw's dejection about his age and the changes it brought must have paralleled his feelings about a society that was very different than the one he experienced as a child. As he settled into the twilight of his long "retirement," he decided to evaluate this new America, spawned by a war whose outcome no one could have predicted or controlled.

\textsuperscript{75} FGS to Elizabeth Neall Gay, August 8, 1870, Sydney Howard Gay Collection, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University; LMC to Sarah Parsons, December 8, 1874, \textit{Collected Correspondence}, 84/2203.
Chapter Six

"We must make land common property":

The Last Great Remedy

“I don’t feel so sad as you do about the transition-state in which we are living,” Lydia Maria Child wrote Sarah Shaw in 1877. "I admit that it is not so pleasant as a quiet adherence to old opinions and traditionary forms. But transition is necessary to growth."¹ The Shaws were keenly aware of the transition American society experienced in the decades following the Civil War. In 1809 Shaw had been born into an agrarian, republican, pre-modern world; now, in the late 1870's he was growing old in the progression toward an industrial, competitively democratic, modern world. The Civil War had accelerated this process in nineteenth-century America, leaving older Americans like the Shaws grappling with the changes they faced. Shaw looked at the world that emerged from the war, and he did not like what he saw. Nor did he like the solutions other reformers proffered to the pressing problems of a modern society.

¹ Lydia Maria Child (LMC) to Sarah Blake Shaw (SBS), December 19, 1877, in Patricia G. Holland and Milton Meltzer, eds., The Collected Correspondence of Lydia Maria Child, 1817-1880 (Millwood, NY, 1979), 89/2352.
Living in New York City, traveling frequently to Boston, managing portions of the Shaw family's property and stocks, Shaw's life intersected the points in American society where the transition was most evident -- major urban areas and the financial sector. Here was the national financial structure put in place by the Republicans to win the war; here was the industrial society with its railroad entrepreneurs and emergent industrialists; here was the consolidation of a capitalist economy. In the cities, the workforce was a new animal -- wage earners replaced the independent craftsmen, while a new breed, white collar workers, filled the ever expanding list of "professional" positions.

Depression in 1873, the first great crisis of industrial capitalism, brought divisive labor issues to the forefront. Massive unemployment and violent strikes over wages and hours rocked northern society. The federal government, unwilling to use troops to uphold Reconstruction governments in the South, used them freely now against workers in the great railroad strike of 1877, "one of the bitterest explosions of class warfare in American history." Free labor ideology was in crisis and its meaning mutated through the great changes unleashed by the Civil War. Free labor had once meant eventual ownership of productive property for all laborers who made the effort, but now the
Republican party, which had once promised access to land for the common man as the path to independence, accepted both black and white laborers as permanent wage earners in an industrial system.²

The Shaws were deeply disillusioned by events in the North. Drawn all his life to movements that promised a classless, cooperative life, Shaw witnessed violent schisms along hardened class lines that in his mind highlighted the failure of industrial capitalism to provide opportunity for the masses of laborers. The Republican party, to which he had turned for moral leadership during the war and Reconstruction, utterly failed him in questions of justice for labor and for African Americans. Child commiserated with Sarah, "the necessities of the crisis forced them to go ahead in a straight line, but now they are mere politicians."³ The party's leaders were bent on preserving


³ LMC to SBS, 1873, Collected Correspondence, 80/2099.
the new industrial system of the North and their own positions of power; they had neither the ideological base to address labor issues nor the moral stamina to sustain Reconstruction in the South against a racist and indifferent northern public. By 1877 that was abundantly clear -- as troops marched on the railroad strikers, South Carolina fell into the hands of conservative elites, ending Reconstruction in the South.4

Class divisions, poverty, unemployment, industrial barons consolidating power, these were some of the problems Shaw identified for the transition-state of the late 1870's. He found that no one seemed to offer solutions; reformers of his circle did not even identify the problems. He was not like many old abolitionists and other reformers whose disillusionment prompted a retreat to classical liberal values and more moderate reform. Promoting laissez-faire economics, individualism, the moral leadership of society's best men, and eschewing party politics, liberal reformers meekly advocated civil service reform, lower tariffs, and government economy. Disappointed with African Americans,

4 According to Lydia Maria Child, Shaw approved of President Hayes' decision to sustain Wade Hampton's government in South Carolina. With no explanation available from Shaw, it is only necessary to say that Shaw's reason could not have been any agreement with the political or social views of South Carolina's redeemers. LMC to SBS, 1877, Collected Correspondence, 89/2356.
they disavowed the more egalitarian precepts of abolitionism and often embraced Social Darwinism. They abandoned the utopian elements of antebellum reform that envisioned a classless society and sought a just basis for society. Asking for moral men to lead business and government, they did not ask if capitalistic society itself were moral.\(^5\)

