"The Hidden Springs of Prejudice and Oppression": Slavery and Abolitionism in Connecticut

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“The Hidden Springs of Prejudice and Oppression”:
Slavery and Abolitionism in Connecticut

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Advanced Independent Research Thesis

Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA
April 18, 2008
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As I unlocked the storage room in the attic and walked past the bust of Admiral George Colvocoresses for what felt like the one thousandth time, it dawned on me that I enjoyed seeing the stern face with the large mustache every morning as I came in every morning for my internship. As the collections intern for the Litchfield Historical Society, I was conducting inventory on the museum’s extensive local artifact collection. By the end of the summer, the experience had not only developed my interest in local history, but radically shifted my interests from Eastern European to American history. Without such a drastic change, I would have never undertaken this project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the individuals who helped make this project possible and who have aided in my development as a historian.

I would first like to thank the staff of the Litchfield Historical Society, especially Catherine Fields, Executive Director; Julie Frey, Curator of Collections; and Linda Hocking, Curator of Library and Archives. Your tireless efforts in retrieving documents, sorting through files, and answering my questions when I dropped in unannounced have benefitted me greatly in my research. Allowing me unfettered access to the archives as an undergraduate entering my senior year was something I will always appreciate.

I would also like to thank Gail Kruppa and the Torrington Historical Society who first revealed to me the difficulty abolitionists faced in Connecticut and pointed me towards the history of Erasmus Hudson. This suggestion would reveal to me the life of a radical abolitionist who otherwise was known to history as an expert on thoracic diseases.
There are also a number of other research libraries I visited during my research that I would like to acknowledge: the staff at the Connecticut Historical Society; Susan Glover and the others that assisted me in Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library; Robert Cox and the staff at the Special Collections & University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts-Amherst; the Microfilm Department, Connecticut State Library, and the Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University. I would also like to thank Audra MacLaren and the staff at the Oliver Wolcott Library, Litchfield, Connecticut for steadfastly obtaining the esoteric secondary sources I requested through Library Loan.

I must acknowledge the professors I have worked with during my tenure at Boston College who have allowed me to develop my abilities in the study and writing of history. I would like to thank Professor Rebecca Nedostup and Professor Alan Rogers for guiding me as I developed and honed my research techniques. I would also like to thank Professor Mark Gelfand, who agreed to review this project as a second reader, and who first introduced a naïve freshman surrounded by a class of seniors and juniors to the rigors of a college history class. Thanks must also go to Professor David Quigley, Professor Roberta Manning, and Professor Frank Taylor for their support, assistance, and excellent classes.

The one professor who deserves the most thanks is my thesis advisor, Professor Cynthia Lynn Lyerly. While I knew I wanted to shift to American history at the beginning of my Junior year, it was her class, The Old South, that solidified my fascination with antebellum history. You have challenged me to become a better writer, researcher, and critical thinker, and perhaps have encouraged me to become more verbose
in historical discussion. I feel your influence has prepared me for my endeavors in graduate school and subsequent research and I cannot thank you enough. You have been much too readily available and willing to offer advice on any number of concerns, both irrational and legitimate. I cannot imagine being able to complete this project without your guidance and encouragement.

Finally, I am indebted to my family and friends. This project would not have been possible without your constant support and reassurance as I slowly became a historical recluse. Instead of brushing off the random facts I expounded upon after returning from an archive, you intently listened to my lessons in obscurity. You never stopped encouraging my passion and I have grown stronger as a historian because of it.

Christopher P. Sawula
March 26, 2008
Introduction

On August 25, 1839, the Spanish ship Amistad made anchor off of Long Island in search of supplies for its crew. Such an event would not be noteworthy were it not for the fact that the crew of the ship was not Spanish, but African. On July 2, the forty-nine slaves aboard the Amistad had revolted against the originally Spanish crew and demanded that the remaining survivors return them to Africa. Led instead to Long Island Sound, the ship was guided to New London, Connecticut, by the USS Washington where the slaves were taken to New Haven prison. Through providential circumstances, the slaves of the Amistad had arrived in the center of Connecticut abolitionism during a period of heightened anti-slavery sentiment. With public sentiment backing the captured Africans, Connecticut courts ruled in favor of the Amistad captives on each level of the Connecticut court system. On March 9, 1841, the United States Supreme Court reaffirmed what the Connecticut judicial system had already ruled: the Amistad Africans had been held and kidnapped illegally by the Spanish and therefore were entitled to return to Africa. While the trial ended successfully for the rebels, they would have faced increased difficulty were it not for the assistance of ardent abolitionists in both Connecticut and New York. As a result, the Amistad trial became a rallying point throughout the North for the rights of Africans and the abolition movement.
While the plight of the *Amistad* Africans found a sympathetic audience in Connecticut in 1839, the state had not always been known for anti-slavery sentiment. Given the nickname “The Constitution State,” Connecticut highlights its commitment to constitutional rights when it touts its history, stressing the state’s Fundamental Orders of 1638 and the Great Constitutional Compromise led by New Haven resident Roger Sherman in 1787. This compromise solved the deadlock within the Constitutional Convention between large and small states and led to the development of the bicameral United States Congress. While Connecticut historians have emphasized the state’s commitment to civil rights in both its rapid endorsement of the Declaration of Independence and the framing of the Constitution, this view is incomplete and hides a major paradox in the state’s origin. Oliver Wolcott, a prominent Connecticut politician and signer of the Declaration of Independence, owned a number of slaves while residing in Litchfield and Roger Sherman, who did not own slaves, sided with the southern delegates on each slave provision during the framing of the Constitution.

Jackson Turner Main estimates that in 1774, the number of slaves working in Connecticut peaked at 6,464, more than the rest of the New England states combined. In 1848, Connecticut became the last state in New England to completely abolish slavery, long after a 1784 law that looked to free any slave over the age of twenty-five had been abused, circumvented, and sometimes outright ignored.

The history of slavery and abolitionism in Connecticut is one that is distinctly different from that of neighboring New England. While these states had similarities with Connecticut at the close of the Revolutionary War, Connecticut’s record remains an anomaly in both demography and ideology. Its small size disguises the disparate peoples
that existed during the antebellum period. It is this fact that makes Connecticut so unique in the realm of Northern slavery. Each region of Connecticut, the eastern farmland, the cities and towns, and the Fairfield County area, established the peculiar institution differently. It is because of this that no definition of slavery can be applied universally across the state. This thesis will pay special attention to the types of slavery existing within the state at the beginning of the Revolutionary War until the passing of the Gradual Emancipation law of 1784. After 1784, the style of slavery shifted from one that resembled southern slavery to a type of uncompensated indentured servitude whose characteristics can be more universally applied to the whole state. While the type of slavery that existed in Connecticut became more or less universal, however, the opinions surrounding both slavery and freed blacks did not. For a variety of social, economic, and religious reasons within the state, Connecticut citizens remained ambivalent and even hostile to abolitionism. When they attempted to raise the issue of anti-slavery and immediate emancipation, the abolitionists of Connecticut faced a harsh and unwilling opposition in the center of the Northeast.

Connecticut abolitionism is a historical subject that has not been truly explored. While the influence of prominent individuals such as William Lloyd Garrison in Massachusetts and the Tappan brothers in New York can be easily demonstrated, Connecticut abolitionism has no “Great Man” to focus on. The anti-slavery movement in the state was fragmented and included societies made up of both secular and religious figures. Beginning with the formation of the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Those Unlawfully Holden in Bondage in 1792 and reaching its zenith with the Amistad Committee in 1839, Connecticut’s drive towards immediate
emancipation was implemented by ordinary citizens through their coordinated efforts. While the movement gained significant ground by the 1840s, these groups encompassed only a small minority of the Connecticut population. Many citizens remained ambivalent or even violent when faced with the idea of immediate emancipation. Throughout the 1830s and the rise of radical abolitionism, traveling lecturers were attacked, church windows were broken, and meetinghouses were burned. Most famously, it was a Connecticut Congregationalist minister who, in 1840, branded prominent radical abolitionist Abby Kelley a “Jezebel.”¹ This resistance to abolitionism throughout the early nineteenth century was rooted in a variety of causes. Economically, Connecticut relied on southern cotton in order to fuel its numerous textile mills. While Connecticut citizens, many of them devout Congregationalists, believed slavery was an evil, their economic interest in the institution tended to convince them it was a necessary one.

The opposition that abolitionists most frequently encountered while traveling throughout Connecticut was based on a deep-seated racism. While Connecticut citizens found emancipation, either gradual or immediate, to be an acceptable concept, universal equality and opportunity in the North was not. Prior to 1818, the Connecticut government did not recognize free blacks as citizens, and only granted blacks the right to vote upon the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments in 1868 and 1870. When black enfranchisement was put to Connecticut voters in 1857 at the height of Underground Railroad rhetoric within the state, it was denied 19,148 to 5,553. The African-American population, which blossomed after gradual emancipation went into effect in 1784, was viewed as a threat to law and order. From 1784 until the Civil War,

Connecticut voters consistently approved of legislation that limited the rights of black citizens within the state. In 1831, New Haven voters denied the construction of a “Negro College” in the city by a 700-4 vote on the fear that such a concentrated group of African Americans would be “destructive of the best interests of the city.” In 1834, the Connecticut General Assembly approved the Black Law, an act that prohibited the education of out-of-state freed blacks within Connecticut. Rather than stemming from a statewide issue, this law was passed expressly to prevent Prudence Crandall’s school in Canterbury from operating. Opposed to Crandall’s plan of educating free African-American girls, the people of Canterbury poisoned Crandall’s well, killed her pets, and ultimately destroyed her property.

