

Stony Brook University



OFFICIAL COPY

The official electronic file of this thesis or dissertation is maintained by the University Libraries on behalf of The Graduate School at Stony Brook University.

© All Rights Reserved by Author.

**A West Indian Jubilee in America:
British Emancipation and the American Abolition Movement**

A Dissertation Presented

by

Dexter Joey Gabriel

to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

Stony Brook University

May 2016

Stony Brook University

The Graduate School

Dexter Joey Gabriel

We, the dissertation committee for the above candidate for the
Doctor of Philosophy degree, hereby recommend
acceptance of this dissertation.

**Dr. April Masten – Dissertation Advisor
Professor, History Department**

**Dr. Jennifer Anderson - Chairperson of Defense
Professor, History Department**

**Dr. Kathleen Wilson
Professor, History Department**

**Dr. Erica Armstrong Dunbar
Professor, History and Black American Studies, University of Delaware**

This dissertation is accepted by the Graduate School

Charles Taber
Dean of the Graduate School

Abstract of the Dissertation

A West Indian Jubilee in America:

British Emancipation and the American Abolition Movement

by

Dexter Joey Gabriel

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

Stony Brook University

2016

This dissertation, “A West Indian Jubilee in America: British Emancipation and the American Abolition Movement,” charts the impact of British Emancipation on American abolitionism and free African-American communities from the 1830s through the 1860s. On August 1, 1834 the British Abolition Act freed by proclamation 800,000 slaves in the West Indies. In the coming decades, in print and in public rituals, the success of the former slaves in the British West Indies became a crucial focal point in the debate on American slavery. This debate took place in the flourishing American print culture that emerged in the 1830s: antislavery newspapers, tracts, books, printed speeches, broadsides, personal letters and other print ephemera. Using personal accounts and collected data, American abolitionists argued that the emancipated British West Indies served as a successful experiment of free versus slave labor that Southern slaveholders could emulate. American reformers toured the emancipated West Indian colonies to determine whether emancipation had improved the morality of former slaves. Success in the emancipated British West Indies instigated a comparative discourse on race, equality and democratic participation in American society among free African-Americans in the U.S. North. The success of freedom in the British West Indies, abolitionists and free American-Americans contended, foretold the success of freedom in America.

Dedication Page

Throughout my graduate studies I have both met and been helped by many within the academic and research community. My dissertation advisor, April Masten, has been essential in providing scholarly support, input and patience. I also want to thank the other members of my Stony Brook committee, including Jennifer Anderson who helped me craft my arguments and edit my drafts, and Kathleen Wilson, whose research and writings were a great inspiration. I want to give special thanks to Katrina Thompson, a Stony Brook alumni, who throughout my graduate career has been both an invaluable colleague, ally, mentor, and most important, a friend.

I was fortunate enough during my studies to conduct research as a fellow at the Library Company of Philadelphia as part of the Mellon Scholars Program in African American History. I want to thank Erica Armstrong Dunbar for the opportunity to participate in a residency at the historic Cassatt House, where I met and interacted with a rich diversity of scholars. I spent the final year of my graduate career as the Frederick Douglass Scholars Fellow at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. It was an enriching experience that offered both professional development and the time and space necessary to complete my dissertation. Thanks to both Victoria Watson, head of the Frederick Douglass Institute, and the IUP History Department and faculty for all your time and help. The support from institutions including the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, New York University Library, the Schomburg Center, the Library of Congress and the Boston Public Library, have also been integral to my research.

To my family and friends. I want to thank my wife, Danielle, without whose constant sacrifice, love, support and encouragement this would not have been possible. I want to thank my father Joseph Gabriel and my sister Lisa Gabriel who remain both supportive and proud of my endeavors. The greatest thanks I reserve for my beloved mother Elizabeth Claudette Gabriel. Though you could not be here to see this accomplishment, you always believed in my dreams even when at times I did not. This achievement is dedicated to you. I hope I made you proud.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: British Emancipation and the Antislavery Press.....	18
Chapter Two: The Benefits of Free Labor.....	74
Chapter Three: Emancipation and Reform in the West Indies.....	126
Chapter Four: African-Americans and British Emancipation.....	172
Chapter Five: A West Indian Jubilee in America.....	227
Chapter Six: Freedom's Struggle.....	291
Conclusion.....	324
Bibliography.....	328

INTRODUCTION

On the morning of Tuesday, August 1st 1854 two steamships, the *Enoch Dean* and *Island City*, left the busy fishing inlet of Manhattan's Fulton Market on the East River headed for Long Island City in nearby Queens. As reported in the *New York Times*, the ships were crowded with members of the New York Anti-Slavery Society. The abolitionist group had been founded fourteen years earlier to advocate for immediate emancipation of the nation's four million black slaves. The passengers—black and white, men and women—disembarked at a wooded grove called St. Ronan's Well, which by the 1850s had become a popular site for picnics, church gatherings, and military drills. The purpose of this festive event was to commemorate the anniversary of British Emancipation, which in 1834 had freed some 800,000 slaves by proclamation, the majority of who lived in the island colonies of the Caribbean. August 1, 1834 marked a momentous turning point for enslaved people in the British Caribbean. But what did their freedom mean for abolitionists and free African-Americans two decades later? More fundamentally, how did the celebration of their freedom, to which events such as the St. Ronan's gathering harkened back, help develop and mobilize abolitionism and African-American struggles for freedom in the United States?¹

During the 1850s, antislavery sentiment, if not abolitionism, was growing in the Northeastern region of the U.S. owing in part to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act that aroused popular indignation. By then, August First, as the day was called, had become a prevalent annual

¹ *New York Times*, August 1854. Information on St. Ronan's Well in the mid-nineteenth century is documented in John Horner French, ed., *Historical and Statistical Gazetteer of the State of New York* (New York: Pearsall Smith, 1860), 549.

public ritual commemorating British Emancipation through religious services, picnics, large parades and speeches.² Indispensable to these events was an abolitionist and free black press, which advertised and reported on them in depth. In 1854 alone, simultaneous gatherings were held in different cities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Massachusetts and New Hampshire. The crowd at St. Ronan's Well was a mixed gathering, counting among its numbers evangelical clergy, radical abolitionists and advocates of antislavery political parties.³

Shortly after 12 o'clock, the black abolitionist the Reverend Willis Hodges helped open August First at St. Ronan's Well with a prayer. Hodges was active in the local black community of Williamsburg, and thirteen years prior had helped organize a British Emancipation commemoration attended by over a thousand people. He and his brother helped found the Union Temperance Benevolent Society, the New York Society for the Promotion of Education Among Colored Children, and a short-lived black newspaper *The Ram's Horn*. No stranger to political activism, Hodges' name also appeared on an 1841 petition to the U.S. Congress protesting attempts to impede political debate over abolition.⁴

The first speaker of the day was Horace Greeley, champion of free labor, editor of the *New York Tribune*, and antislavery Republican. Following a "Jubilee Song," Greeley launched

² August First, First of August or West Indian Day will be used to describe the annual commemorations of British Emancipation. When written as August 1, this will usually refer to the actual date.

³ The terms *antislavery* and *abolitionism*, while related and often used interchangeably, held distinct meanings for people in antebellum America. Accordingly, this paper will adhere as much as possible to those contemporary definitions. Abolitionists advocated for the immediate end of slavery, even though their organizations used the term antislavery in their title. Additionally, abolitionist newspapers were often referred to as the antislavery press. Antislavery proponents, on the other hand, tended to advocate gradual emancipation or the containment of slavery along sectional lines, rather than calling for its immediate end. These camps were not homogenous but there was significant overlap. Political-minded abolitionists, for instance, supported the antislavery Liberty Party and Free Soil Party.

⁴ The 1841 August 1st celebration organized by Willis Hodges was covered in the *Colored American*, 14 August 1841). For more on Willis Hodges see, Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., *Free Man of Color: The Autobiography of Willis Augustus Hodges* (Serialized 1896, *The Freeman*; Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982).

into a speech attacking slavery as an unjust enterprise at the heart of American economic life. In contrast he pointed to England, who had “sinned” through slavery but “repented” with emancipation and grown richer with the deed. He based his remarks on his 1851 visit to London where he saw the famed Crystal Palace, a triumph of British industrialism. Exhibits at the Crystal Palace convinced him of the superiority of English progress and the achievements to be gained through free labor. If America wished to become an industrial society on par with Britain, it must abandon the inefficient system of slave labor. “You can whip the slave to plant cotton—but can’t whip men to build bridges and Crystal Palaces,” he remarked. “Genius is not helped by whips.”⁵

Greeley was followed by Samuel J. May, a Unitarian minister and supporter of William Lloyd Garrison, the Boston abolitionist and editor of the antislavery *Liberator*. Three years prior, May had helped orchestrate the rescue of escaped slave William “Jerry” Henry in open defiance of the Fugitive Slave Law. May spoke to the assembled crowd for nearly two hours, calling British Emancipation “the most worthy and encouraging” event in recent history. It reflected the “best hopes of social progress and Enlightenment,” even more than the Declaration of Independence. He hailed emancipation in the British West Indian colonies as a victory for both free labor and moral reform, evidenced by the “improved” education, social status and condition of the former slaves. The same could happen on American soil, said May, and it was the duty of abolitionists to use “concerted action” to bring it about.⁶

⁵ *New York Times*, 2 August 1854. A New York Crystal Palace modeled on the British original was constructed in 1853, on which Greeley wrote extensively. Horace Greeley, *Art and Industry as Represented in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, New York 1853-4* (New York: Redfield, 1853); Months earlier Greeley joined the fledgling Republican Party, formed in 1854. For more on Greeley’s political life see, Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 184-196 and Robert C. Williams, *Horace Greeley: Champion of American Freedom* (New York: New York University, Press 2006).

⁶ *New York Times*, 2 August 1854.

Several speakers followed May, including delegates from Syracuse, New York and as far away as Indiana. All praised British Emancipation and what it had wrought in the West Indies. The Indiana delegate called it second only to Christ's death. Thomas Van Rennselaer, a black New York abolitionist and co-founder of the *Ram's Horn*, took the moment to declare that free blacks were "the most efficient advocate of the slave" and should take the lead in that cause in the United States. Willis Hodges also called for increased black political activism, with what the *New York Times* called "great animation." The crowd became animated as well. When a speaker dared compliment American Revolutionary leader George Washington, a black woman in the audience identified as Miss Hicks took issue. Interrupting him, she argued that the founding father had "lied to the colored people" about American liberty and freedom:

He called them together, and after they had *fit [fought] and took this country*, then kept them as slaves. It was not right. The colored people were the chosen people of God; they would rise above all.⁷

Miss Hicks's radical denouncement was not the last incendiary charge of the day. As they adjourned at the end of the day, the crowd struck up a hymn comparing slaveholders to despots under the sway of "Mammon." The song warned that the end of human bondage was coming and would not wait. "Slavery itself must pass away," they sang, "and be a tale of yesterday."⁸

The events and speeches at Ronan's Well that 1st of August 1854 illustrate the many ways American opponents of slavery referenced British Emancipation. August First could bring together antislavery Republicans, such as Horace Greely, and radical Garrisonian abolitionists, such as Samuel J. May, for whom the emancipated Anglo-Caribbean functioned as a successful

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. The song, "Let Mammon Hold, while Mammon can," was written by the English Moravian minister James Montgomery in 1834 to herald the British Abolition Act taking effect. Moravians had long been prominent in the British West Indies, where they took special concern for the slave population. After 1834, Moravians flocked to the emancipated English colonies as missionaries to the former slaves. See, Oliver W. Furley, "Moravian Missions and Slaves in the West Indies," *Caribbean Studies* 5, no. 1 (July 1965): 3-16.

experiment in free labor and societal reform. For the Rev. Willis Hodges and Thomas Van Rensselaer, commemorating British Emancipation was part of a larger transnational antislavery struggle of which “colored” men would take the lead. For Miss Hicks, it was an opportunity to enter into the public sphere and to challenge both the American narrative of national independence and the meaning of freedom, liberty and Republican citizenship.

But the significance of British Emancipation in the United States cannot be reduced to a singular annual celebratory performance. The sentiments expressed on that sweltering August day were part of an on-going discussion promoted, advocated and circulated by abolitionists in speeches, newspapers, pamphlets, books and general print culture. The British Abolition Act of 1833 resonated beyond both England and the immediate region of the Caribbean where it applied; in the United States it signaled a shift in American antislavery strategies, as many who previously sought a gradual end to slavery now demanded its immediate abolition.

The key to their argument was to be found in the British West Indies, which many saw as a potentially edifying social experiment in which the effects of emancipating nearly a million slaves could be observed and studied. How did the free labor of those former slaves compare to forced servitude in parts of the United States? How had the former slaves improved themselves as moral beings through emancipation and the subsequent system of apprenticeship intended to prepare them for freedom? How did the former slaves now handle the responsibilities of citizenship in the British West Indies? In this geographic space could be found evidence to argue for the superiority of free labor, the reformatory power of emancipation, and even the possibilities of racial equality.

To this end, from the 1830s through the 1860s, abolitionists in the United States, both black and white, wove references to the emancipated colonies and its black inhabitants into their

popular rhetoric calling for the overthrow of Southern slavery and the expansion of American democracy. The ritual performances of August First at St. Ronan's Well and elsewhere in the United States during the 1850s can only be understood within the larger deployment of British Emancipation within American abolitionism and free African-American mobilization and activism.

This work focuses on the ways that the emancipated British West Indies entered the discussion about abolition and African-American citizenship in the United States. It analyzes this public discourse and its role as both propaganda and rhetoric by abolitionists, black and white, and African-Americans more generally in antebellum America. In public oratory and in print, abolitionists and African-Americans waged a ceaseless crusade to control perceptions of the emancipated West Indies. The British Caribbean was to be presented as a triumph for economic progress, social reform and the possibilities of racial democracy. Of primary importance was the evidence of the ability of former slaves in the West Indies to adapt to emancipation, because success or failure of black freedom in these foreign colonies foretold the success or failure of black freedom in America.

This dissertation draws on a broad spectrum of scholarship on slavery, abolitionism, and emancipation in the nineteenth century, including the following: Anglo-Atlantic antislavery movements and abolitionists, August First commemorations, and British Emancipation's impact on the United States.⁹ It brings together these varied historiographies to demonstrate the role the

⁹ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972); Richard J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Genevieve Fabre, "African American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century," in *History and Memory in African-American Culture*, eds., Genevieve Fabre and Robert O' Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Patrick Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of

British Abolition Act played in the abolition movement in the United States and recontextualizes that moment as part of a broader transnational phenomenon. Despite the frequent mention of the British West Indies in the American antislavery and free black press, it receives little attention in most studies of American abolitionism, even in those that focus on August First. Yet it was the British West Indies, and the emancipated slaves who lived and labored there, that were used by American abolitionists and free African-Americans to validate the success of British Emancipation as a valuable propaganda tool in their arguments against American slavery.

In the Biblical Book of Leviticus, Jubilee took place every fifty years: a period where debts were forgiven and those held in bondage or servitude were to be freed. For antislavery reformers in the early Anglo-Atlantic world, the messianic Jubilee symbolized more than a cyclical occurrence. Instead, it was to be an end, now and forever, of the institution of slavery, ushering in a utopian age of progress. Eighteenth-century English radicals like Robert Wedderburn and Thomas Spence spoke of a coming Jubilee in the West Indies that would emancipate the enslaved. Pennsylvania Quakers like Anthony Benezet and Benjamin Rush evoked Jubilee in their arguments against slavery. These were shared and traded, back and forth, across the Atlantic in pamphlets and correspondences with London reformers like Granville Sharp. The liberating symbol of Jubilee inspired a campaign in England to end the slave trade and an abolitionist movement to end slavery.¹⁰

Massachusetts Press, 2003); Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2013).

¹⁰ On English radicals like Robert Wedderburn and Thomas Spence's notion of Jubilee and antislavery, see Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 287-326; For Jubilee as a principle of antislavery and abolitionist reformers in England and America, see John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 2, 88-89; 100-144.

The awaited Jubilee arrived on August 28, 1833 when the British Parliament passed “An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies.” The law, which would not come into effect until “the first Day of August One thousand eight hundred and thirty-four,” abolished slavery throughout the British Empire.¹¹ The greatest impact was in the West Indies, where 800,000 men, women and children were freed from slavery. In England tracts were printed by reformers announcing the “Negroe’s Jubilee.”¹² Medals depicting slaves celebrating emancipation were cast and distributed to British schoolchildren. On one medal a freed slave stands with broken chains on his outstretched arms as his feet trample whips and rods. Behind him is a tropical scene of sugar cane and palm trees while beneath are words reading “This is the Lord’s Doing” and “Jubilee Aug 1 1834.”¹³

Jubilee, however, did not arrive at once. Excluding Antigua, the Abolition Act also put in place a form of “apprenticed Labourers” throughout the British Caribbean colonies. The stated intent of this provision was “for promoting the Industry and securing the good Conduct” of the recently manumitted. In many respects an extension of slavery, these apprenticeships retained men, women and children under the control of their former masters for various periods of time. The provision sought to both strictly regulate the freed persons’ labor, as well as limit their mobility and independence. After four years of renewed agitation by former slaves and British abolitionists, full emancipation was finally enacted in 1838, ending the apprenticeships. On

¹¹ United Kingdom. *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves.* [London]: n.p., 1833.

¹² Thomas Timpson, *The Negroes' Jubilee: A Memorial of Negro Emancipation, August 1, 1834: with a Brief History of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition, and the Extinction of British Colonial Slavery* (London: Ward and Company, 1834).

¹³ Medal commemorating the Abolition of slavery, 1834. Designed by Joseph Davis. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Michael Graham-Stewart Slavery Collection.

islands like Jamaica, children carried banners to celebrate this second arrival of freedom as “the day of Jubilee.”¹⁴

These events in England’s Caribbean colonies reverberated with distinct importance across the Atlantic. Antislavery newspapers in the United States, like Benjamin Lundy’s *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, spoke of the “Jubilee of West Indian Slavery” and pondered its bearing on the struggle against human bondage in North America.¹⁵

The interactions between British and American abolitionists have been examined in previous works on transatlantic nineteenth-century politics. Betty Fladeland’s pioneering *Men and Brothers* (1972) remains the definitive treatise on the interconnection of antislavery reformers on both sides of the Atlantic. Fladeland argues that, “the struggles of Great Britain in the United States against slavery and the slave trade were so closely connected that they deserve to be studied together.”¹⁶ Beginning with the antislavery transatlantic correspondences of early Quakers, Fladeland explores connections between American and English abolitionists from the colonial era through the Civil War. Richard J.M. Blackett expanded upon this literature with *Building an Antislavery Wall* (1983) by centering on the lives of black abolitionists in this Atlantic exchange. Blackett argues these interactions greatly affected reformers on both sides of the Atlantic, and helped black Americans build a “moral cordon” against oppression and slavery. More recent works like Caleb McDaniel’s *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery* (2013) highlights the close relationships among American abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison and a wide array of British and European reformers to assert that the struggle against

¹⁴ Coffey, 114. The most comprehensive work on apprenticeship and slavery is William L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London: Cape, 1937). See also, William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

¹⁵ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, August 1833.

¹⁶ Fladeland, ix.

slavery in the United States was part of a wider battle being waged for democracy. These three books are part of an expanding historiography that seeks to place American abolitionism within the context of the larger Atlantic world.¹⁷

The most visible public evidence of this Anglo-Atlantic relationship was the transfer of commemorations of the 1833 English Act of Abolition to North America. Celebrations of August First, also known as West India Day, brought British Emancipation into the social and political culture of the United States beginning in the 1830s. Benjamin Quarles in *Black Abolitionists* (1969) describes August First as an African-American replacement for the Fourth of July. Quarles argues that free black communities, excluded from the national holiday and by America's continuance of slavery, turned instead to commemorating a foreign triumph of freedom. In *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (1994) Genevieve Fabre argues that August First commemorative performances and rituals formed a "collective memory" among free African-Americans in the urban North. Patrick Rael's *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (2002) frames August First celebrations as an attempt to present the free black community as "a powerful public force." To distance themselves from earlier cultural folk celebrations, like Election Day and Pinkster, which could be quite raucous, elite African-Americans orchestrated August First observances that were "respectable" gatherings similar to popular democratic protests of the day. Rael argues these more staid commemorations, that emphasized dignity and decorum, were localized community events through which black leaders asserted their authority and moral vision.¹⁸

¹⁷ Blakett, 3-46; McDaniel, 1-18.

¹⁸ Quarles, 124-129; Fabre, 82-86; Rael, 54-81.

Mitch Kachun's *Festivals of Freedom* (2003) dedicates a chapter to August First commemorations in the United States, highlighting their transnational dimensions by calling them "a borrowed day of jubilee." Like Fabre, he argues that August First served as an important site of intersection between memory and ritual in early African-American culture. Kachun also sees the commemoration of British Emancipation as an acceptable vehicle for voicing black abolitionist protest in contrast to the Haitian Revolution, which while admired by segments of the black community could not be celebrated publicly due to its association with revolutionary slave insurrection. Expanding Rael's arguments, Kachun analyzes the stratified class dimensions of August First within free black communities and its differing meanings to leaders and common participants. He concludes that commemorating the British Abolition Act was a cultural surrogate for nationalist commemorations like the Fourth of July: an acceptable way for blacks to celebrate their place in antebellum political culture.¹⁹

Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie's *Rites of August First* (2007) was the first comprehensive examination of the subject. He argues that these celebrations were important to black Americans as a unifying expression of transnational antislavery and a precursor to black Pan-African identity. Kerr-Ritchie begins his examination of August First commemorations with a brief introduction to its celebration in the Caribbean, then dedicates most of the book to the role of blacks in those celebrations in the United States and British Canada. Kerr-Ritchie argues that August First allowed persons of African descent to construct an identity around liberty and selfhood in the midst of white racial domination. He sees these commemorations playing an important role in the political mobilization of "people, ideas, and actions" against American

¹⁹ Kachun, 54-96.

slavery, and creating a type of transnational consciousness among blacks throughout the Atlantic.²⁰

Edward Bartlett Rugemer's *The Problem of Emancipation* (2008) bridges these related historiographies. Like previous histories on Anglo-Atlantic antislavery, he links English and American abolitionists in a shared struggle. However, Rugemer also draws in the English colonies of the Caribbean in this analysis. He argues that the struggle against slavery in Britain and the West Indies was a key factor in the coming American Civil War. Rugemer's work is divided into two parts. The first draws the United States, Britain and the Caribbean together in an Anglo-Atlantic world where issues of abolition were part of a larger transnational political context. Like Richard Blackett and Caleb McDaniel, he recovers ties between Britain and the United States on the question of slavery and political figures on the trans-Atlantic stage dating back to the eighteenth-century. He includes in this analysis the impact of slave rebellions in the Caribbean on the Anglo-Atlantic slavery movement. The second part of Rugemer's work, titled the "Lessons of Abolition," discusses British Emancipation's impact in the United States. Through figures like the New England Unitarian William Ellery Channing and the diplomatic correspondences of Southern politicians like Robert Monroe Harrison, Rugemer explores the impact of British Emancipation on American political and social life. Rugemer devotes a chapter specifically to August First commemorations. Like Kachun, he argues that the commemorations functioned as alternatives to the more racially limited celebrations of July 4th, and helped create both abolitionist and free African-American identities.²¹

²⁰ Kerr-Ritchie, 1-12.

²¹ Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

While past works have evoked the role of the “experiment” in the West Indies in American abolitionism, I argue that this was a much more dynamic debate than has been previously explored. Defending the success of this experiment lay at the center of abolitionist and free African-American interest in British Emancipation. It was part of an ongoing daily public discourse that circulated within abolitionist and free black networks, maintaining a continuous communication with both England the Caribbean colonies. In *A Common Wind*, Julius Scott records information about the Haitian Revolution carried by sailors and slaves on the Atlantic waterway. Similarly, the debate on the emancipated British West Indies moved across the Atlantic. Its evidence was collected, recorded, and shared by abolitionists, missionaries, colonial magistrates, planters, and, others invested in the outcome of the experiment.²²

I explore how this debate was constructed, reasoned and argued. If the experiment was to be proven a success, it needed to have an agreed upon measurement that could be observed, studied and result in satisfactory conclusions. The first measure of success was that the former slaves of the West Indies were more industrious and productive as free laborers. The second measure of success was that emancipation had resulted in the reform of former West Indian slaves. Through a close reading of abolitionist and free African-American newspapers, tracts, pamphlets, books, and printed speeches, I trace the contours of this debate, its development and deployment. In these examinations I move away from past studies that undervalue the central role played by West Indian slaves in this discourse. I argue instead that their perceived behavior, the ways in which they adapted to their freedom, was central to abolitionist and free African-American conceptions of success in the Caribbean. Following the abolitionists who studied them,

²² Julius S. Scott, III, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution” (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1986).

my work explores how the perceived behaviors, choices, and habits of the former West Indian slaves had a direct impact on American abolitionism and the larger Anglo-Atlantic world.

Finally, I situate August First commemorations within this ongoing debate on the success of the West Indian “experiment.” Certainly, as past studies have shown, August First functioned as a commemorative ritual and a focal point of memory, voice and political agitation. However, my work contends that August First can only be understood within the parameters of the debate on black freedom in the British West Indies. I argue, in fact, that the origins of the commemorations of August First were based directly in this debate and that they served as public rituals to affirm the success of freedom in the British Caribbean colonies. By focusing on August First outside of this debate, we lose sight of the influence, importance and meaning that British Emancipation in the West Indies had on American abolitionists, black and white. Through an examination of the importance abolitionists placed on shaping and creating public perceptions of the West Indies, we gain a deeper understanding of August First as both ritual and abolitionist strategy.

Essential to this study is the flourishing print culture that was generated in the early nineteenth century created by abolitionists, both British and American and the free black press. Print and its existence as culture throughout this work refers to various forms of media: newspapers, pamphlets, tracts, books, broadsides, bulletins, hymns, poems, paintings, banners, signs and related ephemera. Speeches were also transcribed into print and circulated along abolitionist and free black networks. This print culture is the key source of this dissertation, as it allows for an examination of ideas that circulated in the public discourse. Print was the social and political voice of marginalized persons like abolitionists and free African-Americans. In shaping public perceptions of the success of the West Indian “experiment,” it created a

countering narrative that challenged popular accounts. In this study, printed materials are recognized as the primary form of mass media that both informed and shaped popular perceptions. Personal correspondences and letters are also utilized in this work, both as supplemental sources and as reprinted materials in newspapers and pamphlets that were offered into the wider public.

This study is divided into six parts. Chapter One, entitled “British Emancipation and the Antislavery Press,” examines the printed public discourse in the United States generated by a trans-Atlantic antislavery movement from the late eighteenth-century to the 1830s. It recovers the roots of American antislavery print culture from the colonial era to the early Republic in a larger Anglo-Atlantic world, the print revolution of the mid-nineteenth-century and its impact on the emergence of an antislavery and free black press that coincided with British Emancipation and the transformation of American abolitionism. The questions it asks are the following: What was the role of print in Anglo-Atlantic antislavery? How did British abolitionism and the British Abolition Act enter the popular debate on slavery in the United States? How did an abolitionist and free black press help create a counter-discourse to shape and promote the perception of emancipation in the British West Indies?

The second chapter, entitled “The Benefits of Free Labor,” examines the ways in which the industriousness of West Indian freedmen and economic success of the emancipated British West Indies served as a key tool of propaganda in American abolitionist rhetoric. Free labor in this chapter is defined as the labor of freemen, set apart and distinguished from the coerced labor of slaves. The questions addressed include the following: How did perceptions of the emancipated British West Indies as an “experiment” of free labor versus slave labor take hold in the Anglo-Atlantic? How did American abolitionists deploy these arguments within their printed

materials to shape perceptions of the emancipated British West Indies? How did abolitionists associate free black West Indian labor with nineteenth-century American notions of racial reform, industry, progress, and free labor democracy?

The third Chapter, “Emancipation and Reform in the West Indies,” explores the part reform played in the rhetorical arguments about the emancipated British West Indies in American abolitionism, particularly in the wake of the Second Great Awakening. The subject matter of this chapter examines these questions: What were the origins of the reform movement in Anglo-Atlantic antislavery and abolitionism? How did American abolitionists use reform in the British West Indies in their arguments for slave emancipation in the United States? How did expectations of the behavior of free black West Indians reflect abolitionist attitudes about the moral degradation of slavery and the transformative power of emancipation?

The fourth chapter, “African-Americans and British Emancipation,” examines the ways in which free African-Americans engaged, defended and used the emancipated British West Indies in their calls for abolition, freedom, and their rights as U.S. citizens. The chapter addresses the following questions: What was the importance of the British West Indies to free African-Americans? Why did they perceive the success of freedom in the West Indies as having material benefit to their unequal status in the United States? How did the issue of emigration complicate this transnational perspective?

Chapter Five, “A West Indian Jubilee in America,” connects the commemorations of August First to the ongoing debate on the success of the West Indian “experiment.” This chapter is centered on these questions: How did August First commemorations arise out of earlier public African-American celebrations and rituals of democratic nationalism in the early Republic? How did August First commemorations function as ritual performances that continued the debate over

the success of British Emancipation? How did print help advertise, disseminate, report and standardize these events within abolitionist and free black communities?

Chapter Six, “Freedom’s Struggle,” examines British Emancipation, the success of the West Indian “experiment,” and commemorations of August First, within the context of the American Civil War. This section brings together the preceding chapters and addresses such questions as: How was the debate on the success of black freedom in the West Indies joined to the national dialogue on slavery and secession leading up to the Civil War? What role did August First play in shaping abolitionist and free African-American arguments and strategies during the Civil War? Why did August First commemorations and the debate on the success of the emancipated British Caribbean colonies diminish in the United States with the enactment of the Emancipation Proclamation and in the years following the Civil War?

This study is restricted to England, the United States and the British West Indies and does not draw in British Canada, which was also emancipated by the British Act of Abolition. Canada featured its own August First commemorations and interacted with American celebrations.²³ This dissertation however focuses primarily on the print discourse surrounding the emancipated British West Indies from the United States and England. Canada was a geographic space of refuge for many African-Americans after the British Abolition Act. But as the majority of slaves freed resided in the West Indies, emancipation in the British Caribbean colonies became the most pertinent focus for the debate on the experiment’s success among black and white abolitionists in America. It is this discourse my dissertation sets out to analyze.

²³ For more on August First commemorations in Canada, see: Kerr-Ritchie, 118-163; Natasha L. Henry, *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2010).

CHAPTER ONE: BRITISH EMANCIPATION AND THE ANTISLAVERY PRESS

The Jubilee of West Indian Slavery has at length arrived. The sound of the whip, and the lash of the task-master will no more be heard in the British isles of the west . . . The effects of this glorious triumph of humanity and justice will soon be seen in the increased prosperity of the planters, and the improved condition of the slaves. The value of West Indian estates will be enhanced, and the produce of the islands will be increased in consequence of the improved condition of the cultivators of the soil. But we need not anticipate the results of this measure. Time will develop them, and refute all the fearful predictions of interested partizans [sic], who have conjured up the most frightful spectres of ruin, and massacre and blood, as the consequences of emancipation. All these imaginary fears will subside . . . and prove to the world, what every christian philanthropist admits *a priori*, that the path of justice and mercy is always the surest road to prosperity and happiness.¹

In August of 1833 the antislavery newspaper *Genius of Universal Emancipation* trumpeted the passing of the Abolition Act in the British Parliament. Founded by Benjamin Lundy, a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the Ohio-based newspaper was one of the first major antislavery publications in the North. Born in Sussex, New Jersey, Lundy had been converted to antislavery at the age of nineteen, after witnessing the brutality of a Virginia slave market. In 1815 he settled in St. Clairsville, Ohio, where he formed an antislavery organization called the Union Humane Society, which he hoped would relieve “the sad condition of the slave.”²

Like many moderate Quaker reformers, Lundy believed political and legal strategies were the keys to securing slavery’s end. He had grown frustrated however by the lack of legislative

¹ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, August 1833.

² Benjamin Lundy, *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy: Including His Journeys to Texas and Mexico, with a Sketch of Contemporary Events, and a Notice of the Revolution in Hayti* (Philadelphia: W.D. Parrish, 1847), 16.

results, most notably the failed attempt by New York Republican James Tallmadge to restrict the expansion of slavery in 1819 during the Missouri Crisis.³ Lundy blamed the defeat of Tallmadge's amendment on Northern political apathy towards slavery. If the public could be properly swayed, he reasoned, an antislavery majority could be voted in at the ballot box. Slavery's expansion could be halted in the halls of Congress, and a gradual emancipation could come about through legislation.⁴ The most persuasive vehicle, Lundy observed, was the rapidly changing print culture that would soon define the age. During the "Missouri question," Lundy had written repeated articles in Missouri and Illinois newspapers on the "evils of slavery" and had previously helped edit a publication dedicated in part to antislavery.⁵ The experience convinced him that what was needed was a newspaper focused solely on antislavery, "for molding public opinion in the desired form" and the *Genius* began publication in January 1821.⁶

For Lundy, the newspaper—mobile, accessible and increasingly integral to American democracy—was the primary vehicle through which antislavery could present its case and win over popular sentiment. Further, with a Northern public that was, at worst, openly antagonistic to the idea of antislavery, or, at best, wholly apathetic, newspapers allowed antislavery advocates to envision themselves as belonging to a larger cause. Antislavery newspapers allowed people to

³ For more on the Tallmadge Amendment, the Missouri Crisis and subsequent compromise see, Robert Pierce Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

⁴ Slavery had been banned by legal means in Lundy's adopted Ohio through the original state constitution in 1802. Gradual emancipation by legislation had also been passed in several Northern states since the 18th century. For more on gradual emancipation in the north see the following: Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006).

⁵ Lundy, *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy*, 19-21.

⁶ Merton L. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 42-45.

imagine a community of likeminded readers, in an often openly hostile social atmosphere.⁷ For probably more than any other national movement of its time, print culture would prove indispensable to American antislavery. But this was in the context of a broader transnational movement.

By the late 1820s Lundy's *Genius* was closely monitoring events in England, spreading news of the English emancipation campaign along antislavery networks. Mainstream American newspapers followed the British struggle as well, believing it of importance to domestic affairs. By the time of the passage of the British Abolition Act in 1833, Americans had watched this foreign political drama over slavery and freedom play out in their own newspapers. But with the onset of emancipation, the focus now shifted from the halls of British Parliament to the British West Indies, where some 800,000 slaves had been freed by proclamation. Mainstream American newspapers were overwhelmingly negative, predicting economic ruin, moral decay and racial warfare for the prosperous English colonies.

Lacking a clear victory for their cause at home, antislavery advocates like Lundy turned to Britain and the emancipated West Indies. Within the pages of the *Genius*, Lundy refuted the dire predictions of the mainstream press with countering predictions of his own. He proclaimed emancipation in the British West Indies a "glorious triumph of humanity and justice," that could lead to nothing else but success. Despite the "frightful specters of ruin, and massacre and blood" the popular press anticipated, Lundy assured readers that the colonies would be vindicated, by

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso 1983), 34-36. Anderson examines print culture's importance in the function of national identity, arguing that newspapers allowed for a type of replicated mass ceremony that each reader understood was simultaneously being carried out by unseen others across a wider spatial realm.

the improvement of former slaves and masters alike. England had taken “the path of justice and mercy” which was “the surest road to prosperity and happiness.”⁸

Lundy’s advocacy in the *Genius* was a precursor to over three decades of discourse on British Emancipation in the West Indies in American abolitionist print culture to come. From the 1830s to 1860s, antislavery and mainstream newspapers became entrenched in an ongoing contest of words over what this “experiment” of freedom would yield. It was a crucial debate for a new era of American abolitionists, who like Lundy sought ways to mold American minds against the Southern slaveocracy. The English Abolition Act, and the successful end of West Indian slavery, provided a clear focus to generate mass public support for emancipation in the United States.

This chapter examines the printed public discourse in the United States generated by British Emancipation during the 1830s, the decisive transformative years when American abolitionists, influenced by the participatory democratic sentiments of the age, sought more direct mass activism. To do so, it traces the roots of American antislavery print culture of the eighteenth-century, its relationship to a larger Anglo-Atlantic antislavery movement, the print revolution in early nineteenth-century America and the emergence of an antislavery and later abolitionist press. This chapter also examines the growing connections between American and British abolitionists, the role this played in the move to advocating immediate emancipation, and the local racial politics unleashed by this debate on the West Indies.⁹

⁸ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, August 1833.

⁹ The main objective of this chapter is to trace the early history of the antislavery and abolitionist print culture of the eighteenth and early nineteenth Anglo-Atlantic, its ties to both British Emancipation and the eventual debate over the fate of England’s Anglo-Caribbean colonies in America.

Antislavery Print Culture in Early America and the Anglo-Atlantic

Since the nascent origins of antislavery in the late eighteenth-century its proponents struggled to place their cause into what German philosopher Jurgen Habermas termed the “public sphere”—that physical and abstract place where matters of shared importance between the state and the people are communicated, presented, discussed and debated.¹⁰ Antislavery advocates would come to understand it was necessary to create their own oppositional network to slavery that could build an alternative, competing discourse. Political theorist Nancy Fraser has called such subaltern formations “counterpublics,” that allow subordinate groups and thoughts to enter the larger discursive arena.¹¹ For antislavery proponents and later abolitionists, the vehicle for creating such a counterpublic was print—the very same tool citizens of early America were increasingly using to engage and participate in democracy.¹²

Quaker communities in America had been at the forefront of antislavery print culture since before the Revolution. Much of this was based on the campaigns of Quaker moralists who sought to convince fellow adherents to abandon slavery. Known also as the Religious Society of Friends, the sect emerged out of the religious turmoil in 1600s England. Like other American colonists, Quakers both invested in the lucrative slave trade and held slaves themselves.

¹⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989) xviii. Habermas openly acknowledges he “leaves aside the plebian public sphere” in favor of a bourgeois gathering. For a critique on the limits of Habermas idealized public sphere see, Houston Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 3-4.

¹¹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 61-62.

¹² For a more thorough examination of print culture, abolitionism and the public sphere see, Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition's Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xii, 1-82. Fanuzzi analyzes abolitionist literature and speeches to argue for the formation of an abolitionist counterpublic that sought to incorporate women and people of color, while at the same time mediating a restrictive public sphere in its efforts to appeal to white citizens.

However, for some within the sect, the institution of bondage and human trafficking proved a moral dilemma that clashed with their egalitarian principles of salvation. Historian David Brion Davis roots this personal conflict in the Quaker belief that God was “no respecter of persons,” and had freely blessed even “the lowliest servant,” including slaves. For a few dissenting Quakers, slavery, and the exploitative trade that made it possible, created a crisis in faith.¹³

As early as 1688, Dutch Quaker immigrants in Germantown, Pennsylvania penned and circulated a petition condemning slavery within Quaker communities in distinctly moral terms: “Is there any that would be . . . sold or made a slave for all the time of his life? . . . Now, tho they are black, we cannot conceive there is more liberty to have them slaves, as it is to have other white ones.” Citing Matthew 7:12 from the Bible, the petition reminded fellow Quakers, “There is a saying, that we shall doe to all men as we will be done ourselves.”¹⁴ Linking the Protestant history of religious persecution, those “oppressed for conscience sake,” with American slavery, those “oppressed who are black in colour,” the petitioners sought to place antislavery at the very heart of Quaker identity.¹⁵ In 1693, Quaker George Keith similarly penned a tract, *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Buying and Selling Negroes*, pulling on Exodus 21 to remind fellow Quakers of the damnable sin of slavery. “He that stealeth a Man and selleth him, if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to Death,” Keith quoted from the scriptures.

¹³ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 291-92. For more on early Quaker antislavery see the following: Thomas Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950); William J. Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery* (Norwood: Norwood Editions, 1980); Brycchan Carey, *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657-1761* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹⁴ Quaker Germantown Petition quoted in Katharine Gerbner, “‘We are Against the Traffick of Men-Body’: The Germantown Quaker Protest of 1688 and the Origins of American Abolitionism,” *Pennsylvania History* 74, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 168.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

“Therefore as we are not to buy stollen Goods,” he reasoned, “no more are we to buy stollen Slaves; neither should such as have them keep them and their Posterity in perpetual Bondage and Slavery, as is usually done, to the great scandal of the Christian Profession.”¹⁶

This moral opposition to slaveholding would grow during the religious revivalism of the First Great Awakening that swept Britain and its colonies during the mid-eighteenth century. In the 1730s, the Quaker radical preacher Benjamin Lay similarly denounced slavery as a “Hellish Practice” and a “filthy sin,” the “greatest Sin in the World, of the very Nature of Hell itself, and is the Belly of Hell.” In 1737 Lay reprinted and distributed one of the first antislavery pamphlets in America, *The Selling of Joseph*. Originally written in 1701 by the New England Puritan Samuel Sewall, the pamphlet used the Bible to refute contemporary defenses of slavery.¹⁷ By the 1750s, slaveholding had become an open site of contention within the Society of Friends, led in great part by the New Jersey Quaker John Woolman and the Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet. Both men penned antislavery tracts that circulated within North American Quaker communities: Woolman’s *Some Considerations of the Keeping of Negroes* and Benezet’s *Epistle of Caution and Advice Concerning the Buying and Keeping of Slaves*. By 1758, their activism led the Annual Meeting of Friends in Philadelphia to unanimously adopt a resolution against slavery, to disown members who continued to sell or buy slaves, and to organize committees urging Quaker slaveholders to emancipate their slaves.¹⁸

¹⁶ George Keith, *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Buying and Selling Negroes* (London, 1693) quoted in William Bradford and George H. Moore, “The First Printed Protest Against Slavery in America,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (October, 1889): 267.

¹⁷ Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* 291-92. Lay’s radicalism led him to keep up sustained attack on slavery, on occasion interrupting church meetings of Baptists and others, and even at one point securing a private meeting with the English King George II.

¹⁸ Maurice Jackson, *Let this Voice be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 49-56. See also, Brown, *Moral Capital*, 87-91. Brown notes that these

Over the next few years Benezet published and distributed several more antislavery tracts, including *Observations on the Inslaving, Importing and Purchasing of Negroes* (1759), and the first edition of *A Short Account of that Part of Africa Inhabited by the Negroes* (1762). In 1766 he published a tract titled, *Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in a Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions*. In it, Benezet expanded his criticisms beyond Quaker communities, and called into question slaveholding throughout the British Empire, in both the West Indies and North America.¹⁹ In 1767 he helped publicize the Virginian physician Arthur Lee's essay in the *Virginia Gazette* critiquing the British slave trade, reprinting and appending it to several later editions of his own antislavery pamphlets.²⁰ Benezet's tracts traversed the late eighteenth-century Atlantic to England, where they had a profound impact on the growing British denouncers of the slave trade, including the Anglican Thomas Clarkson and the Methodist preacher John Wesley.²¹ Clarkson later claimed that previous to reading Benezet's writings, he was "wholly ignorant" of the slave traffic. "In this precious book," Clarkson remarked in reference to Benezet's *History of Guinea*

early resolutions on antislavery helped Quakers build a "collective identity" as moral figures apart from the larger world. While they also did hope their principled actions would eventually have some universal influence, these acts were inherently "inward away from the world, rather than outward and into public canvassing for abolition and emancipation." On the First Great Awakening and its impact on British colonial slavery see, Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 111-139.

¹⁹ Jackson, 59-65.

²⁰ Richard K. MacMaster, "Arthur Lee's 'Address on Slavery': An Aspect of Virginia's Struggle to End the Slave Trade, 1765-1774," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 80 (April 1972): 147-148. Unlike Benezet, Arthur Lee, condemned the slave trade not out of concern for the exploitation of Africans, who he considered "brutes" sprung from "a race the most detestable and vile that ever the earth produced." Instead, Lee warned that the continued importation of Africans might lead to slave insurrection in Virginia. Benezet would remove some of Lee's more inflammatory rhetoric in his reprinted versions.

²¹ Jackson, 153-157.

(1788), “I found almost all I wanted.”²² This was a crucial and reciprocal relationship as important events in antislavery were taking shape in the metropole.

In London in 1767 Granville Sharp, a young clerk, intervened in the case of Jonathan Strong, a fugitive Barbadian slave. Sharp and his brother, a local surgeon, had nursed Strong back to health after the slave was severely beaten and abandoned by his owner, David Lisle, in 1765. Two years later, Strong got word to Sharp that Lisle had kidnapped and sold him to a new owner. Outraged that West Indian slaveholders appeared to hold such power on English soil, Sharp and his brother proceeded to wage a legal battle against both owners in local court. The attempt was successful and Sharp was able to secure the young slave’s freedom.²³

In the coming years several more slaves and freedmen sought Sharp’s aid in securing their liberty, or that of family members, helping push him to further explore antislavery.²⁴ Sharp spent the next two years studying English law and personal liberty, searching for a legal statute he was certain made the reduction of a freeman to a slave on English soil illegal.²⁵ During his research, he became acquainted with the writings of moralist Quakers like Benezet in America. In 1767 Sharp reprinted Benezet’s *A Short Account* and distributed it among fellow English reformers. The antislavery writings of the American Quaker also had an impact on Sharp’s 1769 published work, one of the first English antislavery tracts, entitled, *A Representation of the*

²² Thomas Clarkson, *The history of the rise, progress, and accomplishment of the abolition of the African slave-trade by the British Parliament* (London: Longman & Co., 1808; reprint, London: John W. Parker, 1839), 137.

²³ Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 97-101, 103-104.

²⁴ Douglas A. Lorimer, “Black Slaves and English Liberty: A re-examination of racial Slavery in England,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 3 (1984): 121–150.

²⁵ Brown, 93-94. Brown points out that Sharp’s initial involvement had less to do with antislavery and was more grounded in questions on the seemingly unrestricted power of “autocratic tyrants” from the West Indian colonies on English soil, a place of laws based on liberty and freedom. His research, and the continued agitation of runaway slaves, pushed him towards antislavery.

injustice and dangerous tendency of admitting the least claim of private property in the persons of men, in England, etc. His pamphlet in turn caught the attention of Benezet across the Atlantic, who republished and distributed it in the American colonies.²⁶

Sharp went on to advocate in the 1772 case of another fugitive slave, James Somerset, the property of James Stewart, a Boston customs officer. Somerset had been brought to England in 1769 but escaped from his owner in 1771 only to be recaptured and placed on a ship bound for Jamaica to be sold back into slavery. Sharp intervened on Somerset's behalf, and a legal hearing was scheduled. The case gained publicity in London, and Somerset soon had at least five public advocates. Arguing on matters of property rights rather than humanitarian antislavery, they contended that while colonial law permitted slavery, no such law had been enacted by Parliament for England. As part of the evidence, Sharp distributed Benezet's abridged copies of his own *Representation* to the barristers, the English Prime Minister and the sitting judge Lord Mansfield.²⁷

After a month of deliberation Mansfield ruled in Somerset's favor, declaring "no master was ever allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad because he deserted from his service, or for any other reason whatever."²⁸ While the case was no clear-cut legal victory, it did assert increased freedoms for fugitive slaves on English soil. It further emboldened an emerging British antislavery movement, whose members interpreted and hailed it as a landmark decision.²⁹

²⁶ Steven M. Wise, *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial That Led to the End of Human Slavery* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2006), 21-25, 124.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁸ Mansfield quoted in Jerome Nadelhaft, "The Somersett Case and Slavery: Myth, Reality, and Repercussions," *The Journal of Negro History* 51 (July 1966): 193-208.

²⁹ Brown, 93-97. A long history exists of legal reviews and interpretations of the Somerset case. For some recent yet dissenting views see, George van Cleve, "Mansfield's Decision: Toward Human Freedom," *Law and History*

From Philadelphia, Benezet closely followed the Somerset case and struck up a correspondence with Sharp. The American Quaker reformer kept his English counterpart informed on colonial reform efforts and writings to abolish the slave trade. Sharp in turn helped disseminate these accounts by reprinting them for English audiences. This interaction helped inform the emerging early trans-Atlantic antislavery movements, driven in great part by the mobility of print.³⁰

As revolution unfolded in British North America, white colonists deployed slavery as a metaphor in patriot print culture to describe their relationship with England. Attacking the Stamp Act, a Boston minister bemoaned the replacement of Liberty with “that ugly Hag Slavery, the formed child of Satan.” John Dickinson, owner of the largest number of slaves in Philadelphia, penned in his famed *Liberty Song* that as colonists, Americans were born in “freedom” and that “in freedom we’ll live; Not as *slaves*, but as *freemen* our money we’ll give.” The Massachusetts lawyer John Adams stated Americans would soon have to declare on the matter of high taxes “whether they will be Freemen or Slaves?”³¹

While these metaphors did not extend literally to include the chattel system of human bondage, a small contingent of American clergymen and moral idealists used sermons, pamphlets and resolutions to denounce human bondage as antithetical to revolutionary ideals. Among these was Benezet who employed patriot rhetoric to attack the slave trade as cruel and inhuman. At Benezet’s request in 1773 fellow Quaker Benjamin Rush, a slave owner, member of the Continental Congress and a signer to the *Declaration of Independence*, authored *An Address*

Review, 24, No. 3 (Fall 2006): 665-671; Daniel J. Hulsebosch, “Nothing But Liberty: Somerset’s Case and the British Empire,” *Law and History Review* 24, no. 3, (Fall 2006): 647-658; Ruth Paley, “Imperial Politics and English Law: The Many Contexts of Somerset,” *Law and History Review* 24 (Fall 2006): 659-664.

³⁰ Brown, 167-168.

³¹ Patricia Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999), 3-4. While acknowledging that most patriots were decidedly not antislavery, and that the term was a form of propaganda for white colonists, Bradley argues that slavery had layered meanings within revolutionary rhetoric, that neither directly equated nor disentangled it from the existent racial slavery in its midst.

to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, upon Slave-Keeping. In his tract Rush leveled a scathing critique of both the British slave trade and slavery in the colonies, arguing that, “the plant of liberty...cannot thrive long in the neighbourhood of slavery.”³² That same year, greatly through Benezet’s lead, the Society of Friends helped turn revolutionary Philadelphia against the slave trade, delivering a signed petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly calling for a ban on the entirety of the British traffic.³³

As before, these antislavery sentiments traveled back across the Atlantic. The war in the colonies revealed fissures in English society over the proper role of parliamentary authority and individual liberty. Further, it provoked what historian Kathleen Wilson termed “a crisis in imperialism,” forcing English citizens “to rethink the benefits and dangers of empire, the possibilities of a libertarian or virtuous imperial polity and the nature of its links to the ‘nation.’”³⁴ English radicals and dissenting clergymen, receptive to colonial attacks on British participation in the African slave trade, used these arguments to critique what they perceived as the immorality and arrogance of the metropole. “Where did this infamous commerce originate,” asked the Scottish Evangelical John Erskine in his printed tract *Reflections on the Rise, Progress, and Probable Consequences, of the Present Contentions with the Colonies*. “Where is it still carried on with all the eagerness which avarice can inspire? Where, but England?” Erskine continued to heap praise upon colonial attempts to prohibit the trade, hoping that once the war

³² Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, upon Slave-Keeping* (Philadelphia: John Boyles, 1773), 28. Rush converted fully to antislavery after the war, claiming to have been influenced by a dream of Benezet’s ghost meeting with Africans who recounted the horrors of slavery.

³³ A copy of the petition was sent to Granville Sharp, who disseminated it in England. See Wilson Armistead, *Anthony Benezet: From the Original Memoir* (Philadelphia: Lippincott and Co., 1859), 39.

³⁴ Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1717-1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 237-251. Wilson provides an in depth account of anti-war sentiment in England in the form of petitions, a radical anti-war press and political partisanship.

was concluded, the “poisonous branch” of human trafficking “may entirely be shut out,” as it posed a danger “to the health and security of the whole Empire.”³⁵

At first reluctant to sanction patriot claims of liberty, Granville Sharp eventually warmed to the American cause as a possible means for securing rights for the enslaved. In a letter to Benjamin Rush, Sharp urged the colonists to live up to the ideals of their rhetoric, and rid themselves of the “horrid Oppression” of slavery. Historian Leslie Brown argues that the emerging campaign in the colonies against the British slave trade helped Sharp see American and West Indian slavery as not merely a peculiarity of the colonies, but “as a British institution,” that sat at the heart of the metropole—from London to the financial slave ports of Liverpool and Bristol.³⁶

During the war, Sharp wrote several tracts attacking the English slave trade that made colonial slavery possible. In his 1776 treatise *The law of liberty or, Royal law, by which all mankind will certainly be judged!*, Sharp railed against the “Illegality of Slavery Among Christians,” and warned of damnation for those “violating the Law of Liberty by *Slave-dealing* and *Slave-holding*.” Speaking directly to his fellow countrymen in both England and the colonies, Sharp denounced the African trade as “the most contemptuous Violations of Brotherly Love and Charity that men can be guilty of,” and which was “openly encouraged and promoted by the British Parliament!” Going further, he placed responsibility for slavery at the feet of “BRITISH KINGS” and contended that the “horrible Guilt . . . incurred by *Slave-dealing* and *Slave-holding*” could not be limited to a “few hardened Individuals . . . immediately concerned in those baneful Practices.” Instead he made it clear that “the WHOLE BRITISH EMPIRE is

³⁵ Erskine quoted in, Brown, *Moral Capital*, 149; John Erskine, *Reflections on the Rise, Progress, and Probable Consequences, of the Present Contentions with the Colonies*. (Edinburgh, 1776), 27.

³⁶ Brown, 167-168.

involved” and that “the unhappy Concurrence of *National Authority* . . . and *National GUILT* must inevitably draw down from GOD some tremendous *National Punishment*,” if slavery was not ended by “the Perfect Law of Liberty.”³⁷ Sharp’s tracts were developed in part out of the continued correspondence with Americans such as Rush and Benezet, and the receipt of their writings in England. Benezet in turn readily accepted print material from Sharp and other antislavery British moralists, disseminating them within both Quaker and patriot networks.³⁸

Benezet continued as well to both write and circulate printed antislavery tracts during the war, including the English Methodist John Welsey’s *Thoughts on Slavery* (1774), his own *Observations on Slavery* (1778) and *Notes on the Slave Trade* (1780). By the end of the war Benezet had become one of the most prolific writers on antislavery. His invaluable sources were mined, copied and reprinted by sympathizers throughout the Atlantic.³⁹ A year before his death, a younger generation of American Quakers pulled from Benezet’s antislavery tracts to successfully argue for action by English Friends against the British slave trade.⁴⁰ African-born abolitionists Quobna Ottobah Cugoana and Olaudah Equiano similarly engaged these writings in penning their autobiographies in the 1780s. When Granville Sharp and fellow Anglican Thomas Clarkson formed the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787, both men pulled from Benezet’s writings and went on to pen new tracts based on his example. Similarly, in

³⁷ Granville Sharp, *The law of liberty or, Royal law, by which all mankind will certainly be judged! Earnestly recommended to the serious consideration of all slave holders and slave dealers* (London: B. White and E. and C. Dilly, 1776) 7, 46-50.

³⁸ Jackson, 143-153.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 154-155. Welsey, who had received personal copies of Benezet’s writings, used much of it to write his pamphlet *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774).

⁴⁰ Brown, 412-22. Part of this push by American Quakers centered around fears that English Quakerism would fall into moral decay, if it did not take a stand against a vice so terrible in its midst as slavery. When past attempts to prod the assembly into action did not work, American Quakers took a more direct approach.

the United States free blacks Richard Allen and Absalom Jones turned to Benezet's writings when forming the Free African Society in April 1787, and circulated petitions based on his tracts. In 1792 William Wilberforce quoted Benezet directly in the Parliamentary debates to end the British slave trade. These trans-Atlantic writings would show up again in 1804 as the anti-slave trade campaign picked up steam, resulting in the 1807 passage of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act declaring the "dealing and trading in the Purchase, Sale, Barter, or Transfer of Slaves" to be "unlawful" in the British Empire.⁴¹ This early reliance on print and its dissemination left an important legacy on a growing Atlantic antislavery movement. This was especially pronounced in the early United States, where a print revolution increasingly became tied to moral and political engagement.

The American Print Revolution and the Emerging Antislavery Press

The years 1790 to 1830 marked the coming of age of the first generation of American citizens. The nation had seen a slow, and not altogether harmonious, transformation from a republic ruled by enlightened men to a self-proclaimed democracy of the unenlightened masses. This shift was part of an era of class struggle, where American citizens fought for inclusion and participation in the new political order. Fundamental to this period of change was an emerging print culture that became increasingly integral to antislavery activism and identity.

In the 1790s America saw a surge in printed material, both in volume and accessibility. This was contemporaneous to an increase in literacy that was not altogether coincidental.

⁴¹ Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 108-167; Maurice Jackson, "Anthony Benezet: Working the Antislavery Cause inside and outside "The Society," in Brychan Carey and Geoffrey Plank, eds., *Quakers and Abolition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 113-116; Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 352-353; Victor C. D. Mtubani, "The Black Voice in Eighteenth-Century Britain: African Writers against Slavery and the Slave Trade," *Phylon* 45 (2nd Qtr., 1984): 85-97; United Kingdom. *An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 47 Georgii III, Session 1, c. XXXVI. 25 March 1807.

Historian Richard John traces these developments to the Post Office Act of 1792. Seeking to reform the mailing service and enhance the role of the central government, the law authorized the building of a new postal system, complete with more roads and offices. The act also admitted newspapers into the postal system, spurring the circulation of “exchange papers” among printers and allowing greater contact between the government and its citizens.⁴² Newspapers were further subsidized to mail their printed materials across a network that now linked cities, towns and even the frontier. The underwriting of newspaper distribution allowed for their low-cost transmission, spurring the early American government to create what John calls “a national market for information.”⁴³

As political scientist Benedict Anderson has examined, print culture holds a profound importance to the formation of national identity.⁴⁴ Historian Joyce Appleby similarly contends that newspapers and print material in early America “did more than satisfy curiosity;” they created an “urban sociability.” Newspapers supported trade networks, were vital for commerce conducted across long distances, kept citizens informed and built a sense of community. This was a reciprocal stimulation: “patriotism, religion, recreation, and trade promoted the popularity of newspapers” and other print material; publishing in turn spurred increased literacy and new employment dependent on print culture, from journalism, to law to civil engineering. In this way, print helped shape the new nation and an emerging free market economy. As public use and consumption grew, so too did literary production, making print material readily available

⁴² Richard John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 30-42. Exchange papers refer to the sharing of newspapers between printers. John points out that the Postal Act of 1792 bound postmasters by law to forward all exchange papers to printers free of charge, providing newspapers with a steady stream of information to place within their pages. By 1800, the postal system transmitted 1.9 million newspapers each year; it had more than tripled by 1820.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁴ Anderson, 34-36.

throughout various corners of the early Republic. Newspapers and magazines especially became important institutions of both political access and agitation. Historian Paul Starr suggests that newspapers were also the “organizational base” on which modern American party politics formed.⁴⁵

In the early years of the Republic, American papers were filled with leftover political rancor from the Revolutionary era. Divided between the emergent Federalist and Republican factions, newspapers mostly served as vehicles for directing partisan anger. Federalists especially, in their continued concern with the rise of egalitarian democracy and the foreign threat of Jacobinism unleashed by the French Revolution, became increasingly uncomfortable with criticisms from Republican newspapers. In reaction, President John Adams and a Federalist Congress in 1798 passed the Sedition Act, which made it an offence to “write, print, utter or publish . . . any false, scandalous, and malicious writing against the government of the United States.”⁴⁶ The law was met with derision, drawing strong criticism as an attempt to stifle one of the most vital elements of Republicanism. A 1798 petition from Poughkeepsie, New York declared the Sedition Act’s attempt to deprive citizens of “the medium of the press” was a “precise definition of slavery.”⁴⁷ This threat to suppress America’s print culture in its infancy would not diminish until the election of Thomas Jefferson in 1800, who allowed the Sedition Act

⁴⁵ Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic Books, 2004), 85; Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 91-92.

⁴⁶ Congress, Senate, *An Act in addition to the act, entitled “An act for the punishment of certain crimes against the United States,”* 5th Cong., 2nd sess., 14 July 1798.

⁴⁷ *To the Senate and Representatives of the United States, in Congress Assembled*. Poughkeepsie, New York: Nicholas Power, 1798. Broadside. Rare Book and Special Collections Division. Library of Congress.

to lapse, declaring later that it was incumbent on the young republic “to demonstrate the falsehood of the pretext that freedom of the press is incompatible with orderly government.”⁴⁸

For Americans, the printed word was increasingly associated with democracy and citizenship, what Richard Newman calls “a vital means of both self-expression and diffusion of knowledge.”⁴⁹ At the beginning of Jefferson’s presidency, there were about two hundred newspapers in the United States. By the 1820s they increased to over six hundred. Most were four page dailies or weeklys that flourished with the onset of the market revolution, as the economic marketplace moved to the center of national development and transformed traditional commerce. These papers promoted the market with news of prices and stock quotes; their pages were primarily filled with advertising for the sale of goods, shipping and trade and they marketed themselves as purchasable goods. Dedicated primarily to commerce, they were punctuated only briefly with items of news.⁵⁰ Political papers in contrast focused on news and national politics, but were financed by the newly emerging political parties, factions and candidates. Many worked in concert with the political establishment, on which they depended for maintenance and capital. Few had professional journalists, and instead relied on members of Congress to write or send pertinent information.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Thomas Jefferson to John Norvell, 11 June 1807, The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series 1. General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress. For more on Sedition Act and reactions see, Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy, Jefferson to Lincoln* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2006), 49-50, 78-82; Starr, *The Creation of the Media*, 78-82. Starr argues for a more nuanced look at the legacy of the Sedition Act, pointing to continuing cases of seditious libel in state courts. He contends however that on a Presidential and federal level control of the press proved difficult, citing the proliferation of new newspapers during the nineteenth century as evidence.

⁴⁹ Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 12.

⁵⁰ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 13-15.

⁵¹ Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York: Guilford Press, 2002), 69-73.

Access to both types of papers remained limited to those who could afford them. Most were expensive, costing six cents per issue during a time when the average laborer earned eighty-five cents a day. Newspapers were also typically available through a subscription that could cost as high as eight to ten dollars. These factors made most newspapers primarily the domain of the mercantile and political elite. Thus even as newspapers became linked to an increase in democratization, they remained limited in their circulation among the larger American populace.⁵²

There were, however, more accessible printed materials in early America. Since the 1790s, religious tract societies from New England and New York had dispensed hundreds of thousands of religious books and pamphlets door to door, throughout cities and townships, reaching settlers as far away as Maine, Kentucky and Tennessee. Their purpose was to spread evangelical Christianity by print throughout the Republic, part of the Protestant revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. The American Tract Society alone published some five million copies of tracts and 150,000 books on temperance alone.⁵³ While the elite commercial and political newspapers remained restricted by cost and accessibility, these religious and moral tracts were available to a wider swath of the reading public. This had been made possible through new technologies of the market revolution such as stereotyped printing plates, which reduced the labor of written composition and allowed for the cheap production of books and pamphlets in

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Edwin B. Bronner, "Distributing the Printed Word: the Tract Association of Friends, 1816-1966," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 91, no. 3 (July 1967): 343.

great quantities. Print could be used not only to inform but as well to persuade on religious and moral grounds.⁵⁴

American Quakers quickly adapted this print revolution to their own moral causes. Drawing on Quaker tract societies in Britain, the Tract Association of Friends was formed in Philadelphia in 1816 for the purpose of printing, publishing and distributing religious material. Quaker communities organized three more tract societies soon after in New York (1817), Baltimore (1818) and a second New York society at Auburn (1818). These Quaker societies overlapped with the larger Protestant tract societies and both printed and dispensed “Moral and Religious Books and Pamphlets” that could “explain and enforce” Christian religious doctrine. Though Quaker tract societies were often conservative organs that focused primarily on religious improvement, more radical members readily used this medium, and the networks of dissemination it created, to promote antislavery.⁵⁵

These radicals included the New York Quaker printer Samuel Wood who created popular broadsides attacking slavery. His 1805 tract *Injured Humanity* described the slave trade with vivid accounts of cruelty as well as images. Wood’s broadside pulled from a 1791 publication *An Abstract of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the Years 1790 and 1791*, printed by the British Quaker James Phillips, a member of the London Abolition Committee. Wood helped publish tracts by other reformist American Quakers such as

⁵⁴ *A Brief History of the American Tract Society, Instituted at Boston, 1814: and its Relations to the American Tract Society at New York, Instituted 1825* (New York: American Tract Society, 1857), 4-5, 22-24; Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 212-215, 369-370.

⁵⁵ Bronner, “Distributing the Printed Word,” 343. Bronner identifies three Quaker tract associations that existed prior to 1816 in England: The Tract Association of the Society of Friends in London, The Dublin Tract Association in Dublin and the Bible and Religious Tract Association of Friends in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Elias Hicks' *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans* in 1811 and 1814, which called for fellow Quakers to boycott slave-produced goods.⁵⁶

The transition from antislavery tracts to antislavery newspapers began in the midst of this early print revolution. In 1817 the Ohio Quaker Charles Osborn created his newspaper the *Philanthropist*. Like the moral Quaker tracts, Osborn's newspaper was devoted to moral issues of "temperance and peace" but, as one nineteenth-century biographer put it, the "burden and travail of his heart was slavery."⁵⁷ The first antislavery newspaper of its kind, the *Philanthropist* continued publishing until 1818, when it was acquired by the Quaker Minister Elisha Bates and published until 1822. During its brief time the paper saw a wide circulation, principally in Pennsylvania and the slaveholding regions of southern Ohio.⁵⁸

The second antislavery newspaper in the United States was the *Manumission Intelligencer* founded in 1819 by Elihu Embree of Tennessee. Like Osborn, Embree was a Quaker and his newspaper focused on personal morality as well as slavery. The *Manumission Intelligencer* had a brief run. Embree however, dissatisfied with its direction, revamped the paper into the *Emancipator* in 1820 and devoted it solely to antislavery.⁵⁹ The clear break with his earlier effort was made in his promotion of the new paper:

This paper is especially designed... to advocate the abolition of slavery, and to be a repository of tracts on that interesting and important subject. It will contain all the

⁵⁶ James Phillips, *An Abstract of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the Years 1790 and 1791; on the Part of the Petitioners for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade* (London, 1791); Samuel Woods, *Injured Humanity; Being A Representation of What the Unhappy Children of Africa Endure from Those Who Call Themselves Christians* (New York, 1805); Elias Hicks, *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and Their Descendants and on the Use of the Produce of their Labour* (New York: James Woods, 1811).

⁵⁷ George Washington Julian, *The Ranks of Charles Osborn as an Anti-Slavery Pioneer* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1891), 18. Though Osborn was a personal believer in immediate emancipation, he did not advocate for it within his paper but instead took a more moderate gradualist approach.

⁵⁸ Asa E. Martin, "Pioneer Anti-Slavery Press," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 2 no. 4 (1916): 511-513.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 514-515.

necessary information... of the progress of the abolition of slavery of the descendants of Africa, together with a concise history of their introduction into slavery, collected from the best authorities.⁶⁰

The *Emancipator* was fiery in its rhetoric, deriding slaveholders as “monsters in human flesh,” and advocated for the social equality of free African-Americans. These were bold words for an antislavery newspaper published in a slave state. In December of 1820 Embree died suddenly of a fever and nervous collapse, bringing the *Emancipator* to an end. At the time of his death, the paper had achieved a significant circulation, with some 2,000 subscribers.⁶¹

The Ohio Quaker Benjamin Lundy was profoundly impacted by these publications. Lundy was personally connected to Osborn and *The Philanthropist*, having worked as an associate editor and as an agent to further its circulation. He was also aware of the *Emancipator*, which traveled the Quaker networks. Though critical of the *Philanthropist* for lacking a concise and clear focus on antislavery, his time at the paper convinced him that an audience for a viable antislavery press existed. Lundy’s intent was to create a paper “to awaken the American people” on the issue of antislavery and in so doing affect political change. He began his paper the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* in July 1821 in Ohio, and devoted it “exclusively to the discussion of African slavery.” When Embree died in 1822, Lundy’s *Genius* became the foremost paper advocating antislavery as a political and moral cause.⁶²

Lundy was not alone in understanding the importance of newspapers and print culture to political and social causes. Alongside the rise of this antislavery press, free African-Americans

⁶⁰ *The Emancipator*, 20 April 1820. Embree was a Deist and former slave owner, whose religious conversion helped fuel his antislavery. His past would become a source of controversy, and he was required to explain it within his publication. See, the *Emancipator*, 31 August 1820.

⁶¹ Martin, “Pioneer Anti-Slavery Press,” 518-520. Embree’s Tennessee’s *Emancipator* should not be confused with the later 1833 New York *Emancipator* published by the abolitionist Charles W. Denison.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 521-522.

were forming their own print vehicles for political protest, institution building and autonomy in the early Republic.

