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**Oliver Johnson: Abolitionist, 1831-1865**

by

**Steven M. Raffo**

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2000

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## Abstract

Oliver Johnson: Abolitionist, 1831-1865

by

Steven M. Raffo

Adviser: Professor Charles Strozier

Oliver Johnson was an American abolitionist who dedicated his life to the eradication of slavery. Born in 1809 in a rural farming community in Caledonia County, Vermont, he became one of the most prominent figures in the country in the antislavery crusade. Johnson spent over 50 years of his life as an editor of a reform or antislavery newspaper. As a young man Johnson became acquainted with another young reformer named William Lloyd Garrison, and it became a friendship that lasted all their lives. Johnson was one of the 12 original members of the New England Anti-Slavery Society founded in 1831. He was also instrumental in the creation of the American Anti-Slavery Society, which was the first national antislavery society in the country. Johnson advanced to a position of leadership and power within the organization, and remained a significant member until slavery was finally abolished in 1865.

Johnson also involved himself in many of the other reform movements of the era. For a short time he joined the Hopedale community founded by Adin Ballou in Milford, Massachusetts. Later, he became a member of the Progressive Friends in Longwood, Pennsylvania. He remained an active member of the organization until his death in 1889, and is buried in the private burial grounds at Longwood, which is now part of the Pierre S. Dupont estate.

During his long career Johnson was active in politics supporting the antislavery lobby in Congress. Unlike many of his colleagues, he was an early supporter of Abraham Lincoln for the presidency, making two personal visits to meet with the President. Johnson had a wide circle of friends that included reformers, politicians, businessmen, and members of the clergy. His great skill was the ability to compromise, and he often brought many individuals together, getting them to work in agreement, where no one else could. Johnson was a man who believed in the equal rights of all individuals and spent his life striving to create a society where all people could live together in harmony. This dissertation is the first study of the life and work of Oliver Johnson.

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## Introduction

Oliver Johnson was an American author and journalist who devoted his life to the abolition of slavery and the advancement of human rights. As a young man, he entered the antislavery rank and file while the movement was still in its infancy. He soon emerged as a prominent leader of the abolitionist crusade and remained an active participant in the struggle until emancipation was achieved. His strong leadership helped set the standards by which most abolitionists were guided, and during periods of crisis it was Johnson who bridged the gap between opposing sides and kept the movement from collapsing. His unselfish labors and numerous contributions to the antislavery campaign made him a significant factor in bringing slavery to an end in America. As a reformer, Johnson also actively participated in many of the progressive and radical movements of the era, and for more than half a century he edited and wrote for major antislavery and reform newspapers. This study will provide the first complete study of the life and work of Oliver Johnson.

Historians have varied greatly in their evaluation of Johnson. Their interpretations encompass a wide range of views, from perceiving him as an individual thinker who acted independently, to dismissing him as little more than a dedicated follower of William Lloyd Garrison. The historian Louis Filler believed that he was simply an epigone of Garrison and that Johnson contributed little in the way of ideas or originality to the movement. Filler referred to him as "Oliver Johnson who was to be a Garrison stalwart and editor for almost half a century, and defend him against all

detractors.”<sup>1</sup> John L. Thomas in his superb biography of Garrison was more critical of Johnson. Thomas conjectured that Johnson viewed Garrison as a “divinely inspired leader; and in the years to come served his master as a chore boy, loyal and unquestioning for over thirty years, his carbon copy mind reproducing faithfully the Garrisonian gospel.”<sup>2</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor came closer to an accurate description of Johnson when she pointed out his differences with Garrison and his supporters who steadfastly rejected an abolitionist political party. According to Kraditor, Johnson thought “A third party would be unwise because it would make abolition a political issue, with every member having a vote for its candidates regardless of his interest in other issues besides abolition.”<sup>3</sup>

Kraditor’s statement is correct, but it does not go nearly far enough in explaining Johnson’s position. As for the more negative statements by other historians, they were mainly concerned with other areas of the antislavery movement. None of these individuals ever researched Johnson’s career, and their assumptions about him were based on superficial documentation. This treatise will demonstrate that Johnson was not only an independent theorist, but also a leader who helped shape and direct the movement, often opposing his friend Garrison. These differences included the use of political action, the support of Abraham Lincoln for the presidency, and the inclusion of more radical elements of abolitionism.

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, New York: Harper & Row, 1960, 50.

<sup>2</sup> John L. Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, Boston & Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1963, 130, 281.

<sup>3</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1969, 163, 164.

Oliver Johnson was the quintessential product of evangelical Protestantism. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century the Second Great Awakening in America ushered in a series of reform movements unprecedented in our country's history. For the first time people began raising issues in a way their forefathers had never done. Principal among these were the rights of women, temperance, prison reform, and labor, but none was more volatile than the institution of slavery. Johnson was raised in a rural Vermont community where these topics were the conversation of everyday life. As a youth he received an excellent academic education at the Peacham Academy, and by the time he reached young adulthood he was actively involved in many of these causes. Like many young activists he was motivated by strong religious beliefs and embarked on a career as a reformer by embracing many of the various new ideologies that were emerging. As he became more deeply involved, his concerns centered on what he considered to be the greatest of evils—human bondage. Johnson remained a reformer and continued to support various progressive causes for his entire life, but he was first and foremost an abolitionist.

At the age of 16, Johnson became an apprentice at the local newspaper, the *Vermont Watchman*. It was here that he learned to perfect his skills as a writer and editor. While at the *Watchman* he kept abreast of the latest radical activities occurring across the country and eventually became engrossed in the debates. Before his departure from the paper, Johnson was writing and editing his own articles and had acquired the knowledge necessary to produce a journal of his own. At the age of 22, he decided to strike out alone and set off for Boston, where he started his own newspaper, the *Christian Soldier*. It was at this time that he formed what was to be a lifelong friendship with another young reformer, William Lloyd Garrison.

As a founding member of the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1831, Johnson was involved in the movement from its inception. An examination of his life reveals a wide range of activities, including political action, to produce reforms in government and the church. His interests led him to examine and ultimately join several of the utopian organizations of the period, and he attempted to combine these new life styles with the changes taking place in society. As a lifelong friend and defender of William Lloyd Garrison, Johnson has been considered consistently faithful to the credo of the most celebrated abolitionist in American history. As this research will demonstrate, Johnson was a close friend and supporter of Garrison's, but they disagreed on several critical issues, and on these occasions their strategies and actions took different paths. Still, knowing that their primary goal was the same, they always maintained a mutual respect for each other, thus allowing their friendship to endure.

By the late 1830s the abolitionist movement had grown considerably, and a national organization had been formed. The antislavery crusade seemed to be gaining support and for the first time began having an impact on American life. However, all those who worked for an end to slavery did not necessarily agree on the means by which the goal would be attained. There were many within the antislavery rank and file who were not satisfied with the progress that had been made. In 1840 these disagreements led to a schism in the national organization that threatened to dissolve the entire antislavery movement. Johnson refused to allow this crisis to destroy all that had been accomplished. As this examination will illustrate, it was Johnson who became a mediator between both sides. His reputation for integrity, plus his ability to compromise and grow intellectually and practically, made him an individual who was trusted by all sides.

Through his initiative and skill, he kept the lines of communication open between opposing leaders and helped prevent a complete collapse of the movement. The abolitionist crusade never regained the solidarity it had prior to the schism, but Johnson's great contribution to the cause was that he remained one of the few who could continually bring the various factions together, and he often coordinated these efforts. His influence stretched across the boundaries of the church, the political arena, and the more radical elements of the movement. As the Civil War approached and the issue of slavery became an increasingly explosive topic, it was Johnson who emerged as one of the most prominent coordinators and leaders of abolitionist activities.

When the sectional conflict intensified and the prospects of Civil War became an increasing reality, the division between Johnson and his friend Garrison widened. Unlike Garrison, Johnson became an early supporter of Abraham Lincoln. He led a delegation to the White House to deliver a petition to the newly elected President and plead with him to declare immediate emancipation for all those held in bondage. Johnson worked with antislavery congressmen and senators, as well as members of the President's cabinet, supporting their efforts in numerous articles and speeches. A lifelong believer in non-resistance, Johnson was forced by the armed conflict to revise his thinking and support the Union's struggle during the war.

As a humanitarian who believed in the equality of all people, Johnson held that the end of the war and emancipation did not bring an end to the struggle for human rights. He argued vigorously for the right of suffrage for the freedmen, and through his editorials he endorsed the impeachment of Andrew Johnson. Even though the Civil War had finally eradicated the institution of slavery forever in America, the failure of

Reconstruction demonstrated to Johnson how intense racial prejudice remained throughout the country. He continued to involve himself in various reform movements and struggled to attain equal rights for women, immigrants, and blacks. Johnson remained active in politics, supporting Horace Greeley for President and playing a critical role in his campaign. Johnson became a key figure in the infamous Tilton-Beecher trial, as he was an intimate acquaintance of all the major parties involved in the suit. Towards the end of his life Johnson began to chronicle the events of the antislavery crusade, and he remained an active reformer, writing and speaking on important issues up until the time of his death in 1889 at the age of 80.

This research will focus on the public life of Oliver Johnson and only delve minimally into his private affairs. The Johnson Papers, located at the Vermont Historical Society, consist of an incomplete letter collection and several miscellaneous articles published during his career.<sup>4</sup> Other source material is scattered in various manuscript collections and primary publications. Fortunately, many of Johnson's letters have been preserved in the papers of other prominent abolitionists and statesmen. The Watts-Choate Collection, housed at the Peacham Historical Society Archives, holds the genealogical records of Caledonia County. These documents reveal a considerable amount about Johnson's family history and early life. In addition, the Library of Congress and the Boston Public Library maintain the reports of the American Anti-Slavery Society and other abolitionist organizations to which Johnson belonged. Further information about Johnson can be found in the annals of reform movements such as the Progressive Friends and the Hopedale community, which are kept in the archives of the

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<sup>4</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vermont. This is the only collection of material about Oliver Johnson.

Friends Historical Library, at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania.<sup>5</sup> The records of other reform movements are also good sources. Johnson was an editor of major antislavery and reform newspapers for over 50 years, and numerous editorials, speeches, and articles that he wrote can be found in these various journals. Johnson's other published works include papers and campaign tracts to the biography of his friend William Lloyd Garrison.<sup>6</sup> Although late in life Johnson had planned to write his autobiography, the work was never actually started. *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, published in 1881, is unquestionably a hagiographic reminiscence of his friend, but it is also an excellent source of information about Johnson as it also includes many of his own experiences and independent conclusions.

Johnson's contribution as an abolitionist and humanitarian were enormous, but they have never been completely recognized. Although his close relationship with William Lloyd Garrison overshadowed his own achievements, Johnson pursued his own individual course. This enabled him to produce results independently, often surpassing the efforts of other prominent abolitionists. Therefore, his contribution and his legacy to the antislavery crusade must be considered on their own merits.

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<sup>5</sup> *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of the Progressive Friends*, New York: John F. Trow, Printer, Fifth Month, 1853-1855. Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania. The organization lasted until 1946 and the entire record collection is maintained at the library.

<sup>6</sup> Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881. This is the first biography of Garrison ever published; *What I Know of Horace Greeley*, campaign tract, 1872. Johnson helped organize the presidential campaign of Horace Greeley in 1872. He was a longtime friend of Greeley's, and actively campaigned for him. This is a twelve-page pamphlet he published in support of the candidate.

**Oliver Johnson was a man with a vision of a more equal and humane society.**

**This study will demonstrate his individual accomplishments and his attempts to make that society a reality.**

## Chapter 1

### Vermont Youth and Apprenticeship

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the town of Peacham in Caledonia County, Vermont was a small rural farming community. Located in the hill country surrounded by the majestic scenery of the Green Mountains, Peacham was a small, isolated settlement. At a time when there were no railroads and even the mail coach was infrequently seen, the people by their very isolation from the outside world were made homogeneous and fraternal. They often worked together in the fields in a system of exchange, a dozen or more laboring on one farm at a time. Activities such as husking, quilting and apple-paring bees were common events.<sup>1</sup> The people were hard working and devoted to the Congregational Church.

It was to this town that the pioneer Ziba Johnson and his wife Sally Lincoln migrated in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. They had been married on December 3, 1793, in Westmoreland, New Hampshire. Ziba was descended from Isaac Johnson, who came to America in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and settled in Massachusetts. Ziba was a farmer who was rigidly orthodox and a deacon of the church, who often read copies of *Scott's Commentaries* to his family. Ziba and his wife had five children: Sally, born on January

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<sup>1</sup> Ernest L. Bogart, *Peacham, The Story of a Vermont Hill Town*, Montpelier, Vermont: Capital City Press, 1948, 245. Several other good general sources about the early history of Vermont include works by Charles E. Allen, *About Burlington, Vermont*, Burlington, Vermont: Hobart J. Shanley, 1905, and Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer of Caledonia and Essex Counties, Vermont, 1764-1887*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse Journal Company, 1887. Besides the history of each county, this text includes a business directory with maps.

15. 1795; Leonard, on March 17, 1797; Allen, on December 5, 1798; Zenas, on July 1, 1801 and the youngest Oliver, born on December 27, 1809.<sup>2</sup> Less well known than his brother. Leonard Johnson became an active force in the antislavery movement. His home was one of the stations for the “underground railroad” by which fugitive slaves escaped across the country to Canada.<sup>3</sup>

Oliver was born in a log cabin on the slope of what is known as Cow Hill. At the top of the promontory a stream divides as it winds its way down the hillside. One section ultimately finds its way into Lake Champlain and the other to the Connecticut River.<sup>4</sup> As an infant, young Oliver was small and feeble. He had been born prematurely, and there was grave doubt that he would survive. His mother was unable to breast-feed him, so his sister carried him in her arms to a neighbor, Mrs. Lee, who nursed the child.<sup>5</sup> Although he nearly died as an infant, Oliver grew up to become a strong, healthy young

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<sup>2</sup> Watts-Choate Collection, Johnson family genealogy records, Peacham Historical Society Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Bogart, *Peacham, The Story of a Vermont Hill Town*, 220.

<sup>4</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter to his wife, October 8, 1862. Garrison accompanied Johnson home to Peacham for a visit and Johnson described to him the town and certain events of his youth. Johnson acted as a guide for Garrison, showing him all the sights, including the spot where the original log cabin he was born in had been built, but no longer remained standing.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Peacham Historical Society Archives, letter from Oliver Johnson to Lyman Lee dated July 12, 1869. They were boyhood neighbors on Penny Street. Johnson explained in his letter that, “Your mother will remember that I was a very feeble infant, born in advance of the regular time, and that at first it was very doubtful if I would be raised. I probably owe my life to the fact, that as my mother could not give me adequate nourishment, I was often fed from your mother’s breast. I cannot inasmuch remember this myself, but have often mentioned the circumstances, and I suffice it to be true. I began to ‘board round’ at a very early age, my sister carrying me in her arms from house to house to be suckled. There it was that I acquired the strength which enabled me to survive the perils of infancy, and to continue my existence to this day. Don’t you think it is about time that I thanked your mother for her maternal services.”

man. He worked with his father on the farm, where he performed all of the difficult tasks of a farm boy: plowing the fields, flailing wheat, and shelling corn.

From the time it was founded, Peacham was a village that had prospered and grown steadily. Its inhabitants placed great emphasis on religion and education. The Caledonia Grammar School, also known as the Peacham Academy, was chartered in 1795 and was the first institution of its kind in Vermont. Older than any of the colleges in the state, the academy flourished and became a celebrated institution of learning. Admission to the school required that a student be at least eight years old, able to read a sentence intelligently, and give one "exhibition" a year.<sup>6</sup> He could be expelled for blasphemy, forgery, perjury, adultery, or any other violation of the laws. Cursing, tavern tipping, cards, and dice were prohibited. Students had to be in by nine o'clock at night. For Caledonia County residents, tuition was one shilling per year.<sup>7</sup> The Academy's alumni consisted of many distinguished names: Jeremiah Evarts, Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; William Chamberlain, Professor of Languages at Dartmouth College; Hon. Samuel Ingham of Connecticut; Lemuel H. Arnold, Governor of Rhode Island; Thaddeus Stevens, a distinguished lawyer and political leader in the Congress; John Blanchard, a Congressman from Pennsylvania; and James Merrill, an eminent lawyer, to name just a few. When he came of age, young Oliver entered the academy, where he excelled in his studies. Johnson believed that the

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<sup>6</sup> Bogart, *Peacham, The Story of a Vermont Hill Town*, 117-120. Other sources that examine the early history of education in the state are James A. Keene's, *Music and Education in Vermont, 1700-1900*, Macomb, Illinois, Glenbridge Publishing, 1987, and John Charles Huden's, *Development of State School Administration in Vermont*, Montpelier, Vermont Historical Society, 1943.

<sup>7</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens, Nineteenth-Century Egalitarian*, Chapel Hill & London, The University of North Carolina Press, 1997, 3.

Academy exemplified the highest standards in academic training, and as an alumnus he supported the institution all his life. In 1846, he returned to the school as a guest speaker for its Semi-Centennial Celebration. For this special occasion, Johnson composed an ode to the Peacham Academy that he read in front of the huge crowd gathered for the celebration. The sonnet was printed in newspapers across the country, many of which sent representatives to cover the anniversary.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *New York Tribune*, July 2, 1846.      "An Ode, by Oliver Johnson.

Tune - *Auld Lang Syne*

I

When forests crowned these verdant hills,  
 Full fifty years ago,  
 And ringing through these fertile vales  
 Was heard the axman's blow:  
 When Peace and Thrift came hand in hand  
 These woodlands wild among,  
 Above the settler's humble cot  
 A modest Temple sprung.

II

In faith our fathers reared the shrine  
 To Truth and Knowledge given,  
 And lifted high a beacon-light  
 To guide the soul to Heaven!  
 That light, though kindled long ago,  
 Is burning brightly still;  
 Its rays are now in beauty shed  
 O'er valley, plain and hill.

III

The Fount of Knowledge opened here,  
 From purest source supplied,  
 Hath sent afar its healing streams.

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And showered its blessings wide;  
 The dusky Indian of the West  
 Hath felt his soul reclaimed,  
 And e'en to heathen lands its sons  
 The Gospel have proclaimed.

## IV

On this dear spot, in youth's fair morn,  
 While yet our hopes were bright,  
 Wise Teachers sought to guide our feet  
 In paths of love and light;  
 And now we come in manhood's hour  
 To pour our grateful song.  
 And offer up our fervent prayer  
 Where holiest memories throng.

## V

O Father! In this joyful hour  
 Our thanks to Thee we bring,  
 And with united hearts and voice  
 Thy glorious praises sing;  
 Thy love boundless as the sea-  
 Thy mercy ever true-  
 O may the shrine our fathers reared  
 To latest time endure!

## IV

May EDUCATION's holy light  
 Extend on every hand,  
 Till War's foul blot and Slavery's curse  
 Be banished from the land!  
 And O may Freedom's sacred fires  
 On every altar flame,  
 And Temperance, Righteousness and Peace  
 Exalt our Nation's flame!"

Young Oliver received his religious training from his father, but the entire community of Peacham placed a great emphasis on the power of faith in an individual's life. It was almost a disgrace for a citizen of the town not to be a regular attendant at the orthodox Congregational church. Almost all the inhabitants gathered at the "Meeting House" on Sunday mornings. They brought their meals with them and listened to a second sermon in the afternoon and a third in the early evening. As a deacon of the church, Oliver's father often led the congregation in prayer. These gatherings on the Sabbath were also a form of recreation for the town. Between sermons people conversed with their neighbors. They caught up on events, discussed future plans, and generally engaged in social intercourse with their friends. Growing up in this atmosphere, Oliver became a very pious young boy. He studied hard, became very popular, and was viewed as a promising young man.<sup>9</sup>

At the age of 16 Oliver left his father's farm to learn the printing trade. He secured a position at the *Vermont Watchman*, a weekly publication edited by E.P. Walton.<sup>10</sup> Johnson worked hard at his new vocation, and in a short period of time he mastered all the aspects of the printing business. It was at the *Watchman* that he learned

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Peacham, Vermont, Peacham Historical Society Archives. W.D. Vearnimem letter to the *Unitarian*, 1889. This is a testimonial written in Johnson's honor a few months after his death. It is a summary of his life, honoring his achievements. The author was a friend of Johnson's who had followed his career. He began by stating that, "Mr. Johnson was born in Peacham, Vermont, of good old Puritan stock in 1809. He was educated at the Peacham Academy founded in 1795, the first institution of its kind organized in Vermont, and which celebrated that part of New England three-quarters of a century ago. Isaac F. Ridfield, the distinguished judge and law-writer, Wilbur Fisk, the great Methodist orator and theologian, and Thaddeus Stevens, having received their early education there."

<sup>10</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Peacham Historical Society Archives. Also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 77.

how to set type, operate a printing press, write articles, and edit a newspaper. At the center of the controversies surrounding the reform movements of the era, the office of the *Watchman* exposed Johnson to the debates connected with temperance, prison reform, women's rights, religion and slavery. It did not take long before he began to participate in these discussions. Eventually, he helped write articles and in due time he wrote them himself. He would go on to perfect these skills and become one of the most important and influential journalists of the antislavery movement in America. Horace Greeley described Johnson as "one of the greatest editors I have ever known."<sup>11</sup>

Published in Montpelier, the paper reported the local news of the state and also covered the controversies of the many reform movements of the time. The early 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the time of the Second Great Awakening in America. It was a period of immense social change. William Ellery Channing, the New England liberal, summed up the spirit of the age. It was, he observed, "an age of great movements" that had shown, as had no other age, a "tendency and power to exalt a people."<sup>12</sup> As Gilbert Hobbs Barnes states in the *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, "behind these great movements the triumph of Jacksonian democracy, the extension of popular knowledge, and the enlargement of economic opportunity, Channing discerned a common perception of

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<sup>11</sup> Vermont Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, February 18, 1835, 9; Bogart, *Peacham, The Story of a Vermont Hill Town*, 219, 220.

<sup>12</sup> William Ellery Channing, *The Works of William E. Channing*, New York: Published by Lenox Hill Publishing & Distribution Company (Burt Franklin), 1970, 244. Some other good sources that examine the life of Channing are by Jack Mendelsohn, *Channing, the Reluctant Reformer: A Biography*, Boston: Little Brown, 1971, and Arthur Brown, *Always Young for Liberty: A Biography of William Ellery Channing*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1956.

human brotherhood.”<sup>13</sup> Channing went further, stating, “Every age teaches its own lesson. The lesson of this age is that of sympathy with the suffering, and devotion to the progress of the whole human race.”<sup>14</sup> The evangelical crusade that swept across the country had an immense impact, and many were persuaded to accept the progressive views of the period. Johnson embraced this transformation in ideology. Using his strong evangelical beliefs as a foundation, he became an outspoken opponent wherever he viewed injustice. Armed with his faith in God, he believed that he could make a difference and bring about change. Late in Johnson’s life, Henry Ward Beecher described him as “a wheel horse in every humanitarian movement for almost half a century, a man whose philosophy of life was quite simply to love his neighbor as himself.”<sup>15</sup>

These new movements worked a transformation in religion as well, and the dogmas of orthodox Calvinism came under attack. The theology of orthodox Calvinism preached the doctrine of original sin. Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden was passed down to all humanity, so that all people are conceived in sin. Except those who were predestined for salvation, individuals had no choice but to die in their sins and go straight to hell.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps the most notable opponent to orthodox Calvinism was Charles

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<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, New York and Chicago: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Channing, *The Works of William E. Channing*, 160-165. Also Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Paxton Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, New York: Press of the Readers Club, 1942, 205.

<sup>16</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 3-5. There have been numerous studies on the impact that reform Calvinism had on American society. Some of the better works include Leo Hirrel, *Children of Wrath: New School Calvinism and Antebellum Reform*, Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1998; Victor B. Howard,

Grandison Finney. A lawyer practicing in western New York, Finney was ordained a Calvinist minister and entered into an extraordinary career as a revivalist. As a radical, he had contempt for the Calvinist clergy and the concept of predestination: "you'll be damned if you do, and damned if you don't." He was an eloquent speaker with great charisma who kept his audiences spellbound. This great oratorical ability brought him national prominence, and he used his skill to preach a new church doctrine. He spoke of the new spirit moving in the church and combined it with the old Calvinism. Finney concluded that it was the sinner himself who carried out his conversion. "Indeed, if the sinner has a new heart, he must make it himself. Not through some obscure miracle of the Holy Ghost, but by changing the controlling preference of the mind." As a lawyer with little theological training he had no problem reconciling the two. Original sin, Finney believed, was not "some constituted depravity which lies back and is the cause of actual transgressions": it was simply "a deep seated but voluntary...self interest... All sin consists in selfishness; and holiness or virtue, in disinterested benevolence."<sup>17</sup>

The new doctrine Finney preached matched the new movements of the period. It led people to question conditions their forefathers had accepted unconditionally.<sup>18</sup> The

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*Conscience and Slavery: The Evangelistic Calvinist Domestic Missions, 1837-1861*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990; Louis S. Gerteis, *Morality and Utility in American Antislavery Reform*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987.

<sup>17</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844*, 9-11. This quotation is from a sermon by Finney, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, Sermon I; but he quoted it almost word for word from a sermon by Jonathan Edwards. Finney's life and the impression he made on the reform movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been examined extensively. Some of the most current publications are by Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles G. Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1996, and Keith Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer*, Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Bender, *The Antislavery Debate*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992. Bender examined the origins and reasons for the revisionist

new revisionism promised to provide answers to these problems and still allow a person to live a spiritual life. Thousands flocked to the new ministry, and after the great revivalist movement of 1830, which promised to bring about a transformation in American life, their numbers increased to hundreds of thousands. Finney understood the social change that was occurring in America. The new doctrine gave people control over their destiny. They could live a good Christian life and attain salvation. Most important, they could also help others and in so doing create social change in ways that were to have a profound effect on the way northerners viewed slavery. The old orthodox Calvinism could not help redeem the slave. As cries for social changes rose in America, the abolitionist movement began to grow and become a powerful force. Johnson became an outspoken proponent for many of the reform movements, but it was to the abolition of slavery that he dedicated his life.

Working at the *Watchman* placed the young Oliver at the center of the debate. Vermont prided itself on being a "free State—a State whose soil has never been polluted by the tread of the slave-coffle, and whose citizens scorn to bow the neck or bend the knee at the bidding of the Slave Power which has so long ruled the Nation."<sup>19</sup> Slavery in America was based on race. While the people of Vermont were opposed to human

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attitudes of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Some of the interesting essays in the volume are, "The Problems Of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823," by David Brion Davis and "The Relationship Between Capitalism and Humanitarianism," by John Ashworth. Also included is "The AHR (American Historical Review) Debate," by Thomas L. Haskell.

<sup>19</sup> *New York Tribune*, July 2, 1846. Note also Don C. Seitz, *Horace Greeley*, Indianapolis: The Bobb-Merrill Company Publishers, 1926, 136, Greeley described the events he witnessed when the owner of an escaped slave who found work in Vermont tried to reclaim him. The village protested and in the words of one apprentice, "The result was a speedy disappearance of the chattel, and the return of the master, disconsolate and niggerless, to the place whence he came. Our people hated injustice and oppression, and acted as if they couldn't help it."

bondage, they, like most Americans, did not believe in racial equality. Many supported the concept of colonization, and The American Colonization Society was very popular. The society's intent was to send the entire black population back to Africa, as the organization's members could not imagine a biracial society with black and white people living side by side. Those who favored colonization were also opposed to slavery and believed their plan was the most humane solution for those held in bondage. Thus, the *Watchman*, which often expressed this philosophy, reported the success of the individuals who had previously migrated to Liberia and how their colony flourished. It also published reports from the society and argued the feasibility of the scheme.<sup>20</sup> There is no evidence, however, that Johnson ever demonstrated any interest in colonization as a solution to slavery. For him, emancipation was the only answer. To forcibly ship millions of people to an unknown land, where they would face extreme hardships and a large number would not survive, was an inhumane solution not worthy of consideration.

Lyman Beecher, the most outspoken defender of the orthodox faith at this time, was one of the main advocates for colonization. The American Colonization Society was organized in 1816. Its plan was to take immediate steps to transport the black population back to Africa, on a voluntary basis, or any other place Congress might deem suitable. In an attempt to win public support the organization issued pamphlets, petitioned legislatures, and published its own journal, *The African Repository*. Colonizationist literature depicted a society of decadence and misery for the free black person in America. They argued that theirs was the only humane and just solution. As long as they remained in the United States blacks would be exempt from voting, and from the white

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<sup>20</sup> *Vermont Watchman*, October 4, 1825 and June 15, 1830.

man's schools, churches, and social institutions. They contended that in Africa the American black person would have no superior. He could cultivate the fertile soil, proclaim the message of Christianity, and prosper. At the same time, the United States would benefit by the gradual extinction of slavery and assume a more consistent and influential position in the world community as "the great moral and political lighthouse."<sup>21</sup> The colonizationist appeal was aimed at both whites and blacks. It declared that the removal of the black population from the southern landowner enhanced the value of his property. The scheme was very attractive and received considerable support from many leading public figures. Fourteen state legislatures passed resolutions in favor of colonization. Northern blacks, however, were vigorously opposed to African colonization and maintained that their social status could be improved in the country. One month after the organization of the American Colonization Society, over 300 blacks convened at the Bethel Church in Philadelphia repudiating the plan. Free blacks in the North continued to denounce the scheme in published tracts, newspapers, and conventions.<sup>22</sup> Even the successful establishment of a colony in Liberia had little impact on the free black community. Although colonization appealed to most northern whites as the best solution to the race problem, governmental apathy, southern hostility and constant resistance from blacks kept the program from achieving any significant progress.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The American Colonization Society Records, Third Annual Report, Washington, D.C., 1820, 24.

<sup>22</sup> *Freedom's Journal*, May 18, 1827 and June 8, 1827.

<sup>23</sup> Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961, 20-29.

In the 1820s the small abolitionist population was critical of colonization, but did not openly oppose the plan because it appeared that the majority of Americans favored the idea. After 1831, the abolitionist movement vigorously denounced colonization. Opponents of colonization also expressed their views, particularly William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel J. May, and Theodore Weld. Likewise, Benjamin Lundy, whose tabloid the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* was the leading abolitionist publication of the 1820s, opposed colonization, and articles from his paper were also printed in the *Watchman*.<sup>24</sup> Exposing the program as extremely impractical, Lundy stated it would cost annually, “the wealth of Croesus” and that “We might as well bail dry old Ocean with a thimble.”<sup>25</sup>

Johnson was molded by his exposure to these controversies. The most powerful force in his life remained his belief in the orthodox Congregational faith, but he began to believe he could help transform society by using religion as an instrument for change. He described his early feelings as being “engaged in a warfare in which God himself had declared that one should chase a thousand and two put ten thousand to flight.”<sup>26</sup> In 1831, he decided to strike out on his own and moved to Boston, where he established and edited his own newspaper, *Christian Soldier*. The paper was published

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<sup>24</sup> *Vermont Watchman*, July 13, 1830. On a visit to Baltimore, Lundy described the conditions of a young slave about the age of fourteen or fifteen. He was forced to work in a cellar with an iron yoke around his neck. The yoke was attached to a chain that weighted approximately 50 pounds.

<sup>25</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 27. Also see the *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, II, 8, June, 1827. Zachary Macaulay, the editor of the paper, declared that he intended to quote regularly from Lundy’s newspaper, as it was the only American publication that would “serve to throw light on the whole institution” of American slavery.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 452.

bi-monthly and was principally opposed to the doctrines of the Universalists, who believed that anyone, no matter how evil they had been during their earthly lives, could be saved.<sup>27</sup> The driving force behind the paper always remained Johnson's strong religious convictions, but the journal soon broadened its contents to include temperance, the rights of women, treatment of Native Americans, the Peace Movement, and the abolition of slavery.<sup>28</sup> Johnson soon became acquainted with many of the evangelical clergy of Boston, who sanctioned and endorsed his work.<sup>29</sup>

Johnson's acquaintance with William Lloyd Garrison commenced in boyhood. His father Ziba was a subscriber to Garrison's first paper, the *Free Press*, and the humanitarian tone of the paper's editorials awakened a deep interest in the Johnson household. Garrison's appeal increased further after he visited the town and Johnson was introduced to him. While living in Montpelier, Johnson had heard William Lloyd Garrison speak of freeing the slaves and was extremely impressed. Later, Garrison was involved with the publication, *Journal of the Times*, which Johnson began to read eagerly. He even wrote Garrison a letter of encouragement and sympathy, urging him to

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<sup>27</sup> *Christian Soldier*, August 29, 1832, "Universalists' Sentiments Examined." Pointing out the flaw in Universalist thinking, an anonymous writer using the pseudonym Philistes declared, "If 'no sin can go unpunished,' then the gospel, so far as punishment is concerned, is not preferable to the law." The banner for each edition of the paper read, "If The Righteous Scarcely Be Saved, Where Shall The Ungodly And The Sinner Appear."

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, September 26, 1832; November 7, 1832; December 5, 1832; December 19, 1832; January 2, 1833, "Another Temperance House." "We learn from the following Circular, that another temperance house, in addition to the one we mentioned some time ago, has recently opened in the city."

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 76. Johnson described some of his own encounters stating, "For further illustration of the spirit of the times, I may perhaps be pardoned for reciting some incidents in my own experience."

continue his labors against slavery and assuring him that he could do great things.<sup>30</sup> In late 1831, Garrison moved to Boston where he began publication of the *Liberator* in an office located on the third story of the building then known as Merchants' Hall. A short time earlier, Johnson had moved into the same building on the second floor. It was from this location that he planned to start the publication of the *Christian Soldier*. Both men lived and worked in a single room. Johnson described Garrison's living quarters as a "small chamber, dark, unfurnished and mean. The dingy walls; bespattered with printer's ink; the press standing in one corner; the composing stands opposite; the long editorial and mailing table, covered with newspapers; the bed of the editor and publisher on the floor."<sup>31</sup>

William Lloyd Garrison was destined to become one of the most prominent individuals in the abolitionist movement in America. He created the *Liberator*, the most widely read antislavery journal in the country, and edited it for 35 years. The driving force behind the formation of a national antislavery organization, he became one of the most well known abolitionists in the country. Indeed, most Americans equated abolitionism with Garrisonism.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Peacham Historical Society Archives. Also see Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, Introduction, XVII, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, Introduction, XVII, 50, 51.

<sup>32</sup> John L. Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, Boston & Toronto: Little Brown and Company, 1963. Although this work has been in print for thirty-five years, it is the most complete biography ever written about Garrison. Thomas gives a comprehensive account of Garrison's life, as well as his abolitionist activities. More current works on Garrison include Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998; Doris Faber, *I Will Be Heard: The Life of William Lloyd Garrison*, New York: Lathrop, Lee and Shepard, 1970; Jules Archer, *Angry Abolitionist: William Lloyd Garrison*, New York: J. Messner, 1968.

Johnson was a frequent visitor from the moment Garrison became his neighbor, and they soon became close friends. Johnson admired Garrison's "courage, enthusiasm and devotion, so unlike anything I had ever witnessed before."<sup>33</sup> It was a friendship that lasted throughout their lives. Their relationship also deepened Johnson's interest in the antislavery movement, and it was not long before Johnson moved his own office into a room adjoining Garrison's. For the next year and a half the *Christian Soldier* was printed on the *Liberator* press, the first number being issued on the very day that Garrison began the publication of the *Liberator*.<sup>34</sup> Because Johnson sympathized with Garrison's efforts, it was not uncommon for Garrison's views to appear in the *Christian Soldier*.<sup>35</sup> Many of the eminent Doctors of Divinity who sponsored the *Christian Soldier* were not abolitionists, however, and Johnson was increasingly pressured to disassociate himself from Garrison. At first he ignored these suggestions, never believing they "would attempt to put a gag in my mouth." One day Johnson received a letter from one of the most prominent pastors in Boston, stating that "if the *Christian Soldier* did not stop its references to the slavery question, and cease to manifest its sympathy for Mr. Garrison and his movements, I must prepare myself for a withdrawal of the public endorsement which he and others had given to my paper."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Louis Ruchames, *The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963, 18. See also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 52.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, 130. Also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 76.

<sup>35</sup> *Christian Soldier*, August 20, 1832. Note also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 76.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 76, 77. Johnson viewed this threat as the first real challenge to his integrity and dedication as a reformer.

Johnson had come to a crossroad in his life. The threat posed by these leading members of the city caused him to make a decision. Would he allow himself to be intimidated by these warnings or would he hold firm to his convictions, and face the consequences? He looked to his faith for guidance. As he recalled later in life, "Here was a temptation which, if I had yielded to it, would have been the beginning of a demoralization that might have made me a coward and a poltroon for life. My cheeks burned with indignation and shame, and after taking time for reflection, I received strength from God to say: Get thee behind me, Satan; I will not barter my manhood for anything that man can give or withhold." Johnson replied, telling the eminent pastor that he would not change his course, and if he and his associates chose to deny him the further use of their names, he would "take the liberty of letting the public know their precise reason for executing the threat conveyed in his note."<sup>37</sup>

The threat was never withdrawn, nor was it ever acted upon. The *Liberator* was not yet a year old and was still a struggling publication. Furthermore, the religious leaders of Boston were unclear what direction the public sympathies would take. For Oliver Johnson, however, there was no indecision. He had been tested and had not faltered. Johnson had always believed that slavery was evil, and now he was prepared to dedicate his life towards its eradication. He still remained a reformer supporting many other causes, but of all the problems facing the country Johnson believed that slavery was the worst. At the age of 22 he became an abolitionist, dedicated to the immediate emancipation of all slaves.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 77.

In the summer of 1832, Johnson returned home and visited Montpelier, the capital of Vermont. The antislavery cause was still in its infancy, and the movement was sparsely organized. He secured the Congregational Church for the purpose of an antislavery lecture, “and to do what I could in my first effort at public speaking to remove popular prejudices and misconceptions.”<sup>38</sup> As this was his first solo appearance in front of an audience, he wrote out every word of the lecture in advance. Reflecting upon the experience, he recalled, “I knew I could not trust myself to make an extempore address.”<sup>39</sup> The discourse opened with, “Slavery has ever been regarded by the people of New England as an evil of no ordinary magnitude.” It was strong speech embellished with quotations from Cowper.<sup>40</sup> Stating that slavery was wrong and that immediate emancipation was the right of every slave and the duty of every master, he condemned colonization as delusive and wicked. The argument contained the basic antislavery rhetoric of the time, and the address was well received in Montpelier. Having overcome

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<sup>38</sup> Bogart, *Peacham. The Story of a Vermont Hill Town*, 219; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 77. Johnson was a familiar figure to the people of Montpelier. Five years earlier he had made a public profession of religion in this very same church.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 78. Johnson worked for several days preparing this lecture. He openly admits that it contained only “a meager store of information.”

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. Johnson quoted some well known lines of Cowper: “I would not have a slave to till my ground,

To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,  
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth,  
That sinews bought and sold have ever earned.  
No! dear as freedom is, and in my heart's  
Just estimation prized above all price,  
I had much rather be myself the slave,  
And wear the bonds, than fasten them on him.”

the hurdle of his first public speaking engagement, he returned to Boston believing the speech dull and uninspiring, but a minor personal success. He could not have imagined at this time that this first lecture would propel him to the forefront of the abolitionist movement.

On his way back to Boston, Johnson made a stop at Concord, New Hampshire, where he met some friends. Feeling more confident after his experience in Montpelier, he attempted to secure the fashionable Congregational Church to repeat his address. Unable to acquire the premises for his purpose, he settled for the newer but smaller Methodist church, where he delivered his address to a large audience and immediately after returned to Boston. As soon as he arrived he received a copy of *The New Hampshire Patriot*, a well known Democratic newspaper founded by Isaac Hill, with an article written by Cyrus Barton entitled, "Look out for the Knave." The piece characterized Johnson's address as a "vilification of the whole South, especially the Southern members of Congress," and as "an indelicate and disgusting tirade, that shocked the ears of our citizens," as "civilized people." The editor admitted he did not hear the lecture but went on to say that, "it seemed to be" Johnson's "object to induce the people of New England to march, sword in hand, to the South, and set the slaves at liberty. Instead of being listened to by people of delicate and refined feelings, even by respectable females, as was the case in this town, he ought to be taken up as a vagabond and sent to the workhouse."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *The New Hampshire Patriot*, July 2, 1832. Note also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 79. Johnson considered the last statement by Cyrus Barton as flattering. Even though Hill had sued him, the charges were never proven, and Johnson considered

The article came as quite a shock to Johnson, for he had explicitly declared that “the slaves were to be emancipated by the voluntary action of their masters themselves, and that any attempt to promote an insurrection among them would be an act of wickedness revolting to every Christian heart, and a direct violation of the teachings of Christ.” The article was read by a friend of Johnson’s, David Lee Child, an attorney and the editor of *The Massachusetts Journal*, to whom Johnson gave a complete copy of the item for review. Child convinced Johnson to file suit for libel. Johnson had no money to pay for an attorney, and, realizing it would be extremely difficult to sue Isaac Hill successfully in New Hampshire, Child accepted the entire responsibility for the costs. Furthermore, Hill had recently transferred the newspaper to his brother, Horatio. Knowing that Horatio Hill frequently visited Boston on business, Child prepared the necessary suit papers and waited until the spring of 1833, when he succeeded in having Hill served with the legal papers. Hill retained the services of Andrew Dunlap, Esq., the former United States District Attorney for Boston, who advised Hill to settle the matter, as Hill would receive no mercy from a Massachusetts jury.

Child very much wanted the case to go to trial. It was not the financial restitution that concerned him as much as the promotion a public trial would give to the antislavery movement. Realizing the danger posed in open court, Hill accepted the advice of his counsel. He authorized Dunlap to extend a sum of \$50 and make a retraction of the attack on Johnson, who felt that was satisfactory. Child, who believed he had taken the matter as far as he could, viewed the settlement as a victory and accepted the offer.<sup>42</sup> On

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the attack a sign that his address had made an impact and was not nearly as somber as he originally believed.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 81.

April 15, 1833, the retraction appeared in *The New Hampshire Patriot* under the editorial head “*amende honorable*.”<sup>43</sup> Johnson received one fifth of the settlement, or \$10 as his share. This was not only the first but also the last time he was ever involved as a plaintiff in a law suit.

The address, along with the publicity of the law suit, propelled Johnson into the limelight of the antislavery movement and thrust upon him a notoriety that only a few abolitionists had attained at this time. Accepting the responsibility that came with being a public figure, he viewed it as his Christian duty to dedicate all his energy to securing the immediate and unconditional freedom of the people being held in bondage. To this end he devoted all his time, money and labors. Johnson seemed to enjoy being in the public eye, but he did not let it overshadow any shortcomings he may have felt about his own qualifications. He knew the goal he had set for himself would not be any easy one to obtain. He certainly had doubts about his own abilities to complete the task he had set for himself, but his previous success, plus the energy that drives youth, seems to have given him the confidence needed to move forward.

The abolitionist movement was at least in part a response to the increased economic importance of slavery, brought about by the enormous profits from the cotton trade. The invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1793 revolutionized the

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<sup>43</sup> *The New Hampshire Patriot*, April 15, 1833. “Explanation. – We published in this paper on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July last an editorial article reflecting with severity upon Mr. Oliver Johnson, of Boston, Editor of *Christian Soldier*, and upon his address in relation to slavery, previously delivered in this town. We now admit and cheerfully acknowledge that the harsh epithets and heavy charges contained in said article were unfounded, being hastily prepared and published on the mistaken information of others; that we know nothing against the reputation of Mr. Johnson, and that while we do not embrace his views on the subject of slavery, we regret our statements touching his character and discourse.  
Horatio Hill.

Southern economy. It performed the exhausting task of removing seeds from the cotton, and a single operator could clean as much cotton in a few hours as a group of workers previously needed a whole day to do. Towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, tobacco production had started to decline, and the institution of slavery appeared to be dwindling. Within a decade of the introduction of the cotton gin, the production of cotton had expanded across the South, taking the place of tobacco and firmly entrenching slavery in the Southern economy.<sup>44</sup>

With the rise of abolitionist activity, Southern slaveholders became guarded about what they felt to be their legal rights. As the issue increased in intensity, the subject for southerners became more frightening.<sup>45</sup> For the many antislavery leaders who came from the religious community, the problem of slavery was strictly a moral issue. The way to eliminate slavery, abolitionists argued, was to show the Southern slaveholder that slavery was wrong, that it was a sin.<sup>46</sup> Bondage was contradictory to the fundamental teachings of Christianity, especially the Golden Rule. Once the slaveholder was made to see this, they reasoned, he would voluntarily free his slaves. The great benevolent societies formed under the auspices of the different religious denominations

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Cyrus Barton.”

<sup>44</sup> James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, London, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998, 225, 226.

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution*, New York: Vintage Books, Division of Random House, 1956. Stampp argues that slavery was above all a profitable labor system and remained so right up until the Civil War. For southerners to simply grant immediate emancipation, as the abolitionists demanded, would have resolved in financial ruin for most plantation owners. Therefore, the abolitionist crusade forced the South into a defensive position on slavery and increased hostility between the free Northern states and the slaveholding South.

<sup>46</sup> Glen Jeansonne, “Southern Baptist Attitudes Toward Slavery, 1845-1861,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LV (Winter 1971), 510-520.

as a means of extending Christianity were awakening the sensibilities of the churches, which included the Bible, tract, missionary, and temperance associations. Dr. Lyman Beecher, the head of the evangelical clergy in New England, advocated support for these associations. He was also one of the leading proponents of colonization. Like many Americans, Beecher feared a free black population and attempted to reconcile both colonization and abolition. Endeavoring to form a union between the abolitionists and colonizationists, Beecher posed the question, "Are colonization and abolition opposed to each other after all? The good men of both parties have the good of the slave...at heart. Now then is not a union among men desirable? The door of immediate and unconditional emancipation is closed and barred. What shall we do, philanthropists? Run from Dan to Beersheba and rail against the slaveholder, taking care, however, to keep clear of his territories? Let the abolitionist press abolition, not seek to destroy colonization, and the colonizationist, let him press still harder colonization. Oh yes. Union, this blessed union of all good! The gates of Hell even shall never prevail against it."<sup>47</sup>

Most of the youthful individuals who embraced the abolitionist cause believed in the goodness of the benevolent societies as well. They differed, however, in that they were suspicious of accepted dogma and often intolerant of the compromises inherent in the Christian fellowship of these societies. Consequently, the majority of abolitionists had only a limited involvement with these associations.<sup>48</sup> Refusing to accept colonization

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<sup>47</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 44, 45.

<sup>48</sup> Lawrence Jacob Friedman, *Gregarious Saints, Self and Community in Antebellum America, 1830-1870*, New Rochelle, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 22. See also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 82, 83. Other sources that examine the relationship between abolitionists and the benevolent society's include Louis Filler's, *Abolition and Social Justice in the Era of Reform*, New York: Harper & Row, 1972, and Gerald Sorin's, *Abolitionism: A New Perspective*, New York: Praeger, 1972.

as an alternative, they realized they would receive only a limited amount of support from the existing societies. What was needed was numerous antislavery organizations devoted exclusively to the abolition of slavery.

During the early 1830s, abolitionists began to forge small groups. Most were located in Massachusetts, but others appeared in various parts of the northeast, such as Concord, New Hampshire, Salem, Ohio, and Portland, Maine. The antislavery cause also received support from the Quaker community in Pennsylvania. The most influential of these early groups became known as the "Boston Clique," of which the most powerful member was William Lloyd Garrison, who set the editorial policy of the movement in his publication, the *Liberator*. Johnson was one of the first members to be considered part of the Clique. Others included Samuel Sewall and Ellis Gray Loring, two wealthy Boston lawyers, and Samuel J. May, a Unitarian Minister from Brooklyn, New York. The Clique also included Nathaniel Peabody Rogers, a Dartmouth graduate and editor of the *Herald of Freedom*, Parker Pillsbury, destined to become the most notorious of the "Come Outers," those who believed that the churches were incorrigibly corrupt and that the abolitionists were morally obligated to "come out" from them. Others were Wendell Phillips, a Boston Brahmin, son of the first mayor of Boston, a Harvard graduate, and, at the time of his joining the abolitionist movement, a member of the Boston bar, as well as Edmund Quincy, an editor of several antislavery journals. From its inception the group accepted women on an equal basis in all activities. Both Maria Weston Chapman, an active feminist, and Lydia Maria Child, one of the few female editors, were considered important members.

The Clique functioned as an extension of a family, with the members devoted to each other as well as the cause. Indeed, Garrison considered the Clique and his family as one. Johnson commented that the Clique intimates and Garrison's family were overlapping units: "He [Garrison] was never so happy as when surrounded by his wife and children and a few favored guests."<sup>49</sup> At first, they dedicated their efforts to help fund the *Liberator*, often finding it the only place to get their articles printed, but it soon became evident that more was needed. If they could not depend on the established organizations of the religious societies for support, they would have to form their own association.

Free blacks in the North also participated in the antislavery movement from the beginning. Although technically free, blacks in the North were ostracized from participating equally in society because of racial prejudice. Free blacks held a different perspective on slavery that often separated them from white abolitionists. Whites viewed slavery as an absolute evil. It was the opposite of freedom. Once the institution was abolished, blacks would be free. Northern blacks defined the problem differently. They were not slaves but their lives were restricted. Certain states defined different rights and privileges for blacks and whites. Most states retained property qualifications for black voters, and wherever blacks were allowed to participate in social activities they felt the sting of racial prejudice. These differences generated a relationship of conflict as well as cooperation. Besides attacking slavery free blacks argued for education, political equality and economic advancement. Many white abolitionists, such as Johnson agreed with their black colleagues. Other white abolitionists who also agreed that racial

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<sup>49</sup> Friedman, *Gregarious Saints, Self and Community in Antebellum America, 1830-1870*, 44-46, 50.

prejudice obstructed the way to total freedom, also believed that by including these ideas in the antislavery crusade hampered the efforts to end slavery.

As a consequence blacks formed their own organizations. As early as 1827 the first black newspaper began publication in New York City. *Freedom's Journal* was edited jointly by John Russwurm, a Bowdoin College graduate and Samuel E. Cornish, a Presbyterian clergyman. The paper was established to serve blacks throughout the North, and attempted to change the white image of blacks.<sup>50</sup> Other journals would follow, such as the *Colored American* owned by Philip A. Bell, who previously worked for William Lloyd Garrison as an agent in New York for the *Liberator*, and edited by Samuel E. Cornish. One of the more important newspapers created was the *North Star*, a Frederick Douglass publication. By the 1830s the free black population was mostly centered in urban areas throughout the North. Cities such as New York, Philadelphia and Boston had the highest concentration. Blacks established lodges, benevolent societies, and an array of mutual aid and fraternal organizations that focused on the problems of the black community. Organizations like the Free African Society established by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones in Philadelphia in 1787 had grown considerably in size and were expanding. In New York City and elsewhere the city's African Free Schools run by the New York Manumission Society encouraged education for blacks. No institution, however, was more central than the church. Many black leaders came from the business sector and their financial contributions were paramount, but the church became the center of strength for the black community. The African Episcopal Church and the Bethel

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<sup>50</sup> Bella Gross, "Freedom's Journal and the Rights of All," *Journal of Negro History*, XVII (July 1932), 241-286. This is an excellent account of the problems and successes that the first black newspaper encountered.

African Methodist Church, both founded in 1794 soon expanded with branches in New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. In New York, blacks refused to accept second-class status in white churches and formed the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Like its Philadelphia counterpart it also generated additional congregations. In 1839 Frederick Douglass became a licensed preacher for the church. Like many black leaders Douglass combined a mixture of faith and agitation in his struggle against slavery and racism. As a black abolitionist editor, reformer, and spiritual leader he had to balance several different roles.<sup>51</sup> These secular benevolent societies together with the church, worked both within and separately from white organizations.

As the antislavery movement began to grow blacks were early financial backers of the antislavery press and performed important functions in the new societies that developed. Yet they were never prominent as officers or as decision-makers. Some rejected white abolitionism because of its limitations and prejudices, while others realigned their loyalties as the movement transformed. For the most part, however, black abolitionists remained unsatisfied with the antislavery movement. Blacks did participate in the 1830s in the formation of national, regional and state societies. They presented resolutions, served on committees, and offered prayers for benediction. In the early 1830s they were a crucial means of financial support, but they always played a limited role in the decision making process of the organizations. Officers of the new emerging societies were overwhelmingly white, with only an occasional token black among them. When the national organization was formed in 1833 only five blacks were elected to its 74 member Board of Managers. Part of the problem was that white's believed that blacks

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<sup>51</sup> David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass' Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee*, Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1989, 1-25.

were better fitted for carrying out policy than making it. Many white abolitionists believed that blacks could best serve the cause as agents in the field. Blacks were often taken on in subservient positions in antislavery offices, but they were never in charge. White abolitionists engaged in factional disputes over the relationship of the movement to organized religion and other reform goals, while blacks were concerned with improving their economic positions and struggling against racism. This left little room for independent black spokesmen to voice their opinions against the highly ideological theories of most white abolitionists. In short, the antislavery crusade in America and its various organizations failed to attract and use the enormous amount of black talent that was available. Blacks never played key roles at the national level and most became disenchanted with white abolitionism. This failure forced many blacks to either opt out of the movement or only support it half-heartedly. Instead they preferred to support church sponsored antislavery organizations and other benevolent groups much more than the antislavery societies. As such, in the 30 years prior to the Civil War, blacks developed other separate institutions with similar goals. These associations attempted to change their condition by shaping their own institutions such as the press, schools, churches, businesses, and even antislavery societies. They also understood that because whites were the numerical majority and exercised economic and political power that they still had to attempt to try and work with them as well.<sup>52</sup>

It was under this backdrop that on November 13, 1831, 15 men assembled in the office of Samuel J. Sewall, on State Street. Of those present, Garrison was the most

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<sup>52</sup> Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Black's Search for Freedom, 1830-1861*, Atheneum, New York: Studies In American Negro Life, 1974, 1, 3, 8, 12, 17-29, 68-73, 75-98. This is an excellent account of black organizations and leadership in antebellum America.

dominant figure and chaired the meeting. He began by explaining what the abolitionists of Great Britain had accomplished under the leadership of Elizabeth Heyrick. They had based their movement on the principles of immediate, as distinct from gradual, emancipation. For Garrison, “the gradual emancipation of slavery in the West Indies was not a parliamentary policy urged in vain upon the West Indian legislatures; it was, as many British agitators argued after 1828, simply theory without sound logic, a wicked compromise with the natural right of man to possess his body. It was therefore bound to fail, Garrison concluded, whether tried in Pennsylvania, Georgia, or the islands of the sea.”<sup>53</sup> Garrison wanted societies formed in America upon this same principle. He defined immediate emancipation as meaning the release of all slaves by their masters without any delay. It was to be done voluntarily and not completed at intervals over a period of time. Anything less than immediate emancipation was unacceptable.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, II, 8, June 1827. The editor of the paper was Zachary Macauley, who often quoted from Benjamin Lundy’s, *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, which is where he secured this Garrison quote. Likewise Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 42.

<sup>54</sup> David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 168-226. Davis gives a detailed account of the British antislavery movement, and how it altered its ideology from gradual to immediate emancipation. He also explained the impact that the British philosophy had on Americans, especially after emancipation was granted in the West Indies. Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 83. See also Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 29-37. The British antislavery movement emerged in 1825 and began by advocating gradual emancipation throughout the dominion with no success whatsoever. By the end of the decade British abolitionists had transformed their movement into one of immediate emancipation. The entire question came to the forefront during a great debate in Parliament in July, 1830. The debate brought the British agitation to America, where the proceedings were published in newspapers across the country. An important distinction between the British crusade and the movement in America was that Parliament was sovereign over the entire empire. In America, slavery was based on states rights. It took a long time before many American abolitionists realized the difference. Also Louis Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, New York: Harper & Row, 1960, 50.

Johnson recalled that “every man present admitted the duty and safety of setting the slaves free at once; but six of the number doubted the wisdom of incorporating that principle into the constitution of the society, believing that it would excite popular prejudice, and thus tend to defeat the object in view.”<sup>55</sup> They thought it would be better to leave the question of immediate emancipation open for the present, until the public became more informed on the subject, and that membership should be granted to gradualists as well as immediatists. They did not disagree that anyone who retained a human being in bondage was guilty of a grievous sin, but they doubted the wisdom of stating it in the constitution of the society, as they thought it would prevent individuals whose cooperation was desired and needed from joining. Garrison refused to compromise on the principle of immediatism, no matter how unpopular it was with the general public. The meeting ended with a vote; nine were in favor of organizing upon his plan, and six were opposed.

Another meeting was held at the same place on December 16, 1831. This time only ten individuals were present. A committee of five members was appointed to draft a constitution for an antislavery society. Johnson was one of the five. They were to complete the draft of the constitution and meet again on January 1, 1832.<sup>56</sup> The next

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<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 84. Note also Samuel J. May, *Recollections of the Anti-Slavery Conflict*, New York: Arno Press, 1968, 31. There is some discrepancy as to the unanimous agreement of the people present, as May stated only nine of the number were believers in immediate emancipation.

<sup>56</sup> *Liberator*, February 18, 1832. The entire constitution including the preamble was first published in this edition of the paper. See also Ruchames, *The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings*, 32-35, where the constitution is printed in its entirety, although the preamble is not included. The five members of the committee besides Johnson included David Lee Child, Samuel E. Sewall, William Lloyd Garrison, and Ellis Gray Loring, and are listed in Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 84.

meeting saw the addition of five new members to the group.<sup>57</sup> The body of the constitution was adopted, but the preamble was referred for revision. The meeting was adjourned until January 6, 1832, when the group met at the schoolroom at the African Baptist Church, on Belknap Street. The meeting occurred during a terrible winter storm, but when it concluded, the New England Anti-Slavery Society had been established. A fierce northeast storm, which combined snow, rain, and hail, roared through the city with a vehemence, and the streets were full of slush. It was dark also, for the city of Boston in those days did not light the streets on “Nigger Hill.” It appeared as if nature was glaring down angrily upon the new effort to abolish slavery. But this did not dampen the spirits of the members of the little company. Indeed, the circumstances seemed only to increase their commitment. They believed that their cause was righteous and God and truth were on their side, and they would not let a small thing like the weather discourage them. On that gloomy night, and in the face of public opinion much harsher than the raging blizzard that beat upon the windows of the schoolroom, they laid the foundations for an organized movement against American slavery.

David Lee Child, editor of *The Massachusetts Journal*, presided over the meeting. The committee on the preamble made its report. The preamble, drawn up by William J. Snelling, called for the “immediate freedom” of those held in bondage. It also declared that the organization would not operate “by other than peaceful and lawful means, and that we will give no countenance to violence or insurrection.”<sup>58</sup> Everyone

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<sup>57</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 84. The five new members were Alonzo Lewis (also known as “Lynn Bard”), William J. Snelling, Dr. Abner Phelps, Reverend Abijah Blanchard and Dr. Gamaliel Bradford.

<sup>58</sup> New England Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, 1832. The entire preamble read; “ We the undersigned, hold that every person, of full age and sane mind,

present agreed to the principles of non-violence. The members were attacking slavery in the name of God, Christ, and the Bible. Slavery was a moral issue and was contradictory to the fundamental teachings of Christianity. A great deal of discussion was devoted to the subject of immediatism, as several members doubted the wisdom of establishing the new organization on such a foundation. The majority, however, adopted the preamble, and the constitution was presented for signatures. Of those present, 12 signed.<sup>59</sup> Johnson was the youngest of the original members, all of whom were white males. The New England Anti-Slavery Society became the first association in America dedicated to the immediate abolition of slavery.

The new society elected a Quaker, Arnold Buffum, as its first President. William Lloyd Garrison was appointed Corresponding Secretary, and Johnson was selected as a Counselor.<sup>60</sup> As such, Johnson was to help coordinate all the activities of the society and to write antislavery literature. Within the next few years the New

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has a right to immediate freedom from personal bondage of whatsoever kind, unless imposed by the sentence of law for the commission of some crime. We hold that man can not, consistently with reason, religion and the eternal and immutable principles of justice, be the property of man. We hold that whoever retains his fellow-man in bondage is guilty of a grievous wrong. We hold that mere difference of complexion is no reason why any man should be deprived of any of his natural rights, or subjected to any political disability. While we advance these opinions as the principles on which we intend to act, we declare that we will not operate on the existing relations of society by other than peaceful and lawful means, and that we will give no countenance to violence and insurrection.”

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 86. Among those who opposed immediatism and refused to sign were David Lee Child, Samuel E. Sewall and Ellis Gray Loring. All three, however, did join the society a short time afterwards. For a copy of the entire preamble and Constitution see the New England Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, 1832. The twelve original members included William Lloyd Garrison, Oliver Johnson, Robert B. Hall, Arnold Buffum, William J. Snelling, John E. Fuller, Moses Thacher, Joshua Coffin, Stillman B. Newcomb, Benjamin C. Bacon, Isaac Knapp and Henry K. Stockton.

<sup>60</sup> *Liberator*, March 10, 1832; June 16, 1832.

England Anti-Slavery Society became the parent organization for numerous other affiliated antislavery associations. At its inception, however, it was a small organization struggling against the powerful benevolent associations, such as the Colonization Society, which considered the new group “a small association of nobodies” who were “men with more blood than brains,” and led by Arnold Buffum, “the Quaker hatter”<sup>61</sup>

Johnson admitted that these attacks had an effect on public opinion, but they never swayed him. Believing the cause was righteous and that it was his Christian duty to persevere, he found tremendous strength in his faith and compared the 12 original members of the society to the 12 disciples of Christ. As they left the African Baptist Church on that stormy night, Garrison remarked to him. “We have met to-night in this obscure school-house, our numbers are few and our influence limited; but, mark my prediction. Faneuil Hall shall ere long echo with the principles we have set forth.”<sup>62</sup> As Johnson and the other members of the newly created organization departed and went their

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<sup>61</sup> *Liberator*, February 23, 1833. “ARNOLD BUFFUM-‘The HATTER’ AND REV. J.N. DANFORTH. Must I record it? Well then, here it is!- “*The Agent of the New England Anti-Slavery Society is-A HATTER!*” What a Hatter, and he presume to know any thing about the rights of man? Monstrous absurdity! He undertake to put his *felt* upon our *blockheads*? We’ll teach him better than all that. He bring great men, like us, into his *hot water*? That will never do. He ought to be bound with all the bits of his old broken *bow-strings*, and thrown into his own *dye-kettle* till he is black enough to be colonized, and then, to complete the climax of his punishment, be sent to Liberia.” Cited also in Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 87.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 87, 88. In regard to those who took it upon themselves to attack the new society, Johnson says they forgot the words of Paul; “The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men....Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

separate ways on that stormy night, none of them realized how true Garrison's prediction would become. In the struggle that ensued, Garrison's words would echo in their minds.

Johnson, like most reformers of this period, was involved in other progressive movements, some of which would often overlap with the antislavery cause, but the abolitionist crusade was the dominant struggle in his life. Johnson believed Garrison's prediction and forever remained faithful to the cause. He was, however, not nearly as naïve as the young man who left the hills of Vermont only a few years earlier. He now realized that the goal he had set for himself was not any easy one. Johnson understood that to change the institutional structure of any society was an enormous task, and it would mean a great personal sacrifice on his part. Emotions in youth often get the better of rational thinking, and Johnson was still a young man. He certainly felt passionately about the slavery issue, but his decision to dedicate his life to the abolition of slavery seems to have been a rational one that he carefully thought out. Johnson found strength in his belief in God and that the cause was just. During the course of his life he would be involved in many controversial issues, but he rarely acted on impulse. He was an educated and intelligent man who understood that his actions had consequences, and that he had to accept the responsibility of his actions. This was true on that tumultuous night he left the African Baptist Church, and remained so during the course of his life.

## Chapter 2

### National Organization

In Boston, on September 8, 1832, Oliver Johnson married Mary Anne White, daughter of Reverend Broughton White of Putney, Vermont.<sup>1</sup> Born on August 24, 1808, in Westmoreland, New Hampshire, she seemed to be an excellent companion for Johnson as they had many common interests. They had no children, and the marriage ended with her death at the age of 63 on June 8, 1872. Mary Anne Johnson was a reformer in her own right. She was one of the organizers of, and principal speakers at the first series of women's rights conventions ever held, and she lectured on anatomy and physiology to audiences composed exclusively of women. Active in prison reform, she was employed for a time as the matron of the women's prison at Sing Sing. She participated vigorously in the peace movements of the era and was an incessant toiler for the emancipation of the slave. Later on in life, Mary Anne claimed to have clairvoyant powers, and reported to her husband and close friends visions she had received about events that were to take place in the future. Many of these dreams involved abolitionists, but it appears that Johnson and the majority of the antislavery corps never completely accepted these powers that Mary Anne declared she possessed. As a devoted abolitionist herself, she not only supported Johnson's work, but also actively participated in the antislavery struggle.

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<sup>1</sup> Watts-Choate Collection, Johnson family genealogy records, Peacham, Vermont, Peacham Historical Society Archives.

Mary Anne was not only recognized as the wife of Oliver Johnson, but as an outspoken and convincing reformer, whose views were respected.<sup>2</sup>

With Mary Anne at his side Oliver immersed himself in the activities of the new organization. At first the *Liberator* was the publication that reported the society's actions. Within a short period of time, however, the society began publishing its own journal, *The Abolitionist*. The tabloid was produced under the editorial supervision of a committee of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, and Johnson's talents as a writer and editor contributed greatly to the success of the paper, which advocated the immediate emancipation of all those held in bondage.<sup>3</sup> Both Garrison and Johnson viewed colonization as racist, and the paper argued vigorously against the philosophy. The money needed to transport the entire black population to Africa was an impossible sum to raise. Additionally, the plan was considered a racist answer to the problem of slavery because those who argued in favor of colonization did not want a free black population integrated into American society.<sup>4</sup> The journal printed articles and letters by various

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<sup>2</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 23, 1872. *In Memoriam*, obituary of Mary Anne White.

<sup>3</sup> *The Abolitionist*, January, 1833; February, 1833; March, 1833. See also the *Liberator*, November 26, 1831; February 18, 1832; March 10, 1832; June 16, 1832; December 8, 1832; January 5, 1833; January 26, 1833.

<sup>4</sup> Early Lee Fox, *The American Colonization Society, 1817-1840*, New York: AMS Press, 1971. Fox gives an excellent account of the origins of the society and its goals. He also examines the reasons for the failure of the movement. See also Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, 232, 235, 244, 252-257, 272, 273, 277, 278. Several other excellent sources that examine colonization are by Charles Spurgeon Johnson, *Bitter Canaan: A History of the Negro Republic*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1987; Kwando Mbiassa Kinshasa, *Emigration vs. Assimilation: The Debate in the African American Press, 1827-1861*, Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland Publishing, 1988; Tom W. Shick, *Behold the Promised Land: A History of Afro-American Settler Society in Nineteenth Century Liberia*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980; Archibald Alexander, *A History of Colonization on the Western Coast of Africa*, New York: Negro University Press, 1969; William H. Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America*, Madison: State Historical

abolitionists from across the country and reported the minutes and the resolutions of the society's meetings. Most important, it helped make the New England Anti-slavery Society the center for abolitionist agitation in the country.

In a very short time Johnson began to expand his role within the society. In March 1832, he was appointed to the Committee on Trades.<sup>5</sup> His responsibilities increased again in February 1833, when he became the Recording Secretary.<sup>6</sup> Actively participating in all meetings of the organization, he voiced his opinion on various resolutions and often submitted proposals of his own. At the annual meeting of the society held at Boylston Hall in Boston on Wednesday, January 9, 1833, William Lloyd Garrison read the annual report of the managers, which explained the society's objectives and vindicated its principles against those who had attacked it. Garrison recalled the humble origins of the organization, noted the progress which had been made, and expressed pride in the increased membership. The report strenuously supported the necessity of immediate emancipation and exposed the defects in the idea of colonization. Garrison then included in the report the resolution to continue the struggle based on the original constitution of the society. A motion made to accept the report was enthusiastically seconded by Johnson and passed.<sup>7</sup> At the quarterly meeting of the

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Society of Wisconsin, 1963. For a more contemporary view of the debate see the periodical published by the American Colonization Society entitled, "The African Repository and Colonial Journal." *American Colonization Society*, Volume I, No. 1 (March 1825), Volume 26, No. 8 (August 1850).

<sup>5</sup> *Liberator*, March 10, 1832.

<sup>6</sup> *The Abolitionist*, February, 1833.

<sup>7</sup> New England Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, 1832; *The Abolitionist*, February, 1832. A synopsis of the annual meeting was reported in the paper, including excerpts of various speeches. Also reported was the upcoming schedule of events, but the real purpose of the meeting was to solidify the basic principles that the

society held at the Representatives Hall, in the State House, on Monday, May 26, 1833. Johnson introduced a resolution further emphasizing the doctrine of immediate emancipation. He then delivered a speech to the society in support of the resolution, which was adopted unanimously.<sup>8</sup> He had become a powerful voice within the movement whose opinions were respected and often accepted by abolitionists across the country.

The success of the New England Anti-Slavery Society led to the formation of other organizations in the North. In January 1833, an auxiliary organization was formed in the Theological Seminary at Andover and another at Hudson College in Ohio.<sup>9</sup> Another association was formed at Bath, Maine in April 1833, with Nathan Weld elected as its president.<sup>10</sup> In New York, supported by the wealthy philanthropists Lewis and Arthur Tappan, the New York Anti-Slavery Society expanded and became almost as influential as the New England organization. In September 1833, Providence, Rhode Island formed its own association, and in December 1833 supported by a large Quaker constituency, Pittsburgh followed suit. All of these new organizations were based on the same principles as the New England Anti-Slavery Society and viewed it as the parent association. They framed their constitutions in a similar manner and looked to their colleagues in Boston for guidance. Within a short period, appeals for a national

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organization was founded on which included, immediate emancipation and the philosophy of non-resistance.

<sup>8</sup> *The Abolitionist*, May, 1833. “Resolved. That the principles and measures of the New England Anti-Slavery Society are consistent with every duty which we owe to our country, and that benevolence to the masters, not less than to the slaves, requires us to advocate the doctrine of IMMEDIATE ABOLITION.”

<sup>9</sup> *Liberator*, January 12, 1833.

