



2016

## A Higher Law: Transatlantic Revolution and Antislavery Radicalism in Early America, 1760-1800

Anthony Di Lorenzo  
*Loyola University Chicago*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss)



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Di Lorenzo, Anthony, "A Higher Law: Transatlantic Revolution and Antislavery Radicalism in Early America, 1760-1800" (2016). *Dissertations*. 2127.

[https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc\\_diss/2127](https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_diss/2127)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact [ecommons@luc.edu](mailto:ecommons@luc.edu).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License](#).  
Copyright © 2016 Anthony Di Lorenzo

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

A HIGHER LAW:

TRANSATLANTIC REVOLUTION AND ANTISLAVERY RADICALISM

IN EARLY AMERICA, 1760-1800

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN HISTORY

BY

ANTHONY J. DI LORENZO

CHICAGO, IL

AUGUST 2016

Copyright by Anthony Di Lorenzo, 2016  
All rights reserved.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So many people helped make this project possible. My family and friends endlessly encouraged and supported my efforts. My parents, especially, instilled in me the values that laid the foundations for my path. Teachers along the way made an enormous impression: Matt Whipple at Glenbrook South High School, Jay Holstein and Linda Kerber at the University of Iowa, Jim Block and Michael Alvarez at DePaul, as well as Susan Rosa, Andrew Shankman, and Patrick Miller at Northeastern Illinois. My committee of John Donoghue, Tim Gilfoyle, Kyle Roberts, and outside- reader Jim Sack of UIC, supported the project throughout and provided invaluable feedback. At Loyola, in addition to the committee, Bob Bucholz, David Dennis, Ted Karamanski, and Suzanne Kaufman, in particular, provided wise advice and support.

The English Atlantic Writing Group provided an intellectual forum and jovial atmosphere to test out new ideas and learn from other scholars in the field. The Dissertation Writing Group, coordinated by Amy Oberlin, and the various Dissertation Boot Camps, led by Dina Berger and Jessica Horowitz, kept me on task. Ben Johnson, Michelle Nickerson, and Kyle Roberts helped me to navigate the job market as I finished the dissertation. John Donoghue, my dissertation director and advisor, impressed me with his passion and knowledge from the start. My project took many twists and turns from the proposal stage and Dr. Donoghue was a patient and engaging guide through the process. At times, his trust in my ability to pull this thing off seemed to exceed my own.

The graduate program was full of many talented and passionate students that made the long and arduous process of pursuing the doctorate intellectually stimulating and often a lot of fun. Thanks to our intramural basketball team Discipline and Punish for providing an outlet for my energies and averting my descent into a sedentary existence. Erin Feichtinger, who organized the team, also spearheaded a number of community outreach efforts and was a constant reminder of Loyola's social justice mission. Devin Hunter and Will Ippen, two of my cohort mates, were always there to get a beer or coffee as we soldiered through our coursework, exams, and dissertation projects. My fellow early Americanists and Atlanticists Pete Kotowski, Erin Feichtinger, and Nathan Jérémie-Brink have offered valuable suggestions on my project throughout. Kelsey Walsh, archivist extraordinaire, was a constant companion and always willing to lend a sympathetic ear or a helpful hand.

I benefited from the support of the Colonial Dames of America, the International Center for Jefferson Studies, The Gilder Lehrman Institute, and the Newberry Library. These institutions recognized the project's potential, sometimes even in the early stages. Absent their support, conducting the research necessary for this dissertation would have been impossible.

Finally, to those struggling against injustice and prejudice, I hope that you'll find something of value in the pages that follow. May solidarity triumph over racism and oppression.

In memory of Laura Adamski and Susan Rosa.  
Your wisdom, passion and encouragement made this project possible. I miss you both.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	vii
INTRODUCTION: REASSESSING EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ABOLITIONISM	1
CHAPTER ONE: CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE: THE TRANSATLANTIC FOUNDATIONS OF ABOLITIONISM, 1760-1773	14
CHAPTER TWO: “A HYDRA SIN”: REVOLUTION, RELIGION, AND THE ABOLITIONIST CRUSADE, 1773-1783	83
CHAPTER THREE: “SPARKS FROM THE SACRED FIRE”: ANTISLAVERY ACTIVISM IN THE NEW NATION, 1783-1793	149
CHAPTER FOUR: “A BLOW AT THE ROOT”: THE TRANSATLANTIC POLITICS OF DEMOCRACY AND EMANCIPATION, 1793-1798	222
CHAPTER FIVE: RETREAT FROM RADICALISM: ANTI-JACOBINISM AND THE DEFENSE OF SLAVERY IN THE 1790S	278
EPILOGUE: THE LEGACY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ANTISLAVERY RADICALISM	349
BIBLIOGRAPHY	364
VITA	411

## ABSTRACT

During the Age of Revolution, abolitionist ideas interacted with notions of liberty, independence, and equality. Although slavery often served as a metaphor, in opposition to freedom, it also had tangible meanings for the enslaved. This study traces the development of revolutionary beliefs that connected reformers and abolitionists across the Atlantic world, as well as the rise of conservative ideologies that divided them. Democratic politics, religious enthusiasm, and abolitionism converged in the late eighteenth century, with significant implications for antislavery efforts. The French Revolution, in particular, represented the culmination of radical Enlightenment ideals and emboldened democrats in the United States, contributing to transatlantic cooperation on the issue of abolition. Social conservatives, in response to Jacobin terror in France and fears of spreading religious infidelity, expressed concerns over political extremism, which included abolitionism. Anti-Jacobinism divided the nascent antislavery movement, pushing some towards moderation and others to abandon the cause altogether in the interest of maintaining a fragile Jeffersonian coalition. Understanding the political and cultural responses to the transatlantic radicalism of the period is therefore crucial to comprehending the trajectory of the American abolitionist movement.



## INTRODUCTION:

### REASSESSING EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ABOLITIONISM

On an evening in the spring of 1849 a boisterous crowd amassed in Boston's Faneuil Hall to hear an address by the famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Recently returned from Europe, he boldly proclaimed, "I should welcome the intelligence tomorrow, should it come, that the slaves had risen in the South...." Receiving some gasps, he offered a parallel familiar to the politicized audience: "you threw your caps in honor of the victory achieved by Republicanism over Royalty" he observed, referring to the enthusiastic response to recent news from France, "you... joined heartily in the watchword of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'—and should you not hail, with equal pleasure, the tidings from the South, that the slave had risen, and achieved for himself ... what the republicans of France achieved against the royalists...?"<sup>1</sup> Douglass' reasoned sentiments echoed a durable abolitionist tradition that sought to expose the white supremacist assumptions of revolutionary republicanism and the hypocrisy of democrats. Above all, he called on those moved by higher principles to remain steadfast in both their actions and beliefs—to put abstract principles into practice, and without regard to race.

Fifty-five years earlier, in 1794, another group had assembled at the historic

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Liberator* (Boston, MA), June 8, 1849. The 1848 Revolution in France, sometimes referred to as the February Revolution, toppled King Louis Philippe, but the elected government of the Second Republic, led by liberals, was thought to be too conservative by many radical republicans and socialists. By June, workers and radical leaders were putting great pressure on the government, culminating in the June Days Uprising.

meeting house. The Massachusetts Constitutional Society met to deliberate on a circular letter to be sent to “all the Republican Societies in the United States,” hoping to coordinate the activities of clubs “established on similar democratic principles with their own.”<sup>2</sup> The Boston-based association had been founded about seven-months prior, bound together by a set of political convictions, “above all the sacred regard to the great essential Principle of EQUAL RIGHTS,” as their constitution resolved.<sup>3</sup> For some, these principles, forged in the crucible of two revolutionary wars, would be sacrificed on the altar of racial slavery. For others, they would continue to serve as a beacon, propelling the most committed members of the abolitionist movement to insist on freedom and full equality for black as well as white. To understand these responses, they must be situated within the context of an intense period of radicalism in the Atlantic world—an era that saw dramatic ruptures in the hierarchical political and cultural patterns of the old regime.

In his classic two-volume study, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (1959, 1964), R.R. Palmer moved beyond the narrow nationalistic histories so popular in a period dominated by the American Studies movement and explored broad political and ideological connections spanning the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic world.<sup>4</sup> His periodization, 1760-1800, is the same used here. The events of those forty years, marked by rapid change, were the culmination of trends dating back hundreds of years.

Especially significant among these were the English revolutions of the seventeenth

---

<sup>2</sup> *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), “Boston, August, 28,” November 6, 1794.

<sup>3</sup> *Boston Gazette*, January 20, 1794.

<sup>4</sup> R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959, 1964). Also see the work of Palmer’s collaborator, French historian Jacques Léon Godechot, *Les institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l’empire* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951); and *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1770-1799* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

century. The first, often referred to as the Puritan Revolution (1640-1660), witnessed the execution of a monarch in the name of the people, an unprecedented social, political, and cultural development; the second, the Glorious Revolution (1688), has been referred to as the “first modern revolution,” and had far-reaching international consequences.<sup>5</sup> The subsequent American and French revolutions of the eighteenth century were significantly influenced by these earlier events. The Age of Revolution did not end in 1800, however, but continued into the nineteenth century, with independence movements in the Caribbean, Latin America, and throughout the world. Indeed, the legacy of democratic revolution continues to this day.

A critical blind-spot for Palmer was the existence of chattel slavery, which continued to expand even as Enlightenment-inspired chants of liberty and equality could be heard on both sides of the Atlantic. There is barely a mention of slavery or revolts amongst the enslaved throughout his voluminous study. Even the uprisings in Saint Domingue and the resulting Haitian Revolution were largely neglected.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, there was almost no discussion of the implications of democratic ideology on the antislavery movement developing in the late eighteenth century. In the intervening years since Palmer's pioneering work, valuable scholarship on slavery and abolition has grown

---

<sup>5</sup> On the radicalism of the English Revolution, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London, 1972), 107-150; and John Donoghue, *‘Fire under the Ashes’: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). On the influence of the “Glorious Revolution,” see Steven Pincus, *1688 The First Modern Revolution*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Important recent work on the French Caribbean in the Age of Revolution includes, David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 2001); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

exponentially. In particular, a series of important studies by the historian David Brion Davis have enriched our understanding of slavery in the broader contexts of western civilization and the Age of Revolution.<sup>7</sup>

The purpose of this study is to explore the convergence of democratic politics and radical abolitionism in the early American Republic, while tracing the development of revolutionary ideologies that connected reformers and abolitionists across the Atlantic world. While historians have picked up the torch passed by Palmer and expanded the scholarly literature on the Age of Revolution, the role of antislavery thought and organizational action within this frame demands further attention.<sup>8</sup> Important recent work on popular politics in the early United States has illuminated our understanding of partisanship, republicanism, democracy, and demonstrations out-of-doors.<sup>9</sup> Abolitionism

---

<sup>7</sup> Especially significant are, Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966); and *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York, 1975).

<sup>8</sup> For recent work on abolition in an Atlantic context, see J.R. Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000); Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London and New York, 2011); and Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). Influential work on transatlantic radicalism includes: Joseph Klaitz and Michael H. Hatzel, eds., *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*, ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999); Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); and Matthew Rainbow Hale, "Many Who Wandered in Darkness': The Contest over American National Identity, 1795-1798," *Early American Studies* 1 (2003). On the intersection between popular politics and abolitionism during the 1790s, see especially, Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 58-66; and James Alexander Dun, "Philadelphia not Philanthropolis: The Limits of Pennsylvanian Antislavery in the Era of the Haitian Revolution," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 135, No. 1, January 2011, p. 73-102.

<sup>9</sup> See Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: The People, the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders, Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1799-1828* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: Knopf, 1972); Paul Douglas

and antislavery politics are rarely central in these discussions.

Antislavery radicals appealed to various authorities to justify their repudiation of a practice that had long been supported by custom, tradition, and human law. Some appealed to God, to moral conscience, to the laws of nature, to reason—all of these concepts were entangled in the eighteenth century. Radical dissenters such as the Society of Friends (Quakers), Baptists, and various antinomian Protestant sects, combined religious fervor with republican politics dating back to the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. The most radical amongst them challenged slavery as a usurpation of the sovereignty of God and the integrity of personal morality. They contended that individuals had rights by nature—not merely as Englishmen, but as human beings.

The antislavery activism of the years between 1760-1800 drew on this earlier tradition and laid the foundations for the radical abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century. Critiques of the British empire during the American Revolution often embraced abstract understandings of natural rights and attempted to put principle into practice. The decades after American independence saw both the spread of racialized slavery and the rise of popular politics. The most radical antislavery voices insisted on the equality of the races, even in the face of rising racial prejudice. Yet, these figures and their perspectives are little studied or understood. The prevailing historical narrative of early American abolitionism emphasizes its conservatism and moderation, starkly distinguishing this early phase of the movement from the radical abolitionism of the mid-nineteenth

---

Newman, *Fries Rebellion: The Enduring Struggle for the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 139-140; E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present* 50, no. 1 (1971): 76-136; and David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

century.<sup>10</sup>

While there is considerable value in this differentiation, it obscures not only commonalities in the movement across time but also the radical characteristics of its extreme wing in the eighteenth century. The early movement was heavily influenced by revolutionary ideology, including natural rights philosophy and democratic thought often associated with the transatlantic-artisan radical Thomas Paine. One of Paine's earliest publications after arriving in the United States was an antislavery essay.<sup>11</sup> The democratic culture that Paine helped to forge continued to reflect an understanding that the accomplishments of both the American Revolution and the Enlightenment project required posing a serious challenge to the institution of chattel slavery.

The role of radical Enlightenment thought in shaping the antislavery debate of the

---

<sup>10</sup> Scholars such as Richard S. Newman, John Stauffer, and Shane White have focused on the shift from gradualism to immediatism, contrasting a moderate reform movement dominated by elites in the late-eighteenth century with the Garrisonians who reached out to women, free blacks, and those from various economic stations, gaining prominence after 1830. Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991). A notable exception to this narrative is the work of Manisha Sinha, who casts the abolitionism of the Age of Revolution in a more radical light. Manisha Sinha, "‘To Cast Just Obliquely’ on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Volume LXIV, No. 1 (January 2007): 149-160; and *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). Other recent scholarship has challenged the negative perception of late eighteenth-century abolitionism. Both Ira Berlin and Patrick Rael have focused on a “long emancipation” process, with an emphasis on continuity. Paul Polgar has argued that while late-eighteenth-century abolitionism tended to be gradual, the motivations for this approach were seldom racist but more often grew out of a concern for the formerly enslaved. The shift toward colonization schemes, he argues, marked a shift from an approach that valued integrating African Americans into society. Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015); Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865* (Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2015); and Paul Polgar, "'To Raise Them to an Equal Participation': Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African American Citizenship," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 31(Summer 2011), No. 2, 229- 258; “Standard Bearers of Liberty and Equality: Reinterpreting the Origins of American Abolitionism.” Ph.D., City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 36.

late eighteenth century, moreover, has frequently been misunderstood as a secular divergence from a religious antislavery tradition rather than a logical development from within that tradition. This project serves as a corrective. Recovering and reconnecting the religious and political radicalism of the period sheds light on the intersection between revolutionary ideology and abolitionism. Historian Bernard Bailyn connected patriot ideas to a venerable tradition of English republicanism, exploring the competing and complementary discursive and ideological patterns leading up to the American Revolution. However, he focused primarily on the political thought of elites and neglected many of the most democratic strains within the English republican tradition.

Historians have long argued that the Revolution released a “contagion of liberty,” to use Bailyn's phrase, that spread liberationist ideology and converted some patriots to the cause of antislavery.<sup>12</sup> But abolitionist ideas animated the most radical of the patriot movement from the start. Prominent ideologues like James Otis and Benjamin Rush contended that slavery was a symptom of a corrupted British imperial project. Chattel slavery was the contagion that threatened to infect the body politic, leading to tyranny and despotism. Antislavery ideas did not trickle down to the masses. Rather, the most radical actors of the American Revolution surged from below, putting pressure on elites, and drew from antislavery discourses from the start, citing economic bondage and the slave trade as the most egregious examples of the British Empire's excesses and hypocrisy.

Importantly, religious and Enlightenment revolutionary discourses were deeply interconnected. Historians increasingly differentiate between a “radical Enlightenment,”

---

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), Chapter 6.

and a “moderate Enlightenment,” which helps to distinguish various currents within eighteenth-century social thought, with important implications for the study of abolitionism.<sup>13</sup> The radical Enlightenment was driven by both religious and secular developments. Radical religious dissent was politicized and understandings of conscience and personal independence were reformulated in the context of the American Revolution.

I define radicalism within the context of both political ideology and antislavery thought as denoting principles dedicated to fundamentally altering social and political structures as well as cultural systems. The means for achieving such change differed and there existed a range of commitments, tactics, and strategies to be employed. The aim, however, for all of the figures I label as radicals, was the speedy dismantlement of certain powerful institutions. For abolitionists, this meant the ultimate destruction of the slave system and the rapid emancipation of the enslaved. In contrast, those committed to moderate Enlightenment principles and moderate abolitionism valued order over actions and ideas deemed destabilizing. Analysis of eighteenth-century abolitionism within this framework demonstrates the divergent currents within the broader movement at a time when revolutionary politics and ideology were ascendant.

A failure to recognize the common sources of radical Enlightenment and abolitionist thought has been a persistent stumbling block for historians of slavery and

---

<sup>13</sup> Margaret Jacob connects the political and scientific radicalism of the early Enlightenment with the religious enthusiasm of the English Revolution in *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (1981; Reprint, Lafayette, LA: Cornerstone, 2006). Henry F. May employs a similar term, “revolutionary Enlightenment”, to describe the radicals in his *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Chapter 3. Also see Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Israel's characterization of what constitutes the Radical Enlightenment is somewhat different than Jacob's. While both point to the Enlightenment's seventeenth-century origins, Israel emphasizes the more secular sources of radicalism, especially the influence of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza.



antislavery dating back to the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> An association of abolitionism with religious enthusiasm and a monolithic characterization of the Enlightenment project as deeply skeptical of religion has distorted the historical reality. This is not to say that all abolitionists were committed to the principles of the radical Enlightenment, but a surprising degree of overlap existed in their epistemological assumptions and first principles. Figures like Phillis Wheatley, Thomas Clarkson, David Rice, Abraham Bishop, Richard Allen, John Leland, and David Walker demonstrate the ineffectiveness of simplistic categories to capture their worldviews or conventional periodization to comprehend the long path to emancipation.

During the 1770s and 1780s, Enlightenment radicals and evangelical Christians often found common ground on the issue of slavery. Both groups tended to view the American Revolution with optimism, as ushering in a new age of republican liberty and morality. Baptists and Methodists frequently embraced a post-millennial theology, which held that Christ would return after a thousand-year era of peace and human happiness. Their mission was to implement moral perfection on earth in order to purify it for the second coming.<sup>15</sup> This outlook was consistent with the thrust of the radical Enlightenment, with its claims to rapid human progress and confidence in the “power to begin the world over again,” in Paine’s words.<sup>16</sup> The optimism of the age fostered a

---

<sup>14</sup> For an astute discussion of this historiography see Robert P. Forbes, “‘Truth Systematised’”: The Changing Debate Over Slavery and Abolition, 1761-1916,” in *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, eds., Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer (New York: The New Press, 2006), 3-22. On the false dichotomy between the Enlightenment and evangelical religion, see 8-13.

<sup>15</sup> See Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 216-218.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York: Penguin, 1986), 120.

climate where both evangelicals and Enlightenment radicals cooperated at times in challenging perceived social ills. Inherent tensions between evangelical Christianity and radical democratic ideology, however, later posed problems in sustaining a coalition dedicated to abolition of slavery as the century turned.

Abolitionists, who viewed slavery as anathema to a new age of liberty, achieved real successes during and following the War of Independence. Vermont prohibited slavery in its Constitution, states throughout New England began the process of emancipation, and Pennsylvania passed a gradual emancipation bill justified in the language of natural rights. Manumission laws were liberalized throughout the South and the free black population expanded rapidly.

Scholars tend to view the immediate post-Revolution years as a period when the radicalism of the American Revolution was confronted with the practical realities of independence.<sup>17</sup> Thus, some historians have argued that ratification of the United States Constitution was a veritable death knell for the nascent abolitionist movement.<sup>18</sup> To witness the decline of antislavery sentiment during this period was to witness, in David Brion Davis's artful phrasing, "the perishability of Revolutionary time."<sup>19</sup> A declension narrative, which portrays a decline in antislavery radicalism following the American

---

<sup>17</sup> See Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 566, 471-499, 519-24, 562-64.

<sup>18</sup> See Gary Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990).; and David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013). Some historians, such as Don E. Fehrenbacher, have presented a more positive interpretation of the Constitution as it relates to antislavery. He views the empowerment of the Federal Government to regulate the slave trade after 1808 as an important step toward utilizing national power to challenge the institution in its entirety. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 42-43.

<sup>19</sup> Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 306-326; and *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 154-155.

Revolution, only to be revived with the Garrisonians and immediatists of the 1830s, remains the prevailing view.<sup>20</sup>

Historians have underestimated the radicalism of some voices within the movement in the 1790s. The impact of French abolitionism on the American scene has received far less attention from scholars than efforts by their British contemporaries to end the slave trade. Emboldened by the French Revolution of 1789, a vocal minority pushed for national emancipation. The uprising in Saint Domingue led by enslaved blacks, followed by the French Emancipation Decree in early 1794, which abolished slavery in France and her colonies, occurred just as Francomania was growing in the young United States. Edmond Genet, the first minister from France and a member of the French abolition society the *Amis des Noirs*, was feted not only in the North, but throughout the South as well. Democratic Societies were founded throughout the American Republic. Some members fused pro-French ideology with antislavery sentiment and even lent support for the black rebels in the Caribbean. American Abolition Societies praised the French Decree and urged political leaders to push for rapid emancipation in America. Yet, antislavery efforts during this period are frequently portrayed by historians as elitist, cautious, and moderate. How do we reconcile a moderate antislavery climate during an “age of passion,” as one historian has labeled the

---

<sup>20</sup> See Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism* 39-59; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976), 28-30; David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 107-152; and Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 96-101. Popular histories of the period also tend to embrace this narrative. See, for example, Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 104.

period?<sup>21</sup>

Antislavery activities did not occur in a vacuum, but were heavily influenced by the political atmosphere of the Age of Revolution. Partisan divisions that emerged in the early Republic had significant implications for the abolitionist movement. That Federalists came to dominate the ranks of antislavery advocates in the northern United States by the nineteenth century owes much to the political battles of the 1790s. This, in part, explains the reticence of historians to seek out Democratic-Republican antislavery trends in the late eighteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

Likewise, there is a dearth of scholarship on the influence of the conservative backlash against democratic radicalism on antislavery politics. Social conservatives, in response to Jacobin terror in France and fears of spreading irreligious belief, often expressed concerns over political extremism—including abolitionists. The perceived excesses of the French Revolution and fears of abstract principles led to a backlash against both democratic politics and radical abolitionism by the late 1790s. Conservative “friends of order” like Noah Webster, Jedidiah Morse, and William Cobbett warned of a new contagion -- that of French modern philosophy and the democratic politics that accompanied such ideas. They emphasized the threat of democrats, popular politics, and rash abolitionists to the fabric of the new republic.

Anti-Jacobinism divided the nascent antislavery movement at a critical time in its development. Some were pushed towards moderation and others abandoned the cause

---

<sup>21</sup> Marshall Smelser, “The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion,” *American Quarterly*, X, Winter 1958, 391-419. For a discussion of this historiography, see S. Elkins and E. McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-7.

<sup>22</sup> See Linda Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970).

altogether in the interest of maintaining a fragile Jeffersonian coalition that bridged sectional divides.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, connections between antislavery evangelicals and democratic radicals were often severed amidst a climate that stigmatized supporters of the French Revolution as atheists and infidels. Understanding the political and cultural responses to the French Revolution is therefore critical to comprehending the trajectory of the American abolitionist movement. A shift from principled calls for emancipation towards excessive gradualism and a reliance on colonization schemes reflects a retreat from revolutionary rhetoric and action. The revolutionary antislavery tradition did not die, however, but was carried on in the activities and writings of radical abolitionists like David Walker and Frederick Douglass in the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>23</sup> Some scholars have argued that that anti-Jacobinism reinforced antislavery positions. See Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 107.

## CHAPTER ONE

### CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE:

#### THE TRANSATLANTIC FOUNDATIONS OF ABOLITIONISM, 1760-1773

Under the guise of what seemed government, [Charles I and James II] had hidden tyranny. Patriotism tore off the mask, and said to the enlightened conscience and sleeping intellect of England, "Behold, that is despotism!" It was the first lesson; it was the text of the English Revolution. ... John Brown has done the same for us to-day. The slave system has lost its fascination. ... One assault has broken the charm, — it is despotism!<sup>1</sup>

- Wendell Phillips, 1859.

As tensions heightened between the colonies and Great Britain in the 1760s, the famed abolitionist Anthony Benezet published a series of highly influential pamphlets. A French migrant and Philadelphia Quaker, Benezet sought to reach beyond the narrow band of his fellow sectarians and spread his antislavery message more broadly. The first of these pamphlets, *A Short Account of That Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes* (1762), was a multifaceted tract that combined appeals to Christian brotherhood alongside Enlightenment notions of natural rights and republican concerns regarding the corrupting influence of slavery on society. Uniquely, it featured extensive excerpts from travel accounts and references to acts of resistance by the enslaved. Benezet's work was cited as an inspiration by leading abolitionists throughout the Atlantic world, including Granville Sharp, Benjamin Rush and Thomas Clarkson. He attracted praise from towering figures

---

<sup>1</sup> Wendell Phillips and Theodore C. Pease, "The Puritan Principle and John Brown," in *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1863), 300.

of the age such as Benjamin Franklin and John Wesley.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of the publication of *A Short Account* Britain had nearly defeated its greatest imperial rival in the Seven Years' War and the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade continued unabated. Despite acknowledging the instability caused by recent slave rebellions, such as those in Surinam and Jamaica, Benezet emphasized the imperial power and self-interest that maintained the institution seemingly in perpetuity. The pious educator noted that without divine guidance the "Power of distinguishing between Good and Evil will be obscured by Prejudice, Passion and Interest." Custom had served to "silence the Dictates of Conscience," he continued, "and reconcile ourselves to such Things as would, when first proposed to our unprejudiced Minds have struck us with Amazement and Horror." For Benezet, slavery was founded on "Tyranny, Oppression and Cruelty" and "contrary to the Dictates of Reason, and the common Feelings of Humanity...."<sup>3</sup> Through his writings he attempted to strip the institution of its cultural and intellectual support, revealing the lack of any moral foundation to sustain it.

---

<sup>2</sup>The British abolitionist Granville Sharp discovered Benezet's *A Short Account of That Part of Africa* while browsing a London bookstore and was inspired to have it reprinted in England (1768). Shortly thereafter, Sharp wrote and published *A Representation of the Injustice and dangerous tendency of tolerating Slavery in England* (1769) which Benezet would later print a lengthy excerpt from. See Roger Bruns, ed., *Am I not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788* (New York: Chelsea House, 1977), 79. The republication of Sharp's treatise is referenced in a letter from Benezet to Sharp on May, 14, 1772. On Benezet's influence on the early abolitionist movement, see especially Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 14-43; and Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

<sup>3</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), 4-5.

Benezet's frequent appeals to "conscience" deserve further attention.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will analyze the concept and its foundational role in abolitionist ideology. The language of conscience intersected with discourses related to religious liberty, personal freedom, political autonomy, and economic independence. The idea, in its modern framing, has roots in Reformed Christianity and suggests an innate moral understanding, informed by divine knowledge or natural law. Claims to be guided by conscience often had spiritual significance and could serve to assert the sovereignty of God over human law and custom. Benezet warned of divine punishment and the withdrawal of providential favor if slavery was not challenged. Abolishing the slave trade, he pleaded, was "the best Means to avert the Judgments of God..."<sup>5</sup> Above all, he sought to question the assumptions of those in support of the longstanding institution and win converts to the cause of abolition.

Conscience in its most radical formulations was forged in the crucible of the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. Historian Keith Thomas has reasoned that "The seventeenth century can justly be called the Age of Conscience. Certainly, there has been no period in English history when men and women were subjected to so many religious and political conflicts of duty and allegiance...."<sup>6</sup> Notably, the period marked an upsurge in challenges to forced labor that represent some of the earliest recorded calls for

---

<sup>4</sup> Benezet wrote to George Dillwyn that "I earnestly wish for myself & all those I love & indeed all mankind; that we may sensibly see & feel the benign influence, the true peace & happiness & indeed the nobility & strength of such a state...." Benezet to George Dillwyn, February 15, 1774, Benezet Collection, Haverford College.

<sup>5</sup> Benezet, *A Short Account*, 66, 33, 57.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Thomas, "Cases of Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Public Duty and Private Conscience in Seventeenth-Century England*, eds. John Morrill, Paul Slack, and Daniel Woolf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 29.



the abolition of slavery.<sup>7</sup> To adequately comprehend the abolitionist ideas and tactics of the late eighteenth century requires an investigation of the early modern Atlantic world. This chapter explores historical comparisons that serve to illuminate the long history of slavery and abolition in a variety of contexts, recognizing conceptual similarities between abolitionist expressions and activities across time and noting continuity and change in the various efforts to eradicate human bondage.

By the late eighteenth century the concept of conscience was skillfully employed by opponents of both slavery and British imperialism. In fact, slavery and imperialism were inextricably linked and to undermine one could serve to destabilize the other. Tracing the explosive political potential of this concept to the English Revolution reveals a common revolutionary tradition that grounds both radical republicanism and radical abolitionism. Likewise, both Enlightenment philosophy (at its most revolutionary) and evangelical Christianity (at its most radical) drew on this period of incendiary politics and religious independence. Historians customarily demarcate between a secular Enlightenment project dominated by rational discourse and the spiritual revivals or “awakenings” typified by emotional exuberance and suspicion of science.<sup>8</sup> This

---

<sup>7</sup> See John Donoghue, “‘Out of the Land of Bondage’: The English Revolution and the Atlantic Origins of Abolition,” *American Historical Review* vol. 115, no. 4 (2010), 943-974.

<sup>8</sup> In the British context, see Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760–1810* (London: 1975; Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1976); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, 1977); Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2006); Philip Gould, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003). In the American context, see Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*; and James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1976); Some scholars have emphasized the intersection of various types of religious and political radicalism. As examples, see Gary B. Nash, *Quakers and Politics; Pennsylvania, 1681-1726* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968); *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American*

dichotomy, which emerged within a nineteenth-century context, obscures significant commonalities between the traditions and often neglects dissenting Protestantism as a wellspring for natural rights theory and revolutionary discourse.<sup>9</sup>

Careful study of ideological expressions during the American Revolution demonstrates both the confluence of radical religious belief and revolutionary republicanism and the connection between abolitionism and the democratic thought. The American Revolution did not simply release a “contagion of liberty” as Bernard Bailyn famously framed the transmission of revolutionary ideology to antislavery sentiments.<sup>10</sup> Rather, the most radical strains of the Revolution drew from antislavery discourses from the start, citing economic bondage and the slave trade as the most egregious examples of the British Empire's excesses and hypocrisy—evidence that venerable institutions were fundamentally flawed. Like cracks splintering the base of a grand monument, some viewed slavery as undermining the British imperial project at its foundations. Natural law and moral conscience, rather than custom and human law, would serve as the revolutionary's guide.

---

*Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979); and Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Historians have more effectively identified the influence of secular Enlightenment thought, particularly rationalism, on evangelical religion. See especially: Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Catherine A. Brekus, *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013); and George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), Chapter 6.

*Slavery and Custom*

In the mid-nineteenth century, Horace Greeley referred to slavery as “older than Civilization—older than History.”<sup>11</sup> To combat such an institution required nothing less than a paradigm shift. In his classic study *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, David Brion Davis notes that at the time of New World colonization “the Christian view of slavery accommodated a series of balanced dualisms.... to hold a bond servant was to exercise an ordinance that was part of the governing structure of the world”<sup>12</sup> Sociologist Orlando Patterson also reflected on the extent to which human history was entangled with slavery in his seminal work *Slavery and Social Death*. “There is no region of the earth,” he writes, “that has not at some time harbored the institution.” “There is nothing notably peculiar about the institution of slavery,” Paterson concludes.<sup>13</sup> On the eve of the Age of Revolution, slavery was firmly entrenched in Western culture. Scholars, especially over the past fifty years, have contributed mightily to our understanding of the institution and the multitude of efforts to ameliorate, curtail, or even abolish it.

Chief among them, Davis has vastly illuminated our understanding of the ideas that coalesced around slavery as a concept and abolitionism as a movement. This chapter builds on his insights and those of others, while challenging the compartmentalization of revolutionary ideology and abolitionist sentiment so apparent in the extant literature.

Abolitionism emerged in conversation with broader currents in the revolutionary Atlantic

---

<sup>11</sup> Horace Greeley, *The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America*, Vol. 1 (Hartford, 1864), 24.

<sup>12</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, 1966), 165-166.

<sup>13</sup> Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), vii.

and substantially informed the trajectory of revolutionary movements. No stark line separated religious and Enlightenment discourses. A distinction between a “radical Enlightenment,” as both Margaret Jacob and Jonathan Israel have termed it, and a “moderate Enlightenment,” clarifies the divergent elements of antislavery thought and activism that emerged in the eighteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Far from secular, the engine of the radical Enlightenment derived energy from evolving religious understandings of the self and society. Dissenting Protestants in England were further politicized during the English Revolution and their anti-authoritarian ideas were increasingly applied to the secular sphere.

Despite a long history of human bondage, the English often boasted that they were the freest people in the world. Winthrop Jordan notes that by the fourteenth century villenage, or “bondage” as it was often called, “had decayed markedly, and it may be said not to have existed as a viable social institution in the second half of the sixteenth century. Personal freedom had become the normal status of the Englishmen.”<sup>15</sup> By the early seventeenth century chattel slavery scantily remained in England, but various other

---

<sup>14</sup> Jacob effectively connects the political and scientific radicalism of the early Enlightenment with the religious enthusiasm of the English Revolution in *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (1981; Reprint, Lafayette, LA, Cornerstone, 2006). Henry F. May employs a similar term, “revolutionary Enlightenment”, to describe the radicals in his *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), Chapter 3. Also see Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Israel's characterization of what constitutes the Radical Enlightenment is somewhat different than Jacob's. While both point to the Enlightenment's seventeenth-century origins, Israel emphasizes the more secular sources of radicalism, especially the influence of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. In a review of Israel's book Jacob writes, “Everyone writing since the 1980s agrees on the importance of Spinoza and the Dutch Republic. Israel offers a nod toward that scholarship but refuses to engage with the notion that more complicated influences were also at work in the period after 1650....” Margaret Jacob, *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (June 2003), 388.

<sup>15</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1968), 49.

forms of unfreedom persisted. With the British Empire emerging as a world power, by the mid-eighteenth century, Britons proudly declared, "Rule, Britannia! rule the waves: Britons never will be slaves."<sup>16</sup> After the Restoration, the British crown carried on the innovations of Oliver Cromwell's protectorate and threw its institutional weight behind the trade in human beings.<sup>17</sup> In 1713, with the end of the War of Spanish Succession, the Treaty of Utrecht secured exclusive rights to Britain to supply the Spanish American colonies with slave labor.<sup>18</sup> Britain came to dominate the Atlantic slave trade and her colonies relied on unfree labor from the start.<sup>19</sup> These contradictions, at the core of the British imperial project, contributed to the radical discourses that emerged in response to both economic and political oppression.

British North American colonists of the eighteenth century often struggled to reconcile the idyll of British freedom with lived reality. Rebellions amongst the enslaved in Jamaica, Surinam, and Guyana exposed the fragility of the imperial order and informed the protests that followed the Seven Years' War. As resistance to perceived oppression advanced during the Stamp Act crisis that followed, efforts to undermine authority across the Atlantic contributed to a questioning of tradition and custom more broadly. The abolitionist movement, likewise, relied on revolutionary languages to discredit an ancient institution and make the case for radical change.

---

<sup>16</sup> James Thomson, *The Works of James Thomson, Vol. 2* (London, 1763), 191.

<sup>17</sup> See Carla G. Pestana, *The English Atlantic in an Age of Revolution, 1640-1661* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> See Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> See Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1975).

*Conscience as a Revolutionary Concept*

Conscience has a long history, but began to take its modern form following the Reformation through the expressions of English theologians.<sup>20</sup> The early-seventeenth-century Protestant divine William Ames wrote that “the onely rule of our conscience, is the Law of God written in our hearts.”<sup>21</sup> For Ames, the “Law of God” was synonymous with the “Law of Nature,” and consisted of “principles so cleare and written in the hearts of all men, that they cannot erre to obey and practise them.”<sup>22</sup>

While the basic aspects of the concept were shared between a diversity of Christian traditions, there were important interpretative variations. The most radical embraced the universality of conscience, which imbued all human beings with the capacity for independent moral judgment. The Rhode Island separatist Roger Williams typified this perspective, observing that “I have conversed with all the Indians of this New England land and seas, and... I find that...there is generally in all mankind in the world a conviction of an invisible, omnipotent, and eternal power,” and concluded from this experience that “All mankind... are persuaded that some actions are naught and against God's will...” Individuals are able to discern right from wrong, Williams argued, through a process whereby “natural truth or light [is] received within by a natural light or

---

<sup>20</sup> On the concept's long history, see Edward G. Andrew, *Conscience and Its Critics: Protestant Conscience, Enlightenment Reason, and Modern Subjectivity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Ojakangas, *Voice of Conscience*; and Richard Sorabji, *Moral Conscience Through the Ages: Fifth Century BCE to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (1632; Reprint, London, 1638), 1. For a similar formulation see Richard Sibbes, *The Soul's Conflict and Victory Over Itself by Faith* (1635; Reprint, London, 1837), 40.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 10.

understanding.”<sup>23</sup> The willingness of Williams and others to ascribe such moral freedom even to non-Christians contributed to a critique of slavery based on a natural right to self-determination.

Roger Williams assumed that conscience enabled humans to become moral free agents and this belief had profound political ramifications. Not only did defenders of conscience defend its inviolability, and thus insist on religious freedom, but many also felt liberated to claim a right to participate publicly in matters of moral concern. The capacity to consult one's conscience as a moral guide, it was argued, made social order possible without harsh institutional constraints. Williams' abolitionist sentiments emerged in response to a context that included multiple forms of bondage, including the captivity of native peoples.<sup>24</sup>

The potential for mistaking internal inclinations and desires for spiritual guidance led some to fear the radical implications of such beliefs. Controversies usually centered on a contest between “the word” or the “moral law” and personal understandings facilitated by an innate moral sense. For example, Samuel Rutherford, a Scottish Presbyterian, argued in a lengthy treatise entitled *A Free Disputation Against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (1649) that Williams appealed to “an erroneous conscience” and

---

<sup>23</sup> Roger Williams, *George Fox Digg'd out of his Burrowes* (Boston, 1676), in *On Religious Liberty: Selections from the Works of Roger Williams*, ed. James Calvin Davis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 269.

<sup>24</sup> See John Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), Chapter 2.

was one of many “Libertines” who “bewilder themselves” and mistake their own passions for God's will.<sup>25</sup>

The importance of the concept grew within Reformed Christianity due to an increasing emphasis on personal interpretation of the Bible and was transformed by the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century. John Milton exemplifies this development, claiming that “Every believer is entitled to interpret the scriptures.... He has the spirit, who guides truth, and he has the mind of Christ. Indeed, no one else can usefully interpret them for him, unless that person's interpretation coincides with the one he makes for himself and his own conscience.”<sup>26</sup> Independence in spiritual matters encouraged autonomy in moral matters more generally. Historian Christopher Hill has argued that the mid-seventeenth-century emphasis on personal Biblical interpretation within a widening swath of Protestant sects marked a widening appeal to “lay consciences” and the effect “was to admit that standards are not eternal. Conscience changes with social attitudes and pressures when faced with new facts and problems.”<sup>27</sup> For Milton, this dynamic and active force was critical to “Christian liberty,” which he framed in emancipatory terms: “CHRISTIAN LIBERTY MEANS THAT CHRIST OUR

---

<sup>25</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* (London, 1649), 132. John Milton later attacked Rutherford's views in a piece entitled “On the New Forcers of Conscience Under the Long Parliament,” in John Milton, *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (London: Macmillan, 1897), 440.

<sup>26</sup> John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, ed. M. Kelley, vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 583. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton wrote in verse: “And I will place within them as a guide/ My Umpire Conscience, whom if they will hear, / Light after light we us'd they shall attain/ And to the end persisting safe arrive.” (III. 194-7).

<sup>27</sup> Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 1993), 416.



LIBERATOR FREES US FROM THE SLAVERY OF SIN... AS IF WE WERE EMANCIPATED SLAVES.”<sup>28</sup>

Milton's understanding of conscience reflected what Edward G. Andrew has labeled the “heroic conscience.” Until the English Revolution, conscience was framed as retrospective—judging guilt based on established divine law. By the mid-seventeenth century, Andrew argues, conscience was re-imagined as “prospective in that it made heroes of common men and women, empowered the saints into battle, and supplanted existing law with the dictates of the inner guide.”<sup>29</sup> Early-modern philosopher Thomas Hobbes and later John Locke, Edmund Burke, and Jeremy Bentham, among others, feared the revolutionary potential of this formulation. Hobbes was especially concerned about “the antinomian character of Protestant conscience” and was driven by his skepticism to offer a political solution that did not rely on internal moral guidance for the maintenance of justice and order.<sup>30</sup> Despite opposition, the “heroic conscience” survived and was revived in the late-eighteenth-century climate of democratic revolution.<sup>31</sup>

The Quaker antislavery tradition was especially rooted in a respect for conscience and religious freedom. For the Society of Friends, conscience was conceived as the

---

<sup>28</sup> John Milton, *Two Books of Investigations into Christian Doctrine Drawn From the Sacred Scriptures Alone* (London, 1658, 1660), in John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, ed. M. Kelley, vol. 6 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 537. Also see Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 42-43.

<sup>29</sup> Edward G. Andrew, *Conscience and Its Critics: Protestant Conscience, Enlightenment Reason, and Modern Subjectivity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> See for example John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable* (New London, Mass., 1791) in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, Vol. 2., ed. Ellis Sandoz, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998). Also see Andrew's discussion of late-eighteenth-century radicals in *Conscience and Its Critics*, Chapter 8.

“inner light” or the light of God which resides in each individual. Quaker founder George

Fox wrote in his journal:

When the Lord God... sent me forth into the world to preach... I was commanded to turn people to that inward light, spirit, and grace, by which all might know their salvation, and their way to God; even that divine Spirit which would lead them into all Truth, and which I infallibly knew would never deceive any.

Fox referred to this “divine power” as the “Spirit of God, and the light of Jesus” which anyone could personally access.<sup>32</sup> His emphasis on conscience was not unique amongst the dissenting sects of early-modern England from which the Quaker faith emerged. The development was revolutionary and by 1641, Charles I had declared an anonymous tract “seditious” for affirming “that human laws do not bind the conscience.”<sup>33</sup> The concept posed a serious challenge to power and empire.

Historians have neglected the extent to which the discourses of “liberty of conscience” and antislavery became entangled in revolutionary England. Calls for religious freedom were intimately connected with demands for “liberty of the person”—and vice versa.<sup>34</sup> The “Levellers” of the English Revolution are a case in point.<sup>35</sup> Popular

---

<sup>32</sup> George Fox, *A Journal or Historical Account of the Life, Travels, Sufferings, Christian Experiences, and Labour of Love, in the Work of the Ministry, of That Ancient, Eminent, and Faithful Servant of Jesus Christ, George Fox* (London, 1765), 21.

<sup>33</sup> *An exact collection of all the remonstrances, declarations, votes, orders, ordinances, proclamations, petitions, messages, answers, and other remarkable passages betweene the kings most excellent majesty, and his high court of parliament beginning at his majesties return from Scotland, being in December 1641, and continued until March the 21, 1643* (London, 1643), 150-151.

<sup>34</sup> See Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes*; and “Transatlantic Discourses of Freedom and Slavery during the English Revolution,” *Storicamente*, 10 (2014), no. 32. DOI.

<sup>35</sup> “Levellers” was a derisive term used to paint these radical republicans as fanatics and a threat to order and property. On the influence of the Levellers on eighteenth-century radicalism see, Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution* (London, 1961), 186-190; and *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London, 1972), 107-150.

republicans and Christian radicals, they advocated for a democratic system of representation and religious toleration. John Lilburne and others spoke to the connections between spiritual and physical freedom in the second *Agreement of the People* (1649). For the signatories, nothing had “caused more distractions and heart-burnings in all ages than persecution and molestation for matters of conscience....” As a result of this respect for moral integrity, the agreement forbade violations of bodily liberty which infringed on the freedom of conscience. “We do not empower them to impress or constrain any person to serve in a way by sea or land,” they demanded, “every man's conscience being to be satisfied in the justness of that cause wherein he hazards his own life, or may destroy another's.”<sup>36</sup> Impressment involved forced conscription of military service and was often identified by the Levellers as a form of unfree labor akin to slavery.<sup>37</sup> If impressment was unauthorized, it followed that enslavement of “freeborn people” was an abuse of power as well.

In fact, the connection between impressment and slavery had been made explicit. In their *Remonstrance of Many Thousand Citizens* (1646), Richard Overton, along with other Levellers, argued that there was little difference “between binding a man to an oar as a galley-slave... and pressing of men to serve in your war.” Foreshadowing the arguments of abolitionists in the next century, they observed, “to surprise a man on the

---

<sup>36</sup> *An Agreement of the free people of England* (London, 1649), in *The English Levellers* ed. Andrew Sharp (Cambridge, UK, 1998), 168, 173.

<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of impressment as coerced labor see Nicholas Rogers, “Vagrancy, Impressment and the Regulation of Labor,” in Paul E. Lovejoy and Nicholas Rogers, *Unfree Labour in the Development of the Atlantic World* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), 102-113. For impressment in the eighteenth-century context, see Denver Brunsman, *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

sudden, force him from his calling where he lived comfortably...from his dear parents, wife or children, against inclination and disposition...if any tyranny or cruelty exceed this, it must be worse than that of a Turkish galley-slave.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the expansion of the slave trade with Africa and the hardening of the chattel principle would test this claim, but by the mid-seventeenth century the ideological basis for an abolitionist critique of the institution was crystallizing. Radicals connected freedom of conscience to freedom from bondage—both spiritual and physical.

Levellers argued that liberty of conscience was inviolable and attempts by civil magistrates to physically coerce an individual to comply against the dictates of their conscience were illegitimate. Overton declared that everyone possesses “a natural, innate freedom and propriety—as it were writ in the table of every man's heart, never to be obliterated—even so are we to live, everyone equally and alike to enjoy his birthright and privilege; even all whereof God by nature has made him free.”<sup>39</sup> No “human power,” proclaimed the *Agreement of the People* (1647) can rightly infringe on “what our consciences dictate to be the mind of God...”<sup>40</sup> The conscience was a divine gift and

---

<sup>38</sup> *A remonstrance of many thousand citizens* (London, 1646), in Andrew Sharp, ed., *The English Levellers* (Cambridge, UK, 1998), 47-48. On the English slave trade in the mid-seventeenth century, see Larry Gragg, “‘To Procure Negros’: The English Slave Trade to Barbados, 1627-1660,” *Slavery and Abolition* vol. 16, no. 1 (1995), 65-84. On the experiences of white indentured servants, see Hilary McD. Beckles, “‘A Riotous and Unruly Lot’: Irish Indentured Servants and Freeman in the English West Indies, 1644-1713,” *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 47, no. 4 (1990), 503-522; John Donoghue, “‘Out of the Land of Bondage’: The English Revolution and the Atlantic Origins of Abolition,” *American Historical Review* vol. 115, no. 4 (2010), 943-974; *Fire under the Ashes*, Chapter Seven; and Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Richard Overton, *An arrow against all tyrants* (London, 1646), in *Levellers*, ed. Sharp, 55.

<sup>40</sup> *An agreement of the people for a firm and present peace upon grounds of common right and freedom* (London, 1647), *Ibid.*, 94.

therefore no one, not even the individuals themselves, were justified in consenting to surrender this liberty.

Commitments to religious toleration contained the taproot for abolitionist sentiment. Thomas Edwards, a fierce critic of the Levellers, noted the threat that religious radicalism posed in the political sphere. He observed that “As they do in matters of religion and conscience fly from the Scriptures... so they do also in civill government and things of this world... they will not submit, but cry out for naturall rights derived from Adam and right reason.”<sup>41</sup> His observation is astute, as Levellers did tend to blur the lines between the spiritual and political. Conscience and reason were the best guide in private as well as public life.

Understanding the history of toleration, therefore, sheds considerable light on the various strains of antislavery thought that emerged by the eighteenth century. Historians often point to a dichotomy between “traditional” and “modern” understandings of toleration—usually with John Locke's seminal work on the subject, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), marking the beginning of a modern doctrine.<sup>42</sup> This whiggish view holds that, prior to Locke, advocates of toleration viewed it as a privilege bestowed on certain groups or individuals by a sovereign power, often temporarily, to protect against the dangers of dissent. Such an understanding implied that the dissenting factions were undesirable and uniformity remained the ideal.

---

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena*, part 3 (London, 1646), 20. For more on Edwards' work in the context of the English Revolution, see Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion on the development of these conceptions, see the editorial introduction to *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Cary J. Nederman and John C. Laursen (Lanham, Md., 1996), 5-12.

Locke's *Letter* was but one of many defenses of toleration following the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, which had enforced toleration in France by royal decree.<sup>43</sup> His statement, while influential, was also much less expansive a conception of toleration than many realize. The flurry of pamphlets and broadsides that emerged during the English Revolution contained ideas relating to toleration and liberty of conscience far more radical than Locke's. Levellers like William Walwyn argued for the toleration of "all professions whatsoever" and even contended that those "so far misinformed as to deny a Deity, or the Scriptures" should be respected as well. Locke, rather, explicitly denied that atheists and Catholics should be tolerated and was preoccupied with the disorder that could result from extreme toleration. These fears stemmed largely from his theory of understanding. With no set morals to guide people, Locke feared chaos.<sup>44</sup>

William Walyn's view, on the other hand, extended toleration even beyond religion, as he contended that no one ought to be "punished or discountenanced by Authority for his Opinion," and that "every man ought to have liberty of conscience, of what opinion soever..."<sup>45</sup> These writers drew on gospel to argue for a "two kingdoms" defense of religious liberty. Spiritual debates were to be fought with words rather than

---

<sup>43</sup> See Mario Turchetti, "Religious, Concord and Political Tolerance in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21 (1991): 15-25.

<sup>44</sup> See John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London, [1689], 1836), 251-253.

<sup>45</sup> William Walwyn, *The Compassionate Samaritane* (London, 1644), in *Divine Right and Democracy: An Anthology of Political Writing in Stuart England*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 248.

swords. They also emphasized the long history of persecution for dissenting sects and connected this plight with that of the primitive Christian Church.<sup>46</sup>

The Levellers' understanding of conscience emphasized the sovereignty of God over human law and was used to undermine unjust authority. Conscience was personal but not belonging to the person. Ultimately, conscience was a divine gift which God alone controlled. Levellers wrote of being “bound in conscience” and expressed their “duty to God” in justification of their republican doctrines.<sup>47</sup> William Walwyn, for example, viewed the revolution as “a blessed opportunity... to serve God without hypocrisy and according to the persuasion of conscience....” Alluding to bodily slavery, he compared their liberation to “the Israelites after Egyptian bondage” and encouraged all to do “unto others what they would have others do unto themselves.”<sup>48</sup> Historian Jonathan Scott has observed that in England during the civil wars, “almost all republican writing was overtly religiously engaged. The most powerful reason for laying the earthly monarchy in the dust was to realize the monarchy of God.”<sup>49</sup>

John Lilburne began his stirring postscript to *The Freeman's Freedom Vindicated* (1646) by declaring: “God, the absolute sovereign lord and king of all things in heaven and earth, the original fountain and cause of all causes; who is circumscribed, governed

---

<sup>46</sup> The Levellers and other radicals drew on an earlier tradition of toleration pioneered by sectarians such as the Baptists Thomas Helwys and Leonard Busher who both called for absolute toleration. In 1614 Busher called on the king and parliament to “permit all sorts of Christians; yea, Jews, Turks, and pagans, so long as they are peaceable...” Leonard Busher, *Religions, Peace, or Plea for Liberty of Conscience*, in *Tracts on Liberty of Conscience, 1614-1661*, ed. E.B. Underhill (London, 1846), 33.

<sup>47</sup> William Walwyn, *Gold tried in the fire, of the burnt petitions revived*, June 4, 1647, in Andrew Sharp, ed., *The English Levellers* (Cambridge, UK, 1998), 85.

<sup>48</sup> William Walwyn, *Toleration justified and persecution condemned*, 1646, *Ibid.*, 9, 10.

<sup>49</sup> Scott, *Commonwealth Principles*, 42.

and limited by no rules, but doth all things merely and only by His sovereign will and unlimited good pleasure....” From this foundational premise flowered perhaps the most radical statement of natural rights published before the American Revolution. Lilburne traced the implanting of the conscience to the creation. God had “endued [Adam] with a rational soul, or understanding, and thereby created him after His own image.” Eve was then created by the same process,

which two are the earthly, original fountain, as begetters and bringers' forth of all and every particular and individual man and woman that ever breathed in the world since; who are, and were by nature all equal and alike in power, dignity, authority, and majesty—none of them having (by nature) any authority, dominion or magisterial power, one over or above the other.

Thus, all are descended from a common human family and derive their dignity from the same creator. Anyone who would claim authority over any other without consent, for Lilburne, assumes “unto themselves the office and sovereignty of God...”<sup>50</sup> Such an usurpation of divine authority warranted nothing less than militant resistance. According to this formulation even monarchs were subject to God and the will of the people in accordance with the dictates of conscience. Lilburne's bold conclusions signaled the direction of radical abolitionism in the eighteenth century. The claim that “all are of one blood” reoccurs throughout the religiously imbued antislavery literature of the period and the challenge to worldly authority presaged the “higher law” theory that justified civil disobedience and even rebellion.

---

<sup>50</sup> John Lilburne, *The freeman's freedom vindicated: A postscript, containing a general proposition*, June 16, 1646, in Sharp, *Levellers*, 31-32.



Ideas of liberty of conscience and bodily freedom influenced emigrants to colonial America such as Roger Williams and Henry Vane.<sup>51</sup> After facing persecution for his beliefs and banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Williams argued that the New Testament had brought a new dispensation which overturned the Old Testament call for religious orthodoxy. In 1644 he declared it “the will and command of God that since the coming of his Son the Lord Jesus, a permission of the most Paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or anti-christian consciences and worships be granted to all men in all nations and countries...”<sup>52</sup> He even defended “scandalous” doctrines opposed to the ruling establishment.

Roger Williams' views on religious freedom grew not only from a history of persecution in England but also from his experiences with American Indians. “Nature knows no difference between Europe and Americans in blood, birth, bodies, etc.,” he observed, “God having of one blood made all mankind.” He was especially concerned with the enslavement of American Indians which occurred during the Pequot War and King Phillip's War. As early as 1637 he questioned the justice of “perpetuall slaverie” as a punishment in battle.<sup>53</sup> Slave traders frequently exchanged Indian captives for African

---

<sup>51</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (1966, Revised Edition, New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 133-142; Christopher S. Grenda and Chris Beneke, *The First Prejudice Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 163-164; and Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), 186-192.

<sup>52</sup> Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenant of Persecution for Cause of Conscience: Discussed in a Conference between Truth and Peace, Who, in All Tender Affection, Present to the High Court of Parliament* (1644, Reprint, (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 2001). 3.

<sup>53</sup> Roger Williams to John Winthrop (1637), in *4 Massachusetts Historical Society Collection*, VI, 214. The “Body of Liberties” (1641) in Massachusetts Bay Colony held that, “There shall never be any bond slaverie, villinage, or Captivtie amongst us unless it be lawful Captives taken in just warres, and such

servants and slaves from the West Indies. Resting again on the assumption that all souls were equal before God, he abhorred such a practice and hoped to avoid it in the new colony of Rhode Island.

In the mid-seventeenth century, slavery was a malleable concept and the line between servitude and enslavement was often quite blurred. The chattel principle was applied not only in cases of perpetual bondage, but in many instances of indentured labor along a spectrum of unfreedom. Africans had not been uniformly branded perpetual slaves and Irish captives, especially during Oliver Cromwell's invasions after the English Revolution, were sold into a state of servitude often differing little from chattel slavery.<sup>54</sup>

In the seventeenth century, people were distinguished by religion and geography far more frequently than by race. Even the English were vulnerable to the trade in unfree labor. Barbary pirates seized ships and even raided European coastal villages—seeking Christian slaves for the Arabic market.<sup>55</sup> John Smith, the English explorer and Jamestown leader, fantastically wrote of his experience of being enslaved by Ottoman Turks. He recounted how he and his fellow captives "were all sold for slaves, like beasts in a

---

strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us. And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of God established in Israel concerning such persons doeth morally require. This exempts non from servitude who shall be Judged thereto by Authoritie." This was a qualified sanction of slavery, but allowed for it to persist nonetheless.

<sup>54</sup> See John Donoghue, "'Out of the Land of Bondage': The English Revolution and the Atlantic Origins of Abolition," *American Historical Review* vol. 115, no. 4 (2010), 943-974; and Simon P. Newman, *A New World of Labor* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2013). For comparisons between Irish captives and later African slavery, see Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (London: Verso, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> See Paul Baepler ed., *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives* (University of Chicago Press, 1999); Robert Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005); and Benilde Montgomery, "White Captives, African Slaves: A Drama of Abolitionism," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* vol. 27 (Summer 1994): 615-30.

market-place.”<sup>56</sup> Unfree labor was widespread and commonplace, but in some senses, the conditions for outlawing slavery were as amenable to change as they would be for some time. As perpetual bondage during the period was most often linked to religious intolerance and capture in warfare, sectarians preaching liberty of conscience made inroads into transforming the very culture that supported systems of enslavement.

Opposition arose to those who threatened to upset the power dynamic in the colonies. Both the Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth colonies were hostile to antinomians like Anne Hutchinson, Samuel Gorton, and Thomas Venner. In Massachusetts, Gorton was convicted of sedition and later held captive for months after his settlement was violently invaded. He fled to England to plead his case before the Parliament, calling for a colonial charter in New England that would protect against religious persecution such as that he had suffered.<sup>57</sup> While in London, Gorton published *Simplicity's Defense* (1646) which accused the Massachusetts Puritans of intolerance and persecution. He argues throughout the pamphlet that they have usurped the authority of God and interfered with those who have been called immediately by him. “You play the part of wizards, or Necromancers,” Gorton wrote, “not the part of true naturalists in the things of the Kingdome of God...” Their claims to ministerial authority forced believers to “depend

---

<sup>56</sup> John Smith and E. A. Benians, *Captain John Smith - travels, history of Virginia: the true travels, adventures and observations of Captain John Smith in Europe, Asia, Africa and America and the general history of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles. Books I-III Books I-III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33. Historians have disputed the veracity of Smith's claims. Jill Lepore rescues Smith from a variety of revisionist claims against the authenticity of his autobiographical accounts. Lepore, *The Story of America: Essays on Origins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012) Chapter 1.

<sup>57</sup> On Gorton's transatlantic exploits, see Donoghue, *Fire Under the Ashes*, Chapter Five; and Phillip Gura, *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England 1620-1660* (Middletown, CT: Weleian University Press, 1984), 282-290.

upon false and self-seeking interpreters,” Gorton claimed, rather than rely on their personal understanding of Christ's message.<sup>58</sup> His pamphlet echoed the arguments for tolerance in respect of liberty of conscience so prevalent among radical sectarians of the time.

Edward Winslow of Plymouth, acting as Massachusetts agent to the Parliamentary regime during the English Revolution, responded with a scathing attack on Gorton. His pamphlet, *Hypocrisy Unmasked* (1647) reveals the diametrically opposed conceptions of liberty and slavery emerging during this period among various dissenting sects. Critiquing Gorton's anti-clericalism and emphasis on the personal understanding of God's will, Winslow accused him of undermining the authority necessary for ordered liberty. According to Winslow, Gorton believed that, “a man may be as well a slave to his belly, and make that his god, as be a vassall to his owne species, or kinde, or to any thing that man can bring forth even in his best perfection.”<sup>59</sup> The tract features numerous quotations said to be drawn from Gorton's private correspondence with his followers. They suggest a strong affinity between him and the Levellers. When Winslow had the piece re-printed, in fact, the title was changed to *The Danger of Tolerating Levellers in a Civill State* (1649), presumably in an appeal to a London audience familiar with the political tensions of the period.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> Gorton, *Simplicity's Defense*, 12,13.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Winslow, *Hypocrisie Umasked* (London, 1646), 46. Gura, *Sion's Glory*, 298-303.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Winslow, *The Danger of Tolerating Levellers in a Civill State* (London, 1649). On Gorton and Williams' time in London, see Jonathan Beecher Field, *Errands into the Metropolis New England Dissidents in Revolutionary London* (Hanover, N.H.: Dartmouth College Press, 2009).

After spending time amongst the radical sects in London, Gorton would return to Rhode Island where Roger Williams had been attempting to solidify government under an English charter for the colony in 1647. Facing opposition from William Coddington and the condemnation of Parliament, the colony was divided. Providence Plantations, which Williams and his allies controlled, with Gorton as president, passed a law against slavery and lifetime servitude in 1652. The legislation was the first of its kind in British North America.<sup>61</sup> Massachusetts Bay Colony had legally codified slavery in 1641 and Gorton, Williams and others feared its spread.<sup>62</sup> The act read:

Whereas there is a common course practiced among Englishmen, to buy negroes to the end that they may have them for service or slaves forever, for the preventing of such practices among us, let it be ordered that no blacke mankind, or white, being forced to covenant bond, or otherwise, to serve any man or his assignnes longer than ten yeares.... And at the end or terme of ten yeares to sett them free, as the manner is with English servants....<sup>63</sup>

While the law was largely unenforced and may have lacked sufficient public support, blacks were quick to claim its protections. According to George Washington Williams, as

---

<sup>61</sup> Adelos Gorton, *The Life and Times of Samuel Gorton* (Philadelphia, 1907), 93-94.

<sup>62</sup> George H. Moore, *Slavery in Massachusetts: Additional Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York, 1866), 11.

<sup>63</sup> *Rhode Island Colonial Records: Records of the Court of Trials of the Colony of Providence Plantations, 1647-1670*, Vol. I. (Providence, 1920), 243. There is scant evidence that the law was ever enforced. William Johnston argues that the Rhode Island antislavery laws “were lacking the public sentiment to give them practical force in the colony.” George Washington Williams claims that “For a half-century there was nothing done by the General Court to suppress the slave-trade, though the Act of 1652 remained the law of the colony.” This contradicts Johnston, who contends that most opposed slavery in the colony during this period. See William Johnston, *Slavery in Rhode Island, 1775-1776* (Providence, 1894), 6; George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America, Vol. I* (New York, 1883), 262-263. Also see, Christy Mikel Clark-Pujara, “Slavery, Emancipation and Black Freedom in Rhode Island, 1652-1842,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Iowa, 2009.

their terms of service expired, blacks began to discuss their “rights” and frequently made demands for their freedom-papers.<sup>64</sup>

The assertiveness of formerly bound laborers aroused concern among conservative whites and led to the passage of legislation in 1703 which regulated the public activities of any “negroes or Indians, either freemen, servants, or slaves.” The law established a curfew, ordering them not to “walk in the streets... after nine of the clock of the night” without certain paperwork.<sup>65</sup> The justification for such repression was to secure public order in the colony. In effect, it stigmatized black residents of Rhode Island and further hardened racial boundaries to full participation in public life. Newport became a chief port for the slave trade and Rhode Island merchants would play a leading role in sustaining it.<sup>66</sup> From 1720 until it was outlawed in 1807, the slave trade was the most important sector of Rhode Island's economy.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the expansion of slavery in the eighteenth century, the radical antinomian tradition in America carried on and continued to influence antislavery thought and activity. Benjamin Lay, for example, in *All Slave-keepers... Apostates* (1737), an incendiary tract published by a young Benjamin Franklin, urged all slaveholders to “turn

---

<sup>64</sup> George Washington Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America, Vol. I* (New York, 1883), 264.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>66</sup> See Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981).

<sup>67</sup> On the role of the slave trade in Rhode Island's economy during this period, see Lynn Withey, *Urban Growth in Colonial Rhode Island: Newport and Providence in the Eighteenth Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 33-35; John DeWitt, *Early Globalization and the Economic Development of the United States and Brazil* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2002), 78-79; and Cynthia Mestad Johnson, *James DeWolf and the Rhode Island Slave Trade* (Charleston, The History Press, 2014), 45-46.

to the Lord, the Blessed Truth, in your Hearts for Direction, for Counsel and Advice; that you may quit your selves like Men, hounourably, of this so Hellish a Practice.” He reinforced the ultimate authority of God by declaring, “I suppose the pure holy eternal Being, which made of one blood all nations of men to dwell upon the face of the earth, did not make others to be slaves to us, any more then we to be so to them...” Lay drew on his personal experience in Barbados and recalled the shiploads of starving Africans brought by the thousands each year. A practice that he called “the very nature of Hell itself...”<sup>68</sup> Lay was ostracized by many of his fellow Quakers for his extremism, but gained a wide readership, becoming a folk hero of radical abolitionism in the nineteenth century. A prolific writer, he published over two hundred pamphlets and essays.

Only four feet tall and notable for his odd appearance, Lay engaged in a number of theatrical protests against slavery. Benjamin Rush later recalled that “[t]here was a time when the name of this celebrated Christian Philosopher, was familiar to every man, woman and to nearly every child in Pennsylvania.”<sup>69</sup> Born in England, he became a sailor and settled in Barbadoes, where he came to witness the horrors of slavery. Removing to Philadelphia, he was shocked to find so many of his fellow Quakers involved in human bondage. At the 1738 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Quakers he arrived dressed as a soldier, shocking the expectations of the pacifist Friends, and unleashed a tirade against slaveholding. He concluded the speech by driving a sword into a book (appearing to be the Bible) exploding a pig's bladder full of blood-red juice over a stunned crowd and

---

<sup>68</sup> Benjamin Lay, *All Slave-keepers... Apostates* (Philadelphia, 1737), 12, 61, 27.

<sup>69</sup> Benjamin Rush, “Biographical Anecdotes of Benjamin Lay,” February 10, 1790, in *Essays Literary, Moral and Philosophical* [Philadelphia, 1798], (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1988), 181.

exclaiming “[t]hus shall God shed the blood of those persons who enslave their fellow creatures.”<sup>70</sup> In another audacious stunt, he was said to have temporarily kidnapped a slaveholder's child so they would understand what it felt like for a loved one to be abruptly taken away.<sup>71</sup>

While Lay was unique in his tactics, he was not entirely exceptional in his appeals. He expressed a deep commitment to liberty of conscience and stressed the detrimental influence of slavery on the enslaved person's ability to freely practice their faith and develop a relationship with God. Moreover, the corruption of the slaveholder was an important concern for Lay. He worried that the barbarity of maintaining labor discipline eroded the moral center of the individual and rendered one more beast than man. In essence, the practice clouded moral judgment, obscured the conscience and risked one's soul to hellfire. According to Benjamin Rush, it was left to Anthony Benezet to carry on Lay's legacy. He had left a “seed of virtue” for others to spread.<sup>72</sup>

Further south, a year after Lay's denunciation of Quaker slaveholders in Philadelphia, some struggled to maintain a free colony in Georgia. Whatever the motivations for proprietor James Oglethorpe's initial desire to banish African slavery in the charter, some of those who settled in Georgia valued its free status. The residents of New Inverness (also called Darien) petitioned the Governor expressing fears that the colony's leaders would succumb to pressures from Savannah and elsewhere to legalize

---

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 181-182; Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 49.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 184.



slavery in the colony. New Inverness' population was made up primarily of Scottish immigrants who had been displaced by British imperial expansion. Their list of five reasons for maintaining the ban on slavery concluded with the following affirmation of natural rights:

It is shocking to human Nature, that any Race of Mankind and their Posterity should be sentenced to perpetual Slavery; nor in Justice can we think otherwise of it, that they are thrown amongst us to be our Scourge one Day or other for our Sins: And as Freedom must be as dear to them as it is to us, what a Scene of Horror must it bring about! And the longer it is unexecuted, the bloody Scene must be the greater.<sup>73</sup>

The petitioners staved off demands to reverse the ban for ten years, despite the colony's struggle to maximize profits for investors back in Britain. Eventually finances won out over fears of Spanish encroachment and the pleas of some colonists. In 1749, slavery was authorized in Georgia and the enslaved population grew exponentially over subsequent decades. Darien, however, maintained its commitment to free labor and an aversion to slavery well into the nineteenth century.<sup>74</sup>

Anthony Benezet's antislavery principles were also rooted in a respect for liberty of conscience and natural rights. His family were Huguenots, French Protestants from

---

<sup>73</sup> Allen D. Chandler, ed., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, Vol. 3, (Atlanta, 1905), 427.

<sup>74</sup> A committee of residents in Darien presented a list of resolutions in opposition to British policy and the institution of slavery in January of 1775. The fifth resolution read, "To show the world that we are not influenced by any contracted or interested motives, but a general philanthropy for all mankind, of whatever climate, language, or complexion, we hereby declare our disapprobation and abhorrence of the unnatural practice of Slavery in America, (however the uncultivated state of our country, or other specious arguments may plead for it,) a practice founded in injustice and cruelty, and highly dangerous to our liberties, (as well as lives,) debasing part of our fellow-creatures below men, and corrupting the virtue and morals of the rest; and is laying the basis of that liberty we content for (and which we pray the Almighty to continue to the latest posterity) upon a very wrong foundation. We therefore resolve, at all times to use our utmost endeavours for the manumission of our Slaves in this Colony, upon the most safe and equitable footing for the masters and themselves." <http://amarch.lib.niu.edu/islandora/object/niu-amarch%3A93892>. See chapter two.

northern France who experienced extreme persecution for their Protestant beliefs. He later lamented that, "one of my uncles was hung by these intolerants, my aunt was put in a convent, two of my cousins died at the galleys, and my fugitive father was hung in effigy for explaining the gospel differently from the priests and the family was ruined by the confiscation of his property."<sup>75</sup> As a young child, Anthony and his remaining family emigrated to London, and then later to Philadelphia when he was seventeen. There he was converted to the faith of the Society of Friends. Eschewing business, he worked as a teacher in Germantown and later took a position at the Friend's School in Philadelphia. As an educator he reached out to black children, both free and enslaved, which undoubtedly shaped his perspective on slavery and race.

Benezet employed a diverse set of strategies to challenge the institution of slavery. Targeting the racial biases which supported the practice, he assembled a multitude of firsthand accounts testifying to the capabilities of blacks and the horrors of the "iniquitous Traffick" in human beings. Above all, he emphasized the moral capacity and natural goodness of blacks. "Negroes are generally a sensible humane and sociable People," he observed, "their Capacity is as good, and as capable of Improvement as that of the Whites."<sup>76</sup> These observations were drawn from his extensive experience with African Americans in Philadelphia. He founded a night school for free blacks in the years prior to writing his first antislavery pamphlets and credited this experience, in addition to his religious faith, with shaping his views on black equality. As a teacher he "had

---

<sup>75</sup> George S. Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), 5.

<sup>76</sup> See Wilson Armistead and Robert Vaux, eds., *Anthony Benezet: From the Original Memoir* (London, 1859), 17-18.

opportunity of knowing the temper and genius of the Africans," and could "with truth and sincerity declare amongst them... a variety of talents..."<sup>77</sup> Benezet's abolitionist thought was grounded in this experience and was undoubtedly shaped by the views of his black students. He recognized that African Americans suffered under a severe stigma and that "the abject Condition in which we see them, from our Childhood... induces many to look upon them as an ignorant and contemptible Part of Mankind...."

### *Conscience and the Radical Enlightenment*

Anthony Benezet, along with other leading eighteenth-century abolitionists, combined explicit appeals to religious belief with an emphasis on Enlightenment notions of natural rights. The role of radical Enlightenment thought in shaping the antislavery debate of the late eighteenth century has frequently been misunderstood as a secular divergence from a religious antislavery tradition rather than a logical development from within that tradition. Recovering and reconnecting the religious and political radicalism of the period, however, sheds light on the intersection between revolutionary ideology and abolitionism. In this vein, Benezet asked, "how, has [the enslaved African] forfeited his Liberty? Does not Justice loudly call for its being restored to him?" Later, in his *Notes on the Slave Trade*, he proclaimed that "Liberty is the right of every human creature, as soon as he breathes the vital air. And no human law can deprive him of the right, which

---

<sup>77</sup> Anthony Benezet, *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain* (Philadelphia, 1766), 11-12. Also see Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 29-31.

he derives from the law of nature.”<sup>78</sup> Benezet cited a higher law that transcended human law and was to serve as the basis for natural rights.

Historians of the Enlightenment have increasingly noted the complexity of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century intellectual climate. It may be more accurate to refer to various “Enlightenments,” or strains within a broader cluster of ideas and methods. Nevertheless, the mainstream characterization of the Enlightenment as a unified effort grounded in reason and hostile to religion persists. Isaac Kramnick describes it as continuing “the project begun by the Renaissance: to lift the darkness that fell with the Christian triumph over the virtues of classical antiquity.”<sup>79</sup> While there is some truth to this statement, especially in regard to the reverence that many eighteenth-century intellectuals had for antiquity, it grossly oversimplifies the role of religious belief. As Margaret Jacob has ably argued, the Enlightenment at its most radical drew from the English Revolution and its host of dissenting sects including “Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Muggletonians, Familists and Quakers.” She outlines two dominant strains of Enlightenment thought, both with roots in mid-seventeenth-century England. English Revolutionaries had:

bequeathed to the Enlightenment essentially two contradictory traditions: the first...repudiated the radicalism of the Puritan sectaries and republicans and offered in its place a moderate and liberal Christianity...and supportive of strong monarchy within a constitutional framework. ... A second equally vital tradition, also emerged from the political experiences and thought of the revolution ... early eighteenth-century English radicals extracted a political legacy

---

<sup>78</sup> Anthony Benezet, *Notes on the Slave Trade*, (Philadelphia: 1781), 8.

<sup>79</sup> Isaac Kramnick, “Introduction”, in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed., Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1995), ix.

that was essentially republican, and seen to be in conformity with a pantheistic and materialistic understanding of nature.<sup>80</sup>

Scholars have neglected the formative influence of this second Enlightenment tradition, which Jacob has termed “the Radical Enlightenment,” on eighteenth-century abolitionism.

A failure to recognize the common sources of radical Enlightenment and abolitionist thought has been a persistent stumbling block for historians of slavery and antislavery dating back to the nineteenth century.<sup>81</sup> A common association of abolitionism with religious enthusiasm and a monolithic characterization of the Enlightenment project as deeply skeptical of religion has distorted the historical reality. This is not to say that all abolitionists were committed to the principles of the radical Enlightenment, but is to suggest that there was a surprising degree of overlap in their epistemological assumptions and first principles. Figures like Thomas Paine, Benjamin Rush, Phillis Wheatley, Thomas Clarkson, Samuel Miller and John Leland demonstrate the ineffectiveness of conventional categories to capture their worldviews.

A key conceptual link between the Enlightenment radicals Jacob describes and the most ardent abolitionists of the eighteenth century lies in the language of conscience. She acknowledges the connection, noting that “The inner light doctrines of the Quakers bore no small resemblance to the pantheism of the freethinkers,” and that both were perceived as a threat to order and stability by the ruling elite. Even the scientific intelligentsia came

---

<sup>80</sup> Jacob, 72, 65-66.

<sup>81</sup> For an astute discussion of this historiography see Robert P. Forbes, “Truth Systematised”: The Changing Debate Over Slavery and Abolition, 1761-1916,” in *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*, eds., Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer (New York: The New Press, 2006), 3-22. On the false dichotomy between the Enlightenment and evangelical religion, see 8-13.

to support the Restoration and feared the “fanaticism” of the most extreme sects. The moderate Enlightenment was not so much a reaction against traditional authority but rather a leveraging of new scientific knowledge against the radical sectaries and philosophers who combined the new science with an antinomian cosmology. Jacob observes:

The Puritan schemes for social and intellectual reform during the 1640s largely failed, and in that failure lies the origin of the moderate Newtonian Enlightenment. In the 1650s the new science and its mechanical vision of nature was linked to a reaction against the extreme reformers, many of them drawn from the lower ranks of society. They came to prominence in the late 1640s and dared to challenge property rights and to propose the institution of social democracy.<sup>82</sup>

Recognizing this crucial distinction aids our understanding not only of eighteenth-century thought generally, but of the intellectual origins of radical abolitionism in particular.

Enlightenment philosophers adapted the concept of conscience, some maintaining its original emphasis on innate moral intuition, while others theorized it as a product of reason and experience. Discussing his philosophy of the mind, the Philadelphia physician and vocal abolitionist Benjamin Rush, a close friend of Benezet, referred to conscience as “a judge of law and not a legislator....” While employing the language of Enlightenment rationalism, Rush nonetheless embraced an understanding of conscience as innate. The faculty could be accessed through intuition, “a sudden, or prompt perception of truth or error.”<sup>83</sup> Many of the most radical abolitionists embraced the notion of an inborn moral sensibility with the potential to penetrate the thick veneers of worldly interest, custom,

---

<sup>82</sup> Jacob, 172, 69.

<sup>83</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Benjamin Rush's Lectures on the Mind*, ed. Eric T. Carlson, (Philadelphia, 1981), 469, 477.

and prejudice. In the fight against slavery it was believed that conscience could shock the slaveholder to action. As such, the Quaker abolitionist David Cooper regretted that enslaved blacks had “no advocate but his master's conscience....” and sought to build a movement against the practice with a spiritual core.<sup>84</sup>

While some Enlightenment figures embraced the notion of an inward light or innate moral sensibility, others emphasized external stimuli as critical to reason and judgment. A moderate strain within the Enlightenment contributed by the end of the seventeenth century to a critique of conscience as it had been understood to that point. Political theorist Mika Ojakangas has argued that early Enlightenment thinkers campaigned against “the authority of conscience” in a political effort to curb “those sixteenth- and seventeenth-century religious upheavals in which each faction appealed to the religious truth revealed to it by conscience.”<sup>85</sup> It is within this context that the writings of both Thomas Hobbes and John Locke are best understood.

John Locke's philosophy is especially important for our purposes because of its substantial impact on the antislavery moderates that would come to influence the late eighteenth-century movement.<sup>86</sup> From as early as the 1660s, Locke condemned radical proponents of conscience who claimed that “liberty of conscience is sacred at all times,

---

<sup>84</sup> David Cooper, *A Mite cast into the Treasury: or, Observations on Slave-keeping* (Philadelphia, 1772). In James G. Basker, ed., *Early American Abolitionists: A Collection of Anti-Slavery Writings, 1760-1820* (New York, 2007), 43.

<sup>85</sup> Ojakangas, *Voice of Conscience*, 121.

<sup>86</sup> Locke's influence on eighteenth-century thought in general is profound. Benjamin Franklin, for example, claimed to have read his *Essay concerning Human Understanding* as a teenager. Benjamin Franklin, *The Writings*, Vol. 10, ed. Albert Henry Smyth (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 148. For an analysis of Locke's views on conscience see Andrew, *Conscience and its Critics*, Chapter 5.

and is answerable only to God.” Embracing such a notion “ignites a fire capable of devastating everything” and means that “each individual would become his own law-giver, and his own God.”<sup>87</sup>

Locke's sensationalist psychology, so popular among the intellectual elite of the eighteenth century, provided the epistemological basis for a philosophy which discarded notions of any innate moral capacity.<sup>88</sup> In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), he argued that that the mind was a blank slate, shaped by experience. Moral conscience, in contrast, relies on an inward rather than outward sensitivity and presupposes *a priori* understanding. In Locke's words, “Men's actions convince us that the rule of virtue is not their internal principle.” He explicitly rejects the seventeenth-century antinomian understanding of conscience as “written on [men's] hearts” and views a sense of “Conscience as no proof of any innate moral rule.”<sup>89</sup> Locke posited that morality is not intuitively perceived but understood by reason and shaped by one's external sensations. He reduces conscience itself to mere moral opinion arising from a given environment and privileges reason over moral intuition. Such a formulation undermined the egalitarianism of the Protestant conscience.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> John Locke, *Second Tract on Government* (1662) in *John Locke: Political Writings*, ed., David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 174, 165, 153.

<sup>88</sup> Winthrop Jordan has written that “No line of reasoning... could have better typified the changed pattern of thought in the Revolutionary era. Indeed, the flowering of environmentalism was one of the major historical developments of the second half of the eighteenth century.” Jordan, *White Over Black*, 287.

<sup>89</sup> John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689; Reprint, London, 1836), 25.

<sup>90</sup> Andrew, *Conscience and its Critics*, 84.



Locke's innovative epistemology also subtly stripped natural rights of their sacred foundations.<sup>91</sup> Political scientist Thomas Pangle notes the effect of this departure on Locke's conception of natural law in his political philosophy, viewing Locke's use of the term to be a “somewhat deceptive adornment” for a “radically lowered utilitarian, and self-centered moral outlook.” In Locke's scheme, Pangle observes, natural law no longer referred to “commandments implanted in the conscience, by nature or by God,” but instead related to “learned conventional rules, deductively contrived by reason....”<sup>92</sup> This is a stark departure from the conceptualization of natural law expressed by the Levellers, which was rooted in divine law as expressed in the conscience of each individual.

