

“WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS FREEDOM”: BLACK SPIRITUALITY
AND THE RISE OF THE ANTISLAVERY MOVEMENT, 1740-1841

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“WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS FREEDOM”:
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This dissertation traces the evolution of black abolitionism in colonial North America and the United States from 1740 to 1841. Focusing primarily on reformers, theologians, and activists, it examines specifically the ways in which spiritual beliefs shaped black opposition to slavery. It places black abolitionists in an international context and analyzes the transatlantic connections they developed and maintained in their battle against slavery and prejudice.

Inspired by eighteenth-century pietistic revival, a West African cosmological heritage, and the Enlightenment emphasis on natural rights, men and women of African descent began protesting slavery publicly during the colonial era. With the onset of the American Revolution, they located republican egalitarianism within a sacred framework and underscored the contradiction inherent in a slaveholding polity allegedly predicated on Protestant Christianity. After 1800, many black activists adapted the pietistic model of itinerancy and evangelism to agitate against both slavery and racial discrimination. During the 1820s, black antislavery reformers, disillusioned by the nation’s rejection of abolition and angered by the American Colonization Society’s 1817 plan to send free blacks to Africa, embraced more radical measures. By 1829, they demanded immediate emancipation and after 1830 consolidated their strategies into a full-fledged radical movement.

This study relies on three investigative methods. First, it employs untapped or underutilized archival and textual sources that uncover a biracial transatlantic network of activism as early as the 1780s. Second, it contextualizes familiar documents including newspaper reports, fugitive slave advertisements, conversion narratives, and public orations

more finely. Finally, it draws on black intellectual productions rarely used in discussions of abolitionism.

This dissertation intervenes in the historiography of African American history and culture, abolitionist literature, and transatlantic intellectual history. By placing people of African descent central to the emergence of abolitionism, it offers an important interpretation for how one of the most significant social reform movements in American history developed. The dissertation argues that the call for immediate emancipation that gained currency after 1830 originated in black reformers' collective efforts to put into practice their spiritual convictions.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dianne Wheaton Cappiello, a native of Binghamton, New York, received a Bachelor of Science in Human Resource Management from Empire State College of the State University of New York in 2001. She graduated with a Master of Arts in American history from Binghamton University in 2004 and pursued doctoral studies in American history at Cornell University from 2006 to 2011, receiving her Doctor of Philosophy in 2011.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Ron Cappiello, whose love and support made this project possible.

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Introduction

In 1841, a thirty-four year old black Congregationalist minister in Hartford, Connecticut, published a book in which he denounced the assumption held in many white circles that God endorsed and blessed slavery. James W.C. Pennington asked his readers, “Who is a blasphemer but he who wrests the holy word of the Holy God from its proper meaning, and makes it to sanction iniquity?”¹ By the time Pennington penned these words, slavery in the northern states had for the most part ceased to exist while in the South it had become entrenched. Pennington argued that neither slavery nor prejudice deserved a place among a self-professed Christian people, a common position held by black reformers in antebellum America. Although such public opposition appears natural, just a century earlier another black theologian, an African-born Dutch Reformed minister, Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, proclaimed “that slavery and Christianity are not antithetical.”²

This dissertation traces the development of black abolitionist activism from Capitein’s 1742 affirmation to Pennington’s 1841 denunciation. How some people of African descent engaged the topic of slavery during the intervening century raises questions pertinent to black intellectual history and the emergence of the antislavery movement.³ What theological,

¹ James W.C. Pennington, *A Text Book of the Origin and History, &c. &c. of the Colored People* (Hartford, 1841), 84.

² Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, *Political-theological dissertation examining the question: Is slavery compatible with Christian freedom or not?* In *The Agony of Asar, A Thesis on Slavery by the Former Slave, Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, 1717-1747*, translated with commentary by Grant Parker (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2001), 103.

³ I distinguish between the terms “antislavery” and “abolitionism.” David Brion Davis notes, in *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), that “[c]learly ‘abolitionism’ is a more specific term than ‘antislavery,’ and is associated with the doctrine that slavery or the slave trade must be abolished,” 22. I argue that for most abolitionists, both black and white, ending the slave trade was just one step toward abolishing slavery altogether. In this dissertation, therefore, “abolitionism” refers to the active drive for complete emancipation of all slaves, either through conservative or radical means. Black reformers during the early national period, for instance, pushed for total abolition despite recognizing the political necessity for gradual measures. “Antislavery,” on the other hand, does not automatically connote a push for total emancipation. It refers to an individual or organization’s opposition to slavery that may or may not include activities directed toward obtaining emancipation. A reformer could oppose slavery in principle without endorsing abolition. Colonizationists

philosophical, and political ideas informed black activism, how did these ideas intersect, and in what ways did they inform abolitionism? How did enslaved and free blacks participate in destabilizing the conviction that freedom for slaves referred only to their spiritual condition? While I pay particular attention to actors in the northern part of what became the United States, I place them in a global context and consider transnational influences on black thought and action. For instance, despite Capitein's remoteness to black Americans, he was the first person of African descent to discuss slavery publicly and became an emblem of black intellectual talent for later generations of black reformers. Pennington, nearly a century after Capitein presented his thesis, hailed it as a significant achievement by a native-born African regardless its content.⁴

I argue that black theologians, thinkers, and activists, including the so-called "voiceless," were instrumental in shaping the struggle against human bondage. Inspired by the fires of eighteenth-century pietistic revival, their own West African cosmological heritage, and later by the Revolutionary generation's emphasis on natural rights, people of African descent in New England and the mid-Atlantic entered the public sphere armed with a profound spiritual and moral consciousness that demanded justice.⁵ Throughout the colonial era, they put their faith into motion by speaking and acting publicly. With the onset of the American Revolution, they incorporated republican egalitarianism into their discourse, underscoring the contradiction inherent in a slaveholding republic predicated on human liberty and virtue. Always acknowledging a supreme ruler and pushing white antislavery reformers to remember the Golden

considered themselves antislavery humanitarians but explicitly disassociated themselves from abolitionism. In antebellum America, antislavery activists opposed the extension of slavery into new territories while rejecting a demand for immediate emancipation. The transatlantic antislavery movement that began during the eighteenth century thus encompassed a wide variety of antislavery opinions.

⁴ Pennington, *A Text Book*, 50-51.

⁵ Throughout the dissertation when I use the term "African," I mean specifically West African. According to Michael A. Gomez, in *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), the majority of Africans forcibly transported to British North America originated from West Africa, 29.

Rule, the next generation in the new century looked to northern gradual abolition legislation and Congress's 1808 end to the international slave trade as precursors to total emancipation and civil equality. Ultimately disappointed in white Americans' refusal to fulfill that promise and angered by the American Colonization Society's back-to-Africa proposal, black reformers entered the 1820s embracing a more radical agenda. By 1829, they demanded immediate abolition, a call taken up by William Lloyd Garrison and other white radicals.

This study emphasizes how spirituality and changing theological ideas shaped black abolitionists' political activism.⁶ I contend that black confidence in God as creator, sustainer, and judge of humankind established a foundation for fighting slavery and prejudice. In an age where rational thinking and emotional religious experience appeared incompatible, most people of African descent harmonized the two. Gayraud Wilmore, a scholar of African American religious history, notes that "African religions know nothing of a rigid demarcation between the natural and the supernatural."⁷ Even as the secularizing winds of the Enlightenment blew across Europe and America, enslaved and free blacks remained steadfastly grounded in their relationship to the divine. Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote that it is "in the highest reaches of transcendent spirit" that man "is able to defy historical fate and appeal to a realm of meaning

⁶ I make a distinction between religion and spirituality. The first term implies doctrinal practices and the second an internal belief system. By spirituality, I refer to an individual's belief in a divine being or beings that shapes his or her ideas about the world in which he or she lives, governing relationships with other individuals, with institutions, and with nature. I use the term political broadly to describe black abolitionists' involvement in the public arena, not just as potential electors but as participants engaged actively in addressing civic concerns.

⁷ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, third edition, revised and enlarged (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 37. Throughout this dissertation I refer to African cosmology, by which I mean a spiritual worldview originating in African Traditional Religions. According to Wilmore, African Traditional Religion "is the term used to designate the primal, basically monotheistic if operationally polytheistic and heterogeneous religions of Africa that stretch" back in time and forward to the modern day. Despite variations in beliefs among African ethnic groups, all share some commonalities. According to Wilmore, "They are family- and clan-centered religions, pragmatic in their relation to and effect upon the totality of daily existence, and firmly ecological and anthropocentric in their ontology. African Traditional Religionists regard God, natural phenomena, and the ancestors as intrinsically related to each other, and the traditionalist's primary interest in them is not philosophical, but practical, that is, how they together affect the lives of human beings," 4. See also Margaret Washington Creel, *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988).

in which his life has a significance which history denies.”⁸ Despite the individual’s location in the midst of uncontrollable historical processes, he or she can retain hope. Christian faith, Niebuhr noted, “prompt[s] a sense of obligation towards wider and wider circles of life.... There is a constantly increasing sense of social obligation which is an integral part of the life of grace.”⁹ Confronted by a society that normalized human bondage and brutal discrimination, the spiritually-minded African-born and their descendants discovered in pietistic Christianity a divine mandate to force slavery and its consequences into the public consciousness.

Although Enlightenment thinkers stressed man’s natural right to freedom, black reformers, like many white Europeans, interpreted this idea within the framework of God’s sovereignty. When the Rev. Pennington reminded his readers in 1841 that God had created all people “in *his own image*,” he relied on a longstanding theological vision of common humanity, equality, and liberty.¹⁰ This vision, which gained particular saliency during the eighteenth century as racial slavery expanded and scientists and philosophers interrogated racial difference, proved enduring. After the Revolution, the Declaration of Independence’s affirmation that “all men are created equal” and have a God-given right to liberty became a rallying point for black and white opponents of slavery in the new Republic. Some black thinkers argued further that Africa was the birthplace of humankind and demonstrated Africans’ special place in God’s plan. Black abolitionists’ confidence in their message empowered numerous strategies designed to challenge white Americans to live up to the nation’s political and religious foundations. Many reformers used support for total abolition as a litmus test for true Christians.

⁸ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 68.

⁹ Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation*, vol. II (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 189-190.

¹⁰ Pennington, *A Text Book*, 6.

To uncover how free and enslaved blacks on both sides of the Atlantic fostered a progressively radical abolition movement, I rely on a number of methods. First, I employ untapped sources such as correspondence between Africans, African Americans, and white antislavery proponents. New evidence, for example, links Philadelphia's black leaders directly to British abolitionists early in the nineteenth century, suggesting that for black activists the slave trade and slavery were not just local or regional issues but were part of a global struggle for liberty and justice. Other material, including letters and church records, brings into question the traditional historiographical focus on the African Methodist Episcopal denomination as a center for black independent social reform. Black Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists all engaged in social protest in one way or another. That their efforts have garnered little scholarly attention should not minimize their contribution to the antislavery movement.

Contextualizing familiar sources more finely affords a second, and no less important, avenue for analyzing black spirituality. While writing an intellectual history centered on a people with a strong oral culture without privileging a literate, elite class is challenging, it is not impossible. During the Great Awakening, the revival's opponents recorded numerous, detailed accounts of Africans' response to enthusiastic evangelical pietism. Reading such texts with attention to the context of traditional African spiritual beliefs yields tremendous awards. James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's autobiographical narrative, even though written by an amanuensis, takes on a new dimension when understood as an eyewitness account of the Dutch pietism practiced by Gronniosaw's owner, the Dutch revivalist Theodorus Frelinghuysen. More than the mere rendering of an intense conversion experience, it opens a window ever so slightly onto the spiritual world of a native-born African interpreting Christian beliefs. Newspaper ads for fugitive slaves sometimes offer insight into the religious manners exhibited by the self-

emancipated. Finally, traditional sources such as legislative petitions, public orations, and writings by well-known black intellectuals such as Lemuel Haynes, David Walker, and Hosea Easton still provide not only a means to examine the relationship between sacred ideals and secular goals but to raise important questions about why the antislavery movement took a radical turn.

This study, thirdly, relies on sources rarely used in discussions on abolitionism. Beginning my analysis, for example, with Capitein's ostensible defense of slavery appears at first glance counterintuitive. Yet, because it represents the first public discussion of the institution by a black man in the Western world, it demands inclusion. Capitein also commanded a place of honor in nineteenth-century black historical memory. Black reformers' recognition of the poet Phillis Wheatley, the British African abolitionist Ottobah Cugoana, and others leads me to consider how and where those particular works fit into the larger antislavery movement, especially given their explicitly spiritual messages. Even though the eighteenth-century's black poets and letter writers sit uncomfortably among the ranks of black radical abolitionists, they created an ideological foundation upon which British and American reformers, both black and white, built an antislavery agenda. I incorporate numerous newspaper articles about black celebrations, lectures, and other activities. Even the smallest, most innocuous announcement, perhaps about an African Society lecture or a black preacher sailing to Europe, reveals much about black activism. Reformers spoke publicly against slavery and traveled widely to disseminate their views, actions that received notice in local newspapers.

Finally, I examine the emergence of the American antislavery movement from a black perspective. I explore how the people most intimately concerned with achieving global emancipation participated in and shaped reform. This is not to say that all the subjects of my

inquiry were radical abolitionists intentionally. During the eighteenth century, there was little concerted black action against either the slave trade or slavery. Nevertheless, black agents, famous and nameless, formed a crucial front in the battle against human bondage. It is, therefore, imperative, nay intellectually responsible, to analyze their involvement with abolitionism beginning at a moment before white antislavery sentiment flourished and to trace it through the radicalization of the 1830s. Abolitionism as a major force for social reform in American history was not exclusively white. Studying it from a black viewpoint creates a compelling alternative explanation for why it emerged when and where it did and the trajectory it eventually followed. Factors such as African spirituality, pietistic Protestantism, black self-determination, and interracial transatlantic connections paint a more complete picture of the antislavery movement.

This dissertation, consequently, contributes to the historiography of African American history and culture, abolitionist literature, and transatlantic intellectual history. First, it places people of African descent as central to the struggle against slavery, offering an intellectual discussion of their thought and activities from a sacred and secular perspective. For the past several decades, scholars, including Eric Williams, David Brion Davis, Thomas L. Haskell, and more recently, Christopher Leslie Brown, have debated the origins of the antislavery movement in the English-speaking world during the eighteenth century. Focused primarily on the economic, intellectual, and religious motivations of white abolitionists, older studies simply ignored black opposition to both slavery and the slave trade. Davis famously argued that white antislavery sentiment arose from the man of feeling's desire to "objectify his virtue," to see himself as benevolent.¹¹ Where does this leave black reformers whose passion for abolition arose from their love for friends and family and all those made in God's image? Even Brown in

¹¹ Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, 46.

his recent study, *Moral Capital*, devotes just one chapter to “Africa, Africans, and the Idea of Abolition,” framing his discussion about black activism as part of broader reform efforts already begun by agitators such as the British attorney Granville Sharp and American Quaker Anthony Benezet. Brown writes that “black leaders like Equiano...took advantage of the emerging antislavery movement to claim a public voice for themselves,” a statement that assumes the movement preceded black involvement and not the other way around.¹²

Yet blacks were in the vanguard for effecting social transformation. I suggest asking: How did black leaders’ public voice presage and encourage a nascent antislavery movement? Brown admits that Equiano “helped to shape” the fight against the slave trade but fails to credit him with a more active role.¹³ Often, blacks occupy the periphery in studies on British and American reform, serving only to add emotional intensity and a public face to slavery’s evil. Historians concerned about abstract and impersonal concepts such as white humanitarianism and capitalism miss how the people in the trenches, motivated by their own ideas about the divine, worked to bring an end to what they proclaimed an unjust and unchristian system.¹⁴

By arguing that black spirituality shaped abolitionism in significant ways, my study, secondly, challenges a paradigm that privileges Quakerism and white evangelicalism as driving impulses for the antislavery movement, thus bringing it within the realm of American religious studies. Given the African response to pietistic preaching during the colonial revivals from the 1720s through the 1740s, it would be wrong to assume that black religious experience, shaped by West African cosmology, bore no impact on their thinking about slavery. By the time Quakers

¹² Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 296.

¹³ Brown, *Moral Capital*, 296.

¹⁴ For an example of an intellectual discussion about abstract ideas that omits the black voice, see *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation*, edited and with an introduction by Thomas Bender, with essays by John Ashworth, David Brion Davis, and Thomas L. Haskell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

John Woolman and Anthony Benezet brought the white public's attention to the inconsistency between Christian ideals and the slave trade and human bondage, a few black Americans had already acted on their abolitionist convictions either by speaking out or by emancipating themselves. When the Second Great Awakening swept through the northern states fifty years later, it ignited a variety of perfectionist reform efforts, including antislavery, among white converts, many of whom joined the radical abolition cause after 1830. Although many black reformers embraced the evangelical message and joined traditional denominations, their own radicalization emanated from a sacred worldview originating in neither Quakerism nor evangelical perfectionism. Scholars for decades have recognized the centrality of black religion as an organizing mechanism for northern activists without fully appreciating the extent to which concepts about the divine created a unique black intellectual tradition, rooted in African spirituality and practical pietism, that determined political and social strategies.

Finally, beginning my study in 1740 offers a more extended perspective on the origins of black abolitionism. In recent years, historians have increasingly challenged the standard narrative that locates the impetus for radical reform among black and white activists in the post-1830 era, now suggesting that the American Revolution and its concomitant republican ideals helped shape black reformers' more radical discourse.¹⁵ That revolutionary values provided a new language for northern black activists tells only part of the story. The theological and philosophical changes transforming the American and British religious and social landscape in the decades leading to the Revolution influenced how people of African descent interpreted the Republic's promising ideals and how they understood their connections with activists across the Atlantic. Using any event or date that marks a watershed in social or political history obscures

¹⁵ Among this group of scholars are Richard S. Newman, Roy E. Finkenbine, Peter P. Hinks, Julie Winch, and Manisha Sinha. See their essays in *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007). Earlier historiography relies on the emergence of William Lloyd Garrison as a radical agitator in 1830 to mark the start of immediate abolitionism.

the subtle processes that work together to create that history and results in a misleading teleological analysis. I try to avoid this by starting with the colonial revivals popularly known as the Great Awakening and Capitein's public discussion on slavery, events not overtly abolitionist but still meaningful to black intellectual and religious history.¹⁶

Although the literature on African American history has flourished over the past four decades, little scholarship has focused exclusively on black abolitionism since Benjamin Quarles's 1969 seminal study, *Black Abolitionists*.¹⁷ The first full-length monograph on the topic, Quarles's work recognized the extensiveness of black reform and institution-building, identifying key activists in Boston, Philadelphia, New York, and Baltimore. Like other early antislavery works, it situated radical abolitionism in the post-1830 reform enthusiasm distinguished by the appearance of William Lloyd Garrison and his militant newspaper, *The Liberator*. By disconnecting the drive for immediate emancipation from other more conservative antislavery efforts characterizing the decades before 1830, Quarles elided any continuities between the two and obscured black activism prior to Garrison. While he suggested that "earlier [white] abolitionists had a religious orientation," targeting slaves and free blacks as objects of benevolence, he never addressed how black activists themselves deployed their own sacred discourse to oppose oppression and slavery.¹⁸

¹⁶ I recognize that scholars now question the idea of a single "Great Awakening" and emphasize that evangelical revivals occurred periodically throughout the colonial period and into the early national era, blurring distinctions between a "First Great Awakening" and a "Second Great Awakening." I use the terms primarily to distinguish between the colonial revivals and the evangelical enthusiasm that emerged after 1800. For a historiographical discussion of the colonial awakening, see Christopher Grasso, "A 'Great Awakening'?", *Reviews in American History* 37 (March 2009): 13-21. For an analysis that challenges historians' traditionally narrow temporal construction of colonial revivals, see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ There is a vast literature on both slave and free communities in North and South. These social and cultural histories offer a broad temporal range from the early colonial era through the Civil War. One important social biography that I do not include in this review is Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). It relates significantly to black abolitionism, but the lens of biography limits its usefulness.

¹⁸ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1969), 9.

Julie Winch's 1998 *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* examines the origins of black activism in the post-Revolutionary period. A geographically limited study, it analyzes how "a class of leaders emerged, with their own political and personal alliances, their feuds and friendships, and their own perception of their duties as leaders."¹⁹ Winch emphasizes black institution-building and the relationships among Philadelphia's black elites without interrogating the intellectual origins of this activism. By noting that this leadership "emerged" after the Revolution, Winch, perhaps unintentionally, intimates a causal relationship between the recent war and the development of a black elite. Revolutionary impulses likely did motivate men such as Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and James Forten. Yet, other ideological commitments not born of political struggle may have led these men to establish organizations such as the Free African Society in 1787 and the African Masonic lodge in 1797. Some community leaders, such as Forten, explored emigration to and commerce with Africa, and Allen and Jones founded their own independent African churches, projects that raise questions about black Americans' relationship both to Africa and to their spiritual strivings, questions Winch leaves unexplored.

In 2001, Craig Steven Wilder published *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City*, a study that explores the connection between African culture and the rise of voluntary associations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Wilder argues that the roots of such collectivism lay not in reaction to white oppression but in West African social practices. A variety of religious and political currents of thought informed black reform. Cautioning that "the excessive moralism of these associations—their unforgiving Christian zeal" should not be viewed as evidence for passive receptivity of

¹⁹ Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 3.

white elite ideas, he asserted that morality and mutuality in no way denied “an indigenous ethical culture.”²⁰ Activists gathered under one umbrella ideas about natural rights, republican citizenship, and Christian liberty. Focusing almost exclusively on institutions prevents Wilder from detailing fully how African spiritual beliefs might have blended with Christian precepts to shape an intellectual framework for antislavery reform. Moreover, he implies that organizational names, including the African Woolman Benevolent Association, the Wilberforce Philanthropic Association, and the African Clarkson Association, reflected a strategy designed to attract white support for antislavery principles.²¹ I suggest additionally that reformers in the early Republic chose these names due to a consciousness that positive social change could only be achieved through a transatlantic joint effort between blacks and whites, an effort grounded in deep-seated spiritual beliefs about human beings’ obligation to care for one another.

Patrick Rael’s 2002 intellectual history, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, situates black activism within a white nationalist discourse. Interpreting the antebellum struggle for racial equality from this perspective, Rael contends that black nationalist thought was limited by white ideological conventions, leading reformers to engineer their reform within a “northern worldview.” “For better or worse,” observes Rael, “black northerners cofabricated with other Americans the political and racial discourse of the antebellum public sphere.”²² Unlike Wilder, Rael looks not to Africa but to white Americans for the source of black thought. If he infers that black Americans developed their ideas solely from the culture in which they found themselves, then he leaves little room for nineteenth-century black thought shaped by non-Western spiritual beliefs and eighteenth-century European theological

²⁰ Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 81.

²¹ Wilder, 93.

²² Peter Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 124, 10.

transformations. Rael's temporal framework highlighting the period from the 1820s to the 1860s and his cofabrication thesis both artificially disconnect African American reformers from their cultural past.

Since the publication of Rael's study, scholars have turned to the pre-1830 period to elucidate the origins of black antislavery activism. The most representative example of this cutting-edge work appeared in the January 2007 issue of *The William and Mary Quarterly*, in which a number of scholars participated in a forum entitled, "Black Founders in the New Republic." The forum essayists each offered brief interpretations of select documents, drawing on a source base being developed at the University of Detroit Mercy, the Black Antislavery Writings Project, 1760-1829. Manisha Sinha, for instance, analyzed petitions from the 1770s and slave trade orations published between 1808 and 1815 to argue that revolutionary and republican ideals gave birth to "a distinct antislavery radicalism."²³ Like the other *WMQ* writers, Sinha makes a critical contribution to black abolitionist historiography by linking the earlier black discourse to the later radical shift toward immediate abolitionism. Such a move provides a necessary corrective to the traditionally teleological history that privileged Garrison's prominence in the movement. Arguments like Sinha's, nevertheless, raise concerns about the wisdom of using the American Revolution as a starting point for understanding the complexities of black abolitionism and obscures the ways in which sacred beliefs influenced secular actions.

The most recent studies about black activism center on identity formation. In 2008, Leslie M. Alexander traced how black New Yorkers between 1784 and 1861 transformed their self-identification in order to fight oppression and gain political leverage. While in the late eighteenth century they proudly allied themselves with an African heritage, after 1817, as white

²³ Manisha Sinha, "To 'cast just obliquy' on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 149-160, quote on 151.

reformers increasingly supported African colonization, they began identifying themselves as Americans to claim rights of citizenship.²⁴ Laurie Maffly-Kipp's 2010 study, *Setting Down the Sacred Past*, explores how nearly two centuries of black narratives helped create an African American collective identity. She pays particular attention to black evangelicalism, arguing that Protestant Christian beliefs encouraged blacks and whites "to locate themselves at every minute in relation to God," a practice that led believers to imagine themselves part "of God's plan for the world."²⁵ Whereas Maffly-Kipp is primarily interested in Christianity as a unifying factor in creating an African American collective memory, Rita Roberts considers how Protestant evangelicalism shaped a black American political identity. In her 2010 *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863*, Roberts contends that after the American Revolution many northern blacks "converted to evangelical Christianity and embraced the principles of republicanism." The ideals to which black leaders subscribed profoundly shaped their activism and help explain their willingness to identify themselves "so fully as American."²⁶ While Roberts, Maffly-Kipp, and Alexander help us better understand the strategies people of African descent utilized to claim an American identity, they do not examine in any depth the relationship between black ideas about slavery and the global abolition movement.

This brief literature review reveals the historiographical gaps that my study seeks to fill. To date, no scholar has published a full-length monograph considering the rise of black activism in light of the fundamental question raised by David Brion Davis over four decades ago. Why

²⁴ Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

²⁵ Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African-American Race Histories* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 11.

²⁶ Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 200, 12.

did antislavery sentiment appear when and where it did?²⁷ We cannot begin to answer this question fully until we consider how blacks themselves thought about slavery and how they pushed for a radical change in thinking about human relationships. Historians pay too little attention to inner spirituality as a guiding force in black reformers' lives, preferring to dwell on religious institution-building as instrumental in racial elevation and antislavery strategy. We need to ask: how did sacred West African and Christian beliefs shape black activist tactics? African cosmology and ideas about the relationship between Africa and Christianity often fall by the wayside. Yet, these must have influenced black believers, thinkers, and reformers, notably those not far from Africa in memory and experience. More than this, how did black reformers' theology change over the course of a century, and how did both continuities and shifts in thought incite them to adopt progressively radical abolitionist strategies?

The six chapters that comprise my dissertation address these questions. The first chapter, spanning the period from 1740 to 1770, focuses primarily on African interpretations of the Gospel message. It begins by analyzing the African Dutch Reformed theologian Capitein's 1742 dissertation, *Is Slavery Compatible with Christian Freedom or Not?* The ways in which Capitein linked his thesis to his desire to bring spiritual redemption to Africans kindles doubt about his alleged defense of slavery and suggests how his exposure to Dutch pietism may have shaped his attitudes about slavery and freedom. His subsequent actions and writings in Africa raise further questions about claims that he was thoroughly acculturated to Dutch Calvinism.²⁸ The chapter then explores how Africans and their American-born descendants in Britain's New England and

²⁷ One dissertation addresses this topic. Christopher Cameron, "To Plead Our Own Cause: African Americans in Massachusetts and the Making of the Antislavery Movement, 1630-1835," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010). Cameron argues that Puritanism was central to black activist thought in Massachusetts and that these activists became key players in the creation of the northern antislavery movement.

²⁸ David Nii Anum Kpobi, *Mission in Chains: The Life, Theology and Ministry of the Ex-slave Jacobus E.J. Capitein (1717-1747) with a translation of his major publications* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993). Kpobi argues that Capitein was thoroughly acculturated.

mid-Atlantic colonies responded to Dutch Calvinistic pietism, a brand of Reformed theological practice that demanded believers evidence the indwelling Holy Spirit in daily living. By 1740, Africans had begun flocking to the enthusiastic revivals promoted by pietistic evangelists such as the Dutch theologian Theodorus Frelinghuysen, the American Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent, and the Anglican Methodist George Whitefield. I pay close attention to the conversion account written by Frelinghuysen's African-born slave, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw. Gronniosaw, in a published narrative, described his own African spiritual heritage and his experience of evangelical pietism. This chapter then investigates how other slaves interpreted revival preaching's message. Many blacks, inspired by the New Light way, began exhorting, preaching, and openly opposing slavery as sinful.

The second chapter examines the emergence of a black public voice between 1770 and 1787. In 1770, Boston's Phillis Wheatley, a young African-born slave, began publishing religious poetry, and in 1773, Gronniosaw's autobiography appeared for the first time in America. Throughout the colonies enslaved blacks submitted petitions for freedom and antislavery essays to legislatures and newspapers. What did it mean that at this moment in time an increasing numbers of black writers began publishing? Even though the American Revolution's spokesmen emphasized the Enlightenment ideal of natural rights and liberty, black Americans understood and wrote about this rhetoric from a sacred perspective. How did pietistic principles and theological innovations change blacks' writings and actions? New Divinity theology, for instance, reinterpreted Jonathan Edwards' concept of disinterested benevolence as a mandate for social reform and attracted black proponents for the abolition of slavery.

The chapter analyzes closely how black pietists, inspired by shared spiritual beliefs and their own ambitions, forged ties with British reformers. Gronniosaw, Wheatley, and John

Marrant, an American-born black converted under the ministry of George Whitefield, all traveled to England to meet Whitefield's friends. Gronniosaw believed that the Methodist evangelist's colleagues would treat him well. Wheatley sought to publish a book of poetry in London. Marrant studied Calvinistic Methodism. All three met Whitefield's patroness, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, under whose aegis they published their writings. Through this connection, black evangelicals established a foothold in British reform circles that opened a space for future interaction in the cause of Christian justice.

Black networking warrants greater attention in the third chapter. Between 1787 and 1800, black evangelicals throughout the North coordinated practical strategies for ending their oppression. African societies in Philadelphia, Newport, and Boston corresponded with one another and sent emissaries to discuss reform measures, particularly emigration to Africa. Bringing together African notions of community, Christian calls to help one another, and republican injunctions to virtue, they encouraged each other to trust God to help them overcome their distress. They built on their relationships with white reformers, both in the United States and in Britain, to propel forward their humanitarian goals and an increasingly progressive agenda for change. It is probably no coincidence that white national organizations committed to ending the slave trade and slavery formed at this time. Black activists persisted in what they perceived as a divine mission against slavery and prejudice.

In the fourth chapter, I examine how black reformers employed evangelistic methods to disseminate the antislavery message between 1800 and 1816. During this period, black preachers and activists from various denominations traveled widely to spread their unique brand of the good news and give added meaning to their sacred vocation. One figure, in particular, deserves extensive examination. The Rev. Thomas Paul, a black Baptist born in New

Hampshire, founded Boston's African Baptist Church in 1806. Understudied in historical scholarship, Paul reminded his listeners that true Christianity offered no sanctuary for discrimination. He promoted universal freedom and self-determination as well as spiritual conversion. Relying on an already established transatlantic reform network, he sailed to England in 1815 to explore emigration options for oppressed blacks in America. Paul symbolized black activists' reliance on their own strategies and growing urgency to effect social change.

After the American Colonization Society (ACS) formed in December 1816 to promote a plan to send free blacks to Africa, black activists mobilized in opposition. Despite their own interest in emigration, they rejected any colonization scheme that smacked of coercion or slaveholder placation. This fifth chapter analyzes how sacred imperatives drove black anticolonizationists to pursue vigorously self-determination and abolition between 1817 and 1829. Scholars studying black abolitionism note that the ACS helped radicalize formerly conservative black community leaders. Free blacks viewed it as anti-republican and anti-Christian. The chapter explores how free blacks linked republicanism and spiritual beliefs in a way that made the battle against the ACS and its slaveholding supporters both political and religious. While I am careful not to infer a single universal black discourse for this time period, I do argue that figures as diverse as Robert Young, Nathaniel Paul, David Walker, and Hosea Easton shared a sacred interpretation of events local, regional, national, and global in scope.

The chapter, secondly, suggests that black radicalism increased during the 1820s and that black abolitionists relied on familiar strategies to launch a more aggressive campaign. Confronted with increasing prejudice, the growth of African colonization, and the territorial expansion of slavery under the Missouri Compromise, reformers spoke and wrote publicly about black oppression. They traveled to Haiti, which served as a model for what black self-

determination could accomplish, to investigate possible emigration. And they started their own newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, with agents throughout the United States. Black abolitionists' confidence in the divine righteousness of their cause inspired their efforts.

Finally, my dissertation concludes by analyzing how black abolitionists consolidated their strategies into a radical movement between 1829 and 1841. For historians of the white American antislavery movement, the establishment of William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper, *The Liberator*, in 1831 marked the radicalization and institutionalization of abolitionism. By then, black leaders had spent several years, even decades, unifying, trusting in God, and helping themselves. I consider in this chapter the continuities and transformations in black antislavery tactics and challenge the common scholarly perception that immediatism emerged only from Second Great Awakening revival enthusiasm fostered by white ministers such as Charles Grandison Finney. As James Brewer Stewart contends, black religious figures, though "pronouncedly evangelical . . . were hardly receptive to the romantic utopianism of the white reformers' religion. Belief in human perfectionism had little relevance to their struggles against exploitation and exclusion."²⁹ I argue that black abolitionists during the 1830s adapted and expanded black traditions of organizing, networking, writing, and traveling to meet the exigencies of a militant radicalism. Many in the new generation, including reformers like Charles Lenox Remond and James W.C. Pennington, recognized themselves as heirs to a strong intellectual and spiritual tradition. Their own ideas about divine imperatives governed their reform measures, and they framed their struggle as a holy war.

How black activists' sacred convictions shaped the antislavery movement stands at the heart of my dissertation. Christopher Leslie Brown points out the obvious when he writes that

²⁹ James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 139.

“[t]he study of antislavery ideas is indispensable to understanding abolitionism.” He believes that we need to ask what motivated reformers to transform their ideas into action.³⁰ My study attempts to answer this question by offering an explanation that takes into consideration those people most personally interested in ending slavery. We need to revisit the ways in which ideals translated into social change. Black abolitionists’ spiritual beliefs profoundly affected their worldview. It was these beliefs that gave them the courage to speak out publicly and to push white activists to support them. They argued that their humanity rested upon a sacred foundation and enslavement represented unholy blasphemy. Their sense of obligation toward a supreme ruler and all humankind was not unique to Christianity. Africans and their American-born descendants consistently maintained over the course of a century that they served a sovereign God. Convinced that slavery would end, black abolitionists worked tirelessly toward that goal. Black determination coincided with and more than likely influenced a shift in white European and American thought about human bondage. It illustrated the power of the human spirit to put faith into action and change the world.

³⁰ Brown, *Moral Capital*, 20.

Chapter 1

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free”:

Evangelical Pietism and the Meaning of Black Freedom, 1740-1770

On January 1, 1814, Joseph Sidney, a young free black, asked an assembly gathered at New York’s Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church, “What think you of Capileer, who became a clergyman of the greatest eminence in the Calvinist church?”¹ Sidney referred to Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, an African taken to Holland as a young man in the early eighteenth century, educated in theology, and sent to Africa as a missionary in 1742.² Thirteen years after Sidney’s address, *Freedom’s Journal*, the United States’ first African American newspaper, reprinted an essay from the *Abolition Intelligencer* that included Capitein in a list of African “native geniuses.”³ Finally, in 1841, the black Congregationalist clergyman, James W.C. Pennington, pointed to Capitein as an example of Thomas Jefferson’s “ill judged” opinion of “the colored people.”⁴ Consciousness of Capitein along with other talented African-born figures was integral to nineteenth-century black reformers’ battle against slavery and racial prejudice. That Capitein published a theological dissertation on the compatibility between slavery and Christianity makes his legacy more than an anecdotal historical memory. His 1742 thesis represents the first public discussion of slavery by an African in the modern era. We may well consider this first African Protestant minister the forefather of a black intellectual tradition that made slavery its focal

¹ Joseph Sidney, *An Oration, Commemorative of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the United States; Delivered in the African Asbury Church, in the City of New-York, on the First of January, 1814* (New York, 1814), 10.

² For works in English on Capitein, see David Nii Anum Kpobi, *Mission in Chains: The Life, Theology and Ministry of the Ex-Slaves Jacobus E.J. Capitein (1717-1749) with a translation of his major publications* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993); Grant Parker, *The Agony of Asar: A Thesis on Slavery by the Former Slave, Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, 1717-1747*, translated with commentary (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2001); Kwesi Kwaa Prah, *Jacobus Eliza Johannes Capitein: A Critical Study of An Eighteenth Century African* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1992).

³ *Freedom’s Journal*, May 18, 1827.

⁴ James W.C. Pennington, *A Text Book of the Origin and History, &c. &c. of the Colored People* (Hartford: L. Skinner, Printer, 1841), 53.

point. In colonial British North America, other Africans such as Ukawsaw Gronniosaw began grappling with evangelical Christianity, sometimes drawing conclusions unintended by the First Great Awakening's Gospel messengers.

This chapter traces the African response to evangelical theology from 1740 to 1770.⁵ I first examine Capitein and his dissertation before moving to the British colonies. By the time Capitein offered his erudite interpretation of Christian freedom to the Dutch public, Africans in America were already responding to the pietistic branch of Dutch evangelicalism. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's autobiography and white eyewitness accounts of revival meetings provide a lens through which to analyze the African perspective on spiritual enthusiasm and corporeal liberty in New England and the Middle Colonies.⁶ Finally, the chapter briefly discusses white opposition to slavery during this thirty-year period before considering one of the first published black writers in the Atlantic world, Jupiter Hammon. I argue that, before white Europeans or Americans, people of African descent adapted the theological premises of evangelical pietism in ways that began challenging traditional notions about race and slavery.

Jacobus Elisa Joannes Capitein is an enigmatic figure. Born in West Africa's Gold Coast region in 1717, he recalled that after being "orphaned by war or some other cause" at the age of seven or eight years, he was sold as a slave to a Dutch sea captain.⁷ Probably within a year he

⁵ Although Quakerism garners much attention in antislavery historiography, enslaved and free blacks usually attended the open-air meetings held by pietistic evangelists such as Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, Gilbert Tennent, and George Whitefield.

⁶ For an assessment of the black response to the Great Awakening in the southern colonies, see Margaret Washington Creel, *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Peter H. Wood, "'Jesus Christ Has Got Thee at Last': Afro-American Conversion as a Forgotten Chapter in Eighteenth-Century Southern Intellectual History," *The Bulletin of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and Religion* 3 (November 1979): 1-7.

⁷ Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, *Political-theological dissertation examining the question: Is slavery compatible with Christian freedom or not?* in Parker, *The Agony of Asar*, 86. Parker translates Capitein's thesis directly from its original Latin. The translation in Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, is from the Dutch and reads, "As a child of seven or

worked for a new master, Jacob Van Goch, a Dutch merchant with whom he traveled to the Netherlands in 1728.⁸ As soon as Capitein disembarked, he automatically gained his freedom according to a 1713 ruling by the *Heeren XVII*, the governing body of the East India Company.⁹ Now a free African in a strange land, Capitein quickly learned the Dutch language and attended catechism classes in a Dutch Reformed church. Falling under the guidance of the Rev. Johan Philip Manger, he came to the attention of the Rev. Hendrik Velse, a Reformed minister who displayed a particular interest in evangelization. The belief that an African was ideally suited to proselytize Africans attracted several other benefactors dedicated to encouraging and supporting Capitein's theological studies at the University of Leiden. In 1742, five years after entering Leiden, Capitein presented his oral dissertation, *Political-theological dissertation examining the question: Is slavery compatible with Christian freedom or not?* Originally published in Latin, several editions of Dutch translations soon followed and met with popular acclaim throughout the Netherlands. Within four months of defending his thesis, Capitein departed for the Castle of St. George D'Elmina on Africa's Gold Coast to serve as missionary to the native population and chaplain to West India Company employees.¹⁰ By 1747, he was dead, either by illness or murder, leaving behind a legacy that generated both praise and doubt.¹¹

eight, having been robbed of my parents either by war or some other calamity, I was sold to an enterprising sea-captain, Arnold Steenhart," 190. For the purposes of this study, I use Parker's translation from the Latin. Hereafter *Dissertation*.

⁸ For a deeply researched account of Capitein's life and death, see Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*.

⁹ C.R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire, 1600-1800* (1965; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1990), 296.

¹⁰ The *Ecclesiastical Records, State of New York*, vol. IV (Albany: J.B. Lyon Company, State Printers) record under Acts of the Synod of North Holland, July 31-August 9, 1742, "Johannes Elova Capitein, after preparatory and final examination, qualified May 7, as minister at D'Elmina," 2778.

¹¹ Kpobi writes that Capitein "died suddenly" on February 1, 1747 but that no cause of death was ever offered, *Mission in Chains*, 78. As a consequence, rumors abounded that he had been murdered by Africans. Kpobi suggests that if he had been murdered, the perpetrators were probably dissatisfied Dutchmen angered at Capitein's castigation of their immoral lifestyle.

Historians in the twenty-first century find Capitein's dissertation troubling. While many parts of his life, especially his experiences in Elmina and his cause of death, remain a mystery, his major intellectual work provokes an obvious question: Why would an African who had been sold into slavery defend that institution?¹² One African scholar, Kwesi Kwaa Prah, compares Capitein to Uncle Tom, Harriet Beecher Stowe's title character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, suggesting that he became an exploitative European power's willing servant.¹³ Capitein's most recent biographer, David Kpobi, a Dutch Reformed theologian, believes that this complex figure had been thoroughly acculturated to Dutch culture and Dutch Calvinism, resulting in his failure to understand African customs, a failing that led to his financial, emotional, and professional ruin in Elmina.¹⁴ Caught between a native land he no longer knew and an adopted culture where his color set him apart, he lacked the skill to negotiate between the two. In the eighteenth-century Dutch world, he was an anomaly. Grant Parker, a specialist in Classics at Duke University, argues that Capitein's desire to convert his fellow Africans motivated his defense of slavery, the dissertation thus serving as means to a larger end.¹⁵

A desire to spread the Gospel rather than ideological commitment to slavery stands at the heart of Capitein's dissertation. In the preface, he disclosed that prior to his entrance into university he had written a thesis entitled, *On the calling of the heathen*.¹⁶ After outlining the major points of that work, he concluded that "it is incumbent on all true Christians to promote diligently those means which enable this conversion of heathen."¹⁷ Capitein's early work echoed Richard Baxter's 1658 treatise, *A Call to the Unconverted*. While Baxter, an English Puritan,

¹² Parker, *Agony of Asar*, 76.

¹³ Prah, *Jacobus Eliza Johannes Capitein*, 2.

¹⁴ Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 151-160.

¹⁵ Parker, *Agony of Asar*, 77.

¹⁶ This text has not survived. See Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, and Parker, *Agony of Asar*.

¹⁷ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 82.

directed his exhortation to unconverted English people, Capitein explicitly targeted Africans. It is not unreasonable to expect that Capitein had read Baxter's treatise since it and several other religious compositions authored by English divines had been translated into Dutch.¹⁸ Capitein's evangelical ambition falls both within the Calvinist Reformed tradition and within the imperial contest then raging among European powers.¹⁹ Missionaries usually followed soon after Europeans began colonizing conquered peoples. Spain and England had competed for the souls of natives as well as riches for over a century.²⁰ The Dutch also began implementing missions in the East Indies; in 1599, the Classis of Amsterdam expressed the wish that "the people living there in darkness might be drawn to the true Christian religion."²¹

Capitein's interest in evangelizing Africans was personal. Converting the heathen, "[i]n particular," he observed, "has been entrusted to those who are linked to this or that tribe, from which they themselves were converted to Christianity."²² This interesting statement suggests that Capitein may have been aware that both Protestants and Catholics had sought to train native-born Africans for the purpose of proselytizing other Africans. He had likely learned that the Dutch Reformed minister Jonas Michaelius, serving along the Guinea coast in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, had recommended sending two African mulattoes to the Netherlands for

¹⁸ James Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism in the Middle Colonies: A Study in the Life and Theology of Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1967).

¹⁹ Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 81.

²⁰ For a comparison, see J.H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); and, Jorge Cañizares-Esquerro, *Puritan Conquistadors: Iberianizing the Atlantic, 1550-1700* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

²¹ Quoted in Gerald F. De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church in the American Colonies* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), 147-148.

²² Capitein, *Dissertation*, 82. The difference between the Dutch and Latin translation highlights an important change in emphasis in the point Capitein was trying to make here. The Latin version reads, "In particular, the task has been entrusted..." whereas the Dutch reads "However, that this duty is especially incumbent on those who have any close relationship with one or other of the heathen peoples, having been converted to Christendom from their midst. One may see this realized when they offer themselves to be sent to the heathen," Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 188. Capitein's subsequent justification for employing native missionaries suggests that he believed they made the best missionaries.

training as missionaries. He surely knew that the Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo in West Central Africa had since the sixteenth century employed Kongo to work alongside Portuguese priests and had even ordained a Kongo bishop.²³ Capitein justified his own position as an African missionary by underscoring Jesus' instructions to his disciples that they go only to "their own people, the Jews" first.²⁴ Capitein privileged himself as an authoritative minister to his own people, contradicting over a century of European practice wherein white missionaries proselytized Africans. In 1638, for example, Domine Everardus Bogardus sought to teach the Gospel to Africans in New Amsterdam.²⁵ Anthony Hill, Church of England chaplain to the Duke of Richmond, proclaimed in 1702 "The Necessity of Instructing and Baptizing *Slaves* in *English* Plantations."²⁶ Four years later, Cotton Mather, the Puritan divine, published *The Negro Christianized* to generate interest in converting black slaves.²⁷ When Capitein entered the mission field in 1742, he represented a new type of herald.

At the same time, he denied any original intention to become a missionary. Remarking that one of Hendrik Velse's sons recommended he study theology in order to "show my people the way to a better religion, since they need to be diverted from their cult of idolatry," he inferred that he had not thought about it himself. When Velse questioned Capitein about this desire to "spread the gospel," he replied "that I certainly did not shrink from the proposal." Whether Capitein was flattering his benefactors by emphasizing their role in his accomplishment, thereby deflecting attention from himself, is hard to tell. Clearly, he felt compelled by his Christian

²³ De Jong, *The Dutch Reformed Church*, 163, and John Thornton, "The Development of an African Catholic Church in the Kingdom of Kongo, 1491-1750," *Journal of African History* 25 (1984): 147-167, specifically 155, 161-166.

²⁴ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 85.

²⁵ Gerald Francis De Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Negro Slavery in Colonial America," *Church History* 40 (December 1971): 423-436.

²⁶ Anthony Hill, *Afer Baptizatus: or the Negro made Christian* (London, 1704).

²⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized* (Boston, 1706).

beliefs to “accomplish with perseverance and joy the religious work which is most pleasing to God” while at the same time recognizing it as a “burden” that the New Covenant demanded.²⁸ Capitein subscribed to the teachings of the seventeenth-century Dutch theologian Johannes Coccejus, who identified missionaries’ objective as bringing non-believers into covenant with God.²⁹ Capitein may have adopted some pietistic principles, especially given that Dutch pietists followed both Coccejus and the Utrecht theologian, Gisbertus Voetius.³⁰ Even if Capitein had not embraced the more radical elements of pietism during his time in the Netherlands, his exposure to Puritan writers like Baxter and William Perkins would have acquainted him with its basic premises and encouraged his dedication to evangelization.³¹ Pietism stressed conversion and “experimental” or “experiential” divinity, the idea that a new believer could sense that his soul had been reborn in Christ. Of special importance to pietists was the result of new birth – the evidence in a person’s life of that faith. Capitein regarded “those who by God’s wondrous prudence and goodness converted from paganism to Christianity” now obligated to serve the Lord, a tenet compatible with pietism.³²

Like some of his pietist contemporaries, Capitein emphasized the ecumenical work of the Holy Spirit. The Old Testament prophet, Joel, Capitein reminded his hearers, had declared, “*Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.*” In the New Dispensation, “worship of

²⁸ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 90, 83.

²⁹ Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 84.

³⁰ Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 11-20.

³¹ According to Tanis, in *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, the Dutch pietist, William Teellinck had translated Puritan pietists into Dutch in the early seventeenth century, 44. That Capitein graduated from Leiden argues strongly against his being a pietist. The Universities of Utrecht, Groningen, and Lingen graduated pietists more so than Leiden. See Randall H. Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 129. This suggests that Capitein, while he certainly would have been familiar with Dutch pietism, may have subscribed to more traditional Reformed theology, unsurprising considering his debt to his benefactors. For a lengthy discussion on the differences between the universities, see Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*.

³² Capitein, *Dissertation*, 85.

God,” wrote Capitein, “must no longer be restricted to one place or one race,” but spread “through the spirit and through truth.” Christ commissioned his disciples “to approach all nations without distinction.”³³ The Holy Spirit served as the great leveler of man. Capitein’s Dutch contemporary, the New Jersey revivalist, Theodorus Frelinghuysen, exclaimed, “Oh fortunate are those, who . . . are aware of the leading of God’s Spirit in their hearts.”³⁴ Capitein justified extending Christ’s spiritual kingdom to Africans as consonant with early church practices and more easily accomplished now that Christians faced little persecution.

The spiritual aspect of Christ’s kingdom undergirded Capitein’s confidence in the compatibility between slavery and Christianity. Criticizing his opponents’ belief that the New Covenant assured Christians physical as well as spiritual liberty, Capitein asserted that they misunderstood Scriptures such as Galatians 5:1, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”³⁵ The freedom Christ offered had nothing to do with the physical body. Employing a passage that the Anglican chaplain, Anthony Hill, had used to promote proselytizing African slaves, Capitein argued that the Apostle Paul’s exhortation in II Corinthians 3:17, “*where the spirit of the lord is, there is freedom,*” referred to the release of Christians from Mosaic law and ritual.³⁶ No longer bound by the Old Testament covenant, believers lived under Christian freedom – freedom from both the old law and from sin through the shed blood of Christ. To support his argument, Capitein referred to the Apostle Paul’s admonition that “external or personal freedom is not essential to the worship of God.” Capitein observed that even “Christ makes absolutely clear what he

³³ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 83-84. Capitein quoted from Joel 2:28.

³⁴ Quoted in Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 100.

³⁵ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 107-108. Although Capitein never identified his adversaries by name, Kpobi suggests that he was targeting earlier Dutch theologians critical of Dutch involvement in slavery and the slave trade, an involvement that still generated debate despite the general lack of concern over slavery in the Netherlands. See Kpobi, *Mission in chains*, 98-106.

³⁶ Anthony Hill, *Afer Baptizatus*, 9; Capitein, *Dissertation*, 105.

wished to signify by liberty, that is liberty from the sin by which the devil rules all those who have not yet fled to Christ the savior through his health-giving faith.”³⁷ Anthony Hill made a similar argument in 1702, sounding very much like Capitein: “That the condition of *Slavery* is not inconsistent with *Christianity*, appears from the nature of this Institution: Our Saviour’s *Kingdom is not of this World*.”³⁸ The corporeal and the spiritual existed separately.

Capitein distinguished between slavery as an unnatural condition and slavery as an institution protected by civil authority. The legal definition of a slave as “someone . . . unwillingly subjected to the authority of another” led Capitein to reject as either humorous or arrogant the Aristotelian notion that “while one person is free by nature, another may be born a slave.” Citing ancient Romans and Holy Scripture, he contended that “every human being is under his own authority according to natural law, and that the common condition of early humankind permitted equal freedom to all humans. It is because we are all similar by origin.”³⁹ Only through man’s sinfulness did slavery enter the world. Rather than taking the next logical step and denouncing slavery as contrary to God’s law, Capitein declared that because it was created by men, unnatural though it was, it enjoyed civil protection. The beneficiary of civil abolition himself, Capitein affirmed that slaves brought into Holland were freed “not so much as a result of the laws and principles of the Gospel but rather due to political reasons.” Having won their freedom from Catholic Spanish domination in the sixteenth century, the Protestant Dutch exhibited greater sensitivity to slavery within their nation’s boundaries.⁴⁰ Capitein’s distinctions imply his own refusal to endorse slavery as a legitimate enterprise.

³⁷ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 105, 109, 111.

³⁸ Hill, *Afer Baptizatus*, 34.

³⁹ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 95, 97. This last sentence in the Dutch reads, “The point is that we are all equal in origin,” Kpobi, 196.

⁴⁰ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 129, 128.

In offering a theological interpretation for slavery's appearance in the world, Capitein sidestepped a current intellectual debate over the relationship between slavery and race. Since European expansion to other continents had begun over two centuries before, white observers and thinkers exhibited a fascination with Africans' skin color, generating a number of theories to explain its origins. The idea that skin color and slavery might go naturally together appeared early in the seventeenth century. A Dutch poet, Jacob Steendam, who had lived in the Guinea coast in the first half of that century, wrote to his African son,

Since two bloods course within your veins,
Both Ham's and Japhet's intermingling;
One race forever doomed to serve,
The other bearing freedom's likeness.⁴¹

Steendam referred to the Biblical story found in Genesis where Noah's son Ham gazed on his father's drunken nakedness, consequently receiving a curse that he and his descendants would suffer perpetual slavery.⁴² Capitein adopted a hermeneutic reading of the tale, seeing in it "the moment when slavery entered the earth," not a justification for whites enslaving Africans. On the contrary, the development of slavery proved humankind's increasing "degeneracy." Capitein reminded his audience that slavery "was accepted and spread among most peoples, if not all."⁴³ I argue that Capitein intentionally severed slavery from race to oppose popular claims of African inferiority and to underscore slavery's sinfulness in an oblique criticism.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Quoted in Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977), 85.

⁴² Genesis 9:25.

⁴³ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 99.

⁴⁴ Parker, in *Agony of Asar*, claims that Capitein presents Africans as "the 'son of Ham,'" 61. Capitein, however, never does this. According to Kpobi, in *Mission in Chains*, Capitein should not be classified with "the group of curse-of-Ham advocates. The difference between him and the advocates of the theory was that he did not believe the curse to be eternal. He believed it to be a punishment which had run its course, and which needed to be redeemed," 117.

Given the dissertation's attempt to sustain a call for missions in Africa without disrupting Dutch slaveholding, is it appropriate to call it a defense of slavery? Certainly, it fails to consider some of the more damning evidence against the morality of slavery. Capitein omitted any analysis of the Scriptural opposition to slavery and instead dwelled exclusively on his primary objective.⁴⁵ The Puritan divine Samuel Sewall, in his 1700 antislavery treatise, *The Selling of Joseph, a Memorial*, relied on the Old Testament passage, Exodus 21:16, "He that stealeth a Man and selleth him, or he be found in his hands, he shall be surely put to Death."⁴⁶ The same verse appeared in an essay in London's 1704 *The Athenian Oracle*, reprinted in 1705 in Boston.⁴⁷ The article dismissed slavetraders' defense that Africans were better off enslaved, with the opportunity to become Christians, than free in their own pagan country. Capitein ignored evidence that could have jeopardized his case. The dissertation probably reflected more the opinions held by Capitein's wealthy patrons, one a Dutch jurist. Before Capitein could be ordained, he first had to be appointed a missionary by the West India Company (WIC), which derived profits from the slave trade.⁴⁸ Constrained by his benefactors and living in a society where slavery helped sustain economic prosperity, Capitein could realistically neither demand an end to slavery nor call for its amelioration.⁴⁹ He had to allay slaveholder fears that evangelization would result in emancipation, a debate that had raged in the Dutch Reformed Church during the seventeenth century as the Dutch Empire expanded its colonial possessions.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 114.

⁴⁶ Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph, A Memorial* (Boston, 1700), 1.

⁴⁷ For a full treatment of the relationship between Samuel Sewall and John Dunton, the London editor of *The Athenian Oracle*, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 346-347.

⁴⁸ Parker, *Agony of Asar*, 11. For information on the powerful West India Company, see De Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Negro Slavery," and Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*.

⁴⁹ According to Kpobi, in *Mission in Chains*, Capitein used Scripture selectively, reflecting his own fall to "mental slavery," 113-114. Kpobi argues that Capitein truly believed what he wrote.

⁵⁰ For an analysis of this topic, see De Jong, "The Dutch Reformed Church."

Capitein expressed his own concern that masters “would cease from their efforts to convert slaves [and] rather oppose conversion” if they believed they would lose “their own property.”⁵¹

Even though our twenty-first century sensibilities would like to make Capitein a heroic antislavery figure, we cannot. On the other hand, nowhere does Capitein make the case that slavery was a good thing or that it was necessary in order to Christianize Africans. Throughout his thesis, he insinuates, like a hidden paradox, that slavery is an evil creation that should not prevent the spread of the Gospel. The nineteenth-century black Congregationalist preacher, James W.C. Pennington, recognized the contradiction inherent in Capitein’s work:

The slaveholder will probably grant us the benefit of Capitein’s talents, as they may avail themselves of a part, at least, of his principles. He was instigated by the Dutch planters to become the apologist of slavery. He composed a *politico-theological* dissertation to prove for them that slavery is not opposed to Christian freedom.⁵²

Nowhere does Pennington say that Capitein supported slavery; rather, he implies that Dutch planters, who may have lauded the dissertation, exploited the African’s intellectual talents for their own end. Although no slaveholding planters lived in the Netherlands, they benefited greatly from the slave trade emanating from the African coast where Capitein intended to minister.

Capitein’s failure to condemn slavery outright raises questions about his acculturation. How African or European was he? Recent scholars allege that he had acculturated completely to Dutch customs and religion, rendering him ineffective among the Africans at Elmina.⁵³ As an employee of the WIC, he was responsible for the spiritual welfare of the Dutch at Elmina and for

⁵¹ Capitein, *Dissertation*, 115. For a discussion of slaveholder opposition to evangelization in the southern American colonies, see Creel, “*A Peculiar People*.”

⁵² Pennington, *A Text Book*, 51. Pennington’s reference to Dutch planters is puzzling unless he was thinking of the West India Company merchants who employed Capitein.

⁵³ See Parker, *Agony of Asar*, 11-17, and Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 151-160.

evangelizing Africans. One avenue for proselytization to which Capitein dedicated himself particularly was education, encouraging the Elmina locals to send their children to the Company's school to learn to read and write. In addition, he requested permission from the WIC to marry a local African woman, writing, "For by this means I intend at first to win the affection and trust of the negroes here at Elmina, since they would then be able to see that, although I differ from them in manner of life and in religion, they are nevertheless not despised by me."⁵⁴ From this desire, it appears that Capitein, despite the cultural differences he noticed, held some affinity for his fellow Africans—that their race bound them together. The WIC rejected his proposal and sent a Dutch girl for him to marry.⁵⁵ Capitein's acquiescence fails to prove his European acculturation. First, he would have realized that he needed the support of both the WIC and the Classis, which condemned any marriage to a non-Christian. Second, if thoroughly acculturated to Dutch Reformed ways, he would never have considered marrying an unbaptized African, especially given his position. Although it is impossible to assess motivation for his behavior, there is other evidence that hints at Capitein's retention of African culture.

Particularly notable is his apparent facility with Fante, the language of the Akan in Elmina. Despite leaving the Gold Coast at approximately eleven years of age, Capitein served as interpreter in Fante during treaty negotiations between the Africans at Elmina, the WIC, and the Fantes in 1744.⁵⁶ He translated the Lord's Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, and the Ten Commandments from Low Dutch into Fante to help the "African and mulatto schoolchildren" learn the catechism. Capitein cautioned in the preface to the translation, "Do not by any means believe that this translation, which was undertaken to see whether the entire [Fante] language can

⁵⁴ Capitein, letter to the WIC, February 15, 1743, in Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 235.

⁵⁵ See both Parker, *Agony of Asar*, and Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, for analyses of Capitein's marriage.

⁵⁶ Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 147. Kpobi contends that Capitein must have lost the language over the years but "perhaps had a natural aptitude for languages."

be written down, is perfect.”⁵⁷ That Capitein was even able to render Christian doctrine into the written form of an oral language testifies both to his linguistic skill and his cultural memory.

His translation holds a clue to his understanding of African religious concepts. David Kpobi maintains that Capitein “never made any efforts to understand the traditional religion of the African people.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, in translating the Lord’s Prayer, Capitein, changed the opening, “Our Father,” to “Father of us all, who is in heaven,” an alteration that the Classis in Amsterdam censured notwithstanding their “being ignorant of the language.”⁵⁹ The publisher, Hieronymus de Wilhem, added another preface to warn the reader that there were discrepancies between the Dutch and “Fante” versions of the three texts, curious given his own unfamiliarity with Fante.⁶⁰ Capitein complied with his overseers by submitting his translation for review, but he must have realized that they could neither proofread nor correct it. His textual changes signify a greater consciousness of his African charges’ spirituality than historians have credited him. The more inclusive, “Father of us all,” for example, might have signaled to the Akan people that the Supreme Being they knew was the same one the white Christians claimed as their own. Africans were already familiar with the idea of a divine parent and saw themselves as children under a father or mother’s protection.⁶¹ Whatever the provenance of the translation,

⁵⁷ Capitein, “Preface,” in Parker, *Agony of Asar*, 134.

⁵⁸ Kpobi, in *Mission in Chains*, identifies this as Capitein’s “[o]ne major shortcoming,” 160.

⁵⁹ Classis of Amsterdam to Capitein, January 10, 1745, in Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 250.

⁶⁰ For an analysis on colonizers’ blind belief in their ability to understand a language with which they are unfamiliar, see Eric Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*,” expanded edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

⁶¹ For information on traditional African religion, see Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Creel, “*A Peculiar People*”; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969); John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991).

