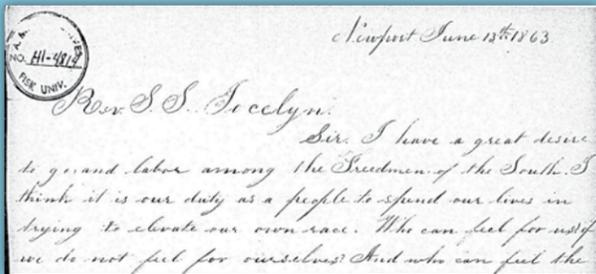


Ellen embraced the fight against slavery and racism.

In June 1863, six months after President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Concord's **Ellen Garrison Jackson*** had an inspiration. The forty-year-old African American woman, born mere miles from Walden Pond, was then a teacher in Rhode Island. Hearing that the American Missionary Association (AMA) was opening schools in areas controlled by the Union Army, she applied for a job teaching freed people. "I feel it is our duty as a people to spend our lives trying to elevate our own race," she explained to the AMA. "Who can feel the sympathy that we can, who are identified with them?"

Born in 1823, the child of **Jack** and **Susan (Robbins) Garrison**, **Ellen Garrison** grew up in Concord, where she obtained "a good Common School and Sabbath School education." Slavery had long since ended in the Bay State, but it was no distant memory. Her grandfather, **Caesar Robbins**, a patriot of color, had been enslaved before the Revolution; her father had settled in Concord around 1810 after escaping from bondage in New Jersey. Her mother was a founding – and only known black – member of the Concord Female Antislavery Society, hosting their second meeting in 1837. Ellen embraced the fight against slavery and racism. In her late

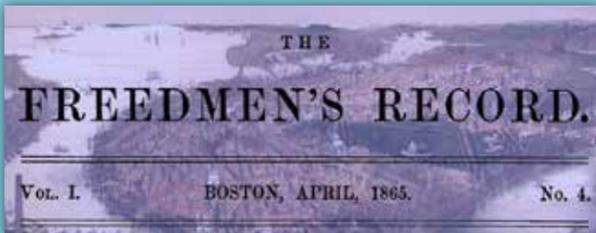


▲ Historian Robert Gross found over 100 letters and school reports written by **Ellen Garrison Jackson** in the Amistad Archives for the American Missionary Association. (Amistad Archives, Tulane University)

teens she moved to Boston, where she enlisted in the abolitionist movement and joined efforts to end racial segregation in the schools and on the railroads. Amid this activism she wed John W. Jackson, a free black farmer from Delaware, who apparently died within a few years.

In 1863, as black men and women claimed freedom in territory won by the Union Army, **Ellen Garrison Jackson** determined to join her fate with theirs. Her opportunity came through the American Missionary Association, founded in 1846 to promote the education and emancipation of African Americans throughout the Republic. The AMA was one of the few interracial organizations in which people of color held positions of leadership. In 1865 the group hired **Ellen Garrison Jackson**; she was one of the first two African American women assigned to its schools for freed people in the South. As a teacher in Port Deposit, Maryland, and James City County, Virginia, **Ellen** found a way to share with newly freed people the education she had obtained as a girl growing up in Concord.

Through the AMA and various Freedmen's Aid Societies, hundreds of black and white northerners went south to teach newly freed people of all ages. Many schools for freed people built on the pioneering efforts of free blacks during the decade before the Civil War. In Baltimore two schools for free people of color were already in operation when the AMA



▲ The New England Freedmen's Aid Society published *The Freedmen's Record* to expose the conditions of freedmen to northerners and promote charitable contributions to fund relief efforts in the postwar South. (Accessible Archives, Inc.)

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Throughout American history, people of African descent have demanded the right to define their racial identity through terms that reflect their proud and complex history. African Americans across greater Boston used the terms "African," "colored," and "negro" to define themselves before emancipation, while African Americans in the early 1900s used the terms "black," "colored," "negro," and "Afro-American" – which later became "African American" to identify themselves and their ancestors. In our brochures, the terms "**people of color**," "**people of African descent**," "**black**," and "**African American**" are used interchangeably to reflect the identities claimed by African Americans over time.

These and the terms "**enslaved**" (versus "slave") and "**enslaver**" (versus "master" or "owner") are used to reflect the humanity of the millions of black men, women, and children who claimed their personhood, in various ways large and small, despite the laws and systems that bound them.



Ellen Garrison Jackson, Fighter for Freedom during Reconstruction (1863-1875)

What did she accomplish?

BY KERRI GREENIDGE, TUFTS UNIVERSITY

*NOTE: names in bold are associated with the Robbins House. Cover image: Late 1800s Freedmen's Bureau Schoolroom.

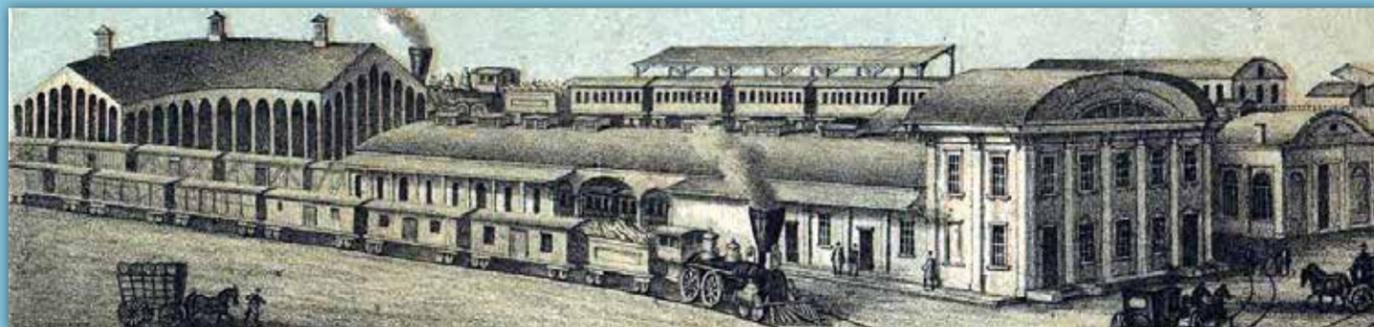
Ellen challenged racism wherever she found it.