It is in this atmosphere that Connecticut abolitionists attempted to agitate the general populace towards accepting immediate emancipation. The 1830s brought about the establishment of local anti-slavery societies, a trend that culminated in a state society in 1838. Without a strong presence in the state, these abolitionists faced stiff opposition to their moral projects throughout the 1830s. Consistently and often violently rejected by Connecticut citizens, the movement required a rallying point such as the Amistad affair in order to maintain its relevance. Cast into the national spotlight, the Connecticut abolitionists were able to use the Amistad trial as a focal point for pushing immediate emancipation. As a result, the ranks of local societies swelled and abolitionist sentiment increased. In the course of my thesis, I will establish the founding and eventual rise of Connecticut anti-slavery and demonstrate its importance to the national cause. In facing the unique conditions present in the state, Connecticut abolitionists were able to foster
and sustain the anti-slavery movement, which culminated in the largely symbolic abolition of Connecticut slavery in 1848.

While the issue of Northern radical abolitionism has been widely researched, the historiography of northern slavery is comparably less developed. Lorenzo Johnson Greene’s *The Negro in Colonial New England* has long been seen as the starting point for research concerning northern slavery. His work establishes the original foundation of slavery within each New England colony and explores the employment and conditions of slaves. Edgar G. McManus’s *Black Bondage in the North* builds on the foundation created by Greene. An in depth analysis of Northern slavery written in 1973, McManus’s work provides a window into the racial conflict that arose in the years leading up to the Civil War, demonstrating the effect that restrictive policies had on the daily lives of African Americans. *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* by Anne Farrow, a Hartford Courant journalist, provides an overview of the North’s economic attachment to slavery. Joanne Pope Melish’s *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race In New England* provides the framework necessary to understand the hostility Connecticut citizens had concerning free blacks. Melish’s analysis of racial ideology and fear during the nineteenth century allows events such as the Prudence Crandall case to be put in the proper context.

The research concerning slavery in Connecticut has a limited scope like that of Greene’s book, as it focuses almost exclusively on the colonial era. Bernard Christian

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Steiner’s *History of Slavery in Connecticut* is the earliest work on slavery in Connecticut. Steiner traces slave legislation during this period in order to demonstrate the restriction and eventual prohibition of the Connecticut slave trade. Ralph Foster Weld’s 1935 work, *Slavery in Connecticut*, provides an expansive narrative of the state’s history of slavery up until the early nineteenth century. Weld’s research establishes the work in which Connecticut slaves were engaged as well as the state’s attitude towards the institution. In examining Connecticut’s economic history, I have relied upon Jackson Turner Main’s *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*. Main’s meticulous study of the economic structure in Connecticut commits a chapter to the discussion of slavery’s role in Connecticut’s society. Here Main highlights the increase of slaves up until the Revolutionary War. Main’s otherwise informative study fails to recognize the diversity of slave work throughout the state such as the large plantation-style slavery that occurred on the eastern Connecticut-Rhode Island border. In establishing the varieties of slavery within Connecticut, I will demonstrate the effect these regional differences had on the state economy.

The history of abolitionism in Connecticut has not been fully explored. While the circumstances surrounding the *Amistad* trial and the work of the *Amistad* Committee in 1839 have been widely documented, the development of Connecticut anti-slavery has not. Most historiography focuses on individual abolitionists from outside the state who worked within it for a number of years in the early nineteenth century. In attempting to establish a timeline in Connecticut, I have relied upon James Brewer Stewart’s *Holy

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Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery. Brewer’s work, while focusing on the national affairs of the American Anti-Slavery Society and its agents, provides a framework by which I can further understand the growth of Connecticut abolitionism. At the same time, Brewer makes frequent mention of Connecticut abolitionist Simeon Jocelyn and his conversion from colonization to immediate emancipation. In this way, Brewer’s timeline of the expansion of radical abolitionism in New England has been helpful in placing Connecticut events in the national context. In particular, Brewer emphasizes the importance of the 1833 Prudence Crandall School and the subsequent Black Law of 1834 as a repudiation of abolitionist sentiments within Connecticut.

Dorothy Sterling’s Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Anti-slavery provides an in depth look at Kelley’s work in Connecticut during the 1830s. Written as a biography, Sterling’s work follows Kelley’s career as an abolitionist beginning in the 1830s. Kelley chose to begin in Connecticut, where she felt it would be a challenge to succeed in fostering abolitionist thought. It is Sterling’s recounting of the trials Kelley faced when in Connecticut that has been most helpful. These anecdotes, combined with diary entries and correspondence from Kelley and others such as Erasmus Hudson, have allowed for greater insight into the social beliefs of the general Connecticut populace during the antebellum period.

I have relied upon a wealth of primary sources collected from various holdings across the state to track the abolition of slavery in Connecticut. In Chapter one, I will introduce the origin of slavery within Connecticut and the social conditions that existed

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10 Stewart, Holy Warriors, 63.
around the Revolutionary War. In order to more fully demonstrate the effect of slavery on Connecticut society, I have chosen to use Litchfield as a case study. Prior to gradual emancipation, one in four middle class families throughout the state owned at least one slave. Litchfield at the end of the eighteenth century was a prosperous town in northwest Connecticut populated by a successful middle class, many of whom owned slaves. I have focused on both the Tallmadge family and the Wolcott family. First residing in New York until his relocation to Litchfield, Benjamin Tallmadge served as a Colonel during the Revolutionary War and distinguished himself during an expedition on Long Island. Upon the completion of the war, Tallmadge launched a successful mercantile business and entered into Litchfield’s privileged class. Over the course of his career, Tallmadge owned and hired a number of slaves. By examining his letters and financial records, an idea of domestic slavery can more easily be established. Oliver Wolcott, a native of Litchfield, is most famously known as a signer of the Declaration of Independence. From the end of the Revolutionary War until about 1820, the Wolcott family owned and hired twelve slaves at various times. I have examined correspondence from Wolcott to his family and colleagues as well as manumission records of various slaves held by Wolcott. Using these two families, I hope to establish a snapshot of slave life within a typical Connecticut town at the turn of the century. This will be supplemented by manumission records collected from various parts of the state as well as runaway ads obtained from the Hartford Courant and other local newspapers.

Chapter two will establish the political pressures surrounding the Gradual Emancipation Law of 1784 and the subsequent reduction of the slave trade within the state. Here, I will utilize the records of the Connecticut General Assembly in order to
establish the argument behind the Gradual Emancipation Law and the pressures that brought such a bill to fruition. In this way, I will also examine the earliest forms of abolitionism within the state, focusing specifically on the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom and the Relief of Those Unlawfully Holden in Bondage. Formed in 1792, this society sponsored a series of speeches given by various public figures from within the state and by analyzing these speeches as well as the society’s constitution, the arguments that formed the earliest abolitionist thought in the state can be more firmly understood. I will also examine a series of newspaper articles from this time period that lobbied for emancipation as well as manumission records that listed reasons for liberating slaves. In particular, the 1787 manumission of two slaves by Abijah Holbrook in Torrington provides insight into the early abolitionist logic of ordinary citizens at the close of the eighteenth century. By analyzing these documents, I will show the formation of anti-slavery thought within Connecticut that would eventually give rise to abolitionism in the early 1800s.

In chapter three, I will address the issue of race in Connecticut and the opposition to abolitionism. In particular, I will examine the arguments that drove many Connecticut residents to embrace colonization instead of emancipation. Central to this movement is Leonard Bacon’s “Plea for Africa” speech, given in New Haven in 1825. Bacon, a prominent Congregationalist minister, was an ardent supporter of colonization and supported the cause long after it fell out of favor. Bacon was instrumental in recognizing the evils of slavery and relating the horrors of the institution to the state. His influence helped to make New Haven a center for early anti-slavery thought within Connecticut and convinced activists such as Simeon Jocelyn and Roger S. Baldwin to first support
colonization. The central idea of colonization, moving free blacks out of the United States, reflects the sentiment of many Connecticut citizens. While the general populace may have understood the evils of slavery, they wished to restrict the “threat” of free African-Americans within the state. These racist themes would reappear throughout the antebellum period, peaking in the mid-1830s and subsiding somewhat in the 1840s. I will also examine the two attempts to establish free black schools within the state in both 1831 and 1833. These include Simeon Jocelyn’s 1831 plan for a “Negro College” in New Haven and Prudence Crandall’s 1833 “School for Colored Girls” in Canterbury. The residents of each community immediately rejected these plans and in Prudence Crandall’s case, her property and reputation were violently attacked. Using records from the town meetings in each case and personal correspondence, I will explore the reasons behind the rejection of each plan and the ideology used to justify it. By demonstrating the place of these events within the national spotlight, I will illustrate the early role Connecticut abolitionists had in the national movement.

After the events of 1831 and 1833, the 1830s brought an increase in abolitionist sentiment within the state and a rise in local and state anti-slavery societies. In chapter four, I will explore the rise of abolitionist societies throughout the state and the backlash caused by their formation. Here I will examine the hostility harbored by Connecticut residents towards immediate emancipation. Using the diary of Connecticut and later American Anti-Slavery Society agent Erasmus Hudson and articles written in the abolitionist paper the *Charter Oak*, I will illustrate the violence committed against traveling lecturers and the opposition to their message. While abolitionism gained ground during this period, the concept of immediacy faced harsh opposition from all
members of society, both secular and religious. I will examine the arguments against abolitionism in newspapers such as the *Litchfield Enquirer* and the *Connecticut Observer*. Both papers reflected the opinions of their constituencies and help to reveal why Connecticut’s population violently opposed the radical abolitionist movement.