African-Americans and the Antislavery Press

Literary culture had long served an important role in black communities in North America. In the 1770s, as Anthony Benezet's antislavery tracts were circulating the Atlantic, slaves were writing petitions that argued in favor of their freedom. In June 1773, a group of slaves in Massachusetts wrote a petition on behalf of those "held in a state of slavery, within the bowels of a free Country" and asserted that "they have in common with other men a naturel right to be free [sic]." In 1777, a petition put forth by "A Great Number of Blackes" used Revolutionary rhetoric to argue for the "Unaliable Right to that freedom which the Grat [Great] Parent of the Unaverse [Universe] hath Bestowed equally on all mankind [mankind]."⁶³

By the 1790s African-Americans, understanding the important democratic principles attached to emerging literary culture, joined in the surge of printed materials. Pamphlets proliferated within free black communities. As print products they were mobile, less costly to manufacture, and could reach a wide swath of disparate black communities. Prince Hall, Revolutionary veteran and organizer of the first African Masonic Lodge, was a key pamphleteer, as were notable members of the black community such as Absalom Jones and Richard Allen. By the early 1800s pamphlets were being written by African-American ministers like Daniel Coker

⁶³ Petition for freedom to Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson, His Majesty's Council, and the House of Representatives, June 1773, from the Jeremy Belknap Papers, Transcript from Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston MA; Petition for freedom to the Massachusetts Council and the House of Representatives, January 1777, from the Jeremy Belknap Papers, Transcript from Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston MA. The petition has been attributed to black freemason founder Prince Hall, and signed by Hall and seven other free black men. For more on African-American uses of the Revolutionary era language of liberty to argue against slavery see, Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58-61; 93-99.

and businessmen like James Forten. Independent societies and institutions, including black churches and civic organizations, helped in both the printing and distribution of these literary materials. Original works and reprints or transcriptions of speeches filled these tracts, which circulated along black communication networks in Massachusetts, New York and Pennsylvania. Pamphlets challenged negative depictions of African-Americans, served as autobiographies, protested discrimination, put forth arguments for political and social rights, and voiced the general concerns of an oft-marginalized community.⁶⁴

In March 1827 in New York City, African-Americans joined the burgeoning newspaper culture with their first publication, *Freedom's Journal*. The paper was the creation of the prominent African-American minister Samuel Cornish and the college-educated African-American activist John Russwurm. Cornish had helped found the First Colored Presbyterian Church of New York in 1822, and served as its pastor from 1824 to 1828. Earlier in 1827 he worked as an agent of the New York Manumission Society's Free African Schools, serving as a liaison between the organization and free African-American students. Jamaican-born John Russwurm had lived in Canada and completed his education at Bowdoin College in Maine before moving to New York, where he met Cornish. The two struck upon creating a black newspaper to reach the free black communities of the North. The four-page, four-column weekly carried news of current events, foreign affairs, editorials, obituaries, public events, and, in the editors words "whatever concerns us as a people."⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, Phillip Lapsansky, *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge), 2-11. The text also holds an extensive catalog of pamphlet materials by Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, Prince Hall, Daniel Coker, James Forten and others.

⁶⁵ Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 71-78.

Print, Cornish and Russwurm realized, would be integral to black autonomy and public activism in the early American republic. Print could create a sense of shared kinship, identity, and simultaneity among an emergent and disparate free black community. It could serve as a political statement that announced black independence and control. It could refute claims of black inferiority common in mainstream publications. As the inaugural issue of *Freedom's Journal* stated to its readers, "We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the publick [sic] been deceived by misrepresentations, in things which concern us dearly."⁶⁶

Freedom's Journal quickly rose in popularity among free African-Americans in the North. At its height, the newspaper is thought to have had an estimated 800 subscribers with an even larger readership. The paper was disseminated through a network of agents and received financial support from both African-Americans and whites. Throughout the year however, Cornish and Russwurm disagreed over the editorial direction of the paper. In September 1827, Cornish resigned from *Freedom's Journal*, though he remained on as an agent through the 1828. While Russwurm continued as sole editor, Cornish founded a short-lived weekly called *The Rights of All*. Like *Freedom's Journal*, Cornish's new paper dedicated itself to relating the news of the day and promoting antislavery. Maintaining a viable print vehicle however proved difficult; *Freedom's Journal* ended publication in 1829 and *Rights of All* followed in 1830.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Bacon, 71-82; Richard Newman, "Protest in Black and White: The Formation and Transformation of an African American Political Community during the Early Republic," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 183-184; *Freedom's Journal*, 17 March 1827.

⁶⁷ Bacon, 45-63. Some of the tensions between Cornish and Russwurm arose in part from Russwurm's gradual conversion to colonization and growing disillusionment with America. Under his editorship *Freedom's Journal* grew increasingly unpopular among African-American readers for its views. Several months after the paper ended publication in 1829, Russwurm left the United States for Liberia.

While valuing autonomy, black writers also worked within and alongside white antislavery papers. Lundy's *Genius* regularly published letters by black authors and advertised tracts of black pamphleteers. Lundy also received key financial support for his often cash-strapped abolitionist paper from the black community. The *Freedom's Journal* frequently called for blacks to subscribe to the *Genius*, insisting it was "the imperious duty" of every "man of Colour" to support the abolitionist paper.⁶⁸ Cornish's *The Rights of All* described Lundy's paper as "rare, sacred and dear" and urged increased black subscription. In 1832 John B. Vashon, a trustee of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh and co-founder of the city's African Education Society, acted as an agent for the *Genius* in Pennsylvania. Through conventions, church gatherings, and in written articles to the black community, black agents like Vashon regularly championed early antislavery papers like the *Genius*, the *Emancipator* and other white publications. For free African-Americans these were matters of both solidarity and strategy, recognizing that maintaining a voice in such papers allowed for greater mobility of their message.⁶⁹

The growing importance of newspapers to political causes impressed a young white Massachusetts writer, William Lloyd Garrison. Recently relocated to Boston in 1828, Garrison was named editor of the *National Philanthropist*, a newspaper launched by the Baptist minister Rev. William Collier whose primary cause was temperance.⁷⁰ There he wrote articles advocating moral and political improvement of the individual, criticizing alcoholic consumption, promiscuity, and, increasingly, slavery. Displaying a growing interest in the nascent antislavery

⁶⁸ *Freedom's Journal*, 21 March 1828.

⁶⁹ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 32-33.

⁷⁰ The *National Philanthropist* of Boston should not be confused with the *Philanthropist* of Ohio.

movement, he had recently become a member of the American Colonization Society, which advocated the repatriation of free African-Americans outside of the United States. In March of that same year, Garrison attended a speech by Benjamin Lundy. The *Genius* editor, at the time facing strong financial pressure and living in a condition that Garrison would later describe as almost destitute, was on a speaking tour of the New England states seeking advocates for antislavery and, most pressing, subscribers for his newspaper. The two quickly developed a relationship, with Garrison expressing admiration for “a gentleman who has distinguished himself . . . by his zeal and perseverance in favor of the oppressed sons of Africa.” Lundy took note of the young writer, and late in 1828 invited him to act as editorial-assistant at the *Genius*, which was then headquartered in Baltimore. Garrison, after a short stint with the *Journal of the Times* in Bennington, Vermont, took up the offer. By 1829 he relocated to Maryland and was penning regular articles for the *Genius*.⁷¹

During Garrison’s time at the antislavery publication, Lundy took him to Philadelphia to attend Quaker Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society meetings. There he developed a close friendship with the abolitionist Thomas Shipley. It was Shipley who put Garrison in touch with prominent members of Philadelphia’s African-American community, including the activist and businessman James Forten. Shipley was one of a number of younger dissident Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society members who felt the conservative ideals of his fellow reformers for “gradual emancipation” would do little to uproot Southern slavery in the face of such losses as the Missouri Compromise. Shipley looked instead to the more direct strategies of African-Americans in Philadelphia. Operating both within and without the circles of white antislavery,

⁷¹ William Lloyd Garrison in the *Courier*, cited in Walter M. Merrill, ed. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Volume 1, I Will Be Heard 1822-1835*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 63-68.

many black reformers were vocal in their calls for immediate abolition and fought against the restrictive, often violent, normalcy of Northern racism.⁷²

It was from African-American activists that Garrison heard fervent denunciations of the American Colonization Society, its anti-black sentiments and its plans to repatriate or colonize blacks outside of the nation. These arguments had existed in the printed pamphlets of James Forten and Richard Allen as early as 1817, and had been debated in *Freedom's Journal* since 1827. In 1828, a group of black activists penned a pamphlet in Philadelphia to publicly combat “all scurrilous” and “injurious” claims made against the black community, including the colonization scheme, appearing in local mainstream newspapers. Whites were warned that such racial prejudice would “have to CONTEND WITH THE COLORED POPULATION” at every turn, who would respond to such defamations with the power of print. The Boston pamphleteer David Walker in his 1829 *Appeal in Four Articles: Together With A Preamble To The Colored Citizens of the World*, charged that colonizationists believed African-Americans to be “a set of brutes,” who were to be bundled up and driven from the country “after having enriched it with [their] blood and tears.”⁷³

The new perspectives of free African-American writers had a profound impact on Garrison, who by late 1829 abandoned his former pro-colonization views and began denouncing the American Colonization Society. In Garrison’s first edition of the *Genius*, he made his position clear: “as a very large portion of our colored people were born on American soil, they are at liberty to choose their own dwelling place, and we possess no right to use coercive

⁷² Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 113-120.

⁷³ *Philadelphia Report*, reprinted in *Freedom's Journal*, 18 July 1828; David Walker, *Appeal in Four Articles: Together With A Preamble To The Coloured Citizens Of The World, But In Particular, And Very Expressly, To Those Of The United States Of America*, (Boston, 1829), 76-79.

measures in their removal.”⁷⁴ No longer for Garrison was even a gradual or moderate approach to the slavery question justified. Like Shipley, Garrison had become an adherent of what would be termed “Immediatism,” or Immediate abolition.⁷⁵

Immediatism was an abolitionist call to arms, a “direct, intuitive consciousness of the sinfulness of slavery, and a sincere personal commitment to work for its abolition.”⁷⁶ Garrison used his position as co-editor of the *Genius* to wage a relentless war of words against the Southern slavocracy, his former American Colonization Society allies, and gradualist antislavery schemes. “Slavery is a monster,” Garrison railed in an October 1829 article in the *Genius*, “and [it] must be hunted down bravely, and despatched [sic] at a blow.”⁷⁷

Garrison’s newfound radicalism placed him at odds with older more established white antislavery supporters, including his benefactor Lundy who remained steadfast to the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society’s conservatism. Gradual emancipation to Lundy was the only means to recruit the favorable opinion of white Northerners, who for the most part viewed slavery as a Southern problem which might cause economic upheaval were the region’s valuable property to be immediately and abruptly set free. By 1829, Garrison could not have been more far removed from Lundy’s views. Increasingly the young editor was losing faith in the old guard of Northern white antislavery, which held that slavery could only be ended in a republic through political channels whereby a majority of representatives supportive of the cause could bring

⁷⁴ *Genius*, 8 September 1829.

⁷⁵ Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 113-120; David Brion Davis, “The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49, No. 2 (September 1962): 209-210. To the general 1830s public, Immediatism meant the abolition of slavery “without delay or preparation,” and rejected gradual approaches to phase out slavery or transition enslaved persons into intermediate apprenticeship programs rather than to complete freedom.

⁷⁶ Davis, 209.

⁷⁷ *Genius*, 9 October 1829.

about peaceful, safe and responsible abolition. For Garrison, the means to end slavery did not lie with the sympathies of a political elite, but rather in opening up the movement to the more democratic and egalitarian currents of the day. Central to this new counter-public would be non-elites, the common people, and in time both blacks and women.⁷⁸

Despite their disagreements, Lundy and Garrison continued to work together through late 1829 and into 1830. To maintain their professional relationship, each agreed to sign their own articles in the *Genius* to indicate authorship to readers.⁷⁹ Years later, in his eulogy of Lundy, Garrison remarked favorably on his former mentor's insight: "how essential to the awakening of a lethargic nation was a regular anti-slavery periodical . . . It was for Lundy to place a just and sagacious estimate upon the all-shaking power of the press."⁸⁰ In 1830, however, after a case of libel against a slaveholder landed him in prison for several weeks, Garrison agreed to part ways amicably with Lundy and moved to Boston. There he began making contacts to lay the groundwork for his own publication, which was launched in the fall of 1830 under the instructive name the *Liberator*. Expressing the more radical themes of emancipation to which he had become exposed in the past two years, through interaction with the print culture of African-Americans, the twenty-seven-year old Garrison famously wrote in the inaugural edition of his newspaper, "I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation . . . I am in earnest -- I will not equivocate -- I will not excuse -- I will not retreat a single inch -- AND I WILL BE HEARD."⁸¹

⁷⁸ Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 132.

⁷⁹ Dillion, 156.

⁸⁰ *Liberator*, 20 September 1839.

⁸¹ *Liberator*, 1 January 1831.

African-Americans continued to play an integral role in Garrison's transformation to abolitionism through the pages of the *Liberator*. In the paper's first year, two hundred articles, accounting for twenty percent of print material, came from black authors. Pamphlets by black writers like abolitionist Maria Stewart were reproduced in the paper's pages, as well as essays and reprinted speeches by black advocates of abolitionism and equal rights. As with Lundy's *Genius*, Garrison relied heavily on early black supporters, who in turn expected to have their voices and concerns placed within the paper's pages. James Forten sent in \$54 to pay for twenty-seven subscriptions just one day before the *Liberator's* first publication, allowing Garrison to purchase the ream of paper needed for printing. Garrison later wrote that without this "timely remittance," he was uncertain "whether there would ever have been a *Liberator* printed." In Philadelphia and Boston, black support provided for over 150 subscriptions in the first few months of the paper's publication.⁸²

Much of the *Liberator's* success in the African-American community was dependent upon a large corps of black agents in cities and towns throughout the Northeast, including New Bedford, Wilmington, New York City, Rochester and elsewhere. During the paper's first few years, the black Pittsburgh businessman John B. Vashon was the *Liberator's* chief benefactor, sending several loans to keep it published. By Garrison's own calculations, during the first three years, blacks made up seventy-five percent of the paper's subscribers. In January 1835 the Colored Liberator Aiding Association was organized, whose purpose was to encourage greater black support for the newspaper. Financial assistance from a black community that had long recognized the importance of print culture in the exercising of democratic activism would keep

⁸² Quarles, 19-20.

the fledgling *Liberator* afloat and secure its importance to the transformation of antislavery in the early 1830s.⁸³

Garrison's *Liberator* and the growing African-American involvement in print arrived at a timely moment in American journalism. The 1830s marked the onset of the "commercial revolution" in print, initiating a break with the traditional business and political press and creating a cheaper more accessible newspaper. Known as the "penny papers," these newspapers sold for a penny, rather than six-cents. Instead of relying on subscriptions they were hawked on street corners and public spaces. Beginning in 1833, penny papers flourished in New York and quickly spread to the country's urban and commercial centers, picking up wide circulations. Not only were these papers more numerous, they also shifted their focus from partisan editorials and business sheets to the reporting of "news" that reflected the political and social events of the day. This coincided not incidentally with the era of Jacksonian Democracy, whose egalitarian ideals were juxtaposed to the elite aristocratic nature of earlier American politics. Penny press papers claimed to "speak for the common good, without regard to that of sects, factions or parties." Between 1830 and 1850 the penny press helped create newspapers that demanded a well-informed public. It was during this period of democratization in print culture that Garrison's *Liberator*, aided in great part by African-American writers and supporters, became the foremost voice for a rejuvenated more forceful egalitarian abolitionism. This debate over slavery grew increasingly louder as British Emancipation unfolded across the Atlantic and through print entered the American public sphere.⁸⁴

⁸³ Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 12-13.

⁸⁴ Edwin Emery, Nancy L. Roberts and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997), 129-155; Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 14-28.

British Emancipation and the Transformation of American Abolitionism

The abolitionist movement that would culminate in British Emancipation in 1833 emerged from dissatisfaction with the slow rate of antislavery reform in the West Indies. Members of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade like the Anglican Parliamentarian Thomas Buxton had pressed for the abolishment of slavery since the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, but there was no consensus on when such an event should come about. William Wilberforce especially lectured strenuously against any immediate call for emancipation. To immediately free the “poor degraded Negro Slaves,” he argued, would “insure not only their masters' ruin, but their own.” Wilberforce believed instead that with the end of the slave trade, West Indian planters would be forced to better treat their existing slaves, train them in the formation of families, and offer them proper socialization and Christianity.⁸⁵

However, little progress was made with the intransigent planters in the British West Indies, as the colonies endured several major slave insurrections during this time, most notably in Barbados (1816) and Demerara (1823). Meanwhile colonial governments, dominated by planter interests, refused to implement or enforce reforms.⁸⁶ Out of this frustration came the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions in 1823, popularly known as the British Antislavery Society. In 1825, the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, the print arm of the British Antislavery Society, went into publication, featuring sermons, speeches, lectures and other forms of public advocacy. This rejuvenated movement used mass campaigns, drawing in various segments of society, including nonconformists like Methodists, Baptists and

⁸⁵ William Wilberforce, *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: Luke Hansard & Sons, 1807), 259.

⁸⁶ Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 254-290.

Congregationalists. Antislavery women's groups organized independently as well, serving in the foot-soldiering and financial support for the movement. Between 1828 and 1831, greatly aided by women's antislavery organizations, the Antislavery Society printed over 2.8 million copies of abolitionist pamphlets and tracts, and delivered some 5,000 petitions for gradual emancipation to Parliament.⁸⁷

Women's antislavery organizations were also instrumental in the shift to immediate emancipation among British reformers. In 1824, a pamphlet was published anonymously by the Quaker abolitionist Elizabeth Heyrick with the title, *Immediate, not Gradual Abolition; or, an Inquiry into the Shortest, Safest, and Most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West-Indian Slavery*. Heyrick, leader of the Leicester Ladies' Antislavery Society, argued that slavery was a sin against God, that the slave "has a right to his liberty," and that immediate abolition was "more wise and rational, - more politic and safe, as well as more just and humane, - than gradual emancipation." Copies of her tract circulated within women's groups, inspiring a few to drop the word "gradual" from their titles. With antislavery women's groups leading the way, by 1830 a steady clamoring grew in male antislavery organizations for immediate emancipation. In a heated meeting in May 1830, the Antislavery Society passed a resolution declaring the terms "mitigation and gradual abolition" dropped from its title, calling for a focus on the "entire abolition" of slavery. A new sub-committee was formed under the British Antislavery Society to create a mass campaign for public support through the wide circulation of print propaganda, lectures, debates and public advocacy. This invigorated campaign, led by the Quaker philanthropist James Cropper and his Young England Abolitionists, advocated extra-

⁸⁷ Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178-182; Claire Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), 48-56.

Parliamentary tactics aimed at the masses of society, rather than the political elite. Under their direct activism the number of abolitionist societies in England grew from 200 to 1300 in a single year.⁸⁸

While abolitionist groups propagated immediate emancipation in the metropole, slaves made their own case in the West Indian colonies. On Christmas day 1831, acting on rumors that the English King had granted emancipation their owners were ignoring, Jamaica's slaves rose up in a massive rebellion. Led by a religious slave named Samuel Sharpe, the rebellion was blamed on the nonconformist Baptist missionaries who operated among slaves and became known as the Baptist War. The rebellion lasted two months until it was put down in February 1832. In the end a dozen whites lay dead and some 1.5 million in property was destroyed. Hundreds of slaves were killed in skirmishes with troops and in public executions. In England, there was horror at the rebellion and the brutal excesses of the planters. Abolitionists seized on these sentiments to draw popular support for emancipation, and turned public sentiment against planter interests. By December of 1832, Thomas Buxton was informed that the English Ministry was set to draft a safe bill to bring about a satisfactory end to slavery. The stage was set for British Emancipation to unfold in August of 1833.⁸⁹

The English struggle was followed closely in the United States. Well-read penny press dailies in the 1830s such as the *New York Observer and Chronicle* reprinted entire British parliamentary debates for their concerned readers. Political journals like *The Albion* included the

⁸⁸ For a thorough accounting of the Agency Sub-Committee, its tactics and the Young England Abolitionists see, David Brion Davis, "James Cropper and the British Antislavery Movement, 1823-1833," *The Journal of Negro History* 46 (April 1961): 154-173.

⁸⁹ Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 103-116; William Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 112-114; For a concise examination of West Indian slave revolts and their possible influences on British Abolitionism see, Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts And the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006).

full meeting minutes of English “planters, ship-owners and others interested,” anxious about what emancipation would mean to their West India possessions.⁹⁰ American readers too were concerned with what emancipation in Britain’s West India colonies would mean to both the larger global market and the social fabric of the region. The *New York Spectator* in 1833 pointed out that the increasing likelihood of British Emancipation in the Western hemisphere had “now become a matter of great interest” and noted that the “anxiety manifested on the part of the West India Proprietors, has caused some animation in the markets.”⁹¹

For Southern newspapers in 1833, British Emancipation was presented as a looming disaster. The *Raleigh Register* of North Carolina declared the matters debated in England “replete with interest” to America, and warned that in abolition’s wake the West Indies would become overrun with “Negro Sovereignties, whose contagion would rapidly spread into the Southern States.” Evoking the possibility of intervention, the paper asked if the United States could afford to “look quietly on and see it [emancipation] consummated,” and told its readers the coming news from England would be “anxiously awaited.”⁹² Worse still was the effect they feared British Emancipation would have on advocates of American abolitionism. The editors of one 1833 Virginia newspaper complained that the prospect of British Emancipation had created a “fanatical spirit” in their Northern neighbors.⁹³

The imminent emancipation of Britain’s slaves was certainly a cause for excitement, if not fanaticism, among both African-Americans and American abolitionists. During its two year run, *Freedom’s Journal* kept its readers abreast of what its editors called “the principal news of

⁹⁰ *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 13 July 1833; *The Albion*, 12 May 1832.

⁹¹ *Spectator*, published as *New York Spectator*, 25 March 1833.

⁹² *National Gazette*, 9 April 1833.

⁹³ *New York Spectator*, 9 May 1833.

the day.”⁹⁴ News from the British West Indies was frequently published, including reports of slave insurrections and the active British abolition movement. *Freedom’s Journal* reprinted at length the speeches and tracts of noted British abolitionists like Thomas Buxton, Henry Brougham and Thomas Clarkson to refute proslavery arguments of both American and West Indian planters. Understanding and negotiating within the racial hierarchies of the day, black writers used such prominent white voices to further legitimate their arguments. Like Anthony Benezet and early antislavery writers, these alliances were not hindered by regional or national boundaries. And for a nation tied to England economically and culturally, there was power in employing Great Britain’s abolitionist movement. Seizing this advantage, the paper’s editors deftly turned the British campaign against slavery into a larger transnational struggle. If the arguments of slaveholders were wrong there, they reasoned, then it followed they must be wrong here as well.⁹⁵

The second edition of *Freedom’s Journal* reprinted in full an article from the English *Christian Spectator* relating to the struggle against slavery in the British West Indies, quoting directly from arguments by noted British abolitionists before English Parliament. Addressed to the “people of colour,” the article claimed “measures” were underway, “by which every slave in the British dominions will soon be free.” The article warned slaveholders in the American South that this talk of liberty and freedom in the West Indies would naturally flow to those they held in bondage in the United States. Either Southerners would act now and give up the “abomination” of slavery, or suffer the “war of extermination” that might ensue at the hands of their aggrieved slaves upon learning of freedom off the shores of America. “Let the alarm continually be

⁹⁴ *Freedom’s Journal*, 23 March 1827.

⁹⁵ *Freedom’s Journal*, 23 March 1827; 6 April 1827; 18 April 1827.

sounded,” the paper proclaimed. “The British slaves will soon be free citizens. Destruction awaits us, unless something official is done. Something must be done.”⁹⁶

This startlingly confrontational message illustrated the attention free African-Americans had given to the political debates over slavery that engulfed British politics of the day. It represented a transnational dimension within black contemporary thought. In its warning of imminent slave revolt, even death and “extermination,” it evoked the specter of events like Haiti, then only decades old in the memory of antebellum Southerners. What dangers would the South face, the paper asked, “when the slaves in the West Indies...become all free citizens?”⁹⁷

By the 1830s Lundy’s *Genius* was also reporting on the discussion and debate in Britain over slavery. An April 1832 *Genius* article following the political struggles of British abolition blamed the Baptist War insurrection in Jamaica on the obstinacy of slaveholders. West Indian planters were said to be filled with the “demoniac spirit of oppression,” and would not be driven towards emancipation “until the blacks, being painfully wearied, and their patience exhausted, determined to take the matter into their own hands.”⁹⁸

This was not the first time the paper had put forth such a radical argument. Several months prior, the *Genius* reported on Nat Turner’s slave rebellion in Virginia, during which fifty-five whites were killed and after which over 200 blacks were murdered in reprisals. Though deploring the violence, a December 1831 *Genius* article warned Southerners that the danger of insurrection did not come from free blacks, but those blacks “whose necks are inured to the yoke

⁹⁶ *Freedom’s Journal*, 23 March 1827.

⁹⁷ *Freedom’s Journal*, 23 March 1827; 6 April 1827. For more on the image and fears of Haiti in the minds of American slaveholders see, Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006); Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

⁹⁸ *Genius*, April 1832.

of cruel bondage; whose limbs are benumbed by unrewarded toil . . .” and who are thus “fired with vengeance, and frensied [sic] by rage and desperation.” This was written in part as a rebuttal to white Southerners who blamed abolitionists for the rebellion. As evidence to slaveholding complicity in insurrections, the article went on to reprint portions of the alleged “Confessions” of Nat Turner for readers.⁹⁹

In a similar vein, the April 1832 article on the Baptist War in Jamaica named the West Indian planters stubborn “tyrants” who would “not yield while a possibility exists of holding on to the rod,” noting at the same time that “the oppressed are determined that they shall wield it no longer.”¹⁰⁰ While referencing the planters of a foreign colony, these words were directed towards an American audience who would have had little trouble interpreting the events in Jamaica as analogous to the recent insurrection in Virginia. Such murderous calamities were the “wages of oppression,” the article warned, sown by the tyrants of the West Indian colonies, and by inference, awaiting likewise those tyrants of the American South.¹⁰¹ In their comparative arguments, African-Americans and abolitionists readily crossed established political and national boundaries, asserting not only the universal nature of antislavery, but also the universality of the moral wrong they sought to eradicate. In their repeated warnings of slave violence they offered slaveholders a choice: commit to the end of slavery or face a destructive alternative. It was a rhetorical threat, demonstrating the more forceful attitude that would come to define the transformation in American abolitionism.

⁹⁹ *Genius*, December 1831. For more on the Nat Turner slave insurrection see, Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner’s Fierce Rebellion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

¹⁰⁰ *Genius*, April 1832.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

The *Liberator* also followed the British struggle closely, as its founder forged closer ties with English abolitionists. Early in 1832, Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society in Boston to further mass mobilization for the abolitionist cause. The organization's constitution proclaimed every person had "a right to immediate freedom from personal bondage," charging, "whoever retains his fellow man in bondage, is guilty of a grievous wrong." The aims were ambitious and reflected Garrison's growth on the goals of abolitionism: "to effect the Abolition of Slavery in the United States, to improve the character and condition of the free people of color, to inform and correct public opinion in relation to their situation and rights, and obtain for them equal civil and political rights and privileges with the whites."¹⁰²

In the spring of 1832, Garrison revised his earlier positions and issued his *Thoughts on African Colonization*. The pamphlet drew on the earlier arguments of James Forten and Richard Allen, and quoted directly from African-American print publications like *Freedom's Journal*. Garrison's tract was a candid attack on the American Colonization Society as an organization of "deceptive assurances, unrelenting prejudices, and unchristian denunciations" aligned with the interests of Southern slaveholders—in some cases even funded by them.¹⁰³ Since the early 1820s, the American Colonization Society had sought to cultivate allies in Britain. They hoped the long-standing English colony of Sierra Leone in West Africa, established for slaves freed during the American Revolution then settled in Nova Scotia, would develop close ties with their fledgling colony of Liberia. The Sierra Leone colony was inspired by Granville Sharp, who was

¹⁰² Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, *Constitution of the New-England anti-slavery society: with an address to the public* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 1, 3-4.

¹⁰³ William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization: or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 16, 35. Over 2500 copies of the pamphlet were printed and circulated, doing irreparable damage to the American Colonization Society among much of the abolitionist community.

concerned with what he saw as a growth in London's black poor. There were ties to the idea in continental America, most notably the Connecticut clergyman Rev. Samuel Hopkins and free black merchant, sea captain and ship owner Paul Cuffe. When the American Colonization Society founded Liberia in 1822, the British colony of Sierra Leone was looked upon as both a model and mutual ally.¹⁰⁴

Between 1832 and 1833, American Colonization agent Elliot Cresson traveled to England to promote the organization's cause and lay the groundwork for a possible merging of the two colonies. There, he established the trans-Atlantic British African Colonization Society and earned support from the English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson.¹⁰⁵ Some English abolitionists like James Cropper, however, questioned the organization's legitimacy. In this trans-Atlantic relationship British abolitionists sought to cultivate Anglo-American ties, viewing it as integral to a broader emancipation movement. The black abolitionist Baptist Minister Reverend Nathaniel Paul of New York toured England during this time, speaking against Cresson and colonization to wide audiences. Simultaneously, the Anglo-Canadian abolitionist Charles Stuart circulated anti-colonizationist pamphlets and tracts to counter Cresson's influence. When Garrison's *Thoughts on African Colonization* arrived in England in 1833, it was within this already pitched trans-Atlantic battle over the American Colonization Society's role in the British movement. Cropper, Paul, Stuart and other critics used none other than Garrison's anti-colonizationist tract to express their concerns about the American organization. Paul lamented in

¹⁰⁴ Bronwen Everill, "British West Africa or 'The United States of Africa'? Imperial pressures on the trans-Atlantic anti-slavery movement, 1839–1842," *Journal of Trans-Atlantic Studies* 9:2 (2011): 138; Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 279-312.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

an 1833 letter to Garrison that his only regret was that the “book had not come sooner.”¹⁰⁶ *The Anti-Slavery London Reporter* hailed Garrison’s tract as being composed with “great ability and effect,” with “proofs drawn from sources which appear unexceptionable.”¹⁰⁷

Garrison, at the same time, was increasing his contacts with Britain’s abolitionist movements. As early as December of 1832, he was in correspondence with a “distinguished Friend in Liverpool,” James Cropper, who in a letter denounced the American Colonization Society as a “diabolical scheme to perpetuate slavery.” Garrison reprinted Croppers’ letter in next *Liberator*, confident it would “make a salutary impression upon the minds of many.”¹⁰⁸ Earlier that same month in a letter to Unitarian minister and fellow founder of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, Samuel J. May, also a refugee from the American Colonization Society, Garrison voiced his unrestrained admiration of the English abolitionists:

Our coadjutors in England are fighting most manfully, with spiritual weapons against sin and cruelty. I have just received from them a large bundle of anti-slavery pamphlets, tracts, circulars . . . The British abolitionists waste no ammunition—every shot tells—they write in earnest—they call . . . a fig a fig, and a spade a spade. When I see what they are doing, and read what they write, I blush to think of my own past apathy, and mourn of my poverty of thought and language.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Richard J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 52-69; Nathaniel Paul to William Lloyd Garrison 10 April 1833 in C. Peter Ripley, *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. I: The British Isles, 1830-1865* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 38.

¹⁰⁷ *The Anti-Slavery London Reporter*, quoted in Charles Stuart, *British Opinions of the American Colonization Society* (Cornell University Library, 1833), 34. Garrison in turn reprinted Stuart’s pamphlet the same year and distributed it through New England; Joshua Civin, “The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National and Global Levels “ (paper presented at the Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 25-28 October 2001). <http://www.yale.edu/glc/conference/>.

¹⁰⁸ William Lloyd Garrison to George W. Benson, Boston 10, December 1832 in *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: I will be heard, 1822-1835*, eds. Walter McIntosh Merrill and Louis Ruchames (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 198.

¹⁰⁹ William Lloyd Garrison to Samuel J. May, Boston 4, December 1832 in Merrill and Ruchames, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 193.

British Abolitionism, with its ready call of Immediatism, displayed the type of radicalism, strategy and mass action Garrison sought to create in the United States. In the preamble of his *Thoughts on African Colonization*, he made plain that Americans would do well to “imitate the example of the people of Great Britain, by seeking the immediate overthrow of the horrid system” of slavery. To this end, he became determined to further develop a growing trans-Atlantic antislavery movement.¹¹⁰

In March of 1833 the *Liberator* announced that the New England Anti-Slavery Society had “appointed William Lloyd Garrison as their Agent” and that he would “proceed to England as soon as the necessary arrangements can be made.” The goal of the trip was twofold. First, Garrison was to raise funds for a proposed reformist Manual Labor School for Colored Youth in New England, which would promote manual-labor for impoverished black youth under the direction of the wealthy abolitionists Arthur and Lewis Tappan. The second reason was for the express purpose of “disseminating in that country the truth in relation to American slavery, and its ally, the American Colonization Society.”¹¹¹

Garrison’s trip was financed in no small part by many of the African-Americans who subscribed to the *Liberator*, and who had been following the debates of British Emancipation printed within the paper’s pages. Collections in black communities were taken up that raised some \$400, with individuals giving from 50¢ to \$5, and groups up to \$124. Black benevolence societies even sent presents to Garrison for the voyage and further provided funds for his return. Free African-Americans had monitored, written, dialogued and engaged with the British

¹¹⁰ Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization*, xix.

¹¹¹ *Liberator*, March 9, 1833.

movement. In their enthusiastic support for Garrison's trip, they showed their understanding of the importance of this transnational moment of Atlantic abolitionism.¹¹²

Garrison arrived in England in late May, landing in Liverpool where he met up with his friend James Cropper. It was an exciting time in British abolitionism. Years of mass agitation, petitions and political wrangling had culminated into what seemed to many the inevitable approach of emancipation. Just eight days before Garrison's arrival, on May 14, the colonial British secretary Edward Stanley, had risen in the House of Commons to move a sitting resolution for the emancipation of slaves in the British colonies. For the next three months, Parliament—and by extension the country—was consumed in debates over the emancipation question.¹¹³ Garrison spent both spring and summer in England, and was received favorably by the abolitionist community that gathered in London to hear the Parliamentary debates. There he met notable British abolitionists such as William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson and developed close relationships with George Thompson and the fiery "Irish Liberator" Daniel O'Connell. The latter made reciprocal trips to the US in later years to preach abolitionism. Garrison claimed that Wilberforce had heard such favorable things about his work he [Wilberforce] assumed the white American abolitionist was black.¹¹⁴

In the midst of this heady emancipation fervor, Garrison mostly abandoned his initial goal of fundraising and focused on his secondary objective—exposing the American Colonization Society. With the aid of Cropper, Stuart, Paul and Thompson, Garrison sought out

¹¹² Quarles, 20.

¹¹³ Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 123-128.

¹¹⁴ Archibald Henry Grimké, *William Lloyd Garrison: The Abolitionist* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891), 152. The alleged account of the meeting between Wilberforce and Garrison was related in Archibald Henry Grimké's 1891 biography of the abolitionist.

and publicly denounced Elliot Cresson in public lectures and in editorials, building greatly on his fame for *Thoughts on African Colonization* which circulated through England preceding his visit. When Cresson appeared in an audience where Garrison was speaking, Garrison openly challenged him to a debate on colonization—a tactic earlier pursued by Paul and Stuart, and an offer that Cresson declined.¹¹⁵

Garrison's added voice against the American Colonization Society proved successful, and he was able to issue a written protest by some of Britain's most prominent abolitionists, among them William Wilberforce, James Cropper, Zachary Macaulay, and Samuel Gurney. In it they declared colonization "a cruel prejudice" that "exposes the colored people to great practical persecution" and concluded the American Colonization Society "not deserving of the countenance of the British people."¹¹⁶ This victory even forced Thomas Clarkson, who had been an ally of the American Colonization Society, to renounce the organization and Cresson in 1833. Feeling success in his mission, Garrison would later declare, "the career of Elliot Cresson in England has been marked by cunning, duplicity and cowardice . . . His overthrow has been complete."¹¹⁷

Garrison's trip to England helped set the stage for a growing trans-Atlantic abolitionist movement that would develop in the coming decades. Further, letters and reprints in the *Liberator* popularized British abolitionism—slowly approaching its climax—in the common

¹¹⁵ Blackett, 65-66.

¹¹⁶ Garrison quoted in Archibald Henry Grimké, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 132-133.

¹¹⁷ *Liberator*, 12 October 1833. The remarks were printed in the *Liberator* upon Garrison's return to the United States; For more on Thomas Clarkson's reversal see: Ousmane Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 76-77; David Brion Davis, *From Homicide to Slavery: Studies in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 286; Giles B. Stebbins, *Facts and Opinions Touching the Real Origin, Character, and Influence of the American Colonization Society: Views of Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Others, and Opinions of the Free People of Color of the United States* (Boston: Jewett, Proctor, And Worthington, 1853), 215-224.

American abolitionist discourse. In a June 1833 article recounting a gathering in London, the *Liberator* proclaimed “exultation of the glorious triumph which must shortly be resounded over the death of British colonial slavery.” In what would become a growing theme of comparisons between the two nations, the paper decried the “humiliation” and “scorn” America must feel for its own “audacious crime of manstealing.” And it invited Britain to “pour out their tremendous rebukes” of America’s guilt and “insulting mockery” for “the enormities of slavery.”¹¹⁸

British Emancipation in the United States

In the United States British Emancipation was becoming linked to American abolitionism in the popular press, with positive and negative implications depending on the reader’s position. This was true of both mainstream newspapers that printed stories of Garrison’s trip to England, and abolitionist papers like the *Liberator* that reported on the British abolitionist struggle. Both drew parallels between the two movements. When the Abolition Act finally passed both Houses of British Parliament on August 1st of 1833, the *Liberator* declared it “cheering news” that inspired courage and hope among the advocates of immediate abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic. They anticipated that Britain’s act of abolition would serve as inspiration, and “lead Republican America to repentance for her crimes!”¹¹⁹

Mainstream American publications in contrast, many of them in the North, reacted to Britain’s Emancipation Act with dire warnings. Pulling from a Jamaican paper, the *New York Spectator* spoke of the coming ruin to the British colonies and claimed the planters in Dominica

¹¹⁸ *Liberator*, June 8, 1833. An American in attendance at the London meeting claimed mortification as the British abolitionists rebuked the United States and the apathy of its citizens towards slavery.

¹¹⁹ *Liberator*, 4 April 1833, 9 September 1833.

were “about to appeal to arms” to resist the Emancipation bill.¹²⁰ Other papers saw the passing of the Abolition Act as directly related to American politics, and derided what they saw as a meddlesome and fanatical transnational abolitionist movement. Calling abolition a question that has “long agitated and inflamed our southern states and the British West India colonies,” the *North American Magazine* named Garrison and other abolitionists “mischief workers and madmen,” whose “frantic disciples now scatter among the ignorant and prejudiced.”¹²¹

Rebutting tales of brutality against slaves in the British West Indies as “exaggerated,” the magazine reprinted in full the account of an Englishman’s travels throughout Jamaica ten years prior. These reports depicted West Indian slavery as benign and described those in bondage as “helpless creatures, too ignorant to appreciate liberty, and too idle and improvident to acquire an honest livelihood.” Sympathetically quoting a “plundered planter,” the architects of British Abolition were derided as “sneaking fanatical ignoramuses” and the lives of slaves were compared favorably to the degraded peasants of England and Ireland. The article concluded that the changes occurring on the West Indian isles were of special concern in the US, given “the ceaseless efforts of disorganizing zealots to depopulate the south and sever the Union.”¹²²

American newspapers took special note of Garrison’s speeches in England during these unprecedented events. In his attacks on slavery and the American Colonization Society before a foreign audience he had repeatedly criticized the United States, while heaping praise on Britain. The *New York Commercial Advertiser* charged, “Mr. Garrison had not only published his own

¹²⁰ *New York Spectator*, 9 September 1833.

¹²¹ *North American Magazine* August 1833.

¹²² *Ibid.*

opinions on the subject [of slavery] in England, but has published British opinions on the subject in America.” Garrison’s enemies seized on these accounts, and painted him a traitor.¹²³

On October 1, 1833 a group of pro-colonizationists met in the Manhattan office of Watson Webb, editor of the *Morning Courier & New-York Enquirer* and a zealous anti-abolitionist. In the wake of British Emancipation, the Tappan brothers had called together a gathering in the city at Clinton Hall to inaugurate the formation of the New York Anti-Slavery Society. The organization was radical for its day, and those in attendance who met to discuss the cause of immediate emancipation were white and black, men and women. This coincided with the return of Garrison from England, who was expected to address the audience about his trip and the passage of British Abolition. Both Garrison and Tappan were regular targets for attack in the New York paper, including insinuations that Garrison was seeking a black wife. This was an outgrowth of anti-abolitionist rumors in Boston, due in part to Garrison’s alliance with abolitionist Lydia Maria Child, who in her 1833 book *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*, openly denounced Boston’s laws against racial intermarriage. While not disagreeing with Child, Garrison publically labeled such assertions on his personal life libelous.¹²⁴

Stinging from the recent rebuke of the American Colonization Society both at home and abroad, and fearing British-styled movements for immediate emancipation in the US, Watson Webb and his allies resolved to invade the multiracial abolitionist gathering and put a stop to these “wicked fanatics.” In an October 2 morning editorial in his *Morning Courier & New-York*

¹²³ “An Anti-Slavery Meeting” from *The New York Commercial Advertiser* reprinted in, *Nile’s Register*, 12 October 1833.

¹²⁴ For Garrison’s denial of amalgamation, see *Liberator* 16 1833; for an account of the lead up to the 1833 riot see *Liberator* 18 October 1844; Lydia Maria Child, *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1836), 196.

Enquirer, Webb stoked public sentiment: “The notorious Garrison has returned among us and the good people of this city are called upon to partake in his mad schemes for exciting the South against the North . . . Are we tamely to look on, and see this most dangerous species of fanaticism extending itself through society? . . . Or shall we . . . expose the weakness as well as the folly, madness and mischief of those bold and dangerous men?”¹²⁵

For Webb the confluence of British Emancipation, fears of miscegenation and American abolitionism was no less than a “many headed Hydra,” a blurring of both national and racial boundaries. He threatened that if not stamped out, these foreign notions would provoke “the horrors of civil war” in America.¹²⁶ That evening a crowd of fifteen hundred gathered at Clinton Hall, incited by placards posted throughout the city addressed to “all persons from the South,” inviting them to disrupt the abolitionist meeting. Described perhaps with some irony in a later paper as “highly respectable citizens,” the mob stormed the building, hunting for Tappan and Garrison. Made aware of the encroaching danger, however, the abolitionist gathering passed their resolutions and dispersed early. Of the incident Garrison charged, “the success of my mission [in England] seems to have driven ‘the enemies of slavery in the abstract’ to the verge of madness . . . They who cannot wield the pen against us, resort to tar—and feathers, and clubs!”¹²⁷

New York saw several more days of anti-abolitionist rioting in July of 1834. Racial tensions had simmered since June, when a sermon by the American Presbyterian minister Samuel Hanson Cox was reprinted in the city’s popular press. A staunch abolitionist, Cox had invited the prominent African-American leader Samuel Cornish to integrate his Laight Street

¹²⁵ Reprint of *Morning Courier & New-York Enquirer* in *Liberator* 18 October 1844.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Liberator*, 12 October 1833. [brackets mine]

church alongside Arthur Tappan in his pew. When his parishioners expressed open hostility to Cornish's presence, Cox took to the pulpit to chastise their obstinacy. According to the astonished *New York Commercial Advertiser*, Cox went further: deriding colonization schemes, denouncing the city's anti-abolitionist press as unjust, illiberal and "venal," and asserting "Jesus Christ was a Colored Man." Noting that the audience at the church was at least "four-fifths" women, the *Advertiser* described the sermon as a "desultory, loose, cloudy and inconclusive harangue." The references to women in attendance at Cox's incendiary sermon, and Samuel Cornish's presence, were no idle comments. In the charged social atmosphere they were meant to trigger fears of sexuality, social impropriety and racial boundary crossing.¹²⁸

Throughout the summer, ties between abolitionism and racial-mixing were repeatedly stoked in the mainstream press. Webb's pro-colonizationist *Courier & Enquirer* painted a May abolitionist meeting as a veritable festival of amalgamation and published an editorial in June charging that "fanatics" such as Cox regularly flirted with black women. Other papers claimed Tappan tried to press his daughter to marry "against her consent, a Negro" and warned of the racial "annihilation" that would be wrought by abolitionism. On the morning of July 4th, Webb's *Courier & Enquirer* described a lecture hosted by the New Anti-Slavery Society at the Chatham Street Chapel as a meeting of "fanatics...inflamed by the doctrines of abolition and amalgamation." A mob of "hundreds of young men" responded to Webb's incitation, breaking into the chapel and violently disrupting the multiracial crowd that had been drawn from black and white churches.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 13 June 1834.

¹²⁹ *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, 23 June 1833; Elise Lemire, *Miscegenation: Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 59-62; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African*

Webb's paper continued to stir discontent, describing the dispersed Chatham Street Chapel meeting in a July 7th article as filled with licentious acts of amalgamation. Cox was reputed to have distinguished himself at the gathering to "ladies, both ebony and ivory" during prayer, while Tappan was said to sit between "some six or eight colored damsels." Most disquieting, a former slave termed "Cuffy" was said to have sat in a pew beside a married white woman. The insinuations of transgressing sexualized racial boundaries were especially apropos for Independence Day, when abolitionists could be charged with attempting to bring a foreign ideology—immediate emancipation—from Britain and the West Indies to American shores. When a melee broke out between black and white groups over the use of the Chatham Street Chapel later that day during a celebration of New York Emancipation, the fuse to this powder keg was set.¹³⁰

Webb's *Courier & Enquirer* described the July 7 melee as the work of black rioters, while other newspapers claimed abolitionists were inciting blacks to burn down the city. On July 9 another white mob said to number 4000, driven by national patriotism and inflamed by rumors of racial-mixing and abolitionist outrages, took to the streets. Over the next three days white rioters destroyed Tappan's home, Cox's home and church, and the properties of other abolitionists and black residents. The churches, black and white alike, were specifically targeted on charges that they performed interracial marriages. Shaken by the violence, Arthur Tappan

Americans in New York City, 1626-1863 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 193-197; Mob violence against free African-American public gatherings was common in many American cities.

¹³⁰ *Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer*, 7 July 1833; Lemire, 59-62; Harris, 197-198; Mob violence against free African-American public gatherings was common in many American cities in the nineteenth century: Christmas and Independence Day were especially notorious. See, David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Books, 1991), 35, 100-110.

hastily published a July 16 broadside signed by black and white abolitionists disavowing, “any desire to promote or encourage intermarriage.”¹³¹

Englishmen were also targeted during the July 1834 riot, most notably the English-born stage actor and manager of the Bowery Theater George P. Farren. Theater riots were not uncommon in nineteenth-century New York; but now rumors circulated that Farren had “cursed the Yankees, and called them jackasses.” Fired up by press reports of English “sympathy and aid” for American abolitionists, the mob turned its anger on Farren. Several thousand men attacked his Bowery Theatre demanding apologies, and were not mollified until an actor began singing the popular minstrel song *Zip Coon*.¹³²

Similarly, in 1835, the poet John Greenleaf Whittier and British abolitionist George Thompson were stoned by a mob in Concord, New Hampshire. When Thompson returned that October to give a speech in Boston, anti-abolitionists labeled him “Mr. Foreigner Thompson” and an “agitator,” claiming that the revolutionary Sons of Liberty knew how to deal with Tories. A mob soon formed, described by the *Boston Commercial Gazette* as “an assemblage of fifteen hundred or two thousand,” whipped up by anti-abolitionist and Anglophobic rhetoric. Unable to find Thompson, the rioters set their sights on a meeting of the Female Anti-Slavery Society where Garrison was said to be speaking. Not finding him there, they destroyed some property and eventually caught up with Garrison, tying and dragging him through the streets of Boston by

¹³¹ Harris, 197-198; Arthur Tappan, *To the Honorable Cornelius W. Lawrence, mayor of the city of New-York* (New York: New York Anti-Slavery Society, 1834).

¹³² Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1849* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 249-254; Joel Tyler Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712-1873* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1873), 85-86; Carl E. Prince, ‘The Great ‘Riot Year:’ Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834,’ *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1985): 1-19; For more on theater riots see, Nigel Cliff, *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Random House, 2007).

a rope. The quick actions of two burly sympathizers and the mayor managed to save Garrison, who had to be whisked away to safety.¹³³

This fear of foreign contagion and racial-mixing remained a key concern for anti-abolitionists. Tied to this was a strong thread of nationalist jingoism in the new republic, which had fought two major wars with Great Britain within the last half a century. Part of the counter-discourse put forth by American abolitionists during this transformative moment was the notion that solutions to America's domestic problems could be found outside of the boundaries of the nation-state. The 1835 preamble to the Constitution of the Philadelphia Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society brazenly marshaled "the Emancipation of those of our fellow beings held in bondage in the British West Indies, South America, and elsewhere" as evidence for slavery's abolition in America. The "experience" and "facts recently developed" through the workings of freedom in these foreign lands, they contended, "indisputably [proved], that there is *no danger* to be apprehended from immediate Emancipation."¹³⁴

Northern anti-abolitionists saw in this the makings of a conspiracy, marking abolitionists as part of a foreign cabal to debilitate the Union. Emancipation in the West Indies was now sowing discord in the United States that could only be beneficial to nefarious foreign interests. The national boundary crossings of abolitionists invited ready parallels to fears of racial crossings, and a blurring of constructed demarcations. British Abolitionism was dangerous precisely because it broke with what was perceived to be the established racial order, granting freedom to blacks and inviting them into the sphere of citizenship. Abolitionist organizations in

¹³³ Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 89-93.

¹³⁴ [Preamble] Constitution, By-Laws and List of Officers of the Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society of the City and County of Philadelphia (1835).

the United States were accused of publicly flaunting this contagion on American soil, creating mass gatherings that invited blacks and whites to cross their localized social boundaries.¹³⁵

Yet criticism of England's emancipation bill also came from an unlikely source—William Lloyd Garrison. In an October *Liberator* article recounting his trip, he declared the bill “a complete triumph of colonial chicanery,” finding it “not an example for us (Americans) to imitate, but a precedent for us to shun.”¹³⁶ For an Immediatist like Garrison, the British Emancipation Bill fell short of the ideal of abrupt and complete abolition. First, it stated that emancipation would take place a year later—on August 1 1834. Second, it allowed an indemnity to be paid to the planters in compensation for the loss of their slave property. Most appalling in Garrison's estimation was the bill's call for a seven-year apprenticeship for ex-slaves, who would continue to serve their former owners in a state of semi-freedom. These provisions, part of a gradualist strain that had seeped into the Parliamentary debates over abolition, clashed with full and immediate emancipation.¹³⁷

Despite Garrison's initial misgivings, most abolitionists heralded the passing of British Emancipation as a triumph for the Anglo-American antislavery movement. A November 1833 article in the *Liberator* reposted in full a pamphlet declaring British abolition, “A Vindication of Female Anti-Slavery Associations,” which had been so instrumental in directing the course of British antislavery towards immediate emancipation.¹³⁸ Meanwhile, Garrison, inspired by the

¹³⁵ Wilentz, 679-86; Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 66.

¹³⁶ *Liberator*, 12 October 1833.

¹³⁷ For a more thorough accounting for the rise and fall of the apprenticeship system, see, William L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London: Cape, 1937). For an understanding of this gradualist strain in the Parliamentary debates see also, Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 121-143.

¹³⁸ *Liberator*, 2 November 1833.

national British Antislavery Society, resolved to create something similar in the United States. The Tappans, unnerved by the rioting in New York and similar receptions in Boston, advocated postponement. But Garrison argued a new society had to be formed while the victory of British Emancipation was still fresh, and could serve as inspiration. On December 4 1833, sixty delegates, black and white, met in Philadelphia to found the American Anti-Slavery Society, a national mass action organization that would attempt—at least initially—to base its strategy and tactics on the success of Britain’s abolitionist movement. Comparing itself to the “band of patriots” which convened in Philadelphia some fifty-seven years earlier, the organization declared that “all those laws . . . now in force, admitting the right of slavery, are . . . utterly null and void.” And as their earliest sentiments decreed, they would “spare no exertions nor means to bring the whole nation to speedy repentance.” The American antislavery movement, inspired in no small part by the success of British abolitionism, had become a struggle to transform the social fabric of America.¹³⁹

By July of 1835, almost one year after the enactment of British Abolition, the American Anti-Slavery Society passed a resolution calling for “the observance of the 1st of August annually, as a day of thanksgiving to God . . . in the cause of our oppressed countrymen” and “the abolition of slavery in the British West India Islands.”¹⁴⁰ The commemoration signaled a new direct phase of American abolitionism, simultaneously forging stronger trans-Atlantic bonds between the United States and abolition in the British West Indies. During this crucial campaign for Northern public opinion, American abolitionists would fight to win the war over the popular

¹³⁹ Merrill and Ruchames, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 204; “Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Society, William Lloyd Garrison (1833),” printed in *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1852; repr., New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 66–71.

¹⁴⁰ *Liberator*, 18 July 1835.

image of British Emancipation in their print publications. Their strategy was to tie freedom in the West Indies to popular ideologies that appealed to Americans of the age. These tactics would include speeches, debates, pamphlets, books and annual commemorations that stressed emancipation as an act of economic progress, moral reform and the path to greater participatory democracy.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BENEFITS OF FREE LABOR

Whether the enemies of emancipation will be incredulous, or not, at the statement, we assure them it does not appear that a single emancipated slave, in all the British W.I. Colonies, has cut either his own or his master's throat, or become insane at the loss of his fetters, or perished by starvation! Not one of the islands has been sunk, or made desolate! Is it not marvelous, that partial liberty should prove a greater blessing to any portion of mankind than unmitigated thralldom!¹

By April of 1836 when this satirical rebuff was printed in the *Liberator*, British Emancipation was nearly two years old. In that time, abolitionists and anti-abolitionists in the United States had sparred repeatedly within newspapers and magazines over the success or failure of the West Indian colonies. The *Liberator* article backed up its claims with statistics of exports and imports of the isles, painting a landscape of wage-labor prosperity that contrasted starkly with negative depictions in popular print media. The proslavery press of the British colonies, and by extension the American press, was taunted as “taxing their ingenuity to account for the prosperous change, in a manner that shall confer no credit upon emancipation.”² For American abolitionists the fate of the West Indian isles had become intrinsically tied to domestic antislavery, what was fittingly called “the mighty experiment.”³

This chapter examines the ways in which the industriousness and economic success of the emancipated British colonies became a key tool of propaganda among American abolitionists beginning in the 1830s. In newspapers, in pamphlets and speeches, American abolitionists

¹ *Liberator*, 14 May 1836.

² Ibid.

³ In 1833 the British colonial secretary Edward Stanley in introducing the resolution for emancipation, began by referring to transition from slavery to freedom as a “mighty experiment.”

sought to counter proslavery accounts of ruin and economic desolation in the West Indies in the wake of British Emancipation. With evidence, they argued that emancipation had brought increased productivity to the colonies and a reform in the work habits of the former slaves. They did so with eyewitness reports, charts, economics, numbers and all the data at their disposal. Freedom in the British West Indies became tied to the efficacy of black labor, which could be studied, measured and analyzed. From this debate emerged counterarguments around issues of race, reform and a persistent confidence that slave labor was antithetical to economic success, development and security. The industrious well being of the British colonies would prove the readiness of America for emancipation, the capability of free black workers, and the reformative triumph of wage labor over slave labor.

Antislavery, Abolition and the Free Labor Ideology

The free labor ideology that would become an essential part of abolitionist discourse in the nineteenth century Atlantic grew out of earlier debates on free versus slave labor. Early economic theoreticians like the British mercantilist Malachy Postlethwayt maintained that while slave labor was insufficient to meet the manufacturing needs of the metropole, it was both ideal and necessary for the flourishing agricultural plantation economies of Britain's colonies. "Are we not indebted to those valuable People, the *Africans*," Postlethwayt wrote in 1745, "for our *Sugars, Tobaccos, Rice, Rum*, and all other *Plantation Produce*?"⁴ Free hired wage labor, it was argued, was best suited for the complex tasks of industry; slave labor, in contrast, worked best in menial agricultural tasks. As the mid-eighteenth British economist James Steuart mused, "Could the sugar islands be cultivated to any advantage, by hired labor?" The answer, for Steuart,

⁴ Malachi Postlethwayt quoted in William Darity Jr., "British Industry and the West Indies Plantations Social," *Science History* 14 (Spring, 1990): 117-118.

appeared to be no. Slavery was endemic to the West Indian colonies precisely because the environment and the labor required, necessitated its use.⁵

The turn towards a more universal free labor ideology took root with later English economists like Adam Smith. In his 1776 treatise *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, Smith criticized the prevailing notion of slave labor's economic sense, arguing that free labor was cheapest in any given environment:

The experience of all ages and nations, I believe, demonstrates that the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their maintenance, is in the end the dearest of any. . . . Whatever work he does, beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance, can be squeezed out of him by violence only, and not by any interest of his own.⁶

Smith's argument was economic, set apart from moral determinants. Using the methodologies of social science, economic theory, measurement and scientific analysis, Smith made a compelling case for free labor's superiority. He also linked civil freedom to the worker's ability to generate wealth and economic prosperity, and thus civic prosperity. To restrict a worker's right to employ his labor as he saw fit, was "a manifest encroachment" on both individual liberty and industrious society. Free labor was thus tied to a natural progression of human nature, best expressed for Smith in the history of the English worker. Forced or coerced labor was tied to tyrannical outmoded systems of production, and was inherently reluctant, less inventive, and a detrimental cost to an advancing society.⁷

⁵ James Steuart quoted in Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16-18; Seymour Drescher, "Free Labor vs. Slave Labor: The British and Caribbean Cases," in Stanley L. Engerman, ed. *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom and Free Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 54-55.

⁶ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), 314.

⁷ Smith, 104; Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 105.

Smith's championing of free labor did not flow seamlessly into the emergent antislavery arguments of the late eighteenth century, or at least not unanimously. Early English antislavery, reacting in part to the politicization of the transatlantic slave trade in the wake of the American Revolution, made England's role in the business of human trafficking their primary focus—not West Indian slavery and the exploitation of human labor. There were several reasons for this choice of strategy. The West Indian plantocracy was well entrenched in English politics and finance, as the sugar and coffee industries made possible by slave labor contributed significantly to England's economy. The Constitutional case against the ownership of human property in the faraway colonies was seen as a greater hurdle than the one to be made against the metropole's involvement in human trafficking. Further, some feared that advocating an end to West Indian slavery in the late eighteenth century could spark slave rebellion in the British colonies, similar to what was engulfing the tumultuous Atlantic colonies of France.⁸

More radical antislavery proponents however openly espoused the superiority of free over slave labor. The Anglican priest James Ramsay in his 1788 treatise *Objections to the Abolition of the Slave Trade, with Answers* declared that if provided the choice, "he who can procure a freeman to work for him, will never employ a slave." For Ramsay, much as with Adam Smith's earlier arguments, this notion of free labor over slave labor made economic sense. Ramsay noted that the free laborer "does twice the work" and upon death is replaced by the next generation of workers, rather than "at the expense from the slave-market." There existed as well to Ramsay in free labor "a confidence, a charm in liberty," through which the laborer "doubles

⁸ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 34-47.

his exertion, and softens its toil,” thus “increasing his employer’s wealth.”⁹ As evidence, he looked to the Quakers in Pennsylvania, who found their work “better done” and their “profits greater” after divulging themselves with the “unnatural property” of slavery. Ramsay’s arguments anticipated the methodology that would become employed by later abolitionists: advocate the economic sense of free labor; present slavery as inimical to productivity in comparison to free labor; tie together notions of free labor and individual liberty; link the maintenance of the empire to free labor; and provide verifiable evidence of free labor’s superiority when properly utilized. The Quakers, Ramsay held, had “tried this [free labor] experiment” and come away with “the most complete success.”¹⁰

With the passage of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1807, the British antislavery movement found itself at a crossroads. Radicals, like the Quaker activist Thomas Buxton, argued the need to take up the issue of West Indian slavery. But even if free labor was thought of as superior, few advocates of British antislavery could see it working upon West Indian slaves. It was one thing to test free labor’s efficacy among free white Englishmen. African slaves however, due both to their race and condition of servitude, were either inherently backwards or too corrupted to make the transition. Conceding the debilitating nature of unfree labor, William Wilberforce nevertheless utilized it as an argument against immediate abolition, declaring that those in bondage required a “course of discipline,” to “be trained and educated”

⁹ James Ramsay, *Objections to the abolition of the slave trade, with answers : to which are prefixed strictures on a late publication, intitled, "Considerations on the emancipation of Negroes, and the abolition of the slave trade, by a West India Planter", with Answers* (London: James Phillips, 1788), 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

for freedom, which only those who had achieved a “perfect state of manly maturity” were fit to enjoy.¹¹

Still, the more radical proponents of antislavery, like Buxton, looking to take on the West Indian planter elite, found themselves drawn to free labor ideology. By the 1820s, with the move towards abolitionism, free labor increasingly became a tactic. The central dilemma now faced by abolitionists was how to put forth a seemingly contradictory notion—Britain as an empire without human bondage, but, instead, an empire that functioned on free labor. Throughout the decade, British abolitionists looked to free labor experiments in the ex-slave colony of Sierra Leone, emancipated states in Latin America and even the Republic of Haiti as evidence. Most of these, however, were ill suited as an example of an economic engine compatible with the goals of empire. And anti-abolitionists seized on any weakness to portray such experiments as failures, citing their own countering evidence to place abolitionists on the defensive. What emerged however through these debates was a strengthening of the belief by English abolitionists in the superiority of free over slave labor as an essential goal of abolition.¹²

In 1833, following a successful mass campaign for an immediate end to slavery and uprisings like the Baptist War in Jamaica, emancipation seemed poised for passage in British Parliament. Arguments shifted from whether abolition would take place, to how the transition was to be carried out and what policies would be put in place. When the colonial secretary Edward Stanley introduced the resolution for abolition, he echoed early antislavery advocates

¹¹ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 106-108; William Wilberforce, *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: Luke Hansard and Sons, 1807), 259.

¹² Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 88-105, 118-120; Phillip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850, Volume 1* (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1973), 96-116; David Geggus, “Haiti and the Abolitionists: Opinion Propaganda and International Politics in Britain and France, 1804-1838,” in *Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790-1916*, David Richardson, ed. (London: Cass, 1985), 113-140.

like Ramsay by referring it to as a “mighty experiment.”¹³ In Parliament works such as the abolitionist Josiah Conder’s *Wages or the Whip: An Essay on the Comparative Cost and Productiveness of Free and Slave Labour*, were cited as experimental evidence in favor of emancipation. In the 90-page pamphlet, Conder, editor of the abolitionist *Patriot* newspaper, made a detailed comparison between slave and wage labor throughout the Caribbean, the United States, Latin America and Asia. “If free labour can be advantageously employed in the cultivation of [sugar] cane,” he surmised, “no one will dispute, that [our] other colonial produce may be grown by free labour...If wages can be substituted for the whip on a sugar-plantation, the whole question is determined.”¹⁴

This metaphor of an “experiment” was used throughout the ensuing debates, and picked up by the British press. Casting abolition as an experiment, however, also helped shape the parameters and direction of the bill. While immediatism had won the day, the inherent nature of an experiment as a controlled procedure and transition seemed to necessitate a gradualist strain. This was pressed by select committees, which stressed the delicate fiscal nature of the coming abolition not only on the West Indian colonies, but also on varied economic interests throughout the Empire.¹⁵

In August 1833, *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies* was put before Parliament, declaring all such “Persons [that] are holden in Slavery within divers of His Majesty's Colonies . . . should be manumitted and set free.” In a favorable concession to slave owners, the Act also called for, “a reasonable Compensation . . . to the Persons hitherto

¹³ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 121-123, 231.

¹⁴ James S. Buckingham, ed., *The Parliamentary Review and Family Magazine, Volume 2* (London: s.n., 1833), 523; Josiah Conder, *Wages or the Whip. An essay on the comparative cost and productiveness of free and slave labour* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1833), 52.

¹⁵ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 231.

entitled to the Services of such Slaves for the Loss which they will incur by being deprived of their Right to such Service,” which would amount to an indemnity of 20 million pounds. The bill also required what was called a system of “apprenticed Labourers” among the former slaves. The stated intent of this provision was “for promoting the Industry and securing the good Conduct” of the recently manumitted.¹⁶ Though opposing the apprenticeship and advocating an immediate end to slavery, English abolitionists were also invested in this notion of emancipated black labor as an experiment—an idea they had come to champion. Now they would have their own experiment in the form of the emancipated Caribbean islands, where the experiment could be studied and measured to gauge its success.

The debate over free labor in the emancipated West Indies began almost immediately in the British press. Just one month after the English Abolition Act took effect, newspapers like the *Hull Packet* noted an “intense anxiety to know the result of the grand experiment of the emancipation” and promised to “look eagerly for news from the late slave colonies.” Relying on accounts from a letter sent to another newspaper, the *Hull Packet* in September 1834 regaled readers with “disastrous intelligence.” A state of “confusion and alarm” now prevailed throughout many of the West Indian colonies, the letter claimed. In Trinidad “negroes...by the hundreds” had left their estates and refused to work. In St. Kitts former slaves also refused to work, and many were arrested. Grenada and Tobago were also in a dire condition, and martial law seemed imminent.¹⁷

¹⁶ United Kingdom. *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for promoting the Industry of the manumitted Slaves; and for compensating the Persons hitherto entitled to the Services of such Slaves.* [London:] n.p., 1833.

¹⁷ *Hull Packet*, 12 September 1834.

The paper however reported that this “gloomy statement” had been “happily contradicted” by other sources. The refusal to work in St. Kitts had arisen out of a misunderstanding of the apprenticeship system and it was expected the former slaves would return to work once they were “better informed on the subject.” The discontent in Trinidad, the paper concluded, had as well been greatly overstated and there was no expectation of “serious difficulty.” In Grenada, while there had been work strikes on two estates, the ringleaders of the trouble had been apprehended and “order was restored.” In most of the other colonies, the former slaves were said to be working under the apprenticeship system “in an orderly and peaceable manner.”¹⁸

An 1834 London cartoon by the radical print-maker Charles Jameson Grant gave a more unfavorable assessment. Titled “Slave Emancipation; Or, John Bull Gulled Out of Twenty Millions,” the cartoon depicted a British abolitionist, derided as the “Philosopher,” who looks on at his handiwork with pride, trumpeting, “Freedom for the poor dear half-starved suffering slaves.” The former West Indian slaves, meanwhile, are barely clothed and appear obese, a refutation of their status of “half-starved” or “suffering.” Depicted in grotesque racial caricature, they while away the time in the newly emancipated colonies not working, but instead dancing, drinking rum and smoking.¹⁹

One of the former slaves holds a banner that reads “FREEDOM” while the others struggle in exaggerated dialect to define emancipation. “You black teef, do you know what mancipation mean” one asks. “No,” the other replies, “nor I no care. I know dat massa Bull pays

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Charles Jameson Grant, 'Slave Emancipation; Or, John Bull Gulled Out Of Twenty Millions' in *The Political drama*. (England: s.n., ca. 1833). Graphics, Print Department, Political Cartoons, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

for it, and it must be good.” A white Englishman, John Bull, the symbol of the British common man and taxpayer, looks on angrily as a Parliamentarian robs his pockets to pay a West Indian planter. The focuses of John Bull’s ire, however, are the former slaves, whose child-like behavior and racial caricature seem to suggest their inability to be converted into free laborers. He derides them as “bishop looking niggers” for whom abolition will “only be a curse.”²⁰

Measuring the success or failure of the emancipation experiment, had become dependent on gauging how the former slaves in the West Indies now utilized their labor in freedom. Central to these arguments was the question of whether slaves could be made citizens, and whether blacks were capable of the self-discipline necessary for industry. These issues did not remain confined to Britain, and fast became part of a larger Atlantic argument on race, freedom and labor.

Debating Free Labor Experiments in America

The arguments over free labor in the emancipated West Indies quickly crossed the Atlantic to become part of the national debate on slavery in the United States. This was not, however, an altogether new argument. British North America had been the site of previous free labor experiments. As early as 1772 an anonymous pamphlet, *A Plan for the Abolition of Slavery in the West Indies*, called for a free labor colony in British West Florida. Taking a gradual approach to emancipation, it was predicated upon the purchase each year of enslaved African children, who would be instructed and trained in England until the age of sixteen, before being settled in Pensacola, Florida. The colony of freed Africans would provide a demonstrable experiment, offering a clear alternative to slave labor that other colonies would soon emulate. It

²⁰ Ibid.

would even work to encourage manumissions and induce “a spirit of industry and achievement” among slaves, providing the incentive of productive labor through which they might seek freedom. The experiment would be irrefutable evidence of the superiority of free labor, and through time put an end to slavery in a safe, pragmatic process.²¹

The 1772 Pensacola plan never came to fruition, and the impending American Revolution rendered it impossible. In the early Republic, the prospect of freeing slaves became tied almost entirely to how their labor would be utilized in a free society. For many white Americans, particularly slave owners, black labor was based on compulsion through the slave system; without such compulsion former slaves would revert to idleness. “If you free the slaves,” the Virginian planter Landon Carter pronounced in July of 1776, “you must send them out of the country, or they must steal for their support.” Thomas Jefferson’s plan for gradual emancipation included an interim period where former slaves would be compelled to labor on rented land, believing them incapable of doing so of their own volition. St. George Tucker, a Virginian born in the West Indies and a professor of law at the College of William and Mary, proposed a similar plan that would replace slavery with serfdom. Like Jefferson, Tucker believed that blacks had to be compelled to labor, or they would become “idle, dissipated, and finally a numerous banditti, instead of turning their attention to industry and labour.”²²

None of these plans at emancipation and regulating compulsory free black labor was ever put into action. However there were smaller attempts at creating experimental free labor zones, as alternative models to slavery. The most prominent among them was established by Pennsylvania Quakers, who since the 1750s had begun emancipating their slaves and making the

²¹ Christopher L. Brown, “Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 56:2 (April 1999), 277-278.

