

STANDARD BEARERS OF LIBERTY AND EQUALITY:  
REINTERPRETING THE ORIGINS OF AMERICAN  
ABOLITIONISM

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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## ABSTRACT

### **Standard Bearers of Liberty and Equality: Reinterpreting the Origins of American Abolitionism**

by

Paul J. Polgar

Advisor: Professor James Oakes

America's first abolitionists sought a rights revolution for a people who for centuries had been viewed as little more than chattel objects. But the story of the sweeping challenge these reformers posed to slavery and black inequality remains untold. A generation of scholarship on the first emancipation has demonstrated the gradual and incomplete nature of African American liberation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century North. In turn, historians have interpreted both gradual emancipation and those activists who advocated for it as inherently conservative. Between tenacious slaveholder resistance to their slaves' liberty and white skepticism about the merits of black freedom, abolitionists faced daunting obstacles to ending slavery in Post-Revolutionary America. Yet it was these very obstacles that generated the early national abolition societies' racially progressive approach to reform. By seeking to obtain and enforce antislavery laws, guard and expand the rights of illegally enslaved and free blacks, uproot white prejudice, and overturn racial inequality through making African Americans virtuous citizens of the new republic, antislavery activists met the formidable barriers to emancipation with a cohesive vision of black freedom and equality.

Early national abolitionism was designed to vanquish slavery through the joint enlightenment of black and white Americans. As gradual abolition laws and the implementation of black education and civic cultivation gave time for former slaves to be fitted into republican citizens, early national antislavery activists hoped to persuade a prejudiced white public to extend the egalitarian promises of Revolutionary ideology to the nation's African Americans. But by the end of the War of 1812, these reformers discovered that prejudice was hardening and the problem of slavery was becoming overshadowed by the problem of race.

Nothing embodied this shift more fully than the founding of the American Colonization Society. Colonizationists viewed white prejudice as unconquerable and therefore the incorporation of free blacks into the body politic as an impossibility. When immediate abolitionists emerged they linked gradualism with colonization and labeled both reactionary and exclusionist, thus erasing the racially progressive origins of gradual abolitionism that this dissertation aims to recapture.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has been a long time in the making and it gives me pleasure to acknowledge those who have aided in its completion. I began the journey some eight years ago while pursuing my Master's degree at George Mason University. It was a matter of serendipity that I happened upon the First Federal Congress Project (FFCP), whose head editor, Charlene Bickford, was offering a class on historical editing. As an intern at the FFCP I discovered a wealth of antislavery newspaper pieces that piqued my interest in the early abolition movement. And my interest has yet to wane. What's more, Charlene and the FFCP's other editors, Ken Bowling, Chuck DiGiacomantonio and Helen Veit, provided me with a deep appreciation for both early American history and primary source analysis, the latter of which, I quickly learned, is the lifeblood of the historian's craft. Once I began my thesis on the debates over race and slavery during the first federal Congress, my advisor, Lois Horton, along with fellow faculty member, Rosemarie Zagarri, asked penetrating questions and made thoughtful comments that in part helped me later to expand the project.

Soon after I began at the Graduate Center I sought Jim Oakes as my advisor. It turned out to be a great decision. Since my first discussion with Jim, I have always found our conversations on slavery and abolition enlightening and his commentary on my own work insightful. After each meeting I'd leave his office with some provocative or prescient idea to ponder. At times his best advice could come when I least expected it. After finishing an essay on black disfranchisement in early national New York, I went to see Jim with the plan of embarking on a dissertation charting the racial origins of Jacksonian Democracy. Jim, who was never one to impose his ideas on me, gently suggested that I consider reinterpreting the meaning of gradual emancipation instead. In retrospect this advice was critical, as taking him up on it allowed me to

pull together several strands of my research and writing and pursue the project that ultimately led to this dissertation. Over the years Jim has shown me time and again that he truly cares about my development as a historian. I am grateful for his guidance.

Other faculty at the Graduate Center likewise deserve special mention here. Jonathan Sassi has engaged with my work since my earliest days in the program. His rich perspective on early antislavery, which comes from his own research on the topic, and his willingness to read and comment on my essays and dissertation chapters has helped me immensely. Greg Downs too has gone out of his way to make himself available as a reader of my scholarship. His close copy editing has improved my writing while his in-depth commentary went above and beyond what I could have justly expected. Along with Jim, Jon and Greg, the outside readers on my defense committee, Lois Horton and Christopher Brown, gave me pithy advice on how to transform my dissertation into a publishable book. Though not on my committee, I want to thank Matt Mason, David Gellman, Jim Gigantino, David Waldstreicher, Carroll Smith-Rosenburg, Paddy Riley and Nic Wood for reading chapter drafts and/or essays which later became incorporated into the dissertation. Their comments pushed me to clarify and expand upon my arguments.

Fellow students at the Graduate Center have offered me the community that has made the often solitary pursuit of a doctorate a more collaborative affair. During the grueling first year of the history program, Joe Murphy, Damien Amblard, Mike Brenes, Brendan Cooper, Rachel Burstein, Vanessa Weller, and others, shared with me the daunting transition to life in a doctoral program. Later in my career at the Graduate Center, Thomas Hafer and I ran into one another after having both become newly minted ABDs. We decided to meet periodically and hold each other accountable for the writing deadlines we had set, a decision that motivated me to get the dissertation rolling in its early stages. As I began the dissertation-phase in earnest, the Early

American Republic Seminar—a group of fellow early Americanists at the Graduate Center who meet frequently to read each other’s work—helped me stave off isolation and gave me the scholarly community that I had always craved. David Houpt, Roy Rogers, John Blanton, Dave Gary, Alisa Harrison, Cambridge Ridley Lynch, and the several other members of the seminar, kept me plugged into vibrant research outside of my own work.

Several libraries and archival repositories assisted me in the research necessary for this dissertation. Staff at the New York Historical Society, New York Public Library, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, The Library Company of Philadelphia, The New Jersey Historical Society and the Delaware Historical Society were very helpful in steering me toward applicable sources and digging up an assortment of documents and collections. Fellowships and grant awards, including those from The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, The Library Company of Philadelphia and The Graduate Center, endowed me with integral funds to research and write-up this dissertation.

Finally, no acknowledgements section would be complete without thanking those closest to the author. For as long as I can remember my parents have given me their unqualified backing in all of my endeavors, academics included. My mother took an interest from the first in this project and offered suggestions that sometimes rivaled that of experts in the field. For all that they have done for me I owe my parents an eternal debt. My wife’s unquestioned support has sustained me through the trials and tribulations of dissertating. Not only did she read each chapter, but at a critical juncture, when I had reached a particularly difficult moment, she had just the right words to keep me going. A few months before I finished the dissertation my

daughter was born. Her arrival graced me with a new light in my life, brighter than I could have ever imagined. It is my love for Valerie and Arlie that makes everything I do possible.

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INTRODUCTION:  
REIMAGINING GRADUALISM

He should be standing, not kneeling. This was the conclusion the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) had reached in the fall of 1789, as the group reviewed an illustration that would serve as the centerpiece of the certificates of membership for the newly reconstituted antislavery organization. They were most likely referring to Josiah Wedgwood's famed depiction of an enslaved man on bended knee pleading "Am I Not A Man and A Brother," printed in London two years earlier. While approving of the image, the PAS made sure that the black man "be represented in a Standing posture." Their decision appeared prescient. Only months later James Pemberton, the chair of the PAS' Committee of Correspondence, excitedly wrote to the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade that in revising the state constitution the Pennsylvania Assembly had voted down an attempt to define citizenship in racially exclusive terms "by a large and very respectable majority." Pemberton celebrated that the "Free Black-Man is to be put on the Footing of a citizen of Pennsylvania" and underscored the momentousness of this "equitable and important decision."<sup>1</sup>

The PAS' emphasis on African American empowerment and civic membership illuminates much about the ideals of the early abolition movement. America's first abolitionists sought a rights revolution for a people who for centuries had been viewed as little more than chattel objects. But the story of the sweeping challenge these reformers posed to slavery and black inequality remains untold. A generation of scholarship on the first emancipation has demonstrated the gradual and incomplete nature of African American liberation in the late

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<sup>1</sup> The Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PPAS), Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 107, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP), Philadelphia; PPAS, Series II, Reel XI, Vol. I, 33, HSP, Philadelphia.

eighteenth and early nineteenth century North. In turn, historians have interpreted both gradual emancipation and those activists who advocated for it as inherently conservative. Between tenacious slaveholder resistance to their slaves' liberty and white skepticism about the merits of black freedom, abolitionists faced daunting obstacles to ending slavery in Post-Revolutionary America. Yet it was these very obstacles that generated the early abolition societies' racially progressive approach to reform. By seeking to obtain and enforce antislavery laws, guard and expand the rights of illegally enslaved and free blacks, uproot white prejudice, and overturn racial inequality through making African Americans virtuous citizens of the new republic, antislavery activists met the formidable barriers to emancipation with a cohesive vision of black freedom and equality.

Nowhere in the Post-Revolutionary Mid-Atlantic did slavery die a fast death. The state legislatures of New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania all enacted gradual abolition acts that balanced the claims of slaveowners to their property rights in persons against the slaves' inalienable rights to liberty. On one level, it is undeniable that the former of these two claims won out. Not one slave was freed immediately by the acts. The children of slaves born after the passage of the gradual abolition laws would be considered indentured servants and were mandated to serve their enslaved mothers' masters until ages ranging from 21 for females and 25 for males in New Jersey to 28 for both sexes in Pennsylvania--the gradual nature of emancipation essentially providing compensation for slaveholders. Those persons already in bondage would remain so, their only solace being that their children would one day be free. If one were to stop here, gradual emancipation would seem like a straightforwardly conservative process that called for the eventual end of slavery, but put off African American freedom to a future date and left unchanged the status of thousands of bondspersons.

But this portrait of gradual emancipation obscures the radical elevation in status early abolitionists strove to win for black Americans. Gradual emancipation brought a pitched battle between slavery's opponents and the institution's defenders that stretched for decades both before and after abolition statutes were adopted. Beginning in the 1780s, abolitionists launched a campaign to establish the basic validity of African American freedom. They defended the rights of free blacks and enlarged those of slaves through widening the scope of antislavery laws. Early abolitionists also attacked slavery on a broader level. The nation's first abolition movement was designed to break apart American bondage through the enlightenment of black and white Americans together. This dissertation charts how antislavery activists and their African American partners drew on an optimistic Post-Revolutionary Enlightenment milieu which combined a commitment to environmentalist social theory, educational and civic development, and rational persuasion. In the process they built a reform agenda premised on the eventual overturning of black degradation and the pervasive white prejudice that undergirded both slavery and African American inequality.

As gradual abolition laws and the implementation of black education and civic cultivation gave time for former slaves to be fitted into republican citizens, antislavery activists looked to persuade a prejudiced white public to extend the egalitarian promises of Revolutionary ideology to the nation's African Americans. This hopeful conception of reform, however, came under increasing pressure during the second decade of the nineteenth century. While early abolitionists had found sustenance for their brand of activism in Northern emancipation, free black community development, and the defensive ideological position of slavery in the years following American Independence, by the end of the War of 1812, these reformers discovered

that prejudice was hardening and the problem of slavery was becoming overshadowed by the problem of race.

Nothing embodied this change more fully than the rise of the colonization movement. The founding of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816 signaled the dawn of a new era in antislavery agitation. Colonizationists viewed white prejudice as unconquerable and therefore the incorporation of free blacks into the body politic as impossible. According to the ACS, the removal of African Americans was the only viable means of combating slavery. This institutional shift in American antislavery was buttressed by larger socioeconomic and political transformations including the expansion of Southern slavery, the growing tide of white prejudice in the North, and the failure to achieve racial equality in the wake of gradual abolition. This study argues that the ACS' axioms of reform represented an important retreat from earlier antislavery ideology. When immediate abolitionists emerged they linked gradualism with colonization and labeled both reactionary and exclusionist, thus erasing the racially progressive origins of American abolitionism that this work aims to recapture.

THIS DISSERTATION RECASTS the history of American abolitionism. An overview of the current literature on gradual emancipation and organized antislavery in the U.S. before the antebellum era underscores the need for revising the historiography of pre-Garrisonian abolitionism. In the last two decades the myth of a Post-Revolutionary North unburdened by the struggle over abolition has been shattered. Joanne Melish, Gary Nash, Jean Soderlund, Leslie Harris and Shane White, among others, have ably shown how the piecemeal orientation of gradual emancipation and the reluctance of white Northerners to embrace African American freedom hampered free blacks socially, politically and economically. As important a corrective

as this literature has provided, scholars are now as preoccupied with demonstrating the failures of Northern emancipation and the prevalence of endemic white prejudice as they once were with celebrating abolition and minimizing white hostility to black freedom. The process of gradual emancipation in the New England and Middle Atlantic states between 1780-1804 is almost universally depicted as a series of conservative compromises that worked against the interest of slaves. The natural rights of all took a back seat to the property rights of slaveholders while Revolutionary ideals of equality were sacrificed on the altar of white prejudice, contemporary historians conclude.<sup>2</sup>

The activists who championed gradual emancipation are presented in a similar vein as the type of abolition for which they fought. They held fast to natural rights doctrines even as they recognized the rights of slaveholders to property in persons. They argued for the innate equality of all persons even as they doubted the suitability of the very slaves whose bondage they protested to a state of freedom. Their program of antislavery reform, though driven by theoretically egalitarian dictates, at best projected a well-intentioned but narrowly elitist paternalism and at worst repressively perpetuated proslavery principles by establishing an "informal servitude" for both the free blacks and emancipated slaves who fell under their moral and intellectual guidance. This scholarship's implicit historical measuring stick of immediate

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<sup>2</sup> Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1790-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Leslie M. Harris, *In The Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) and George William Van Cleve, *A Slaveholder's Union: Slavery, Politics, and The Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). The most influential of recent monographs to analyze gradual emancipation in the North is Melish's, *Disowning Slavery*. Melish conceives of gradual emancipation as a conservative process whereby whites grafted onto gradually emancipated freepersons their racist assumptions of black inferiority and incapacity for citizenship, thereby eliminating the presence of slaves, but disqualifying African Americans from the sociopolitical arena of early national America.

emancipation and unconditional black equality has concealed the underlying philosophy that defined early abolitionism and infused the movement's activism.<sup>3</sup>

The above interpretation is reflected in the prevailing study of abolitionism in the early republic. Richard Newman's *The Transformation of American Abolitionism* paints a dichotomous portrait of the history of American antislavery movements by setting an early republican, conservative approach of gradualism in stark contrast to an antebellum democratic strategy of immediatism. Newman argues that what started as a limited effort led by a group of elite Quaker lawyers, who advocated gradual abolition and focused exclusively on the legalistic strategies of petitioning Congress and working through the courts, transformed itself over the course of the nineteenth century into a mass movement. Drawing upon women and African Americans, this new movement called for the immediate abolition of slavery and directed its energy outside of the strictures of the political and legal world. While identifying important structural changes in American abolitionism, Newman's dualistic framework causes him to leave unexamined key elements of early antislavery reform such as the emphasis placed on public persuasion, black education and civil integration, and the joint building of an abolitionist ideology between African American activists and their white allies.<sup>4</sup>

One study that has moved the literature of early abolitionism beyond its current limitations is David Gellman's *Emancipating New York*. In his book Gellman takes seriously the challenge Revolutionary and Enlightenment ideology presented to American slavery and the utilization of this challenge by the New York Manumission Society. He uncovers the diffusion of

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<sup>3</sup> For a sampling of this interpretation of the abolitionists who lobbied for gradual emancipation see Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 50-83; White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 81-88; Robert J. Swann, "John Teasman: African-American Educator and the Emergence of Community in Early Black New York City, 1787-1815" *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Autumn, 1992), 331-356 and John L. Rury, "Philanthropy, Self-Help, and Social Control: The New York Manumission Society and Free Blacks, 1785-1810" *Phylon*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (3rd Qtr., 1985), 231-241.

<sup>4</sup> Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

an antislavery public discourse that arose in the pages of New York's press, concluding that this material carried with it racially egalitarian mores and possessed important ramifications for black citizenship. But Gellman's focus on the discursive debates over abolition confine his analysis, for the most part, to the print sphere. This study reconceptualizes early abolitionism writ large as a racially progressive reform enterprise.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of such a reconceptualization goes beyond recapturing the meaning of an underappreciated reform movement. Scholars of American abolitionism, writing largely from the vantage point of immediate abolitionists and their ardent rejection of colonization, have tended to portray antislavery reform prior to the 1830s as inadequately liberal and racially retrograde. As a result, colonization is often couched as the first fully formed solution to the problem of slavery in a republic ostensibly founded on the ideals of freedom and equality. Fleshing out the version of abolitionism that came before colonization rose to prominence shines new light on the history of slavery, race and reform in the pre-Civil War United States and reframes the narrative of antislavery in America.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer, *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism* (The New Press: New York, 2006) reflects the bifurcated conception of antislavery activism, contrasting a "gradualist embrace of colonization" with "an immediatist belief in racial equality." See McCarthy and Stauffer, *Prophets of Protest*, xxix. Revealing the predominance of this viewpoint, U.S. history textbooks either skip over early abolitionism altogether and/or present the ACS as the first American antislavery movement. See Jennifer D. Keane, Saul Cornell and Edward T. O'Donnell, *Visions of America: A History of the United States, Combined Volume* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 290-291; David H. Goldfield, et al., *The American Journey: A History of the United States, Vol. 1, 6th edition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2010), 344-345; James L. Roark, et al., *The American Promise: A History of the United States* (New York: Bedford St. Martin's, 2003), 252; H.W.A. Brands et al., *American Stories: A History of the United States, Combined Vol., Second Edition* (New York: Pearson, 2009), 330 and Gary B. Nash, et al., *The American People: Creating a Nation and a Society, Combined Volume* (New York: Pearson, 2008), 410. Likewise, the premier synthesis on American Abolitionism ignores the early abolition movement. James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, Revised Edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996). Scholarship on the early national, gradual abolitionist movement pales in comparison to the historiography of the antebellum, immediate abolitionist movement. See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 213-342; Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 16-106; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 74-166; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 50-83; Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 56-186; Thomas Robert Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society" (Ph.D., diss., New York University, 1963); Wayne J. Eberly, "The

Establishing the racially egalitarian potential of early abolitionism allows for the reinterpretation of the emergence of colonization as a departure from the earlier antislavery organizational tradition. A surge in scholarship on American colonization has complicated the meaning of the movement. Once viewed as a proslavery device of Southern slaveholders eager to strengthen human bondage, several recent works have established the antislavery values of many of colonization's proponents, especially in the Northern states. Almost none of these studies, however, has analyzed the ACS in relation to its organizational precursor and what colonization's widely divergent reform views tell us about the trajectory of slavery, race and antislavery reform in the early republic. The lone exception, Beverly Tomek's *Colonization and Its Discontents*, argues for continuity between the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, whereas this work finds a striking disparity in the reform philosophy of early abolitionists and that of colonizationists.<sup>7</sup>

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Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1775-1830," (Ph.D. diss., The Pennsylvania State University, 1973) and Robert Duane Sayre, "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism: The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race, 1794-1837 (Ph.D., diss., Ohio State University, 1987) for the most systematic coverage of antislavery reform in the early republic. The standard account of Northern emancipation remains Arthur Zilversmit's, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> On the "benevolent" or "humanitarian" strain among Northern colonizationists and their antislavery values see Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 93-131; Nicholas Guyatt, "'The Outskirts of Our Happiness': Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 95, No. 4 (March 2009), 986-1011; Hugh Davis, "Northern Colonizationists and Free Blacks, 1823-1827: A Case Study of Leonard Bacon," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Winter, 1997), 651-675; Hugh Davis, *Leonard Bacon: New England Reformer and Antislavery Moderate* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 1998); Eric Burin, "Rethinking Northern White Support for the African Colonization Movement: The Pennsylvania Colonization Society as an Agent of Emancipation," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. CXXVII, No. 2 (April 2003), 197-229 and George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper and Row Publishing, 1971), 1-42. On the ACS generally see P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) and Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2005).

This dissertation also brings together early abolitionist reform and the flowering of free black antislavery activism. Historians of American antislavery have increasingly recognized the indispensable role of African American activists in the formation of antebellum abolitionism. But, with some notable exceptions, the growing scholarship on African American community growth and protest thought in the early national and antebellum North has tended to isolate black abolitionism from its firm basis in the ideological moorings of Post-Revolutionary America--as expressed by the abolitionist societies and its free black supporters--rather than inspect the ways in which African American reform may have developed in tandem with the antislavery societies of this period.<sup>8</sup>

In the largest sense, this study endeavors to contribute to the historiography of race as a fluid ideological construction, and a contingent and contextual force. Thirty years ago Barbara Fields reconfigured the way historians understand race in American history. Where scholars had naturalized race as a "transhistorical, almost metaphysical phenomena" beyond the realm of rigorous historical inquiry, Fields countered that race represented a social construction constantly in flux and changing according to the course of other ideologies that inform social experience at a given historical moment. Studies of slavery and race in the early American republic were

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<sup>8</sup> Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*; Harris, *In The Shadow of Slavery*; Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and The Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Leslie Alexander, *African or American: Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Champaign, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 2008). See Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) and Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) for evidence of the interlocking visions of free black uplift between the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and black leaders in Philadelphia, and their active cooperation on issues of moral and educational reform in the early nineteenth century. See also Patrick Rael's, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) which links the creation of a black protest tradition to the larger ideological framework of Post-Revolutionary American intellectual thought. For the birth and development of black abolitionism see, Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, Philip Lapsansky, *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2001); McCarthy and Stauffer, *Prophets of Protest* and James O. Horton and Lois E Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

necessarily invigorated by Fields' findings. Yet viewing Revolutionary ideology as a phenomena that should have led unequivocally to full freedom and equality for slaves but did not, scholars have framed their analyses so as to explain why the Revolution was an alleged failure on this score. The primary answer has been what Jim Oakes has called a "racial consensus" (either through a general white racism or abolitionist paternalism) that limited the potential for emancipation and racial equality from the outset. The idea of a racial consensus leaves little room for the nuanced conception of race formation envisioned by Fields. This dissertation reevaluates our understanding of race and reform in the early republic, delineating the period as one of contest over the shape and meaning of race and African American freedom.<sup>9</sup>

In plotting the origins of abolitionism in America, this work stresses the shifting ideological beliefs of antislavery reformers and the greater society in which they operated. This methodological decision certainly is not meant to downplay alternative modes of analysis. Much important scholarship on the origins of antislavery throughout the Atlantic world has examined the relationship between capitalism and the rise of movements in opposition to slavery. Other accounts have looked to explain the emergence of organized antislavery from an imperial perspective. Without in any way discounting either of these approaches, this study spotlights the terms of the contest over slavery, race and abolitionism in the early American republic rather than the structural developments that made this struggle possible.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in J. Morgan Koussar and James M. McPherson, *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-177; James Oakes, "Conflict vs. Racial Consensus in the History of Antislavery Politics," in John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason, *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 291-303.

<sup>10</sup> I define ideology throughout this work as the underlying body of beliefs, values and societal doctrines that set the terms for the reform efforts of early abolitionists, free black activists and colonizationists. I underscore the role of ideology in interpreting organized antislavery under the assumption that we need to gain access to the mindset of reformers themselves, distilling the thought that informed their various versions of reform, in order to effectively understand the meaning of their activism. For some of the major works on the debate over the relationship between antislavery and capitalism see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina

THE FIRST STEP in chronicling gradual abolitionism begins with tracing what the movement was up against. Chapter one profiles the imposing impediments that stood in the way of African American freedom in the Mid-Atlantic. Though chattel bondage never held the same importance in the Mid-Atlantic as it did in the South, during the colonial era, slavery still matured into a full grown institution in the region. Based on the assumption of the categorical inferiority of blacks, enslaved and free, and grounded in violence, oppression, and fear of revolt and rebellion, slavery in the Mid-Atlantic left a lasting legacy of white prejudice with which gradual abolitionists would have to wrestle. While the great majority of white Americans remained at best indifferent to slavery, all did not. The first chapter also surveys the origins of and reasons for Quaker antislavery sentiment. It examines the convergence between Quaker theological dictates and those of the secular Enlightenment that would come to form the roots of early abolitionism, highlighted by the life and activism of Anthony Benezet and Benjamin Rush. By the time the abolition societies were founded, a dialectic had emerged between slavery's antagonists and the institution's defenders that made race the terrain on which the two side's would fight for their respective positions. The chapter ends with coverage of the debates over emancipation in the Revolutionary Mid-Atlantic. It demonstrates how the defenders of slavery utilized claims of the incapacity of those of African descent for freedom and the property rights of slaveholders in putting up the two foremost roadblocks to the abolition societies' emancipatory agenda.

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Press, 1944); Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*; Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part I," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 2 (Apr., 1985), 339-361 and Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part II," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (Jun., 1985), 547-566. Two of the best works on the imperial roots of Atlantic abolitionism include Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: The Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (New York: Verso Books, 1988).

The second and third chapters examine how the abolition societies responded to these roadblocks. Chapter two charts the abolitionists' quest for emancipation laws and their enforcement. The racial and property rights arguments of slavery's defenders ensured that emancipation in the Mid-Atlantic would be a gradual process. Moving beyond an analysis of gradual emancipation statutes alone, the second chapter maps the myriad ways early abolitionists worked for the liberation of African Americans from slavery. It presents the gradual emancipation process as a prolonged conflict in which the abolition societies fight to end slavery consistently endeavored to extend the rights of slaves and free blacks alike. The fruits of these efforts were undoubtedly mixed. In New York and Pennsylvania, where organizational abolitionism was strongest, the rights of slaves and free blacks were strengthened and those of slaveholders weakened from the passage of Pennsylvania's 1780 gradual abolition act to New York's decision in 1817 to set a date for the total abolition of slavery. In New Jersey and Delaware, where the abolitionist presence was less marked, the results of antislavery activism were more ambiguous. Of course, this fact only underscores the central role abolition societies played in making possible black freedom and uplift.

Early abolitionists waged not only a legal war against slavery. They also worked to change the American racial environment that nurtured human bondage. Chapter three sketches the abolition societies' reform philosophy. Revolutionary ideology left a mixed legacy for antislavery activists. Natural rights rhetoric provided an invaluable source of strength for abolitionists. But at the same time, Revolutionary thought conceived of slaves as lacking the autonomy and virtue that free Americans would need to keep intact the burgeoning republic's fragile venture in self-government. Coupled with longstanding white prejudice, doubts about the ability of persons of African descent for responsible freedom demanded a response from

abolitionists. Their answer was a reform program that this chapter names social reform environmentalism. The abolition societies intended to reform the social environment that both degraded African Americans and prejudiced whites towards them. One half of this equation involved proving the aptitude of blacks for virtuous freedom through African American education and civil incorporation. The third chapter shows how gradual abolitionists attempted to mold emancipated slaves into virtuous citizens of the early republic by way of an educational and behavioral program based on the larger ideals of Post-Revolutionary American society. Early abolitionists also wanted to cultivate an antislavery public. Emboldened by an enlightenment belief that white prejudice was vulnerable to defeat, antislavery activists published a panoply of essays, orations and poems arguing for the innate equality of African Americans and making empathetic links between white and black. The abolition societies hoped that this campaign of persuasion would reform the environment in which white Americans cast judgment on those of African descent, thereby augmenting emancipation.

The abolition societies were joined in their reformism by black activists. The fourth chapter looks at the imperative role African American reformers played in the early abolition movement. Agreeing with their white counterparts that the defense of slavery grounded in a denial of the capacity of blacks for virtuous liberty had to be overcome, African American activists set out to create a community of republicans of color. The virtue, morality and piety of republicans of color would shatter the assertion of slavery's proponents that emancipated bondspersons could not properly handle their liberty. Taking as its starting point black progress in the early national Mid-Atlantic rather than a later period beset by growing racial inequality and antagonism, this chapter reconstructs free black abolitionism in early national New York and Philadelphia. Chapter four grounds the origins of African American abolitionism in an optimistic

outlook on the future of black people in the American republic. It begins by acknowledging the explosive growth of the free black population in the Mid-Atlantic, particularly in the urban centers of New York City and Philadelphia, while then tracking the formation of African American churches, fraternal organizations and other outlets of communal sustenance. The chapter next describes the remarkable ascendance of individual blacks turned abolitionists whose own lives seemed to indicate that freedpersons could indeed become republicans of color. Chapter four closes by examining African American pamphlets, petitions, orations and organizational documents. It argues for the deep seated identification black activists made with their fellow white reformers predicated on the optimistic belief that the cultivation of republicans of color offered the surest route to slavery's abolition.

If optimism about the progress of Africans in America sustained early abolitionism, the colonization movement derived its antislavery program from the exact opposite premise. The final chapter evaluates the ascendance of colonization and the response of the abolition societies and African American activists to this new reform movement. Colonizationists believed that an immutable racial gulf permanently divided white from black Americans. This division, they thought, created a static environment of black inequality that made prejudice perpetual just as it left abolition an impossibility. To colonizationists, the only road to abolition was black removal. Chapter five starts by accounting for the origins of the ACS and tracing the organization's founding. While the ACS attracted a diverse set of members, all colonizationists shared the belief that white prejudice had to be placated rather than countered and that freed blacks could not be incorporated into the republic. The message of black removal as a device of antislavery did not at first win many converts in the Mid-Atlantic. It was not until the 1820s, as race relations deteriorated in the urban North, that auxiliary colonization societies began to establish a firm

presence in the region. The fifth chapter provides an in-depth survey of Mid-Atlantic colonizationist rhetoric to show how severely the reform vision of these activists departed from their early abolitionist predecessors. The chapter closes by looking at the reaction of white and black gradual abolitionists to colonization. Although the abolition societies and African American activists struggled to come to terms with colonization, both groups ultimately rejected the ideology of the ACS, choosing instead to reassert their allegiance to the pre-ACS abolitionist values that they had earlier forged.

The geographic focus of this study is on the Mid-Atlantic states of New York, Pennsylvania, and to a lesser extent, New Jersey and Delaware. For several reasons, this region is ripe for an analysis of early American abolitionism. First, the organizational nexus of early abolitionism was located in the Mid-Atlantic. With a legacy of Quaker antislavery activism that inspired a wider campaign in the Post-Revolutionary era, the region possessed the two most prominent societies of the gradual abolitionist movement: the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the New York Manumission Society. These two organizations were the most active and influential in setting the tone for the broader movement's agenda and they also led the way in founding a national conglomeration of abolition societies. The contested character of emancipation in the Mid-Atlantic provides one of the major reasons for the presence of organized abolitionism in the region. Emancipation in the Mid-Atlantic was a highly divisive and drawn out affair taking a quarter of a century to accomplish. This protracted battle over black freedom did much to engender the activist strategy and ideological approach of gradual abolitionists which this dissertation profiles. Even when Mid-Atlantic abolitionists achieved statutory emancipation, the proximity of the region to slave states continued to demand the antislavery efforts of the abolition societies and drew others to colonization when the ACS

arrived on the reform scene in 1816. Finally, the Mid-Atlantic states possessed 80 percent of the Northern black population in the early republic and, in the cities of New York and Philadelphia, two of the most organized and vocal free African American communities. The region's vibrant free black communities fostered a unique partnership between white and black abolitionists that did so much to shape the version of abolitionism that unfolds in the pages that follow.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Although an argument could be made for placing Delaware in the Upper South in a study of slavery and antislavery in the early republic, I have included the state in the Mid-Atlantic region due to a few important factors. During the Post-Revolutionary and early national eras, Delaware's ratio of free blacks to enslaved African Americans was comparable with that of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. Delaware also had communities of Quaker antislavery reformers and several abolition societies throughout the period under study. Additionally, while Delaware did not legally abolish slavery in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries, its manumission laws and statutes regarding free blacks were more in line with its northern neighbors than those of Maryland or Virginia.

CHAPTER I:  
TO FOREGO CUSTOMS AND POPULAR OPINIONS: THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY  
AMERICAN ABOLITIONISM

When the antislavery activist Anthony Benezet sat down in 1762 to write a pamphlet opposing slavery and the slave trade, he could not have known that his words represented the first flickers of American abolitionism. Still enmeshed in a fight to end slaveholding among his fellow Quakers, Benezet nonetheless aimed his arguments at a broader reading public that he hoped to convert to the incipient cause of antislavery. Calling human bondage "contrary to the Dictates of Reason, and the common Feelings of Humanity," Benezet began sculpting an antislavery discourse that would define the movement against human bondage for years to come. Though slavery was founded on "Tyranny, Oppression and Cruelty," Benezet believed that Americans had learned to accept uncritically the "iniquitous" practice of holding people as property. A century of the "Example and Use" of blacks serving as chattel had made racial slavery normative and "reconcil[e]" Americans to an inhuman custom that "to our unprejudiced Minds, would strike us with Amazement and Horror." It was in trying to revolutionize white American attitudes toward slavery and black inequality that early abolitionists like Anthony Benezet gave birth to an antislavery movement.<sup>1</sup>

EXAMINING SLAVERY IN the pre-Revolutionary Mid-Atlantic reveals the truth of Benezet's allusion to the entrenchment of white prejudice during the colonial era. Chattel bondage had a long and racially repressive history in the region. Slavery never took root in the colonies north of

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of that Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes; with Respect to the Fertility of the Country; the good Disposition of many of the Natives, and the Manner by which the Slave Trade is carried on* (Philadelphia, 1762), 4.

Maryland to the same extent as it did in the southern colonies. Lacking a staple crop from which to form the large-scale plantation system that came to define the colonial South, the middle colonies did not end up staking their social, economic and cultural life on chattel slavery. Still, slavery's presence in the region was undeniable. From the wheat fields of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey and Delaware to the artisan shops of New York City and the bustling port of Philadelphia, slaves filled a variety of roles for the labor-hungry white settlers as domestics, mercantile workers, craftsmen and farm laborers.<sup>2</sup>

The Dutch were the first European imperial power to utilize slave labor in the middle colonies. In the first half of the seventeenth century they established New Netherland--encompassing the future colonies of New York, New Jersey and Delaware. Instituting slavery during a period in which the lines of distinction between free whites and black slaves were not fully demarcated, the Dutch's handling of human bondage provides an instructive example of the indefinite nature of early slavery in the Mid-Atlantic. In 1609 the English explorer Henry Hudson, in search of a Northeast water route to Asia, took a Dutch-sponsored voyage and surveyed an area between the North (Hudson) River and the South (Delaware) River. Eleven years after Hudson's voyage the Dutch West India Company, operating under an exclusive charter granted by the Dutch Republic, set out to exploit the commercial opportunities they

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<sup>2</sup> For slavery and the black experience in bondage in the colonial Mid-Atlantic see Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1966); Harris, *In The Shadow of Slavery*, 11-48; Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 6-139; Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 15-25; Henry Scofield Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1896); Marion Thompson Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (April, 1943), 159-171; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 8-38; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 3-41; Edward R. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery--Servitude--Freedom, 1639-1861* (Washington D.C.: American Historical Association, 1911), 1-54; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 47-64 and Patience Essah, *A House Divided: Slavery and Emancipation in Delaware, 1638-1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 9-35.

hoped to find in the New World. Like the Spanish before them and the English after, the Dutch West India Company would look to African slavery in seeking to realize their economic goals.

Unlike the English, the Dutch turn to black bondage was more desperate than calculated. The Dutch West India company struggled mightily to attract permanent settlers to New Netherland. Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that the company had never planned to build extensive colonial settlements, setting up instead makeshift trade posts to handle the fur trade. But the Dutch West India Company did try to establish a more concerted presence in the region when it initiated the patroonship system; patroons were wealthy and well-connected Dutch landowners granted vast tracts of land on the condition that they bring at least fifty settlers to farm their holdings. Economic conditions in the Dutch Republic, however, were not sufficiently dire to push laborers into the great unknown of the New World wilderness. Thus the Dutch West India Company imported slaves to fill the labor vacuum. By the mid-1650s the ascendancy of agriculture over the fur trade as the primary economic engine of New Netherland coupled with the Dutch loss of Brazil to the Portuguese--which necessitated new markets for Dutch slave traders--meant that slavery became an institution integral to the colony's survival.<sup>3</sup>

If the presence of black slavery hardly made New Netherland unique compared with other North American colonies, its form differed markedly from that which the English would later institute once wresting control of the region in the 1660s. One advantage of New Netherland slaves was that many of the early arrivals belonged to what Ira Berlin has called the "charter generation." Consisting of cosmopolitan creoles familiar with European society, the charter generation had a cultural capital of sorts that aided them in negotiating the terms of their enslavement and helped them adjust to New World conditions. Just as importantly, because the Dutch had such a hard time bringing white laborers to New Netherland, they relied upon their

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<sup>3</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 2-7; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 13-14.

bondspersons for certain imperative tasks, including the armed defense of the colony, that brought more privileges to the enslaved than may have otherwise been the case. At the same time, there may simply not have been enough bondspersons in New Netherland to necessitate a thoroughgoing and restrictive group of laws systematically setting off enslaved Africans from the rest of the population. New Netherland slavery took shape during an era when colonial bondage's embryonic character meant that the restrictive orientation of the institution had yet to fully mature.<sup>4</sup>

The Dutch's approach to slavery illustrates the institution's ambiguous nature in New Netherland. Slaves possessed the right to own property, had equal rights to trial, and maintained the ability to sue whites and testify against them in a court of law. Not only were these rights stripped from black bondspersons during the early eighteenth century, but the very denial of these privileges came to form a large part of the legal core of what it meant to be a slave in colonial America. Some of New Netherland's slaves also attained a status known as "half freedom." In this system, bondspersons who pledged to pay an annual fee to the Dutch West India Company in agricultural produce were put "at liberty, on the same footing as other Free people," thus helping to further erode the barriers between black and white and slave and free. Free blacks too enjoyed a level of liberty at which their later counterparts in the English colonial Mid-Atlantic would have marveled. New Netherland's free blacks could carry firearms or marry whites and some even had white servants. Furthermore, there is no record of racially discriminatory legislation being levied at free blacks during the Dutch occupation of the Mid-Atlantic. Despite this comparatively liberal racial atmosphere, slavery was a heritable condition

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<sup>4</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 15-92; A. Leo Higginbotham Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 103. As Higginbotham notes, had the Dutch maintained control of the region they may have followed broader patterns of slavery's profusion and established a firmer, more racially exclusive form of human bondage.

for most New Netherland bondspersons and equal freedom remained out of reach for the majority of the colony's black population. Yet, slavery's fluidity in New Netherland does stand in stark contrast to the English colonial conception of black bondage and free blacks.<sup>5</sup>

The English takeover of New Netherland in 1664 greatly expanded the role of slavery in the region and eventually eliminated any uncertainties about the status of bondspersons. Part of this change in policy resulted from larger forces affecting all of the North American colonies. The last third of seventeenth century saw the English economy improve and the supply of white indentured servants dry up just as the availability of African laborers increased with the British entry into the transatlantic slave trade. Life expectancy rose and with it the prospect of owning someone's labor for life, rather than a limited term, became more attractive. More direct policy choices dictated the English emphasis on slave labor in the Mid-Atlantic. The Duke of York--granted jurisdiction over all of the middle colonies--held a large investment in the Royal African Company and looked to flood the region with slaves, beginning with making Manhattan a major slave trading port.<sup>6</sup>

Viewing the colony of New York as a valuable outlet for the crown-sponsored slave trade, both the Duke of York and the colonial officials he installed made it their mission to facilitate slavery's growth at all costs. The Duke of York's Laws of 1665 limited indentured servitude to an

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<sup>5</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 11-22; Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 100-114; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 20-26; *Act of the Director and Council of New Netherland, emancipating certain Negro Slaves therein Mentioned. Passed 25 February, 1644*, in E.B. O'Callaghan, *Laws and Ordinances of New Netherland, 1638-1674* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1868), 36-37. The reach of half freedom was limited in that "half free" slaves had to pay an annual tribute to the Dutch West India Company to maintain their liberty and their status was not passed on to their children, who were to remain the chattel possessions of the company. The "half free" system, in moving the burden of economic sufficiency of African laborers on to slaves and away from the Dutch West Indian Company, provided pragmatic incentives for the adoption of the law and demonstrates that half freedom was not the product of antislavery principles or egalitarian mores. That the Dutch ceased to permit African baptism in 1655 because of the belief by blacks that it brought them freedom further shows that New Netherland authorities were concerned with upholding the institution of bondage. See Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Slavery began its social, legal and economic solidification in the Mid-Atlantic around the same time as it did in colonial Virginia. See the now classic study, Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975).

explicitly agreed upon length of time, revoking a Dutch practice of indefinite servitude that had made indenturing a more flexible and attractive mode of labor. Then, in 1679, New York's Governor outlawed the enslavement of Indians, pushing the labor pool further in the direction of black bondage. The policies encouraging African slavery were effective. By the mid-1740s New York's slave population reached 19,000, by far the largest number in any colony north of Maryland. And Manhattan was only third to Charleston and New Orleans on the list of colonial cities with the greatest concentration of bondspersons.<sup>7</sup>

While New York led the way in extending slavery's presence in the region, the other middle colonies soon followed. From the beginning, the English made a much stronger effort than the Dutch to entice permanent colonization in the Mid-Atlantic. Under the proprietary system of colonial settlement, a small group of aristocrats and nobles who supported the restoration of Charles II to the English Crown were given governing and financial control of Anglo American colonies as political favors. Looking to maximize profit on their colonial investments in a region that lacked any extractable wealth other than the land itself, the proprietors quickly adopted a liberal land granting system that rewarded slaveholders. Settlers in New Jersey were offered between 30 and 65 acres for every slave they brought to the colony. When Queen Anne gained control of New Jersey in 1702, her close ties to the Royal African Company resulted in the demand that the colony receive a "constant and sufficient supply of merchantable Negroes" and helped give New Jersey the second largest slave population in the Mid-Atlantic. Delaware instituted similar land granting policies as New Jersey, making slave labor an important element in the colony's economy and increasing the enslaved population one thousand fold between 1650 and 1750. Even in Pennsylvania, where William Penn launched the

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<sup>7</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 23-25; Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 115-116; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 27-29.

"Holy Experiment," slaveowners were given generous land grants and Quaker settlers eagerly bought African slaves to fulfill their need for labor.<sup>8</sup>

Although the middle colonies as a whole actively encouraged the expansion of slavery, the institution took shape differently in each colony. The comparative abundance of slaves in New York discouraged the migration of indentured servants. In New York City this translated into a relatively skilled enslaved workforce that staffed artisanal positions which would have otherwise gone to indentured whites. Outside of the city, in the fertile Hudson River Valley and the farms of Long Island, bondspersons worked as agricultural laborers and slave holdings were larger. Slavery's place in the neighboring colony of New Jersey was the product of two disparate sections. In 1676 the colony was split into East and West Jersey. East Jersey's close proximity to New York and the prominent slave port of Manhattan made slavery an important presence. West Jersey, further from New York and populated mostly by Quaker farmers, shied away from enslaved labor and later came to actively oppose slavery. Even after the two Jersey's united at the opening of the eighteenth century, these differences endured.<sup>9</sup>

Delaware's intra-colonial split over slavery was even greater than New Jersey's. In southern Delaware, adjacent to the Chesapeake colonies of Maryland and Virginia, a slave labor economy based on tobacco cultivation took hold of the region as early as the 1680s. Conversely, in Delaware's northern region distance from the slave societies of the Chesapeake limited slavery's economic centrality. Northern Delaware settlers' views of slavery hewed closely to their neighbors in Pennsylvania. When Pennsylvanians moved towards abolishing slavery in the late eighteenth century so too did the northern Delawareans, especially Quakers, seek the elimination

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<sup>8</sup> Cooley, *A study of Slavery in New Jersey*, 9-10; Wright, *New Jersey Laws and the Negro*, 165; Essah, *A House Divided*, 18-26; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 9-12.

<sup>9</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 41-57; Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 18-21; Wright, *New Jersey Laws and the Negro*, 159-161.

of human bondage from their borders. This created what Patience Essah has fittingly dubbed "a House Divided" effect in the state that would endure even after the Civil War.<sup>10</sup>

Slavery formed a part of the socioeconomic fabric of Pennsylvania, specifically in Philadelphia. Like Manhattan, Philadelphia served as a busy slave port and enslaved laborers made up an undeniable component of the city's workforce. But Pennsylvania attracted many more white laborers than New York, and Philadelphia had fewer slaves (and fewer skilled ones) than those of Manhattan. Pennsylvania's rural settlers also utilized slave labor on their farms, yet throughout the colonial period Pennsylvania had the fewest number of slaves of all the middle colonies.<sup>11</sup>

AS AFRICAN SLAVES entered the Mid-Atlantic in ever greater numbers, colonial officials wrote into law statutes clearly demarcating slavery as a heritable and unalterable condition. New York and New Jersey moved first. A 1702 New York law officially acknowledged the chattel principle of American slavery by deeming slaves "the property of Christians." In 1706, the New York Assembly sanctioned slavery as an inherited state following the status of the mother and further clarified the racial contours of bondage when it declared "Negroes only shall be slaves." This same law, along with one issued in East Jersey in 1704, shut the door to Christianity as a means for slaves to claim their freedom by decreeing that baptism could not change the status of the enslaved. In 1700, the Pennsylvania assembly (whose laws at this time also applied to the colony of Delaware) issued an edict entitled "An Act for the better Regulation of Servants" that endorsed black bondage as a lifelong condition, legally distinct from that of indentured servitude.

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<sup>10</sup> Essah, *A House Divided*, 18-22.

<sup>11</sup> Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 1-16; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 14-40.

Whatever opportunity once existed for slaves to negotiate the terms of their enslavement vanished by the early years of the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup>

Mid-Atlantic colonial officials did more than inscribe racial slavery on the record books. From the close of the seventeenth century through the 1740s, the assemblies of the middle colonies enacted a spate of codes that condemned bondspersons to an inferior and unequal status. All four of the middle colonies created special courts for slaves accused of crimes. The fate of slaves subject to these courts was decided not by a jury but by a group of justices and prominent freeholders, called specifically to mete out an often rough justice to unruly chattel. Further handicapping the ability of the enslaved to receive a fair trial, none of the middle colonies sanctioned slave testimony unless it was directed at other slaves. Slave testimony was almost always used to implicate bondspersons in plots against their masters or the state and the enslaved were never permitted to answer the accusations of a free white person. The slave courts allowed colonial authorities to expedite the punishment of slaves, limit the bondsperson's ability to defend him or herself and inflict upon those found guilty penalties reserved only for persons of African descent.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Zebina Lincoln, William H. Johnson and Ansel Judd Northrup, *The Colonial Laws of New York From the Year 1664 to the Revolution* (Albany: J.B. Lyon, 1894), Vol. I, 521; Bernard Bush, *Laws of the Royal Colony of New Jersey, 1703-1745*, Vol. II (Trenton: New Jersey State Library, Archives and History Bureau, 1977), 28-30; John Purdon and George M. Stroud, *A Digest of the Laws of Pennsylvania. From the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred, to the Twenty-Second Day of April, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Forty-Six* (Philadelphia: Thomas Davis, 1847), 1064. Slavery was never explicitly codified in Pennsylvania as an inherited status, though the body of slave codes in the colony and the widespread use of slaves attest to the fact that the institution was firmly established there. The *An Act for the better regulation of servants in this province and territories* gives indirect evidence of slavery's inherited and racial nature in Pennsylvania as early as 1700. The law extended the service of white indentured servants found guilty of stealing goods but meted out corporal punishment for blacks convicted of identical crimes--assumedly because black laborers, as chattel, had no more years of service to pledge for restitution.

<sup>13</sup> Aaron Leaming and Jacob Spicer, *The Grants, Concessions and Original Constitutions of the Province of New Jersey: The Acts Passed During the Proprietary Governments, and other material Transactions before the Surrender thereof to Queen Anne* (Somerville, NJ: Honeyman and Co., 1881), 357; Bush, *Laws of the Royal Colony of New Jersey*, Vol. II (New Jersey Archives: Trenton, 1977), 136-140; James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania, 1682-1800*, Vol. I. (Harrisburg, PA: Clarence M. Busch, 1896-1915), 297; Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. II, 77-79; Lincoln, Johnson and Northrup, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, Vol. I, 521, 598, 631, 765-766; *Laws of the State of Delaware, From the Fourteenth*

And those penalties were harsh. Even in a period when corporal punishment for a variety of crimes was standard, condemned slaves faced an especially cruel and unusual type of punishment. In Pennsylvania, Delaware and New York, slaves found guilty of stealing goods could be whipped as much as the judges and freeholders who decided the case deemed appropriate, even as equivalent white transgressions were limited to a set number of lashes. New York made it lawful for towns to employ a "Common Whipper" for their wayward slaves. In addition to being given forty stripes, New Jersey law mandated that slaves found guilty of pilfering goods be branded with the letter T on their left cheek. For other misdemeanors where free offenders would have received a fine, slaves, because they had no legally recognized possessions, found themselves tied to the whipping post. Pennsylvania and New Jersey required the castration of bondspersons who attempted to rape "or have Carnal Knowledge" of white women while Delaware ordered the ears of such slaves to be cut off.<sup>14</sup>

But the most brutal punishments were reserved for slaves deemed guilty of murdering their masters or conspiring to incite a rebellion. In 1694 a New Jersey slave convicted of murder was to have his hand cut off and "burned before thine eyes" after which he was to be hanged and his corpse burned. Fourteen years later two slaves on Long Island who had killed their master and his family were put to death. One was burned alive while the other was "hung in gibbets and placed astride a sharp iron." The guilty slaves were subjected "to all the torment possible for a terror to others." Slaves were often called to witness these brutal executions. One former slave

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*Day of October, One Thousand Seven Hundred, to the Eighteenth Day of August, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Seven*, Vol. I (New-Castle, DE: Samuel and John Adams, 1797), 102.

<sup>14</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. II, 79, 299; Lincoln, Johnson and Northrup, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, 520; *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. I, 104; Bush, *Laws of the Royal Colony of New Jersey*, Vol. II, 28-30. The English Crown repealed the punishment of castration for attempted rape by persons of color. The resulting revised penalties passed by The Pennsylvania and New Jersey assemblies was reduced, but still harsh. Pennsylvania law now required the black offender to be branded on the forehead with the letters either R or T and exported out of the colony "never to return...upon pain of death." See Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. II, 235.

never forgot the "dreadful screams" of a 20 year old bondsperson whom he was forced to watch burn at the stake not long before the American Revolution. The misery of the slave being executed was compounded when the flames "kindled but slowly" causing his cries to "be heard at a distance of three miles." The aftermath of slave rebellions in New York in 1712 and 1741 left many slaves to be broken on a wheel, hanged, and burned at the stake (the last of these capital punishments one that bondspersons received particularly often). If these executions disregarded the humanity of slaves, the property rights of slaveholders were not forgotten. Masters of executed slaves were compensated for their property, symbolizing how the value of slaves was measured not by their personhood but by their status as chattel objects. In sum, the middle colonies instituted a special system of justice for slaves marked by a level of physical violence and dehumanization far exceeding that applied to freepersons.<sup>15</sup>

Not only did the middle colonies seek to violently repress slave defiance, but bondspersons were also subject to a much greater number of legal restrictions than their free counterparts. To mitigate the threat of slaves running away or meeting to potentially instigate a rebellion, the Mid-Atlantic legislatures severely restricted the free movement of the enslaved. New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Delaware ordered slaves to stay within ten miles of their masters' home at all times, unless given special written authorization by their owners. New Jersey and Pennsylvania enlisted the assistance of white inhabitants by handing out a monetary reward to the person who tracked down and then whipped on the spot the slave found outside the 10 mile boundary. Slaves were also forbidden from gathering in groups due to the widespread fear that

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<sup>15</sup> Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey*, 43; *Boston News-Letter*, Feb. 9 and 23, 1708; William J. Allinson, *Memoir of Quamino Buccau, A Pious Methodist* (Philadelphia: Henry Longstreth, 1851), 4-5; Kenneth Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712," *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 45 (1961), 62. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery*, 136. For colonial laws compensating masters for executed chattel see Lincoln, Johnson and Northrup, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, Vol. I, 631; Bush, *Laws of the Royal Colony of New Jersey*, Vol. II, 136-140; Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. IV, 59-60; *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. I, 103.

such meetings could lead to insurrection plans. These laws hampered slave life and discouraged the construction of a vibrant slave community. Additional withholdings of the rights of bondspersons to trade goods, carry arms, drink spirits and stay out past a certain time of night worked to stifle slave autonomy and leave the enslaved vulnerable to stark penal correction.<sup>16</sup>

Free blacks of the colonial Mid-Atlantic likewise found their rights highly circumscribed. In societies where slavery and blackness were nearly synonymous terms, colonial lawmakers viewed free persons of color as dangerous aberrations to the prevailing institution of black bondage. Intending to perpetuate the lack of socioeconomic independence experienced by many enslaved Africans, a 1704 New Jersey law denied the right of liberated slaves to own property. Eight years later the New York assembly followed this example by similarly taking property rights away from free blacks. Anticipating that free blacks and slaves would always be in league with one another in illicit activities, persons of color were barred from trading with bondspersons and entertaining slaves in their homes. The middle colonies discouraged the growth of the free black population as a whole by mandating that masters planning to manumit their slaves post bond, often for sums far exceeding the value of any individual slave. The potential of a sizeable free black populous simply posed too great a threat in colonial societies predicated on the principle that persons of color were irredeemably condemned to life as chattel slaves.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Leaming and Spicer, *The Grants, Concessions and Original Constitutions of the Province of New Jersey*, 340-342; Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. IV, 63; *Ibid.*, Vol. I., 79; *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. I, 104-105, 215; Lincoln, Johnson and Northrup, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, Vol. I, 519-520, 766-767. Many of these restrictions were often not fully enforced. It was mainly in periods following slave insurrections or suspected planned conspiracies that the full force of the laws were felt. In spite of the restrictions they faced, Mid-Atlantic slaves created families and forged communities.

<sup>17</sup> Bush, *Laws of the Royal Colony of New Jersey*, Vol. II, 28-30, 136-140; Lincoln, Johnson and Northrup, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, Vol. I, 764-765; Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. IV, 60, 62; *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. I, 214-215. New York's ban on free black property holding was not reinstated when the colony revised its slave code in 1730. For a general discussion of the place of free blacks in the slave societies of colonial America see Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University Of North Carolina Press, 1968), 122-128.

Curiously, it was in Pennsylvania, renowned in the Post-Revolutionary era for its racial progressivism, that free blacks faced the most insuperable barriers to equal liberty. During the 1725-1726 legislative session, the Pennsylvania Assembly issued a series of statutes aimed at discouraging the growth of the colony's free black population. Labeling free persons of color an "idle, slothful people" who "often prove burdensome to the neighborhood and afford ill examples to other negroes," the law threatened re-enslavement for those persons of color who "loiter and misspend" their time. The act required the overseers of the poor to bind out for indenture all emancipated bondspersons under the age of 21 and every child of free blacks, with or without the consent of their parents, until the age of 24 for men and 21 for women--a seemingly arbitrary measure that not even the southern colonies took. The 1726 law also criminalized interracial marriages. The black spouse would be sold into slavery in the county where he or she resided. And blacks who lived with white partners "under pretense of being married" or committed adultery with whites were subject to bound labor for seven years. Delaware, still influenced politically by Pennsylvania, passed corresponding laws limiting the rights of free blacks in 1726 and 1740. The message of these laws was clear. Free blacks were unsuited for freedom and in need of being prevented from injuring the sanctity of white society.<sup>18</sup>

Intended to cow slaves and free blacks into submission, the slave laws led instead to a cycle of enslaved resistance and still more draconian measures, all of which worked against recognizing the humanity of black people. Many of the slave codes were written in response to or in anticipation of slave insurrections. New York City was thrown into a panic in 1712 when

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<sup>18</sup> Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. IV, 61-63; *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. I, 108-109, 214-215. The Pennsylvania act levied a 100 pound fine against the official who conducted an interracial marriage. Any children of interracial couples, according to the 1725-26 code, would be bound out until the age of 31. For further analysis of the Pennsylvania act of 1725-6 see Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color*, 283-287. Although modeled after Pennsylvania, Delaware's legal strictures on free blacks were not as extreme as the acts of the Quaker state. Delaware's laws did not mandate the binding out of freed slaves' children unless it could be proved that the parents were "not able to maintain or support" them. They also did not include the penalty of enslavement for the black spouse of intermarried couples or fine the party responsible for marrying black and white persons.

some 24 slaves set a building on fire and then hid in the surrounding woods. When a group of whites arrived to stifle the flames, the slaves pounced, killing nine whites and wounding seven others. For days the city's inhabitants fell into a siege mentality, frantically searching for the insurrectionists. In the end, some 23 slaves were sentenced to death in hasty trials--more than actually participated in the massacre considering that at least six of the conspirators had taken their own lives. One slave was slowly roasted at the stake for 8-10 hours and another one was hung up and left to starve to death. After "justice" had been dispensed, the New York Assembly passed "An Act for preventing Suppressing and punishing the Conspiracy and Insurrection of Negroes and other Slaves," which set legal precedents for much of the colony's slave laws.<sup>19</sup>

Though it did not leave any whites dead, the alleged New York slave conspiracy of 1741 captures how bondspersons were commonly suspected of being inveterate enemies of the state. During the the winter of 1740-41 the colony of New York was gripped by social unrest. Freezing temperatures, food shortages and insecurities over the war taking place between Britain and Spain (Spain offered freedom to any slaves that joined its forces in the imperial struggle) left white New Yorkers on edge. Slave revolts in South Carolina and the West Indies only added to white New Yorkers' dread of slave tumult. After several city buildings were set ablaze and a slave was seen fleeing one of these fires, the authorities uncovered a supposed crime ring implicating lower class whites and blacks as being responsible for the conflagrations. The prosecution's evidence was based on on the unreliable testimony of a 16 year-old white servant. By the time the trials ceased, 30 slaves were executed and 70 banished from the colony. In 1734, New Jersey whites got word of a supposed plot by slaves in the eastern portion of the colony. The slaves were to slay their masters and then escape to Indian territory where they would ally

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Scott, *The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712*; Lincoln, Johnson and Northrup, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, Vol. I, 761-767.

themselves with the French. At least one slave was put to death, while others were fortunate enough only to have their ears chopped off. The colonies of Pennsylvania and Delaware were undoubtedly well aware of these and other alleged slave conspiracies. Inhabitants of these colonies must have similarly remained on guard for any signs of suspicious activity by slaves. Certainly the slave codes of these two colonies seem to indicate as much.<sup>20</sup>

The average slave neither killed his or her master nor plotted to destroy white society through a violent uprising. Yet colonial whites of the Mid-Atlantic came to associate blacks, whether slave or free, with crime, violence and barbarous natural tendencies. These white perceptions of black slaves are elucidated in a printed account of the 1741 New York slave conspiracy. Not long after the prosecutions had ended, the presiding judge Daniel Horsmanden published a transcript of the trials. In his prefatory remarks to the volume, Horsmanden warned "every One that has Negroes, to keep a very watchful Eye of them." Believing slave insubordination resulted from "indulg[ing] them with too great Liberties" rather than imposing too harsh a form of discipline, Horsmanden wanted slaveholders "to keep themselves upon a strict guard against these Enemies of their own Household." In a diatribe directed at one of the condemned bondspersons during the 1741 trials, the court recorder went much further than Horsmanden in debasing the character of enslaved blacks. The recorder lectured the soon to be executed slave that "most of your Complexion" are "worthless, detestable wretches." Estimating that cruelty and a savage disposition was "in the very Nature and Temper of ye" the recorder declared that blacks had clearly "degenerated" so far "below the Dignity of the Humane Species,

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<sup>20</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 126-139; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 43-36. There is a debate among historians as to whether a plot actually existed, but the importance of the 1741 conspiracy lies in what it says about the fragile psyche of colonial whites when it came to the potential for slave revolt. For the New Jersey incident of 1734 see Cooley, *A Study of Slavery in New Jersey*, 42-43.

that even the *brute Animals* may upbraid ye." Black slaves as a whole, he concluded, were the "*the Beasts of the People*."<sup>21</sup>

This phrase, "the Beasts of the People," is an apt metaphor to describe the way many white colonists must have viewed people of African descent. Although a racism based on biological difference would not emerge until the nineteenth century, colonial whites did not need pseudo-scientific theories to prove to them that black people were hopelessly degraded creatures naturally fitted for chattel bondage. The manner in which their societies were structured told them as much. White prejudice also had roots deep within the history of western Europe and long preceded the creation of racial slavery in the English North American colonies. Christian Iberians acknowledged the Muslim construction of black slaves as peculiarly made for the most degrading form of human bondage. By the time Columbus sailed to the Americas and Spain and Portugal inaugurated the New World system of African slavery, white prejudice towards Africans was already an emergent aspect of European culture. Pre-colonial/slave trade era Englishmen themselves had negative conceptions of the word black, associating it with dark, menacing, and evil attributes. When the English encountered Africans beginning in the seventeenth century, they carried these negative connotations and applied them to what they viewed as an uncivilized, heathen culture of a black-skinned people. Thus, previous to the imperial move west, on some level Englishmen already possessed ideas of the African as an inferior "other." Of course, the legal and social dynamics of racial slavery in colonial America put these abstract ideas into practice and made more visceral white prejudices. When human bondage came under widespread attack for the first time during the Revolutionary era, the

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Horsmanden, *A Journal of the Proceedings in the Detection of the Conspiracy Formed by Some White People, in Conjunction with Negro and other Slaves, for Burning the City of New-York in America, and Murdering the Inhabitants* (New York: James Parker, 1744), v-vi, 186.

defenders of slavery would turn to the well-established and deeply engrained colonial white American belief that the only good black was an enslaved one.<sup>22</sup>

IF THERE WAS one group in colonial America that questioned whether persons of color were intended by nature for slavery it was the Quakers. Founded in England during the late 1640s, the Society of Friends was premised on religiously equalitarian ideals. The Quakers' paramount theological principle held that God was accessible to all people. Their belief in an Inner Light assumed every person, regardless of gender, race, creed, or other earthly distinctions, possessed an inborn spirit that rendered all souls equal before God. Friends thought the Inner Light made it possible for all people to lead godly lives and live morally. The concept was based on the biblical passage, "That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world," communicating a divinely inspired imperative of fundamental equality and human sameness. Even though these ecclesiastical tenets seemed to leave no room for slavery in the Quaker sect, many Friends became both slave traders and slave owners as they immigrated to North America. Settling predominately in the Delaware Valley, the Friends established communities stretching from New York and New England to the North and Virginia and North Carolina to the South. Quakers founded the colony of Pennsylvania and slaveholding Friends helped make Philadelphia--the City of Brotherly Love--into the city of brotherly bondage. The nearly century long struggle of reformist Quakers to rid their sect of the sin of slaveholding highlights the

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<sup>22</sup> James H. Sweet, "The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Vol. LIV, No. 1 (January, 1997), 143-166; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 3-40; David Brion Davis, *In the Image of God: Religion, Moral Values, and Our Heritage of Slavery* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 123-136. I do not mean to imply here that white American colonists viewed blacks literally as beasts. The dominance of single creation theory foreclosed the chance that most whites would have thought of blacks as a different species of man. It should also be noted that social thought aside, the lived experience between the races was not as starkly divided as theories of black inferiority would seem to imply. Specifically, lower class whites and blacks associated with one another at levels that they would not after the Revolution. See Lois Horton, "From Class to Race in Early America: Northern Post-Emancipation Racial Reconstruction," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter, 1999), 629-649.

pervasive acceptance of black bondage in the colonial era even as it foreshadows the forces that would eventually lead to the first abolition movement in the United States.