Locke's epistemological departure from earlier natural law traditions had a profound impact on the trajectory of antislavery thought and activity in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world. Many of the more conservative antislavery voices held up Locke's study as a seminal text. As an example, one-time president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and Federalist William Rawle wrote in his diary that if he had but one book, aside from the Bible, he would choose “Locke's Human Understanding,” which he described as a “good and useful study” that “will not soon be exhausted.”<sup>93</sup> Winthrop Jordan has argued that environmentalist antislavery was closely linked with the political philosophy

---

<sup>91</sup> Winthrop Jordan contends that “an environmentalist approach” to natural rights held sway during the American Revolution. Jordan, *White Over Black*, 288.

<sup>92</sup> Thomas L. Pangle, *The Theological Basis of Liberal Modernity in Montesquieu's Spirit of the Laws*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>93</sup> William Rawle Diary, June 11, 1786, Rawle Family Papers, HSP.

which carried forward the Revolution.”<sup>94</sup> While Jordan is correct, the result was that the most radical conceptions of natural rights were abandoned by moderates in favor of Lockean approaches. Locke's environmental psychology undermined the more radical aspects of his political philosophy. Thus, throughout the eighteenth century, claims from seemingly diametrically opposed ideological perspectives were often made, both citing Locke as an authority. If perceptions of right and wrong were understood only as reflections of an external reality, as per Locke's theory of understanding, certain social and cultural norms must be instilled to maintain order.<sup>95</sup> This environmentalist perspective underpinned the assumptions of many antislavery moderates.

Environmentalism provided intellectual support for antislavery positions but also encouraged gradual approaches. In his entry on “conscience” in his famous *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), Voltaire observed that Locke had demonstrated “that we have no innate ideas or principles,” but moral order could still be achieved by instilling good principles “into the mind as soon as it acquires the use of its faculties.”<sup>96</sup> The enslaved, however, were unlikely to have received such moral guidance. If one is believed to be shaped solely by one's environment—it is assumed that an individual who spent a life in slavery would be incapable of republican citizenship—at least in the short term. If there is no moral framework naturally within, both Locke and Voltaire concluded, it must be imprinted from without. Precedents for such an approach were available in the form of

---

<sup>94</sup> Jordan, *White Over Black*, 289.

<sup>95</sup> See Staughton Lynd, *The Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* (1968; Reprint, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 21. Lynd's wide ranging discussion of American radicalism relies extensively on the concept of conscience.

<sup>96</sup> Voltaire, “Conscience,” in *Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire, Vol. 7* (Paris: Furne, 1835), 368.

pedagogical theories by a variety of Christian sects, including Puritans and Pietists.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Locke's own treatise on education, wherein he described the child as “wax to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases,” provided the blueprint.<sup>98</sup>

Appeals to innate conscience, on the other hand, allowed for more radical positions on the abolition of slavery and the inclusion of freed captives in civic life. As Jacob argues, the pantheism of the radical Enlightenment provided “the philosophical foundations for democratic belief.” The moderate Enlightenment embraced the notion that power comes from an external God, but pantheistic understandings of God's power or the power of nature acting in each individual (conscience) destabilizes that notion. In Jacob's words, “If the world of ordinary people and daily events is rendered, in effect, sacred then systems of government justified by recourse to supernatural authority, even if reinforced by human contracts, lose all validity.”<sup>99</sup> Likewise, the institution of slavery could be challenged as a corrupt human innovation and a recognition of divine power within all human beings could serve to justify the rights of the enslaved to immediate liberation.

Much as an evangelical preacher sought to instantly convert those embroiled in lives of sin through an acceptance of Christ, abolitionists who emphasized the power of conscience promised liberation to the slave and slaveholder alike. While the majority of evangelical Christians were not abolitionists, the spread of revivalist idioms in the

---

<sup>97</sup> Johan Amos Comenius is an example of a theologian that outlined approaches to schooling that included an emphasis on instilling moral principles. See Ojakangas, *Voice of Conscience*, 121.

<sup>98</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Dublin: J. Kiernan, 1712), 324.

<sup>99</sup> Jacob, 73, 224.

eighteenth century primed individuals on both sides of the Atlantic to open themselves to narratives of redemption and conversion through appeals to conscience. Evangelists encouraged their audiences to consult their hearts in order to transcend their prejudices.

The evangelical minister George Whitefield, himself not an abolitionist, nevertheless spread the message of immediate conversion, redemption, and regeneration. Central to his message, and that of many New Light revivalists, was that the listener must lay aside their prejudices and open their minds and hearts.<sup>100</sup> He expressed such sentiments in an instructional address on how to “hear sermons” during the period of religious revival often referred to as the Great Awakening. Writing in 1739, the charismatic preacher advised his audience “Not to entertain any the least prejudice against the minister. For... if his audience was prejudiced against him, he would be but as sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal.” “That was the reason why Jesus Christ himself, the Eternal Word, could not... preach to any great effect among those of his own country,” The charismatic preacher continued, “for they were offended at him.”<sup>101</sup> Here the preacher is positioned as the medium between the ‘truths’ of God and the individual’s conscience. In order for this knowledge to be communicated through the minister (or pamphleteer) to the people, the audience must suspend their preconceived beliefs. According to Whitefield, even the presumed perfectly truthful words of Jesus Christ were frequently ignored in his time due to prejudices against him.

---

<sup>100</sup> See Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); and Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America’s Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

<sup>101</sup> George Whitefield, “Sermon XX,” in *Directions how to Hear Sermons*, (Boston, 1740).

For Enlightenment radicals, prejudice was an obstruction to progress. This is especially evident in the writings of some of the most influential French *philosophes*. The term “prejudice” had dichotomous meanings in the discourses of the period. The entry for the term by Louis Jaucourt, in Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d’Alembert’s *Encyclopedie* (1765), indicates a false judgment, often as a result of senses and passions which prevent understanding through reason and “block forever the paths to truth.”<sup>102</sup> Edmund Burke, in contrast, promoted a positive notion of prejudices, whereby they embodied the wisdom and authority of custom. For Burke, prejudices enabled individuals to translate custom into ethical action.

While Voltaire and other important French Enlightenment figures were especially influenced by Newton and Locke, others had a more radical lineage.<sup>103</sup> Signaling the secularization of the concept that would occur in certain radical circles, Pierre Bayle, a forerunner of the mid-eighteenth century *philosophes*, asserted in his widely read *Dictionnaire historique et critique* that “the inward light of conscience, may continue in the mind of a man, even when the notion of the being of God, and the belief of another world are intirely rooted out.”<sup>104</sup> Denis Diderot, in particular, was inspired by

---

<sup>102</sup> Susan Rosa, “Prejudice,” in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* Vol. 3, ed. Alan Charles Kors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 354.

<sup>103</sup> Voltaire was particularly hostile toward the radical sectarians of the English Revolution. In a poem, he lamented the death of Charles I and blamed the fanaticism of “ces peuples de Sectaires,/Trembleurs, Independants, Puritans, Unitaires...” Quoted in Jacob, 105. He also praised David Hume’s *History*, which took a very pessimistic view of the Revolution, as an unprecedented achievement. “Mr. Hume, in his *History*, seems neither a parliamentarian, nor a royalist, nor an Anglican, nor a Presbyterian; we find in him only the fair-minded man,” Voltaire wrote. *Gazette littéraire de l’Europe*, May 2, 1764, I, 200.

<sup>104</sup> Pierre Bayle, *A General Dictionary* (London, 1734-41), vol. 6, 555.

seventeenth-century English radicalism.<sup>105</sup> In part due to Diderot's editorial role, the famous and widely read *Encyclopédie*, perhaps the most significant contribution of the French Enlightenment prior to the Revolution, owed a great deal to a dissenting tradition with roots dating back to the English Revolution.<sup>106</sup> In his 1755 entry for “*droit naturel*,” Diderot based his conception of natural right on the “*sentiment intérieur*” [interior feeling] that “is common both to the philosopher and to the man who has not reflected...” The common person, accordingly, discerned natural rights in the “tribunal of conscience,” and need not have access to philosophical terms to reach moral understanding.<sup>107</sup> Louis Chevalier de Jaucourt, a Huguenot who wrote nearly a quarter of the articles, and the Abbé Claude Yvon, who traveled in radical Dutch circles with links to refugee dissenters, also left substantial imprints on the contents of the *Encyclopédie*.<sup>108</sup>

These democratic assumptions had implications for the issue of slavery. The entry for “slavery” in the *Encyclopédie*, authored by Louis Chevalier de Jaucourt in 1755, demonstrates the extent to which the French Enlightenment critique of the institution corresponded with a broader political agenda. For Jaucourt, slavery “damages the liberty

---

<sup>105</sup> Jacob, 94.

<sup>106</sup> Jacob, 249-260.

<sup>107</sup> “Droit Naturel (*Morale*),” in Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie*, 17 vols. (1751-80), (Paris: Chez Briasson, 1755), 5: 115. Translated. In a related entry for “Right of nature” [Law of nature], Antoine-Gaspard Boucher d'Argis wrote of the natural law [la loi naturelle] “which God has engraved in our hearts,” and is discerned primarily through “an instinct, or a kind of internal feeling” To apply the natural law to actions required that “one must consult one's conscience,” which is a form of “reason.” “Droit de la nature, ou droit naturel,” *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, 5:131–134 (Paris, 1755).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

of man” and is contrary to “the principles of Nature....”<sup>109</sup> His entry was not simply a moral indictment but also a political one. Slavery, he observed, “offends the best forms of government” and violates natural law. He argued that “*civil slavery* is accompanied by *political slavery*,” and that civil tyranny over the body bred political despotism in tangible ways. He found the claim that one could hold “property rights” over another person to be “repugnant to reason.”<sup>110</sup> To allow such an unjust claim to stand was an invitation to political tyranny. “Men and their freedom are not objects of commerce;” Jaucourt wrote in his entry on the slave trade, “they can be neither sold, nor purchased, nor bought at any price.” This uncompromising position was fueled by abstract reasoning and a commitment to first principles that would later flourish in a revolutionary age.

Implicit in the radical Enlightenment critique of human bondage was the assumption that slavery was a cancer on the body politic. Still more radical, some reasoned that formerly enslaved human beings should, by natural right, be fully integrated into civil society. Free institutions of government required bodily freedom. The abolition of slavery was therefore a prerequisite to effective democratic-republican institutions. Under such governments, Jaucourt insisted, “The liberty of every citizen is a part of public liberty.” Popular sovereignty relied on public freedom, and such civil liberty depended on a free population. Immediate abolition of slavery was the only just course of action. He considered it grossly inhumane that judges did not “immediately

---

<sup>109</sup> Denis Diderot and Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, eds., *Encyclopédie*, 17 vols. (1751-80), (Paris: Chez Briasson, 1755), 5:936. Translated.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:937-938. Translated.

decide to liberate” enslaved people, who possess “a soul like theirs,” when they were brought to “free” soil.<sup>111</sup>

Jean-Jacques Rousseau was another of the French vanguard who critiqued slavery and appealed to conscience in his writings. He contended that there is “at the bottom of all souls an innate principle of justice and moral virtue anterior to all national prejudices and all the maxims of education.... it is to this principle that I give the name of conscience.”<sup>112</sup> He criticized relying on custom for moral guidance, which he viewed as encouraging corruption and distanced one from nature. Prejudice, for Rousseau, threatened to muffle the conscience. He argues:

Those innate feelings that nature has engraved in all hearts to... encourage him to virtue can easily... become stifled in individuals; but soon reborn in the generations that follow, they will always bring man back to his primitive dispositions.... The voice of conscience can no more be stifled in the human heart than that of reason can be stifled in the understanding; and moral insensitivity is as unnatural as madness.<sup>113</sup>

Rousseau's definition of conscience aligned in many respects with that of the antinomian English radicals. In contrast to Thomas Hobbes, who viewed a reliance on conscience as dangerous to society, and John Locke, who repudiated the notion of an innate moral sense, Rousseau contended that conscience allowed the individual to hear the “voice of nature” and was the essence of humanity itself.

---

<sup>111</sup> "Traite des nègres," *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1765), 16:532.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Cooper, *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life*, (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 85.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.



Conscience was central to Rousseau's epistemology and political philosophy.<sup>114</sup>

Political theorist Lawrence Cooper concludes that a careful reading of his works reveals that conscience “plays an even larger and more decisive role in Rousseau's understanding of a well-developed person than reason does in Plato's.”<sup>115</sup> Rousseau writes that following one's conscience “is my whole philosophy and I believe, the whole art of being happy that is practicable for man.”<sup>116</sup> In radical republican fashion he connected virtue with conscience and emphasized the egalitarian ramifications of such thinking:

O virtue! Sublime science of simple souls, are so many efforts and so much equipment really required to know you? Are not your principles engraved in all hearts, and is it not enough in order to learn your Laws to return into oneself and to listen to the voice of one's conscience in the silence of the passions? That is genuine philosophy.<sup>117</sup>

Conscience, for Rousseau, was a countervailing force necessary to check the the pressures of custom, society, and public opinion—a call for the individual to resist the corrupting influence of civilization. This formulation would influence English radicals like Thomas Paine and William Blake, both who would become outspoken abolitionists. While reason was integral to Enlightenment thinking, scholars often overlook the

---

<sup>114</sup> Rousseau's understanding of conscience was in direct conflict with Locke's, which helps to explain why scholars have had such a difficult time classifying his thought. Norman Hampson has written that “It may be argued with equal plausibility that Rousseau was either one of the greatest writers of the Enlightenment or its most eloquent and effective opponent.” Hampson, *The Enlightenment* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), 9.

<sup>115</sup> Cooper, *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life*, 83.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>117</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Victor Gourevitch, *The Discourses and Other Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 28.

importance of conscience to the worldviews of not only influential thinkers but ordinary people as well.<sup>118</sup>

Rousseau reasoned that slavery was an illegitimate institution and echoed Jaucourt's contention that the authority of an enslaver comes only from force and is therefore unjust. The relationship between enslaver and the enslaved, he argued, was contrary to nature and “the state of war continues to subsist between them....” For Rousseau, slavery could not be justified by natural right and therefore conscience itself condemned the practice. Having established the illegitimacy of human enslavement, he reasoned that despotic or tyrannical government justified rule from the same faulty foundations. From a political perspective, therefore, slavery is symptomatic of a structural problem in government itself and tends toward corruption. In *Of the Social Contract, or Principles of Political Right* (1762), he concludes that “from whatever aspect we regard the question, the right of slavery is null and void, not only as being illegitimate, but also because it is absurd and meaningless. The words slave and right contradict each other, and are mutually exclusive.”<sup>119</sup> Through comparable reasoning, Rousseau came to the same conclusion as the Leveller John Lilburne: if slavery cannot be justified by natural law, nor can despotic government, and vice versa.

Notwithstanding the arguments of the *philosophes*, criticism of slavery often fell on deaf ears, as the institution remained firmly entrenched in the mid-eighteenth century.

---

<sup>118</sup> On Rousseau's influence on English radicals, see Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 109. He was also read widely by American democrats. See Paul Merrill Spurlin, *Rousseau in America, 1760-1809* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1969).

<sup>119</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *On the Social Contract* (New York: Dover, 2003), 7.

Prior to the American Revolution, it took vocal challenges from the fringes of society to even raise the issue. Anna Barbauld, who bridged Enlightenment rationalism and romantic sensibility in her popular writings of the late eighteenth century, argued:

It is to speculative people... who, by accustoming themselves to make the most fundamental truths the subject of discussion, have divested their minds of that reverence which is generally felt for opinions and practices of long standing, that the world is ever to look for its improvement and reformation.<sup>120</sup>

This willingness to challenge convention while appealing to deeply held personal truths fueled the effort to challenge slavery. Benezet and other abolitionists recognized this maxim and turned Burke's formulation on its head—attacking customary sentiments for obscuring deeper truths and appealing to reason and emotion to encourage ethical action. While their interpretations of prejudice clearly conflicted with that of Burke, calling on people to reject convention, they also eschewed the moderate Enlightenment understanding of prejudice which emphasized the tendency for emotion to interfere with reason.<sup>121</sup> Benezet, instead, lamented the “boasted Pretences of the present Age,” signaling a suspicion of pure reason as a guide.

The term “prejudice” has roots in Reformed Christianity. George Whitefield, for example, presented an alternate notion of prejudice that incorporated emotion as a means of transcending custom and worldly vice. He lamented that, “so many remain

---

<sup>120</sup> Anna Barbauld, “On Prejudice,” (1773) in *The Works of Anna Barbauld, vol 2* (London, 1825), 32. Barbauld was a fellow traveler of the radical dissenters and political reformers in Joseph Priestley’s circle. In her essay she argues that abandoning prejudice altogether is also dangerous and contends for an equilibrium with reason as the fundamental guide.

<sup>121</sup> A distinction between the Reformed Christian concept of “conscience” and the Enlightenment notion of a rational moral sense is drawn and explored in, Edward G. Andrew, *Conscience and Its Critics: Protestant Conscience, Enlightenment Reason, and Modern Subjectivity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001). See especially, Chapter Eight, “Individualist Conscience and Nationalist Prejudice,” 153-176.

unconverted, yea, unaffected with the most evangelical preaching...they only hear the preacher's voice with their outward ears, but do not experience the power of it inwardly in their hearts."<sup>122</sup> Many sermons of the period emphasized the importance of spiritually connecting with God as a way to transcend prejudice and worldly rationality in order to receive truth. In one such sermon, John Hargrove preached that,

Should there be now before me, any Christian, high or low, rich or poor, whose enlightened and scientific mind compels his interior assent to the doctrines just delivered, and yet-- will be such a wretch as to affect to reject or not believe them, because they are yet unpopular. . . . I could say much, but I trust that conscience can, and will say much more. O! Conscience, though agent of the Most High....<sup>123</sup>

Similarly, if the colonists were to become “converts” to the abolitionist cause, it would require more than reason alone—they would have to open their hearts and minds to transcend the habitual customs that blind them to a corrupt past.

The term "prejudice" arises frequently in the antislavery literature of the late eighteenth century. William Dillwyn, a protege of Benezet, recognized that "The prejudices of custom are strong—those imbibed from interest, yet stonger."<sup>124</sup> But he insisted that "It lies in our power" to abolish slavery and declared it "our indispensable duty" to do so. The New Light preacher Samuel Hopkins echoed both Benezet and Dillwyn, observing in a popular pamphlet that for one "who is not under the prejudices of interest, education, and custom," the response to slavery is to be "shocked with it beyond

---

<sup>122</sup> Whitefield, "Sermon XX," in *Directions how to Hear Sermons*.

<sup>123</sup> John Hargrove, *A Sermon on the Second Coming of Christ* (Baltimore, 1805), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 1596.

<sup>124</sup> [William Dillwyn], *Brief Considerations on Slavery and the Expediency of its Abolition* (Burlington, 1773), 10.

all expression."<sup>125</sup> Henry Laurens, one of the wealthiest enslavers in South Carolina, wrote to his son John on the prospect of arming enslaved blacks to fight in the war in exchange for their freedom. Expressing trepidation at the prospect of freeing those he continued to hold in bondage, he observed that "great powers oppose me, the Laws and Customs of my Country, my own & the avarice of my Country Men."<sup>126</sup> Here, Laurens confesses that custom and prejudice guide his decision to enslave human beings, even as he recognizes the immorality of slavery in the abstract.

New Jersey Quaker David Cooper sought to shock the consciences of enslavers like Laurens. He began his first published address on slavery with a declaration that:

The Power of prejudice over the minds of mankind is very extraordinary; hardly any extremes too distant, or absurdities too glaring for it to unite or reconcile.... It is thus we are to account for the fallacious reasonings and absurd sentiments used and entertained concerning negroes, and the lawfulness of keeping them slaves.<sup>127</sup>

The challenge for antislavery activists was to penetrate custom, prejudice, and material self-interest in order to bring about real change. For this effort to succeed, conscience and morality must trump greed and sin. Cooper encouraged his readers to "divest themselves of every bias arising either from prejudice or temporal views... and, if anything is met with, that tends to promote christian rectitude, embrace it..."

---

<sup>125</sup> [Samuel Hopkins], *Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans* (Norwich, 1776), 42. The pamphlet was addressed to the members of the Continental Congress and urged rapid action on the question of slavery. The Rhode Island minister's pamphlet was later reprinted by the New-York Manumission Society and remained an important expression of the Revolution's abolitionist potential.

<sup>126</sup> Henry Laurens to John Laurens, August 14, 1776. Berol Collection, Columbia University.

<sup>127</sup> David Cooper, *A Mite cast into the Treasury: or, Observations on Slave-keeping* (Philadelphia, 1772). In James G. Basker, ed., *Early American Abolitionists: A Collection of Anti-Slavery Writings, 1760-1820* (New York, 2007), 38.

*Slavery, Race, and the Imperial Crisis*

As resistance to the Stamp Act heightened, the press began to frame the issue as a Manichean contest between freedom and slavery. There were only around seven presses publishing newspapers prior to 1750, but by 1765 they had grown to twenty six. One early survey of this literature characterized the newspapers as promoting “the spirit of public Liberty” and “successful emancipation from slavery.”<sup>128</sup> An identification of slavery with tyranny and oppression during the protests, spilled over to contests over the legitimacy of chattel slavery itself. Some of the most radical of the patriot leaders made this connection explicit.

More than a century after the John Lilburne's radical manifesto of the English Revolution, the Boston legal prodigy James Otis, demonstrated the potential of natural rights theory in pressing for racial equality. In *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (1764), published two years after both Benezet's *A Short Account and* Rousseau's *Of the Social Contract*, Otis brilliantly synthesized the political traditions of the past with modern Enlightenment thought—rendering a radical ideological basis on which to challenge abuses of British authority in the colonies. Contrary to those who would portray Otis as a Lockean liberal, his treatise is in fact much more akin to a Leveller tract.<sup>129</sup> This may be no coincidence, as Otis was a close friend of Catharine Macaulay, the foremost propagator of English radical republicanism in the eighteenth

---

<sup>128</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *Annals of the American Revolution* (Hartford, CT, 1824), 115n.

<sup>129</sup> Otis himself seemed to acknowledge the connection. Anticipating attacks, he wrote, “It is possible there are a few... that can't bear the name of Liberty and Property, much less that the things signified by those terms should be enjoyed by the vulgar. These may be inclined to brand some of the principles advanced...with the odious epithets *seditions* and *levelling*.” James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston, 1764), 14.

century.<sup>130</sup> She sent him a copy of a volume of her *History of England* with the inscription, “To you, Sir, as one of the most distinguished of the great guardians of American Liberty, I offer a copy of this book.”<sup>131</sup> It is entirely possible that Otis was influenced by her heroic portrayal of Levellers like Lilburne and may have borrowed pamphlets from her extensive library of revolutionary literature. Attuned to public perception, Otis expressed concern that his writing and oratory may be perceived as “levelling,” and explained his reliance on Locke as an authority for natural rights rather than “British Martyrs” because he feared “an outcry of rebellion” would occur.<sup>132</sup>

Regardless, Otis's pamphlet has much in common with Leveller tracts. He aggressively critiqued Locke's political theory, relying on many of the same premises as the sectarian radicals more than a century earlier. Like Lilburne, he began with a discussion of sovereignty. He immediately challenged the notion that legitimate authority for government can stem from anywhere other than from the sovereignty of God. For example, he dismisses property as a suitable foundation. Referring to James Harrington's famous work of the Interregnum, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), he argues:

---

<sup>130</sup> Catharine Macaulay wrote of the Levellers that they had been “honest to the principles of equal and general freedom” and that the Agreement of the people had been “a better model than any which had yet been offered to the public,” as it provided for “the reformation of all the grievances which the people of England then laboured under, and which to this very day they do at equal rate sustain.” Catharine Macaulay, *History of England*, IV:355, V:8. Bridget Hill claims that Macaulay was “familiar...with all the Leveller Manifestoes.” Bridget Hill, *The Republican Virago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 37. Blair Warden argues that the Levellers were relatively unknown to most in the eighteenth century and refers to Macaulay as an exception. Blair Warden, “The Levellers in History and Memory, c. 1660-1960,” in Michael Mendle, ed., *The Putney Debates of 1647: The Army, the Levellers and the English State* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 268-69.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Katharine Susan Anthony, *First Lady of the Revolution* (New York: Doubleday, 1958), 124.

<sup>132</sup> James Otis, *A Vindication of the Conduct of the House of Representatives of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay* (Boston, 1762), 20.

It is however true in fact and experience, as the great, the incomparable Harrington has most abundantly demonstrated in his *Oceana*... that Empire follows the balance of property: it is also certain that property in fact generally confers power, though the possessor of it may not have much more wit than a mole....<sup>133</sup>

While Harrington may have demonstrated that property leads to power, it did not follow, according to Otis, that either property nor power were legitimate foundations for government. He also dismisses the social contract as a legitimate source of governmental authority, as well as the divine right of Kings which he compares to Catholic “popery.”

Otis queries, “Has it *any* solid foundation? any chief cornerstone, but what accident, chance or confusion may lay one moment and destroy the next?” Otis, like Lilburne, grounds governmental authority in a single source. “I think it has an everlasting foundation in the *unchangeable will* of God, the author of nature,” he concludes, “whose laws never vary.” He laments that “the government of the supreme *ruler* of the universe is every day discussed with less ceremony and decency than the administration of a petty German prince.” “We have a King, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, but eternally watches for our good... so stupid and wicked are some men, as to deny his existence, blaspheme his most evident government, and disgrace their nature.”<sup>134</sup> He refers here not to George III but to God. For Otis, government is within each individual—conscience is government by divine authority, naturally expressed in each human being.

Otis's appeals to divine authority expressed through conscience were not merely an aside but a constant refrain throughout his tome on liberty. In his section entitled “Of

---

<sup>133</sup> Otis, *Rights of the British Colonies*, 10.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 6, 12.



the natural Rights of Colonists,” Otis referred to “the celebrated *Rousseau*” as an authority on natural law and criticized the moderate Enlightenment assumption that ethics could be derived from tradition. Quoting Rousseau, Otis argued that even learned research and study of tradition revealed only a “history of ancient abuses.”<sup>135</sup> Morality and political authority must rest on a more solid foundation. “The power of God Almighty is the only power that can be properly and strictly be called supreme and absolute,” he asserts. Sovereignty lies with the “only monarch in the universe, who has clear and indisputable right to absolute power....”

Otis's contention that the only legitimate authority was divine authority was designed to undermine appeals to common law and parliamentary sovereignty by the British and to situate the colonists in a Godly struggle against those who would dare to infringe on natural rights. “Government is founded...ultimately on the will of God, the author of nature,” Otis continues, “I know of no human law, founded on the law of *nature*, to restrain him....” If all people are subject to God's will and that will is revealed in nature and conscience, then no law of man can bind the duty of the individual against divine authority. “There can be no prescription old enough to supersede... God Almighty,” Otis proclaims, “who has given to all men a natural right to be *free*....” But Otis does not stop at a declaration of natural freedom, but insists that each individual should have it in their power “to make themselves [free], if they please.”<sup>136</sup>

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 13, 15, 17.

His appeals to self-determination and conscience would long be remembered.

John Adams recalled that in 1761 Otis had delivered “A dissertation on the rights of man” where he asserted that every man “was an independent sovereign, subject to no law but the law written on his heart, and revealed to him by his Maker, in the constitution of his nature, and the inspiration of his understanding and his conscience.”<sup>137</sup> Otis not only declared the rights of colonists to resist unjust British imperial policies, but for any individual to rightly resist oppression and the violations of the sacred right of liberty.

From this fundamental assumption, the sovereignty of God expressed through the individual conscience, stems an egalitarian and democratic set of principles on par with those of Lilburne and the Levellers. At a time when “democracy” was a word often used with derision, Otis contended that immediately under God “comes the power of a simple *democracy*, or the power of the whole over the whole.” He concluded that aside from these powers, all other individuals are equal, “from that of the French Monarque, to a petty constable.” The end of government is “manifestly the good of *the whole*.” The doctrine was revolutionary. “There is no one act which a government can have a right to make, that does not tend to the advancement of the security, tranquility and prosperity of the people.” This ideology authorized resistance to monarchs and other usurpers of divine authority—as embodied in the people themselves. “Whenever the administrators... deviate from truth, justice and equity, they verge towards tyranny, and are to be opposed;

---

<sup>137</sup> John Adams to William Tudor, June 1, 1818, in *The Works of John Adams, vol. 10*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, 1856), 314.

and if they prove incorrigible, they will be deposed by the people, if the people are not rendered too abject.”<sup>138</sup>

For Otis, natural rights were universal and he asserted not the rights of Englishmen but the rights of humanity.<sup>139</sup> According to his formulation, “the people” included blacks as well as whites. It is striking that Otis asserted the rights of the enslaved in a pamphlet that sought to prove the rights of British colonists amidst a political crisis with the the metropole. He proclaimed, “The Colonists are by the law of nature free born, as indeed all men are, white or black.” He opposed the enslavement of people “of any colour” and pointed to prejudice as the “foundation of that cruel slavery exercised over the poor Ethiopians; which threatens one day to reduce both Europe and America to the ignorance and barbarity of the darkest ages.” “Does it follow that it is right to enslave a man because he is black?” he asked, “Will short curled hair, like wool, instead of Christian hair, as it is called by those whose hearts are as hard as the nether millstone, help the argument? Can any logical inference in favour of slavery, be drawn from a flat nose, a long or short face?” Ultimately he concludes that the slave trade is a cancer which corrupts the British Empire and denies human beings their fundamental rights. He forcefully observes:

Nothing better can be said in favour of a trade, that is the most shocking violation of the law of nature, has a direct tendency to diminish the idea of the inestimable value of liberty, and makes every dealer in it a tyrant, from the director of an African company to the petty chapman in needles and pins on the unhappy coast.

---

<sup>138</sup> Otis, *Rights of the British Colonies*, 12, 13, 14, 18.

<sup>139</sup> T.H. Breen has argued that such a formulation was a reaction to British nationalism. Breen, "Ideology and Nationalism on the Eve of the American Revolution: Revisions Once More in Need of Revising," *Journal of American History* 84 (June 1997): 13-39.

It is a clear truth, that those who every day barter away other mens' liberty, will soon care little for their own. To this cause must be imputed that ferocity, cruelty, and brutal barbarity that has long marked the general character of the sugar-islanders.<sup>140</sup>

When one considers the target of Otis's general attack, the significance of this passage becomes more clear. He was not simply carrying out the logic of his natural rights theory to its logical conclusion—as many scholars have argued.<sup>141</sup> A skilled lawyer, Otis pointed to slavery as a critical defect in the British system and sought to exploit the weakness. While not ready to assail the English Constitution directly at this stage of the crisis, he suggested the incompatibility of slavery and liberty in a country which upholds the natural rights of all. Otis exploded the category of “the rights of Englishmen” to encompass all human beings, regardless of race or origin.<sup>142</sup> By broadening the liberties of the “free-born” by custom to include Africans, he opened the door to both revolution and abolition.

The foundation for both was natural independence—a “gift of God” which “cannot be annihilated.” The colonists have “not renounced their natural liberty... and if it is taken from them without their consent, they are so far enslaved.”<sup>143</sup> In connecting the

---

<sup>140</sup> Otis, *Rights of the British Colonies*, 43-44.

<sup>141</sup> Bernard Bailyn, for example, refers to Otis's reference to the rights of blacks as “a digression” in the broader debate. Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 238. T.H. Breen asks “Why he chose this particular moment to develop ideas that were certain to upset even his most enthusiastic supporters, we shall never know.” Breen, “Otis's Radical Critique,” 379.

<sup>142</sup> Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra*, 224. Most scholars interpret Otis's reference to Africans and slavery as a curious aside. Linebaugh and Rediker are the exception. While their discussion of Otis is brief, they suggest that his deracializing of the “rights of Englishmen” was intentional and that Otis may have been inspired by Tacky's Revolt in Jamaica in 1760 to view the enslaved as revolutionary actors.

<sup>143</sup> Otis, *Rights of the British Colonies*, 44, 45.

plight of the enslaved African with that of the oppressed British colonist, Otis drew attention to the antislavery potential of the revolutionary cause. His point was to note the lived experience of the enslaved and its connection to the British Empire. One should expect nothing less than tyranny from a country which sustains the trade in human beings. To rebel against the British Empire was to rebel against the barbaric system. Slavery did not serve merely as metaphor but harsh reality.

James Otis's formulation alarmed moderates within the resistance movement. John Adams recalled Otis's passionate defense of the rights of blacks at various times during the imperial crisis. He remembered that Otis recognized certain rights to be "inherent and inalienable" and included "the poor negroes" in his formulation. According to Adams, "Not a Quaker in Philadelphia... had ever asserted the rights of negroes on stronger terms... I shuddered at the doctrine he taught; and I have all my life shuddered, and still shudder, at the consequences that may be drawn from such premises." For Adams, a social conservative in the years following the Revolution, the risk of violent unrest when "the rights of masters and servants clash" was enough for him to show respect for Otis's principles while condemning their practicality. "I adore the idea of gradual abolitions!" Adams assured his reader, "but who shall decide how fast or how slowly these abolitions shall be made?"<sup>144</sup> This is the very question which opponents of slavery would tackle in the early years of the United States. The fear of abstract principles and an emphasis on practical and pragmatic approaches to emancipation would color the debate. As early as the 1760s, Otis condemned sacrificing the natural rights of

---

<sup>144</sup> John Adams to William Tudor, June 1, 1818, in *The Works of John Adams, vol. 10, ed. Charles Francis Adams* (Boston, 1856), 315.

any human being for the accumulation of material wealth. “Neither the riches of Jamaica, nor the luxury of a metropolis,” he proclaimed, “should ever have weight enough to break the balance of truth and justice.”<sup>145</sup>

Otis's emphasis on natural law had currency in the early abolitionist movement. David Cooper repeatedly referred to the law of nature in his 1772 tract, declaring that “the law of nature gives each human being an equal right to freedom...” Unlike most, he went on to define what he meant by natural law:

The law of nature is that which God at man's creation infused into him, for his preservation and direction; is an eternal law and may not be changed; is the law of all places, persons and times without alteration, and has the same force all the world over; its object is the good and happiness of mankind.<sup>146</sup>

Cooper, as Otis had, fused the concepts of conscience and natural law. Conscience is the faculty by which one accesses the law of nature, which is the law of God. The law is “infused into him” at the creation. This conception coupled with the dictate that all human beings are “of one blood” served to destabilize racial prejudice and support the notion that even the formerly enslaved had the capacity for moral behavior. It followed that, as a gift from God, natural rights were inviolable.

Otis's close friend, the Boston patriot Samuel Adams, echoed this doctrine in the “Rights of the Colonists” declaring,

It is the greatest absurdity to suppose it in the power of one or any number of men at the entering into society, to renounce their essential natural rights.... If men through fear, fraud or mistake, should *in terms* renounce & give up any essential natural right, the eternal law of reason and the great end of society, would absolutely vacate such renunciation; the right to freedom being the gift of God

---

<sup>145</sup> Otis, *Rights of the British Colonies*, 46.

<sup>146</sup> Cooper, *A Mite cast into the Treasury*, in Basker, ed., *Early American Abolitionists*, 41, 48.

Almighty it is not in the power of Man to alienate this gift, and voluntarily become a slave.<sup>147</sup>

Years earlier, Adams had witnessed organized resistance against the press gang in Boston which inspired him to theorize a popular politics of opposition grounded in the assertion of natural rights.<sup>148</sup> Mob action was authorized by the community, Adams observed, and bypassed the formal institutions of government in order to secure society from outside dangers. As Jesse Lemisch has argued, “the seaman who defended himself against impressment felt that he was fighting to defend his 'liberty'; and he justified his resistance on grounds of 'right.'”<sup>149</sup> Adams observed the mob as an institution, as an “Assembly of the People,” embodying the natural rights of man. Informed by this insight and drawing on Locke's conceptions of natural rights and consent, he formulated an ideology of popular resistance with revolutionary potential.<sup>150</sup>

A political discourse originally conceived to protect against threats to liberty of the person was extended to include political freedom more broadly. It should come as no surprise, then, that the ideology was reapplied to assault the institution of slavery. Both James Otis and Samuel Adams made the connection explicit, and enslaved people

---

<sup>147</sup> Samuel Adams, “The Rights of the Colonists,” November 20, 1772, in Scott Hammond, Kevin R. Hardwick, and Howard Leslie Lubert, eds., *Classics of American Political and Constitutional Thought: Origins Through the Civil War* (Indianapolis, 2007), 228.

<sup>148</sup> See William A. Pencak and John Lax, “The Knowles Riot and the Crisis of the 1740s in Massachusetts,” in William A. Pencak, *Contested Commonwealths: Essays in American History* (Lanham, MD: Lehigh University Press, 2011), 42; and Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra*, 216.

<sup>149</sup> Jesse Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 25 (1968), 407. For a discussion of impressment during the American Revolution, see Roland G. Usher, Jr., “Royal Navy Impressment During the American Revolution,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (March, 1951), 673–688.

<sup>150</sup> Pencak, *Contested Commonwealths*, 421; Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 216.

themselves frequently asserted their rights in similar terms. Quaker Thomas Nicholson condemned the slave trade as “a very wicked and abominable practice,” which was “contrary to the natural Rights and Privileges of all mankind, and against the Golden Rule of doing to others as we would be done unto.”<sup>151</sup> Francis Alison, writing to the evangelical minister Ezra Stiles, worried that “the Common Father of all men will severely plead a Controversy against these Colonies for Enslaving Negros...and possible for this wickedness God threatens us with slavery.”<sup>152</sup> A petition circulated by Boston slaves was included in a popular pamphlet by James Swan, a disgruntled British merchant residing in Boston.<sup>153</sup> Writing on behalf of their “fellow Slaves in this Province,” the petitioners expressed their hope that “men who have made such a noble stand against the designs of their fellow-men to enslave them” would intercede on behalf of those currently denied their “civil and religious Liberty...”<sup>154</sup>

Similarly, Caesar Sarter, formerly enslaved and a self-identified “African,” authored a widely distributed essay calling slavery an “infringement, not only of your Charter rights, but of the natural rights and privileges of freeborn men....” “Slavery,” Sarter declared, “is the greatest...of all temporal calamities” and “Liberty,” its opposite,

---

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Nicholson, “On Keeping Negroes” (1767), Misc. Collections, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>152</sup> Francis Alison to Ezra Stiles, Philadelphia, October 20, 1768. Quoted in Jordan, *White Over Black*, 299.

<sup>153</sup> James Swan, *A Disuasion to Great-Britain and the Colonies from the Slave Trade to Africa*, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1773); John Allen, *An Oration on the Beauties of Liberty, or the Essential Rights of the Americans. Delivered at the Second Baptist Church in Boston..., December 3, 1772*, 4th ed. (Boston, 1773).

<sup>154</sup> “Petition of Boston Slaves, April 20, 1773,” in John Allen, *An Oration on the Beauties of Liberty, or the Essential Rights of the Americans. Delivered at the Second Baptist Church in Boston..., December 3, 1772*, 4th ed. (Boston, 1773), 80.



“the greatest temporal good with which you can be blest.” After recounting the horrors of coerced labor he queried the reader as to how “your conscience answers” in the light of such atrocities. “I need not point out the absurdity of your exertions for liberty,” he concluded, “while you have slaves in your houses....”<sup>155</sup>

Slavery was not yet firmly racialized in 1770s America, and antislavery activists focused on encroachments of bodily liberty, white as well as black. Granville Sharp wrote to Benezet in 1772, alerting him that he planned to “dissuade the late Highland Emigrants from transporting themselves to America....” His rationale was that he wished to prevent them “from falling into bad hands and from being enslaved....”<sup>156</sup> Notwithstanding his efforts, Sharp hoped that Benezet may help the new arrivals become acclimated and informed of their natural rights.

The simmering debate over slavery in the northern colonies was also reflected in academia. At Harvard University in the summer of 1773 two candidates for a degree debated the issue before the public. Epiphalet Pearson drew heavily from Benezet and Otis in arguing that slavery violated natural rights. He noted “the strangely inconsistent conduct of mankind” on the subject and held it to be a “a matter of painful astonishment, that in this enlightened age and land, where....the natural rights of mankind are so generally understood,” that the enslavement of Africans does not receive more attention. For Pearson, slavery “flagrantly contradicted” the principles of those patriots opposed to British tyranny. Pearson's case against slavery was surprisingly anti-racist as well.

---

<sup>155</sup> *The Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet*, August 17, 1774.

<sup>156</sup> Granville Sharp to Anthony Benezet, September 23, 1772, Gilder Lehrman Collection, #GLC07483.03, New-York Historical Society.

Echoing Benezet, he professed that Africans are descended “from the same common parent with your and me” and boldly stated that “nature has made no distinction” between black and white.<sup>157</sup>

The arguments in defense of slavery, presented by Theodore Parsons, are just as revealing. He readily admitted that they were living in “a period when persons of every denomination are so justly affected with a sense of Liberty....” But, like John Adams, Parsons cautioned against taking these principles too far. Most of all, he feared that the “feeling of humanity” would interfere with cold calculation. He contended that “every tender sentiment” must be suspended, as they interfered with “the voice of reason.” Essentially, Parsons was arguing that calculation and reason trumped conscience and that only by suppressing feelings of empathy could a practical decision be reached. Society itself required “various degrees of authority and subordination,” he argued, and slaves simply occupied the bottom rung of the ladder. This argument in favor of order would resurface with a vengeance after the Revolution had ended.<sup>158</sup>

The pulpit was another significant vector of revolutionary and antislavery ideology. Rev. Samuel Webster of Salisbury, Massachusetts expressed his moral outrage in *An Earnest Address to my Country on Slavery* (1769). “Now keep your eye upon the Christian *law of love*,” he challenged his audience, “and reconcile common slavery therewith and I will undertake to reconcile *light* with *darkness*....” In a call to conscience

---

<sup>157</sup> [Theodore Parsons and Eliphalet Pearson] *A forensic dispute on the legality of enslaving the Africans, held at the public commencement in Cambridge, New-England, July 21st, 1773, by two candidates for the bachelor's degree*, (Boston, 1773), 4-5.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

and a recognition of the tensions at the heart of colonial resistance to British policy,

Webster brashly demanded immediate emancipation. He wrote:

What then is to be done? Done! for God's sake break every yoke and let these oppressed ones go *free without delay*—let them taste the sweets of that *liberty*, which we so highly prize, and are so earnestly supplicating God and man to grant us: nay which we claim as the natural right of every man.<sup>159</sup>

Action did follow Webster's plea. Two months later, an enslaved black named James sued

Richard Lechmere for unlawfully “imprisoning and holding [him] in servitude....”<sup>160</sup>

James was liberated, with the aid of his lawyer Jonathan Sewall, but the courts avoided a

sweeping ruling.<sup>161</sup> Many have credited the case with setting Massachusetts on an

abolitionist path. Moreover, an act to abolish the slave trade passed through the

legislature in 1774, but Governor Hutchinson refused to sign the bill into law.

Advocates for the liberation of slaves were not confined to Quakers and Congregationalists. John Allen, a fiery Baptist who emigrated from Britain in the early 1770s, included a copy of the Boston slave's petition in an edition of one of the most popular pamphlets of the Revolutionary period.<sup>162</sup> In *On the Beauties of Liberty* (1773),

---

<sup>159</sup> Samuel Webster, *An earnest Address to my Country on Slavery*, March 2, 1769 (Salisbury, Massachusetts, 1769).

<sup>160</sup> Quoted in George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America from 1619 to 1880: Negroes As Slaves, As Soldiers, and As Citizens; Together with a Preliminary Consideration of the Unity of the Human Family, an Historical Sketch of Africa, and an Account of the Negro Governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1885), 230. Williams claims that too much has been made of the case and its decision, arguing that it was in fact settled out of court. Regardless, the initiative taken by James and the subsequent media coverage is worth noting.

<sup>161</sup> Jonathan Sewall was a descendant of Chief Justice Samuel Sewall, an earlier antislavery advocate. Sewall was a legal partner and friend of John Adams. He was also a loyalist and political opponent of James Otis. See Clifford Shipton, *New England Life in the Eighteenth Century: Representative Biographies from Sibley's Harvard Graduates* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995), 565-584. Also see, Jonathan Sewall Letters, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>162</sup> The pamphlet went through six editions, making it among the ten most re-printed tracts of the period.

he interspersed various strains of dissenting Protestant thought in a bold case for both the “Rights of an Englishman” and the “Rights and Liberties of the Africans.” Asserting the sovereignty of God he compared “the most potent monarch upon earth” to “a fly or a worm,” all subject to the “law of nature.” Such a premise challenged not only the authority of the King but of all worldly masters over their slaves. He defended the right of the colonists “by law of God, of nature, and of nations, to...resist any military or marine force.” Those “who oppress the Americans,” he argued, are “as great enemies of the law of nature, as “they who would... veil the light of the sun from the universe.” But, he assured his audience, the “Americans will not submit to be Slaves....”<sup>163</sup>

The bulk of the screed was aimed at defending the colonists against British encroachments, but Allen employed attacks on African slavery throughout. He was not only expanding the conception of the Rights of Englishmen to include blacks, but also pointed to slavery as a symptom of corruption within the British imperial state. He urged those in his New England audience to treat their British oppressors with “the most hateful contempt, the same as you would *a banditti of slave-makers on the coast of Africa.*” This was not a mere metaphor. The British were implicated in both forms of enslavement. Allen warned that, “This unlawful, inhuman practice is a sure way for mankind to ruin *America....*” He was stirred by the “frequent revolts” which “so often occasion streams of

---

See Thomas R. Adams, *American Independence: The Growth of an Idea* (Providence, RI, 1965), 69-70. For a list of the most popular pamphlets, see G. Jack Gravlee and James R. Irvine, eds. *Pamphlets and the American Revolution: Rhetoric, Politics, Literature, and the Popular Press* (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1976), viii.

<sup>163</sup> John Allen, *An Oration on the Beauties of Liberty, or the Essential Rights of the Americans. Delivered at the Second Baptist Church in Boston..., December 3, 1772*, 4th ed. (Boston, 1773). Reprinted in Sandoz, *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, vol. 1*, 301-326.

blood to be shed, as well on the side of the Whites as Blacks.” These “revolutions” were “occasioned by the cruel treatment they meet with” but, he concluded, even if they were to be treated well, it was no justification for holding them in perpetual bondage. “Nature trembles at such a thought,” he proclaimed.<sup>164</sup> He condemned the practice as the most extreme symptom of British oppression and urged the colonists to resist both, with force if necessary.

A year later, Allen published another scathing attack against the British ministry, taking aim at the Coercive Acts, especially the Boston Port Bill.<sup>165</sup> The frontispiece of *The Watchman's Alarm* (1774) featured the now famous image of the colonies (represented by an American Indian) being forced to drink “the bitter draught” of taxed tea. Allen isolated and discussed a number of intertwined conceptions of liberty throughout the piece. These included “political liberty,” “civil liberty,” “sacred liberty,” and “personal liberty.” All of the others were predicated on the last. After extensively assailing the ministry for its unjust and tyrannical treatment of the colonists, he asks “And what is a trifling three penny duty on tea in comparison to the inestimable blessing of liberty to one captive?”<sup>166</sup> He then proceeded to severely admonish any “patriot” who continued to hold human beings in bondage:

Blush ye pretended votaries for freedom! ye trifling patriots! who are making a vain parade of being the advocates for the liberties of mankind, who are... trampling on the sacred natural rights and privileges of the *Africans*; for while you are fasting, praying, non-importing, non-exporting, remonstrating, resolving, and pleading for a restoration of your charter rights, you at the same time are

---

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> The acts were derisively referred to as the “Intolerable Acts” by the colonists.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 25-32.

continuing this lawless, cruel, inhuman, and abominable practice of enslaving your fellow-creatures, which is so disgraceful to human nature; a practice which must redound to the eternal dishonor of any people much more to those who *wear* the christian name, and must surely make the heart of every feeling person shudder at the thought of being held in perpetual slavery, but shocking to relate, it is realized by millions of unhappy mortals in the world, a greater part of which I am sorry to say are dwellers in this *American* land of freedom!<sup>167</sup>

Allen's appeal was structured in sermon form. He held out the blessings of liberty but warned the sinner that they must repent and become agents of God. In order to avoid political enslavement by the British and spiritual enslavement by sin, the enslaved must go free.

Failure to give up one's slaves on a personal level exposed the individual to potential damnation. On a national scale, abolition was the obvious path to avoid catastrophic defeat and oppression at the hands of the British. "But if ye fail of abolishing this vile custom of slave-making, either by the province, common law... or by a voluntary releasement," Allen cautioned, "the oppressed sons of Africa" would be justified to resist. But if emancipation were to occur, a "public-spirited example" may be set for the world. "Let it never be told in the streets of America, that nursery of freedom, that there is one bond-slave dwells therein." He hoped that an embrace of liberty to all would build a "band of brethren united in one common cause..."<sup>168</sup> Allen not only attempted to expose the hypocrisy of those who advocated for political liberty while denying personal freedom to others but linked the two campaigns—resistance to British oppression and resistance to slavery --as one and the same. The palpable erosion of colonial faith in

---

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

British policy opened up a space to criticize other customary institutions—slavery first among them.

Throughout the crisis, preachers and common people alike imbued the struggle with a sense of cosmological significance. While Allen's pamphlet was ostensibly a political lambasting of the Boston Port Bill, his use of triumphant universal language shifted the grounds of the debate. He positioned the colonists as divine agents in a cosmic battle, where nothing less than the freedom of the world depended on their decisions. The sense of gravity in this mission would not have been lost on his Salem audience.

Likewise, the celebrated black poet Phillis Wheatley fused religious conviction with the language of natural rights in her widely read poems. One of her earliest was entitled “On the Death of the Rev. George Whitefield” (1770), in which the enslaved bard praised the itinerant minister as a “happy saint” who touched “ev'ry bosom with devotion.”<sup>169</sup> She later wrote to thank her own minister for advocating on behalf of the enslaved and offering a “Vindication of their natural Rights.” She simultaneously spoke the language of the Enlightenment and conscience in hoping that even slave-traders “cannot be insensible that the divine Light is chasing away the thick Darkness....” Referring to the emancipation of the Jews from Egyptian bondage, she observed that God had “implanted a Principle which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance; and... I will assert that same Principle lives in us.”<sup>170</sup>

Throughout the lead up to the Revolution, writers insisted on the connection between

---

<sup>169</sup> Phillis Wheatley, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (London, 1773), 22.

<sup>170</sup> *The Connecticut Journal*, “Phillis Wheatley to the Rev. Samson Occom, February 11, 1774,” April 1, 1774.

slavery and British corruption—appealing to conscience as a means to spur people to action in defense of their God-given liberties.

Across the Atlantic the Abbé Raynal, who had been following events in the American colonies closely, collaborated with Denis Diderot and others in France to publish an unprecedented multi-volume attack on European colonialism, racism, and slavery in 1770.<sup>171</sup> Translated into English and published in 1783 as *The Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, the work was rapidly circulated among Enlightenment radicals and featured some of the strongest critiques of slavery to date. He defined slavery as “a state in which a man hath lost, either by force or by convention, the property of his own person, and of whom a master can dispose as of his own effects.” “Without liberty, or the property of one's own body, and the enjoyment of one's mind,” he continued, “no man can be...a fellow citizen....” “The slave, impelled by the wicked man” is rendered merely a tool, but nevertheless “conscience... remains with the man.” After grounding humanity and natural rights in the individual conscience, Raynal then proceeds to assert the sovereignty of God in revolutionary terms. “If there be not any power under the heavens, which can change my nature and reduce me to the state of brutes, there is none which can dispose of my liberty. God is my father, and not my master; I am his child, and not his slave. How is it possible that I should grant to political power, what I refuse to divine omnipotence?”

---

<sup>171</sup> Raynal later published a pamphlet on the American Revolution in France, entitled *The Revolution of America* (1781) which was subsequently printed in English. Thomas Paine responded in his *Letter Addressed to the Abbe Raynal* (1782).



Echoing Otis, Raynal concluded that it was in these “eternal and immutable truths” that all morality and political authority was justly grounded.<sup>172</sup>

After discrediting multiple arguments in defense of slavery, Raynal famously warned of a slave revolution. In a prophetic voice, he proclaimed that “Nature speaks a more powerful language than philosophy...the Negroes only want a chief, sufficiently courageous, to lead them on to vengeance and slaughter....In all parts the name of the hero, who shall have restored the rights of the human species will be blest; in all parts trophies will be erected to his glory.”<sup>173</sup> Referring to the recent rebellions in Jamaica and Surinam, and presaging the crisis to come in Saint Domingue, Raynal's dramatic fusion of the languages of natural rights, abolition, and revolution contributed to a radical re-framing of late eighteenth-century politics.

From the start, American abolitionism was profoundly affected by intellectual and social currents in the Atlantic world. Ruptures in the political artifice of England, stemming from the English Revolution and its challenge to the legitimacy of hereditary political titles, had important ramifications for colonial American society. Radical republicans based their ideological assault of British tyranny on the sovereignty of God and a transcendent conscience. Such concepts emerged from within a context that included both economic inequality and religious intolerance. Radical antislavery thought was shaped by these ideas, which served to justify bold challenges to custom, tradition and constituted authority. The immense outpouring of pamphlet literature during the

---

<sup>172</sup> Abbé Raynal, *The Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and West Indies*, revised, augmented, and published, vol. 5 (London, 1783), 283, 293-94.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-10.

English Revolution provided a wellspring of ideological resources to draw upon when the colonists sought to justify their own Revolution in the eighteenth century.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “A HYDRA SIN”:

#### REVOLUTION, RELIGION, AND THE ABOLITIONIST CRUSADE, 1773-1783

The prevailing ideas entertained by... most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution were, that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in *principle*, socially, morally and politically.... This was an error. It was a sandy foundation, and the idea of a Government built upon it fell when the 'storm came and the wind blew.'<sup>1</sup>

- Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, 1861.

On the eve of the American Revolution in 1776, Thomas Paine exclaimed that “Ye that dare oppose, not only the tyranny, but the tyrant, stand forth! Every spot of the old world is over-run with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. — Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart.” For Paine, American independence was to “prepare in time an asylum for mankind.”<sup>2</sup> He later hoped that monarchy in Britain would be swept away as well and looked forward to seeing “the New World regenerate the Old....”<sup>3</sup> Fourteen years after Anthony Benezet published *A Short Account*, Paine began his stirring pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776) by signaling his intention to challenge deeply held beliefs long supported by custom:

---

<sup>1</sup> *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year* (New York: D. Appleton and Co, 1863), 129.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1986), 100. Hereafter cited as *Common Sense*.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, in *Paine: Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1995), 433.

Perhaps the sentiments contained in the following pages, are not yet sufficiently fashionable to procure them general favor; a long habit of not thinking a thing wrong, gives it a superficial appearance of being *right*, and raises at first a formidable outcry in defense of custom. But the tumult soon subsides. Time makes more converts than reason.<sup>4</sup>

While Benezet challenged slavery, Paine sought to overturn the English Constitution altogether. English common law had long been celebrated in Anglo political culture and the first protests against British taxation during the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 70s were often framed within the discourse of the "rights of Englishmen."<sup>5</sup> In order to challenge such a formidable political tradition, Paine encouraged the reader to divest "himself of prejudice... and suffer his reason and his feelings" to determine the righteous path of the nation.<sup>6</sup>

Like the antinomians and Enlightenment radicals discussed in the previous chapter, Paine appealed to the reader's conscience. Throughout the tract he fused an Enlightenment narrative of rational progress with the Quaker notion of inward spiritual awakening. "The Almighty hath implanted in us these inextinguishable feelings for good and wise purposes," he proclaimed. "They are the guardians of his image in our hearts" and encouraged his audience to take as their guide "those feelings and affections which

---

<sup>4</sup> *Common Sense*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Pauline Maier argues that this shift from a conservative defense of English customary rights to an assertion of natural rights marked a transition from resistance to revolution in *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991). For a discussion of the various discourses of liberty during the Revolution, see Michal Jan Rozbicki, *Culture and Liberty in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> *Common Sense*, 81-82.

nature justifies....”<sup>7</sup> Moreover, his readers and listeners (many heard the pamphlet read aloud) in the colonies would have perceived his stressing the use of “feelings” and seeking “converts,” as operating within a revivalist idiom — calibrated to win over those who had been swept up in evangelical fervor. He encouraged those deeply connected with Great Britain to abandon convention and connect with a deeper spiritual voice.

Paine was closely connected with a transatlantic network of radical democrats and abolitionists that included Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Rush, Thomas Day, Richard Price, and the Abbe Raynal. A careful reading of *Common Sense* and the radical antislavery tracts of the period sheds light on the intersection between colonial liberationist ideology and the nascent abolitionist movement. Paine's synthesis of dissenting Protestant thought and Enlightenment radicalism drew on the ideological resources of the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century and translated them for an audience that included many profoundly influenced by the religious revivals of the mid-eighteenth century. Historians have seldom looked to *Common Sense* when investigating early abolitionist thought despite Paine's early efforts to challenge the institution of slavery and a recognition of the pamphlet's widespread distribution and appeal. Due to its resonance

---

<sup>7</sup> *Common Sense*, 99-100, 89. Paine's efforts were undoubtedly influenced by a rising elite discourse of “sentimentality” and “sensibility,” but he connected these ideas with an earlier discourse of conscience, which the lower classes were often conversant with as well. Sarah Knott has argued that a transatlantic discourse of sensibility developed during this period and intersected with revolutionary ideology in various ways. It often served as a moderating discourse, employed to check the extremes of radicalism. Nicole Eustace has argued that a conception of human nature arose during the Revolutionary period that emphasized a common humanity based in feeling, which formed the basis for universal natural rights. I argue that a discourse of “feeling” had dissenting Protestant roots and could be employed in radical ways. See Knott *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

with common people, the pamphlet is one of the strongest reflections and shapers of popular ideology during the Revolutionary period available for historical analysis.<sup>8</sup>

Antislavery radicals were in the minority during the 1760s, but by the early 1770s issues surrounding slavery and the slave trade propelled the discourse in unexpected directions. Abolitionist rhetoric and activity was increasingly politicized. Paine's *Common Sense* expressed an ideology of independence and was readily received by the public. In his tome, Paine assaulted the English Constitution and the provincial "rights of Englishmen while asserting the rights of man. In doing so, he sought to overturn custom and convention while elevating principle, reason, and conscience above constitutional law, opening a discursive window for radical challenges to slavery previously thought impossible. By 1776, the colonists had moved boldly from resistance to rebellion — and for a time it seemed that slavery might be swept up in the waves of revolution along with the ruins of monarchy and aristocracy. This chapter argues that a higher law doctrine rooted in abolitionist thought informed the ideology of the American Revolution and that the War of Independence, in turn, infused the abolitionist movement with new meaning and urgency.

---

<sup>8</sup> Historians from diverse historiographical schools recognize the pamphlet's popular appeal. Gordon S. Wood calls it "the most influential and widely read pamphlet of the American Revolution and one of the most brilliant pamphlets ever written in the English language." Howard Zinn estimated that "almost every literate colonist either read it or knew about its contents." Isaac Kramnick concludes that "no single event seems to have had the catalytic effect of Paine's *Common Sense*." More recently, Sophia Rosenfeld has argued that Paine was tapping into an already existing discourse of "common sense" that helped his words to resonate with the broader public. Gordon Wood, ed., *Thomas Paine: Common Sense and Other Writings* (New York, 2003), xiii; Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, 1980), 69; Isaac Kramnick, from the introduction to Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (New York, 1986), 9; and Sophia Rosenfeld, *Common Sense A Political History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).

Paine did not explicitly challenge chattel slavery in *Common Sense*. His earlier writing, however, demonstrates a willingness to connect slavery with a corrupt British empire. Prior to writing anything regarding independence, echoing Benezet and Rush, Paine forcefully addressed the issue of slavery and advocated for emancipation. He shaped an ideology of independence that made radical challenges to the institution of slavery possible and even effective. Three components of this emerging ideology of liberation are important when assessing the sources of a radical antislavery impulse: First, a continued appeal to conscience as a means to transcend prejudice and custom; second, a millennial framework with various strains (Christian, apocalyptic, republican, and secular) helped to create an expectation of revolutionary change; and third, assertions of natural rights as inalienable and an insistence that universal moral principles must shape human decisions. These ideas, combined, propelled challenges to slavery throughout the late eighteenth century and were shaped by transatlantic events.

Scholars have long noted that the American Revolution contributed to antislavery thought and activity, but the ideological complexity of this process is little understood.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> In his influential study, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, Gordon S. Wood posits that: “To focus, as we are apt to do, on what the Revolution did not accomplish—highlighting and lamenting its failure to abolish slavery and change fundamentally the lot of women—is to miss the great significance of what it did accomplish; indeed, the Revolution made possible the anti-slavery and women’s rights movements of the nineteenth century and in fact all our current egalitarian thinking.” Wood regrets that historians have focused too much on the Revolution’s failings, but his argument for the transmission of “egalitarian thinking” to various human rights movements is unsatisfying. We need not wait until the nineteenth century to observe the implications of the Revolution on the abolitionist movement. While the antislavery position benefited from the destabilization of hierarchy unleashed by the Revolution, as Wood notes, ultimately white men are the beneficiaries of democracy in his narrative. Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 7. Others have argued that there was a more immediate impact on antislavery activity. Pioneers of this position include Jesse Lemisch and Benjamin Quarles. See especially: Jesse Lemisch, “The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up,” in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, ed. Barton J. Bernstein (New York, 1968); and Benjamin Quarles, “American Revolution as Black Declaration of Independence,” in *Slavery and*

Historians of both the American Revolution and abolitionism have neglected the coordination between revolutionist and abolitionist activities and discourses. Moreover, an artificial dichotomy between religious and secular sources of both revolutionary ideology and abolitionist thought has obscured the common wellsprings of natural rights philosophy. Louis Hartz's claim that that “the majority of natural law theorists of the American Revolution were more or less oblivious to the anti-slavery dynamite which their egalitarian doctrines carried....” still has currency amongst historians.<sup>10</sup> The prevailing view remains that the natural rights theory used to justify revolution was somehow distinct from religious abolitionist thought and activity.<sup>11</sup> In actuality, revolutionary ideology was profoundly shaped by acts of resistance to slavery and critiques of slaveholding. Patriots also consciously employed radical ideologies in ways

---

*Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, eds. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Louis Hartz, “Otis and Anti-Slavery Doctrine,” *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (Dec., 1939), 745.

<sup>11</sup> Winthrop Jordan has pointed to the interconnectedness of religious and secular strands within revolutionary ideology but argues that it became increasingly “secularized” as the conflict progressed. The primary driver of this secularization of natural rights theory, he argues, was Lockean environmentalism. I argue, rather, that religious convictions and appeals to moral conscience animated the most radical conceptions of natural rights and arguments for the abolition of slavery. Jordan, *White Over Black*, 291-304. Other historians have more explicitly divided religious and secular sources of revolutionary ideology. James Brewer Stewart, for example, divides the abolitionists of the Age of Revolution into “rationalists” such as James Otis, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and “biblicists” like Jonathan Mayhew, Francis Asbury, and Samuel Hopkins. Such a dichotomy can be misleading. Thomas Paine frequently employed “biblicist” arguments and Samuel Hopkins often used the language of natural rights. It also fails to adequately categorize someone like Benjamin Rush who was profoundly influenced by both Protestant evangelicalism and the Enlightenment. Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (1976; Revised Edition, New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 18-20. The assumption of a dichotomy between religious antislavery thought and natural rights philosophy is evident in all of the following influential and important studies. Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 232-246; Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 255-284; Duncan McLeod, *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), passim; James D. Essig, *The Bonds of Wickedness: American Evangelicals against Slavery, 1770-1808* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), passim; Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 227-29.



that disrupted the institution. As we have seen, the intersection of arguments for political, economic, and bodily freedom was evident as early as the seventeenth century. Both revolutionaries and abolitionists — sometimes one and the same — drew on potent languages of liberty and slavery dating back to the Reformation. Colonial resistance during the imperial crisis drew on earlier republican traditions. The most radical asserted natural rights and exploded the “rights of Englishmen” to encompass the rights of mankind.

The historian Edmund Morgan has argued that the racialization of slavery contributed to an expansion of freedoms for ordinary white men and the denial of rights to non-whites, particularly African Americans. However, an active fusion of natural rights principles with abolitionist sentiments by activists during the War of Independence forged a meaningful and lasting link between revolutionary ideology and antislavery sentiment that transcended race. As David Brion Davis has written, there was “no automatic connection between a defense of natural rights and the imperative that slavery be abolished, although slavery, at least in the abstract, was repugnant to the whole spirit of the Enlightenment.”<sup>12</sup> To understand the influence of the Revolution on the abolitionist movement we must look to the rhetoric and action of those who most forcefully opposed chattel slavery as the conflict progressed.

#### *Abolitionist Patriots*

Dr. Benjamin Rush, who recommended Thomas Paine write *Common Sense*, and even claimed to have suggested the title, recalled that he became aware of him after

---

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 262. Also see Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, Chapters 11-12.

reading “a short essay with which I was much pleased...against the slavery of the Africans in our country, and which I was informed was written by Mr. Paine.” “We met soon afterwards in Mr. Aitkin's bookstore,” he recounted, “where I did homage to his principles and pen upon the subject of the enslaved Africans.”<sup>13</sup> Paine's piece, in fact, owed a great deal to Rush's own widely distributed pamphlet of two years earlier.

Rush was urged to write the piece by Benezet in order to reach beyond the Society of Friends in Philadelphia. Rush, a New Light Presbyterian and Edinburgh-trained physician, fused the language of religious conversion with the logic of Enlightenment science. Like Benezet and Paine, he asserted the natural equality of blacks and attacked the British Empire for its complicity in the Atlantic slave trade. He attacked both the practice of slavery and the institutions that supported it. Dismissing economic arguments in support of slavery in the Carribean as morally bankrupt, he claimed that even if “the profits to individuals would be less” shifting to free labor would “promote the welfare of Society” overall.<sup>14</sup> Rush was also keen to point out the countless flaws in religious arguments in support of the slave trade and perpetual bondage.

Rush emphasized the ways in which slavery contradicted the spirit of Christianity and urged the reader to consult his or her conscience as a guide. The physician's presentation was elegant and his argumentation clear and systematic. Rush contended that the New Testament provided a “Dispensation from the Rigor of the Moral Law” of the

---

<sup>13</sup> Benjamin Rush to James Cheetham, Philadelphia, July 17, 1809, in *Letters of Benjamin Rush, 1793-1813*, ed., L.H. Butterfield (Philadelphia, 1951), 1007.

<sup>14</sup> [Benjamin Rush], *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes in America*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia, 1773), 7. The pamphlet was originally titled *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements upon Slavery* in the first edition (Philadelphia, 1773).

Old Testament when it contradicted the teachings of the Gospel.<sup>15</sup> He took the point even further, suggesting conscience rather than scripture as the surest moral guide. "If it could be proved that no testimony was to be found in the Bible against a practice so pregnant with evils of the most destructive tendency to society [as slavery]," he proclaimed, "it would be sufficient to overthrow its divine Original." Sounding like a true antinomian Rush urged his readers to trust in the morality of "the Laws of nature" and "natural religion" above the word of the Old Testament, which justifies taking "a plurality of wives" amongst other practices condemned by conscience.<sup>16</sup>

Slavery, Rush argued, was anathema to true Christianity and corrupted all involved. Christianity delivered a lesson of "charity, Self-denial, and brotherly love...." Slavery, on the other hand, "excludes the practice of [these] virtues." Christ taught "to look upon all mankind even our Enemies as our neighbors and brethren...." He concluded that, "A Christian Slave is a contradiction in terms" and lamented that some actually believe that blacks "have no Souls." The Gospel, he contended, sought to "abolish all distinctions of name and county" and included Africans in one great family of mankind. Slavery "debased" even "the moral faculties" and therefore liberation was critical to freedom of conscience as well as freedom of the person.<sup>17</sup>

The political context of the imperial crisis with Great Britain is palpable throughout the essay. Rush was a strong supporter of the resistance movement against the Stamp Act as a young man and continued to act in the patriot interest throughout the

---

<sup>15</sup> [Benjamin Rush], *A Vindication of the Address* (Philadelphia, 1773), 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 8, 10, 9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 13, 12, 15, 12, 2.

period. Three years prior to the Declaration of Independence, Rush was already speaking the language of American nationalism and extended the call for liberty to enslaved blacks as well. He called for action in defense of liberty against British tyranny and domestic slavery:

YE ADVOCATES for American Liberty, rouse up and espouse the cause of Humanity and general Liberty. Bear testimony against a vice which degrades human nature, and dissolves that universal tie of benevolence which should connect all the children of men together in one great Family. — The plant of liberty is of so tender a Nature, that it cannot thrive long in the neighborhood of slavery. Remember the eyes of all Europe are fixed upon you, to preserve an asylum for freedom in this country, after the last pillars of it are fallen in every other quarter of the Globe.<sup>18</sup>

Presaging the words of Thomas Paine in *Common Sense* a few years later, Rush astutely struck the chord of American exceptionalism beginning to resonate in the colonies.

British policy was under attack and this opened up an opportunity to target the slave trade. Rush applauded the recent Somerset decision of 1772 in Britain and hoped that it would improve their chances of harnessing public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic against slavery.<sup>19</sup> He urged Americans to demand that the African committee of merchants be dissolved in an effort to end the slave trade and send a clear signal to Britain that the colonies were moving toward abolition.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 19. James Somerset was a former Virginia slave who sued for his freedom in England, aided by counsel from the attorney and abolitionist Granville Sharp—a friend of both Benezet and Rush. Sharp coincidentally received a copy of Benezet's pamphlet on the day the monumental decision was reached. Some have argued that the Somerset decision prompted slaveholders to support independence. See especially, Alfred W. Blumrosen and Ruth G. Blumrosen, *Slave Nation: How Slavery United the Colonies & Sparked the American Revolution* (Naperville, Ill: Sourcebooks, 2005); and Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Antislavery proposals during the late eighteenth century should be understood within the context of a protracted imperial crisis. Lord Mansfield's decision in the Somerset case was immediately politicized on both sides. As we have seen, protesting colonists often accused Britain of attempting to make "slaves" of them and the most extreme perceived a conspiracy to bring the colonies under the tyrannical power of the empire. Some British leaders seized on the court's decision as a means to undermine these claims. Asserting the freedom of the formerly enslaved Virginian James Somerset affirmed Britain's commitment to freedom more generally.<sup>20</sup> But the ruling only applied to British soil and some pointed to the absurdity of such a limited scope of English liberties and what that may portend for the colonies. "*Pharisaical Britain!* to pride thyself in setting free *a single Slave* that happens to land on thy coasts," declared Benjamin Franklin in a letter to a leading newspaper, "while thy Merchants in all thy ports are encouraged by the laws to continue a commerce whereby so many *hundreds of thousands* are dragged into a slavery, that can scarce be said to end with their lives, since it is entailed on their posterity!" Attempting to expose British hypocrisy, he wished "that the same humanity may extend itself among numbers if not to the procuring liberty for those that remain in our colonies, at least to obtain a law for abolishing the African commerce in slaves, and declaring the children of present slaves free...."<sup>21</sup> Franklin recognized that to gain the moral upperhand the colonists must place the blame for slavery firmly on the British.

---

<sup>20</sup> See Brown, *Moral Capital*, 96-101.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin Franklin and Verner W. Crane, *Letters to the Press, 1758-1775* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture and University of North Carolina Press, 1950), 223.

Benezet followed suit and insisted that the British broaden their legal protections. In 1773 he distributed a petition among the colonies, to be presented before the King and Parliament, requesting "that an end may be put to the bringing any more Slaves from Afric." "And how can any person who retains a just sense of the worth of that invaluable blessing liberty," he asked, "...look with suppiness or indifferency upon this most interesting circumstance...?" He explained the measure as a means to win divine favor, regain the moral high ground in the contest with Britian, and perhaps avoid war. The only way to bring "blessings on our selves is to promote that good to others which we desire the common father of Mankind would favour us with," he pleaded.<sup>22</sup> If actions were taken quickly to end the slave trade, Benezet observed, violent rebellions amongst the enslaved would ensue.

Similarly, Rush pushed for tangible action against slavery and considered as apostates to the cause American patriots who engaged in the trade advising that they "be shunned as the greatest enemies of our country...." He warned that the English Constitution was compromised by slavery and that only by supressing bondage could liberty be preserved in the colonies.<sup>23</sup> "It would be the Interest of Great Britain to give over attempting to tax her Colonies," he suggested, "It would be her Interest likewise to abolish Slavery in every Part of her Dominions; but how has she sacrificed her Interest in these Respects...."<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Benezet to Robert Pleasants, Philadelphia, April 8, 1773, Benezet Papers, Haverford Library.

<sup>23</sup> Rush, *Address*, 19, 24-25.

<sup>24</sup> Rush, *Vindication*, 14.

Rush went as far as to applaud uprisings amongst the enslaved. "Human nature is now aiming to regain her dignity amongst the Slaves," he observed, "Are not these Insurrections the beginnings of universal Retribution and Vengeance upon European Tyranny, in America? and is it not high time for Britain to change her Conduct...?" For Rush slavery was "a hydra Sin" which violated not only natural law but also the precepts of the Gospel.<sup>25</sup> No empire based on liberty could sustain its virtue while allowing such a barbaric practice to persist. Finally, he concluded the piece by reminding the colonists of "the Rod which was held over them a few years ago in the Stamp, and Revenue Acts." "Remember," he cautioned, "that national crimes require national punishments...." If the Americans prevailed, he looked forward hopefully to the next generation admiring "the finished TEMPLE OF AFRICAN LIBERTY IN AMERICA."<sup>26</sup> Here he signalled a place for blacks in civic life and a means to escape the long history of bondage in the New World.

In his follow-up pamphlet, written in response to a vitriolic attack signed "A West-Indian," Rush pressed his political points even further. He asked, "Where is the difference between the British Senator who attempts to enslave his fellow subjects in America... and the American Patriot who reduces his African Brethren to Slavery, contrary to Justice and Humanity?" Drawing on the history of religious persecution, he followed this line of inquiry, comparing those who fail to treat all men as his equals to the "bigotted Christian" who will not tolerate religious differences.<sup>27</sup> The cause of America

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 23-24, 26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

must be the cause of the enslaved African as well, Rush argued, as both are fundamentally grounded in a quest for freedom.

Moreover, to tolerate slavery was to justify political tyranny. "If domestic Slavery is agreeable to the Will and Laws of God, political Slavery is much more so," Rush asserted. Following this logic, he suggests, "King Charles the First did no wrong — Passive Obedience was due to Oliver Cromwell — King James the Second was the Lord's Anointed...." Drawing explicitly on the tradition of the English Revolution, he argued that all tyranny must be resisted, no matter how seemingly entrenched. He observed that "political as well as domestic Slavery, has existed amongst civilized Nations in every Age, and Corner of the World."<sup>28</sup> Revolutions were needed to overthrow political slavery and would similarly be necessary to eradicate domestic slavery. Reflecting the words of slavery's defenders back on the American cause served to expose slaveholding patriots as unprincipled. Implicit in this critique was a questioning of claims to "British liberty" when the British Empire was profiting from a trade in human beings.

*An Appeal to Common Sense*

Thomas Paine left England a frustrated man. He had apprenticed with his Quaker father as a stay-maker before laboring as a privateer during the Seven Years' War and later as an excise officer and shopkeeper. He arrived in Philadelphia in late 1774, amidst the clamor of an imperial crisis pushed to the brink of war.<sup>29</sup> Immediately he became engaged in the political and intellectual life of the city — conversing with luminaries of

---

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>29</sup> There is some dispute over the date of Paine's arrival, but it was likely sometime in November or December of 1774. See *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, XLIII, 245, n.



the American Enlightenment such as Benjamin Franklin (whom he had met in England), Benjamin Rush, and David Rittenhouse. Two of the early published pieces attributed to Paine, after he became the editor of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, were on the topic of slavery.

In an anonymously published short essay from 1775 entitled “African Slavery in America,” Paine forcefully condemned the enslavement of human beings as unjust, a violation of natural rights and an affront to God.<sup>30</sup> That Paine grounded his argument against slavery in religious terms will undoubtedly surprise some. He was hardly a religious zealot and his notoriety as an opponent of religious dogma is well documented. Paine was, however, acutely aware of the powers that religious categories, ideas, narratives, and systems of thought had in framing the understandings of many in his time. Throughout his career as a pamphleteer, public intellectual and political gadfly, he would structure his arguments in ways that were schematically and thematically akin to sermons.<sup>31</sup> Beyond stylistic parallels and narrative similarities, Paine directly and explicitly appealed to a particular set of idioms stemming from the dissenting Protestant tradition in the Atlantic world in his attacks on both political tyranny and personal slavery.

---

<sup>30</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, “African Slavery in America,” March 8, 1775. The piece was published anonymously but has been attributed to Paine. I rely on Benjamin Rush’s recollection and stylistic similarities to his other work in ascribing Paine as the author. See “African Slavery in America,” in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Moncure Conway (New York: Putnam, 1894), 1:8; *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Phillip S. Foner (2 vols., New York: Citadel Press, 1945), 2: 17; and Thomas Paine, “Essay on Slavery,” in Bruns, *Am I Not a Man*, 376.

<sup>31</sup> Some have commented on the sermon quality of Paine’s prose. See especially Jack Fruchtman Jr., *Thomas Paine and the Religion of Nature*; (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 5-7; and Thomas P. Slaughter, ed., *Common Sense and Related Writings* (New York: Macmillan, 2000), 36-37.

On the pages of the popular *Pennsylvania Journal*, Paine assailed slave-traders who “wilfully sacrifice Conscience, and the character of integrity to that golden idol” and concluded that what is most “shocking of all is alledging the sacred scriptures to favour this wicked practice.” Signalling his later attacks on religious dogma and strict scriptural adherence, Paine adroitly mocked the religious pretensions of slaveholders by noting the inconsistencies of the Old Testament. But he also appealed to the authority of “divine precepts” derived from religion. Christians, wrote Paine, are taught to “love their neighbours as themselves; and do to all men as they would be done by....” For Paine, “enslaving our inoffensive neighbours, and treating them like wild beasts subdued by force” could not be reconciled with such a pacific doctrine.<sup>32</sup>

Paine readily admitted that others had ably demonstrated the injustice of African slavery, but in the essay he hoped to move beyond past antislavery arguments by connecting abolitionism directly to the present political crisis. He called on the colonists to question the consistency of complaining “so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery... without any pretence of authority....” If anything, he argued, such oppression is a fitting punishment for their crimes. “We have enslaved multitudes, and shed much innocent blood in doing it;” Paine continued, “and now are threatened with the same. And while other evils are confessed, and bewailed, why not this especially... which no other vice, if all others, has brought so much guilt on the land?” Not only did he claim that God was punishing the colonists for their slaveholding, but suggested that patriots attack personal slavery as they had political

---

<sup>32</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, “African Slavery in America,” March 8, 1775.

slavery. He encouraged all to confront “man-stealing” even more forcefully than other forms of bondage, as it was slavery's most virulent form.<sup>33</sup>

Abolition was a matter of natural right for Paine, who argued that governments should “in justice set [the enslaved] free, and punish those who hold them in slavery.” Justifications for enslaving human beings, for Paine, were “contrary to the plain dictates of natural light, and the conscience” and holding people in bondage could not be justified according to natural principles.<sup>34</sup> Here he moved beyond the conventional calls for a compensated emancipation, advocating that the enslaved not only be freed from bondage, but that the slaveholders suffer consequences for infringing on their rights. Ultimately, for Paine, all should be held to the eternal standard of natural law rather than the corrupted common law. Such a position prefaced what was soon to come in *Common Sense*.

In his next antislavery piece, "A Serious Thought," Paine joined the crusades of abolition and revolution even more forcefully. He placed the blame for slavery primarily on the British and lamented the treacherous and cruel acts towards innocent natives, including "being bound to the mouths of cannons and blown away... and a thousand instances of similar barbarity...." "I firmly believe," he continued, "that the Almighty, in compassion to mankind, will curtail the power of Britain." Earlier, Paine emphasized the guilt slaveholders in America had brought upon the region, now he shifted much of the blame to Great Britain. The turn was an important one. As independence became the objective, an opportunity presented itself for redemption and even national regeneration.

---

<sup>33</sup> Benezet frequently used the term “man-stealing” in his writings.

<sup>34</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, “African Slavery in America,” March 8, 1775.