²² Edmund S. Morgan, *The Challenge of the American Revolution* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 150-153.

shift to free labor. These voluntary emancipations were followed by state emancipations in the early Republic during the 1780s in several Northern states.²³ By the early nineteenth century, antislavery activists had even begun a Free Produce Society, based on the idea of buying goods produced only by free labor. The hope was that in boycotting slave-produced products, evidence could be gathered to show that products of equal or greater quantity could be gained through free labor. In 1826, Benjamin Lundy opened a Free Produce store in Baltimore and by 1827 a Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania was founded. Many of its most prominent members were Quakers, including James Mott and Thomas Shipley. The society's constitution argued that by obtaining goods and articles through free labor, they might convince both the populace and slaveholders to "change the condition of their Slaves into that of Hired Freeman."²⁴

None of these small-scale attempts at free labor however proved overly convincing. Whatever success proponents of free labor found in small-scale experiments, detractors could easily dismiss them as incomparable to the large agricultural slave labor regimes that flourished in the Southern states. Adam Smith himself had noted that the free labor success among Quakers in Pennsylvania was not analogous to vast plantation-economies where "the whole work is done by slaves." For American abolitionists, the most readily available experiment of free labor in the nineteenth century would arrive in the 1830s with the recently emancipated sugar colonies of the

²³ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 88-89.

²⁴ Brian Temple, *Philadelphia Quakers and the Antislavery Movement* (North Carolina: McFarland, 2014), 116-117; *Constitution of the Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: D. & S. Neall, 1827), 3. Many of the Free Produce Societies that appeared in the 1820s were led by women, both black and white, who championed free sugar, cotton and other slave produced crops. See, Stacey M. Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 67-90.

West Indies. Here they hoped to find evidence of free labor success that could refute the most ardent claims of Southern slaveholders.²⁵

American abolitionists were not alone in seeing the potential the emancipated British Caribbean could offer on the national free labor debate. Anti-abolitionists launched a preemptive attack on the British Emancipation Act before it even became law, hoping to blunt the arguments of abolition advocates at home. A January 1834 article in the *Western Monthly Magazine* warned that British Emancipation had called national attention “to the subject of negro emancipation,” and that “no little fear prevails in the slave-holding states, that the north may be unwisely proposed to bring this matter before congress.” The article cautioned that “to release the slave, in his present moral and intellectual condition, would be to destroy the property, the security, the independence of the whites, without advancing the happiness or welfare of the blacks.”²⁶

American anti-abolitionists especially singled out the impact of emancipation on the industry of the Caribbean sugar colonies, predicting a dire fate for any free labor experiment. The January 1834 *Saratoga Sentinel* of New York claimed that for “self protection” and to “preserve themselves from depredation, bankruptcy and ruin,” the British planters in the West Indies were forming a plan to introduce white laborers to replace the freed slaves. An “indolent disposition” was said to pervade the former West Indian slaves, who, without the force of the lash, could not be counted upon for the labor of the lucrative sugar estates. Left to their natural condition, the paper argued, blacks lacked the incentives necessary for Western industry.

²⁵ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 88-89; Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), 314.

²⁶ *The Western Monthly Magazine, and Literary Journal*, January 1834. The article goes on to propose several steps by which Southern planters can make their slaves more obedient through education, as a counterpoint to abolition.

Misguided attempts at emancipation would only bring harm to those it sought to help, and leave a once industrious society in a state of disrepair.²⁷

The free black republic of Haiti was often evoked as a fitting comparison to what awaited the emancipated British Caribbean, an experiment that displayed the infeasibility of free black labor. The January 1834 *Western Monthly Magazine* warned that “the fate of St. Domingo” had “proved” the disastrous results of abolition; black emancipation in the British West Indies would only “enforce that same lesson.”²⁸ Drawing on the report of “a well known writer of various pamphlets on behalf of the [British] West Indian proprietors,” the Baltimore based *Niles Register* in March of 1834, reprinted statistics of exports and revenue of Spanish slave-holding colonies such as Cuba and Puerto Rico. Depicted as prosperous industries, both Spanish colonies were compared to Haiti, which was described in contrast as presenting “a miserable account” of economic decline and depopulation.²⁹ An article in the August 1834 issue of the *North American Magazine* asserted that “as proof of the utter incapacity of the blacks for self-government,” its readers need only “look at Hayti—the negro despotism founded in blood!” The once opulent French colony had been reduced to “filth and ruin” the paper decried, in the hands of “the squalid, lazy and licentious blacks.” For detractors of British Emancipation, the very notion of black free labor was antithetical to economic progress. The “ruin” of Haiti “would be the condition of our Southern States,” the magazine warned, “if the abolitionists had their will; such, within seven years, will be the condition of all the West India Isles belonging to Great Britain.”³⁰

²⁷ *Saratoga Sentinel*, 28 January 1834.

²⁸ *The Western Monthly Magazine*, January 1834.

²⁹ *Niles' Register*, 22 March 1834.

³⁰ *North American Magazine*, August 1834.

Having predicted ruin, by June of 1835, less than a year since the emancipation act was put into effect, American anti-abolitionists were already declaring it an outright failure. The *New York Spectator* described “the state of the colonial possessions in the West Indies” as “embarrassing” to Britain. Citing a letter from a mercantile house in Liverpool, the paper reported on “a great want of confidence” in the free black laborers, “as the negroes are not doing one half of the work they formerly did,” resulting in “diminishing” agricultural productivity.³¹

An 1836 proslavery tract titled *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* used the alleged failure of free labor in the British West Indies to rail against the growing Anglo-American cooperation against slavery. In a chapter dedicated to the “peculiar doctrines” of the “rabid” abolitionists such as “Garrison, Lundy and some others,” it denounced British Emancipation as a failed experiment in free labor. The English abolitionist George Thompson was described as a “British agent,” who had created a subversive cabal with American abolitionists in great part to undermine America’s industrial and economic might. “The insurrection of our slaves, and the agony and horror which must ensue,” the author warned, “the distraction of the American people, the dissolution of the American Union, the degradation of the American name—these are the aim and end of British philanthropy.”³²

Through emancipation, the book argued, the abolitionists of Britain had managed to “throw the [West Indian] colonies into confusion” and “endanger” the lives of the planters, now left to the whims of their former slaves and in economic ruin. These disastrous acts, the author concluded, would result in an industrial “loss to the mother country [England]” and eventual

³¹ *New York Spectator*, 11 June 1835.

³² Anonymous, *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists* (Philadelphia: H. Manly, 1836) 157-171.

“ruin to the colonies.”³³ The February *Charleston Mercury* that year went so far as to refer to the West India planters as the real “victims,” and vowed that the south “will never consent to be bought out” in a similar fashion.³⁴ For anti-abolitionists the British West Indies was evidence that black emancipation was nothing less than civilization in reverse, a place where free labor could not possibly flourish.

Whatever its shortcomings, American abolitionists could not leave British Emancipation, undefended in the face of such attacks. Despite the victory of freedom in the West Indies, abolitionists in the United States had not yet translated this into victory at home. Nor was the tactic of moral suasion, which sought to use moral appeals to entice slaveholders to relinquish their human property, proving particularly effective. Northern clergy were unreceptive, even hostile, to abolitionist calls for immediate emancipation. A letter campaign initiated by the American Antislavery Society in 1835 to “sow the good seed of abolition thoroughly over the whole country,” had quickly failed, as abolitionist mailings were burned by mobs in Southern cities.³⁵ That summer had also seen several anti-abolitionist riots from Boston to Philadelphia, where abolitionist newspapers in particular were singled out. James Birney, editor of the abolitionist *Philanthropist* in Cincinnati, Ohio, was attacked twice by mobs in 1836. In Alton, Illinois editor Elijah Lovejoy of the abolitionist *Observer*, lost three printing presses to mobs,

³³ Ibid., 65. [brackets mine]

³⁴ *Charleston Mercury* quoted in *Philanthropist*, 12 February 1836.

³⁵ James Brewer Stewart and Eric Foner, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 51-74; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Abolitionists' Postal Campaign of 1835,” *The Journal of Negro History* 50, No. 4 (Oct., 1965): 229; Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 19-50.

and finally his life. To culminate these setbacks, in 1836 the US House of Representatives placed a “Gag Rule” on any consideration of anti-slavery petitions within the political body.³⁶

British Emancipation, however, remained a victory to which American advocates of emancipation could champion. With their calls for immediatism, abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison had tied themselves—ideologically and strategically—to the British colonial experiment. Moreover, free labor was an argument that could resonate with a Northern populace, which valued economic independence and the honesty of free productive labor. White urban artisans especially defined their labor as a type of personal property analogous to republican ideals of liberty, in contrast to what they saw as exploitative bankers and members of the elite class. With the rise of Jacksonian Democracy, an expansion of white male suffrage was undertaken largely based on these tenets of free labor. To display free labor as a success in the West Indies was to compare it, in great part, to Northern free labor and progress as opposed to Southern despotism.³⁷

If British Emancipation was branded a failure, with its colonies in ruin and the former slaves retrograded to barbarism, there was little chance of convincing Northern whites to the abolitionist cause. A counter-discourse was necessary, one that showed the benefits of free labor. Emancipation had to be depicted as a success, not only for the former slaves but the colonies as a whole. American abolitionists thus met their detractors on their own ground, arguing the economic viability of the recently emancipated colonies. Once more, abolitionist print culture

³⁶ Richard B. Kielbowicz, "The Law and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers, 1833-1860," *Law and History Review* 24 (Fall 2006): 559-600; Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 88-93.

³⁷ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2004), 13-17, 61-103; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy, Jefferson to Lincoln* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2006), 312-424; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) xiii-xxxix.

proved indispensable to creating this counter narrative of free black labor efficiency. In January 1835 the *Anti-Slavery Record*, the irregular daily of the recently formed American Anti-Slavery Society, printed what was titled, “Facts showing the safety of Emancipation” to counter claims that their cause “would ‘turn loose’ . . . two millions of savages to plunder and destroy” the American Union. Readers were assured that in the nearby West Indies the emancipation “experiment, thus far, has been perfectly safe” and that “the former slaves have everywhere continued to labor . . . with no interruption.”³⁸ In April, the *Liberator* announced that a pamphlet showing “the safety and practicability of Immediate Emancipation” using “fully known facts” would be soon published for sale.³⁹

Abolitionist reports relied on first hand accounts on the overall progress of the emancipated isles. Their contacts were invariably white men of some social or political standing and were meant to appeal to Northern audiences. A March 1836 article in the *New Bedford Mercury* carried what it termed “Authentic and Recent News from Barbadoes.” The contact was described as a “respected acquaintance:” a former attorney, merchant, and Christian “man of observation” whose character rendered his remarks “worthy of entire confidence.” The informant described the effect of emancipation on the financial state of the island as “remarkable,” with a rise in real estate, and an increase in trade goods and overall fortune. Readers were assured that the former slaves had been made into free laborers, with a greater sense of industry and care for their work. The article assessed that “the negro goes of an errand quicker and loiters less, now he is paid, than when he was a slave, and was less “sullen” in his work. They now greeted their former masters with “joy” as both “friend and benefactor.” The article asked American

³⁸ *Anti-Slavery Record*, January 1835.

³⁹ *Liberator*, 4 April 1835.

slaveholders to dwell on this image of idyllic free labor efficiency, querying “when will such pure joy be yours?”⁴⁰

A May 1836 *Liberator* article utilized what would become a common trend, sourcing favorable British newspapers, economic records, government accounts and journals of commerce, to paint an alternative landscape of wage-labor prosperity in the emancipated West Indies. Citing the colonial *Guiana Gazette*, the paper provided American readers with a detailed economic account from Demerary (Demerara) in British Guyana. Using measurements of pounds and sterling, it showed that exports “exceeded the average of the last three years of the existence of slavery.” The author was clear in his intent, noting that such facts would likely “have more weight with American planters, than any which relate to the intellectual and spiritual improvement of the apprentice.” An August article in the *Liberator* that same year quoting “English papers” noted that exports from the British West Indies had seen “considerable increase, instead of the diminution which was feared.” Constructing the emancipated black West Indians as productive free laborers, the article noted that “the negroes are quite as valuable . . . as they were while held as slaves.”⁴¹

American abolitionists were not content with relying only on secondary accounts to make their case. In November 1836, the American Anti-Slavery Society sent abolitionists Joseph Horace Kimball, editor of the *Herald of Freedom*, and James A. Thome, the son of a Kentuckian slaveholder now reformed to abolitionism, on a six-month tour of the English West Indies. The purpose of their expedition was to determine the effects of “the great experiment of freedom” on

⁴⁰ *New Bedford Mercury*, 3 March 1836. Though not an abolitionist newspaper, its editor Benjamin Lindsey frequently featured antislavery writings within its pages. Lindsey also went on to later publish antislavery books such as Leonard Black, *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black, a Fugitive from Slavery, Written by Himself* (New Bedford: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847).

⁴¹ *Liberator*, 14 May 1836, 27 August 1836.

both the emancipated islands and the emancipated. Kimball and Thome divided their time between Antigua, Barbados and Jamaica, where they engaged in “laborious study” to observe and record the daily lives of the former slaves. On nearly every island they were hosted by British missionaries, clergymen, educators and workers of “Negro aid,” who took them on tours of freedmen villages, invited them to church gatherings and schools, showed them black laborers and introduced them to former slaves. Kimball and Thome were meticulously thorough in their research, questioning missionaries and clergymen on the progress of reform in the two years following emancipation.⁴²

In July 1837, the *Philanthropist* heralded their return, announcing the two men would soon “present a mass of interesting facts,” pertaining to “the intelligence, industry, and docility of the negroes” and “the safety of immediate emancipation.”⁴³ By 1838, Kimball and Thome’s findings were turned into a work titled, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months’ Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica, in the year 1837*. At nearly 500 pages, the book was billed as “a publication of facts and testimony collected on the spot” to break up the “silence” of the “proslavery press” on the “great experiment of freedom.”⁴⁴

Among Kimball and Thome’s findings, was information relating to the industrious nature of the free black laborers of the emancipated West Indies. In Antigua especially, they gathered testimony from planters who assured them “free labor is decisively less expensive than slave

⁴² *Philanthropist*, 21 July 1837.

⁴³ *Ibid.* The rest of the article presents the initial findings of the British agents, showing a favorable and industrious emancipated West Indies.

⁴⁴ James A. Thome and J. Horace Kimball. *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months’ Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), iii-iv.

labor.”⁴⁵ Further, Kimball and Thome assessed that the former slaves worked “more cheerfully” and performed “their work better” as free laborers. “Wages are found to be an ample substitute for the lash,” their report maintained, “they never fail to secure the amount of labor desired.” Emancipation had as well “put an end to the practice of skulking, or pretending to be sick,” among the former slaves one planter stated. Another estate owner, boasting of no longer needing sick houses, claimed that as free laborers his workers declared, “they have not time to be sick now.”⁴⁶

The report found as well that estates were better managed with freemen rather than slaves. Kimball and Thome noted that they had “repeated opportunities” to observe the labor management on former slave plantations, and were “struck with the absence of every thing like coercion.” One planter assured while leaving his workers unattended, “I have entire confidence that those laborers will do their work just as I want to have it done.” Finally, the report found that as free laborers, the former slaves were now “more trustworthy,” and, took “a deeper interest in their employers’ affairs.” Kimball and Thome’s assessment of the West Indian experiment was for abolitionists evidence of what they argued were the benefits of free labor. Emancipation had created more economically successful societies and, relatedly, turned inefficient slaves into disciplined workers who properly utilized their labor and their freedom. As one planter put it, “Formerly it was ‘whip—whip—whip’—incessantly, but now we are relieved from this disagreeable task.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid. 159.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 161-164.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 58, 169, 171.

In each report to follow, abolitionists used a similar methodology to Kimball and Thome: rebut proslavery claims of economic ruin in the West Indian colonies; create a counter-narrative of economic prosperity for the colony; on a human basis, provide evidence of more efficient and grateful workers and dutiful free laborers; and, point out the possible benefits for this application among American slaveholders. It was a strategy that could effectively challenge detractors and allow greater mobilization for the fledgling abolitionist movement. However, while the transition from slave to wage labor was not the disastrous ruin predicted by anti-abolitionists, there were conflicting elements of the experiment with which its supporters would have to contend.

The Problems of Apprenticeship

Despite the hopes for a free labor triumph, American abolitionists had to confront the inherent problems created by the apprenticeship system—and, in particular, the reactions of West Indian slaves to the provision. In 1834, the new governor of Jamaica Howe Browne, the Marquess of Sligo, penned a letter in the colonial *Royal Gazette* “to The Negro Population throughout the Island of Jamaica,” informing them that “on the 1st August next [1834],” they would “no longer be slaves.” As of that day, the governor informed the slaves, “you will be APPRENTICED to your former owners for a few years, in order to fit you all for freedom.”⁴⁸ He informed the former slaves that they were now “fellow subjects” and that the people of England were friends, who had “shown themselves such by passing a Bill to make you all Free.” Among these new friends were also their masters, who “proved their kind feeling . . . by passing in the

⁴⁸ Reprint of the address by the Marquess of Sligo in *Liberator*, 20 September 1834. See also, Howe Peter Browne, Marquess of Sligo, *Jamaica Under the Apprenticeship System* (London: J. Andrews, 1838).

House of Assembly the same Bill.” Former slaves could “prove” they were “deserving of all this goodness . . . by labouring diligently” as apprentices.⁴⁹

From the very beginning, the apprenticeship provision in the Abolition Act of 1834 was met with hostility by former West Indian slaves who expected, and demanded, full freedom. By August 2nd labor strikes and riots had broken out on estates in several parishes in Jamaica. Freedmen and women declared, “they will have their heads cut off, or shot, before they will be bound apprentices.”⁵⁰ In Trinidad, twenty-five labor gangs went on strike, marching on the governor’s house in Port of Spain and confronting the special magistrates. From the colonies of St. Kitts to Dominica, there were similar acts of defiance by former slaves in the early weeks of August of 1834, who complained of mistreatment, lack of mobility, and the hours of work. Many apprentices engaged in acts of day-to-day resistance, running away, shirking labor or confronting their former owners and the colonial authority. Planters complained that their apprenticed laborers were “idle and disorderly,” and in many cases police and troops were called out to put down strikes, hunt runaways and administer corporal punishments.⁵¹

The labor strife that plagued the apprenticeship system proved problematic for American abolitionists’ depiction of a prosperous emancipated West Indies and contented black labor. Scenes of worker strikes complicated free labor arguments, and anti-abolitionists seized on any such reports to validate their fear mongering. To remedy this problem, American abolitionists employed a nuanced approach, supporting British Emancipation yet denouncing the apprenticeship system as deleterious to the free labor experiment. In a particularly savvy

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Gad Heuman, “Riots and Resistance in the Caribbean at the Moment of Freedom,” in *After Slavery: Emancipation and its Discontents*, ed. by Howard Temperley (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 141.

⁵¹ Ibid., 143-146.

strategy, abolitionist papers blamed any purported economic failures or labor disputes following emancipation not on the former West Indian slaves but on the excesses of the apprenticeship system and the planters who maintained it.

American abolitionists like Garrison had found the apprenticeship system problematic from its inception, denouncing the provision as the “chicanery” of West Indian planters “over the philanthropy of the British people.” Deriding the new labor system as “base in its principles” and “impracticable in its requirements,” Garrison complained that it favored the former slaveholders and betrayed the cause of immediate emancipation. Still, he asked fellow abolitionists to console themselves “with the certainty of the complete emancipation of all slaves in the British Colonies within seven years.” If the West Indies was an experiment of free labor, it was as yet an imperfect one.⁵²

This tempered approach to British Emancipation and the apprenticeship system increasingly informed the free labor arguments put forth by American abolitionists. A March 1835 *Liberator* article reprinted the resolution of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, criticizing the American press for not faulting labor strife in the British colonies “upon the apprenticeship system itself, and upon the oppressive conduct of the planters acting under that system,” but instead placed blame on the free black laborers and “the principles of immediate abolition.” A fiery *Liberator* article in August recounted, with disgust, “advertisements for several runaway apprentices” in Jamaican newspapers. The apprenticeship system was denounced as nothing less than the remaining vestiges of slavery, calculated, in the article’s estimation, to incite disorder and strife on the island among the former slaves. Describing the good behavior of the apprentices in the face of such injustice as “noble and self-sacrificing,” the writer went on to declare, “if ever

⁵² *Liberator*, 12 October 1833.

a system was ingeniously contrived to injure the reputation of the colored population, and . . . the abolition cause, it is the apprenticeship.”⁵³

Even more conservative antislavery advocates, who still favored gradualist approaches to emancipation, found fault with the apprenticeship system in the British West Indies. *The Friend*, a Pennsylvania Quaker religious and literary journal, in 1836 reprinted in full an article from an English newspaper with the headline: “Failure of the Apprentice Scheme in the West Indies,” which recounted numerous travesties conducted under the apprenticeship system by planters, including beatings and outright murder; the article described the former masters as nothing less than “petty tyrants.”⁵⁴

This criticism of apprenticeship served the interests of American abolitionists on two counts. First, they argued that the system degraded the former West Indian slaves by keeping them in a state of semi-slavery, thus also degrading the sanctity of free labor. Kimball and Thome in their observations of apprenticeship in Barbados described it as a state of semi-freedom. West Indian apprentices, they contended, labored as slaves for nine hours of the day and were only afforded “a taste of the sweets of liberty” for the remainder. This was little more than “the tantalizing mockeries of freedom,” they warned, that was certain to create strife between laborers and planters. Most problematic, thrown into this tense equation was the third party of the colonial magistrate, who sat as the final arbiter between planter and the apprentice. This state of affairs, Kimball and Thome argued, intensified labor strife as it taught apprentices

⁵³ *Liberator*, 14 March 1835; *Liberator*, 1 August 1835.

⁵⁴ *The Friend*, 28 May 1836.

to “reply insolently, to dispute, quarrel...and fight” with planters, creating “a permanent state of alienation, contempt of authority, and hatred.”⁵⁵

Second, American abolitionist criticism of apprenticeship helped affirm their broader argument against gradual emancipation. The excesses in the apprenticeship system served as its own experiment, a warning that nothing less than immediate emancipation could assure free labor success. To bolster their criticisms of apprenticeship, Kimball and Thome in their report included an interview with the then Governor of Barbados, Sir Evan John Murray McGregor. The governor criticized the apprenticeship system as “vexatious,” and contrasted it sharply to the more tranquil labor relations of Antigua, where immediate emancipation had been implemented. The state of semi-freedom in Barbados, he maintained, created “a constant state of warfare” between the labor arrangements of “master and apprentice.” While admitting himself “ignorant of the character of the black population of the United States,” the governor nevertheless believed, based on the experience of the West Indies, that immediate emancipation was the proper course. “Unconditional freedom,” he held, “was better than apprenticeship” and “better for the planter and the laborer.”⁵⁶

In 1838 the apprenticeship system was abruptly ended, some two years early. This was in great part the result of continued agitation by West Indian freedmen, who daily challenged their apprenticeship. It was also the work of British advocates of immediatism like the abolitionist James Cropper. Cropper’s brother-in-law Joseph Sturge toured the West Indies in 1836 and 1837, collecting evidence against apprenticeship. The result was the work, *The West Indies in 1837*, which was used as evidence before the House of Commons. American abolitionists hailed

⁵⁵ Thome and Kimball, 340-341.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 215-217.

the end of apprenticeship as a second victory. The once skeptical Garrison could now declare the British Abolition, “Freedom’s noblest jubilee.”⁵⁷

For American abolitionists the end of apprenticeship and the implementation of immediate emancipation in the West Indies now meant that the experiment of free labor could be carried on in full. Many were certain that with such impediments removed, productivity and industry in the colonies would soar. A Philadelphia newspaper in late 1838 reprinted parts of the speech of the Jamaican governor Howe Brown to the assembly that November, claiming that “the conduct of the laboring population...entitles them to the highest praise, and proves how well they have deserved the boon of freedom.”⁵⁸ With evidence seeming to be on their side, an 1839 *Liberator* article rebutting former president John Quincy Adams call for “gradual emancipation,” and favoring immediatism, declared: “With the help of the West India ‘experiment,’ we [abolitionists] should have every advantage we could ask for, in such a struggle.”⁵⁹

Within a year abolitionists could even point to a few mainstream papers citing economic prosperity on the islands. An early 1839 edition of *The New York Spectator* cited a St. Vincent planter who claimed emancipation on the island was working “extremely well.” The planter boasted he now produced more and yielded greater profit than ever. “The emancipated slaves,” he recounted, “now do in eight hours what was before considered a two days’ task,” for little more than a dollar a day.⁶⁰ The Philadelphia based *North American* quoted an “English gentleman” who explained any decrease in sugar exports from the British West Indies as the

⁵⁷ *Liberator*, 24 August 1838; William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 153. The most comprehensive work on apprenticeship and slavery is William L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London: Cape, 1937).

⁵⁸ *Philadelphia Gazette*, 06 December 1838.

⁵⁹ *Liberator*, 22 March 1839.

⁶⁰ *New York Spectator*, 28 February 1839.

expected “withdrawal” of women and children from field labor. It was further reported that many industrious black laborers had gone to coffee plantations or to learn mechanical trades, all of which would be of benefit to the colonies. The *Boston Courier* made similar observations, noting that with the end of apprenticeship the labor problems had been “obliterated” in the free colonies. The “aversion” West Indian blacks had heretofore shown to plantation work was a consequence of the apprenticeship system. The nebulous nature of their existence, neither slave nor free, had worked against the compelling incentives of free labor. It allowed the former planters to abuse their workers and had rendered the apprentices “unruly, oftentimes rebellious and worthless.” With this more perfect form of emancipation, the paper argued, the planters had been given true free laborers: “hands to work with,” through which they would “reap the richest benefits.”⁶¹

In late 1839, abolitionists were emboldened enough by the seeming success of the British experiment that they held their first annual meeting of the American Free Produce Association in Philadelphia. Attended by some 100 delegates, the group pledged to implement boycotts of slave-produced goods, particularly in the American South. As they saw it, “the cause of abstinence has taken a deeper and deeper hold on the public mind,” and the moment of increased interest would create greater mobilization for abolitionism. The attendees were quite forthright in declaring that emancipation and free labor in the British West Indies was their primary inspiration. Great Britain had enabled “the produce of the labor of freemen to come into competition with slave produce,” thus offering conscientious consumers a choice in their purchases. It was resolved that a fund be created, to encourage the production of Southern cotton through free labor. American abolitionists would carry out their own experiment of free labor superiority on American soil, certain that like the West Indies it would yield positive results. At

⁶¹ *North American*, 13 August 1839; *The Boston Courier*, 14 November 1839.

the meeting, several resolutions were passed. They upheld wage labor as both a right and guarantee of the Creator; called on abolitionists to abstain from products of slave labor; and to work with Great Britain who had provided the example of free labor.⁶² But if the end of apprenticeship had brought a triumph of freedom, it soon however brought new challenges to the free labor experiment.

The Challenges of Free Labor

The brief sense of triumph by abolitionists on either side of the Atlantic was disrupted in the 1840s when the experiment in the British West Indies began to falter. Through the coming decade, sugar production in the British Caribbean fell by more than 35 percent from its pre-emancipation high. The drop was due in great part to the very forces abolitionists had insisted upon: free labor. With the end of the apprenticeship system, the rigid labor discipline planters held over freed men and women diminished significantly. Vagrancy laws, regulations on the treatment of workers, statutes against the forced labor of women and children, and other edicts steadily decreased the productivity of plantations. Free West Indian laborers, realizing their collective strength, also organized mass strikes and protests to assure fair payment for fair work. As the noted Caribbean historian William Green assessed, “The main fact of life in the free West Indies was that black labourers were unwilling to remain submissive and disciplined labor.”⁶³

In the English metropole this was felt most acutely, as sugar importation dropped with the lessening of supply. The price of sugar also rose, with consumers eventually paying 60 percent more than during the years of apprenticeship, which itself was already higher than during

⁶² *Liberator*, 15 November 1839; Carol Faulkner, “The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 27 (Fall 2007): 377-405.

⁶³ William A. Green quoted in, Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 159.

slavery. As the price of sugar rose, discontent grew in England with calls for government to alleviate these hardships. British abolitionists staunchly defended their free labor experiment, opposing the lowering of duties on foreign sugar or any other acts that might harm the economic well being of the colonies. They also painted a picture of West Indian laborers living better lives and appealed to the philanthropy of British Empire. Opponents in Parliament however countered by asking bitterly “whether the happiness of the Negro depended on the ‘excessive price’ of West Indian free labor.”⁶⁴

Despite the objections of British abolitionists, Parliament passed the 1846 Sugar Duties Act, which set the West Indies isles in direct competition with foreign planters. The result was the near collapse of the sugar industries in the colonies, with entire commercial merchant houses wiped out by the economic downturn. British newspapers and intellectuals, who had grumbled since 1840 of the imminent failure of the free labor experiment, now openly declared the colonies in a state of “ruin.” An 1848 editorial in the London based *Times* newspaper lamented: “We have thought fit to make of those islands the scene of a great experiment. . . . We have made a desert and called it freedom.”⁶⁵

These events in the British metropole and colony in the 1840s reverberated across the Atlantic, where American abolitionism was undergoing its own period of change and discord. Debates over strategies and tactics including working within electoral politics, the place of women in the movement, and the role of established religion, created divisions among abolitionist leaders. Ideologues like Garrison and Wendell Phillips, disenchanted with the tactic of moral suasion, called for “No Compromise with Slavery! No Union with Slaveholders!” Both

⁶⁴ Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment*, 162.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 158-78.

men denounced the Constitution as a flawed document that collaborated with slavery, and publicly argued for Northern secession. In 1840 Lewis Tappan formally split from Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society and created the separate American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, intent on continuing the original mission of moral suasion and reconciliation with slaveholders. Others, like abolitionist James Birney in Ohio, turned to electoral politics. Birney became closely affiliated with the antislavery Liberty Party, which in 1840 and 1844 nominated him as a presidential candidate.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the experiment in the West Indies remained of paramount importance for American abolitionists across these strategic divides. All three factions continued to champion British Emancipation as an economic success, even in the face of reports on decreasing production. In fact, if anything, their fervor increased.

Popular pamphlets like that of the Rhode Island Unitarian theologian William Channing's 1841 *Emancipation* gathered positive accounts on the economic progress of the isles. Channing, an earlier advocate of gradual emancipation, had been won over to immediatism by the West Indian experiment. His 1841 *Emancipation* cited heavily from Kimball and Thome, chastising what he saw as "a backwardness" and "unwillingness" of Americans "to believe the good reports of the West Indies." He charged detractors with a desire "to hear evil" and of propagating "every fiction or exaggeration unfavourable to freedom." Channing addressed the issue of falling exports directly, pointing out that imports, in contrast, had increased. This, Channing contended, showed the industry of free blacks that employed their labor to their own wants rather than the whims of "absentee proprietors" of plantations. Drawing on Northern notions of citizenship and

⁶⁶ Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 64-71. James Brewer Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 16-18; For more on Ohio and the regional politics of abolitionists in the Old Northwest see, Reinard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

free labor, he presented the emancipated slaves of the West Indies as a new “working class” who equitably sold their labor to their own benefit. “Surely,” Channing wrote, “when we see the fruits of industry diffusing themselves more and more through the mass of the community...raising the multitude of men...we cannot grieve much.”⁶⁷

An 1841 abolitionist pamphlet titled *Slavery of the United States to sinful and foolish customs* by another Rhode Island abolitionist Charles Simmons, also stepped up to support the West Indian experiment. Describing slavery as “the national curse” he wrote that Southern slaveholders could immediately emancipate their slaves, and “would derive much more profit from their plantations by the free-labor system.” Rather than maintaining the “cruel policy of slavery,” Simmons urged American slaveholders to look to the “experiment of the West Indies.” Appearing to refer to the apprenticeship system, he conceded that the experiment was a limited and partial one “when compared with what it ought to have been.” Still, it was evidence that “the negro race are disposed to engage in laborious, industrious, and useful employments, as free laborers, whenever and wherever the proper motives and encouragements are offered.” If slaveholders procured more work from their bonded property it was because of “great physical force and violence.” This state of affairs was inherently unproductive, as it led to “despondency, imbecility, disease, wretchedness and death” among workers. Using the “mental happiness” of free white Northern laborers as a comparison, Simmons insisted that were Southerners to free

⁶⁷ William Ellery Channing, *Emancipation* (London: Paternoster Row, 1841), 7; Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2009), 170-179.

their slaves “they would soon be able to *naturally* perform much more labor...what [had] already become a matter of fact in some of the West Indian islands.”⁶⁸

Abolitionist newspapers also continued to assert a favorable picture of the free labor experiment. A February 1842 *Liberator* reprinted accounts from English and colonial papers that continued to give news of economic success in the West Indies. In meticulous detail, the article painted images of hard-toiling West Indian laborers who were “smiling and delightful in appearance.” Both property and industry were improved, and individual laborers were steadily gaining the ability to purchase finer goods. Despite the misgivings of detractors, once the laborer “put his shoulder to the wheel,” prosperity would naturally follow. A July 1842 *Liberator* speaking directly to American slaveholders noted “that the value of the land in those islands...is even greater than was the value of the land and slaves previous to emancipation.” The article stated further, “Let the South proclaim liberty to her slaves...and in six years...the value of her soil would be greater by \$1200,000,000, than it now is.” The most “effectual remedy” Southern slaveholders could take to the inefficiency of slave labor, was in emancipating their human property and making them a free labor force.⁶⁹

The answer from the South and anti-abolitionists was the continued denunciation of both West Indian Emancipation and what they perceived as radical abolitionist rhetoric. An abolitionist vendor selling copies of a speech extolling the virtues of free labor and British Emancipation in South Carolina was arrested in 1842 and held in bonds to the amount of \$1,000. The *Liberator* quoted an 1843 New Orleans paper that claimed the once fertile fields of the British isles were in a state of disrepair, as freed West Indian blacks had reverted to “animal

⁶⁸ Charles Simmons, *Slavery of the United States to Sinful and Foolish Customs* (Pawtucket, Rhode Island, 1841), 8-9.

⁶⁹ *Liberator*, 4 February 1842, 29 July 1842.

sluggishness,” and were now doing only the “minimum” of labor...a picture of indolence ...almost as revolting...as their kindred fellows in Hayti.” The wealth of the West Indian isles had been grossly depreciated, the paper noted, with the colonial government unable to “stimulate the negro to industry,” whose natural state was antithetical to wage labor.⁷⁰

And it was not only Southern papers. Northern newspapers as well, receiving news from an increasingly skeptical British press, began to pronounce the West Indian experiment in free black labor a failure. In a lengthy piece spread across two issues of the Philadelphia based *North American* entitled, “The West Indian Emancipation Question,” the dismal results of the free labor experiment were discussed. The article drew from the accounts of two British men, one an advocate of free trade and the other an advocate of planters, finding that they remarkably now arrived at the same conclusion. Emancipation in the British colonies had created a diminishment in the “disposition to labor” of blacks, and by consequence a reduction in the quantity of sugar being produced. Not only had this created an increase on the price of sugar, referred to as a “heavy tax” on the English people, it had also made the cheaper slave produced sugar from Brazil and the Caribbean more profitable. The irony, the paper noted, was that “emancipation in the British Islands is likely to act as permanent bounty upon the product of slave labor elsewhere.”⁷¹

The *North American* article placed the blame for this sad state of affairs at the feet of the free black laborers of the islands, who it was said “preferred play to work.” The people of England had paid a contribution of “thirty millions,” only to see the deterioration in the productivity of former slaves and in the lives of classes on the islands. If this was so, the paper

⁷⁰ *Liberator*, 30 December 1842, 7 April 1843.

⁷¹ *North American*, 20 July 1844, 29 July 1844.

mused, seeming to speak directly to American abolitionists, then “the whole course of Great Britain in regard to this matter has been erroneous.” Admitting slavery to be a “dire evil,” the paper insisted that all readers nevertheless had to face these “lamentable facts and conclusions.” If abolitionists were indeed “true friends of the Negro,” they would abandon immediatism “and study some other mode of giving freedom to the African race” in America, than the model afforded by the West Indies. The free labor experiment American abolitionists had used in their arguments for immediate emancipation was now being wielded against them.⁷²

Abolitionist newspapers answering the onslaught of negative depictions accused detractors of distorting the facts. Speaking on the abolitionist newspaper vendor jailed in Charleston for extolling West Indian Emancipation, the *Liberator* called it the act of a state with a “muzzled press,” and charged South Carolina as “trembling with fright” to the literature of freedom. Abolitionists also continued to make an appeal to evidence, which they believed would vindicate their free labor experiment.⁷³ An April 1843 *Liberator*, pulling from British reports, told of free black workers in the West Indian colonies who labored “cheerfully,” and pointed out that sugar was now being manufactured at a “cheaper rate” than under slavery or apprenticeship. James Birney’s Ohio based abolitionist paper the *Philanthropist*, a mouthpiece for Liberty Party politics, that same month printed a full analysis “in reference to the existing relations between employers and laborers” in the West Indian colonies, pulled from a favorable British House of Commons report. The report went through each island, giving brief detail of existent labor conditions. In nearly every case, the supply of labor and state of the colonies was deemed “in favor of freedom.” Estates were in a positive state of success; the only cases of abandonment

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ *Liberator*, 11 December 1842.

were the fault of disreputable planters, “as the people refused to work without wages.” Most noticeably, the paper stressed that “No negro is idle” and are “at all times employed.” A May 1843 *Liberator* article billed as “Important Intelligence” similarly reprinted in meticulous detail the crop production and exports, notably sugar and coffee, of the British West Indies colonies in the past three years.⁷⁴

Anti-abolitionists and proslavery forces however by the mid 1840s had become emboldened. Seizing on reports by English detractors of the West Indian experiment, they used reports on the economic failure of the colonies in the contentious debates on the annexation of Texas. Britain had been invited to serve as a mediator, along with France, to assure the recognition of an independent Texas by Mexico. Proslavery forces in the United States favored annexation, believing that Britain would encourage slave emancipation in an independent Texas. Though there was no real danger of Britain putting forth such a plan, proslavery forces were concerned by emancipation rhetoric coming out of the 1843 World’s Convention of Abolitionists in London. At the gathering several abolitionists, among them prominent Americans like Lewis Tappan, had drawn up resolutions for effecting emancipation in Texas.⁷⁵

To thwart these perceived British interests, annexationists evoked the economic instability of the British West Indian colonies, urging the maintenance of slavery to assure the economic prosperity of Texas. Among the reasons championed by the *Richmond Enquirer* for the annexation was the deplorable plight of the white planters of the British colonies who now suffered under free black labor. South Carolina native Secretary of State John C. Calhoun, in his

⁷⁴ *Liberator*, 21 April 1843, 12 May 1843; *Philanthropist*, 26 April 1843.

⁷⁵ Stanley Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic, 1836-1845* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 226-227. A committee of abolitionists met with the British Foreign Secretary about their emancipation plans, but he showed little interest in the matter.

appeal for Texas annexation, and in response to what was seen as English interference in domestic policy, similarly made the “ruinous effects on the tropical productions of Great Britain” central to his argument. Great Britain, he argued, had operated under “the fallacious calculation that the labor of the negroes would be at least as profitable, if not more so in consequence of the measure [emancipation].” Now the country had “failed in all her objects,” as free black labor had “proved far less productive, without affording the consolation of having improved their [the former slaves] condition.” Not only had “the experiment” turned out economically costly, but at the same time it “has given a powerful stimulus...to those countries which have had the good sense to shun her [England’s] example.”⁷⁶

Proslavery writers also wrote pamphlets and tracts, attacking the state of the British West Indies. The prominent slaveholder and former governor of South Carolina James Henry Hammond in early 1845 published a set of letters to the English abolitionist Thomas Clarkson. The tract was a defensive response to Clarkson’s 1844 letters to American Northerners detailing the horrors of slavery in the American South. Hammond understood the importance American abolitionists had placed on the free labor experiment and their strategies for emancipation. “A notable scheme has been set on foot to achieve abolition,” he wrote, “by making, what is by courtesy called ‘free’ labor, so much cheaper than slave labor as to force the abandonment of the latter.”⁷⁷

In his letters, Hammond attacked the claims of economic success in the West Indies, chiding abolitionists had no cause “for exultation” given the “monstrous error of emancipation.”

⁷⁶ Letter of John C. Calhoun to France, printed in the *Mecklenburg Jeffersonian*, 3 January 1845; Siegel, *A Political History of the Texas Republic*, 226-231.

⁷⁷ James Henry Hammond, *Gov. Hammond's letters on southern slavery: Addressed to Thomas Clarkson, the English abolitionist* (Charleston, 1845), 20-21.

As evidence, he quoted from an 1840 *London Quarter* article, which found that “none of the benefits” expected by the “mistaken good intentions” of abolitionists had been realized in the emancipated West Indies. These dire results, Hammond contended, were “the real fruits” of the free labor experiment and the “valuable dividend” of the twenty million in indemnities paid for by the British people. For Hammond, the failure of free labor in the West Indies was enough to make the “wild rashness” of abolitionist “fanaticism,” and their faith in free black labor, inconceivable for the Southern United States. “You are greatly mistaken,” he wrote Clarkson, “[if] you think that the consequences of emancipation here, would be similar and no more injurious than those which followed from it in your little seagirt West India Islands, where nearly all were blacks.”⁷⁸

To Hammond the doctrine of free labor was a meddling, foreign intrusion, the work of what he called “operatives” from Britain. In advocating free black labor and using the West Indies as an example, American abolitionists were willing participants in inviting economic disaster upon slaveholders. He accused them as well of disseminating “destructive doctrines” among slaves, with the intent to “excite them to insurrection.” Writing on abolitionist attempts to “dissolve the Union,” Hammond warned that Southerners were “content to give up the Union...than sacrifice two thousand million of dollars, and with them all the rights we prize.”⁷⁹

In 1846, a Mississippian, Mathew Estes, went further with a proslavery work entitled *A Defence of Negro Slavery as it Exists in the United States*. Estes dedicated several chapters specifically to Great Britain’s free labor experiment. The dire state of the West India Islands was evidence, Estes wrote, “that the Negroes, left to themselves, will not work.” To destroy slavery

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 19.

in the South, and to take black labor from under the guidance of whites, was to put a stop to progress. Setting about to “prove that the whole scheme of English emancipation in the West Indies, has turned out to be a most splendid failure,” Estes quoted British accounts of free blacks who now neglected work and existed in a state of general idleness. The millions the British people had spent on their experiment of free black labor had been “worse than thrown away.” Rather, it had “destroyed the prosperity of the finest and most productive islands in the world—ruined the Negroes themselves, and impoverished their former masters.” For anti-abolitionists and proslavery Southerners, the free labor experiment in the West Indies had proven a dangerous precedent. Were American abolitionists to attempt such a process in the United States, the result would be economic disaster and the ruin of profitable Southern industries.⁸⁰

Abolitionist newspapers again took the lead in crafting new arguments to adapt to the changing dynamics of the free labor experiment. They took the popular press to task, rebutting with counterarguments that insisted the labor situation in the British colonies was either stable or in a state of progress. An 1847 *Liberator* article chided a New York paper for circulating “thrice-refuted falsehoods” about the economic and labor failure in the West Indies. Another reprinted a lengthy synopsis of the speech of a Reverend George L. Hovey of Boston, who had spent three years as a missionary in Jamaica. Rev. Hovey refuted the notions of emancipation as “an entire failure,” and instead blamed any fall in exports on events such as the removal of sugar duties, droughts, or greater consumption of produced goods by free black laborers. In fact, Rev. Hovey

⁸⁰ Matthew Estes, *A Defence of Negro Slavery as it Exists in the United States* (Press of the Alabama Journal 1846), 180-239.

argued, “emancipation had saved instead of ruined the planters of Jamaica.” What was more, the former slaves were steadfastly laborious and “not a negro had been taken up as a vagrant.”⁸¹

A June *Liberator* reprinted an article from the *Boston Courier* that stated gravely, “Perhaps there have been no time when the impression has been so general and strong in this country that West India emancipation has proved a failure as now.” These “accounts of ruin and distress” were providing “triumph” to proslavery forces in the United States, and even sowing doubts among the friends of emancipation. Some, even claimed, the British West Indian colonies were now calling for annexation by America. In rebuttal to these claims, the article quoted a Jamaican newspaper account of a meeting of a group of colonial planters, who rather than engaging in “bitter denunciation of the ‘fanatics’ who had ruined them,” instead listened to an abolitionist speech by a Rev. S. Oughton. Not a “single word” by the planters was said, the article claimed, against emancipation or abolitionism. Instead, they listened and reacted with “immense applause” when Rev. Oughton denounced ideas of annexation to slaveholding America, stating that “he would sooner see Jamaica sunk to the bottom of the ocean, than behold it degraded by such a connection.” America, he contended, was “the stronghold of slavery” whose “boasted land of liberty” held within it “two to three millions of poor, helpless, and cruelly depressed slaves.” Rev. Oughton was said to call for “three groans for America,” and was rejoined by “loud and long continued groaning.” The article ended by hoping for a time when the spirit that pervaded the meeting of planters in Jamaica, would soon possess “Northern and Southern defenders” of American slavery.⁸²

⁸¹ *Liberator*, 19 November 1847, 26 November 1847.

⁸² *Boston Courier* reprinted in *Liberator*, 9 June 1848.

Despite such confidence, by the late 1840s, abolitionists were on the defensive. Increasingly, many antislavery newspapers found themselves devoting considerable print space to “correcting” distortions of the labor and economic situation in the West Indies. The shifting fortunes of the free labor experiment in the West Indies had not made it the definitive success many abolitionists had hoped. Yet, it had also allowed them to engage a substantive public debate on emancipation within newspapers, pamphlets and other print vehicles. As the issue of slavery was increasingly pushed to the forefront of American politics in the coming decade, abolitionists would draw on this experience to put forth their case for freedom.

The Free Labor Experiment and the Politics of American Slavery

The late 1840s began a turbulent political era in the United States over the issue of slavery, in which the British West India free labor experiment became entangled in the national conversation. The end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 created a new dilemma, as the lands gained through Mexican Cession became embroiled in the slavery issue. Following the defeat of the 1848 Wilmot Proviso proposed by Pennsylvania Congressman David Wilmot, which would have banned slavery in the acquired territories, the Free Soil Party emerged in American politics. While distancing itself from abolitionism, the party attacked slavery as a threat to free white labor. In their principles they declared “FREE SOIL—FREE LABOR—NO MORE SLAVE STATES—NO FURTHER EXTENSION OF SLAVERY.” Their politics led Garrison to denounce them as promoting “white manism,” rather than taking a moral stance against human bondage. But Free Soilers, like the Liberty Party before them, saw themselves as

a moderate bulwark against slavery: the only ones who could effectively utilize constitutional politics to diminish the power of the slave states.⁸³

Some Free Soilers joined Garrisonians in defending British Emancipation as a free labor experiment. Gamaliel Bailey, the editor of the Washington D.C. *National Era*, had once been the secretary of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society and previously edited the Cincinnati *Philanthropist* alongside James Birney. Bailey had supported the Liberty Party in 1847 and by 1848 had begun to drift increasingly towards Free Soil politics, backing the antislavery factions in the party. Existing as a print arm of these antislavery political organizations, his newspaper continued to advocate for the success of British Emancipation. In June 1847 the *National Era* printed an editorial from a Virginian who declared slavery to be “undoubtedly doomed” in the state, after the example set by the free labor system in the emancipated British West Indies. “Where free Labor is the general system, slave Labor cannot prevail,” the editorial asserted, “it may exist for a time, but it is must soon become extinct... There is no alternative *all laborers must be free, or all slaves.*” The writer challenged local papers to put together a commission of the “enlightened men of Virginia” to travel to the British West Indies and “make a full examination of the operation and results of emancipation there and then lay the facts before the people of the State.”⁸⁴

Similar to abolitionist arguments, Bailey’s *National Era* vociferously argued that any drop in productivity in the emancipated West Indies could be explained by mitigating circumstances. In November 1847 the paper devoted several columns to rebut nearly line for line

⁸³ Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 201-230; 231-259; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 124-148.

⁸⁴ *National Era*, 10 June 1847.

a disparaging account of British Emancipation printed in the *Charleston Mercury*, which blamed the current labor conditions of the islands for the failure of several London merchant houses. Decrying the *Mercury* as untrustworthy on British colonial policy, the article gave a detailed economic history of free labor in the West Indies since emancipation, including an extensive examination of colonial sugar duties, exports and commercial economics.⁸⁵

In February 1848, the *National Era* similarly warned of an article “going the rounds” in Southern papers, which gave “a one-sided report” of the state of the British West Indies; it was of “vast importance to the Southern states,” the paper asserted, that the truth be known regarding the “comparative condition of the colonies under the Law of Slavery and under that of Personal Freedom.” In June of that year the *National Era* once again sounded the alarm, reprinting an article from the *New Orleans Delta* that made the ambitious declaration that the United States should annex the British West Indies. The New Orleans paper, influenced by the filibuster movement that sought further American expansion in the wake of the Mexican-American War, claimed the colonies were now “suffering under...neglect, and the still more hurtful experiments” of their mother countries. Jamaica, it was said, had been “utterly ruined and prostrated by the Emancipation Act,” and now suffered the rapid disappearance of the white population while the blacks were “sinking deeper and deeper into sloth and worthlessness.” According to the New Orleans paper, Jamaican planters, eager to recoup their fortunes and bring their labor force back firmly under their control, would welcome annexation by the Union.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ *National Era*, 11 November 1847.

⁸⁶ *National Era*, 24 February 1848, 6 June 1848; for more on the militaristic filibuster movement see also, Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Southern politicians in turn were growing increasingly wary of antislavery politics and their use of British Emancipation. In December 1848, as a response to several antislavery resolutions, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina wrote up his “Southern Address.” Signed by forty-eight proslavery Southern “delegates” and circulated in February 1849, the manifesto rallied Southerners to unite “in defense of rights involving your all—your property, prosperity, equality, liberty, and safety.” Inveighing against the “fanaticism” of abolition, Calhoun warned that emancipation would “destroy the existing relation between the free and servile races” of the South, spreading “wretchedness, and misery, and desolation.” As evidence, he pointed to the “example of the British West Indies,” where the colonies were now “ruined, impoverished, miserable, [and] wretched” under attempts at free black labor.⁸⁷

If Southerners saw fanaticism in advocates of the British Emancipation experiments, those Free Soilers who identified with antislavery were similarly suspicious of slaveholders. In August 1849, political antislavery activist Sherman Booth’s Free Soil Party newspaper the *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, warned that a cabal of slaveholders at Mobile Alabama were seeking to form a coalition with West Indian planters to urge “the failure of the West Indian experiment,” as an argument against American emancipation. According to the article, however, their attempts were rebuffed, the leading paper of Jamaica denouncing their disparaging claims as “most unfortunate.” The Southern slaveholders were derided as knowing “nothing of the true state of affairs in the West Indies,” and thus had “purposefully misrepresented” the results of emancipation to their constituents.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ John C. Calhoun, *The Address of Southern Delegates in Congress, to their Constituents* (Washington D.C.: Towers, 1849), 37, 39, 42; Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 76-78.

⁸⁸ *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, 8 August 1849.

Even during several national crises following the Mexican-American War, the free labor experiment of the British West Indies remained a point of contention. The Compromise of 1850 sought to neutralize national tensions by attempting to create a balance between slave and free states. Out of these attempts at conciliation came the Fugitive Slave Act, which made it the duty of marshals, deputies and legal officials to engage in the capture and return of fugitive slaves “to the State or Territory from which such persons may have escaped or fled.” Further, the act stipulated that any person “who shall knowingly and willingly obstruct, hinder, or prevent” the return of fugitives, could be both fined and imprisoned. In its provisions, the Fugitive Slave Act extended the influence of Southern slaveholders and inflamed Northern public sentiment against slavery.⁸⁹ In 1854 sectional differences increased as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, created to allow settlers to decide whether slavery would be allowed within the new territories, led to open warfare between proslavery and free-soil factions. That same year, remnants of the Free Soil Party and the Whig Party came together to form the Republican Party, which while stopping short of abolitionism advocated an antislavery platform of free soil and free labor.⁹⁰ Anti-abolitionists were especially concerned with what they perceived as the growing radicalism against slavery, whether by the abolitionism of Garrisonians or the increased political confrontation of antislavery politics.

Amidst growing calls for disunion, a Kentucky slaveholder and anti-abolitionist, Henry Field James, published a pamphlet attacking abolitionists as scourged knaves, atheists and swindlers. Part of his ire was leveled at the British West Indies, and the experiment of free labor,

⁸⁹ Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 *US Statutes at Large* 9 (1850): 462-5.

⁹⁰ Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War*, 26-30; see also, Jonathan Earle and Diane Mutti Burke, *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013); Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

declared by him as “worse than a failure.” British possessions in the western hemisphere had been rendered “valueless,” leaving the nation to “fret under the fact that her Emancipation Act destroyed her West India colonies.” James accused American abolitionists of leading America to this end, with their dangerous and foreign schemes.⁹¹

Both abolitionists and antislavery advocates, recognizing the importance of British Emancipation to their larger domestic causes, continued to defend the condition of the West Indian islands. While ceding that a drop of exports had indeed occurred, abolitionist and antislavery supporters of the experiment nevertheless refused to depict the emancipated isles in ruin. Any failures, they asserted, were to be attributed to flaws among the planter class or government policies, not emancipation or free labor. Among these traditional arguments however, was an increasing shift among abolitionists and antislavery advocates that there were more important measures of emancipation’s success beyond free labor productivity.

The *Wisconsin Free Democrat* in March 1850 announced that there was “no place on the globe” of greater interest than the emancipated British colonies. “Exact and reliable information,” the paper proclaimed, “in regard to the actual condition of the British West India islands is very much needed in the United States as well as in England.” To this end, the paper relied on the recent accounts of “two English gentlemen of high character,” who had been sent on a “mission of inquiry” to Jamaica and other islands. The two reported back that indeed, they were treated to complaints that “the negroes will not work, now they are free” and that commercial men of property everywhere gave “the most deplorable accounts” of the island, including the loss of valuable estates, a lowering of exports, and the low price of produce. The

⁹¹ Henry F. James, *Abolitionism Unveiled! Hypocrisy Unmasked! and Knavery Scourged! Luminously Portraying the Formal Hocusses, Whining Philanthropists, Moral Coquets, Practical Atheists, and the Hollow-hearted Swindlers of Labor, yclept the “northern abolitionists.”* (New York: T.V. Paterson, 1850).

envoys concluded these accounts may be true, even if somewhat exaggerated; but what was of greater importance, was that the former slaves were now “better off, morally and intellectually, and in their material comforts, in a state of freedom.”⁹²

The drop in exports, the paper claimed, was to be blamed at any rate on British reduction of sugar duties, which allowed in cheaper made slave produced sugar from Cuba and Brazil. Further, slavery had caused planters to live “extravagantly,” awash in money wrongly accrued from slave labor, a state that could not be sustained in a free labor society. The planter class was even chided for a failure to expand their cultivation, beyond sugar or other cash crops in which black free laborers could now participate. “For the black man,” the report concluded, “the experiment of emancipation surely has not proved the utter failure which it has so often been presented.”⁹³

A *National Era* article from August 1850 similarly sought to shift the argument away from free labor’s economic superiority:

We do not think that the great question of slave emancipation should be decided by the number of hogsheads of sugar or bales of cotton that may be produced by free compared with a slave community but by the far higher considerations of justice and benevolence and the requirements of Christianity.⁹⁴

This was a remarkable change in strategies for newspapers, which just years prior, were heavily invested in proving the success of the emancipation experiment based on measurements and statistics of economic prosperity. Still, abolitionists were not abandoning the argument of free labor altogether, and challenged proslavery advocates on the interpretation of their data. After displaying a table on sugar production in the West Indian colonies, the article conceded that there

⁹² *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, 13 March 1850.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *National Era*, 8 August 1850.

had indeed been a drop in production. However, this was due to the more humane nature of free labor, which unlike slavery was not “labor obtained under...the exercise of a cruel coercion.” In fact, readers were told they had “reason to rejoice” when it was taken into consideration that the larger production of goods had been “wrung from the bondsman and the miscalled apprentice.” A proper examination of the economic statistics, the paper argued, showed that the “consequences of slave abolition have not been so disastrous...as has been represented.”⁹⁵

A May 1851 article in the same paper reasoned along similar lines, rebutting a pamphlet by the anti-abolitionist and agent for the Ohio Colonization Society, David Cristy, denouncing the “commercial failure of British West India emancipation.” Rather than arguing against the data, the paper rebutted that Mr. Cristy’s evidence amounted to little. The world now understood that slavery was not essential to commercial progress, and if free labor did not produce more than slave labor it owed to the oppression of government, or some other cause. “Freedom is nature’s order,” the paper declared, “and will work well.”⁹⁶

To show the fallacy in Cristy’s argument, the author compared slavery to prison labor, and asked if the fact that prisoners, like slaves, could produce cheaper goods this too meant all workers should be reduced to prisoners. If slavery was more profitable in places like Cuba, it was only because the slaveholder exploited his workers, robbing them of their labor, and driving them through inhumane coercion. Slavery was a “system of robbery,” the paper contended; men such as Mr. Cristy were extolling the virtues of stolen labor in much the way a thief would flaunt his ill-gained goods.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ *National Era*, 22 May 1851.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

In a careful shifting of strategies regarding British Emancipation, abolitionist and antislavery arguments at once posited free labor as morally superior while charging that the higher productivity of slavery was inherently immoral to a progressive society. The gains of slave labor, whatever the profitability, was an inherently flawed concept as it followed from an inhumane system that degraded the sanctity of free labor. An August 1854 *Liberator* article denounced a “bastard Englishman” who spoke ill of British Emancipation in a letter to the *Boston Post*, which they termed “the appropriate medium for such a contemptible assault.” The *Liberator* called the entire article “a forgery,” and derided the *Boston Post* as “capable of any trick, falsehood, and imposture, as the servile tool of the Slave Power.” In response to the claim that “the hard worked, ill fed laborers of England” had been saddled with a “black debt” through emancipation, the *Liberator* replied that it was those very white laborers who showed “sympathies” with “West Indian bondmen,” and who so vociferously endorsed abolition. In an act of free labor solidarity, the paper claimed, the workers of England had “loudly rejoiced” at the end of slavery in the West Indies, understanding that it was the “tyrannical master” and planter class who were to blame. “Freedom,” the paper stated, “always pays—Slavery always is a swindle.”⁹⁸

A September 1855 *Liberator* article was similarly forceful in its defense of the West Indian experiment. “What were the pleas advanced to justify West Indian slavery?” the paper asked, “Precisely such as are now put forth against the anti-slavery movement in our own country.” Comparing West Indian planters to proslavery Southerners, the article went on to refute each argument against emancipation. Mocking claims put forth by planters, both in the West Indies and the American South, that “the slaves would not work if they were emancipated,”

⁹⁸ *Liberator*, 11 August 1854.

the paper responded, “It is for the slaves, not for you, to determine whether they will work or not.” The plantocracy of both the United States and the British West Indies were denounced as “the laziest of the lazy, subsiding entirely on the labors of others.” Such statements by abolitionists now called for former slaves to have control over their labor, deciding for themselves how they would participate in a free society. These were powerful new arguments that could speak to Northern audiences by making common cause with white labor in their depictions of emancipation.⁹⁹

By 1855, the issue of British Emancipation was a partisan issue in America, in great part due to the free labor argument of abolitionists and antislavery politics. A July 1857 article in the *New York Tribune*, a former Whig paper that by 1854 had aligned itself with the newly emerging Republican Party, gave a lengthy rebuttal to “sham Democratic journals” who through “constant repetition” had attempted to depict the industries of the British West Indies as “ruined...by the emancipation of the slaves.” The *Tribune* pointed out that, as free men, the laborers of the West Indies were able to determine the length of their work and would not labor like slaves. This fact, as well as the inefficiency of planters and proprietors, was to blame for any fall in sugar production. While noting that the experiment in free labor was not to be judged by the output of sugar alone, the paper provided data and statistics on the improvement of industry in the islands.¹⁰⁰

Not all arguments on black labor went through such a radical transformation. An earlier September 1855 article in the *National Era* defended the West Indian experiment as a triumph for free labor, yet contrasted West Indian black labor with the labor of American slaves on

⁹⁹ *Liberator*, 28 September 1855. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, xxiii-xxiv.

¹⁰⁰ *New York Tribune*, 14 August 1857.

racialist grounds. Southerners were told that the effects of emancipation on the West Indies should not prejudice them against the cause of American antislavery, as the two cases were “wholly different.” The blacks of the West Indies were “little removed above the condition of savages.” The slaves of the American South, in contrast, were “intermixed with civilized white people,” and thus being more intelligent had a better understanding of agriculture, mechanics and other necessities of labor. Further, upon freedom American blacks would migrate south, to Mexico, the West Indies and Central America. The working population of the South would be filled by white labor from the North. Such accounts were a reminder of the complicated ideas of race that permeated arguments of free black labor.¹⁰¹

Most abolitionists papers however remained in favor of portraying West Indian emancipation as a success for free labor, which, even if meaning a reduction in industry, had greatly improved the work ethic of the former slaves. An October 1859 *Liberator*, in reaction to “pro-slavery journals, politicians, and ecclesiastics” whose “crocodile lamentations” had falsely decried British Abolition a failure, pointed to the reports that claimed free blacks had become purchasers of land throughout the emancipated islands. The black workers were “well-behaved and industrious,” and had become freeholders who labored on their own land. In time, it was estimated, some of them would own sugar plantations of free labor that rivaled the chattel estates that once held them in bondage.¹⁰²

Thus, progress was given an alternative measure, one that centered on free labor’s ability to improve the individual (if not the pocketbooks of their former owners) and on making yeoman

¹⁰¹ *National Era*, 13 September 1855.

¹⁰² *Liberator*, 14 October 1859.

planters out of former slaves similar to free white laborers. However, American abolitionists had never rested their argument solely on free labor. The success of the British Emancipation experiment could be judged by other triumphs, most notably the reformatory moral effects of emancipation on the former West Indian slaves.

CHAPTER THREE: EMANCIPATION AND REFORM IN THE WEST INDIES

The most gratifying statements were made respecting the progress of the negroes in education, morality, and religion; respecting the facility for educating the children, the increased observance of the Sabbath and of marriage, the rapid enlargement of the churches, and withal, the gradual yet constant abatement of prejudice.¹

In 1838, some four years after the passing of British Emancipation, Joseph Horace Kimball and James A. Thome's *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six Months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica* was published in New York by the American Anti-Slavery Society. At almost almost 500 pages, the book including charts, figures and indices, on the state of the freed population of the British islands, told with the literary flair of travel narrative. The text was mass-produced and disseminated for sale in 1838 and advertised in antislavery newspapers. It would continue to circulate among abolitionists for the next several decades and through the Civil War.

Abolitionists found Kimball and Thome's work a useful tool as it countered negative depictions of West India Emancipation that were all too pervasive in the proslavery and popular press. While the book focused in great part on the success of free labor, its other outstanding theme was the progress of reform among the recently emancipated. In their travels, Kimball and Thome investigated the daily lives of the former slaves, recording their mores, behaviors and habits. Their report was favorable, concluding that as free people the former slaves were

¹ James A. Thome and J. Horace Kimball. *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), 75-76.

“perceptibly rising in the scale of civilization, morals, and religion.” Emancipation in the West Indies was not only a triumph for free labor, but a triumph for reform as well.²

This chapter examines the ways in which the moral reform of the emancipated slaves in the British colonies became an important argument in American abolitionism. The reformation of the former West Indian slaves served as a measure of the success of the emancipation experiment. While arguments and debates emerged over labor and industry, morality, religious instruction, education and uplift served as a separate, though often related, indicator of the success or failure of emancipation.

In newspapers, pamphlets and other print materials, American abolitionists touted the transformational nature of freedom, and contrasted it with the vices of slavery. In some ways this rhetoric was at once a condemnation of Southern slavery as inherently immoral, a system that degraded both master and slave alike. In other ways, it both countered and endorsed certain notions of black immorality, which could be tamed and brought under control through “religious instruction...Christian morality...and European marriage customs.”³ Americans who feared that blacks were ill-prepared to become members of society could look to the West Indies, where freedom had not only made the former slaves more industrious laborers, but also more religious, temperate and pious.

Reform and British Antislavery

Reform had long been linked to the Atlantic antislavery struggle. Protestant missionaries arrived from England in the British Caribbean in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth

² Ibid., vi.

³ William Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 30-32.

centuries, and openly preached to slaves hoping to spread the gospel and convert many to Christianity. They hoped that with religious instruction the slaves would become more pious, adapt to Christian mores, take up marriage, and renounce African religious practices. Among these missionaries were Anglicans, Baptists, Methodists, and, later, lesser-known sects like the Moravians. All of them would have profound impacts on the culture and societies of the British West Indies. However for most of this early history, missionaries in the main were ambivalent about ending slavery. The presence of slavery as a condoned practice in scripture appeared, to many English clergy, to condone its practice in the West Indian colonies. Converting slaves to Christianity did not preclude participating in the system of human bondage. The Anglican Society for the Propagation of Gospel in Foreign Parts, for instance, throughout the eighteenth century owned more slaves in the West Indies than it employed disciples to proselytize the faith.⁴

Missionary work however did force English men and women of faith to confront slavery, in ways to which they were unaccustomed in the metropole. Many English missionaries encountered firsthand the brutalities of plantation slavery in their visits to the West Indies and North American colonies. They wrote openly about their experiences, and shared it in books and pamphlets that traveled back across the Atlantic. Anglican minister Morgan Godwin after witnessing slavery in Virginia and Barbados, wrote tracts in 1680 graphically detailing scenes of masters “Emasculating and Beheading” the enslaved, and “cropping off their Ears.” Yet Godwin did not challenge slavery or the slave system. Instead, he sought the amelioration of its more harsh qualities. He urged slaveholders to allow the instruction of religion among slaves, which would make them more moral and thus more obedient. Christianity, he argued, “establisheth the Authority of Masters, over their Servants and Slaves...exact[ing] the strictest Fidelity” and

⁴ Travis Glasson, *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5-6, 75-110.

“requiring service.” Religious instruction would even quell the possibility of resistance or rebellion, requiring slaves to dwell on “their future recompense in Heaven” rather than earthly liberty.⁵

Missionary attempts at reform increased during the First Great Awakening in the mid-eighteenth century, which sought to instill greater religious piety throughout society. In the Awakening’s call for universal salvation, it spoke out about the treatment of slaves, if not slavery itself, at the hands of their owners. In mainland British North America revivalists like the Anglican pastor John Whitefield preached to poor whites, slaves, free blacks and Native Americans. He spoke out forcefully about the immorality of slaveholders, penning in an open letter to planters, “I think God has a Quarrel with you for your Abuse of and Cruelty to the Poor Negroes.” While Whitefield prayed that the slaves would “never be permitted to get the upper hand,” he pronounced that if ever God allowed the enslaved retribution for their treatment, “all good men must acknowledge the judgment would be just.” Like earlier advocates of religious instruction for slaves, however, Whitefield did not work towards slavery’s end. Instead, he castigated slave owners for not converting their slaves to Christianity, which he believed would make them more obedient and orderly.⁶

While some slave owners in British North America, particularly in Northern colonies like Pennsylvania, accepted the conversion of their slaves, most West Indian planters remained intractable. Many saw religious instruction as potentially disruptive, given the large numbers of

⁵ Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 50; Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (New York: Verso, 1998), 258-260; Morgan Godwin, quoted in David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 204-205; Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 57-58; 69-72.

⁶ George Whitefield, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield M.A.* (London, 1771), 3. Jessica M. Parr, *Inventing George Whitefield: Race, Revivalism, and the Making of a Religious Icon* (Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2015), 67. Glasson, *Mastering Christianity*, 123-125.

slaves involved in Caribbean plantation labor. Converting Africans to Christianity would also remove a fundamental demarcation on islands where the enforcement of caste hierarchies was rigorously policed to maintain order. Nor did slaves easily acquiesce to religious instruction, where barriers of language and culture existed among more recent African arrivals. Many planters in the West Indies and mainland North America also doubted claims that religious instruction to their slaves would make them more obedient. They worried, in fact, of the opposite. When a 1741 slave insurrection conspiracy swept colonial New York, blame was quickly placed on evangelicals like Whitefield and his advocacy for preaching to slaves. By the late eighteenth century most attempts at the religious conversion of the enslaved in the West Indies had met with few successes.⁷

As historian Leslie Brown argues, it may have been the recalcitrance of West Indian planters that helped fuel later antislavery movements. The perception that “only civil reform in the West Indies could enable religious reform,” was increasingly taking hold among English reformists.⁸ The Anglican minister James Ramsay, frustrated with the obstinacy of West Indian planters, in 1784 drafted a “Plan for the Improvement and Conversion of African Slaves.” Ramsay called for an establishment of clergy throughout the sugar plantations of the colonies; the general improvement of the lives of slaves; the granting of privileges to slaves; and a judicial body to intercede between masters and slaves. New reformatory British laws and policies,

⁷ Brown, *Moral Capital*, 59-66; John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725–1775* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 199-224.

⁸ Brown, 74.

Ramsay believed, would bring about religious instruction and amelioration rather than direct appeals to slaveholders.⁹

The work of early missionaries and reformers was also integral to emergent antislavery movements in late eighteenth century England. Their accounts of the West Indies through pamphlets and tracts provided citizens of the metropole with information about slavery in the colonies and the reformative potential of the gospel. Antislavery advocates increasingly saw their best hopes for reform in the West Indian sugar colonies through the legal system, calling for an end to British involvement in the slave trade. In 1786 the twenty-six year old Cambridge University graduate Thomas Clarkson had several meetings with James Ramsay, whose writings had been informative in Clarkson's own thoughts on slavery. In 1787, along with the antislavery reformer Granville Sharp, Clarkson formed the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, describing the traffic as both "impolitick and unjust."¹⁰

With the passage of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807, its advocates believed the reforms they had sought could now take hold in the West Indies. William Wilberforce predicted that planters, no longer able to replenish their labor force through the trade, would now be forced to engage in the "breeding" of their slaves. The dynamics of this arrangement would necessitate that slave owners implement reforms to ensure the continued viability of their workforce. It would serve to limit the abuse of power by planters, and lead inevitably to the less harsh treatment of slaves. It would also compel planters to encourage among slaves the

⁹ James Ramsay, *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies* (London: J. Phillips, 1784), 263-291.