While the 1830s proved to be decisive within Connecticut, 1839 altered the state's dialogue on slavery dramatically. In chapter five, I will focus on the year 1839 as a shift in abolitionist sentiment within the state centered on the *Amistad* affair. Here I will address the importance of Connecticut abolitionists such as Simeon Jocelyn and Roger S. Baldwin in the *Amistad* committee. The events surrounding the *Amistad* trial proved to be instrumental in rallying Connecticut citizens to abolitionism and reduced the hostile dialogue that opposed immediate emancipation. I will also examine the national split in abolitionism that resulted in the radical wing, led by William Lloyd Garrison, and the conservatives, led by Arthur Tappan. This split caused a dramatic change in opinion in Connecticut, as citizens moved away from supporting Garrison and radical political abolitionism and embraced the more conservative tactics of Arthur Tappan. This break caused many radical abolitionists such as Erasmus Hudson to leave the state and begin touring throughout the rest of New England and the Midwest.

Finally, I will address the formal abolition of slavery in Connecticut. A largely symbolic gesture, the 1848 law banned slavery for any people under the age of sixty-four. It stipulated that their owners would care for those above this age, the only slaves remaining in the state, until death. The 1848 law made Connecticut the last New England state to formally abolish slavery. I will examine the status of abolitionism within Connecticut and discuss the issues present in the state dialogue. In framing Connecticut’s
place in the history of abolitionism, I will also examine the contemporary role of memory in highlighting Connecticut’s past.

This thesis highlights the role of Connecticut’s abolitionists on both the local and national level. The history of slavery and abolitionism in Connecticut is fundamentally different from its neighboring states and it is a story that has not been fully explored. But even though the state’s history parts ways with the more progressive histories of its neighbors, it more fully aligns with American history. As historians have emphasized for decades, slavery, racism, and discrimination were not limited to the South. Scholars who have chosen to focus on the “righteousness” of the North during the Civil War have traditionally subverted the scope of the issue. As a result, the national institution of slavery is viewed as one that exclusively existed below the Mason-Dixon line. It is the nation’s original sin, whose legacy and repercussions are still felt today. The history of the institution and its downfall in one of the original thirteen states is a crucial part of the story.
In an 1819 letter to friend John Paine Cushman, Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge expressed his displeasure concerning a recent vote in Congress. Recently reawakened to religion through the actions of a Lyman Beecher revival in Litchfield, he lamented:

I am sorry to learn that by the votes of any of our Northern Members, Slavery should be perpetuated in any part of our Country. But I have long since learned to expect disappointment from the Conduct of Men, from whom a very different Course of Conduct might have been hoped. This will doubtless be the Case until the pure principles of the Gospel shall universally prevail.¹²

While Tallmadge’s conviction matched his faith, they were new ideas for him. Throughout his career as a soldier and a merchant in both New York and Connecticut, Tallmadge possessed numerous domestic slaves that assisted him both at home and in the military. While he was proven to be relatively humane as masters went, Tallmadge’s abolitionist views arose only after his religious conversion. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the early 1800s, few Connecticut citizens viewed slavery as anything but an element of the economy and a symbol of prosperity. As Connecticut grew as a colony

¹² Benjamin Tallmadge to John Paine Cushman, 25 February 1819, Tallmadge Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
and became a state, Connecticut’s residents relied on slaves in various sectors of their economy. On the eve of the Revolution, Connecticut was home to more slaves than Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined. By exploring the origins of slavery within the state, we can more easily understand why Connecticut’s inhabitants were slow to accept abolitionism as a viable movement.

Slavery was not a part of the colony of Connecticut’s original legal code. Instead, the institution grew within the first few years of the colony’s foundation even before slavery had a legal basis. Connecticut was first settled in 1633. Native American slaves taken during the Pequot Wars were recorded as early as 1637. In 1639, a black slave was executed for killing his Dutch master in Hartford, establishing that the importation of African slaves had begun on a limited level. This is reinforced by a 1644 record of slaves working on building projects within New Haven. While the slave population in Connecticut continued to grow, the colonial assembly never incorporated slavery into the colony’s legal code. In 1650, slavery was officially established as an institution, but not through a newly passed law. Instead, while Connecticut was codifying its system of laws, it used the 1649 Massachusetts law code as its basis, effectively recognizing the legal status of slaves without directly acknowledging them.

As the population of slaves, both African and Native American, continued to grow within Connecticut, the state government began to restrict the freedoms formerly afforded to them. In 1690, slaves were forbidden from leaving the town in which they were held without a pass and ferrymen were banned from allowing any slaves to cross

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14 Ibid., 18.
rivers. All blacks were held to a nine o’clock curfew and would be arrested and flogged if found out without a pass. In 1703, Connecticut banned innkeepers from allowing any black man “to sit drinking in his house, or have any manner of drink there.” Any innkeepers found violating the law would be fined ten shillings or flogged. In 1717, the lower house of the Connecticut Assembly passed a bill that would have prohibited blacks, free or slave, from purchasing land or from living independently of a white benefactor without express consent of the town. While it received a large amount of support from the lower house, it never officially became law. A 1730 statute stated that any slaves found guilty of “speaking defamatory words” were to be arrested, beaten, and sold at auction in order to offset rising court costs surrounding slave transgressions. Blacks were also routinely denied enfranchisement until after the Civil War and were famously denied full citizenship in Connecticut’s Constitution of 1818.

This is not to say that Connecticut’s slaves did not benefit from legal safeguards that allowed them a degree of freedom unseen in the southern colonies. As historian Ralph Foster Weld described:

> Slaves, like indentured servants, possessed the privilege of suing masters for unjust treatment. The law protected their right to life and property. They were servants for life, not for a period of years; yet the Connecticut slaves were not helpless chattle of masters invested with absolute power. Their status was not unlike that of indentured servants except for the duration of the service, which made of the indentured servant a prospective freeman and master, and left the slave a bondman forever.

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19 McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, 75.  
Weld may have exaggerated the similarities between servants and slaves, but slaves in the state possessed some important legal protections. Visitors to the state also commented on the close relationship many masters had with their slaves. In Waterbury, Deacon Clark allowed his slave Mingo to choose which of Clark’s sons he would live with after his death. In the process of choosing his future master, Mingo first chose to live with one, deemed the conditions too harsh, and reversed his decision.\textsuperscript{21} Traveling through Connecticut in 1704, Sarah Knight of Boston commented on the blurring of lines in some of the state’s households:

Too Indulgent (especially [the] farmers) to their slaves, suffering too great familiarity with them, permitting [them] to sit at Table and eat with them (as they say to save time) and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand. They told me that there was a farmer lived near the Town where I lodged who had some difference with his slave concerning something the Master had promised him and did not punctually perform: wch cause some hard words between them; But at length they put the matter to arbitration and Bound themselves to stand to the award as such as they named—wch done, the Arbitrators Having heard the allegations of both parties order the master to pay 40s to black face, and acknowledge fault, and so the matter ended; the poor master very honestly standing to the award.\textsuperscript{22}

As a member of Boston’s upper class, Knight could not understand the shared quarters of master and slave. As her reference to a black “hoof” versus a white “hand” shows, she also viewed African-Americans as animals. The tendency among upper class residents, who in most cases owned more than a few slaves, was to house them in a separate outbuilding. This was most common in eastern Connecticut on plantation style properties that will be discussed later. More commonly, Connecticut slaveholders were in the farming and merchant class, who owned one or two slaves as additional workers or

\textsuperscript{21} Greene, \textit{The Negro in Colonial New England}, 220.
\textsuperscript{22} Weld, \textit{Slavery in Connecticut}, 9.
domestic servants. In these cases, slaves were housed in either the attic or the cellar of the house as space allowed.²³

It is within this broad framework that slavery began and developed in colonial Connecticut. In the late 1680s, Africans overtook Native Americans as the majority of slaves.²⁴ While the number of Africans within Connecticut continued to grow, how they arrived remains a point of contention. Early research into Connecticut slavery stressed that Connecticut was not directly involved in the slave trade. Ralph Foster Weld, in his 1935 study, stands as an example of the early interpretation based on evidence available at the time:

Connecticut shipmasters took little active part in the direct African trade, nevertheless, they had a share in the traffic, carrying corn meal, staves, and horses to the West Indies, where they took on cargoes of slaves. Some of these cargoes were brought to Connecticut; but the Connecticut shipmaster of the period was primarily a coastal peddler, and so it is likely that he brought home, as a rule, only what he could not dispose of elsewhere.²⁵

It was believed that Connecticut merchants rarely imported slaves directly, and in the rare occasion when importations did occur, they consisted of slaves unwanted in other colonies. These “refuse” slaves were supposedly considered too unhealthy to survive the West Indies and instead were sold in New England at a lower price. Weld attributes the most substantial increase in the slave population to an active trade with both Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Weld declared that due to Massachusetts’s and Rhode Island’s substantial involvement in the Triangle Trade and direct Atlantic Ocean ports, “it

is to the brisk commerce carried on by the neighboring colonies that the increase in Connecticut’s slave population must be largely attributed.”

As new evidence was revealed concerning Connecticut’s role in the slave trade, this interpretation fell out of favor. Statistics compiled concerning the era began to cast doubt on the veracity of the traditional interpretation. According to a 1774 census, Connecticut was home to 6,464 slaves, more than Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined. Edgar J. McManus, in 1973’s *Black Bondage in the North*, also pointed to a factor that strongly suggests Connecticut’s merchants imported slaves:

> Slave profits were enhanced by a favorable tax structure. Although tariffs were levied on imports, legal loopholes and smuggling weakened their impact. New Hampshire and Connecticut had no duties at all. These colonies provided smugglers bases from which slaves could be sold duty-free into neighboring provinces.