Quaker antislavery got off to an inauspicious start. Missionary Friends made their biggest inroads on the West Indian island of Barbados, arguably the most brutal of all the slave societies of the Americas. There is evidence that at least some Quaker itinerants were distressed by the system of racial slavery emerging on the island in the aftermath of the sugar boom of the 1660s. In response the founder of the Society of Friends, George Fox, decided to address Quaker Barbadian slaveholders in 1671. While Fox insisted that "Christ dyed...for the Blacks, as well as for you that are called whites" and "enlightened them as well as he hath enlightened you," his solution to slavery's inequity was not the institution's dissolution but its Christianization. Fox called for Quaker slaveowners to teach their bondspersons the principles of Christianity. He envisioned a patriarchal relationship between masters and slaves. Slaveholders were to provide their slaves with a Christian education and sufficient provisions while slaves remained "Faithful and Dilligent" laborers in service to their paternal betters. This compromise between "universalist and hierarchical ideals" was hardly novel, harkening back to the millennia-old view of a dualism between the spiritual and material world that at the very least condoned slavery. It was also an approach to Christianity and slavery that such non-antislavery groups as the Anglicans took in their conversion efforts aimed at African slaves in the North American colonies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Kristen Block, "Cultivating Inner and Outer Plantations: Property, Industry, and Slavery in Early Quaker Migration to the New World," *Early American Studies*, Volume 8, Number 3 (Fall 2010), 521-524; Larry Gragg, *The Quaker Community on Barbados: Challenging the Culture of the Planter Class* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2009), 38-57; Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1950), 6. While Fox recommended limiting the service of black slaves to a set number of years, he did this at a time when the institution of racial slavery as a lifelong and inherited condition was still being established in Barbados. See Katharine Gerbner, "Antislavery in Print: The Germantown Protest, the 'Exhortation,' and the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Debate on Slavery," *Early American Studies*, Vol. 9, Number 3 (Fall 2011), 555-556, 558. One early exception to the general approach of 17th century Quakers to slavery can be found in the writing of

As Quakers spilled into the Mid-Atlantic region in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the vast majority of Friends readily countenanced slavery as an understood reality of colonial society. Along with their fellow colonists, Quaker farmers, artisans, and shopkeepers utilized slave labor and the transatlantic slave trade provided a lucrative business for Quaker merchants. Slavery was so interwoven in the Society of Friends that much of the leadership during the first half of the eighteenth century owned slaves. Jean Soderlund has been able to show that from 1681-1730 anywhere from 58%-70% of those persons in leadership positions of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting were slaveholders. It follows logically that these influential slaveowning Friends, many of them members of the Quaker dominated Pennsylvania Assembly, helped construct the colony's slave code and oversaw the passage of the most restrictive of all the middle colonies laws pertaining to free blacks.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, most of the concerns about slavery that existed among Quakers in the early colonial period related to the safety and well-being of white society rather than the injustice of slavery or the inhumanity of holding people as chattel. In 1696, the Quaker minister Caldwell Morgan doubted that slavery was worth the risks it posed. What if, Morgan asked, he bought a "bad" slave that had to be "Corrected, Or would Run away, Or when I went from home, & leave him with a woman or Maid" the bondsman "Should desire or seek to Comitt Wickedness." The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting showed that it shared similar uneasy thoughts about slaves. In its first official pronouncement regarding the issue of slavery, the Meeting impressed upon Quakers

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the Irish Friend William Edmundson. Edmundson questioned directly whether blacks should be made slaves. But he too focused mostly on giving black slaves equal access to Christianity rather than freeing them from bondage. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America*, 9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Jean R. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985) 34.

the importance of "Restraining them [bondspersons] from Loose, and Lewd Living...and from Rambling abroad."<sup>25</sup>

Yet there were some Friends who began to challenge the morality of slaveholding in important ways. In 1688, Friends of German and Dutch origin who had established the Quaker settlement of Germantown outside of Philadelphia wrote a protest against slavery intended for the Quaker Meetings of Pennsylvania. The petition criticized the racial lines of slavery, determining that it made "no difference" what "descent or colour" slaves were for "tho they are black we cannot conceive there is more liberty to make them slaves, as it is to have other white ones." Ruing that by holding slaves Quakers were treating men as they did "cattle," the petitioners asked Friends to consider what it must be like to endure the middle passage and have one's family broken up through sale. In a biblical reference to the Golden Rule that would be endlessly repeated by later antislavery writers, the Germantown Protest pressed Quakers who partook in the enslaving of Africans to ask themselves "if you would be done" in "this manner?" The Germantown Quakers introduced a humanitarian argument against slavery that judged the institution not by its effects on white society but by the woes inflicted on those subjected to human bondage.<sup>26</sup>

Two additional Quaker antislavery appeals echoed the tack taken by the Friends of Germantown. In 1693 George Keith, who had started a splinter group of Friends known as the Christian Quakers, published *An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning the buying or keeping of Negroes*; the document was most likely co-authored by some of the same Quakers

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<sup>25</sup> William J. Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery* (Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1980), 70; *Ibid.*, 74. The wording of the Yearly Meeting's warning about slaves "Rambling abroad," echoes the language used in Pennsylvania's 1725-26 slave code regarding the supposed tendency of bondspersons to "ramble about," giving additional evidence that Quakers played a large part in creating the slave laws and restrictions on free blacks in colonial Pennsylvania. See Mitchell and Flanders, *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania*, Vol. IV, 64

<sup>26</sup> "Germantown Protest," 1688. Gerbner, "Antislavery in Print," 559-563.

who five years earlier had penned the Germantown Protest. *An Exhortation* stated that because blacks were "a real part of Mankind for whom Christ has shed his precious Blood" Friends must give to slaves "Liberty both inward and outward." Pointing out that Quakers never considered keeping their own people in bondage, the authors averred that the Golden rule dictated "neither should we keep them in perpetual Bondage and Slavery against their consent." John Hepburn, a self-identified New Jersey Friend unaffiliated with any of the Quaker Meetings, condemned slaveholders for "Tyranizing over...our Fellow Creatures" in a pamphlet printed in 1715.

Hepburn was appalled by the treatment of blacks in colonial New Jersey and bemoaned the "cruel and inhumane" way slavery suspended the free will of humans to do good, a power God had given to all people. Although these three writings presaged later Quaker antislavery literary themes, it is not a coincidence that they were crafted by Quakers outside the mainstream of the Society of Friends. In early colonial America conventional Quakerism took no official antislavery stance.<sup>27</sup>

The Quaker Meetings that received remonstrances from dissenting members against Friends selling, buying or holding slaves, took a slow and cautious approach to these entreaties. When enough individual Friends began urging Quaker leaders to address the issue of slavery by the end of the seventeenth century, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting responded with a toothless warning that Friends be "Careful not to Encourage the bringing in of any more Negroes." Indeed, the Quaker leadership seemed to be more preoccupied with the presence of slaves in their midst than with making any move toward the emancipation of its members' enslaved blacks. Fearing

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<sup>27</sup> George Keith, *An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning buying or keeping of Negroes* (New York: William Bradford, 1693), 1, 3-4; John Hepburn, *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule, or An Essay to prove the Unlawfulness of making Slaves of Men. By him who Loves the Freedom of the Souls and Bodies of All Men* (New York, 1715), 1-2, 4-5. From their arrival in Pennsylvania, the Germantown Friends consciously remained distinct from their English Quaker neighbors. They even gained a charter that gave them their own borough within the colony. Gerbner, "Antislavery in Print," 561-562 For evidence that *An Exhortation*, once thought to have been solely penned by George Keith, was actually co-written by some of the authors of the Germantown Protest see Gerbner, "Antislavery in Print," 564-569.

that "Multiplying them [slaves] may be of a dangerous consequence," in 1714 the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting wrote to the London Meeting asking their advice on how best to go about discouraging the importation of slaves. The following year the Quaker-led Pennsylvania Assembly passed the colony's first duty on imported slaves. In a religious sect where group consensus was prized above all else, Quaker leaders grew wary of the dissension that discussing slavery was causing among members. They advised Friends to abstain from buying slaves and thought bondspersons should be treated with "humanity," but hastened to add that their words were "a caution and not a Censure." By the 1730s antislavery had become so marginalized among the Society of Friends that the eccentric Benjamin Lay, whose infamous protest antics included temporarily kidnapping an acquaintance's child to dramatize the evils of the slave trade, became the standard bearer of Quaker antislavery.<sup>28</sup>

In the mid eighteenth century the Friends' views on slavery changed. While the overwhelming majority of white colonial Americans continued to accept uncritically the institution of slavery, Quakers moved to purge slaveholding from the ranks of their society. Historians have given several explanations for this change of heart, suggesting moral, religious and sociopolitical motives. The most common explanation points to the Quakers' withdrawal from colonial politics during the Seven Years War. When the pacifist axioms of the Friends caused them to stay neutral in the battle for European control of North America, the Quakers

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<sup>28</sup> Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 74-76. There were other antislavery protests and petitions by individual Quakers in this period, such as those by William Southeby, Robert Piles and John Farmer. But these appeals either brought disownment or were ignored. For an account of William Southeby's antislavery activities see, Kenneth L. Carroll, "William Southeby, Early Quaker Antislavery Writer," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (October, 1965), 416-427. Throughout the colonial era, the Pennsylvania Assembly imposed duties on imported slaves in hopes of discouraging the growth of the enslaved population. The duties were often repealed by English authorities, who viewed colonial America as an important market for slaves, and then invariably passed again by Pennsylvania legislators. The same pattern of the colonial passage of import duties, and English refusal to accept the laws, played out in New York and New Jersey. Benjamin Lay's trenchant and outlandish antislavery demonstrations were many. See Roberts Vaux, *Memoirs of the Lives of Benjamin Lay and Ralph Sandiford; Two of the Earliest Public Advocates of the Enslaved Africans* (Philadelphia: Solomon W. Conrad, 1813), 25-29 for a narrative of Lay's unique brand of activism. For a broader look at the limitations of antislavery reformers in the early colonial Atlantic world see Brown, *Moral Capital*, 33-101.

turned inward and underwent a critical period of self-searching that led them to return to their founding principles, so at odds with the practice of slavery. As they lost political power in Pennsylvania and were roundly castigated for their refusal to participate in the Seven Years War, the Quakers remembered their beginnings in England as a persecuted minority sect and may have begun to identify more readily with the sufferings of the enslaved. Freed from the demands of colonial politics, Quakers began to reconnect with their radical sectarian roots, making themselves more open to the activism of reform-minded Friends. If the imperial war was providential punishment for Quaker sins, as many Friends believed, slavery seemed a particularly striking sin in need of cathartic cleansing. Taking up philanthropic causes like antislavery also permitted Friends to regain a voice in greater society without compromising their religious scruples. The Quaker antislavery movement was one of several social reform programs of the Friends that stressed Quaker benevolence as never before.<sup>29</sup>

But focusing exclusively on intra-Quaker explanations for the revival of antislavery among Friends misses the fact that when a new generation of Quaker activists constructed antislavery arguments, they did not look solely within their own religious sect for inspiration. Melding Quaker theology with Enlightenment thought and Revolutionary ideology, these activists created a potent new brew of antislavery that would have influence far beyond the sectarian confines of the Society of Friends. Quaker mores and Enlightenment and Revolutionary ideals shared much in common. At the broadest level, the Quakers' sense of the Inner Light

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<sup>29</sup> On the origins of and reasons for the Quaker reform movement beginning in the 1750s, see Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*; Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit*; Sydney V. James, *A People Among Peoples: Quaker Benevolence in Eighteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Jack D. Marietta, *The Reformation of American Quakerism, 1748-1783* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984) and David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 291-332. Another key factor in making Friends more open to antislavery may have been the fact that slaveholders had a much reduced presence in the Society's leadership by the mid-eighteenth century, at least in Pennsylvania. Soderlund found for the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting that the share of slaveholders with leadership positions had shrunk to just over ten percent between 1754 and 1780. Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit*, 34.

gelled with the Enlightenment conception of the inner moral sense. Quaker doctrine described the Inner Light as capable of "illuminating" the individual's "understanding and assisting him to distinguish good from evil." The Scottish Enlightenment belief in the inner moral sense similarly held that all people had "a general approbation of benevolence" waiting to be tapped into. Fortified by these currents of thought, antislavery Friends sought to convince Quakers, and then American society as a whole, to abandon slavery while persuading them that emancipated slaves could be made into responsible freemen.<sup>30</sup>

The Enlightenment's rejection of custom as serving to perpetuate irrational, unjust institutions and societal practices meshed with the Quakers' longstanding distrust of both religious and social customs as impure agents of worldly corruption. Quaker antislavery writers often presented slavery as an oppressive custom to which people must apply their Inner Light and moral sense. Lastly, the Revolutionary rhetoric of natural rights had a profound influence on Quaker perceptions of slavery. Whereas nature had previously represented the sinful state of fallen man, by the 1760s and 70s Quaker antislavery writers started to depict nature in a positive light and natural liberty as a Godly ordained state to which slaves must be restored. Over and over again both Quaker antislavery activists and the Society's Meetings spoke of the "natural rights" of slaves to freedom.<sup>31</sup>

John Woolman and Anthony Benezet, the foremost figures in the Friends' antislavery movement, embody the interaction between Quaker sectarian values and Enlightenment and Revolutionary principles. Woolman and Benezet's ascetic practices and religious devotion

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of the People Called Quakers; Their Rise, Religious Principles and Settlement in America* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1780), 11. For the congruence between the Inner Light and inner moral sense and Quaker theology and Enlightenment thought generally see See Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680-1760* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 71-77.

<sup>31</sup> My depiction of the changed beliefs of the Society of Friends in their understanding of nature and natural man, and the important influence of natural rights ideology over Quaker antislavery comes from James, *A People Among Peoples*, 222-225.

represent quintessential aspects of the doctrinal revival among Quakers in the 1750s. Born in 1720 to a New Jersey Quaker family, John Woolman trained as a tailor and was on track to live the typical commercial life of a middling Quaker. But when he was asked one day to draft a bill of sale for a fellow Quaker's slave, Woolman was troubled by the thought of playing a role in the selling of "one of my fellow creatures." His conscience pricked, Woolman became an itinerant Quaker reformer tirelessly seeking to convince slaveholding Friends to emancipate their bondspersons. A spiritual mystic whose abolitionist principles were undoubtedly driven by devout Christianity, Woolman nonetheless expressed his antislavery in language consonant with Enlightenment thought. In 1754 Woolman published *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*, the first antislavery pamphlet formally endorsed by the Society of Friends. Woolman asked his Quaker readers "to forego Customs and popular Opinions" for "the infallible Standard Truth." This truth, according to Woolman was that God had made "all Nations...of one Blood" and given people the "NATURAL Affection" necessary to see through the artificial distinctions society created between God's children. Slaves, he maintained, possessed a "natural right to Freedom" and a "Liberty" that was "never forfeited." For Woolman, both God and natural law called unequivocally for Quakers to free their slaves.<sup>32</sup>

No Quaker antislavery activist combined the religious values of the Society of Friends and Enlightenment secular ideals more effectively than Anthony Benezet. Arriving in Philadelphia in 1731, the 18 year old Benezet was soon drawn to the Quakerism of Pennsylvania.

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<sup>32</sup> John Woolman, *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes. Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of every Denomination* (Philadelphia: James Chatten, 1754), first page of unnumbered introduction, 11. On Woolman's life and antislavery activism see Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 51-62 and Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Beautiful Soul Of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008). Slaughter focuses on the profound influence of spiritual mysticism in Woolman's antislavery and other reform ventures. While one certainly cannot discount the centrality of religion and mysticism to Woolman's antislavery thought, Enlightenment ideas had also clearly influenced him by the 1750s. Woolman's writing shows that Enlightenment thought and Quaker antislavery were admixed from the beginning of the reform movement among Friends. For additional instances of Enlightenment based rhetoric in *Some Considerations*, including environmentalist thinking and the importance of reason, see Woolman *Some Considerations*, 7-8, 21.

Born in France to Huguenot parents, Benezet chose not to follow his father and two of his siblings when they converted to the Moravian faith, pledging himself instead to the Society of Friends. After an extended foray in the family mercantile business, Benezet left the life of worldly gain behind. Committing himself to the philanthropic spirit sweeping Quakerism, Benezet became a school master and educator as well as the most prolific antislavery pamphleteer of the eighteenth century. In relying on biblical principles like the Golden Rule and arguing that slavery violated God's love for the entirety of humankind (the Inner Light), Benezet grounded his antislavery writings in Quaker interpretations of Christian morality.<sup>33</sup>

Benezet, however, also positioned his arguments in Enlightenment thought, citing or excerpting a panoply of Enlightenment thinkers in his antislavery publications. To prove that the desire for freedom was natural and universal among all people Benezet looked to the father of Scottish moral philosophy, Francis Hutcheson. To show that no man could rightfully claim ownership over another, he turned to the enlightened jurist George Wallace. To substantiate slavery's detrimental effects on civil society, he quoted the famed French philosophe Montesquieu. And in order to demonstrate that slavery had unreasonably prejudiced white Americans towards enslaved blacks, Benezet relied on the Enlightenment literary figure, Abbe Raynal. Of all Quaker antislavery figures, Benezet merged most effectively the principles of his religious sect's internal movement against slavery and those of Revolutionary era American society, so influenced by Enlightenment thought.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 2-9.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account of that Part of Africa*, 22-26; Anthony Benezet, *A Caution and a Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies. In A Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions* (Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1766), 22-26; Anthony Benezet, *Short Observations on Slavery, Introductory to Some Remarks from the writing of the Abbe Raynal, on that important Subject* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1785), 8-12. For additional analysis of the influence Enlightenment thought and natural rights theory had on Benezet's antislavery writing see Roger Bruns, "Anthony Benezet and the Natural Rights of the Negro,"

But before Quaker antislavery activists could turn their full attention to society at-large, they first had to expunge slavery from among themselves. There were certainly signs that Quaker Meetings were imbibing the arguments of antislavery Friends. In one of their first pronouncements against human bondage, The New York Yearly Meeting exclaimed in 1769 that black slaves were "rational creatures" and had been "by Nature born free." Five years later the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting issued a formal statement saying that slavery was "evidently contrary to our Christian principles...and the common Rights of Mankind." It then wrote to neighboring Meetings that "restoring" slaves to their "natural and just Right to Liberty" should be on the agenda of all Quakers. Across the Atlantic, the London Yearly Meeting similarly declaimed against slavery for suspending the "natural rights of mankind" and relegating persons of color to "oppressive and unnatural bondage."<sup>35</sup>

Yet if the statements of the Quaker Meetings on human bondage reflect the triumph of antislavery rhetoric, getting slaveholding Friends to release their unrighteously held chattel was a much more difficult matter. David Ferris, an antislavery member of the Wilmington Monthly Meeting of Delaware believed that Friends who owned slaves, aside from being wary of losing the benefits of unfree labor, were skeptical of the ability of blacks to handle freedom. Ferris was certain that if given "advantages for improvement" equal to whites and "the same education," those of African descent would prove themselves more than capable of liberty. But he lamented that those "accustomed to Slave keeping can hardly believe it should be so." Partially in response to this obstacle to abolition, several Quaker Meetings urged the religious and educational instruction of bondspersons emancipated by slaveholding Friends. Quakers in New Jersey, Delaware, and Pennsylvania formed committees for "the improvement of Knowledge of Truth,

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*Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (Jan., 1972), 104-113 and Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 57-61.

<sup>35</sup> James, *A People Among Peoples*, 222; Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 240-241; *Ibid.*, 174.

and the practice of Piety and Virtue" of recently liberated slaves. In 1770, the Philadelphia Monthly Meeting established a school for free black children with the hope of "qualify[ing]" emancipated slaves "for the proper enjoyment of freedom, and for becoming useful and worthy citizens." This preoccupation with proving that liberated slaves were capable of equal freedom would come to form an essential strategy of the abolition societies of Post-Revolutionary America, spearheaded by Quakers.<sup>36</sup>

The long drive by Quaker activists to extirpate slavery from the Society of Friends proceeded at different speeds throughout the Mid-Atlantic. The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's decision in 1758 to deny leadership positions to members who bought, sold or imported slaves and its blanket condemnation of not only the slave trade but of slaveholding in general set an influential precedent. Following the example set by John Woolman's journeys to the homes of slaveholders, several Quaker Meetings created committees to visit slaveholding Friends and convince them to release their bondspersons. These committees grappled with thorny issues, such as at what age slaves should be freed, how ready persons of color were for freedom, and manumission laws requiring costly bonds for the release of slaves--which made emancipation a serious economic sacrifice for slaveholders.<sup>37</sup>

It took until 1776 for the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to come to the fateful decision to disown any remaining slaveholding Friends. This edict applied to Meetings in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware and it brought about the ultimate demise of chattel bondage among

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<sup>36</sup> David Ferris to James Rigby in Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 182-186; James, *A People Among Peoples*, 233-234; Nancy Slocum Hornick, "Anthony Benezet and the Africans' School: Toward a Theory of Full Equality," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (October, 1975), 404. The attention of Quakers to the religious and educational development of freed slaves came from a sense of responsibility within the sect for the welfare of persons of color after they were liberated. This preoccupation with liberated blacks was not necessarily only concerned with countering the prejudices of slaveholders, but had a deeper theological basis. James, *A People Among Peoples*, 231-238.

<sup>37</sup> See Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 170 for the 1758 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting statement. On the Quaker committees to visit slaveholders see James, *A People Among Peoples*, 225-226 and Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 75-77.

Quakers there. By 1783, the antislavery committees had reported that nearly all slaveholding Friends had either been disowned or forced to free their human property. In New York events moved more slowly. The New York Yearly Meeting first advocated the liberation of slaves in 1771. Because the Yearly Meeting never made emancipation mandatory, however, it was not until 1787 that New York Friends were free of slaveholders. Though it had taken a two decades long fight to persuade their fellow Friends that slavery was unjust and black bondspersons were capable of freedom, Quaker antislavery activists had finally prevailed.<sup>38</sup>

WITHOUT THE AMERICAN Revolution, a larger antislavery movement outside the Society of Friends may have remained forever relegated to the realm of the counterfactual. The rhetoric of American Independence transformed rights from specific, social, and limited in scope to a universal, inherent, and inalienable creed of human equality. Although instigated by political grievances, the American Revolution had major implications for the institution of slavery. How, in a land looking to enshrine a new era of human liberty, could one explain that the natural rights of one group of people were starkly and incontestably suspended? This question forced the Revolutionaries to confront both slavery and bondspersons as no generation before them. What was for centuries the reality of slavery was turning ineluctably into the problem of slavery.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See Frost, *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*, 244-245 for the 1776 Philadelphia disunion statement. For New York Yearly Meeting's struggle against slaveholding Friends see James, *A People Among People's*, 229-230 and Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 28-29. For Delaware Quakers' battle to eradicate slavery from their ranks see Essah, *A House Divided*, 44-49. The New England Yearly Meeting forbade slaveholding among their members in 1773 and by 1782 Quakers there reported that no Friends owned slaves. In the Southern colonies of Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina the movement to end slavery among Quakers was understandably more challenging. Nevertheless, between 1778 and 1784 all three of the Yearly Meetings of Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina made slaveholding a disownable offense. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery*, 78-84.

<sup>39</sup> The historiographical term the "problem of slavery," was coined by David Brion Davis whose immensely influential writings on slavery, New World development, and the Revolutionary-era have had a seminal influence on virtually every piece of the scholarship on American slavery. See Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* and Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* for the ideological background behind the problem of slavery in American thought.

Awareness of the contradiction between American slavery and the new rhetoric of American freedom resulted from more than inference. Revolutionary writers and orators claimed that they were being made into "virtual" slaves by the unrighteous impositions of the British government. When white Americans railed at Britons for keeping them in virtual slavery, they did not speak simply for the sake of political hyperbole. The concept of political slavery was vital to the colonial American rationale for independence from Britain. Revolutionary pamphleteers and newspaper writers attempted to persuade the public that through the arbitrary power and autocratic coercion of a distant British crown, the individual agency, personal independence, and even bodily autonomy of the American colonists was under serious duress. In order for the colonists to avoid the fate of millions of subjects in tyrannical Europe, these Revolutionaries wrote, they needed to reclaim their natural rights as a free and independent people or become slaves to the British Empire's despotic rule. Repeatedly in the literature permeating the Revolutionary War era, warnings of imminent enslavement to English oppressors rang through the political discourse.<sup>40</sup>

That chattel slavery was the plight of over half a million Americans in this period aroused some to action. From Pennsylvania to Massachusetts, politicians, preachers and propagandists extended the rhetoric of natural rights to the enslaved. Two prominent Revolutionary leaders in New England urged their white compatriots to impart the natural rights of equal liberty to all Americans. The Boston Patriot, James Otis, in a pamphlet defending the rights of the rebellious colonists, wrote that the "colonists are by the law of nature free born, as indeed all men are, white or black." The same year that the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia, the New Light Calvinist minister Samuel Hopkins released a pamphlet entitled "A Dialogue

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<sup>40</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 233-234.

Concerning the Slavery of the Africans" requesting the "total abolition of slavery" for an enslaved people possessing "an equal right to freedom with ourselves," and distributed his treatise to delegates of the Second Continental Congress. Before publishing *Common Sense*, Tom Paine, writing in a Pennsylvania newspaper, wondered how Americans could "complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery." Slaves wondered the same thing. Between 1773 and 1774, bondspersons in Massachusetts submitted a series of petitions to Governor Thomas Hutchison and the colonial legislature pressing for emancipation.<sup>41</sup>

Quaker antislavery activists leapt at the opportune moment provided by the Revolution. David Cooper, a New Jersey Quaker, wrote two anonymous pamphlets using Revolutionary rhetoric to call on Americans to live up to their lofty ideals. Cooper cited John Locke's definition of the law of nature as prohibiting the "arbitrary absolute power" of one man over another. He insisted that "Every man has a property in his own person," and wrote that it was only the "power of prejudice" that kept Americans from admitting that slaves were entitled to "enjoy their natural rights as fully...as the rest of mankind." To cut through the "habit and custom" that "rendered familiar the degrading and ignominious distinctions" white Americans "made between people with black skin and ourselves," Cooper excerpted the Declaration of Independence and several of the state constitutions. He asserted that all of the high minded proclamations of liberty and equality in these cherished documents applied with the same force to enslaved Africans. William Dillwyn, a Philadelphian Quaker who would later move to England and help start London's Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, found it "remarkable" in 1773 that the colonies, "so

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<sup>41</sup> Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 56; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 297-298; *The Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), March 8, 1775. Paine wrote the newspaper piece in 1774. For the full text of Massachusetts slave petitions see, Roger Bruns, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1977), 428-429, 452-453.

eminently distinguished for asserting the common rights of mankind," could "tolerate so grievous an infringement of liberty" as chattel slavery. Surely, Dillwyn told his readers, "the light of our natural reason" should lead Americans towards abolishing black bondage. Already influenced by Enlightenment thought and Revolutionary ideas, Quaker antislavery activism had now been seamlessly inserted into the discourse of mainstream America.<sup>42</sup>

While several Quakers addressed their antislavery to the larger public, Anthony Benezet was the man most responsible for morphing the Friends' fight against human bondage into a battle for the hearts and minds of all Americans. As early as 1766, Benezet realized the powerful boost Revolutionary rhetoric gave to antislavery advocates when he published *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies*. Benezet alerted those on both sides of the political struggle that "at a time when the general rights and liberties of mankind" were "subjects of universal consideration" it behooved the "Advocates of Liberty" to admit that only "tyrant custom" rationalized leaving blacks in their present state of bondage. *A Caution and Warning* was only the first of several publications by Benezet that implored those in power to legislate against slavery wherever and whenever possible. Besides citing Enlightenment thinkers and utilizing Revolutionary ideology at every turn, Benezet also implemented the lobbying tactics antislavery Friends had perfected over the many years that they petitioned their Meetings and met with slaveholding brethren. With a broad transatlantic network of mostly Quaker contacts, Benezet strategically placed pamphlets into the right hands and published them at potentially promising moments for antislavery legislation. Beginning with Friends in the Mid-Atlantic,

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<sup>42</sup> David Cooper, *A Mite cast into the Treasury: Or, Observations on Slave-Keeping* (Philadelphia: J. Crukshank, 1772), 23, iii, 19; David Cooper, *A Serious Address to the Rulers of America, On the Inconsistency of their Conduct respecting Slavery: Forming a Contrast Between the Encroachments of England on American Liberty, And American Injustice in tolerating Slavery* (Trenton: Isaac Collins, 1783), 5-20; William Dillwyn, *Brief Considerations on Slavery, And the Expediency of its Abolition. With Some Hints on the Means whereby it may be gradually effected* (Burlington, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1773) 3-5.

Benezet gradually expanded the targets of his antislavery campaigns to the British Parliament, the state legislatures of New Jersey and Pennsylvania and the Continental Congress.<sup>43</sup>

With the ideological winds of Revolutionary America seemingly at the backs of antislavery activists, how would the defenders of slavery respond? In colonial era America no external rationale for slavery was needed because human bondage did not run counter to the dominant line of social thought. From the initial period of New World settlement, slavery was couched as a traditionally sanctioned practice supported by a series of universal truths. The ancient belief in a dualism between the body and soul of mortals permitted the worldly practice of slavery. According to this doctrine, the slave's best route to freedom was in the afterworld where heavenly reward awaited the pious and dutiful bondsperson. The concept of the ideal Christian servant--in which the slave took his or her place in a hierarchy of human relationships joined by reciprocal obligations and contingent on fealty to social superiors--additionally supported slavery. The biblical themes of the sinful slave and the often cited allegory of the Curse of Ham also sustained the practice of slavery as a timeless truth. Bondspersons continually challenged their servile status and pockets of opposition to slavery did materialize. But in a colonial society where "relationship[s] of inherited subordination" informed every facet of human existence, those parties interested in slavery's preservation did not need to rationalize a practice taken for granted as a natural fact.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Benezet, *A Caution and a Warning*, 3. For Benezet's antislavery network, the strategic purposes of his pamphlets, and the antislavery political activities he participated in see Jonathan D. Sassi, "With a Little Help from the Friends: The Quaker and Tactical Contexts of Anthony Benezet's Abolitionist Publishing," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 135, No. 1 (January 2011), 33-71.

<sup>44</sup> Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. Jonathan Saffin, a Boston Merchant, penned one of the few public defenses of slavery in the colonial era. Replying to the anti slave-trading pamphlet of Judge Samuel Sewall, Saffin indicted the integrity of black slaves and questioned their humanity in much the same manner as Revolutionary era defenders of slavery would do. Yet Saffin's arguments relied on the assumption that social inequality and a fixed social hierarchy were natural truths universally desired by all. Later defenders of slavery could not make this same claim--at least not to the same degree--causing late eighteenth century apologists for slavery to defame blacks even more than colonial defenders such as Saffin. Jonathan Saffin, *A Brief and Candid*

It would take a momentous cultural transformation to unfix nature from slavery and throw nature in the direction of freedom. That is exactly what the American Revolution did. Finding nature no longer on the side of human bondage, the only choice of slavery's defenders was to dehumanize slaves, and argue for their inherent incapacity for freedom. Out of the Revolutionary rights discourse swirling in the early 1770s, antislavery writers and defenders of human bondage engaged in a telling dialectic. Both slavery's opponents and its defenders would stake a claim on "nature," with one side championing the natural rights of man to liberty and the other advancing African slaves' natural suitability for slavery.<sup>45</sup>

One of the clearest expressions of this discursive dynamic took place in the Harvard commencement of 1773 when two students, Theodore Parsons and Eliphalet Pearson, debated the issue of slavery. Pearson, representing the antislavery perspective, quickly turned to his side's staple argument. He expressed "painful astonishment, that in this enlightened age and land, where the principles of natural and civil Liberty" as well as "the natural rights of mankind are so generally understood," Americans continued to hold others in chattel slavery. Colonists who claimed "natural rights in defence of their own Liberties" and at the same time overlooked those of African slaves--though "nature has made no distinction" between them and whites--"flagrantly contradicted" the cause for Independence. Extending the rhetoric of Revolutionary rights to slaves and calling out the hypocrisy of Patriot silence on slavery, Pearson presented a powerful if predictable argument against black bondage.<sup>46</sup>

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*Answer to a late Printed Sheet, Entitled, The Selling of Joseph* in, George H. Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1866), 251-256.

<sup>45</sup> Barbara J Fields, "Presentation given by historian Barbara J Fields at a "School" for the Producers of Race, The Power of an Illusion (March, 2001 from [http://www.pbs.org/race/000\\_General/000\\_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)).

<sup>46</sup> *A Forensic Dispute on the Legality of enslaving the Africans, Held At the public Commencement in Cambridge, New England, July 21, 1773. By Two Candidates for the Bachelor's Degree* (Boston: John Boyle, 1773) 4-5.

Parsons, tasked with defending slavery, had a more difficult assignment. He began by acknowledging "That Liberty to all is sweet," but soon added that "all" could not "equally enjoy it." Rejecting the universalism of natural rights, Parsons argued that in order for societies to function "degrees of authority and subordination" were essential, meaning that the liberty of some necessarily hinged on the inequality of others. Here Parsons was situating his defense of slavery in the traditional colonial view of the importance of a hierarchy of human relationships premised on social inequality. Cognizant that this assertion alone would fail to persuade an audience of Revolutionary-era Americans of the necessity of chattel bondage, Parsons extended his argument. While the "principle of natural equality" was fine in theory, Parsons stated that "slavery *in general*" or the "involuntary subordination of the will of one to another" was the governing premise of all human existence. No one in their right mind would deny that God governed man and that parents must have authority over their children. Both of these relationships were in the best interest of the dependent party. Implying an analogy between the fallibility of man or the helplessness of children, and the depravity of chattel bondspersons, Parsons was ready to impugn the character of African slaves.<sup>47</sup>

Anticipating Parsons' next move, Pearson shot back that while he accepted the limited sense of slavery in general as it applied to the distribution of authority between God and man and parents and children, he utterly rejected this distinction when it came Africans and whites. No "natural inequality" existed between these groups because "nature seems to have made no such difference," unless something as superficial as "the darkness of a man's skin" or "the quality of their hair" qualified Africans for slavery. But Parsons begged to differ. Africans, in his estimation possessed a "depraved nature" and were saddled with a "brutal stupidity" and "savage

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<sup>47</sup> *A Forensic Dispute*, 7-16. Interestingly, Parsons had a personal connection with slavery through his slaveholding minister father who had been under attack by his parishioners for holding bondspersons. Larry Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 30.

barbarity" that left them destitute of those qualities "by which the human species is distinguished from the other parts of the animal creation." Leading lives of "misery" and "wretchedness" in their native land, Africans were actually done a favor when brought into slavery in the civilized Americas. Sharing character traits with children, idiots and madmen, the natural inequality of Africans meant that no consent on their part was necessary to justify American slavery. Though he rebuked what he saw as the dangerously utopian ideals explicit in natural rights ideology, Parson's defense of slavery ultimately rested on attacking the nature of enslaved Africans.<sup>48</sup>

Another highly publicized dialogue between slavery's apologists and chattel bondage's opponents broke out over whether the environment of slavery explained black inequality. In the same year that *A Forensic Dispute* was published, Anthony Benezet convinced the Philadelphia physician Benjamin Rush to pen a pamphlet attacking slavery and the slave trade. The youthfully enthusiastic Rush employed a bevy of arguments against the morality of slavery, from its incompatibility with Christianity to the inhumanity of holding people as chattel. But it was no coincidence that Rush began his pamphlet by defending the "capacities for virtue" of persons of color. Claiming that the accounts of travelers to Africa proved that blacks "are equal to the Europeans" in "ingenuity" and "humanity," Rush blamed slavery for stifling the innate positive qualities of Africans. Slavery, according to Rush, "debased, and rendered torpid" Africans' "moral faculties, as well as those of understanding" making all the negative attributes attached to slaves only the "offspring of slavery" and "an argument to prove that they were not intended for it." This early environmentalist argument in favor of underlying black equality led Rush to

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<sup>48</sup> *Forensic Dispute*, 21, 24-28.

conclude that slavery should be gradually abolished and the emancipated, after receiving a religious and literary education, given "all the privileges of free-born British subjects."<sup>49</sup>

Slavery's defenders hurried to answer Rush's arguments. Piqued by Rush's depiction of the hardheartedness of slaveholders and the brutality of slavery, Richard Nisbet, a recent West Indian migrant to Philadelphia, responded with a pamphlet of his own. Nisbet based much of his rationalization for slavery on the alleged inferiority of Africans. He believed it was "probable" that Africans were "a much inferior race of men to the whites, in every respect." African societies appeared "unacquainted with arts, letters, manufactures, and everything which constitutes civilized life." Nisbet asserted that Africans cared not when separated from one another for sale into slavery and attributed this to their race on the whole supposedly lacking "friendship, gratitude" and other humane sentiments. From first hand experience in the plantations of the West Indies, Nisbet attested that African imports were "stupid" and "lazy" when first arriving at the islands but improved their behavior after being acclimated to life in chains. Thus Nisbet believed new world bondage improved black Africans and saved them from "a more wretched slavery to their fellow barbarians." Nisbet reversed Rush's argument that slavery damaged Africans and debased their inborn talents. He claimed instead that black persons discovered their humanity only in slavery. The travel writer, Bernard Romans, also painted Africans as naturally made for slavery in his history of East and West Florida. Panning Rush's pamphlet as the product of unthinking fanaticism, Romans assured his readers that the "Treachery, theft, stubbornness, and idleness" he attributed to slaves was "natural to them and

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<sup>49</sup> Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes in America* (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1773), 1-2, 20, 25. Rush suggested that because slavery so degraded its victims, only those slaves who had not "acquired the low vices of slavery" be freed while the rest, "for the good of society" remain in bondage, showing the limits of this early expression of antislavery environmentalism. Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements*, 19-20.

not originated by their state of slavery." Romans believed that the "perverse nature of this black race" made Africans a "naturally subjected species of mankind."<sup>50</sup>

Although they went to great lengths to denigrate those of African descent, Nisbet and Romans never claimed that Africans belonged to a separate species from whites. Edward Long, a third defender of slavery in the Revolutionary era, did just that. Serving as a private secretary to Jamaica's governor, Long must have grown increasingly alarmed with the antislavery rhetoric ringing on both sides of the Atlantic. In his two volume *The History of Jamaica*, printed in 1774, Long dedicated a large section to exploring the nature of Africans. Long thought the "black colour," "bestial fleece" and "fetid smell" of Africans set them apart physically from Europeans. Coupled with these dissimilarities in appearance, Africans' "void of genius," the absence of "civility or science" in their societies," and the "stupidity, and vices" endemic in their culture caused Long to conjecture that those of African descent were in fact "a different species" altogether. In Long's view, the "brutish, ignorant, idle, crafty, treacherous, bloody, thievish, mistrustful and superstitious" behavior of Africans dictated that when enslaved they had to be "managed at first as if they were beasts" and "tamed, before they can be treated like men." Conveniently for Long's purposes, only in the civilizing institution of West Indian slavery could Africans, over time, achieve even the slightest glimmer of the humanity he steadfastly denied them on their native continent.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Richard Nisbet, *Slavery Not Forbidden By Scripture. Or a Defence of the West-India Planters* (Philadelphia: John Sparhawk, 1773), 21-25. Bernard Romans, *A Concise Natural History of East and West-Florida* (New-York: R. Aitken, 1776), 105-107.

<sup>51</sup> Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica. Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island, With Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws, and Government, Vol. II* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), 351-356, 401. Long went to great lengths in attempting to banish Africans from the ranks of human kind. Conjecturing that "the oran-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied," Long made a comprehensive comparison of Africans and orangutans and concluded that the apes possessed "a much greater resemblance to the Negroe race, than the latter bear to white men." Long also suggested that male orangutans and African women had sexual relations. Long, *The History of Jamaica, Vol. II*, 364-371.

With the defenders of slavery pinning much of their case for human bondage's justness on the inferiority of Africans, antislavery activists had to come up with a counter argument. Anthony Benezet was up to the challenge. In a series of pamphlets highlighted by *A Short Account of That Part of Africa, Inhabited by Negroes* and *Some Historical Account of Guinea*, Benezet sought to construct a positive image of African culture and convince the reading public of the capacity of black persons for virtue. Benezet perused the leading travel narratives by Europeans describing the social and cultural dispositions of Africans and selectively excerpted quotations that depicted those of African descent as a noble, virtuous and intelligent people.<sup>52</sup>

Before inundating his readers with positive descriptions of African societies, Benezet instructed the public in *A Short Account* that the travel accounts proved "the Negroes are generally sensible, humane and sociable" and that "their Capacity is as good, and as capable of Improvement, as that of the White People." It was the deleterious effects of slavery and "an Idea of Superiority" that made many whites view blacks "as an ignorant and contemptible Part of Mankind." The image of Africans Benezet put forth was of a sober, industrious, pious and honest people, capable of self-government but corrupted by the slave trade and then denied their essential humanity in slavery. The exchange between slavery's antagonists and the institution's defenders regarding the nature of Africa and Africans manifests how race was early established as the primary terrain on which the contest over slavery's abolition would be waged.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Anthony Benezet, *Some Historical Account of Guinea, Its Situation, Produce and general Disposition of its Inhabitants. With An inquiry into the Rise and Progress of the Slave-Trade, its Nature and lamentable Effects* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1771); Benezet, *A Short Account of that Part of Africa*. That Benezet began constructing these positive images of Africans through excerpting travel accounts beginning in 1762 shows he realized the immense task of overturning white prejudices early on in the debate over slavery. It also indirectly illustrates that whites in colonial America held negative conceptions of Africans long before slavery's apologists started denigrating African culture.

<sup>53</sup> Benezet, *A Short Account of that Part of Africa*, 8, 51. See also Benezet, *Some Historical Account*, 1-2. For an incisive analysis of the ways Benezet selectively excerpted travel account narratives to combat negative depictions of Africans and African society see Jonathan D. Sassi, "Africans in the Quaker Image: Anthony Benezet, African Travel Narratives, and Revolutionary-Era Antislavery," *Journal of Early Modern History*, 10: 1-2 (2006), 95-130.

THOSE ACTIVELY OPPOSED to slavery realized that they needed to do more than pen pamphlets against human bondage. To translate antislavery opinion into an antislavery movement, the opponents of slavery founded abolition societies. The two most influential of the antislavery societies of the Post-Revolutionary and early national eras were the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) and the New York Manumission Society (NYMS). The PAS began life in 1775 as the "Society for the Relief of Africans Unlawfully Held in Bondage." Inspired by the case of Dinah, an Indian woman who along with her children was held illegally in slavery, ten men (seven of whom were Quakers) met at Philadelphia's Sun Tavern and started an organization to aid individuals wrongly enslaved. Forced to disband during the war years, at the urging of Anthony Benezet in 1784 the society met and reconstituted itself.<sup>54</sup>

During the Confederation period, the PAS took on a variety of antislavery tasks. The society aided blacks who had already gained their freedom with educational and economic assistance, provided legal representation to individual bondspersons who had fled to Pennsylvania from the bordering slave states of Maryland and Virginia, lodged legal challenges on behalf of former slaves kidnapped back into bondage, and pressured the Pennsylvania state legislature to enforce the state's 1780 Gradual Abolition Act. The PAS reorganized again in 1787 as the "Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage." A combination of a growing membership and the creation of a new national government with potentially broad powers over slavery encouraged the PAS to broaden its activism. The society now sought to directly influence public opinion by

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Sassi argues that Benezet created his depiction of Africans to fit the Quaker model of the virtuous individual. Although Benezet certainly imparted Quaker attributes to Africans in his writings, those attributes were also consonant with the ideals that all Americans in the Revolutionary era found desirable. Benezet's pamphlets caught the attention of slavery's proponents. Many of the defenders of slavery in the late eighteenth century disputed Benezet and his positive renderings of Africans in their pamphlets.

<sup>54</sup> Eberly, "The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1775-1830," 22-27; Nash and Soderlun, *Freedom By Degrees*, 114-118.

publishing antislavery literature and establishing a presence in the social and political spheres of early national America. When the PAS added the cultivation of black freedom to its agenda in 1789 it put "improving the condition of Free Blacks" at the end of the society's title, rechristening itself for the final time.<sup>55</sup>

Not far behind the PAS in organizational scope was the NYMS. On January 25, 1785 a group of New York's leading merchants, bankers, judges, lawyers (many of them Quakers) gathered in the abode of innkeeper John Simmons to found the "New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been, or May Be Liberated." The ostensible motivation for the society's formation came from the "Violent Attempts lately made to seize, and export for Sale, several free negroes." But from the beginning the NYMS had much larger goals. In a preamble to its administrative rules and regulations, the society announced its intentions to set the state's bondspersons free and "enable them to share, equally with us, in that civil and religious Liberty with which an indulgent Providence has blessed these States; and to which these, our Brethren are by nature, as much entitled as ourselves."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Eberly, "The Pennsylvania Abolition Society," 22-31; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 114-124. In her article "Remembering Dinah Nevil," Kirsten Sword argues that when the PAS reorganized itself in 1787, it erased its earlier history as an agent of black liberty that combined the efforts of white and black activists. In taking on a broader national agenda, she argues, the PAS reinvented itself as a national entity with politically elite white male members. It is true that Quaker leaders of PAS strategically sought to broaden the appeal of the organization to the public at-large and looked to gain politically elite allies to advance their antislavery agenda. Yet the actual records of the PAS do not reveal any disjunction between the pre and post 1787 years; other than that the society was expanding its agenda and doing more, not moving away from aiding wrongfully enslaved blacks or ceasing to work with African Americans to realize emancipation. Kirsten Sword, "Remembering Dinah Nevil: Strategic Deceptions in Eighteenth-Century Antislavery," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 97, Issue 2 (September 2010), 315-343. I use the terms antislavery and abolitionist interchangeably. This editorial choice reflects the fact that the societies were both antislavery and abolitionist organizations: antislavery because they took on a plethora of tasks beyond the abolition of slavery, and abolitionist because these wider antislavery activities were all aimed at the ultimate goal of slavery's abolition.

<sup>56</sup> New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been, or May Be Liberated (NYMS) Records, Vol. VI., 3-4, New York Historical Society, New York; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 239-240. It has been estimated that twelve of the first eighteen members present at the NYMS' founding were Quakers. Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society," 85.

Although the NYMS' title seemed to signal that its members favored the manumission of slaves rather than abolition of slavery, the society's name was a misnomer. Immediately after forming, the NYMS petitioned the state legislature for a gradual abolition act and continued to push for an emancipation law until finding success in 1799. The NYMS diligently lobbied for gradual abolition legislation and pressed for state laws that would prohibit the exportation of slaves outside the state, limit the rights of slaveholders, and expand the purview of antislavery laws so as to grant liberty to as many slaves as possible. Like the PAS, the NYMS also paid heed to the condition of free blacks. In 1787 it established the African Free School, which provided education for hundreds of free black New Yorkers. The PAS and NYMS helped found abolition societies in New Jersey and Delaware. While lacking the organizational clout of the PAS or NYMS, the New Jersey Abolition Society and the Delaware Abolition Society played a central role in advocating emancipation in their respective states and guarding and enlarging the rights of enslaved and free blacks.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society," 20-21; Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 56-57. The NYMS was the only early abolition society that admitted slaveholding members. The issue caused internal disagreement and in 1809 the NYMS banned slaveowners from the society. Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society," 23-24. That the NYMS permitted slaveholding among their members should not at all detract from their activism or cause questions regarding the goals of the society. Quaker leaders of the NYMS, hoping to attract a sociopolitically prominent membership, may have been willing to overlook slaveholding in their society--especially if these members indicated that they would gradually emancipate their chattel. For an interpretation of the NYMS which uses the admittance of slaveholders to openly question whether the society advocated the abolition of slavery see White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 81-86. As the next chapter of this dissertation will make clear, the NYMS unequivocally worked for slavery's abolition. Together the PAS and the NYMS made up the organizational marrow of the early abolition movement, but these two societies did not stand alone. The American Revolution generated a groundswell of antislavery sentiment that found form in several antislavery organizations sprinkled throughout the New England, Middle Atlantic, and Upper Southern states. By 1793 antislavery societies existed in Rhode Island, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, western parts of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The activities and goals of these societies differed according to the various local antislavery exigencies facing state activists. In Rhode Island, long the northern capital of the transatlantic slave trade, antislavery forces focused on eliminating the slave trade after helping to enact a gradual emancipation act in the state in 1784. In western Pennsylvania, the Washington County Abolition Society, located in the southwest corner of the state, concentrated on assisting ex-slaves whose tenuous hold on freedom was threatened by slave catchers eager to re-enslave them. In 1790 the Virginia Quaker Robert Pleasants formed an antislavery society headquartered in Richmond, and urged non-slaveholding Virginians to join him in transferring private manumission efforts into public policy. See Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 213-342 and Jordan, *White Over Black*, 343-345.

Membership in the PAS and NYMS was dominated by Quakers. Antislavery Friends initiated the establishment of both societies. Quakers also were often the most involved members of the abolition societies. Friends made up at least 75% of the most active members of the PAS and at least half of those most active in the NYMS. However, to conclude that these organizations were simply bastions of Quaker sectarian activism would be to overlook the larger currency of antislavery in the early national period and to misread the ideological framework within which the antislavery societies operated. The PAS and the NYMS enlisted members of the Revolutionary vanguard. Having already brought politically weighty Americans like Benjamin Rush, Tench Cox and Thomas Paine into the organizational fold, when the PAS reorganized for a second time in 1787 it named Benjamin Franklin as its president. In the NYMS such political luminaries as Alexander Hamilton, Noah Webster and Egbert Benson, along with three of the state's first four governors--George Clinton, John Jay and Daniel Tompkins--all were either present at the NYMS' founding or manned high ranking positions in the society. The inclusion of such national dignitaries partially represents an attempt by the Quakers, who were socially and politically marginalized by their neutrality during the Revolutionary War, to give their societies popular credence. But the choice of these luminaries to accept membership in the societies, and the fact that some of them served as more than mere figureheads, reflects the antislavery zeitgeist of the Revolutionary and early national periods in the Mid-Atlantic region.<sup>58</sup>

The motivating spirit and activist strategy of the abolition societies blended Quaker benevolence and broader Enlightenment trends in social reform. These two influences are

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<sup>58</sup> Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, 216-217. For John Jay's and Alexander Hamilton's active involvement in the early years of the NYMS see Moseley, "A History of the New-York Manumission Society," 37-38. The PAS' efforts in 1787 to broaden the organization brought prominent non-Quaker members like Franklin (who was mostly a figurehead) and other politically prominent and wealthy individuals, but their participation did not last very long. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 130-131. Two exceptions to this pattern were Tench Coxe and especially Benjamin Rush, both of whom were members of the PAS before 1787.

exemplified in the reformism of Anthony Benezet and Benjamin Rush. Benezet's benevolence knew few bounds. He not only opposed slavery but argued against war, advocated for the fair treatment of Native Americans, and pushed for a more progressive system of education that substituted moral suasion for corporal punishment. Perhaps stemming from his family's experience as a persecuted religious minority, Benezet possessed a peculiarly sensitive disposition that made him acutely aware of the agony of others. For example, he refused to eat meat believing that one living creature should not depend on the suffering of another. No suffering touched Benezet more than that of Philadelphia's blacks. His house was located not far from the city's slave trading markets and the brutality and inhumanity of chattel bondage left an indelible mark on the Quaker reformer. Benezet devoted himself to befriending the black community. He learned of their grievances, assisted them whenever possible, and championed their rights. Though he did not live to partake in much of the PAS' activism, Benezet's undying compassion for the concerns of enslaved and free blacks would be carried on by the most committed members of the early abolition societies, many of whom were also Quakers.<sup>59</sup>

The cause of Benezet's life, and the one that would influence the abolition societies most profoundly, was black education. As early as 1750, Benezet began to provide evening classes for free black youths in his home. What started as a charitable endeavor taken up in response to the desire of African American parents for their children to gain an education became a weapon against the defenders of slavery and their claims of black inferiority. When Benezet refuted the arguments of slavery's proponents he relied not just on positive renderings of Africans in Africa,

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<sup>59</sup> Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 18-19. For a sampling of some of Benezet's non-antislavery reformist publications see Anthony Benezet, *Thoughts on the Nature of War, And Its Repugnancy To The Christian Life* (Philadelphia: Henry Miller, 1766); Anthony Benezet, *The Mighty Destroyer Displayed, In Some Account Of The Dreadful Havoc made by the mistaken Use as well as Abuse of Distilled Spirituous Liquors* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1774) and Anthony Benezet, *The Pennsylvania Spelling Book, Or, Youth's Friendly Instructor and Monitor* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1779).

but on his first-hand experience with instructing Philadelphia's blacks. Benezet assured the public in one of his antislavery pamphlets that he had "for many years" been familiar with "the temper and genius of the Africans" through the classes he offered free blacks. He declared that people of African descent were "equally capable of improvement, as...Whites" and wrote that only "vulgar prejudice" could say otherwise. Benezet's successful experiment in black education (his pupils included future leaders of Philadelphia's African American community) directly influenced the Philadelphia Meeting to open a school for free blacks in 1770. Benezet remained intimately involved with the school's operations until his death in 1784. When the abolition societies turned to black education to prove wrong the defenders of slavery and cultivate virtuous African American freemen, they had Benezet's legacy to shine the way.<sup>60</sup>

Benjamin Rush's fervor for reforming American society matched that of his friend Benezet. Born near Philadelphia in 1746, Rush received medical training in Scotland before returning to the City of Brotherly Love, where he established a medical practice and eventually became the most prominent physician in America. When the Revolution arrived Rush served in the Continental Congress and acted as a surgeon in the Continental Army. These experiences fired Rush with a patriotic zeal for the future of newly independent America. The Revolution, in Rush's eyes, had broken with the ancient iniquities of Europe and opened the way for reformers to create a new society based on principles of republican equality. Influenced by the

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<sup>60</sup> Benezet, *Short Observations on Slavery*, 12; Hornick, "Anthony Benezet and the Africans' School"; Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, and James Forten were three free black community leaders who were pupils of Benezet's. Benezet started his career as an educator by teaching in a Quaker school. In 1742 he became the head of a non-sectarian Philadelphia school. In 1755 Benezet opened an educational institution for girls. Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 21.

Enlightenment's commitment to social progress and the perfectibility of human nature, Post-Revolutionary reformers confidently went about trying to remake society.<sup>61</sup>

Rush was at the head of this movement. Believing that in independent America "the benefactor of mankind may realize all his dreams," Rush involved himself with nearly every reform cause of the era, including antislavery. First brought to the fight against slavery by Benezet, Rush joined the PAS in 1784 and later served as president of a national convention of abolition societies. Flush with an optimism born of the reform spirit of his age, Rush foresaw "a great revolution in behalf of our oppressed Negro brethren" that would lead ultimately to the abolition of slavery. This optimistic outlook and the Enlightenment basis of Post-Revolutionary American reform would serve as two key themes of the early abolition movement.<sup>62</sup>

Rush's greatest influence on the reform program of the abolition societies was his environmentalist philosophy and his advocacy of a system of republican education. Like many of his reform-driven contemporaries, Rush subscribed to the Enlightenment belief that people were products of their surrounding environment. Rush believed that the minds of Americans were "like soft clay" waiting to be molded. Rush thought everything from such basic human functions as diet and sleep to more complex ones such as morality and religion informed the character of individuals. From this environmentalist premise, Rush advocated a public education system that could fit Americans for citizenship in the new republic. Education had taken on new importance in independent America, according to Rush, because republican government had "created a new

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<sup>61</sup> Carl Binger, *Revolutionary Doctor: Benjamin Rush, 1746-1813* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966); Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 469-479.

<sup>62</sup> Rush to William Peterkin, November 27, 1784 in L.H. Butterfield, "Further Letters of Benjamin Rush," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (January, 1854), 26; Benjamin Rush to Granville Sharp, November 1, 1774 in John A. Woods, "The Correspondence of Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp 1773-1809," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (April, 1967), 13. Rush involved himself in a host of Post-Revolutionary era reform movements including temperance, female education, penal reform, the cessation of both corporal and capital punishment and ending the practice of dueling, among others.

class of duties to every American." America needed a knowledgeable and virtuous public for republican government and society to endure.<sup>63</sup>

Fusing religious morality with secular civics, Rush called for an educational system that could "adapt our modes of teaching to the peculiar form of our government." Rush hoped to "convert men into republican machines" so that Americans could "perform their parts properly" in republican society. Antislavery Quakers had already instituted a system of black education within their own religious sect by the time Rush devised his educational theories. But when the defenders of slavery insisted on the incapacity of blacks for freedom in the new republic, the abolition societies would utilize Rush's environmentalist system of republican education in seeking to prove the capacity of African Americans for virtuous citizenship.<sup>64</sup>

AS ANTISLAVERY ACTIVISTS pushed state legislatures to adopt emancipation policies, debates over the issue of abolition ensued as far south as Virginia. Wherever emancipation was debated, two fundamental issues emerged as formidable hurdles to the cause of abolitionism: the rights of slaveholders to property in bondspersons and the assertion that black slaves were not capable of freedom (a claim especially pertinent in a newly independent republic based on the ideal of a virtuous citizenry). Throughout the middle states, extensive debates over emancipation

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<sup>63</sup> Butterfield, "Further Letters of Rush," 26; Benjamin Rush, *A Plan For the Establishment of Public Schools, and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania; To Which Are Added Thoughts Upon the Mode of Education, Proper in a Republic* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1786), 13.

<sup>64</sup> Rush, *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools*, 13, 27; Robert Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18-23. For Rush's thoughts on environmentalism and public education see Benjamin Rush, *An Oration Delivered Before the American Philosophical Society, Held in Philadelphia on the 27th of February, 1786; Containing An Enquiry into the Influence of Physical Causes Upon the Moral Faculty* (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1786) and Rush, *A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools*. Rush's linkage of secular republicanism and Christian morality--what Robert Abzug has called "Christian Republicanism"--fit well with Quaker sectarian mores of virtuous and pious living and constitutes another connection between American Revolutionary ideology and Quaker theology, expressed in the early abolition movement.

appeared from the time of Pennsylvania's abolition bill of 1780 through New Jersey's emancipation act of 1804.

Defenders of slavery in New Jersey grabbed on to property rights in slaves as a major component of their case against legislative abolition. One writer exclaimed that "slaves" were "as much their owners property as any thing we possess." Another New Jersey essayist called the principle of property in slaves "one of the unalterable particulars of our rights," and proclaimed that it was unconstitutional for chattel to be emancipated "without the concurrence of their possessors." A third New Jersey apologist for slavery thought that it was "no trifling thing" for slaveholders "to be deprived of their *legal property*" and caustically suggested a "perusal of our constitution" by abolitionists. Opposing a New York bill for abolition in 1796, *Justice* asked rhetorically if abolitionists meant to tell slaveholders that "you shall not hold that property [slaves] any longer, which by the laws of your country you were before authorized to hold?" *Justice* asserted that such an act would be "an outrage on justice and liberty" much greater than the practice of holding people in bondage.<sup>65</sup>

Virginian defenders of slavery articulated one of the strongest formulations of the property rights in slaves argument. On the heels of the 1782 private manumission act that made it possible for Virginia's slaveholders to voluntarily free their bondspersons, Quaker and Methodist activists pushed the state assembly for a general abolition bill. Proponents of slavery quickly responded with a flurry of petitions declaiming against abolition and requesting the repeal of the manumission law.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), February 14, 1781; *Ibid.*, January 11, 1781; *Ibid.*, April 11, 1781; *The Argus* (New York), January 23, 1796. See also *The Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), January 31, 1781.

<sup>66</sup> Fredrika Teute Schmidt and Barbara Ripel Wilhelm, "Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January, 1973), 133-146. While the petitions for general abolition were never considered by the Virginia Assembly, a bill to repeal the 1782 voluntary manumission act was soundly defeated.