<sup>10</sup> *The Abolitionist*, April, 1833.

antislavery organization became more frequent. It was believed that the efforts of such a union would have more influence on the advocates for both colonization and slavery, as well as wield more power in forcing them to agree to immediate emancipation.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after the formation of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, it became known that managers of the American Colonization Society had sent agents to England with the purpose of collecting considerable sums of money for its treasury and to secure public support for their cause. In order to counteract the efforts of these agents and to establish a closer relationship between American and British abolitionists, it was decided that William Lloyd Garrison should visit Great Britain, and at a meeting held on March 16, 1833, the Managers voted to send him there.<sup>12</sup> The funds of the society were extremely low, and it became necessary to ask for contributions to aid in the project. The necessary capital was soon accumulated, and Garrison sailed for England in the spring of 1833.<sup>13</sup>

During Garrison's absence he entrusted the editorship of the *Liberator* to Johnson. Later, in the summers of 1837 and 1838, because of ill health, Garrison again turned the paper over to Johnson's care. In 1840, Garrison made a second visit to England, and once more left the editorship of the paper to Johnson's charge.<sup>14</sup> Johnson was one of the few people Garrison trusted completely, and he was the only person he ever left in control of the *Liberator* in his absence.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., May 1833; June, 1833; August 1833; December 1833.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 129.

<sup>13</sup> *The Abolitionist*, May, 1833.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 349-362. Johnson gives a detailed account of Garrison's visit. He also examines the problems that the Garrisonian abolitionists faced at the London Conference.

Garrison's visits to England were an enormous success. Before his departure and during his absence, there was much serious talk among abolitionists about organizing a national antislavery society. There was an obvious need for such an organization, and the only question was whether the time for its establishment had come. The *Liberator* had increased its circulation considerably and was having a significant influence in many areas of the country. The cause was gaining a foothold in many places as smaller auxiliary organizations guided by the New England Anti-Slavery Society formed in various parts of the country. Garrison's account of what he had seen and heard in England greatly encouraged abolitionists everywhere, and almost immediately upon his return a call was issued for a national convention to combine all these organizations.<sup>15</sup>

The national convention met at the Adelphi Building in Philadelphia on December 4, 1833. It was composed of 62 delegates from 11 different states.<sup>16</sup> To his great dismay, Johnson did not attend the convention as he was called to Ohio on personal business. Exactly why Johnson could not attend the conference is unknown, as he simply states "I was not myself a member of the Convention. Before it was called I left Boston for a visit to Ohio, under circumstances which made my attendance impossible." Missing the convention was an event he lamented all his life. As he later recalled, "This to me has been a subject of life-long regret, for no public gathering during the whole anti-slavery struggle was more memorable than this."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 144.

<sup>16</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records, Entry # 1, from the minutes, plus the First Annual Report, 1834. Also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 147, 149, and *The Abolitionist*, December, 1833. The paper published the list of all the officers of the national society, as well as its Declaration. It also chronicled the events of the convention.

<sup>17</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 147.

The convention was an enormous success and completed its work in three days, culminating in the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society (A.A.S.S.). Arthur Tappan, the well-known New York City philanthropist, was elected as its first President. Many prominent abolitionists from across the country became officers of the new national organization, which chose Garrison as the Secretary of Foreign Correspondence, adopted a constitution, and issued a Declaration of Sentiments, which Garrison wrote.<sup>18</sup>

Johnson called the Declaration of Sentiments “the Magna Charta of the anti-slavery movement,” and compared it to the Declaration of Independence.<sup>19</sup> Stating that “slavery is a crime,” it called for the immediate emancipation of all those who were held in bondage, and said that “the slaves ought to be instantly set free, and brought under the protection of the law.” Rejecting the use of violence, it advocated “the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love—and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance.” It declared as “delusive, cruel, and dangerous, any scheme of expatriation,” and insisted that “no compensation should be given to the slave planters emancipating the slaves.” It further endorsed ending slavery “by moral and political action, as prescribed in the Constitution of the United States.”<sup>20</sup>

The A.A.S.S. began its operations promptly and vigorously, making New York its headquarters, with offices on the corner of Nassau and Spruce Streets, the same spot

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<sup>18</sup> *The Abolitionist*, December, 1833; American Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, 1834; Ruchames, *The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings*, 65-71. Ruchames also prints a copy of the Declaration of Sentiments in its entirety; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 149-154, 473-480.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 152.

<sup>20</sup> *The Abolitionist*, December, 1833. Also American Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, 1834; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His friends*, 473-480.

occupied by the *New York Tribune*.<sup>21</sup> Upon his return to Boston, Johnson immediately began to labor for the new national organization. He was also selected as its traveling agent, and from this time forward he continuously engaged in the work of the antislavery crusade, lecturing under the auspices of several of the numerous antislavery societies, writing, and editing.<sup>22</sup>

In accordance with the Declaration of Sentiments, the A.A.S.S. quickly began formulating plans to increase antislavery agitation. Abolitionists viewed slavery first and foremost as a sin. It was immoral to own human beings as property and the slaveholder had to be convinced that slavery was adverse to the basic tenets of Christianity.

Describing their tactics and goals, Johnson wrote, "Their movement was characteristically moral and spiritual, making its appeal to the consciences of men; their weapons were peaceful," such as "scattering the living coals of truth on a nation's heart," and "calling men to repentance for a gigantic sin."<sup>23</sup> The new national organization looked to the various denominations in the North to speak out against human bondage so that the whole body of churches would join in a united voice against slavery. As Johnson stated, "This was what we all longed for; for this we incessantly toiled and prayed, for we were fully aware of the truth, that there was no power outside of the church that would sustain slavery an hour if it were not sustained in it."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 155.

<sup>22</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library, letter to Amos Phelps, August 29, 1836. See also, *Dictionary of American Biography*, Dumas Malone editor, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961, 112.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *The Abolitionists Vindicated in a Review of Eli Thayer's Paper on the New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 11, 12.

<sup>24</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 156.

Using arguments from the Bible, the A.A.S.S. began to appeal to the churches for support. The members intertwined Christian morality with social mores, declaring slavery as evil and a sin that not only infected the Church but also led to corruption in all American institutions. They argued a move consistent with the revivalism of the time, which was a "religion of humanity," consisting of doctrine that scrapped formal theology for a pure humanitarian creed. It entailed what was called "coming out," which meant, separating the antislavery movement from established institutions such as the Church, which refused to adopt an abolitionist position. By becoming the conscience of the Church, they believed they could direct the moral sense of the nation.<sup>25</sup> As Johnson recalled, "We saw therefore, that the terrible responsibility for the existence of slavery rested upon the churches; and we appealed to them, in the name of God and Christ, and by arguments drawn from the Bible, to abandon their position of open connivance, or of a not less guilty silence, in respect to the sin which made Jefferson tremble for his country when he remembered that God was just."<sup>26</sup>

The northern churches, however, were not to be so easily swayed. They resisted the constant entreaties and appeals, sometimes acting with open hostility to the cause, but mostly they preferred to just shy away from advocating an issue that was becoming more and more controversial in the eyes of the public.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery And Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965, 63-68, 83; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, New York: Hill & Wang, 1978, 114, 115.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 156.

<sup>27</sup> William. H. Pease, *The Antislavery Argument*. Indianapolis, New York, Kansas City: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1965, 143-142. An address by Stephen Foster denouncing the churches as pro-slavery organizations. Some other interesting books that illustrate the opposition to the established churches are Paul Finkelman editor,

At its first anniversary held on May 6, 1834, the A.A.S.S. attempted to remedy the complacency of the church.<sup>28</sup> The American Bible Society was engaged in supplying every family in America with a Bible, but slave families were not included in the distribution. The A.A.S.S. passed a resolution calling public attention to this omission and offered, if the Bible Society would appropriate \$20,000 for the purpose of supplying Bibles to slaves, it would contribute an additional \$5,000. A committee headed by Lewis Tappan presented the proposal to the board of managers of the American Bible Society, but that body denied Tappan permission to address it in person. The Bible Society was well aware that many Southern states had made teaching blacks to read a crime. They feared the distribution of Bibles among black families would only lead to more unrest within the church. As such, the Bible Society preferred not to deal with Tappan's proposition. Whether the Bible Society ever considered the proposal is unknown, as no official report appears in any of the society's proceedings.

Johnson believed that the church's failure to act caused the moral issue to fester and eventually led to dissension within the national organization. Charging that "it must be admitted that the church was responsible for the failure to abolish the system by moral power, and for all the blood spilled and treasure lost in the war of the Rebellion!" he would later openly blame the church.<sup>29</sup>

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*Comparative Issues in Slavery*, New York: Garland Publishers, 1989; Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher editors, *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*, Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980; Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: The World The Slaves Made*; New York: Vintage Books, 1976. Genovese asserts that slavery is paternalistic, and examined the relationship between Christianity and slavery, 161-284.

<sup>28</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, 1834.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 48, 49. See also 157, 158. A good study of black abolitionists involved in the American Missionary Society is by Clara

As the A.A.S.S. began to grow in size, so did its influence on public sentiment. This in turn led to increased alarm from pro-slavery quarters. When newspapers across the country denounced abolitionist activities, Johnson noted sadly that the religious press was no less hostile than the secular. On occasion, a religious paper treated the subject fairly, but generally the organs of the different sects were extremely hostile. Johnson conceded that certain journals such as *Zion's Herald*, the Methodist paper of New England, were friendly, but *The Christian Advocate*, the official organ of the Methodist church, constantly abused the abolitionists in its pages.<sup>30</sup>

The leaders of the churches themselves often remained silent on the subject. They did not openly advocate slavery but disguised their hostility with a great variety of pleas and pretences. "Immediate emancipation would be dangerous," some argued, "the slaves would cut their master's throats if set free; they are not prepared for freedom; they are contented and happy, and wouldn't take their freedom if it were offered to them: they ought not to be set free in this country, but taken back to Africa, where they belong: the final question was, would you like to marry your daughter to a nigger?"<sup>31</sup>

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Merritt DeBoer, *Be Jubilant My Feet: African American Abolitionists in the American Missionary Society, 1839-1861*, New York: Garland Publishers, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 158.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 159, 160. Some of the interesting contemporary studies that explore the opposition to the movement are by William Drayton, *The South Vindicated from the Treason and Fanaticism of the Northern Abolitionists*, New York: Negro University Press, 1969. Drayton lived from 1776-1846, and was a defender of Southern rights. His work discusses some of the controversial literature of the time. See also Robert Lewis Dabney, *A Defense of Virginia, and Through her the South, in Recent and Pending Contests Against the Sectional Party*, New York: Negro University Press, 1969. Dabney lived from 1820-1898, and his book is a justification of Southern institutions. Additionally Calvin Colton, *Abolition A Sedition, by a Northern Man, Calvin Colton*, Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970. Colton lived from 1789-1857, and his text examines the controversial literature of the

Some of the religious arguments advocating slavery were not very plausible, such as the curse of Ham. Pro-slavery advocates demanded that the scriptures must be fulfilled in accordance with the Bible. The original story of Ham's curse is in Genesis 9, 10, and 11 and takes place after the great Flood. Ham looked upon his father's nakedness as Noah lay drunk in his tent, but the other two sons, Shem and Japheth, had covered their father without looking upon him. When Noah awoke he cursed Canaan, son of Ham, saying, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."<sup>32</sup> The original text certainly implied slavery, but it stated nothing about skin color. Exactly how the story developed to include race is unclear, but one popular explanation is that Europeans had enslaved Ethiopians in the ancient world, and it became accepted that Africans were descended from one of Ham's four sons.<sup>33</sup>

Further distorting the interpretations of the scriptures, these divines declared that "the chosen people of God held slaves by Divine permission; Jesus did not condemn slavery, and Paul expressly sustained the system by sending the slave Onesimus back to his master: the agitation of the subject will divide the churches and divert their attention

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period. Also David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969.

<sup>32</sup> *Holy Bible: New International Version*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1978, Genesis 9:18-10:29, 10, 11. The entire text reads, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brother. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth, may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave."

<sup>33</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1995, 17-20. Some additional sources which discuss race as a reason for slavery include, Eugene D. Genovese and Stanley L. Engerman editors, *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975. This text incorporates papers that were presented at the University of Rochester in 1972. Also Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Mans Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.

from religious work; the Abolitionists are too indiscriminate in their denunciations; of course slavery in the hands of bad men is wrong, but there are thousands of good slaveholders, who treat their slaves kindly; the slaves are property, and it would be cruel to deprive the masters, without compensation, of that for which they paid their money; the Constitution guarantees slavery, and without such guarantees the Union never could have been formed; the discussion of the subject is dangerous to the peace of the country, and tends to a dissolution of the Union."<sup>34</sup>

Thus the churches declared that slavery was not in itself a sin, and reasoned therefore that the Church did not have the authority to comment on such a civil institution. Using arguments from the New Testament, they found proof that under Roman rule Church leaders had accepted slavery. Likewise, southern Methodists and Baptists both argued that continued agitation endangered the welfare of the slaves and would also lead to schism and dismemberment of the Church.<sup>35</sup> Under such influences the South became more adamant than ever in defending its peculiar institution. The slaveholders viewed the press as a tool that could be used to defend itself against abolitionists, as well as a resource for going on the offensive. They believed they had broken no laws and had done nothing wrong. Pro-slavery advocates stated they were being assailed wrongly, and they encouraged resistance to abolitionism by any means.

The idea of granting freedom to the entire black population in America instilled fear in a large number of people in the North. Many northern businessmen often secured

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<sup>34</sup> Johnson. *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 160.

<sup>35</sup> Mathews. *Slavery And Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845*. 158-160, 180, 190-192, 209, 210. Mathews gives an excellent account of how the Methodist church divides over the slavery issue. See also Barnes. *The Antislavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 90-94.

loans from southern slaveholders. If the slaves were freed, the slaveholder would lose his capital and these loans would be called in. Abolition especially frightened the working class and the poor. Racism, combined with the fear of having to compete for jobs, housing, and all the other essentials of life created a panic in many individuals.<sup>36</sup> As abolitionist activity increased, the stream of abuse emanating from political and religious journals of broad influence had a powerful effect upon the lower classes of society in cities and large towns, and indeed in smaller regions as well. Antislavery meetings were often interrupted and in some instances broken up by mobs.<sup>37</sup> One newspaper said that the only way to cure the “phrensy of Garrison and Arthur Tappan” was by “cutting off their heads.”<sup>38</sup> On the evening of July 8, 1834, a mob sacked the house of Lewis Tappan and destroyed the furniture.<sup>39</sup> Inflamed by the press and appeals to popular ignorance and prejudices, mob violence grew across the country. Rioters targeted black people as

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<sup>36</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1970, 103-149. See also Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969, 104. For a more detailed economic study of slavery see Robert W. Fogel, *Time on the Cross*, Boston: Little Brown, 1974; Richard H. Abbott, *Cotton & Capital: Boston Businessmen and Antislavery Reform, 1854-1868*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991; Paul Finkelman editor, *Economics, Industrialization, Urbanization, and Slavery*, New York: Garland Publishers, 1989.

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 183.

<sup>38</sup> *Emancipator*, September 21, 1833.

<sup>39</sup> *Liberator*, July 12, 1834. Also Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 117, 118. “William L. Stone, James Watson Webb, Mordeci Noah, and other editors printed their usual diatribes and commended the rioters for their civic spirit. Even the weather conspired against the abolitionists, for a blanket of hot, muggy air settled over the city. With a roar, the vandals smashed open the door, poured inside, and began hurling furnishings out the windows. ‘Battenders’ and ‘Huge Paws,’ the city’s gangs of butcherboys and day laborers, did the actual dirty work, while ‘respectable’ merchants and even a deacon or two watched and applauded them.” See also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 162, 163.

well as abolitionists, destroying their homes and gutting free black churches in the North.<sup>40</sup>

At a time when violence against the antislavery movement was on the rise, a great impetus to the American abolitionist movement occurred. On August 1, 1834, England freed more than 800,000 slaves in the West Indies.<sup>41</sup> For Johnson and others, the peaceful emancipation signaled that “obedience to God in the breaking of the chains of so many slaves would be perfectly safe; and so it proved, for not a drop of blood was shed: the negroes received their freedom with grateful joy as a boon from heaven, and all the predictions of the pro-slavery party were falsified. Naturally enough, American Abolitionists were mightily encouraged by this intelligence to persevere in their labors.”<sup>42</sup>

Encouraged by what had occurred in England, the A.A.S.S. began an extensive mail campaign in which Johnson participated actively. As he recalled, “It adopted the practice of sending its most important publications—those especially which explained its principles and designs—to leading citizens at the South. Seeking the abolition of slavery, not by external force, but by appeals to reason and judgment as well as the conscience of the masters.”<sup>43</sup> The effects were alarming and were viewed in the South as well as the North as attempts to incite a slave insurrection. Instead of appealing to the slaveholder’s

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<sup>40</sup> Peter C. Ripley editor, *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974. These papers give an excellent insight into the reactions of black abolitionists to the mob violence.

<sup>41</sup> Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 50, 51. Note also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 164. For a detailed account of the influence of the British antislavery movement on Americans see Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 29-32, 47, 48, 53, 56, 140, 142, 143, 171.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 164.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 191. During the mail campaign Johnson got to see the enormous contribution the women of the abolitionist movement performed.

conscience. the mail crusade only led to increased antislavery publications and mob activity. On July 29, 1835, a mob broke into the post office in Charleston and destroyed the antislavery literature.<sup>44</sup> The A.A.S.S., however, only increased the publication of its antislavery tracts and the number of agents in the field. In retaliation, southern journals such as *The Richmond Whig* threatened to kidnap and bring abolitionists to the South to face justice.<sup>45</sup> Bounties were placed on the heads of certain individuals, as their actions were considered treason.

The incidents that occurred at the beginning of the year 1835 led to what became known in antislavery circles as the "reign of terror." Riots and mob violence became commonplace in cities across the north. Abolitionists were constantly threatened and, when attending meetings, were often pelted with stones. In the summer of 1835, a young theological student named Amos Dresser was selling bibles in Nashville, Tennessee. In his trunk he carried antislavery tracts for which he was arrested and flogged in the public square of the city.<sup>46</sup> On October 21, 1835, riots took place simultaneously in Boston, Montpelier, and Utica. On the same day William Lloyd Garrison was hanged in effigy and had to flee for his life from a mob shouting, "We must

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<sup>44</sup> *Liberator*, August 15, 1835, and the *Charleston Southern Patriot*, July 29, 1835. Also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 192.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 84. "Let the hell-hounds of the North beware. Let them not feel too much security in their homes, or imagine that they who throw firebrands, although from, as they think, so safe a distance, will be permitted to escape with impunity. There are thousands now animated with a spirit to brave every danger to bring these felons to justice on the soil of the Southern States."

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 218. The punishment was directed by a Vigilance Committee composed of the most distinguished citizens of the city and consisted of twenty lashes on his bare back from cowskin.

have Garrison” and “Lynch Him.”<sup>47</sup> The abolitionists had been successful in getting their message to the people, but they were finding out that the response was nothing like they expected.

The year 1835 also became known as the “mob year.” The moral argument against slavery was not only failing to sway southern sentiments, it was actually increasing the hostility of many northerners. Southerners felt they were being attacked for no reason, as they had broken no laws and had done nothing wrong. In the North, racism, along with the thought of additional competition from a free black population, created antagonism among a large portion of the populace. Many abolitionists determined that moral argument alone was not sufficient to end slavery, and they began to voice alternative actions such as the use of violence and political action. Johnson, however, was not one of them.

By the late 1830s, the abolitionist movement had begun to have some impact on American society. In small areas in the North it had started to win over a population previously hostile to antislavery ideology. In the South, it had placed many in a defensive position on the issue. Cotton had become “king” in the South and southern slaveholders were not willing to voluntarily relinquish their burgeoning profits. The reality of the situation, however, was that the crusade appeared no closer to eliminating

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<sup>47</sup> For a more detailed account of Garrison’s escape from the mob see Thomas, *The Liberator*, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 200-206. In addition see Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 194-200, 207, 208. Garrison only escaped the mob by fleeing to the police station where he was locked up in a cell overnight for his own protection. He was released from prison the following day and asked by city authorities to leave the city in order to “tranquillize the public mind.” The riot in Montpelier took place in the same church where Johnson had given his first antislavery lecture a little more than three years earlier. Johnson’s close friend Samuel J. May, who was called the “Apostle John,” because of his gentleness of speech was the speaker on this occasion.

slavery than when it began. Many abolitionists became disenchanted because all their efforts had produced little in the way of actual change. Others no longer believed that the southern slaveholder could be convinced of the evils of slavery. If anything, the slaveholders were becoming more aggressive and were digging in for a fight. Many abolitionists believed that stronger and more forceful measures were needed. Their goal remained the same, but in order to accomplish that aim their methods had to change.

This new philosophy was a broad platform that incorporated many of the social reform movements of the era within the abolitionists' cause, such as women's rights, labor, temperance, prison reform, and the use of violence and political action. The arguments over a Broad Platform vs. a Narrow Platform led to increased dissent within the A.A.S.S.<sup>48</sup> Many individuals still felt that moral suasion was the correct path and that to broaden the platform by creating an antislavery political party, increasing the role of women, or threatening violence, would only hinder progress, not advance it. Garrison, who was the controlling voice of the A.A.S.S. believed that many of the movements could be promoted together, provided these actions were advocated as part of the antislavery cause. Abolitionism was not to be used as a platform to advocate other reform movements by themselves, but these other movements could be coordinated within the antislavery cause, and each could gain strength from the other. There were two issues, however, which Garrison could not advocate. The first was the use of violence. As a pacifist, he remained firm on his stand of non-resistance. The second was

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<sup>48</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1969, 78-117, and Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 108-136. Also see the American Anti-Slavery Society Records, *First Annual Report*, 50. The debates over a Broad Platform vs. a Narrow Platform were recorded in the proceedings of the national organization.

the use of political action. Political parties were inclined to compromise on crucial issues, and Garrison viewed compromise as treason to the cause.<sup>49</sup>

These problems led to disagreements about the future strategy of the movement that became increasingly pronounced and eventually caused division within the national organization. The rift received considerable impetus from an incident that occurred in Alton, Illinois on November 7, 1837, when an antislavery editor named Elijah P. Lovejoy was murdered by a mob.<sup>50</sup> Lovejoy, a former teacher, had entered the ministry in 1832 and was licensed to preach by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. He settled in St. Louis and became the editor of a religious paper called *The Observer*.<sup>51</sup> Although “he was not considered an abolitionist in the full sense of the word” by Johnson and other leaders in the antislavery movement, Lovejoy was a friend of the cause.<sup>52</sup> His remarks on the subject of slavery offended many in St. Louis, and Lovejoy was often threatened by mob violence.<sup>53</sup> Rioters destroyed his office and demolished his press on more than one occasion.

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<sup>49</sup> *Liberator*, February 27, 1836; August 18, 1837; December 7, 1838, plus the *Emancipator*, April 18, 1839. Note also Thomas, *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, 206-304, and Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 57-62, 100-108, 118-136. Kraditor explains in detail the philosophy of the Broad Platform vs. a Narrow Platform, as well as Garrison's affiliations. For a general analysis of the non-resistance philosophy see John Demos, “The Anti-Slavery Movement and the Problems of Violent Means,” *New England Quarterly*, XXXVII (December 1964), 501-526.

<sup>50</sup> Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 82; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 225.

<sup>51</sup> Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 78-81.

<sup>52</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 222, 223.

<sup>53</sup> *The Observer*, July 21, 1836. Lovejoy's unpopularity increased when he denounced the burning of a mulatto sailor declaring it, “a crime, which if committed, by one or two, would be punishable with death, may be perpetrated by the multitude with impunity.”

Fearing for the life of his family, he decided to move to Alton, Illinois, where he re-established the paper under the name of *The Alton Observer*. Lovejoy's arrival in Alton created considerable controversy among the citizenry. On October 31, 1837, a colonization meeting was held with the intention of inflaming the mob. On November 3, Lovejoy made a powerful speech in defense of his tabloid, declaring, "Before God and you all, I here pledge myself to continue it, if need be, till death; and if I fall, my grave shall be made in Alton."<sup>54</sup> The printing press arrived on November 7 amidst great excitement. That evening a mob surrounded the building where Lovejoy and several others were working and set fire to the roof. What occurred next sent shock waves through the entire abolitionist movement in America. Several shots were fired into the mob from within the building by the little band of defenders. The mob returned fire, and in the confusion Lovejoy was shot and killed. The mob then rushed the building, smashed the press to pieces, and threw them into the river.<sup>55</sup>

By defending his press, Lovejoy had defied the principles of non-resistance and in doing so, set off a controversy as to whether violent means were acceptable in

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<sup>54</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 225. Johnson quoted Lovejoy's entire speech, which is eloquent and impressive, but it was also a challenge to those who would try and stand in his way. In many ways the speech only antagonized the mob spirit already brewing in the city. An excellent discussion surrounding Lovejoy's actions can be found in Friedman, *Gregarious Saints, Self and Community in Antebellum America, 1830-1870*, 196-210, 225.

<sup>55</sup> For a general account of the Alton, Illinois incident see Russell B. Nye, *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy 1830-1860*, East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1963, 115; Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973, 169, 171, 178, 182-184; Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 82, 83, 111; Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 80. For a complete account of Lovejoy's life and his abolitionist activities see Merton L. Dillon, *Elijah P. Lovejoy: Abolitionist Editor*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961.

accomplishing abolitionists' goals. The *Emancipator*, the official organ of the A.A.S.S., did not condemn Lovejoy's resort to violence.<sup>56</sup> Debates raged over Lovejoy's actions, and most abolitionists defended the use of force. Others, fearing the widespread use of violence, argued against Lovejoy's actions. But the publicity that the incident at Alton received made Lovejoy an instant hero in the eyes of most antislavery individuals. In fact, most abolitionists declared Lovejoy the first martyr of the movement.<sup>57</sup> Johnson's close friend, Samuel J. May, openly attacked the *Emancipator* for not condemning Lovejoy's actions and voiced his disapproval, stating that the A.A.S.S. must adhere to its principles or it "will soon involve our country in servile and civil war."<sup>58</sup> It should also be noted that the incident at Alton inspired Abraham Lincoln's Lyceum Address. Shortly after the Alton incident, Lincoln addressed a crowd at the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, Illinois. The lecture was titled, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions." and it dealt in a general way with the mob violence that had occurred at Alton. Lincoln declared that the greatest danger to our institutions was the "wild and furious passions" of the mob. This threatened to undermine order and stability and destroy a nation's attachment to its institutions. The result would be the overthrow of the government and dictatorship.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Kraditor. *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*. 82.

<sup>57</sup> For various reactions to Lovejoy's action see articles in the *Liberator*, November 24, 1837; December 1, 1837; December 8, 1837; December 22, 1837; December 29, 1837; January 5, 1838; January 12, 1838; February 16, 1838.

<sup>58</sup> Samuel J. May Papers, letters to Garrison dated December 18, 1837 and December 26, 1837. Letter to Beriah Green printed in the *Emancipator*, January 5, 1838.

<sup>59</sup> Charles B. Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest For Union: Public and Private Meanings*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1982, 56-61.

Johnson did not speak out directly against Lovejoy's actions. He could not condone his use of violence, but he also felt that to criticize one who had the courage to die for the cause so bravely would have tainted his memory and hampered future abolitionist efforts. Johnson considered Lovejoy a "martyr" and declared that his grave "To the friends of liberty will be a shrine, reminding them how much they owe to one noble man, who preferred to die rather than surrender the dearest right of an American citizen."<sup>60</sup> The majority of abolitionists, however, which included Lewis Tappan and most of the New York Anti-Slavery Society, defended Lovejoy's action.<sup>61</sup>

The debate reached a climax at a public meeting in Boston at Faneuil Hall on December 8, 1837.<sup>62</sup> A large audience assembled, and Johnson was in attendance.<sup>63</sup> The Attorney General, James T. Austin, delivered a diatribe against the abolitionists and emphasized that Lovejoy had "died a fool dieth."<sup>64</sup> When he took his seat, a comparatively unknown young man stepped up to the rostrum. He was Wendell Phillips, who was destined to become a leader in the antislavery movement, and this was the first time he had spoken in front of such a large audience. Phillips delivered a rousing speech that from this time forward made him one of the leading orators of the antislavery cause. He declared Lovejoy an abolitionist hero and defended his use of guns. Phillips condemned the mob and declared that in order to defeat the slaveholder, vital new heroes

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<sup>60</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 227.

<sup>61</sup> *Liberator*, January 5, 1838. In a letter to the editor, Tappan goes into detail explaining his reasons for his support of Lovejoy and why the Declaration of Sentiments was not a pledge of thorough non-resistance.

<sup>62</sup> Perry and Fellman, *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, 182.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 228.

<sup>64</sup> Ruchames, *The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings*, 142.

like Lovejoy were needed.<sup>65</sup> Johnson, who had heard Phillips talk once before in front of a small gathering of people, had high expectations, but as Phillips began to speak, Johnson stated, he “transcended them all, and took the audience by storm.”<sup>66</sup> The walls of the “Old Cradle of Liberty” reverberated as the eloquent voice of the young speaker articulated his stimulating and noble sentiments. Johnson found it difficult to describe the speech in words because, as he said later, he felt he could not fully do it justice. Johnson did not endorse the use of violence, but he had great admiration for Wendell Phillips and those who passionately supported the cause, even though their methods differed from those in which he believed. Their goal was the same, and Johnson believed that they could work together towards a common objective. He concluded that if they looked for common ground and concentrated their efforts in a unified movement, their impact would eventually bring the slaveholders to their knees. The differences, however, between the Broad Platform vs. a Narrow Platform were having the opposite effect, they began to divide the entire antislavery rank and file.

The Lovejoy incident and its aftermath continued to divide the antislavery cause. Garrison and his followers were fast becoming a minority in the movement. Other issues as well soon began to split abolitionists further apart. One of the most

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<sup>65</sup> Wendell Phillips Papers. For a complete reprinting of Phillips’ speech see Ruchames, *The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings*, “The Murder of Lovejoy, As Seen by Wendell Phillips,” 141-148. Also Louis Ruchames, “Wendell Phillips and the Lovejoy Address,” *New England Quarterly*, XLVII (Fall 1974), 107-116. Ruchames proves that Phillips was expecting to speak at the meeting and that he spoke without notes, reacting with great vehemence to the previous speaker who had criticized Lovejoy’s impudence while justifying the mob’s right to kill.

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 229. Johnson always admired the skill of Wendell Phillips as a speaker, as well as his dedication to the antislavery cause. By the end of the Civil War, however, they had become enemies. Johnson believed that the personal ambition of Phillips became greater than his desire for reform.

volatile issues of all was the participation of women in the movement. Johnson had always believed in the total equality of women and felt that there should be no restrictions placed upon their participation. His beliefs coincided with those of Garrison and his followers, but they constituted a minority.

The strongest opposition to the inclusion of women came from some members of the clergy, which consisted of some of the most powerful and influential antislavery leaders. Although women had been an active part of the abolitionist cause since its inception, their activities were limited to certain areas. Women had formed female antislavery societies across the country, and it was they who performed most of the work in the mail crusade of 1835. In 1837, the A.A.S.S. began its petition campaign to Congress.<sup>67</sup> During the summer of that year, Johnson had assumed the editorship of the *Liberator* and witnessed the great efforts made by women.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, it was the women of the various organizations who secured most of the signatures on the petitions.

The Grimke sisters, Angela and Sarah, were the most notable among female abolitionists, as they were the first to be permitted to speak publicly on the subject. They began by writing and lecturing on women's rights and abolition to exclusively female audiences, mostly in private homes. By the mid-1830s, it was not uncommon for men to be present as spectators, and soon the sisters managed to procure lecture halls and small churches for their meetings.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For a detailed account of the petition campaign see Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 109-145.

<sup>68</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter to George Benson, June 14, 1837. Also Johnson. *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 274.

<sup>69</sup> Theodore D. Weld Papers. This and other details about the lectures can be found in a series of letters from Angela Grimke to Jane Smith. They constitute a sort of diary, with summaries of the lectures, the reactions and sizes of the audiences, and the sisters'

The constitution of the A.A.S.S. admitted membership to “any person” who accepted their principles and contributed to their funds. Johnson openly stated that “from the beginning, women had done much of the work of the societies, in circulating petitions, collecting funds, etc., their right to full membership, to vote, and speak, if they wished, was generally regarded as unquestionable.” Many women were now eager to avail themselves of their constitutional rights. The first showdown occurred at the New England Anti-Slavery Society annual convention held in May 1838.<sup>70</sup> Johnson introduced a resolution that all women be received into the organization on equal terms.<sup>71</sup> The resolution “was adopted without a single negative vote,” although “eight orthodox clergymen removed their names from the roll of the convention and eight others remained to protest against the introduction of a topic which they said was foreign to the platform.”<sup>72</sup>

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thoughts concerning their mission. These letters are all in the Weld Papers, and only one is in the published *Weld-Grimke Letters*. This collection is an excellent primary source for the work and life of the Grimke sisters. Theodore Weld and Angela Grimke were married and their letters and papers provide a rare and intimate look into their personal thoughts and actions. Sarah never married, but lived with her sister’s family. See also Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 41-43.

<sup>70</sup> Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society Records, Seventh Annual Report, 1839. These records give a complete account of what occurred at the annual convention. See also the *Liberator*, February 1, 1839. “The Woman Question.” This article is a continuation of the extracts from the annual report.

<sup>71</sup> Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 133; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 271.

<sup>72</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 271, 272. “Resolved, That all persons present, or who may be present at the subsequent meetings, whether men or women, who agree with us in sentiment on the subject of slavery, be invited to become members, and participate in the proceedings of the convention.” Johnson gives an excellent first hand account of the proceedings and the impact the resolution had on the national society. See also Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 49. The Reverend Charles T. Torrey was the spokesman for the members who had their names expunged from the roll of the convention. He read a prepared statement complaining that

Johnson felt sure that “after the first excitement was over, they would be reconciled to so reasonable and inevitable a change.” He considered the incorporation of women as a natural evolution of reform, maintaining that the woman question had not been arbitrarily raised at the convention, but had come up uncontrived by itself in the natural course of events, and it was an obligation to decide it propitiously and fairly. With all the fine work being performed by an extremely large number of women, what other course was there? “When noble women wished to join our ranks, we could not beat them back in deference to conventional usages or sectarian prejudices, which, in their nature, were evanescent,” he wrote.<sup>73</sup> Simply stated, the women were left free to act unrestricted according to their own individual convictions. Johnson maintained that no man had the right to define their position; to do so would have been usurpation. Furthermore, it was taken for granted that they were competent and could protect themselves and that no restrictions should be placed on them.

If the New England Anti-Slavery Society was willing to admit women on an equal basis, the majority of antislavery men in the national organization were not. Almost immediately, there was a backlash to the resolution. As Johnson and others soon realized, “there is nothing more obstinate than prejudice, and, when fortified by a dash of temper, it does not readily yield to argument.”<sup>74</sup> Many abolitionist men feared that women were using the antislavery cause to promote women’s rights as their main

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the convention’s action deviated from previous usage and hurt the cause of the slave by connecting it with a foreign subject and by furnishing a precedent for associating it with other irrelevant topics. Torrey’s statement was later published in the *Liberator*, June 8, 1838.

<sup>73</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 272, 273.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 273.

objective, while others charged that it led directly to undermining the foundations of social life and the teachings of the Bible. In a series of letters published in the *Liberator*, Lewis Tappan, whose philanthropy led to his control of the New York organization, attacked the Grimke sisters and the followers of Garrison for their support of women. He wrote, "Let Mr. Garrison conduct his paper, in his own way, untrammelled," provided there was no official connection between it and any antislavery society, and "Let it be understood that our friends Grimke go a warfare at their own charges, as they in fact do & are not connected with an Anti-Slavery Society."<sup>75</sup>

The most forceful arguments opposing the equal participation of women emanated from the clergy. The contentions that the ministers used were impossible to ignore, and Johnson made use of the *Liberator* to respond to attacks, accusing clergymen of being hypocrites who denounced as immoral the public lectures of female abolitionists.<sup>76</sup> Dissension about the woman question within the A.A.S.S. continued to grow. The Reverend Charles T. Torrey declared, "We are astonished to hear it pretended, that if a women speaks at an anti-slavery meeting, the responsibility is not her own, but rests upon every man in the assembly;—a guilt from which he cannot absolve himself by protesting against it, but only by breaking up the whole anti-slavery organization."<sup>77</sup> The always outspoken and violently anti-Garrison Joshua Leavitt, editor of the *Emancipator*, also voiced his opposition to the equal participation of women.<sup>78</sup> Johnson, who again

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<sup>75</sup> *Liberator*, June 18, 1840; June 26, 1840.

<sup>76</sup> *Liberator*, August 11, 1837, "Appeal of Clerical Abolitionists on Anti-Slavery Measures."

<sup>77</sup> Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society Records, Ninth Annual Report, 1841.

<sup>78</sup> *Emancipator*, May 23, 1839. Joshua Leavitt often used the *Emancipator* as an outlet to vent his frustration with Garrison.

because of Garrison's ill health had assumed temporary editorship of the *Liberator* in the summer of 1838, continued to use the paper to endorse the complete participation of women.<sup>79</sup> He argued that the members of the annual convention had no choice but to grant women equal status as stated in the constitution.<sup>80</sup>

The issues surrounding the Broad Platform vs. a Narrow Platform increased in intensity. In the spring of 1839, a large number of prominent abolitionists issued a public statement opposing the participation of women on equal terms.<sup>81</sup> The ideology of non-resistance continued to come under attack as well. Members who viewed political action as a necessary step to end slavery were becoming more vocal. No one rejected the morality of non-resistance, but it was becoming increasingly clear that many abolitionists were disenchanted with its lack of results. Garrison's control over the A.A.S.S. was gradually slipping away as dissidents within the national organization increasingly challenged his leadership. Johnson remained steadfast in his belief that slavery was a sin and stayed faithful to his friend Garrison and the original sentiments of the national organization. But he also realized the importance of a unified national antislavery society as well as the possibilities of political action. As the division within the national organization widened, he began to walk a fine line between the Garrisonian principles set down by his friend and the more drastic measures espoused by the skeptics.

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<sup>79</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter to Edmund Quincy dated June 19, 1838. Garrison lets Quincy know that Oliver Johnson is now editor de facto of the *Liberator* and authorizes Quincy to turn over all funds to Johnson.

<sup>80</sup> *Liberator*, July 27, 1838.

<sup>81</sup> *Liberator*, May 31, 1839, "An Abolitionist Protests Against the Participation of Women in the American Anti-Slavery Society." The protest statement was published in its entirety and was followed by comments from Garrison; Ruchames, *The Abolitionists, A Collection of Their Writings*, 160-164. The statement is also reprinted here with the names of all those who signed it.

## Chapter 3

### Schism

In the early years of the A.A.S.S., very little thought was given to the use of political action. The Declaration of Sentiments drafted by Garrison explicitly endorsed political campaigns against slavery, and it was assumed that abolitionists who could vote should prefer antislavery candidates. These convictions were echoed in the *Liberator*, and all good abolitionists recognized “the highest obligations...to remove slavery by moral and political action.”<sup>1</sup> “The society’s constitution pledged abolitionists ‘to endeavor, in a constitutional way,’ to influence Congress to abolish the interstate slave trade and to end slavery in the District of Columbia and the territories.”<sup>2</sup> It did not, however, specifically state how this was to be accomplished. Many individuals viewed politics as sordid and corrupt and engagement in it immoral. Abolitionists exerted political influence morally by petitioning a legislative body, interrogating candidates and publishing their views, and by voting. These were individual acts rather than a group action. As the cries for unified political action intensified, abolitionists were forced to examine the meaning of moral suasion to which their constitution committed them.

The strongest supporters of political action were powerful men within the national organization. They included prominent names such as Lewis Tappan, James G. Birney, Charles Sumner, Salmon P. Chase, and Joshua R. Giddings. They argued that

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<sup>1</sup> *Liberator*, December 14, 1833.

<sup>2</sup> Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 119.

abolitionists could regenerate politics, and that this could be accomplished through an independent third party.<sup>3</sup>

Garrison and his supporters stated that they valued politics chiefly as a means of agitating on the subject of slavery in order to gain the attention of the American people. Furthermore, the most effective place to arouse public feelings was in the legislature with the entire nation listening. Abolition was a moral question and should not be considered along with politics or the formation of a third party. If abolition became a political question, other topics would interfere with abolitionism and detract the public from the antislavery issue. If it had any hope of success an antislavery political party would be forced to align itself with other causes. Antislavery was a topic only a minority of Americans supported, and abolitionists would be forced to compromise on critical issues, such as immediate emancipation. Petitioning legislatures and questioning candidates was the route that should be taken. Members should vote on an individual basis and not in a bloc.

As a non-resistant, Johnson supported Garrison's views. In an editorial in the *Liberator*, he endorsed the moral argument and exhorted members against forming a third

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<sup>3</sup> *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1859*, edited by Dwight L. Drumond. Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith Publishing, 1966, 512-514. Birney was a former slaveholder who freed all his slaves, renounced slavery, and became an abolitionist. Having a first hand knowledge of what it was like to be a slave owner, he was one of the few abolitionists who never believed the moral argument alone could convince the South to end slavery. He strongly supported the use of political action, and in 1840 and 1844 he was the Liberty Party candidate for President. Letter from Francis J. LeMoyne to James G. Birney dated December 10, 1839. See also the *Emancipator*, Lewis Tappan, "A Third Party," November 14, 1839. For a complete examination of James G. Birney as an abolitionist, see Betty Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney: Slaveholder to Abolitionist*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1955. Additionally, Friedman, *Gregarious Saints, Self and Community in Antebellum America, 1830-1870*, 87-94, 115-119.

party.<sup>4</sup> Johnson did not view an independent political party as detrimental to the movement. He believed that it could produce small results by bringing the problem before the voters. What he feared was that an independent antislavery party could not win an election. He also believed that unless people truly believed that slavery was wrong, it could not be eradicated by the ballot box. Therefore, continuing to emphasize the moral implications of slavery was the best way to spend the resources of the movement. Johnson, who had once contemplated entering the ministry, remained a pacifist whose religious beliefs would never allow him to endorse the use of violence.<sup>5</sup> As for the use of political action, however, he did not view its application as evil. Here is revealed perhaps the major difference between Johnson and Garrison.

When writing about the issue of political action, Johnson openly acknowledged his disagreement with Garrison. He did not condemn those who wanted to form the Liberty Party, which was a third party with abolition as its one issue platform. Stating that “Mr. Garrison thought, in the first place, that it was wholly unnecessary for abolitionists to organize a political party,” he cited Garrison’s objections and concluded, “In saying this let me not be understood to question the motives of those who originated the Liberty Party, or to speak in a controversial spirit upon the subject. Nor let it be for a moment supposed that I undervalue the results of political action, or would detract from the praise due to the noble men who fought the slave power by this means.”<sup>6</sup> Johnson continued even further with his praise of those who turned to politics as a solution, saying

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<sup>4</sup> *Liberator*, August 10, 1838, “To the Abolitionists of Massachusetts,” reprinted June 21, 1839.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library, letter to Amos Phelps, August 29, 1836.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 308, 310, 311.

that his heart swelled with gratitude for the courage and devotion of men such as Slade, Giddings, Gates, Hale, Wilson, Sumner, Morris, and others. He believed they used the entire power of the Constitution in their efforts to abolish slavery.

Johnson remained Garrison's faithful friend, but he was also an individual with firm convictions of his own, and he rarely swayed from these beliefs. As the issues of politics and non-resistance began to threaten the national organization and split the abolitionist movement, Johnson became one of the few who were capable of bridging the gap between the two sides. His major contribution to the cause came about after the great schism in that he was able to bond with both sides, keeping communication open and not allowing either side to become completely estranged from the other.

By 1839, the mob violence of the middle of the decade began to subside, and the Great Revival had run its course, leading to a decline in evangelical piety across the nation. This in turn helped to change the direction of the spirit of reform within the country. The emphasis for many abolitionists was to make the A.A.S.S. the nucleus of a new political pressure group and to attract thousands of antislavery voters. Adding to the internal struggles were the continuing issues of the Broad Platform vs. a Narrow Platform, with the role of women as one of the most prominent themes.

The initial attempt at a coup came at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in January 1839. This endeavor to overthrow his leadership was crushed by Garrison and his followers, but it did cause many to denounce the outcome and resign. The Reverend Amos A. Phelps relinquished his position as secretary and member of the board of the society averring that, "the Society is no longer an Anti-Slavery Society simply, but in principle and modes of action, has become a *women's*

*rights, non-government Anti-Slavery Society.*"<sup>7</sup> Phelps was Johnson's close friend, and his departure was a great disappointment. Johnson wrote, "I had placed the highest confidence in his clear-sightedness as well as his integrity. I lamented his course quite as much for his own sake as for the cause, for I felt that he was preparing for his own lips a cup of bitter disappointment."<sup>8</sup> Led by men such as Elizur Wright, the defeated members established their own association, the Massachusetts Abolition Society, in May 1839.<sup>9</sup> A short time earlier they founded their own newspaper, the *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, edited by Elizur Wright, which was to be a rival publication to the *Liberator*.<sup>10</sup> Lacking finances, the new organization had a short and undistinguished existence.

A more vigorous undertaking to wrest control of the organization from Garrison and his followers was attempted at the annual meeting of the A.A.S.S. in 1839.<sup>11</sup> The *Liberator* sounded the alarm, and the meeting witnessed a large turnout of members. Garrison brought with him all his lieutenants, including Johnson, counting on them to keep the faithful in line. Not surprisingly the first issue that confronted the 435 delegates was the role of women. During the course of the meeting, Lewis Tappan made what was

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<sup>7</sup> *Emancipator*, May 23, 1839, "The Woman Question." Letter to the editor.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 283.

<sup>9</sup> Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 50, 51, 77; Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 135; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 283-285.

<sup>10</sup> *Massachusetts Abolitionist*, February 7, 1839. In the first issue of the new tabloid, the editor and his supporters made their objective clear with a headline in bold print declaring, "Political Action." In subsequent issues Wright refined and increased his argument for antislavery politics. His ability to combine the moral implications of slavery with a call for political action helped enormously in the creation of an abolitionist party. Note also Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 134, 135; Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 50,51; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 283-285.

<sup>11</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 158-160.

to be his first and only major speech to the society. He stood on the rostrum with a pair of whips in one hand, in the other a bowie knife with the inscription "Death to Abolitionists" inscribed on the blade. His theme was the complicity of the North in the sins of the South. Speaking in a roaring voice, he paced up and down the platform brandishing his props. An audience of more than 5,000 in the Broadway Tabernacle roared with enthusiasm and constantly interrupted him with cheers. Tappan attacked northern merchants as well as the clergy for their transgressions. Though Johnson had long believed that these two factions bore responsibility as well as slaveholders, he deplored the actions of Tappan and his followers who were intentionally creating dissension within the organization. Tappan's oration was so rousing to everyone present that Johnson declared the performance "electrifying."<sup>12</sup>

As the business of the day progressed, Tappan and Birney demonstrated an inability to maneuver their delegates effectively. Birney introduced a motion condemning the no-government and non-resistance philosophies, which was quickly voted down.<sup>13</sup> With roughly one quarter of the delegates' votes still to be recorded, it was decided to interpret the word "person" in the Constitution as including women. The vote was close with 180 yeas to 140 nays.<sup>14</sup> It is not surprising that a large number of the

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<sup>12</sup> *Liberator*, May 10, 1839. Johnson promoted Garrison in his efforts to hold the A.A.S.S. together, but he also supported the topic that Tappan espoused in his speech and believed he had a duty to report the truth of what occurred at the meeting. For a comprehensive examination of Tappan's involvement at the annual meeting see Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 190-194.

<sup>13</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records, Sixth Annual Report, 1839. Also Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 193.

<sup>14</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records, Sixth Annual Report, 1839. See also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 286.

nays came from the New York delegation, which was led by Lewis Tappan and James G. Birney, both of whom pressed the anti-women and political issues so vigorously.

The opposition had not achieved its goal of toppling Garrison, but it had been successful in dividing the national organization. Many prominent abolitionists began talking of breaking away from Garrison and his followers. They no longer agreed with the direction that Garrison was leading the movement. Some objected to the involvement of women, while others wanted the organization to play a larger role in politics. Still others had become disenchanted with the effectiveness of a national organization altogether and were not sure that one was even needed. Realizing that Garrison could not be overthrown in Massachusetts, Tappan, Birney and others continued to concentrate on the national organization where Garrison's leadership was waning. This was followed by increased antagonism within the A.A.S.S. as the internal struggles began to threaten the entire abolitionist movement in America. Both sides realized a showdown was now inevitable, and the stage was set for a final confrontation at the annual meeting of the A.A.S.S. in 1840.

As the stated time approached, Johnson and others believed that a scheme had been contrived to take control of the national organization at the meeting. He was aware that leaflets had been secretly issued with the aim of procuring a large turnout of those who were in favor of such a plan and that steps had been taken to recruit the support of large numbers of abolitionists in New York and the surrounding area. Adding further credence to their fears, three weeks before the annual meeting came the sudden announcement that the *Emancipator*, which was an organ of the national organization, had been transferred to the New York Anti-Slavery Society. The reason given was lack

of funds to maintain the publication of the paper. Johnson promptly declared that “the paper was the property of the society, and had been published at its expense for years.” and that “this was regarded as an act of bad faith, designed to keep the paper out of the hands of its rightful owners, in case the scheme for revolutionizing the society should miscarry.”<sup>15</sup>

The anniversary meeting of 1840 was scheduled to be held in May in New York City, the stronghold of the Tappan brothers and their following. Garrison understood that his support had largely evaporated, but he had no intention of allowing the A.A.S.S. to be dissolved. In many ways he regarded the national organization as his own society and a product of his inspiration. He resolved to save the association from destruction.

With the help of Johnson and other leaders still loyal to him, Garrison and his friends devised a strategy to counter the plot of the opposition. Completely aware they could not procure anything like a majority among the expected delegates, they decided to import a majority of their own. They chartered a steamboat at Lynn Harbor and offered citizens an outing to New York at nominal cost, provided they would cast their votes at Garrison’s direction.<sup>16</sup> Similar methods were employed elsewhere, and as Johnson recalled, “They put the fare at a low rate, and sent out a rallying-cry through the ‘*Liberator*’ to all who desired to keep the good ship Anti-Slavery on her right course. The call elicited a prompt response. More than 400 delegates, many of them women, went to

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 287, 288.

<sup>16</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 169.

New York on the steamer, prepared to do what they could to preserve the integrity of the anti-slavery movement.”<sup>17</sup>

Johnson not only assisted in organizing the trip, he traveled on the steamer with most of the delegates. He remembered the amusing stories during the passage and the entertainment provided. Johnson believed he was participating in a modern crusade and often talked about the excursion in later years. “A happier crowd I never saw, and surely a more respectable body of people never went on board a ship. They were all animated by what they regarded as a high and noble purpose. They were of one heart and one mind. of ‘one accord in one place.’ Songs and speeches filled up the evening hours until the time of sleep, when such as were fortunate enough to obtain berths retired for the night. Those less fortunate appropriated to themselves such portions of the steamer’s floors, in cabin or on deck, as they found available.”<sup>18</sup>

Upon their arrival in New York, the situation changed dramatically. The living arrangements and facilities provided were insufficient. For Johnson, “the fun of the occasion was mixed with some serious annoyances.”<sup>19</sup> John A. Collins, the general agent of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, had substantial qualifications as a quartermaster and commissary and had been selected to provide all the accommodations and lodgings for the crusaders. The quarters he arranged for them turned out to be

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<sup>17</sup> *Liberator*, April 24, 1840. See also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 289.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 289. Johnson described the journey and events aboard ship in detail. It is clear that he considered this an important and momentous occasion for the antislavery movement and his memories of the episode were extremely pleasant. Note also Thomas, *The Liberator*, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 290, 291. Thomas gives an excellent narration of the trip as well, but does so from Garrison’s viewpoint.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 290.

altogether inadequate, and Johnson compared them to the dark, unfurnished rooms in Merchants' Hall, where he and Garrison had lived when they first became close friends, over seven years earlier. Tents were supposed to be provided and erected in City Hall Park, but they never arrived, and even if they had reached their destination, the New York City police were not friendly to the crusaders, and staying in tents would not have been safe. Yet these aggravations did not deter anyone from the objective, as everything was handled with patience and good will, and all were ready at the appointed place and time.

The meeting of the society was held in the Presbyterian church on the corner of Madison and Catherine Streets. Remarkably, Arthur Tappan, the President, did not attend the proceedings. Instead, with no explanation he sent in his letter of resignation. Johnson believed that Tappan's absence and sudden withdrawal were intentional, as he had anticipated a division of the national organization. This led to some initial confusion in the New York Committee. One of the Vice Presidents, Francis Jackson of Massachusetts, an associate of Garrison's quickly filled Tappan's office.

It was fortunate that Garrison and his followers had planned so well. Lewis Tappan did attend the meeting and was very much in evidence on the convention floor. The New York Committee had succeeded in finding recruits from all areas, and Tappan was rallying his faction, determined to fight it out. The first issue addressed was the nomination of a Business Committee. Selected for the committee was a young Quaker woman named Abby Kelly, of Lynn, Massachusetts. She was a well-known lecturer, and no one could object to her credentials as an active abolitionist. But her selection immediately reopened the question of the involvement of women in the movement.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 197; Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 52.

Objections to her nomination were instantly voiced. This in turn led to an open debate in which the entire subject was again argued. Johnson was in complete agreement with the nomination. He, who had long fought for equal participation of women in the movement and felt that the selection was just, noted, "Considering the fact that full half the members of the Society were women, whose rights as such had been duly acknowledged the year before, this action on the part of the Chair was eminently proper." If he had any regrets, they concerned the false accusations and insults Kelly was made to endure, as well as the damaging propaganda leveled against the national society. Johnson's apprehensions were that "the only mistake, if there were any, was that Mr. Jackson did not give her a companion of her own sex on the committee." Why this oversight occurred is unclear, but Johnson believed that the main reason was that many of the most prominent women of the society had gone to England as delegates to the London Anti-Slavery Conference, and there were few left who had the desire or courage to face the task. If they had been present, he was certain that Kelly would not have been left alone on the committee. A large amount of the ridicule that Kelly was forced to endure was the result of her being one woman alone in the company of six or eight men. This situation made her vulnerable to vulgar attacks and vile insinuations. Johnson was extremely sympathetic to Kelly's plight, as he knew she felt these insults keenly. He also believed that she bore them with courage and, by doing so, established a path for other women to follow. In addition to the calumny directed at Kelly, the A.A.S.S. was attacked as a women's rights association that sought to overturn the family structure and destroy the faith of men in the Bible. Johnson was convinced that "extraordinary efforts had been made to secure a reversal of

the action of the previous year.”<sup>21</sup> As the debate continued, he lobbied feverishly among the delegates in an attempt to secure votes in favor of Kelly’s nomination. The events of the meeting had Johnson convinced that much more was at stake than this one position, and the entire future of the national organization was in jeopardy.

Finally, the society voted, with the result in favor of Kelly’s appointment. The New York Committee had lost by 557 to 451.<sup>22</sup> Garrison and his followers had made excellent use of the boatload of delegates, as the town of Lynn and the women delegates had collaborated to give him a victory. Lewis Tappan, who had been selected for the Business Committee, promptly resigned.

Lewis Tappan and William Lloyd Garrison had been friends for 10 years, ever since the young Garrison walked into the Tappan warehouse in the summer of 1830 and introduced himself. A short time earlier, Garrison had been arrested and imprisoned in a Baltimore jail on a charge of libel, and Arthur Tappan had sent a check for Garrison to be released on bail. Garrison had come to thank Arthur Tappan, and to request assistance in funding his new publication the *Liberator*. The Tappan brothers had already demonstrated an interest in the antislavery cause, and Garrison left with a check for \$100 and a further promise of their support. Lewis Tappan helped Garrison with the creation of the A.A.S.S., and his philanthropic aid was pivotal in keeping the new national organization solvent. As the organization began to grow, both men began to drift apart ideologically, which began to place a severe strain on their friendship. Lewis held

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<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 291, 292.

<sup>22</sup> Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, 290-292. Thomas gives a complete account of the proceedings of the anniversary meeting and the effects it had on the national organization. Also, Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 169; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 291.

steadfast to his Unitarian faith and worried that Garrison no longer believed in family prayer, church attendance, or the usefulness of clergy. The main obstacle that drove a wedge between the two men was Garrison's anti-institutionalism. Garrison claimed that the churches and even human government itself obstructed progress, and this specifically applied to abolitionism. The churches allowed slaveholders to take communion, and political parties had surrendered moral courage in behalf of corrupt self-interest. It was this philosophy that led Garrison to denounce the Constitution and the very institutional structure of the American government itself. Tappan, however, found strength in his religious faith. He viewed the government as a source of stability in society. As a victim of mob violence, he believed that the institutional structure of the country kept order. Without it, chaos would reign. Tappan also believed that reform could occur by using the mechanisms available within the institutional structure, such as political parties and government agencies. By 1840, both men had drifted apart so far that compromise was no longer possible.<sup>23</sup>

When Lewis Tappan resigned, he took with him the entire New York Committee and its following, which numbered over 400. This group left the hall and reorganized in a conference room in the basement of the church. That evening, about 30 leading members of the schism met at the home of Lewis Tappan, where he read them a constitution he had drafted. Their aim was to form a new society, which they called the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (A & F). The following day the document was adopted, and Lewis Tappan was elected president. The A & F explicitly denied women the right to vote, but did not categorically state a shift from moral suasion to

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<sup>23</sup> Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 78, 79, 185-189.

political action, although this would be the direction favored.<sup>24</sup> Garrison was now in complete control of what was left of the national organization, and for the moment, the remaining delegates at the convention celebrated their victory.

Whether the division could have been avoided is difficult to access, but it appears unlikely as the two groups had been traveling on a collision course for some time. The differences in ideology were the main reasons for the separation, as Garrison and his followers could never sanction an antislavery political party. Furthermore, the prejudice demonstrated against the women was perhaps commonplace for the time, but those who walked out of the convention should have realized the tremendous contribution the women had made to the cause. The schism left the A.A.S.S. near bankruptcy and almost in ruin, but its eventual rejuvenation can be credited in great part to the continued hard work of many of the female abolitionists. Garrison, on the other hand, was unwilling to compromise on any of the major issues. He viewed the A.A.S.S. as his organization. Garrison had developed his own vision of what the national antislavery society should be and refused to tolerate any diversion from his original standards. Both Tappans also remained unshakable in their convictions, especially Lewis who was just as unwilling to compromise as Garrison. There also appears to have been a conflict of egos,

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<sup>24</sup> Historians have taken conflicting views on Garrison's packing of the assembly. For the versions of the two competing factions see the *Liberator*, May 15, 1840 and the *Philanthropist*, June 16, 1840. See also Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 203. Brown gave Garrison considerable credit for his actions at the convention, stating that few believed he could muster such a large amount of support. Additionally Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 169, 175, is extremely critical of Garrison's behavior comparing it to a *coup d'etat*, Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 52. Correspondingly see Thomas, *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, 291, 292, and Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 292. Johnson gives an excellent description of the proceedings, as well as his evaluation of the harm the schism caused to the movement.

as power, besides principle, was behind the struggle. Theodore Weld voiced this opinion as Lewis Tappan and Garrison each viewed himself as the main guiding force of the antislavery crusade.<sup>25</sup> They were now at an impasse where neither was willing to listen to the other. Their own importance had become so inflated that it conflicted with their common goal, and rather than yield, both allowed the antislavery movement to suffer. Now both would have their opportunity to lead, but they would be in command of much smaller and less powerful organizations. The outcome was tragic, as American abolitionists had not only splintered their membership, but damaged the movement considerably as well.

The great schism that occurred at the anniversary meeting divided the entire antislavery movement in America. The abolitionist movement had started to have an impact on public opinion. Its membership was growing and its influence increasing. The schism weakened the cause to such an extent that it would never again become a united force capable of bringing about reform. The movement was now split between two major organizations that viewed each other, as well as slavery, as the enemy. Many abolitionists decided not to join either organization and went their separate ways. Theodore Weld, for example, could not accept the anti-women position of the A & F or the political views of the A.A.S.S., and he refused to be associated with either society.<sup>26</sup> Others, such as Gerrit Smith, also refused to join either organization believing that doing

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<sup>25</sup> Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 203. Additionally the Theodore D. Weld Papers, letter from Lewis Tappan dated May 26, 1840. Tappan confessed that the “women question” was only one of a number of complaints he had against Garrison.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore D. Weld Papers, letter to Lewis Tappan, January 23, 1843. Also Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 175, 176, 194. Barnes explains how the national society does not just divide, but splinters into various groups.

so would make abolitionists take sides against one another. In a letter to Weld he expressed his feelings saying, "Old and New Anti-Slavery Organization...will be the occasion of keeping up and aggravating their quarrels." Smith went on to state that "I have come to the conclusion that the benefits our anti-slavery organization yields are not adequate recompense for the danger it does our cause...and that it is therefore better that it should be abandoned."<sup>27</sup> The schism destroyed the credibility of the movement with an American public, many of whom were still undecided on the issue.

For his part, Garrison was ecstatic over the victory. In a letter to Johnson a few days after the schism, he rejoiced about the events knowing full well that Johnson had been present and witnessed all that had occurred.<sup>28</sup> In an equally enthusiastic letter to his wife he boasted that "it was our anti-slavery boatload that saved our society from falling into the hands of the new organizers, or more correctly, disorganizers."<sup>29</sup> The schism not only caused the departure of the New York organization and the withdrawal of the auxiliary associations, it left the A.A.S.S. virtually bankrupt. This, however, did not appear to faze Garrison for, in his judgment, the A.A.S.S. had been cleansed.

Unlike his friend, Johnson deplored the division and the damage that had been done to the cause. Believing in the Broad Platform to which Garrison subscribed, he

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<sup>27</sup> Theodore D. Weld Papers, letter from Gerrit Smith to Theodore D. Weld, November 7, 1840. See also Lewis Perry, *Radical Abolitionism, Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1973, 158-187. Perry explains in detail that both the Garrisonians and their opponents displayed ambivalent attitudes towards politics and anarchy. In addition, there was great complexity in the relationship between radical abolitionism and politics. As Perry correctly points out, the schism did not divide the movement into two opposing camps, it splintered it entirely.

<sup>28</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971-1981, letter to Oliver Johnson, May 12, 1840.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Letter from Garrison to his wife, May 15, 1840.

nevertheless, also viewed those who were demanding political action as allies of antislavery. For slavery to be abolished, compromises had to be reached, and a joint effort by all parties had to be aimed at destroying the institution of slavery. He openly admitted that the schism left the old society “strong only in principles and in its unswerving loyalty and faith of its members. It had no depository, no newspaper, and no funds. The division had carried away nearly all the abolitionists of New York and vicinity, so that it was hard to find there a sufficient number of persons qualified to constitute an Executive Committee.”<sup>30</sup> For Johnson, the schism was a catastrophic event.

As soon as the anniversary meeting adjourned, Garrison left to join his colleagues in London for the World Anti-Slavery Conference. Most of the delegates had sailed for England in April. This included members of the New York Committee, which had selected James G. Birney as its chief representative. Garrison had intentionally delayed his departure until the conclusion of the annual meeting at the end of May. As he had done several times before, he left the management of the *Liberator* in the capable hands of his trusted friend Johnson.<sup>31</sup> At the convention in London, Garrison found that his associates in England were even less enlightened in regards to the participation of women than his enemies in New York. Prior to his arrival, and with the help of the delegates from the A & F, the format for the convention had already been agreed upon. Immediately upon entering the convention, Garrison was told that it had been declared that no women delegates would be seated. When they agreed to the prohibition the British did not realize that the seating of women delegates would become a major issue,

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<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 296.

<sup>31</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson, May 22, 1840.

and they were extremely embarrassed about it. Birney regretted that the question had been introduced, and he apologized that it had been brought across the Atlantic, stating it had caused enough problems at home.<sup>32</sup> The outcome abroad, however, was the complete reversal of what occurred in New York. Against the vigorous objections of Garrison, it was concluded that no women delegates would be allowed to participate at the convention. In protest, the small group of Garrison men refused to take their seats. Instead, they sat in the gallery and watched the proceedings without taking part. Garrison described all the proceedings in letters to Johnson, which he printed regularly in the *Liberator*.<sup>33</sup> Although the convention in London was a disappointment for the Garrisonians, they remained firm in their convictions and never lost faith in their beliefs. What was made strikingly clear to their British hosts was that Garrison could no longer be considered the ambassador of American abolitionism to the world and that the A.A.S.S. and the entire American antislavery movement was in disarray. The English were having the same reaction as the American public, as it appeared that the common enemy of slavery was being sidelined in the melee between the two factions. One of the main goals of the convention was to foster an international accord on slavery matters. Instead, two groups competed for British endorsement. It is true that the English did

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<sup>32</sup> Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention, London: 1840, 20. These records are the best summary of the correspondence between the American and British abolitionists. The documents also reflect the confusion on the part of the British delegates in regard to seating women at the convention.

<sup>33</sup> *Liberator*, October 23, 1840, "The London Convention." See also William Lloyd Garrison Papers. In his correspondence to Johnson, Garrison gave a complete account of all the activities of the convention. Johnson then printed exact copies of the letters in the *Liberator*. For a complete description of the London convention and Garrison's activities see Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, 293-299. For a public statement of the British Anti-Slavery Society about the actions of Garrison see the *Emancipator*, February 25, 1841.

view the A & F more favorably, but they had difficulty granting complete support to either side, and the cause suffered greatly from the division.

The results of the London convention only added confidence to the organizers of the A & F, who began to revitalize and combine many of the local auxiliaries. The thrust was to readdress the new philosophy of a Broad Platform and eliminate what they considered the shortcomings of the original A.A.S.S. Many believed the British had been successful in their antislavery program because they refused to allow other reform movements to be affiliated with abolitionism.

Johnson understood the danger the A & F posed and said that “It is not to be denied that the new society presented a formidable front, embracing in its ranks as it did Abolitionists of high standing and great popularity.” At the same time, he could not pass judgment on them because he believed their intentions were honorable. When considering what they had done, he asserted, “It is not for me to cast any implications upon the men who thus separated themselves from the old society. Doubtless the great body of them believed that they had taken the right course best calculated to advance the cause.”<sup>34</sup>

The new organization had a strong start, but it would not be able to maintain its original momentum. The differences that resulted in the schism were many, and as the A & F entered into the new arena of politics and non-resistance, the organization was challenged with new problems. All of the individuals associated with the A & F were abolitionists, but for many, antislavery was not the prominent issue. In their minds, the

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<sup>34</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 293. An older text, yet one that remains a good source and examined the different beliefs and convictions held by various abolitionists is by Richard H. Sewell, *John P. Hale and the Politics of Abolition*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.

slavery question took a back seat to other reform movements, and they pressed these issues forward over abolition. Most important, even though they had finally rid themselves of Garrison and his supporters, they soon realized that there was not sufficient unity among themselves to sustain a national organization. For his part, Garrison continually referred to the A & F as the “soulless new organization.”<sup>35</sup>

Within a short period of time the A & F found itself in trouble. The great plan of its founders to establish a national organization never came to pass, as many of the larger auxiliaries remained indifferent. Many of the local groups soon began to withdraw, as did several of the A & F’s leading members.<sup>36</sup> James G. Birney and Henry Stanton both resigned their positions as secretaries. At the first anniversary of the A & F in 1841, Joshua Leavitt admitted the organization was a failure.<sup>37</sup> One of the principal reasons for its lack of success lay in the fact that many antislavery men no longer believed there was a place for a national organization.

Johnson maintained that there were numerous reasons for the failure of the new society. He was able to dissect the problems and evaluate the results, some of which were favorable to the cause. In his analysis there was no doubt that the members of the A & F believed that they would attract to their more conservative and prudent society the support of a large number of the evangelical ministers and laymen who had remained distant, because of their abhorrence of Garrison. As Johnson correctly concluded, “The men whom they hoped to conciliate and win, however strong their aversion to Garrison,

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas, *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, 307.

<sup>36</sup> *Emancipator*, notices of withdrawals of various auxiliaries are listed in the paper from August, 1842 to November, 1841.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, November 25, 1841. Reports the resignation of both Birney and Stanton, as well as Leavitt’s admission that the A & F is a failure.

yet loved the anti-slavery cause no more than they loved him. They still stood aloof, grumbling and carping over everything that either society did."<sup>38</sup>

The A & F did not die a quick death; it lingered on for 14 years due to the financial support of Lewis Tappan. He collected around himself the vestiges of the New York Committee and worked incessantly to make the organization a success. Tappan assumed control of the treasury and continually corresponded with British leaders, traveling to England on several occasions and raising money for various projects.<sup>39</sup> He founded the *National Era*, which became the organ of the A & F, and he never ceased to believe in the benefits of a national organization.

The two organizations were now termed by members of the A.A.S.S. as the "Old and New Anti-Slavery Organizations."<sup>40</sup> Johnson believed that the A & F did accomplish much that was good while it existed. When dealing with Lewis Tappan his evaluation was much harsher, as he accused him of being the leader of the schism. "Mr. Tappan," he maintained, "let it not be forgotten, was the man who led in the secession, dividing the anti-slavery host for the purpose of securing the co-operation of men, who, as it was afterwards proved, had not a drop of anti-slavery blood in their obdurate hearts, being 'like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; which will not hearken to the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely.'" The new society failed to gain support of this class

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<sup>38</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 293.

<sup>39</sup> American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society Records, First Annual Report, 1841. For a complete examination of Tappan's involvement with the A & F see Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, 198-215, 249-252, 279-282, 315, 316, 332. A full account of Tappan's achievements as treasurer of the A & F is printed in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 27, 1843.

<sup>40</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 176.

of men because, although it had turned its back upon Garrison, it still denounced slavery as a sin and urged immediate emancipation as a duty."<sup>41</sup>

Johnson observed that it was not Garrison's harsh language or even his antislavery principles that repelled these individuals, as they would no more follow Tappan than him. This demonstrated what a blunder it was to divide the antislavery corps by responding to the objections of these men that women were admitted to membership. It was not just the ideology of the new organization that damaged the antislavery movement, it was Tappan's failure to see the harm he was doing by dividing the cause and thus hurting the crusade. The good the new society did, and Johnson did not deny that it did much, was meager recompense for the effects of the schism. In the years to follow, the abolitionist movement would regroup and become increasingly important, but those who seceded were never again as strong as they were at the moment of their departure.

Johnson acknowledged that the *National Era* as well as the many pamphlets issued by William Jay and others, accomplished a great deal of good in Washington by gaining the attention of congressmen. But he condemned the actions of those who formed the new society, believing they had splintered the movement and caused permanent damage. He denounced the conduct of Tappan and the others stating, "I only say that if the seceders had stood firmly by the old organization, and the united body had continued to 'move upon the enemy's works' with steady and unflinching step, far more might have been accomplished than was possible to be done by a divided host."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 294, 295.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

Johnson believed that the schism was created by selfish acts that should not have conflicted with the antislavery cause. He perceived that the reasons for the division were not the sort which should have had a greater influence on men who loved the antislavery cause more than they did their own factions, and hence, the new society became defunct because it lacked moral vitality.