Capitein remained committed, as he informed his employers in 1743, to his “main objective, which is to win the African Moors who are my kindred according to the flesh.”⁶²

In late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century British North America, few Africans, forcibly transported there as slaves, found the Dutch Reformed tradition attractive. Its liturgical style of worship and demand that communicants understand doctrinal points contrasted sharply with an African spiritual heritage that incorporated dancing, shouting, and spirit possession.⁶³ Baptism in the Reformed church further required literacy skills white masters routinely denied their slaves.⁶⁴ The Classis of Amsterdam in 1661 proclaimed that “children may not be baptized, unless the parents pass over to Christianity, and abandon heathenism.”⁶⁵ Most, if not all, African parents recently arrived from Africa would have found it difficult to master the Heidelberg Catechism, the Psalms, prayers, and hymns required of church communicants.⁶⁶ White slaveholders discouraged conversion, fearing that ideas of spiritual equality might foster a rebellious attitude. Many whites in America, like those in Elmina, refused to adopt Christian principles themselves. Capitein expressed his concern to the WIC in 1745 that his work as chaplain to the Dutch would fail like his predecessors’ “in the face of the hatred, contempt, menace and persecution of most of the depraved Christians here.”⁶⁷

As Capitein struggled to share the Gospel with his fellow West Africans and the recalcitrant Dutch, a white Dutch evangelist had already achieved success in British North America. Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, a German trained to the Dutch Reformed ministry

⁶² Capitein, letter to the WIC, February 15, 1743, in Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 235.

⁶³ See Creel, “A Peculiar People,” 299-302; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 264-269

⁶⁴ See Creel, “A Peculiar People,” on the reluctance of southern slaveholders to evangelize their slaves, 67-109. For information on the Dutch Reformed Church and Dutch slaveholders’ resistance to converting slaves, see De Jong, “The Dutch Reformed Church,” 430-435.

⁶⁵ Quoted in De Jong, “The Dutch Reformed Church,” 432.

⁶⁶ In addition to De Jong, see Firth Haring Fabend, *Zion on the Hudson: Dutch New York and New Jersey in the Age of Revivals* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000).

⁶⁷ Capitein, letter to WIC, July 1, 1745, in Kpobi, *Mission in Chains*, 246.

at the University of Lingen, arrived in New York in 1720, bringing new ideas about the practice of Calvinism. Influenced by Gisbertus Voetius, a seventeenth-century Dutch theologian who spearheaded Dutch pietism, Frelinghuysen ignited a powerful spiritual transformation in the Middle Colonies that affected both blacks and whites and became the father of the fierce revivals that later became known as the Great Awakening.⁶⁸ His pietistic doctrine, style, and practice helped shape the ministry of Presbyterian revivalist Gilbert Tennent and others. Anglican Methodist revivalist George Whitefield wrote of Frelinghuysen in 1739, “He is a worthy old soldier of Jesus Christ, and was the beginner of the great work which I trust the Lord is carrying on in these parts.”⁶⁹ Jonathan Edwards remembered him as “a very pious young gentleman.”⁷⁰ Anglican critics of revival commented on the “strange notions” advocated by Frelinghuysen and Tennent.⁷¹ Frelinghuysen would lay the foundation for a great work that embraced Africans and their American-born descendants. Evangelical minister William Tennent, Gilbert Tennent’s brother, wrote to the Rev. Thomas Prince from Freehold, New Jersey, in 1744 that Frelinghuysen’s early ministry revived spirituality among a people dead to God’s grace and made them aware of their lost condition.⁷²

⁶⁸ Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*. Also see Martin H. Prozesky, “The Emergence of Dutch Pietism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 28 (January 1977): 29-37; and Joel R. Beeke, ed., *Forerunner of the Great Awakening: Sermons by Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen (1691-1747)* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000); F. J. Schrag, “Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen: The Father of American Pietism,” *Church History* 14 (Sep., 1945): 201-216.

⁶⁹ George Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals (1737-1741) To Which Is Prefixed His “Short Account” (1746) and “Further Account” (1747)*, a facsimile reproduction of the edition of William Wale in 1905 with an introduction by William V. Davis (Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles & Reprints, 1969), 348.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton, and the Neighboring Towns and Villages of the County of Hampshire, in the Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New England. First edition 1737*, in *Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakening*, ed. C.C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 155-156.

⁷¹ Patrick Henry, Sr., to Bishop of London’s Commissary, William Dawson, Hanover, Virginia, February 13, 1745, in *Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening*, ed. David S. Lovejoy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 55.

⁷² Thomas Prince, *The Christian History*, 90:298, November 17, 1744.

Frelinghuysen subscribed to such “strange notions” as the new birth, or spiritual rebirth, holy living, a regenerate church membership, zealous public worship, and an emphasis on the Holy Spirit in a believer’s life. In combining these attributes, Frelinghuysen created a controversial but influential shift away from traditional religious practice. Pietists stressed experimental or experiential divinity, the concept that believers “experienced” conversion and could recount what God had done for their souls.⁷³ The new birth demanded lived spirituality, and only those individuals evidencing conversion were admitted to church membership. Frelinghuysen observed that changed behavior, or practical piety, proved the Holy Spirit at work in the converted, a concept central to Frelinghuysen’s pietism.⁷⁴ Attendance in church, participating in communion, and repeating memorized prayers did nothing for the souls of those refusing a spiritually transformative experience. “Have you received a new heart and a new spirit?” asked Frelinghuysen of his hearers. Without “an experimental knowledge of spiritual things,” they faced eternal damnation.⁷⁵ Frelinghuysen injected a breath of fresh air and terror into the old Reformed service and drew criticism that “by his harsh conduct, [he] should change the people into Quakers, or Atheists, or Suicides, or Pharisees.”⁷⁶

How did people of African descent interpret Frelinghuysen’s theology and tactics? There is one extant account that provides an African perspective on evangelical pietism during the first

⁷³ Schrag, “Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen,” 208-209, and Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 105-116.

⁷⁴ T.J. Frelinghuysen, “The Believer’s Well-founded Expectation of Future Glory,” in *Sermons by Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, First Minister of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in Somerset County, New-Jersey*, translated from the Dutch and prefaced by “A Sketch of the Author’s Life,” by Rev. William Demarest, with an introduction by the Rev. Thomas De Witt, D.D. (New York: Board of Publication Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, 1856), 256. According to Tanis, in *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, Frelinghuysen emphasized the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, received from Calvin’s theology, over the orthodox Dutch Reformed ministers’ stress on justification by faith in Christ, 101. Faith in practice took precedence.

⁷⁵ Frelinghuysen, “The Believer’s Well-founded Expectation of Future Glory,” *Sermons*, 255.

⁷⁶ *Boel’s Complaint Against Frelinghuysen*, translated and edited by Joseph Anthony Loux, Jr. (1725; repr., Rensselaer, NY: Hamilton Printing Company, 1979), 32. For an analysis of the antagonistic relationship between Frelinghuysen and Domine Henricus Boel, see Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*.

half of the eighteenth century. James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African-born slave who served the Dutch domine for approximately seventeen years, published an autobiographical narrative in 1772. Born in Bournou (or Bornu in what is modern-day Nigeria) between 1710 and 1714, Gronniosaw was tricked into slavery as a child, transported to the Gold Coast, and sold to a Dutch sea captain, eventually finding himself enslaved as a domestic to Frelinghuysen sometime around 1730.⁷⁷ Converted to evangelical Christianity shortly before Frelinghuysen's death in late 1747, Gronniosaw centered his narrative on his spiritual journey. His exposure to Dutch pietism and later connections to English Methodists and Evangelicals, particularly those interested in abolishing the slave trade, make his autobiography significant to studying the relationship between sacred beliefs and activism.⁷⁸

As a West African, Gronniosaw possessed an already deeply ingrained spirituality when he first encountered Christianity. He recalled as a child "it being strongly impressed on my mind that there was some GREAT MAN of power which resided above the sun, moon and stars, the objects of our worship."⁷⁹ Like any inquisitive child, he asked his mother "who made the *First Man*?" and where did other creatures of the earth originate? Although some scholars presume that the inhabitants of Gronniosaw's native land practiced animism,⁸⁰ traditional African religion incorporated a belief in God as the supreme ruler over humankind and the spirit world.⁸¹ Spirits

⁷⁷ Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr, eds., *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

⁷⁸ As one of the earliest pieces of writing published by an African in the English-speaking world, it has attracted attention from literary scholars of the Black Atlantic. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. includes it in his essay, "The Trope of the Talking Book," in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988): 127-169.

⁷⁹ James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars In the LIFE of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, AN AFRICAN PRINCE, As related by HIMSELF, 1772*, in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 34. Hereafter *Narrative*.

⁸⁰ Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, 55.

⁸¹ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 18-19. According to Mbiti, "Animism means the system of belief and practices based on the idea that objects and natural phenomena are inhabited by spirits or souls. It is true that

could inhabit inanimate objects while still subject to God's authority. One Anglican missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), Thomas Thompson, discovered when he visited the Gold Coast in 1752 that "the Natives have all a Notion of a *Deity* . . . I never spoke with one of them, who did not confess Belief in a supreme Being." That Thompson worked with English-speaking West Africans, however, should not conceal the possibility that his conception of God and the West African notion of a supreme power were very different.⁸²

The details of Gronniosaw's native spirituality get obscured by his English amanuensis's pen. For instance, in describing how his community worshipped, Gronniosaw explained that several "congregations" would gather on the "sabbath" to meet underneath trees, assemblies presided over by a "priest."⁸³ The amanuensis, a young Englishwoman, ignorant of Africans' sacred life, portrayed Gronniosaw as spiritually assimilated to European modes of worship to make him more appealing to English readers.⁸⁴ In addition, Gronniosaw communicated to the amanuensis in English, a language less familiar to him than Dutch, which could have resulted in misinterpretation.⁸⁵ Gronniosaw, nevertheless, revealed for readers an African community

African peoples in their traditional setting acknowledge the existence of spirits, and that some of the spirits are thought to inhabit objects like trees, ponds, and rocks," but these beliefs represent only a "small portion of the many beliefs held in African Religion," 18.

⁸² Thomas Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages by the Appointment of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. The one to New Jersey in North America, the other from America to the Coast of Guiney* (London, 1758), 43. According to Adama and Naomi Doumbia, in *The Way of the Elders: West African Spirituality & Tradition* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004), the "Supreme power" is one Spirit and "Nyama is the energy that emanates from Spirit and flows throughout the universe," 4-5. West Africans believe that there are many spirits, in humans and in nature, that mediate between people and Spirit. Nevertheless, all share Spirit.

⁸³ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 35.

⁸⁴ According to the Preface to Gronniosaw's *Narrative*, "a young LADY of the Town of Leominster" was the amanuensis, 32.

⁸⁵ The following passage from Gronniosaw's *Narrative* relating Gronniosaw's early relationship with Frelinghuysen indicates how an amanuensis can alter the narrative's meaning: "After I had been a little while with my new master I grew familiar, and ask'd him the meaning of prayer: (I could hardly speak English to be understood) he took great pains with me," 39. Because both Gronniosaw and Frelinghuysen spoke Dutch, they would not have had to speak

dedicated to spiritual beliefs and ritualized group worship where people would kneel with hands raised for long periods of time. Given the Muslim influence in the Kanem-Bornu region of northern Nigeria where Gronniosaw was born, it is possible that Gronniosaw's community adopted Islamic practices.⁸⁶

When Gronniosaw first arrived in New York, after serving an unknown period of time on the Dutch ship, he encountered Western spiritual ideas. Enslaved by a Mr. Van Horn as a domestic, Gronniosaw soon picked up the habit of swearing from other servants. One day an elderly slave chided him for his tongue, warning Gronniosaw that "there was a wicked man call'd the Devil, that liv'd in hell" who would burn him there.⁸⁷ While Gronniosaw would have understood the concept of evil spirits, he would have found the "devil" a foreign one.⁸⁸ Shortly after the incident, Gronniosaw heard his mistress, presumably Mrs. Van Horn, curse at a servant girl. He issued a warning similar to the one he had received except with a twist, informing Mrs. Van Horn that "a black man call'd the Devil" would throw her into a fire. Perhaps Gronniosaw racialized the Devil because he had heard slaves being called "devil" or someone had told him that blacks went to hell. Gronniosaw's attempt to modify his mistress's language, far from angering her, led her to rehearse the story for her friends, one of whom was the Dutch minister, Theodorus Frelinghuysen.⁸⁹ Recognizing in Gronniosaw something special such as innate

English with one another. Gronniosaw, in fact, had learned Dutch either before or early in his captivity by the Dutch ship captain.

⁸⁶ Noel Q. King, *African Cosmos: An Introduction to Religion in Africa* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1986), 97, and Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 33, 68.

⁸⁷ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 39.

⁸⁸ According to Mbiti, in *Introduction to African Religion*, Africans believed that some people used spirits to cause harm or evil to befall others, 80. Gomez, in *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, notes that Africans thought evil "emanate[d] from a living person," 287.

⁸⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 39.

intelligence or spirituality, Frelinghuysen persuaded Mr. Van Horn to sell him for £50, a considerable sum in 1730.⁹⁰

As a member of Frelinghuysen's household in New Jersey, Gronniosaw confronted confusing Christian concepts. At first, he was "delighted" to discover from the Dutch domine that "God was a GREAT and GOOD SPIRIT, that He created all the world, and every person and thing in it, in Ethiopia, Africa, and America, and everywhere," confirming what Gronniosaw had experienced as a child.⁹¹ Gronniosaw's happiness turned to dismay when he heard Frelinghuysen preach from the books of Revelation and Hebrews about God's terrible judgment on the world. In a sermon published in 1738, one that Gronniosaw may have heard, Frelinghuysen proclaimed, "Awake then ye sinners, men and women; be moved, cast down yourselves before the Lord. . . . Tremble at his judgments."⁹² Pietists insisted that the unregenerate feel themselves in imminent danger. Gronniosaw recounted that Frelinghuysen "preached the law so severely, that it made me tremble."⁹³ As an African, he was unfamiliar with the concept that an individual's sin or disobedience against God's law led to eternal hellfire. For West Africans, sin involved transgressing the social or moral norms of the community.⁹⁴ Confronted with this new frightening image of damnation, Gronniosaw responded with fear and anxiety, withdrawing into himself.

Gronniosaw's feelings of worthlessness multiplied as he grappled with Frelinghuysen's evangelical admonishments.⁹⁵ The distressed young African turned to Frelinghuysen's wife,

⁹⁰ The National Archives of the United Kingdom, <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid> (accessed October 19, 2010). That £50 in 1730 is equivalent to \$6,762.33 in today's American currency.

⁹¹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 39.

⁹² Frelinghuysen, "The Earthquake Improved," *Sermons*, 317.

⁹³ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 40.

⁹⁴ See Creel, "A Peculiar People," for a discussion of what sin may have meant to West Africans, 181-183, 282-283. See also Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 177-179.

⁹⁵ I recognize that this emphasis on unworthiness may reflect the evangelical amanuensis's unseen hand.

Eva, who gave him John Bunyan's *The Holy War* to read. Some days later, perhaps at his wife's prodding, Frelinghuysen handed Gronniosaw Richard Baxter's work, *A Call to the Unconverted to Turn and Live*, which aggravated his distress to such a point that he "even attempted to put an end to my life."⁹⁶ Gronniosaw's agonizing experience mirrored what Frelinghuysen's opponents had feared – that the pietism practiced by the Dutch domine "required, before regeneration, despair, which is the path to suicide."⁹⁷ Overwhelmed by the idea of his sin, or at least terrorized by the images painted by Frelinghuysen and the Puritan authors, Gronniosaw envisioned no end to his spiritual predicament. Listening to the Calvinistic Frelinghuysen, he would have understood that only God's grace could save him. Gronniosaw was in the throes of a pietistic conversion. At what stage in his service to Frelinghuysen Gronniosaw entered into and how long he remained in this distraught state is unknown, but it took seventeen years for him to experience conversion at last.

As Gronniosaw worked through his fear and guilt, he reverted to the calmer, more peaceful spirituality of his childhood. Pursued by Frelinghuysen's vengeful God, Gronniosaw expressed a fervent desire to return home to Africa, believing that God would not find him there.⁹⁸ Since such a return was out of the question, he instead found solace in the forest, paying frequent visits to "a large remarkably fine Oak-tree," to which he aired his troubles and under

⁹⁶ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 39-41. Frelinghuysen and his wife sent Gronniosaw to school to learn to read and write Dutch. Gronniosaw would, therefore, have read Bunyan and Baxter in Dutch. Dutch pietists including Frelinghuysen read the translated works by English Puritan pietists. See Tanis, *Dutch Calvinistic Pietism*, 45, and J.M. Bumsted and John E. Van de Wetering, *What Must I Do To Be Saved? The Great Awakening in Colonial America* (Hinsdale, IL: The Dryden Press, 1976), 28.

⁹⁷ *Boel's Complaint*, 32.

⁹⁸ It is possible that Gronniosaw was familiar with Igbo spiritual beliefs. According to Gomez, in *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, the Igbo or Ibo, a West African society that originated in the area southwest of Gronniosaw's native land of Kanem-Bornu, were strongly attached to their ancestral land. Removal from the land created suicidal tendencies among enslaved Igbo despite their aversion to such an action. Gomez argues that the trauma of enslavement led them to consider suicide a means to return to Africa, 125-134.

which he spoke to God.⁹⁹ The scene Gronniosaw recreated, intentionally or not, resembled the sacred gatherings he and his family enjoyed under the large palm tree, a tree that, Gronniosaw had emphasized, provided for all the body's needs. In African cosmology, the spirits inhabiting the earth's natural resources such as trees and water, those things near human beings, could be considered divine.¹⁰⁰ In fact, West Africans set apart special wooded areas as sacred.¹⁰¹

Gronniosaw confessed that he "found more comfort and consolation than I ever was sensible of before" in this forested refuge where he "often lamented my own wicked heart."¹⁰²

When Gronniosaw finally experienced pietistic conversion shortly before Frelinghuysen died, he continued to describe it from an African cosmological perspective. During his hours spent among the trees, he felt his "heart lifted up to GOD;" and, there he often prayed and thanked "Almighty GOD." One day the formerly downcast African "was so drawn out of [himself], and so fill'd and awed by the Presence of God" that he believed a light from heaven surrounded him "for the space of a minute."¹⁰³ Gronniosaw may have believed he was communing with divinity in a profound way. Not only would the experience accord with his native spirituality but with his understanding of Frelinghuysen's sermons about God's presence manifested in nature. The Dutch minister claimed that lightning shot "forth from the throne of God."¹⁰⁴ Gronniosaw felt "joy unspeakable," feeling the weight of sin fall away before divine mercy. While some scholars debate the meaning of this "light" experience, I argue that

⁹⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 42.

¹⁰⁰ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 71-75; Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 123-124.

¹⁰¹ Doumbia, *Way of the Elders*, 90.

¹⁰² Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 42.

¹⁰³ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 42. For a different interpretation, see Frank Lambert, "'I Saw the Book Talk': Slave Readings of the First Great Awakening," *Journal of Negro History* 77 (Autumn 1992): 185-198. Lambert views this passage as a description of African soul possession as described by Melville Herskovits, 185. Hodges, in *Root & Branch*, suggests that Gronniosaw's "inner light stemmed from an African conception of salvation," 124. Gronniosaw at no time mentions that he was "unconscious" of what was happening around him, though.

¹⁰⁴ Frelinghuysen, "The Earthquake Improved," *Sermons*, 305.

Gronniosaw understood perfectly well the theology behind his conversion but interpreted it within a sacred African framework – feeling the presence of God the creator, who resided in nature, as gracious savior. Even after his conversion, Gronniosaw returned to the woods to pray.

What Gronniosaw thought about any contradiction between his Christianity and his enslavement remains veiled by the amanuensis's pen. An African living in a Dutch household as a slave would have been aware of the current debates concerning the relationship between slavery and Christianity. By 1745, he was one of approximately 4,606 Africans or African-Americans out of a total population of 61,403 in New Jersey.¹⁰⁵ He may have traveled throughout the Raritan Valley with Frelinghuysen to the churches the Dutch domine pastored and met other bondspeople. It is not improbable that Gronniosaw had heard about Capitein's popular dissertation and even read it. Considering Frelinghuysen's library of Puritan works, Gronniosaw might have been acquainted with Baxter's *Christian Directory* which included his 1673 essay, *Directions to Slave-Holders*. Baxter reminded masters that slaves "are reasonable creatures as well as you, and born to as much natural liberty; that they have immortal souls, and are equally capable of salvation with yourselves."¹⁰⁶ When Frelinghuysen, on his deathbed, emancipated Gronniosaw, telling him he "was at liberty to go where [he] would," and leaving the African £10, or roughly \$800 by today's standards, the African stayed on with Mrs. Frelinghuysen until her death sometime around 1750. Why the Dutch minister freed him, leaving such a rich endowment, and how Gronniosaw perceived his liberty must remain a mystery. While the domine had certainly taken Baxter's admonition to heart, his decision to emancipate

¹⁰⁵ Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 15.

¹⁰⁶ *Baxter's Directions to Slave-Holders, Revived; First Printed in London, in the Year 1673*. To which is subjoined, A Letter from the Worthy Anthony Benezet, late of this City, deceased, to the Celebrated Abbe Raynal, with his Answer, which were first Published in the Brussels Gazette, March 7, 1782 (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1785), 4.

Gronniosaw probably related to the African's own unusual character. Frelinghuysen had even promised to take his slave to Holland to meet the friends to whom he had written regarding him.¹⁰⁷ As for the freedman, he may have continued working for the family out of loyalty or from lack of employment elsewhere.

The path Gronniosaw pursued following the death of the Frelinghuysens suggests how he interpreted his pietistic beliefs in the context of the discrimination and abuse he suffered. In debt and without means, he signed on as a cook for a privateering vessel, spending a number of years at sea. Throughout his seafaring adventures, he believed that the Lord protected him as he confronted danger, death, and persecution from his fellow sailors. Finally returning to New York, he worked as a servant but "had a vast inclination to visit ENGLAND," praying that he might escape the "cruelty or ingratitude" that dogged him in the colonies.¹⁰⁸ New York and New Jersey still sanctioned slavery during the colonial era, and Gronniosaw's opportunities for obtaining a position with livable wages were limited. After the New York City slave conspiracy of 1741, free and enslaved blacks faced curfews and other legal restrictions. If Gronniosaw attended the Dutch Reformed Church of his former master, he probably discovered prejudice and a refusal to baptize him.¹⁰⁹ England, however, represented a "Christian Land" where Richard Baxter, whose *Call to the Unconverted* Gronniosaw had found such a comfort, had lived and where the Methodist revivalist George Whitefield, Frelinghuysen's old friend, now resided. In England, he "expected to find nothing but goodness, gentleness and meekness in this Christian Land."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 43.

¹⁰⁸ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 45.

¹⁰⁹ Hodges, *Root & Branch*, 122-124; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 35.

¹¹⁰ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 46.

Even though Gronniosaw's conversion occurred after the first fires of the Great Awakening had died down, many Africans embraced Christianity during the mass revivals taking place between 1739 and 1741. Throughout the British North American colonies, people of African descent heard the message, delivered by Frelinghuysen and other evangelists influenced by his pietistic methods such as Gilbert Tennent, that God was no respecter of persons.¹¹¹ Spiritual equality in Christ and hope in for the future became the watchwords of the day. When the Anglican Methodist itinerant revivalist George Whitefield arrived on American soil in 1739, he joined the hellfire-breathing Presbyterian Tennent on his tour through the Jerseys and New York.¹¹² A dynamic preacher in his own right, Whitefield already bore the marks of German pietism and the Methodistic principles of John Wesley, which emphasized the personal practice of piety and experiential divinity.¹¹³ Thousands of blacks and whites flocked to his open air meetings, avid for the egalitarian good news. One evangelist, presumably Whitefield, wrote a public letter to South Carolina slaves to inform them that God would lift them up "from the Depth of . . . vile Slavery, to *Sin*, to *Satan*, and to *wicked Men*; to set [them] among *Princes* . . . and to make [them] inherit the *Throne of Glory!*"¹¹⁴

Free and enslaved Africans immediately comprehended the possibilities inherent in Whitefield's work among them. On Sunday, May 11, 1740, as Whitefield prepared to leave Philadelphia, close to fifty blacks approached him where he was residing to express gratitude

¹¹¹ Acts 10:34, "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons," KJV. Evangelists used this to explain how God treated all people the same regardless of their social status.

¹¹² Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920). According to Maxson, Tennent, whose preaching style Frelinghuysen influenced, in his turn influenced George Whitefield's preaching, 49.

¹¹³ Frank Lambert, "Pedlar in Divinity": *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 17-21.

¹¹⁴ *A Letter to the Negroes Lately Converted to Christ in America. And Particularly to Those, lately Called out of Darkness, into GOD's marvelous Light, at Mr. Jonathan Bryan's in South Carolina, or A Welcome to the Believing Negroes, into the Household of GOD, By a Friend and Servant of Theirs in England* (London: J. Hart, 1742), 6.

“for what God had done to their souls” and to encourage him in his attempts to establish a school for black Philadelphians. Whitefield noted in his journal that several of his unexpected visitors had “begun to learn to read.”¹¹⁵ These black converts probably recognized that the Bible spoke words of freedom, and that reading it for themselves was the key to unlocking other opportunities for themselves and their children.¹¹⁶ One free woman promised to Whitefield’s school, when it opened, her two children.¹¹⁷

Africans seeking spiritual fulfillment attracted special attention from evangelists.¹¹⁸ Their behavior at Jonathan Edwards’ Northampton revival in 1734-35 caused him to comment that several blacks had “been truly born again” during this outpouring of God’s spirit.¹¹⁹ Edwards harbored great expectations for both Africans and Native Americans, commenting several years later that they would become “divines, and that excellent books will be published in Africa, in Ethiopia, in Tartary, and other now the most barbarous countries.”¹²⁰ Black participation in revival was such that William Seward, Whitefield’s companion in his second American tour, thought that blacks, more than any others, would “become the Lord’s People.”¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Whitefield, *George Whitefield’s Journals*, 420.

¹¹⁶ Historians stress how evangelicals and missionaries promoted literacy as a necessity for religious knowledge. See, for instance, Lambert, “I Saw the Book Talk.” My focus here is on the proactive slaves who wanted to learn to read the Bible. They well could have suspected whites of failing to deliver the entire story about freedom, but they also realized that literacy opened doors to opportunity.

¹¹⁷ Whitefield, *Journals*, 420.

¹¹⁸ There is a vast literature on the topic of missions to slaves, along with analysis of slaveholders’ resistance. See particularly Creel, “*A Peculiar People*,” Jordan, *White Over Black*; Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990); William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988). Edgar McManus, in *Black Bondage in the North*, notes that “Lutheran, Baptist, and Presbyterian clergy also favored proselytization,” and that “the period of the Great Awakening gave added impetus to all these efforts, for the emotional gospel of the evangelists attracted black converts to every denomination,” 101.

¹¹⁹ Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative*, 157, 159.

¹²⁰ Jonathan Edwards, excerpt from *A History of the Work of Redemption*, in *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequence*, eds. Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc. 1967), 27.

¹²¹ William Seward, *Journal of a Voyage from Savannah to Philadelphia, and from Philadelphia to England* (London, 1740), 73.

Throughout New England and the Middle Colonies, in rural regions and more populated areas, many people of African descent demonstrated, as Edwards noted, a keen desire to communicate with God.

Africans' enthusiasm for pietistic preaching reflected a spirituality profoundly shaped by their native beliefs. In African religious ceremonies, worshippers celebrated life in ecstatic ways by singing, shouting, or dancing and sometimes falling into trances or experiencing spirit-possession, all activities consonant with the responses evangelical revivalists expected from an indwelling Holy Spirit.¹²² During George Whitefield's visit to Philadelphia in the spring of 1740, one black woman, who had converted to Christianity the year before under Whitefield's ministry, spoke to him about how the Lord "manifest[ed] Himself to her soul" one Sunday. While listening to a Baptist preacher that day, "the Word came with such power to her heart" that she cried out to such an extent that the congregation tried to silence her, but she could not control herself and continued "praising and blessing God." After her ecstatic response, witnesses questioned her sanity and sobriety. Whitefield, on the other hand, found her tale "rational" and considered it proof that "the Lord Jesus took a great possession of her soul."¹²³ Although the woman's African provenance is unknown, she was probably familiar with spirit possession, through which an African could share with others their relationship to divinity.¹²⁴ In Lebanon, Connecticut, the Congregational revivalist, Eleazer Wheelock recorded that he could not even

¹²² Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 253; Creel, "A Peculiar People," 299-301. See also King, *African Cosmos*; Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*; Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Stuckey argues throughout his study that the ring shout evidenced the strong survival of African religious practices. Much of his evidence comes from the mid-nineteenth century South where African influence would have been abating. This leads me to think that the influence would have been that much stronger in the slaves in the colonial North.

¹²³ Whitefield, *Journals*, 418.

¹²⁴ Creel, "A Peculiar People," 300. Michael Pierson, in *Black Yankees*, states that "it is probable that more than three-quarters of New England's black immigrants were African by birth," many originating from the Gold Coast, 7. It is safe to assume that in 1739, many of the black slaves in the Middle Colonies still remembered Africa.

finish his sermon to the blacks because their “distress” and “agony . . . seemed a lively emblem of the damned.”¹²⁵ More than likely, their cries and groans reflected an ecstatic spiritual event, perhaps mixed with emotional agony over their enslavement.

Black slaves’ intense devotion to spiritual matters raised concerns and fears among the Awakening’s critics that revival excesses would disrupt the social order. Charles Brockwell, an SPG missionary and the rector at St. Peter’s Church in Salem, Massachusetts, wrote to London in June 1741, that slaves, having heard Whitefield and Tennent, “pretend to extraordinary inspiration,” abdicating their work responsibilities to “run rambling about to utter their enthusiastic nonsense.”¹²⁶ The minister at Boston’s First Church, Charles Chauncy, one of Whitefield’s and Edwards’ staunchest antagonists, lamented the outrageous emotions accompanying conversion. “Yea, *Negroes*, have taken upon them to do the Business of *Preachers*,” cautioned Chauncy. Worse, they preached everywhere throughout New England, not just in private homes but even “held forth in the *public Congregations*.”¹²⁷ Alarmed by the prospect that the blacks, and the white women who shared their excitement, would usurp clerical authority, Chauncy argued that emotion and religion were incompatible. He warned, “An enlightened mind, not raised affections,” paved the way to salvation.¹²⁸ Black enthusiasts made no distinction between the rational and the emotional for both were sacred. Pietistic revivalists

¹²⁵ Eleazer Wheelock to Rev. Mr. Daniel Rogers, Lebanon, New Hampshire, January 18, 1742 (Eleazer Wheelock Papers, Dartmouth College Archives, microfilm).

¹²⁶ Charles Brockwell to the Secretary of the SPG, Salem, Massachusetts, June 15, 1741, in *Historical Collections Relating to the American Colonial Church*, vol. III, ed. William Stevens Perry (Hartford: The Church Press, 1873), 356-357.

¹²⁷ Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (Boston, 1743), 226. Chauncy focuses his complaints on those innovations that Frelinghuysen instituted: private meetings, lay preaching, and lay exhorting. See Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*.

¹²⁸ Quoted in William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 72. For a discussion on Chauncy’s views, see Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 202-207.

such as Jonathan Edwards adhered to the Lockean concept that the mind and senses worked together.¹²⁹

Although some scholars claim that Africans responded to the style of evangelical Christianity rather than the theology, I argue that black converts discovered in pietism beliefs concordant with African spiritual ideals.¹³⁰ One black Massachusetts woman, Flora or Flory, a member of the New-Gathered Congregational Church in Chebacco, comprehended well the demands of New Light theology. The pastor of her church, John Cleaveland, had been expelled from Yale College in 1744 for attending private worship services and listening to lay exhorters. As a New Light, Cleaveland sought “to serve the Lord in Spirit and in Truth.”¹³¹ Sometime after being received into church membership in 1746, Flora committed some transgressions for which the church had barred her from fellowship. On November 8, 1748, the church recorded that she had confessed “her fall and is now restored to our Charity and Fellowship.”¹³² In her confession, Flora stated that among her sins were “spirituall Pride, Ingratitude...& great Freedom to utter same before men, & also after freedom in persuading sinners to repent and live.” For some reason, her exhorting or eagerness to share the good news with her community, an accepted practice among New Lights, had offended her church family. Framing her downfall as a temptation from Satan, she praised God for “bringing home to my soul some Texts of holy Scripture.”¹³³ While her confession, with its concern over specific behavior, rests securely

¹²⁹ Bumsted and Van de Wetering, *What Must I Do To Be Saved?*, 103-106, 120-121.

¹³⁰ Piersen, *Black Yankees*, 69. See also McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, 101.

¹³¹ John Cleaveland Papers, Phillips Library, Salem, MA, Box 1, Folder 1A.

¹³² John Cleaveland Papers, Phillips Library, Salem, MA, Box 1, Folder 3a.

¹³³ Flora’s confession was transcribed and printed in Erik R. Seeman, “‘Justise Must Take Plase’: Three African Americans Speak of Religion in Eighteenth-Century New England,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 56 (April 1999): 393-414, quote on 407, 410. Seeman, like Piersen, McManus, and others, claims that African Americans “found the emotional emphasis of the revival more fulfilling than the increasingly intellectualized piety of the Old Lights,” 396.

within pietistic practice, it was also compatible with an African worldview where transgression involved offending the communal order.¹³⁴

Black spiritual seekers did not confine themselves to New Light churches. Years before Whitefield arrived in the colonies, people of African descent had pursued communion with the Church of England. In 1735, an SPG missionary in Albany notified the SPG Secretary in London that he had spent ten years “catechizing and instructing the Negroes. . . .They come every evening when they have done their masters work, to my house to be instructed in our Holy Religion.”¹³⁵ Writing from Hempstead, New York, Robert Jenney reported that some black congregants who were literate sought prayer books to use during church.¹³⁶ These black church members, like the black Philadelphians eager to learn to read, probably distrusted what white ministers were preaching and desired to discover for themselves what lay in holy books. Even in the Great Awakening’s wake, many blacks appeared at the doors of orthodox churches. Jenney, in Philadelphia by 1744, recorded, “Our Negroes also are numerous & many of them inclined to be Religious who would be glad to attend the Lectures of a Catachist.”¹³⁷ The next year he observed that many blacks expressed an interest in religious matters, and he had baptized several. Jenney thought that the blacks who followed itinerant evangelicals would remain faithful to the Anglican church “if properly Instructed.”¹³⁸ Jenney could have been referring either to their doctrinal instruction or instruction at home that depended on slaveowners’ encouragement and own church attendance.

¹³⁴ See Creel, “*A Peculiar People*,” 181-183, 282-283.

¹³⁵ John Beazley to the Secretary of the SPG, Albany, New York, November 1, 1735, in *The Papers of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Lambeth Palace Library*, microfilm edition, Reel 14, 101-102.

¹³⁶ Robert Jenney to the Secretary of the SPG, Hempstead, New York, July 30, 1735, in *The Papers of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel at Lambeth Palace Library*, microfilm edition, Reel 14, 92-97.

¹³⁷ Robert Jenney to the Secretary of the SPG, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, January 26, 1744, in Perry, *Historical Collections*, vol. II, 236.

¹³⁸ Robert Jenney to the Secretary of the SPG, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, November 14, 1745, in Perry, *Historical Collections*, vol. II, 237.

Africans probably found the Anglican church, like the orthodox Dutch Reformed, less appealing than the New Light congregations because it stressed catechism and ritual over freeform spiritual expression. A people frequently denied the means to literacy could hardly be enthused about worshipping in an environment where they could not understand the accoutrements of faith fully. More than this, they may have rejected outright the white ministers' spin on Christian doctrine. In 1745, Thomas Thompson, an SPG missionary in New Jersey, met a black servant or slave, belonging to a Quaker, who proved to be a particularly refractory conversion. The man had been sentenced to death for raping a woman and was imprisoned. As Thompson counseled the slave over the two weeks before his execution, he learned that the man was already familiar with Christian principles. At Thompson's prodding, he made "a Sort of involuntary Confession of his guilt, and the Sense of his Soul soon corresponded with what his Tongue uttered, and he felt in himself those Affections which worked duly and properly, after they had been thus excited." This description of the Anglican method highlights the dry orthodoxy criticized by New Lights and helps partially explain why some Africans chose another way. A few years later when Thompson ministered among the Cape Coast blacks, he recorded, "The Christian Religion they [the Africans] call *white Man's Fashion*, and *white men*, they say, *know best*, but *black Man follow black Man's Fashion*."¹³⁹

A few men and women of African descent in colonial North America decided that their spiritual beliefs comported well with their desire for physical freedom. Simon, a forty year old slave from Middlesex County, East New Jersey, walked away from his master in August 1740. Native-born and literate, he could perform some minor medical procedures, "pretending," according to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* advertisement offering a reward for his capture, "to be a

¹³⁹ Thompson, *An Account of Two Missionary Voyages*, 12-14, 68.

great Doctor and very religious, and says he is a Churchman.”¹⁴⁰ Perhaps Simon had heard Gilbert Tennent or George Whitefield preach. The Brunswick area of Middlesex County, just a few miles from Kingston where Simon lived, was home territory to Tennent, and Whitefield had preached there the previous fall. Since he wore “a dark grey Broadcloth Coat, with other good Apparel,” he may have styled himself a preacher. Another Jersey black, Samson, claimed his independence in 1749. Only twenty-one, he could “read middling well, and took with him a hymn book, and a testament,” suggesting that these items carried some meaning for him.¹⁴¹ He might have preached or read aloud to others. The presence of the hymn book suggests pietist leanings; the Moravians and the Methodists had brought psalmody to the Great Awakening.¹⁴²

Black slaves thus adapted the New Light message to fit their understanding of freedom. According to historian Erik R. Seeman, “With its commitment to the spiritual equality of all believers, evangelicalism provided marginalized people an unequalled path to power and respect,” using the Bible “in ways not envisioned by the slaveowners and ministers who long had worked to Christianize them.”¹⁴³ In 1754, one enslaved man, Greenwich, a member of the Separate Church in Canterbury, Connecticut, a New Light congregation, publicly criticized human bondage before his congregation, where his master was a church leader. Seeman points out in his exegesis of Greenwich’s testimony that the man mixed Scriptural references to show that kidnapping and selling people offended God. Citing Exodus 21:16, Greenwich asserted, “He that steel A man and seleth him or if he be found in his hands he shall surely be put to death.” Although this Old Testament command applied only to the tribe of Israel, Greenwich extended its meaning to all humankind. Seeman is correct in emphasizing “that the Euro-

¹⁴⁰ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 11, 1740.

¹⁴¹ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 17, 1749.

¹⁴² Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 148.

¹⁴³ Seeman, “‘Justise Must Take Plase,’” 406.

American roots of evangelicalism had much to offer blacks in colonial New England.”¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, Greenwich, a black man in a small New Light church, appreciated that Africans were at the center of a larger, global intellectual discussion about the relationship between Christianity and African slavery.¹⁴⁵

Enslaved Africans in early America received attention from a few benevolent white reformers. Historians have argued for the past several decades that the Society of Friends was the earliest and most vocal group to oppose the slave trade and slaveholding. English Quaker George Fox encouraged other Friends in 1657 to share the Gospel with their slaves and by 1676 went so far as to suggest that masters free their slaves after many years of faithful service.¹⁴⁶ As early as 1688 in the American colonies, a group of Dutch-speaking German Quakers at Germantown, Pennsylvania, sent an antislavery petition to the Philadelphia Yearly meeting. Possibly influenced by German pietism, the petitioners claimed that the Golden Rule made trafficking in slaves unchristian. “There is a saying,” the document states, “that we shall doe to all men licke as we will be done ourselves; macking no difference of what generation, descent or Colour they are.”¹⁴⁷ Five years later, Quaker George Keith also penned an antislavery petition. By the early eighteenth-century, Ralph Sandiford and Benjamin Lay declared their opposition to slavery, an unpopular position at a time of increasing prosperity for Quaker merchants. Lay, a radical English Quaker, predicted in 1736 “everlasting Damnation” for those involved in “*the*

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 405, 400.

¹⁴⁵ Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680-1865* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). Bruce argues that “Greenwich’s testimony was an important instance of a slave’s perception of possibilities for inserting himself into a debate with more than religious implications, a debate over the nature of slavery and the status of people of African descent in the larger colonial realm,” 8. I would argue that, for Greenwich and other African converts to Christianity, the debate at its core was a religious one and this is what made it so significant to them.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in Jordan, *White Over Black*, 194.

¹⁴⁷ The Germantown Quaker Protest Against Slavery or 1688, <http://www.qhpress.org/texts/oldqwhp/as-1688.htm> (accessed May 27, 2009). See also Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 308-309.

Merchandize of Slaves and Souls of Men.”¹⁴⁸ For Quakers, the slave trade involved the sin of manstealing, polluting Quakerism, and slavery prevented spreading the Gospel to the slaves in direct contradiction of Jesus’ command.

One Friend, West Jersey-born John Woolman, finally motivated his fellow Quakers to think seriously about the deleterious effects slavery introduced among them. In 1754, the same year that the Connecticut slave Greenwich castigated his fellow congregants, Woolman, then thirty-four years of age, published *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*.¹⁴⁹ Informing his readers “that all Nations are of one Blood,” he exhorted them to treat Africans with brotherly affection. Slaveholding resulted in laziness, pride, and disdain for one’s fellow man. No messenger of racial equality, Woolman considered blacks inferior to whites and deserving of Christian kindness.¹⁵⁰ Although Woolman informed the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1758 that American slaves suffered under oppressive conditions, he expressed concern primarily for the spiritual lives of his fellow Quakers, cautioning that God would judge them harshly.¹⁵¹

Woolman’s fellow Quaker, Anthony Benezet, took reform a step farther, actively promoting the welfare of the black community in Philadelphia. Born in France to Hueguenot parents, Benezet’s family moved to England, finding their way to Philadelphia in 1731. Concerned about improving conditions for Philadelphia’s black community, he opened a school for black children in his home in 1750. In 1754, Benezet presented to the Yearly Meeting

¹⁴⁸ Quoted in Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, 291.

¹⁴⁹ Jordan, *White Over Black*, 273. See also Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*; Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Beautiful Soul of John Woolman, Apostle of Abolition* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008); Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ John Woolman, *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* (Philadelphia, 1754), 3. Woolman quoted from Acts 17:26.

¹⁵¹ *The Journal of John Woolman*, with an introduction by John G. Whittier (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1871), 137.

Woolman's *Epistle of Caution and Advice*, a document denouncing slavery as a sin.¹⁵² Eight years later, Benezet published *A Short Account of That Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes*, which argued "that the Negroes are equally intitled to the common Priviledges of Mankind with the Whites, that they have the same rational Powers; the same natural Affections, and are as susceptible of Pain and Grief as they."¹⁵³ To Benezet, living in Philadelphia where the black population comprised mostly slaves and totaled approximately 8 percent of the city's total population, slavery was not an abstract concept.¹⁵⁴ His father, Stephen, had hosted George Whitefield during the Methodist's 1740 swing through the colonies, and Anthony may have attended the revivalist's open-air meetings where slaves congregated to hear the message of spiritual equality.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, Stephen Benezet and Gilbert Tennent served as trustees for the school Whitefield sought to build in Pennsylvania.¹⁵⁶ Anthony Benezet worked with black families as a teacher and advocate, seeing in human bondage the sinfulness of the human heart.

Antislavery voices reached the public ear at a politically contentious time. As American colonists sought to register their complaints against the British Parliament for its attempts to raise revenue to pay for the recent Seven Years' War, the concept of natural rights offered them a basis for opposing slavery. James Otis asserted in his 1764 *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, "The colonists are by the law of nature freeborn, as indeed all men are,

¹⁵² Jordan, *White Over Black*, 273. Woolman's biographer, Thomas P. Slaughter, takes for granted that Woolman wrote this epistle. Benezet's biographer, Maurice Jackson, writes that Benezet edited the letter and excerpted Woolman's *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes*. In comparing the documents and considering Woolman's *Journal*, I find the *Epistle* more in keeping with Benezet's works. I cannot find where Woolman mentioned "manstealing" as a sin. Perhaps Benezet added this to the letter. Jackson notes that Woolman and Benezet collaborated on antislavery reform, 53.

¹⁵³ Anthony Benezet, *A Short Account Of that Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes* (Philadelphia, 1762), 78.

¹⁵⁴ Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 15.

¹⁵⁵ Whitefield identifies his host only as "Mr. Benezet." The editor, William Wale, in the 1905 edition of Whitefield's *Journals* footnoted that it was Anthony Benezet, but Stephen Benezet was a trustee for Whitefield's school. Furthermore, he was friendly to the pietist cause, joining the Moravians in 1743. Whitefield recorded, "I was received with great joy by my kind host, Mr. Benezet, and many other friends," 417.

¹⁵⁶ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 24, 1740 and November 27, 1740.

white or black.” Quoting from John Locke, Otis attempted to persuade his readers that “the natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth,” adding that “this gift of God cannot be annihilated.”¹⁵⁷ Two years later, Benezet published yet another essay, *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies*, detailing the brutalities experienced by slaves throughout the British dominions and reviving the words of Puritan divine Richard Baxter that those who kidnapped Africans “are fitter to be called devils than Christians.”¹⁵⁸ In 1767, Virginian Arthur Lee declared to the House of Burgesses that slavery violated “justice and religion.” He cautioned Virginians that their future happiness depended on ending an institution that trampled underfoot God’s own will.¹⁵⁹

How people of African descent in America interpreted this incipient shift in white thinking about slavery and liberty between 1760 and 1770 is difficult to determine. There are few writings from black authors extant for the period. In 1760, while the Seven Years’ War still raged, Jupiter Hammon, a slave owned by the Lloyd family of Long Island, published *An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries*. Renowned primarily for its author’s color rather than any literary merit, the poem reflects Hammon’s own evangelical conversion. Given that he was close to fifty years of age when he wrote the poem and had resided with the Lloyds since at least 1730, he probably had been exposed to Great Awakening preaching. Throughout the poem, Hammon stresses that Christ’s gracious salvation and

¹⁵⁷ James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston, 1764), excerpt in *Am I Not A Man and A Brother: The Antislavery Crusade of Revolutionary America, 1688-1788*, ed. Roger Bruns (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1977), 104.

¹⁵⁸ Anthony Benezet, *A Caution and Warning to Great Britain and Her Colonies, in A Short Representation of the Calamitous State of the Enslaved Negroes in the British Dominions. Collected from various Authors, and submitted to the Serious Consideration of All, more especially of Those in Power* (Philadelphia: 1766), 29. Benezet also quoted from *A Letter from the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina*.

¹⁵⁹ Arthur Lee, *Extract From an Address in the Virginia Gazette, of March 19, 1767*, in *Am I Not A Man*, 110.

redemption was available to all.¹⁶⁰ In a curious twist, he suggests that Jesus is the reader's "captive slave" by offering salvation.¹⁶¹ Hammon's short work, like Capitein's 1742 dissertation, focuses primarily on spiritual freedom from sin and fails to engage the topic of slavery.

Ten years later, another descendant of Africa acted on his opposition to tyranny and became the first colonist to die in the Boston Massacre of March 5, 1770. Crispus Attucks, described as a mulatto, headed a mob that taunted the hated British Regulars quartered in Boston since 1768. Hardly a stranger to slavery, Attucks had emancipated himself twenty years earlier as a 17-year-old in Framingham, Massachusetts. No evidence exists telling us his spiritual beliefs. There is a possibility that an ancestor through his Indian mother was a Christian convert, but this tells us nothing about Attucks himself. He may have been a sailor for he was at a pub with other seamen that March night. Other blacks and Irishmen accompanied Attucks to confront the red-coated soldiers whom they accused of physically abusing boys in the street. When the soldiers fired their muskets, Attucks was struck in the chest.¹⁶² What inspired Attucks' actions? Perhaps he had been drinking. Maybe his simmering anger over the treatment meted out by the Regulars to common people finally boiled over. However Attucks found himself leading the mob, his death galvanized Bostonians against imperial rule. At the burial of the Boston Massacre's victims, the *Boston Post-Boy* reported that Attucks' body was one of two

¹⁶⁰ See Vernon Loggins, *Critical Analysis of the Works of Jupiter Hammon*, in *America's First Negro Poet: The Complete Works of Jupiter Hammon of Long Island*, edited with an introduction by Stanley Austin Ransom, Jr. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1970).

¹⁶¹ Jupiter Hammon, *An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries: Composed by Jupiter Hammon, a Negro belong to Mr. Lloyd, of Queen's Village on Long-Island, the 25th of December, 1760*, in *America's First Negro Poet*, 46.

¹⁶² Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855; repr., New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1968).

carried from Faneuil Hall, “attended by a numerous train of Persons of all ranks.”¹⁶³ In death, Attucks represented the evils of political oppression, ironic for a black man who had been a slave.

Conclusion

By the time Attucks died in 1770, people of African descent had spent several decades actively grappling with the meaning of freedom. As this chapter has argued, Africans hearing evangelical pietists’ Gospel message interpreted it within their own sacred framework and adapted it to their own circumstances. Jacobus Capitein understood Christianity as offering only spiritual release from sin and claimed the mantle of a missionary especially suited to minister to Africans in the Gold Coast. Constrained by his relationship with his Dutch patrons, as James W.C. Pennington observed, Capitein had no other choice but to find slavery compatible with Christianity. West Africans in colonial America, presented early in the Great Awakening with the promise that Christ freed sinners, heard something that encompassed more than the spiritual. Some took to the roads to preach and share the good news while some freed themselves from bodily bondage, and many sought opportunities for education to read for themselves what the Bible had to say. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw struggled for at least seventeen years in the midst of pietism before converting to Christianity. Perhaps he experienced or witnessed other Africans experiencing treatment contradictory to the Christian message of liberty. Once emancipated but still victimized by prejudice, Gronniosaw struck out for England where he believed true Christians lived.

Whatever path they followed, black converts incorporated into their lives the pietistic emphasis on spiritual equality, lay exhortation, and Spirit-guided practice to mold their own

¹⁶³ *Boston Post-Boy*, March 12, 1770.

African awakening. Further nourished by West African spiritual beliefs, they adhered to a sense of responsibility to their fellow human beings which made the slavery practiced by Europeans and Americans untenable. Even as the Enlightenment discourse on natural rights and liberty infiltrated public discourse in the years leading to the American Revolution, black evangelicals understood it in sacred terms. In the years following the Boston Massacre, many enslaved and free blacks extended the meaning of freedom beyond the spiritual and, like the Connecticut slave Greenwich, voiced publicly their conviction that Christianity and slavery were fundamentally incompatible.

Chapter 2

“Let the oppressed Africans be liberated”:

A Black Public Voice in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1787

On November 12, 1770, the *New-York Gazette* printed an advertisement for “An Elegiac Poem, On the Death of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield.” The poet’s identity, “A Servant Girl of 17 Years of Age . . . [who] *has been but 9 Years in this Country from Africa,*” made this announcement notable.¹ Phillis Wheatley’s poem garnered popular attention quickly, appearing throughout the Northeast and in London.² Barely four years later, the *Newport Mercury* publicized in boldface the sale of *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, Written by Himself*. Originally published in London in 1772, the *Narrative*’s American debut followed by just three months the American edition of Wheatley’s 1773 poetry collection.³ Wheatley and Gronniosaw joined a growing chorus of black public voices that signified a crucial shift in a developing tradition of black activism that began in 1742 when Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein vigorously justified his return to Africa.⁴

¹ *The New-York Gazette, or Weekly Post-Boy*, November 12, 1770.

² Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *The Origins of African American Literature, 1680-1865* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 41-42.

³ There has been some question whether 1770 or 1772 or 1774 is the correct date for the narrative’s first London edition. See Vincent Carretta, ed., *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 54; Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr, ed., *Black Atlantic Writers of the Eighteenth Century: Living the New Exodus in England and the Americas* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 26. Potkay and Burr suggest that 1774 is the correct publication date, but Carretta points out that *Boddely’s Bath Journal* advertised the *Narrative* in December 1772. In my own examination of *Boddely’s Bath Journal*, I find that the notice on December 21, 1772, “*This Day is Published,*” favors a 1772 first edition date. Phillis Wheatley published her London edition of *POEMS, on various Subjects, RELIGIOUS and MORAL* in 1773.

⁴ Until Wheatley’s poem appeared in print in 1770, few other Africans had published their own writings or narratives. In 1760, Briton Hammon published *A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man*, and Jupiter Hammon, no relation, published *An Evening Thought. Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries*. These short works emphasized Christian beliefs. Other black authors may have been writing, but their works had not been published. Consider, for instance, Lucy Prince’s poetry. See Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Mr. and Mrs. Prince: How an Extraordinary Eighteenth-Century Family Moved Out of Slavery and into Legend* (New York: Amistad, 2008).

This chapter examines how free and enslaved blacks translated their spiritual ideals into widespread visible action between 1770 and 1787. I argue that Gronniosaw, Wheatley, and many other black figures were inspired by evangelical pietism's emphasis on the practical application of Christian principles to social problems, which suggested a shared vision of both a sacred and just society. Scholars have noted that black writers during the eighteenth century employed Christianity for collective resistance.⁵ Cedrick May remarks that "Blacks' writings and speeches constituted a significant part of mainstream culture and played an important role in changing the religious and political ideals and practices of the time."⁶ I concur with this statement but assert that the significance of these works depends not so much on their use of Christian rhetoric, unsurprising in an era characterized by evangelical activity, as in their appreciation for the radical implications of pietistic tenets. Like Capitein, this next generation of literate black believers recognized a divine imperative for their actions. They understood clerical exhortations about spiritual equality, revolutionary rhetoric about natural rights and liberty, and the American fight for independence as part of God's greater plan to redeem the world. Blacks' autobiographies, legislative petitions, and antislavery essays testify to the inspiration they gleaned from sacred, philosophical, and political ideals in their quest to end oppression. They rejected racial stereotyping and transcended national boundaries created by war to further the belief that Christian liberty encompassed more than spiritual freedom.

James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's actions after reaching England illustrate how pietistic beliefs influenced his decisions. Although defrauded upon his arrival, Gronniosaw

⁵ Cedrick May, *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1760-1835* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008); Bruce, *The Origins of African American Literature*. Joanna Brooks has written on the black print public sphere, "The Early American Public Sphere and the Emergence of a Black Print Counterpublic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (January 2005), <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/62.1/brooks.html> (accessed October 21, 2009).

⁶ May, *Evangelism and Resistance*, 12.

quelled his disappointment and determined to locate Whitefield in London.⁷ This connection opened a number of doors for the former slave. Henry Louis Gates argues that “[i]t is his ability to read and write and speak the Word of the Lord which motivates Gronniosaw’s pilgrimage to England.”⁸ True as this may be, it fails to consider how accurately Gronniosaw gauged the strength of pietistic ties that welcomed believers of any color. Gronniosaw reported that upon reaching London, “Mr. Whitefield received me very friendly” and paid for his lodgings. After a few weeks, Gronniosaw met some Dutch Calvinist ministers, Theodorus Frelinghuysen’s friends, probably the same men Frelinghuysen had written about his slave, who insisted that he visit Amsterdam to be examined by other domines there. Since Gronniosaw would have been in Amsterdam in the late 1750s or early 1760s, these Dutch clerics certainly knew about or may have even heard Capitein speak and possibly expressed interest in another converted African. They questioned Gronniosaw at length during his sojourn in Amsterdam to determine the sincerity of his confession and declared themselves “very well satisfied.”⁹ Through his pietist associates in England and in Holland, he secured gainful employment and met other acquaintances who would help him.

Gronniosaw’s extensive Whitefieldian network led directly to the writing and publication of his life story. A precise timeline for the *Narrative*’s development is impossible to trace. After Gronniosaw returned to England from Amsterdam, he was baptized by Dr. Gifford, a Baptist, then married a white widow, and held various jobs to support his growing family.¹⁰ At some point before 1772, he met the Rev. Walter Shirley, who wrote the preface to the *Narrative*.

⁷ James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars In the LIFE of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, AN AFRICAN PRINCE, As related by HIMSELF, 1772*, reprinted in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), 44, 45. Hereafter *Narrative*.

⁸ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 135.

⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 47, 48, 43.

¹⁰ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 48-51.

Shirley's cousin, Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon, had been George Whitefield's friend and patroness from the 1740s until his death in 1770. Perhaps Gronniosaw attended services at one of Lady Huntingdon's chapels, built to promote the strictly Calvinistic Methodist wing of the Anglican church.¹¹ Gronniosaw's own piety and friendship with Whitefield may have attracted him to the Huntingdon Connexion, or Whitefield might have introduced Gronniosaw to Shirley or Lady Huntingdon, either of whom could have encouraged him to tell his story publicly. Gronniosaw's tale of Calvinistic pietist conversion appealed to the Huntingdonians' desire to spread the Gospel.

Thus, Gronniosaw, who dedicated his book to the Countess, obviously knew her personally. In 1773, Phillis Wheatley, during her visit to London, wrote to Lady Huntingdon, "It gives me very great satisfaction to hear of an African so worthy to be honored with your Ladiship's approbation & Friendship as him whom you call your Brother."¹² Even though Huntingdon's letter to Wheatley is lost to us, Wheatley's statement indicates that the Countess had praised an African friend with whom she had close contact. To call Gronniosaw a brother would not be remarkable since both he and Lady Huntingdon in 1773 were over 60 years of age and shared similar religious sentiments, but it was remarkable in that Gronniosaw had been a slave and Selina Hastings harbored no antislavery feelings.¹³ For Gronniosaw, the friendship meant support for an endeavor designed to ease his family's poverty.

¹¹ Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion: A Sect in Action in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Boyd Stanley Schlenker, *Queen of the Methodists: The Countess of Huntingdon and the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Faith and Society* (Durham: Durham Academic Press, 1997).

¹² Phillis Wheatley to Countess of Huntingdon, London, July 17, 1773, in *The Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley*, ed. John C. Shields (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 168.

¹³ John R. Tyson with Boyd S. Schlenker, *In the Midst of Early Methodism: Lady Huntingdon and Her Correspondence* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2006), 16. Lady Huntingdon had inherited George Whitefield's American plantation along with its slaves and had purchased more to work on the plantation. Even after Anthony Benezet warned her against slaveholding in 1774, she saw no contradiction between it and Calvinistic Methodism, believing that "God alone" could end slavery when the time came.

Who authored Gronniosaw's text remains a mystery. Walter Shirley recorded that the narrative "was taken from his own mouth, and committed to paper by the elegant pen of a young Lady of the town of Leominster."¹⁴ Since Gronniosaw could not read English, it is certain he did not write it himself and needed an English amanuensis. Scholars identify Hannah More, a young schoolteacher from Bristol, as Gronniosaw's amanuensis due to the fact that her name appears on an 1809 Salem, New York, edition of the *Narrative*.¹⁵ No direct evidence exists linking her with either Gronniosaw or the Huntingdon Connexion. More grew up and taught school in Bristol, not Leominster, and her own evangelical conversion in the Church of England took place years after Gronniosaw's death in 1775.¹⁶ On the other hand, the Huntingdonians' activities could not have escaped More's notice, for in the late summer of 1771, the hardcore Calvinists sought to interfere with a conference held in Bristol by their Arminian nemesis, John Wesley.¹⁷ In addition, More may have been familiar with Lady Huntingdon's chapel in Bath just eleven miles from Bristol. This tentative conjecture fails to ascertain More as Gronniosaw's amanuensis, leaving us to wonder what impact the unknown lady of Leominster had on the *Narrative*. What matters more than the amanuensis's identity was Gronniosaw's public testimony as an African and as a former slave whose faith impelled him to establish important transatlantic connections. When he died in Chester, England, the local newspaper recorded, "His

¹⁴ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, 32. Whereas the 1772 London edition stated "As related by HIMSELF," the 1774 American printing by Solomon Southwick advertised it as "Written by Himself."

¹⁵ Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, 54, and Potkay and Burr, *Black Atlantic Writers*, 53.

¹⁶ Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81-83. Stott comments that little is known about More's teenage years, so it is possible she continued studying languages

¹⁷ Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion*, 243-286. The rift between John Wesley and Lady Huntingdon began in 1770 when Wesleyan Methodists issued the Minutes from their London conference, suggesting that good works were necessary to salvation, an Arminian doctrine. According to the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, justification was by faith alone and that faith was the gift of God. In other words, salvation was not earned but freely given by God to those he elected. This belief in no way led Calvinist revivalists such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, and Lady Huntingdon to conclude that Africans were not among the elect. Only God could know who numbered among the elect. At the same time, these evangelical pietists found no contradiction between preaching conversion and owning slaves.

last moments exhibited that cheerful serenity which, at such a time, is the certain effect of a thorough conviction of the great truths of Christianity.”¹⁸

Phillis Wheatley’s pietistic Calvinism, like Gronniosaw’s, motivated her to pursue the same transatlantic connections. In the fall of 1770, she sent her elegy on George Whitefield’s death to Lady Huntingdon, qualifying her “boldness” by averring, “The Tongues of the Learned are insufficient, much less the pen of an untutor’d African, to paint in lively character, the excellencies of this Citizen of Zion!”¹⁹ Her literary modesty belied her action, suggesting that Wheatley intended to attract the Countess’s attention, addressing her in the poem, “Great Countess, we Americans revere/Thy name, and mingle in thy grief sincere.”²⁰ Wheatley and her mistress, Susanna Wheatley, did not pursue publishing her poetry until early 1772. This raises the question of why Wheatley wrote to Lady Huntingdon when she did. One scholar believes that Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* influenced Wheatley’s desire for the Countess’s patronage, and that she may have met Gronniosaw on her 1773 trip to London with John Wheatley’s son Nathaniel.²¹ If we accept 1772 as the definitive date for the publication of Gronniosaw’s autobiography, then Wheatley could not have read it before she began her correspondence with Lady Huntingdon in 1770. Wheatley possibly had heard about Gronniosaw and his friendship with the Countess through the Huntingdon Connexion’s itinerant ministers who frequented John and Susanna Wheatley’s Boston home.²² They may even have encouraged her to write the memorial poem.