Another group of reformers, many of them from the generation that grew up during the war, including Josephine Shaw Lowell, became interested in the work of British reformers who advocated liberal philanthropy and scientific charity. The latter movement emphasized that social problems had to be studied scientifically before they could be ameliorated. This was an extension of ideas the U.S. Sanitary Commission implemented during the war -- ideas that...

were a departure from the radical individualism that was the dominant ante-bellum intellectual style. Ante-bellum humanitarianism emphasized voluntarism, religious feeling, and individual spontaneity. The new charity reflected a resurgent institutionalization. These reformers wanted a professional social welfare system aimed at efficiency, and they sought to place the popular impulse to help within the hands of experts. They used paid professionals rather than volunteers, decided "scientifically" how to distribute funds, and emphasized rules and procedures. Accepting the capitalist industrial structure as sound, they adhered to liberalism's premise that poverty was partially a personal failure that required rehabilitation and at times punishment. The emergence of scientific charity coincided with the professionalization of social science; academics took control and turned their attention to empirical investigations on the state of the field rather than the state of society.  

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Lowell was at the forefront of the new movement. The lesson of the Civil War for the young widow was the value of self-sacrifice for an idealistic cause and she dedicated herself to a social activism that effaced her private life. She joined the State Charities Aid Association of New York, a body created to inspect poorhouses in each New York county and to report violations of state code. The SCAA's larger goal was to recommend needed reforms and drum up public support for changes in state law. George William Curtis and Francis Barlow were on the SCAA's advisory board and Shaw and Anna served on the Richmond County visiting committee. Lowell was chairwoman of the standing committee on adult able-bodied paupers and in this capacity she advocated the principles of scientific charity. She wanted to identify and separate different categories of dependents within a network of state run institutions. Hoping to abolish traditional outdoor relief and spontaneous giving, Lowell crusaded for a system that would exclude from the almshouses all but the sick and aged poor and would provide a "rigorous work program for those who were not mentally ill or otherwise disabled." Her work for the SCAA brought her to the attention of Governor Samuel Tilden, who appointed

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7 Waugh, *Unsentimental Reformer*, 110, 123.

8 Ibid., 111.
her to the State Board of Charities and gave her the
distinction of being the first woman appointed to state
office in New York.9

Lowell's strong advocacy of scientific charity led to
lively family arguments in the Shaw household. The first
thing in the morning Frank, Sarah, Josephine, and Carlotta
assembled for breakfast, where "discussions on the 'eternal
fitness of things' were sure to arise."10 On her visit to
the Shaws, Child was amused to see Lowell "laying down the
law, moral and scientific, to her father."11 Shaw, though
he worked with the SCAA, found scientific charity and the
new organizational reform inadequate because they did not
address what he considered to be the underlying faults in
the economy that caused poverty and distress. Shaw's
background as an Associationist and an advocate for land
reform in the South during Reconstruction prohibited an easy
acceptance of any reform that remained within the industrial
capitalistic structure. Before the war, Shaw had infused
French socialism into the mix of ideas that made up
antebellum reform and he maintained this vision of a

9 Ibid., 127.

10 LMC to Francis George Shaw(FGS), April 4, 1875,
Collected Correspondence, 85/2226.

11 LMC to SBS, May 13, 1875, Collected Correspondence,
85/2232.
classless, cooperative society as an alternative to capitalism.

As Shaw expressed his dissatisfactions with scientific charity to his daughter, he came to believe that the failures of Reconstruction toward the freedmen and the heightened class tensions apparent in the North were symptomatic of the failures of capitalism. Association had argued that white laborers and black slaves were alike exploited; the developments of post-war America confirmed this for Shaw. How could he have expected northern victory to accomplish justice for the masses when the victorious society was itself unjust? The only remedy for the evils of American society was to restructure it along lines of cooperation, not competition, by sharing profits among all, not relegating workers to wage slavery.\textsuperscript{12}

His criticism of the new charity organizations extended beyond their blindness to the structural problems of capitalism. He also condemned their lack of concern for the moral dimensions of reform. Liberal reformers and scientific charity advocates focused on a set of individual moral standards, those of the charity recipient, who could avert poverty through his behavior, and those of society's leaders, who were responsible for sound government and