Slavery and its corrupting influences on the body politic could be targeted as a symptom of British corruption — another potent rationale for separation. And it was all the more likely that providence would favor the endeavor if they took the axe to the root of slavery.<sup>35</sup>

Much like James Otis a decade prior, Paine appealed to the sovereignty of God in his appeal. Reflecting on the barbaric colonization of the Americas and the introduction of slavery, he observed that "the little paltry dignity of earthly Kings hath been set up in preference to the great cause of the King of Kings...." Arguing that monarchs served to protect a corrupt and cruel institution, he positioned the British Empire as diametrically opposed to the will of God. "Ever since the discovery of America, she hath employed herself in the most horrid of all traffics, that of human flesh...." He admonished the British for having, with "deliberate brutality," "ravaged the hapless shores of Africa, robbing it of its unoffending inhabitants, to cultivate her stolen dominions in the west." No longer framing the imperial crisis as punishment for sins, he instead characterized the drift toward separation as a divinely inspired split from a fatally flawed empire. Divine providence sanctioned independence, he assured his audience, "the Almighty will finally separate America from Britain... it is the cause of God and of humanity, it will go on."<sup>36</sup>

To ensure divine favor in a battle against the world's premier power would require extraordinary action.<sup>37</sup> Paine insisted that "when the Almighty shall have blest us, and

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., October 18, 1775.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> On the connection between divine providence and antislavery discourse see Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 306-20; Brown, *Moral Capital*, 167-86; Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States, 1607-1876* (New York: Cambridge, 2007), 106; and Nicholas P. Wood,

made us a people, *dependent only upon him*, then may our first gratitude be shewn, by the act of continental legislation, which shall put a stop to the importation of Negroes...and in time procure their freedom." Nine months prior to the Declaration of Independence, Paine called for antislavery legislation. Less than a year earlier, the Continental Association had banned the importation of slaves as part of the "Non-Importation, Non-Consumption, and Non-exportation Agreement," which aimed to provide the colonies with economic leverage in their political conflict with Britain.<sup>38</sup> The Articles of Continental Association failed, however, to end the trade in its entirety, nor to improve the condition of those currently enslaved. Less than two months after Paine's essay hit the presses, "the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes unlawfully held in Bondage" was formed in Philadelphia. Its constitution also drew attention to the contradiction at the core of colonial protest against British tyranny. It declared that:

... loosing the bonds of wickedness, and setting the oppressed free, is evidently a duty incumbent on all the professors of Christianity, but more especially at a time when justice, liberty, and the laws of the land are the general topics, among most ranks and stations of men.<sup>39</sup>

As tensions heightened with the British, following the battles of Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, Benjamin Rush suggested Paine as a suitable author for a tract demanding independence. *Common Sense*, published in January of 1776, was an

---

"Considerations of Humanity and Expediency: The Slave Trades and African Colonization in the Early National Antislavery Movement," Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2013, Chapter 1.

<sup>38</sup> "United States Continental Association, 1774," in *Am I not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788*, ed. Roger Bruns (New York: Chelsea House, 1977), 351-357.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Edward Needles, *An Historical Memoir of the Pennsylvania Society: For Promoting the Abolition of Slavery; the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, and for Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, Printers, 1848), 15.

unprecedented best seller in its time. Paine's contemporaries wrote of the pamphlet's peculiar power. Rush proclaimed that "its effects were sudden and extensive upon the American mind."<sup>40</sup> Paine himself immodestly declared it "the greatest sale that any performance had since the use of letters."<sup>41</sup> Even the cautious Jedidiah Morse, known for his assaults on Unitarianism in New England and concerns about popular politics, remarked that *Common Sense* brought about a "change of the public mind... without parallel."<sup>42</sup> Equivant sales if it were to be released today have been estimated at around fifteen million copies.<sup>43</sup>

Paine's tract owed a great deal to James Otis's radical shot across the bow more than a decade earlier. John Adams, advising a biographer gathering information on Otis's political philosophy, told him to "Look into the declaration of independence in 1776. Look into the writings of Dr. Price and Dr. Priestley. Look into all the French constitutions of government; and, to cap the climax, look into Mr. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, *Crisis*, and *Rights of Man*."<sup>44</sup> Like Otis's tract, Paine's *Common Sense* shifted conceptions of political authority from human artifice and cultural custom, to the natural and divine. Rather than citing Locke or Montesquieu, as was common of political pamphleteers, he referenced only Scripture and a quotation from John Milton's *Paradise*

---

<sup>40</sup> George W. Corner, ed., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, 1948), 114-115.

<sup>41</sup> Phillip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine, 2 Volumes* (New York, 1945), 2:1162-1163.

<sup>42</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *Annals of the American Revolution* (Hartford, CT, 1824), 241.

<sup>43</sup> Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York, 2005), 43.

<sup>44</sup> John Adams to William Tudor, April 5, 1818, in *The Works of John Adams, Vol. 10*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, 1850-56), 310-11.

*Lost*. He referred to an earlier conception of authority in order to challenge the status quo, but fused it with natural rights theory to form a potent modern synthesis.<sup>45</sup>

An earlier conception of divine sovereignty was employed as a justification for rule by monarchs through divine right. The common law tradition overturned the foundational authority of divine right by challenging divine sovereignty and shifting jurisdiction to the government itself. In *Common Sense*, Paine revived the discourse of divine sovereignty while at the same time undermining the divine right of kings, thereby challenging both the common law and divine right conceptions of legal jurisdiction.<sup>46</sup> Just as the Levellers challenged the authority of both king and parliament, Paine grounded sovereignty firmly in God as expressed through the people. This conception of authority challenged predominant British notions of civil dominion and helped to build a new foundation for American identity. The pamphlet's resonance with a popular culture dominated by dissenting Protestant religious concerns helped motivate common people to cross the Rubicon and fight for independence. The significance of this ideological development for the nascent abolitionist movement during the Revolutionary period was profound. The most extreme abolitionists rooted their discourse in the languages of conscience and natural rights and Paine's pamphlet helped to broadly spread such premises.

---

<sup>45</sup> For more on the foundations of the connection between divine sovereignty and monarchical authority see the works of Jean Bodin, especially *The Six Books of the Commonwealth* (*Les Six livres de la République*, 1576). For a recent edited collection, see Jean Bodin, ed. Julian H. Franklin, *Bodin: On Sovereignty*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>46</sup> See Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha* (London, 1680); and John Locke's refutation of Filmer in his *Two Treatises on Government* (London, 1689).

During the English Revolution, John Lilburn had similarly expressed a disdain for custom and tradition. Both he and Paine pointed to the "Norman yoke" as the beginning of bondage in England and castigated those who would blindly follow common law. "The laws of this nation are unworthy a free people," Lilburne noted, and dismissed even the celebrated Magna Carta as "being but a beggarly thing, containing many marks of intolerable bondage...." The irreverence which typified the Leveller movement would resurface with Paine and the radical wing of the American Revolution. Much to the consternation of moderates, the incessant challenges to traditional authority from radical Enlightenment figures and religious non-conformists served to destabilize all hierarchical institutions.

Abolitionists had begun to question the validity of the English Constitution throughout the imperial crisis and often referred to a "higher law" that trumped common law. Quaker Samuel Allinson reached out to Patrick Henry in 1774, insisting that "the case of the poor Negroes in Slavery...never call'd louder for a candid consideration and just conclusions than at a time when many or all the inhabitants of North America are groaning under unconstitutional impositions destructive of their Liberty." What at first appears as a defense of constitutional rights turns to a higher law argument, as Allinson writes that the "national injustice" of slavery has "drawn down divine vengeance upon a whole people" that will continue "until the evil has been expiated." He continues:

We complain of the violence done to the constitution by which we as Englishmen Claim many immunities but seem to forget that there is a more general constitution delivered to us from Heaven, by which all mankind is included & injoined, that 'whatever we would that men should do unto us, we should do even



unto them,'.... Let us consider, whether a Negro is not intitled to the same impartial Justice with ourselves....<sup>47</sup>

In attempting to enlist the fiery Patrick Henry in the abolitionist cause, Allinson appealed to a law above the English Constitution.

Moreover, Allinson requested that the Congress, which spends “so much time to secure their own liberties” should act to in defense of the liberties of “their fellow men in bondage....” He questioned how the colonists could justify their opposition to “a limited slavery” but fail to challenge the “absolute slavery” of “a race of fellow men” simply “because they are black.”<sup>48</sup> Such arguments destabilized the narrow category of the “rights of Englishmen” and framed objections to slavery within a framework of human rights. Ultimately, these natural rights were justified based on their divine origin — placing them beyond the reach of king or parliament.

Paine reinforced the distinction between monarchs and God when he recalled the story of Gideon refusing the title of king, declaring “I will not rule over you...THE LORD SHALL RULE OVER YOU.”<sup>49</sup> He argues that Gideon did “not decline the honor but denieth their right to give it” and notes that their “proper sovereign” was the “King of Heaven.”<sup>50</sup> For Paine, political authority lay with the people themselves, under the sovereignty of God. He portrayed the acceptance of kings by the Jews as a sinful act in its historical origins. In this way, monarchy itself was depicted as an outgrowth of sin and as

---

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Allinson to Patrick Henry, October 17, 1774, Haverford Library Special Collections.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> *Common Sense*, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 74.

a moral defect that must be cast off. Paine extended the metaphor to hereditary rule in general:

If the first king of any country was by election, that likewise establishes a precedent for the next; for to say, that the right of all future generations is taken away, by the act of the first electors, in their choice not only of a king, but of a family of kings for ever, hath no parallel in or out of scripture but the doctrine of original sin, which supposes the free will of all men lost in Adam; and from such comparison, and it will admit of no other, hereditary succession can derive no glory. For as in Adam all sinned, and as in the first electors all men obeyed; as in the one all mankind were subjected to Satan, and in the other to Sovereignty... original sin and hereditary succession are parallels.<sup>51</sup>

Historian A. Owen Aldridge contends that “the parallel between divine right and original sin would seem to support hereditary monarchy....” He notes that “A traditionalist... would argue that in Adam all sinned; Adam was the father of mankind; therefore, all men are tainted with Adam’s sin and properly subjected to the dynasties of temporal rulers succeeding him.” Aldridge concludes that “Paine does not even recognize the problem of explaining how man can cast off hereditary monarchy if he is still inexorably bound by original sin.”<sup>52</sup>

However, Paine's interpretation was not grounded in this “traditionalist” theology.<sup>53</sup> His framing of the origins of monarchy in this way suggests a parallel with the concept of “regeneration” embraced by radical dissenters and evangelical

---

<sup>51</sup> *Common Sense*, 78.

<sup>52</sup> Aldridge, *Thomas Paine's American Ideology*, 56-57.

<sup>53</sup> Some ministers did find the comparison offensive. In a sermon which largely supported Paine’s view of sovereignty as tied to God and natural law, John Witherspoon directly challenged Paine in an extended footnote over the “simile.” He took Paine’s comparison to be a repudiation of the doctrine of original sin altogether and noted that this position would offend “the great majority of very different denominations.” See John Witherspoon, “The Dominion of Providence Over the Passions of Men,” May 17, 1796, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 538-539.

Protestants.<sup>54</sup> It is the idea that an individual can reformulate her fallen nature and redirect it towards positive ends as dictated by the sovereign action of the Holy Spirit. Puritans used the term to refer to one's entire spiritual rebirth, including conversion and sanctification. Religious historian J.I. Packard observes that "The focus of Puritan preaching was the regeneration and conversion of people.... Regeneration-conversion was a single sequential process, a work of grace the Holy Spirit wrought through the message of law and gospel...."<sup>55</sup> In equating monarchy with sin and calling for a renewal in the colonists' approach to government, Paine was evoking such an idiom, as he was when he identified slavery as an outgrowth of sin that could be overcome by repentance and an embrace of freedom. He presents the possibility of regeneration as a collective possibility by framing the Revolution itself as a national conversion event. Independence from Britain meant independence from the corrupting influences of both monarchy and slavery and sanctification in republican liberty.

For Puritans regeneration meant a commitment to the moral law, but for antinomians who emphasized conscience over scripture, it meant liberation to follow the dictates of one's heart. Such an idiom resonated in the secular as well as the sacred sphere. For adherents to the radical Enlightenment, a faith in individual reason over custom animated their rejection of the past in favor of a commitment to future progress. In opposition to the gradualism of Enlightenment moderates — who emphasized the continued importance of hierarchy, harmony, and order — these radicals embraced what

---

<sup>54</sup> See Jerald C. Brauer, "Conversion: From Puritanism to Revivalism" in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (July, 1978), 227.

<sup>55</sup> J.I. Packard, "Theology on Fire," in *Christian History*, Vol. 13, Issue 1 (1978), 1.

Henry F. May has termed a “secular millennialism” which celebrated a new age of reason and rejected “the wickedness and folly of ancient ideas and institutions...”<sup>56</sup>

Fundamentally important to such a world view was a sincere belief in the natural goodness of human beings.

The notion of national regeneration held out a promise appealing to the secular and spiritual alike. Preachers in Revolutionary America frequently evoked the renewal of regeneration when addressing the issue of independence. In a sermon entitled *God Arising and Pleading His People’s Cause* (1777), Abraham Keteltas declared that among Protestant doctrines, “those most essential to man, are his fall in Adam, and redemption by the Lord Jesus Christ, the necessity of being regenerated and sanctified by the spirit of God...”<sup>57</sup> Paine himself explicitly evoked the concept in the introduction to *Rights of Man* (1791), when he looked forward to seeing “the New World regenerate the Old...”<sup>58</sup>

The Pauline theological concept of regeneration provided a theoretical justification for revolutionary action. Political rebirth was as much a possibility as spiritual awakening. For both Keteltas and Paine, independence was an act of political redemption, offering

---

<sup>56</sup> Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 153.

<sup>57</sup> Abraham Keteltas, “God Arising and Pleading His People’s Cause” (Newbury, 1777), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 584.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, in *Paine: Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1995), 433. Thomas P. Slaughter hints at such an interpretation when he notes that while Paine saw people as “inherently flawed,” nonetheless, “*Common Sense* found us capable of moral improvement, just as the New Testament does. Indeed, Paine saw eighteenth-century Americans as less corrupted by civilization than Europeans.” See Slaughter, ed., *Common Sense and Related Writings*, 36.

the colonists an opportunity to cast off monarchy and become baptized in republican freedom.<sup>59</sup>

In this vein, Paine asked, “But where say some is the King of America? I’ll tell you Friend, he reigns above, and doth make havock on mankind like the Royal Brute of Britain.”<sup>60</sup> This reference to God as the king of America pervaded sermons of the period. Jesus Christ was the true king of America, declared one preacher. “Surely there is no king like the king of America who lives and reigns for ever and ever.”<sup>61</sup> The people have it in their power “to begin the world again” and “to begin government at the right end.”<sup>62</sup> By this he means to reverse the order of sovereignty through which governmental authority was grounded. He writes, “First, they had a king, and then a form of government; whereas, the articles or charter of government, should be formed first, and men delegated to execute them afterward...”<sup>63</sup> This reasoning undermined the foundational authority of the common law tradition and formulated a concept of constitutional authority based on popular sovereignty. The government does not form a constitution, rather the people constitute a government.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> James E. Block has argued that this conception of liberty should be distinguished from the modern conception of the term, and contends that it is better understood as “agency”, where the regenerate became “empowered to be agents of God” and were rendered free to make choices as individuals, but also as representatives of the divine on Earth. See Block, *A Nation of Agents: The American Path to a Modern Self and Society*. (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 27.

<sup>60</sup> *Common Sense*, 98.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Powers, *Jesus Christ the true King and Head of Government* (Newbury Port, 1778), 29-30.

<sup>62</sup> *Common Sense*, 108.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> J.C.D. Clark notes the shift from a common law tradition to a conception of popular sovereignty, writing that, “The sovereignty of the people under God, was an idea which led away from the ancient constitution or from British liberties...and towards a unified society whose fundamental laws, of general

*Common Sense* reflects this conceptual shift. Paine undermined the prevailing view of a sovereign parliament through his appeals to traditional conceptions of divine sovereignty. When transposed from the religious to civil sphere, the notion of the supremacy of God migrated into discourses of popular sovereignty and natural rights theory and served to discredit the notion that parliament or the monarch retained ultimate authority.<sup>65</sup> While natural rights philosophy may have motivated the elites, it was necessary to appeal to conceptions of authority understood by common people as a means to overturn an established common law tradition. Dissenters began to view Parliamentary sovereignty as “an affront to God’s sovereignty as expressed in fundamental law.”<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, this traditional conception of fundamental law laid the foundation for the natural law doctrine embraced by both revolutionaries and abolitionists.

The British lawyer and pioneering abolitionist Granville Sharp's widely distributed pamphlet *The Law of Liberty* (1776), corresponding with *Common Sense* and the American *Declaration of Independence*, translated some of this higher law logic to the issue of the slavery. The decision in the Somerset Case, with Sharp representing Somerset against his enslaver, was grounded in a common law assertion of the “rights of Englishmen,” but four years later the brilliant lawyer attempted to de-limit this rationale. The Mansfield judgment was promoted by conservatives as a patriotic celebration of British liberties, but Sharp, both a supporter of the American colonists and a severe critic

---

applicability, mirrored and expressed the eternal principles of natural law.” Clark, *Language of Liberty*, 112.

<sup>65</sup> See Edmond S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989).

<sup>66</sup> Clark, *Language of Liberty*, 112.

of colonial slavery, attempted to push beyond these provincial confines. He called on “Citizens of the World” to embrace the “eternal Rules of (16) natural Equity and Justice.” The right of an individual against enslavement was rooted in “The Law of LIBERTY,” which accorded with the “fundamental moral Principles of Christianity.”<sup>67</sup> For Sharp, the constitutional protections of a particular nation or region were not sufficient to end slavery.

Moreover, Sharp contended that false law, or laws which violate conscience and the spirit of Christianity, must be disobeyed. The false laws are laws in name only and arise “(like the Harlot POPERY from pure CHRISTIANITY) in another Dress! She is clothed with the many-coloured garment of misconstruction, and seats herself at the right hand of the unjust judge....” In this formulation, the rights of man are gifts of God and nature, rooted in Christian morality. Violators of “the *natural Rights of Mankind*” may not justly hide behind the law and “plead *Ignorance*” as an excuse for “having violated the general Laws of Morality....”<sup>68</sup> Sharp argues that False law, like “popery” in Christianity, is a thoroughly corrupted version of a once reliable guide.

The implications of Sharp's higher law doctrine for the American Revolution were manifold. British leaders had attempted to leverage the Somerset decision in a propaganda war with the colonists, hoping to expose slaveholding patriots as

---

<sup>67</sup> Granville Sharp, *The law of liberty, or, royal law, by which all mankind will certainly be judged! Earnestly recommended to the serious consideration of all slave holders and slave dealers* (London, 1776), 16-17.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

hypocrites.<sup>69</sup> Most of these critics had no real interest in ending colonial slavery. The British Empire itself became vulnerable to attack on grounds that the slave trade, which it largely controlled, was the lifeblood of the institution. Some British friends of the American cause, Sharp included, pointed to efforts in the colonies to restrict the import of enslaved persons as progress and condemned the Crown and Parliament for maintaining it. Sharp insisted that Mansfield's decision did not go far enough and offered a grounding for natural law that extended beyond British soil. Colonial slavery was ultimately a British institution and the empire itself was culpable for its existence:

And the most detestable and oppressive *Slavery*, that ever disgraced even the unenlightened Heathens, is notoriously *tolerated* in the British Colonies by the *public Acts* of their respective Assemblies, — by Acts that have been ratified with the Assent and Concurrence of BRITISH KINGS! The horrible Guilt therefore, which is incurred by Slave-dealing and Slave-holding, is no longer confined to the few hardened Individuals, that are immediately concerned in those baneful Practices, but alas! the WHOLE BRITISH EMPIRE is involved! By the unhappy Concurrence of *National Authority*, the GUILT is rendered *National*; and *National GUILT* must inevitably draw down from GOD some tremendous *National Punishment*....<sup>70</sup>

In some respects, inverting Paine's framing, Sharp suggested that the American Revolution itself was divine punishment for the sins of the British Empire, namely slavery.

### *The Cause of God*

Both Granville Sharp's pamphlet and Thomas Paine's writings featured an appeal to millennialism common in abolitionist pieces of the period. Informed by the Book of

---

<sup>69</sup> See Brown, *Moral Capital*, 114-134. On the propaganda war more generally, see Patricia Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda and the American Revolution* (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 1998). On loyalists attacks on slaveholding patriots, see Dorsey, *Common Bondage*, 75-99.

<sup>70</sup> Granville Sharp, *The law of liberty, or, royal law, by which all mankind will certainly be judged! Earnestly recommended to the serious consideration of all slave holders and slave dealers* (London, 1776), 49.



Revelations, millennialism represented a powerful idiom which had a history of promoting enthusiastic behavior in support of various causes deemed divinely favored.<sup>71</sup> Ruth Bloch observes that the “belief in the millennium is one of the oldest and most enduring patterns of thought in Western civilization.”<sup>72</sup> What began as an apocalyptic view of the future has been adapted, transformed, and reinterpreted numerous times throughout human history. In the late eighteenth century a persistent millennial tradition was available to those seeking to make sense of the ruptures in society in a revolutionary age.

In the British North American colonies, millennialism had a history that went back to early settlement. Among the many religious dissenters that fled to the New World were as many as twenty-thousand Puritans. Massachusetts Bay governor John Winthrop spoke of the colonies as a religious “refuge” and sought to establish a distinctive society.<sup>73</sup> Winthrop affirmed his faith in providential destiny by claiming, “that God hath provided this place to be a refuge for many whom he meanes to save out of the generall calamity.”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, he famously described their purpose as nothing less than to guide

---

<sup>71</sup> See Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role*, (University of Chicago Press, 1968); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Jack Fruchtman, *The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth Century-English Republican Millennialism* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983).

<sup>72</sup> Bloch, *Visionary Republic*, xi.

<sup>73</sup> Hutson, *Founding*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> Robert C. Winthrop, *Life and Letters* (Boston, 1864), 309.

the future of Protestantism, to “be as a City upon a Hill.”<sup>75</sup> This Puritan founding myth would later become incorporated into a broader Protestant narrative that emphasized America’s distinctive place in a divine plan.<sup>76</sup>

On the other side of the Atlantic, the English Revolution witnessed a surge in millennialist beliefs. Some dissenters viewed the contest as one between the powers of light and darkness — nothing less than the commencement of Armageddon — a war between God and the Antichrist. To succeed in such a conflict required the purging of corruption and sin, ushering in an era of peace and liberty.<sup>77</sup> Sectarians like the Ranters and Fifth Monarchists were highly animated by such apocalyptic visions. The Levellers, too, were influenced by the millennial expectations so predominant among ordinary people in England during the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>78</sup> Even elite theorists such as John Milton, Algernon Sidney, and James Harrington exhibited millennial themes in their works.<sup>79</sup>

After the Restoration, English republicans lamented a return to political slavery. Algernon Sidney recalled the Biblical tale of exodus, proclaiming that “We could never be contented till we returned again into Egypt, the house of our bondage. God had

---

<sup>75</sup> John Winthrop, “A Model of Christian Charity,” *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>76</sup> See Ernest L. Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role*, (University of Chicago Press, 1968).

<sup>77</sup> See Davis, *Slavery in Western Culture*, 296-297.

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London, 1972, Reprint, Penguin: London, 1991), 96.

<sup>79</sup> Jonathan Scott, *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 2004), 41-44.

delivered us from slavery and showed that he would be our king....”<sup>80</sup> John Locke, on the other hand, greeted the Restoration positively and in his *First Tract on Government* (1660) lambasted those who suggested “we are returning to Egypt.”<sup>81</sup> This narrative of a republican exodus persisted in radical circles on both sides of the Atlantic.

These millennial trends throughout the Atlantic world had long half-lives, especially among dissenters. Some continued to carefully look for signs of an impending apocalypse and held out expectations for a New Jerusalem in their lifetime.<sup>82</sup> A transatlantic religious revival in the mid-eighteenth century breathed new life into such visions. The influential new light Congregationalist Jonathan Edwards did much to spread such ideas.<sup>83</sup> In his treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1742), Edwards attempted to demonstrate that the period of religious revival was orchestrated by God.<sup>84</sup> He writes:

America was discovered about the time of the Reformation, or but little before: which Reformation was the first thing that God did toward the glorious renovation of the world, after it had sunk into the depths of darkness and ruin under the great antichristian apostasy. So that as soon as this new world is (as it were) created and stands forth in view. God presently goes about doing some great thing to make

---

<sup>80</sup> Algernon Sidney, *Court Maxims*, ed., Hans W. Blom (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, UK, 1996), 197.

<sup>81</sup> John Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 59-60.

<sup>82</sup> E.P. Thompson notes that “Muggletonians... were still preaching in the fields and parks of London at the end of the 18th century” and points to millennial ideas in Methodism which were spread in revival meetings. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the Working Class*, 48.

<sup>83</sup> Nathan Hatch has argued that the millennialism of the Great Awakening was limited to the spiritual realm, whereas the later millennialism of the Revolution became secularized. This may have been as a result of the language migration taking place during the period between the two spheres, sparked in part by pamphlets like *Common Sense* and political sermons of the period. See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty, Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

<sup>84</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 264.

way for the introduction of the church's latter day glory, that is to have its first seat in, and is to take rise from that new world.<sup>85</sup>

Edwards situated the Great Awakening (as it came to be known) within the context of the millennium.<sup>86</sup>

Edwards evoked a millenarian cosmology in support of his argument for American distinctiveness in the eyes of God. He viewed the revivals in apocalyptic terms — as bringing about the thousand-year reign of Christ — presumably in the New World.<sup>87</sup> This marked a shift away from otherworldly visions and toward an understanding of the millennium as an event to be played out in this world.<sup>88</sup> The lines were blurred between the Augustinian categories of the City of God and the City of Man. Christ would return to rule on earth and the New World would be the site for his return. Many American revolutionaries and abolitionists framed their cause as inextricably linked with the divine plan of God to usher in the next phase of Christian history. The Awakening may have fizzled out, but the discourse of millennialism that it helped disseminate gained new application in a period of tumult and revolution.

Uprisings among the enslaved were frequently connected to evangelical revivalism throughout the colonies. Blacks, including slaves, were among the converts, destabilizing racial hierarchies and contributing to cross-cultural exchange. Religion was

---

<sup>85</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England*, (New York, 1845), 194.

<sup>86</sup> Edwards had an influence on later antislavery activity. See Kenneth P. Minkema and Harry S. Stout, "The Edwardsean Tradition and the Antislavery Debate, 1740-1865," *Journal of American History*, vol. 92 (June 2005), 47-74. Edwards also had an influence on conservatives who embraced his view that slavery was sanctioned by the Bible and an ordinance from God. See *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>87</sup> Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 264.

<sup>88</sup> Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, 12.

frequently a catalyst for slave revolt throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>89</sup> In 1741, for example, New York was shaken by fears of an uprising after numerous buildings were burned to the ground. Many blamed the conspiracy on a recent visit from the itinerant preacher George Whitefield.<sup>90</sup> Apocalyptic imagery and anti-Catholic attacks were common on both sides of the controversy.

Millennial categories also surfaced in the rhetoric surrounding the French and Indian War (1754-1763), following on the heels of this period of religious revival. The clergy mobilized popular support for the conflict based largely on fanning fears of Catholic aggression. France's Roman Catholicism represented not only a theological threat but also a danger to English rights.<sup>91</sup> Ministers fused anti-Catholic sentiment and a Protestant millennial vision with the politics of a proto-nationalist wartime effort. The clergy stirred up support for the war effort by demonizing the French enemy and presenting a unifying set of established Protestant idioms. In this vein, one minister frantically warned in 1756 that,

Our enemies may yet triumph over us, and the gospel taken from us, instead of being by us transmitted to other nations. It is possible, our land may be given to the beast, the inhabitants of the sword, the righteous to the *fire* of martyrdom, our wives to ravishment, and our sons and our daughters to death and torture.”<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1979), 28; On African religious influences, see William C. Suttles, Jr., “African Religious Survivals as Factors in American Slave Revolts,” *Journal of Negro History* 56 (1971).

<sup>90</sup> Jill Lepore, *New York Burning* (New York, 2005).

<sup>91</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, “The Origins of Civil Millennialism in America: New England Clergymen, War with France, and the Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 31, No. 3. (July, 1974), 418.

<sup>92</sup> John Mellen, *The Duty of all to be ready for future impending Events* (Boston, 1756), 19-20.

The characterization of the Pope (and by extension Catholics) as the Antichrist was well established in the colonies and repeatedly the trope found its way into sermons and the larger political discourse of the period.

The threat was not limited to the French but to “*popish* Enemies both without and within the Kingdom,” and some feared that if the Catholics were allowed to triumph, “Cruel *Papists* would quickly fill the *British Colonies*, seize our Estates, abuse our Wives and Daughters, and barbarously murder us...”<sup>93</sup> The conflict was frequently portrayed as a “grand decisive conflict between the Lamb and the beast.”<sup>94</sup> For Protestants, such a visible and well defined enemy confirmed their identity as saints fighting in a “cosmic war between good and evil.”<sup>95</sup> The American colonies were, in large part, unified in opposition to the French, helping to forge a closer bond among them during the crisis with Britain, in which dissenting Protestantism proved to be an indispensable unifying cultural force.

Eighteenth-century abolitionists drew heavily on this discursive tradition. The struggle against slavery was tailor-made for such a cosmological framing. Nathaniel Niles combined the crusade against the British in the American Revolution with a divine call to abolish slavery. “God gave us liberty, and we enslaved our fellow-men.... Would we enjoy liberty? Then we must grant it to others.... Let us either wash our hands from blood, or never hope to escape the avenger.” The only way to bring about peace was to

---

<sup>93</sup> Thomas Prince, *A Sermon Delivered at the South Church in Boston...* (Boston, 1746) 12, 18.

<sup>94</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, V (Philadelphia, 1818), 257.

<sup>95</sup> Hatch, “Civil Millennialism,” 419.

extricate the cancer of slavery from the body politic. The favor of God depended on it. He

continued:

... unless we adopt some prudent decisive measures in humble dependance on God; we have reason to fear some almost unparalleled calamity. If we do not exert ourselves: It would not be strange, should a military government be established, and popery triumph in our land. Then, perhaps those, who now want fortitude to deny themselves some of the superfluities of life, may see their husbands, and sons slain in battle, their daughters ravished, their wives ript up, their children dashed against the wall, and their pious parents put to the rack for the religion of Jesus. Now is the decisive moment. God sets before us life and death, good and evil, blessing and cursing, and bids us choose. Let us therefore choose the good and refuse the evil, that we may live and not die.<sup>96</sup>

Niles assured his audience that should they succeed, they would “ensure liberty in its highest perfection.” But first they must “detest the chains of sin...”<sup>97</sup> Rather than defend the English constitution, he held up “the constitution of Christ's kingdom” as the freest.<sup>98</sup>

The way to achieve such a lofty goal was to follow one's conscience.

Paine also framed independence in cosmological terms. As John Allen had done, he attempted to strip the monarch of his majesty, comparing him to “a worm, who in the midst of his splendor is crumbling into dust!” “Government by kings was first introduced into the world by the Heathens,” he declared, “from whom the children of Israel copied the custom. It was the most prosperous invention the Devil ever set on foot for the promotion of idolatry.”<sup>99</sup> He drew on the popular disdain for Catholicism which had been fueled by the French and Indian War, writing that, “monarchy in every instance is

---

<sup>96</sup> Nathaniel Niles, *Two Discourses on Liberty; delivered at the North Church, in Newbury-port, on Lord's-Day, June 5th, 1774, and published at the general desire of the hearers* (Newbury-Port, 1774), 38.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>99</sup> *Common Sense*, 72.

the Popery of government.<sup>100</sup> This association between monarchy and the papacy served to undermine popular support for the ruling English establishment in two vital ways.

First, it equated the English monarchy with the religious authority of the Catholic Pope, deemed illegitimate by many in colonial America and second, it served to rekindle sectarian disputes between dissenters and Anglicans, where the latter were accused of drifting towards “popery.”

Through his conflation of monarchy and papacy, Paine undoubtedly sought to reinforce the proto-nationalist sentiment of the recent war, only this time with the British cast as the “cruel papists.” Paine would not stand alone in promoting this relationship during the Revolution. As the war progressed, the narrative of God's elect versus the conspiratorial and evil British framed the purpose of the Revolution and justified its violence. This characterization imbued sermons from across the spectrum of Protestant denominations, and Britain was frequently depicted as “the Beast in Revelations 13 who would annihilate the children of God.”<sup>101</sup> Whereas Catholics had previously represented the “Beast,” now the British government was depicted as synonymous with “antichristian tyranny.”<sup>102</sup> Paine attacks the term “parent country” as “jesuitically adopted by the king and his parasites, with a low papistical design of gaining an unfair bias on the credulous weakness of our minds,” and refers to the king as “the sullen tempered Pharoah of

---

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>101</sup> James H. Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1998), 42.

<sup>102</sup> Samuel Sherwood, *The Church's Flight Into the Wilderness* (New York, 1776), in *Political Sermons of the Founding Era*, ed. Sandoz, 501.



England” and Britain as a “hellish power.”<sup>103</sup> This language incited Protestants to rise up in defense of their religion — to protect it from Catholicism and tyranny.

Political propaganda during the American Revolution often took the form of poetry. In contrast to visions of British tyranny and the rule of the anti-Christ, patriot poets envisioned a world where evil had been conquered in battle. Elisha Rich assailed the British and celebrated the coming reign of Christ in a poem following the bloody battle of Bunker Hill.

Would thou obtain thy LIBERTY, / Then break all bands of slavery, And do thou  
LIBERTY proclaim/ To all that have a human frame. / But if oppression here is  
found? Can you with victory be crown'd, No, no, be sure this cannot be. / While  
thou thy neighbours do not free.

Rich prays for God to “turn their night to day” and hopes “That Tyrants may no more arise.... That so Christ's kingdom may encrease.” Emancipation is presented as a prerequisite to the reign of Jesus as “Priest and King.”<sup>104</sup> Lemuel Haynes, son of an African father and a white mother and himself a soldier, expressed the stakes and sacrifices of battle: “For Liberty, each Freeman Strives/ As it's a Gift of God/ And for it willing yield their Blood/ Thrice happy they who thus resign/ Into the peaceful Grave/ Much better there, in Death Confin'd/ Than Surviving Slave.”<sup>105</sup> For free blacks like Haynes, the call of a revolution against tyranny promised more than a change in imperial tax policy.

---

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 84, 92, 99.

<sup>104</sup>Elisha Rich, *A poem on the bloody engagement that was fought on Bunker's Hill....on the 17th of June, 1775* (Chelmsford, MA, 1775). Broadside.

<sup>105</sup>Lemuel Haynes, “The Battle of Lexington” (1775), in James G. Basker, *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems About Slavery, 1660-1810* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 231.

In a tract on the coming of the millennium, Thomas Bray similarly foretold of a world without slavery:

The world will no longer be held fast in the chains of slavery and darkness, servants in both spiritual and temporal concerns, to the ambition of the wicked impostors and oppressing tyrants. Babylon will then come down with a swift pace, until she sits in the dust, and there be no more throne for her; and her merchants, the great men of the earth, no longer abuse the riches of the world, to feed their lusts, and support imposture, and by overbearing influence, oppose the gospel of the Son of God. The wicked trade of Babylon in slaves and souls of men, under which the whole creation has long groaned, as an unsupportable burthen, be no longer carried on....<sup>106</sup>

Bray's imaginative details and prophetic language connected the call for emancipation with a narrative of millennial paradise as reward.

Pieces such as those by Rich and Bray were exceptional in their strident calls for emancipation, but popular sermons and political pamphlets such as *Common Sense* helped to spread the narrative that rapid progress was possible, even probable, if the patriots were victorious. These tracts seized upon a sense of American exceptionalism as a means to establish a unique identity in the face of British cultural hegemony. Echoing Benjamin Rush's earlier warning in an antislavery pamphlet, Paine famously asserted that:

Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia, and Africa, have long expelled her. — Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.<sup>107</sup>

He positioned America within a larger dissenting-protestant historical narrative as the last great refuge for freedom-seeking people. This discourse helped to foster a sense of a

---

<sup>106</sup>Thomas Wells Bray, *A Dissertation on the Sixth Vial* (Hartford, CT, 1780), 64.

<sup>107</sup>*Common Sense*, 100.

messianic mission for America and made the arguments in *Common Sense* all the more potent. The rebellion was recast, not as a battle to restore English liberties, but as a grand battle to restore and defend Christian freedom.

The American Revolution was cast as an historical event unprecedented in the annals of human history. It was to be the beginning of a grand new stage of history. The monumental importance ascribed to the rejection of Old World traditions brought with it an imperative of mission for the new nation's people. Members of the Revolutionary generation frequently evoked a sense of divine destiny for America as an argument for political separation and the creation of a new nation founded on principles of natural rights and republican liberty.<sup>108</sup> As the Revolution progressed, these notions took on a life of their own and what began as a conservative movement in defense of "British liberties" evolved into a radical call for a new society with an exceptional mission. The Quaker abolitionist William Rawle, writing to his mother in 1778, sensed an unfolding American destiny, even amidst a war he opposed. "... I am not more persuaded of any thing in the world," he confided, "than that vice will not always triumph — Sooner or later a day of retribution must arrive...." America was cast as a "new Israel" favored with a new covenant and destined to serve as the purveyor of "true religion."<sup>109</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup>See Patricia U. Bonomi, "'Hippocrates Twins': Religion and Politics in the American Revolution," *The History Teacher* 29 (1996); J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660—1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Gordon S. Wood, "Religion and the American Revolution," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>109</sup>William Rawle to Mother, New York, Sept 21, 1778, Rawle Family Papers, HSP. Rawle, a Quaker, was at one-time president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. He became an opponent of the democratic-republicans by the 1790s, and as district attorney for Pennsylvania, prosecuted those who participated in the Whiskey Rebellion.

Within this context of providential destiny, the American Revolution was often understood as the ushering in of a new age of history, a final break from the Old World and the beginning of a new stage of American mission. The religious dogmatism of the prior period was challenged by the rationalism of the Enlightenment and civic-republicanism. Nonetheless, the millennial discourse adapted and persisted in the founding period. In some respects, it was even strengthened, as it enveloped parallel concepts and idioms from the languages of the Enlightenment. The notion of historical progress in science, industry, and political philosophy suited the narrative of a culminating age of human achievement marked by the emergence of the United States as a new nation of political freedom and a grand experiment in republican government. America became the vanguard not only spiritually but also publicly, as a test of “enlightened” political principles and institutions.

The mythical American mission started anew after what was imagined as a clean break from the corruption of the Old World and sought to shape a new course. For Lockean liberals, natural rights are understood relative to an ahistorical state of nature. For Americans, the state of nature was often viewed not merely as a thought experiment, but as a normative reality. The American project was in some respects, then, an escape from history. The romantic myth of a nation freed from history to pursue a glorious future on her own terms was seductive. The narrative force with which the Revolution’s founding ideals and principles were presented was a clarion call for Americans to take part in the new national project. If that project was to succeed, some argued, slavery would need to be eradicated.

*Independence from Slavery*

Within this context, antislavery writers sought to exploit the momentum of the Revolution and the withering confidence in British institutions. Even Thomas Jefferson, a slaveholder himself, sought to strike a fatal blow to the institution.<sup>110</sup> In a draft of the *Declaration of Independence*, Jefferson penned a section which included slavery amongst the many grievances against the British. Of the King, he wrote:

He has waged a cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of INFIDEL powers, is the warfare to the CHRISTIAN king of Great Britain.

The passage bears a striking resemblance to a paragraph in Paine's "A Serious Thought," a year earlier. Both accuse George III of violating the natural rights of Africans as a means to undermine the legitimacy of British rule. The condemnation was not included in the final draft, likely due to its abolitionist implications, or perhaps because it simply did not adequately stand as a legitimate grievance. The colonists, after all, had hardly been forced to accept slavery in the colonies. Jefferson recalled that "The clause... was struck out in complaisance to *South Carolina* and *Georgia*, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who, on the contrary, still wished to continue it."<sup>111</sup> It

---

<sup>110</sup>On Jefferson's complicated relationship to the abolitionist movement, see especially: Jordan, *White over Black*, 461-481; John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (New York, 1977); Paul Finkelman, "Jefferson and Slavery: Treason Against the Hopes of the World," in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 181-221; Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008).

<sup>111</sup>*Works of Thomas Jefferson, Vol. I.*, Federal Edition (New York and London, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 33.

appears that representatives of those interests insisted on not establishing a precedent against the trade in the *Declaration*.

Jefferson had previously attacked the British for preventing any action to abolish slavery in the colonies. In *A Summary View of Rights of British America* (1774), which was printed several times in a variety of locations in both the colonies and England, he included the grievance as one of the primary examples of arbitrary monarchical power. Most of the pamphlet centered on accusations of “parliamentary tyranny” but Jefferson accused the King of failing to use his veto against parliament, when in the interest of the colonies, but employing the negative against colonial legislatures. In particular, he pointed to the King's interference with efforts in Virginia to impose duties on the slave trade that would result in its decline. Ostensibly representing the views of Virginians, Jefferson was communicating his sense of the matter to the delegates convened in Williamsburg to coordinate their response to the Boston Port Bill. In surprisingly strong language, perhaps revealing his uneasiness with personally holding slaves, he conveyed to the convention his sense that slavery had been unjustly imposed on them by the British:

The abolition of domestic slavery is the great object of desire in those colonies, where it was unhappily introduced in their infant state. But previous to the enfranchisement of the slaves we have, it is necessary to exclude all further importations from Africa; yet our repeated attempts to effect this by prohibitions, and by imposing duties which might amount to a prohibition, have been hitherto defeated by his majesty's negative: Thus preferring the immediate advantages of a few African corsairs to the lasting interests of the American states, and of human nature, deeply wounded by this infamous practice.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup>*A Summary View of the Rights of British America* (Williamsburg, 1774) in Merrill Jensen, ed., *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003), 269.

That Jefferson would even consider such an accusation in not only his *Summary View of the Rights of British America* but also the formal *Declaration of Independence* itself reveals the extent to which the ideology of the Revolution had opened possibilities for radical change. In the lead-up to independence, antislavery writers referred to slavery as “a malignant disorder in the body politick,” and during the war years would take the metaphor further, lamenting that the English constitution had been reduced to a “debilitated and sickly state” by slavery.<sup>113</sup> Even absent explicit antislavery appeals, the principles forwarded in *Common Sense* and the Declaration shook the foundation of slavery as an institution. Anthony Benezet, who as a Quaker opposed the war, noted that “...nothing can more clearly and positively militate against the slavery of the Negroes, than the several declarations lately published that 'all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.'”<sup>114</sup>

Emphasis on the contradiction of a Revolution for freedom and the maintenance of a system of enslavement was persistent throughout the period. Samuel Hopkins called slavery a “public sin” which could not be washed away except “by freeing all our slaves.” The matter, he continued, “admits of no delay, but demands our first and most serious attention and speedy reformation.”<sup>115</sup> He declared it the “duty” of every American “to oppose and bear testimony... against this evil practice... which threatens our ruin as a

---

<sup>113</sup>[William Dillwyn], *Brief Considerations on Slavery and the Expediency of its Abolition* (Burlington, 1773), 4; [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, 1783), 3.

<sup>114</sup>Anthony Benezet, *Serious Considerations on Several Important Subjects....* (Philadelphia, 1778), 28.

<sup>115</sup>[Samuel Hopkins], *A Dialogue Concerning Slavery of the Africans, Showing it to be the Duty and Interest of the American Colonies to Emancipate All the African Slaves...* (Norwich, 1776), 6.

people.”<sup>116</sup> The enslaved, he argued, “see the slavery the Americans dread as worse than death is lighter than a feather compared to their heavy doom...”<sup>117</sup> The Presbyterian minister Jacob Green asked, “Can it be believed that a people contending for liberty should, at the same time, be promoting and supporting slavery?” Failing to recognize such a contradiction could threaten to undermine the Revolution itself. Green questioned:

What foreign nation can believe that we who so loudly complain of Britain’s attempts to oppress and enslave us are, at the same time, voluntarily holding multitudes of fellow creatures in abject slavery, and that while we are abundantly declaring that we esteem liberty the greatest of all earthly blessings?... In our contest with Britain how much has been said and published in favor of liberty? In what horrid colors has oppression and slavery been painted by us? And is it not as great a sin for us to practice it as for Britain?<sup>118</sup>

Hopkins and Green positioned the struggle for liberty and against slavery within a providential framework. According to this framing, Britain was the promoter of tyranny and America a beacon for freedom. If patriots failed to live up to their principles, then on what foundation did they declare independence?

Indeed, enslaved people themselves drove this narrative of contradiction.<sup>119</sup> Many expressed a deep sense of the inconsistencies at the heart of a revolution for liberty that maintained chattel slavery. Prince Hall, a former slave and founder of the first black Masonic lodge, joined others in asserting the “Natural and Unalienable Right to that

---

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>118</sup> Rev. Jacob Green, “A Sermon Delivered at Hanover (in New Jersey), April 22nd, 1778, Being the Day of Public Fasting and Prayer throughout the United States of America, 1779,” NYPL. On Green, see Scott S. Rohner, *Jacob Green's Revolution: Radical Religion and Reform in a Revolutionary Age* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014).

<sup>119</sup> Benjamin Quarles, “American Revolution as Black Declaration of Independence,” in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, eds. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville, 1983).



freedom which the Great Parent of the Unavers hath Bestowed equalley on all menkind” before the Massachusetts General Court in early 1777. He concluded that all “born in this Land of Liberty” should be free.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, in the midst of the war, enslaved blacks in New Hampshire petitioned the legislature for a redress of grievances, asserting their natural rights and the sovereignty of God. Largely abandoning the submissive stance of humble petitioners, they proclaimed:

... That the God of nature gave them life and freedom, upon the terms of the most perfect equality with other men; That freedom is an inherent right of the human species, not to be surrendered, but by consent... That private and public tyranny and slavery are alike detestable to minds conscious of the equal dignity of human nature; That in power and authority of individuals, derived solely from a principle of coercion, against the will of individuals... consists the completest idea of private and political slavery; That all men being amenable to the Deity for the ill-improvement of the blessings of His Providence, they hold themselves in duty bound strenuously to exert every faculty of their minds to obtain that blessing of freedom, which they are justly entitled to from the donation of the beneficent Creator....<sup>121</sup>

Like Paine and Jefferson, the petitioners spoke truth to power and grounded their complaints in the language of natural equality and divine authority. “[W]e know that the God of nature made us free,” the petition continued, “Is their authority assumed from custom? If so let that custom be abolished, which is not founded in nature, reason nor religion.”<sup>122</sup> The petitioners employed a rhetorical attack on custom and tradition which had become commonplace among the radical wing of the revolutionary movement. Appeals to reason and conscience over custom and common law de-centered authority and opened all claims to power based on history or tradition to scrutiny. Arguments

---

<sup>120</sup>“Petition of Prince Hall and Other Blacks, January 13, 1777,” in Bruns, *Am I Not a Man*, 428, 429.

<sup>121</sup>“Petition of New Hampshire Slaves, November, 12, 1779,” *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>122</sup>*Ibid.*, 453.

defending slavery as a venerable institution were rapidly losing traction with a people in revolt.

Some pushed back and clarified their intentions, asserting that natural rights did not extend to enslaved African Americans. Benjamin Edes, a member of the Sons of Liberty and editor of the patriot *Boston Gazette*, lamented the “gross misrepresentations” of his politics and denied that he had “undertaken in the way of my professions to free the negroes, who were held as slaves in this state.” He “utterly denied” this charge and pledged his honor to clear up his position. He assured those who questioned the emancipatory applications of his ideology “that in no single instance ... was the right of holding them as slaves ever made a question...”<sup>123</sup> Edes stance, in a newspaper that featured hundreds of essays by Samuel Adams and other leading revolutionaries, speaks to the conservatism of some within the independence movement. However, especially in the North, figures like Benjamin Edes were increasingly swimming against the tide.

The American Revolution set the stage for a dramatic contest over how far the rights of man would extend. Absent the ideological shift which challenged tradition and custom and celebrated abstract notions of natural liberties and universal declarations of freedom, it is unlikely that any serious challenges to chattel bondage would have surfaced. Scholars have frequently referred to the failure of the American Revolution to end the peculiar institution, but there were also successes worth recognizing both in the short and long terms.

In 1777, slavery and servitude of adults was immediately abolished in Vermont.

Its Constitution read:

---

<sup>123</sup>*Boston Gazette*, April 27, 1778, Gilder Lehrman Collection, # GLC06604, N-YHS.

... all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent and unalienable rights.... Therefore, no male person, born in this country, or brought from over sea, ought to be holden by law, to serve any person, as a servant, slave or apprentice... nor female, in like manner... unless they are bound by their own consent....<sup>124</sup>

The prohibition of slavery and servitude stemmed directly from a recognition of the natural and unalienable rights of the individual. Massachusetts, likewise, by the end of the war had effectively abolished slavery, with a ruling in favor of an enslaved man named Quock Walker who sued for his freedom. The court ruled that the language in the state's Constitution that “all men are born free and equal” applied to enslaved blacks like Walker.<sup>125</sup>

In Connecticut, a young Joel Barlow sensed that the tide of revolution would wash away slavery and lead to a general emancipation.<sup>126</sup> In a poem recited at Yale College that mixed odes to Enlightenment science with millennial fervor, he proclaimed:

No grasping lord shall grind the neighbouring poor,/ Starve numerous vassals to increase his store,/ No cringing slave shall at his presense bend,/ Shrink at his frown, and at his nod attend;/ Afric's unhappy children, now no more/ shall feel the cruel chains they felt before,/ But every State in this just mean agree,/ To bless mankind, and set th'oppressed free./ Then, rapt in transport, each exulting slave/ Shall taste that Boon which God and nature gave,/ And fil'd with virtue, join the common cause,/ Protect our freedom and enjoy our laws.<sup>127</sup>

---

<sup>124</sup>*Vermont State Papers* (Middlebury, 1823), 244.

<sup>125</sup>“Letters and Documents Relating to Slavery in Massachusetts,” in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society* III (1887), 440.

<sup>126</sup>Barlow would become a vocal abolitionist and transatlantic radical. See Richard Buell, *Joel Barlow: American Citizen in a Revolutionary World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Larry E. Tise, *The American Counter Revolution: A Retreat from Liberty, 1783-1800* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books), 138-148; Gould, *Barbaric Traffic*, 78-85.

<sup>127</sup>Joel Barlow, *The Prospect of Peace: A Poetical Composition, delivered in Yale College...July 23, 1778* (New Haven, 1778), 6. Barlow would split politically from many of his literary circle at Yale, later known as the Hartford Wits, and become an ardent supporter of the French Revolution and democratic politics.

Barlow connected the plight of the poor under a feudal lord to that of the enslaved and emphasized the common cause of all mankind against oppression. Most surprising is his invitation to those liberated from slavery to join in the political life of the republic. Perhaps Barlow was aware of the efforts of blacks like Prince Hall and Quock Walker to assert their rights in the public square.

As slavery became associated with monarchy and corruption, some patriots distanced themselves from the practice and warned others to do the same. John Murray, a New England Presbyterian, unleashed an uncompromising screed against slaveholding from the pulpit. All “exertions of power” which infringe on natural rights are “usurpation, not authority: are rebellion and treason against society, reason, nature and God: and as such, whenever they appear, ought to be resisted, defeated and punished,” he reasoned. Murray then identified chattel slavery in particular as the grossest violation of this principle:

The nations therefore that support or contrive at the practice of enslaving the human species, as an article of commerce, ought to be considered in a state of war against all mankind; since none can be thought willing to wear that public brand of the antichristian beast — a traffic consisting of the souls of men, unless they had previously conspired the extermination of every remain of virtue and humanity from the face of the earth.<sup>128</sup>

His sermon seamlessly blended radical natural rights theory with Christian millennialism. Slaveholders, for Murray, were not only traitors to the Revolution but apostates to God — not only un-American but anti-Christian as well.

Thus, a host of antislavery voices insisted that the new state constitutions take action against bondage. Murray warned that “should a toleration of the slave trade be

---

<sup>128</sup>John Murray, *Nehemiah, OR the Struggle for Liberty Never in Vain* (Newbury, MA, 1779), 9.

now mingled with our new Constitutions, that leaven will soon corrupt the whole lump,” and would “entail the curse of heaven on all our struggles for the defense of our [liberties].”<sup>129</sup> Nearly two-thousand citizens in Pennsylvania signed a petition demanding a ban on the slave trade and other measures to secure “justice to an oppressed part of the human species.”<sup>130</sup>

With pressure from the public, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed a gradual emancipation policy, despite fierce resistance from conservatives in the state. Radicals called for more immediate emancipation, but compromise led to an extremely gradual proposal.<sup>131</sup> The act came up for debate after Joseph Reed instructed the legislature to consider the emancipation bill. “See you give the compleat sanction of Law to this noble and generous purpose,” he wrote, “and adorn the annals of Pennsylvania with this bright display of Justice and publick Virtue.”<sup>132</sup> With Thomas Paine as clerk, the “Act for the gradual Abolition of Slavery” passed through the General Assembly on March 1, 1780.<sup>133</sup>

Despite its moderate pragmatics, the language of the first section of the legislation was quite radical, drawing a striking parallel between political oppression and chattel

---

<sup>129</sup>John Murray, *Nehemiah, OR the Struggle for Liberty Never in Vain* (Newbury, MA, 1779), 9.

<sup>130</sup>“Petitions from citizens of Philadelphia against the slave trade 1780,” Am.2821folio, HSP. Signatories included David Rittenhouse (future president of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania) and James Pemberton (future president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society).

<sup>131</sup>Nash and Soderland, *Freedom by Degrees*, 101-118.

<sup>132</sup>Quoted in *Early American Abolitionists*, ed. Basker, 102, n12.

<sup>133</sup>Act of the Legislature of Pennsylvania for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery (1780), Cox-Parrish-Wharton Collection, HSP.

bondage.<sup>134</sup> It began by immediately acknowledging the sovereignty of God in human affairs and framed the action as a sort of divine offering — an atonement for the sin of slavery and a recognition of the American's deliverance from political tyranny. “WHEN we contemplate our abhorrence of that condition to which the arms and tyranny of Great Britain were exerted to reduce us,” it began, “...we are unavoidably led to a serious and grateful sense of the manifold blessings which we have undeservedly received from the hand of that Being from whom every good and perfect gift cometh.” Affirming divine providence, the Act then declared it “our duty... to extend a portion of that freedom to others, which hath been extended to us; and a release from that state of thralldom to which we ourselves were tyrannically doomed, and from which we have now every prospect of being delivered.”<sup>135</sup>

Consistent with the trajectory of radical abolitionist rhetoric during the American Revolution, the Act was presented as an opportunity to right a wrong that had been perpetuated by British corruption. The legislation was hailed as “one more step to universal civilization,” and “the sorrows of those who have lived in undeserved bondage,” were blamed on “the assumed authority of the kings of Great Britain,” which obstructed all efforts to abolish the practice. “Weaned... from those narrower prejudices,” Americans had found their “hearts enlarged with kindness” towards people of all “conditions and nations....” They hoped that the act would serve as “substantial proof of our gratitude” to God. In 1779, as the legislation was being debated, the war was far from

---

<sup>134</sup>Many have ascribed authorship of the preamble to Paine. See Moncure Conway, ed., *Writings of Thomas Paine* (1902; Reprint, New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 2:29; and Phillip Foner, ed., *The Complete Works of Thomas Paine* (2 vols.: New York, 1945), II, 21.

<sup>135</sup>“An Act for the gradual Abolition of Slavery,” in *Early American Abolitionists*, ed. James G. Basker, 93.

decided. Americans still feared that they would fall in defeat to the British and be forced to accept terms which they understood to be a form of slavery. The emancipation Act, therefore, should be understood as both currying the favor of God and as the manifestation of a growing comprehension that slavery was incompatible with the ideological assumptions of the Revolution. The cause of America was cosmically interlaced with those in bondage striving for freedom.

Antislavery voices in Pennsylvania also argued passionately against the slave trade. Nearly 1,700 people signed a petition in protest. A failure to stop the trade, they asserted, violated the “nature of those principles” they were fighting for and was “inconsistent with the spirit of the Law....” The petitioners called for the intervention of the legislature on behalf of “the afflicted Africans....” Moreover, they called for a national law which would “effectually put a stop to the Slave Trade being carried on directly or indirectly” and demanded “benevolence and justice” for this “oppressed part of the human species.” Its signatories included James Pemberton (future president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society) and David Rittenhouse (future president of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania).<sup>136</sup>

From the start of tensions with Britain, patriot slaveholders were placed in a difficult theoretical position — resisting supposed oppression while holding human beings in bondage. Anthony Benezet observed in 1775, “But how strange it is to see the southern Colonies take such a lead, in what they call the cause of liberty, whilst the most horrible oppressions even under the Sanction of their Laws, is continually practiced

---

<sup>136</sup>“Petitions from citizens of Philadelphia against the slave trade 1780,” Am.2821folio, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

amongst them....”<sup>137</sup> Perhaps to influence such leadership he wrote to Henry Laurens, president of the Continental Congress in 1777-1778, urging compassion for Quaker pacifism and respect for the natural rights of the enslaved.<sup>138</sup>

Henry Laurens was a wealthy South Carolina planter who had made a fortune in the slave trade. In 1776, he exchanged letters with his twenty-one-year-old son John regarding the ideological contradiction between bondage and freedom. Expressing his abhorrence of slavery, the elder Laurens nevertheless lamented the social and legal pressures that made emancipating his own captive laborers a serious challenge. Recognizing the hypocrisy of those claiming to fight for freedom while maintaining slavery, he ridiculed all who “trust in Providence for defense & security of their own Liberty while they enslave... thousands who are as well entitled to freedom as themselves.”<sup>139</sup> He proceeded to blame the British for forcing slaveholding upon him. “I am not the man who enslaved them,” he exclaimed, “they are indebted to English Men for that favour, nevertheless I am devising means for manumitting many of them...” According to the elder Laurens, Slavery had been established “by British Kings & Parliaments as well as by the Laws of that Country, Ages before my existence.”<sup>140</sup>

John Laurens, later an aid to George Washington, responded to his father's letter with praise, applauding his desire to restore “the Rights of Men, to those wretched

---

<sup>137</sup>Anthony Benezet to Elias Boudinot, April 17, 1775, Boston Public Library.

<sup>138</sup>Jackson, *Let this Voice be Heard*, 131.

<sup>139</sup>Henry Laurens to John Laurens, August 14, 1776. Berol Collection, Columbia University.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid.



Mortals who have so long been unjustly deprived of them....”<sup>141</sup> The younger Laurens lacked the elder's cautious moderation and sought a means to strike a blow to slavery in the midst of the soaring rhetoric surrounding independence. He boldly advocated for the rights of the enslaved in a letter to a conservative friend:

I think we Americans at least in the Southern Colonies cannot contend with a good Grace for Liberty, until we shall have enfranchised our Slaves. How can we whose Jealousy has been alarm'd more at the Name of Oppression sometimes than at the Reality, reconcile to our spirited Assertions of the Rights of Mankind, the galling abject Slavery of our negroes....<sup>142</sup>

John Laurens had been influenced by radicals and reformers during his time studying in London and Geneva. Chief among them was the British abolitionist Thomas Day, a thoughtful and passionate disciple of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.<sup>143</sup>

Day embodied the transatlantic spread of the modern philosophy often associated with the radical French Enlightenment. Though he rejected philosophers who became mere shills of those with power, he celebrated the unselfish pursuit of universal truth and saw progress on the horizon. Introducing his 1773 tragic poem *The Dying Negro*, one of the earliest literary protests against slavery published in Britain, he looked forward to a time when “philosophy and science glory in a race of illustrious disciples, whose labours

---

<sup>141</sup>*Papers of Henry Laurens*, 11:275.

<sup>142</sup>John Laurens to Francis Kinloch, May 28, 1776, NYPL.

<sup>143</sup>The expanded third edition of Thomas Day's poem “The Dying Negro,” published in 1775, was dedicated to Rousseau: “I found one man, whose matchless eloquence is less admirable than the fortitude with which he has developed the principles, and defended the rights of human nature; whose virtue is as unequalled as his genius; and whose life is a nobler pattern of imitation than his writings; who, rejecting the supercilious bounty of the vain, yet un pitying and ungenerous Great; exerts a painful industry amidst the evils and infirmities of old age, and prefers exile, poverty, and obscurity, to all the riches and the honors which ambitious meanness extorts from Kings.—After this portrait is it necessary to subscribe a name, and to acknowledge, that I dedicate this poem to JEAN JAQUES ROUSSEAU.” and *The Dying Negro, A Poem, 3rd Edition* (London, 1775), iv.

may dispel the gloom of fanaticism....”<sup>144</sup> Like Paine, he spoke both the language of science and that of conscience, praising Rousseau for having demonstrated “that a stoical severity is not always inconsistent with a feeling heart; and that the simplicity of ignorance is compatible with the most exalted genius.” Day professed that the subject of slavery should “interest every heart not totally impenetrable.” He took as his goal to reach the conscience of each reader and communicate universal truths about the equality of man; or as he phrased it, “to explain the eternal principles which providence has decreed....”<sup>145</sup>

Thomas Day filtered the American Revolution and the institution of slavery through a Manichean worldview of pure truths and evil corruption. This outlook left little room for contradiction. Though a supporter of the American cause, he was a fierce critic of “patriot” slaveholders, exclaiming in 1776: “If there be an object truly ridiculous in nature, it is an American patriot, signing resolutions of independency with the one hand, and with the other brandishing a whip over his affrighted slaves.” “If men would be consistent,” Day continued, “they must admit all the consequences of their own principles,” and this meant that patriots must acknowledge “the rights of [the] Negroes” or surrender their own.<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>144</sup> Thomas Day, *The Dying Negro, A Poem, 3rd Edition* (London, 1775), vi.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>146</sup> Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes, Written in the Year 1776, by Thomas Day* (Philadelphia, 1784). Along with John Bicknell authored an antislavery poem in protest of the lax enforcement of the Somerset decision. *The Dying Negro, A Poetical Epistle, Supposed to be written by a Black (Who lately shot himself on board a vessel in the river Thames;) to his intended Wife A Poem* (London, 1773). A letter of Day's on the question of freeing America's slaves was published as a broadside in 1784 and widely circulated by the American abolition societies. See *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes, Written in the Year 1776, by Thomas Day*, cited above.

In a letter addressed to a slaveholder, Day emphasized that adherence to universal principles exposes the injustice of those who act simply out of self-interest. Echoing James Otis, Day rejected the selfish worldview of the “gloomy pupil of Hobbes” and instead reasoned “universal morality” to be “the only rational and legal foundation of all human government....” If might makes right, then “the instant they shall become the strongest” former slaves would “have a right to the services of yourself and... will have a right to force you to labour naked in the sun to the music of whips and chains.... they will have a right to *use* you, as you do them.” “Whoever would deny this,” Day posited, “must either deny the existence of right and justice entirely... or must shew some natural distinction by which one part of the species is entitled to privileges from which the others is excluded.” To assert that such a racial justification for slavery existed, he concluded, was “altogether absurd.”<sup>147</sup> The only solution, therefore, was immediate emancipation. Day's uncompromising worldview and insistence on principled action was fully embraced by his protégé, John Laurens.

After returning from his studies, Laurens joined the Continental Army at a time when morale had reached its nadir. Philadelphia was occupied by the British and shoeless soldiers huddled at Valley Forge on the brink of starvation. Passages from Thomas Paine's *American Crisis* were read at the camp. Paine, himself a volunteer, encouraged the troops to carry on in their struggle against slavery and oppression:

... it would be strange indeed, if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared, that she has a right... 'to bind us in ALL CASES WHATSOEVER,' and if being bound

---

<sup>147</sup> Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes, Written in the Year 1776, by Thomas Day* (Philadelphia, 1784), American Antiquarian Society; in *Early American Imprints*, Doc. #18437.

in that manner is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon the earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.<sup>148</sup>

Laurens and Paine were both keenly aware that political slavery was not the only usurpation of divine authority.

With voluntary enlistment down and privates deserting in droves, a rare opportunity presented itself for the arming of slaves. An act in Rhode Island offered "every able-bodied Negro, mulatto, or Indian man-slave" freedom and pay (and compensation to their "owners") in exchange for their military service.<sup>149</sup> The First Rhode Island Regiment organized black companies and offered African Americans an opportunity to fight for their personal liberty as well as that of their countrymen.<sup>150</sup> Inspired by the innovative legislation, John Laurens proposed that South Carolina and Georgia should follow a similar course. Even as an aide-de-camp, he had distinguished himself and was known for his reckless zeal in combat. Fighting alongside the Marquis de Lafayette at Brandywine, the Frenchman recalled that "it was not [Laurens'] fault that he was not killed or wounded he did everything that was necessary to procure one or t'other."<sup>151</sup> His brave service won the young officer the respect of General Washington and others among the army elite. Laurens hoped to personally lead an African American

---

<sup>148</sup> Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, No. 1, December 19, 1776, in *Thomas Paine: Collected Writings* (Library of America), 91.

<sup>149</sup>"Formation of a Colored Regiment in Rhode Island, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, In General Assembly, February Session, 1778" in William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855), 30.

<sup>150</sup>Lorenzo J. Greene, "Some Observations on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island in the American Revolution." *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 37, No. 2, April 1952.

<sup>151</sup> Henry Laurens and David R. Chesnutt, *The Papers of Henry Laurens Vol. 11* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 547.

regiment and even had plans for distinctive uniform colors to match the dark skin tone of his troops. His plan to enlist three thousand enslaved blacks in the South eventually received a fair hearing and was approved by the Continental Congress in 1779 with Laurens appointed Lieutenant-Colonel of the regiment.<sup>152</sup>

What could have proven a staggering setback for slavery in the South was frustrated by an unwillingness to implement the plan in South Carolina and Georgia. Washington, near the end of the war, made clear that he no longer considered the plan realistic. “I must confess that I am not at all astonished at the failure of your Plans,” he wrote to Laurens, “That Spirit of Freedom which at the commencement of this contest would have gladly sacrificed every thing to the attainment of its object has long since subsided....”<sup>153</sup> Laurens never gave up on his scheme, despite criticism and even ostracism from the planter elite, including his own father. After a diplomatic journey to France with Thomas Paine, he returned in 1782 to make one last push to carry his project to fruition.<sup>154</sup>

The intrepid young radical was killed in a meaningless battle in the summer of 1782 at the age of twenty-seven. Even the conservative minister Jedidiah Morse recalled that Laurens “was zealous for the rights of humanity, and living in a country of slaves, contended, that personal liberty was the birth-right of every human being....”<sup>155</sup> The

---

<sup>152</sup> Gregory D. Massey, *John Laurens and the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), Chapter 7.

<sup>153</sup> George Washington to John Laurens, July 10, 1782. Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-08890>, ver. 2014-05-09).

<sup>154</sup> For an account of the diplomatic mission, see Daniel Wheeler, *Life and Writings of Thomas Paine*, Volume 1 (New York: Vincent & Parke, 1908) 26–27.

<sup>155</sup> Morse, *Annals of the American Revolution*, Appendix, 18.

abolitionist William Rawle lamented that “Laurens fell almost the last of the heroes. He was destroyed in a petty skirmish on a rice field.”<sup>156</sup> Commemorating the younger Laurens' sacrifice, Thomas Day penned the following poem, which he sent to John's father:

Beyond the rage of time, or fortune's power  
 Remain, cold stone, remain, & mask the hour  
 When youthful Laurens yielded up his breath,  
 And seal'd his country's Liberties in death:  
 For injur'd rights he fell & equal laws,  
 The noble victim of a noble cause.  
 Oh! may that country which he fought to save  
 Shed sacred tears upon his early grave!<sup>157</sup>

While John Laurens never lived to see the founding of a new republic, James Forten, a young African American veteran, would. Forten had been a student at the Friend's African School in Philadelphia, overseen by Anthony Benezet.<sup>158</sup> Born of free parents in 1766, he had grown up in a community where Quakers were highly involved. By the time of his childhood, the sect had agreed to abolish slavery amongst their members and thus turned to the task of preparing the formerly enslaved for freedom. Education was paramount in this endeavor and Benezet was the leading light on pedagogy and curriculum in Philadelphia. He personally advised James' mother Margaret after the death of her husband Thomas. Only seven years old, James began his education with the Friends shortly after.

---

<sup>156</sup>William Rawle Diary, June 11, 1786, Rawle Family Papers, HSP.

<sup>157</sup> Thomas Day to Henry Laurens, Allingsley, July 10, 1783, Henry Laurens Papers. South Carolina Historical Society. Henry Laurens had previously written to Day requesting a “monumental Inscription” to John Laurens. Henry Laurens to Thomas Day, July 6, 1783, Henry Laurens Papers, SCHS.

<sup>158</sup> Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23-25.

James Forten was surrounded by revolutionary fervor from the time of his birth. At the age of nine he heard the Declaration of Independence read for the first time in public. He later described it as the key text of the Revolution, setting forth the principle that “God created all men equal...”<sup>159</sup> Three years later, in 1780, Forten celebrated the gradual emancipation act passed in Pennsylvania and shortly thereafter volunteered to serve the patriot cause. He joined the crew of a privateer, plundering British shipping. Forten's ship was captured and he feared he would be sold into slavery in the West Indies.<sup>160</sup> Remarkably, the young Forten was selected by the British warship captain to accompany his son back to England. He declined the fortuitous offer and insisted on remaining with the rest of the American captives. “I have been taken for the liberties of my county,” he was remembered to have declared, “and never will prove a traitor to her interest.”<sup>161</sup> He spent seven months in a prison hulk as a result of this decision.

These experiences of service and principled sacrifice by African Americans of James Forten's generation would justified their claims to equal citizenship and respect. Forten was incredulous that by the early nineteenth century blacks were being stripped of their civil rights in Pennsylvania. He forcefully argued that the thrust of the Revolutionary War itself had been to advance freedom. Referring to the men who drafted Pennsylvania's constitution, he insisted that their “souls were too much affected with their own deprivations to commence the reign of terrour over others,” and recalled that

---

<sup>159</sup> James Forten, *Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill Before the Senate of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1813), 1.

<sup>160</sup> Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 37-43.

<sup>161</sup> *A Discourse Delivered on the Occasion of the Death of Mr. James Forten, Sr., in the Second Presbyterian Church of Colour in the City of Philadelphia, April 17, 1842* (Philadelphia, 1843), 21-22.

they “knew we were deeper skinned than they were, but they acknowledged us as men, and found that many an honest heart beat beneath a dusky bosom.” Forten recalled that they “felt they had no more authority to enslave us, than England had to tyrannize over them.” He singled out one leader in particular for special praise. Addressing his fellow blacks, he described Benjamin Rush as “a zealous friend, a powerful, a herculean advocate; a sincere adviser, and one who spent many an hour of his life to break your fetters, and ameliorate your condition....” For Forten, men like Rush needed to be remembered. “Sacred be the ashes,” he remarked, “of those heroes who are dead; and revered be the persons and the characters of those who still exist and lift the thunders of admonition against the traffick in blood.”<sup>162</sup>

African American leaders like Forten turned to the principles of the Revolution to make their case for equality.<sup>163</sup> Abolitionists had consistently sounded the alarm on hypocrisy throughout the period. With the official end of the war, the attention of antislavery activists turned to the new American leadership. In *A Serious Address to the Rulers of America* (1783), the New Jersey Quaker and abolitionist David Cooper, a close associate of Benezet, presented the most extensive commentary to date calling for consistency between the cause of independence and that of abolition.<sup>164</sup> He later recalled that early in 1783 “it often occurred to my mind that a use might arise from collecting and publishing some of the most striking statements of Congress in favor of liberty, with

---

<sup>162</sup> James Forten, *Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill Before the Senate of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1813), in Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Lanham, MD, 2001), 192-193.

<sup>163</sup> On the notion of claiming civil rights based on service and sacrifice, see François Furstenberg, “Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse,” *Journal of American History* vol. 89 (March 2003): 1295-1330.

<sup>164</sup> See David Cooper, *Diary*, The Quaker Collection, Haverford College, Haverford, PA.



parts of the Constitutions of some of the American States on the same subject, contrasted by the idea of tolerating slavery.”<sup>165</sup> He pointed to the “debilitated and sickly state” to which the English constitution had sank as a result of tolerating bondage in the colonies. To remedy the ill and make true on the promise of the Revolution, Cooper reasoned, the new governments must purify themselves of the institution from the start. A new American constitution needed to be grounded in freedom. The new governments were now “unfettered from the arbitrary control” of corrupted British institutions.<sup>166</sup>

Echoing a burgeoning spirit of national mission, he proclaimed “Now is the time to demonstrate to Europe, to the whole world, that America was in earnest, and meant what she said, when, with peculiar energy, and unanswerable reasoning, she plead the cause of human nature, and with undaunted firmness insisted, that *all mankind* came from the hand of their Creator *equally free*.” Referring to the Declaration of Independence, Cooper noted the absurdity of the slaveholders' claims that the document states “the rights of *white men*, not of *all men*...”<sup>167</sup> Cooper interpreted the Declaration as applying to all human beings and asserted that no person should be held in slavery.

Cooper firmly rejected the notion that emancipation must be gradual. The difficulties that may accompany immediate emancipation are “of our own creating” and in no way justify allowing “the innocent” to continue to suffer. The desired end, he insisted, is “the entire *abolition of slavery*” and looked to a “superintending authority” to

---

<sup>165</sup>*Friends' Review* (Philadelphia), September 12, 1862. Quoted in *Early American Abolitionists*, 53.

<sup>166</sup>[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, NJ, 1783), 60. Hereafter cited as *A Serious Address*.

<sup>167</sup>*A Serious Address*, 60-61, 66.

end the practice throughout the former colonies. He compared gradual approaches to “attempting to destroy a great tree by nibbling at its branches.” Only “supreme power, which pervades the whole,” he argued, “can take it up by the roots.” Such power is derived only from the “fundamental law of nature” and expressed in the people themselves.<sup>168</sup>

Presaging the arguments of radical abolitionists in the nineteenth century, he interpreted the Declaration as part of the American Constitution — setting forth the first principles of the new nation. He wished the Declaration itself had instructed the legislatures to “provide laws, declaring, that no person imported into, or born into America after that date, should be held in slavery....” Indeed, such action would have sent a clear signal regarding the aims of the Revolution in regards to the institution. In 1783, the former colonies were still struggling to define their local politics, let alone their role in the world. But Cooper attempted to harness the patriotic energy following the conflict, a war which as a Quaker pacifist he abhorred, as a means to make sense of the bloodshed and build something pure on the ruins of the past. To own human beings was “treason against the rights of humanity, against the principles upon which the American Revolution stands, and... is to justify Britain in her claims, and declare ourselves rebels.”<sup>169</sup>

On a national level, the Continental Congress failed in 1784 to pass a bill introduced by Thomas Jefferson which would have prohibited slavery from the trans-Appalachian territory after 1800. On the ninth anniversary of the battles of Lexington and Concord, a representative from South Carolina moved to strip the bill of its provision on

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 69, 70, 71.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 69, 71.

slavery. Only one vote was needed to override the objection. Looking back, Jefferson lamented, "The voice of a single individual would have prevented this abominable crime; heaven will not always be silent; the friends to the rights of human nature will in the end prevail." He would have to settle for the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, however, which would only exclude slavery north of the Ohio River, albeit a considerable achievement given the economic interests of slaveholders. Debate over slavery continued at the Constitutional Convention that same year. The upheaval that followed shortly afterward, as revolution and radical ideology emerged again across the Atlantic, informed the antislavery politics of the 1790s in unexpected ways.

The fusion of dissenting Protestant and radical Enlightenment language established an ideological foundation for future challenges to the institution. The Revolution heralded the coming of a new age. Ordinary people were swept up in a wave of extraordinary historical change and many believed that the prophesied millennium was at hand. An apocalyptic framing of the Revolutionary War as a conflict between the forces of good and evil lent currency to the claims of abolitionists who cautioned against the corrupting influences of slavery and the divine punishments that may be expected if the institution were allowed to persist. In the end, the Revolution failed to strike it a fatal blow.

## CHAPTER THREE

### “SPARKS FROM THE SACRED FIRE”:

#### ANTISLAVERY ACTIVISM IN THE NEW NATION, 1783-1793

Liberty and Slavery—opposite as Heaven and Hell—are both in the Constitution; and the oath to support the latter, is an oath to perform that which God has made impossible.<sup>1</sup>

- Frederick Douglass, 1849

After the American Revolution, the Society of Friends petitioned the Continental Congress in an attempt to maintain the national ban on the slave trade that was established during the conflict. The petition concluded:

The Restoration of Peace and restraint to the effusion of human Blood we are persuaded excite in the minds of many of all Christian denominations gratitude and thankfulness to the all wise controller of human events; but we have grounds to fear, that some forgetfulness of the days of Distress are prompted from avaricious motives to renew the iniquitous trade for slaves to the African Coasts, contrary to every humane and righteous consideration, and in opposition to the solemn declarations often repeated in favour of universal liberty, thereby increasing the too general torrent of corruption and licentiousness, and laying a foundation for future calamities.<sup>2</sup>

Echoing the ideas and beliefs of New Divinity minister Samuel Hopkins, the Quaker petition expressed fears that reestablishing the trade would cost the new nation divine favor. According to this narrative, Providence had delivered America from her British oppressors in large part because the revolutionaries had chosen to end the trade in human

---

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Douglass, *The North Star*, March 16, 1849.

<sup>2</sup> “Address from the Yearly Meeting of the People called Quakers,” October 4, 1783, *Papers of the Continental Congress 1774-1783*, I: 43, 337.

beings during the war.<sup>3</sup> Benezet had long argued that national sins would invite divine retribution and the time to break from the oppressive institutions of the past seemed at hand.

Benezet died shortly after the war's conclusion. His funeral, according to Benjamin Rush, "was attended by persons of all religious denominations, and by many hundred black people."<sup>4</sup> Eulogies throughout the world spoke to his benevolence. "Benezet's sympathy with mankind was universal," one read, "the oppressed and suffering found in him a friend who never yielded to fear of man, or ever turned back from any enterprise." He requested that no memorial be held but "if my friends will not regard my request they may say of me, 'Anthony Benezet was a poor creature, and through Divine favor was enabled to know it.'"<sup>5</sup> In one of his last published works, he reaffirmed his commitment to conscience and human nature, arguing that even "heathens" could become wise through "conformity to that inward principle of divine intelligence, which all men are favoured with, doing by nature... the works of the law written in their hearts."<sup>6</sup>

The early American abolitionist movement lost a towering figure but had also made great strides. Writing in 1784, Rush sensed progress would continue. He saw in the

---

<sup>3</sup> While the Society of Friends embraced abolition, they were resistant to integration of their religious services. Some expressed fears of inter-marriage between whites and blacks, which they thought "would reverse the order of Divine Providence." See James Pemberton to James Phillips, November 18, 1784, Gilder Lehrman Collection, # GLC04237, N-YHS.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Rush, "Biographical Anecdotes of Anthony Benezet," July 15, 1788", in *Essays Literary, Moral and Philosophical* [Philadelphia, 1798], (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1988), 186.

<sup>5</sup> *The Friend* (Philadelphia), 1827, vol. 67, 203.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Benezet, *Plainness and Innocent Simplicity of the Christian Religion With Its Salutory Effects compared to the corrupting Nature and dreadful Effects of War* (Philadelphia, 1783), 23.

spread of abolitionism a path to a new millennium of peace. “It is scarcely forty years, since a few men in Pennsylvania, who were branded as enthusiasts, first bore a testimony against the slavery of Negroes,” he wrote. “From them, and by their industry,” he continued, antislavery principles “have been propagated ... through all the middle and eastern states of America.” And Rush did not stop in the North, but insisted that “principles of *equal* liberty.... are traveling along the Chesapeake,” and beyond. He concluded that, “In a few years they will probably have their full operation upon the minds of our southern brethren, and produce laws for the abolition of slavery....”<sup>7</sup>

Despite the doctor's optimism, slavery was still very much in place after the American Revolution. National leaders failed to fully capitalize on the momentum towards liberation begun during the imperial crisis. The Declaration of Independence, while offering inspiring language and signaling a commitment to human equality and natural rights, flinched at threats of disunion from the deep South and lacked a direct condemnation of chattel bondage. In 1786, George Washington conveyed that “I never mean... to possess another slave by purchase; it being among my first wishes to see some plan adopted by which slavery in this Country may be abolished by slow, sure, & imperceptible degrees.”<sup>8</sup> His private and qualified pledge signaled both a shift toward antislavery sentiments among the elite, but also their deep ambivalence and a reluctance to take radical action. Moreover, the power of a minority planter elite in the South

---

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Rush, *Considerations upon the Present Test-Law of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1784), 20-21.

<sup>8</sup> George Washington to John Francis Mercer, September 9, 1786. GLC, # GLC03705.

remained entrenched and disproportionately influenced policy on the issue. Meanwhile, the future of slavery in the West was still an open question.

Scholars tend to view the years between roughly 1783-1788 as a period when the radicalism of the American Revolution was confronted with the practical realities of independence. Historian Gordon S. Wood has characterized the ratification of the Constitution as the “triumph and end of American ideology.”<sup>9</sup> For Wood, the Constitution represented an escape from the idealism of the Revolution and a turn toward the pragmatism that typified the worldview of framers like James Madison and Alexander Hamilton. Rather than a betrayal of the Revolution, he argues, the conservative turn was a concrete realization of the Patriot goal to achieve representative institutions. The people out-of-doors were no longer needed once republican forms of government had been established after ratification.<sup>10</sup> Historian David Waldstreicher, however, has criticized Wood's perspective primarily for excluding any discussion of slavery. The “republican school,” he argues, “tends to see slavery as at most a side issue—a distraction that nearly derailed the Constitution.” This is because “scholars of republicanism take ideas and rhetoric most seriously.... But they tend to see slavery as the opposite of ideas, of discussion, of reason.”<sup>11</sup> Waldstreicher considers the Constitution to represent a nearly fatal blow for the nascent abolitionist movement and a consolidation of elite power in the

---

<sup>9</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 566, 471-499, 519-24, 562-64.