The schism left the old society in severe distress as well. It remained an organization strong only in principle. The A.A.S.S. was financially bankrupt and had no newspaper. The defection of the New York Committee left the old society with virtually no representation in New York City. Johnson was quick to face the reality of the situation, admitting, "The secession, it must be confessed, left the old society in a very crippled condition."

Johnson's analysis of the situation was correct, and what he had feared most became a reality. The great schism damaged the American abolitionist movement to such an extent that it never again regained the influence and power it once had. What remained of the A.A.S.S. was only a shell of the once powerful organization. It was fast becoming an organization without a constituency. The old society was to enter the decade of the 1840s with little more than its name in its continuing struggle against slavery. Johnson viewed the schism as a setback, but never lost faith in the cause.<sup>43</sup> He

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<sup>43</sup> Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*, New York, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976, 3-18. Walters admits the schism did weaken the movement and put an end to a period of rapid growth in its operations. It caused the A.A.S.S. to curtail its operations, and it lost the support of a reform entrepreneur and philanthropist, such as Lewis Tappan. Nonetheless, he also asserts that after 1840 abolitionism did not require a strong national organization. Walters states that the A.A.S.S. had done its best work by then and was becoming a victim of its own success. The division increased the variety of antislavery societies, and rather than discouraging abolitionists, this diversity encouraged the maximum number of

immediately immersed himself in the reorganization of the old society. The first order of business was to maintain a foundation in New York. As Johnson explains, “The Garrisonians were determined not to yield their foothold in New York. They reorganized the Executive Committee with such men as James G. Gibbons, a Quaker (“faithful among the faithless found”), the venerable Isaac T. Hopper, a radical Quaker and overseer for the Benezet School for black children, William P. Powell, and others.”<sup>44</sup> The new committee’s program was much less ambitious than the old. There were no provisions for antislavery libraries, agencies, petition campaigns, or correspondence. Its function was to reconstruct what was left of the old society. Most important, since the old society had lost the *Emancipator*, it needed to have its own newspaper to communicate with the public.

Funds were now desperately needed, as the A.A.S.S. was virtually penniless. A nationwide appeal was made after the 1840 anniversary meeting, but almost no one responded.<sup>45</sup> Subsequently, John C. Collins, acting as an agent of the old society traveled across the Atlantic to solicit funds from the British. They rejected his request, saying that “the course recently pursued by the American Anti-Slavery Society had alienated their confidence,” and Collins returned home empty handed.<sup>46</sup> Former allies such as Theodore

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people to enlist in the cause. Walters concludes that the division did not weaken abolitionism, instead it proved that a large national organization was not essential.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 295, 296.

<sup>45</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records. The financial difficulties of the A.A.S.S. are recorded in the Minutes of the Executive Committee, September 25, 1840; December 3, 1840; January 20, 1841.

<sup>46</sup> *Emancipator*, February 25, 1842. Collins requested a “grant of 2,000 pounds,” or if that was impossible, “an expression of their cordial desire for success,” of his agency. The executive committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society refused both requests. Also Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 173. Barnes explains in

D. Weld and Charles Stuart, who now viewed the A.A.S.S. as the opposition, further hampered Collins's efforts. But to many people across the country the name Garrison was still equated with abolitionism. Collins was persistent, and in the countryside he was able to secure the necessary funds and establish a system of regular contributions for the future.

The old society immediately set about launching its new publication, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. As Johnson recalled, "It was the story of 'The Liberator' all over again, save that the new paper was without a permanent editor and was compelled for a time, like a Yankee schoolma'am, to 'board round.' An office was opened in Nassau Street above Beekman, and the venerable Quaker, Isaac T. Hopper, put in place of the office agent." James S. Gibbons, James C. Jackson, and William M. Chase managed the paper during the summer. Johnson considered it a very competent and interesting publication that was pleasing to those on whose patronage it depended for support. At first a permanent editor could not be found. There were several qualified individuals, the most notable being Nathaniel P. Rogers, but none wished to relocate to New York. In the autumn of 1840, a decision was rendered calling for Johnson to assume the temporary editorship of the paper.<sup>47</sup> He accepted the post but, as his home was in Boston, he, too, did not wish to permanently uproot himself at this time.

This compromise continued until May 1841, when Lydia Maria Child was induced to assume the permanent editorship.<sup>48</sup> She and her husband had both been

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detail the reasons for the opposition to Collins mission by both the British and American abolitionists.

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 296, 297.

<sup>48</sup> Perry and Fellman, *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, 275. Note also Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, 292; Kraditor, *Means*

prominent in the antislavery cause for some time. Under her leadership, the paper flourished and became a popular journal. She incorporated articles that encompassed all aspects of the movement.<sup>49</sup> Johnson had the highest praise for the skill and devotion Child brought to the paper during her tenure, noting that she gave the paper a high degree of integrity and secured for it a large circulation.<sup>50</sup> Although her editorship of the paper was brilliant, Child soon became disillusioned. The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* was now the official organ of the A.A.S.S., and Garrison took it upon himself constantly to interfere with the journal's message. This, along with what Child considered to be the constant bickering over petty factionalism, caused her to resign in disgust after two years.<sup>51</sup>

The post was taken up by her husband with the understanding that he would be free to conduct the paper as he pleased. This agreement did not last very long, and after a

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*And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 64; Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 136; Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 173.

<sup>49</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, July 31, 1841, "Speaking in the Church." In this editorial Mrs. Child commented on the involvement of the church in the antislavery movement. Some of Child's other works include, *An Appeal in Favor of Americans Called Africans*, New York: Arno Press, 1968, reprinted from the 1836 edition, and *The Freedmen's Book*, New York: Arno Press, 1968, reprinted from the 1865 edition. Two excellent biographies of Lydia Maria Francis Child are by Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, and Bruce Mills, *Cultural Reformations: Lydia Maria Child and the Literature of Reform*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 297. Lydia Maria Child held the position for two years before her husband succeeded her.

<sup>51</sup> Lydia Maria Francis Child Papers, letter to Ellis Loring Gray, June 26, 1843. The letter expressed Mrs. Child's disenchantment and desire to break all connection with the movement, as she stated, "The ruling idea of my life is to earn money, and I want to do nothing that will obstruct my purpose. I wish you would likewise caution the *Liberator* folks against implying, in that I shall have anything to do with the *Standard*. I shall never write another column for it under any circumstances, but I do not want to be driven to

year of discord he also resigned.<sup>52</sup> In the spring of 1844, Johnson again assumed the temporary editorship of the journal.<sup>53</sup> Within a short period of time, Sydney Howard Gay became the local editor and agent, with Edmund Quincy and James Russell Lowell as contributing editors. Gay was a close associate of Garrison's who exuded an air of aristocratic refinement. Quincy and Lowell were also loyal supporters of Garrison.<sup>54</sup> Johnson approved of the appointments, and Gay and his associates made the paper a great power. Gay retained the position until 1858, continuing to produce excellent work, and secured for himself the trust and endearment of his fellow abolitionists by his ability as a writer and his solid devotion to the cause.<sup>55</sup>

The appointment of Gay brought stabilization to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, but with the departure of the Childs the paper lost two magnificent editors and never again regained its original status. The problems for the tabloid did not entirely end here, as Garrison also quarreled with Gay over the management of the paper, with Garrison usually winning the argument.<sup>56</sup> In truth, under the editorship of the Childs, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* was probably the best-managed antislavery newspaper ever published. In contrast, the *Liberator*, regulated by Garrison, was one of the most

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announce that publicly." Although frustrated, Mrs. Child did not leave the antislavery movement.

<sup>52</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 23, 1844. This is an account by David Lee Child of the editorial difficulties that he and his wife had with Garrison.

<sup>53</sup> Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 281.

<sup>54</sup> Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 66; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 297; Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 90.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 297, 298.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, 338, 339.

poorly edited, but best written journals.<sup>57</sup> Although Johnson never openly criticized Garrison, it was Garrison's desire to maintain a firm grip on the A.A.S.S. and his constant interference that hampered the success of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and kept it from becoming an even more effective publication. In support of Garrison's interference with the paper, Johnson was quick to point out, "Thus, while '*The Emancipator*,' a few years after its transfer, was reckoned among 'things lost upon the earth,' the '*National Anti-Slavery Standard*,' which, under the most discouraging circumstances, was established in its place as the organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society, lived, together with the society, to record the death of American slavery and the enfranchisement of its victims."<sup>58</sup> Even though the A & F turned out to be a failure, initially it began with a certain degree of competence and power. This was short lived, for as the years went by it declined steadily and was defunct long before the abolition of slavery. Despite the crippling effects the schism had inflicted on the old society, its members never lost hope. They remained faithful to their original convictions, worked on the old plan and solicited the aid of all the friends of immediate emancipation without regard to their sect, party or gender. They continued the struggle with increased vitality and never abandoned the cause until the more than four million who were held in bondage received their freedom.

The damage the schism had created, however, was irreversible. Johnson understood the harm that had been done and believed that those who had participated in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 311. As Thomas correctly points out, "The Childs could have told Gay that Garrison would tolerate no one who showed the least editorial independence. Lydia said that Garrison's idea of a proper editorial was a preamble and a dozen resolutions, and that when he went to heaven he would present Saint Peter with resolutions that protested being admitted by a traitor who has betrayed his master, a bloodthirsty villain who cut off the high priest's ears, and a miscreant who had been warned thrice by the beast."

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 297, 298.

the withdrawal lamented their misdeeds. He declared, "I have always believed that many of those who took part in the secession regretted it afterwards, seeing the mistaken impressions upon which they acted."<sup>59</sup> Being an intimate friend of Garrison's, Johnson knew his inner feelings. He spoke of the pain the division caused Garrison. Garrison was especially distressed by his estrangement from Lewis and Arthur Tappan. They had become close comrades over a decade earlier in 1830, when Arthur Tappan secured the freedom of the young Garrison from a Baltimore jail by paying his fine.<sup>60</sup> Now their differences in ideology had split the movement and threatened to cause its collapse. As the two camps continued to battle against the institution of slavery, as well as each other, Johnson became a conciliating force keeping the movement from becoming even more decimated.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 299.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas, *The Liberator, William Lloyd Garrison*, 109-113. Thomas gives a complete account of the incidents surrounding Garrison's trial and 49 day imprisonment. Tappan paid Garrison's fine and donated another one hundred dollars to the antislavery cause. See also Johnson's account of Garrison's trial and imprisonment, Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 35-41. At the time of Garrison's arrest, Johnson was living in Boston, but they had not yet become friends.

## Chapter 4

### Politics

In 1842, Johnson accepted the position of Boston correspondent of the *New York Tribune*. Working for the *Tribune* placed Johnson in the middle of the political argument. He knew that the A & F and others who wanted to use politics as a tool would have an impact. Although he was stationed in Boston, the main office of the *Tribune* was in New York, the stronghold of the A & F. This provided him with a unique opportunity to be privy to the deliberations of both major organizations, and to intervene as the voice of compromise when needed.

The idea of a third party had been brewing in the minds of a small number of abolitionists for several years. As early as 1836, James G. Birney had declared that there was not much to choose between the two candidates for the Presidency, Harrison and Van Buren. "If abolitionists unite themselves to either of the existing parties they will weaken their influence. Let our votes be given, where we can vote at all, to the most worthy without partisan distinction."<sup>1</sup> Although the moral issue remained prominent in the minds of most antislavery advocates, some began to look towards Congress for assistance.

During the late 1830s, this faction encompassed only a small minority of abolitionists. The national and state organizations continued to advocate the interrogation of political candidates and to vote only for those who agreed with their principles.

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<sup>1</sup> *Philanthropist*, October 28, 1836.

Additionally, the various tabloids of the state auxiliaries persisted in opposing any desire to form an antislavery political party. Articles such as those printed in the *Philanthropist*, which was a James G. Birney publication, constantly asserted the position that "Abolitionists have never organized; they never will organize as a political party for the purpose of accomplishing the great object of their desires."<sup>2</sup> At this time it was plainly stated that a third party for abolitionists was unnecessary and unwise: "Let them attempt a regular political organization, and who does not see that...zeal for human rights would be smothered in the dust of political conflict?... We have been thus explicit, not because we apprehend abolitionists will ever become so imprudent as to pursue the course animadverted on, but to convince our adversaries...how impossible it is that abolitionists, men of all politics and religion, should ever organize as a distinct, regular and political party."<sup>3</sup>

Despite these disclaimers, however, by the end of the decade the tide had begun to turn from Biblical discussions and moral work towards political action. Those who viewed a third party as righteous received some encouragement from the large number of antislavery candidates nominated during the state elections to Congress in 1838 and 1839.<sup>4</sup> At first it appeared that the interrogation method had succeeded, but when the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., May 19, 1837.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., September, 8, 1837. The article concluded, "All that can safely be done in a political way, is to be done by questioning candidates."

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Clarke Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969, 27-29. By 1840 the majority of abolitionists were searching for new methods of agitation. Very few rejected the moral suasion argument, but many in the antislavery rank and file had become disenchanted with it as their major contention. A large number began to believe that political action was the arena where change could be brought about. By the middle of the decade, those who refused to accept political action as a tool for reform were in the minority.

votes were tallied the initial exuberance turned to disappointment. In many areas the Democratic Party won sweeping victories, but it was soon discovered that in most cases the abolitionists had been misled and betrayed. Candidates who pledged their support to the antislavery cause immediately reneged or ignored their oath upon election.<sup>5</sup> In one of several such instances, the incumbent Thomas Morris, in the 1838 election in Ohio, was displaced by the Democratic Party for the same reasons the abolitionists honored him.<sup>6</sup>

Previously, in January 1837 a dismaying series of resolutions upheld the states' Black Laws and condemned abolition. These laws discriminated against black people and were designed to guarantee white supremacy. The codes varied from state to state and authorized local officials to apprehend unemployed blacks and fine them for vagrancy. The laws also forbade blacks from voting and owning or leasing farms. Men who had been elected as opponents of slavery were in many instances the same ones who voted for these enactments.<sup>7</sup> The policy of questioning candidates had proved to be a discouraging failure.

There were some small victories, however, as Joshua Giddings, Seth Gates, and William Slade did win their seats. Led by John Quincy Adams, they formed the antislavery congressional lobby known unofficially as the "Select Committee" on slavery

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<sup>5</sup> Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, 17-20.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed examination of the Democratic Party see Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1991, 33-87. Note also Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, 30, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, 31.

and argued against the pro-slavery gag order on petitions in Congress.<sup>8</sup> They were supported by Theodore D. Weld, who acted as a lobbyist, and Joshua Leavitt, who traveled to Washington, D.C. as a correspondent for the *Emancipator*.<sup>9</sup> By 1839, an increasing number of abolitionists were ready for the next step of a separate political party.

Third parties in America have consistently displayed poor performances in the polls, and the attempt by antislavery forces to create a political party in the 1840s would be no exception. Failure, however, was not on their minds as third party proponents moved forward with enthusiasm and tremendous optimism. When discussing the events in Congress, Henry Stanton was in favor of creating an abolitionist political party. When asked about the moral issues he contended, "that does not abate the necessity of political action. It is but the cause. Moral feeling is but the steam by which we have been employed for 4 or 5 years in getting up; and political action is the engine to which it must be applied. For it is by legal means only, that slavery can ever be abolished."<sup>10</sup> In New York, a letter to Gerrit Smith in 1838 described how abolitionists were beginning to

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<sup>8</sup> Joshua R. Giddings Papers. Giddings gave the small group of lobbyists their name, based on their aggressive actions in the House of Representatives. Similar to any other regular constituted committee, they planned a program of bills and resolutions to be introduced into the House of Representatives that would open the discussion of slavery.

<sup>9</sup> Joshua Leavitt Papers. This collection contains an enormous amount of correspondence between Leavitt and the antislavery Congressmen. It outlines their strategies, as well as their disagreements as to the various action plans undertaken. A large number of these letters were printed in the *Emancipator*, but usually by then they were several months old. As such, the arguments were often outdated. See also Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 177-179. Barnes gives a complete account of the antislavery lobby and the individuals who participated in it.

<sup>10</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 10.

contemplate a third party: "I am in favor of a distinct political organization—for these reasons:... Respect for our principles."<sup>11</sup>

Johnson viewed the events that were unfolding with mixed emotions. As a non-resistant, he acquiesced with the Garrisonian principles of not actively taking part in the management of a political party, but he still looked to political action as an important means of advancing the antislavery cause. Johnson viewed the growth of antislavery sentiment in political parties, the state legislatures, and Congress as natural. Advancement into politics, he thought, "was the anticipated result of the moral agitation created by anti-slavery societies, newspapers, tracts, lectures, conventions, etc." Johnson believed that Garrison also perceived those who were agitating in Congress were doing a noble service for the cause and that, "No man appreciated more highly than he [Garrison] did the noble service in the cause of freedom rendered by the earliest agitators of the question in Congress—such men as John Quincy Adams, William Slade, Seth H. Gates and Joshua R. Giddings." Johnson also conjectured that Garrison "saw in their action the fruit of his own labors, and a sure augury of the success of the movement, which he had planted." Johnson admitted that privately Garrison acknowledged the good that was being done by introducing the slavery question into politics, but there was an inconsistency inasmuch as, "Outside of anti-slavery meetings he would do what he could

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<sup>11</sup> Gerrit Smith Papers, letter from James C. Jackson to Gerrit Smith dated November 1838. Jackson became an abolitionist in the mid-1830s and assumed the position of Secretary of the A.A.S.S. in 1840. He edited several antislavery journals, such as *The Madison County Abolitionist*, *The Liberty Press*, *The Albany Press* and for a short time co-edited the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. Also Gerald Sorin, *The New York Abolitionists, A Case Study of Political Radicalism*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1971, 96.

for the spread of his Peace principles; but on the anti-slavery platform he had neither the right nor the wish to introduce the subject."<sup>12</sup>

Johnson did not see Garrison's stance as inconsistent, although his own beliefs conflicted with Garrison's principles. Garrison welcomed all individuals who were willing to support immediate emancipation regardless of their religious sect. According to Johnson, if the Catholic Church had decided to work for the abolition of slavery, "No reproach of the Pope would have fallen from Garrison's lips on the anti-slavery platform." Johnson went on to state that "[Garrison's] relation to the political parties was exactly similar to his relationship to the churches, and he felt no more scruple in urging the one than the other to take an anti-slavery course."<sup>13</sup>

As a non-resistant, Johnson too worked for the ideals of peace, but his religious convictions would never have allowed him to embrace Catholicism the way Garrison could have, assuming the opportunity did arise. The two men were dissimilar in other ways as well. According to Johnson, it was not Garrison's non-resistance sentiments that made him opposed to the establishment of a third party. He wrote: "Thousands of the most earnest Abolitionists in the land, who had no sympathy with his non-resistance views, were as warmly opposed to it as he was." Such an organization was indeed in direct opposition to numerous acknowledgments, official as well as private, of the

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 306.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 306, 307. When describing Garrison's relationship to the church, Johnson confirmed that, "He was no Roman Catholic, any more than he was a politician, and could not in conscience have become a member of the Catholic Church; but if that ancient and powerful denomination had lent itself to the work of abolishing American slavery, he would have rejoiced with joy unspeakable. He was indeed a member of *no* religious sect, nor would he have joined any one of all the churches around him; but not the less on this account would he have been glad to see any one of them take a position of

abolitionists. "We have opened," said the American Anti-Slavery Society in its third annual report, "and shall open, no road to political preferment. The strength of our cause must be in the humble, fervent prayer of the righteous man, which availeth much, and the blessing of that God who has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty."<sup>14</sup>

For Garrison, the dictum had been established with the creation of the A.A.S.S. and was not to be altered. In 1837 the annual report said, "It is expected that some political wolves will put on clothing of abolitionism, and seek to elevate themselves and manage the anti-slavery organization, to secure their own purposes. But they ought to be met at the threshold, and stripped of their disguise. The best safeguard against their entrances is for the Abolitionists, while they firmly refuse to vote for a man who will not support abolition measures, to avoid setting up candidates of their own." Later the A.A.S.S. avowed that, "Abolitionists have resolved from the first to act upon slavery politically, not by organizing a new political party, but by making it the interest of the parties already existing to act upon abolition principles."<sup>15</sup>

The prediction of the national organization did come true, as the interrogation method demonstrated. There were many politicians who used the antislavery cause to secure votes, but never believed in or followed on their promises to support the movement. By the 1840s, the course of the abolitionist crusade had been altered greatly

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active hostility to slavery. It was indeed his constant effort and desire to induce them all to do this."

<sup>14</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records, Third Annual Report, 1836. For Johnson's quotes about Garrison see Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 307.

<sup>15</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records, Fourth Annual Report, 1837. See also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 307, 308.

since its inception. The schism had severely damaged the public impression of what the antislavery campaign was attempting to accomplish. The populace had not been convinced of the righteousness of the cause. For the most part, the citizenry remained either hostile or ambivalent to the plight of the slave. Johnson understood the changes that had occurred and realized that the strategy of the A.A.S.S. had to be revised to meet the new challenges. As an individual he had the ability to grow and evolve, which allowed him to accept new methods of agitation. He was able to reconcile the possibility of new approaches with his religious beliefs, never giving up his conviction of non-resistance.

Garrison, however, remained firm in his original doctrine. As Johnson wrote, "Mr. Garrison thought, in the first place, that it was wholly unnecessary for Abolitionists to organize a political party, since one or both of the existing parties would be compelled to espouse the cause so soon as public opinion should call for anti-slavery action." This vision never came to pass and by the 1840s seemed extremely improbable. Factions of the Whig Party were certainly more sympathetic to the movement than the Democrats, but neither party ever embraced the abolitionist cause. This became very clear when there were no candidates running for office who supported antislavery. It left abolitionists no choice except not to vote. Johnson understood that this was a waste of power. He agreed with Garrison that "their true course, was to persevere in the work of moral agitation, enlightening the people as to the character of slavery and their duties concerning it, quickening their consciences, and seeking to form a public sentiment that would impel the National and State Governments to exercise all constitutional powers in opposition to slavery." But he dissented with the consequences, unlike Garrison, who

believed that the results already accomplished by moral agitation and the interrogation method had demonstrated the efficacy of these methods.<sup>16</sup>

Garrison also argued that a political party was the most expensive, wasteful, and least efficacious of all instruments for moral agitation and enlightenment of the people.<sup>17</sup> Johnson thought differently. He saw a political party as not just an opportunity to fight for constitutional reforms, but also an excellent means of getting the message to the people. Antislavery candidates would stump the countryside spreading the idea of the evils of slavery. Political literature that incorporated abolitionist philosophy also continued to agitate the subject. Political action created open debate, which in turn increased agitation in all spheres of American life. Politics was a forum that could give the crippled antislavery movement a rebirth, and Johnson believed it should be used to its full advantage.

Since the spring of 1839, the idea of a third party had been rapidly taking shape in the minds of a few men. The first person openly to urge abolitionists to organize their own political party was Myron Holley of upstate New York. A graduate of Williams College, Holley had moved to Cooperstown, New York, in 1799 to study law and soon set up his own practice at Canandaigua. He was raised as a Congregationalist, but gradually developed an eclectic, humanistic faith that rejected orthodox Calvinism as unscriptural, irrational, and demoralizing. Instead, he accepted a benign and tolerant God

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<sup>16</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 308.

<sup>17</sup> Wendell Phillips Garrison and Francis Jackson Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade In America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1889, 89, 90, 114; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 308.

who offered salvation to all men.<sup>18</sup> In a sequence of small, scantily attended conventions during 1839, he and a few supporters tried to persuade their colleagues in the A.A.S.S. that abolitionists must make autonomous nominations for President and Vice President in time for the 1840 election.<sup>19</sup> Initially, the reactions were dissenting and pessimistic. During the summer of that year, abolitionist newspapers were constantly occupied with the controversy. As futile as the interrogation method had been, it still seemed preferable to a forlorn-hope political party. The overwhelming majority appeared to agree with the opinion stated in the *Philanthropist*: "Let us retire from the contest, and leave the dough-faced politicians to fight their own battles."<sup>20</sup>

Johnson refused to condemn Holley and those who defended his views. He believed the discussion needed to be brought out into the open and debated, and he wanted the political advocates to be heard. In an article in the *Liberator* entitled "Hear Both Sides," he expressed the need to use all available resources to end the scourge of slavery in America.<sup>21</sup> Johnson did not advocate or denounce either side as wrong in principle. He merely wanted whatever was positive to be used to its best advantage.

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<sup>18</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 54, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Rayback, "The Liberty Party Leaders of Ohio: Exponents of Antislavery Coalition," *The Ohio State Archeological and Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (April 1948), 165-167. Rayback explained what occurred at each of these conventions. For a complete analysis of the various conventions, as well as the antislavery political party in general see Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, 27-47.

<sup>20</sup> *Philanthropist*, April 30, 1839. An editorial by Gamaliel Bailey, who took over the editorship of the paper from James G. Birney in 1837. Unlike his predecessor, Bailey argued vehemently against an independent party movement.

<sup>21</sup> *Liberator*, September 14, 1838, "Hear Both Sides." In this article Johnson's tone was intentionally conciliatory and not aggressive. He also urged abolitionists to work together as a pressure group to force a major party to take acceptable positions and nominate antislavery candidates.

In spite of the opposition, those who believed in political action refused to yield, and the dilemma persisted. On November 13, 1839, a convention was held in Warsaw, New York, where Holley used the opportunity to nominate James G. Birney for President and F.J. Lemoyne for Vice President. Birney, a former Alabama slaveholder, had been a well-known abolitionist for sometime, and Lemoyne was prominent in the movement in Pennsylvania. Both declined the nomination. Lemoyne felt there was no need for a third party, and Birney stated, "While I agree with you fully in the opinion that the great anti-slavery enterprise can never succeed without independent nominations, I feel assured that the views of abolitionists as a body do not enough harmonize to make such a measure advisable now."<sup>22</sup>

Birney was correct at the time, but as the next few months passed, the situation changed. With the prospect of Martin Van Buren and William Henry Harrison as the likely candidates both of whom were unacceptable, many abolitionists gradually became convinced that Holley was right. Without a separate antislavery party, many abolitionists began to believe that their votes would be wasted. This became clearer by the huge number of letters that began to appear in the antislavery publications.<sup>23</sup>

On April 1, 1840, another convention was called in Albany, New York. Inclement weather kept attendance low; only 121 delegates were present. Most of the leading third party advocates such as Myron Holley, Joshua Leavitt, and Elizur Wright did show up. For two days arguments ensued as to the formation of a third party. When the vote was finally tallied at the end of the second day, 44 voted aye and 33 nay, while

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., January 21, 1840.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., February 25, 1840; April 14, 1840.

the remainder of the delegates abstained.<sup>24</sup> By a slender margin, a new political party had been created. Again, Birney was nominated for President, and, in the hope of attracting constituents from the Democratic Party, Thomas Earle, a Quaker from Philadelphia and former Democrat was selected for Vice President. This time, both men accepted. The new party, named the Liberty Party, received its name from Gerrit Smith and was established on a very unstable foundation.<sup>25</sup>

Faced with the reality of the formation of a third party, Johnson now addressed the issue in the *Liberator* in a tract designated, "Anti-Slavery Political Party." He could still not commit himself to promote a third party, but argued what became known as the "scattering policy." He asserted that abolitionists could cast write-in votes for individuals not on the ballot. This would demonstrate the dissatisfaction with the nominees of the two major parties. Abolitionists could act as a pressure group and force the major parties to nominate antislavery candidates. Johnson, feeling strongly that everyone should cast his vote, stated, "We urge no arguments, on the anti-slavery platform, to dissuade men from voting," but he believed that the "scattering policy" would have the greatest impact.<sup>26</sup> Johnson's argument stemmed from the belief that a third party would fail and

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<sup>24</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 71.

<sup>25</sup> For a complete analysis of the Liberty Party see Vernon L. Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest, 1838-1848*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990. Also Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, 38-40.

<sup>26</sup> *Liberator*, June 26, 1840, "Anti-Slavery Political Party." Johnson argued in his article: "The question is not, whether the ballot-box is not an important instrumentality, which should be wielded by every voter for the promotion of the cause of humanity and freedom: nor whether anti-slavery voters are not under the most sacred obligations to bestow their suffrages upon men who have given unequivocal evidence of their fidelity to the principles of impartial justice; but it is, whether the desired object can be most speedily and effectually accomplished by an organized and independent political party, or by the modes of action hitherto pursued, modified somewhat, perhaps, in the light of past

that those who did not vote for the Liberty Party would end up casting their ballots for candidates who were indifferent about antislavery.

The election of 1840 proved to be extremely disappointing for the Liberty Party. Approximately 2.5 million votes were cast, of which Birney and Earle received just under 7,000.<sup>27</sup> The Liberty Party's disastrous showing at the polls gave their opponents the opportunity to declare that they, by their votes, had bolstered up the tottering fabric of slavery.<sup>28</sup> Regardless, the poor showing in the election was no proof that the tactic itself was inappropriate. The reasons for the catastrophic failure were numerous. The Liberty men were inexperienced as political managers, and they had the disadvantage of entering the race late. Additionally, the nationwide depression left the party with few financial resources. The A & F, the association which the party hoped would furnish their campaign workers, turned out to be a failure. Birney's actions did not help the new party either, as he made several campaign blunders, one of which was to choose the time of the election to travel abroad to England.

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experience. It does not follow, that he who opposes the plan of independent nominations must therefore stay away from the polls, or vote for the pro-slavery candidates of the present parties." Johnson then went on to espouse the scattering policy.

<sup>27</sup> Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln*, 165- 191. Note also Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, 46. The exact results of the election were not known until several weeks after the election, at which time it was reported that the Liberty Party had received a total of 6,784 votes. Also Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844*, 176.

<sup>28</sup> *Emancipator*, November 12, 1840. See also the *Liberator*, April 10, 1840, letter to the editor from Gamaliel Bailey who declared the party "must be regarded as a *failure*;" June 26, 1840, "Anti-Slavery Political Party;" November 6, 1840. Garrison dismissed the party as ridiculous. Through the *Liberator* he stepped up his attacks on the new party.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle of all was the party's philosophy of the "one idea." It had a one-issue platform, which was to end slavery in America.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, its scope was severely restricted, as it ignored many of the major issues, including tariff reform, bank revision, and internal improvements such as the construction of roads and bridges. The Whig and Democratic parties concentrated their efforts on these issues, as these were the problems that most concerned people. Harrison, a wealthy man with a considerable estate, was portrayed as a simple man of the people who loved log cabins and hard cider. Against such tactics and the effects of economic depression, the Democrats could not win. This in turn led many abolitionists to believe they would throw away their vote if they cast it for a party that had no chance of winning. They abandoned the Liberty Party and voted the Whig ticket of Harrison and Tyler.

The impotent showing of the Liberty Party bolstered Johnson's belief that the advocates of a third party had shown an impatience with the progress of the cause. Pointing to England, he stated that Americans should follow its example. In Great Britain, the abolitionists continued to hold the balance of power without organizing their own party until they won. Johnson was convinced that the American political parties were more subservient to the slave power than the English were. He also understood that slavery differed in the West Indies and the United States. Furthermore, the institutional structure of both countries was fundamentally different. In America, there was no national church, no national bar for laws, or centralized institution for education. Slavery was part of the established institutional structure, and legally it was part of the social, economic, and political structure of American society. Furthermore, the institution had a

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<sup>29</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 107.

financial economic base, and members of the slave owning class wielded tremendous power. The slave power controlled the South and had great influence in the North. This, he conjectured, merely proved that Americans were more corrupted by slavery than the English and that a third party would not counteract the corruption in their hearts. He further reasoned that, "All attempts to abolish slavery by legislation before the people of the country are converted to anti-slavery principles must of necessity be unsuccessful. A political party is not needed as a means of converting the people, and when they are converted, such a party will of course be unnecessary. When we say that efforts to abolish slavery by legislation must for the present be necessarily unsuccessful, we do not mean to intimate that such efforts should not constantly and vigorously be made; but only that the want of success should be attributed to the right cause, and not lead to the adoption of a measure which is at best of doubtful utility."<sup>30</sup> Johnson still maintained that the endeavors of the Liberty men did produce some good, but he also viewed their actions as wasteful, concluding that the effort and money spent could have been put to better use.

The devastating defeat did not deter those who believed in political action. Undaunted, the Liberty Party regrouped and prepared for the next election. The old state and local antislavery societies still existed, but their power had been severely diminished, and the vitality of the movement had shifted to the Liberty Party. Almost immediately following the election, a movement commenced to reorganize the political abolitionists on a local and national scale for distinct party action. In early 1841, at meetings and state conventions, they began by nominating candidates for local and state elections. Within a

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<sup>30</sup> *Liberator*, June 26, 1840, "Anti-Slavery Political Party."

short period of time, the Liberty Party called for a national convention to begin preparing for the next presidential election.<sup>31</sup>

On May 12, 1841, the party met in New York for what was really its first national convention. Delegates were present from all the New England states, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and Indiana. On the first day it was decided to nominate James G. Birney and Thomas Morris for President and Vice President respectively.<sup>32</sup> Next followed a plan for the organization of a national campaign, and the convention adjourned with a pledge to meet again in two years. The Liberty Party, having begun as basically a sectional party in the northeast, had to broaden its constituency in order to achieve success. In the years prior to the next presidential election, this is exactly what it attempted to accomplish by securing support from the western and border states. By 1843, the party had achieved some moderate success by expanding from a sectional to a national party.

For Johnson, the early 1840s were a stressful period, as he was forced to struggle through some severe financial difficulties. For most of his life he lived on the meager salary he received as an editor. For this reason he continually had trouble making ends meet. His wife Mary Anne, who was also dedicated to the cause, aided him in his work whenever possible. The Johnsons indulged in few luxuries and lived a very modest existence. Most of their time was spent working for the antislavery movement and

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<sup>31</sup> *Philanthropist*, January 13, 1841; January 27, 1841; February 3, 1841.

<sup>32</sup> *Emancipator*, June 10, 1841. The vote was as follows;

President: James G. Birney, 108	Vice President: Thomas Morris, 83
Thomas Morris, 2	Thomas Earle, 18
Gerrit Smith, 1	Gerrit Smith, 2

participating in church activities. In 1842, Johnson's monetary difficulties forced him into debt. Unable to meet his financial obligations, he procured a loan from his friend Francis Jackson.<sup>33</sup> What hurt most perhaps, was that he was forced to sell his printing press and seek employment at a more lucrative position at the *New York Tribune*. The thought of owing money to a friend and not being able to repay it weighed heavily on his conscience.

He sold his printing materials on the best terms possible to the extremely reputable firm of Andrews, Prentiss & Studley, on Devonshire Street in Boston. Even though his need was great, Johnson was careful not to sell his equipment to a firm that would use them to endorse slavery. Besides the money he received for the items he was also promised work, as well as a commission for articles submitted to the firm that it deemed suitable for print. Accordingly, Johnson wrote several letters to his friends endorsing the company and stating it was eager to print abolitionist articles.<sup>34</sup> At about the same time, he took the position of Boston correspondent of the *New York Tribune*. He remained at this post for two years, and in 1844 he became an assistant to Horace Greeley at the paper. Even though he was not working for an antislavery newspaper, the *Tribune* was an extremely liberal publication. Johnson was not assigned to any particular

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William Jay, 1

Alvin Stewart, 1

<sup>33</sup> Letter to Maria Weston Chapman, September 4, 1844, Oliver Johnson Records, Antislavery Collection, Boston Public Library. In his letter, Johnson explained his financial difficulties and the debt he owed Francis Jackson. He also expressed the dismay he felt at having to sell his printing materials and seek new employment, but vowed to remain active in the antislavery movement.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.. Johnson endorsed the firm of Andrews, Prentiss and Studley and stated, "they are among the very best printers in the city" and "may print the *Christian Examiner*, and their work is always in good taste." He then requested that if possible, could she or some of their friends forward some work to the firm, as he would be remunerated for it.

department, but he was hired because of his expertise in the reform movements and his skill as a writer and editor. Greeley knew that Johnson was a member of the inner circle in the antislavery movement and a confidant of many leading reformers. As such, Johnson was able to secure information about meetings, strategy and events before most people even knew they were occurring. His ability to move among reformers gave the *Tribune* an edge on the competition, and Johnson was considered a valued asset to the newspaper. Johnson also remained an active member of the A.A.S.S. and his job allowed him to report on what was happening at the society, as well as in the antislavery movement in general. He spent the next four years at the *New York Tribune* working with Greeley, who greatly admired Johnson's skill as both a writer and editor. Years later, Johnson became an active worker in the reform campaign of Horace Greeley, and in 1872 he published a campaign tract for him entitled, *What I Know of Horace Greeley*.<sup>35</sup> During this time, their working relationship grew into a friendship that lasted all their lives.<sup>36</sup> He was eventually able to repay the money he owed and pull himself out of debt, but at no time in his life was he ever financially secure. Throughout his career, opportunities did arise for him to make considerable sums of money by working for any number of the more popular newspapers across the country. His skills as a writer and editor were in great demand, and the financial rewards could have been substantial. Had he decided to choose this path, his contribution to the antislavery cause would have had to be curtailed. But for Johnson, his struggle against the institution of slavery was a

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<sup>35</sup> Oliver Johnson, *What I Know of Horace Greeley*, campaign tract 1872, Oberlin College Library (Main Special Collections); Library of Congress. The pamphlet was also printed in the *Golden Age* on August 12, 1872, with the title "Horace Greeley For President." Also the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 112.

<sup>36</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Peacham Historical Society Archives.

deeply felt and spiritual matter, and he therefore determined to devote his life to ending slavery even though his charitable nature and devotion to the cause always left him in a financially difficult position.

The Liberty Party continued to argue that slavery was evil and also attempted to demonstrate that it was unconstitutional. Pointing specifically to the Fifth Amendment, which stated that no person could be deprived of life or liberty without due process of the law, they argued that the Constitution was an antislavery document, and the federal government therefore had every right to put an end to human bondage. The party fought against the concept of racial inferiority and discriminatory statutes and condemned the Black Laws, which prohibited the hiring of free blacks in the north on federal projects. It argued against colonization and declared the fugitive slave laws, which empowered masters to seize runaways anywhere in the Union, contrary to the laws of God and null and void.<sup>37</sup>

The party pointed out that slavery hurt whites as well as blacks. It was a time of depression in America, and the party blamed the backward and inefficient economic system of the South for the hard times, maintaining that slavery hampered the nation as a whole because it employed slow and less fruitful methods of production. The North had begun to industrialize and surpass the South in prosperity, and the party argued that the planters and their backward system stifled this thriving economy, keeping it at the ineffective level of the South.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 94.

<sup>38</sup> *Emancipator*, May 27, 1841, "Address of the National Liberty Convention." The party charged that the slave power; "has manifestly sought to preserve the balance of power between the impoverished South, and the more prosperous and industrious North, by

Pointing again to the Constitution, the party showed that the three-fifths clause, which counted each slave as three-fifths of a free person, increased southern representation in Congress and gave the South an additional 25 percent in extra congressional seats. This allowed it to control national finances. It also increased the power of the slaveholders, who soon became known in abolitionist circles as the "slavocracy." This contention had been argued before, but the abolitionists now added a new and crucial issue by stating that free white labor was being hampered by the deliberate efforts of the South to curb northern liberties.<sup>39</sup>

In keeping with the resolution affirmed at the New York convention in 1841, the party met again for a national convention at Buffalo in 1843. Birney and Morris were unanimously renominated, and a series of resolutions that embodied the party's creed were adopted. By the beginning of 1844, the Liberty Party had its presidential ticket in the field and entered the campaign with unusual confidence.<sup>40</sup>

The Liberty party received considerable support from the free black population in the North. *The Colored American*, which generally furnished an accurate account of

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crippling the energies of the latter, and reducing them, as nearly as possible, to the level of the former."

<sup>39</sup> Julian P. Bretz, "The Economic Background of the Liberty Party," *American Historical Review*, XXXIV (January 1929), 25. Note also Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 90. Several other important economic studies include Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989, and Marcus Cunliffe, *Chattel Slavery and Wage Slavery: The Anglo-American Context, 1830-1860*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1979.

<sup>40</sup> For a detailed account of the Liberty convention see the *Emancipator*, September 14, 1843. "The Right Sort of Politics." For the first time, this convention demonstrated a national, or at least a northern, political antislavery assembly. Unlike the management of 1841, when almost the entire gathering was controlled by abolitionists from New York and Massachusetts, this convention witnessed a large number of western delegates in attendance.

the sentiments of blacks on issues, enthusiastically supported the new party.<sup>41</sup> At the New York convention several prominent black abolitionists were present, the most influential being Henry Highland Garnet. Garnet took his advocacy of the Liberty Party to the national convention of colored men held in Buffalo in August 1843. Garnet delivered a speech asserting that the Liberty Party was the only one in the country that represented the true spirit of liberty. His resolution supporting the new party was endorsed by over 50 fifty other delegates, including Theodore S. Wright and Charles B. Ray, with only 7 dissenting votes. At the Liberty Party Convention in Buffalo in 1843 Samuel Ringgold Ward, a black abolitionist, opened one of the sessions with prayer and delivered a formal address. Another black abolitionist, Charles B. Ray served as one of the convention secretaries. Most important, two party planks referred specifically to blacks, one extending a cordial welcome for all blacks to join the party and another condemning racial discrimination as a relic of slavery. After the convention many black leaders took to the field in support of the Liberty Party in an attempt to rouse the support of black voters.<sup>42</sup>

As the Liberty Party moved forward, Johnson continued to hold firm to his belief in the "scattering policy." By 1844, he and Mary Anne had taken up residence in New York. It was here that Johnson would make his home for a good part of the remainder of his life. New York was the heart of political abolitionism, and, although he now worked for the *New York Tribune*, he remained in the midst of the controversy. This was Tappan brother territory, and together with James G. Birney and other leading third

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<sup>41</sup> *The Colored American*, May 23, 1840.

<sup>42</sup> Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, 183-188.

party men, the Tappans attacked what they considered the backward and outdated ideas of the A.A.S.S. and Garrison. Johnson, who firmly supported his friend Garrison, was nevertheless also sympathetic towards the Liberty Party. This sympathy allowed him to befriend the Tappans and Birney and to keep the hostilities between the two rival factions at a minimum. Johnson made it a point never to attack the Liberty Party in articles he wrote. Often, he was able to introduce individuals who normally would never have spoken to each other. This led to a decrease in hostilities and at times small concessions were obtained allowing ventures to proceed more easily. Johnson understood that, because their goal was the same and neither side truly hated the other, it was merely a difference in tactics that kept them apart. It was because of his efforts that a dialogue between the two troubled groups continued, often with Johnson as a mediator.

The election of 1844 was fraught with mishaps for the new party and was again a great disappointment for those who had labored so diligently for its success. Birney and Moore received only 62,197 votes nationally, or 2.3 percent of the vote.<sup>43</sup> Most important, the party was unable to convince people that the slavery question was paramount to all others. In addition to the economic problems, voters considered the annexation of Texas a crucial issue, but the party had no provision in its program to address the topic and felt no need to alter its strategy. Also, many individuals were repulsed by the intolerance of the Liberty men for any opinion but their own.

After the election of 1844, the Liberty Party lingered on for another three years, but in name only. Many abolitionists who supported it became disillusioned and viewed a reconciliation with the Whig Party as a more viable option. Others believed in

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<sup>43</sup> Perry and Fellman, *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, 120.

compromising and adopting a slower, more deliberate policy. The Mexican War vastly increased the amount of territory the nation controlled, and the problems of slavery now expanded to the new territories. New ideologies were developing on how to eliminate slavery, as were new coalitions, such as the Free Soil and Know Nothing parties. Few who believed in politics as a weapon to end slavery abandoned the idea, but many thought that their methods had to be altered.

Johnson was not surprised by the failure of the Liberty Party, nor was he disappointed. He was aware that the Liberty Party was not the first venture into politics for abolitionists. On July 30, 1835, citizens of Charleston, South Carolina broke into the post office and burned abolitionist propaganda. Numerous meetings were held throughout the South and resolutions were passed offering rewards for the apprehension of persons carrying antislavery material, and recommending the censorship of all mail. President Andrew Jackson, who was a slaveholder, agreed with the censorship, as he believed the circulation of incendiary publications was intended to instigate the slaves to insurrection. In a message to Congress, Jackson recommended the passing of such a law. Although the bill failed to pass, it was from this conflict that the right of petition was raised. Faced with the prospect of having to debate petitions involving the slavery question, Congress attempted to pass a "gag rule" that would table all petitions without reading them. Although not considered an abolitionist, John Quincy Adams became the champion of the antislavery rank and file by opposing the gag on petitions. The gag passed in May 1836 and became a standing rule in the House of Representatives in 1840. Adams fought an eight-year battle against the ruling. The majority of his support came from abolitionists, and women supplied most of the petitions. At various female

antislavery conventions the call went out for women to petition the Congress for abolition in the District of Columbia. Signatures on petitions were secured by women from all across the North demanding an immediate end to slavery in all parts of the country. The petitions poured in and Adams was never at a loss for new petitions to introduce.<sup>44</sup>

Adams was a master at introducing the subject, which brought him under constant attack. It was not uncommon for days and sometimes weeks to be given over to the petitions he presented. Although Adams believed the fight was more over constitutional privileges and a violation of the First Amendment than it was slavery, he was able to introduce the topic into a Congress that did not want to deal with the issue.<sup>45</sup>

Johnson witnessed the struggle in Congress and saw how politicians did not even want to discuss the subject. He was convinced that if the populace was not morally persuaded that slavery was wrong, opposition to it was not an issue that could win at the ballot box. One would follow the other naturally, and once the evils of human bondage were understood to be immoral, the constitutional problems would be remedied. Johnson also thought the efforts of the party were advancing the cause. By bringing the issue of slavery into the political arena, the Liberty men and other reformers also discussed the morality of the institution in their campaign. Even though their efforts failed, the antislavery crusade remained a political topic that would be addressed by several political parties. Johnson later stated that he "could not forget that it was the political party which

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<sup>44</sup> Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, editors, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, Ithaca and London: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1994, 12-14, 78, 184, 192, 196, 209. This text gives an excellent account of the petition campaign and the critical role women played in its success.

<sup>45</sup> Louis Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, Algonac, Michigan: Reference Publications, Inc., 1986, 123-128, 211, 212. This is a new

went into power in 1861, and which had absorbed into itself the anti-slavery voters of the country," which brought slavery to an end.<sup>46</sup> From this time forward, no major political figure could ignore the issue, and he believed it was the work of the Liberty men who helped bring this about.

Nevertheless, Johnson was quick to point out that if it had not been for the continued agitation of those who continued to struggle against the institution of slavery as strictly a moral issue, the movement might very well have collapsed. He attacked the churches for turning their backs on the antislavery movement, leaving the A.A.S.S. alone in its struggle. Large numbers of the clergy who had labored for over a decade to elevate the standard of morality in their churches had found the task of convincing their congregations to act against slavery too unpleasant and difficult. These pastors chose to turn their attention to the political field.

Johnson considered this retreat by the churches to be a grave error, for slavery was not a creature of the law, but was born of public sentiment, and he reasoned that "the best weapons of the anti-slavery warfare were spiritual and mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds." His criticism of the churches was harsh, as he was certain that an end to human bondage could never be accomplished by political means only. He thought the churches had abandoned the cause at a crucial time and by doing so, allowed the institution of slavery to be sustained. As the Liberty Party disintegrated and the slavery question became ever more pressing, it was the A.A.S.S. that continued to

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revised edition from the original publication in 1960. This edition has several hundred changes, which include the text, footnotes and bibliography.

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 311, 313, 314. Johnson defended his actions by pointing to Abraham Lincoln who, "by a single stroke of the pen, lifting four

educate the people as to the character of the institution and their duties concerning it. Garrison also agreed with Johnson on this point when he asserted that “If the Garrisonian Abolitionists had been supplanted or driven out of the field, a collapse would have followed.” and that “neither a [Joshua] Giddings nor a [Charles] Sumner, neither a [Henry] Wilson nor a [George] Julian would have been seen as a political representative of the movement in Congress.”<sup>47</sup> These men, all abolitionists, had been elected to Congress, but they could not carry the struggle forward alone. Their efforts complemented and helped advance the movement, but it was the moral agitation that held the cause together.

There still remained those who believed in an abolitionist political party but were also willing to compromise on the “one idea” ideology. They were led by Gerrit Smith, who condemned those who rejoined one of the major political parties or were willing to compromise their beliefs. Smith castigated these individuals as traitors to the movement, and he asserted that what began as a crusade for black freedom had become an opportunistic campaign for northern white supremacy. He led a small group of diehards who attempted to keep the philosophy of the Liberty Party alive by forming their own party called the Liberty League, which abandoned the “one idea” approach, because it had lost its popularity and was now viewed by many as unrealistic. They believed that by advocating a broader platform incorporating many kinds of reform, they could recruit

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millions of human beings from the condition of chattels to that of men, and delivering the Republic forever from the guilt and shame of slavery.”

<sup>47</sup> Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, 219, 224, 238, 239, 241, 256, 274. These four individuals, Giddings, Sumner, Wilson and Julian, were all abolitionists elected to Congress. Also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 313-315.

a large membership and still keep abolition as the major issue.<sup>48</sup> In 1847, they held a convention in Macedon Lock, New York, and nominated Gerrit Smith and Elihu Burritt for President and Vice President respectively. Burritt was known for his activities in the peace movement and his contributions to pacifism. The Liberty League adopted a long series of resolutions based on the ideas of William Goodell and Lysander Spooner, whose premise was that the United States Constitution was an antislavery document and therefore, slavery was unconstitutional.<sup>49</sup> The platform not only took a radical stand against slavery declaring it an illegal, unconstitutional, and anti-republican institution, but it also called for numerous other reforms as well. The Liberty League demanded the abolition of legalized monopolies such as the post office, dismantling of the Army and Navy, retrenchment of government expenses, eradication of secret societies, the establishment of free trade, and the distribution of public lands.<sup>50</sup> The league itself was short lived, as it received little support, and Smith's efforts failed miserably. Political abolitionists were willing to cooperate with other groups in the belief that a broad political platform would have a much better chance of success. Holding that it did not matter if the issues of tariff reform and internal improvements were part of the platform, as they were legitimate problems which concerned the American people, they began to believe they could incorporate these topics with antislavery, and that these issues could

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<sup>48</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 120.

<sup>49</sup> William Goodell, *Slavery and Anti-Slavery*, New York: Cooper Bros. Inc., 1852. Additionally Lysander Spooner, *The Unconstitutionality of Slavery*, New York: Burt Franklin, 1965, reprint of 1860 edition. Both Goodell and Spooner had reached the same conclusion, but arrived there by different methods. Goodell viewed the Constitution as an antislavery document from its inception, while Spooner worked out his theory based on historical and legal grounds. See also Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, 98, 99.

<sup>50</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 119.

very well enhance the abolitionists' cause. Accordingly, many abolitionists began to look at new political ideologies that were beginning to emerge as weapons to end human bondage.

The election of 1844 was widely expected to be a contest between two old foes: the Whig Henry Clay and the Democrat and former president Martin Van Buren. Both men were in favor of the annexation of Texas, but only with the consent of Mexico, and both tried to avoid taking a stand on the controversial issue. Those who believed in expansion took control of the Democratic convention and nominated a strong supporter of annexation, James K. Polk. He was a compromise candidate and the first "dark horse" to win the presidential nomination of his party. Polk carried the election by 170 electoral votes to 105, but the balloting was actually much closer as his popular majority was less than 40,000. In fact, Polk did not even win his own state of Tennessee, which had 13 electoral votes. What made his victory possible that year was his belief, expressed in the Democratic platform, that the "reoccupation" of Oregon and the "re-annexation" of Texas at the earliest possible time were great American measures.<sup>51</sup>

The idea of the expansion of the country into new territories inflamed the slavery question. The A.A.S.S. vigorously opposed the Mexican War as one "of aggression, of invasion, of conquest, and rapine—marked by ruffianism, perfidy, and

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<sup>51</sup> For a complete account of the election and Polk's presidency see Paul H. Bergeron, *The Presidency of James K. Polk*, Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1987. Note also John Edward Weems, *To Conquer A Peace; The War Between The United States And Mexico*, College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1988; Charles G. Sellers, *James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966; Oscar Doane Lambert, *Presidential Politics in the United States, 1841-1844*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1936. Lambert's is an older text, but still one of the better sources on the subject.

every other feature of national depravity.”<sup>52</sup> The old society viewed the war as a plot to expand and strengthen the hated institution of slavery. They condemned Polk and “his” war. It also went against the basic pacifist beliefs of men like Johnson. The New England minister Theodore Parker stated, “ War is an utter violation of Christianity. If war be right, then Christianity is wrong.”<sup>53</sup> Garrison, who was the loudest antislavery voice against the war, received support from Johnson and other abolitionists. Despite all their efforts the public remained largely indifferent to their arguments, and Polk did his best to ignore the abolitionist denunciations. Opposition to the war was also weakened by disagreement within the antislavery ranks as whole. The most notorious dissenter was Kentucky abolitionist Cassius M. Clay, who left his post at an antislavery newspaper to join the volunteers. He was later captured during the Battle of Buena Vista and spent eight months as a captive of the Mexican army. Other journalists, including Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the *National Era* in Washington, D.C., refused to print antiwar articles if they endangered the safety of American soldiers in Mexico.<sup>54</sup>

The actual fighting in the Mexican War ended in 1847, but the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, signed on February 2, 1848, secured a vast amount of new land for the United States.<sup>55</sup> This new region included California, New Mexico, and Texas, the larger part being acquired by the South. Polk had tremendous inner drive and perhaps

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<sup>52</sup> *Liberator*, May 22, 1846, “Twelfth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society.” This editorial denounced the antislavery Congressmen who supported the war.

<sup>53</sup> Weems, *To Conquer A Peace: The War Between The United States And Mexico*, 346.

<sup>54</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, *To The Halls Of Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985. 275, 276.

<sup>55</sup> Weems, *To Conquer A Peace: The War Between The United States And Mexico*, 446, 447; Johannsen, *To The Halls Of Montezumas: The Mexican War in the American Imagination*, 4, 5.

worked harder than any other President at accomplishing his goals. In fact, he labored so hard that it has been stated that he worked himself to death, as he died four months after he left office. He had a strong personality and succeeded at accomplishing every objective he set for himself except one, the amount of new territory the United States gained. Polk had promised to settle the northern border dispute with Great Britain at the 54° 40' parallel, but instead he had been forced to compromise along the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel. This was his one great mistake, as he failed to realize the ramifications of the agreement. By accepting this boundary the country expanded more to the South than the North, and the slavery question flared with new intensity. Antislavery leaders charged that the acquisitions were part of a Southern scheme to expand slavery into new realms. Johnson also viewed the new boundaries as a setback, and abolitionists were divided on how to combat this new dilemma.<sup>56</sup>

As early as 1837, Garrison had attempted to expose what he conceived as a plot by the slaveholders to expand slavery.<sup>57</sup> Despite his efforts, it was not until after the schism that the subject began to take on national proportions, and it was largely through the labors of the A.A.S.S. that Massachusetts was roused to make a persistent, though unsuccessful, obstruction to the project. On this issue Johnson was in complete agreement with his friend Garrison.<sup>58</sup> The old society, sending its lecturing agents to

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<sup>56</sup> Joshua R. Giddings Papers, letter from Joshua R. Giddings to Oliver Johnson dated December 15, 1843. Giddings complained that the northern states are treated as provinces and that they have given in, too much, to the extreme notions of the South.

<sup>57</sup> *Liberator*, June 30, 1837, "The Texas Question" and "Shall Texas Be Annexed to the Union?" In both these editorials Garrison argued that northerners were not ignorant of their part in keeping slavery alive, but they were ignorant of how that complicity threatened their own freedom. Likewise see Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 327.

<sup>58</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 327.

enlighten the public and stir people to action, took up the argument with tremendous enthusiasm. Faneuil Hall became a meeting place where the issue was openly debated, and the A.A.S.S. used the power of its newspapers, tracts, and lectures to oppose annexation whenever it could.<sup>59</sup> It became a major source of research on the question, and members of Congress who wished to lecture on the subject used the antislavery organization's publications for information for their speeches. Consequently, a genuine exchange of ideas began to take shape between those who remained firm on their original moral principles and those who were active in the political field.<sup>60</sup> Johnson encouraged this interaction and participated whenever possible to bring all sides together, realizing that a joint hostility to slavery would have a much greater impact.<sup>61</sup>

By 1848, those who believed in political action began to collaborate with the newly emerging Free Soil Movement, whose main objective was to block the extension of slavery into the new territories. Abolitionists who joined the movement believed that in order to survive, slavery would have to expand. Therefore, by keeping the new regions free, they would slowly strangle the life out of the institution. Oddly, this philosophy became an article of faith for the South as well, as southerners demanded that an expansion westward must include an equal number of slave states with any that were declared free. The idea of non-extension was very popular in the North. In an attempt to

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<sup>59</sup> Horace Greeley, *The American Conflict*, Hartford: O.D. Case & Company, 1864. This is a view of the annexation of Texas as strictly a pro-slavery operation. Also Thomas, *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, 333-337.

<sup>60</sup> *Liberator*, August 30, 1844 and April 11, 1845, "Annexation of Texas, Duties of the North." Gerrit Smith made his constitutional argument and the articles are also an inquiry into the constitutional position of Judge William Jay. Also the *Liberator*, January 22, 1847, "Defining Its Position." This is an editorial written by Salmon P. Chase outlining his political position.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 327.

win additional support, the Free Soilers incorporated many of the major concerns of the country into their platform, favoring road construction, river and harbor improvements, tariff reform, free homesteads, cheap postage, and cheap government.<sup>62</sup> This broad platform was an attempt to secure a fusion among several diverse groups: Liberty men, Whigs, Free Soil Democrats, and New York Barnburners, who were the more radical element of the party machinery of the New York Democrats.<sup>63</sup> While the attempt was unsuccessful, it did what the Liberty Party could not accomplish—secure the active support of many prominent and seasoned politicians, such as Charles Sumner and Salmon P. Chase. The irony of this strategy was that it also created the means for the extension of slavery, while at the same time unifying its opposition.

The Free Soil Party appealed to many of the racist prejudices of the time. Its chief concern was to rid the territories of slavery, but it was perfectly content to let the peculiar institution flourish where it was already firmly established. The movement became popular, for if many northerners did not believe in slavery, they also did not believe in equality of the races. Their object was to keep blacks out of the new territory. Their real concern was expressed in editorials such as the one printed in the *New York Post*. “What Shall Be Done For The White Man.”<sup>64</sup> Here, the question of slavery was

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<sup>62</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 170-210.

<sup>63</sup> Eric Foner, “Racial Attitudes of the New York Free Soilers,” *New York History*, XLVI, No. 4 (October 1965), 311-329. See also Foner, “Politics and Prejudice: The Free Soil Party and the Negro, 1849-1852,” *The Journal of Negro History*, L, No. 4 (October 1965), 239-256, and Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln*, 68, 69. Also Smith, *The Liberty And Free Soil Parties In The Northwest*, 138, 139.

<sup>64</sup> *New York Weekly Evening Post*, April 27, 1848, “What Shall Be Done For The White Man.” The article charged that, “One slaveholder with his gang of negroes, elbows out thousands of free settlers who bring only implements of their toil and their own hardy families.”

secondary to the problems of free white laborers, who would be forced to compete with a free black population.

Although many antislavery activists believed the non-extension of slavery an important issue, they viewed the Free Soil Party as a betrayal of genuine abolitionist philosophy. Several Liberty men refused to align themselves with the Free Soil Party, but the main opposition came from the A.A.S.S. and those who refused to abandon the ideas of immediatism and racial equality. Johnson stood firmly on the side opposed to any compromise of these original key issues. Again, as before, he understood that new strategies were needed to combat the latest problems that expansion had created. What was required was a human brotherhood that transcended the barriers of politics, religion, race, and gender, which all too often created partisan warfare and tore the movement apart.

After the schism of 1840, Johnson observed that "The American Society [A.A.S.S.] was indeed left at first in a condition like that of a ship dismantled in a hurricane." and "The pro-slavery party on every hand assumed the Abolitionists had at last done for their own movement what mobs, the denunciations of the press, and ecclesiastical and social proscription had utterly failed to do." Despite the calamity the organization, which had been the center of all abolitionist activity, was still powerful enough to alarm the slaveholders and keep the pro-slavery party in the North anxious. Although the different divisions no longer obeyed a single leader, Johnson viewed the separation as more external than internal, saying that "The power of the movement, though impaired for lack of unity, was not destroyed."<sup>65</sup> It remained the duty of those

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<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 319-321.

who believed in moral agitation to carry on the work by every legitimate means and to enlighten the people about the character of slavery.

Although the movement had sustained a serious setback, Johnson and the majority of abolitionists never waived from their objective. They continued to regroup and devise new strategies to accomplish their goal. Their stubbornness in the face of several reversals was less fanaticism than belief in the righteousness of their cause, and although their initial efforts had failed, they had made considerable progress. Slavery was wrong and this reality had gradually seeped into the consciousness of American culture. The abolitionists had led the way in this progress, but the intensity of their struggle reflected in large part the monumental size of the evil they opposed. As Johnson and others had found out, they had misjudged the strength of the slave power, and it was going to take an increased effort on their part to end human bondage in America. Beleaguered in the North as well, they had a collective agreement that they knew the truth, and their persistence haunted northerners. They were certain that the considerable knowledge and experience they had gained would enable them to continue the struggle to its successful conclusion. Using historical perspective, they were right.

Historians have attempted to explain the motives of abolitionists by using religious, social, class, and psychological theories. David Donald viewed abolitionist leaders as victims of the industrial revolution. He categorized them as a “displaced class in American society,” a former elite group frustrated by a “drastic dislocation of northern society,” participating in agitation because it “allowed the only chance for personal and social self-fulfillment.” According to Donald, the antislavery leaders were men and women with lowered status, who were suffering from a “profound social and

psychological dislocation.”<sup>66</sup> Both James G. Randall and Charles W. Ramsdell depicted the abolitionists as overwrought moralists driven by evangelical religion and a heightened sense of personal sin who sacrificed rational judgment and practical politics in their assault on slavery. They concluded that abolitionists exhibited pathological behavior.<sup>67</sup> Others, such as Robert H. Abzug and Lawrence J. Friedman stressed that the conditions of the time placed young Americans under severe mental strain, and in order to alleviate the ordeal of coping with a changing society, many found fulfillment by becoming reformers and particularly abolitionists.<sup>68</sup>

In a more recent study, Edward Magdol concluded that in the antebellum period a developing “free labor” ideology embraced not only a harmony of interests but also a shared repugnance of slavery. Magdol asserted that it was no accident that the abolitionist centers of activity were in the industrializing regions and large cities. He compiled a survey of the occupations of various abolitionist societies in the north, and concluded that local craftsman and manufacturers constituted the majority of the enrollment. Most owned very little real estate or property. The majority of abolitionists were middle class men in professional and proprietor groups. According to Magdol, the abolitionist movement was a reflection of the social and ideological changes caused by

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<sup>66</sup> The quote is from David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972, 19-33. See also David Donald, *Lincoln*, New York: Published by Simon & Schuster, 1995, 63, 64, 82, 103, 133-137, 165-168, 169, 173, 177, 180, 181, 188, 189, 216, 220, 239, 541, 542.

<sup>67</sup> James G. Randall, “The Blundering Generation,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXVII (June 1940), 3-28; Charles W. Ramsdell, “The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion,” *Mississippi Historical Review*, XVI (September 1929), 151-171.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 138-143; Friedman, *Gregarious Saints, Self and Community in Antebellum America*, 1, 2.

industrialization. These men were optimistic capitalists seeking self-assertion that was rooted in equal rights. The tenets of equal rights that inspired them to struggle against monopolies and aristocratic privileges also caused them to despise the institution of slavery.<sup>69</sup>

John Jentz has done additional new research. He showed that abolitionists had their roots in radical republicanism, which prepared them for their numerically significant participation in antislavery petitioning.<sup>70</sup> Also Allan M. Kraut investigated the abolitionist political constituency in the Liberty Party. Kraut did an analysis of 64 western New York towns. He yielded a profile of that constituency that was composed of white males, largely in their thirties, most of whom were native to the state. They frequently were small merchants, tradesmen, and farmers, and they were generally poorer than their neighbors. Most showed a mild tendency to belong to pietistic churches. Kraut distinguished Liberty and non-Liberty men by the terms "abolitionists" and "nonabolitionist." Although artisans were well represented in both groups, Kraut determined that farmers constituted the largest occupational group among readers of abolitionist newspapers.<sup>71</sup> Judith Wellman, who researched the roles of rank and file women in the antislavery movement, did another interesting study. Wellman's work not only provides a larger insight into the role women played during the petition campaign, she also examined the movements social composition. Her findings offer evidence that

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<sup>69</sup> Edward Magdol, *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists' Constituency*, New York, London, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986, 43-51.

<sup>70</sup> John Jentz, "The Antislavery Constituency in Jacksonian New York City," *Civil War Journal*, 27 (June 1981), 101-122.

<sup>71</sup> Allan M. Kraut, "The Liberty Men of New York: Political Abolitionism in New York State, 1840-1848," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1975).

impressive numbers of factory workers were involved in the petition campaign and the antislavery crusade.<sup>72</sup>

Christopher Dixon, Seymour Drescher and Tim Stafford have done some of the latest research. Dixon explored the public and private relationships between members of abolitionist families. Dixon concluded that these relationships were sometimes complicated by the rising status and aspirations of the women, and by the women's suffrage issue. Male abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, behaved much like nonabolitionist politicians and issue advocates, and tended to favor family roles for their wives.<sup>73</sup> Drescher asserts that the decline of slavery coincided with the development of industrial capitalism. As such, slavery was transformed into an economically viable system after the onset of the Revolution. Drescher's complex hypothesis is that the abolition of chattel slavery was a means by which the ruling class leadership was maintained in the industrializing "free labor" world of Britain and the northern United States.<sup>74</sup> Stafford views the religious revival of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as the catalyst for the antislavery movement. He believes that the abolitionist movement was a Christian movement. Abolitionists used Christian doctrine and vocabulary in their 30 years of preaching, making slavery an issue that could not be eluded. The nation, however, refused to accept the will of God and abolish the sinful institution of slavery. Stafford

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<sup>72</sup> Judith Wellman, "'Are We Aliens Because We Are Women?' Female Abolitionists and Abolitionist Petitions in Upstate New York," (Paper presented to the National Archives Conference, Washington, D.C., April 1976).

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Dixon, "A True Manly Life: Abolitionism and the Masculine Ideal," *Mid-America*, 1995, 77 (3): 213-236.

<sup>74</sup> Seymour Drescher, "The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation," *History and Theory*, 1993, 32 (3): 311-324.

determines that repentance for the sin of slavery did not occur, so God punished the nation and ended the sin through Civil War.<sup>75</sup>

When described as a fanatic, Johnson refuted the charge by stating that the A.A.S.S. merely made adjustments, and its actions constituted a “new departure, though not by any means a change of position.”<sup>76</sup> He saw nothing fanatical about individuals who held true to their faith and their belief in God that all people should be free. What emerged were new strategies of agitation based on the original principles of the movement, and although unpopular they became an effective means of reform. These new action plans came about as a direct result of the changing political and social climate of the country. Additionally, Johnson came from a humble background and was not a member of any displaced elite group. In the course of his life many opportunities were presented which would have allowed him to secure financial and social status, all of which he declined. He truly believed in the cause he struggled for all of his life. The impetus of his dedication came from his religious faith, but he never discarded rational behavior in his decisions. He did not view other abolitionists who differed with him as antithetical, but he did feel their methods prolonged the struggle by compromising critical issues, often for the sake of avoiding confrontation. As an individual he never ceased to continue to educate himself and stay abreast of the changing environment. His evaluations and subsequent actions were thought through, and he never blindly committed himself to a dictum.

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<sup>75</sup> Tim Stafford, “The Abolitionists,” *Christian History*, 1992, 11 (1): 21-27.

<sup>76</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 322. Johnson emphatically rejects the accusation that the members of the A.A.S.S. were fanatics.

Johnson's behavior best fits the assessment of Martin B. Duberman and Betty Fladeland, who attacked the notion that abolitionists were psychological misfits. Both asserted that abolitionists truly believed that slavery was evil and that its final demise would not only bring an end to a great sin, but also benefit the nation as a whole.<sup>77</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor researched the connection between those who struggled against the slavocracy and the suffering of those held in bondage. She concluded that the relationship arose from the ability of the abolitionists to empathize with the dilemma of the slaves.<sup>78</sup> Johnson certainly empathized with the plight of the slave, but the issue was an even greater one for him. His convictions transcended the slavery issue and extended to the racial equality of all people. He rejected colonization, and he had also come to the conclusion that America had to be a society where people of all races could live side by side. It was a noble idea developed through serious examination of the subject. Johnson was an individual who was far ahead of his time.

As the tenets of Free Soil and other political ideologies were being pressed on the population, the antislavery movement reacted by modifying its tactics as well. In opposition to the ideas of Free Soil was the philosophy of disunion.<sup>79</sup> The idea of disunion went hand in hand with the theory that the Constitution was a pro-slavery document and was in direct opposition to the theory embraced by the Liberty Party. It was the belief that to cooperate with the federal government was an accommodation with

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<sup>77</sup> Martin B. Duberman, "The Abolitionists and Psychology," *Journal of Negro History*, XLVII (July 1962), 183-191, and Betty Fladeland, "Who Were the Abolitionists?" *Journal of Negro History*, XLIX (April 1964), 99-115.

<sup>78</sup> Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 21, 237. Kraditor asserted that abolitionists agonized over their fellow human beings held in bondage.

<sup>79</sup> Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*, 129, 130.

evil, and that the peaceful separation from the government of the United States was what was necessary to rid the country of slavery. It called upon the American people to secede from the union and to pay no allegiance to the federal government. In an article in the *Liberator* entitled "Repeal of the Union," Garrison argued it was a revolution without the shedding of blood and taking up of arms.<sup>80</sup> Disunion was a topic that had long been discussed by the members of the original "Boston Clique," of which Johnson was a constituent.<sup>81</sup> Soon after Garrison's article in the *Liberator* was printed, other prominent abolitionists, with Johnson in the forefront, began advocating disunion.<sup>82</sup> It was Garrison who led the charge, but the idea gradually gained popularity even with individuals who had opposed the old society. Several prominent abolitionists advocated disunion as early as 1842, but the A.A.S.S. first went on record in favor of dissolution of the federal union between the free and slave states at its annual meeting in May 1844.<sup>83</sup> Two weeks later the matter was again put to a vote at a convention in New England, and the vote was

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<sup>80</sup> *Liberator*, May 6, 1842, "Repeal of the Union." In this editorial Garrison explained the doctrine of disunion in detail.