¹⁰ John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade 1787-1807* (London: Routledge, 2012), 70-74; Committee for the Abolition of Slavery (London), Meeting Minutes 22 May 1787, The British Library Online, London, England (Accessed April 16, 2016). See also, Thomas Clarkson, *The history of the rise, progress, and accomplishment of the abolition of the African slave-trade by the British Parliament* (London: Longman & Co., 1808; reprint, London: John W. Parker, 1839).

formation of family structure, proper socialization and Christianization, which they had heretofore neglected. This would naturally lead to the uplifting of the “degraded Negro,” who could be reformed and made ready to one day become a member of free society.¹¹

Missionaries flocked to the British Caribbean in the early nineteenth century soon after the abolition of the trade. “Negro Aid” societies in England raised funds to help those now engaged in charitable work and religious instruction among the slaves on colonial sugar plantations. The Society for the Relief of Distressed and Discarded Negroes in Antigua, Moravian Sunday Schools in Jamaica, and organizations like the Society for Promoting the Early Education and Improvement of Children of Negroes, all worked towards the reform of slaves and the amelioration of their conditions.¹²

Not all missionaries arriving in the West Indies brought with them antislavery sentiment. Larger religious societies continued to warn their recruits against engaging in politics. In a set of printed instructions the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society reminded workers that their “sole business” was “to promote the moral and religious improvement of the slaves.” Missionaries were warned against “interfering” in the “civil condition” of slaves, and told instead to preach to them a gospel of moral reform and obedience:

On all persons in the state of slavery, you are diligently and explicitly to enforce the same exhortations which the Apostles of our Lord administered to the slaves of ancient nations... " Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ... ”¹³

¹¹ William Wilberforce, *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1807), 119, 125-127; Mary Turner, *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 8-10.

¹² Claire Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), 53-54.

¹³ Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, *Statement of the plan, object, and effects of the Wesleyan missions in the West Indies* (London: Committee of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Church, 1824), 8.

For many missionaries the reformation of slaves remained compatible with slavery. Even for those who may have held antislavery views, the primary concern was the improvement of the lives of the former slaves—not their emancipation. This would be achieved by religious instruction, promoting marriage and discouraging immoral behavior such as stealing, gambling and other vices.¹⁴

Contrary to the hopes of antislavery reformers like Clarkson, however, the abolition of the slave trade did not lead to an amelioration of slavery. Colonial governments, dominated by elite planter interests, refused calls to implement or enforce required reforms. In the wake of the 1823 Demerara slave rebellion in British Guyana, Clarkson concluded that legal measures would once again need to be taken. Along with Parliamentarians Thomas Buxton and William Wilberforce, Clarkson founded the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions, popularly known as the British Antislavery Society. That May, in the House of Commons, Buxton, condemned West Indian slavery as “repugnant to the principles of the British Constitution and of the Christian Religion,” and called for a gradual abolition “throughout the British Colonies.”¹⁵

For this new abolitionist movement, the institution of slavery was itself an impediment against reform and improvement in the colonies. Missionary work was not enough, they contended, if it did not work against slavery. The English abolitionist Elizabeth Heyrick in 1824 chided that West Indian slaves could not be expected to take religious instruction from those who would not speak out against the immorality of slavery. In 1825 Lucy Townsend, founder of the Birmingham Ladies’ Antislavery Society for the Relief of Negro Slaves, reminded “noble-

¹⁴ Turner, 65-101.

¹⁵ Thomas Buxton quoted in Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178.

minded” missionaries that it was the colonial system that debased slaves. Reform and moral improvement would follow when the enslaved were delivered from “their cruel bondage, which reduces them to the brutish and demoralized state in which we find them.”¹⁶

Those missionaries arriving in the West Indies during this new abolitionist movement in the 1820s and 1830s fast found themselves in conflict with planters, who viewed their work with suspicion and indignation. After an 1831 slave insurrection in Jamaica, later called the Baptist War in reference to the religious denomination of the slaves involved, outraged planters leveled blame on missionaries, particularly the English Baptist Ministers William Knibb and Thomas Burchell. The rebellion was put down brutally, with the killing of over 500 slaves. White colonists took out their anger on religious houses for slaves as well, destroying chapels and places of prayer. Missionaries were hounded, tarred and feathered and molested in the streets, with a leading Anglican leader calling for antislavery Methodist and Baptist preachers to face extrajudicial hangings. Knibb and Burchell were imprisoned, managing to escape the gallows only by leaving the island entirely. An official colonial March 1832 report was unwavering on placing blame on religious reformers. It charged the rebellion had arisen from “a mischievous abuse existing in the system adopted by different religious sects in this Island, termed Baptists, Wesleyan Methodists and Moravians.”¹⁷

The slave insurrections, and the excesses of white colonial reprisals, helped turn public sentiment against the planters. Various nonconformists and religious reformers across denominations now called for abolition as the only means of bringing social improvement to the

¹⁶ Elizabeth Heyrick and Lucy Townsend quoted in Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, 55.

¹⁷ Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2008), 112; Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (London: Cornell University Press, 1982), 313-321.

colonies. With the passing of the British Emancipation Act in August 1833, new waves of missionaries arrived in the West Indies. This time, many came with the consent of colonial governments, who saw them as useful in the gradualist experiment of apprenticeship. Former slaves were expected to become faithful subjects who could properly fit into the spaces allotted them in English colonial society. In an open letter to the *Royal Gazette* in 1834, the new governor of Jamaica lectured the apprentices that their “own conduct” would decide if they were deserving of the freedom granted to them by a beneficent Empire. Missionaries would be relied upon to help police recently freed blacks, maintain the limits placed on their new freedoms, entice them to continue in their labor and thus maintain the status quo.¹⁸

For English missionaries, this was a task not unlike the greater outcomes expected by earlier reformation projects. As William Green notes, enlightened British paternalists saw the emerging emancipated colonies as existing under a hierarchical system, based on “gradations of West Indian society,” and ordered on class, race and cultural identity. Missionaries, abolitionists and colonial officials agreed that some form of “paternal guidance” was needed to “uplift” the former slaves. Their duty was, “to provide them religious instruction, to encourage Christian morality, to institute European marriage customs, and to extinguish” any African cultural forms such as obeah or myalism. The former slaves may have been inherently uncivilized as Africans, and doubly debased by slavery, but through moral instruction, education and Christianization, they would be reformed into diligent and obedient subjects.¹⁹

¹⁸ Morgan, 178-182; Green, 30-32; Reprint of the address by the Marquess of Sligo in *Liberator*, 20 September 1834.

¹⁹ Green, 30-32. Myalism and Obeah are syncretic forms of religious and spiritual practice derived in part from West Africa that were practiced in varied islands of the Caribbean. For missionaries, such “fetishisms” represented a challenge to creating strict Christian converts, and they sought desperately (with varying success) to stamp out its practice. See, Monica Schuler, “Myalism and the African Tradition,” *Savacou* (June 1970): 8-31; Margarite Fernández Olmos, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 159-180.

Missionaries had done similar work preceding the emancipation, denouncing African religious and cultural practices, such as dance and music, as profane and lascivious. Writing in 1832, a Bishop in Barbados spoke favorably of seeing the “disorderly and demoralizing” behavior of slaves on the Sabbath decreased in favor of proper Christian observation. The missionaries who arrived after emancipation carried similar sentiments. Missionaries also fretted over sexual promiscuity, low rates of marriage, piety and church attendance among former slaves. They saw it as their duty to improve the lives of former slaves, and helped establish schools, advocated for laborers, and worked towards the acquisition of land for freedmen. Many advocated a rigorous moral code, fearful that without instruction the former slaves would degenerate to idleness and immorality. Christian churches set up for freedmen and women discouraged religious practices outside accepted norms, including spiritualism or African “fetishism,” and insisted on both monogamy and sexual fidelity; a breach of either could result in expulsion from a religious congregation or community. Even the celebrations commemorating emancipation were policed, with missionaries insisting on quiet religious observances each August 1st for slaves, rather than festivities or raucous expressions. These strict moral codes often led to conflict between former slaves and missionaries, who sometimes saw the definitions and meanings of freedom starkly different.²⁰

Missionaries and envoys were sent regularly to the islands, to investigate and report on what progress had been made towards reform. These accounts circulated back across the Atlantic, to be touted by English abolitionists as examples of the success of emancipation. Accounts on the progress of the former slaves also circulated to North America, where Northern abolitionists would take a distinct interest in the workings of freedom and reform in the West

²⁰ Ibid., 307, 341, 344-345. See also, Robert J. Stewart, *Religion and Society in Post-emancipation Jamaica* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1992), 44-65.

Indies. Perhaps for Americans, in fact, the impact of reform in these foreign colonies was felt more acutely. Unlike England's geographic relationship to the Caribbean, the slaveholding states of the South were not distant colonies. And the four million black men, women and children who might emerge from bondage would have to be contended with on American soil. For American abolitionists, the reformatory outcome of emancipation in the British colonies could provide both example and possibility for what could happen in America upon the arrival of Jubilee.

Reform and American Abolitionism

The transformation in American abolitionism in the 1830s coincided and grew out of several larger social currents of the era. The most prominent of these was the Second Great Awakening, which swept the young nation with evangelical fervor in the early nineteenth century. The Awakening was in part a reaction to a growth in urbanization, the transition to an industrialized society and the loosening of the ties between church and state. To combat what the Connecticut Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher termed an "injury to the cause of Christ," evangelicals called for a break from old structures of church life and promoted universal salvation based on lay conversion. They endorsed emotion and sentimentality over rationality and emphasized personal piety and moral improvement. Utilizing the emerging power of print, these evangelicals disseminated bibles, religious tracts and treatises on moral reform to spread Protestant revivalism throughout the young Republic. They also turned to religious voluntarism, urging the formation of "societies, missions, and revivals" to nurture a democratization of American Christianity that could transform society. "The great aim of the Christian Church in its relation to the present life," Beecher pronounced, "is not only to renew the individual man, but

also to reform human society.” One of those attempts at societal reform Beecher embraced was temperance, the movement against alcoholic consumption.²¹

Concerns on the intemperance of drinking and its moral effects existed among earlier reformers in British North America. The Quaker Anthony Benezet had written on the harmful effects of distilled spirits in 1774, naming it a “mighty destroyer.” In a 1785 medical treatise fellow Quaker Benjamin Rush charged that distilled spirits harmed the body and soul: impairing memory, debilitating understanding, and perverting the moral faculties. The “demoralizing effects of distilled spirits,” Rush contended, was comparable to Biblical stories of demonic possession, producing “not only falsehood, but fraud, theft, uncleanness, and murder.”²² It was during the Second Great Awakening however that the temperance movement in America began in earnest. Physicians like Rush had believed alcoholism and its attendant maladies could be remedied. Later revivalists like Beecher instead sought a religious solution to the numerous hardships thought to arise out of America’s consumption of alcohol: including drunkenness, domestic violence and social degeneration.²³

Beecher had embraced temperance in 1812. While other advocates called for moderation in drink, Beecher in contrast called for a complete reformation. In 1825, through the American

²¹ Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 19-43, 164-165; Louis Billington, “The Perfect Law of Liberty’: Radical Religion and the Democratization of New England, 1780-1840” in David K. Adams, Cornelius A. Van Minnen eds. *Religious and Secular Reform in America: Ideas, Beliefs, and Social Change* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 29-50; Charles Beecher ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, Volume 1* (New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1864), 344-345.

²² Maurice Jackson, *Let this Voice be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 80, 97; Anthony Benezet, *The Mighty Destroyer Displayed, in Some Account of the Dreadful Havoc Made by the Mistaken Use as Well as Abuse of Distilled Spiritous Liquors* (Philadelphia: Crukshank, 1774); Benjamin Rush, *An inquiry into the effects of ardent spirits upon the human body and mind: with an account of the means of preventing, and of the remedies for curing them*, 8th ed. (Boston: James Loring, 1823), 11.; Peter Turner Winskill and Frederic Richard Lees, *The Temperance Movement and Its Workers: A Record of Social, Moral, Religious, and Political Progress, Volumes 1-2* (London: Blackie & Son Limited, 1893).

²³ Howe, 166-168.

Tract Society, he published his *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance*, demanding total abstinence from the “moral ruin” of alcohol. In 1826 he helped found The American Temperance Society, which, through a call for individual reformation, worked “for the suppression of the intemperate use of intoxicating liquors.”²⁴ Temperance societies and their pamphlets soon spread across the country. Like the Awakening, the call for abstinence found mass appeal: from urban to rural environments, among men and women, whites and blacks. In its attempt to change behavior through individual reform, the American Temperance Society also provided a model for national movements focused on addressing other societal problems. These included poverty, prostitution, atheism, Sabbath breaking, lewdness and signs of moral disintegration; the most prominent was antislavery.²⁵

In the early nineteenth century, American antislavery was a movement comprised mostly of religious moralists and free African-Americans. Inspired in part by the First Great Awakening, Quaker radicals like Benjamin Lay and Anthony Benezet had written and disseminated tracts against slavery since the mid-eighteenth century. Free African-Americans Richard Allen and Absalom Jones had also pioneered moral arguments against slavery in the early Republic. In 1790 the two penned “An Address To Those Who Keep Slaves and Uphold the Practice.” In the pamphlet, Allen and Jones warned that slavery was “hateful...in the sight of God,” and reminded slaveholders that divine judgment awaited them much as it had been delivered on the oppressors

²⁴ Howe, 166-168; Lyman Beecher, *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance* (New York: American Tract Society, 1827), 9.

²⁵ Howe, 182-184; Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3, 50-56.

of the Israelites. If slaveholders loved their children and their country, they would “clear their hands” of the burden of slavery.²⁶

In 1808 the United States abolished the slave trade. In the wake of the American Revolution, gradual emancipation had also begun in Pennsylvania, New York, New England and other Northern states. Much of this had been the work of early antislavery reformers, including free African-Americans and religious organizations like the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Despite these victories, by the mid-nineteenth century slavery was expanding in the South. This was due in part to the invention of the cotton gin in 1794 and the opening up of lands to the West in 1812. The ensuing cotton revolution of the 1820s made slavery profitable both to Southern agrarians and the interdependent textile and shipping manufacturing of the North. With the Missouri Compromise in 1819, which allowed slavery to take root in newly entering states, the nation appeared to have tied its economic fate to slavery.²⁷

For revivalists and reformers during the Second Great Awakening, it was difficult to ignore the institution of human bondage that appeared to invite many of the moral vices they inveighed against. The physical abuse and inhuman treatment that accompanied slavery was antithetical to the religious humanitarian impulses of reform. Moreover, if all men were truly created in God’s image, then slavery was an abomination that contradicted the tenets of universal

²⁶ Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014); Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, “A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia (1794)” in Richard Newman, Patrick Rael and Philip Lapsansky eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (Routledge: New York, 2001), 42. More will be discussed of African-Americans and the Second Great Awakening in Chapter Four of the manuscript.

²⁷ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 213-342; James Brewer Stewart and Eric Foner, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 36-39; for growth of cotton revolution and American slavery, see Eugene Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

salvation. For some reformers, it seemed to follow only naturally that the reforms against social immoralities like alcohol should be tied to the social sin of slavery. In 1817 the Ohio Quaker Charles Osborn's newspaper the *Philanthropist* dedicated itself to temperance and antislavery. Elihu Embree's Tennessee based *Manumission Intelligencer* in 1819 promoted temperance and morality, before renaming itself the *Emancipator* in 1820 and dedicating itself to antislavery. Lyman Beecher in his 1825 *Six Sermons* likened slavery to intemperance, declaring both "must be regarded as sinful, impolitic and dishonorable."²⁸

Reform movements drew young religious men like William Lloyd Garrison. At twenty-two, in an 1827 letter to the *Boston Courier*, Garrison described himself as "a friend to the poor...a lover of morality, and an enemy to vice."²⁹ By this time Garrison's advocacy of reform and his experience in publishing, caught the attention of the Boston Baptist Minister William Collier. Collier published newspapers dedicated to both the temperance movement and popular reform minded religious revivalism. In 1828, Collier invited Garrison to co-edit his temperance newspaper the *National Philanthropist*, whose slogan read "Moderate drinking is the downhill road to intemperance and drunkenness."³⁰

Collier also introduced the young editor to another reformer, the Quaker Benjamin Lundy. Garrison already viewed slavery as part of the larger reform movement. But Lundy's accounts of slavery's evils, which he depicted in his antislavery newspaper the *Genius of*

²⁸ Stewart and Foner, 36-39; Howe, 168; Timothy Beal, *Religion in America: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 78-80; George Washington Julian, *The Ranks of Charles Osborn as an Anti-Slavery Pioneer* (Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1891); Asa E. Martin, "Pioneer Anti-Slavery Press," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 2 no. 4 (1916): 511-513; Beecher, *Six Sermons*, 64-65.

²⁹ Garrison to the Editor of the *Boston Courier*, February 8, 1827, in eds. Walter McIntosh Merrill, Louis Ruchames, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: I will be heard, 1822-1835* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 26.

³⁰ Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 49-50.

Universal Emancipation, convinced Garrison that the institution of human bondage was the greatest moral concern of the age. In September 1829 Garrison joined Lundy in Baltimore to work on the *Genius*, where he fervently took up the antislavery cause.³¹

Much of Garrison's early antislavery efforts mirrored the conservative sentiments of revivalists like Lyman Beecher, who advocated gradual emancipation and supported the American Colonization Society. Garrison had been in Beecher's Boston congregation in 1828 and had listened to evangelical sermons that called for a national reform movement and denounced slavery as a heinous sin. But the young newspaper editor was hearing other voices on antislavery. In Boston, Collier had introduced him to the congregation of the African Baptist Church pastored by the Reverend Thomas Paul that engaged in antislavery, missionary and reform work from New York to Haiti. Garrison sat in on these sermons and became acquainted with Boston's African-American community where he likely heard more radical calls for antislavery reform.³² While working at the *Genius* Garrison also visited Philadelphia, where he was introduced to the antislavery writings of Richard Allen and James Forten denouncing colonization and calling for an end to slavery. By late 1829 Garrison had moved away from colonization and gradual emancipation, declaring that immediate emancipation was the only solution to the moral reform of slavery.³³

In 1830, Garrison wrote his former pastor Lyman Beech, imploring the elder revivalist to help him create a national newspaper and a national reform movement to work against slavery.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Denis Brennan, *The Making of an Abolitionist: William Lloyd Garrison's Path to Publishing The Liberator* (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2014), 116. The African Baptist Church was also known as the African Church.

³³ Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998, 49-50; Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 113-120.

Like the American Temperance Society and Beecher's unwavering stance against moderation in drink, Garrison envisioned an antislavery campaign that would make no compromise with slaveholders. Beecher declined, stating "I have too many irons in the fire to put in another," likely referring to his dedication to temperance. Garrison replied: "you had better let all your irons burn than neglect your duty to the slave." Beecher commended Garrison for his "zeal" in reform, but urged him to "give up his fanatical notions" of immediate emancipation.³⁴ Garrison however believed that the abstinence demanded by temperance should be applied to the greater moral outrage of slavery. This uncompromising stance of reformation was printed in Garrison's first edition of the *Liberator*, where he declared, "I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation... I will not equivocate."³⁵

For William Lloyd Garrison and the new abolitionist movement of the 1830s, slavery was a sin for the nation and the slaveholders it protected, who he charged with violating "all injunctions of the Gospel" in holding fellow men and women in bondage. Slavery's degenerative effects were felt most acutely by slaves, subjecting them "to every species of torture" and "degrading them to a level of the beasts." Slave life was one of sexual immorality that lacked the sanctioned structure of marriage, forcing its victims "to live in a state of uncleanness and pollution surpassed by nothing in Sodom or Gomorrah."³⁶ Forbidden to read and write, the slave, Garrison said, was even kept from receiving the evangelical message of revivalism: "The letters of the alphabet are caballistical to his [the slave] eyes. A thick darkness broods over his soul.

³⁴ The account of the meeting between William Lloyd Garrison and Lyman Beecher was recounted by Wendell Phillips and retold further in the works of Garrison's children with slight variations. See, Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children* (New York: Century Company, 1885), 130; Wendell Phillips, "Philosophy of the Abolition Movement," Speech to the Massachusetts Antislavery Society (January 27, 1853), in *Speeches, Lectures and Letters* (Boston: James Redpath, 1863), 130.

³⁵ *Liberator*, 1 January 1831.

³⁶ Garrison quoted in Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers*, 128.

Even the ‘glorious gospel of the blessed God,’ which brings life and immortality to perishing man, is as a sealed book to his understanding.”³⁷

The only solution to bring about both a reform of society, and the reform of the slave, was the immediate abolition of slavery. However, the improvement of free blacks in the urban North following gradual emancipation attempts remained a contentious debate. White conservatives like the American Colonization Society argued that freedom had ruined former slaves, and complained that free black Northern communities were ripe with degeneracy and vice beyond moral redemption. White Manumission Societies and free black clergy and newspapers in turn urged free blacks to live pious and moral lives, to counter such depictions.³⁸ But none of the gradual emancipation attempts in the North could match the proposed immediate emancipation of four million slaves who labored within Southern plantation economies. Just as much as abolitionists needed an experiment of mass free labor to plead their case, they required an experiment of mass reform. They would search for it in the emancipated British West Indies.

The Triumph of Freedom and Reform

Even before British Abolition had passed, American antislavery newspapers looked to free blacks in the British colonies as evidence of the moral improvement emancipation could bring. Proslavery advocates predicted that “the enfranchised Negroes” of the West Indies would “act with violence” towards their former masters and “bring the planters to ruin, refusing to

³⁷ William Lloyd Garrison, to Ebenezer Dole, 14 July 1830, Transcript from The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York, GLC 4516.

³⁸ William Lloyd Garrison, *THOUGHTS ON AFRICAN COLONIZATION: or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832) 125-134; Tunde Adeleke, “Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830’s,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 83, No. 2 (Spring, 1998): 127-128. More on free African-Americans and moral reform is discussed in Chapter Four of the manuscript.

work.” Benjamin Lundy’s *Genius* responded to these claims by detailing “a number of well authenticated facts and statements” on “the Negro character” in the British West Indies. This was done, by comparing the smaller free black population of the British Caribbean with their enslaved brethren. The article noted that free West Indian blacks were “uniformly peaceable and subordinate” to the whites of the island, even when through sheer numbers the latter were “almost wholly at their mercy.” This was said to be their “natural disposition,” described as “gentle, amiable, grateful, affectionate, and docile.”³⁹

Inherent in this supposition was that more negative traits were in fact common among those blacks in bondage; however it was the inherent corrupting influence of slavery that created such vices, the article argued. West Indian blacks were described as innately “subject to the influence of religion, both on his feelings and on his conduct; and ... he is active and laborious when placed in circumstances in which his conduct can be improved.” As evidence, the free blacks of the West Indies were described as prosperous, obedient and “industriously employed for their own benefit,” all traits lacking in their enslaved brethren and unattainable while in a state of bondage.⁴⁰

In April 1833, the *Liberator*, pulling from British documents, reprinted a statistical analysis on “the state of pauperism” among free blacks in the British West Indies colonies. In Barbados it was claimed that but with a single exception, the 998 impoverished persons supported by the state were white. In Berbice there were reportedly only two black paupers as opposed to 17 white ones. The same paucity of black poor, the paper confirmed, could be found in Jamaica, Nevis, Trinidad and elsewhere, in comparison to their more numerous white

³⁹ *Genius*, 30 October 1830.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

counterparts. Certainly, the article argued, there were more impoverished whites in England than there were impoverished blacks in the colonies. Not only this, but Jamaica showed a higher proportion of criminal convictions for whites than blacks. “Incontestable testimony,” was given “to the good conduct of the freed black and the colored people” of the colonies, who “apply themselves to some kind of industry” and “are never seen begging.”⁴¹

The free black populace was described as gainfully employed, favorable to education, religious, church going and sober. “Can any one read these statements, made by the Colonists themselves, and still think it necessary to keep the negroes in slavery, lest they should be unable to maintain themselves if free?” the article asked. “There is clearly much more reason, on this ground, for reducing the poor whites both in the West Indies and in England, to slavery, than for retaining the negroes in that state.”⁴²

With the enactment of British Emancipation in 1834, American abolitionists kept a close scrutiny on the moral habits, daily life and behavior of free blacks in the West Indies. The moral character of the former West Indian slaves had to be judged by someone of credible standing. To that end, accounts were often taken from reputable contacts such as white clergymen, missionaries and educators who now worked among the former slaves. A July 1835 *Liberator* article relied on a letter from a Wesleyan missionary from the Bahamas who noted that since emancipation, along with an increase in marriage between former slaves, “services of religion are well attended, and vice is becoming less audacious.”⁴³

⁴¹ *Liberator*, 6 April 1833.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Liberator*, 11 July 1835.

Public safety was of paramount concern, refuting proslavery arguments that with freedom blacks would resort to pillaging or criminality. A *Liberator* article in March 1836 dismissed claims of violence as misguided, citing “a Christian, and a man of observation” who had resided in Barbados and Jamaica since 1834. “As to the effects of emancipation upon the public safety,” the contact stated, “they now laugh at the idea of fear.” Even the planters, “who have opposed the abolition of slavery, step by step to the last are now in favor of it.”⁴⁴

How free blacks conducted themselves on a daily basis, in a social and legal manner, was indicative of their state of progress after bondage ended. Emancipation, the confidant observed, had made the former slaves less impudent and “more civil.” Even the once “barbarous” speech of the blacks was being replaced with “English” through education. “The negro dialect will soon disappear,” the confidant assured, “as well as the negro habits.” There was as well a focus on the decline in alleged promiscuity among former slave women and the rise in formal marriages. “The colored women,” it was reported, “who used to be kept as concubines of white men, are now getting colored husbands.” Fears of sexual co-mingling were also put to rest, as emancipation was said to “separate the two races.” With such promising beginnings, in twenty years the confidant declared the former slaves would “have all the blessings of civilization, freedom and religion.”⁴⁵

Citing a “highly respectable gentleman, who had long resided in Jamaica,” A May 1836 *Liberator* article provided readers with what it hailed as “FACTS FROM THE WEST INDIES.” The gentleman claimed that not only could the former slaves be considered socially well-behaved under emancipation, their “moral condition” too was said to be “much improved.” As

⁴⁴ *Liberator*, 4 March 1836.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

evidence, he noted that during the Christmas holidays “there was not a single arrest for improper conduct.”⁴⁶ Relying on the word of “English papers,” an August 1836 *Liberator* article described the recently freed blacks of the colonies as “more cheerful” and “happy,” as emancipation had “been most salutary upon both master and slave.”⁴⁷

In their paternalism, these reformist impulses reflected the attitudes of the age. In America, similar language of reform and moral improvement was used to depict the white poor of urban America, whose impoverished lives were linked to anti-social behavior, promiscuity, violence and other depravities. The rhetoric of reform used to describe free slaves, and the measurements of progress, were shaped for a particular audience: often middle-class members of society with definitive expectations of respectability, morality and domesticity. These were further informed by racial attitudes and preconceptions of black behavior, which reformers believed could be studied, observed and compiled into data to be interpreted and disseminated to convert the sympathies of fellow Americans.⁴⁸

In November 1836 the New York *Anti-Slavery Record*, the print arm of the American Anti-Slavery Society, published a twelve-page tract entitled “Facts in Regard to the Working of the British Abolition Act.” Setting a standard for the methodical, scientific, approach of defending British Emancipation that would continue for the next three decades, the tract covered nearly every island in the British Caribbean. It sought “to give a condensed view” of the effects of emancipation using parliamentary papers from the British House of Commons. Readers were urged to remember that these statements were “official,” drawing a distinct contrast with

⁴⁶ *Liberator*, 14 May 1836. The article was reprinted from the *Anti-Slavery Record*.

⁴⁷ *Liberator*, 27 August 1836.

⁴⁸ For more on the language of nineteenth century reform and its depiction of corrupt of urban society, see Robert Fitts, “The Rhetoric of Reform: The Five Points Missions and the Cult of Domesticity,” *Historical Archaeology* 35, no. 3 (2001) : 115-132.

proslavery depictions, which abolitionists assailed as rumors or outright slander. From Barbados to Tobago, the former slaves were described as “perfectly orderly” and content, incontrovertible evidence in abolitionists’ eyes of the safety and transformative nature of immediate emancipation.⁴⁹

In a December 1836 *Liberator* article the noted abolitionist and philanthropist Gerritt Smith, relying on the letter of an American “gentleman” living in the West Indies, similarly reported the blacks of the colonies as “cheerful and harmless.” The correspondent confirmed that “all the predictions . . . of massacres, insurrections . . . were no better than nursery tales.” The former slaves had been brought “under the influence of religion,” as the whites of the colonies realized “their safety and interest” were dependent on black “moral character and religious improvement.” There had been a “prodigious increase” in public schools, as well as marriages, observations of the Sabbath and improvements in dress. The “greatness of the change for the better” was said to be “quite evident and undisputed,” despite the claims of detractors. Were the “opposers of abolition in the United States, including slaveholders,” to spend a few months in the British colonies, Smith declared, “abolition societies might dissolve themselves at once—their occupation would be gone.”⁵⁰

But anti-abolitionists claimed their own evidence to the contrary. Throughout February 1837, the editor James Birney of the Ohio-based abolitionist newspaper *Philanthropist* engaged in a running debate with the *Cincinnati Republican* over the effects of emancipation in the West Indies. In a mocking article entitled, “Glorious Fruits of Abolitionism in Barbadoes [sic],” the *Republican* used a dossier reportedly published in Barbados showing the criminality of freed

⁴⁹ *Anti-Slavery Record*, November 1836.

⁵⁰ *Liberator*, 9 December 1836.

slaves as a challenge to Birney. “Burglary, larceny, murders and other crimes seem to be the things of common occurrence,” the paper noted. Singled out in particular was the story of a black nursemaid who “out of revenge” used a scissor to stab the white infant of her former master.⁵¹

In a lengthy rebuttal, Birney dismissed the *Republican* editor as part of an American press willfully duped by a “West India slave party.” He charged major American news journals with republishing “exaggerated and false statements as to the condition of things in the West Indies” in order to delude the American people. “Were it not for the abolition papers,” Birney asserted, “...the people of the United States would be excluded entirely from any correct knowledge of the state of things in the West Indies.”⁵²

Seeing themselves as the only reliable source on the social and moral state of the emancipated West Indies, American abolitionists were not content with only secondary accounts to make their case. In May 1836 at the annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York, the abolitionist and journalist Henry B. Stanton had proposed the sending of “two or more agents” to visit the British West Indies. Their purpose would be to “collect and transmit” back to the United States “facts from official and unofficial sources relative to the condition of the colored population” of the islands. The agents were to gather information on “the effect of the various systems of emancipation there adopted,” and assess “the physical, agricultural, commercial, educational, and religious prosperity” of the islands’ inhabitants. In November of that year, the New York American Anti-Slavery Society sent Joseph Horace Kimball and James A. Thome as their agents, on their six-month tour of the English West

⁵¹ *Philanthropist*, 17 February 1837.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Indies. Their purpose, as outlined by Stanton and reported in Osborn's *Philanthropist*, was to determine the effects of "the great experiment of freedom."⁵³

While analyzing the workings of free labor was part of their mission, so too was measuring the rate of moral improvement and reform. In their tours of black villages, church gatherings and schools, Kimball and Thome interviewed missionaries, clergymen and educators. They interviewed former slaves as well, and asked them about their daily social habits, progress in education, church attendance, marriage, vices and more. Taking copious notes, both men related in great detail their various encounters, even transcribing their interviews with former slaves. In 1838, the American Anti-Slavery Society published the results of Kimball and Thome's expedition in a 500-page report entitled *Emancipation in the West Indies*.⁵⁴

Included among their findings was that immediate emancipation had caused no disorder or disturbances in the British West Indies, and that the former slaves were "perceptibly rising in the scale of civilization, morals, and religion."⁵⁵ Antigua received the most favorable reporting, as the island had seen immediate emancipation and avoided the transition of the apprenticeship. In Antigua, Kimball and Thome noted the moral condition of the entire island was "rapidly brightening," as white men no longer took slave women as concubines. Prior to emancipation, "it had been customary for married men...to keep one or two colored mistresses," the report noted. But the practice had become increasingly "disreputable." The former slaves of Antigua were reported as being exceedingly polite, and they described men and women who bowed and

⁵³ *Third annual report of the American Anti-Slavery Society : with the speeches delivered at the anniversary meeting, held in the city of New-York on the 10th May, 1836 : and the minutes of the meetings of the society for business* (New York: s.n., 1836), 29; *Philanthropist*, 21 July 1837.

⁵⁴ James A. Thome and J. Horace Kimball. *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York: Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), v-vi.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, vi.

curtsied to whites upon the road. The former slaves were now also more pious, attending church services on the Sabbath and celebrating Christmas not with “dance or drunken riot, nor wild shouts of mirth,” which had typified the occasion during slavery, but solemn prayer and religious services.⁵⁶

Indeed, the disposition of the freed slaves was found to be much improved with freedom, which had brought out their innate amiability: “the negroes were an affectionate people...Any kindness shown them by a white person, was treasured up and never forgotten...To shake hands with a white person is a gratification which they highly prize.”⁵⁷ An interview with one former slave, who the authors called “Grandfather Jacob,” related both the degradation of slavery and the moral improvement that had taken place in its wake. “You see old Jacob?” the former slave related, “de old sinner use to go on drinkin’, swearin’, dancin’, fightin’! No God—no Savior—no soul!” He praised emancipation as a “kind blessin from our Savior! Him make we all free.” When told by Kimball and Thome that there were yet slaves in America, Grandfather Jacob reportedly exclaimed, “Ah, de Savior make we free, and he will make dem free too. He come to Antigo [Antigua] first—he’ll be in Merico [America] soon.”⁵⁸

Reform in the emancipated West Indies was often measured by the rate of marriage among former slaves, in particular women. In Antigua, Kimball and Thome concluded that the moral lives of blacks had “essentially improved” with the onset of emancipation, a vast change from the “revolting” conditions during slavery. Marriages, it was reported, were “rapidly increasing,” replacing what had been the “promiscuous intercourse of the sexes.” Citing

⁵⁶ Ibid., 33, 36-37.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 67-68.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 69-70.

statistical data from a local missionary society, Kimball and Thome highlighted the growth in “regular marriages” among the former slaves. “It appears that the whole number of marriages during *ten years* previous to emancipation,” they reported, “...was but *half* as great as the number for a single year following emancipation.”⁵⁹ Marriage, both men contended, had curbed “licentiousness” in black women, who were using “great strictness” to preserve their daughters’ chastity. This moral improvement among freed black women was linked to their material and financial wellbeing. Kimball and Thome observed in contrast that those women who lived outside of marriage were “uniformly neglected” and in their immorality “suffered great deprivations.” As evidence their report pointed to two of the most impoverished women on the island. Unmarried, the women were described by a white planter as living in a “miserable and despised” state, that served as warning for other blacks on the dangers of moral lapses. For those former slaves who chose a reformed life, freedom had given “the death blow to open vice” and enabled the flourishing of “self-respect, attachment to law, and veneration for God.”⁶⁰

Temperance proved to be another indicator of moral improvement, which Kimball and Thome wrote of in detail. In Antigua it was pointed out that the first temperance society began in 1836. The authors attributed its founding to emancipation, and described it as “one of the guardian angels which hastened to the island as soon as the demon of slavery was cast out.” The report found that temperance societies had sprung up not only in towns, but also on the various estates (plantations) on which free blacks now labored. “Teetotalism” was described as common among those who during slavery had been prone to “spirituous liquors.” Planters on several estates were heralded for discontinuing the slave-era practice of giving rum or other alcohol to

⁵⁹ Ibid., 97-98.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 99-100, 102-103.

workers, who instead were now gifted sugar or molasses. What followed from this, Kimball and Thome asserted, was a greater religious observance among the former slaves. A general atmosphere of “domestic peace and quietness,” they observed, now replaced the “discord and strife” known previously.⁶¹

What were termed “friendly societies,” sponsored and created by missionaries, also sprouted up on the island to morally guide the laboring class of former slaves. In Antigua, Kimball and Thome presented readers with detailed reports of groups “designed exclusively for the benefit of the negro population.” Their purpose was “to encourage sobriety and industry, and to check disorderly and immoral conduct.” Most of these societies obtained funding through membership dues, and were formed through established church organizations. Kimball and Thome noted that morality was encouraged among freed persons in the societies, and their behavior determined the mutual aid they could receive from the group. Anyone who was “disabled by drunkenness, debauchery or disorderly living,” was forbidden from receiving assistance from the society.⁶²

Further, any member, man or woman, found guilty of “adultery or fornication,” risked expulsion. Those expelled from the church or who committed an offence punishable by the colonial magistrate, forfeited their membership. In what was a common theme, the societies as well encouraged marriage, and gifts were given to couples that bore children in wedlock. The societies also gave rewards to “married persons living faithfully” or any single person who yet lived a virtuous life. Members were discouraged and forbidden from public “drunkenness, tippling [excessive drinking], gambling, revelling, fighting, quarrelling, swearing, lying,

⁶¹ Ibid., 107-108. Teetotalism was an American term by reform advocates in which “Capital T” Temperance called for total abstinence from alcohol.

⁶² Ibid., 108-110. [brackets mine]

slandering, angry and bitter words, insolent language, and indecent discourse,” or they would accrue fines and risk suspension.⁶³

The manner in which former slaves both celebrated and commemorated the passing of emancipation was also scrutinized for evidence of proper behavior. Kimball and Thome provided readers several accounts of August 1st 1834, as related to them by persons on the island. The former slaves were described as orderly, gathering in chapels and churches in prayer and thanksgiving. Missionaries in turn were said to read them passage from Bibles, “exhorting the freed people to be industrious, steady, obedient...and to show themselves in all things worthy of the high boon which God had conferred upon them.” The report assured readers that “the day was like a Sabbath,” and that the former slaves showed no gaiety, even dressing in simple and modest fashion. Throughout the island, it was claimed there was “not a single dance known...nor so much as a fiddle played.” The former slaves were praised for the lack of riotous assembles, drunken carousals, debauchery, violence or carnage.⁶⁴

Kimball and Thome also made a visit to a parochial school in Antigua’s capital city St. John’s, to witness the education of free black children. There they found over a hundred and fifty students representing the color spectrum of freed persons, “from the deepest hue of the Ethiopian, to the faintest shadowing of brown.” The report made note that the children’s clothing was “clean and tidy,” which both men remarked provided “good evidence of careful mothers at home.” Students were then asked to show their proficiency to the visitors by reciting passages from the Bible, exhibiting their penmanship, and solving arithmetic. To make certain they were not simply reciting from rote memory, Kimball and Thome put their own questions to the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 145-147.

students. They declared satisfactorily that the black students displayed “as much attention, respectfulness, and general intelligence as any school of the same age.”⁶⁵

The two men visited a second school in the country made up of students who had recently been removed from slavery. Here they noted that the young children were doing surprisingly well, able to read from a donated Bible and write with credible penmanship. Most noticeably, the teachers at this school were former slaves, and were also examined for their moral and social progress. Readers were informed that these new black teachers were “pious” and exerted “a happy influence on the morals of their pupils.” Undesirable traits such as “falsehood and theft,” desecrated as common during slavery, had greatly lessened. And in their new respected roles as teachers, these former slaves had begun to “have a regard to character,” imbuing them with a sense of right and wrong and the “power of resisting temptation.” Emancipation had allowed former slaves to pull children from the “sordid huts” of “ignorance and misery,” and expose them to the Bible, and thus guaranteeing greater morality, education and civilization. Readers were urged to remember that in the United States, in contrast, “thousands of such children” yet lived “under the yoke and scourge, in utter darkness and heathenism.”⁶⁶

The Bible was the key text in many of these schools. As Kimball and Thome reported, “as soon as children have learned to read, the Bible is put into their hands.” The children were said to commit verses to memory, especially “those passages which inculcate obedience to law...prohibitions against stealing, lying, cheating, [and] idleness.” These passages were morals that instilled the habit of industry, and were “reiterated day and night.” Students were also taught through the use of hymns and songs, all of which implored obedience, friendship, a love of

⁶⁵ Ibid, 114-117.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 117-121.

school and “the sinfulness of sloth, of lying, and stealing.” The report stated emphatically that this was evidence that “negroes were as capable of receiving instruction” as anyone else. A planter, one of “age and long experience on the island,” was quoted as stating: “The negroes are as capable of culture as any people on earth...It is slavery alone that has degraded the negro.”⁶⁷

While Kimball and Thome presented Antigua as the best evidence on the reformatory results of immediate emancipation, their views of Barbados and Jamaica were generally favorable on the reform brought about by freedom. While finding greater rates of improvement in Antigua, in their investigations they detailed a general rise across all the islands in temperance and education. There was as well increased marriage, a greater trustworthiness of emancipated blacks, a new importance placed on the Christian religion among freed slaves and the overall improved morality that now existed throughout the British West Indian isles.

For the American abolitionist movement, Kimball and Thome’s fact-finding expedition provided incalculable, providing easily accessible, first hand evidence that refuted negative depictions of British Emancipation. Abolitionist newspapers ranging from Garrison’s Boston based *Liberator* to the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society’s *Pennsylvania Freeman*, all reprinted excerpts from *Emancipation in the West Indies* to bolster their arguments for immediate emancipation. The reformatory impulse so important to American abolitionism had proved successful in the emancipated British colonies. Whatever moral licentiousness black West Indians had previously shown during their bondage, had been eradicated through emancipation. Slavery encouraged idleness, irreligious behavior, criminality, promiscuity, and in doing so degraded its victims. But as with the drinker, the impoverished and the habitual sinner, they too could be brought up from their low state and rehabilitated as citizens.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 128-130.

To make their case for the reformatory power of emancipation, Kimball and Thome depicted the slaves in the West Indies as subjects of a social experiment. It was not enough that freed persons were living in improved material conditions; their behavior was critically scrutinized, analyzed and observed. Both men worked in collusion with missionaries and the colonial government, formulating judgments that placed black West Indians under a measuring gaze. The book they eventually compiled circulated widely in abolitionist circles, inviting readers to play the role of spectators, as black behavior was scrutinized to determine its preparedness for freedom. American abolitionism saw in British Emancipation a reformatory experiment that could be adapted to their struggle against slavery at home. Emancipation would both remove a terrible sin from the country, and provide moral uplift and guidance for several million persons who yet lived in the daily degradation and debasement of bondage. This goal fit seamlessly into the reform-minded appeals of the era, and the recently freed English colonies of the Caribbean gave evidence that freedom could succeed.

The standard set by Kimball and Thome's extended beyond the abolitionist press. A November 1837 article in the Boston based *Zion's Herald*, the only Northern Methodist newspaper that did not condemn abolition, reprinted the accounts of a Baptist missionary minister who worked in Jamaica. While speaking positively on the industriousness of the former slaves, the missionary reminded readers that "it is to the moral improvement of the people we look as the best safeguard" for the continued stability of the island. He also waylaid fears of sexual boundary crossing with the coming of emancipation, by pointing to improved moral

conduct among former slave women. The “abominable” practice of concubinage, he reported, had become disreputable. And “the bugbear amalgamation” was now greatly diminished.⁶⁸

In 1838 the Unionist governor of Massachusetts Edward Everett, who had previously opposed abolition, admitted openly that Kimball and Thome’s book had swayed him to the possibility of immediate emancipation. In May 1838 the abolitionist *Pennsylvania Freeman* reprinted a letter from Everett to the Boston abolitionist Edmund Quincy after a favorable reading of *Emancipation in the West Indies*. The governor stated that his opposition to emancipation had been based on Southern claims for its “Necessity,” and his fears that abolishing slavery would have “disastrous” consequences. However, he believed that the freeing of “nearly a million slaves in the British Colonies,” if successful, “would seal the fate of slavery throughout the civilized world.” After reading the “observations of Messrs. Thome and Kimball,” Governor Everett proclaimed that, “beyond a doubt...the experiment of immediate emancipation...has fully succeeded.” Based on the “unquestionable authorities contained in the work,” it appeared that British Emancipation had commenced “without danger to the master.” The governor pronounced the book would “have a powerful effect on public opinion, not only in the Northern states but in the slaveholding states.”⁶⁹

The *Pennsylvania Freeman* predicted Kimball and Thome’s book would convert others, and that it was “destined...to accomplish more in the work of emancipation” in the United States, “than any other instrument whatsoever.” If immediate emancipation was safe in the

⁶⁸ *Zion’s Herald*, 1 November 1837. The paper was the print arm of the Boston Wesleyan Association who engaged regularly in missionary work. The Baptist minister noted that there were a minority of interracial liaisons between white men and women of color, but these he depicted as voluntary rather than the exploitative relationships that typified slavery.

⁶⁹ Governor Edward Everett to Edmund Quincy in *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 10 May 1838.

British West Indies, the paper surmised, then it was “obvious to every person of common sense” that it was safe in America.⁷⁰

Not only abolitionist newspapers were paying attention to eyewitness reports on the workings of emancipation in the Caribbean colonies. An 1839 report by an English reverend recently returned from the West Indies circulated among mainstream American newspapers as well. The Philadelphia *North American* reprinted the reverend’s report showing an increase in the industrial output from the islands. Alongside a listing of exports and crop production from the individual colonies, were also statistics on crime. All claimed to show a marked diminution in criminal behavior since emancipation, with findings that in Trinidad “those imprisoned for murder were all white.” The local police reported a decrease in their ranks, no longer needed in the face of a more reformed free black populace. The reverend assured readers that according to “the principal records,” there were no cases of an “emancipated black” assaulting any white man on the isles.⁷¹

English abolitionists also understood the impact of reform in the British West Indies on public opinion in the United States as well. A London article reprinted in an October 1839 edition of the *New Hampshire Gazette*, featured a letter by an English writer extolling the importance of “the experiment in process of trial in the West Indies.” He implored fellow Englishmen to better administer the West Indian colonies, to rebut the slander of “those who pronounce the negro incapable of reaching the average standard of civilization.” When “sound

⁷⁰ *Pennsylvania Freeman* 10, May 1838.

⁷¹ *North American*, 13 August 1839.

morals, education, and well applied industry,” are achieved by black West Indians, he proclaimed, then “slavery on the American Continent will die a natural death.”⁷²

Anti-abolitionists and proslavery advocates were not willing to cede the issue however. An 1843 New Orleans newspaper decried in headlines, “the Disastrous and Dangerous Tendencies of West India Emancipation.” In a lengthy piece, the paper described the emancipated black populace of the British colonies as having returned to their “animal sluggishness,” which no education could improve. The paper derided them as a “picture of indolence,” much like their “kindred fellows in Hayti.” Attempts by colonial governments, missionaries and benevolent societies to “stimulate” free blacks to industry, education, higher morality and civilization had proved unsuccessful and abortive. Nothing less than “anarchy, bloodshed, riot, and confusion,” the article predicted, would soon follow. Loosed from the behavioral constraints of bondage, the black population was said to be “quickly relapsing” into their original uncivilized and immoral state.⁷³

The paper also accused American abolitionists of placing white Southerners in harm’s way by advocating such a plan. The article warned that Southerners would be the inevitable victims of a “future scene of ruin and dismay” brought about by “negro excesses,” if abolitionists had their way. Such strong repudiations denied not only the reformist success of West India Emancipation but also the very possibility of black civility. Freedom in the West Indies had made blacks more immoral, more criminal, and more licentious, it was argued, not less. And the

⁷² *New Hampshire Gazette*, 29 October 1839.

⁷³ *New Orleans Tropic*, reprinted in *Liberator*, 7 April 1843.

same would follow in the United States if such foreign schemes were to be applied on American soil.⁷⁴

Abolitionists refuted arguments that challenged the example set by British Emancipation or questioned the entire premise upon which reform rested. Much as the Second Great Awakening advocated that every individual could receive universal salvation through the knowledge of Christ, reform promised that every individual could be brought to the light of education, morality and civilization. In their rebuttals, abolitionist papers continued printed stories of free blacks in Jamaica who had built their own church, under the supervision of the London Baptist Missionary Society. They printed accounts of moral and religious improvement, the diminution of crime, the rise in Christian education and the adoption of marriage over concubinage. One report even noted that with the increase of marriage over “arrangements of convenience,” the social stability of the island had increased. Immoral practices, it argued, had been “the fruitful source of much disorder and crime” that formerly plagued the colony.⁷⁵

Leaving no slander unchallenged, in one account a respected physiologist was relied upon to rebut claims that “the odour exhaled from the skin” of West Indian Negroes was particularly offensive due to their lack of hygiene. Described as a former resident of the West Indies whose credentials gave him “some right to offer an opinion on the science part of the question,” he concluded while “it is very well known, that the secretion of the skin of all dark races... is more abundant than that of the white,” this was nothing “but the habits of cleanliness” rather than a mark of racial inferiority. “From my experience in the West Indies,” he declared, “I

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ *Liberator*, 31 March 1843; 1 September 1843; *National Era*, 1 April 1847.

would as soon sit in a room full of Negroes” than “the ‘great unwashed’ of our own country.”⁷⁶

Increasingly, the triumph of reform became the marker of success for freedom in the West Indies and the predictor for freedom in America.

Reform Over Free Labor

As the commercial success of the wage labor system in the West Indies came under increased attack by proslavery forces in the 1840s, and reports continued to show a lowering in exports and industry from the West Indies, American abolitionists turned to evoking the progress of reform.⁷⁷ In 1845 the Boston lawyer George S. Hillard, Esq., in an open letter in the *Boston Courier* to the Antislavery Society in Waltham, Massachusetts on the anniversary of British Emancipation, broke from convention and sharply questioned the abolitionist focus on the free labor success of the West Indian colonies. Calling the abolition of slavery in the British West Indies “one of the greatest events of the age,” he argued that statistics on industry and production were a type of “false standard.” The worthiness of emancipation could not be judged, he stated, “by the comparative amount of material products drawn from the soil” or its value.⁷⁸

“I have no patience,” Hillard wrote, “with the heartless spirit of calculation, which looks upon the West-India islands and their inhabitants in no other light than as a means and instruments for the production of sugar and coffee.” In strong terms, he declared to “care not” if emancipation had any effect on goods he considered to be “luxuries.” For Hillard, slavery’s

⁷⁶ *Liberator*, 21 June 1844.

⁷⁷ The challenges to the free labor arguments of abolitionists in the 1840s is discussed in Chapter Two of the manuscript.

⁷⁸ *Boston Courier*, 11 August 1845.

greatest evil was “the wrong” it committed “on the mind and soul of its victim” too long degraded in bondage:

The true points of inquiry are the comparative moral and intellectual condition of the colored race, who have received the boon of freedom. Are they better men and women, better husbands and wives, better fathers and mothers? Are they more desirous of knowledge? Have they more self-respect? Are they more provident and thrifty? There can be no question that on these points the results of the emancipation are entirely satisfactory, and will continue to be more and more so. It must be so. To doubt this, would be to suppose that God had made a part of his children incapable of freedom.⁷⁹

To deny the reformatory power of freedom and religious instruction, Hillard argued, was to deny the very reformatory power of God. For nineteenth century readers, living in an age of religious reform, this was an argument that affirmed the spirit of liberty, spiritual redemption and divine providence.

The moral reform of former West Indian slaves for many abolitionists was an ongoing process. For all the improvements made since emancipation, slavery’s debilitating nature necessitated a constant vigil. In a popular speech reprinted in the *Liberator* in November 1847, the Rev. George L. Hovey, a Boston minister and missionary to Jamaica, told the audience that during his time on the island he witnessed first-hand the evidence of moral reform. The sins of concubinage, intemperance and working on the Sabbath among the freed persons, were greatly diminishing, but at a measured rate. He warned that the process of lifting former slaves out of their previously debased conditions, to a higher moral state would take time:

Their progress in morals is still slower. They were socially degraded to the lowest conceivable state. Marriage was almost unknown, and female chastity in a slave not to be spoken of or expected. Great changes for the better had taken place. Marriage is now highly honorable, but by no means universal. Great efforts must

⁷⁹ Ibid.

yet be made by missionaries and Christian teachers, before the polluting effects of slavery will be washed away from the mass of the people.⁸⁰

Hovey illustrated much of the popular abolitionist sentiment towards slaves, as people who could be reformed but not without proper guidance. Though he spoke of the West Indies, it was a sentiment that also had domestic implications.

While British Emancipation was evoked mostly for the issue of free labor, both proslavery and antislavery discourse utilized the conduct of the emancipated population of the West Indies in their arguments. The end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 paved the way for a sectional crisis in the United States, as the nation was divided between the competing power of free and slave states. The succeeding Compromise of 1850, which to many Northerners symbolized a capitulation to slave power and interests, thrust the issue further into the larger national discourse. The rise of moderate antislavery politics as represented by the Liberty Party and Free Soil Party joined the debate over slavery's expansion into the new Western territories.⁸¹

Sherman Booth's Free Soil Party newspaper the *Wisconsin Free Democrat* in 1849 charged that Southern newspapers were "continually...publishing false accounts of the evil workings of emancipation" in the West Indies. In particular, the paper pointed to what was described as a "large meeting of slaveholders" in Mobile, Alabama, who claimed the British Caribbean colonies now kept a large military and naval force, along with a large number of "magistrates, constables and other civil officers" to maintain order in the face of an unruly free black population. The *Wisconsin Free Democrat* cited the Jamaican Kingston Journal to rebut

⁸⁰ *Liberator*, 26 November 1847.

⁸¹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 103-148; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy, Jefferson to Lincoln* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2006), 602-667, John Ashworth, *The Republic in Crisis, 1848-1861* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012), 5-64, 80-96.

these assertions, finding there had actually been a “diminution” in the military, navy and civil authorities. Contrary to “Southern alarmists,” they assured that the “social and political superiority of education and talent” were yet preserved on the islands. There had never been another time, the paper claimed, “in which life and property were more secure, and peace and quite more universal.”⁸²

The example of morality and reform set by British Emancipation even emerged briefly in a moderate antislavery plank in the slaveholding South. In 1850, the *Examiner* newspaper in Louisville, Kentucky, part of an effort to gain a regional audience of both white slaveholders and non-slaveholders to lobby for a gradualist approach to emancipation in the state constitution, looked to the results in the West Indies as evidence of the possibility of making Kentucky “free soil.” The unusual antislavery Southern paper argued that if blacks had prospered in slavery through close relations to their white masters, then in freedom they could be similarly guided by benevolent white benefactors acting as missionaries. The article pointed out that none of “the most atrocious” visions of rape, murder and mayhem had occurred with the onset of abolition on the Caribbean islands. The former West Indian slaves had “received the boon of freedom,” with gratitude, and “instead of imprecations... offered up prayers” for deliverance from bondage.

The article depicted Kentucky slaveholders as “indulgent” and “sympathetic” in comparison to the slaveholders of the West Indies, and argued that if the mistreated West Indian slaves did not rise up to murder their former owners, the more humanely treated slaves of Kentucky would behave no differently. In the years since emancipation, it was said that West Indian blacks had busied themselves with acquiring “all the elements of civilization.” Freedom had “lessened... and mitigated the quality of vices,” causing a great improvement in the morals

⁸² *Wisconsin Free Democrat*, 8 August 1849.

and education of black population. The schools of the West Indies were now filled with black students, and former slaves attended churches with “orderly congregations” which exhibited morals comparable to those of whites.⁸³

The *National Era* of Washington D.C., linked to antislavery Free Soil politics, increasingly used the success of reform to defend the emancipated British West Indies. While the paper did not abandon the free labor argument altogether, increasingly the moral improvement of former West Indian slaves took on greater importance. When David Cristy, an agent of the Ohio Colonization Society, circulated a pamphlet at the state Constitutional Convention in 1851, castigating abolitionists for their support of the “commercial failure of West India emancipation,” the *National Era* launched a lengthy rebuttal over several May editions. The paper reminded detractors of British Emancipation that “the well-being of nations” was not to be judged by commercial prosperity alone. Though the British West Indies did not export as much sugar or rum as previously, the editors pointed out there now existed “thousands of adults, as well as children, being in a course of mental and moral training.”⁸⁴

In a later July edition, the *National Era* article, recounting in length the progress of Christianization made by the West India Missions among former slaves, hoped these efforts could be transferred to Africa, “with its teeming millions of degraded Mohammedans and pagan idolaters.” As had been seen in the West Indies, Christian reform was “the only remedy” for the continents many “misereries.”⁸⁵

⁸³ “Emancipation in Kentucky” in the Louisville *Examiner*, reprinted in the *National Era*, 17 October 1850. For more on the *Examiner* and antislavery in Kentucky, see Harold D. Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003).

⁸⁴ *National Era*, 22 May 1851; 29 May 1851.

⁸⁵ *National Era*, 3 July 1851.

The *National Era* in 1852 printed the report by an expedition of British philanthropists, having returned from touring and inspecting the West Indian colonies. The observations made on the former slaves was generally positive as to reform, though tempered in its expectations. “In estimating the intellectual, moral and religious improvement of the negro peasantry since emancipation,” the report stated, “disadvantages and advantages must be equally taken into account.” Readers were warned that it was unrealistic to expect education to take root completely in a populace whose instruction during slavery had been “wholly neglected.” Any “mental improvement,” the report reasoned, “must be principally looked for in those upon whose early years freedom has shone.” Among younger members of the freed communities, it was found many were “receiving the benefit of instruction” through day and Sabbath schools.⁸⁶ In morals, the report also found “much improvement.” Still, it warned that the “deep rooted” effects of slavery, “has left bitter fruits.” The former slaves were lauded for the attention paid to religion, now that the hindrances of slavery had been abolished. Many of the church congregants were described as “exemplary in their conduct.” Some persons, who were once slaves, were now even pastors of churches.⁸⁷

In July 1858 the *Liberator* printed excerpts of a sermon delivered by the Reverend Henry Bleby at a local Boston church. Bleby was a missionary who had spent twenty-seven years in the West Indies. He had come to the United States to meet with fellow abolitionists, and hoped to raise money to build five schoolhouses in Barbados. His time in the West Indies had allowed him to witness the Baptist War in Jamaica of 1831-1832, as well as the passage of the British Abolition Act. He recalled for the American audience the day of emancipation in 1834, when he

⁸⁶ *National Era*, 11 September 1851.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

claimed 5,000 recently freed slaves crowded his church, to “spend the day decorously and in the worship of God.”⁸⁸

Bleby painted a nuanced picture of the economic outcome of emancipation in the West Indies, stating that some planters were ruined in the transition while others saw success. But he remained unconditional on the success of reform and improvement on the islands. He compared the criminal statistics in colonies like Barbados favorably with any part of the world. The schools he described as well attended, on par with that of the common schools of England. Reform had allowed black West Indians to now take up roles in civic government and professional life. Such improvement, he contended, was evidence that black people were “as capable of intellectual culture as the whites, and as appreciative of the virtues and graces which adorn every condition of life.”⁸⁹ These were the results of emancipation, which his American audience readily believed could be brought about in the United States.

The triumphalism of moral reform was best summarized in an 1858 article in the *National Era*. Following a rigorous defense of the commercial success of the isles, the paper went on to point to other improvements, which they charged never entered “into the cold calculations of selfish capitalists....the condition of the negroes themselves.” Black West Indians were described as “infinitely better in freedom, both physically and morally. “Before emancipation,” the paper noted, “the poor degraded creatures [were] herded together like the beasts of the field, and marriage...was the exception;” in the emancipated colonies, marriage among the former slaves had now become the rule. This moral reform, brought about by Christian missionaries, and the teachings of the Bible, was said to be “worth in itself all the sugar

⁸⁸ *Liberator*, 30 July 1858.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

which the Islands ever produced.” The paper announced that this was something that all men, North and South, who themselves had “common morality and conscience” had to declare an accomplishment.⁹⁰

With the onset of British Emancipation, moral reform in the British colonies served as a rhetorical argument in American abolitionism. In newspapers, tracts and pamphlets, the behavior and moral habits of the former West Indian slaves became part of the debate over the soundness of American abolition. Within newspapers and pamphlets, speeches and books, the freed blacks of the West Indies were examined to gauge their level of moral reform and attainment of civilization. American abolitionists relied on chiefly on the observations of British missionaries, and funded several of their own fact-finding missions to ascertain emancipation’s success. In this ongoing experiment, black West Indians were subjected to close scrutiny, every act and behavior of their daily lives examined, inspected and mined for evidence. If emancipated slaves in the West Indies could be improved through moral reform, then so could the slaves of the American South.

But this need to assert the moral and social achievements of of free black West Indians was not limited to white abolitionists and the issue of slavery. For free African-Americans, the success of the West Indian colonies held a particular importance. Some 800,000 former slaves had joined the ranks of the free black communities of the Atlantic world—almost six times the number in the American North. This triumph would stand as evidence that not only were blacks ready for liberty, they were also willing to enter society as citizens of moral and social standing. For these black communities, the success of British Emancipation was both a powerful argument

⁹⁰ *National Era*, 25 November 1858.

in favor of abolitionism, and a chance to also affirm and elevate the dignity, humanity and social progress of blacks everywhere.

CHAPTER FOUR: AFRICAN-AMERICANS AND BRITISH EMANCIPATION

But you may ask, what interest have we in this matter? ... Whatever has been done in the British West Indies, our condition, in point of fact, remains the same. ... still the act referred to is far from being totally without benefit to us. So far as the spread of correct principles, on the great subject of human rights is concerned, we are materially benefitted. For, since the principle of moral justice has successfully triumphed over wrong and outrage *there*, can it be without its influence in bringing about the same glorious result *here*...?¹

In August 1838 a reprint of the speech of black abolitionist and pastor William L. Douglass appeared in the *Colored American*, a prominent black newspaper. Days earlier Douglass had spoken at the anniversary of British Emancipation at St. Thomas's Protestant Episcopal Church, one of the oldest African-American institutions in Philadelphia, which he presided over as pastor. Marking the end of the apprenticeship system, 1838 was an important year for British Emancipation. And Philadelphia's free black community gathered throughout the city to hold observances. Like other speakers of the day, Douglass contrasted the triumphant "spread of correct principles" in the West Indies with the immoral crime of slavery in America. Moreover, he sought correlations between the full emancipation of 800,000 blacks under the government of a foreign power, with the challenges and "disabilities" that faced the free black communities of the American North. If such "moral justice" could succeed there, he proclaimed, it could as well succeed here.²

Douglass's speech evokes questions of self-perception and identity of free African-Americans in the antebellum North and the wider Black Atlantic world. What ties did they have

¹ *Colored American*, 18 August 1838.

² *Ibid.*

as Americans to recently freed black slaves from a colony of another government? How might the principle of freedom in the West Indies have material benefit to their unequal status in the United States? What importance did they believe the emancipated West Indies held for the millions of slaves still held in bondage in America? What did the moral triumph over a “wrong and outrage” in the far off Caribbean have to do with their everyday lives?

This chapter examines the ways in which African-Americans in the nineteenth century incorporated British Emancipation in the West Indies into their rhetoric for abolitionism, freedom, liberty, and citizenship rights. Like white abolitionists, free African-Americans followed and debated the industrious and moral success of the recently freed black inhabitants of the West Indies. Yet for this marginalized group, living under continued assault from a hostile Northern society, and an encroaching Southern slaveocracy, the West Indies further functioned as an important site of possibility. For many African-Americans, the successful emancipation of West Indian slaves fed similar strivings for dignity, self-identity and participation in American democracy.

British Abolitionism in the West Indies and the African-American Press

In the late 1820s and early 1830s, free African-American communities in the North closely followed the British abolitionist struggle. Northern slavery had steadily declined in the past four decades. Religious Quaker and Methodist Manumission Societies in Pennsylvania and New York supported voluntary emancipation and urged their members to forsake slavery. Enslaved people agitated for their own freedom, using the religious appeal of the Second Great Awakening and the ideals of liberty promoted by the American Revolution. The Delaware slave Richard Allen was drawn to the universalist appeals of Methodism, and used religious arguments to gain emancipation from his owner in 1780. The Massachusetts slave Elizabeth Freeman in

1780 successfully sued for her freedom in court, arguing that slavery was incompatible with the state's constitution. That same year Pennsylvania passed a gradual emancipation act.

Massachusetts followed in 1783, followed by New York in the 1790s and the New England States in the early years of the nineteenth century.³

As free African-American communities developed in cities like Philadelphia, Boston and New York, they attached themselves to the democratic principles of the emerging literary culture. Pamphlets by African-American clergy, churches and benevolent civic groups helped create a sense of community and autonomy as free people. Much of this early print literature focused on domestic issues: challenging negative depictions of African-Americans, refuting the claims of organizations like the American Colonization Society, disseminating local news, engaging in political protest and serving as a means institution building.⁴

Early pamphlets and tracts gave way to the first independent, black owned, and operated newspaper *Freedom's Journal*. The publication was born in New York City, in March 1827 and was creation of the black Presbyterian pastor Samuel Cornish, and the Jamaican-born John Russwurm. Both men believed such a print vehicle was needed, to inform free African-Americans on the news of the day and to correct "misrepresentations" common in the popular

³ Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 36-42; Catherine Adams and Elizabeth H. Peck, *Love of Freedom: Black Women in Colonial and Revolutionary New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 139-144. For more on Northern emancipation, see: Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1991); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and 'Race' in New England, 1780-1860* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2000); Richard Newman, *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011); Paul J. Polgar, "To Raise Them to an Equal Participation": Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African American Citizenship," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31 no. 2 (Summer 2011): 229-258.

⁴ Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, Phillip Lapsansky, *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge), 2-11.

press. The four-page, four-column weekly which at its height had a circulation of 800 subscribers, carried both local and foreign news, as well as editorials that confronted issues the editors believed impacted black communities.⁵

Like Benjamin Lundy's contemporary Ohio-based newspaper the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Cornish and Russwurm's *Freedom's Journal* spoke out forcefully against American slavery. The paper also followed the British abolitionist struggle in the late 1820s and predictions on its impact on the West Indies. Many of these accounts were reprinted articles from newspapers and periodicals, which presented antislavery perspectives. Quoting the New England *Christian Spectator*, the second edition of *Freedom's Journal* in March 1827 informed readers of "recent movements in behalf of the children of Africa." The emancipation of Britain's slaves appeared imminent, and it would have profound consequences for "the welfare of four millions of people, connected with this subject." This news, it was believed, would inevitably reach the ears of America's slaves: "Their slave population is in the immediate neighborhood of our own. They speak the same language. The intercourse is easy, constant, and unavoidable." Slaveholders in America would inevitably have to contend with black freedom in the Caribbean. "When...all the colored population in the West Indies comes to enjoy the 'civil rights and privileges of his majesty's other subjects,'" the article asked, "what will be the condition of the southern States?" In their providing of this vital information to readers, the editor's of *Freedom's Journal* made the British campaign to end slavery in the West Indies part of a larger trans-Atlantic struggle.⁶

The article was continued over the next three issues of *Freedom's Journal*. Throughout, speeches and tracts of British abolitionists like Thomas Buxton, Henry Brougham and Thomas

⁵ Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007), 71-78; *Freedom's Journal*, 17 March 1827.

⁶ *Colored American*, 23 March 1827.

Clarkson were used to tie British Emancipation in the West Indies to domestic issues facing African-Americans. The American Colonization Society was denounced as “feeble” in its unrealistic attempts at “transporting two millions of people across the Atlantic” to resettlement in Africa. In contrast, the West Indies was used to show the possibility of black freedom without the need for removal. “Emancipation must take place on the spot where slavery exists,” the article stressed. “Nothing short of this will meet the exigency.” With the imminent arrival of British Emancipation, slavery would become a disgrace to the United States, impacting foreign relations, international laws and the nation’s claim to liberty: “It cannot be believed that while all the rest of mankind are advancing in the march of improvement, two millions of the race in free America, shall be left in irretrievable degradation.” For African-American readers of *Freedom’s Journal*, the term “free” resonated with obvious irony: a critique of the United States as it perceived itself, enshrined in its founding documents, institutions and national rhetoric.⁷

Black abolitionist newspapers also directly attacked more established papers for their defense of West Indian slaveholders. A May 1827 article in *Freedom’s Journal* titled “Slavery in the West-Indies” excoriated the *New-York Evening Post* editor for attempting to paint slavery in the British West Indies and the Southern United States as benign. In their criticisms, the writers pointed out that the editor’s claims were “derived not from experience” but instead gained from Southerners and West Indian planters, persons whose “revenue [was] exuded out of the flesh and blood of their fellow-creatures.” The editors pointed to the numerous advertisements for runaways in American and West Indian papers as evidence that any claims of benign slavery were “absurd” and the product of an “impaired” mind approaching old age. Even if claims of slaves existing in a life “of contentment, of gaiety, and happiness,” were correct, *Freedom’s*

⁷ *Freedom’s Journal*, 6 April 1827, 18 April 1827.