<sup>10</sup> On the role of the public in the ratification process, see Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008); and Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 9.

interests of slaveholders. Both scholars, from divergent perspectives, conclude that the Constitution's ratification represented a retreat from an earlier period of democratic politics.

Narratives related to abolition often conform to an interpretive framework that emphasizes a fading Revolutionary ideology and the corresponding emergence of a conservative national government. To witness the decline of antislavery sentiment during this period was to witness, in David Brion Davis's artful phrasing, "the perishability of Revolutionary time."<sup>12</sup> The imperatives of liberationist ideology seemed less immediate as the conflict with Britain receded in the minds of Americans. The characterization of the Constitution's ratification as a veritable death knell for the cause of antislavery-- with radicalism only revived with the Garrisonians and immediatists of the 1830s-- remains the prevailing view.<sup>13</sup> Scholars also neglect the extent that abolitionist discourses helped animate radical republican ideology during the Revolutionary era. Abolitionism and revolutionary politics were closely entwined.

A declension narrative, that marks the ratification of the Constitution as the beginning of the end for revolutionary abolitionism, obscures one of the most radical periods of antislavery activity in the Atlantic world. In the late 1780s and early 1790s the plight of the enslaved remained a question of moral concern for many Christians, abolition societies rapidly proliferated, and the popular politics of the period emboldened

---

<sup>12</sup> Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 306-326; and *Inhuman Bondage The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 154-155.

<sup>13</sup> See Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism* 39-59; Brewer, *Holy Warriors*, 28-30; Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, 107-152; and Berlin, *The Long Emancipation*, 96-101. Popular histories of the period also tend to embrace this narrative. See, for example, Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 104.



challengers of the institution. Three significant factors contributed to a climate of antislavery radicalism following the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783: first, the spread of evangelical Christianity during the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening reinforced spiritual commitments to personal and national redemption; second, the French Revolution emboldened democratic radicals on both sides of the Atlantic and destabilized existing claims to authority; and third, the opening of the American West provided new possibilities for the spread of antislavery doctrine.<sup>14</sup>

Significantly, the intersection between these three developments led to coalitions of evangelicals and radical democrats, who when combined posed a significant threat to elite interests. Ordinary people throughout the country were animated by both religious and political fervor in the late 1780s and early 1790s. Importantly, while the ideological origins of transatlantic republican abolition were crucially informed by evangelical Protestant and radical Enlightenment traditions, the rebellions and revolutions of enslaved Africans became another critical source of abolitionist resistance in the late eighteenth century.

### *The Gospel of Abolition*

The spread of evangelical Christianity in the period following the war offered new hope for challenging the institution of slavery throughout the states. The ferment of political rebellion and widespread distribution of radical tracts like Paine's *Common Sense* served to undermine traditional claims to power in an array of spheres. Just as republican ideology had drawn on sectarian theology in formulating challenges to

---

<sup>14</sup> The best account of the debates over slavery in the early American West is John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

hierarchical authority based on conscience and natural equality, the assaults on deference unleashed by the Revolution contributed to the democratization of certain elements of American Christianity.<sup>15</sup> According to the historian Nathan Hatch, “many humble Christians in America began to redeem a dual legacy. They yoked strenuous demands for revivals in the name of George Whitefield, with calls for the expansion of popular sovereignty, in the name of the Revolution.”<sup>16</sup> For ordinary people the conflict with Great Britain was frequently filtered through a religious imagination, including categories and narratives with roots dating back to the Reformation.

The rapid expansion of various evangelical denominations at the end of eighteenth century, especially Methodists and Baptists, cultivated a popular religious culture that emphasized spiritual revival and doctrinal freedom.<sup>17</sup> The development marked the beginning of a religious revival that lasted well into the nineteenth century. Basing his assessment on a survey of statistical evidence, historian Mark Noll contends

---

<sup>15</sup> Phillip N. Mulder has argued for parallel challenges to authority posed by the Revolution and the Awakening, writing that “The awakenings, like the Revolution, transformed the sources of authority.” Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6. Some historians have challenged the democratization thesis. See especially, Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). Porterfield argues that evangelical revivals of the early nineteenth century were a reaction to the political divisiveness of the 1790s as well as the rise of popular deism. I contend that there existed, for a time, common ground amongst Democratic-Republicans and evangelicals from which to challenge slavery, but it was undercut by suspicions of infidelity associated with the French Revolution (see Chapter 4).

<sup>16</sup> Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 6-7. Hatch privileges the impact of secular discourse on the religious sphere, while I argue that religious discourses strongly contributed to revolutionary rhetoric from the start.

<sup>17</sup> See Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, Chapters 1 and 2, and passim; John Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), Chapter 7; and Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), Chapter 9. For a discussion of the growing influence of evangelical religion in Virginia, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

that “No other period of American history ever witnessed such a dramatic rise in religious adherence and corresponding religious influence on the broader national culture.”<sup>18</sup> This movement, often referred to as the Second Great Awakening, embraced the language of conscience so prominent in the antislavery discourse of the late eighteenth century.<sup>19</sup> Evangelical reformers often promulgated a theology of postmillennialism, which held that Christ would return after a thousand-year era of peace and human happiness. Their mission was to implement moral perfection on earth in order to purify it for the second coming.<sup>20</sup> This postmillennial outlook was consistent with the thrust of the radical Enlightenment, with its claims to rapid human progress and confidence in the “power to begin the world over again,” in the words of Paine.<sup>21</sup> The optimism of the age fostered a climate where both evangelicals and Enlightenment radicals cooperated in challenging perceived social ills. Inherent tensions between evangelical Christianity and radical democratic ideology, however, later posed problems in sustaining a coalition dedicated to abolition of slavery as the century turned.

---

<sup>18</sup> Mark Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166.

<sup>19</sup> Most historians of the period mark the period of revival as beginning around 1790 and lasting until the 1840s. See Donald G. Matthews "The Second Great Awakening as an organizing process, 1780-1830: An hypothesis" in *American Quarterly* (1969): 23-43; Joseph Conforti, "The Invention of the Great Awakening, 1795-1842" in *Early American Literature* (1991): 99-118; Charles I. Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790–1837*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960); and Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950).

<sup>20</sup> See Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992), 216-218.

<sup>21</sup> Paine, *Common Sense*, 120.

Following in the wake of the Quakers, American Methodists and Baptists challenged slavery within their denominations. Writing to the English abolitionist Granville Sharp, Methodist leader John Wesley expressed that he felt “a perfect detestation of the horrid Slave Trade.” Sharp later testified to his friend's compassion, writing that “the Methodists are... highly offended at the scandalous toleration of slavery in our colonies, if I may judge by the sentiments of one of their principal teachers, Mr. Wesley.”<sup>22</sup> Two years later in 1774, inspired by Anthony Benezet, Wesley wrote a widely distributed pamphlet entitled *Thoughts Upon Slavery* and his opposition to human bondage and the slave trade continued throughout his life.<sup>23</sup> Similarities between Wesley's pamphlet and Benezet's work attracted the notice of contemporaries and historians alike.<sup>24</sup> For his part, Benezet embraced his colleague's efforts and offered to publish Wesley's piece in the colonies.<sup>25</sup>

After the Revolution, Methodism spread rapidly through America, particularly in the South.<sup>26</sup> The antislavery positions of its founders and a commitment to religious toleration created a crisis of conscience for some Methodists, especially those who held slaves. In 1784, the first general conference of American Methodists declared slavery an “Abomination” that was contrary to “the Golden Law of God” and “the unalienable

---

<sup>22</sup> Granville Sharp to Robert Hay Drummond, July 30, 1772, in Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq. Composed from his own Manuscripts, and Other Authentic Documents* (London, 1820), 185.

<sup>23</sup> He recalled reading a book by “an honest Quaker” in 1772, which was most likely Benezet's *Some historical account of Guinea*. See John Wesley, *Journal*, v, 446.

<sup>24</sup> See Brookes, *Friend Anthony Benezet*, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Benezet wrote to Wesley that his work “afforded me much satisfaction.” *Ibid.*, 318.

<sup>26</sup> Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 269.

Rights of Mankind.”<sup>27</sup> In a founding national convention that included delegates from throughout the South, it is striking that such strident language was employed. Fusing appeals to practical Christian ideals with the radical Enlightenment language of natural rights, leading Methodists disparaged slavery as anathema to a free republic. With at least two African American Methodists present at the proceedings, the denomination voted to officially exclude slaveholders from membership.<sup>28</sup>

The black preachers present at the conference, Richard Allen of Philadelphia and Harry Hosier of North Carolina, were denied voting privileges at the conference, but their very presence signaled progress. Born into slavery in Delaware and only twenty-four years old at the time of the conference, Richard Allen had already distinguished himself. The Reverend Freeborn Garrettson, who had emancipated his slaves after a conversion experience during the Revolution, convinced Allen's enslaver that his acts were sinful while preaching at his plantation. Allen was offered an opportunity to purchase his freedom and did so in 1780. He became a minister at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1786 and founded the Free African Society (FAS) a year later.<sup>29</sup> Despite facing racial discrimination, Allen won the respect of many Methodist leaders and became a pillar of the burgeoning free black community in Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> *Minutes of Several Conversations Between The Rev. Thomas Coke, L.D., The Rev. Francis Asbury and Others, At a Conference, Begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on the 27th of December in the Year 1784* (Philadelphia, 1785), 15.

<sup>28</sup> See Donald Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966), 8. In 1808, the section on slaveholding was omitted from the South Carolina Conference, meaning that members in South Carolina could continue to hold slaves. See *Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. 1 (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1855), 93.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen: To Which Is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America: Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord 1793 : with an Address to*

Harry Hosier's story was no less harrowing. Born to enslaved parents, he gained his freedom by the end of the Revolution. He met Francis Asbury in 1780 and traveled with him for several years. Asbury valued Hosier's abilities to connect with southern blacks and marveled at his abilities as a preacher. He was not alone, as Benjamin Rush was reported to have pronounced Hosier the “greatest orator in America.” One chronicler of Methodism observed that “Harry was a more popular speaker than Mr. Asbury, or almost any one else in his day.”<sup>31</sup> Undoubtedly, the presence of Allen and Hosier as leading Methodist preachers had an influence on racial perceptions and opinions on abolition. These two formerly enslaved individuals were in short time preaching alongside Methodist leaders. Despite discrimination, they established themselves as worthy members of the religious community.<sup>32</sup>

Antislavery Methodists in Virginia attempted to restrict slaveholders from membership and influence both state and national policy. A year after the founding conference, Methodists in Frederick County petitioned the General Assembly, declaring liberty “the Birthright of Mankind, the right of every rational Creature without exception....” The Methodist position on slavery was no mere abstraction, but specifically

---

*the People of Color in the United States* (Reprint; New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 15-40. Allen would go on to found the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in 1794 in resistance to unequal treatment at St. George's.

<sup>30</sup> See Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 109-134, and passim. On the challenges posed by racism for Allen, see Nash and Suderland, *Freedom by Degrees*, 199-199.

<sup>31</sup> John Lednum, *A History of the Rise of Methodism in America Containing Sketches of Methodist Itinerant Preachers, from 1736 to 1785 ... Also, a Short Account of Many Hundreds of the First Race of Lay Members, Male and Female, from New York to South Carolina, Together with an Account of Many of the First Societies and Chapels*. (Philadelphia, 1859), 282.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Allen formed the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1794 with Absalom Jones in part as a protest against racial segregation of the congregation at St. George's. Allen, *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*.

applied to “the Body of Negroes in this State,” who had “been robbed of that right... and therefore ought in Justice to have their rights restored.” This positive call for the liberation of slaves in the name of natural equality echoed the language of the Declaration of Independence. Moreover, the Revolution could not be justified, the petitioners claimed, but by the principles which call “with greater force for the Emancipation of our Slaves....”<sup>33</sup> Methodist leaders Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke met with George Washington in an effort to persuade him to support their call for the abolition of slavery. Coke later recalled that Washington “did not see it proper to sign the petition,” but “informed us that he was of our sentiments....”<sup>34</sup>

The petition for emancipation had as little sway with the Virginia legislature as it had with Washington, but the conditions for private manumission were more favorable than ever. Manumission of slaves became more practical in the 1780s, as laws regulating the voluntary release of enslaved people were liberalized throughout much of the South. In 1782, after intensive lobbying from Quakers and evangelicals, Virginia repealed a 1723 law regulating manumission, allowing for people of conscience to release those held in bondage without risk of legal penalty. Referring to this momentous development, the Meeting for Sufferings in Philadelphia that year proclaimed that “through the favour of divine Providence the Light of Truth hath evidently broken forth in many places amongst those whom... long accustomed prejudices have held in obdurate blindness.”<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Frederick County Petition, November 8, 1785, Library of Virginia.

<sup>34</sup> Journal of Thomas Coke, 45. Quoted in Samuel Drew, *The Life of Rev. Thomas Coke* (London, 1817), 138.

<sup>35</sup> Philadelphia Meeting for Sufferings, 1782, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Meeting for Sufferings and Representative Meeting Records, 1719-1954, Haverford College.

The law itself, predictably, featured no soaring language of natural rights, but it nevertheless authorized others to choose to “emancipate and set free” those held in bondage.<sup>36</sup>

Some historians have explained the insistence on a right to manumission as an outgrowth of a spreading ideology of possessive individualism following the Revolution.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, the manumission law recognized an enslaver’s right to deal with his own “property” in any way he chooses. This analysis, however, overlooks another critical influence. The Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776) had established the freedom of conscience.<sup>38</sup> As opposition to slavery became increasingly bound to religious belief and expressed in the language of conscience, denying the authority of an individual to privately release an enslaved person became a concern for advocates of religious freedom.

Methodists in particular were vocal proponents of religious liberty in the years following the American Revolution. Founder John Wesley was an Anglican priest who sought to reach a broader public. “With persecution I have nothing to do,” Wesley reassured in a letter, “I persecute no man for his religious principles. Let there be

---

<sup>36</sup> William Waller Hening, ed., *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of the Legislature in the Year 1619*, vol. 11 (Richmond, 1823), 39.

<sup>37</sup> See especially: Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 10-11, 379-380. On possessive individualism and its relation to slavery, see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, 1962), 137-42; and Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 35, 48.

<sup>38</sup> “That religion, or the duty which we owe to our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity toward each other.” *The Federal and State Constitutions, Colonial Charters*, VII, ed. F. N. Thorpe (Washington, 1909), 3814.



'boundless a freedom in religion,' as any man can conceive."<sup>39</sup> American Methodists remained affiliated with Anglicans until after the war, at which time they broke off to form a separate denomination and allied, to a degree, with other evangelical denominations in calling for religious toleration.<sup>40</sup> In Virginia, in particular, Methodists joined with Baptists and New Light Presbyterians, as well as with Democratic-Republicans, to achieve formal legal protections for the free exercise of religion.<sup>41</sup> This alliance also had ramifications for abolitionist efforts in the region.

Due to a long history of persecution by established churches, Baptists were also fierce defenders of religious freedom. For some this commitment extended to African Americans.<sup>42</sup> John Leland was a particularly influential voice in this regard. Leland's opposition to slavery was motivated by a commitment to conscience, which he defined as signifying "common science, a court of judicature which the Almighty has erected in every human breast; a *censor morum* over all his actions. Conscience will ever judge right when it is rightly informed, and speak the truth when it understands it."<sup>43</sup> He wrote

---

<sup>39</sup> John Wesley, "A Letter to the Printer of the Public Advertiser," (1780) in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 3 (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1828) 74.

<sup>40</sup> Phillip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4-6, 80-81.

<sup>41</sup> Phillip N. Mulder observes that the "quest for religious freedom represented the triumph over the established church by New Lights, allied curiously with rationalists like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison." *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>42</sup> Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 151; Christopher S. Grenda and Chris Beneke, *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 124.

<sup>43</sup> John Leland, *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable* (New London, Mass., 1791) in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, Vol. 2., ed. Ellis Sandoz, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998).

that “Liberty of conscience... is the right of slaves, beyond contradiction...”<sup>44</sup> Defending this prerogative, Leland presented the following antislavery resolution to the Virginia Baptist General Committee in 1789:

That slavery is a violent deprivation of the rights of nature, and inconsistent with a republican government; and therefore we recommend it to our Brethren to make use of every legal measure to extirpate from the land, and pray Almighty God, that our Honourable Legislature may have it in their power, to proclaim the general Jubilee, consistent with the principles of good policy.<sup>45</sup>

The resolution was adopted by the committee representing Baptists throughout slaveholding Virginia.<sup>46</sup>

Leland's bold stance, however, was met with disapprobation amongst some local Baptist associations. The Roanoke District Association, for example, emphasized the sanctity of *individual* conscience in the following response:

...we believe it would be a very great violation [of the spirit of humanity] very little short of driving our children from us in a state of non age to emancipate our slaves promiscusly without means or visible prospects of their support. That tho' we are not unanimously clear in our minds whether the God of nature ever intended, that one Part of the human species should be held in an abject state of slavery to another part of the same species; yet the subject with us is so very abstruse and such a set of complex circumstances attending the same, that we suppose the general committee nor any other Religious Society whatever has the least right to concern therein as a society, but leave every individual to act at discretion In order to keep a good conscience before God, as far as the Laws of our land will admit; and that it is indispensable duty of masters to forbear and suppress cruelty and do that which is Just and equal to their servants.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> John Leland and L F. Greene, *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland: Including Some Events in His Life* (New York, 1845), 95. *Virginia Chronicle*, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Virginia Baptist General Committee, Minutes, 1790, Library of Virginia. Also, see Robert Baylor Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, 1894), 105.

<sup>46</sup> In late-eighteenth-century America, Baptists were a rapidly growing denomination but still in a phase where they were able to express counter-cultural positions.

<sup>47</sup> Roanoke District Association Minute Book, 1789-1831, June 1790, Library of Virginia.

The Roanoke Association's rationale was instructive. Slaveholding was defended in the terms of liberty of conscience and concern for the enslaved persons they held in captivity. The association muddied the waters on the issue, challenging the notion that a general body could conclude for each individual the proper moral path to take.

Historians often cite such responses as a demonstration of popular support for slavery in Virginia. “The inability of the leadership of both [Methodists and Baptists] to place their congregations on clear and forceful antislavery ground,” Douglas Ambrose has argued, “testifies to the strength of the laity.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, David Matthews has characterized Methodism as “a people's movement,” arguing that based on the flurry of petitions in defense of slavery, “the people either wanted slavery or feared emancipation.”<sup>49</sup>

However, the responses in defense of slavery that emerged throughout the South were not simply an outgrowth of popular resistance to an antislavery elite. They reflect the ambiguity of the discourse surrounding liberty of conscience. Baptists, in particular, were highly suspicious of centralized authority over local religious beliefs and practice.<sup>50</sup> The default position was frequently to defer to the individual's sense of right and wrong. Thus, while conscience often motivated members to speak out forcefully against slaveholding and bolstered claims to unregulated manumissions, appeals to conscience also insulated slaveholders from formal sanction. The controversy surrounding Leland's

---

<sup>48</sup> Douglas Ambrose, “Of Stations and Relations,” in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery*, ed. McKivigan (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998) 40.

<sup>49</sup> Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 23.

<sup>50</sup> Brandon O'Brien, “From Soul Liberty to Self-Reliance: John Leland and the Evangelical Origins of Radical Individualism,” *American Baptist Quarterly* 27, 2 (Summer 2008): 136-150.

resolution reflects the complexities of balancing the demands of an expanding sect with concerns over consistency with first principles.

Leland followed his resolution with a pamphlet defending his principles in the face of objections. Entitled *The Virginia Chronicle* (1790), the work was a commentary on Baptist history and the issues facing the denomination in Virginia. In it, Leland combined evangelical immediacy with Enlightenment language of natural law and moral progress. The enslaved in Virginia, he observed, were acquired by “bartering spirituous liquor for human souls, plundering the African coast, and kid-napping the people....” In language strikingly similar to Benezet, he wrote that “human nature, unbiased by education, shudders at the sight.” Of particular concern for Leland were the souls of the enslaved. He emphasized the growth of African American participation within Baptist congregations and their spiritual thirst. He lamented that they were denied their religious freedom, as many had a “great inclination for religion” and sought to act “in the service of God....” He also accused masters of preventing those held in bondage from adequately following their consciences and of violating the law of God by forcing married slaves to separate. The foundation for his reasoning was that all are of one blood descended from Adam and Noah.<sup>51</sup> Even “the master would be better without them, than with them,” he insisted.

Writing to a Methodist audience in Virginia, Leland forcefully called for immediate emancipation of those unjustly enslaved. “The whole scene of slavery, is pregnant with enormous evils,” he continued. “On the master's side, pride, haughtiness,

---

<sup>51</sup> John Leland, *The Virginia Chronicle: with Judicious and Critical Remarks, under XXIV Heads* (Fredericksburg, 1790), 8, 13, 9-10, 11.

domination, cruelty, deceit and indolence; and on the side of the slave, ignorance, servility, fraud, perfidy and despair.” His radical solution was to abolish slavery altogether. “If these and so many other evils attend it, why not liberate them at once?—Would to Heaven this was done!”<sup>52</sup> Leland was well aware that he would be accused of pursuing a rash course, but calmly responded to each objection with an appeal to a higher law and the natural rights of all human beings. Recognizing that some had invested considerably in slaves and that the Constitution protected their “property,” he nevertheless could not justify stripping people of their basic rights. Even the threat of violent reprisals against whites and the probability of racial mixing after abolition was not enough to dissuade him from advocating drastic action on behalf of the enslaved.

Like Benezet, Leland warned of divine consequences if America failed to act. The new millennium of peace was said to be at hand. Whatever occurred, it could not be worse than how the whites had treated the Africans, Leland concluded. “Something must be done! May Heaven point out that something, and may the people be obedient.” He proclaimed to all who would listen, “If they are not brought out of bondage, in mercy, with the consent of their masters, I think that they will be, by judgment, against their consent.” Absent swift action to address this oppression, God was likely to intervene on behalf of the enslaved. “It is the peculiarity of God to bring light out of darkness, good out of evil, order out of confusion,” Leland warned, “and make the wrath of man praise him.” It would take sacrifice and some would lose wealth, but it was a small price to pay for salvation and justice. “If we were slaves in Africa,” he questioned, “how should we reprobate such reasoning as would rob us our liberty. It is a question, whether men had

---

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

not better lose all their property, than deprive an individual of his birth-right blessing, *freedom*.”<sup>53</sup> Shortly after writing the pamphlet, Leland moved to New England, where slavery was firmly abolished. In politics, he went on to strongly support the Democratic-Republicans, while maintaining his dedication to the abolitionist cause.<sup>54</sup>

While some influential Baptists opposed slavery, they remained in the minority within the denomination. Most professed to believe in a strict separation between public and private affairs. This was, in part, a result of the settlement reached regarding freedom of religion. Sectarians had argued that religion should be a private matter and should be left unregulated and unsupported by governments. There were also theological roots to this type of thinking. Early Baptists Thomas Helwys and Leonard Busher contended for liberty of conscience by focusing on a “two kingdoms” interpretation of the gospel. Spiritual debates were to be fought with words rather than swords.<sup>55</sup> Some took this to mean that spiritual and political concerns should remain separate. In 1789, for example, a Baptist association in Kentucky, when asked whether Baptists should own slaves,

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11, 12-13, 12n.

<sup>54</sup> On Leland's relationship to democratic-republicanism, see Lyman Butterfield, “Elder John Leland, Jeffersonian Itinerant,” *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 62, pt. 2 (1952): 155-242; Hatch, *Democratization of American Christianity*, 93-101; Jeffrey Pasley, “The Cheese and the Words: Popular Political Culture and Participatory Democracy in the Early American Republic,” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004). Leland refers glowingly to Thomas Jefferson in *A Blow at the Root, Being a Fashionable Feast-Day Sermon, Delivered at Cheshire, April 9th 1801* (New London, CT, 1801), 32.

<sup>55</sup> Grenda and Beneke, *The First Prejudice*, 27.

declined to answer, calling it “improper to enter in to so important and critical matter at present.”<sup>56</sup>

*National Politics and the Problem of Slavery*

John Leland's protest against slavery was not focused narrowly on religious policy, but spoke to the broader political context of the early national period. Looking back to the principles of the Revolution, he praised the first Virginian assembly for prohibiting the slave trade (albeit temporarily), and lamented that even after the ratification of the Federal Constitution, enslaved people “have no vote in the choice of Representatives to Congress” and are treated as “3 fifths of a man, and 2 fifths of a brute.”<sup>57</sup> Debate over the Constitution of the United States was divisive and slavery featured prominently in the various controversies and compromises which emerged by the time of its narrow ratification. Leland scathingly gestured to the most glaring of these compromises—which designated that enslaved human beings would count as three-fifths of a person for the purposes of apportioning members of the House of Representatives. Abolitionists were alarmed that the 3/5ths clause institutionalized slavery and allowed for disproportionate representation of slaveholders in Congress.

Of the fifty-five delegates who met in Philadelphia for the Convention in 1787, approximately half were slaveholders. That fact alone, however, does not explain the reluctance to tackle the problem of slavery directly. Even some of the slaveholding delegates, especially in Virginia, had privately (and some publicly) expressed a distaste

---

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in William Warren Sweet, *The Baptists, 1783-1830: A Collection of Source Material* (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1964), 79.

<sup>57</sup> Leland, *Virginia Chronicle*, 8-9, 10.

for the institution and an inclination to put it on a road to extinction if given the opportunity.<sup>58</sup> Despite the potential for finding some common ground on the issue, the leaders considered any threat to disunion not worth the risk. James Madison remarked that “that the States were divided into different interests not by their difference in size, but by other circumstances; the most material of which resulted... from... their having or not having slaves.”<sup>59</sup> Slavery, then, was perceived as a divisive issue which threatened to doom the national project of the Federalists.<sup>60</sup>

Most of the delegation, which included many of the wealthiest and most influential men in America, had an interest in maintaining order and discouraging popular challenges. Even those who opposed slavery often had an incentive to not rock the boat. Some feared the excesses of democracy more than the ills of bondage. On the floor of the Convention, for example, Alexander Hamilton declared: “The people are turbulent and changing; they seldom judge or determine right... Nothing but a permanent body can check the imprudence of democracy....” He proceeded to propose that the United States adopt a system similar to the British constitution, including lifetime appointments for the

---

<sup>58</sup> Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), 33-36; and John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason, eds., *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*, vol. 1 (New Haven, 1937), 486.

<sup>60</sup> See Nash, *Race and Revolution*, Chapter 2; Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*; Van Cleve, *Slaveholder's Union*, Chapters 3 and 4; Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*; and Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), Chapter 1. On debates over slavery during the ratification process, see Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 175-176, 283-285, passim.



executive and members of the Senate, to be drawn from people of the “first class.”<sup>61</sup> The Constitution that Hamilton went on to defend in *The Federalist* did not align with his initial plan. Conservative voices at the Convention recognized that they must at least gesture toward popular government or risk failure of ratification.<sup>62</sup>

John Leland's denunciation of the compromises made at the Convention were not exceptional. The day after the three-fifths compromise was reached, the Continental Congress in New York approved the Northwest Ordinance, which prohibited slavery from the northwestern territories, but allowed for slavery south of the Ohio River, where it would be most profitable.<sup>63</sup> Those attempting to secure the West for slavery feared any encroachment against the institution in the Southwest and, despite a majority position in the Congress, were willing to bargain if it meant tacit sanction of slavery in regions where it had the potential to reap the most profit. In combination, the two compromises laid the groundwork for sectional controversies throughout the antebellum period.

While the Constitution expanded federal protections for slaveholders and protected the slave trade from national interference for the next twenty years, some

---

<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Elliot and James Madison, eds., *The Debates in the Several State Conventions, on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, 2nd edition (Washington D.C., 1836), 422.

<sup>62</sup> See Alfred F. Young, “Conservatives, the Constitution and the 'Genius of the People'” in *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York, 2006); Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*; and Maier, *Ratification*,

<sup>63</sup> Scholarly debate continues over whether the ordinance should be considered as an antislavery measure or a pro-slavery one. Reacting to a tradition that held the ordinance as a major antislavery accomplishment based on principle, both Staughton Lynd and Duncan J. MacLeod have argued that the ordinance was a capitulation to the interest of slaveholders, while David Brion Davis and Paul Finkelman find it more ambiguous. Staughton Lynd, *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution* (1967, Reprint, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 185; Duncan MacLeod, *Slavery and the American Revolution*, 47-49; Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 153-154; and Paul Finkelman, “Slavery and the Northwest Ordinance: A Study in Ambiguity,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 1 December 1986, Vol.6 (4), pp. 343-370.

abolitionists saw a silver lining in the possibility for outlawing slavery after the year 1808.<sup>64</sup> Benjamin Rush was among those who applauded the section and interpreted it as a functional ban on the slave trade in two decade's time. He wrote enthusiastically to a friend in England that by 1808 there would be "an end of the African trade in America."<sup>65</sup> In the same vein, George Clymer wrote to Rush, lauding the Constitution for opening a new opportunity to challenge the institution. Among "the expected glories of the Constitution," he included "the abolition of slavery...."<sup>66</sup> There has been little in the way of consensus on the issue, amongst both contemporaries and historians, but the Constitution clearly failed to challenge slavery in the short term.

The ratification of the Constitution was clearly a setback for proponents of radical action of the issue of slavery. Historian Gary Nash has noted that by delaying action against the slave trade, slavery was effectively codified in law and protected from antislavery policy on the national level, closing a window of opportunity to challenge the institution.<sup>67</sup> Both Nash and Waldstreicher characterize the ratification of the Constitution as monumental set-back for the nascent American abolitionist movement.

While a setback, the ratification of the Constitution was not enough to derail the movement in an age of transatlantic popular politics. The French Revolution, in

---

<sup>64</sup> Some historians, such as Don E. Fehrenbacher, have presented a more positive interpretation of the Constitution in regards to the abolitionist movement, emphasizing this section. He views the empowerment of the Federal Government to regulate the slave trade after 1808 as an important step toward utilizing national power to challenge the institution in its entirety. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 42-43.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Fehrenbacher, 42.

<sup>66</sup> George Clymer to Benjamin Rush, June 18, 1789. GLC, # GLC04769.

<sup>67</sup> Gary Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990).

particular, emboldened both democratic radicals and abolitionists alike to test the limits of the national consensus. While the Constitution represented a reactionary turn against the popular politics unleashed by the Revolution, the ideology of natural rights and liberation persisted.<sup>68</sup>

The various abolition societies that were formed in the 1780s and 1790s were fighting an uphill battle, but played an important role in national politics, despite the Constitution's proslavery provisions. The societies also transcended national politics, connecting abolitionists from throughout the Atlantic world and were profoundly influenced by broader trends in popular politics emerging during the Age of Revolution. The Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), first formed in 1775, reemerged in 1784 and drafted a new constitution in 1787. The society was originally founded by Quaker elites, but between 1784 and 1787, the majority of new members were artisans and laborers—including radical democrats.<sup>69</sup>

The PAS embraced elements of revolutionary ideology and reached out to abolitionists throughout the Atlantic world. While membership was divided ideologically, a strong commitment to transatlantic radicalism was evident from the beginning. In 1784, James Pemberton, then vice president of the PAS, pledged to spread the antislavery

---

<sup>68</sup> Larry Tise similarly argues that the Constitution, while a conservative reaction, was not sufficient to stifle revolutionary ideology. See Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), Chapter 7. For a sophisticated political history of the debates surrounding slavery in this period, see Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>69</sup> Gary B. Nash and Jean Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 115-116. The reemergence of the organization was initially led by a Quaker tailor named Thomas Harrison. Also see Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, 1988), 104-5; and *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (London: Viking Penguin, 2005), 152-153.

message throughout the United States and hoped that “a fragment of a letter from T[homas] Day” would “prove useful” in the task.<sup>70</sup> Day, who was a strong influence on a young John Laurens, embodied the uncompromising antislavery stance that was to become the hallmark of the radical abolitionist movement in both Britain and France.<sup>71</sup> Writing to the elder Laurens, he observed that he was sure of just “one great truth” that “moral honesty is the only support of public liberty.”<sup>72</sup> In the published letter, Day observed that if “there be certain natural and universal rights as the declarations of your Congress so repeatedly affirm, I wonder how the unfortunate Africans have incurred their forfeiture....” Cutting directly to the root of the problem, he called on Americans to reject hypocrisy and embrace “the rights of man.” Day had spent time in France and was a zealous promoter of modern philosophy and universal principles. In the letter he referred to the question of slavery as “the most important question in the universe”<sup>73</sup>

The timing of the publication of Day's letter was no accident. While purportedly penned in 1776 in response to an inquiry from a slaveholding associate of John Laurens,

---

<sup>70</sup> James Pemberton to James Phillips, November 18, 1784, Gilder Lehrman Collection, # GLC04237, N-YHS. The letter he was referring to was published as a broadside in Philadelphia. See, Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes, Written in the Year 1776* (Philadelphia, 1784), American Antiquarian Society; in Early American Imprints, Doc. #18437. Pemberton was an influential Quaker who had been arrested during the American Revolutionary War for his pacifist beliefs.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Day included a eulogy to John Laurens in his widely distributed pamphlet in 1784. He wrote that “in him his country has lost one of its noblest and most useful citizens, his father the kindest and most affectionate friend: and all the wretched a generous and disinterested patron.... O my unfortunate country!... I seek in vain a colonel John Laurens.” Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes, written in the year 1776* (Philadelphia, 1784). Day was elected as an honorary member of the PAS in 1787. James Phillips to Tenche Coxe, London, 12/5/1787, Loose Correspondence, incoming: 1784-1795, Boxes 34-50, PAS papers, HSP.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Day to Henry Laurens, Allingsley, July 10, 1783, Henry Laurens Papers. South Carolina Historical Society.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Day, *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes, written in the year 1776* (Philadelphia, 1784), 1.

its publication after independence imbued the piece with renewed power.<sup>74</sup> In his 1784

editorial introduction, Day hoped that those:

who are enlightened by a more extensive knowledge of human nature, may perhaps respect an Englishman, who, after daring to assert their cause through all the varied events of the late revolution, dares now with equal intepidity assert the cause of truth and justice, and of that part of the human species whose wrongs are yet unredressed....<sup>75</sup>

Day had supported the colonies when it was politically unpopular in Britain to do so, and now he hoped that Americans would objectively consider the rights of those enslaved.

As new state constitutions were formed and novel forms of national authority debated throughout the region, the subject of what to do about slavery resounded everywhere. In this tense political climate, readers encountered Day's trenchant words. "You cannot hide from yourself," he warned every American, "Can anything be clearer than that a man who is born free can never forfeit his inheritance by suffering oppression...?" To be an American, Day asserted, was to reject tyranny, not to uphold it:

Yes, gentlemen, as you are no longer Englishmen, I hope you will please to be men, and, as such, admit the whole human species to a participation of your unalienable rights. You will not, therefore, drag a trembling wretch from his cottage and his family. You will not tear the child from the arms of his frantic mother, that they drag on a loathsome existence in misery and chains. You will not make depredations upon your unassuming neighbours and, having spread desolation over a fertile country, reduce the innocent inhabitants to servitude. To do this, you must be monsters, worse, I fear, than the House of Commons and the English Ministry.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> Day notes in the letter that he did not know the author of the letter to him asking his views on slavery, but upon seeing the name recalled that he was an associate of John Laurens. Presumably, Laurens nudged the author to correspond with Day on the issue of slavery.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

He appealed to a burgeoning sense of American identity and pride. Having just vanquished a global power, American citizens were open to remaking the world around them to accord with revolutionary principles that had imbued the conflict with higher meaning. Many members of the growing abolitionist movement embraced this outlook and presented emancipation as a logical extension of the Revolution itself, a necessary predicate to true independence from the corruptions of the old world.

Just months before the Federal Convention, abolitionists from throughout Pennsylvania met in Philadelphia to coordinate their efforts, hoping to encourage the founding of new societies throughout America and beyond. Among them were Benjamin Franklin (President), Benjamin Rush (Secretary), and James Pemberton (Vice President). The introduction to the society's new constitution celebrated diversity and was a frontal assault on racism and prejudice. It announced that it “having pleased the Creator of the world, to make of one flesh, all the children of men—it becomes them to consult and promote each other's happiness, as members of the same family, however diversified they may be, by colour, situation, religion, or different states of society.”<sup>77</sup> Members pledged their dedication to “the rights of human nature” and acknowledged a Christian duty to “extend the blessing of freedom to every part of the human race....” Members emphasized their faith in both reason and conscience. “Truth like the immortal principle that dwells in every human bosom can never be extinct,” the constitution declared, “when brought into light it will maintain its existence in spite of all opposition, finally it will produce its

---

<sup>77</sup> *The Constitution of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully held in Bondage* (Philadelphia, 1787), 1.

effects upon the human mind.”<sup>78</sup> Membership certificates were stamped with the phrase, “He hath made of one blood all flesh.”<sup>79</sup>

In the wake of political independence, the PAS framed its mission in terms of redemption and millennial hope. In 1788, Benjamin Franklin sent a copy of the society's constitution and a pamphlet by the young British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson to Connecticut governor Samuel Huntington. He lamented over “a considerable part” of those sold as slaves in the South since the end of the Revolution had come on American ships. He encouraged Huntington to attempt to prevent the practice, which was “repugnant to the political principles & forms of government lately adopted by the Citizens of the United States.” If the United States should fail to act, her citizens could expect retribution from “the impartial ruler of the Universe.”<sup>80</sup>

From the start, members of the PAS corresponded with and were inspired by like-minded individuals and organizations across the Atlantic. As such, the society envisioned itself not as a national political organization, but as transnational human rights association. James Pemberton, for example, welcomed the arrival of vessels from London that “furnished us with numerous publications on the enormity of the Slave trade which we are endeavouring to get diffused in the like manner....” He hoped that “they may have a beneficial tendency particularly in the Southern Governments where the people & the Rulers in some of them require to be animated to a sense of the iniquity they are

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>79</sup> Quarterly Meeting of the PAS, January, 5, 1789. Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, HSP. The reference is to Acts 17:26.

<sup>80</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Huntington, January 12, 1788. GLC, #GLC07485.01.

forcefully involved in.”<sup>81</sup> This cosmopolitan orientation led the society to welcome philanthropists from around the world to become corresponding members. Among those initially invited were the English abolitionists Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp, and Richard Price, as well as French leaders the Marquise de Lafayette and the Abbé Raynal.

Not coincidentally, all of the invited members had been strong supporters of the American Revolution. “We are engaged in a cause,” the society wrote to Lafayette, “which we conceive to be of the utmost importance to the honor of the United States of America & to the happiness & natural rights of Mankind.” Official correspondence of the society seamlessly transitioned from religious language to expressions of Enlightenment principles. Members emphasized the implications of the Revolution and its significance toward liberating humankind from bondage. “The present age has been distinguished by a remarkable Revolution,” the society insisted. Mankind has begun “to consider themselves as Members of one family. The groans of our distressed & injured brethren from the Shores of Africa have at length reached the ears of the Citizens of the United States....” The association did not appear to perceive the ratification of the Constitution as a major setback, writing triumphantly that “Most of the Legislatures have already abolished the Slave trade, & a provision has been made in the general Constitution, which we trust will effect it completely.”<sup>82</sup> Abolitionists tended to believe that emancipation could be accomplished state by state, and that by 1808 the national government would codify a general emancipation into law.

---

<sup>81</sup> James Pemberton to Moses Brown, May 17, 1788, GLC, # GLC04980.

<sup>82</sup> PAS to Marquis of Fayette, September 9, 1788, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, HSP.



The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST), also referred to as the London Abolition Society, was founded in Great Britain in 1788, shortly after the PAS revised its constitution.<sup>83</sup> Granville Sharp wrote on behalf of SEAST to the PAS to insist that both organizations remain true to first principles. “We cannot for a moment abandon the fundamental principle of our association,” he wrote, “that no gains however great” should compete with the “rights of man....” In bold terms, Sharp observed that slavery contradicts “the rights of nature and the maxims of Christian Religion” and that “humanity calls for its extinction.”<sup>84</sup> In response, the PAS pledged to forge a “relation of Brotherhood & mutual correspondence between your Society & ours.”<sup>85</sup> Throughout their relationship, however, some PAS members expressed concern that a narrow focus on the abolition of the slave trade by the CEAST was detrimental to the broader cause of emancipation.<sup>86</sup> It was generally accepted, however, that if the slave trade were to end, the institution of slavery would be badly damaged.

Abolitionism also emerged in France, the other major empire reliant on slavery in the late eighteenth century. In the fall of 1787, the French abolitionist Jacques-Pierre Brissot visited with British activists in London. Brissot was heavily influenced by Rousseau and had long been a supporter of American independence and republican

---

<sup>83</sup>J.R. Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 17-19.

<sup>84</sup> Granville Sharp to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, July 30, 1788, PAS Papers, HSP.

<sup>85</sup> PAS, signed by Benjamin Franklin, to SEAST, December 3, 1788. PAS Papers, HSP.

<sup>86</sup> James Pemberton, for example, noted that a tract sent by the CEAST "cautiously avoids the Idea of Emancipation." See PAS to CEAST, June, 24, 1789, PAS Papers, HSP.

politics.<sup>87</sup> His outspoken advocacy of republican principles marked him as an enemy of the ruling monarchy in Paris. He had traveled to England in order to get some breathing room from authorities in France after having been imprisoned in the Bastille a few years earlier for publishing anti-monarchical material deemed obscene. While in London, he joined the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Upon returning to Paris, he consulted with other leading intellectuals in his circle and helped to found *La Société des Amis des Noirs* (The Society of Friends of the Blacks) in early 1788.<sup>88</sup> The roots of the club extended to the Gallo-American Society, a French group that gathered together enthusiastic supporters of the American cause and Enlightenment ideals. It was also heavily indebted to the influence of Anthony Benezet, who they held as a veritable patron saint.<sup>89</sup> Members included Brissot, the Marquis de Lafayette, Etienne Claviere, Marquis de Condorcet, Abbe Gregoire, and Mirabeau, among others. By the beginning of 1789, the *Amis des Noirs* had nearly 150 members.<sup>90</sup> Many would go on to become leaders of the Girondin faction in the National Convention following the French Revolution.<sup>91</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 41-42, passim; and Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism*, 32-36.

<sup>88</sup> Daniel P. Resnick, "La Société des Amis des Noirs and the Abolition of Slavery," *French Historical Studies*, 7 (4) (1972): 558-569. For the organization's minutes and related material, see Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Gainot, eds., *La Société des Amis des Noirs, 1788-1799: Contribution à l'histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage* (Paris: UNESCO, 1998).

<sup>89</sup> Two leading scholars of the Amis des Noirs have observed that the society viewed Benezet "as the initiator of abolitionism." Marcel Dorigny and Bernard Guinot, *La Société des Amis des Noirs, 1788-1799: Contribution à l'histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage*, 73, n. 28. Also see Jackson, *Let this Voice Be Heard*, Chapter 7.

<sup>90</sup> Resnick, "La Société des Amis des Noirs and the Abolition of Slavery," 560.

<sup>91</sup> Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 181-186.

By the time of the Society's founding, French ships had carried nearly a million Africans into slavery in the French West Indies. Abolitionists in America, Britain, and France all recognized that their best chance to end the Atlantic slave trade was to band together.<sup>92</sup> Geopolitics played a significant role in efforts to defend the institution of slavery and the trade in human beings. British leaders feared that if they prohibited the trade, France would fill the gap and strengthen her empire. Likewise, Paris was hesitant to challenge slavery in the French colonies for similar reasons. There was also, of course, a strong economic incentive to continue the trade, regardless of imperial competition. The Messiac Club was formed in Paris by wealthy planters and slave traders with colonial interests. It was essentially a lobbying group that sought to counteract the Amis des Noirs' efforts and influence government officials.<sup>93</sup>

Brissot developed friendships with both Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine during their time in Europe. He toured the United States in 1788. Upon his departure from France, he wrote "I quit it without regret; since the ministerial despotism which overwhelms it, leaves nothing to expect for a long time, but frightful storms, slavery, or war." Little did he know that upon his return the country would be pushed to the brink of revolution. In his travels, Brissot was pleased to have the opportunity to observe the results of the American Revolution and the experience undoubtedly shaped his perceptions of the tumult that was to occur in France. He praised the pure republicanism

---

<sup>92</sup> Perry Viles, "The Slaving Interest in the Atlantic Ports, 1763–1792," *French Historical Studies*, (7), 4 (1972): 529–543.

<sup>93</sup> Valerie Quinney, "The Problem of Civil Rights for Free Men of Color in the Early French Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* (55), 2 (1970), 548.

of patriots like Samuel Adams and credited the “zeal” of Quakers with spearheading the movement for the abolition of slavery.<sup>94</sup>

While in the United States Brissot met with members of the PAS. After the meeting, the society unanimously resolved to “entertain a high sense of the zeal & respectability of the Society of Paris,” and “to aid him in his meritorious mission to the Continent.”<sup>95</sup> The PAS recognized that the struggle against slavery needed to be an international one. During times of rising geopolitical tension antislavery activists were frequently portrayed as disloyal or accused of undermining the national interest. Thus, the societies from the United States, Britain, and France framed their mission as a global one—beyond the scope of national politics. “The European Nations who have Colonies in which Negroes are employed must cooperate with us in perfecting the great design for which we are associated,” the PAS resolved, “before it can be fully Completed, we believe it to be a duty incumbent on us to invite them to our assistance in loosening the Bonds of Wickedness & letting the Oppressed go free—.”<sup>96</sup>

In his reflections on his travels in America, Brissot recognized Anthony Benezet, in particular, as an “extraordinary man” and recalled that his Huguenot family had fled French oppression for refuge in England in the early eighteenth century. For Brissot, Benezet was a model humanitarian who “regarded, as his brothers, all men, of all countries, and of all colours....” He observed that Benezet had employed the strategies

---

<sup>94</sup> J.P. Brissot de Warville, *New Travels in the United States of America* (Paris, 1791, Reprint, Bowling Green, 1919), 54-55, 74, 100.

<sup>95</sup> PAS Papers, HSP. A letter from the Amis des Noirs was sent to the PAS on April 29, 1788, alerting them of Brissot's travels.

<sup>96</sup> PAS Minutes, May 1, 1789, PAS Papers, HSP.

used by Quakers to distribute information on their sect and build networks in his efforts to spread the gospel of abolition. “Benezet carried always in his pocket a copy of his works on the Slavery of the Blacks,” Brissot remarked, “why he gave and recommended to every one he met.... It is method generally followed by the Society of Friends.”<sup>97</sup>

Brissot was not alone in admiring the Quaker philanthropist Benezet's work was popular with abolitionists in France and his *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771) was published there in 1788 and widely distributed.<sup>98</sup>

On the eve of the French Revolution, the PAS, SEAST, and *Amis des Noirs* all firmly challenged racial prejudice and embraced the possibility of an integrated political sphere. Equality was not simply an abstraction but a demonstrable fact. The PAS, for example, publicized the “accounts of two Blacks, which it is expected will convince the most prejudiced against them that this deficient Race of Men are by no means deficient in mental Qualifications.” A piece authored by Benjamin Rush was distributed to newspapers throughout the new nation, commenting on the “remarkable capacities” of two African Americans—James Denham (a trained physician) and Thomas Tuller (referred to as a “human calculator”).<sup>99</sup> While these were just two examples of the capacity of blacks, the activities of the entire organization were predicated on the assumption that blacks could effectively be integrated into the republic. Committees of guardians, education, and employ were established to aid free blacks.

---

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>98</sup> Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 177.

<sup>99</sup> Letter signed by James Pemberton, November 12, 1788, PAS Papers, HSP.

The PAS included lawyers who defended free African Americans against enslavement, which they referred to as wrongful imprisonment.<sup>100</sup> It was not enough merely to pass a law protecting free blacks from enslavers who planned to sell them for a profit in the South, but was necessary to defend them in court against such offenses. The PAS was resolute that “the carrying of such a Negroe by Force & against his will is an offence of Common Law punishable by Indictment....”<sup>101</sup> Identifying cases where free blacks were unlawfully imprisoned was a difficult task, but one that the PAS took to be a principle role of the society.

While the Federal Constitution was promoted as a beacon of national unity, geographic sectionalism accelerated in the late 1780s. The issue of those fleeing from enslavement to the North, coupled with reports of kidnappings of free blacks to be sold in the South, stoked these regional tensions. Jeremiah Wadsworth, a wealthy Connecticut merchant, wrote to Henry Knox seeking a runaway in New England. He assured Knox that he would attempt to retrieve the man privately, because “to do it publicly is impossible in Boston.”<sup>102</sup> The perception was that retrieving a formerly enslaved person in Massachusetts was exceedingly difficult, no doubt due to public hostility to the institution. The popular politics ignited by the Revolution had spilled over to the issue of economic enslavement. The following year, Knox observed events across the Atlantic:

---

<sup>100</sup> One such attorney, Miers Fisher, posited: “I am clearly of Opinion that every Person is entitled to the Protection of the Laws of his Country against all Invasion against his Life, Liberty or Property. That a Negro, who has with the Consent & by the Procurement of the Person claiming him as a Slave, resided in this State from the 4th Day of June to the 4th Day of December became by the Operation of the Act of Assembly for the gradual Abolition of Slavery a free man & entitled to the Protection of the Laws....” Fisher to George Bryan, December 15, 1787, Bryan Papers, HSP.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Jeremiah Wadsworth to Henry Knox, November 2, 1788. GLC, # GLC02437.04021.

“What an uproar in France! The instability of human affairs has never been displayed in stronger colors! The clouds and darkness hang on the issue.”<sup>103</sup> KNOX, a Federalist, was already concerned about the ramifications of the French Revolution.

*Transatlantic Popular Politics and Antislavery Activism*

To comprehend the milieu that the abolition societies were operating in requires an exploration of the broader popular politics of the period. Benjamin Rush remarked in 1787 that, “The American war is over: but this is far from being the case with the American revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed.”<sup>104</sup> The second act took the form of a contest over the meaning of popular government and free public association on a world stage. The beginning of the French Revolution emboldened popular democratic movements in both Britain and the United States and advocates of revolutionary change introduced novel political methods and institutions.

On the heels of the storming of the Bastille in 1789, Richard Price, a prominent dissenter with strong antislavery opinions, delivered a sermon in London brimming with the optimism of a revolutionary age and signaling the radical ideological commitments of a new generation. He exclaimed: “What an eventful period is this! I am thankful that I have lived to see it... I have lived to see a diffusion of knowledge, which has undermined superstition and error. I have lived to see the rights of men better understood than ever:

---

<sup>103</sup> Henry Knox to Jeremiah Wadsworth, November 28, 1789. GLC, # GLC02437.04422.

<sup>104</sup> Benjamin Rush, “Address to the people of the United States,” in *American Museum* (Philadelphia, 1787), 8.

and nations panting for liberty, which seemed to have lost the idea of it.”<sup>105</sup> Price had been an ardent supporter of the American cause and viewed it as a catalyst for the flowering of freedom throughout Europe.<sup>106</sup> He saw “the ardour for liberty catching and spreading; a general amendment beginning in human affairs.”<sup>107</sup> In the 1790s the entire Atlantic world seemed to be living according to revolutionary time. Some embraced this rapid change and the possibilities of human progress in an “enlightened age.” For others, the rupture in traditional values and institutions signaled the dissolution of civilization and descent into anarchy and barbarism.

Much as Price had anticipated, the American Revolution had a profound impact on the European political scene. British opposition politics had migrated to the colonies but those ideologies were further radicalized in the context of political upheaval and war. The very foundations of the British political system were destabilized as a result.<sup>108</sup> Major John Cartwright helped to found the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI)

---

<sup>105</sup> Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of our Country, Delivered on November 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain in The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal* (London, 1790), 117.

<sup>106</sup> Colin Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 165-168, and passim.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> During the American crisis, a number of liberal Whig members of parliament and like-minded elites founded reform societies dedicated to preventing abuses of power by the Crown and curbing corruption in parliament. Inadequate representation and political patronage fueled concerns that the injustices in the colonies were not isolated but symptoms of a broader crisis in British politics. It has been estimated that the 513 MPs in England and Wales in 1793 were elected by only about 20,000 and represented a population of about eight million. The rapidly growing industrial towns in the North were often underrepresented. Sheffield, with a population of 32,000 had no representative in parliament. The Whig elite had long feared the expansion of power under the reign of George III, but the movement to reform parliament splintered in the 1780s into two elite factions. *The State of the Representation of England and Wales* (London, 1793). On the British politics of the period, see Bonwick, *English Radicals and the American Revolution*; Peter Whiteley, *Lord North: The Prime Minister Who Lost America* (London, 1996).



in 1780, which was inspired by the American Revolution and promoted universal manhood suffrage as well as the dissemination of political information broadly among the people.<sup>109</sup>

While American radicalism challenged the British model of governance, the French Revolution shook the European political world to its core. Once the model of political absolutism, France's monarchical authority was challenged to a degree not necessary in the British-American colonies. William Blake compared the liberation of the French people from monarchy to the African slave breaking his chains: "The millions of spirits immortal were bound in the ruins/ of sulphur heaven/ To wander inslav'd; black, deprest in dark ignorance,/ kept in awe with the whip,/ To worship terrors, bred from the blood of revenge and breath of desire,/ In bestial forms; or more terrible men, till the dawn of our peaceful morning."<sup>110</sup> Combining political and religious radicalism, Blake embodied the confluence of spiritual regeneration and the birth of a new politics.

Demands for *liberty, equality and fraternity* sent tremors across the continent and broadened the popular political sphere of the Atlantic world. John Cartwright echoed the thoughts of many when he proclaimed in a letter: "The French, Sir, are not only asserting their own rights, but they are advancing the general liberties of mankind."<sup>111</sup>

Increasingly, in both Britain and the United States, people were embracing the political identity of "citizen." The role of *citizen* was very different from that of *subject*. British

---

<sup>109</sup> The SCI experienced a sharp decline in membership by the mid-1780s but was revived under the leadership of John Horne Tooke in the 1790s. SCI would serve as the most direct model for the popular associations of the 1790s and the democratic societies in the United States.

<sup>110</sup> William Blake, *The French Revolution* (Book I, Unpublished; Printed, 1791), lines 210-215.

<sup>111</sup> John Cartwright and F. D. Cartwright. 1826. *The life and correspondence of Major Cartwright* (London: H. Colburn, 1826), 182.

subjects had long expressed the “rights of Englishmen” as their birthright. These traditional liberties were often said to derive from an ancient English constitution. Ultimately, however, British subjects were still subject to sovereign authority and political participation could be severely restricted. Developing notions of citizenship emphasized positive privileges and civic responsibility that included political participation. These notions of citizenship often extended beyond the geographically confined region or particular claims to liberties to a cosmopolitan formulation of universal rights and duties.

Defenders of custom and tradition were quick to respond. A pamphlet war over the political consequences of the French Revolution soon broke out in Britain. Prominent MP Edmund Burke penned a strong rebuke of the recent developments in France. Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), written from the perspective of the propertied elite, was a call for tempered expectations and caution during a period of intense change. He feared that French innovations would undermine existing authority and custom. Mary Wollstonecraft and Paine responded in kind with stirring pamphlets of their own in defense of the French cause as an advancement of the “rights of man.”<sup>112</sup> Wollstonecraft wondered, “on what principle Mr Burke could defend American independence... for the whole tenor of his plausible arguments settles slavery on an everlasting foundation.” She criticized his “servile reverence for antiquity, and prudent

---

<sup>112</sup> The pamphlet war began with Richard Price’s *A Discourse on the Love of our Country* (London, 1789), which praised the French Revolution as the fulfillment of the ideals of the Glorious Revolution (1688) in England. Edmund Burke viewed the comparison as a fraud and was deeply pessimistic about the French Revolution’s challenges to authority. Mary Wollstonecraft promptly replied to Burke, arguing in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) that hierarchy is used by the powerful to oppress the weak. See Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

attention to self-interest,” as obstacles to human progress.<sup>113</sup> Paine's pamphlet, *The Rights of Man* (1791) was particularly influential, with wide circulation in both Britain and the United States. He repeated many of his arguments against the English constitution formulated in *Common Sense* but tailored them to the British context. His writing also reflected the language of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* from August 1789. For Paine, natural rights trumped tradition and he encouraged everyone to engage in the political process. The work, while not explicitly antislavery, declared that “Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a property in the generations to follow.”<sup>114</sup> Each generation must consent to their own government and had a right to advocate for its own freedom. This was a challenge to inherited power in all its forms, including slaveholding. Paine sought to put theory into practice by becoming a member of the SCI and helping to shape the popular agenda of the group, serving as an inspiration for the founding of new democratic societies. Burke chose not to reply at length to Wollstonecraft and Paine. In his *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791), he responded only generally and questioned whether his adversaries “deserve any other than the refutation of criminal justice.”<sup>115</sup> His statement was prescient, as the treason and sedition trials soon to follow would literally put many of his political opponents on trial.

In the new United States, the French Revolution was greeted enthusiastically by most and with caution by some. It appeared from the outset that France was profoundly

---

<sup>113</sup> Mary Wolstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (London, 1790), 24.

<sup>114</sup> Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution* (Dublin, 1791), 3.

<sup>115</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Works and Correspondence of ... Edmund Burke* (London: F. & J. Rivington, 1852), 457.

influenced by the American revolutionary experience. France, of course, had been an important ally in the conflict against Britain and participants in the war emerged as leaders in the early stages of the uprising across the Atlantic. The Marquis de Lafayette, one of Washington's most trusted officers, sent the former general, now President of the United States, the key to the Bastille after becoming head of the Paris National Guard. Paine approved, writing to Washington that “the principles of America opened the Bastille...”<sup>116</sup> From London, Catharine Macaulay also wrote to Washington with high hopes:

All the friends of freedom on this side the Atlantic are now rejoicing for an event which, in all probability, has been accelerated by the American Revolution. You not only possess, yourselves, the first of human blessings, but you have been the means of raising that spirit in Europe, which I sincerely hope will, in a short time, extinguish every remain of that barbarous servitude under which all the European nations... have long been subject.<sup>117</sup>

Many American artisans and laborers donned the tricolor cockade and professed their solidarity with French revolutionaries fighting for *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* cautioned that “the many changes in public opinion...on the subject of personal rank and distinction, is not the least striking,” and compared the situation to the English Revolution, noting that “the most enthusiastic Leveller that ever existed could never have hoped for a change such as has been the effect of the recent convulsion.”<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Paine to George Washington, May 1, 1790, in *The Writings Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private, Selected and Published from the Original Manuscripts: With a Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustrations, vol. 10*, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston: American Stationers Co, 1837), 104.

<sup>117</sup> Catherine Macaulay to George Washington, October, 1789, in *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, vol. 4, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston, 1853), 283.

<sup>118</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 11, 1791.

While many feted French victories, others anxiously warned that order in the new republic could be in peril.

American patriots had long claimed that their Revolution had global ramifications. As David Waldstreicher has observed, “The French Revolution completed the transfer of liberty from old England to young America. Freedom and civilization now moved eastward, reversing the previous course.”<sup>119</sup> “Liberty will have another feather in her cap,” proclaimed the *Boston Gazette*, “[t]he seraphic contagion was caught from Britain, it crossed the Atlantic to North America, from whence the flame has been communicated to France.”<sup>120</sup> At this stage, there was little partisan division regarding the developments in France, but the situation would change as politics became radicalized, sparking a democratic revival in America.<sup>121</sup> The popular mobilization of the American Revolution, which some hoped the ratification of the Constitution had quelled, resurfaced in new forms and in novel institutions as the 1790s progressed. Many of the French leaders embraced this logic, referring to the American Revolution as their inspiration.<sup>122</sup>

Lafayette funded a national magazine published by Matthew Carey, an Irish immigrant, entitled *The American Museum* in 1787, which featured essays on political and literary topics from across the Atlantic world, including many on slavery. The periodical became an important political voice. The first issue included a reprinting of

---

<sup>119</sup> David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 127.

<sup>120</sup> *Boston Gazette*, September 7, 1789.

<sup>121</sup> On the initial reaction in the United States to the French Revolution, see Charles D. Hazen, *Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution* (Baltimore, 1897), 139-152.

<sup>122</sup> See Joyce Appleby, “America as a Model for the Radical French Reformers of 1789,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1971), 17-18.

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and an excerpt from Joel Barlow's epic poem "the Vision of Columbus," which the author cited as an example of "American genius." The poem was followed by a piece on slavery, which included an extract from a letter written by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, a leading member of the *Amis des Noirs* in Paris. The subject was a case involving a slave who was accused of killing his overseer on a plantation and was tortured as a result. The author refers to the overseer as a tyrant and notes that "oppression will make even a wise man mad." Claims to the necessity of such torture, he argues, "is a forcible argument for the abolition" of slavery and concludes that "this custom of enslaving and tyrannising over our fellow-creatures, disgraces us not only as christians, but as men, and lovers of liberty; and makes us, as a nation, condemn ourselves by our own declaration of independence...." The writer asked, "Was it for this that a hundred thousand men were killed?" If the new republic failed to abolish slavery, he warned, quoting scripture, God will "come and smite the earth with a curse."<sup>123</sup>

Another piece was aimed directly at the reader's conscience. Entitled, "Address to the heart, on the subject of American Slavery," the author called for all "whose hearts are attuned to sympathy" to obey "the God of the universe" and hear the voices "of his distressed creatures..." "The markets in the west are full of slaves, the author lamented, "[t]he fathers of oppression are there: their flinty hearts regard them as beasts of burden."<sup>124</sup> The lengthy piece is full of appeals to sympathy, sentiment, and Christian morality. The first issue of the *American Museum* set a tone for what was to follow, a

---

<sup>123</sup> *The American Museum, or Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces & C. Prose and Poetical* (Philadelphia: Matthew Caray, 1787), 209-210.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 465-466.

fusion of revolutionary ideology with Christian idealism and practical policy proposals. The magazine was purportedly non-partisan and sought to publish work from across the ideological spectrum, but above all, it engaged the American public in a burgeoning transatlantic discourse over politics and philosophy.

Subsequent issues of the *American Museum* featured a number of antislavery pieces. Its sixth volume, published on the heels of the French Revolution in 1789, was dedicated almost entirely to the cause of abolition and included Samuel Stanhope Smith's "Essay of the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species," and Benjamin Franklin's "Address to the Public from the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery."<sup>125</sup> A long letter from Warner Mifflin appeared in the 1790 issue, wherein he professed that "the practice of slavery is oppressive and inhuman," and ascribed this view to not only the Quakers but "men of all ranks." He quoted scripture, declaring that "He who rules over men, must be just, ruling in the fear of God," and appealed to Americans to emancipate their slaves or risk divine punishment.<sup>126</sup> The magazine also printed public papers from Rhode Island related to the ratification of the Federal Constitution, which included a statement that "a traffic tending to establish or continue the slavery of any part of the human species, is disgraceful to the cause of liberty and humanity—that congress shall, as soon as may be, promote and establish such laws and regulations as may effectually prevent the importation of slaves

---

<sup>125</sup> *The American Museum*, volume VI, 1789. GLC, # GLC09397. Subscribers included Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and George Washington.

<sup>126</sup> *The American Museum or Universal Magazine*, Vol. VII, July - December, 1790 (Philadelphia: Matthew Caray, 1790), 62-63. He did not advocate for immediate emancipation on the national level, however, fearing the chaos that may ensue, he hoped people would become gradually enlightened and abolition "may be brought about in safety."

of every description, into the united states.”<sup>127</sup> The tone of one of America's first national periodicals was firmly antislavery and sometimes even radically so.

While the French Revolution eventually generated a conservative backlash with a strong religious core, during its early stages and into the mid-1790s it was widely celebrated even in American churches.<sup>128</sup> A tendency by scholars to push the date of the conservative reaction to French radicalism backward, however, has contributed to the lack of attention paid to the French Revolution's influence on the abolitionist movement in the early United States.<sup>129</sup> Accounts of religion during the Revolutionary era often portrayed a conflict between Enlightenment rationalism and Christian piety. One Methodist Church history, for example, recalled:

At the time of the American Revolution, the country was inundated with French infidelity; as the French Revolution acted on the American. Many feared for the Ark of God in those days, but there were always faithful men who stood by it, so that it never passed into the hands of the Philistines.<sup>130</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., Appendix II: 4. The magazine also reported that “the Algerines have 4000 christians in slavery,” including on Henry Whiting from Virginia.” As well as intelligence from Cuba approvingly reporting that “a gradual and real abolition of negro slavery is taking place throughout that island.” Ibid., Appendix: 5, 14.

<sup>128</sup> Gary Nash has argued that “Among the 'publishing clergy,' those ecclesiastics whose pulpit oratory was committed to print, such views [in support of the French Revolution] were held with virtual unanimity during the first five years of the Revolution.” See Nash, “The American Clergy and the French Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (July, 1965), 392-412.

<sup>129</sup> Amanda Porterfield, for example, characterizes the revolutionary period as marked by a “trend toward secularity,” and the religious revivals of the nineteenth century as a reversal of course. She notes the ways in which the established clergy seized on the Revolution to advance their Christian vision, but at times seems to take for granted that religious skepticism and democratic radicalism were the ethos of the Revolution, and thus the evangelical revival a reactionary impulse. There was tension between these poles from the beginning, and perhaps the mainstream national culture that resulted was a product of this dialectic. Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, quote on p.4.

<sup>130</sup> James Shaw, *Twelve Years in America: Being Observations on the Country, the People, Institutions and Religion: with Notices of Slavery and the Late War, and Facts and Incidents Illustrative of Ministerial Life and Labor in Illinois: with Notes of Travel Through the United States and Canada* (London: Hamilton, Adams, and Co, 1867), 165.



In reality, churches were eager champions of the French cause and the pulpit was a popular source of opinions on the happenings in France. The Revolution seemed to fulfill the wish that the New World would redeem the Old and serve as a model of regeneration. The American clergy tended to understand the French Revolution through the same apocalyptic lens by which the dramatic events in America were perceived.

The Society of Friends petitioned Congress in 1790, asserting the natural rights of enslaved blacks. Some northern Federalists warned of the political consequences of entertaining such antislavery voices. “Friends to the Government in general think it a most ill judged measure to make so serious a matter of the Quaker Petition about the Negroes,” Nathaniel Gorham wrote to Henry Knox. He even blamed the difficulties in reaching a compromise with the South on the nationalization of war debts as related “to this Quaker Negro business....”<sup>131</sup>

The PAS, SEAST, and the *Amis des Noirs* were closely connected throughout the early 1790s. Shortly after forming, Granville Sharp wrote on behalf of the SEAST to the PAS urging the society to embrace the *Amis des Noirs*, “thus extending our sphere of action.”<sup>132</sup> The British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson was dispatched by the SEAST to Paris in 1789 to help coordinate a united front against the slave trade.<sup>133</sup> While in France, Clarkson developed a close relationship with Brissot and other leaders of the Revolution. He facilitated an extensive correspondence between the SEAST and the *Amis des Noirs* throughout the early 1790s. Moreover, his *Essay on the slavery and Commerce of the*

---

<sup>131</sup> Nathaniel Gorham to Henry Knox, April 17, 1790. GLC, #GLC02437.04588.

<sup>132</sup> *Pennsylvania Packet*, May 22, 1788.

<sup>133</sup> Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism*, 85.

*Human Species*, became a key text of the international movement and was widely circulated in Britain, France, and the United States.<sup>134</sup> After reading the book, Benjamin Rush was so affected that it provoked an extraordinary dream involving a “paradise of negro slaves.” He awoke from this utopian realm of racial harmony by the “noise of a general acclamation of - ANTHONY BENEZET!”<sup>135</sup>

For its part, the PAS actively cultivated a close working relationship with France. James Pemberton celebrated the founding of the Amis des Noirs as a sign that “the principles of justice and sound policy” were advancing throughout the world.<sup>136</sup> Members of the PAS had high hopes that the political Revolution would open a window for swift change on the issue of slavery. The Amis des Noirs made clear that they owed a great debt to American patriots and frequently looked to the abolitionist movement in the United States as a model. Henri Grégoire dedicated his book on the literary achievements of Africans to a host of Americans, including Rush, William Pinkney and Joel Barlow.

A public eulogy was held in Paris for Benjamin Franklin, after his death in 1790, culminating in a period of national mourning and a call for unity between the two republics.<sup>137</sup> One of Franklin's last public acts was to present a petition on behalf of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society to the United States Congress. Some antislavery

---

<sup>134</sup> The PAS distributed the pamphlet and the Amis des Noirs had it translated into French and published in 1789. See Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism*, 35-40; Drescher, *Abolition*, 153-154; and Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard*, 181.

<sup>135</sup> Benjamin Rush, “Paradise of Negro Slaves - A Dream,” in *Essays Literary, Moral and Philosophical* [Philadelphia, 1798], (Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1988), 187, 190.

<sup>136</sup> James Pemberton to Thomas Scott, April 20, 1789, PAS Correspondence, Microfilm, Reel 11.

<sup>137</sup> Annals of Congress, Senate, Dec. 10, 1790. On the correspondence with the French regarding Franklin's death, see Hazen, 148-149; Larry E. Tise, *American Counterrevolution: A Retreat from Liberty: 1783-1800* (Mechanicsburgh, PA, 1998), 4-6.

advocates lamented that the celebration of Franklin was more restrained in the United States than in France—possibly due to his forcefully taking up of the abolitionist cause at the end of his life. It was the Comte de Mirabeau (a leading member of the Amis des Noirs) who dramatically announced his death before the National Assembly, calling on his fellow citizens to celebrate “this mighty genius,” who had conquered “both thunderbolts and tyrants.” Brissot joined the chorus of French leaders in publicly honoring Franklin and his bust was displayed alongside Rousseau and Voltaire as champions of liberty and equality.<sup>138</sup>

The French National Assembly's dramatic display would not be the last time that France set a more radical tone than the United States and Great Britain on the world stage. While the SEAST was primarily interested in ending the slave trade and emphasizing the horrors of the middle passage, French abolitionists began to consider racial politics more broadly. The Revolution had opened up an array of pressing issues related to imperial policy in the French colonies. First among them was the question of whether the large free colored population (roughly equal to that of whites) would be represented in the National Assembly. While not explicitly related to the status of those enslaved, the issue would begin a wide ranging discussion on race and citizenship throughout the Atlantic world.<sup>139</sup>

---

<sup>138</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 230-231; Julian P. Boyd, “The Death of Franklin: The Politics of Mourning in France and the United States,” in Boyd ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, 19:81; and A. Owen Aldridge, *Franklin and His French Contemporaries* (New York: New York University Press, 1957, 212-238.

<sup>139</sup> See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938; Second Revised Edition, New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 36-43; Laurent Dubois *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution & Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of

From the start of the Revolution, Brissot's journal, *Le Patriote Français*, covered the campaign to extend representation to the free colored population in Saint Domingue.<sup>140</sup> Grégoire also took up the cause as well in numerous publications and addresses to the National Assembly.<sup>141</sup> As a result of this advocacy, the Amis des Noirs included mixed-race members and argued for equal citizenship rights for all free men. Clarkson was present at many of these meetings and personally lobbied members of the National Assembly.<sup>142</sup> He warned that if France failed to abolish the slave trade: “the Principles on which She has brought about the revolution will be justly considered to have flowed from a polluted source, her Declaration of the Bill of Rights will be considered as the Declaration of Hypocrites... and She will become the Derision of Europe.”<sup>143</sup> Such a strong appeal to national honor exposed Clarkson to accusations of spying. In fact, the Amis des Noirs as a whole were suspected of attempting to subvert the French Revolution and, in the end, many of its members would be executed during the Terror.

Abolition societies were founded throughout the United States and employed similar rhetoric. These organizations frequently pointed to the hypocrisy of holding slaves in a purportedly “free” nation. Memorials were presented to the House of

---

North Carolina Press, 2004), 99-101; and *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 75-80.

<sup>140</sup> See *Le Patriote Français*, October 9, 1789; November 10, 1789; December 3, 1789.

<sup>141</sup> See especially, *Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur ou sang-mêlés de Saint-Domingue & des autres îles françaises de l'Amérique, adressé à l'Assemblée nationale* (Paris, 1789); and *Lettre aux philanthropes sur les droits, les réclamations des gens de couleur de Saint-Domingue et des autres îles françaises de l'Amérique* (Paris, 1790).

<sup>142</sup> Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism*, 90.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas Clarkson to Bouvet de Cresse, December 1, 1789, quoted in Davis, *Age of Revolution*, 400.

Representatives in December of 1791 from a number of such organizations. Rhode Island's memorial drew attention to a recent controversy related to Barbary pirates making slaves of American citizens.<sup>144</sup> It noted that “our own citizens” should be protected “against a deplorable captivity” by “the cruel pirates of the Mediterranean....” The memorial then adroitly shifted to the protection of Africans from captivity by American and European ships. It insisted that “the people of foreign countries” should be secure from “similar outrages on the sacred rights of humanity from our own citizens....”<sup>145</sup> Drawing an equivalency between the rights of American citizens and those of Africans, the memorial took on a cosmopolitan tone which sought to transcend national and racial prejudice. Ultimately, these rights were the birthright of all human beings and this memorial and others referred to the sovereignty of God and natural law in framing their challenges to temporal authority. Slavery was “against the sacred laws of the great Ruler of the Universe” and abolition would “be pleasing in the sight of the merciful Father of all the families of the earth.”<sup>146</sup>

Above all, the memorials spoke to the inconsistency of slavery with the principles of the American Revolution. Rhode Island emphasized “those great principles of natural and political law, which gave birth to the late Revolution” and Connecticut lamented that “a considerable number of our fellow-men doomed to perpetual bondage, in a country

---

<sup>144</sup> On the controversy over barbary pirates, see Robert Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

<sup>145</sup> *Memorials Presented to the Congress of the United States of America, by the different societies instituted for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, in the States of Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, Published by the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery....* (Philadelphia, 1792), 2.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, 31.

which boasts of her freedom.”<sup>147</sup> New York found slavery “repugnant to the principles of humanity, to those ideas of the rights of mankind which form the basis of the government of the United States, and to the benign sentiments of the Christian religion” and that it “ought not receive any countenance from those who profess to be under the influence of either.”<sup>148</sup>

The abolition society from Maryland, where gradual emancipation had not yet been attempted, offered perhaps the most strongly worded rebuke of slavery. The Maryland members described bondage as “inconsistent with the principles which free-men profess” and concluded that the “rights of man can never be seriously venerated, or long supported, by a people familiar in the abuse of those rights.” Maryland’s memorial was actually the most radical of them all, being the only statement to question the legitimacy of the slave protections in the U.S. Constitution. The Maryland document referred to such protections as an “infraction of the rights of man” and a “defect in the noble structure of our liberties....” Instead, Maryland abolitionists suggested that “we solicit no deviation from the principles established by it” and appealed to the aspects of the Constitution which accorded with the spirit of the Revolution.<sup>149</sup>

#### *Uprisings in Saint Domingue and the Right of Revolution*

The American memorialists recognized that enslaved Africans possessed rights due to the “common nature” of all human beings and that people of all nations were “of

---

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 3, 7.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 24-26.

one blood.”<sup>150</sup> If, as the PAS claimed, there existed an “unalienable right of all men to equal liberty,” did it not follow that those enslaved had a right to rebel?<sup>151</sup> Natural rights theorists like Brissot and Gregoire, echoing Rousseau and Diderot, had long recognized a fundamental right to rebel against unjust enslavement. While they rarely advocated violence, abolitionists in the late eighteenth century understood the tyranny of the slaveholder over any human being to be a violation of sacred rights. Some expressed faith that democratic revolutions could restore to all human beings their natural liberties. In this vein, Phillip Freneau foresaw a time when “philosophy and religion shall deliver a suffering race from those evils; and when the gradual progress of reason will unite nation with nation, and colour with colour, blending the rights of man with expectation of policy and commerce.”<sup>152</sup> The question of the right to rebel became an urgent one in light of slave rebellions in the Caribbean.

As the revolution in France progressed, many wondered what would become of the French colonies in the Americas. To be sure, the political transition exposed weaknesses in the imperial system, a tenuousness that was quickly exploited by the oppressed. Saint Domingue was the leading producer of both sugar and coffee in the world and brought immense profits to planters and investors in France. After a series of revolts in the colony in the early 1790s, and pressure from free colored deputies and prominent members of the *Amis des Noirs*, the National Convention voted in the spring of 1791 to recognize full citizenship rights for free men of color whose parents had been

---

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 4, 2.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>152</sup> *National Gazette*, January 5, 1792.

born free and who owned the requisite property.<sup>153</sup> While not an explicit attack on slavery (in fact it included language which protected colonial autonomy in this regard) the decree recognized that slavery was inconsistent with the “general principles” of the Revolution and expressed “hope that in time the progress of public opinion and enlightenment will produce a change of conditions....”<sup>154</sup> The decree also attacked racism directly and signaled that republican France was accepting of a multiracial citizenry.

American abolitionists took notice. James Pemberton wrote to the *Amis des Noirs*, calling the decree an “advance” that promised to “forward the great business of the abolition of slavery, and of a just recognition of the Rights of Man.”<sup>155</sup> American abolitionists in this period increasingly situated the struggle against slavery as parallel to the fight against oppression and arbitrary power expressed in the American and French Revolutions. By expanding the “rights of man” to include the rights of men of color, the French National Assembly was perceived to be moving toward emancipation according to the logic of Enlightenment progress. The conception of republican citizenship as open to all men, regardless of race, was consistent with the assumptions of the PAS from the start—that all are of one blood.

---

<sup>153</sup> On the history of the Haitian Revolution, see especially C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: The Dial Press, 1938); and Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004). On the influence of the Haitian Revolution in the United States, see Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

<sup>154</sup> “From Explanation of the Reasons for the Decrees of May 13 and 15 Above and Elsewhere on the Status of Persons in the Colonies, Decreed May 29, 1791” in Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, ed. and trans., *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804* (Boston, 2006), 85. “See also; “Decree of the National Assembly of May 15, 1791”, 84.

<sup>155</sup> James Pemberton to Le Amis des Noirs, Aug. 29, 1791, PAS Papers, HSP.



White planters in both Saint Domingue and the American South were, of course, disturbed by such radicalism and sought to protect a system based on racialized slave labor and white privilege. French abolitionists were often the target of their vitriolic attacks as they received blame for inciting slave revolts in the French Caribbean. The *Amis des Noirs* were singled out, in particular, as agents of disorder. In a letter to a wealthy planter, one overseer noted “The varied writings produced in your capital in favor of the Negroes, the unbelievable discussions that led to the May 15 decree, writings that have long circulated in the colony and that the negroes knew about.... all these causes united have finally led the class of the slaves to revolt....”<sup>156</sup> The planters prescribed, therefore, to limit exposure to radical French ideas in the colonies. Likewise, in the United States, the rebellion in Saint Domingue was a cause for concern among slaveholders and attempts were made to insulate some vulnerable regions from people of color and slaves from the island. The presence of emigres with slaves from the Caribbean was deemed dangerous by wealthy southern planters and newspapers frequently cautioned slaveholders to remain vigilant.<sup>157</sup>

Revolutionary ideology, however, continued to spread in the United States. At times, the ideology of the French Revolution framed the situation in Saint Domingue and the system of chattel slavery more generally. Responding to recent events, Phillip Freneau's *National Gazette* published a piece from France which celebrated the "diffusion

---

<sup>156</sup> Pierre Mossut to the Marquis de Gallifet, September 19, 1791, in Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, ed. and trans., *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804*, 93-94.

<sup>157</sup> On refugees from France and Saint Domingue in American during this period, see Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Natalie Dessens, *From Saint-Domingue to New Orleans: Migration and Influences* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007); and Frances Sergeant Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States, 1790-1800* (Baltimore, 1940).

of light issued from the metropolis, at once destructive of ancient prejudices and so completely developing the whole system of the natural rights of man," which had spread to Saint Domingue. The French Revolution was "the boldest experiment, perhaps, that has ever been made since the existence of the civilized state of nations," the author boldly continued, and the colonial rebellion was proof that even the enslaved were developing "their own strength, and the means of breaking their chains..." All must "elevate their minds to a sense of the due dignity and importance of relying upon reason for their guide in all human concerns."<sup>158</sup>

Poets like Freneau seized the opportunity to express their solidarity with the black rebels. Thomas Paine praised the poetry of Sarah Morton, a blue-blooded socialite from Boston who had been swept up in the zeal of revolution.<sup>159</sup> In one of her poems, "The African Chief," published in 1792 as news of the slave uprising swirled, Morton proclaimed: "Does the voice of reason cry, / 'Claim the first right that nature gave, / From the red scourge of bondage fly, / Nor deign to live a burdened slave.'" She lionized the black warrior of the title, writing: "First of his race, he led the band, / Guardless of danger, hurling round, / Till by his red avenging hand, / Full many a despot stained the ground."<sup>160</sup> A poem appearing in the *American Museum* entitled "Lines on the

---

<sup>158</sup> *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), December 22, 1792.

<sup>159</sup> Morton's poems were published in *the Massachusetts Magazine*, the *New York Magazine*, and the *Tablet*. James G. Basker, Susan F. Saldenberg, and Nicole A. Seary, *Slavery in the Founding Era: Literary Contexts* (New York: Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, 2005), 21. Radical Republican Charles Sumner quoted Morton's poem at length in publications prior to the American Civil War. Charles Sumner, *Freedom National; Slavery Sectional* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed and Fields, 1852), 26.