The Old Dominion's proslavery memorialists appropriated the mantle of Revolutionary liberty and the meaning of American Independence from antislavery writers. Stating that Americans had "risked their lives and fortunes" to be "put in the possession of our Rights of Liberty and Property" the petitioners warned the assembly that antislavery laws of any sort violated "our sacred rights of property" in slaves. In the judgment of the petitioners, through the trials of war Americans had "sealed with our Blood, a Title to the full, free, and absolute enjoyment of every species of our Property," and yet now abolitionists threatened to destroy everything the Revolution had been fought over. While the initial defenders of slavery during the early 1770s had left property rights off the table in their arguments, those writing in the 1780s and onward, as abolitionism itself became a subject of public debate, made no such oversight. When antislavery activists began advocating emancipation, the defenders of slavery countered by citing the long sanctioned practice of holding property in people and by making use of Revolutionary ideology for proslavery devices.<sup>67</sup>

Together with the property rights defense, the apologists for slavery during the emancipation debates relied upon racial arguments of black inferiority. In one sense this was nothing new. Defenders of slavery tried to establish the racial inferiority of those of African descent whenever chattel bondage was attacked. But as Americans put in place a republican society dependent on the virtue of the people to govern themselves, the defenders of slavery fine-tuned these arguments. They now claimed that emancipating a people ill-suited for freedom would ruin American Independence by subverting the liberties of the body politic and corrupting the fragile new republic. In Pennsylvania, one writer warned that it was "*impolitic and*

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<sup>67</sup> "To the honourable the General Assembly of Virginia, the Remonstrance and Petition of the Free Inhabitants of Amelia County" and "To the Honourable the General Assembly of Virginia, The Remonstrance and Petition of the free Inhabitants of the County of Lunenburg" in Teute and Wilhelm, "Early Proslavery Petitions," 138-143. The proslavery petitioners also freighted their arguments with religious references. For the religious arguments of the petitioners in favor of slavery, see Jonathan D. Sassi, "Religion, Race, and the Founders," (forthcoming), 23-24.

*dangerous*" to emancipate slaves and make them "free citizens." Abolition would "injure ourselves and them too" bringing "a new kind of bondage" wherein "theft, murder and rapine" by a people filled with "ignorance" and intent on enacting revenge for being held in slavery would roil the republic.<sup>68</sup>

Opponents of emancipation in New York and New Jersey also relied heavily on making dire predictions of what black freedom would mean for republican America. A New York essayist contemptuously dismissed any efforts at the emancipation of so many "villains and vagabonds" and dreaded the prospect of "*black republicans*" replete with "vice, roguery, [and] indolence" joining the ranks of civil society. *A Lover of true Justice*, writing in the *New-Jersey Gazette* lectured the public that "*The preservation and interest of civil society ought to be regarded*" before New Jerseyans rushed to abolish slavery. If a people accustomed only to dependence and unfit for freedom were unleashed from slavery, "What kind of a nation" would America become, the writer asked ominously.<sup>69</sup>

Another defender of slavery in New Jersey, *Eliobo*, outdid his fellow writers in painting a horrifying portrait of African American emancipation. *Eliobo* "denied" the "speculative notion" of abolitionists that "the spirits of Negroes can be operated upon by education." Those of African descent were naturally inferior to whites and ready made for human bondage. By freeing slaves and "declar[ing] them intitled to the liberties of freemen" blacks would gain a misguided pride and look to "erect a kingdom and empire of their own." Having "returned to their native wildness and brutality," emancipated bondspersons would look to the "murder and rapine" of whites, leading the republic to reverberate with the "shrieks and cries of murdered children and the

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<sup>68</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), February 21, 1781. An antislavery writer replied to this piece in *The Pennsylvania Journal* (Philadelphia), April 4, 1781.

<sup>69</sup> *The New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth), January 17, 1791; *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), February 14, 1781.

lamentations of assassinated friends weltering in gore." Eliobo portrayed himself as the voice of reason, chiding abolitionists for not having "weighed into the consequences" of emancipation.<sup>70</sup>

Delaware's defenders of slavery likewise sounded alarm bells regarding the damage emancipation would do to the fledgling republic. Following the passage of a law liberalizing manumission standards in 1787 and the founding of Delaware's first abolition society two years later, proponents of slavery made a preemptive strike at any potential abolition law. Stating that "nature has marked the line of distinction" between black slaves and free whites "too strong to be erased," *Camillus's* essays in the *Delaware Gazette* argued that emancipation would embolden the savagery of African Americans and bring "the black cloud of discord and confusion." The result would be "one general scene of rapine and all the complicated horrors of a most cruel civil war." *Camillus* implored Americans "as patriots, as freemen" to "combat" abolitionism "under every form." Otherwise "an ignorant and unprincipled race" would "involve your country in misrule." *Humanus* seconded these arguments when he wrote that "the person who manumits his negroes, does an essential injury to the neighbourhood where he lives." The writer believed that the "public good," which evidently worked against the freeing of a people in a state "altogether uncivilized," should be consulted before abolition took place. A third opponent of abolition in Delaware thought emancipation would "sever the bands of society, excite the Negroes to rebellion" and leave "government prostrate at the feet of barbarians."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> *The New-Jersey Journal* (Chatham), December 17, 1780. See the antislavery response to these essays in the *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), March 14, 1781; *Ibid.*, March 21, 1781; *The New-Jersey Journal* (Chatham), January 10, 1781; *The New-York Packet*, March 28, 1785; *Ibid.*, March 31, 1785 and *The Argus* (New York), Feb. 3, 1796. See especially the biting satirical response to *Eliobo* by *Eliobo Secundus* in the *The New-Jersey Journal* (Chatham), January 10, 1781. The piece was penned by the Reverend Jacob Green, whose antislavery sermons had earlier been published in the state's newspapers.

<sup>71</sup> *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington), Sept. 23, 1789; *Ibid.*, September 26, 1789; *Ibid.*, October 24, 1789; *Ibid.*, October 31, 1789. A *Plain Citizen* writing in the *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington), October 28, 1789 evidenced how the defenders of slavery created a dichotomy between black slavery and black rule, and black subjugation or black equality, with no in between, to effectively make emancipation a fatal choice for independent America: "to make them [blacks] good subjects, all the rights of freemen must be restored to them, if they are not, you make them

When they claimed that abolition imperiled the experiment in American republicanism, the defenders of slavery once again drew on Revolutionary ideology for proslavery ends. While these arguments were hyperbolic, one must remember that to a prejudiced American public, who over the course of the colonial era came to view those of African descent as inferior beings and enemies of the state, they held a potent resonance. Pointing to the threat of black freedom and the unfitness of African Americans for citizenship gave the opponents of abolition formidable ideological artillery to combat emancipation.<sup>72</sup>

THE CONTRADICTION IMPLICATIONS of Revolutionary ideology aside, by the time the Constitution was ratified and a federal republic that seemed to offer great promise for the new nation was formed, the abolition societies of early national America could similarly look to the future of their cause with confidence and hope. Slavery had gone from being an unquestioned institution ubiquitous throughout the colonies to a stain on the conscience of Independent America, in need of justification by those daring enough to defend the institution. But the emergence of the first abolition movement in the western world, and the revolutionary change in the way Americans perceived human bondage, neither guaranteed emancipation nor ensured that the white public could be disarmed of the racial prejudices that had for nearly two centuries undergirded chattel slavery. The Mid-Atlantic debates over emancipation show that though the proponents of slavery were undoubtedly on the ideological defensive in the Post-Revolutionary

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turbulent and factious, if they are, you make them governors and masters." The debate over slavery in the *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington) started in response to a writer who questioned whether slaveholders should be representatives of the people in a free government. The discussion soon turned into a larger debate about emancipation, wherein slavery's defenders turned the ideals of republican self-government in their favor by claiming that black freemen would tear asunder the republic. For the antislavery retort to these arguments see the *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington), October 10, 1789; *Ibid.*, November 7, 1789 and *Ibid.*, October 14, 1789.

<sup>72</sup> Abolitionist writers countered the racial republicanism based claims of slavery's defenders by arguing for inherent black equality, the universalism of natural rights, the fitness or capacity of African Americans for virtuous freedom, and the threat of slavery to the meaning of the Revolution.

era, they had powerful tools to wield against their antislavery foes. The opponents of emancipation used Revolutionary ideology, in the form of property rights arguments and assertions that blacks were incapable of civic membership, to put the onus back onto antislavery activists. The abolition societies' response to these crucial challenges would go on to shape their program of antislavery reform.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LIBERTY OF THE BLACKS WILL BE DEFENDED: THE CONTEST OVER GRADUAL EMANCIPATION AND THE FIGHT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN RIGHTS

In the summer of 1800, one year after gradual abolition became law in New York, Lewis Martin De Moor, a man of mixed racial origin, set foot in Manhattan as a slave. Brought on a boat from the southern Caribbean island of Curaçao and sold to a New York resident soon after disembarking in the expanding commercial city, some six months after his arrival De Moor found himself subject once again to the threat of transportation and sale. This time though De Moor had reason for hope. Capitalizing on the laws that banned both the importation and exportation of slaves to and from the state for sale, the New York Manumission Society interceded on De Moor's behalf. Making sure that "measures were taken to keep" Moor "out the hands of his Master's reach," the manumission society went to confront De Moor's owner, intending to inform him that he was in violation of the law and that his slave was in fact a free man. But realizing that "something more than friendly" was intended by the manumission's society's visit, De Moor's master had skipped town. The society's standing committee then gave De Moor a "Certificate of Freedom" to protect him in his newly acquired liberty.<sup>1</sup>

Emancipation came hard to the Post-Revolutionary and early national Mid-Atlantic. Adamantly opposed to any laws that abridged their rights to their chattel property, slaveholders fought fervidly to fend off abolitionist attempts at legislating slavery out of existence. In making sure the debate was as much about the vested property rights in people as the rights of people to their liberty, slavery's defenders limited the immediate purview of emancipation in the Mid-

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<sup>1</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VII, 181, NYHS, New York.

Atlantic from the outset. Combining this property defense with the racially-charged caveat that liberated slaves unsuited for freedom could endanger the young republic, slavery's apologists guaranteed that emancipation would be a long and arduous process. Moreover, the gradual nature of Mid-Atlantic abolition blurred the lines between slave and free. That slavery remained a legal institution at the same time as abolition and antislavery laws promoted the growth of free black communities added up to a fragile freedom for many African Americans. Slaves who had come to manumission agreements with their masters, the indentured children of those condemned to perpetual bondage, and free blacks all found themselves exposed to being illegally held in bondage, exported to the South, or kidnapped into slavery, among an array of other subterfuges by slaveholders and slavedealers.<sup>2</sup>

Even though slavery in the Mid-Atlantic was destroyed gradually, in the end, it was the slaveholders who were on the losing side of the battle. This chapter highlights the monumental difference gradual emancipation made in the lives of slaves and their masters. While Mid-Atlantic slavery remained alive in a greatly weakened form well into the nineteenth century, without acknowledging the significant break from the past that gradual abolition represented one cannot comprehend the struggle for statutory emancipation, understand the strident resistance of slaveholders to antislavery laws and their implementation, or appreciate the ongoing efforts of the abolition societies to put emancipatory legislation into practice. An in-depth analysis of the

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<sup>2</sup> For the literature on the gradual emancipation process in the Mid-Atlantic see Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 99-204; Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 60-85; Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 64-109; Van Cleve, *A Slaveholder's Union*, 59-93; White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 24-55; McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 161-179; Harris, *In The Shadow of Slavery*, 48-133; Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society," 97-169; George Fishman, "The Struggle for Freedom and Equality: African Americans in New Jersey, 1624-1849/50" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1990), 221-321; Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 162-186; Simeon Moss, "The Persistence of Slavery and Involuntary Servitude in a Free State (1685-1866)," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Jul., 1950), 298-310; Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," 171-189; Gary Wolinetz, "New Jersey Slavery and the Law," *Rutgers Law Review*, 50 L. Rev. 2227 (Summer, 1998), 2237-2257 and Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 124-200. Zilversmit's work, short in length and yet encyclopedic in its breadth, rightly remains the standard account of Northern emancipation as a whole.

tortuous road to emancipation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Mid-Atlantic captures the imposing barriers to African American liberty faced by early abolitionists and their enslaved and free black allies even as it underscores why asserting the fundamental rights of those persons with black skin was so central to the nation's first organized abolition movement.<sup>3</sup>

EMANCIPATION ORIGINATED IN Pennsylvania. With the Quakers' political lobbying curtailed by the Revolutionary War, the legislative push for abolition came not from the Society of Friends or the Society for Relief of the Free Negroes, but from the radical Whig politician, George Bryan. In 1778, the Executive Council (a body that replaced the role of the Governor in Revolutionary-era Pennsylvania) under the leadership of Bryan, who had been newly installed as the acting president of the Council, urged the Assembly to take up the issue of abolition. Acknowledging that the majority of those currently in bondage were "scarcely competent of freedom" the Council called for the gradual abolition of slavery in the state.<sup>4</sup>

After three separate lobbying efforts by the Council, the Assembly responded by writing up an emancipation bill in the spring of 1779. The Assembly proposed that the children of slave mothers born following the bill's enactment be considered indentured servants and have all the rights of indentured servants: girls serving until the age of 18 and boys until the age of 21. Slaveowners would need to register all their slaves by a definite, but as of yet undetermined date or their chattel would be deemed free. The bill also called for the repeal of the slave codes of

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<sup>3</sup> My point here is not to claim gradual emancipation as a radical policy measure, as much as to dramatize the great departure it made from the previous legal and social state of slavery in the colonial Mid-Atlantic. For the classic interpretation of gradual emancipation as a conservative process in which slaveholders lost little see Stanley Engerman and William Fogel "Philanthropy at Bargain Prices: Notes on the Economics of Gradual Emancipation," *The Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June, 1974), 377-401. While Fogel and Engerman's calculations establish that slaveowners received nearly full compensation for their chattel, if gradual emancipation truly was "philanthropy at bargain prices," judging by the words and actions of slaveholders and slavery's defenders, someone forgot to inform them.

<sup>4</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 126-127.

1705 and 1725 and set forth that slaves and free persons and blacks and whites should be tried in the courts of law in "like manner," excepting that a slave could not testify against a free person. Rounding out the bill were racially restrictive measures including a ban on interracial marriage punishable by seven years of bound labor and a fine of one hundred pounds as well as an edict that free blacks who "loiter or misspend his or her time" and are "likely to become chargeable" could be bound out for service by the Overseers of the Poor. Though the Assembly had made way for the eventual end of slavery and put the two races on a more equitable standing in the courts of law, they also displayed a pressing concern for the future place of freed blacks in civil society.<sup>5</sup>

When the Assembly neglected to vote on its own bill, the issue of abolition was carried over into the next legislative session. At this point a freshly elected assembly drafted a new abolition bill with some important differences from its predecessor's. In a concession to slaveholders, the Assembly extended the age in which both sexes of the offspring of slaves would have to serve as indentures to 28. Just as significant was what the new bill did not include. Both the ban on intermarriage and the section threatening "idle" free blacks with bound labor were stricken from the 1780 bill. In an extended preamble the Assemblymen mused that while they were "Weaned by a long course of experience" in "a narrow course of prejudices and impartialities" they had discovered their "hearts enlarged with kindness towards men of all conditions and nations." This benevolent disposition was of no small importance. Indeed, as its detractors would point out, the 1780 abolition law bestowed citizenship rights on free blacks.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), March 4, 1779. The clauses banning miscegenation and allowing the binding out of free blacks under certain circumstances actually originated in the 1725 slave code entitled "An Act for the Better Regulating of Negroes in this Province," showing that the state legislature was not yet fully prepared to break with its colonial past on the issues of slavery and race.

<sup>6</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 128; *The Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), March 30, 1780. The preamble to the 1780 abolition act, extended from the unsuccessful 1779 bill, self-consciously stressed the revolutionary

Two sections of the bill regarding the registration of all slaves and servants in the state would become important mechanisms for emancipation by slavery's opponents. Masters who owned slaves were required to register them, along with their indentured offspring, with the Clerk of their respective county, and had to provide the slave's name, age and sex and the master's name, occupation and place of residence by November 1, 1780. If slaveholders failed to register their bondspersons they would lose their claim to these people. After November 1, 1780 only those slaves and servants registered would be considered slaves or servants and all others would gain their liberty and be adjudged "free men and free women." Here the Assembly anticipated that many slaveholders would seek to thwart the law by simply ignoring it. Thus the bill included a means to ensure that the emancipation process maintained its integrity. The act did exempt some slaveholders from the registration clause. Sojourners in the state, "seaman in ships," Federal Congressmen and foreign ministers and counsels who did not become residents of Pennsylvania were all immune from the abolition law as long as they did not keep slaves in the state for more than six months. Both of these clauses opened an avenue for freedom that enslaved blacks and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society would employ in widening the scope of emancipation in the state.<sup>7</sup>

The bill gave other hints that many slave masters would do their best to continue the institution of bondage in Pennsylvania. Anticipating that slaveowners would try to get around the abolition act by bringing into Pennsylvania blacks whom they had bound "to serve long and unreasonable terms," the Assembly forbade any indenture or apprenticeship of more than seven years unless the servant or apprentice was under the age of 28, in which case the indenture would

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nature of legislative abolition by rejecting white prejudice and highlighting the connection between America's campaign for freedom from Britain and the right of slaves to equal liberty.

<sup>7</sup> For instances of the PAS utilizing the registration and six month clauses to press for the freedom of African Americans see PPAS, Series I, Reel IV, 95-96, 117, 123 129-130, 225-227, 462, HSP, Philadelphia.

only be legally recognized until the servant reached the age of 28. The intention of this stipulation was to ban the further importation of slaves into the state. The other two major elements of the 1779 bill eliminating the slave codes of 1705 and 1725 and giving blacks the same rights as whites in state courts remained unchanged in the 1780 version.

Members of the legislature were not wholly united behind the bill. By a vote of 34-21 the Assembly chose to begin the process of gradual emancipation in Pennsylvania. The opposition published a list of reasons why it objected to emancipation. They labeled abolition "a step imprudent, premature," and insisted that the Assembly had received no explicit mandate from its constituents to pass such a law. Prime among their reasons for voting against emancipation was the door it opened to black citizenship. "If even the time were come when slaves might safely be emancipated," the legislators noted skeptically, "we could not agree to their being made free citizens in so extensive manner as this law proposes." In effect, abolition's opponents admitted that the 1780 bill made way for free black citizenship and then tried to use this groundbreaking fact against the law itself. Despite the opposition, "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" became law on March 1, 1780. But if the struggle to enact an abolition law had just ended, the battle for emancipation in Pennsylvania had only begun.<sup>8</sup>

The ink had hardly dried on the new act when it came under direct attack. In the fall of 1780 the Pennsylvania Assembly received a number of petitions from slaveholders asking for an extension of the deadline for registering their bondspersons. The Assembly's members, more than half of whom were newly elected, appeared responsive to the pleas of the petitioners. A proposed alteration to the act that would allow for the registration deadline to be extended until

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<sup>8</sup> *The Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), March 25, 1780. Opponents of abolition also utilized the uncertain and chaotic social atmosphere created by the ongoing war with Britain as a reason for voting against gradual emancipation in 1780. See Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 105-108 for a detailed breakdown of the legislative vote on the abolition bill.

January 1782, over a year past the original date of November 1780, won assent on an initial reading in March of 1781. Because many African Americans had already gained their liberty through the negligence of their masters in registering them, the proposal would have actually re-enslaved those who had claimed their legal freedom. The state legislature seemed primed to undermine the black liberty they had made possible only months earlier.<sup>9</sup>

Realizing the gravity of the situation, antislavery writers immediately responded with outrage at the prospect of black re-enslavement. Their principle argument against extending the registration deadline was that freedom from slavery translated into equal rights for freedpersons. An essayist in the *Freeman's Journal* insisted that all African Americans who had gained their liberty through the abolition law were now "a part of the body of freemen, citizens of the state" and thus "in point of liberty" they could not "be distinguished from the rest." The writer found the idea of extending the registration deadline to be "the height of tyranny" and dared the legislature to "contradict the very design of the constitution, which was to secure the lives, liberties, and properties of the people." Another antislavery author warned that if the newly emancipated could be legally re-enslaved so too could "I, my neighbour, and every citizen in the metropolis be deprived of our liberty." Formerly enslaved African Americans were now "a part of the free community" and thus white and black rights had become "united together." The author concluded with an unequivocal statement in favor of African American liberty. "I take them [free blacks] by the hand as brethren, and boldly declare to the world, we are equally free."<sup>10</sup>

Those former slaves who had garnered their freedom through the 1780 abolition act joined the fray. One group of recently freed slaves submitted a memorial in opposition to moving

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<sup>9</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 133; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 112.

<sup>10</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), June 13, 1781; *Ibid.*, September 26, 1781.

up the registration deadline, thereby asserting one of the fundamental rights of American freemen: that of petitioning. "The grand question of slavery or liberty, is too important for us to be silent--It is the momentous person of our lives" announced the memorialists. Alarmed at the prospect of being "plunged into all the horrors of hateful slavery," the petitioners were incredulous that the Assembly would rob them of "the common blessings" of freedom as stated in the preamble to the 1780 act. A former slave, who along with his children had recently obtained freedom by way of the registration clause, penned a newspaper piece pleading for the legislature to uphold the law as it stood. While he always read the gradual abolition act "with joy" "Cato" wondered "what must we think of the meaning of all those words" put forth against slavery in the preamble to the law if slaveholders could place back into bondage those who were now free. Apparently the Assembly took note of the campaign against extending the registration deadline. Although the proponents came close to amending the 1780 law, their attempts were repulsed by a vote of 27-21.<sup>11</sup>

Although the abolition law's integrity was now assured, resistance to the emancipation process continued apace. By 1788 slaveholders had exposed so many loopholes in the gradual abolition act that the Pennsylvania legislature felt obliged to amend it drastically. The Assembly acted in response to two petitions: one from a group of Philadelphia Quakers and another from the PAS. The latter memorial referred to several violations of the abolition act and asked the legislators to alter it so as to answer the call of "humanity & justice to the oppressed part of the human Species." A legislative committee was formed to examine the petitioners' supplication. In March of 1788, the committee filed a report. It began by acknowledging that the 1780 act was "not sufficiently calculated" to meet the emancipatory spirit of the original legislation. Citing

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<sup>11</sup> *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), September 21, 1781; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 113.

"the mischiefs and subtle evasions, which artful and unprincipled men are too apt to embrace," the committee agreed with the petitioners that the time had come to amend the law.<sup>12</sup>

In their report the committee revealed the several ways slaveholders worked surreptitiously to flout the intent of the of the 1780 act. While the law gave gradual freedom to the children of slaves born after March 1, 1780, it did not ban their being exported into slavery in "neighbouring states or foreign countries" with the purpose of depriving these persons of the "liberty to which they would be entitled here." The 1780 law also did not prohibit pregnant slaves from being forced to leave the state while they gave birth so that their offspring could be legally deemed slaves, allowing their owners to continue to reap the hereditary benefits of chattel bondage. Furthermore, the law did not stop slaveowners from selling their slaves out of the state of Pennsylvania, forcing the separation of wives from husbands and parents from children. Even stipulations specifically laid out in the law were being subverted. The committee noted that the six month exemption for slaveholding non-residents had been violated by those who sent their slaves out of Pennsylvania immediately before the end of this half-year period, and then quickly brought them back into the state. Finally, no penalties or punishments existed for "*men-stealers*" who kidnapped free blacks and took them from Pennsylvania and into slavery.<sup>13</sup>

To remedy these defects in the law, the committee recommended a host of amendments. The Assembly assented to these suggestions, passing them into law on March 29, 1788, three weeks after the report was first submitted. Dubbed "An Act to Explain and Amend an Act, entitled, An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," the legislation is better viewed as

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<sup>12</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 27-29, HSP, Philadelphia; *Constitution and Act of Incorporation of the Pennsylvania Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage. And for Improving the African Race. To Which Are Added, The Acts of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, and the Acts of the Congress of the United States, Respecting Slaves and the Slave Trade* (Philadelphia: J. Ormond, 1800), 33.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

Pennsylvania's second abolition law. According to the 1788 act, no black slave or servant of the state (except those belonging to persons legitimately entitled to six month exemption) could be legally "removed" from Pennsylvania to deny freedom to children of slave mothers, to have enslaved women give birth to their children in slave states, or to bypass the six month exemption without the express consent of the slave or servant being taken out of the state. This consent had to be given by him or her in front of two justices of the peace or, if under 21, through the testimony of the parent of the given slave or servant. If permission was granted, the justices had to make an official record of it, including the name, age, status and place of residence of the slave or servant, and give a copy to him or her. Anyone who sold or took a slave or servant out of the state in violation of the law "whereby such slave or servant would lose those benefits and privileges, which by the laws of this state are secured to him or her," would be subject to a fine of 75 pounds. In closing the original emancipation law's loopholes, the Pennsylvania legislature decided that to abolish slavery it needed to expand the rights of black persons.<sup>14</sup>

This expansion of rights also protected slave families. No one claiming the service of a slave or black servant would be permitted, as of June 1, 1788, to separate families by more than 10 miles without the express consent of the persons being separated. Evidence of permission for the separation had to be given in court according to the same procedure as slaves or servants being taken from the state. Violators of this clause would be fined 50 pounds. The 1788 law also stated that the six month exemption for non state resident slaveholders would no longer be considered sufficient cover by inhabitants or residents of Pennsylvania to evade the registration clause of the 1780 Act. Solidifying the ban on the importation of slaves, the Assembly held that

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<sup>14</sup> "An Act to Explain and Amend an Act, entitled, An Act for the gradual Abolition of Slavery," in *Constitution and Act of Incorporation of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage. And for Improving the African Race. To Which Are Added, The Acts of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery, and the Acts of the Congress of the United States, Respecting Slaves and the Slave Trade*, sect. II, 38-39.

each and every slave who was brought into Pennsylvania by state inhabitants and residents or persons "intending to inhabit or reside therein" were considered "immediately free." Lastly, the 1788 act dictated that kidnappers of free blacks or slaves and servants of the residents of Pennsylvania were subject to 100 pound fine and would be sentenced to "hard labour" for a term of between six months and a year. As the 1788 amendments show, the quest to effect abolition in Pennsylvania was a protracted struggle in which African American rights took center stage.<sup>15</sup>

WHILE PENNSYLVANIA CAPPED its legislative efforts at gradual emancipation by amending the 1780 act to further protect the rights of those enslaved and free, the New York legislature had only recently failed to enact an abolition law due to the question of black citizenship. In January of 1785, the New York Senate took up a bill for the gradual abolition of slavery in the state. The bill, introduced by Senator Ephraim Paine, proposed that the children of slaves born after the legislation's passage would receive freedom in their twenties--men at the age of twenty-five and women at the age of twenty-two. Although following the gradualist logic of the period, the bill did give freedom to the offspring of bondspersons at an earlier age than Pennsylvania's law. With little debate, the Senate approved the bill. Meanwhile, the Assembly, responding to an abolitionist petition from Quaker memorialists, had assigned a committee to consider the request. The committee came back with a report approving of the petitioners' aims and by a three to one

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Sect. VII, 42-43, Sect. I, 37 Sect. VIII, 43. The act also imposed the extraordinarily high penalty of 1,000 pounds for anyone participating in the slave trade from Pennsylvania ports, effectively banning the practice in the state. George William Van Cleve uses the large disparity between the fines for taking part in the slave trade and illegally exporting slaves and servants or kidnapping free blacks as evidence of the public's ambivalence in protecting the rights of Pennsylvanian African Americans. As he also points out, however, the 75 pound penalty on illegally removing bondspersons from the state amounted to as much as double the cost of a slave in Post-Revolutionary Pennsylvania, indicating the serious intent of the legislature to guard against the exportation of slaves and servants from the state without their consent. See Van Cleve, *A Slaveholder's Union*, 81-82.

margin Assembly members voted to consider the abolition issue as a whole. The passage of a gradual emancipation bill seemed imminent.<sup>16</sup>

Slavery's defenders, however, would not go down without a fight. Proslavery Assemblymen, mostly from the Dutch slaveholding counties of Kings, Richmond and Ulster--where slave labor still flourished--waged a determined campaign to defeat the cause of emancipation. At first they were unsuccessful. Latching on to Aaron Burr's radical proposal to immediately emancipate the state's slaves, proslavery members voted in favor of the measure in hopes of delivering an unpalatable bill to the Senate that they thought would have no chance of passing. But recognizing this ruse, antislavery Assemblymen defeated the Burr amendment. Then, slavery's proponents attempted to excise a section of the bill which required masters to provide for the indentured children of their bondspersons, most likely hoping to take advantage of the public's fear of the economic costs to the state that such a measure might entail. This attempt too fell flat. Next, opponents of abolition looked to extend the duration of service owed by the indentured children of slaves to 28 for both sexes from the ages of 25 and 22 for men and women respectively proposed by the Senate and similarly adopted by the Assembly. Here proponents of the bill prevailed by only two votes in keeping the two bills the same.<sup>17</sup>

By preying on racialized doubts about the suitability of blacks for equal citizenship, slavery's defenders finally found a winning formula for derailing emancipation. Opponents of the bill took to the press to institute this strategy. One writer under the pseudonym *American* published a newspaper piece warning of the bleak consequences that would follow emancipation under the terms currently being considered by the legislature. Contending that "it would be greatly injurious to this state if all the negroes should be allowed the privileges of white men,"

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<sup>16</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 48; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 56-57.

<sup>17</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 148.

*American* asked, "what will be the consequences" if emancipation was to be carried out in this manner. Answering his own question, the writer cited "the shame...from a mixture of complexion" along with the absurdity of blacks "participating in government, seated in our Senate and Assembly, General Quaco here, Col. Mingo there." But worst of all, New Yorkers could expect "the total subversion of our liberties" if African Americans were emancipated and allowed citizenship. Another piece making a similar argument was published in satirical form. Speaking in pidgin dialect *Cuffee* exclaimed, "Me wanna be freemen, Legislatureman too; Pompey too; Cato too; ebery nega an him wife too." The message was clear. Emancipating the state's blacks under the terms of equal citizenship was not only a ludicrous policy choice. It endangered the sanctity of republican government.<sup>18</sup>

As the debate over abolition picked back up in the Assembly, proslavery forces offered three amendments setting out a sphere of civic inferiority for African Americans. One of these amendments banned blacks from holding elected office and prohibited African Americans from serving as jurors or witnesses in cases involving whites. Another made interracial marriages illegal. And a third stipulated that free blacks would be stripped of all voting rights. The Assembly adopted all of these provisions and sent the amended bill, now exceedingly altered from Senate's version, to the Senate for consideration. The Senate demanded that the Assembly get rid of all three of these additional clauses. The Assembly then voted narrowly to remove the ban on black office holding and unequal judicial rights, but refused to overturn the other two amendments. Unmoved by the lower House's intransigence, the Senate requested that the Assembly abandon the remaining two amendments. This time the Assembly agreed to lift the ban on interracial unions but refused to budge on black disfranchisement. Faced with the

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<sup>18</sup> *The New-York Packet*, April 4, 1785; *The New-York Packet*, March 31, 1785.

prospect of losing the battle for an emancipation law altogether, the Senate grudgingly accepted the Assembly's decision and forwarded the bill to the Council of Revision for approval.<sup>19</sup>

The Council of Revision, a body with the power to veto all laws passed by the state legislature, declined the opportunity of adopting a gradual abolition act that so clearly compromised black citizenship. Choosing to veto the bill, the Council of Revision issued a statement decrying the idea of disfranchising black New Yorkers in no uncertain terms. Arguing that New York's free African Americans were "entitled to all the privileges of citizens," the Council argued that only by "shocking the principle of equal liberty" could they be stripped of the inestimable right of suffrage. This unjust clause did not only apply to blacks who would be gradually emancipated but to free African Americans who already possessed equal voting rights. Turning one of the arguments of slavery's defenders on its head, the Council warned that if the abolition bill was passed in its present form it would create a "class of discontented and disfranchised citizens" who could eventually "become dangerous to the state."<sup>20</sup>

The Council of Revision returned the vetoed bill to the Senate. Perhaps anticipating that proslavery forces in the Assembly would seize on the Council's veto and kill the bill once and for all, the Senate voted to override the Council's ruling. The Assembly answered by sustaining the Council's veto. But its members did not suddenly have a change of heart about black suffrage. In fact, the legislators who had previously voted to disfranchise blacks now voted in favor of African American suffrage (and against the Senate), while those who had before voted against disfranchisement now supported sacrificing black suffrage rights to get an abolition law on the

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<sup>19</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 148-149; Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 49-50. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 58-59.

<sup>20</sup> *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York, at their Second Meeting of the Eighth Session, Begun and Holden in the City of New-York, on Friday the Twenty-Seventh Day of January, 1785* (New York: S. Loudon, 1785), 119-120. Members of the Council of Revision in 1785 included then governor George Clinton, a founding member of the New York Manumission Society, and Robert R. Livingston, a close associate of New York Manumission Society President John Jay.

books. With the legislative waters sufficiently muddied and the Senate and Assembly at loggerheads once again, the cause of abolition went down to defeat. Frustrated by this development, an antislavery correspondent in *The New-York Packet* complained of "those, who under the pretext of passing a bill for manumitting slaves," were actually "industriously employed in foisting in clauses, which they were sure would frustrate the designs of emancipation." In short, New York's first attempt at enacting gradual abolition had foundered on the issue of race and the question of African American citizenship.<sup>21</sup>

The NYMS would not soon forget this lesson. Founded in January 1785, just before the legislature began addressing the topic of emancipation, from its inception the manumission society found itself faced with the problems of racial prejudice and white skepticism about black liberty. But the near-passage of a gradual abolition act also encouraged the NYMS to constantly push the state legislature to pass antislavery laws enlarging the pathways to African American freedom. While refusing to revisit the divisive issue of emancipation, soon after turning down gradual abolition the New York legislature agreed to make it illegal to buy or sell any slaves imported into the state after June 1, 1785. They also liberalized manumission standards by rescinding the bond requirement on slaveowners who wished to manumit their chattel. Slaves under the age of 50 and deemed qualified to take care of themselves could now be freed without their former owners having to post bond. Signaling to the NYMS that the state government was not averse to legislating against slavery, these two laws served as a launching pad for a three decades long manumission society campaign to, on the one hand, obtain and enforce

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<sup>21</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 51-52; Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 149; *The New-York Packet*, March 31, 1785.

emancipatory laws, and, on the other, guard and enlarge the rights of slaves and free blacks in New York.<sup>22</sup>

The NYMS began its petitioning efforts by urging a ban on the exportation of slaves. If the state legislature would not, for the time being, pass an abolition law, the manumission society could at least agitate for the enactment of basic protections for black New Yorkers. The NYMS' preoccupation with this issue was as old as the society itself. Communicating in the preamble to their constitution that African Americans were "under great disadvantage in asserting their Rights," the founders of the NYMS referenced the "Violent Attempts lately made, to seize, and export for sale" free blacks as a primary reason for forming the organization. In late eighteenth century New York, kidnappers apprehended free blacks, claimed them as chattel and then, according the legal practice of taking slaves out of state, sold freepersons into perpetual bondage. In February of 1786, finding that the exportation of slaves and free African Americans "is still Continued," the NYMS drafted a memorial to the legislature. Alluding to the "frequent and very affecting Instances" of families being torn from one another, the petition instructed the legislature that there were many "manumitted Slaves and other Freemen whose Colour exposed them to such Outrages [exportation]; being Kidnapped and carried to Market in distant Parts."<sup>23</sup>

A bill prohibiting the exportation of slaves soon passed the Senate. In the Assembly, though, where gradual abolition had less than a year earlier met its demise, the ban was not approved. It would take two more years for the bill against slave exports to become law. In 1788, the New York legislature decreed that anyone who purchased a slave or served as an agent for a

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<sup>22</sup> *Laws of the State of New York* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1886), Vol. II, 120-122.

<sup>23</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 4, NYHS, New York; *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, 35, 41. Reports of a black kidnapping ring and editorials in support of a law against the exportation of slaves and free persons of color were printed in New York newspapers only one month after the NYMS submitted its 1786 petition, suggesting that the manumission society sought public support for its memorial. See *The New-York Packet*, March 13, 1786 and *The Independent Journal*, March 15, 1786. Around the same time, *The New-York Packet* also published a notice warning African Americans "to be upon their guard, lest they should meet with some kidnappers, and share the fate many have heretofore done." See *The New-York Packet*, March 16, 1786.

buyer of a bondsperson "with intent to remove, export or carry such slave from this state" would be fined 100 pounds, half of the sum going to the person bringing the suit and the other half to the state. The slave being wrongfully removed from New York would be "declared...free." The state government also chose to reissue the 1785 moratorium on the purchase or sale of slave imports, implementing the same 100 pound fine for violators and a declaration of freedom for slaves illegally brought into New York. In essence, the legislature had frozen the market on slave selling and trading while the issue of slavery itself remained unresolved. Owing to the unwearied activism of the NYMS, the laws against slave importation and exportation would give freedom to hundreds of slaves and protect the liberty of hundreds more free blacks.<sup>24</sup>

This victory, however, was not without ambiguity. At the same time as the state legislature improved conditions for some black New Yorkers it heeded the prerogatives of slaveowners by issuing an updated slave code. Included in "An Act Concerning Slaves," were several clauses restricting the rights of slaves. Legally enslaved African Americans would continue to be regarded as chattel and a slave's baptism could not make him or her free. Slaves could not trade goods with others or buy liquor without the permission of their masters. Any slave accused of striking a white person could be thrown in jail and convicted of the offense without the benefit of a trial by jury. Especially troubling to antislavery activists, in an 1801 recodification of the 1788 act, bondspersons convicted of a crime not punishable by either death or life in prison could be "transported out of this state." Even though few of these measures were novel, the 1788 and 1801 acts highlight how slavery in New York was still a legally viable institution. Freedom and slavery lived side by side in early national New York. Confronting this

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<sup>24</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 151; *Laws Relative to Slavery and the Slave Trade* (New York: Samuel Stansbury, 1806), 3-5.

fact would occupy the abolitionists in the state for years to come, even after a policy of gradual emancipation was enshrined in law.<sup>25</sup>

The NYMS always had legislative abolition in their sights. In 1787 and 1793 the organization planned to petition for an emancipation law and then pulled back when they determined that the political climate was not favorable enough. With former NYMS President John Jay in the Governor's office by 1796, the timing seemed right. But when a bill for gradual emancipation was introduced in the Assembly, abolition's enemies rallied behind principles of property rights as a defense. A report on the bill complained that it would be "unjust to deprive any citizen of this state of his property" absent "a reasonable pecuniary compensation." Slavery's defenders also turned again to racial prejudice. A correspondent to a New York newspaper (probably a legislative proponent of emancipation) complained bitterly that abolition's "*mortal* enemies" had exploited white prejudice to shower disfavor on the bill. When one member vocalized his "disgust at the idea of setting along side of a '*black representative*'" the correspondent "*saw clearly*, that there was a plan in view *to defeat the bill!*" Legislative emancipation in New York would have to wait a while longer.<sup>26</sup>

It took until 1799 for the abolitionists to triumph. Another failed attempt at emancipation in 1797 had yielded a compromise on the compensation issue. Slaveholders were given the choice of abandoning any black children that would be classified as servants to the town or city in which they resided; making local governments responsible for their financial support. The Assembly passed an abolition bill, but the Senate voted against the bill because of the abandonment clause. In 1799 the Assembly amended the abolition bill, putting the state rather

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<sup>25</sup> *Laws of the State of New York*, Vol. II, 675-677; *Laws Relative to Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 21-22. The 1788 act also gave slaves the right to trial by jury in cases of capital crime.

<sup>26</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 60, NYHS, New York; *America Minerva*, February 11, 1796; *American Minerva*, February 12, 1796.

than local jurisdictions on the financial hook for abandoned children. The Senate found this alteration acceptable and gradual emancipation cleared its final hurdle. On March 29, 1799, "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" made it into law. The act gave freedom gradually to the children of slaves born after July, 4 1799. Males would serve their mother's master as indentured servants until the age of 28 and females until 25.<sup>27</sup>

As with Pennsylvania's abolition law, the act required slaveholders to register the indentured children of their bondspersons, providing the "name, age and sex of every child so born" with the clerk of the master's town or city of residence. Whereas in Pennsylvania slaveholders were given six months to report to the clerk, in New York they had nine months to do so. In a more crucial way, New York's registration clause was weaker than Pennsylvania's. New York's slaveholders were asked to register only the children of their bondspersons and not their slaves--closing off a route to freedom utilized by enslaved persons of Pennsylvania. The New York act also inflicted a much lighter penalty for slaveowners who neglected to register the emancipated offspring of their chattel. Rather than declaring these unregistered servants free, the New York act imposed relatively paltry fines of five dollars for the first offense and one dollar for every month thereafter in which the servant went unregistered.<sup>28</sup>

Another element of the act showed how much political power the slaveholders still wielded in New York. The state's slaveholders could elect to abandon the children of their bondspersons within a year of their birth, at which point the overseers of the poor would bind out the child for as much as \$3.50 a month. Since it was easier to indenture the child to the owner of

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<sup>27</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 180-181. Several explanations can account for the adoption of a gradual emancipation law in New York by 1799, but most central among them are reapportionment and the withering influence of slaveholders in the legislature. The absence of racially restrictive clauses in the legislative process, clauses which had sunk the 1785 attempt, was also a factor. See Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, 169-171.

<sup>28</sup> "An Act for the gradual abolition of Slavery," *Laws of the State of New-York* (Albany: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1887), Vol. IV, 388-389.

his or her parent, slaveholders received, in many instances, a sizeable stipend for "abandoning" the children of their slaves. One historian has called this clause of the gradual emancipation act "a disguised scheme for compensated abolition." Yet while slaveholders helped shape the bill in some ways, their influence was missing in others. Aside from the obvious fact that proslavery legislators opposed emancipation altogether, the racialized restrictions on citizenship that slavery's defenders had dredged up to defeat abolition fourteen years earlier were notably absent from the 1799 act. No suffrage restrictions, bans on black office or jury holding or injunctions on interracial marriage marred New York's abolition law. If the rights to equal freedom were temporarily suspended for the indentured children of the enslaved, the 1799 law tacitly acknowledged equal citizenship for manumitted slaves and free blacks.<sup>29</sup>

Undoubtedly a significant achievement, the New York gradual abolition law, like that of Pennsylvania, did not end the fight for emancipation. The concise wording of New York's abolition act empowered slaveholders and traders to undermine emancipation's execution. The act addressed the gradual phasing out of slavery, but did even less than Pennsylvania's 1780 law to confront the problem of enforcement. The NYMS therefore had little time to celebrate the new legislation. Within a year of the gradual abolition act's passage, the NYMS reported that the practice of exporting slaves had increased greatly. Now that the legislature had put human bondage on the road to extinction, it made more economic sense than ever for New York slaveholders to sell their chattel out of state. Slaveholders and persons interested in acquiring bonded labor were also buying slaves outside of New York and claiming them as legal property

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 388-389; Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 182. Pennsylvania's abolition law also contained an abandonment clause, but it did not specify how much the recipient of the indentured child was to receive for his or her support. Unlike in New York, the abandonment clause was not an important issue in Pennsylvania's debate over emancipation. More importantly, there is no evidence that slaveholders took widespread advantage of the clause for direct compensation from the state for the emancipation of their chattel. A controversial measure from the beginning, New York's abandonment clause was rescinded by the state legislature in 1804.

when returning to the state. Others had devised a means of skirting the law against slave importation through purchasing slaves in nearby states and then indenturing them to long terms of labor upon their arrival in New York. Something had to be done to combat these threats to abolition's effectiveness.<sup>30</sup>

In 1800, the NYMS petitioned the state legislature to strengthen the restraints on the importation and exportation of slaves. "Influenced by a regard to the rights of men," the manumission society called attention to "a Subject so highly interesting to the welfare of Society and the safety of individuals." The rights of slaves, indentured persons and free blacks had been "sacrificed to the rapacious views" of "unprincipled men" determined "to elude the benign intention" of New York's antislavery laws through exporting and selling or bringing into the state persons of color unlawfully. The New York legislature responded favorably to the NYMS' requests and, in 1801, bolstered the laws against the importation and exportation of bondspersons. Violators would now be fined \$250 and ship captains that received illicitly slaves for exportation would be subject to the same penalty as the agent or seller of the slave.<sup>31</sup>

The 1801 amendments to the importation and exportation laws sought to further narrow the legal channels for bringing slaves into and taking them out of the state. No slave could be brought into New York unless the slaveholder intended to "reside permanently," in which case the master had to have lived outside of New York for at least one year and owned the slave being imported for one year before moving to the state. These newly arrived slaveholding residents were required to certify in front of a public official that they had conformed to the above

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<sup>30</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 40, NYHS, New York; *Ibid.*, 50-51. The brevity of New York's abolition act in part reveals the legislature's concern with avoiding the same sort of divisive debate over the contours of black freedom it had endured in 1785. It also indirectly demonstrates the continuing political sway of slaveholders in the state, especially in comparison to Pennsylvania where the registration clauses and bans on residents from bringing slaves into the state under any circumstances more strictly limited the rights of slaveholders.

<sup>31</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 50-51, NYHS, New York; *Laws Relative to Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 10-11, 13.

conditions within nine months of taking up residence or each slave imported would be legally free. According to the original 1785 law restricting slave importation, they were also deprived of the right of selling their bondspersons once gaining resident status. Similarly, a new stipulation in the export law held that only New York slaveowners who had lived within the state for at least one year, and had owned their bondspersons for more than one year prior to their move, could remove their slaves from New York--provided they received an official license demonstrating that they had met these requirements. Under no other circumstances could state residents export their slaves.<sup>32</sup>

The new laws did contain some exemptions. Persons "travelling to or from, or passing through this state" did not have to comply. And it would remain lawful for New York residents travelling outside of the state to take their bondspersons with them, although these slaves had to return with their masters or the slaveholder would face a \$250 fine. The state legislature took seriously the NYMS' protestations that the clandestine trade in slaves and free blacks had only increased since the 1799 gradual abolition act. In so doing, they continued to limit the rights of slaveholders while broadening opportunities for black freedom. Still, the fact that bringing slaves into and taking them out of the state remained legal in certain cases evinces the delicate balance being struck in early nineteenth century New York between slaveholders rights to property in their chattel and the imperatives of African American liberty.<sup>33</sup>

As long as slavery remained a legal institution in New York, new laws guarding the rights of enslaved and free blacks were necessary. In 1804, the NYMS petitioned the municipal government of New York to prohibit slaveholders from confining slaves not accused of crimes in

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<sup>32</sup> *Laws Relative to Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 8-9, 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> *Laws Relative to Slavery and the Slave Trade*, 11-12. Slaveholders who took their slaves out of the state and did not return with them but could cite "some unavoidable accident" that prohibited the return of their bondspersons were not subject to the \$250 fine.

the infamous New York City prison, Bridewell. As with nearly all the NYMS' initiatives this effort stemmed from first-hand experience. The society's standing committee informed the full society in December of 1804 of a case in which a black man had been placed in Bridewell until arrangements could be made for his transportation to Richmond Virginia, where, it was claimed, his owner resided. Members of the committee spoke with the African American man who "asserted his Freedom" and told his visitors that he had resided in New York for four years. Because the imprisoned man's accuser could not gather enough evidence to prove him a slave, he had detained the black man in Bridewell and left the alleged slave "without the hope of Liberty." Distressed by this strategy of exportation by slaveholders and kidnapers, the NYMS persuaded the Corporation of New York City to prohibit the holding of slaves in Bridewell who had "not been criminally accused" in 1805.<sup>34</sup>

The NYMS initiated a raft of antislavery laws passed by the state legislature between 1807 and 1817. In 1807, the legislature decided that slaveholders planning to move from the state with their slaves had to have resided for at least a decade in New York and needed to produce two witnesses to attest to their claims. Black servants could not now be removed from New York without their owners giving monetary security for their return. One year later New York enacted its first anti-kidnapping law, with violators facing imprisonment of up to fourteen years for the first offense and life in jail for the second. In 1810, the legislature banned the

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<sup>34</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 270-271, NYHS, New York. The NYMS began lobbying against the holding of blacks accused of crimes in Bridewell prison beginning in 1801. See NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 63. Despite their success on the Bridewell confinement problem, the NYMS could not convince the state legislature to overturn the law permitting slaveowners to export from the state slaves convicted of certain crimes, one of their few failed initiatives. For a petition on this matter see NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 230, 268-269, NYHS, New York. When their petitions came up short, the NYMS formed a committee to visit New York judges and try to "dissuade them from using their discretionary power of Transportation." NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 244, NYHS, New York.

importation of slaves in all cases and explained that it would judge free all African Americans brought into the state as slaves after nine months of their owners' residence.<sup>35</sup>

New York continued to issue laws delimiting the rights of slaveholders and boosting those of slaves and servants in the early national era. In 1809, slaves attained the right to own and transfer property and the state now recognized slave marriages. For slaves who had been legally brought into the state but were born after the 1799 act granting gradual freedom to the children of New York bondspersons, the state legislature, in 1813, gave these persons the same legal standing as their New York-born counterparts--meaning they would be considered indentured servants and receive full freedom at the age 25 or 28. This law also stipulated that all indentured servants scheduled to receive full freedom must be taught how to read or their indentures would be voided when they turned 21.<sup>36</sup>

At last, in 1817, New York opted to abolish slavery totally. On March 31, 1817, at the behest of the state's governor and NYMS member Daniel Tompkins, the legislature passed the inconspicuously titled, "An act relative to slaves and servants." It decreed that all slaves born before July 4, 1799 would be made free by July 4, 1827, allotting gradual freedom to those bondspersons untouched by the original emancipation act. Slaves born between July 4, 1799 and July 4, 1817 would be considered free but had to serve as indentured servants under provisions

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<sup>35</sup>*Laws of the state of New York passed at the thirtieth session of the Legislature begun and held at the city of Albany, January 27th, 1807* (Albany: Webster and Skinner, 1807), 92-93; *Laws of the state of New-York passed at the thirty-first session of the Legislature, begun and held at the city of Albany, the twenty-sixth day of January, 1808* (Albany: John Barber, 1808), 108-109; *Public laws of the state of New-York passed at the thirty-third session of the Legislature, begun and held at the city of Albany, the thirtieth day of January, 1810* (Albany: Solomon Southwick, 1810), 45-46. Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society," 120-245. The NYMS waged petition campaigns urging the enactment of these laws. NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 165, 182, 205, NYHS, New York. Cognizant that slaveholders would continue to circumvent the ban on slave imports by indenturing out of state bondspersons, the 1810 act stated that all indentures, bonds of service and contracts made with anyone who was a slave in another state before coming to New York were considered void and the person so bound was to be "declared free."

<sup>36</sup>McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 178; Moseley, "A History of the New York Manumission Society," 122; The 1809 act enabling slaves to own property and recognizing their marriages is one of the few laws that cannot be traced to the initiative of the NYMS.

of 1799 act and those born after the passage of the 1817 act would remain servants until the age of 21. While bringing a staggered rather than immediate end to slavery, the act consummated 30 years of NYMS-led antislavery agitation and denoted the ultimate destruction of human bondage in New York.<sup>37</sup>

LIKE ITS NEIGHBOR, New Jersey became a prolonged battleground over emancipation and black rights. In 1778, Governor William Livingston broached the subject of abolition to the New Jersey legislature. Recently converted to the antislavery cause by Revolutionary ideals, Livingston prodded the General Assembly to take steps toward abolishing slavery in the newly independent state. But pointing to the social instability created by the ongoing war with Britain, New Jersey's legislators convinced the governor that the time was not right to tackle such a momentous issue. Two years later, on the heels of Pennsylvania's 1780 emancipation law, several groups of petitioners submitted numerous abolitionist memorials to the General Assembly. Like the governor's request, the petitioners' solicitations went nowhere. The state legislature received the memorials and then promptly voted to bury them, refusing to even appoint a committee to consider the possibility of ending slavery in New Jersey.<sup>38</sup>

Public opposition to emancipation in Revolutionary-era New Jersey outpaced that of Pennsylvania or New York. While the General Assembly displayed its disapproval of emancipation by silencing all discussion of the topic, opponents of abolition gave voice to a full-

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<sup>37</sup> "An Act relative to slaves and servants," in *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the Fortieth Session of the Legislature, Begun and Held in the City of Albany, the fifth Day of November, 1816* (Albany: J. Buel, 1817) from David N. Gellman and David Quigley, *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 68-72. The NYMS petitioned the state legislature for total abolition in 1811 and 1816. See NYMS, Vol. IX, 283-284, NYHS, New York and *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fifteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Fifth Day of August, 1817, and Continued by Adjournments Until the Eighth of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Merritt, 1817), 5-6.

<sup>38</sup> Moss, "The Persistence of Slavery," 228-229; "Wright, New Jersey Laws and the Negro," 172-173; *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), February 23, May 17, 1780; Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 141.

fledged defense of slavery in the state's press. The legitimacy of property rights in slaves was at the heart of their arguments. One writer confidently proclaimed that "no one will presume to deny" that slaveholders were "legally possessed" of their chattel and "cannot be divested of them by legislative authority." This fact, the essayist stated, was "as evident" as "white is not black, or that slavery is not freedom." Other apologists for slavery sought to stoke racial prejudice and fan fears over the social consequences of slavery's abolition. Pressing his readers to imagine what freedom to a race of persons "slow, sluggish and stupid by nature" might look like, a writer in the *New-Jersey Gazette* asked rhetorically, "who...would not wish to be far distant from such a civil society?" Another proponent of slavery maintained that black people were innately fitted for bondage and cautioned that their "naturally lazy" and dependent behavior meant that emancipation would be "impolitic and ruinous" to the body politic. The time it would take to institute a gradual abolition policy and the laws passed restricting black rights in New Jersey would reveal the hold these arguments had on the state's population and their legislators.<sup>39</sup>

By 1785, antislavery activists were ready to resume their lobbying efforts. Perhaps roused to action by the progress abolition seemed to be making in New York, New Jersey Quakers submitted in person to the state legislature a memorial for emancipation. Unlike in 1780, the assembly appointed a committee to draft a bill. However, legislators promptly voted to order this committee to address solely the importation of slaves into the state and not the abolition of slavery. The act passed by the legislature illustrates the limits of antislavery in Post-Revolutionary New Jersey. The 1786 act did ban the importation of slaves, but levied comparatively meager fines for violators. Manumissions were also made easier by the new law.

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<sup>39</sup> *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), January 11, 1781; *Ibid.*, February 14, 1781; *The New-Jersey Journal* (Chatham), December 27, 1780. For other proslavery opinion pieces in Revolutionary era New Jersey see *The New-Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), October 4, 1780 and *Ibid.*, April 11, 1781. It is worth observing that many of the arguments of these writers anticipated those of Southern antebellum positive good theorists.

Masters with slaves between the ages of 21 and 35 who could prove their manumitted slaves' ability for self-support were freed up from providing surety to the state.<sup>40</sup>

More noteworthy were the restrictions the law imposed on the persons whose manumission the legislature purported to encourage. Emancipated bondspersons found guilty of crimes above petty larceny and not punishable by death were ordered to leave the state. If they did not comply, these persons could be sold "at publick Auction" and classified "the Property of the Purchaser," essentially re-enslaving them. Free blacks manumitted in other states were prohibited from entering New Jersey and resident free persons of color could not "travel or remain" in any county other than the one in which they were emancipated without a certificate signed by two justices of the peace. In barring black migration into the state and severely restricting the free movement of African Americans, these two laws stripped black New Jerseyans of their basic rights. State legislators appeared as preoccupied with tamping down the growth and vitality of the free black population as they did with reducing the spread of slavery.<sup>41</sup>

Another unsuccessful attempt by Quaker petitioners to secure a gradual abolition law in 1788 did lead the assembly to amend the 1786 act. The amended law prohibited the exportation of slaves without their consent, yet the insubstantial fine of 20 pounds meant that violators could pay the penalty and still make a profit on selling their bondspersons outside of New Jersey. Furthermore, while the importation and exportation of slaves was now illegal, New Jersey law, unlike the laws in Pennsylvania or New York, did not free slaves illicitly brought into or shipped

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<sup>40</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 152; *Acts of the Tenth General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey. At a Session Begun at Trenton on the 25th Day of October, 1785, and Continued by Adjournments. Being the Second Sitting* (Trenton: Isaac Collins, 1786), 239-240. The import ban included exceptions for persons moving to New Jersey and those passing through the state. The fines for illegally importing a slave into the state ranged from 20 to 50 pounds for pre and post 1776 African imports respectively, attesting to the legislature's recognition of the moral condemnation that Revolutionary ideals had placed upon the slave trade.

<sup>41</sup> *Acts of the Tenth General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey*, 241-242. African Americans convicted more than twice of petty larceny were also subject to exile from the state and public sale if they did not comply. The clause banning black migration into the state imposed fines for any New Jersey citizens who knowingly "harbour[ed], conceal[ed]" or "employ[ed]" an out of state person of color.

out of the state. By requiring masters to instruct their slaves in literacy and, as in Pennsylvania, making "all criminal Offences" of enslaved and free blacks subject to the same judicial process as whites, the 1788 supplement did move closer to the wishes of abolitionists. The 1788 amendments also repealed the section in the 1786 law making possible the re-enslavement of blacks found guilty of a felony, striking from the books a statute clearly open to abuse by would-be kidnapers of free African Americans.<sup>42</sup>

Aware that individuals alone had constituted the antislavery cause in New Jersey, by 1792 the NYMS and the PAS called for an organized abolitionist front in the state. With assistance from the PAS, the New Jersey Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (NJAS) was founded in 1793. The Society wasted little time in beseeching the state legislature to adopt antislavery laws. An NJAS petition of 1794 manifests how early abolitionists believed enlarging and protecting the rights of African Americans was necessary to fully abolish chattel bondage. Together with asking for a gradual abolition policy, the memorial appealed to the General Assembly for laws securing the personhood of slaves and free blacks. Because African Americans were "considered merely as subjects of property...they likewise become the objects of plunder," and were inhumanly sold or kidnapped. The petition not only requested laws restricting the rights of slaveholders and increasing the penalties for those who violated antislavery legislation, it also linked improving the status of the "African citizen" with making emancipation an achievable goal. The General Assembly greeted the memorial positively, but a gradual

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<sup>42</sup> *Acts of the Thirteenth General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey. At a Session Begun at Trenton on the 28th Day of October 1788, and Continued by Adjournments. Being the First Sitting* (Trenton: Isaac Collins, 1788), 486-488.

abolition bill was defeated by one vote. New Jersey had come closer than ever before to adopting emancipation.<sup>43</sup>

Undeterred by their defeat, the NJAS submitted another petition for gradual abolition to the General Assembly in 1797. Following months of debate and legislative maneuvering, an emancipation bill was again defeated by a single vote. The legislature did pass a law regarding slavery, just not the one the NJAS had in mind. The 1798 "Act Respecting Slaves" showed how far abolitionists had to go. Much of the law reenacted slave codes from the colonial era, revealing the resiliency of slaveholder political power in the Garden State. Similar to New York's 1788 slave code, bondspersons' mobility and their rights to buy and sell goods and gather in groups, among other activities, were limited or outright restricted; with corporal punishment the price to pay for breaking the laws. The act also offered monetary rewards for citizens who apprehended slaves in violation of the laws, endorsing public enforcement of slavery's strictures. A few elements of the 1798 act did partially answer the desires of abolitionists. Penalties for illegally importing and exporting slaves or neglecting to teach slaves to read were raised. And free blacks from out of state were permitted to enter New Jersey with a certificate of freedom, rather than being completely banned from the state. But these changes were minor in comparison to the many clauses that affirmed slavery as a state-sanctioned institution.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 166, NYHS, New York; PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 174, 189, HSP, Philadelphia; *Minutes of the Proceedings of a Convention of Delegates From the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the First Day of January, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Four, and Continued, by Adjournments, Until the Seventh Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Junr., 1794), 13-17; *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Third Convention of Delegates From the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the First Day of January, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Six, and Continued, by Adjournments, Until the Seventh Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Junior, 1796), 9. The memorial was written by the American Convention for several different state legislatures, to be presented and lobbied for by the various constituent abolition societies.

<sup>44</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 184-188; *Acts of the Twenty-Second General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey. At a Session Begun at Trenton on the Twenty-Fourth Day of October 1797, and Continued by Adjournments. Being the Second Sitting* (Trenton: Matthias Day, 1798), 364-373. The gains made by abolitionists in 1798 were at least partially mitigated by an 1801 law making legal the transportation of slaves out of state guilty of certain crimes,

Six years later, the NJAS embarked on its most aggressive campaign yet to gradually abolish slavery in New Jersey. The society's petition to the state legislature in 1804 sounded a note of exasperation with those opposing abolition. "It is alleged" the memorial read "that to emancipate those now living" would breach the property rights of slaveholders. "But as respects *those who may in future be born* this does not apply." The NJAS denounced the principle that permitted slaveholders to claim ownership over a group of people who "come into existence only to labor for others--to be bought and sold" and "to transmit the same wretched inheritance to their posterity." The abolition society matched the exigency of its rhetoric by sending a committee to wait on the General Assembly and urge them to pass emancipation legislation. The resulting law, passed by the assembly and agreed to by the legislative council (the state government's upper house), paved the way for slavery's abolition. "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery" freed the male children of slaves born after July 4, 1804 at the age of 25 and female children at the age of 21. As in all states that implemented gradual abolition laws, those slated to be emancipated would have to serve their enslaved mother's masters as indentured servants in the meantime. A quarter century of abolitionist activism had finally signaled slavery's eventual end in New Jersey.<sup>45</sup>

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striking another blow to New Jersey's antislavery movement. See *Acts of the Twenty-Fifth General Assembly of the State of New-Jersey. At a Session Begun at Trenton, on the Twenty-Eighth Day of October, One Thousand Eight Hundred, and Continued by Adjournments. Being the Second Sitting* (Trenton: Sherman, Mershon & Thomas, 1801), 77-78.