\textsuperscript{12} LMC to FGS, August 10, 1880, \textit{Collected Correspondence}, 94/2515.
business practices. What Shaw meant by moral reform was seeking the truth about what constituted justice in order to apply those principles to the entire society. The antebellum reforms that helped shape Shaw's ideas -- Association and abolition -- depicted America's flaws as above all moral failures that demanded moral solutions. These moral solutions required knowledge of God's laws and underlying spiritual truths, because the ultimate goal was to create the perfect society by matching the physical order with moral truths. Scientific charity neither sought these moral truths nor questioned what society should be. For Shaw, such an approach violated the very foundation of reform. Consequently, neither liberal reform nor scientific charity quelled the deeper yearnings that Association had awakened for Shaw in the 1840's. "He was always seeking for the great remedy that should strike at the root of all evils, and inequalities, and suffering which the world inherits from generation to generation," Sydney Howard Gay recalled.  

Shaw's thoughts returned to the problems that had occupied him in his younger reform days. Never an original thinker, he once again sought solutions through extensive reading. He faced constant disappointments in his quest to

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find the panacea for the nation's ills, however, and after years of searching became "hopeless on social questions." Despite his despair, he decided early in July, 1881, to read a recently published work on political economy, *Progress and Poverty*, which was beginning to excite a diverse set of readers. Henry George, its author, was newly arrived in New York from California to publicize the book through a series of public appearances and speeches. Shaw expected little, but as he read, all of the questions agitating his mind were answered -- he felt that every single page of the book spoke truth directly to him. "The light broke upon him," he later told George. He had at last found the great remedy.

*Progress and Poverty*, published in 1879, was the culmination of years of thought for Henry George, the Philadelphia-born journalist who sought his fortune, but did not find it, in California. Facing starvation in his early years out West, George struggled through a series of successes and reverses in the newspaper business. His own

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15 Ibid.

failures made him challenge the idea that poverty was the product of personal failure. His dissatisfaction with the American economy was enhanced during a trip to New York and Philadelphia in 1869. The "conjunction of wealth and want" and the "shocking contrast between monstrous wealth and debasing want" in the cities of the East appalled him; *Progress and Poverty* emanated from the same impulse that had prompted Shaw's retirement from Robert Gould Shaw & Co. in the 1840's.17

The introduction to *Progress and Poverty* drew upon this theme and enthralled Shaw from the first. Outlining the nineteenth century's incredible increase in wealth through increased production, George asked why that increase did not bring an end to poverty. Instead it seemed that poverty accompanied progress: "Where conditions to which material progress everywhere tends are most fully realized - that is to say, where population is densest, wealth greatest, and the machinery of production and exchange most highly developed - we find the deepest poverty, the sharpest struggle for existence, and the most enforced idleness."18

This observation, the central fact around which George built

17 Barker, Henry George, 120-121.
18 Henry George, Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Causes of Industrial Depressions, and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth - the Remedy (San Francisco, 1879), 6.
his tract, proved Shaw's longstanding fear that mass suffering accompanied industrial progress. "It is as though an immense wedge were being forced, not underneath society, but through society," Shaw read. "Those who are above the point of separation are elevated, but those who are below are crushed down."  

Shaw sympathized with George's critique of the work of the modern laborer; it was not only poverty that crushed the masses, but their lack of independence and their monotonous life. The laborer, a "mere link in an enormous chain," had become "a slave, a machine, a commodity -- a thing, in some respects, lower than the animal." Shaw had once sought the solution through a Phalanx, where monotonous labor would be divided and shared so that all would have ample leisure to express their creative energies in other ways. Now he eagerly turned to George for insight into the social problems facing his society.

George built his solution to poverty around the observation that "where the value of land is highest, civilization exhibits the greatest luxury side by side with the most piteous destitution." He argued that labor,

19 Ibid., 8.
20 Ibid., 256-57.
21 Ibid., 201.
capital, and land (which he defined as all natural forces) united for production and divided the produce. As increased production and land speculation made land more valuable, the distribution of wealth became skewed in favor of land, at the expense of labor and capital. Private land owners were in effect a monopoly, hoarding wealth that rightfully belonged to labor.

"The great cause of inequality in the distribution of wealth is inequality in the ownership of land," George asserted.22 The remedy was simple: "To extirpate poverty, to make wages what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the laborer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership."23 Appealing to the conservatism of Americans on the subject of landed property, George claimed that "it is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent."24 He called for appropriating rent by taxation and abolishing all taxes save that upon land values.