¹⁸ *The Chester Chronicle, or Commercial Intelligencer*, October 2, 1775.

¹⁹ Phillis Wheatley to Countess of Huntingdon, Boston, October 25, 1770, in *Collected Works*, 162.

²⁰ Phillis Wheatley, “On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield. 1770,” in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral. By Phillis Wheatley, Negro Servant to Mr. John Wheatley, of Boston, in New England* (London, 1773), in *Collected Works*, 25.

²¹ Julian D. Mason, Jr., ed., *The Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, revised and enlarged edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

²² William H. Robinson, “Phillis Wheatley in London,” *College Language Association Journal* 21 (December 1977): 187-201.

In Whitefield's spiritual egalitarianism lay another motive for Wheatley's bold move. According to the poet, Whitefield had brought the news of "That Saviour" to American shores, urging "ye Africans" to come to Jesus, because "he longs for you, / *Impartial Saviour* is his title due."²³ The Methodist evangelist had exhorted southern slaveholders in 1740 that "as for the grown Negroes, I am apt to think, whenever the Gospel is preach'd with Power among them, that many will be brought effectually home to God."²⁴ That Christ offered redemption for all sinners regardless of color appealed to both Gronniosaw and Wheatley, who embedded this colorblind salvation in their writings. The American edition of Wheatley's *Poems* notably lacked the elegy's references to Africans, including its last lines, "You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to God."²⁵ For Wheatley to dedicate a poem with such a proclamation to Lady Huntingdon underscores her confidence that it would meet with approval, hinting that she knew in advance her audience's predisposition toward African evangelicals, enslaved or free, who admired Whitefield.

Wheatley's intentionality causes some scholars to doubt the sincerity of her piety. Literary scholar Joanna Brooks argues that Wheatley "cannily manipulated transatlantic networks of white evangelicals to secure the publication of her *Poems* in 1773 and her manumission shortly thereafter."²⁶ This statement places Wheatley's actions in a cagey and calculative light, lessening the importance of her spiritual beliefs to those actions. Yet, her poems fitted with the New Light emphasis on lay exhortation, and she charted an independent path to her piety. Although John and Susanna Wheatley were longtime members in Boston's

²³ Wheatley, "Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield," *Collected Works*, 23.

²⁴ *A Letter from the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina*, printed in *New England Weekly Journal*, April 29, 1740.

²⁵ Wheatley, "Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield," *Collected Works*, 23. Shields, in *Collected Works*, suggests that Wheatley "composed alternative versions of certain poems" to avoid offending white audiences, 195.

²⁶ Brooks, "Early American Public Sphere," paragraph 2.

New South Congregational Church, Phillis Wheatley chose to join the Old South Church in 1771. The Old South Meeting House hosted a massive assembly headed by the radical patriot Samuel Adams in the aftermath of the Boston Massacre in 1770, a meeting Wheatley would have known about and might have attended.²⁷ Wheatley was baptized by Samuel Cooper from Brattle Street Church.²⁸ Cooper, who became a leading patriot preacher during the Revolution, declared the primacy of faith in God over the reason of man.²⁹ Wheatley quite possibly joined a church different from that of John and Susanna Wheatley because she found its patriotic fervor and calls for freedom more compatible with the experimental religion prescribed by Whitefield. Perhaps her desire for independence from her master also dictated her decision. In any case, she obviously declared a confession of faith suitable to a communicant in the church. Certainly, her own writings demonstrated more than a passing knowledge of Scripture and Calvinistic doctrine. Instead of “manipulative” maneuvering, Wheatley exhibited an unwavering commitment to spiritual matters.³⁰

On the other hand, as newspapers assisted in creating this young African woman’s public persona, there is no evidence that she discouraged it. The *Connecticut Courant* in January 1773 reprinted a letter and poem from “Phillis” that was submitted the previous year to the *London Magazine*. The letter described her as “a compleat temptress, an accomplished mistress of her pen, and discovers a soft surprising genius.”³¹ Just four months later, the *Connecticut Journal* and the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* both reported that Wheatley was sailing the next week for London, the *Journal* calling her “ingenious” and the *Chronicle* “extraordinary.” The *Chronicle*

²⁷ *History of the Old South Church* (Boston: Published for the Benefit of the Old South Fund, 1929).

²⁸ Mason, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 173-174.

²⁹ Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 227.

³⁰ Considering that her baptism occurred after her first contact with Lady Huntingdon, one could propose that it was calculated to reach the Countess’s ears. This may be a stretch though.

³¹ *Connecticut Courant*, January 26, 1773.

added that Wheatley was traveling “at the invitation of the Countess of Huntingdon.”³² These notices reveal how Wheatley’s connection to the Countess attracted attention; and the poet was certainly prepared to use her fame to an advantage.

Wheatley, then, may have used her reputation as an African “genius” to gain wider recognition and to achieve her emancipation. Her connection with Lady Huntingdon was also instrumental in getting her volume of poetry published in London, but it was actually Wheatley’s “genius” that won the day. That January before Wheatley sailed, Captain Calef, who would be commanding the Wheatleys’ ship, the *London*, on the May voyage, reported to Susanna Wheatley that “Mr. Bell,” the London printer, had delivered the young slave woman’s poems to the Countess, “who was greatly pleas’d with them . . . and then expressd herself, She found her heart to knit with her and Questiond him much, whether She was Real without a deception?” The meeting between Mr. Bell and Lady Huntingdon took place just weeks before Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* went on sale in Bath. Mr. Bell further related to Captain Calef that the Countess expressed a desire that Wheatley’s volume be dedicated to her, knowing that another work by an African would soon greet the public under her aegis.³³ Wheatley probably knew this as well. Once published, she received considerable attention, not only for her writing but for her African origins and her enslaved status. One London magazine reviewing her poetry remarked, “Youth, innocence, and piety, united with genius, have not yet been able to restore her to the condition and character with which she was invested by the Great Author of her being.”³⁴ Sometime at the end of 1773, John Wheatley emancipated her. This African woman’s spirituality, like

³² *Connecticut Journal*, May 7, 1773; *Pennsylvania Chronicle*, May 10-17, 1773.

³³ Susanna Wheatley to Samson Occom, Boston, March 29, 1773, Samson Occom Papers, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford. See Mason, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, for information on John Wheatley’s business and for a reprint of the letter, 6-7.

³⁴ *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, September, 1773, quoted in Robinson, “Phillis Wheatley in London,” 200. Robinson notes that there is no direct evidence that Wheatley’s British friends had any influence on her emancipation.

Gronniosaw's, delivered her from her bonds and propelled her into the public eye. Yet, her spirituality showcased her literary gifts well.

Gronniosaw and Wheatley established a black tradition for relying on transatlantic connections via networks of ideas and people tied by spiritual beliefs. During the eighteenth century, they intertwined the pietistic tenet that all sinners can receive Christ's salvation with the Enlightenment certainty that all human beings possess reasonable faculties. Drawing on these fundamental principles, they contacted people most likely to help them, either directly or indirectly, thereby participating in the common social custom of developing patronage ties which aided them in fashioning a reform agenda used by Africans and their descendants. Gronniosaw left an impressive narrative; Wheatley penned both poetry and correspondence. While an extensive scholarship exists analyzing her poetry, it is her letters that reveal how significant and widespread were the connections sustained by people of African descent.

Wheatley's correspondence first situates her within a broader "republic of letters." Throughout the Revolutionary period, despite war, men on both sides of the Atlantic remained committed to cordial mutual support of intellectual pursuits in the arts and sciences, what historian Gordon Wood calls a "fellowship of intellect." The enlightened, cosmopolitan person was, George Washington asserted, "a citizen of the great republic of humanity at large."³⁵ He or she accepted other persons into an intellectual community regardless of color or nationality, as long as that person exhibited personal qualities such as good manners, civility, and education in the liberal arts. Wheatley's written communication with people, notable and lesser known, in America and in England identified her as that "citizen" of humanity. Literary scholar Phillip M. Richards argues that Wheatley understood astutely the literature of her day and that her poetry

³⁵ Quoted in Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vantage Books, 1991), 221. According to Wood, the "fellowship of intellect" was also "commonly called the 'republic of letters,'" 221.

“articulated the political and religious discourses of the Revolution into a vital popular art.”³⁶ I contend that through her correspondence she further demonstrated herself to be cosmopolitan and immersed in the age’s discourses on religion and humanity, a fact of which she was surely aware.³⁷ Benjamin Rush, Philadelphia physician and intellectual, observed that Wheatley’s “singular genius and accomplishments are such as not only do honor to her sex, but to human nature.”³⁸ In her letters and poetry, Wheatley framed herself a humble “African,” at the same time demanding recognition for her “human nature.”

Her correspondence, secondly, hints at how her profound spirituality linked her with humanitarian reformers. In 1772, Wheatley wrote to John Thornton, a wealthy London merchant and evangelical lay preacher, that she lamented her “flinty heart” and wished her eyes and heart made “God alone their proper object.” At the time, she was confined to her bed and, in keeping with Calvinistic beliefs, perceived her illness as “paternal corrections” demanding greater devotion. Wheatley had written to Thornton earlier, perhaps initiating their correspondence, for she thanked him for “honouring me with an Answer to my letter,” and assured him that “the friends of Souls bear Some resemblance to the father of Spirits and are made partakers of his divine Nature.”³⁹ She knew Thornton either through John Wheatley’s business contacts or through Thornton’s friend, the Countess of Huntingdon.⁴⁰ Thornton, a philanthropist like the

³⁶ Phillip M. Richards, “Phillis Wheatley and Literary Americanization,” *American Quarterly* (June 1992): 163-191, quote on 164.

³⁷ John Shields, in *Collected Works*, argues that given the letters Wheatley proposed to include in a 1779 volume of her writing (which was never published), “she consciously cultivated the epistolary genre as *belles lettres*,” 158. Another former enslaved African, Briton Ignatius Sancho, wrote letters in the style of the age. See Victor C.D. Mtubani, “The Black Voice in Eighteenth-Century Britain: African Writers against Slavery and the Slave Trade,” *Phylon* 45 (2nd Qtr., 1984): 85-97.

³⁸ Benjamin Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in American, upon Slave-Keeping* (Philadelphia: Dunlap, 1773), 2.

³⁹ Phillis Wheatley to John Thornton, Boston, April 21, 1772, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 188-189.

⁴⁰ Mason, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 8, 189. According to Schlenker, in *Queen of the Methodists*, by 1785, Thornton’s ties with Lady Huntingdon had diminished, and he headed a group of Evangelicals within the Anglican church that would later develop into the Clapham sect, whose members John Newton, William Wilberforce, and Hannah More would spearhead the fight against the slave trade, 163.

Countess, took an interest in the young African woman whose piety and talent were capturing public interest, unsurprising since the Wheatleys acted as a conduit for Thornton's charity to Indian missions.⁴¹ As one of Lady Huntingdon's associates, he would have been familiar with both Gronniosaw and Wheatley, and as an evangelical, he promoted missionary programs.

Wheatley employed language familiar to proponents of Christianizing Africans and fighting slavery such as the famous reformer Anthony Benezet. Writing to Thornton after returning to Boston from her 1773 summer visit to London, Wheatley extolled the "sublime mysteries of Christ's Incarnation" and simultaneously praised "him, who is no respecter of Persons, being equally the great Maker of all: Therefor disdain not to be called the Father of Humble Africans and Indians."⁴² Although criticism against Thornton may have prompted Wheatley to respond as she did, the passage suggests a nascent antislavery position. In a postscript, she informed Thornton that she had written to Mrs. Wilberforce, whose husband some years later would lead the fight in England against the slave trade.

Wheatley's network of correspondents expanded in 1772 to include the Earl of Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the American Colonies. Dartmouth was an evangelical in the Church of England who introduced John Newton, the notorious slavetrader converted by George Whitefield, to his friend John Thornton.⁴³ Wheatley penned a letter and poem to Dartmouth at the request of Thomas Woolridge, in Boston on business for Dartmouth. Woolridge reported to Dartmouth that he "found by conversing with the African, that she was no Imposter. . . . She shewd me her Letter to Lady Huntington [sic], which, I dare say, Your Lordship has seen."⁴⁴ Dartmouth, a friend to both the Countess and Whitefield, surely was already acquainted with the

⁴¹ Mason, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 189.

⁴² Phillis Wheatley to John Thornton, Boston, December 1, 1773, in *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 200-201.

⁴³ William E. Phipps, *Amazing Grace in John Newton: Slave-Ship Captain, Hymnwriter, and Abolitionist* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 91.

⁴⁴ Thomas Woolridge to Lord Dartmouth, New York, November, 1772, in *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 149.

Huntingdon Methodists' interest in Africans. Wheatley's letter itself was polite and humble; in characteristic fashion she apologized "for this freedom from an African."⁴⁵ Yet, in the poem she dedicated to Dartmouth in honor of his colonial appointment, she embedded an explicit and personalized antislavery message: "From Native clime, when Seeming cruel fate/Me snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy Seat/Impetuous.—Ah! what bitter pangs molest/What Sorrows labour'd in the Parent breast!"⁴⁶ Whether Wheatley received any response from Dartmouth is unknown, but she met with him the following summer, recording that she "had near half an hour's conversation with his Lordship."⁴⁷

Wheatley's contact with Dartmouth places her in the midst of early antislavery agitation. Dartmouth's friend, Granville Sharp, the British solicitor and antislavery advocate, guided Wheatley on a tour of London during her 1773 visit.⁴⁸ In a January 1774 letter to Anthony Benezet, Sharp described how he pushed Dartmouth persistently to attend to colonial petitions requesting an end to the slave trade, informing the Earl of "the favourable inclination of the People at New York, and Boston for the abolishing of slavery" and complaining about the colonial governors who dragged their feet on the subject. Sharp related that after meeting with Dartmouth, "I have reason to flatter myself that L.D. detests that Traffick as much as I do, but is unwilling that my having seen him on this subject, should be known; and therefore you must not mention what I have wrote concerning him; except, indeed to Dr. Rush, or such other Friends as you can well confide in."⁴⁹ Even though Dartmouth favored Wheatley with money to buy books during her summer tour, he acted cautiously on the slave trade at a time when British/American

⁴⁵ Phillis Wheatley to Lord Dartmouth, Boston, October 10, 1772, in *Ibid.*, 192-193.

⁴⁶ Wheatley, "To the Right Honl. William Earl of Dartmouth, His Majesty's Secretary of State for North America &c. &c. &c.," in *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 150.

⁴⁷ Phillis Wheatley to Colonel David Wooster, New Haven, October 18, 1773, in *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁸ Phillis Wheatley to Col. David Wooster, Boston, October 18, 1773, in *Ibid.*, 195-198.

⁴⁹ Granville Sharp to Anthony Benezet, London, January 7, 1774, in *The Granville Sharp Papers from Gloucestershire Record Office, in Abolition and Emancipation*, Part 4, microfilm edition (Marlborough, Wiltshire, England: Adam Matthew Publications, 1997).

hostilities held his attention.⁵⁰ Sharp warned Dartmouth of “some dreadful Judgment on the whole Kingdom” for the nation’s participation in the slave trade.⁵¹ Vincent Carretta proposes that Wheatley and Gronniosaw benefited from increased antislavery sentiment after Lord Mansfield’s decision in the 1772 Somerset case, a case in which Sharp argued for Somerset’s freedom from enslavement.⁵² But it could easily be argued the other way round—that antislavery reformers benefited from meeting or reading Wheatley and Gronniosaw. Somerset, after all, did not desert his master until a year after Wheatley had written her first letter to the Countess of Huntingdon.

Wheatley also developed relationships with antislavery activists in New England. In February 1774, she wrote to the Rev. Samuel Hopkins, pastor at the First Congregational Church in Newport, Rhode Island, to voice her approval of Hopkins’ plan to send two free Africans “to their native country, to preach the Gospel.”⁵³ Wheatley, advising Hopkins that she had received the books she had purchased for him in London, may have known him through his preaching at Old South Church, or through her friend and correspondent Obour Tanner, a member of Hopkins’ Newport congregation.⁵⁴ In August 1773, Hopkins and his colleague at Newport’s Second Congregational Church, the Rev. Ezra Stiles, notified the public of their desire to train the two African men, John Quamine and Bristol Yamma, to become missionaries to Guinea.⁵⁵ In their proposal, Hopkins and Stiles declared “the iniquity of the *slave trade*; and . . . the great

⁵⁰ Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 175-177. Brown notes that Dartmouth’s Evangelicalism failed to prevent his faithfulness to his duties to the King, and his interests lay against the colonies in 1774.

⁵¹ Sharp to Benezet, 1774.

⁵² Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, 4-6. For a discussion on Granville Sharp’s role in the Somerset case, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 487.

⁵³ Phillis Wheatley to Samuel Hopkins, Boston, February 9, 1774, in *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 202.

⁵⁴ Mason, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 202.

⁵⁵ Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981), 146-149.

inhumanity and cruelty of enslaving so many thousands of our fellow men every year,” and postulated that a Christian ministry in Africa by Africans would be one step toward ending the foul business.⁵⁶ Calling the plan a “laudable design,” Wheatley viewed it as an opportunity to spread the Gospel to “my benighted Country.” She concluded with a vision of Africa as part of God’s plan, quoting the Psalmist, “Ethiopia Shall Soon Stretch forth her hands Unto God.”⁵⁷

Hopkins represented the vanguard of a theological transformation that attracted reform-minded blacks. Grounded in the experimental religion of pietism, the New Divinity movement extended Jonathan Edwards’ concept of “benevolence to Being in general” to a “disinterested benevolence” that demanded action.⁵⁸ Hopkins, unaware of the irony, applied the slaveowning Edwards’ abstract ideas in a way Edwards never intended—to solve practical social problems, particularly the evil of slavery. One historian contends that “when a distinctly evangelical anti-slavery sentiment emerged in America it came not from contact with Quakers but through an application of the theology of Jonathan Edwards.”⁵⁹ Whereas an earlier generation of evangelical ministers stressed including Africans in God’s plan of salvation without altering their enslaved condition, several New Divinity theologians adopted the position that slavery was, as Hopkins called it, “a very great and public sin.” In 1776, Hopkins published a lengthy treatise, *A Dialogue, Concerning the Slavery of the Africans*, in which he declared slaveholding “an open

⁵⁶ Ezra Stiles and Samuel Hopkins, *To the Public*, (Newport, 1776), 3.

⁵⁷ Wheatley to Hopkins, 1774, in *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 203.

⁵⁸ Kenneth P. Minkema and Harry S. Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and the Antislavery Debate, 1740-1865,” *Journal of American History* 92 (June 2005): 47-74, quotes on 48. They quote from Jonathan Edwards, *The Nature of True Virtue*, which was published posthumously in 1765 and wherein Edwards explained that true virtue lay in “benevolence to Being in general,” loving God and loving others. For an enlarged discussion on disinterested benevolence, see Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins*.

⁵⁹ Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 248.

violation of the Law of God,” illustrating how far white theological thinking had progressed since the days of Edwards and Whitefield.⁶⁰

People of African descent, like Phillis Wheatley, endorsed New Divinity theologians. In Newport, several enslaved and free blacks attended the First and Second Congregational churches. Ezra Stiles noted in his diary that he held a “religious Meet^g of the Negroes at my house.” In 1770, he recorded, “A Negro Burying, the Chh. bell toll’d (all our Bells sometimes toll for Negroes), a procession of Two Hundred Men, & one hund. & thirty Wom. Negroes.”⁶¹ How many of these hundreds, if any, were church communicants cannot be ascertained, but the ringing church bell ringing hints at some relationship between the deceased and the church. A few months later, Stiles wrote that George Whitefield preached at both his and Hopkins’ churches. In the field next to Hopkins’ church, he preached to over a thousand people, some of whom were probably Newport blacks. This affinity between Methodistic pietism and New Divinity may help explain Wheatley’s and others’ connections with Hopkins and Stiles, but I would suggest that the New Divinity’s explicitly antislavery message appealed to blacks who interpreted it as compatible with the Christianity they embraced.⁶²

For the two African Newporters whom Hopkins sought to train, John Quamine and Bristol Yamma, the New Divinity offered a chance to return to Africa. This is not to say that the men converted to Christianity only to escape bondage. Although they gained their freedom early in 1773 by purchasing a winning lottery ticket together, they had converted years before and

⁶⁰ Samuel Hopkins, *A Dialogue, Concerning the Slavery of the Africans; Shewing it to be the Duty and Interest of the American Colonies to emancipate all their African Slaves: with an Address to the Owners of such Slaves* (Norwich: Printed and sold by Judah P. Spooner, 1776), 5.

⁶¹ *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D. President of Yale College*, edited under the authority of the Corporation of Yale University by Franklin Bowditch Dexter, M.A., vol. I, January 1, 1769-March 13, 1776 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 90, 52.

⁶² According to Conforti, in *Samuel Hopkins*, the New Divinity’s emphasis on disinterested benevolence was not new. Methodists George Whitefield and John Wesley “developed notions of benevolence,” as did common sense philosopher Francis Hutcheson and the Quakers, 123. Whitefield was a slaveowner who saw no contradiction between Christianity and slavery.

joined Hopkins' church while still enslaved.⁶³ Perhaps Quamine and Yamma had even stood in the field to hear Whitefield preach that late summer in 1770. Their "natural abilities" and facility with languages impressed Hopkins. The two men agreed when the Newport theologian recommended sending them to Princeton College to study with the renowned Presbyterian John Witherspoon.⁶⁴ According to Hopkins, the men were "not only *willing*, but *very desirous* to quit all worldly prospects and risqué their lives, in attempting to open a door for the propagation of Christianity among their poor, ignorant, perishing, heathen brethren."⁶⁵ Quamine died in 1779 in action aboard a privateer during the Revolution, but Yamma continued supporting Africans' efforts to return to their homeland, becoming a leading member of Providence's African Society in 1789. He never returned to Africa.⁶⁶

Despite Hopkins' testimony concerning the Africans' respectable character, he verified Quamine's claim that his father in Annamaboe was wealthy by enlisting Philip Quaake, the African Anglican missionary at Cape Coast Castle, to conduct a background check. Quaake himself was a native of Annamaboe, sent to London by SPG missionary Thomas Thompson in 1754 for training in the ministry.⁶⁷ Hopkins and Stiles included Quaake's 1773 response in their plea for funds from the public three years later. Quaake substantiated Quamine's story and described how his mother, when she found that he was alive, did "break forth in tears of joy," and that his family happily anticipated his presence among them again.⁶⁸ Hopkins wisely

⁶³ Stiles and Hopkins, *To the Public*, 1, 2. Yamma's master demanded more than what Yamma had won to purchase his freedom, but Hopkins covered the shortfall. See Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins*, for details about the relationship between Hopkins and the two Africans.

⁶⁴ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins*, 146.

⁶⁵ Stiles and Hopkins, *To the Public*, 2.

⁶⁶ William H. Robinson, ed., *The Proceedings of The Free African Union Society and The African Benevolent Society, Newport, Rhode Island 1780-1824* (Providence: The Urban League of Rhode Island, 1976), 21-22, 60.

⁶⁷ *Classified Digest of the Records of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1892*, third edition (London: Society's Office, 1893), 254-258.

⁶⁸ Stiles and Hopkins, *To the Public*, 6.

omitted Quaque's criticism of the planned mission, instead printing the encouraging excerpt from Phillis Wheatley's letter.⁶⁹

The London merchant John Thornton, Phillis Wheatley's friend, expressed his desire to subsidize Quamine and Yamma. Thornton informed Samson Occom, the Mohegan Congregationalist minister, that he wanted to "give them some aid." Occom had written Thornton recounting a "Negro preacher," who was trying to get "his wife released" so that the couple could return to Africa. Thornton inquired "whether the person you mean is one of them," referring to Quamine and Yamma.⁷⁰ Sometime during 1774 Thornton suggested to Phillis Wheatley that she join Quamine and Yamma in their mission. Wheatley, kidnapped as a child, no longer knew the language and demurred: "[H]ow like a Barbarian Shoud I look to the Natives; I can promise that my tongue shall be quiet for a strong reason indeed being an utter stranger to the Language of Anamaboe." Thinking the project too dangerous, she wished to stay with her "British & American Friends."⁷¹

Soon after Wheatley lent her support to Samuel Hopkins for the mission project, she disclosed her antislavery position. On March 14, 1774, the *Boston Post-Boy* published an extract of a letter she sent to Samson Occom. Occom had spent several years during the 1760s in London raising funds for the Rev. Eleazer Wheelock's Indian Charity School in Lebanon, Connecticut, associating with John Thornton, George Whitefield, and Selina Hastings, the Countess of Huntingdon.⁷² Occom, friendly with the Wheatleys, may have recommended the

⁶⁹ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins*, 145-146.

⁷⁰ John Thornton to Samson Occom, Clapham, January, 1774, Samson Occom Papers, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford. It is not known which preacher was trying to free his wife.

⁷¹ Phillis Wheatley to John Thornton, Boston, October 30, 1774, in *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 211.

⁷² Mason, *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 47, 189, 203-204. For an in-depth analysis of Samson Occom, see Bernd C. Peyer, *The Tutor'd Mind: Indian Missionary-Writers in Antebellum America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997). Wheelock was an active revivalist during the Great Awakening, and according to Peyer, Occom had been converted under the ministry of James Davenport, a radical evangelical who was also Wheelock's brother-in-law, 64.

African woman to the Countess.⁷³ It is not unreasonable to suppose that Occom had even met Gronniosaw while in London from 1765 to 1768. Phillis Wheatley took advantage of both her fame and the already established reputation Occom enjoyed as a missionary to New England Indians to air her agreement with Occom's "Reasons respecting the Negroes . . . in Vindication of their natural Rights."⁷⁴ Declaring that "civil and religious Liberty" were "inseparably united," Wheatley hoped that those American colonists, "our Modern Egyptians," who cried for "Liberty" in the current conflict with Great Britain would someday realize their own hypocrisy in maintaining slavery. Wheatley corresponded with Occom less than two months after the Sons of Liberty had dumped tea in Boston Harbor, an event that made her criticism all the more salient. Wheatley deployed Enlightenment ideas about the nature of God and man with which every colonist would be familiar, arguing, "[I]n every human Breast, God has implanted a Principle, which we call Love of Freedom; it is impatient of Oppression, and pants for Deliverance."⁷⁵

Despite the political undertones in her letter, Wheatley's pronouncement derived from her understanding of the sovereignty of God. Phillip Richards contends that Wheatley adopted the voice of both revivalist and Whig patriot to create "an African-American nationalist sentiment" that supported the Revolutionary vision of "civil millennialism."⁷⁶ Yet, her letter should also be considered a jeremiad in the service of the transatlantic fight against slavery and the slave trade. Her connections with well-known antislavery advocates in America and England originated in her New Light faith. She never advocated radical measures, instead believing that God would "grant Deliverance in his own way and Time," and predicted, in almost prophetic

⁷³ For the connection between Occom and the Wheatleys, see Peyer, *Tutor'd Mind*, 330 n, 128.

⁷⁴ In an undated sermon, Occom called the slave trade "Murderous" and "Devilish," quoted in Peyer, *Tutor'd Mind*, 100.

⁷⁵ Phillis Wheatley to Samson Occom, February 11, 1774, in *Boston Post-Boy*, March 14, 1774.

⁷⁶ Richards, in "Phillis Wheatley," describes civil millennialism as "the notion that the millennium would bring about a perfect Republic," 185. Richards draws on Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, 1977), for his definition.

fashion, that “the divine Light” was already dispersing the darkness in Africa and spreading liberty.⁷⁷

Wheatley joined a black tradition begun by the African Dutch theologian Capitein but broadened it considerably. Despite recognizing that God’s mercy brought her from a “*Pagan land*” to one where she learned about a God and Savior, she found little compatibility between Christianity and slavery.⁷⁸ Unlike Capitein, she freely and explicitly proclaimed her opposition to slavery publicly. She articulated spiritual feelings similar to those experienced by earlier black Christian converts, most notably Flora in the Rev. John Cleaveland’s New-Gathered congregation, and added an imperative for action. Her pen revealed how the metaphysical could shape ideas about the nature of man and the course of a just society. More significantly, her work injected an African woman into the American debate on slavery and the merits or disabilities of Africans. Educated and talented, Wheatley proved that Africans were far from devoid of those sensibilities that characterized cultured humanity. Wheatley became central to a changing discourse among reformers on both sides of the Atlantic. Although Ukawsaw Gronniosaw published his narrative earlier, he was less well-known to the American public.⁷⁹ Wheatley offered later generations a touchstone to refute prejudice. That Thomas Jefferson disparaged her talent caused the black Presbyterian preacher, James W.C. Pennington, almost seventy years later “to regret that Mr. Jefferson has so plainly discovered to the world the adverse influence of slavery on his great mind.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Wheatley to Occom, February 11, 1774, in *Boston Post-Boy*.

⁷⁸ Phillis Wheatley, “On Being Brought from Africa to America,” in *Poems of Phillis Wheatley*, 53.

⁷⁹ I refer to him as less well-known because he did not enter discussions on African genius by either whites or blacks. Wheatley was better known for a number of reasons. She was literate. Her connection to John Wheatley, a Boston merchant known among businessmen and evangelicals at home and abroad, had opened doors to wide publication of her poetry. She corresponded with famous people in New England and London, and she engaged in the discourse of the era.

⁸⁰ James W.C. Pennington, *A Text Book of the Origin and History, &c. &c. of the Colored People* (Hartford, 1841), 52.

Wheatley was only one among many people of African descent throughout New England and the mid-Atlantic who found ways to express their ideas about the relationship between religion and freedom. Some bondspeople eschewed conservative reform in favor of radical measures and took their liberty. In Pennsylvania, for example, one enslaved man in October 1769 escaped his owner while traveling through Pennsylvania, forged a pass, and changed his name to James Pemberton, a piquant irony because James Pemberton was a well-known Philadelphia Quaker reformer and future leader of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. The “fugitive” James Pemberton was “a well set black fellow, very talkative, and pretends to be very religious.”⁸¹ In August 1772, another slave, Moses, walked away from his Philadelphia home, his owner describing him as “very religious, preaches to his colour, walks before burials, and marries; he is very artful, and pretends to be free.”⁸² For Moses the preacher, there was no pretension to freedom, and for James Pemberton, there was probably no pretension to spirituality. Other self-emancipated and free blacks sustained such a reputation for their religious behavior that it became a defining characteristic. During the Revolution, John Hill, “a Mulatto fellow...a Methodist preacher,” helped a slave from Chambersburgh, Pennsylvania, pass as a free man.⁸³ In 1783, twenty-three year old Stess, “a great Methodist, [who] will endeavour to pass for a free man” left Delaware to head for New York.⁸⁴ Whether the men’s Methodist beliefs shaped their actions we cannot know. That whites commented on their denomination suggests that they engaged in some sort of evangelical conduct that might have stressed not only spiritual equality but civil as well.

⁸¹ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, January 18, 1770. For information on James Pemberton, the Quaker abolitionist, see Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 105, and Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 124.

⁸² *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 25, 1772.

⁸³ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 6, 1778.

⁸⁴ *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 3, 1783.

Throughout the 1770s, other enslaved blacks incorporated their religious beliefs into their public protest against slavery. On January 6, 1773, a petition signed by Felix, representing “many Slaves” in Boston and Massachusetts, observed how God, “who is no respecter of Persons . . . hath lately put it into the Hearts of Multitudes on both Sides of the Water, to bear our Burthens, some of whom are Men of great Note and Influence.”⁸⁵ Published before Wheatley’s poetry collection, this document reveals that enslaved New Englanders were well aware of the antislavery currents swirling throughout the British Empire. Granville Sharp, Phillis Wheatley’s London escort that summer, had argued forcefully the year before against slavery in the Somerset case and had written antislavery tracts as early as 1771. Anthony Benezet’s fame as an indefatigable abolitionist had spread throughout the British Empire. Perhaps Felix and his fellow petitioners had even heard about Samuel Hopkins’ work among Newport’s blacks. In April 1773, other black Bostonians, believing in the “divine spirit of *freedom*,” petitioned to “leave the province” and “transport ourselves to some part of the Coast of *Africa*, where we propose a settlement.” This request appeared fourteen years before London’s Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade proposed a settlement in Sierra Leone and points to an incipient nationalism based in racial solidarity rather than any specific African ethnic affiliation. The Bostonians expressed their desire to return to any part of coastal Africa following an admission that they submitted themselves to God and expected “divine approbation” for their “lawful attempts” at emancipation.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ A Lover of Constitutional Liberty. *The Appendix: or, some Observations on the Expediency of the Petition of the Africans, living in Boston, &c. lately presented to the General Assembly of this Province. To which is annexed, The Petition referred to* (Boston: Russell, 1773), 8.

⁸⁶ Petition from Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Felix Holbrook, and Chester Joie to the Representative of the town of Thompson, April 20, 1773, Boston, in *A Documentary History of The Negro People in the United States*, vol. I, ed. Herbert Aptheker (New York: The Citadel Press, 1968), 8.

Like Phillis Wheatley, black petitioners simultaneously emphasized God's sovereignty and their own humility, drawing on two established traditions, one religious and one social. Thomas J. Davis locates Felix's rhetoric in the "religious currents that were then stirring anti-slavery sentiment."⁸⁷ While Davis classifies the petition's language as Christian, we cannot know specifically Felix's or his fellow slaves' denominational persuasion. Their assertion that they would be enslaved "so long as God in his sovereign Providence shall *suffer* us to be holden in Bondage" intimated that they subscribed to some form of Calvinism, one that George Whitefield and Lady Huntingdon would have recognized.⁸⁸ The April petitioners similarly accepted that "the wise and righteous governor of the universe, has permitted our fellow men to make us slaves."⁸⁹ But the New Divinity movement transformed Calvinism. In Hopkins' interpretation, God permitted slavery to bring about good and thereby manifest sovereignty over all matters.⁹⁰ On the other hand, the petitioners' implication that slaves depended only on God denied whites power over black lives.

Furthermore, the carefully chosen words in both these 1773 petitions accorded with deferential social relationships prevalent during the colonial era.⁹¹ In a society where economic opportunities depended upon patronage ties, it was not unusual for individuals to diminish their own worth in order to gain the attention of powerful benefactors, much as Gronniosaw and Wheatley had done. Any colonist, black or white, seeking favor from the King's representatives must display the appropriate humility. At the same time, black petitioners boldly asserted their divine right to liberty. A few years later, several Connecticut slaves affirmed in their petition for

⁸⁷ Thomas J. Davis, "Emancipation Rhetoric, Natural Rights, and Revolutionary New England: A Note on Four Black Petitions in Massachusetts, 1773-1777," *New England Quarterly* 62 (June 1989): 248-263, quote on 252.

⁸⁸ *Appendix*, 10.

⁸⁹ *Documentary History*, 8.

⁹⁰ Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins*, 61, 147.

⁹¹ According to Wood, in *Radicalism*, "Personal relationships of dependence, usually taking the form of those between patrons and clients, constituted the ligaments that held this society together and made it work," 63.

abolition “that we are endowed with the same Faculties with our masters, and there is nothing that leads us to a Belief . . . that we are any more obliged to serve them, than they us.”⁹²

Slaves’ petitions during the Revolutionary era marked the overt widespread politicization of black antislavery thought that merged the sacred and the secular, Christian and Enlightenment ideas. In October 1774, just a month after the *Newport Mercury* had advertised the American edition of Gronniosaw’s narrative, the *Providence Gazette* printed a petition addressed to “the Sons of Liberty in Connecticut.” The author, Bristol Lambee, wrote “on behalf of many others.” Lambee argued that liberty “was founded upon the law of *nature*,” and that “we, notwithstanding our present state of *slavery*, have, in common with other men, *a natural right to be free*.” More than freedom, blacks had the right to property and to sustain marriage and family ties. Lambee pointed out that slavery prevented these ties in violation of “the laws of God,” making slavery “contrary . . . to the very genius of *Christianity*.” In Lambee’s view, natural rights and the law of God were inseparable. The politically astute Lambee observed, “[W]e are informed there is no law of this colony whereby our masters can hold us in slavery . . . and that the charter of the colony puts us on a level with other men, respecting freedom.”⁹³ In fact, it was only “custom” that kept them enslaved. Acknowledging that several petitions had already met failure before Connecticut’s legislature, Lambee recognized that the men wielding power in the colony held an interested stake in slavery.⁹⁴ He and the slaves he represented rejected compensation for their services, even though it was their due for being confined contrary to the law, and asked only for their liberty and “the free use of our natural rights and privileges.”⁹⁵

⁹² Petition to the State of Connecticut, 1779, in *Documentary History*, 11.

⁹³ *The Providence Gazette, and Country Journal*, October 22, 1774.

⁹⁴ According to Arthur Zilversmit, in *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1967), abolitionist sentiment fueled by the Revolution began in Connecticut in 1776 with several abolitionist petitions coming before the assembly in 1777, 122. Lambee’s petition appeared a year and a half before the earliest petition cited by Zilversmit.

⁹⁵ *The Providence Gazette, and Country Journal*, October 22, 1774.

Several events likely motivated Lambee to write his essay. The black Bostonians' petitions and Phillis Wheatley's writings all appeared in 1773. Benjamin Rush and Granville Sharp, well-known advocates for slaves, published antislavery essays in 1773, and an edition of John Wesley's *Thoughts upon Slavery* was printed in Philadelphia in 1774. That same year, the Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia outlawed the slave trade.⁹⁶ The Congress, in fact, issued its *Declaration and Resolves* demanding colonists' right to "life, liberty and property" just eight days before the *Providence Gazette* printed the Connecticut petition.⁹⁷ The month before, Levi Hart, a Connecticut New Divinity minister, preached an antislavery sermon in Farmington, and that fall Hart prepared a treatise, "Some Thoughts on the Subject of Freeing the Negro Slaves in the Colony of Connecticut."⁹⁸ In January the following year, Samuel Hopkins wrote Hart to comment on the draft of the essay, approving his plan for ending slavery in Connecticut but suggesting that more "ought to be said" about "the injustice of keeping these slaves" altogether.⁹⁹ In 1774 when Bristol Lambee penned his petition, Connecticut had the largest black population in New England although Rhode Island's reflected a larger percentage of the population, 6.3 percent.¹⁰⁰ Rhode Island had prohibited slave importation that year, the assembly declaring that "those who are desirous of liberty themselves, should be willing to extend personal liberty to others."¹⁰¹ In addressing his petition to the "Sons of Liberty," Lambee put the burden

⁹⁶ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, enl. ed., (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 1992), 245.

⁹⁷ Continental Congress, *Declaration and Resolves*, October 14, 1774
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/resolves.asp (accessed January 5, 2010).

⁹⁸ John Saillant, ed., "'Some Thoughts on the Subject of Freeing the Negro Slaves in the Colony of Connecticut,' by Levi Hart with a response from Samuel Hopkins," *New England Quarterly* 75 (March 2002): 107-128.

⁹⁹ Samuel Hopkins to Levi Hart, Newport, January 25, 1775, MSS, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford.

¹⁰⁰ Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (1942; repr., New York: Atheneum, 1969), 74.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*, 106.

to live up to that appellation on those whom he thought must be “the most zealous assertors of the *natural* rights and liberties of mankind in general.”¹⁰²

Eight months before Lambee’s petition was printed, a writer identifying himself only as “A Son of Africa” submitted an antislavery essay to the *Massachusetts Spy* that stressed slavery’s incompatibility with Christianity. It is possible that Lambee wrote both since both texts underscore colonists’ hypocrisy and maintain that because the civil law never sanctioned slavery, it was merely a “custom.”¹⁰³ Historians have long noted how white Americans used the metaphor of slavery politically to protest their treatment by Parliament, but black protesters turned the metaphor around and invested it with a sacred meaning.¹⁰⁴ Son of Africa not only maintained, like Lambee, that slavery opposed “the laws of God,” but he avowed, “We all came from one common father, and HE by the law of nature gave every thing that was made, equally alike, to every man, richly to enjoy.”¹⁰⁵ The idea that God made all men and controlled all human agency inspired early English missionary work among slaves, inspired New Light evangelicals, and inspired Africans like Gronniosaw. Now, black writers deployed this powerful belief in the logical argument against human bondage.

Caesar Sarter, a former slave, revealed the power of injecting the vision of a sacred Africa into the growing black protest against slavery. In an essay printed in *The Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet* in August 1774, Sarter began with standard antislavery rhetorical tools, including stressing man’s natural rights, Christ’s Golden Rule, and the Scriptural injunction

¹⁰² Lambee, *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, 1774.

¹⁰³ I am inclined to believe that the same person wrote both documents, Lambee was willing to identify himself by October 1774. Particularly telling is the similar legal argument, demonstrating that no positive law endorsing slavery existed either in Great Britain or in the colonies.

¹⁰⁴ Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins*, and Peter A. Dorsey, “To ‘Corroborate Our Own Claims’: Public Positioning and the Slavery Metaphor in Revolutionary America,” *American Quarterly* 55 (September 2003): 353-386. Dorsey argues that patriots “spoke pragmatically rather than from principle,” 354. They used the metaphor to describe their own position and developed an antislavery critique to which their commitment dissolved once the Revolution ended.

¹⁰⁵ *The Massachusetts Spy Or, Thomas’s Boston Journal*, February 10, 1774.

against manstealing. Sarter then portrayed Africans as kidnapped from “a land of comparative innocence—from a land that flows, as it were, with Milk and Honey.” Creating a discourse to counter the image of Africa as a savage, barbaric land, he instead painted a picture of God’s promised land invaded by “ten fold more the children of satan,” reiterating the sentiment held by the Puritan theologian, Richard Baxter, that slavetraders were “Devils.”¹⁰⁶ By associating Africa with a holy consecrated land, a land flowing with milk and honey, Sarter imputed to Africa a sacredness lacking even in Benezet’s work.¹⁰⁷ To the proslavery assertion that slavery brought the Africans good by bringing them to America and Christianity, to which even Wheatley assented, he responded insightfully that “every man is the best judge of his own happiness.” As an African who had no fewer than “eleven relatives suffering in bondage,” Sarter rendered personal and public his demand to “let the oppressed Africans be liberated.”¹⁰⁸ He warned white Americans that if they would be like Pharaoh, then they would face a sure judgment just as Moses’ sister, Miriam, suffered for her hatred of Moses’ Ethiopian wife.¹⁰⁹

Sarter’s threat of divine punishment and Afro-centric perspective reveal something about black perceptions of the relationship between the political and the sacred. To New England blacks like Sarter, Lambee, and Son of Africa, the white Americans who flaunted their Christianity while continuing to desecrate Africa by buying and enslaving its kidnapped people assured their political and spiritual fall from grace. Historian Nathan Hatch argues that New

¹⁰⁶ Caesar Sarter, *Essay on Slavery*, August 17, 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 Publishers, 1977), 337-340, quote on 339. Richard Baxter, *Baxter’s Directions to Slave-Holder, Revived; First Printed in London, in the Year 1673* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1785), 7. It is important to note that Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, as he noted in his *Narrative*, read Baxter’s works.

¹⁰⁷ For detailed analyses on white thought about Africa and Africans, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977); Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁸ Sarter, *Essay on Slavery*, in *Am I Not a Man and a Brother*, 339.

¹⁰⁹ Moses’ sister Miriam turned leprous, Numbers 12:1, 10.

England witnessed an “intellectual shift” during the Revolutionary era that blended theology with “republican ideas.” Many clergy came to see the Revolution as a sacred battle, envisioning a “republic as Christian commonwealth” devoted to virtue and benevolence.¹¹⁰ The Founders, whatever their own personal religious convictions, believed that Christianity served to maintain civic virtue in a republic and could not be divorced from the fight for a new type of independent polity.¹¹¹ Politically savvy Africans like Sarter recognized New Englanders’ sacralization of republicanism and utilized the familiar jeremiad to criticize slavery as a violation of spiritual and political ideals. Americans who kept a free people in bonds while advocating egalitarian principles deserved divine retribution.

Soon after the Declaration of Independence was published, a black New England preacher, Lemuel Haynes, laid out his thoughts about the relationship between the divine and the political. In 1776, the presumed year that he penned his unpublished treatise, “Liberty Further Extended: Or Free thoughts on the illegality of Slavekeeping,” Haynes, born in Massachusetts, was twenty-three years old and had been a minuteman and served in the Continental Army. He did not begin studying for the Congregational ministry until 1779 and eventually became a New Divinity preacher in Vermont.¹¹² Haynes’ essay takes as its starting point the Declaration of Independence’s affirmation “that all men are created Equal” and emphasizes liberty as “an innate principle” in man that no one could “infringe upon” without meeting resistance. Man clung to his freedom naturally. For Haynes, that nature lay rooted in the divine. “Liberty is a Jewel which was handed Down to man from the cabinet of heaven, and is Coeval with his Existence,” he

¹¹⁰ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 12, 14.

¹¹¹ Wood, *Radicalism*, and Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹¹² Ruth Bogin, “‘Liberty Further Extended’: A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 40 (January 1983): 85-105.

insisted. The one who would steal that liberty usurped God's authority. Like black essayists before him, Haynes exercised Enlightenment confidence in the law of nature and perceived that law as divinely appointed.¹¹³ Haynes' biographer, John Saillant, contends that "Evangelical Calvinism sacralized the liberty Englishmen exercised in the colonial periphery. . . . In black hands, evangelical Calvinism sacralized the freedom slaves desired and propounded reforms in both individual and society."¹¹⁴ I would extend that argument and suggest that black evangelicals like Haynes always understood liberty as sacred but that conversion and Biblical study provided a language with which to articulate the concept in a way comprehensible to a white audience.¹¹⁵

Haynes framed his argument much like other white and black antislavery reformers. As at least one historian has noted, he employed the same construction of the Biblical passage from Acts 17: 24, 26 that Benezet used to prove that God made all men "of one Blood."¹¹⁶ Thus basing his case in Scripture, Haynes rejected the idea that the Bible condoned making the "Black man a Slave" and cited the Golden Rule as the divine law to which slaveholders should be held accountable. After detailing the brutality of the slave trade, he called it "repugnant to Christianity." This phrasing was similar to Benjamin Rush's in his 1773 *Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, upon Slave-Keeping*.¹¹⁷ Haynes then launched into a jeremiad much like Samuel Hopkins did in his 1776 *Dialogue*. This was a time when American victory was not a foregone conclusion, when the Patriots confronted the real possibility of execution if they lost. Quoting from New Divinity preacher Levi Hart's 1774

¹¹³ Lemuel Haynes, "Liberty Further Extended," in Bogin, 94.

¹¹⁴ John Saillant, *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The Life and Thought of Lemuel Haynes, 1753-1833* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

¹¹⁵ According to Bogin, in "Liberty Further Extended," Haynes' essay appeared to be intended for publication but was never published, 89.

¹¹⁶ Bogin, "Liberty Further Extended," 95. This passage appeared on the title page of Anthony Benezet's *A Short Account of that Part of Africa, Inhabited by the Negroes* (1762).

¹¹⁷ Rush, *Address to the Inhabitants*, 9.

Farmington sermon, Haynes remarked, “’Twas an Exelent note that I Lately read in a modern peice, and it was this. ‘O when shall America be consistantly Engaged in the Cause of Liberty!’” Haynes appealed to New Divinity thought to express his desire that pity and compassion “run free thro’ Disinterested Benevolence.”¹¹⁸ A young man when he wrote this essay, Haynes engaged the foremost antislavery thinkers of his day and joined many other black reformers in establishing a foundation for future black abolitionism.

Lemuel Haynes became an important figure to later generations of black activists. *The Colored American*, in reviewing an 1837 memoir of his life, praised him as “the only man of known African descent, who has ever succeeded in overpowering the system of American caste.” More importantly, “this he did by wisdom and piety.”¹¹⁹ His commitment to Calvinistic principles earned him a reputation as a steadfast opponent of watered-down Christianity. A minister who learned under his tutelage remembered him as “a preacher of the first order, eminent in his gifts for prayer, a good instructor.”¹²⁰ In December 1840, seven years after his death, *The Colored American* reprinted Haynes’ sermon against the doctrine of Universalism in which he proclaimed, “The devil is not dead, but still lives.”¹²¹ An often reprinted sermon, it sustained the presence of Satan in the world and proclaimed that the unregenerate would go to hell in opposition to Universalism which claimed salvation for all even without faith in Christ. Haynes was remembered primarily as a spiritual man. On his deathbed, he “exclaimed . . . Oh, what beauties have I seen! Glories of the other world! – What joys do I feel! I have seen the Savior!”¹²² Haynes’ Savior was so real to him that he had spent his life offering that Savior’s

¹¹⁸ Haynes, “Liberty Further Extended,” 96, 100, 102, 104. According to Peyer, in *The Tutor’d Mind*, Haynes may have known Samson Occom, his New Divinity contemporary.

¹¹⁹ *The Colored American*, March 11, 1837.

¹²⁰ *The Colored American*, April 8, 1837, reprinted from the *New York Observer*.

¹²¹ *The Colored American*, December 12, 1840.

¹²² *The Colored American*, April 8, 1837.

love to all people, black and white. According to one obituary, Haynes' faith permitted him to rise above the "cruel prejudice against those of his color."¹²³

In 1777, another black Congregationalist, Prince Hall, petitioned the Massachusetts General Court on behalf of "A Great Number of Blackes" to end slavery.¹²⁴ Hall, about whose origins little is known, founded the first African Masonic Lodge in Boston in 1775 and would become one of that city's most respected black leaders. Gaining his freedom in 1770, he may have served in the Revolution for the patriots and authored several other petitions to the Massachusetts General Court.¹²⁵ The 1777 petitioners admitted that they lived "in a State of slavery in the Bowels of a free & Christian Country," a statement that put the Court on notice that slavery and Christianity were irreconcilable. Hall observed that the blacks' burden of perpetual slavery existed "Among A People Profesing the mild Religion of Jesus."¹²⁶ Freemasonry emphasized brotherly love, and Hall's African Lodge was well established by the time he penned this document. It is possible that members of the General Court, like the Founders, were Masons, and Hall appealed to their sense of Christian brotherhood. Although one historian has described Freemasonry as "a surrogate religion for an Enlightenment suspicious of traditional Christianity," Hall's writings stressed its foundations in Judeo-Christian traditions.¹²⁷

A free black man who would also later become a respected activist introduced his voice to the public at large through a petition to the Massachusetts General Court. Paul Cuffe, born to

¹²³ *The Liberator*, November 9, 1833.

¹²⁴ Petition of Prince Hall and Other Blacks, January 13, 1777, in *Am I Not a Man*, 428.

¹²⁵ For detailed biographical information, see Charles H. Wesley, *Prince Hall Life and Legacy* (Washington, DC: The United Supreme Council Jurisdiction, Prince Hall Affiliation, 1977). According to Wesley, Hall may have been West Indian or may have been born in Africa, England, or America, 14. There is no documentary evidence for his birth. See also Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 202-203.

¹²⁶ Petition of Prince Hall, in *Am I Not a Man*, 428-429.

¹²⁷ Wood, *Radicalism*, 223.

an Akan father and Wampanoag mother, spent the latter part of the Revolution ferrying supplies in his own vessels to Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket Island.¹²⁸ In 1780, he and several other blacks from the Town of Dartmouth requested relief from unjust property and poll taxes. Even though the men had served in the Revolution, they were "not allowed the privilege of freemen of the State having no vote." The petition combined politics with prayer. After asking the "Honoureaable Court" to consider their plea, the petitioners began a public prayer, "[W]e humbly beg and pray thee to plead our case for us with thy people O God. . . . O God be mercyfull unto the poor."¹²⁹ Although the prayer interrupts the flow of the petition, it highlights how blacks perceived the relationship between providential sovereignty and civil proceedings. While it would not have been unusual for Paul Cuffe, as a Quaker, to invest his writing with Scriptural references, this public text testifies to the religiopolitical nature of early black activism.

The petition, therefore, needs to be considered in the context of other black writings during the Revolutionary era. These documents together represented a unified black activism. Cuffe, for instance, most certainly knew Prince Hall, who may have joined the Continental army at Dartmouth where Cuffe's petition originated. Both men probably heard about, read, or participated in the writing of other antislavery petitions, and many blacks throughout the colonies would have been familiar with Phillis Wheatley's works. Black petitioners and essayists, shrewdly assessing the political battle swirling around them, brought to the public's attention the inherent symbiosis between the republicanism articulated by the Founders and their own collective efforts to help create a just society. Rather than emphasizing a liberalism dedicated to securing individual rights, black activists grounded their arguments in a sacred interpretation of

¹²⁸ Rosalind Cobb Wiggins, ed., *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters, 1808-1817: A Black Quaker's "Voice from within the Veil,"* with an introduction by Rhett S. Jones (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1996), 45-49.

¹²⁹ Petition of Paul Cuffe and Other Blacks, February 10, 1780, in *Am I Not A Man*, 454-456.

classical republicanism that was consistent with West African cultural norms.¹³⁰ Citizens sacrificed individual interests for the public good.¹³¹

Two sermons supporting the colonists' cause, one written by a "Black Whig" and the other by "An Aethiopian," were published in Philadelphia in 1782 and 1783. Despite the writers' refusal to identify themselves, the sermons' similarities in style and phrasing speak to a single author. Both addressed the conflict between America and Great Britain and exhorted "ye sons of Columbia" to "fear not."¹³² The Black Whig called himself "a fellow citizen, though a descendant of Africa," and the Aethiopian referred to his audience as "fellow citizens."¹³³ The sermons framed the fight for independence as a cosmic battle for freedom in which God would grant the victory. Permeated by Scripture, the essays encouraged American bravery in war and contrasted the colonists' virtue with British villainy. More notably, in the 1782 sermon the writer asked that his "virtuous fellow citizens," after gaining their independence, would "also emancipate those who have been all their life time subject to bondage."¹³⁴ The 1783 sermon writer advocated the gradual abolition of slavery and "making the Aethiopian race comfortable among us" as appropriate responses to achieving political independence.¹³⁵

Who was this early abolitionist sermonizer? His erudition and use of Scripture suggest that he was a minister or had aspirations in that direction. He may have lived in Philadelphia

¹³⁰ Literary scholar Joanna Brooks, in "Early American Public Sphere," argues that black writers such as Wheatley and Hall created a black "counterpublic" originating in West African voluntary associations. They "entered the public sphere, not with the negative identity of the disinterested individual citizen, but through positive collective incorporation," paragraph 6. Brooks draws on Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). Brooks contends that her model offers an alternative explanation to others "too reliant on liberal philosophical paradigms," paragraph 23. While I agree with this, I contend that classical republicanism that stresses the public good does fit with West African concepts about the importance of community.

¹³¹ Wood, *Radicalism*, 104-105.

¹³² *A Sermon, on the Present Situation of the Affairs of America and Great-Britain. Written by a Black.* (Philadelphia: Bradford & Hall, 1782), 11; *A Sermon on the Evacuation of Charlestown. By an Aethiopian.* (Philadelphia: Woodhouse, 1783), 10.

¹³³ A Black, *Sermon*, 10; Aethiopian, *Sermon*, 9.

¹³⁴ A Black, *Sermon*, 9.

¹³⁵ Aethiopian, *Sermon*, 10.

and/or had respected friends there. According to the author, he never intended the 1782 essay for public consumption, and it was “printed at the Request of several Persons of distinguished Characters.”¹³⁶ In both sermons, the writer expressed a deep affection for South Carolina and great concern for “virtuous” and “beloved Carolinians.”¹³⁷ Although Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, both educated, pious men, lived in Philadelphia at this time, they had little or no connections to South Carolina that are known. Yet, this Aethiopian dedicated his second sermon to Thomas Heyward, a patriot judge in South Carolina and signer of the Declaration of Independence.¹³⁸ Heyward trained in law at Middle Temple Inn of Court in London along with several other Revolutionaries, many of whom hailed from Philadelphia.¹³⁹ Heyward found himself in Philadelphia after spending time as a prisoner of war in St. Augustine, Florida, following General Clinton’s siege of Charleston, and may have been there at the same time as the black writer.¹⁴⁰ Or, perhaps, the writer knew Heyward from South Carolina. The Aethiopian thanked Heyward for “private favours conferred upon me, when I was a sojourner in a strange land,” suggesting that the black essayist may have traveled through Heyward’s state and received some kindness from him.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ A Black, *Sermon*. The Pennsylvania legislature had passed the new nation’s first gradual abolition act in 1780, something of which this black South Carolinian was aware given his calls for gradual emancipation. The law freed no slaves automatically and required children born to slaves after enactment to serve indentures until maturity. See Nash, *Forging Freedom*; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*; and Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation*. By 1780, Philadelphia’s slave population had declined by almost a third in the previous thirteen years, *Freedom by Degrees*, 18.

¹³⁷ A Black, *Sermon*, 10; Aethiopian, *Sermon*, 13.

¹³⁸ Aethiopian, *Sermon*.

¹³⁹ His Honour Eric Stockdale and Justice Randy J. Holland, *Middle Temple Lawyers and the American Revolution* (Eagan, MN: Thomson West, 2007).

¹⁴⁰ For information on Thomas Heyward, Jr., see <http://www.thomasheywardjr.com>.

¹⁴¹ Aethiopian, *Sermon*, 4.

There was one well-known free black who might have written these sermons.¹⁴² John Marrant was born free in 1755 in New York but raised in Georgia and South Carolina. Like the author of the 1782 sermon, Marrant identified himself as “A Black” in the fourth edition of his 1785 autobiography, *A Narrative of the Lord’s wonderful Dealings with John Marrant*.¹⁴³ A Calvinistic Methodist, Marrant preached throughout South Carolina for several years after his 1769 evangelical conversion under George Whitefield.¹⁴⁴ It was there that the British Navy impressed him into service on the man-of-war sloop, *HMS Scorpion*, which arrived in Charleston in June 1775. The *Scorpion* spent the next five and a half years patrolling the Eastern coast from the Carolinas to Connecticut. When Sir Henry Clinton rode into Charleston in May 1780, Marrant may have played French horn or fiddle with the British military band.¹⁴⁵ Marrant commented in his *Narrative* that he had suffered through the siege of Charleston and “passed through many dangers.”¹⁴⁶ Whether the sloop visited Philadelphia is unknown. By July 1780, it was assisting in action against patriots at New Haven, Connecticut.¹⁴⁷ In December, New York

¹⁴² There were educated black ministers in South Carolina such as George Liele and David George who could have written the sermons. Liele evacuated to Jamaica and George to Nova Scotia, and there is no evidence linking them either to Philadelphia or to the patriots’ cause. For information on Liele and George, see Margaret Washington Creel, “A Peculiar People”: *Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), and Carretta, *Unchained Voices*.

¹⁴³ *A Narrative of the Lord’s wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, A Black, (Now going to Preach the Gospel in Nova-Scotia) Born in New-York, in North America; Taken down from his own Relation, Arranged, Corrected, and Published By the Rev. Mr. Aldridge. The Fourth Edition, Enlarged by Mr. Marrant, and Printed (with Permission) for his Sole Benefit, with notes explanatory* (London: R. Hawes, 1785), in “Face Zion Forward”: *First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798*, eds. Joanna Brooks and John Saillant (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002). Hereafter *Narrative*. Brooks and Saillant note that this edition contains accounts of slaveowner brutality in South Carolina

¹⁴⁴ Marrant’s conversion experience is well-documented. See Peter H. Wood, “‘Jesus Christ Has Got Thee at Last’: Afro-American Conversion as a Forgotten Chapter in Eighteenth-Century Southern Intellectual History,” *The Bulletin of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and Religion* 3 (November 1979): 1-7; and Creel, “A Peculiar People.”

¹⁴⁵ Simon Schama, *Rough Crossing: Britain, the Slaves, and the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 104.

¹⁴⁶ Marrant, *Narrative*, 72.

¹⁴⁷ *The Providence Gazette*, January 22, 1780.

City's *Royal Gazette* advertised the ship's hull for sale.¹⁴⁸ By August 1781, Marrant was on board the HMS *Princess Amelia* in the North Sea, and, in 1782, he was discharged at Plymouth, England. If Marrant penned the sermons, he could have written the first in Philadelphia before leaving for the open seas, and the second in London after the British evacuated Charleston in December, 1782. Wherever he wrote them, he could have given or sent them to a friend in Philadelphia.

A Marrant authorship raises the possibility that Marrant was a Whig.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps the violence he witnessed at Charleston and during his tenure with the British navy encouraged him to reject British loyalty; or he may have supported the patriot cause due to its rhetoric of liberty. That Marrant's *Narrative* and the sermons in question differ considerably in style and content, despite their shared commitment to Christianity, can be explained by their disparate purposes. The sermons, for example, addressed fellow Carolinians suffering British depredations. Marrant's own family and the slaves among whom he had preached resided in South Carolina at the time, and some fled to Nova Scotia, often via New York, after the British left in December 1782. In his 1785 *Narrative*, Marrant exhibited no patriotic fervor, unsurprising given that William Aldridge, a Huntingdonian preacher, composed it from notes taken at Marrant's ordination at Lady Huntingdon's Bath chapel in May of that year. Aldridge admitted that he could not preserve Marrant's "language."¹⁵⁰ At an English Methodist ordination after the American Revolution, Marrant was unlikely to say anything about his political leanings. The *Narrative* served primarily to demonstrate God's providence and thereby convert readers. The

¹⁴⁸ *Royal Gazette*, December 9, 1780.

¹⁴⁹ That the sermons were explicitly patriotic militates against a black Loyalist such as Boston King authoring the sermons. For details on black Loyalists, see Ellen Gibson Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1976).

¹⁵⁰ Brooks and Saillant, eds., "Face Zion Forward," 49. For information on Aldridge, see Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion*.

little mention Marrant made to the war briefly filled the gap between his impressment and his ordination, with the majority of the text devoted to spiritual concerns, Marrant's own and those of the people he met.