<sup>45</sup> New Jersey Abolition Society Report to the American Convention, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Eighth Convention of Delegates From the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Tenth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Three, and Continued by Adjournment Until the Fourteenth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Jun., 1803), 10; New Jersey Abolition Society Report to the American Convention, *Minutes of the proceedings of the ninth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race: Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Ninth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Four, and Continued by Adjournments Until the Thirteenth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Solomon W. Conrad, 1804), 8. *An Act For the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* (Burlington, NJ: S.C. Ustick, 1804). See *The True American* (Trenton, NJ), February 6, 1804 for the NJAS petition. As in New York, New Jersey's gradual abolition law included a clause giving slaveowners nine months to register the indentured children of their bondspersons and did not require the registration of slaves.

What had caused the New Jersey legislature to relent and approve of a gradual abolition bill? Certainly the role of NJAS, and other antislavery activists, in tirelessly memorializing the legislature should not be overlooked. But the evidence suggests that another factor was at least as important in getting emancipation over the legislative hump. The legislature added an abandonment clause nearly identical to that of New York's 1799 abolition act before giving gradual emancipation its endorsement. Although the clause would eventually be repealed because of its inordinate cost to the state, proslavery legislators may have signed on to the bill knowing that slaveholders could game the system and recoup partial financial compensation for the loss of their chattel, as New York masters had done. But the abandonment clause far from pacified all of the state's slaveholders. Petitions opposing the abolition law castigated the legislation with uncompromising language. Memorialists from Bergen County accused the abolition act of being "unconstitutional, impolitic, and unjustly severe." The petitioners reasoned that possessing property rights in slaves translated into "an equal right to the unlimited services, of their issue" and so on through the generations. From this vantage point "it is easy," complained the petitioners, for abolitionists to "Cry out freedom" for they had "no such species of property" and stood to lose nothing from the law's enforcement. In spite of the act's controversy, gradual emancipation was upheld in New Jersey.<sup>46</sup>

As in Pennsylvania and New York, gradual abolition's ascendancy in New Jersey still called for antislavery activism. But the NJAS was not up to the formidable task of enforcing emancipation. Lamenting their lack of organization and the dearth of abolition's supporters in the state, the NJAS reported to the American Convention of Abolition Societies that "the very few firm Friends to Abolition" were "watched with an evil eye" by the public. Yet the NJAS did enjoy some success in freeing slaves illegally held in bondage and stopping both slaveholders

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<sup>46</sup> Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, 193-196. Petition quoted from Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, 197.

and kidnapers from exporting New Jersey's blacks out of state and into slavery. The society also scored the occasional legislative victory, such as in 1812, when it persuaded the state legislature to greatly increase the fine for transporting slaves from New Jersey without their consent and to enlarge the law's authority to help ensnare additional slavedealers. By selling their slaves out of state, New Jersey slaveholders demonstrated ongoing resistance to abolition. They ensured that abolitionists intent on seeing emancipation implemented had to stand up for the rights of enslaved and free blacks.<sup>47</sup>

IN EARLY NATIONAL Delaware, slavery also underwent a barrage of attacks by antislavery activists. Although abolitionists never succeeded in attaining a gradual emancipation law, they did convince the legislature to promote manumission, clamp down on the sale of slaves out of state and make Delaware a majority free black state by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Delaware's turn away from a tobacco dependent economy and toward a grain-centered one in the

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<sup>47</sup> New Jersey Abolition Society Report, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Seventh Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Third Day of June, One Thousand Eight Hundred and One, and Continued By Adjournments Until the Sixth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Jun., 1801), 8-9; New Jersey Abolition Society Report, *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Thirteenth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twelve, and Continued By Adjournments Until the Sixteenth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: 1812), 12-13; *Acts of the Thirty-Sixth General Assembly of the State of New Jersey at a Session Begun at Trenton, on the Fifteenth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twelve, and Continued by Adjournments. Being the Second Sitting* (Trenton: James J. Wilson, 1812), 15-18. For examples of the NJAS liberating slaves illegally held in bondage and protecting free and enslaved blacks from being sold or kidnapped into slavery outside of NJ see *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1803), 11-12; *Minutes of the American Convention of Abolition Societies*, 1804, 7; *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race: Assembled at Philadelphia on the Fourteenth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Five, and Continued by Adjournments Until the Seventeenth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia, 1805), 10-11; *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Eleventh American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race: Assembled at Philadelphia on the Thirteenth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Six, and Continued by Adjournments Until the Fifteenth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Kimber, Conrad, and Co., 1806), 10. The problem of slave exportation and free black kidnapping in New Jersey increased during the second decade of the nineteenth century, as slavery expanded into the southwest. See James Gigantino, "Trading in Jersey Souls: New Jersey and the Interstate Slave Trade," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 77, Number 3 (Summer 2010), 281-302. The New Jersey legislature disfranchised African Americans in 1807, further disassociating black freedom from black citizenship.

late eighteenth century opened the way for black freedom. This move towards African American liberty, however, did not happen automatically but needed proponents to make it a reality. Antislavery Quakers filled that role. Closely affiliated with Philadelphia's Quaker abolitionists, Delaware Friends, led by the relentless activist Warner Mifflin, petitioned the state legislature beginning in 1786. The memorial immediately bore fruit. In 1787, the Delaware legislature passed an act dropping the bond requirements for slaveholders who sought to manumit bondspersons between the ages of 18 and 35, inaugurating a period of thousands of voluntary manumissions in the state. The law imposed the impressively high penalty of 100 pounds for anyone who sold a slave out of state without a permit from three justices. It also granted freedom to bondspersons imported into Delaware by those not intending to become residents of the state.<sup>48</sup>

Building off this momentum, Delaware antislavery activists founded four separate abolition societies during the 1780s and 90s. The biggest challenge Delaware's abolitionists faced, other than cajoling the legislature to adopt a policy of gradual emancipation, was to cut down on the prevalence of slave exportation and free black kidnapping in the state. Delaware's close proximity to the Upper South, the withering vitality of slave labor within its borders, and the growing presence of free African Americans, spurred a drastic increase in the number of black Delawareans clandestinely carried into slavery. The abolitionists' publicity of numerous cases of illegal exportation of bondspersons and kidnapping of free blacks led the Delaware legislature in 1793 to augment the penalties for such illegal activities. Anyone convicted of

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<sup>48</sup> Essah, *A House Divided*, 50; *Laws of the State of Delaware, From the Fourteenth Day of October, One Thousand Seven Hundred, to the Eighteenth Day of August, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Seven. In Two Volumes* (New Castle: Samuel and John Adams, 1797), Vol. II, 884-888. The 1787 law retroactively applied the new manumission standards to slaves previously granted freedom without a bond who were now at least 21 and at the time of being freed under the age of 35. The act also overturned a 1767 prohibition on manumission without a sixty pound surety per slave. See *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. I, 435-437.

kidnapping an African American was subject to being publicly whipped 39 times. Violators would then be made to stand in a pillory for one hour with their ears nailed to the post, at the duration of which their earlobes would be cut off. This sentence was the harshest form of punishment for a statute of its kind in the entire early national United States. The 1793 act also freed those slaves whose masters attempted to export their bondspersons without a license.<sup>49</sup>

Only one of the four original abolition societies of Delaware survived the 1790s. With financial assistance and encouragement from the PAS, and after a brief dissolution, the Wilmington society reorganized itself as the Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery (DAS) in the winter of 1800. One of its first actions was to memorialize the state legislature for a gradual abolition act. Coming up empty on their initial attempt, for the next five years the DAS logged several abolition memorials with the Delaware legislature. Though some of these petitions resulted in abolition bills, none made it into law. Disheartened by its multiple defeats, the DAS reported in 1806 to the the American Convention that "slave-holders" and those "closely connected with the enemies of African liberty" dominated the legislature, creating a "hostile spirit" that the society feared "will not speedily subside."<sup>50</sup>

The Delaware legislature did clarify the status of the many bondspersons whose masters had granted them conditional manumission after a limited term of service. In 1810 "An Act concerning Negroes and Mulattoes" verified that these agreements would be recognized by the

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<sup>49</sup> Essah, *A House Divided*, 59; Monte A. Calvert, "The Abolition Society of Delaware, 1801-1807," *Delaware History*, Vol. X, No. 4 (October, 1963), 297; *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. II, 1093-1095.

<sup>50</sup> Calvert, "The Abolition Society of Delaware" 308; PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 292-293, HSP, Philadelphia and PPAS, Series II, Reel XI, Vol. II, 77-78, HSP, Philadelphia. Delaware Abolition Society Report, in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1801), 20; Delaware Abolition Society Report, in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1803), 18; Delaware Abolition Society Report, in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1804), 14; Delaware Abolition Society Report, in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 19; Delaware Abolition Society Report, in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1806), 16. The DAS' full title reads, The Delaware Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and for the Relief and Protection of Free Blacks and People of Colour, Unlawfully Held in Bondage or Otherwise Oppressed.

state, making these conditionally manumitted persons free once serving out their terms of labor, but declaring them slaves until that time. The children born to these quasi slaves would also be temporarily considered chattel until reaching their early twenties, when the state would deem them free as well. This law acted as a de facto gradual abolition policy, with the important qualification that only the offspring of bondspersons in temporary slavery were eligible to gain their freedom and they were to be classified as slaves and not servants before their liberation.<sup>51</sup>

The vulnerable position of quasi slaves, and the many enslaved and free blacks susceptible to being kidnapped, kept the DAS busy carrying out what antislavery laws they had at their disposal. Some of the work of the society's acting committee involved simply ensuring that masters who had agreed to manumit their bondspersons followed through on their promises. One slave contacted the acting committee complaining that he had purchased his freedom only to find that his master refused to manumit him. The acting committee tracked down a written record of the agreement and the slave was freed. Just as important as legitimating voluntary manumission, the DAS utilized the anti-kidnapping and slave exportation laws to defend the rights of Delaware's African Americans. The DAS' tactics included keeping a close eye on those alleged to be planning on sending their slaves out of state for sale, litigating suits to punish kidnapers, and sometimes even pursuing masters and slavedealers who had illegally absconded with black persons, slave and free. By 1816, alarmed at the growing practice of kidnapping, the DAS circulated a petition asking for the repeal of a law passed five years earlier that permitted

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<sup>51</sup> *Laws of the State of Delaware, From the Seventh Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Six, to the Third Day of February, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirteen. Volume IV* (Wilmington, DE: M. Bradford and R. Porter, 1816), 337-339. The act gave freedom to the children of quasi slaves at 25 for men and 21 for women, matching the ages at which the 1804 New Jersey abolition law decreed freedom for the indentured children of slaves. Another section of Delaware's 1810 act reveals that the legislature took existing gradual abolition laws as a model. One of the act's clauses required masters to register the issue of their quasi slaves or face a fine, mirroring similar statutes on the books in New York and New Jersey. In the same act the Delaware legislature raised the penalty for illegally exporting slaves to \$500, highlighting that while these slaves would not be considered servants neither could they be taken out of state under most circumstances.

the indenturing and sale out state of free blacks convicted of felonies. The DAS reported that the law had been abused by slaveholders and kidnappers eager to reap the profits of the expanding slave market of the cotton kingdom. The legislature amended the most egregious section of the act by making illegal the exportation of convicted free blacks into slavery.<sup>52</sup>

While the DAS committed itself to protecting black rights, the Delaware legislature made certain that these rights were unmistakably inferior to those of whites. As early as 1787, in the same law that ushered in the era of mass manumission, the Delaware legislature disfranchised all African Americans. State lawmakers limited free black rights to property ownership and equity in the courts (although this latter right was rendered meaningless by a prohibition on free black testimony against whites). In 1807 and 1811, as white Delawareans' hostility to black freedom grew, the legislature banned black migration to the state--punishable by imprisonment and possible re-enslavement--took away resident status from blacks who travelled outside of Delaware for longer than six months, made free blacks convicted of felonies liable to enslavement, and banned interracial marriage. These laws came as no surprise to the DAS, who consistently bemoaned the staying power of slaveholders in dictating the legislative agenda. Abolitionists viewed "the general temper of opinion" in Delaware firmly "against the freedom of persons of colour." Thus even as Delaware passed laws facilitating manumission and

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<sup>52</sup> Calvert, "The Abolition Society of Delaware," 306-316; Delaware Abolition Society Report, *Minutes the Proceedings of the Fourteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race. Assembled at Philadelphia, On the Ninth Day of January, 1815--On the Eighth Day of January, 1816--and By Adjournments Until the Twelfth of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: W. Brown, 1816), 18-19; *Laws of the State of Delaware, Volume IV*, 408-409; *Laws of the State of Delaware, Passed at a Session of the General Assembly, Begun and Holden at Dover, On Tuesday the Second Day of January, and Ended on Friday the Sixteenth Day of February, In the Year of Our Lord, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixteen, and of the Independence of the United States of America, the Fortieth* (Dover, DE: A.M. Schee, 1816), 149.

safeguarding the freedom of African Americans, the state's conception of African American rights differed greatly from that of both New York and Pennsylvania.<sup>53</sup>

LEGISLATIVE ABOLITION IMMEDIATELY changed the meaning of human bondage in the Mid-Atlantic. Premised on its status as an hereditary institution, American slavery gained its salience and economic vitality from a master's claim to the life and labor of succeeding generations of human beings. If slaveowners managed to keep property rights in the already enslaved and maintain a temporary claim to the children of their bondspersons, the institution's core axiom, the chattel principle, was forever severed by gradual emancipation laws. Well aware of this radical reality, many slaveholders acted quickly to divest themselves of this dying form of property, making whatever profit they could while they could still make it. As we have already seen in New York and New Jersey, some slaveholders leapt at the compensatory opportunity that the abandonment clause in these two states' emancipation laws provided. For a substantial number of bondspersons the death sentence slavery received from gradual abolition worked to their immediate advantage. The loss of the hereditary component of slavery made slaveholders more receptive to striking individual agreements with their bondspersons in which slaves would work for a set number of years in exchange for their release from bondage, while others simply

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<sup>53</sup> *Laws of the State of Delaware*, Vol. II, 888; *Laws of the State of Delaware, Volume IV*, 108-113; *Laws of the State of Delaware, Volume IV*, 400-403; *Laws of the State of Delaware, Volume IV*, 408-409. Delaware Abolition Society Report, in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery*, 1801, 19. The 1807 black codes were repealed in 1808 and then reissued in 1811. The 1807 prohibition on black immigration contained an exemption for African American migrants who could get written testimonials of their freedom and a certificate signed by two justices attesting to their "good moral character, and industrious habits," a highly burdensome requirement and one that assumed black degradation unless proven otherwise. The 1811 law barred black migration under all circumstances and applied the same good character exemption to African American Delawareans who were absent from the state for more than six months consecutively and had lost their residency status.

bought their freedom outright. In this way, the abolition laws gave liberty indirectly to a great number of slaves.<sup>54</sup>

Other slaveholders reacted to the onset of antislavery legislation and gradual abolition by seeking to deny the promise of African American freedom. The abolitionist fight for black rights is most dramatically evident in the convergence between the permeable barriers of slavery and freedom created by the gradual emancipation process and the redefinition of Mid-Atlantic slavery as an ultimately doomed but still legal institution. The abolition societies appointed committees that were tasked with overseeing the enforcement of antislavery laws and acting as agents for African Americans seeking redress from wrongful enslavement and other attempts to limit their freedom.

The agenda of the NYMS' standing committee was always full. In 1796 it took the case of Harry Henry. A black man who, contrary to the ban on slave imports, was brought as a slave to New York from New Jersey in 1792, Henry had been sold five times before being hired out as a coachman. After two years of legal wrangling by the NYMS, Henry was adjudged a free man. Oftentimes the standing committee achieved justice for black New Yorkers at a swifter pace. In 1799 Getty Simmons, an African American women born a slave on Staten Island, appeared before the standing committee and related that she had been sold several times before ending up with a master who took her to New Jersey, and then, after a year, returned to New York and sold Simmons to a new owner. Two members of the standing committee confronted Simmons's current owner, apprising him that his purchase of the women was illegal. The man admitted that Simmons's assertions were true and, without litigation, gave up his claims to her labor.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> My usage of the term the chattel principle is borrowed from Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 19-44.

<sup>55</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VII, 73, 109, NYHS, New York; *Ibid.*, 131.

Most of the time, however, slaveholders did not give up so easily. The NYMS fought for the freedom of the children of the African American woman Dinah. Dinah's two children were willed to a New York man who manumitted them, but they were being claimed as slaves by Thomas Skinner. When the standing committee paid Skinner a visit, he admitted that the children had a right to freedom and yet refused to release them. After the NYMS informed Skinner that they would press charges against him, the standing committee learned that Skinner planned to abscond with the children to South Carolina, where no one would interfere with his illegally obtained property. The NYMS hastened to bring their suit forward, and Skinner, under the immediate threat of a lawsuit he knew he could not win, renounced his fraudulent claim to Dinah's children. The constant threat of kidnapping likewise called for the standing committee's vigilance. In 1804, a black boy was spotted being chased and overtaken by a man in the streets of New York who then brought him aboard a ship. The NYMS issued a writ to prevent the boy's exportation and the ship from disembarking. When members of the standing committee boarded the vessel, they discovered two other African American boys being held against their will. The ship's captain clearly intended to carry the three blacks into slavery and would have done so without the interference of the NYMS.<sup>56</sup>

The PAS, through the aegis of its acting committee, worked diligently to execute Pennsylvania's abolition laws while securing the rights of black Philadelphians. In 1787 the PAS' acting committee got word of the case of Charles. Charles had arrived as a slave in Philadelphia with his Maryland master in 1780, just as the abolition law went into effect. Charles lived in the city for two years--long past the six month residential grace period granted out of state slaveholders--before returning with his owner to Maryland. Following his bankrupt owner's death, Charles was to be sold at auction to John Dove, but escaped to Philadelphia before being

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 173, 178, 182-183, 185, 187; Ibid., 266.

arrested in response to a runaway slave advertisement posted by Dove. Visiting the jailhouse and learning of Charles' plight, the PAS served a writ for the black man's freedom on the basis of his residence in Philadelphia for more than six months and had Charles released from prison. That same year the acting committee obtained the freedom of two black women who had been sold as slaves to John Stokes who subsequently brought them to the state as chattel, violating the state's embargo on the importation of slaves. When the two women appeared before a judge, they were declared free and given certificates of freedom legitimating their new status.<sup>57</sup>

The PAS also did its best to block the illegal exportation of black servants and slaves from Pennsylvania. John, a sixteen year old mulatto, alerted the PAS that he was being illegally held as a bonded laborer by Robert Cross, who was preparing to take John and six other blacks whom he claimed as indentured servants out of the state without their consent. The acting committee quickly issued writs of habeas corpus for all seven of the African Americans. A justice then ruled one of the blacks free, presumably John, and prohibited Cross from taking the servants, six of whom were legitimately under contract with him, from the state. When the manumitted bondsman Moses Browne learned that the new husband of his former Maryland mistress planned to travel to Philadelphia and kidnap him into slavery, he sought the counsel of the PAS. The society's acting committee quickly drew up a certificate verifying the free status of Browne in order "to Protect him" from the prospect of re-enslavement. The PAS also used the registration clause of the 1780 abolition law to make slaves into freepersons. After discovering that Peter had been kept for years as a slave but had not been registered by his owner, the PAS gained a hearing before a judge who ruled Peter free from the service of Isaac Hazelhurst.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel IV, HSP, Philadelphia 92, 97-98.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 96, 109-110, 114; Ibid., 110, 112, 116; Ibid., 117, 123.

The PAS won the freedom of other African Americans by holding steadfastly to the unassailable worthiness of black liberty. Thomas and Mary applied to the acting committee in the winter of 1799. They informed the committee members that their master, Samuel Young, had taken them from New Orleans to Philadelphia and resided with them in the city for just over six months, making them eligible for freedom. To corroborate their story, Thomas and Mary told the acting committee that Young had purchased a carriage when he first arrived in Philadelphia. After contacting the store and gathering evidence that Young had bought the carriage just over six months earlier, the acting committee informed Young that Thomas and Mary were his slaves no more. Confident that they now had powerful allies on their side, Thomas and Mary had already left the service of Young. The spurned slaveholder pleaded with the acting committee to help him work out a compromise with his erstwhile chattel. But the acting committee would not budge. "Being clearly informed" that the two African Americans were "very unwilling" to serve Young in any capacity, the PAS succinctly stated that "the Liberty of the Blacks will be defended."<sup>59</sup>

THE HEATED CONTEST over gradual abolition in the Post-Revolutionary and early national Mid-Atlantic brought with it an extended period of antislavery reform that stretched for decades. Fighting for the inalienable rights of African Americans, the abolition societies took on a panoply of reformist tasks beyond agitating for gradual abolition. Through petitioning their state governments for racially inclusive legislation, agitating to expand the scope of statutory antislavery, and working alongside the illegally enslaved to put the laws into practice, early abolitionists sought much more than the successful adoption of gradual emancipation statutes.

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<sup>59</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel IV, HSP, Philadelphia 47-48.

Yet early abolitionists remained mindful that winning and then enforcing antislavery and abolition laws alone could not consummate the quest for African American liberty. Lurking behind all the abolitionist's struggles lay another formidable opponent: white prejudice. The abolition societies would look to solve this dilemma by cultivating communities of virtuous citizens among newly emancipated and free blacks.

### CHAPTER III

#### DISPELLING THE CLOUDS OF PREJUDICE: SOCIAL REFORM ENVIRONMENTALISM AND THE ABOLITIONISTS' QUEST FOR BLACK CITIZENSHIP

The New York Manumission Society made clear the blueprint of early abolitionism in its annual report to the American Convention of Abolition Societies of 1805. Pledging with "unabated zeal" to "promote the gradual emancipation of the unhappy race of Africans who are enslaved amongst us," the NYMS planned to "raise" newly emancipated slaves and free blacks "to an equal participation in the rights and benefits of political society." The report expressed confidence that "the enlightened and sincere friends to the happiness of human kind" would applaud the joint goals of slavery's gradual abolition and the integration of freed slaves into civil society. The NYMS revealed that it felt heartened by the "evidence of the industry, sobriety, and economy" of New York's free blacks and remained hopeful that former slaves would "gradually emerge from their degraded condition" and take their place as virtuous citizens of the early republic.<sup>1</sup>

Even as they struggled to enact gradual emancipation laws, enforce antislavery statutes, and guard the rights and liberties of African Americans, the abolition societies believed something more was needed to win the battle against slavery. Without raising the status of free blacks to equal citizenship, these activists determined that African American freedom would never be complete. The genesis of the reform project implemented to accomplish this racially inclusive version of antislavery stemmed from a central dilemma bequeathed to abolitionists by the American Revolution. The same natural rights Revolutionary ideology that made the

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<sup>1</sup>*Minutes of the Proceedings of the Tenth Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race: Assembled at Philadelphia on the Fourteenth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Five, and Continued by Adjournments Until the Seventeenth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Kimber, Conrad, & Co., 1805), 6.

abolition movement possible also presented slaves as the very antithesis of the independent, virtuous citizenry necessary to uphold representative government and maintain the American experiment in republicanism, making emancipation a problematic process.

Out of their quest to solve this paradox, abolition society members advocated gradual emancipation coupled with an antislavery agenda of social reform environmentalism. This unique brand of reform was based on free black socioeconomic uplift and the diffusion of the early republic's educational mores--which would inculcate republican virtue in former slaves--together with the defeat of racial prejudice--which would convince the white public that African Americans were worthy of emancipation. Through these reformist initiatives, early abolitionists sought to prove black capacity for freedom by gradually integrating African Americans into the American republic and making them virtuous and independent citizens, fully capable of productively exercising their liberty within greater white society. Predicated on an enlightenment idealism that viewed white prejudice towards blacks as conquerable, the abolition societies thought their antislavery program would disprove the arguments of slavery's defenders that African Americans were fit only for bondage. For early abolitionists the cultivation of black citizenship and the vanquishing of white prejudice were interwoven goals essential to ending slavery.

When American Revolutionaries accused the British Parliament of attempting to enslave them beginning in the 1760s, hundreds of thousands of persons throughout the North American colonies were held in the chains of actual slavery. This contradiction paved the way for the first abolition movement in America and gave much needed ideological ammunition to antislavery activists. Yet revolutionary ideology did not lead newly independent America unswervingly down a one-way path to antislavery egalitarianism--far from it. One important check on the

antislavery tendencies of Revolutionary thought were the twin pillars of liberty and property rights embedded in the axioms of American Independence. Just as the rhetoric of the Revolution seemed to proffer a natural right of all men to their freedom, so too did slaveowners claim a natural right to property in the form of their chattel possessions. Both sides in this dialectical tug of war called on a compelling intellectual legacy for support. An equally integral challenge facing antislavery activists was the question of whether a former slave could ever become a responsible freeman. Many white Americans doubted slaves' competency for freedom and feared that slave emancipation threatened the existence of the American republic. No surface level issue, this quandary cut to the core of the very same ideology that had put human bondage on the defensive in the first place.

American Independence overthrew millennia old practices of monarchy and ushered in the pathbreaking ideology of republicanism. Monarchy was based on the idea that people were weak and sinful, lacking self-restraint, unfit to govern, and thus in need of being controlled from above. The societal stratification that reinforced these postulates justified a political order based on dependencies, inequalities, and an assortment of titles, rituals, and ceremonies that helped reinforce the hierarchies considered essential to conserve the stability of the state. The ideology of republicanism, however, turned these assumptions on their head. The ability of the people for self-government and the concept of popular sovereignty, rather than the helplessness of the people and royal sovereignty in the hands of a monarch, informed the creation of American republicanism. But if monarchy and the submission of the people-at-large to a single sovereign power were no longer the standard of society and politics, a great deal more would be demanded of the people.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991). The

American Revolutionary thought warned that virtue and independence would have to replace the depravity and dependence of the body politic if the fragile experiment in American republicanism were to survive. Only a virtuous, knowledgeable and independent citizenry could withstand the onslaught of corruption, greed, and moral decrepitude that republicanism's purveyors apprehended as inevitable. The problem for those opposed to chattel bondage was that even as slavery violated the principles of republican theory, slaves were seen as degraded, ignorant and dependent--the exact opposite of every quality needed in the people of the new nation. When Revolutionary writers inveighed against the English Imperial government for trying to turn American colonists into slaves, they highlighted this ideological conundrum. The early abolition societies' attempt to bridge the chasm between the Revolution's antislavery potential and its derogatory understanding of slaves would guide the Post-Revolutionary antislavery program of reform, from the ideal of gradual emancipation to the belief that former slaves had to be made into knowledgeable and virtuous citizens.<sup>3</sup>

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historiographical concept of republicanism in America has had a long and controversial life. Beginning with Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* and bookended by Wood's *Radicalism of the American Revolution* it has generated a dizzying and seemingly endless debate among scholars, especially over whether liberal or republican ideas directed the founding of the American republic. Historians now generally appear to agree that revolutionaries utilized both of these ideologies. See Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (April, 1982), 334-356; Joyce Appleby, editor "Republicanism in the History and Historiography of the United States," *American Quarterly*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Fall, 1985), 461-598; Isaac Kramnick, "The Great National Discussion: The Discourse of Politics in 1787," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (January 1988), 3-32; James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 74, No. 1 (June, 1987) and Alan Gibson, "Ancients, Moderns and Americans: The Republicanism-Liberalism Debate Revisited," *History of Political Thought*, 21 (Summer 2000), 261-307 for a sampling of this debate. Although prematurely announcing that republicanism had lost its relevance in the field, Daniel Rodgers provides a useful overview of this complex but important ideology. See Daniel Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 79, No. 1 (June, 1992), 11-38. Wood has received much criticism for claiming that the American Revolution was a radical event. While he does cast a one-dimensional and overly progressive transition from republicanism to democracy in the early republic, I concur with Wood that American Independence radically altered the theoretical role of the people and marked a significant departure from the colonial past. For the debate between Wood and his critics see "How Revolutionary Was the American Revolution? A Discussion of Gordon Wood's *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (October, 1994), 677-716.

<sup>3</sup> Leslie Harris similarly points to the role of republican ideology in disposing white Americans to view former slaves as lacking the virtue necessary for republican citizenship. Harris uses this framework to argue that free black

IN CONFRONTING THE predicament that the republican paradox posed to their reform efforts, early abolitionists embraced environmentalism as the lodestar of their activism. Antislavery activists used environmentalist theory to argue for the underlying sameness present in each human being, irrespective of physical and cultural differences. Tracing the history of environmentalist thought demonstrates how this utilization of environmentalism was actually much more novel than it may seem at first glance. By the late eighteenth century environmentalism already had a lengthy career as an explanatory device for assessing the great variety in human appearance and culture. Ancient Greek philosophers first hypothesized that climate dictated both the physiological and behavioral elements of human societies by acting directly on the humors, or the four bodily fluids of black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. Different climates, these philosophers posited, brought out different combinations of the various humors, with such environmental elements as water, air, and geographic location predicting which humors would dominate. In turn, the humors, in their interaction with climate, could decide the character of individuals and the larger civilization of which they were a part. Not all environments were created equal. From the start, environmental theory ascribed a hierarchy of cultural predispositions with temperate and cold climates producing persons with mental and physical superiority to those who lived in hot climates.<sup>4</sup>

For centuries, little about environmentalism changed. Christian theological writers had adopted the ancient Greeks' theories and fully accepted the connection between the humors and

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men were dogged by whites' preconceived notions of their dependency after gaining freedom in early national New York. I use the paradoxical implications of republican thought for former slaves as an ideological tent within which white antislavery reformers and free blacks tried to overcome the roadblock to slavery's abolition and African American equality engrafted in republican theory. See Harris, *In The Shadow of Slavery*, 97-99.

<sup>4</sup> Clarence Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore: Nature and Culture in Western Thought From Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 80-82.

climate, seeing no conflict between God's original creation of Adam and Eve and the several variations in humanity that environment had subsequently produced. The age of exploration and colonization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, took Europeans out of their relative isolation and into contact with an assortment of new peoples and strange cultures whose differences needed explaining. When coupled with the rise of Enlightenment thought and its emphasis on empiricism, sensationalism and the study of human nature, eighteenth century philosophers' usage of environmentalism greatly expanded the explanatory power of the concept. Crucial to this expansion of environmentalism's importance was Locke's rejection of innate ideas. If everyone came into the world as a tabula rasa, dependent on sensation and reflection for character formation, then environment took on the god-like role of determining human identity. Other Enlightenment writers, such as Montesquieu, while reiterating the effect of climate on personality traits (writing from the perspective of a European he saw cold climates as the most conducive to positive attributes) linked environmentalism with state formation, judging that monarchical, despotic, or republican governments were a product of the area's environment. In short, by the time America declared independence from Britain, environmentalism had become ensconced as a natural science of humanity.<sup>5</sup>

The ascendance of environmentalism as a natural science would have complex and contradictory effects on antislavery in America. The Revolution may have made Americans particularly receptive to environmental theory. Overthrowing the colonial rule of a country with which they still identified and yet felt profoundly different from, the Revolutionary and early national eras put a premium on environment as one important answer to the question of what made Americans exceptional. Yet rather than account for the singularity of Americans, the most

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 254-257; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 287. On environmentalism and race construction in the early American republic see Jordan, *White Over Black*, Parts 3-5 and Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind, American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 40-148.

prominent environmentalist writer in eighteenth century America defended the unity of human nature. In 1787 Samuel Stanhope Smith, a Presbyterian minister and President of the College of New Jersey, penned an influential book entitled *An Essay on the Causes and Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*. His essay was written in answer to the Scottish Enlightenment figure Lord Henry Home Kames. Kames, in his highly influential, *Sketches on the History of Man*, had theorized that human societies passed through different stages of civilization, starting as hunter gatherers and moving progressively through domestic herding, agriculture, and finally mercantile oriented cultures. While nothing in this theory seemed to challenge environmentalist orthodoxy, Kames also asserted that climate and other environmental factors could not explain human diversity. To Kames, the only answer for the broad spectrum of social formation lay in polygenesis. The various peoples of the earth must have emerged from distinct ancestry.<sup>6</sup>

Samuel Smith inveighed against polygenesis. No antislavery activist, Smith nevertheless rejected the "arbitrary hypothesis that men are originally sprung from different stocks, and are therefore divided by nature into different species." It was indisputable, according to Smith, that all people had "arisen out of the same origin." Smith began his essay by averring that God had "given to human nature the power of accommodating itself" to various climates. In fact, humans became so "*assimilated*" by a given climate over time that skin color was only a superficial phenomenon that changed with human migration. Echoing ancient Greek precedents, Smith argued that geography was the key player in human appearance. The excessive heat of the African continent and the unrelenting exposure of its inhabitants to a searing sun caused their bile to turn black and endowed them with dark skin color. Africa's intense heat not only marked

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<sup>6</sup> Jordan, *White Over Black*, 288-289; Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Six Sketches on the History of Man, Containing the Progress of Men as Individuals* (Philadelphia: R. Bell and R. Aitken, 1776).

Africans with black skin, it also rendered their society a savage one. Although he asserted the original sameness of the human constitution, Smith, like most Enlightenment scientists, associated blackness with being on civilization's bottom rung. But there were indicators for Smith that black Americans were shedding their ancestors' savagery. Pointing to the house slaves of the South, whose exposure to whites was permitting them to attain "the agreeable and regular features" of Europeans, Smith implied that black Americans would begin to express their fundamental equality when they started looking like their white counterparts. Environmentalism as African American improvement for Smith hinged on a black physical metamorphosis to whiteness.<sup>7</sup>

Smith's environmental rebuttal to Kames' ideas of polygenesis did not go unchallenged for long. Positioning polygenesis within a comparative study of human anatomy, the English Physician Charles White claimed to have found empirical support for theories of innate human differences in his widely read *The Regular Gradation of Man*. White measured human skulls and skeletons in constructing a hierarchy of the human form. Not surprisingly Europeans stood at the top of his rankings, both aesthetically and in intellectual prowess. Blacks on the other hand, White concluded, were "nearer to the brute creation," their skulls, limbs and sensory strengths placing them closer to apes than to humans in the scale of creation. Interestingly, in making the argument that those of African descent were unequal to whites in mental ability, White turned to

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. To Which are Added Strictures on Lord Kaim's Discourse, on the Original Diversity of Mankind* (Philadelphia: Robert Aiken, 1787), 9, 13-15; 57-58, 111. Dain interprets Smith as not believing that blacks had to literally become whitened in order to attain an equal social condition with white Americans. See Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 47-48. While Smith did deny the necessity of African American whitening in the 1810 revised edition of his essay, he also focused on the supposed physiological adaptation of certain privileged blacks to the features of their white betters as proof that African Americans were improving. Smith then unmistakably linked physical transformation and an argument for black capacity for freedom.

Thomas Jefferson, whose *Notes on the State of Virginia* had "advanced as a suspicion only" that blacks were "inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind."<sup>8</sup>

Samuel Stanhope Smith responded to White's findings by publishing a revised edition of his 1787 essay. He wanted to reestablish the crux of his earlier argument for the unity of the human species; that differences between ethnic groups resulted from environmental causes and were not fixed inalterably in the bodies of people. But Smith's arguments revealed the telling limits of natural science environmentalism as a vehicle for antislavery reform. Smith accepted White's anatomical studies as demonstrating the obvious point that the human physique varied according to geographic location. Yet for Smith, these differences were a product of environment. "I have already shewn" Smith confidently decreed that "climate, the habits of life, and the state of society" had a direct effect on human complexion. What White had failed to account for was that the physical and moral degradation of Africans aside, blacks in the new United States "were undergoing a favorable change." In making this argument, Smith once again singled out the house slaves of the South while adding Northern free blacks to his list of African American improvement. These blacks were "visibly losing the most uncouth peculiarities of the African person, and physiognomy," Smith insisted. Meeting White on his own ground, Smith claimed that the skulls, facial features and limbs of blacks exposed to white American civilization were beginning to approximate those of "the fair native of Europe." Smith's revised essay, published in 1810, highlights how natural science environmentalism had become tied to a

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<sup>8</sup> Charles White, *The Regular Gradation of Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables* (London: C. Dilly, 1799); Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1788), 153; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 499-502. White was careful to insist that his book should not be interpreted as a justification for the "pernicious practice of enslaving mankind," but his racially essentialist conclusions said otherwise. For an American attack on Samuel Smith's environmentalism, see [Charles Caldwell] "An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species," *American Review of History*, Vol. II (1811), 128-166. Caldwell's anonymous review essay signaled the beginning of the end of natural science environmentalism as the leading explanation for racial differences in America. Caldwell codified and extended his arguments in 1830. Charles Caldwell, *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race* (New York: E. Bliss, 1830).

burgeoning racial science of biological difference by the early nineteenth century. Despite their objections to polygenesis, as long as environmentalists focused on the physical qualities of African Americans they were bound to highlight human difference instead of collapsing it.<sup>9</sup>

Even though early abolitionists agreed with the basic premise of natural science environmentalists that humans were products of their surroundings, they possessed an entirely separate understanding of environmentalism. Their formulation was disarmingly simple, helping to mask the great divergence it marked from millennia old ideas of environmental theory. Both the natural rights ideology of the American Revolution and the biblical decree that God had made "of one blood all the nations of the earth" meant that all people were created equal, according to abolitionists. The problem was that the environment of slavery had held down the innate faculties of black persons for virtuous freedom at the same time as it corrupted the white public mind into thinking that African Americans were innately inferior beings. In this model of social reform environmentalism, it was not the physical features of blacks that needed to change but the society that had permitted slavery to take root in the first place.<sup>10</sup>

The only time abolitionists used natural science environmentalist's fixation on physical appearance was to mock the faulty idea that superficial difference could be used to justify slavery. Samuel Miller, a member of the NYMS, stated that if color and complexion were to distinguish slaves from freemen, Americans could enslave those Europeans with darker hues

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<sup>9</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes and Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species. To Which Are Added, Animadversions on Certain Remarks Made on the First Edition of this Essay, by Charles White* (New Brunswick, NJ: J. Simpson and Co., 1810), 252-263; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 509. When countering Jefferson's suppositions of black inferiority in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Smith argued that the environment of slavery and its tendency to degrade the social state and stunt the intellectual growth of bondspersons explained African American inequality. Yet Smith's brief foray into explaining the unequal social condition rather than physical differences of blacks--the key focus of early abolitionists—was a sidelight in his natural science environmentalist formula for disproving African American inferiority. See, Smith, *An Essay on the Causes and Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, 268-270.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Dain alludes to this type of environmentalism but ascribes it solely to African American, and not white antislavery activists of the early republic. Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 52.

than their own. Even some white Southerners may be rightfully enslaved according to this type of logic. "How many shades," Miller asked, "must we descend...before mercy is to vanish with them?" Another antislavery orator rejected the entire hierarchy of the human form as a flimsy pretext for enslavement based on the arbitrary determinate of cultural relativism. The "beauty of a complexion is a mere matter of taste" totally inadequate in dictating "the rights of nature." The "darkness of a skin, the flatness of a nose, or the wideness of a mouth," this speaker proclaimed were "only deformities or beauties as the undulating tribunal of taste shall determine." Thus where Samuel Smith had fallen into a dead-end discourse with the advocates of polygenesis, antislavery activists called out the misguided social conventions that gave physical differences relevance.<sup>11</sup>

More commonly, early abolitionists used environmentalism to critique the effects of slavery on African Americans. At one level this tactic was a defensive response to slavery's proponents, who never lost an opportunity to point out the reality of black inequality. Finding themselves having to explain the degraded condition of African American slaves, abolitionists identified the environment of slavery as the prime culprit. The PAS labeled slavery, "an atrocious debasement of human nature" and blamed the institution of bondage for "fetter[ing] the intellectual faculties" of African Americans while "impair[ing] the social affections" of bondage's victims. The NYMS believed the "degraded state" that slavery imposed on blacks left many "destitute of those advantages among the whites to seek with success a maintenance for themselves and families." Antislavery orators similarly stressed the centrality of environment to black inequality. Elihu Smith of the NYMS insisted that African Americans, like all people were

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<sup>11</sup> Samuel Miller, *A Discourse Delivered April 12, 1797, at the Request of and before the New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been or May Be Liberated* (New York: J. Swords, 1797), 13; William Pinkney, *Speech of William Pinkney, Esq. in the House of Delegates of Maryland, At their Session in November, 1789* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1790), 16.

"creatures of education, of example, of circumstances." "Make them outcasts...shut from them the fair book of salutary light of knowledge, degrade them into brutes, and trample them in the dust" Smith intoned and only "Madmen!" would expect blacks to perform equally with whites.<sup>12</sup>

MERELY ACCOUNTING FOR inequality of outcomes among African American slaves could never alone counter the damning charge of black incapacity for freedom. Antislavery writers and speakers were always careful to acknowledge that despite the evils of slavery, those blacks who had been given the opportunity to improve themselves had demonstrated their ability for virtuous freedom. But the abolition societies of early national America pursued a grander vision of African American uplift. In order to turn back the deleterious effects of slavery, the social environment of black Americans would have to change for the better. The first step required on the road to this revolutionary reconstruction of black life was the development of African American education and socioeconomic uplift, along with free black citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

As with much of Post-Revolutionary abolitionism, the PAS and the NYMS took the organizational lead. The NYMS established the African Free School in 1787. During its first two decades, the school enrolled between 100 and 200 students annually, registering a total of eight hundred pupils by 1822. The PAS instituted a series of schools for free blacks and endorsed the establishment of independently founded African American schools run exclusively by free blacks. The Delaware Abolition Society (DAS) launched a day school for African Americans by

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<sup>12</sup>*An Address to the Public From the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1789), 1; *New-York Daily Advertiser*, Feb. 22, 1790; Elihu Smith, *A Discourse, Delivered April 11, 1798, at the Request of and Before the New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, and Protecting Such of Them as Have Been or May Be Liberated* (New York: T. and J. Swords, 1798), 28.

<sup>13</sup> For examples of early abolitionists acknowledging black improvement despite the stifling atmosphere of slavery see Miller, *A Discourse Delivered*, 34; Smith, *A Discourse Delivered*, 28-29 and George Buchanan, *An Oration Upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery. Delivered at a Public Meeting of the Maryland Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage* (Baltimore: Philip Edwards, 1793), 10-11

1801 and continually expanded the school throughout the decade. In 1810 the DAS founded the African School Society, allowing the abolition society to offer education for free blacks until the school was incorporated by the state in 1824. Meanwhile, educational initiatives took only temporary and incomplete root in New Jersey.<sup>14</sup>

The schools established by the antislavery societies implemented a holistic curriculum of classical education intended to nurture the minds of its students and prepare them for the burdens of civic membership. In the NYMS' African Free School, areas of study included reading, writing, grammar, mathematics and geography, all of which were conventional educational fare for the era. At the end of each academic year, the African Free School held what it referred to as examination day. Meant to showcase the scholarly accomplishments of the school's students for donors, parents, and the general public, examination day was geared toward celebrating the intellectual growth of graduating pupils and authenticating to the white public that African Americans were worthy of civic inclusion. In a widely published synopsis of the African Free School's examination day of 1796, an observer (probably an NYMS member) of the event commended the "great spirit and propriety" of the students and professed that "the most prejudiced advocate for African slavery present, could have felt his favorite argument weakened." The excellent performance of the students had shown that "the powers of the mind do not depend on the complexion." Instead, "with equal encouragement and equal advantages, the African is capable of the same intellectual improvement as the European."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> By the early 1830s the New York African Free School had expanded its enrollment to over one thousand pupils in several schoolhouses. Although even the most thoroughgoing attempts to promote education only reached a fraction of the black population in the urban Mid-Atlantic, the schools nonetheless demonstrate the importance abolitionists attached to African American education as a lever of antislavery reform. On the educational efforts of the early abolition societies see Sayre, "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism," 166-178.

<sup>15</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 28, NYHS, New York; *Ibid.*, 101-103; *Argus* (New York), November 16, 1796 and *The Herald* (New York), Nov. 16, 1796. Reprinted in *Greenleaf's New York Journal*, Nov. 18, 1796 and *The Register of the Times* (New York), Nov. 18, 1796. For a description of examination day and annotated examples of student pieces from the African Free School see David W. Blight, Jean Willoughby Ashton and Louise Mirrer, *Hope is the*

Scanning the surviving records of student work from the African Free School gives a glimpse into the type of educational program the abolition societies adopted for its students. Some examples of student assignments include a transcription of an excerpt from Joseph Addison's "Slavery and Liberty Contrasted," a drawing of Benjamin Franklin, "cyphering to the rule of three" (a universally taught math rule) and original poems and valedictory speeches written by the students themselves. Other surviving work from the African Free School also indicates that the NYMS looked to prepare its graduates for eventual entry into the middling and upper merchant classes of which much of the society's membership was composed. One student demonstrated the stock trading principle called fellowship, in which individual investors gauged their economic profits or losses in a joint stock company. This was a rule that all merchants of the early republic would have needed to know as a prerequisite for success in the mercantile profession.<sup>16</sup>

In their monthly visits to the African Free School, the trustees of the school frequently remarked on the unmistakable progress of the pupils. While punctuated by the occasional lament for better attendance or more rigid adherence to the school's rules, for the most part the reports the trustees logged with the NYMS beamed with encouraging news. Not long after the school's founding, the trustees announced that the "improvement" of the "Scholars" had already met their "best expectations." Within a year of this report, the trustees were "happy to find that the progress of the scholars continued to answer their most sanguine expectations" and looked forward to "the most pleasing prospect of the great advantages" that the school would give to the cause of abolitionism. The trustees viewed the school's success as helping to dislodge the

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*First Great Blessing: Leaves from African Free School Presentation Book* (New York: The New York Historical Society, 2008). See also the *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), April 20, 1819 for additional evidence of the NYMS' attempts to utilize examination day as a vehicle for persuading the public of black talent and virtue.

<sup>16</sup> Records, 1817-1832, New-York African Free School, Vol. IV, 12, 25, 10, 13-14, NYHS, New York.

prejudiced idea "of their [black people's] incapacity for improvement." In what had by now become a familiar refrain, the July 1804 Free School report effused that the student's "are in a State of Improvement perhaps equal to any School of White Children."<sup>17</sup>

If the African Free School stood as the foremost means of reconstructing the environment of New York's emancipated slaves, the PAS cast an even wider organizational net in seeking African American uplift. In 1789 the PAS formed the Committee for Improving the Condition of the Free Blacks (CICFB) and issued a broadside appeal to the public to help raise funds for its operation. The new committee was broken up into four sub-departments. The committee of Inspection would look to "superintend the morals, general conduct, and ordinary situation of the Free Negroes" and "afford them advice and instruction." The committee of Education was tasked with starting up schools for free blacks that would supply the level of learning necessary for membership in the body politic. Just as the above two committees complimented each other, the committee of Guardians and committee of Employ would work in tandem. The committee of Guardians would oversee the binding out of black indentures, placing, whenever possible, African Americans in labor situations where they could "learn some trade or other business of some substance," while ensuring that employers did not abuse the terms of the indenture. The committee of Employ offered to seek employment for all free blacks that were looking for work and also hoped to offer to those blacks "with proper talents" jobs in the "various trades." Over the next ten years, the CICFB dedicated itself to raising the social, economic and educational standing of black Pennsylvanians.<sup>18</sup>

One of the CICFB's first actions involved reaching out to black Philadelphians for support. The committee of Inspection discussed the new agency with African American

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<sup>17</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 123, 127, NYHS, New York; NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 104, 124, NYHS, New York.

<sup>18</sup> *A Plan for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1789); Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 128-129.

community leaders before holding a public meeting for the black community at large. Indicating that they felt "well Satisfied" with the PAS' plan for black improvement, the members of the Free African Society (a newly established African American reform organization with similar goals of black uplift) even appointed their own committee to assist the CICFB in gathering data on the condition of free blacks. The committee of Inspection next set out to make a comprehensive census of Philadelphia's free African Americans, recording everything from head of household to religious affiliation. This initial recording was followed by periodic visits taking note of the habits of living, moral decorum, educational pursuits, and employment status of the City's free persons of color.<sup>19</sup>

Like the African Free School Trustees, the committee of Inspection was overwhelmingly positive about what they found. In 1793 the committee reported that they had "with pleasure observed" that most families lived "reputably." They saw a "considerable Improvement" in the "Sobriety & Industry" of free blacks. After another visit to free black families, the committee again sounded an upbeat note. While some blacks were "idle and disorderly" a "much greater number live comfortably and reputably," many African Americans proving themselves "very worthy Citizens." Although the committee of Inspection's consultations with liberated blacks were freighted with paternalistic advice on how best to conduct themselves in freedom, their reports illustrate the PAS' belief that African Americans did live as virtuous citizens of the republic.<sup>20</sup>

As the committee of Inspection monitored the social state of freedpersons, the Guardian, Employment and Education committees were kept busy trying to improve the economic and educational status of African Americans. The Guardian and Employment committees received a

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<sup>19</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel VI, 14-17, HSP, Philadelphia.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 59-60; Ibid., 112.

steady supply of applicants. Free black job seekers, parents wishing to indenture their children, and the children of slaves now considered indentured servants by the state's gradual abolition act, all needed employment. Whenever possible, these committees sought to find employment situations favorable for free black socioeconomic elevation. In the winter of 1796, the committee of Guardians reported that it was able to win work contracts for a third of its recent applicants in which African Americans would receive an education and learn a trade. To guard the integrity of indentured blacks' work status, the PAS also granted permission for the CICFB to provide African Americans with certificates of indenture, in essence warning potential kidnappers or unscrupulous employers that the abolitionist organization would not tolerate any breach of contract. Before the PAS initiated a school of its own, the committee of Education helped to fund two night schools for black youths. By 1793, the PAS had opened the doors to its first school and during the next decade and a half started several more institutions of learning for free blacks; receiving funds from black churches, among other sources. None of these schools matched the reach of the NYMS' famed African Free School, but they do show the PAS' dedication to black education.<sup>21</sup>

HOPING TO EXPAND their activities beyond the local level, the PAS and NYMS attempted to take their abolitionist formula of black uplift to the national stage. In March of 1793, the NYMS dispatched a circular letter to its sister groups, stretching from Connecticut to Virginia, requesting that they send delegates to a national convention of the abolition societies. With the

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<sup>21</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel VI, 117, HSP, Philadelphia; For an overview of the committee of Education and its initiatives see Eberly, "The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1775-1830," 136-154. For a statement of the CICFB looking for indentures where blacks could learn a trade see PPAS, Series I, Reel 6, 149, HSP, Philadelphia. The CICFB also indentured African Americans to free black community leaders such as Absalom Jones. PPAS, Series I, Reel VI, 79, HSP, Philadelphia. This demonstrates that the PAS believed virtuous free blacks could raise the status of their own race. The CICFB was dissolved in 1803 but the PAS continued to carry out much of the committee's work long after the CICFB disbanded. Eberly, "The Pennsylvania Abolition Society," 129-179 gives a detailed summary of the CICFB's history and activism.

intent of forming a more united antislavery front that could coordinate a spectrum of activities, from petitioning the national congress for antislavery and slave trade legislation to coordinating resources for the protection of free blacks from kidnapping, the NYMS urged the societies to come together in promoting the "great cause of their oppressed brethren of the African race." When society delegates met in Philadelphia in January of 1794, they inaugurated the first "American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race," a body that would continue to meet sporadically until 1837. The convention was always dominated by the PAS and NYMS and became regionalized a decade after its first meeting--shrinking into a coalition of Middle Atlantic societies by 1803. Nevertheless, the convention's proceedings provide a window into the philosophical underpinnings of early abolitionism, predicated on social reform environmentalism.<sup>22</sup>

Delegates to the American Convention's first meeting in 1794 laid out their conception of abolitionist reform. First, they acknowledged the deep reservoir of white American prejudice and skepticism about the ability of African Americans to handle freedom without endangering greater society. Second, they affirmed their belief that white American prejudices towards blacks were surmountable. The "clouds of prejudice" hanging over the young nation would be "gradually dispelled" through both black educational improvement, and the attending education of racist whites--"the voice of reason and the impulse of humanity" proving their erroneous prejudices unreasoned. Third, the delegates identified black education, specifically in the

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<sup>22</sup> Between 1794 and 1806, the Convention met annually, except for 1799 and 1802. It was during this twelve year period that the body also enjoyed its greatest influence, successfully lobbying the New York and New Jersey Legislatures to enact gradual emancipation laws, commanding free black audiences receptive to its program of reform, and continuing to tap into the powerful antislavery ideology of the American Revolution that, while increasingly losing its hold on the imagination of the American public during the first decade of the nineteenth century, was still a significant force. The Convention retained its Mid-Atlantic, regional composition from 1803 until 1817, when Upper Southern abolition societies reemerged, driving the controversial issue of colonization onto the American Convention's agenda. For a comprehensive treatment of the American Convention see Sayre, "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism: The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race, 1794-1837."

"principles of virtue and religion," "common literature," and "the useful mechanical arts" as the primary agent of African American liberation. Education would "prepare them [former slaves] for becoming good and useful citizens of the United States," and "gradually tend to the emancipation of slaves" by demonstrating the capacity of African Americans for freedom. From the first then, the early antislavery movement fastened the abolition of slavery and African American citizenship as part of the same project of reform.<sup>23</sup>

But just what did early abolitionists mean when they spoke of citizenship for free blacks and emancipated slaves? Although it remains unclear exactly how antislavery societies conceived of black citizenship in the early republic, there is enough evidence to reach certain broad conclusions about this important question. Most elementally, the anchor of African American citizenship for the abolition societies was freedom from bondage. By expanding statutory emancipation and protecting free blacks from kidnapping and wrongful enslavement, the abolition societies fought for the fundamental rights of blacks. As an 1801 statement by the New Jersey Abolition Society to the convention put it, slavery permitted "the most palpable violation of those boasted equal rights by withholding from several thousand human beings their just and natural claim to Liberty." For slaves slated to be freed gradually the transition to full independence would take time, but the end here was the indispensable revolutionary rights of human autonomy and self-ownership.<sup>24</sup>

Legislative enactments that Post-Revolutionary era abolitionists helped initiate indicate how agitating for emancipation could open the door to black citizenship. In 1788, Pennsylvania antislavery activists managed to prompt the state legislature to ban the splitting of slave families

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<sup>23</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1794), 15, 18, 20. Delegates to the first American Convention included representatives of the Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Wilmington (DE), Maryland, and Chestertown (MD) abolition societies.

<sup>24</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1801), 15.

and the selling of the offspring of slaves out of state, further bolstering the state's gradual emancipation law. That same year the New Jersey state government, in response to the lobbying of antislavery Quakers, passed a series of statutes hostile to slavery, including forbidding slaveowners to send their chattel out of state without express permission, mandating masters to instruct their slaves in reading, and giving all blacks the same customary rights as whites in state courts. The NYMS oversaw the passage of several laws expanding the rights of slaves and free blacks and restricting those of slaveowners. By 1809, the New York legislature went so far as to grant slaves the right to own property and have their marriages legalized. As far as early abolitionists were concerned, all of these laws necessarily assumed that African Americans would remain within their state of residence, where they would gain their liberty over time and be gradually incorporated into American civic life.<sup>25</sup>

Next to freedom on the scale of African American citizenship stood the ability to own property. The abolition societies held that the adoption of a sober, industrious and virtuous life, buttressed by an effective education, would bring moral and monetary success to free blacks and emancipated slaves. Property ownership, a staple component of early national citizenship discourse, was the penultimate reflection of proper civic practices. The abolition societies and the American convention recognized black freeholders and lauded these African Americans. In 1801, the PAS noted that a good portion of Philadelphia's free persons of color possessed "houses and other valuable property" and connected this fact with their virtuous behavior. The DAS made the same connection when they reported to the American Convention that the most "industrious and sober" African Americans of Delaware were those that "hold real property." The NYMS likewise believed that the "increase of the number of free-holders among the free blacks is an evidence of the progress of industry, sobriety, and economy, and strengthens the

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<sup>25</sup> Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 158-160. See also the second chapter of this dissertation.

hope, that they will gradually emerge from their degraded condition." Property ownership and virtuous citizenship went hand in hand for black Americans, according to the abolition societies.<sup>26</sup>

With property rights came suffrage. In a republican polity where voting represented the highest act of virtuous self-determination, black suffrage was yoked to the struggle for emancipation. The PAS' James Pemberton commended the Pennsylvania legislature for upholding black suffrage rights in the state's 1790 Constitution. When the voting rights of Northern blacks came under increasing attack in the early nineteenth century, American Convention delegate Peter Jay defended the franchise of propertied free blacks against efforts to enact racial restrictions in electoral politics. Perhaps the best way of viewing the early abolitionists' ideas of black citizenship is that they sought the same status for African Americans as those whites with similar socioeconomic status. In constructing a roadmap for a black citizenry the antislavery societies took the societal orthodoxy of Post-Revolutionary American citizenship as their guidepost.<sup>27</sup>

That antislavery reformers of the early republic eschewed making civic distinctions along the lines of race did not mean they opposed all checks on equal citizenship. Early abolition societies belonged to a group of several reform organizations comprised of affluent men who hoped to maintain civic order in a society revolutionized by American Independence. These groups agreed on the need to provide benevolent philanthropy on behalf of the "public good." The educated, well-born and highly connected leading men of society would extend their

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<sup>26</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. II, 1800-1824, HSP, Philadelphia 25; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1801), 20; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1803), 7.

<sup>27</sup> For Pemberton's comments see PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 107, HSP, Philadelphia. Peter Jay of the NYMS spoke up in support of black voting rights at New York's 1821 Constitutional Convention. The convention, although not inserting the word white in its requirements for voting, disfranchised the vast majority of African American in the state of New York by imposing a \$250 freehold standard on black voters. See Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York*, 111-114, 138-142.

beneficent patronage to the lower sorts in exchange for deference from the recipients of their good will. Therefore, the antislavery societies, while applauding free black property holders and working with African American community leaders and educators, undoubtedly viewed African Americans on the whole as the clients of their patronage. It would be wrong to expect early antislavery reformers to imagine a categorically egalitarian version of citizenship, white or black, on the level of antebellum abolitionists. These later reformers, enmeshed in a more democratic and egalitarian society, called more overtly for black equality. Such an understanding of citizenship was not in harmony with the philanthropic circles of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries or that of the larger society of which they were a part. So too would one err, however, in dismissing as hollow rhetoric the sincere commitment of early abolitionists to African American citizenship. It was class rather than race that determined one's position in the scale of citizenship. Free blacks were citizens entitled to the same rights and privileges as whites, according to early abolitionists.<sup>28</sup>

By appreciating the priority the American Convention placed on African American education, we can begin to grasp the movement's sense of black citizenship. Time and again the delegates to the American Convention labeled African American education as the engine of abolitionism. Calling black education our "noblest and most arduous task," the 1795 convention made the case for its importance to their fellow abolitionists.

"When we have broken his chains, and restored the African to the enjoyment of his rights, the great work of justice and benevolence is not accomplished--The new born citizen must receive that instruction, and those powerful impressions of moral and religious truth, which will render him capable of fulfilling the various duties he owes to himself and to his country."

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<sup>28</sup> For an incisive overview of the early national worldview that imbued this type of reform see Alan S. Taylor, *William Cooper's Town: Power and Persuasion on the Frontier of the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

This instruction would "do away with the reproach" of those Americans opposed to emancipation by "confound[ing] the enemies of truth" and "evincing that the unhappy sons of Africa, in spite of the degrading influence of slavery, are in no wise inferior to the more fortunate sons of Europe and America," thus furthering abolition.<sup>29</sup>

The 1804 Convention once again made explicit the connection between African American education and a successful fight against American slaveholding. Arguing that an effective program of education would permit African Americans to conduct themselves as "becomes men, escaped from bondage," the 1804 address told the abolition societies that it was the "conduct" of the free blacks and the newly emancipated on which "the liberation of their brethren" would "depend." Expressing similar sentiments, and speaking with the general public close in mind, the 1805 abolition society address reminded antislavery activists that the "enjoyment of liberty may be of little use" were not the newly emancipated "qualified by suitable instruction to conduct with propriety the various stations allotted them in civil society."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia, 1795), 29-30. Quakers had always been at the vanguard of African American education, instituting schools for blacks prior to the American Revolution. For an analysis that associates the educational programs of the early abolition societies exclusively with the Society of Friends, see Jordan, *White Over Black*, 356-361. In contrast, I contend that the educational initiatives of these antislavery groups were not merely an expression of Quaker religious doctrine, but part of the larger Revolutionary and early national standards of educational cultivation and individual reform that pervaded American society in this period.

<sup>30</sup> At the 1798 Convention the delegates claimed that "too much cannot be said about the subject of education" and, during the previous year's meeting insisted that, in spite of the amount of ink already spilled in justifying the need for African American education, its role "cannot be too forcibly impressed." *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fifth Convention of Delegates From the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the First Day of June, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Eight, and Continued, by Adjournments, Until the Seventh Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Junior, 1798), 18; *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Fourth Convention of Delegates From the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Third Day of May, One Thousand Seven Hundred and Ninety-Seven, and Continued, by Adjournments, Until the Ninth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Zachariah Poulson, Junior, 1797), 23; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1804), 17; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 7. For additional examples of the Convention's emphasis on the importance of former slaves' education see *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1794), 20; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1801), 43; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1803), 31.