<sup>160</sup> Sarah Morton, "The African Chief," in *Columbia Centinel*, June 9, 1792. The piece was widely distributed and printed in many school readers in the early nineteenth century. See John Shuler, "Calling

devastation of St. Domingo,” framed the violent rebellion as a just punishment for enslavement. The anonymous piece concluded: “’Tis the Sons of iron chains,/ Triumph o'er the burning plains./ Arm'd with judgments, his right hand/ Whelms at once a guilty land:/ Now's repaid the trade in blood:/ Now is loos'd the scourge of God./ Nations! learn this truth divine,/ Hand to hand as one may join,/ In oppression's horrid trade,/ But the wrong shall be repaid.”<sup>161</sup> Sympathetic poets framed the uprising as both the actualization of natural yearnings for freedom and the fulfillment of God's will—sometimes in the same work. These writers were in the minority, but the publication of their work in widely distributed magazines of the day speaks to the potency of both revolutionary ideology and religious jeremiad.

Democratic newspapers also featured stories sympathetic to the slave rebel cause. Abraham Bishop's series of essays, reprinted in many democratic newspapers, entitled “The Rights of Black Men” are further evidence of a revolutionary antislavery sentiment coalescing in the early 1790s.<sup>162</sup> Having recently returned from France, Bishop explicitly connected the principles of the American and French Revolutions with the rebellion in the French Caribbean. “We believe,” he proclaimed, “that Freedom is the natural right of all rational beings, and we know that the Blacks have never voluntarily resigned that

---

Out Liberty: Human Rights Discourse and Early American Literature,” PhD Dissertation, City University of New York, 2007, 66, n28.

<sup>161</sup> *The American Museum; or Universal Magazine* (Philadelphia: M. Carey, 1792), Part II: 13. In the same issue, see “Mulattoes of St. Domingo,” 39.

<sup>162</sup> On Abraham Bishop's career, see Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 177-183, 208-210, 221-222, 244-245; and Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 58-59.

freedom.”<sup>163</sup> But Bishop's view was controversial and his pieces received criticism for glorifying slave violence. He replied by encouraging his compatriots to remain dedicated to revolutionary principles and attempted to expose the hypocrisy of French supporters. He asked, “Shall we now sacrifice principle to a paltry partiality for colour? Can we believe that the French people were ever oppressed as the Blacks have been?”<sup>164</sup>

Even in a slave state such as Maryland, fiery antislavery pamphlets were circulated at the beginning of the decade. Dr. George Buchanan delivered such a speech before the Maryland Abolition Society on the Fourth of July, which soon thereafter was published and widely distributed. Buchanan, a physician trained in Paris and Edinburgh as well as a member of the American Philosophical Society, was a man of the Enlightenment. He was also the son of a Revolutionary War general and a vocal democrat.<sup>165</sup>

From the start, Buchanan's oration insisted on equality and the errors of racial prejudice. “Let an impartial view of man be taken” he insisted, framing his broader argument, “the *white*, *swarthy* and *black*, will be all linked together, and at once point out their equality.” Arbitrary differences in appearance are caused by environment, he argued, and “serve as flimsy pretexts” for enslavement. He blamed slavery on a lust for power, greed, and the pursuit of profit. Slavery “was too lucrative to be totally

---

<sup>163</sup> Abraham Bishop, “The Rights of Black Men, I,” in Tim Matthewson, “Abraham Bishop, 'The Rights of Black Men' and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Summer, 1982), 150.

<sup>164</sup> “Rights of Black Men, III,” *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>165</sup> William Frederick Poole, *Anti-Slavery Opinions Before the Year 1800: Read Before the Cincinnati Literary Club, November 16, 1872* (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1873), 19. Also see Thomas J. Scharf, *The Chronicles of Baltimore: Being a Complete History of "Baltimore Town" and Baltimore City from the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (Baltimore: Turnbull Bros, 1874), 258-259.

eradicated” in ancient times, but he hoped that through “social refinement” and Enlightenment progress, slavery may be totally abolished.<sup>166</sup>

Time was of the essence, though, and Buchanan recognized that the moment was right for revolutionary action on slavery. “In the first struggles for American freedom,” he reminded his audience, “one of the most noble sentiments that ever adorned the human breast, was loudly proclaimed in all her councils—Deeply penetrated with a sense of *Equality*, they held it as a fixed principle, '*that all men are by nature and of right ought to be free*'....” After appealing to the legacy of the American Revolution, he spoke to the burgeoning sense of American mission in the world. Americans were “Emancipated from the shackles of despotism” and were now “Renowned in history” for their “valour,” “wisdom” and were the best hope for achieving “the highest eminence of human perfection.” America had “diffused a spirit of Liberty throughout the world” and “set examples of heroism...”<sup>167</sup> These appeals may have served to flatter Americans, but they could also inspire them to radical action. American independence had seemed nearly impossible in the years leading up to the Revolution, but it had been achieved. Buchanan, along with others, urged patriots to take up a related cause with equal fervor and perfect the new republic. This narrative of American exceptionalism gained currency after the French Revolution, when citizens of the United States perceived the French cause to be an extension of their own.

---

<sup>166</sup> George Buchanan, *An Oration Upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery. Delivered...July 4th, 1791* (Baltimore, 1793), 7-8.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-14.

Having already struck the chord of American patriotism, Buchanan turned to the monstrosity that the new nation had become. In a section which reads like a pamphlet from Paine, Buchanan declaimed how America “wantonly abuses the *Rights of Man*, and willingly sacrifices her liberty at the altar of slavery....” He warned that slavery is “the most implacable enemy of your country” and “threatens you with destruction.” Just as soon as the “streams of liberty” had begun to flow they were becoming “polluted” by the corrupting influence of the slave system. Like Bishop, he encouraged lovers of liberty to identify with the enslaved blacks who would be justified in rebelling against such a tyrannical system. In a state with a substantial enslaved population, Buchanan called on citizens to “exterminate the pest of slavery from your land.” “In this enlightened period, when the Rights of Man is the topick of political controversy, and slavery is considered not only unnatural but unlawful, why do you not step forward and compleat [sic] the glorious works you have begun,” he asked, “and extend the merciful hand to the unfortunate Blacks? Why do you not...abolish slavery in your country?” Not only was this a call to action for those animated by revolutionary fervor, but also a warning to those who continue to stand idly by. He warned of bloodshed and revenge if emancipation could not be accomplished peacefully. What if slaves with help from their allies rise up violently against their oppressors? He queried. What if “the fire of Liberty shall be kindled amongst them?”<sup>168</sup> Slaveholders themselves were the targets of Buchanan's vitriol. He encouraged them to sever their connections with slavery once and for all.

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 13, 15, 17.

Indeed, slaveholders throughout the South manumitted slaves in relatively large numbers throughout the early 1790s, many justifying their decisions in the language of revolutionary liberation and national regeneration. Thomas Harrison wrote to the PAS in the spring of 1787 reporting:

It will be pleasing to the Friends of Humanity to hear that a young Man who traveled in Baltimore Circuit as a preacher amongst the Methodists the last 12 months has obtained the manumition [sic] of 229 Slaves belonging to people of that Community, his name is Wolman Hickson—it revived in my mind the original Wolman whose memory is dear to me.<sup>169</sup>

Hickson, a Methodist, had been inspired by deep religious beliefs to release those he had held in bondage, and he was not alone. Robert Carter, one of Virginia's wealthiest slaveholders, had been converted to evangelical Christianity during the Revolutionary War and joined a Baptist church in 1778. He came to reject slavery, despite inheriting and enslaving hundreds of human beings. In a letter to a friend in London, he wrote that “The toleration of slavery indicates great depravity of mind.”<sup>170</sup> By 1790, Carter lamented that the “Liberation of the blacks, here, is my greatest difficulty—it is a Subject that our Legislature will not take up—and it appears to me that Judgments will follow us so long as the bar is held up.”<sup>171</sup> In 1791, in accordance with his disdain for the institution, he took matters into his own hands and manumitted all of his slaves,

---

<sup>169</sup> Thomas Harrison to PAS, Philadelphia, May 21, 1787, PAS, Loose Correspondence, incoming: 1784-1795, Boxes 34-50, PAS papers, HSP.

<sup>170</sup> Quoted in Robert Baylor Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, 1894), 158.

<sup>171</sup> Robert Carter to Samuel Jones, Westmoreland County, VA, November 24, 1790, McKesson Collection, HSP.

amounting to about five hundred people, the largest private emancipation in U.S. history.<sup>172</sup> A manumission on this scale would have been impossible only ten years prior.

By 1792, Carter had left the Baptists after encountering the writings of the philosopher, scientist, and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg.<sup>173</sup> His interest in radical antinomian spirituality helps us to comprehend his motivations in opposing slavery. Swedenborg wrote that Christianity had become corrupted and that the only way to connect with God was to turn inward. All human beings had the capacity for unmediated moral introspection. In fact, he argued, blacks were even more able to access uncorrupted truths. “The Africans comprehended and received these [divine truths],” Swedenborg claimed, “because they think more interiorly and spiritually than others.”<sup>174</sup> Such sentiments emphasized the eminence of conscience and likely resonated with Carter on these terms. Others influenced by Swedenborg, such as William Blake and C.B. Wadström had become radical in their antislavery views.<sup>175</sup> Another, August Nordenskiöld, wrote a widely distributed antislavery pamphlet in 1789 calling for the

---

<sup>172</sup> While Virginia law now allowed for private manumission, the process was required to be gradual in some cases. Robert Carter was required to support some of the younger slaves even after he had prepared for their release. On Virginia manumission laws, see Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006). There was a pro-slavery backlash to this wave of manumissions. See Fredrika Teute Schmidt and Barbara Ripel Wilhelm, “Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 30 (January 1973).

<sup>173</sup> Carter refers to Swedenborg in a letter explaining why he is withdrawing his son from Providence College. Carter to Samuel Jones, Oct 29, 1792, McKesson Collection, HSP.

<sup>174</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Continuation on the Last Judgment* (London, 1763), 75. As another example, Swedenborg wrote that, “The African people are more capable of enlightenment than all other peoples on this earth, because they are of such character as to think interiorly and thus to accept truths and acknowledge them.” Swedenborg, *The Last Judgment* (London, 1758), 118.

<sup>175</sup> Swedenborg's religious ideas were often associated with radical political ideas as well. See E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 131-151; and Robert Rix *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2007), Chapter 4.



abolition of slavery and the development of a free-black colony based on Swedenborg's principles in Sierra Leone.<sup>176</sup> The political plans included universal male suffrage and broad protection of basic civil liberties. Political democracy and freedom were seen as prerequisites to “Spiritual Liberty” and regeneration.<sup>177</sup> The pamphlet's appeal in some circles reflects the dual desires to pursue political renewal alongside religious enlightenment.<sup>178</sup>

Inspired by an atmosphere of revolution, Carter was one of many who manumitted their slaves during the 1790s. Richard Randolph, an idealistic, privileged, Virginia planter and cousin of Thomas Jefferson, left a will that liberated his slaves and identified with Enlightenment radicalism. As the French Revolution continued to influence American politics, Randolph left his former slaves parcels of land by which to make a new start in a nation often hostile to their interests, testifying to his commitment to racial equality. Employing similar language to Buchanan, he characterized the slave system as a “monstrous tyranny” and referred to its perpetrators as “usurpers” of rights and “tormentors” who use “torture” for their own “wealth and enjoyment,” and should be grouped with other “tyrants of the earth” such as “throned despots.” Moreover, his appeals to the “sacred law of nature,” and the “rights of man,” put on full display his credentials as a passionate democrat, supporter of the French Revolution, and promoter of

---

<sup>176</sup> August Nordenskiöld, *Plan for a Free Community upon the Coast of Africa under the Protection of Great Britain; but Intirely Independent of All European Laws and Governments* (London, 1789).

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>178</sup> Many leading lights of the antislavery movement of the nineteenth century were readers of Swedenborg, including William Blake, Lydia Maria Child, Lucretia Mott, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

the principles of the radical Enlightenment.<sup>179</sup> He, and others who set slaves at liberty, embodied the potential for revolutionary ideas to be put into practice.<sup>180</sup>

Syphax Brown, one of those individuals released from bondage by Randolph's will, also embodied the transformative potential of the age. Brown, along with others, would establish a vibrant and lasting free black community in Virginia. He would also defend himself in court against the accusations of a white landowner. Brown was not only vindicated of the charges, but successfully sued the man for damages.<sup>181</sup> This was not an isolated incident. The history of the community speaks to the assertiveness and capabilities of formerly enslaved blacks. They too would echo the language of the American and French Revolutions in asserting their equality, as when Gabriel Prosser planned a slave rebellion that he hoped would include “French people” along with “poor white people” who would surely rally to the banner of “death or liberty.”<sup>182</sup>

---

<sup>179</sup> Richard Randolph, *Will Book for 1797*, County Clerk's Office of Prince Edward County, Virginia. In more detail, it reads: “To make retribution, as far as I am able, to an unfortunate race of bondmen, over whom my ancestors have usurped and exercised the most lawless and monstrous tyranny, and in whom my countrymen (by their iniquitous laws, in contradiction of their own declaration of rights, and in violation of every sacred law of nature; of the inherent, inalienable and imprescriptible rights of man, and of every principle of moral and political honesty) have vested me with absolute property; to express my abhorrence of the theory as well as infamous practice of usurping the rights of our fellow creatures, equally entitled with ourselves to the enjoyment of liberty and happiness;... for the aforesaid purposes and, with an indignation, too great for utterance, at the tyrants of the earth from the throned despot of a whole nation to the most despicable, but not less infamous, petty tormentors of single wretched slaves, whose torture constitutes his wealth and enjoyment, I do hereby declare that it is my will and desire, nay most anxious wish that my negroes, all of them, be liberated, and I do declare them by this writing free and emancipated to all intents and purposes whatsoever.”

<sup>180</sup> For background on Richard Randolph and the free black Americans who founded the community of Israel Hill in Prince Edward County, VA, see Melvin Patrick Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

<sup>181</sup> For more on Syphax Brown, see *Ibid.*, 43-45.

<sup>182</sup> Quoted in Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 51. Also see Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 157, Chapter 5.

*Antislavery Activism in the Kentucky*

Following the Northwest Ordinance, residents in the western lands began to consider organizing into separate states. From the start, western newspapers reported events in France alongside local stories. John Bradford, the brash young editor of the *Kentucky Gazette*, made clear from the beginning of the French Revolution that Kentuckians would be kept well informed:

Every citizen of the World, every friend of the rights of mankind and more especially every citizen of the United States, must feel interested in the Kingdom of France. The following authentic and judicious Journal of Events, as they transpired from day to day, at the crisis of the glorious Revolution, will we trust, be acceptable to our readers.<sup>183</sup>

Following this announcement was an account of the storming of the Bastille and an address by Mirabeau. Kentucky's primary newspaper extensively covered major events occurring across the Atlantic and the tone was usually celebratory. "The affairs of France have long exhibited an interesting spectacle to mankind," one story proclaimed, "friends of the human race have rejoiced in the downfall of one of the most stupendous fabrics ever erected by the demon of despotism...." The American Revolution was extended abroad and the "progress that has been made...is truly astonishing."<sup>184</sup> The news from France was often received months later in Kentucky, but it seems that residents in the western United States were captivated nonetheless.

Kentuckians received news from revolutionary France as they awaited their own state constitutional convention. In 1792, Samuel McDowell wrote to his colleague Andrew Reid with anxious anticipation of the upcoming deliberations. "Our Grand

---

<sup>183</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, November 21, 1789.

<sup>184</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, October 22, 1791.

Convention sits in April next,” McDowell observed, “I suppose there will be a great revolution then.”<sup>185</sup> The debates surrounding the convention were heated and many perceived the process through the lens of the democratic changes unfolding precipitously overseas. For ordinary people throughout the young United States, the stakes fixed to the French Revolution's success were extremely high. Reid, for example, wrote that if France is defeated, “Republicanism will be at an end probably during the present age—and America may dread the consequence.”<sup>186</sup> The very future of democratic government in America hung in the balance.

For abolitionists, the convention was a key opportunity to prohibit slavery in the region and prevent the further spread of the institution in the West. By 1790 there were already over twelve-thousand people held in bondage in Kentucky. Just a decade later that number would triple to about forty-thousand.<sup>187</sup> In the town of Lexington, a cultural center, slaves made up nearly thirty-five percent of the population in 1810.<sup>188</sup> In the heady days following the American Revolution, however, many had high hopes that the practice could be cut off at the pass, with the state conventions as mechanisms by which to do so.

Increasingly, abolitionists drew parallels between the battles of Americans in the West and the French against monarchy, as well as the struggles of the enslaved against a

---

<sup>185</sup> Samuel McDowell, Jr. to Andrew Reid, March 16, 1792, McDowell Family Letters, KHS.

<sup>186</sup> Andrew Reid to Ephraim McDowell, October 13, 1793, McDowell Family Letters, KHS.

<sup>187</sup> *Century of Population Growth: From the First Census of the United States to the Twelfth, 1790-1900* (Washington: U.S. G.P.O, 1909), 133.

<sup>188</sup> Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of the Western Cities, 1790-1830* (Cambridge, 1959), 49-50. Of a reported 1,475 people in 1798, 360 were counted as “negroes” in a census administered by the board of trustees. See *Kentucky Gazette*, “Census of the Town,” May 8, 1798.

despotic system. Kentucky abolitionist David Rice, for example, vocally supported the uprisings in Saint Domingue and compared the rebel slaves to the patriots who had sacrificed their lives for liberty in the American and French Revolutions. Rice, who had himself fought in the American Revolutionary War, declared on the floor of the Kentucky Convention:

Let us turn our eyes to the West-Indies; and there learn the melancholy effects of this wretched policy. We may there read them written with the blood of thousands. There you may see the sable, let me say, the brave sons of Africa engaged in a noble conflict with their inveterate foes. There you may see thousands fired with a generous refinement of the greatest injuries, and bravely sacrificing their lives on the altar of liberty.<sup>189</sup>

These were not the expressions of a man on the fringes of society. Rice was an important delegate and both a political and religious leader in Kentucky. He urged supporters of the French Revolution in his state to turn against economic as well as political slavery.

Father Rice, as he was respectfully known, was a Presbyterian minister who had moved to Kentucky from Virginia following the war. Upon his arrival, he immediately established a number of churches. Like Anthony Benezet and Benjamin Rush, he was also highly committed to education. He began the first grammar school in Kentucky and was a founder of the Transylvania Seminary—which was to become Transylvania University—the leading institution of higher learning in the region.<sup>190</sup> He emerged as a

---

<sup>189</sup> David Rice, Speech delivered in the Convention for the formation of the Constitution of the State of Kentucky, assembled at Danville, in April 1792. *Constitutional Convention Journal, 1788-1792*, KHS. Also published as David Rice, *A Kentucky Protest Against Slavery*, (New York, 1812), quote from p.6. For a discussion of Rice's military service, see Vernon F. Martin, "Father Rice, the Preacher who Followed the Frontier," *FCHQ* 29 (Oct. 1955), 325.

<sup>190</sup> Asa Earl Martin, *The Anti-Slavery Movement in Kentucky Prior to 1850* (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 12-13. David Rice was chairman of the first board meeting of Transylvania University in 1783. See Walter Wilson Jennings, *Transylvania: Pioneer University of the West* (New York, 1955), 6.

leading intellectual light of the West and a prominent voice in a growing abolitionist movement.

Rice's writings were widely read and fused the language of conscience with the revolutionary rhetoric of the radical Enlightenment reverberating on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1790s.<sup>191</sup> To support legal slavery “in a land of religious liberty” was among “the severest persecutions,” he argued, and served “to rob multitudes of their religious privileges, and the rights of conscience.” Rice was also adept at marshaling the language of revolution, recalling the *spirit of seventy-six* as he insisted that the enslaved should not be “bound to obey the law of the land” to which they had “never consented...” and denounced those who would deprive an individual “of his liberty and the means of happiness.”<sup>192</sup>

A Democratic-Republican and leading member of the Kentucky Abolition Society, Rice sought to put principle into practice, introducing an emancipation clause at the State Constitutional Convention held in Danville. Delivering a stirring address before the Convention, he forcefully reasoned:

A Slave claims his freedom; he pleads that he is a man, that he was by nature free, that he has not forfeited his freedom, nor relinquished it. Now unless his master can prove that he is not a man, that was not born free, or that he has forfeited or relinquished his freedom, he must be judged free, the justice of his claim must be acknowledged.<sup>193</sup>

---

<sup>191</sup> Betty Fladeland contends that Rice's *Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy* was “Perhaps the most widely read of any antislavery pamphlet published at that time.” Fladeland, *Men and Brothers*, 58-59.

<sup>192</sup> Philanthropos [David Rice], *Slavery inconsistent*, 9,10.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

What appeared to Rice as a self-evident truth, however, was contested by defenders of slavery. To challenge the undeniable emancipationist underpinnings of the radical Enlightenment required rationalizations and justifications based on racist assumptions. Some attempted to demonstrate that the enslaved were not men, or at least not men who, in the infamous words of Chief Justice Robert Taney, possessed “rights that the white man was bound to respect.”

But in 1792, sixty-five years before the Dred Scott decision made strikingly clear that African Americans were living under a “white man's government,” intellectuals, clergy, politicians, and ordinary people throughout the United States were coming to recognize the gross hypocrisy of holding slaves in a democratic republic and sought to bring the practice to an end. Rice made the comparison explicit. The slave, he argued, is “in a state of war with his master, his civil rulers and every member of that society. They are all his declared enemies, having, in him, made war upon almost everything dear to a human creature.” To Rice, violence was fully justified given these circumstances and all of society was complicit. “The injury done him... is much greater than was the cause of war between us and Britain.” Political slavery and economic slavery both justified resistance and Rice was unafraid to lionize the rebels in Saint Domingue, even in the presence of slaveholders at the Convention, as brothers in arms “carrying on war in defence of principles....”<sup>194</sup>

Rice also warned that unless Kentucky and the nation as a whole turned away from slavery, the entire republican project would likely collapse. “Consistent justice,” he proclaimed, “is the solid basis on which the fabrick of government will rest securely; take

---

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

this away, and the building totters, and is liable to fall before every blast....” Speaking in republican terms, he observed that “Slavery naturally tends to sap the foundations of political virtue... absolutely necessary for the happiness and prosperity of a free people.” His was a plea not only to respect the rights and natural liberty of all, but also to secure the republic for future generations. The fatal error of racism, furthermore, rendered toleration of slavery as an especially dangerous situation. He warned that slaveholders are made tyrants with a lust for power and questioned whether “the color of my skin [will] prove a sufficient defense against their injustice and cruelty? Will the particular circumstance of my ancestors being born in Europe, and not Africa, defend me?”<sup>195</sup> Rice recognized the arbitrary nature of racial categorization and drew on the radical Enlightenment's suspicion of prejudice to demystify the institution.

What is particularly striking about Rice's vision is the extent to which he foresaw a future republic as a multi-racial one. He expressed faith in the ability for people to overcome prejudice and embrace free blacks into the polity. He viewed Kentucky's decision on slavery as a momentous one in this regard. The West could become “an asylum for the miserable, a land of liberty” and a place where free people can live apart from slavery and oppression. “The first thing to be done” he declared, is to decide “*unconditionally to put an end to slavery in this state*. This, I conceive, properly belongs to the convention, which they can easily effect, by working the principle into the constitution they are to frame.”<sup>196</sup> Rice's vision for the West as an asylum for refugees of

---

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 30.



racial and economic oppression takes Thomas Jefferson's desire for an "empire of liberty" and extends it beyond the narrow confines of white "civilization."

Rice and his allies were challenged by a slaveholding elite, most former Virginians such as George Nicholas, who insisted on the necessity of slave labor for the growth and development of the region.<sup>197</sup> Despite the fact that the vast majority of the delegates at the Convention owned slaves, the measure failed on a relatively close vote of twenty-six to sixteen. In 1792, about twenty-three percent of white families owned slaves in Kentucky. That percentage would hold firm as the population grew exponentially throughout the antebellum period.<sup>198</sup>

Kentucky land speculator Gilbert Imlay was one of many who regretted the Kentucky convention's failure to end slavery in the state. "While weak men dread what they call innovation," he observed, "amendments will be very tardy.... However, an era will arrive when States... will tear from the fair face of reason, the odious mark which has so long obscured her lustre." He criticized not only the tyrannical tendencies of slaveholders but also their racism. Thomas Jefferson's description of blacks as intellectually, morally, and physically inferior, expressed in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), aroused Imlay's "pity and indignation." In a widely distributed pamphlet originally published in 1793,<sup>199</sup> he denounced Jefferson's views as "paltry sophistry" and evidence that "slavery destroys the energy of the human mind...." While he had love for

---

<sup>197</sup> John D. Wright Jr., *Transylvania: Tutor to the West* (Lexington, KY, 1975), 18.

<sup>198</sup> James Ramage, *Kentucky Rising*, 258; U.S. Census, 1860.

<sup>199</sup> Imlay's *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory* was a published selection of letters from he to a friend in London about life and politics in the Western territories. It went through multiple editions: in 1793 (London, Dublin, New York, and Berlin); 1795 (an expanded edition in London), and in 1797 (another London edition).

Jefferson's political principles and his authorship of the Declaration of Independence, Imlay felt that the Virginian's mind had been “warped by education,” habit, and “disgraceful” prejudice.<sup>200</sup>

By 1793, Imlay was living in France as a diplomat and connected with a circle that included Thomas Paine, Joel Barlow, Thomas Cooper, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, and Mary Wolstonecraft (who was also his lover at the time).<sup>201</sup> Through his pamphlet, he entered the raging debate over the French Revolution and its principles throughout the Atlantic world.<sup>202</sup> In his letter, the Kentucky democrat assured his friend from across the Atlantic that Jefferson's racism did not reflect “the general sentiments of the people of America.” Like many of his Enlightenment-inspired contemporaries, Imlay, perhaps naively, thought slavery and racial bias were withering away. In addition to his faith in the American public, he hoped that rising antislavery sentiment in Europe might “give a stab to the principles of domestic tyranny, and fix an odium upon those leachers of human blood, as flagrant as they are contemptible.”<sup>203</sup> Born and raised in the backcountry, Imlay was a fierce critic of elitism, unproductive aristocrats, and tyrannical slaveholders.

---

<sup>200</sup> Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory* (Dublin, 1793), 204, 201.

<sup>201</sup> Wil Verhoeven, “Gilbert Imlay and the Triangular Trade,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), 828-829. Thomas Clio Rickman names Imlay as one of Paine's close friends in France. Rickman, *Life of Thomas Paine*, in *Life and Writings of Thomas Paine: Containing a Biography by Thomas Clio Rickman* (New York, 1908), 1:53. On Paine's circle in France, see Moncure Daniel Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1892), 2: 61-76.

<sup>202</sup> Wil Verhoeven writes that the pamphlet's “promise of a Rousseausque return to nature in the New World's pristine wilderness attracted many.” Verhoeven, “Imlay and the Triangular Trade,” 830.

<sup>203</sup> Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory* (Dublin, 1793), 204, 185, 201-202.

A strong advocate of emancipation, Imlay criticized the gradualism and racism of some antislavery voices. His opposition to slavery was firmly rooted in the ideology of the American Revolution. “[I]n contending for the birthright of freedom, we have learned to feel for the bondage of others;” he declared, “and in the libations we offer to the bright goddess of liberty, we contemplate an emancipation of the slaves of this country, as honourable to themselves as it will be glorious to us.” Black skin, he concluded after reviewing “the daily testimony of the most enlightened philosophers of the present age,” was not fixed in nature, but is the mere effect of climate....” He was therefore especially offended by Jefferson's suggestion that emancipated blacks should be excluded from the republic based on their race, arguing that “banishing a numerous class of men who might be made useful citizens” would be unjust and “impolitic.” Moreover, such concerns merely delayed the execution of emancipation and “thus a most odious tyranny would be prolonged.”<sup>204</sup>

Higher law theory was the cornerstone of Imlay's antislavery radicalism. In fact, a secularized antinomianism emerged throughout the radical republican discourse of the period. “There is no law in nature which binds one man to another; Imlay asserted, “and laws which are not founded in the principles of reason and truth, invalidate themselves.” He insisted that “[t]here is no statute which gives power to a white man to exercise despotism over a man because he is black...it is repugnant to the code of nature.” Imlay

---

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 185, 191, 187.

therefore advocated for a “complete emancipation” but conceded that the politics of situation made a gradual plan similar to Pennsylvania's more likely.<sup>205</sup>

Imlay envisioned a future multiracial republic in the United States. The formerly enslaved, he reasoned, should settled on “tracts of lands” that can be parceled out by the state, so that they may become “little farms” for the cultivation of crops.<sup>206</sup> He had no doubt that blacks would succeed on par with whites if given opportunity because he was convinced of their equality, concluding that “it is certain we are essentially the same in shape and intellect.”<sup>207</sup> Perhaps the strongest evidence of Imlay's optimism and the possibilities opened up by the radicalism of the Age of the Revolution was his perception of interracial marriage. Once blacks became integrated freely into society, there would “be some whites who would marry blacks for the sake of property; and, no doubt, when prejudices are worn away, they would unite from more tender and delicate sentiments.”<sup>208</sup> America, for Imlay, would unite “white and black” and racial prejudice would wither away as truth and reason progressed. Even after the United States Constitutional Convention failed to end slavery, some antislavery voices maintained faith that the American Revolution was not yet over. Democratic radicals believed the Revolution would only be complete when republican values were fully realized through abolition and for some of the more extreme, through racial integration and multi-racial citizenship.

---

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 187-189.

<sup>206</sup> Imlay recognized that land had “been impoverished by the pernicious cultivation of tobacco” and hoped that settling freed blacks there would restore these tracts to their previous “fecundity.” Ibid., 188.

<sup>207</sup> He cited Phillis Wheatley as an example of black achievement and quoted one of her poems at length. Ibid., 198-199.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 194, 189.

Nevertheless, failure to place slavery on a path to extinction on the national level was compounded by a lack of abolitionist success at numerous state conventions in the South. While these lost opportunities were disheartening to those pushing for serious challenges to the institution, events in the Caribbean and from across the Atlantic in revolutionary France would provide new hope. The same month that Rice was delivering his speech to the Kentucky convention, war broke out in Europe.

Some perceived the ratification of the United States' Constitution as a death blow to the abolitionist movement. The numerous compromises with slaveholders negotiated at the Convention insulated the institution from attack, but also opened the way to national challenges. The rise of evangelical Christianity, embracing a post-millennial vision that actively sought to establish peace and virtue on earth, contributed to a cultural climate where slaveholders were put on the defensive. The fall of monarchy in France and a transition to republican government further breathed new life into a struggling movement. The most radical antislavery activists and thinkers were emboldened by the French Revolution, considering it an extension of the American patriot cause and a sign that the traditions of the past, including slavery, were crumbling. A cosmopolitan outlook emerged, even among ordinary Americans, and transatlantic connections amongst supporters of radical change were strengthened and new networks formed. These included both political and religious communications, as well as the spread of various types of reform societies dedicated to ushering in a new age.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“A BLOW AT THE ROOT”:

THE TRANSATLANTIC POLITICS OF DEMOCRACY AND EMANCIPATION,

1793-1798

HAPLESS descendant of old Afric's race,  
Check the big tear that damps thy aged face;  
See o'er the south, the Gaulic flag unfurl'd,  
Proclaiming peace and freedom to the world:  
That splendid sun that gilds the Indian isles,  
On tyrants frown, but on your brethren smiles;  
Anon Columbia'll rouse, from prej'dice freed,  
To share the glories of that godlike deed;  
E'er long (to set no more) shall Freedom rise,  
Emancipate the world, and glad the skies.<sup>1</sup>

- *Anonymous*, New York, 1797

In September of 1792, Léger-Félicité Sonthonax landed in Saint Domingue to enforce the decree by the French National Convention guaranteeing equal political rights to the free people of color in the colony.<sup>2</sup> Just months later, another revolutionary and member of the *Amis des Noirs* embarked for the Americas—Edmond-Charles Genet, first minister from France. Genet arrived in Charleston, South Carolina with an ambitious mission to mobilize the citizens of a young American republic for action in a world war—a conflict which, according to his framing, pitted the liberating forces of revolutionary democracy against a league of despotism and monarchy. He was greeted in South Carolina and

---

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous, *The American in Algiers, or The Patriot of Seventy-Six in Captivity* (New York, 1797).

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Louis Stein, *Leger-Felicite Sonthonax: The Lost Sentinel of the Republic* (London, 1985).

throughout the slaveholding South with grand festivals enthusiastically attended by wealthy coastal planters and backcountry yeomen alike.<sup>3</sup> This reception is surprising given Genet's vocal abolitionism and commitment to radical democratic revolution. He spoke out for the “equality of skin” and, like Diderot before him, equated chattel bondage with political despotism. He considered the multitude of émigrés from Saint Domingue, who often fled to the United States with enslaved captives in tow, to be racist tyrants.<sup>4</sup>

To the dismay of slaveholding émigrés, shortly after Genet's arrival, the National Convention in Paris radically proclaimed the emancipation of all slaves in the French colonies—ratifying the August 1793 general emancipation decree of Sonthonax and codifying the will of the rebels.<sup>5</sup> While the commission in Saint Domingue rallied former slaves, Genet and his delegates throughout the United States began to assemble a “Legion of the Republic,” not only to defend against counter-revolutionaries, but to take the offensive in spreading democracy throughout the hemisphere. Invasions of Spanish Florida and Louisiana as well as British Canada were on France's agenda.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> On Genet's enthusiastic reception, see Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997), 139-140; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 133-136; Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic 1788-1800* (New York, 1993), 330-373; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785-1800*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 153-154; and Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 86-88. On the Genet mission in general, see Harry Ammon, *The Genet Mission* (New York, 1973); *The Career of Edmond Charles Genet* (New York, 1928); and O'Brien, *The Long Affair*, Chapter 5.

<sup>4</sup> Edmond Genet to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, November, 1793, Genet Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>5</sup> On the reaction of French émigrés to the proclamation, see François Furstenberg, *When the United States Spoke French* (New York: Penguin, 2014), 115-117.

<sup>6</sup> On Genet's plans for military operations in North America, see Jane G. Landers, “Rebellion and Royalism in Spanish Florida: The French Revolution on Spain's Northern Colonial Frontier,” in David Barry Gaspar and David Patrick Geggus, eds., *A Turbulent Time: The French Revolution and the Greater Caribbean* (Bloomington, 1997), 156-77; and Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Jackson, MI, 2005), 74-78.

Genet's vision was consistent with the objectives and ideology of the ascendant Girondin faction in France, which included abolitionists such as Jacques-Pierre Brissot and Nicolas de Condorcet, as well as Americans Thomas Paine and Joel Barlow. In fact, Barlow, in cooperation with Gilbert Imlay, enabled Genet's plans for mobilizing the American West in defense of a cosmopolitan conception of republicanism. Barlow perceived France's declaration of war against Spain as an opportunity for "the liberation of the Spanish Colonies," and hoped that the seizing of Louisiana would spread republican liberty to the region. He, in cooperation with Imlay and Stephen Sayre, promised to aid the French in securing the approval of Americans on the frontier and suggested raising a Franco-American force in Ohio and Kentucky that would be capable of blitzing New Orleans and potentially holding the vast Louisiana territory and Florida.<sup>7</sup>

Revolutionary France's momentous decision to abolish slavery in early 1794 was arrived at precisely as Democratic-Republican sympathies for the French Revolution peaked in the young United States and democratic chants were heard throughout the nation. This chapter centers on the influence of radical Enlightenment notions of progress, millennial fervor, and emancipationist principles on the antislavery

---

<sup>7</sup> Richard Buel, *Joel Barlow American Citizen in a Revolutionary World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 164-165; quote on 164. For Imlay's role, see Wil Verhoeven, *Gilbert Imlay: Citizen of the World* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008), Chapters 7 and 8.



crusade.<sup>8</sup> It explores the influence of British, French, and American popular politics on transatlantic abolitionism and radical antislavery activism. The rapid spread of democratic societies dedicated to involving ordinary people in politics was a central feature of this period on both sides of the Atlantic. The French National Convention's emancipation decree, in particular, had a significant impact on American politics and reflects the power of revolutionary principles to shape perceptions of chattel servitude. How was news of the decree received in the United States amidst intense enthusiasm for the French cause and growing fears of radical democratic excesses? This question has largely escaped scholarly attention, despite a substantial literature on the influence of the French Revolution on American political culture. The role of antislavery thought and action within this context deserves further attention.<sup>9</sup>

Connections between French abolitionism and American antislavery efforts have received far less attention from scholars than efforts by their British contemporaries to

---

<sup>8</sup> I use the labels *democrat* and *conservative* to refer to those who embraced popular participation in politics and those who favored traditional rule by elites. In addition to these terms, contemporaries used an array of labels to refer to those who favored popular participation; such as republican, democratic republican, jacobin, and Whig. Those who favored rule by an elite were referred to, at various times, as anti-republican, federalist, monocrats, aristocrats, Tories and elitists. Some of these terms are obviously more derogatory and likely to be used by political opponents. *Democrat* and *democratic* had negative connotations for many, but were increasingly embraced after the French Revolution.

<sup>9</sup> The most comprehensive account of slavery and abolition during this period remains David Brion Davis' sweeping study *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (New York, 1975). Recent important work on the subject includes: Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000); Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London and New York, 2011); J.R. Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, 2013); and Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America* (Cambridge, 2009). On the influence of the French Revolution on American culture, see especially: Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals* (Lawrence, 1999); Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville, 2011); and Matthew Rainbow Hale, "Many Who Wandered in Darkness': The Contest over American National Identity, 1795-1798," *Early American Studies* 1 (2003).

end the slave trade.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, as James Sidbury has persuasively argued, for the enslaved “the 1791 revolution in Saint Domingue, rather than the actions of French legislators, was the model for liberation.”<sup>11</sup> However, the National Convention's decree was significant for Francophile republicans in the early United States and substantially influenced American abolitionism in the 1790s, as well as the trajectory of antislavery activism thereafter.

Surveys of post-American Revolution antislavery activity often imply that the abolitionist movement in both the United States and Britain was predominantly animated by religious belief.<sup>12</sup> Reflecting this assumption, intellectual historian Jonathan Israel distinguishes the moderate American response to slavery from that in France. He writes of a French “social revolution” that was “not merely concerned with abolishing slavery as such, like the Christian abolitionist movements in England and Pennsylvania, but formed a broader, more comprehensive emancipationist movement....”<sup>13</sup> Israel is correct to note the importance of revolutionary French ideas on emancipation but neglects not only their

---

<sup>10</sup> See Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill, 2004); Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> James Sidbury, “Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800,” *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (August, 1997), 534. Also see C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London, 1938); and Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1944).

<sup>12</sup> See especially: Brewer, *Holy Warriors*; and Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*. This perception likely stems from the characterization of the movement in its first major history, Thomas Clarkson's, *The History of the Rise, Progress, Et Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade, by the British Parliament* (London, 1808). The book was also published in Philadelphia that same year.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 396.

profound impact on American and British abolitionists, but also their transatlantic origins.<sup>14</sup>

Far from revolutionary, antislavery activity in the early United States is typically depicted by historians as moderate, cautious, and dominated by elites. In his influential study *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, Richard S. Newman characterizes the American abolitionists of the 1790s (led by the Pennsylvania Abolition Society) as “deferential petitioners” notable for their “conservative style of activism” and commitment to a “dispassionate,” “careful approach.” Citing a letter circulated by the PAS to a number of abolition societies in 1790, Newman argues that abolitionists of the period were encouraged to “focus on the creation of narrow laws respecting the trade, not broad human rights or Africans' natural rights.”<sup>15</sup> Only a few years later, however, animated by revolutionary radicalism, the PAS and American abolitionism more generally, re-emphasized natural rights and abstract principles in their writings, policies, and tactics.

Moreover, Newman's reliance on the PAS as a case study of early American abolitionism obscures a broader movement that was emerging from below in the latter part of the eighteenth century. Important recent work on popular politics in the early United States has illuminated our understanding of partisanship, republicanism,

---

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 1.

<sup>15</sup> Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill, 2002), 39, 16, 4, 49. Also see John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1991). A notable exception to this narrative is the work of Manisha Sinha, who characterizes the abolitionism of the Age of Revolution in more radical terms. 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 *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

democracy, and demonstrations out-of-doors.<sup>16</sup> Abolitionism and antislavery politics are rarely central in these discussions. While the major antislavery societies of the period featured prominent figures in leadership positions, abolitionist sentiment and activism was expressed at all levels of society. During the 1790s, in particular, with the French Revolution capturing global attention, slavery was a topic of popular politics. Viewing these events through a transatlantic lens aids in comprehending the ascent and decline of revolutionary abolitionism. Far from moderate, many democratic radicals of the 1790s embraced emancipation as the fulfillment of first principles—an absolute necessity in a new enlightened age.

In his seminal 1943 work *American Negro Slave Revolts*, historian Herbert Aptheker claimed that “the dozen years following 1790 formed a period of more intense and widespread slave discontent than any that had preceded.”<sup>17</sup> Factors that contributed to this climate of rebellion include the spread of revolutionary ideology stemming from the French Revolution and the example of uprisings in Saint Domingue, themselves

---

<sup>16</sup> On popular politics in the period, see Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy: The People, the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (New York, 2007); Robert H. Churchill, “Popular Nullification, Fries’ Rebellion, and the Waning of Radical Republicanism, 1798–1801,” *Pennsylvania History* 67, no. 1 (2000):105–40; Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders, Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1799-1828* (Chapel Hill, 1999); Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2004); Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York, 1972); Paul Douglas Newman, *Fries Rebellion: The Enduring Struggle for the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 2004); Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 1997), 139-140; Barbara C. Smith, “Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 51, no. 1 (1994): 3–38; E. P. Thompson, “The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present* 50, no. 1 (1971): 76–136; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997). On the intersection between popular politics and abolitionism during the 1790s, see Cotlar, *Tom Paine’s America*, 58-66; and James Alexander Dun, “Philadelphia not Philanthropolis: The Limits of Pennsylvanian Antislavery in the Era of the Haitian Revolution,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 135, No. 1, January 2011, p. 73-102.

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York, 1943), 209.

influenced by such ideological currents. According to historian David Geggus, less than a month after rebellion broke out in Saint Domingue, slaves in Jamaica wrote songs in celebration.<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly, news spread quickly throughout the Atlantic world. After 1791, refugees from Saint Domingue fled to Philadelphia and Charleston in high numbers, bringing tales of violent slave revolt and sometimes captives who had witnessed or even participated in these events firsthand. The spread of democratic principles, even in the South, further contributed to a sense of unease among planters throughout the 1790s.

African Americans, both free and enslaved, received the news of a rebellion less than one thousand miles from U.S. territory. By the 1760s, Saint Domingue had become one of the most profitable colonies in the world, specializing in sugar and coffee extracted through a harsh slave-labor regime. American merchants traded regularly with the French colony and blacks were among those bringing news back to the United States. When enslaved people rose up in resistance, the ideology of liberation and self-emancipation, growing out of the American Revolution, framed the reception of such events by many in the United States. African Americans, in particular, were emboldened by the actions of Caribbean blacks to confront political and economic oppression.

#### *Popular Politics/Popular Abolitionism*

News of the French Revolution's democratic turn and the rebellion in Saint Domingue infused American popular politics with a sense of urgency. Rallying supporters of France was made easier by the rapid founding of democratic societies throughout the United States. In 1792, taking his cue from the founding of popular

---

<sup>18</sup> David Geggus, "The Enigma of Jamaica in the 1790s: New Light on the Causes of Slave Rebellions," *William & Mary Quarterly* 44 (April 1987): 274-299.

associations in Britain and the Jacobin clubs in revolutionary France, Phillip Freneau observed in the *National Gazette* that some “seem greatly alarmed at an idea that has been lately started of *establishing constitutional societies* in every part of the United States, for the purpose of watching over the rights of the people, and giving an early alarm in case of governmental encroachments thereupon.”<sup>19</sup> By June of 1793, two political societies had been formed in Philadelphia: The German Republican Society and the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania. Mirroring the exponential growth of popular associations in Britain, by 1794 there were forty or more clubs throughout the country dedicated to the aim of protecting republican government from corruption and encouraging popular participation in public affairs.<sup>20</sup>

Particularly influential on this movement were the writings of Thomas Paine, especially *The Rights of Man* (Part 1, 1791; Part 2, 1792), and the activities of reform associations in Britain such as the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society (LCS), founded in 1791 and 1792 respectively.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> *The National Gazette*, June 25, 1792.

<sup>20</sup> The individual societies varied in their particular emphasis, but their general missions were quite uniform. The degree of popular participation that was embraced by each society also varied. Women were not members of these organizations, but some did advocate for an expanded role for women in political affairs. There was also a split on slavery, with the more radical societies advocating anti-slavery measures while slaveholders were members of some of the southern societies.

<sup>21</sup> Examples of British democratic societies include the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information and the London Corresponding Society (LCS), founded in 1791 and 1792 respectively. While the membership rolls of these organizations were not entirely filled by common people, they greatly expanded political participation. See Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); H.T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Oxford, U.K., 1985); Mark Philp, *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge UK, 1999); Stuart Andrews, *The British Periodical Press and the French Revolution, 1789-99* (Hampshire UK: Palgrave, 2000); E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966); and Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain During the French Revolution* (London, 1968).

These associations were operated by laborers and artisans themselves, rather than by elites who merely sympathized with “the people.” The popular societies brought the “lower orders” into politics to an unprecedented extent. Thomas Hardy, a soft spoken shoemaker, helped found the London Corresponding Society (LCS) with the express purpose of bringing common people into the political fold. He also had strong abolitionist views. Unlike the Society for Constitutional Information (SCI), which charged a significant fee for membership and was composed primarily of those from “polite society,” the LCS charged little and was open to all. The very act of lowering hurdles to organized political participation had a destabilizing effect on British politics, which spilled over to antislavery activism. Hardy resolved that “The people should lay aside leaders, discard factions and act for themselves.”<sup>22</sup> In 1794, another society in the LCS network implored common people to “Claim as your inalienable *Right* universal suffrage and Annual Parliaments... and whenever you have the gratification to chuse a representative, let him be from among the *lower order* of mankind.... He will know how to sympathize with you and represent you in character.”<sup>23</sup> The LCS quickly expanded to include thousands of members, primarily literate laborers.<sup>24</sup>

Liberal elite reformers had also called for expanded suffrage and annual parliaments, but the popular associations of the 1790s planned to mobilize popular

---

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Hardy and Joseph Gurney, *The Trial of Thomas Hardy for High Treason, at the Sessions House in the Old Bailey, on Tuesday the Twenty-Eighth ... [to] Friday the Thirty-First of October: And on Saturday the First ... [to] Wednesday the Fifth of November, 1794 ... Taken in Short-Hand* (London: Sold by Martha Gurney, 1794), 312).

<sup>23</sup> Stockport Friends of Universal Peace and the Rights of Man, January 5, 1794, Papers relating to the London Corresponding Society and the Constitutional Society, The National Archives, London, UK, TS 11/954/3498.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Place Papers, Manuscripts, British Library, 27831-27859.

opinion in ways that these organizations tended to avoid. A primary objective of the LCS was the broad diffusion of political knowledge that would make universal suffrage practicable. Assertive *demand*s were made rather than deferential *petitions*. Drawing on the democratic ideologies of revolutionary France, they addressed power from the role of *citizen* rather than the subordinate position of *subject*. The shift was not simply a game of semantics but reflected a complete reformulation of the role of the people in politics. The act of organizing in associations, directly electing members for particular positions, forming networks with other organizations—not just in Britain but in France and the United States too—put democratic ideology into practice. The English reformer John Horne Tooke expressed the importance of this approach, observing that a “revolution in sentiment must precede revolution in government and manners. The popular energies must be excited, that the popular voice may be felt and heard. The people must grow wise, in order that the people may rule.”<sup>25</sup>

These popular energies engulfed the abolitionist movement in Britain, which took a popular turn in the early 1790s, with democrats forming a vocal base. In turn, social conservatives persistently painted abolitionists with the brush of radicalism. While claims that they planned to incite a full scale revolution in Britain were overstated, there was a great deal of truth in the notion that democratic reformers were involved in antislavery activity. William Wilberforce's brother-in-law Thomas Clarke admitted that in 1793 it was difficult to find anyone who “would sign a petition that are not republicans.”<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Bayly Howell, and Thomas Jones Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783 With Notes and Other Illustrations*, (London: T.C. Hansard, 1818), 675.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, Volume 1 (London, 1838), 150.



Popular abolitionism gained adherents through the efforts of reformers from the laboring classes. The 1792 mass-petitioning campaign led by the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST) involved every county in England and Scotland, in an unprecedented show of popular support for abolition.<sup>27</sup>

The British democratic societies were crucial to making slavery a topic of popular politics, helping to shape public opinion.<sup>28</sup> The growing network of reform associations allowed for the dispersal of information amongst the people and the politicization of those previously excluded from politics. Even moderates like Wilberforce recognized the growing power of public opinion. While expanding suffrage was their primary objective, abolition was increasingly an issue taken up by democrats. Hardy, for example, was a vocal abolitionist and even housed the celebrated African writer and activist Olaudah Equiano for a time. According to his memoir, the first piece of correspondence Hardy sent out after forming the LCS was an appeal to the Methodist Thomas Bryant to join the movement for universal suffrage. He wrote:

Hearing from my friend, Gustavus Vassa [Equiano], the African, who is now writing memoirs of his life in my house, that you are a zealous friend to the abolition of that cursed traffic, the Slave Trade, I infer from that circumstance, that you are a zealous friend to freedom on the broad basis of the Rights of Man.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery. The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester, 1995), 61.

<sup>28</sup> I use the term “democratic societies,” in both the British and American context, to refer to popular political associations that sought to broaden public participation in politics and disseminate political information throughout the community. These organizations were opposed to strictly aristocratic, oligarchical or monarchical governance. In addition to “democratic”, contemporaries used various terms for such societies, often interchangeably; including “popular,” “republican,” “patriotic,” “reform,” “constitutional,” and “jacobin.”

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Hardy, *The Memoir of Thomas Hardy* (London, 1832), 15.

Bryant had become involved with Equiano's abolitionist efforts and spread his antislavery views to his congregation, many of whom would become involved in democratic politics as well.<sup>30</sup>

Like Bryant, Equiano personified the confluence of religious fervor and radical democratic politics. Having suffered himself through the terrors of the middle passage and torturous bondage on a plantation, he became an able messenger for the growing abolitionist movement.<sup>31</sup> Upon witnessing George Whitefield's revivalist preaching in 1765, the young African seafarer was struck by the “fervour and earnestness” of his preaching style and soon thereafter converted to Methodism.<sup>32</sup> The success of Equiano's book tour was due in part to the networks of both Methodist associations and democratic societies that had grown extensive by the early 1790s. In fact, they often intersected more so than most scholars acknowledge.<sup>33</sup> Historian Peter Linebaugh has argued that Equiano played a critical role in forging links between the democratic radicals in London and those in Sheffield, helping to make English working-class identity possible.<sup>34</sup> He also

---

<sup>30</sup> Linebaugh and Rediker note that Bryant's congregation were later labeled “Tom Paine Methodists.” *Many-headed Hydra*, 338.

<sup>31</sup> On Equiano's life, see James Walvin, *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745-1797* (New York: Continuum, 2000); and Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2005). There is some scholarly debate regarding the origin of his birth and the validity of his narrative. Carretta argues that Equiano may have been born a slave in South Carolina, rather than in Africa. For an earlier piece questioning Equiano's origins, see S. E. Ogude, “Facts into Fiction: Equiano's Narrative Reconsidered,” *Research in African Literatures*, 13 (Spring 1982), 31-43. For a defense of the integrity of Equiano's narrative and a response to earlier arguments from Ogude and Carretta, see Paul E. Lovejoy, “Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano, the African,” *Slavery and Abolition* 27, no. 3 (2006): 317-347.

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Carretta, *Equiano, The African*, 166.

<sup>33</sup> John Bugg, “The Other Interesting Narrative: Olaudah Equiano's Public Book Tour” *PMLA* 121, vol. 5, (Modern Language Association: 2006), 1424-42.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Verso, 2006), 415.

formed close relationships with Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, and William Wilberforce—linking the mainstream leadership of the SEAST with the popular reform efforts of the London Corresponding Society and other democratic clubs throughout Britain.

Increasing repression by the ministry of William Pitt the younger culminated in a series of trials for treason and sedition that involved the detention of political dissidents and, at times, their banishment to Botany Bay in Australia.<sup>35</sup> Hardy was one of many democrats charged and tried for sedition. Included in the evidence against him at trial was a letter from the LCS to another society that distilled the “higher law” argument at the base of the democratic movement. The cause was “grand and important” and centered on one overarching goal, that “the rights of man... are extended to the whole human race, black or white, high or low, rich or poor.”<sup>36</sup> Hardy was acquitted. Others charged with treason or sedition included Thomas Paine, who had since left for France, and Thomas Muir, a Scottish radical who combined Enlightenment rationalism with Christian piety.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> See especially: Jennifer Mori, *William Pitt and French Revolution: 1785-1795* (New York, 1997); and John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford, 2000). There is debate among historians as to the exact numbers of prosecutions. See Clive Emsley, “An Aspect of Pitt's 'Terror': Prosecutions for Sedition during the Decade of the French Revolution,” *Social History*, 6:2 (1981), 155-84; and Steven Poole, “Pitt's Terror Reconsidered: Jacobinism and the Law in Two South-Western Counties, 1791-1803,” *Southern History*, 17 (1995), 65-87. Poole points to evidence that a significant number of arrests that did not result in prosecution for sedition still resulted in prosecutions for lesser offenses.

<sup>36</sup> “Letter from the London Corresponding Society, to the Chairman of the Society in Southwark, dated April 18th, 1792, signed Thomas Hardy,” in *The Proceedings in Cases of High Treason, Under a Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer Which Was First Opened at Hicks's Hall, Oct. 2, 1794, and Afterwards Continued at the Sessions House, in the Old Bailey. Taken in Short Hand, by William Ramsey* (London, 1794), 652.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Muir was a reformer in Scotland and attendee of the British National Convention held in Edinburgh. He was tried for high treason, convicted, sentenced to fourteen years of imprisonment and transported to Botany Bay, Australia. An American ship, the *Otter*, commanded by Captain Dawes was sent to rescue Muir and he was secured on February 11, 1796. See Marjorie Masson and J. F. Jameson.

Muir, who was also a strong opponent of slavery became a martyr to the cause when he was convicted of treason and forcibly transported to the prison colony in Australia for planning a national convention on the French model. Those who perceived the transportation of political dissidents as unjust often equated their arbitrary sentences with enslavement, linking the natural rights claims of abolitionists to those of democratic reformers.<sup>38</sup>

In the spring of 1794, more than ten thousand people met in open air during a rain storm “to consider on the propriety of addressing the king, in behalf of the persecuted patriots, citizens Muir, Palmer, Skirving Margarot, and Gerrald... and to determine upon the propriety of petitioning the king for the total and unqualified abolition of negro slavery.”<sup>39</sup> This public meeting of the Sheffield democratic society concluded with “a most eloquent and animated speech” on the subject of abolition that drew “sighs and tears” from the majority of those assembled. The chair of the meeting Henry Yorke asserted that “Justice is eternal,” and called on the British parliament “immediately to abolish, in the fullest manner, and without any qualification, negro slavery in the West India Islands—because it is insulting to human nature in an age of reason and philosophy....” “The rights of a social being are denied to [enslaved persons], and every

---

"The Odyssey of Thomas Muir". *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (Oct., 1923), pp. 49-72.

<sup>38</sup> American newspapers were critical of Pitt's tactics. See, for example: *Columbian Gazeteer* (New York), October 10, 1793; *The Eastern Herald* (Portland, Maine), November 2, 1793; *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*, November 26, 1793; *Columbian Herald* (Charleston, South Carolina), February 24, 1794; *Daily Advertiser* (New York), March, 7, 1794; *American Minerva* (New York), August 12, 1794; *Philadelphia Gazette*, December 24, 1794; *The Herald* (New York), June 5, 1795; *American Mercury* (Hartford, Connecticut), June 15, 1795; and *Impartial Herald* (Newburyport, Massachusetts) December 11, 1795.

<sup>39</sup> Maurice Margarot was a Frenchman and member of the Constitutional Society of Information and chairman of the London Corresponding Society. He was tried for treason and sentenced to transportation.

principle of moral obligation is destroyed,” he boldly asserted. Yorke went on to draw a comparison between “the poor of this country and the negro slaves in the colonies” and argued that both were entitled to the enjoyment of their natural rights and constitutional privileges.<sup>40</sup> Such ideas were deemed dangerous by the ruling establishment, but the multitude of people who assembled to hear and discuss such demands speaks to the resonance and malleability of democratic ideology.

### *Transatlantic Radicals and American Antislavery Politics*

The treason trials in Britain, accompanied and enabled by a growing loyalist movement, contributed to the emigration of many radical democrats to France and the United States.<sup>41</sup> Thomas Cooper, an active member of the Constitutional Society of Manchester, wrote a series of antislavery tracts and publicly assailed Edmund Burke for his attacks on the French Revolution. In his *Letters on the African Slave Trade*, Cooper referred to slavery as “the most diabolical exertion of political tyranny.”<sup>42</sup> The famed scientist and Unitarian minister Joseph Priestley, a close friend of Cooper and Paine, was

---

<sup>40</sup> “Proceeding of the Public Meeting, held at Sheffield in open Air, 2d of April, 1794,” in *The Proceedings in Cases of High Treason, Under a Special Commission of Oyer and Terminer Which Was First Opened at Hicks's Hall, Oct. 2, 1794, and Afterwards Continued at the Sessions House, in the Old Bailey. Taken in Short Hand, by William Ramsey* (London, 1794), 726-727, 738, 739-740. Also, see Thomas Bayly Howell, Thomas Jones Howell, David Jardine, and William Cobbett, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors: From the Earliest Period to the Year 1783: with Notes and Other Illustrations* (Buffalo, N.Y.: W.S. Hein, 2000), 614.

<sup>41</sup> On loyalist associations, see Michael Duffy, “William Pitt and the Origins of the Loyalist Association Movement of 1792,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Dec., 1996), pp. 943-962; and Kevin, Gilmartin, *Writing Against the Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge, UK, 2007). For a sampling of the writings of one prominent conservative association, see *Proceedings of the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers Number 1*. (London, 1793). For Thomas Hardy's complaint of loyalist repression, see “Thomas Hardy's account of government interference with the LCS, re 20 November 1792,” in *Selections of the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*. ed. Mary Thale (Cambridge, UK, 1983), 30.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Letters on the African Slave Trade* (Manchester, 1787), 4.

also a vocal opponent of slavery and supporter of the French Revolution, until riots and persistent loyalist intimidation led to his emigration to the United States in 1794.

Another dissident who chose to flee the atmosphere of repression in Great Britain was Morgan John Rhees. From Glamorganshire in Wales, Rhees was a Baptist minister, a democratic reformer, and ardent abolitionist. He welcomed the French Revolution and even took to the streets of Paris in celebration. Dedicated to democratic principles and natural rights, Rhees published a republican periodical, *Cylchgrawn Cymraeg* [Welsh Magazine], and was quickly under the scrutiny of William Pitt the younger's ministry for “being friendly to the French interests....”<sup>43</sup> Seeking to avoid prosecution for treason, he left for the United States, arriving at New York in 1794.

Morgan Rhees, like other émigrés of the period, brought the political culture of the radical reform movement with him to America. He applauded those who “choose to transport themselves to the New World, instead of being liable to be sent by a... mad Administration to Botany Bay.”<sup>44</sup> He also noted the founding in New York of a “town called Sparta,” which was to serve as a refuge for “British Republicans” and wished “these Sons of Freedom may be successful in their attempt to form a settlement....”<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>43</sup> William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit: Or, Commemorative Notices of Distinguished American Clergymen of Various Denominations: from the Early Settlement of the Country to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Five: with Historical Introductions* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros, 1857), 345. Rhees included excerpts from work by American radicals such as Gilbert Imlay in his magazine. See, for example, *Cylchgrawn Cymraeg*, 3, August 1793.

<sup>44</sup> Morgan J. Rhees to unknown [draft journal in letter form], New York, October 21, 1794, Morgan John Rhees Collection, MS#1066, Columbia University. Hereafter referred to as “Rhees Collection.”

<sup>45</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, New York, October 29, 1794, Rhees Collection.

Later he excitedly recounted visiting the location where “Paine wrote his famous Pamphlet, call'd Common Sense....”<sup>46</sup>

Brimming with optimism, Rhees depicted the United States as a democratic paradise, triumphing over the corruption and tyranny of the old world. In America, he observed, they “adhere strictly to the command of Christ 'call no Man, Master!’” He expressed beliefs that a society with respect for the sovereignty of God and the natural rights of humankind was arising in this newly independent territory. His writings combined the language of Protestant dissent with that of the radical Enlightenment. The people of America, he proclaimed, worship at the “Temple of Freedom” where they “adore the universal Parent within its Dome under the shade of the Tree of Liberty... and notwithstanding the Blast of Tyrants its Branches will soon cover the Globe.” For Rhees, the American Revolution had begun a millennial break with the past, which was now spreading to Europe as well. In a prophetic voice, he declared that liberty “moves on in the majesty of her mind towards the Meridian Day of her Glory.”<sup>47</sup>

Antislavery opinions, so deeply entwined with the democratic movement in Britain, were a key component of Rhees' progressive worldview. He lamented that “Negro slavery is tolerated” in New York, but remained optimistic that “it cannot last long” and expressed, in millenarian fashion, faith that it would soon be abolished. “The Day Star from on high has risen,” Rhees proclaimed, “The morning dawns—The Sun

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Burlington, New Jersey, November 2, 1794, Rhees Collection.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

appears—the Remains of Slavery shall be soon swept from the new World with the bosom of pure Democracy.”<sup>48</sup>

Those fleeing repression in Britain expressed their wholehearted support for the democratic societies of the United States and many became influential members. Rhees praised the “Democratic Societies” for their “attachment to France” and spreading principles in support of “universal emancipation.”<sup>49</sup> Members of the societies were “zealous,” according to the Baptist minister, and questioned “whether it be consonant with the Constitution to hold any human being in bondage?”<sup>50</sup> Acknowledging that “Americans did much in the Cause of Freedom,” he nevertheless lamented that “they stumbled as it regards the poor Africans at the threshold of equal rights.”<sup>51</sup> He viewed the American Revolution as unfinished and the popular clubs as helping to usher in a new era of equality. In the end, like Paine, he envisioned the United States as an “Asylum for the distresse'd of all Nations!”<sup>52</sup>

Similar in composition to the London Corresponding Society, the membership of many American political clubs cut across socio-economic lines and included mechanics, artisans and small farmers, as well as lawyers, merchants, doctors and scientists. Historian Eugene Link estimated that around seventy percent of the members were craftsmen or from “the lower orders.”<sup>53</sup> In a letter to the *Newark Gazette* signed

---

<sup>48</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, New York, October 29, 1794, Rhees Collection.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, Burlington, New Jersey, November 2, 1794, Rhees Collection.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> Eugene P. Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* (New York, 1942), 72.



“Republicanism,” a defender of the societies wrote of the attacks on the sharing of “political knowledge” by the “moneyed part of the people” who are “in general opposed to Republican Societies.” The writer declared that “it must be the mechanics and farmers, or the poorer class of people (as they are generally called) that must support the freedom of America; the freedom which they and their fathers purchased with their blood - the nobility will never do it...”<sup>54</sup>

The primary mission of popular political organizations, therefore, was the broad dissemination of political knowledge and political education for the purposes of mobilizing the force of public opinion. A knowledgeable and engaged public was thought crucial to preventing abuses of government power. Democratic societies were to enable the public to serve as a watch dog—evaluating legislation and holding representatives accountable. Where elites feared dissent as a harbinger of disunity and faction, populists embraced it as critical to the survival of republican government. Many political elites were disturbed by the openness of these groups and their democratic inclinations.

Conservatives were troubled by the passionate support for the French cause and hostility toward the official position of American neutrality exhibited by the democratic clubs. The New York Democratic Society expressed this support in quasi-religious terms:

we take a pleasure in avowing thus publicly to you, that we are lovers of the French nation, that we esteem their cause as our own, and that we are the enemies... of him or those who dare to infringe upon the holy law of *Liberty*, the sacred *Rights of Man*, by declaring, that we ought to be strictly neutral, either in thought or speech, between a nation fighting for the dearest, the undeniable, the invaluable Rights of human nature, and another nation, or nations wickedly... endeavouring to oppose her in such a virtuous, such a glorious struggle.<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> *Wood's Newark Gazette*, (Newark), March 19, 1794.

<sup>55</sup> Democratic Society of New York, *An address of the Democratic Society, of the City of New-York, to the republican citizens of the United States* (Newport, Rhode Island, 1794), 8.

Declarations such as this provoked accusations of treason from those in power and in the conservative press. The fear was that only the newly constituted government could serve as an expression of popular sovereignty and challenges to Federal authority could quickly devolve into anarchy or rebellion.

The language on both sides became increasingly hostile and the logic Manichean. Members of the societies were highly suspicious of secrecy and suspected plots were being hatched behind closed doors to reinstate monarchical authority. Morgan Rhees cautioned that “the British influence” threatens to “creep in imperceptibly with those English Agents who have nothing to lose, but every thing to get from their connection with the old country.” Rhees and others, hoped to avoid the “Seed of Aristocracy” at all costs.<sup>56</sup>

Members of the democratic societies forcefully responded to accusations of treason. One society rebuked such claims, daring the government to prosecute them:

If this is the language of treason, if this is the language of sedition, come forward, ye votaries of opposite principles... ye secret abettors of tyranny and despotism, ye hermaphroditical politicians, come forward, we call upon you, bring us by legal means, if such you can contrive, to the bar of justice, and punish us for these our open, our avowed principles, from which no earthly consideration shall ever tempt us to recede.<sup>57</sup>

Voices on both sides called into question the loyalty of those on the other. Democratic society members resented being called traitors for defending principles which they closely identified with the revolutionary struggle. They pointed to the repressive tactics of Pitt in Britain as an expression of the very despotism they had fought to overthrow.

---

<sup>56</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, Burlington, New Jersey, November 2, 1794, Rhees Collection.

<sup>57</sup> Democratic Society of New York, *An address of the Democratic Society, of the City of New-York, to the republican citizens of the United States* (Newport, Rhode Island, 1794), 8-9.

Opponents of the popular associations, however, looked to the increasingly chaotic situation in France, where multiple theories of popular sovereignty could not be reconciled, and pleaded for moderation and order at home.<sup>58</sup>

These clubs included ardent abolitionists among their members.<sup>59</sup> Among them were French émigrés like Benjamin Nones. Born in France, he was a veteran of the American Revolution and a political activist in Philadelphia. Nones had been a slaveholder but, inspired by the French Revolution, manumitted his only slave. By 1794, he was a member of the French Society of Friends of Liberty and Equality, the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS). These clubs had an uneasy relationship with French émigrés from Saint Domingue, who were often assumed by democrats to harbor counter-revolutionary tendencies and monarchical sympathies. The Friends of Liberty and Equality disparaged them, contending that “their prejudices & their aristocracy of colour, [were] not less absurd and prejudicial to mankind than that of the heretofore French nobles, [and were] the principal cause of all the evils which now assail them.”<sup>60</sup>

Many democrats were receptive to this logic. A meeting held in Philadelphia, for example, considered that the displaced planters “may have by their guilt drawn the

---

<sup>58</sup> For a theoretical discussion of popular sovereignty and ideology in France and the United States in the 1790s see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, North Carolina, 2004), 109-141.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Paine had been an early member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, as were active members of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania such as James Hutchinson, Benjamin Rush, Absalom Baird, Peter S. Du Ponceau and George Logan. Phillip Freneau, Benjamin Franklin Bache and Josiah Parker, among many others, were also active members of both democratic clubs and abolitionist associations. See Phillip S. Foner, ed. *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook* (Westport, 1976), 12.

<sup>60</sup> *Federal Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 12, 1793. Brackets added.

misfortunes they feel on their own heads....”<sup>61</sup> Meanwhile, the democratic press promoted emancipation as a signal event.<sup>62</sup> Sonthonax's proclamation was reprinted in Philadelphia in October of 1793, announcing to the formerly enslaved citizens of France: "You shall be no longer the property of another, your own shall be sacred to you, and you shall live happy" he told them, "Liberty draws you out of non-entity into existence,—Shew yourselves worthy of it....”<sup>63</sup>

Defenders of slavery immediately rallied in support of their planter brethren in Saint Domingue, voicing concerns about the egalitarian rhetoric and policies promoted by the democratic societies—even blaming them for stirring up unrest amongst the enslaved. The clubs were attacked by Federalists for disrupting social hierarchies, including those based on race. A cartoon displayed in a 1793 broadside entitled “A Peep into the Antifederal Club,” caricatured African Americans as unfit for popular politics and suggested that democrats were currying the favor of blacks and encouraging the abolition of slavery.<sup>64</sup> References to the French Revolution in the image abound, including a

---

<sup>61</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 17, 1793.

<sup>62</sup> The democratic press in the United States had close connections with the American democratic societies and in many ways they were two sides of the same coin. Leading printers such as Benjamin Franklin Bache (*Aurora*, Philadelphia), Thomas Greenleaf (*New York Journal*) and Thomas Adams (*Independent Chronicle*, Boston) were members of the societies, enabling the associations to gain a foothold in the national political scene. Likewise, the societies provided an active readership network for democratically oriented publishers. These printers publicized the societies' resolutions while facilitating the broad dissemination of political information which was such an integral part of the societies' mission. News of events throughout the Atlantic world, therefore, circulated among society members and informed their positions on national political issues. On the partisanship of the press during the 1790s see Jeffrey L. Pasley, *Tyranny of the Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, VA, 2001). On the connection between the democratic societies and the republican press see Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America* (Charlottesville, VA, 2011), 76-81.

<sup>63</sup> *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), October 12, 1793.

<sup>64</sup> "A Peep Into the Antifederal Club," New York, August 16, 1793. Historical Society of Pennsylvania large graphics collection (V65), Bc 612 P345. Also held at The American Antiquarian Society (P373.E25968). A caricatured drawing of a black man, addressed as “Citizen Mungo” who says in a

mocking depiction of Thomas Jefferson standing on a table in a pose modeled after Jean-Louis David's iconic painting of Jean-Sylvain Bailly's directing of the Tennis Court Oath.<sup>65</sup> A figure wearing a naval cap and dark glasses (perhaps representing his blindness) is featured in the rear singing the revolutionary anthem “Ça ira,” and a sinister depiction of Genet is located at the center of the action holding a written plan to “subvert American government.” All the while, a demonic figure looks on, proclaiming, “What a Pleasure it is to see one's work thrive so well.” Despite such attacks, the work of the societies did indeed thrive, with a multitude of clubs springing up throughout the young United States.



“A Peep into the Antifederal Club,” New York, August 16, 1793. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania [<http://digitalhistory.hsp.org/hint/politics-graphic-detail/doc/peep-antifederal-club>].

caption, “our time nex,” addressing a Quaker (presumably an abolitionist). The name “Mungo” was a reference to a character (a black slave) from Isaac Bickerstaffe's popular play *The Padlock*, first performed in London in 1767 and Philadelphia in 1769. Isaac Bickerstaffe, *The Padlock* (1767), in Jeffrey Cox, ed., *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period*, vol. 5 (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999). On the play's popularity, see Jenna M. Gibbs, *Performing the Temple of Liberty: Slavery, Theater, and Popular Culture in London and Philadelphia, 1760-1850* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 44-45; William Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre* (New York, 1832), 31. Songs from *The Padlock* are included in *The American Songster: Being a Select Collection of the Most Celebrated American, English, Scotch, and Irish Songs* (New York, 1788).

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Louis David, “the Serment du je u de paume,” 1789.

For the most part, the American democratic societies avoided taking on slavery directly in their public meetings, leaving the task to abolition societies. Historians have often taken this to indicate a lack of interest or commitment on the issue.<sup>66</sup> Clearly the situation was more ambiguous than in Britain—with slaveholders as members of some of the societies, especially in the South. But to ignore the connection between the democratic societies and antislavery is to miss a critical interplay of principles and tactics. Political culture itself was dramatically shifting during this crucial period and abolition was impacted from the start.

A significant number of members were active opponents of slavery. Leading members of democratic societies on both sides of the Atlantic, including Thomas Paine, Benjamin Rush, Richard Price, Thomas Hardy, and Morgan Rhee, were committed to both popular politics and abolition. Even the smaller local societies took antislavery positions and hosted abolitionist speakers. The Democratic Society of Clark County in Kentucky, for example, resolved to protect the “natural rights of the people” and directly echoed the language of David Rice in questioning whether “the practice of keeping the negroes in bondage [was] consistent with Justice and good policy....”<sup>67</sup> The society seems to have been taking some radical positions, as a letter to the *Virginia Gazette* referred to it as “that horrible sink of treason - that hateful synagogue of anarchy... that poisonous garden of conspiracy... and opposition to all regular and well balanced authority.”<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> Foner, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 12; and Eugene P. Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies* (New York, 1942), 153. Seth Cotlar acknowledges that in some cases “democrats translated...abstract calls for interracial solidarity into local action” by joining abolition societies. Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 62.

<sup>67</sup> Democratic Society of Clark County, December 23, 1793, Edna Whitley Collection, KHS.

<sup>68</sup> *Virginia Chronicle* (Norfolk, Virginia), July 17, 1794.

Conservatives feared that democrats were importing the “new philosophy” of the radical French Enlightenment and putting it into practice on the local level. They feared the levelling of social and economic status, as well as the potential for creating a climate that encouraged slave rebellions like those in Saint Domingue.

Developments in France influenced the trajectory of both democratic radicalism and popular abolitionism. By the early 1790s, American abolitionists had been corresponding with French antislavery advocates for some time. Various abolition societies throughout the Atlantic world were in frequent contact and a vibrant dialogue regarding republican citizenship and the natural rights of individuals developed. J.P. Brissot, in particular, was a strong innovator and proponent of *la philosophie moderne* and emphasized abstract principles in his arguments against slavery.<sup>69</sup> The British abolitionist Thomas Clarkson had been dispatched by SEAST to France in 1789 to help coordinate a united front against the slave trade.<sup>70</sup> Clarkson, unlike Wilberforce, was a strong supporter of the French Revolution and popular reform. He was also a strong advocate for the democratic societies in Britain, even chairing a committee organized by the London Corresponding Society to finance their defense against charges of treason in 1794.<sup>71</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> For a recent discussion of Brissot's philosophy as it relates to slavery, as well as an overview of French Revolutionary perspectives on abolition, see Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, 396-419. For comparisons between French, American, and British approaches to antislavery, see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 137-148; Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, UK and New York, 2009), 152-169.

<sup>70</sup> Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism*, 85.

<sup>71</sup> Knud Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 235.

Clarkson is a fascinating and often misunderstood figure. He had been introduced to antislavery activism by the Quaker William Dillwyn, himself a protégé of Anthony Benezet.<sup>72</sup> Due to his strong religious beliefs and friendship with Wilberforce, Clarkson is often discussed as one of the Christian “saints” who opposed the slave trade for moral reasons. In the nineteenth century, the narrative of a British abolitionist movement dominated by evangelical fervor gained currency, not in small part due to Clarkson's own account in *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade* (1808). While not without merit, his story neglects significant contributions from democratic reformers and Enlightenment rationalists. Clarkson, like Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Rush, and Morgan Rhee, embraced aspects of Enlightenment radicalism while maintaining a commitment to religion and spirituality. As we have seen, these categories need not be mutually exclusive and notions of natural rights were grounded in the dissenting Protestant tradition. The motivations of figures like Clarkson can be better understood through a recognition of these common sources—grounded in a radical tradition that accommodated religious commitment.

Clarkson maintained a vigorous transatlantic correspondence and a network that included both Quakers and radical democrats. Clarkson's mentor William Dillwyn had moved to England in 1774 from Philadelphia but his daughter lived in Pennsylvania during the tumultuous 1790s.<sup>73</sup> The two maintained rich correspondence that included discussions of politics and abolitionist activities. Many of their letters concerned

---

<sup>72</sup> Dillwyn introduced Clarkson to the efforts of Granville Sharp and James Ramsay to end the slave trade. He and Clarkson were both founding members of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST).

<sup>73</sup> William Dillwyn diary, MC.975.01.017, Special Collections, Haverford College.



William's cousin, the radical democrat George Logan. In a letter to her father, Susanna

Dillwyn noted that her uncle was:

quite a warm Jacobin and seems to wish for a revolution in England, similar to that in France, he says he delights in storms and tempests because they purify the atmosphere, all the softness and elegance of his lovely wife have not been able to smoothen the roughness of his character nor meliorate his manners, and yet there is a sincerity & frankness in him that is pleasing.<sup>74</sup>

Logan's wife Deborah had been a student at Anthony Benezet's public school for girls and the couple expressed strong sympathies for the enslaved. Trained as a physician in Edinburgh, Logan was both a man of the Enlightenment, as well as a committed Quaker and democrat. This small sample of correspondence indicates just how interconnected the various strains of antislavery activism were in the late eighteenth century, with figures like Clarkson serving as a conduit for abolitionist ideas and activities throughout the Atlantic world.

*French Abolitionism and the Emancipation Decree of 1794*

In early 1794 the Convention of American Abolition Societies was called, which gathered antislavery organizations from throughout the United States to coordinate a national strategy. Twenty-five delegates from nine antislavery societies met in Philadelphia, including groups from New York, Connecticut, Maryland, and Virginia. The Convention made public their evolving position on black freedom, informed by democratic principles. A memorial to Congress, declaring that "Freedom and slavery can

---

<sup>74</sup> Susanna Dillwyn to William Dillwyn, Philadelphia, May 8, 1793, Dillwyn and Emlen Family Correspondence, HSP.

not long exist together,” and that slavery “necessarily unfits man for discharging the public and private duties of citizens of a republic,” was presented.<sup>75</sup>

Just weeks later, the French National Convention shook the world with a declaration for the immediate emancipation of slaves in the French Caribbean. The decree of February 4, 1794 fulfilled the highest hopes of abolitionists and the deepest fears of slaveholders—that the French Revolution's fundamental principles of liberty and equality were to be applied more broadly than most had imagined possible just a few years prior. Unlike the Somerset decision in Great Britain, which was interpreted by most to mean that English soil was exceptional and should remain free from slavery, the Convention's act applied to her colonies as well, and even universally. Georges Danton audaciously announced that “until now our decrees of liberty have been selfish.... But today we proclaim it to the universe....”<sup>76</sup>

France framed emancipation as the culmination of a process which began with the abolition of royal privilege and ended with a wholesale rejection of “aristocracy of the skin.”<sup>77</sup> Racial hierarchy, like inherited wealth and privilege, was artificial—an affront to nature and reason. The Convention had wavered on abolition in the early years of the Revolution and came to the sweeping declaration seemingly as a last resort to hold onto colonies that seemed destined to fall into the hands of occupying British forces.

---

<sup>75</sup> “The Address of the Delegates from the several Societies formed in different parts of the United States, for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, in convention assembled at Philadelphia, on the first day of January, 1794,” in William Frederick Poole, *Anti-Slavery Opinions Before the Year 1800: Read Before the Cincinnati Literary Club, November 16, 1872* (Cincinnati, 1873), 61.

<sup>76</sup> “The Abolition of Slavery”, February 4, 1794 in Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, ed. and trans., *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804*, (Boston, 2006), 131.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

Nevertheless, the decree was unprecedented, and was greeted with celebration by American abolitionists. With so many fervent supporters of the French cause throughout the United States, such a bold declaration of freedom encouraged others to follow suit and embrace emancipation at home, aggressively challenging the planter interest.

American abolitionists, including free blacks, increasingly took their cue from Paris, insisting that the process of emancipation in the United States accelerate. A letter printed from the “citizens of color of Philadelphia” to the National Convention praised Sonthonax and the Commissioners for “breaking our chains” with “the immortal Decree wiping out all traces of slavery in the French colonies.”<sup>78</sup> Shortly after news of the declaration reached Philadelphia, one advocate wrote to Benjamin Rush, a member of both the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, noting that “the French... are more rapid in their motions than we.”<sup>79</sup> Upon receiving news of the decree, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society held a “special meeting” on May 2nd promising to discuss “business of the greatest importance....”<sup>80</sup>

At the next Convention of American Abolition Societies, the delegates sounded a more radical tone than in the past. Delegates from Pennsylvania declared it their “principal design” to bring about “the universal emancipation of the wretched Africans who are yet in Bondage” and “an entire abolition” of all laws that enabled slavery to continue. Echoing the language of evangelical revival, they hoped that enslavers “might be awakened to a sense of their injustice, and be startled with horror at the enormity of

---

<sup>78</sup> ‘Les Citoyenes de couleur de Philadelphie a L'Assemblee Nationale’, September 24, 1793. John Carter Brown Library, Providence, Rhode Island. Also see Gary B. Nash, ‘Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Domingans in Philadelphia’, *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 65 (1998), 53.

<sup>79</sup> Anonymous to Benjamin Rush, March 3, 1794, Benjamin Rush Miscellaneous Correspondence, HSP.