This remedy resonated with Shaw as nothing had in many years. His arguments with Josephine proved to him that reform which advocated the diffusion of education and

22 Ibid., 266.
23 Ibid., 295.
24 Ibid., 362-365.
improved habits of industry and thrift as solutions to poverty were meaningless. In his earliest articles, Shaw argued that changing the social structure and hence the environment was necessary to produce positive changes in the lives of lower class individuals. In proposing the abolition of private property in land, George claimed that scientific charity was the false theory of a comfortable class that had always blamed the poverty and suffering of the masses on their lack of industry, frugality, and intelligence. George, calling poverty the "'Slough of Despond' into which good books may be tossed forever without result," echoed Shaw's assessment. "To make people industrious, prudent, skillful, and intelligent, they must be relieved from want," he told reformers. "If you would have the slave show the virtues of the freeman, you must first make him free."^25

Seeking a remedy that addressed underlying issues of justice, the moral passages of Progress and Poverty appealed to Shaw; in them he envisioned the quest for truth that modern movements like scientific charity lacked. George's plan would "substitute equality for inequality, plenty for want, justice for injustice," and would reflect the "laws of the universe," which did not "deny the natural aspirations

^25 Ibid., 273-74, 278-79.
of the human heart." Although he did not reject capitalism, George's terminology recalled all of Association's tenets of cooperation. He claimed that the laws of the universe showed that "the progress of society might be, and, if it is to continue, must be, toward equality, not inequality; and that the economic harmonies prove the truth perceived by the Stoic Emperor -- 'We are made for co-operation.'"\(^{26}\)

George appealed to universal laws to prove that private property in land was unjust. "Nature acknowledges no ownership or control in man save as the result of exertion," he argued. "The laws of nature are the decrees of the Creator. There is written in them no recognition of any right save that of labor; and in them is written broadly and clearly the equal right of all men to the use and enjoyment of nature."\(^{27}\) Landownership "strips many of the wealth they justly earn, to pile it in the hands of few, who do nothing to earn it."\(^{28}\)

George's arguments here addressed the fundamental lesson that Shaw had learned from Reconstruction. George explained Shaw's disillusionment with the results of emancipation by claiming that the slaves had never been

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 296.

\(^{27}\) Ibid., 299-302.

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 304-306.
emancipated, since the ownership of land imposed ownership on other men and thus reduced labor to slavery. Slavery had been abolished, but the planters in the South "find they have sustained no loss." By owning the land upon which the freedmen must live, they had "practically as much command of labor as before." Reconstruction had not even touched the North, with its conditions of "degrading and embruting slavery." As long as northern society recognized private property in land, "our boasted freedom necessarily involves slavery" and "Declarations of Independence and Acts of Emancipation are in vain."^°

George's vision of the effects of his remedy were sweeping indeed, and they appealed to Shaw's utopian proclivities. Nationalizing land would unleash industry and unburden production as millions and millions of acres opened for improvement. Labor and capital would divide half the community's wealth among them, and the rest, confiscated rent, would go to the community as a whole, to be distributed as public benefits to all its members. This would change the very character of government. "Society would thus approach the ideal of Jeffersonian democracy, the promised land of Herbert Spencer, the abolition of

29 Ibid., 319.
30 Ibid., 321.
government," George prophesied. "But of government only as a directing and repressive power. It would at the same time, and in the same degree, become possible for it to realize the dream of socialism." 31

In George's abundant vision of the future, increasing material progress would create a gigantic public fund from which the community could create innumerable benefits for all its citizens. Besides building and operating public utilities like railroads and communication systems, the government would oversee public baths, museums, libraries, gardens, and universities that every citizen could enjoy. The funds from confiscated rent would support science and line the road with fruit trees. "We would reach the ideal of the socialist, but not through governmental repression," George promised. The government "would become the administrator of a great co-operative society. It would become merely the agency by which the common property was administered for the common benefit." 32

Shaw was especially attracted to the communal vision that dominated the last pages of Progress and Poverty. He was too much an old transcendentalist to be a socialist in the meaning of the word as it had developed in the 1880's,

31 Ibid., 410.
32 Ibid., 410.
but he was no Jeffersonian traditionalist or Gilded Age liberal reformer either. He was not a pragmatic social scientist, and had he lived, he would not have been a Progressive. This makes him hard to place in the realm of ideas, just as it has been hard for historians to neatly classify George. Understanding why Frank Shaw, of all the old ante-bellum reformers, saw George as his savior may offer a clue to more fully understanding Progress and Poverty.