<sup>81</sup> Kraditor, *Means And Ends In American Abolitionism*, 229.

<sup>82</sup> *Liberator*, March, 4 1842, "The Union." In this article by Lydia Maria Child she declared that, "it is more than two years since we came to the conclusion, that there was no other way for the free States to clear themselves of being accomplices in tremendous guilt." than disunion. She concluded that, "If the South is determined, at all hazards, to sustain her guilty system, and to implicate the free States therein, what can the North do to satisfy her own conscience, and secure her own freedom, unless it be to take measures for a peaceful separation."

<sup>83</sup> Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society Records, Twelfth Annual Report, February 2, 1844; *Liberator*, May, 17, 1844, "Annual Meeting in New York." This article outlined the resolutions put forward and the final vote of 59 to 21 in favor of disunion. It also included articles of those who were in the minority, such as Thomas Earle, Ellis Gray Loring and William A. White. See also *Liberator*, May 24, 1844, "Business Meetings of the American Anti-Slavery Society," reprinted in the *Liberator*, May 31, 1844, listing all the individuals who voted.

overwhelmingly in favor of disunion by a tally of 250 to 24.<sup>84</sup> From that moment on, the invocation, “No Union With Slaveholders” became the battle cry. Dissolution became so important an issue to Garrison that he publicly burned a copy of the Constitution.<sup>85</sup> Disunion was viewed as a way to call the South’s bluff, as well as to preserve the moral purity of the movement. It would doom slavery by withdrawing northern military protection and eliminating economic privileges that the South needed for survival. The South would be compelled to supply all its own manufactured goods, and without the military support of the union the slaveholder would be forced to confront insurrections without northern arms.<sup>86</sup>

Although many individuals who eventually championed the idea of disunion were slow to grasp it at first, Johnson supported it from the start. He pointed to the original “Declaration of Sentiments—our Magna Charta—adopted in 1833.” in which the connection with the federal government was denounced as criminal and so full of danger that it must be broken up. Johnson understood that the Constitution could not be changed without the consent of the slave states, or at least a considerable portion of them. He also understood that the Constitution had become a sacred document in the eyes of many individuals. Americans looked to the union as a source of national blessing and the foundation of their hopes for the future. Nevertheless, he believed that “the time had come to destroy the idolatrous reverence for the Constitution, which had long been the shield and buckler of slavery.” It was under the aegis of the Constitution that for 20 years

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<sup>84</sup> *Documents of Upheaval: Selections from William Lloyd Garrison's The Liberator, 1831-1865*, edited by Truman Nelson, New York: Hill and Wang, 1966, 206; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 338.

<sup>85</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 338, 342, 348.

<sup>86</sup> Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*, 129, 131.

the foreign slave trade had been legal in the United States. The Constitution allowed slaveholders to count three-fifths of their slaves in their basic representation in Congress, and it made provision for the return of fugitive slaves, thus protecting and extending the slaveholders rights into the North.<sup>87</sup>

In the early days of the movement, Johnson wondered why northern members of Congress who were antislavery at home found it hard to remain firm in their convictions in Washington. By the 1840s, he came to the conclusion that between what the Constitution forbade them to do in opposition to slavery, and what it required them to do for its support, they were left with almost no room to maneuver. Therefore, time and again, many elected officials found they could not help the slave without hurting themselves. By supporting antislavery positions, they often cut themselves off from their constituents. This was a pattern Johnson had witnessed continually, and it only reinforced his belief in the moral argument and increased his opposition to political action. It was impossible to be faithful to the cause and at the same time obey an oath to sustain a pro-slavery Constitution.<sup>88</sup>

Disunion sentiment was strong within the A.A.S.S., but it certainly did not have a monopoly on it. Many political abolitionists were induced to endorse disunion by events such as the annexation of Texas. Congressmen opposed to the expansion of slavery argued that the annexation of Texas was identical to dissolution, and others who believed in third party action united to denounce federal complicity in the hated

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<sup>87</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 334, 335, 338, 340.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 338, 339.

institution of slavery.<sup>89</sup> Again, Johnson welcomed those who believed in political action when they endorsed disunion. For him, the moral platform was broad enough for all who opposed human bondage. Indeed, at numerous meetings of the A.A.S.S. many political abolitionists were invited to take the podium and speak their minds. Johnson considered them allies and believed that if they felt that their own positions were more favorable for successful action against slavery, they were following their own conscience and were just as earnestly bent upon destroying slavery by the means which seemed right and feasible to them. Johnson welcomed these individuals and believed that open debate among all abolitionists could help heal the rift of the schism. Individuals such as Theodore Parker, who did not accept the premise of disunion, often spoke in front of the old society. Parker did not accept the A.A.S.S. view of the Constitution and often disagreed with strategies that were proposed. Johnson admired his skill as a speaker and his courage in attacking both politicians and the church. Parker rarely missed an opportunity to speak before the A.A.S.S. and, even though his remarks often spurred debate, he felt at home among his fellow abolitionists. This was also true of many others, and Johnson viewed open debate as an opportunity to bridge the gap created by the schism. It was all right for opinions and methods to differ, as their goal was the same. No offense was taken if one speaker, out of regard for the cause, criticized another. By embracing this compromising attitude, Johnson was able to discuss matters with individuals whom others could not approach. He often found that if there were areas of serious disagreement, there were also points they could agree on. In this way Johnson helped keep abolitionists from

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<sup>89</sup> Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*, 132-136. For articles on the collaboration of political abolitionists with the A.A.S.S. on the Texas question see the *Liberator*, August 8, 1845; November 7, 1845; June 5, 1846.

attacking each other and encouraged them to concentrate on their common enemy, the institution of slavery.<sup>90</sup>

The end of the Mexican War increased disunion sentiment across the country and added momentum to the Free Soil Party. At its national convention held in Buffalo in August 1848, the Free Soil Party nominated the “Red Fox,” Martin Van Buren, for President and Charles Francis Adams for Vice President.<sup>91</sup> The party’s decision to go with Van Buren was a major turning point for antislavery advocates. Although Adams had a better record than Van Buren when it came to supporting antislavery measures, neither candidate was famous for his support of abolitionism. In their desire to secure votes, the antislavery men traded away the moral principles on which antislavery rested because they believed that Van Buren had a better chance of winning. The platform now consisted of the non-extension of slavery consolidated with many other issues.

The election of 1848 was an even greater disappointment than the Liberty Party failures in the past. The Free Soilers were unable to break down the old party ties of the Whigs and Democrats. Van Buren and Adams received 291,804 votes, or barely 10 percent of the total.<sup>92</sup> Even more discouraging, Zachary Taylor, a Louisiana slaveholder and hero of the Mexican War, won the election, albeit by a small margin. After the election abolitionists who had joined the Free Soil Party were dismayed, and others in the antislavery rank and file were unclear as to what was needed to be done. For Johnson

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<sup>90</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 328-333.

<sup>91</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 153, 156-158; Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln*, 219-236; Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest*, 142, 143.

<sup>92</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 167-169. Sewell explains in detail the reasons for the failure of the Free Soil Party.

and the members of the A.A.S.S., the election proved to be just another exercise in the futility of the Free Soil Party as a solution. Johnson remained a disunionist until the Civil War. In Johnson's mind, the war confirmed his previous convictions concerning the moral argument and disunion. He justified his later national pride by pointing out that the Constitution had been amended to eliminate slavery. The endorsement of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution led Johnson to declare, "The Constitution under which we are now living is not that which [Garrison] publicly burned a certain Fourth of July in Framingham; nor is the Union which he sought to dissolve any longer in existence. The Union of today is a Union redeemed, regenerated, and disenthralled by the Genius of Universal Emancipation."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 348. Also Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 167, and Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*, 131.

## Chapter 5

### Utopian Idealism

The reform movements of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were characterized by the formation of innumerable theories, plans, and social experiments. These projects cannot be separated from the antislavery movement, as many abolitionists advanced from idealism to practical undertakings. Johnson took a great interest in the new ideas of communal living that began to arise, especially those that were open to abolitionism and non-resistance.<sup>1</sup> Garrison and most non-resistants were not eager to embrace these communitarian experiments, as they diverted attention from their hopes for a swift end to slavery, but Johnson was intrigued by what these new communities offered, and their appeal eventually led him to actively participate in some of these experiments.<sup>2</sup>

Ralph Waldo Emerson introduced his new doctrine of Transcendentalism, declaring all the old doctrines antiquated and impaired. Transcendentalism is a loose term designating a philosophy concerned for man's spiritual nature that was being crushed by American commercialism. It was a revolt against the institutions that confined the human spirit, an assertion of the divinity of the human soul, the immanence of God in the universe, and the efficacy of intuition as a way of apprehending truth. Within a short period of time various philosophies began to emerge and new

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<sup>1</sup> Perry, *Radical Abolitionism, Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*, 143.

<sup>2</sup> Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, 154, 155; Perry, *Radical Abolitionism, Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*, 129.

communities to form.<sup>3</sup> The aims of these communities varied, but they were all intent on shaping a more perfect society in miniature, within the whole. Among the more notable was Fruitlands, in Massachusetts, which in 1843 housed A. Bronson Alcott and his famous family. Fruitlands attempted to recapture the simplicity of paradise, and it included vegetarianism and the unwillingness to use animals as beasts of burden.<sup>4</sup>

Another community was founded by John A. Collins, an abolitionist who was converted to Owenism and atheism. Robert Owens asserted the fundamental principle that man was a creature of circumstances, and therefore irresponsible. His community was based on equal rights and equal property, which he believed would lead to the regeneration of the world. His small settlement in Skaneateles, New York, lasted only three years from 1843-1846. Collins ended up as a gold prospector and a businessman in California, denying his earlier life. The Reverend George Ripley started one of the more interesting experiments at Brook Farm in 1841. Located in West Roxbury, Massachusetts, this commune sought cooperative living and sharing of labor. Ripley was one of the first Americans to attribute positive connotations to the idea of leisure time. Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Brook Farm was the free relationship between men and women, allowing each member to have full opportunity for self-realization, even though it was

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<sup>3</sup> For a complete examination of Transcendentalism see Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists*, Boston: Harvard University Press, 1950. Several other good studies of Transcendentalism are by Sterling F. Delano, *The Harbinger and New England Transcendentalism: A Portrait of Associations in America*, Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983; Anne C. Rose, *Transcendentalism as a Social Movement, 1830-1850*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981; Brian M. Barbour, *American Transcendentalism: An Anthology of Criticism*, Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1973. Also Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, 135.

<sup>4</sup> For a more extensive examination of Fruitland see Clara E. Sears, *Bronson Alcott's Fruitland*, Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1915.

within the confines of accepted morality. The community went through several changes and eventually ceased to be an institute for agriculture and education and adopted the ideals of the French theoretician Charles Fourier. Fourierism insisted that man must be accepted as a whole, with all his needs, passions, and instincts and that no society that regularly ignored the basic drives of man could be stable or happy. In the course of its existence, Brook Farm attracted the attention of many noteworthy individuals, including Horace Greeley. Others, such as the writer Nathaniel Hawthorne, expressed disillusionment with the experiment and wrote scathingly about Brook Farm. In 1846, a fire burned the community to the ground and its members scattered and never regrouped.<sup>5</sup>

Another group that caught the imagination of many abolitionists were the “Millerites” or, as they were sometimes called, “adventists.”<sup>6</sup> Founded by a New England farmer named William Miller, Millerism or Millennialism preached that the apocalypse would come during his own time, specifically around the year 1843. A unique aspect of Millerism is that those who anticipated the second advent of Christ could be found in the established churches—Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian—and other Christian denominations. The movement emerged during the rising period of evangelicalism, and the presence of Millerites in the established congregations became extremely visible, often irritating to other members.

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<sup>5</sup> Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms, 1820-1860*, 141, 142-146.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Alden Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987, 1-9. Several other good examinations of millennialism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are by Teresa Kennedy, *Welcome to the End of the World: Prophecy, Rage, and the New Age*, New York: M. Evans and Co., 1997; Daniel Wojcik, *The End Of The World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, And Apocalypse In America*, New York: New York University Press, 1997; J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1979.

The connection between abolitionism and Millerism developed naturally. Both movements arose from the revivalist religion of the era, and both had commitments to a higher law than that which ruled existing institutions. Both groups demanded an immediate commitment, which set the righteous apart from the unjust and immoral. This rebirth not only opened the way for the perfection of the individual, but for humanity as a whole. Millerite leaders, such as the Methodist minister George Storrs, the noted editor Nathaniel Southard, and Ezekiel Hale, Jr., a prominent businessman, all emerged from the abolitionists' ranks. Outside of Joshua Himes, who participated in the founding of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, few abolitionists from the old society really embraced the doctrine of Millerism.<sup>7</sup> Lectures and meetings were reported in the various antislavery newspapers, but the A.A.S.S. never made it an extension of its principles as it did women's rights and non-resistance. The leaders of the old society, including Garrison and Johnson, never accepted the doctrine of the second coming as stated by the Millerites. They considered the movement a waste of time and money. By 1842, a growing rift emerged between the two causes, and the *Liberator* began attacking adventists, going as far as declaring some insane.<sup>8</sup> When the apocalypse did not happen in 1843, the doctrine had to be altered. By 1844, the movement had not totally disappeared, but it had begun to subside considerably. During its height Millerism did have an impact on the abolitionist movement, but by all accounts it was a negative one. It distracted the public from the issue of antislavery by making them ambivalent about

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<sup>7</sup> Edited by Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987. This is an anthology of work by various historians. Chapter 8 by Ronald D. Graybill, "The Abolitionist-Millerite Connection," 139-145.

<sup>8</sup> *Liberator*, November 25, 1842; February 10, 1843; April 5, 1844.

participation in any cause.<sup>9</sup> If the end were near, there would be no need to try and alter society, as all were soon to be transformed by a higher power.

As a reformer interested in all of the progressive ideas of his time, these utopian communities intrigued Johnson. His interest in the new theories and utopian communities was stimulated by the vast amount of material that crossed his desk at the *New York Tribune*. His duties at the paper also gave him an opportunity to meet and discuss these new philosophies with many other reformers interested in social change. Exposure to the many reform issues in which various communities were involved afforded him an opportunity to enlarge his perspective in regard to transforming society. He thought that in-depth coverage of all of the major issues, both domestic and international, would help to accelerate these changes. With little money and only a small number of financial backers, Johnson set out on his own to create a publication that encompassed all of the reform movements.

He set up operations in the village of Blackstone, Worcester County, Massachusetts. He selected this site because he determined that it possessed "a thriving and intelligent population in that portion of Massachusetts long known as 'THE HEART OF THE COMMONWEALTH,'" and that his publication would be received very well by its residents. Blackstone was chosen for other reasons as well. The town was situated at an intersection that connected Boston, Providence, and Worcester by railroad. In addition, it was to be the terminus of the new Norfolk County Railroad soon to be completed. Therefore, the newspaper had the potential of becoming an excellent advertising medium.

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<sup>9</sup> Doan, *The Miller Heresy, Millennialism, and American Culture*, 180-187.

The newspaper was called *The Blackstone Chronicle*, and Oliver Johnson was the sole editor and chief. It was published weekly every Saturday, and the banner under the title read, "No Conceivable Divergence From The Line Of Strictest Rectitude Can Possibly Be Otherwise Than Calamitous." It was also billed as "A Newspaper for the Family- - Bound Neither to Party or Sect." The paper was moderately priced at four cents a copy or \$1.75 for an annual subscription. The first issue was printed on February 26, 1848, and received only a tepid response from the public.<sup>10</sup>

*The Chronicle* was a fascinating attempt to discuss all the radical issues of the period. Slavery was a topic consistently debated, and Johnson secured articles from all fringes of the movement. He announced antislavery meetings and fairs and often reproduced commentaries from many of the abolitionist publications. His mediation skills and ability to listen to all sides played an important role in the contributions to the paper. Because he had gained a reputation of being fair in his dealings with even his most stalwart opponents, many individuals, including prominent politicians, submitted articles. The doctrine of disunion was a common subject argued in the columns of the paper, as were other antislavery tactics. The journal declared that, "In Politics, *The Chronicle* will be independent of Party, in Religion free from the trammels of Sect; and this not alone from policy, but especially from principle." *The Chronicle* devoted space to all the problems facing the nation. There were sections on labor that argued for the

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<sup>10</sup> *The Blackstone Chronicle*, February 26, 1848. The first issue announced the purpose of the newspaper and included articles such as "Literature And Labor," and "Public Hearing Of The Petitioners For A Secession From The Union." Also included were a commentary on the peace treaty with Mexico entitled, "PEACE! PEACE!" In a section called "Reforms of the Day," an article appeared about "The Temperance Movement—Speeches of Rev. H.W. Beecher And Rev. Dr. Tyng." Horace Greeley also attempted to help his friend by submitting a short essay on life.

ten-hour work day. Immigration, temperance, religion, women's rights, capital punishment, and philanthropy were all discussed. Prison reform, a topic Johnson's wife Mary Anne was keenly interested in, argued for rehabilitation and jobs for prisoners upon their release. Internal improvements and trade were debated, as were the rights of Native Americans. The newspaper had an entire section devoted to "International Affairs of State" and brought the public up to date on events in Europe and other parts of the globe. As the journal was aimed at the entire family, each edition had a special section devoted to "Literature," which included book reviews. It also printed poems, verse, and excerpts from works by many well-known authors. There was also a "Miscellaneous Selections." for articles to be printed that were not mainstream topics or were a little out of the ordinary.<sup>11</sup>

Johnson had great hopes for the newspaper, but the reaction to the first issue was a portent of things to come. When one reads *The Chronicle* today, it is an enlightening and extremely interesting attempt to examine and discuss the critical issues of antebellum America. The publication, however, soon came under attack by the less

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., March 25, 1848. Congressman John P. Hale submitted an article entitled "How Our Government Is Controlled," where the events of the Senate were discussed. Also appearing in the section "Congress," the problems posed by Indian tribes on the western borders of the United States. Other articles included, "Temperance," "The Treaty of Peace," and in the section "Reforms of the Day," a general discussion on the reform movement entitled, "Progress And Tendency Of Our Time." William Cullen Bryant also submitted a poem entitled, "March;" see also *The Blackstone Chronicle*, April 1, 1848. Several of the articles in this issue included, "Real Philanthropy," "Progress Of Liberty In France," "The Age Of Trade," "Protest Against Slavery;" *The Blackstone Chronicle*, April 8, 1848. "Frauds on Immigration," "Ten Hour System," a bill establishing a ten hour work day that passed in the Pennsylvania legislature, "Help For Discharged Prisoners;" *The Blackstone Chronicle*, April 15, 1848. Calls for a "Worcester County **Anti-Slavery Fair**" were announced. Johnson's wife was one of the main organizers of the event. Also included in this issue were "Famine And Destitution In Ireland," and "The Fugitive Slave."

progressive members of the community. Johnson was accused of having his own political agenda, and critics claimed that his true intention was ultimately to espouse a political party. In addition, various other papers stated that certain town politicians had appropriated \$500 for the support of *The Chronicle*, thus influencing its editorial position. It was true that Johnson had borrowed that amount from the town surplus revenue fund to start the paper. He defended himself against his critics, explaining that the loan was to be returned to the town with interest. He defiantly declared that the “Newspaper intended to meet the wants of all classes,” and was “devoted to any or even all the distinctive Reforms in general.” and he attacked those who attempted to compare the newspaper to other journals whose columns were chiefly filled with details of horrible crimes and casualties. Instead, its aim was to “make its readers acquainted with the *World as it is*, its joys and its sorrows, its good and its evil, its wisdom and its folly, and which records for their enlightenment every important event, which pertains to Politics or Religion, Church or State, Art or Science, Education or Philosophy, Agriculture or Commerce, that may be calculated to advance the Race in Knowledge, Virtue and Happiness.”<sup>12</sup>

Despite Johnson’s efforts and his belief in what *The Chronicle* could accomplish, the newspaper never caught on as he had hoped, and it remained constantly in debt. On September 2, 1848, *The Blackstone Chronicle* published its final edition. One reason for its failure was the competition in the region. Johnson had selected a location with a large and well educated population, but many of the residents already subscribed to other newspapers and were not easily persuaded to change or enroll for an additional one. Mostly, *The Chronicle* was a publication ahead of its time. It advocated

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., From the very first issue Johnson had to defend the principles of the paper. These quotes are taken from the February 26, 1848 edition.

change at a time of political and social turmoil when most citizens were seeking stability and order. Although Johnson's attempt with *The Chronicle* turned out to be a disappointment, it did not reduce his interest in the utopian ideology that was emerging in various parts of the country. On the contrary, his failed endeavor with the paper only fueled his interest. He had become acquainted with several progressive leaders, and one who caught his attention above all others was Adin Ballou, who had formed a commune at Hopedale, in Milford, Massachusetts. Johnson was now broke and out of work, and his circumstances not only allowed him to look further into the activities of the Hopedale community but actively to take part in it.

The ideas combining disunion and non-resistance were extremely unpopular and needed better clarification. Adin Ballou, who had been actively involved in the revivalist movements of the time since he was a youth, joined the non-resistants at a time when they were accused of being fanatics and encouraging anarchy. Many individuals believed that non-resistance was being expanded beyond the basic Christian doctrines. As early as 1839, Ballou provided an explanation of the true nature of non-resistance and gave it a theological defense.<sup>13</sup> In a series of articles published in the *Liberator*, he argued against the political abolitionists, declaring that a Christian's role was that of a subject, not a citizen, and in that role he would find a more excellent way of life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Liberator*, December 6, 1839. After a speech at the New England Non-Resistance Society, Ballou was requested to place his theological defense of non-resistance in writing, which was immediately published by several antislavery tabloids.

<sup>14</sup> *Liberator*, January 3, 1840, "Non-Resistant and Practical Christian;" February 7, 1840; February 28, 1840; March 3, 1840.

In 1840, Ballou formed the Hopedale community, which was an effort in practical Christianity.<sup>15</sup> At Hopedale, each member agreed to work eight hours a day for 50 cents and to give the community one dollar a week for room and board. Liquor and tobacco were forbidden and tea and coffee discouraged.<sup>16</sup> Its newspaper, the *Practical Christian*, kept the world abreast of the activities of the community. Hopedale was designed as a mediating agency between the present world of sinful coercion and the peaceful future of the millennium. It was created as a response to the obligations of abolitionists to create new institutions that stayed clear of the complicity of sin, did not condone slavery, and did not negate the sovereignty of God. At its height the community was composed of over 300 men, women, and children, and it lasted until 1856 when it came to an abrupt end. During the course of its existence, the Hopedale community went through a series of social and economic experiments.<sup>17</sup>

Hopedale was greatly concerned with reforming moral principles, and it was closely associated with antislavery. The community was the site of many antislavery rallies, and Ballou himself was twice sent by the A.A.S.S. to lecture in Pennsylvania and New York.<sup>18</sup> Although few abolitionists were willing to separate themselves from society, many visited and supported the community. Henry C. Wright made Hopedale

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<sup>15</sup> For a complete history of the Hopedale community see, Adin Ballou, *History of the Hopedale Community*, edited by his son-in-law, William S. Haywood, Lowell, Massachusetts: The Vox Populi Press-Thompson & Hill, 1896. Also Thomas, *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, 313, 314.

<sup>16</sup> *Liberator*, February 26, 1841. The Constitution of the Hopedale community appeared in this edition of the paper.

<sup>17</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Society*, 115; Thomas, *The Liberator*, William Lloyd Garrison, 313.

<sup>18</sup> Adin Ballou, *Autobiography of Adin Ballou*, Lowell, Massachusetts: The Vox Populi Press-Thompson & Hill, 1896, 356, 370.

the headquarters for his New England Non-Resistance Society. Wright was raised as a farmer, but graduated from Andover, and became licensed to preach in 1823. He was a Garrisonian abolitionist and an active worker in the peace movement. Edmund Quincy, who became an abolitionist in 1837, also attended the quarterly meetings. He was the scion of an eminent Boston family and son of Josiah Quincy, president of Harvard.<sup>19</sup> Frederick Douglass visited the community in 1842, and in 1845 he left an escaped slave, Rosetta Hall, in their safekeeping.<sup>20</sup> The British abolitionist George Thompson made it a point to stop at Hopedale on his visit to America, and Samuel J. May reported the events of the community in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*.<sup>21</sup> Both William Lloyd Garrison and Samuel J. May sent their young sons, George Thompson Garrison and Edward May, to be educated and live in the community.<sup>22</sup>

Johnson's interest in Hopedale went much further than that of most of his colleagues, and he had become closely associated with Adin Ballou. Ballou admired many of Johnson's personal characteristics, describing him as "a devoted Abolitionist, a teetotaler, peace man, and general moral reformer on Christian principles, and also an able and acceptable public speaker and writer." Johnson applied for acceptance to the Hopedale community, and membership was quickly granted.<sup>23</sup> On September 23, 1848,

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<sup>19</sup> *Practical Christian*, May 15, 1840; January 8, 1848; Ballou, *Autobiography of Adin Ballou*, 380, 381.

<sup>20</sup> Ballou, *History of the Hopedale Community*, 77; Perry, *Radical Abolitionism, Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*, 143, 144.

<sup>21</sup> *Practical Christian*, February 15, 1851. May's name was listed as a regular contributor to the paper on July 15, 1840. See also Ballou, *History of the Hopedale Community*, 327-330.

<sup>22</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade In America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, 220, 221.

<sup>23</sup> Ballou, *Autobiography of Adin Ballou*, 381.

Johnson officially entered the community.<sup>24</sup> During his stay there he occupied several positions, writing articles and lecturing as one of the approved ministers. His skills as an editor were quickly utilized, as almost immediately upon his arrival he was made editor of the *Practical Christian*, an organ of the Hopedale ministry composed of properly constituted preachers and lecturers.<sup>25</sup>

Although Johnson supported the Hopedale community until its demise, commune life was too narrow for his talents and aspirations. He soon became restless and stayed for only a few months. The numerous reform movements of the time all interested him, but he had dedicated his life to end slavery in America. Life in an isolated community hindered these efforts, and he wanted to be where the action was taking place. He was given an opportunity to manage and edit the abolitionist publication, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, in Salem, Ohio.<sup>26</sup> Founded in the mid 1840s, it was one of the few abolitionist publications in the midwest and was based on the *Liberator*.<sup>27</sup> He accepted the post and departed Hopedale on the best of terms with Ballou and all the inhabitants. Ballou considered Johnson a friend and in later years commended him for his actions and the work he performed.<sup>28</sup> Although his stay at Hopedale had been brief, Johnson's curiosity about commune life had been temporarily satisfied. At the *Anti-*

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<sup>24</sup> *Practical Christian*, September 30, 1848. The announcement of Johnson's admittance to the community was printed in this issue.

<sup>25</sup> Ballou, *Autobiography of Adin Ballou*, 381, 382; *Practical Christian*, February 3, 1848; July 21, 1849; Perry, *Radical Abolitionism, Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 342; Perry, *Radical Abolitionism, Anarchy and the Government of God in Antislavery Thought*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> Filler, *The Crusade Against Slavery 1830-1860*, 157.

<sup>28</sup> Ballou, *Autobiography of Adin Ballou*, 381, 382.

*Slavery Bugle* he again became embroiled in the thick of the antislavery fight. He remained at the paper for two years, during which time his skill as an editor advanced agitation on the subject, as well as increased the circulation of the journal.<sup>29</sup>

The *Anti-Slavery Bugle* was launched on June 29, 1845, and the first six issues were published at Lisbon, Ohio.<sup>30</sup> After the sixth issue it moved to Salem, Ohio, where it was published until Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. The paper was closely associated with the Western Anti-Slavery Society, which included such notable abolitionists as Theodore D. Weld, Gamaliel Bailey, and Salmon P. Chase. In the June 15, 1849 issue appeared the valedictory of the original joint editors, Benjamin and Elizabeth Jones.<sup>31</sup> Two weeks later a column headed the "Words of Introduction" presented the new editor, Oliver Johnson.<sup>32</sup> Immediately upon his arrival, Johnson immersed himself in the work of the newspaper and became an active member of the Western Anti-Slavery Society.

Johnson came to Salem expecting to remain for only one year until a permanent editor could be found, but he soon found the work so congenial that he consented to stay for almost two years. The *Bugle* was a four-page, six-column paper that increased its size by increasing the width of its columns. Its space was given up almost entirely to the antislavery cause, and there were few advertisements. It printed speeches in Congress, letters from agents in the field, information about antislavery meetings and conventions,

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<sup>29</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 143.

<sup>30</sup> *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, June 29, 1845.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, June 15, 1849.

<sup>32</sup> C.B. Galbreath, "Anti-Slavery Movement in Columbiana County," *Ohio Archeological and Historical Quarterly*, XXX (September 1921), 371, 372. Johnson was introduced as "the famous anti-slavery advocate."

and accounts of clashes with pro-slavery sympathizers. In short, the paper was an organ of agitation and propaganda. What Johnson enjoyed about the *Bugle* was that although it was primarily an antislavery publication, it also favored many of the other reform movements of the time. These reforms included temperance, opposition to capital punishment, and women's suffrage. He had an interest in all of these movements and included articles related to these topics in the paper whenever possible. Under Johnson's editorship, the first call for an Ohio women's suffrage convention appeared in the April 13, 1850 issue.<sup>33</sup> The suffrage movement in the midwest had not really got underway at this time, and it was the *Bugle*, under Johnson's leadership, that helped to initiate reform in this part of the country.

The town of Salem was well chosen as the western citadel of the antislavery forces. It was settled by Quakers and had a long history of hostility towards the slavocracy. Unlike James G. Birney's *Philanthropist*, which had been attacked by mobs in Cincinnati who threw the press into the river, the *Bugle* was not threatened. Although abolitionists were safe in Salem, pro-slavery activity could put them in danger elsewhere. The agitation created by the *Bugle* often led to disruptions of antislavery meetings and provoked mob violence in Ohio and the midwest. Ohio had become one of the main staging points for the underground railroad, and Johnson actively supported the work.<sup>34</sup> By night, abolitionists traveled long distances to help fugitive slaves gain their freedom and, once they were rescued, they found lodging and safety for them. Johnson's older

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<sup>33</sup> *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, April 13, 1850, "Women's Suffrage Convention." This convention was held in Salem, Ohio, on April 19, 1850. The *Bugle* was influential in promoting and supporting the suffrage convention and remained active in the debate even after Johnson's departure.

<sup>34</sup> Galbreath, "Anti-Slavery Movement in Columbiana County," 374, 375.

brother Leonard was active in the underground railroad in Vermont, and he communicated with him in regard to the safest routes to travel and the relocation of escaped slaves in Canada.<sup>35</sup>

Even though Salem was a safe haven, the antislavery activities that took place in neighboring towns were often plagued with difficulty. Speakers could not find lodging, and public buildings and churches were often closed to them. Threats of violence were not uncommon, and when meetings were held pro-slavery advocates often disrupted them. Johnson often took time out from his duties as editor to lecture, and he was the target of threats and experienced the hardships of his colleagues in the field. He often chronicled his experiences in the field in the *Bugle*. Once, on a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1850, he was scheduled to speak at a meeting hall in Columbiana, Ohio. The address was to commence at 3:00 P.M., and a fairly large crowd turned out. Upon his arrival, he “found the gate secured by strong padlocks and the doors and windows made fast.” He believed that this had been done “with the full knowledge and approbation of the two preachers who usually attend that meeting.” With the complete approval of Johnson, several attendees removed the nails locking the windows and climbed inside the church. By this time it had started to rain, but within a short time they had also removed the bar holding the door closed, and everyone entered. The small church was packed to overflowing, and although the meeting started late it was a huge success. In his rendition

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<sup>35</sup> Bogart, *Peacham, The Story of a Vermont Hill Town*, 220, 221. Leonard Johnson was an active force in the local anti-slavery movement, and his home was one of the stations for the underground railroad. He was also an active radical in the church, and for a short time was suspended for “using unchurchly language against one of his fellow parishioners,” during an argument over the slavery question. Unlike his younger brother, Leonard was known for having a temper, and when he received the news in Peacham of the death of John Brown, he tolled the bell in the Congregational Church for an hour, to the displeasure of many of the townspeople.

in the *Bugle* of what had occurred, Johnson accepted full responsibility for the acts performed that day.<sup>36</sup>

There were, however, some halls and churches that were always open to antislavery speakers. One of the more popular was the church near Cool Spring, which today bears the name Unionville. It was situated in an extremely advantageous position, because it was located midway between a large number of towns and conveniently accessible. Whenever possible, Johnson tried to secure the most popular and charismatic speakers, often filling the various halls to overflowing.<sup>37</sup> On July 14, 1850, a meeting of unusual interest was held with several prominent lecturers, including Abby Kelly Foster and Henry C. Wright. Wright was a Yale graduate teaching mathematics at Western Reserve College when he became converted to abolitionism. He was a corresponding secretary for the A.A.S.S. from 1833 to 1839 and later edited *The Abolitionist* in the 1840s.<sup>38</sup> Johnson was also in attendance, not as a speaker, but to participate and report

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<sup>36</sup> *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, June 22, 1850. Johnson gives a detailed account of the events at the Congregational Church that day. He also accepted full responsibility stating, "Whatever of responsibility is involved in the removal of the nail, we cheerfully take upon ourselves for the act was performed by our hands; and we must plead guilty to a subsequent effort to *drive a fresh nail* in the coffin of pro-slavery Quakerism."

<sup>37</sup> *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, October 6, 1849. This is a letter dated September 4, 1849, from Frederick Douglass to Oliver Johnson, printed in the paper. Douglass declined an invitation forwarded by Johnson, but regretted his inability to attend. He also praised the work being done by the old society, declaring that there is no other real antislavery society in the country. Douglass went on to say that he completely supported the work Johnson did, and was "proud to be connected" with the organization, and "willing at all times to be known as a *Garrison Abolitionist*."

<sup>38</sup> This is the same Abby Kelly who was active in the A.A.S.S. and appointed to the Business Committee in 1840, which helped lead to the schism. She married Stephen S. Foster, also an active abolitionist. Neither marriage nor the birth of her only child kept Abby Kelly Foster from traveling and pursuing her career. For more on the relationship of Abby Kelly Foster and Stephen S. Foster see Friedman, *Gregarious Saints, Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1870*, 147.

the events. The meeting aroused great excitement because the speakers differed greatly in their approach to ending slavery. William D. Lewing advocated the Constitution and the Free Soil Movement, while others such as De Lorma Brooks opposed the Union and the Constitution believing they upheld the sin of slavery.<sup>39</sup> This was exactly the type of debate Johnson enjoyed, and he encouraged all views to be expressed and argued freely.

There was a large audience, and the early session of the meeting went extremely well. After a short adjournment, the meeting resumed at 2:00 P.M. only to find that an individual who called himself Dr. O.C. Evans had seized the platform and refused to yield it to any of the appointed speakers. Encouraged by several of his cronies, he denounced the proceedings in a reckless and vulgar manner. It was later determined that Dr. Evans had been hired to disrupt the meeting. In the spirit of open debate, Dr. Evans was told he could participate only if he yielded the floor and allowed the meeting to resume. Johnson often printed this type of challenge in the *Bugle* and was always willing to meet the pro-slavery contingent in an open, organized debate.<sup>40</sup> But on this occasion, as on most others, the challenge was not accepted. Dr. Evans and his rowdy companions filled the hall with cigar smoke and profanity, refusing to step down.

Seeing that any type of negotiation was useless, the abolitionists removed the speaker's stand and relocated the meeting to the south side of the building. In spite of the fact that Dr. Evans and his accomplices remained inside the building amusing themselves

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<sup>39</sup> *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, July 20, 1850. A complete account of the meeting and the speeches of all the orators were printed in this issue. Johnson also condemned the actions of those who disrupted the meeting, but especially chastised the individuals behind the scenes who instigated the incident.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, In this issue Johnson again published a challenge of open debate to the pro-slavery contingent stating, "Our opponents very well know that we are ever ready to meet them in fair argument—that our platform is not more free to ourselves than to them."

for an hour or more, the meeting went on as planned and turned out to be a highly successful occasion.

The Western Anti-Slavery Society included western Pennsylvania in its sphere of operations. The antislavery tabloid, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, had been established in Philadelphia about the same time as the *Bugle*, and it, too, was an organ similar to that of the *Liberator*. After the schism of 1840, the A.A.S.S. was able to maintain the support of four state auxiliaries located in Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, along with five weekly newspapers. Boston with the *Liberator* was the most efficient area, with New York City and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* as a close second. This was followed by Salem with the *Bugle* and Philadelphia with the *Freeman*. In 1855 the *Freeman* was united with the *Standard*, while the *Bugle* survived until emancipation.<sup>41</sup> A fifth publication, the *Herald of Freedom* was instituted in Concord, New Hampshire in the early 1840s, but it was discontinued in 1846. During his career Johnson would edit all four of the major newspapers, all of which remained in publication until the Civil War.

After almost two years at the *Bugle*, it was time for Johnson to turn over the reins of the paper to a permanent editor. His work in Ohio had been extremely fulfilling, and he left reluctantly. It was his choice to leave, however, and he based his decision on other pressing matters that he wished to address. Among these was his continued interest in the communities that were attempting to establish a life style that combined the new religious fervor with the numerous reform movements. His "Parting Words" were printed in the *Bugle*, and Marius R. Robinson, who remained editor of the *Bugle* until it

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<sup>41</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 324, 325.

ceased publication, succeeded Johnson.<sup>42</sup> Johnson, who was Robinson's friend and co-worker, gave a summary of Robinson's work, proclaiming him a "champion of every principle and measure which he thought beneficial to his fellow man." As he declared, "For many years he was editor of the Ohio *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, the files of which are a memorial of his power as a writer as well as of his unswerving devotion to the cause of freedom."<sup>43</sup> After Johnson's departure the two men remained in close contact until Robinson's death on December 8, 1878.<sup>44</sup>

Although Johnson felt a certain sadness in leaving the *Bugle*, he was also excited about moving to Pennsylvania and becoming part of the reform movement that had been established there in the mid-1840s. Here he was afforded the opportunity to work for the antislavery cause with the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, as well as become actively involved in a reform community in which he'd been interested for some time. The group, founded in 1848, was known as the Progressive Friends, and included several noteworthy abolitionist figures such as Lucretia Mott, Abby Kelly Foster, and Castner Hanway. Hanway was later destined to become something of a martyr to the antislavery cause for his part in the Christiana Riot, which involved the rescue of a fugitive slave in

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<sup>42</sup> *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, April 26, 1851, "Parting Words." Johnson's farewell as editor is printed in this issue. Note also the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, May 24, 1851, Robinson's acceptance of his new post is in this issue, in which he expresses his reluctance and misgivings as to his qualifications for the new position.

<sup>43</sup> Galbreath, "Anti-Slavery Movement in Colmbiana County," 389. Johnson's tribute to Marius R. Robinson is printed here in its entirety. Johnson summarized the life of his friend and co-worker and began by stating that "Mr. Robinson was a man of great sweetness and purity of life, and an earnest and eloquent champion of every principle and measure which he thought beneficial to his fellow-men."

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 388, 389.

Christiana, Pennsylvania.<sup>45</sup> The Progressive Friends' center was established at Kennett Square, in Longwood, Pennsylvania. Today it is part of the Pierre S. Dupont estate, and the Longwood Gardens are a tourist attraction, but the original white frame building used for meetings is still preserved.<sup>46</sup> Johnson not only became an active member of the community, he remained so until his death, and his remains were laid to rest in Kennett Square.

The *Pennsylvania Freeman* described the annual meetings of the Progressive Friends as a "moral earthquake."<sup>47</sup> Reformers in the Protestant church encountered great hostility from the conservative majority. Indeed, the Protestant churches of America often became the arena in the contest on questions of slavery, women's rights, and kindred causes. Rebellious meetings were held across the north in New York, Ohio, Indiana, Iowa, and Michigan, attended by people who wanted to throw off the authority and formalism of superior church bodies and return to a life-style that had more liberty and simplicity. The agitation had been brewing since the 1840s, and by 1852 the tension between the progressive and conservative groups within the organization had reached the breaking point. From the moment he arrived in Pennsylvania, Johnson became an outspoken advocate for the progressives, and the conservatives of the church now disowned him and other like-minded leaders. The formation of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends in 1853 was an extension of this conflict. Johnson was

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<sup>45</sup> Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, 154, 155, 193.

<sup>46</sup> Albert J. Wahl, "The Progressive Friends of Longwood," *Bulletin of the Friends Historical Association*, XXII (September 1953), 13.

<sup>47</sup> *Pennsylvania Freeman*, September 14, 1848.

one of the original founders, and the group remained in existence for 88 years as an independent reform organization.<sup>48</sup>

By 1852, hostilities between the conservative and reform groups had reached a boiling point, and neither party wished the other to use the meeting house. Johnson refused to submit to threats and was arrested when he used the building to speak on a reform subject during a meeting for worship.<sup>49</sup> Finally, the liberal group appointed a committee to submit its grievances in writing. Johnson was a member of the committee, and to his dismay its grievances were tabled. It was then decided to form an independent group, and the "Call for a General Religious Conference" was broadcast in the local reform newspapers.<sup>50</sup> The first meeting was held as advertised on Sunday, May 22, 1853, at Old Kennett, in Longwood, Pennsylvania. The choice of the Sabbath was intentional, as it was viewed as symbolic by the reformers. On the scheduled day, the meeting house was crowded to overflowing, and many individuals could not find standing room inside. The general character and purpose of the new institution were discussed, and finally the group decided to retain the name Progressive Friends as being the best description of the organization. Johnson authored the "Exposition of Sentiments," which became the official statement of the new associations' principles.<sup>51</sup> It was determined that there

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<sup>48</sup> Wahl, "The Progressive Friends of Longwood," 14, 15, 31. By 1906, the organization decided to abandon formal publication of its activities. The group went through a short renaissance after World War I, but disbanded in 1940, at which time the meeting house was sold to Pierre S. Dupont.

<sup>49</sup> Wahl, "The Progressive Friends of Longwood," 16.

<sup>50</sup> *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 10, 1853; March 24, 1853; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 5, 1853.

<sup>51</sup> *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of the Progressive Friends*, Fifth Month, 1853, 3, 4, 5, 12-26. The "Exposition of Sentiments" as composed by Johnson is printed here in its entirety.

would be no select meeting or ordained ministers, and men and women would transact their business together as a congregation of equals. All people were invited to join, without regard to sex, color, or condition in life. The only test for membership would be the desire to demonstrate faith in God by leading a life that combined greater personal purity with increased practical benevolence.

Having adopted these basic principles, the meeting continued for an additional three days. On May 23, 1853, Johnson opened the proceedings with a reading from the Bible. The members then plunged into what they considered a service of practical Christianity, with enthusiasm and energy characteristic of a society in its formative stages. Johnson reminded everyone of the principles expressed in the "Exposition of Sentiments," that no question was too sacred for examination or discussion, and that there was no question on which human reason should yield to the authority of elevated position. The members then prepared testimonies on what they considered the evils of the day such as chattel slavery, the subservient position of women to men, demon rum, war, capital punishment, and tobacco.<sup>52</sup>

Once the major issues were outlined, committees were formed to present articles setting forth the views of the organization upon each topic. The first committee established examined "the subject of Woman, her position in the world, her present false relations to society, and her rights and duties as an equal member of the great human family." Johnson chaired the committee, which consisted of 15 members, nine of whom were women. Johnson's wife, Mary Anne, who had introduced the topic of the many

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 5, 6. Johnson used Corinthians, Chapter I, XII and XIII, to open the meeting. The text deals with *Spiritual Gifts and Love*, but the greatest emphasis of the reading was placed on *One Body, Many Parts*, which he believed, described the new organization and hoped would be a guide for its future.

evils arising from the use of tobacco, was selected chairwoman of the committee that dealt with that issue. Both submitted written reports to the organization at a meeting where their conclusions were openly discussed, and their suggestions were eventually adopted. Johnson was also named to a committee to prepare letters to the several auxiliaries in New York, Ohio, and Michigan, as well as other organizations that were affiliated with the Progressive Friends. As he was intimately acquainted with Adin Ballou, he was selected to correspond with him directly. In this way he was not only able to keep abreast of the activities at Hopedale, but to continue his friendship with Ballou as well. He also corresponded with associations outside of the United States such as the Universal Christian Alliance, in France. The purpose was to spread the ideas of the society's Christian principles to foreign lands, and the addresses from these societies were often read aloud at meetings and published with the yearly proceedings.<sup>53</sup>

The winter months were marked by a series of recriminations and hostilities. In May 1854, the Progressive Friends attempted to hold their second annual meeting at Old Kennett, but their deliberations were disturbed by a group of conservatives who demanded they leave the premises. Physical violence erupted when an attempt was made to eject certain progressive members, including Johnson. This disturbed him and many other members, so it was decided to hold all future meetings at nearby Hamorton Hall.<sup>54</sup> This location was less suitable, but the building at Old Kennett was too small to accommodate the crowds that the yearly meeting attracted. It was therefore decided to

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<sup>53</sup> *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends*, Fifth Month, 1853, 6-10; Fifth Month, 1854, 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 1, 1854; *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of Progressive Friends*, Fifth Month, 1854, 4; Wahl, "The Progressive Friends of Longwood," 19.

construct a larger building in the immediate vicinity, which would be under the complete control of the progressives. They purchased a suitable lot from John and Hannah Cox, owners of the Longwood Farm, for \$107.11 and then raised funds to construct a hall in which religious, moral, scientific, and literary activities might be carried on. On September 3, 1854, Johnson, along with Joseph A. Dugdale and Thomas Curtis, who had been appointed trustees for the building, officiated in the laying of the cornerstone. Dugdale was a Quaker and one of the original leaders in the drive to organize the new society along liberal lines. He was known as "Uncle Joseph," because of his love for children, and a long series of children's conventions held under his leadership in connection with the Longwood Yearly Meeting. In a jar placed inside the cornerstone were the proceedings of the Pennsylvania Progressive Friends for 1853 and 1854, the Whole World's Temperance Convention of 1853, and the Women's Rights Convention of 1852. The new hall was ready for use by the third annual meeting, and May 19, 1855, the day before the opening session, was selected for its dedication. Johnson opened the dedication ceremonies with a brief statement outlining the reasons that led to the erection of the house and of the objects and purposes for which it would be used. Theodore Parker, an extremely popular abolitionist, was chosen to give the principal address. He had recently been arrested for his antislavery activity in Boston, and his two-hour speech kept everyone in the audience captivated. The Hutchinson family, a band of professional singers often heard at reform conventions, closed the ceremony.<sup>55</sup>

With the dedication of their new hall, the Progressive Friends were ready to move forward, and the new building became the center of the general reform movement

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<sup>55</sup> *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of the Progressive Friends*, Fifth Month, 1855, "Opening Of The Meeting-House At Longwood," 55, 59-96.

in eastern Pennsylvania. There were no constraints on the topics discussed, provided they offered a promise of improving human moral, mental, or physical condition. Individual speakers or committees lectured on “The Proper Use of the First Day of the Week,” “Spiritualism,” and the “Causes of Crime and Treatment of Criminals.” Conferences were held to support the peace movement, land reform, and the harmful treatment of Indians.<sup>56</sup> The Longwood meeting house served as a lyceum, not just on Sunday, but for the entire week, and all kinds of subjects were discussed. People paid as much as 25 cents to hear speakers tell of their travels abroad or discuss common interests, such as landscape gardening and horticulture.

Still, it was the annual meetings that attracted most people. They were held in late May or early June, lasted three to four days, and were attended by reformers from all over the country. The meeting house, which held about 500 people, was not nearly large enough to hold the thousands of visitors who flocked to Longwood each year to hear such renowned reformers, such as Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, and Anna E. Dickinson lecture on women’s rights and temperance. Sojourner Truth, a former slave, sang hymns, while claiming divine inspiration for her name, and Larooqua from the Penobscot tribe sang her Indian laments.<sup>57</sup> Occasionally, however, invited guests bordered on the absurd and outlandish. Two such visitors were the eccentric Sidney Jones and his consort Fanny Lee Townshend, who spoke about physiology and “companionate marriage.” Conservatives

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<sup>56</sup> Wahl, “The Progressive Friends of Longwood,” 19-21.

<sup>57</sup> *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of the Progressive Friends*, Fifth Month, 1853, 9. See also May, *Recollections Of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict*, 405, 406. May openly worried about the impact that some of these eccentrics had on the reform movement. When Sojourner Truth declared that, “I was to travel up an’ down the land showin’ the people their sins, an’ bein’ a sign unto them,” May and other reformers worried that she did not make a good impression and offended people.

were quick to condemn the activities at Longwood, calling it the place where “long-haired men and short-haired women” plotted revolution. They suggested that the community erect “a snug little Asylum” for their insane and that straitjackets be used to restrain the inmates. If there was an overlapping of subjects, or some of the invited orators had certain eccentric qualities, this was to be expected in a reform movement that encouraged an open mind and freedom of debate. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, one of the invited speakers, voiced the general consensus when he said, “without a little crack somewhere, a man could hardly do his duty to the times.”<sup>58</sup> Notwithstanding how much the Progressive Friends worked for other causes, they never lost sight of the need for the abolition of slavery.

The meeting house at Longwood was home to three main classes or groups: the regular attendants, the visiting artists, and the eccentrics. The regulars, who attended to the business of the group all year long, differed among themselves as well. Older women who were Quakers continued to wear their casing bonnets, while younger ones chose to discard them. Many men combined their zeal for progress with a desire to retain their plain dress, while others decided on a more lively wardrobe. This contrast can best be seen with two of the charter members, Joseph A. Dugdale and Johnson. Dugdale never discarded his complete suit of Quaker drab.<sup>59</sup> Johnson’s personal convictions led him to dress in a much more flamboyant manner. His coat was described as “fashionable” by

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<sup>58</sup> Wahl, “The Progressive Friends of Longwood,” 22, 23, 27. Individuals such as Sidney Jones and Fanny Lee Townshend were a constant problem for the Progressive leaders. They were never quite sure if there should be a line drawn between what was acceptable and what was not, and as such, they never defined what was permissible. In regards to Jones and Townshend, Joseph A. Dugdale’s statement spoke for the majority when he said he found them “coarse, vulgar, [and] indelicate.”

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 23, 24, 25.

some, while the more conservative members agreed with the observation that “Johnson’s dress would have done credit to a tip-top dandy, if placed on a well-shaped person.”<sup>60</sup> The comment was made by an anonymous source, who obviously knew little about Johnson. He was an impressive figure who was over six feet tall. Johnson was clean-shaven and well built, with the rugged good looks of a man who was raised on a farm. Later in life he did grow a full beard, but it was always neatly trimmed. Johnson and his wife traveled in a large social circle and they had numerous friends. Many of these individuals were involved in the various reform movements, while others were members of the clergy or engaged in politics or other business professions. They received invitations to numerous social events, which they often attended. When possible, they entertained guests at their home, where Mary Anne had a reputation of being an excellent hostess. Nevertheless, Johnson’s financial situation never allowed him to spend extravagantly on anything, including his wardrobe. Most of his clothing was conservative by the standards of his time, but on occasion he did wear something flashier. His beliefs and life style were nothing close to those of a dandy, but his dress, never vulgar or in poor taste, did express his desire for new freedoms and change in society.

The Progressive Friends, with their liberal view of the world, challenged individuals to ask questions and get involved. This in turn often moved people to increase their participation in a variety of events sponsored by the Progressive Friends. This participation was expressed in many ways, one of which was creativity. Johnson was no exception, and his own inventiveness became stimulated while involved with these reform associations. Similar to many reform movements, antislavery produced

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<sup>60</sup> *Pennsylvania Freeman*, February 3, 1853; Wahl, “The Progressive Friends of Longwood,” 25.

songs and verse to help arouse fervor in the cause. The songs were often not very good, and in some instances they were terrible, but then, as in the civil rights movement of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, it was believed that you could not have a good crusade without singing. Many abolitionists, experienced in writing editorials, tried their hand at composing songs. William Lloyd Garrison published a volume of sonnets, and Maria Weston Chapman, a non-resistant and feminist, as well as a leader in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, authored a volume of songs and hymns. She also edited a journal called *The Liberty Bell*, a short lived publication that included poems and verses by many talented and not so talented individuals.<sup>61</sup> In 1848, William Wells Brown, an abolitionist sympathizer, produced a collection of tunes and verses in *The Anti-Slavery Harp*.<sup>62</sup>

In 1844, George W. Clark began compiling many of these works, and he continued to update the collection in a text titled *The Liberty Minstrel*.<sup>63</sup> It contained musical notations as well as words, and included not only the works of Longfellow and Whittier, but of others less known for their literary or musical talents than for their reform ideas, such as Elizur Wright. It was in *The Liberty Minstrel* that Johnson first tried his hand at songwriting with the publication of two antislavery hymns, "Progress of the Cause" and "God and Liberty."<sup>64</sup> Both are published with music and lyrics, but it is

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<sup>61</sup> Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, 223.

<sup>62</sup> William Wells Brown, *The Anti-Slavery Harp*, Boston: B. Marsh, 1848.

<sup>63</sup> George Washington Clarke, *The Liberty Minstrel*, New York: Leavitt & Alden, 1845.

<sup>64</sup> John A. Collins, *Anti-Slavery Offering and Picknick: A Collection of Speeches, Poems, Dialogues, Songs, For Schools and A.S. Meetings*, Boston: H.W. Williams, 1843. This is a compilation of most of the songs and poems published in *The Liberty Minstrel* and *The Anti-Slavery Harp*, as well as some new additions. This collection is often referred to as the "Picknick Papers," and were used by abolitionists to help educate people about antislavery. The volume was updated on several occasions to include supplementary works.

unknown if Johnson actually composed the music for these songs. Johnson continued to dabble in poetry and song all his life, but his real talent was that of an editor, and his skill as a songwriter was mediocre, at best.

While living in the town of Longwood, Johnson's skill as an editor was not used to its full potential. He remained active in the antislavery cause, but his involvement with the Progressive Friends took up most of his time. Johnson also wanted to do more for the antislavery cause, but this would mean leaving Longwood and assuming another editorial post. He searched his conscience and in 1853 reluctantly agreed to take on the job of associate editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in New York City. Sydney Howard Gay was the editor of the paper at that time, and when he retired in 1858 Johnson filled his place. It was not just Johnson's talents as a writer and editor that inspired his colleagues to urge him to this new post but also his ability to coordinate with the leaders of the A & F. The abolitionist movement needed unity among all its members. By the 1850s the South had become extremely hostile to any infringement on its absolute right to maintain forever the institution of slavery. Lines were being drawn not just in politics but in religion and all aspects of American life. Johnson had made many friends while at Longwood, and it was with mixed emotions that he departed from the organization he'd helped create. He remained a member of the Progressive Friends and participated in their activities for the rest of his life. New York, however, became his new home, and he would remain editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* until the end of the Civil War.<sup>65</sup> Johnson would also remain in New York and live there until his death.

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<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 297, 298.

## Chapter 6

### Coalitions

Although Johnson had been drawn to the activities of the many Transcendental movements of the era, he never lost sight of his main goal in life, the abolition of slavery. As the slavery question intensified during the 1850s, Johnson wanted to be at the forefront of the controversy, and he decided it was time to devote all his energy to the cause.

The late 1840s saw an ever-increasing hostility in the South to any criticism of its peculiar institution. It began with Polk's election in 1844 and the ensuing annexation of Texas. The slavery question now spread into the new territories and reached as far as the Pacific Ocean in California. In 1848, Zachary Taylor was elected President, but never lived out his first term. On July 9, 1850, Taylor suddenly died, falling victim to an attack of heat prostration followed by a violent stomach disorder. His death left Millard Fillmore as President, which only aroused passions on the issue even more. Taylor believed that slavery should be protected in the states where it already existed, but had no desire to see it extended. With the discovery of gold in California the new dominion was to bypass the territorial stage and go straight to statehood. Free settlers outnumbered slaveholders by a huge margin, and Taylor hoped that southerners would be able to tolerate the outcome of a free California. But he had interpreted southern sentiment incorrectly, and if he had lived, Taylor would not have been able to secure the approval of a single Southern state. With Taylor's death his plans became irrelevant, and the

solution now was in the hands of the new President. Fillmore had been perceived as a typically antislavery Whig from New York who was placed on the ticket to balance the southern slaveholder, Taylor. Fillmore believed that a politician should be flexible, and once he ascended to the presidency he supported the ideas of compromise and used his powers of persuasion to bring Northern Whigs into line.<sup>1</sup>

Compromise on the slavery question took several forms. In August, 1846, while the Mexican War was still in progress, President Polk had requested \$2 million from Congress for the purpose of purchasing peace with Mexico. Congressman David Wilmot of Pennsylvania, an antislavery Democrat, introduced an amendment to the appropriation bill prohibiting slavery in any territory acquired from Mexico. This became known as the Wilmot Proviso. Even though it passed in the House of Representatives but failed in the Senate, the proposal would be called up, debated, and voted on repeatedly for years.<sup>2</sup>

Others supported another compromise called "popular sovereignty." This allowed the people of each territory to decide for themselves whether the new state would be slave or free. In short, it meant congressional non-interference with slavery in the territories. One of the most important new leaders of this proposal and the question of

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<sup>1</sup> John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 472-474. Although an older text, one of the best biographies of Millard Fillmore is by Robert J. Rayback, *Millard Fillmore: Biography of a President*, Buffalo: Published by the Buffalo Historical Society by H. Stewart, 1959. Several other good examinations of the life of Millard Fillmore are by Elbert B. Smith, *The Presidencies of Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore*, Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1988, and W.L. Barre, *The Life and Public Services of Millard Fillmore*, New York: B. Franklin, 1971.

<sup>2</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1988, 52-60. Also Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum, Republic Volume I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850*, 435.

compromise in general, was a young Senator from Illinois, Stephen A. Douglas. Douglas was one of a new breed of younger politicians, which included individuals such as William H. Seward of New York and Jefferson Davis of Mississippi. They were replacing the aging leaders of the Congress, men such as John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay. Together they took part in the debates that led to the Compromise of 1850, which both houses of Congress passed and Fillmore eagerly signed.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the Missouri Compromise 30 years earlier, the Compromise of 1850 was not a product of widespread agreement on common national ideals. The Missouri Compromise divided the country at the 36° 30' parallel, and Polk was in favor of extending it through the new territories to the Pacific coast. Henry Clay led an effort to put together a pact that would be agreeable to all sides in the belief that the problem could not be solved unless all the issues in dispute were settled. On January 29, 1850, he introduced a bill that encompassed five provisions. The bill proposed that California be admitted as a free state; the rest of the new territory acquired from Mexico be admitted without restrictions; Texas yield in its boundary dispute with New Mexico; the slave trade, but not slavery itself, be abolished in the District of Columbia; and a new, more effective fugitive slave law be passed. After six months of hard fought debate, Clay's proposal was defeated, but the controversy continued with the younger group emerging in the forefront. These new leaders were able, where the old guard was not, to form a compromise. This compromise did not consist of one "omnibus bill" as Clay had

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<sup>3</sup> David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1976, 90-120. Also Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 52 131, 133, 135-138,

envisioned. Instead, it was a series of separate measures to be voted on one by one. Thus representatives of different regions could support those elements of the compromise favorable to them while they could abstain from voting on or could vote against those they opposed. Although the Compromise of 1850 was considered a triumph when passed, it basically left the underlying problems unresolved. The immediate result was misleading. Due to a booming economy and widespread prosperity, the sectional conflict was briefly forgotten. But the tensions between North and South remained, and the crisis continued to smolder.<sup>4</sup>

The issues confronting the nation and the actions taken by political leaders and activists at this time had a direct result on the two major political parties. With the rise of the Free Soil Party in the late 1840s, many Whigs had abandoned their old party affiliations to join the new party. So did many Liberty Party members who still believed in politics as a solution to the slavery question but felt that the Liberty Party had been too narrow in its ideology. Even though Van Buren and the Free Soilers had been defeated soundly in the 1848 election, they still did considerably better than the Liberty Party. Although considered racist by today's standards, Free Soilers' views on race relations were typical of the time. As the decade of the 1850s opened, the Free Soil Party continued to draw Whigs into its ranks as well as a smaller number of northern Democrats. The defection of Whigs from the old party caused it to disintegrate and, by

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142-149, plus Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850*, 366-369.

<sup>4</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 70-77; Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850*, 366-369.

the middle of the decade, disappear.<sup>5</sup> The Democratic Party, however, was beginning to shift its allegiance to the South and within a few years would be considered the party of the slaveholder.

As the issues separating the country intensified, the abolitionist movement continued to agitate the slavery question. Those who believed in political action continued to attempt to influence their respective parties, while the A.A.S.S. remained firm in its moral position of nothing less than immediate emancipation. The political climate bothered Johnson deeply and stirred him into action. He increased his allegations against the churches for neglecting their duty to their fellow man by being ambivalent about the question of human bondage. At the same time, Johnson viewed the rise of the Free Soil Party as another failure of those who looked for a political solution. He believed Free Soilers neglected abolition and racial equality in their attempt to protect free white labor against the slavocracy. An extremely popular belief expressed by most antislavery Free Soilers was that if slavery did not expand it would die.<sup>6</sup> This was also the view of several leading abolitionists, including Salmon P. Chase and Gamaliel Bailey.<sup>7</sup> Johnson rejected this position as too narrow and too slow to be effective. He also saw it as a betrayal of the antislavery cause as it distracted people from the issue of immediate emancipation. Instead, it led to what he believed was a more racist and less

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<sup>5</sup> For a complete examination of the Free Soil Party and its impact on the Whig and Democratic parties see Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 170- 230. Another excellent examination of coalition politics is by Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, 225-266.

<sup>6</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 171, 190, 191.

<sup>7</sup> Salmon P. Chase Papers, letter from Joshua Giddings to Salmon P. Chase, June 17, 1848. Giddings cautioned Chase to "say nothing about the abolition of slavery. This is misunderstood and frightens many." Note also in the *National Era*, June 28, 1849, an editorial by Gamaliel Bailey attempting to deflate the racist ideas of the Free Soil movement.

equal compromise. Agreeing with the assertions of Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Samuel J. May, who were extremely outspoken as to the limitations of the Free Soil movement, he supported the position of Frederick Douglass who, he felt, “set the subject in a clear light” when he declared that “the Free Soil movement ought not to be considered the real anti-slavery movement of the country.”<sup>8</sup> What was needed was to strive by every means to keep the crusade a moral movement. Both the Liberty and Free Soil parties owed their existence to the previous ten years of moral agitation by the old society. Neither party could have been created without this foundation, nor could they succeed without it as their main guiding principle.

The Compromise of 1850 also produced one of the most appalling pieces of legislation in American history, the Fugitive Slave Law, which required that fugitive slaves, even if they had reached free soil, were to be returned to their owners. Most Northerners had never witnessed slavery first hand, and for the first time they were brought face to face with the evils of owning human beings. The impact of enforcing the new statute shocked individuals in the free states and awakened their sensibilities. The newly implemented Fugitive Slave Act set up commissioners to administer the law and offered them fees to do so in the interest of the slave catchers. It implicated northern citizens in their activities and provided drastic penalties for obstructing the law. Bounty hunters roamed into the free states with few limitations placed on their powers.<sup>9</sup> They

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel J. May Papers, letter from Wendell Phillips to Samuel J. May, April 20, 1848. Phillips complained how the Free Soil movement “has sifted just enough namby pamby Antislavery into the common papers to take off the edge of people’s interest in ours.” In addition see the *Liberator*, May 26, 1848. Also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 314, 315.

<sup>9</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 80, 81; Paula J. Priebe, “Central and Western New York and The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and*

pursued fugitive slaves, intruding into homes and all aspects of social life. When captured, slaves were often treated in the most inhumane manner, chained, beaten, and often dragged through the streets. Witnessing these events outraged many individuals and touched off an unprecedented rebellious defiance throughout the North.

The Fugitive Slave Law was a measure that horrified all abolitionists and one on which they all agreed. Johnson seized the issue as a means of uniting the splintered movement. He declared the law “infamous” and quickly joined those in opposing it whenever possible.<sup>10</sup> Abolitionists at once began uniting to protect runaway slaves and transport them to Canada. Many northerners were angry that their rights were being trampled on, while others felt a sense of shame. Collections were taken up to secure funds to buy the freedom of many slaves who had escaped to the North. Others opened their homes or provided aid in other ways.<sup>11</sup> Free blacks were also very active in the underground railroad and other means of assisting runaway slaves. In 1849, when her master died, Harriet Tubman escaped to Philadelphia to avoid being sold out of state. She was taken in by the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and soon began a career of aiding runaway slaves by setting up underground stations that extended from Maryland through New York and into Canada. Her work even caused her to travel 19 times to the South in spite of the dangers she faced there. She has been credited with assisting over

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*History*, 1992, 16 (1): 19-29. This article gives an excellent analysis of the prejudice that black Americans experienced while living in the North.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 346.

<sup>11</sup> Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, Volume I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850*, 472, 473, 475, 478, 479, 482, 483; Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, 240-247; Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 236-239.

300 slaves to escape from Maryland to freedom.<sup>12</sup> Free blacks, many of whom will never be identified, played a large part in defying the Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that any nation could implement and enforce a statute as cruel as the Fugitive Slave Law only confirmed for Johnson the moral position he had been advocating for years. The new law made it a crime to assist runaway slaves and Johnson believed the creators of the law were attempting to use it to crush the anti-slavery movement. If intelligent men of high esteem resorted to this type of action when confronted with the slavery question, what could be expected of smaller men, who had not been influenced by that moral power? Johnson stated that more than ever, "We needed in that awful hour all the strength which a whole generation of moral agitation had developed."<sup>14</sup> For this support, he viewed the A.A.S.S. and its followers as the only real organization where this strength could be obtained.

As party lines began to break down, coalitions started to form between Free Soilers and members of the major parties. Abolitionists who had joined the Free Soil movement had seen their cause diluted and in many ways transformed. By joining the Free Soil ranks they had been brought closer to the mainstream of national politics, but

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<sup>12</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*; 81-86; Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 136, 137, 172; Filler, *Crusade Against Slavery: Friends, Foes, and Reforms 1820-1860*, 243-245. For an examination of the life of Harriet Tubman see M.W. Taylor, *Harriet Tubman: Antislavery Activist*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991; Judy Carlson, *Harriet Tubman: Call to Freedom*, New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1989; Sarah Bradford, *Harriet Tubman: The Moses of Her People*, Gloucester, Massachusetts: P. Smith, 1981.

<sup>13</sup> For a complete examination of black abolitionists see Olivia Mahoney, "Black Abolitionists." *Chicago History*, 1991, 20 (1-2): 682-695. Also R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 346, 379-381.

the message being transmitted was more about the rights of free white laborers than the plight of the slave. Well aware of the racial bias of the times, they couched their antislavery communications in language that was directed mainly at the self-interest of white Americans.

After the defeat of 1848, most Free Soilers preferred a fusionist or coalition policy. They weighed the advantages of going it alone, and decided that an alliance with either the Whigs or the Democrats was the best way of getting antislavery candidates elected to important offices. The leading advocate for coalition was Salmon P. Chase, who had long been a believer in coalition politics. As a member of the Liberty Party, he had worked to advance its interests with the other major organizations. There were some who urged resistance against all proposals of amalgamation or coalition with Whigs and Democrats, but they were in the minority. Joshua Giddings continued to argue for the party's independence, as he believed that any political deals with the two older, tainted parties would only water down the Free Soil principles. The effect on antislavery, he believed, would be even more devastating.<sup>15</sup> Although the party had improved significantly upon the earlier Liberty Party efforts and had successfully sent a dozen representatives to Congress, most Free Soilers viewed coalition as the only way of keeping the party from disintegrating.

Oddly, Chase was originally convinced that fastening the Free Soil Party to the northern Democrats was the best way to secure antislavery advancement. His initial efforts in Ohio demonstrated some success, and within a short time Free Soilers began

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<sup>15</sup> Salmon P. Chase Papers, letter from Joshua Giddings to Salmon P. Chase, May 6, 1849. Giddings also urged that their mission was not to control political action, but to enlighten the public, a position with which Chase thoroughly disagreed.

referring to themselves as Free Democrats. But the reality of the situation soon became clear when an increasing number of Free Soilers were absent at coalition meetings. It was clear to most that coalition meant altering and even surrendering the party's identity. Alliances were also attempted in various states with Whigs. In most cases they met with moderate success at best. To Chase's great disappointment, fewer and fewer Free Soilers seemed inclined to share his view of coalition.

As the idea of coalition began to burn out, so did the Free Soil Party. Coalition had not been a complete failure as it had been successful in electing several leading antislavery politicians. Charles Sumner was elected to the Senate, as were Benjamin F. Wade and Hannibal Hamlin, and several other friends of the Free Soil movement were elected to Congress.<sup>16</sup> There was also the radicalizing impact that Free Soilers had made upon the major parties, which to some extent advanced the antislavery creed.

In the end, coalition often hurt more than it helped. The philosophy of coalition politics was behind the creation of the Compromise of 1850. As the covenant proved to be a failure, sectional hostilities increased and again led to violence. Assimilation often drove away individuals who were partial to one of the other major parties. All too often, it required a sacrifice of principles, a result which undermined their *raison d'être*. In every northern state during the 1850s, the Free Soil Party began to disintegrate. It did compete in the 1852 election, when it nominated John P. Hale as its presidential candidate, but its vote was small and its impact on the election minimal. By 1853, the Free Soil Party had basically disappeared. Just as important, the two major parties had been changed as well. The Whigs had been weakened even further, causing their

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<sup>16</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 210, 218, 220-222, 229, 241.

candidate, Winfield Scott, to be overwhelmed by the Democrat, Franklin Pierce.<sup>17</sup> The Democratic Party was also becoming continually more sympathetic to the South. This, along with the failure of the Compromise of 1850, brought the slavery issue to the forefront of American life where it was to stay until the end of the Civil War.

The Compromise of 1850 had a direct impact on the way the populace viewed antislavery. This concept was not always consistent and changed as the shortcomings of the Compromise became clearer. Although antislavery had filtered into the major parties, by the late 1840s it had been severely weakened as a political force. The Compromise of 1850 at first led many citizens in the North to believe that further agitation was unnecessary and that the problem had been solved. However, as the initial impact faded, it became clear that the problem remained. Johnson and other members of the A.A.S.S. never relaxed their efforts. They condemned the Compromise from the outset, especially the Fugitive Slave Law, and continued to hold rallies and meetings. The initial response was renewed hostility in the North to abolitionist activities.