Whether Marrant wrote the patriotic sermons or not, he began cultivating his reputation as a preacher soon after his conversion in 1769. His talents must have secured him respectable benefactors quickly after reaching London in 1782 because within three years he received his ordination under Lady Huntingdon's patronage. He commented in his *Narrative* that during this time in London, "I saw my call to the ministry fuller and clearer," and grasped every opportunity to "exercise my gifts."¹⁵¹ A report from London in October 1784, circulated throughout American newspapers the following December and January about a black preacher. "There is an African black now in town studying divinity, under some of the first preachers among the Methodists," the account recorded. Described as "sensible, chatty, well-behaved," the African's style was "quite parsonic," and he wore "a sort of second mourning, dark grey and black buttons, with a black waistcoat, breeches and stockings, with silver buckles in his shoes, a smart cane in his hand, and a round hat turned up on the side like a clergyman's." He frequented "coffee-houses" and was "well-known in several parts of the town," going by the name of the "Black Parson."¹⁵² While the correspondent failed to name the preacher, it was more than likely Marrant, who possessed a flair for performance.¹⁵³

Marrant's profound sense that God was leading him propelled him into the limelight and into the mission field. He expressed a "concern for the salvation of my countrymen," particularly for his family. After writing to his brother living in Nova Scotia, Marrant received a

¹⁵¹ Marrant, *Narrative*, 73.

¹⁵² *Connecticut Journal*, January 26, 1785.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "John Marrant Blows the French Horn: Print, Performance, and the Making of Publics in Early American Literature," unpublished.

response that the people there needed ministers. Lady Huntingdon took this as a sign from Providence that Marrant should go.¹⁵⁴ The journalist covering the Black Parson reported that he was “intended to go over and preach among the negroes in America, as a means of assisting the Quakers benevolent schemes, who have of late set up schools.”¹⁵⁵ While Marrant would preach to mixed audiences and was not headed for Philadelphia where the Quakers had set up schools, he did intend to go to America. Just three months after ordination, a day on which he felt the Spirit of God upon him, Marrant sailed for Nova Scotia.

In 1790, Marrant published in London a *Journal* of his ministerial activities between August 1785 and March 1790. Unlike his *Narrative*, Marrant wrote the *Journal* himself. Seeking to lay to rest rumors that he had misappropriated funds received from the Huntingdon Connexion, he explained that the “greater part” of his funds originated with “the Tabernacle People,” referring to George Whitefield’s churches.¹⁵⁶ The two groups cooperated up to a point but by the 1780s had become fairly competitive.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Marrant provided close accounting of his expenditures, and despite requesting assistance from Lady Huntingdon who had promised her aid, he received nothing. He observed, “I was soon reduced so low that I was obliged to pawn my jacket off my body” and asserted confidently that “there is not a Preacher belonging to the Connection could have suffered more than I have for the Connection, and the glory of God, and for the good of precious souls.”¹⁵⁸

Whereas the *Narrative* focused on Marrant’s conversion and preaching experience in South Carolina, the *Journal* highlighted his commitment to Calvinistic Methodism and the

¹⁵⁴ Marrant, *Narrative*, 73.

¹⁵⁵ *Connecticut Journal*, January 26, 1785.

¹⁵⁶ *A Journal of John Marrant, From August the 18th, 1875, to The 16th of March, 1790* (London: Printed for the Author, 1790), in “Face Zion Forward,” 94. Hereafter *Journal*.

¹⁵⁷ Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion*, 287-290, 329.

¹⁵⁸ Marrant, *Journal*, 95.

conversion of souls in Nova Scotia.¹⁵⁹ Despite his dispute with the Huntingdon Connexion, he rejected Wesleyan Arminianism out of hand and clung to the more conservative theological doctrine propounded by Whitefield, under whose ministry Marrant converted. The mutual antagonism between the Huntingdonians and the Wesleyans revolved around the issue of predestination versus perfectionism with the Calvinists insisting that God elected who would be saved, good works availing nothing to achieve salvation. Wesleyan Arminians, on the other hand, taught that God imbued all people with a prevenient grace which enabled them to choose salvation of their own free will and to work for perfection or freedom from sin in this life.¹⁶⁰ When Marrant arrived in Halifax, he attracted large crowds of “both . . . black and white,” and his staunch Calvinism created dissension in Birchtown and Shelburne. In Birchtown in December 1785, he found that a man from Halifax had written a letter “informing them that I was not an Arminian, and did not come from Mr. Westley.” The people had been told that he “preached, there was no repentance this side the grave, and thus inflamed the minds of the people.” According to Marrant, “God over-ruled all things for his glory,” and he was allowed “to preach in the Arminian meeting” to a vast crowd. A true pietistic evangelist, Marrant reported “groans and sighings” as “white and black, and Indians” cried out.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ For a detailed analysis of Marrant’s theology, see Brooks and Saillant, eds., “*Face Zion Forward*.” Brooks and Saillant contend that, through the Scripture verses he preached, the Marrant encoded a “hidden transcript” in which he transmitted a redemptionist message to black Loyalist Nova Scotians as a “covenanted community,” 24. It is significant, however, that Marrant preached to blacks, whites, and Indians. It is also important to consider the immediate context in which Marrant wrote. For instance, Brooks and Saillant refer to the same passage I employ later in this paragraph, “God over-ruled all things for his glory,” to support their argument, 25. Marrant, however, wrote this in the context of the Arminian controversy, 104. On hidden transcripts, see James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

¹⁶⁰ Noll, *America’s God*. Noll writes that “Wesleyan Arminianism also included a belief in Christian perfection, or that it was possible for believers to be liberated from all known sin,” 563. The split between the Huntingdonians and Wesleyans began in 1770 when the Minutes of the Wesleyan Methodists’ 27th conference detailed Wesley’s doctrinal beliefs more explicitly, angering the Calvinists. See Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion*, 256-286.

¹⁶¹ Marrant, *Journal*, 102, 104. For detailed analysis of religious life in Nova Scotia for black loyalists, see Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*.

Marrant's Calvinism courted opposition from the Wesleyan Methodist itinerant Freeborn Garrettson and the blind black Arminian preacher Moses Wilkinson.¹⁶² Marrant's and Garrettson's journals provide differing accounts of what took place in Nova Scotia in 1786. In April, just months after Marrant's arrival, he recorded the "great out-pouring of God's spirit" in Birchtown. The "Arminian," either Garrettson or Wilkinson, had told the people that Marrant would not return to them, "endeavouring to draw them away," and their enthusiasm upon seeing Marrant again led them to carry him from the pulpit. Those who had joined the "Arminians" for a time turned back to Marrant.¹⁶³ Garrettson reported news about Marrant's spring visit to Shelburne, calling him "an amazing bad" man who had "much deceived" Lady Huntingdon," for Garrettson found only half as many people in his church as when he had left. Even while Marrant was still in Birchtown, Garrettson wrote John Wesley on April 25 that "I believe that Satan sent him."¹⁶⁴ In June, Marrant discovered that Moses Wilkinson would not permit him to preach in the public meeting house in Birchtown, but Marrant, with the backing of the multitude, gained entry to the place and preached that the kingdom of God would spread like leaven.¹⁶⁵

Garrettson failed to record his meeting and reconciliation with Marrant in July, an event Marrant detailed in triumph. Visiting Birchtown again the fourth of July 1786, Marrant discovered that Garrettson be preaching in the evening the next day. Marrant, whom Garrettson had never before seen, slipped into the crowd that went to hear him. He himself heard Garrettson call him "a devil." One of the elders complained about this abuse of Marrant from the pulpit, declaring that Marrant had converted souls and, therefore, could not be the devil. As the elders finally quieted, Garrettson finished his sermon and encouraged the congregation to join

¹⁶² For details on Moses Wilkinson, see Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*.

¹⁶³ Marrant, *Journal*, 121.

¹⁶⁴ In *American Methodist Pioneer: The Life and Journals of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, 1752-1827*, ed. Robert Drew Simpson (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1984), 128, 246.

¹⁶⁵ Marrant, *Journal*, 124.

Wesleyan society, but all except fourteen walked out at Marrant's cue. Once outside, when the people discovered that Marrant remained behind the door to the pulpit where he had spent the service, they returned. Marrant then revealed himself, asking Garrettson to leave the pulpit, which he did only under threat of force. The next day, Garrettson again preached to the people and "begged that the congregation would forgive him for wounding their precious souls." Marrant grasped his hand when he descended from the pulpit, and the two men wept and walked together. Garrettson admitted "believing what was told him, without examining into the matter and knowing the certainty of it." After praying together, they parted in peace.¹⁶⁶ It is not surprising that Garrettson declined to record the incident. Neither is it surprising that Marrant did, given his desire to justify his mission work as a Calvinistic Methodist and successful minister of the Gospel.

In both his *Journal* and the fourth edition of his *Narrative*, Marrant emphasized an all-inclusive spiritual equality. He preached to whites, blacks, and Native Americans during his time in Nova Scotia. After his conversion in South Carolina, the freeborn Marrant had spent several years ministering to slaves. Although he made little mention of his own color or ethnicity and never called for an end to slavery, his published works implied that slavery and racial discrimination were antithetical to Christianity. In the edition of the *Narrative* that he authorized, he added details about the brutality of some Carolina planters.¹⁶⁷ One slaveowner complained that Marrant "had spoiled all his Negroes" and feared that the black preacher would "make them so wise that he should not be able to keep them in subjection." Marrant "asked him whether he thought they had Souls to be saved?"¹⁶⁸ Marrant was not unaware of how the Gospel

¹⁶⁶ Marrant, *Journal*, 125-128.

¹⁶⁷ Brooks and Saillant, eds., "*Face Zion Forward*," 19.

¹⁶⁸ Marrant, *Narrative*, 69.

he preached might be interpreted by those in bonds. When he later heard that the slaves continued to meet during the night hours in the woods, he perceived it as a work of God.

The answer to why Marrant failed to include an abolitionist message in the *Narrative* and *Journal* lies again in their origins. He did not write the autobiography, and the Huntingdonians supported its publication as a tale of conversion to encourage others. The *Journal* Marrant published himself as a defense against accusations that he had defrauded Lady Huntingdon. His benefactors and associates, like those of Capitein and Gronniosaw, were not necessarily friendly to antislavery sentiment, ensuring that, whatever he believed himself, any pronouncements published under his own name would be socially conservative. Still, Marrant's consciousness in creating a public self and using the public space to pursue his agenda reveals the transition taking place in black public discourse

Conclusion

Between 1770 and 1787, people of African descent, emboldened by Calvinistic pietism's emphasis on spiritual equality and practical action, exposed to white Americans their transgressions against Africans. New Light and New Divinity theology supported what blacks already knew—slavery was inconsistent with Christianity. Gronniosaw, Wheatley, and Marrant used their ties to pietists, their own constructions of faith, and their talents and astuteness to establish a foundation for international cooperation and to broadcast their message widely. Ordinary blacks added their voices to the insistent plea that all Americans live by Christian principles and liberty. They joined others such as Prince Hall and Paul Cuffe who eschewed denominational affiliations to espouse a belief in a sovereign divinity that governed their reform endeavors. Certainly Revolutionary rhetoric encouraged confidence in the Enlightenment concept of natural rights; yet black activists couched this ideology in sacred terms consistent

with their African heritage.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, people of African descent recognized the contradictions inherent in Christian republicanism. Numinous visions of a transformed world compelled black Americans to enter into spiritual, social, and political battle.

¹⁶⁹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (1935; Hamden, CT: The Shoe String Press, 1956). According to Niebuhr, "In America as in England the Christian enlightenment stood beside the rational enlightenment in the battle for democracy, and it furnished ten soldiers to the cause where the latter furnished one," 124.

Chapter 3

“Laboring together in the same vineyard”:

Black Networking in the Cause of Freedom, 1787-1800

A little over three years after preaching his first sermon in Nova Scotia, John Marrant sailed for Boston. Arriving there in February 1789, he met the black Congregationalist activist and African Masonic Lodge founder, Prince Hall, with whom he resided.¹ Later that year, as Marrant continued preaching weekly in Boston, Hall received correspondence from Newport’s Free African Union Society about its members’ desire to return to Africa. The Newporters sent their news by way of Henry Stewart, a representative from Philadelphia’s Free African Society. These numerous interactions reflected a conviction among early black reformers in New England and the mid-Atlantic that collective action was imperative to effect positive change in black Americans’ living conditions. Reformers continued and expanded the tradition begun by Ukawsaw Gronniosaw and Phillis Wheatley by establishing a transatlantic network of black and white activists committed to ending slavery and prejudice. Their widespread associational connections, when considered together, reveal a compelling portrait of early black activism.

This chapter examines the relationship between black reformers’ spiritual beliefs and the cooperative strategies they developed in their struggle against oppression. Between 1787 and 1800, as northern states in the young republic moved to abolish slavery primarily through gradual legislation, black activists, many newly emancipated, intensified their efforts to promote the Gospel and ameliorate the desperation in their communities. They founded independent churches and mutual aid organizations, acknowledging God as their sole source of power,

¹ See *A Journal of John Marrant, From August the 18th, 1775, to The 16th of March, 1790* (London: Printed for the Author, 1790), in *“Face Zion Forward”: First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798*, eds. Joanna Brooks and John Saillant (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 149, 156. Hereafter *Journal*. Marrant states that he divided his time between the houses of Prince Hall and Samuel Beans, later noting that he resided with Hall while in Boston.

strengthening their corporate African identity, and including Africa in God's plan of redemption. Although many religiously oriented free blacks espoused a variety of doctrinal views, they shared an ideal centered on the sovereignty and grace of God. Like the pietists of an earlier generation, they put their faith into practice to wage a battle for nothing less than a new world. I argue that, during this early national era, black activists' grounding in Protestant evangelicalism and African spirituality and social customs guided their alliances and their agitation for emancipation.² Free black networking activities in the cause of freedom represented the continued shift toward a progressive reform agenda.³

In 1787, several milestones occurred in black activism that reflected a range of goals and interests. Although people of African descent on both sides of the Atlantic had publicly criticized slavery and discrimination for several years, they now began mobilizing more formally. The year marked the official founding of Philadelphia's Free African Society, for instance. Prince Hall petitioned the Massachusetts General Court on behalf of Africans desiring to return to their homeland, and he finally received from London the official charter for the African Masonic lodge. It was the first year for which correspondence exists for Newport's Free African Union Society. In New York City, the slave poet Jupiter Hammon published an address

² In the January 2007 issue of *The William and Mary Quarterly*, several historians participated in a forum, "Black Founders in the New Republic." They emphasized how black American reformers in the first years of the Republic pursued racial uplift and engaged in "oppositional discourse" about "American republicanism, Christianity, and commerce." See Manisha Sinha, "To 'cast just obliquy' on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 149-160, quote on 155. I find that this approach stresses black activism as reactive, diminishing its proactive nature. A more productive method for analyzing black criticism of the nation's refusal to end slavery would be to consider how black activists reframed positive American ideals to push their agenda for social change. In addition, Richard S. Newman, Roy E. Finkenbine, and Douglass Mooney argue that black interest in settling Africa, particularly that expressed by black Philadelphians, "testifies to their emerging consciousness of transatlantic reform movements." See their essay, "Philadelphia Emigrationist Petition, circa 1792: An Introduction," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 161-166, quote on 163. The evidence demonstrates that black consciousness of transatlantic reform efforts was well-developed by the 1770s.

³ For an analysis of black Christianity and abolitionism, see Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, third edition, revised and enlarged (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998). Wilmore believes that black preachers and churches shifted their reform efforts from racial elevation to abolition around 1800. I would argue that this shift took place much earlier.

he gave before the city's African Society. Across the Atlantic, a member of London's Sons of Africa, Ottobah Cugoano, submitted to the Prince of Wales a lengthy treatise recounting the evils of slavery. That these events took place when they did was neither sudden nor coincidental. Instead, they signified a growing consciousness among blacks of the many reform strategies available to them at a time when major social and political change appeared within reach.

In Philadelphia, the confidence that promoting Christian principles could improve black lives motivated two former slaves, Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, to form the Free African Society (FAS) on May 17, 1787.⁴ Jones, who would later become an ordained Episcopal priest, and Allen, a Methodist preacher who founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in 1816, began circulating their idea for the Society as early as 1778 while Jones was still enslaved. The preamble to the FAS stated that they, "from a love to the people of their complexion whom they beheld with sorrow, because of their irreligious and uncivilized state, often communed together . . . in order to form some kind of religious society." Due to the lack of religious or denominational unity among black Philadelphians, several years passed before Allen and Jones agreed to establish the society "without regard to religious tenets." The FAS emphasized piety, sober living, education, and service to the sick and needy, virtues that Jones wished all members would seek to emulate. It was clear from the beginning that Allen and Jones envisioned an organization that would address the needs of everyone in the black community. Ironically, Allen split from the group at the end of 1788 because it demonstrated a predilection toward Quakerism when the society decided to begin its meetings with fifteen minutes of silence, in opposition to

⁴ For detailed information about Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, see Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Carol V.R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Rise of Independent Black Churches, 1740-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

the “large number of the members . . . in favor of an unconstrained outburst of the feelings in religious worship.”⁵ Differences in worship style would lead eventually to the creation of Philadelphia’s first two independent black churches, one led by Jones and one led by Allen.⁶

Perhaps not coincidentally, the Free African Society met for the first time one week before the United States Constitutional Convention gathered in Philadelphia. Many of the Founders, including Benjamin Rush, a benefactor to black Philadelphians, advocated a government grounded in benevolence and encouraged voluntary reform associations in the enlightened belief that man could change for the better, a theme the FAS had already adopted.⁷ The Society’s own focus on communal good preceded the writing of the Constitution and reflected Christian, African, and republican ideals. Its members, many of whom would have either remembered Africa or experienced a West African upbringing, subscribed to social and religious customs that stressed the individual’s responsibility to the community, including working hard, taking care of one’s family and household, and exercising fairness in relationships with others.⁸ Not too long after the African Society formed, its membership agreed to “disown”

⁵ Rev. Wm. Douglass, ed., *Annals of the First African Church, in the United States of America, now styled The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: King & Baird, printers, 1862), 15, 22. Hereafter *Annals*. See George, *Segregated Sabbaths*, for a detailed analysis of Allen’s departure from the society, 56-61.

⁶ According to Wilmore, in *Black Religion*, “The historic decision of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones to transcend white denominationalism by organizing a nonsectarian society that could solidify the community for morality and mutual welfare led directly to the founding of the first black churches in the North,” 271.

⁷ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 192. See also Wood’s discussion on Rush’s ideas about social reform in *The American Revolution: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 122, and Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 64-65. According to Noll, many intellectuals in the early Republic blended Protestant Christianity and Enlightenment ideas about man in order “to bring social order out of the rootlessness and confusion of the new nation,” 113. In early June, the newly reconstituted Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery issued its constitution, a document that its president, Benjamin Franklin, a delegate to the Constitutional Convention, forwarded to British abolitionist Granville Sharp. For Franklin’s letter to Sharp, see Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq. composed from his own Manuscripts and other Authentic Documents in the Possession of His Family and of the African Institution* (London: Printed for Henry Colburn and Co., 1820), 251-252.

⁸ Robert L. Harris, Jr., “Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830,” *Massachusetts Review* (Autumn 1979): 603-625, specifically 612-614, and Margaret Washington Creel, “A Peculiar People”: *Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 238-240, 274-275. According to John

one Samuel S. for leaving his wife and child for another woman and “sometimes quarreling, fighting and swearing,” in violation of its rules, rules mirroring the social expectations of the post-Revolutionary polity.⁹

In Newport, Rhode Island, the members of the Free African Union Society, which began meeting in 1780, directed their attention toward emigration to Africa.¹⁰ They offered three reasons for leaving America. First, many who were African-born and still spoke their native language desired to return home. Second, they sought to establish their own autonomous community away from oppression. Finally, they hoped to help their fellow Africans by bringing the Gospel to them. The Union Society began corresponding before 1787 with William Thornton, a wealthy white Quaker planter from the Caribbean.¹¹ When Thornton arrived in Philadelphia in 1786, he began promoting African colonization but met with little encouragement from black Philadelphians.¹² In the Newporters’ earliest extant letter to Thornton, dated January 24, 1787, member Anthony Taylor lamented the lack of funds that prevented the members’ return to Africa and forced them to apply to their “Superiors . . . for their assistance.” Taylor, nevertheless, recognized a sovereign God as responsible for providing

S. Mbiti, in *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd rev. ed. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks, 1991), “the individual exists for his society,” and whatever “weakens the life of the community is held to be evil and wrong,” 176-177.

⁹ *Annals*, 21.

¹⁰ *The Proceedings of The Free African Union Society and The African Benevolent Society, Newport, Rhode Island 1780-1824*, edited with an introduction by William H. Robinson (Providence: The Urban League of Rhode Island, 1976). Hereafter *Proceedings*. For an overview of black Americans’ interest in African emigration, see James Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006).

¹¹ James Sidbury, in *Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), suggests that the Newport Free African Society became involved in the “broader currents of international antislavery” through their contact with white colonizationist William Thornton, 79. However, it is clear from the evidence that free blacks in Newport, Boston, and Philadelphia sustained their own affiliations with white abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic and were aware of antislavery reform efforts long before William Thornton arrived in Newport.

¹² For information on William Thornton, see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 101-102; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 231; Sidbury, *Becoming African in America*, 79-80.

“many friends and benefactors to assist” the Society’s efforts.¹³ For the Africans waiting to go home, the ties between the sacred and secular assistance they received were inseparable, and they framed their project as a holy mission.

Black Bostonians shared the Newporters’ views on African emigration but doubted Thornton’s sincerity and integrity. The Union Society sent a letter, delivered by Thornton, to their fellow freemen in Boston requesting their assistance with the emigration plan. Samuel Stevens, responding for his fellow black Bostonians, cautioned, “We do not approve of Mr. Thornton’s going to settle a place for us,” advising that blacks themselves go. He exhorted Newport’s blacks to “trust in a Righteous God.” Sounding like a traditional Calvinist, Stevens believed that blacks’ own sins and the sins of their fathers had caused their “Sufferings and Affliction,” and only Christ could remedy their circumstances. The Bostonians agreed to make the second Tuesday in July a “Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer” to ask for God’s blessings. Anthony Taylor and Salmar Nubia, representing the Union Society, admitted that they owed Thornton respect for his work on their behalf while asserting that they would “behave with caution, and [be] on our guard against being imposed upon in the very important affair which we have in view.” They trusted God to raise up other benefactors who could facilitate emigration to Africa.¹⁴

Besides revealing the spiritual ideals that provided a framework for cooperation among free black organizations, the Free African Union Society’s correspondence suggests a desire for independence from white control and for racial solidarity. Separated by distance and perhaps by denomination, they cohered around beliefs that privileged community, mutual support, and justice. The Bostonians concurred with the Newporters’ proposal to send “surcular Letters to our

¹³ *Proceedings*, 16, 17.

¹⁴ *Proceedings*, 18.

free Blacks to all the States,” appreciating the wisdom in gathering backing for financing and supporting the emigration project themselves.¹⁵ Two years later, in 1789, when the Newport Society opened correspondence with Philadelphia’s Free African Society, the FAS anticipated that “a lively and religious correspondence would be conducive to our religious improvement.” The Philadelphians, however, remained relatively silent on the African emigration plan, preferring to look ahead to the day when the Lord would liberate all the oppressed. Despite their diffidence on the subject, the Philadelphians concluded that those endorsing the plan, by their actions, manifested Christ’s Golden Rule. If any felt compelled by “divine injunction” to risk their lives “in order to promote piety and virtue” in Africa, then they prayed for God’s protection over them.¹⁶ In other words, they would support the Newporters’ decision even as they admitted the dangers inherent in the plan.

While these early activists maintained a healthy skepticism of white benefactors, they were aware that many worked sincerely for the cause of freedom. By 1787, Samuel Hopkins, pastor of Newport’s First Congregational Church, where several African Union Society members worshipped, had been agitating against the slave trade and slavery for over fifteen years. In London, a group of antislavery reformers, many of whom were Quakers, formed the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. British abolitionists such as Granville Sharp, a twenty-year veteran of the struggle and Phillis Wheatley’s tour guide in 1773, continued to correspond with white American reformers. Disturbed by the outcome of Philadelphia’s Constitutional Convention, Sharp wrote to Benjamin Franklin in January 1788 that he was “sincerely grieved to see the new Federal Constitution stained by the insertion of two most exceptionable clauses,” referring to the extension of the international slave trade for another

¹⁵ *Proceedings*, 17.

¹⁶ *Proceedings*, 30.

twenty years and the fugitive slave clause. Antislavery proponents such as Hopkins and John Jay, president of the New York Manumission Society, expressed to Sharp their interest in African colonization as an effective means to end the slave trade and ameliorate the condition of free blacks.¹⁷

Free black activists on both sides of the Atlantic took advantage of increasing white interest in opposing slavery and discrimination to present their own views on the subject. In London, Ottobah Cugoano, an African and associate of his more famous friend, the ex-slave autobiographer Olaudah Equiano, published a treatise in 1787, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*. Cugoano even had the temerity to submit it to King George III in “[t]he cause of justice and humanity.”¹⁸ Given the avenues through which black Americans worked, many of which led to and through Cugoano’s friend, Granville Sharp, the tract probably graced the homes of well read black reformer and may have been read aloud at gatherings, a common practice among blacks.

Cugoano, like his comrades in the United States, peppered his argument with numerous Scriptural references, deploying them as weapons against current scientific racial theories about the inferior nature of Africans.¹⁹ Applauding Enlightenment thinkers and reformers who promoted the theory of natural rights, Cugoano developed a detailed case for Africans’ spiritual and physical equality with whites. Cugoano then turned confidently and repeatedly to Christian principles that denied legitimacy to slavery. He wondered how slaveowners could “think that the

¹⁷ Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 253.

¹⁸ Ottobah Cugoano to King George III, 1788, in appendix to *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery by Ottobah Cugoano 1787*, with an introduction by Paul Edwards (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1969), xxi. For details on Olaudah Equiano and his relationship to Cugoano and Granville Sharp, see Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

¹⁹ For analyses of white ideas about Africans and Africa, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977); Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

Universal Father and Sovereign of Mankind will be well pleased with them, for the brutal transgression of his law.”²⁰

Much of what Cugoano wrote harked back to earlier tracts by Anthony Benezet, but his emphasis on his native Africa echoed the black Newporters. Kidnapped as a child from the coast of Africa in what is now Ghana, Cugoano represented the voice of experience. Like some black Americans, he looked upon Africa as a mission field and as a place awaiting the Lord’s redemptive purpose. He prophesied that God would soon visit the poor African slave and advocated the “total abolition of slavery.” Freedpeople, Cugoano proposed, should be educated and trained in Christianity so that they might return to Africa in order to educate and Christianize the people there. White Christians, for their part, ought to make it their duty to search for the family and friends of the formerly enslaved and, thus, bring honor to Great Britain. Cugoano pointed to Ukawsaw Gronniosaw and John Marrant as examples of the advantages attending Christianizing people of African descent. As for the attempt to settle a colony at Sierra Leone, a cause Granville Sharp had begun popularizing, Cugoano suspected that it was neither “prudent” nor “right” and that its proponents needed first to engage in treaty negotiations with the Africans. The Africans in Great Britain, furthermore, cast a gimlet eye upon the whole affair, particularly after hearing dismal reports about the misery suffered by colony’s early black settlers.²¹

Cugoano’s proposals sounded much like those proffered by black Bostonians in a petition to the Massachusetts General Court on January 4, 1787. Prince Hall, the Grand Master of Lodge No. 459, and seventy others, including Samuel Stevens, who had corresponded with Newport’s Free African Union Society, expressed a desire to return to their “native country” in order to escape the “very disagreeable and disadvantageous circumstances” under which they lived in

²⁰ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, 23.

²¹ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, 130, 139.

Massachusetts. Though freed either by their masters or by the state constitution, they believed they would be better off in Africa living in equality with the people there. Like Cugoano, the Bostonians recognized that preparation was essential to the mission's success and informed the Court that they could obtain land easily if they applied properly for it. The petitioners insisted that blacks be responsible for establishing the settlement themselves as the vanguard of those who would come later to create a more formal polity.²² The petition indicates a high level of planning and forethought on the part of Hall and his colleagues, many of whom were probably Masons. It is possible that the idea had been bandied about among free blacks in other northern cities. When Stevens wrote to Anthony Taylor in Newport, he commented that the Bostonians had submitted their petition, suggesting that the Newporters knew about it already. That may explain why the Free African Union Society sent William Thornton to Boston. Perhaps they hoped to combine the two projects for economic efficiency.²³

The Bostonians' project revealed their concern for spiritual unity, their commitment to African-sponsored Christian missions, and their identification with native Africans. The petitioners emphasized that emigrationists would organize churches and ordain their own religious leaders. At the time, such an idea appeared simultaneously optimistic and prescient. The first black ordained preacher in the United States, Lemuel Haynes, received his orders from the Congregational Church just two years before, long before either Absalom Jones or Richard Allen had been ordained in Philadelphia. News about Hopkins' attempts to train John Quamine and Bristol Yamma in 1773, a project supported by Phillis Wheatley, would have reached the

²² Petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, January 4, 1787, in Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 207-208. For a discussion of emancipation in Massachusetts, see Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 109-116. In 1783, chief Justice William Cushing declared the state constitution made slavery illegal.

²³ *Proceedings*, 18.

Bostonians. By 1789, Yamma was a member of the Providence African Society, a sister organization to Newport's Free African Union.²⁴ The Bostonians' nondenominationalism bespoke an understanding of Christianity as independent of factions and inclusive of all peoples everywhere.²⁵ More than this, the petitioners rejected white oversight and, like Jacobus Capitein decades before, claimed authority over a mission they believed could benefit their African brethren. Some by their own admission were from Africa. Many possessed an ingrained sense of responsibility to their larger community and embraced the Christian imperative to go into the world to share good tidings.²⁶ West African social customs stressed that individuals should put the good of the community before their own desires, and these would-be missionaries may have felt compelled to return home to Africa with a hopeful message.²⁷

The drive to Christianize Africa and the concern for the welfare of the black collective raise questions about whether New England's Africans had been acculturated to Anglo-American thought.²⁸ Capitein's biographer, David Kpobi, believes that the African Dutch theologian's complete assimilation made it difficult for him to accomplish his mission successfully.²⁹ African-born Phillis Wheatley and Ottobah Cugoana also acculturated and exhibited an intense desire to share the Gospel with Africans. We might ask whether these black authors as well as the members of many northern African societies operated under the influence of hegemonic ideology because they supported Christian proselytization. Political theorist James

²⁴ *Proceedings*, 60.

²⁵ Petition, in Kaplan and Kaplan, *Black Presence*, 208.

²⁶ John Marrant, while in Nova Scotia, often preached from the Gospel of Matthew 28:19-20, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," KJV. See Marrant, *Journal*, 105, 109, 117, 133.

²⁷ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 177.

²⁸ For an analysis of black New Englanders' resistance and accommodation to European culture, see William D. Piersen, *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 143-160.

²⁹ David Nii Anum Kpobi, *Mission in Chains: The Life, Theology and Ministry of the Ex-Slaves Jacobus E.J. Capitein (1717-1749) with a translation of his major publications* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993).

C. Scott argues that if, “in the course of active protest, subordinate groups still embrace the bulk of the dominant ideology, then we can reliably infer the effect of a hegemonic ideology.”³⁰ Does this mean that even those black activists seeking a return to Africa had been hegemonized? Historians Richard S. Newman and Roy E. Finkenbine contend that black Founders, including figures such as Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and John Marrant, “defin[ed] themselves not merely as counterhegemons but as legitimate members of the American civil realm.”³¹ I question this notion of hegemony versus counterhegemony. The idea of acculturation tells us nothing about black activists’ nuanced motivations. That the Boston petitioners, for instance, relied on stock descriptions of Africans as barbaric and ignorant reveals far more about their audience, the Massachusetts General Court, than it does about their own viewpoint. If black Founders and other activists, even the enslaved who emancipated themselves, participated in the dominant Christian and republican discourse of equality and liberty, were they counterhegemonic when they challenged that discourse’s exclusion of them? Scott notes that subordinate groups are counterhegemonic when they can imagine something else.³² If blacks blended West African notions of religion and community with the dominant discourse to create their own vision of the world, then they neither subscribed to hegemonic ideology totally nor opposed it totally. I suggest that black reformers instead offered a more inclusive program for social change, one that accommodated a number of cultural infusions and was indeed counterhegemonic.

Jupiter Hammon’s 1787 oration before New York City’s African Society suggests the subtle ways in which counterhegemony might work. His speech invites scrutiny as well because

³⁰ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 91.

³¹ Richard S. Newman and Roy E. Finkenbine, “Black Founders in the New Republic: Introduction,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 83-94, quote on 89.

³² Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 91.

he failed to call for abolition of the slave trade or slavery. Like Capitein, Hammon appeared to endorse the position of his oppressors. While he admitted the desirability of gaining liberty, Hammon, an elderly enslaved New Yorker, refused to make that his address's focal point. He preferred to warn both enslaved and free blacks against God's wrath and dwelled instead on eternal salvation. Historian Craig Steven Wilder argues that West African ideas about an afterlife informed Hammon's "spiritual optimism" and hope in future eternity.³³ This did not mean that Hammon was ignorant of larger antislavery currents swirling throughout the Atlantic world nor that he cared little about reform. He probably tread lightly because New York had not yet passed emancipation legislation. Nevertheless, he expressed the hope that "God would open" the eyes of the white Americans who had just won their liberty from Great Britain and would lead them to consider the plight of the slaves. Hammon, who may have been African-born, understood liberty within a communal framework and concluded his address by warning free blacks that bad behavior such as laziness, drunkenness, and thievery would hinder the course of freedom. Despite Wilder's contention that Hammon privileged spiritual unity over physical freedom, Hammon's cagy caution to freedpeople hints at what Scott might call a hidden transcript.³⁴ On its face, Hammon's message accorded with dominant ideas about morality and virtue. Underneath lay the belief that blacks themselves could effect emancipation.

The increase in free black engagement with the topic of slavery during 1787 represented the continuation and logical extension of reform efforts. Hammon, for example, had been publishing his religious literature periodically for years. People of African descent in the United States and Great Britain had labored under the constraints of discrimination and poverty for

³³ Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 65.

³⁴ Jupiter Hammon, *An Address to the Negroes In the State of New York*, in *America's First Negro Poet: The Complete Works of Jupiter Hammon of Long Island*, edited with an introduction by Stanley Austin Ransom, Jr. (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1970), 112-113. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 14-16.

decades, and recent emancipation acts in the northern states enabled them to decry more fully the anti-Christian injustice that oppressed them. Aware that European Enlightenment thinkers such as David Hume had declared them “naturally inferior to the whites,” black reformers maintained that God had created them equal with whites. Their confidence in their own innate equality and slavery’s injustice spurred them to bolder action. Hammon himself observed, “That liberty is a great thing we may know from our own feelings.”³⁵

Other blacks openly challenged white social superiority, civil injustice, and Christian hypocrisy. They called upon black leaders astute in catching the eye of powerful white benefactors. For example, Prince Hall, the tenacious pursuer of the African Masonic Lodge’s charter from England and filer of numerous petitions on behalf of Boston’s blacks, corresponded with Benjamin Rush and Boston’s Jeremy Belknap in 1788. Hall had petitioned the General Court yet again, this time representing free blacks, including many seamen, who feared kidnapping by slavetraders after three black Bostonians had been tricked on board a ship and sold into slavery. Appalled at such deeds, Hall proclaimed, “Blush, O Heavens, at this!”³⁶ Jeremy Belknap first wrote Rush about the kidnapping incident in early April, notifying him in August that the enslaved men had been returned to Boston. “The morning after their arrival,” Belknap wrote, Prince Hall called on him to introduce the returnees to “the gentleman that was so much your friend.” Perhaps the rescued men sought to thank Belknap himself. Certainly Hall had worked with Belknap on their behalf. In a nod to Hall’s respectability and fame, Belknap described him as “a *Primus inter pares* of the blacks in this town.”³⁷ When Rush replied, he said

³⁵ Hammon, *Address*, 112.

³⁶ *Cumberland Gazette*, April 24, 1788.

³⁷ Jeremy Belknap to Benjamin Rush, Boston, August 1788, Benjamin Rush Correspondence, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

nothing about Prince Hall but congratulated Belknap on his success, extolled “the name of Africa,” and looked forward to the day when the Gospel would reach Ethiopia.³⁸

In 1789, John Marrant stepped into this active biracial reform network when he traveled to Boston to preach to that city’s blacks and whites.³⁹ Bringing letters of recommendation with him, he tried first visiting a Mr. Watts, who was not at home, and from there made his way to the Rev. Dr. Stillman who treated him with “all that respect that becometh a Minister of the Gospel of Christ.” Samuel Stillman was pastor at Boston’s First Baptist Church and had served as a delegate just the year before at Massachusetts’ constitutional convention.⁴⁰ Possibly Marrant had acquaintances among patriotic figures who recommended him to Stillman. Stillman provided Marrant with “some refreshment” before sending him on to Mr. Samuel Beans, whose wife was a member of Stillman’s church, and Prince Hall, “one of the most respectable characters in Boston.” Marrant then split his time between the homes of these two men. His first sermon in Boston, however, he preached “at a society room of Dr. Stillman’s people,” before preaching “to a large concourse of people, at the west end of the town.” After that, he preached at least twice weekly to large crowds consisting of both blacks and whites, witnessing the conversion of

³⁸ Benjamin Rush to Jeremy Belknap, Philadelphia, August 19, 1788, in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, Vol. I: 1761-1792, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 482.

³⁹ What prompted Marrant to make the move remains a mystery. John Saillant, “‘Wipe away All Tears from Their Eyes’: John Marrant’s Theology in the Black Atlantic, 1785-1808,” *Journal of Millennial Studies* 1 (Winter 1999): 1-23, <http://www.mille.org/journal.html> (accessed October 20, 2009). Saillant suggests that Prince Hall invited Marrant to preach to the African Masonic Lodge, 9-10. There is no evidence for that. According to Marrant’s *Journal*, in 1787, while still in Nova Scotia, he had received correspondence from a Jonathan Allstyne in Boston desiring to meet Marrant in Nova Scotia upon the recommendation of a Rev. Mr. William Farmadge. It appears that Farmadge knew Marrant personally or had heard about his preaching. Whatever the case, Marrant recorded upon his arrival in Boston on February 1, 1789, “Here I was in a strange country, knowing nobody,” 148.

⁴⁰ There are numerous newspaper reports listing the Massachusetts convention delegates, i.e. *Massachusetts Centinel*, December 5, 1787. New York’s *Daily Advertiser* printed a notice about the Rev. Samuel Stillman baptizing several people at the First Baptist Church in Boston, March 28, 1786. According to the *Salem Mercury*, September 9, 1788, Stillman received an honorary doctorate at the “anniversary Commencement at the Rhode-Island College, in Providence,” and John Hancock, then governor of Massachusetts, received “the degree of Doctor of Laws” at the same time. Prince Hall had business dealings with John Hancock. For details on the relationship between Hancock and Prince Hall, see Charles H. Wesley, *Prince Hall: Life and Legacy* (Washington, DC: The United Supreme Council Jurisdiction, Prince Hall Affiliation, 1977).

many.⁴¹ Interestingly, Marrant eschewed his denominational affiliation, perhaps in favor of networking more freely with the city's black leaders.

During his year-long sojourn in Boston, Marrant sustained an itinerating evangelism that both provoked trouble in the city and gained him the respect of the black activist community. Just weeks after his arrival, he faced a mob "with swords and clubs" at the west end of town bent on his murder. Whether racial tensions had anything to do with this danger is hard to determine. Marrant escaped, and the instigators told the justice that they sought to kill Marrant because their girlfriends were "gone to meeting" rather than staying at home waiting for them.⁴² By early June, Marrant had been received into membership by the African Grand Lodge.⁴³ On June 24, 1789, Marrant, now "keeping school" in addition to his regular preaching schedule, preached a sermon at Prince Hall's request before Lodge No. 459 to celebrate the festival of St. John the Baptist. Marrant, serving as the Lodge's chaplain, recalled that he "preached to a great number of people that day," and just two days later he went into the country to preach twice a day with "people coming from every quarter with their mouths open to hear the word of God, and much of the out-pouring of God's spirit was among them."⁴⁴

Marrant infused his Lodge sermon with criticisms of slavery. Beginning his oration by declaring that he and his fellow Masons were "partakers of the divine nature," he underscored that they were "all members of the body of Christ." As he traced the history of Masonry, he took his listeners back to creation and reminded them that Eden "did as it were border upon Egypt,

⁴¹ Marrant, *Journal*, 148-149. For Chloe Beans church membership, see James Spear Loring, *First Baptist Church of Boston Records, 1665-1838*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. The marriage between Samuel Beans and Chloe Edwards took place in Boston, April 14, 1785, <http://www.ancestry.com>, Massachusetts Marriages, 1633-1850, online database (accessed March 22, 2010).

⁴² Marrant, *Journal*, 149-150.

⁴³ Harry E. Davis, "Documents Relating to Negro Masonry in America," *Journal of Negro History* 21 (October 1936): 411-432. The report of Marrant's admission into the Lodge was dated June 4, 1789. Joining him was John Bean, who may have been related to Samuel Beans with whom Marrant sometimes resided.

⁴⁴ Marrant, *Journal*, 150-151.

which is the principal part of the African Ethiopia,” making Ethiopia one of the original nations God intended to “settle in this world.” Marrant warned that God would judge any “nation or people” that dared to infringe on the rights of the people living in this region—their right to freedom, their land, and their bodies.⁴⁵ Marrant’s antislavery sentiments were clear. Early in his sermon, he declared that the “wretches . . . who despise their fellow men, as tho’ they were not of the same species with themselves” came not from God but from Adam’s fall. In other words, racial prejudice originated in sin or disobedience to God. By intimating that only the ungodly practiced discrimination, Marrant may have targeted the white members of his audience.⁴⁶ He concluded his message by exhorting his Lodge brothers specifically to brotherly love, forgiveness, and acts of benevolence, all characteristics of Freemasonry, Christianity, republicanism, and a West African ethos.⁴⁷

Marrant further emphasized his fellow black Masons’ important African heritage. He pointed out that ancient history revealed “Africans who were truly good, wise, and learned men,” such as Tertullian and Augustine and reminded his Lodge brothers that throughout history nations and people had engaged in slavery, “which is not a just cause of our being despised.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ John Marrant, *A Sermon Preached on the 24th Day of June 1789, Being the Festival of Saint John the Baptist, at the Request of the Right Worshipful the Grand Master Prince Hall, and the Rest of the Brethren of the African Lodge of the Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in Boston*, in “Face Zion Forward,” 78, 81. For the relationship between Freemasonry and Egypt, see Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987). For an analysis of John Marrant’s emphasis on Africa in this sermon, see Joanna Brooks, “Prince Hall, Freemasonry, and Genealogy,” *African American Review* 34 (Summer 2000): 197-216.

⁴⁶ Peter P. Hinks, “John Marrant and the Meaning of Early Black Freemasonry,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 105-116. According to Hinks, several white Masons, including Jeremy Belknap and William Bentley, attended the oration. Belknap, however, admitted in a letter, dated September 19, 1789, to Ebenezer Hazard that he did not hear it himself but later obtained a copy of it. According to Belknap, he had heard Marrant preach before and was unimpressed. As for the sermon, Belknap found it laughable. See Belknap Papers in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. III Fifth Series* (Boston: published by the society, 1877), 166-167.

⁴⁷ Marrant, *Sermon*, 78.

⁴⁸ Marrant, *Sermon*, 89. Marrant uses a quote from St. Gregory to prove that beautiful white boys had been bought and sold in Rome: “Gregory (sighing) said, alas! for grief, that such fair faces should be under the power of the prince of darkness, and that such bodies should have their souls void of the grace of God,” 89. John Saillant, in “Wipe away All Tears,” uses this quote to argue that Marrant was preaching that “slave-holders, who set blacks in

He encouraged their efforts to improve, their determination to reject discrimination, and their self-confidence as a people whom God had created. Historian John Saillant believes that while Marrant was in Nova Scotia he preached that blacks would return to Africa as a restored, covenanted community, and Saillant claims that Marrant's message in Boston may have been designed to reassure an audience similarly minded.⁴⁹ No evidence exists, however, that Marrant intended such a meaning. In the final analysis, Marrant, like the apostle Paul, preached only Christ crucified. Admonishing his fellow Masons "to seek what is the essence of Christ's religion," he confided that "it is from this fountain I have endeavoured to give my hearers the idea of Christianity in its spiritual dress, free from any human mixtures."⁵⁰

Marrant was certainly aware that many New Englanders' aspired to return to Africa, especially since Prince Hall, his host for a year, had authored the 1787 petition to the Massachusetts General Court. Marrant and Hall may have shared ideas about Africa. While Marrant lodged with Hall, the latter corresponded with Newport's Free African Union Society, who continued to press their case for African emigration. Hall responded to the black Newporters, "We here are not idle, but are doing what we can to promote the interest and good of our dear brethren that stand in so much need at such a time as this." Hall added that they would hear from Henry Stewart, "by word of mouth of some proposals we made to him."⁵¹

'despised' condition, were actually 'under the power of the prince of darkness,' living with 'souls void of the grace of God,'" 10. This misinterprets the passage.

⁴⁹ Saillant, "Wipe away All Tears," 9. In this text and "*Face Zion Forward*," Saillant fails to consider the immediate context for Marrant's sermons. First, Marrant preached before blacks, whites, and Indians. Second, Marrant referred to Zion in Scripture used for funeral sermons. At some funerals, for instance, Marrant preached from Revelations chapters 7 and 21 and Isaiah chapter 60, references Saillant claims as proof that Marrant preached to a black covenanted community returning to Africa. Christopher Leslie Brown relies on Marrant's essay, "Wipe away All Tears," to support his statement, "The free black preacher John Marrant told his Nova Scotia congregation in the late 1780s that on the coast of Africa they could establish a Christian utopia and an independent black state," in *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 282. The evidence is grossly insufficient to make such a statement.

⁵⁰ Marrant, *Sermon*, 91.

⁵¹ This letter appears in both *Proceedings*, 25-26, and *Annals*, 30-31. Julie Winch has interpreted Hall's "proposals" to be related to the formation of a Masonic lodge in Philadelphia, in Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of*

Although these proposals probably related to African repatriation, most Philadelphians expressed little interest in the project. Stewart probably discussed with Hall and Marrant what the Newporters envisioned for their African project. The Free African Union Society forwarded to Hall their “satisfaction to find that you are united with us in laboring in the same vineyard.” This may have referred either to Hall’s interest in the African project, his advocacy for black social improvement, or both.⁵²

Marrant’s ministry and his connection to the ardent activist, Prince Hall, reflected the changes taking place in Calvinistic thought among black activists. Historian Peter Hinks is right that Marrant, who stressed disinterested benevolence, may have been connected to New Divinity preachers such as Samuel Hopkins through Prince Hall’s communication with the Newport Free African Union Society.⁵³ At the least, Marrant would have known about the Newporters’ commitment to wait on God’s will in the matter of African emigration. Even though reformers of African descent acknowledged their impotence in moving forward without God’s help, they involved their fellow blacks, sympathetic whites, and even the state to assist their plans. In other words, they subscribed to a theology that acknowledged God’s sovereignty without precluding their own earnest efforts to achieve what they perceived as God’s purpose according to his word—justice in America and the redemption of Africa.⁵⁴ Waiting upon God no longer meant waiting with idle hands. They understood too well that “sincere and disinterested laborers are

James Forten (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 145; but the evidence indicates that Hall was responding to the Newport society’s letter.

⁵² *Proceedings*, 29.

⁵³ For an analysis of the connection between Marrant and New Divinity, see Hinks, “John Marrant and the Meaning of Early Black Freemasonry,” 111-113, specifically 112. Hinks links Marrant’s ideas about disinterested benevolence manifested in his Masonic address to New Divinity ideas.

⁵⁴ Brooks and Saillant, in “*Face Zion Forward*,” claim that “late-eighteenth-century writings represent a foundational moment in black Atlantic intellectual history, a moment that generated two essential modes of black thought about Africa. The first imagined Africa as a place to be redeemed through emigration, colonization, and proselytization by once-enslaved Christian blacks, and the second conceived of Africa as a recollected group consciousness among the members of the modern black diaspora,” 18-19. The redemption discourse, I suggest, resulted first from free blacks’ commitment to Christian missions in the tradition of Capitein and, second, from a desire to develop their vision of a just autonomous society.

few” as the Newporters informed Prince Hall.⁵⁵ The actions taken by Marrant, Hall, and their fellow black reformers to ameliorate free blacks’ living conditions and demand an end to slavery accorded well with New Divinity ideas about the relationship between true virtue and social reform. Loving God required helping others.⁵⁶

The possibility of a connection between Marrant and Hopkins points to the widespread, transatlantic network of antislavery reformers in which blacks played a key role. Marrant himself still remained close to the Huntingdonians, who had supported missions among Indians and blacks in America and would later involve themselves in advancing the English colony of Sierra Leone as a home for displaced black Loyalists and mission entrée into Africa.⁵⁷ Two weeks before Marrant arrived in Boston, Samuel Hopkins wrote for the first time to Granville Sharp on behalf of freed blacks seeking to return to Africa. He explained that although Massachusetts had freed its slaves in 1783 and Rhode Island had enacted gradual emancipation, many in the black community were “in many respects unhappy, while they live here among the Whites.” Whites treated them as “*underlings*, and den[ie]d them the advantages of education and employment.” The remainder of Hopkins’ letter outlined almost word for word Hall’s 1788 petition to the Massachusetts General Court: the blacks’ desire to obtain land, to form religious societies, and to spread Christianity in Africa. Hopkins may have known Prince Hall, possibly through the Congregationalist minister Jeremy Belknap, and was certainly aware of black Bostonians’ efforts to emigrate. Moreover, he probably supported the black Newporters in their emigration project. Hopkins admitted “there are a number of religious blacks, with whom I am

⁵⁵ *Proceedings*, 29.

⁵⁶ For detailed analysis of the New Divinity movement, see Joseph A. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement: Calvinism, the Congregational Ministry, and Reform in New England Between the Great Awakenings* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian University Press, 1981) and Noll, *America’s God*.

⁵⁷ Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon’s Connexion: A Sect in Action in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 371. For analysis of Sierra Leone and reform, see Brown, *Moral Capital*; Sidbury, *Becoming African in America*; and Wilson, *The Loyal Blacks*.

acquainted, who wish to be formed into a distinct church” and, under the leadership of a black pastor, go to Africa.⁵⁸ He likely referred to Newport’s Free African Union Society, which expressed to the black Philadelphians later in 1789 their desire to serve God in Africa and called on “all Blacks in America” to fast and pray that God would pour out his spirit upon them that they might at last reach that continent.⁵⁹

The Free African Union Society and Hall’s Boston group expanded their connections with white European abolitionists through William Thornton, the Quaker colonizationist. Late in 1789, Thornton wrote to Etienne Clavière of the French abolition society, *Amis des Noirs*, founded in 1788, and to Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp, England’s preeminent abolitionists, to generate support for the Union Society’s proposed emigration plan.⁶⁰ Either unaware that Sierra Leone had already been established or unfamiliar with details relating to it, he cautioned Clarkson, “The Blacks of this country cannot be expected to form a Colony for any European Powers. They would not do it for even the benefit of this Government.”⁶¹ Thornton later enclosed copies of his overseas correspondence in a letter to Samuel Hopkins, asking him to forward them to the Union Society, the blacks in Providence, and to Prince Hall’s Boston group.⁶² Thornton recognized the emigrationists’ desire for autonomy and acknowledged his need for their approval in order to continue representing them.

It appears that few activists in the United States, black or white, were aware of the British colony being settled in Sierra Leone. Hopkins confessed to Granville Sharp in January 1789 that “we have, to our great joy, been informed that such a plan has been projected and executed in

⁵⁸ Samuel Hopkins to Granville Sharp, Newport, January 15, 1789, in Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 341.

⁵⁹ *Proceedings*, 25.

⁶⁰ For a description of *Société des Amis des Noirs*, see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*.

⁶¹ *Proceedings*, 32.

⁶² *Proceedings*, 33.

England.”⁶³ Sharp responded in July with a somewhat negative report about the colony but stated that free lots would be available to those blacks willing to follow the English government’s regulations.⁶⁴ William Thornton mentioned the colony by name in his November 19, 1789, letter to Hopkins in which he enclosed copies of Sharp’s suggested regulations for the settlement. By January 1791, Thornton, despite his warning to Clarkson that black Americans would not submit to colonization by Europeans, was encouraging Newporters to consider Sierra Leone as their destination and ask whether the state of Massachusetts had finally agreed to help finance the emigration venture.

The New England black societies continued debating the idea. At the end of 1791, the black Bostonians sought to publish Thornton’s letters in the newspaper in order to “bring numbers to join us throughout this and other States.”⁶⁵ Lack of funds still preventing any action forward, the Union Society purchased lottery tickets in an attempt to raise money. On January 15, 1794, the African Society in Providence wrote to the Union Society that it had voted to petition the Rhode Island Assembly for “permission to leave the State in order to go to Siere leone in Africa” and had decided to send three men from Providence, Boston, and Philadelphia to scout the settlement. The Newporters agreed as long as one of the delegates represented them. Furthermore, they wished to lay the plan before the white Newport Abolition Society.⁶⁶ The plan never came to fruition, but the years spent in pursuing the vision testify to the confidence

⁶³ Hopkins to Sharp, in Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 341. It seems odd that Hopkins should have just found out about the settlement at Sierra Leone. Indications are that even the black Nova Scotians were unaware of it until 1790. See Wilson, *Black Loyalists*, 177-216, and *Clarkson’s Mission to America 1791-1792*, edited with an introduction, notes and index by Charles Bruce Fergusson (Halifax, N.S.: Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1971). If the blacks in New England and Nova Scotia knew nothing about the Sierra Leone settlement, then John Marrant could not have known about it either. Wilson assumes that Boston King, a Wesleyan Methodist Loyalist, had to have known about the colony in 1787 because that is when he began advocating preaching the Gospel in Africa. This assumption implies that black Americans first had to hear about such a settlement before they could imagine it themselves.

⁶⁴ Granville Sharp to Samuel Hopkins, July 25, 1789, in Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 342-344.

⁶⁵ *Proceedings*, 39.

⁶⁶ *Proceedings*, 43-47.

that their endeavors on their own behalf were just as necessary as praying to God and waiting for his answer.

As black Americans continued mobilizing, many white reform-minded Americans arrived late to antislavery reform. Only in New York and Pennsylvania had white elites organized substantial abolition societies during the 1780s, but by 1789, several other states boasted white abolition societies.⁶⁷ At least two factors contributed to the emergence of these groups. First, the Revolutionary language of republican egalitarianism and natural rights encouraged northern states to examine the conflict between their constitutions and the slavery within their borders.⁶⁸ Second, evangelical pietists and Quakers kept before the public eye the idea that slavery was sinful.⁶⁹ I contend that a third key factor fueled the impetus for this nascent antislavery movement. Free and enslaved blacks themselves, by addressing the public directly and by developing relationships with powerful white abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic, pushed white Americans to recognize their right as fellow human beings to natural, God-given liberties. White abolition societies often began their constitutions recognizing that God created all humankind, drawing on both the Biblical injunction that “God hath made of one blood all nations of men,” and on the Declaration of Independence’s admonition that “all men are created equal,” both important touchstones for black reformers.⁷⁰

As the new decade dawned, people of African descent faced greater scrutiny for their conduct and their accomplishments, sometimes becoming objects of scientific and philosophical

⁶⁷ For a discussion on some of these societies, see Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002) and Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*.

⁶⁸ Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, 169-175.

⁶⁹ Davis, *Problem of Slavery*. Davis identifies four factors leading to the rise of antislavery sentiment: 1) an Enlightenment secular emphasis on natural liberty; 2) “an ethic of benevolence, personified in the ‘man of feeling;’” 3) Methodism, Anglican Evangelicalism, and American revivalism; 4) the idea of the slave the “noble savage” or as innocent and oppressed, 45-48.

⁷⁰ Acts 17:26, KJV.

inquiry. In 1788, Thomas Jefferson published the first American edition of *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a work in which he speculated that the black was “in reason much inferior” to the white.⁷¹ The year before, the Rev. Dr. Samuel Stanhope Smith, a Presbyterian minister and professor of theology and moral philosophy at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), rejected the idea that Africans constituted a different species as a heretical notion contradicting the belief in a God who orders nature and grants man an innate moral sense.⁷² Smith joined European intellectuals in the query into differences between groups of people.⁷³ The German anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach published in 1790 the first edition of *Contributions to Natural History*, in which he named a number of talented Africans including Jacobus Capitein and Phillis Wheatley. Blumenbach concluded that “there is no so-called savage nation known under the sun which as so much distinguished itself by such examples of perfectibility and original capacity for scientific culture.”⁷⁴ In France, as that country’s Revolution raged, novelist Joseph La Vallée published a lengthy work, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, which affirmed black oratorical skills as proof of “the first spark of genius,” and lamented that “nothing is wanting but the nurture of liberty fully to developpe their genius.”⁷⁵ The novel was serialized in the Philadelphia periodical, *The American Museum*, throughout 1791.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, edited with an introduction and notes by William Peden (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 139.

⁷² Smith offered an explanation on humankind’s varieties in his 1787 *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*. For a discussion of Smith’s work, see William Stanton, *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3-10, and Jordan, *White Over Black*, 443-444, 486-488.

⁷³ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach published in 1776 his study, *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*.

⁷⁴ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *Contributions to Natural History*, in *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Late Professor at Gottingen and Court Physician to the King of Great Britain.*, translated and edited from the Latin, German, and French originals, by Thomas Bendyshe, M.A., V.P.A.S.L. (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), 312.

⁷⁵ Joseph La Vallée, *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*, translated from the French (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1790), 268-269.

⁷⁶ Edward Derbyshire Seeber, *Anti-Slavery Opinion in France during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 175-176.

Free blacks understood well the burden they shouldered before a skeptical white public. When Benjamin Banneker, a free black Marylander and self-taught astronomer and mathematician whose father came from Guinea, found his first almanac for the year 1791 rejected for publication, he prepared another for 1792. On June 10, 1791, his neighbor, Elias Ellicott, a Quaker, wrote to the Philadelphia abolitionist, James Pemberton, that Banneker thought “as it is the first performance of the kind ever done by one of his complection that it might be a means of promoting the Cause of Humanity as many are of opinion that the Blacks are void of mental endowments.”⁷⁷ Once Banneker’s almanac was published, he forwarded it to Jefferson with a letter observing that “one universal Father has given being to us all; and . . . afforded us all the same sensations and endowed us all with the same faculties.” In an apparent riposte to Jefferson’s comparison of blacks to animals, Banneker asserted that “we have long been considered rather as brutish than human, scarcely capable of mental endowments,” offering his mathematical calculations as evidence to the contrary.⁷⁸ So important to Banneker was publication of his almanac that he told Ellicott that he preferred to receive nothing from the printer as payment “than not have it published.”⁷⁹

White reformers noticed blacks’ activities on their own behalf. Thomas Wilkinson, a Quaker writing from England to Quaker merchant Thomas Stewardson in Philadelphia in 1795, called Banneker’s letter to Jefferson “an agreeable expression of the talents of that injured Race,” and found Richard Allen’s and Absalom Jones’s *Narrative* of the 1793 yellow fever epidemic

⁷⁷ Elias Ellicott to James Pemberton, Baltimore, June 10, 1791, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. For information on the life of Banneker, see John H.B. Latrobe, *Memoir of Benjamin Banneker: read before the Maryland Historical Society, at the monthly meeting, May 1, 1845* (Baltimore: John D. Toy, 1845).

⁷⁸ Benjamin Banneker, Letter to the Secretary of State, with his answer, in *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Vincent Carretta (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 319. Carretta conjectures that Banneker may have been unaware of Jefferson’s comments, but a comparison of Jefferson and Banneker suggests otherwise, 323 n, 1.

⁷⁹ Ellicott to Pemberton, 1791.

“very acceptable.”⁸⁰ When Banneker wrote to Quaker abolitionist John Parrish reminding him that he had visited his home in Maryland and asking him “to send me an Almanac soon as possible of some other persons calculation beside that of my own,” Parrish added a note to the side of the letter. Apparently finding it “difficult to employ” dependable workers for his farm, Banneker had decided to make do with less and live alone, preferring to “suffer hunger, than anger.” Parrish then noted that Banneker was now devoting himself to “his studies & calculations of almanacks.”⁸¹

Like Banneker, the black activists responsible for the birth of the independent African churches in Philadelphia cultivated patronage ties with prominent whites, a necessary strategy in the struggle for autonomy. While the story of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones is well known and oft told, historians place undue emphasis on Allen’s place in black history.⁸² Even though Allen paved the way to independent denominationalism for Philadelphia’s black community and Jones appeared to adopt the safer course by remaining within the Episcopal fold, Jones’s ability to influence white reformers on behalf of Philadelphia’s African community demands a reassessment of his significance. Long before the summer of 1794 when Jones’s St. Thomas Episcopal and Allen’s Mother Bethel AME churches were dedicated, Jones had been pressuring Benjamin Rush to support his efforts to establish an independent church. Rush recorded in his journal on August 1, 1791, that after the Protestant Episcopal Bishop of Pennsylvania, William White, expressed to him his disapproval of the project, Absalom Jones and some others, called on him “soon afterwards” to advise him that the white “preachers were much displeased with

⁸⁰ Thomas Wilkinson to Thomas Stewardson, Yanweth, December 31, 1795, Stewardson Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁸¹ Benjamin Banneker to John Parrish, Ball County near Ellicott’s Mills, December 22, 1795, Cox, Parrish, Wharton Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁸² For a detailed analysis of Allen’s and Jones’ efforts, see George, *Segregated Sabbaths*, Nash, *Forging Freedom*, and Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*.

them.” The exchanges that summer day decided Rush “more than ever of the necessity of an African Church, & of the advantages to be expected from it.” In fact, he thought it would be an example for other states to follow and might “be the means of sending the gospel to Africa.”⁸³ By September, either Rush or Jones made sure that the church’s progress began appearing in newspapers, giving the enterprise the publicity it needed to garner further support over the next few years.