Journal's editors argued, this was nothing more than evidence of the “evil” of bondage. Any system that could so “debase the human mind as to render it happy in such a state,” they asserted, “certainly is an evil” and should it was the duty of every “good man” to see such a thing undone.⁸

Throughout the British Emancipation struggle, *Freedom's Journal* continued to show its interest in delivering such news to its readers. In several August 1827 editions, the paper reprinted an English abolitionist tract entitled “What Does Your Sugar Cost,” detailing the “subject of British Negro slavery.” Framed as a dialogue, it told the story of a mother and daughter in England who are informed, much to their chagrin, that they “help to keep a poor black negro in slavery” in the West Indies through the purchase of slave-produced goods and products. This was part of a larger Atlantic campaign dating back to at least 1791 calling for a boycott on Caribbean slave-produced sugar. It was revived again in the 1820s, as part of a mass British antislavery campaign. Its appearance in *Freedom's Journal* highlights the many ways in which the newspaper sought to connect its readers to a larger transnational antislavery movement. Like the white Englishwoman and her daughter, free African-Americans could do their part in boycotting slave-produced goods that continued the oppression of black West Indians, a people with whom they shared ties of consanguinity and bondage.⁹

A November 1827 *Freedom's Journal* similarly reprinted a correspondence from the English Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Dominions, to show “that the Abolitionists of Great-Britain are yet alive to interests and cause of

⁸ *Freedom's Journal*, 11 May 1827.

⁹ *Freedom's Journal*, 17 August 1827, 24 August 1827. For more on the sugar boycott see, Clare Midgley, “Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture,” *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 17, No. 3 (December, 1996): 137-162.

our enslaved brethren.” In March 1828, the front four columns of the paper reprinted in full the British abolitionist pamphlet “Thoughts on British Colonial Slavery, ” by the Rev. Daniel Wilson, the Vicar of Islington, who spoke at length on “the contrariety between the Christian religion and West Indian Slavery.”¹⁰

Other African-American print vehicles of the time also acknowledged the importance of this trans-Atlantic movement against slavery. The Boston pamphleteer David Walker in his 1829 *Appeal in Four Articles: Together With A Preamble To The Colored Citizens of the World*, described Great Britain as “the best friends the coloured people have upon earth.” Though admitting, “they have oppressed us a little,” and held slave colonies in the West Indies, “which oppress us *sorely*,” Walker viewed British abolitionism as the antithesis to American apathy. The English, in Walker’s estimation, had “done one hundred times more for the melioration” of the black condition “than all the other nations of the earth put together.” There was “no intelligent black man” who could deny that the British were “the greatest benefactors” black people then had “upon Earth.”¹¹

With *Freedom’s Journal’s* end in 1829, however, there were few black newspapers to continue disseminating reports on the British abolitionist struggle. Samuel Cornish’s short-lived weekly, *The Rights of All*, founded in 1829 stopped publication in 1830 leaving a void. As British abolitionism entered its most tumultuous moments in the 1830s, no widely circulated African-American paper existed. Instead, black readers followed reports through established antislavery papers like Lundy’s *Genius*, William Lloyd Garrison’s newly formed *Liberator* and William Denison’s *Emancipator*. African-Americans had been subscribers and crucial supporters

¹⁰ *Freedom’s Journal*, 9 November 1827, 7 March 1828.

¹¹ David Walker, *Appeal in Four Articles: Together With A Preamble To The Coloured Citizens Of The World, But In Particular, And Very Expressly, To Those Of The United States Of America*, (Boston, s.n., 1829), 47.

of these newspapers, which could now provide them with reprints of British Parliamentary debates over slavery and the coming Emancipation Act.¹²

African-Americans could also rely on reports through American abolitionists that journeyed to England in the early 1830s. Garrison's 1833 trip on behalf of the New England Anti-Slavery Society was financed in great part by donations collected by African-American churches and black benevolent societies.¹³ The black abolitionist Baptist Minister Reverend Nathaniel Paul of Albany, New York was also in England at this time. Paul had been in the country since 1831, raising funds and support for a free black settlement in Canada. Together, with Garrison and other abolitionists, Paul took on the American Colonization Society that was at that time seeking support from British reformers. Their lengthy public debates against colonization in Britain were printed in the *Liberator*, as were their observations of the ongoing abolitionist struggle.¹⁴

An April 10, 1833 letter written by Nathaniel Paul to Garrison and reprinted in the June 22 *Liberator*, recounted momentous events for readers. In the correspondence Paul cheered the success made against the American Colonization Society while in Britain, contrasted the benevolent nature of English abolitionists to the "hypocritical pretenders to humanity and religion" in America and predicted the coming emancipation in the Caribbean colonies. "Its [Slavery's] death warrant is sealed, so far as it relates to the British West Indies," he wrote. "The

¹² Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 19-20; *Genius*, April 1832; *Liberator*, 6 April 1833, 8 June 1833; *The Emancipator*, 27 July 1833.

¹³ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 20; *Liberator* 9, 23, March 1833; *Emancipator* 29, June 1833.

¹⁴ Richard J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 52-59, 65-66; *Liberator*, 16 February 1833, 8 June 1833, 10 August 1833, 12 October 1833.

advocates of slavery are trembling, for the signs of the times proclaim the end of their oppression draweth near.”¹⁵

The next independent black newspaper would not arrive until 1837, nearly four years after the passage of the British Act of Abolition in 1833. But the interest in British Emancipation had not waned in the free black community. In 1836, at the third annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York, the influential black abolitionist and Philadelphian Robert Purvis proposed a resolution honoring British Emancipation. Purvis’s motion called on the multiracial gathering to “regard the remarkable and happy results of the experiment of Immediate Emancipation, in those West Indian islands...as conclusive proof of the safety and policy of such emancipation.” The abolitionist Henry Stanton followed Purvis’s resolution, calling for agents to be sent to the islands to ascertain the industrious and moral behavior of the former West Indian slaves.¹⁶

In January 1837 the former *Freedom’s Journal* co-editor Samuel Cornish created a New York based publication, entitled the *Weekly Advocate*. The paper published only nine issues and in March changed its name to the *Colored American*, with Cornish remaining editor. Black abolitionists Charles B. Ray and Phillip A. Bell were also associated with the paper, holding the roles of general agent and proprietor. the *Colored American*, which also published a Philadelphia edition, became the first black newspaper that offered independent reports in its own voice on

¹⁵ Nathaniel Paul to William Lloyd Garrison April 10 1833 reprinted in *Liberator*, 22 June 1833.

¹⁶ *Third annual report of the American Anti-Slavery Society : with the speeches delivered at the anniversary meeting, held in the city of New-York on the 10th May, 1836 : and the minutes of the meetings of the society for business* (New York: s.n., 1836), 27, 29.

British Emancipation in the West Indies beyond white abolitionist publications like Garrison's *Liberator*.¹⁷

In July 1837, some months after its founding, the paper reminded readers that in the West Indies “800,000 of Christ’s suffering” had gained freedom just three years past, and spoke in strong religious tones of its significance to freedom in the Black Atlantic. It was according to the paper “a RAIN-BOW of promise—a pledge that God has not forgotten our down-trodden race.” With a forcefulness that harkened back to the *Freedom’s Journal’s* earlier militancy and direct challenge to American slavery, the paper warned that British Emancipation trumpeted the “approach of Liberty” for America, before which all tyrants would “tremble.”¹⁸

Moral Reform and British Emancipation in Free Black America

Like their white abolitionist counterparts, free African-Americans placed importance on the industrious and moral outcome of the British West Indian isles and its inhabitants in the wake of emancipation. The triumph of abolitionists in Britain could serve as a model for abolitionism in the United States. But the success or failure of the former slaves in the West Indies held importance beyond slavery’s end. British Emancipation had thrust 800,000 black inhabitants of the Atlantic world into freedom, turning them from slaves into *de facto* citizens. It was a familiar condition in which many northern African-Americans had found themselves for the past three decades as emancipation gradually took hold in New York, New England and Pennsylvania. For free black communities the failure or success of these newly risen members of a freed class

¹⁷ Charles H. Wesley, “The Negroes of New York in the Emancipation Movement,” *Journal of Negro History*, 24, No. 1 (Jan, 1939): 83-84. Two other independent black newspapers would emerge in the late 1830s following *Colored American*, both only lasting a short period: the New York *Mirror of Liberty* (1838 to 1840) published by David Ruggles and the Philadelphia *National Reformer* (1838 to 1840) published by William Whipper.

¹⁸ *Colored American*, 29 July 1837.

became especially acute, mirroring concerns of their own perceptions and social standing in American society. The editors of *the Colored American* pronounced that freedom in the West Indies symbolized the hopes of “a whole people” who everywhere existed in the “darkness of oppression...and...sorrow.”¹⁹

The racial climate of the early nineteenth century placed free African-Americans outside the bounds of the larger themes of expanded democracy that defined the age of Jacksonian Democracy. Their seeming foreignness (non-whiteness), prior proximity to slavery, even their very work as domestics or in menial labor, rendered them incapable in the eyes of Northern whites to participate in republican citizenship.²⁰ Free African-Americans were linked to drinking, adultery, gambling and other acts defined as iniquitous, and featured in crime pamphlets of the day.²¹ Racial conservatives in groups like the American Colonization Society argued openly that free blacks were “a greater nuisance than even slaves” and derided African-American communities as “ignorant, degraded and miserable, mentally diseased, [and] broken-spirited.” Free blacks they claimed were nothing less than a “constantly increasing evil,” occupying “a middle station” between lower whites and slaves and “corrupted both” with their bad habits.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford University Press: New York, 2004), 13-17, 61-103; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy, Jefferson to Lincoln* (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2006), 312-424; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African-Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2003), 97-100.

²¹ Adeleke, 128; Harris, 103-118. Harris uses court cases to illustrate perceptions of black morality, both of enslaved and free blacks of early nineteenth century New York. The perceptions of working-class blacks are also compared to those of working class-whites, which were overall negative. However Harris finds that blacks faced an added burden fostered by race prejudice and slavery that placed them outside the ranks of republican society.

Thrown into a “merciless and despising world,” and forced to compete alongside free whites, freed persons could only expect “poverty” and a life of “insensibility.”²²

In the stratified and hierarchical early Republic, black and white reformers mutually accepted notions of behavioral deficiency among recently emancipated and lower working-class blacks. The root of this deficiency was slavery, which one black newspaper argued rendered those in bondage “indolent, licentious, intemperate, violence, revengeful, and unfeeling.” Slavery deprived its victims “almost entirely of intellectual, moral and religious instruction,” leading women into “prostitution and promiscuous intercourse” and discouraging “lawful marriage.” As the Virginia born AME black abolitionist Lewis Woodson saw, slavery had rendered freed African-Americans “a distinct class.” Whites had enjoyed freedom and had been imbued with “every power and privilege.” Blacks in contrast had been “divested of every right,” leaving them in a peculiar position within a free North. “The distinction of our classification,” he wrote, “is as wide as freedom and slavery.”²³

Unlike white racial conservatives, however, black reformers argued that reformation of such undesirable traits was possible. If lower-class blacks and former slaves were in a degraded condition, it was slavery and their lack of societal access that was to blame, not an inherent biological trait. Proper education and behavioral changes could remedy this situation, and simultaneously work as “moral suasion” to persuade public opinion of the shared humanity of African-Americans. By 1831 moral suasion was openly championed by middle-class white abolitionists like Garrison, who argued that whites, both north and south, could be convinced of

²² William Lloyd Garrison, *THOUGHTS ON AFRICAN COLONIZATION: or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832) 125.

²³ *Weekly Advocate*, 21 January 1837. Woodson quoted in, Tunde Adeleke, “Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830’s,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 83, No. 2 (Spring, 1998): 136.

the sin of slavery through propaganda, petitions, economic boycotts and even letter writing. For free African-Americans, moral suasion had long been part of activism and strategy. Beyond abolitionism, free African-Americans believed moral suasion and moral elevation could also be used to gain racial equality. They argued that slavery had degraded black morality and that black self-improvement was the answer. Whites in the North would welcome and accept “a more morally upright, industrious, intelligent and economically elevated black man.” Moral elevation could thus work to help rid African-Americans of the stigma of slavery and achieve greater participation in Republican citizenship.²⁴

The connection between race, slavery and reform had precedents in Northern antislavery. In the 1780s, the predominantly Quaker Manumission Society discouraged disreputable behavior in black communities including the frequenting of bars, dance halls, parades or other social gatherings. The organization reprinted pamphlets the ex-slave Jupiter Hammon’s 1787 “Address to the Negroes in the State of New York,” an appeal with strong Christian moral themes. Hammon warned blacks, both slave and free, not to “be lazy and idle, and get drunk and steal,” as it would prove to whites “that we should not know how to take of ourselves.”²⁵

In Philadelphia in 1787, black religious leaders Richard Allen and Absalom Jones founded the Free African Society. Like the white reformist groups, it encouraged and demanded strict moral behavior, regulating marriage and accepting only those who “lived an orderly and sober life.” In the coming years similar black mutual relief organizations such as the New York African Society for Mutual Relief (1808) and the Ohio based African Benevolent Society (1827)

²⁴Adeleke, 127-128. Adeleke points out that though moral suasion is most often associated with Garrisonian abolitionism beginning in 1832, free African-Americans had espoused these same notions following the First National Negro Convention in Philadelphia in 1831. African-Americans especially saw black moral elevation as a persuasive agent upon white society, the legacy of reform movements dating back to the late 18th century.

²⁵Jupiter Hammond and Paul Royster (ed)., “An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York (1787)” *Electronic Texts in American Studies* (1787), 11.

followed suit.²⁶ Samuel Cornish in an 1827 *Freedom's Journal* advised moral elevation and moral suasion to readers: "It is for us to convince the world by uniform propriety of conduct, industry, and economy, that we are worthy of esteem and patronage." The paper in fact openly devoted itself to "the dissemination of useful knowledge among our brethren, and to their moral and religious improvement."²⁷

Throughout the early 1800s, black reform groups sprang up among the free and recently emancipated. They hoped that religious morality, thrift, education, industriousness and piety would help them better fit into society. Traits such as frugality and temperance were stressed, and in New York black newspapers even discouraged such pastimes as dancing. In Philadelphia, black women's benevolent societies like the Daughters of Africa focused on education while monitoring communities for proper ethical behavior. African-American churches regulated the morality of their congregants, imposing fines or even expulsion for drunkenness, adultery and other infractions. White Manumission Societies also attempted to elevate the importance of "honest" labor among the recently freed. Confronting and changing the perception of blacks through individual and group action, it was hoped, would in turn work as moral suasion against race prejudice and allow them to participate in the greater society.²⁸

²⁶ "Preamble of the Free African Society," in William Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church, in the United States of America, Now Styled the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1862); Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 65-67, 120-122. See also: Robert L. Harris, "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830," *The Massachusetts Review* 20 no. 3 (Autumn 1979): 603-625; Craig Steven Wilder, "The Rise and Influence of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, 1808-1865," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 22 (July 1998).

²⁷ *Freedom's Journal*, 17, 30 March 1827.

²⁸ Harris, 98-103; 118-133; Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 184; Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 51-52, 58-69; Emma Jones Lapansky, "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 32 no. 1 (Spring 1980): 67-73.

Moral reform was linked to social mobility, acceptance, freedom and eventual equality. These principles were enshrined at the First Annual Convention of the People of Color in Philadelphia in June 1831, who counted among its attendees the *Colored American's* co-editor Samuel Cornish. While focused on civil rights and abolitionism, delegates also passed resolutions affirming that most blacks in the country lived lives of a “dissolute, intemperate, and ignorant condition,” and that it was the duty of the more “virtuous of our color” to bring them out of such degradation. Pledging their opposition to slavery, the convention demanded that free people of color work against “the many oppressive, unjust, and unconstitutional laws” that diminished their rights as freed persons. It was their duty to stand up “whenever they may feel themselves aggrieved, or their rights invaded, by any cruel or oppressive laws.” Free blacks could improve both their moral and material condition through “simplicity, neatness, temperance and economy,” which would work to persuade whites to see them as equal citizens.²⁹

African-Americans held similar conventions in following years throughout the urban North to create a national consensus on the propriety of black behavior. Their aim was “the diffusion of correct moral principle” to “clear away the mists of prejudice,” and to “press upon our people the necessity and advantage of moral reformation.” This mission to further black moral improvement culminated in 1835 with the creation of the American Moral Reform Society in Philadelphia. Co-founded by black abolitionists William Whipper and James Forten, Samuel Cornish would serve as its vice-President until 1836. Its declared purpose was to combat slavery and discrimination. “The moral, upright, and correct deportment of our people,” a meeting resolution pronounced, “will be one of the strongest arguments we can present, in favor of

²⁹Adeleke, 127; Minutes from The First Annual Convention of the People of Color in Philadelphia, June 1831 in George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America, 1619-1880, Volume 2* (New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1883), 62.

Universal, civil, and religious Liberty.” By 1837 however, the American Moral Reform Society was not always a united front. While Whipper envisioned an interracial organization without distinction to race, Cornish and others argued for black autonomy and a focus on black communities in the goal of moral uplift.³⁰

Despite such differences, there was a general agreement among many of the nineteenth-century African-American elite that condition was the true cause of color prejudice. While Cornish placed the “guilt” for this condition “wholly at the White man’s door,” he also proposed African-Americans could escape social stigma through individual reform. As free blacks “elevated their condition” he argued, racial prejudice against them would “wear away.” In his paper, Cornish encouraged readers to seize the age of reform, to establish a “more religious...moral, more industrious and prudent” character, to uplift themselves and their collective communities.³¹

In 1837, the Young Men’s Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia took up a similar task, conducting surveys of lower class blacks in the city. The organization of young black and white abolitionists had come together in 1835, and counted among them James Forten, Robert B. Forten, Robert Purvis and other men of color. Alongside the aim of eradicating slavery, in January 1837 the group began to meet regularly “for the purpose of ascertaining what might be

³⁰Adeleke, 130-140; Howard H. Bell, “The American Moral Reform Society, 1836-1841,” *The Journal of Negro Education*, 27, No. 1 (Winter, 1958): 34-36; American Moral Reform Society, “The minutes and proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society : held at Philadelphia, in the Presbyterian Church in Seventh Street, below Shippen, from the 14th to the 19th of August, 1837,” (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn..., 1837), Daniel A.P. Murray Pamphlet Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; “Minutes and proceedings of the third annual convention, for the improvement of the free people of colour in these United States: held by adjournments in the city of Philadelphia from the 3d to the 13th of June inclusive, 1833,” (New York, 1833), 17; “Minutes and proceedings of the fourth annual convention, for the improvement of the free people of colour in these United States: held by adjournments in the Asbury Church, New-York From the 2d to the 13th of June inclusive, 1834,” (New York, 1834), 7.

³¹ Samuel Cornish, quoted in Adeleke, 133.

done for the moral improvement of the lower class of the people of colour.”³² At the annual convention of the American Reform Society in August 1837 members pledged themselves to reforming the “general character” of fellow blacks. The key symbol of this would be the “liberated slave” whose very freedom would usher in an improvement in his “moral and mental culture.” Reform in free black communities of the 1830s addressed both the personal and the political.³³

In the midst of this age of reform came British Emancipation by which, one black newspaper proclaimed, “800,000 freemen sprang into existence.” Though divided by national and geographic boundaries, black West Indians had shared with African-Americans the degradation of a “horrid chattel system” which had left them in moral and intellectual darkness. Now they were joining the ranks of free men and women, part of a broader Black Atlantic world. Emancipation would allow them a chance to reform their characters and take up their role as citizens. Such an achievement would act as moral suasion upon anti-abolitionists, proslavery advocates and those who believed blacks incapable of reformation.³⁴

A June 1834 meeting of the Annual Convention for the Improvement of People of Colour in New York heralded the coming August emancipation as a momentous occasion, when the “British dominions” would be “free of slaves.” Calling slavery a “Satanic monster,” the delegates foresaw a time when the United States would follow a similar example, and “tyranny, cruelty, prejudice and slavery” would fall away. Only then could black people “rise in glory and triumph, reason, virtue, kindness and liberty, and take a high exalted stand among the sons of

³² Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 265-266; Meeting of the Young Men’s Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA), Minutes of Meeting of the Young Men’s Anti-Slavery Society, 25 January 1837.

³³ American Moral Reform Society. Meeting 1837, 10.

³⁴ *Colored American*, 5 August 1837.

men.” The success of British Emancipation would demonstrate the efficacy of immediate emancipation, repudiate claims of black inferiority and provide a model for freedom in America.³⁵

Black newspapers like the *Colored American* stepped into the debates over the success of emancipation in the British West Indies. American newspapers were deemed “so stupid or so willful,” on the topic of British Emancipation, that it was necessary to look elsewhere for accuracy.³⁶ In articles and editorials, black newspapers openly challenged the negative portrayals of the West Indies as bastions of greater black degeneracy and immorality in the wake of British Emancipation. Instead, they painted the Caribbean colonies as a place of free labor success and moral reform. Like white abolitionist papers they relied on eyewitness accounts, colonial newspapers and missionary envoys to make their claims.

In February 1837, the *Colored American* informed readers that The British and Foreign Bible Society had distributed “100,000 bibles among the liberated slaves in the West Indies,” as part of their religious instruction.³⁷ Drawing on news reports from Antigua, an April 1837 paper detailed the success of the Wesleyan Missionary Society in creating “a great increase of religious interest” among the former slaves. In Nevis black West Indians were described as flocking “to the preaching of the gospel” in such great numbers, the existing chapels required a doubling in size. In Jamaica there was a marked rise in missionaries to meet this demand, who were working with the colonial government to promote education. It was reported that 19 school house had been built in the past year throughout the British West Indies: “two at Antigua, two at Dominica,

³⁵ Minutes and proceedings of the fourth annual convention 1834, 6.

³⁶ *Colored American*, 9 July 1838.

³⁷ *The Weekly Advocate*, 25 February 1837. The *Weekly Advocate* was the early name for *Colored American* when it was published under Phillip A. Bell.

one at Montserrat, one at Nevis, one at St. Christopher's, one at Tortola, one at Bermuda, one at St. Vincents, two at Barbadoes, two at Demerara, two in Jamaica, one at New Providence, and one at Harbor Island.” Teachers had also been recruited, some of them from among the former slaves who had been educated through Sabbath Schools. Though the qualifications of these instructors were described as “meager,” such deficiencies, it was said, were “made up by diligence and perseverance.”³⁸

In an 1837 article, the *Colored American* relied heavily on James A. Thome who, along with Joseph Kimball, had been sent by the American Anti-Slavery Society on a six-month tour of Antigua, Barbados and Jamaica. The editors informed readers that Thome had “lately returned from a visit of inquiry to the British West India Islands” and was now “furnished with facts and experimental testimony.” This included, the article claimed, “volumes of official testimony in favor of the emancipated.” Such evidence would be “sufficient to silence...opponents, and refute all the arguments leveled against IMMEDIATE EMANCIPATION.”³⁹

Citing Thome, the *Colored American* noted that the freed slaves were praised for “their quietness, their industry, their respect for the laws, and their attention to moral improvement and religious duties.” Emancipation had brought about as well “the cultivation of virtuous habits” among the islands’ black inhabitants who were showing promise of greater “intellectual improvement.” If freedom could so dramatically change the condition of 800,000 slaves in the West Indies, it could as well disenthral and redeem “two millions of bleeding slaves” in America, the editorial argued. The editors remarked with some irony that, “had Republican

³⁸ *Colored American*, 29 April 1837.

³⁹ *Colored American*, 5 August 1837; James A. Thome and J. Horace Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838).

America remained a colony of Great Britain, the first of August 1834, would have emancipated every slave, and made us a nation of FREEMEN.”⁴⁰

In June 1838 the *Colored American* printed an article entitled “Immediate Emancipation.” In the write up, the editors marshaled Kimball and Thome’s *Emancipation in the West Indies*, a Barbados newspaper and a letter by the Massachusetts Governor Edward Everett, to denounce detractors of emancipation in the West Indies. “Why is it,” the paper asked, “that so many adhere with such pertinacity to the notion, that *immediate* emancipation is dangerous?” The editors insisted the ultimate effects of emancipation must be approached “philosophically—logically—by deductions from facts—from history—from the nature of the human mind.” It was “in accordance with the principles of human nature” that those who had been given freedom would not turn upon the society that had given them liberation. Those who opposed emancipation were invited to “study the subject” rather than engaging in “speculation.”⁴¹

Quoting an American professor who had recently visited the West Indies, another *Colored American* article pointed out that the former slaves showed “no incapacity to understand the nature of law,” and readily acquiesced to the legalities of free society. If this was the case in a place like Jamaica, the article put forth, where former slaves were thought to be “in a deplorably backward state,” with regards to both intelligence and “moral cultivation,” then it would certainly be “a possible probable result in Virginia and the Carolinas.” If freedom could uplift those from the most degraded forms of slavery into capable citizens of this foreign land, it could do the same, more easily so, in a free republic. The West Indies, the article argued, provided a

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ *Colored American*, 9 June 1838.

“specimen” of what the slaves of the American South “can and will become” once liberated from the blight and oppression of slavery.⁴²

The free people of color in the West Indies, who had existed before British Emancipation, were reported as even better poised to exploit the virtues of freedom. The *Colored American* quoted the visiting professor who claimed to find among this previously free populace “an advancement: in knowledge and mental development [sic], corresponding with their advancement in privileges.” Free blacks had attained positions as “mechanics, merchants and magistrates,” alongside the civil rights due free citizens of a state. They had even surpassed the whites in their class. By “superior industry,” the professor claimed, the previously free people of color had “driven the lower order of whites” from trades as diverse as masons, tailors and smiths. And while the latter lived often in “the lowest state of poverty, and wretchedness” requiring “casual charity,” the free black population thrived. The article in the end poignantly asked why the same should not be for the United States, when former slaves are made “free and protected by law?” For the editors of the *Colored American*, the social elevation of the free people of color in the West Indies upon emancipation mirrored their own hopes. The end of slavery in America would remove the racial stigma that marginalized their participation in democratic society, and propel them into the ranks of free citizens.⁴³

The success of British Emancipation was also used to attack the motivations and aims of the American Colonization Society. “We suppose,” another July 1838 *Colored American* article stated, “that sincere Colonizationists in this country, who have learned that the blacks of the West Indies are all turned loose, will be anxious to know what expedient the whites are adopting

⁴² *Colored American*, 14 July 1838.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

to get rid of the nuisances and save their country from the horrors of amalgamation.” The article critiqued the racial hysteria marshaled by American colonizationists, and demanded an answer for the absence of similar hysteria in the emancipated West Indies. Did the whites in the West Indies not also fear “black ascendancy?” Did they have “no fears of amalgamation” as well? “Do they not know,” the article mocked, “that it is impossible for the two races to live together?” If emancipation did not usher in such calamities in the West Indies, then it stood to reason that attacks by the American Colonization Society on the free black communities of New York and Philadelphia were equally misplaced.⁴⁴

Another *Colored American* article reprinted a letter by the New York Anti-Slavery Society founder William Goddell, mocking anti-abolitionists. Go to the West Indies, the article implored, and tell them “how the country will be overrun with negroes that can't take care of themselves, unless...driven to unpaid labor by the cartwhip.” Go to the West Indies and tell a former slave “husband and wife...who have lately been married in consequence of emancipation,” that they should return to what was seen as a life of immorality. “A Christian audience in Jamaica or Antigua,” the article declared, “would doubtless be able to comprehend the depth and cogency of [such] arguments!” It was proposed that American “abolitionists, anti-abolitionists, and slaveholders” should together travel to the West Indies, where through eyewitness evidence they could meet to “settle their disputes.”⁴⁵

Like white abolitionists, African-Americans had been vocally critical of the apprenticeship law passed with the British Abolition Act. Newspapers like the *Colored American* contrasted the interference of gradual emancipation in colonies like Barbados and Jamaica, with

⁴⁴ *Colored American*, 28 July 1838.

⁴⁵ *Colored American*, 11 August 1838.

the success of immediate emancipation in Antigua and Bermuda. “The proofs that immediatism is the true and only doctrine,” the editors argued, “are thickening upon us...and will soon carry all candid minds.”⁴⁶ In 1838 the black abolitionist David Ruggles launched his own independent short-lived paper, the *Mirror of Liberty* out of New York. Like other black newspapers, it kept its readers apprised of the happenings in the West Indies and covered the ongoing debate over apprenticeship taking place in British Parliament. A June 1838 *Mirror of Liberty* article cited “intelligence from England” which stated that a law for the “immediate and unconditional Emancipation to the Negroes of ALL the Islands” was soon to commence, thus ending the apprenticeship system, what the paper termed “a matter of long deferred justice.” When the act passed British Parliament that August, the editors were jubilant, calling the removal of this “last vestige” of human bondage a time to rejoice “for the friends of human liberty everywhere.”⁴⁷

Taking aim at American hypocrisy, Ruggles’s paper mocked “those in this boasted ‘land of the SLAVE and the FREE,’” who resisted Immediatism by claiming that freedom had caused moral degeneration in the emancipated slaves of the British West Indies. Speaking directly to the anti-abolitionists, the article demanded they “no longer deafen the ears of this nation with the cry of ‘down with the fanatics!’ ‘LYNCH THE INCENDIARIES!’” British Emancipation and the early end of apprenticeship served as “a star of Hope” for the abolitionist movement in America, evidence that former slaves could be made proper citizens in a free state. Through the example set through the success of freedom in the emancipated West Indian colonies, slavery would “be compelled to go out of the world.”⁴⁸ The *Colored American* that September was ecstatic, calling

⁴⁶ *Colored American*, 9 June 1838.

⁴⁷ *Mirror of Liberty*, July 1838.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

the recent events in the British West Indies the “general course of the universe” towards emancipation, a force which the slaveholders of the American South would find impossible to oppose: “The long and bloody contest waged between the two great rival principles, liberty and slavery . . . is at last about to be decided . . . by the power of truth and argument.”⁴⁹

Black newspapers mocked the popular press for their repeated attempts to discredit the liberated West Indies, and by extension the reformatory power of immediate emancipation. In an article entitled “Satan Outgeneraled!,” the *Colored American* noted with sarcasm that the “horrible consequences” of British Emancipation depicted by a Providence newspaper was not murder or wanton destruction, but instead “two negroes . . . seen quarrelling.”⁵⁰ The paper accused a “proslavery party” in the West Indies and “American pro-slavites” of collusion with the popular press. Their intent, it was claimed, was to spread misinformation about the “glories of British emancipation,” in order to maintain slavery in the United States. If England were to “succeed in the West Indies,” the paper noted, American slaveholders would be “left without any apology for their inhuman, anti-civilized system.”⁵¹

Accusing American newspapers of “extravagantly” prophesying “ruin” and “vagrancy” among the former slaves, an 1839 *Colored American* article set out to show the opposite. Emancipation and reform was said to have created a middling class of former slaves who pulled from the degradations of slavery, had become “industrious” and “enterprising.” These had become shopkeepers, merchants and manufacturers, contributing to the wealth and prosperity of

⁴⁹ *Colored American*, 22 September 1838.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Colored American*, 8 June 1839.

the island in ways their former forced labor could not.⁵² A May 1841 *Colored American* article took the *New York Courier and Enquirer* to task for their negative portrayal of the emancipated West Indian slaves, accusing the paper of lacking “truth” and using “every occasion” to “make the worst of everything...which concerns the rights of the “colored people.” Relying on files recently received from English and Caribbean papers, the article claimed it could find nothing “upon which to base” such negative reports. The American newspapers were charged with attempting “to keep the public in the dark as to all the greater good” that resulted from “giving liberty to the captives” of the British West Indies.⁵³

In their assessments, black moral reformers turned the very question of degeneracy and civilization on its head. It was not the free blacks of the West Indies, or by extension the free blacks of the North, who existed in a state of immorality. It was instead the slaveholders of the South, who fell short of the moral ideals they denied to those they held in bondage. The emancipation of 800,000 slaves in the British West Indies was praised as an act of God, “preparing the way for the emancipation of two and a half millions of their enslaved brethren, in the United States.”⁵⁴

The Problem of Emigration

For African-Americans British Emancipation, and its success in the West Indies, was complicated by the controversial issue of emigration. Beginning in 1839, agents from British Guiana, Trinidad and Jamaica embarked on a tour of the Northeastern states in a search for labor.

⁵² *Colored American*, 27 July 1839.

⁵³ *Colored American*, 8 May 1841.

⁵⁴ *Colored American*, 14 July 1838.

Setting up offices in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, these agents sought to entice free blacks to settle in the British West Indies where they would find work and prosperity.

The agent of the Immigration Society of British Guiana, Edward Carbery, produced tracts in Boston in 1840 that spoke directly to the free black communities of the North. The pamphlet painted a favorable picture of the geography of British Guiana, with rich soil open for cultivation to willing emigrants. Carbery contrasted the social climate of the colony with the hostile racial animus towards free black communities in the American North. “Those distinctions . . . which render the position of the colored man in the United States so mortifying and uncomfortable, are wholly unknown in British Guiana,” the pamphlet assured. “In this respect all are equal . . . without distinction by white and colored.” Blacks in the emancipated British colony were described as “wealthy, influential, and highly respectable,” with many holding positions such as “magistrates, proprietors,” and “merchants with large establishments.” Labor on the British Guiana plantations was economically rewarding, the pamphlet promised. The existing black West Indian laborers, who were “active and industrious,” had been supplied with their own houses, land, schooling and other social benefits unattainable in the United States.⁵⁵

Similar tracts were created for Jamaica. British agent Alexander Barclay enticed the “coloured people of the United States” to immigrate to the island with assurances of free passage, and by providing “particulars” about the island. African-Americans were assured that communication with Jamaica was frequent, with ships traveling weekly from New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore—all cities that boasted large free black populations. Jamaica was described as warm, temperate, bountiful and even idyllic—with “crystal” streams, “cloud-

⁵⁵ Edward Carbery, *Inducements to the Coloured People of the United States to Emigrate to British Guiana* (Boston, 1840), 7, 11-14.

wreathed” mountains, and “luxuriant cultivation.” Migrants could also expect religious tolerance, education for all children, and wages for labor “exceeded by none in the world.”⁵⁶

Most noticeable, Barclay highlighted the political and social privileges that African-Americans could expect to enjoy on the island. Citing a motto seen on an American flag at a Fourth of July celebration in New York, “Where liberty dwells, there is my country,” the pamphlet pointed to the free constitution of the Jamaican colony. Jamaica, the pamphlet assured, would see that the republican principles and rights sought “in vain” by African-Americans would be “equally secured” to the arriving emigrants. Jamaica’s free coloured class was already said to be a “numerous body,” many of whom were “well-educated,” upstanding persons of property. They had secured “an entire equality of rights” with the whites of the island even before emancipation. With abolition and the “removal of legal disabilities,” color prejudice in the colony had “rapidly died away.”⁵⁷

The pamphlet readily cited the familiar work of the American Anti-Slavery Society agents Kimball and Thome, highlighting integrated schools, equitable participation in occupational trades, and democratic participation by people of color in civic government. In Jamaica, men of talent would “find no bar to...advancement,” the pamphlet assured, and society was “open to every class of men without distinction.” These were appeals to which an unenfranchised free black community could readily relate. The success of emancipation in the British West Indies now offered a space of possible social and political refuge.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Alexander Barclay, *Remarks on Emigration to Jamaica: Addressed to the Coloured Class of the United States* (New York, 1840), 1-8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 9-14.

Reaction within free black communities was mixed. For black abolitionists like Samuel Cornish of New York, emigration appeals to the British West Indies were too similar to the schemes of the American Colonization Society. In 1837 the *Colored American* carried a poem that reflected where Cornish stood on the matter: “We hereby make our proclamation, That we’re opposed to emigration—This is the land which gave us birth, Our father’s graves are freedom’s earth.”⁵⁹ A year later, the paper was sounding the same refrain “respecting the emigration of our brethren from the United States to the West Indies.” The *Colored American* reminded readers that the United States was, “THE LAND OF OUR BIRTH.” Through the fate of slavery the editors argued, God had cast the lot of free blacks in the United States. And on this soil, they declared, it was the duty of African-Americans “to be virtuous, industrious, economical, and enterprising.” Talk of leaving the United States was derided as “nonsense,” no matter the opinions of individuals and colonizationists, be they black or white.⁶⁰

As evidence the editors turned to a correspondence from Kingston, Jamaica, that they claimed accorded “perfectly” with their thoughts on emigration to the British Caribbean. The author described himself as no “idle spectator” who had resided in the West Indies for forty years. He pointed to labor conflicts between West Indian planters and former slaves as the true impetus for the emigration scheme. He claimed to have particular insight on “the character and habits of the free people of color in the United States.” In his assessment, “not a decent man or woman among them” would come to the West Indies, “if made acquainted with all the difficulties they would have to encounter.” Those that did emigrate would hastily find themselves returning to the United States, “notwithstanding the political disadvantages” under

⁵⁹ *Colored American*, 7 October 1837.

⁶⁰ *Colored American*, 11 August 1838.

which free blacks lived. He described former slaves of the West Indies as centuries behind free black Americans “as regards civilization.” Black Americans would find the West Indies hostile, and the food and pay inferior. The author related stories of free black American seamen seduced to the British islands with false claims of “liberty and equality” of the races. Now impoverished, those unfortunate men desperately sought a return to the United States, “where no man need ever want, who will work.”⁶¹

These negative descriptions were a startling divergence from the more typical depictions of the Anglo-Caribbean in the *Colored American*. It speaks to the complexities of British Emancipation for free African-Americans. Denunciations of American hypocrisy and praises of progress in the emancipated West Indies were meant to stimulate change in the United States. The most important battle was the one that would end the Southern slaveocracy and grant African-Americans rights as free citizens. Samuel Cornish made his own appeal against emigration to the British West Indies. He implored his readers to remain the United States, despite obstacles of violence and even death, for their struggle at home was the most consequential. “Take courage brethren,” he urged, and pointed to the recent victories of abolitionism, including the emancipation of the British West Indies, as the coming downfall of slavery in America, of which they would play a great part.⁶²

Still, free African-Americans did not speak with one voice on the issue. In October 1838, the *Colored American* responded to the growing interest on emigration by relenting to present information on the topic. Clearly distinguishing its position from groups like the American Colonization Society, the paper argued that if emigration was to be considered it was “nonsense

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Colored American*, 16 October 1838.

to talk or think about barbarous, pestilential Africa,” over “infinitely more superior asylums” nearby in the West Indies. Their readers were more vocal.⁶³

In a series of letters to the *Colored American* in 1838 a writer calling himself Augustine asserted that emigration to the British West Indies was a viable option for free African-Americans. If African-Americans could thrive as equal citizens abroad in a free society, he argued, it would have “a very great effect” on slavery in the United States. “That this would be the case,” Augustine wrote “is made manifest from the deep interest which yourself, and everybody else in this country now take in the working of emancipation in the British West Indies.”⁶⁴

He challenged the paper on this point, citing the contradictions inherent in the editors’ stance:

If the successful issue of emancipation there, is to have no influence upon slavery here, why has the great Am. Anti-Slavery Society taken such a deep interest in it? Why did they send agents there to investigate its operations, and mark its results? and why have they published the account of their investigations throughout the length and breadth of this land, if it is to have no influence upon slavery? I reassert it, that the elevation of colored men at a distance, has, and will continue to have, an incalculable influence upon slavery in this country.⁶⁵

Even as the *Colored American* sought to detach the issue of emigration to the West Indian colonies from the larger abolitionist cause, he reminded them that the two were intrinsically tied.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Colored American*, 13 October 1838.

⁶⁴ *Colored American*, 10 November 1838. Historian Floyd Miller has identified Augustine as black abolitionist and AME leader Lewis Woodson of Ohio; Miller describes Woodson as a “Father of Black Nationalism.” See, Floyd Miller, “The Father of Black Nationalism: Another Contender,” *Civil War History* 17 (December 1971): 310–19.

⁶⁵ *Colored American*, 10 November 1838.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Augustine further tied emigration to the British West Indies as part of an act of freedom and mobility that transcended national allegiances or boundaries. “If we cannot go where and when we please,” he declared, “we cannot call ourselves free.” Making a distinction between voluntary and forced migration, he contended “that where another country holds out higher privileges, and greater inducement than our own,” African-Americans had a moral right to emigrate.⁶⁷ By late 1838, free African-Americans would have been witness to the concerted retaliatory violence upon abolitionists and their allies. 1834 had seen anti-abolitionist riots in New York. That May in 1838, anti-black rioters had attacked and burned down Pennsylvania Hall. The racial climate in the North had not improved. If anything, it had grown considerably worse. Considering the mounting danger, there were those like Augustine who believed emigration arguments should at least be given a fair hearing. In a previous article he pointed to blacks who were “living happily in the West Indies, and in Canada,” asserting he would “rather be a *living freeman*,” in a foreign land, “than a ‘dead nigger’” in America.⁶⁸

Another writer to the paper, using the pseudonym Viator, announced that though he was opposed to colonization and did not align with Augustine’s “heretical” doctrines, emigration to the British West Indies should at least be explored for “the good of our people.” The writer proposed an African-American agent be sent to “to examine” the resources of the islands, and to gauge the “advantages” it held for “farmers, mechanics, and professional, literary and commercial men.” If the conditions were favorable, the writer proposed that African-Americans, acquainted with American ownership and capital, “would have advantages superior to the native

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ *Colored American*, 22, September 1838.

freedman.”⁶⁹ Viator claimed he was aware of writings on the subject by Kimball and Thome, who were deserving of credit, but “they could not consult the interests of colored men” or truly understand “the working man” and his specific “situations. Agents of their own selection, and of their own color, would be needed “and sent for that ostensible purpose.” If emigration to the British West Indies was going to be explored the writer argued, blacks would have to take the lead and arrive at their own conclusions.⁷⁰

Divisions over West India emigration came from within the ranks of the *Colored American* as well. Phillip A. Bell, co-owner of the paper, though not an emigrationist, wrote an article in July of 1839 calling it a “misrepresentation ... that colored citizens have determined not to emigrate from this, to any other country whatever, *under any circumstances whatever.*” Bell blamed this erroneous opinion on black orators and writers who failed to make distinctions between forced colonization schemes and voluntary migration, arguing that free blacks should “look out for every chance of enterprise—every door of emigration, where we can, individually, better our condition.” Far from harming the cause of abolitionism, Bell contended, the success of industrious black emigrants to Canada, the British West Indies or Haiti, would deal a blow to perceptions of black inferiority “in this slavery-ridden, prejudice-cursed country.”⁷¹

Bell was not alone. By autumn of 1839, emigration was openly being discussed in free African-American communities. In Baltimore, blacks working with the British agent Edward Carbery organized a Committee of Emigration. Two delegates, Nathaniel Peck and Thomas

⁶⁹ *Colored American*, 29 December 1838.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* The writer as well supported voluntary emigration, provided it was beneficial, to Haiti, Africa and the American West. But it was the West Indies to which he proposed African-Americans first turn their attention.

⁷¹ *Colored American*, 27 July 1839; Great Britain. Colonial Office. *1841 Papers Relative to the West Indies. 1841. British Guiana. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty*, (London: William Clowes and Sons, H.M. Stationary Office, 1841) 139-145.

Price, were selected to travel to British Guiana and Trinidad that December. Their trip, “free of expense,” was paid for and managed by Carbery. In his own words, the purpose was to “give them an opportunity to examine the country, to judge for themselves, and to report to their brethren, what the prospects for immigrants really are.”⁷²

The general interest in emigration to the British West Indies caused even the *Colored American* to ease its initial objections. While we continue to “wage unceasing, uncompromising war against Colonization,” the editors noted in November, “we are not so hostile to voluntary emigration.” Comparing the Northern free black community to a garden that “occasionally require culling” after becoming “too luxuriant, and overgrown,” the editorial argued that only the “right kind of people” should emigrate, those who could prove the industriousness and character of the race.⁷³ The editorial tacked on an article from the mainstream *Evening Signal*, which asserted that in the British West Indies “labor is light; wages are high” and the tropic climate naturally made “for the residence of the colored portion of the human race.” Emigration was urged for a “considerable portion” of the free black Northern populace: “instead of freezing, starving, leading lives of wretchedness here, let them go [to] the warm, genial latitudes of the South, feed and clothe themselves and their offspring abundantly.” At the same time, the *Colored American* expressed misgivings about those who blundered “headlong” into emigration, and lectured its readers to wait until more reports were forthcoming. As the stated rather succinctly on the matter, “Brethren beware.”⁷⁴

⁷² Carbery, 16.

⁷³ *Colored American*, 16 November 1839.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; *Colored American*, 5 October 1839.

In April of 1840, Peck and Price returned to Baltimore from their expedition “to ascertain the character...and the political and social condition of the coloured inhabitants” of Trinidad and Guiana. The two black envoys turned their findings into a meticulous twenty-nine-page report similar to that of Kimball and Thome. While most of their descriptions dealt with the climate, soil and agricultural possibilities for emigrants, some portion was dedicated to describing the black West Indian population. Both men stressed “conversing on every occasion with the labourers,” to gauge both the “satisfaction of their situation” and the progress made since emancipation. The two visited churches that were “well attended” by free blacks “seeking knowledge,” an amazing feat they remarked for people “only about 18 months...emancipated.” Peck and Price asserted that in the emancipated West Indies, free African-Americans could expect to be treated “according to tradition” rather than race. Only “education, character and wealth,” which all could attain regardless of color in the British colonies, stood as a barrier to success. Visiting a criminal court, they witnessed clerks and other officials participating in legal proceedings “without regard to colour.” In all they painted a favorable picture of life for black emigrants to the West Indies, where fertile land, labor and social equality awaited. When Peck and Price presented their report back to the Committee of Emigration, they found over a hundred blacks in Baltimore already prepared to leave the United States.⁷⁵

But black emigrants, independent of British colonial agents, were returning to tell their own stories. In the tradition of black literary politics, they committed their stories to print. The same April that Peck and Price gave their report, a black emigrant identified as Mr. Waugh

⁷⁵ Christopher Phillips, *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 216-218; Nathaniel Peck, and Thomas S. Price, *Report of Messrs. Peck and Price, Who Were Appointed at a Meeting of the Free Colored People of Baltimore, Held on the 25th November, 1839, Delegates to Visit British Guiana, and the Island of Trinidad; for the Purpose of Ascertaining the Advantages to be Derived by Colored People Migrating to Those Places* (Baltimore: Woods & Crane, 1840), 2, 9-11, 13-15.

created a pamphlet entitled *Waugh's Statement* that expressed “dissatisfaction and disappointment” with the “general circumstances” of African-American emigrants to Trinidad. The already skeptical editors at the *Colored American* amplified the pamphlet by reprinting much of its content. They described Mr. Waugh as a “respectable man” who perhaps “embarked with too much anticipation,” and upon seeing “things as they were,” had his “hope sunk . . . became disheartened, and found he had misapprehended most things.”⁷⁶

A follow up article one week later was even more direct. Like past investigations of the British Caribbean colonies, the paper relied on the accounts of an independent observer who had traveled to Trinidad, a black envoy identified as Mr. Walker and described as a “friend” of the editors. In direct contradiction to Peck and Price, and the tracts of British agents, Walker described the colony as having an unhealthy climate, low wages and poor food. African-American emigrants were said to be isolated from both the whites and the black “natives,” most of who had sunk “too low in moral degradation to associate with.” The work conditions were labeled as “complete slavery,” and many disheartened emigrants now lamented they had been deceived. Worse still, many suffered from illness and some had even died. The editors declared that this information had finally “set things right in relation” to emigration to the West Indies. They expressed hope that now “our people will settle down . . . in our country, where we ought to be.”⁷⁷

By May, the editors openly declared they had “taken a decided stand against . . . all emigration to the West Indies.” Pulling on a report from the *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, the paper portrayed the British West Indies as still run by a “tyrannical” planter elite

⁷⁶ *Colored American*, 4 April 1840.

⁷⁷ *Colored American*, 11 April 1840.

who held the blacks there in “political and social degradation.” A week later the editors followed with a lengthy commentary titled, “This Country Our Only Home.” Point by point, the article refuted emigration as a tactic, arguing that free blacks had been “completed Americanized” and had to be “raised up” on this soil—no other. Addressing the lack of rights afforded African-Americans, the editorial countered that “the strongest claim to citizenship is birthplace,” and to relinquish that right was to in a way give in to those who denied them their rights. Those white Americans, who were ultimately charged with propagating emigration, may as well attempt to resettle “the Jay’s, the King’s the Adam’s, the Otis’s” and “the Hancocks’s.” The editorial assured readers that the current state of inequity could not long prevail, and that the “rights, hopes and prospects” for African-Americans were “in this country.” It was “a waste of time and of power” to look for rights under the power of any other government.⁷⁸

When a British Immigration Agent from Trinidad wrote a letter purporting to give an accurate assessment of free African-Americans and their desire to emigrate, the editors at the *Colored American* responded with as much fervor as they had to proslavery advocates. They denied, as the agent claimed, that their lives in the United States had become “vexatious and intolerable,” or that agitations for abolition was the root cause of the prejudice. They denied as well the agent’s claim that “the most intelligent of the free colored class,” in response to their “deteriorated” condition, now openly advocated emigration as the best possible remedy. Such a position was the domain of a “few selfish men,” who cared only about themselves, and were concerned neither with “their brethren” or the cause of freedom. The editors acknowledged that British Emancipation was indeed celebrated by African-Americans. However, they noted wryly, had the British abolished slavery decades earlier, when the United States were yet colonies, they

⁷⁸ *Colored American*, 2 May 1840, 9 May 1840.

would now be “completely an enfranchised people.” Thus, they stated bluntly, African-Americans would both celebrate and utilize British Emancipation on their own terms, for their own distinct purposes, a statement that served as a tempering of British moral superiority in the transnational struggle against slavery.⁷⁹

Increasingly the motives of those supporting emigration to the British West Indies came under question. A pamphlet of the National Reform Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the United States of America complained openly of “paid agents” in the employ of a “British West India Colonization scheme,” who were opposed to the progress of free African-Americans. A November 1840 *Colored American* article leveled pointed criticisms at Nathaniel Peck and Thomas Price’s report. The two men were depicted as being in the “lap of the planters,” whose interest it was to present a favorable view of the islands. The editors lamented that sending agents to examine the British West Indies on emigration was useless and implied that Peck and Price had been bribed by their hosts. Any men sent on such a mission “would require an unusual amount of moral courage after having been *so richly* entertained.” They finished their editorial with an article from the *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Reporter*, which denounced Peck and Price as “simple-minded men” who had been duped by white planters to see “just what they wished to see.”⁸⁰

The emigration “scheme” to the British colonies was described as the project of West Indian planters, created for their “selfish” interests, and divorced from the favorable reformist

⁷⁹ *Colored American*, 11 July 1840; The letter was written by the British agent William H. Burnley to the British Colonial Secretary Lord John Russell, Papers Relative to the West Indies.

⁸⁰ *Colored American*, 1 August 1840, 7 November 1840. The stance of British Abolitionists on the emigration of free African-Americans to the West Indies was neither static nor monolithic. As emigration from India and China grew, what many British abolitionists saw as slave labor, some increasingly sought to encourage immigration from either free African-Americans or free black laborers on other West Indian colonies. See, Madhavi Kale, *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

work of abolitionism. What was needed in the British West Indies, the *Colored American* suggested, was not new laborers but for the planters to “promote marriage and domestic habits” among the former slaves, treat them with “equity and kindness,” and improve their “houses and household comforts.” If emigration to the British West Indies would bring “Yankee enterprise” to colonies destined to one day “be governed by colored men,” the editors asserted they would be in favor of it. If however the West Indian planters expected black emigrants to simply toil like slaves as cultivators in their fields, they had “reckoned wrong upon the character of ‘colored Americans.’”⁸¹

By 1841, the *Liberator* joined the chorus of black newspapers, advising their “coloured friends” against emigration to the British West Indies. The *Colored American* reprinted a tract by the British and Foreign Anti Slavery Society denouncing emigration as a “delusive and fallacious” plot of West Indian planters to “seduce the credulous.” Readers were reminded that these were the words of British abolitionists, who knew the “character, motives, and doings” of West Indian planters and who had at their hearts “the interest of the freed men” there.⁸²

Those who argued for emigration to the British West Indies or elsewhere, because of the hardships of the United States, had the wrong of it:

the compulsory settlement of this country by the African race, with the cruel sufferings they have endured, and the immense labors they have performed, have given them a right of continuance on the American soil, which God requires them to claim for themselves and their children, and from which he does not intend they shall ever be driven.⁸³

⁸¹ *Colored American*, 4 April 1840; 2 May 1840.

⁸² *Colored American*, 20 March 1841, 13 November 1841. A March 13th article claimed as well the West Indian emigration agents had enticed immigrants from Ireland, sending a vessel to the West Indies, an act with Irish papers were heavily against. This included the Irish nationalist and well-noted abolitionist David O’Connell, who had spoken out against it.

⁸³ *Colored American*, 5 June 1841.

The marginalization African-Americans faced in the United States was not evidence in favor of emigration. A legacy of slavery was no justification for the denial of rights of republican citizenship and participatory democracy. It was precisely the opposite. The history of bondage African-Americans had endured was the right by which they would assert their rights. What was more American or better illustrated the common man after all than his toil, labor and struggle to be free.

British Emancipation and the Politics of Slavery

As the struggle against slavery entered the larger American political discourse, free black communities continued to engage and utilize the emancipated West Indies in their rhetoric and discourse. This era marked an increasing shift away from strict moral suasion. As early as 1835, David Ruggles, Samuel Cornish and other free African-Americans had formed the New York Committee of Vigilance, which tempered strict moral suasion with more direct activism—namely defending blacks from being kidnapped or returned into slavery.⁸⁴ The black abolitionist Peter Paul Simons in an April 1839 address before the African Clarkson Association of New York City decried moral suasion as “mere song,” an attempt to curry favor with whites and a hindrance to significant black progress. No people, Simons argued, had ever gained freedom by becoming more moral in the eyes their oppressors. The navies of England, the United States and France had not been persuaded to abandon the slave trade because blacks had shown themselves more moral, he insisted. Simons advocated instead that free blacks engage in a more direct

⁸⁴ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 42-56.

confrontation with slavery and racism. “We must show ACTION! ACTION! ACTION!” he declared, “and our will to be, or not to be.”⁸⁵

Moral suasion among African-Americans suffered most acutely from the limited returns of its success. After a decade of both advocating and making more upright African-Americans, emancipation and equality seemed as far away as ever—if not more so. Anti-black race riots broke out in Philadelphia in 1838, in Cincinnati in 1842, in Boston in 1843, and other northern cities. Altogether, some forty-eight anti-black and anti-abolitionist riots occurred in the United States between 1830s and 1840s.⁸⁶ After a British Emancipation parade in Philadelphia in 1842 set off a three-day riot, the black abolitionist Robert Purvis was shaken from moral suasion by “the wantonness, brutality, and murderous spirit” of the mobs. “I am convinced of our utter and complete nothingness in public estimation,” he recalled in a letter to fellow abolitionist Henry Wright. “Nothing is redeeming, nothing hopeful...the bloody *will* is in the heart of the [white] community to destroy us.”⁸⁷ Unable to gain a national platform outside of Philadelphia, The

⁸⁵ *Colored American*, 1 June 1839. Simons had earlier come into conflict with Cornish and Ruggles, who he accused of both classism and colorism in their reluctance to print his article. Simons also clashed with both men on their views of the role of women in the abolitionist movement, which would become a prominent issue by 1840. His attacks on moral suasion and moral elevation would increase those tensions. See, Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery* 202-206.

⁸⁶ Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 88-91; David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62-64; see also, Leonard Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 20-81, 171-175; William Cheek and Aimee Lee Cheek, “John Mercer Langston and the Cincinnati Riot of 1841” in Henry Louis Taylor, ed. *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 29-69.

⁸⁷ Robert Purvis to Henry C. Wright, August 22, 1842 in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. III: The United States, 1830-1846*, ed. Peter C. Ripley (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 81-82; Margaret Hope Bacon, *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 98-100; Joseph A. Borome, “The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (January 1968): 326-327. The riot may as well have had a class dimension, as the mob singled out elite African-Americans and institutions for attack. See, Lapansky, “‘Since They Got Those Separate Churches’, 71-72.

American Moral Reform Society disbanded in 1841. Increasingly, moral suasion seemed inadequate to the meeting the challenges of the moment.⁸⁸

The gradual break from moral suasion among black abolitionists coincided with various fractures within the larger abolitionist movement. William Lloyd Garrison increasingly promoted a more uncompromising abolitionism that eschewed white religious institutions and political activism. Some like New York abolitionist Lewis Tappan continued on in the more traditional trend of moral suasion, seeking to reform religious institutions and promoting moral elevation among free blacks. Others sought a political solution, forming groups like the Liberty Party and advocating engagement in the voting process to undermine slavery.⁸⁹

Black abolitionists took advantage of the moment to make alliances they found beneficial. Some black women abolitionists in cities like Boston remained pro-Garrisonian, favoring his advocacy for women's leadership roles in the movement. Some like Samuel Cornish and Theodore Wright joined opposing factions, breaking with Garrison's stance on women's involvement, his attack on religious institutions and his strident criticism of antislavery politics.⁹⁰ Many African-Americans realized that they would have to chart their own path, to tackle the twin enemies of slavery and racial inequality. The more radical Thomas S. Sidney reminded fellow African-Americans that though white abolitionists were well-intentioned, it was blacks

⁸⁸ Howard H. Bell, "The American Moral Reform Society, 1836-1841," *The Journal of Negro Education* 27, No. 1 (Winter, 1958): 39-40.

⁸⁹ Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 64-71. James Brewer Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 16-18.

⁹⁰ Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 100-106; David E. Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1989), 102-112. Both Cornish and Wright had been instrumental in leading black petitions against political disfranchisement in 1837 to 1838, and saw a staunch importance in African-American participation in the democratic system.

who lived the everyday degradation, oppressiveness and violence brought about by slavery and racism. And so it was blacks that must take the lead in advocacy. Whites “are our allies,” he stated emphatically, but “ours is the battle.”⁹¹

No figure of the time epitomized this growing move to independence and political action more than Frederick Douglass. After escaping as a slave from Maryland, Douglass arrived in New York in 1838. While there, he was sought out by David Ruggles, who sheltered the fugitive slave in his boarding house and assisted in his move to New Bedford, Massachusetts. Douglass later wrote that Ruggles’s “vigilance, kindness, and perseverance” in aiding black fugitives was something he would never forget.⁹²

Douglass fast became the most prominent black abolitionist orator of the age, part of a new generation of free African-Americans in the North. In his formative years he spoke mostly under the patronage of white abolitionists like Garrison. By the mid 1840s, however, Douglass experienced his own dissonance from the fractured abolitionist movement. Garrison’s disavowal of political action and philosophies like disunion seemed limiting to the growing and increasingly international former slave. The slow split began to emerge while Douglass was on an eighteen-month trip to Britain between 1845 and 1847. There he spoke and met with English abolitionists, some of who were openly anti-Garrisonian. He was well received and funds were

⁹¹ *Colored American*, 6 March 1841; Adeleke, 135-137. Sidney was engaged in an ongoing argument with black Philadelphia abolitionist William Whipper, who advocated a more universal activist approach that focused more on larger national reform issues instead of just African-Americans. Both Cornish and Sidney argued against this, insisting that the focus of African-Americans needed to be upon the black oppressed first and foremost.

⁹² Frederick Douglass, “The Life of Frederick Douglass,” in *The Classic Slave Narratives* ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Signet Classics, 2002), 391-392. Disunion was a tactic proposed by Garrison that deemed the Constitution a corrupt immoral compact and advocated a complete split from the slave holding state. “No Union With Slaveholders” became the masthead of the *Liberator*, and disunion conventions were even held. This divided Garrisonians from antislavery activists who proposed political action. It also alienated free African-Americans, eventually even Douglass, as it appeared to signal a willingness to leave millions of blacks in bondage with the severing of slave holding states. See, Elizabeth Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

even raised to purchase his freedom. Upon his return, seeing the need for a voice beyond the *Liberator*, Douglass and the radical black activist Martin Delaney began their own newspaper, the *North Star*. Though the ties between them had been strained, Douglass and Garrison continued a working relationship until a formal break in 1851.⁹³

The need for a newspaper like the *North Star* was abundantly evident by 1847. Ruggles's short-lived *Mirror of Liberty* begun in 1838, printed only sporadically for three years. The *Colored American* had ceased printing in 1842. For much of the 1840s no consistent independent black newspaper spoke for free African-Americans. Douglass and Delaney's *North Star* sought to fill that void, pledging to give voice to the "immediate victims of slavery and prejudice." Like Cornish and Ruggles a decade prior, the *North Star* laid claim to a tradition of black autonomy through print. "It has long been our anxious wish to see," the first issue declared, "in this slave-holding, slave-trading, and Negro-hating land, a printing-press and paper, permanently established, under the complete control and direction of the immediate victims of slavery and oppression." Douglass had been born into slavery. Delaney, though born free, was the son of an enslaved mother in West Virginia. Both had witnessed firsthand the degradation of human bondage and now lived under racism in the North. Theirs was a unique voice and a claim to authenticity that black elites like Ruggles and Cornish could not match. It was those who had

⁹³ Richard J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 79-117. Douglass's trip to England was in part to avoid possible recapture by his former owner. It also provided space from the influence of William Lloyd Garrison. On Douglass's turn to antislavery politics see, David Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 26-59. On the Douglass-Garrisonian split see, Benjamin Quarles, "The Breach Between Douglass and Garrison," *Journal of Negro History* 23 (April 1938): 144-154; Tyrone Tillery, "The Inevitability of the Douglass-Garrison Conflict," *Phylon* 37 (June 1976): 137-149; William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W.W. Norton Press, 1995), 142-150; James Brewer Stewart and Eric Foner, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1996), 130-146.

experienced “the cruel pangs of Slavery,” Douglass and Delaney argued, that must now take up “to advocate Liberty.”⁹⁴

This new generation of black abolitionists did not give up on the tenets of moral suasion and moral elevation altogether. For men like Frederick Douglass, it was still incumbent for African-Americans “to rise from ignorance and debasement, to intelligence and respectability.”⁹⁵ The proportion by which free African-Americans rose in human improvement would determine the speediness of emancipation. This was the familiar refrain of moral elevation. But the increase of racial violence, which Douglass experienced first-hand, made it clear that black respectability would not be enough. It would take more than self-improvement to overcome the structural systems of slavery and prejudice. Direct action and increasing engagement with the political structure would be necessary.⁹⁶

This greater political focus of black abolitionists occurred, as slavery was becoming an increasing part of American politics. The issue of slavery was creating fissures between Northern and Southern Whig Party Representatives in Congress in the late 1830s. When Southern Whigs in 1839 introduced a rule to make permanent the existing Gag Rule against slave petitions, Northern Whigs voted against it. In 1840 more antislavery minded Whigs would split to form the Liberty Party and later the Free Soil Party in 1848.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *North Star*, 3 December 1847; see also, Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁹⁵ *North Star*, 29 September 1848.

⁹⁶ Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 57-58; Stewart and Foner, 118-119, 148-149.

⁹⁷ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 44-45, 155-160; 331-382; ; John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason, *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 279-281.

With this increase in antislavery politics came greater attention to British Emancipation. The Kentucky Senator and 1844 Whig presidential candidate Henry Clay, though opposed to slavery, spoke out against abolitionists who used British Emancipation as an example for the United States. Clay, a vocal supporter of the American Colonization Society, advocated a gradual approach to emancipation with the eventual repatriation of freed blacks outside the United States. In an 1839 speech to the United States Senate he addressed “the existing excitement on the subject of abolition” and its impact on antislavery politics. This fervor had been brought about principally, he believed, by “the example of British Emancipation of the slaves in the islands adjacent to our country.” With the similarity in laws, language, institutions, language and origin between the United States and Great Britain, Clay conceded “no great measure of national policy can be adopted in the one country without producing a considerable degree of influence in the other.” However, he chastised American abolitionists as “superficial men” who had confounded the two “totally different situations” in the British West Indies and the American South. Nothing on the practicality of abolition in the United States could be “inferred,” he asserted, “from the undecided British experiment” in the West Indies.⁹⁸

In 1840, the Quaker abolitionist Joseph John Gurney returned to the United States after a stay of several months in the West Indies. The purpose of his trip was to investigate the results of emancipation and preach to the former slaves. Convinced of the success of British Emancipation, Gurney toured the United States and lectured to political leaders, including Henry Clay. In 1840 he produced a book in the form of letters he himself had written to Clay, urging him to change

⁹⁸ Henry Clay, *Speech of the Hon. Henry Clay, in the Senate of the United States: on the subject of abolition petitions, February 7, 1839* (Boston: James Monroe and Company, 1839), 11-12. In 1840, the Quaker abolitionist Joseph John Gurney returned to the United States after a stay of several months in the West Indies. The purpose was to investigate the results of emancipation and preach to the former slaves.

his stance on emancipation through the example set by the West Indies.⁹⁹ Clay reportedly listened to Gurney's appeal. But though he lamented the "great evil" of slavery and the "irremediable wrong, to its unfortunate victims," he remained unconvinced on the implementation of West Indian styled emancipation in the United States. At a Lexington rally of Whigs in November 1847, he spoke out against the "incalculable mischief" done by abolitionists to the antislavery cause and characterized immediate emancipation as a plan that would place white Southerners under black political control. "In States where the slaves outnumber the whites," he contended, "the blacks could not be emancipated and invested with all the rights of freemen, without becoming the governing race in those States." In such a state of affairs Clay predicted "Collisions and conflicts between the two races," leading to "shocking scenes of rapine and carnage" and the inevitable "extinction or expulsion of the blacks."¹⁰⁰

In contrast, Frederick Douglass and Martin Delaney's *North Star* openly defended British Emancipation and the role it could play in the political debate on slavery in America. In the inaugural December 1847 issue, they dedicated the name and symbol of the paper to freedom in the West Indies and connected it intimately to the struggle for freedom in America. "Of all the stars in this 'brave old, overhanging sky,' the NORTH STAR is our choice," they proclaimed. "To thousands now free in the British dominions it has been the STAR OF FREEDOM. To

⁹⁹ Robert Seager II, ed., *The Papers of Henry Clay: The Whig Leader, January 1, 1837-December 31, 1843, Volume 9* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 467; see also, Joseph John Gurney, *A winter in the West Indies, described in familiar letters to Henry Clay, of Kentucky* (London, s.n., 1840).

¹⁰⁰ Henry Clay, *Henry Clay's advice to his countrymen relative to the war with Mexico* (H.R. Robinson: New York, 1847), 45-48; Clay, *The Papers of Henry Clay*, 467; The greater purpose of Clay's speech was to voice criticism of the war with Mexico and his former political opponent, President James Polk. Also at issue was whether the new territories acquired in the war would be brought into the Union as slave or free. For more on the war, slavery and Clay's speech see, Amy Greenberg, *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012), 229-237.

millions, now in our boasted land of liberty, it is the STAR OF HOPE.”¹⁰¹ In the same paper Douglass responded to Henry Clay’s 1847 Lexington address in long letter. Quoting the senator’s speech, Douglass called himself “one of those 'UNFORTUNATE VICTIMS'” for whom Clay claimed to feel sympathy. He also commented on the political marginalization suffered by African-Americans. “My position under this government, even in the State of N.Y., is that of a disfranchised man,” Douglass related. “I can have, therefore, no political ends to serve, nor party antipathy to gratify.” While commending Clay for his stance against the “unjust, mean, and iniquitous war” against Mexico, and the senator’s disavowal of acquiring any new territory for the “purpose of introducing slavery,” Douglass voiced his skepticism on Clay’s political commitment. “As one of the oppressed, I...earnestly hope that you may be able to keep your vow unsullied by compromises,” he wrote, which “have too often marred and defaced the beauty and consistency of your humane declarations and pledges on former occasions.”¹⁰²

Douglass went on in the letter to question Clay’s claim of racial war and extermination in the Southern states with the implementation of immediate emancipation. “How do you know that any such results would be inevitable? You will probably point me to the Revolution in St. Domingo...But the facts in that direction are all against you.” The revolution in Haiti, Douglass reminded Clay, was not the result emancipation, “but of a cruel attempt to re-enslave an already emancipated people.” Douglass implored Clay to instead, “Look...at the history of Emancipation in the British West Indies” where, like the American South, blacks number in the majority. “Have there been any ‘shocking scenes of rapine and carnage, extinction or expulsion,’” he asked? Douglass accused the Senator of engaging in “unfounded and irrational conjecture” to

¹⁰¹ *North Star*, 3 December 1847.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

“frighten” Americans from following a similar course of “righteous performance,” as had been done in the British West Indies, and to give “justice to millions now groaning in almost hopeless bondage.”¹⁰³

Wading into the antislavery politics of the day, in opposition to Whigs like Clay, Douglass wrote favorably of the “Conscience Whig” Congressman John Gorham Palfrey of Massachusetts. In February 1848 the paper reprinted large extracts from a speech of Palfrey against a proslavery Congressman from North Carolina entitled, “The Political Aspect of the Slave Question.” In the speech Palfrey denounced claims of “negro inferiority” by appealing to “woolly-headed Negroes” of Egypt, Alexandre Dumas, and even Frederick Douglass. Palfrey took time as well to counter claims of the “failure of the emancipation of the negroes of the West Indies.”¹⁰⁴

Charging his proslavery opponent with listening solely to West Indian planters, Palfrey cited Parliamentary Reports on exports from the British Caribbean colonies and the industry of the free black population. Calling British Emancipation a “magnificent triumph of Christianity and Right,” he spoke of the moral elevation of former slaves who had not carried out “one act of violence.” How was it a failure, Palfrey expounded, when 800,000 humans once regarded as “chattel” had been peacefully raised to the ranks of men and women, “endowed with the possession and care of their own bodies and souls, introduced to the relations of humanity, entitled to call their children their own, empowered to have husband and wife, brother and sister, in some intelligent sense!” Palfrey was not an abolitionist, but his political rhetoric was informed

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ *North Star*, 18 February 1848; John Gorham Palfrey, *Speech of Mr. Palfrey, of Massachusetts, on the political aspects of the slave question. Delivered in the House of representatives, January 26th, 1848* (Washington D.C.: J & G. S. Gideon, 1848), Palfrey was engaged in a debate with the proslavery Democratic Congressman from North Carolina, Thomas Lanier Clingman. The speech was delivered on January 28th, 1848 at the House of Representatives. It appears that Palfrey and Douglass also kept up a correspondence.

by over a decade of abolitionist arguments on the relative industrious and reformatory success of British Emancipation in the West Indies.¹⁰⁵

A September 1849 edition of the *North Star* presented readers with an overview of the British West Indian colonies entitled, “The Working of Emancipation.” The article cited extracts from Jamaican papers to refute “arguments that are continually being advanced against emancipation on the ground that it has not worked well in those places where it has been tried.”¹⁰⁶ By 1849 American anti-abolitionists were using the drop in sugar exports on the islands and the rise of prices in England as evidence of emancipation’s failure. They could as well point to the Spanish colony of Cuba, which using slave labor had surpassed the sugar production of Barbados and Jamaica.¹⁰⁷ Like other abolitionist papers, the *North Star* responded by tempering its use of free labor prosperity in the colonies as a marker of success. “It is not with us a question of very vital import,” the paper stated, “whether or not the [West Indian] planters can realize as large a profit from free, as from slave labor.” Wealth gained through slave labor was compared to “robbery” that would unsurprisingly reward the immoral. It was only “a fool or worse” that could not “contrive to fill his pockets out of the labor of others.” The paper argued that whatever loss in profits took place, both planters and laborers had “benefited” from emancipation.¹⁰⁸

As evidence, the author cited extracts from meetings by planters, local clergy and colonial authorities held earlier that year to assess the state of Jamaica and Antigua. Most advocated that the best way to assure the economic wellbeing of planters and laborers was to end

¹⁰⁵ *North Star*, 18 February 1848.