The early 1850s witnessed a revival of mob violence. At the beginning of the decade, the A.A.S.S. decided to hold its annual meeting at the Broadway Tabernacle, in New York City. Prior to the meeting, Northern businessmen and merchants organized a Union Safety Committee to express solidarity with their business associates in the South. They also intended to demonstrate a bipartisan sectionalism by disrupting the annual meeting. Many of these businessmen were prominent citizens, and they were successful in finding a Tammany Hall boss, Isaiah Rynders, to organize a mob and disrupt the proceedings. Johnson was present when Rynders and his band of ruffians invaded the

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<sup>17</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 147, 148; Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 229, 230.

building. They stormed the rostrum, harassed individual members, and at one point some of the thugs threatened to cut off the hair of Charles C. Burleigh. Burleigh was a lawyer who left a promising career to become an abolitionist. He was known for his extravagantly long hair and beard. Even his close friends regretted the style of his hair, and Burleigh made an easy target for the gatecrashers. True to their principles of non-resistance, Johnson and the others did nothing to defend themselves. Johnson described the scene as one of high drama and excitement. Garrison, who was chairing the meeting, kept his cool, as did everyone else. Frederick Douglass was also in attendance, and distinguished himself by his wit and eloquence.<sup>18</sup> The mob was completely baffled by the courage displayed and the refusal of anyone to yield. After a short delay the intruders left, and the meeting continued.

Hostility against the antislavery movement persisted for some time. In 1851 and 1852, the A.A.S.S. was unable to secure a church or hall in New York City to hold its annual meeting, so the events took place in Rochester and Syracuse respectively.<sup>19</sup> This attitude toward antislavery gave the appearance that the abolitionist movement had lost its momentum and was struggling against the same obstacles it had been confronted with 20 years earlier. This conclusion would be misleading, as anti-Southern sentiment was actually increasing in the North. The Fugitive Slave Law, combined with the continued erosion of party lines, only added to the sectionalism. California became a state in 1850, and homesteaders were moving west in large numbers. Within a short period of time the

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<sup>18</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 148; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 381.

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 381.

other newly acquired territories would seek statehood as well, and the Compromise of 1850 did not resolve whether these regions would be admitted as free or slave states.

In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe published *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>20</sup> It first appeared serially on a weekly basis, in Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era*. The book was an instant success and became the most important piece of abolitionist propaganda ever published. Within the first year, 300,000 copies were printed in the United States alone. Stowe's portrayal of slavery dealt with all the horror that northerners had imagined and confirmed for many others the suspicions they had about southern plantation life. The book brought to light what everyone knew at some level, that slavery was a cruel and inhuman institution, and it was alive and well in a country that prided itself on freedom. This one text made hostility to slavery routine expression in everyday affairs, and no other abolitionist publication ever reached the public sensibilities so successfully or did more for the cause of antislavery.

New alliances were also beginning to form, and as before, abolitionists began to re-examine their strategy. The public disposition towards antislavery fluctuated, but after 1853, the movement began to secure a more favorable and permanent foothold in the minds of the people in the North. In 1853, the A.A.S.S. returned to New York City to hold its annual meeting, which was conducted without any fear of disturbance. Southerners, who were very much aware of their numerical minority, now believed their way of life and very existence were at stake. They felt they had no alternative but to go on the offensive and began pressuring Franklin Pierce and the Democratic Party leaders

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<sup>20</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, revised and updated edition, New York, London: Published by Signet Classic, 1981. For an analysis of the impact of Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, see Moira Davison Reynolds, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and Mid-Nineteen Century United States*, Jefferson, North Carolina, McFarland & Co., 1985.

to open the new territories to the expansion of slavery. As the sectional division grew wider and the hostility increased, abolitionists began to feel an enhanced sense of confidence and became more aggressive than ever before.

1853 was also the year when Johnson permanently moved his residence to New York City to assume the associate editorship of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*. The *Standard* was the most important antislavery newspaper in the country after Garrison's *Liberator*, and Johnson would be at its helm until the end of the Civil War. As the tabloid was in financial straits and was in jeopardy of being discontinued, Garrison selected Johnson to assume the task of shoring up the paper and increasing its circulation. The editor, Sydney Gay, had done an excellent job in managing the journal, but as the only official servant of the A.A.S.S. in New York he was obliged to assume responsibilities and duties distinct from his editorial labors. Johnson's appointment was specifically intended to relieve Gay of many of these chores. Johnson held the title of assistant editor, but in fact, he and Gay edited the paper on equal terms. In 1857, Gay permanently left the *Standard*, and Johnson assumed the sole editorship.<sup>21</sup>

Johnson was the unanimous choice of the Executive Committee of the A.A.S.S. to undertake this task. The old society faced two major problems in New York, which he perhaps better than any other person was capable of handling. The first was the opposition posed by the waning A & F, whose headquarters were in the city. The wounds created by the 1840 schism had not healed, and many members of the new organization were still bitter and resentful. There remained some original members who

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<sup>21</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter addressed to Sydney Gay accepting his resignation from the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, January 15, 1858. Contrary to the implications in the letter, Oliver Johnson did not retire, but became senior editor; Thomas. *The Liberator*, *William Lloyd Garrison*, 338, 339.

opposed the principles of the A.A.S.S. with the same fervor that they attacked slavery. Johnson was a leader in the A.A.S.S. who could speak for the organization. He had also demonstrated an ability to act independently from his friend Garrison when he felt it was necessary. Many individuals had broken off all contact with the old society because they viewed Garrison as a fanatic who refused to listen to any form of compromise. They were willing to work with Johnson, however, who was always ready to listen to new suggestions. Not only did Johnson wield substantial power within the old society he also had considerable influence with Garrison as well. The Executive Committee knew that by having Johnson in New York he could secure support where Garrison could not. This is exactly what he did. Johnson not only worked with many of the former members of the A.A.S.S. who were now estranged from the old society he also secured their financial support and assistance in coordinating events. In return, he used the *Standard* and the New York antislavery rank and file to aid politicians and other reformers not affiliated with the A.A.S.S. His ability to converse and work with people whose ideas differed, brought in new converts to the abolitionist cause as well as additional revenue that was severely needed. Even when Johnson knew that Garrison would not approve of certain actions, he still acted on his own, following a course that he believed was right. Garrison not only trusted Johnson, he needed him as well. Garrison knew the pivotal role Johnson played within the organization, and Johnson was always able to reconcile his actions with Garrison.

The second problem related to the other various reform movements of the era, which numerous abolitionists supported. As the official organ of the old society, the *Standard* had an obligation to ally itself to these issues, but the paper was an antislavery

publication first and foremost. As such, its circulation was unlikely to grow if it did not give equal billing to the other reform movements.<sup>22</sup> Johnson's job was to act as a mediator between the old and new societies and increase the circulation of the paper, while keeping it an antislavery publication.

Having the headquarters of the *Standard* in New York City was a great advantage, and Johnson was often privy to certain information before many of his Boston colleagues. In addition, the changing political climate of the country also assisted him in his work. With the assistance of his wife, Johnson made personal appeals to individuals in order to increase subscriptions. His pleasant manner and speech were attributes that helped convince people of his sincerity, and many new subscribers were added to the paper's list. Most important, his skills as an editor gave the *Standard* a rebirth as Johnson tackled the problems dividing the antislavery cause. The office of the *Standard* was often frequented by antislavery politicians and members of the A & F. On their way to or from Washington, they made it a habit to stop at the *Standard* to discuss the future strategy of the A.A.S.S. and consult on various issues. Johnson used these opportunities to narrow the gap the schism had created. Action plans were discussed in which the old society would coordinate with congressmen to affect measures in the Congress. Political abolitionists such as Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, Joshua R. Giddings, Salmon P. Chase, John P. Hale, and John A. Andrew all subscribed to the paper. They gathered from its columns information they considered to be of the highest practical value. Although Garrison did not always agree with Johnson's strategy, he acknowledged the

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<sup>22</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter addressed to the Executive Committee of the A.A.S.S. outlining the reasons for appointing Oliver Johnson to the editorship of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 31, 1853.

positive aspects of his accomplishments. When Garrison fell on hard times financially, Johnson was able to secure the help of numerous politicians and associates in New York to raise a testimonial fund of \$30,000 to support Garrison and his family.<sup>23</sup> Although he was never able to unite the movement completely, Johnson did do what the more stubborn Garrison could not accomplish. He was able to bring the various factions closer together, which enabled them to act in concert on many occasions. Within a few months the paper had increased its circulation and was out of debt.

Johnson's duties were not confined to the *Standard*, as he remained an active participant in the events of the A.A.S.S. as well as those of the Progressive Friends and several other reform movements. In fact, he now became the cornerstone of abolitionist activity for the old society in New York. He organized antislavery meetings and made arrangements for many prominent abolitionists from across the country to attend. When possible, Johnson continued to travel, attending lectures and accompanying Garrison and others to conventions and speaking engagements. On September 5, 1853, Garrison arrived in New York to attend a series of antislavery meetings. Also on his agenda was the World's Temperance Convention, being held on September 6 and 7, at which many prominent women, such as Lucretia Mott and Lucy Stone, were in attendance. A previous convention held on May 12 had attempted to exclude women not just from the Business Committee, but from the convention as a whole. Subsequently, a public protest was issued and another convention scheduled.<sup>24</sup> Both Johnson and his wife signed the

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 428, 440.

<sup>24</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, 388, 389.

call for the second meeting and escorted Garrison to the convention.<sup>25</sup> Only a few of the more prominent clergy attended, and Johnson and Garrison took a very subordinate role, as this time the women were very much in charge. That evening, Mrs. Johnson accompanied Garrison and several friends to the Crystal Palace to see a performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The next day Garrison attended several antislavery gatherings, and in the evening he attended a meeting at Metropolitan Hall where about 2,000 people gathered, including a large number of southerners. Johnson was one of the main speakers, and he was constantly interrupted by several pro-slavery men intent on disrupting the meeting by shouting profane insults and making constant requests for locks of his hair. The threat to cut Johnson's hair was an attempt to embarrass him, as he did not wear his hair long and had no beard. By now he was quite accustomed to this type of interference and well prepared to deal with the situation. He never retaliated against the intruders, but instead stood firm in his place and continued with the meeting. But the gatecrashers continued their insults, attacking people in the audience as well, and at half past nine it was decided to adjourn. By all accounts Johnson handled himself well, and it was an effective meeting.<sup>26</sup>

As the decade progressed, sectional politics began to take on a momentum all its own, apart from abolitionist activity. Gradually, divisive forces continued to erode the two-party system. The events of the 1850s led many abolitionists to discard their non-

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<sup>25</sup> *Liberator*, July 22, 1853, "World's Temperance Convention." The entire call for the convention was printed along with the signatures of all those who demanded the equal participation of women.

<sup>26</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to his wife describing the events in New York, September 5, 1853. Although dated the 5<sup>th</sup>, Garrison held onto the letter for several days and continued to add to it before it was mailed; *Liberator*, September 9, 1853. An account of the meetings which Garrison attended were printed in this issue.

violent creed. The Fugitive Slave Law especially increased the number of antislavery people who condoned physical resistance, and some began contriving direct confrontations with the government. After 20 years of preaching non-resistance against the sin of slavery emancipation was no closer than when they started, and the number of those held in bondage had increased by 400,000. Abolitionists discovered that the more forcefully they opposed the law, the more widespread northern resentment became against the slave power.

Resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law and defiance of the government were strategies that Johnson had no problem condoning. They went hand in hand with the philosophy of no union with slaveholders. He could not sanction the actual use of physical force, but he knew he was walking a fine line, and as the country became more volatile and violence erupted in the territories, Johnson was continually forced to re-evaluate his position. As the nation came closer to war, there would come a time when he would have to decide whether to support the Union in its struggle for survival. The time had not yet come to make that decision, but events that pressed on the conscience of all abolitionists were occurring on a national scale.

Men whom Johnson admired, such as Theodore Parker and Samuel J. May, both ministers, were now engaging in examples of what they called "practical Christianity." May was a close friend of Johnson's and was instrumental in the forceful liberation of Jerry McHenry, a free black resident of Syracuse, New York, who had been seized and imprisoned by federal marshals acting under the Fugitive Slave Law. In October 1851, May collaborated with black abolitionists in successfully storming the jail to free McHenry. He was also instrumental in promoting cooperation between militant black

and white reformers. That same year in Christiana, Pennsylvania, a group of blacks shot and killed a federal marshal who was attempting to seize a member of their community.<sup>27</sup> Southerners were closely watching all of these actions, and they viewed a slave insurrection as a real threat. Adding fuel to the fire, President Pierce was determined to enforce the law with federal power. Pierce aligned himself with the planter class and placed the power of his office at their disposal.

Southerners were aware of their numerical minority and feared that free-soil abolitionism was making serious gains in both parties. They sensed their political power waning and pressured Democratic leaders to open new western lands to the expansion of slavery. In January 1854, Stephen A. Douglas sponsored a bill to apply the doctrine of popular sovereignty to Kansas and Nebraska. This opened the possibility of the expansion of slavery into territories previously declared free by the Missouri Compromise. Douglas's bill damaged the Democratic Party in the north and resulted in a death blow for the Whigs, as southerners joined the Democrats in backing the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. Former Liberty adherents and Free Soilers warned of a hideous plot to expand the slave power. The demands of sectionalism had at last drained the resilience of the two-party system, and the nation's political structure had been dismembered. By late 1854, elements of the Whig Party, former Democrats, Liberty men, and Free Soilers came together with the purpose of endorsing free soil and to form the Republican Party. For the first time abolitionists found themselves embraced by a huge antislavery

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<sup>27</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 84-86.

constituency, and the components for an ultimate confrontation with the South had been put together.<sup>28</sup>

Once the Kansas-Nebraska Act was passed it caused a stampede of free and pro-slavery settlers to the territories where each tried to dominate the elections that were to decide the future by popular sovereignty. The struggle in Kansas soon led to guerilla warfare, and many abolitionists who previously had supported non-resistance now supported the use of force. The fact that the Pierce administration blatantly pursued pro-slavery policies in Kansas made it easier for many abolitionists to justify violence.<sup>29</sup> In the North, militant abolitionists held meetings to raise funds for weapons. The radical extremist, John Brown, came north to request funds to protect the free-state settlers of Kansas and received support from many prominent abolitionists. In Massachusetts, the New England Emigrant Aid Company recruited free-state settlers with offers of capital and rifles. Besides John Brown and his sons, the family that frightened southerners most was the Beechers. The children of Lyman Beecher, the old colonizationalist, were all active in arguing against the Fugitive Slave Law. Harriet was the most influential, through her powerful book, and her brothers, Charles and Henry Ward Beecher, were actively involved with the New England Emigrant Aid Company. Rifles transported to Kansas were often concealed in Bible crates and were called "Beecher's Bibles." Northern politicians also urged free-staters to take up arms against the pro-slavery policies of Franklin Pierce.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 162, 163.

<sup>29</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 121-125, 145-169. Also Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, Volume II, New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1971, 88-156, 390-484.

<sup>30</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 164, 165.

These events had a considerable effect on the people of the north, as they viewed them as additional encroachments on their rights and liberties. They also had a direct significance on antislavery operations, as they secured a greater tolerance for the abolitionists. At the height of the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the New York Anti-Slavery Society invited Garrison to give an address in the city. The speech was scheduled for the evening of February 14, 1854, at the Broadway Tabernacle. The weather was execrable, as it had rained for several days and was foggy and cold. Garrison did not arrive in New York until 5:00 P.M., and Johnson, who was waiting for him at the depot, greeted him. Johnson took Garrison home with him for a light supper, and as the two men walked through the mud, often sinking in the muck over their shoes, they discussed their disappointment in the weather and how it would keep people from attending the lecture. To their great surprise a huge audience had assembled at the Tabernacle, and they were warmly applauded as they entered. Many in the crowd were not abolitionists but had been affected by the turmoil in the nation and were, for the first time, taking an active interest in what the abolitionists had to say. Garrison delivered a prepared speech that lasted an hour and a half. He used strong language in attacking religion and politics and was interrupted only by spatters of applause.<sup>31</sup> The speaking engagement was an enormous success and made a great impact on the local citizens. At the close of his lecture editors from *The New York Times* requested a copy of Garrison's manuscript, which was printed in its entirety in the morning edition of the paper. Johnson, along with the Executive Committee of the A.A.S.S., made arrangements to buy

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<sup>31</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to his wife dated February 16, 1854. Garrison described his trip in detail. He explained how Johnson was waiting for him at the depot and the events that occurred at the Broadway Tabernacle, as well as the after effects of his lecture.

500 copies and have them distributed. He also published the entire address in the *Standard*.<sup>32</sup> Both men viewed the success in New York as a sign of the favorably changing times.

Later that year, Garrison began a western speaking tour of about three weeks duration. His first stop was in New York on October 16. His train was about an hour late, but he again found Johnson waiting to welcome him. The next day they visited the Women's Rights Convention, which had opened the day before. Attending the convention were many noteworthy feminists, such as Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott. Also present were many friends of antislavery from the Hopedale community. From New York Garrison traveled to Philadelphia for another convention. Johnson and his wife did not travel with him, but arrived shortly after. The meeting took place in the Sansom Street Hall, and Johnson had made arrangements for many of the Progressive Friends to be present. Joseph Dugdale, Hannah Cox, and many other members from Longwood attended, and Johnson and his wife found great pleasure in seeing their old friends. A special invitation had been issued to the black members of the community, many of whom were present.<sup>33</sup> The building was so crowded that the

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<sup>32</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 18, 1854. This issue printed a report on the lecture and commented on its success. Garrison rarely wrote his speeches out in advance and often spoke from prepared notes. For this occasion he had prepared a written speech that was printed in the February 25, 1854 edition; *Liberator*, February 24, 1854. The speech was also published in this edition of the paper; *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from Johnson to Garrison dated February 4, 1854. Johnson knew Garrison would feel constricted if forced to read from a prepared text. In the letter he gives him some words of encouragement by stating, "Give yourself no uneasiness about the *reading* of your lecture. Of course, you will feel somewhat constrained, but know for your consolation that you always read impressively, never coldly or dully."

<sup>33</sup> *Liberator*, October 13, 1854. This issue carried the invitation to "the colored citizens of Philadelphia" to attend the meeting. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*,

speakers had difficulty getting to the rostrum, but the event was a wonderful occasion. Johnson did not travel with Garrison on his entire tour as his duties at the newspaper prohibited him from being away from the editorial desk for too long. But whenever possible, he did accompany Garrison and attended antislavery meetings throughout the North, lecturing and organizing.

From his office at the *Standard* Johnson remained in the center of the controversy. Charles A. Stearns and other roving reporters sent back information from Kansas. Stearns was a supporter of non-resistance, but after the siege of Lawrence, Kansas, where he witnessed the wanton murder of a free-state man, he adopted the belief that killing pro-slavery men was not in violation of his pacifist tenets.<sup>34</sup> Stearns's sudden change disturbed Johnson greatly. He could not support the killing that was taking place in the territories and spoke out against the activities of the New England Emigrant Aid Company. He stated that the company "invited not a moral but a physical conflict," and its "weapons were those of war, as symbolized by the 'Sharpe's rifles,' with which many of the emigrants were furnished." Furthermore, the emigration scheme did not eliminate slavery: it only planned to stop it from entering the Kansas territory. As he said, "Abolitionists could not be satisfied with such a narrow platform, but must still work as best they could for the utter extinction of slavery wherever it existed."<sup>35</sup> His fears were confirmed by reports from Stearns and other correspondents who validated rumors that

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letter to his wife dated October 19, 1854. Garrison gives an account of all his activities during his trip to New York and Philadelphia.

<sup>34</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, 418, 419.

<sup>35</sup> Johnson, *The Abolitionists Vindicated in a Review of Eli Thayer's Paper on the New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 12.

the free-settlers opposed slavery because they did not want blacks in the territory. Stearns reported. "Now I feel quite certain that the very people who will vote against the introduction of slavery will also vote for a 'Black Law.' I am much disappointed in the character of the New England emigrants. They come here, as men go to California, mainly after money."<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, the company did nothing to amend the Constitution as it existed with all its pro-slavery implications, but instead it embraced the legality of slavery. Johnson admitted that the emigration scheme was an appealing episode in the antislavery struggle and conceded it won the support of many men who had before done excellent service in the abolitionist cause. He also did not doubt that those who organized and supported the company hated slavery and took what they thought was the best course of action to promote abolition.<sup>37</sup>

What repelled Johnson most about the company was its avowal to be a "self sacrificing project," when in fact it was intended to secure "great pecuniary profits" for its patrons. This never came to pass, but the scheme had never been a completely "philanthropic affair." He also saw a great danger in the violent measures being applied by the company and other antislavery advocates, as he feared they would provoke a war with the South. These actions "were actually inviting it and daring the slaveholders and their minions to come on." Johnson also raged against the churches and the large body of clergy who did not speak out against the violence. He agreed with James G. Birney's

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<sup>36</sup> *Liberator*, December 24, 1854. Stearns wrote this article from Lawrence, Kansas, before the siege. At this early stage he had already become disillusioned with the antislavery forces adding, "I can find but few who dare to say that they are in favor of allowing the colored man to come here and buy land on an equality with the white man. The common cry is, 'We want no slavery and no niggers.'"

<sup>37</sup> Johnson, *The Abolitionists Vindicated in a Review of Eli Thayer's Paper on the New England Emigrant Aid Society*, 14.

statement that “The American Churches are the Bulwarks of American Slavery.” It was not until after the passing of the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Law that the clergy changed their attitudes. Religious leaders viewed the abolitionist cause as dangerous and believed it could bring them into ruin and disgrace. Johnson accused the clergy who claimed to speak in the name of God as prostituting the Bible to support the system of slavery.<sup>38</sup>

What troubled him was that the moral message had been discarded and was replaced by violence and hatred. He was able to face the fact that moral suasion alone could not end slavery. Likewise, he was willing to compromise on the need for political action and was inclined to seek out other alternative methods when feasible, but he still believed that slavery could be ended without bloodshed and could not resign himself to countenance murder as a part of the solution. As hostilities intensified and the nation became more divided, Johnson would be forced to search his conscience and question his faith before he could make a final evaluation.

As the turmoil in Kansas increased in its intensity, the political party system fragmented. Conservative elements formed a new organization, the Unionist Party, which specifically attacked foreigners and Catholics. By 1855, the American Party “called the Know-Nothings,” had been established. It embraced the principles of nativism and was overtly anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic. Most abolitionists were deeply suspicious of the new Irish immigrants entering the country and of Catholicism in general. They could not, however, bring themselves to support nativism, and they

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<sup>38</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume III, 405, 417; Johnson, *The Abolitionists Vindicated in a Review of Eli Thayer's Paper on the New England Emigrant Aid Company*, 13, 14, 25, 26.

opposed its philosophy, believing it violated the fundamentals of an individual's free labor. They also felt that throwing weight behind the movement would divert attention from its primary goal, the abolition of slavery. In the South, Democrats collected what remained of the Whig Party and soon incorporated it into its own ranks. In the North, Whigs such as William H. Seward attempted to revive the Whig Party, with little success. Emerging with more power than ever before, new antislavery coalitions began to form throughout the North. They consisted of former Whigs, Free Soilers, and anti-Nebraska Democrats. These coalitions called themselves by various names, such as Anti-Nebraska, Fusion, People's, and the Independent Party, but the name that emerged as the most popular was Republican.<sup>39</sup>

From his pivotal position in New York, Johnson continued to advocate open debate on the political issues as they evolved. He invited politicians from all the various parties to participate at antislavery meetings. These public discussions were having a positive impact on the public, and at times he received support from Garrison. When the selected speaker at an upcoming meeting in New York had to bow out at the last minute, Anson Burlingame was selected as a replacement. Originally an active member of the Free Soil Party, Burlingame was elected to Congress as a member of the Know-Nothing Party. His political and antislavery views were well known, and he was an extremely capable debater. Opposing him on the podium would be Samuel J. May, Johnson's close friend. Johnson disagreed with Burlingame's limited antislavery position, and he

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<sup>39</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, 225-260. Also McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 126, 135-139.

believed that May's argument would demonstrate the folly of that position. In Johnson's view there was no better way to convey the moral argument and sway public sentiment.<sup>40</sup>

On another occasion, Sam Houston, the famous liberator of Texas, delivered a series of speeches at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York and the Tremont Temple in Boston. The main theme of his speech was that the South was not aggressive and that all she required was a faithful observance of her rights under the Constitution. Both Garrison and Johnson viewed Houston's opinion as "a stolid defense of slavery, as a necessity, and utterly devoid of all reason and principle—of course."<sup>41</sup> Arrangements were quickly made to rebuke Houston's remarks. Although Johnson believed Houston had every right to state his opinion, he knew the Texan was an extremely popular figure, even in the North, and that any criticism of him would not go unchallenged. Johnson scheduled a meeting to take place on February 27, 1855, at the Broadway Tabernacle to condemn the statements made by Houston.<sup>42</sup> Garrison made a special trip to New York to address the issue. He repeated his remarks in Boston on March 1.<sup>43</sup> These open and very public lectures, which were open to discussion, roused the public's interest, which

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<sup>40</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Johnson dated February 7, 1855. This is a reply to a letter just received from Johnson, where Garrison discusses the use of Burlington to "fill the gap," as well as May's already prepared lecture for the occasion.

<sup>41</sup> *Liberator*, March 2, 1855, "Anti-Slavery Course." This was part of Garrison's commentary on the lecture Houston delivered at the Tremont Temple, on February 23, 1855.

<sup>42</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Johnson dated February 23, 1855. Garrison commented on Houston's lecture and requested that Johnson find accommodations for him for his brief stay in New York. Garrison had to return to Boston, as he was scheduled to repeat his lecture within two days.

<sup>43</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, March 3, 1855, "Anti-Slavery Course." Garrison's entire address was printed in this issue. Also the *Liberator*, March 2, 1855, "Lecture On Slavery." The complete text of Houston's speech appeared in this issue; *Liberator*, March 9, 1855. This is a summary of Garrison's talk.

was exactly what Johnson had hoped would occur. They kept people thinking and talking about abolition and in some instances made actual participants of them.

The events in Kansas helped the new Republican Party to grow in size and power very quickly. It was soon strong enough to enter the next presidential election where it made a very good showing. Not all abolitionists raced to embrace the ideals of the new Republican Party. A group of radicals, many left over from the Liberty Party, still viewed an independent abolitionist party as a possibility, especially amidst the changing political climate of the country. These men included Gerrit Smith, William Goodell, and Lewis Tappan. They called for a "Radical Political Abolition Convention" to be held in Boston at the Melodeon, on October 23 through 25. Even though he was extremely busy, Johnson journeyed to Boston to meet with Gerrit Smith and other abolitionist leaders to discuss the futility of this endeavor.<sup>44</sup> Johnson thought that such a convention couldn't possibly be productive. If anything, it would only add to the division in the antislavery ranks and counter his efforts to reconcile the differences between the old society and those who had abandoned it. Despite his efforts and those of Garrison and others, the convention took place as scheduled. By all accounts, "this Convention appeared to excite no attention, and was thinly attended throughout."<sup>45</sup> While the radical abolitionists failed miserably in their attempts at organization, the upstart Republican Party demonstrated the possibility of becoming a more powerful political weapon than

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<sup>44</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Samuel J. May dated October 26, 1855. Garrison discussed the meeting with Gerrit Smith, Oliver Johnson, and others, as well as the failure of the convention.

<sup>45</sup> This quote is from a review of the convention in the *Liberator*, October 26, 1855. By most accounts the convention was not a success.

either the Liberty Party or Free Soilers had ever been. Johnson saw the potential of the new party, but could still not commit to supporting it.

By January, 1856, Kansas had two territorial governments. The official government was at Leecompton and represented the pro-slavery settlers, while an unofficial one at Topeka represented the majority of the residents. Both sides had arsenals, and numerous incidents occurred. The spring of that year brought a new migration of free-staters, which further increased hostilities. Samuel Lecompte, a pro-slavery judge, declared that the members of the free state government in Topeka were traitors and had them indicted. Many of these men lived in the town of Lawrence, and Lecompte's actions provided an opportunity to destroy this stronghold of abolitionist activity. On May 21, a small army of about 800 carrying five cannon attacked the town. They destroyed the newspaper offices, burned the hotel and the residence of the elected governor, plundered stores and homes, and sacked the city.<sup>46</sup>

The incidents that occurred in "Bleeding Kansas" all took place while the nation and Congress debated a solution. Federal troops stationed in Kansas stood by idly, as they received no orders from President Pierce. Both Republicans and Democrats introduced bills to admit Kansas as a state, the former under the free state constitution and the latter under the Leecompton territorial government. Preston Brooks, a congressman from South Carolina, took up the pro-slavery cause, declaring, "The fate of the South is to be decided with the Kansas issue."<sup>47</sup> Opposing Brooks was Charles Sumner who delivered a two-day speech on May 19 and 20 to the Senate. A few days

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<sup>46</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 147; McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 148, 149.

<sup>47</sup> Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union*, Volume II, 427.

before his address, Sumner informed Salmon P. Chase of what his oration would entail, saying "My soul is wrung with outrage, & I shall pour it forth."<sup>48</sup> This is exactly what Sumner did. He held nothing back, accusing murderers from Missouri of being "hirelings picked from drunken spew and vomit of an uneasy civilization," who had committed a "rape of a virgin territory, compelling it to the hateful embrace of slavery." Sumner singled out individuals such as Senator Andrew P. Butler of South Carolina, an outspoken defender of slavery, who had demanded the disarming of free-state men in Kansas. Sumner's speech produced pandemonium in the Senate, where Democrats rebuked him and Republicans praised his words. Butler was the cousin of Brooks, and both men were so outraged that they wanted to challenge Sumner to a duel. What held them back was their certainty that Sumner would refuse, and besides, dueling was for men of honor, which they certainly did not believe included Sumner. Two days after the speech, Brooks approached Sumner in the Senate and accused him of libel of South Carolina and Mr. Butler. As Sumner attempted to stand up, Brooks began to beat him over the head with his cane. Sumner, whose desk was bolted to the floor, struggled to rise and defend himself, ripping from the floor the bolts that held the desk in place. The assault left Sumner on the floor of the Senate bleeding profusely from the head and unconscious. So severe were his injuries that Sumner was unable to return to the Senate for four years, during which time his state refused to replace him. He became a martyr, and Brooks's actions were used by abolitionists to illustrate the barbarism of the South. The incident incensed abolitionists, and the term "Bleeding Sumner" soon joined that of

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<sup>48</sup> Salmon P. Chase Papers, letter to Salmon P. Chase from Charles Sumner, dated May 15, 1856.

“Bleeding Kansas.”<sup>49</sup> Talk of recrimination was in the air, and men such as Benjamin Wade, a radical Republican Senator from Ohio, and Henry Wilson, a dissident Whig from Massachusetts, could be seen walking the halls of Congress with handguns under their coats.

It was at this point that, in revenge for the sack of Lawrence and the caning of Sumner, John Brown conceived his retaliatory raid on Pottawatomie Creek. On May 25, 1856, Brown, accompanied by four of his sons and three other men, abducted five pro-slavery settlers from their cabin and split their heads open with broad swords. This shocking massacre went unpunished, although Brown’s homestead was burned by a pro-slavery band. The violence soon escalated into a guerilla war of ambushes.<sup>50</sup> The presidential election of 1856 took place as the slavery issue continued to intensify and Kansas continued to bleed.

The events occurring in the country did not cause Johnson to discard his ethical code during the election of 1856. Millard Fillmore, the signer of the infamous Fugitive Slave Law, became the presidential candidate for the Whigs and Know-Nothings, while the Democrats nominated James Buchanan of Pennsylvania. Buchanan was a party stalwart who, as an emissary to England, could detach himself from the recent controversies as well as appeal to some borderline Northerners. Johnson did see a great distinction between these parties and the Republicans, who nominated John C. Fremont.

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<sup>49</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 149, 150. Note also Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War*, 281-288. Donald gives a detailed account of the assault on Sumner and the after effects it had on his career.

<sup>50</sup> Stephen B. Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1970, 126-137. Oates gives a vivid description of the guerilla warfare in Kansas and the terror that spreads throughout the territory. See also McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 152, 153.

was unable to attend the convention because of illness. Garrison's message outlined the position of the A.A.S.S. in regard to the upcoming election. He gave credit to the Republican Party for what it was attempting to accomplish, but called for the rejection of all the candidates, as the election of any one of them would lead to a pact with the slaveholder and legitimize the continuation of human suffering. Therefore, Garrison maintained, to vote for any candidate would be a matter of moral inconsistency, and he urged abolitionists to abstain from the election process.<sup>53</sup> Johnson agreed with Garrison in principle, but did not believe that throwing away the right of suffrage would accomplish anything. For the first time abolition was becoming a political power, and if the efforts of politically active antislavery men were supported, this power could increase. There is no doubt that Johnson was extremely suspicious of the new party and how it would fare in the future, but he believed it was a mistake to detach antislavery from the political process completely.

The election of 1856 was surprisingly close, with Buchanan winning a narrow victory. He received 174 electoral votes but not a majority of the popular vote. Buchanan received 1,833,000 votes, to Fremont's 1,340,000 and Filmore's 872,000. The new Republican Party did astonishing well, carrying 11 states with 114 electoral votes. A slight shift of votes in Pennsylvania and Illinois would have given those states to the Republicans and elected Fremont.<sup>54</sup> The future looked very promising for the new

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Oklahoma: Oklahoma University Press, 1991, and Ruhl Jacob Bartlett, *John C. Fremont and the Republican Party*, New York: DaCapo Press, 1970.

<sup>53</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 25, 1856. Garrison's letter to the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society was printed in its entirety. It also outlined the events of the annual convention.

<sup>54</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 161, 162. See also Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 168.

The Republican Party embodied the main portion of the political antislavery strength of the country, whereas the other parties represented the slave power exclusively. Johnson saw the Democratic Party as extremely dangerous and agreed with Garrison that "Under this administration of this party, the government has been overthrown, by a *coup d'etat* of the slave oligarchy in the person of Franklin Pierce."<sup>51</sup> Fremont had made a national reputation as an explorer of the West, and he had no political record. This is exactly why he won the nomination over men such as William H. Seward and Salmon P. Chase. These more prominent abolitionists had made enemies within various Republican groups. Fremont had none, and it was believed his dashing image could entice nativists, antislavery Democrats, and disgruntled Whigs to the new party.<sup>52</sup>

The Republican platform did call for the non-extension of slavery, but it left the South as it was. If Johnson supported this platform, he had to forgo the immediate emancipation of those held in bondage. Furthermore, the Constitution remained intact as a pro-slavery document. He did not deny that the new party was stronger in its antislavery convictions than any previous political force or that it was a weapon that could have an impact on the planters, however, he could not endorse halfway measures. As the excitement surrounding the election increased, Johnson continued to insist that nothing was satisfactory except immediate emancipation.

In a speech delivered at the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society on October 16, 1856, Johnson read a letter written by Garrison who

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<sup>51</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to James Miller McKim dated October 14, 1856.

<sup>52</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 154-156. Two excellent biographies of John C. Fremont are by Andrew F. Rolle, *John Charles Fremont: Character as Destiny*, Norman,

party, but it was the South that had elected Buchanan, and Southerners were not about to let him forget it. Buchanan would turn out to be a painfully timid and indecisive President. Faced with a national depression and a decline in agricultural prices, people in the North blamed the hard times on the unsound economic policies of southern Democrats. The frustrated economic interests of the North began creating an alliance with antislavery elements, and as a result many were drawn to the Republican Party.

Having Buchanan in the White House caving in to pro-slavery demands in Kansas and other parts of the country did not dismay Johnson. Republicans were gaining strength throughout the North, and abolitionist rhetoric was increasing throughout the nation as well. The numerous antislavery organizations sponsored annual meetings, lectures, and fairs and distributed a variety of publications as part of their political action, thereby constantly reminding the populace of the hideous institution sanctioned by government. Johnson believed that progress was being made by this continuous assault on slavery from all directions, and he called for an increase in the pressure being applied.

Johnson's public life now became more active than ever before as he threw himself into all the activities of the antislavery movement and participated in as many events as possible. Employing the A.A.S.S. as an anchor to organize strategy and the *Standard* as an instrument for issuing tactics, he embarked on an all-out campaign to counter the actions of Buchanan and the pro-slavery forces. Although his work at the paper kept him from traveling as much as he would like, it did not stop him from attending numerous conventions outside of New York. He also embarked on a campaign to recruit a whole new generation of young disciples to the cause.

The Twenty-first Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society was held in Philadelphia in 1856, on December 17 through 19. It came upon the heels of the much-publicized book, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, by Mattie Griffith.<sup>55</sup> The author was the daughter of a deceased Kentucky slaveholder, who emancipated her slaves after her father's death. It was actually a biography of a slave as told to her, and the book stirred quite a controversy as abolitionist propaganda. Prior to attending the convention, Garrison, Johnson, and others met in New York to discuss their strategy, which included the impact that Griffith's book was having on the public. As usual, Johnson was waiting for Garrison at the depot, but this time he was not alone. Mary Anne accompanied him, and so did a young protégé named Theodore Tilton, who was working for the weekly congressional newspaper, the *New York Independent*. The newspaper, founded in 1848, was edited by Henry Ward Beecher and had strong antislavery leanings. Tilton would rise to become managing editor of the paper and a renowned abolitionist. He became a close friend of Henry Ward Beecher and was a member of his church. In 1871, a scandal involving Tilton's wife and Beecher caused Tilton to be dismissed from the *Independent*. He later sued but lost the case.<sup>56</sup> At this time Tilton was an unknown, but Johnson was greatly impressed with his abilities as an editor and his enthusiasm, and he made a very favorable impression on Garrison as well.

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<sup>55</sup> Mattie Griffith, *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, New York: Redfield, 1857. A review of the book was printed in the *Liberator*, November 28, 1856, "Autobiography of a Female Slave." The title of the book was misleading, as a later issue of the *Liberator*, January 9, 1857, printed an extract from the book and explained it was actually a biography and identified the author.

<sup>56</sup> Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, 178-215. The entire scandal is explained, as well as Johnson's involvement as a mediator between Tilton and Beecher.

That evening, an informal reception was held at the home of Charles G. Judson, a rubber merchant and member of Henry Ward Beecher's church. The purpose of the gathering was to introduce Garrison to people who only recently had taken an interest in the abolitionist movement. Judson was not an abolitionist, but had recently begun supporting antislavery activities. Slavery was becoming an issue that concerned an increasing number of people. Johnson attended these gatherings whenever possible and believed they did more good than any public speech. Not everyone was persuaded, but he was often successful in securing new converts to the cause and was able to win antislavery sympathy from many others. That night about 40 people were present at Judson's home, including Garrison, Johnson, Beecher, and Tilton. Johnson addressed the guests assembled in Judson's living room and explained abolitionist strategy and tactics, while Tilton read excerpts from the *Liberator*. Garrison's notoriety made him the best known abolitionist in the country, and many had come that evening to hear him speak. He did not disappoint them, and when he concluded everyone applauded enthusiastically.<sup>57</sup> There were many such gatherings taking place in the north, and they played an important role in putting antislavery discourse in a positive light in the public mind.

Garrison and Johnson spent the night at Tilton's and the next day they headed to the office of the *Standard* where they continued to discuss the upcoming convention. The same day they left for Philadelphia, as they were most anxious to arrive early because of the antislavery fair that was to take place in conjunction with the conference.

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<sup>57</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to his wife Helen dated December 17, 1856. Garrison described meeting Johnson and Tilton at the railroad depot and their activities, as well as all the events that evening at the home of Charles G. Judson.

The bazaar was basically a product of the women's auxiliary and organized by many prominent feminists who were active in the antislavery crusade. Johnson's wife, Mary Anne, was one of the organizers, as were Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, and several members of the Progressive Friends such as Hannah Cox.<sup>58</sup> More people than ever before attended both the fair and the convention, and both were a huge success. Between 1837 and 1860 antislavery fairs were one of the most important fund-raising activities of the abolitionist movement. They also served as community gatherings and recruitment drives. Women organized these events almost exclusively and they proved to be tremendously successful. In England the antislavery fairs produced by female abolitionists had demonstrated to be extremely prosperous. In the United States Lydia Maria Child arranged the first antislavery fund-raising fair in Boston in 1837. It sold handicrafts made by women and netted \$300 for the New England Anti-Slavery Society. The following year Sarah Pugh began to coordinate fund-raising fairs annually in Philadelphia during the Christmas season with the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society. These fairs raised money by selling tickets and antislavery pamphlets. Eventually they broadened their activities by selling gift books containing abolitionist poetry and prose, and small household items like silk bags and pin cushions that were inscribed with antislavery catch phrases, such as "Remember the Slave." The fairs educated people to the evils of slavery by decorating the walls with antislavery slogans and mottoes proclaiming the moral suasion argument. Posters and banners were placed on sidewalks and street corners announcing the bazaars. They also appealed too and received support from black women as well, and helped raise funds for several black institutions. These

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<sup>58</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, December 6, 1856, "Anti-Slavery Fair." Announced the fair and the convention.

fairs reached their peak in the 1850s. They were enjoyable events that many individuals looked forward to attending, but most important, they were always an important source of revenue for the antislavery organizations.<sup>59</sup>

The year 1857 opened with a celebration on January 2 at Faneuil Hall of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. It was followed by a Massachusetts Disunion Convention on January 15 held in Worcester at Belknap Street Church. Those attending the convention were basically limited to abolitionists, although a small number of Republicans were there. Of the original 12 founders only Garrison and Johnson were present. Four of the initial members were dead, and the rest could not attend because of old age and infirmities. As expected, Johnson was one of the keynote speakers.<sup>60</sup>

It was agreed by all that tremendous progress had been made in the last quarter of a century and that if the schism had not occurred in 1840, emancipation might already have taken place. As anticipated, the convention pointed to the events in Kansas and declared that the only solution that remained was disunion and no union with slaveholders. Many leading antislavery Republicans, did not attend the convention because they could not endorse the principles of disunion but instead, sent letters

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<sup>59</sup> Yellin and Home, editors, *The Abolitionists Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, 228, 57, 207, 250-252, 260, 330, 331. Note also Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860*, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992, 102, 103. For additional information about antislavery fairs and the work of women in benevolent societies see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990, 46, 47, 64, 129.

<sup>60</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, 448-457. See also the *Liberator*, January 2, 1857, "State Disunion Convention," and "Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society." The notices for both of these events appeared in this issue.

explaining their position. Charles Francis Adams, the son and grandson of two former Presidents, John Quincy Adams and John Adams respectively, later destined to become the American minister to London during the Civil War, stated that “the notion of no union with slaveholders is founded on a mistaken theory of morals, compelling the good to withdraw altogether from the bad.” A letter from U.S. Senator Henry Wilson was read aloud at the convention. Wilson stated that this movement could have no other effect than to put a burden on the Republican Party by arraying against it, “that intense, passionate, and vehement spirit of nationality which glows in the bosoms of the American people.” He further avowed his want of sympathy with the ideology of disunion and refused to be connected with it. Wilson hoped the convention would discard the notion and target the “Southern slave-propagandists; and proclaim their readiness to follow, in the conflicts of the future, the banner of Liberty and Union.”

Johnson remained dedicated to the philosophy of disunion despite the pleas of his Republican colleagues. He could never grant legitimacy to the Southern slave power, as the Republicans were willing to do. As long as politicians were willing to sell out and leave human beings enslaved anywhere in the country, he could not endorse their programs. Johnson supported the actions of the convention when they formed a state committee of seven, selecting Thomas Wentworth Higginson as chairman, to publicize the disunion movement. Higginson was a radical minister and politician, well known for his public acts of noncompliance. He was one of the first abolitionists to call for violent resistance and he helped finance John Brown’s raid on Harpers Ferry.<sup>61</sup> Johnson could

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<sup>61</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 154-158, 165, 172.

not actually sit on the committee himself, as all its members resided in Massachusetts, but he supported the adoption of the committee and their work of disunion propaganda.

If Johnson had any doubts about his stand of no union with slaveholders, they were quickly eliminated by the actions of the Supreme Court. On March 6, 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court announced its decision on *Dred Scott vs. Sanford*. Dred Scott was a slave who had been taken by his master to a territory declared free by the Missouri Compromise. Aided by Gamaliel Bailey and 75 Northern congressman, Scott filed suit for his freedom. The decision handed down by Chief Justice Roger B. Taney not only denied Scott his freedom but, in a series of broad declarations, gave slave owners a theoretical standing in the law which was extremely favorable to them. Taney declared that the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional and that Congress possessed no power to legislate the limits on the expansion of slavery. He went further, stating that at the time of the adoption of the Constitution it was believed that blacks had no rights before the law that whites were "bound to respect." In short, slavery had been elevated to a national institution and white supremacy sanctified as law.<sup>62</sup> Taney was 80 years old, and it was an opinion he had long wanted to write. He had previously expressed growing anger toward "northern aggression." "Our own southern countrymen" were in great danger, he wrote; "the knife of the assassin is at their throats."<sup>63</sup> His decision was a culmination of his desire to defend his beloved South from the malignant forces of blacks

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<sup>62</sup> For a complete examination of the Dred Scott decision and its consequences see Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1978. Also McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 174-176; Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, 168, 169.

<sup>63</sup> Roger Brooke Taney Papers, letters from Taney to his son-in-law, J. Mason Campbell dated October 2, 1856 and October 19, 1860; reprinted in an article by Don E.

and Republicans. For Johnson, the ruling confirmed that the Constitution was a pro-slavery document, and that there could be no compromise with pro-slavery states.

Instead of removing the issue of slavery in the territories from politics, the Supreme Court's ruling itself became a political issue. Southern senators began demanding slave codes for the territories to protect their property.<sup>64</sup> The reaction in the North was swift as abolitionists condemned the decision and advocated resistance whenever possible.<sup>65</sup> Taney had hoped to cripple the Republican Party, but instead, the ruling actually strengthened it. Republicans moved quickly, depicting the decision as a slave power conspiracy between the Chief Justice and the president-elect, Buchanan. The two foremost advocates of the conspiracy theory were U.S. Senator William H. Seward and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>66</sup> Whether Lincoln and other Republicans believed in the conspiracy, or whether they were creating a ruse to frighten northern voters is unclear. Lincoln did address the Dred Scott decision directly a year later. It was during his Illinois senatorial race, in the same speech in which he used the famous metaphor, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Lincoln conceded that he could not know that all of this was part of a conspiracy to expand slavery, "But when we see a lot of framed

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Fehrenbacher, "Roger B. Taney and the Sectional Crisis," *Journal of Southern History*, XLIII (November 1977), 555-566.

<sup>64</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 35<sup>th</sup> Congress, Session 2, 1242, 1243. Senator Albert G. Brown of Mississippi demanded that Congress pass a federal slave code for the territories. Also the *Congressional Globe*, 31<sup>st</sup> Congress, Session 27, 28, 257-261. Brown was a Southern firebrand who when speaking about California had previously declared, "We ask you to give us our rights, if you refuse, I am for taking them by armed occupation."

<sup>65</sup> *Liberator*, June 19, 1857; July 13, 1857; July 17, 1857. These issues document several incidents of attempted resistance to capture fugitive slaves in Ohio.

<sup>66</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 178; *Congressional Globe*, 35<sup>th</sup> Congress, Session 1, 941. In a speech to the Congress, Seward charged collusion between Taney and Buchanan.

timbers...which we know have been gotten out at different times and places by different workmen—Stephen [Douglas], Franklin [Pierce], Roger [Taney] and James [Buchanan], for instance—and when we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the frame house...we find it impossible to not believe that Stephen and Franklin and Roger and James...all worked up in a common plan.”<sup>67</sup> Lincoln himself believed that the right of property in a slave is not distinctly and expressly affirmed by the Constitution.<sup>68</sup>

The A.A.S.S. viewed the decision as meaning only one thing: the extension of slavery. The promoters of disunion were more determined than ever to proceed, and they issued a circular dated July 8, 1857, calling for a Disunion Convention to be held at Cleveland, Ohio, on October 28 and 29. Johnson agreed with the announcement which stated, “That the new Administration will be thoroughly subservient to the Slave Power is a foregone conclusion,” and that “From *mere* politics there is little to be expected.”<sup>69</sup> He did see the mass of Republican voters becoming more antislavery, but still agreed with his colleagues at the A.A.S.S. that the new party was too cautious, timid, and easily compromised. If the idea of disunion were accepted by the mass of antislavery advocates, it could create a united and more determined North.

The political events that had transpired, combined with the continued agitation by the antislavery forces, started to reap dividends as the abolitionist crusade made

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<sup>67</sup> Roy P. Basler, editor, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume II, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953, 461, 462, 465-467.

<sup>68</sup> Donald, *Lincoln*, 206-209. David Donald believes that “Lincoln probably genuinely believed in this alleged pro-slavery conspiracy among Northern Democratic leaders.”

<sup>69</sup> *Liberator*, July 24, 1857 and August 21, 1857, “To The Anti-Slavery Men And Women Of The North.” The circular was actually a letter submitted by the committee of seven calling for a disunion convention. Also Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume III, 460-463.

headway in areas that previously were banned. Now, both Boston and New York were the main centers for abolitionist agitation. Garrison and Johnson frequently made the trip back and forth between the two cities coordinating speaking engagements and numerous activities. They were receiving an increasing amount of support from the many progressive organizations that were affiliated with antislavery as well. In May, Johnson attended the annual meeting of the Progressive Friends. Every year following the erection of the new hall at Longwood witnessed a larger gathering of people. On this occasion over 700 carriages were counted and less than one-fourth of the number assembled could get into the meeting house. The conference lasted for three days, and Johnson was one of the principal speakers. The main topic of discussion was disunion, and although the majority of those present were in agreement with the concept, many voiced their doubts. Garrison was present, and both he and Johnson placed the argument in a favorable light, convincing many individuals.<sup>70</sup> Before the meeting adjourned, a declaration was voted on in favor of disunion. Still, the Progressive Friends had several auxiliaries, and the final task of securing support for the doctrine of disunion was left to Johnson.

An indication that sentiment had started to change in favor of the abolitionists occurred immediately following the annual meeting of the Progressive Friends. Garrison traveled to Wilmington, Delaware, where he was invited to speak. He had been actively involved in the antislavery movement for more than 27 years, but this was the first time he ever gave an address in a slave state. A small but respectable audience was in

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<sup>70</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to his son William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. dated May 23, 1857. Garrison described the annual meeting at Longwood. He also discussed his meetings in New York to prepare strategy. The letter also recounted the events of his first speech in a slave state, Delaware, and the reception he received.

attendance, and Garrison spoke for about an hour. Those assembled listened to his words, but Garrison noted that, “There was no excitement in the place whatever, but rather a lack of curiosity.” A minor incident did occur when, a few moments before he closed, someone turned off the gas lights and left everyone in total darkness. Nothing else followed as everyone remained quiet in their seats, and they closed in good order.<sup>71</sup> Garrison and other leading members of the antislavery rank and file considered the lecture a success as well as a sign of progress.

On May 16 and 17, an antislavery fair and convention sponsored by the A.A.S.S. were held in the County Fair Building in Dutchess County, New York. Garrison was not present, and it was up to Johnson to introduce the doctrine of disunion to the assembly. Not all those in attendance were in favor of disunion, but Johnson’s eloquence and persuasion as a speaker led to the promotion of a doctrine of resolutions in favor of the dissolution of the union. He received assistance from several outspoken abolitionists, among them, Susan B. Anthony, Parker Pillsbury, a notorious “Come Outer,” and Aaron M. Powell, an old-time zealot who considered Lincoln as much a slaveholder as Jefferson Davis because of his hesitancy to endorse unequivocal emancipation. A number of resolutions were offered, but could not be agreed upon. It was not until one of the last speakers, Aaron M. Powell, “addressed the meeting on the subject of Slavery, advocating thorough and uncompromising action—the dissolution of the Union—and recommended the adoption of the testimony...” that the audience was

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<sup>71</sup> *Liberator*, June 12, 1857. Garrison’s account of his lecture in Wilmington, Delaware, appeared in this issue. The quote in regards to what happened in Wilmington is taken from a letter by William Lloyd Garrison addressed to his son, William Lloyd Garrison Jr., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, dated May 23, 1857.

convinced. The testimony was discussed and then adopted, “not unanimously, but by a very large majority.”<sup>72</sup>

On June 7, Johnson attended another meeting of the Progressive Friends, which was held at Waterloo, Seneca County, New York. The announcement of the convention included an invitation to “all who feel that true and acceptable worship consists of something better than empty creeds and stereotyped forms to mingle with this occasion.”<sup>73</sup> Garrison did not attend, and the responsibility of persuading the huge crowd to support the doctrine of disunion fell squarely upon Johnson.<sup>74</sup> At the recent annual meeting of the Progressive Friends in Longwood, a very clear and forcible testimony in favor of disunion had been adopted. At this meeting, the intent was to secure a similar declaration of disunion. By the close of the meeting, the Progressive Friends had followed the example of their colleagues in Longwood. Again, the doctrine of disunion did not receive unanimous support, but it did receive endorsement from the majority.

It was about this time that Abraham Lincoln began to ascend to national prominence. Lincoln had been a politician for many years, but it was not until he became a candidate for the Illinois Senate and engaged in debates with the “Little Giant,” Stephen

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<sup>72</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 9, 1857, carried the following announcement: “An Anti-Slavery Convention, for Dutchess County, under the auspices of the ‘American Anti-Slavery Society,’ will be held at Washington Hollow, in the County Fair Building, on Saturday and Sunday, May 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, 1857.” In addition see the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 30, 1857. An account of the convention appeared in this issue. Also the *Liberator*, June 19, 1857, the quotes are taken from this issue of the paper, which also gave an account of the meeting.

<sup>73</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 9, 1857, “Friends of Human Progress.” The quote is taken from the announcement of the meeting in this issue.

<sup>74</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Susan B. Anthony dated June 19, 1857. Garrison outlines the accomplishments of the convention and Johnson’s presence, “to enforce the true doctrine [disunion].”

A. Douglas, that he received considerable attention from abolitionists. Johnson viewed Lincoln with considerable skepticism, as did most abolitionists.<sup>75</sup> When reviewing Lincoln's past record, abolitionists believed they had good reason to be suspicious. There was no doubt that Lincoln did not believe in slavery, but he never declared himself an abolitionist, and like many Republicans he appeared to be attempting to compromise on the issue with the South. As early as 1847, Lincoln belonged to that contingent of Whigs who regarded slavery as socially repressive, economically backward, and harmful to the free states. They voted for the Wilmot Proviso, that neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any of the new territory acquired from the Mexican War, but did not consider it the most crucial matter facing the country. Lincoln believed slavery, "an unqualified evil to the negro, the white man, and the State" which "deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world—enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites." He also believed that "the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than abate its evils" as it united the South and forced it on the defensive to protect its institution.<sup>76</sup>

The stakes in the Lincoln-Douglas debates were much higher than the senatorial election. The theme of all seven debates was the future of slavery within the United States. There were many other issues confronting the nation, such as tariffs, bank practices, internal improvements, and corruption, but none of these subjects received a

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<sup>75</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume III, 504. Johnson's initial evaluation of Lincoln came from his speeches. It was not until he began to follow Lincoln's career more closely that he began to view him more favorably.

<sup>76</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume I, 74, 75,

word in these debates. The sole topic was slavery, and although the entire country followed the contest, no group paid more attention than the abolitionists.

During his campaign Lincoln had attempted to identify Douglas with the pro-slavery conspiracy. He argued that the only way to stop slavery was to elect Republicans “who consider slavery a moral, social, and political wrong.” But when he was challenged on the issue by Douglas, who stated that Lincoln “believes that the Almighty made the Negro equal to the white man,” it appeared to abolitionists that Lincoln refused to commit himself to the idea of equality, and in fact, actually back stepped on the issue.<sup>77</sup> It also seemed to Johnson and other abolitionists that Lincoln was attempting to appease the pro-slavery contingents while securing antislavery support at the same time. Most important, they felt that immediate emancipation and equality for the black man were not what he truly espoused.

Lincoln accused Douglas of abandoning the position of the founding fathers that slavery should be considered wrong, and therefore, should not be allowed to expand. He asserted that the country could not remain forever half slave and half free, and that most Americans shared the founding fathers’ beliefs and agreed that restricting slavery would put it on the road to extinction. In the famous Freeport question, Lincoln attempted to demonstrate the contradiction between *Dred Scott* and popular sovereignty. He asked, is there any lawful way that the people in the territories could exclude slavery if they

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<sup>77</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, *Lincoln, the South, and Slavery*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991. This is a penetrating account of Lincoln’s increasing concern with the slavery question. Also Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850’s*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1962, 123. This text is one of the most accurate in describing Lincoln’s emergence as a political leader; McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 181, 182. One of the better biographies on Douglas is also by Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973.

wanted to do so? Here he was arguing that under the current law, there was no choice but to let slavery expand. Lincoln's arguments struck at the heart of abolitionist doctrine. For decades they had rejected what Lincoln was proposing, which was gradual emancipation. When pressed by Douglas about the institution of slavery in the states where it already existed, Lincoln repeated his statement on several occasions, saying, "I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institutions of slavery in the States where it exists." When pressured further about the ultimate extinction of slavery Lincoln replied, "I do not mean...it will be in a day, nor a year, nor two years. I do not suppose that in the most peaceful way ultimate extinction would occur in less than a hundred years at least; but that it will occur in the best way for both races in God's good time."<sup>78</sup> Lincoln's words only reinforced the abolitionist doctrine of disunion. He promised no immediate end to slavery, only the slow process of non-extension, which in his own words could take decades or even a century.

During the debates, the race issue became a paramount theme. Here also, abolitionists viewed Lincoln's response as unacceptable. Douglas harped on the fact that Lincoln was in favor of conferring upon blacks the rights and privileges of citizenship. He continually hammered away at the "Black Republican Party" and its desire to make blacks socially equal to whites. Lincoln's response reduced the fears of many northerners who, like most Americans, even those who did not believe in slavery, did not accept the concept of racial equality. He declared, "I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races – that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of

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<sup>78</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume II, 502, Volume III, 16.

qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality.” This was not acceptable to Johnson and the other members of the old society. Lincoln’s response in these debates was the exact reason Johnson could not advocate politics as a solution to the slavery question. If there were any similarities between Lincoln and the abolitionists, it was that Lincoln refused to be cornered into a plan for ending slavery. In the final debate Lincoln concluded that the true issue was the morality and future of slavery, and that it was the eternal struggle between right and wrong. Lincoln did lash out at “the monstrous injustice of slavery,” and said, “There could be no moral right with one man’s making a slave of another.”<sup>79</sup> Certainly, Johnson could agree with that, but in his mind if slavery was morally wrong it had to be ended immediately.

Most historians agree that Lincoln, who won the popular vote but lost the election, got the better of Douglas in the debates. Johnson placed Lincoln in a category with the majority of antislavery Republicans who wanted to end slavery and opposed its extension, but could live with it if necessary. The defeat was in many ways a victory for Lincoln. He had handled himself extremely well during the debates and demonstrated his party leadership. The issues between Republicans and Northern Democrats had been clarified, and he had emerged as a national spokesman for the Republican Party. As Lincoln continued to rise in prominence and was forced to confront the slavery question, Johnson was also forced to revise his original evaluation of him. Eventually, Lincoln’s genuine ideology about race and his tactics became clearer, and although he never agreed

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Volume III, 16, 117, 145, 146, 165, 181, 323, 399.

completely with his actions, Johnson did come to comprehend the greatness of Lincoln. Like that of so many other individuals, however, this understanding came too late.

As the sectional division widened, many of those in the abolitionists' ranks who formerly preached non-resistance now believed that the only way to end slavery was by the use of force. At the New England Anti-Slavery Convention held on May 26, 1858, Theodore Parker, clergyman and writer, reiterated his belief that the time had passed for the issue of slavery to be settled without bloodshed. Parker had just come from a meeting of a group of men whose identities were hidden, known as the "Secret Six." The other members, all men of wealth and position, were Gerrit Smith, a wealthy landowner from upstate New York; Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a writer and Transcendentalist; Samuel Gridley Howe, a physician; George L. Stearns, a prosperous manufacturer; and Franklin B. Sanborn, a teacher and protégé of Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>80</sup> All of these men were conspiring with John Brown for an invasion of the South. The committee supported Brown with funds for the purpose of purchasing arms. When the invasion occurred, they expected the slaves to rise up in rebellion and gather around Brown's banner ready to fight for their freedom.

Garrison and the old guard were quick to denounce the condoning of violence. From the onset they had perpetuated the doctrine of non-resistance and had adhered to it through the years of mob violence and persecution, and they saw no reason to discard

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<sup>80</sup> *Liberator*, May 28, 1858, Higginson, like the other members of the "Secret Six" had come to believe that the slaves could not achieve their freedom without fighting for themselves, and that slavery, "is destined, as it began in blood, so to end." For a complete study of the conspiracy of the "Secret Six" see Jeffrey S. Rossbach, *Ambivalent Conspirators: John Brown, The Secret Six, and a Theory of Slave Violence*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982.

their principles at this time.<sup>81</sup> But in the years since the *Liberator* issued its first paper, the ranks of the old antislavery vanguard had thinned out. Many of the most prominent men in the early years of the movement had died. Ellis Loring Gray, one of the original counselors, Arnold Buffum, one of the founders of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society and signer of the Declaration of Sentiments, and Effingham L. Capron, a disunionist who departed from the old society because he refused to vote, were all gone. So were Samuel Philbrick and Charles F. Hovey, both early supporters of antislavery, just to name a few.<sup>82</sup> Johnson, the youngest member of the original 12 members of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, was now considered an elder statesman of the cause. The old guard was gradually being replaced by younger, less patient individuals who did not receive their antislavery beliefs from the religious awakening of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but from politics. Men like John Brown had considerable appeal for those among them who were more apt to use force.

Brown's objective was the U.S. armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia, just across the Potomac River. He planned to initiate his slave rebellion with a total force of 22 men, which included three of his sons and five blacks. Brown did try to enlist more black recruits, particularly Frederick Douglass. He even met with Douglass at a secret rendezvous in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, in August 1859, and tried to convince him

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<sup>81</sup> For a good examination of how Garrison and the A.A.S.S. justified their doctrine of non-resistance in the face of increasing pressure from younger abolitionists, see Lawrence R. Jannuzzi, "William Lloyd Garrison and the Crisis of Nonresistance," *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 1995, 23 (1): 21-43.

<sup>82</sup> Garrison and Garrison. *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, 472, 476-481. As the founding members of the A.A.S.S. died, the next generation was not inclined to agree with the original strategy of the organization, and were much more impatient to secure results.

of the importance of his leadership. Douglass refused, believing Brown's scheme to be suicidal. Some black recruits upon whom Brown was depending failed to show up.

On October 16, 1859, Brown and his shock troops entered Harpers Ferry after dark and captured the armory, which was defended by a lone watchman. Brown then sent a patrol into the countryside to pass the word that the uprising should begin. The rebellion that Brown hoped for never happened, and by morning the residents of Harpers Ferry were taking shots at Brown and his little band; by the afternoon eight of Brown's men were dead, including two of his sons. That evening, the U.S. Marines arrived commanded by Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J.E.B. Stuart. The marines stormed Brown's position and killed two more of his men, suffering only one marine fatality. Brown, who was wounded in the fight, was taken prisoner with the remaining survivors of his group. The entire incident lasted less than 36 hours.<sup>83</sup>

Repercussions from Brown's raid were felt across the country. Johnson and the A.A.S.S. were quick to condemn Brown, even declaring him insane. His actions were described as, "The particulars of a misguided, and apparently insane, though disinterested and well-intended effort by insurrection to emancipate the slaves in Virginia, under the leadership of Capt. Brown, alias Osawatomie Brown."<sup>84</sup> Indeed, there is good reason to believe Brown was insane, as his venture had no hope of success in the eyes of most observers. The state of Virginia quickly indicted, tried, and convicted him of treason, murder, and inciting rebellion. He was hanged one month later. Of the six other men

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<sup>83</sup> Oates, *To Purge This Land with Blood: A Biography of John Brown*, 237, 243-247; McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 204-206.

<sup>84</sup> *Liberator*, October 21, 1859.

captured with Brown, four of whom were black, all received swift trials and met the same fate as their leader.

Brown's death did not bring the incident to a close, as a carpetbag belonging to him was recovered. It contained documents naming the members of the "Secret Six," letters, and other materials. This, along with the reaction from the South that a full-scale slave rebellion was being instigated, increased tensions to the boiling point. Included in Brown's papers was a map with the location of seven additional targets. Rumors abounded that slave uprisings throughout the South were being supported by armed abolitionists. This was contrary to what Southern whites had long argued, claiming that their slaves were treated well and would never turn on their masters. Yet after Brown's death, insurrection panics swept through the South. Southerners eventually relaxed, as the rumors were determined to be false and not one slave had rebelled. Even so, the South was quick to accuse the abolitionists en masse of inciting the incident, making no distinction between those who believed in non-resistance and those who declared Brown a martyr. In fact, Brown's actions during the trial and his eloquent speech at its end transformed him from an apparent fanatic lunatic into a martyr for liberty.<sup>85</sup>

Brown's failed attempt had such huge ramifications that it had to be investigated. The Senate established a committee to carry out the task, headed by the

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<sup>85</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society Records, Twenty Seventh Annual Report, 1859, dedicated as "The Anti-Slavery History of John Brown Year." Contained the final address to the court of John Brown, printed in its entirety. Brown's final oration to the court is also reprinted in Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume III, 490, 491. See also McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 206, 207.

Senator from Virginia, James Mason.<sup>86</sup> When the information about the conspiracy was revealed, only Higginson remained firm in his convictions and defiant. Parker was in Europe dying of tuberculosis, and the other four fled the country for Canada. Also under suspicion were abolitionist leaders throughout the North. Brown had first met Garrison in January 1857, when invited to the home of Theodore Parker. In May 1859, Johnson was first introduced to him at an antislavery convention in Boston. They discussed tactics, peace, and non-resistance. Few members of the A.A.S.S. agreed with Brown who, at the close of the convention was heard to say, "These men are all talk; what is needed is action—action!" When Brown conceived his ill-fated raid, he did not seek support from the A.A.S.S., as he knew he would receive none. Yet there is evidence to support the fact that Garrison and the leading members of the old society had advance warning of Brown's intentions. Higginson had hinted at it during the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society held on January 27, 1859. He spoke of Brown's raids into Kansas and Missouri and the carrying off of 11 slaves to Canada as the first of other actions. Also there was a letter found in Brown's carpetbag from Sydney Howard Gay that alluded to a Colonel Hugh Forbes and his "betrayal of confidence," causing the postponement of the uprising. In addition, Francis Jackson Meriam, one of the individuals who had enlisted under Brown, allegedly confided in Higginson about the adventure.<sup>87</sup> The investigation by Mason's committee found no conspiracy and no one

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<sup>86</sup> Rossbach, *Ambivalent Conspirators: John Brown, the Secret Six, and a Theory of Slave Violence*, 236-266. Gives a complete account of the investigation of the Mason committee and its ambivalence to seek further indictments. Rossbach concluded, that it was felt by all, that once Brown and the other participants were hanged, the South would be appeased and the incident closed.

<sup>87</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, 487, 488. The letter from Sydney Howard Gay to Garrison

was ever indicted. Furthermore, Mason's interview with Brown before his death cleared those who held non-resistant views of any collusion. After his death, Brown became a figure of admiration for most abolitionists, and public opinion swung towards the antislavery movement. When Elijah P. Lovejoy had died defending his press in 1837, it was said he "died a fool dieth," but now, Brown was declared a martyr. He was praised in speeches and songs and held up as a role model by many abolitionists. Ralph Waldo Emerson prophesied that Brown would "make the gallows as glorious as the Cross." and Theodore Parker pronounced him "not only a martyr...but also a saint."<sup>88</sup> Even though Johnson did not agree with his actions, he viewed Brown as most abolitionists came to see him, a hero who gave his life for the cause.

The presidential election of 1860 took place under the shadow of Brown's failed raid. The perception in the South was that Brown's attempt at invasion, theft, and murder were being applauded. Harpers Ferry did more for disunion sentiment than any previous event. At its annual meeting in January 1860, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society took advantage of the political climate to advance its doctrine of disunion. It expressed its disappointment in the Republican Party and condemned it for attempting to hold together a union with slaveholders at all costs.<sup>89</sup> Many Republicans attempted to distance

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mentioning the betrayal of Brown's "drill-master" is mentioned in this text, although the original letter is not included in the Garrison papers or the publication of his letters and appears not to have survived.

<sup>88</sup> *Liberator*, October 28, 1859, "As to Capt. Brown." This article praised Brown as an honest, conscientious, truthful, brave, disinterested man (however misguided or unfortunate)." In addition see the *New York Evening Post*, October 31, 1859. In an editorial, Wisconsin Republican Timothy Howe declared, Brown struck unwisely, but unselfishly, "not for his own good, but for the good of others."

<sup>89</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume III, 499.

themselves from Brown and repudiated his actions. On December 3, 1859, the day after Brown's execution, Lincoln delivered a speech at Leavenworth. He acknowledged the justice of Brown's sentence. He also agreed with Brown that slavery was wrong and paid tribute to his courage, but warned that his action was wrong because "it was a violation of the law" and that "all violence, bloodshed and treason" would be handled in the same way. He surmised that the old abolitionist was "insane." This clashed with antislavery promotion of Brown as a hero. On February 27, 1860, Lincoln gave his Cooper Union Address in New York, which put him on the road to the Presidency. Here he modified his position and took the offensive. Stating that Brown's raid was not a slave insurrection, "but an attempt by white men to get up a revolt by slaves, in which they refused to participate."<sup>90</sup> While Lincoln tried to minimize Brown and his efforts, abolitionists fought to keep his memory alive. For the leading members of the A.A.S.S. and Johnson, Lincoln's position appeared unaltered. They viewed him as wanting to appease the South and compromise the slavery issue, and their original evaluation of him remained unchanged.

Johnson believed that the disunion movement was gaining momentum in the North. What was needed was to keep the pressure on by continuing to agitate the situation. In this respect, the old society received considerable help from the South. Northern citizens there were being mobbed and expelled. Several were tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail, while a few were lynched. Fear and hostility swept through the South, which readied them for war as thousands joined military

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<sup>90</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume III, 496, 503, 537, 541. In his speech, Lincoln was trying to quell the fear of Southerners, while at the same time acknowledging that slavery was wrong. Abolitionists viewed this as a compromise with slavery for the sole purpose of succumbing to Southern threats of secession.

companies and state legislatures appropriated funds for arms. Southerners living in the North or attending educational institutions began to return home en masse. Many had gone so far as to announce that if a Republican was elected President the Union would be dissolved, and the fault would be the North's. Of this argument, Lincoln said, "A highwayman holds a pistol to my ear, and mutters through his teeth, 'Stand and deliver, or I shall kill you and then you will be a murderer.'"<sup>91</sup> Johnson viewed the impending crisis as progress and interpreted Lincoln's rhetoric as more appeasement. What was required was a clean break with the pro-slavery South. He did not want rebellion, but knew, as did most people by this time, that it was certainly a possibility, especially if the Republican candidate won. As the candidates began vying for position, Johnson remained firm and refused to endorse anyone. He continued to argue the moral issues, along with the doctrines of non-resistance and disunion, as the nation awaited the outcome of the election.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 550. Lincoln viewed these threats as a form of blackmail. He refused to accept that if he won the election fairly, his victory would cause the Union to dissolve. If the South chose to secede, it would have to accept the responsibility for its actions.