For Jones and the black community, the advantages of an independent church were many. In establishing St. Thomas, the church’s founders noted that they sought “to restore our long lost race, to the dignity of men and of Christian,” asserting that the city’s blacks who did not now attend church would feel more inclined to hear the word of God preached among people of their own color. They no longer had to endure the humiliation of gallery pews or separate communion. The church officers of whom Jones was chief, aimed to bring an end to the cringing fear instilled by bondage and replace it with the fear of the Lord wherein they “would desire to walk in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.” St. Thomas’s constitution ensured that, despite the church’s subjection to white oversight, its members would permanently retain the power to select their own minister; and, although the minister could be white, only Africans or their descendants could serve as officers and vote in church elections. The church leaders acknowledged their debt to white patrons for their help and desired the salvation of all, but they made clear that the church was designed especially for “our relatives, the people of color.” The constitution’s preamble emphasized that the church would advance the “true knowledge of God,” implying that Philadelphia’s blacks might not receive that knowledge elsewhere.⁸⁴

⁸³ Benjamin Rush’s Journal, “Letters & Thoughts,” Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁸⁴ *Annals*, 93-94.

St. Thomas's, I suggest, offered a means for Jones to enter a more comprehensive network of reformers agitating against slavery and oppression. Through Rush's fundraising efforts on the church's behalf, Jones established contact with Granville Sharp, the slave trade's ablest opponent. In 1792, Sharp mailed to Rush from London a package of books for Jones, an action demonstrating his support for Jones's activities.⁸⁵ Whether Jones sent anything to Sharp at this time is unknown, but Sharp's patronage of the African Church was well known publicly.⁸⁶ On November 25, 1793, Jones, William Grey, and William Gardners sent a note of gratitude to Sharp for his "labours of love to our afflicted nation," telling him, "You were our advocate when we had but few friends on the other side of the water."⁸⁷ Jones thus recognized the more than twenty years Sharp had worked to achieve justice for Africans. There is no way of knowing what books Sharp intended for Jones's hands, but the package probably included religious tracts, possibly even antislavery works. It raises the specter of Jones's increasing involvement in more radical activism.

Jones was a consistent proponent of black freedom and social improvement in Philadelphia. He had been enslaved himself until 1784. After his marriage in 1770, he first borrowed money to purchase his wife's freedom, spending seven years working "until twelve or one o'clock at night" and then helping his wife find employment in order to repay the loan. He spent another six years working to gain his own freedom. Such a man appreciated the difficulties facing his community. In 1794, Jones and Richard Allen advertised for "a number of Africans, or their descendants, as Journeymen and Apprentices" to work in a nail factory they founded adjoining St. Peter's Episcopal Church, revealing an aspect of their proactive secular

⁸⁵ Granville Sharp to Benjamin Rush, London, 1792, Benjamin Rush Correspondence, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁸⁶ Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 111-112, 117.

⁸⁷ Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*, 254-255.

approach to community progress.⁸⁸ The establishment of St. Thomas's further reflected Jones's commitment to community activism. That the church's membership far outnumbered Allen's Bethel Church in its early years suggests that it offered the Africans in Philadelphia something vital.⁸⁹ The church officers stressed St. Thomas's "social religious worship."⁹⁰ Given Jones's split with Allen in the Free African Society over Allen's emotional worship style, it appears that St. Thomas's may have adopted a more liturgical service, or it may be that the Episcopal use of communal prayers attracted Africans for whom such prayers were essential to group worship in their native homeland.⁹¹ More than this, Jones's own activism probably drew Philadelphia's blacks to him. According to St. Thomas's chronicler, William Douglass, Jones was loved in the black community not for his preaching but for "his active cooperation with every effort . . . for the advancement of his race,--(in which respects he had no superior among the contemporaries identified with him)."⁹²

Boston's Prince Hall also continued pushing to elevate the black community socially and spiritually. In 1792, Hall reminded African Lodge No. 459 that the duties of a Mason entailed believing "in one supreme Being," obeying "the laws of the land," engaging in "love and benevolence to all," and abstaining from those vices antithetical to Masonic honor such as drinking and gambling.⁹³ Hall seemingly drew from the New Divinity's emphasis on virtuous acts toward those in distress, classical republicanism's views of the public good, and West

⁸⁸ *Philadelphia Gazette*, March 8, 1794.

⁸⁹ According to Gary Nash, in *Forging Freedom*, by 1795, St. Thomas's membership numbered 427 and Bethel's 121, 132.

⁹⁰ *Annals*, 94.

⁹¹ Mbiti, in *Introduction to African Religion*, writes, "Communal prayers . . . help to cement together the members of the group in one intention, for one purpose, and in one act of worship. Some communal prayers include choruses of litanies, which are spoken by the group in response to the direction of their leader," 63. The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States would have used both communal prayer and responsive readings. The first edition of the Book of Common Prayer adopted by the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States was published in 1790. See <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1789/1790/index.htm> [accessed November 17, 2010].

⁹² *Annals*, 122.

⁹³ Prince Hall, *A Charge Delivered to the Brethren of the African Lodge On the 25th of June, 1792*, in "Face Zion Forward," 192.

African ideas about communal responsibility.⁹⁴ An ardent advocate for public education of black children, Hall encouraged a listening audience to persist in their efforts to improve and to “look forward to a better day” because God had promised, “*Aethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto me.*” Nodding to Anthony Benezet’s school for blacks in Philadelphia, he suggested that God might bring to Boston another such friend to initiate a similar project. In order for this to take place, blacks themselves must take the initiative and begin to shift their resources from entertainment and unnecessary expenses to the education of their children. While God would bring a blessing some day, it was up to black Bostonians themselves to work in anticipation of that time.⁹⁵ Like the Philadelphians, Newporters, and John Marrant, Hall advocated a theology in which man demonstrated his love of God by engaging in reform.

By 1797, when Hall preached his second charge to the African Masons, his antislavery position had advanced, precipitated by a number of significant events since his earlier oration. Black Philadelphians had founded two churches. Several black Bostonians established a mutual aid organization, the African Society, committed to godly love for one another.⁹⁶ Hall’s attention was especially riveted by the revolution for freedom in St. Domingue. He asserted that Boston and the whole world should take heed of what was happening in the Caribbean, declaring that “Ethiopeans . . . cannot change their skins: But God can and will change their conditions, and their hearts too.” Then painting for his listeners a picture of white Bostonians’ insolent behavior toward blacks, Hall praised the change in the French West Indies where “the snap of the whip was heard from morning to evening” just a few short years ago but now “doth Ethiopia

⁹⁴ For an overview of New Divinity, see Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins*; Noll, *America’s God*; Kenneth P. Minkema and Harry S. Stout, “The Edwardsean Tradition and the Antislavery Debate, 1740-1865,” *Journal of American History* 92 (June 2005): 47-74. For a discussion about West Africans’ emphasis on community, see Creel, “*A Peculiar People*,” 238-240, 274-275, and Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 176-177.

⁹⁵ Hall, *Charge . . .* 1792, 196.

⁹⁶ *Laws of the African Society, Instituted at Boston, Anno Domini, 1796* (Boston, 1796), 6.

begin to stretch forth her hand, from a sink of slavery to freedom and equality.” Hall anticipated the day when God would demand justice from whites for America’s black population. At the same time, he argued, in pietistic fashion, that God would effect an inner transformation in Africans, inferring that with freedom would impart a new spirit and willingness to follow divine commands.⁹⁷

Like earlier black thinkers, Hall credited God with bringing about radical social change. By shifting responsibility for the Haitian Revolution from the slaves to the God who watched over Ethiopians, Hall deftly avoided being seen as an advocate for the same violence in the United States where southern slaveholders quaked at the prospect of black rebellion and white northerners eyed Haitian refugees suspiciously. At the same time, he did not shrink from protesting slavery and racial prejudice. The act of publishing his address was itself a form of protest and declaration of autonomy. Four years later, Hall promised to send the Charge to the Rev. William Bentley, pastor of Salem’s East Church, explaining to him that the first Charge he wrote, “tho’ not correct, was useful.”⁹⁸ Perhaps Hall believed the second one to be better written or conveyed his antislavery sentiments more accurately. Whatever Hall meant by “correct,” he obviously thought that these public, and subsequently published, orations served an important or “useful” purpose.

Throughout the early national era, free blacks and white reformers maintained their connections with one another. Free blacks, however, continued to see their own organizational associations as crucial to their communities’ success. Philadelphia’s African Society in 1796 wrote to Newport’s Free African Union Society concerning a visit from one of its

⁹⁷ Prince Hall, *A Charge Delivered to the African Lodge June 24, 1797 at Menotomy*, in “*Face Zion Forward*,” 201, 204. For an analysis of Hall’s Charges, see Brooks, “Prince Hall, Freemasonry, and Genealogy.”

⁹⁸ William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D. Pastor of the East Church Salem, Massachusetts*, Vol. II, January, 1793-December, 1802 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 379.

representatives, expressing its “satisfaction to hear that you still hang together.” The Philadelphians, some of whom were leaders in the African Episcopal Church, offered to exchange their rules with the Newporters in an attempt at uniformity across region. The Union Society acknowledged the letter and, with it, the receipt of an address by the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race. The delegates from various white abolition societies throughout the country had met in Philadelphia in January 1796. The Newporters responded to the Convention nearly a year later by sending a note of thanks and enclosing the minutes of their discussion about it.⁹⁹

In New York, black reformers waged their own battle against oppression. While there is little evidence linking black New Yorkers to the broader activist network during this early period, they would certainly have been aware of others’ various strategies. In 1796, several black congregants at New York City’s John Street Methodist Church, wishing “to exercise their spiritual gifts among themselves,” which they could not do freely in a white church, declared their spiritual independence by founding the African Methodist Episcopal Church, known as Zion.¹⁰⁰ That same year, one of the church’s founders, William Hamilton, a cabinet maker, wrote to John Jay, New York’s Federalist governor and member of the New York Manumission Society. Hamilton complained bitterly about “the sons of Africa groaning under oppression” where “liberty and equality” supposedly abounded. The language Hamilton employed on its face

⁹⁹ *Proceedings*, 49.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Rush, *A Short Account of the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (New York, 1843), electronic edition, 9, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/church/rush/rush.html> (accessed January 21, 2010). See also Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); William J. Walls, *The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church* (Charlotte: A.M.E Zion Publishing House, 1974); . For an extensive review of Peter Williams, Sr., one of Zion’s founders, see Joseph Beaumont Wakeley, *Lost Chapters Recovered From the Early History of American Methodism* (New York, 1858).

sounded both familiar and new. He accepted the “misfortunes Providence hath brought upon them,” but was unwilling to “blame Heaven” for the evil taking place in “a christian country.” Hamilton asked, “Has God appointed us as their slaves? I answer No.” By the time Hamilton contacted Jay, many black spokespersons, perhaps unconsciously, had turned away from a theology that emphasized human beings’ impotence to alter their world for the better. Now they freely laid blame where it belonged—at the feet of those individuals responsible for perpetuating the evil of slavery. Hamilton, consequently, asked Jay to “plead the cause of the poor and needy” and to advocate for manumission.¹⁰¹

It was no coincidence that Hamilton helped found New York’s African Church in the same year in which he wrote to Jay. Hamilton’s correspondence indicates his strategies for bringing about an end to slavery. Jay, like Samuel Hopkins, had established contact with the London abolitionist, Granville Sharp, and he was involved with the New York Manumission Society.¹⁰² Moreover, Jay was governor. Hamilton understood, like black activists throughout the North, the need to go to the seat of government. Hamilton was “confident,” he told Jay, “that you will not refuse to hear my simple address.”¹⁰³ White New Yorkers’ refusal to abolish slavery and their persistent prejudice even in the white Methodist church all contributed to the African Church’s desire for autonomy and Hamilton’s frustration with state leaders. The formation of an independent church and the demand to end slavery were intimately related. In New York, where gradual emancipation legislation was not enacted until 1799, both acts

¹⁰¹ “Anti-Slavery Papers of John Jay, Collected by Frank Monaghan,” *Journal of Negro History* 17 (October 1932): 481-496, quotes on 491-493. The members of the New York Manumission Society, many of whom were slaveowners, approved efforts to help blacks enslaved illegally or to prevent their sale to the South, but shied away from complete emancipation. They believed that blacks required white supervision. When New York State passed gradual emancipation legislation in 1799, the law made indentured servitude a mandatory requirement.

¹⁰² Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp*. Sharp wrote in 1791 that John Jay had expressed interest in the project, 362.

¹⁰³ “Anti-Slavery Papers of John Jay,” 491.

reflected an understanding of a divine imperative which combined spiritual and physical freedom.

At the close of the eighteenth century, the Rev. Absalom Jones, by now the Grand Master of Philadelphia's African Masonic Lodge and an ordained deacon in the Protestant Episcopal Church, led in a petition to the United States Congress to abolish slavery. He and over seventy other free blacks began by thanking "God, our Creator, and . . . the Government" for the many "blessings and benefits" they enjoyed.¹⁰⁴ Jones observed, however, that despite the Constitution's supposed protection of individual liberty and guarantee of domestic tranquility, many free blacks were being kidnapped and sold to the South. Confident in blacks' natural rights and the "benign doctrines of our Blessed Lord," Jones condemned both this illegal trafficking and the international slave trade altogether. "Can any commerce, trade, or transaction so detestably shock the feeling of man, or degrade the dignity of his nature equal to this?" he asked. The petitioners acknowledged slaves' need for education as preparation for liberty. Hence, they avoided petitioning immediate emancipation. They argued, nevertheless, that by extending the promises of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights to all blacks, the government would be "drawing down the blessing of heaven upon this land."¹⁰⁵ Just the day before Jones submitted the petition, the Rev. Richard Allen eulogized George Washington as a proponent of black liberty.¹⁰⁶

Jones's petition signaled a shift in black activism by adopting a more progressive antislavery position. This was not the first petition free blacks had addressed to Congress, nor was it the first to criticize slavery since abolitionist Quakers had been petitioning for a number of

¹⁰⁴ Absalom Jones and seventy-three others, *Petition to the President, Senate, and House of Representatives*, December 30, 1799, in *Early Negro Writing 1760-1837*, ed. Dorothy Porter (1971; repr., Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1995), 330.

¹⁰⁵ Absalom Jones and seventy-three others, *Petition*, in *Early Negro Writing*, 331.

¹⁰⁶ *Philadelphia Gazette*, December 31, 1799.

years. In 1797, several North Carolina freedmen complained to Congress that the state allowed the reenslavement of what it considered illegally manumitted blacks, thus forcing them to flee their homes and families for their own safety. They requested redress but were rejected.¹⁰⁷ Jones and his fellow petitioners took a much bolder step by including the total abolition of slavery in their demand for justice for kidnapped blacks. They explicitly linked sacred and political ideals to interpret the nation's founding documents in a way guaranteed to prick the consciences of the young government's republicans. While others had done the same, this antislavery lesson came from the hands of a prominent black Philadelphian.

The petition generated controversy in Congress. When the Sixth Congress met on January 2, 1800, Federalist Robert Waln of Pennsylvania presented the petition to the House of Representatives, after which a lengthy debate ensued. Waln had hoped that the petition would be referred to the committee examining the international slave trade, but John Rutledge, Jr., a Federalist from South Carolina, vehemently opposed any action other than tabling. What provoked Rutledge was that it came from "the hands of the black *gentlemen*." Fearing another St. Domingue, Rutledge blamed "this new-fangled French philosophy of liberty and equality" for slaves' demands for liberty. John Smilie, a Republican from Pennsylvania, however, asserted that the black petitioners were "a part of the human species" with a right "to be heard." The Federalist from Massachusetts, Harrison Gray Otis, on the other hand, expressed consternation that accepting the petition from black hands "would teach them the art of assembling together, debating, and the like, and would soon, if encouraged, extend from one end of the Union to the other." After the heated discussion carried over to the next day, the House decided to forward to committee those parts of the petition relating to the slave trade but, in an unusual move,

¹⁰⁷ Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of The Negro People in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York: The Citadel Press, 1968), 39-44.

expressed its disapprobation of the parts that would “create disquiet and jealousy.” All except Federalist George Thatcher from Massachusetts voted in favor of the amendment.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion

By the time Absalom Jones submitted his petition, free and enslaved blacks throughout the North needed no congressional approval for the activities feared by Harrison Gray Otis. They had organized independent associations and churches over the past two decades. Adopting a variety of reform strategies, black leaders pushed a progressive agenda that incorporated Africa, Christian and African spiritual ideals, and a concern for bondspeople throughout the United States. They drew the logical conclusion that spiritual freedom demanded physical freedom and acted accordingly. More significant, they created extensive activist networks, often grounded in shared religious beliefs. Blacks in Newport, Boston, and Philadelphia maintained a healthy correspondence and visited with one another and with dedicated white reformers in the United States and Great Britain. That we have no evidence that black New Yorkers participated in the network fails to convince that they did not also develop relationships with their fellow activists. It may be that they left fewer records or that they suffered under the onus of New York’s continued slavery. Black activists, whatever their ideological, political, or religious differences, cooperated with one another to achieve a larger goal. In so doing, they established a model for collective action which future generations would follow in an increasingly progressive struggle against bondage and oppression.

¹⁰⁸ United States Congress, *Annals of Congress*, Sixth Congress, 229-245.

Chapter 4

“We would insist on the universality of freedom”:

Building the Antislavery Movement through Evangelism, 1800-1816

Five years after Harrison Gray Otis, the Congressman from Boston, voiced his fears of free blacks “assembling together, debating, and the like,” a black Baptist preacher attracted an assembly in West Boston to witness the rite of believers’ baptism.¹ On Sunday morning, May 26, 1805, the Rev. Thomas Paul, a thirty-one year old free black preacher ordained in New Hampshire three weeks before, stood in the waters of the Charles River speaking to the people gathered.² Many Baptist Bostonians, black and white, watched and listened, with some blacks stepping into the water to hear more clearly. After the Rev. Paul removed his hat, he remarked to the man and eight women waiting to be baptized “that neither christians nor gentlemen would ridicule them, either on account of their colour or manner of being baptized.” He declared “that if any should treat them with contempt, such persons could not by them be considered either christians or gentlemen.”³ The Rev. Paul’s injunction on this solemn occasion reflected his understanding that spiritual and physical equality inhered in the Gospel message.

This chapter examines how, between 1800 and 1816, free blacks broadened an evangelistic mission into a vehicle for disseminating the antislavery message. This merger between black evangelism and antislavery challenges the idea that such convictions became a “sacred vocation” only after the revivals of the 1820s. Historian Donald M. Scott coined the term to describe white evangelical abolitionists’ commitment after 1830 to immediate and total emancipation. He likens the adoption of immediatism to a religious conversion or “call” to

¹ United States Congress, *Annals of Congress*, Sixth Congress, 231.

² Biographical information on Thomas Paul comes from an obituary in *The American Baptist Magazine*, July 1831.

³ “Religious Intelligence. An Account of the baptism of nine Negroes in Boston, May 26, 1805,” *The Christian’s Magazine, Reviewer, and Religious Intelligencer* 1:2 (1805).

spread the antislavery word. However, for black activists pursuing social change, the Gospel always precluded anything other than a complete end to slavery. Despite never articulating a demand for immediate emancipation, their work on freedom's behalf was no less a "sacred vocation" and began much earlier than 1820.⁴ Many, like Thomas Paul, participated in the religious revivals that became known as the Second Great Awakening and supported social reform movements grounded in Christian benevolence and republican efforts to build a better society.⁵ They traveled widely and spoke boldly. The free black leadership in those states where slavery no longer existed or was slated to end avidly pursued their "vocation" to abolish the evil institution everywhere. Most blacks throughout the nation also viewed Haitian independence as proof of the revolutionary era in which they lived and believed that ending American slavery was truly possible. Black leaders hailed the end to American involvement in the transatlantic slave trade as a step in the right direction. At the same time, confidence, particularly among the clergy, that evangelical work encompassed broad, global change, led many to maintain ties to British abolitionists and continue to support emigration to Africa. I argue that black reformers in the early Republic adapted the pietistic model of evangelism to embed in the Gospel message an often explicit critique of slavery and racial prejudice.

⁴ Donald M. Scott, "Abolition as a Sacred Vocation," in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, eds. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 51-74. For a discussion on immediatism, see David Brion Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (September 1962): 209-230.

⁵ There is a large literature on the relationship between evangelical revival and social reform in the Early Republic. See especially Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (1950; repr., New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers 1815-1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Few, if any, scholars include blacks in discussions of the Second Great Awakening.

The baptismal ritual that the Rev. Thomas Paul conducted thus deserves a closer look. It was a polyvocal public and sacred act.⁶ That Paul first cautioned the converts to reject disdain from onlookers for their color and their denomination demonstrates his own awareness of the constraints under which they lived. As a Baptist, Paul justified total immersion as Scriptural and assured the converts' identification with Christ by reminding them that Jesus himself had been baptized in the River Jordan. Then, Paul prayed and baptized the waiting believers. Elias Smith, a white radical anticlerical, antislavery preacher who observed the scene, described how the women sang and praised God as they came out of the water, some to the accompaniment of the black bystanders. Many remained silent, "solemn, cheerful and lowly." Upon completing the baptisms, Paul, who had been accompanied by his brother Benjamin to the riverside, prayed and "thanked the people for their civility." The ceremony ended as "the people retired in silence," and Paul walked with his brother and the newly baptized "back to the house," singing, "What poor, despised company/Of travelers are these,/Who walk in yonder narrow way,/Along the rugged maze." Smith perceived that "God was no respecter of persons, and that Ethiopia was stretching out her hand, and that a son had taken them by the hand."⁷ Thomas Paul's respectable and public display of Christian faith and brotherhood reinforced for all onlookers the sacred and solemn nature of what they had just witnessed. Through this baptism, Paul not only ushered nine converts into the church universal but sent a powerful message to black and white observers that the civility with which the black believers had conducted themselves proved their worthiness to live as equals with whites in an egalitarian republic.

⁶ For analyses on African Christian baptism, see Margaret Washington Creel, *"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 293-295, and Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 272-274.

⁷ *The Christian's Magazine*, 1805.

Born in Exeter, New Hampshire, in 1773 to a formerly enslaved African, Thomas Paul experienced conversion at sixteen years of age and began his public ministry twelve years later.⁸ Diligent in spreading the good news of Christ's salvation, he traveled throughout New England. Two weeks after baptizing the Bostonians, Paul appeared in Rhode Island, preaching that God promised a kingdom to his followers. The Rev. John Pitman, the Baptist minister at Seekonk, commented that Paul was "[a]n Excellent preacher, much admired."⁹ After Paul's death in 1831, *The American Baptist Magazine* praised him for his work, acknowledging his success as an itinerant beyond the bounds of his own church in Boston. The black minister gained a reputation for his oratory and drew crowds to hear him, even preaching to "an audience of more than one thousand persons." According to the magazine, his "slow and gentle manner" of baptizing converts only lent power to his style, and during the baptismal ritual, "he was truly eloquent." Throughout Paul's many travels, "he seemed to go among the people in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ," and his ministry led to many religious revivals.¹⁰

By the time Thomas Paul was ordained in 1805, five years had passed since Absalom Jones petitioned Congress. The prospects for ending slavery and racial oppression in the United States appeared dimmer than they had immediately following the Revolution. In 1801, the 1800 presidential election had finally been decided by the House of Representatives in favor of Thomas Jefferson, that republican defender of individual rights and liberty, and veteran

⁸ *The American Baptist Magazine*, July 1831.

⁹ Rev. John Pitman Diaries, entry Saturday, June 8, 1805, Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence. According to Pitman, the Rev. Paul preached from Luke 12:32, Isaiah 32:2, and 1 Peter 4:18. On June 14, Pitman heard Thomas Paul preach again.

¹⁰ *The American Baptist Magazine*, July 1831. For more on Thomas Paul's background, see Lois Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins: Black Daughter of the Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008) and James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1979). While valuable in some respects, both of these studies suffer from incorrect details about Thomas Paul's life and activities. Brown, for instance, links Paul to Prince Hall several years after Hall's death, 11, and the Hortons refer to Nathaniel and Benjamin Paul, Thomas Paul's brothers, as his sons, 143. See also George A. Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1994).

slaveholder.¹¹ The man who ruminated on black intellectual inferiority in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* now sat in the White House. Jefferson's fellow Virginians still reeled from the foiled slave insurrection plotted by Gabriel Prosser the previous fall, and in the Lower South, planters increased cotton production with gratitude to Eli Whitney's gin. The American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, a group of delegates from white abolition societies, continued to meet annually in Philadelphia, as they had since 1794, with little impact on society. At the end of 1801, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society's Committee of Correspondence sent the minutes of its meetings to date to the French abolitionist, the Abbé Henri-Baptiste Grégoire. Grégoire responded by expressing his disappointment that the Paris Society for the Liberty and Instruction of the Negroes had dissolved and lamenting that few persons possessed the "love to do good," the "courage to perform it," and the "Religion and its divine maxims which inspire this courage," at least in France.¹² The same could be said about white Americans. Prince Hall, named Grand Master of the African Lodge in 1800, noted that in Boston there were some who were "not ashamed to take an African by the hand; but yet there are to be seen the weeds of pride, envy, tyranny and scorn, in this garden of peace, liberty, and equality."¹³

Still, numerous black community leaders, undergirded by divine maxims, displayed courage in opposing injustice. In 1801, the same year that the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church in New York City received its charter, Lemuel Haynes, the black New Divinity

¹¹ Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005).

¹² Abbé Henri-Baptiste Grégoire to Citizens Pemberton, Milnor and Others of the committee of Correspondence of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, Paris, March 2, 1802, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

¹³ Quoted in, "Negro Slavery in Massachusetts. Portions of a paper read before the Beverly Lyceum, April, 1833. By Robert Rantoul, Senr.," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, Vol. XXIV (Salem, MA: Printed for the Essex Institute, 1888), 81-108, quote on 107-108. It is hard to tell when Hall said this. It could have been during the 1790s or possibly in response to the Massachusetts' Council's rejection of his offer to help put down the rebels during Shays' Rebellion.

minister, preached a sermon in Rutland, Vermont, on the relationship between the sacred and the civil. In *The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism*, Haynes celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, by proposing a “simple definition” for republican government: “to defend and secure the natural rights of men . . . those privileges, whether civil or sacred, that the God of nature hath given us.” Republicanism, thereby, ensured the public good. When Haynes turned his attention to slavery, he argued that Africans had “become despised, ignorant, and licentious” because their oppressors prevented them from realizing their own equality with others. Oppression, he asserted, attacked the rights of men. His audience, then, ought to encourage the liberty that originated with Christ. For republicanism to operate as it should and for the new country to succeed and prosper in “order, virtue and morality,” it depended on Christian piety.¹⁴ Haynes said nothing surprising, reiterating what many of the Founders and patriotic ministers had advocated. In referring to slaves, however, Haynes insisted that Christian spiritual freedom equaled civil liberty. This was a departure from white eighteenth-century ideas about the relationship between slavery and Christianity. Thomas Paul and other black New Englanders probably read or heard Haynes’ discourse. Their own words and deeds in the years that followed demonstrated that they shared similar ideas.

As Haynes celebrated a sacred civil liberty, the young nation’s love affair with its republican experiment gained impetus from the fervent stirrings of revival. Western New York during the winter of 1799-1800 and Cane Ridge, Kentucky, in 1801, witnessed an overwhelming response to enthusiastic evangelicalism. In ensuing years, particularly throughout the South,

¹⁴ Lemuel Haynes, *The Nature and Importance of True Republicanism: with a Few Suggestions Favorable to Independence. A Discourse, Delivered at Rutland, (Vermont,) The Fourth of July, 1801. It Being the 25th Anniversary of American Independence*, in *Black Preacher to White America: The Collected Writings of Lemuel Haynes, 1774-1833*, ed. Richard Newman with introduction by Helen Maclam and preface by Mechal Sobel (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1990), 77-88, quotes on 79, 82. For a complete exposition on the treatise, see John Saillant, *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The Life and Thought of Lemuel Haynes, 1753-1833* (New York Oxford University Press, 2003).

spectators watched converts faint, tremble, twitch, and dance.¹⁵ Encouraged by the tremendous growth in Methodism and the decline in strict Calvinist orthodoxy, theology in the United States had taken a decided turn toward Arminianism, a doctrine propounding that an individual could decide of his own free will to accept Christ and to lead a holy life.¹⁶ Revitalized spirituality in a liberty-loving republic led to the proliferation of churches and voluntary societies devoted to social transformation.¹⁷ While not all benevolent associations originated with religious sentiment, the link between the sacred and the secular was close enough to make distinctions futile. Christianity appeared as a stabilizing force in a rapidly changing social and political milieu and as a guarantee for a virtuous citizenry, making mutual aid, mission, and literary societies indispensable to nascent republicans, black and white. In establishing their own separate organizations during this vibrant period, free blacks continued to incorporate West African social customs, republican ideology, and evangelical principles.¹⁸ Many participated fully in the religious renaissance and carried a message of possibility to others.

Revivals occurring throughout the country hinted at the far-reaching implications of the theological shift. A student at Yale wrote his brother on May 30, 1802, about the “wonderful revival of religion at College.” Far tamer than the emotional outpourings in the southern states, the spiritual awakening at Yale still arrived “like a mighty rushing wind” and resulted in many

¹⁵ Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

¹⁶ According to Noll, in *America's God*, in 1771 “there were four Methodist preachers caring for about 300 people,” but by 1813, there were 678 preachers leading 171,448 white and 42,850 black church members, 168. Furthermore, by 1800, Calvinist theology among Congregationalists had weakened and would undergo greater liberalization in the following decades, 269-292.

¹⁷ Wood, *Radicalism*, 328-336; Noll, *America's God*, 182-183, 197-199.

¹⁸ Philadelphia's African Methodist Episcopal Church and New York's African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church emerged from such societies. Robert L. Harris, Jr., “Early Black Benevolent Societies, 1780-1830,” *The Massachusetts Review* (Autumn 1979): 603-625. According to Harris, these early black organizations helped “provide a sense of security in their new status as freemen,” 609.

conversions, bringing together students “who had been almost strangers to each other.”¹⁹ The implied democratic nature of the spirit that descended on the college’s students extended into the larger social body. Further marking a radical divergence from the early eighteenth-century revivals, the new century’s enthusiasts, Baptists and Methodists in particular, insisted that ministers no longer needed a university education to preach the Gospel.²⁰

The new revivalistic era provided Thomas Paul with incentive and opportunity to form Boston’s First African Baptist Church. When Paul baptized the nine black believers in 1805, no place of worship specifically for black Christians graced the city of Boston.²¹ Just a year and a half before Paul stepped into the water of the Charles River, the city’s Baptists had experienced a spiritual quickening, with First and Second Baptist Churches adding over two hundred members combined between 1803 and 1805, including several black converts.²² After Paul returned from preaching in Rhode Island in June, 1805, he, along with a black member of First Baptist, Scipio Dalton, asked for assistance from First and Second Baptist to form “the people of Colour who have been baptized into a distinct Church.”²³ First Baptist agreed to help on the condition that the new church exclude white members who might “ultimately become the majority, & defeat the intention of their being an African church.”²⁴ By holding their own services in their own

¹⁹ *Connecticut Centinel*, September 14, 1802.

²⁰ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 9-11, 133-141.

²¹ The city’s small black population, less than 1,200 people, or roughly 4.7 percent of the total population, may have accounted for this fact. In Philadelphia and New York, blacks comprised approximately 10 percent of the urban population. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York & East Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

²² Nathan E. Wood, *The History of the First Baptist Church of Boston (1665-1899)* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), 294-295.

²³ *Second Baptist Church of Boston Records, Book 1* (1788-1809), Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Newton Centre, MA.

²⁴ *First Baptist Church of Boston Records, Book 2* (1800-1831), Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Newton Centre, MA.

meeting house, which they finally did in December 1806, blacks who had been relegated to the galleries in white churches could now worship as they pleased without prying eyes and humiliation.²⁵

Paul, unlike the pioneers Allen and Jones in Philadelphia, and William Hamilton, Peter Williams Sr., William Miller, and James Varick in New York, eschewed Methodism in favor of the Baptist faith. Although educated by Freewill Baptists in New Hampshire, Paul affiliated with the Regular Baptists who subscribed to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.²⁶ Why he became a Baptist may relate to his early background, or he may have found the denomination's adherence to individual church autonomy attractive. Paul's father, Caesar, likely arrived in New Hampshire from West Africa through either the domestic slave trade or trade with the West Indies.²⁷ As a West African, Caesar Paul, would have been familiar with sociopolitical initiation rites involving water immersion. Perhaps the Rev. Paul had heard stories about this, and it influenced his experience or his affinity for the Baptists, whose baptismal ritual entailed full immersion.²⁸ The popularity of baptism combined with church independence would have attracted Africans to Thomas Paul's new church. At African Baptist, the leaders and members faced no white oversight like their Methodist colleagues in New York and Philadelphia. When Paul attended the annual Boston Baptist Association conferences, he did so as the representative of a self-governing church polity. Paul was so committed to the denomination's expansion that

²⁵ Charles L. Coleman, "A History of the Negro Baptists in Boston. 1800-1875," (master's thesis, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, 1956). He gets much of the information from an "unidentified newspaper clipping from a Boston newspaper in 1905." A copy of this clipping is attached to the end of the thesis.

²⁶ J. Marcus Mitchell, "The Paul Family," *Old Time New England* 63 (Winter 1973): 73-76; William Little, *The History of Weare, New Hampshire. 1735-1888* (Lowell, MA: S.W. Huse & Co., 1888); Noll, *America's God*.

²⁷ Caesar Paul was enslaved by Major John Gilman of Exeter, New Hampshire, and freed before 1771. He married a former slave with a white father. David T. Dixon, "Freedom Earned, Equality Denied: Evolving Race Relations in Exeter and Vicinity, 1776-1876," *Historical New Hampshire* 61 (Spring 2007): 29-47. For information on slavery in New Hampshire, see Mark J. Sammons and Valerie Cunningham, *Black Portsmouth: Three Centuries of African-American Heritage* (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2004).

²⁸ See Creel, "A Peculiar People," for a detailed analysis of the relationship between West African social customs and Baptist immersion practices, 292-295.

in 1808 he helped establish Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York City, installing his brother, the Rev. Benjamin Paul, as pastor.²⁹ One of Caesar Paul's other sons, Nathaniel, later also became a Baptist preacher and activist.

Thomas Paul's well-documented role in founding the First African Baptist Church obscures the important historical tradition upon which he built.³⁰ Before 1806, black believers for eight years had been meeting together informally at Master Vinal's school near Boston's West End. Nearly a decade before that, Boston's selectmen, voting in February 1789, permitted them to use Faneuil Hall for their meetings as long as they were on a Tuesday or Friday. John Marrant, who was in Boston that same February, recorded that he "obtained a large place, and preached every Friday afternoon to a large concourse of people," and preached on Sunday in the West End.³¹ The Rev. Paul sustained a relationship with First Baptist's pastor, Samuel Stillman, the same patriotic minister whom Marrant visited when he first arrived in Boston. No doubt, Paul knew that Marrant preached in Boston. Stillman, along with Second Baptist's minister, Thomas Baldwin, preached at Paul's installation service at the African Meeting House in Belknap Street in December 1806. Like Marrant, Paul sought to present himself as a respectable member of the clergy, and forging ties with Stillman and Baldwin cemented his position.³² Witnesses described Paul as "dignified, urbane and attractive."³³ Elias Smith, the anti-authoritarian Freewill Baptist whom Baldwin criticized for his plain appearance, suggested that

²⁹ Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*; William J. Walls, *The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church: Reality of the Black Church* (Charlotte: A.M.E.Z. Publishing House, 1974).

³⁰ Levesque, *Black Boston*; Brown, *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins*; Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*.

³¹ *A Journal of John Marrant, From August the 18th, 1775, to The 16th of March, 1790* (London: Printed for the Author, 1790), in "Face Zion Forward": *First Writers of the Black Atlantic, 1785-1798*, eds. Joanna Brooks and John Saillant (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 149.

³² Hatch, *Democratization*, points out that by the turn of the century, Baptists, who up to that point had been criticized for their lack of decorum, were gaining respectability. Baldwin gave the Massachusetts' election sermon in 1802 and received a doctor of divinity from Union College in 1803, becoming a trustee of Brown University in 1807.

³³ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, April 1831. Thomas Paul's manner of dress is reminiscent of the Methodist "Black Parson," Marrant likely, who appeared in London in 1784. See chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Paul would now “be adorned with the POPISH ATTIRE,” presumably referring both to his donning clerical robes and his relationship with orthodox Baptist leaders Stillman and Baldwin.³⁴

In Boston, Thomas Paul found a black community already committed to spiritual and social improvement. The city’s African Society, before which Paul spoke several times, had been founded the previous decade as a mutual aid association. Its members, including Scipio Dalton and Cato Gardner from First Baptist, dedicated themselves to becoming good citizens, growing in Christian knowledge, and maintaining upright, respectable lives.³⁵ To this end, the Society supported at least one auxiliary group. In March 1806, the Bostonians assisted Salem’s African Society in celebrating its first anniversary with a procession that received attention from white onlookers for its decorum.³⁶ The following year, many black Bostonians traveled again to Salem to parade in respectable fashion.³⁷ The societies and their parades served a number of functions in the community. West African in origin and style, they fostered cultural solidarity and mutual support among the foreign and the American-born.³⁸ For instance, William Bentley, the liberal Congregationalist pastor of Salem’s East Church, noted that in June of 1806, the African Society provided the music for a long funeral procession held for Mingo Freeman, Bentley’s African-born servant and a member of the Society.³⁹ The parades, furthermore, modeled for white observers the respectability demanded of republican citizens. One historian

³⁴ *The Christian’s Magazine, Reviewer, and Religious Intelligencer*, 1806. For information on the debate between Smith and Stillman and Baldwin, see Noll, *America’s God*; Hatch, *Democratization*.

³⁵ *Laws of the African Society, Instituted at Boston, Anno Domini, 1796* (Boston, 1802), 3, 6.

³⁶ *Salem Register*, March 24, 1806.

³⁷ William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D. Pastor of the East Church Salem, Massachusetts*, Vol. III, January, 1803 - December, 1810 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 309.

³⁸ Harris, “Early Black Benevolent Societies,” points out that African societies “stressed moral training and good conduct” similar to early black benevolent organizations, 613. Sterling Stuckey, in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), interprets black “election” day parades as evidence for a shared African culture among American blacks, 73-83. There is no evidence available that the Salem parades were related to election day.

³⁹ Bentley, *Diary*, Vol. III, 237. Both Creel, “*A Peculiar People*,” 313-317, 320, and Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 274-278, analyze the relationship between African customs and African American Christian funeral rites.

argues that black paraders in the North were “asserting their right to the streets.”⁴⁰ Certainly African society members staked out their public position as American citizens; however, I suggest that the processions, which invariably ended with a church sermon, were integral to black leaders’ call for social and spiritual improvement. Decorous parades that carried their participants to church encouraged both racial solidarity and spiritual considerations. They were nationalistic and evangelistic in nature and style.

Northern black leaders also combined Gospel itinerancy with activism against the transatlantic slave trade. The month after the Bostonians paraded in Salem in 1807, Philadelphia’s Absalom Jones traveled to Providence, Rhode Island, to conduct services at St. John’s Church. The *Providence Gazette* disclosed that Jones sought to visit Bristol, a slave-trading seaport, ostensibly to preach against the slave trade.⁴¹ “[B]ut he cannot prevent the traffic in human flesh,” the paper reported, “and is advised, should he go there, not to descant on that *very delicate subject*, if he wishes to escape ‘*tar and feather*,’ or a worse fate.—The *Goshawk Parson* dare not, *for his ears*, either preach or print against it.”⁴² Two or three weeks later Jones was in Boston, probably to visit Prince Hall and members of the African Society there, including Thomas Paul.⁴³ In opposing slavery, Jones was like the bird of prey to which the *Providence Gazette* had compared him. It is likely that in Boston Jones incorporated some

⁴⁰ Shane White, “It Was a Proud Day”: African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834 *Journal of American History* 81 (June 1994): 13-50, quote on 34. For other analyses of black parades and festivals, see Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (1942; repr., New York: Atheneum, 1969); Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and “Race” in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). Kachun argues that beginning in 1808, when black northerners began celebrating the end of the slave trade, “African American organizers consistently used freedom celebrations to articulate a distinctive, black-centered historical consciousness and sense of peoplehood,” 28. It is clear, however, that this consciousness predated the end of the slave trade.

⁴¹ Bristol, Rhode Island, was home to Captain James D’Wolf, a notorious slave trader and United States Senator. In 1791, D’Wolf was involved in an act of brutality on a slave ship, a case of which Jones would have been aware. See Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2007), 343-348, 352-353.

⁴² *Providence Gazette*, August 29, 1807.

⁴³ Bentley, *Diary*, Vol. III, 321. Bentley recorded that Prince Hall informed him about Jones’ visit.

message about the slave trade and discussed with his colleagues strategies for spreading Christian virtue in the black community and ending slavery altogether. Jones was fully aware that, although the United States Congress earlier in the year had finally passed legislation to abolish the transatlantic trade, the congressional debate stirred up sectional divisions and engendered passion among southern slaveholders. The Virginia representative, John Randolph, called the slave trade bill “the most frightful, abominable, and tremendous of all laws” and feared it would lead eventually to universal emancipation.⁴⁴ Black leaders such as Jones hoped for exactly that.

The public debate over the transatlantic slave trade sustained black communities’ attention. When the Philadelphia Quaker John Parrish published his 1806 antislavery treatise, *Remarks on the Slavery of the Black People*, he asked Quomony Clarkson, a black schoolteacher and later member of First African Presbyterian, to read it and share his opinion.⁴⁵ Parrish, an elderly man by this time, did not dwell on abstract ideals in the address but included real accounts of slavery’s cruelty. He underscored the nation’s hypocritical actions against the stated intentions of its own Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, arguing from Scripture that “[a] house divided against itself cannot stand.” Parrish went so far as to suggest colonizing the western lands for freed blacks as an inducement to slaveholders to emancipate their slaves.⁴⁶ Clarkson, the day after hearing William Gray, a cofounder of St. Thomas’s Episcopal Church, read Parrish’s essay aloud, wrote the Quaker that the treatise demonstrated to him how much the slaves’ friends were doing to liberate them. In words that presaged the black slave trade orations

⁴⁴ *United States’ Gazette*, March 3, 1807; *Connecticut Herald*, June 9, 1807. The House of Representatives passed the slave trade legislation on February 26, 1807. The debate was reported in newspapers throughout the country. For analysis of the debate, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴⁵ For information about Quomony Clarkson, see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 200, 217, 239.

⁴⁶ John Parrish, *Remarks on the Slavery of the Black People* (Philadelphia: Kimber & Conrad, 1806), 6, 9.

of 1808, he expressed his gratitude for Parrish's and others' attempts to "alleviate the miseries, which appear to be visited on that unfortunate people by the . . . cruelty of man."⁴⁷

Just months before the slave trade legislation took effect, another reformer, Paul Cuffe, shared with John Parrish's Quaker friend, William Rotch, how deeply he experienced racial prejudice. Cuffe, a wealthy ship owner and captain residing in New Bedford, Massachusetts, confided to Rotch that he felt himself a member of a "degraded class" and that he would gladly "be skinned if his black could be replaced by white." A wealthy white man unable to approximate Cuffe's experiences, Rotch believed Cuffe weak in his desire to be white. Cuffe's words, in fact, reflected the deep pain of racism even for a wealthy black and suggest that not all reformers shared the same optimism over the demise of international slave trafficking. Despite his business success and the reputation he had earned in his own neighborhood, Cuffe was realistic and certainly cynical enough to eye future race relations with skepticism. He observed the strictest racial separations himself even in his own home where he provided white guests with separate tables and beds. He dined with whites only reluctantly. One evening after dining with Rotch, Cuffe left to pick up a meal that he had ordered. Upon arriving at his destination, he was informed that he would need to retrieve it from the kitchen. Justifiably angered, Cuffe informed them that "he had dined with William Rotch in the parlor."⁴⁸ Cuffe not too long after decided that black Americans might be better off leaving their country than living in the midst of prejudice.

⁴⁷ Quomony Clarkson to John Parrish, Philadelphia, March 13, 1806, Cox, Parrish, Wharton Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ William Rotch to John Parrish, New Bedford, August 9, 1807, Cox, Parrish, Wharton Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. The letter is incomplete so there is no way of knowing whether this was William Rotch, Sr. or William Rotch, Jr. The elder Rotch was an abolitionist and the younger corresponded with Paul Cuffe. For details on Cuffe's background, see Rosalind Cobb Wiggins, ed., *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters, 1808-1817: A Black Quaker's "Voice from within the Veil,"* with an introduction by Rhett S. Jones (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 45-70).

Black activists in Philadelphia and New York prepared with happy anticipation to celebrate the official termination of American involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. In Philadelphia, the Rev. Absalom Jones, the Rev. Richard Allen, James Forten, and Belfast Burton, agreed at a planning meeting to write resolutions to share with other African religious societies throughout the country. They resolved to thank the Almighty for influencing the slave trade's opponents on their behalf.⁴⁹ In New York, John Teasman, principal of the African Free School,⁵⁰ and Peter Williams Jr., whose father helped found the city's AMEZ church, held a meeting at the African School to discuss their celebration preparations. Their resolutions indicate that they had corresponded with the Philadelphians, both groups thanking "the friends of humanity" who had acted with the help of "Divine Assistance" to bring about "this happy event."⁵¹ The New Yorkers went further by acknowledging themselves victims of a trade that had robbed them of happiness.⁵²

As 1808 dawned, Absalom Jones explained why the traffic in humans had finally ended legally. On the first day of this promising era, he made known to the people gathered at St. Thomas's African Episcopal Church that God had acted in history. Just as the Hebrews' Lord had delivered them from the Egyptians, he had seen the affliction of the Africans. Acknowledging God as the Common Father of all humankind, Jones identified with the Africans who had suffered kidnapping and endured the Middle Passage only to face more inhumane treatment upon arriving in seaports in America and the West Indies. Jones emphasized repeatedly that God had seen the slave ships, the agony and heartbreak of human hearts, and the backbreaking work on rice, sugar, and tobacco plantations. God had seen masters' refusal to

⁴⁹ *The Daily Advertiser*, December 30, 1807.

⁵⁰ Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 65-66.

⁵¹ *Daily Advertiser*, December 30, 1807, and *The Providence Gazette*, December 26, 1807.

⁵² *Providence Gazette*, December 26, 1897.

share the Gospel, and He had seen the torture they inflicted on slaves. Jones, who had been enslaved himself for almost forty years, spoke to an audience among whom sat slaves, perhaps some from the South and the West Indies. But God had “*come down to deliver* our suffering countrymen from the hands of their oppressors,” Jones impressed upon his listeners. “He *came down* into the British Parliament. . . . He *came down* into the Congress of the United States” to stop the bloodshed in the Africans’ ancestral land.⁵³ It was only by God’s intervention in the affairs of men that hope glimmered on the horizon.

Jones’ sermon served as a springboard for advancing his own mission of racial uplift, a cause that he linked to a broader, more global reform project. He reminded his audience that they should publicly acknowledge that their fathers and grandfathers had been slaves, and ought to ponder what God had done for them. Like any good Christian republican, he encouraged virtuous behavior, exhorting the black listeners to “be sober-minded, humble, peaceable, temperate in . . . meats and drinks,” practice frugality, work hard, act justly, and “honour all men.” As in his 1799 petition to Congress, Jones refused to call for immediate emancipation, instead asking the Holy Spirit to influence legislatures to ease bondspeople’s hardships, especially their lack of education. Jones believed that slaves required preparation for freedom and that learning to read Scripture constituted a crucial part of their education to guide their behavior. While they were yet slaves, they could become “the freemen of the Lord.” For Jones, bondage to Satan was far worse than human bondage.⁵⁴ At the same time, he recognized slavery as an unmitigated evil that had no place in Christ’s kingdom. Implicit in his admonitions was the

⁵³ Absalom Jones, *A Thanksgiving Sermon, Preached January 1, 1808, In St. Thomas’s, or the African Episcopal Church, Philadelphia: On Account of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade, on that Day, by the Congress of the United States* (Philadelphia: Fry and Kammerer, 1808), in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, ed. Dorothy Porter (1971; repr., Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1995): 335-342, quotes on 338.

⁵⁴ Jones, *Thanksgiving Sermon*, in *Ibid.*, 340, 339.

confidence that good conduct and education would assist blacks to take their place in the Republic.

Jones argued explicitly that education helped fulfill Christ's Great Commission to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Africans converted to Christianity in America could return to Africa to share the good news.⁵⁵ This particular vision may have harkened back to Jones' experience as a member of the Free African Society (FAS) when it corresponded with Newport's Free African Union about emigration to Africa. The FAS had sent Henry Stewart to Newport almost twenty years before and then on to Boston where Africans were pressuring the state to help finance an African settlement. Jones may even have discussed the options for ameliorating the conditions of American blacks with Prince Hall in Boston and with the Africans in Providence when he was there a few months before. If nothing else, Jones' vision for the future revealed the expansive nature of the reform he and others were undertaking and its relationship to their numinous worldview.

Jones mailed a copy of his sermon to Granville Sharp in London, a testament to his own understanding of global concerns about human rights. Benjamin Rush, likely present in the audience listening to Jones' oration, had written to Sharp about the sermon and also sent copies. Sharp asked Rush "to present my sincere thanks to the Rev. Mr. Jones for his favour in sending a copy of it to me. The good sense, and religious knowledge, which he has manifested in that little work will enable him (I trust, with God's blessing,) to enlighten his African Brethren, by instructing them in the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures." Sharp ensured that the sermon had a broad reading by carrying Rush's copies, the day after receiving them, to the homes of stalwarts against the slave trade such as the Duke of Grafton, William Wilberforce, and Thomas Clarkson. Sharp then forwarded to Jones by way of Rush two tracts on the "The Iniquity of Tolerating

⁵⁵ Jones, *Thanksgiving Sermon*, in *Ibid.*, 340.

Slavery,” which Sharp told Rush he could not “with propriety or prudence, send to your African Friend, while there are any remains of Slavery in the United States.”⁵⁶ Sharp and Jones had maintained ties for some fifteen years, and the old British abolitionist recognized the danger to which he exposed the black Episcopal priest by sending him such material directly. Perhaps Sharp worried that slavery’s defenders would discover that Jones had received inflammatory pamphlets from a diehard abolitionist. This concern may explain why Sharp and Jones kept their relationship quiet.

In New York, Peter Williams Jr. gave a slave trade address at the African Church that adopted a different historical perspective than that offered by Jones. Rather than dwelling chiefly on God’s deliverance, Williams Jr. traced human beings’ complicity with evil beginning with Christopher Columbus’s introduction of slavery into the Americas. Slave dealers’ intrusion into Africa, a land Williams Jr. portrayed as an idyllic paradise, corrupted the innocent natives and led to devastating wars with the enslavement of millions of Africans as the consequence.⁵⁷ It would be easy to claim that Williams Jr. drew on an eighteenth-century intellectual tradition of sentimentalism, but by the time he addressed these New Yorkers, reports had reached the public from the explorer Mungo Park and others about African society and culture.⁵⁸ Many of the listeners in Williams Jr.’s audience had been born in Africa and knew that while it may not have been paradise, it was Eden compared to foreign bondage. In keeping with his emphasis on man’s responsibility for his fellow beings, Williams Jr. praised antislavery advocates such as John

⁵⁶ Granville Sharp to Benjamin Rush, London, October 26, 1808, Benjamin Rush Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁵⁷ Peter Williams Jr., *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade; Delivered in The African Church, in the City of New York, January 1, 1808* (New York: Samuel Wood, 1808), in *Early Negro Writing*, 343-354, quotes on 345, 353, 346.

⁵⁸ On the relationship between sentimentality and antislavery, see Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968; repr., New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1977).

Woolman, Anthony Benezet, William Wilberforce, and Thomas Clarkson. Throughout the oration, he stressed that whites must bear the responsibility for the cruel and devastating slave traffic. While he never advocated immediate emancipation, Williams Jr. looked forward to the day “when the sun of liberty shall beam resplendent on the whole African race.”⁵⁹ And, like Jones, Williams Jr. recognized the value in publicizing his essay. Once published, it was advertised in the *New York Gazette and General Advertiser* for several months and in the *New Bedford Mercury* throughout the month of March.

Boston’s African Society celebrated later in the year. Following a procession of two hundred blacks through the city’s streets on July 14, 1808, the organization’s members and others gathered at the African Meeting House to hear white Congregationalist minister Jedidiah Morse. No strong evidence exists to explain the choice of this date in preference to January 1. Historians suggest that black Bostonians might have associated the date with French revolutionaries storming the Bastille, or it may simply have been a convenient date.⁶⁰ Despite the fact that Thomas Paul was the pastor of the African Church, the black community in Boston asked several white ministers to officiate at the service although they provided the music themselves. Other white clergymen from surrounding neighborhoods also attended the celebration.⁶¹ The Society’s dependence on white ministerial services for this and subsequent

⁵⁹ Williams, *Oration*, 353. For an extensive analysis of New Yorkers’ freedom orations, see Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

⁶⁰ Kachun, in *Festivals of Freedom*, suggests that black Bostonians may have identified with French revolutionaries, 26. For more analysis of freedom celebrations, see William B. Gravely, “The Dialectic of Double-Consciousness in Black American Freedom Celebrations, 1808-1863,” *Journal of Negro History* 67 (Winter 1982): 302-317. Gravely provides evidence that the date may have been convenient and further implies that it was possibly related to the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts, 303. Kachun finds no evidence for that link. Nevertheless, the July 24, 1829, edition of the *New-Bedford Mercury* reported that the Nantucket African Society, on July 14th, “celebrated the anniversary of the abolition of slavery in this state. A web search suggests that Massachusetts’ slavery ended on July 8, 1783. It is also possible that the date may harken back to 1787 when the African societies in Boston and Newport agreed to hold a day of fasting the second Tuesday in July to ask God’s blessing. Although that Tuesday was not the 14th, it is possible that the Bostonians made a decision to keep the date.

⁶¹ *New-Bedford Mercury*, July 22, 1808.

freedom commemorations reveals its members' political shrewdness. The presence of white supporters sanctioned their event and granted it the aura of republican respectability, demonstrating for onlookers blacks' worthiness as Christian citizens. Having thus accomplished their public purpose, they afterwards separated themselves from the whites to dine together as a race.⁶²

The Rev. Dr. Morse's sermon differed little from traditional antislavery fare. Emphasizing that God had made all men, he specifically refuted Henry Home, Lord Kames' 1776 *Discourse on the Original Diversity of Mankind* as incompatible with Scripture.⁶³ In true Calvinist fashion, he accepted that social divisions were necessary to the social order while simultaneously admitting that "a kind of equality" existed among different people in that they were "born free and equal." He noted the inconsistency between slavery and Christianity, quoting from Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia* that "liberties are the gift of God" and could not "be violated but with his wrath." The blacks present surely would have appreciated the irony in Morse's words. From the slavery of the body, Morse turned his attention to slavery of the human spirit to sin. Civil freedom meant nothing without the blessing of spiritual freedom that followed Christian conversion. The members of the audience that summer day heard that the slave trade, though wicked, resulted in the conversion of many to Christianity. The Rev. Dr. Morse in Boston exhorted them to good behavior and saw, with the end of America's international slave trade, the promise that Africans could remain on their own continent to hear

⁶² According to the *New-Bedford Mercury*, "Africans and coloured people dined together," suggesting that both African- and American-born blacks attended the service.

⁶³ For information on Lord Kames' theories, see Jordan, *White Over Black*, William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes Toward Race in America 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960) and Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

the preaching of the Gospel by missionaries sent there.⁶⁴ What the celebrants did not hear from the white minister was his anticipation of the day of universal emancipation.

In a telling move, the African Society published in 1808 *An Essay on Freedom* that represented a new trend in black activism.⁶⁵ Consequently, it deserves considerable attention. Written anonymously by one of the Society's own members, the first half of this little analyzed, impressive essay engaged in minimal sentimentality about the horrors of the slave trade; it recounted instead the origin of slavery in the fall of man, much as John Marrant did a generation earlier. Beginning with the topic, "Freedom, a thing so desirable to most men," the essayist traced the sin of men's enmity against one another from Cain and Abel to Moses and Pharaoh. These examples demonstrated "that men are selfish, and that some will even murder their own brethren, rather than they should have the ascendancy over them, or enjoy an equal privilege with them." Men even now ignored the Golden Rule and God's claim to have made all people, and, as in Pharaoh's day, they chose "to tyrannise, enslave and oppress." The writer pointed out that Africans employed the same language as Joseph when he found himself in Egypt after his brothers had sold him: "*I was stolen and brought down here and sold.*" Addressing those who believed that no African should taste freedom, he argued that just because some were enslaved did not mean that all should be. On the contrary, freedom obtained to "every man." White Americans had fought for liberty against Great Britain, and they surely would oppose seeing their people taken captive by other nations. Then why should not the Africans enjoy the same freedom?⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Jedidiah Morse, D.D., *A Discourse Delivered at the African Meeting House, in Boston, July 14, 1808, in Grateful Celebration of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade, by the Governments of the United States, Great Britain and Denmark* (Boston: Lincoln Edmands, 1808), 6, 13.

⁶⁵ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton devote two sentences to it in *Black Bostonians*, 129. I could not find it mentioned elsewhere.

⁶⁶ *The Sons of Africans: An Essay on Freedom. With Observations on the Origin of Slavery. By A Member of the African Society in Boston* (Boston, 1808), 3, 7, 8, 9.

The desirability of universal freedom sustained the writer's attention for the remainder of the treatise. He reasoned that there was no excuse for holding Africans in bondage, which kept them in "darkness, poverty and distress" and prevented them from becoming useful citizens. Even worse, persons involved in perpetuating slavery usurped God's authority. "All men are the Lord's, he hath a right to them and all their services," asserted the essayist. Massachusetts deserved praise for its commitment to religious and civil liberty compared to other states. Salem especially merited honor for its "peculiar partiality to freedom, and . . . particular benevolence to the African" for accepting the African Society's parades in March 1806 and July 1807. This statement suggests that this black Bostonian writer witnessed those events. Finally, after describing the value of freedom to those who pursued it and asking hypothetically how the enslaved would respond to "a general proclamation of freedom," he argued that few would not rejoice at the prospect. In a backhanded compliment to the white citizens of Massachusetts, he remarked, "Although freedom was our right, as it is the right of every other man, yet it was in their power to have held us in slavery and oppression." Despite reports from some whites that many Africans could not conduct themselves "with propriety," he affirmed that "we would insist on the universality of freedom." The essay drew to a close by reminding readers complexion did not make a man a slave. Like any good evangelical, he concluded that "temporal bondage" was nothing "compared to that spiritual bondage."⁶⁷

An Essay on Freedom adopted an explicitly antislavery perspective. Bolder than the published orations of Absalom Jones and Peter Williams Jr., and not even mentioning the end of the slave trade, the author presented a positive, logical, Scripturally-based argument in favor of universal emancipation. This was a radical position for a person of African descent to make

⁶⁷ *Essay on Freedom*, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 21.

public in 1808. That this was a written text further underscored its' author's educational training and exegetical talent. Its content revealed the heart of a committed antislavery activist.

The Rev. Thomas Paul, the founder of Boston's African Baptist Church, probably authored this essay. Paul had addressed the African Society in 1807 and again in January 1809. He had connections in Salem, specifically with the hairdresser and restaurateur John Remond, a member of Salem's First Baptist Church.⁶⁸ Given his penchant for traveling, he likely attended the parades in 1806 and 1807. For Paul, there was no distinction between serving the Lord and serving his community, both black and white. Out of faith in God emerged a faith in the equal rights with which God had bestowed all men. A call for universal freedom would not have been out of place for the man who cautioned candidates for baptism to consider no one a Christian who despised them for their color. Neither would a reminder that spiritual freedom was even more precious than civil liberty. Also, given the erudition of the essay and Prince Hall's death in December the previous year, few blacks in Boston besides Paul were educated enough to produce such a piece.⁶⁹

Thomas Paul's zeal for preaching the Gospel empowered his activism for social change. In this early period, he spoke against slavery and acted out his dedication to the equality of man. During the winter of 1809-1810, Paul participated in revivals in Sutton, Massachusetts, his

⁶⁸ Dorothy Burnett Porter, "The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts: A Nineteenth-Century Family Revisited," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 95 (1985). Porter writes that Thomas Paul married John Remond and Nancy Lenox in Boston on October 29, 1807, after publishing their intention to marry on October 3, 1807. Porter, however, provides no footnote for her information. According to the Massachusetts Marriages, 1633-1850, online database, Remond and Lenox married in Salem on October 3, 1807, <http://www.ancestry.com> (accessed March 18, 2010). Wherever the marriage took place, it is possible that Thomas Paul performed the ceremony. The Second Baptist Church of Boston, Thomas Baldwin's church, and the one from which African Baptist drew members, recorded in its minutes for November 6, 1807, that it had voted to dismiss "John Raymond" so that he could go to Salem First Baptist Church, *Second Baptist Church of Boston Records, Book I* (1788-1809), Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Newton Centre, MA.