The American Convention did not merely aim its pleas for the education of African Americans at the constituent abolition societies. In fact, the Convention spent more time communicating to African American communities the absolute necessity of black education and moral living as a strategy for successfully abolishing slavery. As is evidenced by the steady enrollment of free blacks in the schools established in New York and Philadelphia, African Americans needed little convincing. Between 1796 and 1805, the American Convention issued four addresses to free blacks, instructing them on how to best behave as American citizens. The messages put forth in these addresses encapsulate the comprehensive nature of the American Convention's understanding of education, an umbrella term which referred to the moral conduct, religious practices and daily habits of the nation's blacks.<sup>31</sup>

In their earliest address to African Americans, penned at the 1796 Convention, the delegates listed guidelines for free blacks to live by. Not surprisingly, the address began by citing the "important duty of public worship" which would help form the moral bedrock of a life of propriety and "proper conduct." Next, the Convention encouraged free blacks to gain a general competency in "reading, writing and the first principles of arithmetic," which would give them access to the foundational elements of human knowledge. Paralleling the early national values of republican austerity, the address also urged African Americans to be "simple in your dress and furniture" while remaining "frugal in your family expences." Furthermore, free black parents should teach their children "useful trades" so as to permit them to "acquire the habits of

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<sup>31</sup> See "To the Free Africans, and other free People of color, in the United States," in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Abolition Societies* (1796), 13-15; "To the Free Africans, and other free People of color, in the United States," *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1797), 16-18; "To the Free Blacks, and other free People of Colour, in the United States," in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1804), 30-32; "To the free Blacks, and other free people of colour, in the United States," in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (Philadelphia, 1805), 36-39. The number of copies printed of the addresses to free blacks regularly outpaced the printings of the Convention's minutes, further underscoring the imperative of black education and moral uplift for the Convention's delegates. The addresses were also sometimes published in the nation's newspapers. For example, see *New-York Daily Advertiser*, January 26, 1796.

industry." Should African Americans adopt these values, the address promised them that "virtue" and success would follow. Warnings against the follies of "frolicking," "gaming," "amusements which lead to expence and idleness," and the "use of spirituous liquors" rounded out the Convention's advice. It was advice that readers of the paragon-setter of late eighteenth century American citizenship, Benjamin Franklin, would have found highly familiar.<sup>32</sup>

The 1796 address to free blacks closed with the insistence that virtuous free black behavior would eradicate the prejudices of white Americans; prejudices that so threatened the total abolition of slavery. "We beseech you to reflect, it is by your good conduct alone," the delegates averred, "that you can refute the objections which have been made against you as rational and moral creatures, and remove many of the difficulties, which have occurred in the general emancipation of such of your brethren as are yet in bondage." As if to underscore the gravity of its address to free blacks, the Convention had 3,000 copies printed, and prodded the abolition societies to distribute them among African American communities. The societies answered this request by holding public gatherings where the addresses were read and discussed with free blacks. The NYMS and PAS relayed to the convention that African Americans had reacted enthusiastically to these meetings.<sup>33</sup>

Subsequent statements to free blacks echoed much of the same advice dispensed in the 1796 address. The 1804 address asked African Americans to "be industrious, diligent in your business, frugal in your expences" while "striv[ing] to acquire that knowledge" of reading" and always maintaining "industry and sobriety" in action and thought. It also asked free persons of color to keep in mind that "by your worthy conduct you may destroy the prejudices which some

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<sup>32</sup> "To the Free Africans, and other free people of color, in the Unites States," in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1796), 13-15.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15. For PAS and NYMS reports of reading addresses to free blacks see NYMS Records, Vol. IX, 2, NYHS, New York; PPAS, Reel I., Vol. I, 304, HSP, Philadelphia.

persons entertain against you." The 1805 Convention acknowledged free black civic growth. "You have found that industry and oeconomy have procured for you, independence; that temperance has greatly promoted, if not absolutely secured to you, health; and that the cultivation of the faculties of the mind, has enlarged the capacity for discharging your various duties, and for enjoying the numerous benefits you have received." In the eyes of the Convention's delegates, the continuing adoption of such virtuous behavior would overcome the "devastations" of slavery inflicted upon bondspersons by the iniquitous institution of bondage and prove to Americans everywhere that emancipation could be a safe and secure process. Early abolitionists offered African Americans a straightforward deal: We will do our best to provide you with the tools needed to cultivate yourselves as American citizens and you must do your best to embrace this model of civil cultivation. It was an educational offer, and a strategy to defeat white prejudices, that many African Americans embraced wholeheartedly.<sup>34</sup>

The American Convention's free black educational program of moral, religious, and behavioral development emanated from larger early national standards for enduring citizenship. Pamphlets and speeches which supported education during the Revolutionary and early national periods show that the Convention's advice to free blacks was a product of compatible expectations for white Americans, and not specifically tailored for free persons of color. Josiah Clark opened his 1794 publication on the education of youth by stating that education was the "the natural means of preserving religion and virtue in the world." Putting forth his outlines for a proposed system of public schooling in the state of Pennsylvania, Benjamin Rush singled out "industry and oeconomy" undergirded by the inculcation of "republican duties" and "republican principles" as working to "qualify" those emerging from the school system "for becoming good

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<sup>34</sup> "To the free Blacks, and other free people of Colour, in the United States," *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1804), 30-32; "To the free Blacks, and other free people of colour, in the United States," *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 36-39.

citizens of the republic." In 1785, Enos Hitchcock gave an address in a Providence Rhode Island Congregational church arguing that education would "cultivate the minds" of pupils "direct their manners, and 'train them up in the way they should go.'" In Hitchcock's estimation, a general system of education centered on "moral duty and christian faith" for all Americans was especially important to the fledgling republic because in "republican states" society's "existence depends on the wisdom and virtue of the people at large."<sup>35</sup>

The statements of city governments and public officials in the early republic also sound strikingly similar to the American Convention's addresses to free blacks. A 1789 printing of "recommendations to school masters" by the public education committee of Boston instructed teachers to "address their pupils on moral and religious subjects; endeavouring to impress their minds with a sense of the being and providence of God." The committee alerted the instructors to guard against their students taking up "the prevailing vices such as Sabbath-breaking, profane cursing and swearing, gaming, idleness" and other immoral behavior. In 1785, the Governor of Massachusetts, James Bowdoin, issued a proclamation promoting the benefits of public education. Providing "the rising generation" with "good Instruction, and disseminating among them the Principles of Wisdom and right Conduct, so they may become good and useful citizens" would be key for "the Preservation of the Rights and Liberties of the People" in a republican society. Bowdoin thought "Industry and Frugality, Temperance, Sobriety and decency of Manners" needed to supersede "Gaming, Idleness, Drunkenness, and every other species of vice" in order for a society based on self-government to survive. Antislavery activists viewed the

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<sup>35</sup> Josiah Clark, *The Parent's Monitor; Or, An Address To Parents and Teachers, concerning the Education of Youth in several Particulars* (Boston: E. Russell, 1794), 5; Benjamin Rush, *A Plan For The Establishment Of Public Schools And The Diffusion Of Knowledge In Pennsylvania; To Which Are Added Thoughts Upon The Mode of Education, Proper In A Republic* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1786), 22-24; Enos Hitchcock, *A Discourse On Education, Delivered At The Meeting House On The West Side Of The River, In Providence* (Providence, RI: Bennett Wheeler, 1785), 9-10, 12.

adoption of these notions of education and the moral development of a virtuous citizenry by African Americans as the best way to realize the abolition of slavery. Once persons of color exhibited these guidelines of virtuous behavior, they would eliminate their threat as former slaves to the integrity of republican government.<sup>36</sup>

If early abolitionists encouraged blacks to take on universal standards for republican citizenship, they also displayed a paternalistic condescension at times in their interactions with African Americans. The CICFB's committee of Inspection routinely entered the homes of Philadelphia's free blacks and admonished those whom they judged to be falling short of virtuous conduct. The NYMS required the parents of African Free School students to register with the society. Inspectors then went into the houses of free blacks and insisted that these families remain sober, industrious and orderly at all times, refraining from fiddling, dancing, or hosting any vivacious form of entertainment. Families that failed to meet these strictures were threatened with the loss of the society's patronage. In an 1805 pep talk to its constituent members, the American Convention asked whether the abolition societies were willing to "leave" free blacks "friendless and abandoned" or "continue our parental care over them." How can we square the abolitionists commitment to black equality with their penchant for paternalism? One way to do so is to remember that the antislavery societies did not treat all blacks in a paternalistic manner. African Americans who had achieved elements of republican virtue--such as property holding--sometimes worked with the abolition societies rather than receiving their aid. The paternalist

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<sup>36</sup> *Recommendations to the Schoolmasters, by the Committee appointed to carry into execution the System of public Education, adopted by the Town of Boston* (Boston: s.n., 1789); James Bowdoin, *A Proclamation, For the Encouragement of Piety, Virtue, Education and Manners, and for the Suppression of Vice* (Boston: Adams and Nourse, 1785).

dictums free black leaders and abolition society members subsequently promoted were presented as a means for the rest of the African American community to reach citizenship and equality.<sup>37</sup>

In a larger sense the abolitionists' paternalism stemmed from the same philosophy of social reform environmentalism that fueled the entire movement. If people were products of their social environment and slaves had been relegated to the degrading state of bondage, then it necessarily followed that the environment in which former slaves subsisted had to be closely monitored should both emancipation and free black citizenship win the day. To African Americans this practice could be as constricting as the larger abolition movement was empowering. Yet some scholars have blurred the lines between antislavery activists and slavery's defenders by emphasizing the undeniable presence of paternalism in abolitionist reform. This overbearing paternalism, they have claimed, threatened the autonomy of free blacks and worked to exert social control over them by arrogantly attempting to mold African American community development. Unfortunately, an overemphasis on this paternalism and its unsavory elements has come at the cost of distorting the progressive nature of antislavery environmentalism and overlooking the ties between gradual emancipation and free black societal incorporation as envisioned by the early abolition movement.<sup>38</sup>

Delivered in 1797, two years before a gradual abolition act passed the New York state legislature, the speech of the NYMS member, and delegate to the American Convention, Samuel

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<sup>37</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel VI, 27, 181, 237, HSP, Philadelphia; NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 99-100, NYHS, New York; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 33.

<sup>38</sup> For the scholarly stress on paternalism and social control as the foremost characteristics of early antislavery reformers and their societies see Swan, "John Teasman," 331-356; Rury, "Philanthropy, Self-Help, and Social Control"; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 50-83 and White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 81-88. If social control was the primary impetus behind the reform enterprises of the abolition societies then why agitate to abolish slavery--easily the most effective means of social control imaginable--at all? For its part, the PAS, in a statement submitted to the 1804 American Convention, reported that "prospects" of black equality "encourage...the continuance of our labours on their behalf" and motivate "our endeavours to diffuse among them the important benefits of school education." See *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1804), 11. For an even-handed assessment of the PAS' paternalistic reform tendencies see Eberly, "The Pennsylvania Abolition Society, 1775-1830," 176-179.

Miller, epitomizes the interplay between environmentalism, abolitionist strategy, and claims of equal citizenship for African Americans. A Presbyterian minister, social reformer and strong supporter of the French Revolution, Miller viewed slavery as incompatible with American liberty. He attacked the pretensions of white prejudice that he believed underlay the institution of bondage. Skin color was not the only means used to rationalize bondage for those of African descent. Many white Americans also asserted that black people were mentally inferior and deficient in "*intellectual capacity*." According to Miller, this claim was disingenuously grounded. Considering that enslaved blacks were cut off from the same society that permitted white citizens to cultivate their intellects, any negative judgment with regard to black potential was wholly unfair. Besides, the African Free School had already demonstrated that once freed and provided with educational opportunities, the performance of manumitted slaves equaled that of whites in scholarly and moral endeavors.<sup>39</sup>

As Miller saw it, there was only one solution to the evil of slavery and the injustice of black inequality: gradually abolish slavery and incorporate freed slaves into the body politic. The "INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL CULTIVATION of slaves" must accompany slavery's abolition, so freepersons could "be prepared to exercise the rights, and discharge the duties of citizens, when liberty shall be given them." Both Miller and his antislavery cohorts may have started from the position that slaves were inferior in condition, but the key was that this inferiority was a transitory, environmental condition that could be transcended by proper instruction rather than a permanent state of degradation. "Say not that they [slaves] are unfit for

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<sup>39</sup> Samuel Miller, *A Discourse Delivered*, 12-14.

the rank of citizens...Make them freemen; and they will soon be found to have the manners, the character, and the virtues of freemen," Miller concluded.<sup>40</sup>

WHILE A STRICT adherence by free blacks to the educational standards of newly independent America could ensure the growth of a virtuous African American citizenry, early abolitionists held that this imperative alone could not eradicate slavery. Also needed was an antislavery enlightenment of the white public. Premised on the same theory of environmentalism that abolitionists applied to African American citizenship, this antislavery enlightenment would make way for a society-wide acceptance of slave emancipation, swaying public opinion to recognize the capacity of black freemen for republican virtue. Antislavery activists of the young republic clearly identified white prejudice as one of the biggest obstacles to a successful drive for the abolition of slavery. The NYMS pinned the problem of prejudice on slavery itself. Believing many whites associated the dehumanizing institution of bondage with the people subjected to its oppressive wrath, the manumission society thought it was "from the abhorrence with which the human mind naturally contemplates slavery" that African Americans were "too often considered as a Race of Beings of inferior Rank." The NYMS curtly concluded that "this Prejudice is not yet eradicated in this state."<sup>41</sup>

The American Convention presumed that the basic humanity of persons of color often went unrecognized. "Many remain under the erroneous notion," the 1805 Convention lamented, "that blacks are a class of being not merely inferior to, but absolutely a different species from the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 31-32. The text of Miller's speech was turned into a pamphlet and published by the NYMS for public consumption in the same year that it was delivered. Miller's address was also circulated among the delegates to the 1798 American Convention and read aloud to the entire assembly during that year's meeting. See, *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1798), 13.

<sup>41</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 96, NYHS, New York.

whites...intended, by nature, only for the degradations and sufferings of slavery." In a letter to the PAS William Pinkney, then an ardent young legislator who had delivered a speech in the Maryland House of Delegates supporting the easing of restrictions on private manumission, captured well the enormous barriers faced by abolitionists in overturning white prejudice. "It is difficult," Pinkney wrote "to conquer hereditary prejudices--to silence fears for the public Safety--to excite Compassion for those on whom we have been accustomed to look at without it--to make Men just where Iniquity has for years been fashionable and familiar." Pinkney's solution, and that of the early abolition movement, was to have the "public Mind...be taught" the "rights" to which African Americans "ought to be restored." To abolish slavery, antislavery activists were going to have to alter the way the white public thought about black people.<sup>42</sup>

Abolitionists endeavored to reform the environment in which white Americans formed judgments on the character of blacks. Nestled alongside its recurrent reminders to the abolition societies to tackle the educational and moral development of free blacks, the American Convention inserted pleas to the societies to focus on alerting the white public both to the injustice of slavery and, as importantly, the underlying equality of African Americans. Those Americans who "continue to acquiesce in the sophistry of the advocates" of slavery the 1795 Convention declared did so "merely from want of reflection" left over from an unenlightened era. "The force of reason, and the persuasion of eloquence" could "revive in the minds of our fellow citizens" the oppression of slavery. Antislavery tracts would play a pivotal role in "enlightening the public mind" and "preparing" white Americans for "the reception of important truths," namely the sins of slavery and the humanity of those with black skin. Heeding the connection between white public enlightenment and slavery's abolition, the DAS, in a report to the

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<sup>42</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 35; PPAS, Series II, Reel XI, Vol. III [unnumbered, loose correspondence], HSP, Philadelphia.

American Convention asserted that "sound reasoning, must finally break down the mounds which the prejudices of education, and avarice have erected between Africans and humanity."<sup>43</sup>

The American Convention's urgent requests for the abolition societies to "impart," "prepare," and "impress" the white "public mind" with the justness of black liberty matched its effort to "cultivate," "impress," and "prepare," the African American mind for the proper exercise of freedom. The Convention's plan for combating white American prejudices mirrored its reform program for bondspersons injured by slavery. "The man whose mind is clouded by prejudice," the Convention told the abolition societies, must "have truth frequently repeated, and presented" so that "his errors can be corrected, his prejudices subdued, and the noble feelings of philanthropy excited in his breast." In other words, the white public needed to be conditioned to see the wrongs of slavery and convinced of the virtue of black Americans just as former bondspersons had to be placed in the proper environment to cultivate their innate ability for citizenship. For antislavery activists, these two environmental developments would work in tandem, allowing former slaves to gradually advance beyond slavery's debilitating fetters and white prejudices to be gradually quelled. Then "the light of truth" would "break through the dark cloud of oppression" and the "practice of the people" would "be conformable to their declaration-  
-That all men are born equally free, and have an unalienable right to Liberty."<sup>44</sup>

Abolitionists relied on the printed word to expunge prejudice from the white body politic. The PAS credited antislavery essays of the Revolutionary era for the adoption of laws

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<sup>43</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1795), 26-31; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1803), 32; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1797), 26; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 28; *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>44</sup> *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Twelfth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race: Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Ninth Day of January, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Nine, and Continued by Adjournments Until the Twelfth Day of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: J. Bouvier, 1809), 30; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1798), 20.

prohibiting the slave trade in several states and even for the gradual emancipation law of Pennsylvania. By "excit[ing] the attention of the public" to the plight of slaves the tracts had gained important allies for the cause of abolition. Concerned with the public's perception of its activities, the NYMS in 1792 stated that "a diffusion of the principles on which they act" was as important as the society's activism. The American Convention wanted to systematize antislavery publishing. Informing the abolition societies that "it is our duty to employ the pen and the press" to "convince our countrymen of the injustice and impolicy of slavery" the Convention recommended the creation of antislavery publication committees. All four of the Mid-Atlantic societies established committees to publish abolitionist literature. Moreover, the PAS and the NYMS contained members who were printers and these societies made partnerships with newspaper editors and publishers to disseminate antislavery writings. It is also noteworthy that a sizeable portion of the abolitionist and anti slave trade material appearing in the early national press had British and, to a lesser degree, French origins. London's Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade and Paris' Society of the Friends of the Blacks showered the PAS and NYMS with antislavery poems and essays. The leading American abolition societies responded by appointing committees to read over the writings and then submit them to various newspapers, magazines, and printers for re-publication. These societies sent antislavery publications and news to their sister groups in Europe, especially those illustrating the equal talent of blacks. Consequently, early antislavery print culture was a transatlantic creation forged from communication between American and European abolition societies.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, October 20, 1787, Letter to London Society, HSP, Philadelphia; NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 164, NYHS, New York; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 35. See *Minutes of American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 18 and Calvert, "The Abolition Society of Delaware, 1801-1807," 303-304 for the DAS' antislavery print activities. For evidence of the PAS and NYMS containing members who were printers and publishers see Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 130; Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 239. The London and Paris societies frequently sent antislavery writings to its organizational counterparts in the U.S., particularly the PAS. See PPAS,

Drawing on the ideological forces of the Revolutionary era, the abolition societies constructed a racially egalitarian idiom using the antislavery material they published. Based on equalitarian and natural rights principles, and rooted in sentimental empathy for the enslaved, these antislavery writings championed the human rights of persons of color rather than the property rights of slaveholders to their bondspersons. Hoping to push public opinion against slavery and the slave trade, racially egalitarian antislavery literature exhorted white Americans to dispense with their prejudices and begin to view slaves as equal human beings instead of chattel objects. This literature's roots lay deep within significant cultural changes taking place in the late eighteenth century. A new cult of sensibility arose from Locke's epistemological emphasis on sensationalism melded with Scottish Enlightenment conceptions of the inner moral sense and the centrality of sympathy to social formation. In this novel cultural phenomenon the man of feeling identified with the sufferings and pains of others as if they were his own. It became a sign of refinement to make sympathetic connections with society's sufferers. Hitched to the natural rights philosophy of universal equality, the cult of sensibility provided important opportunities for reformers. As Lynn Hunt has shown, the idea of human rights was born in this era. American Abolitions took advantage of this pivotal development by encouraging readers to empathize with African American slaves and oppose the institution of bondage.<sup>46</sup>

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Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 34-35, 39, 70, 133, 148, 174, 282 HSP, Philadelphia and NYMS Records, Vol. VI, 115-116, NYHS, New York. The American Convention's choice to publish its proceedings and distribute them for public consumption was itself an important foray into the antislavery print sphere.

<sup>46</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007). When discussing the "limitations" of late eighteenth century antislavery, Winthrop Jordan fingers the "absence of any clear disjunction" between the human rights of the enslaved and the property rights of slaveholders by both antislavery activists and greater early national American society. Much of the antislavery literature disseminated during this same period, however, contradicts this dichotomy and points to a more subtle yet no less compelling challenge to the property rights of slaveowners. See Jordan, *White Over Black*, 351. David N. Gellman also demonstrates the presence of racially egalitarian antislavery literature in the newspapers of the young republic, focusing on the public debate over gradual emancipation in New York during the 1790s. See David N. Gellman, "Race, the Public Sphere, and Abolition in Late Eighteenth-Century New York," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 20, No. 4, (Winter, 2000), 607-636 and Gellman, *Emancipating New York*, chap. 6. For the importance of public opinion in the republican politics of early national America see Colleen Sheehan, "The Politics of Public Opinion: James Madison's 'Notes on

Poems gave lyrical expression to early antislavery literature. Antislavery poetry communicated indignation at the injustice of holding sentient fellow men in chattel bondage. Poets often dramatized imagined scenes of slavery-induced horror as a way of hammering home slavery's brutality. "The African Slave's Soliloquy" depicted the plight of a slave dragged from his native land and into bondage. Describing a scene in which the slave's village is set on fire, his children burned to death, and his wife left disconsolate and alone, this bondsman found himself in abject servitude--"he groans with weighty woes oppressed, What sad sensations rankle his breast." The slave was haunted by nightmares wherein "I see my parents, hear my children cry, And in the flaming cottage see them die." A poem entitled the "Tender's Hold" took readers to the scene of a slave ship disembarking from the African coast and put its audience in the misery of this tragic moment. "Dragg'd by oppression's savage grasp, from every dear connection. 'Midst putrid air, O! hear them gasp, And mark their deep dejection." "The Island Field Negro" indicted the barbaric cruelty of slaveowners. The author painted a macabre portrait of the life of a West Indian slave.

*One with a gibbet wakes his negroes fears,  
One to the windmill nails him by the ears;  
One keeps his slave in dismal dens unfed,  
One puts the wretch in pickel, ere he's dead,  
This, to a tree suspends him by the thumbs!*

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Government," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. XLIX (October, 1992), 609-627 and Colleen Sheehan, "Madison and The Authority of Public Opinion," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Series, Vol. LIX, No.4 (October, 2002), 925-956. For efforts by early antislavery activists and societies to influence public opinion, specifically the PAS, see Dee E. Andrews, "Reconsidering the First Emancipation: Evidence from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Correspondence, 1785-1810" *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 64, No. 5 (Summer 1997), 230-249. For the dynamic growth of a print sphere laden with sensibility and the important role this development played in Revolutionary and early national America see Sara Knott, "Sensibility and the American War for Independence," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 109, No. 1 (February, 2004), 19-40; Sara Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and Catherine O'Donnell Kaplan, *Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forms of Citizenship* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

That, from his table grudges even crumbs<sup>47</sup>

After detailing the inhumanity of human bondage, antislavery poems often invited readers to make empathetic associations between themselves and the enslaved. "An elegy on African Slavery" played on readers' sentiments by declaring "O! ye whose gen'rous breasts, can, weeping, bend Your tears with mine in feeling concert blend, And mourn with me man's cruelty to man." One poem was based on the agony of a slave boy, who wept as he was separated from his good friend by sale. The author began the piece by asking rhetorically "And can'st thou weep? alas poor Negro Boy, And feel the warmth of hope and chill of fear? Can *Separation* thus thy soul employ and draw from thee the sympathetic tear?" The next logical step after giving this black child human feelings was to relate to the boy's emotional pain. "Full well I know the pangs you now endure; And blush to think, that those of lighter dye Unmov'd can view the miseries they procure." An "Address to the Heart, on the Subject of American Slavery," called on all those "whose hearts are attuned to sympathy" to "Awake!" and "let the miseries of others be your own." Dripping with overwrought prose, it is hard for the contemporary reader to look past the intense sentimentality of this late eighteenth century literary genre. But the degree to which these poems presented slaves as fellow human beings and not property or beasts of burden, as slavery's defenders wished the public to think of blacks, marked an important contribution to the abolition societies' goal of changing the public's view of African Americans.<sup>48</sup>

Antislavery poetry deliberately erased the color line to discredit the arguments of slavery's defenders and shake the public's sense of racial differences between white and black.

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<sup>47</sup> *The Independent Journal* (New York), June 14, 1788; *New-York Weekly Museum*, November 2, 1793; *The New-Jersey Journal* (Elizabeth), Mar. 23, 1790 and *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), March 2, 1791. See also *The New-York Packet*, March 9, 1786.

<sup>48</sup> *Philadelphia Repository and Weekly Register*, October 31, 1801; *The Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia), Apr. 9, 1796; *The American Museum* (Philadelphia), June 1787, Vol. 1, Issue 6 and *The New-York Packet*, March 29, 1787.

One of the most famous examples of this type of antislavery poetry was penned by the English author, William Cowper and published extensively in the American press. In "The Negro's Complaint" Cowper ridiculed the significance attached to skin color. "Fleecy locks and black complexion, Cannot forfeit nature's claim: Skins may differ, but affection Dwells in *white* and *black* the same." He ended the piece by having an African slave tell bondage's defenders to "Deem our nation brutes no longer, 'Till some reason ye shall find, Worthier of regard and stronger, Than the *colour of our* Kind." While Cowper refuted skin color as a marker of human difference, additional poems affixed the humanity of white and black. "Reflections on the Slavery of the Negroes" said simply that a black person's "soul he has immortal as our own; and flesh and blood as rich as monarch's boast." His "birth, feelings, passions, powers, and wants, Decline and death, to ours similar." A like-minded poem echoed these thoughts in asserting "One common Father form'd each kindred frame; One common will inspired the vital flame; By the same laws, we breathe equal air, Fruits of one love, and objects of one care," If the races shared the same inner core of being then how could one person justly claim absolute ownership over another?<sup>49</sup>

Coming from black speakers, arguments for the inner equality of the races posed an even greater challenge to white prejudices. By endowing African Americans with eloquence, antislavery writers reversed the well-established literary black figure, whose pidgin dialect and woeful ignorance only reinforced claims of racial inferiority. A rejoinder to the negative characterization of blacks in the popular play *The Padlock*, Mungo in the poem "Mungo Speaks" reveals his true virtue. "T'ank you Massas! have you laugh your fill?--The let me speak, nor take

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<sup>49</sup> *The Burlington Advertiser* (NJ), November 9, 1790. Reprinted in *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 11, 1791 and *Spooner's Vermont Journal* (Windsor), November 12, 1792; *The Time Piece and Literary Companion* (New York), June 16, 1797; *The Public Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 2, 1807; *New-York Daily Gazette*, August 14, 1789.

the freedom ill." When given the chance to speak Mungo reminds his readers of the essential humanity that he shares with whites--"Alike our wants, our pleasures, and our pains"--and dismisses the demarcating lines of slavery, "Comes freedom then from color? Blush with shame." Mungo concludes by calling on the "sons of Freedom!" to "equalize your laws; Be all consistent--plead the Negro's cause." As with Mungo's impassioned plea for consistency, antislavery writers often gave black speakers a superior moral compass and had them chastise whites for their hypocrisies. "The Last Anniversary" imagined a slave witnessing a July 4th celebration. The bondsman wonders why he heard "freeman swell a melodious strain, And shout for the rights they destroy?" The slave then sarcastically repudiates the entire celebration as marred with contradiction. "How joyous the wretch at the head of the throng, How full of benevolence he? And those who now raise a devotional song; By those, ah! I ceased to be free."<sup>50</sup>

There was no greater remonstrance of racial prejudice than when free blacks writers conveyed opposition to slavery. In 1789, *A Free Negro* launched a spirited invective aimed at slave traders and natural philosophers who attempted to dehumanize those of African descent. Freed as a youth and given the benefits of a literary education, the author had decided from an

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<sup>50</sup> *The Independent Journal*, March 8, 1788. Reprinted in *The Albany Journal*, March 17, 1788; *The Farmer's Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), August 11, 1807. See also "The Negro's Prayer" from *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), February 16, 1791 for a poem allegedly written by a slave from Virginia eloquently speaking out against his enslavement. David Gellman is one of the few scholars who has acknowledged the use of a black literary voice for racially egalitarian ends, viewing it as an attempt by antislavery writers to imagine blacks as eligible for citizenship. See *Emancipating New York*, 115-127. While I concur with this position, my interpretation of this racially egalitarian literary device is that it more elementally sought to establish the intrinsic humanity and essential sameness of blacks and whites. This simple but powerful assertion was a crucial prerequisite for making the argument to the white public that African Americans were capable of citizenship. Despite the fact that an imagined black voice deploying pidgin dialect was often used to disparage African Americans in the early national print sphere, this was not always the case. For one remarkable exception see the anecdote of Sambo the Revolutionary War black soldier, first published in *The Essex Journal* (Newburyport, MA), January, 19, 1791 and then widely reprinted as far south as Baltimore. For a rare example of a black voice being employed to directly justify slavery see *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (Charleston, SC). The piece depicts an enslaved speaker leading a group of slaves giving thanks for their bondage. In part it reads, "Thy burdens yield, nor grief, nor pain, Thy toils demand no tear." This was an obvious response to the antislavery harnessing of a fictive black voice that dramatized slavery's inhumanity.

early age to advocate "the true principles on which the liberties of mankind are founded." Hoping to advance the cause of slavery's abolition, *A Free Negro* submitted his essay as a tool for assisting in the "deliverance" of his black brethren from bondage. Like many other antislavery authors and activists, this free black essayist believed that removing white prejudice was the mandatory initial step in eradicating slavery. As absurd as it sounded, blacks needed "to prove that we are men." Unlike fellow white activists, to *A Free Negro*, white prejudices were not simply barriers to black freedom, but visceral forces weighing down black freemen and foreclosing the chance for persons of color to realize their potential as equal individuals. Slavery's apologists wrongly claimed that the "innate perverseness of our minds" and "nature" itself had "marked us out for slavery." But "if treated like other men, and admitted to a participation of their rights" *A Free Negro* assured the reading public that blacks would be just as virtuous as whites. The writer's own literary skill attested to that very argument.<sup>51</sup>

Additional literary forms contrived by antislavery writers made direct appeals to the reader to recognize the aptitude and intelligence of slaves. Bemoaning that the practice of bondage fettered the innate talents of enslaved blacks, these pieces asserted that African Americans would be every bit the equal of whites if only given the chance to cultivate their natural endowments. The obituary of "Negro Tom," a Virginian slave, who died at the age of seventy in the winter of 1790, illustrates this type of antislavery literary approach. "Negro Tom's" obituary pervaded the press, finding its way into newspapers in the Upper South, Middle Atlantic, and Northern regions. Brought from Africa to Virginia as a slave at the age of fourteen,

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<sup>51</sup> *The American Museum* (Philadelphia), July 1789, Vol. 6, Issue 1. Reprinted in *Osborne's New-Hampshire Spy*, April 14, 1789 and *The New-York Packet*, September 11, 1790. The essay originated in England. Given the way writers often took on different guises in the pseudonymous early American press, it is impossible to know whether the piece was actually written by a free black. Yet even if it was not penned by an African American, unlike pieces that clearly were imaging a black voice, this writer unequivocally presented himself as an actual free black. For a similar example see the "Africanus" essays in *Gazette of the United States* (New York), March 3 and 6, 1790.

the obituary began by informing its readers that Negro Tom was a "prodigy." Possessing unmatched mathematical skills, Tom could answer mind boggling calculative inquiries "in less time than ninety-nine men out of a hundred would take with their pens." Tom was, the writer emphasized, "a *self taught arithmetician*" and an "*untutored scholar*" who, had he been given the same opportunities as his "fellow men," the "Royal Society of London, the Academy of Sciences in Paris, nor even *Newton* himself would have been ashamed to acknowledge him as a brother in science." After placing Tom in the same sphere as the Enlightenment's leading scientist, the author applied Tom's case to the slave populous at large, speaking out "in favour of the genius, capacity, and talents of our illfated black brethren." It was the prejudices of a misguided white public, the obituary closed, as "unfounded in fact as they are inhuman in tendency!" that perpetuated slavery and prevented prodigies like Tom from finding self-fulfillment.<sup>52</sup>

One of the most acclaimed free blacks of early national America drew the attention of abolitionists as a prime opportunity to further broadcast African American capability. In 1791, James Pemberton of the PAS wrote the Baltimore printer William Goddard asking him for copies of the free black surveyor and astronomer Benjamin Banneker's soon to be published almanac. The prefatory note to the first edition of Banneker's almanac spelled out the ramifications of this work for the antislavery movement. Banneker's learning shone above "thousands of whites, liberally educated" who could not match the self-educated free black in "intellectual

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<sup>52</sup> *Alexandria Advertiser* (VA), December 9, 1790. Negro Tom's obituary was one of the most widely circulated antislavery pieces in the early national era. See reprints in *The Pennsylvania Mercury* (Philadelphia) December 16, 1790 (alternative version); *Ibid.*, December 21, 1790; *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), December 21, 1790; *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), December 22, 1790; *New-York Daily Gazette*, December 22, 1790; *Independent Gazetteer* (Philadelphia), December 25, 1790; *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester), January 6, 1791; *The Salem Gazette* (MA), January 7, 1791; *Hampshire Gazette* (Northampton, MA), January 12, 1791; *Connecticut Journal* (New Haven), January 12, 1791; *The Vermont Gazette* (Bennington), January 17, 1791; *The Western Star* (Stockbridge, MA), January 18, 1791, and *The United States Chronicle* (Providence, RI), March 17, 1791. See *The Pennsylvania Mercury* (Philadelphia), December 30, 1790, *A Philadelphian*, for an antislavery piece using the death of "Negro Tom" as a springboard to attack the slave trade and slavery. The antislavery obituary stemmed from Benjamin Rush's certificate of Negro Tom, first published by the PAS in local newspapers in 1789. See PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 61, HSP, Philadelphia.

acquirements and capacities." Making a clear allusion to the emerging theory of polygenesis, the opening to the almanac used the accomplishments of Banneker as evidence against those who believed blacks had an "origin different from whites." As emancipation gave many more African Americans the chance to pursue education, cases similar to Banneker's would "multiply" and blacks could display their innate genius. Meanwhile, American Convention and PAS member Benjamin Rush published the remarkable story of James Derham, a free black physician of New Orleans. Born a slave in Philadelphia, Derham served as a physician's assistant to his British surgeon master during the Revolutionary war, before being sold to another physician slaveholder who eventually agreed to grant Derham his freedom. Having heard of his talents, Rush approached Derham planning to give the young black doctor some medical pointers. Instead he found Derham "suggested many more to me," demonstrating that one's early life as a slave by no means foreclosed the faculties of human improvement.<sup>53</sup>

Antislavery essays constituted a straightforward but no less effective means by which to mobilize an antislavery public. The NYMS sponsored antislavery orations. Samuel Miller's and Elihu Smith's orations were both published in pamphlet form. The speakers dissected and then denounced the arguments in favor of black bondage, and told white Americans that the nascent nation's experiment in free government would never endure without slavery's abolition. Similar orations were delivered before and printed by the New Jersey, Delaware, Connecticut and Maryland abolition societies. PAS member and printer Joseph Crukshank published William

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<sup>53</sup> Benjamin Banneker, *Benjamin Banneker's Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Almanack and Ephemeris, for the Year of Our Lord, 1792* (Baltimore: William Goddard, 1792). The preface was printed in *The American Museum* (Philadelphia), September, 1792, Vol. 12, Issue 3. Joseph Crukshank a PAS member and antislavery printer sold copies of Banneker's almanac. See PPAS, Series II, Reel XI, Vol. 1, 88-90 for Pemberton's letter to Goddard. Rush's certificate of Derham and Negro Tom was published in *Freeman's Journal* (Philadelphia), January 5, 1789 and reprinted in *The Worcester Magazine* (MA), January 29, 1789; *Osborne's New-Hampshire Spy* (Portsmouth), February 3, 1789; *The Cumberland Gazette* (Portland, ME), February 12, 1789. The PAS sent the certificates of accomplishment written by Rush about Derham and Negro Tom to the London Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. See PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. I, 61, 73-79, HSP, Philadelphia.

Pinkney's antislavery address to the Maryland state assembly. In his speech, Pinkney astutely confronted the republican paradox facing antislavery activists by turning African American enslavement into an argument for black citizenship. "He who best knows the value of a blessing, is generally the most assiduous in its preservation," hypothesized Pinkney. A former slave who had "felt the yoke of bondage must forever prove the assertor of freedom, if he is fairly admitted to the equal enjoyment of its benefits." Thus slaves' bondage actually made them more fit for republican liberty, if given equal freedom. The American Convention published addresses to the public urging the American people to "use" their "reason and social affections for the purposes for which they were given." To the Convention these "purposes" were realizing that "nature has made no essential distinction in the human race, and that all individuals of the great family of mankind have a common claim upon the general fund of natural bounties." In sum, antislavery literature of the early national era aspired to convert white Americans into accepting that blacks had a legitimate right to freedom and equality.<sup>54</sup>

AS THE ANTISLAVERY societies instituted an optimistic agenda for slavery's abolition through African American incorporation and the destruction of white prejudice, their reform

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<sup>54</sup> NYMS, Vol. VI., 189-190, NHYS, New York; Miller, *A Discourse Delivered*; Smith, *A Discourse Delivered*; Pinkney, *Speech of William Pinkney*, 13-14; *Address of a Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Society, to the Citizens of the United States* (New York: W. Durell, 1794), 5; "To the Citizens of the United States," in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1801), 38. See also William Griffith, *Address of the President of the New Jersey Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, to the General Meeting at Trenton, on Wednesday the 26th of September 1804* (Trenton: Sherman & Mershon, 1804); *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser* (Wilmington, DE), May 30, 1801; Buchanan, *An Oration Upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery*; Zephania Swift, *An Oration on Domestic Slavery. Delivered at the North Meeting-House in Hartford, on the 12th Day of May, A.D. 1791. At the Meeting of the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Held in Bondage* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1791); Jonathan Edwards, *The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of the Slavery of the Africans: Illustrated in a Sermon Preached Before the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and for the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Held in Bondage, at Their Annual Meeting in New-Haven, September 15, 1791* (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1791) and Theodore Dwight, *An Oration Spoken Before The Connecticut Society, for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage. Convened in Hartford, on the 8th day of May, A.D.. 1794* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1794).

vision was nourished by a host of factors that seemed to point the way towards the progressive elimination of American bondage. The American Revolution--with its dictates of natural rights and universal human equality--placed slavery on the ideological defensive in the years following the Revolutionary War. Furthermore, by 1804 every state north of Maryland had either eliminated slavery immediately or set the institution on the road to ultimate extinction and various legislative initiatives in some states appeared to clear the way for free black citizenship. Meanwhile, in the Upper South a wave of private manumissions seemed to signal a move away from the slave-labor centered tobacco economy while, when pressed, the Virginia Revolutionary vanguard often spoke out against the idea of enslaving their fellow men. There also existed in this period a broad condemnation of the international slave trade as an inhumane relic of the barbaric past, the elimination of which many antislavery activists believed was the first, essential step in extirpating slavery from the American republic.<sup>55</sup>

Abolitionists took heart from positive developments abroad as well. In their frequent correspondence between each other, activists on both sides of the Atlantic gained a sense of antislavery and racially egalitarian progress. The PAS communicated to the Paris Society in 1801 that it anticipated the end of the French Revolution would allow the "completion of the Grand design" of African rights foretold by the National Assembly's 1794 extension of citizenship to all free blacks in the French empire; a national achievement that the PAS similarly hoped to garner.

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<sup>55</sup> On voluntary manumission in the Upper South see Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 39-84 Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 277-285. There was a clear ambivalence in the rhetorical denunciation of human bondage by much of Virginia's Revolutionary leadership and their actual continuing commitment to the institution of slavery, a phenomenon the historian Joseph Ellis has called the "Virginia straddle." The important point for the early abolition movement was that between ideological opposition to slavery and the wave of manumissions in Post-Revolutionary Virginia and Maryland, the idea that the Upper South was turning away from slavery seemed plausible. And perception is more important than reality here. When combined with the nearly universal, though very wrong, belief that the abolition of slave trade would lead eventually to slavery's demise and the triumph of gradual emancipation in the North, early abolitionists at times optimistically marveled at the great progress of antislavery since the dawn of the Revolutionary War. For an illustrative expression of the optimism born of these developments see Edwards, *The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of the Slavery of the Africans*, 29-30.

The London Society informed the PAS that it took "great pleasure" in hearing that "the public mind" is "daily" becoming more "enlightened" on slavery related matters, and expressed that "We cannot but believe that the dawn of that day is not far off, when skin shall no longer afford a handle for iniquity and a seat for prejudice." When the London Society asked the NYMS for an assessment of the progress of antislavery in New York, the manumission society replied that "a Liberality of sentiment begins to prevail, which will admit the Claim of Africans to a rank among rational Beings and to the natural Rights of Mankind." Through their transatlantic exchange, the antislavery societies crafted an optimistic outlook on the future fruits of their activism. The fact that "every part of the civilized world has shewn a disposition gradually to restore to the Africans the equal rights of men" emboldened abolitionists and girded them for the long fight ahead.<sup>56</sup>

And it would be a long fight. Even though the antislavery societies were confident in their activism, they had no illusions that abolition would happen overnight. The President of the New Jersey Abolition Society, William Griffith, took both domestic and international antislavery as a signal that "the public sentiment has been changed," emancipation allowing for blacks to become "*advanced* in the scale of intellectual and social existence." But Griffith also believed it may take up to a century to fully abolish slavery. Gradualism was palatable to early abolitionists because they viewed society on a slow but steady march towards abolition and racial equality. Although they never forgot the potency of white prejudice, what separated early abolitionists from the gradualism associated with the later colonization movement was the former's unequivocal belief in the eradicable nature of these prejudices. For example, after acknowledging white prejudice, the American Convention could, in the next breath, confidently assure the

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<sup>56</sup> PPAS, Series II, Reel XI, Vol. II, 79, HSP, Philadelphia; *Ibid.*, 1-2; NYMS Records, Vol. XI, 95; *Federal Gazette* (Philadelphia), March 23, 1790. Reprinted in *The Maryland Journal* (Baltimore), March 30, 1790, *The New-York Packet*, March 27, 1790 and *Farmer's Journal* (Danbury, CT), April 7, 1790.

abolition societies that their continued exertions toward the general education of black Americans and the antislavery education of white Americans must ultimately "obtain a complete and universal triumph."<sup>57</sup>

Approaching this antislavery idealism from the perspective of an antebellum American society increasingly polarized along racial lines makes the words of the early abolitionists on the subject of white prejudice and slavery's abolition sound quixotic. But by contextualizing their views in the transatlantic Enlightenment that swept late eighteenth century America, the idealism of these abolitionists begins to attain more than a glimmer of plausibility. The Enlightenment brought into disrepute centuries old understandings of stratified relationships between kings and subjects, masters and slaves and men and women. In the eyes of those who subscribed to Enlightenment philosophy, human society had been awakened from eons of superstition and ignorance and was now on a track of progress based on rational reflection and the recognition of the natural rights of men. Ascribing universality to human nature and a positivist belief in the power of societal progress, early antislavery philosophy possessed all the hallmarks of this Enlightenment idealism. Hence, the 1794 American Convention sanguinely asserted that "the progressive and rapid influence of reason and religion are in our favour." One antislavery poem aptly expressed this kind of thinking.

Foul fiends depart! your pow'r is gone,  
In slavery man no more shall dwell  
Behold the day of reason dawn,  
And superstitious clouds dispel!

Could not the same Enlightenment forces that had shattered the time honored divine right of kings and quashed British Imperialism in America, also break apart centuries worth of

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<sup>57</sup> Griffith, *Address of the President of the New Jersey Society, for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery*, 5-7; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 35.

unreflective white prejudices towards blacks? To the American Convention and the abolition societies of the early republic, the answer to this question was, quite understandably from their frame of reference, a resounding yes.<sup>58</sup>

EARLY ABOLITIONISM AIMED to annihilate American bondage through the simultaneous enlightenment of black and white Americans. While gradual abolition permitted ex-slaves to transform themselves into republican citizens, airing their aptitude for virtuous liberty, antislavery activists aimed to convince skeptical white Americans to endorse black freedom and equality. In many ways this was an audacious plan of reform. Undertaking to change the image of a race of people who for hundreds of years had been viewed as little more than private property and proving that emancipated slaves could be anything more than depraved vassals upon gaining their freedom was no easy mission. The progressive philosophy of social reform environmentalism and the winning of emancipation and antislavery laws, both at home and abroad, helped reassure early abolitionists that their optimistic hopes were not fantastical. But the single biggest indicator that their reform vision had merit came from African Americans themselves. As a substantial free black populace emerged in Post-Revolutionary New York and Philadelphia they looked to form virtuous communities that could answer the public's doubts

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<sup>58</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention of Abolition Societies* (1794), 19; *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), June 27, 1794 and *The United States Chronicle* (Providence, RI), July 10, 1794. Early abolitionism was an important incarnation of the Enlightenment in America and should be recognized as such. Enlightenment thought did not ultimately head in an egalitarian direction when it came to gender and race. With race, the Enlightenment's focus on natural science and classification helped give rise to a budding racial science of polygenesis, profiled earlier in this chapter. But, in general, the Enlightenment's stress on the power of reason, natural rights, individual liberty, a disregard for the authority of tradition (i.e. racial slavery and white prejudice) and the centrality of moral sense and empathy to human interaction, were all trademark characteristics of the early abolition movement. For interpretations of Enlightenment thought in late eighteenth and early nineteenth American society see Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) and Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

about abolition. These free blacks planned to demolish white prejudice and the institution of slavery by becoming republicans of color.

CHAPTER IV:  
A WELL GROUNDED HOPE: REPUBLICANS OF COLOR AND THE OPTIMISTIC  
ORIGINS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ABOLITIONISM

In early January of 1806, Peter Williams Jr., Methodist minister of a New York black church and a former pupil of the NYMS' African Free School, welcomed the new year by writing a letter to the American Convention of Abolition Societies beaming with grand expectations for the future of his fellow black Americans. Though persons of African descent had suffered for generations the "abject and forlorn condition" of slavery, Williams Jr. now believed history was witnessing "the African race emerging from complicated misery, to the full enjoyments of civilized life." Williams Jr. praised the "indefatigable zeal" of the abolition societies which, he explained, had made the freedom and equality of persons of color possible. The black minister understood the program of African American education and uplift advocated by antislavery activists as resulting in the "gradual discardment of the illiberal opinions entertained against part of the human family" held by the majority of white Americans. Just over the horizon lay a promised land in which America would eliminate "all the distinctions between the inalienable rights of black men, and white," Williams Jr. boldly predicted.<sup>1</sup>

From the vantage point of free black antislavery activists in the early national North, the period of African American advancement that Williams Jr. described, and that he himself embodied, was no myth. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed the vast expansion of the free black population in the urban centers of Philadelphia and New York, the rapid ascent of African American community and institutional development, and the emergence of an economically successful and politically engaged black leadership group in the Mid-Atlantic

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<sup>1</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1806), 35-37.

region. From this wellspring of African American betterment emerged a vision of antislavery reform based on an optimistic belief in black civic progress. To the bedrock contention of slavery's defenders that freed slaves were unsuited for freedom and posed a dire threat to the American body politic, early national black activists responded by cultivating a community of "republicans of color." The virtuous conduct, moral behavior, and religious and educational attainments of republicans of color would affirm the ability of blacks to exercise their freedom responsibly and pave the way for the total abolition of slavery in America.

When free black community leaders such as Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and James Forten in Philadelphia and Peter Williams Jr., Henry Sipkins, and William Hamilton in New York, set out to persuade the white public of the capacity of blacks for republican virtue, they did so from a profound sense of their own remarkable rise to republican respectability. The white-led Pennsylvania Abolition Society and New York Manumission Society shared a belief in black civil incorporation as central to antislavery agitation and worked with free black activists and institutions. This cross-racial abolitionist alliance furthered African American leaders' hopeful commitment to Post-Revolutionary republican values. They sought civic inclusion in a republic to which, during the early national era, these black activists were unswervingly committed.

THE REVOLUTIONARY AND early national eras brought sweeping changes to the status of slaves and free blacks in the Mid-Atlantic. State legislatures passed gradual emancipation acts and liberalized manumission standards, while new laws recognized the rights of free African Americans and in some cases slaves as well. It all began with Pennsylvania's 1780 abolition law. It annulled the 1725 slave codes, but it did more than that. The first section of the bill denounced racial prejudice in a way that would have been unthinkable only a generation earlier. By

throwing off "those narrow prejudices and partialities we have imbibed," the state legislature considered it "a peculiar blessing granted to us" to end "the sorrows of those who have lived in undeserved bondage." Among the act's clauses, white and black, slave or free, were now to be tried "in like manner" before the same courts of law. The act contained loopholes that would arouse the activism of white and black abolitionists in the years to come. Nevertheless, it set the tone for a striking reversal of fortune for many of the region's African Americans.<sup>2</sup>

The Revolutionary fervor emanating from Pennsylvania spread throughout the Mid-Atlantic states. The New Jersey legislature insisted that it was "desirous of extending the blessings of liberty" to the state's slaves. In 1788 that body enacted legislation giving blacks equal justice before the law and, in anticipation of the abolition of slavery, requiring that all masters teach slaves under the age of twenty-one how to read. New York's Gradual Abolition Act of 1799 included no mention of the civic exclusion of African Americans, causing one free black to conclude that the state had "made the same provisions for the security of our rights as for the rights of others." For those still in bondage, New York granted its slaves the right to marry and own and transfer property in 1809. Even in Delaware, where the state's former tobacco economy and its close proximity to the Upper South made difficult the adoption of an abolition bill, the state legislature lifted the bond requirements for private manumissions and passed laws prohibiting the sale of slaves out of state. A new age free from slavery and racial inequality seemed to be dawning, and slaves and free blacks from New York to Delaware, undoubtedly took notice.<sup>3</sup>

Thoroughgoing changes in the slave codes were matched by the explosive growth of the free black population in the region. The aggregate number of freepersons more than doubled

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<sup>2</sup>*An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* in Bruns, *Am I Not a Man and a Brother*, 446-448.

<sup>3</sup>Wright, "New Jersey Laws and the Negro," 175; "A Citizen of Color," *New York Evening Post*, November 1, 1814; McManus, *A History of Slavery in New York*, 178; Essah, *A House Divided*, 40-41

between 1790 and 1800, going from just under 18,000 in 1790 to almost 38,000 in 1810. The free black population nearly doubled again in the next decade reaching a total of 68,804. By 1820 three-fourths of Mid-Atlantic blacks were free, whereas only thirty years earlier six in ten blacks had been held in chattel bondage. However gradual or compromised this liberty may have been, the position of a majority of African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic states had shifted from slavery to freedom in a relatively short period of time.<sup>4</sup>

TABLE 1.1

Black Population in the Mid-Atlantic, Free and Enslaved, 1790-1820<sup>5</sup>

	New York		New Jersey		Pennsylvania		Delaware	
	Free	Enslaved	Free	Enslaved	Free	Enslaved	Free	Enslaved
<u>1790</u>	4,682	21,193	2,762	11,423	6,531	3,707	3,899	8,887
<u>1800</u>	10,374	20,613	4,402	12,422	14,564	1,796	8,286	6,153
<u>1810</u>	25,333	15,017	7,843	10,851	22,492	795	13,136	4,117
<u>1820</u>	29,279	10,088	12,460	7,557	30,202	211	12,968	4,509

Nowhere was this demographic earthquake more evident than in New York City and Philadelphia. On the eve of the American Revolution only 300 free African Americans inhabited these two cities. By 1810 that number stood at 18,651. This increase was especially pronounced during the early national era. Whereas eight in ten blacks in New York and Philadelphia were enslaved in 1790, nine in ten African Americans were free by 1810. Between 1800 and 1810 alone the free black population of New York increased by 132%, going from 3,499 to 8,137.

<sup>4</sup> In the Upper South, the only other region with comparable numbers of blacks emancipated in the early national era, no more than 37% of African Americans in Maryland and less than 9% of African Americans in Virginia were free in this period.

<sup>5</sup> Census data derived from the University of Virginia Historical Census Browser. Retrieved September 24, 2010 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

Philadelphia's biggest growth in its free black inhabitants took place from 1790-1800 when the population more than tripled. By 1820 the city of brotherly love had the largest number of free blacks in the urban North, with a total of 11,884. This astronomical rate of growth is particularly notable when compared to other northern cities. For instance, from 1800-1820, Boston's free black population grew by only 552, bringing the total to 1,726 persons.<sup>6</sup>

TABLE 1.2

Black Population in New York City and Philadelphia, Free and Enslaved, 1790-1820<sup>7</sup>

	New York City		Philadelphia		
	Free	Enslaved	Free	Enslaved	
<u>1790</u>	1,119	2,373	<u>1790</u>	2,099	373
<u>1800</u>	3,499	2,868	<u>1800</u>	6,795	85
<u>1810</u>	8,137	1,686	<u>1810</u>	10,514	8
<u>1820</u>	10,368	518	<u>1820</u>	11,884	7

Free African Americans flocked to New York City and Philadelphia during the Post-Revolutionary years for several reasons. Both of these cities' growth as bustling ports with sprawling urban centers offered ample employment and cultural opportunities for free blacks when compared to outlying areas. Urban areas imparted a type of anonymity and autonomy sorely lacking for African Americans living in rural communities. Also vital, marine and merchant work, which attracted many free black men, flourished in the transatlantic commercial economies of Post-Revolutionary New York City and Philadelphia. Once free blacks began

<sup>6</sup> Gary B. Nash, "Forging Freedom: The Emancipation Experience in the Northern Seaport Cities, 1775-1820," in Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman, *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Census data derived from the University of Virginia Historical Census Browser. Retrieved September 30, 2010 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

establishing churches, schools and other community institutions, the reputation of these two cities as incubators for free black community development spread far and wide. All of these factors resulted in heavy African American migration into New York City and Philadelphia, where, throughout the early national era, over a quarter of the Mid-Atlantic's free blacks resided.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike in New England, where by 1810 only 418 blacks were enslaved, the Mid-Atlantic states contained the largest percentage of both enslaved and free blacks in the North, ranging from 90-99% of the North's slaves and 60-75% of its free black population from 1790-1820. Additionally, much of the free black in-migration to New York and Pennsylvania came from outside those states. The growth of the free black population in New York City far outpaced the rate of emancipation among the state's slaves. In Pennsylvania, where slaveholding had never been as widespread as New York, Philadelphia was a magnet for newly freed blacks and runaway slaves of the Upper South thanks to its reputation as a beacon of liberty for the nation's African Americans. Thus those of African descent knew well the joys of liberty at the same time as they remained familiar with the chains of bondage. To be black in the Mid-Atlantic did not necessarily mean to be free and to be free meant maintaining an acute sense that the battle to end slavery had just begun. The reality of slavery and freedom side by side would have a lasting influence over black activists in New York City and Philadelphia throughout the early national era.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of free black community development in Post-Revolutionary and early national New York City and Philadelphia see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 100-172; White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 150-184; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 72-95 and Hodges, *Root and Branch*, 187-227.

<sup>9</sup> Black migration from Saint Domingue was also rather sizeable in this period. As they fled their war torn island, French masters took their slaves with them to American seaports. Not an inconsiderable number of these slaveholders, and their bondspersons, settled in New York City and Philadelphia.

As thousands of African Americans made the transition from chattel to freemen, they looked to position their liberty on sound financial footing. Limited to work as domestics and unskilled laborers, many struggled to meet this goal. Part of the problem was the gradual nature of northern emancipation. Over thirty percent of New York City's free blacks in 1810 lived in white households in the affluent city wards as domestic servants. For this assemblage of domestics, freedom did not add up to independence. Others lacked skills denied them in bondage and were forced to find work that was both low-paying and transitory. These freepersons toiled as bootblacks, sweepers, chimney sweeps, gravediggers, and loaders of ships, among an assortment of undesirable occupations. Consequently, even though they were no longer enslaved, a numerical majority of emancipated bondspersons, grouped at the bottom of New York City's and Philadelphia's economy, found themselves marginalized both socially and economically.<sup>10</sup>

But this sobering picture of black emancipation tells only half the tale. For a considerable number of African Americans in the urban Mid-Atlantic, freedom was followed by economic progress and personal empowerment. By 1816 about 20% of Philadelphia's free blacks established themselves in proprietary, professional or artisan employment and 11% ran their own businesses. Skilled African American workers ran the gamut from carpenters, cabinetmakers, shoemakers, tailors, silversmiths, hatters, jewelers, butchers and bakers, while proprietary professions included carting, food catering, hairdressing and shop keeping. Some industrious free blacks saved money and bought real estate, an act that brought them from being claimed as property in slavery to owning property in freedom. As many as one in three of New York City's free black male heads of household were artisans, a profession lionized in the early national era as the bulwark of an independent citizenry. In New York and Philadelphia, many African

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<sup>10</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 156-157; Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 144-146.

Americans earned their livelihood from the sea as mariners. All of these economically self-sufficient free blacks reached a degree of autonomy unimaginable in slavery.<sup>11</sup>

The greatest measure of African American socioeconomic progress in this period is the number of free blacks who established independent households. American republicanism was supposed to be built on the backs of independent male freeholders. Many free black men from amongst the burgeoning population of heads of household must have met this criterion for inclusion in the young republic. In New York City, a substantial number of African American males, 946, were counted as heads of household in the 1810 census. The proportion of free black male heads of household expanded by almost twofold between 1800 and 1810 as former bondspersons gained their freedom and established an independent existence. Philadelphia's total number of free black men heading their own homes went from 369 in 1800 to 1,188 in 1820. From this group an emerging middle class of African Americans would spearhead the black abolitionist drive and, along with white antislavery societies, attempt to raise the black underclass to their level of economic success and republican virtue. It was these exceptional free African Americans who founded independent churches, mutual relief societies, and reform and educational organizations as they waged a concerted antislavery campaign. And it was these men who would cling so tenaciously to the mores of republican ideology in their quest to see American Revolutionary ideals through to their logical conclusion.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 148-153; White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 158-161. As White notes, free black skilled workers in New York City greatly outnumbered those in Philadelphia due to the widespread use of the enslaved as artisans in New York City's labor force in the years leading up to emancipation.

<sup>12</sup> Totals on free black male heads of household in New York City were compiled from the genealogical reference book by Alice Eiholtz and James M. Rose, *Free Black Heads of Households in the New York State Federal Census, 1790-1830* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research Company, 1981). This collection lists alphabetically all free black heads of household in the New York State census from 1790-1830. To construct the table, I picked out the males according to their given names. Prior to the census of 1820, New York state census takers did not record the gender of the state's free black persons, listing them under the category, "other free persons." The Philadelphia numbers come from Tom W. Smith, "The Dawn of the Urban Industrial Age: The Social Structure of Philadelphia, 1790-1830" (Ph.D. diss.,

TABLE 1.3

Free Black Male Heads of Household in New York City and Philadelphia, 1800-1820

	New York City	Philadelphia
<u>1800</u>	548	369
<u>1810</u>	946	742
<u>1820</u>	944	1,188

NORTHERN EMANCIPATION MADE possible the meteoric rise of a set of accomplished individuals. Their stories manifest the sense of progress and optimism felt by African American community leaders in Philadelphia and New York. They also capture many of the major influences of black antislavery activism in the early national era. One of these leaders was Richard Allen. Born into slavery in Philadelphia in 1760, Allen early experienced the disempowering effects of being classified as chattel. As a child he, along with his parents and four siblings, were sold south to Delaware. Here Allen took on the tasks of a typical Delaware bondsman, laboring in the fields and tending to the mixed agricultural products of his new owner, Stokley Sturgis. To cover debts, Sturgis sold Allen's mother and three of his brothers and sisters. Only Allen and two of his siblings remained on Sturgis' plantation. To this point nothing distinguished Allen's lot in slavery from that of thousands of his fellow bondspersons.<sup>13</sup>

Then came Allen's awakening. As he put it, "I cried unto him...and my chains flew off, and glory to God, I cried. My soul was filled. I cried, enough for me--the Saviour died." Allen

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University of Chicago, 1980), 178. Black women headed between 10% 20% of the total number of free blacks households in Philadelphia and New York City from 1790-1820.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Reverend Richard Allen* (Philadelphia: Martin and Boden, 1833), 5-6; Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, The A.M.E. Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 35. Newman's recent biography is the most complete secondary account of Allen's life available. It is not completely clear whether Allen was born in Philadelphia or Kent County Delaware, as his first owner, Benjamin Chew, had residences in both locations. In his autobiography Allen states only that he was born "a slave to Benjamin Chew of Philadelphia." See Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 29-30.

was not alone in finding God. In the Post-Revolutionary era protestant religiosity proliferated throughout the American landscape. The evangelical brand of Christianity taking shape in the 1780s resonated deeply with Allen and other black Americans. Promoting spiritual access to all and utilizing emotive appeals and forms of worship, Methodism, to which Allen and a growing number of black Americans would claim allegiance, was particularly effective in garnering black converts. Methodist itinerant preachers condemned slavery and reached out to slaves such as Allen like no other American Christians before them. Unlike earlier conversion attempts by the Anglican clergy, which aimed to make slaves more docile and obedient by accepting worldly bondage for an eventual reward in the afterlife, the Methodist's message of spiritual equality and their endorsement of biracial worship inspired persons of color.<sup>14</sup>

Richard Allen was one of those inspired. Soon after his conversion, Allen and his older brother began attending Methodist meetings not far from their owner's home. Sturgis, apparently contrite for not actively worshipping God, told Allen that while he was "not good myself," he was pleased to watch Allen and his brother "striving yourselves to be good." Soon Sturgis would also be converted. Allen, witnessing how evangelicalism was bringing white and black together in previously unfathomable ways, invited a Methodist preacher to his master's house. Once pledging himself to Methodism, Sturgis judged slavery "to be wrong" and decided that "he could not be satisfied to hold slaves." In 1780, he offered Allen the opportunity to earn his liberty in exchange for \$2000 made in a series of payments over the course of five years. Allen was suddenly on the road to freedom. Three years later he finished paying off his master. When

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Allen, *Gospel Labors*, 5; For the explosive growth of black Christianity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and the particular stamp African Americans put on American evangelicalism see Silvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 118-208; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 102-118; Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 147-149, and Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 39-42.