There was much of the Jeffersonian individualist in George: he advocated free trade, he was suspicious of the repressive power of government, and he wanted to expand individual opportunity. In the face of a modern, pragmatic age, he recaptured the antebellum search for natural law, fundamental truth, and a political economy that matched God's laws. The key, however, was that Progress and Poverty oscillated continually "from revolutionary collectivistic reforms to evolutionary individual development."³³ Fundamentally, George's vision was rooted in communalism -- the last sections of the book that explain the ideal society proclaimed cooperation and equality of condition. Communalism was present in equal balance with Jeffersonianism: abolishing private property in land was

intended to restore individual opportunity and to usher in a new state of society where common ownership led to communal administration of benefits for the entire society. Although George himself repudiated Charles Fourier as a superficial thinker, one of Fourier's most ardent American disciples found in George a soulmate. \(^{34}\)

\(^{34}\) Historians who have studied George and *Progress and Poverty* generally place him within the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian traditions of destroying private economic monopolies and advancing equal opportunity for everyone. John L. Thomas' study, *Alternative America: Henry George*, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition (Cambridge, 1983), is the best example of scholarship that locates George squarely in the antebellum tradition. Thomas sees *Progress and Poverty* as utilizing the key antebellum democratic-republican myths: the spiritual mission of a Christian nation, the moral primacy of the individual, equality of opportunity, simple government, and the virtues of a life lived close to the soil. George reached back to the antebellum tradition of "communitarianism and shopfloor cooperation to prove that capitalist society could transform itself through the replication of the model community (286)." In effect George was reviving the artisan tradition of a moral economy -- a naturally cooperative community. Others who placed George within the Jeffersonian tradition are: Rose, *Henry George*; Barker, *Henry George*; Eric F. Goldman, *A Rendezvous with Destiny: A History of Modern American Reform* (New York, 1952); Steven J. Ross, "Political Economy for the Masses: Henry George," *Democracy* 2(1982): 125-134.

Putting the question in terms of laissez faire, Sidney Fine disagreed that aside from confiscating rent George was an advocate of laissez faire. He pointed out that George wanted to extend the cooperative functions of government -- the revenues from the single tax would be distributed for public benefit. See Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General Welfare State*.

Edward O'Donnell, in his dissertation, "Henry George and the 'New Political Forces': Ethnic Nationalism, Labor Radicalism, and Politics in Gilded Age New York City" (Ph.D. Diss, Columbia University, 1995), argues that George appealed to wage earners in New York City because *Progress*
The communal society Shaw envisioned arising from land reform was different than the socialism of Fourier, however, for its scale was larger. Shaw recognized the difference between the industrial society of 1881 and the agrarian society of 1841. George advocated a vast cooperative state rather than a smaller scale Phalanx; he proposed nationalization of utilities, railroads, and other natural monopolies in addition to his single tax. George embraced large cities, for he believed that greater numbers of people could produce greater abundance. Although Shaw’s communitarianism was rooted in the antebellum past, he tried to adjust his thinking to the needs of the present.

George's ideas gripped Shaw as nothing had since the last days of the Civil War; he had found the panacea -- the one great remedy -- that promised utopia in America. Almost as soon as he read the last phrases of *Progress and Poverty*, Shaw decided to seek out George and see what he could do to

*Progress and Poverty* captured the key themes of a new “labor republicanism” that emerged after the Civil War: labor as a sanctified activity, labor theory of value, anti-monopolism, and the Jacksonian distinction between producers and non-producers. This republicanism emphasized complete social equality and that those who worked should receive the full fruits of their toil.

Other works that address the economic thought of Henry George with some attention to the issues discussed here are: John K. Whitaker, “Enemies or Allies? Henry George and Francis Amasa Walker One Century Later,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 35 (December 1997): 1891-1915; Rhoda Hellman, *Henry George Reconsidered* (New York, 1987).
help publicize the man's ideas. In July, 1881, Shaw contacted George. "I am much interested in the truths presented in your book 'Progress and Poverty,' & wish to do what I can in disseminating them," he wrote. Shaw suggested that he could publish extracts of the books in several newspapers, which would promote sales and bring it widespread notice.\textsuperscript{35} George was thrilled with Shaw's attention and responded warmly. The two men agreed to meet, get personally acquainted, and consult about the best method of distributing \textit{Progress and Poverty}.\textsuperscript{36}

In September the old reformer and the new met in the lobby of a downtown bank. Shaw told George how "the light broke upon him" after reading the book. "He wants to spread it," George reported enthusiastically to a friend. The two decided that Shaw would order one thousand copies and place them in libraries throughout the country.\textsuperscript{37} Shaw insisted that his donation remain anonymous, even though George pressed him strongly on that point and insisted that his name on the project would be one of its best advertisements and would sell as many copies as the donation. George also