⁶⁹ See Nash, *Forging Freedom*, about the illiteracy rate in Philadelphia, 209. For a discussion on black Bostonians' battle for better education, see Levesque, *Black Boston*.

preaching resulting in many “awakened” hearts.⁷⁰ In Salem, where Paul had preached several times to the Close Baptists, the stage driver refused him passage within the coach after one of his visits to the town. The Rev. William Bentley, a Congregationalist with Unitarian leanings, attributed the driver’s rejection to Paul’s association with the Close Baptists, whom townspeople viewed as fanatics. This is a plausible reason, but it was more likely that the driver decided not to offend potential white customers by allowing a black man to ride alongside them. Bentley recorded in his diary that Paul was offered “a seat with the driver, which he angrily refused.”⁷¹ There is no way of knowing whether Paul chose to walk or whether he found some other conveyance to carry him to his next destination, but his stand for his civil rights speaks volumes about the man. While his discourses before the African Society are not extant, the evidence indicates that he celebrated the end of the international slave trade along with his ecclesiastical colleagues in New York and Philadelphia. In July 1814, he delivered a discourse in honor of abolition of the slave trade, an event reported in papers in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Perhaps he even spoke about universal freedom.

Well-known, well-respected, and a powerful preacher, Paul influenced those who heard him. When he visited Connecticut at the end of 1813, an observer remarked, “[T]he Rev. Thomas Paul arrived, and the Spirit of God manifestly accompanied the word which he preached, which had a most blessed effect, in awakening, convicting, and converting souls to God,” both Baptists and Congregationalists. On December 31, a bitterly cold day with several inches of snow on the ground, the Rev. Paul led thirteen young baptism candidates to the icy water to receive the ordinance. People from as far as eighteen miles away gathered to witness the ceremony. The eyewitness reporting the scene never mentioned the color of any of the

⁷⁰ *Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, March, 1810.

⁷¹ Bentley, *Diary*, Vol. III, 490.

participants in the unfolding drama, including Thomas Paul's. What mattered was that the candidates were prepared to "follow the dear Son of God into the cold streams of Jordan!" The occasion was solemn, and the joyous people afterwards appeared reluctant to leave the scene. Paul had similar success in Dudley, Connecticut, where his preaching to crowds was "accompanied with divine power."⁷² The mission to convert and the mission to change society, even if one individual at a time, walked hand in hand.

In Philadelphia, the Rev. John Gloucester, the founder of the city's First African Presbyterian Church, found in evangelical preaching the means to free his own family from slavery. Gloucester had been a slave in Tennessee, owned by Gideon Blackburn, a Presbyterian missionary to the Cherokee.⁷³ Upon visiting Philadelphia with Blackburn in 1807, Gloucester's talents attracted the attention of the newly formed Presbyterian Evangelical Society and its founder, Archibald Alexander, D.D. The Presbyterian General Assembly approved his licensure as a minister but referred him back to the Union Synod of Tennessee, which ordained him in 1810. In the meantime, Blackburn had freed Gloucester to work as a missionary among Philadelphia's blacks while the black preacher's family remained behind in bondage.⁷⁴ Even as Gloucester worked to build his church, he attempted to raise money, through itinerant evangelizing, to purchase liberty for his wife and children. In August 1812, the *Salem Gazette* reported that Gloucester would be preaching at the Tabernacle where "[t]he whole of the galleries, excepting the singing seats, will be assigned to them [the Africans]."⁷⁵ The paper noted that \$1500 had already been raised by Gloucester's friends in Philadelphia. Gloucester

⁷² *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, December 1814.

⁷³ Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro – A History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 32.

⁷⁴ Murray, *Presbyterians*, 32, and William T. Catto, *A Semi-Centenary Discourse, Delivered in the First African Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, May, 1857* (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1857; repr., New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 15-65.

⁷⁵ *Salem Gazette*, August 28, 1812.

eventually crossed the Atlantic to obtain the funds necessary to redeem his family.⁷⁶ He probably contacted renowned British abolitionists who met his dire need.

Gloucester's experience puts into relief the personal anguish many black preachers felt about slavery and racial prejudice and their attempts to ameliorate blacks' conditions. At the beginning of 1812, Gloucester wrote Benjamin Rush, his "worthy friend," to request \$186 to reimburse Gideon Blackburn for a loan to help move his family from Tennessee. Blackburn had called the loan in before Gloucester had the funds to pay it. "I can not beg money to do it," he disclosed to Rush, "neither can I expect my dear friends that have done so much for unworthy me, & my helpless family to do any more." Gloucester had just returned after preaching in Baltimore despite an illness, and the money he raised had gone toward supporting himself and his family.⁷⁷ He contacted Rush out of desperation and pride. It would not have been surprising if Rush helped Gloucester out of his financial predicament given Rush's own advocacy for the black Philadelphians. In 1810, Rush asked his son in London to tell Sharp, Wilberforce, and Clarkson about "the amelioration of the conditions of blacks in our city." In a telltale revelation of his own prejudices, Rush wrote, "By building churches, we shall be relieved from the necessity and greater expense of building jails for them."⁷⁸ This may have been Rush's objective, but by all reports, Gloucester was a talented preacher who parlayed his ability into obtaining his family's freedom while serving Christ and his own community. Charity began at

⁷⁶ Catto, *Semi-Centenary Discourse*, 35.

⁷⁷ John Gloucester to Benjamin Rush, Philadelphia, January 11, 1812, Benjamin Rush Correspondence, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

⁷⁸ Benjamin Rush to Dr. James Rush, Philadelphia, October 19, 1810, Benjamin Rush Correspondence, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

home. Gloucester went on to mentor his sons, including Jeremiah who would preach against slavery, and a young Samuel Cornish, who became a radical abolitionist.⁷⁹

Whereas Gloucester left no written record of his opposition to slavery, another theologian, Daniel Coker, an African Methodist Episcopal minister in Baltimore, published an explicit critique. Set as a dialogue between himself and a proslavery Virginian, the 1810 tract revisited much of the material covered in slave trade orations. Coker not only drew on the Quaker John Parrish's antislavery work but on the 1799 petition that Absalom Jones and his friend James Forten submitted to Congress. While he premised his argument on Scripture, he relied on the Holy Spirit for his interpretation. Responding to the Virginian's inquiry, "Pray have you ever studied divinity?" Coker, a Methodist steeped in pietistic principles, replied, "God can teach me by his spirit to understand his word." Later, when the Virginian asked where Coker studied divinity, Coker answered, "In the school of Christ." Coker assured his interlocutor, however, that he advocated gradual abolition due to the fear immediate emancipation would provoke in elderly slaves lacking the vigor to start over. Firm in his belief "that slavery is contrary to the spirit and nature of the Christian religion," Coker concluded the tract with a list of black preachers he knew personally as proof that God was working on Ethiopia's behalf.⁸⁰ Before settling in Baltimore, he had lived in New York where he was ordained a deacon by Bishop Asbury in 1808 and had met several of the city's Methodist leaders.⁸¹ Elsewhere in his travels he had become acquainted with Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and Thomas and Benjamin Paul. Curiously, Coker mentioned a Presbyterian minister,

⁷⁹ For more information on John Gloucester and his sons, see Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 200, 236, 245, 262-263, and Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 165, 192, 203.

⁸⁰ Daniel Coker, *A Dialogue Between a Virginian and an African Minister, Written by the Rev. Daniel Coker, A descendant of Africa... Minister of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore. Humbly Dedicated to the People of Colour in the United States of America* (Baltimore, 1810), in *Negro Protest Pamphlets*, ed. Dorothy Porter (New York: Arno Press and the *New York Times*, 1969), 15, 22, 25.

⁸¹ Walls, *The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church*, 67.

Rev. Paul Cuffee of Long Island, though New York would have no African Presbyterian church for another twelve years.⁸² Perhaps Coker had heard about the black sea captain, Paul Cuffe, and confused him with someone else, or there was a black Presbyterian by the same name.

The shipowner and captain Paul Cuffe from New Bedford, Massachusetts, was a Quaker who by 1810 had set Africa as his target for philanthropic attention. Cuffe epitomized the marriage between the desire to spread the Gospel globally and to effect positive social reform for people of African descent. Far from being a pioneer in the sacred vocation, he acted on ideas that had guided black activists during the eighteenth century and, like others, used blacks' long-established ties with British abolitionists to advance his agenda. Why Cuffe, a sea captain and merchant in a profitable business, developed an interest in Christianizing Africans and setting up trade with the British colony at Sierra Leone invites speculation. One historian suggests that either Quakers or black Newporters informed him about the project.⁸³ Another reminds us that the black Philadelphians with whom Cuffe sustained a relationship had known about the colony for at least twenty years.⁸⁴ Although an American newspaper reporting on his 1811 trip to Sierra Leone claimed that reading Thomas Clarkson's "history of the abolition of the slave trade . . . awakened all the powers of his mind to a consideration of his origin, and the duties he owed to his people," Cuffe needed no such awakening. Peter Williams Jr., the New York activist, attributed Cuffe's designs to "the force of prejudice" he witnessed.⁸⁵ His own experiences at

⁸² The first African Presbyterian church in New York was organized in 1822 by the Rev. Samuel Cornish. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro*.

⁸³ According to Wiggins, in *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, Newport, where the Free African Union had formed in 1780, was a "center for New England Quakers," 55.

⁸⁴ According to Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, Cuffe forged a relationship with James Forten, a wealthy sailmaker, 176-194. See Wiggins' *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters* for details on Cuffe's relationship with the British abolitionists involved with London's African Institution, through whom Cuffe worked to get his project off the ground, 58-69.

⁸⁵ Peter Williams, *A Discourse, Delivered on the Death of Capt. Paul Cuffe, Before the New-York African Institution, In the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, October 21, 1817* (New York: B. Young and Co., 1817), 9.

home in New Bedford were enough to goad him into action. Cuffe manned his brig *Traveller* in 1811 with only Africans and their descendants.⁸⁶ In an 1813 memorial to Congress requesting permission to sail with settlers to Sierra Leone, Cuffe admitted that he found slavery “inconsistent with that Divine principle [of equity and justice]” and sought to ameliorate Africans’ degradation by bringing “improvement and civilization” to their land.⁸⁷

Christianizing and civilizing Africa served a spiritual and moral imperative. Since John Quamine and Bristol Yamma, with Samuel Hopkins’ support, had sought to return to their native land carrying the Gospel, Africans and their descendants in British North America and the United States had tried for decades to make the dream a reality. Paul Cuffe’s mission involved transforming the African economy and disseminating Christian ideals in order to improve the condition of a people suffering from the deleterious consequences of the slave trade. The black Quaker hoped to thereby inhibit further trafficking in human beings. The project also offered a relief valve to those in the United States suffering from oppression. Paul Cuffe wrote to a friend in 1813 that he had communicated with blacks in Boston, Providence, New York, and Philadelphia who expressed interested in traveling to Africa. Black Bostonians and New Yorkers were especially eager to sail to Sierra Leone.⁸⁸ After Cuffe transported several black Americans to Sierra Leone early in 1816, the New York African Society, at a June meeting, confirmed Cuffe’s “intentions” as “pure, honourable and benevolent.”⁸⁹ Upon his return, Cuffe thanked New York’s Peter Williams Jr., for his help in getting Philadelphia’s African Institution

⁸⁶ *American Watchman*, October 19, 1811.

⁸⁷ Paul Cuffe, “A Petition to the President and Congress,” June 1813, in *Black Nationalism in America*, eds., John H. Bracey, Jr., August Meier and Elliott Rudwick (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), 41-43, quotes on 43 and 42.

⁸⁸ Paul Cuffe to Elisha Tyson, Westport, April 25, 1813, in *Captain Paul Cuffe’s Logs and Letters*, 246.

⁸⁹ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 14, 1816.

to participate in bearing “the yolk of Christian Benevolence.”⁹⁰ Unlike Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, whose 1742 mission work in Africa was also framed as a Christianizing and civilizing program, Cuffe and his supporters vowed that Christianity was incompatible with slavery, and determined to use their project to bring that institution to an end.⁹¹

Thomas Paul supported Cuffe’s efforts. On June 9, 1815, just a few months after the Treaty of Ghent officially ended the United States’ war with Great Britain, Paul was onboard the brig *Panther* waiting to set sail for Liverpool.⁹² While the black preacher may have been sent by the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society, it is possible that Paul traveled specifically to discuss the African emigration plan with Cuffe’s friends in London’s African Institution.⁹³ He was away for over a year, and in July 1816 just before his departure for the United States, he spoke at a dinner before the African Institution. According to a news report, Paul praised William Wilberforce and expressed his delight in “seeing face to face the savior and benefactor of the blacks—the friend of the whole human race.”⁹⁴ This suggests that Paul had not met

⁹⁰ Paul Cuffe to Peter Williams Jr., n.d., Westport, in *Captain Paul Cuffe’s Logs and Letters*, 438. For analysis of the relationship between Cuffe and Williams, see Alexander, *African or American?*, 36-40. For information on Philadelphia’s African Institution, see Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 183-194.

⁹¹ For information on black missionaries in the Atlantic world, see David Killingray, “The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement, 1780s-1920s,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33 (February 2003): 3-31.

⁹² *Baltimore Patriot*, June 13, 1815.

⁹³ Mitchell, “The Paul Family,” *Old Time New England*. Mitchell provides no footnote for this claim and states only that the “Massachusetts Baptist Society sponsored” his trip. See also *Dictionary of American Negro Biography*, eds. Rayford W. Logan and Michael R. Winston (New York: Norton, 1982), 482-483. The Rev. Thomas Baldwin from Second Baptist in Boston edited *The Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Magazine*, which fails to mention this trip. Julie Winch, in *Gentleman of Color*, states that Paul went with Prince Saunders on African Lodge business. The two men, however, sailed separately, Prince Saunders arriving in Liverpool in May 1815 on the *New Packet* and sailing to Haiti the following February according to reports in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* and *Federal Republican*. Paul probably had forged some sort of relationship with the British Baptist Missionary Society. In 1814, he served as executor for the estate of a young Baptist preacher, Charles Warburton, who died while visiting London. Apparently of noble birth, Warburton left his family in England to preach the Gospel in the United States. In “An Elegy” on his death, the poet, “A Lady of Colour,” perhaps even Thomas Paul’s wife, Catherine, commented about Warburton that “the truths of the gospel was all his delight,” “An Elegy on the Death of the Late Reverend Charles Warburton, who died in Boston, July the 1st, 1814, Aged 30. By A Lady of Colour,” (Boston: Nathaniel Coverly, June 1814).

⁹⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 6, 1816.

Wilberforce previously. It does not mean that Paul had not met with other British abolitionists.⁹⁵

In fact, the attention the African Institution paid to the American blacks in England at the time enraged West Indian planters who predicted “revolt and pillage” in the colonies as a consequence of the visit.⁹⁶ Two months after Paul returned to Boston from Liverpool, James Easton, Jr., a black businessman, remarked in a letter to Paul Cuffe that he had seen the Rev. Paul, who expressed pleasure that Cuffe and his family were doing well.⁹⁷ The black preacher hoped that Cuffe would assist “some good instetution Being Established in this Country,” possibly referring to Paul’s plan to establish Sunday schools for black children to aid their education.⁹⁸

With Thomas Paul at the London dinner was Prince Saunders, another Cuffe supporter who voiced an interest in ameliorating the conditions of Africans throughout the world.⁹⁹

Saunders was educated at Dartmouth College, a teacher at the African school housed in the

⁹⁵ *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* states that Paul was “lionized by abolitionists in England,” 483. According to Catharina Slautterback, Curator of Prints & Photographs at the Boston Athenaeum, the British artist J. Palmer painted Paul’s portrait while he was in London. James Hopwood then engraved the portrait, publishing it in 1816. This suggests that there was great public interest in the Rev. Paul. Personal communication, April 22, 2010.

⁹⁶ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 6, 1816.

⁹⁷ Paul returned to Boston July 28, 1816, aboard the *Sagadahock* from Liverpool according to New York’s *Evening Post*, July 30, 1816. James Easton, Jr., may have been a leader in Paul’s church because according to the Boston Baptist Association Minutes for 1815 and 1816, James Easton attended the annual meeting representing African Baptist. It is possible, however, that it was the elder Easton who attended Paul’s church. Nevertheless, James Easton attended the 1816 meeting with Caleb Easton, another son of the elder James Easton. Either father and son or two brothers attended. James Easton, Jr., was a physician. His brother, Hosea Easton, became a Methodist minister and outspoken abolitionist. For more extensive information on the Easton family, see William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855; repr., New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1968), 33-34, and *To Heal the Scourge of Prejudice: The Life and Writings of Hosea Easton*, edited with introduction by George R. Price and James Brewer Stewart (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 1-10.

⁹⁸ James Easton, Jr. to Paul Cuffe, Bridgewater, October 8, 1816, in *Captain Paul Cuffe’s Logs and Letters*, 468-469. Thomas Paul’s efforts on behalf of a Sunday School for black children and his involvement with an Education Society for the People of Colour are recounted in newspapers beginning in 1817. The context of the letter indicates that this may have been the subject to which Paul referred because Easton went on to lament to Cuffe that lack of education prevented blacks from accomplishing any public business. They could not afford to travel to meet together, and when they could, their ignorance precluded forming a society conducive to their own improvement.

⁹⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 6, 1816. Arthur O. White, “Prince Saunders: An Instance of Social Mobility Among Antebellum New England Blacks,” *Journal of Negro History* 60 (October 1975): 526-535. White states that Thomas Paul and Prince Saunders “sailed in 1815 to promote colonization,” 528, but he fails to cite his source for this information. It appears that much of White’s biographical information on Saunders comes from *Dictionary of American Biography*, ed. Dumas Malone (20 vols.; 19th ed. New York, 1968) XVII, 382.

African Baptist Meeting House, and a Secretary to Boston's African Lodge since 1809.¹⁰⁰ On March 21, 1815, he wrote to Cuffe about his plans to travel either to Haiti or Africa and asked if Cuffe could arrange to take him to Africa along with "several families."¹⁰¹ His plan failed and, instead, he traveled to England in May to meet with the country's humanitarians to discuss measures for spreading Protestantism and European education to Haiti.¹⁰² Upon his arrival in Liverpool, he was, according to news reports, "treated by the English clergy and gentry at Liverpool, with as distinguished honors and hospitality, as the prince regent exercised towards the legitimate sovereign who last summer visited London."¹⁰³ Conferring with nobility and notable abolitionists, Saunders sailed early in 1816 to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to meet with King Henri Christophe. According to Saunders, Christophe expressed a sincere interest in the mission and sent Saunders back to England for further training. Wilberforce courted Saunders especially to take the smallpox vaccine to Haitians to arrest the spread of the disease.¹⁰⁴ When Saunders returned to Haiti, he began teaching at an academy and encouraging Christophe to change Haiti's official religion from Roman Catholic to Episcopal.¹⁰⁵ For Saunders, as for Thomas Paul and Captain Cuffe, the secular and sacred overlapped. The most devout emigrationists often proved to be the most devout missionaries.

As 1816 drew to a close, black activists such as Thomas Paul and Paul Cuffe remained committed to their divinely inspired work despite an uphill battle. The black Philadelphia printer, Russell Parrott, at the annual slave trade celebration, confessed his disappointment that

¹⁰⁰ According to an obituary in *The Liberator*, June 21, 1839, Saunders presumably graduated from Dartmouth. For more information on Saunders, see also Levesque, *Black Boston* and Records of the African Lodge, Boston, Minutes, 1809-1816, Samuel Crocker Lawrence Library, The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Boston.

¹⁰¹ Prince Saunders to Paul Cuffe, Boston, March 21, 1815, in *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 336-337.

¹⁰² *Dedham Gazette*, May 24, 1816.

¹⁰³ *Columbian*, July 29, 1815.

¹⁰⁴ *Dedham Gazette*, July 19, 1816.

¹⁰⁵ *Christian Messenger*, January 22, 1817.

“total abolition” still loomed far in the future if at all.¹⁰⁶ The American withdrawal from transatlantic slave trafficking did not translate to support for universal emancipation. Slavery and the domestic slave trade continued unabated in the southern states and free black Americans confronted oppression daily. Black activists and ministers offered education and Christian conversion as the best hope for Africans everywhere to improve their conditions. As Saunders worked in Haiti, Thomas Paul returned to Boston, maintaining his involvement with the white Boston Baptist Association to further the denomination’s goals. New Yorkers Peter Williams Jr., and Philadelphians Absalom Jones and James Forten encouraged Paul Cuffe’s project in Sierra Leone. But on December 28, 1816, a group of white humanitarians founded the American Colonization Society with the ostensible goal of aiding free blacks who wanted to emigrate to West Africa. The rise of this organization would lead black activists to question its humanitarian motives and to expand their own agenda for abolition and social reform.

Conclusion

Between 1800 and 1816, black activists strove to embed the antislavery message in their evangelistic projects. Recognizing the power of experimental religion to transform lives and remake society, they developed strategies that depended on both a West African cultural heritage and the pietistic ideals circulated in the decades following the First Great Awakening. This new generation of black leaders stood on the shoulders of Gronniosaw, Wheatley, and Marrant. They continued to cross racial, denominational, and national boundaries and to pursue broad social change. Their mobility sustained and extended their cooperative networks among each other and with white humanitarians. The decades after the Revolution whispered the promise of a new egalitarian social and political order, a promise reinforced by the end of American involvement

¹⁰⁶ Russell Parrott, *An Address, on the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, Delivered before the different African Benevolent Societies, on the 1st of January, 1816* (Philadelphia, 1816), 4.

in the international slave trade and the democratic nature of religious revivals. Thus encouraged, black activists used their pens and took to the roads and to the seas to articulate their vision for change. They now unabashedly linked spiritual and physical freedom. In significant ways, they practiced what they preached. Absalom Jones, the “goshawk” parson, demonstrated his audacious convictions by mailing his freedom address to Granville Sharp, thus guaranteeing it as wide a reading as possible. Thomas Paul, famed in evangelical circles, sailed the Atlantic to share his hope for the future with renowned British abolitionists. These pioneers in a new boldness could not help but shape what observers thought about Africans, the Gospel of Christ, and slavery. They were evangelists dedicated to the annihilation of human bondage and would face increasing opposition with new strategies and a certainty that a divine wind stood at their backs.

Chapter 5

“We love this country, but we do detest the principle of holding slaves”:

A Divine Mission, Self-Determination, and the Emergence of Radical Abolitionism,
1817-1829

For several decades, African Americans had consistently framed their challenges to slavery and racial discrimination in sacred terms. Activists involved in reform, including antislavery, emigration, education, Christian missions, moral uplift, and equal rights, insisted they were guided by the will of God. Between 1817 and 1829, they adopted more aggressive tactics to achieve their goals, often resorting to the familiar language of the jeremiad.¹ It appeared to most blacks that the nation had turned its back on its initial compact and on the egalitarian republicanism vaunted by the Founders, thereby making the new nation vulnerable to God’s judgment. Their advocacy for change became more urgent for a number of reasons. During the 1790s, states had begun broadening suffrage rights and over the next three decades rewrote their constitutions to incorporate universal white male suffrage. At the same time, states moved to restrict or exclude black voting rights.² Beginning in 1819, new states admitted into the Union denied blacks the vote.³ In 1820, the Missouri Compromise guaranteed slavery below 36° 30' latitude. Amidst an expanding southern slave power and denial of suffrage in the North, blacks also confronted a new kind of paternalistic white benevolence, the American Colonization

¹ For an extended analysis of the jeremiad, see Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953; repr., Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993), 29-31, 34-39, 46-52. The jeremiad was a uniquely American literary form dating to the earliest New England Puritan ministers who first developed it. The jeremiad was a sermon that warned hearers of God’s retribution for their wicked ways. It called for repentance and reformation in order to avoid divine judgment.

² Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 82-83, 186-199, 309-310, and Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 74-87.

³ Litwack, *North of Slavery*, 79.

Society (ACS).⁴ These developments demanded that black abolitionists change their strategy. Anticolonizationism was more than opposition, however. It was a battle for self-determination and for the good of the country and the world.⁵ Black critics dubbed the ACS the handmaiden of sinful slavery and questioned ACS supporters' motives. Embracing traditions of practical piety and self-determination, black ministers, educators, and other activists believed they had a divine mandate to end slavery. I argue that black Americans' objections to the ACS and to the nation's political developments inspired the radical movement for immediate abolition. Eventually, black reformers attracted the attention of white abolitionists willing to embrace radicalism and eradicate the nation's sin.⁶

Free blacks denounced the ACS soon after its founding. A large assembly gathered at Philadelphia's Bethel Church in January 1817 to express outrage at colonizationists' plan to "exile" free blacks because they represented a menace to American society and supposedly

⁴ For a complete treatment of the American Colonization Society (ACS), see P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Octagon Books, 1980). The ACS endorsed a plan to encourage free blacks to leave the United States in order to colonize the African coast.

⁵ Craig Steven Wilder, *In the Company of Black Men: The African Influence on African American Culture in New York City* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). Wilder, following Sterling Stuckey's lead, contends that self-determination lay at the heart of black nationalism during the antebellum era. Wilder writes that "[t]he best measure of antebellum nationalism was not how fully one sought to integrate or escape white America but how committed one was to the self-determination of Africans in the Diaspora," 156. This was crucial for the black leaders debating colonization. It was a matter of asking what was best for people of African descent in America and throughout the world. See Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Stuckey has argued that free black leaders "found no contradiction between the founding principles of the Republic and blacks' being responsible for themselves as a people," 202. Nationalism accommodated a number of reform strategies. I suggest further that faith in divine intervention on behalf of the people of the African Diaspora reinforced nationalist sentiment.

⁶ There is a vast literature on white radical abolitionists in the United States and Great Britain. I argue that the rise of immediatism in the United States, while to some extent related to the same phenomenon in Great Britain, was fundamentally different due to free blacks' involvement in antislavery reform. David Brion Davis treats American antislavery as emerging in the same intellectual environment as the British movement. While similar intellectual currents such as Enlightenment rationalism and evangelical revivalism shaped both reform movements, the social and political environments in the two countries were entirely different. Some seminal and recent studies on antislavery reform in the United States and Great Britain include: Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Anti-Slavery Impulse 1830-1844* with a new introduction by William G. McLoughlin (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964); Christopher Leslie Brown, *Mortal Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, revised edition (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997); Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1978).

would never improve socially or politically in the United States.⁷ The ACS's proposal reeked of cruelty and violated republican principles. Under the leadership of Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, James Forten, Russell Parrott, John Gloucester, Quomony Clarkson and others, the people unanimously asserted their right to remain in the nation which they helped build and proclaimed their "confidence in the justice of God, and philanthropy of the free states." The black Philadelphians thus linked the sacred and political in a way that delivered a not so subtle rebuke to the ACS.⁸ They placed their destinies in the hands of God "who suffer[ed] not a sparrow to fall without his special Providence."⁹ The ACS later clarified its doubts about blacks' capacity for improvement by explaining its environmentalist position.¹⁰ Robert Finley, the ACS's founder, claimed that "the wretchedness" of free people inspired his plan. Unable to envision their advancement in education and morals in white society where they must always feel their political and social disadvantages, he thought removal to Africa a reasonable solution for both blacks and whites. Finley, nevertheless, revealed his true intentions in a letter to New York City attorney, John P. Mumford, when he wrote, "We should be cleared of them."¹¹

⁷ Analyses of the black response to the ACS that pay little attention to the influence of spiritual ideals on black opposition include Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Stuckey, *Slave Culture*; and, Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Nicholas Guyatt, "'The Outskirts of Our Happiness': Race and the Lure of Colonization in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 95 (March 2009): 986-1011.

⁸ Mark Noll, in *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), argues that in "the United States, republican and Protestant convictions merged" to create a "Christian republicanism," 73. I argue that people of West African descent, who subscribed to social customs that emphasized communal good and collective harmony, framed the secular world from a sacred perspective. Hence, republicanism was a spiritual condition. To be a republican was to do God's will—to practice the Golden Rule and recognize everyone as equal in God's eyes.

⁹ *National Advocate*, August 14, 1817.

¹⁰ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1971). Fredrickson points out that an essay in the first issue of the *African Repository*, the ACS's newspaper, criticized theories that Africans were a different species, 13. The ACS focused on cultural inferiority originating in blacks' conditions, which the Society's members believed would never change in the face of white prejudice.

¹¹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, March 1825.

The ACS's black critics' belief that the organization's goals were less than charitable was also substantiated by its slaveholding membership. Distinguished political figures such as Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, Speaker of the House Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, James Monroe, and Thomas Jefferson, endowed colonization with an air of white respectability and republican benevolence. Yet, their status as large slaveholders, their writings, and their ACS leadership made their intentions obvious. Colonization, admitted Virginia planter John Randolph, would "materially tend to secure" his property in black slaves.¹² The black Philadelphians, in a show of racial solidarity, vowed never to "separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population in this country." It would be better to suffer "privations with them" than benefit without them.¹³ Black unity and cooperation was a bulwark against slaveholding interests as people of African descent dug in for the battle ahead. Their survival as an integral part of the Republic was at stake and their ties to southern enslaved people was unwavering.

Black reformers had their own emigration projects distinct from the ACS's plan. The ACS offered colonization as a condition of emancipation under the guise of fostering Christianity and trade in Africa. More significantly, it raised the awful specter of forced migration.¹⁴ For at least thirty years, free blacks had plans in the work involving voluntary repatriation to Africa in order to return to their homeland, spread the Gospel, and live autonomously without white discrimination and abuse. Just months before the ACS's founders convened in Washington on December 28, 1816, the Rev. Thomas Paul of Boston had returned from his year-long sojourn visiting British abolitionists involved in sponsoring the Sierra Leone colony. Black Philadelphians' anticolonizationist spokesmen, Forten, Allen, and Jones supported Paul Cuffe's efforts to promote trade with and emigration to Sierra Leone. Cuffe had

¹² Quoted in Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 29.

¹³ *National Advocate*, August 14, 1817.

¹⁴ Alexander, *African or American?*

corresponded with Robert Finley and his friend Samuel J. Mills, a Congregational mission agent, regarding suitable sites for an African American settlement.¹⁵ When the ACS began promoting its plan in 1817, therefore, not all free blacks rejected it out of hand.¹⁶

At the same time, black leaders sought control over the emigration agenda. In Richmond, Virginia, the city's free blacks met in January 1817 to announce that although colonization "would ultimately tend to the benefit and advantage of a great portion of our suffering fellow-creatures," they preferred to ask Congress "to grant us a small portion of their territory, either on the Missouri river, or any place" within the confines of the United States rather than accepting exile to a foreign land.¹⁷ Even in Philadelphia, after voicing resistance to colonization, eleven black clergymen met with an ACS representative, who ascertained their unanimous agreement on the necessity for "being separated from the whites." Eight ministers believed that Africa afforded the best location "where they could have the fairest prospect of becoming a great and independent people." The free blacks favoring emigration, like their eighteenth-century predecessors in Newport and Boston, perhaps saw divine intervention on their behalf through white benefactors' assistance. Philadelphia's black clerics admitted that "the hand of God was secretly moving in this business."¹⁸ This spiritual interpretation of events did not necessarily mean that they supported Finley's particular vision for free blacks. Their agreement on the need for separation disclosed a self-determination agenda that demanded autonomy and appreciated the difficulty in erasing white Americans' deep-seated racial hatreds.

¹⁵ Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, and *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters, 1808-1817: A Black Quaker's "Voice from within the Veil,"* ed. Rosalind Cobb Wiggins with an introduction by Rhett S. Jones (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1996). Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), views Cuffe's plan and the ACS project as part of the same colonization movement that underwent a change when whites claimed leadership, 203. This obscures the long tradition behind black-sponsored emigration to Africa.

¹⁶ Because Paul Cuffe initiated the plan, it is probable that Finley and Mills co-opted the idea in creating the ACS.

¹⁷ *New-York Courier*, February 6, 1817.

¹⁸ *American Beacon*, March 24, 1817, reprinted a letter to the editor of the *National Intelligencer*.

At a second anticolonization meeting in Philadelphia, held in August 1817, the city's black residents declared that the ACS obstructed God's will. James Forten and Russell Parrott formulated a response to the city's procolonizationist whites that stressed the benefits of living in the United States. Here free blacks could worship "the only true God, under the light of Christianity" in whatever fashion they chose; they could educate their children and maintain families and homes. Forten and Parrott asserted that the ACS's attempts to transport free-born and emancipated blacks to Africa stood as a certain impediment to "[t]he ultimate and final abolition of slavery," a cause already advancing toward fulfillment "under the guidance and protection of a just God."¹⁹ Free blacks understood colonization as a tool for southerners to rid themselves of troublemaking slaves and for northerners to siphon off the free blacks, whom they perceived as a threat to the social order, and probably to replace them with white immigrants.²⁰ Colonizing freed slaves lacking a firm educational, moral, and religious background only harmed the cause of Christ in Africa forever. Forced deportation of free people would tear families apart and constitute something akin to a second middle passage.

Black Philadelphians, nonetheless, left emigration open as an option if conditions in America became unbearable.²¹ Forten and Parrott's public statement reflected how well members of the black community articulated their concerns through their chosen spokesmen. Forten, who supported black-sponsored voluntary emigration, wrote to Paul Cuffe after the January 1817 meeting at Bethel church that, despite his conviction that "the Father of all Mercies, is in this interesting subject," he stood in the minority and would "remain silent."²² In

¹⁹ Quoted in William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on Colonization, Part II* (Boston, 1832; unabridged facsimile, Elibron Classics, 2005), 10-11.

²⁰ Fredrickson, in *Black Image in the White Mind*, argues that colonizationists viewed free blacks like other philanthropists viewed "drunkards, infidels, and people moving west too fast for the churches to keep up with them," as social threats, 8.

²¹ Garrison, *Thoughts, Part II*, 10-13.

²² James Forten to Paul Cuffe, Philadelphia, January 25, 1817, in *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 502.

other words, he deferred to the people who looked to him as their representative. Cuffe informed a friend later that he had advised Philadelphia's African Institution "to be quiet and trust in God," but by early September Cuffe was dead.²³ There was now no black emigrationist as knowledgeable and hands-on as Cuffe to advise black communities about an appropriate course of action pertaining to settlement in Africa.

Many black reformers maintained an interest in Africa as a mission field even as they lost interest in a permanent settlement there. In 1816, Forten, John Gloucester, Russell Parrott, and several other black Philadelphians organized the Augustine Education Society, a nondenominational seminary for children that viewed education as "the true way to strengthen the African missions." Society President, the Rev. John Gloucester of the African Presbyterian Church affirmed the seminary's goal of preparing young men "to display the banners of the Cross" throughout Africa. Both Gloucester and Richard Allen enrolled their sons, and the Rev. Absalom Jones presided at the seminary's official opening in June 1816.²⁴ Four months later, the Synod of New York and New Jersey announced its plans to sponsor training black teachers and ministers to work in the United States and abroad, particularly Africa.²⁵ Robert Finley and other directors of the school's board, while refusing to denounce slavery, saw disseminating the Gospel as a means to repay Africa for the human losses it had sustained over the centuries.²⁶

While Finley's objective was probably related to his colonization project, the Augustine Society

²³ Paul Cuffe to John James, Westport, February 1817, in *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 507.

²⁴ *Boston Recorder*, August 21, 1816.

²⁵ There is some confusion about the relationship between the Augustine Society and the Synod's seminary. In *A Gentleman of Color*, Winch writes that James Forten and others established the Society in 1818 to provide Philadelphia's black children with an education, 231. According to Gary Nash, in *Forging Freedom*, the Society's seminary "was one of ten black schools taught by black teachers" in Philadelphia, 270. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church heard a proposal from Samuel J. Mills, a mission agent, some time during the summer of 1816 to establish a school for training black teachers and preachers, which it did in Parsippany, New Jersey. See Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro – A History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 36. Still, it appears from newspaper reports that Philadelphia's black leaders such as James Forten, John Gloucester, Jacob Tapsico, Robert Douglass, Samuel Cornish, Russell Parrott, and Quomony Clarkson formed the Augustine Society before the Synod agreed to establish the seminary.

²⁶ *Salem Gazette*, July 4, 1817.

adopted a more comprehensive view of its place in reform. In the circular advertising the new seminary, Gloucester pointed out that slavery in Pennsylvania had almost disappeared due to the efforts of pious people from various religious denominations; some Africans had grown wealthy; black churches were flourishing. The Augustine Society served as the means to advance further blacks' social and religious improvement not only in Africa but in the United States as well. By explicitly linking benevolence to Pennsylvania abolition, Gloucester implied that the Society's benefits might extend to ending slavery elsewhere.

Boston's black leadership initially sidestepped the colonization controversy but, like the Philadelphians, recognized that educating black Americans was the first step in spreading the Gospel to Africa. In November 1817, the Rev. Thomas Paul along with the white pastor of Boston's Second Baptist Church, the Rev. Thomas Baldwin, and several other white clerics, formed the Education Society for People of Colour in New England to train young black men to preach the Gospel to and educate New England's black population. The organization admitted that the freedom experienced by black New Englanders resulted in a desire for an education that would allow them to "share in the comforts of the social state, without interruption from those prejudices which too often produce collisions and permanent hostility." Education would raise them out of poverty and dependency on whites. For the fledgling ministers, their training could help them extend their mission beyond America's borders. The New England Society wished to wipe out "the miseries to which tyranny" had subjected Africans by delivering God's blessings directly to Africa through those who had been "enslaved in Christian lands."²⁷ Unlike the ACS, both the Augustine and New England organizations, sponsored and/or supported by free blacks, aimed to prepare men for Christian ministry either in the United States or abroad. The race's improvement did not depend on emigrating from their country.

²⁷ *Christian Messenger*, January 14, 1818.

However, black Bostonians not only refused to dismiss emigration outright but displayed enthusiasm for the venture. In May 1818, Prince Saunders, the former Boston schoolteacher now working in Haiti, visited the Rev. William Bentley of Salem to encourage his support for African American emigration to the island.²⁸ Thomas Paul had also called on Bentley to request his subscription to New England's Education Society. Fresh from these visits, Bentley resolved to hear Thomas Paul preach at the African Church in Boston. He recorded in his diary that an "overflowing" crowd assembled to hear Paul due to "[t]he great zeal displayed in the plan of a Colony, upon the subject of which Agents had gone from the U.S.A. to England, had been kindly received & had sailed for Africa." Bentley believed that Saunders' presence at the service, given his fame for traveling to England and Haiti, contributed to the size of the congregation that day.²⁹ Whether either Paul or Saunders had traveled to Africa as well is unknown, but Paul Cuffe sailed to Africa twice, a fact well-known by black Bostonians.

In December 1818, Prince Saunders was in Philadelphia offering Haiti as an emigration alternative to Africa, eschewing the legitimacy of the ACS, and emphasizing black spiritual goals. In an address to the white delegates at the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, Saunders hinted obliquely that the ACS was disreputable and its plan not part of God's will. He contrasted "those whom observation and experience might teach us to beware" with "the friends of abolition and emancipation," godly men such as Quakers Benjamin Lay and Anthony Benezet. Avoiding the topic of African colonization altogether, Saunders considered Haiti the best place for free blacks to settle. There God would bless them and perhaps

²⁸ For detailed analyses on Saunders' attempts to stimulate black emigration to Haiti and his relationship with Haitian leaders, see James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 192-194, and Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 211-213.

²⁹ William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D.D. Pastor of the East Church Salem, Massachusetts*, Vol. IV, January, 1811-December, 1819 (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1962), 522-523.

use them as instruments to reconcile the divided halves of Haiti, thereby serving the peace-loving Saviour.³⁰ Saunders' actions echoed previous black leaders' determination to pursue emigration on their own terms and to frame the topic as spiritually endowed. Moreover, by ignoring the Society before an audience of white abolitionists, Saunders tried to discredit it among its most likely supporters and to imply blacks' disinterest and even hostility.

Black New Yorkers waited nearly three years to offer their public opinion on the controversy. Between twelve and fifteen hundred blacks gathered to discuss African colonization on November 23, 1819. Ministers William Miller and Peter Williams Jr. chaired the meeting and wrote the preamble to the group's resolutions, vowing to consider the subject "calmly and seriously." New Yorkers did not reject the plan as had the Philadelphians but gave the benefit of the doubt to the ACS's members' benevolent motives. They conceded that an African colony offered a safety valve for slaves rescued by the United States' Navy during its raids on illegal slavers. As for supporting the large-scale emigration of free blacks, those assembled unanimously agreed that they required more information. They suggested to the ACS that Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York each send a black representative to Africa to assess the viability of a colony and report back directly to blacks throughout the United States. Finally, Miller, Williams Jr., and John Dungy formed a committee to discuss their resolutions with the ACS secretary Elias Boudinot Caldwell.

The New Yorkers' positive reaction stemmed from two reasons. First, Peter Williams Jr. headed the city's African Institution and had supported Paul Cuffe's plans to establish a black American settlement in Sierra Leone.³¹ Even though he suspected he would never see Africa himself, Williams Jr. registered his commitment to the project by offering to go if Cuffe needed

³⁰ Prince Saunders, *A Memoir Presented to the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the African Race, December 11, 1818* (Philadelphia: Dennis Heartt, 1818), 3.

³¹ Alexander, *African or American?*

him there.³² Second, the nation was currently witnessing a rancorous debate over Missouri's quest for statehood. Nine months earlier, James Tallmadge, the representative from New York, introduced two antislavery amendments to the state constitution proposed by Missouri.³³ Southern cotton planters, enjoying a period of economic prosperity generated by Eli Whitney's cotton gin, dug in their heels. The Fifteenth Congress expired in March without passing the Missouri bill, and the new Congress would not convene again until December. Antislavery agitation increased during the fall. The week before the November meeting of black New Yorkers, a group of whites met at the City Hotel to express their opposition to admitting Missouri into the union as a slave state. The assembly described slavery as "a great political as well as moral evil . . . opposed to the benign spirit and principles of the Christian religion."³⁴ The *New-York Daily Advertiser* worried that if passed, the bill would signal the end of the free states' political power.³⁵ This heightened concern over southern slaveholder clout could not have escaped the notice of Williams Jr., Miller, and the more than twelve hundred blacks who agreed to give colonization a fair hearing.

As the new decade dawned, Jeremiah Gloucester of Philadelphia, the Rev. John Gloucester's son, insisted that Africans and their descendants in the United States faced a promising future. Early in 1820, he addressed the African Association of New Brunswick, the seminary sponsored by the Presbyterian Synod. Gloucester praised the educational and religious societies that "Afric's sons and Daughters" had formed as heralding a "universal change" taking place among Africans throughout the world. In this little known oration, Gloucester engaged a

³² Peter Williams Jr., to Paul Cuffe, New York, October 18, 1816, in *Captain Paul Cuffe's Logs and Letters*, 472.

³³ For excellent analyses of the Missouri debate, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionists at Bay 1776-1854* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 144-161, and Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 232-240.

³⁴ *National Advocate*, November 18, 1819. According to Wilentz, in *Rise of American Democracy*, over 2,000 people attended the meeting, 231.

³⁵ Reprinted in *Rhode-Island American*, November 5, 1819.

diasporic identity acknowledging that black Americans and Africans elsewhere were one people. Calling the New Brunswick association members “Beloved country-men,” he framed their pursuit of education as a national undertaking that bore ramifications for Africa’s people, whose “wilderness should blossom [sic] like the rose and their deserts bud.” Though aware of his fellow black Philadelphians’ antipathy toward the American Colonization Society, Gloucester praised the late colonizationist Samuel Mills, perhaps for his part in organizing the seminary that provided Gloucester with his own Christian education and training. Possibly Gloucester directed his remarks to the white Presbyterian clergy who probably sat in his audience. Perhaps he recognized the ACS as a tool for a broader spiritual purpose. In any case, the young black Presbyterian gave credit to Africa’s descendants who were engaged in reform that would benefit Africans everywhere and bring glory to God. Gloucester deftly placed himself beyond the colonization controversy by focusing on education, Christian proselytization, and exhorting blacks to “associate together universally for the support of the sacred cause.” His charge to Ethiopia’s sons and daughters to “be up and doing” for the race rang with a self-determination that abjured individual aggrandizement in favor of the collective good.³⁶

Daniel Coker, the antislavery African Methodist minister in Baltimore, embraced the ACS as a means to fulfill Christ’s commission to spread the Gospel universally. While the ACS never pretended to be anything other than an organization to remove free blacks to Africa,³⁷ Coker and others believed its sacred destiny could be greater. On February 6, 1820, Coker sailed from New York, heading for Sherbro Island off the coast of Africa, and recorded in his journal, “. . . [M]ay nothing move me from the right way.” Upon arriving, he confirmed that he was

³⁶ Jeremiah Gloucester, *Address to the African Association of New Brunswick on their fourth Anniversary. 1st of January, 1820*, handwritten copy, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford.

³⁷ *Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society*, in *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, January 1827.

there to “build up Christ’s kingdom.”³⁸ In a public letter to his fellow Africans in America, Coker mirrored Jeremiah Gloucester’s certainty that a tremendous work awaited willing laborers. Coker called for an end to denominational conflict at home and hoped to unite free blacks in the broader Christian cause for Africa. While the attempt to settle Sherbro ended in disaster and Coker later moved to Sierra Leone, his journey evidenced both a sincere interest in Christian mission and disillusionment with the progress of antislavery in the United States.³⁹

Moreover, by 1823, Jeremiah Gloucester had changed his mind about the ACS and publicly censured the group as an affront to the nation’s religious and political principles. Celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the international slave trade’s demise, he informed an assembly at Philadelphia’s Bethel Church, “We are opposed to this plan [colonization] in its present form.” The ACS, said Gloucester, served the slaveholding interest by holding out the prospect of ridding the South of free blacks. Gloucester asked why slaveholders voted to admit Missouri into the union if they really sought to abolish slavery. Colonization, like the spread of slavery, interfered with the goal of universal emancipation. In a city that was home to many free and self-emancipated black southerners and where relatives of the enslaved lived, Gloucester’s charge would find a receptive audience.⁴⁰ Blending Christian beliefs with revolutionary ideals, Gloucester alleged that those who failed to see racial slavery as sinful were not “true republicans.” Gloucester became one of the earliest black American activists to deliver a jeremiad and proclaimed that slavery’s supporters threatened the nation’s existence by their

³⁸ Daniel Coker, *Journal of Daniel Coker: A Descendant of Africa, from the time of leaving New York, in the ship Elizabeth, Capt. Sebor, on a voyage for Sherbro, in Africa, in company with three agents, and about ninety persons of colour: with an appendix* (Baltimore: Published by Edward J. Coale, in aid of the funds of the Maryland auxiliary colonization society, 1820), 17, 34.

³⁹ For discussion of Coker’s experiences, see Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 61, and Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 200.

⁴⁰ According to Litwack, in *North of Slavery* the Pennsylvania legislature began supporting colonization because it believed removing the black population from the country would be “highly auspicious,” 69.

continued refusal to end the accursed institution.⁴¹ “[W]e love this country,” Gloucester asserted, “but we do detest the principle of holding slaves, because it tolls the death bell of this republic.” If the ACS truly had black Americans’ interest at heart he insisted, it would demand that emigrants be educated for their supposed task of establishing a republican government in Africa. Native Americans had benefited from teachers so why shouldn’t people of color? Gloucester advised his listeners to continue in unity and exemplify virtuous and moral conduct, remembering that for people of African descent “the hands of Providence” would determine the final victorious outcome.⁴²

A few months later, a black New Yorker espoused even bolder opposition. Speaking before the New York African Society for Mutual Relief gathered at the African Zion Church, the unknown orator linked colonization directly to the South Carolinians’ brutal response to the Denmark Vesey insurrection the previous autumn of 1822. Aware that some of the alleged conspirators had been sent to Cape Mesurado in the new colony of Liberia,⁴³ the speaker argued that the special council convened in Charleston to mete out justice used its power “to get rid of a few respectable colored men, whose little good sense was obnoxious to these great republicans.” Thus he damned the colonization project and the hypocrisy of republican slaveholders. “They had try’d,” he informed his audience, “the experiment of lying about a paradise to be found in the wilds of Africa, this failing, the pretended insurrection was to gratify their wishes.” Like a

⁴¹ Christopher Cameron, “‘We Expect Great Things’: Puritanism, Black Petitioning, and the Origins of American Abolitionism” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, Boston, MA, January 7, 2011). Cameron argues that the ex-slave Caesar Sarter’s “Essay on Slavery,” published in *The Essex Journal and Merrimack Packet*, August 17, 1774, was the earliest black jeremiad. Sarter framed his call for ending slavery in the context of the battle then going on between the colonies and Great Britain, warning that colonial success depended on abolition. Gloucester predicted a final abolitionist victory for people of African descent. Both then can be considered jeremiads since they demand some sort of repentance from white slaveholders.

⁴² Jeremiah Gloucester, *An Oration, Delivered on January 1, 1823, in Bethel Church, on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (Philadelphia: Printed by John Young, 1823), 13, 10, 11, 15.

⁴³ Douglas R. Egerton, *He Shall Go Out Free: The Lives of Denmark Vesey*, revised and updated edition (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 201.

true Jeremiah, the orator expected God to execute an awful vengeance on the council's participants.⁴⁴

The angry allegation implicating the ACS in a conspiracy against free blacks and the jeremiad-like prediction reveal the extent to which events over the past three years had influenced black New Yorkers' opinion of colonization. In fact, they needed to look no farther than their own state to notice which way the conspiratorial wind was blowing. In 1817, the legislature passed New York's final emancipation law, to take effect on July 4, 1827; but in 1821, the state passed a law raising the property qualification for black voters while removing any property restriction from white males.⁴⁵ According to the Society for Mutual Relief speaker, not only had illiterate free blacks been duped by white politicians into handing over "their political birth-rights," they had become the victims of unscrupulous whites upon whom they relied for financial advice. Rather than turning to their fellow blacks, they turned to white agents, discovering at times that they lost their property through fraud. When they died, often their property reverted to white men. The orator exhorted his audience that they must unify across class lines to protect themselves. To the Biblical injunction, "Man love thyself," he added, "After ourselves, the claims of our own colour take precedence: let us be governed by this principle."⁴⁶

Newport's black leadership took the admonition to heart and epitomized the greater drive for spiritual and political self-definition that characterized the 1820s. On November 4, 1823, several black Newporters met at Newport Gardner's house. Gardner, African-born, had served as the Free African Union Society's secretary during the 1790s while the association pursued

⁴⁴ *An Oration Delivered at the Fifteenth Annual Celebration of the New York African Society, for Mutual Relief, at the African Zion Church, the 24th March, 1823*. By a Member (Brooklyn: Printed by G.L. Birch, 1823), 12-13.

⁴⁵ Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 116-119.

⁴⁶ *Oration*, 1823, 16.

repatriation to Africa.⁴⁷ Now his home became the center for a different effort: establishing an independent black church. The interdenominational nature of the proposed institution made it a unique venture. The blacks who gathered that November belonged to various white congregations throughout city including Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, and Episcopal. They sought to leave those churches to form the Colored Union Church and Society where members could “hold communion together and attend upon the ordinances of the gospel” whatever their doctrinal differences might be. Although the black Newporters acknowledged that contentions might arise over baptism and communion, they agreed to walk in love. Two weeks later, with the blessing of Newport’s white churches, they went forward with their plan and approved a constitution specifying that “[n]o particular Religious Sect or Denomination shall Ever be Required as a qualification for a minister or any officer.”⁴⁸ They nevertheless demanded that a black minister preach the truth of God to them. Despite their commitment to local church-building, some blacks’ realized that full autonomy and social improvement were still a far distant dream. Newport Gardner, in 1826, sailed for Liberia under ACS auspices. Close to eighty years old, his sixty-year battle against prejudice had taught him that racial elevation could never take place in the United States.⁴⁹

Other similarly-minded free blacks continued to explore emigration to Haiti as a viable route to independence and happiness. In late June 1823, the Rev. Thomas Paul embarked from Boston for Haiti, spending almost a year there in the service of the Massachusetts Baptist Missionary Society. Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer received him civilly and allowed him to preach in private venues while cautioning him to avoid upsetting the largely Catholic

⁴⁷ For details on Newport Gardner’s background, see James Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787-2005* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

⁴⁸ Records of the Union Church or Colored Union Church, Newport Historical Society, Newport.

⁴⁹ Campbell, *Middle Passages*, 54-55.

population. Paul distributed Bibles in Port-au-Prince and preached several months in Cape Haytien.⁵⁰ Upon his return to Boston, he wrote to the *Boston Centinel*'s editor to describe Haiti, revealing a second motive for his trip. He hoped to improve the condition of his own people in the United States by promoting emigration to an island "highly inviting to men who are sighing for the enjoyment of the common rights and liberties of humankind."⁵¹ Shortly after Paul returned to the United States in May 1824, black Philadelphians and New Yorkers formed their own Haitian emigration societies.⁵² By late summer, over a hundred black New Yorkers and several Philadelphia families had sailed for the island.⁵³ The following January the brig *De Witt Clinton*, which had carried the first New Yorkers to Haiti, this time carried the Rev. Peter Williams Jr. to examine the island's prospects for black Americans.⁵⁴

The plan held out the hope to black Americans that emigration was one means of overcoming their oppressions. Haiti, founded by former slaves, stood as a powerful example of black revolution, independence, and republicanism. Indeed, Haiti appeared as a land and government blessed by God's own hand. The Board of Managers for New York's Haytian Emigration Society promised the first emigrants sailing on the *De Witt Clinton* that "a dark complexion [would] be no disadvantage" in a nation where they could be free and independent. The Board directed these pioneers to form "civil and religious societies," remain unified, help one another, maintain morality, and worship God. The Board charged them with an almost

⁵⁰ *Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot*, August 2, 1823; *New Bedford Mercury*, June 4, 1824.

⁵¹ Letter to *Boston Centinel* editor reprinted in *New Bedford Mercury*, July 9, 1824.

⁵² According to Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, Richard Allen and James Forten headed Philadelphia's society. The New York's Haytian Emigration Society of Coloured People included on its Board of Managers Peter Williams Jr., Samuel Cornish, Thomas Sipkins, Benjamin Paul (Thomas's brother), James Varick, Thomas L. Jennings, and Adam Carman. The groups unified around a purpose, not a denomination.

⁵³ *Daily National Intelligencer*, September 7, 1824; *Trenton Federalist*, October 25, 1824. For extensive analysis of the Haitian emigration plan and its ultimate failure, see Alexander, *African or American?*, Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, and Winch, *Gentleman of Color*

⁵⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, January 10, 1825. Alexander, *African or American?*

millennial duty, for upon their success depended the future of millions.⁵⁵ Some blacks responded enthusiastically to the promise and the challenge. In Cincinnati, Ohio, free blacks formed a Haytian Union, agreeing to send their own agent to the island republic.⁵⁶ One free man walked from Wayne County, Indiana, to Boston, Massachusetts, in order to sail for Haiti.⁵⁷

Excitement over emigration to Haiti and Africa coincided with white abolitionists' first explicit calls for immediate emancipation in the Atlantic world. Up to this time, early activists, both black and white, had accepted gradualism as the best path to ending slavery. A few white reformers in Great Britain and the United States had by 1808 adopted the language of the jeremiad and expressed their opinion that universal abolition must begin in order to avert divine judgment.⁵⁸ In 1816, however, George Bourne, a Presbyterian minister and English immigrant, demanded "immediate and total abolition."⁵⁹ He published a pamphlet, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable*, which argued that Christianity and slavery were incompatible, old news to black abolitionists.⁶⁰ But Bourne displayed more concern over slavery's corrupting influence on the Christian church than its effect on slaves.⁶¹ Elizabeth Heyrick, a British Quaker, penned a tract in 1824, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition*, urging an end to West Indian slavery. She labeled gradual abolition "the very masterpiece of satanic policy" because it imperceptibly lulled

⁵⁵ Haytian Emigration Society, *Address of the Board of Managers of the Haytian Emigration Society of Coloured People, to the Emigrants Intending to Sail to the Island of Hayti, in the Brig De Witt Clinton* (New York: Printed by Mahlon Day, 1824), 3, 5.

⁵⁶ *Eastern Argus*, November 4, 1824.

⁵⁷ *Boston Commercial Gazette*, October 18, 1824.

⁵⁸ David Brion Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism in British and American Antislavery Thought," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (September 1962): 209-230. Davis points out that in 1806 Granville Sharp, who "condemned gradualism," pressured Parliament "for direct emancipation" to avoid God's vengeful wrath, 219. In 1808, an American, David Barrow called for similar urgent emancipation although not for immediate abolition, 223.

⁵⁹ George Bourne, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable* (1816; repr., New York: Arno Press & *The New York Times*, 1969), 19.

⁶⁰ For information on Bourne and his influence on William Lloyd Garrison, see Henry Mayer, *All On Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998).

⁶¹ Davis, "The Emergence of Immediatism," 223.

slavery's opponents into a false sense of security that the practice would cease someday.⁶²

Heyrick's work received attention in the press. Benjamin Lundy, the Quaker abolitionist and gradualist, reprinted excerpts from it in 1825 and 1826 in his Baltimore paper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*.⁶³ In Boston, the *Christian Register* reprinted Heyrick's suggestion that the cruelty of slavery justified the recent Demerara slave insurrection.⁶⁴

Black involvement in emigration and agitation against slavery had begun decades before either Bourne or Heyrick issued their pamphlets. The accusation Heyrick leveled at gradualism black anticolonizationists had already made against the ACS's plan—that it only served slaveholders' purposes. Blacks had not previously called categorically for immediate emancipation but always couched their antislavery agenda in conservative terms. Nonetheless, their ultimate goal was universal liberty and civil rights for all blacks. To this end they directed their educational programs, Christian proselytization, and emigration efforts. Black activists thus would have agreed with much of what Heyrick wrote but the Haitian Republic had already provided a far more influential touchstone for immediate abolition. The legacy of St. Domingue hovered over every idea, spiritual and secular, that they translated into action for the collective good.⁶⁵ The freedom the island nation promised had encouraged Denmark Vesey's insurrection

⁶² Elizabeth Heyrick, *Immediate, Not Gradual Abolition: Or, An Inquiry into the Shortest, Safest, and Most Effectual Means of Getting Rid of West Indian Slavery* (London, 1824; Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838), 12.

⁶³ David W. Blight, "Perceptions of Southern Intransigence and the Rise of Radical Antislavery Thought, 1816-1830," *Journal of the Early Republic* 3 (Summer 1983): 139-163. According to Blight, Heyrick's book was widely circulated in the United States.

⁶⁴ *Christian Register*, February 26, 1825. For details on the large rebellion in Demerara, see Emilia Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). For a discussion on the relationship between slave revolts and British abolitionism, see Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

⁶⁵ On the influence of the Haitian Revolution on black antislavery writers, see Philip N. Edmondson, "The St. Domingue Legacy in Black Activist and Antislavery Writings in the United States, 1791-1862," (doctoral diss., University of Maryland, 2003). Edmondson argues that St. Domingue offered "inclusive membership in an imagined transnational community with Haiti," xvi. He focuses on the literary aspect of interest in Haiti. I would argue that American blacks already identified with Haitians as part of a real African collective that transcended

plot in Charleston, South Carolina, and encouraged free blacks in the North to persist in their activism.⁶⁶

Against this backdrop, black abolitionists certainly greeted enthusiastically the vigorous debate over immediate emancipation that a contributor to New Haven's *Christian Spectator* opened in March 1825. The unknown author, identified only by the initials S.F.D., emphasized the "full, dark, unmitigated" guilt borne by all white Americans who did nothing to end slavery. Perceiving the ACS as a benevolent organization, the writer believed that it had "made a beginning" in procuring justice for blacks but, contradicting himself, suspected that it only served as southern slaveholders' "safety-valve." Already, southerners were raising the specter of slave revolt at whispers of abolition. S.F.D. asked ironically, "[W]hat mean those pistols under his pillow, and that loaded rifle over it?"⁶⁷ Slaves needed no encouragement to appreciate their right to freedom. The essayist ended with a jeremiad warning that God's justice would prevail regardless what whites did. In May, S.F.D. began the remainder of his lengthy piece with the appeal, "*Emancipation must take place on the spot where slavery exists.*" No alternative existed, and it must be conducted at the national level. If the newly elected President John Quincy Adams could express interest in "*a hundred thousand Indians*" in his inaugural address, then why could he not have mentioned "*two millions*" of the slaves suffering under federal eyes? What was the answer, S.F.D. wondered? Abolition should not be left up to the slaveholders and neither should it wait until slaves were "fit" to experience freedom. Their degradation hinged upon their enslaved state. Something universal must take place then in the law. With the slave "wholly freed from the arbitrary power of his master," he could then achieve some civil rights

geographical boundaries. St. Domingue, consequently, offered an example of successful immediate emancipation, albeit by revolutionary measures.

⁶⁶ Egerton, throughout *He Shall Go Out Free*, emphasizes how significant the Haitian revolution was for the South Carolina rebels.

⁶⁷ *Christian Spectator*, March 1, 1825, 134, 135,

depending upon “industry, good management, and moral deportment.”⁶⁸ By June 1825, the subject had become the object of a lengthy debate in the *Boston Recorder and Telegraph*.⁶⁹

Black reformers welcomed the shift in white antislavery thought but probably considered it late in coming. Blacks continued to look to Haiti as the beacon foreshadowing global emancipation. In August 1825, William Watkins, celebrating France’s recognition of Haitian independence, declared “[t]hat the Arm of the Lord is stretched forth for the deliverance of the sons of Africa, in different parts of the habitable globe.” Irresistibly, God was bringing emancipation closer and Haiti represented what could happen when the Sovereign Ruler “overrules the designs of men, and out of evil brings good to those who reverence and fear him.” Watkins scanned the United States for benevolence and discovered even there the promise “of universal emancipation.”⁷⁰ In Boston, the Rev. Thomas Paul, delivering an oration at a similar celebration held by the African Society, preached from the book of Romans, applying to Haitians God’s promise that those who had been far from him would now be his children.⁷¹ By crediting Africans’ advancement to divine Providence, Watkins and Paul removed from white hands any responsibility for black freedom and social improvement. They rejected colonization as a means to immediate emancipation and praised Haiti instead.