## Chapter 7

### Civil War and Emancipation

The election of 1860 was followed closely by Americans across the country, but especially so by those in the antislavery movement. Lincoln had shrewdly been attempting to outmaneuver several of the more popular candidates by making small private moves. In order to get his position circulated, he compiled his 1858 debates with Stephen A. Douglas into a book. Shortly before the national convention, he had the text published with the title *Political Debates Between Hon. Abraham Lincoln and Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, in the Celebrated Campaign of 1858, in Illinois*. Almost immediately, it became a best seller. In December 1859, Lincoln made another quiet move by preparing an autobiography for campaign purposes. The national convention was held in Chicago in the middle of May 1860. Earlier that month, the Illinois state Republican convention met in Decatur and instructed its delegates to vote as a unit for Lincoln. This first step gave him 22 convention votes and a small boost of confidence, as two of his main rivals, Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, and Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania, were unable to secure unanimous support from their states.

Lincoln's emergence and victory at the convention were the result of a compromise. William H. Seward, a tested veteran of the political wars, began as the leading contender, but his reputation as an antislavery radical, along with his opposition to the New York Whigs, hurt his chances of success in the critical regions that would decide the election. Chase, in turn, was considered more radical than Seward, and Cameron's record did not inspire much confidence in the delegates. Lincoln did have

several advantages in that Illinois Republicans were highly organized and pushed hard for him. There was also the added benefit of the convention being held in Chicago, as the galleries were stacked with his supporters.

After his House Divided speech Lincoln took a more conservative approach to the slavery question. He appears to have toned down any radical tendencies and placed expediency ahead of principle. Caution and conciliation were expressed in his New England speeches, and he was perceived as more moderate than Seward on the slavery issue. It took three ballots at the convention for Lincoln to win the Republican nomination, and on each ballot he gained considerable votes.<sup>1</sup> His victory came, not because he was the most desirable candidate, but rather because a decision had been reached by the delegates that the leading candidate, Seward, could not win in the presidential election. Also, by nominating Lincoln, Republicans did not compromise their principles.

Seward's defeat at the convention was a great disappointment to abolitionists, and was keenly felt by Johnson. The Republicans, however, were not completely united, as a small group of conservatives believed that the best way to avoid a calamity of disunion was to take no stand on the slavery issue. A week before the Republican convention, they held their own convention and formed the Constitutional Unionist Party, dedicated to the "Constitution... Union... and the Enforcement of Laws." They nominated a wealthy slaveholder, John Bell of Tennessee, for President, and a Cotton Whig, Edward Everett of Massachusetts, for Vice President. The Democratic Party was

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<sup>1</sup> Donald, *Lincoln*, 237, 250-252. Also Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None: A Life of Abraham Lincoln*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1977, 176-179, and Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's*, 143-159.

not completely united either in its selection of candidates, as the Northern wing nominated Lincoln's old rival, Stephen A. Douglas as their candidate, and the Southerners nominated John C. Breckenridge. This division in the party seriously hurt their chances of defeating the Republicans in the presidential election. Following the tradition of the time, Lincoln did not campaign prior to the election, insisting that his opinions were on record in his previous speeches. This led abolitionists to critically examine his debates with Douglas, which confirmed their original evaluation that Lincoln did not object to the Dred Scott decision and that he was not overly concerned with the immediate relief of those held in bondage. In truth, Lincoln was slow to react to the Dred Scott decision, as he was reluctant to challenge the Court's ruling because he had enormous respect for the judicial system. To many, it appeared that he was indifferent on the subject.<sup>2</sup> Abolitionists were divided on Lincoln's nomination, as some were more critical of him than others. For his part, Garrison felt that "He will do nothing to offend the South."<sup>3</sup> Johnson was not as critical of Lincoln as some of his colleagues. He was disappointed in Seward's defeat and viewed it as just another example of the failure of political parties to solve the problem of slavery, but he also knew that Lincoln had a

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<sup>2</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume II, 401-410. "Speech at Springfield, Illinois," June 26, 1857. When Lincoln finally spoke out he stated, "We think the Dred Scott decision is erroneous," and "We know the court that made it, has often over-ruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to over-rule this. We offer no resistance to it." Also Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume III, 503, 504, and Donald, *Lincoln*, 200, 201, 221, 222.

<sup>3</sup> *Liberator*, June 22, 1860, "Abraham Lincoln, the Slave-hound of Illinois." This is a stinging article by Wendell Phillips accusing Lincoln of being a collaborator with Mason of Virginia, who investigated the John Brown affair. Phillips referred to Lincoln by stating, "We gibbet a Northern hound to-day, side by side with the infamous Mason of Virginia." Also see *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Johnson dated

chance to win. The mood in the South was one of secession, which went hand in hand with the doctrine of disunion. The actions of the South played right into the tactics he had been advocating and forced the North to confront the gravity of the situation as well.

Many who believed in non-resistance and avoided politics, such as Johnson's old friend, Adin Ballou, did not share his confidence. Ballou explained his growing feelings of estrangement from the old society, which he saw as backing a course toward civil war and making it the dominant movement in the country. Local governments were persistently pressured to pass criminal legislation against the pro-slavery laws of the government, and Ballou viewed the current escalation of the antislavery cause as revolution. Ballou believed that a radical change was needed, but he postulated that it could be a bloodless revolution. The motto, "peaceably if we can, forcibly if we must," was constantly reiterated throughout the North, and Ballou contended that the actions of the society were exaggerated and extreme.<sup>4</sup>

Although women could not vote or serve as delegates, they still made an impact in the electoral process. To what extent their activities actually altered the outcome is unclear, but their influence was courted by all the major political parties. By the late 1850s women were becoming increasingly visible among supporters in electoral campaigns. This reflected both their growing concerns with electoral power and their belief that even though they were not enfranchised, they could participate in the political process. They raised money through the numerous benevolent societies that had

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August 9, 1860. Garrison believed the election of Lincoln had become a real possibility, but did not feel he would do anything favorable for the antislavery cause.

<sup>4</sup> *Liberator*, September, 16, 1859, "Practical Christian Anti-Slavery." Ballou explained his differences with the A.A.S.S. and although he believed the old society was the real

continued to grow in number, and actively endorsed candidates. As the secessionist crisis increased, southern women organized boycotts of northern industrial goods. They began a campaign of making homespun garments, and they urged that items that could not be made be purchased from England. Southern women appeared to be divided among the Douglas, Breckenridge and Bell nominations. All three candidates argued that they were committed to the Union, although it was a Union in which slavery and Southern rights were protected. They played on the fear of the physical danger a Lincoln election would put the South and its women. The Republican Party also attempted to secure support of women, especially in the border states where the division among candidates was greatest. Republican journals often featured reports on women's contributions to the party. One important effect women had in the election of 1860 is the personal influence they wielded over men. Wives argued and cajoled with their husbands and sons, as politics had now become a topic discussed in the household by both men and women. Although not unique to women, exchanging favors such as raising funds for a particular cause were used in order to sway an individual's vote. To what degree this pressure and the actual role women played in the election can not be evaluated with any certainty. It does appear, however, that on the eve of the election, moderates and Unionists greatly outnumbered secessionists. Although it is true that some women served as recruiters for the secessionist cause, by the time of Lincoln's election, such public sentiments by women were rare.<sup>5</sup>

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antislavery movement of the country, he stated he could not condone the organization's present actions. Reprinted in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 17, 1859.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women & Politics in Antebellum Virginia*, Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998, 144-

Samuel J. May, Jr. took up the defense of the old society. May had long been a believer in the use of physical force in defending one's personal property and life. He advocated the petitioning for the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law and urged continued pressure on the government to endorse many of the Personal Liberty Laws, which called for northern states to defy the Fugitive Slave Law and make no further concessions to the slavocracy. He also argued that if Ballou continued to protest against even the slightest appearance of physical resistance, which he believed these actions constituted, that it "would well-nigh render any antislavery movement impossible."<sup>6</sup>

Johnson respected Ballou and wished to prevent his departure from the old society. He published a series of editorials in the *Standard*, urging a more conciliatory approach. These editorials were written by James Miller McKim and others, and conceded that Ballou's "articles contained much wholesome and edifying truth." However, they also denied Ballou's charges of extremism and urged him to remain in the organization which itself contained a variety of points of view concerning non-resistance and politics.<sup>7</sup> Johnson did not necessarily see disunion resulting in bloodshed, and he attempted to convince his friend that war was not the aim of the society. Ballou, however, remained unconvinced.

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164. Also Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*, 70-76, 69-132.

<sup>6</sup> *Liberator*, November 4, 1859. May's reply was given at a meeting of the Worcester County South Division Anti-Slavery Society on October 23, 1859. This issue reported the proceedings of the meeting.

<sup>7</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 24, 1859. McKim's original rebuttal to Adin Ballou is in this issue. Also see the *Liberator*, November 4, 1859, "Adin Ballou in Reply to J. Miller McKim."

In the interim, abolitionists remained divided on the Republican nomination of Lincoln. At a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in Framingham, on July 4, 1860, a large audience heard H. Ford Douglass, a runaway slave, make a long speech that was extremely critical of Abraham Lincoln. This forced Henry Wilson to rise and deliver an able address in defense of Lincoln and the Republican Party. Parker Pillsbury then took the podium and gave a long and “racy reply” in opposition to the candidate.<sup>8</sup> Johnson did not speak out against Lincoln, as he thought his chances of winning were poor. Lincoln’s platform reflected his antislavery commitment, which was that of a typical moderate Republican, and although his election could put a stop to pro-slavery progress, Johnson did not see him as an individual who would advance the antislavery cause, especially if it increased sectional hostility. Additionally, the 1860 Republican platform contained a section strongly condemning threats of disunion as an “avowal of contemplated treason.”

For Johnson, a Lincoln presidency would result in continued appeasement of the planters and continuation of slavery. In turn, his defeat would leave the nation in the hands of the pro-slavery powers. As the election approached, Johnson believed that he had no choice but to support Lincoln’s candidacy. Using the *Standard*, he began to speak out and make it known that his sympathies lay with the Republican Party. He openly endorsed Lincoln and declared that “Deficient as the Republican Party is, I regard its

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<sup>8</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Wendell Phillips dated July 5, 1860; *Liberator* July 13, 1860. A detailed account of the meeting appeared in this issue. H. Ford Douglass was no relation to Frederick Douglass. At this time he was 28 years old and an outspoken abolitionist in the midwest, living in Chicago. He was also the most outspoken black critic of Lincoln during the election of 1860. His speech is printed in its entirety in this issue.

success as the beginning of a new and better era.”<sup>9</sup> Johnson attempted to persuade other abolitionists who opposed Lincoln by arguing that “to me it seems utterly preposterous to deny that Lincoln’s election will indicate growth in the right direction.”<sup>10</sup> Securing assistance from many of the local reform movements, such as the Progressive Friends and various women’s organizations, Johnson campaigned for Lincoln and urged others to do the same.<sup>11</sup>

In the November 1860 election, Lincoln won the presidency with a clear majority of 180 electoral votes, whereas Breckenridge received 72, Bell 39, and Douglas only 12. Breckenridge and Bell helped divide the Democratic vote. Bell’s strength was in the upper Southern states of Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Breckenridge won in all the other slave states. Still, Lincoln received only about two-fifths of the popular vote, or about 40 percent of the total. The exact count was 1,866,452 for Lincoln, 1,376,957 for Douglas, 849,782 for Breckenridge and 588,879 for Bell. Not surprisingly, the Republican ticket received no votes in the South, but carried all the free states except one, New Jersey, and that was divided with Douglas.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the Republicans failed to win a majority in Congress, and they did not control the Supreme Court.

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<sup>9</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 29, 1860.

<sup>10</sup> James Miller McKim Papers, letter from Johnson to McKim dated, October 11, 1860. McKim was preparing to attend the annual meeting of the Progressive Friends in place of Garrison, who was suffering from bronchitis. Johnson urged him to speak out in support of Lincoln and to beseech everyone to vote for the Republican Party.

<sup>11</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, November 3, 1860. A meeting of the Progressive Friends was held on October 25, 1860 and reported in this issue. The topic was the upcoming election, and Johnson implored all eligible voters to cast their ballots for the Republican Party. James Miller McKim, who was attending in Garrison’s place, also demonstrated his support for Lincoln; the events of the meeting were also reported in the *Liberator*, November 9, 1860.

<sup>12</sup> Donald, *Lincoln*, 256.

Although Northerners viewed Lincoln as a moderate, Southerners did not. They made no distinction between various types of antislavery advocates; in the mind of the South, they were all linked together as one. The A.A.S.S. was an enemy that had openly declared its opposition to the institution of slavery and was intent on destroying it. Lincoln, who never stated that he wanted to alter slavery where it existed, but did oppose expansion, was also an enemy in the eyes of the planters. Southerners, who had chosen to link John Brown to the abolitionists and the Republican Party, now connected Lincoln to the abolitionists. Abolitionists only bolstered their suspicions by rejoicing in Lincoln's victory. Once the returns were in, even most of the outspoken critics joined in the celebration. This included Wendell Phillips, who five months earlier had harangued Lincoln as the "Slave Hound of Illinois," but now reversed his position reveling in that, "for the first time in our history the *slave* has chosen a President of the United States."<sup>13</sup> Almost immediately the cords that bound the Union together began to snap, and Johnson and other abolitionists rejoiced, as it appeared that disunion would quickly follow the results of the election.

In October, just prior to the election, the governor of South Carolina called an extra session of the legislature to schedule a secession convention in the event of a Lincoln victory. This action was also intended to arm the militia and organize an army. Many of the Southern states empathized with this action and acted similarly. The entire country was thrown into a maelstrom of agitation, which was intensified by numerous unsubstantiated rumors. There were false reports of slave insurrections; other rumors

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<sup>13</sup> Sewell, *Ballots For Freedom*, 342.

claimed that the Republican North was willing to make every concession the South demanded in an effort to stave off secession.

Abolitionists were viewed by many as the agents behind the cause of the problem, and mob violence again began to occur at antislavery gatherings. The refusal of many abolitionists to compromise on the issue of slavery made them easy targets. The result was a resurgence of mob violence in the North that had not been seen since the early years of the antislavery movement. Behind the mob violence were two groups of people: men of property and standing who feared great financial losses should the South secede; and urban white workingmen, who feared competition from a free black working force. The Democratic and conservative newspapers in the North supported this view with incendiary attacks against abolitionists. It was common to read articles declaring that "The Anti-Slavery agitation is the true and only cause of all our woes and trouble," and "Kill the vile cause of disunion, and disunion itself will perish for lack of food. Abolition is disunion. It is the vile cause and most cursed effect. It is the Alpha and Omega of our National woes. Strangle it."<sup>14</sup>

Violence erupted across the North in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. On December 3, 1860 a group of Boston abolitionists who believed in John Brown's method of insurrection held a meeting at Tremont Temple. As soon as the meeting began it was interrupted by a group of "North end Roughts and Beacon Street Aristocrats," who were led by lawyers and merchants. A fight broke out and the police were called. The police sympathized with the mob and refused to protect the abolitionists, and the meeting was

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<sup>14</sup> *Chicago Daily Times and Herald*, November 21, 1860 and the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, December 6, 1860.

disbanded.<sup>15</sup> On January 24, 1861 the convention of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society erupted into pandemonium. Merchants and shopkeepers gave their employees the day off to attend the meeting. Wendell Phillips was the main speaker, and he had to endure insults and interruptions from several hundred young workingmen and rowdies. Finally, the police cleared the galleries. The abolitionists attempted to return for an evening meeting, but found they had been locked out by an order of the Democratic mayor. In New York, Susan B. Anthony and Samuel J. May arranged a series of abolitionist meetings in the upstate area. In Buffalo, a mob led by ex-Governor, Horatio Seymour, shouted down the abolitionists and drove them from the platform. In Rome, Rochester, and Auburn similar incidents occurred. In Syracuse, a drunken rabble armed with pistols and knives threw rotten eggs at the speakers and burned effigies of Susan B. Anthony, Samuel J. May, and other abolitionists. When Susan B. Anthony attempted to secure a permit for a meeting, the city council of Utica refused to allow any antislavery organization to use its public halls. Several antislavery leaders, such as William H. Furness, an abolitionist pastor of the Unitarian Church in Philadelphia, feared mob violence against the church and its members. Many in his congregation came armed when they attended his Sunday services.<sup>16</sup> Johnson believed that the purpose of the mobs was to help sway southern sentiment against secession, by demonstrating that the North was ready to adopt a policy of conciliation. After attending a rally in New York he wrote

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<sup>15</sup> *New York Tribune*, December 7, 1860.

<sup>16</sup> For a detailed study of mob violence in antebellum America see David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. An older text, although still an excellent source is James M. McPherson, *The Struggle For Equality: Abolitionists and The Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964, 40-45.

that, “the rallying cry is the ‘Union and Constitution.’”<sup>17</sup> He concluded that those behind the mob violence were vehemently opposed to the doctrine of disunion, and blamed abolitionists for all the sectional problems.

It was during this time that Johnson’s wife Mary Anne had a vision that involved a close friend of the Johnsons, Wendell Phillips. For several years now it had been believed by many that Mary Anne had clairvoyant powers. Many reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century believed in spiritualism and the powers of channeling. Whether Johnson accepted these concepts as fact is unclear, as he rarely spoke about them. His experience with a clairvoyant wife appears to closely parallel that of Lincoln’s. Unfortunately, there is very little in his personal writings that refer to Mary Anne’s supposed prescience. On this occasion he appears to have been concerned enough to write Garrison requesting that he warn Phillips of impending danger. Mary Anne allegedly had a vision of a plot to murder Phillips, who continued to speak out against slavery and antagonized the sectional differences. Threats on Phillips’s life would have come as no surprise. He was certainly one of the main targets of vengeance by the mob, but it appears that Garrison did not take Mary Anne’s vision very seriously. He never reported it to Phillips except to tell him he thought his life was in danger and caution him to be careful when he delivered a speech at the Tremont Temple in Boston, commemorating John Brown’s execution. Mary Anne’s warning did not contribute any information to what everyone already knew, and Phillips, as well as all the abolitionists who attended the oration, expected trouble. So it came as no surprise that as soon as Phillips opened his delivery by asking the question, “How can American slavery be abolished?” the gathering was disrupted by a mob and

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<sup>17</sup> James Miller McKim Papers, letter from Oliver Johnson to James Miller McKim dated April 18, 1861.

turned out of doors by no one less than Mayor Wightman, who refused to provide police protection and threatened to arrest the speakers. Garrison always spoke kindly of Mary Anne and never said he did not believe her vision, but he did not respond to Johnson's letter until after the meeting at the Tremont Temple, claiming sickness and fatigue. His illness may very well have been the cause for his delay in responding, as Garrison acknowledged that he believed in "such revelations," and "that it is sometimes given to individuals to foresee future events." He then made an inquiry into a vision Mary Anne had two or three years earlier, predicting the breaking up of the marriage of Thomas Davis, a Rhode Island congressman, which eventually came to pass. Johnson knew about Garrison's interest in spiritualism, but did not seem overly concerned with his wife's clairvoyance, nor did he appear offended by the delayed response.<sup>18</sup>

Following the incident in Boston, mob action continued across the North. On December 16, 1860, during a Sunday service entitled "Mobs and Education," Theodore Parker was assaulted and had to endure a street fight on the way home. On the same day, Johnson's friend, Henry Ward Beecher, while preaching a sermon at his Plymouth Church, had to be guarded by police.<sup>19</sup> As abolitionists continued to revile slavery, the South viewed these and other actions as a direct assault on all Southern institutions and moved forward with its attempt to break with the union.

In South Carolina the secession convention moved forward as scheduled, and on December 20, 1860, the state passed a secession ordinance based on the violation of its

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<sup>18</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Johnson dated January 19, 1861; Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 3, 4.

<sup>19</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume III, 505, 506.

constitutional rights. It was a Southern ultimatum that, if the abolitionists could not be suppressed, no compromise could avert the impending catastrophe. There was still time before Lincoln's inauguration to arrange a compromise and restore the tottering union, and Republicans across the North attempted a settlement of the issue. The most promising agreement was the Crittenden Compromise, which reinstated the 36° 30' line between slavery and freedom in all the territories. Many influential Southerners and Northerners alike opposed this proposal. If it had any chance of success, it had to be endorsed by the President-elect. Lincoln, however, was not willing to compromise and believed that the very notion "acknowledges that slavery has equal rights with liberty, and surrenders all we have contended for... We have just carried an election on principles fairly stated to the people. Now we are told in advance, the government shall be broken up, unless we surrender to those we have beaten... If we surrender, it is the end of us." Lincoln rejected the Crittenden Compromise, stating, "We would lose us everything we gained by the election."<sup>20</sup> He was willing to make very few concessions, as he considered doing so would be a scheme to bribe secessionists.

After the election the A.A.S.S. refrained from any immediate, open criticism of the government. Johnson agreed with this tactic, as he believed that disunion would cause the Southern slave oligarchy to eventually destroy itself. He advocated what Garrison called the "stand still" policy in the belief that all efforts to save the union were wasted. According to Garrison, "The covenant with death had been annulled" and "the agreement with hell broken," at least with South Carolina, and before long with all the

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<sup>20</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume IV, 149-151, 154, 155, 172, 183. Letters from Abraham Lincoln to Thurlow Weed, dated December 17, 1860, and to William H. Seward, dated February 1, 1861.

slaveholding states.<sup>21</sup> Even though war clouds loomed above the nation and the country faced an ominous and uncertain future, for the moment abolitionists were overjoyed. Johnson too rejoiced in the triumph, as it appeared that the doctrine of disunion had been successful, and the nation had finally liberated itself from the disgrace of slavery.

The secession of South Carolina triggered a chain reaction throughout the South beginning with Mississippi, which adopted a similar ordinance on January 9, 1861, and by the time Lincoln took office another five states had withdrawn. The federal government did little to stop what occurred, as there was a four-month interval between Lincoln's election and his inauguration, and the lame-duck President Buchanan accepted little responsibility for the crisis.<sup>22</sup> The A.A.S.S. viewed the secession of the Southern states as a victory and announced its own solution to the emergency. It called for a convention of free states to organize an independent government based on free and just principles and allow the South to depart in peace. Such an action would avert war and create a union where slavery did not exist. Johnson wholeheartedly supported this measure, believing that this was the specific goal of the doctrine of disunion and that a peaceful separation was the most efficient and quickest way to end slavery.<sup>23</sup>

It was under these tumultuous circumstances, along with threats of assassination, that the new President had to sneak into Washington for his inauguration.

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<sup>21</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from Garrison to Johnson dated, April 19, 1861. See also the *Liberator*, January 2, 1861. Garrison greeted readers at the opening of the thirty-first volume of the paper with, "All Union-saving efforts are simply idiotic." Garrison believed that the remainder of the southern states would quickly follow the actions of South Carolina.

<sup>22</sup> Donald, *Lincoln*, 267, 268; McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 234, 235.

<sup>23</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 14-16.

Few people outside of the antislavery circle agreed with the abolitionist proposal, least of all the President-elect. Lincoln, who was committed to maintaining the union, would have nothing to do with the abolitionist recommendation. He declared that revolution was "a moral right, when exercised for a morally justifiable cause," but believed that the South did not have a just cause, and therefore, "when exercised without such a cause revolution is no right, but simply a wicked exercise of physical power." Lincoln warned that "disunion by armed force was treason, and treason must and will be put down at all hazards."<sup>24</sup> On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces began their bombardment of Fort Sumter, located on an island in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. Within a short time, the remaining Southern states joined the Confederacy and Lincoln began mobilizing the North: the Civil War had begun.<sup>25</sup>

The advent of war drastically changed the tactics of the old society. In a conclusion that was by no means unanimous, the A.A.S.S. decided to cancel its annual meeting in New York scheduled for May, as well as several other conventions across the country. The theory behind this action was that nothing should be done to check or divert the popular feeling against slavery that had swept across the country. The ensuing conflict was directed toward the goal of universal emancipation and the separation of the free from the slaveholding states in accordance with the principles of no union with slaveholders. Writing to Johnson, Garrison urged no criticism of Lincoln or the Republican Party, believing that "The war is fearfully to scourge the nation, but mercy

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<sup>24</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume IV, 157, 159, 434.

<sup>25</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 248-250, 273-275.

will be mingled with judgment, and that grand results are to follow."<sup>26</sup> Garrison feared that any action by abolitionists might alter popular sentiment and bring violence upon them.

Johnson did not agree with the decision of the A.A.S.S. and argued vigorously in favor of continuing to hold the annual meeting and advance agitation on the subject. The war fever that had spread across the North was aimed at the slaveholding Confederacy, and he did not see the public taking aim at abolitionists, who were now readily supporting the conflict. Johnson believed that the pressure had to be kept on Lincoln and other government officials, not just to pursue victory, but to end the legal aspects of slavery as well. Given the choice between Christian non-resistance and war, he preferred the former, but not at the cost of a cowardly compromise as proposed by some in the administration. For the first time, Johnson openly declared "... my voice is for war."<sup>27</sup> He viewed the annual meeting in New York as especially important, stating that there was little chance of violence erupting. The new Superintendent of Police in New York was John A. Kennedy, who had previously been secretary of the Baltimore Anti-Slavery Society and a partner of Benjamin Lundy in publishing the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Although no threats of violence were made, Kennedy had

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<sup>26</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to Johnson dated April 19, 1861. Garrison believed the war would destroy the slave power and did not want anything to interfere with total victory. The letter is reprinted in Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 21, 22.

<sup>27</sup> *Oliver Johnson Papers*, Vermont Historical Society. Letters from Johnson to Samuel J. May dated April 1, 1861 and April 15, 1861. Johnson attempted to convince May to hold the annual meeting in New York as scheduled. He stated he had already made arrangements to have several prominent speakers present such as Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In addition, he planned to reject speakers such as Lucretia Mott, as "she can never make a distinctly anti-slavery speech," and always included women's

promised Johnson ample protection for the meeting. Johnson wrote several letters to various members of the Executive Committee of the old society declaring that abolitionists were not in as much danger of being mobbed as were southern sympathizers.<sup>28</sup> He disagreed with Garrison and the final vote of the A.A.S.S., and he thought that the time had come to support the Republican administration and the President. Furthermore, he believed it would be a mistake to sit back and allow events to unfold without attempting to control them.

The A.A.S.S. did not follow Johnson's recommendations, and for a short period of time the old society ceased holding meetings and refrained from public agitation. Johnson did not oppose the society's decision, but through the *Standard* he continued to support the administration and the war effort. Like many individuals, he hoped for a short war and a speedy victory for the North. The initial victories, however, were won by the Confederacy, and as the war lengthened, the administration remained firm in its stance of not addressing the slavery issue. The situation called for a revised action plan, and Johnson, in conjunction with the A.A.S.S., began to develop a new strategy for agitation.

Private resources were drained by the war effort, and a scarcity of funds soon threatened the existence of several antislavery journals. The A.A.S.S., which had always bordered on the brink of financial insolvency, was especially hard hit. Within a month after the fall of Fort Sumter, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* succumbed to bankruptcy and ceased

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rights and depravity. Johnson believed the selection of the right speakers would ensure the success of the meeting and be viewed favorably by the public.

<sup>28</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated April 13, 1861. Once war was declared, the conditions in New York City for abolitionists became much more favorable.

publication. The *Liberator* and the *Standard* were also in financial difficulty, and a proposal to merge both newspapers was considered in the hope of combining the subscription lists of both to retain all of the subscribers. Neither Garrison nor Johnson found this solution acceptable, and they embarked on a campaign to raise the necessary funds to keep the journals alive.<sup>29</sup>

During the first few months of the war, Johnson's duties in New York increased while his salary remained the same. The war had caused prices to rise on many goods, and Johnson was again feeling the financial strain. At the same time, it was requested that every agent of the A.A.S.S. make a contribution of \$200 to the treasury, and the Executive Committee considered reducing his salary from \$1,200 annually to \$1,000. Adding to their difficulties, Mary Anne had become ill. Johnson argued that most of the other agents had additional incomes and devoted only half of their time to the cause. In addition, his work had increased while theirs had diminished, and his salary alone was not enough to maintain his household. He and his wife had made ends meet with her earnings as a lecturer, but her poor health prohibited this now. Johnson argued that his associates should not demand more of him than he could pay, and he requested that they reconsider reducing his salary.<sup>30</sup> Knowing Johnson as they did and realizing he would not reject their request without good reason, a compromise was reached where Johnson

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<sup>29</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 29, 30. See also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated May 9, 1862. The *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, which had been published in Salem, Ohio, had recently ceased publication. Johnson had been requested to supply subscribers with copies of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* in its place.

<sup>30</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society. Letters to Samuel J. May dated June 26, 1861 and July 3, 1861. May was a member of the Executive Committee and a

would pay only \$100 and his salary would remain the same. Johnson still could not afford the contribution, and he requested assistance from the Progressive Friends, who helped him raise the sum. This entailed a trip to Pennsylvania, and although he was glad to see his old friends there, the journey took precious time from the completion of his tasks in New York and getting the *Standard* to press. He returned from his trip with the necessary funds, but he was extremely depressed and weary. In a letter to his good friend Samuel J. May, Johnson expressed a rare sense of resentment, saying, "How deep was my repugnance to the resumption of my task." He further mentioned a feeling of harassment and declared, "On this point there are some things which I could say in a personal notes view, but which I do not like to put on paper."<sup>31</sup>

It is clear that Johnson believed he had been pressured unnecessarily by the Executive Committee. This, along with Mary Anne's illness and the increased work load, contributed to a heightened amount of stress, which appears to have temporarily taken its toll on him. The requested donation and decrease in salary came as a surprise to him, and he was offended that his colleagues did not understand or appreciate his situation. His dissatisfaction certainly appears justified, as he had been perfectly honest in stating that he had no other income because the antislavery crusade and the publication of the paper consumed all his time. He understood that the old society desperately needed funds, but the unfair demands made it seem that his contribution had gone unnoticed and unappreciated. His distress did not last long, as the compromise that had

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close friend. Johnson wrote to him requesting he appeal to the Executive Committee on his behalf.

<sup>31</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society. Letter to Samuel J. May dated August 27, 1861. Although it occurred infrequently, Johnson probably confided his

been agreed upon, as well as Mary Anne's recovery, helped lift his spirits. Within a short period of time he again became engrossed in the publication of the *Standard*, and the depression he appears to have experienced soon vanished.

As the war intensified, Garrison and the A.A.S.S. argued that the doctrine of non-resistance and its peace principles remain intact. Garrison declared, "If they had been long since embraced and carried out by the people, neither slavery nor war would now be filling the land with violence and blood. Where they prevail, no man is in peril of life or liberty; where they are rejected, and precisely to the extent they are rejected, neither life nor liberty is secure."<sup>32</sup> Garrison refused to give his sympathies to the federal government against the secession movement. Instead, he argued that the North should embrace the doctrine of non-resistance and let the South go. In this way, the antislavery and peace principles of the old society would not be compromised. Garrison knew that the war fever that had spread across the country would not be quelled and realized that the war must go on to its conclusion, but he refused to support the government and the Constitution, which he still viewed as sanctioning slavery.

Johnson took a more supportive stance in regard to the government. He understood that he could not remain neutral in the conflict and that the war had to be endured to its conclusion. He now determined to throw his full support behind the Union cause. In defiance of the official policy of the A.A.S.S., Johnson added the American

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bitterness to May because of their long standing friendship and believed he would understand as well as be sympathetic to his problem.

<sup>32</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 26.

flag to the masthead of the *Standard*.<sup>33</sup> The Executive Committee quickly judged it unacceptable, and as the paper was an organ of the old society, which contributed financial support that he desperately needed, he was forced to remove it after only two issues. As the armed conflict progressed and the policies of the government were revised, many of those who opposed supporting the war altered their position, as Johnson had already done.

Meanwhile, some abolitionists continued to doubt that the Lincoln presidency would end slavery. They viewed the actions of the President as being inconsistent with abolition and feared that the war could end with the hated institution intact. In May 1861, General Benjamin Butler declared that slaves who had worked on Confederate fortifications and escaped to Butler's lines at Fort Monroe, Virginia, were contraband. Butler further stated that the fugitive slave law did not apply, and he put these escaped slaves to work in his camp. After some hesitation, the administration approved Butler's policy, but it remained unclear whether these individuals were actually free. As the number of contrabands increased, Congress also wrestled with the ambiguous legal status of these people. On August 6, 1861, the Congress approved an act whereby slaves employed in the military service of the rebellion were declared free. On August 30, General John C. Fremont issued a stunning proclamation freeing the slaves of all

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<sup>33</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 27, 1861 and May 4, 1861. "Chronicles of War." The American Flag appeared with a liberty cap atop the staff, and was between two slogans: "Proclaim Liberty throughout the land, unto all the Inhabitants thereof" and "Today the Slave asks God for a sight of this banner." Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated May 9, 1861. Garrison requested that Johnson remove the American flag from the masthead of the *Standard* stating, "Understanding that some sensitiveness is felt and expressed by some in our ranks at the appearance of the American flag in the Standard, notwithstanding the motto over and under it, the Committee deem it advisable to have it quietly withdrawn."

Confederate activists in Missouri. Lincoln worried about the effect such an act would have on the army, especially in the border states. He requested that Fremont modify his proclamation to conform to the August 6 act passed by Congress. Fremont refused, and Lincoln removed him from command.<sup>34</sup> Lincoln's decision was extremely unpopular, even among many of the strongest Republican supporters, but he remained firm in his belief that to lose the border states could very well mean losing the war. He made no attempt to hide his feelings in regard to slavery, stating he "thought it was wrong and should continue to think so," and that slavery was "somehow, the cause of the war." Lincoln also declared "that the government neither should, nor would send back to bondage such as came to our armies."<sup>35</sup> The initial engagements, such as the major battle at Bull Run (Manassas) fought on July 21, had all ended with Confederate victories, and Lincoln was not prepared to turn the war into a conflict over slavery.

Abolitionists were exhilarated by the proclamations of Butler and Fremont, and their disappointment at Lincoln's actions was especially keen. Johnson, although displeased by Lincoln's actions, continued to argue that the old society should remain loyal to antislavery principles as well as to the government now fighting the South.<sup>36</sup> Here again he disagreed with Garrison, whose distrust of the President only increased. Garrison never doubted Johnson's loyalty to the cause and stated he always regarded him "as possessing an unusually clear perception of things." He reasoned that Johnson would remain firm in his conviction to support the President and could not alter his stance on

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<sup>34</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 352-357; Donald, *Lincoln* 314-317, 342, 343.

<sup>35</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume IV, 506, 513, 518, 531, 532. Volume VIII, 332.

<sup>36</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 19, 1861 and November 2, 1861.

this issue. In a letter to Johnson, he expressed his understanding that he would take the path, which he believed benefited the slave, most. Garrison wrote: "I have known that, in forming and expressing your own opinions, you have always adhered to your convictions of right, independently and conscientiously, without stopping to ask whether they were embraced or rejected by others."<sup>37</sup> Garrison understood that Johnson's power within the old society had increased to such a degree that he could not control his actions, and that the *Standard* would reflect the opinions of its editor. The disagreement did not sever the close relationship between the two men. Perhaps just as important as their dedication to the antislavery cause, they both cherished their long-standing friendship of more than 30 years and neither wished to see it dissolve. This had not been their first disagreement, and both knew the other was acting in what he believed to be in the best interest of those held in bondage. On many other issues they were in harmony, and as the war progressed their mutual respect for one another appears to have increased, as did their friendship.

On October 24, 1861, the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society held its annual meeting at West Chester. Garrison used the occasion to deliver a succinct exposition of the position held by the A.A.S.S., which included another attack on the President.<sup>38</sup> On his way back to Boston, he traveled to New York where he spent several days visiting Johnson and his wife. They attended several antislavery lectures, and on Sunday they went to Henry Ward Beecher's church, where they "were provided the best seats, near to the pulpit, and directly in front of the speaker."<sup>39</sup> Johnson, Garrison, and other New York

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<sup>37</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from Garrison to Johnson dated October 7, 1861.

<sup>38</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, "Statement of Principles," October 26, 1861.

<sup>39</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter to his wife dated October 21, 1861

abolitionists also used the time to discuss future strategy, which included how to address the continued need for funds as well as ways to increase the pressure on the President into declaring emancipation for the slaves.

On December 3, 1861, Lincoln gave his annual message to Congress, which abolitionists across the North hoped would at least hint at emancipation. The President's speech not only disappointed those in the antislavery rank and file, it further alienated many of them. In his message Lincoln proposed colonization as a scheme for resettling the slaves who, under the name of contraband, flocked to the Union armies. He gave no indication of initiating an active antislavery policy, or any inkling of emancipation.<sup>40</sup>

Johnson considered the message a setback, but Garrison was appalled. Writing to Johnson about the President in an almost boastful fashion, as if to remind him of their disagreement about the chief executive, Garrison declared, "It is more and more evident that he is a man of very small calibre." and that "He has evidently not a drop of anti-slavery blood in his veins; and he seems incapable of uttering a humane or generous sentiment respecting the enslaved millions in our land."<sup>41</sup> Aware of the political contacts Johnson had nurtured, he urged him to use the *Standard* to influence events in Washington.

Johnson did not agree with Lincoln's tactics regarding slavery, but he was sympathetic to the problems faced by the administration. Not only did Lincoln face the dilemma of the border states, but the Republican Party remained divided on the issue as

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<sup>40</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, December 3, 1861, "Annual Message to Congress," 35-53. See also Oates, *With Malice Toward None: A Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 268, 269.

<sup>41</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from Garrison to Johnson dated December 6, 1861.

well. In Boston, at the state convention of the Republican Party held in October 1861, Charles Sumner addressed a large audience requesting they pass resolutions in favor of emancipation. Not only was the measure voted down, but the Republican press poured contempt on the Senator for his appeal. Johnson did use the *Standard* to promote those in Washington who, like Sumner, called for action. In a move upon which he and Garrison were in total agreement, he further urged the President to use his war powers to end slavery. The three-fifths clause in the Constitution made slavery a legal institution. The War Powers Act, which gave the President additional power, such as the ability to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, now afforded a unique opportunity for Lincoln to use this power for the good of the slave.<sup>42</sup> As the year came to a close, Johnson refused to heed warnings from Garrison and others to be careful lest there occur at abolitionists' meetings a backlash similar to Sumner's experience in Boston. Nevertheless, Garrison left the planning of events in New York up to Johnson. With the assistance of Theodore Tilton, Johnson began organizing rallies and speaking engagements, and Garrison declared, "I commit myself, and will cheerfully abide by your concurrent judgments."<sup>43</sup> It now seemed to many in the antislavery crusade that Johnson's influence and power in New York and Washington equaled or surpassed that of Garrison's.

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<sup>42</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, December 28, 1861. The paper described attempts to incite mob violence. The efforts were fruitless, thanks to the Superintendent of Police, John A. Kennedy, who was present with a large force ready for any emergency; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, "The War," January 4, 1862. This issue contained the entire speech by Wendell Phillips given in New York on December 19, 1861. Phillips's oration was an enthusiastic support of the war; Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 39.

<sup>43</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letters from Garrison to Johnson dated December 22, 1861 and December 26, 1861.

Toward the end of the year, Johnson scheduled a series of lectures and rallies to be held in New York. He persuaded Garrison to attend some of the major events as he knew his presence would attract large audiences. The objective of these mass meetings was to continue to put pressure on the President to declare emancipation. In addition, he and other abolitionists believed they had to define their position in regard to the war and the policies of the government. Although Johnson knew that Garrison would be extremely critical of Lincoln's policies, he also knew that he had gradually increased his support of the war effort. The site selected for the larger events featuring the more popular speakers was the Cooper Institute. On December 19, 1861, Wendell Phillips kicked off a series of rallies organized by Johnson at the institute. He delivered a rousing discourse that demanded enthusiastic support of the war.<sup>44</sup> The following week, on December 26, 1861, Theodore Tilton took to the podium as the main speaker. Tilton's popularity had continued to rise, and he had become one of the more favored speakers in abolitionist circles. His oration was well received by those who were present, and he ended his speech with the conclusion that the only way to put down the rebellion was to eliminate slavery, its cause.<sup>45</sup> Garrison arrived in New York as a first stop on a tour of several areas in the northeast. On January 14, 1862, he addressed a large audience at the institute, who heard him pick up where Phillips had left off. Garrison's words had the

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<sup>44</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, "Extract from a private letter, dated Boston Dec. 22," December 28, 1861. In his letter to Johnson, Garrison critiqued the speech Phillips gave at the institute on December 19, and in effect became the reporter of the lecture. Johnson printed the excerpt of the letter in the *Standard*.

<sup>45</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 40-42. Also the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, "The Latest Questions of the War." January 4, 1862. Tilton set the stage for Garrison's upcoming speech at the institute by stating, "Better fitted than I to teach it, will be the man who is to stand here a few weeks hence. I mean William Lloyd Garrison."

impact Johnson had hoped they would, sweeping away old prejudices and misconceptions and placing the position of the A.A.S.S. in a clear light. Mixing a rare sense of humor with the seriousness of his plea, Garrison argued that slavery was the cause of the war and that the government had every right to use its power to end the hated institution. Garrison declared that emancipation was essential for the suppression of the rebellion and the return of peace. His speech lasted two hours and received considerable attention. Johnson believed it to be one of Garrison's best and most important lectures, and he printed the speech in its entirety.<sup>46</sup>

In early February 1862, the New York Anti-Slavery Society held its annual meeting in Albany. The convention lasted two days, and although the turnout was not as large as expected, Johnson considered the meeting "quite interesting," and he enjoyed his stay. The low attendance was blamed on the weather, but Garrison and other prominent leaders did attend. Johnson believed progress had been made as new tactics were discussed and a tentative action plan for the spring had been developed.<sup>47</sup>

The lecture series was such a huge success that a new strategy emerged from the triumph. The leaders of the old society believed that if they could declare their

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<sup>46</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, "The Abolitionists and Their Relationship to the War," January 18, 1862. Garrison utilized humor when he answered the charge that he had abandoned the motto on the head of the *Liberator* "Covenant with Death," by supporting the war. He replied, "Well, ladies and gentleman, you remember what *Benedick* in the play says: 'When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married.' And when I said I would not sustain the Constitution because it was a 'covenant with death and an agreement with hell,' *I had no idea that I should live to see death and hell secede*. Hence it is that I am now with the Government, to enable it to constitutionally stop the further ravages of death, and to extinguish the flames of hell forever." Note also that the entire speech is printed in the February 1, 1862 issue of the *Standard*.

<sup>47</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter to Samuel J. May from Oliver Johnson dated February 11, 1862.

sentiments and demands in relation to the war not just in public, but personally to the President, his cabinet, and members of Congress, they could sway the position of the administration. They were also concerned with the continuing financial difficulty of maintaining agents in the field and other activities that at this juncture had little impact on events. It was proposed that they could take their cause directly to the President and his supporters and keep the *Liberator* and the *Standard* afloat, and that other agencies and methods useful in the past might be safely discontinued in order to secure a greater concentration of their labors.<sup>48</sup>

Efforts aimed at the new strategy proved to be initially successful. George W. Julian, a radical Republican congressman, delivered a remarkably well-timed speech in the House of Representatives. Julian declared that slavery and freedom could not coexist without leading to a devastating war and that slavery must be abolished and the country reconstructed in freedom. Johnson considered the speech “one of the very best ever delivered in Congress.”<sup>49</sup> James Miller McKim resigned his position as corresponding secretary of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society because he believed his work in this post was done. He stated that the society could now discontinue the use of some of its agencies that in the past were considered indispensable. Although slavery still existed, McKim believed its overthrow to be close at hand. His efforts would now be aimed at the government and what he considered to be more practical measures, such as bringing relief and education to the newly freed men. Other agents and representatives of the

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<sup>48</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 42.

<sup>49</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter to Samuel J. May dated February 6, 1862; extracts from Julian’s speech were also printed in the *Liberator*, May 2, 1862.

various antislavery organizations began taking this path as well. The strategy received increased support after a visit by Wendell Phillips to Washington, where he received considerable attention in both houses and had an interview with President Lincoln. Phillips became convinced that the President was on the road to emancipation, and he urged other abolitionists to visit the capital as well.<sup>50</sup> Although his support of Lincoln would later be withdrawn, for the moment Phillips implored his colleagues to make their presence known in Washington.

Johnson also advocated this tactic and began planning a trip to the capital as soon as it could be arranged. He wrote letters to other prominent abolitionists and implored Garrison to come along. Garrison, however, declined. He had become seriously ill after the Albany convention, and he responded that he was still ailing and in no condition for public speaking. Mostly however, it appears that he did not believe Phillips's statement that the city was safe, as he wrote, "Phillips's reception at Washington had roused up pro-slavery spite and malice in every direction."<sup>51</sup> It now appeared that the organization of any delegation to the capital would fall to Johnson.

Phillips's conviction that Lincoln's intent was eventual emancipation was bolstered by a message Lincoln sent to Congress on March 6, 1862. He recommended that "the United States ought to co-operate with any state which may adopt gradual abolishment of slavery, giving to such state pecuniary aid, to be used by such state in its discretion to compensate for inconveniences public and private, produced by such change

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<sup>50</sup> Wendell Phillips Papers, letter to his wife Anne Phillips dated March 1862. He urged her to assure Garrison and others "that Washington is as safe as New York," and that they will be received with enthusiasm; Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 46.

<sup>51</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter to Oliver Johnson dated March 30, 1862.

of system.” Lincoln went on to state that “in my judgment, gradual, and not sudden emancipation, is better for all.”<sup>52</sup> The message captured the attention of the entire antislavery vanguard, as it now appeared that Lincoln had decided to take measures to abolish slavery. Phillips praised the President and welcomed his words “as one more sign of promise.”<sup>53</sup> Johnson and other members of the old society considered the directive a disappointment, as it included no time limit to accept the offer and therefore had no inducement for any state to emancipate its slaves immediately. Even though the message had been aimed primarily at the border states, it made no distinction between the states in rebellion and the “so-called loyal slave States.” Johnson was in complete agreement with Garrison that the suggested measure did not go far enough, and that “it will prove ‘a decoy duck’ or ‘red herring,’ so as to postpone that decisive action by Congress which we are so desirous of seeing.”<sup>54</sup> Johnson saw no need to allow the slaveholders to wait until it became financially advantageous for them to accept such a proposition when the President had the constitutional power to dispose of the entire matter now. Neither Johnson, Garrison, or the majority of the A.A.S.S. supported Lincoln’s directive.

The President’s message to Congress and subsequent events in the spring of 1862 only enhanced Johnson’s desire to send a delegation to Washington. In April, the

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<sup>52</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, “Message to Congress,” March 6, 1862, 144-146.

<sup>53</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 48. On March 10, 1862, Phillips delivered a speech to the Emancipation League of Boston supporting Lincoln’s plan. The Emancipation League was a local organization formed on December 31, 1861, by George L. Stearns, Francis W. Bird and others. The organization produced its own newspaper, the *Commonwealth*, but did not survive for very long.

<sup>54</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter to Oliver Johnson dated March 18, 1862.

Congress decreed immediate emancipation in the District of Columbia, purging the capital of slavery forever, and in June, slavery became prohibited in the territories. The President approved these measures without delay, but in May 1862, Lincoln also revoked the proclamation of Major-General David Hunter, who commanded the Department of the South at Hilton Head, South Carolina. Hunter announced that as the states of Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina had taken up arms against the United States, it was necessary to declare them under martial law. He further decreed that slavery and martial law in a free country were not compatible, and therefore all the slaves in these three states were free. When he annulled the order, Lincoln announced that he reserved for himself to decide “whether at any time, or in any case, it shall become a necessity indispensable to the maintenance of the government to exercise such supposed power,” and that he did not feel justified in leaving such a decision to his commanders in the field. He still hoped that the slave states would consider the offer of Congress to cooperate in the scheme of gradual, compensated emancipation and that the states in rebellion would not “be blind to the signs of the times.”<sup>55</sup>

Dismayed by the President’s veto of Hunter’s proclamation, the A.A.S.S. began to draft a declaration defining its position in view of the recent events. At a meeting of the New York Anti-Slavery Society held in May 1862, Garrison composed a “Statement of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society,” which was modified

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<sup>55</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, May 19, 1862, “Proclamation Revoking General Hunter’s Order of Military Emancipation of May 9, 1862,” 222-224. Hunter’s entire decree, General Order No. 11, is also included in the proclamation.

and approved by Johnson and other leading members of the organization.<sup>56</sup> Johnson then accompanied Garrison to the yearly meeting of Progressive Friends at Longwood, Pennsylvania. Although they worked tirelessly for other causes, the Progressive Friends had never lost sight of the need for the abolition of slavery. They too were bitterly disappointed in the President's conduct, and by the spring of 1862 they were demanding direct action. The meeting lasted four days, and during that time it was decided to draft a petition to the President and send a six-member delegation to deliver it to him in person. The representatives would implore him to use the high power of his office for the total abolition of slavery. It was also decided that Johnson would lead the delegation and personally present the message to the chief executive. Garrison headed the committee charged with drawing up the document, but Johnson and others helped amend the original draft. The paper carried the title, "Memorial to the President," and when it had been completed Johnson gave the entire text his approval.<sup>57</sup> Five other members of the Progressive Friends were to accompany Johnson on his mission: Thomas Garrett, Alice Eliza Hambleton, Dinah Mendenhall, William Barnard and Eliza Agnew.<sup>58</sup>

A collection was taken up for the expenses of the trip, and arrangements were made through Senator David Wilmot of Pennsylvania to schedule an interview with the

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<sup>56</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 51. The purpose of the declaration was to demonstrate support for Hunter, as well as disappointment in the actions taken by the President.

<sup>57</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 14, 1862, "Memorial to the President." This issue printed the entire message to the President; *Liberator*, June 27, 1862, reprinted the entire memorial, along with the comments made by Lincoln, and the other delegates.

<sup>58</sup> Wahl, "The Progressive Friends of Longwood," 28, 29.

President.<sup>59</sup> The deputation traveled to Washington, where a meeting was planned for June 20, 1862. On the appointed day, Senator Wilmot introduced the delegation to the President in the White House where he received them courteously. Lincoln remarked it was “a relief to be assured that the deputation were not applicants for office, for his chief trouble came from that class of persons. The next most troublesome subject was Slavery.” He continued, stating that he had not been furnished with a copy of the memorial, so he could not be expected to make any extended comments. Johnson then read the document in its entirety as the President listened attentively. Johnson appealed to the President to immediately free every slave. When he had finished, Lincoln replied that “I agree with the memorial, that slavery is wrong,” but he disagreed with them regarding the ways and means of its removal. The President went on to say that any decree of emancipation “could not be more binding upon the South than the Constitution, and that can not be enforced in that part of the country now.”

Johnson replied by admitting the President’s statement was true. but he added, “The Constitution cannot now be enforced at the South, but you do not on that account intermit the effort to enforce it, and the memorialists are solemnly convinced that the abolition of Slavery is indispensable to your success.” The President retorted that “he felt the magnitude of the task before him, and hoped to be rightly directed in the very trying circumstances by which he was surrounded.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Yearly Meeting of the Progressive Friends*, Fifth Month, 1862, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, June 20, 1862, “Remarks to a Delegation of Progressive Friends,” 278, 279. Although Johnson failed in his task to get the President to declare immediate emancipation, he left the meeting with renewed hope. He now believed the President would abolish slavery when he felt the time was right.

The meeting with the President certainly was not successful in bringing about an instant end to slavery, but it did satisfy Johnson of Lincoln's sincerity on the issue of abolition. Prior to his meeting with Lincoln, Johnson stated he agreed with Garrison and other members of the old society who "were exceedingly impatient, with what seemed to be the uncertain, shilly-shally policy of President Lincoln." They had all seen so many men in high positions falter and fail, and they feared that Lincoln too would be tempted to make a fatal error. Johnson wrote, "He seemed to them like a turtle for slowness, and they piled hot coals upon his back to quicken his movement."<sup>61</sup> All through the summer of 1862, the A.A.S.S. increased the pressure on the President. Johnson argued for additional delegations to visit the White House and keep the urgency of the matter before the administration, but after meeting the President, he believed that Lincoln would declare emancipation when he thought the right time had come. Therefore, he directed his efforts against the policies of the administration, but did not make a personal attack on the President.

As the summer progressed, Lincoln still remained in favor of gradual emancipation combined with financial remuneration to the states that freed their slaves. On July 14, 1862, he presented a bill to the Congress to compensate any state that abolished slavery within its limits. He continued to meet with representatives from the various border states as well as with black abolitionists, to whom he appealed to support his efforts at colonization and to establish a colony in Central America.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 382.

<sup>62</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 54-56.

Johnson quickly denounced these tactics and urged Garrison and others to do the same. He wrote to Garrison stating that the *Standard* and the *Liberator* should harmonize in expressing their sentiments in opposition to any scheme of financial remuneration or colonization. Johnson suggested that Garrison should consider writing out all his future speeches in advance so as not to offend those who disagreed with their doctrine, but were nonetheless fighting for the freedom of the enslaved.<sup>63</sup> In reply, Garrison protested that preparing his speeches in advance was extremely difficult, but nevertheless he said he would follow Johnson's advice. Regarding the *Standard*, Garrison wrote: "I would have you exercise your own good judgment, just as you have hitherto done, in determining what shall appear in the *Standard*. I do not feel that I can give you any advice, or that you need any." Still, Garrison confided to Johnson that he was "growing more and more skeptical as to the 'honesty' of Lincoln," and considered him "nothing better than a wet rag." He feared the border states had an absolute control over the President and were preparing to overthrow his administration, which would lead to terms with the rebels.<sup>64</sup> Johnson continued to disagree with Garrison about Lincoln's ultimate aim and persisted in beseeching him to use caution and tact when attacking the administration and the President.

Johnson was correct in his analysis of the President, for by the summer of 1862 Lincoln had clearly started considering emancipation, but outwardly he showed no signs

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<sup>63</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated August 28, 1862. Johnson believed that a prepared speech was more tactful and less apt to ostracize other abolitionists who were not necessarily in total agreement with Garrisonian principles.

<sup>64</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letters from Garrison to Johnson dated July 31, 1862 and September 9, 1862. Although Johnson tried to convince Garrison of Lincoln's

of it. In a letter to Horace Greeley dated August 22, 1862, which Greeley published in the *New York Tribune*, Lincoln stated that his paramount objective was to save the Union. He declared that "If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that." The highly publicized letter was extremely upsetting to abolitionists, but the members of the old society did find some encouragement in Lincoln's frank promise at the end that, "I shall do *more* whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause, I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views."<sup>65</sup>

Unknown to the public, Lincoln had already submitted the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation to his cabinet a month before the Greeley letter.<sup>66</sup> However, he delayed its execution and kept the document in his desk, waiting for an opportune moment to execute it in the belief that without a substantial military victory, any proclamation issued would be worthless. Lincoln also worried about the effect emancipation would have on the war effort, and he cleverly waited until the conflict took a favorable turn for the North. This occurred on September 16 and 17 when the Army of the Potomac won a significant victory over General Robert E. Lee's Confederate forces at

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sincerity, Garrison refused to believe that the President was doing all he could to abolish slavery.

<sup>65</sup> *New York Tribune*, August 20, 1862, "The Prayer of Twenty Millions." Printed in this issue is Greeley's communication to Lincoln of August 19, 1862, which expressed disappointment with the policies of the President; *New York Tribune*, August 25, 1862, letter from Lincoln to Greeley, replying to his previous communication. Also see Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, letter to Horace Greeley dated August 22, 1862, 388, 389.

<sup>66</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, July 22, 1862, "Emancipation Proclamation-First Draft," 336-338.

the battle of Antietam, pushing the rebel armies back across the Potomac River into the deep South. On September 22, 1862, five days after the battle, Lincoln called his cabinet into session and told them he would issue his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. After some discussion, the cabinet unanimously approved the document, and it was handed to the Secretary of State to be copied and officially published.<sup>67</sup>

The Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation declared that on January 1, 1863, all persons held as slaves within the states that were in rebellion would be free. Lincoln also continued to hold out an olive branch to the Confederacy by stating, "It is my purpose upon the next meeting of Congress to again recommend the adoption of a practical measure tendering pecuniary aid" to the rebellious states that "voluntarily adopt immediate or gradual abolishment of slavery," or "make an effort to colonize persons of African descent, with their consent."<sup>68</sup>

The document set the stage for total emancipation, but Lincoln had only taken the first step and clearly left the door open for compromise. Johnson greeted the news with elation, as did most abolitionists, but he understood that a great deal more still needed to be done. He agreed with Wendell Phillips who, upon reading the proclamation, stated, "Step, it's a stride." Garrison, who only a few weeks before had complained to Johnson that he feared the border states had control over the President, welcomed the proclamation as "an important step in the right direction." Still, Garrison

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<sup>67</sup> Donald, *Lincoln*, 362-369, 374, 375, 385. Donald gives an excellent account of Lincoln's thought process up until the actual time the proclamation was issued. Also McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 538-545, 556, 557, and Oates, *With Malice Towards None: A Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 317-313, 326.

<sup>68</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, September 22, 1862, Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation," 433-436. Lincoln claimed he had the power to issue the proclamation under the authority given to him by the War Powers Act.

complained that he was disappointed that the document was not more sweeping. It disturbed him that the border states were not included and that the states in rebellion were given 100 days grace. Additionally, the considerations of gradual emancipation and colonization were totally unacceptable to him.<sup>69</sup>

With the military conflict still undecided, Johnson and Garrison agreed that it was important to keep agitating the subject, and that the *Standard* and the *Liberator* were the best instruments for this action. The war had increased the price of paper and printing materials, and both publications were struggling to meet expenses. Furthermore, the entire country was putting its resources into the war effort, and subscriptions were down, with the *Liberator* losing over 200 subscribers. Johnson agreed with Garrison on the importance of keeping the newspapers alive as long as the struggle against slavery continued. They decided to increase the cost of the subscriptions and solicit additional contributions from various benefactors of the cause to keep both journals in print.<sup>70</sup> Their efforts were successful, and neither newspaper missed a publication date.

In October 1862, Johnson and Garrison set off on a short speaking tour through Massachusetts and Vermont. For Johnson, the purpose of the trip was twofold. In addition to his planned lectures on the flaws of the proclamation, he was able to return to Vermont to assist his brother Leonard on business matters. Meetings were scheduled in Peacham, Burlington, and Braintree, and both men made arrangements to be kept abreast of developments at home. In fact, the local journals they were able to pick up during

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<sup>69</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 62.

<sup>70</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, December 20, 1862. This issue printed the results of a special emergency session of the executive committee, and the decision to increase

their excursion kept them updated on all events, including General McClellan's order to the Army of the Potomac to obey the Emancipation Proclamation, and a meeting at Faneuil Hall, where Charles Sumner had been the principal speaker.<sup>71</sup> The trip actually turned into a pleasant period of relaxation for the two friends. Once they arrived in Peacham, Johnson's brother made them both feel extremely welcome. The weather was exceptionally pleasant, and Leonard gave them a tour of the countryside, affording Johnson an opportunity to visit family members, renew old friendships, and to reminisce with Garrison about growing up in a Vermont hill town. The visit also provided a much needed rest for both men, who had been under enormous pressure for some time.

The journey did not go off entirely without incident, as their presence caused a disturbance on a train traveling from Barnet to White River Junction. Johnson, accompanied by Leonard, planned to get off at Andover to visit their sister, while Garrison would continue on to Burlington, where they arranged to meet again for a scheduled lecture. Both men were recognized by a fellow passenger, who began to speak loudly, justifying the war and declaring it "a just judgment from heaven upon our land for its sin of oppression." This stirred up two other men, one of them being Henry Keyes, who just happened to be a prominent businessman and politician who had been the chairman of the Vermont delegation to the Democratic convention in 1860 and had nominated Stephen A. Douglas for President. Keyes and his companion began reviling the first speaker and then turned their attention to Garrison and Johnson, spewing

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subscription prices; *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letters from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated September 9, 1862 and December 14, 1862.

<sup>71</sup> *Liberator*, October 10, 1862. Garrison returned home to Boston in time to publish in this issue, McClellan's general order, and the October 6, 1862 speech of Charles Sumner delivered at Faneuil Hall.

derogatory comments about abolitionists and pouring insults on them. Keyes and his associate appeared to be looking for a fight, but before the incident got any further, a Dr. Smith, originally from Ryegate, Vermont, interceded on the abolitionists' behalf. It became apparent that none of the other travelers were sympathetic to Keyes and his partner and, as they were outnumbered, both retired to their seats.<sup>72</sup>

Upon his return to New York, Johnson, with the assistance of Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips, and others, continued to complain about the defects of the proclamation. On December 1, 1862, Lincoln delivered his annual message to the Congress, which made a last plea for the plan of compensated emancipation. At this time he proposed a constitutional amendment by which any state abolishing slavery by or before the year 1900, would receive compensation from the federal government.<sup>73</sup> The proposed amendment made no provision for the abolition of slavery by the year 1900 in the states that did not sanction it, and the thought of waiting until the next century to abolish slavery was completely unacceptable to all members of the antislavery rank and file. It appeared unlikely that the proposal would be accepted, and in view of the promised emancipation edict on January 1, 1863, Johnson felt there was no other option but to wait.

As the time approached, watch-meetings in black churches and abolitionist houses were held across the North in anticipation of the event. On New Year's Day, 1863, Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared, "I do order and

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<sup>72</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letters from Garrison to his wife Helen dated October 9, 1862 and October 10, 1862.

<sup>73</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume V, December 1, 1862, "Annual Message to Congress," 518-537; Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 63, 64.

declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are and henceforward shall be free.”<sup>74</sup> When the news finally came over the wire that the proclamation had been issued, Johnson was jubilant and joined in the celebration praising the milestone event. He reasoned that from that moment on, the government was irrevocably committed to the emancipation policy. Yet, he also knew that more needed to be done as the Congress and the President had to be urged to complete the task by abolishing slavery in the border states as well. At a meeting of the A.A.S.S. called specifically for the purpose of addressing the proclamation, a series of resolutions were decided upon. These called for the President to stand by the proclamation and to move forward to abolish slavery everywhere in the country. They also urged the Congress to establish a Freedmen’s Bureau for the special purpose of guarding the rights and interests of the liberated bondsmen. Additionally, they demanded that the freedmen be provided with land and resources, to give them a fair chance to develop their abilities and powers and that they be furnished the necessary education.<sup>75</sup> Johnson had long been a supporter of education for all classes of people, and he gladly endorsed the resolutions.

The new year brought with it continued fighting on the battlefield, with no end to the war in sight. The Emancipation Proclamation had been a major turning point in the antislavery movement, and Johnson was now assured that it was just a matter of time before slavery became extinguished forever. Nevertheless, there remained the possibility

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<sup>74</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* Volume VI, January 1, 1863, “Emancipation Proclamation,” 23-26, 28-31. The “Preliminary Draft of Final Emancipation Proclamation” was completed on December 31, 1862, and given to the cabinet the following day for review.

<sup>75</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 70, 71. The resolutions of the meeting demanding additional support for the freedmen are outlined in the text.

that the war could end with slavery still intact as a legal institution and part of the Constitution. Lincoln had used the power invested in him as Commander and Chief of the Army and Navy in time of war to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Johnson knew that if the war ended and the document was challenged, it might very well not hold up. Slavery had to be brought to an end by a constitutional amendment. This now became his paramount goal, and more than ever his political contacts became exceptionally important. His strategy remained the same in regard to Lincoln and his support of the war effort, but now he began to utilize all his connections in Washington to urge the President and the Congress to pass a constitutional amendment to permanently eradicate the scourge of slavery from the nation.

## Chapter 8

### Freedom and the End of a Crusade

The year 1863 began with great promise for those who had labored so long and hard for the antislavery cause. It now appeared that their struggle, which at times had seemed hopeless, finally had an end in sight. The ideology of the nation had been transformed, and if those who believed in the equality of all people continued to persevere, America could become a country where freedom and justice were afforded to all its citizens without regard to race. It had taken a terrible civil war to overcome the most difficult obstacles, and the hostilities continued to rage on. Johnson had always believed that an armed conflict had not been necessary to eradicate slavery, but now that it had come, he believed it must be used to generate a complete transformation in the social order of the country. This now became his objective, as circumstances demanded that he continue to carry on and finish the work of total emancipation. Not to accomplish this goal would mean that all the destruction and death caused by the war had been in vain.

With the official issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, Johnson realized that additional support for the antislavery cause and the war could be received from their abolitionist colleagues in Great Britain. The English had been extremely hesitant about supporting the Union, and the *Trent* affair, which created an international incident, had only increased distrust between the two countries.<sup>1</sup> Johnson had attempted to persuade

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<sup>1</sup> The *Trent* affair involved the capture of two southern commissioners, James Mason and John Slidell, from the British ship *Trent*. It created an international incident and placed the two countries on the verge of war. For a complete examination of the *Trent* affair see Norman B. Ferris, *The Trent Affair: A Diplomatic Crisis*, Knoxville, University of

fellow abolitionists in England to support the struggle, but most of the leading British antislavery figures remained on the fence, as they did not want to appear to be in opposition to their own government, especially if the rebels began to get the upper hand. Additionally, up until the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, President Lincoln gave them very little in the way of hope. Now the situation had changed dramatically, and Johnson saw this as an opportunity that must not slip by.

He urged that a delegation led by Garrison be sent to England to secure additional funds and support. The Emancipation Proclamation had been greeted by the British antislavery vanguard with tremendous enthusiasm. Without being prompted by Americans, many began to openly support the Union for the first time.<sup>2</sup> On New Year's Day George Thompson, a noted British abolitionist, addressed a crowded assembly in the town of Heywood, near Manchester, and spoke for two hours in support of the war. The crowd received his words with warm approval. As he traveled the English countryside, he was received with the same enthusiasm. Frederick William Chesson, another well-known British abolitionist, was also well received, lending support to the belief that the time was right for a visit from the Americans.<sup>3</sup>

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Tennessee Press, 1977. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated December 26, 1861. Johnson's original letter to Garrison has been lost, but it is alluded to in this correspondence. The two men discussed the problems that the *Trent* affair had caused in the relationship between American and British abolitionists.

<sup>2</sup> *Liberator*, February 20, 1863; February 27, 1863. These issues reported a series of enthusiastic meetings in support of the Union held in London and Bristol, most of which were organized by the London Emancipation Society.

<sup>3</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letters from Frederick William Chesson and George Thompson to William Lloyd Garrison dated January 9, 1863 and February 5, 1863 respectively.

Johnson believed that it was important that Garrison lead any delegation sent to Great Britain. In Parliament the Roebuck bill, which provided for British support of the Confederacy, was pending. Garrison had many friends and supporters in the country, and Johnson felt that he, better than anyone else, could make the most persuasive argument against the proposed bill. Garrison agreed that a delegation should be sent, but he had to decline making the trip himself because of poor health. Johnson then suggested that Wendell Phillips undertake the leadership of the mission. Phillips had previously spoken harshly about the British when it appeared that they might support the South, but recently softened his position. Phillips could be warm, charming, and extremely convincing, and he had become one of the most popular antislavery lecturers in America.

Garrison approached Phillips with the offer, and at first he seemed receptive and said he would take the matter into consideration. He did confide to Garrison that he still felt a nagging aversion to England, but before the matter could be discussed further, he left for a speaking tour in New York. Garrison requested that Johnson meet with Phillips during his stay in New York and convince him to lead the delegation. Johnson not only made several attempts to do so, he also enlisted help from Theodore Tilton, Sydney Howard Gay, George Washburn Smalley, and others.<sup>4</sup> Phillips, however, could not bring himself to completely absolve the British of their once considering to support the Confederacy, and, in the end, he declined.

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<sup>4</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 77. See also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated March 10, 1863.

Among those sent as part of the delegation was Moncure D. Conway, a liberal minister and Virginian turned abolitionist.<sup>5</sup> Conway got involved in a very public controversy with the Confederate commissioner James Mason over whether Conway had the power to speak for all abolitionists in America. Conway did overstep his authority by declaring that abolitionists would stop supporting the Union cause if the South began emancipating its slaves, a statement which the A.A.S.S. had to denounce.<sup>6</sup> Whereas many abolitionists were divided about Conway's announcement, he managed to get the upper hand in his continued public battles with Mason and became an influential force in defeating the Roebuck bill.<sup>7</sup> The initial plan of the delegation had not gone off as smoothly as Johnson had hoped, but he was correct in his thinking that this was an opportune moment for such a mission, as it proved to be a tour de force. Not only had public opinion in England been turned in favor of the war, British abolitionists now began forwarding needed financial aid as well.

Subsequently, Henry Ward Beecher, Johnson's close friend, turned a visit to Great Britain in the spring of 1863 into a tour on behalf of the Union cause. With the help of funds raised by the A.A.S.S., Beecher held a series of meetings that turned out to be enormously successful. The additional funds received from across the ocean could not

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<sup>5</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 11, 1863. This issue announced Moncure D. Conway's mission to England.

<sup>6</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, July 18, 1863. Immediately upon hearing Conway's declaration, Johnson repudiated his proposal without conferring with anyone. A short time later, Garrison and others wrote to him agreeing with his denouncement, and the official disclaimer by the A.A.S.S. was in the July 25, 1863 issue of the *Standard*. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from Garrison to Johnson dated July 14, 1863. Garrison expressed his agreement with Johnson's condemnation of Conway's declaration, and stated the A.A.S.S. must respond officially to his remarks.

<sup>7</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, "III War For Freedom: 1863," 131-133.

have come at a better time. The issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the effort that the citizenry continued to put into the war drew attention away from the antislavery movement. Many individuals viewed the goal as basically accomplished and directed all their energy to winning the war. This was reflected at the annual meeting of the A.A.S.S., which began on May 11, 1863, in New York City. Johnson organized the engagement, taking great care in the selection of the speakers and attending to all the intricate details of the event. Several conferences were scheduled prior to the meeting, and a committee had been selected to investigate the operations of the Freedmen's Inquiry Commission. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton had organized this board in January 1863 to investigate the condition of freed black people and the ways in which they could aid the Union cause.<sup>8</sup> Johnson had a great interest in the duties of the committee, as he believed it essential that the freedmen receive the proper tools to succeed in a free society. This included equal protection under the law, as well as the right to an education.