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\textsuperscript{35} FGS to HG, July 18, 1881, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.\\
\textsuperscript{36} FGS to HG, August 22, 1881, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL; Barker, \textit{Henry George}, 327-332.\\
\textsuperscript{37} HG to Edward Taylor, September 7, 1881, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
\end{flushleft}
wanted to use Shaw's name because he was proud that his ideas attracted the support of a respected, wealthy reformer. "It is not merely the attention it will call to the book that makes me desirous of giving all the publicity I can to your act," George told him. "It is the moral reinforcement. It is an answer to those who have stigmatized the book as incendiary and communistic."^38

In making arrangements for the library editions, George and Shaw developed an affectionate and deep friendship that was important to the lives of both men. Shaw believed that George had uncovered the fundamental truth of the universe; nothing was more vital than sharing the message and initiating a new age of justice for the masses. In September, the Irish World, an Irish-American newspaper, invited George to go to Ireland as its correspondent. Shaw viewed this as the perfect opportunity for George to attack the land question where the issue would most resonate, so he enabled George to go by paying his outstanding debts.®

Corresponding across the Atlantic, Shaw and George discussed how best to promulgate Progress and Poverty in America. They viewed themselves as agitators launching a

^38 HG to FGS, October 4, 1881, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL; HG to FGS, September 13, 1881, HGP, NYPL.

® Barker, Henry George, 339-340; George, Life of Henry George, 378-400.
revolutionary movement, one whose ultimate triumph was inevitable. Shaw would never again lose faith, for he knew that "Justice must at last prevail." Reaching the masses was important, but so was discrediting the current political economy which served as an obstacle to true reform. George believed that political economists and social scientists expounded errors that barred the structural reforms necessary to promote justice and end poverty. He attacked both classical economics for misunderstanding the relationship between labor and capital and Malthusian theory for its explanation for poverty. Academics, scoffing at the untrained economist, either ignored George or wrote scathing reviews dismissing the book’s ideas entirely.

Shaw felt that if the book was publicly discussed, its ideas would win converts through the sheer weight of their Truth. "How true it is that the fallacies on which the current Political Economy is based had to be disproved before the light could enter," Shaw remarked. He thought that Progress and Poverty had so devastated the field that intellectual concurrence was inevitable. "I have yet to find the first person who does not give assent to the

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40 FGS to HG, May 10, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
41 George, Progress and Poverty, 15-134.
42 FGS to HG, January 25, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
doctrine after reading P&P," he reported to George. "Though some complain that it is very hard reading & that they have to study it, which is just what we would want them to do."\textsuperscript{43}

Shaw, perhaps cashing in on the debt his brother Quincy owed him, obtained three thousand dollars from New England's richest man to send 1382 special copies of \textit{Progress and Poverty} and George's \textit{The Irish Land Question} to every member of the elite Society for Political Education.\textsuperscript{44} George at first was not sure that this move would be very effective, but he did realize the importance of publicity: "All we have to work for is to bring on the discussion, when that point is reached then the movement takes care of itself."\textsuperscript{45} As things turned out, Shaw and Quincy's action brought on that discussion. The Boston \textit{Daily Advertiser} reported that socialists and dangerous labor agitators were infiltrating the elite halls of the Society for Political Education and in the fallout it was revealed that the dangerous agitators were members of the untouchable Shaw family. Shaw was thrilled. "The Daily Advertiser has given us quite a lift in New England," he wrote the absent George. "We could not

\textsuperscript{43} FGS to HG, January 25, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.

\textsuperscript{44} FGS to HG, May 19, May 19 (Second Letter), June 7, and July 3, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.

\textsuperscript{45} HG to FGS, July 1, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
have a better advertisement." On receiving Shaw's letter, George could not contain his glee. The paper's "evident astonishment when it finds the 'socialist seducer' of the Society for the propagation of Sumnerian political economy is of the bluest Boston blood is to me very funny." George admitted his doubts were unfounded, "You have kicked up a row. And of all the things we want to do, to kick up a row is first and foremost." George was also glad that Shaw had lost his anonymity. "That frees me," he said, "and now I can use your name." For his part, Shaw reported that "it has set a good many people to reading P&P & opened an entrance into New England much wider than I anticipated. So many school teachers go from there that this is a great gain."