Without tariffs in place discouraging the importation of slaves, Connecticut served as an ideal port of entry for slave imports. An anecdote taken from the *History of Ancient Wethersfield* describes the circumstances surrounding slave smuggling in the state:

> In the burying ground at Rocky Hill, is a tombstone on which is cut—Captain Richard Dunn of Newport, RI, died 1791, aged 69. It is tradition among the people now living here who were born in the first quarter of the last century, that Captain Dunn had made a fortune in the slave trade, but had lost it before coming to Rocky Hill to spend his last days. Narragansett Bay was the home of many vessels surreptitiously engaged in transporting blacks from Africa. Whether or not the same sort of trade was carried on from the wharves of Rocky Hill cannot be known; but the probabilities are that some of it was done, for the good people here were not less enterprising than other New Englanders, and quite as ready to make an honest dollar.

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While the smuggling of slaves through Connecticut is acknowledged as a strong possibility, recent research has identified New London as a center for legal slave importation and trade. Located on the southeastern coast of Connecticut, New London served as a prominent port and whaling center throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Sheltered by the Long Island Sound, it would have served as a convenient port for Connecticut shipping. Simple demographics taken from Connecticut’s 1774 census help to reinforce the idea that New London and the surrounding county was a focal point for slavery in Connecticut. The three largest slave populations by town in Connecticut all existed within New London County in 1774: New London housed 522, Stonington possessed 456, and Groton held 360 slaves. Advertisements in Connecticut newspapers dating back to the 1760s reveal to a limited extent the slave trade that occurred there. In a November 1760 issue of the *New London Summary*, an advertisement stated “Two Negro Men Slaves Imported the 5th Instant, and to be Sold by Gurdon Saltonstall.”

A similar advertisement placed by Dr. Thomas Walker of Middletown appeared in an October 1762 issue selling “A parcel of likely young Negroes lately imported from the Coast of Africa.” The most compelling evidence of the New London slave trade is found in the 1757 log of a ship named the *Africa*. The log, kept by Samuel Gould of Killingly, details three slave voyages captained by John Easton of Middletown. Using the *Africa* and other vessels throughout the 1760s, Easton sailed out of New London to Bunce, Sierra Leone in order to bring slaves to the Caribbean and the American colonies. The logs of Easton’s *Africa*, as well as Timothy Miller’s *Speedwell*, a ship

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30 *New London Summary*, 7 November 1760, 4.
31 “To Be Sold”, *New London Summary*, 8 October 1762, 4.
that sailed to Africa in 1763, reveal that the slave trade was active in and out of Connecticut’s main harbors.\textsuperscript{33}

The evidence surrounding New London’s slave trade remains sparse due to an unfortunate destruction of New London’s shipping records. In 1781, Benedict Arnold, then a Brigadier General in the British Army, attacked New London in order to take the two forts that flanked it. In assaulting the port, the gunpowder housed along the harbor ignited, as well as the town, which was considered the “magazine of America.” As the \textit{Hartford Courant} noted, “At New London, the magazines, the town, and all the shipping in the harbour, were reduced to ashes.”\textsuperscript{34} The fire completely demolished the New London Customs House, effectively destroying all shipping records of New London vessels sailing to Africa.

Nonetheless, through this importation and the domestic slave trade Connecticut’s slave population grew rapidly in the eighteenth century. In 1680, thirty slaves were recorded in Connecticut’s colonies. By 1774, this number peaked at 6562, more than Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.\textsuperscript{35} This is not to say that the distribution or even the approach to slavery within the state was universal. The institution varied greatly depending on the income of the slaveholder and the region of the state in which a slave was held. Primarily, slaves held in the western counties were used as domestic servants and additional help on farms. Owned by the middle or merchant class, these slaves were considered “handy men.”\textsuperscript{36} Connecticut slaves cleared farmland, cut firewood, herded livestock, built roads, and worked alongside white laborers in any number of tasks that

\textsuperscript{33} Anne Farrow, “New London Towards Africa,” 5.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Connecticut Courant and Weekly Intelligencer}, 25 September 1781, 2.
\textsuperscript{35} Horatio T. Strother, \textit{The Underground Railroad in Connecticut} (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 212.
\textsuperscript{36} Greene, \textit{The Negro in Colonial New England}, 119.
required manual or semi-skilled labor.\textsuperscript{37} Connecticut’s elite and middle class considered slave ownership a sign of status and as the century progressed, prosperous families continued to invest money in purchasing slaves. In 1700, eleven percent of merchants and craftsmen held slaves. By 1774, this number would rise to twenty-five percent.\textsuperscript{38}

While individual slave ownership remained relatively small scale through the state, there were dramatic exceptions in eastern Connecticut. Godfrey Malbone, of Pomfret, Connecticut, in Windham County, is widely considered the largest slaveholder native to Connecticut. In a 1764 inventory, Malbone listed twenty-seven slaves in his possession. Among them were “Prince, Harry, Pero, Dick, Tom, Adam and Christopher, all Negro men, and Dinah, Venus, Rose, Miriam, Jenny and Rose, all Negro women.” As for slave children, Malbone listed “Primus, Christopher, Sias, Sharper, and Little Pero.”\textsuperscript{39} Malbone most likely obtained his slaves through his father’s Rhode Island slave trafficking and used them to work his 3,000-acre farm. Elijah Mason, a Lebanon farmer, owned twenty-eight slaves at the time of the 1790 census.\textsuperscript{40} Mason’s case reveals a frightening aspect of the Gradual Emancipation Act of 1784, which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter. The act called for all slaves born after 1784 to be freed at the age of 25. The law, however, did not call for slaves born prior to 1784 to be released from their masters. Six years after the Law came into effect, Mason saw no moral reason to release his slaves and continued to work them on his plantation.

\textsuperscript{37} David Brion Davis, \textit{Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World}, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 129.
\textsuperscript{38} Main, \textit{Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut}, 177.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 1.
Recent archeology and historical research has revealed a plantation in Salem, Connecticut, that dwarfed both the Malbone and Mason farms in eastern Connecticut. Colonel Samuel Browne, a merchant from Salem, Massachusetts, began buying land in Connecticut in 1718 and amassed 4,000 acres for his personal use. It is believed that Browne’s descendants transformed his farm into a plantation staffed by overseers and sixty slaves.\textsuperscript{41} If confirmed, the Brownes would prove to be the largest slaveholding family in New England. Slaves employed on these plantations as well as most small farms in Connecticut worked under the task system. Slave owners assigned each slave a daily job, allowing them to manage his or her own time and pace. If slaves finished their task early, they would be given the rest of the day off as a reward. If slaves did not finish their task by the end of the day, they were punished.

Even though some contemporary outside observers noted the “closeness” of masters to their slaves, the treatment of slaves was not universally benevolent. Newspapers throughout Connecticut as well as testimonies from former slaves reveal similar treatment to that in the South. Connecticut’s newspapers throughout the eighteenth century were filled with runaway ads as masters attempted to reclaim captured slaves. While not describing instances of abuse directly, they allow a glimpse into a slave’s life in Connecticut.

An advertisement placed in the September 22, 1772, issue of the \textit{Connecticut Courant} is representative of the typical runaway in Connecticut:

\begin{quote}
Ran away from subscriber the 13\textsuperscript{th} instant, a negro man named POMP, about 25 years old, a thick well set fellow, about 5 feet 6 inches high, speaks quick and broken English, he has lost the first joint of his right thumb, so that the nail turns down; had on when he went away, a mix’d
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{41} Lang, “The Plantation Next Door,” 1.
colour’d blue & red homemade coat, lined with blue shestoon, with yellow mettle buttens, an brown camblet, lapell’d jacket, a pair buckskin breeches, a pair steel plated buckles, flowed’ and somewhat wore, and a felt hat.42

Runaways in Connecticut throughout the eighteenth century tended to be “prime hands,” at an age when their labor was most valuable. They also frequently displayed some sort of evidence of abuse or injury. While Pomp’s injury to his thumb may have come in the course of labor, other advertisements described scars about the head and arms that were most likely caused by their masters or overseers. In the May 7, 1773, issue of the Connecticut Journal, a runaway slave named Cush was described as having “one or two of his fore Teeth out, and a scar on one of his Ears.”43 Similarly, another slave named Pomp appeared in a runaway advertisement in the New London Gazette with a “large Scar on one part of his Forehead.”44 While these slaves each came from various towns throughout the state, each were described as wearing old homespun clothing, items possibly worn formerly by their masters.

Some slaves also appeared to be accustomed to running away from their masters. On August 16, 1771, an advertisement appeared in the Connecticut Journal requesting the capture of a slave named Boston. The master, Caleb Humastun of Waterbury, gave a revealing description of the slave:

He is something of a well built fellow, hath had the small pox, and hath lost one of his fore teeth, he had no cloaths on when he escaped but a pair of short trowsers and check’d linen shirt, saving a pair of iron handcuff, which he may have got off, he is pretty talkative and flattering, and will tell any story to deceive so as to prevent being secured. Whoever shall take him up is cautioned to take care he don’t again escape.45

42 Connecticut Courant, 22 September 1772, 3.
43 Connecticut Journal, 7 May 1773, 3.
44 The New London Gazette, 9 November 1770, 3.
45 Connecticut Journal, 16, August 1771, 3.
Humastun’s usage of iron handcuffs reveals a sense of desperation in the restraint of his slave. Uncommon when dealing with obedient slaves, iron handcuffs would have been utilized only in the case of repeat runaways. Judging by Humastun’s representation of his slave’s personality, Boston was accustomed to running away.