¹⁰⁶ *North Star*, 7 September 1849.

¹⁰⁷ Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press 2002), 158-178.

¹⁰⁸ *North Star*, 7 September 1849.

“competition of stolen labor” in Puerto Rico, Cuba and Brazil. Calls were made for Britain to enforce “the suppression of the unhuman traffic in slaves” so that slavery could be abolished “throughout every portion of the civilized world.” One speaker affirmed he supported these measures “on the principles of humanity” and not merely the interests of his sugar estates. Another speaker argued that the greatest cost of slave labor was the “expense of the military establishment” needed to prevent an insurrection. The gain in security for the emancipated British colonies far outweighed losses in production. “The natural tendency in man was to desire freedom,” he said, “and the slaves of Cuba would very soon burst asunder the bonds that bound them.” The threat of rebellion made the price paid for slave labor more “dearer than free.”¹⁰⁹

An October 1849 *North Star* spoke out against the “constant slander and abuse” from Southern slaveholders on British Emancipation. Citing a Republican Boston newspaper, the editors criticized proslavery Congressmen for the “gross, premeditated, and oft repeated misrepresentations” used to disparage British Emancipation in their attempts to defend slaveholders in America. The article noted that there were reports “published by honest and impartial men” and “filled with authenticated facts,” that pointed to the safe and “happy effects” of emancipation. Yet, it bemoaned, “Southern alarmists” persisted in claims that the islands were now “ruined, impoverished, miserable, wretched.” The article countered that the islands were so safe the British had reduced their garrisons and plantations no longer needed police. There was never a time they affirmed “in which life and property were more secure, and peace and quiet more universal,” than existed now under emancipation. For free African-Americans the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

perception of the emancipated British West Indies remained an important strategic tool, as slavery increasingly became part of the larger political dialogue.¹¹⁰

The politics of slavery in 1850 also brought the complicated issue of emigration to the British West Indies back into African-American discourse. That September, the United States Congress passed a package of bills to diffuse tensions between slave and free states arising out of the Mexican-American War. For African-Americans, the most impactful of these bills was the Fugitive Slave Act. The law made it the duty of marshals, deputies and legal officials to engage in the capture and return of fugitive slaves, placing many African-Americans in danger of being returned or kidnapped into slavery. Throughout 1850 the *North Star* closely followed these political developments. In October, the paper reprinted in full what was termed “The Man Stealing Law.” Frederick Douglass warned readers that no black person would be safe from its implications: “We are all at the mercy of a band of blood-hound commissioners...ready to enslave the free, as to return the fugitive slave to bondage.” In reaction, African-Americans formed vigilance committees, sometimes armed, and mounted rescues of those who had been captured. Others resisted the threat of enslavement by choosing to flee.¹¹¹

In the wake of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act emigration once more became a possibility for African-Americans. Many fled to Canada, which had become free soil since the enactment of British Emancipation in 1834. Others looked to Liberia, Mexico, Central America and Haiti. Alongside these possibilities was also the British West Indies, which for nearly two decades American abolitionists had analyzed, defended and commemorated as a model of

¹¹⁰ *North Star*, 19 October 1849.

¹¹¹ Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 *US Statutes at Large* 9 (1850): 462-5; Stewart, *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War*, 26-30; *North Star*, 3 October 1850, 4 October 1850; Finkelman, *Slavery and the Law*, 155-157; Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 200-212.

emancipation.¹¹² The *North Star* in 1850 printed a brief tract entitled “Sympathy for Fugitives in the West Indies.” The excerpt mentioned a dispatch sent from the Bermuda House of Assembly denouncing the Fugitive Slave Law in America and “expressing sympathy for the unfortunate fugitives.” Further, the Bermudian Assembly recommended that the British colony hold out inducements to fugitive slaves from the United States to settle in the West Indies.¹¹³

This may have represented one of the most radical transnational moments in British Emancipation, whereby American abolitionists appeared to endorse the flaunting of American law by a foreign power. It was a demonstration of the increased direct action of free African-Americans who now advocated extralegal, even seditious, means to resist slavery. At a speech in Philadelphia, the black abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond spoke of this increased sense of displacement: “We owe no allegiance to a country which grinds us under its iron heel and treats us like dogs. The time has gone by for the colored people to talk of patriotism.”¹¹⁴

While the *North Star* tempered its stance towards emigration to the West Indies for fugitive slaves, it remained generally opposed to emigration for free African-Americans. A reprint of the Convention of the Colored Citizens held in Columbus, Ohio in 1851 appears to have been selected specifically for its strong anti-emigration stance. While most of the report was spent disparaging emigration to Africa, a small portion was meant to denounce emigration to the West Indies. British claims that emigration would profit enterprising individuals were derided as selfish as such success would do nothing for the masses of African-Americans. While

¹¹² Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 144-163; Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 129-157.

¹¹³ *North Star*, 3 April 1851.

¹¹⁴ John Lenox Remond quoted in Martin H. Blatt, Thomas J. Brown, Donald Yacovone, eds. *Hope & Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 7. Remond was speaking in April 1857, in the wake of the Dred Scott decision handed down that March.

the paper favored emigration to Jamaica over Liberia, free black Americans were encouraged to remain in the United States “to live, die, and be buried in the graves of their fathers.”¹¹⁵

Douglass also took white abolitionists to task for advocating emigration. Gamaliel Bailey and John Greenleaf Whittier’s *National Era*, associated with the Free Soil Party, took an intermediate approach on emigration to the West Indies. An article entitled “Improvement of the Colored People” while denouncing forced or compulsory emigration, counseled that African-Americans should “consider the subject” and make a voluntary decision. “Let the people of Jamaica and the other islands take measures for diffusing in this country correct and ample information concerning the advantages to be secured by colored emigrants in the West Indies,” the paper stated. “Let them hold out inducements powerful enough to start the tide of emigration.” White Americans were colonizing the United States and moving westward, why could blacks not colonize other parts of the world like the West Indies. Free blacks, the paper pronounced, could learn something by emulating the “diffusing...Anglo-Saxon race” and in turn achieve a measure of “self-respect.”¹¹⁶ Three months later the editors published a follow-up article defending their position after receiving criticism in Douglass’s *North Star*. The editors of the *National Era*, distancing themselves from groups like the American Colonization Society, stated emphatically that they condemned any schemes of compulsory emigration or colonization. However they viewed the voluntary emigration of free blacks no different than slaves who chose to flee the South.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ *North Star*, 10 April 1851.

¹¹⁶ *National Era*, 13 March 1851.

¹¹⁷ *National Era*, 8 May 1851.

For Douglass however, the issue of emigration to the West Indies for free African-Americans appeared to have sinister motives. An April 1851 article reported that the *Richmond Enquirer* was “warmly in favor” of encouraging free blacks from their city to emigration to Jamaica. The purpose of this was to separate free blacks from slaves, and create greater trade between Jamaica and Virginia. To bring this about the *Enquirer* proposed a tax upon free blacks, the money of which would then be used for their removal.¹¹⁸ A September 1851 article reprinted in full for readers a dispatch from Henry Clay, who Douglass once named the “unceasing and bitter enemy of our people,” appearing to advocate West Indian emigration. The letter was from Clay to Thomas Hankey of London, who had written the Kentucky senator requesting his opinion on free black emigration to the British Caribbean. In the article “Colonization and Henry Clay,” the senator referred to African-Americans as “an improvident and thoughtless race, addicted to habits of vice,” who could never achieve equality with whites in the United States. He advocated that agents be sent from the West India colonies to explain the advantages and privileges of emigration within free black communities. He surmised the American government would be passive about the matter and even welcoming of the idea. For Douglass, such support by a colonizationist like Clay only furthered suspicion of West Indian Emigration.¹¹⁹

A set of letters by the black abolitionist William Wells Brown illustrates the complications that arose with emigration to the British Caribbean in the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act. Brown was touring England at the time, and in July 1851 wrote the *London Times* proposing emigration to the West Indies as a possible solution for those displaced by the 1850

¹¹⁸ *North Star*, 17 April 1851.

¹¹⁹ *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 4 September 1851; For the original letter by Clay see, Melba Porter Hay, ed., *The Papers of Henry Clay: Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Statesman, January 1, 1844-June 29, 1852, Volume 10* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015), 890-891. Clay also corresponded with British emigration agents, including N.W. Pollard of Trinidad. See, Mary Elizabeth Thomas, “Henry Clay Replies to a Labor Recruiter From Trinidad,” *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 77, No. 4 (Autumn 1979): 263-265.

Fugitive Slave Act. “I wish...to call the attention of those interested in the West India estates...” he wrote, “and to suggest the propriety of adopting some measures to secure the services of a many of these fugitives as may feel inclined to go to the West Indies.” Wells assured the editor that American slaves had skills in “the raising of cotton, sugar, rice, and such other products as are raised in the West Indies.” Such an arrangement would benefit both the planters in the West Indies and fugitive American slaves.¹²⁰ By September however, Wells reversed his earlier endorsement. Citing a plot similar to the one depicted by Douglass, Brown warned of a cabal of British agents and West Indian planters seeking to induce desperate fugitives to go to Trinidad and Jamaica, where they would be reduced to a state of slavery. Writing once more to the *London Times*, he warned all colored men to be on guard, and to not enter into agreements with anyone, white or black, to go to the West Indies—“least they find themselves again wearing the chains of slavery.”¹²¹

Even as British Emancipation was complicated by debates over emigration, African-Americans continued to defend its success in the West Indies. In the 1850s they did so increasingly through public commemorations held every August 1st. The *North Star* regularly published accounts of commemorations, including speeches and events of the day. Douglass was a frequent speaker and abolitionist newspapers regularly carried his oratory. As the commemorations grew in frequency spreading to towns and cities throughout the North, they signaled a new form of direction action, abolitionism and political agitation.

¹²⁰ *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 24 July 1851. In June 1851 *North Star* merged with abolitionist Gerrit Smith’s *Liberty Party Paper* and became the *Frederick Douglass Paper*. By this time Douglass had broken openly with Garrison on issues like disunion and now directly supported involvement in antislavery politics.

¹²¹ *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 25 September 1851.

CHAPTER FIVE: A WEST INDIAN JUBILEE IN AMERICA

All civilized men at least, have looked with wonder and admiration upon the great deed of justice and humanity which has made the first of August illustrious among all the days of the year. But to no people on the globe, leaving out the emancipated men and women of the West Indies themselves, does this day address itself with so much force and significance, as to the people of the United States. It has made the name of England known and loved in every Slave Cabin, from the Potomac to the Rio Grande, and has spread alarm, hatred, and dread in all the accursed slave markets of our boasted Republic from Baltimore to New Orleans. Slavery in America, and slavery everywhere, never received a more stunning and killing condemnation.¹

When Frederick Douglass delivered this speech at an 1857 public celebration of August First in Canandaigua, New York, the British Abolition Act was twenty-three years old. In the two and a half decades since, yearly anniversaries of August First, also called West India Day, were held throughout the North. These commemorations celebrated not only what had taken place in English Parliament in 1833 but also the progress that had since transpired on the British colonies of the West Indies.

For Douglass, this progress stood in sharp contrast to the United States. In New York, suffrage for African-Americans remained elusive; in Pennsylvania it had been abruptly revoked in 1838. Through the 1830s and 1840s, anti-black riots had erupted in major Northern cities, targeting African-Americans and white abolitionist allies. 1850 saw the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, causing thousands of African-Americans to flee to Canada, while others formed

¹ Frederick Douglass, *Two Speeches, by Frederick Douglass; one on West India Emancipation, Delivered at Canandaigua, Aug. 4th, and the other on the Dred Scott Decision, Delivered in New York on the occasion of the Anniversary of the American Abolition Society, 1857* (Rochester, NY: C.P. Dewey, Printer, American Office).

armed vigilance committees for self-defense. In the western territories, a literal war was raging over slavery in what came to be known as “Bleeding Kansas.”²

That March the Supreme Court handed down its decision in the case of Dred Scott, a slave who attempted to gain his freedom through the law. Finding against Scott’s request, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney declared that blacks “had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit... [to be] bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever profit could be made by it.” It was a decisive blow to abolitionism, and especially for America’s free black community, who now lived under the threat of an increasingly powerful slave constituency.³

This charged political atmosphere was the backdrop as Douglass stood on the stage at the amphitheater in the Ontario County Agricultural Society fairgrounds in 1857. Douglass spoke to a crowd of one thousand, most of them African-Americans, who had gathered in a public space to commemorate British Emancipation. More than that, they came to defy a system based on the legal codification of their inherent inferiority. They did this by pointing not only to the example set by Britain in passing abolition, but also to the successful progress made by former slaves in the West Indies.⁴

Douglass’s speech mocked those who had made themselves “hoarse” in denouncing British Emancipation as a failure. He called it instead, the “resurrection of a mighty multitude

² Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 192-199, 263-264, 272-273; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 42-46; Jonathan Earle and Diane Mutti Burke, *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border* (University Press of Kansas, 2013).

³ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. [19 How.] 393 at 407 (1857).

⁴ Robert S. Levine, John R. McKivigan and John Stauffer, eds., *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 133.

from the grave of moral, mental, social, and spiritual death.” Emancipation had bestowed the former West Indian slaves “with all the rights, responsibilities, powers, and duties, of free men and women.” God, Douglass pronounced, had commanded “the devil of slavery to go out of the British West Indies,” making the black populace there at once “British subjects, and henceforth equal before the British law.” All of mankind’s industrial and material achievements would “sink to nothingness,” when compared to the triumph of emancipation on August 1, 1834.

Douglass defended as well the right of African-Americans to commemorate the day, in their own way, separate and apart from white abolitionists. He was adamant that this gathering was not merely a celebration of white benefactors in Britain. The slaves of the West Indies “did fight for their freedom” he asserted, “which finally resulted in their emancipation.” Evoking “General Turner” and the “fires of insurrection at Southampton,” he placed the deeds of those slave rebels of Virginia alongside those slaves in the West Indies, and openly pondered the nearness of freedom in America.⁵

Douglass’s words resonated with meaning to his audience. The elevation of 800,000 slaves to citizens in the British West Indies was a refutation of the marginalization African-Americans faced in their own country. It disproved at once the Fugitive Slave Act and the Supreme Court’s denial of black humanity. Douglass’s brazen talk of the efficacy of slave insurrection, both at home and abroad, pulled on republican notions of liberty translated through the intellectual notion of the “heroic slave.” The success of freedom in the British West Indies

⁵ Douglass, *Two Speeches*, 8-11, 19, 21, 24. Frederick Douglass, "The Heroic Slave," in ed. Julia Griffiths, *Autographs for Freedom* (Cleveland: John P. Jewett & Company, 1853).

was evidence that slavery was not just wrong, but based upon a lie: the “falsehood” of “slaveholders” Douglass intoned, taken by “vast numbers of the American people” as a truth.⁶

Douglass’s declaration of the progress of freedom and the lie of black inferiority was predicated on the principle that emancipation in the West Indies had been a success. He spoke to an audience who would have been exposed to this argument, as it had been laid out in pamphlets, newspapers, books and other print material for the past twenty-three years. In a way his speech was a performance, a ritual in which his listeners could readily participate because of its vernacular familiarity. And in this repetition, this reiteration, there was affirmation that gave meaning to all they had gathered to commemorate. The speech was reproduced in newspapers and as a pamphlet that circulated within abolitionist and free black communities, placing a public spectacle into an even larger public sphere.

This chapter examines the ways in which August First commemorations in the United States functioned as ritual performances in public and print perpetuating the debate over the success of British Emancipation. Through church services, public gatherings and parades, abolitionists and free African-Americans attempted to shape public perceptions of the emancipated Anglo-Caribbean. These were to be orderly, civil, events that displayed the possibilities of racial and moral progress. But they were also radical events, in what they dared to espouse and where they chose to do so. British Emancipation in the West Indies was to be celebrated as a success, and attendees at these gatherings championed this assessment. In doing so they performed it as well, with speeches, resolutions, banners, placards and parades that

⁶ Ibid. Douglass was specifically referring to the words of Senator Robert Augustus Toombs of Georgia, who stated that African-Americans were mentally and morally inferior. As evidence Toombs pointed to political upheavals in Haiti and to the British colonies like Jamaica, where he claimed “the negro, true to the instincts of his nature, buries himself in filth, and sloth, and crime.” See, Robert Augustus Toombs, *A lecture delivered in the Tremont Temple, Boston, Massachusetts, on the 24th January, 1856* (S.I., s.n., 1856), 10-11.

emphasized the benefits of immediate emancipation abroad and at home, displaying the readiness of African-Americans for freedom, citizenship and democratic participations. August First also enabled abolitionists and African-Americans to publicly merge political and intellectual thoughts with the transnational triumph of British Emancipation.

A Brief History of African-American Public Celebrations in Slavery and Freedom

Early African-American public celebrations had their roots in popular street festivals and observances in colonial America: commemorations of monarchs, imperial military might and political culture enacted through gunfire salutes, bonfires, militia reviews and revelries. The origin of these public celebrations was located within borrowed rituals from England, designed to strengthen the bonds of distant colonists to the metropole.⁷

While most public celebrations in the English colonies were organized and maintained by the elite, they invited participation from other classes of society. The unifying and loyalist intent of public rituals required what Simon Newman has termed “large and enthusiastic audiences” necessary to “bear witness to community solidarity” through public performances of allegiance to colony and crown.⁸ Away from coastal towns and cities, festive cultures took on specialized meanings. The mustering of local militias, for instance, celebrated local victories, commemorated defeats and symbolized martial defense against both domestic and external enemies. While white men overwhelmingly performed these drills, those outside the boundaries

⁷ Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 11-16. Newman points out these were not always widespread celebrations, confined primarily to coastal town and urban areas. They also differed depending on regions, predominating in New England Middle Atlantic communities and parts of the South.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16-21.

of direct participation, such as women and African-Americans, could still watch and offer legitimacy.⁹

African-Americans adapted these popular traditions to their own celebrations and imbued them with distinctive cultural and social meaning. In New England, Negro Election Day was celebrated beginning in the 1740s. Adapted from General Election Day during which white colonists chose local English authorities, Negro Election Day was used by slaves to carry out their own mock coronations.¹⁰ Blending African cultural elements with English customs, slaves held coronations and elections of kings, governors, sheriffs, deputies and other authorities. Courts were held to adjudicate matters within the slave community and in some cases were sanctioned by colonial magistrates. Though direct participants were usually blacks, the celebrations drew diverse crowds of whites and Native Americans.¹¹

In parts of New York and New Jersey slaves adapted the Dutch Pentecost tradition to a celebration called Pinkster. Commemorated sometime after the American Revolution, the festival included a week of what observers described as “Guinea music,” public dances and communal feasting. The celebration culminated in the crowning of a black Prince Charles who

⁹ Ibid., Newman points out these military drills must take regional distinctions into account. The mustering of militias in the South, for instance, was more so a display of force to domestic enemies represented by a servile black slave class, rather than external ones.

¹⁰ Melvin Wade, "Shining in Borrowed Plumage: Affirmation of Community in the Black Coronation Festivals of New England, *Western Folklore* 40 (July 1981): 212, 225-226; Shane White, "It was a Proud Day: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *The Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 17.

¹¹ Wade, 214. Wade identifies links between the coronation festivals of Negro Election Day and Central and West African kingship rites that may have served as a link through which persons of African descent memorialized the past. See also, Ira Berlin, "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 53 (April 1996): 251-288.

presided over “Pinkster Hill.”¹² In a reversal of status and power, whites that ventured to Pinkster Hill were subject to the laws of its prince.¹³

Another African-American observance, Negro Training Day, was also popular in New York, New England and the mid-Atlantic region. The commemoration was an adaption of the mustering of local militias by white colonists. African-Americans, slave and free, came “from miles around” to watch the drilling of all black militias dressed in formal military uniforms. These were also socializing events, with eating, drinking and entertainments.¹⁴ Negro Training Day also held a subversive undercurrent, allowing blacks to display their martial prowess. Near Windsor, Connecticut in the years following the American Revolution, slaves at a Negro Training Day celebration were said to pay homage to a “General Ti.” This was perhaps a reference to Colonel Tye, the escaped New Jersey slave and guerilla fighter in the British auxiliaries.¹⁵

White reaction to black public celebrations ranged from tolerance to mockery. Slaves also interwove mockery and satire into these performances, parodying white authority from colonial governors and armies to distant English kings. There was a continuity with similar traditions in the Black Atlantic found in Caribbean public festivals such as Jonkannu, where

¹² White, 17-21. Pinkster Hill in New York was usually the colonial capitol at Albany.

¹³ Ibid., 18-25. For an alternative origin of Pinkster, see more recent work by Jeroen DeWulf, “Pinkster: An Atlantic Creole Festival in a Dutch-American Context,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 126 (Summer 2013): 245-271. DeWulf argues that Pinkster did not arise in a Dutch-American context, but instead within earlier social, religious and cultural interactions between Europeans and Africans in Central Africa.

¹⁴ White, 18; Wade, 213-215; 223-225; Newman, 20.

¹⁵ White, 18, 29; Wade, 213. Colonel Tye and his Ethiopian Regiment were known to have the words “Liberty to Slaves” sown into their lapels. For more on slave participation in the American Revolution see, Benjamin Quarles, “Lord Dunmore as Liberator,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 15 (Oct., 1958): 494-507; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961); Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

portrayals of “John Canoes” and “Actor boys” in theatrical public street culture mimicked, parodied and subverted traditional and allegedly immutable racial boundaries. Kathleen Wilson identifies such acts of adaption as a type of “mimesis” that revealed the porous nature of these societies and “threatened to undo the supposed gulfs between enslaved and free.” Negro Election Day, Pinkster and Negro Training Day in colonial America were similar adaptations. Blacks, both slaves and free, appropriated public space and challenged the boundaries of their status. These acts of mimesis played lose with the rigid constructions of difference that defined the colonial social order.¹⁶

The American Revolution had a distinct influence on the politicization of public celebrations. Since the 1680s New England colonists had adapted the Protestant Gun Powder Treason Day, or Guy Fawkes Day, from England to voice their support or opposition of internal British political contests. As scenes of oppositional social politics, these festivities could turn violent. Bonfires, effigy burnings and brawls took place in the streets of Boston. These public spectacles also invited wide participation from sailors, shipwrights, and the more marginalized classes of society.¹⁷ Early politicized public spectacles provided a template for later Patriot spectacles such as the Stamp Act Protests and the ritual raising of the Liberty Pole. Like their predecessors, Revolutionary era public protests could also turn riotous. Colonial tax collectors were burned in effigy and buried as a symbolic ritual of justice and execution. Mobs joined the protests or grew out of them, tarring and feathering colonial authorities and destroying property.

¹⁶ White, 17-21; Kathleen Wilson, “The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (January 2009), 51, 74-79. Wilson defines mimesis in this sense as theatrical and representative acts that draw attention to itself as performance.

¹⁷ Newman, 20-21; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 18-25; James A. Sharpe, *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 141-145.

This political street theatre was opened up to participation from slaves and black freemen, making revolutionary crowds biracial and socially diverse.¹⁸

The politicization of public space and the democratization of its participants continued during the Revolution, with anniversary celebrations of the Declaration of Independence held in cities like Philadelphia and Boston. These commemorations included toasts, civic feasts, military drills and processions that served as public performances of nationalism and patriotism. By the 1780s parades and public ceremonies had become tools of nation building in the early American Republic: what Susan G. Davis identifies as “modes of propaganda, recreation, local celebration, and national commemoration.” The politicization of parades and public ceremonies helped memorialize the past through public communication that developed across newly formed states and communities, utilizing a repertoire of styles and techniques.¹⁹

Political public celebrations were aided by a flourishing print culture during the early Republic. Pamphlets, broadsides and newspapers provided evidence to readers of spontaneous and simultaneous events. Reprinted orations, addresses and civic toasts allowed patriotic rites and performances to be shared and relived nationwide, making them extra-local events. Fourth of July speeches by political orators like John Quincy Adams became popular pamphlets while toasts to George Washington were published in papers across the country. Print did more than document these spectacles; it created a discourse that placed public celebrations within a

¹⁸ Waldstreicher, 24-27; Newman, 22-29; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 211-247. For public spectacles and street violence during the American Revolution see, Gordon S. Wood, “A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (Oct 1966): 635-42; Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), Chapter 2; Patrick Griffin, Robert Ingram, Peter Onuf and Brian Schoen, eds. *Between Sovereignty and Anarchy: The Politics of Violence in the American Revolutionary Era* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015).

¹⁹ Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 3-20.

political, temporal and social context for readers. Even for those not in attendance, print made these rituals, celebrations and performances tangible and real, forming a new political culture that became part of the fabric of the early Republic.²⁰

Free African-Americans had long participated at the fringes of these national ceremonies, at what David Waldstreicher calls the “margins of festivity.” This was acutely apparent in politicized parades that functioned as performances of the existent hierarchy. More important members of society were placed strategically in the front of processions, the less important in the rear and those with least importance placed outside the boundaries of participation. In rare instances African-Americans were included in national parades. In Philadelphia in 1800 black freemasons were allowed in a procession of George Washington’s birthday, but were relegated to the rear. At most public patriotic observances African-Americans were allowed only as spectators. But even then they might be barred. In 1805 in Boston whites turned on blacks in the crowd at a Fourth of July celebration, driving them from the main square with threats and abuse.²¹

As Mitch Kachun observes, Americans designed public spectacles to teach citizens “the lessons of patriotism as well as their place in the social order.” Free African-Americans were a paradox: a people who were not slaves, but whose race marked them with slavery. The exclusion of blacks from public rituals of civic nationalism was itself evidence of their inherent alterity, a difference that could not be overcome with freedom. By 1815 organizations like the American

²⁰ Newman, 29-43, 47-49, 186-192; Waldstreicher, 10-11, 20-37, 106-107, 308-315; Davis, 13; John Quincy Adams, *An Oration Production July 4th, 1793, At The Request Of The Inhabitants Of The Town Of Boston In Commemoration Of The Anniversary of American Independence* (Boston: Benjamin Edes & Son, 1793); *The Independent Gazette*, 17 May 1783, *New York Journal and Patriotic Register*, 8 July 1795, *Connecticut Journal* 19 July 1797.

²¹ White, 34; Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 23.

Colonization Society were openly advocating the physical removal of free African-Americans from the North. In telling symbolism, the Colonization Society was allowed to take part in Fourth of July street parades, while the blacks they sought to exile from citizenship remained excluded.²²

The street, the setting and conduit through which these performances were communicated, was not a public sphere of idealized neutrality. Instead, it existed as contested territory, a place of conflict and constraint shaped by its simultaneous existence as public and social space. Denied participation in national ceremonies, African-Americans created separate public celebrations that communicated an autonomous popular, vernacular and political culture. In appropriating public space, African-Americans formed what Robert Fanuzzi terms a counterpublic space through which the marginalized could place themselves into the larger public arena.²³

Cognizant of the importance of parades in the political culture of the early Republic, free African-Americans increasingly moved away from old celebrations of revelry like Negro Election Day, Pinkster and Negro Training Day, to more politicized, and respectable, forms of

²² Waldstreicher, 304-308; White, 31-34. Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 23, 25. Kachun mentions infrequent black involvement in some Fourth of July parades, but with blacks playing the roles of entertainers—not as actual participants in the rituals of patriotism. For more on the American Colonization Society see, Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008)

²³ Robert Fanuzzi, *Abolition's Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 137-139. Here public space means the larger public arena contested but open to dominant societal groups. Fanuzzi argues that by placing their “outsider” interests into public space, they destabilize its hegemony, forming their own counterpublic spaces; Davis, *Parades and Power*, 15-16; Houston Baker, “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” *Public Culture* 7 (1994): 3-4.

public commemoration. These celebrations were often organized through religious institutions, civic societies, communal groups and mutual benefit organizations.²⁴

In the 1790s, uniformed black freemasons led funeral and other processions through the streets of Boston and Philadelphia. In 1809 the African Society for Mutual Relief of New York held a procession to mark its one-year anniversary, holding aloft a silken banner that contained a full portrait of one of their members. The banner asked: “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?” An 1813 Boston march of the African Society was described as composed “very good looking *coloured* people” by a local paper, which noted as well their use of the white rose of Federalism.²⁵ These parades were at once public acts of defiance and assertions of citizenship. The freemason’s apron and black suit, the banners, the white rose: all transmitted an African-American understanding of the social and political power of public spectacles. In their accrument of the symbols and rituals of patriotic ceremonies, free blacks asserted their presence within the nation and their liberty. Henry Highland Garnet would later remark that such through such “bold action,” those African-Americans of the early Republic carried themselves with an air of freedom.²⁶

The most prominent public celebrations for African-Americans centered on emancipation and abolition. Pennsylvania had begun a gradual emancipation of slaves in 1780, and Massachusetts followed in 1783. Through the 1790s New York began its own gradual

²⁴ Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 327; White, “It was a Proud Day,” 30-31; Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 18-20.

²⁵ Waldstreicher, 332-333; White, 33; Kachun, 19.

²⁶ Waldstreicher, 332-333; White, 33; Kachun, 19. Henry Highland Garnet, *A Memorial Discourse by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, Washington City, D.C. On Sabbath, February 12, 1865. With an Introduction By James McCune Smith, M.D.* (Joseph M. Wilson: Philadelphia, 1865), 20-21.

emancipation and by 1804 slavery was abolished throughout New England. For African-Americans, who sought to show themselves ready for the duties and responsibilities of freedom, commemorating these victories became paramount. In earlier celebrations slaves had tested the boundaries of their freedom. Now free blacks would create a counterpublic space to deliberately perform their liberation.²⁷

One of the first of these “Freedom Days” took place on July 5, 1800 in New York City, when African-Americans gathered to observe the state’s Gradual Emancipation Act passed one year previously on July 4th. African-Americans had hoped to participate in the city’s Independence Day parade, but were disallowed after objections by white marchers. In a type of “countertheater,” African-Americans held their parade on July 5th.²⁸ John Teasman, a black educator and the principal of the New York Manumission Society’s African Free School, organized the first event. Several hundred African-Americans donned uniforms, displayed banners and played music as they marched through the city, employing all the symbolic rites of the previous day’s national commemoration. A local enslaved Haitian man, Pierre Touissant, was approached to act as grand marshal. This was a stunningly blatant statement, as the rebellious slaves of his former French Caribbean colony were then free and being governed by a black general of the same name. In approaching Pierre Touissant, New York’s free black

²⁷ For more on emancipation in the North, see the following: Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006).

²⁸ Davis, 46. Davis uses the term “countertheatre” to describe the oppositional framing of July Fifth by African-Americans to communicate the “dichotomies between American principle and practice.”

population sought to publicly identify themselves to both a larger transnational antislavery movement and a radical form of black liberation.²⁹

In January 1808 in Philadelphia and New York, African-Americans held parades to celebrate the Abolition the Slave Trade in the United States. That same July, black Bostonians held a procession to the local African Meeting House to celebrate the "late Abolition of the Slave Trade, by governments of the United States of Great Britain and Denmark." This celebration of transnational antislavery continued on August 1814, when blacks from Canada joined African-Americans in Niagara New York to commemorate the 1793 Canadian Act Against Slavery. When the full expansion of manumission went into effect on July 4, 1827, African-Americans in New York once again seized the Fifth to celebrate their freedom, establishing the date as a "Black Independence Day."³⁰

As with national civic ceremonies, print served an important function in recording and promoting these events. An 1827 pamphlet published a speech by the black abolitionist and minister Nathaniel Paul delivered in Albany, New York at a July Fifth commemoration. Paul engaged in a mingle of religious prophecy and politics, predicting the demise of slavery, declaring, "The progress of emancipation, though slow, is nevertheless certain." He denounced recalcitrant planters who yet held "thousands in bondage," alluded to the "catastrophe and

²⁹ Waldstreicher, 328-329; Robert J. Swan, "John Teasman: African-American Educator and the Emergence of Community in Early Black New York City, 1787-1815," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Autumn, 1992): 343-344; Touissant declined the invitation, in part because of his ties to his white mistress. For an account of Pierre Touissant see, Rev. Joseph Delaney et al. Editing Committee, *United States Catholic Historical Society, Historical Records and Studies, Volume XII* (New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1918), 95.

³⁰ White, 35, 38-41. White notes that these dates were fluid, and that some blacks even insisted on July 4th as their day of "Jubilee." In a few cases, dissent led to multiple and competing parades in the same city; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 26-53. Kachun notes that July 14 was also Bastille Day, and does not leave out the possibility that Boston's black community may have found some link to the French Revolution, and perhaps, indirectly, Haiti; Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, "Rehearsal for War: Black Militias in the Atlantic World," *Slavery and Abolition* 26 (April 2005), 15; Swan, "John Teasman," 344. See also, Genevieve Fabre, "African American Commemorative Celebrations in the Nineteenth Century" in *History and Memory in African American Culture*, eds. Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Meally (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 72-88.

exchange of power” displayed through Haiti, and warned of the inherent antagonist “restless disposition of both master and slave.” Paul pronounced slavery borne from the “original chaos of darkness” that would be “forever annihilated from the earth.” Pamphlets of his apocalyptic speech against slavery circulated within African-American communities, tying public commemorations to an emerging black political culture of freedom.³¹

Many white observers were not prepared for these public rituals of national belonging. The counterpublic spectacle of blacks performing their own freedom was derided as a farce and mocked in print. One mainstream newspaper complained the celebrations had “a tendency to make the soot-headed race more impudent,” and urged that blacks “be made to correctly understand their station in society.” As early as 1816 and through the early 1830s, racist broadsides known as “Bobalition” went up every year before black freedom celebrations, and became part of a popular commercial print culture in major American cities. In drawings, blacks were inked with exaggerated facial features that played on racist stereotypes, dressed in garish uniforms and speaking with strong dialects.³²

An 1819 Boston broadside claimed to depict the “Grand Bobalition of Slavery,” the “most helligunt Selebrashum...in de Nited Tate ob New Engulnt, and commenwet of Bosson in de country of Massa-chuse-it.” Caricatures depicted blacks dressed in overwrought military uniforms and bicorne hats with feathered plumage, marching with pikes and a banner. They were led by a figure strutting atop a horse, holding a saber over one shoulder. Included in the

³¹ Waldstreicher, 325, 308-325; White, 33-41; Kachun, 29-35; Nathaniel Paul, *An address, delivered on the celebration of the abolition of slavery in the State of New York, July 5, 1827* (Albany: John B. Van Steenbergh, 1827).

³² Waldstreicher, 335-338; Kachun, 26-27; Broadside, *Grand bobalition of slavery. : Grand and most helligunt selebrashum of the bobalition of slabery in de Nited Tate ob Neu Englunt, and commonwet of Bosson in de country of Massa-chuse-it* (Boston, Mass. : s.n., 1819?). Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, Repository of Historical Documents, Brown University, Providence Rhode Island. (Accessed online July 21, 2015).

broadside was a lengthy account of “toasts by de chief marshall” where songs to “Liberty, and piece of quality” were sung alongside odes to “Massa Jefferson.”³³

Bobalition broadsides were posted each year before black freedom celebrations, and reprinted in the popular press as authentic accounts. The *Rhode-Island American* in 1816 used a bobalition story to contrast Fourth of July toasts to those by “men of colour, at an anniversary abolition of slavery.” The *Salem Gazette* in 1822 reprinted the supposed “Queer Toasts” of the “African Celebration” in typical bobalition dialect. The *Baltimore Patriot* printed an almost identical piece, claiming to bring readers “the genuine toasts” by blacks in Boston at a July 14th ceremony.³⁴

Bobalition broadsides attacked black public performances of freedom and the adaptation of the rituals of citizenship. Free African-Americans were mocked as inept imitators of white public ceremonies, with pompous dress made more glaring by their exaggerated speech. Their toasts spoke of “liberty” but like slaves they called the former president “Massa.” Through caricature and ridicule, whites turned black attempts at national belonging into a mark of their inherent difference and alienation.³⁵

African-Americans responded to negative public perceptions with a countering narrative of their commemorations. Using print as their political voice, black pamphleteers circulated their speeches to highlight their proficiency as orators. During an 1809 address a black speaker held up the previous year’s printed speech as “a specimen of African genius,” and called for its continuation to “put our enemies to the blush” and leave them “abashed and confounded.”

³³ *Grand bobalition of slavery.*

³⁴ *Rhode-Island American, and General Advertiser*, 6 August 1816; *The Salem Gazette*, 23 July 1822; *The Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser*, 24 July 1822.

³⁵ Waldstreicher, 337-338; Kachun, 26-27.

Parade routes were laid out to avoid confrontations with belligerent whites, and dates were chosen that would not conflict with white civic marches. On one occasion black Bostonians “greatly incensed” by white “mockery of their festival...and infringement of their liberty,” voiced their determination to resist their attackers—with arms if need be. When a mob appeared hurling “clubs and brickbats” and chasing down “terrified children and women,” black parade participants fought back. An old black man named Col. Middleton, termed “Commander of the Bucks,” reportedly brandished a musket at the mob and rallied his comrades to “resist to the last.” In their defiance, African-Americans demonstrated the importance they placed on black public commemorations and their willingness to fight for them if need be.³⁶

The derision heaped upon black public life however took its toll on an African-American leadership class determined to portray a respectable face to society. Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm used their newspaper *Freedom's Journal* to police black behavior at these public rituals. In an 1828 article they denounced the “foolish exhibitions” at an emancipation celebration in Brooklyn: “Nothing is more disgusting to the eyes of a reflecting man of colour, than one of these grand processions, followed by the lower orders of society.” The editors complained of “officers in high authority scarcely able to bear their standards,” the reported “insolence of certain Coloured females” and scenes of “debasing excesses” that “would be a disgrace” to report in full. The march was a secondary event, held after the sanctioned July Fifth procession where the paper observed, “everything was conducted with order and propriety.” The

³⁶ Waldstreicher, 342-344; White, 35, 38; Kachun, 27-33; William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution: With Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons: to which is Added a Brief Survey of the Condition and Prospects of Colored Americans* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855), 26-27. The account of the incident with Col. Middleton is given as an eyewitness recollection by abolitionist Lydia Maria Child.

black attendees at the Brooklyn march in contrast were mocked as “a faint but shabby representation of Hannibal and his hardy legions.”³⁷

Russwurm and Cornish’s disdain for certain forms of black public commemorations revealed class fractures between an established black elite and a more common black folk culture. In letters to newspapers and from pulpits, African-American elites stressed proper conduct in public parades lest blacks render themselves “complete and appropriate laughing stocks.”³⁸ Some called for a doing away with public political celebrations altogether. An anonymous writer to the *Freedom’s Journal* in 1828 asked if blacks could not “manifest the joy in our hearts and our gratitude to God...without making a parade in the streets?” Referring undoubtedly to caricatures like the Bobalition broadsides another reminded readers, “our enemies watch us narrowly, to catch each little failing.”³⁹

How freedom was to be performed and its contextualization within public space had become part of a contested discourse carried out in print. As African-Americans entered the 1830s, they would have to negotiate their concerns of perception with the need to lay claim to the politics of public rituals during a new age of abolitionism and activism.

The First of August in 1830s America: Days of Thanksgiving

August First commemorations arose from the earlier Freedom Day traditions of African-Americans and the renewed era of abolitionist activism in the 1830s. Its origins were grounded in the rhetorical debate over the success of the British Abolition Act in the West Indies and the

³⁷ *Freedom’s Journal*, 28 July 1828.

³⁸ Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 56-61.

³⁹ Kachun, 44-45.

ability of the former slaves to adapt to freedom. August First commemorations served as a space where the argument in favor of success could be made in toasts and speeches to receptive audiences, as well as reprinted and circulated along abolitionist networks. These were rituals of freedom, where the economic, moral and social triumph of British Emancipation, and the promise it held for the United States, was performed annually.

August First commemorations were not static events. They were adapted to the social and political currents within both a regional context and the larger United States. Hailed as days of Thanksgiving, early August First commemorations featured dinners, oratory and religious services. These events were organized within churches, through the work of mutual-aid societies and by abolitionists, both black and white. They were held primarily in abolitionist strongholds such as New York and Massachusetts, but also in nearby Rhode Island, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Ohio, and cities with large free black populations like Philadelphia.⁴⁰

These commemorations were covered primarily in the abolitionist press, which had emerged in the late 1820s and early 1830s as tools of protest and mass activism. Since the late 1820s, Benjamin Lundy's *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, Cornish and Russwurm's *Freedom's Journal* and William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* had informed readers on the struggle towards emancipation in Britain and the progress of former slaves in the West Indies. Abolitionist and African-American newspapers had also begun to formulate arguments on the success of the emancipated Caribbean colonies, countering narratives of ruin and desolation in

⁴⁰ Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 57, 83-85.

the emerging mainstream American press. It was in the context of this debate that the earliest commemorations of August First took place.⁴¹

There was a spatial dimension to this print coverage. Abolitionist newspapers were mostly published in states and regions where slavery had been abolished, which also saw the most widespread August First celebrations. As with other public ceremonies, print shaped how these rituals would be carried out, defining for readers and participants what was proper, acceptable, required and expected. This helped make August First ceremonies, with some regional variations, remarkably uniform across vast distances even as they changed over time.⁴²

There were a small number of events to mark the enactment of British Emancipation on August 1, 1834. Perhaps fewer than five were covered in both the abolitionist and popular press.⁴³ The apprenticeship system governing most of the British West Indies may have been enough for reluctance in adopting August First as a definitive Freedom Day. In the abolitionist *Liberator* William Lloyd Garrison had denounced the gradualist strain in the British Emancipation act as “a precedent for us [Americans] to shun.”⁴⁴ More pressing was the fraught racial atmosphere of 1834. The mainstream press and anti-abolitionists worked regularly to discredit abolitionists in the public mind, painting them as treasonous extremists and purveyors of amalgamation. In July 1834, tensions of racial and national boundary crossing in New York exploded into riots that began with attacks on abolitionist celebrations: the Fourth of July and the commemoration of

⁴¹ The rise of the abolitionist and African-American press as a counterpublic to popular depictions of the West Indies is discussed further in Chapter One and Chapter Five.

⁴² Waldstreicher, 24-27.

⁴³ This number is drawn from Kerr-Ritchie’s listing of four 1834 August First commemorations and the addition of my own research of the event in Salisbury and Amesbury, Massachusetts.

⁴⁴ *Liberator*, 12 October 1833. Garrison and the *Liberator* later supported and celebrated British Emancipation Day’s enactment in August 1834, but still denounced the apprenticeship system until its demise.

New York Emancipation Day. Presbyterian minister and colonizationist Robert Jefferson Breckenridge was only partly speaking metaphorically when he urged an 1834 Philadelphia audience to “seize the abolition scheme by the throat, and strangle it to death.”⁴⁵

Though there was no formal call to celebrate the day, the *Liberator* assumed such resolutions were taking place within abolitionist organizations. The paper reported that undoubtedly events were being held in “various parts of the United States.”⁴⁶ A brief article appearing two weeks after the law’s enactment, urged “every friend of righteousness and humanity” to observe August 1, “as a day of thanksgiving and praise to God.”⁴⁷ At an August 1 meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society of Amesbury and Salisbury in Massachusetts, British Emancipation was celebrated with a resolution greeting the liberation of 800,000 slaves in the West Indies as a day of “gratitude” that would “hasten” the legal extinction of slavery in the United States. A motion was passed to place the resolution in the *Liberator*, highlighting the importance of print in publicizing such acts.⁴⁸

The *Liberator* also reported on an 1834 August 1 church service held at the African-American Baptist Belknap Street Church in Boston, also known as the African Meeting House.⁴⁹ A separate celebration by the New England Anti-Slavery Society was held fifteen miles away in

⁴⁵ Harris, 197-198; *Liberator* August 9, 1834.

⁴⁶ *Liberator*, 9 August 1834.

⁴⁷ *Liberator*, 16 August 1834. The article was attributed to the Lowell Journal, possibly the work of the literary figure and abolitionist James Russell Lowell.

⁴⁸ *Liberator*, August 9 1834.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, The African Meeting House had been the founding place of the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832, and was the center of the Boston black community. It had also been the site of earlier Freedom Day commemorations, including the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade. See, Beth Ann Bower and Byron Rushing, “The African Meeting House: The Center for the 19th Century Afro-American Community in Boston,” in Robert L. Schuyler, ed., *Archeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro-American and Asian American Culture History* (Farmingdale: Baywood Publishing Company, 1980), 69-75.

South Reading, where a black Juvenile Choir entertained the audience. In what would become a mainstay of August First celebrations, abolitionist David Lee Child concluded the event with a speech that lasted for an hour and a half. The *Liberator* commended Child, saying he acquitted himself well and requested he favor them with a sketch of his oration to be reprinted in the paper.⁵⁰

In New York City that August 1 1834, black abolitionist David Ruggles, defying the violence of just a month previous, held a celebration at Philomathean Hall. The building was the meeting place of an African-American literary society and housed the Garrison Literary and Benevolent Society.⁵¹ The *Liberator* described Ruggles's event as "a public meeting of the colored citizens of New-York" that was held "to commemorate the glorious day" when "the restoration of liberty" and "the birth right of man" had been restored to the 800,000 emancipated slaves of the British West Indies. The meeting selected officers and, in a uniquely transnational delineation of freedom, read aloud the Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention and the British Emancipation Act.⁵²

Resolutions were passed predicting optimism for the "future moral, religious and political elevation" of the former West Indian slaves, referred to as "our brethren in the British Colonies." Ruggles concluded the event with a speech, hailing the day when "free America" would follow

⁵⁰ *Liberator* August 9, 1834. David Lee Child was a co-founder of the New England Anti-Slavery Society and husband of the outspoken Lydia Maria Child.

⁵¹ Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 68-69; *Liberator*, 30 August 1834.

⁵² *Liberator*, 30 August 1834.

Britain's example and grant freedom to "three million of her countrymen." A final resolution was passed that the proceedings of the meeting be published in the paper.⁵³

These inaugural celebrations provide some insight into the origins of August First commemorations and the workings of those to follow. First, African-Americans took the initiative in both Boston and New York, as they would in decades to come. The existence of two celebrations in Massachusetts, only a short distance apart, point to the importance a growing free African-American community placed on their autonomy. Second, early August First events were primarily held in churches, meeting houses and halls established by African-American and abolitionist institutions for social, religious, educational and political purposes. This offered both safety and a readily available organizational apparatus that could mobilize congregations and members.

Third, there was a distinct argument put forth that the success of British Emancipation in the West Indies would serve as an example for the United States. The celebration at Philomathean Hall was particularly noteworthy for its transnational vocality, naming those freed in the British colonies as "brethren." These early celebrations linked the newly freed black West Indians to the aspirations of American slaves yet held in bondage. Fourth, unlike previous black Freedom Days, early August First events were expected to be solemn celebrations, organized by black leaders and abolitionists sensitive to public perceptions. That past June, delegates at the Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour passed a resolution denouncing the annual July Fifth celebrations as "vain expenditures of time and pomp in dress"

⁵³ Ibid.

and banned all processions except those “necessary for the interment of the dead.”⁵⁴ These were attempts to take control of public black celebrations, stamping out what was perceived as lower-class behavior and bringing them in line with elite sensibilities.

Attempts to ensure August First celebrations in the United States were solemn events mirrored abolitionist depictions of the passage of emancipation in the West Indies. An August First speech reprinted in the *Liberator* described the 1834 arrival of emancipation in Jamaica as “orderly, and in general religious.” The former slaves reportedly assembled to give three cheers, then “rushed with the turbulence of a torrent” to church, “to thank God for their freedom.” The 1835 *Anti-Slavery Record* assured readers that across the West Indies none of the “noisy drumming” expected upon emancipation took place. Instead, “all was quietness” as the former slaves, “with a proper sense of feeling,” rushed to attend “divine worship.”⁵⁵

The reality in the West Indies was more complex. The arrival of emancipation was also celebrated with fetes, boisterous night processions, labor stoppages and various acts beyond religious services.⁵⁶ Anti-abolitionists in London seized on such imagery, creating broadsides that depicted former slaves celebrating emancipation with dancing, rum drinking and pipe smoking while discussing freedom in exaggerated dialect.⁵⁷ Like their British counterparts,

⁵⁴ *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour* (New York: Published by the Order of the Convention, 1834), 14.

⁵⁵ *Liberator*, 29 August 1835; *Anti-Slavery Record*, January 1835.

⁵⁶ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 13-48. Kerr-Ritchie discusses different forms of celebrations of emancipation among West Indian slaves, particularly in Jamaica and Trinidad. As he illustrates, while colonial and religious authorities attempted to control how emancipation would be observed, former slaves often subverted such control by holding their own celebrations. For more on West Indian slave celebrations of emancipation see, Barry Higman, “Slavery Remembered: the Celebration of Emancipation in Jamaica,” *Journal of Caribbean History* 12 (1979): 59-61; Errol Hill, *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 253-254.

⁵⁷ For negative British press portrayals of black celebrations in the West Indies see, Charles Jameson Grant, 'Slave Emancipation; Or, John Bull Gulled Out Of Twenty Millions' in *The Political drama.* (England: s.n, ca. 1833).

American abolitionists preferred respectable depictions that countered negative press portrayals. The ways in which former West Indian slaves celebrated their liberation was to determine the efficacy of freedom. Early August First events in the United States reflected these perceptions and concerns.

In May of 1835, on a motion by Unitarian Minister Samuel J. May, the American Anti-Slavery Society in Boston resolved to “recommend to all its auxiliaries, the observance of the 1st of August annually, as a day of thanksgiving to God.” May had spent the past year in the company of the British abolitionist George Thompson whom he called “the champion of the triumphant conflict for West India emancipation.” Thompson was touring the United States at the invitation of Garrison, and in his speeches spoke often of both British abolitionism and the success expected in the West Indies, denouncing naysayers in the mainstream press.⁵⁸ For May, a commemoration of British Emancipation served as just the type of mass activism that had galvanized the British abolitionist movement.⁵⁹

Despite these declarations, August First commemorations remained scarce. There were perhaps two reported observances in 1835 and four in 1836, taking place between Massachusetts, New York and Philadelphia. Speeches praising the success of British Emancipation in the West Indies were the highlight of these events, and were passed along to abolitionist newspapers to be

Graphics, Print Department, Political Cartoons, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. Grant’s political cartoon arrives simultaneous to the popularizing of American Bobalition broadsides and the black caricatures of William Clay by British artists. See: Phillip Lapsansky, “Afro-Americana: From Abolition to Bobalition,” in *The Library Company of Philadelphia 2003 Annual Report* (Philadelphia: The Library Company of Philadelphia, 2004), 39-46; Charles Hunt and William Summers, *Tregear’s black jokes, : being a series of laughable caricatures on the march of manners amongst the blacks. Twenty plates.* (London: G.S. Tregear, 1834). Rare Books & Other Texts, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

⁵⁸ *American Anti-Slavery Society, Second Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society; with the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, Held in the City of New-York, On the 12th May, 1835, and the Minutes of the Meetings of the Society for Business* (New York: William S. Door, 1835), 33.

⁵⁹ For more on May’s account of Thompson’s 1835 tour of America see, Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of our Antislavery Conflict* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869), 117-125.

reprinted and circulated. The *Liberator* reported that on August 8 1835 Samuel J. May's West India Day address to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in Boston, he rose to praise Great Britain, rejoice at the "moral power" of emancipation and spoke with "anticipation of the effect, which the abolition of slavery in the West Indies will produce upon our own country."⁶⁰

George Thompson followed, accusing the American press of "dishonesty" in its depiction of the British colonies and pointing to Antigua and Bermuda as scenes of "serene and peaceful and prosperous" emancipation. "What press has spoken, what daily or weekly vehicle of intelligence, has presented this prominent fact?" Thompson asked. "Is it told in Charleston? No. . . . New-York or New-Haven? No. In Boston? NO." He urged Americans who wanted to see the fruits of freedom to go to Antigua, Bermuda and Jamaica to witness "regenerated men" and the "genius of emancipation." The *Liberator*, claimed Thompson "sat down amidst great applause" from the abolitionist crowd.⁶¹

When the abolitionist David Lee Child spoke later that month honoring August First, the *Liberator* printed his speech in three columns that took up an entire page. "Millions," Child declared, "hang trembling on the lips of every messenger from the British Isles." Chastising the "foes of justice" in America who predicted ruin for the colonies, Child spent the bulk of his speech crafting a meticulously detailed argument for the success of both moral improvement and free labor among the emancipated West Indian slaves. "Hundreds of presses have printed strings of detraction," he charged. "What newspaper has told the whole truth? What editor has even told the half without a sneer?" The American press, Child concluded, was fearful of what success in

⁶⁰ *Liberator*, 8 August 1835.

⁶¹ *Liberator*, 8 August 1835. All italics from original source. Thompson's rhetoric would be met by violence on his return to Boston in October of 1835, where a mob of up to two thousand stopped him from speaking and nearly lynched Garrison. See, Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2000), 89-93.

the West Indies would mean: “if emancipation prospers in the British colonies, slavery perishes forever in the United States.”⁶²

The next August First in 1836, the *Liberator* reported on a commemoration of black Philadelphians, who had marked the day “in quite an imposing style.” The brief write up mentioned that the event was held outside the city, and included both orations and a dinner, the latter of which was attended by “upwards of sixty persons.” The paper stated that it had intended to publish accounts of the proceedings, “at length,” but was unable to obtain the necessary details in time for print.⁶³ The closing remark is a reminder that abolitionist papers relied on the transmission of prepared speeches, resolutions and accounts. This reciprocal relationship between August First organizers and abolitionist newspapers helped publicize and inform the larger public on these happenings. Without access to these accounts, the *Liberator* instead wrote a short article on a smaller First of August commemoration at a meetinghouse in Fall River, Massachusetts organized by the Reverend Asa Bronson of the First Baptist Church.⁶⁴

In contrast, Benjamin Lundy’s Pennsylvania-based *National Enquirer* reported with depth on the 1836 commemoration of black Philadelphians in articles on August 17 and again on August 31. According to the paper the celebration was put together by, “a respectable meeting of colored persons.” It began at 6 AM, with the handing over of “a splendid, appropriate, and chaste *Silken Banner*” by a Miss Henly to an organizing committee. The banner was said to be made of “finest white satin, with green fringes and tassels,” and bore a description fitting the occasion in gold leaf: “AUGUST FIRST, 1834. HAIL BIRTH DAY of BRITISH EMANCIPATION.”

⁶² *Liberator*, 29 August 1835. Though critical of the apprenticeship system, Child argued that even Britain’s gradual emancipation was superior to American slavery. He also placed the blame of any labor disturbances on the island at the feet of capricious planters who attempted to treat freed men as slaves.

⁶³ *Liberator*, 3 August 1836.

⁶⁴ *Liberator*, 3 August 1836, 13 August 1836.

Further inscriptions were dedicated to the American abolitionist mission, naming the “LUNDY’S AND GARRISON’S of America” as men that would “fan the like flame” throughout the country, “until every slave is FREE.”⁶⁵

Miss Henly, accompanied by “a number of Ladies,” then addressed a crowd of several hundred participants. She expressed her belief that August First should be “publically commemorated, by our colored citizens, generally, throughout America,” and presented the banner as an emblem “of the deep impression” the day had upon the minds of both herself and her fellow African-American women. The black abolitionist Jacob C. White praised the women’s concern for “the Emancipation of Eight Hundred Thousand of our Brothers and Sisters from the scourge, the chains, the groans, and the demoralizing influence of Slavery,” and for being inspired by the same “angelic spirit of Liberty” that inspired Britain’s women abolitionists to liberate “the poor, the needy, and down-trodden slave.”⁶⁶ He then linked British Emancipation to the fate of “Two and a Half Millions of our race in these U. States,” and reminded those present that at least one million of those yet in bondage were women. He pronounced the banner a symbol of their “pledge to the fidelity to the cause” of freedom.⁶⁶

The press coverage of women at the 1836 Philadelphia highlights the gendered dynamics that often underlay August First commemorations. While the speakers were men, with few later exceptions, women made up a significant percentage of the crowds. Women also played key functions as organizers, raising funds and publicizing the events through their auxiliaries and mutual-aid groups. A day after the event an African-American women’s literary society held their own separate commemoration at the St. Thomas Church. The women read to each other and

⁶⁵ *National Enquirer*, 17 August 1836, 31 August 1836.

⁶⁶ *National Enquirer*, 17 August 1836.

recited several pieces, while Benjamin Lundy provided the key address.⁶⁷ That past April 14th African-American abolitionist and businessman James Forten told a crowd of black women at the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia, "you are just as capable as your sisters in England." It was women, Forten pronounced, whose justice "smote the monster" of slavery in the West Indies, breaking its chain link by link, until "eight hundred thousand human beings sprang into life again."⁶⁸

After the mornings' festivities in August 1836 the crowd gathered in Philadelphia moved to the local Mechanic's Hall, where they were shuttled by omnibuses and horse-drawn carriages to nearby Germantown on the city's outskirts. There they assembled in a large open-air clearing surrounded by tall green trees in a scene that the *Enquirer* editor remarked carried "the full majesty of nature's Freedom."⁶⁹ This was significant, as most early August First commemorations usually took place indoors. A late August 31 *Liberator*, reprinting from the *National Enquirer*, informed readers that the "sumptuous dinner" concluding the day followed "the Temperance plan," and participants drank only "good cool water, and fine pure lemonade." The day's officers and rituals were recounted and their banners described as "splendid, appropriate, and chaste." Like the blacks of the West Indies who they celebrated, free African-Americans would show that emancipation had made them morally improved and fit for democratic citizenship. The Philadelphia commemoration was applauded for its "order,

⁶⁷ *Liberator*, 17 September 1836.

⁶⁸ James Forten, *An Address Delivered Before the Ladies' Anti-slavery Society of Philadelphia on the Evening of the 14th of April* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn 1836), 15-16.

⁶⁹ *National Enquirer*, 17 August 1836, 31 August 1836.

regularity and temperance,” hailing it as “a model which might be imitated” by white celebrants of Fourth of July.⁷⁰

Despite the *Liberator's* exultation, 1837 saw an overall decline in commemorations with newspapers reporting perhaps no less than two or three altogether.⁷¹ That same Spring however, the delegates of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Joseph Horace Kimball and James A. Thome returned from their six-month tour of the emancipated British West Indies and released their 490-page book, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837*.⁷² Reprinting entire extracts from the text, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* pronounced the book an “anxiously expected work” of “facts and authentic testimonials” that would show the true effects of British Emancipation. Armed with this “cheering news,” abolitionists launched a new offensive of rhetorical arguments to rebut negative portrayals of the West Indies in the popular press, and new celebrations of August First.⁷³ *The Colored American* in its first issue in July 1837 declared the upcoming August 1 “a

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August*, 57, 84. The reasons for the low number of commemorations are unclear, although it may have been due to the overall economic recession in the United States following the Great Panic of 1837. For more on the Great Panic see, Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁷² *Colored American*, 5 August 1837. Theodore Wright was the minister of the First Colored Presbyterian Church and the first African-American to attend Princeton Theological Seminary. His success came in great part through the aid of the Tappans and the New York Manumission Society. In 1833, he was a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

⁷³ James A. Thome and J. Horace Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838); *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 12 April 1838. The *Freeman* was edited by John Greenleaf Whittier beginning in 1838, and had previously been edited by Lundy as the *National Enquirer*.

day that should be remembered, observed, and consecrated to gratitude and gladness, by every colored man and his friend.”⁷⁴

1838 saw the largest number of August First commemorations in the United States since the enactment of the British Abolition Act. That year, following sustained agitation by West Indian laborers and English abolitionists, the apprenticeship system was formally abolished by Parliament. American abolitionists had long cited Antigua, which was given full freedom, as proof of the superiority of immediate over gradual emancipation. Now the full experiment of freedom was set to unfold on the remaining islands of the British West Indies, where it could be observed, measured, recorded, and presented as evidence in the American cause.⁷⁵

In 1838 August First commemorations took place in Boston and New York City, spreading to Newark and Providence, westward to Cincinnati and to small towns throughout much of New York state and Massachusetts.⁷⁶ The majority, were held in churches and public halls; only one was an outdoor Temperance event. The street remained a dangerous place for African-Americans to engage in acts that defied racial norms. In a letter to the abolitionist Oliver Johnson on August 14 1838, William Lloyd Garrison recounted a near riot in New York just weeks previous when an English woman was seen walking “arm in arm” with a black man. Cries of “white woman and a nigger!” were raised and a mob quickly formed. The two were only saved when the police took them into custody for safekeeping. It was later explained that the black man was only a bodyguard, but Garrison noted with alarm that a local newspaper was certain to point out that the incident occurred “on the evening of *the first of August!*” This, he

⁷⁴ *Colored American*, 29 July 1837.

⁷⁵ William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 153.

⁷⁶ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August*, 57, 84-85.

believed, was meant to incite the public to conclude that racial amalgamation was “a consequence of West India emancipation.” Denouncing the paper for fomenting a “murderous spirit,” Garrison remarked that for whites and blacks to gather in public in Northern cities was “at the peril of life or limb.”⁷⁷

Despite such opposition, abolitionist newspapers continued to report on August First events, helping spread similar rituals across states and regions. The *Colored American* that year pronounced the First of August “an event which calls the friends of human liberty everywhere... to rejoice and take fresh courage.” The editors called for religious thanksgiving services to celebrate “with our enfranchised brethren across the waters,” in the hopes that one day “the oppressed of our own land may go free.”⁷⁸ Philadelphia alone hosted at least three August First commemorations, two of them by African-American institutions and groups. It had been a challenging year in the city. Pennsylvania voters had approved a state constitution restricting black men from voting. In May, anti-abolitionist sentiment had erupted into a riot that ended on an attack on a multiracial gathering at Pennsylvania Hall, and the burning of the building. In this fraught environment, the triumph of full emancipation throughout the British West Indies was greeted as a welcome reprieve.⁷⁹

By the close of the 1830s, August First had become an established day of commemoration for both African-Americans and abolitionists in the Northern United States. In 1839 anniversary celebrations were almost equal in number to those in 1838, taking place throughout New York, New England, New Jersey and as far west as Detroit. In the coming

⁷⁷ William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson, August 14, 1838 in Luis Ruchames ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Volume II: A House Divided Against Itself 1836-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 379.

⁷⁸ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August*, 57, 84-85; *Colored American*, July 28 1838.

⁷⁹ Robert Purvis, *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838). Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

decades August First supplanted or surpassed many previous African-American Freedom days in size, attendance and range, becoming the premiere mass abolitionist celebration of the antebellum era. But for many, the restriction to indoor spaces (with few exceptions) was not enough to transmit the triumph of British Emancipation to a larger populace. Public space was especially important to combat and offer a counternarrative to the negative portrayals of the West Indian colonies. As the commemorations grew in size and popularity, African-Americans and abolitionists increasingly took their message of the success of August First to the groves, streets and public spaces of America.

Public Rituals of August First: The Antislavery Picnic

August 1 1840, the *Colored American* reminded readers, was a day to be “memorable and ever to be remembered,” the lifting up of “800,000, of our dear brethren in the West Indies, to the condition of men.” Their improvement was going on “gloriously” the paper assured its readers. Schools were “multiplying” and religion was “regarded as first in importance.” Readers were provided with sources to learn more on these successes, and informed that during the daylong commemoration of August First more of such “information” would be “made known.”⁸⁰

But the day didn’t pass as smoothly as the editors would have liked. Three weeks later the paper reported on a “quite *revolting*” display at a commemoration in nearby Newark. The usual political speeches and religious rituals were interrupted by participants identified as having come “in from the country” with “a drum and fife.” They formed a procession that was joined by “the more thoughtless” and went on to engage in conduct that the paper termed “deeply mortifying.” The editors voiced their disapproval in no uncertain terms:

⁸⁰ *Colored American*, 1 August 1840, 22 August 1840.

We deprecate processions of our people, and hope the time has already come when our people will cease celebrating events, interesting to us, by public processions. We should not now refer to this, were it not to enter our protest, and utter disapproval of public processions, certainly one of the most direct means to degrade our people.⁸¹

The *Colored American* also disapproved of “the drinking of toasts” and chided a Buffalo August First commemoration for doing so even though they used cold water and lemonade. They were confident however that the organizers would “doubtless make improvement in this matter” going forward.⁸²

The *Colored American*'s disapproval echoed larger criticisms of working class public behavior common among moral reformers. White newspapers complained regularly of drinking, carousing and public fighting at celebrations ranging from presidential inaugurations to the Fourth of July. In the 1830s and 1840s, authorities complained of Christmas and New Year's night revelries among white Philadelphians that verged on disorder. Susan Davis locates these frustrations in class fears that boisterous street performances, in their seeming rejection of more solemn or religious ceremonies, were challenging dominant ideals.⁸³

These ideas were shared across racial lines. The *Colored American* described Fourth of July celebrations as filled scenes of “rioting and dissipation,” where canon firing, rum drinking, fighting and gambling made white men “lower than demons.”⁸⁴ African-Americans were chided not to emulate such behavior. Fears of festivity sliding into public disorder was palpable to a black elite concerned with moral uplift and sensitive to media portrayals. However, despite the

⁸¹ *Colored American*, 15 August 1840.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Davis, 39, 46-47; White revelers often singled out African-Americans in particular for attack. See, David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (Verso: New York, 1991), 103-111.

⁸⁴ *Colored American*, 17 August 1839.

disapproval of papers like the *Colored American*, and the ever-present dangers faced from white mobs, the 1840 Newark celebration was a harbinger of things to come.

The 1840s were a time of change and discord within American abolitionism. Debates over strategies and tactics in the movement had created divisions between William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society and Lewis Tappan's newly created American & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. Disenchanted with the prospect of morally persuading Southerners to abandon slavery, Garrison increasingly promoted an abolitionism that saw no compromise with slaveholders. Others like the newspaper editor and abolitionist James Birney in Ohio became closely affiliated with the Liberty Party, the first antislavery political party founded in 1840.⁸⁵ Many African-Americans in the main supported Garrison; but others charted an autonomous path, breaking with his strict moral suasion and instead promoting a more aggressive campaign of direct action.⁸⁶ The schisms within American abolitionism and the call for new tactics allowed a break with more conservative prohibitions against public rituals. As the 1840s unfolded, August First commemorations adapted to these crucial changes and currents.⁸⁷

In 1841 there were two separate August First commemorations in Salem, Massachusetts, one organized by white abolitionists on August 2nd and another by African-Americans on August 6th. Black children from the local Sabbath school sang at the white celebration; William Lloyd Garrison spoke at the black celebration. While both consisted mainly of religious services, the black celebration featured something different on Salem's streets: a procession. Mainstream

⁸⁵ Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 64-71. For more on Ohio and the regional politics of abolitionists in the Old Northwest see, Reinard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009).

⁸⁶ Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1992), 100-104; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 40-47.

⁸⁷ Kachun, 67; Rael, 61-62, 76-81.

newspapers reported curiously on the “very interesting appearance” of Salem’s black citizens marching down the street, led by neatly and well dressed “colored children, boys and girls.” The group bore “banners with various mottoes” as they made their way to the church, and again formed a procession at the end of the service to march to the local Masonic Hall for a celebration dinner.⁸⁸

An August First event that year in Williamsburg, New York also featured a mass procession of black Sabbath School students. The *Colored American* praised the scene of “neatly-dressed and well-behaved” children taking up several entire city blocks.⁸⁹ These tentative steps to bring August First commemorations into the public sphere would expand throughout the 1840s as African-American and white abolitionist organizers moved toward celebrations that could serve the interests of mass activism and racial uplift.

In May 1842, the abolitionist Henry C. Wright presented a motion at the New England Anti-Slavery Society convention concerning a plan being worked on with “vigorous efforts” by the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Wright called for the First of August to be “celebrated simultaneously throughout the State, by encouraging abolitionists in each town to interest the citizens, so as to set up an Anti-Slavery Pic Nic.” This “Pic Nic” would be held “by all the abolitionists of the New-England States” and include participation by “those of both sexes, and of all ages.”⁹⁰

The plan was the brainchild of the Massachusetts abolitionist John Anderson Collins. On June 20 1842, Collins wrote a letter to Samuel J. May proposing that abolitionists across the free

⁸⁸ *Salem Register*, 26 July 1841, 5 August 1841.

⁸⁹ *Colored American*, 14 August 1841.