The guest speakers included some of the most popular abolitionists of the day. Wendell Phillips, Theodore Tilton, and Horace Greeley were among those who addressed the audience, along with Frederick William Chesson, who edited the *London Dial* until 1863, when he became co-editor of the *London Morning Star*. Both publications were favorable to the antislavery cause, and Chesson also served as secretary for the London Emancipation Society. His presence demonstrated the turn of events that had recently taken place in England in favor of the war. Perhaps the most surprising guest of all was

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<sup>8</sup> *Liberator*, May 29, 1863. The developments of the business meetings were recorded in this issue.

Theodore D. Weld.<sup>9</sup> Considered by many to be one of the greatest orators of the antislavery movement, Weld had become disenchanted with large organizations after the great schism of 1840. At about the same time, his great speaking voice had started to fail, partly from overuse and fatigue, as he had worked at a frenetic pace for the cause for over a decade. He never abandoned his antislavery beliefs or stopped working to free the enslaved, but he argued for their freedom on his own terms and refused to align himself with any single society. Johnson considered it a real coup that Weld had been persuaded to speak at the annual meeting.

The anniversary convention officially opened on the morning of May 11 at the Church of the Puritans. The morning and afternoon meetings were held at the church, while the evening sessions, where the main speakers addressed the audience, were held at the Cooper Institute. Despite the extensive effort made in the planning and advertising of the celebration, it turned out to be one of the most sparsely attended events in years. Not since the 1830s, when the A.A.S.S. had been struggling to survive, had there been such a poor showing. The business meetings, although small, did accomplish several goals, including the presentation of a full budget of resolutions again urging the President to use his war powers to end slavery in the border states. Additionally, there was a general expression of the sentiment that the society must not be dissolved until slavery was extinct in the nation.

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<sup>9</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from Garrison to his wife Helen dated May 14, 1863. Garrison described the events of the meeting, along with comments about the various speeches made. Also *Liberator*, May 22, 1863, "The State of the Country." Wendell Phillips gave a rousing address in support of the war. All of the other speeches except for Weld's were also printed in this issue. Phillips's speech was also printed in its entirety the next day in the *New York Tribune*, May 12, 1863.

Notwithstanding the small number in attendance, those who were present remained enthusiastic about the future. There was a general agreement that considerable progress had been made and that the outlook was bright. Though he was disappointed at the small turnout, Johnson remained optimistic and viewed the results of the meeting as promising.

Meanwhile, the war had started to produce some positive results. In Washington, the first black troops were being assembled, and within two weeks after the close of the New York meeting, the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Regiment, the first contingent of black troops, paraded through Boston.<sup>10</sup> Johnson remained firm in his support of the war and the President, but he continued to apply pressure on the administration to take the final steps to completely end slavery. Johnson believed that the opportunity was now at hand to deliver the death blow to the barbaric institution and that it must not be allowed to slip by.

Johnson was correct in his evaluation of the situation, for the year 1863 proved to be a time of success on the battlefield. On July 1 through 3, the most celebrated battle of the war was fought at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Union forces won a decisive victory over the outnumbered Confederate troops, inflicting heavy casualties on the beleaguered army of General Robert E. Lee. The engagement was a major turning point in the war, as never again were the weakened Confederate forces seriously able to threaten northern territory.<sup>11</sup> Several days later, however, New York City witnessed the draft riots, the largest civil insurrection in American history apart from the South's rebellion itself. The

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<sup>10</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 79.

<sup>11</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 471, 609, 610, 647, 648, 666, 667.

system of voluntary recruitment had produced adequate troops, but only for a brief period of time. In March 1863 Congress passed a national draft law, but a man could escape service by hiring someone else to go in his place or by paying the government \$300.<sup>12</sup> Opposition to conscription was widespread, particularly among laborers, immigrants, and northern Democrats known as copperheads who opposed the war. Draft officers began drawing names on Saturday, July 11, and the first day of selections went by quietly. Most of the federal troops stationed in the city had been deployed to Pennsylvania, and few believed that the protesters would make good on their threats of civil disobedience. The following day hundreds of men, most of whom were low wage earners, draft dodgers, and Irish immigrants, congregated in saloons. Spurred on by the Democratic political machine, which wielded considerable power in the city, they vented their hostility towards the Protestant middle and upper class and at blacks, whom they viewed as competition.<sup>13</sup> The violence that erupted lasted four days and took a heavy toll on the city. Draft offices and federal property were burned. Rioters beat numerous individuals and lynched a half dozen people. Black residents were especially targeted. The Colored Orphan Asylum was burned to the ground, and mobs destroyed several businesses that were either owned by or employed blacks. The roving gangs also sought out abolitionists and attempted to destroy Horace Greeley's newspaper, the *New York Tribune*, successfully burning out the ground floor of the building. The police were outnumbered and untrained for what occurred, and they had little success in stopping the rioters. The

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<sup>12</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 37<sup>th</sup> Congress, Session 3, 1293, 1389.

<sup>13</sup> Betty Fladeland, *Abolitionism and Working-Class Problems in the Age of Industrialization*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984. Fladeland examines the growing fear among white wage earners who view free blacks as

War Department desperately organized several regiments from Pennsylvania, and on July 15 and 16 they poured volleys of cannon fire into the ranks of the mob. By July 17 an uneasy calm returned to the city. The government, determined to carry out the draft policy, ordered 20,000 troops to the city, and on August 19 the draft resumed.<sup>14</sup>

Almost all of the devastation and murder took place in Manhattan, and Johnson, who lived in Brooklyn, appears to have escaped the anger of the mob. But the office of the *Standard* was located in the city, and surprisingly it sustained little damage. Why this was so is not exactly clear, as Johnson and Garrison expected it to be demolished completely. One can only speculate, but perhaps its location on the second floor made it less visible to the mob. Additionally, it was not as well known as the *New York Times* or *New York Tribune*, both of which were attacked but not completely destroyed by the mob. Other antislavery newspapers, including *The New York Independent* went unscathed as well. Several of Johnson's associates, among them John Kennedy, the superintendent of the New York police, were not so fortunate. On July 13 Kennedy was beaten and left for dead. Kennedy was eventually rescued, but he never fully recovered from his injuries. Mattie Griffith, who became a celebrated abolitionist when she freed her slaves after her father's death, was an eye witness to several atrocities as she watched from the window of her home.<sup>15</sup> Riots also occurred in Boston, Hartford, Newark, and

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competition. See also Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> James W. Geary, "Civil War Conscription in the North: A Historiographical Review," *Civil War History*, (January 1986), 208-228. Note also Peter Levine, "Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863-1865," *Journal of American History*, 67 (1981), 816-834.

<sup>15</sup> Mary Estlin Papers, letter from Mattie Griffith to Mary Estlin dated July 27, 1863. Mattie Griffith's description is quite vivid as she recalls, "A child of 3 years of age thrown from a 4<sup>th</sup> story window and instantly killed. A woman one hour after her

other cities as well, but none reached the magnitude of what occurred in New York City. Fearing for the safety of his family, Garrison was forced on July 14 to flee his home at Dix Place in Boston for two days.<sup>16</sup>

When the upheaval finally ended, at least 105 people had been killed. Among the dead were eleven black victims, eight soldiers, and two policemen. Property damage mounted into thousands of dollars.<sup>17</sup> The riots demonstrated the depth of the anti-war sentiment in the North, and for Johnson they clearly exhibited the racism triggered by emancipation. Many felt threatened by the entrance of an undefined class of free black people, and Johnson feared this might block the path to complete extinction of slavery. He also saw a threat to what he believed to be essential once slavery had been eradicated, the integration of black people into American society with all their civil rights guaranteed. This, Johnson believed, was fundamental if the former slaves were to succeed once they received their freedom. The ideology of white supremacy, combined with the fear of competing with over four-million free black people, drove many poor whites and wage earners to denounce any form of equality for the freedmen. This increased the difficulty of the struggle, and Johnson began to combat both slavery and racism at the same time. He was well aware that slavery in America was based on race,

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confinement was set upon and beaten with her tender babe in her arms...Children were torn from their mother's embrace and their brains blown out in the very face of the afflicted mother. Men were burnt by slow fires."

<sup>16</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated July 14, 1863.

<sup>17</sup> Adrian Cook, *The Armies of the Streets: The New York City Draft Riots of 1863*, Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1974, 193, 194, 310. The number of persons killed has been extremely exaggerated into the thousands, but Cook's careful research established that the total was much smaller. The text is also an excellent analysis of the racial and class tensions that flared up in New York during the riot. For a contemporary account of the riots see the *Liberator*, July 17, 1863.

but they were not the same problem. Once the slaves were freed, they would have to overcome the problems of racial prejudice. Johnson also knew that these were two different battles, as those who argued against slavery in the North did not necessarily believe in equality of the races. It became a dilemma Americans would have to face once the war concluded, and he began incorporating his arguments in the *Standard*.<sup>18</sup> As the New York riots had shown, racism was embedded in American society, and racial equality would not come easily or quickly. Johnson also believed that slavery would end before these basic principles of human equality were realized. Yet there now appeared no alternative but to continue an aggressive antislavery campaign, as the fortunes of war had turned favorably for the Union, and slavery had to be abolished in its entirety before the war ended.

The next several months demonstrated that Johnson's fears were not unfounded. As the tide of the war began to turn in favor of the Union, several of the border states began moving to abolish slavery within their limits. Pressured by an increasingly stronger Republican presence, both Missouri and Maryland started advocating immediate and unconditional emancipation. Lincoln, however, continued to argue in favor of gradualism, and he remained opposed to any radical measures. On November 19, 1863, he delivered his famous speech dedicating the Gettysburg Cemetery. Only 272 words, his Gettysburg Address reverberated across the country. On December 2, 1863, he gave his annual address to the Congress. This communication, much longer, did not have the

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<sup>18</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, January 10, 1863. It is argued that the legacy of the war to preserve the Union and to abolish slavery posed several unanswered questions. The wartime correlation of a powerful national state, and a growing sense that blacks were entitled to some measure of civil equality led Johnson to argue that "it is not in the power of man...to stop the course of events, after they have once been set out on a career of revolution."

same effect on the nation as a whole, but it did have a greater impact on abolitionists. Lincoln's message transmitted his initial ideas for reconstruction and his desire to restore the rebel states into loyal state governments. He proposed amnesty, if at least one-tenth of the voters of 1860 took an oath of allegiance to the Constitution and promised to obey the proclamations and congressional acts relating to slavery. At that time, new state governments could be organized, excluding the prominent leaders of the rebellion.<sup>19</sup>

This type of action was exactly what Johnson and other members of the A.A.S.S. did not want to happen. It not only allowed those in rebellion to vote and remain in power, it disfranchised the newly freed. On December 3 and 4, the A.A.S.S. held its thirtieth anniversary meeting at the Concert Hall in Philadelphia, and the annual address of the President was fresh in everyone's mind. The main order of business became the creation of a petition to Congress asking for a constitutional amendment to prohibit slavery forever within the United States.<sup>20</sup> This is precisely what Johnson believed needed to be done, and he supported the measure wholeheartedly. What Johnson and the others did not realize was that Lincoln's plans had already advanced in that direction. He realized that the Emancipation Proclamation was a weak document that, if challenged, could very well be reversed. For all his outward concessions to the rebels, Lincoln understood that he had to move cautiously. He was not ambiguous in his

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<sup>19</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume VII, "Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg," 12-23, "Annual Message to Congress," 36-53. "Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction," 53-56; Donald, *Lincoln*, 460-466, 471-474.

<sup>20</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, December 12, 1863; December 19, 1863; December 26, 1863; January 2, 1864, "Third Decade Meeting." The proceedings were reported in these issues, as well as the *Liberator*, December 18, 1863; December 25, 1863; January 4, 1864. The A.A.S.S. also published the full proceedings in pamphlet form with an appendix and catalogue of antislavery publications in America from 1750 through 1863.

thinking, but he believed the timing of such a measure would be imperative to its success.<sup>21</sup>

Lincoln's behavior was viewed by several prominent abolitionists as unacceptable. Wendell Phillips, who had originally supported the President, now began openly to refute his actions. At the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society held in late January 1864, Phillips made an elaborate speech on the danger of a premature reconstruction policy and demanded that any program must include the political enfranchisement of the freedmen. Among Lincoln's critics were other notable

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<sup>21</sup> LaWanda Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985. This is one of the best examinations of Lincoln's reconstruction policies. Cox demonstrates that Lincoln was not ambiguous in his fundamental principles for establishing voting rights and legal equality for black people. He was a consistent friend of black freedom, but his process of presidential leadership did not convey the determination of his commitment. Note also George W. Fredrickson, "A Man but Not a Brother: Abraham Lincoln and Racial Equality," *Journal of Southern History*, XLI, No. 1 (February 1975), 39-58. Fredrickson addressed the statements made by Frederick Douglass in his famous speech at the dedication of the Freedman's Monument in 1876. Douglass stated that Lincoln "was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man, or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudice, he was a white man. He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country." Douglass went on to describe Lincoln's vacillation, his procrastination, and his slowness in pushing antislavery measures. He believed that Lincoln only became dedicated to the antislavery cause towards the end of his life. The speech was not a complete denunciation of Lincoln, as Douglass also praised Lincoln for his courage and leadership, and as the man who ended human bondage in America. He also praised the monument being dedicated in his honor. Fredrickson demonstrated that Lincoln had strong antislavery beliefs, which had been forged when he was a young man. Fredrickson resolved that Lincoln did not come to the conclusion that black people should be freed in the last two years of his life, and that the Emancipation Proclamation was not issued conveniently, at the spur of the moment. Fredrickson further ascertained that the document was the culmination of a lifetime of thought before it had been enacted. For an entire copy of Douglass's speech see, Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass: Reconstruction and After*, Volume IV, New York: International Publishers, 1955, 309-319.

reformers such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Anna E. Dickerson, all of whom began to advocate General John C. Fremont's candidacy for the next presidential election. Garrison, who still presided over the A.A.S.S., had originally been critical of the President's moderation, but, to a great extent because of Johnson's influence, he reversed his position. He now agreed with Johnson's evaluation of the government's position and, when corresponding with him, declared that "The best thing that can be done, politically, is to stand by Abraham Lincoln, with all his shortcomings."<sup>22</sup> Both men resolved that the A.A.S.S. had to throw its full support in favor of the re-election of Lincoln.<sup>23</sup>

The dissension over the re-election of Lincoln led to a power struggle within the old society. Phillips did not just disagree with the position of the A.A.S.S., he had ambitions of his own, and one of them was to oust Garrison and the old guard from the leadership of the society and assume leadership himself. At first, his scheme was not apparent, and although Garrison, Johnson, and others objected to his comments, they publicly declared they simply had a difference of opinion. They defended his honesty, integrity, and basic principles.<sup>24</sup> As the months passed, Garrison and Johnson attempted to be understanding and conciliating. Phillips took these gestures as a sign of weakness, and the friction between the leaders continued to smolder.

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<sup>22</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated March 14, 1864. This letter is on microfilm and separate from the rest of the papers at the Boston Public Library.

<sup>23</sup> *Liberator*, March 18, 1864, "The Presidency." This article publicly announced the support of the A.A.S.S. for the re-election of Abraham Lincoln.

<sup>24</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from J.M. McKim to William Lloyd Garrison dated February 9, 1864. Also a letter from Garrison to Samuel J. May dated February 10, 1864, defending Phillips's actions against some of the criticisms.

Phillips increased his attacks to include the British who supported the President and his administration. In an attempt to counter these denunciations, George Thompson, one of the most celebrated British abolitionists, decided to visit the United States. Thompson had been one of the earliest supporters of the war and an influential figure in swaying public opinion in England. In late February 1864 he landed in Boston where his arrival received considerable attention. On February 16 and 23 he gave two public lectures at the Music Hall in favor of the war. On both occasions he addressed an immense crowd, and his speech, entitled "The Popular Sentiment of England in regard to America and the Rebellion," was greeted with loud cheers.<sup>25</sup> He did not stay in Boston long, as he was scheduled to travel to New York on February 29 and then begin a tour of the northeast, which was to culminate in Washington. Johnson wrote Garrison with a preliminary itinerary he had planned for Thompson's stay. Phillips had his own ideas of what should be done, but the arrangements for Thompson's tour of the city was left entirely up to Johnson.<sup>26</sup>

With the help of several prominent New York abolitionists, Johnson planned a reception and speaking tour for Thompson in Brooklyn and Manhattan.<sup>27</sup> At first Garrison had planned to accompany Thompson on his tour, but he decided against it. In April 1862 Garrison's wife Helen had suffered a stroke, and despite various kinds of

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<sup>25</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 99, 100.

<sup>26</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated February 16, 1864. Johnson's earlier letter to Garrison outlining his plans for Thompson's visit to New York has not survived. Garrison refers to this previous correspondence and Johnson's suggestions, stating, "Yours is just received. You are quite right in regard to what ought to be done with and for George Thompson."

<sup>27</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 100, 101.

treatments, she never fully recovered. His own health being poor as well, Garrison felt it best that he remain in Boston and recommended that Johnson be Thompson's traveling companion.<sup>28</sup> It was well known that Johnson would be able to move in the political circles in Washington much better than Garrison. His many friends in government and his political contacts could open doors for Thompson that Garrison could not.<sup>29</sup> If Johnson agreed, he would have to leave the publication of the *Standard* in the hands of someone else. After considerable thought, he deemed the trip extremely important and resolved to make the necessary arrangements.

Johnson secured the assistance of Theodore Tilton to help plan the schedule of events in New York and asked a prominent businessman, Edwin A. Studwell, to help with the finances.<sup>30</sup> He also arranged for Tilton to edit the *Standard* in his absence. On February 29 Thompson arrived on schedule and spoke at the Cooper Institute, giving basically the same speech he had delivered in Boston. An attempt to secure the Academy of Music with a seating capacity of 2,300 had failed, as it had been reserved for some time to come. Instead, Henry Ward Beecher invited Thompson to speak at his Plymouth

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<sup>28</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Henry Hale dated February 20, 1864. Garrison explained his reasons for not accompanying Thompson on his tour.

<sup>29</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated March 14, 1864. Garrison explained to Johnson the importance of having Thompson meet with as many prominent individuals as possible while in the capital, "for it will tell well in England, and help to strengthen the ties of friendship and amity between both countries."

<sup>30</sup> Edwin A. Studwell was a wealthy real estate developer and businessman involved in the shoe and boot industry. His company, Studwell Bros. & West, was located in New York City. He was active in the Society of Friends and helped finance Thompson's stay in New York. Studwell was a mutual friend of both Garrison and Johnson, and his support is discussed in the February 16, 1864 letter from Garrison to Johnson, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*.

Church in Brooklyn. Beecher introduced Thompson by sketching the history of his involvement with the emancipation movement and emphasized his early support of the war. On March 11 Thompson addressed a large crowd at the Central Union Club in Brooklyn. The response from the audience on all these occasions was enthusiastic.<sup>31</sup> Johnson also spoke at these gatherings, usually preceding Thompson and then introducing him. He expected Thompson's visit to be an exciting and eventful one, and his first stops had proved to be everything that had been promised.

The tour Johnson planned took several weeks, and during that time he became intimately acquainted with Thompson. The trip was an exhausting experience for him, but he appears to have enjoyed it immensely. He admired Thompson's eloquence as a speaker and considered him a man of "clear intellect" with an admirably poised mind and a rare "moral discernment."<sup>32</sup> The trip also gave Johnson an opportunity to escape the daily routine of running the newspaper. He enjoyed his work, but this excursion allowed him a respite from his usual labors, which at times were arduous, and afforded him a change of environment that greatly benefited him. The two men became close friends, and Johnson was a champion of Thompson for the remainder of his life. Their tour took them through upstate New York with stops at Elmira, Syracuse, Auburn, and Rochester. In Massachusetts, Thompson addressed large crowds in Springfield, Lowell, New

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<sup>31</sup> *Liberator*, March 4, 1864. This issue reported Thompson's speech at the Cooper Institute; *Liberator*, March 11, 1864 and March 18, 1864, "The Popular Sympathy in England with the Efforts in the United States for the Suppression of the Rebellion and the Liberty of the Slave."

<sup>32</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated April 11, 1864. This letter was written from Philadelphia on their way back to New York. On a previous visit to New York City Thompson had addressed a large crowd at the Academy of Music and made such "a grand impression" he was requested to deliver

Bedford, and Worcester. A short layover was planned in Philadelphia, where Thompson addressed a large audience at the Academy of Music, and some of the most prominent citizens of the city turned out to hear him speak.<sup>33</sup> But the zenith of his lecturing engagement occurred at Washington, where he met with some of the most powerful figures in the administration.

To Johnson's delight, Thompson received an invitation signed by 24 senators and 22 congressmen to lecture in the hall of the House of Representatives. The engagement took place on April 6, 1864, with Vice President Hannibal Hamlin presiding over the event. A huge audience, which included the President, members of his cabinet, and a majority of the Congress, gathered in the hall. Thompson praised the President and brought encouraging messages from English sympathizers with the North. He predicted that the rebellion would end only with the extinction of slavery. His speech received a standing ovation, and when it concluded, not only did numerous members of Congress come forward to congratulate him, so did President Lincoln. The following day Thompson received an invitation from the President to visit him at the White House. In attendance at the meeting were several members of Lincoln's cabinet, which included Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of State William H. Seward, and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase. The meeting was brief, but they discussed the possibility of a constitutional amendment abolishing slavery forever in the country, and

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another speech. The hall was not available, so he was asked by the Union League to speak at their club.

<sup>33</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 100-104.

everyone appeared to agree that it could become a reality in the near future.<sup>34</sup> For Johnson the visit was exceptionally satisfying. His second meeting with the President confirmed his belief in Lincoln's dedication to eradicate slavery from the land before the war ended. More than ever, Johnson now believed that Lincoln's re-election was imperative if this was to be accomplished. He returned home to New York determined to use the *Standard* and all the power of the A.A.S.S. for this aim, with the re-election of the President in the forefront as the major priority of the antislavery campaign.

Thompson accompanied Johnson back to New York after their tour was completed, but did not stay very long. He had planned to remain in America for several more months and soon continued his journey around the country. His travels took him through Connecticut and as far west as Cincinnati and St. Louis. Everywhere he went large crowds came to hear him speak, and he received warm greetings from the citizenry. Johnson did not escort Thompson on these trips, but remained in constant touch with him and kept the public abreast of his activities in the *Standard* and the *Liberator*.

The importance Johnson placed on the re-election of Lincoln resulted partly from a widening gap within the A.A.S.S. created and led by Wendell Phillips, whose accusations against the President continued to increase. The President himself reinforced Johnson's convictions as he began to publicly shift from his inaugural pledge not to interfere with slavery to a policy of emancipation.<sup>35</sup> However, the Women's Loyal

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<sup>34</sup> *Liberator*, April 15, 1864. Thompson's speech in the House of Representatives is reported in this issue, along with the individuals who were present at his meeting with the President.

<sup>35</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume VII, 281-283. A letter from Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges dated April 4, 1864. Hodges is the editor of the Frankfort, Kentucky newspaper, the *Commonwealth*, and he printed the entire letter in the newspaper. In the letter Lincoln stated, "I claim not to have controlled events, but

National League, founded in 1863 for the explicit purpose of influencing political events, denounced Lincoln's policy and supported the candidacy of John C. Fremont. The President of the new coalition was Elizabeth Cady Stanton; Susan B. Anthony and Charlotte B. Wilbur were Secretaries. The league boasted many prominent feminists as members and threatened to have considerable influence in the upcoming election.<sup>36</sup> The league scheduled a convention in New York to be held at the Church of the Puritans on May 12, 1864. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had previously declared Lincoln the "golden calf" of the nation and in an attempt to sway many of those in support of his re-election to change their position, she invited Johnson and Garrison to the conference. Johnson had always been a supporter of women's rights, but he viewed the league's stance as political and not a feminist issue. He and Garrison determined not to attend the meeting of the women's convention, and urged others to do the same.

Meanwhile, Johnson was planning the thirty-first annual meeting of the old society in New York. The assembly promised to attract a significant number of people, and Johnson believed the debate surrounding the presidential election would be the main topic. He anticipated that Phillips and many of his supporters would attempt to use this opportunity to their advantage, and he began preparing to defend his position far in advance of the convention. Johnson consulted with Garrison and others and decided to

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confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years struggle the nation's condition is not what either party, or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it."

<sup>36</sup> *Liberator*, June 3, 1864. This issue identified many of the leading members of the Women's Loyal National League, and their support of John C. Fremont for the presidency. The league did not survive after the election, as it dissolved in 1865. The British abolitionist George Thompson, a champion of Lincoln and his policies, did attend the meeting, and received a cordial welcome.

hold the Convention on May 10 and 11 a few days earlier than the women's league convention.<sup>37</sup>

The annual meeting opened at Dr. George Cheever's church, where a large and respectable audience attended the ceremonies. The main event then moved to the Cooper Institute, where the President's platform and the presidential election immediately occupied the attention of everyone. As anticipated, Phillips's introductory speech attacked Lincoln and the policy of the administration. He received considerable support from Stephen S. Foster and Parker Pillsbury, both respected abolitionists. The confrontation spilled over into the business meetings as well, with Phillips declaring he would rather sever his right hand than support Lincoln. On the final day of the convention, Phillips reiterated his hostility towards the President by stating that on the day of Lincoln's re-election, "I shall consider the end of the Union in my day, or its reconstruction on terms worse than Disunion."<sup>38</sup>

Phillips and his supporters did not take over the convention as they had hoped. for Johnson had carefully arranged the event. True to his character, he denied no one in the opposition an opportunity to speak, but he also invited as many of the most powerful, pro-Lincoln members of the antislavery cause as he could muster. William Lloyd Garrison and George Thompson were in attendance, as were Samuel J. May, James

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<sup>37</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson, dated April 28, 1864. This letter is a reply to a previous one, sent by Johnson, outlining the plans for the annual meeting. Johnson's original letter has not survived, but Garrison refers to it in this correspondence, along with their strategy for dealing with Wendell Phillips and the Women's Loyal National League.

<sup>38</sup> *Liberator*, May 20, 1864 and May 27, 1864. The events at both the New York and Boston conventions were reported in these issues, including the various confrontations instigated by Phillips and his followers. Also recorded in detail were the vicious attacks by Phillips against the President.

Miller McKim, and Theodore Tilton. Garrison gave an especially effective speech in which he quoted Phillips's own words of only a year before when he heaped praise on the President and said he wanted him to remain at the helm of government until the job of emancipation was completed. Phillips and his followers did gain some benefit from the convention, but the public sympathy clearly resided with the defenders of the President. In Boston a few days later, at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Phillips continued to force the debate, and his actions continued to threaten the harmony of the old society.<sup>39</sup> Believing he had gained considerable ground, he began to plan a more active endeavor, which included expansion into the political arena.

The two greatest political threats to Lincoln were George B. McClellan and John C. Fremont. Both were disgruntled generals who were angry with the President for not appointing them to an important military command. Of the two, McClellan posed the greatest threat, as it appeared he would win the Democratic nomination at the convention scheduled in Chicago during the summer. Fremont had formed a coalition of abolitionists, radicals, and a few low-level Republicans into a third party, calling itself the Radical Democratic Party. They planned a convention in Cleveland on May 31, 1864, to officially nominate Fremont and launch his campaign. The party platform asserted that Congress rather than the President must control reconstruction, and it advocated that rebel lands be confiscated and distributed among soldiers and settlers. It also denounced

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<sup>39</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 106-109; *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from Garrison to his wife Helen dated May 13, 1864. In this correspondence Garrison describes the events of the convention, along with the time spent with Johnson, Thompson, and Tilton planning their strategy. He also discusses the dissension created by Phillips.

the suspension of habeas corpus by Lincoln and the suppression of free speech.<sup>40</sup>

Freemont's most prominent supporter was Wendell Phillips, who expected that the A.A.S.S. would use its resources to promote the convention.

Phillips believed he had increased his power within the old society to such a degree that his requests could not be ignored. He began by sending Johnson a letter informing him of the convention in Cleveland and stating that it should be announced and supported in the *Standard*. The letter did not come in the form of a request, but as a dictate. The letter arrived late, and Johnson did not print the call for the convention. He stated that he could not oblige Phillips because the anniversary proceedings crowded it out, as did many other things of more importance, and the paper was ready for press. When the announcement did not appear, Phillips sent another letter to Johnson, basically telling him that nothing should prevent him from printing it in the next issue.<sup>41</sup>

Johnson was not completely honest in his reply to Phillips. There seems to be no doubt that he received the request late, and that the anniversary proceedings certainly took up a large portion of the paper, but the main reason he did not accede to Phillips's demand was that he did not want to support the convention. Johnson was aware that Phillips was vying for control of the society, but he also knew that the majority of the members favored a Lincoln re-election. He not only viewed the rift that Phillips was

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<sup>40</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 714, 715.

<sup>41</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated May 20, 1864. May was a member of the Executive Committee and Johnson explained his reasons for not printing Phillips's request. He also objected to the way Phillips ordered him, and he quoted from Phillips's letter which he said, "I was surprised, on looking through my *Standard*, not to find the call for the Cleveland Convention. It will be very late to have it this week. But let nothing prevent you finding a place for it in this week's paper. Let no one have it to say that Abolitionists have no welcome to an effort for a radical and true politics."

causing as dangerous to the A.A.S.S., he believed it was harmful to the antislavery cause and the nation as a whole. His initial reply was an attempt to avoid a confrontation and quell the issue. But as Phillips continued to press his demands, Johnson was left with no alternative except to openly dispute his demands.

In his reply to Phillips, Johnson stated that “his demand that the *Standard*, which has never yet printed the Baltimore Convention, should welcome that of the convention to be held at Cleveland, seems to be eminently unreasonable, and to imply a state of mind on his part to be lamented.” He gave his main objection to the announcement stating frankly that “I would not do that, because I had reason to suspect that Copperhead money, and influence were at the bottom of it, or giving it aid.” Johnson also complained to the Executive Committee of the A.A.S.S. that Phillips’s letter was “somewhat peremptory if not dictatorial in its demands.” Phillips became outraged and sent a note to William I. Bowditch, the Treasurer of the A.A.S.S., forbidding him to forward any further money to support the *Standard*. Garrison and other leading members of the society were mostly in agreement with Johnson’s position, but they worried about the damage Phillips could inflict on the organization. Instead of supporting Johnson, they called a meeting of the Executive Committee to determine how to handle the problem. Garrison warned Johnson that Phillips held considerable influence over the committee and that he should be prepared to receive a censure or a proposition to change the tone of the newspaper.<sup>42</sup> Garrison advised Johnson to attempt a compromise, as he feared the results of the confrontation could be extremely damaging to the cause.

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<sup>42</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated June 17, 1864.

The Executive Committee did not delay in scheduling its meeting, and Johnson found out about it only a few days in advance. He could not make arrangements to leave New York to attend the meeting on such short notice, and it infuriated him that he would not be present to defend himself against Phillips's accusations. He sent a telegram to the Executive Committee demanding the postponement of the meeting until he could be present, but it turned down his request and held the special session as scheduled. Johnson's reply came swiftly, and he did not flinch at the possible consequences. He rejected any form of concession, stating, "If I am required either to set the *Standard* in opposition to Lincoln's re-election, or to suppress my honest convictions in regards to the Fremont movement, its candidates and platform, I shall resign the editorial chair."<sup>43</sup>

At the meeting Phillips claimed that the A.A.S.S. had previously denounced the re-election of Lincoln on three occasions and had pronounced his administration unworthy of the confidence and support of any antislavery society. He maintained that the *Standard* had no choice but to be governed by these decisions. He also threatened to leave the society if the newspaper continued on its present course of action, but decided to wait a little longer and see what developed. His chief complaint was against Johnson and his refusal to print anything favorable about Fremont or the Cleveland Convention.

Johnson knew he could count on the support of friends like Samuel J. May and Garrison, but he also knew that several of the committee members, such as William I. Bowditch and Charles K. Whipple, were anti-Lincoln and disposed to side with Phillips. Johnson was also aware that he wielded considerable power himself, and that his influence in New York and his position at the *Standard* were critical to the society. The

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<sup>43</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated June 20, 1864.

debate on the subject did not last long, as it appears Phillips had overestimated his own strength. The loss of Johnson to the society would be a crushing blow at this stage of the struggle, and everyone knew that his position coincided with that of the majority in the antislavery rank and file. Not only was the vote unanimous in favor of Johnson, but the Executive Committee also issued a statement asserting that the paper had been produced with remarkable fairness and impartiality, and they expressed no wish to interfere with the future publication of the *Standard*, leaving its content exclusively up to Johnson.<sup>44</sup>

Phillips departed the Executive Committee meeting angry and resentful. It now appeared to be just a matter of time before he resigned from the A.A.S.S. and took as many members as he could with him. Johnson worried about the division Phillips could create, but he believed there to be no other path but to continue to work for the re-election of Lincoln. The verdict of the Executive Committee not only vindicated him, it bestowed a vote of confidence on him personally, as well as on his leadership and plans for the future. Up until this time, Johnson had not taken a strong position on his policies regarding the forthcoming election, but had been careful not to offend anyone. He published articles in the *Standard* favoring the re-election of the President, but he did not attack those who opposed Lincoln. Now he went on the offensive, dissecting the Democratic platform of McClellan and that of the newly formed Radical Democratic Party that supported Fremont. He became extremely candid in expressing his support for the convention that nominated Lincoln, and he denounced the others.<sup>45</sup> With the added

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<sup>44</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated June 20, 1864. Garrison explained to Johnson in detail the outcome of the meeting of the Executive Committee.

<sup>45</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 18, 1864, "The Platforms." This is the leading editorial in the paper composed by Johnson. For the first time he outwardly condemns

confidence of knowing he had the complete support of the A.A.S.S., he now turned the newspaper into an organ for the re-election of Lincoln.

The Republican Party convention met in Baltimore on June 7, 1864, and nominated Lincoln for a second term. In an attempt to project a unified party image, it had been determined that the Vice President should be a war Democrat from a southern state. Andrew Johnson of Tennessee received the nomination on the first ballot. He had dealt severely with rebels and also appeared to embody the reconstruction philosophy of Lincoln.<sup>46</sup> Johnson felt a sense of relief now that the incident with Phillips was over and Lincoln's nomination was secured, but he was unhappy about the division in the ranks of the old society. Nonetheless, he had no doubts as to the position he took, for as the candidates started their campaigns he wrote to the Executive Committee stating, "The path of duty was never clearer to me than at this critical juncture, and I must follow it at every hazard." Johnson believed that Phillips's "position is manifestly weak and false" and that "The great mass of the Abolitionists of our school will stand by us." Furthermore, if Phillips decided to leave the A.A.S.S. he could take only a small number of individuals with him, and Johnson did not view this as a catastrophe. He admitted he would miss their oratory, but felt there was the added benefit of not having to encounter them as enemies within the society.

In the midst of all the political excitement the old society was also facing other internal problems. Both the *Liberator* and the *Standard* were having increased financial

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both the Fremont and McClellan campaigns, and zealously throws his support behind the re-election of Lincoln.

<sup>46</sup> *Liberator*, June 24, 1864. Garrison attended the convention in Chicago and reported the entire event as an eye witness. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter

difficulty. The price of paper continued to rise, and funds were being used up faster than ever before. Additionally, Garrison had not been in good health, and it was becoming increasingly difficult for him to keep up his editorial duties at the *Liberator*. In the last year the health of his wife had deteriorated even further, and he had cut back on many of his activities. Johnson believed that the time had come to unite both journals. He knew his friend would probably not agree, but he had become convinced that the time was right. It was unclear whether they could keep both publications in print, and he strongly urged Garrison to consider a consolidation of the two newspapers. Since the war, the differences in the papers had basically disappeared, and he therefore reasoned that their combined circulation would probably remain the same, as their subscribers purchased only one of the newspapers in any case. Johnson suggested that the paper should be printed in New York, but could be published inexpensively in Boston, Philadelphia, or New York. He would continue to edit the journal, and Garrison would be employed as an official contributor at a good salary with the understanding that he would write a weekly column about whatever pleased him. Johnson felt that “this plan, by relieving him [Garrison] of all the detail of editorial labor, and making it impossible for him to waste himself in the mechanical drudgery of the printing office, would enable him to write far more than he does now, and so keep not only his present subscribers, but win others by the hope it would excite of seeing him put his hands more strongly than ever at the helm of the course.”<sup>47</sup>

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from Garrison to his wife Helen dated June 8, 1864. Garrison described the convention and the nomination of Lincoln for a second term.

<sup>47</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated August 9, 1864. See also Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 124-126.

As anticipated, Garrison hesitated to merge the papers and procrastinated in responding to the suggestion. When he did reply, Johnson said he felt his initial reasons for rejecting the idea “seem weak, compared with those which exist in favor of the proposition.” He believed Garrison was reluctant to occupy a salaried position and that his new duties might involve a sacrifice of his personal independence. Garrison also argued that mergers of this type had never been successful. Johnson again wrote the Executive Committee asking for assistance in helping to change Garrison’s mind. He explained that the new paper would be called the *Liberator*, and that Garrison was mistaken in that there had been a successful merger of two newspapers, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* and the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, in the past. He wanted the committee members to assure Garrison that the proposed merger would allow Garrison to write for the high value of his contributions, and that this was not simply a gesture of sympathy displaying their friendship because of his deteriorating health.<sup>48</sup>

Johnson’s motivations for wanting to combine the publications seem to have been sincere, as he believed that the union would benefit the movement. He had no intention of undercutting Garrison’s power or prestige, but instead felt the merger would enhance his position. He also knew better than anyone how fragile Garrison’s health had become, and he worried deeply about his ability to continue performing all his present tasks. Combining both newspapers would allow him to concentrate his skills where they could do the most good. As for his own position, Johnson himself had not been well that summer. Weakened by nervous exhaustion, he suffered a severe cold that lingered for several months. Garrison’s son Wendell came to New York to assist Johnson with his

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<sup>48</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated August 26, 1864.

work at the *Standard*. Even his physician advised him to take some time off, but he was unwilling to do so in the middle of the presidential campaign. It was during several talks with Wendell Garrison that Johnson finally became convinced that his old friend would never favor his plan. He concluded that there was little use in pushing his suggestion and decided to let the matter drop.<sup>49</sup> Garrison eventually communicated to Johnson his final decision not to merge the two papers. The dispute between the two men appears to have done no damage to their friendship. Garrison never thought that Johnson's scheme had any design to undermine him, and when making his decision he wrote to Johnson that "I have not a more attached or a more disinterested friend in the world than yourself. And the anti-slavery cause has never found a truer advocate or a more faithful laborer than you have been from the hour you espoused it."<sup>50</sup> Together, the two men resolved to keep both publications afloat. With the help of the Executive Committee and several benefactors, both the *Liberator* and the *Standard* overcame their financial problems and remained in print.

As the presidential campaign got into full swing during the summer of 1864, another important matter of immense concern to the antislavery forces came before the Congress. Many congressional Republicans feared a revival of slavery once the war had ended. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation ended slavery in only certain parts of the country, and it had many uncertain legal implications that allowed its validity to be challenged. The best solution for this problem was a constitutional amendment

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., letters to Samuel J. May dated September 9, 1864 and September 12, 1864.

<sup>50</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated November 26, 1864. As part of his scheme to keep the *Liberator* solvent, Garrison raised the price of the newspaper to \$3.50 and Johnson increased the price of the *Standard* to \$3.00.

abolishing slavery from the entire nation. Lincoln favored the amendment and had considerable support from the members of Congress. The Senate quickly voted in favor of the amendment, securing the necessary two-thirds majority with little trouble. The stumbling block came in the House of Representatives where, on June 15, 1864, a vote of 93 to 65 in favor of a Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery fell short by 13 votes.<sup>51</sup>

The initial vote came as an alarming surprise to Johnson and many others in the antislavery ranks. It demonstrated that the struggle was far from over and that there were considerable obstacles yet to be overcome. The amendment was not a dead issue as it was saved from final defeat by a motion to reconsider, which carried it over until the winter session. In an attempt to ensure that emancipation became part of the reconstruction policy, Congress passed the Wade-Davis bill on July 2. By its terms, the President would appoint a provisional governor for each southern state. When a majority of white males pledged their allegiance to the Union, the governor could summon a state constitutional convention whose delegates were to be elected by voters who had never taken up arms against the United States. The new state constitutions were required to abolish slavery, disenfranchise Confederate leaders, and repudiate debts accumulated by the state governments during the war. Once these conditions were met, Congress would admit the states back into the Union.<sup>52</sup> The bill was seen as inadequate by Johnson because it left up to the states the question of political rights for blacks, and placed the freedmen under the power of their former masters. What was needed at this point was to

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<sup>51</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988, 66. Foner's text is an excellent examination of the period of reconstruction and one of the best books published on the subject.

<sup>52</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 706, 712, 713. Explains in detail the debate over the Wade-Davis bill and Lincoln's reasons for his pocket veto of the bill.

lobby to secure the necessary votes in the House before the amendment came up for a final vote early the following year. This involved fighting the battle on two fronts and mustering several forces, first in the Congress where the necessary votes were needed, and then in the presidential campaign to insure Lincoln's re-election.

With the help of his political contacts like William H. Seward, Charles Sumner, and other active members of the government, Johnson attempted to sway the minds of several members in the House of Representatives. But the most powerful influence became President Lincoln, who pocket vetoed the Wade-Davis bill. Since Congress had passed the bill at the end of the session, he needed only to withhold his signature from the bill to prevent it from becoming law. Lincoln also issued a statement explaining his reasons why. He denied the right of Congress to abolish slavery by statute, declaring it legitimized the secession of these states from the Union. Most important, he asserted that a constitutional amendment was the only way to abolish slavery.<sup>53</sup> Many radicals at first reacted angrily to Lincoln's veto of the bill, believing the President had slipped back on his emancipation policies. Even Charles Sumner, upon hearing of the veto, remarked, "I am inconsolable."<sup>54</sup> Others, including Johnson, did not doubt the President's trustworthiness and believed that this was not the time for half measures. Lincoln had stated that he favored a constitutional amendment, and this was their goal. It was imperative to secure Lincoln's re-election because he was needed as the driving force to secure the necessary votes.

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<sup>53</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume VII, "Proclamation Concerning Reconstruction," 433, 434.

<sup>54</sup> Donald, *Lincoln*, 510-512.

As the summer came to a close Johnson's health had not improved, and he decided he had no choice but to take a few weeks respite. Not only had his own physician Dr. Main ordered him to take a rest, but many of his associates were concerned about his health as well. Knowing that Johnson did not want to leave his duties at the *Standard* with the election only a few months away, his friend Samuel J. May extended an invitation to him to spend two weeks with him at his home in Leicester. Mary Anne expressed her desire to accept the invitation and persuaded Johnson to comply. He made arrangements for Wendell Garrison and Theodore Tilton to look after matters at the paper while he spent the last week of September relaxing at his friend's home. The trip was not all rest for him, as Johnson used the opportunity to address a meeting of the Executive Committee in Boston en route to Leicester, and on the way home he made several other stops as well. The weather appears to have been very favorable, and this short hiatus from his usual work schedule restored him to health. The Johnsons were gone for almost a month, which turned out to be longer than he had originally planned, but he returned to New York invigorated and healthy, ready to pick up where he had left off.<sup>55</sup>

As the presidential election came closer, Wendell Phillips continued to create dissension within the old society. At an Executive Meeting held in early November, he again attacked Johnson. This time, Johnson was there to defend himself, and he was astonished to hear Phillips bring up the old accusations involving the Cleveland convention and the position of the *Standard* in the upcoming election. Johnson refuted Phillips's claims, but now realized that there was more behind his accusations than he

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<sup>55</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated September 26, 1864. Johnson described his stay at the home of Samuel J. May, and the places he intended to visit during his trip.

was saying. Fremont's candidacy had not gone well, as clever Democrats had infiltrated his campaign in order to sabotage his chances. They induced Fremont with the prospect of a coalition with Democrats to beat Lincoln, and the naïve Fremont accepted the offer. In his acceptance of the nomination Fremont ignored the issue of equal rights for the freedmen, but concentrated on what he called Lincoln's misconduct of the war and violation of civil liberties. The Democratic plan had the objective of redirecting a small number of Republican votes to a third party in states where the election would be close. Most radicals renounced the measure and concluded they had no alternative but to vote for Lincoln. Phillips, however, did not agree.<sup>56</sup> It now appeared that he was blaming Johnson for all of Fremont's troubles, and making Johnson a "scapegoat for his wrath." In addition, Johnson sensed that Phillips had no intention of leaving the society. On the contrary, his objective appeared to be to take control of it, and this meant eliminating all opposition such as Johnson, by "crushing me [Johnson] by the weight of all his power."<sup>57</sup> Johnson had no intention of allowing this to happen, and he mobilized the support of the Executive Committee to stand by him. He was confident that they would aid him because if Phillips could oust him, any one of them could be next. His reliance on the board members was well founded, and again Phillips's attempts at a coup were repulsed.

In November came the triumphant re-election of Abraham Lincoln. He carried every Union state except for Delaware, New Jersey, and Kentucky. With over four million ballots cast, Lincoln defeated McClellan by almost a half million votes and won a

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<sup>56</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 716.

<sup>57</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated November 4, 1864.

resounding victory in the electoral college of 212 to 21.<sup>58</sup> Now what needed to be done was to support the President in his endeavors to pass the Thirteenth Amendment and bring the war to an end. In a letter to Lincoln, Johnson expressed his admiration for the President and encouraged him to continue and complete the work he had started. He praised Lincoln, stating: "God bless you Mr. President, and give you strength and wisdom for the trials to come. A redeemed, disenthralled and regenerated nation will forever speak your name with gratitude and reverence, as worthy to stand side by side with that of the 'Fathers of his country.'"<sup>59</sup>

The news from the battlefield was also encouraging, as Lincoln received notice of one Union victory after another. He had just won a national election, which Johnson and others viewed as a mandate of his emancipation policy, and they felt that his victory should be used to its full advantage to immediately free all the slaves. As Johnson had hoped, the President now began using his powers of persuasion and patronage to get the constitutional amendment passed. Lincoln invited congressmen to the White House, pressuring conservative Republicans and resistant Democrats. He utilized federal patronage and negotiated tactfully in an attempt to obtain the necessary votes.<sup>60</sup>

Lincoln's exceptional political skills are clearly seen in the way he maneuvered to secure the passage of the amendment, which he considered the "King's cure for all evils," in that

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<sup>58</sup> Oates, *With Malice Towards None: A Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 401.

<sup>59</sup> *Abraham Lincoln Papers*, "Robert Todd Lincoln Collection," Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1959, Mina Reese Library microfilm collection # 391118. Letter from Oliver Johnson to Abraham Lincoln dated December 7, 1864. Johnson also joked with the President stating that his mother's name was Lincoln and that perhaps they had a common ancestry: "Subsequently, being myself a product of the 'Lincoln and Johnson ticket', it was quite natural that I should vote as I did in the last election."

<sup>60</sup> Oates, *With Malice Towards None: A Life of Abraham Lincoln*, 405.

it would put to rest any questions regarding the legality of the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>61</sup> Finally, on January 31, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment passed, with every Republican member of the House of Representatives voting for it. The final tally was 119 for the amendment and 58 against, three more votes than the required two-thirds majority.<sup>62</sup> All that remained was for the amendment to be submitted to the states for ratification, which was a formality.

The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment initiated celebrations in antislavery circles across the country. The struggle for freedom had taken Johnson from a young idealist into a man approaching his senior years. When the excitement of the victory had finally subsided, there remained the decision of what to do with the *Standard* and the *Liberator*, as well as the American Anti-Slavery Society itself.

Johnson realized that freedom did not mean legal equality in society for black people. This was one of many pressing issues he wished to address. He determined to turn his attention to these problems, beginning with reconstruction. Because slavery had finally been abolished in America, it appeared to him that there was no reason to continue with an antislavery organization or its publications. There were others, however, who disagreed with him and wanted to use the A.A.S.S. and its resources to further other reform programs. As the war came to a close, internal struggles surfaced within the old society as rival factions debated what place, if any, an antislavery organization had in society once peace had been restored.

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<sup>61</sup> Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume VIII, "Response to a Serenade," 254-255.

<sup>62</sup> Donald, *Lincoln*, 552-554.

## Chapter 9

### Reconstruction and Post-War Reform

For Johnson, the year 1865 was bittersweet. With the rebellion rapidly approaching its end, the controversy within the A.A.S.S. continued. On April 9, 1865, Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, bringing the bloody war to a close. Finally, the nation breathed a sigh of relief as Americans stopped killing Americans. But the victory was tainted with tragedy when only a few days later, on April 14, John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Lincoln while he and his wife were attending a play at Ford's Theater in Washington.<sup>1</sup> The leadership of the nation now fell to Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson. It was not long before abolitionists viewed the former Vice President as someone who could not be trusted to advance a formula of equality for the freedmen.

Oliver Johnson, who had never viewed the President favorably, soon turned against him and his reconstruction policies. This happened at a time of upheaval within the ranks of the abolitionists. Johnson, like many of his generation, had started out believing in several causes, but eventually concentrated his efforts on one course of action, and by 1865 he considered himself an abolitionist. In contrast, the generation that followed him entered the reform movement as abolitionists, and many had evolved into professional agitators. This was at the heart of the dispute over what to do with the old society. Led by Wendell Phillips, this new breed of radical believed the A.A.S.S. should

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<sup>1</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry Of Freedom*, 848, 849. Also Donald, *Lincoln*, 597-599.

now be used as a political organization to fight other problems in society. Phillips was a general without a command, and he viewed the A.A.S.S. as a victorious army returning from battle. It was a ready-made organization, with political contacts, its own publications, and a faithful following. In his view there was only one problem; its present leaders were old and worn out. What the organization needed to take it into the postwar era was new leadership more in tune with the present day dilemmas of the nation. In short, what the society needed was Wendell Phillips at its helm.

The differences over what to do with the old society increased as the war drew to a close. Garrison, who had complete control of the *Liberator*, believed his life's work had come to an end. At a meeting at the Music Hall in Boston, he announced that he would discontinue the paper at the close of the year.<sup>2</sup> He also believed that there was no further need for an antislavery society and that the A.A.S.S. should be disbanded. Johnson did not view his own life's work coming to an end, but he did see his days as an active abolitionist as over. He had always remained a reformer and, when possible, had participated in other causes. Now was the time to start thinking about moving on once the final nail had been placed in the coffin of slavery, that nail being the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. He believed that the society should remain active until this objective had been completed and argued to keep the organization going until the end of the year. Johnson also thought that it would be a pity if the *Standard* ceased publication before the final goal had been accomplished.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Liberator*, March 24, 1865, "Nunc dimitis." "We have concluded to discontinue the *Liberator* at the close of the present year, which will complete THIRTY-FIVE volumes.

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letters to Samuel J. May a member of the Executive Committee dated February 9, 1865 and February 10, 1865. Johnson expressed his anxiety about ending the antislavery movement prematurely in the second

However, he was keenly aware of the fact that Phillips and his supporters were pressing the issues that divided the organization. Although the Executive Committee was made up mostly of the old guard, the society remained divided fairly evenly on the question of dissolution. Several members of Johnson's generation were reluctant to end the organization, as the annual meetings and festivals had become a part of their lives. They were hesitant to break up old friendships and were willing to hear new arguments that would compel them to agree that the old society still had a purpose. As the two factions continued to debate, it was decided that the annual meeting of the society would be held in May in New York City.<sup>4</sup> Johnson again had the task of organizing the event, but he feared that "Phillips will show himself there at the head of a rally of sore-heads, determined to make an issue with Garrison" to assume control of the organization. He did not want the meeting to turn into a struggle over whether the society should be dissolved, but he believed that Phillips would press the subject and that there would be no way to avoid it. Additionally, what to do with the *Standard* would also become a topic, as Phillips and his supporters wanted to assume control of the newspaper as well.<sup>5</sup>

Johnson's apprehensions grew as the convention approached and Phillips continued his assault on the old guard. Through his protracted correspondence with the Executive Committee, Johnson learned that the ranks of the old society were becoming increasingly divided. This upset him greatly, and he wrote to Samuel J. May, "What

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letter when he asserted to May, "It would be a pity I think to stop the *Standard* before the Society can be dissolved. Anxious as I am to see the struggle over and get my release from the war, I don't want to retire before the work is done."

<sup>4</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 154-156.

<sup>5</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter to Samuel J. May dated March 17, 1865.

mortifies me is that this difference is intensified by hateful feelings and personal rivalry.” Instead, he suggested that “We ought to come together in a spirit of consideration toward one another, to listen candidly to one another, and then to vote in a spirit of love and good will.”<sup>6</sup> The reports he received, however, only depressed him further, and he came to the conclusion that the meeting would be one of strife. Johnson felt he was left with no choice except to prepare to defend himself against false accusations and to try and rally as many supporters as possible for the coming confrontation.

By April, the situation had continued to deteriorate. With the annual meeting less than one month away, Johnson realized that the fight would be lost. Unable to convince Garrison and many other members of the Executive Committee to continue on until the end of the year, he too determined it was time to end the old society. He decided to remain with the *Standard* until after the annual meeting, at which time he would submit his resignation. Johnson remained in charge of organizing the event, and he spent the few weeks that were left in busily preparing for it. Nonetheless, he still found time to meet with his old friend Garrison, who stopped off in New York en route to a flag raising ceremony at Fort Sumter where he was one of the honored guests. Although the stopover was brief, it turned out to be a jubilant occasion for both men. While in New York, Garrison received a telegram from Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton granting his son George a furlough to accompany his father on the trip. This was made possible because of Johnson’s influence in Washington and his interceding with the Secretary of War.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, “Jubilee And Dissension: 1865,” 245-249; Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter to Samuel J. May from Oliver Johnson dated March 31, 1865.

<sup>7</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 136-140.

Garrison in turn had a surprise for Johnson, as he told him that the Executive Committee had decided to present him with a check for \$1,000 for his devoted service.<sup>8</sup> The gift came as a most welcome surprise to Johnson, who always needed money, but it also had a greater meaning, as it expressed the appreciation of his colleagues for his labors over the years.

Johnson opted for the Church of the Puritans for the annual meeting, and was careful in selecting the speakers he invited. Still, he was aware that many individuals who were hostile to the old regime would be present. As the time for the convention approached, Phillips and his supporters publicly denounced members of the old guard, saying they had been disloyal to the cause. Johnson was personally accused of treason, a charge that he refuted and challenged anyone to prove. Naturally, his hostility towards Phillips greatly increased at this time, as the attacks on him and other members of the old guard were steadily heightened. Realizing his membership in the A.A.S.S. and work at the *Standard* were near an end, Johnson began making arrangements for his departure.<sup>9</sup> Several options were open to him, but he decided he would accept a position as an associate editor at the *Independent*, a newspaper where his friend and former protégé Theodore Tilton was now the managing editor.<sup>10</sup> By the time of the annual meeting the battle lines had been drawn, and it was clear to everyone that a showdown was inevitable.

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel J. May Papers, letter from Samuel J. May to Oliver Johnson dated May 20, 1865. The official presentation and check came in this letter.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to the Executive Committee (He addressed the letter to My Dear Friends), stating his intent to resign dated April 6, 1865, and a letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated April 8, 1865.

<sup>10</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letters from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated April 23, 1865, April 24, 1865 and April 29, 1865.

The question of whether the A.A.S.S. should be dissolved caused an unusually large attendance at the annual meeting. Members who previously had been apathetic about the operations of the society and rarely showed up now appeared with strong convictions, professing that the termination of the organization would place the freedom and enfranchisement of black people in jeopardy. Phillips had planned his strategy for the meeting well and had enlisted all the available support that he could possibly muster to be present. The old guard was also well represented, but it was clear from the outset that they were outnumbered. Garrison, as the current president of the organization, opened the proceedings and wasted no time in introducing the subject. In an elaborate speech he asserted that the purpose of the organization no longer existed now that emancipation had been accomplished. He closed stating that further antislavery agitation was uncalled for and that the operations of the society should be ended. Immediately upon the completion of the address, Wendell Phillips took the podium and opposed Garrison's motion, and the contest had begun.<sup>11</sup> The meeting was taken up exclusively with this topic, and the debate raged on for two days.

It appeared to Johnson that there was little hope of defeating Phillips's forces, but he believed there was still a slim chance of getting the majority of the members to agree to a compromise proposal. When the time came for him to speak he reiterated his original plan. Johnson argued that the A.A.S.S. should be continued until the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified and the official end of slavery took place. He also reasoned that the Executive Committee should remain in place until that time and that the *Standard* should stay in operation, but only as long as the organization existed, and be disbanded

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<sup>11</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 157, 158.

with it. At the convention he had been able to rally support for his proposals from several powerful members of the society, among them Samuel J. May and William I. Bowditch. He knew, however, that without Garrison and the entire old guard supporting his recommendations, they were a last ditch effort with little chance of success. Phillips had rallied to his side some of the most charismatic members of the antislavery rank and file. They included Frederick Douglass, Stephen S. Foster, Robert Purvis, and Anna E. Dickinson, all of whom spoke enthusiastically of the work that still needed to be done. Their point was that black people would not be free until they were enfranchised. This, they argued was the object of the Declaration of Sentiments and the Constitution of the society. Additionally, there was a great deal of work yet to be done with the Freedman's Aid Society in providing education and necessary skills that would enable the former slaves to assume their rightful place in society.

Johnson's efforts did have some moderate success, as several of Phillips's supporters did ask Garrison to remain as president of the society and entreated Johnson and others to remain with the organization. This gesture of conciliation had very little effect on Johnson, for accepting it would have meant a compromise of his basic principles. He had participated in the writing of the Declaration of Sentiments and the Constitution, and he knew all too well that the object of the organization was solely and exclusively the extermination of slavery. The society was never intended to expand beyond that into other areas of education and civil liberties. He also knew that in this respect, the members of the old guard were in full agreement with him. What he despised most about Phillips was the man's insinuation that he and others were deserters to the movement and were backsliding on their commitment.

The debate was exhausting as Johnson and others were determined to fight it out until the last moment. The final ballot came on May 10 with the members voting 118 to 48 in favor of continuing the society. The result, although disappointing, came as no surprise to Johnson, nor did the election of Wendell Phillips as the organization's new president. In his acceptance speech Phillips adopted a tone of reconciliation, praising the work of those who were retiring. Before it adjourned, the society passed a resolution paying a special tribute to only three individuals, William Lloyd Garrison, Oliver Johnson, and Edmund Quincy, ignoring the rest of the old guard. The new Executive Committee later passed this recognition in an emasculated form. When Johnson and the others finally received the memorial, they refused to accept it and sent it back.<sup>12</sup> For Johnson, it seemed that "the society would have had a more dignified ending if it had dissolved then and there," but his path was now clear, and he moved forward with confidence.<sup>13</sup> After almost three and a half decades as a leading member of the antislavery movement, his days as an active abolitionist had come to an end.

Still, Johnson felt he could not retire without setting the record straight. In his valedictory statement as editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, he not only defended his own position, but supported the actions of the A.A.S.S. in its controversy with Phillips. In a lengthy exposition he argued the absurdity of continuing with an antislavery organization when slavery was now abolished, declaring, "Why run the mill after the grist is out?" Knowing that the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment was

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<sup>12</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated May 21, 1865. Johnson refused to accept the memorial, because he believed the gesture snubbed his colleagues. See also Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 161, 162.

<sup>13</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 390.

merely a formality, he wrote. "There is nothing that Abolitionists can do to make its ratification more certain." He attacked Phillips and his supporters for their tactics and selfish desire to use an antislavery society for other reform movements, stating that, "They should not, it seems to me, persist in occupying an isolated position, but rejoice to mingle with others in the great work of giving to the emancipated people of color the rights and immunities of citizens, and aiding them to rise above all the degrading influences of slavery and caste."<sup>14</sup> His parting shot hit at the core of the dissension within the society, in that the A.A.S.S. that Phillips proposed would not be composed of abolitionists, but of other types of reformers. New causes and ideologies were emerging in which Johnson would actively participate. He never stopped believing in agitation, but he could not endorse the use of what he considered to be an organization that had already accomplished its aim and was now defunct.

Within days, two stalwart supporters of Phillips, Parker Pillsbury and George W. Smalley, filled Johnson's post at the *Standard*. Their editorship lasted only briefly, as almost from the beginning they had problems with Phillips regarding the ideology of the paper, and they left after a disagreement over women's suffrage. By 1866 both men had resigned, and Aaron M. Powell had become the next editor, assisted by Phillips.<sup>15</sup> Under the new leadership the newspaper never regained the prominence of its glory days, as it

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<sup>14</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, May 20, 1865, "Valedictory." Johnson's farewell was also printed in its entirety in the June 2, 1865 edition of the *Liberator*. See also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 388, 389. Johnson gives his own detailed account of the struggle with Phillips and his reasons for resigning from the society.

<sup>15</sup> McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 438. After the adoption of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1870 the *Standard* changed its name to *The National Standard*. In the beginning of 1872 it became a monthly instead of a weekly, and in 1873 it merged with the *National Temperance Advocate*.

never acquired an editor with the same skill or fervor that Johnson had brought with him. In spite of the fact that Johnson retained a sentimental attachment to the paper, it cannot be said that he was saddened by its problems. He still felt deeply injured and aggrieved by his treatment at Phillips's hands. He was especially troubled by the false accusations, and he had expressed this in his farewell commentary. Yet despite his bitterness he took great comfort in the numerous letters he received at this time from all over the country. They congratulated him on his fidelity and dedication to the cause and testified to his impartiality and outstanding conduct, while at the same time praising him for his work at the *Standard*.<sup>16</sup> Almost immediately upon resigning from the *Standard*, Johnson assumed his new post as assistant editor of the *New York Independent* in May 1865. From the outset he was given almost complete autonomy, and his close friendship with Theodore Tilton, who was the managing editor of the paper, made the job even more pleasing. He began by pressing for the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment and was soon involved in other issues as well. Johnson did not abandon his antislavery friends or break completely with what had consumed the greater part of his adult years, but he now began to move forward with his life in a different direction.

The *Independent* was located at 5 Beekman Street only a few blocks from his old office at the *Standard*. Johnson made the transition rather smoothly, as it barely disrupted his daily work habits. Initially his private correspondence to friends expressed his disappointment in the new management of the *Standard* and the direction that the paper had taken, viewing the new leaders as weak and the newspaper dull. But his attention turned elsewhere as he became involved in new challenges. His salary at the

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<sup>16</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated May 28, 1865.

*Independent* was higher than any he had received for his work as an editor in the past, and this gave him a feeling of security he had never had before. The change also appeared to have rejuvenated his health as well as spirit, for he pronounced himself more fit than he had been in the last five years. During the summer of 1865, while visiting relatives in Ohio, Mrs. Johnson became seriously ill. At the time of her visit, her niece Jennie K. Smith died, which affected Mary Anne deeply and hindered her recovery. Johnson feared she would not recover, but as the summer progressed, his wife's letters became more encouraging and her general health improved. Left alone as a bachelor for several months during Mary Anne's absence, Johnson spent a large amount of his time challenging the reconstruction policies of Andrew Johnson, advocating the ballot for the freedmen, and urging the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.<sup>17</sup> He also devoted a great deal of energy to the American Freedmen's Aid Commission. This new organization was a combination of smaller coalitions from across the country and was dedicated to the education and assistance of former slaves. Its president was Bishop Matthew Simpson. William Lloyd Garrison was vice president, and James Miller McKim was corresponding secretary. All of the founders were well known to Johnson, and with his help they established a branch office in New York.<sup>18</sup>

As the summer came to a close, Mary Anne returned home in fairly good health, although not fully recovered. Johnson, however, came down with a serious case of

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<sup>17</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated June 23, 1865. In his letter Johnson expresses his deep concern over his wife's illness as he states "Mrs. Johnson (who is still in Ohio) is quite feeble... and I sometimes fear that she has not strength to rally. Her latest letters, however, are more encouraging."

<sup>18</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America*, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, Volume IV, 165, 166.

influenza that threatened his life. Whether this is what Mary Anne had been suffering from is unknown, but his ailment completely incapacitated him for three weeks, and it took another month for him totally to recover. The Johnsons received another blow with the death of Mrs. Johnson's mother in the fall of 1865, and Mary Anne fell into a deep depression. Johnson recovered from his illness slowly, and by November was back working in his office at the *Independent* full time.<sup>19</sup> He returned to find another battle raging, as the entire history of the A.A.S.S. and its past activities were being challenged and belittled by the same individuals who had created the recent conflict.

This time the disharmony stemmed from a disagreement over the administrative policies of Andrew Johnson. From the outset, Johnson feared that "The conduct of Andy Johnson is indeed [a] matter for deep sadness."<sup>20</sup> Wendell Phillips supported the President and stated, "I have never expressed a doubt with regard to President Johnson," and, "I believe him. I believe he means suffrage."<sup>21</sup> Other reasons also motivated Phillips and his followers. As the year drew to a close, Garrison was preparing to issue the last volume of the *Liberator*. Although once considered agitators, Garrison, Johnson, and other remaining members of the old guard were now viewed much more favorably by the public because of their commitment and loyalty to an honorable cause. Furthermore, they had demonstrated considerable integrity when they stepped down gracefully,

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<sup>19</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to his wife Helen dated December 3, 1865; Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated November 28, 1865.

<sup>20</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May dated March 17, 1865.

<sup>21</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 165. Garrison and others now viewed the actions of Wendell Phillips directed towards achieving personal recognition and individual power.

believing their task completed. Phillips, however, had ignited controversy for what many people were beginning to interpret as purely personal gain. He had aspired to running for governor, but by late 1865 his popularity had begun to wane. Phillips's ambitions, along with what President Johnson called his "Restoration" policy, did not fulfill the requirements of what anyone in the antislavery rank and file believed was needed.

Andrew Johnson did not believe that emancipation meant full equality for the freedmen. Though he had denounced slavery, he believed that blacks were inferior. The President had also attacked slavery as an economic system yet found it impossible for the federal government to help alleviate the war's devastating economic aftermath for blacks. He made no attempt to secure the ballot for the freedmen, but he offered amnesty to those Southerners who would take an oath of allegiance. In order to win readmission, a state had to revoke its ordinance of secession, abolish slavery, ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, and repudiate Confederate and state war debts.<sup>22</sup> The actions of the President were proving to be embarrassing to Phillips, and he needed a springboard to get him back on track.

On December 18, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment was ratified and incorporated into the Constitution. Johnson rejoiced at the news, as did all his colleagues, as with this final measure slavery was abolished forever within the country. The ratification of the amendment also came at an opportune time for Garrison, who, as

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction 1863-1869*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974, 141-146. Also James E. Sefton, *Andrew Johnson and the Uses of Constitutional Power*, Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1980, 106, and Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 239-247.

promised, on December 29, 1865 issued the final edition of the *Liberator*.<sup>23</sup> Johnson joined many others in celebrating Garrison's career and the importance of the *Liberator*. This only antagonized Phillips, who increased his attacks on the old society and its membership.<sup>24</sup> Johnson had objected to Phillips's continued assaults, and his dislike for him now increased as he considered Phillips to be a hypocrite. He also expressed his personal pain for what he regarded as the betrayal of a friend, "and deep mortification" for Phillips, a champion of the antislavery cause, who now turned against the old guard and sought to use the organization for his own purposes. Johnson also believed that more had to be done to defend the A.A.S.S. from the revisionist accounts of the movement that Phillips was spreading. Johnson became concerned that many of the old guard were ignoring these problems, and he encouraged many of his colleagues to follow his example and confront Phillips. He received a letter from Garrison castigating Phillips and printed it in the *Independent*.<sup>25</sup> Garrison realized that Phillips would take his letter in the *Independent* "as a mortal affront, as it was certainly sharp and pointed."

Garrison was now unemployed and in need of money, and Johnson asked him to write articles for the paper defending the A.A.S.S. and outlining what remained to be

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<sup>23</sup> *Liberator*, December 29, 1865, "Valedictory." This last issue also included a letter from Johnson to Garrison praising him for his contribution to the movement and approving the termination of the paper now that slavery had been abolished. See also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated December 23, 1865.

<sup>24</sup> *New York Independent*, January 11, 1866, "The Euthanasia of the *Liberator*." Also see articles in the *New York Tribune* by Henry B. Stanton, and the *New York Nation* by Octavius B. Frothingham dated January 4, 1866.

<sup>25</sup> *New York Independent*, February 3, 1866. Garrison wrote a blunt letter attacking Phillips and defending himself. He later confided to his close friends, "the breach is now, doubtless....past healing." Note also the William Lloyd Garrison Papers, letter to James Miller McKim dated February 11, 1866.

done for the freedmen. The agreement was that he would be paid for as many articles as he could submit. Although Johnson was officially only the associate editor, he had been given complete autonomy at the newspaper and had the power to make this gesture.<sup>26</sup> With the *Liberator* discontinued, Garrison was eager to have an outlet where his voice could be heard. Moreover, he was extremely pleased by the overture of his friend and replied that he would submit articles randomly, but only if they were printed unabridged.<sup>27</sup> Johnson agreed, and was able to secure support in his defense of the A.A.S.S. as Garrison and various other members of the abolitionist movement submitted articles for publication in the *Independent*.<sup>28</sup> This also added strength to his advocacy of the radical Republicans in Congress who were attempting to thwart the reconstruction policies of Andrew Johnson. Johnson theorized that the *Independent* would be an ideal forum not only to defend the old society, but also to denounce the reconstruction policies of the administration. Since the new managers of the *Standard* had taken over, the readership of the paper had decreased considerably, while that of the *Independent* had risen to a total circulation of 66,000. Through Johnson's efforts, the *Independent* now became the leading voice of the antislavery movement, both past and present.

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<sup>26</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated February 6, 1866.

<sup>27</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated February 11, 1866.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Independent*, March 29, 1866, "Sonnets for the Times." Garrison submitted four sonnets for publication, which Johnson gladly printed. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated March 25, 1866. Garrison while running to catch a train fell and seriously injured his right shoulder and arm. In this correspondence he explained that the accident had incapacitated him and that even writing was painful. Garrison then took an extended trip to Europe and it was not until his return that Johnson again reiterated his offer to Garrison asking him to become a regular contributor to the *Independent*.