America officially gained its independence from Britain, so too, at the age of twenty three, did Allen make his own declaration of independence.<sup>15</sup>

After finding freedom Allen began his new life as an itinerant preacher. He travelled the Mid-Atlantic region, starting in Delaware before moving on to New Jersey and then Pennsylvania. Everywhere he went Allen preached the gospel, made converts, and encouraged his audiences to live sober, industrious and moral lives--in other words, to be godly. The most extraordinary element of Allen's early career is the amount of positive interracial experiences he had while serving as a peripatetic missionary. There was the influential apostle Benjamin Abbott, whom Allen referred to as "a friend and a father." There was the "kind and affectionate" Jonathan Bunn of Bennington New Jersey, from whom Allen would later buy the land on which he built the first independent Methodist black church in America. Allen's overwhelmingly white congregation of Radnor, Pennsylvania remarked that Allen was certainly a "Man of God" for they had "never heard such preaching" before. The congregation thanked the preacher by giving him a horse to travel to his next destination. Then there was Bishop Francis Ashbury, who noticed Allen's talents and served as the young black preacher's spiritual mentor. Even though white Methodists moved away from their antislavery stance and biracial beginnings by the early 1800s, Allen's understanding of black uplift and abolitionist reform came first from his belief that white people could be convinced of the humanity of persons of color. After all, Allen himself was living proof of such an assumption.<sup>16</sup>

Allen settled down in Philadelphia where he founded a chimney sweeping business, purchased property and gathered a growing body of black Methodists. It was also in Philadelphia where Allen met another African American on the rise, Absalom Jones. Fourteen years Allen's

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Allen, *Gospel Labors*, 6-7; Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 42-43.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Allen, *Gospel Labors*, 9-12.

senior, Jones was born a slave in Sussex Delaware in 1746. When he was a small boy, his master brought Jones from the fields to wait upon him as a domestic. From an early age Jones yearned to learn. Collecting whatever tips he could from house guests who gave him small change from time to time, Jones purchased a school book and took advantage of "any body that I found able and willing to give me the least instruction." After saving more money Jones next bought a spelling book and a copy of the New Testament. According to Jones, this early interest in education and self-improvement, allowed him to "escape from many evils" stemming from "amusements that took up the leisure hours of my companions." The evils of slavery, however, Jones could not escape. In 1762 he lost his mother, five brothers and a sister to the whims of human bondage, when his master, Benjamin Wynkoop, sold his entire family and took the eighteen year old Absalom to the city of Philadelphia.<sup>17</sup>

Instead of letting personal tragedy handicap him, Jones committed himself even further to a life of individual progress and upward mobility. Four years after arriving in Philadelphia, he got his master's permission to attend a night school where he gained a knowledge of mathematics. In 1770, Jones married a slave and convinced her owner to let him buy her freedom. Taking on extra work whenever he could, Jones also raised money from local Quakers and was able to purchase his wife's liberty. By 1778, still enslaved, Jones bought a house and, aware that it could be seized "as the property of my master," pressed Wynkoop for his freedom. At last, in 1784, his master granted Jones his request.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Sketch of the Rev. Absalom Jones," in William Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church in the United States of America, Now Styled the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1862), 119-120. Douglass a black historian and minister of Philadelphia's St. Thomas African Church published a short autobiographical account of Jones penned sometime before his death in 1818. See also Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 67-68.

<sup>18</sup>"Sketch of the Rev. Absalom Jones," in Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church*, 120-121.

Through hard work and disciplined saving Jones had gone from a subjugated, orphaned slave to a respectable, property-owning freeman in a little over two decades. He chose to work for his former master as a salaried employee and he constructed two additional houses on the land he owned, renting these dwellings out to tenants. Jones believed it his "duty" at all times "to be industrious to improve the little estate that a kind Providence has put in my hands." His life embodied the perfect model of what "industry, frugality, and economy,"--central republican virtues--could yield to Philadelphia's growing free black population. Jones would team up with Richard Allen in religious, reform and antislavery projects, always carrying his first-hand acquaintance with the power of republican principles close at hand.<sup>19</sup>

While Allen and Jones entered the world as slaves, James Forten was born free in Philadelphia in 1766. Forten's grandfather had managed to obtain his liberty at a time when being free and black was an anomaly. Forten's father, Thomas, became a sailmaker, and made enough money to support a family of four. Hoping to improve further the status of the next generation of Fortens, James' parents registered their son in the African School run by the Society of Friends. Here, until the age of nine, Forten learned reading, writing, bookkeeping and mathematics. By 1775, his father dead and the family struggling economically, Forten had to abandon school and get a job as a storekeeper's assistant. A year after leaving his studies, Forten took part in an event that would cement his identification as an American citizen for the rest of his life. On July 8, 1776 the newly minted Declaration of Independence was presented to the public for the first time, and Forten made sure he was there. One can only imagine the sense of excitement the young Forten felt when he heard the words "We hold these truths to be self-

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 121-122.

evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."<sup>20</sup>

In fact, Forten was so "fired with the enthusiasm and feeling" of American patriotism that he signed on to fight for the cause of independence as a member of the privateer ship *Royal Louis* in 1780. After his ship was captured by the English, Forten became a captive of war. He then befriended the son of a decorated English captain and was offered passage to England, along with the exalted patronage of his young companion's father. But Forten's connection to the country of his birth ran too deep to accept this tempting offer. Dubbing himself a "PRISONER FOR THE LIBERTIES OF MY COUNTRY," Forten insisted that he would at no time "prove a traitor to her interests." Following seven months of captivity, he made his way back to Philadelphia. Arriving in the city emaciated and with much of the hair "worn from his head," a result of scurvy, Forten wore the tangible scars of his patriotic service.<sup>21</sup>

Forten's path to prosperity led him to the profession of his father. In 1785 James Forten apprenticed himself to his father's former boss, the sailmaker Robert Bridges. "Neither discriminating nor appreciating a man by the mere color of the skin," Bridges, observing Forten's skills as a craftsman and his good business sense, promoted his protégé to foreman only a year after beginning his apprenticeship. In 1798, Bridges' retired and made the momentous decision to hand over his sailmaking business to Forten. With the essential patronage of "a few staunch friends" in the business community, Forten's sailmaking loft thrived. He hired apprentices and journeymen, bought real estate and became a creditor. But wealth did not make Forten complacent. He remained determined to extend the ideals of freedom and equality that had

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<sup>20</sup> Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 11, 24-25, 31; *The Liberator*, March 11, 1842. Winch's magisterial biography of Forten fleshes out his identification as an American citizen and Forten's complex but steady allegiance to the country of his birth.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Purvis, *Remarks on the Life and Character of James Forten, Delivered at Bethel Church, March 30, 1842* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1842), 3-4; Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 62.

inspired him since his earliest days, to all black Americans. Together with Allen and Jones, Forten completed what might be called the triumvirate of free black Philadelphians in the early republic.<sup>22</sup>

New York City had its share of distinguished free blacks as well. Two of the most illustrious were Peter Williams and his son, Peter Williams Jr. The elder Williams was born a slave in 1749. Under the ownership of the tobacconist James Aymar, Williams learned a skilled trade early on in his life. Swept up by the same religious forces that changed Richard Allen's life, Williams became a Methodist sometime during the 1760s. When the American Revolution arrived in New York, Williams' master, a Loyalist, fled to New Jersey. It was here that Williams, "a decided advocate for American independence," demonstrated his dedication to American sovereignty. After helping a Patriot parson to safety from British capture, Williams was confronted by a Royal officer who commanded the abettor to reveal where he had taken the parson. To the British soldier, who initially threatened Williams with death by drawing his sword and then tempted him with money, Williams stoically replied "I cannot tell."<sup>23</sup>

When his owner left for England following the end of the Revolutionary War, he sold Williams to the John Street Methodist Church in New York City. Acting as a sexton and undertaker for the church, Williams strove to be free. Fortunately for him, the Methodist church, with its opposition to slavery, was receptive to African American liberty. With the aid of some "republican friends" of the Methodist faith, who lent him money, Williams bought his freedom for forty pounds on the very same day as the British evacuated New York City, a coincidence

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<sup>22</sup> Purvis, *Remarks on the Life and Character of James Forten*, 8; Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> Kyle T Bulthuis, "Peter Williams Sr." in *African American National Biography*, ed. Henry Lois Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbottom (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), Vol. 8, 342; Peter Williams Jr., "To the Citizens of New York," *The African Repository*, Vol. 10, 1834, 186-188 in *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis*, ed. Carter Woodson (Washington DC: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926), 630-631.

that, according to his son, brought "double joy to his heart, by freeing him from domestic bondage and his native country from foreign enemies." Williams went on to establish a highly profitable tobacconist business that made him one of the wealthiest African Americans in all of New York. Even after he helped found the city's first independent free black church in 1801, Williams remained in close contact with his white brethren in the John Street Church and acted as a bridge between black and white Methodists.<sup>24</sup>

Peter Williams Jr. was weaned on his father's identity as a patriotic citizen. Born in the midst of war in 1780, Williams Jr. later recalled his father instilling in him "an ardent love for the American government" that "made me feel...that it was my greatest glory to be an American." Lacking an education, Williams Sr. made sure to provide his son with one. He enrolled Williams Jr. in the New York Manumission Society's African Free School and arranged for Thomas Lyell, a Reverend of John Street Church, to give private tutoring lessons to his son. Interestingly, Williams Jr. opted for Episcopalian rather than Methodist worship, attending the Trinity Episcopal Church and eventually being ordained the first black Episcopal minister in New York City.<sup>25</sup>

Where his father steered clear of social activism, Williams Jr. paired his growing knowledge with a commitment to abolitionism and black uplift. The younger Williams believed that making African Americans "intelligent, useful and virtuous members of the community" would lead to a time when all blacks would have "abundant reason to rejoice in the Declaration of American Independence." In the early national era he helped to found black reform

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<sup>24</sup> Bulthuis, "Peter Williams Sr." in *African American National Biography*, Vol. 8, 342-343; Williams Jr., "To the Citizens of New York," in Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro*, 631. On the life of Peter Williams Sr., see also his obituary in the *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), February 21, 1824.

<sup>25</sup> Graham Hodges, "Peter Williams Jr." in *African American National Biography*, Vol. 8, 341; Williams Jr., "To the Citizens of New York," in Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro*, 631.

organizations, delivered antislavery speeches, and wrote editorials on behalf of New York's African Americans in the city's press. Like his father, who was admired by black and white Methodists, Williams Jr. was respected by both white and black abolitionists and served as a leading spokesperson for the fledgling free black community of New York City. Joining Williams Jr. in the free black leadership vanguard were William Hamilton, a house carpenter and frequent orator, Henry Sipkins, the son of the founder of New York's second black Methodist Church, William Miller, a Methodist Reverend, and the black educator John Teasman, among others. Patriotic, respectable, successful, confident, and optimistic about what was to come; all of these qualities describe the mindset of the men who began setting up communities of color in the American republic during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Building on their new found agency, New York City and Philadelphia free blacks cultivated community associations that acted as institutional strongholds for the rising generation. Within these cultural centers an ideology of antislavery reform and black uplift started to take shape.<sup>26</sup>

Free blacks carved out their own churches. In Philadelphia, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and others were forced from their seats by white Methodists towards the end of service one Sunday in 1792. Allen had always had the ambition to start an independent black church and the seating controversy gave him and Jones the support from African Americans that they needed. With the assistance of the Revolutionary figure and antislavery reformer, Benjamin Rush, whose unflagging assistance Allen thought "should never be forgotten among us," enough money was raised to construct an exclusively black house of worship by 1794, creating the St. Thomas African Episcopal Church in which Absalom Jones was chosen as pastor. That same year, Allen, a devout Methodist, founded the Bethel Church for black Methodists. In New York, Peter

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 631; On the lives of Henry Sipkins and John Teasman see *The Colored American* (New York), November 7 and 24, 1838 for a eulogy of Sipkins and Swann, "John Teasman" for what little is known about Teasman's educational career.

Williams, William Hamilton and William Miller won recognition of a separate church in 1796 and in 1801 black Methodists finished constructing the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Twelve years later William Miller and Thomas Sipkins, Henry Sipkins' father, were among a number of black Methodists who splintered off from Zion to establish the Ashbury Methodist Episcopal Church. All four of these churches were key sites for African American community development throughout the early national period.<sup>27</sup>

To go along with churches free blacks also established mutual aid societies that supplied much needed support for a community of persons recently liberated from slavery. Two of the earliest and most extensive of the aid societies were the Free African Society (FAS) of Philadelphia and the New York African Society for Mutual Relief (NYASMR). The FAS founded in 1787, primarily by Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, and the NYASMR formed in 1808 and whose charter members included Peter Williams Jr., Henry Sipkins and William Hamilton, had benevolent and moral purposes: benevolent in that they created communal funds that members could draw from in times of distress and moral in that they demanded a strict code of behavior from their members. Additional mutual relief societies--The Friendly Society of the St. Thomas African Church (1796), the Wilberforce Philanthropic Society (1809), and The African Marine Fund (1810)--followed the model of the FAS and NYASMR.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Allen, *Gospel Labors*, 16; Christopher Rush, *A Short Account of the Rise and Progress of the African A.M.E. Church in America* (New York: J.J. Zullie, 1866); Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 110-121. Chroniclers of African American Christianity used to interpret the seating incident in Philadelphia as the catalyst for the independent black church movement there. It has now been shown, however, that the seating controversy took place five years after Allen, and three years after Jones, had first tried to raise funds for a freestanding black church. There is little doubt that the 1793 seating incident galvanized support among black Philadelphians for the black church movement, but it was not white racism that originally convinced Allen and Jones of the need to establish an independent church for African Americans. Rather it was their desire to create a house of worship that could express the views and address the concerns of the budding free black community of Philadelphia. And it was the financial support of a handful of white Philadelphians that ultimately made the black church movement a successful one.

<sup>28</sup> Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church*, 15-46; Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 5-7; Daniel Perlman, "Organizations of the Free Negro in New York City, 1800-1860," *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (July, 1971), 181-184; *Constitution and Rules to be Observed and Kept By The Friendly Society of St. Thomas African Church* in Dorothy Porter, *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837* (Boston: Beacon press, 1971), 28-32;

The mutual aid societies were the bastion of a relatively small but highly influential set of free blacks who excluded from membership many freepersons. Part of this exclusiveness was a result of the monetary imperatives necessary for keeping up a reliable communal fund. But it was also due to the free black leadership's goal of upholding the behavioral standards of Christian morality and republican respectability among African Americans of the urban Mid-Atlantic. The FAS only admitted persons of color who lived "an orderly and sober life" while the NYASMR, "stimulated by the desire of improving our condition" refused to countenance anyone who was "fond of spending his time in brothels, in gambling, or in tippling." Although the societies wanted to improve the quality of life for the wider community of African Americans, they promoted unity, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging for those blacks who had the time, money, and values required to become members.<sup>29</sup>

THE FREE BLACKS who launched independent churches and mutual aid societies were not solely concerned with creating and sustaining a community. They had bigger aspirations. From their citadels of communal cohesion, African Americans built a program of antislavery reform premised on their belief that an evolving cadre of black civic actors could play a preeminent role in abolishing American slavery. An unwavering commitment to American republicanism drove New York City and Philadelphia free black antislavery activists. For these reformers, resting

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*Constitution of the African Marine Fund, For the Relief of The Distressed Orphans, and Poor Members of this Fund* in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 42-44; In their rules, guidelines, and overall shape, the free black societies mirrored the plethora of white social improvement societies that popped up in this same period. The first President of the NYASMR cast that society as one of many being formed at that time when he noted that "the spirit of Liberty, improvement, and philanthropy pervades the people" of the United States and that "societies for the purpose of spreading useful knowledge, diffusing virtuous principles" were "sprouting up everywhere." William Hamilton, *An Address to the African Society, For Mutual Relief, Delivered in the Universalist Church, January 2, 1809* in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 39. For an analysis of the New York societies that place them in African rather than American cultural origins see Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

<sup>29</sup> "Preamble of the Free African Society," in Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church*, 15; *The Constitution of the New York African Society, For Mutual Relief* (New York, 1808) 3, 7.

their abolitionist activism on republican ideology made complete sense given that the Revolution enabled black liberty and free African American community development in the first place.<sup>30</sup>

African American abolitionists of the early national urban Mid-Atlantic looked to the ideals of the republic in which they lived for their brethren's deliverance from the house of bondage. They believed that the Revolution's promises of freedom and equality were embedded in American republicanism, forming the basis of the new nation's identity and its governing creed. In a speech observing the abolition of the international slave trade in 1808, Peter Williams Jr. called the Revolution that "illustrious moment" when a "sacred temple of liberty" was erected according to the precepts that "all men are created equal." For Williams Jr., it was in the wake of American Independence that the "angel of humanity" successfully sought to enter the "bleeding African" into the civil fold, by claiming the "inherent rights of man" for people of all colors. John Teasman, selected in 1811 to deliver the keynote speech on the two year anniversary of the NYASMR's state charter, depicted the African Society's incorporation as indicative of a larger trend by New York State towards the admission of black liberty and citizenship. The state government had "arose, decreed, and stretched forth its arm for the destruction of slavery in itself." Then, following the passage of a gradual emancipation law it "took you [free blacks] into social citizenship, gave you a charter, placed you on a level with other civil societies of the state, and rendered you a body politic," announced Teasman.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> For historians who have increasingly come to interpret the Post-Revolutionary era as one of halting African American freedom and limited progress based on a white consensus of racial exclusion, the locus for black abolitionism must be found elsewhere--in a nascent black nationalism, in a "radical counternarrative to the history of revolutionary republicanism" or in a "black print counterpublic." See Alexander, *African or American?*; Manisha Sinha, "'To Cast Just Obliquy' on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Volume LXIV, No. 1 (January 2007), 149-160 and Joanna Brooks, "The Early American Public Sphere and The Emergence of a Black Counterpublic," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 1 (January, 2005), 67-93.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Williams Jr. *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered in The African Church, in the City of New-York, January 1, 1808* (New York: Samuel Wood, 1808), 20-21; John Teasman, *An Address Delivered in the in*

Five years later, in another celebration of the slave trade's abolition by New York City blacks, George Lawrence, a member of the NYASMR, pointed out to his audience that the American nation had been "founded on the principles of liberty and equality." Lawrence was "confident" that "the land in which we live" operating in accordance with these principles "gives us the opportunity rapidly to advance the prosperity of liberty." Richard Allen, in his eulogy of George Washington (whom Americans saw as the embodiment of virtuous republicanism) exclaimed that the nation's progenitor was a "sympathizing friend and tender father" to America's blacks and one who "believed we had a right to liberty." Allen marked Washington's passing as an event in which Philadelphia's people of color "participate in common with whites" and pressed his congregation to "shew to the world that you hold dear the name of George Washington." The Mid-Atlantic's black abolitionists viewed the creation of the United States and the spread of African American emancipation and racial uplift a result of simultaneous forces indelibly linked by the principles of freedom and equality.<sup>32</sup>

American republicanism emphasized not only the liberties but also the duties incumbent upon members of the body politic. Black abolitionists tapped into American republicanism's preoccupation with a virtuous citizenry and invoked it as the proving ground for African American freedom. Free black community leaders and antislavery activists in New York City and Philadelphia used public gatherings to disseminate among their black brethren republican values. Henry Sipkins called for "an upright and steady deportment" among the emancipated

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*the African Episcopal Church on the, 25th of March, Being the First Anniversary of its Incorporation* (New York: J. Low, 1811), 6.

<sup>32</sup> George Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered on the First Day of January, 1813, in the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Hardcastle and Van Pelt, 1813), 11; Richard Allen, "Eulogy of George Washington," *The Philadelphia Gazette*, December 31, 1799.

while Peter Williams Jr. counseled freepersons to show "a strict obedience and respect to the laws of the land."<sup>33</sup>

To ensure black civil cultivation, Henry Johnson, a black freeholder of New York City, warned his "fellow-citizens" to be vigilant against immoral and depraved behavior, insisting that there were no "greater advocates" for African American freedom than free blacks themselves. Richard Allen wanted persons of color to adopt the entreaty of George Washington's farewell address to "love your country--to obey its laws." Absalom Jones advocated both republican simplicity and austerity calling for African Americans to be "sober-minded...temperate in our meats and drinks, frugal in our apparel and in the furniture of our houses" and "industrious in our occupations," so as to "furnish no cause of regret" among white Americans about the merits of black freedom. To secure the progressive march of emancipation, black abolitionists were sculpting a community of republicans of color.<sup>34</sup>

In fashioning themselves model republicans, black abolitionists went beyond adopting the behavioral precepts of the American polity. They also asserted their capacity for virtuous citizenship through active political engagement. In New York, free black politics flourished. Many black New Yorkers supported the Federalists. In 1809, Joseph Sidney, a leading black Federalist, announced that emancipation "has broken down the wall of separation that had previously distinguished our rights and duties from those of the white inhabitants." This "assimilated" state of black rights, according to Sidney, carried with it the "indispensable *duty*" of suffrage. Noting wryly that the "great idol of democracy" Thomas Jefferson and his fellow

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<sup>33</sup> Henry Sipkins, *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; Delivered in the African Church, in the City of New-York, January 2, 1809* (New York: John C. Totten, 1809), 17; Williams, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Henry Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered in the African Church in New-York, January 1, 1810* (New York: John C. Totten, 1810) 13-14; Allen, "Eulogy of George Washington," *The Philadelphia Gazette*, December 31, 1799; Absalom Jones, *A Thanksgiving Sermon, Preached January 1, 1808, in St. Thomas's, or the African Episcopal, Church, Philadelphia: On Account of The Abolition of the African Slave Trade, on That Day, by the Congress Of The United States* (Philadelphia: Fry and Kammerer, 1808), 17.

Virginian Republicans were the same people who held "our African brethren" in a state of slavery, Sidney argued that the choice for black electors among the Republicans and Federalists was one between "your enemies and your friends" and between "slavery and freedom."<sup>35</sup>

Other black New Yorkers cast their lot with the Jeffersonian Republicans. In their resolutions supporting Republican candidates, African American electors drew on the rhetorical idioms of the party's figurehead, Thomas Jefferson. An 1813 meeting of the "Citizens of Colour" intoned that "Republican principles are favorable to the equal rights of mankind, and to the preservation of Life, Liberty and Property." The following spring another meeting of black Republicans set forth "That all men are by nature created equal." On whichever side of the partisan aisle they stood, free black electors devoted themselves to ending slavery and contributing to the racial equality of African Americans.<sup>36</sup>

While New York City's black activists used party politics to display the virtuous character of free persons of color and agitate against slavery, Philadelphia's African American abolitionists turned to the right of petitioning. With the federal capital located in Philadelphia, free black activists sent three antislavery petitions to the House of Representatives between 1797 and 1800. Absalom Jones' and James Forten's 1799 petition to Congress called for the federal government to crack down on the kidnapping and re-enslavement of Northern free blacks into bondage in the South, enforce restrictions on American involvement in the foreign slave trade,

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<sup>35</sup> Joseph Sidney, *An Oration Commemorative of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the United States; Delivered Before the Wilberforce Philanthropic Association of the City of New-York, on the Second of January, 1809* (New York: J. Seymour, 1809), 8-9, 14. For free black New York Federalist electoral meetings see the *Spirit of '76*, April 25, 1809; *New York Herald*, April 30, 1808; *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), November 9, 1813; *New-York Evening Post*, November 8, 1813; *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), November 12, 1813 and the *New-York Evening Post*, November 11, 1813.

<sup>36</sup>*Mercantile Advertiser* (New York), November 10, 1813; *The Columbian* (New York), April 26, 1814. See *The Columbian* (New York), April 26, 1813; *Mercantile Advertiser* (New York), November 10, 1813; *The Columbian* (New York), November 12, 1814, April 25, 1814, April 26, 1814, April 11, 1816; *The National Advocate* (New York), April 22, 1816; *The Columbian* (New York), April 16, 1816, April 24, 1816, and April 18, 1816 for additional published reports of free black Republican political meetings.

and review the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. Thankful for the "benefits granted to us in the enjoyment of our natural right to liberty, and the protection of our persons and property," Jones and Forten remained painfully aware of "the condition of our afflicted brethren."<sup>37</sup>

Insisting that all African Americans were the "objects of your representation...in common with ourselves, and every other class of citizens" as set out in the preamble to the Federal Constitution, "We the people," Jones and Forten requested that Congress do everything in their power to "prepare the way for the oppressed to go free." Black Philadelphians also petitioned their state legislature in opposition to a series of proposed anti-free black laws during the early nineteenth century. Fearing that "the prejudices which they [the petitioners] deplored will be increased and perpetuated against persons of their colour" by one such bill, an 1806 petition told the Pennsylvania Assembly that by voting down the legislation it would "evinced an attachment to individual freedom, and the principles of the Constitution." By grounding their antislavery crusade on irrefutable evidence that African Americans were knowledgeable and engaged citizens, free black activists furthered the construction of a community of republicans of color.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> "The Petition of the People of Colour, free men, within the City and Suburbs of Philadelphia" in John Parrish, *Remarks on the Slavery of the Black People; Addressed to the Citizens of the United States, Particularly to Those Who Are in Legislative or Executive Stations in the General or State Governments; And Also to Such Individuals As Hold Them in Bondage* (Philadelphia: Kimber, Conrad, & Co., 1806), 49. In 1797 Absalom Jones, writing for four free black migrants who had been manumitted in North Carolina but were subject to kidnapping following that state's passage of laws that encouraged the reenslavement of newly emancipated African Americans, submitted an antislavery petition remonstrating against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. See *Annals of Congress*, Vol. 6 (Washington DC, 1849), 2015-2018. The petition was presented to the House of Representatives by a former member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Nicholas Waln. Absalom Jones gathered black signatures for a third petition effort and submitted an antislavery memorial to the Congress in 1800 directly imploring President elect Jefferson to work towards abolishing slavery and ending the slave trade. See the Cox-Parrish-Wharton Collection, Vol. II, 3, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

<sup>38</sup> Parrish, *Remarks on the Slavery of the Black People*, 49-50; *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), February 17, 1806. Free African American Philadelphians submitted at least two additional petitions to the state legislature opposing anti-black laws in the early national period. See *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1806-1807* (Lancaster, PA: William & Robert Dickson, 1807), 331; *Journal of the of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1806-1807* (Lancaster, PA: William & Robert Dickson, 1807), 652; *Journal of the of the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1812-1813* (Lancaster, PA: William & Robert Dickson, 1813), 588.

To fortify a public presence of virtuous citizenship, Richard Allen and Absalom Jones embarked on a mission to exemplify their community's republican rectitude. When a Yellow Fever epidemic gripped Philadelphia during the fall of 1793, Allen and Jones answered the call of Doctor Benjamin Rush, who, concluding that blacks were immune to the dreaded disease, asked that African Americans come to the aid of afflicted whites. The two black leaders gathered together volunteers of color who served as nurses, gravediggers, and medical attendants for hundreds of infected whites. Unfortunately, not only were African Americans just as prone to contracting Yellow Fever as white Americans, but Matthew Carey, a one-time antislavery publisher, accused black nurses of taking advantage of the situation by charging exorbitant prices for their services and pilfering from white homes. In a popular pamphlet he printed after the fever had subsided, Carey did praise the conduct of certain African American volunteers, including Jones and Allen, but fingered "the vilest" of the city's blacks as guilty of heinous crimes.<sup>39</sup>

Allen and Jones told a different story. At first glance it seems strange that these two men, whom Carey singled out for applause, would pen a tract opposing Carey's depiction of events. However, fearing that Carey's pamphlet would "prejudice the minds of the people in general against us" by portraying all blacks as dishonorable and vice-ridden, Allen and Jones felt "justice to our colour" called for the true story to be told. Although they acknowledged that a handful of blacks had probably acted injudiciously, the authors listed several examples of republican self-sacrifice by African American volunteers such as Ceasar Cranchal. When he offered to nurse sickly whites, Cranchal vowed to all he assisted that "I will not take your money, I will not sell

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<sup>39</sup> Matthew Carey, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever Which Prevailed in Philadelphia in the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: Matthew Carrey, 1793); Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, During the Late Awful Calamity in Philadelphia, in the Year 1793: And a Refutation of Some Censures, Thrown Upon Them in Some Late Publications* (Philadelphia: William E. Woodward, 1794), 12-13.

my life for money.'" Overall, "our services were the production of real sensibility" wrote Allen and Jones, and they assured the public that "we sought not fee nor reward." The authors closed their pamphlet by appealing to all free African Americans to keep in mind that "much depends upon us for the help of our colour." Because the "enemies of freedom plead" black intemperance "as a reason we ought not to be free," Allen and Jones implored those not enslaved to "consider the obligations we lay under, to help forward the cause of freedom."<sup>40</sup>

Allen and Jones had good reason to urge their fellow blacks to closely monitor their conduct in freedom. African American abolitionists framed their antislavery in response to the proslavery argument that black inferiority justified racial enslavement. Placed on the ideological defensive during the Post-Revolutionary years, slavery's apologists questioned the fitness of black people for freedom in a republic ostensibly based on universal liberty. Black abolitionists shot back that persons of color were indeed capable of an ordered, virtuous liberty.

One telling example of this discursive interplay can be found in a 1790 New York City newspaper debate. Writing in reference to antislavery petitions submitted to the First Federal Congress, a proslavery writer under the nom de plume *Rusticus* began a six part set of essays by conceding that slavery contradicted the fundamental principles of a free and enlightened society. For *Rusticus*, however, the problem of slavery lay not in its incompatibility with the American republic but with the impossibility of persons of color being anything other than slaves. "As plainly as the ox is born to plough the ground," *Rusticus* wrote, "the wool hairy negro by innate inferiorities...is the slave of other nations." While he acknowledged that chattel "are a contradiction to the laws of a free government" *Rusticus* mocked the idea of turning a "sheep hairy African negro" into "a spirited noble, and generous American freeman!" If black slaves were set free into white society, the writer predicted they would stain the glory of a virtuous and

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<sup>40</sup> Allen and Jones, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People*, 10, 12, 4, 27.

prosperous America and “the original character of the nation will only stand recorded in the historic page.”<sup>41</sup>

A self-identified black writer *Africanus* responded to *Rusticus* by aiming to debunk the idea of "our inferior nature." The fundamental law of nature as expressed in the Good Book was that "God hath made of one blood all the nations of men who dwell on the face of the earth." Turning to environmentalist explanations for black differences in appearance and civil attainments, *Africanus* refuted that "we are an inferior link in the great chain of creation" and fused white with black and African with American. Using himself as an example of black citizenship, *Africanus* wrote that "the African and the American are one species" and that he was personally "equal to the duties of a spirited, noble, and generous American freeman." Proslavery allegations of the natural inferiority of all those of African descent mandated that black abolitionists respond with assertions of African American aptitude for civic equality.<sup>42</sup>

Well aware of proslavery assertions of black inferiority, African American abolitionists consistently highlighted the need for their compatriots to counter the indictments of slavery's defenders. Joseph Sidney pushed blacks to demonstrate "that sobriety, honesty, and industry are the distinguishing traits of our character." Were persons of color to "unceasingly" guide their actions by "pure and upright conduct" it would "effectually put to silence every cavil which may be offered against African emancipation, and must eventually convert our enemies into friends." Henry Johnson challenged the emancipated to "improve and prove ourselves worthy of all the privileges" of liberty. Through the adoption of the "habits of industry, frugality, and honesty" freepersons could put themselves on "the sure road to happiness, respectability and prosperity."

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<sup>41</sup> "Letter No. I" *Gazette of the United States* (New York), February 20, 1790; "Letter No. III," *Ibid.*, February 27, 1790; "Letter No. IV," *Ibid.*, March 3, 1790; "Letter No. I" *Ibid.*, February 20, 1790.

<sup>42</sup> *Gazette of the United States* (New York), March 3, 1790.

George Lawrence believed blacks should play their part in bringing about abolition by "abounding in good works, and causing our examples to shine forth as the sun at noon day." This course of action would "melt" the "callous hearts" of slavery's defenders "and render sinewless the arm of sore oppression." By becoming republicans of color free blacks strove to "form an invulnerable bulwark against the shafts of malice," at once raising their station in freedom and exploding the fallacious accusations of slavery's proponents.<sup>43</sup>

Even as they railed against those who discounted the ability of the emancipated to exercise their liberty responsibly, black abolitionists granted that slavery made many bondspersons less than desirable candidates for membership in civil society. But the source of the problem was slavery, not race. One black activist commented that it was perfectly understandable for slaves, the mere "property of others" to disregard the "propriety of conduct, habits of industry, or precepts of morality." Slavery represented a "hopeless situation" where the enslaved were "lost in a sense of wretchedness," their "natural strengths" going "uncultivated." Another African American antislavery orator observed that slavery "keeps down all the noble faculties of the soul, debases and corrupts human nature, and reduces man to a mere instrument." Russell Parrott, a Philadelphia free black printer and close confidant of James Forten, remarked in 1812 that slavery "enervates the mind" and "corrodes the tender feelings of the heart" making it "insusceptible of those manly virtues."<sup>44</sup>

The institutions of an emerging community would therefore play a crucial role in elevating blacks degraded by slavery. The many black churches, relief societies and educational

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<sup>43</sup> Sidney, *An Oration Commemorative of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the United States*, 15; Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 14; Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11; Williams Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 26.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11-12; Adam Carman, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered at the Fourth Anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, in Second-Street, New York, January 1, 1811* (New York: John C. Totten, 1811), 19; Russell Parrott, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered on the First of January, 1812, at the African Church of St. Thomas* (Philadelphia: James Maxwell, 1812), 9.

outlets spreading throughout early national New York City and Philadelphia meant that "the thick fogs of ignorance" which had for so long shrouded African Americans were "gradually vanishing...dissipated by the superior radiance of increasing knowledge." Thousands of former slaves were "emerging from the depth of obscurity" to the echelons of enlightenment, making black activists certain that "we may anticipate a pleasing reform in the manners of many of our brethren." This essentially environmentalist approach to human behavior and social development girded black abolitionists for the long fight ahead. It also underscored that the newly liberated had to transform their former ignoble existence in slavery into a virtuous, ennobled life of freedom.<sup>45</sup>

IN THEIR RESOLUTE identification with environmentalism and republican virtue, black abolitionists embraced the values of the wider antislavery movement. White and black antislavery reformers shared an ideological roadmap to abolition and, in several instances, worked together to achieve their emancipatory vision. The New York Manumission Society and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, in conjunction with free black leaders in New York City and Philadelphia, assembled their vocabulary of reform from the same assumptions. Both groups focused much of their activism on the need to convince the white public that black Americans were capable of a virtuous, republican exercise of their freedom. White abolitionists reminded free persons of color that "one great obstacle to [emancipation] it is in your power and it is eminently your duty to remove; the enemies of your liberty have loudly and constantly asserted that you are not qualified to enjoy it." Only through rejecting "idleness, gambling and dissipation"

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<sup>45</sup> Sipkins, *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 20; Carman, *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 20; Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 13. This concession about the potential unsuitability of former slaves for civil and civic membership was likewise made by white abolitionists, who also dismissed this critique of black liberty by holding to an environmentalist belief in the capacity of former slaves to be transformed into republican freemen.

and embracing "industry" "morality" "education" "temperance" and "virtue"--and in turn making themselves "good and useful citizens" of the republic--did white abolitionists think free blacks could help emancipation win out.<sup>46</sup>

Black abolitionists could not have agreed more. The free black leadership of Philadelphia and New York dispensed nearly identical advice to their communities of color. They cautioned against being "lazy and idle" and warned freepersons that "base pursuits, habits of idleness, and unguarded insolence" would "reduce us to misery...and be a stumbling block" to those who "remain in bondage." Richard Allen used the sensational murder of a white woman by two Philadelphia blacks to issue a jeremiad beseeching free persons of color to "never more attend a frolic" give up drunkenness, swearing, whore-mongering and correct their intemperate behavior by attending church regularly. Black abolitionists exhorted free African Americans to "walk worthy of our profession wherein we are called," and "free our minds from every trace of that ignominious state [slavery]" through "virtue and education," which would show beyond the shadow of a doubt that the emancipated were "not only capable of self-government, but also of becoming honourable citizens and useful members of society." The leaders of these growing free black communities had already exemplified the civic ideal of republicans of color, wholeheartedly committing them to the program of African American uplift.<sup>47</sup>

By founding free black schools, issuing addresses to persons of color to comport themselves virtuously, and publicizing instances of African American achievement, white

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<sup>46</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1805), 38; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1803), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Allen and Jones, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People*, 27; Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 14; Richard Allen, *Confession of John Joyce, Alias Davis, Who Was Executed on Monday the Fourteenth of March, 1808. For the Murder of Mrs. Sarah Cross; With an Address to the Public, and the People of Colour* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Benefit of the Bethel Church, 1808), 5-6; Richard Allen, Eulogy of Warner Mifflin, in *Articles of Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, of the City of Philadelphia, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: John Ormond, 1799), 19; Russell Parrot, *An Address, on the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, Delivered Before the Different African Benevolent Societies, on the 1st of January, 1816* (Philadelphia: S. Manning, 1816), 10; Sidney, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 15.

abolitionists relied heavily on environmentalism. Black antislavery activists likewise articulated a thoroughgoing environmentalism in their antislavery efforts. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, in their defense of black volunteers during Philadelphia's 1793 Yellow Fever crisis, told slaveholders "if you would try the experiment of taking a few black children, and cultivate their minds with the same care...as you would your own children, you would find upon the trial, they were not inferior in mental endowments." In rejecting the claim that "Africans are inferior to white men in the structure of body and mind," William Hamilton, the first president of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, announced in 1809 that knowledge and "science has begun to bud with our race." Holding up examples of black literary accomplishment, including the antislavery orations of Peter Williams and Henry Sipkins, Hamilton confidently proclaimed that "soon shall that contumelious assertion be proved false, to wit, that Africans do not possess minds as ingenious as other men."<sup>48</sup>

Above all else African American civic leaders expressed the same optimistic belief articulated by white abolitionists that slavery and prejudice were destined to topple. New York City's Methodist minister William Miller argued that the mere acknowledgement that blacks were "men" was powerful enough "to raise us from the foul abyss of indignity into which we have plunged." George Lawrence declared to an 1813 congregation of free blacks that "the time is fast approaching when the iron hand of oppression must cease to tyrannize" African Americans. Lawrence assured his audience that soon "our tree of liberty shall reach the sun." In 1789, members of Philadelphia's Free African Society anticipated that "a happy day" was just over the horizon in which "every yoke" would be broken and the "oppressed" would "go free."

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<sup>48</sup> Allen and Jones, *Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People*, 24; Hamilton, *An Address to the African Society, For Mutual Relief*, in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 36. For further examples of black abolitionist's faith in environmentalism see Teasman, *An Address Delivered in the in the African Episcopal Church*, 9-10; Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11-14; Carman, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 19-20 and Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11-12

That "captivity shall cease, and buying and selling mankind have an end," the FAS surmised they had "a well grounded hope" in believing. This assurance of free black progress and its power to dissuade a cynical white public unmistakably connected the abolition societies with free black community leaders.<sup>49</sup>

Reflecting their mutual embrace of the philosophy of antislavery reform, black and white abolitionists also joined forces in their struggle to complete the destruction of slavery. In April of 1790, five delegates of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) met with FAS leaders, familiarizing its members with the efforts of the PAS to improve the condition of free blacks. The PAS emissaries asked the FAS to help them collect information on the state of black Philadelphians, a request with which the FAS eagerly complied. Further advancing this objective, two decades later Philadelphia's free black activists founded the Society for Suppressing Vice and Immorality. Members of the society planned to visit the homes of freepersons and, through "persuasive measures," hoped to "produce a reformation of manners" among the newly emancipated. When the Society of Free People of Colour, for Education of Children of African Descent started up a school for free blacks with the purpose of making them "useful members of society," they invited the superintendents of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to measure the "progress of the pupils" and give curricular advice. Finally, in opposition to various anti-black bills that found their way before the Pennsylvania state legislature from 1805 to 1813, white and black abolitionists submitted petitions remonstrating against the proposals and used congruous language in their appeals.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> William Miller, *A Sermon on the Abolition of the Slave Trade: Delivered in the African Church, New York, on the First of January, 1810* (New York: John C. Totten, 1810), 4; Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 13, 15; "Epistolary Correspondence," Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church*, 29.

<sup>50</sup> "Proposition from Old Abolition Society," Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church*, 39; *Ibid.*, 118; *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), August 10, 1804, September 18, 1804 and October 29, 1804; *Ibid.*, February 17, 1806; PPAS, Series I, Reel I, Vol. II, 182-184, HSP, Philadelphia.

This biracial cooperation helped convince black Philadelphians to rebuff colonization. In 1787, the Free African Society received a request by the Newport Rhode Island Union Society of free blacks to join them in repatriating persons of color to Africa. Designating themselves "strangers and outcasts in a strange land" and anticipating the "many disadvantages and evils which are likely to continue on us and our children, while we and they live in this country" the Union Society asked the FAS for their support. The FAS sent a warm but firm rejection. Alluding to the antislavery reform of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, the FAS wrote the Union Society that "persons who are sacrificing their own time, ease and property" on behalf of Philadelphia's blacks denoted that the prophecy of human freedom "is fulfilling daily for us" and that colonization was therefore unnecessary. In Philadelphia, black antislavery reformers were allied with white partners who similarly advocated African American civil incorporation as the corollary of abolitionism. Neither partner looked outside the United States for a solution to racial slavery.<sup>51</sup>

New York City's black activists also identified with white abolitionists. In 1796, the New York Manumission Society (NYMS) welcomed a group of free blacks who asked for the society's "advice and assistance" in forming "an association" that would root out "every species of vice among the people of their own description, by information, advice, and above all by an example of virtuous conduct." The NYMS approved of the "worthy design" of these free black reformers and offered their assistance. The Manumission Society also helped to gain a state charter for the New York African Society for Mutual Relief in 1810, causing the NYASMR's Vice-President to remind its members that in the "great work of extending your liberties, the manumission powers were very active." At the second annual celebration of the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, a committee of free blacks planned to donate part of the proceeds from their

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<sup>51</sup> "Epistolary Correspondence," Douglass, *Annals of the First African Church*, 25-30.

jubilee to the NYMS. At least one black antislavery oration was printed by a member of the Manumission Society, who then placed advertisements promoting the publication in New York City newspapers. Peter Williams Jr. thanked the American Convention of Abolition Societies in 1806 for helping to "rescue" black Americans from the "evil consequences" of slavery and having "inculcated by precept and example, the lessons of morality, industry and economy" in the persons of former bondsmen.<sup>52</sup>

Yet the reigning interpretation of African American abolitionism in the early republic has worked to all but erase the cross-racial nature of Post-Revolutionary antislavery reform. It is true that there were no black members in the New York or Pennsylvania abolition societies. But there is no evidence of African American exclusion from antislavery organizations either. To judge the early abolition movement solely by the racial makeup of its respective organizations overlooks the manifold ways the ideology and actions of white and black activists crossed paths. Williams Jr. elucidated the early abolitionist conception of biracial reform when, in explaining his reluctance to get too involved in the American Antislavery Society of the 1830s, he stated that as far as he was concerned while white abolitionists "were laboring to restore our rights" African American reformers needed to "labor to qualify our people for the enjoyment of those rights." Admitting that abolitionism in this period was not interracial in its organizational composition,

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<sup>52</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. VII, 60, NYHS, New York; Teasman, *An Address Delivered in the African Episcopal Church*, 6; See *New-York Commercial Advertiser*, December 28, 1808 and *New York Gazette and General Advertiser* (New York), January 26, 1808 for Samuel Wood's printing of Peter Williams' 1808 oration. The advertisement ran for three months; Peter Williams Jr. "To the Convention of Delegates from the different Abolition Societies in the United States, to be held in Philadelphia the 13th of January, 1806" in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1806), 35-36. In his article on John Teasman, Robert Swann argues for a rift opening up between Teasman and New York's free blacks on the one side and the New York Manumission Society on the other following the NYMS' decision to remove Teasman from his post as principal of the African Free School in 1810. But in a speech given a year after his firing, Teasman had only positive things to say about the NYMS and its members. See Swann, "John Teasman," 348-349 and Teasman, *An Address Delivered in the African Episcopal Church*, 6-7. For one instance when New York's free black activists and white abolitionists had a tactical disagreement regarding the manner in which African Americans celebrated the abolition of the slave trade see *Minutes of the New York Manumission Society, 1810*, Vol. 9, 10, NYHS, New York and John Jay Zuille, *Historical Sketch of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief* (New York, 1892), 7.

the recipe for antislavery reform bridged the boundaries of race and permeated the rhetoric and actions of both white and black activists. This cross-racial activism is key to understanding the depth of black abolitionist optimism in the early national Mid-Atlantic. Having white abolitionist allies was absolutely crucial in convincing black leaders that their race had a future in America.<sup>53</sup>

AND THAT FUTURE, black abolitionists believed, was a bright one. The penultimate reflection of free black antislavery optimism are the slave trade orations from 1808-1815. It is in these speeches turned antislavery pamphlets that African Americans of New York and Philadelphia fully illustrated their understanding of emancipation and free black uplift. Long viewed as the most egregious violation of human rights associated with the institution of chattel bondage, the international slave trade was outlawed by the U.S. Congress in 1808. Antislavery activists on both sides of the Atlantic considered the abolition of the slave trade a monumental achievement that would lead irrevocably to the disintegration of institutional slavery. The ban garnered a bevy of communal gatherings held by black Northerners in celebration of what they marked as an auspicious day for African American freedom. In New York and Philadelphia, African Americans activists delivered yearly orations that laid out a narrative of their enslavement and transition to freedom, fostered a free black identity, and proffered a formula for clinching the complete abolition of American slavery. Subsequently printed and distributed for public consumption, the slave trade orations were a uniquely African American "literary genre," and as such, they quickly attained a conventional quality.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Williams Jr., "To the Citizens of New York," in Woodson, *The Mind of the Negro*, 633. For an example of the literature that puts white and black abolitionists of the early national era on different tracks of reform see Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 16-106. For two exceptions to this prevailing interpretation see Nash, *Forging Freedom* and Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*.

<sup>54</sup> Dickson Bruce Jr., *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680-1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 106. My analysis of the abolition of the slave trade orations is based on close readings of all thirteen published speeches delivered in New York and Philadelphia between 1808 and 1815. For extended

Nearly every address began by portraying the abolition of the international slave trade as the conspicuous harbinger of an ever-growing black freedom. Joseph Sidney thought the ban on the Atlantic slave trade a big "stride" in the direction of "the total abolition of slavery in America" and "a progress towards the consummation of our fondest hopes," which forecast that the antislavery movement would "finally triumph!" Adam Carman told his black listeners to "rejoice at the event, and never forget the highly favorable and encouraging laws now provided for our welfare." George Lawrence delighted in his confidence that "this heaven born plant [the abolition of the slave trade] shall bring forth the full fruits of emancipation, and divulge the bright genius so long smothered in slavery." Henry Sipkins took the abolition of the slave trade as a sign that this example "will ere long become the unanimous voice of the world." Russell Parrott's effusiveness knew no national boundaries, couching the slave trade's cessation as the "commencement of that happy era, in which Freedom shall reign to the 'furthest verge of the green earth.'" The orators impressed on their fellow blacks the massive import of the slave trade's abolition and communicated to them the efficacious results it foretold.<sup>55</sup>

After this rosy introduction, the orators invariably narrated a history of African enslavement. They set in diametrical opposition a history of European vice and greed-stricken depravity that brought about new world slavery and a primordial African nobility and virtue that had fallen victim to rapacious slave traders. Prior to European arrival, Africa had been filled with

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scholarly coverage of the orations see Alexander, *African or American?*, 17-30; Bruce Jr., *The Origins of African American Literature*, 106-112 and Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1815* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2003), 30-41. Alexander sees a split in the addresses between some black orators who advocated racial uplift and incorporation and others who encouraged African nationalism and colonization--a division that this author does not find substantiated in the documents. Bruce concludes that Christian providence was the major motif of the addresses. And Kachun is interested in the orations mainly for the precedents they set in memory making and freedom festivals for later generations of black activists. Free black Bostonians also held annual celebrations of the slave trade's abolition, but white ministers rather African Americans delivered the orations.

<sup>55</sup> Sidney, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 4; Carman, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 6; Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 6; Henry Johnson's introductory address to Williams Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 10; Parrott, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1812), 4.

"simplicity, innocence, and contentment" its "blissful regions" and "innocent inhabitants" a product of the "beneficent hand of nature." Being "rich in the enjoyments of liberty and all the glory nature could afford," Africans made their continent a site of "Liberty, Peace and Equality." Then came the Europeans. The "harmless Africans" were "easy prey to European wiles." Initially realizing that Africans possessed rights and liberties "inherent in them," Europeans came to view their enslavement of blacks as "a matter of right." Slave traders instilled "a spirit of avarice, and love of luxury" in all those they came across, making the once "paradisaical garden" of the African continent "groan from sea line to its center." The romanticized idea of Africa's Eden-like serenity despoiled by calculating Europeans had actually been invented by white antislavery writers. White activists produced widely circulated tracts condemning the slave trade with which black activists were clearly familiar. And yet black orators would put their own twist on this well established antislavery literary convention.<sup>56</sup>

From the corruption of Africa, black abolitionists asked their audiences to imagine the sheer terror and incommunicable sadness that the transformation from freedom to slavery must have stamped on its "wretched victims." The orators described parents and children, brothers and sisters being separated forever as they were "torn from their native land" and placed on slave trading vessels. Next, the Middle Passage was colored by the "dejected countenances" of the enslaved and marked by their "streaming eyes" and "fettered limbs." The speakers envisaged the "piercing cries" and "pitiful moans" these poor men and women surely let forth. When they arrived in the new world, their painful subjugation continued. Sold as mere "vendible articles" and "viewed and considered as commercial commodities," the enslaved fell into lives fit for

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<sup>56</sup> Sipkins, *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 12; Hamilton, *An Address to the African Society, For Mutual Relief*, in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 35; Lawrence, 7-8; Sipkins, *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 9-11; Carman, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 10; For a penetrating look at the rhetorical and ideological links between white and black antislavery discourse in the Revolutionary and early national eras see Bruce Jr., *The Origins of African American Literature*, 39-143.

"domestic beasts." Doomed to "the lash, extreme hunger, and incessant hard labour" of plantation life, slaves could look forward only to the "emancipating grave" as a final respite from their mortal torture. This deliberately visceral description of enslavement--once again borrowed from the discourse of late eighteenth century antislavery--must have resonated particularly strongly with many on hand to celebrate the slave trade's abolition who knew personally the deprivations of chattel bondage. Though free, black activists wove the story of the enslaved firmly into their own existence and empathized with the experiences of those relegated to slavery.<sup>57</sup>

Black orators used this dire delineation of African enslavement as an elaborate setup to accentuate the impressive progress of black Americans. Where "sophistry, falsehood, cruelty, and tyranny" had held sway, now, "in these United States, reason, truth, humanity, and freedom have finally obtained a glorious triumph." Where human bondage had gone on unchecked, now, with the abolition of the slave trade, "the sources of slavery" were "dying away" and the "condition" of African Americans "fast ameliorating." Since the "hydra from which issued all our sufferings, has received its death wound" slave trade oration speakers concluded that the time was close at hand when "the rich fruits of liberty shall be strewn in the paths of every African and descendant." The northern states were "fast conceding" black liberty and the southern states "must comply." A Philadelphian orator reminded free persons of color that "our present situation, contrasted with" what it was before the age of emancipation and the abolition of the slave trade "presents a picture highly animating to the humane mind" and averred that "under the mild influence of the laws of Pennsylvania, *we* are rapidly advancing in every useful improvement." Making clear that "very different are the days that we see from those that our ancestors did"

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<sup>57</sup> Hamilton, *An Address to the African Society, For Mutual Relief*, in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 35; Williams Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 19; Carman, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11-13.

black abolitionists tried to imbue the members of their communities with a strong sense that the tide of history was on the side of the formerly oppressed.<sup>58</sup>

Who was responsible for this mighty about face in the place of those of African descent in America? To these religious black Christians divine providence was certainly a chief force, but there was also the human efforts of slavery's opponents. Slave trade orators often thanked by name a pantheon of antislavery luminaries like Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, John Woolman, Anthony Benezet, and Benjamin Rush (to name but a few). These men had "voluntarily stepped forward...to restore our natural rights" and "dared to oppose the strong gales of popular prejudice" In consecrating themselves to "the vindication of our rights, and the improvement of our state" they had "laid the foundation of the happiness we now enjoy." There were also the manumission societies of New York and Pennsylvania, which, "attached to the principles of liberty and the rights of man," not only pushed for emancipation, but established free black schools. By circulating antislavery literature, giving antislavery speeches, and petitioning legislatures, the societies were "calculated to awaken sentiments of compassion" for the enslaved. In embracing the conviction that white Americans would eventually come to discern that all persons of color were eligible for freedom and civic equality, black abolitionists of the Mid-Atlantic turned to white antislavery figures and their abolitionist organizations as proof positive that such an expectation was reasonable.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Sidney, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* 5; Miller, *A Sermon on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11; Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11-13; Parrott, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1812), 9. Whatever white American hypocrisy and failure to live up to Revolutionary republican ideals of liberty and equality did exist was located in the Southern and not the Northern states, according to the Mid-Atlantic abolition of the slave trade orators. See Sidney, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Williams Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11-12, 21; Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 5; Hamilton, *An Address to the African Society, For Mutual Relief*, in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 39; Williams Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 24; Characterizing white abolitionists and antislavery societies as prime enablers of African American liberty and black emancipation is one of the most pervasive themes in the abolition of the slave trade addresses. See Jones, *A Thanksgiving Sermon*, 18-19; Sipkins, *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 16-17. Parrott, *An Oration on the Abolition of the African Slave Trade*

Scrutinizing the abolition of the slave trade addresses shows us that African and American identity were not mutually exclusive entities for black New Yorkers and Philadelphians of the early national era. Black orators, in their creative usage of the traditional antislavery rhetoric of Africa's original virtue, characterized Africa as a site of black righteousness that persons of color needed to recapture as they made the switch from slavery to virtuous citizenship. Just as Africans found relief from the privations of the slave trade and were able to reembrace their pure, idyllic past--"emerging from the depths of darkness and despair" to "the most brilliant rays of future prosperity"--so too would freed slaves reconnect with their prior African glory and natural morality, the "day star" of freedom "dispersing the dark clouds" that had covered African Americans in slavery. While the slave trade orators unambiguously identified with Africa and its people, this black antislavery discourse looked decidedly to the American republic and not to Africa as the final destination of the newly emancipated. In this way the slave trade orators were not proto black nationalists. Nor at this juncture did they think relocating to Africa would answer the problem of American slavery.<sup>60</sup>

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(1812), 7; Russell Parrott, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered on the First of January, 1814 at the African Church of St. Thomas* (Philadelphia: Thomas T. Stiles, 1814), 10; Sidney, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 15-16; Joseph Sidney, *An Oration, Commemorative of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the United States: Delivered in the African Ashbury Church, in the City of New-York, on the First of January, 1814* (New York: J.S. Pudney, 1814), 6-7; Carman, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 19 and Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Miller, *A Sermon on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 5; Williams Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 19; Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 13. Miller and Hamilton tweaked slightly the portrait of primitive Edenic pre-European contact Africa by connecting Africa to ancient Egypt and insisting that Africans were among the "first learned nation." But they still portrayed European slavers as corrupting Africans and saw the end of the slave trade as rescuing Africa from a social and cultural degradation brought on by the era of the transatlantic slave trade. See Miller, *A Sermon on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 4-5 and William Hamilton, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered in the Episcopal Ashbury African Church, in Elizabeth-St., New York, January 2, 1815* in Porter, *Early Negro Writing*, 392-399. On the slave trade orations as expressions of a black nationalist identity see Alexander, *African or American?*, 17-30 and David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 323-325, 344-347. For a succinct and trenchant critique of applying the framework of black nationalism to African American abolitionist activism in the early republic and antebellum periods see Patrick Rael, "Free Black Activism in the Antebellum North," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (February, 2006), 215-233.

Despite celebrating the many advances of persons of color, the slave trade orators ended their speeches by confronting the one imposing barrier that stood in the way of emancipation: white prejudice. Henry Sipkins was one of several orators who blamed the "strong imbibed opinion of our [black] inferiority" for still "shed[ing] on the mind[s]" of many white Americans "its wizard darkness." Nursed by those whites who "ungenerously denounce us vagrants, indolent and beastly rioters, mere nuisances in society," and buffeted by the "unmerited reproach" of "those perfidious men" who "brand us an inferior species of human beings," white prejudice presented the "most insuperable difficulties" to finalizing the project of black freedom. Here was where the freepersons who took in these orations could make all the difference. If the newly emancipated would "cling closely to the paths of virtue and morality" and avail themselves of an education, they would "give an effectual blow" to slavery's defenders. Free blacks were standing on the grand stage of abolitionism and had it in their power to act as a powerful antidote to all those whites skeptical of emancipation's feasibility. More than any one element, black abolitionists of early national New York and Philadelphia believed it was on the relentless strivings of the already emancipated to live up to their equal potential as republican citizens that the movement to abolish slavery would either stand or fall.<sup>61</sup>

MAYBE THESE REFORMERS were too sanguine in thinking that creating a virtuous community of republicans of color could break apart American slavery. To a knowledgeable, accomplished and upwardly mobile leadership class of Mid-Atlantic free blacks well versed in American republicanism, and whose liberty and success was part and parcel of the same Revolutionary forces that propelled early national American society, however, fixing on

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<sup>61</sup> Sipkins, *Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 21; Johnson, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 11; Lawrence, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 12; Parrott, *An Address, on the Abolition of the Slave-Trade* (1816), 11.

republican ideology as the cornerstone of their abolitionist agitation was a cogent decision. The optimism of this era's black abolitionists peaked with the War of 1812. Americans saw martial service as the paramount expression of republican devotion to country. Free black activists saw the coming of war with Britain as a golden opportunity to put before the white public their republican virtue. In the summer and fall of 1814 "A Citizen of Color" wrote two open letters to the city's African Americans conveying that "our patriotism is now put to the test." The writer thought that the war would demonstrate black New Yorkers' zeal for "exert[ing] ourselves, whenever or wherever our services are needed, for the protection of our beloved state" in order to "secure to us" the "republican principles" of "life, liberty, and prosperity." As he gathered black volunteers for the war effort, a Philadelphian African American activist informed whites that "you have secured to yourself a band of citizens ...whose bosoms are ready to be bared in your service, and whose blood will cheerfully flow in your defence." Denied service in the militia, free black volunteers formed companies that built trenches and fortified the defense of New York City and Philadelphia from British attack.<sup>62</sup>

Yet, the antislavery strategy of republicans of color had some serious drawbacks. One issue was the question of reception. There are no signs of class antagonism among free blacks in either early national Philadelphia or New York City. Nevertheless, the continual infusions of emancipated blacks and runaway slaves into the urban Mid-Atlantic may have contributed to a clash of sorts between the already established black middle class and the many African Americans stuck on the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder. Removed economically, and perhaps culturally, from the black leadership class, impoverished blacks were overburdened with trying to scrape out a living. They may have declined, or simply not had the time, to devote

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<sup>62</sup> *New-York Evening Post*, August 20, 1814; *New-York Evening Post*, November 1, 1814; Parrott, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave* (1814), 13.

themselves to the austere demands of republican cultivation that the black middle class championed so enthusiastically.<sup>63</sup>

A more damaging dilemma was what Patrick Rael has called the problem of representation. For every virtuous free black putting on display his aptitude for the strictures of republican citizenship, many whites pointed to others among the emancipated who presumably failed to live up to the benchmarks of civic propriety. As cities grew and industry developed, class distinctions became more visible among blacks. African American abolitionists bemoaned that many whites dismissed free black accomplishments by condemning the growing impoverished urban underclass. Facing a number of new challenges, black activists would discover their antislavery optimism thrown into doubt. Indeed, by the second decade of the nineteenth century it was the seeming staying power of white prejudice that appeared most conspicuous to black and white activists alike.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> On the argument for a black cultural and economic divide in early nineteenth century Philadelphia see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 219-223;

<sup>64</sup> Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, 179-183.