The most famous runaway slave in Connecticut during the eighteenth century was James Mars. Born in Canaan, Connecticut, on March 3, 1790, Mars was the son of a father from New York and a mother from Virginia. In his 1864 autobiography, *Life of James Mars: A Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut*, Mars describes his life as a slave up until age twenty-five. The Mars family was owned by Reverend Thompson, the minister of North Canaan who also possessed a farm in Virginia. Mars described Thompson as a reverend who “spoke to the people from the pulpit morally, and they thought much of the man. He had taught them that slavery was right and that the Great Almighty God had sanctioned the institution and he would practice it.” When Mars was eight years old, Thompson spoke of moving the family south to work on his farm in Virginia. Perceiving the harsher conditions of southern slavery, Mars’s father elected to run away. Mars described his father’s plan for escape:

> It was a matter of doubt with my father what course to take, how he could get away with his family the best and safest; whether to go to Massachusetts, which joined Canaan on the north, or to Norfolk, which joined Cannan on the east...He concluded to take them to Norfolk, but how was he to get them there with what he wanted to take with them. He came to the conclusion that the horses he had for a long time driven might as well help him now in this hour of distress as not; he got a colored man to help him that was stout and healthy. They hitched up the parson’s team, put on board what few things he had and his family, in the still of a dark night, for it was very dark, and started for Norfolk.

Mars’s family was quickly discovered in Norfolk but was protected from Thompson by the people of Norfolk. Mars, however, did not attribute this assistance to abolitionist sentiment. Instead, Mars stated that it was the result of “an unpleasant feeling existing between the two towns or the inhabitants of Canaan and Norfolk,” in which “the people of Norfolk would take sides against Canaan and their pastor.”48 The Mars family was shuttled between sympathetic homes in Canaan and Norfolk out of the reach of Reverend Thompson until it was announced that Thompson would not bring the family South. A deal was set in place in which Thompson “proposed to sell the boys until they were twenty-five, sell them to somebody here that my parents would select for that was as long as the law of Connecticut could hold slaves, and he would give the other members of the family their freedom.”49

On September 12, 1798, James Mars and his brother were sold for one hundred pounds each to men in Salisbury and Norfolk. Separated from his family, Mars spoke of the trauma of being sold off:

I went alone. Tears ran down my cheeks. I then felt for the first time that I was alone in the world, no home, no friends, and none to care for me. Tears ran, but it did no good; I must go, and on I went.50

For Mars, this shock was softened by the move of Mars’s family to the nearby area. Mars makes no mention of how his brother took the move, as his brother’s master lived fifteen miles away in Salisbury.

49 Ibid., 20.
50 Ibid., 22.
While he mentioned that he primarily enjoyed his time living with his master Mr. Munger due to the close proximity of his family, Mars found two major reasons to complain about his circumstances. First, Mars lamented his lack of education during his time in slavery:

All the books I ever had in school were a spelling-book, a primer, a Testament, a reading-book called Third Part, and after that a Columbian Orator. My schooling was broken and unsteady after the first winter and the second winter, as Mr. Munger had no help, and had to go something like two miles for his wood. He would take me with him to the woods, and he would take a load and go home, and leave me to chop while he was gone...I went to school the most of the first winter; after that my schooling was slim.\(^{51}\)

While Mars decried his lack of education while in slavery, the fact he had even a rudimentary education was an exception. Slaveholders, while not banned from educating their slaves, rarely found practical or moral reason to. While some masters taught their domestic slaves to read, the practice was not widespread throughout Connecticut.

Mars’s second complaint was Mr. Munger’s “fondness of using the lash.” Mars attempted to be obedient in all facets of his bondage, as “I stood greatly in fear of him and dreaded his displeasure, for I did not like the lash.”\(^{52}\) Mars continued to work for Mr. Munger until he was twenty-five, when he was released in accordance with the Gradual Emancipation Law of 1784. While he resented some of the aspects of his servitude, Mars stayed close to the Munger family until they died. Mars’s treatment was a reflection of the relationship between master and slave in a small farming household. Like many former slaves in New England, Mars depended on his ex-master’s influence to negotiate an environment hostile to free blacks. Munger, unable to work his field alone, purchased

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 25.
Mars in order to supplement his labor. Reliant on Mars’s help, Munger did not in any way overtly threaten Mars’s health or well-being. As was also seen in the story of southern slave William Grimes, small-scale slavery in Connecticut appeared benign when compared to slavery in the South.

In his autobiography, published in 1855, William Grimes opened with the brief biographical snapshot, “I was born in the year 1784, in J--, County of King George, Virginia, in a land boasting its freedom, and under a government whose motto is Liberty and Equality. I was yet born a slave.” Writing from New Haven, Grimes’s story is one of a successful runaway fleeing the South for Connecticut. The illegitimate son of a slaveholding father and an enslaved mother, Grimes changed hands twice before finally coming into the ownership of Colonel William Thornton of Culpepper County for a sum of sixty-five pounds. Grimes described in detail the whippings received at his master’s plantation as a house slave:

First, he caused me to be what they call horsed up, by being raised upon the shoulders of another slave, and the slave to confine my hands around his breast; in this situation they gave me about forty or fifty lashes; they whipped me until I had hardly any feeling in me.

Lacking allies and fearful of constant supervision and punishment in the house, Grimes elected to work the fields. Here, he found a life much worse than what he had anticipated:

The overseers have unlimited control over the slaves on the plantation, and exercise their authority in the most tyrannical manner. I then worked under old Valentine again...who punished me repeatedly, to make me perform more labor than the rest of the boys...My master engaged a new overseer by the name of Burrows: he was more severe than either of the former. After working with him some time, he set us to making fence, and

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54 Ibid., 10.
would compel us to run with the rails on our backs, whipping us all the time most unmercifully...In this manner do the overseers impose on their planters and compel their slaves to run away, by cruel treatment.\(^\text{55}\)

After two years of brutal treatment in the plantation’s fields, two aborted escape attempts, and eight months working as an assistant to his master’s son, a doctor-in-training, Grimes resolved to run away. No longer able to bear his constant whippings, he devised a plan to escape from Virginia. Grimes, however, did not blame his master or his overseers for his harsh treatment; instead he reasoned, “I ought, perhaps, to blame slavery more than my masters. The disposition to tyrannize over those under us, is universal; and there is no one who will not occasionally do it.”\(^\text{56}\)

Grimes’s plan, however, did not succeed. Instead, he was sold multiple times to a variety of slaveholders and eventually came to reside in Georgia. Grimes served as a general laborer, a plantation worker, and as a carriage driver during this period. With increased freedom due to his increased responsibility, Grimes finally established a successful escape plan. Grimes attributed the overall structure and success of his plan to the benevolence of northern sailors:

I have experienced the sufferings of a slave in the Southern States. I have travelled from Frederickstown in Maryland, to Darien in Georgia and from there to Savannah, from whence I made my escape in the following manner. While I belonged to Mr. Welman he went with his family to Bermuda, and left me to work for what I could get, by paying him three dollars per week. During this time the brig Casket, from Boston, arrived. I went with a number more to assist in loading her. I soon got acquainted with some of these Yankee sailors, and they appeared to be quite pleased with me. Her cargo chiefly consisted of cotton in bales. After filling her hold, they were obliged to lash a great number of bales on deck. The sailors, growing more and more attached to me, they proposed to me to leave, in the centre of the cotton bales on deck, a hole or place sufficiently large for me to stow away in, with my necessary provisions. Whether they


\(^{56}\) Ibid., 23.
then had any idea of my coming away with them or not, I cannot say; but this I can say safely, a place was left, and I occupied it during the passage, and by that means made my escape.\textsuperscript{57}

With the assistance of the sailors on board, Grimes made his way to New York and covertly disembarked on Staten Island. Within the next three days, Grimes made his way to New Haven in an attempt to begin a new life and avoid the many southerners residing or temporarily sojourning in New York City. There, Grimes began work at Yale where he chopped wood and worked as a barber.\textsuperscript{58} After making a small sum of money, Grimes chose to relocate to Litchfield in the 1820s as a business opportunity:

Hearing that there was no barber in Litchfield, (a very pleasant town, about thirty-six miles back in the country, where the celebrated Law School, under the direction of Tapping Reeve, Esq., was kept,) and as there were between twenty and thirty law students, I thought it a good place for me.\textsuperscript{59}

In Litchfield Grimes worked as barber, horse trader, and porter for the law students. While not fully accepted by the townspeople who saw his frequent business lawsuits as the actions of a meddling outsider, Grimes was able to establish a new life for himself.

One danger, however, continued to arise in Connecticut. In both New Haven and Litchfield, whose affluent citizens maintained some degree of interaction with the South, Grimes “was often recognized by students and others from the South; and [his] master knew where he was.”\textsuperscript{60} In 1823, William H. Thompson, a Georgian who represented Grimes’s last master, Mr. T.H. Welman, finally confronted Grimes on his runaway status. Grimes offered to sell his Litchfield house and land to buy himself back from Welman, and asked for Litchfield resident Abel Catlin to negotiate with Thompson. Catlin, a

\textsuperscript{57} Grimes, \textit{Life of William Grimes}, 62.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 79.
respected doctor and partial owner through mortgage of Grimes’s land, wrote to Welman’s lawyer on Grimes’s behalf:

Sir, William Grimes, who lived several years in this place called on me yesterday and stated, the interview which he had with you in New haven, which drew forth the circumstances of his leaving Savannah and the manner in which he passed from Virginia etc. which was before unknown, I believe in this place. At his request I write you, and state, what he proposes to be willing to do, and what, I believe he can, that is, to surrender every thing in his power for his freedom. He has property in this place which I think may be worth 4 or 400 fifty dollars, he owes for it about $160—the balance I think could be had in reasonable time. I made a very particular enquiry of him of your character, and his feelings on the subject of the return, &c He is married to a good woman and family of couleur. He has three children, and was affectionate to them when I knew him and industrious whence here in an unusual degree.  