A year later, thirty-one year old Samuel E. Cornish, added his voice to the public discussion about slavery. Cornish, a member of New York’s Haytian Emigration Society, was no stranger to doing the Lord’s work on behalf of his people. A founder of the First African

⁶⁸ *Christian Spectator*, May 1, 1825, 239, 240, 246.

⁶⁹ For analysis of the interaction between New Englander Samuel M. Worcester, writing under the pseudonym, “Vigornius,” and three southerners, “Philo,” “A Carolinian,” and “Hieronymus,” see Davis, “The Emergence of Immediatism.” In the December 2, 1825 issue of the *Recorder and Telegraph*, Hieronymus suggested the possibility that the ACS might possibly recasting itself as an abolitionist society to catch the rising tide of public opinion.

⁷⁰ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, August 1825. The December 1825 issue of the *Christian Spectator* reported that there were more than 100 antislavery societies in the United States, with many in the South. It is probable that some, if not most, were colonization societies.

⁷¹ *Salem Gazette*, September 2, 1825. Paul preached from Romans 9:5: “And it came to pass in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.”

Presbyterian Church in New York, he had previously served as secretary to the Augustine Society and as a missionary among poor blacks in New York and Philadelphia. Cornish had undergone the rigorous educational and theological training required by the Philadelphia Presbytery which licensed him and had preached in John Gloucester's church.⁷² On September 30, 1826, he wrote a prickly letter to *The Literary Gazette and American Athenaeum* criticizing two articles published in that periodical. In the first, the white editor sarcastically encouraged Benjamin Lundy, the editor of the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* to walk down Broadway to get a true picture of black life. The second essayist wished that all blacks would either emigrate to Sierra Leone or be enslaved.⁷³ An outraged Cornish advised the newspaper editor to "trace effects back to their causes." The evil of slavery and not emancipation had degraded the black population in the United States. Moreover, he asserted that the "lower class of white people" and "low emigrants" behaved much worse than blacks, holding himself and his wife up as examples of respectability and refinement.⁷⁴ Cornish's letter thus challenged the Colonization Society's assumption that free blacks could never live successfully in a civil society with whites. Moral uplift grounded in spiritual ideals, Cornish believed, was the bedrock of fighting slavery.⁷⁵ He pointed out that by denying blacks the means for improving their socioeconomic status, whites perpetuated their present condition.

⁷² For details on Cornish's ministry, see David E. Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989); Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African-American Newspaper* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro*. First African Presbyterian split after John Gloucester's death with part of the congregation desiring Cornish as their pastor and another part Jeremiah Gloucester, their late pastor's son. Jeremiah Gloucester went on to lead Second African Church of Philadelphia after the Presbytery of Philadelphia licensed him in 1823. See *Presbytery of Philadelphia Minutes*, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, 330-435.

⁷³ *New York Literary Gazette and American Athenaeum*, July 29, 1826.

⁷⁴ *New York Literary Gazette and American Athenaeum*, October 7, 1826.

⁷⁵ Leslie Alexander, in *African or American?*, contends that Cornish "clung desperately to his hope for moral uplift's potential" because he feared the "ACS's growing power," 72.

In March 1827, Cornish joined John B. Russwurm, a graduate of Bowdoin College, in providing a venue for other black antislavery activist voices, the black community's first newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*. From its inception, the paper was dedicated to abolition and anticolonizationism.⁷⁶ Russwurm, born in Jamaica to a white American merchant and enslaved black woman, was a committed emigrationist. At his graduation from Bowdoin in September 1826, he spoke about his admiration for Haitian leaders and republican government. He viewed Haitian revolutionary success as evidence of the inexorable and divine march of freedom.⁷⁷ The men who worked as the *Journal's* agents were long-time advocates for black liberty, autonomy, and civil rights. The aging Rev. Thomas Paul of Boston, for example, had distinguished himself as an able champion of black civil and religious equality. David Walker, a radical abolitionist and former North Carolinian, belonged to a black Methodist church headed by an antislavery preacher, Samuel Snowden.⁷⁸ John Remond, Salem's representative on the paper and Thomas Paul's old friend, was a well-respected caterer with business connections in New York.⁷⁹ By

⁷⁶ Literary scholars and historians debate the paper's origins. Bacon, in *Freedom's Journal*, cautions against accepting without question the I. Garland Penn's 1891 account of the paper's founding, 38. Penn claimed that Cornish, Russwurm, and others met at M. Boston Crummell's house to discuss the anti-black rhetoric spewed by New York editor Mordecai Noah. Bacon sees the paper as a product of the 1820s where prejudice and oppression against blacks increased and where Americans viewed literacy as essential to citizenship. Peter Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, suggests that the ACS's own journal, the *African Repository*, begun in 1825, may have partially motivated blacks to start their own paper. Frederick Cooper, in "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827-50," *American Quarterly* 24 (December 1972): 604-625, focuses more on the journal as an organ for uplift than "as a paper of protest," 607. Bacon, in *Freedom's Journal*, acknowledges, rightly so, that the paper built on a decades-long foundation of community self-determination, 30. Hinks, in *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), argues that *Freedom's Journal* bound black activists more tightly together, 75. See also Bella Gross, "Freedom's Journal and the Rights of All," *Journal of Negro History* 17 (July 1932): 241-286, a valuable resource despite its datedness. I argue that the paper's contributors used it as a radical antislavery forum. Moral uplift was an antislavery strategy.

⁷⁷ *Western Recorder*, October 17, 1826. For details on Russwurm's background and life, see Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*; and, Amos J. Beyan, *African American Settlements in West Africa: John Brown Russwurm and the American Civilizing Efforts* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005). According to Bacon, Russwurm had been in touch with the ACS about a teaching or administrative position in Liberia late in 1826 but declined their offer at the time, 45. For an analysis of *Freedom's Journal* and Haiti, see Edmondson, "St. Domingue Legacy."

⁷⁸ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*.

⁷⁹ Dorothy Burnett Porter, "The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts: A Nineteenth-Century Family Revisited," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 95 (1985); John Remond Papers, Phillips Library, Salem, MA.

1827, he and two other black men decided to form Salem's first independent black church.⁸⁰ The agent in Washington, DC, John W. Prout, a Baltimore schoolteacher, had in 1818 defended the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a separate denomination.⁸¹ Within a year, the *Journal's* agents, many of them ministers of the Gospel, had multiplied with some promoting and distributing the paper in Virginia, North Carolina, Haiti, and Liverpool, England. If the editors perceived dissemination of information as a sacred mission, then they had enlisted a number of capable missionaries in the cause of moral uplift and abolition.

Freedom's Journal wasted no time staking out its position on immediate emancipation. On March 23, 1827, the editors began reprinting the 1825 *Christian Spectator* article over the course of the next six weeks. Interestingly, Cornish and Russwurm exercised their editorial privilege to transform the essay in a subtle but meaningful way to claim blacks' right to self-identity. Of the roughly twenty mentions made by the *Spectator* essayist to "negroes," the editors altered thirteen to "blacks" and one to "Africans," even changing a quotation credited to a British Member of Parliament. The editors probably read Jacob Oson's angry attack against the use of "negro" in 1817. A black schoolteacher and minister, Oson had spoken in New Haven on the origins of Africa, contending that the term "stigmatized [blacks] . . . and its meaning applied to a mean wretch."⁸² According to Oson's logic, it was unfair to label only Africans as wretches when every human should fall under the epithet due to original sin. To call a black man or woman a negro, therefore, was unchristian. The editors may have had both religious and social reasons for replacing the appellation. Whatever the reason, they exchanged a term associated

⁸⁰ Scrapbook 974.462 S1 S23 v.8, 165, Phillips Library, Salem, MA.

⁸¹ John W. Prout, *Oration, on the Establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, in the United States of America* (Baltimore: Kennedy & Magauran, 1818), 16.

⁸² Jacob Oson, *A Search for Truth; Or, An Inquiry for the Origin of the African Nation: An Address, Delivered at New-Haven in March, and at New-York in April, 1817* (New-York: Printed for the proprietor, 1817), 10. For a detailed analysis of Oson's address, see Stephen G. Hall, "A Search for Truth: Jacob Oson and the Beginnings of African American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 105-116.

with the degradation of slavery—one that impugned the bearer’s character, with one associated with skin color, a physical characteristic.⁸³ Their decision united self-identity with a move toward radical abolition.

The colonization debate that dominated the *Journal*’s pages in the ensuing months revealed more clearly black reformers’ efforts to shape antislavery discourse.⁸⁴ They managed to shift the attention on the ACS from benevolent association to an upholder of slavery. For example, on May 18, 1827, *Freedom’s Journal* published a letter from “A Man of Colour” that criticized ACS vice-president Henry Clay for misrepresenting a public memorial adopted by Baltimore’s black citizens at a meeting the previous December.⁸⁵ The black Baltimoreans, in Clay’s retelling, supposedly approved of the African colonization plan.⁸⁶ In reality, according to the newspaper’s informant, “at least two-thirds of the meeting dissented from it.”⁸⁷ The letter writer declared that Clay had exposed the ACS’s true mission. In league with southern slaveholders, it intended to force free blacks to leave the United States. In July, several free

⁸³ It is impossible to know if one or both editors agreed to make the editorial change. Applying Oson’s argument that the appellation “negro” demeaned blacks, the editorial refusal to use the term went hand-in-glove with both men’s emphasis on education and moral conduct and, in particular, their agenda for outfitting free blacks for virtuous citizenship. This was particularly important in New York where adult emancipation was scheduled for July 4, 1827. New York’s black reformers sought to prepare the enslaved for freedom by encouraging good behavior. For discussions of Samuel Cornish’s attitudes toward working-class blacks and his elitism, see Alexander, *African or American?* and Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*. Cornish during the 1830s became embroiled in a battle with the black Philadelphian William Whipper over whether blacks should call themselves “colored.” See Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture* for an analysis of Cornish’s position. Given Cornish’s concern for the moral deportment of black community members, it would not be out of character for him to initiate or agree with replacing an offensive epithet with class connotations.

⁸⁴ Between August 1825 and August 1826, a debate over colonization raged in the *Richmond Enquirer*. The Virginian, William Henry Fitzhugh, vice-president of the ACS, writing as “Opimius,” contended with “Caius Gracchus” over the merits of colonization. Gracchus argued that it cloaked a fanatical abolition plan. Black abolitionists were likely aware of this controversy. See Staudenraus, *African Colonization*, 173-174.

⁸⁵ According to Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, the letter was written by James Forten, the wealthy black sailmaker, 204.

⁸⁶ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, December 1826.

⁸⁷ *Freedom’s Journal*, May 18, 1827. Forten may have gotten his information from William Watkins. In March, Watkins, writing as “A Colored Baltimorean,” declared to the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, that the memorial failed to represent the free people’s opinion, observing that friends, black and white, in Philadelphia and New York were “not a little surprised” to hear about such pro-colonization sentiments,” *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, March 3, 1827. For information on Watkins writing as “A Colored Baltimorean,” see Mayer, *All On Fire*, 82.

black Baltimoreans contradicted Clay's assessment of their support for the ACS. At a dinner commemorating enslaved New Yorkers' emancipation on July 4, 1827, members of Baltimore's Friendship Society, including its president, James Deaver, one of the original memorialists, drank a toast that laid out their position unequivocally. "*Emancipation without emigration, but equal rights on the spot; this is republicanism,*" they proclaimed.⁸⁸

By portraying colonization as proslavery and linking the abolition of slavery to Americans' founding political ideology, the Baltimoreans cast the ACS as a threat to the nation. Writing to *Freedom's Journal* in July 1827, William Watkins articulated what he called "the life giving principle of the African colonization system"—that blacks were "'repugnant to their [white ACS members] republican feelings;' in short, 'a nuisance.'" Watkins understood that skin color not degradation lay at the heart of the ACS's hypocritical plan. "This is our crime; and for this alone," he observed angrily, "we are told that we can never be men, unless we abandon the land of our birth . . . O that men would learn that knowledge and virtue, not colour, constitute the sum of human dignity. With these we are *white*, without them *black*."⁸⁹ ACS members, Watkins implied, betrayed the nation's founding principles by reserving the human capacity for social improvement and participatory citizenship to whites only. Watkins sardonically pointed out that black skin color imputed the inability to become a virtuous republican, an idea he disputed.⁹⁰ Black reformers recognized that education and moral, Christian living equipped each American to become the virtuous citizen upon which the Republic depended for its survival. These qualities, not skin color, determined a person's worth

⁸⁸ *Freedom's Journal*, July 20, 1827.

⁸⁹ *Freedom's Journal*, July 6, 1827.

⁹⁰ The idea that republicanism belonged only to whites is similar to a concept of *Herrenvolk democracy* explicated by George Fredrickson in *Black Image in the White Mind*. Whites, suggests Fredrickson, "projected a democratic and egalitarian society for whites, denying that the blacks were, in any real sense at all, part of the human community," 61.

as a republican. True republicanism, black abolitionists argued, was meritocratic and egalitarian. It emphasized disinterested benevolence toward the public good; and slavery, consequently, had no place in such a polity and society.⁹¹

Watkins exposed the ACS's greater hypocrisy. Even while colonizationists heralded spreading republican government to Africa, they refused to prepare free blacks to become republican citizens in their native land. At the ACS's 1825 annual meeting, Virginian George Washington Parke Custis overflowed with patriotic fervor when he looked upon the republic "where education, industry, intelligence and contentment, so eminently prevail," exclaiming, "[T]here is the essence of republicanism!"⁹² He described how, by helping free blacks reach the shores of Africa, resplendent republicanism could extend to the rest of the world. Black activists, including Jeremiah Gloucester, James Forten, William Watkins, and Richard Allen found the ACS's claims paradoxical. On one hand, its members and supporters rejected free blacks' presence in the United States due to their miserable state and denied their ability to become worthy citizens among whites. On the other hand, the ACS believed that free blacks could form a republican government, develop a virtuous citizenry, and Christianize Africa. Colonizationists' benevolence only extended to shipping free blacks across the Atlantic not to educating them at home or preparing them to fulfill the ACS's vision of republican imperialism.

The Rev. Nathaniel Paul of Albany, Thomas Paul's brother and an agent for *Freedom's Journal*, predicated a black return to Africa upon the universal abolition of slavery. Paul spoke

⁹¹ For a brief, trenchant distillation of J.G.A. Pocock's analysis of Atlantic republicanism, see Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Wilentz points out that republicanism relied on four concepts: 1) an emphasis on the public good; 2) virtuous citizenry; 3) independent citizenry; and, 4) citizens as active participants in politics. Wilentz contends that "versions of American republicanism multiplied" in the first half of the nineteenth century "as men of different backgrounds and conflicting social views . . . came to judge themselves and each other by their adduced adherence to republican principles," 61. I suggest that even as the white working class redefined what republicanism meant, black abolitionists retained a vision close to the classical republicanism espoused by the Founding Fathers, one that stressed the collective good over the individual's interests.

⁹² *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, March 1825.

at Albany's First African Baptist Church on July 5, 1827 in celebration of black New Yorkers' bonds breaking.⁹³ He indirectly criticized hypocritical white republicans by asserting that had slavery not already been present in the colonies when the American Revolution started, "the spirit of pure republicanism" would have prevented it ever appearing in the United States. But the day was fast approaching when the slaveholder would no longer exercise power. Paul exhibited "no hesitation in declaring . . . that not only throughout the United States of America, but throughout every part of the habitable world where slavery exists, it will be abolished." Universal emancipation was no chimerical vision. Encouraging his audience to literary and spiritual improvement, Paul envisioned Africa's children in America becoming scholars and statesmen and missionaries. Some might even travel to their ancestors' land to spread the Gospel and cultivate morality and dignity in Africa, but they would do so voluntarily and from their desire to serve God.⁹⁴

Black anticolonizationists' promotion of education and religious instruction takes on new meaning in light of the ACS's lack of interest in improving blacks' social condition in the United States. I contend that black reformers used the racial uplift discourse to invert colonizationists' narrative of benevolence and define American citizenship in spiritual and moral terms.⁹⁵ Many

⁹³ At a meeting at Nathaniel Paul's Albany church on March 27, 1827, the blacks present approved a motion by Lewis Topp to hold their emancipation celebration on July 5, 1827, instead of July 4 because "the 4th day of July is the day that the National Independence of this country is recognized by the white citizens," *Freedom's Journal*, April 20, 1827. Either the celebrants refused to recognize July 4 until every American was independent or because they rejected sharing their celebration with whites. Either way, they reserved a day to themselves for publicly acknowledging their "gratitude to Almighty God."

⁹⁴ Nathaniel Paul, *An Address, Delivered on the Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery, in the State of New-York, July 5, 1827* (Albany: Printed by John B. Van Steenbergh, 1827), in *Negro Protest Pamphlets*, ed. Dorothy Porter (New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1969), 12, 15. The second quote appeared in an extract printed in the August 10, 1827, issue of *Freedom's Journal*.

⁹⁵ Patrick Rael argues that "northern black elites in the antebellum era reflected their deep participation in the construction of a northern worldview" by adopting "the public manifestations of virtue in the forms of 'respectability,'" *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 124. I suggest that black activists, many of whom were not elites, were deeply conscious of uplift as a strategy for fighting colonization, discrimination, and slavery. More than participating in creating a "northern worldview," they were attempting to ameliorate blacks' conditions throughout the union.

historians have noted the relationship between black leaders' devotion to racial elevation and their desire to participate as full American citizens in the electoral process, the growing market economy, and other benefits of middle-class life.⁹⁶ Intellectuals such as Cornish, Russwurm, and Nathaniel Paul repeatedly counseled their audiences that knowledge, industry, thrift, and moral conduct could alleviate oppression's worst effects. But they grounded these virtues in Scripture, not necessarily "middle-class" values—unless Christians were only middle-class. Cornish and Russwurm acknowledged in their newspaper's second issue that it was their "duty and privilege . . . to convince a Religious and Republican nation" of the necessity for improving blacks' socioeconomic status in this country.⁹⁷ While ACS proponents portrayed their plan as a divinely appointed mission to spread both republicanism and Christianity to the "heathen," black activists claimed the sacred mantle for their own efforts to develop good American citizens.

Black reformers emphasized that the ACS's policies contradicted its godly façade. They used the ACS's same tactics to tap into white Americans' collective political and religious psyche with subversive intent. William Watkins argued that colonizationists "hold out the anti-christian doctrine, that justice cannot be done to us while we remain in this land of civilization and gospel light."⁹⁸ Other black writers, drawing on nearly a century of antislavery reasoning, agreed that the ACS's policies violated the Bible's injunction against having "respect of persons." Their lengthy essays appearing in *Freedom's Journal* and elsewhere served to

⁹⁶ Harris, in *In the Shadow of Slavery*, sees black leaders' admonitions about moral conduct as evidence of class divisions within the black community, 119-124. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, argues that the desire "to participate more fully and successfully in the mainstream American economy and middle-class culture" was fueled by the belief that African American "needs, independence, and dignity . . . would be best served by adherence to these values," 86-87. I suggest that calling these values "middle-class" evaluates them economically rather than ideologically.

⁹⁷ *Freedom's Journal*, March 23, 1827.

⁹⁸ *Freedom's Journal*, July 6, 1827.

discredit the scheme while portraying themselves as the true inheritors of the Revolution.⁹⁹ They excluded white colonizationists from the kind of citizenship they believed the Founders envisioned, one that included not only the rights due a free people but an absolute divine command to pursue the good of others.

Several black activists in the free northern states began incorporating in their anticolonization message greater criticism of slavery. In November 1827, as the colonization debate in *Freedom's Journal's* faded after Cornish relinquished his co-editorship, Bishop Richard Allen wrote a letter to the paper complaining that sending an “unlettered people” to Africa rather than elevating them in the United States strengthened slavery’s hold over the nation.¹⁰⁰ John T. Hilton, a member of Thomas Paul’s African Baptist Church and Boston’s African Grand Lodge No. 459, spoke against slavery on June 24, 1828, at the Masons’ annual festival of St. John the Baptist. Without naming the ACS specifically, he asked “Americans” whether the picture of free people imprisoned in the nation’s capitol for having no papers did not move them to call on God’s help for ending slavery. He denounced the hypocrisy of raising funds for overseas missions when slaves needed their help at home. “Let me remind you, religious Sirs,” he intoned, “that ‘charity begins at home.’” Hilton reserved special contempt for Edward Everett, a Massachusetts congressman, for “such an anti-christian purpose as the support

⁹⁹ For a discussions of *Freedom's Journal's* impact on damaging the ACS in the black community, see Gross, “Freedom’s Journal,” 264-271, and Swift, *Black Prophets*, 36-39.

¹⁰⁰ *Freedom's Journal*, November 2, 1827. Cornish left the newspaper in September 1827. Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal*, writes that the split between Russwurm and Cornish was “amicable,” 54. Cornish had agreed to be co-editor for six months and decided to focus on the ministry. At this point, he had no idea that Russwurm would adopt colonizationist views. Alexander, in *African or American?*, suggests that they split over their difference of opinion, 72. According to Murray, in *Presbyterians and the Negro*, Cornish resigned from First African Presbyterian in 1828 due to health problems, 37. Cornish had been trying for three years to dissolve his pastoral relationship with the church due to its inability to meet its debts. See *New York Presbytery Minutes*, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia. Whatever the reason for Cornish’s departure from *Freedom's Journal*, the paper printed few articles on colonization with Russwurm, who supported colonization as sole editor. In April 1828, Russwurm changed the motto under *Freedom's Journal's* masthead from “Righteousness Exalteth A Nation” to “Devoted to the Improvement of the Coloured Population,” to reflect his own commitment to black education.

of Southern Slavery.”¹⁰¹ Sometime during the previous year, Everett had gone on record as saying that Scripture sanctioned slavery.¹⁰² He later supported the American Colonization Society.¹⁰³

In a Thanksgiving Day oration in Providence, Rhode Island, Hosea Easton blasted slavery, racial prejudice, and colonization. The son of a black ironworker from Massachusetts who had served as an engineer for George Washington, Easton, like Hilton, found intolerable the appearance of slaves in the nation’s capitol. He recited a litany of rights whites denied blacks everywhere—basic rights of citizenship, education, business opportunities. Even in church, blacks were relegated to “some remote part of the Meeting-House, or in a box built above the gallery.” Easton related an occasion where a respectable black preacher had been forced to relinquish his seat in a stage in New Bedford to accommodate a white sailor and factory girl, an event that fueled his anger. Finally, Easton leveled familiar charges: “The *Colonizing Craft* is a diabolical pursuit, which a great part of our Christian community are engaged in.” No stranger to the jeremiad, Easton concluded that colonizers and slaveholders trying to ease their guilty consciences by sneaking their goods, stolen from their divine owner, back from where they got them would “meet the justice of God, which will be to them a devouring sword.”¹⁰⁴

Easton’s angry address reflected the collective efforts behind black antislavery activism and symbolized a reform tradition undergoing transformation. He echoed John Hilton’s censure of slavery in Washington, DC. Easton almost certainly knew John Remond, the Salem agent for

¹⁰¹ John T. Hilton, *An Address, Delivered before the African Grand Lodge, of Boston, No. 459. June 24th, 1828*, by John T. Hilton: *On the Annual Festival, of St. John the Baptist* (Boston: Printed by David Hooton, 1828), 13.

¹⁰² *Providence Patriot*, June 16, 1827.

¹⁰³ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, February 1832. At the Fifteenth Annual Meeting of the American Colonization Society on January 16, 1832, Everett had motioned, “That the colonization of the coast of Africa is the most efficient mode of suppressing the slave trade and civilizing the African Continent.” He may have expressed similar sentiments earlier which prompted black Bostonians opposed to the ACS to criticize him so openly.

¹⁰⁴ Hosea Easton, *An Address: Delivered before the Coloured Population, of Providence, Rhode Island, on Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 27, 1828*, in *To Heal the Scourge of Prejudice: The Life and Writings of Hosea Easton*, eds. George R. Price and James Brewer Stewart (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 57-59.

Freedom's Journal, who had spent at least ten years in the gallery at Salem's First Baptist church and recently notified the paper in March that Salem's new "coloured church" had erected its frame.¹⁰⁵ That he should mention white discrimination against black stagecoach riders was not surprising for the Rev. Thomas Paul, whose church Easton's family attended, had experienced similar humiliation and perhaps continued to experience it. Like those who preceded him, Easton recommended community unity, education, and industry as solutions to oppression. But something more radical shaded his criticism of the ACS. It symbolized the transition that some activists were making from anticolonization to radical abolition. I argue that many black abolitionists inspired by the black Republic of Haiti, angered by the ACS, and disillusioned with the progress of universal emancipation, cemented their decision to fight oppression with a vengeance. If that meant adopting a position that invited a dangerous backlash from white Americans, so be it.

In February 1829, Robert Alexander Young, a black New Yorker, published *The Ethiopian Manifesto, issued in the defence of the Black Man's Rights, in the scale of Universal Freedom*. Although the document elicited no response from *Freedom's Journal*, it drew on one of the most conspicuous themes addressed in the paper. Written from the perspective of an Ethiopian prophet, the writer declared that "the power of Divinity" resided within Africa's descendants and that they possessed a sense of the justice due them. This message offered hope at a time when the outlook for reform appeared bleak. Almost in stream of consciousness fashion, Young prophesied that God had heard blacks' cries and would restore them. The whites

¹⁰⁵ *Freedom's Journal*, March 14, 1828. First Baptist Church of Salem Records, Book #46. The records show that John Remond paid pew rent from 1810 to 1819. After 1820, only the pew rents for non-gallery pews are listed.

had no power over them. “But learn, slaveholder,” he warned, “thine will rests not in thine hand: God decrees to thy slave his rights as man.”¹⁰⁶

Rather than contend, as some historians do, that the manifesto’s radicalism departed from the “political framework of Euro-American society” embraced by reformers like Samuel Cornish, I propose a different interpretation.¹⁰⁷ While the *Ethiopian Manifesto* exposed the depths of frustrated anger, it also echoed the words and actions of other black abolitionists by declaring blacks’ destiny to be in divine hands. Young certainly read *Freedom’s Journal* and the writings of other black activists as well as sermons of black preachers. His work was not a radical departure from a black antislavery tradition. Instead, it was embedded in a black political strategy centering on a concern for Africans and their descendants everywhere. Young exhibited both the despair and the hope of his generation. Acknowledging the suffering which black slaves endured under the “deadly foe, the monster of a slaveholder,” he advised them to wait patiently. A day was soon coming when God would break “the vile shackles” holding them. No man would own them then. Unlike a jeremiad that predicted divine vengeance, Young’s prophecy consistently focused on the hope of universal freedom.¹⁰⁸

Young published his tract four days after John Russwurm announced his conviction that colonization represented the best opportunity for blacks to advance as a people. In the February 14, 1829, edition of *Freedom’s Journal*, Russwurm admitted that he came to this conclusion only after considering carefully both sides of the debate. He confessed that his position put him at odds with “the majority of our readers, to many of whom we are personally known.” The ACS’s

¹⁰⁶ Robert Alexander Young, *The Ethiopian Manifesto, issued in Defence of the Black Man’s Rights in the Scale of Universal Freedom* (New York, 1829), in Sterling Stuckey, *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 36.

¹⁰⁷ Hodges, *Root & Branch*, 245. Stuckey, in *Ideological Origins*, considers it an early expression of black nationalism, 7.

¹⁰⁸ Young, *Ethiopian Manifesto*, in Stuckey, *Ideological Origins*, 38.

African Repository immediately and gleefully reprinted the editor's admission. Russwurm conceded that it was a "mere waste of words to talk of ever enjoying citizenship in this country." Even though he held out Liberia as a viable option for relief from oppression in the United States, he refused to discourage those in the black community eyeing emigration to Haiti despite negative reports about the project.¹⁰⁹ New York City's blacks branded him a "traitor" and responded to his apparent turnabout by rioting and burning his effigy.¹¹⁰

But blacks' response to repatriation and even colonization was more nuanced than their reaction to Russwurm implies. Less than two months before Russwurm's controversial revelation, he printed a report about Abduhl Rahaman, an African prince who had spent forty years enslaved in Natchez. Rahaman had appeared at the Rev. Benjamin Paul's New York Abyssinian Baptist Church to hear a sermon and receive a collection taken for his benefit before departing for Philadelphia and Norfolk where he would board a ship bound for Liberia. Russwurm likely attended the event. In August 1828, black Bostonians had feted Rahaman in grand style, marching in procession from the African School House to the African Masonic Hall then dining with and toasting the African prince. After the Masons offered their "regular" salutations to Africa, William Wilberforce, and Benjamin Lundy, they used the occasion to condemn slavery. Domingo Williams, for instance, wished in particularly vivid imagery that "the Slave holders of the world be like the whales in the ocean, with the trasher at their back, and the sword fish at their belly, until they rightly understand the difference between freedom and slavery." David Walker lamented that Rahaman had been "torn from his country, religion, and friends, and in the very midst of Christians, doomed to perpetual though unlawful bondage." Others looked forward to the day coming soon when all of Africa's descendants would enjoy

¹⁰⁹ *Freedom's Journal*, February 14, 1829. For information on Russwurm's background before joining *Freedom's Journal*, see Beyan, *African American Settlements*.

¹¹⁰ Alexander, *African or American?*, 74.

liberty.¹¹¹ Although many black leaders opposed colonization, they distinguished between repatriation and the coerced emigration of American-born blacks.

Russwurm's former co-editor, Samuel Cornish, clarified the distinction between the ACS's allegedly benevolent plan and true Christian benevolence. After Russwurm shut down *Freedom's Journal* at the end of March, Cornish published a new paper from May to October, called *The Rights of All*.¹¹² In the second issue, he stated that he cared about "the improvement of virtue and religion" among all people, not just Africans.¹¹³ Cornish supported an African colony designed to spread the Gospel and civilization—if that was its initial intention. The ACS's repugnancy lay in its refusal to perform its Christian duty in its own country; instead, it made the removal of free blacks its primary objective.¹¹⁴ Cornish did not reject emigration per se. In fact, he encouraged black Ohio residents to flee to Canada after no "ambassador of Jesus Christ" could be found to prevent the \$500 bond imposed upon them by the state legislature. Yet under no circumstances, he warned, should they head for Africa.¹¹⁵ Incensed by the ACS's anti-Christian stand, Cornish monitored its actions closely. In October, he discovered that key members of the Society, including Francis Scott Key and Navy Lieutenant Robert Field Stockton, would be appearing in New York. At home when he read the news, he mounted a "very swift horse" and rode through the dark evening hours to hear what these benevolent reformers had to say. Cornish concluded that Key's heart "cannot be bigger than a cherry" and

¹¹¹ *Freedom's Journal*, October 24, 1828.

¹¹² Gross, "Freedom's Journal and the Rights of All," 248, and Swift, *Black Prophets*, 41-45.

¹¹³ *The Rights of All*, June 12, 1829.

¹¹⁴ Cornish's argument mirrors one made by a contributor to *Freedom's Journal* writing under the pseudonym, "Investigator." Cornish may have been Investigator. The similarities between Cornish's essay in the June 12, 1829, issue of *The Rights of All* to Investigator's reports about colonization point to a single author. Black abolitionists often used the same references, though, making it difficult to distinguish who might have written the contributions to *Freedom's Journal*. Nevertheless, both Cornish and Investigator discussed the acceptability of the African colony as a mission station and both cited the following passage, "make the master Christ's servant, and the slave Christ's freeman . . . slavery will be but a name in our dictionaries." *Freedom's Journal*, October 5, 1827, and *Rights of All*, June 12, 1829.

¹¹⁵ *The Rights of All*, August 14, 1829.

“his God a bat or a mole” if he believed that God could not advance free blacks in the United States. Cornish’s comments elicited criticism from the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*’s new editor, the Bostonian William Lloyd Garrison.¹¹⁶ Although Cornish’s caustic remarks appeared in a newspaper serving the black community, they targeted a white audience. More than this, Cornish’s words reflected the belief espoused by the *Ethiopian Manifesto* that God could and would advance black freedom.¹¹⁷

The summer of 1829, less than a year after honoring Prince Rahaman, black Bostonians aired their grievances with the ACS in a public display of unity that encouraged Garrison to rethink his gradualist antislavery position. Garrison recorded what happened at the annual 14th of July celebration commemorating the end to the slave trade.¹¹⁸ At noon, “members of the African Abolition Society” gathered to march to Thomas Paul’s African Baptist Church and hear a sermon by one of Boston’s white clergymen. Whether the name “African Abolition Society” was Garrison’s invention, reflected the African Society’s growing radicalization, or was a different organization altogether is unclear. Nevertheless, activists like David Walker, John T. Hilton, and Hosea Easton would surely have attended the celebration.¹¹⁹ If Boston’s black community, accustomed to their leaders’ sharp rhetoric, hoped to hear a message about abolition, they were sorely disappointed. The white clergyman exhorted the audience to maintain a “moral and religious character,” whereupon some, according to Garrison, misinterpreted the minister’s purpose and walked out.¹²⁰ A black minister, either Paul or one of Boston’s black Methodist

¹¹⁶ *The Rights of All*, October 16, 1829, and *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, October 30, 1829.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Jennings, chairman of the paper’s stockholders, and Peter Williams Jr., the secretary, noted that the paper was “the only channel of communication which we have with the whites,” *The Rights of All*, August 14, 1829.

¹¹⁸ The witness to the events identified himself as “An Observer.” Garrison’s biographer, Henry Mayer, in *All On Fire*, contends that it was Garrison himself, 69.

¹¹⁹ According to Mayer, in *All On Fire*, the African Abolition Freehold Society, which sponsored the parade, was a “black benevolent association with an interest in the purchase of real estate,” 68.

¹²⁰ Most likely, they understood well the message they were hearing but were now primed for something more than general admonitions to good behavior. See Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African*

pastors, James Lee or Samuel Snowden, calmed the congregation enough to allow the white cleric to continue.¹²¹ In resuming, the orator only made matters worse by “endeavoring to prove, that the liberation of two millions of slaves, in their present condition, would be neither a blessing to them, nor safe for the country,” a mistake compounded by an ACS representative present stepping in to clarify. The crowd murmured to such an extent that Garrison conceded, “I felt as if, were I a black, I too would growl my disapprobation. It was the language of nature—the unbending spirit of liberty; and it gave me a higher opinion of this body of men.”¹²² By the time Garrison moved to Baltimore the following month, he was a thoroughgoing immediatist.¹²³

Blacks’ collective protest found its most forceful representation in David Walker’s *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*.¹²⁴ Born free in Wilmington, North Carolina, Walker moved to Boston in the 1820s, joining African Lodge No. 459, the Massachusetts General Colored Association, and the black Methodist church. He published his incendiary pamphlet within a month of the black Bostonians’ parade. Filled with invective against white hypocrites, Walker repeated other abolitionists’ belief that God guaranteed black rights. Much of what he wrote would have rung familiar to those who had read or heard *Freedom’s Journal*, *The Rights of All*, and other black writings and orations. Walker’s biographer, Peter Hinks, recognizes that Walker drew on a black oratorical and antislavery tradition and argues that while

American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915 (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 41-42. Kachun argues that black disaffection revealed “the growing tensions within the emerging abolitionist movement,” 42. This assumes that colonization was an abolition strategy, which it never was.

¹²¹ James Lee is mentioned as a Methodist preacher in *Freedom’s Journal*, April 25, 1828. For information on James Lee and Samuel Snowden, see Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 75, 78-79.

¹²² *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, September 2, 1829.

¹²³ Mayer, *All On Fire*. In noting Garrison’s turn to immediatism in the summer of 1829, Mayer suggests that “his account of the July 14 celebration . . . survives as a tantalizing indication of the political education he may have acquired on the margins of the color line in 1820s Boston,” 69. Nonetheless, he goes on to argue that George Bourne’s 1816 tract, *The Book and Slavery Irreconcilable*, and Elizabeth Heyrick’s 1824 essay on immediatism influenced his decision to embrace radical abolition. I would suggest that Boston’s black leadership, given its progressive agenda, likely already had a relationship with Garrison and invited him to their celebration, knowing that he would publish an account. Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), argues that Garrison turned his back on colonization because of black opinion, 19.

¹²⁴ For two exegeses of the *Appeal*, see Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, and Stuckey, *Slave Culture*.

Walker collaborated with no one in writing the *Appeal*, he may have shared the pamphlet's contents with other black reformers in Boston.¹²⁵ I suggest, however, that collaboration would not have been unusual. For several decades, black activists had circulated their thoughts among one another before presenting them to the public. Many written productions bearing an individual name reflected a group discussion and consciousness. One essayist, "Investigator," complaining about colonization in *Freedom's Journal* wrote, "[F]or while I possess but one voice, I know that I speak the sentiments of nearly all my brethren."¹²⁶ Similarly, Walker's righteous anger against slavery and colonization was not his alone. While whites stressed the violence threatened in Walker's *Appeal*, Walker's activist peers understood its message because it was also theirs. Hosea Easton, selling the *Appeal* from his store, described Walker as a "godly man, who loves his God and his country . . . and is willing to tell the truth for the good of his country, and benefit of his fellow creatures." Because white Americans feared not God, they tread a dangerous path by rejecting an end to slavery.¹²⁷ David Walker warned them yet again. He was no singular voice crying in the wilderness. Black faith in universal equality and divine justice found its most eloquent expression in Walker's *Appeal*.

Conclusion

Rather than link David Walker's *Appeal* to the rise of white radical abolitionism as some historians maintain, I contend instead that he was a capstone of a black activist tradition.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 118. Hinks insists that the *Appeal*'s uniqueness arose from Walker's forceful emphasis on the "interrelatedness of exploited blacks throughout the world," 179. In addition, as a black evangelical, Walker subscribed to a radical egalitarianism that believed God had created all humankind equal. Other black reformers grounded in practical piety, however, had delivered the same message and made it a solid cornerstone of their activism for at least four decades. I argue that Walker's essay was not unique except for its undisputed vitriol and its circulation in the South, a strategy that supported emerging radicalism.

¹²⁶ *Freedom's Journal*, September 7, 1827.

¹²⁷ *Rhode-Island American*, December 8, 1829. Hinks, in substantiating Walker's authorship of the *Appeal*, appears unaware of this advertisement.

¹²⁸ Peter P. Hinks, introduction to *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), xli-xliv, and Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 16-17.

After generations of individual voices and collective efforts, the push for immediatism emerged fully in 1829.¹²⁹ Several factors combined to drive blacks' increasing aggression against slavery throughout the 1820s. Confident that their mission to end slavery was divinely appointed, they battled the colonization movement on the grounds that it violated God's law by assisting slaveholders, reneging on the nation's commitment to republican egalitarianism, and denying blacks' right to self-determination. Confronted with disfranchisement, discrimination, and exclusion from economic opportunities, blacks pursued their own strategies for emigration. They maintained a strongly transnational perspective and looked to Haiti as a powerful model for black freedom and autonomy. Black activists realized that the gradual emancipation carried out in the North would never extend to the South. In fact, the Missouri Compromise ensured slavery's survival and expansion. The debate over how to end slavery now took on an urgency that demanded radical action. David Walker warned that "unless something is immediately done," the nation would suffer the wrath of God.¹³⁰ This sentiment would propel black abolitionists into the next decade with renewed faith in the sacredness of their cause.

¹²⁹ Other historians have acknowledged that black resistance to the ACS inspired white immediatists. See especially Patrick Rael, "Free Black Activism in the Antebellum North," *History Teacher* 39 (February 2006): 215-253, page 224 in particular. Resistance, I suggest, was more than a reaction to or struggling against oppression or threats of oppression. Black reformers' spiritual worldview led them to re-envision how society and community should operate. They not only pushed back but they pushed forward with an agenda grounded in a global perspective centered on what they perceived to be divine truth. While American revolutionary ideals provided some impetus to black activism, it was more the prophetic interpretation that enslaved and free blacks, inspired by long held spiritual beliefs, placed on those ideals that led them to turn increasingly toward radical strategies.

¹³⁰ David Walker, *Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, edited with an introduction and annotations, by Peter P. Hinks (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 71.

Chapter 6

“To drive these ‘abominations of desolation’ from the church and the world”:

Black Activists and the Sacred War for Radical Abolition, 1829-1841

In the introduction his *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, David Walker declared that the Lord God would end all enslaved and free blacks’ oppression under one condition: they must be willing to help themselves through any means available.¹ Walker’s exhortation encompassed several black intellectual traditions: it appeared in print publicly; it demanded black self-determination; it elucidated the global nature of black oppression; and it recognized the centrality of divine sovereignty in black life. Borne of the generations of black voices that preceded it, Walker’s *Appeal* marked a bolder, more radical antislavery stance by calling for immediate emancipation. Yet Walker did not stand alone. By the time Walker published his pamphlet in September 1829, immediatism had gained currency among many black reformers disgusted with increasing white support for the American Colonization Society, the rise of universal white male suffrage, and the territorial expansion of slavery. Radical abolition offered hope for realists impatient with whites’ false promises, foot-dragging, and betrayal.

This chapter traces the ways in which black abolitionists between 1829 and 1841 framed immediatism and their reform agenda in both sacred and political terms. I argue that the call for immediate abolition represented the fulfillment of a black protest agenda that first emerged in the eighteenth century. I begin with a brief analysis of Walker’s 1829 incendiary pamphlet then trace black activism through the 1830s and end with a consideration of James W.C. Pennington’s

¹David Walker, *Walker’s Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, edited with an introduction and annotations, by Peter P. Hinks (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 2. According to Hinks, this particular edition underscored white Americans’ hypocrisy in cloaking themselves in a mantle of Christianity and republicanism even as they oppressed blacks.

1841 work, *A Text Book of the Origin and History, &c. &c. of the Colored People*. Although largely ignored in historical scholarship, Pennington's history serves as an appropriate bookend to a century of black intellectual engagement with the topic of slavery that began with Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein's 1742 dissertation. Black abolitionists' spiritual ideals, shaped by decades of collective experience in practical piety and reform, compelled them to consolidate their strategies into a full-fledged movement demanding immediate emancipation and self-determination in the years following Walker's *Appeal*. Walker's call was their call, and black activists brought to bear on this new radicalism tactics long embedded in their own intellectual and cultural tradition of engaging with Christian beliefs, Enlightenment thought, and revolutionary ideology. Committed to improving the political, moral, and social conditions of blacks everywhere, their mission transcended local, regional, and national boundaries. However much they differed over specific tactics, black activists recognized the need for a holy war.

David Walker articulated a sound immediatist theology for arousing his people to radical action and revealed how black antislavery thought had matured. Historian Peter Hinks argues that Walker's *Appeal* focused primarily on whites' brutality.² For Sterling Stuckey, Walker emphasized black unity and a concern for all people of African descent that distinguished him as an early black nationalist.³ I suggest further that the *Appeal*'s repeated references to divine sovereignty and intervention in black lives not only mirrored decades of previous black reform

² Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). Hinks argues, "No one else more directly confronted the problem of how to motivate a people to pursue freedom and power who had become accustomed to not having it," 199. He goes on to say that Walker "orient[ed] his pamphlet around demonstrating the unique brutality of American slavery." Yet, black reformers had often lamented blacks' cruel burdens under slavery and in freedom. Slaves and free people needed no reminder of their sufferings to motivate them. I suggest that Walker stressed slavery's brutality to motivate blacks to think more seriously about their relationship to divinity and their responsibility to God and to their fellow blacks.

³ Sterling Stuckey, *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 8-13.

thought but permitted Walker to impose a political obligation on his readers.⁴ While the notion that divine ownership and protection delegitimized human bondage and comforted an oppressed people, it conferred a responsibility to resist God's enemies and unify against slavery and prejudice. As the "property of the Holy Ghost," blacks served no other master but Jesus Christ, rendering white usurpers subject to holy vengeance.⁵

The idea that a just God sided with blacks' righteous cause, which had spurred earlier black reform efforts, now inspired black radicals to advocate more aggressive measures.

Although it might be tempting to link Walker to the revivalistic environment of early nineteenth-century America and argue that his spiritual outlook and radicalism derived from that, such a contention obscures black radicals' reliance on older pietistic theological traditions that also underscored the believer's ability to change his or her life.⁶ As a Methodist, Walker subscribed to the belief that through Christ God made his grace free to all and all could choose salvation.⁷ True believers could turn from sin, lead sanctified lives, and no one was predestined to either

⁴ According to Sterling Stuckey, in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), David Walker "sparked opposition" in his own community because he was a nationalist "at a time of growing integrationist sentiment," 120. Not all black activists agreed that racial unity would effect political and social change. For Walker, unity was essential, 120-125. Furthermore, Stuckey considers Walker "the father of black nationalist theory in America," the forerunner of twentieth century black nationalists such as Paul Robeson and Malcolm X, 120. I argue, however, that Walker's emphasis on self-determination was a legacy from previous generations. To call him an early nationalist obscures the contributions his intellectual predecessors made to the development of his thought as expressed in the *Appeal*.

⁵ Walker, *Appeal*, 51.

⁶ George A. Levesque, in "Black Abolitionists in the Age of Jackson: Catalysts in the Radicalization of American Abolitionism," *Journal of Black Studies* 1 (December 1970): 187-201, argues that the revivalism of the early nineteenth century "radicaliz[ed] the antislavery crusade" and led black abolitionists to become "catalysts in the radicalization of American abolitionism," 191. Levesque does not include David Walker as a catalyst. I contend that the black radicalism emerging in the 1830s represented the logical outcome of a spiritual tradition predating the Second Great Awakening. In other words, a black antislavery theology did not suddenly appear coincident with nineteenth-century revival.

⁷ For discussion of Walker's spiritual beliefs and church affiliation, see Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 38-39, 68-69, 227-233.

slavery or freedom. In his doctrinal thinking, consequently, Walker reflected the changes that had taken place within Protestant Christianity over the past several decades.⁸

Walker, however, did not subscribe exclusively to the moral suasion strategy which many radical abolitionists, both black and white, embraced during the 1830s.⁹ He disagreed that stressing moral arguments against slavery would persuade slaveholders to give up their bondpeople. His jeremiad warned that if white Americans failed to free slaves and treat all blacks as fellow human beings created equally by God, they would suffer divine judgment. More to the point, that judgment might come justifiably at the hands of blacks themselves. Rather than a suasionist argument, Walker raised the specter of black soldiers arming themselves for God.

Walker also made blacks accountable to God for their refusal to throw off their shackles. This helps explain why Walker and so many other black reformers gave priority to education and

⁸ Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). According to Noll, traditional Calvinism during the late 1820s was weakening, and more liberal interpretations of Christian doctrine proliferated, 293-345. As intellectual descendants of George Whitefield, Methodists stressed experiential faith as did other evangelicals. But long before David Walker came to the denomination, Methodism had embraced John Wesley's Arminianism in contrast to Whitefield's Calvinism.

⁹ For an analysis of white moral suasion, see James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 51-74. Many white and black reformers inspired by evangelical Christianity believed that they could end slavery by encouraging its supporters to acknowledge the institution as sin, to repent, and to work for immediate emancipation. Moral suasion, according to Stewart, encompassed a strategy whereby immediatists would win over the prejudiced and slaveholding "with the tools of revivalism," 56. It incorporated a broad range of tactics designed to perfect society including purifying churches of proslavery clergy and members, organizing antislavery societies, and petitioning the United States Congress for abolition. Tunde Adeleke offers an alternative explanation for the rise of moral suasion in his essay, "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830's," *Journal of Negro History* 83 (Spring 1998): 127-142. He argues that moral suasion originated "as far back as . . . the tradition of the Quakers, and among African Americans to the self-help and cooperative activities of free blacks in New York and Pennsylvania in the eighteenth century," 127. Although he claims that the ideology would later become identified with William Lloyd Garrison, Adeleke links the rise of the antislavery movement in the 1830s to black abolitionist influence. He traces the roots of moral suasion, in particular, to the Enlightenment. While I recognize the force of moral suasion in black abolitionist thought during the 1830s, I suggest that a belief in experiential or experimental Protestant Christianity led many black abolitionists to utilize the same strategies they embraced from the 1770s to the 1820s—collective networking, forming independent societies and churches, employing public exhortation—in the service of radical abolitionism. This spiritual ideal did not preclude moral suasion but could move beyond it.

moral reform.¹⁰ If blacks could read, they would learn from the Bible that white Christians had rejected God's word. Walker declared, "It is a notorious fact, that the major part of the white Americans, have . . . tried to keep us ignorant, and make us believe that God made us and our children to be slaves to them and theirs."¹¹ While education and moral improvement might assist free blacks to become model republican citizens and partakers in economic prosperity, it would do more. Rather than advocating middle-class values, as some scholars have argued, Walker promoted a militant Christianity that rejected submission to those who claimed the mantle of Christianity without practicing its tenets.¹² This crucial distinction opens up an alternative interpretation of Walker. He blamed blacks themselves not for failing to live up to American social and political ideologies but for denying the spirit that God had given them. If they failed to retaliate against murderous white tyrants, blacks would answer to God Almighty. For Walker, both racial elevation and violent resistance were holy endeavors.¹³

Walker targeted for especial reproach white ministers of the Gospel who supported black oppression. Walker recalled that while visiting South Carolina, he attended a camp meeting expecting "to hear the word of my Savior." Instead, he heard a white preacher exhort slaves to obey their masters or receive the whip on their backs as their just due. Asserting that white

¹⁰ Adeleke, in "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion," argues that black moral suasionists proffered a "situational deficiency argument," or an environmentalist position, that claimed blacks were responsible for improving their condition, 133.

¹¹ Walker, *Appeal*, 36.

¹² Patrick Rael, throughout *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), contends that blacks reformers' public protest of slavery and discrimination strategically reflected white northern values. See also Patrick Rael, "Free Black Activism in the Antebellum North," *The History Teacher* 39 (February 2006): 215-253. According to Rael's essay, free blacks participated in creating the public sphere that provided the space for their voice, 223. He finds this a source of strength for black reformers. See Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, for a discussion of the importance of middle-class values to black activists, 86-87.

¹³ Peter Hinks, in *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, acknowledges that "Walker followed an African American tradition, evolving since the late eighteenth century, of employing evangelical religion not only for individual regeneration but also for radical social transformation," in the tradition of slave insurrectionists Gabriel, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner, 232. Walker adopted an even more radical tactic by widely disseminating his inflammatory message.

Americans did not have “the Bible in their hands,” Walker did not consider such preachers true Christians.¹⁴ With this accusation, Walker spoke on behalf of at least two generations of black reformers.¹⁵ His words echoed Thomas Paul’s admonition to the black converts he baptized in Boston in 1805 to judge those who despised them as neither gentlemen nor Christians. His warning to whites mirrored the jeremiads of Jeremiah Gloucester, Hosea Easton, and others. Just ten days before Walker published the first edition of the *Appeal*, Samuel Cornish’s paper, *The Rights of All*, reprinted an extract from an address given on July 6, 1829 at Troy, New York, by the Rev. Nathaniel Paul. Paul proclaimed that a Christian would not scorn “his fellow man on account of his complexion,” and even though he might sit in a church pew or gallery or stand in the pulpit, “his soul is . . . destitute of the holy religion of the Cross of Christ” if he believed the conceit that blacks were not equal to whites.¹⁶ Walker reminded his readers that even in Boston, white churches segregated black worshippers. He then offered an apocalyptic vision, “I tell you Americans! that unless you speedily alter your course, *you and your Country are gone!!!!!!*”¹⁷

The American Colonization Society (ACS) in particular would trigger divine wrath. Like his associates in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, Walker considered the ACS

¹⁴ Walker, *Appeal*, 41, 40.

¹⁵ That Walker echoed the words or ideas of his antislavery predecessors does not reveal whether they were militant abolitionists. All certainly spoke against oppression. Thomas Paul openly rejected racial discrimination and acted as agent for *Freedom’s Journal*, which advocated immediate abolition. We can safely assume, therefore, that he was an immediatist although not militantly so. Gloucester died at the age of 27 on January 1, 1828, so we can never know how he would have reacted to the new radicalism. (See *Freedom’s Journal*, January 11, 1828, for Gloucester’s obituary.) Both he and Paul offered moral arguments against slavery during a time when to advocate radical abolitionism was to invite violent censure or worse. Hosea Easton, on the other hand, supported Walker’s militant position wholeheartedly. Nathaniel Paul was an immediatist who advocated black emigration to Canada. He relied more on positive action in behalf of the black community than trying to persuade slaveholders to convert. In a January 11, 1839, letter to Gerrit Smith, Paul expressed his joy that Governor Marcy had lost the recent election but regretted that any abolitionists would have voted for proslavery candidates, an opinion that suggests Paul favored political abolitionism. See *Black Abolitionist Papers*, ed. C. Peter Ripley, microfilm edition (New York: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1981), reel 2. What all of Walker’s intellectual forefathers agreed upon was the unchristian and evil nature of racial prejudice and slavery. Walker adopted and transformed their language to recommend a more militant course of action. I suggest that few black abolitionists relied exclusively on moral suasion. The life of their community depended on far more practical measures.

¹⁶ *The Rights of All*, September 18, 1829.

¹⁷ Walker, *Appeal*, 42.

anti-Christian and proslavery, or two sides of the same coin. Walker directed the brunt of his righteous anger at the prominent ACS member, Henry Clay. Clay had never advocated emancipation and cared nothing for blacks, a position that guaranteed his eventual reproach by the Lord Jesus Christ. According to Walker, Clay had no right to interfere in blacks' business by sending correspondence around the world regarding African colonization. "Do we not belong to the Holy Ghost?" asked Walker. White Americans then ought to abandon all talk of colonization and treat blacks like human beings. Their own actions rejected the nation's revered principles of equality set forth in the Declaration of Independence. Blending the sacred and secular, Walker drew on the same intellectual traditions his predecessors had claimed to oppose the ACS. At the *Appeal's* conclusion, he included a passage from *The Book of Common Prayer*: "No longer let the wicked vaunt,/And, proudly boasting, say/Tush, God regards not what we do;/He never will repay."¹⁸ Walker not only condemned colonizationists as wrongdoers but prophesied their destruction.

How Walker subverted white American pride went largely unnoticed as southerners zeroed in on the *Appeal's* call for slaves to resist violently. The essay may have escaped comment altogether except that Walker determinedly circulated copies throughout the Union, particularly in the South, using seamen as conduits. A writer to the *Boston Centinel* commented at length on the pamphlet, reprinting some of its more inflammatory sections and noting that the *Appeal's* message was already finding its way south.¹⁹ By January 1830, Georgia had passed

¹⁸ Walker, *Appeal*, 52, 79. The poetical passage comes from *The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. Together with The Psalter, or Psalms of David* (Boston: Charles Williams, 1811), Psalm X. Peter P. Hinks, footnoting this passage, noted that he could not find where Walker's version originated, 131, n 108. The hymn from the Wesley Collections, "Shall I, for fear of feeble man," with which Walker concluded the *Appeal* was written by John Joseph Winckler, a German Pietist, and translated by John Wesley. See Charles S. Nutter, D.D., and Wilburt F. Tillett, D.D., *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church: An Annotated Edition of The Methodist Hymnal* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1911), 122-123, 448.

¹⁹ *Berkshire Journal*, December 24, 1829.

legislation preventing free blacks from entering the state's ports for fear they would pass the pamphlet to the slave community.²⁰ Other states followed suit.²¹ North Carolina, by the end of 1830, began prohibiting slaveowners from teaching their slaves to read. One legislator complained that some planters wanted to teach their slaves to read Scripture, but another countered that "they would be more likely to read the inflammatory [sic] Walker pamphlet than the Scriptures."²² Harrison Gray Otis, Boston's mayor, wrote to both Savannah's mayor and Virginia's governor regarding the *Appeal*. Thirty years earlier, Otis, as a Congressman, had voiced concern to the House of Representatives that Absalom Jones's antislavery petition would encourage blacks to assemble together. His fears apparently materializing in the worst possible way, he insisted disingenuously to Virginia's Governor Giles that black Bostonians disapproved Walker's "sanguinary fanaticism."²³

Yet Walker had struck a chord that reverberated through much of the black community. Hosea Easton, Walker's fellow radical reformer, began selling the *Appeal* at his store in Providence, Rhode Island, in early December 1829. Easton perceived that Walker's profound spirituality would escape whites' attention and anticipated their accusation that Walker was a "Blackamoor—A Saucy Black" for his effrontery in publishing such a bold declamation of American hypocrisy.²⁴ When Savannah's black Baptist preacher, the Rev. Henry Cunningham, received several copies in December, he promptly turned them over to the police, probably fearing for his life.²⁵ In Boston, contrary to Mayor Otis's optimistic assertion, the city's blacks, according to a newspaper report, "glor[ied] in its [the *Appeal*'s] principles, as if it were a star in

²⁰ *Salem Gazette*, January 15, 1830.

²¹ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, does an excellent job of detailing the *Appeal*'s circulation and response both in the North and the South, 116-172.

²² *Connecticut Courant*, December 28, 1830.

²³ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 18, 1830.

²⁴ *Rhode Island American*, December 8, 1829.

²⁵ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 118-119.

the east.”²⁶ This observation was likely prompted by a violent altercation a month after Walker’s death in August 1830 between blacks and whites. The news account of the fight that took place near the African Church observed that Boston’s blacks were “assuming to have some extraordinary privileges in consequence of this incendiary pamphlet.”²⁷ While for whites, Walker’s *Appeal* rang the warning bell of possible revolt, for blacks it sanctioned greater mobilization against oppression.

Walker’s pamphlet was a timely commentary on white Americans’ current racist agenda, and some whites used it as an excuse to proceed with further anti-black measures. Walker was well aware that in July 1829 the Supreme Court of Ohio had ordered free blacks to leave the state or pay a 500 dollar bond, a sum beyond the financial means of most if not all of Ohio’s black population. After Walker’s *Appeal* appeared in the South, hysteria reached such a height that the Louisiana legislature not only prohibited free blacks from entering the state but sought to expel those free blacks who had lived in the state since 1825.²⁸ A July 4, 1830, benefit for the Wilberforce colony in Canada, was held at St. Philip’s Church in New York City, where the Rev. Peter Williams Jr. reminded his audience that Cincinnati and New Orleans were not the only places where “the sight of *free* men of colour” was offensive.²⁹ During the 1820s and 1830s, many northern states restricted black voting rights or disfranchised blacks completely. Where voting rights existed, blacks stayed away from the polls out of respect for social custom and because of a justifiable concern for their own safety.³⁰

²⁶ *Boston Evening Transcript*, September 28, 1830, reprinted in Hinks, *David Walker’s Appeal*, 109-110.

²⁷ *Rhode Island American*, September 24, 1830.

²⁸ *Baltimore Patriot*, April 1, 1830. See also Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*.

²⁹ Peter Williams Jr., *Discourse Delivered in St. Philip’s Church, for the Benefit of the Coloured Community of Wilberforce, in Upper Canada, on the Fourth of July, 1830* (New York: G.F. Bunce, 1830), 12.

³⁰ Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

In September 1830, even as black and white Bostonians battled on Belknap Street, black reformers throughout the North met in Philadelphia to address the social ills plaguing their communities. As historians have maintained, the rise of the black national convention movement was a response to increasing discrimination and an opportunity for free blacks to exercise some control over their future.³¹ However, I further suggest that the convention was a legacy of the Appeal and that the subsequent movement emerged as a practical strategy for addressing the problems David Walker identified: white hypocrisy and black apathy. The purpose of the first meeting, headed by Richard Allen, was to form a parent society and auxiliaries to purchase land in Canada for a black settlement. Emigration remained a touchy subject for reformers who failed to agree on its efficacy. James Forten, in fact, stayed away from the meeting for this reason.³² The convention hedged on supporting large-scale emigration by calling the proposed Canadian settlement a “refuge” for those who might be forced to flee their homes and for parents who hoped to see their children prosper unencumbered by prejudice. Richard Allen, in his address to convention members, exposed the recent black laws as anti-Christian, asking how a purportedly Christian nation could treat a part of its population so cruelly and still send Christian missionaries to foreign lands. He offered Canada as one solution to oppression but stressed the importance for all blacks, as Walker had advised, to pursue education as a means to “raising the moral and political standing of ourselves.”³³

³¹ Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., *Exodus! Religion, Race, and Nation in Early Nineteenth-Century Black America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest*; Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³² Winch, *A Gentleman of Color*, 238.

³³ “Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Color, for improving their condition in the United States; for purchasing lands; and for the establishment of a settlement in Upper Canada, also The Proceedings of the Convention, with their Address to The Free Persons of Colour in the United States” (1831), in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Howard H. Bell (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 11. Hereafter *Minutes*.

Whatever the immediate context for the convention, it represented the institutionalization of decades of networking among free blacks throughout the North.³⁴ The movement answered at least partially Walker's demand for black unity. Historian Patrick Rael suggests that the convention movement represented black elites attempting to push their uplift agenda on lower classes.³⁵ This position elides the fact that the men who participated in the convention sought to address their communities' real distress and despair caused by poverty, lack of access to education, and alcohol abuse. Black leaders, many of whom were not elite by economic standards, cared deeply about their communities. Despite their denominational and regional differences, these convention activists believed wholeheartedly that education, temperance, and economy paved the way for each free black to advance politically and "to discharge all those duties enjoined on him by his Creator."³⁶ By portraying the black majority as degraded, the convention's organizers appear elitist to twenty-first-century scholars, but they and their contemporaries referred to the social conditions which prevented black Americans from improving their lives. This discourse furthermore echoed Walker's own disappointment that many members of the black community rejected education and religious instruction to their own

³⁴ Hinks, in *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, argues that the Negro Convention Movement was an attempt to develop "more regular and broader organization among the black leadership of the North" that had begun through "ties forged through *Freedom's Journal*," 103. Glaude, in *Exodus!*, contends that the early conventions promulgated a "politics of respectability" and emerged as "an extension into the broader public space of the black religious impulse of self-reliance and social uplift," 113-114. According to Glaude, the Biblical Exodus story provided a collective identity for a people seeking liberation, 4-11. Interestingly, David Walker used the Exodus story not to identify with the ancient Hebrews but to demonstrate that black Americans were worse off than the Jews under Pharaoh. While both Hinks and Glaude recognize that the convention movement emerged in the immediate context of anti-black sentiment in the country, they pay insufficient attention to the larger antislavery context that birthed the movement. Black convention members lived in a post-Haitian Revolution world and were aware of the continuing drive for abolition in Great Britain's West Indian colonies. They were also heirs to a long tradition of collective organizing in the decades before the 1820s.