## CHAPTER V

### AN UNCONQUERABLE PREJUDICE? THE AMERICAN COLONIZATION SOCIETY AND THE RESPONSE OF ABOLITIONISTS TO BLACK REMOVAL

When the New York pastor William McMurray took to his pulpit to preach against human bondage in the summer of 1825, he made what at first sounded like well worn antislavery arguments. No matter a bondsperson's "complexion or his country," McMurray declared that slaves possessed "natural sensibilities" alike with all other people. Chastising the American republic for contradicting its own founding creed, the "*self evident truth, that all men are born equal,*" he predicted that the abolition of slavery would place "the greatest gem in the crown of a nation's glory."<sup>1</sup>

McMurray's plan for effecting emancipation, however, departed greatly from his abolitionist predecessors. Gradual emancipation in the Mid-Atlantic had been, according to McMurray, an utter failure. Free persons of color were "contemned and despised" because of the "indelible mark" of blackness. Relegated to "vice and poverty by the "insuperable barrier to advancement" of white prejudice, emancipated slaves became the pests of the neighbourhoods in which they reside" constituting serious threats to public safety. The permanency of black degradation made emancipation in the South, where a much larger population of people of color lived, a daunting and dangerous prospect. Fortunately, McMurray assured his listeners, there was a solution. The American Colonization Society (ACS) wisely advocated for black removal. Through the colonization of free blacks and emancipated slaves in Africa, not only would white Americans be able to "get rid of our black population" and thus make emancipation safe and

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<sup>1</sup> William McMurray, *A Sermon Preached in Behalf of the American Colonization Society, in the Reformed Dutch Church, in Market-Street, New York, July, 10, 1825* (New York: J. Seymour, 1825), 13-14, 17.

palatable, but those of African descent could reach a level of "equality" in their ancestral homeland that they could never achieve within the United States.<sup>2</sup>

McMurray's speech, sponsored by the ACS, represented a sweeping shift from the reform program of the early abolition movement. For early abolitionists slavery created a corrupted racial environment that degraded blacks and blinded whites to the inherent equality of African Americans. The abolition societies and their black allies believed that if persons of color could achieve virtuous citizenship through moral and educational uplift, white prejudice would be overcome and the barriers to both African American equality and the justifications for human bondage would simultaneously shatter. According to colonizationists, however, the problem facing antislavery advocates was not slavery itself but race. As colonizationists saw it, an unalterable racial divide between white and black Americans created a fixed environment of black inferiority in which prejudice was unconquerable. The reality of an unchangeable white prejudice made freedom a mockery in the North and an impossibility in the South, as long as African Americans remained within the nation's borders. Colonizationists turned their backs on the reformers that came before them by arguing that slavery could not be abolished through black incorporation. Unless those of African descent were removed from American society, the ACS insisted that emancipation constituted a mere delusional hope.

By the time William McMurray made his pitch for the ACS in the summer of 1825, the landscape of antislavery reform had been remade from the period of the abolition societies' campaign for statutory emancipation in the Mid-Atlantic. As the focus of antislavery reform moved south, where a far different racial climate prevailed, abolitionists were forced to question whether their formula for black freedom applied. At the same time, escalating racial divisions in the urban North resulted in a drastically more pessimistic view by many reformers about the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

power of individuals to overturn white prejudice. The response of early abolitionists, black and white, to this changed environment was complex and multifaceted. Although they entertained colonization schemes of their own, ultimately most members of the early abolition societies, and nearly all black activists, rejected the ACS' ideology of emancipation. They instead held fast to their longstanding ideals of black incorporation and equality within the American republic as the most effective way to combat human bondage.

THE IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS of the ACS differed as vastly from that of the early abolition societies as did their agenda. One seminal source of the ACS' recipe for reform came from Virginia's Revolutionary gentry. The Old Dominion was a hotbed for the Revolution's rhetoric of liberty and equality. The disconnect between the liberating ideals of the war with England and the reality of chattel bondage in Virginia caused a small but prominent portion of the state's political vanguard to question the institution of slavery. Thomas Jefferson famously lamented the deleterious effects of slavery on Virginian society in terms clearly influenced by Revolutionary ideology. Slaveholding, Jefferson wrote in the midst of the Revolutionary War, brought "the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submission on the other." Imbibing the evils of slavery from their earliest days, the very leaders of the Revolutionary struggle had been "nursed, educated, and daily exercised in tyranny," leaving them to "trample on the rights of others." St. George Tucker, one of Virginia's most celebrated jurists of the late eighteenth century, unequivocally denounced the "incompatibility of a state of slavery with the principles of our government, and of that revolution upon which it is founded." Tucker thought it not a little bit hypocritical that "whilst we were offering up vows at the shrine of Liberty," Virginia's bondspersons were subject to "a *slavery*, ten thousand times more cruel." Thus, ironically

enough considering how these planter elites would propose to abolish slavery, both Jefferson and Tucker did agree with early abolitionists that slavery itself was a grave contradiction to independent America's core values.<sup>3</sup>

Jefferson was the first Virginian to explain why colonization must be attendant with emancipation. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, published in America in 1787, Jefferson put forth an infamous and oft-quoted explanation for black inferiority. Historians do not always note that Jefferson's denigration of African Americans was primarily a rationalization for abolition based on colonization and not the product of abstract racist musing. Jefferson registered his support for a bill of emancipation that he claimed to have co-authored but never presented to the state legislature. The bill would have freed all slaves born after the passage of the act gradually, males at 21 and females at 18, and provided the emancipated with agricultural and educational training that could equip them for life as freepersons. Unlike the gradual abolition laws of the Mid-Atlantic, however, the bill Jefferson referred to would have required the colonization of liberated slaves upon gaining their freedom. Colonization would work to "declare" persons of color "a free and independent people," according to Jefferson, though to where they would be colonized he did not specify.<sup>4</sup>

It was at this point in *Notes* that Jefferson went on a detailed explanation of black inferiority. Referencing the version of emancipation held by the Mid-Atlantic abolition societies,

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 162; St. George Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery, With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of it, in the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Matthew Carey 1796), 10-11. On the always ambivalent and often complex ways the Revolutionary and early national era Virginia gentry addressed slavery see Robert McColey, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (Urbana, IL.: University of Illinois Press, 1964) Duncan J. Macleod, *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974) and Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation*.

<sup>4</sup> Peden, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 137-138. The bill entitled "concerning slaves" did not actually include an emancipation clause, though Jefferson maintained that it was added in an amendment. While it is unclear what role, if any, Jefferson played in drafting the bill we do know that in his capacity as chairman of the committee to revise Virginia's laws he refused to put any abolitionist legislation before the state legislature. Ultimately, Jefferson's antislavery rhetoric does not match his public record. See Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 118-120, 153-156.

Jefferson asked rhetorically "Why not retain and incorporate the blacks into the state." The first problem with this plan of abolition, in Jefferson's estimation, were the "real distinctions nature has made" between the races. Jefferson described blacks as "dull" and "tasteless" with "reason much inferior" to whites. While they had vivid powers of sensation--especially when it came to sexual pursuits--those of African descent lacked the higher powers of reflection. Even one of the few compliments Jefferson gave to African Americans was actually an insult in disguise. He conceded that blacks were "at least as brave, and more adventuresome than whites," but explained these traits as a result of "a want of forethought." To the master of Monticello a veritable ocean of inequalities separated black from white and Jefferson made it crystal clear who he thought was the superior race.<sup>5</sup>

Coupled with Jefferson's claims of black inferiority were "Deep rooted prejudices" of whites that he believed closed off any chance of abolition without colonization. These prejudices embodied a logical outgrowth of the alleged racial differences Jefferson went to great pains to demonstrate. Jefferson looked to counter social reform environmentalist arguments that white prejudice was the product of the condition of slavery rather than of the slaves' character. He pointed to the artistic and philosophical accomplishments of Roman slaves and attributed them to their being "of the race of whites." Meanwhile, at best freedom to black slaves in America had produced the poet Phillis Wheatley whose work Jefferson contemptuously dismissed as being "below the dignity of criticism." Jefferson rejected the most fundamental tenet of early abolitionists when he insisted that persons of color be judged "on the same stage as whites,"

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<sup>5</sup> Peden, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 138-139. The gulf between black and white for Jefferson extended into the physical realm. The "immoveable veil of black" and supposed "strong and disagreeable odor" of persons of color made Jefferson recoil at the thought of a biracial society of free blacks and whites.

ignoring their argument that bondage denied slaves entrance onto that very stage and created the level of white prejudice that Jefferson saw as natural.<sup>6</sup>

A longstanding racial antagonism pitting black against white constituted the final component in Jefferson's advocacy for colonization. Jefferson was haunted by the specter of race war. If nature had made blacks fundamentally different from whites, slavery had made them white Americans' natural enemies. The very same environment of slavery that Jefferson blamed for turning white Virginian's into tyrants transformed blacks "into enemies" of the state. Jefferson imagined that "ten thousand recollections, by the blacks of the injuries they have sustained" in slavery meant that freed slaves and whites could never inhabit the same republic. He feared that "a revolution of the wheel of fortune" could bring about the successful uprising of vengeful slaves upon the white populous and he could only hope that emancipation would proceed from "the consent of the masters, rather than by their extirpation." Jefferson's emphasis on black degradation, his belief in the permanence of white prejudice, and his stress on the incompatibility of white with black foreshadowed three of the basic principles of the ACS' ideology nearly three decades before the society's founding.<sup>7</sup>

St. George Tucker, in his plan for gradual abolition submitted to the Virginia legislature in 1796, stressed more than Jefferson the all-mighty power white prejudice played in precluding emancipation without colonization. Tucker proclaimed that manumitted slaves were sentenced by the tribunal of public opinion to a life of "civil inferiority" which denied them the rights of serving as jurors or judges and appearing as witnesses in court, owning property or voting in elections. As Tucker saw it, the inequitable status of free blacks stemmed from "prejudices" that

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<sup>6</sup> Peden, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 138-142. In one instance Jefferson did seem to acknowledge the role of environment in explaining his allegations of black inferiority. The "disposition to theft," among persons of color Jefferson believed had to be "ascribed to their situation, and not to any depravity of the moral sense."

<sup>7</sup> Peden, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 138, 163.

had "taken such deep root in our minds" that it was "impossible" for them to be "eradicated." In light of the fact that blacks were degraded beyond repair by immovable prejudice, abolition would "turn loose a numerous, starving, and enraged banditti" on whites unless Virginians implemented an alternative emancipation plan to that of states such as Pennsylvania. Tucker did not think it realistic to mandate the colonization of all emancipated slaves. But rather than try to "obliterate those prejudices, which now form an obstacle" to free black incorporation, Tucker proposed to encourage them. He called for freed persons of color to be legally stripped of all political, property and judicial rights, entailing on them a kind of "civil slavery" which would, Tucker euphemistically added, "render it their inclination" to leave Virginia on their own accord. When the Pennsylvania Abolition Society was requested to print copies of Tucker's pamphlet for distribution they refused to do so, rightly concluding that the Virginian jurist's version of emancipation was at odds with their own.<sup>8</sup>

Where Jefferson and Tucker's plans proposed mandatory emancipation, Ferdinand Fairfax, a third prominent Virginian and co-founder of the ACS, drew up a voluntary gradual manumission plan in 1790. Fairfax couched large scale voluntary manumission as a middle ground between the natural rights to freedom arguments of slavery's opponents and the natural rights to property arguments of the institution's defenders. He thought that manumitted blacks had to be colonized because of prejudices that "operate so powerfully as to be insurmountable." Persons of African descent formed a "separate interest" from whites that made their freedom dangerous without free black expatriation. In Fairfax's judgment, the establishment of a free black colony in Africa would safeguard white Virginians from emancipated slaves and entice

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<sup>8</sup> Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery*, 75-76, 88-96; PPAS, Series I, Reel, I, Vol. I, 268, HSP, Philadelphia. Tucker's plan for emancipation was similar to the one Jefferson referred to in *Notes* with the exception that Tucker's proposal would have kept in slavery the first generation of male bondspersons born after the act's passage. See Tucker, *A Dissertation on Slavery*, 91-94. Tucker also excerpted from Jefferson's *Notes* at length to substantiate that blacks and whites could never live together in a society free from slavery.

slaveholders to manumit their bondspersons. Looking to reconcile Revolutionary ideals that caused them to question slavery with their belief in the impossibility of free black incorporation, Jefferson, Tucker and Fairfax turned to colonization as the answer.<sup>9</sup>

While none of these Revolutionary era-inspired proposals for emancipation made it into law, by the early nineteenth century white Virginia's concern over the presence of free blacks reached new heights. In 1800 the uncovering of a planned slave revolt in Richmond, Gabriel's plot, along with a growing free black population in the state triggered the Virginia legislature to request that Governor James Monroe correspond with President Jefferson about establishing a colony where free blacks and emancipated slaves could be sent. When no colony was established, advocates for black removal found another opening. They sought to amend Virginia's voluntary manumission law of 1782 so as to require the removal of all manumitted slaves. Warning that "whoever emancipates a slave may be inflicting the deadliest injury upon his neighbor," proponents of free black removal successfully altered the manumission law in 1806 when the legislature decreed that liberated slaves had to leave the state within a year of their being freed. Virginia's non-emancipationist colonization policy set off a ripple effect throughout the Upper South. Maryland and Kentucky countered Virginia's legislators in 1807 by passing acts banning the immigration of free persons of color, and North Carolina followed suit soon after. The Upper South's preoccupation with the danger free blacks posed to slave societies would exert important influence at the ACS' founding.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ferdinand Fairfax, "Plan for liberating the negroes within the united states," in *The American Museum* (Philadelphia), December, 1790, 285-287.

<sup>10</sup> John Henderson Russell, "The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619-1865" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1913), 65-72; Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 59-65. Revealed not long after the discovery of Gabriel's plot, the uncovering in January 1802 of another slave insurrection, this one planned for Easter weekend of that year, helped to garner support for free black removal. For increasing white Virginian opposition to African American freedom and the state's growing focus on removing free blacks see Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 109-127. The North Carolina law against black immigration did

A second critical contribution to the ideology of the ACS originated with the religious-driven activism of the New England Congregationalist theologian, Samuel Hopkins. During the Revolutionary period Hopkins developed the theory of disinterested benevolence, which equated godliness with pursuing social morality on earth. To assure their election to heaven, good Christians needed to spread human happiness and improve the lives of those around them. To Hopkins, no human institution called for more reform than slavery. True Christianity, in Hopkins' eyes, was antagonistic to slavery. Wherever Christianity was "fully and faithfully preached, and cordially received and obeyed" human bondage could not survive. Here, "no man will forfeit his liberty...and no man will make a slave of another." Viewing the gospel as an antislavery weapon in the hands of pious Christians, Hopkins espoused the Christianization of Africa as a redemptive measure by white Americans to atone for the sin of slavery. He wanted to send Christianized free persons of color to Africa where they could spread the Gospel and rescue Africans from "ignorance and barbarity." With the arrival of Christianity on African shores, the natives would turn away from the slave trade and therefore ultimately doom the institution of slavery. This way "good shall be brought out of all the evil" that slavery had entailed on human civilization.<sup>11</sup>

Hopkins thought his vision of colonization would benefit persons of African descent. For Africans in Africa, the introduction of Christianity could "civilize" the continent and convert heathens into industrious and moral Christians. Just as importantly, by removing to the land of their forefathers, and away from debilitating prejudice, Africans in America could "be raised to an acknowledged equality with the white people." Hopkins agreed with me like Jefferson and

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not place an outright ban on the entrance of persons of color into the state. But the costly bonds it required of black immigrants acted as a prohibition to their entrance.

<sup>11</sup> Stanley K. Schultz, "The Making of a Reformer: The Reverend Samuel Hopkins as an Eighteenth-Century Abolitionist," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 115, No. 5 (October 15 1971), 353; Samuel Hopkins, *A Discourse Upon the Slave-Trade, and the Slavery of the Africans* (J. Carter: Providence, 1793), 9, 19, 22.

Tucker that white prejudice was invincible. "The whites," he explained, were "so habituated by education and custom, to look upon and treat blacks as an inferior class of beings" that persons of color could "never be raised to an equality" in the United States. But where Revolutionary era Virginian proponents of colonization presented black removal as a means to protect white Americans from eternally degraded African Americans, Hopkins saw his scheme as a way to "compensate blacks" for slavery by allowing them to achieve in Africa "all the liberty and rights to which they have a just claim." Though Hopkins never realized his missionary-based colonization dreams, his hopes of Christianizing Africa left a lasting impression on the Northern reformers who took part in the ACS.<sup>12</sup>

When the ACS formed it fused the two strains of colonization described above. On December 21, 1816 a motley mix of Northern reformers, Southern planters and national politicians gathered together in Washington DC to preside over the ACS' inaugural meeting. On one side were the heirs of Hopkins' doctrine of disinterested benevolence. By the second decade of the nineteenth century, a plethora of benevolent societies had sprouted up throughout the Northern states. Peace societies, temperance societies, educational societies, to name but a few, were all products of the evangelical Christian mission to promote the public good and morally purify American society. With urban growth, this movement came to focus on the increasing presence of impoverished, and, these reformers thought, immoral segments of the population. When the New Jersey Presbyterian minister, Robert Finley looked to involve himself in the wave of reform sweeping the evangelical community he decided to propose a society dedicated to

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<sup>12</sup> Hopkins, *A Discourse Upon the Slave-Trade, and the Slavery of the Africans*, 20, Appendix. Hopkins trained black missionaries and raised money for their transportation to Africa. See Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles, *To the Public* (Newport: Solomon Southwick, 1776). Hopkins eventually joined his efforts with the African colonization venture of the English reformer William Thornton, though Thornton's attempt to establish a colony in Africa failed. P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 5-8.

colonizing free blacks. Colonization would, Finley wrote to a patron of benevolent causes, allow white Americans to be "cleared of" free blacks, make "civilized and christianized" the African continent, and "put in a better situation" emancipated slaves. The Northern campaign to form the ACS had begun.<sup>13</sup>

Finley elaborated on his understanding of the blessings colonization could bestow on persons of color in the promotional pamphlet, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*. The minister called for the "gradual separation of the black from the white population" writing that the benefits for those of African descent were "numerous and great." Asserting that people of color were "capable of improvement," Finley thought they need only be returned to Africa and their "minds will then expand and their nature rise." Much like Hopkins, Finley believed the introduction of Christian civilization would permit white Americans to re-pay the debt of enslavement and may even turn Africa into "a seat of liberal learning." Additionally, colonization could stimulate emancipation by providing Southern slaveholders with an external outlet for their freed bondspersons. Elias B Caldwell, a well-connected Washington lawyer and enthusiastic advocate of evangelical reform, echoed Finley's sentiments at the ACS' first meeting. Colonization, Caldwell told the gathering, could allow African Americans to "enjoy equal rights and privileges with those around them" while bringing Christianity and civilization to Africa and "redeeming many millions" of currently heathen Africans. The Northern reform wing of the ACS

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<sup>13</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement*, 12-17; Isaac V. Brown, *Memoirs of the Rev. Robert Finley, D.D. Late Pastor of The Presbyterian Congregation at Baskingridge New-Jersey, and President of Franklin College, Located at Athens in the State of Georgia, With Brief Sketches of Some of His Contemporaries, and Numerous Notes* (New Brunswick: Terhune & Letson, 1819), 77. For an overview of the flowering of reform movements in the early republic see Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling*; Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 1-54.

highlighted the liberating potential of colonization for black Americans and their African brethren.<sup>14</sup>

Southern founders of the ACS did not bring the same perspective on the role of colonization as their Northern counterparts. Whether they sought to strengthen slavery or simply rid the South of free blacks, these planter politicians shared the view that the ACS should play no part in encouraging emancipation. The Virginia Federalist Charles Fenton Mercer could claim as much credit for creating the ACS as Finley. Discovering that the Virginia legislature had contemplated colonization in 1800, Mercer wanted to revive what had by 1816 become a moribund movement. Mercer had spent time in England and left there horrified at the prospect of a growing underclass in the U.S. which might mirror the lower classes of industrialized Great Britain. While impoverished whites could be reformed and educated, Mercer feared that free persons of color were inassimilable due to the "everlasting mark" of black skin. He harkened back to Tucker's belief that free blacks would forever remain an "idle, worthless, ignorant, and corrupt" population that threatened white society unless they could be removed. Yet Mercer was a product of Virginia's early nineteenth century emphasis on free black removal irrespective of abolition. Unlike Tucker, he thought colonization should have "nothing to do with domestic slavery." As Mercer worked to reintroduce a colonization plan in the Virginia legislature, Mercer spoke about colonization with several Washington elites, including Elias Caldwell. Robert Finley may even have been introduced to the idea of colonization through Mercer's conversations with Caldwell.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks* (Washington D.C.: American Colonization Society, 1816), 5-7; *A View of the Exertions Lately Made for the Purpose of Colonizing the Free People of Colour, in the United States, in Africa, or Elsewhere* (Washington D.C.: Jonathan Elliot, 1817), 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas R. Egerton, "Its Origin is Not a Little Curious': A New Look at the American Colonization Society," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter, 1985), 466-472.

Slaveholding attendees at the ACS' initial proceedings aired their conviction that the society should leave abolition off the table. Henry Clay, chosen to chair the 1816 meeting, made sure to tell his audience that the ACS would not "deliberate on, or consider at all, any question of emancipation," adding that it was "no object of this meeting to touch or agitate, in the slightest degree" the "delicate question" of slavery. Robert Wright of Maryland wanted his fellow ACS members to know that he held "the most delicate regard to rights of property" and warned that the society must not "furnish the means of transporting out of the reach of the master his property." The eccentric Virginian congressman John Randolph announced that colonization would "tend to secure the property of every master in the United States over his slaves." Through exciting "discontent" among the enslaved, free blacks were notorious "promoters of mischief" that jeopardized the slave system. Therefore, removing the freed would fasten the fetters of bondage ever more securely on the enslaved, according to Randolph. Clay made the same point more opaquely when he extolled the ACS for aiming to "rid our country of a useless, pernicious, if not a dangerous portion of its population." For Southern members of the ACS there existed no connection between colonization and emancipation.<sup>16</sup>

Northern and Southern ACS spokesmen seemingly held different goals. But one connective thread stitched them together. They shared a belief in the incompatibility of free blacks with the body politic and the intractable barrier of white prejudice to free black uplift within the United States. Robert Finley felt that colonization would result in the republic being "saved from many a pang" that the potential "intermixture" of the races and widespread black

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<sup>16</sup> *A View of the Exertions Lately Made for the Purpose of Colonizing the Free Persons of Color*, 5, 9-10. Although he did not share with Northern ACS founders the idea that black removal might be used as a tool of abolition, Clay did mention the civilization of Africa as a benefit of colonization. Randolph's claims that colonization would strengthen slavery coincided with his belief that it would stimulate manumission by providing a safe haven for masters to dispose of freed blacks, who would otherwise threaten slave society. Therefore, encouraging manumission and bolstering slaveholding property rights were not contradictory for Randolph.

poverty placed on white Americans. A prejudice "too deep to be eradicated" would hold down persons of color in America, hence the need to remove them to Africa. Elias Caldwell judged that white prejudice would continue to leave blacks in America deprived and exclude them" from participation in society with the "soundest reason." Henry Clay dubbed persons of African descent victims of "unconquerable prejudice." If they remained in the United States, black people would continue "through all succeeding time, degraded and debased, aliens" in a country that was not theirs, Clay somberly explained. Robert G. Harper of Baltimore added his voice to this dreary chorus when he wrote on behalf of the ACS that white attitudes "condemned" blacks "to a hopeless inferiority" and caused whites to associate all persons of color with slaves. Finding common ground on the need to remove persons of African descent from the American republic, it is no accident that colonizationists named their group "The American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color," and said nothing about abolishing slavery in the organization's constitution.<sup>17</sup>

Soon after the the ACS' founding auxiliary societies began to pop up in the Mid-Atlantic, showing at least some support among the reform communities there for colonization. In Philadelphia, citizens gathered in the state house during the summer of 1817. The Philadelphians listened to an address by Elias Caldwell--who maintained that the ACS agitated for the "extirpation of slavery"--after which they formed "The Philadelphia Society" auxiliary to the ACS. In the fall of 1817, a group of New Yorkers meeting in Manhattan founded the New York Auxiliary Colonization Society." Though both societies adopted the sole explicit intention of endeavoring to colonize free blacks, they also made evident their belief that the activism of the

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<sup>17</sup> Finley, *Thoughts on the Colonization of Free Blacks*, 5; *A View of the Efforts Lately Made for Colonizing the Free People of Colour*, 5-6; *The First Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Color, of the United States; And the Proceedings of the Society at Their Annual Meeting in the City of Washington, on the First Day of January, 1818* (Washington D.C.: D. Rapine, 1818), 30, 38. For the Constitution of the ACS see *A View of the Efforts Lately Made for Colonizing the Free People of Colour*, 11.

ACS would lead eventually to the abolition of slavery. Nonetheless, there is evidence that Mid-Atlantic reformers remained skeptical. Speaking for a bloc of attendees at the Philadelphia meeting who had walked out, a writer from a local newspaper cautioned that colonization "would be fatal to the gradual and final Abolition of Slavery." Another essayist in the same newspaper asked the "Southern Gentlemen" members of the ACS whether they intended to "rivet" more strongly on their slaves "*the fetters of servitude*." Broad dissemination of the speeches of Clay and Randolph at the ACS' initial meeting may have tempered the organization's reception in the Mid-Atlantic. In any case, the Philadelphia and New York auxiliaries vanished from the historical record almost as soon as they appeared.<sup>18</sup>

BY THE 1820s, HOWEVER, white attitudes toward free blacks in the Mid-Atlantic had deteriorated in ways that made colonization a more attractive movement. Two nearly simultaneous developments beginning as early as the turn of the nineteenth century provoked an increasingly hostile white public to disparage free persons of color. First, the pace of African American migration to the urban centers of Philadelphia and New York soared. This migratory pattern was driven mainly by steady private manumissions of southern slaves. Forced to leave Virginia after being freed, denied a haven in surrounding states, and subject to a host of racially restrictive legislation in the Upper South, many emancipated slaves fled the land of their bondage and made the trip North. If the oppressive racial climate of the Upper South provided the push of migration, the thriving free black communities of Philadelphia and New York

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<sup>18</sup> *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), August 8, 1817; *The New-York Columbian*, October 31, 1817; *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), August 9, 1817; *Ibid.*, August 12, 1817. For New York colonizationists' statement of their aim to abolish slavery see the "Address of the New York Auxiliary Colonization Society" in the *Commercial Advertiser* (New York), December 9, 1817. For evidence that the Mid-Atlantic auxiliaries officially called for the colonization of free people of color, and not abolition see the New York auxiliary society's constitution in *The New-York Columbian*, October 31, 1817.

provided the pull. The impressive presence of autonomous black churches, mutual aid societies and a small but successful African American middle class held out promise to liberated slaves that their freedom could be meaningful.

Yet upon their arrival in the urban Mid-Atlantic these migrants found their opportunities limited. Many of them lacked knowledge of skilled trades, were illiterate, and possessed a general unfamiliarity with urban life. Already destitute from their time spent as bondspersons, some quickly became reliant on public support for survival. Others, desperate to make ends meet, turned to petty theft. Although some individual freed slaves from the South thrived in their new environment, those that did not unintentionally fed already prevalent white doubts about the capacity of African Americans for responsible freedom. Soon the white public rued that their cities were being flooded by a tide of black depravity. To compound matters, extensive Southern black immigration happened to coincide with burgeoning industrialization and the resulting growing pains it brought to urban America. Free blacks found themselves the scapegoat on two sides. Middle and upper class whites wrongly fingered free persons of color as being wholly responsible for mounting crime and poverty. Concurrently, the white working class, disempowered by the deskilling of their professions and pitted against free blacks for wage work, targeted African Americans as an easy outlet for their frustrations.<sup>19</sup>

The heightened alarm over the presence of free blacks manifested itself in legislative attempts to restrict black migration into Mid-Atlantic states and clamp down on the rights of African Americans already there. In February of 1813, Jacob Mitchell, a member of the

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<sup>19</sup> Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 173. African Americans of the Urban Mid-Atlantic were far more likely to commit petty offenses having to do with the need for economic survival than violent crime or assault. But the white public neglected to acknowledge the sociological, or environmental, reasons for black crime. For the often contentious and always complex relationship of the white working class to African Americans in the early republic see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991) and Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Pennsylvania Assembly, presented a petition to the state legislature from inhabitants of Philadelphia soliciting the state government to restrict the residence of free blacks in the city. The memorial alleged that over "4000 runaway negroes" illicitly walked the city streets and called on the legislature to register all black Philadelphians in order to keep out emancipated slaves from the South. Complaining that all African Americans were "public nuisances," the petitioners requested that those who were found guilty of crimes be "sold for a term of years" upon their conviction. The memorial also asked for a special tax on free blacks to support the poor of their race who otherwise, the petitioners believed, would continue to swell the rolls of the public dole. A similar memorial from the Mayor and alderman of Philadelphia arrived a month later.<sup>20</sup>

In response, Pennsylvania assemblymen drew up "An act to prevent the migration of people of colour into the city and county of Philadelphia." The bill passed the House but failed in the Senate of the state Assembly. Undeterred, likeminded petitioners submitted similar remonstrances to the Pennsylvania legislature throughout the 1820s and 30s. Though none of various bills that resulted passed, they symbolized the enduring disdain some whites held for the state's black population. The petitioners' proposals were intended to link Pennsylvania with the Upper South in excluding African Americans from state borders and imposing discriminatory policies on resident free blacks. These efforts demonstrate the receptiveness of a portion of the white public in the Mid-Atlantic for black exclusion. They also reveal the region's susceptibility to the message of colonizationists.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Journal of the Twenty Third House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: J. Peacock, 1812), 417, 481-482.

<sup>21</sup> *Journal of the Twenty Fourth House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: J. Peacock, 1813), 264, 448, 495, 498; Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania*, 152; *Journal of the Thirtieth House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, PA: James Peacock, 1819-20), 341, 511; *Journal of the Forty Third House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Vol. I* (Harrisburg, PA:

Even as the current of white prejudice in the Mid-Atlantic aimed its ire at the black underclass, a popular culture of prejudice emerged that belittled the free black middle class. The racially ridiculing cartoons of the illustrator Edward Clay first appeared in 1828. Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* drawings were meant to satirize social pretensions of urban life in the early republic. Making African Americans the subjects of his lampooning pen, Clay derided black efforts at socioeconomic uplift through his burlesque etchings. One cartoon depicted a black man and woman dressed in lavish attire on an apparently warm day. The man asks "Miss Chloe" how she is holding up in "dis hot weader," and Miss Chloe responds that the heat is making her "aspire too much." The pun, which scorned free blacks for aspiring to a respectable status, was lost on no one.<sup>22</sup>

Analogous prints parodied African American gentility. Calling on Miss Dina, a washerwoman (itself a message that persons of color were fit only for a servant's work), a black man finds that she is not available but asks her friend to "pay his devours" to her. Two extravagantly robed blacks return from a ball in a third of Clay's cartoons. The female asks her escort, Mr. Lorenzo, if he enjoyed the dance and Mr. Lorenzo responds in pidgin dialect that "pon de honour ob a genleman" he found the ball "vastly indelicate" and "fit for de common

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Henry Welsh, 1832 '33), 23, 87, 144. In Delaware and New Jersey, the legislature did enact laws restricting the immigration of African Americans and the movement of resident free blacks. In 1807 and 1811, as white Delawareans' hostility to black freedom grew, the legislature banned black migration to the state--punishable by imprisonment and possible re-enslavement--and took away resident status from blacks who travelled outside of Delaware for longer than six months. A New Jersey law of 1785 prohibited free blacks manumitted in other states from entering New Jersey and decreed that resident free persons of color could not "travel or remain" in any county other than the one in which they were emancipated without a certificate signed by two justices of the peace. In 1798, the New Jersey legislature permitted free blacks from out of state to enter New Jersey with a certificate of freedom, rather than being completely banned. See Chapter II of this dissertation.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Williams Clay, *How you find yourself dis hot weader Miss Chloe?* (Philadelphia: S. Hart, 1830).

people!!" Persons of color could only embarrass themselves through trying to display the attributes of bourgeois America, Clay seemed to be saying.<sup>23</sup>

Other illustrations, not part of the *Life in Philadelphia* series, communicated the racial anxieties of working class whites. An engraving entitled "The Results of Abolitionism!" imagined blacks inverting the racial hierarchy of work. A black foreman yells at two white grunt workers to "Hurry up them bricks," while an African American bricklayer taunts the "white rascals" and commands them to bring him mortar. All of these racially divisive prints shared the assumption that African Americans were unwanted and alien outsiders, conversely incapable of proper decorum and a threat to white dominion. Either way the popular dissemination of white prejudice left little room for persons of color in the American republic.<sup>24</sup>

Free blacks became further marginalized in the Mid-Atlantic following the successful attempt in New York during the state Constitutional Convention of 1821 to strip them of political citizenship. Free blacks in New York City asserted a dynamic presence in the early national political sphere. But when New York's Bucktail Republicans determined that persons of color voted overwhelmingly for their Federalist foes, African American voting rights were exposed to the whims of party politics. Black disfranchisement in New York was primarily the product of political partisanship. Still, in justifying their actions, advocates of black disenfranchisement painted black New Yorkers as apolitical, degraded dependents who lacked the rationality and mores necessary to take part in the emergent democratic political system. Convention delegate Jonathan Ross labeled African Americans "a peculiar people, incapable, in my judgment, of exercising that privilege [suffrage] with any sort of discretion, prudence or independence." Free

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<sup>23</sup> Edward Williams Clay, *Is Miss Dinah at Home?* (Philadelphia: W. Simpson, 1828) in the Library Company of Philadelphia; Edward Williams Clay, *How you like de Waltz, Mr. Lorenzo?* (Philadelphia: S. Hart & Son, 1829) in the Library Company of Philadelphia.

<sup>24</sup> *The Results of Abolitionism* (United States: s.n., ca. 1835) in the Library Company of Philadelphia. For a sharp analysis of these racially charged prints see Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, 162-167.

persons of color had no "just conceptions of civil liberty" and were "consequently indifferent to its preservation." Preying on white New Yorkers' fears of black immigration, Ross worried that continuing black suffrage "would serve to invite that kind of population to this state," the prospect of which he "most sincerely deplore[d]." Ross concluded that the convention should recognize emancipation, but keep manumitted blacks as distinct dependents, outside the reach of ballot boxes.<sup>25</sup>

Samuel Young, a Bucktail from Western New York, reiterated many of Ross' arguments, but also used white prejudice as a means to defend black disenfranchisement. Confidently asserting African American inferiority, Young stated that "the minds of blacks are not competent to vote. They are too much degraded to estimate the value, or exercise with fidelity and discretion that important right." While Young conceded that black improvement might someday necessitate their inclusion in the body politic, he judged that the current inferior condition of free blacks in New York compelled the convention to "withhold that privilege which they will inevitably abuse." Proffering an unabashedly racialized understanding of political citizenship, Young announced that "public sentiment" opposed black enfranchisement. "The distinction of colour is well understood. It is unnecessary to disguise it, and we ought to shape our constitution so as to meet the public sentiment." Like his Bucktail colleague Ross, Young recommended continuing the process of emancipation, but walling off free blacks from political rights.<sup>26</sup>

One of the most influential Bucktails, Peter R. Livingston, vocalized his support for disfranchising black voters. Agreeing with Young that black New Yorkers were "not competent

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<sup>25</sup>Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York*, 107-108. On black disfranchisement in New York see Dixon Ryan Fox "The Negro Vote in Old New York" *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 32 (June, 1917), 252-275; Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage: Race, Party, and Voting Rights in the Antebellum North* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 23-55; Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York*, 90-200 and Paul J. Polgar, "Whenever They Judge it Expedient: The Politics of Partisanship and Free Black Voting Rights in Early National New York," *American Nineteenth Century History*, Vol. 12, Issue 1 (March 2011), 1-23.

<sup>26</sup> Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York*, 122-125.

to vote," Livingston added that African Americans also lacked the "intelligence" and "purity of principle" to vote. Livingston counseled his fellow delegates that free black voters were "dangerous" to New York's "political institutions" and added that keeping them enfranchised would be like placing "a weapon into their hands to destroy" the state. Intimating that they could be made tools in the hands of ambitious politicians, Livingston sardonically averred that when black voters "approach the ballot boxes, they are too ignorant to know whether their vote is given to elevate another to office, or hang themselves upon the gallows." Though they did not succeed in inserting the qualifying word "white" in a clause redefining male suffrage, opponents of black voting rights did prevail by imposing a \$250 freehold for black voters, effectively disfranchising the overwhelming majority of the state's African American population.<sup>27</sup>

INTO THIS MILIEU of ascending white prejudice stepped the ACS. Until the mid-1820s, colonizationists had focused on garnering federal funding to send African Americans to the organization's colony, Liberia. But mostly frustrated in their lobbying of Congress, the ACS took a new tact with the appointment of Ralph Gurley as Secretary of the society in 1825. Gurley wanted to refashion the ACS into a voluntary society. He hoped to create a network of auxiliary societies capable of raising funds for the transportation of persons of color to Liberia, effectively making up for the dearth of federal money the ACS received. To drum up enthusiasm for colonization, Gurley spread the ACS' message far and wide. He established the nationally circulated journal, *African Repository*, and engaged with travelling agents who could visit local communities to encourage the formation of auxiliary organizations. A Connecticut born Presbyterian, Gurley was steeped in the evangelical reform movements that had inspired the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 136. With fierce opposition from New York's Democrats, the state's Constitution was not revised to incorporate equal black male voting rights until 1874.

Northern wing of the ACS at its founding. The ACS, Gurley thought, needed to appeal to the "moral principle" of Americans instead of "interest or expediency." For Gurley, part of this overture to "moral principle" meant explaining that colonizationists aimed to rescue the "degraded and miserable, mentally diseased, broken spirited" persons of color of the Northern cities by sending them to Africa. The deteriorating state of race relations in the North certainly made this message more powerful.<sup>28</sup>

One of Gurley's prime targets were social reformers of the Mid-Atlantic. With a large free black population and a long history of involvement in causes associated with African American uplift, the region seemed amenable to Gurley's plans. In fact, it was. Between 1823 and 1829, auxiliary societies to the ACS emerged in Philadelphia, New York, Princeton, New Jersey and Wilmington, Delaware. These auxiliaries revived the interpretation of black removal to Africa that emphasized the emancipatory possibilities of the movement. They argued that colonization would relieve free blacks from the surrounding environment of white prejudice and the white public from enduring black degradation. They also insisted that colonization would usher in abolition in the South by giving masters a distant land to send their manumitted bondspersons. Though the message of these "benevolent" or "humanitarian" colonizationists was not new, the proliferation of their rhetoric and the founding of colonization societies in the Mid-Atlantic concretized an ideology of reform adverse to nearly every principle of early abolitionists.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement*, 97-100, 117.

<sup>29</sup> The Wilmington Union Colonization Society was founded in 1823, The New Jersey Society Colonization Society in 1824, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society in 1827, and the New York State Colonization Society in 1829. For background on Northern antislavery and humanitarian colonizationists see Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 6-27; Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents*, 93-131; Guyatt, "The Outskirts of Our Happiness" and Davis, "Northern Colonizationists and Free Blacks."

For Mid-Atlantic colonizationists, the immutability of white prejudice stood as the first supposition of their reform program. To Lucius Elmer of the New Jersey Colonization Society (NJCS), the "former origin" of emancipated slaves and the color of their skin "impose[d] an impassible barrier" to free black integration. Stacey Potts, also of the NJCS, avowed that a wall between white and black as "fixed and changeless as the shade of colour by which" those of African descent were "distinguished" made colonization a necessity. A member of the New-York State Colonization Society (NYSCS), arguing that the "separation of the blacks from the whites" was essential, exclaimed that "laws may declare a black man to be free; but they cannot make him white." Speaking on behalf of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS), John H. Kennedy seconded this line of thought when he concluded that "prejudices" put "insuperable obstacles" in the way of black freedom "where no legal disabilities exist." Where early abolitionists had based their reform on the idea that white prejudice was fluid and capable of being overturned, Mid-Atlantic colonizationists believed this prejudice was an indestructible force. They naturalized the boundaries between black and white in ways that separated them little from the justifications Thomas Jefferson gave for black removal.<sup>30</sup>

The fact that free persons of color were blocked by white prejudice from improving their condition created a degenerate class of depraved vassals. The emancipated had nothing at stake

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<sup>30</sup> *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society, Held at Princeton, July 11, 1825, With Extracts From the Report, &c.* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein, 1825), 13; *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society, Held at Princeton, N.J. August 15, 1827. To Which is Added The Report of the Board of Managers, &c. &c.* (Princeton: D.A. Borrenstein, 1827), 23; *Proceedings of the New-York State Colonization Society, On Its Second Anniversary; Together With An Address to the Public From the Managers Thereof* (Albany: Webster and Skinners, 1831) 5; John H. Kennedy, *Sympathy, Its Foundation and Legitimate Exercise Considered, In Special Relation to Africa: A Discourse Delivered on the Fourth of July 1828, in the Sixth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: W.F. Geddes, 1828), 4. For other examples of Mid-Atlantic colonizationists expressing a belief in the impregnable nature of white prejudice see William T. Hamilton, *A Word for the African. A Sermon Preached, for the Benefit of the African Colonization Society, Delivered in the Second Presbyterian Church, Newark, July 24, 1825* (Newark, NJ: W. Tuttle & Co., 1825), 23; *Proceedings of the New-York State Colonization Society, On Its First Anniversary, Together With an Address to the Public, From the Managers Thereof* (Albany: Websters and Skinners, 1830), 20 and *Extracts From an Article in the North American Review for January, 1824. On the Subject of The American Colonization Society* (Princeton, NJ: D.A. Borrenstein, 1824), 7.

in the society in which they lived but were not a part, according to Mid-Atlantic colonizationists. Speaking before the 1829 meeting of the NYSCS, Eliphalet Nott called free blacks an "outcast and isolated race," who were "shunned" and "despised" by the white community. Filling jail cells as "convicts" and staffing menial positions, Nott explained that persons of color were denied "all incentives to exertion" that created virtue in whites. Another New York colonizationist thought white prejudice made American blacks "depressed to the dust" and left them "a race of beings but little elevated above the brute creation." Joseph Ingersoll of the PCS testified that the denial of political equality" and "social rights" to free blacks meant that they were "colonized already in the heart of the land of their birth." To Ingersoll, white "habit" and "prejudice" had "totally excluded" African Americans from improvement in the United States. Augustus Taylor tagged those of African descent "a degraded population," whose state "cannot be bettered so long as they remain among us." In their hurry to paint a grim portrait of African American life, these colonizationists ignored the communities of republicans of color that both free black activists of New York and Philadelphia, and the abolition societies, had worked so hard to produce.<sup>31</sup>

Intractable white prejudice and eternal black degradation in the American nation made emancipation absent black removal highly malignant to the white body politic. In an about-face from his earlier optimism, Samuel Miller, a former member of the NYMS, told a gathering of colonization supporters in New Jersey that because persons of color "will be *treated*" and "*feel* as

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<sup>31</sup> *Proceedings, of the New-York State Colonization Society; Together With An Address to the Public, From the Managers Thereof* (Albany: Websters and Skinners, 1829), 8; Nathaniel S. Prime, *The Year of the Jubilee; But Not to the Africans: A Discourse, Delivered July 4th, 1825, Being the 49th Anniversary of American Independence* (Salem, NY: Dodd and Stevenson, 1825), 16; Joseph R. Ingersoll, *Address of Joseph R. Ingersoll at the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, October 25, 1838* (Philadelphia: William Stavely, 1838), 10; *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society*, 27. On the Mid-Atlantic auxiliaries' emphasis on free black degradation see also *Proceedings of the New-York State Colonization Society, On Its Second Anniversary*, 26 and *Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Princeton, New Jersey July 14, 1824 to Form a Society in the State of New-Jersey to Cooperate With the American Colonization Society* (Princeton, NJ: D.A. Borrenstein, 1824), 17.

inferiors," their "degraded *character*" would make them "a constant source of annoyance, or corruption" and a "danger to the whites." They "could never," Miller instructed his audience, "be trusted as faithful citizens." The Vice-President of the NJCS, James Green, characterized free blacks as "an enormous mass of revolting wretchedness" who embodied a "deadly pollution" that would infect "the whole with a moral and political pestilence" were they not swept out of the republic. The NYSCS resolved in 1829 that emancipated slaves consisted of "alien enemies." Colonization, the society intoned, would "remove" the "alarming evil" of "a distinct, a degraded, and a wretched race" resident among white Americans. If early abolitionists believed former slaves could be turned into virtuous citizens, Mid-Atlantic colonizationists thought such visionary ideas only imperiled the societies into which slaves were emancipated.<sup>32</sup>

Notwithstanding their pessimistic take on the condition of African Americans, Mid-Atlantic colonizationists did profess their commitment to eventual black equality. But even in an area of seeming agreement between the early abolition societies and the ACS auxiliaries, these two groups could not have been farther apart. Paradoxically, for colonizationists, it was only outside of the United States that persons of color could attain the promises of liberty and equality enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. In a July 4th address dedicated to gaining supporters for colonization in New York, the reverend Nathaniel S. Prime affirmed that free black removal to Africa would save a people who had "previously groaned under the chains of servitude" by granting them "the blessings of freedom and self-government ." A Pennsylvania colonizationist verified that in their "father-land," Africa, free blacks could enjoy "unrestrained

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<sup>32</sup> Samuel Miller, *A Sermon Preached at New-Ark, October 22nd, 1823, Before the Synod of New-Jersey, For the Benefit of the African School, Under the Synod* (Trenton: George Sherman, 1823); 13-14; *Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Princeton, New Jersey July 14, 1824*, 15; *Proceedings, of the New-York State Colonization Society* (1829), 18. For additional instances of this rationale for colonization see *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society*, 14-15 and Nathaniel Bouton, *Christian Patriotism. An Address Delivered at Concord, July the Fourth, 1825* (Concord, NH: Shepard and Bannister, 1825), 19-20.

liberty and perfect equality." The reform-minded New Jersey politician Theodore Freelinghuysen told the NJCS in 1824 that "no finger of scorn" existed to "extinguish" in free blacks "every hope of elevation" in Africa as it did in America. On the African continent former slaves would find "manly independence" and shake off the stifling environment of white prejudice. NYSCS member Harmanus Bleeker pronounced that the ACS sought "real freedom" for African Americans in a land where they could "hold up their heads, and feel and act as freemen." Thus colonization would permit those of African descent to raise their status and actualize their freedom. But antithetically to the activism of early abolitionists, this black uplift would take place outside of the American republic, not within it.<sup>33</sup>

Recognizing the divergence between their movement and the type of antislavery reform that had previously reigned in the region, Mid-Atlantic colonizationists discounted the achievements of early abolitionists. In Pennsylvania, colonizationists cast "doubt" on the outcome of the PAS' efforts. Though the PAS meant well, the benefits of their activism were little. Early abolitionists' campaign to protect the rights of blacks had only attracted fugitive slaves to the state. In turn, the PAS' stubborn insistence on aiding these alleged fugitives enraged Southern slaveholders and made abolition much more unlikely than it would have otherwise been. For those whose liberty the PAS had fought to obtain the only result was a nominal freedom. Though they had spent years attempting to prove the equal capacity of African Americans for freedom, the "moral inferiority of the black man in Pennsylvania" was "irresistible," in the eyes of colonization's boosters. It was high time, colonizationists concluded,

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<sup>33</sup> Prime, *The Year of the Jubilee; But Not to the Africans*, 18; J.R. Tyson, *A Discourse Before the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania, Delivered October 24, 1834, in St. Paul's Church, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Printed for the Society, 1834), 19; Theodore Freelinghuysen, *An Oration: delivered at Princeton, New Jersey, Nov. 16, 1824, before the New Jersey Colonization Society* (Princeton, NJ: D.A. Borrenstein, 1824), 11; *Proceedings of the New-York State Colonization Society, On Its Second Anniversary*, 12. An insistence on black uplift in Africa was widespread among Northern colonizationists. See *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society*, 22-23; Samuel Miller, *A Sermon Preached at New-Ark*, 15 and Bouton, *Christian Patriotism*, 16.

that reformers embrace the "more hopeful expectations of success" that the ACS offered antislavery advocates.<sup>34</sup>

Colonizationists panned the undertaking of early abolitionists to incorporate emancipated slaves into white society. Theodore Freelinghuysen complained that in New York and Pennsylvania, "after all the toils of benevolence," the activism of the NYMS and PAS had resulted only in a "separate, degraded, scorned, and humbled people" with "a line of demarcation" between black and white "drawn deep and broad; and durable as time." James Green denounced the abolition societies' program of emancipation for "entail[ing] upon us [white New Jerseyans] an "evil too intolerable to be borne." Gradual emancipation without black removal had released from bondage "worthless and idle negroes" who spent their time in "drunkenness, and quarrels, and riots." Green alerted white New Jerseyans that they would suffer in "ten-fold degree" the evils of black freeman among them when the emancipation law, held up by the abolition societies as a victory for humanity, was complete. By presenting the activism of early abolitionists as a total failure, Mid-Atlantic colonizationists worked to turn public opinion against the reformers who had preceded them.<sup>35</sup>

For all their differences, one goal linked Mid-Atlantic colonizationists and the abolition societies: the abolition of slavery in the South. As often as they claimed black removal would carry with it genuine freedom for free persons of color, the region's ACS auxiliaries contended that colonization offered the sole path to the emancipation of Southern slaves. Addressing the PCS, Francis Scott Key said that it was "well known" that colonization held out "the only mode in which the friends of Abolition could hope for much success." In the South, where public

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<sup>34</sup> Tyson, *A Discourse Before the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania*, 8-15; Kennedy, *Sympathy, Its Foundation and Legitimate Exercise Considered* 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> Freelinghuysen, *An Oration*, 9; *Proceedings of a Meeting Held at Princeton, New Jersey July 14, 1824 to Form a Society*, 19-21. See also *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society*, 18.

opinion and legislative enactment mitigated against freeing slaves without their consequent removal, colonization would tear down "a great obstacle" to black freedom and "directly" strengthen the "cause of Abolition," maintained Key. In the PCS' first report, the board of managers wrote that they had every "reason to believe" colonization would "facilitate manumissions" and end up "hastening the entire extirpation of slavery." Eliphalet Nott informed a gathering of New York colonizationists that there were "owners of thousands of slaves...impatient to emancipate them" if only arrangements could be made for their removal to Africa. Peter Vroom similarly made clear to the NJCS that the expatriation of persons of color would have the effect of "opening the way to a gradual--though general abolition of slavery." Struggling themselves to spread their antislavery formula southward, the emancipatory prospect of black removal in the South would transform some early abolitionists into colonizationists.<sup>36</sup>

THE EMERGENCE OF COLONIZATION onto the agenda of early abolitionists was indicative of a shift in the locus of antislavery reform from the Mid-Atlantic to the South and Southwest. Thirty years after the abolitionists launched their campaign for black freedom, their antislavery activism had borne much fruit. The successful lobbying for gradual abolition and the appeal of New York City and Philadelphia to emancipated slaves from the rural Mid-Atlantic and Upper

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<sup>36</sup> *Report of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society, With An Appendix* (Philadelphia: Thomas Kite, 1830), 3-4; *The First Report of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society: read at the Annual Meeting Held April 9th, 1827. With an appendix* (Philadelphia: T. Town, 1827), 8; *Proceedings, of the New-York State Colonization Society* (1829), 21; *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society*, 24. The Mid-Atlantic colonization society auxiliaries consistently projected the ultimate demise of human bondage as the result of black removal, though they were often careful to add that slavery's end would come voluntarily on the part of Southern masters. See Kennedy, *Sympathy, Its Foundation and Legitimate Exercise Considered*, 9-10; *The Fourteenth Annual Report of the American Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour of the United States. With an Appendix* (Washington D.C., 1831), xii; *Proceedings of the New-York State Colonization Society, on its First Anniversary*, 7,10-11 and *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the New Jersey Colonization Society*, 9. It was the attraction of abolition in the South that most likely accounts for the 31 Pennsylvania Abolition Society members who helped found the PCS or joined the ACS. See Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents*, 61. For the PCS' commitment to the manumission of Southern slaves see Burin, "Rethinking Northern White Support for the African Colonization Movement," 197-229.

South (an appeal the abolition societies contributed to) had revolutionized the status of the region's African Americans. Whereas in 1790 sixty percent of the Mid-Atlantic's black population was enslaved, by 1820 seven in ten persons of color were either free or on the path to eventual liberation. While abolitionists continued to guard the rights of those scheduled to be emancipated and looked to improve the socioeconomic standing of the free black community, they increasingly found that the basic liberty of free blacks was under attack. For at the same time slavery was shrinking in the Mid-Atlantic, it was expanding in the South. The cotton boom, along with the steady admittance of new slave states to the Union, caused an insatiable appetite for slave labor in the Southern states. With the price of bondspersons on the rise, many slave dealers made the trip North in search of additional supplies of chattel.<sup>37</sup>

Slavery in the South made the kidnapping of free blacks in the Mid-Atlantic a major area of concern for early abolitionists. The problem of kidnapping was especially endemic in states that bordered the Upper South. In 1816, the Delaware Abolition Society reported to the American Convention that kidnappers had "invaded the dwelling of the freeman," sending many of the state's free blacks into "exile and slavery." Delaware's abolitionists blamed the growth of Southern slavery for inflicting the "poison" of re-enslavement into their borders and producing "a numerous and loathsome breed of dealers in human flesh." The PAS agonized that many of Pennsylvania's free persons of color were "torn from their homes and relatives" by kidnappers and "forced to a great distance for the means of proving and defending their rights." Because Southern states presumed black persons slaves unless proven otherwise, aiding kidnapped free

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<sup>37</sup>In 1790 there were 45,210 slaves and 17,874 free blacks in the Mid-Atlantic and in 1820 71,934 free blacks and 17,856 slaves in the region. Putting aside Delaware, where no statutory abolition was passed, the proportion of free blacks in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in 1820 was even higher at 75%. Studies charting the growth of slavery in the South in the early nineteenth century include Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom and Expansion in the Early American West* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007) and Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

blacks was no easy task. The PAS correctly noted that these "outrages upon personal freedom in the free states" derived from "the continuance of slavery in others." The widening dilemma of kidnapping after the War of 1812 tied the legitimacy of the abolitionist cause in the Mid-Atlantic to fighting slavery in the South.<sup>38</sup>

Not just the protection of free blacks from re-enslavement but also the ambition to make gradual emancipation a national policy brought early abolitionists into a head-on encounter with colonization. Reformers had started the American Convention of Abolition Societies in 1794 with the motive of attracting the participation of antislavery organizations from all parts of the Union. Not long after the Convention's founding, however, the body had been reduced to a collection of Mid-Atlantic abolition societies. Yet these activists had never lost hope of rekindling a nation-wide abolitionist movement. With total abolition assured in New York in 1817, the Convention spent much of the 1820s trying to encourage the formation of abolition societies in the South, with the intention of bringing Southern antislavery under their organizational umbrella. For example, in 1821 the NYMS wrote to the Convention that it was "very desirable to see" activists "in the South and West, becoming zealous advocates" of abolition. The NYMS thought the Convention should "encourage our distant brethren," whose "hearts and minds" they believed "in unison with our own," to establish societies for battling

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<sup>38</sup>*Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1816), 18; *Minutes of the Seventeenth Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race. Convened at Philadelphia, on the Third Day of October, 1821* (Philadelphia: Atkinson and Alexander, 1821), 13-14. Kidnapping had been endemic in the Mid-Atlantic long before slavery's expansion in the South. Yet the growth of Southern slavery along with the proliferation of free blacks in the Mid-Atlantic, and the surfacing of a widespread slave-dealing network, made kidnapping in the Mid-Atlantic a larger problem than previously. Early abolitionists deplored the dilemma of kidnapping and its connection to slavery in the South. See *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1816), 23-24; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of the Slavery* (1817), 24; *Minutes of the Eighteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race: Convened at Philadelphia, on the Seventh Day of October, 1823* (Philadelphia: Daniel Neall, 1823), 11-12 and PPAAS, Series I, Reel II, 47-48, HSP, Philadelphia.

human bondage. Mid-Atlantic abolitionists though would discover that for Southern antislavery activists, black freedom in the South depended on African American removal.<sup>39</sup>

The arrival of colonization on the Convention's docket split early abolitionists into two camps. One group, best described as pragmatic colonizationists, supported the partial emigration of emancipated blacks. This version of colonization was to be limited to persons of color in the Southern states who could not otherwise be freed due to public opinion and legislative statutes. Pragmatic colonizationists conceived of black removal as a lever of emancipation designed to abolish slavery in the South. Although on this point they agreed with the Mid-Atlantic ACS auxiliaries, pragmatic colonizationists did not call for the removal of Northern free blacks. Neither did they make ideological arguments, such as the indomitability of white prejudice or the indissoluble division between white and black, to support their assertions. Thomas Earle and Benjamin Lundy were two leading champions of pragmatic colonization. Earle of the PAS was a renegade Democratic politician who continued his commitment to antislavery while his party became more and more proslavery. He made colonization proposals to the American Convention time and again, even as the PAS consistently rejected any support for black removal. As if to underscore the line pragmatic colonizationists drew between the colonization of manumitted slaves in the South and the rights of free blacks in the Mid-Atlantic, Earle led the defense of black voters from disfranchisement at the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1838.<sup>40</sup>

Benjamin Lundy, another vociferous supporter of pragmatic colonization at the American Convention, was an itinerant antislavery activist and newspaper editor. Raised in New Jersey, Lundy dedicated himself to abolitionism after witnessing the dehumanization of slavery up close

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<sup>39</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention* (1821), 7.

<sup>40</sup> Edwin B. Bonner, *Thomas Earle as a Reformer* (Philadelphia: International Printing, 1948). For Earle's role in arguing against black disfranchisement at the Pennsylvania 1837-38 state convention see Nicholas Wood, "'A Sacrifice on the Altar of Slavery': Doughface Politics and Black Disfranchisement in Pennsylvania, 1837-1838," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring, 2011), 75-106.

in Virginia. Lundy went on to spend his life trying to convert Southerners to abolitionism. He was nearly singlehandedly responsible for the formation of Southern abolition societies during the 1820s. Lundy brought with him to the American Convention a vast knowledge of the Southern antislavery perspective. He wanted the Convention to adjust itself to what he saw as the reality that the freedom of slaves in the South would require their removal from the region. Lundy demonstrated his pragmatic support for colonization by publishing pieces in his newspaper, *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, promoting emancipation through black removal in the South and devoting space to African American denunciations of the ACS.<sup>41</sup>

Opposite the pragmatic colonizationists stood the stalwarts of the early abolitionist reform program. Wary of the ideology and rhetoric of the ACS, these activists remained wedded to the well-established, inclusive vision of abolitionism that worked toward black incorporation and the elimination of white prejudice. Thomas Shipley of the PAS and Peter A. Jay of the NYMS were both exemplary of those in the Convention who rejected colonization outright. Shipley, born in 1784, the same year the PAS was formed, became one of the society's most integral members soon after he joined in 1817. Shipley immersed himself in the caseload of the PAS' Acting Committee. Through fighting for the fundamental liberty of black Philadelphians, Shipley must have quickly developed an abiding empathy for black claims to the rights of free citizens under Pennsylvania law. As the author of his memoirs put it, Shipley was "scarcely ever absent from the side" of Philadelphia's free persons of color, as the abolitionist "sat before our judicial tribunals, trembling for his [accused slaves'] fate." A frequent delegate to the Convention,

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<sup>41</sup> Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *Bound With Them in Chains: A Biographical History of the Antislavery Movement* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1972), 90-114. Other sources on Lundy's life include Thomas Earle and Benjamin Lundy, *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy: Including His Journeys to Texas and Mexico* (Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847) and Merton Lynn Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana, Ill: University of Illinois Press, 1966).

Shipley represented the PAS' consistent opposition to any involvement of early abolitionists in colonization schemes.<sup>42</sup>

Peter A. Jay, the son of John Jay (a charter member of the NYMS), embodied the NYMS' founding principle that those of African descent should "share, equally with us, in that civil and religious Liberty with which an indulgent Providence has blessed these States." Like his father the younger Jay served at one time as the president of the NYMS. In 1821 he spearheaded the defense of black suffrage rights at the New York Constitutional Convention passionately inquiring "Why are these men to be excluded from rights they possess in common with their countrymen?... Why are they, who were born free as ourselves, natives of the same country, and deriving from nature and our political institutions, the same rights and privileges which we have, now to be deprived of all those rights, and doomed to remain as aliens forever among us?" Jay spoke out against the view that blacks were permanently sentenced to inferiority, arguing that such a claim contradicted enlightenment precepts and forestalled black potential. This same allegiance to equal rights for blacks inspired Jay to condemn the ACS when he chaired an American Convention committee asked to look into colonization. In their complete refusal to adopt colonization plans of any stripe, Convention members like Jay and Shipley in essence argued for the application of Mid-Atlantic abolitionist society reform to states that had yet to adopt emancipation laws.<sup>43</sup>

When Southern slaveholders began to contact the Mid-Atlantic abolition societies about wanting to free their bondspersons, the stage was set for the American Convention to wrestle with the question of colonization. At the 1816 Convention the PAS presented a bundle of letters

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<sup>42</sup> Isaac Parrish, *Brief Memoirs of Thomas Shipley and Edwin P. Atlee, Read Before the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, &c. Tenth Month, 1837* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838), 11.