After a series of negotiations with Welman’s lawyer, Catlin was able to secure Grimes’s freedom for a sum of five hundred dollars. While Welman accepted the sum, he was not pleased with the final results of his investment:

I hold myself in readiness to comply provided it is promptly complied with, without putting me to further trouble and expense; although it is not by one half as much as he cost me…I have no hesitation in saying he would command $800, but I never owned a Negro in my life for the purpose of traffick, nor yet am I compelled to do so in my own defence.

On April 21, 1824, Welman completed the transaction and manumitted William Grimes. At the age of forty, Grimes was free to live in Connecticut. Grimes’s story is distinctly different from Mars’s in that it reveals a contrast between slavery in Connecticut and that of the South. While both remained violent and tragic institutions, Connecticut slaves typically maintained closer relationships with their masters. While this relationship may not have been as benevolent as many contemporary commentators may have described,

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slaves such as Mars were not bought and sold with such frequency as slaves in early national Virginia.

Grimes also benefitted in Connecticut from discovering a benevolent person in Litchfield who agreed to assist him in obtaining his freedom. While the town throughout the nineteenth century would be known for its proslavery stance, notable residents were at least sympathetic to the plights of individual slaves. Tapping Reeve, the Connecticut Judge who established the United States’ first law school, was known for helping runaway slaves and was occasionally sought out by those in need of assistance. In its dealings with slaves in the eighteenth century, Litchfield can be understood as the prototypical town in Connecticut. Founded in 1719, the town grew in importance due to its location on western Connecticut trade routes and its designation as the county seat in 1751. While it enjoyed a substantial amount of growth and prosperity, becoming the fourth largest town in the state by 1800 and home to a law school and a female academy, it remained far removed from the urban life of Hartford, New Haven, or New London. Its demographics during the eighteenth century reflected a mix of both an emerging middle class and a primarily rural farming population. While a percentage of its inhabitants achieved a high level of prosperity, it was not of the same nature seen in the Connecticut River Valley. The families who did own slaves during this period considered them significant investments and the number owned remained low per household. The slaves owned in Litchfield during this time period reflected the typical Connecticut employment of general laborers and domestic servants. In this way, by

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examining Litchfield’s slaveholders and their interactions with their slaves, a general idea can be established of the average slaveholder within the state.

The upper and merchant classes of Litchfield utilized slaves both as general laborers and signs of status. In his *Brief History of Litchfield*, Alain C. White describes a passage in George C. Woodruff’s genealogical study, *The Residents of Litchfield*. White stated that “Woodruff, gives a list of twenty-nine slaves, with their owners’ names, and their dates of birth, ranging from 1777 to 1801.”65 This list reveals a variety of owners representing lawyers, officers, merchants, and politicians. David Welch, a prominent lawyer whose 1756 mansion today still stands as a testament to his wealth, owned four slaves when the survey was taken.66 While other prominent community members such as Oliver Wolcott and Reynold Marvin also owned four slaves each, the list reveals that customarily, prominent households owned one slave. Many of the slave names listed hint at the genealogy of the slave families. The slaves with Christian names such as “Jenny,” “Frank,” and “Hosea,” were born from fathers “Phillis” and “Barley.” These names would seem to reflect a Christianizing influence on slave families. Conversely, slaves “Juba,” “Pero,” and “Lettice,” born from a father named “Congo,” would seem to reveal a stronger African identity.67

This list, however, was by no means a complete picture of slaveholding within eighteenth-century Litchfield. Most notably, the names of the Tallmadge family and the

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66 Interestingly, the Welch property has been meticulously maintained and frequently appears on Litchfield House Tours. A 1987 New York Times guide to the Litchfield House Tours makes mention of a still-standing “lean-to once occupied by slaves.”
67 George Catlin Woodruff, *A Genealogical Register of the Inhabitants of Litchfield, Conn., from the settlement of the town, A.D. 1720, to the year 1800, whereby one knowing his father’s name, may perhaps ascertain who were some of his antecedent progenitors* (Hartford: The Case Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1900), 156.
Champion family are missing entirely from its contents. In addition, most of the slaves mentioned in the *Genealogical Register* were born after 1780. A gravestone in Litchfield’s East Cemetery reveals slaves dating back much earlier. On an 1838 visit to Litchfield, Nathaniel Hawthorne described one corner of the burial ground:

> In a remote part of the graveyard, remote from the main body of dead people, I noticed a humble, mossy stone, on which I traced out ‘To the memory of Julia Africa, servant of Rev.’ somebody. There were also half obliterated traces of other graves, without any monuments in the vicinity of this one. Doubtless the slaves here mingled their dark clay with the earth.\(^{68}\)

While Hawthorne’s description is important in establishing a slave burial ground located in the town, his grasp on the specific details is lacking. The grave Hawthorne refers to is of Jeph Africa, whose grave reads, “Here lies the body of Jeph Africa, servant of Rev. Judah Champion, who died June the 5\(^{th}\), 1793.”\(^{69}\) Jeph’s master, Reverend Judah Champion, was Litchfield’s Congregationalist minister from 1753 to 1798, a prominent position that was awarded to him shortly after Litchfield became a county seat. As minister, Champion was given twenty acres of land, an eight hundred pound salary, and two thousand pounds to move to Litchfield.\(^{70}\)

> With this position of power, Reverend Champion quickly became a distinguished member of the community. While an exact inventory of his slave holdings cannot be fully established, family correspondence reveals slaves other than Jeph Africa. A 1793 letter from Esther Champion to Dorothy Deming lamented:

> Our faithful friend and servant Samson died the Saturday before Thanksgiving of a general decay & old age was confined but three days

\(^{68}\) White, *A Brief History of Litchfield*, 153.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 152.

but has been declining a considerable time. I consider myself deprived by his death of one of my best friends.71

Esther’s description of her slave Samson reveals an important distinction concerning the family’s benevolence. While Reverend Thompson’s actions concerning James Mars coincide with the immoral aspects of slavery, it appears Reverend Champion’s family attempted to act with kindness towards their slaves. This principle is reinforced by the gravestone given to Jeph Africa and a letter written from Henry Champion, Judah’s son, to Julius Deming in which he wrote about “Kate, a negro woman who was slave to our late father, and by him made free, last summer was taken delirious and raving.”72 Written in 1812, the correspondence would later reveal that Henry took custody of Kate in order to care for her until she later died of a seizure. The treatment of Jeph, Samson, and Kate, while not standard in Connecticut, reveals a degree of compassion towards Champion’s slaves.

This tendency towards kindness is also evident in the actions of the Oliver Wolcott family. Oliver Wolcott Sr., son of Royal Governor Roger Wolcott, moved to Litchfield as acting county sheriff in 1751. After establishing himself in Litchfield, where he also worked as a judge, he served with distinction in the Revolutionary War, becoming the Brigadier General of the Connecticut forces. He later became a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Lieutenant Governor, and eventually Governor of Connecticut in 1796.73 Wolcott was described as a man of “cultivated manners” and “resolute character,” typical of an eighteenth-century gentleman of a wealthy

71 Esther Champion to Dorothy Deming, 23 December 1793, Quincy Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
72 Henry Champion to Julius Deming, 25 May 1812, Quincy Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
background. As befit a man of his status, Wolcott possessed multiple slaves that served as domestic servants. As mentioned earlier, Wolcott is listed as owning four slaves at the time of the Genealogical Register: “Peggy Zillah,” “Chloe,” “Juba,” and a second “Chloe.” Each of these slaves was born after 1784, meaning that they existed more as unpaid indentured servants who would be freed at age twenty-five. Other evidence points to slaves owned by the family much earlier. Frederick Wolcott, the youngest son of Oliver Wolcott, is listed as owning a slave named Hebe Williams. Instead of listing a date of birth, it lists Hebe’s death as April 11, 1803. As the Genealogical Register compiled a list of servants, it is logical to believe that Hebe was an older slave, possibly given to him by his father. Evidence of more slaves, and of the Wolcott’s care towards their slaves, comes from manumission records. On May 2, 1794, Oliver Wolcott entered the following request into the Town Clerk’s office:

I, Oliver Wolcott of Litchfield in the County of Litchfield and State of Connecticut do hereby manumit, Make Free and forever discharge my Negro Servant Zilla Williams from all claims to her service or obedience and that the full and entire emancipation and freedom hereby given to her the said Zilla Williams might be fully ascertained—the Town Clerk of Litchfield is hereby requested and impowered to record the above testament thereof in his office in presence of Fred Wolcott.\(^{74}\)

The manumission request is notable in that Zilla shares the same surname with Frederick Wolcott’s slave, Hebe. This factor, as well as the African names, would seem to suggest that the Wolcotts were in possession of a slave family. An earlier manumission record provides for at least one more slave owned by the Wolcotts. On November 23, 1786, Wolcott signed the manumission of Caesar James:

In expectation that my Negro Servant Man Caesar will by his Industry be able to obtain a comfortable Subsistence for Himself and that he will make

a proper use of the Freedom which I hereby give him Do Discharge, Liberate, and set free him the Said Caesar. I do hereby exempt him from any further obligation & servitude to me, my Heirs & from every other person claiming any Authority over him by from or under me and that my said Servant whom I now make free asforesd may be known hereafter by a proper Cognomen, I hereby give him the name of James so that hereafter he is to be known & distinguished by the Name of Caesar James.75

One element missing from the manumission records is the age of the freed slaves. Many Connecticut slaveholders were willing to manumit their slaves after the Gradual Emancipation Act of 1784, but only if they had already exploited their labor in their prime years. While Wolcott may have had benevolent intentions in the freeing of his slaves, he may instead have manumitted them because he was receiving diminishing returns on their labor. There is also no evidence to support the idea that Wolcott manumitted his slaves as a result of religious conversion. Some prominent Litchfield citizens, through the actions of Lyman Beecher and the Second Great Awakening, embraced the evangelical revivals and attempting to be morally pure, manumitted their slaves. While the impulse was not universal, the conversion of one such citizen provides some explanation for the increase in manumissions at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge was born in Brookhaven, Long Island, in 1754. Born into a distinguished New York family, Tallmadge attended Yale College in 1769 and upon completion in 1773, took up residence in Wethersfield as the school’s superintendent.76 After the events of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill, Tallmadge entered into the Continental Army and was given a commission as a Lieutenant in 1776. Later in the Revolutionary War, Tallmadge rose to the rank of Colonel and led the

76 Benjamin Tallmadge, Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge (New York: Thomas Holman, Book and Job Printer, 1858), 6.
Second Continental Dragoons on a successful campaign on Long Island. Upon leaving the military in 1783, he moved to Litchfield and established a thriving mercantile business. Tallmadge quickly rose to prominence in town, importing genteel goods for the growing upper class.

As Tallmadge’s fortune improved, he began to purchase slaves. In 1784, Tallmadge purchased “One Certain Negro Boy named Prince, as a Servant, for & during his natural life.” Planning a future investment for his family’s prosperity, Tallmadge purchased Prince when he was only seven years old. Shortly after, on April 7, 1785, Tallmadge entered into an agreement with Charity, a “mustee,” to indenture her son Ebo as a servant until age twenty-one. While there is no evidence that Ebo protested the arrangement, it seems Charity may have agreed out of economic necessity. Rather than signing her name, she placed a small “X” at the bottom of the paper, revealing her illiteracy. On March 10, 1787, Tallmadge made his final slave purchase. In an agreement with Ezra L’Hommedieu, Tallmadge purchased “a thirteen year old Slave Girl named Jane, born in my House and a Slave in according to the Laws of the State of New York.” With Prince, Ebo, and Jane, Tallmadge established a core of slaves that would attend to his family, acting as both laborers and servants.

In subsequent years, Tallmadge supplemented the labor of these three slaves with additional hired slaves. In May of 1788, Benjamin Tallmadge agreed to hire Cash Africa

77 Bill of Sale from Captain John Shethar to Benjamin Tallmadge, 19 May 1784, Tallmadge Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
78 Indenture from Charity to Benjamin Tallmadge, 7 April 1785, Tallmadge Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
79 Bill of Sale between Ezra L’Hommedieu and Benjamin Tallmadge, 10 March 1787, Tallmadge Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
for the summer “in the services of forty shillings per month.”\textsuperscript{80} As part of the agreement, Tallmadge provided boarding and lodging for Cash, but maintained the ability to void the contract if the slave did not act “in a becoming manner.” After Cash’s term of service expired, Tallmadge agreed to indenture “a Negro Girl named Abigail, for the service of one year.”\textsuperscript{81} In exchange for Abigail’s labor, Tallmadge paid her owner, Ruth Woodhull, a total sum of four pounds.

After this flurry of activity, slave life in Tallmadge’s household stabilized. In 1802, while on business in New York, Tallmadge wrote a letter to his daughter Maria. After asking about life at home and describing New York, Tallmadge asked his daughter to teach their slave Ebo to read, adding, “I should really rejoice, beyond measure, if any progress could be made in this respect by him. Let me hope that you will at least make the tryal—a reward shall accompany success.”\textsuperscript{82} While it appears that Tallmadge wished to improve the education of his slave, it does not seem to have been the result of a moral conversion.

Tallmadge’s actions and correspondence beginning with his arrival in Litchfield are wholly consistent with an individual unopposed to slavery as an institution. Tallmadge had no qualms purchasing slave children, or in indenturing them away from their families. This attitude, however, abruptly changed after the arrival of Lyman Beecher. It appears as though, through the evangelizing of Lyman Beecher, Tallmadge became a deep convert to Congregationalism. In his correspondence, Tallmadge abruptly

\textsuperscript{80} Agreement that Cash Africa will serve Benjamin Tallmadge, 19 May 1788, Tallmadge Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
\textsuperscript{81} Indenture between Ruth Woodhull and Benjamin Tallmadge, 25 November 1788, Tallmadge Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
\textsuperscript{82} Benjamin Tallmadge to Maria Tallmadge, 7 February 1802, Tallmadge Collection, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.
shifted and began to support the growing cause of colonization, a movement whose goal was to purchase slaves from masters and send the newly manumitted to the African colony of Liberia where they could convert native Africans to Christianity. In an 1816 letter to Tapping Reeve, Tallmadge approved of the new movement:

The new plan for colonizing the Negroes seems to gain ground. While the slave holder advocates it, because the free blacks are dangerous Neighbours, the Christian wishes it well, for the sake of millions of his heathen Brethren.\(^{83}\)

In addition to supporting Connecticut’s earliest form of emancipation, Tallmadge also began to oppose slavery on the national scale. In his frequent correspondence with John Paine Cushman, Tallmadge both praised the religious conversions occurring in Litchfield and condemned the actions of Congress in allowing slavery. As the beginning of this chapter shows, Tallmadge hoped further revivals would convert northern Congressmen to antislavery.

Tallmadge’s commitment to the abolition of slavery came at a time of drastic decline of slavery both locally in Litchfield and throughout Connecticut. Primarily due to the Gradual Emancipation Law of 1784, slavery in Connecticut began to lose its financial appeal. By 1800, only seven slaves for life were owned within Litchfield, the rest falling under the Gradual Emancipation Act to be freed on their twenty-first birthday.\(^{84}\) The last slave emancipated in Litchfield was believed to be Tom Jackson, a slave of Benjamin Tallmadge about whom little evidence survives. Jackson lived on the outskirts of town with his wife and daughter and died late in 1857.\(^{85}\) With the arrival of the nineteenth century, the foundations of abolitionism in Connecticut began to take hold. Beginning

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\(^{83}\) Benjamin Tallmadge to Tapping Reeve, 26 December 1816, Tallmadge Photostats, Litchfield Historical Society, Litchfield, Connecticut.

\(^{84}\) White, *A Brief History of Litchfield*, 151.

\(^{85}\) Ibid., 154.
with a series of acts designed to limit the expansion of slavery in the state and culminating with the Gradual Emancipation Act of 1784, slavery in Connecticut was destined to end, eventually. Spurred on by such legislation, an early abolitionist movement formed, beginning a dramatic shift in the state’s moral rhetoric that would not be resolved until after the Civil War.
Chapter Two
“Motives of Humanity and Benevolence”:
Antislavery Efforts in the Wake of the American Revolution

Throughout the eighteenth century, slavery continued to grow as an institution within New England. While not to the same extent as the southern colonies, the North relied on slaves for shipping, menial labor, and domestic service. On the eve of the American Revolution, slavery in Connecticut existed at its highest point. It was, however, at the zenith of Connecticut’s attachment to slavery when sentiments began to change. With the Revolutionary War as a catalyst, slavery in Connecticut began its long decline.

In the 1770s, scattered voices of opposition appeared in Connecticut’s almost universal acceptance of slavery. At this time, Connecticut was home to 6,562 slaves, more than both Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.\(^{86}\) In addition, there were an unknown number of free blacks within the state that were not included in the census. Leading up to 1774, there was little organized effort against slavery within the state. Without a significant Quaker population, opinions on slavery were formulated almost exclusively through Congregationalist ideals. While some pastors may have condemned

\(^{86}\) Strother, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*, 212.
the harsh treatment of slaves, many moderate preachers would have held opinions along
the lines of Congregationalist theologian Jonathan Edwards. Nowhere in the Bible was
there a direct condemnation of slavery. Instead, Edwards emphasized the Biblical
requirement that a master treat his slave with care and respect. Edwards reasoned, “In
these two things are contained the most forceable reasons against the master’s abuse of
his servant. That both have one Maker, and that their Maker made ‘em alike with the
same nature.” Many pastors of the eighteenth century, including Lyman Beecher,
Jonathan Edwards, and the Reverend Thompson of Canaan (who was featured in James
Mars’s narrative), owned slaves. Connecticut pastors owned slaves in order to
supplement domestic and agricultural labor while they were occupied with spiritual
matters. In addition, Congregational clergy owned slaves to set themselves apart from
their neighbors as the elite of New England towns.