⁹⁰ *Liberator*, 3 June 1842.

states organize an “Anti-Slavery Pic-nic” to commemorate August First. In his letter Collins extolled the importance of British Emancipation to the abolitionist movement, and the cause of America’s “two and a half millions” who yet languished “in the most abject slavery.” He cited the success of the West Indian colonies where rather than the predicted “idleness, insurrection and disorder on the part of the Negroes,” there had instead been the advancement of the agriculture, the introduction of improvements on society, and the moral uplift of the former slaves through the fast multiplication of religious institutions and a “liberally bestowed” education. Collins pronounced the success of British Emancipation “indispensable” to American abolitionism, and implored it “be kept constantly” before the public attention, “that they may see the benefits...of immediate emancipation.”⁹¹

Collins’s letter was printed four days later in the *Liberator*, along with a lengthy reply by Samuel J. May praising his effort. Collins was hurriedly putting together his book *The Anti-Slavery Picknick*, an anthology of “speeches, poems, dialogues and songs; intended for use in schools and anti-slavery meetings.” He had accompanied Garrison on a fund-raising mission to England in 1840, and was profoundly disturbed by the schisms within British political, social and abolitionist movements. Upon his return to the United States he set about traveling and speaking, seeing the need for a wider mass activism against slavery and social reform. In August 1841 it was Collins who, upon hearing a young Frederick Douglass speak, enlisted the runaway slave to tour as a lecturer, believing his voice both necessary and authentic in drawing new converts to abolitionism.⁹²

⁹¹ *Liberator*, 24 June 1842.

⁹² Thomas D. Hamm, *God's Government Begun: The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, 1842—1846* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 8-18. In 1839 Collins helped Garrison rebuff an early attempt by

Collins's 1842 book outlined a strategy "to interest the young in the anti-slavery cause." It was the responsibility of abolitionists "to encourage every movement which shall impress upon their minds the beauty of freedom, and the impolicy and wickedness of slavery." No event, he believed, could more readily be used to persuade than August First: the celebration of both the triumph of immediate emancipation as well the proven success of freedom in the British West Indies. The first speech in his guidebook was an August First 1841 address by Wendell Phillips hailing "the birth-day of West India Emancipation" as "Freedom's Jubilee." Phillips recounted the moral and industrious elevation of the former West Indian slaves and pronounced August First "should be celebrated throughout the Free States of America."⁹³

For Collins, church services and Thanksgivings could not meet the challenge of drawing public interest. "To make this occasion useful and interesting to all parties, it seems important that we deviate from the ordinary stereotyped plan," he wrote, urging abolitionists to "adopt... a method, to which all can participate." He called for dialogues, select hymns and speeches to take place not just in churches or meeting halls, but instead in open groves and places where entertainment could be provided. There was to be the inclusion of "banners, with... anti-slavery emblems and mottoes," that could be used during processions.⁹⁴

In the *Liberator* Samuel J. May agreed, urging that the success of "the glorious deed of the first of August, 1834," be kept continually in the public view. Americans had been "hoodwinked" May lamented, into believing that immediate emancipation in the West Indies had been "impractical as well as hazardous." The success of British Abolition had to be placed before

opponents to seize control of the movement; John A. Collins, *The Anti-slavery picknick: a collection of speeches, poems, dialogues and songs; intended for use in schools and anti-slavery meetings* (Boston: H.W. Williams, 1842).

⁹³ Collins, 3-7.

⁹⁴ *Liberator*, 24 June 1842.

the people, to combat the “enemies of freedom,” identified by May as the mainstream press and proslavery advocates, who had filled the public minds with “the grossest misrepresentations” of the emancipated West Indies. May agreed with Collins that an August First “Pic-Nic” would do much to reach the broader swath of society, “to make them fully acquainted with the facts of the case.” He called for “large assemblies” to gather in churches or in “open fields,” not just to listen to sermons but vent freely “in songs, and anthems and shouts of gladness.” It did “the heart of a man good to huzza for freedom,” he pronounced, and for August First demanded, “we must have music—joyful noises—shouts and long and loud huzzas.”⁹⁵

Collins “Anti-Slavery Pic-Nic” grew in part from the outdoor religious revivals and Temperance Festivals of the early nineteenth century. The use of banners and mottoes was an extension of the popular political American street culture and performance of the 1840s. But Collins also drew on the tactics of Black Freedom Days: commemorations of the Abolition of the Slave Trade and July Fifth. For both Collins and May, these public rituals would aid the abolitionist press in overcoming the common disparaging discourse on British Emancipation. Like African-Americans had done decades prior, Collins and May sought to create a counterpublic space, where the marginalized abolitionist narrative on the success of the “experiment” of freedom in the West Indies could be both placed and performed. Heeding Collin’s appeal, August First events spread through antislavery newspapers and other print materials from Massachusetts to other states and nearby regions.

Collins and May also proposed that books and tracts for rituals of August First be disseminated and by early July *The Anti-Slavery Pic-Nic* was on sale in pamphlet form. Listed within was “a large amount of original and carefully selected matter admirably adapted for

⁹⁵ Ibid.

recitation, declamation, singing, etc.” In the call for an ordered mass participation, August First took on the qualities of a theatrical event, engaging in a distinct visual culture intended as public communication. If the church services of the early commemorations of West India Day were designed as rituals of thanksgiving and praise, this new phase was intended for full public spectacles and performances of freedom.⁹⁶

Public August First events combined secular activities with religious worship that appealed across class lines. Picnics included an abundance of food as well as boat rides, games, and even dances, alongside sermons and political orations. Sites were chosen for their natural beauty, size, accessibility, and nearness to useable water such as lakes or rivers. In many cases these sites were external to larger cities, yet close enough to allow for short travel. Groves and parks became the most popular public locations, and hosted August First picnics throughout New England, New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Abolitionist newspapers took care to depict these public spaces in terms that aligned them with the sacredness of their moral cause. Trees were described as “majestic” and said to hold “a solemn grandeur.” The sun, clouds, rivers, and even animals, were often highlighted as working in concert with the goals of the day.⁹⁷

Quoting William Cullen Bryant, one newspaper remarked that groves “were God’s first temples.” Attendees were encouraged to give their thanks and gratitude to the “God of the oppressed” for providing such a fitting place for their gathering. In their externality to urban spaces, groves and parks also provided a place of relative safety. Here, away from the “busy hum of the city,” abolitionists and African-Americans could create their own space, to celebrate the triumph and success of August First, to commune, affirm their stance against slavery and

⁹⁶ *Liberator*, 24 June 1842; Marian H. Studley, “An ‘August First’ in 1844,” *The New England Quarterly* 16 (December 1943): 567-568; Collins, 3; Kachun, 67.

⁹⁷ *Liberator*, 17 September 1836; Studley, 568.

mobilize their activism. The natural environment of the picnic space was described in the *Liberator* as ordained by God for this particular use: a physical manifestation of a just God's protection, allowing his servants to work in "breaking the bonds of wickedness, and letting the oppressed go free."⁹⁸

In August 1842, the same year of Collin's proposal, a crowd of five thousand gathered for an antislavery "Pic Nic" in a grove near Lynn, Massachusetts. Wendell Phillips performed the keynote while the entertainment included a choir, a band and refreshments. Birds, it was claimed, alighted over the stage and "joined in pleasant rivalry" with the musicians, appearing to give "boisterous praises" to the orators. A similar "Pic Nic" in West Brockfield, Massachusetts, arranged by the "the ladies" of the local antislavery society, began with a 10:00 AM procession to a shady bower where a stage, music and food had been prepared.

The march took about an hour, growing to at least a thousand as companies of men and women from nearby towns joined the main procession. The climax of the day was a speech by Samuel J. May who addressed the crowd on the "origin" and "complete success" of British Emancipation. Dr. E.D. Hudson of the American Anti-Slavery Society followed with an oration on the same subject. The *Liberator* heralded the day and called on abolitionists to rejoice in the freedom of the West Indies "until our nation can celebrate a jubilee of her own."⁹⁹

In Hubbardston, Massachusetts, abolitionists converged on a grove for their August First picnic of sliced meats, "grains of every variety," cakes and "oranges, raisins and fruits." Marchers were formed into groups, such as the Princeton Anti-Slavery Society, and the Washingtonians, a working class temperance society, or by the names of their towns. They

⁹⁸ *Liberator*, 8 August 1845.

⁹⁹ *Liberator*, 5 August, 19 August 1842.

carried banners, one of them depicting a “figure of a female form, with chains beneath her feet, bearing the motto, ‘The Truth shall make you free.’” Garrison gave the main speech and included in his oration “cheering accounts of the condition and prosperity of the West India Islands.” Among the day’s rituals was the presentation of a banner “to a young colored lad” with the motto, ‘I am free.’”¹⁰⁰

Not every August First held that 1842 was a picnic. In Hingham, Massachusetts, abolitionist societies met in the local Willard Hall. Though indoors, the commemoration included music as well as speeches. When asked to regale the audience on the economic and free labor success of West Indian Emancipation, the outspoken Connecticut abolitionist Henry Clarke Wright broke from the usual reciting of statistics. Wright declared he felt no need to know if more sugar or coffee had been raised or if property was now more valued, and he chastised abolitionists for overly focusing on this point. He pronounced it enough “to know that chains are broken...that slavery is abolished—that 800,000 are made from beasts and chattels into men, into human beings.”

Wright refuted detractors of immediate emancipation by pointing out “not a drop of blood” had been shed, and “not one blow struck,” by the former slaves of the West Indies. Two pictures set up in the hall emphasized this moral tone. One featured a kneeling slave with chains on her wrists representing the United States; in contrast the second picture depicted a freed West Indian slave who trampled beneath her feet a broken whip and chains.¹⁰¹

On the streets of cities, however, such forthright displays could still prove provocative. In Philadelphia that year an August First Temperance Parade by the Young Men’s Vigilante

¹⁰⁰ *Liberator*, 9, September 1842.

¹⁰¹ *Liberator*, 19 August 1842, 30 September 1842.

Committee was attacked by a mob as it passed a working-class Irish enclave on Lombard Street. When the marchers retaliated, the mob turned to setting buildings on fire, including the African-American Second Presbyterian Church. The *Pennsylvania Freeman* recounted later that “the colored people were pursued every where with savage ferocity.” Instead of arresting the rioters, the paper claimed, black Philadelphians were arrested and blamed for the violence. The rioting continued for two more days, destroying much of the black district until the mayor called in the local militia.¹⁰²

The black abolitionist Robert Purvis was a particular target of the rioters in Philadelphia, who twice surrounded his home. An armed Purvis sent his family away and remained within, vowing to kill any intruder. When fellow abolitionist Henry Clarke Wright wrote from England, hoping to use details of the violence in his lectures abroad, Purvis responded that he was too shaken to speak on the event. It was not just the mob he recounted, but the “apathy and *inhumanity* of the *whole* [white] community” that disturbed him. “Press, Church, Magistrates, Clergymen and Devils are against us,” he pronounced with despair.¹⁰³ The riot also impacted how white Philadelphians perceived and portrayed their city in print. An 1842 lithograph entitled “A View of the City of Brotherly Love” depicted scenes of mayhem including the Lombard Street riots, with images of blacks and whites fighting in the streets.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Joseph A. Borome, “The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (January 1968): 326-327; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 18 July 1844. The riot may as well have had a class dimension, as the mob singled out elite African-Americans and institutions for attack. See, Emma Jones Lapansky, “‘Since They Got Those Separate Churches’: Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia,” *American Quarterly* 32 no. 1 (Spring 1980): 71-72.

¹⁰³ Robert Purvis to Henry C. Wright, August 22, 1842 in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. III: The United States, 1830-1846*, ed. Peter C. Ripley (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 81-82; Margaret Hope Bacon, *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 98-100; Borome, “The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia,” 326-327.

¹⁰⁴ Lithograph, “A View of the City of Brotherly Love,” (New York: H.R. Robinson, 1842), Large Graphics Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

Rioters later charged that a banner, depicting scenes of blacks attacking whites, incited them to violence: a clear reference in their minds to Haiti. In fact, upon its display in court, the banner was shown to instead depict a kneeling slave with broken chains. An annual report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1843 placed blame for the “storm of infuriated violence” squarely on the religious institutions of the city. The rioters, they claimed, had only imitated the “deep-seated prejudices against an unoffending class of their fellow men” common in white churches that sanctioned and fostered “unchristian” principles. The report lamented that the marchers at the August First parade had only “thought to express their joy in modes common and popular in this republican country.” But for African-Americans, public performances of freedom were still radical and dangerous acts. To lay claim to the tools of white democratic citizenship was to subvert the existent racial order, risking the possibility of violent retribution.¹⁰⁵

Even in the face of such threats, public August First commemorations continued to grow throughout the 1840s. Like their predecessors, these larger events were advertised in abolitionist newspapers. A July 1843 *Liberator* announced three different public August First commemorations in Massachusetts, one of them “a public and social Picknick” in a field designated “Temperance Grove” in Dedham, some twenty miles south of Boston. Attendees were informed to prepare for a procession and that banners and badges for the march would be procured. Advertisements were also printed in local mainstream papers, in an attempt to reach those who might be newly recruited to the abolitionist cause. Public advertisements in local papers imbued August First events with an air of openness, showing that were sanctioned and welcomed by local officials. The *Salem Register* advertised a commemoration in Dedham with

¹⁰⁵ Bacon, 98-100; Davis, 66; *Ninth Annual Report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1842), 6-7.

detailed instructions on how Salem residents might arrive in Boston, complete with train time and cost.¹⁰⁶

An 1844 *Liberator* advertisement invited readers to the “Colored Citizens Celebration of the First of August” in Boston, which while held in a chapel included a midday march through the city and an evening “Soiree.” A “PIC-NIC AND CLAM-BAKE” at Rodman’s Grove in Falls River, Massachusetts was announced in an 1845 *Liberator*, welcoming the “Friends of Freedom” to attend. The same paper advertised separate August First antislavery picnics and celebrations in Middlesex and Suffolk Counties, Norfolk County, Old Essex, Leicester, Duxbury, Lowell and one held by the “colored citizens” of Boston.¹⁰⁷

The growth of August First commemorations was part of an increased abolitionist mass mobilization in the 1840s. Abolitionist papers not only advertised these events, they also implored abolitionists to attend as an act of civic responsibility. “Every friend of the slave,” the *Liberator* insisted, should “allow nothing to keep him away but insurmountable obstacles,” and should “spare no pains “ to induce his neighbors to attend. In gathering to celebrate August First in great numbers, abolitionists could display their assuredness in the success of British Emancipation and the rightness of Immediatism: “Let ALL TURN OUT as with one heart and one mind—the old, the middle aged, the young—that the foes of emancipation may behold such an array of virtue loveliness, moral heroism and true piety, as to fill them with consternation, and cause them to retire from the conflict in despair.”¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ *Liberator*, 14 July 1843; *Salem Register*, 27 July 1843.

¹⁰⁷ *Liberator*, 19 July 1844, 25 July 1845.

¹⁰⁸ *Liberator*, 25 July 1845.

Abolitionist papers called on organizers and attendees to send “graphic descriptions” of the various events in order keep the whole country apprised “through the medium of the press, of what is said and done on the occasion.” Reports were also increasingly picked up in local papers. In 1843 the *Liberator* reprinted accounts of August First events from the *Rochester Democrat* and the *Nantucket Telegraph*. The former was a brief blurb describing African-American celebrants as behaving in a “very becoming manner;” the latter was a detailed recounting complete with a critical analysis of the main address.¹⁰⁹ Still, in order to control public perceptions, the *Liberator* relied on friendly first hand accounts, asking for “sketches of the speeches,” resolutions, incidents and anything “that may have served to heighten the interest of the scene.”¹¹⁰

An 1844 August First picnic in Hingham, Massachusetts illustrates the detail with which newspapers like the *Liberator* portrayed these public events. Held in Tranquilly Grove, the antislavery picnic was one of the largest of its day, with some six to eight thousand in attendance. Attendees arrived by carriage and steamboats from nearby counties, each sending its own number of delegates from “miles around.” The gathering crowd was described as diverse: “men and women, black and white, clerical and lay, rich and poor.”

As in other August First commemorations, women played key organizational roles at Hingham. In newspaper accounts a local woman named Ann Q. Thazier was listed as a prominent member on the Committee of Arrangements. Women also provided food for the vast gathering, including baked goods, tea, coffee, meats, fruits, raisins and vegetables. The frequent mention of women at August First events in Garrison’s newspaper was particularly significant,

¹⁰⁹ *Liberator*, 14 July 1843, 11 August 1843, 25 August 1843.

¹¹⁰ *Liberator*, 25 July 1845.

given his advocacy of women having public roles in abolitionist meetings and organizations. The *Liberator* gave “much credit” to “the ladies of Hingham at the 1844 event,” for their “ability and taste” in arranging “the tables and decoration.”¹¹¹

Organized into companies by elected “Marshals,” a “Grand Procession” of attendees took place along the main street to the grove. Marchers wore gold emblems of the North Star depicting a shackled slave kneeling before the words “A voice from Great Britain to America 1834.” On a banner a slave with outstretched arms awaited “the hour of emancipation,” with “chains falling from his limbs” and a broken whip trampled at his feet. Merging the star of fugitive American slaves with emancipation British West Indies, the banner declared, “This is the Lord’s Doing”¹¹²

The marchers were led by a “Chief Marshal and Aids” on decorated horses, and followed by “fifty young ladies, dressed uniformly in white, with wreaths of oak leaves.” The Hingham Anti-Slavery Society took a place near the front, with a banner of white silk bearing the motto “Still achieving—still pursuing.” The delegates Abington delegates held a banner proclaiming, “No union with slaveholders, religiously or political.” From Essex County came the motto, “Shall a republic which could not bear the hands of a king, cradle a bondage which a king has abolished?” The banner from Plymouth may have been the most radical, depicting an American eagle “trampling a prostrate slave” and declaring, “This is American Liberty.” The procession went on for a mile and half, in ranks “formed four deep” with a multiracial crowd of diverse ages and gender said to be mingling “with harmony and pleasure in the promiscuous files.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ *Liberator* 9, August 1844; Studley, 570-571.

¹¹² *Liberator* 9, August 1844; Studley, 572-573.

¹¹³ *Liberator*, 9 August 1844.

Descriptions of pageantry of the procession in Hingham that 1844 were imbued with a radical utopian vision demonstrating the significance of August First. Described as a “promiscuous” harmony, its open social amalgamation defied racial, gender and class conventions of the day. The political declarations of the various banners and mottoes cast moral condemnation upon both American government and society. The procession embodied a new social organization inspired by the reshaping of the emancipated British colonies. In public, and print, white and black men and women crossed transnational boundaries and comingled in an open and festive atmosphere. These were defiant pronouncements against those who claimed the experiment of freedom in the West Indies had been a failure. Their presence and rituals denounced the mobs, the violence and the attacks of anti-abolitionists who claimed such a society was doomed to failure and could not exist. As one banner read with satire deftly aimed at critics, “Our fanaticism: ‘All men are created equal—thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’”¹¹⁴

Speeches remained prominent at August First events and were either reprinted in full in newspapers and pamphlets or summarized in detail. Among the speakers at Hingham in 1844 was the transcendentalist essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. In his speech, Emerson spent ample time on tenets that had become commonplace in August First orations: extolling the success of British Emancipation as a triumph of free labor and moral improvement. The *Liberator* reported that Emerson “traced the progress of West India Emancipation” and the “nobleness” with which it was received by the former slaves. Like the abolitionist debates in newspapers and pamphlets, he peppered his speech with quotes from colonial officials on the “good order and decorum” of the freed black West Indians and economic treatises on the

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

destructive nature of slave labor. British Emancipation was heralded as a “new and coming civilization” of which former slaves in the West Indies now played a key element.¹¹⁵

African-Americans made common appearances at August First events sponsored by white led Anti-Slavery societies. They marched in the crowds, spoke on stages and were even guests of honor. Celebrating the success of emancipation in the West Indies was a public ritual that for them held particular meanings. “Who were the slaves in the West India Islands?” asked the African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister Jehiel C. Beman at an August First event in 1843 held by a black vigilance committee. “Colored men,” he pronounced. “Who were rejoiced in the great jubilee? Colored men. Who ought now, above all others, celebrate this day? Colored men.”¹¹⁶

While welcoming the attendance of white abolitionist allies, Beman identified with the former West Indian slaves as similarly recently freed persons: “The colored man...was the injured party and could alone *feel* on this occasion.” Though sympathetic, Beman contended, “our white friends...*could not*, having never been placed in the same circumstances with the colored people, *feel*” as they did “in celebrating this great event.” Beman’s words explained why many African-Americans insisted in holding autonomous public commemorations of August First. Their personal freedoms were symbolized by the success of British Emancipation and their celebrations were bold performances of that freedom in a hostile public space.¹¹⁷

In their August First speeches, African-Americans praised the success of British Emancipation and deployed it in larger nationalist arguments for republican citizenship. The

¹¹⁵ *Liberator*, 16 August 1844. This sketch of Emerson’s speech in the *Liberator* was reproduced from the mainstream newspaper the *New York Tribune*, which had also begun to report on the growing public event.

¹¹⁶ *Liberator*, 11 August 1843.

¹¹⁷ *Liberator*, 11 August 1843; Kachun, 60-61; Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 219.

August 14, 1840 *Liberator* reported on a gathering at the Belknap Church, providing readers with a synopsis of a speech by the black Boston abolitionist William Cooper Nell. In his oration, Nell compared British Emancipation to the movement for independence by Patriots of the Revolutionary Era. Drawing on this patriotic memory, he prophesied the striking of chains from 800,000 former West Indian slaves was “the harbinger of American Emancipation—a bright omen...” and a “rainbow of promise” to the abolitionist cause. Nell further called on African-Americans to “contend earnestly” for equal rights, insisting the United States was their home, consecrated by their loyalty, contributions and the “blood of our forefathers” shed towards liberty. The nation owed a debt to African-Americans he charged, which could “never be liquidated by insult and persecution.”¹¹⁸

In the *North Star* Frederick Douglass reprinted in full his address at an 1848 August First event in Rochester, New York. Written and spoken as a letter to President, the speech continually extolled the “peaceful emancipation” of the now “disenthralled brethren” in the West Indies. Douglass chastised as well American newspapers that continually proclaimed, “The British Colonies are ruined...The emancipated negroes are lazy and won’t work...Emancipation has been a failure.” Replying to these critics, Douglass asserted that, in fact, blacks could claim a superiority of the industrious spirit to their white counterparts. He proclaimed white industry “unequal” to that of black efforts, and quoted the Prime Minister of England in stating that since emancipation, “the negroes of the West India colonies” now exist “in the best condition.” The former slaves were said to have “the best food” and were “better clothed...than any peasantry in the world.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ *Liberator*, 14 August 1840.

¹¹⁹ *North Star*, 4 August 1848.

Douglass ended his speech by calling upon the American press “to let these facts be known, so that [a long] abused and injured race may at last have justice done them.” In his final words, Douglass blurred the lines of the former slaves of the West Indies and free African-Americans—both members of the “injured race” which a truthful recounting of the success of British Emancipation will help free.¹²⁰

Several weeks later the *North Star* published selections of a speech by the black abolitionist H.W. Johnson, who had followed Douglass at the Rochester commemoration. In his oration Johnson paid homage to “Freedom’s Jubilee, the birthday of liberty to 800,000 crushed and bleeding victims of oppression.” British Emancipation, Johnson claimed, had “swept away” anti-abolitionist claims of the “impracticability of immediate emancipation.” The former slaves in the West Indies had disproved all the “frightful” images conjured up by emancipation’s detractors. There had been no devastation of property, revenge or “rioting in the blood of their former masters.” Citing the disproportionate numbers of blacks to whites in the British colonies, Johnson reminded his audience that it would have been “easy” for the former slaves to have “dug the grave of every white man upon those islands.” This to Johnson was evidence of the success of the “great experiment,” which he likened to a divine mission “to restore man to the condition in which his Creator designed he should live.”¹²¹

As August First moved from churches and halls into the parks, groves and streets of the North, abolitionists were able to communicate the success of British Emancipation to a larger public and mobilize for their cause. Beyond its cultural and organizational dimensions, August First was also a political phenomenon. Reacting to the shifting domestic politics of antislavery,

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *North Star*, 21 August 1848.

abolitionists and African-Americans adapted this transnational commemoration to place a more forceful, direct and vigilant abolitionism into the larger national discourse.

August First in the Public Square: The Politics of Antislavery

In May 1844 at the tenth anniversary of the Garrisonian American Anti-Slavery Society, a resolution was passed by a vote of nearly three to one in favor of dissolving “the existing national compact,” proclaiming “secession from the government is a religious and political duty.” It was decided that the motto on abolitionist banners should be “NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS.” To compromise with slavery was to compromise with sin. It was “impractical” the resolution held, “for tyrants and the enemies of tyranny to coalesce and legislate together for the preservations of human rights, or the promotion of the interests of Liberty.”¹²²

Placards and shouts of “No Union with Slaveholders, Political or Religious!” soon became common at Garrisonian August First commemorations. Britain’s break with slavery was used to call for severance of the North from a morally bankrupt South. Following the annexation of Texas as a slave state, the Unitarian preacher William Channing at an 1845 August First held at the Court House in Concord, Massachusetts, declared the Constitution “broken” and called for it to be “absolved.” After Channing’s speech, which was said to hold the audience in “breathless attention,” the following speaker echoed his remarks, shouting forcefully “THIS UNION IS DISSOLVED!” and scorning the South as a “cottonocracy.”¹²³

Channing’s choice of the Court House in Concord, Massachusetts was rife with intentional political symbolism. To denounce the Constitution while extolling Great Britain in

¹²² *Liberator*, 14 June 1844.

¹²³ *Liberator*, 8 August 1845.

this patriotic space was to deflect criticisms of treason; in fact, Channing in his political stance against slavery could evoke and lay claim to the rebelliousness of the Founders. It was a bold declaration on the present state of American politics and the national body, couched in the rhetoric and ritual performances that surrounded August First and British Emancipation.¹²⁴

The print culture that allowed African-Americans and abolitionists to enter the public sphere also placed their commemorative gatherings to celebrate British Emancipation into the larger American discourse. In the protected space afforded by August First, abolitionists openly condemned slavery, spoke on national politics and criticized the United States, all while celebrating the triumph of emancipation in a foreign country. Resolutions at the 1842 August First celebration in Hingham called the victory of British Emancipation part of a universal “holy war,” and called for a million men, women and children to march on the halls of Congress to demand an end to slavery. In 1845 in Fall River, Massachusetts, speakers contrasted the success of immediate emancipation in the West Indies to the “woeful disparity” of America. Most notably, the actions of British Parliament were contrasted with the American Congress. The Ohio Presbyterian minister John Rankin gave an accounting of the Underground Railroad, calling upon others to defy unjust American laws. At the day’s end, a collection was taken up for the abolitionist John Walker. A year previous, Walker had been arrested and branded with the words “slave stealer” upon his hand after his attempt to sail fugitive slaves from Florida to none other than the emancipated British West Indies.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Richard J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 79-117.

¹²⁵ *Liberator*, 8 August 1845. The actions of Congress referred to here was likely the recent legislation and compromise to annex Texas as a slave state, which speakers like William Channing had condemned just a year past. For more on Jonathan Walker see, Alvin F. Oickle, *The Man With the Branded Hand: The Life of Jonathan Walker, Abolitionist* (Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2011).

Walker was a featured speaker at a contemporaneous August First commemoration in Waltham, Massachusetts. The *Liberator* recounted the scene, saying there was “a strong desire” among the crowd to both “hear the voice and see the branded hand” of the “honorably distinguished” captain. Speaking on his attempt to liberate slaves, Walker affirmed, “I repent not of what I have done...As long as life remains in me, this hand this voice shall be raised against slavery.”¹²⁶

Walker’s radical political defiance, its direct link to British Emancipation and the physical space of the liberated West Indies was not lost upon these gatherings. Preceding his speech, the Unitarian minister Reverend Caleb Stetson spoke at length on the “good working of emancipation” in the West Indies, where the freedmen “were more industrious as ever,” had become owners of property, and were filled with “decorum and obedience to law.” Other speakers repeatedly condemned the annexation of Texas, as the antithesis to British Emancipation. Channing, who delivered his own address at Waltham, noted that “while Great Britain rejoices” for the triumph unfolding in the West Indies, Americans hung their heads “in shame.”¹²⁷

Public rallies of August First gave African-Americans a rare physical space to speak with a black political voice. In their speeches they openly mocked slave owners, asserted their equality and made statements that at times dwarfed the proclamations of white counterparts. In his 1848 August First speech at Rochester, Frederick Douglass declared America degraded by the “slave whip.” He reminded the audience that in contrast to the West Indies, at that very moment “three million slaves clank their galling fetters.” Douglass placed responsibility at “the

¹²⁶ *Liberator*, 8 August 1845.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

door of every American citizen.” He charged that slavery existed “because of the moral, constitutional, political and religious support” it received from white Americans. “Carry it home with you from this great gathering,” he told the crowd. “You, my white fellow-countrymen, are the enslavers of men, women, and children.” While chastising white Americans, he eulogized the slave rebel Nat Turner as “a man of noble courage” whose “strike for liberty” was the work of a “God of justice.”¹²⁸

At an 1850 August First event in Cleveland, the black abolitionist Hezekiah Ford Douglass urged his listeners to “not forget to remember the wrongs and outrages” of America even as they celebrated liberty in the West Indies. In a lengthy, dramatic and expressive speech that touched upon topics as far ranging as “slave-holding Russia,” the “hallowed” American Founders, the “rights of man” and the historical march of humanity towards freedom and liberty, Douglass cast British Emancipation and American slavery within a global struggle for civilization.

Douglass also refuted notions of black inferiority, proclaiming African-Americans descendants of the “Ethiopian race” who once “held the balance of power” in the ancient world. He claimed Egypt as an ancient black nation, and said that the pyramids “were reared by woolly headed negroes.” It was from Egypt, Douglass told the crowd, that Greece “derived her letters and laws and politics,” before passing the “scepter of the world...from the colored to the white race.” From there he traced a line of descent from Hannibal and Alexander Dumas to Frederick Douglass and Henry Bibb, “whose intellectual acquirements would do credit to any age or nation.”¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *North Star*, 4 August 1848.

¹²⁹ *Antislavery Bugle*, 31 August 1850.

The speeches by both Frederick Douglass and Hezekiah Ford Douglass, in their directness, forthrightness and refutation of black inferiority, highlights the importance of the space offered by August First commemorations. Here an autonomous black voice could place an African-American perspective into the national debate on slavery. In this appropriated space, African-Americans could contest the most eloquent speakers of their day and challenge the most hallowed myths of white supremacy. In their speeches, both men engaged in a radical counter-theatre that subverted both the arguments of anti-abolitionists and the very foundation upon which slavery rested.

On September 18, 1850 the United States Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, authorizing bounty hunters, federal marshals and even local authorities to recapture slave fugitives and return them to bondage. The law was a blow to the efficacy of abolitionism and the rallying cry for an even more forceful vigilance and mobilization. The advertisement for an 1851 August First event in Boston called for a “MASS CELEBRATION” and the attendance of “all who desire” to help hasten the day “when no slave shall clank his fetters on American soil.” An 1852 advertisement heralded “THE JUBILEE! WEST INDIA EMANCIPATION!” and the coming of a “GRAND MASS CELEBRATION,” inviting all “who are longing and laboring to witness a similar...glorious event in the United States.”¹³⁰

At the 1851 August First in Worcester, resolutions were passed affirming that after thirteen years of evidence none of the “evil predictions” of violence, vagrancy outrage and “barbarous treatment” had come to pass in the West Indies. “All uncertainty is ended, as to the successful working of West India emancipation,” they pronounced, and through “labor, revenue, education, personal security, morality” and religion,” the freedmen had proven themselves

¹³⁰ *Liberator*, 18 July 1851, 16 July 1852.

worthy of the “equal rights and privileges” of citizens. Further, “the rapid rise of social and political equality” of black West Indians was “refutation” of the doctrine of race prejudice, and any claim that whites and blacks could not co-exist “on equal terms.”¹³¹

The urgency of the moment at times sparked bold proclamations at August First events. At a Boston celebration in 1852 William Lloyd Garrison read aloud a poem titled “The Slave Catcher,” comparing the purity of New England’s Pilgrim ancestors to the “savage” hunters of fugitive slaves, whom he depicted as an “unleashed pack” of hounds. At the 1853 August First celebration in Flushing Queens, a letter by the abolitionist John Jay was read called “Shortness of Life Among Negro Catchers.” In it, Jay related the recent history of the fugitive slave Henry Long who, after a three-week ordeal that excited many abolitionists, was returned to slavery. According to Jay, each of the key officials, including the Judge and County Clerk, had met their untimely deaths. Jay counted this not as chance but providence. Each man had been “summoned, in turn, by Death” for their complicity with slavery and would now receive judgment.¹³²

The increasingly tense political moment called as well for bolder rituals. August First picnics had utilized the procession as part of the public commemoration. Increasingly, processions gave way to full parades, returning African-Americans to a tradition of earlier Freedom Days. In 1851 at an August First event in New Bedford, Massachusetts, African-Americans marched through the “principal streets” of the city to the music of brass bands from New York and Boston. Outfitted with banners and regalia, the companies of freemasons and clubs with such names as the Sons of Freedom, paraded from City Hall to a grove. There, speakers lambasted the pro-colonizationist Kentucky Senator Henry Clay as “the ever-active

¹³¹ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, 14 August 1851

¹³² *Liberator*, 1 August 1852, 9 September 1853.

enemy of the colored American” and extolled the rescue of the fugitive slave Shadrach Minkins from a Boston courtroom by black and white abolitionists.¹³³

An 1852 August First celebration in Cincinnati, said to number some 3000 persons, was preceded by a parade that included a local Order of United Colored Americans, “dressed in their regalia.” In 1853 Cleveland, African-Americans celebrated August First with a parade and band “through the principal street” of the city. In 1856 the *Liberator* reported that the “colored citizens of New Bedford” held a parade complete with ranks of men, women and children, music bands and various banners reading “Liberty to the British West Indies” and “Equal Rights to All.”¹³⁴

Perhaps one of the boldest sights at August First commemorations of the 1850s was the presence of organized black militias, many of whom regularly drilled, carried rifles or other weaponry and marched in processions. These companies, reminiscent of the earlier Negro Training Day, took on distinctive names such as the Hannibal Guards of Brooklyn and Long Island, the Liberty Guard of Boston, the Independent Company of Cincinnati, and more.¹³⁵ A “colored military company from New York” escorted black August First paraders in New Bedford in 1851. This was also likely the meaning of “a special military celebration” held by African-Americans at an 1855 August First picnic in Staten Island. An even larger group of black New Yorkers paraded through the city that same year to celebrate West India Emancipation, including among their number both civic societies and “several colored military” companies. The 1856 August First parade in New Bedford included forty members of the local

¹³³ *Liberator*, 15 August 1851. For more on the Shadrach Minkins rescue see, Gary L. Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹³⁴ *National Era*, 16 September 1852; *Liberator*, 19 August 1853, 15 August 1856.

¹³⁵ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 183.

Independent Blues headed by a Captain Henry Johnson, and were said to give “a fine appearance.”¹³⁶

Black militias existed within the context of an increased presence of African-Americans in public political life. In their military dress and drills, militias appropriated symbols of white American manhood as their own and subverted the normative rules that supported the slave system. Their militant display served as a deterrent to the contested and often racially violent street; and in several instances they directly protected paraders from disruptive white mobs. In 1857, the all black Boston Liberty Guard, which had been formed at a previous August First gathering, retaliated against white attackers. As the mob hurled brickbats the militia charged, “fleshing their bayonets in the posteriors of their assailants.”¹³⁷

Black militia companies also appeared in the wake of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, during which African-Americans armed themselves and even engaged in gun battles with slave catchers. It was a precarious moment for the continued existence of black freedom. As an 1853 August First resolution in Philadelphia starkly pronounced, the “monster king slavery” yet held dominion over Brazil, Cuba and Texas. Talk of a return of the slave trade and the encroaching plantocracy of “tyrannical” pro-slavery men was evidenced in American politics. A speech given at an 1855 August First commemoration in Long Island spoke at length of the looming and inevitable “conflict with the slave power” for which abolitionists needed to prepare. An 1856 advertisement for the approaching “Anniversary of West India Emancipation” in Hopedale,

¹³⁶ *Liberator*, 15 August 1851, 10 August 1855, 15 August; *Boston Evening Transcript*, 2 August 1855.

¹³⁷ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 179; *Liberator*, 27 1857.

Massachusetts called for a “grand rally” for those “on the side of God...in the mighty contest” of American slavery, “now nearing its crisis.”¹³⁸

In their martial drills black militias fit within the orderly nature prescribed for public rituals of freedom. Watching the all-black militias the National Guards and Union Cadets parade at a West India Day commemoration in Bedford, Massachusetts, Frederick Douglass beamed with pride. “But how did these companies look and act, you will ask?” he asked in the *Frederick Douglass Paper*. “I answer, for all the world, just like soldiers.” Douglass admitted that having never before seen “colored soldiers,” he had doubted how they would be perceived. Like other African-American leaders, he feared they would only add to the ongoing ridicule of black public celebrations. But he remarked gladly “the companies quite surpassed me by their soldierly bearing, and compelled my admiration.” For Douglass, the well-ordered militias proved the equality of free African-Americans to this public democratic rite: “They marched, halted, wheeled, and handled their arms just as you have seen well-drilled white soldiers do.”¹³⁹

The presence of organized black militias at August First Commemorations also served as a threat of force, both contradicting and undergirding the peaceful proscriptions of British Emancipation. Common abolitionist propaganda of August First proclaimed the example of the West Indies “the right way” and the “safe way.” African-Americans in their early commemorations of British Emancipation appeared to agree with a peaceful transition to freedom. But through the enacting of military parades they transmitted as well a warning, of what could result were the United States not to follow Britain’s lead. In public space and within printed newspaper reports, black militias evoked images of the most radical form of antislavery:

¹³⁸ *Liberator*, 19 August 1853, 24 August 1855, 18 July 1856; For more on vigilant resistance to Fugitive Slave law see, Gordon S. Barker, *Fugitive Slaves and the Unfinished American Revolution* (New York: McFarland, 2013).

¹³⁹ *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 10 August 1855. This paper was formerly the *North Star* until 1851.

the ever present threat of slave rebellion, the revolutionary rhetoric of David Walker and, perhaps most ominously, the specter of Haiti.¹⁴⁰

Playing on these latent fears, the always outspoken white abolitionist Wendell Phillips in 1841 had alluded to the landing of black West Indian troops in the South to extinguish slavery.¹⁴¹ It was a provocative image that carried into the public black military performances of the 1850s. Viewing the black militias parade at August First in 1855 in New Bedford, Frederick Douglass proclaimed, “that if a knowledge of the use of arms is desirable to any people, it is desirable to us.”¹⁴² As black militias paraded in the major towns and cities of the North, they seemed to be enacting what Kerr-Ritche astutely terms “a rehearsal for war.”¹⁴³

In their rhetoric, many African-Americans certainly seemed prepared for conflict. In the protected space of August First they continued to discuss this possibility with remarkable candor in the public square. An advertisement for an African-American August First gathering in Boston urged blacks “to pull altogether for the downfall of our American Bastille!” A mainstream Ohio newspaper reporting on an August First speech was shocked at this more militant rhetoric. The paper identified the black abolitionist John Mercer Langston as a “person of Oberlin notoriety,” describing his August First speech as “filled with the wildest assertions and most rapid denunciations of the white people, their religions and institutions.” Such brazen talk was not limited to designated speakers. Reacting to praise of George Washington at a commemoration in

¹⁴⁰ In 1860 the Massachusetts abolitionist Lydia Maria Child published a pamphlet extolling the virtues of British Emancipation as the right and safe way for the United States to end slavery and stop the threat of slave rebellion. See, Lydia Maria Child, *The Right Way the Safe Way: Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies, and Elsewhere* (New York: s.n., 1860)

¹⁴¹ *Liberator*, 20 August 1841.

¹⁴² *Frederick Douglass Paper*, 10 August, 1855.

¹⁴³ Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 185.

Long Island, a black woman interrupted and denounced the founding father as a liar who had kept slaves even after blacks had fought to free the country. “The colored people were the chosen people of God,” she shouted at the stage. “They would rise above all.”¹⁴⁴

Throughout the heightened tensions, the debate over the success of the experiment in the West Indies remained central to the ritual in the political countertheatre of August First. For American abolitionism it was a final appeal that seemed the only means to avert crisis. An 1856 August First speech by the black abolitionist orator and minister James W.C. Pennington in Hartford, Connecticut, attempted to show the “reasonableness” of immediate emancipation to the South through the “legitimate inference from the success of British Emancipation.” He challenged naysayers, who predicted bloodshed and ruin in the American South, to look to the West Indies. “No ill consequences followed West Indian emancipation,” he asserted; it had instead “led to a vast amount of good.” Pennington called on “no abolitionist” to be “ashamed” or “afraid” in advocating the cause. After all, he asked, “What slave in ours or any other country need despair of liberty since the British slave has gone free!” The news of the success of the “great experiment” in the West Indies guaranteed the victory “to the cause of human liberty in every land.”¹⁴⁵

An advertisement for an 1857 West India Emancipation commemoration in Salem proclaimed it a day that challenged “this slaveholding republic,” as it “demonstrated the ability of the emancipated to take care of themselves.” Emancipation had raised the former West Indian slaves to “the position of freemen.” They could now “acquire property, and advance in

¹⁴⁴ *Daily Ohio Statesman*, 8 August 1859; *Liberator*, 29 July 1859; *New York Times*, 2 August 1854.

¹⁴⁵ James W.C. Pennington, *The reasonableness of the Abolition of Slavery at the South, a legitimate inference from the success of British Emancipation. An Address, Delivered at Hartford, Conn.. on the First of August, 1856* (Hartford: Press of Case, Tiffany and Company, 1856), 14-17.

intellectual and moral culture...to meet creditably all the responsibilities which belong to a state of liberty.”¹⁴⁶

In his 1857 speech the black physician and abolitionist John Stewart Rock similarly defended the success of emancipation against detractors, claiming the moral improvement of the former West Indian slaves was above that of France or Italy. An 1858 advertisement called on “the friends of impartial freedom” to arrive in Abington to “OBSERVE THE JUBILEE!” of “the glorious achievement of West India Emancipation.” Much of the day would be given over to the Rev. Henry Bleby, a missionary from Barbados, who would present “a most lucid and reliable account of the workings of the great experiment.” Attendees were assured that Bleby, “a competent witness” and an “old resident West Indian,” would “refute the slanderous statements that have been multiplied and circulated ad infinitum, by a malignant pro-slavery press, respecting West India emancipation and its results!”¹⁴⁷

These performances were enacted in public and further relived in shared experiences through print. They expressed the understanding that it was the success of British Emancipation that afforded this public space. The success of former West Indian slaves had provided evidence for the rightness of immediate emancipation. Moral triumph and freedom on the liberated islands in the Caribbean made the commemoration possible and imbued it with meaning.

When the writer and outspoken black New York abolitionist William J. Wilson stepped onto the stage to give his oration commemorating the anniversary of August First in Newark in 1859, the state of New Jersey had only permanently abolished slavery thirteen years past in 1846. However, because of the law’s careful protection of property rights, white New Jersey

¹⁴⁶ *Liberator*, 31 July 1857.

¹⁴⁷ *Liberator*, 7 August 1857, 30 July 1858.

citizens still held a small number of African-Americans as “apprentices for life.” The state’s revised Constitution had also disfranchised black voters in 1820. Wilson was thus set to give a speech on the triumph of freedom in the West Indies in a state that retained a form of slaveholding, though technically not a slave state.¹⁴⁸

Wilson came to tell the crowd that in the British West Indies 800,000 former slaves could rejoice because they were on this day “erect” and “FREE!” Not only free, they were now prosperous, peaceable, content, industrious and frugal. Wilson acknowledged that “slave-holders and their abettors,” including “the servile press, and paid menials” had long worked to “distort” this truth. For if slaves could be emancipated in the British West Indies with such success, “the whole argument” and “tirade” over “the propriety, necessity, or rightfulness of slavery, must fall to the pit of oblivion.”¹⁴⁹

August First provided a public day to make this debate. On that day the marginalized voices of African-Americans and abolitionists spoke their minds in the public square. They did so with picnics and parades, with speeches and banners, and most notably in print. They wielded the tools of participatory democracy to affirm, commemorate and communicate truths about the triumphant success of British Emancipation. In doing so they joined the public debate over slavery in the United States and pushed it towards their ultimate goal: eradicating the scourge of slavery in their country, and everywhere, forever. “Up, up...fellow-citizens, and be doing!” Wilson urged. “...and when we shall have performed our task—when our work is accomplished—conscious I am the day shall have arrived...[of] our rejoicing.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 178-181.

¹⁴⁹ *Weekly Anglo-African*, 20 August 1859.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER SIX: FREEDOM'S STRUGGLE

To-day belongs to the slave. History has consecrated it for his use. Whatever question we discuss to-day, we should discuss as the slave looks at it -- from no other stand-point, it is not for us, at least, on the First of August, to plan for the perpetuity of civil institutions. This day belongs to the problem and the method of emancipation.¹

On August 1, 1861 the influential Boston abolitionist and orator Wendell Phillips spoke at a commemoration of British Emancipation held in Abington, Massachusetts. His speech was carried in the *New York Time* and reprinted in the *Liberator*. Phillips praised the experiment of freedom in the West Indies, where the former slaves were now “successfully industrious” and where “marriage, education, [and] religious institutions” had been “quadrupled.”²

But the majority of Phillips’s address focused on the turmoil engulfing the United States. Ten days previous, Union and Confederate forces had clashed in the first major battle of the Civil War at Bull Run, Virginia, ending in a humiliating defeat for the North. Phillips called the Union loss “butchery” and questioned the strategy of a government unwilling to confront the issue of slavery. He pronounced that every slave “capable of firing a musket” needed to be armed. And the Union had to declare itself willing to accept “every man, black or white” who entered into its lines. “The moment they have said it, there is [no] longer Slavery in the

¹ *Liberator*, 9 August 1861; *New York Times*, 6 August 1861.

² *Ibid.*

Commonwealth of Virginia,” Phillips told the crowd. “The moment they have said it ours is an Army advancing into a country where one-half of the population is on our side.”³

Over twenty August First commemorations were reported in newspapers in the first year of the American Civil War. Frederick Douglass that summer had worried that the celebrations of West Indian Emancipation would not be as extensive as in previous years. “The war swallows up everything,” he said. But August First commemorations in 1861 were held in New England, New York, and New Jersey, further west in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan, and as far away as Kansas.⁴

Since 1834, the anniversary of British Emancipation had served as an important part of abolitionist mass activism. Advertised and shared through print, these ritual performances were part of a broader debate waged by both abolitionists and free African-Americans on the success of emancipation in the English Caribbean colonies. This debate continued through the tumult of the Civil War. In print and public the transnational triumph of British Emancipation joined the national dialogue in the United States on freedom, slavery and the aims of a conflict that became a defining moment in the reformation of America.

British Emancipation on the Eve of Civil War

In the years immediately preceding the Civil War abolitionists and free African-Americans continued to incorporate the success of freedom in the West Indies into the domestic struggle against slavery. In the late 1850s the “slavery question” had risen to the forefront of the national political discourse. In 1858 it featured prominently in the well-publicized debates of the

³ Ibid., On the Battle of Bull Run and the Union loss see, Edward L. Ayers, *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 90-142, 135, 191-200.

⁴ Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 97-98; *Douglass Monthly*, August 1861.

Illinois Senate race between the Democrat Stephen Douglas and the Republican Abraham Lincoln. While denying Douglas's accusation that he was trying to "abolitionize" the old Whig and Democratic parties, Lincoln stressed the immorality of slavery and pledged to stop it wherever the Constitution allowed.⁵

The slavery question was again thrust onto the national stage when on October 16, 1859 the radical abolitionist John Brown led a raid of twenty-one men, including former slaves and free blacks, to capture the U.S. arsenal at Harper's Ferry in Virginia. Brown had close ties to black abolitionists like Frederick Douglass and had studied the Haitian Revolution. His plan was to seize the weapons at Harper's Ferry and initiate an armed slave insurrection. Federal forces arrived and put down the planned rebellion before it could begin. But the attempt convinced many Southerners that abolitionism had become a threat to their existence.⁶

Among the dangers posed by abolitionists was the continued championing of British Emancipation in the West Indies. An American writer to the *Boston Courier* in March 1860 decried the "abolition warfare" being waged against the South. He placed its origins at "about the time of the British Emancipation" and maintained that the abolitionist battle against slavery "has been kept up from that day."⁷ Denouncing Joseph Horace Kimball and James A. Thome's 1837 book *Emancipation in the West Indies* as "replete with gross errors and falsehoods," the writer

⁵ Lincoln warned against introducing slavery into the territories not yet admitted as states as this would create an expansion of Southern power. He also advocated upholding the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 while at the same time questioning the constitutionality of the Supreme Court's Dred Scott decision. See, Rodney O. Davis and Douglas L. Wilson, eds., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

⁶ John Brown was tried and executed by hanging on December 2, 1859. For more on his role as a causation of the Civil War, see: John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Radical Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); John Stauffer and Zoe Trodd eds., *The Tribunal: Responses to John Brown and the Harper's Ferry Raid* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁷ *Boston Courier* reprinted in *Liberator* 9, April 1860; James A. Thome and J. Horace Kimball, *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837* (New York: Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838).

put forth his own eyewitness accounts. While visiting the British West Indian colonies, he reported seeing black women turning to prostitution after losing “the wholesome restraints of family discipline” enforced through slavery. Other freed black West Indians, he claimed, were sent “swarming through the streets...rejoicing in a new-found liberty for they were not prepared, and which was fast accomplishing their ruin.” He charged that the “errors and falsehoods” by Kimball and Thome were part of the unchristian “aggression” long waged by an abolitionist press.”⁸

The slavery question took center-stage in the 1860 presidential election. The Republicans nominated Abraham Lincoln as their candidate and endorsed a moderate platform against the expansion of slavery. The Democratic Party was split over the issue along regional lines and nominated separate Northern and Southern candidates. Talk of secession mounted in the South with the likelihood of a Republican victory.⁹ Similarly, since the early 1840s William Lloyd Garrison had argued for the dissolving of a national government that defended slavery. Disunion, he claimed, was every abolitionist’s “religious and political duty.” In 1854 he publicly burned a copy of the Constitution in protest and in 1857 proposed a National Disunion Convention. “No Union with Slaveholders” became the uncompromising motto among Disunionists and was displayed in print, speeches and public rallies—including those of August First.¹⁰

⁸ The writer appeared to be visiting Munich, Bavaria at the time of composing the letter and described poor Germans as living in worse conditions than slaves in the United States or the West Indies.

⁹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 301-317; See also, Shearer Davis Bowman, *At the Precipice: Americans North and South during the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹⁰ *Liberator*, 14 June 1844, 28 October 1857, 6 November 1857; Elizabeth Varon, *Disunion: The Coming of the American Civil War 1789-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 8-9, 152-154, 194-195, 301; Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children In Four Volumes: Vol. III. 1841-1860* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894), 412.

Now in 1860, Garrison and other Disunionists openly encouraged Southern secession. They argued that an independent South could not maintain control of its servile class through force of arms and yet maintain its peace, security and wealth. Slaveholders would be forced to emancipate their slaves and a new Union would be born free of the sin of human bondage.¹¹ The Boston Unitarian William Ellery Channing echoed these sentiments in an August 1860 edition of the *Liberator*, calling the Constitution “a covenant with death and an agreement with Hell,” and deriding free states as “the guardians and supporters of slavery.” Channing urged Northerners to accept secession with “with manly and Christian resolution.” The preservation of the Union, he said, was not enough to justify the continuance of slavery.¹²

Not all abolitionists embraced this radical view. Lydia Maria Child, though a Garrisonian, disavowed disunion as “foreign” to the purpose of abolitionism. Though an avowed pacifist, over the decades Child had privately voiced doubts that “moral influence” would ever reach the “haughty sinners” of the Southern slaveocracy. “I am convinced that emancipation must come through violence,” she once wrote despairingly.¹³ Now in 1860 Child sought to avoid such a conflict. Turning to the abolitionist press, Child published a pamphlet entitled, *The Right Way the Safe Way, Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies, and Elsewhere*. Advertised in April editions of the *Liberator*, the pamphlet was billed as an “elaborate and

¹¹ James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964), 33-36.

¹² *Liberator*, 10 August 1860.

¹³ Archibald Henry Grimké, *William Lloyd Garrison, the Abolitionist* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1894), 309-310; Lydia Maria Child to Abigail Kelly in *Lydia Maria Child, selected letters, 1817-1880*, eds. Milton Meltzer and Patricia G. Holland (Boston: University of Massachusetts, 1982), 90.

reliable work” that “triumphantly” refuted the “malicious statements of a proslavery press” regarding the success of emancipation in the West Indies.¹⁴

“It is a common idea that the British West Indies were a mine of wealth before the abolition of slavery,” Child wrote, “and since that event have been sinking into ruin.” To correct these “erroneous impressions” Child’s pamphlet collected 95 pages of reports, statistics and testimonies from newspapers, journals, English Parliament, planters, colonial magistrates, teachers, clergymen, missionaries, and emancipated slaves. Following what had been an abolitionist strategy in public celebrations and print for nearly three decades, these testimonies argued that emancipation had brought both economic and moral improvement to the British Caribbean colonies. Child hoped that evidence of the successful results of the West Indian experiment would convince Southerners to abandon slavery through peaceful means and thus preserve the Union. She concluded her pamphlet by arguing that whatever challenges attended immediate emancipation, they paled in comparison to the “difficulties and dangers involved in the continuance of slavery,” which were “permanent” and “constantly increasing.”¹⁵

Southerners and Northern publications attacked abolitionists who relied on the British West Indies in their arguments on the efficacy of immediate emancipation. In response to arguments like Child’s, the *New York Journal of Commerce* in May 1860 published a lengthy critique of “those so distant philanthropists” in America who claimed that emancipation in the West Indies had shown that blacks were “capable of self-government” and that the “moral,

¹⁴ *Liberator*, 27 April 1860; Lydia Maria Child, *The Right Way the Safe Way: Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies, and Elsewhere* (New York: s.n., 1860). The islands given the most study by Child included the English colonies of Jamaica, Antigua and the Windward Islands of Grenada, Dominica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the French colony of Martinique.

¹⁵ Child, *The Right Way the Safe Way*, 3, 95; for a more thorough examination of Child’s pamphlet see, James M. McPherson, “Was West Indian Emancipation a Success? The Abolitionist Argument during the American Civil War,” *Caribbean Studies*, 4 no. 2 (Jul., 1964): 28-34.

physical and political condition” of the former slaves had been improved. The *Journal* derided American abolitionists as filled with “a mistaken fanaticism,” and marshaled its own testimony from white inhabitants of the islands to argue emancipation had in fact ruined the colonies. The former slaves were described as lacking in skill, the desire to work, and religious instruction. They also now engaged themselves “in the strange superstitions” of their African forbearers. “Take away the whites,” the writer argued, and the islands “would relapse into an utter state of barbarism.” He urged abolitionists to spend a few weeks in the British West Indian colonies, and predicted this would make “the most determined negrophilist” a wiser man.¹⁶

As these debates continued, commemorations of August First in 1860 adapted to address the national political climate. Once more, the antislavery press proved integral to providing a counter-narrative to disparaging accounts of British Emancipation. An advertisement in the *Liberator* reported that in New Bedford, Massachusetts, the local “Colored Citizens” invited “brethren, far and near,” to a Convention to be held on August 1, 1860. The day was to commemorate emancipation in the West Indies, and also “to advance the cause of Freedom” in America. “Let the voice go forth...that we are entitled to equal political and judicial rights,” the advertisement stated, “that our claim to a seat in the jury box cannot justly be withheld...we pledge ourselves to agitate the question of our wrongs until justice is bestowed upon all men whose only crime is the color of their skin.”¹⁷

An advertisement for a celebration in Milford, Massachusetts asked readers to gather a “multitudinous array, to call the attention of our own guilty land” to the achievement of freedom in the West Indies. “By the light of this noble example,” it proclaimed, “let our own shame and

¹⁶ *Journal of Commerce* reprinted in the *Liberator*, 18 May 1860.

¹⁷ *Liberator*, 20 July 1860.

startling hypocrisy urge on the work” that would free “the four million slaves who pine and suffer beneath the galling yoke of American despotism.”¹⁸ A letter read at the event and printed in the *Liberator* stated that since the “liberation of the West India bondmen,” there had been a “systematic, persevering and unscrupulous” attempt to depict emancipation as a failure. However, these “forgeries” were belied, by the “advancing in intelligence, sobriety, industry, economy, and...moral virtues” of the former West Indian slaves. A resolution was passed denouncing the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln for his support of the Fugitive Slave Act, while praising the “heroic” sacrifice of John Brown.¹⁹

An advertisement in the *Liberator* for an 1860 August First celebration in Abington, Massachusetts contrasted the example of British Emancipation with the current turmoil in the United States: “Amidst the war of factions, the strife of parties, and the social antagonisms which convulse our country, the voice of British Philanthropy...speaking deliverance to Eight Hundred Thousand CHATTEL SLAVES, proclaims the justice, the divinity, the inevitable triumph of the Anti-Slavery principle.” Immediate and “unconditional emancipation” was “the only method of solution” for the slavery question, the advertisement maintained. The day was to be “consecrated to the achievement of this sublime purpose.”²⁰

One of the speakers at the Abington August First event was the black abolitionist Hezekiah Ford Douglass. As had become common at August First events, his speech was later reprinted and disseminated in the *Liberator*. Douglass proclaimed it was “proper...that all who love justice and liberty” should meet to keep “fresh and green in our memories...that which gave

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Liberator*, 17 August 1860.

²⁰ *Liberator*, 20 July 1860.

freedom to a million souls in the Caribbean isles.” His address also attacked discrimination faced by free African-Americans in the North. Refuting claims of black inferiority, he asserted that all people were “children of the same Creator” and assigned race prejudice to the “barbarous forms of other times.” Douglass appealed for “justice to all people” and called for greater African-American democratic participation at every level of society: “through the complicated forms of civil government, from the pew to the pulpit, and from the ballot-box to the presidential chair.”²¹

Douglass’s speech expressed sympathy for the “braver deeds of patriots of the old world,” evoking Victor Hugo in France and Giuseppe Garibaldi in Italy in the cause of abolition, while proclaiming the United States had less “democratic ideas” than Russia. He bemoaned the upcoming presidential election, saying it would put a man in office “pledged not to lift a finger in the work of abolishing slavery...but, on the contrary, pledged to slave-breeding, slave-trading and slave-catching.” Douglass chastised Lincoln as a “political juggler” whose pragmatism was incompatible with the “higher anti-slavery purpose” to which many had been called this day. It was better that the United States be dissolved, he proclaimed, “than that the poorest man in the world should be robbed of his liberty to save it.”²²

Douglass was also not averse to evoking the specter of violence. Slaves would achieve liberty either by a “generous restoration” of their rights as offered by the example of British Emancipation “or else through a sea of blood.” If revolution was the “dreadful necessity” to ending slavery, then “the sooner the better,” Douglass stated: “and may God speed the right!” The *Liberator* recorded that the audience at Abington reacted to his proclamation with “loud

²¹ *Liberator*, 17 August 1860.

²² *Ibid.* For more on transnational democratic reform and abolitionism see, Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2013).

applause.” As the nation sped towards a political crisis over slavery, abolitionists and free African-Americans utilized August First commemorations to put forth their thoughts and perspectives—some of them quite radical—into the public sphere.²³

On December 20, 1860, six weeks after Lincoln was elected president, South Carolina seceded from the Union. Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas followed during the first months of 1861.²⁴ Abolitionists were condemned in secessionist speeches and pamphlets throughout the South, with some evoking British Emancipation. In a speech on November 26, 1860 the Alabama Congressman Jabaz L.M. Curry pointed to the West Indies as a “conclusive refutation of all anti-slavery theories.” Curry described the former slaves as “uniformly lazy...improvident...half-starved and only anxious to live hand to mouth.” In a pamphlet entitled *The Right of Secession*, the Louisiana state senator Judah B. Benjamin used the British Caribbean to deride abolitionist attempts to free four million American slaves. “Would you repeat the experiment of the British West Indies?” he asked. To do so would reduce white Southerners “to the level of the negro” and return freed slaves to a state of “Negro...barbarism.”²⁵

In the North, abolitionists also faced blame for secession. Proslavery mobs in cities from Boston to New York attacked abolitionist meetings and met African-Americans in attendance

²³ *Liberator*, 17 August 1860.

²⁴ William Barney, Robert J. Cook, and Elizabeth R. Varon eds., *Secession Winter: When the Union Fell* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 11-16, 29-33.

²⁵ Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry, *The Perils and Duties of the South, Speech Delivered in Talladega, Alabama, November 26, 1860* in *Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November 1860-April 1861*, ed. Jon L. Wakelyn (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 44; Judah P. Benjamin *The Right of Secession* (Washington 1861), in Wakelyn, ed., *Southern Pamphlets on Secession*, 277.

with bricks and bats.²⁶ Conservative Northern newspapers inflamed the violence with incendiary articles that pointed to abolitionism and Garrisonian disunion rhetoric as the root of the national crisis. The *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* named abolitionists “crack brained fanatics” who should be “put down” to safeguard the country. The *Chicago Times* declared abolition an “evil” and “hideous monster” that was the “Alpha and Omega of our National woes.” Northerners were called upon to “kill” and “strangle” abolitionism, branded as the “vile cause” of disunion.²⁷

The popular press cited the British West Indies in their criticism of U.S. abolitionism. A December 1860 *Boston Post* article ridiculed American abolitionists for extolling the English, who had “ruined their West India planters, and degraded their West India negroes by abolition.” The March 1861 *Daily Milwaukee Press and News* derided British Emancipation as “an act of philanthropy” which cost “one hundred millions of dollars and the ruin of the commerce of [the] islands, without benefitting the blacks at all.” A *Philadelphia Inquirer* article that month condemned abolitionists for using Haiti or the British West Indies as evidence of “the capability of the negro race for political or personal freedom,” citing both as failures.²⁸

Garrisonians stoked further hostility by welcoming secession. In the *Liberator*, Garrison urged Northerners to accept that the “UNION IS DISSOLVED, and act accordingly.” Wendell Phillips pronounced to an enthusiastic New Haven audience that the South’s “declaration of independence is the Jubilee of the Slave.” For Garrison and Phillips the collapse of the South seemed a more likely outcome than war. After witnessing compromises with slavery for over a decade, abolitionists also doubted the Union’s conviction to its preservation. Even non-

²⁶ McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 40-42.

²⁷ *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 6 December 1860; *Chicago Times*, 7 December 1860. Both papers are quoted along with further anti-abolitionist editorials in McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 41.

²⁸ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 March 1861; *Daily Milwaukee Press and News*, 31 March 1861;

Garrisonians like Frederick Douglass mocked Northern talk of “putting down treason and rebellion by force” as “impotent and worthless.”²⁹

In February 1861 Lydia Maria Child struggled to reconcile herself to the possibility of conflict. After working just a year previous to reconcile North and South through the example of the emancipated British West Indies, she now wrote the abolitionist Henrietta Sargent on her fears of the likelihood of war. Though deploring the thought of conflict, Child was even more determined not to give in to Southern threats. “Much as I deprecate civil war,” she confided to Sargent, “I deliberately say even *that* is better than compromises of principles, at this momentous crisis.”³⁰ For almost thirty years, in public and in print, abolitionists and free African-Americans had presented the United States with a model of a safe transition to freedom in the British Caribbean. With the outbreak of Civil War, the success of the West Indian experiment would now be used to help transform a struggle to preserve the Union into a war to end slavery.

British Emancipation in the American Civil War

On April 14, 1861, following two days of bombardment, Fort Sumter in South Carolina surrendered to the Confederacy. Abraham Lincoln reacted by issuing a blockade of Southern ports and calling up 75,000 military volunteers to help put down the rebellion. Outraged at Sumter, Northerners greeted Lincoln’s call with enthusiasm. Mobs in New York turned their attacks on pro-southern newspapers or those unsupportive of the war effort.³¹ The Ohio

²⁹ *Liberator*, 4 January 1861; Wendell Phillips, *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters, Volume 1* (Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1894), 355; *Douglass Monthly*, April 1861; McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 34-46.

³⁰ Lydia Maria Child to Henrietta Sargent, 9 Feb. 1861 in Meltzer and Holland, *Lydia Maria Child: Selected Letters*, 374-375.

³¹ Kenneth Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1950), 290-292.

Republican John Sherman wrote from Washington: “Civil War is actually upon us... it brings a feeling of relief: the suspense is over.”³²

The outburst of patriotism caught skeptical abolitionists by surprise. William Lloyd Garrison described it as an “uprising” that swept “every city, town, and hamlet of the North...like a general resurrection from the dead.”³³ In the *Douglass Monthly*, Frederick Douglass marveled that “the dead North is alive . . . The cry now is for war, vigorous war, war to the bitter end.” The abolitionist Oliver Johnson in New York called it “war fever.”³⁴

Within the abolitionist press, calls for disunion turned instead to enthusiastic support for the Northern war effort, now seen as a means by which to end Southern slavery. On April 21, the Sunday after Lincoln’s call for troops, Wendell Phillips addressed a crowd at the Music Hall in Boston: “Now for the first time in my antislavery life, I speak under the Stars and Stripes, and welcome the tread of Massachusetts men marshaled for war...today the slave asks God for sight of this banner, and counts it the pledge of his redemption.”³⁵ Garrison proclaimed this the “brightest” hour for slaves “in the history of American servitude.” He postponed the annual May meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, urging members to do nothing that might “check or divert the mighty current of popular feeling” in the North. He wrote to Oliver Johnson that abolitionists should limit criticism of Lincoln, Republicans and Northern parties that were now “fusing for a death grapple with the Southern oligarchy.” These politicians were “instruments in the hands of God” that would “carry forward” and “achieve the great object of emancipation for

³² John Sherman quoted in Stamp, *And the War Came*, 290.

³³ Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, 19.

³⁴ *Douglass Monthly*, May 1861; Oliver Johnson quoted in, McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 47.

³⁵ Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, 20; *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters*, 396; Stamp, *And the War Came*, 292.

which we have so long been striving.”³⁶ The Boston abolitionist Henry Bowditch tied Southern secession directly to emancipation. He called for the Union to raise a “liberating army” that would march through the South and undo “slavery...the cornerstone of treason.”³⁷

Abolitionists were aware that the war aims of the Union were not identical to their own. But many were also convinced that the conflict would inevitably become a struggle against slavery. “Emancipation is nearer than when we believed,” Garrison assured readers in the *Liberator*, “and the present struggle cannot fail to hasten it mightily, in a providential sense.”³⁸ The April 20 *Anti-Slavery Standard* predicted, “This outburst of spirit and enthusiasm may spring chiefly from indignation at the wrongs of the white man, but it will none the less finally right those of the black man.”³⁹

Despite allusions to providence, abolitionists were not willing to leave this transformation to divine chance. In newspapers, pamphlets, speeches and public rallies, they agitated to shift the Union effort from a war of preservation to one of liberation. Commemorations of British Emancipation and the debate on the success of freedom West Indies were joined to this campaign. That summer in the *Douglass Monthly*, Frederick Douglass called for the anniversary of freedom in the West Indies to be used as a rally to make emancipation the ultimate aim of the war: “Let the people speak on the coming first of August, and ask our Government to seize the occasion...forced upon them, for breaking the chains of every American slave.”⁴⁰

³⁶ Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, 21-23.

³⁷ Vincent Y. Bowditch, *Life and correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch Vol. 2* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1902), 3.

³⁸ Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, 23.

³⁹ *Anti-Slavery Standard*, 20 April 1860; McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 48-49.

⁴⁰ *Douglass Monthly*, August 1861.

Amid news reports dedicated almost completely to the war and the impending Battle of Bull Run, an advertisement in the *Liberator* on July 19, 1861 invited the “friends of freedom” to commemorate August First. The “peaceful emancipation” of 800,000 men, women and children in the West Indies was heralded as “one of the most beneficent and memorable events in the history of the world.” Those interested in “the great events of human progress,” and who desired “to see the barbarous, inhuman and un-Christian” system of bondage give way to “Freedom, Justice and Peace,” were called upon to celebrate the day. The “cheering results” of freedom in West Indies would help cleanse America “from the curse and shame of human slavery.”⁴¹

The *Liberator* reported that on Friday August 2nd African-Americans in New Bedford, Massachusetts held their commemoration of British Emancipation in an open grove outside the city. In what had become a common ritual, twenty-two members of the all-black Liberty Guards militia traveled from Boston to march with the local New Bedford Attucks militia in an August First parade. In another ritual common to nineteenth-century public commemorations, the black abolitionist and physician William P. Powell offered up a series of resolutions. Powell had been born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1834, the year British Emancipation was enacted. Raised in England where he trained as a surgeon, he returned to New York in 1861 with his family. That same year, he helped organize New Bedford’s August First commemoration, serving as an officer. His resolutions to the gathered crowd addressed the politics of the war and asserted the rights of free African-Americans.⁴²

Powell’s first resolution condemned “his un-excellency” Jefferson Davis as an “arch-traitor” and the “would-be President.” A second resolution protested the Confederate seizure of

⁴¹ *Liberator*, 19 July 1861.

⁴² *Liberator*, 9 August 1861; Philip S. Foner, “William P. Powell: Militant Champion of Black Seamen,” in *Essays in Afro-American History*, ed. Philip S. Foner (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 88-111.