<sup>43</sup> NYMS Records, Vol. I, 4, NYHS, New York; Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York*, 183. For more on Peter A. Jay see John Jay, *Memorials of Peter A. Jay Compiled for His Descendants* (Arnheim, Holland: G.J. Thieme, 1929).

from Southern and Southwestern slaveholders professing their eagerness to liberate their chattel, but fretting that they had been blocked from doing so unless banishing the manumitted. One recently deceased Virginian master, Samuel Guest, gave freedom to three hundred of his slaves in his will. And yet state law required the relocation of the liberated. Cases such as this one convinced the Convention that something more than piecemeal solutions were necessary to facilitate Southern manumissions. They decided to petition Congress. The petition stated that "the progress of individual sentiment" among some slaveholders had brought about considerable opportunities for the liberation of Southern bondspersons whose freedom was often blocked by "the difficulty of finding an asylum" for those proposed to be manumitted. As a consequence, the Convention asked Congress to look into putting aside a portion of western territory "for the colonization of legally emancipated blacks." The Convention here was reacting not to white prejudice or alleged black degradation, but to specific instances in which the prospective freedom of bondspersons could not be obtained without their being colonized from the state in which they were enslaved. The petition proposed federally sanctioned colonization only for manumitted slaves of the South and not all persons of color in the United States.<sup>44</sup>

The founding of the ACS at the end of 1816 complicated early abolitionists' handling of colonization. Now that a national organization supporting black removal had formed, a committee appointed to weigh in on colonization issued a cautious rebuke of the ACS program at the 1817 Convention. The committee confirmed that "colonization appears to occupy the minds

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<sup>44</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1816), 26-28, 32. Though the petition did not propose an ACS style colonization plan, it did include the statement that a colony could "prevent the injury of the mixture of too large a proportion of such persons [manumitted slaves] amongst the white people." Perhaps due to the founding of the ACS only months after this petition was drafted, the Convention did not use such racially divisive rhetoric again until the late 1820s, when Southern antislavery societies began to assert more influence over the Convention's proceedings. See the *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1816), 37, for additional evidence of pragmatic support for colonization designed to aid Southern manumissions and geared toward solving specific cases where southern slaveholders wanted to manumit their chattel but were prohibited from doing so without removing them from the state.

of a great multitude of our fellow citizens" and acknowledged the "large portion of talent and virtue" which seemed to make up the ACS. Communicating their skepticism over the motives of the ACS, however, the committee expressed its "unqualified wish" that colonization go unsupported "without an immutable pledge from the slaveholding states of a just and wise system of gradual emancipation." The Convention further insisted that "gradual and total emancipation of all persons of colour, and their literary and moral education should precede their colonization." This latter statement amounted to an indirect rejection of ACS ideology since the organization believed emancipation unattainable without the prior removal of free blacks and denied that African Americans could improve their condition in the United States. What is more, emancipation and black uplift, according to early abolitionist philosophy, would make colonization unnecessary by proving to white Americans that persons of color were capable of a virtuous freedom and turning the tide of white prejudice on which the ACS based its reform presumptions.<sup>45</sup>

One year after its first statement on the colonization movement, the Convention's skepticism of the ACS was not so measured. The 1818 Convention selected a committee to examine closely this prominent organization. The committee, headed by Peter A. Jay, responded by issuing a decisive indictment of the ACS. Identifying the ACS as the brainchild of slaveholders, the committee's report excerpted statements from Southern members of the organization explaining that colonization had nothing to do with emancipation and that the ACS would make slavery a stronger institution. The committee thought the ACS looked to remove

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<sup>45</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1817), 30-31. The Convention was guarded in its first public statement on the ACS both because it was not totally clear yet what the organization was about and because early abolitionists were likely gratified to see the problem of slavery drawing the attention of such politically prominent Americans--the very types of figures whose support the abolition societies had always sought. The 1817 Convention assigned a committee to encourage the formation of more abolition societies, perhaps as an early effort to counter the ACS. *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1817), 27.

from the republic free blacks in order to "eternize the bondage" of the enslaved. Jay and his fellow committee members imagined colonizationists inflicting on free blacks every means of tyranny possible so that persons of color would be "driven to adopt, as a refuge from suffering and oppression, transportation to a grave in Africa." Although the 1817 Convention had left open the possibility that the ACS could conceivably support emancipation, the Jay report castigated the ACS for being run by hardhearted slaveholders conspiring to bolster rather than abolish human bondage.<sup>46</sup>

The Jay report found it equally offensive to the cause of abolitionism that the ACS denied Africans in America were Americans. Expressing the committee's sensitivity to black views of colonization, the report referenced the black community of Philadelphia's rebuff of the ACS. Persons of African descent were "our fellow men, who are natives of our common country" and who "acknowledge an alliance and affection for no other." Once white Americans gave back North America to the Indians the ACS might expect persons of color to return to Africa, the committee caustically added. The Jay report made more than moral arguments, also shooting down the ACS for the "impracticability" of its plan. The exorbitant cost of transportation and the bevy of other African colonization ventures that had previously failed made the ACS' program of reform bankrupt on all fronts. In sum, the ideas of the ACS appeared to "portend" to the Jay committee all that the abolition societies "ought to dread." The Jay report's adoption signified the enduringly negative view of the ACS held by early abolitionist stalwarts.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Minutes of the Proceedings of a Special Meeting of the Fifteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, Assembled at Philadelphia, on the Tenth Day of December, 1818, and Continued by Adjournments Until the Fifteenth of the Same Month, Inclusive* (Philadelphia: Hall & Atkinson, 1818), 47-49, 53.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-53. See also the 1818 Convention address to the abolition societies which similarly renounced colonization and told its constituent members that they "should act in concert" in denying the movement support. *Ibid.*, 65-68.

The Jay report may have been a resolute statement on the ACS, but it did not serve as the Convention's final word on colonization. Perhaps feeling pressure to come up with its own version of colonization in answer to that of the ACS, a committee at the 1819 Convention drafted a detailed proposal for a western colony of emancipated bondspersons. With much lower costs for the relocation of the liberated and the close proximity of the colony for potential migrants, the committee thought they had found a sensible alternative to African colonization. The committee's report carefully avoided association with the ACS by announcing that "any plan of colonization" with "even a remote tendency to rivet the unhallowed fetters of the slave, this Convention must withhold its concurrence." Yet the committee believed it had discovered the "benevolent aspect" of colonization by devising a practical plan that could act as an "incentive to individual emancipation" in the South. The Convention as a whole thought otherwise and voted down the proposal for a western colony. Another blow to pragmatic colonizationists came in 1821 when the Convention repudiated western colonization again just as it had done with colonization in Africa.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Minutes of the Sixteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race. Held at Philadelphia, on the fifth of October, and the tenth of November, 1819* (Philadelphia: William Fry, 1819), 50-56; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1821), 43-45. The 1821 Convention turned down western colonization in a paternalistic manner by arguing that the current degraded sociopolitical state of many blacks would make the colony a failure and rob free persons of color of improvement through education and moral uplift within the United States. The Convention dismissed colonization again in 1823 when it declined to endorse the Manumission Society of Tennessee's suggestion that the body petition Congress for a western colony. That same year, the Convention lauded Haiti whose independent republic could be "looked to as an example for refuting prejudices against the Blacks, and as a suitable place of refuge for those Coloured persons who may be unwilling to endure the degradation they are doomed to suffer in other Countries." *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1823), 18, 26, 28-31. During this period the Convention did devise a plan for the emancipation of Southern slaves without colonization. Slaveholding states would pass gradual abolition legislation and repeal anti-black laws. Southern masters would be required to educate the children of their slaves and the manumitted would stay on the land of their former owners after receiving their freedom. The freed could earn small wages and be encouraged in sobriety and hard work, which would bring more profit to masters (under the assumption that free labor was more profitable than slave labor) and uplift the emancipated. "And thus the interest of the master, and the melioration of the condition of the slave, would be gradually and reciprocally advanced in the progress of this experiment." The plan, however, never received the approval of the PAS and was soon abandoned. See *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1821), 50-55 and Sayre "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism: The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race, 1794-1837," 258-263.

In spite of repeated opposition to black removal, by 1825 pragmatic colonizationists renewed their push to get the Convention to adopt a colonization plan. One reason for the reemergence of colonization at the Convention was the presence of colonization advocates such as Thomas Earle, and to a lesser extent, William Stone of the NYMS. It may not have been an accident that these men thrust colonization onto the Convention's agenda at the very same time that the ACS was making inroads in Mid-Atlantic reform communities. To Earle and Stone, colonization was fast becoming the new reality of antislavery activism, and the Convention needed to adapt or lose all relevancy. The 1820s also brought more Southern involvement in the Convention, due in large part to Benjamin Lundy. Lundy's mission to plant a viable antislavery movement in the South helped generate, by his count, more than one hundred abolition societies during the 1820s. Though these societies were small and for the most part short lived, they nonetheless heartened many Mid-Atlantic abolitionists who were hopeful that their existence boded well for Southern antislavery. Enthusiasm for Southern abolitionism even permitted Lundy to move the Convention, which had never met outside of Philadelphia, to Baltimore and Washington DC in the latter part of the decade.<sup>49</sup>

As opponents of colonization at the Convention would soon realize, however, the advocates of emancipation in the South were committed to black removal. Sounding much like the ACS, the Anti-slavery Society of Maryland wrote to the Convention that "insurmountable prejudices among the white people" of the South meant that emancipated slaves would have to be shipped "to foreign lands." The Manumission and Emigration Society of Loudon County Virginia thought that "the difficulty and inconvenience which would arise from the

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<sup>49</sup> Sayre, "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism," 263-270, 295. The American Convention met in Baltimore in 1826 and 1828 and in Washington D.C. in 1829. For the enthusiasm of Mid-Atlantic abolitionists for the participation of Southern antislavery societies at the Convention see PPAS, Series I, Reel II, 47-48, HSP, Philadelphia.

incorporation" of freed slaves beckoned their removal. More effective than ideological arguments were practical claims that abolitionism was unfeasible in the South without the expulsion of persons of color. In its 1829 address to the Convention, the Benevolent Society of Alexandria for Improving the Condition of the People of Color spoke directly to colonization's opponents when it wrote that abolition would be "much retarded in this country, by any opposition (however well intended)" to black removal. It was an undeniable fact, the address added, that Southern masters were "not willing that the slaves shall be liberated to remain among us." The Washington City Abolition Society argued that a viable colonization plan would allow abolitionists to see whether the many Southern slaveholders who claimed they would free their bondspersons upon their subsequent removal were "in earnest." And the Manumission Society of North Carolina predicted that emancipation would be "hardly probable" without at least "a considerable number" of free blacks being removed from Southern society.<sup>50</sup>

Armed with the testimony of Southern antislavery societies, pragmatic colonizationists went to work seeking to throw the support of the Convention behind a colonization plan. Thomas Earle tried unsuccessfully in 1825 to have the Convention approve his resolution endorsing Rufus King's initiative in the US Congress, which would use proceeds from the sale of public lands to buy slaves and remove them to foreign countries. With the Convention of 1826 meeting in Baltimore, colonization's proponents felt the time was finally right for laying out a removal plan of their own. Sponsored by the NYMS' William Stone and the Anti-Slavery Society of Maryland member Willam Kesley, the plan brought together Northern and Southern advocates of colonization. It called for the "gradual, but certain, extinguishment of slavery and the

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<sup>50</sup> *Minutes of an Adjourned Session of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (Baltimore: Benjamin Lundy, 1826), 30; *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (Baltimore), November 5, 1825; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race. Convened at the City of Washington, December 8, A.D. 1829* (Philadelphia: Thomas P. Town), 56; *Ibid.*, 63; *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (Baltimore), December, 1824.

transportation of the whole coloured population, now held in bondage" to Africa or Haiti through federal funding. Appealing to the Convention's perennial regard for black rights, the proposal also called on Congress to ban the separation of slave families, recognize slave marriages, and require masters to teach slaves to read. Even with these sweeteners, and the Convention's Southern location, the colonization element of the plan did not even go up for a vote. Pragmatic colonizationists could claim a small victory when a divided Convention voted in favor of Earle's 1825 resolution, which he had resubmitted to the 1826 meeting.<sup>51</sup>

Pragmatic colonizationists undertook one final effort to craft a removal plan that the Convention would support. At the 1829 meeting, convened in Washington DC, Thomas Earle headed up a committee tasked with investigating what sort of emancipation plan would work most effectively in the current sociopolitical atmosphere. Earle expressed frustration that "but small progress has, of late years been made in the work of emancipation." In a not so veiled swipe at the stalwarts among early abolitionists, Earle questioned whether the version of abolition that might "abstractedly be best" (e.g. the traditional Convention formula of black uplift and incorporation) had any chance of being "generally adopted." Colonization's opponents, according to Earle, failed to take into account the much larger ratio of blacks to whites in the South. This racial demography inhibited white Southerners from seriously entertaining any plans of emancipation, Earle thought. But if the "partial emigration" of persons of color in the South could reduce the proportion of black to white, not only would the freedom of thousands be secured, but for those remaining an emancipation along the lines implemented by the Mid-

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<sup>51</sup> *Minutes of the Nineteenth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, Convened at Philadelphia, on the Fourth Day of October, 1825* (Philadelphia: Atkinson & Alexander, 1825), 16; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1826), 5-8, 42; Sayre, "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism," 205-208. Displaying the influence of Southern antislavery societies (and perhaps the ACS and its auxiliaries) on the Convention, the 1826 colonization proposal included the statement that it sought to "rid the country...of a population whose continuance among us is so unnatural, and whose rapid multiplication is so alarming."

Atlantic states might become possible. Through Earle's partial emigration plan could not have been more conciliatory to colonization's foes, the Convention decided to continue the committee without bringing its report to a vote, effectively silencing pragmatic colonizationists once and for all.<sup>52</sup>

Adherents to the traditional formula for emancipation in the Mid-Atlantic powered the Convention's resistance to colonization by delivering consistent reminders of their movement's original values. At the same meeting where the Convention impugned the ACS in 1818, its annual address to the abolition societies reasserted the organization's founding program. While the defense of slavery rested on the claim that "the African race is of an order of beings inferior to our own," the Convention was certain that gradual emancipation laws and black education would show the "fallacy" of white prejudice. Fresh off their defeat of pragmatic colonizationists, stalwarts at the 1829 Convention swore there was "a secret fire enkindled in the public bosom" that abolitionists could draw on in order to break down "Prejudices imbibed in youth and strengthened by age." The Convention address of 1821 informed the abolition societies that "nothing but perseverance" by the abolitionists could account for the "great change in public opinion" that had brought emancipation in the North. The stalwarts "confidently hope[d]" their activism would produce "a similar change in the South." The Convention also broadcast its enduring commitment to the early national concept of abolitionism by continuing to deliver addresses to free blacks. The Convention persistently told persons of color that that through lives of "virtue and sobriety" they would bring liberty to "thousands of your color" by illustrating the fact that those of African descent were in fact the equal of whites.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1829), 12, 25-35. Sayre, "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism," 222-224.

<sup>53</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1818), 63; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1829), 21; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting*

The PAS acted as the motivating force behind the Convention's opposition to colonization. The oldest antislavery organization in the world stood unconvinced that colonization represented anything more than a radically wrong turn from early abolitionist doctrine. In 1819 the PAS wrote urgently to the Convention about the need for abolitionists to withhold their support from the ACS. The PAS believed that emancipation in the Mid-Atlantic had demonstrated that ex-slaves could be kept "in our country without hazard to our tranquility." Freedom had brought "the elevation" of many former bondspersons whose "character" and "feelings" reflected those of virtuous freemen. While the ACS accepted white prejudice, the PAS proclaimed that abolitionists must "make no compromise with the prejudices of slavery or the slavery of prejudice." It was not colonization but "the principle of immutable justice!" that had to fire the activism of abolitionists, exclaimed the PAS.<sup>54</sup>

As late as 1832, the PAS was still hammering away at colonizationist ideology. The PAS' last address to the Convention reasoned that "too great a reliance upon Colonization" by antislavery advocates had "tended to retard the progress of emancipation." Colonizationists only "stigmatized" free blacks "as a burden and nuisance" and cast "unjust imputations" on a people with the "same right to remain upon the soil of their nativity as ourselves." To the PAS, "the great barrier to emancipation" still lay in slaying white prejudice and not in conforming to it. The

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*the Abolition of Slavery* (1821), 56; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1818), 47. For other times when early abolitionist stalwarts gave voice to their movement's traditional reform formula see *Minutes of the American Convention* (1826), 18; *Minutes of the Twentieth Session of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race. Convened at Philadelphia, on the Second of October, 1827* (Baltimore: Benjamin Lundy, 1827), 21-22 and *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1823), 40-41.

<sup>54</sup> *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery*, 1819, 9. The NYMS consistently reaffirmed early abolitionist values as well. See *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery*, (1823), 7; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (1825), 7-8; *Minutes of the Adjourned Session of the Twentieth Biennial American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, Held at Baltimore, November 28* (Philadelphia: Samuel Parker, 1828), 36-40 and *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1829), 52. Yet unlike the PAS, by the late 1820s the NYMS had also come to advocate for pragmatic colonization. This is seen both in Michael Stone's role in the 1826 Convention proposal for colonization and the NYMS' addresses to the Convention of 1826 and 1829, which suggested the removal of emancipated slaves.

society proudly identified early abolitionists as among "the few who still stand forth as standard bearers in the Cause of Liberty and Equality." And they made sure it would stay that way. With consistently high representation at the Convention and stalwarts like Thomas Shipley among the society's delegation, the PAS oversaw the repeated defeat of colonization proposals. In the tug of war between pragmatic colonizationists and early abolitionist stalwarts, it was the latter group that won out.<sup>55</sup>

WHEREAS COLONIZATION DROVE a wedge between factions at the American Convention, black activists more readily distinguished colonization from abolitionism. Black ideas of emigration and their desire to fight for freedom and equality at home were not mutually exclusive strategies, unlike for the vast majority of the members and supporters of the ACS. Nor was black support for colonization of any kind married to a strategy for abolishing slavery as it was for some ACS supporters and American Convention members. Except perhaps for a very brief moment after the ACS was founded, black abolitionists never turned their backs on the early abolitionist reform program. By the beginning of the 1830s, black abolitionists became the foremost champions of combating slavery by overturning white prejudice and improving the condition of their race within the United States.

African American ideas of colonization originated with one man: Paul Cuffe. Born in 1759 off the coast of Massachusetts in Cuttyhunk Island, Cuffe enjoyed great financial wealth as

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<sup>55</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel II, 23, 155-156, HSP, Philadelphia. For additional instances of the PAS abjuring colonization see *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1825), 12; *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1829), 54 and PPAS, Series I, Reel II, 62, HSP, Philadelphia. The PAS' own fight for black rights in Pennsylvania, from petitioning against discriminatory laws to their activities in unsuccessfully guarding against black disfranchisement in the state, informed the society's view that abolition and black citizenship were of a piece. See PPAS, Reel I, Series I, 181-184, HSP, Philadelphia; *Ibid.*, 393-398; PPAS, Series I, Reel II, 157-161, HSP, Philadelphia; *Ibid.*, 295, 300-305, 313-314, 326; *To the People of Color in the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1838) and *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color, Of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts, as Exhibited by the Report of a Committee of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, &c.* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838).

a New England merchant. With little formal education and humble beginnings, Cuffe had defied the odds. But his economic success did not cause Cuffe to ignore the plight of his oppressed brethren. While he supported black improvement in America, being the son of a native African gave Cuffe a great interest in and attachment to the continent of Africa. Cuffe's membership in the Society of Friends allowed him access to the transatlantic antislavery network of Quaker activists. It was this network that provided Cuffe with an opportunity to make good on his desire to uplift the land of his ancestors. In the summer of 1808, Friend James Pemberton, the Vice President of the PAS, brought Cuffe's attention to the African Institution of London. Dedicated to "civilizing" and Christianizing Africa, the African Institution was looking for persons of color to help introduce Western forms of industry and agriculture in the English-controlled African colony of Sierra Leone. With an invitation from the Governor of Sierra Leone, Cuffe set sail for Africa in December of 1810.<sup>56</sup>

Cuffe's trip kicked off his lifelong mission to improve the African continent. By the improvement of Africa, Cuffe meant several things. First, he wanted to offer Africans an alternative to the slave trade. Cuffe shared the nearly universal belief among both black and white antislavery activists that the slave trade had ruined the once proud Africans. By bringing non-slavery related commerce to Africa, Cuffe planned to offer his black brethren a vehicle for their deliverance from the sin of slave trading. But overcoming the depredations of slavery was not the only thing Cuffe hoped to give to Africans. Accompanying the establishment of commercial alternatives to slavery, Cuffe envisioned the spread of Christianity and civilization to

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<sup>56</sup> James Pemberton to Paul Cuffe, June 8, 1808 in Rosalind Cobb Wiggins, *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letter, 1808-1817: A Black Quaker's Voice from With the Veil* (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press, 1996), 77-78. Rhode Island blacks, especially in Newport, organized a small and ultimately unsuccessful movement to emigrate to Africa in the late eighteenth century. See Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 3-20. It was Cuffe who first made black colonization a full-fledged movement. On Cuffe's early life see Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 22-24 and James Sidbury, *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 145-146.

Africa as well. After all, Cuffe was a product of a republican society that believed commerce, Christianity and civilization were all interlocked.<sup>57</sup>

The key to Cuffe's plan was to recruit black Americans willing to go to Africa and transmit the values he wanted the natives to adopt. Cuffe hoped that by convincing some republicans of color to make a "Temporary residence" in Africa he could introduce "industry, sobriety and frugality amongst the nations of that country." Ultimately, Cuffe sought for black Americans to forge commercial partnerships with black Africans. It was in this partnership that Cuffe beheld the grandest effects of his plan. By making Africa "a Nation to be numbered among the historians nations of the World," Cuffe would create a transatlantic network of industrious, pious and respectable blacks. These virtuous blacks would then raise the status of the entire race by proving that all persons of African descent were equal to "the white Brother." Cuffe's interpretation of colonization provides a stark contrast to that of the ACS' racially reactive program, premised on black exclusion from the American republic. Though his focus was on the improvement of Africans, Cuffe grounded his understanding of colonization in a more positivist vision of the joint uplift of people of color in United States and Africa. While the ACS pushed for total and permanent black migration and saw emancipation as dependent on black removal, Cuffe sought partial and temporary African American migration and did not couch his plan as a solution to the problem of slavery.<sup>58</sup>

To gain financial support for his plan and win converts to his cause, Cuffe toured cities with large free black communities. The black mariner found a receptive audience in the black activists of the Mid-Atlantic, including Peter Williams Jr. of New York and James Forten and

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<sup>57</sup> Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 25-30.

<sup>58</sup> "The Memorial Petition" June, 16 1813 in Wiggins, *Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 252-253; Paul Cuffe to William Allen, March 22, 1811 in Wiggins, *Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 119; Paul Cuffe to Cato Sawyer, Feb. 17, 1814 in Wiggins, *Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 271.

Russell Parrott of Philadelphia. Forten, Philadelphia's thriving free black sailmaker, found great appeal in the commercial possibilities of Cuffe's colonization plan. Though he had no intention of moving to Africa himself, Forten and his fellow black businessmen could brighten the prospects of their African brethren while extending their business interests at the same time. More profoundly than commercial considerations, Cuffe's goal of the regeneration of Africa resonated with black abolitionists of the Mid-Atlantic. As we have seen in their orations on the abolition of the slave trade, New York and Philadelphia's free black community leaders anticipated the simultaneous uplift of Africans and African Americans as the harbinger of a new era free of black degradation. Cuffe's program must have appeared to the likes of Williams Jr., Parrot, and Forten as the embodiment of their hopes for black improvement. With the loyalty of black elites secured, Cuffe initiated the establishment of African Institutions in Philadelphia and New York. Meant to open a correspondence with similar organizations in London and Sierra Leone, the African Institutions of the Mid-Atlantic also scoured New York and Philadelphia for potential colonists and raised money for Cuffe's trips to Africa.<sup>59</sup>

In 1816, Cuffe abruptly altered his program of African colonization. Where he had once imagined the impermanent and small scale emigration of free blacks from Northern cities, he now advocated the permanent and wholesale settlement of manumitted blacks of the South. Cuffe wrote to Samuel Mills, soon to be co-founder of the ACS, in August of 1816 about his changed idea of colonization. Sharing the rhetoric of those among the ACS who claimed African colonization would encourage emancipation, Cuffe explained that "it appears many" Southern slaveholders were "willing to manumit their Slaves if Thay could Do it on Safe Ground." The "safe ground" Cuffe referred to was the removal of Southern freed slaves. Cuffe had learned that

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<sup>59</sup> Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 32-33. Blacks in Baltimore founded an African Institution in addition to those in New York and Philadelphia. Despite their efforts, the African Institutions could find very few potential emigrants willing to relocate to Sierra Leone.

white Southerners were "much alarmed on the account of the Africans rising." He professed that the creation of both an African and American colony that could receive freed slaves upon their manumission might "prevent all Insurrection and bloodshed" currently feared by Southern masters. In subsequent letters to his supporters Cuffe reiterated this entirely different idea of colonization.<sup>60</sup>

How can we account for great change in Cuffe's plans for African colonization? The answer most likely lies in Cuffe's realization by 1816 that repackaging colonization could give new life to his dreams of rejuvenating Africa. Cuffe's trip to Africa in 1810 had met with some success. He had encountered a group of Africans eager to stimulate mercantile development and founded with them the Friendly Society of Sierra Leone, which was to nurture the commercial ambitions of the colony. Cuffe even got the British government to officially recognize his right to trade with Sierra Leone. But Cuffe happened to return to the United States just as the War of 1812 threatened his plans. Though he met with President Madison and petitioned Congress, hostilities between England and the American republic negated any chance that Cuffe might win federal recognition of trade between the U.S. and Sierra Leone. Undaunted, Cuffe set sail again for Sierra Leone in December of 1815, this time with 38 black American colonists. This trip, however, came at great economic cost to Cuffe as instability in Sierra Leone and assistance to the African American migrants exacted a heavy toll on Cuffe's finances. When Robert Finely and Samuel Mills contacted the black mariner about their own expectations for African colonization Cuffe had open ears. The knowledge that Washington's political elites supported a colonization

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<sup>60</sup> Paul Cuffe to Samuel J Mills, August 6, 1816 in Wiggins, *Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 432-433. Cuffe used similar language in subsequent letters to his white colonizationist correspondents. See for example Paul Cuffe to Samuel C Aiken, August 7, 1816 in Wiggins, *Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 434-435. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 44-47 argues that the major change in Cuffe's understanding of black emigration was his new stress on how the colonization of Africa would benefit African Americans instead of Africans in Africa. While Miller interprets Cuffe's original conception of colonization as bettering exclusively Africans, Cuffe's earlier visions did aim at raising up those of African descent generally, even if he mainly focused on Africans in Africa.

scheme of any kind must have given Cuffe hope that his faltering efforts might finally bring recognition and support from the federal government.<sup>61</sup>

At first free black activists seemed open to supporting Cuffe despite his new conception of colonization. One explanation is the admiration of black elites towards Cuffe and the reverence they held for him. When Cuffe died in the summer of 1817 he was mourned by Peter Williams Jr., who delivered a eulogy for his departed friend in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. Williams Jr. wanted his audience to appreciate that Cuffe had emerged from "poverty, ignorance, and obscurity" to "wealth, to influence, to respectability." The memory of Cuffe, "a man that was truly great," Williams Jr. thought "should be placed in our bosoms" for "public imitation and esteem." Williams Jr. used this image of Cuffe to caution the crowd not to "hastily condemn a measure to which every fibre of his heart clung." Now that colonization was associated with the ACS, the reverend asked his parishioners "to suspend out judgments" of black emigration until it was clear in what direction the movement was headed. The close friendships Cuffe crafted with the free black leadership of the Mid-Atlantic stopped men like Williams Jr. from censuring a movement that they had actively supported prior to its affiliation with the ACS.<sup>62</sup>

African American activists seriously pondered an alliance with antislavery forces in the ACS for another reason. By 1816, free black abolitionist optimism about racial uplift in America had temporarily withered. James Forten expressed his exasperation with the Pennsylvania

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<sup>61</sup> Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 27-47. Finley was careful to present only the emancipatory side of white colonizationist ideology, writing to Cuffe that an African colony would allow black Americans to "rise to their proper level." There is no evidence that Cuffe endorsed the view of Finley that colonization could free the urban North of degraded free blacks. Cuffe makes only veiled references to the permanent colonization of free people of color in his correspondence, referring mainly to the removal of manumitted slaves of the South. See Paul Cuffe to Robert Finley, January 8, 1817 in Wiggins, *Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 492.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Williams Jr., *A Discourse Delivered on the Death of Captain Paul Cuffe, Before the New-York African Institution, in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, October 21, 1817* (New York: B. Young and Co., 1817), 4-5, 16.

Assembly's 1813 "act to prevent the migration of people of colour into the city and county of Philadelphia." By compelling all African Americans to carry certificates of freedom and threatening with jail and re-enslavement those that did not, the legislation would "swallow our rights, as fellow creatures; our privileges, as citizens; and our liberties as men!" Forten lamented that it was pointless for free blacks to cultivate institutions and organizations to "correct their morals and render them not only honest but useful members of society." If the state's legislators gave their consent to the bill, all persons of color would be "doomed to feel the lash of oppression." What the bill portended for black Pennsylvanian's future was bad enough, but equally troubling to Forten was the era of progress and promise it threatened to leave behind. The American nation had been founded on the idea that all men were created equal and the Revolutionary generation had realized that these words applied to "the white Man and the African," according to Forten. But now Pennsylvania's legislators proposed to lower the status of free blacks "below the brute." Although Forten must have breathed a sigh of relief when the bill was not adopted, its drafting signaled troubling signs about the road ahead for free blacks in the state.<sup>63</sup>

By the close of the War of 1812, black abolitionists found the ground they stood their activism on shifting. If the triumph of gradual emancipation, the abolition of the international slave trade, and the forward progression of so many former bondspersons turned freemen had symbolized the early national era, now the spread of slavery southwestward, a ripening white racial animus, and the resilience of chattel bondage seemed just as, if not more, noteworthy. With biting rhetoric in tow, Russell Parrott's 1816 abolition of the slave trade speech was taken

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<sup>63</sup> James Forten, *Letters from a Man of Colour, on a Late Bill Before the Senate of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1813), 1-11.

<sup>64</sup> Russell Parrott, *An Address, on the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, Delivered Before the Different African Benevolent Societies, on the 1st of January, 1816* (Philadelphia: T.S. Manning, 1816), 4-5.

up by the hardships confronting black Americans more than any other address before it. Mourning the "injustice of retaining in ignominious servitude a class of fellow creatures" who were "of course worthy a better fate...in a land, professedly the chosen retreat of liberty," Parrott openly questioned "what is our standing" and "what improvement do we derive" in "this enlightened confederacy." He rued the sorrowful fact that the lives of far too many persons of color, consisted "from infancy to manhood" of "one dark tract allotted to his proscribed feet, unillumed by hope." Parrott encouraged blacks to continue fighting prejudice by leading lives of virtue. Yet his lamentations captured the growing frustrations of free black activists.<sup>64</sup>

In an address which was intended to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the New-York African Society for Mutual Relief's incorporation, Peter Volgelsang instead noted that "it is our unhappy lot to be so circumstanced, that we are overwhelmed with joy at the most common act of justice done in our favour." Even as he grudgingly acknowledged that the condition of free blacks was "growing better slowly," the "subterfuge" of white prejudice seemed more noteworthy to Volgelsang. "Our situation would be gloomy indeed," Volgelsang thought "did we not persuade ourselves that a majority" of whites were opposed to black degradation. On the heels of the ACS' formation, Robert Finley seized the opportunity that free black pessimism seemed to give to white colonizationists by securing a meeting with the free black leadership of Philadelphia. James Forten and Richard Allen were among those in attendance when the New Jersey minister made his case for the ACS.<sup>65</sup>

Interestingly, the meeting with Finley took place after black Philadelphians issued an unambiguous repudiation of the ACS. But it was not the vanguard of the African American

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<sup>65</sup> *An Address Delivered Before the New-York African Society for Mutual Relief in the African Zion Church 23rd March, 1815, being the Fifth Anniversary of Their Incorporation* (New York: Hardcastle and Pelsue, 1815), 11-15. For the meeting with Finley see Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 192-193.

community that led the charge. In January of 1817 some 3,000 of Philadelphia's persons of color gathered in Richard Allen's Mother Bethel Church to announce their judgment of the ACS. They left no question where they stood. "WHEREAS our ancestors (not of choice) were the first cultivators of the wilds of America," the meeting resolved that "we their descendants feel ourselves entitled to participate in the blessings of her luxuriant soil, which their blood and sweat manured." Free black Philadelphians reprobated the ACS for promoting African American exclusion, calling such a stance "in direct violation of those principles, which have been the boast of the republic." The black community was disturbed most by the ACS' emphasis on alleged black degradation. They disclaimed the "unmerited stigma attempted to be cast upon the reputation" of free persons of color. Instead of identifying with the pan African identity promulgated by Cuffe and his followers, the crowd at Bethel looked to the enslaved of the South when they called southern bondspersons "our brethren" from whom they would "never" willingly "separate." If the black elite had not yet given up on working with white colonizationists , the larger community left no door open to an alliance with the ACS.<sup>66</sup>

Philadelphia's black leadership did not immediately follow their brethren in breaking ties with the ACS. James Forten actually chaired the hearing at Mother Bethel and together with Russell Parrot, signed his name to the anti-ACS resolutions. Yet in a letter to Cuffe penned not long after the meeting, Forten insisted that he disagreed with the crowd at Bethel. Forten explained to Cuffe that he believed those of African descent "will never become a people untill they come out from amongst the white people." But because "not one sole" among the meeting's attendees had been in favor of colonization, Forten had chosen to "remain silent." That he put his

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<sup>66</sup> *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), Aug. 12, 1817. The Mother Bethel meeting's resolutions were reprinted from New York to Virginia, including *The National Advocate* (New York), Aug. 14, 1817; *The Western Monitor* (Lexington, KY), Aug. 30, 1817; *American Watchman* (Wilmington, DE), Sept. 20, 1817 and *The Genius of Liberty* (Leesburg, VA), Oct. 7, 1817.

name to the resolutions critical of the ACS means Forten must have held some reservations about the organization. Still, the fact that Robert Finley scored a meeting with Forten and other eminent free blacks indicates the willingness of African American abolitionists to hear out the ACS. Forten may have illuminated why prominent persons of color were open to learning more about the ACS when he purportedly told Finley that black education and wealth ironically made prominent free blacks "feel their degradation more acutely." Certainly black activists had been expressing serious grievances with America's racial climate around this time.<sup>67</sup>

By the late summer of 1817, however, free black leaders started to view African colonization differently. The continuing resolve of nearly all free black Philadelphians to oppose colonization in Africa in tandem with the wider broadcasting of the ACS' racially exclusionary views, must have convinced the black vanguard to reassess their position. Particularly disconcerting to black abolitionists was the attempt by the ACS to set up auxiliaries in the urban Mid-Atlantic. In the white colonizationists' march to spread the principles of the ACS northward, they threatened the activism of early abolitionist organizations like the PAS. To help dissuade Philadelphia's antislavery reformers from supporting the ACS, the city's free blacks held a second meeting in August of 1817.<sup>68</sup>

Chaired again by James Forten, with Russell Parrot acting as secretary, this second gathering of black Philadelphians elaborated on their community's first rejection of colonization

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<sup>67</sup> James Forten to Paul Cuffe, Jan. 25, 1817 in Wiggins, *Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 501-503; Brown, *Memoirs of the Reverend Robert Finley*, 124. We do not know what Forten actually said at the Finley meeting as the only extant record of it comes from the second hand claims of Finley's biographer. Backers of the ACS, who were angling for black support for the organization, were hardly neutral observers in the debate within the African American community over colonization. But taken together with Forten's remarks to Cuffe and his alarm at the growth of white prejudice in Philadelphia, it is plausible that Forten did in fact tell Finley something close to what he was quoted as saying.

<sup>68</sup> The death of Cuffe and Finley in the fall of 1817 severed the main connection free black leaders of the Mid-Atlantic had with African colonization and helped push them toward opposing the ACS. The publication in Philadelphia newspapers of an imagined dialogue between William Penn, Absalom Jones, and Cuffe (the latter two of which were recently deceased) acting as mouthpieces for the ACS in an effort to win black endorsement of the society may have rubbed black activists like Forten the wrong way. See Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 198; *The Union United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), June 6, 10, 1818 and Brown, *Memoirs of Robert Finley*, 313-345.

in Africa. The meeting expressed its disapproval of reformers connecting colonization with abolition in part by arguing for the benefits of gradual emancipation for liberated slaves. Freedom had given persons of color "opportunities for instruction and improvement" and "fitted for their liberty" those of African descent. Along with the PAS, Philadelphia's free blacks believed that "the gradual, but certain march of the cause of abolition" was "progressing" and that colonization only impeded the route to universal emancipation. Like the American Convention, black Philadelphians at the meeting interpreted colonization as a slaveholder scheme to rid their societies of free blacks and strengthen slavery. When the American Convention's president, Richard Peters of the PAS, asked Forten to map out for early abolitionists the black community's views of the ACS, the sailmaker readily submitted the resolutions of this second anti-ACS meeting; resolutions he now fully backed. The opinions of Philadelphia's free blacks probably influenced the American Convention's own denunciation of the ACS in 1818.<sup>69</sup>

Irrespective of their opposition to the ACS, free black activists did not abandon support for all forms of colonization. The excitement over the potential of African American migration to

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<sup>69</sup> "To the humane and benevolent Inhabitants of the city and county of Philadelphia," in *Minutes of the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (1818), Appendix, ii-iii. That the American Convention published the free black rejection of colonization indicates the influence free blacks exerted on white abolitionists. Free black Philadelphians met for a third time in 1819 to censure African colonization in reaction to support among some free blacks for the ACS. See *The Union United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), November 18, 1819. Not all free persons of color opposed the ACS. Daniel Coker and Lott Carey, both of Virginia, are examples of prominent free blacks who were won over by the ACS and moved to Liberia to help establish the colony. See Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality*, 55-74 and "Circular Addressed to the Colored Brethren and Friends in America: An Unpublished Essay by Lott Cary, Sent from Liberia to Virginia, 1827," ed. John Saillant, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (Autumn, 1996), 481-504. In response to African American opposition to the ACS, black emigrants to Liberia painted a rosy picture of their lives in Africa and depicted those who chose to stay in the United States as foolhardy. One circular written by Afro American Liberians claimed that upon landing in Africa "the burthen is gone" and "we feel ourselves, for the first time, in a state to improve." The Liberians felt only "pity" for African Americans, who knew but "the empty name of liberty" and wrongly remained "in a country that is not yours" under "the delusion which makes you hope for ampler privileges." "Address of the Colonists to the Free People of Colour in the U.S." in *Report of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society* (1830), 24-25. It does not seem that New York's black community was as steadfast or vocal in their opposition to the ACS, although that would change by the late 1820s and early 1830s.

Haiti highlights that certain types of colonization schemes could win the affection of large numbers of Mid-Atlantic free blacks. Although Haitian emigration piqued Northern free black interest as early as 1818, it was not until 1824 that a viable movement to migrate to the island nation took shape. That year Loring Dewey, an agent of the ACS stationed in New York City, contacted the president of Haiti, Jean-Pierre Boyer, about the possibility of sending free persons of color to the independent black nation. Dewey was frustrated with black opposition to African colonization and hoped to win free black support for emigration to Haiti. Boyer, believing incorrectly that Dewey was writing for the ACS and not on his own initiative, welcomed what he thought was a prime opportunity for Haiti to gain official recognition by the United States government and receive American blacks eager to improve their socioeconomic standing. To attract potential migrants, Boyer offered generous terms to those who moved to Haiti. Migrants who agreed to work uncultivated areas would have their transportation paid for, get three acres of land free of charge and be provided with provisions. Meanwhile, all migrants would be considered full citizens upon stepping foot on Haitian soil. Boyer sent an emissary, the charming Jonathas Granville, to free black communities in New York and Philadelphia to communicate his liberal offer. African American leaders responded enthusiastically by founding emigration societies and seeking to enlist support for Haitian emigration among their fellow persons of color.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 209-214; Alexander, *African or American?*, 40-42. For details on Boyer's offer see *Correspondence Relative to the Emigration to Hayti, of the Free People of Colour, in the United States. Together With Instructions to the Agent Sent out by President Boyer* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1824), 8-10. New York's Haytian Emigration Society of Coloured People was founded during the first campaign for free black migration to Haiti in 1818. Black Philadelphians also supported Haitian emigration. Richard Allen played an especially central role in the campaign there to recruit emigrants to the island, serving as the leader of the Philadelphia Emigration Society. See Newman, *Freedom's Prophet*, 247-258. See *Information for the Free People of Colour Who are Inclined to Emigrate to Haiti* (Philadelphia: J.R. Cunningham, 1825) for an example of the pro-Haiti literature produced by African Americans in Philadelphia.

Haiti held obvious allure for free blacks of the urban Mid-Atlantic. The Haitian government's offer came at exactly the time when race relations in the North began to reach a nadir. Black supporters of Haitian emigration, who had always maintained great pride in the only independent free black nation, mixed a cheerless recognition of white prejudice with an optimistic sense of Haiti's liberating potential. New York's Haytian Emigration Society of Colored People, led by Peter Williams Jr., told migrants set to embark that they were going to "remove beyond the influence of the prejudices which oppose the civil, intellectual, and moral advancement of men of colour in the United States" to a place where "a dark complexion will be no disadvantage" and persons of color could "become independent and honourable...respectable and happy." It may be tempting to see overtones of the ACS in the words of Williams Jr., but the Haitian emigration societies did not encourage total black removal or correlate their support for partial emigration with the abolition of slavery. Haiti, for its supporters, represented the continued aspirations among free blacks for uplift and equality. The island nation also provided an insurance policy for those persons of color unable to improve their condition within an increasingly racially divisive America. Even though somewhere between 6,000 and 13,000, African Americans made the exodus to Haiti the realities of life there did not meet their expectations. Finding economic opportunities limited and falling victim to a black Haitian prejudice they hardly could have anticipated, most of the migrants came back to the United States disappointed. While black Americans would continue to view Haiti as proof that their race was capable of a self-sustaining liberty, the Haitian migration experiment ended only a few years after it had begun.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Address of the Board of Managers of the Haytian Emigration Society of Coloured People, to the Emigrants Intending to Sail to the Island of Haiti, in the Brig De Witt Clinton* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1824), 3. Language barriers and religious differences helped divide Haitians and black American emigrants. Many of Haiti's elite looked down on African Americans who came to the island as not sufficiently wealthy or educated, viewing emigrants as

With Haitian emigration sidelined, free black activists recommitted themselves to the early abolitionist values that they had earlier helped create. The ACS' presence in the Mid-Atlantic by the late 1820s helped convince black abolitionists to renew their fight against slavery and prejudice within the United States. In February of 1827, Philadelphia's persons of color gathered again in Allen's Bethel Church to take on the ACS. They utilized the republicans of color concept to argue that white prejudice could be beaten. The meeting resolved that "by an industrious, prudent, and peaceable course of life" persons of color could win "the respect of the community" and evince the "gradual but certain termination of those prejudices which still exist against us." In prototypical early abolitionist fashion the gathering concluded that the defeat of white prejudice would "remove the strongest plea of the slaveholder" and "aid in the liberation of our now enslaved brethren," making emancipation possible.<sup>72</sup>

New York's black abolitionists concurred with persons of color in Philadelphia that white prejudice was in need of a fresh assault. In January 1831, the city's black activists came together to push back against the New York Colonization Society. They held a meeting in response to the rhetoric of New York colonizationists, which they blamed for encouraging whites to wrongly believe that free blacks were "a growing evil, immoral, and destitute of religious principles." In an address to the citizens of New York, a committee of three tried to set the record straight. The address "absolutely den[ied]" the assumption of the New York Colonization Society that "our condition cannot be improved here because there exists an unconquerable prejudice in the whites towards us." Instead of spending their energies stoking discrimination, colonizationists should acknowledge the "respectable part of our community" and pursue the "improvement of our moral and political condition in the country of our birth." The address concluded with the resolve that

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intrusive outsiders. The Haitian government's promises to black Americans of economic prosperity and equal participation in the political process turned out to be untrue as well.

<sup>72</sup> *Genius of Universal Emancipation* (Baltimore), Feb. 24, 1827.

"the time must come when the declaration of independence must be felt in the heart as well as uttered from the mouth." African American abolitionists in New York had regained their determination to fight black inequality by waging war on white prejudice.<sup>73</sup>

The African American revival of early abolitionist reform gained an important vehicle when the black newspaper *Freedom's Journal* began publication in March of 1827. The idea for *Freedom's Journal*, the first black newspaper in the United States, came from a bloc of New York's leading African American activists, among them Peter Williams Jr. and William Hamilton. The newspaper's backers selected Samuel Cornish as head editor. Cornish was a Presbyterian minister whose ties to the ideals of early abolitionism ran deep. An adherent of the belief that black morality and virtue could dispatch white prejudice, Cornish served as an agent of the NYMS' African Free Schools and tried to enforce a strict code of sober and industrious behavior among his fellow blacks. Cornish was joined in his editorial post by John Russwurm, the Jamaican born and college educated activist who through his experiences teaching black children had only recently been familiarized with the depths of black inequality. Cornish and Russwurm laid out their objectives in *Freedom Journal's* first issue. The newspaper would aim to "arrest the progress of prejudice" and be "devoted to the improvement of our brethren." The editors informed their readership that it was time for black Americans to "plead our own cause" as "Too long have others spoken for us." A black newspaper provided a powerful innovation in American abolitionism. But the cause for which *Freedom's Journal* pled was one that African American activists had championed together with white abolitionists for many years.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> "An Address to the Citizens of New-York," in William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization: or an Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purpose of the American Colonization Society. Together With the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 13-17.

<sup>74</sup> *Freedom's Journal* (New York), March 16, 1827. For background on Cornish's life see Pease and Pease, *Bound With Them in Chains*, 140-161. For John Russwurm see Sandra Sandiford Young, "John Russwurm's Dilemma: Citizenship or Emigration?" in McCarthy and Stauffer, *Prophets of Protest*, 90-113. *Freedom's Journal* gained

*Freedom's Journal* was the production of black middle class reformers who had affiliated themselves with white abolitionists. Therefore, it is not surprising that the periodical united with the abolition societies in pressing free blacks to use their own lives to knock down white prejudice. One of the newspaper's items instructed persons of color that "propriety of conduct, never was more essential to any people than to us." Since whites made "no distinction" between the virtuous and the vicious," the indiscretions of one member of the black community was used to disparage all African Americans. *Freedom's Journal* warned that free blacks must "do nothing which shall have the least tendency to excite these prejudices; but rather strive to allay them." The newspaper's prescription for mollifying white prejudice was identical to the advice of early abolitionists. Through guiding their actions by "INDUSTRY, PRUDENCE, and ECONOMY," keeping "a strict obedience to the precepts of the gospel" and making sure "never to neglect any of the means of education," persons of color could do "battle against prejudices of longstanding." Bent on displaying the virtuousness of African Americans, black abolitionists now stressed the values of republicans of color more than ever before.<sup>75</sup>

As much as *Freedom's Journal* tried to guide the conduct of free blacks to counterpoise white prejudice, it spilt much ink answering the ACS' racially exclusionary rhetoric. Shrewdly

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financial support from black leaders in Philadelphia such as James Forten. Advertisements in the paper's pages indicate that it catered to a black middle class aspiring to socioeconomic betterment. The only book length treatment of *Freedom's Journal* is Jaqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African American Newspaper* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007). See also Timothy Patrick McCarthy, "To Plead Our Own Cause: Black Print Culture and the Origins of American Abolitionism," in McCarthy and Stauffer, *Prophets of Protest*, 115-133 and Bruce Jr., *The Origins of African American Literature*, 163-174 for additional accounts of *Freedom's Journal*.<sup>75</sup> *Freedom's Journal* (New York), July 18, 1827; *Ibid.*, July, 27, 1827; *Ibid.*, March 23, 1827; *Ibid.*, April 28, 1828. Like early abolitionists, at times *Freedom's Journal* chastised free blacks for supposedly failing to live up to the virtuous standards they believed persons of color had to meet to overturn white prejudice. See *Freedom's Journal* (New York) July 20, 1827 and February 7, 1829. The activist values set forth by *Freedom's Journal* were not necessarily shared by all free blacks in New York. A debate over the propriety of holding parades in 1827 to celebrate the total abolition of slavery in New York split the black community. *Freedom's Journal* opposed the planned parades for contradicting the chaste, sober behavior they, along with the NYMS, wanted to inculcate in the free black community while other black New Yorkers embraced the opportunity of publically celebrating African American freedom. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 122-128. During the 1830s some black activists would reject the uplift formula altogether and argue instead for a more direct confrontation with white prejudice.

realizing that colonizationist reform rested on a bleak view of the state of free blacks and the progress of emancipation, *Freedom's Journal* answered with a buoyant optimism that not even the PAS could match. In a series of essays taking on the ACS, an essayist under the pseudonym *Clarkson* wrote that while "the monster prejudice" had underpinned human bondage for generations, the "march of correct sentiment" was "beginning to dispel the dark clouds" of slavery and black inequality. Contradicting colonizationists' claims that African Americans were a depraved people, *Clarkson* looked out around him and saw "thousands" of emancipated slaves who were "aspiring after character, property and distinction" and "rising from the depths of degradation...to an honourable station in society." *Clarkson* wrote that despite the allegations of colonizationists' that emancipation in the South could not happen absent black removal, the "moral influence which has emancipated the slaves of Pennsylvania and New York" would "free those of the Carolinas and Georgia." *Freedom's Journal* confronted ACS avowals of permanent black inequality and the impossibility of emancipation without black expatriation by presenting African American uplift and Mid-Atlantic abolitionism as unstoppable forces destined to advance throughout the nation.<sup>76</sup>

In constructing this alternative narrative of black liberty, *Freedom's Journal* affixed its own conception of antislavery reform to that of the early abolition societies. The newspaper lauded the PAS and NYMS for netting results not "anticipated by the most sanguine friends of religion and humanity." In four decades of dedicated activism the abolition societies had secured legislative emancipation, stimulated free black improvement and saw to it that persons of color would enjoy "civil and political rights." *Freedom's Journal* also singled out the American Convention, contending that since the abolition societies came together into one body "our condition has been gradually improving--our privileges have been extended--and in many cases,

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<sup>76</sup> *Freedom's Journal* (New York), Sept. 27, 1827.

prejudice itself has had to give place to the dictates of reason." *Freedom's Journal* utilized the coalition of early abolitionists and free blacks to put colonizationists on the defensive. If colonizationists admitted that gradual abolition and black incorporation had given birth to persons of color with wealth, character, and respectability, they would have to acknowledge that prejudice was beatable and their advocacy of black removal "the VERY STRONG HOLDS OF SLAVERY AND OPPRESSION." For black activists, rejecting colonization meant reaffirming early abolitionist principles.<sup>77</sup>

BY THE END of the 1820s, early abolitionists, and those free blacks who shared their blueprint for activism, discovered that the walls of slavery and prejudice would not fall as quickly or totally as those of monarchy and absolutism. Prejudice's resilience was undeniable and more and more reformers were beginning to accept its presence as a permanent reality. The founding of the ACS in 1816 exemplified this shift, offering a new strategy for organized antislavery. When the ACS forced the issue of colonization onto the American Convention's docket, it divided the abolition societies and its members between those who began to view colonization as the only means to achieve the total abolition of slavery and others who refused to accept black removal as anything but a betrayal of everything for which their movement had fought. It was in opposition to the ACS that a new generation of abolitionists would emerge. As many of their white allies abandoned them, African American activists served as the torchbearers for the pre-ACS

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<sup>77</sup> *Freedom's Journal* (New York), Nov. 9, 1827; *Ibid.*, Dec. 19, 1828; *Ibid.*, April 13, 1827. For a sampling of other editorials from the *Freedom's Journal* lambasting African colonization see *Freedom's Journal* (New York), May 18, 1827, July 26, 1827, August 24, 1827, September 7, 1827, October 5, 1827, November 16, 1827 and November 30 1827. *Freedom's Journal* often excerpted the proceedings of the American Convention and reported on white and black abolitionists working together. White abolitionist organizations, including the PAS and the American Convention, reciprocated by subscribing to the paper. *Freedom's Journal* ceased publication in March of 1829 once John Russwurm, who had taken over head editorial duties from Cornish six months after the inaugural issue, shocked the periodical's subscribers by retracting his opposition to the ACS and accepting an official position in Liberia. Cornish then founded the newspaper *The Rights of All*, which was intended to serve as the successor to *Freedom's Journal* but lasted less than a year.

antislavery values of incorporation and black citizenship, carrying the paramount principles of early abolitionism forward for a fresh set of activists to inherit.

## EPILOGUE:

### A MOVEMENT FORGOTTEN

With the publication of his widely read *Thoughts on African Colonization* in 1832, William Lloyd Garrison redefined what it meant to be an abolitionist. An erstwhile supporter of colonization, Garrison had recently decided that black removal was a sinful cause and he wanted to make his fellow citizens aware of just how damaging the ACS had been to antislavery in America. One of Garrison's leading complaints about colonization was the gradual approach to emancipation taken by its proponents. Gradualism, according to Garrison, deferred to the rights of slaveholders, left unchallenged white prejudice, and perpetuated slavery by refusing to combat the immorality of holding fellow human beings as chattel. Instead of a mechanism of abolition, Garrison concluded that calls for the gradual end of slavery were actually "calculated to perpetuate the thralldom of our species." He answered gradualism with immediate abolition (which demanded that slaveholders immediately confront the problem of slavery and free their slaves). Garrison declared that the boundaries between gradualists and immediatists could not be more clear. In one corner stood the advocates of "IMMEDIATE ABOLITION" who sought "EQUAL RIGHTS" for African Americans and exclaimed "NO EXPATRIATION." Opposite them were the friends of "AFRICAN COLONIZATION" who counseled "GRADUAL ABOLITION," insisted on "NO EQUALITY" for persons of color and worked for the "EXPULSION OF THE BLACKS." In his attempt to draw a sharp distinction between

immediatists and colonizationists, Garrison constructed a dichotomy of antislavery activism that submerged the racially progressive roots of gradual abolitionism.<sup>1</sup>

Though his presentation of American antislavery papered over the original meaning of gradualism, Garrison could perhaps be excused for his error. By the time *Thoughts of African Colonization* appeared in print, colonizationists had in fact become the most publically visible champions of gradual emancipation. Antislavery forces within the colonization movement vocalized their intention to gradually abolish slavery through black removal since the ACS' founding. But when immediate abolitionists began renouncing the ACS in the early 1830s, antislavery colonizationists only grew louder in their defense of gradual emancipation. Francis Scott Key told the Pennsylvania Colonization Society that "a slave, suddenly emancipated" did little good for either society or freedpersons. Calling "such an emancipation...at least questionable," Key believed that gradual emancipation and the colonization of the liberated to Africa was the only answer to ending slavery in America. Another colonizationist was more direct. Dismissing the "new fangled notion of *immediate and total abolition*," J.R. Tyson castigated the "turbulent invective and acrimonious clamour" that immediatists directed against "the ancient and recognized principles of *gradual* emancipation." The onset of immediate abolitionism touched off a war of words between immediatists and colonizationists that masked the vision of reform set out by the first advocates of gradual abolition.<sup>2</sup>

As colonizationists and immediatists reproached one another, the early abolition movement was falling apart. Early abolitionists centered their reform philosophy on the assumption of an ever-evolving antislavery progress: the securing of gradual emancipation

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<sup>1</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on African Colonization: Or An Impartial Exhibition of the Doctrines, Principles and Purposes of the American Colonization Society. Together With the Resolutions, Addresses and Remonstrances of the Free People of Color* (Boston: Garrison and Knapp, 1832), 80, 147.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Colonization Society* (1830), 3; Tyson, *A Discourse Before the Young Men's Colonization Society of Pennsylvania*, 41, 46.

statutes by state legislatures, the cessation of the international slave trade, the extension of equal rights to free blacks, the social, political and economic uplift of African Americans, and the elimination of white prejudice. But by the third decade of the nineteenth century the tide of antislavery progress seemed undeniably to be regressing. Gradual abolition had been accomplished only regionally and the liberty of blacks freed by these laws was threatened by the pandemic of kidnapping. Rather than withering, slavery had spread to new states that entered the Union, only augmenting the political power of slaveholders. The international slave trade continued clandestinely at the same time as a domestic slave trade made the lives of slaves even more unbearable and the rights of free blacks even more insecure. As discouraging, white prejudice, which had appeared on the defensive in 1790, seemed on the upswing in the 1820s and 30s. A popular culture of white prejudice demeaned black freedom, racially discriminative labor practices barred many free persons of color from improving their socioeconomic condition, and the state legislatures of New York and Pennsylvania took political rights away from black Americans in 1821 and 1838 respectively.

Early abolitionists continued to express optimism in the face of these deflating developments, yet it became increasingly difficult to make such a case persuasively. The gradual abolitionism of these reformers took another hit as the focus of antislavery shifted to the South, where the formula applied to Mid-Atlantic states was infeasible. Though stalwarts could claim victory over pragmatic colonizationists at the American Convention, they could not change the fact that the only version of antislavery white Southerners seemed willing to accept was colonization. And by the time of Andrew Jackson's election to the presidency, even colonization was fast becoming an untenable position in an increasingly proslavery South. Colonization's pessimistic outlook matched the state of antislavery trends and race relations in the nation at

large by the time immediatists arrived on the scene. With colonizationists pushing for the removal of persons of color as a solution to slavery and immediate abolitionists abandoning gradualist strategies, early abolitionists found themselves out of touch with the national conversation over slavery, race and reform in America.<sup>3</sup>

Though gradual abolitionism without colonization effectively died when the American Convention met for a final time in 1837, the abolition societies pressed onward. The PAS endured in asserting black rights and trying to secure the future of African Americans in the republic. The PAS had helped fend off for years the recurring efforts of some Pennsylvania legislators to circumscribe the rights of black Pennsylvanians. At the state Constitutional Convention of 1837-38, black suffrage rights were hanging in the balance. A proposal to disenfranchise African Americans was before the Convention when the PAS decided to take action. To answer the "violent & bitter prejudice against the free people of color" the PAS planned to conduct a census reflecting the true condition of Philadelphia's black community. The census could "meet the enemies of the Coloured Man with irresistible argument" and stave off disfranchisement, the PAS thought. In a subsequent pamphlet publishing their findings, the PAS acknowledged the impressive level of free black wealth, success and virtue in the city and explained African American inequality purely as a result of the stifling environment of prejudice. Here was a lasting tribute to the social reform environmentalism of early abolitionists. Fittingly enough for the tenor of the times, this appeal fell on deaf ears. The same constitution that James

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<sup>3</sup> Some early abolitionists joined the immediatist movement. For example, high ranking PAS members Thomas Shipley, Edward P. Atlee, Evan Lewis, Isaac Barton and Joseph Parker all announced their allegiance to immediate abolitionists while remaining supportive of the PAS. Shipley even led the formation of the Philadelphia Antislavery Society, an auxiliary of the immediatists' flagship organization, the American Antislavery Society. Sayre "The Evolution of Early American Abolitionism," 307-309.

Pemberton had so lauded as a beacon of black citizenship nearly forty years earlier now officially designated citizenship in racially exclusive terms.<sup>4</sup>

But not all was lost. Just as the American Convention and early abolitionism was fading away, a black abolition movement premised on analogous values rose in its place. To further solidify the antislavery message broadcast by such outlets as *Freedom's Journal*, African American abolitionists chose to organize a convention of black reformers in 1831. Showing that they had not completely abandoned the colonization of some persons of color as a partial means of dealing with white prejudice, African American activists officially convened the first black convention to investigate the prospect of emigration to Canada. While they supported persons of color who elected to move to Canada, the Convention's members focused on the improvement of those of African descent within America rather than outside its borders. The Convention's address to black Americans explained that it was "to remove prejudices based on "the accidental diversities of colour" that they had met. Lambasting the ACS for "pursuing the direct road to perpetual slavery," the Convention implored persons of color to stay "devoted to our instruction and elevation" by remaining anchored to the mores of republicans of color. The "Annual Convention of the People of Colour" shared an ideological and organizational affinity with the American Convention. William Lloyd Garrison, who attended the first black convention and

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<sup>4</sup> PPAS, Series I, Reel II, 302-305, HSP, Philadelphia; *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color, of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts, As Exhibited by the Report of a Committee of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838). As in New York, partisan politics played a large role in black Pennsylvanians losing suffrage rights at the Pennsylvania Convention of 1837-38. State Democrats wanted to placate Southern Democrats uneasy about the state of their peculiar property as a result of the vitriolic rhetoric of immediate abolitionists who condemned Southern slaveholders in no uncertain terms. See Wood, "A Sacrifice on the Altar of Slavery." The PAS recognized as much when they bitterly noted that the Convention displayed "a humble subserviency to the southern policy." PPAS, Series I, Reel II, 326, HSP, Philadelphia.

drew his inspiration from black activists, helped found an immediate abolition movement with more echoes in the gradualism of the early national past than he ever could have known.<sup>5</sup>

What are we to make of the legacy of America's first abolitionists? If measured by their own lofty goals it is hard to classify the movement as a success. Slavery was not totally abolished, racial equality remained elusive, and white prejudice lived on. Still, early abolitionists accomplished much. Though they did not directly end slavery in America, the abolition societies played a pivotal part in placing slavery on the road to extinction in the North. This act, in the long run, set a free North and slave South on a collision course that would eventually bring the complete abolition of slavery. While they came up short in achieving equality for former slaves, the early abolitionist program of black uplift and its commitment to African American rights helped nurture a generation of black reformers who would continue this racially redemptive quest. If they could not vanquish white prejudice, gradual abolitionists understood that eradicating the inequities of slavery required more than ending the actual institution of human bondage. It meant reconstructing the society that made slavery a viable institution in the first place; a lesson well taken in the Post-Civil War South. Yet the most enduring legacy of the early abolition movement was its abiding faith that a world free from black oppression and racial inequality was possible. It was this audacity to imagine such a society that inspired not only America's first abolitionists but every group of likeminded Americans after them, from Radical Republicans during Reconstruction to the freedom riders of the Civil Rights movement.

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<sup>5</sup> *Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, Held by Adjournments in the City of Philadelphia, from the Sixth to the Eleventh of June, Inclusive, 1831* (Philadelphia, 1831), 18-19. The Convention met all the way up to the Civil War. For the history of the black convention movement See Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest*. Revealing how imperative black opposition to the ACS had been in his own break with colonization, Garrison excerpted dozens of black protest documents in *Thoughts on African Colonization*.

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