<sup>80</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette*, May 1, 1794.

their conduct.” Beyond calling for emancipation, they insisted on education for those freed from bondage so that they could become virtuous citizens of the republic. “When we have broken his chains and restored the African to the enjoyment of his rights,” they declared, “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 and desirous of fulfilling the various duties he owes to himself & to his Country.” While their tone was perhaps paternalistic, the delegates nonetheless insisted that formerly enslaved persons could become citizens—they could be “born again” and sanctified by republican liberty. Moreover, they repudiated racism and the “enemies of truth” who promoted supposed black inferiority as an impediment to a multi-racial citizenry. Even “the degrading influence of Slavery” had not rendered these people inferior to “the more fortunate Inhabitants of Europe and America.”<sup>81</sup> Taking aim at both environmentalist and racist justifications for denying civil rights to former slaves, the delegates offered an optimistic vision.

The French emancipation decree captivated the American abolitionist convention.

Delegates asserted that:

By a decree of the national Convention of France, all the blacks and people of colour, within the territories of the french Republic, are declared free, and entitled an equal participation of the rights of citizens of France. We have been informed that many persons of the above description, notwithstanding the decree in their favor, have been brought from the West India Islands by emigrants into the United States, and are now held as Slaves.

---

<sup>81</sup> PAS papers, Meeting, 4/6/1795, Microfilm, Reel 1, 236-237.

Moreover, demands were made for actions “effecting their liberation....”<sup>82</sup> The Convention ultimately resolved “To endeavor to free negroes from St. Domingo retained here as slaves, contrary to the decree of the National Convention of France.”<sup>83</sup> This decision to embrace French law even in the United States and to ground their appeals for emancipation in the language of natural rights suggested that what had once been a narrow religious concern had become a transnational human rights movement.

Moderate abolitionists were alarmed by the radicalism of many leading delegates. Federalist William Dunlap, a delegate at the convention from New York, recalled that Robert Patterson praised the French National Convention’s decree and called for a “sudden and total abolition of slavery as it respects the Southern states....” In true French fashion, Patterson then declared, “it is morally right that all men should be free and what is morally right cannot be politically wrong.” According to Dunlap, Benjamin Rush agreed and conveyed “with admiration Condorcet’s expression of, ‘Perish the Colonies rather than we should depart from principle.’”<sup>84</sup> Dunlap, who typified the moderate Federalist position, feared that “confounding abstract principles with actions and things, have thrown circumstances quite out of consideration.”<sup>85</sup> Dunlap felt that he was swimming against the tide of the Convention, which was increasingly radical. Influential

---

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> *Minutes of the proceedings of a Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States (1794-1797)*, (Philadelphia, 1801), 43. Also see 30-31.

<sup>84</sup> William Dunlap Diaries, June 29, 1797, New York Historical Society. Also see, Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre*, vol. I (London, 1833), 327-328.

<sup>85</sup> The diary entry related that Dunlap had been reading Condorcet, and was considering how his abstract philosophy may have influenced abolitionists at the last convention.

members of the American abolition societies were emboldened by France's declaration and looked to it as an example of what could be legally accomplished.<sup>86</sup>

The National Convention's appeal to principles in deciding in favor of emancipation may have shaped the Pennsylvania Abolition Society's shift in tactics in 1794 -- favoring judicial challenges that sought sweeping rulings over piecemeal legislation.<sup>87</sup> Members discussed in May of 1794 whether "Slavery, under any modification whatever, is not inconsistent with the present Constitution of this State" and recommended that "this important Question be immediately brought before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania for a legal decision."<sup>88</sup> One abolitionist wrote to another predicting sweeping rulings to be decided throughout the states, outlawing slavery on the French model. Perhaps antislavery sentiments would take hold, he hoped, even in "Aristocratical" states "where men make pompous declamations in favour of Liberty & Equality, whilst they hold in abject & degraded bondage multitudes of their unhappy fellow Creatures, for no other reason than that they differ from them in Colour."<sup>89</sup>

The PAS also vowed to "take into consideration the case of those Blacks in America, who being entitled to the benefit of the Decree of the National Convention of France, giving freedom to the Blacks, are nevertheless detained in Bondage." Benjamin Rush authorized to "call a special Meeting of this Society" to discuss appropriate action

---

<sup>86</sup> The influence of the *Amis des Noirs* can be seen in many of the American abolition societies. The society in Wilmington, Delaware, for example, was called the "Friends of the Blacks in Wilmington." PAS papers, Reel 1, 290.

<sup>87</sup> The number of court cases by black litigants suing for their freedom increased precipitously in the mid-1790s. See Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon, 1975), 33-35.

<sup>88</sup> PAS papers, May 2, 1794, Reel 1, 214.

<sup>89</sup> Archibald McCLean to William Rogers, February 23, 1795, PAS papers, Letterbook, vol. 2, HSP.

on the subject.<sup>90</sup> Lawrence Embree of New York wrote to James Pemberton to inquire as to whether the French decree may even be applied retroactively. He noted that many slaves, taken from Saint Domingue, “suppose themselves entitled to their freedom in cosequence of a Decree of the National Convention liberating all people of Colour in their Colonies.” Embree wondered whether the decree applied to “the case of those People of Colour, who were brought into the United States by their former Masters previous to the passing of the Decree?”<sup>91</sup> The actions of France threatened to destabilize the fragile justifications for enslavement in the United States.

In the West, David Rice of Kentucky took the lead in founding the Kentucky Abolition Society and corresponded frequently with the PAS and others throughout the nation. Following the French decree, he related his optimism regarding antislavery activity in Kentucky and also some concerns over internal disputes. “The Methodists, I believe, are generally friends to freedom;” he observed, and “the Presbyterian Minsters, and I believe a large majority of the People are on the same side....” He lamented however that the Baptists in the state had begun to turn away from antislavery activity, some even possessing slaves. “The Baptists... are too great politicians to see with moral eyes; on this subject I apprehend they have reasoned themselves into a kind of belief that black is white. But on the whole we stand in more need of something to awaken the conscience than to inform the understanding.”<sup>92</sup> Rice recognized that reason alone would

---

<sup>90</sup> PAS Meeting, Philadelphia, Jan. 14, 1795, PAS papers, Microfilm, Reel 1, 237.

<sup>91</sup> Lawrence Embree to James Pemberton, January 24, 1795, PAS papers, Committee of Correspondence Letterbook, vol. 2, 1794-1809, HSP.

<sup>92</sup> David Rice to William Rodgers, Mercer County Kentucky, Nov. 4, 1794, PAS papers, Letterbook vol. 2, HSP.

not awaken slaveholders to their wrongs and emphasized an appeal to conscience as critical in this respect. His concerns point to fissures spreading within the movement and the difficulty in forming a coalition against slavery in the West.

Yet David Rice's letter also spoke to popular support for the abolitionist cause in Kentucky and envisioned the West as a region where national renewal was possible. For Rice, those from "low or but middling circumstances" would form the base of the Kentucky Abolition Society. Not surprisingly, many who joined were also members of the democratic societies in Kentucky. Abolition societies in the West were far less elitist than the PAS and their membership suggests significant overlap between the most radical democrats in the region. Rice even went as far as to propose that "a petition be presented to Congress, to lay off a State in the Western lands for the use of the Blacks, and make provision for their government, protection, instruction, etc."<sup>93</sup> Rice's proposal speaks to a progressive and populist element of some schemes that resembled "colonization."

The French emancipation decree shifted the grounds of the debate from conservatism to revolutionary action, rallying popular support for antislavery. The decree received considerable attention beyond formal abolitionist circles. The democratic press printed English translations of the proclamation and covered civic feasts featuring toasts which mingled the celebration of French military victories with calls for the abolition of slavery in all its forms.<sup>94</sup> A description of engravings displayed at a "civic feast" in Boston was printed in a republican newspaper in South Carolina. It described "people of

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Some Federalist newspapers covered the decree, but not in as great of detail or as frequently as Democratic-Republican papers. See *Gazette of the United States* (New York) May 1, 1794; *American Apollo* (Boston), May 8, 1794; *Providence Gazette*, (Providence, RI), May 10, 1793.



colour, all clad after the manner of their respective countries, stretching forth their arms towards France... stepping forward to take a copy of what is written on the tables (THE RIGHTS OF MEN).”<sup>95</sup> Emancipation was consistently situated within the context of broader republican revolution and made use of radical Enlightenment imagery and symbols. These were categories that “patriotic” Americans were predisposed to receive favorably, insisting on an unwavering support for freedom and an unconditional commitment to fundamental principles.

Increasingly, democratic-republican newspapers focused on the extension of citizenship rights to people of color and emphasized the inclusive nature of the French approach. The *New York Journal*, for example, printed a transcript of the proceedings at the Convention, including the claim that the “people of colour” were destined to “become good republicans....”<sup>96</sup> Another northern paper captured the magnitude of the event, observing that the “most affecting scene took place, each Member with eager haste ran to clasp in his embrace the deputies of St. Domingo while tears of joy ran down their cheeks. A female Negro who was present... fainted with joy.”<sup>97</sup> The *General Advertiser* reported that the decree had “avenged both nature and humanity of two centuries of crimes....”<sup>98</sup> The papers warned of plots in France to subvert the decision and denounced “secret assemblies of colonists, whose design it is to restore and cement slavery.”<sup>99</sup> The

---

<sup>95</sup> *City Gazette* (Charleston, S.C.), August 19, 1794.

<sup>96</sup> *New York Journal* (New York City), May 7, 1794. Philadelphia's *General Advertiser* also provided extensive translated quotes from the decree, May 1, 1794.

<sup>97</sup> *Connecticut Gazette*, May 15, 1794.

<sup>98</sup> *General Advertiser*, May 27, 1794.

<sup>99</sup> *The Diary* (New York), May 1, 1794.

decree was framed in the democratic press as another blow to monarchy, aristocracy, and arbitrary power, deserving of celebration and praise.

In the United States, the decree opened the window for revolutionary abolitionism based on the French model. Genet's mission was to unite the two nations and both the democratic press and the democratic societies frequently linked the young republics in a cosmic struggle against the old regime. "We consider your cause, as the common cause of mankind" wrote one American in an open letter to Genet, "For notwithstanding our distant separation by the *atlantic*, we view our liberties, and independence as intimately connected with your prosperity."<sup>100</sup> In a period marked by sweeping change and a reordering of society—France's policy of immediate emancipation based on universal natural rights followed the logic of the radical Enlightenment.

Democratic newspapers in the United States increasingly emphasized the importance of remaining firmly committed to revolutionary principles. A letter in the *Kentucky Gazette* signed "a Farmer" was addressed to all "plebeians" and "Lovers of equal liberty." Echoing Brissot, he reminded the poor laborer not to forget "*that which is fundamentally wrong can never be right in practice.*" Operating within an antislavery idiom, he urged them to "Let the magistrates know they have *no property* in you. Form yourselves... into pure Democratic Societies...."<sup>101</sup> The French decree and the steadfastness of republicans emboldened some abolitionists in the United States to push for revolutionary change rather than moderate reform. An editorial in Philadelphia's *General Advertiser* applied this logic of universal natural rights regardless of race to the

---

<sup>100</sup> *Daily Advertiser* (New York), June 12, 1793.

<sup>101</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, March 8, 1794.

American scene, declaring that “Every Negro in America is this moment of right, a freeman.”<sup>102</sup> Many Americans continued to view the French Revolution as an extension of their own and took pride in every perceived advancement in human freedom.

Fourth of July celebrations in 1794 presented an opportunity to fuse the principles of America's Declaration of Independence with those of the French Revolution and its radical shift on slavery. Democratic-Republican newspapers from July of 1794 included resolutions from clubs that “the soil of America be consecrated by the genius of universal emancipation” and a call for the “speedy extinction of that species of slavery which disgraces our country—degrades too many of our fellow citizens—and gives lie to our declaration of Independence.”<sup>103</sup> Another declared that the revolution would only be fulfilled when all people are able to enjoy “their natural rights and privileges” and “slavery abolished throughout the world.”<sup>104</sup> Toasts published from these celebrations point to the extent revolutionary ideology framed nearly every issue according to its terms.

Members of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen expressed their hope that “the time soon arrive when men shall be ashamed to make their fellow creatures an article of commerce” and the Republican Society of Ulster County declared their outrage for “the infamous traffic and merchandise of the human species.”<sup>105</sup> With

---

<sup>102</sup> *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), June 28, 1794.

<sup>103</sup> *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), July 8, 1794.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug 5, 1794.

<sup>105</sup> Foner, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 201, 12. Also see Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 95.

millennial fervor, participants in these events sought to usher in a new age of republican liberty—one in which slavery was anathema.

Stories of French battles with the British in Saint Domingue were read alongside descriptions of democratic parades and festivals. Baltimore's *Daily Intelligencer* included a heroic depiction of Sonthonax declaring “he would defend the city [Port-au-Prince] to the last extremity” against British attack. The same issue featured an account of a “grand parade” and a celebration which featured “Many toasts and songs... replete with sentiments of gratitude to France... and extension of the spreading flame of liberty...” The author went on to observe that “the first cause of our great revolution and arduous struggle for our birth-right (liberty) was not suffered to be forgotten—nor was the cause of humanity, in sympathizing with the unfortunate African, and in endeavoring to loosen his shackles, permitted to suffer.” The celebration fittingly included an “oration on the abolition of slavery” delivered by Dr. George Buchanan at the court-house.<sup>106</sup>

#### *Democracy and Slavery in the South*

Buchanan was an active member of the Maryland Abolition Society (MAS), which, despite its location in Baltimore where a busy slave market persisted, was one of the most radical of all the American antislavery societies. Members had urged the “protection of the unhappy sons of Africa, who are entitled to liberty, but unjustly deprived of it.” The group even attacked the slavery protections in the Constitution as an “infraction of the rights of man” and a “defect in the noble structure of our liberties.” The MAS had close ties with the Baltimore Republican Society and both partook in the

---

<sup>106</sup> George Buchanan often spoke before the Maryland Abolition Society and was the author of several widely distributed abolitionist pamphlets. See Chapter 3 above for a discussion of Buchanan's antislavery thought and rhetoric.

Independence Day festival in 1794. The Republican Society reportedly toasted “The national convention of France, and an emulation of their virtues by the American congress” as well as to “Universal liberty and extinction of monarchy.”<sup>107</sup> This was not simply for rhetorical flourish or mere metaphor—some members of the Society had been slaveholders who reportedly manumitted their slaves.<sup>108</sup> The Democratic-Republican societies continued to oppose “slavery” in the abstract throughout the 1790s, and occasionally made their opposition concrete, as when one club toasted the “abolition of every species of slavery throughout America.”<sup>109</sup>

The spread of such beliefs yielded tangible benefits for the enslaved. Writing while in Baltimore, Morgan Rhees observed a general “Spirit of Manumission,” and noted that “many have liberated their Slaves, and more are likely to follow.”<sup>110</sup> There was also a flurry of court cases, whereby black litigants asserted that they had been falsely enslaved around this time.<sup>111</sup> The general sentiment, Rhees contended, was that the words “Intolerance” and “Slavery” would “become obsolete in all the Dictionaries of the World....” He understood the institution as the vestige of a colonial past, “a degrading badge,” which had been unjustly imposed on the New World by Britain. It would be the challenge of America to rid themselves of this menace. Following the lead of the French, he suggested that making the case for the natural rights of the enslaved before the

---

<sup>107</sup> *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*, July 7, 1794.

<sup>108</sup> Court records show that John McKim, John Sticker, Thomas McCreery, and Thomas McElderry manumitted their slaves. All were members of the Baltimore Republican Society. Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 153, 131n.

<sup>109</sup> *General Advertiser*, November 29, 1794.

<sup>110</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, Baltimore, December, 1794, Rhees Collection.

<sup>111</sup> For example, see *Shorter v. Rozier* (1794) and *Thomas v. Pile* (1794), two cases in Maryland, where formerly enslaved people were freed by court ruling. Also, see Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 33-35.

Supreme Court may yield results. If the justices should uphold slavery, he proffered, “I wish they might have their Residence for a few months with the Dey of Algiers, in order to taste the Sweets of Slavery.”<sup>112</sup>

The democratic societies in the South were among some of the most connected to and influenced by French revolutionary culture. While rebellions of the formerly enslaved in the Caribbean were a major source of concern among large slaveholders in the region, Francomania was simultaneously prevalent. Support for the French Revolution was especially fervent among backcountry smallholders, the majority of whom owned no slaves.<sup>113</sup> Even in the port cities support was high. Charleston hosted one of the largest democratic clubs in the United States and was the site of numerous parades and celebrations.<sup>114</sup> One resident later remembered that in 1794, the “Sansculottes and their principles had great ascendancy in Charleston—when the tri-colored cockade of France was the great badge of honour, and *Ca Ira!* and Marseillaise hymn the most popular airs—and 'Vive la republique Francaise!' the universal shout.”<sup>115</sup> In accord with this enthusiasm, the French consul reported that in South Carolina he had enlisted almost 4,000 men in a “Republican Army” which was raised for a planned attack on St. Augustine by land. He described the supporters of France in the region as “very

---

<sup>112</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, Letter 4, [November?], 1794, Rhees Collection. Around 120 American captives were held in Algiers. Robert J. Allison, *The Crescent Obscured: The United States and the Muslim World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13-14.

<sup>113</sup> See Rachel N. Klein, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), Chapter 7.

<sup>114</sup> On democratic societies in Charleston see Michael L. Kennedy, “A French Jacobin Club in Charleston, South Carolina, 1792-1795,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 91 (1990), 4-22. John Harold Wolfe, *Jeffersonian Democracy in South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1940); George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Columbia, SC, 1980).

<sup>115</sup> Charles Fraser, *Reminiscences of Charleston* (Charleston, SC, 1854), 35-36.

different from the gentlemen who we have known only too recently; all the good farmers and not the pompous planters....”<sup>116</sup> This description lends credence to the notion that some may have been inspired by both revolutions to free their slaves and perhaps turn against the institution. From 1790 to 1800 the free-black population in South Carolina rose from 1,801 to 3,185—the largest rate of increase for any population group in the state according to U.S. Census records.<sup>117</sup> This increase may be attributable, in part, to the prevalence of radical republican beliefs in the region during this time.

Letters from large planters and Federalist elites during the mid-1790s point to growing anxiety over democratic politics in the region. Nathaniel Russell from Charleston wrote to Ralph Izard, with concerns that the “diabolical decree of the national convention” would have “evil consequences” in the United States. “We are to have a meeting of the citizens,” Russell announced, to discuss “a circumstance the most alarming that could happen to this country.”<sup>118</sup> By November of 1794, Izard was worried that allying with the French would bring more republican radicals to America., “who would Fraternize with our Democratical clubs, & introduce the same horrid tragedies among our Negroes, which have been so fatally exhibited in the French Island.”<sup>119</sup> The backlash against the excesses of the French Revolution in its Jacobin phase, therefore, undoubtedly had a negative impact on antislavery thought and policy in the South and

---

<sup>116</sup> Mangourit to Minister of Foreign Affairs, December 10, 1793, in Richard K. Murdoch, ed. and trans., “Correspondence of the French Consuls in Charleston, 1793-1797,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (1973): vol. 7. 76,73.

<sup>117</sup> *Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington, D.C., 1864), 600-601.

<sup>118</sup> Nathaniel Russell to Ralph Izard, June 6, 1794, Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

<sup>119</sup> Ralph Izard to Mathias Hutchinson, November 20, 1794, Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library.

throughout the United States. Concerns over the unpredictable path of the French Revolution, fueled by Genet's overzealous approach and rebellious activity in rural areas hit hardest by Alexander Hamilton's tax schemes, contributed to a polarization of American politics in the mid-1790s. Support for the French remained strong, but a vocal pro-British party, made up especially of coastal merchants and planters with ties to Britain, emerged.

Anti-British sentiment still remained a potent partisan weapon, however, and was harnessed at times to discredit the pro-slavery emigres from Saint Domingue. Democratic-Republican papers frequently characterized the "refugee" planters from the islands as a threat to the republican project. Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* scathingly referred to them as "blood-suckers of the people who have never done anything for the Republic" and "pollute the land of liberty...."<sup>120</sup> The republican press, moreover, pointed to the alliance between the British and white planters as a logical continuation of Britain's support for slavery over liberty and evidence of the planters' royalist tendencies.

Great Britain's intervention and occupation of Saint Domingue fueled partisan divisions in the United States, dividing the antislavery movement. The British were often portrayed as intervening to support slavery in the Caribbean. At times, Democratic-Republicans were willing to identify not only with the French but also their black allies in the Caribbean against British imperial aggression. One writer reported in a letter to George Bryan on "a London ship that was turned away from Boston [harbor]" and

---

<sup>120</sup> *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), October 26, 1793. Also see September 11, 1793.



observed that it “had raised a great ferment among the Mechanicks” who “have caught a spark of the patriotic flame which has ever been kindled in New England.”<sup>121</sup>

Newspapers throughout the United States reported on the conflagration. As an example, the *Kentucky Gazette* ran an article encouraging support for the “40,000 negroes under arms determined to resist every enemy.”<sup>122</sup> Slaveholding planters in the West Indies were depicted as enemies of republicanism and the thousands of armed black rebels poised to battle the British were applauded. Reports during the period featured celebrations of Americans aiding the French in their battles. One democratic paper printed a French letter which lauded “an American privateer; manned and commanded by Americans” which had sailed to Guadalupe to “cruise against the English.” The author reported proudly that the crew “got naturalized and admitted French citizens.”<sup>123</sup> Ever since the American Revolutionary War, Anglophobia was a salient feature of southern popular politics and slaveholders were put in the difficult position of choosing sides between their former enemy and a French republic arming former slaves.

#### *Millennialism Reborn*

From the start, the French Revolution was filtered through the millennial expectations cultivated by victory in the American War of Independence. As soon as King Louis XVI called for the Estates General, some took it as a sign that the millennium

---

<sup>121</sup> Sam Bryan to George Bryan, May 1795, George Bryan Papers, HSP.

<sup>122</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, February 8, 1794.

<sup>123</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, April 6, 1794.

had arrived.<sup>124</sup> Events such as the French victory at Valmy, the execution of the King, and the commencement of war between France and Great Britain all were greeted in apocalyptic terms in the press, in the streets, and in taverns throughout the United States. Where conservatives increasingly viewed the radical trajectory of the Revolution with trepidation or even hysteria, democrats looked on with awe at the dawning of a new age.<sup>125</sup> Those under the sway of this orientation were confident that America had set France on a world-redeeming course. “You have fought the battles of freedom, and enkindled that sacred flame which now glows with vivid fervour through the greatest empire in Europe,” one Independence Day oration declared.<sup>126</sup> They optimistically observed “that under the guidance of a benign, though unseen arm, the political circumstances of mankind are rapidly meliorating and improving” and “that the Republic of France is made a most distinguished instrument in this great, god-like work.”<sup>127</sup>

Celebrations of the French emancipation decree took on this millennial tone as well. An “extract” printed in the *General Advertiser* heralded “this glorious prospect opening to mankind... a revolution which shall conform the government of the world to the interest and welfare of the human race....” This millennium was understood as a truly global phenomenon and would include “tribes of Africa” who will “participate of the common blessing. That spirit of enquiry, and that liberality of sentiment which are

---

<sup>124</sup> See Richard Landes, *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) Chapter 9, “Democratic Millennialism.” Landes argues that the Terror emerged as a result of millennial frustrations.

<sup>125</sup> See Matthew Rainbow Hale, “On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers During the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, circa 1792-1793,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Summer, 2009), 191-218

<sup>126</sup> “Extract from an Oration Delivered at Boston. July 4, 1794 in Commemoration of American Independence,” in *Columbian Orator* (1797; Reprint, Boston, 1832), 268.

<sup>127</sup> *Phenix*, August 24, 1793, quoted in Hale, 105.

prompting mankind to a general struggle for liberty and happiness, will comprehend for their object every nation on the globe.” The author then turned directly to the issue of slavery:

...no subject has more warmly engaged the attention of the literary world than African slavery—and the writings of the divine, the philosopher, the poet and novelist concur in reprobating the practice in terms of equal severity. The rapid and extensive diffusion of those generous sentiments, will in a short time produce the total extirpation of slavery which has exhibited the most complicated system of baseness and cruelty, that ever insulted the dignity of human nature. Let us combine our exertions in accelerating the accomplishment of this happy event, while our hearts are elevated at the pleasing scene, let us address the father of mercies with this humble supplication: that all people may be restored to the safe and peaceable enjoyment of their natural rights and privileges—that domestic and national slavery, may be abolished through the world, and that civil government may be every where established upon the broad and permanent basis of political liberty, and the general good; and flourish till time shall be no more.<sup>128</sup>

The piece captures the mood of the hour, one that combined sweeping change with a sense of inexorable progress—humanitarianism with emotional exuberance for a new age.

These confident expressions exemplify what Henry F. May has called “the Revolutionary Enlightenment.” May argues that while the varieties of Enlightenment prior to the late eighteenth century tended to oppose “popular enthusiasm and especially popular religion,” the “Revolutionary Enlightenment was itself enthusiastic and religious in spirit.”<sup>129</sup> While often not explicitly spiritual, these expressions nevertheless corresponded with a millennial logic. As when one Boston democrat declared:

Tyrants! Turn from the impious work of blood in which your hands are imbrued and tremble at the desperation of your revolting subjects! repent in sackcloth and ashes. For behold, ye, who have been exalted up to heaven, shall, ere long, be cast down to hell! The final period of your crimes is rapidly approaching. The grand

---

<sup>128</sup> *General Advertiser*, August 5, 1794.

<sup>129</sup> May, *The Enlightenment in America*, 154.

POLITICAL MILLENNIUM is at hand; when tyranny shall be buried in ruins; when all nations shall be united in ONE MIGHTY REPUBLIC! when the four angels, that stand on the four corners of the globe, shall with one accord lift up their voices to heaven: proclaiming PEACE on EARTH AND GOOD WILL TO ALL MEN.

The American Revolution had set a “glorious example,” that “with electrical rapidity, has flashed across the Atlantic.” “[L]ive FREE or DIE,” the author proclaimed, for “it becomes us, as the votaries of freedom, as friends to the rights of man,” to support the French cause.<sup>130</sup> Proponents of a coming millennium of peace urged others to consult their emotions and to recognize the wave of progress sweeping the globe. We “should do violence to our feelings,” one enthusiast proclaimed, “were we not to seize an occasion like the present, to manifest to the world, how much we are interested in the dawn of universal happiness.”<sup>131</sup>

As has been argued in previous chapters, this fusion of religious enthusiasm and Enlightenment confidence in human potential did not begin with the French Revolution, but had a long history dating back to the seventeenth century. May correctly notes the emergence in the 1790s of a millennial temperament, although it was not limited to the “secular” Enlightenment figures that he profiles. Even examples such as these, drawn from the democratic press, frequently refer to divine power, God and Providence—framing events in religious categories and terms.

In the wake of the French Decree, harsh criticism of slaveholders reached new heights. “A Democrat,” referred to freedom as a blessing from “the great God of nature”

---

<sup>130</sup> “Extract from an Oration, Pronounced at Worcester (Mass.) July 4, 1796; by Francis Blake, Esq.” *Columbian Orator*, 236-237, 234. This speech was reprinted in the *Columbian Orator*, which Frederick Douglass claimed to have read obsessively while enslaved. See Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave. Written by Himself* (London, 1851), 40-41.

<sup>131</sup> *Phenix*, August 24, 1793.

who has guaranteed rights to all. The author scornfully rebuked those “who keep their fellow creatures, in a state of wretched servitude, who rob them of that first, the most essential of the rights of man, and withhold from them a blessing, which the great God of nature has not refused....” Slaveholders were not only attacked for their hypocrisy but also for lacking “common sense” and “the common feelings of humanity,” as to render them “insensible to the sufferings of [their] fellow creatures....” The author appealed to both the conscience of the reader and one's sense of justice within the context of Enlightenment principles. Slavery is “repugnant to the law of nature and the principles of morality and religion,” it was argued, “and militating against the very intention of society, and the happiness of the human race.”<sup>132</sup>

Whether slaveholders could remain part of a virtuous republic was an open question. The author questioned whether enslavers adequately distinguished between good and evil or could even comprehend the value of freedom. Ultimately, the author concluded, anyone who continued to hold slaves must “possess the benevolence of tygers, or their feelings must be smothered and their reason obfuscated by avarice....”<sup>133</sup> In this new enlightened age, slaveholders were to be shunned. Chastising those who continued to trade in human beings, another piece sarcastically referred to slave advertisements as “charming proof of civilized society, of the age of reason and philosophy, of humanity, or approaching millennium and of the *rights of man!*”<sup>134</sup> There was no place for slaveholding in the new millennium envisioned by these writers.

---

<sup>132</sup> *General Advertiser*, August 8, 1794.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, August 5, 1794.

A growing sense, especially in the North, that democratic-republicanism militated against not only slavery but also racism began to spread. The numerous festivals and parades held to celebrate the achievements of the French Revolution were populated by a wide swath of early American society. According to Simon Newman, “subordinate groups—including women, the poor, and black Americans... found a larger role for themselves in French Revolutionary celebrations than in any of the other rites and festivals of the early American Republic.”<sup>135</sup> The presence of blacks at these celebrations was a source of consternation for many leading Federalists. Joseph Dennie lamented that in one celebration “they gave Tars and tailors a civic feast and taught the rabble that they were viceroys.” Another claimed to have never before seen such a “shabby and mongrel” collection of people.<sup>136</sup>

Nevertheless, celebrants of emancipation expressed their confidence in racial justice. As late as the spring of 1795, the French emancipation proclamation was applauded as a harbinger of things to come—a sure sign that the flame of liberty would spread and the project of the Enlightenment would continue to progress. “The liberation of the slaves in the French islands by the memorable decree of the National Convention,” according to the democratic *Kentucky Gazette*, “introduced an important change in the condition of about a million of human beings and their offspring.”<sup>137</sup> For a time, the abolitionist movement would ride this wave of change and press for rapid reform.

Reverend Samuel Miller, a fervent democrat and abolitionist who spoke before both the

---

<sup>135</sup> Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Streets*, 122. On the French Revolution’s influence on women and print culture in America, see Susan Branson, *These Fiery Frenchified Dames Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

<sup>136</sup> Joseph Dennie to his parents, April 9, 1793, quoted in Newman, *Parades*, 125.

<sup>137</sup> *Kentucky Gazette*, March 7, 1795.

Democratic Society of New York and the New York Manumission Society, lamented that as “friends of humanity” throughout Europe and America celebrated French successes, there were still those who would “employ themselves in the odious traffic of human flesh,” while calling themselves citizens of a republic.<sup>138</sup>

Just as seemingly secular politics was influenced by the religious fervor of the period, so was religion affected by the spread of radical Enlightenment principles. In an Independence Day oration in Rhode Island, the Baptist minister Jonathan Maxcy combined civic ritual with millennial fervor:

The citizens of America celebrate that day which gave birth to their liberties. The recollection of this even, replete with consequences so beneficial to mankind, swells every heart with joy, and fills every tongue with praise. We celebrate... the resurrection of liberty, the emancipation of mankind, the regeneration of the world... we love liberty, we glory in the rights of men, we glory in independence. The Angel of Liberty descending, dropped on Washington's brow the wreath of victory, and stamped on American freedom the seal of omnipotence.... We tread a new earth, in which dwelleth righteousness and view a new heaven.<sup>139</sup>

He was not alone among Baptists and Methodists. The issue of slavery continued to cause tension.

Undoubtedly echoing the many sermons he delivered on his journey across the United States, Morgan Rhees proclaimed that “French Principles, pervade the Universe and universal Emancipation must be the Result.” News of the Terror led many to withdraw their support for the French Revolution, but Rhees justified (or perhaps rationalized) the massacres as part of a divine plan with noble ends. A long history of

---

<sup>138</sup> Samuel Miller, *Discourse Delivered Before the New-York Manumission Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, April 12, 1797*, (New York, 1797).

<sup>139</sup> Jonathan Maxcy, *An Oration, Delivered in the Baptist Meeting-House in Providence, July 4, A.D. 1795, at the Celebration of the Nineteenth Anniversary of American Independence* (Providence, 1795), 5.

oppression meant that “Protestant Blood was to be aveng'd,” and the “ignoble Despots and vagabond Priests to be reduc'd to Men, else banish'd or destroy'd.” He continued:

The divine Thunder, which had long been reserv'd must be tremendous, and the electrical shocks which purified the Air of such Vermine, rapid and severe. What we lament most is that in pulling down the Strong Holds of Tyranny, so many of the first born Sons of Freedom should be destroy'd in the Ruins!<sup>140</sup>

In his millennial framing of revolutionary violence in France, Rhees expressed empathy for radicals killed in the Terror, but ultimately envisioned emancipation as the end.

For Rhees, French victory meant victory for the entire human race. The Baptist settlement of Cambria in Western Pennsylvania that Rhees helped to found was to be a source of spiritual regeneration: “for the light shineth,” as one settler wrote to Benjamin Rush, “and will spread and lighten every man that cometh and will announce to the world.”<sup>141</sup> He also connected the successes of the French in their fight for liberty with the fate of the enslaved:

These are the blessed effects of liberty. God grant the French may never lay down their arms, untill the whole human race are emancipated. But I am told the free negroes do not behave as well as they ought to do. Is it any wonder? Let us consider the inequality of their education & the general prejudice which the whites in America [hold] against them. Still they are obliged to acknowledge that as they increase in knowledge they become better citizens.... certainly they claim an equality of rights.<sup>142</sup>

For Rhees and other radical Baptists, political liberty, religious freedom, and bodily freedom were intrinsically connected. The French Revolution was interpreted through a

---

<sup>140</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, Letter 4, [November?], 1794, Rhees Collection.

<sup>141</sup> Thomas Lewis to Benjamin Rush, Cambria, June 14, 1797, Benjamin Rush Papers, Rosenbach Library, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Much of the land for the settlement was purchased from Rush by Morgan Rhees.

<sup>142</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, September 28, 1795, Rhees Collection.



millennial lens and often understood as a theater in a larger battle for both physical and spiritual emancipation.

Even in the South, perhaps influenced by revolutionary politics, some Baptist leaders renewed their commitment to oppose the institution of slavery. In 1794, the Georgia Baptist Association sent a memorial to the General Assembly calling for an end to the slave trade. This commitment was undoubtedly influenced by the thousands of African Americans, both free and enslaved, who joined Baptist churches in Georgia following the war.<sup>143</sup> In 1796, the Portsmouth [Virginia] Baptist Association echoed Anthony Benezet in resolving that “Covetousness leads Christians with the people of this country in general, to hold and retain, in *abject* slavery a set of our poor fellow creatures *contrary to the laws of God and nature.*”<sup>144</sup> Likewise, the Kettocton Association in northern Virginia debated the question: “Is hereditary slavery a transgression of Divine Law?” The group affirmed that “the Bondage of Africans amongst us” was indeed was such a violation and recommended that the state pass a gradual emancipation policy.<sup>145</sup>

David Barrow, an antislavery Baptist minister from Virginia, traveled through a number of states in the summer of 1795. As he passed through western Virginia he noted with approval that the “inhabitants are mostly emigrants from the northward. They have few slaves and are consequently industrious.” Throughout the record of his travels, Barrow was keenly attuned to the conditions of freedom and slavery. “Negro slavery,” he remarked, “degrades the human race” and is “fraught with evils of almost every

---

<sup>143</sup> *History of the Baptist Denomination in Georgia: With Biographical Compendium and Portrait Gallery of Baptist Ministers and Other Georgia Baptists, vol. 1* (Atlanta, Ga: J.P. Harrison & Co, 1881), 259.

<sup>144</sup> Portsmouth Baptist Association Minutes, Virginia, 1796, Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

<sup>145</sup> Kettocton Association Minutes, Virginia, 1797, Virginia Baptist Historical Society.

description; whether political, natural or moral; [it is] absolutely inconsistent with every idea of republicanism as well as humanity and christianity.” Upon arriving in Ohio he rejoiced that “I had once the privilege to set my foot on a land where hereditary slavery, the lasting and degrading curse of the eastern states, should never come.” Displaying an enlightened view of racial equality, he wrote that both blacks and Indians are “undoubtedly are our equals and consequently are naturally entitled to our respect....”<sup>146</sup>

Barrow was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and had taken up the cause of abolition shortly after. He manumitted his own slaves in 1784, discovering “the inconsistency of hereditary slavery, with a republican form of government.”<sup>147</sup> He established a number of churches in Virginia and preached an antislavery message before congregations which included blacks and slaveholders alike. In 1798 he moved to Kentucky and continued the fight against slavery that David Rice had spearheaded a half-decade prior.<sup>148</sup> A few years before relocating to the bluegrass state, Barrow offered some interesting insights on life in the region. In Kentucky he recalled meeting people who “despise hereditary slavery” but also many who were committed to democratic-republicanism in theory, but not in practice. They are “very clear in theory concerning the rights of man, and what are commonly called good republicans,” Barrow observed, “but... they mostly miss it in practice, for but few have freed their slaves.” Accordingly, he strongly disapproved of the fact that “hereditary slavery is countenanced by their

---

<sup>146</sup> David Barrow Diary, 1795, Kentucky Historical Society.

<sup>147</sup> David Barrow, *Circular Letter* in Carlos R. Allen, “David Barrow's Circular Letter of 1798,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1963), 445.

<sup>148</sup> Thomas D. Clark, *A History of Kentucky* (New York, 1937), 288-289.

*constitution and laws,*” which he found to be “very inconsistent with a republican form of government.”<sup>149</sup>

Nevertheless, Barrow chose to move to Kentucky rather than free Ohio, perhaps because he saw an opportunity to challenge slavery in the new state. Shortly before his departure from Virginia in 1798, he penned an address to his congregation. The forty-five-year-old minister's *Circular Letter* is a remarkable example of the fusion of Enlightenment radicalism and evangelical Christianity in the late eighteenth century.<sup>150</sup> He spoke of his “religious and political faith” and condemned “holding, tyrannizing over, and driving slaves,” as “contrary to the laws of God and nature.”<sup>151</sup> He proceeded to enumerate both his religious and political creeds. After testifying to his belief in the primary tenants of Christianity according to the Baptist denomination, he listed his political beliefs in similar fashion. He testified to his belief in “the equality of man;” the unalienable right of people “of all complexions, shapes, and sizes” to the enjoyment of “life and property; that no one can be unjustly bound by their own consent; that representatives are accountable to the people; in a free press and freedom of religion, etc.”<sup>152</sup>

Barrow then offered prayers and hopes for a better world. He listed his wishes in almost manic succession. Praying for the “revocation of all *tyrannical laws now in existence,*” he called for the “the universal spread and prevalence of light and truth.—The

---

<sup>149</sup> David Barrow Diary, 1795, Kentucky Historical Society.

<sup>150</sup> David Barrow, *Circular Letter* (Norfolk, 1798). Reprinted in Carlos R. Allen, “David Barrow's Circular Letter of 1798,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1963), 440-451.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 444-445.

<sup>152</sup> Carlos R. Allen, “David Barrow's Circular Letter of 1798,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1963), 447-448.

downfall of all despots and despotism; and that the *great trump of Jubilee may be shortly sounded from pole to pole*; that all the oppressed, in all countries, may enjoy the sweets of liberty, and *every man, of all complexions, return to his inheritance.*”<sup>153</sup> If that was not a clear enough denunciation of slavery, he wished “that all masters, or owners of slaves, may consider how inconsistently they act, with a Republican Government, and whether in this particular, they are doing, as they would others should do to them!” and hoped that the enslaved will soon “be delivered from the iron talons of their task-masters, and joyfully put off the galling yoke of slavery....”<sup>154</sup> Barrow continued his fight against slavery in Kentucky and was expelled from the church by the North District Baptist Association for “preaching the doctrine of emancipation” in 1806.

The landscape of evangelical religion shifted by decade's end and few were able to reconcile the egalitarian beliefs of the radical Enlightenment with the dictates of congregational order. Barrow had noted the spread of irreligious beliefs during his travels in 1795. Infidels “have been much strengthened,” he observed, “by a late publication of Thomas Paine which as lately appeared among them.” By 1798 he perceived a “present deadness and coldness of religion” but expected a revival.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, Morgan Rhees was requested to preach a sermon in Kentucky against “Deism,” and reported that many in the region were alarmed at the “strides which infidelity make in their country & in the world.” For his part, however, Rhees professed he would rather associate “with infidels,

---

<sup>153</sup> Allen, 450.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 451.

<sup>155</sup> Barrow, 445.

than superstitious & immoral Christians.”<sup>156</sup> Notwithstanding Rhess' enlightened perspective, many believers were distressed by the growing number of Deists, infidels, and Painite democrats. Such fears would contribute to the bunker mentality typical of many evangelicals by the late 1790s. Such anxieties would lead Baptists and Methodists to further withdrawal from politics, especially on the issue of slavery.

The mid-1790s marked a dramatic and radical shift in the American antislavery movement. Emboldened and revitalized by the French Revolution, the spread of democratic principles emphasizing freedom and equality pervaded this stage of vocal activism. The revolutionary turn was not merely secular in nature, but included religious calls to fulfill millennial visions of a new era sanctified in republican liberty. While the French emancipation decree proclaimed political and racial equality from the top, a revolution in political culture emerged from below. Ordinary people throughout the Atlantic world asserted that slavery was anathema to democracy and threatened to poison the fragile new republics in America and France. The struggle to extricate the institution from the politics of the age marked a temporary breakthrough in the tactics and rhetoric of abolition. At the same time, the seeming novelty of putting abstract principles into practice threatened to divide a movement that combined secular and religious voices. Fears of infidelity, terror, and unpredictable innovations in the political sphere contributed to a growing sense that emancipation may result in anarchy. For some, however, the prospect of turning the page on centuries of oppression was too precious to sacrifice on the altar of order.

---

<sup>156</sup> Rhees Diary, Danville, KY, May 27, 1795, Rhees Collection, Columbia University.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RETREAT FROM RADICALISM:

#### ANTI-JACOBINISM AND THE DEFENSE OF SLAVERY IN THE 1790S

...the current was turned still more powerfully against us by the peculiar circumstances of the times. ...Thomas Paine had published his *Rights of Man*. ... At this time also the French revolution had existed nearly two years. ... Now will it be believed that our opponents had the injustice to lay hold of these circumstances, at this critical moment, to give a death-blow to the cause of the abolition? They represented the committee... as a nest of Jacobins; and they held up the cause... as affording an opportunity of meeting for the purpose of overthrowing the state. Their cry succeeded.<sup>1</sup>

- Thomas Clarkson, 1808.

The tide began to turn against French radicalism throughout the Atlantic world by the mid-1790s. In the United States, Federalists voiced concerns over revolutionary excesses and newspapers printed pieces that painted the French emancipation decree in a negative light. "It is to be feared," read one such column, "that the French islands will undergo total ruin when the decree of the National Convention, declaring the entire abolition of the slavery of the negroes, shall be known there."<sup>2</sup> Arch-Federalist William Cobbett viewed France's emancipation proclamation as further evidence that the sister republic should not serve as a model for the United States. In August of 1794 he wrote that "In the abolition of negro slavery...the Governments of the United States have not rushed headlong into the mad plan of the National Convention." They have, he continued, "in

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, & Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-trade, by the British Parliament, Volume 2* (London, 1808), 208-209.

<sup>2</sup> *American Star*, (Philadelphia) May 1, 1794.

spite of clubs and societies, proceeded with caution....”<sup>3</sup> Cobbett's insistence on moderation foreshadowed the tactics of American antislavery advocates in the early nineteenth century, who emphasized order and an aversion to revolutionary violence as justifications for pragmatic reform.

As the issue of slavery became increasingly politicized in the late 1790s the radical element of the antislavery movement lost momentum and fell victim to effective conservative attacks. Rather than stimulating abolitionist activity, as some have argued, anti-French rhetoric stifled the extreme wing. Historian Rachel Hope Cleves, for one, argues that “anti-Jacobinism and antislavery were connected by a common concern: unrestrained violence could destroy civil society.”<sup>4</sup> Her formulation is true of antislavery voices among Federalists, but neglects the negative implications of anti-French sentiment on democrats, who were often best positioned to seriously challenge the institution in both the North and South. The role of anti-Jacobinism in tempering enthusiasm for revolutionary abolitionism throughout the country has been largely ignored in the scholarly literature on the subject.

Moreover, a focus on northern Federalists within the antislavery movement distracts from the atmosphere surrounding slavery in the southern United States. Even in the North, Democratic-Republicans were intensely concerned with the importance of southerners to their political coalition. Reacting to anti-French attacks that questioned their loyalty and patriotism, many retreated to the moderate center while others

---

<sup>3</sup> William Cobbett, *Observations on the Emigration of Doctor Joseph Priestley*, August 1794, in *Porcupine's Works* (London, 1801), 173.

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Hope Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 107.

abandoned the cause altogether, prioritizing Jefferson's national political aspirations. Ultimately, the politics of the Age of Revolution propelled the abolitionist movement, but also contributed to a conservative backlash that divided it.<sup>5</sup>

Popular loyalism and social conservatism had important implications for the nascent abolitionist movement in the aftermath of the French Revolution. William Cobbett personified this cultural shift toward moderation and away from the extremes of revolutionary ideology, but he was not alone.<sup>6</sup> Fears of religious infidelity, loosening social morals, and economic disorder contributed to a cultural mood of anxiety that spread to all levels of society. Placing these developments in transatlantic context explains the trajectory of the abolitionist movement in the late 1790s and early nineteenth century. Émigrés fled to the United States from England, Ireland, and France in an effort to escape political persecution propelled by a conservative loyalist movement. These dissidents often injected radicalism into American politics. They were also met with suspicion by conservatives interested in maintaining stability in the new Republic. The result was an atmosphere hostile to the politics of emancipation.

British historians have established the ways in which national identity was strengthened amidst the French Revolution and how a loyalist movement arose amongst ordinary Britons in reaction to the perceived threat of democratic radicalism both at home

---

<sup>5</sup> A seminal work on democratic ideology in the Age of Revolution is R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959, 1964). Palmer rarely refers to slavery and the term never appears in the index of either volume.

<sup>6</sup> Cobbett was enthusiastic about the French Revolution at first, even fleeing to France in 1792 to avoid prosecution for publishing a pamphlet against the mistreatment of enlisted men. Alarmed by the political violence in France and escalation of war with Great Britain, he settled in the Philadelphia later that year and became a vocal opponent of French sympathizers and radical democrats. See William Cobbett and David A. Wilson, *Peter Porcupine in America Pamphlets on Republicanism and Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).



and abroad.<sup>7</sup> Americanists, however, have neglected the influence of this movement on political culture in the early United States. In particular, the shift toward popular loyalism and social conservatism has failed to receive much scholarly attention.<sup>8</sup> The impulse in the United States drew strength not just from the British example, but also from developments in American religious life and reactions to the perceived irreligious commitments of democratic radicals. As a result, a synthesis developed that contributed to understandings of national identity and a re-conceptualized sense of American exceptionalism. The shaky coalition between Enlightenment radicalism and evangelicalism on the issue of slavery was largely torn asunder by decade's end.

#### *Loyalism and British Abolitionism*

A loyalist movement emerged in Britain during the early 1790s in reaction to the growing transatlantic democratic movement. Its central tenants were loyalty to the King, the British constitution, and the Church of England. Loyalists were hostile to democratic politics, considering deference to leadership as essential to social order. They also feared

---

<sup>7</sup> On the loyalist movement in Britain, see, see H.T. Dickinson, "Popular Conservatism and Militant Loyalism 1789-1815" 110-125; Philp, "Vulgar Conservatism"; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 282-320; "The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820," *Past & Present*, no. 102 (1984): 94-129; Eugene Charlton Black, *The Association-British Extraparliamentary Political Organization, 1769-1793* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), 233-74; Austin Mitchell, "The Association Movement of 1792-93," *History Journal*, 4 (1961), 56-77; Donald E. Ginter, "The Loyalist Association Movement of 1792-93 and British Public Opinion," *Historical Journal*, 9 (1966), 179-90; Dozier, *For King, Constitution, and Country*; and Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740-1830* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, C.1760-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993); Michael Duffy, "William Pitt and the Origins of the Loyalist Association Movement of 1792," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Dec., 1996), pp. 943-962; Jennifer Mori, *William Pitt and French Revolution: 1785-1795* (New York, 1997); and John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford, 2000); Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against the Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge, UK, 2007); and M.O. Grenby, *The Anti-Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*.

religious dissenters, who challenged Church authority and were often suspected of disloyalty. Prime Minister William Pitt the younger's attempts to quell democratic reform through legislative and executive acts against treason and sedition, along with considerable public support, contributed to an atmosphere hostile to multiple forms of dissent.

Popular support was generated, in part, by the founding of Loyalist associations, which sought to counter the influence of the democratic societies on public opinion. The mother society was the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers. Founded in late 1792 in London with connections to the Pitt regime, the association spawned a plethora of sister organizations throughout Great Britain. One such organization, The Loyalist Association of Portsmouth, resolved “that it be recommended to the magistrates to caution all victuallers and publicans of this borough, against suffering any meetings of a seditious tendency at their houses...”<sup>9</sup> Conservative newspapers and journals printed and re-printed the resolutions of these associations and urged their readers to resist the tide of democracy.<sup>10</sup> One popular paper contained the following call to action: “Continue, my brave countrymen, to stigmatize sympathy for slaughter and sedition, and let the indignation of your hearts declare against those democratic tyrants who would enslave the freedom of your glorious

---

<sup>9</sup> *The Star*, December 22, 1792.

<sup>10</sup> Just as the popular reform societies formed relationships with printers to distribute radical tracts, loyalist associations partnered with publishers to widely distribute pamphlets of their own. Hannah More's *Cheap Repository Tracts* and *Village Politics* (1792), as well as John Reeve's *Association Papers* were widely distributed and read even among the lower classes. William Paley's pamphlets, *Reasons for Contentment* (1792), *Equality as Consistent with the English Constitution* and *The Labourer and the Gentleman* preached the virtues of the British constitution in its current form and called on the people to be vigilant against the democratic threat.

constitution...They are monsters, as you have found them, and ought to be driven from the haunts of men.”<sup>11</sup> These associations did not hesitate to appeal to the emotions, fear foremost among them.

The popular conservative backlash took its toll on the reform societies. In London, Thomas Hardy lamented the success of the loyalist strategy, writing in late 1792 that “[t]hey succeeded so far in their alarm and threats that not one publick house - tavern nor Coffee House would receive a branch of the society that professed a reform in parliament... All that hubbub and noise throughout the country,” he continued, “disorganized the London Corresponding Society very much - many of the Members... fled to different parts of the country- some went to America...”<sup>12</sup> These emigrants entered a political scene more familiar than they may have expected, as the popular conservatism of the loyalist movement in England spread to the United States.

The loyalist movement not only disrupted democratic clubs, but negatively impacted antislavery efforts as well. The backbone of popular abolitionism in Britain at this time was the network of democratic societies that extended throughout the region.<sup>13</sup> Extreme abolitionists were increasingly associated with the Painites and suspected of harboring revolutionary tendencies, forcing some antislavery activists to moderate their positions. Arthur Young typified the backlash in Britain, warning that “any reform at all *on principle*, would be a sure step to all that followed reform in France,—Jacobinism,

---

<sup>11</sup> *The Observer and Sunday Advertiser*, Sept. 23, 1792.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hardy, “Thomas Hardy's account of government interference with the LCS, re 20 November 1792,” in *Selections of the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*. ed. Mary Thale (Cambridge, UK, 1983), 30.

<sup>13</sup> See J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

anarchy, and blood,” and cautioning Britain to avoid “bringing forward the many-headed monster in clubs of riot...” Emancipation was numbered by Young as one of the dangerous French “innovations.”<sup>14</sup>

Loyalists in Britain often lumped moderates like William Wilberforce together with democrats like Thomas Paine in order to pit members of a diverse coalition against one another. A popular pamphlet from a British loyalist (that Paine himself responded to) demonstrates the effort to connect Jacobinism with abolition. The writer exclaimed that abolitionist radicals were motivated to attack “the Commerce of this Country” by “Fanaticism and the Spirit of Party,” that “the JACOBINS of ENGLAND, the *Wilberforces*, the *Coopers*, the *Paines*, and the *Clarksons*,” as well as “the dupes who are flattered into mischief” by these radical leaders, viewed abolition as a “means of establishing such a Government as best suited their wild ephemeral theory.” The author was adamant about “classing the promoters of the Abolition and the Republicans together,” arguing that the activities of democratic radicals in Manchester and “in the Society calling itself, Friends of the People” was clear evidence of their collusion.<sup>15</sup>

Loyalists argued that antislavery activity was a sign of more radical, even revolutionary, tendencies among democratic society members. Thomas Clarkson recalled the effectiveness of such attacks and recalled that by the time they presented their evidence against the slave trade to parliament it was “considered by many members as poisonous as that of the Rights of Man. It was too profane for many of them to touch; and

---

<sup>14</sup> Arthur Young, *The Example of France: A Warning to Britain*, 4th ed. (London, 1794), 110, 139.

<sup>15</sup> *A very new pamphlet indeed! being the truth addressed to the people at large, containing some strictures on the English Jacobins, and the evidence of Lord M'Cartney, and others, before the House of Lords respecting the slave trade* (London, 1792), 3-5.

they who discarded it, discarded the cause also.”<sup>16</sup> Opponents of abolition sought to submerge the antislavery movement beneath the turbulent political waters of Britain. To be sure, loyalists counted antislavery advocates among them as well, but anti-Jacobin attacks effectively muddied the waters.<sup>17</sup> Even Wilberforce lamented that some in parliament voted against his abolition bill as “not to encourage Paine's disciples.”<sup>18</sup> His brother-in-law Thomas Clarke concurred, lamenting that “People connect democratical principles with the Abolition of the Slave Trade and will not hear mentioned.”<sup>19</sup> Likewise, in the United States, conservatives drew on this readily available set of idioms to attack radical democrats and abolitionists.

Wilberforce recognized the power of this political weapon, observing in a letter that: “It is certainly true, and perfectly natural, that these Jacobins are all friendly to the Abolition; and it is no less true and natural that this operates to the injury of our cause.” Moreover, he expressed concern regarding Thomas Clarkson's vocal support of the French Revolution, predicting that it would “be ruin to our cause.” “I am very sorry for it,” Wilberforce continued, “because I see plainly advantage is taken of such cases ... to

---

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Clarkson, 210.

<sup>17</sup> See Kevin Gilmartin, *Writing Against the Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832* (Cambridge, UK, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, Volume 1 (London, 1838), 344.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 150. The argument even made an impact in the House of Lords, where in 1793 the earl of Abingdon reportedly made some “animated observations on the principles and characteristics of the French nation, and a variety of arguments to support the opinion, that that the idea of abolishing the slave trade is connected with the levelling system and the rights of man....” After receiving some rebuke, he insisted that “If proofs are wanting, look at the colony of St. Domingo... see what the rights of man have done there.... There you will see... fountains of human blood....” *The Annual Register, or a View of the History, Politics, and Literature, For the Year 1793* (London, 1821), 90.

represent the friends of Abolition as levellers.” Though he admitted, “Levellers certainly are friends of Abolition,” he insisted that the converse need not always be true.<sup>20</sup>

*Anti-Jacobinism in America*

Loyalist political tactics were readily shared by conservatives in the United States and partisans on both sides of the Atlantic engaged in a dialogue about how best to prevent revolutionary disorder.<sup>21</sup> Anti-Jacobinism was a potent conservative discourse and democratic politicians were frequently labeled “Jacobins” by political opponents.<sup>22</sup> As early as 1792, John Adams wrote of Federalist fears of “Jacobins in this Country who were pursuing objects as pernicious by means as unwarrantable as those of France.”<sup>23</sup> Historians have noted that British conservatives drifted away from antislavery positions during the 1790s, but few have noted the influence of transatlantic anti-Jacobinism on the American abolitionist movement.<sup>24</sup> American abolition societies frequently received updates from Britain on the campaign to end the slave trade. They were well aware that

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 343.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Burke, an early leading light in the antislavery movement, wavered significantly during the French Revolution. In *Reflections*, for example, Burke disparagingly compared the French rebels to “a gang of Maroon slaves suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage,” and unfit for liberty. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London, 1790), 52. On Burke’s antislavery views see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 353-362; James J. Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, 1760-1832* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 171-172. Other antislavery loyalists such as Hannah More and William Paley espoused the cause while maintaining their ardent opposition to political radicalism of all kinds.

<sup>22</sup> On loyalism in the American context, see Philip Gould, *Writing the Rebellion: Loyalists and the Literature of Politics in British America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jerry Banister, and Liam Riordan, *The Loyal Atlantic: Remaking the British Atlantic in the Revolutionary Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012); and William Cobbett and David A. Wilson, *Peter Porcupine in America: Pamphlets on Republicanism and Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Cleves, *Reign of Terror in America*.

<sup>23</sup> John Adams to Abigail Adams, December 7, 1792. Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>24</sup> Sack, *From Jacobite to Conservative*, 170-172.

conflating abolitionism and democratic radicalism served as a potent rhetorical weapon in the heated atmosphere of war with revolutionary France.

As the French Revolution radicalized in the early 1790s, the American lexicologist Noah Webster struck an anxious chord, cautioning that “popular despotism is a whirlwind, a tornado of passions; it collects in a moment; a calm clear sky is instantly darkened, and furious winds, bursting on their affrightened victims while helpless and unguarded, sweep away the fruits of their labor, and bury them in the ruins.” Webster’s tract recounted events in revolutionary France, but the American political scene was his target. After lamenting the extremes of Jacobin clubs and the atheism of their leadership, he asserted that popular political associations “are useful in pulling down bad governments; but they are dangerous to good government, and necessarily destroy liberty and equality of rights in a free country.” He was especially concerned that “democratic clubs” in America would “create disaffection, suspicion and hostile passions” among common people toward their political leaders and government.<sup>25</sup> Webster had once promoted Rousseau’s political ideas but by this time rejected such philosophy as “chimerical” and dangerous. “The ideas are too democratic & not just,” he wrote in the margins of an earlier pamphlet, “[e]xperience does not warrant them.”<sup>26</sup>

Webster’s concerns regarding the excesses of the French Revolution and democratic politics spilled over to his views on slavery and abolition. The influential lexicographer was a member of the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom

---

<sup>25</sup> Noah Webster, “The Revolution in France” (New York, 1794) in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, 2 vols. (2nd ed. Indianapolis, 1998). 2: 1298, 1279, 1285.

<sup>26</sup> Webster relied on Rousseau’s *Social Contract* in his pamphlet *Sketches of American Policy* (1758). Webster’s later comments were written in a personal copy of the pamphlet. Noah Webster Collection, Columbia University Library.

and recognized the injustice of slavery. In a widely distributed tract entitled *Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry* (1793), Webster based his opposition to slavery not on abstract rights but as a defense of “interest,” which he understood to be “the only steady, permanent and uniform spring of men's actions.” To challenge slavery, he argued, defenders of the institution must be convinced that abolition “will not be materially prejudicial to their interest.” He hoped that slaveholders could be persuaded to gradually transition from bondage to free labor, arguing that “free tenants” are more productive than slaves. Integral to this approach, however, was an extreme gradualism and a privileging of order and “*private interest or policy*” above natural rights.<sup>27</sup>

The majority of the pamphlet was a meditation on the various ways in which the conditions of slavery debase the enslaved and create hostility between slaves and slaveholders. In short, the environment of slavery, Webster argued, corrupted both the enslaved and the enslaver, leaving both unfit for republican government. Throughout, he emphasized the “tendency of slavery to corrupt the human heart” and produce a dulling of the intellect and capacity for reason.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, Webster challenged racial prejudice and held that any human being when placed in such a situation would be comparably debased.

While admirable for his attack on racism as a justification for enslavement, Webster's emphasis on the corrupting effects of slavery suggested that emancipation was impractical and even dangerous. “From the universal depravity of slaves, from a keen sense of the injuries they suffer and a strong desire of revenge,” Webster cautioned,

---

<sup>27</sup> Noah Webster, *Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry* (Hartford, CT, 1793), 5, 37, 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



“have sprung numerous insurrections, which have frequently deluged whole countries in blood.” The slave rebellion in Saint Domingue was seen as a corollary of the “riots and outrages of a licentious populace” evident in the streets of revolutionary Paris. What was necessary, he argued, was “to make a distinction between *abstract right and political expedience*.”

In the end, Webster rejected any policy that advocated a rapid abolition of slavery. He argued:

To give freedom at once to almost 700,000 slaves, would reduce perhaps 20,000 white families to beggary. It would impoverish the country south of Pennsylvania; all cultivation would probably cease for a time; a famine would ensue; and there would be extreme danger of insurrections which might deluge the country in blood and perhaps depopulate it. Such calamities would be deprecated by every benevolent man and good citizen; and that zeal which some persons discover to effect a *total sudden abolition* of slavery in the United States, appears to be very intemperate.<sup>29</sup>

Webster's reference to zealots who call for “a total abolition of slavery” undoubtedly targeted the radical democrats who celebrated the uprising in Saint Domingue and hoped for rapid emancipation in the United States. He preferred a moderate approach, whereby no slaves were immediately to be freed.

After spending a great deal of the pamphlet identifying the corrupting effects of slavery, it comes as no surprise that Webster found releasing these supposedly debased and corrupted people unwise. He lamented that “slavery benumbs the faculties of the mind, and renders men unfit to plan and direct the cultivation of a farm.” A policy of emancipation, he asserted, would be akin to releasing unschooled children to fend for themselves. Moreover, the potential for conflict if such a policy were put into place

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 14, 31, 33-34.

threatened the stability of a still fragile republic. “Whatever have been the means and however unjustifiable the policy by which slavery has been introduced and encouraged,” Webster observed, “the evil has taken such deep root, and is so widely spread in the southern States, that an attempt to eradicate it at a single blow would expose the whole political body to dissolution.”<sup>30</sup> The stakes were simply too high to experiment with rapid abolition schemes.

Webster was a leading nationalist who feared above all the collapse of the republic. Federalists of the period were increasingly concerned with creating a patriotic culture celebrating national institutions and reinforcing identification with the “general government.” This effort was a means to stabilize the political system and lay the foundation for enduring traditions. Washington, Hamilton, and other national leaders argued that political clubs were unnecessary in a republic with appropriate channels for political participation such as congressional elections. The representative model of popular participation was said to ensure that men of merit would wield political power. Popular associations, the argument followed, threatened to undermine this exercise of political power and enabled a faction of the population to disproportionately influence the political sphere. In the end, this was a debate over which model of popular participation best expressed the “will of the people.” Many conservatives voiced concerns that democratic radicalism and revolutionary enthusiasm would spill over into the closely guarded domain of economic enslavement.

To properly understand American anti-abolitionist sentiment in the late eighteenth century, it is important to recognize the close connections between democratic radicals on

---

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, 35.

both sides of the Atlantic. Democrats in the United States were deeply influenced by the British reform movement and many European radicals sought refuge from persecution by emigrating to the United States.<sup>31</sup> These political refugees had a disproportionate influence on the popular press and contributed to the antislavery politics of the period.

As dissidents from Britain arrived in America they were greeted affectionately by democrats who were well informed of their struggles and celebrated their antislavery credentials. A group in New York City welcomed Joseph Priestley and his compatriots as “friends to the Equal Rights of Man” who would help to perfect “a system of such beauty and excellence” that remained “tarnished by the existence of slavery....”<sup>32</sup> Antislavery advocates cut across party lines, but many of the most radical abolitionists in Britain were affiliated with the democratic societies.

Conservatism in the United States was further bolstered by William Cobbett's writings. Featuring a caustic style, they received a wide audience. An English publisher and polemicist who arrived in America in 1792, Cobbett was an ardent supporter of the Pitt ministry and committed enemy of French popular politics. Like Hannah More and William Paley in Britain, Cobbett injected an anti-democratic presence into the public sphere of the Republic. The democratic societies had made it their mission to spread political information to the public, but Cobbett was unimpressed with their efforts, noting that the American people are “are phlegmatic, slow to act, extremely cautious and

---

<sup>31</sup> See especially Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals in the Early Republic* (Lawrence, KS, 1997); and Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville, VA, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> *General Advertiser*, “The Address of the Republican Natives of Great Britain and Ireland, resident in the City of New York, to Doctor Priestley,” June 18, 1794.

difficult to deceive.”<sup>33</sup> He was confident that the people were conservative at their core.

Cobbett was also convinced that America's preoccupation with the French Revolution and democracy was fleeting and anticipated a resurgence of pro-British sentiment.

The prolific Cobbett brought the loyalist politics of 1790s Britain to the American public through his many writings and brash persona. He became a bookseller in Philadelphia for the express purpose of “propagating writings against the French.” Cobbett, the consummate Anglophile, recalled decorating his shop with portraits of “Mr. Pitt and Lord Grenville” and all “that I had in my possession of kings, queens, princes and nobles.” He boasted that “Never since the beginning of the rebellion, had any one dared to hoist at his window the portrait of George the Third.” Exhibiting his signature scurrilous tone, he exclaimed: “I have a Right Reverend Father in God in once corner of my window, and if I could procure the right irreverend Father of the Devil, Tom Paine, I would hoist him up in the other...”<sup>34</sup> The British *Anti-Jacobin Review*, applauded him in 1798 as having “more essentially contributed to give a proper tone to the public spirit in America, than all the efforts of the well-disposed part of the native Americans...” and for stemming “the impetuous tide of democracy which threatened to overwhelm the American States...”<sup>35</sup> Through his periodicals, the *Political Censor* and *Porcupine's*

---

<sup>33</sup> William Cobbett, “A Summary View of Politics of the United States from the Close of the War [1783] to the Year 1794,” in *Porcupine's Works* (London, 1801), 1:100.

<sup>34</sup> William, Cobbett, “The Scare-Crow,” in *Porcupine's Works* (London, 1801), 4:3,14,4, 14.

<sup>35</sup> *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* vol. I (London, July-December 1798), 7-8.

*Gazette*, as well as his numerous pamphlets, Cobbett challenged what he called the “seditious discourses and treasonable insinuations” of democrats throughout the 1790s.<sup>36</sup>

In particular, Cobbett and his allies were dedicated to counteracting the influence of the democratic societies on public opinion. Mirroring the resolutions of the Association for the Preservation of Liberty and Property, he was motivated by the proposition “that as great warmth would be admissible in the cause of virtue, order, and religion, as had been tolerated in the wicked cause of villainy, insurrection, and blasphemy.”<sup>37</sup> Just as the loyalist associations saw as their role countering the efforts of popular reform in the public sphere, Cobbett and other pro-British, anti-democratic, voices in the press sought to counter the public influence of the American democratic societies and newspapers by appropriating their techniques for reaching the masses. Their offerings of inexpensive tracts, reprinted material from Britain, and writing in a popular style allowed the political elite to carve out a sizable faction of conservative Americans who feared French intrigue and foreign plots against the young republic. Developing notions of national identity and a distinctively isolationist variant of American exceptionalism emerged in reaction to the commitments of an international democratic movement.

In Britain, loyalists based their appeal on a sense of loyalty and duty. American conservatives followed suit. Federalist newspapers cast the members of the democratic societies as disloyal. One warned that: “When a people suffer themselves to drink out of

---

<sup>36</sup> William Cobbett, “The Republican Judge, or the American Liberty of the Press,” in *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* vol. I (London, July-December 1798), 10.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

this intoxicating cup [joining democratic “clubs”], the duty of *obedience* soon becomes a grievous burden, and the best of governments an intolerable evil: I consider the institution of political *clubs*, therefore... as the first stage of a revolution...”<sup>38</sup> The presumption of a “duty to obedience” revealed conservative attempts to cultivate a sense of self-control and internal regulation—arising from the people themselves. For these Federalists, the republican experiment could succeed only if the old bonds of aristocracy were replaced by a consensual commitment to a new moral order. This commitment involved not only self-government, but community policing to maintain a virtuous public sphere, where all understand their proper roles in the new constitutional arrangement.

Blasting radical dissidents in print for their democratic views, many of Cobbett’s most scathing attacks were related to race and slavery. He was particularly perturbed by the vocal radicals arriving in America from Britain. When Joseph Priestley reached the shores of America, Cobbett was quick to greet him with the anti-Jacobin rhetoric that was so effective across the Atlantic.<sup>39</sup> A close reading of Cobbett’s pamphlet reveals a striking parallel with arguments advanced in Britain and suggests that anti-Jacobin discourse was a key mode of opposition to radical abolitionism in the early United States. Just as British loyalists had warned against the destabilizing implications of antislavery thought, Cobbett embraced order over change and counseled a retreat from revolutionary principles.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Gazette of the United States*, April 23, 1794.

<sup>39</sup> William Cobbett, *Observations on the emigration of Dr. Joseph Priestly [sic], and on the several addresses delivered to him on his arrival at New-York* (New York, reprinted in Philadelphia, 1794).

Cobbett was sure to establish the doctor's connection to the French Revolution and democratic radicals in Great Britain. "Those who know any thing of the English Dissenters," he observed, "know that they always introduce their political claims and projects under the mark of religion."<sup>40</sup> Cobbett recognized the intersection of democratic and religious radicalism and knew that Priestley was well respected in dissenting circles as someone of moral virtue. It was therefore necessary, Cobbett reasoned, to penetrate this veneer and expose him as a fraud. The conservative pamphleteer asserted that religion was only a pretext for an attempt by Priestley and his compatriots to bring about a revolution "upon the French plan...." He warned that in Britain, Priestley had supported "the revoultionists" who "began to form societies all over the kingdom... in perfect conformity to that of the Jacobin clubs in France."<sup>41</sup>

Cobbett spared nothing in his condemnation of revolutionary France, with its democratic philosophy, religious infidelity, and a popular politics revolving around clubs. The French republic, he contended, "thanks to the benign influence of the Rights of Man, has made such a progress in ferociousness, murder, sacrilege, and every species of infamy." He subverted the radical Enlightenment narrative—France did not represent progress, but a decent into barbarism and anarchy. And while he had no love for the crowd, the chief figure to blame was "the modern philosopher" who is "ten thousand

---

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Edwards similarly attacked the Levellers for conflating religious and political radicalism in the mid-seventeenth century. Edwards, *Gangraena* (London, 1646). For more on Edwards' work in the context of the English Revolution, see Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> William Cobbett, *Observations on the emigration of Dr. Joseph Priestly [sic], and on the several addresses delivered to him on his arrival at New-York* (New York, 1794). Reprinted in William Cobbett (*Porcupine's Works*, vol. 1., "The Emigration of Priestley," August, 1794 (London, 1801), quotes on 153, 162.

times more to be feared” than the assassin.<sup>42</sup> The modern ideas of the French philosophes and radical democrats posed a direct threat to tradition and custom, which Cobbett valued as essential to order and stability.

Central to Cobbett's argument was the assertion that appeals to abstract principles were dangerous. He argued that Enlightenment philosophers, such as Priestley, led common people astray through sophistry and possessed no loyalty to country. These cosmopolitan thinkers, he counseled the ordinary American, should be greeted with mistrust and disdain. “A man of all countries,” Cobbett reasoned, “is a man of no country....” He singled out transatlantic abolitionists who had migrated to America in particular. “These gentlemen are hardly landed in the United States,” he wrote, “before they begin to cavil against the Government.”<sup>43</sup> The message was patently clear, although ironic, as Cobbett was himself an immigrant, practical Americans should keep their guards up against foreign agitators.

Among the many consequences of falling victim to modern philosophy and abstract principles, for Cobbett, was the loss of commerce and wealth. He pointed to Saint Domingue, “That fine rich colony was ruined, its superb capital and villas reduced to ashes....” Priestley and his compatriots, he argued, celebrated “that system of anarchy and blood....”<sup>44</sup> For Cobbett, material wealth was critical to sustaining the British empire, and if America had ambitions to become an empire as well, it would require steady

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 169, 187.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 173, 174.



economic policy. Abolition was a disruption that threatened to bring down the entire system.

The bellwether of abstract philosophy's dangers, for Cobbett, was the French emancipation decree. After noting that the United States had wisely avoided emancipating the enslaved after the Revolution, he applauded the government for ignoring the many “toasts and resolutions of popular societies” calling for action similar to France on the slavery question. He then quoted Edmund Burke, “the Americans,” avoided calamity by not running “into the absurdity of France, and by seizing on the rights of man....” Cobbett concurred that the French Constitution was:

founded on what is called the rights of man; but to my conviction, it is founded on the wrongs of man; and I now hold in my hand, an example of its effects on the French colonies. Domingo, Guadaloupe, and the other French Islands... before they heard the new doctrine of the rights of man; but these rights were no sooner arrived at the islands than any spectator would have imagined that Pandora's box had been opened, and that hell had yawned out discord, murder, and every mischief; for anarchy, confusion, and bloodshed raged every where....<sup>45</sup>

Cobbett struck at what he saw as the roots of radical democratic and revolutionary abolitionist activity—the Painite principles of natural rights and equality for the poor as well as the rich.

Recognizing that these radicals, in combination with their French allies, could bring about actual revolutionary change, Cobbett admonished the democratic society members in New York who had reached out to welcome Priestley. “If they,” he warned, “had been landed in the southern States, they might have lent a hand to finish the great work so happily begun by Citizens Santhonax and Polverel,” a reference to the commissioners in the French Caribbean who had abolished slavery by decree. He warned

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 173, 174, 175.

that transatlantic democrats had “caught the *itch* of addressing, petitioning, and remonstrating, in their own country... let them not attempt spreading their disorder; they ought to remember, that they are come here 'to seek freedom and protection' *for themselves*, and not *for others*.” Cobbett feared the zeal of the radical immigrants to spread their reformist message throughout the United States, potentially destabilizing the new federal government in the process. “When the people of these States are ready for a total abolition of negro slavery,” he insisted, “they will make a shift to see the propriety of adopting the measure without the assistance of these northern lights.”<sup>46</sup> Appealing to a nascent sense of American pride and simmering xenophobia, Cobbett hoped to persuade citizens of the new republic to reject outsiders and preserve domestic institutions—slavery included.

Tellingly, Cobbett's 1794 pamphlet was received tepidly by the public and as inflammatory and anti-republican by democrats. He recalled that “there were, in Philadelphia, about ten thousand persons, all of whom would have rejoiced to see me murdered” and resented intimidation by “the sans-culottes in America.”<sup>47</sup> His work did, however, help to plant a seed of anti-Jacobinism which would emerge in full force in the latter half of the decade. Four editions of his pamphlet were printed from 1794-1796. The British *Anti-Jacobin Review*, applauded him in 1798 as having “more essentially contributed to give a proper tone to the public spirit in America, than all the efforts of the

---

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>47</sup> William Cobbett, “The Scare-Crow” (1796) in Ibid., 4:13.

well-disposed part of the native Americans...” and for stemming “the impetuous tide of democracy which threatened to overwhelm the American States...”<sup>48</sup>

In a 1795 pamphlet entitled *A Bone to gnaw, for the Democrats*, Cobbett said of Edmond Genet that he was a graduate “of the great Alma Mater of Anarchy,” complained that Joseph Priestley read Robespierre with “enthusiasm,” and accused abolitionists like J.P. Brissot and Warner Mifflin of “freeing Blacks with one hand, and buying Whites with the other...” He wrote of having a dream (seemingly a nightmare) of a grand procession of “a great multitude” including people “all all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, and *colours*.” “I thought however I could distinguish amongst them,” he exclaimed, “the *Chiefs of the State of Pennsylvania!*” Cobbett's vision included Americans as well as “foreigners” in liberty caps, virgins in white robes wearing tricolor gloves, all worshipping to a Goddess sitting on an alter that bore an inscription from Voltaire. Cobbett observed “that it was the Goddess of Folly,” that propelled the crowd's actions. This “Goddess” was undoubtedly Marianne, a French symbol of liberty and democracy who became ubiquitous in the streets of revolutionary Paris.<sup>49</sup>

Awakening with a shriek Cobbett observed that the festival was occurring in the streets, as the democrats celebrated a French victory. While he feared that the abolitionist zeal of democrats he also noted their hypocrisy. Pointing out that declarations against tyranny appeared alongside ads for enslaved blacks. Cobbett criticized southern democrats for their slaveholding, even as he associated French abolitionism with

---

<sup>48</sup> *The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine* vol. I (London, July-December 1798), 7-8.

<sup>49</sup> See Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880* (New York: Cambridge University Press ; Paris : Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, [1981] 1981); and Lynn A. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California press, 1984).

extremism and anarchy. While he positioned himself as someone who opposed slavery in principle, he privileged order over freedom and saw in Saint Domingue the recipe for political instability in the United States. Moreover, he feared a revolution in Britain and Ireland based on the “*sans culotte principles*,” he claimed that democrats promoted.<sup>50</sup>

A few years later, many of Cobbett's themes and arguments were repeated to much acclaim in a work from England that was reprinted multiple times in America. Bryan Edwards' *Historical Survey* (1797) blamed the violent rebellion in Saint Domingue on radical abolitionists. He claimed that it was “not the strong and irresistible impulse of human nature groaning under oppression” that led to the uprising, but slaves were “reluctantly driven, by the vile machinations of men calling themselves philosophers... whose pretenses to philanthropy were a gross mockery of human reason, as their conduct was an outrage on all the feelings of our nature, and the ties which hold society together!”<sup>51</sup> Thus, rather than lionizing (or condemning) the rebellious slaves, Edwards and others shifted blame to abolitionists. They established the narrative of the cunning antislavery agitator who, driven by delusions of grandeur rather than philanthropy, leaves nothing but disorder and destruction in his wake.

Cobbett's *Porcupine's Gazette* promoted the abolitionist as dangerous agitator narrative as the presidential election approached at the end of the decade. In typical sardonic tone, he had referred to the membership of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania as consisting of “butchers, tinkers, broken hucksters, and trans-Atlantic

---

<sup>50</sup> William Cobbett, *A Bone to Gnaw, for the Democrats: or Observations on a Pamphlet [by J.T. Callender.] Entitled 'The Political Progress of Britain.' The Third Edition, Revised*, (Philadelphia: T. Bradford, 1795), 41, 42, 36, 39, 46, 58.

<sup>51</sup> Bryan Edwards, *An historical survey of the French colony in the island of St. Domingo: comprehending a short account of its ancient government, political state, ...* (London, 1797), xx-xxi.

traitors” and now attempted to further connect the clubs nationwide to anti-slavery tendencies.<sup>52</sup> Its pages featured scathing attacks on democrats, Jacobins, French philosophers, and wild-eyed abolitionists. Even in the South, Cobbett perceived a growing danger to racial stability. He warned of uprisings in “Sans-culotte Richmond,” and encouraged his readers to maintain vigilance against foreign disorganizers and abolitionist democrats.<sup>53</sup>

Even those who had long opposed slavery were attracted to conservative calls to order and frequently expressed disdain for those who politicized the cause. Thomas Evans wrote to Miers Fisher in 1795 complaining that:

By thy friendly recommendation... I became a subscriber to Mr. Fenno for his paper. I must acknowledge I have not been entirely pleased with his manner of conducting it: he seems to be too much of a partizan even in a cause, which I embrace with all my heart, & has disgraced himself with me by becoming a party litigant with the dirty editor of the *Aurora*.

Fisher evidently recommended that Evans subscribe to John Fenno's highly partisan *Gazette of the United States*. Evans was offended by the Federalist newspaper's political tone and compared it to Benjamin Franklin Bache's *Aurora*, a democratic paper that was taking increasingly radical antislavery positions by the mid-1790s. Fisher's increasingly conservative positions on the issue of slavery were likely influenced by his evolving Federalist worldview. Fenno's paper printed numerous articles criticizing the democrats for their destabilizing influence on society. By 1796, Fisher, while acknowledging that slavery was a defect in the constitution, conceded that Pennsylvania should not confront

---

<sup>52</sup> William Cobbett, *A Little Plain English Addressed to the People of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1795) 70.

<sup>53</sup> *Porcupine's Gazette* (Philadelphia), April, 2, 1798.

other states on the issue. He moderately observed that “it is better to let them go on slowly progressing in discovery of these Errors by their own Light of Reason, than for our State to interfere....”<sup>54</sup> His statement was typical of Federalist antislavery voices by mid-decade and reflected growing political and sectional factions in the young nation.

Through his newspaper John Fenno attempted to co-opt the popular politics of the democrats and disseminate pro-government information amongst the patrons of taverns and coffee houses in America's cities.<sup>55</sup> The formation of conservative associations by the mid-1790s helped to counter the influence of the democratic societies and aid Fenno and other Federalist printers in this effort.<sup>56</sup> The documents related to these organizations demonstrate an affinity with the loyalism arising in Britain just a few years prior. Conservative residents of Norfolk, Virginia founded the Society of Constitutional and Government Support and a secretive network of “informants and clubs” was organized “to prevent people's joining the popular societies.”<sup>57</sup> The Constitutional Association of the Inhabitants of the Borough of Elizabeth released a mission statement very similar to that of Reeve's association. Members pledged their support for President Washington and promised to counter the hostilities of his detractors. Mirroring the loyalist associations in Britain, its members resolved that “this association contemplates an associate existence

---

<sup>54</sup> Miers Fisher to Joseph Thomas, February 12, 1796, Miers Fisher Papers, HSP.

<sup>55</sup> Pasley, *Tyranny of the Printers*, 75-105; and Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System from Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 34-36;

<sup>56</sup> In addition to the Elizabeth-town association, the residents of Norfolk Virginia founded the Society of Constitutional and Government Support.

<sup>57</sup> Eugene Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* (New York, 1942), 188. Little evidence of this network's operations has been discovered.

no longer than while associations of a contrary spirit and practice shall appear...”<sup>58</sup>

Therefore, this *counter-association* did not actively defend the right to free assembly in all instances but instead justified its existence as necessary only insofar as democratic popular associations were “unduly” influencing the public.