Garrison's contributions appeared often in the *Independent*, but Johnson knew that his fees from the newspaper were only a small part of the income that Garrison required. Johnson was not alone in his concern for Garrison. Other members of the old guard were aware that he had fallen on difficult times financially and that he was not in good health. He had recently fallen and injured his right shoulder and arm, which reduced his mobility and made writing painful. The injuries kept him off the lecture circuit, which he had hoped would provide the necessary funds to sustain him and his family in the coming year. To add to his worries, his wife's health had deteriorated, and she had become an invalid. Johnson, along with several other prominent members of the antislavery rank and file, decided to organize a testimonial for Garrison. On April 18, 1866, a large group met at the home of Henry I. Bowditch, the former editor of two Boston newspapers, the *North Star* and *Latimer's Journal*, and author of a highly successful 48-page pamphlet on the legality of slavery entitled *The Constitutionality of Slavery*. They formed a committee for the purpose of establishing a national testimonial in grateful recognition of Garrison's part in bringing an end to slavery in the United States. Their intent was to raise \$50,000, a sum they believed would take care of him for the remainder of his life. Not everyone was optimistic about the outcome, for in the past testimonials had been attempted for the British abolitionist George Thompson and the family of John Brown, but both had failed. This time the results were different, primarily due to the enthusiasm of Johnson, the committee members, and the many notable individuals they enlisted across the northeast. Johnson did his part in New York, while others such as Samuel J. May called upon many distinguished citizens in Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington. They succeeded in securing the signatures of 85

celebrated personages, including two cabinet members, 11 governors and ex-governors, 17 senators, 14 congressmen, 35 businessmen, and six prominent literary men. They attached the signatures to a letter and distributed it across the country. The response they received was considerable, and even though they were unable to attain their goal they managed to raise a total of \$33,010.23. Although Garrison did not receive the money until March 10, 1868, as it required some time to accumulate the funds, the \$3,000 mortgage on his house was paid in 1866.<sup>29</sup> Johnson seemed to find an enormous amount of joy and pride in the testimonial for his friend. The contributions came from a cross section of America that included politicians, clergy, famous writers, and reformers. Many had disagreed at times with the course of the A.A.S.S. and its leaders, but Johnson viewed the success of the testimonial as a reaffirmation of his belief in moral agitation, in which all his basic principles were rooted. It was almost as if the country were saying, "You were right all along."<sup>30</sup>

With the war finally over, the nation faced the problem of healing the wounds that the terrible armed struggle had inflicted on the entire country. The government was also faced with new problems, the most perplexing being the status of the newly freed people in American society. During the first year of his administration, Andrew Johnson demonstrated that his approach to the national problem differed entirely from Lincoln's. The President was headstrong, opinionated, and bigoted in his post-war policy. He had no sympathy with the ideology of human equality espoused by Oliver Johnson and his

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<sup>29</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 178-189. Garrison was deeply touched by this gesture, and considered it a great honor. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, "VI Retirement And Financial Security: 1866," 366, 377.

<sup>30</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 394.

comrades in Congress, and he refused to cooperate or even compromise with them. Furthermore, the President was unable to initiate a policy of his own, which hindered reconstruction efforts and almost brought them to a standstill. The President's position created a unique situation, and the Congress was puzzled at how to combat the problem. The Republican Party itself was divided into three groups and was unable to unite against the policies of the administration. The conservatives cooperated with the President; the moderates were willing to settle measures and compromise on major issues like the Fourteenth Amendment; and the radicals, led by Thaddeus Stevens, were prepared to compromise on minor issues in order to achieve their more extreme measures of reconstruction. As the President became more intractable, conservatives and moderates chose to cooperate with their more radical colleagues in an attempt to get some measures moved forward. Basically, the President's reconstruction policy transformed many of them into radicals.<sup>31</sup>

Through his work at the *Standard* and his active interest in politics, Johnson had befriended many of the elected officials in Congress who were advocating the right of suffrage for blacks. Radical leaders such as Charles Sumner and Henry Wilson in the Senate and George W. Julian in the House of Representatives had been active in the abolitionist movement. Nathaniel P. Banks and other former antislavery activists took a more centrist view of reconstruction, but still favored enfranchisement for the newly freed people. Johnson, who had always been suspicious of the President's motives, was at first optimistic. In reality, the President never believed in universal suffrage or the

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<sup>31</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969, 334, 336-338. Trefousse argues that Andrew Johnson was impeached for political reasons, and not because he violated the office of the presidency as outlined in the Constitution.

right of the federal government to dictate voting requirements to the states.<sup>32</sup> It soon became clear that the chief executive had no intention of allowing the vote to be given to blacks, and Johnson's original suspicions became a reality. With the help of Theodore Tilton, he used the *Independent* to support the radical position in Congress.<sup>33</sup>

Republicans of the Thirty-ninth Congress worked feverishly to put together a reconstruction program. Both houses of Congress passed two important pieces of legislation: the Freedmen's Bureau bill and the Civil Rights bill.<sup>34</sup> The main objective of the first bill was to extend the existence of the Freedmen's Bureau and allow it to continue indefinitely. It protected freedmen not only in the states that had been in rebellion, but in all parts of the country, and extended military jurisdiction to protect blacks in any state that discriminated against them in its laws. It also allowed the President to set aside large tracts of public lands to be parceled out in forty-acre plots to be rented or purchased by blacks. The Civil Rights bill declared the inhabitants of every state and territory entitled to equal privileges and immunities irrespective of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. It made it a crime for anyone to deny these rights under the law. Additionally, it declared that all persons of African descent born in the United States were citizens.<sup>35</sup> The President, who originally had hinted at approving both bills, had no intention of signing them and used his veto power on both pieces of

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<sup>32</sup> Hans L. Trefousse. *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989, 222-225.

<sup>33</sup> *New York Independent*, December 25, 1865; January 4, 1866.

<sup>34</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, Session 1, 298, 299, 323, 606, 607, 655, 658, 688. The Freedmen's Bureau bill passed both houses of Congress on January 25, 1866, and the Civil Rights bill passed on February 2, 1866.

<sup>35</sup> Benedict, *A Compromise of Principles: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction 1863-1869*, 147-150.

legislation. The Republicans were outraged by the President's actions, as they had compromised on the issue of black suffrage specifically to gain his support.

Once both bills had been passed, the Congress quickly turned its attention to a constitutional amendment that would alter the basis of state representation in Congress. The bill passed the House of Representatives, but it met fierce opposition in the Senate. Taking the lead, Charles Sumner demanded that the amendment include the right of suffrage for blacks.<sup>36</sup> He and other radicals believed that states would discriminate in voting rights on the basis of color if this were not specifically added to the amendment. Sumner requested and received public support from Johnson and Tilton at the *Independent*.<sup>37</sup> Johnson also coordinated his efforts with several individuals lobbying in Washington led by Frederick Douglass and George T. Downing. In addition, he and Tilton were able to rally to Sumner's side a large number of abolitionists, many of whom had opposed each other over the division of the A.A.S.S. at the end of the war, but all of whom agreed on the right of suffrage for the freedmen. This included Wendell Phillips, who now controlled the *Standard* and used it to support the suffrage issue, but not nearly with the same effectiveness as the *Independent*.

Despite the enormous effort by the radicals, the proposed amendment never included the right of suffrage for blacks. In the end, a compromise had to be reached before the Senate finally approved it. With his veto, the President had destroyed every radical and centrist reconstruction measure and left the Congress with no policy at all.

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<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Globe*, 39<sup>th</sup> Congress, Session 1, 704, 705. On February 6 and 7 Sumner delivered a speech in the Senate entitled "Equal Rights of All," which outlined his reasons for universal suffrage for the freedmen. See Also David Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War*, New York: Knopf, 1960.

<sup>37</sup> *New York Independent*, February 6, 1866.

The only option remaining was to attempt to override the President's veto, but in order to do so, the proposed legislation would have to be watered down even further to secure the additional votes. The situation climaxed with failure of the initial effort to pass the Freedmen's Bureau bill in February. However, a similar bill was introduced later, and it eventually passed that summer. The Congress did secure enough votes to pass both the Civil Rights bill and the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, or reconstruction amendment. But the great failure of the first civil rights movement of the 1860s was that the amendment never incorporated into the Constitution the right of suffrage for blacks. Finally, in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified. It forbade the states and federal government from denying suffrage to any citizen on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Yet while it guaranteed black suffrage with constitutional sanction, the amendment said nothing about voting requirements or the right to hold office.<sup>38</sup> Democrats soon developed plans to limit black voting power by applying poll taxes, which disenfranchised the bulk of the black population. Reconstruction finished the work of abolishing slavery forever, but ultimately it failed because it created a system where blacks became second class citizens and were subservient to the same individuals who previously had owned them as chattel.

Johnson lamented the outcome of events and saw no reason to celebrate the passing of the amendment. The President had demonstrated the type of racism Oliver Johnson had anticipated, and his actions had thwarted any chances of success for a radical reconstruction. Most disappointing was the Congress's failure to declare equality for the freedmen. By its inability to overrule the President's veto, Congress had reflected

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<sup>38</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 246-268, 417, 422, 446-449.

the racist sentiments of the large majority of the white American population. The government, like the people it represented, was not prepared to accept a free black population with the same rights and protections as white people. The black population, however, viewed racial prejudice as their principal enemy. The only alternative was colonization. Discouraged by the obstacles they faced in the United States, colonization did appeal to some black leaders, but they were a small minority. The answer for most black Americans was black uplift, with the emphasis on self-improvement, through education and community development. Johnson agreed with the sentiments of most blacks, as did most abolitionists. By improving their condition the black population would not only attain upward mobility in society, but also contradict the assumptions upon which prejudice rested.<sup>39</sup> Johnson, who had argued vigorously for black suffrage, now mourned its failure.<sup>40</sup> At the same time he and his associates in Washington increasingly expressed their dissatisfaction with Andrew Johnson. The President had shown leniency toward the states that had been in rebellion, which Johnson viewed as intolerable. He had single handedly impeded the radicals, and at the same time produced a complete break with Congress and his party. Yet the radicals were not willing to accept defeat, as they still wielded a considerable amount of power. As the President continued to distance himself from the Congress, the radicals mustered support to remove him from office. Johnson would support these efforts as well, for he not only objected to his policies, but he considered the President a danger to the overall well-being of the country.

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1998, 23-35, 62, 246, 255.

<sup>40</sup> *New York Independent*, June 13, 1866 and June 21, 1866.

In his support of the radical Republicans Johnson again demonstrated that he was a man ahead of his time. He believed in a society with no racial or ethnic boundaries, and he deplored the failure of reconstruction that prevented this from becoming a reality. He could not have known that it would take 100 years before the country had the courage to complete the work it had begun when it abolished slavery or that when Americans finally did confront the issue of civil rights, they would pick up right where reconstruction had left off, with the Fourteenth Amendment. Johnson did, however, live to see the formation of the Black Codes, the Jim Crow laws, and the terror of the Ku Klux Klan. The post-war years produced the kind of appalling conditions he had feared, but Johnson never compromised on his belief in the basic principle of equal rights for all human beings, and he continued to struggle for reform for the remainder of his life. Long after his death, the goals of Johnson and his colleagues would finally be met with the passing of the civil rights legislation of the 1960s.

While Johnson followed the events in Washington closely, his work at the *Independent* covered a variety of subjects as well as the problems of reconstruction. The energy he had focused on abolition could now be concentrated on other reform movements. He now began to involve himself more in the temperance movement, in which his wife had been a leader for sometime. He also spoke out on the topic of women's rights and other subjects, such as the role of the Church, immigration, the rights of workers, and industrial reform. Furthermore, he encouraged his friend Garrison and others to participate as well.

By 1867, Garrison's health was renewed, and he spent the better part of the year traveling through Europe. He had received an appointment by the American Freedmen's

Union Commission to represent it at an international antislavery conference to be held that summer at Paris. Upon his return, Johnson again invited him to become a regular contributor to the *Independent*. “You will speak,” he wrote, “to a great audience of whom your real sentiments are hardly known, and some of whom, doubtless, are filled with prejudice against you.”<sup>41</sup> The offer came almost in the form of a challenge, and this time Garrison did not hesitate in accepting. Within the next seven years, Garrison contributed more than 100 articles to the paper. As promised, Johnson paid him \$25 for each article at first, and increased the fee later on. The articles touched on a wide range of subjects, many of which included the reform movements that Johnson was writing about.<sup>42</sup> Johnson was not only able to help his friend, but the articles proved to be an enormous success as many readers wrote in requesting to see more essays from Garrison. Johnson told him he would print whatever he sent in as quickly as he received it and offered to pay Garrison an additional \$15 for every editorial that was two-thirds of a column.<sup>43</sup> Together, the two men were not only able to promote various reforms, they also became the most prominent guardians of the antislavery movement, defending it

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<sup>41</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated January 27, 1868.

<sup>42</sup> *New York Independent*, December 31, 1868. This article advocated the right of suffrage for women. Other submissions included a theme supporting prohibition, March 31, 1870, and “The Common School,” an article advocating the admittance of all children to the public school system, regardless of race or ethnic background, April 16, 1874.

<sup>43</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated April 7, 1868. Johnson expressed the sentiments of the readers as he wrote, “One of the very best and ablest of our orthodox ministers expressed himself as highly delighted with your articles, and said they were not only specimens of fine English, but pervaded by an eminently noble and Christian spirit.” Also Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 236, 237.

against critics who were attempting to belittle the contribution of the A.A.S.S. and its membership.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, as tensions intensified between Congress and the President, the chief executive took no initiative to alleviate the situation. In fact, his actions only alienated him even further. Having failed to control the party because of his reconstruction policies, he found himself in a difficult position. As his efforts to regain control faltered, he attempted to found a new political organization, the Union Party. Here also, his efforts were unsuccessful. Additionally, he had a falling out with several key individuals, most notably the commander of the army General Ulysses S. Grant and his own Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Grant was fast becoming the frontrunner for the presidential nomination, and Stanton was the only Lincoln appointee still in Andrew Johnson's cabinet.<sup>45</sup> Stanton and Oliver Johnson were old acquaintances, and their relationship dated back to before the war. Stanton had often stopped in at the *Standard* to discuss strategy with Johnson in order to coordinate their efforts. The Secretary of War supported the radicals against the President, and Johnson in turn allied himself to Stanton.

Viewing Stanton as disloyal and thoroughly disgusted with his actions, on February 21, 1868, the President dismissed him from his post. The radicals, believing the President to be a serious impediment to reconstruction, had begun looking for a way to

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<sup>44</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison's son Frank dated February 7, 1867. Johnson requested that he send him a copy of the "Groton Pamphlet," along with a copy of a letter from his old friend Silas Hawley. He stated the pamphlet had "mistakes in regards to the 'Come-Outers' discussion of 1840-48," and Johnson wanted the opportunity to correct them. Johnson continuously reviewed articles about the antislavery movement his entire life.

<sup>45</sup> Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, 287-292, 306-334.

get rid of him. The dismissal of Stanton gave them what they believed they needed. They charged the President with the violation of the Tenure of Office Act, which forbade the chief executive from removing civil officials, including members of his cabinet, without the consent of the Senate. They charged that Stanton's dismissal violated the Constitution and was an impeachable offense. Led by Thaddeus Stevens, radicals in the House of Representatives impeached the President on eleven charges.<sup>46</sup> The first eight counts dealt with the Tenure of Office Act, the ninth with violation of the Command of the Army Act, and the tenth and eleventh charged the President with slandering Congress and not enforcing the Reconstruction Acts. The trial before the Senate lasted throughout April and May 1868. The radicals put considerable pressure on all the Republican Senators to convict the President, but in the end the final vote of 35 to 19 fell one vote short of the two-thirds majority needed.<sup>47</sup>

Johnson supported the radicals in their attempt to oust the President from office and was extremely disappointed at their failure.<sup>48</sup> In this instance, perhaps the morality of the issue got the better of him. Johnson had always attempted to look beyond the immediate gains of his actions, and his support of the impeachment of the President demonstrated a rare shortsightedness in his thinking. For a brief period of time the radicals wielded power that surpassed their numbers. Certainly the President had posed

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<sup>46</sup> Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens, Nineteenth-Century Egalitarian*, 208-211, 220-228, 232-235.

<sup>47</sup> Michael Les Benedict, *The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1973, 26-34; Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 336; Sefton, *Andrew Johnson and the Uses of Constitutional Power*, 157-159.

<sup>48</sup> *New York Independent*, July 30, 1868. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated December 12, 1867. Even before the Congress took official action, Johnson was in favor of replacing the President.

obstacles to the radicals which they could not overcome, especially on the critical issue of black suffrage. But their reasons for impeachment were political, never really meeting the standard of "high crimes or misdemeanors" as decreed in the Constitution. If they had been successful, the result could have destroyed the tripartite system of government that still exists today. If the Congress were allowed to impeach the chief executive every time it disagreed with his policies, the executive branch of the government would have been severely weakened. The result could very well have been a parliamentary type government with an executive and judiciary branch with few powers. The senators recognized this danger in their decision to acquit the President, and they rose above party politics and individuals egos and decided in favor of the common good of the republic. Rather than destroy the government, they chose to let the President finish his remaining nine months in office, at which time they would proceed with a new election for the presidency. Perhaps Johnson had been induced to support the impeachment out of frustration over the suffrage issue or the injustices faced by blacks in the South. Unquestionably he was disgusted with the President, but in making his decision he had overestimated the strength of the radicals and apparently never really considered the long-range implications of the conviction of the President.

Through the *Independent* Johnson supported Ulysses S. Grant for the presidency in 1868. Theodore Tilton was not overly enthusiastic about Grant's nomination, and in articles written in the *Independent*, he expressed serious doubts about his ability to lead the country.<sup>49</sup> The corruption Johnson witnessed during Grant's first term as chief

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<sup>49</sup> *New York Independent*, August 29, 1867 and September 5, 1867. Tilton worried that Grant had surrendered to the President (Andrew Johnson) when he removed Edwin M. Stanton as Secretary of War. He also believed others could easily maneuver him.

executive would lead him to alter his opinion of the war hero and challenge his re-election four years later. He also continued to remain active in numerous reform movements once the antislavery crusade was over, his favorite being the Progressive Friends in Longwood, Pennsylvania. Johnson's work at the *Independent* no longer required his constant oversight, freeing him to travel and attend meetings of numerous reform movements that he supported. These were often business trips that could be combined with visits to old friends and acquaintances, and Johnson planned carefully to be able to attend the yearly meetings of the Progressive Friends. The Johnsons were also hosts for many antislavery dignitaries who visited New York from across the country and Europe. At these times it became common for commemorative celebrations to be held, and awards and gifts were often distributed.<sup>50</sup> Life was pleasant for the Johnsons at this time, as the great struggle of their lives had been completed. Johnson had a position he enjoyed for which he was well paid, and small earnings from his wife's lectures supplemented the family's income. Friends surrounded them, and Johnson was beginning to receive considerable recognition for his role in the antislavery movement. This period of contentment would be short lived, however, as the decade of the 1870s

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<sup>50</sup> Larry Gara, "A Glorious Time: The 1874 Abolitionist Reunion in Chicago," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, LXV (1974), 280-292. Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated December 18, 1867. The letter described the preparations for the arrival of the wife of a Spanish delegate on a mission to Cuba who had attended the antislavery conference in Paris; letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated May 12, 1868. Garrison notified Johnson that he might not be able to attend the annual meeting of the Progressive Friends, scheduled for June 4 through 7. He is aware that the meeting will be taken up primarily with Grant's nomination and that there are those who will oppose it. Garrison knows Johnson will be prepared to counter any attacks against Grant, and he extends his complete support; letter from William Lloyd Garrison to his wife Helen dated June 8, 1868. Garrison described the proceedings at Longwood, as well as Johnson's participation.

would bring great changes in his life. Not only would he be faced with new challenges, but he would also suffer tragedy and become involved in the most scandalous controversy of the century.

Henry Ward Beecher, an extremely close friend of both Johnson and Tilton, was perhaps the most prominent religious leader in the country. Beecher presided over Plymouth Church in Brooklyn. In 1849, the original building had burned down, and its replacement was a magnificent structure that held 2,800 seats. Beecher did not own the church. Henry C. Bowen, a silk merchant and dry goods salesman, owned a third of the land the church was built on and received a large share of the income from the pew rentals. In fact, it was Bowen who had persuaded Beecher to move from a small church in Indiana in 1848. The church was an extremely profitable endeavor, as regular parishioners obtained their pew rentals at annual auctions, paying hundreds of dollars to reserve a seat. Beecher received an extraordinary salary of \$22,000 a year, and had an additional income from lectures and writings of over \$20,000. Bowen also owned the *New York Independent*, a leading antislavery publication. His wife Lucy was the daughter of Lewis Tappan, a prominent abolitionist. In 1856 Bowen hired the young progressive Theodore Tilton, and in 1861 he appointed Beecher as the editor. After only one year at the helm of the newspaper, Beecher took an extended leave of absence to lecture in England in favor of the Union cause. Unbeknownst to anyone, the lecture tour was used as a cover-up for his personal indiscretions, and in 1862 Tilton was promoted to the editorship of the paper.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Joe Fodor, "Loving Thy Neighbor," *Brooklyn Bridge*, IV, No.6 (February 1999), 42-47.

By 1870 Theodore Tilton had made a name for himself as a reformer and was very popular on the lecture circuit. During his absences Beecher frequently visited Tilton's wife Elizabeth, who had offered to help him work on various manuscripts. During a twenty-month period they engaged in an adulterous affair that would eventually result in what has been described as the "nation's first media feeding frenzy." On a July evening in 1870, Elizabeth confessed her guilt to Theodore. Hoping to avoid scandal, Tilton at first went about his business as editor of the *Independent*, attempting to forget his wife's confession. But no matter how much he absorbed himself in his work, he was tormented by his wife's admission on that hot summer night. In the hope that talking about his personal problem might afford him some emotional relief, he sought out the one man he believed he could trust, his friend and colleague Oliver Johnson.

Tilton remained tormented by his wife's infidelity. During his absence she had written him letters of passionate devotion, and in his need to understand her behavior, he appealed to Martha Bradshaw, the oldest and most intimate friend of his wife. Martha Bradshaw taught Sunday School at Plymouth Church, and she revered Beecher. Bradshaw found him "sick with misery and wretchedness," and told him she could not help him.<sup>52</sup>

The entire Beecher family was well known to Johnson. Henry Ward's father Dr. Lyman Beecher had been the leading advocate for colonization during the 1830s. As head of the evangelical clergy in New England, if not America, Lyman Beecher held tremendous power within the Church and helped persuade the majority of the clergyman to favor colonization over abolition. In 1833 Johnson and Garrison had tried to persuade

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<sup>52</sup> Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, 178.

the elder Beecher to assist them in forming the A.A.S.S., but they were bitterly disappointed.<sup>53</sup> Henry Ward followed in his father's footsteps, as he viewed abolitionism as an unpopular cause and saw nothing to be gained by assisting the antislavery crusade. By the 1850s the antislavery movement had expanded in the north, and abolitionist views were gaining acceptance. It was at this time that Henry Ward Beecher began advocating an end to slavery. Johnson knew that Henry Ward was an opportunist and not the saintly individual his parishioners and the public believed him to be. He had no doubts that Beecher had wronged his friend, but he also knew that he was almost as powerful as his father, so he counseled Tilton to proceed with caution. "You cannot paint too blackly the wrongs you have suffered," Johnson told him, but he also cautioned Tilton and pleaded with him saying, "I beg you to remember that nothing can change the law which makes forgiveness noble and godlike."<sup>54</sup> Though Johnson was well aware of the true character of Henry Ward Beecher, even he was to be stunned by the events that followed.

Within a short time rumors began to spread, and Johnson knew that several individuals, particularly Beecher's wife Eunice, were behind much of the malicious gossip. She had long been aware of her husband's infidelities and hoped that the threat of a public scandal would frighten Henry Ward into coming to his senses. Johnson, who found Eunice Beecher an extremely disagreeable person, called her "one of the most jealous women that ever lived," and he termed Henry Ward's life with her a "hell on

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<sup>53</sup> Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 44, 45. In response to the request for assistance in forming the A.A.S.S. Lyman Beecher replied, "I have too many irons in the fire already. Your zeal is commendable; but you are misguided." See also Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, 46-51.

<sup>54</sup> *New York Sun*, July 22, 1874. Johnson's advice to Tilton was reported in this issue. Also Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, 205.

earth.”<sup>55</sup> Still, he found no excuse for Beecher’s conduct and continued to aid Tilton. As the rumors continued to spread, Bowen became nervous about the scandal, and made a decision to discharge Tilton.

While many prominent individuals including Garrison believed that Beecher was being accused falsely, Johnson did not.<sup>56</sup> He now became a mediator between Tilton, Beecher, and Bowen. On Christmas Eve, he visited Tilton and told him that “an avalanche” of malicious gossip about him had been poured into Bowen’s ears. On Christmas day, accompanied by Tilton, Johnson went to Bowen’s house for a confrontation. Johnson, angered by the false accusations against his friend, stated, “I know that some of the stories told against him are false and that malicious persons are on his track, with the intention of hounding him down.”<sup>57</sup> Johnson was extremely persuasive in assuring Bowen of Tilton’s innocence in the entire matter, and the incident would have been put to rest except for one detail. Unknown to Johnson, over seven years earlier, Bowen had written a letter to Tilton fuming with a terrible anger against Henry Ward Beecher. He professed that “One word from me would make a *revolution* throughout Christendom.” The letter had coincided with Beecher’s trip to Europe and

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<sup>55</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, these statements by Oliver Johnson were reported in the newspaper on August 1, 1874 and August 2, 1874.

<sup>56</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to his son Wendell dated August 5, 1874. Garrison viewed the entire Tilton-Beecher scandal as “a most sickening revelation.” Moreover, he did not agree with Johnson’s support of Tilton as he expressed that, “While Beecher has lacked circumspection and laid himself open to suspicion of criminal conduct, it is my belief that he has been foully, falsely and maliciously accused by Tilton.”

<sup>57</sup> Altina L. Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982, 87, 88. This is an excellent work that examines the entire scandal and the trial as well as their impact on the country. Additionally Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, 209, 210. See also the *New York Sun*, February 7, 1876.

Tilton's elevation to editor of the *Independent*. The letter was not specific concerning Beecher's offense, but now everything came out in the open. When Bowen had appointed Beecher to the editorship of the *Independent* in 1861, he was unaware that his wife Lucy was having an affair with the minister. The following year Lucy became seriously ill, and on her deathbed she confessed to her husband that she had had an adulterous affair with Henry Ward Beecher and that the relationship ended when Beecher had left her for another woman. Beecher admitted his guilt to Bowen, whose prestige would have suffered greatly if the affair became public. Therefore, he covered it up, and even allowed Beecher to preach at Lucy's funeral. But Tilton, once his initial anguish had passed, chose to deal boldly with Beecher. He demanded that Bowen immediately dismiss Beecher from the pulpit and further demanded that Beecher leave Brooklyn as well. Johnson backed Tilton, asserting he also had additional "evidence that would convict him [Beecher] in a court of justice." should Beecher try to lie his way out of things.<sup>58</sup> Still, all of those involved agreed that a private understanding should be reached in order to protect their reputations. Bowen agreed to back Tilton and Johnson in their demands. Tilton wrote a letter, which called for an apology, and signed it. Bowen, who was supposed to have placed his signature next to Tilton's, never signed the letter. Upon receiving the dispatch, Beecher, with the help of the congregation at Plymouth Church, immediately retaliated by instigating a public character assassination of Tilton.

Over the next several years the negotiations continued, with Johnson and others attempting to put together a compromise. Afraid that the entire matter would become

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<sup>58</sup> Theodore Tilton Papers, Bowen's quote is recorded by Tilton when he recounted the incident. Johnson also confirmed the statement. See also the *New York Sun*, February 7, 1876. Johnson wrote to Bowen, "I know something of the evidence you do not against Mr. Beecher. That evidence I have seen."

general knowledge, Bowen eventually threatened both Johnson and Tilton declaring that if they ever revealed his wife's infidelity, "I'll fire you on the spot!"<sup>59</sup> It was soon clear that Bowen was not going to back Tilton and, although at times there seemed to be hope that the crisis would be contained, both he and Johnson decided to resign from the *Independent*. For a while Beecher and Tilton came to a truce, with Beecher and a friend of Tilton's giving him money to start his own newspaper, the *Golden Age*. Johnson's skills as an editor were always in demand, and he quickly assumed a new post as the editor of the *New York Weekly Tribune*. Rumors continued to spread as an increased number of individuals became involved in the scandal, and soon newspapers across the country began picking up the story. Reporters investigated Beecher's past liaisons as far back as his days in Indiana, while the congregational community attacked Tilton as a "knave and a dog."<sup>60</sup> Both men became the favorite targets of cartoonists. The entire incident culminated when Tilton finally had enough and filed suit against Beecher in a Brooklyn court, alleging alienation of affection and claiming \$100,000 in damages.

The trial began on January 11, 1875, and lasted over six months. Tilton's side called a dozen witnesses to testify, and Tilton himself spent 11 days on the witness stand. Incriminating letters were admitted into evidence, and many of those who testified gave extremely damaging testimony against Beecher. Meanwhile, Beecher had secured one of the best defense attorneys in the country to defend him, William Evarts, who had represented Andrew Johnson during his impeachment trial. Beecher's charisma never

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<sup>59</sup> Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, 215.

<sup>60</sup> Fodor, "Loving Thy Neighbor," *Brooklyn Bridge*, 46. This statement was made by the head of a committee of orthodox Congregationalist churches that investigated the matter and wanted Plymouth Church to clear its pastor of all charges. The investigation appears to have been a minimal one, at best.

served him better, as he denied all the allegations from his pulpit and asked the congregation to support him. They responded enthusiastically, collecting an enormous sum of \$100,000 to pay for his legal defense. It took Evarts four months to present his case as he called 95 witnesses to the stand. Most of those who testified attacked the credibility of Tilton and his defenders. Beecher's testimony itself was astounding, as he emphatically denied any guilt and misleadingly answered questions with, "I can't recollect," or "I presume," and "I don't know," 894 times. The trial made sensational news and was publicly reported across the entire nation and in Europe. On July 2, 1875, the "Trial of the Century" ended with a hung jury, 9 to 3 for acquittal.<sup>61</sup>

The aftermath of the trial left Tilton ruined. Divorced and disgraced, he left for Paris where he remained until he died in 1907. Beecher never regained the moral standing and power he previously held, but he did remain loved by his congregation until he died in 1887. Over 50,000 people attended his funeral, and he was laid to rest next to his wife Eunice in Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. A simple tombstone inscribed with the words "He Thinketh No Evil" marks the gravesite. Years after the trial ended, the scandal continued to make headlines. In 1878, after living secluded for years, Elizabeth Tilton broke her silence and wrote a letter to a local newspaper reaffirming her original confession.<sup>62</sup> She lived out her remaining days in solitude and died in 1897.

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<sup>61</sup> Henry Ward Beecher Papers, trial transcripts. Also see the Beecher-Tilton Scandal Scrapbooks. This catalogue is material collected during the scandal and the trial. It contains newspaper articles, letters, and assorted documentation, most of which was published in Brooklyn.

<sup>62</sup> *New York Times*, April 6, 1878. Finally breaking her long period of silence Elizabeth Tilton wrote a letter to the newspapers confessing her affair with Henry Ward Beecher, which is printed in this issue.

Johnson viewed the entire incident as a tragedy. He believed that the whole humiliating affair could have been avoided if Beecher and Tilton had not behaved in a “reckless” and “impulsive” manner.<sup>63</sup> To the end of his life, he maintained that a great injustice had been done to Tilton. Not only had innocent lives been ruined, but the guilty had gone unpunished. Bowen and Beecher had betrayed the deepest of personal trusts. Johnson believed that Tilton also bore some blame because when the issue finally became public it no longer was about the betrayal of the marriage bond, but had become the betrayal of a “social obligation.” In Johnson’s view Tilton had originally “condoned” and “forgiven” the adultery and “passed his word that he would forever keep it a secret from the world.” He then “took counsel of those who ministered to his vanity and inflamed his passions.” Thus, he ended up filing suit, which led to a betrayal of a “sacred” obligation, which, Johnson stated, turned into a “game of treachery, perfidy, and folly that is without parallel.” The public viewed Beecher as the one who had pursued the moral course by keeping silent. Johnson concluded that once Tilton filed suit, he doomed himself in the public eye and could never be lifted from the “pit into which he has plunged headlong.” Johnson perceived that the general public thought that Beecher’s transgressions and sin of adultery could be excused, while they did not forgive Tilton’s vacillation and, indeed, labeled him a “monster.”<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Anna E. Dickinson Papers, letter from Oliver Johnson to Anna E. Dickinson dated August 1, 1874. Anna E. Dickinson was the daughter of the Philadelphia Quaker and abolitionist John Dickinson. She was an outspoken advocate of women’s rights and other reform movements.

<sup>64</sup> Anna E. Dickinson Papers, letter from Oliver Johnson to Anna E. Dickinson dated August 17, 1874; Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America*, 140, 141.

By the time the tragedy ended Johnson had lost several close friends who insisted on supporting Beecher, and his close relationship with the Tiltons had been severed forever. Johnson continued to live and work in Brooklyn, but he avoided any contact with Bowen and Beecher whenever possible. There was also the added impact on his own life, for his job at the *Independent* had been the most lucrative of his career. Although employment had not been difficult to find, his new position was not nearly as enjoyable, nor did it pay as well as his job at the *Independent*. Furthermore, coping with the scandal over such a long period of time took its toll on everyone involved. In addition Johnson faced a deep personal crisis during this period.

In 1872 tragedy struck the Johnson home; Mary Anne became seriously ill and her condition deteriorated rapidly. Her affliction is unknown, and she seems to have suffered very little, but she died on June 8, soon after its onset. She remained clearheaded until the end and passed on calmly with Johnson at her side. Mary Anne was 66 years old, and the Johnsons had been married for 40 years. Her death was a severe blow to Johnson. Mary Anne, who was considered a kind and loving person by everyone who knew her, had been a companion and partner in his work. Although her views were often controversial, her character and demeanor were never challenged. Mary Anne was intelligent, opinionated, and articulate. She had demonstrated her own leadership skills through the years of the antislavery struggle and earned respect for her work in the feminist and other reform movements. This was evidenced by the large number of well-known individuals from various reform movements who attended her funeral, some of whom traveled long distances. The day after the funeral, Johnson had her remains

borne to the cemetery at Longwood, Pennsylvania, and she was laid to rest in the private burial ground of the Progressive Friends.<sup>65</sup>

Mary Anne's death was an extremely painful loss for Johnson. He took solace in his faith in God and acquired strength from his firm religious convictions. He also received enormous support from his many friends, all of whom helped him endure the suffering and move on with his life. Johnson also had his work to occupy him, and he engrossed himself in the presidential campaign of 1872. Disgusted by the corruption, extravagance, and incompetence of the Grant administration, he had become disillusioned with the President. Many Republicans, including Johnson's friend in the Senate, Charles Sumner, were dissatisfied as well with what the last four years had produced. As Grant's first term came to an end, a large faction of the party had become opposed to the present policies of the administration. In an effort to prevent Grant's re-election, they bolted the party and, calling themselves Liberal Republicans, nominated their own presidential candidate: Horace Greeley, the veteran editor and publisher of the *New York Tribune*. The Democratic Party, hoping to defeat Grant, reluctantly aligned itself with the liberals within the Republican Party and also nominated Greeley.

Johnson was an old acquaintance of Greeley's, and their friendship dated back more than 25 years to when they worked together at the *Tribune* during the 1840s.

Greeley was also extremely fond of Johnson and considered him one of his "young men"

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<sup>65</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 23, 1872. "In Memoriam," obituary of Mary Anne White. A wide range of reformers, such as William Lloyd Garrison, James Miller McKim, Horace Greeley, Theodore Tilton, and Lucretia Mott attended the funeral. There were numerous eulogies, the most rousing being delivered by Lucretia Mott who, in her eighties, had traveled from New Jersey to pay a last tribute to her departed friend.

who had grown up with the *Tribune*.<sup>66</sup> Under the Grant administration, intimidation and violence had undermined the reconstruction governments in the South, with secret societies such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camellia becoming more visible. These organizations formed themselves into paramilitary groups spreading terror among blacks and physically blocking them from voting or exercising their rights of citizenship. Johnson viewed the failure of the current administration as the cause, and believed the situation would only get worse with another four years of Grant in the White House. He not only endorsed the presidential nomination of Greeley, but, for the first time, Johnson also actively participated in a political campaign.

Johnson was well aware that during the antislavery campaign Greeley had placed an emphasis on the political struggle, categorizing the A.A.S.S. as “unconditional abolitionists” who had no immediate influence on legislation. He also knew that Garrison never believed Greeley to be in harmony with the society and that in the past he treated its members shabbily. Garrison completely disagreed with Johnson, refused to endorse Greeley’s nomination, and openly argued against it. Instead, he endorsed Grant for re-election and wrote articles in various newspapers attacking Greeley’s character and political stance.<sup>67</sup> Again, Johnson found himself at odds with his old friend. While he

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<sup>66</sup> Constance Mayfield Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee: Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lyman Beecher, Horace Greeley, P.T. Barnum*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1927, 342. Greeley made this statement in 1872 at a birthday party in his honor at the home of Alvin Johnson.

<sup>67</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Mary Grew dated January 24, 1872; letter from William Lloyd Garrison to his daughter Fanny Garrison Villard dated July 11, 1872. See also the *New York Times*, August 6, 1872. Garrison argued against a plea by Charles Sumner for the “colored citizens” of Washington, D.C. to vote for Greeley. Also the *Boston Journal*, August 23, 1872, “To The Editors Of The Boston Journal.” This is a lengthy attack on the Greeley campaign and an endorsement of Grant for re-election.

had not agreed with Greeley on how to end slavery, he categorized him with others who hated the institution and believed that the most expedient course was political action. Johnson never viewed these individuals as enemies, but as persons who truly believed that their ideology would be more effective. Now that slavery had been abolished, the critical issue was establishing equality for black people, and he viewed Greeley as the best candidate capable of accomplishing this goal. In a letter to the Liberal Republican Party accepting the nomination for President, Greeley ended with a plea for national unity. He asked everyone “to clasp hands across the bloody chasm” dividing the North and South.<sup>68</sup> Johnson believed that Greeley had the courage to enforce the reconstruction laws in the South and would do all he could to end the terror that was being conducted against blacks. He also viewed Greeley as an honest man who would not tolerate corruption in his administration.

Johnson actively lobbied for Greeley and also helped manage his campaign. With the help of Sumner, he attempted to secure additional endorsements in the Congress, sway the American public, and motivate black voters to get out to the polls and vote for Greeley. Johnson personally wrote a campaign tract entitled *What I Know of Horace Greeley*, in which he told of his long-standing friendship with Greeley and his intimate knowledge of the candidate.<sup>69</sup> Johnson praised his excellent character and

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<sup>68</sup> Michael E. McGerr, “The Meaning of Liberal Republicanism: The Case of Ohio,” *Civil War History*, 28 (December 1982), 311, 312; Matthew T. Downey, “Horace Greeley and the Politicians: The Liberal Republican Convention of 1872,” *Journal of American History*, 53 (March 1967), 727-750.

<sup>69</sup> Oliver Johnson, *What I Know of Horace Greeley*, campaign tract, 1872. The pamphlet was also printed in the *Golden Age*, August 24, 1872, with the title “Horace Greeley For President.” See also the *New York World*, July 31, 1872, “Mr. Sumner’s Letter to His Colored Fellow Citizens.” In this editorial Sumner strongly endorsed Horace Greeley,

dedication to the Union during the rebellion. Johnson stated that although they had not always agreed on how to abolish slavery Greeley's aims were true, and he had advocated what he believed to be the most effective way to end the horrid institution of slavery. He maintained that the work remained unfinished, however, as demonstrated by the atrocities being committed against blacks in the South. Johnson argued that four more years of a Grant presidency would only lead to more corruption and strengthen the Bourbon class already controlling Southern politics. He believed that Greeley would force the Southern states to comply with the reconstruction laws and that change had to take place quickly before even more damage was done.

Although Johnson truly believed that Greeley was the best man for the job, he also knew that his candidacy was a long shot. Grant was the great hero of the Union victory, and he remained extremely popular with the general populace. Furthermore, many people did not believe the charges of corruption against him. In the presidential election of 1872, Grant won a substantial victory, polling 286 electoral votes and 3,595,132 popular votes to Greeley's 66 electoral votes and 2,834,125 popular votes. The campaign had taken its toll on Greeley, completely exhausting him. As the time for the election approached, he began to show signs of physical weakness and frustration. In addition, he was grief stricken when his wife died just five days prior to the election. At this time the *Tribune* was having severe financial problems, and stockholders were considering replacing him as the editor. Two weeks after the election he confided in Johnson that he was a ruined man. When recalling the incident, Johnson stated Greeley grasped his hands with a wild look in his eyes and kept repeating over and over that he

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the Liberal Republican, over Grant. He also attempted to persuade black voters to cast their ballots for Greeley as well.

was ruined. Johnson attempted to convince him that this was not true, but it seems he had little success in alleviating his anxiety. It also appears from other statements by those who were familiar with Greeley that he was close to a breakdown.<sup>70</sup> Several days after his meeting with Johnson, Greeley died.<sup>71</sup>

Johnson had resigned from his position at the *New York Weekly Tribune* in order to involve himself in the Greeley presidential campaign. After the election he took a job as managing editor of another New York reform newspaper, the *Christian Union*. Originally established by Henry Child in 1867 as the *Church Union*, the paper was purchased by J.B. Ford and company in 1869 and the name was changed.<sup>72</sup> It was primarily a religious journal whose readers were also concerned with the progressive issues of the time. As is the case in all presidential campaigns, the post-election results were scrutinized and the platforms of the candidates analyzed. Greeley's campaign was no exception and quickly came under sharp attack. Greeley's sudden death made it impossible for him to defend himself, so Johnson picked up the gauntlet. In his own distinctive style, which was refined and not offensive, Johnson responded to those who attacked Greeley during the campaign and took them to task. He knew that this would open him up to reproach as well, and it came as no surprise when he was attacked for his

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<sup>70</sup> Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee: Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lyman Beecher, Horace Greeley, P.T. Barnum*, 357.

<sup>71</sup> James M. McPherson, "Grant or Greeley? The Abolitionist Dilemma in the Election of 1872," *American Historical Review*, 71 (October 1965), 41-61. Also Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*, 499-511. For a complete examination of the Liberal Republican Party and the election of 1872 see Seitz, *Horace Greeley*, 370-409.

<sup>72</sup> *Christian Union*, June 24, 1975, letter to the editor from a researcher, Ilana Stern.

stance. But he believed he had acted correctly and fulfilled an obligation to answer those who had challenged the validity of Greeley's run for office.<sup>73</sup>

As the excitement surrounding the election subsided, Johnson continued to move forward with his life. His career as an activist and reformer had always kept him constantly on the move and extremely busy. For a man in his early 60's he was in remarkably good health and showed no signs of slowing down. He had weathered the tragedy of Mary Anne's death, but his work alone was not enough to keep him happy. As an editor of a progressive newspaper, he was constantly introduced to a wide range of individuals. He was outgoing, with a friendly disposition, and his circle of friends and acquaintances continued to enlarge. One new acquaintance was Jane Maria Abbott, the daughter of the historian and minister John Stevens Cabot Abbott. Johnson enjoyed her company and began visiting her on a regular basis. Although he was almost 24 years her senior, he saw no reason not to pursue the relationship. Jane Abbott had never been married, and the two appeared to have a great deal in common. Their courtship continued to blossom, and on August 27, 1873, they were married. Although not an activist herself, Jane supported Johnson in his reform work. Both appeared to be extremely content and the marriage remained solid until Johnson's death. Johnson became a father for the first time at the age of 64 when, in June 1874, Jane gave birth to

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<sup>73</sup> *New York Independent*, December 5, 1872, "The Late Horace Greeley." This is an editorial by the abolitionist Joshua Leavitt, which is extremely critical of Horace Greeley. On December 14, 1872 Johnson responded in an article addressed to "Father," where he argued that Greeley represented the spirit of compromise. See also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated January 13, 1873. Garrison told Johnson that he did not agree with his article defending Horace Greeley, because Greeley had sacrificed and subordinated many of their basic principles.

their only child, a daughter they named Helen Hunt Johnson.<sup>74</sup> Always a firm believer in family, Johnson had been raised in a large household himself. He was elated by the birth of his daughter, and he seems to have welcomed all the responsibilities that come with fatherhood.

Newly married and with an infant to care for, Johnson cut back on his traveling and spent more time at home. He had plenty to keep him busy, including his work at the newspaper and chronicling and defending the activities of the antislavery movement. The activities of the A.A.S.S. and its members were now being scrutinized and condemned by many who had disagreed with its philosophy of non-resistance and immediate emancipation. Johnson felt it was his duty to answer these charges and set the record straight. He would spend the remainder of his life writing and lecturing on the abolitionist movement, as well as participating in national debates and political events. His home life was pleasant, and reformers were always welcome at the Johnson household where Johnson and his wife often entertained guests. Johnson remained an editor of a prominent newspaper for the next 15 years, working for five years at the *Journal*, which was located in Orange, New Jersey, and the *New York Weekly Evening Post*. During that time he published several individual works about the antislavery crusade, the most notable being the first biography of William Lloyd Garrison. He had the pleasure of watching his daughter grow to young adulthood, and in these later years he received recognition for his participation in bringing slavery to an end in America.

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<sup>74</sup> Watts-Choate Collection, Johnson family genealogy records, Peacham Historical Society Archives. Jane Maria Abbott was born on November 15, 1833. See also Francis Gould Butler. *A History of Farmington, Franklin County, Maine*, Farmington: Press Knolton, McLeary & Coe, 1885, 355. The actual birth date of Helen Hunt Johnson is not given, only the month and year.

## Epilogue

### Final Years

As reconstruction came to an end, the institution of slavery began to become a memory for many Americans. With the passing of time came a new generation that, for the first time in the nation's history, would not be faced with the evils of slavery. Their only knowledge of the past would be the stories told by the aging participants and the records they left. Johnson believed that it was important that he and others who had taken part in the struggle, document the abolitionist movement for future generations. He knew that there were many individuals who would attempt to discredit the actions of the antislavery leaders, and he believed that it was imperative that an honest history be produced by those with an intimate knowledge of the movement. To this end, he encouraged many of his colleagues to write their memoirs, autobiographies, and personal histories of the antislavery period.

Johnson began by attempting to convince William Lloyd Garrison to write his autobiography. He believed that Garrison had been one of the major driving forces behind the crusade and that without his leadership, success would not have been possible. He encouraged Samuel J. May and others to do the same, but it was Garrison whose name was synonymous with abolitionism in America, and Johnson felt it was his story that was the most important and needed to be told. At first he attempted to coax Garrison into the project by himself, but his efforts produced only a half-hearted response from his old friend. Garrison was willing to devote himself to the endeavor, but had serious

doubts as to whether he was up to the task. Johnson enlisted the help of several friends, all of whom convinced Garrison of the importance of the work. Finally, after a great deal of pressure was placed on him, Garrison agreed to undertake the job. In an effort to continue to help his friend financially, Johnson devised an arrangement at the *Christian Union* similar to that at the *Independent* where Garrison would be paid for submitting editorials and various articles. This he hoped would relieve him of any monetary burdens so that he could concentrate most of his time on the manuscript. They had no problem finding a publisher; the distinguished firm of Ticknor and Fields in Boston enthusiastically contracted with him to write a voluminous history of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> The result, however, was extremely disappointing. Garrison never really made an effort to complete the work. In fact, on the day the book was to be published, he had not even written a single page. He gave numerous excuses, continually procrastinating. He referred to his ill health, as well as his failing memory of the events that had occurred over the past forty years. Finally, he admitted that "So far as I am concerned, I feel no

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<sup>1</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated January 13, 1873. Garrison replied to Johnson's letter written a few days earlier on Thursday, urging him to write his autobiography. Johnson's letter dated March 10, 1873, has not survived, but it was printed in the *Boston Journal* along with Garrison's reply on March 27, 1873. Johnson begins the letter by speaking for all those who participated in the struggle, stating, "We take the liberty, as your personal friends of many years standing, and your fellow-laborers in the Anti-Slavery movement, to address you on a matter which we have very much at heart. We mean the preparation of the history of your life by yourself." See also Garrison's letter addressed to "Edmund Quincy, Samuel E. Sewall, Oliver Johnson, John Greenleaf Whittier, Gerrit Smith, Maria Weston Chapman, Lucretia Mott, and Others" dated March 17, 1873. In this letter Garrison gives the reasons for his inability to complete the manuscript he promised to deliver.

interest in any history of it [abolitionist crusade] that may be written. It is enough for me that every yoke is broken and every bondman set free.”<sup>2</sup>

Through the remainder of Garrison’s life, Johnson tried to persuade him to write his autobiography, but he never prevailed upon his old friend. Meanwhile Johnson began a history of the early years of the antislavery movement. He did not rely on his own memory alone, but requested input from many of his associates. It appeared in 24 installments over a period of ten months in the *Christian Union*.<sup>3</sup> He also attended many of the major antislavery reunion conventions held in various parts of the country. These conventions allowed him to discuss past events with other abolitionists, and they refreshed his own memory as well.<sup>4</sup> He also remained an active member of the Progressive Friends and attended their annual meetings. These engagements, along with his extensive correspondence with friends and associates, allowed him to stay up to date on events and helped secure a more accurate depiction of what had transpired in the past.

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<sup>2</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Papers, the letter is addressed to Edmund Quincy and Others, of which Johnson is one of the recipients. It is dated March 10, 1873, and Garrison elaborated on his reasons for not writing his history of the antislavery movement. See also Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 257, 258.

<sup>3</sup> *Christian Union*, February 11, 1874 through December 30, 1874, “The Early Anti-Slavery Days.” Also *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated March 1, 1874. In this letter Garrison supplied information about other antislavery publications and individuals who were influential in the movement during the early years.

<sup>4</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, letter from William Lloyd Garrison to Oliver Johnson dated May 25, 1874. An extremely large reunion convention was held on June 9, 1874 in Chicago. In the letter Garrison explained to Johnson that he would not be attending the convention. Also the letters from William Lloyd Garrison to Zebina Eastman dated June 4, 1874, and Henry Wilson and The Anti-Slavery Reunion Convention dated June 5, 1874. Garrison explained his “rheumatic trouble” prevented him from attending the reunion convention.

In 1876 Johnson decided to take a new position as editor of the *Journal* located in Orange, New Jersey. The paper was struggling, and Johnson was hired in the hope that his editorial skills could bring new life to the journal and increase its circulation. It meant a rather extensive move for him and his family, but his health was good and the opportunity appeared promising. His “little girl,” as he affectionately referred to his daughter even as she grew older, was in good health, and his wife Jane appears to have had no objections to the move.<sup>5</sup> Johnson came to his new post highly recommended and remained at the paper as its editor for the next five years. He continued to write and print articles about the antislavery movement, but he also remained outspoken in his opinions concerning the struggles of the various new reform movements of the period.<sup>6</sup>

As the years passed, the numbers of the old guard that had made up the leadership of the antislavery movement began to dwindle. On May 24, 1879, while visiting his daughter in New York, William Lloyd Garrison died. His remains were taken back to Roxbury, where the funeral services were held four days later. The Reverend Samuel May conducted the liturgy, which was held at the First Religious Society. Johnson was present as one of the pall bearers, and he later printed in the *Journal* the events and various addresses given that afternoon.<sup>7</sup> His death ended any hope of a

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<sup>5</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter from Oliver Johnson to William Lloyd Garrison dated January 28, 1876.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson sympathized with issues such as women’s suffrage and the “Chinese question” and equated them with the antislavery struggle. See Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 395; Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter addressed to My Dear Ludwell [unidentified] from Oliver Johnson dated June 9, 1880. Here Johnson declared himself for James A. Garfield in the next presidential race, and stated “my disposition to ‘march for Garfield’ is as good as any marine’s.”

<sup>7</sup> Garrison and Garrison, *The Anti-Slavery Crusade in America, William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*, Volume IV, 304-307. Also Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 404, 404, “Appendix,” 454-472.

Garrison autobiography or history of the antislavery crusade. Johnson now felt compelled to preserve his friend's memory himself, and he spent the next two years writing the first biography of William Lloyd Garrison. The book was more than a biography, as it also examined the history of the entire antislavery movement in America. Johnson included much of his own personal knowledge and many of his own experiences in the text. He also secured assistance from Garrison's family and material from other interested parties. Johnson did not stop there, as he attacked those he believed had committed wrongs against the movement and those who were now lying about what had occurred. When published in 1881, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times* stirred considerable commotion. It was praised and warmly greeted with cheers by those who had hated the institution of slavery, but condemned by those who were criticized in the book. Johnson was especially harsh on the Church, as he believed the leaders of the clergy had abdicated their responsibility to the bondsmen. He remained convinced until his death that if the Church had supported the abolitionist cause and demanded immediate emancipation, the struggle could have ended much sooner without a terrible Civil War. In the revised edition to the book, Johnson added a supplementary chapter responding to his critics and holding firmly to his convictions. With his usual modesty, he always contended that the work was incomplete and only a fragment of all that had occurred. He believed that another volume was needed to tell the entire story and always hoped to write it, but never did. In his last years he felt that it had fallen upon his shoulders in his old age to defend the good name of the early and faithful antislavery workers, and he continued to debate the topic through his writings and lectures until his death.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letter to Elizur Wright from Oliver Johnson dated April 4, 1881. This is a detailed letter to Elizur Wright in regards to

In 1881 Johnson moved his family back to New York and became associate editor of the *New York Evening Post*. Despite his age, he remained in good health and continued to stay active. He did complain of the cold New York winters, as he was prone to catching bouts of the flu that often left him prostrate for weeks at a time. He still worried constantly about how the next generation would view him and his comrades and often discussed the need to defend the antislavery cause against antagonists who would deceive a whole new generation. He continued to write, and he felt it was essential that he address the youth of the country in person whenever possible. Therefore, when his health and the weather permitted, he spoke at universities and other institutions.

It was also at this time that Johnson made one of his many visits back to his hometown in Vermont. While staying with his brother's family, he became embroiled in still another controversy. This was an issue that struck at the very foundation of the local Congregational Church where he had made his first public speech so many years earlier. When he arrived in June, he found the congregation extremely upset and divided by the behavior of the current pastor, Azel W. Wild. Most church members were hoping for his speedy removal. Of the three deacons, two expressed a desire that he would resign from the ministry, while the third believed Wild would eventually be left with no choice but to seek another parish. It appears that Reverend Wild had been engaged in several acts of duplicity in an attempt to gain control of the ministry, and his expenditures were putting a huge burden on the congregation. Furthermore, he had been charged with plagiarism, as

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comments he made about Johnson's book; letter addressed to My Good Friend [Samuel J. May, Jr.] and My Dear Mr. May dated January 4, 1884, and June 24, 1884, respectively. In these letters Johnson also discussed several articles he had published in various journals, such as the *Weekly Magazine* in Chicago and the *Commonwealth* in Boston. These articles included a comment on the General Birney tract, "Sketch of the Life of James Birney" and "An Inquiry into the Scripture Views of Slavery."

a large part of a sermon he delivered entitled "On the Death of James Abram Garfield," was copied verbatim from a sermon preached earlier by the Reverend F.D. Powers in Washington, D.C., and another part was taken from an article by Professor O.N. Stoddard of Wooster University, Ohio, published in the *Christian Statesman*. As a guest visiting for only a short time, Johnson was asked to fill the pulpit one Sunday during Wild's absence. In his sermon he denounced Wild's activities and stated that the congregation "should not be satisfied with an unprogressive, unspiritual man who, having ceased to grow himself, has no power to lead you forward in a Christian life." In his statement, Johnson only expressed what he felt was best for the congregation and explained the choice was up to them. His words infuriated Reverend Wild who, upon his return, organized a counsel to sanction Johnson. The committee, made up of partisans devoted to the minister, exonerated him of all wrong doing and issued a "letter-missive" against Johnson written entirely by Reverend Wild. Johnson had underestimated the power that the clergyman wielded in the community, and it seemed most people were afraid to challenge his authority. He returned to New York on August 1 believing the incident was over, but on September 9, 1881, Reverend Wild issued a public reprimand against Johnson. He specifically cited three resolutions, which were placed in the church records and sent to all the county newspapers for publication.<sup>9</sup> Johnson, refusing to accept the censure, drafted an eight-page letter and addressed it to the Peacham Congregational

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<sup>9</sup> Records of the Congregational Church in Peacham, Volume III, 72, 97, 285; *Vermont Watchman*, 1881. The newspaper is on microfilm and the clipping is taken from the paper, but the exact date is unclear.

Church.<sup>10</sup> In the letter he openly chastised Reverend Wild and his actions, going into specific detail and calling the committee's actions a "farce." He considered himself as having been made a "scapegoat" for the behavior of Reverend Wild and warned the congregation that if Wild were allowed to get away with plagiarism and other unscrupulous acts now, he would continue to commit them in the future. Johnson further cautioned them that they had come to a very important crisis in their history, and that now was the time to bind together in fellowship and undo the grievous wrong done against him. It would take the congregation five years to finally absolve Johnson, but in 1886 all of the resolutions issued against him were eventually rescinded.

In the years that followed Johnson showed no signs of slowing down, and he continued to contribute his regular column as associate editor of the *New York Evening Post*. As he approached his 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1884, he decided it was time for him to write his autobiography.<sup>11</sup> It appears that Johnson started work on the book, but he never completed it. How far along he actually got is unknown, as his notes and initial drafts have not survived. In his correspondence with friends, he complained that work on the project was constantly interrupted because of illness during the cold winter months and he knew the odds were against his finishing it. Still, as he reached his 77<sup>th</sup> birthday, he remained hopeful, stating that "Men older than I have overcome even greater obstacles

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<sup>10</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Peacham Historical Society Archives, January 5, 1882, "AN OPEN LETTER To the Members of the Congregational Church and Society in Peacham, Vt." See also Bogart, *Peacham, The Story of a Vermont Hill Town*, 419.

<sup>11</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Peacham Historical Society, letters to Samuel J. May, Jr. from Oliver Johnson dated July 14, 1884, October 22, 1884, and December 27, 1884. Johnson tells May he has accepted an invitation to speak to the students at Oberlin College. He also discussed his work at the *New York Evening Post* and his plans to write his autobiography. This is Johnson's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, and he sends May a picture of his "little girl" which he received as a birthday gift.

than those that hinder me.” In truth, it seemed that Johnson did not make much progress on the text. In spite of his winter ailments, he still had to earn his livelihood at the newspaper and stay on top of current events as well. In 1885, two of Garrison’s sons, Wendell and Francis, published the first edition of a four-volume biography of their father. Johnson provided information to assist them in the work and wrote an anonymous review of the book in the *Christian Union*.<sup>12</sup>

Although he led an active life and continued to work regularly at the *New York Evening Post*, the infirmities of old age eventually caused him to curtail a good many of his activities. He was bothered most by continued bouts of asthma and his weakening legs and complained that he could no longer walk or stand for long periods of time. In the summer of 1887, he was given an invitation to spend several months at a health resort in Clifton Springs, New York. The resort was considered a state of the art facility and was rather expensive, but Johnson and his family were given free admission to all that the institution had to offer. The founder and head of the facility was a Dr. Foster, and the retreat boasted the highest quality medical treatment. Some 600 guests were housed in individual cottages making up a small village. Within walking distance was a 226-foot sanitarium where daily treatments were provided for each guest. There were Turkish, electric, and salt baths, a gymnasium and the “Swedish movement cure.” Johnson especially enjoyed the soothing salt baths, but he detested the white sulfur water drinks, complaining that they tasted terrible and smelled awful as well. His daughter Helen found particular delight in the gymnasium and spent most of her days there with the other

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Letter to Samuel J. May, Jr. from Oliver Johnson dated October 30, 1885; letter to Frank Garrison dated September 27, 1886; letter addressed to My Dear Boy [Frank Garrison] dated December 29, 1886.

children. While staying at the resort Johnson encountered many individuals who knew him or had heard of him. Even while relaxing at the retreat and absorbing himself in the various cures, he was not able totally to escape work. Weekly prayer meetings were held in the chapel, and Johnson was requested to speak on numerous occasions. He was also asked to deliver several lectures on the early history of the antislavery movement, and he gladly obliged. The family's stay at Clifton Springs was perhaps the longest vacation Johnson ever took in his life. The sojourn was extremely pleasant and helped invigorate his spirits, though, as he and his family returned to New York at the end of the summer, he worried about the effects of the coming winter. On his way home from Clifton Springs he made stopovers at Rochester and Niagara Falls, and he addressed students at those cities on the antislavery movement.<sup>13</sup>

Upon his return to New York Johnson secured a new residence in Brooklyn's Columbia Heights. The accommodations were small, but comfortable and pleasant. His salary from the *New York Evening Post* was his only income, and the move was made because he could not afford the payments on their previous more commodious home. He had some small savings, and he had given the royalties from his book to a friend, Henry Villard, to invest for him. Villard was a successful entrepreneur and member of New York City's elite social class who had married Garrison's daughter Fannie.<sup>14</sup> Johnson also owned some property in Chicago, which could not be disposed of at this time except

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Letter to Samuel J. May, Jr. from Oliver Johnson written from Washington D.C. dated April 19, 1887; letter to Wendell Garrison written from Clifton Springs dated August 31, 1887.

<sup>14</sup> *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, "Introduction," 15, 16. Towards the end of Johnson's life, Villard appears to have been an individual Johnson confided in and trusted.

at a loss, and Johnson did not want to touch the investment as he hoped it would help provide for his wife and child after his death.

As Johnson approached his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, he continued in his editorial post and lectured whenever possible. He worked mostly from home, forwarding his articles to the newspaper, and only went into the office a few days a week. Walking and stair climbing became especially difficult for him, and he complained to friends that he now walked at a snail's pace because of a shortness of breath. He continued to defend his support of Horace Greeley in the 1872 presidential election and Greeley's doctrine of protection. As an elder statesman of the antislavery crusade and the only original member of the New England Anti-Slavery Society still alive, Johnson was often asked to speak and prepare papers on the subject. Even though his mind remained clear his body was failing him, and he selected his speaking engagements very carefully. Though the fees from these events were small, they were a necessary addition to Johnson's limited income. Unfortunately, he could only stand for short periods of time and could accept only invitations in which a carriage was provided for him. In the early winter of 1889, he prepared a paper, "The Anti-Slavery Movement in America," which he was to read at the Long Island Historical Society. The society had only a small lecturing hall, and its president, Dr. Stover, made arrangements for the lecture to be given at the Brooklyn Congregational Club. On February 20, 1889, Johnson made his last public appearance when he addressed an audience of about 160 people at the club. He spoke from a sitting position, and the lecture lasted about 70 minutes. He had worried that his voice would fail him, but by his own account it remained strong throughout the reading, and the excellent acoustics of the hall helped make the evening a success. Copies of the speech

were printed in the local newspapers, and Johnson received congratulations from individuals across the country.

That winter he received a surprise in the form of a check for additional royalties from his book. He used the money to spend a good part of the summer in Bellvue Villa Highland in Ulster Bay, Long Island. His ability to walk continued to deteriorate, and he now complained that in many ways he was almost totally dependent upon his wife. As the summer ended he again spent a short time at Clifton Springs, where he absorbed himself in various treatments. Johnson continued to work and go to the office of the newspaper right up until the last days of his life. His last letter was addressed to Henry Villard shortly before he died on December 10, 1889. Towards the very end, he suffered terribly from lack of breath and was unable to write, so he dictated the letter and then signed it. Despite his suffering, Johnson's mind appears to have remained sharp and clear until the very end. He believed he had only a short time to live, and this was confirmed by his physician. In this final letter he thanked those who had helped him during this last illness and made arrangements with Villard for the future financial security of his wife and daughter. This included turning over to Jane whatever savings, investments, and land he owned, as well as making arrangements for them to keep their current home. Villard later forwarded the letter to Wendell Garrison, who Johnson knew would help look after his wife and child after his death.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Oliver Johnson Papers, Vermont Historical Society, letters from Oliver Johnson to Frank Garrison dated April 10, 1888, October 4, 1888, December 20, 1888, December 26, 1888, February 13, 1889, February 21, 1889, March 24, 1889, and June 9, 1889; letters from Oliver Johnson to Wendell Garrison dated February 22, 1889, February 27, 1889, and July 9, 1889; letter from Oliver Johnson to Samuel J. May, Jr. dated March 4, 1889; letter dictated by Oliver Johnson to Henry Villard dated December 20, 1889. Johnson signed the letter, but it is dated ten days after his death. The date appears to be when Villard forwarded the letter to Wendell Garrison.

Jane Johnson remained in New York until her death. Very little is known about the remainder of her life, but she appears to have lived quietly with their daughter Helen. After Johnson's death, it appears that Jane maintained a closer relationship with her family and she is referred to as Aunt Jennie by one of her grandchildren in one of the few letters that mention her. The exact date of her death was never recorded in any of the genealogical records, but it appears she died in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Not surprisingly, the Johnson's daughter Helen became a writer, and at one time she was on the staff of *Good Housekeeping* magazine. She married twice, both times to physicians. Her first husband was a Dr. Daly, and later she married Dr. John M. Keyes, who was a surgeon during World War I. She lived most of her life in New York, and her last known address, in 1932, was at 57 West 58<sup>th</sup> Street. She had several children, and the family now appears to be spread across the northeast. Johnson was buried next to his first wife in the cemetery at Longwood, Pennsylvania, in the private burial grounds of the Progressive Friends. The cemetery is part of the Pierre S. Dupont estate, which includes the Longwood Gardens, and is an historical preservation site visited by thousands each year.<sup>16</sup>

Historians have attempted to describe abolitionists through various theories, none of which properly characterizes Oliver Johnson. Johnson certainly does not fit the

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<sup>16</sup> Oliver Johnson Records, Peacham Historical Society Archives, letter from Elsie Choate to Oliver Semple dated April 8, 1932; letter from Oliver Semple to Elsie Choate dated April 10, 1932. See also the testimonial published after Johnson's death by W.D. Vearrimem in a letter to the *Unitarian*, 1889. The original hand written draft of the testimonial is preserved in the archives.

mold of a psychological misfit created by James G. Randall and Charles W. Ramsdell.<sup>17</sup> He was unquestionably inspired by the evangelical movement of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and did preach the sin of slavery as Tim Stafford contends.<sup>18</sup> Yet Johnson never exhibited pathological behavior, or sacrificed rational judgment in his attack on slavery. He did not view the Civil War as God's punishment for failing to abolish slavery, but saw it as a practical problem. Abolitionists failed to unite in convincing the nation of the moral evils of slavery, which was caused by their own dissension. Furthermore, they were never able to convince the church to support the cause whole-heartedly, which severely handicapped their efforts. The war was the product of the failure of those men and women within the movement, not God's punishment. Johnson was also not a member of a "displaced class in American Society" as David Donald asserts. He was also not a member of a former elite group frustrated by a "drastic dislocation of northern society."<sup>19</sup> Johnson was the son of a farmer, who had received an exceptional education. If anything, he had risen above the social class he had been born into. If Johnson fits the profile of Edward Magdol in that he owned little property, it was strictly by choice.<sup>20</sup> He had numerous opportunities to utilize his skills for financial gain that would have enabled him to live a very comfortable life. Instead, he made a conscious decision to devote his energy and finances to the abolitionist movement. Similarly, Johnson does not fit the

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<sup>17</sup> Charles W. Ramsdell, "The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion," *Mississippi Historical Review*, XVI (September 1929), 151-171; James G. Randall, "The Blundering Generation," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXVII (June 1940), 3-28.

<sup>18</sup> Tim Stafford, "The Abolitionists," *Christian History*, " 1992, 11 (1): 21-27.

<sup>19</sup> Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era*, 19-33.

<sup>20</sup> Magdol, *The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists' Constituency*, 43-51. This text also includes the evaluation of abolitionist groups by numerous other historians.

portrayal of Robert H. Abzug and Lawrence J. Friedman. He was not part of a group of young Americans suffering from severe mental strain caused by a changing society, who looked to the abolitionist movement for fulfillment.<sup>21</sup> He chose the antislavery crusade as his life's work, because he truly believed in the cause and thought he could make a difference. Furthermore, Johnson's background and life do not fit the outline described by John Jentz and Judith Wellman.<sup>22</sup> His roots were not in radical republicanism and neither Johnson or any member of his family were involved in factory work.

Oliver Johnson does not fit into any one frame, and he must be described as an individual. He was born in a log cabin on a farm. His circumstances allowed him to secure an education that few individuals were able to attain. He was also raised in a religious family, and in a community that emphasized the Congregational faith. In this respect, Johnson comes closest to fitting the mold portrayed by Allan M. Kraut.<sup>23</sup> Yet this is where the comparison with Kraut ends. He certainly was influenced by his strong religious faith, but Johnson used his education and continued to grow both intellectually and practically. He involved himself in the events of his time, continuing to educate himself, and rarely plunged blindly into any activity. He combined his religious faith with practical undertakings, and seldom allowed his emotions to dictate his conduct.

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<sup>21</sup> Friedman, *Gregarious Saints, Self and Community in Antebellum America*, 1, 2; Abzug, *Passionate Liberator: Theodore Dwight Weld and the Dilemma of Reform*, 138-143.

<sup>22</sup> John Jentz, "The Antislavery Constituency in Jacksonian New York City," *Civil War History*, 27 (June 1981), 101-122; Judith Wellman, "'Are We Aliens Because We Are Women?' Female Abolitionists and the Abolitionist Petitions in Upstate New York," (Paper presented to the National Archives Conference, Washington, D.C., April 1976).

<sup>23</sup> Allan M. Kraut, "The Liberty Men of New York: Political Abolitionism in New York State, 1840-1848," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1975). Although Kraut's initial description coincides with Johnson's early life, it differs when he evaluates occupations and political affiliations.

Johnson was an individual who continued to increase his knowledge and was not afraid of change. His ability to listen to all sides of the argument and compromise on issues allowed him to enhance his own knowledge, which he used to solve problems and advance new ideas. This allowed him to direct the course of his life independently.

Johnson was a man of vision, who understood that changing the institutional structure of any society was a difficult task. He believed the struggle to bring about change an important one, so much so that he made it his life's work.

Oliver Johnson lived a remarkable life. During his 80 years he contributed greatly to the abolitionist movement and left his mark on many of the other progressive campaigns of the era as well. He had the ability to grow intellectually, and all through his long life he attempted to put new ideas into practice with the aim of creating a society where all people were treated as equals. In many ways, Johnson was a man ahead of his time. When civil rights leaders today argue for the creation of a "rainbow coalition" or call for advancements in education and job opportunities, they are spreading the philosophy that Oliver Johnson espoused more than 150 years ago. Considered radical by most of his contemporaries, his ideologies would be regarded as conservative by present day standards. Johnson believed in an America where all people could live side by side, regardless of race or ethnic background. Even though our country has not yet reached that goal in its entirety, it has made enormous advances in that direction and continues to struggle to complete the work started by men like Johnson. Oliver Johnson was an original thinker who believed he could change the world and make a difference. He had the courage and dedication to challenge the status quo, and his efforts started a revolution in the way people perceive each other that is still evolving today. Oliver

Johnson helped change the world he lived in and made a difference in the lives of present day Americans as well.

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