The other prong of the attack was to stir up the people and to this end Shaw and George directed most of their efforts. In the spring of 1882, Shaw wrote a sketch, aimed more for an English audience than for an American one, entitled "A Piece of Land." The essay presented a short dialogue between three characters, "Labor," "Capital," and

46 FGS to HG, July 31, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
47 HG to FGS, August 3, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
48 FGS to HG, August 14, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
49 FGS to HG, May 10, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
"Landowner." In the opening, Labor is digging the ground with a stick and planting potatoes, when Capital passes by with a spade. Capital agrees to let Labor use the spade in exchange for a new spade and twelve bushels of potatoes. Labor does well working on the common land -- he pays for the spade and has enough left for his family to be comfortable. But then enters Landowner, who has succeeded in getting Parliament to inclose the common and take possession of it. He fences in the common against Labor and demands an exorbitant rent, thus reducing the once comfortable, independent Labor to a serf. In a jab at liberal reformers, Shaw ends the piece with Landowner telling Labor if "I find that you really haven't enough to live on...I will give you some of the small potatoes in charity, to keep you alive and out of the poorhouse - where I should have to pay for the whole support of you and your family."50

George exulted over the little sketch. "I am a great believer in the power of that sort of writing," he told Shaw, "for it goes where more elaborate arguments would not. And I think this most admirably done - just the thing needed."51


51 HG to FGS, April 28, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
began to peddle Shaw's work to labor societies and newspapers in Britain. The Land Nationalization Society printed 20,000 copies as a tract and it appeared in the *Radical*. It received fairly large circulation through publication in the Irish papers the *News* and the *Nation*, which received several letters praising the sketch. George passed out copies at all his lectures in Britain and sent it, along with his work *The Irish Land Question*, to every member of Parliament. "So my dear friend we are in the way of doing something," George wrote. "The big stone is already moving." In America, *Truth*, a New York one cent daily with a circulation of nearly one hundred thousand, published the sketch. They had less success publishing it elsewhere in the United States, however, even though George sent it to several Boston papers.

Shaw's most important work in reaching the masses, however, involved providing cheap editions of *Progress and Poverty* in Britain and the United States and subsidizing George's continued personal appearances in England and

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52 HG to FGS, April 28, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
53 HG to FGS, June 30, June 8, and August 3, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
54 FGS to HG, May 29, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL; HG to FGS, August 3, 1882, Reel 2, NYPL; George, *Life of Henry George*, 355. The editor of *Truth*, Louis F. Post, became a staunch disciple of George.
Ireland. Shaw, explaining that "I know of no better way to help the cause than by enabling you to devote yourself to it without being distracted by worry," constantly sent George money. To Shaw, the Cause transcended any individual, but George was "its representative." To George, Shaw was an advisor, a mentor, and a collaborator; in his letters to Shaw, he often referred to "our ideas" and promised to keep Shaw apprised of "every move." On receiving one of Shaw's donations, George responded, "Now we will start the Revolution!" Shaw arranged for a cheap edition in the United States, and funded the publication of a sixpenny version in the United Kingdom. "Thanks to Mr. Shaw, this country will be flooded with it," George told a friend. To Shaw he wrote, "The movement has certainly begun in England, and in influencing England we are indirectly influencing the United States."

55 FGS to HG, June 12, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
56 FGS to HG, May 10, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
57 HG to FGS, July 1, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
58 HG to FGS, June 20, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
59 HG to Edward Taylor, June 29, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL; HG to FGS, June 2, 1882, Reel 2, NYPL; FGS to HG, June 12 and July 10, 1882, Reel 2, NYPL.
60 HG to FGS, September 12, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
Shaw and George were very successful in their efforts to promulgate *Progress and Poverty* and its ideas. In the early 1880's it was the most widely distributed and read book in economic literature; it became one of the nation's all time best selling works of non-fiction. The book's influence cannot be overstated. It converted many Britons to socialism; in the United States it contributed to the growth and militancy of the labor movement in the 1880's; it set a surprising number of American reformers on the road to new thinking and turned them away from conservative Darwinism; it made George an international hero, and in some circles, a prophet. The book touched the lives of millions of Americans.61

This was possible because George tapped into dual traditions of American reform -- both Jeffersonian individualism and social cooperation. Frank Shaw had helped introduce the ideas of French socialism to the American scene and he recognized in *Progress and Poverty* a kindred spirit. In its demand for communal ownership of property, in its call for economic justice for labor, and in its promise that labor would share equally in the goods of

society, the book appealed to those who were suspicious of the Jeffersonian enthusiasm for laissez faire capitalism but who could not accept the repression of state socialism. In this regard, Shaw represented a vital link between antebellum reform of this kind and the labor movements of the 1880's and later social reforms.