As anti-Jacobinism emerged as an effective discourse to be deployed against reformers, the antislavery cause was targeted in turn. The polarized partisanship of the period served to divide the movement at a crucial time—undermining the effectiveness of some of slavery's most vocal opponents in both Britain and the United States. American apologists for slavery often took their cue from loyalists in Britain. One Federalist paper argued that the democratic societies had introduced a “slow poison” that “threatened the destruction of the legitimate government of the citizens of the United States.”<sup>59</sup>

Increasingly by mid-decade, conservatives struck an anxious chord, warning of counter-revolution and pleading for the protection of a fragile republic from the “fanaticism” of antislavery democrats.

These anti-democratic fears found a receptive public, especially after President George Washington publicly implicated the democratic societies in fomenting an insurrection against the established government in 1794. In his November address to Congress he defended his decision to send a 12,500-man militia to put down the Whiskey Rebellion and associated “self-created societies” with the “enemies of order,” declaring

---

<sup>58</sup> Foner, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 443.

<sup>59</sup> *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia), November 29, 1794.

that by appealing to “their passions” influential men had “produced symptoms of riot and violence.”<sup>60</sup>

This visible denunciation made public what Washington had already expressed in private. In a letter of September 25, 1794, he concluded that the “insurrection in the western counties of this State... may be considered as the first *ripe fruit* of the Democratic Societies.”<sup>61</sup> A year prior, in a meeting of Washington's cabinet, Alexander Hamilton voiced concerns that the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania “would extend its connections over the continent.”<sup>62</sup> As late as 1798, when the influence of the societies was seriously waning, Washington declared as “too evident to be questioned” that “the Democratic Societies in the United States... actually had a separation of the *People* from their *Government* in view...”<sup>63</sup> Washington feared that a conspiracy existed to topple the constitution in the name of popular sovereignty. The President openly opposed the democratic societies and led a volunteer militia to put down an uprising he thought a symptom of popular political participation.

---

<sup>60</sup> George Washington, “Message to the Third Congress 19 November 1794,” in Lance Banning, *Liberty and Order: The First American Party Struggle*, ed. and with a Preface by Lance Banning (Indianapolis, 2004), 176. On the Whiskey Rebellion, see Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); William Hogeland, *The Whiskey Rebellion: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and the Frontier Rebels Who Challenged America's Newfound Sovereignty* (New York: Scribner, 2006); and Terry Bouton, *Taming Democracy “the People,” the Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>61</sup> George Washington to Burges Ball, Sept. 25, 1794. Washington Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas Jefferson, “Notes of Cabinet Meeting on Edmond Charles Genet,” Aug. 2, 1793, in Richard Holland Johnston, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson: Vol. 1, ed.*, (Washington D.C., 1904), 380.

<sup>63</sup> George Washington to G.W. Snyder, October 24, 1798, in Jared Sparks, ed., *The Writings Being His Correspondence, Addresses, Messages, and Other Papers, Official and Private, Selected and Published from the Original Manuscripts; With a Life of the Author, Notes, and Illustrations* (Boston: American Stationers Co, 1837), 337.



Washington's public denunciation of the democratic societies in the wake of the Whiskey Rebellion and the threat of prosecution for violating the Neutrality Act damaged their appeal as the decade progressed. In his farewell address of 1796, Washington doubled down on his rejection of popular political associations. He declared that, "The very idea of the power and the right of the people to establish government presupposes the duty of every individual to obey the established government." Few members of democratic societies would have disputed this claim. But, for Washington, obedience implied that "all combinations and associations, under whatever plausible character, with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive of this fundamental principle, and of fatal tendency."<sup>64</sup> Clearly, the democratic societies were organizations designed to sway public opinion, debate policy and hold government officials accountable, illegitimate ends in Washington's estimation.

For Washington, such associations served "to organize faction, to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put, in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a party." He placed an inordinate amount of faith in the ability of elected office holders to discern the public good. He warned that popular associations could only interfere with this process. They are likely "to become potent engines, by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and

---

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

to usurp for themselves the reins of government...”<sup>65</sup> In his parting speech to the nation, Washington definitively branded the democratic societies as insidious and dangerous.

Arriving as a political émigré just before Washington's address was William Duane, a former member of both the United Irishmen and the London Corresponding Society, who was also a democratic journalist and strong opponent of slavery. He joined the chorus of democrats blasting Washington for his vilification of popular associations. In his *Letter to Washington*, Duane (under the pseudonym Jasper Dwight) boldly asserted: “your judgment must have been under the dominion of a most domineering prejudice when you pronounced an anathema against all combination and association, because a few popular societies of your countrymen dared to assert their own opinion in opposition to yours.” He defended the popular associations against attack with an appeal to the traditions of the American Revolution: “you forgot that it is to association...the United States owe this day the blessings of Independence...”<sup>66</sup>

Paradoxically, however, it was this connection between popular association and revolution that rendered many of the American Revolution's leaders fearful of political societies in the new republic. Turning Washington's argument on its head, Duane insisted that “indifference of a people towards their governors, and the measures they pursue, enables tyranny...”<sup>67</sup> Far from causing anarchy and disorder, Duane argued, popular associations were necessary as safeguards of liberty.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Jasper Dwight [William Duane], *A Letter to George Washington, President of The United States: Containing Strictures on His Address of the Seventeenth of September. 1796...* (Philadelphia, Dec. 1796), 18.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Provocatively, Duane located the groundwork for the President's assault on political societies in his slaveholding:

... discover that the great champion of American Freedom, the rival of Timoleon and Cincinattus, twenty years after the establishment of the Republic, was possessed of FIVE HUNDRED of the HUMAN SPECIES IN SLAVERY, enjoying the FRUITS OF THEIR LABOUR WITHOUT REMUNERATION, OR EVEN THE CONSOLATIONS OF RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION—that he retained the barbarous usages of the feudal system, and kept men in LIVERY—and that he still affected to be the friend of the Christian Religion, of civil Liberty, and moral equality—and to be withal a disinterested, virtuous, liberal and unassuming man.<sup>68</sup>

For Duane, Washington had been corrupted by slavery and his possession of human beings rendered the President unfit for his office. The assertion was not simply a rhetorical move to position Washington as a despot, although it served that purpose, but was rooted in Duane's long personal history as an opponent of slavery. He had spent time in India where he became a vocal critic of the slave trade.<sup>69</sup> In his last publication before being expelled from India, he wrote of America: "I trust in God I shall find them free, that I may forget if possible that Slavery exists anywhere."<sup>70</sup>

Returning to Britain after his exile, Duane became a vocal member of the London Corresponding Society. Just a year prior to emigrating to the U.S., he presided over a massive open air meeting in London expressing solidarity with democrats in France and the United States. A crowd of over one hundred thousand people attended without incident. Days later, George III's carriage was assailed by an aggressive mob in St. James Park, chanting "Down with Pitt," "No War," and other slogans heard at the rally. Soon

---

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>69</sup> Kim Tousley Phillips, *William Duane, Radical Journalist in the Age of Jefferson* (New York: Garland Publishers, 1989), 27.

<sup>70</sup> *World* (Calcutta), December 26, 1794.

after, the King proclaimed that the LCS promoted “inflammatory Discourses” aimed at stirring up “Jealousy and Discontent, and to endanger the Public Peace...” Reacting to the controversy, Parliament introduced the treasonable and seditious practices act and the seditious meetings act. In response, the LCS organized another mass protest. Held on November 12th, Duane opened the meeting of an estimated three hundred thousand people, with a call for “free discussion on all topics...”<sup>71</sup> The seditious meetings act, passed a day after the rally, made such gatherings illegal in Britain. Duane decided to leave for the United States, but many of his associates were prosecuted for their role in organizing the demonstration.

Duane perceived little difference between the Prime Minister and the President on the issue of public freedom. Chastising Washington directly, he wrote that “the sentiments as well as the phraseology of your official productions, have suddenly swelled from their former simplicity into servile imitations of the pompous verbiage of the British administration.” He then made the comparison even more direct: “you have not had equal reason to hate, nor as just motives as the British minister to fear the petty vengeance of petty clubs, yet your principles go as far, and your sympathy of sentiment falls nothing short of Mr. Pitt, on that subject.”<sup>72</sup> Having narrowly avoided prosecution by Pitt in Britain, Duane had now put himself at risk in America as well. His fear that Washington's address would set a precedent for future repression was prescient. He would later be

---

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Larry E. Tise, *The American Counterrevolution: A Retreat from Liberty, 1783 -1800* (Mechanicsburg, Pa, 1998), 29.

<sup>72</sup> Jasper Dwight (William Duane), *A Letter to George Washington, President of The United States: Containing Strictures on His Address of the Seventeenth of September. 1796...* (Philadelphia, Dec. 1796), 19.

arrested twice under the Alien and Sedition Acts during the administration of John Adams.

### *Agents of Disorder*

The antislavery cause was not only associated with the democratic societies, but also caught up in a popular panic over atheism, secret societies, and the Illuminati.<sup>73</sup> These accusations and conspiracy theories came primarily from the clergy. In the first years of the Revolution, mainstream clergymen had been broadly in support of the French Revolution and measured in their assessments of popular politics.<sup>74</sup> In 1794 this sentiment began to shift and by 1796 most of the mainstream clergy were in full attack mode.<sup>75</sup> Jedidiah Morse, a New England Congregationalist minister, an opponent of slavery, and formerly an ardent supporter of the French cause, turned his ire on the democrats. After dining with Morse in late 1795, the antislavery Baptist Morgan Rhees recorded in his journal that the doctor had become “violent against the Democrats” and was drifting towards aristocratic beliefs.<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> The Illuminati was a Bavarian secret society that promoted Enlightenment principles and suspected by some conservatives of promoting treason and religious infidelity around the world. See Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago, 2012); and Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels: The Politics of Religious Controversy in the Early United States* (Philadelphia, 2013).

<sup>74</sup> See Gary B. Nash, “The American Clergy and the French Revolution” in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 22, No. 3 (July, 1965).

<sup>75</sup> Nash argues that Morse and others did not fully turn on the French Revolution until 1796, but in private correspondence, Morse, for one, voiced hostile opinions as early as 1793 and was a fierce opponent of the democratic societies from the beginning. “We have grumbletonians among us, who, when the French are victorious speak loud and saucy....,” Jedidiah Morse to Oliver Wolcott, December 16, 1793, Morse Papers, NYPL.

<sup>76</sup> Morgan J. Rhees Journal, September 23, 1795, Rhees Collection, Columbia University.

Rhees's fears were prescient, as Morse would warn from the pulpit in 1798 that the United States had been invaded by agents of a secret society with the intent to destroy all existing political and religious authority. He proclaimed that “fraud, violence, cruelty, debauchery, and the uncontrolled gratification of every corrupt and debasing lust and inclination of the human heart” were spreading throughout the world as a result of the French Revolution and the democratic politics it had spawned.<sup>77</sup> Even in the South, slavery's defenders could easily draw on the discourse developing in New England to caution against any dramatic alterations to the institution. The resulting cultural, political, and religious atmosphere was not hospitable to radical abolitionist thought and activity. Even many opponents of slavery came to fear the destabilizing implications of emancipationist policies.

Just as in England, where the call to defend the “Church and King” against radical religious and political dissenters led to the Priestley Riots of 1791, ordinary Americans rallied to defend their religious communities against supposed anarchists and infidels. Congregational churches in Massachusetts, for example, had become so engaged in politics that the democratic *Independent Chronicle* declared one of the various political “committees” they had formed a “*self created society... to influence the people through the medium of the clergy...*”<sup>78</sup> While the label “self created society” was undoubtedly employed with a degree of jest, the Congregational committees had become a corollary of the democratic societies, serving to rally conservatives against radical democratization and preservation of the status quo.

---

<sup>77</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered at the New North Church ... May 9th, 1798* (Boston, 1798), 18-23.

<sup>78</sup> *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), April 6, 1797.

The radicalization of the French Revolution at this time, including the emancipation decree, contributed to the perception that popular politics could bring chaotic consequences. Adding to this sense of disorder, Thomas Paine's deistic *Age of Reason* was published in 1794 and became a best seller in the United States.<sup>79</sup> Historian Amanda Porterfield calls its release the “catalyst of a significant shift in public opinion at a moment of formative development in American politics and religion....” She contends that reaction against the book “contributed to a new understanding of the relationship between religion and politics. Against Paine's effort to link the two by attacking unwarranted authority in both, evangelicals elevated religion above politics and censored religious skepticism.”<sup>80</sup> This reaction posed challenges for an abolitionist movement that had brought together devout believers and Enlightenment skeptics behind a common cause. Supporters of the French Revolution and France's recent emancipation decree were now open to attack as promoters of infidel ideas—as agents of disorder.

As early as 1793, the Quaker abolitionist and Federalist William Rawle sensed the threat. In a letter to his wife regarding the education of his children, he insisted that she teach them “to avoid and abhor atheism and deism alike and endeavor to bring them up in the knowledge, love and fear of God.” He viewed popular culture as contributing to “declining virtue, degenerating sincerity & corrupted morals” and demanded that his children not be sent to study in Europe until the age of twenty-five, for fear they may be

---

<sup>79</sup> William Cobbett was surprised that so many Christian printers were helping to distribute *the Age of Reason* and called the pamphlet “a libel against God.” William Cobbett, *A Bone to Gnaw, for the Democrats: or Observations on a Pamphlet [by J.T. Callender,] Entitled "The Political Progress of Britain." The Third Edition, Revised*, (Philadelphia: T. Bradford, 1795), 66.

<sup>80</sup> Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 15.

infected by liberal ideas.<sup>81</sup> These views placed Rawle at odds with the more radical members of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the ordinary people agitating for democracy and emancipation out-of-doors.

David Osgood of Medford, Massachusetts was an early propagator of similar criticisms of democratic culture. A moderate patriot during the Revolution and the son of a poor farmer, he was known for his plain style and eloquent public speaking. His widely circulated Thanksgiving sermon delivered in 1794 received six editions and was frequently excerpted in the Federalist press. The piece anticipated the flurry of attacks on democrats to come in the next several years.

Osgood targeted the democratic societies specifically and attempted to rally his flock to the cause.<sup>82</sup> By 1795, newspapers were commenting on how Osgood's sermon had opened a floodgate of anti-democratic sermons from the New England clergy. One noted that "The subject of Democratic Societies is now transferred from the Gazettes to the productions of the Pulpit. The great fame of one writer, has encouraged many adventurers."<sup>83</sup> Echoing Noah Webster's pamphlet on the French Revolution, even to the point of quoting it at length, Osgood set off to defend the government against the "popular societies" which threatened to "kindle the smothered embers of sedition" through appeals to the "passions" and "prejudices" of the people. He encouraged loyalty to the government and declared that "of all our political blessings for which we ought to

---

<sup>81</sup> William Rawle to Sarah Rawle, December 8, 1793, Rawle Family Papers, HSP.

<sup>82</sup> The sermon was also frequently reprinted or excerpted in Federalist newspapers. For example, see *Gazette of the United States*, January 2, 1795; *Worcester Intelligencer*, January 20, 1795, January 27; *Federal Intelligencer*, February 2, 1795; *Columbian Centinel*, March 7, 1795; *The Mirrour*, March 27, 1795.

<sup>83</sup> *Salem Gazette*, March 3, 1795.



be grateful... our federal government is the greatest...”<sup>84</sup> Offering the established government as the indispensable political institution and the Christian religion as the primary guide to virtue, he hoped to instill in his listeners and readers the conviction that drifting from the calm harbor to the stormy sea could wreck the ship of state and the republican experiment along with it.

In doing so, Osgood reversed the clarion call of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, and the radical Enlightenment more generally, to cast off the traditional constraints of the past and begin anew. Instead, he insisted on caution and moderation among the people and praised the Constitution for bringing order, rather than the American Revolution, which brought anarchy and chaos. This shift by the Congregational clergy from celebrating the Revolution itself as the culminating historical event to an emphasis on ratification of the Constitution and the establishment of the federal government is telling. In essence, Osgood's sermon is a Hobbesian tale of redemption through popular submission to the “God of order.” The confederation government was a “many-headed monster, frightful and alarming to all the lovers of peace and good order.” He continued to characterize it as a deeply flawed system that wrought “open rebellions” as “we tottered on the brink of the most dreadful convulsions.” For Osgood, it seems, the people had reverted to a dangerous state of nature once the political bonds with Britain were severed. Luckily, “the federal government...rescued us from this eminently hazardous situation.” It provided the people's “greatest security against the attempts both of internal

---

<sup>84</sup> David Osgood, *The Wonderful Works of God are to be Remembered*, (Boston, 1794) in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, 2 vols. (2nd ed. Indianapolis, 1998). Vol. 2., 1229.

faction and external invasion.” To support “certain self-created societies,” then, was to turn away from the government and invite a return to the abyss.<sup>85</sup>

Democrats responded promptly and in great volume to Osgood's sermon. Many noted its popular appeal. A column in the democrat Robert Greenleaf's *New York Journal* observed that it had “an extensive circulation by *sales*...For they who will not *buy* can always have aristocratical matter *gratis*—Rich owners!!!”<sup>86</sup> Accusing the wealthy benefactors of the Federalist presses with flooding the streets with free conservative literature was a common jibe by the democratic press of period. This suggests not only that the wealthy elite recognized the importance of public opinion but also that they saw a market for their writings. What once was a leisure activity of the wealthy had become by the 1790s the duty of every citizen—to remain engaged with political affairs. The rapid growth of newspapers at this time speaks to this new felt urgency and sense of civic responsibility.<sup>87</sup>

Conservative newspapers at the time sought to stem the tide of French influence on American politics. Jedidiah Morse observed in 1796 that “very few of the clergy in the circle of my acquaintance seem disposed to pray for the success of the French since they have so insidiously & wickedly interfered in the management of our political affairs...”<sup>88</sup> He blamed domestic political concerns rather than the irreligious actions of the French

---

<sup>85</sup> David Osgood, *The Wonderful Works of God are to be Remembered*, (Boston, 1794) in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, 2 vols. (2nd ed. Indianapolis, 1998). Vol. 2., 1227-1228.

<sup>86</sup> *New York Journal*, January 28, 1795.

<sup>87</sup> See Pasley, *Tyranny of the Printers*; and Brown, *Knowledge is Power*.

<sup>88</sup> Jedidiah Morse, in William De Loss Love, Jr., *The Fast and Thanksgiving Days of New England* (Boston, 1895), 373. Morse held antislavery views but became fiercely opposed to democratic policies by the late 1790s and his commitment to abolition wavered as a result of fears over disorder in politics.

revolutionists, but that would change as well. In 1798 he warned that the Illuminati, which he claimed had started the French Revolution, aimed “to root out and abolish Christianity, and overthrow all civil government.”<sup>89</sup> Morse drew from a recent work by John Robison that had been distributed widely throughout the United States entitled *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797).<sup>90</sup>

Morse made it his personal mission to spread Robison's conspiracy theories and to discredit democrats. Rev. John Avel of New York claimed to have read Robison's book with “avidity and attention” after Morse gave it such high praise. Avel concurred that “atheism and vice” as well as the “speculations of the philosophes” have spread “in every rank... its baneful influence.”<sup>91</sup> He concluded that Robison's book uncovers a plan for “the total disorganization of civil society.” John Jay, the U.S. Chief Justice and former president of the New York Manumission Society, was another of the influential figures who read Robison's tract at Morse's recommendation.<sup>92</sup> Morse took it upon himself to send other pamphlets and sermons in this vein to Jay and other leading Federalists such as Timothy Pickering, Timothy Dwight, and even George Washington.<sup>93</sup> Jay, like the

---

<sup>89</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon Delivered on the New North Church of Boston, May 9, 1798* (Boston, 1798), 21.

<sup>90</sup> The American edition was published in Philadelphia in 1798.

<sup>91</sup> John N. Abeel to Jedidiah Morse, New York, August 15, 1798, Morse Papers, NYPL.

<sup>92</sup> As examples, see Timothy Dwight to Jedidiah Morse, New Haven, August 25, 1798; John Rodgers to Jedidiah Morse, New York, Aug. 25, 1798; Abiel Abbott to Jedidiah Morse, Haverhill, MA, Dec. 9, 1798; Timothy Pickering to JM, Philadelphia, Jan. 30, 1799; George Washington to Jedidiah Morse, Mount Vernon, Feb 2, 1799, Morse Papers, NYPL.

<sup>93</sup> George Washington thanked Morse for sending him a letter including his “Thanksgiving sermon” and claimed to have read it “with pleasure,” wishing that it had a much “more general circulation” as it “contains important information as little known out of a small circle, as the dissemination of it would be useful, if spread through the Community.” George Washington to Jedidiah Morse, Mount Vernon, Feb 2, 1799, Morse Papers, NYPL.

others, was a ready convert and professed to Morse that the “extinction of Religion & morals in France” had left him disillusioned. “Enemies are to be found among the admirers & advocates of the new philosophy,” he observed, “and the abettors of sedition & licentiousness both in Europe and America.”<sup>94</sup>

If the democrats and many advocates of immediate abolition were the enemies, Jay sensed in the clergy a new hope. “It is a happy circumstance that so very few of the clergy are infected,” he wrote, “and that they are so well apprized of their own and of the common danger.” Using the language of “infection,” “contagion,” and “disease,” was common among those among the Federalist elite who feared the invasion of “foreign” ideas. As early as 1794, Oliver Wolcott wrote to Morse warning of a “mental epidemic” that was “spreading through the world, and threatening all Society with destruction...” Only steadfast adherence to moderation could “resist its contagion.”<sup>95</sup> Likewise, Jay and others hoped to “see our people more americanized,” so that they may “act as an independent nation” and avoid “foreign intrigue.”<sup>96</sup> Foreign abolitionism, especially of the radical French variety, was caught up in this web of suspicion.

William Dunlap, a delegate to the Convention of American Abolition Societies, was among those in Morse's circle who became an ardent anti-Jacobin. In his diary, he wrote of “clouds & thick darkness, debauchery, irreligion & poverty,” descending on the

---

<sup>94</sup> John Jay to Jedidiah Morse, Sept 4, 1798, Jedidiah Morse Papers, NYPL; Also see, [draft], John Jay Papers, Columbia University

<sup>95</sup> Oliver Wolcott to Jedidiah Morse, Philadelphia, June 22, 1794, Morse Papers, NYPL.

<sup>96</sup> John Jay to John Trumbull, Oct 27, 1797, Jay Papers, Columbia University.

United States, in the form of “the serpent, the old Dragon, Jacobinism.”<sup>97</sup> “The word Jacobin is a kind of Pandora's box,” Dunlap continued, containing “the deeds of every evil if not the evil itself...” Among those evils, he listed “innovation, disorganizes, anarchist, antifederalist, heretic, sceptic, materialist, infidel, deist and Atheist.”

Antislavery moderates like Morse and Dunlap were increasingly concerned with the disordering effects of democratic politics and hoped to keep the genie in the bottle.

Dunlap was particularly concerned about the rising influence of modern philosophy. His anxieties extended to the abolition of slavery. In his fictional writings and his diary, Dunlap positioned “the modern deistical, Atheistical, diabolical philosophes,” as his intellectual enemies.<sup>98</sup> After reading Condorcet, Dunlap offered an extended critique of the *philosophie moderne*, particularly as it relates to slavery and abolition. In an extraordinary letter to Thomas Holcroft, a novelist and Paineite democrat, Dunlap suggested that moral absolutes were dangerous and emancipation unjust.<sup>99</sup> To counter Holcroft's insistence on adherence to pure principles, he argued that such an inflexible commitment would open the door to emancipation, inviting violence and chaos. Thus, even though Dunlap admitted that holding another man in slavery was

---

<sup>97</sup> William Dunlap Diary, October 2, 1797, Dunlap Collection, N-YHS.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, November 9, 1797.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Holcroft has been credited by some scholars as having authored the first English Jacobin novel, *Anna St. Ives* (1791), and was an early promoter of Paine's *Rights of Man*. He was also a member of the Society for Constitutional Information and a correspondent with the London Corresponding Society and was tried for treason, only to be acquitted, in the mid-1790s. Thomas Holcroft's daughter, Fanny Holcroft, authored the celebrated antislavery poem, "The Negro" (1797). See Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel*, 17; Thomas Holcroft, *Memoirs of the Late Thomas Holcroft: Written by Himself; and Continued to the Time of His Death*, ed. William Hazlitt (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, Hazlitt, 1852). On Holcroft's activity in the SCI and radical politics, see David S. Karr, "'Thoughts That Flash like Lightning': Thomas Holcroft, Radical Theater, and the Production of Meaning in 1790s London," *Journal of British Studies* 40 (3): 324–56 (July, 2001).

immoral in the abstract, immediate abolition of slavery was too dangerous. “To restore a man to his liberty,” Dunlap asserted, could be “productive of evil.”<sup>100</sup> That he chose this example is telling.

Dunlap directly rejected the French emancipation decree and argued that it was unjust to both master and slave. Taking on Holcroft, who was a strong supporter of the French Revolution, he asked:

...would these savage Africans be made happier by a decree of our national legislature similar to the decree of the French Convention by which their Colonial slaves were liberated or by any other measure which should suddenly leave them at liberty without knowledge suiting the society into which they have been forced, without property, & with sentiments hostile to their former masters...[?]<sup>101</sup>

A clear split formed between those committed to upholding the natural rights of African Americans and those who felt the need to balance the rights of the enslaved with what they perceived as the maintenance of order in the society. Antislavery advocates who revered Locke's environmentalism felt it too dangerous to “unleash” formerly enslaved people on the public. As Dunlap put it, former slaveholders would find it impossible to live with those “whom they would consider as a herd of brutes, elevated to the rank of man, and becoming formidable & dangerous from their numbers.”<sup>102</sup>

Like-minded antislavery voices pointed to the enslaved person's environment as predictive of their future behavior. The enslaved were corrupted by slavery, they reasoned, and therefore unfit for society until they had been properly educated and integrated. A Federalist, Dunlap was appalled by a pamphlet that was making its way

---

<sup>100</sup> William Dunlap to Thomas Holcroft, July 29, 1797, William Dunlap Collection, N-YHS.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

through the colonies berating Washington for his slaveholding. The author leaves out the fact, Dunlap observed, that the President “is gradually preparing the minds of his slaves for emancipation & giving liberty to them as he finds those fitted to receive it....” It was this gradualist position that came to dominate the antislavery movement by decade's end.<sup>103</sup> Dunlap recalled that Benjamin Rush had called for more immediate action along the lines of the French model at a past convention of Abolition Societies and argued that such impulses must be avoided, or “devastation, misery & murder” would be the result.<sup>104</sup>

The danger of disorder was exacerbated by fears that the most extreme abolitionists of the period also embraced other radical philosophies and beliefs. Some connected the illusive danger of infidelity directly to abolitionism. A widely circulated tract by the Abbe Baruell, entitled *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (1799) claimed that “Revolutionary Masons” pursued abolition “to conceal the grand object of their Conspiracy under the specious pretext of humanity.”<sup>105</sup> For Baruell, abolitionists took aim at chattel slavery merely as a means to subvert the entire system of hierarchy and order—leaving anarchy and destruction in their wake. “While occupying all Europe with the question they had proposed, on the slavery of the Negroes in America,” he continued, “they never lost sight of that Revolution which they had so long meditated,

---

<sup>103</sup> The influence of environmentalism on antislavery thought extended to both Federalists and Democratic-Republicans. See Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 118-120; and Nash, *Race and Revolution*, Chapter 1. Both Jordan and Nash view environmentalism as an ideology conducive to emancipation and anti-racism. However, I contend, environmentalism also contributed to abolition policy that emphasized gradualism, as the formerly enslaved must be slowly acclimated to their new surroundings.

<sup>104</sup> He quotes Rush as saying “Let us do out duty...and trust the rest to providence.” Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Jedidiah Morse writes of acquiring Baruell's work. See Jedidiah Morse in a mass letter, Feb 30, 1799; Correspondents of Jedidiah Morse remarked on Baruell's work. See for example, Abiel Abbott to Jedidiah Morse, Haverhill, MA, Dec. 9, 1798, Morse Papers, NYPL.

and which was to liberate all Europe from the pretended slavery of the laws and of supposed tyrants.”<sup>106</sup> Purposefully conflating political and economic discourses, writings such as these turned potent revolutionary language back on its proponents. Not only were revolutionaries likely to be abolitionists, conservatives argued, but abolitionists likely to be revolutionaries.

Connecting radical abolitionists to religious infidelity divided the antislavery movement. Opponents of abolition were able to tap into a potent anti-democratic narrative, which had widespread appeal in a nation experiencing a popular religious revival. Democrats were frequently portrayed in sermons as a threat not only to orderly government but also to religion itself. One delivered by John Lathrop, a New England Congregationalist, entitled “Patriotism and Religion” posed a question: “At such a time as this, when books are circulated... to render both the Government and the religion of the country despicable, what is the duty of a patriot?”<sup>107</sup> The rhetoric of patriotism, which the members of the democratic societies had often successfully employed, was now turned against them. Ministers and laymen alike accused democrats of unpatriotic activities and efforts to subvert both church and state. Lathrop, for his part, called on patriots to exert their powers “in opposition to the Missionaries of Atheism and Sedition, who employ their wicked arts, to banish religion and order from the earth.”<sup>108</sup>

Whereas antislavery writings of earlier in the decade had frequently employed both the language of the radical Enlightenment and Protestant Christianity (sometimes

---

<sup>106</sup> Abbe Barruel, translated by Robert Clifford, *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (New York, 1799), 251.

<sup>107</sup> John Lathrop, *Patriotism and Religion...* (Boston, 1799), 13.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.



interchangeably), increasingly by the late 1790s religious antislavery voices avoided association with abolitionists thought too extreme. French philosophy was now equated not only with radical schemes of emancipation, but also atheistic plots to subvert Christianity. This rhetoric was frequently repeated amongst conservatives throughout the United States, as when a member of a Federalist club called France, that “nation of atheists” and warned that it had plans to subvert religion in the United States.<sup>109</sup> Claims to the “rights of man” on behalf of the enslaved were replaced by a discourse emphasizing Christian supplication, scriptural arguments, and national sin.

Amongst the religious, the optimistic post-millennialism of the Revolution was becoming replaced by a pre-millennial vision of horrors that were to precede the second coming. Whereas many had viewed the successes of the American Revolution, with its sweeping principles of natural rights and equality, as ushering in the prophesied thousand years of peace to precede Christ's return, theological interpretation began to tend toward a view that the savior would rule on earth to bring peace and prosperity *after* a period of violence and chaos. Newspapers and sermons reflected the shift throughout the nation. The pages of the Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* during this period, as an example, were filled with descriptions of debauchery and blood as the Federalist mouthpiece narrated the radicalization of the Revolution as a descent into barbarism and irreligious fanaticism.<sup>110</sup> The French radicals had “extolled the *Jacobin Clubs*, as the sacred deposits of the splendid flame of liberty, from whence all mankind were to be illuminated, and made happy,” one piece proclaimed. “But, alas! the Clubs were forthwith suppressed by

---

<sup>109</sup> *City Gazette* (Charleston), January 5, 1799.

<sup>110</sup> Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, Chapter 2; and Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, Chapter 2.

their good friends as so many poisonous nests of vipers, and the illustrious Robespierre converted into the most infamous monster that ever infected the Earth.” A column in the same issue, warned that “The evil assumes daily a more dangerous consistency” and warned virtuous citizens to remain vigilant.<sup>111</sup> These authors not only reinforced the narrative of dangerous decline in France but also mocked the optimism of democrats who had celebrated her achievements in the United States.

At times millennial expectations were expressed quite explicitly. A story in a Baltimore newspaper, and reprinted in others, reported the findings of a supposed prophecy discovered in France. “As it predicts a most glorious and universal revolution in 1800, I heartily wish to congratulate you on the welcome news,” it declared.<sup>112</sup> The glorious revolution was not the American or the French, but the second coming of Christ. “I do expect great changes will take place here,” the author continued, “The Millennium will soon come... may you and I prepare for it.” A time-line followed that claimed to predict the French Revolution, war in Europe, and the abolition of religion, to be followed by “a great slaughter and much blood shed by land and sea” and “there will appear a Gog and Magog that will make war against all nations of the world.” Jesus was scheduled to return by decade's end.<sup>113</sup>

Pessimistic clergymen in the United States perceived Paine's *Age of Reason*, France's radical politics, and the emancipation decree as all connected to the end of days.

---

<sup>111</sup> *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), April 7, 1797.

<sup>112</sup> *Washington Spy* (Hagers-Town, MD), March 14, 1794.

<sup>113</sup> Millennial sermons ascribing apocalyptic meaning to the French Revolution continued throughout the early nineteenth century, especially in New England. Amanda Porterfield demonstrates that both Jedidiah Morse and Timothy Dwight continued to express these beliefs in the early 1800s. Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt*, 201-204.

This viewpoint was essentially prevalent in New England, a Federalist stronghold where the established Congregational church maintained great influence.<sup>114</sup> A leading light in this movement was Timothy Dwight, a Congregationalist minister and president of Yale University, who had once passionately opposed slavery, but by the mid-1790s feared the disordering implications of radical abolitionism.<sup>115</sup> Federalists in New England, where slavery was less entrenched and put on a road to extinction, had an opportunity to make common cause with antislavery Democratic-Republicans, but the maintenance of order at all cost prevented bold challenges to the institution.

### *The Green Menace*

The 1798 rebellion in Ireland was yet another sign of impending Armageddon for those fearful of spreading disorder. During the 1790s over ten thousand Irish arrived in the Philadelphia region alone, many having experienced British repression.<sup>116</sup> Among these were political revolutionaries who had participated in a large-scale uprising to overthrow British control of the island.<sup>117</sup> The United Irishmen, in particular, were a

---

<sup>114</sup> Tise, *Proslavery*, 202-203, and passim.

<sup>115</sup> The shift can be seen as early as Dwight's work *Greenfield Hill* where he portrays the Connecticut slave as passive and generally content. "He toils, 'tis true; but shares his master's toil...And takes his portion of the common good." Timothy Dwight, *Greenfield Hill* (New York, 1794), 37. He claimed that slavery dulled the enslaved person's moral capacity, but suggested that disrupting the system would be unwise. See Essig, *Bonds of Wickedness*, 100-101; and Tise, *Proslavery*, 210-211.

<sup>116</sup> Hans-Jiirgen Grabbe, "European Immigration to the United States in the Early National Period, 1783-1820," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 133 (June 1989): 192. On Irish affinities for America during this period, see Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution, 1760-1783* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>117</sup> On popular politics in Ireland during the late eighteenth century, see Jim Smyth, *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); and Nancy J. Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). On the United Irishmen in America, see David A. Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Michael Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*

highly influential organization that corresponded with the democratic societies in Britain and France, sharing their dedication to democratic politics, cosmopolitanism, and commitment to the “rights of man.” Many among the United Irishmen also opposed chattel slavery and they frequently drew parallels between British tyranny in Ireland and imperial ventures in Africa.<sup>118</sup> The injection of radical politics and antislavery sentiment into an American political culture increasingly hostile to revolutionary ideas proved highly combustible by the turn of the century.

Societies of United Irishmen were formed in the early 1790s to challenge British imperial power and to link proponents of independence and radical Enlightenment principles throughout Ireland.<sup>119</sup> The writings of Thomas Paine and leading French revolutionaries were especially influential and widely distributed amongst their circle of reformers and radicals. At celebrations of French victories, society members toasted “Confusion to the Enemies of French Liberty,” and to “The Rights of Man.”<sup>120</sup> The

---

(Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997); Edward C. Carter, "A 'Wild Irishman' Under Every Federalist's Bed: Naturalization in Philadelphia, 1789-1806,"; Margaret H. McAleer, "In Defense of Civil Society: Irish Radicals in Philadelphia during the 1790s," *Early American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003): 176-97; and Maurice J. Brie, "Ireland, Irishmen, and the Broadening of the Late Eighteenth Century Philadelphia Polity" (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1991).

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, *The Northern Star* (Belfast), March 17, 1792; April 14, 1792; Thomas Russell, *A letter to the people of Ireland, on the present situation of the country* (Belfast, 1796), 7; *The Press* (Dublin), “Letters from the Mountains,” October 3, 1797; March 11, 1798; and Thomas Addis Emmet, *Memoir of Thomas Addis and Robert Emmet* (New York, 1915), 1: 234-235.

<sup>119</sup> Kevin Whelan, "The United Irishmen, the Enlightenment and Popular Culture," in David Dickson, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan, eds., *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion* (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993); R.B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760-1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), Part III; and J.S. Donnelly, Jr., “Propagating the Cause of the United Irishmen,” *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, lxxix (1980), 5-23.

<sup>120</sup> *Northern Star*, July 11, 1792. Theobald Wolfe Tone went as far as to toast to “the spirit of the French mob to the people of Ireland.” Theobald Wolfe Tone, T. W. Moody, R. B. McDowell, and C. J. Woods, *The Writings of Theobald Wolfe Tone, 1763-98* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), I:274. For more on

societies reached out to common people and recruited members of the Catholic Defenders to join them in resisting British authority.<sup>121</sup> One member, William Paulet Carey, lamented that “Born a Catholic, my slavery commenced with my existence.”<sup>122</sup> The ability to link their own struggles with those of others, including enslaved blacks, characterized the ethos of the movement.

Their cosmopolitanism and dedication to abstract rights allowed the United Irishmen to transcend religious and cultural differences, building a unified front of resistance.<sup>123</sup> In 1791, Theobald Wolfe Tone and others formed the first branch in Belfast, calling for independence and unity. The goal of the society, he wrote, was to “unite the whole people of Ireland, abolish the memory of our past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishmen in place of the denomination of Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter....”<sup>124</sup> Shortly thereafter, a society was founded in Dublin, which called on each Irishmen to “open your heart to your Countrymen,” so that “the rights of nature” and “the rights of conscience” may be fully enjoyed.<sup>125</sup> The Irish, the society declared, were one people with “common interests, and common enemies, who suffer

---

political toasts in this context, see Martyn Powell, “Political Toasting in Eighteenth-century Ireland” *History* 91 4 (Wiley: 2006), 508–29.

<sup>121</sup> Whelan, “The United Irishmen,” 275-280, 287.

<sup>122</sup> W.P. Carey, *An Appeal to the People of Ireland. First Part First Part* (Dublin, 1794), 61. William's brother was Matthew Carey, an Irish emigre to Philadelphia in the 1790s, who became an influential printer and journalist (see Chapter 4).

<sup>123</sup> McAleer, “In Defense of Civil Society,” 181; and Sean J. Connolly *Divided Kingdom; Ireland 1630-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 434–449.

<sup>124</sup> Thomas Addis Emmet, *Memoir of Thomas Addis and Robert Emmet* (New York, 1915), 1:226. Also, see Thomas Russell, *A letter to the people of Ireland, on the present situation of the country* (Belfast, 1796), 8.

<sup>125</sup> *Society of United Irishmen of Dublin* (Dublin, 1794), 9-10. 1798 Collection, Boston Public Library.

common wrongs, and lay claim to common rights."<sup>126</sup> In pursuit of these common rights, the United Irishmen championed the “emancipation” of Catholics, freedom of conscience for dissenters, and equal citizenship in an independent Ireland.<sup>127</sup>

Many among the United Irishmen took up the cause of enslaved blacks. In 1791, Olaudah Equiano had toured Ireland, meeting abolitionists, discussing his autobiography, and fueling antislavery sentiment throughout the island.<sup>128</sup> Thomas McCabe, one of the society's founders, planned an effective campaign against the involvement of Belfast merchants in the slave trade and another, William Drennan, organized a boycott of West Indian sugar in the early 1790s.<sup>129</sup> Yet another founding member, Henry Joy McCracken, was a vocal abolitionist, circulating toasts to “The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade” and looked forward to “a speedy Repeal of the infamous traffic in the flesh and bone of Man.”<sup>130</sup> The society's mouthpiece, the *Northern Star*, consistently promoted antislavery views throughout the 1790s. One editorial insisted that “it it be admitted that the consumption of West India produce... is the sole support of [the slave trade], every

---

<sup>126</sup> Thomas Stephens, *Proceedings of the Society of United Irishmen of Dublin* (Philadelphia: Printed by Jacob Johnson and Co., 1795), 10.

<sup>127</sup> For examples of the term “emancipation” as it relates to Catholic equality, see Richard Robert Madden, Richard Robert, *The United Irishmen, Their Lives and Times*. (London: J. Madden, 1842), 18, 104, 135, 304, 366, 400; and Kevin Whelan, *The Tree of Liberty: Radicalism, Catholicism and the Construction of Irish Identity, 1760-1830* (Cork, 1996), passim. There existed, however, deep divisions in radical circles between dissenters and Catholics that made cooperation difficult. See I. R. McBride, “When Ulster Joined Ireland: Anti-popery, Presbyterian Radicalism and Irish Republicanism in the 1790s,” *Past & Present*, no. 157 (Oxford University Press, Past and Present Society, 1997): 63–93.

<sup>128</sup> Nini Rodgers, *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast* (Belfast, Northern Ireland: Belfast Society in association with the Ulster Historical Foundation, 2000).

<sup>129</sup> Richard Robert Madden, Richard Robert, *The United Irishmen, Their Lives and Times*. (London: J. Madden, 1842), 303; Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, 134.

<sup>130</sup> Henry Joy McCracken to Sam McTier, 1792, in William Drennan, William, Maria Luddy, Jean Agnew, and Martha Drennan McTier, *The Drennan-McTier Letters* (Dublin: Women's History Project in association with the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998), I:411.

individual, as far as he consumes, becomes accessory to the guilt.”<sup>131</sup> Calling for a boycott on sugar and rum from the Caribbean, the paper hoped to cut off the flow of capital that sustained plantation slavery in the new world.

Thomas Russell, a leading United Irishmen, published *A Letter to the People of Ireland* in 1796, which was widely distributed and has been credited by scholars with contributing to a shift toward popular radicalism within the organization in the years leading up to the rebellion.<sup>132</sup> Russell's stirring pamphlet emphasized a higher law doctrine of natural rights, harkening back to the antinomian tradition of the mid-seventeenth-century English Revolution. He adroitly linked the causes of oppressed Catholics, Irishmen impressed by the British Navy, and enslaved Africans. Like Paine's *Common Sense* of two decades earlier, Russell's tract aimed to thoroughly discredit British law and imperial policy. “Those insolent enslavers of the human race,” he exclaimed, “wish to fetter the mind as well as the body....” Striking a populist tone, he observed that the rich “derive their wealth from the labours of the poor,” and noted that “[t]he God of Heaven and earth endowed [the poor] with the same passions and the same reason as the great, and consequently qualified them for the same liberty, happiness and virtue; but these gentlemen conceive themselves wiser than the Deity; they find that he was wrong, and set about rectifying his work....” Jesus, Russell insisted, “did not revile

---

<sup>131</sup> *Northern Star* (Belfast), April 14, 1792.

<sup>132</sup> Smyth, *Men of No Property*, 165.

the poor—he comforted, he instructed, he blessed them....” Human beings, he contended, were moral agents accountable only to God and conscience.<sup>133</sup>

Like the Leveller writings of the mid-seventeenth-century English Revolution and the formulations of abolitionists like Granville Sharp, Russell's *Letter to the People* grounded egalitarianism and democratic politics in divine will rather than human law. Human laws, he contended, “are to be obeyed so far as they consist with the Divine will and no further.” Respect for human laws was the greatest cause of “the calamities and wickedness which fill the annals of mankind.” He lamented that hundreds of thousands of Irishmen had been impressed to service in the British Navy and “a man may be forced to act against his reason and his conscience, or be exposed to such torments as all men's fortitude is not equal to withstand.”<sup>134</sup> Impressment was akin to enslavement, in that individuals were coerced to fight without their consent. For Russell, the poor throughout Ireland needed to unite in common cause and overthrow British attempts to keep the island in a state of dependency.

Provocatively, Russell moved beyond the customary metaphor of slavery and called for the Irish to explicitly reject Britain's support of African bondage as a violation of the rights of man. He pleaded with “the Irish nation” to consider that Britain's warfare was aimed to continue the slave trade, a concern that he held was “of the greatest consequence on the face of the earth.” Were the Irish “willing to employ their treasure

---

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Russell, *A letter to the people of Ireland, on the present situation of the country* (Belfast, 1796), 15, 17, 18.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 22.



and their blood,” he asked, “in support of that system...?” He continued with a series of sharp queries on the subject:

Do they know that that horrid traffic spreads its influence over the globe; that it creates and perpetuates barbarism and misery, and prevents the spreading of civilization and religion, in which we profess to believe? Do they know that by it... hundreds of thousands of these miserable Africans are dragged from their innocent families like the miserable defenders, transported to various places, and there treated with such a system of cruelty, torment, wickedness and infamy, that it is impossible for language adequately to express its horror and guilt, and which would appear rather to be the work of wicked demons than of men. If this trade is wrong, is it right for the Irish nation to endeavour to continue it?

He compared treatment of Africans to that of Irish Catholics who were routinely denied basic rights by the Penal Law. For Russell, to provide support for the slave trade contradicted the fundamental principles of the United Irishmen. It is “not only the right but the *essential duty* of every man” to remove support for a government that supports such a system, he implored.<sup>135</sup> The rights of humanity included the rights of Africans, and Russell hoped that the Irish would take the lead in asserting liberty for all, regardless of race, class, or religion. This outlook was undoubtedly shaped by the unique context of eighteenth-century Ireland, where religious and ethnic divisions made collective action a serious challenge.

Nevertheless, Russell and other United Irishmen emphasized what the Irish had in common rather than their differences. In essence, they were all in some way oppressed by British imperialism. A failure to act in accordance with the collective moral conscience spelled doom for the promise of an Irish nation. Sounding an apocalyptic tone, he warned of “that great and dreadful day when all the human race shall appear in the presence of their creator and judge; when the heavens and earth shall fly away from his

---

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

face, and the guilty shall in vain call upon the rocks and mountains to hide and cover them; when the innocent blood which has been shed shall be avenged....” “The great object of mankind,” Russell proclaimed, “should be to consider themselves accountable for their actions to God *alone*, and to pay no regard or obedience to any men or institution, which is not conformable to his will.” Rallying Irishmen to defend their moral destinies in the face of British greed and oppression meant challenging all laws that support tyranny. “It is on this account that liberty should be fought and is truly estimable;” he observed. Not just Irishmen, but all human beings, must destroy “those prejudices and institutions which made man bow down before man, or his law; and to these Idols... sacrifice of his abilities, his judgment, his conscience, and his eternal happiness.”<sup>136</sup> Like Paine, he identified the institutions of the past as corrupted and encouraged all to base their actions on a new moral code, grounded in reason and conscience. Human bondage was incompatible with this new moral outlook.

In asserting their rights, the United Irishmen tended to reject precedent and constitutional approaches, instead embracing abstract principles and natural rights. Thomas Addis Emmet, a strong advocate of Irish independence and a vocal opponent of chattel slavery, embodied this perspective.<sup>137</sup> Prior to the rebellion, he wrote:

...if Ireland can not produce a better title than precedent, to independence, she is of right enslaved. But she can produce that title. The title of man to liberty is derived from heaven, from the bounty of that Providence which made him the piece of workmanship he is.... She can produce the immortal record of independence traced by Deity on the mind of man.... Their title to liberty rested

---

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>137</sup> Thomas Addis Emmet was the brother of Robert Emmet, another influential Irish revolutionary. See Patrick M. Geoghegan, *Robert Emmet: A Life* (Montreal [Que.]: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002); and Anne Dolan, *Reinterpreting Emmet: Essays on the Life and Legacy of Robert Emmet* (Dublin, Ireland: University College Dublin Press, 2007).

not on the charter, it rested on the *rights of man*. Yet man considers his title to liberty like the title to an estate, and anxiously inquires if his ancestors have registered the deeds. Man looks to antiquity for a right to be free. As well might he look to antiquity for a right to breathe.

Man is made “a slave by precedent,” he concluded, “when he could not be made a slave by force.” For Emmet, freedom from enslavement was a natural right and he fought consistently against multiple forms of slavery throughout his life. “Slavery in every form it can assume,” he argued, “is destructive of the virtue, the genius and the spirit of man.” He viewed the “subjection of Ireland to the English power” as a debasing form of slavery and also considered the enslavement of Africans as a gross violation of their natural rights.<sup>138</sup>

Emmet put principle into practice.<sup>139</sup> After being imprisoned following the failed rebellion 1798, he was exiled to the United States. Shortly after settling in New York City he wrote to a friend in Ireland, justifying his decision to avoid taking up residence in the South. “You know the insuperable objection I have always had to settling, where I could not dispense with the use of slaves,” he noted, “and that the more they abound, the stronger are my objections; but, in truth, circumstances have decided me to settle here if I can.”<sup>140</sup> He proceeded to take up cases as a lawyer for the New-York Manumission

---

<sup>138</sup> Emmet, *Memoir*, I:28, 8-9.

<sup>139</sup> While some among the United Irishmen who migrated to the United States maintained firm in their opposition to slavery, others accommodated the Jeffersonian shift away from antislavery activity amongst Democratic-Republicans. See Durey, *Transatlantic Radicals*, 282–288; Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, 133–140; and Richard J. Twomey, *Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American Radicalism in the United States, 1790–1820* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), 102–106.

<sup>140</sup> T.A. Emmet to Joseph McCormick, New York, January 28, 1805, *Ibid.*, I:393.

Society and remained a passionate advocate for the enslaved and a defender of democratic principles well into the nineteenth century.<sup>141</sup>

Prior to Emmet's arrival, a number of other dissidents of the rebellion of 1798 had settled throughout the United States. In 1797, The American Society of United Irishmen was established in Philadelphia and seamlessly entered the already established network of democratic societies. A shared affinity for the “rights of man” and resistance to a perceived revival of arbitrary power in Britain and the United States united the organizations in support of democratic revolutions throughout the world. The Constitution of the Society called for “the Union, Equality and Liberty of All Men. . . .”<sup>142</sup> Society member James Reynolds declared that the “tyrannical imprisonments, the rapes, the arsons, the tortures, and the military murders are about to be avenged, and, that a manly people, whom six hundred years slavery could not debase, are about to be restored to their rights.”<sup>143</sup> Members such as Reynolds brought a militancy to the American democratic movement that raised the ire of conservatives.

Predictably, William Cobbett was alarmed that radical Irish republican writings were being circulating amongst democratic circles in America. He promptly published a pamphlet attacking the group in 1797. Lumping the United Irishmen together with the “whisky-boys and their partizans, the democrats,” Cobbett characterized the society as

---

<sup>141</sup> Emmet's first case in the United States involved the prosecution of a slave-trader. *Ibid.*, I:491. On Emmet's activities with the N-YMS, see Wilson, *United Irishmen, United States*, 135; and Craig A. Landy, “Society of United Irishmen Revolutionary and New-York Manumission Society Lawyer: Thomas Addis Emmet and the Irish Contributions to the Antislavery Movement in New York,” *New York History* 95 (Spring, 2014): 193-222.

<sup>142</sup> “Constitution of the American Society of United Irishmen,” in William Cobbett, *Detection of a Conspiracy, Formed by the United Irishmen With the Evident Intention of Aiding the Tyrants of France in Subverting the Government of the United States*. (Philadelphia, 1798), 5.

<sup>143</sup> American Society of United Irishmen, December 18, 1797 (Philadelphia, 1797), 21.

imitators of the “French sans-cullotes,” “modern philosophers,” as well as the English dissenters “Priestley and Price.” Accordingly, he observed their chants of “‘Equality! Dignity of human nature!—Aristocracy!—Slavery! Chains!’ The very cant of the philosophic philanthropic murderers in France.” Cobbett lamented that the Irish were emigrating in large numbers to the United States and even suggested they should be enslaved instead. “I have sometimes been surprized,” he biting remarked, “that the traders to the Irish coast did not give their merchandize a different hue....” But he was not too surprised, because “a cargo of black boys is worth two of white boys at any time....”<sup>144</sup>

After the founding of an American chapter of the United Irishmen, Cobbett’s denouncements grew even more intense. His 1798 pamphlet *Detection of a Conspiracy Formed by the United Irishmen* exhibited his severe distaste for the society and his concerns over their liberal views on race. The “emigrated UNITED IRISHMEN,” Cobbett warned, were plotting a conspiracy to topple the established government of the United States. He was especially concerned with the Society’s commitment to “*Equality and Liberty to ALL men*,” and that the society held its meetings at “the AFRICAN SCHOOL.” For Cobbett, “what renders the situation of America more favourable to the views of France than any other country, is the *negro slavery* to the southward.” He sensed a clear link between democratic radicalism and emancipationism:

---

<sup>144</sup> Peter Porcupine [William Cobbett], *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats Part II; Containing, Observations on a Patriotic Pamphlet, Entitled, ‘Proceedings of the United Irishmen’* (Philadelphia, 1797), 3, 6, 15-16.

On this it is that the villains ground their hope. It is said, that some of the *free* negroes have already been admitted into the conspiracy of the UNITED IRISHMEN, and that some slave-holders either in Carolina or Virginia have engaged, in ‘*a case of URGENCY*,’ to set their negroes free, in order to excite discontents amongst those of their neighbours, and thus involve the whole country in rebellion and bloodshed.

Such a result is desired by “the jacobins” of America, he continued, and called on the “friends of government” to remain vigilant. He warned that “the closest intimacy exists between the sans-culotte French... the emigrated United Irishmen, and a base American printer, notoriously in the service of France.” To cap it off, Cobbett asserted that “the *Christian Religion* is discarded” in the society.<sup>145</sup>

Fears over the radical politics of Irish and French emigres contributed to an atmosphere that seems paranoid in retrospect. The Alien and Sedition Acts passed during the Adams administration attempted to quell dissent and insulate the established government from attack.<sup>146</sup> Conservative observers looked across the Atlantic for evidence of the efficacy of such an approach. Pitt’s Britain had effectively stymied the reformers through a series of repressive laws and decrees. Ireland served as a warning to those who would take democratic radicalism too lightly. One conservative newspaper

---

<sup>145</sup> William Cobbett, *Detection of a Conspiracy, Formed by the United Irishmen With the Evident Intention of Aiding the Tyrants of France in Subverting the Government of the United States*. (Philadelphia, 1798), 2, 5, 23, 27, 20, 10.

<sup>146</sup> See James Morton Smith *Freedom's Fetters; The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956). Debates over the act frequently refer to “Jacobins” as a threat. See, for example, United States, Thomas Hart Benton, and John C. Rives, *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856: From Gales and Seatons' Annals of Congress; from Their Register of Debates; and from the Official Reported Debates*, by John C. Rives (New York: D. Appleton, 1857), 2: 239, 279, 306, 336.

included an article from Dublin, daring its subscribers to read it and “tell me if the Alien and Sedition bills are not necessary.”<sup>147</sup>

*Anti-Jacobinism in the South*

Attacks by conservatives like Cobbett and members of the clergy were especially influential in the North, but the backlash against French radicalism was widespread in the South as well. Local militia, for example, once seen as a bulwark of democracy, increasingly justified their existence based on the potential for slave revolt.<sup>148</sup> Even Robert Anderson, an ardent democratic-republican from South Carolina, voted against a bill in 1794 that proposed a democratic process for electing officers. In defense of his position, he cautioned his countrymen to consider the extremes of the “French nation,” and suggested that “the experience of past ages sufficiently shew that in all revolutions the revolving party generally embraces the opposite extreme.”<sup>149</sup> Planters assured their associates that the antislavery movement had no traction in the South. Any representative who proposed abolition would, according to one association of planters in South Carolina, be “tarred and feathered as soon as he returned home.”<sup>150</sup> The wavering of support for France, especially during the administration of John Adams, allowed for a

---

<sup>147</sup> *Windham Herald* (Windham, CT), January 17, 1799.

<sup>148</sup> Militia's had a long tradition of democratic election dating back to the colonial period. Shifts in the South speak to a growing fear of slave rebellion and a distrust in common people to organize the militia. The risk of slave rebellion was tied to events in the Caribbean. Much was made of the the use of fire as a weapon of rebellion, as in Saint Domingue. See Gary B. Nash, “Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Domingans in Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 65 (1998), 61-63.

<sup>149</sup> *City Gazette*, April 8 1794.

<sup>150</sup> *Columbian Herald*, Oct. 29, 1795.

more comfortable alliance between large planters and yeoman farmers in the southern states.

Abolition societies in the south began to shut down by the mid-1790s. As early as 1795, members of the society in Alexandria, Virginia reported being harassed by influential slaveholders. Records show that they were visited by slaveholders, including one who warned of “the dangerous consequences which might result from the establishment of such a Society, by infusing into the Slaves a spirit of insurrection and rebellion.”<sup>151</sup> Virginia slaveholders subsequently petitioned the legislature to curb abolitionist activity and won a rapid victory.<sup>152</sup> Complaining of “alarming mischiefs” by those who “under cover of effecting that justice towards persons unwarrantably held in slavery, which the sovereignty and duty of society alone ought to afford; have in many instances been the means of depriving matters of their property in slaves,” a law was passed on Christmas day making it functionally impossible for associations to aid blacks in lawsuits.<sup>153</sup> The act speaks to the successes of abolitionists in Virginia, but also the growing social and legal pressure they were under throughout the South. The abolitionist

---

<sup>151</sup> Archibald McClean to Reverend Doctor William Rogers, Alexandria, VA, February 15, 1796, PAS Papers, HSP.

<sup>152</sup> On the petitions, see Fredrika Teute Schmidt and Barbara Ripel Wilhelm, “Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 30 (January 1973).

<sup>153</sup> The law made it illegal for a white person to bring a freedom suit on behalf of an African American or “interfere” in the process. “An Act to amend an act, intituled, an act to reduce into one, the several acts concerning slaves, free negroes, and mulattoes, and for other purposes,” [Passed the 25th of December, 1795.], *A Collection of All Such Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia*, (Richmond, 1803), 346.



Archibald McClean viewed the law as effectively “*abolishing the Abolition of Slavery* throughout the State of Virginia.”<sup>154</sup>

Anti-Jacobin accusations led some to retreat from revolutionary rhetoric and others to abandon it altogether. Robert Goodloe Harper, for example, once a strong supporter of the French Revolution and a member of a democratic society in Charleston, was on the attack by 1798.<sup>155</sup> In a speech on the floor of the congress he vilified “the *philosophers*” as “pioneers of revolution” who “advance always in front, and prepare the way, by preaching infidelity, and weakening the respect of the people for ancient institutions.” He remembered a time when “that *phrenzy of revolution* which seemed to have been poured out upon the earth like a vial of wrath... did once extend its dreadful influence to this country, where... it infected every description of people, and made them eager for a change, and ripe for revolution. But it has *passed away never to return*.” He gave thanks that the American people had “finally subdued this dreadful malady,—*the love of revolution*.” While, for Harper, the threat to order had seemingly passed, he cautioned that revolutions are brought about by “*Philosophers, Jacobins, and Sans-cullottes*.”

Abolitionists remained an ever present threat to order in South Carolina and Harper was sure to implicate them in his assault on infidels and revolutionaries. “Thus the *Quakers*,” he proclaimed:

---

<sup>154</sup> Archibald McClean to Reverend Doctor William Rogers, Alexandria, VA, June 6, 1796, PAS Papers, HSP. On future anti-abolitionist and anti-manumission laws in Virginia, see Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 109-127.

<sup>155</sup> In his memoir, Charles Frances recalled that “For several years a Jacobin Club existed in this town, of which Mr. Harper, at present a violent federalist, was a member.” Charles Fraser, *Reminiscences of Charleston* (Charleston, SC, 1854), 42.

rush forward to the liberation of the blacks; thus the falsely-named philanthropists of France involved the French colonies in the flames and slaughter; and thus a set of *political fanatics*, in the same country, in pursuit of their wild and visionary theories, put arms into the hands of the mob, taught the populace the doctrine and practice of insurrection, overthrew the government, and were... crushed under its ruins.

He connected religious and political extremism and admonished those perceived to have dangerous motives. Harper himself had become a convert to the conservative cause and he leveraged this experience to encourage others to follow suit—to avoid being seduced, in his view, by eloquent but unrealistic fanatics. He feared, above all, the poor who “under the guidance of fanatic philosophers” will overturn “all order and government” in every country where they are “not opposed with great force and unceasing vigilance.” Unless the leadership of the United States maintained this vigilance, he warned, chaos and anarchy will reign. “We have jacobins in plenty, and philosophers not a few,” he lamented, but hoped that the lack of “sans-culottes” would secure America from “great danger.” The underclass in the United States was not the roving “rabble” Harper feared but slaves. He sought to keep them in their chains.<sup>156</sup>

On March of 1798, the Congress debated a bill to create a government for the Mississippi Territory. Congressman George Thatcher from Massachusetts proposed that the precedent of the Northwest Ordinance be followed and slavery barred from the territory. Massachusetts Democratic-Republican Joseph Varnum supported the proposal, arguing that if the government was to “promote the rights of man” it should “support the rights of all men; for where there was a disposition to retain a part of our species in slavery, there could not be a proper respect for the rights of mankind.” In response, South

---

<sup>156</sup> Robert Goodloe Harper, *Speech of R. Goodloe Harper, Esq., on the Foreign Intercourse Bill Delivered in the House of Representatives of the United States on ... March 2, 1798* (London, 1798), 36-38, 39.

Carolina Federalist John Rutledge argued that it was Varnum who wished to interfere with their rights. He thought it absurd that the government would tell slaveholders in Mississippi that “[t]he rights of man was the watch-word of the day, and Congress have determined that you shall not possess this property. They cannot as yet do slavery away altogether...but they have determined it shall not exist in the Mississippi Territory.” He hoped that Varnum would withdraw the motion as it could do great “mischief” in some regions of the United States.<sup>157</sup> The fear of slave rebellion loomed over the hearings.

It comes as no surprise that South Carolina Federalists forcefully objected to a proposal for governing Mississippi as a free territory, but the opposition of even some New England Federalists against the motion is instructive. Massachusetts Federalist Harrison Gray Otis (ironically a nephew of James Otis) forwarded anti-abolitionist rhetoric even more extreme than his southern colleagues. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to reassure those in the South that northerners had no desire “to interfere with the Southern States as to the species of property in question.” He sincerely “wished that the gentlemen who held slaves might not be deprived of the means of keeping them in order.” If “the rights of man” was the watchword of the Republicans, then “order” was that of the New England Federalists. “If the amendment prevailed,” he feared, “An immediate insurrection would probably take place, and the inhabitants would not be suffered to retire in peace, but be massacred on the spot.”<sup>158</sup> The shadow of Saint

---

<sup>157</sup> United States, Thomas Hart Benton, and John C. Rives, *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856: From Gales and Seatons' Annals of Congress; from Their Register of Debates; and from the Official Reported Debates*, by John C. Rives (New York: D. Appleton, 1857), 2:221-222.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

Domingue was cast over the discussion and Otis led the northern objections with an appeal to stability.

Even gradual emancipation plans came to be perceived as extreme in this hostile political climate. An organization of free blacks in Philadelphia petitioned the Federal Government suggesting such a policy on the national level in early 1800. John Rutledge of South Carolina perceived the pleas as more “of this new-fangled French philosophy of liberty and equality... by which nothing would do but their liberty.”<sup>159</sup> He considered even discussion of emancipation in the halls of Congress as “unconstitutional” and insisted that the august body “should say no more.” In Rutledge's view, it was “extraordinary” that such a policy would even be discussed in the halls of Congress when “dreadful effects” are the inevitable consequence. Even allowing deliberation on the matter could serve as “an entering wedge to an inevitable loss of our property....”

Rutledge proceeded to make the connection with France even more explicit. It appeared to him that George Thatcher, who defended the rights of the free blacks to petition on the issue, “had just been reading the opinions of his brother philosopher, Brissot”—referring to the French philosophe and founding member of the *Amis des Noirs*.<sup>160</sup> He went on to describe the fateful scene as the French National Convention debated emancipation: “Three emissaries from St. Domingo appeared in the hall of the Convention,” he warned, “demanding the emancipation of their species from slavery. The

---

<sup>159</sup> “Petition of Free Blacks, January 1800,” 6th Congress, House of Representatives, in Peter M. Bergman and Jean McCarroll, eds., *The Negro in the Congressional Record, Volume II: First to Sixth Congress 1789-1801* (New York, 1969), 241. Also see a discussion of the petition in W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African slave-trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* (New York, 1896), 82.

<sup>160</sup> Jacques-Pierre Brissot was a prominent Girondin revolutionary in France, outspoken abolitionist, and founding member of the *Amis des Noirs*.

Convention were told it would operate as an entering wedge... that the first towns in that fine island would be reduced to a heap of ashes.”<sup>161</sup> Rutledge, among others, expressed concern that even a discussion of emancipation in the Congress would embolden black resistance to slavery in the South. Conservative Federalists and southern Democratic-Republicans allied in the late 1790s to stifle radical change on the slavery question. In the debate over the emancipation petition, even northern Democratic-Republican party leader Albert Gallatin, who had joined the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in 1793, concurred with Rutledge and voiced his support for tabling discussion of slavery, as “it was improper for the House to legislate on the subject.” The vote that followed was 85 to 1 in favor of gagging the petition in the House.<sup>162</sup>

*Federalist Antislavery and Jeffersonian Democracy*

Thomas Jefferson was routinely attacked for his connections to France in the months leading up to the Presidential election in 1800. A series of essays printed in the *Philadelphia Gazette* and elsewhere, for example, disparaged Jefferson for “rallying round the standard of his friend Tom Paine” in the early 1790s and repeatedly labeled him a “philosopher” with close ties to Jacobins and French radicalism.<sup>163</sup> A Federalist parody of a democratic society meeting published in the *Gazette of the United States* in 1800 referred to a “Citizen Sambo.” Here, the Federalist press returned to a familiar

---

<sup>161</sup> “Petition of Free Blacks, January 1800,” in Thomas Hart Benton, and John C. Rives, *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856: From Gales and Seatons' Annals of Congress; from their Register of debates; and from the official reported debates, by John C. Rives.* (New York, 1857), 442, 443.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 444. Galatin had declared in a draft of a Pennsylvania emancipation bill from 1793 that “slavery was inconsistent with every principle of humanity, justice, and right.” Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin.* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co, 1879), 671.

<sup>163</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette*, “The Pretensions of Thomas Jefferson's to the President Examined, VI.” September 6, 1800.

refrain, equating democratic politics with abolitionism, African-American political participation, and even miscegenation. The author of the piece claimed to have attended a meeting out of curiosity which was “composed of the very *refuse* and *filth* of society.” The “observer” describes a “*motley group*” who “are notorious for the seduction of *black innocence*” and sow “anarchy, confusion and commotion...”<sup>164</sup>

Conflating democratic radicalism with antislavery proved even more effective in the wake of Gabriel's conspiracy in Virginia.<sup>165</sup> In his study on Virginia slave conspiracies during the period, Douglas Egerton has noted that in Virginia “artisans, who in the mid-1790s had formed themselves into Democratic-Republican societies... adhered to an egalitarian interpretation of the American Revolution...” Slaves could sense the growing egalitarian movement and were motivated by it. He argues that “working class taverns” became multiracial extensions of the democratic societies and “rumor and gossip passed freely among white and black during the evening revels...”<sup>166</sup> The conservative press reflected a growing anxiety over racial politics in Virginia at this time, as when Cobbett's *Porcupine Gazette* referred to Richmond, the capital city, “the metropolis of *Negro-land*.”<sup>167</sup>

Many blamed the Gabriel conspiracy on the influence of democrat radicals.

William Vans Murray writing to John Quincy Adams noted the connection between the

---

<sup>164</sup> *Gazette of the United States* (Philadelphia), “An Observer,” August 5, 1800.

<sup>165</sup> Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*; Michael L. Nicholls, *Whispers of Rebellion: Narrating Gabriel's Conspiracy*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012); and Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>166</sup> Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 & 1802* (Chapel Hill, 1993), 38-39.

<sup>167</sup> *Porcupine's Gazette* (Philadelphia), April, 2, 1798.

planned rebellion and French influence. He speculated: “Certainly there are motives... independent of the contagion of Jacobinism, to account for an insurrection of slaves; but I doubt not that the eternal clamour about liberty in V[irginia] and S[outh] C[arolina] both, has matured the event which has happened.”<sup>168</sup> A letter printed in the *Virginia Herald* noted that “in the general massacre of white males,” supposedly planned by Gabriel, “*not a Frenchman was to be touched.*” The letter went as far as to claim “that two Frenchmen had planned the plot, and that the general Gabriel, who is not yet caught, had procured it from them.”<sup>169</sup> According to the author, the plot was not only hatched by French radicals but carried out with the assistance of homegrown democrats. “It is very certain...that this dreadful conspiracy originates with some vile French Jacobins,” the letter continued, “aided and abetted by some of our own profligate and abandoned democrats. Liberty and equality have brought the evil upon us.” The author then turned to natural rights doctrine and boldly asserted that “This doctrine...cannot fail of producing either a general insurrection or a general emancipation.” Clearly, the latter was out of the question. Recognizing the contradiction at the heart of Democratic-Republican politics, the letter concludes with an unequivocal statement: “That man must be a fool... who thinks that there can be any compromise between liberty and slavery.”

The correspondence of leading Federalists during the period reflects their anxieties relating to the spread of popular politics and the mobilization of national power by the Democratic-Republicans. Fischer Ames wrote to Theodore Dwight in 1801

---

<sup>168</sup> William Vans Murray to John Quincy Adams, December 9, 1800 in American Historical Association. *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1912* (Washington D.C., 1914), 663

<sup>169</sup> *Virginia Herald*, (Fredericksburg) “Extract of a Letter,” September 23, 1800. According to Douglas Egerton, no massacre of whites was in fact planned by Gabriel. The merchant elite and slaveholders were targeted. Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 28, 76-77.

warning that “Philosophism and Jacobinism” fueled the Democratic-Republicans’ “passions” and that “political power is to be wholly in their hands,” fearing “the extremist use of this power....”<sup>170</sup> While both Ames and Dwight opposed slavery, they also preached caution and sought to avoid disorder at all costs. Fisher Ames, whose own older brother Nathaniel was a radical democrat, was worried that Democratic-Republicanism in the urban North could empower the masses. In an earlier letter to Dwight he cautioned against the power of the “rabble formed into a club. Thus Boston may play Paris, and rule the State.”<sup>171</sup>

Jefferson was careful to distance himself from past antislavery positions and presented racist opinions that could be used to justify the institution.<sup>172</sup> His *Notes on the State of Virginia*, aimed at an elite French audience, planted the seeds of pseudo-scientific racism, even as he denounced the institution for corrupting the master class.<sup>173</sup> Some democrats were appalled at Jefferson's arguments for the inferiority of Africans.

---

<sup>170</sup> Fischer Ames to Theodore Dwight, March 19, 1801, in Seth Ames, ed., *Works of Fisher Ames*, I, 292–95.

<sup>171</sup> Fisher Ames to Theodore Dwight, September 3, 1794. Quoted in Charles Warren, *Jacobin and Junto* (New York, 1931), 57.

<sup>172</sup> On Jefferson's complicated relationship to slavery, see David Brion Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 166-84; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black*; 334-365, 461-481; Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); Paul Finkleman, "Jefferson and Slavery: Treason Against the Hopes of the World," in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 181-221; Annete Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); John C. Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991).

<sup>173</sup> William Peden, ed., *Notes on the State of Virginia, by Thomas Jefferson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 138-143. His criticisms of slavery were focused primarily on its negative effects on whites. *Ibid.*, 162-163.



Gilbert Imlay, for one, proclaimed them to be “sophistry and nonsense!”<sup>174</sup> According to David Brion Davis, “After [Jefferson's] return to America” from France in 1789, “the most remarkable thing about Jefferson's stand on slavery is his immense silence.”<sup>175</sup> Jefferson himself admitted to George Logan that while in national office he had “carefully avoided every public act or manifestation” on the subject of slavery.<sup>176</sup>

Likewise, Democratic-Republicans, even in the North, began to retreat from their earlier emancipatory radicalism. Tunis Wortman, an articulate defender of the democratic societies from New York, clarified his position on race in the lead up to Jefferson's election in 1800:

We may sincerely advocate the freedom of black men, and yet assert their moral and physical inferiority. It is our duty to assert their liberties, but it is not our duty to blend our form and colour and existence with theirs. Education and habit, nay, nature herself recoils at the idea.<sup>177</sup>

Abraham Bishop, the New England democrat who had penned one of the most radical antislavery pieces of the early 1790s, did Jefferson's bidding in his home state of Connecticut, attempting to allay the fears of New Englanders that Jefferson was an atheist and an infidel.<sup>178</sup> While his antislavery views appeared to remain, his priorities had

---

<sup>174</sup> Gilbert Imlay, *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory* (1793: Revised Edition, New York, 1797), 231.

<sup>175</sup> David Brion Davis, *Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 179.

<sup>176</sup> Thomas Jefferson to George Logan, May 11, 1805. *Founders Online*, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/99-01-02-1709> [last update: 2015-12-30]).

<sup>177</sup> Tunis Wortman, *A Solemn Address, to Christian Patriots, upon the Approaching Election of a President of the United States* (New York, 1800), 16.

<sup>178</sup> Abraham Bishop, *Connecticut Republicanism, An Oration, On the Extent and Power of Political Delusion* (Philadelphia, 1800), 80. On Bishop's embrace of Jeffersonian politics and shift from earlier antislavery commitments, see Pdraig Riley, *Slavery and the Democratic Conscience: Political Life in Jeffersonian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 44-46.

clearly shifted. Defending Democratic-Republicans against attacks from the “friends of order,” which included those relating to Jefferson's slaveholding, Bishop presented a striking analogy:

... a Southern slave has only one master; a northern one has many, yea, he has a master to every power and faculty, to every thought and opinion on every subject. It is not necessary to the character of a slave that he have a chain about his leg, or a rope about his neck. Invisible slavery is more dreadful, extensive and intolerable than visible slavery, because in the first case the masters will often deny its existence.

Northerners under Federalist rule, he argued, were actually in a state of slavery even more pernicious than the actual bondage of hundreds of thousands of human beings in the American South. The author of the “Rights of Black Men” was now significantly blurring the definition of enslavement in the political interest of Jefferson and his party. Bishop would become Collector of the Port of New Haven after Jefferson's election to the Presidency, which many viewed as patronage for his partisan support.<sup>179</sup>

Federalists increasingly attacked Democratic-Republicans as hypocrites for tolerating slaveholders in their party while claiming to stand for liberty and equality. Levi Lincoln was quick to respond. Back in 1781, Lincoln had defended the enslaved Quock Walker in Massachusetts and won a landmark decision on the grounds of higher law theory. He was a firm supporter of Jefferson and wrote a series of “letters to the people” in defense of his policies. Lincoln argued that Federalist attacks on southern slaveholding were appeals to “prejudices” in order to divide the Democratic-Republican party along

---

<sup>179</sup> Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Franklin Bowditch Abraham Bishop of Connecticut and His Writings* (Cambridge, MA: J. Wilson, 1905), 193-196.

sectional lines.<sup>180</sup> The Federalists, he accused, were engaged in an effort “to subject republicans to a popular prejudice, on the idea of their being opposed to the principles” of the American Revolution itself. Despite his earlier endeavors on behalf of the enslaved, Walker found such accusations absurd and called on the reader to recall the “incidents of *seventy-five*” when “independence and liberty” were won through cooperation with the South. When blood stained the plains of Lexington “inhabitants of the South, these Virginian slave holders, with a swell of magnanimity,” hurried to the North's rescue.<sup>181</sup> Jefferson's supporters, which included many democrats who had been at the extremes of antislavery agitation, now brushed aside differences and rallied around their leader. Lincoln was appointed Attorney General in Jefferson's first term and enjoyed a long political career in the party.

Some antislavery voices among the democrats remained firm and those figures most often became marginalized as the national party grew in strength. Jefferson himself, in response to various attacks on his Francophilia, distanced himself from the democratic societies and the radical wing of the party-- actively seeking the votes of fellow slaveholders instead. By the end of the eighteenth century, the radical Enlightenment was in full retreat and a moderated Democratic-Republican party with a slaveholder as Presidential candidate, ascended to national leadership.

Proslavery opinions were loudly expressed throughout the late eighteenth century, but the revolutionary potential of the American and French Revolutions appeared to advance a principled assault on the institution for a time—and garnered substantial public

---

<sup>180</sup> Riley, *Democratic Conscience*, 20-22.

<sup>181</sup> Levi Lincoln, *A Farmer's Letters to the People* (Philadelphia, 1802), 69.

support in the process. The momentum behind this movement produced real tangible gains. It helped to assure that emancipation policies in the North were implemented and enforced. The strength of Democratic-Republicanism in the South also contributed to a climate where some slaveholders were motivated to relinquish their claims to human property and justify their actions in the language of the “rights of man.” France's uncompromising position on slavery in 1794 further exposed the contradiction of maintaining slavery while proclaiming liberty.

The decline in enthusiasm for the French cause was coupled with a retreat from revolutionary abolitionism in the United States and a trend toward a more moderate approach to anti-slavery activism in first decades of the nineteenth century. The distancing from abolitionism by the Democratic-Republican leadership at the end of the 1790s tamped down enthusiasm for it among some of the rank and file. Perhaps the winds of change appeared too treacherous for the newly-chartered nation tossed amidst Atlantic swells of revolution. Ultimately, those at the helm sought to avoid the emancipatory, but hazardous, course plotted by democratic abolitionists and circumvent the rough waters of sustained cosmopolitan exchange. The evidence suggests that the proslavery position of the party under Jefferson was not inevitable, but the window of opportunity for radical change closed quickly and was shaped by various political and ideological currents in the Atlantic world.

## EPILOGUE:

### THE LEGACY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ANTISLAVERY RADICALISM

The French Revolution had no territory of its own; indeed, its effect was to efface, in a way, all older frontiers. It brought men together, or divided them, in spite of laws, traditions, character and language, turning enemies sometimes into compatriots, and kinsmen into strangers; or rather, it formed, above all particular nationalities, an intellectual common country of which men of all nations might become citizens....<sup>1</sup>

- Alexis de Tocqueville

Thomas Jefferson did nothing to challenge the institution of slavery as president. He owed his election to the three-fifths clause, without which he would not have secured the electoral votes necessary for victory over John Adams in 1800. Slaveholders and their human “property” were valuable political assets to the burgeoning Democratic-Republican party. While in office, President Jefferson was sure to take care of this constituency. He supported Napoleon in his effort to re-impose slavery in Haiti, established an embargo on the black republic, and instituted a policy of non-recognition that lasted for sixty years.<sup>2</sup> This policy reversed course from America's support for Toussaint L'Ouverture in the late 1790s, when imperial France was perceived to pose a far greater threat to the national interests of the United States than an

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in R.R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959, 1964), i.

<sup>2</sup> Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge, UK and New York, 2009), 172; and Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations During the Early Republic* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

independent Haiti.<sup>3</sup> For a brief moment, anti-French sentiment and support of a free black nation coincided. But with the ascendancy of Jefferson and a coalition that included southern slaveholders, fears of slave insurrection usually trumped principle.

With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 the United States greatly expanded its territories and it remained to be decided whether they would become free or slave. Thomas Paine, having returned to the United States after being imprisoned and nearly executed in revolutionary France, took up his pen to expose the hypocrisy of a petition calling for the right to enslave others issued by the inhabitants of Louisiana to the American government. “You are arriving at freedom by the easiest means that any people enjoyed it,” Paine observed, “And you already so far mistake principles, that under the name of *rights* you ask for *powers*; power to import and enslave Africans; and to govern a territory that *we have purchased*.” For Paine, this request violated the fundamental principles of the American Revolution itself. “Dare you put up a petition to Heaven for such a power, without fearing to be struck from the earth by its justice? Why, then do you ask it of man against man? Do you want to renew in Louisiana the horrors of Domingo?”<sup>4</sup>

But Paine no longer had the influence he once did. He was greeted unceremoniously upon his return to the United States from France in 1802. After a fifteen-year absence, Paine may have felt like Rip Van Winkle awaking from his slumber. The American scene had changed in startling ways while he was away. He may have

---

<sup>3</sup> Larry Tise, *American Counter-Revolution: A Retreat from Liberty: 1783- 1800* (Mechanicsburgh, PA, 1998), 481-92.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Paine, “To the French Inhabitants of Louisiana,” Sept. 22, 1804, in *The Political Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. George H. Evans (New York, 1835), 434-35, 438.

expected to be feted as a revolutionary hero, much as Citizen Genet had been less than a decade prior. Instead, the author of *Common Sense*, veteran of the Revolutionary War, whose *American Crisis* was read to boost the morale of Washington's starving troops at Valley Forge, was denied service at taverns, lodging at inns, and generally scoffed at wherever he went. When he finally found a place to lay his head, "Great numbers of people, waggoners, porters, &c &c crowded round the house to have a peep at this famous animal."<sup>5</sup> His publication of the deistic *Age of Reason* and the anti-Jacobin political climate had transformed the pamphleteer from a scion of freedom to a creature to be gawked at.

An America that was hostile to Thomas Paine and his radical Enlightenment principles was likely to be unreceptive to radical abolitionism. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, Democratic-Republican leaders in the South often expressed the belief that while the principles of the French Revolution were noble, they were taken too far when applied to blacks. John Taylor of Caroline, a prominent member of the American Colonization Society who was a U.S. Senator in 1794, argued that the abstract impulse behind the Revolution "turned out to be a foolish and mischievous speculation;" and asked, "what then can be expected from making republicans of negro slaves...?" The Revolution, he continued, "attempted to compound a free nation of black and white people in St. Domingo. The experiment pronounced that one colour must perish."