³⁵ Rael, in *Black Identity and Black Protest*, cautions that he is not arguing for "the hegemony of a small class of black elites;" instead, he claims that the "convention movement illustrated themes of conflict and contention," 35.

³⁶ "Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour," (1831), in *Minutes*, 5.

detriment. Black leaders interpreted the individual's failure to improve as injuring the collective good.³⁷

At stake was nothing less than the total abolition of slavery in the United States. When the convention held its first official conference in June 1831 in Philadelphia, some of those attending were dyed-in-the-wool radical abolitionists such as Hosea Easton and the Rev. Samuel Snowden from Boston and Samuel Cornish now back in Philadelphia. Several representatives from the slave states of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia attended, revealing that the movement encompassed a national reform agenda. Neither was the agenda exclusively radical. Most convention delegates expressed interest primarily in elevating free blacks, believing this crucial to ending prejudice. The white reformers appearing at the meeting, except for the fiery William Lloyd Garrison, supported more conservative abolition and reform measures. Benjamin Lundy of Washington, DC, for instance, had long approved gradual emancipation; Arthur Tappan of New York and the Rev. Simeon Jocelyn of New Haven, Connecticut, laid before the convention a proposal for a black college in New Haven.³⁸ In the end, however, the convention resolved to recommend to all black Americans to spend July Fourth in "humiliation, fasting and prayer—and to beseech Almighty God . . . that the shackles of slavery may be broken, and our sacred rights obtained."³⁹ The twin goals of obtaining emancipation and ending oppression were inseparable.⁴⁰ Still, the convention remained careful to avoid mentioning immediate abolition.

³⁷ Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010). Roberts claims that the moral perfectionism preached by Charles G. Finney "strongly influenced many black evangelical reformers" who believed the moral failings of one African American "affected the future" of all, 108-109. This argument reinforces the traditional paradigm that black reform emerged from the Second Great Awakening. Yet, the combined legacies of pietism, republicanism, and African communal social customs complicated how black leaders understood their responsibilities to their communities.

³⁸ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

³⁹ "Minutes and Proceedings . . . 1831," in *Minutes*, 10.

⁴⁰ "Minutes and Proceedings . . . 1831," in *Minutes*. The convention address, signed by Belfast Burton, Junius C. Morel, and William Whipper, failed to call for immediate emancipation specifically but recognized that "general

By the time black reformers convened in 1833, they agreed that Canadian emigration, the plan which prompted the convention in the first place, should only be encouraged as a last resort. Black Americans should stay where they were if they could safely do so and pursue social and religious improvement at home. The emigration committee had disclosed the year before its conviction that “any express plan to colonize our people . . . tends to weaken the situation of those who are left behind.”⁴¹ Black leaders’ retreat from the Canadian plan was not so much an intentional decision to identify themselves as Americans as it was an overt display of love and solicitude for a larger black public that included bondspeople.⁴² “Ours is a defensive warfare,” Abraham Shadd of Pennsylvania, informed the convention, “on our domicil we meet the aggressor.” If blacks budged before whites forcibly drove them from their homes, then they deserved white criticisms. Therefore, they must stand against the slavery and prejudice which stalked the land to deprive man of God’s precious gift of freedom.⁴³ Shadd and his fellow convention members represented a new generation of reformers that interpreted their mission in militant terms and sought new avenues beyond emigration for achieving the battle’s victory.

Both the old and rising generations of black abolitionists took advantage of William Lloyd Garrison’s Boston-based antislavery periodical, *The Liberator*, to disseminate their progressively radical views. By all accounts, *The Liberator* was a black newspaper edited by a white man. Even before the paper made its first appearance on January 1, 1831, the Revs.

emancipation” was attracting European friends, 12. They admitted that the convention would not focus its attention on the cruelty of slavery because it was a subject “too sensibly felt to need description,” 12. Instead, they would look at their prospects for improvement. It is clear that not all convention delegates were automatically militant or immediate abolitionists.

⁴¹ “Minutes and Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color In these United States” (1832), in *Minutes*, 18.

⁴² Alexander, in *African or American?*, argues that black Convention members decided that the only way to end slavery and “attain American citizenship” was to “stay in the United States and fight,” 81. For Alexander, this strategy allowed black activists to claim an American identity while employing a black nationalist agenda.

⁴³ “Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in these United States” (1833), in *Minutes*, 32-33.

Thomas Paul and Samuel Snowden gave Garrison their support.⁴⁴ Shortly after Garrison began publishing, he even hired Thomas Paul's son, Thomas Jr. as an apprentice.⁴⁵ It is well known that black activists largely financed Garrison's venture. James Forten garnered enough subscriptions to guarantee *The Liberator's* first printing and black subscribers sustained it through its early years. The paper further demonstrated what the well-developed black reform network was capable of accomplishing.⁴⁶ Black activists, in fact, shaped Garrison's editorial choices. Almost immediately, David Walker's *Appeal* received a great deal of Garrison's early attention. As a pacifist, Garrison could not condone Walker's call for self-defense. Nonetheless, he acknowledged the truths within the *Appeal* and either commented on it himself or printed others' lengthy commentaries including excerpts from the pamphlet. When one letter writer, Leo, condemned the *Appeal* and doubted Walker's authorship, Garrison responded that, while he did not know Walker himself, he knew personally others who could confirm that the *Appeal* "was an exact transcript of his [Walker's] daily conversations."⁴⁷ This revelation tells us more about the black reform community than anything else Garrison could have said. Walker certainly shared his views while on the job, at church, at the meetings of the Massachusetts General Colored Association, and in African Lodge #459. His friends made sure that the new periodical incorporated Walker's message.

⁴⁴ William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (1855; repr., New York: Arno Press and *The New York Times*, 1968), 344-345; Henry Mayer, *All On Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1998).

⁴⁵ Mayer, *All On Fire*, 116. Thomas Paul, Jr. did not stay long and later graduated from Dartmouth in 1841.

⁴⁶ For detailed analyses of black support for *The Liberator*, see Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969) and Mayer, *All On Fire*. Stewart, in *Holy Warriors*, states that *The Liberator* gained attention for its "willingness to open its columns to African Americans," 52. Garrison, however, could not have started his paper without blacks, and as the majority of its supporters, blacks certainly wielded a major influence over what Garrison printed. Levesque, in "Black Abolitionists," contends that "the more radical antislavery offensive of the early thirties and forties was to a large extent inspired, and not infrequently directed, by black abolitionists," 188.

⁴⁷ *The Liberator*, January 29, 1831.

The Liberator's black contributors recognized that a long line of reform-minded intellectuals, black and white, stood behind Walker. In one of the paper's earliest issues, a "Man of Color" writing from Boston hoped that a Clarkson or Sharp would aid Garrison's endeavor. Admitting that he advocated universal emancipation himself, the writer qualified his statement by saying that he was "very far from wishing a second St. Domingo warfare in the United States."⁴⁸ He looked upon the *Liberator* as a newborn and invoked God's blessings on it. A similar letter appeared a month later, this time encouraging blacks to continue their spiritual and educational renewal as necessary to liberty. "O Capitein, Sancho, Vassa, Cugoana!" the writer proclaimed, "send back your ambitious spirits into the bosoms of your brethren, that they may sweetly repose under the shadow of your wisdom, and meditate upon your virtues with great delight."⁴⁹ Despite Capitein's failure to condemn slavery, he remained a significant figure in black reformer's historical consciousness as an example of what educated blacks could achieve. In a sense, Capitein, along with Sancho, Equiano, and Cugoano, offered hope to the downtrodden.

After David Walker died in 1830, it was as if his *Appeal* had sparked a war that had been long-simmering and new soldiers emerged to carry the stanchion of radicalism. Activists willing to enter the public eye multiplied. *The Liberator* represented only one strategy for black abolitionists. From the end of 1830 to early 1832, blacks throughout the North held at least eighteen anticolonization meetings. The impetus behind them probably lay in the activity of local ACS auxiliaries, but the meetings were significant for at least three reasons. First, black leaders' offered arguments to oppose African colonization that mirrored those put forward over the past fourteen years. Blacks feared forced removal, recognized colonization as integral to a

⁴⁸ *The Liberator*, January 22, 1831.

⁴⁹ *The Liberator*, February 19, 1831.

proslavery agenda, and pointed out the contradictions in an allegedly benevolent plan that could only help blacks improve outside the United States. They distanced themselves from Africa and often deployed the Declaration of Independence to attack the ACS.⁵⁰ Second, reformers revealed a tremendous ability to draw on an earlier tradition of networking to organize widely. It was clear that the meetings were a coordinated effort to present a unified front and to ensure that the proceedings and any orations were published for public consumption in *The Liberator* and other newspapers.⁵¹ Third, black anticolonization meetings bore the stamp of David Walker's jeremiad. At a meeting in Boston, the committee that reported on the state's colonization society even drew from the book of Jeremiah to ask the gathering to consider as false prophets those clergymen endorsing colonization.⁵²

This new generation of activists added a twist to the spiritual traditions that had sustained their eighteenth-century intellectual forebears. Whereas in Boston, Providence, and Newport some forty years earlier, Africans had agreed to fast and to pray to God to provide benefactors to help them return to Africa, nineteenth-century black Americans warned of a coming judgment day for whites who oppressed and enslaved blacks. In September 1831, even as slave rebel leader Nat Turner remained at large in Southampton, Virginia, John T. Hilton of the African Baptist Church called on the blacks in Boston and its surrounding area, regardless of denomination, to observe a "day of fasting and prayer in behalf of their afflicted brethren." Hilton hoped "that the Lord God of the holy prophets would extend towards them his arm of deliverance." Rather than comparing black Americans to the Jews in the Exodus, he requested

⁵⁰ Leslie Alexander, in *African or American?*, argues that the ACS's agenda forced black reformers to claim an American identity, 75. I suggest further that the using the Declaration of Independence rhetorically not only bolstered their American heritage but, by emphasizing racial equality as God-given, criticized procolonizationists as anti-Christian.

⁵¹ William Lloyd Garrison compiled the news reports and address in his 1832 *Thoughts on African Colonization*.

⁵² William Lloyd Garrison, *Thoughts on Colonization, Part II* (Boston, 1832; unabridged facsimile, Elibron Classics, 2005), 21.

the fast in the tradition of Queen Esther who sought to save the Jews from destruction.⁵³

Whether influenced by the aftermath of Nat Turner's rebellion or not, many black abolitionists adopted an apocalyptic view of the future in which their dedication to God would preserve them in the time of trial.⁵⁴ They saw themselves as the genuine Christians and, like Walker, rejected procolonization ministers as participants in an "unholy crusade . . . totally at variance with true Christian principles."⁵⁵

The most visible heir to Walker's legacy and by extension to the long tradition of black antislavery exhortation was Maria W. Stewart. Although literary scholars have examined in some detail her writings and orations, most of which appeared in *The Liberator* between 1831 and 1833, her spirituality and her place in black abolitionism warrant greater attention.⁵⁶ As a black female political figure, she rightly stands in the shadow of women of African descent who spoke or wrote publicly decades before. Her expressive spirituality calls to mind the Congregational New Light, Flora, and the famous poetess, Phillis Wheatley, and unnamed others who exhorted listeners to conversion.⁵⁷ Stewart, living in Boston, would have known about Wheatley and probably read her works. She knew the Rev. Thomas Paul who officiated at her

⁵³ *The Liberator*, September 17, 1831.

⁵⁴ For analysis of Nat Turner's rebellion, see Stephen B. Oates, *The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1975).

⁵⁵ Quoted from a meeting held by black New Yorkers on December 25, 1830, in Garrison, *Thoughts*, 14.

⁵⁶ For the best treatments of Maria W. Stewart's essays, see *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer: Essays and Speeches*, edited and introduced by Marilyn Richardson (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987) and Carla L. Peterson, "Doers of the Word": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (1995; repr., New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998). There is a large body of scholarship on women in reform. See the following works for discussions about or including black female reformers: Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Margaret Washington, *Sojourner Truth's America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

⁵⁷ See Chapter 1 of this dissertation for a discussion of Flora and Chapter 2 for an analysis of Wheatley's place in reform.

marriage in 1826 and had certainly heard his sermons and imbibed his ideas about racial equality. As Walker's close friend and neighbor, she moved in the same circles and shared in the conversations out of which emanated his *Appeal*. She probably attended the African Society's parades and lectures. In 1830, she underwent a conversion experience that, like her contemporaries Jarena Lee and Sojourner Truth, instilled in her, she wrote in October 1831, "that spirit of independence that, were I called upon, I would willingly sacrifice my life for the cause of God and my brethren." In other words, the Holy Spirit compelled her to speak out against injustice. Imbued with practical piety, Stewart adopted the language of the jeremiad to incite blacks to virtuous behavior. Remembering Walker, dead for over a year, and Thomas Paul, gone six months, she lamented the loss of "the most learned and intelligent of our men."⁵⁸ I argue that she intentionally attempted to fill the void left by their passing.

Stewart addressed the same themes that had occupied male black reformers for the past thirty years. She emphasized black self-sufficiency, self-determination, and unity; like Walker, she envisioned the quest for physical liberty as a global concern. While she backed away from Walker's demand that blacks defend themselves from violence, Stewart believed that the key to achieving racial equality lay in social and religious improvement. Whether Stewart, as some scholars have argued, simply wanted to participate more fully in American prosperity to claim middle-class status is doubtful.⁵⁹ At an 1832 meeting at Boston's Franklin Hall, Stewart informed her audience that service work was not "derogatory." She only feared that, for those women not healthy enough to perform it, physical drudgery would make their lives miserable.⁶⁰ If blacks possessed an education, they might live out their days more happily. Their elevation

⁵⁸ "Religion and The Pure Principles Of Morality, The Sure Foundation On Which We Must Build" (1831), in *Maria W. Stewart*, 29, 35.

⁵⁹ Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren*, 86, and Peterson, "Doers of the Word," 58.

⁶⁰ "Lecture Delivered At The Franklin Hall," in *Maria W. Stewart*, 47.

would silence their colonizationist critics. Like her predecessors, Stewart's confidence that the Holy Spirit guided her actions motivated her admonitions to education and morality. Blacks must pursue Christ above all else in order to help themselves. Literary scholar Carla Peterson contends that Stewart relied more on Scripture than Enlightenment ideas.⁶¹ In doing this, she joined a black intellectual tradition that predicated human equality on divine decree. This by no means meant that black reformers rejected Enlightenment rationalism. Stewart, in fact, promoted education in science and philosophy. Her belief that the Founding Fathers established a government consonant with Christian principles only underscores how black activists cloaked rational ideals in their spiritual beliefs.

In pursuing antislavery reform, Stewart drew on a strong gendered tradition that recognized women's importance to the Republic's survival. After the American Revolution, female benevolent societies proliferated as women took seriously their role as republican mothers and guarantors of the next generations' virtuous citizens.⁶² They formed temperance, missionary, literacy, and charitable organizations. Black women, well acquainted with the sorrows associated with poverty, additionally began establishing mutual aid organizations as early as the 1790s.⁶³ Their societies mingled antislavery activism with moral reform. When Maria Stewart published a book of her writings in 1835, she included William Cowper's 1788 poem, "The Negro's Complaint," which Garrison had printed in *The Liberator* on March 19,

⁶¹ Peterson, in "Doers of the Word," states that Stewart made greater use of the Bible than did David Walker, 68.

⁶² There is a vast literature on the relationship between the concept of republican motherhood and women's reform efforts. See especially Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980).

⁶³ *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Dorothy Sterling (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984).

1831.⁶⁴ This religious poem or hymn was an explicit call to end slavery. The black women of Salem, Massachusetts, who formed the first female antislavery society in 1832, stated in their constitution that their organization specifically promoted morality, unity, and black welfare.⁶⁵ The following year, the Colored Female Religious and Moral Society of Salem, which had first organized in 1818, reconstituted itself as a mutual aid society that also supported Garrison's abolition work.⁶⁶ Although Stewart stepped outside of her prescribed gender role by speaking publicly, she was not unique in serving her community. In an earlier era, a black Baptist woman, Chloe Beans, hosted the itinerant evangelist, John Marrant, in her Boston home, hinting at the ways in which women were crucial to black reform networks.⁶⁷

As black reformers, men and women, maintained many of their traditional strategies, they found themselves helped by but often subordinated to white abolitionists. With *The Liberator's* publication, white evangelicals increasingly embraced the immediate emancipation project.⁶⁸ Garrison founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society in January 1832 at the African Baptist Church, but blacks continued to form their own organizations. According to William C. Nell,

⁶⁴ "The Negro's Complaint" was written by William Cowper in 1788 and later published in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, December, 1793, *Luminarium: Anthology of English Literature*, <http://www.luminarium.org/eightlit/cowper/negroscomplaint.htm> (accessed January 12, 2011). Marilyn Richardson, ed., in *Maria W. Stewart*, did not know the origin of the poem, but suggested that Garrison printed it as a hymn and Stewart likely admired it, 75.

⁶⁵ *The Liberator*, November 17, 1832.

⁶⁶ *The Liberator*, February 16, 1833. A letter that John Remond of Salem wrote to William Lloyd Garrison on April 7, 1833, reveals the power wielded by the women of Salem's Female Religious and Moral Society. Remond had tried three years earlier to raise funds from the Society to help pay for building the black meeting house/church, but the president of the society, Clarissa Lawrence, refused. He asked other members, some of whom were willing and some, including his own wife, Nancy Lenox Remond, who refused. At a meeting of both male and female church subscribers, the women continued to refuse. In early 1833, however, the Female Religious and Moral Society donated funds to Garrison. John Remond to William Lloyd Garrison, April 7, 1833, Boston Public Library, Anti-Slavery Collection. According to Dorothy Burnett Porter, Nancy Remond greeted David Walker's *Appeal* as "a great event and praised the author as a 'young and noble apostle of Liberty,'" in Porter, "The Remonds of Salem, Massachusetts: A Nineteenth-Century Family Revisited," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 95 (1985), 259-295, quote on 274. Porter fails to footnote where she found this quote from Nancy Remond, and I was unable to locate it in the Remond Family Papers at the Phillips Library, Salem, MA.

⁶⁷ See Chapter 3 of this dissertation. Samuel Stillman referred Marrant to Samuel Beans, whose wife, Chloe, was a member of Stillman's church, First Baptist of Boston.

⁶⁸ Stewart, in *Holy Warriors*, writes that within two years of Garrison's publication, "abolitionist organizations had expanded from four local societies in two states to forty-seven in ten states," 66.

writing in 1855, black and white abolitionists failed to see the necessity for working together since they differed over a fundamental interpretation of antislavery. For whites, the mission inhered in speaking out publicly against slavery. Blacks, on the other hand, subscribed to acting out “their principles in every-day practice.”⁶⁹ Antislavery activism was no moral abstraction for persecuted blacks; it was a real matter of life and death. Confidence in the divine righteousness of their mission drove them to examine the motives of their allies.⁷⁰ Long experienced in white double-dealing, they thus tempered their enthusiasm for white abolitionism. A year would pass before the Massachusetts General Colored Association, where David Walker’s friends promoted abolition, applied to the New England Anti-Slavery Society as an auxiliary, with Joshua Easton, Hosea Easton’s brother, serving as a delegate.⁷¹

Whatever the source of abolition strategies, black leaders focused on their communities’ best interest. John Remond, in a letter to *The Liberator*, revealed the importance of black self-determination. According to Remond, in early January 1833, a white Salem clergyman, the Rev. Babcock, invited Joshua Danforth, a Presbyterian minister and ACS agent, to speak to Salem’s blacks at the Union Bethel Church, an independent congregation that Remond helped found. A church member notified Remond that Salem’s black population opposed letting an ACS agent speak in their meeting house. Realizing that denying access to the church would fuel the impression that blacks were less than open-minded, Remond agreed to let the ACS representative have the floor. A shrewd anticolonizationist, Remond also saw “a favorable opportunity for the people of Salem to find out that there are two sides to the story.” Consequently, Remond wrote to Boston inviting either the Quaker abolitionist Arnold Buffum or William Lloyd Garrison to represent Salem’s blacks at the meeting. Remond believed that Salem’s “high-minded” people

⁶⁹ Nell, *Colored Patriots*, 345.

⁷⁰ This helps explain black anticolonizationism.

⁷¹ Nell, *Colored Patriots*, 346.

desired to know what best served the black community's interest. Once they heard both sides, they could not help but support immediate abolition. Remond repeated, "I say *immediate abolition*—for I am convinced we must plead for that alone." Cautious to disclaim faith in Buffum or Garrison alone, he asserted that white Salemites' positive relations with the city's blacks would lead them to make the right decision. As it turned out, Danforth refused to speak when he discovered that Arnold Buffum was in the house.⁷²

John Remond was a member of what William C. Nell called the "Old Guard," long-time black antislavery activists who continued to advocate on their own behalf despite help from the Garrisonians. This group relied on tried and true reform measures. During the 1830s, they persevered in the cherished method of transatlantic networking.⁷³ Nathaniel Paul, Thomas Paul's brother, sailed to England at the end of 1831 with the blessing of other black clergy including Peter Williams Jr. and Theodore Wright, pastor of the Colored Presbyterian Church of New York. Paul spent the next several years drumming up British abolitionist support for the Wilberforce Colony in Canada. Paul wrote to Austin Steward at Wilberforce that he believed British reformers were getting ready to "form a society for the abolition of Slavery throughout the world" and would be celebrating the end of slavery in the West Indies on August 1, 1834.⁷⁴ At an anticolonization meeting held in Exeter Hall, London, Paul appealed to his audience's sense of Christian justice by describing how in certain parts of the United States blacks could not

⁷² *The Liberator*, February 16, 1833. For details on the rancorous relationship between Buffum and Danforth, see P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 195-198, 209-210.

⁷³ Scholars have examined the relationship between black American and white British abolitionists after 1830 but without placing the transatlantic exchange in the context of an interracial tradition that began as early as the 1770s when Ukawsaw Gronniosaw and Phillis Wheatley traveled to meet with dedicated British benefactors. American blacks had a strong sense of the lack of prejudice against color in England and admired the nation's decision to abolish slavery. See Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, and R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (1983; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

⁷⁴ N. Paul to Austin Steward, 1833, London, in *Black Abolitionist Papers* microfilm edition, reel 1.

even “worship the God who made them” alongside whites.⁷⁵ A few years after he had returned to the United States, Paul recalled that when he attended a church service in England, he was treated respectfully and given a seat next to a “respectable white lady.”⁷⁶

Like his intellectual ancestors, Nathaniel Paul resorted to the court of European public opinion to embarrass white Americans.⁷⁷ While overseas, Paul received news about Prudence Crandall, a Quaker schoolmistress in Canterbury, Connecticut. Crandall’s decision to admit black children into her school had led to the state legislature passing a law prohibiting it. When she refused to comply, she was jailed. As the controversy unfolded, Crandall lamented to the Rev. Simeon Jocelyn, a Congregationalist minister leading a black New Haven church, that she never imagined “that Christians would act so unwisely and . . . outrageously.”⁷⁸ Nathaniel Paul wrote a public letter, printed in *The Liberator*, to Andrew T. Judson, the attorney prosecuting Crandall. With sardonic wit, he declared that Judson’s “acts so patriotic, so republican, so Christian-like” deserved to be broadcast to the world. Since Paul was then in London, he declared that he would inform the Britons that entire American towns participated in dragging helpless women to prison for “teaching females of color to read!!” Paul concluded by assuring Judson he would not charge him for his service, but if Judson felt compelled to compensate him, he could donate to the ACS, of which Judson was a member.⁷⁹

The Crandall case exposed only the tip of the iceberg that was white northern prejudice. Black abolitionists were up against a double edged sword—slavery and racism. The popular

⁷⁵ *The Liberator*, November 16, 1833.

⁷⁶ *Friend of Man*, March 14, 1838.

⁷⁷ According to Blackett, in *Building an Antislavery Wall*, black Americans in the thirty years preceding the Civil War believed that “favorable international opinion could influence developments at home,” 3. While I agree, I would extend the argument farther back to include earlier figures like Phillis Wheatley. For sixty years, black evangelicals had maintained strong ties to British abolitionists to pressure white Americans to reform their society.

⁷⁸ Prudence Crandall to Rev. S.S. Jocelyn, Canterbury, April 17, 1833, Connecticut Historical Society. For details on the Crandall case, see Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, 64-65, and Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 90-91.

⁷⁹ *The Liberator*, November 23, 1833.

young writer Lydia Maria Child's 1833 *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans* detailed several incidents of blatant prejudice, arguing that in the North white contempt for blacks was much worse than in the South. Child's claims earned her vitriolic criticism, ostracism by former friends, and her popularity plummeted.⁸⁰ Black Philadelphian James Forten wrote to New York black physician, James McCune Smith, praising Child's *Appeal* as "one of the best productions on the subject" he had read. Because white abolitionists were gaining a reputation as "fanatics" through their friendship with the "man of color," Forten believed optimistically that the abolition cause was attracting greater public attention.⁸¹ In July 1834, seven months after Garrison and his like-minded friends, including New York's wealthy Tappan brothers, formed the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), anti-abolition riots broke out in New York City. Many black homes, businesses, and churches, including Peter Williams Jr.'s St. Philip's African Episcopal, were destroyed.⁸² Several black New Yorkers were beaten. One black barber, despite seeing his shop demolished, stayed where he was, shooting at the rioters and wounding one.⁸³ A month later riots broke out in Philadelphia, and a year later Garrison was almost lynched in Boston.⁸⁴ By the end of 1835, New York Governor William L. Marcy wrote John Gayle, the Governor of Alabama, that northern public opinion on the subject of slavery was "exerting a benign influence in repressing the fanaticism" of a few abolitionists.⁸⁵

Black radicals confronted opposition by adopting nonviolent strategies based in spiritual beliefs. Before the New York City riots, the 1834 black convention had proclaimed, "Our

⁸⁰ Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁸¹ James Forten to James McCune Smith, September 8, 1835, Philadelphia, *Black Abolitionist Papers* microfilm edition, reel 1.

⁸² *Gloucester Telegraph*, July 16, 1834. Lewis Tappan's house was also destroyed. See Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 118-119.

⁸³ *Gloucester Telegraph*, July 16, 1834.

⁸⁴ Mayer, *All On Fire*, 200-206.

⁸⁵ Gov. William L. Marcy to Gov. John Gayle, December 1835, in Misc. MSS Alabama, New York Historical Society, New York.

reliance and only hope is in God.”⁸⁶ A year later, the convention praised blacks for their example of peaceful Christianity in the face of mobs. Rather than fighting to participate in American citizenship, black activists saw themselves as warriors engaged in a spiritual battle of good versus evil. They perceived disfranchisement in positive terms—as preventing their participation in the guilty American sin of slavery. In fact, they distanced themselves from so-called American values, which they argued were tainted. Both the 1834 and 1835 conventions offered the same “Declaration of Sentiment” that proudly claimed an African intellectual heritage that American slavery had besmirched.⁸⁷ The sighs and groans under which they now lived, “like the blood of martyrs,” would eventually lead to God’s blessing. Uniting divine revelation with the principles of equality embedded in the Declaration of Independence, black abolitionists fought not just for emancipation or political advancement but for truth. They sought, above all, to end “*expediency*, without which the true principles of religion can never be established, liberty never secure, or the sacred rights of man remain inviolate.”⁸⁸

The expediency to which black conventioners referred was the African colonization scheme, and their righteous anger at the ACS’s plans continued to define black abolitionist protest.⁸⁹ On August 6, 1835, Charles Lenox Remond, John Remond’s son, chaired a meeting at

⁸⁶ “Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour, in the United States” (1834), in *Minutes*, 29.

⁸⁷ “Minutes . . . 1834,” 27-32. Leslie Alexander, in *African or American?*, argues that anticolonizationism had led black reformers to distance themselves from Africa and “espouse[d] and American identity,” 75. I contend that black Americans’ relationship with Africa was more complicated. Their consciousness of what white Christians had done to their ancestors and continued to do to them drove them to see Africa as part of a larger struggle against sin. They framed their political action in Christian terms, rejecting affiliation with what they believed opposed divine will. Manisha Sinha, in “To ‘cast just obliquy’ on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 64 (January 2007): 149-160, contends that black reformers challenged “American republicanism, Christianity, and commerce” to criticize slavery, 155. I suggest that this challenge was more than reaction against oppression. It was the promotion of a positive reinterpretation of Christianity and republicanism. Black reformers did not merely criticize but put into motion a variety of strategies to achieve their vision.

⁸⁸ “Minutes . . . 1834,” 30.

⁸⁹ Much of the scholarship on black abolitionism tends to focus on anticolonization sentiment before 1832, obscuring the significant black protest against the ACS during the late 1830s. Yet, this later period reveals the consistency in black arguments against slavery and prejudice since 1817, long before the radicalization of abolition.

Salem's Union Bethel Church to quell a rumor that Salem's black population supported the ACS. Portraying the ACS as "opposed to the genius of Republicanism, and the spirit of Christianity," the assembly considered it a universal duty to destroy the organization.⁹⁰ In 1838 and 1839, large black assemblies in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia registered their agreement with the Salemites' sentiments. The New Yorkers, who met on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the 1815 American victory over the British at New Orleans, recounted the ACS's wicked ways and styled themselves true patriots for opposing it. Samuel Cornish, an anticolonization veteran, declared that clergy who supported the scheme departed from their ministry. In contrast to the distinctly anti-Christian ACS, the assembly recognized Garrison's organization, the AASS, as true to "the principles and doctrines of Jesus Christ."⁹¹ In Boston, the city's blacks noted that because their Creator had seen fit to give them their skin color, they owed it to the enslaved, to Africans, and to all humanity to protest the ACS as diabolical.⁹²

Although black activists had fought colonization since the ACS's founding in 1817, their ideas infiltrated white abolitionist orthodoxy only in the 1830s. In an 1834 letter to the white radical Theodore Dwight Weld, New York businessman and abolitionist Lewis Tappan expressed doubts about the Rev. Lyman Beecher's antislavery credentials because of Beecher's tepid stand on colonization. Tappan disclosed to Weld that Beecher, a New England Congregationalist, expressed a desire for black improvement in the United States but refused to say that the blacks "shall be elevated here." Beecher thought they should have their own nation

⁹⁰ *The Liberator*, August 29, 1835.

⁹¹ *The Colored American*, January 12, 1839.

⁹² *The Liberator*, December 14, 1838.

somewhere else on the North American continent, to which Tappan replied that in a thousand years everyone on the continent would be of one copper color.⁹³

Whatever waffling took place among white abolitionists, black reformers believed that blacks themselves bore the responsibility for ending their oppression. When Philip Bell, Samuel Cornish, Theodore Wright, and Charles B. Ray, established their own newspaper, *The Colored American*, early in 1837 in New York, they explained that white reformers, no matter how “pious and benevolent,” could never do what blacks must do on their own—redeem their character. Even *The Liberator* insufficiently represented the black voice. Framing their venture as a “a great moral struggle,” the editors founded the paper to encourage blacks to drive “abominations of desolation from the church and the world.” The problem blacks faced was one of apocalyptic proportions; slavery and prejudice had invaded the Church of Jesus Christ. Blacks must make it known throughout the land. They should not expect others to help them until they had first proclaimed their own oppression “from the HOUSE-TOP.”⁹⁴ In a later editorial, the paper asserted that the current age’s abolitionists served a sacred purpose and that blacks must show themselves equal to their white friends in moral and intellectual virtues. Thus, the editors conflated serving God and elevating themselves with the abolition cause. They confessed that they supported “Abolition doctrine” just as surely as they did “Bible doctrine, and Christian effort.” Social and moral improvement, however, required equal treatment from whites. Blacks recognized their responsibility for achieving equality and asked for no favors, only justice.⁹⁵

⁹³ Lewis Tappan to Theodore Dwight Weld, September 29, 1834, New York, in Slavery Collection, New York Historical Society, New York. Tappan also revealed that Lyman Beecher advised getting rid of William Lloyd Garrison in order to draw more supporters to the antislavery movement.

⁹⁴ *The Colored American*, March 4, 1837. For details on the paper’s founding, see David E. Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 77-90.

⁹⁵ *The Colored American*, May 27, 1837. Swift, *Black Prophets*, notes that the paper promoted racial uplift, 82. Blacks, however, directed their uplift program at not only achieving equality but also serving God. The two aims were inseparable.

Black activists countenanced strategies beyond racial uplift to end prejudice. Almost three years before *The Colored American* began publishing, the 1834 black convention's abolition committee recommended that blacks who traveled boycott those conveyances and businesses that refused to grant them equal privileges with whites. Whereas individuals, like the Rev. Thomas Paul, had resisted discrimination decades earlier, the convention called for wider collective action. In 1838, *The Colored American* exhorted readers to stay at home or travel by foot.⁹⁶ While the scholarship is strangely silent on this type of public resistance, apparently such calls were not unusual. *The Colored American* early on counseled its readers to refrain from attending New York's Broadway Tabernacle en masse due to segregated seating.⁹⁷ The editors recommended that black worshippers either attend their own churches or, if they remained in white churches, to "scatter" themselves in smaller numbers among the denominations. They advised black churchgoers to never "go into the proscribed negro pews." Instead, they ought to stand in the aisles rather "than become a party to your own degradation."⁹⁸ God, in fact, demanded it of them. More practically, by attending the Tabernacle, they hurt their own community, a charge that harkened to David Walker's calls for unity. Supporting the white church supported hypocrisy of the worst kind. As *The Colored American* cautioned, the American church had innocent blood on its hands, being silent on slavery and sending missionaries to foreign lands while denying the Gospel to millions of blacks at home. It was a "daring reproach on Jesus Christ."⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *The Colored American*, June 30, 1838.

⁹⁷ After Charles G. Finney left the Tabernacle early in 1837, Joel Parker, a proslavery clergyman, assumed leadership. See Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 177-178. In February 1837, a minister at Broadway Tabernacle broached the subject of desegregating the worship service. *The Gloucester Telegraph* reported on February 18, 1837, that "two thirds of the congregation arose and left the church." According to Wyatt-Brown, Finney opposed racial mixing at Chatham Chapel and at Oberlin, so it is unlikely he was the minister who proposed desegregation.

⁹⁸ *The Colored American*, August 19, 1837.

⁹⁹ *The Colored American*, April 8, 1837.

Hosea Easton took up the refrain that the sin of prejudice resided in God's house. Toward the end of his 1837 polemic, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States*, Easton paid special attention to how white Christians, particularly clergy, perpetuated brutal discrimination against blacks. When young men and women of color were spurned by their homeland and their government, they turned to the house of God only to discover that "here, also, [they] received a death thrust." Any American ecclesiastical body that denied blacks equality murdered them. The black community desired ministers and people who withheld "no longer their inalienable rights to seek happiness in the sanctuary of God, at the same time" as white Americans. They demanded the right to citizenship, to serve on juries, and to become statesmen. If white Americans refused, then God would judge them.¹⁰⁰ Easton, a radical abolitionist and an ordained deacon in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, drew on a black intellectual tradition that equated the political with the sacred.¹⁰¹ While Easton centered the bulk of his treatise on blacks' civil and political condition, he prefaced it with an acknowledgement that God had made all humankind and concluded it with a warning of divine judgment. Black radicals were well aware that the champions of bondage were sharpening their defenses. Early in 1837, John C. Calhoun, South

¹⁰⁰ Hosea Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character, and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the United States; and the Prejudice Exercised Towards Them: with a Sermon on the Duty of the Church to Them* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837), in *To Heal the Scourge of Prejudice: The Life and Writings of Hosea Easton*, eds. George R. Price and James Brewer Stewart (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 109, 116.

¹⁰¹ Patrick Rael, in *Black Identity and Black Protest*, has argued that "black northerners cofabricated with other Americans the political and racial discourse of the antebellum public sphere. They sought not to revolutionize American political values, but to fulfill them," 10. I ask how black criticism of the white church fits with this cofabrication thesis. If blacks found the political and sacred inseparable, then they faced an epistemological problem in working for emancipation alongside white reformers who may not have joined come-outer churches. Supposedly both were Christian, but Christianity that failed to condemn slavery was not true Christianity according to black abolitionists. I contend that black radicals emphasized the sacred origin of American political values to criticize the secularization of those values, a secularization with which the white American church was complicit. In other words, black activists sacralized political ideals to demonstrate where the American Revolution and its nominally Christian supporters had failed. For a full treatment of come-outer churches, see John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

Carolina's senator, informed the Senate that slavery was "a positive good."¹⁰² For Easton, the root of prejudice lay in slavery. Hence, immediate abolition was an urgent and holy cause.

Emancipation, wherever it occurred, drew black praise. On August 1, 1834, the British officially ended slavery in the West Indies, although former bondspeople were subject to an apprenticeship program for another four years. At an 1837 celebration of West Indian emancipation held by a black abolitionist society in New York, the United Anti-Slavery Society, the Presbyterian minister, Theodore Wright hailed the event as a "triumph of principle over tyranny and sin."¹⁰³ In 1838, *The Colored American* reprinted an article from the *Advocate of Freedom* about West Indian emancipation under the heading, "Emancipation grows out of the Gospel." The essay asserted that "[t]he antislavery enterprise is not political or commercial, it is religious."¹⁰⁴ A year later *The Colored American* observed how blacks celebrated the first anniversary of complete West Indian emancipation with prayer and thanksgiving in contrast to white Americans who commemorated American Independence with drinking, fighting, and gambling. West Indian emancipation was a solemn occasion that reflected the sacred nature of emancipation. Black Bostonians used the occasion to remember Crispus Attucks who fell at the Boston Massacre, David Walker who still lived "in the hearts of genuine abolitionists," and

¹⁰² John C. Calhoun, speech in the United States Senate, February 6, 1837, at TeachingAmericanHistory.org, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=71> (accessed January 19, 2011).

¹⁰³ *The Colored American*, August 5, 1837. Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, Press, 2003). Kachun writes that both black and white abolitionists saw West Indian emancipation as having "partially cleansed the world of the sin of human bondage and that presaged the end of slavery in the United States," 56.

¹⁰⁴ *The Colored American*, August 11, 1838. It is interesting to note that *The Colored American's* editors were very much interested in political abolition but disagreed over how to pursue such a strategy. A debate on the topic played out in the paper's pages. In 1839, the National Anti-Slavery Convention, held in Albany in August, resolved to never vote for any politician who did not support "the immediate ABOLITION OF SLAVERY." Samuel Cornish, one of the paper's editors, believed that such a position would effectively disfranchise all abolitionists. Philip A. Bell and Charles B. Ray, the paper's other editors, apparently supported the idea of exclusively abolitionist third-party candidates. One of the editors, most likely Cornish, observed that "[p]olitical power, subservient to moral power and influence, is a mighty Anti-Slavery engine," and for abolitionists to vote their own ticket would "avail as much as Pagan worship," *The Colored American*, August 17, 1839.

Prince Saunders who went to Haiti. They hoped that America would repent of her sin.¹⁰⁵ In Newark, New Jersey, a thirty-two year old black Congregationalist minister, James W.C. Pennington, a self-emancipated slave, claimed that West Indian emancipation imposed a duty to promote immediate abolition elsewhere.¹⁰⁶ Appearing on a platform with the white revivalist Charles G. Finney and another self-emancipated black activist, Samuel Ringgold Ward, Pennington declared the event as proof that “the principles of human liberty” ultimately rested with God, “the Judge of all the earth.” True Christians, then, should fight so that these principles would prevail for every slave in America. For Pennington, rebellion against the government was “loyalty to God.”¹⁰⁷

The black reformers of the 1830s realized that faith without works was dead.¹⁰⁸ “Paddle and pray,” admonished *The Colored American*’s editors.¹⁰⁹ Black abolitionists threw themselves into speaking, writing, and traveling with even greater zeal, and their works became increasingly political. In the fall of 1839, Charles Lenox Remond was lecturing in churches in Hampden, Maine, when he was pelted with eggs and stones aimed at his head. Rather than retiring quietly, he budged not a whit and requested that the audience remain seated since he was the target and they were in no danger. If it took being pelted with eggs or stones, Remond proclaimed, and even if his opponents “must walk over my prostrate and bleeding body,” he could not be silent

¹⁰⁵ *The Liberator*, August 9, 1839.

¹⁰⁶ James W.C. Pennington, *An Address delivered at Newark, N.J. at the First Anniversary of West India Emancipation, August 1, 1839* (Newark, NJ, 1839). For a full treatment of Pennington, see R.J.M. Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers: The Lives of Six Nineteenth-Century Afro-Americans* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 1-84. According to Blackett, Pennington did not purchase his freedom until 1851, 52-53.

¹⁰⁷ Pennington, *An Address . . . 1839*, 12. See Swift, in *Black Prophets*, argues correctly that Pennington combined hope with warning in this address, 225. Pennington explicitly endorsed radical abolitionism and advised working toward that end in addition to praying. In the *Address*, he tentatively qualified his stand by assuring his audience that black Americans were not seeking to sow discord in the Union only to declare, “But while we love our country, and love her prosperity, we dare not love her sins and abuses,” 12.

¹⁰⁸ *The Colored American*, March 9, 1839. The Biblical basis for this idea comes from James 2:17, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone,” *KJV*.

¹⁰⁹ *The Colored American*, March 9, 1839.

about slavery while there was still a single chain in the land.¹¹⁰ The following spring Remond wrote from Newport, Rhode Island, where he and his father were trustees at the Union Colored Church founded by Newport Gardner.¹¹¹ He suggested to his correspondent in Portland, Maine, that the Declaration of Independence provided justification for fighting slavery not because all men were created equal but because the obstruction of justice in the nation demanded a revolution. He predicted that antislavery would yet arraign slavery “before the dread bar of the nation.”¹¹²

Charles Remond, one of the most eloquent and unsung heroes of the radical abolition movement, represented the fulfillment of a long tradition of black antislavery activism. Rather than just a “black leader from Boston,” as one historian calls him,¹¹³ Remond carried forward his intellectual forebears’ vision for social change in both a familiar and a new fashion. Born in 1810 in Salem, Massachusetts, he would have grown up hearing stories about the Boston African Society’s parades and about the discrimination experienced by his father’s friend, the Rev. Thomas Paul. Remond had likely heard Paul preach and was certainly old enough to help his father form Salem’s first independent black church in the late 1820s. When only a teenager, Remond claimed the abolitionist mantle, possibly after reading *Freedom’s Journal*, the paper for which his father served as agent.¹¹⁴ By 1840, he followed the footsteps of Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Phillis Wheatley, Paul Cuffe, Thomas Paul, Prince Saunders, and more recently,

¹¹⁰ *Advocate of Freedom*, November 2, 1839.

¹¹¹ Records of the Union Church or Colored Union Church, Newport Historical Society. John and Charles Remond are listed as trustees for the years 1837 and 1838. The Remond family had moved from Salem to Newport in 1835 according to John Remond’s obituary in the *Salem Register*, March 9, 1874, found in Eleanor Broadhead’s notebook in the Phillips Library, Salem, MA.

¹¹² Charles Lenox Remond to Martha Usher, Newport, Rhode Island, April 29, 1840, John Remond Papers, Phillips Library, Salem, MA.

¹¹³ Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest*, 69.

¹¹⁴ Porter, “The Remonds of Salem,” 274. Remond became an agent for *The Liberator* and *The Colored American*, and was a member of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society.

Nathaniel Paul, by traveling to Great Britain to meet with that nation's reformers.¹¹⁵ Remond poignantly articulated to his Maine friend, Martha Usher, what it meant to touch England's soil, providing insight into how his predecessors viewed England. Remond described it as a place where the shackles would fall and "where the body of the colored man swells too large for his chains, where the alter and the Moloch" became dust.¹¹⁶ In other words, it was a land of freedom and true worship where the false god of slavery had been put away. Once in England, Remond, like other blacks, found a receptive audience.¹¹⁷

Remond was not alone in relying on traditional reform strategies to fight oppression, but some measures met with little success. Despite black leaders' continued animosity toward the ACS and their rejection of large-scale Canadian emigration, many members in the northern black community continued to find emigration attractive. They now looked to the Caribbean island of Trinidad for their escape from prejudice and poverty.¹¹⁸ Samuel Cornish, who had once promoted Haitian emigration, viewed Trinidad with a practiced and jaundiced eye. Although the Trinidad government sought field workers, the black Americans expressing an interest in emigrating were only willing to perform hoe work for a short period before becoming landowners in their own right. Cornish cautioned that the emigrants and Trinidadians should

¹¹⁵ Blackett, in *Beating Against the Barriers*, locates the "the tradition of the black involvement in the transatlantic abolitionist movement" as beginning in the 1830s with Nathaniel Paul and James McCune Smith, 27. However, it began with Phillis Wheatley, continued with Absalom Jones though he never traveled to England, and was carried forward by Paul Cuffe and the Paul brothers. For an extended discussion of black abolitionists' transatlantic movements, see Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*.

¹¹⁶ Remond to Usher, April 29, 1840. Moloch was a Canaanite deity which God had forbidden the ancient Hebrews to worship. Lev. 18:21, Amos 5:26-27. Remond employed similar imagery in a letter to Mrs. Ellen Sands of Hollis, Maine, dated April 1, 1840. He likened northern prejudice to "Bael's education," John Remond Papers, Phillips Library, Salem, MA.

¹¹⁷ For the best discussion of Remond's activities abroad, see Quarles, *Black Abolitionists*, 131-134. Remond served as an American Anti-Slavery Society delegate to the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, although he refused to sit as a delegate when the Convention rejected seating women delegates. Remond sided with Garrison on the woman's rights issue. For an analysis of Garrison's position on woman's rights, see Mayer, *All On Fire*.

¹¹⁸ There is little scholarship on the topic of black emigration to Trinidad. Apparently, it was a short-lived operation. See Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 316-317. I suggest that it is important, however, for what it reveals about blacks' continued interest in settling themselves where they could be independent and free from discrimination and its consequences.

come to an understanding of each others' expectations. Ever the moral reformer, Cornish feared that only lazy people, black and white, would emigrate and saddle the hardworking emigrants with a poor reputation.¹¹⁹ In 1840, Cornish reported that when he took over his church in Newark, New Jersey, thirty congregants had already left for Trinidad with many of the remaining members determined to follow.¹²⁰ Abraham Shadd of West Chester, Pennsylvania, in an 1840 address commemorating West Indian emancipation, warned that emigrants to Trinidad would only be disappointed to find "that though slavery be dead, its evil spirit still haunts the island." Calling to mind arguments opposing African emigration, he pointed out that any measure that separated northern free blacks from their southern brothers and sisters in bonds was unjust.¹²¹

Black abolitionists' strong sense of their own intellectual history shaped their activism. When the AASS split over the subject of woman's rights and political abolition in 1840, black activists took sides but remained focused on the ultimate goal of immediate emancipation and freedom from prejudice.¹²² This explains why transatlantic networking, emigration projects, and moral uplift remained important strategies and why spiritual beliefs that transcended petty divisions continued to frame black policies. After the schism in the AASS, for instance, *The Colored American* turned to black history repeatedly to encourage readers to pursue education.

¹¹⁹ *The Colored American*, October 12, 1839.

¹²⁰ Samuel E. Cornish to Milton Badger and Charles Hall, Newark, New Jersey, July 15, 1840, *Black Abolitionist Papers* microfilm edition, reel 3.

¹²¹ *The Colored American*, August 22, 1840.

¹²² There is a large literature on the antislavery schism between the Garrisonians and the Tappanites and on the formation of the Liberty Party. See Mayer, *All On Fire*; Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Stewart, *Holy Warriors*; Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999); Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*. According to Blackett, in *Building an Antislavery Wall*, the black abolitionists who traveled to England on speaking engagements tried to stay neutral because they soon realized that bitter quarrels hurt the movement, and such divisions were "secondary" to their goal, 42. Even Charles Remond, Blackett argues, "counseled moderation" among sparring abolitionists speaking in England, 43. Despite his support for Garrison and the women delegates at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, Remond met with British supporters of the Tappans' new organization, the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.

In September 1840, the paper, following in the tradition of *Freedom's Journal*, reprinted an essay that praised famous black figures including Capitein, Equiano, and Saunders.¹²³ A year later Amos G. Beman, a black Congregational minister in New Haven, Connecticut, called for blacks to pursue knowledge and “to unite with James Durham, Benjamin Bannaker, Thomas Fuller, Phillis Wheatley, Ignatius Sancho, and Capitein” among others, to prove to the world that skin color had nothing to do with intellectual prowess.¹²⁴ Beman recognized that the human mind originated with a divine creator and served an eternal purpose. By naming the roll call of dignified black intellectuals, Beman perhaps realized that he and other black leaders stood on the foundation laid by those who went before.

In 1841, the black Congregationalist minister James W.C. Pennington, like Capitein nearly a century earlier, wrote about the relationship between slavery and Christianity. Whereas Capitein found the two compatible, Pennington explicitly rejected such a conclusion. In *A Text Book of the Origin and History, &c. &c. of the Colored People*, Pennington vigorously refuted common misconceptions about blacks and any notion that the Bible sanctioned racial slavery. Historian R.J.M. Blackett stresses that the book was not a textbook so much as it was a response to slavery's defenders since Pennington employed Biblical exegesis to criticize scientific racism.¹²⁵ Skillfully subverting the commonly held belief that Noah's curse on his grandson Canaan resulted in African slavery, Pennington pointed out that because Africans were not Canaanites, slaveholders must compensate their slaves and obtain Canaanites instead. The significance of Pennington's book lies in its wit, bold accusations, and the author's ability to

¹²³ *The Colored American*, September 5, 1840. *Freedom's Journal*, May 18, 1827, reprinted an essay from an 1822 issue of the *Abolition Intelligencer* that repeated Grégoire's list of brilliant Africans.

¹²⁴ *The Colored American*, October 2, 1841. According to Swift, *Black Prophets*, Beman was inspired by Hosea Easton and understood “how pivotal the role of the black minister could be both in the life of a local black community” and in reform, 178.

¹²⁵ Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers*, 17-18. For a discussion of scientific racism, see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

debunk whites' fallacious theories. Pennington, for instance, called "stupid" the proposition that Africans bore the mark of Cain, an idea bandied about the "bar-room and porter-house." Far from being facetious, Pennington analyzed seriously a number of historical claims to conclude that slavery originated with the Catholics of the dark ages. This he said to condemn the American church, which was already under attack from other black abolitionists. By insinuating that American clergy were in league with the Pope, Pennington could have flung no greater insult to a white, primarily Protestant nation.¹²⁶ In one fell swoop, he neatly severed any connection between true Christianity and the institution of slavery.

Pennington appealed to blacks' own intellectual tradition to expose American hypocrisy for what it was—sin against God. By praising distinguished blacks such as Ottobah Cugoana, Johannes Capitein, and Phillis Wheatley, Pennington hoped to demonstrate how wrong-headed Thomas Jefferson was in his denigration of black capabilities. According to Pennington, Jefferson's own intransigence on the subject had besmirched his memory. God had made all men the same, and to suggest otherwise originated in selfishness and resulted in numerous evils including a tendency to murder and blasphemy. Pennington, like David Walker, was angry with whites who called themselves Christians and discriminated against blacks. Toward the end of his book, Pennington recounted his experience in a Hartford church where he had stopped to see if a revival was taking place. He "found that *something was reviving*" but, unsure what it was, he moved on when he encountered sneering. This led him to consider in a footnote how he had adopted a practice for some years, perhaps prompted by the 1837 editorial in *The Colored American*, of standing in the aisle rather than sitting in the "negro pew." Pennington believed strongly that revivals "managed strictly on the man-hating principle" offered no true religion and

¹²⁶ James W. C. Pennington, *A Text Book of the Origin and History, &c. &c. of the Colored People* (Hartford, 1841), 14, 7-8, 44.

pondered his own sin in fellowshiping with ministers sanctioning prejudice.¹²⁷ The same year that he published the *Text Book*, Pennington founded the Union Missionary Society as a means for blacks themselves to take the Gospel to Africa. His interest emerged from his support for the return of the *Amistad*'s captives to their homeland.¹²⁸ I would argue further that his own suspicion of the white Christian church and his confidence in black self-determination guided his decision. Like a modern-day Capitein, Pennington recognized that ministers of African descent could help their fellow Africans better than white sinners. The black intellectual tradition had come full circle.

Conclusion

Pennington's words and actions reflected well how black abolitionists' spiritual ideals, grounded in pietistic principles of Protestant Christianity, continued to guide their reform strategies during the 1830s. After David Walker opened the door for bolder measures, a new generation of blacks schooled in the cause moved forward collectively to demand immediate and total emancipation. No matter what specific tactics divided them, black intellectuals maintained their sacred convictions in an age of increasing prejudice and disfranchisement against blacks. More than a marriage between evangelicalism and politics, their ideological commitment to benevolence and equality formed the bulwark for a war against unholiness. To fight this spiritual battle against the forces of darkness, black reformers relied on and extended many of the same strategies that had characterized their earliest efforts to end slavery. They expanded regional, national, and transatlantic networks of dedicated reformers. They spoke in public, evangelizing

¹²⁷ Pennington, *A Text Book*, 81, 84.

¹²⁸ For more on the *Amistad* case, see Howard Jones, *Mutiny on the Amistad*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). For Pennington's part in it and the formation of the Union Mission Society, see Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers*, 23-26; Swift, *Black Prophets*, 219-221; and Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 292-293. According to Wyatt-Brown, Lewis Tappan and other white reformers took over the Society, and its original purpose vanished. In 1846, it was reconstituted as the American Missionary Association.

potential antislavery converts. Some, like Walker, Maria Stewart, and Hosea Easton, resorted to the jeremiad to emphasize the danger slavery posed to white Americans. Others used newspapers as a public forum to espouse their radical agenda. While they praised white abolitionists for their help, black activists insisted that they alone were responsible for improving the lives of blacks in the United States and around the world. Their insistence on self-determination characterized their abolition strategies and mirrored their belief that only among true Christians could justice flower.

Epilogue

In the years following publication of James W.C. Pennington's *Text Book*, a younger generation including Pennington and Charles Remond replaced the Old Guard.¹ Figures such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Henry Highland Garnet, and countless others soon added their radical voices to the public demand for slavery's immediate demise. They drew on black intellectual and religious traditions grounded in pietistic evangelicalism that had already shaped the global antislavery movement in significant ways. Thus, the radicalism characterizing the 1840s and 1850s emerged neither from the Second Great Awakening nor Garrisonian abolitionism. While both of these provided context for the black activism that developed in the early nineteenth century, they do not explain its origins and trajectory.

The first stirrings of black antislavery activism began in the eighteenth century as the initial enthusiasm of the Great Awakening waned. Africans already imbued with a deep respect for an all-powerful divinity embraced the pietistic message of spiritual freedom and extended its meaning to include physical liberty. Some enslaved emancipated themselves during this period while others roamed the countryside exhorting and evangelizing. Even as black converts in America began identifying with the radical possibilities evangelical Christianity offered for an activist voice, the African Dutch theologian Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein engaged publicly the topic of slavery. Despite his refusal to criticize human bondage directly, Capitein recognized its origins as a man-made institution. In 1754, the Connecticut slave Greenwich went so far as to point out to his congregation that Scripture recommended death for the sin of manstealing.² While few blacks exhibited such boldness between 1740 and 1770, it was clear that the spiritual

¹ By the close of the 1830s, Thomas and Nathaniel Paul, Jeremiah Gloucester, David Walker, and Hosea Easton had all died.

² Erik R. Seeman, "'Justise Must Take Plase': Three African Americans Speak of Religion in Eighteenth-Century New England," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56 (April 1999): 393-414.

firestorm ignited by European pietism had provided them with a theology that, combined with an African worldview, formed the basis for struggling against slavery.

During the Revolutionary era, free and enslaved blacks' spirituality inspired them to write and speak publicly about liberation. Some even petitioned colonial legislative bodies for freedom. Blacks appropriated the Enlightenment language of natural rights but couched their activism in Christian terms. Their understanding of a righteous omnipotent God guided their efforts to effect social change, and their faith sometimes led them to establish ties with white reformers in Great Britain and America. Phillis Wheatley and John Marrant, for example, sailed the Atlantic to gain support for their personal endeavors from the Countess of Huntingdon—Wheatley for her poetry and Marrant for his ministry. Both evinced concern for their fellow blacks. Wheatley encouraged the New Divinity minister Samuel Hopkins in his desire to send black missionaries to Africa, and Marrant returned to the newly formed United States to preach redemption among blacks and whites in Nova Scotia and Boston. These two pioneers represented an activism that transcended the tensions created by the American Revolution in a nation that denied them citizenship. They placed both the spiritual and temporal good of their own community over national concerns. Many black Christians blended revolutionary republicanism's emphasis on the public good with West African notions of community to create an original blend of social and political consciousness.

After the Revolution ended, blacks throughout the North established regional and transatlantic networks designed to end racial oppression. They recognized the power of collective action and the importance of maintaining already established ties with white British abolitionists who were ardent champions of black rights. Many black activists, some of whom were born in Africa, corresponded and visited one another to discuss African emigration as a

means of escaping overwhelming prejudice and returning to their families and former homes; they used their London antislavery connections to attract support. Black reformers were bound together not only by race, heritage, and condition but by their conviction that their movement was righteous, just, and global. As they witnessed the Haitian Revolution raging in the Caribbean, they were convinced that this was fulfillment of the promise that God would free enslaved people. Black Americans stepped up efforts to pressure white Americans to end slavery. In fact, most white antislavery associations only began to organize after black activists established their own reform networks.

After 1800, black activists embedded the Gospel message with abolitionist ideals and spread their antislavery news through itinerancy. Faith in God and a desire for self-determination nourished their “sacred vocation” which they pursued throughout the North and in Great Britain. The Rev. Thomas Paul of Boston exemplified this method of activism. Although often relegated to the backseat of history by scholars, Paul was a driving force in reform. He traveled extensively throughout New England and crossed the Atlantic to meet with British abolitionists. At home, he established an independent black church, encouraged his parishioners to disdain any who demeaned them, and put his own words into action by refusing to patronize segregated stagecoaches. In the generally ignored 1808 Boston essay that I maintain Paul wrote, he argued boldly for universal freedom. Like Paul, the Rev. Absalom Jones of Philadelphia, though little studied, also exhibited his talents as an able antislavery evangelist and advocate for black rights. Jones traveled throughout New England preaching and even mailed his own 1808 slave trade oration straightaway to Granville Sharp, who promptly distributed it to several British reformers.

This enterprising and independent spirit characterized black abolitionists following the formation of the American Colonization Society (ACS) at the end of 1816. Incensed at the ACS's plan to send free blacks to the African coast, most blacks of every social rank opposed the organization vigorously despite their own interest in emigration. Their anger centered on the ACS's violation of their right to determine for themselves how best to ameliorate their oppression. The ACS's approach was not only proslavery, it was anti-Christian and sinful. The federal government's decision to compromise on the subject of slavery and northern states' restriction of the black electorate further convinced black reformers that their support for gradual emancipation was no longer tenable. Throughout the 1820s they stepped up their agitation and looked to Haiti as a successful model for complete abolition and black political independence. When Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm established *Freedom's Journal*, they created an opportunity for black activists to speak for themselves. To advocate "immediate emancipation" was no longer taboo for this generation of abolitionists. When David Walker published his famous *Appeal* in 1829, he spoke for many. When he prophesied that God would yet free blacks from their white oppressors, he reflected a long-held belief that black activists were engaged in a righteous cause. Walker opened wide the door to radical abolitionism.

After stepping through that door in 1829, black abolitionists readied themselves for what they judged to be a holy war. They were the vanguard for developing new strategic measures against slavery and political oppression. Most white abolitionists dragged their feet in embracing immediate abolition. William Lloyd Garrison did not begin publishing his radical periodical, *The Liberator*, until January 1831, six months after black community leaders met in a national convention to examine the dire state of black American affairs. While the convention itself declared no radical agenda, it signaled black activists' continued determination to shape their

own destiny as David Walker had enjoined them. This they maintained was God's plan. Blacks engineered and motored the radicalism of the 1830s, including being the backbone of Garrison's newspaper. As antebellum heirs to a legacy of evangelical pietism, extensive networking, and political activism, black abolitionists continued to travel widely, cultivate transatlantic ties, and create cooperative associations to build a cohesive movement. Even though they differed at times over specific methods and often found themselves excluded from white abolitionist enclaves, they trod their own path, convinced that God blessed their efforts and they would be victorious.

The development of a black antislavery intellectual tradition over the course of a century should give historians pause. Its significance to the emergence of the American abolitionist movement alone demands that we reassess how social reform begins, the actors driving it, and the trajectory it takes. Even more significantly, we need to study how early black activism influenced the sectional divide that widened during the antebellum period. While scholars pay much attention to the political events taking place between 1840 and 1860 to explain why the South finally severed its ties with the federal government, we need to examine more closely how black abolitionists initiated the debate that ultimately led to total emancipation for four million bondspeople. I tentatively suggest as an important avenue for further research the idea that the Civil War bore the fruit of a seed sown in black activism and spiritual ideals emerging from early eighteenth-century evangelical pietism.

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