George’s ideas appealed to an antebellum reformer of Shaw’s ilk, one who had always repudiated the extreme individualism of American society; older reformers who had settled into Gilded Age liberalism either ignored George or angrily denounced his economic theories. The distance between Shaw and many of his old colleagues was evident in a story that George related. James Russell Lowell, a life long friend of Frank and Sarah and long time supporter of abolition, had asked the publisher William Appleton who would buy such a book as *Progress and Poverty*. "One man who buys it is a friend of yours -- Francis G. Shaw," Appleton told him. "He bought a thousand, and then he came back and bought another thousand!" Lowell was shocked. "He is a dear, good friend of mine, but -- but, he must be getting eccentric!" 62

Shaw did not live to see the fruits of his labor on Henry George’s behalf. He never knew that he had both

62 HG to FGS, September 12, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
succeeded and failed — succeeded in exposing George's ideas to a wider audience, but failing to convince the majority of the validity of George's remedy. Just sixteen months after his partnership with George began, Shaw caught pneumonia and, after a few days, died on November 7, 1882. The reformer who had so long sought to reconcile the social order with some eternal plan for utopia died content. He was firm in his faith that "beyond the grave he should find that kingdom of heaven which he had hoped might come on earth, and the way to which he had sought so diligently and so long."  

The importance to his final days of his belief in George's truths became apparent in the family's plans for the funeral. The service was very private, with nobody but immediate family invited. Even the brothers in Boston were asked not to come. Placed on the coffin was a cross, "the only flowers he had near him, because we knew he would like them coming from you," Josephine told the grieving George. George was grateful that Shaw "did not go to the grave without some little token of the affection there was between

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63 HG to Annie George, November 8, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL; New York Times, November 9, 1882, 5:3.
64 Gay, "Francis George Shaw," 2.
65 Josephine Shaw Lowell to HG, November 11, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL; HG to Annie George, November 8, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.
us." He described their feelings as what "among the ancients was the closest of ties." George felt he was Shaw's "proxy, his younger man, whom he sent into the struggle he would have made himself."66 George's next work, Social Problems, was dedicated to Shaw and included "A Piece of Land" in the appendix.

Shaw's will provided a comfortable living to his wife and children and legacies for all his grandchildren. He left his long faithful Irish servants land and a house in West New Brighton.67 Leaving the home that she and Frank had shared, Sarah moved to Manhattan and rented a house on East 13th Street that adjoined Josephine's. Sarah was intensely proud of her daughter's public life; no longer active herself, she continued her intense interest in reform. "I had never before been with people who talked over the affairs of city and State exactly as they would those of their own family," said a friend, "and on Decoration Day, when the flag hung across the doors of these two houses, one knew what it meant to the women within."68

66 HG to Josephine Shaw Lowell, November 15, 1882, HGP, Reel 2, NYPL.

67 Staten Island Gazette and Sentinel, January 10, 1883, 1.

Although Lowell's activities continued along the lines of scientific charity, the introduction of Henry George's ideas helped move her toward support of labor and a quest for social justice. "Whether Henry George and Father are right," she said in 1883, "and that plan will help to make things straight I can't say, but that they need putting straight I am very sure of."^69 Lowell's biographer, Joan Waugh, notes that toward the end of her life she became more oriented toward social questions. She gained a greater recognition of the connection between poverty and unemployment, which allowed her to move beyond her early individual, moral focus. In the 1880's and 1890's, she became an anti-imperialist and a labor activist, supporting a union's right to strike and working to establish fair arbitration boards.\(^\text{70}\)

There were not a few reformers who, like the elderly Elizabeth Peabody, read *Progress and Poverty* after "hearing that Mr. Francis G. Shaw died happy because the book was in the world."\(^\text{71}\) Shaw's life had been dedicated to social reconstruction, and to those who would listen, he offered his great remedies to the problems confronting America. For

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\(^69\) Waugh, *Unsentimental Reformer*, 190.


\(^71\) Elizabeth Peabody to HG, March 4, 1883, Reel 3, NYPL.
those seeking a cooperative society he translated French socialists and made Henry George available to the masses. For those seeking justice for African Americans he created a symbol of freedom and promoted a true reconstruction of the South. Most Americans, however, ignored the larger meaning of Shaw's life. His cousin and close friend, John Murray Forbes, the railroad magnate who had simultaneously used his powers to arm freedmen and create the industrial North, was saddened that immediately after Shaw's death no one had mentioned his stirring epitaph over Rob's grave. Shaw's words had been "better than any I know in history." Later Americans, like Forbes, would find it easier to recall those few words than to face the deeper meaning of his utopian vision and lifelong critique of American society.

\[\text{\footnotesize 72 John Murray Forbes to Mrs. M.W. Chapman, November 9, 1882, Anti-Slavery Collection, Ms.A.9.2., V. 32, No. 92, Boston Public Library, by courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Public Library.} \]
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268
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269


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276