---

<sup>5</sup> James Perhouse to John Perhouse, Perhouse Papers, American Philosophical Society. On Paine's hostile return to America, see Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, 257-63; and Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*, 1-3. Foner largely blames Paine's perceived religious infidelity, while Cotlar argues that, in addition to this perception, his politics were too radical for the mainstream in a climate more hostile to the French Revolution and witnessing a rising sense of American nationalism in conflict with Paine's cosmopolitanism.

Abolitionists were to blame. If they were able to “emancipate the blacks,” in the United States, it would surely bring civil war and needless bloodshed for whites. He viewed an integrated republic with “inconceivable horror” as “monstrous and unnatural as a mongrel half white man and half negro.” White sympathy for enslaved blacks, he complained, was akin to blacks transferring “their affections from their own species to the baboons.”<sup>6</sup> Civil rights in the South were increasingly racialized—republican participation was a badge of white privilege and blackness a perpetual brand of slavery.

Democratic-Republicans who had once ardently opposed slavery, tended to quiet their objections during Jefferson's presidency. Some even went as far as to become enslavers themselves. Edmond-Charles Genet, the celebrated French minister to the United States and one-time member of the Amis des Noirs, married the daughter of New York Governor George Clinton and became a slaveholder.<sup>7</sup> Thomas Cooper, the Manchester democratic society member and author of abolitionist tracts, who was later prosecuted under the Alien and Sedition Acts in the United States, moved South to become an instructor at the University of South Carolina. “In South Carolina,” he doubted whether “the rich lands *could* be cultivated without slave labour,” and joined the planter elite himself after reconciling himself to its economic necessity.<sup>8</sup>

Even in the North, emancipationism had given way to more conservative approaches to the problem of slavery. In 1833, William Dunlap, once a Federalist

---

<sup>6</sup> John Taylor, *Arator; Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical & Political In Sixty One Numbers* (Baltimore, 1817), 82.

<sup>7</sup> Padraig Riley, *Slavery and the Democratic Conscience: Political Life in Jeffersonian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 146-47.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Cooper, *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy* (McMorris & Wilson: Columbia, SC, 1830), 96. Also, see *Ibid.*, 78.



member of the American Abolition Convention, lamented the radicalism of the 1790s and gave thanks that the subject of slavery “is better understood now, and Colonization Societies are superseding the Abolitionists....”<sup>9</sup> Scientific racism was on the rise nationwide and the antislavery movement was increasingly dominated by those who wished to colonize freed slaves elsewhere as opposed to including them in the civic life of the Republic.

While anti-Jacobinism and social conservatism suppressed revolutionary abolitionist ideology, these ideas continued to inspire abolitionists in the nineteenth century. Many of the same people that had fought against slavery in Kentucky moved on to free-soil Ohio following their defeat. New democratic societies were formed in the Northwest, emanating from Cincinnati, which spread republican and antislavery principles.<sup>10</sup> “Slavery is contrary to the rights of man,” one Ohio activist wrote, while a political candidate observed that if anything “is opposite in its nature to republican principles, or disgraceful to the profession of republicanism, it is the abhorred system of slavery.”<sup>11</sup> Leading western abolitionists like Benjamin Lundy were inspired by this movement. Paine's influence was often veiled but distinguishable. One of the earliest antislavery newspapers in the United States was entitled *The Rights of Man* and William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* featured Paine's phrase, “Our Country Is the World—Our

---

<sup>9</sup> William Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre*, vol. I (New York, 1832), 328.

<sup>10</sup> John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 84-90.

<sup>11</sup> *Western Spy* (Cincinnati), July 24, 1802; and *Western Spy*, October 2, 1802. See *Ibid.*, 86.

Countrymen Are Mankind” on its masthead.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps his “army of principles” marched on.

David Walker's famous *Appeal* (1829) combined religious fervor, appeals to conscience, and a commitment to natural rights in a similar fashion to the most radical tracts of the revolutionary period. Walker was a vocal African-American opponent of slavery, who had moved from Charleston to Philadelphia and finally to Boston. He became active in both African Methodism (influenced by Richard Allen) and Prince Hall Freemasonry, as well as antislavery organizations.<sup>13</sup> The tract's full title is revealing: *Appeal, In Four Articles; Together with A Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America*. Walker's audience was simultaneously transnational and national—with the designation of “citizen” applied to both. Like Thomas Paine, Walker spoke prophetically in both cosmopolitan and nationalistic terms.<sup>14</sup> Writing at a time when the term “colored citizen” was becoming an oxymoron in the United States, Walker asserted civic equality and sought to rally blacks throughout the world to the cause of the enslaved in America.

Scholars usually focus on Walker's explicit appeal to people of color and his calls to violence. Often overlooked is his insistence on the sovereignty of God as a means to

---

<sup>12</sup> The newspaper was published by the abolitionist William C. Bloss, William F. Peck, *History of Rochester and Monroe County, New York, From the Earliest Historic Times to the Beginning of 1907* (New York: Pioneer Pub. Co, 1908), 538. Also see Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*, 148. On Garrison's cosmopolitanism and links to transatlantic radicalism, see Caleb W. McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> See Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Harvey J. Kaye notes that Walker was influenced by Paine's *Common Sense*. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*, 147-48.

undermine the authority of slaveholders. “God made man to serve Him alone,” he writes, asserting “that God Almighty is the sole proprietor or master of the WHOLE human family....” Much as Paine de-sacrilized George III, Walker asked whether whites were “not dying worms as well as we?” All human beings were subject to divine authority, he contended, and questioned whether slaveholders had not usurped this privilege. “[W]ould they not *dethrone* Jehovah,” he asked, “and seat themselves upon his throne?” Walker's God was a wrathful king. “God Almighty alone, who rules in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and who dethrones one earthly king and sits up another,” judged the enslavers to be cruel and immoral. In the ensuing Apocalypse, “When God Almighty commences his battle on the continent of America,” Walker professed, “for the oppression of his people, tyrants will wish they never were born.” Blacks, he proclaimed, were the chosen people, the new Israelites in bondage.<sup>15</sup>

Walker combined claims of divine sovereignty with appeals to conscience and assertions of natural equality. He called on “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” to “open your hearts to understand and believe the truth.” He hoped to “awaken in the breasts of my afflicted degraded and slumbering brethren, a spirit of inquiry....” Echoing Montesquieu and James Otis, he queried, “who can dispense with prejudice long enough to admit that we are *men*, notwithstanding our *improminent noses* and *wooly heads*...?” Challenging the rising racial prejudice of his day, Walker insisted that blacks “feel for our

---

<sup>15</sup> David Walker, *Appeal, In Four Articles; Together with A Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America, 3rd Edition* (Boston, 1830), 7, 19, 23, 43, 51.

fathers, mothers, wives and children, as well as the whites do for theirs.”<sup>16</sup>

Walker isolated Thomas Jefferson's opinions on race in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* as contributing mightily to the emergence of pseudoscientific racism and an obstacle to black liberation. Jefferson “declared to the world” the inferiority of blacks, and Walker hoped that his misguided views would soon be “refuted by the blacks themselves” throughout the world. Referring to Jefferson’s suggestion that Africans may be a subspecies of human, he lamented that one of the world's great philosophers and revolutionaries had erected a “great a barrier to our emancipation.....” Jefferson's status as a hero of the Revolution imbued his racism with political and symbolic power. Despite this setback, Walker was confident that his fellow blacks would seize their “natural right” to freedom.<sup>17</sup>

The stirring diatribe concluded with a stinging rebuke of both Jefferson's and America's claims to stand for universal liberty and equality. Extracting the Declaration of Independence at length, Walker asked Americans to “[c]ompare your own language above...with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers....” Appealing now directly to the natural rights ideology of the Revolution, he inquired: “Now Americans! I ask you candidly, was your sufferings under Great Britain, one hundredth part as cruel and tyrannical as you have rendered ours under you?”<sup>18</sup> Having wholeheartedly rejected colonization schemes earlier in the book, Walker now grounded his appeal to black people throughout the world in the unfulfilled language of the

---

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 4-5, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 12, 17-18, 31, 14.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 84-86.

American Revolution's most liberatory document.

His was a demand for civic equality, the rights and privileges of citizenship, as well as a respect for basic human rights. Walker foretold a time when the world would be fundamentally transformed, much as it had in the minds of many after America's independence was achieved. "I advance it therefore to you, not as a problematical, but as an unshaken and forever immoveable fact," he proclaimed, "that your full glory and happiness, as well as all other coloured people under Heaven, shall never be fully consummated, but with the *entire emancipation of your enslaved brethren all over the world.*"<sup>19</sup> Walker's faith in justice and divine will led him to envision a multiracial republic. If not equality, then justice dictated that the world must be turned upside down entirely, with blacks emerging with power. Of one thing he was certain, the enslavement of blacks would not continue and must inevitably come to an end.

By 1835, Faneuil Hall, the "Cradle of Liberty" as it is sometimes called, was closed to abolitionist meetings in David Walker's Boston. Anti-abolitionist meetings, however, were well attended. Former congressman, and staunch Federalist, Harrison Gray Otis observed at one such meeting that fanatical abolitionists aimed to found societies in "every state and municipality," and warned that this proved them "imminently dangerous" and "hostile to the spirit and letter of the constitution."<sup>20</sup> That same year, radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison evaded a furious mob and took

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>20</sup> "Speech of Harrison Gray Otis," in American Colonization Society, *The African Repository*, vol.11 (Washington, 1835), 313. Otis was a strong defender of slaveholders rights throughout his career. He voted in favor of legalizing slavery in the Missouri Territory in 1819. See James M. Banner, *To The Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, 1970), 107-108.

cover at Boston's City Hall, just blocks from the meeting place of democratic radicals forty years prior. Boston, the birthplace of the Sons of Liberty, was unsafe for an advocate of black freedom.

That orations similar to Garrison's were delivered, published, and dispersed in regions with large percentages of slaveholders—such as Maryland, Kentucky, Virginia, and South Carolina, only four decades earlier is remarkable. Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and other leading antislavery voices undoubtedly drew on this earlier radical tradition. Dispensing with the moderate gradualism and paternalism that marked aspects of late eighteenth-century antislavery efforts, as well as the often racist motivations for the colonization movement of the early nineteenth century, nineteenth-century radical abolitionists sought a usable past in the revolutionary era.

In his famous autobiography, Douglass recalled that at around twelve years of age he “got hold of a book entitled 'The Columbian Orator.' Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book. Among much of other interesting matter, I found in it a dialogue between a master and his slave.” The enslaved man, “was made to say some very smart as well as impressive things in reply to his master,” which resulted in his “emancipation.” The moral he derived from the story was of the “power of truth” to penetrate “the conscience of even a slaveholder.” In the same book he read a powerful speech “in behalf of Catholic emancipation.” Douglass viewed it as “a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights.” He read these orations repeatedly “with unabated interest” until they “gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul...” Douglass went as far

as to credit the “reading of these documents” with enabling him to contest the “arguments brought forward to sustain slavery” later in his life.<sup>21</sup>

*The Columbian Orator* was first published in 1797 and became a popular reader in schools throughout the northern United States in the early nineteenth century. Interestingly, it contained some of the most radical expressions of democratic values from the revolutionary period. Douglass would have encountered a speech from the Scottish radical, and leading member of the Friends of the People, Thomas Muir, wherein he states that, “I can look death in the face; for I am shielded by the consciousness of my own rectitude.” The enslaved child may have taken comfort in the democrat's fortitude during a trial for treason. “I may be condemned to languish in the recesses of a dungeon,” he continued,” but “nothing can destroy my inward peace of mind, arising from the remembrance of having discharged my duty.”<sup>22</sup> The collection also featured a eulogy for Benjamin Franklin by the Abbe Fauchet, praising the former president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society on behalf of the Paris Commons as “the founder of transatlantic freedom” and encouraging lovers of liberty to keep the “sacred fire of patriotism” burning in their breasts.<sup>23</sup> Such rousing orations must have touched a young Douglass as he struggled to maintain faith in his own liberation.

Celebrations of both the American and French revolutions fill the pages of the *Columbian Orator*. One Fourth of July speech evoked Paine's words, hoping that

---

<sup>21</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave. Written by Himself* (London, 1851), 40-41.

<sup>22</sup> “Extract from the Plea of Thomas Muir, Esq. at his Celebrated Trial in Scotland,” *Columbian Orator* (1797; Reprint, Boston, 1832), 43.

<sup>23</sup> “Extract from the Eulogy of Dr. Franklin Pronounced by the Abbe Fauchet, in the Name of the Commons of Paris, 1790,” *Ibid.*, 65-66.

listeners would recall “The feeling which inspired them in the ‘times which tried men's souls,’” and hoped that they would once again “catch the divine spirit which impelled them to bid defiance to the congregated host of despots.”<sup>24</sup> Most linked the two revolutions together as a common struggle for universal liberty. One speaker noted “that the glorious example with electrical rapidity, has flashed across the Atlantic; that guided by the same principles, conducted by the same feelings, the people who so gallantly fought and bled for the security of our lives and liberties, are now fighting and bleeding in defence of their own.”<sup>25</sup> Another declared to Americans that, “You have fought the battles of freedom, and enkindled that sacred flame which now glows with vivid fervour through the greatest empire in Europe.”<sup>26</sup> Douglass may have noted hypocrisy in their reverential embrace of the American Revolution's legacy, but he may also have sensed unfulfilled promise.

The promise of America may have been reinforced, for Douglass, by the explicit orations dedicated to slavery and abolition in the late eighteenth-century collection. The dialogue between master and slave mentioned in his autobiography asserted the rights of enslaved people in the language of natural rights. Like Paine, in his letter to the inhabitants of Louisiana, the enslaved person in the dialogue argues that having the power to enslave him does not give the slaveholder the right to do so. He asks the

---

<sup>24</sup> “Extract from an Oration Pronounced at Boston, July 4, 1796,” *Ibid.*, 274

<sup>25</sup> “Extract from an Oration, Pronounced at Worcester (Mass.) July 4, 1796; by Francis Blake, Esq.” *Ibid.*, 234

<sup>26</sup> Extract from an Oration Delivered at Boston. July 4, 1794 in Commemoration of American Independence,” *Ibid.*, 268



enslaver, “I had lost the power, but how the right?”<sup>27</sup> The collection also featured a speech by Samuel Miller, who spoke before both the Democratic Society of New York and the New-York Manumission Society. Writing in the context of the French Revolutionary wars, he lamented that, “While the friends of humanity, in Europe and America, are weeping over their injured fellow-creatures, and directing their ingenuity and their labors to the removal of so disgraceful a monument of cruelty and avarice, there are not wanting men, who claim the title, and enjoy the privileges of American citizens, who still employ themselves in the odious traffic of human flesh.”<sup>28</sup> *The Columbian Orator* would have provided Douglass with a primer on democratic radicalism in the era of the American and French revolutions—one that exposed him to principles which motivated his actions for years to come.

Perhaps most important of all, the collection contained visions of a future very different from the reality that Douglass inhabited while enslaved. One extract from a 1794 Fourth of July oration exemplifies the sense of optimism these speeches conveyed:

That the blissful period will soon arrive when man shall be elevated to his primitive character; when illuminated reason and regulated liberty shall once more exhibit him in the image of his Maker; when all the inhabitants of the globe shall be freemen and fellow-citizens, and patriotism itself be lost in universal philanthropy. Then shall volumes of incense incessantly roll from altars inscribed to liberty. Then shall the innumerable varieties of the human race unitedly 'worship in her sacred temple, whose pillars shall rest on the remotest corners of the earth, and whose arch will be the vault of heaven.'

It would be left to future generations to fulfill this vision of universal freedom and equality.

---

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>28</sup> “Extract from a Discourse Delivered Before the New-York Manumission Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, April 12, 1797, By Rev. Samuel Miller,” *Ibid.*, 294.

Tellingly, in legislative debates regarding the wording of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery in the United States, Radical Republican Charles Sumner proposed language drawn from the constitutions and decrees of revolutionary France:

All persons are equal before the law, so that no person can hold another as a slave; and the Congress shall have power to make all laws necessary and proper to carry this declaration into effect everywhere within the United States and the jurisdiction thereof.

Sumner argued that while the phrasing may be novel to American law, the recognition of “equality of all persons before the law” was a universal standard of human rights that all would understand. It derived its power from its history—when France “in the throes of revolution,” contended for “the natural rights of man, inalienable and sacred....” He hoped that his proposed wording would embody “*liberty and equality*,” keeping “the double idea perpetually in the mind and conscience, “to warn, to comfort, and command.” Another senator rose in response, accusing Sumner of having “made a very radical mistake in regard to the application of this language of the French constitution,” and suggested instead “to dismiss all reference to French constitutions or French codes, and go back to the good old Anglo-Saxon language employed by our fathers in the ordinance of 1787....”<sup>29</sup> Seventy years after the French emancipation decree, Americans still viewed the language of revolutionary France as too radical for the United States.

The antislavery radicals of the late eighteenth century, in the face of great obstacles, displayed perseverance and courage. If we hold them to their own standards,

---

<sup>29</sup> *Congressional Globe* (Washington D.C.), April 9, 1864. Also, see Charles Sumner, *No Property in Man.: Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, on the Proposed Amendment of the Constitution Abolishing Slavery Through the United States. In the Senate of the United States, April 8th, 1864* (New York: Published by the Loyal League Publication Society, 1864).

they failed in their lifetimes to bring about the fundamental change necessary to put an end to chattel slavery. The racial prejudice that Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Rush, Richard Allen, and others sought so aggressively to challenge only hardened in the early nineteenth century. As civic equality for white men became the norm, blacks faced disenfranchisement and discrimination in all spheres of life. The colonization movement sought to rectify the “problem of slavery” by removing blacks from the body politic—as if they were a cancer infecting a pure white republic. More likely, the presence of black people was a reminder of the nation's sins and the hypocrisy of its founding creed.

Contained in those revolutionary principles, however, were the seeds of a new revolution. The early-antislavery radicals helped to put these ideas into practice, founding societies dedicated to mobilizing people to action, spreading information, and defending natural rights. While they wished for more immediate action, they helped to ensure that gradual emancipation bills were passed in the North. In the South, loosening of manumission laws enabled many to release human beings from bondage. This movement may have accomplished much more if it were not for a conservative backlash in the late 1790s. By the early nineteenth century, cotton yields were increasing exponentially as slave labor became more profitable than ever with the invention of the cotton gin and the development of harsh profit-maximizing labor practices.<sup>30</sup> But as many abolitionists had long foretold, violence was met with violence, and power with power—and the enslaved won their freedom in the end.

---

<sup>30</sup> A nineteenth-century source estimates that “In 1791 it was 9,000 bales; in 1801, 211,000; 1811, 269,000; 1821, 647,000...1841, 1,635,000.” Southern History Association, *Publications of the Southern History Association* (Washington, D.C.: Southern History Association, 1897), 89. On the expansion of cotton production in this period. See Edward Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### *Primary Sources*

### Manuscript Sources

#### **American Philosophical Society:**

Benjamin Franklin Bache Papers, 1779-1793  
DuPonceau Collection  
Hutchinson Family Papers  
Thomas Paine Papers  
Perhouse Family Papers  
Joseph Priestley Papers  
Richard Price Papers  
Benjamin Rush Correspondence, 1759-1813

#### **Boston Public Library:**

1798 Rebellion Collection  
Elias Boudinot Papers  
Charleston Republican Society Papers  
Massachusetts Constitutional Society Papers

#### **British Library:**

Constitutional Society Papers  
Francis Place Papers  
London Corresponding Society Papers

#### **Columbia University:**

Berol Collection  
John Jay Papers  
Morgan John Rhees Collection  
Noah Webster Papers

**Filson Historical Society:**

Danville Political Club Records, 1786-1790

**Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College:**

Baltimore Yearly Meeting Records  
 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Records  
 Virginia Yearly Meeting Records

**Haverford College Library:**

Abington Monthly Meeting Manumissions  
 Allinson Family Papers  
 Anthony Benezet Papers  
 William Dillwyn Papers  
 Manumissions, 1771-1780  
 New Jersey Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery Records, 1793-1809  
 Philadelphia Yearly Meeting for Sufferings Records  
 Quaker Collection  
 Robert Pleasants Letterbook

**Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP):**

Benjamin Franklin Papers  
 George Bryan Papers  
 Charles Biddle Papers  
 Cox-Parrish Wharton Collection  
 Democratic Society of Pennsylvania, Minutes, 1793-1794  
 Dillwyn and Emlen Family Correspondence  
 Miers Fisher Papers  
 Logan Papers  
 McKesson Collection  
 Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers  
 William Rawle Family Papers  
 Société des Amis de la liberté et l'égalité, Minutes, 1793-94

**Kentucky Historical Society (KHS):**

David Barrow Diary  
 Constitutional Convention Journal, 1788-1792  
 Democratic Society of Clark County Records, 1763-1862  
 Harry Innes Collection

McDowell Family Collection, 1784-1805  
Edna Whitley Collection

**Library of Congress (LOC):**

Genet Papers  
Hamilton Papers

**Library of Virginia:**

Roanoke District Association Minute Book  
Virginia Baptist General Committee, Minutes

**Maine Historical Society:**

Portland Republican Society Papers

**Newberry Library:**

French Revolution Collection  
Ruggles Collection

**New-York Historical Society (N-YHS):**

Aaron Burr Papers  
American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the  
Condition of the  
African Race: Minutes of the Sessions: 1794-1837.  
Dewitt Clinton Papers  
William Dunlap Collection  
Albert Gallatin Papers  
David Gelston Papers  
Genet Papers  
Gilder Lehrman Collection  
New-York Manumission Society Collection  
Nicholson Family Papers  
Robert R. Livingston Papers, 1707-1862  
Tamanny Collection

**New York Public Library (NYPL):**

Genet Family Papers, 1719-1925  
Henry Laurens Papers

Jediddiah Morse Papers  
 Noah Webster Papers, 1764-1843  
 Tammany Society or Columbian Order, Minutes of Proceedings, 1791-1817

**Rosenbach Library:**

Benjamin Rush Papers

**South Caroliniana Library:**

Izard Papers

**Virginia Baptist Historical Society:**

Portsmouth Baptist Association Minutes

**William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan:**

Fenno-Hoffman Family Papers

Periodicals

American Apollo  
 American Mercury  
 America Minerva  
 The American Museum  
 American Watchman  
 American Star  
 The Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine  
 The Argus  
 Aurora General Advertiser  
 Baltimore Daily Intelligencer  
 Boston Gazette  
 Carlisle Gazette  
 City Gazette  
 Columbian Centinel  
 Columbian Gazeteer  
 Columbian Herald  
 Columbian Orator  
 Connecticut Gazette  
 Connecticut Journal  
 Courier de L' Amerique  
 The Diary

Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser  
Eastern Herald  
The Essex Journal  
The Farmer's Cabinet  
Farmer's Journal  
Federal Gazette  
Friends' Review  
Gazette of the United States  
General Advertiser  
Genius of Universal Emancipation  
The Genius of Liberty  
Impartial Herald  
Independent Chronicle  
Independent Gazetteer  
Kentucky Gazette  
Kentucky Journal  
Kline's Weekly Carlisle Gazette  
Level of Europe and North America  
Liberator  
Massachusetts Magazine  
National Gazette  
National Magazine  
Newark Gazette  
New-York Evening Post  
New York Journal  
Northern Star  
The Observer  
Oracle of Dauphin  
Le Patriote Français  
Pennsylvania Gazette  
Pennsylvania Journal  
Pennsylvania Packet  
Pittsburgh Gazette  
Porcupine's Gazette  
Phenix  
Philadelphia Aurora  
Philadelphia Gazette  
Pittsburgh Gazette  
Providence Gazette  
Repository  
Republican Journal  
Salem Gazette  
The Star



The Time Piece and Literary Companion  
 Washington Spy  
 The Western Star  
 Windham Herald  
 Vermont Gazette  
 Virginia Chronicle

#### Other Primary Sources

*A Copy of the Bill of Indictment found Against Thomas Hardy, John Horne Tooke, John Augustus Bonney, Stewart Kyd, Jeremiah Joyce, Thomas Wardle, Thomas Holcroft, John Richter, Matthew Moore, John Thelwall, Richard Hodgson, and John Baxter. for High Treason. with a List of the Grand and Petty Jurors, and the Names of the Witnesses. Who have been Subpoened on the Part of the Crown.* London: 1794.

*A Forensic Dispute, on the Legality of Enslaving the Africans, Held at the Public Commencement in Cambridge, New-England, July 21st, 1773. by Two Candidates for the Bachelor's Degree.* Boston: Thomas Leverett, 1773.

*A Letter to George Washington, President of the United States: Containing Strictures on His Address of the Seventeenth of September, 1796, Notifying His Relinquishment of the Presidential Office.* by Jasper Dwight, of Vermont. Printed at Philadelphia: 1796.

*A Plan for Improving the Condition of Free Blacks.* Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1789.

Adams, John; Adams, Charles Francis. *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: With a Life of the Author, Notes and Illustrations,* Boston: Little, Brown, 1850.

*Address of a Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Society, to the Citizens of the United States.* New York: W. Durell, 1794.

Allen, John. *An Oration, upon the Beauties of Liberty, Or the Essential Rights of the Americans. Delivered at the Second Baptist-Church in Boston. upon the Last Annual Thanksgiving. Humbly Dedicated to the Right-Honourable the Earl of Dartmouth. Published by the Request of Many.* Printed and sold by D. Kneeland, and N. Davis, in Queen-Street, Boston, 1772.

Allen, Richard. *The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen: To Which Is Annexed the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America: Containing a Narrative of the Yellow Fever in the Year of Our Lord 1793: with an Address to the People of Color in the United States*. Reprint; New York: Abingdon Press, 1960.

Allen, Richard and Jones, Absalom. *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.

American Colonization Society. "The African Repository and Colonial Journal." *The African Repository and Colonial Journal* (1825).

*The American Museum, or Repository of Ancient and Modern Fugitive Pieces & C. Prose and Poetical*. Philadelphia: Matthew Caray, 1787.

American Society of United Irishmen, December 18, 1797. Philadelphia, 1797.

*The American Songster: Being a Select Collection of the Most Celebrated American, English, Scotch, and Irish Songs*. New York, 1788.

American State Papers: Foreign Relations, 1789-1797. Vol. 1. Washington D.C., 1832.

American State Papers: Miscellaneous, 1789-1809. Vol. 1. Washington D.C., 1834.

Ames, William. Slaithwaite Parish Church,,. *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof ... Translated Out of Latine into English for More Publique Benefit*. [London]: 1639.

*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.

*An Account of the Treason and Sediton, Committed by the London Corresponding Society, the Society for Constitutional Information, the Other Societies...&c. their Correspondence with the Covent on and Jacobin Societies at Paris; Sending Deputies to France*. London, 1794.

*Articles of Association of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, of the City of Philadelphia, in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: John Ormrod, 1799.

Armistead, Wilson. Vaux, Roberts,,. *Anthony Benezet; from the Original Memoir*. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1971.

- Bailyn, Bernard. *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965.
- Banneker, Benjamin. *Benjamin Banneker's Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia Almanack and Ephemeris, for the Year of Our Lord, 1792*. Baltimore: William Goddard, 1792.
- Barbauld, Aikin, Lucy. *The Works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld : With a Memoir by Lucy Aikin : In Two Volumes. Vol. I[-II]*. New-York: G. & C. Carvill, E. Bliss & E. White, Collins & Hannay, S.C. Schenck, Collins & Co. H.I. Megary, G. Long, W.B. Gilley, S.B. Collins, R. Lockwood, J.F. Sibell, G.C. Morgan, and J.A. Burtus, 1826.
- Basker, James G. *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660-1810*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Barlow, Joel. *The Prospect of Peace: A Poetical Composition, delivered in Yale College...July 23, 1778*. New Haven, 1778.
- Bayle, Pierre. *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical in which a New and Accurate Translation of that of ... Mr. Bayle....* Printed by James Bettenham, for G. Strahan, J. Clarke, T. Hatchet, 1737.
- Benezet, Anthony. *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*. W. Dunlap: Philadelphia, 1762.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Brief Considerations on Slavery, and the Expediency of its Abolition*. Burlington, N.J.: Collins, 1773.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Short Observations on Slavery, Introductory to Some Remarks from the writing of the Abbe Raynal, on that important Subject*. Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1785.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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.

- Benton, Thomas Hart and John C. Rives, *Abridgment of the Debates of Congress, from 1789 to 1856: From Gales and Seatons' Annals of Congress; from Their Register of Debates; and from the Official Reported Debates, by John C. Rives*. New York: D. Appleton, 1857.
- Bergman, Peter M. and Jean McCarroll, eds., *The Negro in the Congressional Record, Volume II: First to Sixth Congress 1789-1801*. New York, 1969.
- Bishop, Abraham. *Connecticut Republicanism, An Oration, On the Extent and Power of Political Delusion*. Philadelphia, 1800.
- Boyd, Julian, et al, eds. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. 28 vols. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1955-1998.
- Brackenridge, Hugh H. *Incidents of the Insurrection in the Western Parts of Pennsylvania in the Year 1794*. Philadelphia, 1795.
- Bray, Thomas Wells. *A Dissertation on the Sixth Vial*. Hartford, CT, 1780.
- Brissot de Warville, J.P. *New Travels in the United States of America*. Paris, 1791, Reprint, Bowling Green, 1919.
- Bruns, Roger A. *Am I Not a Man and a Brother : The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America 1688-1788*. New York: Chelsea House, 1977.
- Buchanan, Archibald. *An Oration Composed and Delivered at the Request of the Republican Society of Baltimore on the Fourth of July*. Baltimore, 1794.
- Buchanan, George. *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.
- Burke, Edmund. *The Works and Correspondence of ... Edmund Burke*. London: F. & J. Rivington, 1852.
- Burrueil, Abbé. *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism. A Translation from the French of the Barruel*. Volume 4. London: 1797.
- Busher, Leonard. *Religions Peace: Or, A Plea for Liberty of Conscience. Long since Presented to King James, and the High Court of Parliament then Sitting*. London: Printed for John Sweeting at the Angel in Popes-head-alley, 1646.
- Carey, Mathew. *The Plagi-Scurriliad, a Hudibrastic Poem. Dedicated to Colonel Eleazer Oswald*. Philadelphia, 1786. 392

- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Desultory Account of the Yellow Fever, Prevalent in Philadelphia, and of the Present State of the City*. Philadelphia, 1793.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Observations on Dr. Rush's Enquiry into the Origins of the Late Epidemic Fever in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, 1793.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia*: Philadelphia, 1794.
- Clark, George Rogers. "George Rogers Clark to Genet, 1794." *American Historical Review*. 18, 4. (July 1913): 780-83.
- Clarkson, Thomas. *The History of the Rise, Progress, & Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, by the British Parliament*. London, 1808.
- Cobbett, William. *A Little Plain English, Addressed to the People of the United States on the Treaty*. Philadelphia, 1795.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Bone to Gnaw for the Democrats*. Philadelphia, 1795.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Observations on the Emigration of Dr. Joseph Priestley, and on the several Addresses Delivered to Him, on His Arrival at New-York. Four Lines of Verse in French from Boileau*]. Philadelphia: 1796.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The History of Jacobinism... With an Appendix, by Peter Porcupine, Containing a History of the American Jacobins, Commonly Denominated Democrats*. . Vol. 1. 2 vols. Philadelphia, 1796.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *History of the American Jacobins, Commonly Denominated Democrats*. Philadelphia, 1796.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Democratic Principles Illustrated by Example*. London, 1798.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Detection of a Conspiracy Formed by the United Irishmen*. Philadelphia, 1798.
- The Columbian Orator*. Boston, 1797.
- Condict, Lewis. "Journal of a Trip to Kentucky in 1795." *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society IV* (1919): 108-127.
- The Constitution of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully held in Bondage*. Philadelphia, 1787.
- Constitutional Society. *Principles and Articles Agreed on by the Members of the Constitutional Society in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, 1780.

- Cooper, David. *A Mite cast into the Treasury: Or, Observations on Slave-Keeping*. Philadelphia: J. Crukshank, 1772.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1783.
- Cooper, Thomas. *Letters on the African Slave Trade*. Manchester, 1787.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Lectures on the Elements of Political Economy*. McMorris & Wilson: Columbia, S.C., 1830.
- Correspondence between Citizen Genet... And the Officers of the Federal Government*. Philadelphia, 1793.
- Cox, Jeffrey ed. *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation: Writings in the British Romantic Period, vol. 5*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999.
- Croecoeur, J. Hector St. John. *Letters from an American Farmer and Sketches of Eighteenth Century America*. Ed. Albert E. Stone. New York: Penguin, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *To the Citizens of the County of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia, 1799.
- Day, Thomas. *Fragment of an Original Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes, Written in the Year 1776*. Philadelphia, 1784.
- Democratic Society of Philadelphia. *Principles, Articles, and Regulations, Agreed Upon by the 393 Members of the Democratic Society in Philadelphia, May 30, 1793*. Philadelphia.
- Democratic Society of New York. *Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 1794*. New York, 1794.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Circular. To the Democratic Society of Philadelphia. New York, 1794.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Constitution. New York, 1794.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *An address of the Democratic Society, of the City of New-York, to the republican citizens of the United States*. Newport, Rhode Island, 1794.
- Diderot, Denis, Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, and Pierre Mouchon. *Encyclopédie; Ou Dictionnaire Raisonné Des Sciences, Des Arts Et Des métiers*. Paris: Briasson, 1751.

- Dillwyn, William. *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.
- Douglass, Frederick. Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave. Written by Himself.* London, 1851.
- Drayton, John. *Letters Written During a Tour through the Northern and Eastern States of America.* Charleston, 1794.
- Drennan, William, Maria Luddy, Jean Agnew, and Martha Drennan McTier, *The Drennan-McTier Letters.* Dublin: Women's History Project in association with the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1998.
- Duane, William. *A Report of the Extraordinary Transactions which Took Place at Philadelphia, in February 1799. in Consequence of a Memorial from Certain Natives of Ireland to Congress, Praying Repeal of the Alien Bill by William Duane.* Philadelphia, 1799.
- Dubois, Laurent and John D. Garrigus, ed. and trans. *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804.* Boston, 2006.
- Duke de la Rochefoucault Liancourt, Francoise, A.F. *Travels through the United States of North America, the Country of the Iroquois, and Upper Canada, in the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797 with an Authentic Account of Lower Canada.* London, 1799.
- Dunlap, William. *A History of the American Theatre.* New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832.
- Dwight, Jasper [William Duane]. *A Letter to George Washington, President of The United States: Containing Strictures on His Address of the Seventeenth of September. 1796...* Philadelphia, Dec. 1796.
- Dwight, Theodore. *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.
- Earle, Thomas and Lundy, Benjamin. *The Life, Travels, and Opinions of Benjamin Lundy: Including His Journeys to Texas and Mexico.* Philadelphia: William D. Parrish, 1847.
- Edwards, Bryan. *An historical survey of the French colony in the island of St. Domingo: comprehending a short account of its ancient government, political state, ...* London, 1797.

Edwards, Jonathan. *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.

*Execution of the French King.* New Haven, CT, 1793.

Farrand, Max, ed. *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, vol. 1.* New Haven, CT, 1937.

Findlay, William. *History of the Insurrection in the Four Western Counties of Pennsylvania.* Philadelphia, 1796.

Foner, Philip S., ed. *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts.* Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976.

Forten, James. *Letters from a Man of Colour on a Late Bill Before the Senate of Pennsylvania.* Philadelphia, 1813.

Franklin, Benjamin, Smyth, Albert H. *The Writings of Benjamin Franklin.* New York; London: Macmillan Co.; Macmillan & Co., 1905.

Fraser, Charles. *Reminiscences of Charleston.* Charleston, SC, 1854.

Genet, Edmond Charles. *Libres Les Frances Libres Leurs Frances De La Louisiane.* Philadelphia, 1793.

Gore, Christopher. *Manlius; with Notes and References.* Philadelphia, 1796.

Gorton, Adelos,., *The Life and Times of Samuel Gorton; the Founders and the Founding of the Republic, a Section of Early United States History and a History of the Colony of Providence and Rhode Island Plantations in the Narragansett Indian Country, Now the State of Rhode Island, 1592-1636-1677-1687 ...* Philadelphia: Ferguson Co., Printers, 1907.

*Great News. By This Morning's Mail... Important Intelligence! Express Dispatched from Citizen 394 Genet, at Philadelphia, to Citizen Hauterive, at New-York. "The Duke of York Is Taken, with His Whole Army; Toulon Is Re-Taken..."* Boston, 1794.



- Greeley, Horace. *The American Conflict: A History of the Great Rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-'65: Its Causes, Incidents, and Results: Intended to Exhibit especially its Moral and Political Phases, with the Drift and Progress of American Opinion Respecting Human Slavery from 1776 to the Close of the War for the Union*. Hartford; Chicago: O.D. Case & Co.; G. & C.W. Sherwood, 1864.
- Hardie, James. *The Philadelphia Directory and Register*. Philadelphia, 1794. Harold C. Syrett, et al, eds. *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. 27 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-1987.
- Hardy, Thomas and Joseph Gurney, *The Trial of Thomas Hardy for High Treason, at the Sessions House in the Old Bailey, on Tuesday the Twenty-Eighth ... [to] Friday the Thirty-First of October: And on Saturday the First ... [to] Wednesday the Fifth of November, 1794 ... Taken in Short-Hand*. London: Sold by Martha Gurney, 1794.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Memoir of Thomas Hardy*. London, 1832.
- Hatton, Julia Ann. *The Songs of T-a-M-M-a-N-Y or the Indian Chief. A Serious Opera*. New York, 1794.
- Hedges, Phineas. *An Oration Delivered before the Republican Society of Ulster County, July 4, Goshen, NY, 1795*.
- Hepburn, John: *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.
- Hopkins, Samuel. *A Discourse Upon the Slave-Trade, and the Slavery of the Africans*. J. Carter: Providence, 1793.
- Horsmanden, Daniel *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.
- Howell, Thomas Bayly and Thomas Jones Howell. *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason and Other Crimes and Misdemeanors from the Earliest Period to the Year 1783 With Notes and Other Illustrations*. London: T.C. Hansard, 1818.
- Imlay, Gilbert. *A Topographical Description of the Western Territory of North America*. London, 1792.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Emigrants*. New York: Penguin, 1998.

- Jefferson, Thomas. *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*. Williamsburg, 1774.
- Jefferson, Thomas, Joyce Oldham Appleby, and Terence Ball. *Thomas Jefferson, Political Writings*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Johnston, Holland ed. *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. Washington D.C., 1904.
- Kames Lord, Henry Home. *Six Sketches on the History of Man, Containing the Progress of Men as Individuals*. Philadelphia: R. Bell and R. Aitken, 1776.
- Keith, George. *An Exhortation & Caution to Friends Concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*. New York: William Bradford, 1693.
- Lathrop, John. *Patriotism and Religion...* Boston, 1799.
- Lay, Benjamin. *All Slave-Keepers that Keep the Innocent in Bondage, Apostates...* Printed [by Benjamin Franklin] for the author, Philadelphia, 1737.
- Leland, John. *The Virginia Chronicle: with Judicious and Critical Remarks, under XXIV Heads*. Fredericksburg, 1790.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Rights of Conscience Inalienable, and therefore Religious Opinions Not Cognizable by Law: Or, the High-Flying Church-Man, Stript of His Legal Robe, Appears a Yaho*. Printed by T. Green & Son, Boston, 1791.
- Leland, John and L F. Greene, *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland: Including Some Events in His Life*. New York, 1845.
- Lettre aux philanthropes sur les droits, les réclamations des gens de couleur de Saint-Domingue et des autres îles françaises de l'Amérique*. Paris, 1790.
- Lincoln, Levi. *A Farmer's Letters to the People*. Philadelphia, 1802.
- Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. London, 1689.
- London Corresponding Society. *An Account of the Seizure of Citizen Thomas Hardy, Secretary to the London Corresponding Society; with some Remarks on the Suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act*. London, 1794.
- Long, Edward. *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.

- Logan, George. *Letters Addressed to the Yeomanry of the United States*. Philadelphia, 1791.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Excise, the Favorite System of Aristocrats, by Which Unequal and Burdensome Taxes Are Drawn from the Laborious Part of the Community. Philadelphia, 1793.
- Madden, Richard Robert, Richard Robert. *The United Irishmen, Their Lives and Times*. London: J. Madden, 1842.
- Manning, William. "The Key of Libberty." *William and Mary Quarterly*. Ed. Samuel Eliot Morrison. 13, 2. (1956): 202-54.
- Massachusetts Constitutional Society. *Constitution*. Boston, 1794.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rules and Regulations*. Boston, 1794.
- Maxcy, Jonathan. *An Oration, Delivered in the Baptist Meeting-House in Providence, July 4, A.D. 1795, at the Celebration of the Nineteenth Anniversary of American Independence*. Providence, 1795.
- Memorials Presented to the Congress of the United States of America, by the different societies instituted for promoting the Abolition of Slavery, in the States of Rhode-Island, Connecticut, New-York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia, Published by the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery....* Philadelphia, 1792.
- Mémoire en faveur des gens de couleur ou sang-mêlés de Saint-Domingue & des autres îles françaises de l'Amérique, adressé à l'Assemblée nationale* . Paris, 1789.
- Michaux, Andre. "Portions of the Journal of Andre Michaux. Botanist, Written During His Travels in the United States and Canada, 1785 to 1796." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 26.129 (1889): 1-145.
- Miller, Samuel. *A Sermon Delivered in the New Presbyterian Church, New York, July Fourth, New York, 1795*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Discourse Delivered Before the New-York Manumission Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves, April 12, 1797*. New York, 1797.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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.
- Milton, John. *The Poetical Works of John Milton*. Boston; New York: T.Y. Crowell & Co., 1892.

- Minutes of the proceedings of a Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies Established in Different Parts of the United States (1794-1797)*. Philadelphia, 1801.
- Minutes of Several Conversations Between The Rev. Thomas Coke, L.D., The Rev. Francis Asbury and Others, At a Conference, Begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on the 27th of December in the Year 1784*. Philadelphia, 1785.
- Monroe, James. *A View of the Conduct of the Executive, in the Foreign Affairs of the United States, Connected with the Mission to the French Republic*. Philadelphia, 1797.
- Morality of the Sans-Culottes of Every Age, Sex, Country, and Condition: Or, the Republican Gospel*. Philadelphia, 1794.
- Morse, Jedidah. *A Sermon, Delivered at the New North Church ... May 9th, 1798*. Boston, 1798.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Annals of the American Revolution*. Hartford: 1824.
- Murdoch, Richard K. ed. and trans., "Correspondence of the French Consuls in Charleston, 1793-1797," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (1973): vol. 7.
- Murray, John. *Nehemiah, OR the Struggle for Liberty Never in Vain*. Newbury, MA, 1779.
- Niles, Nathaniel. *Two Discourses on Liberty; delivered at the North Church, in Newburyport, on Lord's-Day, June 5th, 1774, and published at the general desire of the hearers*. Newbury-Port, 1774.
- Nisbet, Richard. *Slavery Not Forbidden By Scripture. Or a Defence of the West-India Planters*. Philadelphia: John Sparhawk, 1773.
- Otis, James. *A Vindication of the Conduct of the House of Representatives of the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay More Particularly, in the Last Session of the General Assembly*. Printed by Edes & Gill: Boston, 1762.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*. Printed and sold by Edes and Gill, in Queen-Street: Boston, 1764.
- Osgood, David. *The Wonderful Works of God are to be Remembered*. Boston, 1794.
- Paine, Thomas. *Common Sense: Addressed to the Inhabitants of America*. Philadelphia, 1776.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Letter Addressed to the Abbe Raynal, on the Affairs of North-America in which the Mistakes in the Abbe's Account of the Revolution of America are Corrected and Cleared Up." Printed for J. Ridgway.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution. Part One. 2nd edition.* Philadelphia, 1791.
- Paine, Thomas, Foner, Philip Sheldon. *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine.* New York: Citadel Press, 1945.
- Paine, Thomas, Kramnick, Isaac. *Common Sense.* Harmondsworth Middlesex, England; New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Books, 1986.
- Patriotic Society of the County of Newcastle, Delaware. *Declaration of Political Principles and Constitution.* Wilmington, 1794.
- Phillips, Wendell. *Speeches, Lectures, and Letters.* Boston, 1892.
- Pinkney, William. *Speech of William Pinkney, Esq. in the House of Delegates of Maryland, At their Session in November, 1789.* Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1790.
- Playfair, William. *The History of Jacobinism, Its Crimes, Cruelties and Perfidies: Comprising an Inquiry into the Manner of Disseminating, under the Appearance of Philosophy and Virtue Principles Which Are Equally Subversive of Order, Virtue, Religion, Liberty and Happiness.* London, 1795.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The History of Jacobinism... With an Appendix, by Peter Porcupine, Containing a History of the American Jacobins, Commonly Denominated Democrats* Vol. 1. 2 vols. Philadelphia, 1796.
- Price, Richard. *A Discourse on the Love of our Country, Delivered on November 4, 1789, at the Meeting-House in the Old Jewry, to the Society for Commemorating the Revolution in Great Britain in The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal.* London, 1790.
- Proceedings of the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property against Republicans and Levellers Number 1.* London, 1793.
- Republican Society. *To the Citizens of Philadelphia.* Philadelphia, 1780.
- Rhode Island Court Records; Records of the Court of Trials of the Colony of Providence Plantations, 1647-1670.* Providence: 1920.

- Rice, David. *Slavery Inconsistent with Justice and Good Policy*. Lexington, 1792.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Kentucky Protest Against Slavery*. New York, 1812.
- Rich, Elisha. *A poem on the bloody engagement that was fought on Bunker's Hill....on the 17th of June, 1775*. Chelmsford, MA, 1775.
- Robison, John. *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against all the Religions and Governments of Europe, Carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies. Collected from Good Authorities*. New York: 1798.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques and Victor Gourevitch. *The Discourses and Other Political Writings*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Rush, Benjamin. *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements, on the Slavery of the Negroes in America*. Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1773.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Vindication of the Address*. Philadelphia: 1773.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *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.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Essays, Literary, Moral and Philosophical*. Philadelphia: 1798.
- Rush, Benjamin, Carlson, Eric T., Wollock, Jeffrey L., Noel, S. *Benjamin Rush's Lectures on the Mind*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981.
- Sandoz, Ellis. *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730-1805*. Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991.
- Sharp, Granville. *The law of liberty, or, royal law, by which all mankind will certainly be judged! Earnestly recommended to the serious consideration of all slave holders and slave dealers*. London, 1776.
- Sibbes, Richard. *The Soul's Conflict and Victory Over itself by Faith*. London: Pickering, 1837.
- Society of United Irishmen, of Dublin. *An Address of the Society of United Irishmen of Dublin, to Joseph Priestly, L.D.D. Dublin?]*: 1794.
- Smith, Elihu. *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.

- Smith, James M. *An Account of the Remarkable Occurrences in the Life and Travels of Colonel James Smith*. Lexington, 1799.
- Smith, John. *The True Travels, Adventures, and Observations of Captain John Smith in Europe, Asia, Africa and America: And the General History of Virginia, New England and the Summer Isles, Books I-III*. Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1908.
- Smith, Stanhope Samuel. *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.
- Speed, Thomas. *The Political Club, Danville, Kentucky, 1786-1790: Being an Account of an Early Kentucky Society from the Original Papers Recently Found*. Louisville: John P. Morton, 1894.
- Stiles, Ezra. *A History of the Three Judges of Charles I*. Hartford, 1794.
- Sumner, Charles. *No Property in Man.: Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, on the Proposed Amendment of the Constitution Abolishing Slavery Through the United States. In the Senate of the United States, April 8th, 1864*. New York: Published by the Loyal League Publication Society, 1864.
- Charles Sumner, Swan, James. *A Dissuasion to Great-Britain and the Colonies, from the Slave Trade to Africa. Shewing, the Contradiction this Trade Bears, both to Laws Divine and Provincial; the Disadvantages Arising from it, and Advantages from Abolishing it, both to Europe and Africa, Particularly to Britain and the Plantations*. N.E.: Printed by E. Russell, near the new intelligence-office and auction-room, and next the cornfield, Union-Street.
- Swift, Zephania. *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.
- Thale, Mary, ed. *Selections of the Papers of the London Corresponding Society, 1792-1799*. Cambridge, UK, 1983.
- The Trial at Large of John Thelwall. for High Treason; before the Special Commission, at the Sessions-House in the Old-Bailey: Began on Monday, December 1, and Continued Until Friday 5, 1794. with the Whole Proceedings of the Attorney and Solicitor General on the Part of the Crown; and Mr. Erskine and Mr. Gibbs for the Prisoner. by John Newton, Esq.* London, 1795.

- The Trial of Joseph Gerrald, Delegate from the London Corresponding Society, to the British Convention. before the High Court of Justiciary, at Edinburgh, on the 3d, 10th, 13th, and 14th of March, 1794, for Sedition. Taken in Short-Hand by Mr. Ramsey. The second edition.* Edinburgh, 1794.
- The Trial of Maurice Margarot, before the High Court of Justiciary, at Edinburgh, on the 13th and 14th of January, 1794, on an Indictment for Seditious Practices. Taken in Shorthand by Mr. Ramsey.* New York, 1794.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson, ed., "Correspondence of George Rogers Clark and Genet, 1793-94: Selections from the Draper Collection." *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for 1896*. I (Washington, 1897): 930-1107.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Correspondence of the French Ministers to the United States, 1791-97." *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1903*. (Washington, 1904): 721-1009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Documents on the Relations of France to Louisiana, 1792-95." *American Historical Review*. 1897-98. 3.3 (April 1898): 490-516.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Mangourit Correspondence to Genet's Projected Attack on the Floridas." *Annual Report of the American Historical, 1897*. (Washington, 1898): 569-679.
- The Trial of Maurice Margarot, Delegate from London, to the British Convention, before the High Court of Judiciary at Edinburgh on the 13th and 14th of January, 1794. For Sedition.* Philadelphia, 1794.
- True Republican Society. *Rules and Regulations of the True Republican Society, in the City and Liberties of Philadelphia.* Instituted the Third of May, 1794. Philadelphia, 1797.
- Tucker, St. George. *A Dissertation on Slavery, With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of it, in the State of Virginia.* Matthew Carey: Philadelphia, 1796.
- Tyrannical Libertymen. A Discourse upon Negro-Slavery in the United States: Composed at ----, in Newhampshire; on the Late Federal Thanksgiving-Day. Four Lines of Quotation].* Hanover, N.H.]: 1795.
- Walker, David. *Appeal, In Four Articles; Together with A Preamble, to the Colored Citizens of the World, but in particular, and very expressly, to those of The United States of America, 3rd Edition.* Boston, 1830.
- Walwyn, William. *The Compassionate Samaritane.* London, 1644.



- Warren, Charles, ed. *Jacobin and Junto, or Early American Politics as Viewed in the Diary of Dr. Nathaniel Ames, 1758-1822*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931.
- Waterman, Elijah, *An Oration Delivered before the Society of Cincinnati, Hartford, July 4, 1794. by Elijah Waterman. Four Lines of Quotations*]. Printed at Hartford: 1794.
- Webster, Noah, *Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry*. Hartford, CT, 1793.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Revolution in France*. New York, 1794.
- Wesley, John. *The Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, vol. 3. New York: J. & J. Harper, 1828.
- White, Charles. *The Regular Gradation of Man, and in Different Animals and Vegetables*. London: C. Dilly, 1799.
- Whitefield, George. *Directions how to Hear Sermons*. Printed and sold by G. Rogers and D. Fowle, at the printing-office over-against the south east corner of the town-house. And also by B. Eliot at the south end (n.d.).
- Wilberforce, Robert Isaac and Samuel Wilberforce. *The Life of William Wilberforce, Volume I*. London, 1838.
- Williams, Roger. *The Bloody Tenant Yet More Bloody*. London: Printed for Giles Calvert, 1652.
- Wolstonecraft, Mary. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. London, 1790.
- Winslow, Edward. *The Danger of Tolerating Levellers in a Civill State...* London: Printed by R. Cotes for J. Bellamy, 1649.
- Winslow, Edward; Chapin, Howard M. *Hypocrisie Unmasked a True Relation of the Proceedings of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Against Samuel Gorton of Rhode Island*. Providence: Club for Colonial Reprints, 1916.
- Woolman, John. *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes. Recommended to the Professors of Christianity of every Denomination*. Philadelphia: James Chattin, 1754.
- Wortman, Tunis. *An Oration on the Influence of Social Institutions Upon Human Morals and Happiness. Delivered before the Tammany Society... the Twelfth of May, 1796*. New York, 1796.

\_\_\_\_\_. *A Solemn Address, to Christians and Patriots, Upon the Approaching Election of a President of the United States*. New York, 1800. 398

Young, Arthur. *The Example of France: A Warning to Britain, 4th ed.* London, 1794.

#### *Secondary Sources*

Abzug, Robert H. *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Adelson, Judah. "The Vermont Democratic-Republican Societies and the French Revolution." *Vermont History* 32 (1964): 3-23. \_\_\_\_\_. "The Vermont Newspapers and the French Revolution." *Vermont History* 33 (1965): 375-94.

Agulhon, Maurice. *Marianne into Battle: Republican Imagery and Symbolism in France, 1789-1880*. New York: Cambridge University Press; Paris: Editions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1981.

Alderson, Robert J. *The Bright Era of Happy Revolutions: French Consul Michel-Ange-Bernard Mangourit and International Republicanism in Charleston, 1792-1794*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008.

Aldridge, A. Owen. *Franklin and His French Contemporaries*. New York: New York University Press, 1957.

Allen, Theodore W. *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control*. London: Verso, 1993.

Allison, Robert J. *The Crescent Obscured : The United States and the Muslim World, 1776-1815*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Ambrose, Douglas. "Of Stations and Relations," in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery*, ed. McKivigan. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998.

Ammon, Harry. "The Formation of the Republican Party in Virginia, 1789-1796." *The Journal of Southern History* 19, 3 (1953): 283-310.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Genet Mission*. New York: Norton, 1973.

Andrew, Edward. *Conscience and its Critics : Protestant Conscience, Enlightenment Reason, and Modern Subjectivity*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2001.

- Andrews, Dee E. "Reconsidering the First Emancipation: Evidence from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Correspondence, 1785-1810" *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 64, No. 5 (Summer 1997): 230-249.
- Anstey, Roger,. *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1975.
- Anthony, Katharine Susan. *First Lady of the Revolution: The Life of Mercy Otis Warren*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958.
- Aptheker, Herbert. *American Negro Slave Revolts*. New York, 1943.
- Appleby, Joyce Oldham. "America as a Model for the Radical French Reformers of 1789," *William and Mary Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1971).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s*. New York: New York University Press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans*. Cambridge, Mass., 2000.
- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1963.
- Armitage, David and Michael Braddick, ed. *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.
- Baepler, Paul Michel. *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*. Chicago (Ill.): University of Chicago press, 1999.
- Bailyn, Bernard. *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Origins of American Politics*. New York: Knopf, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction*. New York: Knopf: Distributed by Random House, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Banner, James M. *To The Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815*. New York, 1970.
- Banning, Lance. *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978.
- Baker, Keith. *French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture*. Bingley, UK, 1994.

- Baptist, Edward E. *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism*. New York, Basic Books, 2014.
- Barrell, John. *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Baumann, Roland. "The Democratic-Republicans of Philadelphia: The Origins, 1776-1797." Ph.D., Pennsylvania State University, 1970.
- Beneke, Chris, Christopher S. Grenda. *The First Prejudice : Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America*. Philadelphia; Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011.
- Berlin, Ira. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.
- Berlin, Ira, and Ronald Hoffman. *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*. Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1983.
- Blackburn, Robin. *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492-1800*. London; New York: Verso, 1997.
- Bloch, Ruth H. *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Block, James E. *A Nation of Agents: The American Path to a Modern Self and Society*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Bogin, Ruth. "Petitioning and the New Moral Economy of Post-Revolutionary America." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (Jul., 1988): 391-425.
- Bonomi, Patricia. "'Hippocrates Twins': Religion and Politics in the American Revolution," *The History Teacher* 29 (1996).
- Bonwick, Colin. *English Radicals and the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977.
- Bouton, Terry. *Taming Democracy: "The People," The Founders, and the Troubled Ending of the American Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Bradburn, Douglas. *The Citizenship Revolution: Politics and the Creation of the American Union, 1774-1804*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

- Branson, Susan. *These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Branson, Susan and Leslie Patrick, "Saint-Domingan Refugees of Color in Philadelphia," in *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Ed. David P. Geggus. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.
- Breen, T.H. "Ideology and Nationalism on the Eve of the American Revolution: Revisions Once More in Need of Revising." *Journal of American History* 84, no. 1 (1997): 13-39.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2010.
- Brekus, Catherine A. *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelical Christianity in Early America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Bric, Maurice J. *Ireland, Philadelphia and the Reinvention of America, 1760-1800*. Four Courts Press, Portland, OR, 2008.
- Brooke, John L. "Ancient Lodges and Self-Created Societies: Voluntary Association and the Public Sphere in the Early Republic." *Launching The "Extended Republic": The Federalist Era*. Ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert. Charlottesville: United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1996. 273-380.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Columbia Rising*. University of North Carolina Press, 2010.
- Brookes, George S. *Friend Anthony Benezet*. Philadelphia; London: University of Pennsylvania Press; H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1937.
- Brown, Christopher Leslie. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Brown, Gordon S. *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution*. Jackson, MI, 2005.
- Brown, Richard D. *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Strength of a People: The Idea of an Informed Citizenry in America, 1650-1870*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Brown, Vincent. *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008.

- Bruns, Roger, ed. *Am I Not a Man and a Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1977.
- Brunsmann, Denver Alexander. *The Evil Necessity: British Naval Impressment in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013.
- Buchanan, George. *An Oration Upon the Moral and Political Evil of Slavery. Delivered...July 4th, 1791*. Baltimore, 1793.
- Buel, Richard. *Joel Barlow American Citizen in a Revolutionary World*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011.
- Bugg, John W. "Gagging Acts: The Trials of British Romanticism." Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University, 2007.
- Butler, Jon. *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.
- Canny, Nicholas. *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland and the Atlantic World, 1560-1800*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.
- Carey, Brycchan. *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657-1761*. Yale University Press, 2012.
- Carp, Benjamin L. *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Carter, Edward C. "'A Wild Irishman under Every Federalist Bed: Naturalization in Philadelphia, 1789-1806.'" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*. 94 (1970): 331-46.
- Casto, William R. *Foreign Affairs and the Constitution in the Age of Fighting Sail*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006.
- Carwardine, Richard J. *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America*. Yale University Press, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the 'New Measures'", *Journal of American History* 59, 1972: 327-340.
- Childs, Frances Sergeant. *French Refugee Life in the United States, 1790-1800*. Baltimore, 1940.

- Clark, J. C. D. *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Cleves, Rachel Hope. *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Colley, Linda. "The Apotheosis of George III: Loyalty, Royalty and the British Nation 1760-1820," *Past & Present*, no. 102 (1984): 94-129.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.
- Combs, Ann Price. "Notes on the Political Club in Danville and Its Members." *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 38 (1961): 333-52. 402
- Cooper, Laurence D. *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life*. University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.
- Cornell, Saul. *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Cotlar, Seth. *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reading the Foreign News: Imagining an American Public Sphere: Radical and Conservative Visions of 'The Public' In Mid-1790s Newspapers." *Periodical Literature in Eighteenth-Century America*. Ed. Mark L. Kamrath and Sharon M. Harris. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005. 307-38.
- Coughtry, Jay. *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981.
- Countryman, Edward. *Enjoy the Same Liberty: Black Americans and the Revolutionary Era*. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.
- Curtin, Nancy J. *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Dain, Bruce. *A Hideous Monster of the Mind, American Race Theory in the Early Republic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Davis, David Brion. *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. Oxford, England; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Davis, Lawrence H. "The Jacobin Clubs in the French Revolution, 1793-1795." *Labour / Le Travail* 49, (Spring 2002, 2002): 329-331.
- Darnton, Robert. *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopedie, 1775-1800*. 1987.
- De Baecque, Antoine. *The Body Politic: Corporeal Metaphor in Revolutionary France, 1770-1800*. 1997.
- Dickinson, H.T. *British Radicalism and the French Revolution, 1789-1815*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Dickson, David, Dáire Keogh and Kevin Whelan, eds. *The United Irishmen: Republicanism, Radicalism and Rebellion*. Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1993.
- Diouf, Sylviane A. *Fighting the Slave Trade: West African Strategies*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Donoghue, John. "Out of the Land of Bondage: The English Revolution and the Atlantic Origins of Abolition." *American Historical Review*. 115, no. 4 (2010).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Fire Under the Ashes: An Atlantic History of the English Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Dorigny, Marcel and Bernard Gainot, eds. *La Société des Amis des Noirs, 1788-1799: Contribution à l'histoire de l'abolition de l'esclavage*. Paris: UNESCO, 1998.
- Dorsey, Peter A. *Common Bondage: Slavery As Metaphor in Revolutionary America*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009.
- Drescher, Seymour. *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery*. Cambridge, UK and New York, 2009.
- Dubois, Laurent. *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804*. 2004.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004.



- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Suppression of the African slave-trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. New York, 1896.
- Dun, James Alexander. "Philadelphia not Philanthropolis: The Limits of Pennsylvanian Antislavery in the Era of the Haitian Revolution," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 135, No. 1, January 2011, p. 73-102.
- Durey, Michael. *Transatlantic Radicals and the Early American Republic*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997.
- Egerton, Douglas R. *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 & 1802*. Chapel Hill, 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*. Oxford, 2009.
- Elkins, Stanley M., and Eric L. McKittrick. *The Age of Federalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Ely, Melvin Patrick. *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom from the 1790s Through the Civil War*. New York: Knopf, 2004.
- Emmet, Thomas Addis. *Memoir of Thomas Addis and Robert Emmet*. New York, 1915.
- Epstein, James A. *Radical Expression: Political Language, Ritual, and Symbol in England, 1790-1850*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Essah, Patience. *A House Divided: Slavery and Emancipation in Delaware, 1638-1865*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996.
- Essig, James D. *The Bonds of Wickedness: American Evangelicals Against Slavery, 1770-1808*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982.
- Estes, Todd. *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006.
- Eustace, Nichole. *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill, 2008.
- Fehrenbacher, Don E. *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Ferrer, Ada. *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution*. New York: New York University Press, 2016.
- Ferguson, Robert A. *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.

- Fields, Barbara J. "Ideology and Race in American History" in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Finkelman, Paul. "Slavery and the Northwest Ordinance: A Study in Ambiguity," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 1 December 1986, Vol.6 (4), pp. 343-370.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996.
- Fitzsimons, David. "To Paine's New World Order: Idealistic Internationalism in the Ideology of Early American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 19, Fall 1995, 569-582.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Toward a New World Order: Thomas Paine and the Ideology of Early American Foreign Relations" University of Michigan, Dissertation, 2002.
- Fladeland, Betty. *Men and Brothers; Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972.
- Foner, Eric. *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*. Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Forisiano, Ronald P. *For the People: American Populist Movements from the Revolution to the 1850s*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Foster, Charles I. *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790–1837*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960.
- Fredrickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. New York: Harper and Row Publishing, 1971.
- Frey, Sylvia R. *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Frey, Silvia R. and Wood, Betty. *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.
- Frost, William J. *The Quaker Origins of Antislavery*. Norwood, PA: Norwood Editions, 1980.
- Fruchtman, Jack. *The Apocalyptic Politics of Richard Price and Joseph Priestley: A Study in Late Eighteenth Century-English Republican Millennialism*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thomas Paine: Apostle of Freedom*. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1996.
- Furet, Francois. *Interpreting the French Revolution*. 1981.
- Furstenberg, François. "Beyond Freedom and Slavery: Autonomy, Virtue, and Resistance in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History* vol. 89 (March 2003): 1295-1330.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *When the United States Spoke French: Five Refugees Who Shaped a Nation*. New York: Penguin Press, 2014.
- Geggus, David. "The Enigma of Jamaica in the 1790s: New Light on the Causes of Slave Rebellions," *William & Mary Quarterly* 44 (April 1987): 274-299.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina, 2001
- Gellman, David N. *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "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.
- Gellman, David N. and Quigley, David. *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*. New York: New York University Press, 2003.
- Genovese, Eugene. *From Rebellion to Revolution: Afro-American Slave Revolts in the Making of the Modern World*. Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1979.
- Gibbs, Jenna M. *Performing the Temple of Liberty: Slavery, Theater, and Popular Culture in London and Philadelphia, 1760-1850*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014.
- Gigantino, James J. *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015.
- Gilbert, Alan. *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Gilge, Paul A. *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Gilmartin, Kevin. *Writing Against the Revolution: Literary Conservatism in Britain, 1790-1832*. Cambridge, UK, 2007.

- Godechot, Jacques Léon. *Les institutions de la France sous la Révolution et l'empire*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1951.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *France and the Atlantic Revolution of the Eighteenth Century, 1770-1799*. New York: Free Press, 1965.
- Goodman, Dena. *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment*. Ithaca, 1994.
- Goodman, Paul. *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and The Origins of Racial Equality*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Goodwin, Albert. *The Friends of Liberty: The English Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Gordon-Reed, Annette. *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.
- Gould, Philip. *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Greene, Jack P. *The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Greene, Lorenzo J. "Some Observations on the Black Regiment of Rhode Island in the American Revolution." *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 37, No. 2, April 1952.
- Grenby, M.O. *The Anti Jacobin Novel: British Conservatism and the French Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Gura, Philip F. *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984.
- Haakonssen, Knud. *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Hale, Matthew Rainbow. "Many Who Wandered in Darkness': The Contest over American National Identity, 1795-1798," *Early American Studies* 1 (2003).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "On Their Tiptoes: Political Time and Newspapers During the Advent of the Radicalized French Revolution, Circa 1792-1793." *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, 2 (2009): 191-218.
- Hammond, John Craig. *Slavery, Freedom and Expansion in the Early American West*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

- Hammond, John Craig and Matthew Mason, eds. *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011.
- Hampson, Norman. *The Enlightenment*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968.
- Harris, Leslie M. *In The Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Harsanyi, Doina Pasca. *Lessons from America: Liberal French Nobles in Exile, 1793-1798*. University Park, PA, Pennsylvania State University, 2010.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Hazen, Charles D. *Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution* Baltimore, 1897.
- Hill, Bridget. *The Republican Virago: The Life and Times of Catharine Macaulay, Historian*. Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Hill, Christopher. *Puritanism and Revolution; Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century*. London: Secker & Warburg, 1958.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The World Turned Upside Down; Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Milton and the English Revolution*. New York: Viking Press, 1978.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714*. New York: Norton, 1982.
- Hinks, Peter P. *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- Hodges, Graham Russell. *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Hofstadter, Richard. *The Idea of a Party System; the Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.
- Holton, Woody. *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2008.

- Horne, Gerald. *The Counter-Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of America*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Horton, James O. and Horton, Lois E. *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Hughes, Ann. *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Hunt, Lynn. *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*. Berkeley, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Inventing Human Rights*. 2007.
- Hutson, James H. *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1998.
- Isaac, Rhyss. *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.
- Israel, Jonathan. *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre*. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Jacob, Margaret. *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans*. 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe*. New York, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Strangers Nowhere in the World: The Rise of Cosmopolitanism in Early Modern Europe*. 2006.
- Jackson, Maurice. *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- James, C.L.R. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. 1938; 2nd Revised Edition, Vintage: New York. 1989.

- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Familial Politics: Thomas Paine and the Killing of the King, 1776." *Journal of American History* 60, 2 (1973): 294-308.
- Kaye, Harvey J. *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005.
- Kennedy, Michael L. "The Foundation of the Jacobin Clubs and the Development of the Jacobin Club Network, 1789-1791." *The Journal of Modern History* 51, 4 (1979): 701-33.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Best and the Worst of Times: The Jacobin Club Network from October 1791 to June 2, 1793." *The Journal of Modern History* 56, 4 (December, 1984): 635-666.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A French Jacobin Club in Charleston, South Carolina, 1792-1795." *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 91, 1 (1990): 4-22.
- Kerber, Linda K. *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1997
- Ketcham, Ralph. "France and American Politics, 1763-1793." *Political Science Quarterly* 78 (1963): 198-223.
- Klein, Rachel N. *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry, 1760-1808*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- Kidd, Thomas S. *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Knott, Sarah. *Sensibility and the American Revolution*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.
- Koschnik, Albrecht. "The Democratic Societies of Philadelphia and the Limits of the American Public Sphere, Circa 1793-1795." *William and Mary Quarterly* 58 (2001): 615-36.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *"Let a Common Interest Bind Us Together": Associations, Partisanship, and Culture in Philadelphia, 1775-1840*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.

- Kramer, Lloyd S. "The French Revolution and the Creation of American Political Culture." *The Global Ramifications of the French Revolution*. Ed. Joseph Klaitz and Michael H. Haltzel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Lambert, Frank. *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Landes, Joan. *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca, 1988.
- Landes, Richard. *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of the Millennial Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Landy, Craig A. "Society of United Irishmen Revolutionary and New-York Manumission Society Lawyer: Thomas Addis Emmet and the Irish Contributions to the Antislavery Movement in New York," *New York History* 95 (Spring, 2014): 193-222.
- Larkin, Edward. *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Lemisch, Jesse. "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America." *The William and Mary Quarterly*. 1 (1999): 109.
- Lepore, Jill. *The Story of America: Essays on Origins*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker. *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.
- Link, Eugene P. *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800*. New York: Octagon Books, reprint, 1972.
- Locke, Mary. *Anti-Slavery in America, 1619-1808*. Gloucester, MA: Radcliffe College, 1901.
- Lovejoy, David. *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World: Heresy to Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985.



- Lovejoy, E. "Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano, the African," *Slavery and Abolition* 27, no. 3 (2006): 317-347.
- Lynd, Staughton. *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*. 1967, Reprint, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Macleod, Duncan J. *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1974.
- Maier, Pauline. *From Resistance to Revolution; Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776*. New York: Knopf, 1972.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution, 1787-1788*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010.
- Marsden, George M. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.
- Massey, Gregory D. *John Laurens and the American Revolution*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000.
- Mason, Matthew. *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- Mathews, Donald G. *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis." *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Spring, 1969): 23-43.
- Matthewson, Tim. "Abraham Bishop, 'The Rights of Black Men' and the American Reaction to the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (Summer, 1982)
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2003.
- May, Henry F. *The Enlightenment in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- McCarthy, Timothy Patrick and Stauffer, John. *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of American Abolitionism*. New York: The New Press, 2006.

- McDaniel, W. Caleb. *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013.
- McDowell, R.B. *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760-1801* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979.
- McConville, Brendan. *The King's Three Faces: The Rise & Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.
- McAleer, Margaret H. "In Defense of Civil Society: Irish Radicals in Philadelphia during the 1790s," *Early American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003).
- Melish, Joanne Pope. *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Mendle, Michael. *The Putney Debates of 1647: The Army, the Levellers, and the English State*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Miller, John C. *The Federalist Era, 1789-1801*. New York, 1960.
- Miller, Richard G. *Philadelphia--the Federalist City: A Study of Urban Politics, 1789-1801*. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1976.
- Miller, William. "The Democratic Societies and the Whiskey Insurrection." *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62, 3 (1938): 324-349.
- Morgan, Edmund S. *The Gentle Puritan; a Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727-1795*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*. New York: Norton, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Mori, Jennifer. *William Pitt and French Revolution: 1785-1795*. New York, 1997.
- Mulder, Phillip. *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Mullin, Gerald W. *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Nash, Gary B. "The American Clergy and the French Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 22, 3 (1965): 392-412.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Quakers and Politics: Pennsylvania, 1681-1726*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Race and Revolution*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Reverberations of Haiti in the American North: Black Saint Domingans in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 65 (1998).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. New York: Viking, 2005.
- Nash, Gary B. and Soderlund, Jean R. *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Neem, Johann N. *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Newman, Richard S., *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- Newman, Richard, Rael, Patrick and Lapsansky, Phillip. *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African American Protest Literature, 1790-1860*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Newman, Simon P. *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A New World of Labor: The Development of Plantation Slavery in the British Atlantic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Noll, Mark. *America's God*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- O'Brien, Brandon. "From Soul Liberty to Self-Reliance: John Leland and the Evangelical Origins of Radical Individualism," *American Baptist Quarterly* 27, 2 (Summer 2008): 136-150.
- O'Brien, Conor Cruise. *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785-1800*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Ojakangas, Mika. *The Voice of Conscience: A Political Genealogy of Western Ethical Experience*. New York; London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Voice of Conscience: A Political Genealogy of Western Ethical Experience*. New York: London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Oldfield, J.R. *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery. The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807*. Manchester, UK, 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Onuf, Peter S. *Jefferson's Empire: The Language of American Nationhood*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000.
- Ozouf, Mona. *Festivals and the French Revolution*. Cambridge, MA, 1988.
- Palmer, R.R. "A Revolutionary Republican: M.A.B. Mangourit." *William and Mary Quarterly* 9, (1952): 483-96.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800, 2 vols.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959, 1964.
- Pasley, Jeffrey L. *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001.
- Pasley, Jeffrey L., Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, eds. *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Pestana, Carla Gardina. *The English Atlantic in the Age of Revolution, 1640-1661*. Cambridge: Harvard University press, 2007.
- Philp, Mark. *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Pocock, J.G.A. *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3 (1972): 119-134.
- Polgar, Paul. "'To Raise Them to an Equal Participation': Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African American Citizenship," *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 31(Summer 2011), No. 2, 229- 258.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Standard Bearers of Liberty and Equality: Reinterpreting the Origins of American Abolitionism." Ph.D., City University of New York (CUNY) Graduate Center, 2013.
- Poole, Kristen. *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England*. Cambridge, U.K.: New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Poole, William Frederick. *Anti-Slavery Opinions Before the Year 1800: Read Before the Cincinnati Literary Club, November 16, 1872*. Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1873.
- Popkin, Jeremy. *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery*. Cambridge, UK, 2010.
- Porterfield, Amanda. *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Quinney, Valerie. "The Problem of Civil Rights for Free Men of Color in the Early French Revolution," *Journal of Negro History* (55), 2 (1970).
- Rael, Patrick. *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865*. Athens, GA, University of Georgia Press, 2015.
- Resnick, Daniel P. "La Société des Amis des Noirs and the Abolition of Slavery," *French Historical Studies*, 7 (4) (1972): 558-569.
- Riley, Pdraig. *Slavery and the Democratic Conscience: Political Life in Jeffersonian America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.
- Rix, Robert. *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate, 2007.
- Robertson, Andrew W. *The Language of Democracy: Political Rhetoric in the United States and Britain, 1790-1900*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.
- Rockman, Seth. *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Servitude in Early Baltimore*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009.
- Rodgers, Nini. *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast*. Belfast, Northern Ireland: Belfast Society in association with the Ulster Historical Foundation, 2000.

- Roediger, David. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Revised and Expanded Edition. New York: Verso, 1999.
- Rohner, Scott S. *Jacob Green's Revolution: Radical Religion and Reform in a Revolutionary Age*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014.
- Rude, George. *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848*.
- Thomas Russell, *A letter to the people of Ireland, on the present situation of the country*. Belfast, 1796.
- Sack, James J. *From Jacobite to Conservative: Reaction and Orthodoxy in Britain, C.1760-1832*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Sassi, Jonathan D. "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
- \_\_\_\_\_. "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.
- Sayre, Robert Duane. "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., Ohio State University, 1987.
- Scott, Jonathan. *Commonwealth Principles: Republican Writing of the English Revolution*. Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Shankman, Andrew. *Crucible of American Democracy: The Struggle to Fuse Egalitarianism & Capitalism in Jeffersonian Pennsylvania*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004.
- Sharp, James Roger. *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Schmidt, Fredrika Teute and Ripel, Barbara Wilhelm. "Early Proslavery Petitions in Virginia," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (January, 1973): 133-146.
- Schoenbachler, Matthew. "Republicanism in the Age of Democratic Revolution: The Democratic-Republican Societies of the 1790s." *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 2 (-06-01, 1998): 237.

- Schultz, Stanley K. "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): 350-365.
- Semple, Robert Baylor. *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia*. Richmond, 1894.
- Shoemaker, Robert W. "'Democracy' and 'Republic' as Understood in Late Eighteenth-Century America." *American Speech* 41, no. 2 (May, 1966): 83-95.
- Sidbury, James. *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Saint Domingue in Virginia: Ideology, Local Meanings, and Resistance to Slavery, 1790-1800," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (August, 1997).
- Silverman, Aaron Jay. "A Dark Spectre: The Haitian Revolution and American Politics." Ph.D., University of California, Los Angeles, 2010.
- Sinha, Manisha. "'To Cast Just Obliquely' on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly, Volume LXIV, No. 1* (January 2007): 149-160.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.
- Shuler, John. "Calling Out Liberty: Human Rights Discourse and Early American Literature." PhD Dissertation, City University of New York, 2007.
- Skinner, Quentin. "Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action," *Political Theory* 2, no. 3. 1974: 235.
- Slaughter, Thomas P. *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.
- Smelser, Marshall. "The Jacobin Phrenzy: Federalism and the Menace of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity." *The Review of Politics* 13, no. 4 (Oct., 1951): 457-482.
- Smyth, Jim. *The Men of No Property: Irish Radicals and Popular Politics in the Late Eighteenth Century*. New York St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Soderlund, Jean R. *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.
- Stauffer, John. *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

- Stewart, James Brewer. *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1976.
- Tagg, James. *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.
- Thompson, E.P. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1964.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Customs in Common*. New York: New Press, 1991.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*. New York: New Press, 1993.
- Thompson, Peter. *Rum Punch and Revolution*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
- Tise, Larry. *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *American Counterrevolution: A Retreat from Liberty: 1783- 1800*. Mechanicsburgh, PA, 1998.
- Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Origin of Genet's Projected Attack on Louisiana and the Floridas." *The American Historical Review* 3.4 (1898): 650-71.
- Twomey, Richard J. *Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American Radicalism in the United States, 1790–1820*. New York: Garland Publishing, 1989.
- Van Cleve, George William. *A Slaveholder's Union: Slavery, Politics, and The Constitution in the Early American Republic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Verhoeven, Wil. "Gilbert Imlay and the Triangular Trade," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Oct., 2006).
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Gilbert Imlay: Citizen of the World*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008.
- Wade, Richard C. *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790-1830*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996.
- Waldstreicher, David. *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Runaway America: Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the American Revolution*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2004.



- \_\_\_\_\_. *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification*. New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 2009.
- Wahrman, Dror. *Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, 1780-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Warner, Michael. *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth Century America*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1990.
- White, Ashli. *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010.
- White, Shane. *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991.
- Wilder, Craig Steven. *Ebony & Ivy: Race, Slavery, and the Troubled History of America's Universities*. 2013.
- Wilentz, Sean. *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. New York: Norton, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Williams, George Washington. *History of the Negro Race in America*. New York: Bergman Publishers, 1968.
- Williams, Gwyn A. *Artisans and Sans-Culottes: Popular Movements in France and Britain During the French Revolution*. London: Arnold, 1973.
- Wilson, David A. *United Irishmen, United States: Immigrant Radicals in the Early Republic*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Winch, Julie. *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Gentleman of Color: The Life James Forten*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Winik, Jay. *The Great Upheaval: America and the Birth of the Modern World, 1788-1800*. New York: Harper Collins, 2007.
- Wolf, Eva Sheppard. *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.

- Wood, Nicholas. "Questions of Humanity and Expediency: The Slave Trades and African Colonization in the Early American Republic" Ph.D., University of Virginia, 2013.
- Wood, Gordon S. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. New York: A.A. Knopf, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Woodson, Carter. *The Mind of the Negro as Reflected in Letters Written During the Crisis*. Washington DC: The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1926.
- Young, Alfred Fabian. *The Democratic Republicans of New York; the Origins, 1763-1797*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "English Plebian Culture and Eighteenth-Century American Radicalism." *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism*. Ed. Margaret Jacob and James Jacob. Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1984. 185-213.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution*. New York: New York University Press, 2006.
- Young, Alfred F.; Nash, Gary B.; Raphael, Ray. *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011.
- Zagarri, Rosemarie. *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- Zilversmit, Arthur. *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

## VITA

Anthony Di Lorenzo was born in Chicago, Illinois. As an undergraduate, he studied film and literature at the University of Iowa, before transferring to DePaul University in Chicago, where he was awarded a competitive policy debate scholarship. There, he earned his Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science. After working as a political consultant, policy researcher and high school debate coach, he entered graduate studies at Northeastern Illinois University in history and teacher education. This work culminated in a Master of Arts degree in History and the publication of a journal article drawn from his thesis on Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* in 2009.

While at Loyola, Di Lorenzo was awarded a number of internal fellowships, including the Advanced Doctoral Fellowship, the Pre-Doctoral Teaching Scholarship, and the Arthur J. Schmitt Leadership Fellowship. He also received external funding and support from a number of organizations, including the Colonial Dames of America, the International Center for Jefferson Studies, the Gilder Lehrman Institute, and the Newberry Library. He coordinated the English Atlantic Writing Group in 2014-2015.

Di Lorenzo has presented his work at numerous conferences, including the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR), the Omohundro Institute for Early American History, the British Group of Early American Historians (BGEAH), and the Institute for the Study of the French Revolution at the University of Paris-Sorbonne.