arrived. The national society, in collaboration with the Society of Friends, added sixteen more. The aid was essential, but these steps to foster black freedom were met with hostility and violence by many Southern whites. Antagonists in Virginia threw rocks at black students and shoved teachers off sidewalks. In Royal Oak, Maryland, whites threatened to burn down the school that freed people built with their own funds. It was “unsafe [for colored people] to go out,” **Ellen Garrison Jackson** found in Port Deposit, “for they are stoned and driven about at the pleasure of the rowdies.” One Maryland man, she noted drily, was “not content with simply stepping on my dress;” he also lashed out at her with a racial insult and a threat, warning that he “would not have any of [her] sass and would slap [her] in the mouth.”

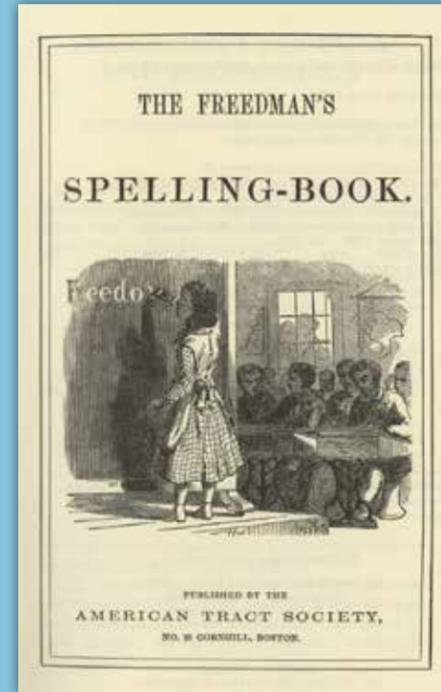
The first U.S. Civil Rights Bill was passed in April 1866. A month later, in May 1866, **Ellen** and her fellow AMA teacher Mary Anderson were in Baltimore for a visit. Traveling by train, they bought tickets at a local station of the Baltimore and Ohio line and entered the ladies’ waiting room, reserved for whites only, to await its arrival. For this brave challenge to racial segregation, they were “forcibly ejected” and physically assaulted by the stationmaster. “We were injured in our

persons as well as our feelings,” **Ellen** told the AMA, “for it was with no gentle hand that we were assisted from that room and I feel the effects of it still.” With the help of local black and white abolitionists, Ellen filed suit in Maryland district court under the Civil Rights Act of 1866, passed by Congress over President Andrew Johnson’s veto, a month before. This was possibly the first case in the nation to test the effectiveness of the new law. For reasons unknown, a Baltimore grand jury dismissed the suit, and it did not go to trial.

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was one of several measures for racial equality pushed by Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner through Congress during Reconstruction. The Act, which he helped to draft, led to the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. In 1875 Sumner sponsored another law barring racial discrimination in public accommodations and railroads, later overturned by the Supreme Court. These actions had their beginnings in the 1849 campaign against school segregation in Boston, in which Charles Sumner, the rising politician and **Ellen Garrison Jackson**, the young schoolteacher were fellow warriors for equality and justice. New England’s reform tradition thus revolutionized American law, helped establish many educational institutions for formerly enslaved men, women, and children across the South, and planted the seeds of interracial democracy throughout the Republic.



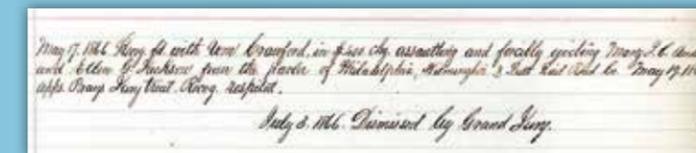
▲ **Ellen Garrison Jackson**, with her colleague Mary Anderson, purposely took seats in the segregated ladies waiting room at the Baltimore train station a month after the Civil Rights Bill passed, then filed a lawsuit against the train guard who “forcibly ejected” them, in order to reinforce the Bill. (1869, Courtesy Library of Congress)



◀ **The Freedman’s Spelling-Book** taught literacy as well as words “in connection with important practical subjects; as occupations, civil institutions, and morals,” with the intent of providing “practical information... of great value to the freedmen in the new condition into which Providence has raised them.” (c. 1865, Library of Virginia)



▲ **Congress passed the Civil Rights Bill on April 9th, 1866 – over the veto of President Andrew Johnson – declaring that all persons born in the U.S. were now citizens, without regard to race, color, or previous condition.** (Philadelphia Press, March 28, 1866, Rare and Early Newspapers)



▲ **The docket for Ellen Garrison Jackson’s court case reveals that although the train guard was fined \$400 dollars (worth \$6,000 today) for assaulting Ellen and Mary, the Grand Jury dismissed the case and no legal precedent was set to protect their civil right to sit in the ladies’ waiting room.** (Maryland Archives)

PRIMARY SOURCES

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