Union vessels that had resulted in the selling of “several loyal colored American citizens... into life-long slavery.” Another resolution praised the black seaman William Tillman for his recapture of a Union vessel, stating he was “entitled to the unanimous thanks of the United States Congress.” The Preamble to the resolutions cited in particular the right of black men to enlist to fight in the Union. It called for the term “white” to be “stricken from the militia list” of Massachusetts so that black men “might render loyal service in times of war.” It was further proposed that the resolutions, Preamble and accounts of the day, be printed and sent to several local newspapers, the abolitionist press, the state legislature and the United States Congress.⁴³

Thirty-two miles south of New Bedford, in a grove in Abington, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society held a separate August First event. Abington had become a common site for public rituals of August First since the 1840s. The *Liberator* commemorated the occasion in 1861 with the transnational motto: “Across the Carib sea, Was heard the Clash of breaking chains.” The celebration was hailed as an “institution” of American abolitionism that would be “perpetuated until the coming of the jubilee for the four million slaves in this land.” William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel J. May and Wendell Phillips were speakers, and each of them applauded the success of emancipation in the British Caribbean.⁴⁴

Garrison praised the former West Indian slaves who had “since been rising in the scale of human improvement and general prosperity.” Samuel J. May criticized the “political press” of the United States for “industriously,” “untiringly,” and “laboriously” attempting to depict the

⁴³ *Liberator*, 9 August 1861; Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 155; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 32-24.

⁴⁴ *Liberator*, 9 August 1861; The motto was taken from the lines of a poem entitled “The Free Islands.” The author was the literary figure, antislavery newspaper editor, and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, who wrote the poem in 1846 to commemorate August First. See, John Greenleaf Whittier, *The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Houghton Mifflin, 1894), 238.

West Indies experiment as a failure. He cited Kimball and Thome, Lydia Maria Child, antislavery newspapers, and “indisputable” eyewitness reports, missionary accounts, tracts and pamphlets to prove the success of British Emancipation. Wendell Phillips commended the “prosperity of the laboring classes of the West Indies” since emancipation, describing the former slaves as “shrewd,” “thrifty,” and as “industrious” as white free laborers in America.⁴⁵

All three men tied freedom in the West Indies to the need to transform the American Civil War into a struggle against slavery. “What we are now endeavoring to achieve for our country,” Garrison told the crowd, “is to bring about the same auspicious state of things here as exists in the British isles.” Samuel J. May suggested that those in the North “anxiously asking the question, ‘What is to be done with the enslaved people of our land!’” should inform themselves on “the happy results of emancipation in the British West Indies.” America had not heeded this example to end the “intolerable wrong” of human bondage “by peaceful and Christian means.” Now the country was “plunged into war.”⁴⁶

May warned of dire consequences if the Union neglected to act on emancipation. The current conflict would end in abolition, or it would be followed by a “servile war” as had happened in Haiti.⁴⁷ Wendell Phillips painted an even grimmer picture. The example set by the free British West Indies, he pronounced, “is no longer within our reach... We omitted to seize the opportunity.” Phillips also now evoked Haiti: where “blood flowed in torrents” and “half the cities were burned” to secure the end slavery. “What is the policy that may save us from that last

⁴⁵ *Liberator*, 9 August 1861.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

extremity of bloody emancipation?” he asked. “The British model is gone. The only question for us is, how far short can we stop of St. Domingo?”⁴⁸

Phillips’s fiery oration did not go without a rebuttal. In a letter to the *Liberator* the *New York Journal of Commerce* criticized his August First speech as “entirely different from all...facts and statistics” on the current state of the emancipated British West Indies. The *Journal* protested that such statements could “not to be allowed” to be “broadcast over the North...without a refutation.” Citing statistics on exports from Parliamentary Returns, the writer traced the “disastrous” decline of productivity on islands like Jamaica under free labor. Regarding moral elevation, the *Journal* quoted a British historian who claimed “the incipient civilization of the negro” had been “arrested” by abolition. Black West Indians, it was claimed, had resumed the “savage habits and pleasures” of their African ancestors, scattering into the woods or building their cabins “amidst the ruined plantations.”⁴⁹ The *Journal* spoke directly to readers of the *Liberator*, imploring them to “profit [from] the lesson” of England. As had been demonstrated by the West Indies, the emancipation of “four million Africans in our midst” would prove “destructive of the commerce of the North,” the paper warned. It would be destructive to “our [Northern] manufacturers,” and unleash “untold horrors” upon the slaves themselves.⁵⁰

That same year, the New York abolitionist Lewis Tappan had published a pamphlet entitled *Immediate Emancipation: The Only Wise and Safe Mode* that asserted universal emancipation was “justifiable and lawful” under the war power. Tappan cited popular

⁴⁸ Ibid., *New York Times*, 6 August 1861.

⁴⁹ *Liberator*, 23 August 1861.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

abolitionist tracts to show the success of the West Indian experiment and the lesson it held for America: “what intelligent and candid mind can fail to see and freely acknowledge that emancipation has been, in the West-Indies, an unspeakable blessing.”⁵¹ But using emancipation in a set of foreign colonies to influence the Union’s liberation of four million slaves in the South was met with derision. When Phillips in a series of speeches compared British West Indian exports favorably to those of New England, the *Chicago Times* charged him with treason. It was a gross insult, the paper maintained, to compare white American workers to “the greasy and half-civilized Negroes of Jamaica and Hayti.”⁵²

Newspapers were not alone in attacking abolitionists for their use of emancipation in the British Caribbean during the war. The New York physician and promoter of scientific racism Dr. John H. Van Evrie, published a 34-page tract in 1862 entitled *Free Negroism: or, Results of Emancipation in the North and the West India Islands*. Evrie blamed British Emancipation for the “great impulse to the cause of anti-slavery in the United States” which had bought on the war. Abolitionists like Garrison were singled out for promoting a disastrous foreign colonial policy on American soil. The “devil of free Negroism” had ruined once prosperous colonies like Jamaica and Barbados, Evrie wrote, where “Sambo” was now allowed to “loll in idleness.” Black freedom in the British West Indies was likened to the “heathenism” of Haiti and the “degraded” black populations of the American North.⁵³

⁵¹ Lewis Tappan, *Immediate Emancipation: The Only Wise and Safe Mode* (New York: s.n., 1861), 2, 4-16.

⁵² *Chicago Times* reprinted in *Liberator*, 11 April 1862.

⁵³ *The Daily Age*, 4 August 1863, 8 August 1863; Forrest G. Wood, *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 35-36; John H. Van Evrie, *Free Negroism: or, Results of Emancipation in the North and the West India Islands* (New York: Van Evrie Horton, & Co., 1862), 2-4, 7, 13, 16. Evrie’s pamphlet was advertised for sale in Northern newspapers, alongside other tracts that blamed abolitionists for the Civil War.

American abolitionists who defended the success of freedom in the West Indies, were also forced to confront England's complex role during the Civil War. Wendell Phillips's 1861 August First speech warned that despite the benevolence of British Emancipation, the English government's dependence on Southern cotton made it amenable to overtures from the Confederacy. Garrison attempted to allay such fears, claiming that the "people of England" would "never intelligently allow their government to do any act which shall make against the cause of freedom in which we are interested," or, "give any countenance whatever to the Slave Power of America." The abolitionist Charles K. Whipple writing in the *Liberator* urged readers "not to be unreasonable" regarding England's position. Whipple differentiated between the philanthropic spirit of "the people of Great Britain" who felt "an active sympathy" for American abolitionists, from "English government" that acted on "considerations of policy" rather than principle.⁵⁴

Even as these debates were being waged, events in the South were changing the dynamics of the war. Fugitive slaves seeking safety and freedom with Union forces were placing pressure on generals in the field and, in turn, the federal government in Washington. On August 6, 1861 Lincoln had been persuaded to sign the Confiscation Act authorizing the seizure of property, including slaves, being used to support the Confederate war effort. Later that month, on August 30, the Union General John C. Frémont issued an emancipation proclamation freeing slaves in Missouri to deter secessionists in the state. Lincoln hastily rescinded the general's field order on September 11, fearing its impact on the slaveholding border states. Frémont was later removed from his command. On May 9, 1862 General David Hunter issued a similar

⁵⁴ *Liberator*, 9 August 1861. For more on British attitudes towards the United States during the Civil War see, Richard J.M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2001).

proclamation freeing slaves in Georgia, Florida and South Carolina. Lincoln once more rescinded the emancipation order. However, as fugitive slaves continued to make their way to Union lines, their determination to seize freedom became an unavoidable issue. On July 17, 1862, reacting to these pressures, Congress passed the Second Confiscation and Militia Act declaring those slaves fleeing the Confederacy who provided labor or aid to the Union “shall forever thereafter be free.”⁵⁵

These developments were followed closely in the abolitionist press and were a prominent part of August First commemorations in 1862. Speaking to a crowd in Abington, Massachusetts the Congregationalist minister Daniel Foster praised General Frémont as “the noblest” and “ablest man” in the field: a genius akin to Napoleon who understood that “striking down the slave system” was the only way to end the war. Foster criticized Lincoln for removing Frémont. The President had missed “the golden hour” to turn “four million men” held in slavery into “allies and friends all over the South,” thus rendering the rebellion powerless. “There is no name given under heaven by which this Union can be saved, except the name of Universal Emancipation,” Foster stated. “The man who does not see this is stone blind.” Foster informed the crowd that the following Sunday, he would be leaving to commence duties as a chaplain in the 33rd Massachusetts Regiment where he pledged to fight against slavery, even if in defiance of military law. “If that leads me to prison or to death, so be it,” he proclaimed. “May my right hand wither, and my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I ever strike a blow to return a fugitive slave, or fail to strike a blow to give him his freedom!” The abolitionist Henry Clark Wright

⁵⁵ Second Confiscation Act, July 17, 1862, *Congressional Globe*, 37th Congress, 2nd Session (Washington D.C.: Globe, 1862), 412-413; For more on Lincoln, the Confiscation Acts, and Fugitive Slaves in the Civil War see, Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); Silvana R. Siddali, *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2005); Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011); James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013).

called for the Union to pass emancipation with an appeal to Revolutionary patriotism, declaring, “Give me liberty or give me death!” The “crushed and crucified Negro,” he stated, had become “the sole arbiter of the nation’s destiny.”⁵⁶

Several free African-Americans also spoke that day in Abington, joining the success of freedom in the West Indies to their calls for freedom at home. In his address, the black abolitionist John Stewart Rock publicly questioned Lincoln’s unwillingness to follow the example set by British Emancipation. Rock argued that those who claimed the West Indian experiment had failed were no different than the despots of Europe who claimed democracy a failure. The facts of British Emancipation showed, instead, that the former slaves had become “good citizens, and industrious to a remarkable degree.” The only salvation for the country was to enact emancipation, allowing black men—“oppressed, bond and free” to take an active part in the war.⁵⁷

The black businessman and abolitionist James Newton Gloucester gave an impromptu speech heralding the “jubilee day” of August First and called for the overthrow of “this relentless and bloody tyrant, slavery.” The former slave William Wells Brown told the crowd there was “not to be a possibility of putting down the rebellion without giving the black man his freedom.” Criticizing those who have “looked at the black man’s liberty” in the West Indies “as a matter involving so many hogsheads of sugar,” Brown instead measured success by “the moral, social and intellectual condition of the former slaves.” If in the emancipated West Indies blacks and whites could live together in “perfect equality,” then they could do so in America. Let the

⁵⁶ *Liberator*, 15 August 1862.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

government proclaim emancipation, Wells said, and black men would flock to the Union cause with “strong arms and willing hearts, ready to strike for freedom.”⁵⁸

The most forthright speaker of the day in Abington was Wendell Phillips, who used the platform provided by August First to lambast the Union war effort. In a lengthy speech that was printed in both the *Liberator* and the *New York Times*, Phillips took direct aim at President Lincoln. “I believe Mr. Lincoln is conducting this war, at present, with the purpose of saving Slavery,” he charged. Phillips ridiculed Lincoln’s hesitation to enact emancipation as cowardice, naming him the “tortoise President.” Military and civil necessity demanded Lincoln turn the war into one of liberation that would make allies and soldiers of millions held in bondage: “Slavery...is a God-given weapon, a glorious opportunity, a sword rough ground by God, and ready every moment for our use.”⁵⁹

The pressing question for many was what the former slaves would do with their emancipation. For almost thirty years abolitionists had pointed to the experiment in the British West Indies as evidence in favor of black freedom. Now on the day celebrating that emancipation, Phillips called on Northerners to reject the “popular theory” put forth by newspapers, ministers, and politicians that slaves could not be made free men. “You do not believe in the negro,” he chided. “The papers are accumulating statistics to prove that the negro will work, and asking whether he will fight. If he will not fight, we are gone—that is all! If he will not work without the lash, the Union is over.” The *Liberator* reported a week later that the paper carrying Phillips speech at the August First commemoration in Abington was so in demand

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ *Liberator*, 15 August 1862; *New York Times*, August 16 1862.

they had exhausted every copy. Readers were asked as a “special favor” to please send in copies, as the newspaper needed some for their files.⁶⁰

Despite the lambasting, behind the scenes Lincoln had begun to put together a draft for emancipation. Throughout the year he had proposed compensated, voluntary and gradual abolition to the Border States. The plan had worked in Washington D.C., where Lincoln signed a compensated Emancipation Act on April 16, 1862. But it was rejected by the Border States, whose dissatisfaction Lincoln feared could further divide the Union. Meanwhile, the war was in a precarious state. The Union siege of the Confederate capital at Richmond had ground to a stalemate and there was the prospect of European intervention to force a peace. Pressures were also mounting from abolitionists in the North, radicals in the Republican Party, and fugitive slaves in the field who continued to arrive at Union lines. Moved to act by these events, Lincoln presented a preliminary draft of the Proclamation to members of his cabinet on July 22. For the next two months the military emancipation plan was kept secret until it was revealed to the national press on September 22, following the Union victory at Antietam. On January 1, 1863 the final Emancipation Proclamation was signed, stating that all persons held as slaves in those states or regions in rebellion against the United States “shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.” The war to preserve the Union had at last become a war to end slavery.⁶¹

During the late hours of July 31, 1834 West Indian slaves and missionaries in the English colonies had held church services to greet the coming enactment of British Emancipation.⁶²

Twenty-eight years later, on December 31, 1862, free African-Americans, abolitionists and

⁶⁰ *Liberator*, 22 August 1862.

⁶¹ Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, 126-130; Oakes, 340-392; Mathew Pinkser, “Lincoln’s Summer of Emancipation” in *Lincoln and Freedom: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment*, eds. Harold Holzer and Sara Vaughn Gabbard (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2007), 79-99.

⁶² Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 18-20.

fugitive slaves held similar “watch night” meetings in churches, public halls and contraband camps across the country to herald the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Throughout January, from New York to Key West Florida, celebrations were held with cannon fire, bells, hymns, processions and speeches. The abolitionist press heralded the signing as a long awaited day of an American Jubilee.⁶³

The *Liberator* waited to print its first paper of the year on January 2, so that it could include the final Proclamation. Garrison described its enactment as a “a great historic event, sublime in its magnitude, momentous and beneficent in its far-reaching consequences.” The paper reported on Wendell Phillips reading aloud of the Proclamation to a crowd of hundreds in Boston’s Music Hall, calling it “the act of a great nation, linking its cause to the throne of the Almighty.” In the *Douglass Monthly*, Frederick Douglass claimed that while “the fourth of July was great...the first of January, when we consider it in all of its relations and bearings is incomparably greater.”⁶⁴

While the Proclamation was limited in its reach, abolitionists generally viewed it as a path to universal emancipation. It disrupted the Confederacy’s ability to make war and turned Union forces into the “liberating army” hoped for by abolitionists like Henry Bowditch. Perhaps most important to free African-Americans, the Proclamation allowed black men to enlist. Union generals since 1862 had experimented with conscripting fugitive slaves. Now free black men in the North could join the military struggle. The recruitment of black troops began in Massachusetts in February 1863 and was gradually replicated in other states. This was a triumph

⁶³ Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2003), 103-109; Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, 142-152.

⁶⁴ *Douglass Monthly*, January 1863; *Liberator*, 2 January, 9 January 1863; William M. Merrill, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: Let the oppressed go free, 1861-1867* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 131.

that had been won only through constant mobilization and agitation, what Wendell Phillips called a “reluctant gift of the leaders to the masses.”⁶⁵

The Two Emancipations

Abolitionists and free African-Americans gathered again on August 1, 1863 to commemorate the victory of freedom in the West Indies. But what they celebrated primarily was a victory for freedom fought and won at home. During the first year after the Emancipation Proclamation, the *Liberator* carried an advertisement for a celebration of the “29th Anniversary of West India Emancipation” to be held in Island Grove in Abington, Massachusetts. Previous adverts had often cited the freeing of 800,000 slaves in the West Indies as a cause for jubilation. Now, however, all friends of liberty were invited who desired to see the day when “every root of slavery” was “extirpated from the American soil.”⁶⁶

Two thousand people from throughout Massachusetts arrived in Abington that year, many of them by train. Those gathered were called upon to show their determined support for the ongoing war effort: “to utterly crush the rebellion of the slaveholders, South and North, and with the rebellion, its origin, support, motive, and end—Human SLAVERY.” Wendell Phillips was not in attendance due to an illness. But on hand were William Lloyd Garrison and other notable speakers including white abolitionist Theodore Weld and Angelina Grimke, Radical Republican

⁶⁵ Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War*, 107-120, 165-189; Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, 156-184; Bowditch, *Life and correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch*, 3; *Liberator*, 9 January 1863.

⁶⁶ *Liberator*, 24 July 1863.

politician Henry Wilson, black abolitionist writer and orator William Wells Brown, and the fugitive slave, Thomas Sims.⁶⁷

Opening the day, Garrison praised the Emancipation Proclamation as “the almost literal fulfillment of the prophecies made by Abolitionists of the good working of emancipation in the British West Indies.” But most of his speech, and those to follow, were focused on emancipation in America. Like the recounting of the successes following freedom in the British colonies, a letter was read on the results of the Port Royal Experiment to educate and engage in free labor with former slaves in South Carolina. “Numerous facts and statistics” were cited showing “how favorably freedom is working for the emancipated people there.”⁶⁸

William Wells Brown praised the enlistment of black men in the Union and commended their readiness to “do their duty” at Port Hudson, Louisiana and Fort Wagner in South Carolina that past July. told the crowd that the Civil War had been needed. “We have had slavery so long, and so many causes educating the country into the belief of a natural, essential inferiority in the black race,” he said, “that it seemed as if this prejudice was not to be eradicated without such testimony as the colored people are now giving, before the whole nation, of their possessing the characteristics of men, physical, mental and moral.” Reacting to claims that the South might similarly enlist their slaves, Wells scoffed. Slaveholders, he assured, “dare not trust the slaves

⁶⁷ *Liberator*, 24 July 1863; 7 August 1863. Originally from Georgia, Thomas Sims had become a cause for abolitionists when he was arrested as a fugitive slave in Boston in 1851 and forcibly returned into bondage. In 1863, after living as a slave in Vicksburg, Mississippi, Sims escaped once again to Boston. See, Gordon S. Barker, *Fugitive Slaves and the Unfinished American Revolution: Eight Cases, 1848-1856* (Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2013), 54-7.

⁶⁸ *Liberator*, 7 August 1863. On the Port Royal Experiment see, Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999).

extensively with arms.” The enlistment of black men was the “key to the overthrow of the rebellion and slavery at once.”⁶⁹

Despite these victories, both abolitionists and African-Americans understood that their struggles were far from over. The larger goals of universal freedom for which they had long fought had yet to be realized. The fugitive slave Thomas Sims addressed the crowd briefly, claiming he had only come to enjoy the festival. But he heaped recrimination upon the government that had once sent him back to into slavery and which now offered no protection to black soldiers from Confederate violence. “Not much allegiance” was owed to such a government, he remarked.⁷⁰

Henry Wilson called on “every man, woman and child” to “petition the government against slavery, and for cleaning it out of the country.” The Proclamation needed to be enforced throughout the Border States, if the nation was to achieve “Peace, Safety, and Union.” Garrison agreed, stating that the best way to sustain the Emancipation Proclamation was to ask Lincoln “to abolish *all* slavery.” Theodore Weld spoke candidly on the challenges ahead. He reminded abolitionists that even as they convened to celebrate, the rebellion still needed to be put down. This was to be a universalist triumph, much as British Emancipation had once been. Perhaps, it was even greater. “This is the duty of the hour,” he declared. “We are not fighting for ourselves or for the slave... The battle of the human race, of liberty for all peoples, is now waging.”⁷¹

⁶⁹ *Liberator*, 7 August 1863.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* In reaction to Confederate refusal to enslave or execute black soldiers, Lincoln on July 30, 1863 issued General Order No. 233 ordering retaliatory action to be taken on rebel soldiers for each such offense. The *Liberator* did not receive news of the order until August 3, and Sims appeared to be unaware of it at the time of his August First speech. See, Edward Davis Townsend, General Orders No. 233. U. S. War Department, Washington, D. C., 1864. Image. Retrieved from the Library of Congress (Accessed March 21, 2016).

⁷¹ *Liberator*, 7 August 1863.

At the 1863 August First celebration held in the inaugural year of emancipation, the day's events concluded with the singing of a Contraband song, "Freedom Coming."⁷² Since the passage of British Emancipation in 1834, American abolitionists and free African-Americans had joined freedom in the West Indies to their struggles at home. That freedom was not to come through peace as they had first argued, but through war. Yet they had managed to help turn the course of a nation towards the ultimate destruction of human bondage. With the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment by Congress on January 31, 1865, formally abolishing slavery in the United States, the greatest goals of the movement had been realized.

Legacies of a West Indian Jubilee

Appeals to British Emancipation continued after the war, as a new debate erupted on how black labor should be utilized in the emancipated South. Some based their models on the British West Indies. An article in the Philadelphia *Daily Age* in May 1865 cited "the defective industrial system which followed emancipation" in the English Caribbean colonies to argue that compulsory labor be demanded from former Southern slaves. A second article adamantly counseled against using the British West Indies as an example for the South to follow. "The system of the British West India Islands has proved a failure," it stated. "It has reduced the products of those Islands to a ruinous figure, and debased of elevated the colored freedman." A third article called for a formulation of a plan, to prevent former slaves "from falling into the thousand crimes and errors which follow in the train of idleness." Once again the British West

⁷² Ibid.

Indies was cited, where the lack of a plan was blamed for “the mournful condition” and decline in those islands. “This mistake we must not repeat,” the article warned.⁷³

Abolitionists drew on the evidence accumulated for over thirty years of debate to rebut these claims. Reacting to predictions that the former slaves in the South might die out without the slave system, the *Liberator* in September 1865 reprinted an excerpt from *The Nation* entitled, “Vitality of the Freed Negro.” The article cited a list of available abolitionist pamphlets, books and data on the workings of emancipation in varied colonies of the British West Indies. Contrary to erroneous impressions, it insisted the free black population of the islands was not “dwindling away” but had instead progressed “commercially and materially, as well as socially and morally.” The same could be expected for the freedmen of the South.⁷⁴

In 1865, during the final year of its publication, the *Liberator* printed its last account of August First in Abington, Massachusetts. An advertisement called for a commemoration not only of emancipation in the West Indies, but as a time to memorialize the “heroism and martyrdom” of the Union dead “whose service is our highest honor and reward.” Samuel J. May gave the opening address. In a noticeable break from past speeches, May criticized British Emancipation’s shortcomings and contrasted it to the example now set by the United States. There was no Freedman’s Bureau created in the emancipated West Indies he pointed out. Conversely, an apprenticeship system had not been established in the South nor had planters been provided compensation. May boasted that the “American experiment” of emancipation had already proven the superiority of freedom granted by a Republic over that granted by a monarchical power.⁷⁵

⁷³ *Daily Age*, 23 May 1865, 2 June 1865, 8 June 1865.

⁷⁴ *The Nation*, reprinted in *Liberator*, 29 September 1865.

⁷⁵ *Liberator*, 3 August 1865, 11 August 1865.

Other speakers saw challenges ahead. Henry C. Wright addressed the crowd on the issue of the ballot, which he believed should be granted both to African-Americans and women: “It was just as great a crime...for a man to claim the right to vote because he was a man and not a woman, as it was for him to claim the right to vote because he was white and not black.” The black abolitionist Charles Lenox Remond agreed with Wright that the “suffrage question” was to be the next great struggle. Remond believed that emancipation on this count “so far...had failed.” Until “free suffrage, a free religion, and free social and civil rights” were granted in America, “freedom, democracy and civilization...were lost.” The only woman to speak that day was the African-American abolitionist, suffragist and writer Frances E.W. Harper. She told the crowd she was “not hopeless for the future of the Negro” and advocated the ballot as “the means of self-defence” for the slave “against the malice of his oppressors.”⁷⁶

The eventual decline of British Emancipation in American political discourse and celebratory ritual came with the end of the Civil War. What had once been a Union was now a nation, its uniformity paid for in struggle, blood and sacrifice. In this act of nation-making the transnational narrative of British Emancipation waned in importance. This trend was underway as early as 1864. Citing a correspondence from Chicago, the August 3, 1864 *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted the absence of the annual event: “It has heretofore been the custom of the colored people of Chicago to have a grand demonstration on the 1st of August—a celebration of the anniversary of West India emancipation; but this they have abandoned, and now celebrate as their day of Jubilee Lincoln’s Proclamation of freedom to the African race, on the 1st of January.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ *Liberator*, 11 August 1865.

⁷⁷ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 August 1864.

Some African-American newspapers now urged the celebration of nationalist commemorations that emphasized the role of black people as citizens. In San Francisco on July 30, 1864, the journalist Phillip A. Bell called for an end to August First. Bell had been an editor at *Freedom's Journal* and helped found the *Colored American*. In San Francisco, he took over editorship of the black newspaper the *Mirror of the Times* in 1855, and in 1862 established the *Pacific Appeal*. August First had crossed the country in the 1850s and black newspapers, including Bell's, covered the events. Now in 1864 he championed its demise. Writing in his *Pacific Appeal*, he told readers that he hoped the "Custom of American colored men getting up celebrations of the 1st of August...is forever done within." While it was a day all should appreciate and rejoice as it had emancipated "800,000 our race," Bell found it "impolite" for black Americans to laud British Emancipation over the freedom that had been fought and won in the United States. As "patriotic Americans," he implored black communities to keep and adhere to celebrations of January 1st commemorating the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation.⁷⁸

While still held on the anniversary of abolition in the West Indies, August First commemorations in the postwar period were adapted to celebrating American Emancipation and freedom. These were increasingly festive gatherings that sometimes drew massive numbers. August First in 1865 in Leffert's Park, Brooklyn was described as an "Emancipation Jubilee" reportedly attended by twenty thousand "jubilants" who were primarily African-American. The day included a "frolic" of bands, music dancing, food, drink, and merriment. Attendants conjoined the celebration of British Abolition with the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13th

⁷⁸ *Pacific Appeal*, 30 July 1864; Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 93, 104, 107, 108, 110; Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 93-94.

Amendment abolishing slavery, and the end of the Civil War. Invited speakers such as Frederick Douglass complained he could not even be heard above the swelling crowd.⁷⁹

In the coming decades August First was supplanted by a growing number of Freedom Days that proliferated across the country. These were nationalist African-American celebrations that commemorated freedom, citizenship, suffrage, military participation and more. They were as diverse as they were numerous, adopting rituals and days of importance that differed across cities and regions. Commemorations of British Emancipation diminished in the face of these younger more vibrant celebrations of freedom. But they did not disappear entirely. As late as the 1880s, August First events were being reported in mainstream papers like the *New York Times*. For a decade and a half after the Civil War, the commemorations continued as a space where the two emancipations, one in the West Indies and the other in America, could be celebrated in ritual, speeches and memory.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ *New York Times*, 2 August 1865.

⁸⁰ *New York Times*, 2 August 1868; 2 August 1871; 2 August 1883; 3 August 1886. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 August 1873; 7 August 1885; *Patriot*, 27 August 1886; For the new growth of Freedom Days after the Civil War and the place of August First in them see, Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 111-142.

CONCLUSION

In the city of Elmira, New York, near the southern border with Pennsylvania, a meeting was held on August 1, 1880 to celebrate West India Emancipation. As he had done in previous decades, the 62-year-old Frederick Douglass delivered the keynote address of the day. The speech was preserved in his last autobiography first written in 1881 and then republished in 1892, three years before his death. Douglass regaled his audience with the long history of American emancipation and the work of abolitionists throughout the Atlantic. He took time particularly to answer those who questioned the meaning of the day:

We are sometimes asked why we American citizens annually celebrate West Indies emancipation, when we might, American emancipation, why go abroad, say they, when we might as well stay at home? The answer is easily given. Human liberty excludes all ideas of home and abroad. It is universal and spurns localization. It is bounded by no geographical lines and knows no national limitation.¹

Douglass was speaking to an audience for which August First had lost its relevance in popular memory. Most of the early abolitionists had “passed beyond the borders of this life,” he told them, and he now sought to convey to a less familiar generation the “important part” that British Emancipation held in “the history of the American conflict with slavery.”²

For over three decades British Emancipation had played a pivotal part in American abolitionism. The site where this experiment of freedom would play out was the West Indies. Working together across the Atlantic, black and white abolitionists shared arguments for their

¹ Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself* (Boston: De Wolfe & Fiske Co., 1892), 603-604.

² *Ibid.*, 602.

vision of success in the emancipated British colonies of the Caribbean. Emancipation, it was argued, made the former slaves more industrious laborers, providing evidence of the superiority of free labor over slave labor. Emancipation had also brought moral reformation to the former slaves, who now received religious instruction and lived more pious lives. As Douglass told the audience that day, “Emancipation in the West Indies was the first bright star in a stormy sky; the first smile after a long providential frown; the first ray of hope; the first tangible fact demonstrating the possibility of a peaceable transition from slavery to freedom, of the negro race.”³

In their newspapers, pamphlets, tracts, books, advertisements and broadsides, American abolitionists and free African-Americans had championed this assessment for over thirty years. These arguments were a rebuttal to a mainstream press that too often disparaged the West Indian experiment of freedom. The annual commemoration of August First that Douglass addressed in 1880 had emerged out of this debate. In church services, speeches, picnics, public gatherings and parades, abolitionists and free African-Americans adapted the nationalist rituals of democracy to help shape perceptions of the British West Indies. In commemorating August First they brought the debate over emancipation abroad into the growing national question of American slavery, and joined a transnational argument on the success of black freedom and citizenship.

For Douglass the emancipated British West Indies was of particular importance to African-Americans. “The day we celebrate is preeminently the colored man's day...” he told his audience. “The emancipation of our brothers in the West Indies comes home to us and stirs our hearts and fills our souls with those grateful sentiments which link mankind in a common

³ Ibid.

brotherhood.”⁴ Free African-Americans had shared this transnational understanding of British Emancipation since the 1830s. The success of 800,000 former slaves in the West Indies mirrored their own strivings for dignity and citizenship in America. In print, free African-Americans voiced their confidence for the experiment of freedom in the West Indies. And in parades down the main streets of America, they used commemorations of August First to perform and declare their rights as free people. “Whoever else may forget or slight the claims of this day,” Douglass stated, “it can never be to us [African-Americans] other than memorable and glorious.”⁵

This work has traced the ways that the emancipated British West Indies entered the discussion about abolition and African-American citizenship in the United States. It analyzes this public discourse and its role as both propaganda and rhetoric by abolitionists, black and white, and African-Americans more generally in antebellum America. While the British West Indies featured prominently in the American antislavery and free black press, it has been undervalued in most studies of American abolitionism, even in those that focus on August First. This study places the British West Indies, and the emancipated slaves who lived and labored there, into the larger discourse of Anglo-Atlantic antislavery. In particular, it contributes to the historiography of abolitionist movements as well as black political activism in nineteenth-century America, joining commemorations of August First to arguments on race, freedom and democracy that migrated between the United States, England and the West Indies.

Despite the important role of British Emancipation to American abolitionism, commemorations of August First mostly vanished by the end of the nineteenth century. This stands in contrast to Canada, Britain and much of the English-speaking West Indies, where

⁴ Ibid., 602.

⁵ Ibid. [brackets mine]

August First is still celebrated and remembered. This study has sought to recover these transnational connections to place them within the broader American narrative of the struggle against human bondage. In recounting the history of British Emancipation and August First for his audience in 1880, Frederick Douglass sought a similar recovery. His hope was to impress upon them the vital part these events had played in shaping the world in which they now existed. “The downfall of slavery under British power meant the downfall of slavery, ultimately, under American power,” he pronounced, “and the downfall of Negro slavery everywhere.”⁶

⁶ Ibid., 604.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Newspapers and Magazines:

Anti-Slavery Bugle (Salem, Ohio)
Anti-Slavery Record (Boston, Massachusetts and New York City)
Anti-Slavery Standard (New York City)
Baltimore Patriot & Mercantile Advertiser (Baltimore, Maryland)
Boston Courier (Boston, Massachusetts)
Charleston Mercury (Charleston, South Carolina)
Chicago Times (Chicago, Illinois)
Cincinnati Daily Enquirer (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Colored American (New York City)
Connecticut Journal (New Haven, Connecticut)
Daily Age (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Daily Ohio Statesman (Columbus, Ohio)
Douglass Monthly (Rochester, New York)
Emancipator (New York City)
Examiner (Louisville, Kentucky)
Frederick Douglass Paper (Rochester, New York)
Freedom's Journal (New York City)
Genius of Universal Emancipation (Baltimore, Maryland)
Hull Packet (Hull, Yorkshire England)
Independent Gazette (New York City)
Journal of Commerce (New York City)
Liberator (Boston, Massachusetts)
Meckelenburg Jeffersonian (Charlotte, North Carolina)
Mirror of Liberty (New York City)
Morning Courier and New-York Enquirer (New York City)
National Enquirer (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
National Era (Washington, D.C.)
National Gazette (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
National Philanthropist (Boston, Massachusetts)
New Bedford Mercury (New Bedford, Massachusetts)
New Hampshire Gazette (Portsmouth, New Hampshire)
New York Commercial Advertiser (New York City)
New York Journal and Patriotic Register (New York City)
New York Observer and Chronicle (New York City)
New York Spectator (New York City)
New York Times (New York City)
New York Tribune (New York City)
Niles' Register (Baltimore, Maryland)

North American Magazine (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
North Star (Rochester, New York)
Pacific Appeal (San Francisco, California)
Patriot (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania)
Pennsylvania Freeman (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Philadelphia Gazette (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Philadelphia Inquirer (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
Philanthropist (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Rhode-Island American, and General Advertiser (Providence, Rhode Island)
Salem Gazette (Salem, Massachusetts)
Saratoga Sentinel (Saratoga, New York)
The Friend (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)
The Nation (New York City)
Weekly Anglo-African (New York City)
Weekly Advocate (New York City)
Western Monthly Magazine, and Literary Journal (Cincinnati, Ohio)
Wisconsin Free Democrat (Milwaukee, Wisconsin)
Zion's Herald (Boston, Massachusetts)

Primary Sources:

“A View of the City of Brotherly Love.” New York: H.R. Robinson, 1842. Large Graphics Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

Adams, John Quincy. An Oration Production July 4th, 1793, At The Request Of The Inhabitants Of The Town Of Boston In Commemoration Of The Anniversary of American Independence. Boston: Benjamin Edes & Son, 1793.

American Anti-Slavery Society. *Second Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society; with the Speeches Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, Held in the City of New-York, On the 12th May, 1835, and the Minutes of the Meetings of the Society for Business*. William S. Door: New York, 1835.

----- *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society : with the speeches delivered at the anniversary meeting, held in the city of New-York on the 10th May, 1836 : and the minutes of the meetings of the society for business*. New York: s.n., 1836.

American Moral Reform Society. “The minutes and proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society : held at Philadelphia, in the Presbyterian Church in Seventh Street, below Shippen, from the 14th to the 19th of August, 1837.” Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn..., 1837. Daniel A.P. Murray Pamphlet Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

- American Tract Society. *A Brief History of the American Tract Society, Instituted at Boston, 1814: and its Relations to the American Tract Society at New York, Instituted 1825*. New York: American Tract Society, 1857.
- Armistead, Wilson. *Anthony Benezet: From the Original Memoir*. Philadelphia: Lippincott and Co., 1859.
- Barclay, Alexander. *Remarks on Emigration to Jamaica: Addressed to the Coloured Class of the United States*. New York: James Van Norden & Co., 1840.
- Beecher, Charles, ed., *Autobiography, Correspondence, Etc., of Lyman Beecher, Volume I*. New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1864.
- Beecher, Lyman. *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs, Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance*. New York: American Tract Society, 1827.
- Belknap, Jeremy. *Jeremy Belknap Papers*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston MA.
- Bell, Howard H., ed. *Minutes and Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.
- Benezet, Anthony. *The Mighty Destroyer Displayed, in Some Account of the Dreadful Havoc Made by the Mistaken Use as Well as Abuse of Distilled Spiritous Liquors*. Philadelphia: Crukshank, 1774
- Black, Leonard. *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black, a Fugitive from Slavery, Written by Himself*. New Bedford: Press of Benjamin Lindsey, 1847.
- Bowditch, Vincent Y. *Life and correspondence of Henry Ingersoll Bowditch Vol. 2*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1902.
- Bradford, William and George H. Moore. "The First Printed Protest Against Slavery America," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (October, 1889): 265-260.
- Browne, Howe Peter, Marquess of Sligo. *Jamaica Under the Apprenticeship System*. London: J. Andrews, 1838.
- Buckingham, James, ed. *The Parliamentary Review and Family Magazine, Volume 2*. London, 1833.
- Calhoun, John C. *The Address of Southern Delegates in Congress, to their Constituents*. Washington D.C.: Towers, 1849.
- Carbery, Edward. *Inducements to the Coloured People of the United States to Emigrate to British Guiana*. Boston, 1840.

- Channing, William Ellery. *Emancipation*. London: Paternoster Row, 1841.
- Child, Lydia Maria. *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans*. New York: John S. Taylor, 1836.
- . *The Right Way the Safe Way: Proved by Emancipation in the British West Indies, and Elsewhere*. New York, 1860.
- Clarkson, Thomas. *The history of the rise, progress, and accomplishment of the abolition of the African slave-trade by the British Parliament*. London: Longman & Co., 1808; reprint, London: John W. Parker, 1839.
- Clay, Henry. *Speech of the Hon. Henry Clay, in the Senate of the United States: on the subject of abolition petitions, February 7, 1839*. Boston: James Monroe and Company, 1839.
- . *Henry Clay's advice to his countrymen relative to the war with Mexico*. H.R. Robinson: New York, 1847.
- Collins, John A. *The Anti-slavery picknick: a collection of speeches, poems, dialogues and songs; intended for use in schools and anti-slavery meetings*. Boston: H.W. Williams, 1842.
- Committee for the Abolition of Slavery (London). Meeting Minutes 22 May 1787, The British Library Online, London, England.
- Conder, Josiah. *Wages or the Whip. An Essay On the Comparative Cost and Productiveness of Free and Slave Labour*. London: Hatchard and Son, 1833.
- Cong. Globe*, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess. (1862).
- Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color. Third Annual (1833: Philadelphia, PA), "Minutes and proceedings of the Third annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in these United States, :held by adjournments in the city of Philadelphia, from the 3d to the 13th of June inclusive, 1833." Published by order of the Convention (New York, NY, 1833)
- . Fourth Annual (1834 : New York, NY), "Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour, in the United States; held by adjournments in the Asbury Church, New York, from the 2d to the 12th of June, inclusive, 1834." Published by order of the Convention (New York, NY, 1834)
- Davis, Joseph [designer]. Medal commemorating the Abolition of slavery (1834). Michael Graham-Stewart Slavery Collection, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

Delaney, Joseph Rev. et al. Editing Committee. *United States Catholic Historical Society, Historical Records and Studies, Volume XII*. New York: United States Catholic Historical Society, 1918.

Douglass, Frederick. *Two Speeches, by Frederick Douglass; one on West India Emancipation, Delivered at Canandaigua, Aug. 4th, and the other on the Dred Scott Decision, Delivered in New York on the occasion of the Anniversary of the American Abolition Society, 1857*. Rochester, NY: C.P. Dewey, Printer, American Office, 1857.

----- *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself*. Boston: De Wolfe & Fiske Co., 1892.

Douglass, William. *Annals of the First African Church, in the United States of America, Now Styled the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, 1862.

Dred Scott v. John F.A. Sandford, 60 U.S. [19 How.] 393. (1857).

Erskine, John. *Reflections on the Rise, Progress, and Probable Consequences, of the Present Contentions with the Colonies*. (Edinburgh, 1776).

Estes, Matthew. *A Defence of Negro Slavery as it Exists in the United States*. Press of the Alabama Journal 1846.

Forten, James. *An Address Delivered Before the Ladies' Anti-slavery Society of Philadelphia on the Evening of the 14th of April*. Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1836.

Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of Free People of Colour. *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour*. New York: Published by the Order of the Convention, 1834.

Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania. *Constitution of the Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: D. & S. Neall, 1827.

French, John Horner ed. *Historical and Statistical Gazetteer of the State of New York*. New York: Pearsall Smith, 1860.

Fugitive Slave Act. US Statutes at Large. Vol. 9 (1850).

Garnet, Henry Highland. *A Memorial Discourse by Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Delivered in the Hall of the House of Representatives, Washington City, D.C. On Sabbath, February 12, 1865. With an Introduction By James McCune Smith, M.D.* Joseph M. Wilson: Philadelphia, 1865.

- Garrison, Francis Jackson and Wendell Phillips. *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children Vol 1. 1805-1835*. New York: Century Company, 1885.
- *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children In Four Volumes: Vol. III. 1841-1860*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1894.
- Garrison, William Lloyd. *THOUGHTS ON AFRICAN COLONIZATION: or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together with the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color*. Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832.
- Gates, Henry Louis. ed. *The Classic Slave Narratives*. New York: Signet Classics, 2002.
- Gatewood, William B. Jr. ed. *Free Man of Color: The Autobiography of Willis Augustus Hodges*. Serialized 1896, *The Freeman*; reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982.
- Grand abolition of slavery. : Grand and most helligunt selebrashum of the abolition of slabery in de Nited Tate ob Neu Englunt, and commonwet of Bosson in de country of Massa-chuse-it*. Boston, Mass. : s.n., 1819?. Broadside. Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, Repository of Historical Documents, Brown University, Providence Rhode Island.
- Grant, Charles Jameson. "Slave Emancipation; Or, John Bull Gulled Out Of Twenty Millions' in The Political drama." England: s.n., ca. 1833. Graphics, Print Department, Political Cartoons, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.
- Great Britain. Colonial Office. *1841 Papers Relative to the West Indies. 1841. British Guiana. Presented to both Houses of Parliament by Command of Her Majesty*. London: William Clowes and Sons, H.M. Stationary Office, 1841.
- Great Britain, Parliament. *An Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. 1807.
- *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for Promoting the Industry of the Manumitted Slaves; and for Compensating the Persons Hitherto Entitled to the Services of Such Slaves*. [London]: n.p. 1833.
- Greeley, Horace. *Art and Industry as Represented in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, New York 1853-4*. New York: Redfield, 1853.
- Griffiths, Julia. *Autographs for Freedom*. Cleveland: John P. Jewett & Company, 1853.
- Grimké, Archibald Henry. *William Lloyd Garrison, the Abolitionist*. New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891.

- Gurney, Joseph John. *A winter in the West Indies, described in familiar letters to Henry Clay, of Kentucky*. London, s.n., 1840.
- Hammond, James Henry. *Gov. Hammond's letters on southern slavery: Addressed to Thomas Clarkson, the English abolitionist*. Charleston, 1845.
- Hammond, Jupiter and Paul Royster ed. "An Address to the Negroes in the State of New York." *Electronic Texts in American Studies* (1787).
- Hay, Melba Porter. *The Papers of Henry Clay: Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Statesman, January 1, 1844-June 29, 1852, Volume 10*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015.
- Headley, Joel Tyler. *The Great Riots of New York, 1712-1873*. New York: E.B. Treat, 1873.
- Hicks, Elias. *Observations on the Slavery of the Africans and Their Descendants and on the Use of the Produce of their Labour*. New York: James Woods, 1811.
- Holland, Patricia G. and Milton Meltzer, eds. *Lydia Maria Child, Selected Letters, 1817-1880*. Boston: University of Massachusetts, 1982.
- Hunt, Alfred N. *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006.
- Hunt, Charles and William Summers. *Tregear's black jokes, : being a series of laughable caricatures on the march of manners amongst the blacks. Twenty plates*. (London: G.S. Tregear, 1834). Rare Books & Other Texts, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.
- James, Henry F. *Abolitionism Unveiled! Hypocrisy Unmasked! and Knavery Scourged! Luminously Portraying the Formal Hocusses, Whining Philanthropists, Moral Coquets, Practical Atheists, and the Hollow-hearted Swindlers of Labor, yclept the "northern abolitionists."* New York: T.V. Paterson, 1850.
- Jefferson, Thomas. The Thomas Jefferson Papers Series I. General Correspondence, 1651-1827, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- Julian, George Washington. *The Ranks of Charles Osborn as an Anti-Slavery Pioneer*. Indianapolis: Bowen-Merrill Company, 1891.
- Kimball, Horace J. and James A. Thome. *Emancipation in the West Indies: A Six months' Tour in Antigua, Barbadoes, and Jamaica in the Year 1837*. New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838.

- Lapansky, Philip, Richard Newman and Patrick Rael, ed. *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. Routledge: New York, 2001.
- Lees, Frederic Richard and Peter Turner Winkill. *The Temperance Movement and Its Workers: A Record of Social, Moral, Religious, and Political Progress, Volumes 1-2*. London: Blackie & Son Limited, 1893.
- Levine, Robert S. *Martin Delany. Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Levine, Robert S., John R. McKivigan and John Stauffer, eds. *The Heroic Slave: A Cultural and Critical Edition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015.
- Lundy, Benjamin. *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy: Including His Journeys to Texas and Mexico, with a Sketch of Contemporary Events, and a Notice of the Revolution in Hayti*. Philadelphia: W.D. Parrish, 1847.
- Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. *Constitution of the New-England anti-slavery society: with an address to the public*. Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832.
- May, Samuel J. *Some Recollections of our Antislavery Conflict*. Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869.
- Merrill, William M. and Louis Ruchames. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: I will be heard, 1822-1835*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.
- Merrill, William M. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison: Let the oppressed go free, 1861-1867*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Nell, William Cooper. *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution: With Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons: to which is Added a Brief Survey of the Condition and Prospects of Colored Americans*. Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855.
- Palfrey, John Gorham. *Speech of Mr. Palfrey, of Massachusetts, on the political aspects of the slave question. Delivered in the House of representatives, January 26th, 1848*. Washington D.C.: J & G. S. Gideon, 1848.
- Paul, Nathaniel. *An address, delivered on the celebration of the abolition of slavery in the State of New York, July 5, 1827*. Albany: John B. Van Steenberg, 1827.
- Peck, Nathaniel and Thomas S. Price. *Report of Messrs. Peck and Price, Who Were Appointed at a Meeting of the Free Colored People of Baltimore, Held on the 25th November, 1839, Delegates to Visit British Guiana, and the Island of Trinidad; for the Purpose of Ascertaining the Advantages to be Derived by Colored People Migrating to Those Places*. Baltimore: Woods & Crane, 1840).

Pennington, James W.C. *The reasonableness of the Abolition of Slavery at the South, a legitimate inference from the success of British Emancipation. An Address, Delivered at Hartford, Conn.. on the First of August, 1856.* Hartford: Press of Case, Tiffany and Company, 1856.

Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. *Ninth Annual Report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.* Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1842.

Phillips, James. *An Abstract of the Evidence Delivered before a Select Committee of the House of Commons in the Years 1790 and 1791; on the Part of the Petitioners for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade.* London, 1791.

Phillips, Wendell. *Speeches, Lectures and Letters.* Boston: James Redpath, 1863.

----- *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters, Volume I.* Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1894.

Purvis, Robert. *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with Disfranchisement, to the People of Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838.

Ramsay, James. *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies.* London: J. Phillips, 1784.

----- *Objections to the abolition of the slave trade, with answers: to which are prefixed strictures on a late publication, intitled, "Considerations on the emancipation of Negroes, and the abolition of the slave trade, by a West India Planter", with Answers.* London: James Phillips, 1788.

Ripley, C. Peter, ed. *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. I: The British Isles, 1830-1865.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985.

----- *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. III: The United States, 1830-1846.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Ruchames, Luis. ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison, Volume II: A House Divided Against Itself 1836-1840.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Rush, Benjamin. *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, upon Slave-Keeping.* Philadelphia: John Boyles, 1773.

----- *An inquiry into the effects of ardent spirits upon the human body and mind: with an account of the means of preventing, and of the remedies for curing them, 8th edition.* Boston: James Loring, 1823.

Seager, Robert II ed. *The Papers of Henry Clay: The Whig Leader, January 1, 1837 December 31, 1843, Volume 9.* Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015.

- Sharp, Granville. *The law of liberty or, Royal law, by which all mankind will certainly be judged! Earnestly recommended to the serious consideration of all slave holders and slave dealers.* London: B. White and E. and C. Dilly, 1776.
- Simmons, Charles. *Slavery of the United States to Sinful and Foolish Customs.* Pawtucket, Rhode Island, 1841.
- Smith, Adam. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.* 1776.
- Stebbins, Giles B. *Facts and Opinions Touching the Real Origin, Character, and Influence of the American Colonization Society: Views of Wilberforce, Clarkson, and Others, and Opinions of the Free People of Color of the United States.* Boston: Jewett, Proctor, and Worthington, 1853.
- Stuart, Charles. *British Opinions of the American Colonization Society.* Cornell University Library, 1833.
- Studley, Marian H. "An 'August First' in 1844." *The New England Quarterly* 16 (December 1943): 567-568
- Tappan, Arthur. *To the Honorable Cornelius W. Lawrence, mayor of the city of New York.* New York: New York Anti-Slavery Society, 1834.
- Tappan, Lewis. *Immediate Emancipation: The Only Wise and Safe Mode.* New York, 1861.
- The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists.* Philadelphia: H. Manly, 1836.
- Timpson, Thomas. *The Negroes' Jubilee: A Memorial of Negro Emancipation, August 1, 1834: with a Brief History of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition, and the Extinction of British Colonial Slavery.* London: Ward and Company, 1834.
- To the Senate and Representatives of the United States, in Congress Assembled.* Poughkeepsie, New York: Nicholas Power, 1798. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.
- Toombs, Robert Augustus. *A lecture delivered in the Tremont Temple, Boston, Massachusetts, on the 24th January, 1856* (Washington D.C., 1856).
- Townsend, Edward Davis. General Orders No. 233. U. S. War Department, Washington, D.C., 1864. The Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana, Rare Book And Special Collections Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
- U.S. Congress. Senate. *An Act in addition to the act, entitled, "An act for the punishment of certain crimes against the United States."* 5th Cong., 2nd sess., 14 July 1798.

- Van Evrie, John H. *Free Negroism: or, Results of Emancipation in the North and the West India Islands*. New York: Van Evrie Horton, & Co., 1862.
- Wakelyn, Jon, ed. *Southern Pamphlets on Secession, November 1860-April 1861*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Walcutt, R.F. ed. *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison*. Boston: R.F. Walcutt, 1852; New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968.
- Walker, David. *Appeal in Four Articles: Together With A Preamble To The Coloured Citizens Of The World, But In Particular, And Very Expressly, To Those Of The United States Of America*. Boston, s.n., 1829.
- Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. *Statement of the plan, object, and effects of the Wesleyan missions in the West Indies*. London: Committee of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Church, 1824.
- Whitefield, George. *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield M.A.* (London, 1771).
- Whittier. John Greenleaf. *The Complete Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier*. Houghton Mifflin, 1894.
- Wilberforce, William. *A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*. London: Luke Hansard & Sons, 1807.
- Williams, George Washington. *History of the Negro Race in America, 1619-1880, Volume 2*. New York: GP Putnam's Sons, 1883.
- Woods, Samuel. *Injured Humanity; Being A Representation of What the Unhappy Children of Africa Endure from Those Who Call Themselves Christians*. New York, 1805.
- Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia. *Constitution, By-Laws and List of Officers*. Philadelphia: PA, 1835.
- Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, PA). Meeting Minutes 25 January 1837.

Secondary Sources:

- Adams, Catherine and Elizabeth H. Peck. *Love of Freedom: Black Women in Colonial and Revolutionary New England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Adams, David K. and Cornelius A. Van Minnen eds. *Religious and Secular Reform in America: Ideas, Beliefs, and Social Change*. New York: New York University Press, 1999.
- Adeleke, Tunde. "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830's." *The Journal of Negro History*. 83 (Spring, 1998): 127-142.
- Angell, Stephen W. and Pink Dandelion. *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*. London: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983.
- Appleby, Joyce. *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001.
- Ashworth, John. *The Republic in Crisis, 1848-1861*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2012.
- Ayers, Edward L. *In the Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003.
- Bacon, Jacqueline. *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007.
- Bacon, Margaret Hope. *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis*. New York: State University of New York Press, 2007.
- Baker, Houston. "Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere." *Public Culture* 7 (Fall 1994): 3-33.
- Baptist, Edward. *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. New York: Basic Books, 2014.
- Barker, Gordon S. *Fugitive Slaves and the Unfinished American Revolution*. New York: McFarland, 2013.
- Barney, William, Robert J. Cook, and Elizabeth R. Varon eds. *Secession Winter: When the Union Fell*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013.
- Barnhurst, Kevin G. and John Nerone. *The Form of News: A History*. New York: Guilford Press, 2002.
- Beal, Timothy. *Religion in America: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

- Bell, Howard H. "The American Moral Reform Society, 1836-1841." *The Journal of Negro Education* 27 (Winter, 1958): 34-40.
- Berlin, Ira. "From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African American Society in Mainland North America." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 53 (April 1996): 251-288.
- Blackburn, Robin. *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*. New York: Verso, 1998.
- Blackett, Richard J.M. *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983.
- . *Divided Hearts: Britain and the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2001.
- Blatt, Martin H., Thomas J. Brown and Donald Yacovone, eds. *Hope & Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009.
- Blight, David. *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991.
- Borome, Joseph A. "The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92 (January 1968): 320-351.
- Bowman, Davis S. *At the Precipice: Americans North and South during the Secession Crisis*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Bradley, Patricia. *Slavery, Propaganda and the American Revolution*. Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1999.
- Brennan, Denis. *The Making of an Abolitionist: William Lloyd Garrison's Path to Publishing The Liberator*. Jefferson: McFarland Press, 2014.
- Bronner, Edward B. "Distributing the Printed Word: the Tract Association of Friends, 1816-1966." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 91 (July 1967): 342-354.
- Brown, Christopher Leslie. "Empire without Slaves: British Concepts of Emancipation in the Age of the American Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56 (April 1999), 273-306.
- . *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

- Burin, Eric. *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008.
- Burke, Diane Mutti and Jonathan Earle. *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2013.
- Burn, William L. *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies*. London: Cape, 1937.
- Carey, Brycchan. *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657-1761*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012.
- Carey, Brycchan and Geoffrey Plank, eds. *Quakers and Abolition*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- Carrington, Selwyn. *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002.
- Civin, Joshua. "The Revival of Antislavery in the 1820s at the Local, National and Global Levels." Paper presented at the Proceedings of the Third Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, 25-28 October 2001. <http://www.yale.edu/glc/conference/>.
- Cliff, Nigel. *The Shakespeare Riots: Revenge, Drama, and Death in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Random House, 2007.
- Coffey, John. *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Collison, Gary L. *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Craton, Michael. *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Curtin, Phillip D. *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850, Volume 1*. Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 1973.
- Darity, William, Jr. "British Industry and the West Indies Plantations Social." *Science History* 14 (Spring, 1990): 117-149.
- Davis, David Brion. "James Cropper and the British Antislavery Movement, 1823-1833." *Journal of Negro History* 46 (April 1961): 154-173.

- "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (September 1962): 209-230.
- *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1720-1823*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975.
- *Slavery and Human Progress*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- *From Homicide to Slavery: Studies in American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014.
- Davis, Rodney O. and Douglas L. Wilson, eds. *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014.
- Davis, Susan G. *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- DeWulf, Jeroen. "Pinkster: An Atlantic Creole Festival in a Dutch-American Context." *Journal of American Folklore*, 126 (Summer 2013): 245-271.
- Dillon, Elizabeth Maddock. *New World Drama: The Performative Commons in the Atlantic World, 1649-1849*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.
- Dillon, Merton L. *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966.
- Drake, Thomas. *Quakers and Slavery in America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.
- Drescher, Seymour. *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*. Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh, 1977.
- *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

- . *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor Versus Slavery in British Emancipation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Dunbar, Erica Armstrong. *A Fragile Freedom: American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.
- Egerton, Douglas R. *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Emery, Edwin, Michael Emery and Nancy L. Roberts, eds. *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997.
- Engerman, Stanley L. ed. *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom and Free Labor*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.
- Everill, Bronwen. "British West Africa or 'The United States of Africa'? Imperial pressures on the trans-Atlantic anti-slavery movement, 1839–1842." *Journal of Trans-Atlantic Studies* 9 (2011): 136-150.
- Fabre, Genevieve and Robert O'Meally, eds. *History and Memory in African-American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Fanuzzi, Robert. *Abolition's Public Sphere*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.
- Faulkner, Carol. "The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820 1860." *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Fall 2007): 377-405.
- Filler, Louis. *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes and Reforms, 1820-1860*. New York: Harper, 1960.
- Finkelman, Paul, ed. *Slavery and the Law*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002.
- Fitts, Roberts. "The Rhetoric of Reform: The Five Points Missions and the Cult of Domesticity." *Historical Archaeology* 35 (2001): 115-132.
- Fladeland, Betty. *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Foner, Eric. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- . *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2011.

- Foner, Eric and James Brewer Stewart. *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1976.
- Foner, Philip, ed. *Essays in Afro-American History*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978.
- Forbes, Robert Pierce. *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.
- Frost, William J. *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*. Norwood: Norwood Editions, 1980.
- Furley, Oliver W. "Moravian Missions and Slaves in the West Indies." *Caribbean Studies* 5, (July 1965): 3-16.
- Gabbard, Sara Vaughn and Harold Holzer, eds. *Lincoln and Freedom: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2007.
- Gellman, David N. *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006.
- Genovese, Eugene. *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.
- Gerbner, Katharine. "'We are Against the Traffik of Men-Body': The Germantown Quaker Protest of 1688 and the Origins of American Abolitionism." *Pennsylvania History* 74 (Spring 2007): 149-172.
- Gerzina, Gretchen Holbrook. *Black London: Life Before Emancipation*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995.
- Gilbert, Alan. *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Gilje, Paul A. *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.
- . *Rioting in America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Glasson, Travis. *Mastering Christianity: Missionary Anglicanism and Slavery in the Atlantic World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Green, William A. *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

- Greenberg, Amy. *A Wicked War: Polk, Clay, Lincoln, and the 1846 U.S. Invasion of Mexico*. New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2012.
- Griffin, Patrick, Robert Ingram, Peter Onuf and Brian Schoen, eds. *Between Sovereignty and Anarchy: The Politics of Violence in the American Revolutionary Era*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015.
- Grimsted, David. *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into A Category of Bourgeois Society*. Translated by Thomas Burger, with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989.
- Hamm, Thomas D. *God's Government Begun: The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, 1842—1846*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Hammond, John Craig and Matthew Mason, *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*. Richmond: University of Virginia Press, 2011.
- Harris, Leslie. *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Harris, Robert L. "Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830." *The Massachusetts Review* 20 (Autumn 1979): 603-625.
- Henry, Natasha L. *Emancipation Day: Celebrating Freedom in Canada*. Toronto: Dundurn, 2010.
- Higman, Barry. "Slavery Remembered: the Celebration of Emancipation in Jamaica," *Journal of Caribbean History* 12 (1979): 55-74.
- Hill, Errol. *The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992.
- Holt, Michael F. *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Hodges, Graham Russell Gao. *A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Howe, Daniel Walker. *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

- . *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Hulsebosch, Daniel J. "Nothing But Liberty: Somerset's Case and the British Empire." *Law and History Review* 24 (Fall 2006): 647-658.
- Jackson, Maurice. *Let this Voice be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- Jasanoff, Maya. *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.
- John, Richard. *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- Johnson, Reinard O. *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009.
- Johnson, Walter. *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Kachun, Mitch. *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003.
- Kale, Madhavi. *Fragments of Empire: Capital, Slavery, and Indian Indentured Labor in the British Caribbean*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
- Kerr-Ritchie, Jeffrey R. "Rehearsal for War: Black Militias in the Atlantic World." *Slavery and Abolition* 26 (April 2005): 1-34.
- . *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007.
- Keyssar, Alexander. *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States*. New York: Basic Books, 2001.
- Kielbowicz, Richard B. "The Law and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers, 1833-1860." *Law and History Review* 24 (Fall 2006): 559-600.
- Lapansky, Emma Jones. "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia." *American Quarterly* 32 (Spring 1980): 54-78.
- Laspansky, Phillip. "Afro-Americana: From Abolition to Bobalition." *The Library Company of Philadelphia 2003 Annual Report*. Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 2004: 39-46.

- Lemire, Elise. *Miscegenation: Making Race in America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- Lepler, Jessica M. *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Lorimer, Douglas A. "Black Slaves and English Liberty: A re-examination of racial Slavery in England." *Immigrants and Minorities* 3 (1984): 121–150.
- MacMaster, Richard K. "Arthur Lee's 'Address on Slavery': An Aspect of Virginia's Struggle to End the Slave Trade, 1765-1774." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 80 (April 1972): 141-157.
- Martin, Asa E. "Pioneer Anti-Slavery Press." *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 2 (March 1916): 509-528.
- Matthews, Gelien. *Caribbean Slave Revolts And the British Abolitionist Movement*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006.
- May, Robert E. *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Mayer, Henry. *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*. New York: St Martin's Press, 1998.
- McDaniel, Caleb. "The Fourth and the First: Abolitionist Holidays, Respectability, and Radical Interracial Reform." *American Quarterly* 57 (March 2005): 129-151.
- . *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic Reform*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2013.
- McFeely, William S. *Frederick Douglass*. New York: W.W. Norton Press, 1995.
- McManus, Edgar J. *Black Bondage in the North*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973.
- McPherson, James M. "Was West Indian Emancipation a Success? The Abolitionist Argument during the American Civil War." *Caribbean Studies* 4 (July 1964): 28-34.
- . *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964.

- Melish, Joanne Pope. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Midgley, Claire. *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns 1780-1870*. London: Routledge, 1992.
- . "Slave Sugar Boycotts, Female Activism and the Domestic Base of British Anti-Slavery Culture." *Slavery & Abolition: A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies* 17 (December, 1996): 137-162.
- Miller, Floyd. "The Father of Black Nationalism: Another Contender." *Civil War History* 17 (December 1971): 310-19.
- Mintz, Sidney. *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Morgan, Edmund S. *The Challenge of the American Revolution*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1978.
- Morgan, Kenneth. *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America*. London: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Mtubani, Victor C.D. "The Black Voice in Eighteenth-Century Britain: African Writers Against Slavery and the Slave Trade." *Phylon* 45 (2nd Qtr., 1984): 85-97.
- Nadelhaft, Jerome. "The Somerset Case and Slavery: Myth, Reality, and Repercussions." *The Journal of Negro History* 51 (July 1966): 193-208.
- Nash, Gary B. and Jean R. Soderlund. *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Newman, Richard. *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- . *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- . *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011.
- Newman, Simon P. *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- Oakes, James. *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2013.

- Oates, Stephen B. *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
- Oickle, Alvin F. *The Man With the Branded Hand: The Life of Jonathan Walker, Abolitionist*. Yardley: Westholme Publishing, 2011.
- Oldfield, John. *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade 1787-1807*. London: Routledge, 2012.
- Olmos, Margarite Fernández and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*. New York: New York University Press, 2011.
- Pale, Ruth. "Imperial Politics and English Law: The Many Contexts of Somerset." *Law and History Review* 24 (Fall 2006): 659-664.
- Pasley, Jeffrey, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher. eds. *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Parr, Jessica M. *Inventing George Whitefield: Race, Revivalism, and the Making of Religious Icon*. Oxford: University of Mississippi Press, 2015.
- Phillips, Christopher. *Freedom's Port: The African American Community of Baltimore, 1790-1860*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997.
- Polgar, Paul J. "To Raise Them to an Equal Participation?: Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African American Citizenship," *Journal of the Early Republic* 31 (Summer 2011): 229-258.
- Power-Greene, Ousmane K. *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Prince, Carl E. "The Great 'Riot Year': Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834." *Journal of the Early Republic* 5 (Spring, 1985): 1-19.
- Quarles, Benjamin. "The Breach Between Douglass and Garrison." *Journal of Negro History* 23 (April 1938): 144-154
- , *The Negro in the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953.
- , "Lord Dunmore as Liberator." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 15 (October 1958): 494-507.

- . *The Negro in the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961.
- . *Lincoln and the Negro*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.
- . *Black Abolitionists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.
- . *Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Rayback, Joseph G. *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2015.
- Richards, Leonard. *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Richardson, David, ed. *Abolition and Its Aftermath: The Historical Context, 1790-1916*. London: Cass, 1985.
- Robertson, Stacey M. *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Verso: New York, 1991.
- Rose, Willie Lee. *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999.
- Rugemer, Edward Bartlett. *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.
- Schudson, Michael. *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- Schuler, Monica. "Myalism and the African Tradition." *Savacou* (June 1970): 8-31.
- Schuyler, Robert L. ed. *Archeological Perspectives on Ethnicity in America: Afro American and Asian American Culture History*. Farmingdale: Baywood Publishing Company, 1980.
- Scott, Julius S. III. "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution." PhD dissertation, Duke University, 1986.

- Sellers, Charles. *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Sharp, James A. *Remember, Remember: A Cultural History of Guy Fawkes Day*. Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Siddali, Silvana R. *From Property to Person: Slavery and the Confiscation Acts, 1861-1862*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2005.
- Siegel, Stanley. *A Political History of the Texas Republic, 1836-1845*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.
- Sinha, Manisha. *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Smith, John Howard. *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014.
- Snay, Mitchell. *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Soderlund, Jean R. *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Stamp, Kenneth. *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860-1861*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1950.
- Starr, Paul. *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications*. New York: Basic Books, 2004.
- Stauffer, John. *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Radical Transformation of Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Stauffer, John and Zoe Trodd, eds. *The Tribunal: Responses to John Brown and the Harper's Ferry Raid*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Stewart, James Brewer. *Religion and Society in Post-emancipation Jamaica*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1992.
- . *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War*. Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008.
- Swan, Robert J. "John Teasman: African-American Educator and the Emergence of Community in Early Black New York City, 1787-1815." *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (Autumn, 1992): 331-356.

- Swift, David E. *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1989.
- Tager, Jack. *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence*. Boston: Northeastern University Press 2000.
- Tallant, Harold D. *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2003.
- Taylor, Clare ed. *British and American Abolitionists: An Episode in Transatlantic Understanding*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974.
- Taylor, Henry Louis ed. *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Taylor, Quintard. *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West 1528-1990*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1999.
- Temperley, Howard, ed. *After Slavery: Emancipation and its Discontents*. London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000.
- Temple, Brian. *Philadelphia Quakers and the Antislavery Movement*. North Carolina: McFarland, 2014.
- Thomas, Mary Elizabeth. "Henry Clay Replies to a Labor Recruiter From Trinidad." *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 77 (Autumn 1979): 263-265.
- Tillery, Tyrone. "The Inevitability of the Douglass-Garrison Conflict," *Phylon* 37 (June 1976): 137-149.
- Turner, Mary. *Slaves and Missionaries: The Disintegration of Jamaican Slave Society, 1787-1834*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982.
- Van Cleve, George. "Mansfield's Decision: Toward Human Freedom." *Law and History Review* 24 (Fall 2006): 665-671.
- Varon, Elizabeth. *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Wade, Melvin. "Shining in Borrowed Plumage: Affirmation of Community in the Black Coronation Festivals of New England." *Western Folklore* 40 (July 1981): 211-231.
- Waldstreicher, David. "Rites of Rebellion, Rites of Assent: Celebrations, Print Culture, and the Origins of American Nationalism." *The Journal of American History* 82 (June 1995): 37-61.

- . *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Walters, Ronald G. *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*. New York: WW Norton Y Company, 1984.
- Wesley, Charles H. "The Negroes of New York in the Emancipation Movement." *Journal of Negro History* 24 (January 1939): 65-103.
- White, Ashli. *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
- White, Shane. "'It was a Proud Day:': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834." *The Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 13-50.
- . *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1991.
- Wilder, Craig Steven. "The Rise and Influence of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, 1808-1865." *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* (July 1998).
- Wilentz, Sean. *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*. Oxford University Press: New York, 2004.
- . *The Rise of American Democracy, Jefferson to Lincoln*. W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 2006.
- Williams, Eric. *Capitalism and Slavery*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1944.
- Williams, Robert C. *Horace Greeley: Champion of American Freedom*. New York: New York University, Press 2006.
- Wilson, Kathleen. *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1717-1785*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- . "The Performance of Freedom: Maroons and the Colonial Order in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica and the Atlantic Sound." *William and Mary Quarterly* 66 (January 2009): 45-86.
- Winch, Julie. *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Wise, Steven M. *Though the Heavens May Fall: The Landmark Trial That Led to the End of Human Slavery*. Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2006.

- Wood, Forrest G. *Black Scare: The Racist Response to Emancipation and Reconstruction*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1968.
- Wood, Gordon S. "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (Oct 1966): 635-42.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. "The Abolitionists' Postal Campaign of 1835." *The Journal of Negro History* 50, (October, 1965): 227-238.
- Yee, Shirley J. *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*. Memphis: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.
- Zilversmit, Arthur. *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1967.