Although the vast majority of Connecticut’s population was either supportive of,
or ambivalent towards slavery, there were notable exceptions. In 1770, John Trumbull, a
Watertown native who would later become an accomplished poet and Superior Court
Justice, published a series of satirical essays in The Connecticut Journal under the name
“The Correspondent.” On July 6, Trumbull satirized the defenders of slavery in an
attempt to demonstrate the institution’s excesses and logical flaws. Parodying the
“moral” arguments for enslavement, Trumbull highlighted one of the major defenses of
slavery:

With no other end in view than to bring those poor creatures to Christian
ground, and within hearing of the gospel, we spare no expence of time or
money, we send many a thousand miles across dangerous seas, and think
all our toil and pains well rewarded…We deprive them of their liberty, we

87 “Miscellaneous Observations on the Holy Scriptures,” Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, as
quoted in Marsden, Jonathan Edwards: A Life, 258.
force them from their friends, their country, and every thing dear to them in the world; despising the laws of nature, and infringing upon the rules of morality. So much are we filled with disinterested benevolence! So far are we carried away with the noble ardor, the generous enthusiasm of Christianizing the heathen! And are they not bound by all the ties of gratitude, to devote their whole lives to our service, as the only reward that can be adequate to our superabundant charity?  

After highlighting the “benevolent” nature of slaveholders in educating their slaves, Trumbull provided an anecdote describing the progress achieved:

I myself have heard of no less than three, who know half the letters of the alphabet, and have made considerable advances in the Lord’s prayer and catechism. In general, I confess they are scarcely so learned; which deficiency we do not charge to the fault of any one, but have the good nature to attribute it merely to their natural stupidity; and dullness of intellect.

Trumbull concluded his work by stressing the moral importance of the slave trade in educating the “poor Africans.” In doing so, he jokingly suggested that “the Chinese, the Tartars, or the Laplanders,” as well as “the Turks and the Papists” should be enslaved in order to bring them into the Christian fold. While Trumbull’s work stands as one of the earliest public condemnations of the slave trade, it is clear its message was not a common one. Connecticut’s slave trade would continue until 1774, with little additional public discourse concerning its morality.

The morality of Connecticut’s slave trade was again broached in 1773 by emerging religious leaders Ebenezer Baldwin and Jonathan Edwards Jr. Published in the Connecticut Journal in four major installments, “Some Observations upon the Slavery of Negroes” addressed the hypocrisy of the continuing slave trade amidst the growing

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89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
rhetoric of American liberty. Echoing the arguments put forth by Trumbull, Baldwin and Edwards railed against the “moral” defenders of the slave trade who claimed:

We are Christians; but the Africans are heathen; therefore it is right for us to enslave them, that we may bring them into this land of gospel light, and convert them to Christianity. In answer to this, I ask, is this the end, for which they are enslaved? If it be not, the argument is nothing to the purpose of justifying our conduct. If it be, it only shows that, We do evil that good may come.91

The arguments of Trumbull, Baldwin, and Edwards are demonstrative of a growing discontent with the transatlantic slave trade. Unwilling to attack slavery directly, they instead chose to condemn the importation of slaves as unwarranted and immoral. These theologians did, however, criticize the rhetoric of bondage used to support American liberty:

It has often been surprising to me, that while we in the American colonies, have been so jealous of our own liberties, and so cautious to guard against every encroachment upon them from our mother country; we have been so inattentive to our own conduct in enslaving the Negroes, or at least in joining in the trade, whereby they are enslaved. Has it not a shrewd appearance of inconsistence, to make a loud outcry against the British parliament for making laws to oblige us to pay certain duties, which amount to but a mere trifle for each individual; when we are deeply engaged in reducing a large body of people to complete and perpetual slavery?92

Other egalitarian thinkers throughout the American colonies joined Baldwin and Edwards in condemning the hypocritical rhetoric of American liberty. Two weeks prior to the Boston Tea Party, other writers highlighted the inconsistency of enslaving Africans while cursing the British Parliament for subjecting colonists to economic slavery. No group exploited the rhetoric of slavery more than the Sons of Liberty. Unwilling to be taxed by a Parliament in which they were not represented, the Sons of Liberty considered any

92 Ibid.
increase in duties to be equivalent to life in bondage. In their *Association of the Sons of Liberty of New York*, issued on December 15, 1773, the Patriot group expounded upon the necessity of opposing the British Parliament after the enacting of one of the Intolerable Acts, proclaiming, “the execution of that Act, involves our slavery, and would sap the foundation of our freedom where by we should become slaves to our brethren and fellow subjects, born to no greater stock of freedom than the Americans.”

Demanding their freedom, they entirely ignored the plight of African slaves, concentrating only on their unequivocal opposition to the “diabolical project of enslaving America.”

As the rhetoric of the Sons of Liberty and the events of the Boston Tea Party began to stimulate patriotic fervor among the colonists, some critics found fault in the movement’s logic. On July 7, 1774, an intriguing letter was published in the *Norwich Packet*, which is worth quoting in full:

To all those who call themselves SONS OF LIBERTY in America, Greetings. My friends, We know in some good measure the inestimable value of liberty. But were we once deprived of her she would then appear much more valuable than she now appears. We also see her, standing as it were, tiptoe on the highest bough ready for flight. Why is she departing? What is it that disturbs her repose? Surely, some foul monster of hideous shape and hateful kind, opposite in its nature to hers, with all its frightful appearances and properties, iron hands and leaden feet, formed to grip and crush, hath intruded itself into her peaceful habitation and ejected her. Surely this must be the case, for we know oppositions cannot dwell together. Is it not time, high time, to search for this Achan? This disturber of Israel? High time, I say, to examine for the cause of those dark and gloomy appearances that cast a shade over our glory, and is not this it? Are we not guilty of the same crime we impute to others? Of the same facts, that we say are unjust, cruel, arbitrary, despotic, and without law in others?...We declare, and that with much warmth and zeal, it is unjust, cruel, barbarous, unconstitutional, and without law to enslave, *do we enslave*? Yes, verily, we do! A black could witnesseth against us and our own mouths condemn us! How preposterous our conduct! How vain and hypocritical our pretences! Can we expect to be free, so long as we are

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determined to enslave? How preposterous our conduct! How vain and hypocritical our pretences! Can we expect to be free, so long as we are determined to enslave? Signed, Honesty.  

“Honesty’s” letter is revealing in that it acknowledges the hypocrisy of the colonists’ rhetoric concerning taxation and the Intolerable Acts. In 1776, Samuel Adams portrayed the struggle of the American Revolution in terms of slavery. When addressing those who would not support the Patriots, Adams proclaimed, “If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquility of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom—go from us in peace. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen.”  

“Honesty” posed a point that few revolutionaries were willing to acknowledge directly. The hypocrisy of holding slaves while opposing British “servitude” sat uneasily with some of the more egalitarian proponents of the Revolution.  

Connecticut and the other colonies addressed this contradiction in October of 1774 with the adoption of the Articles of Association. Convening on September 5, 1774, the First Continental Congress looked to draft a response to the recently passed Intolerable Acts affecting the colonies. Designed to inspire a boycott of crucial British goods, the Articles bound the state legislatures to oppose certain aspects of colonial trade. While ultimately ineffective, one stipulation abruptly altered America’s relationship with slavery:

That we will neither import, nor purchase any slave imported after the fifth day of December next; after which time, we will wholly discontinue the slave trade, and will neither be concerned in it ourselves, nor will we

94 “To all those who call themselves Sons of Liberty in America,” Norwich Packet, 7 July 1774, 3. 
96 Fittingly, “Honesty’s” letter appeared almost directly above an advertisement placed by a Canterbury man offering a ten dollar reward for the return of his escaped slave, Sampson.
hire our vessels, nor sell our commodities or manufactures to those who are concerned in it.97

While the states agreed to the terms contained in the Articles of Association, it still remained their responsibility to pass legislation that would reflect the decisions made by the Continental Congress. On December 2, 1774, the Connecticut Gazette reported on the newly adopted legislation, “An Act for prohibiting the Importation of Indian, Negro, or Molatto Slaves.” The text of the act, while brief, aligned Connecticut with the end of the colonial slave trade:

Be it enacted by the Governor, Council, and Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the Authority of the same, That no Indian, Negro, or Molatto Slave shall, at any Time hereafter, be brought or imported into this Colony, by Sea or Land, from any Place or Places whatsoever, to be disposed of, left, or sold, within this Colony.98

The Connecticut legislature also attempted to give strength to the new law. If any of Connecticut’s colonists were found to have violated the act, they were to be fined one hundred pounds. There was no further penalty, however, once the fine was paid. Once a person had paid the fine for importation, the slave remained his property.

The shortcomings of Connecticut’s new law were publicly criticized soon after its implementation. As the tenets of American liberty and freedom permeated the national dialogue, the cause of equality began to gain ground. On December 12, 1774, the town of Danbury voted to adopt a series of resolutions concerning the Articles of Association. While approving of the boycott of British goods, the townspeople voted “by a great majority” to publicly criticize the Continental Congress’s stance on slavery. Danbury declared:

It is with singular pleasure we notice the 2d article of the association, in which it is agreed to import no more Negro slaves; as we cannot but think it a palpable absurdity so loudly to complain of attempts to enslave us while we are actually en-slaving others; and that we have great reason to apprehend the enslaving of Africans is one of the crying sins of our land, for which Heaven is now chastising us. We notice also with pleasure the late act of our General Assembly imposing a fine of 100 [pounds] on any one who shall import a Negro slave into this colony. We could also wish that something further might be done for the relief of such as are now in a state of slavery in the colonies, and such as may hereafter be born of parents in that unhappy condition.99

The opinions on the slave trade put forth by the people of Danbury reflected the shift in thinking that was gradually being adopted throughout the state. No longer content to simply criticize the slave trade, moral and egalitarian colonists were rapidly embracing the democratic philosophy of equality and applying it to their subjugated brethren.

With the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, conditions within the colonies necessitated a dramatic change in the relationship of masters and their slaves. Prior to 1774, while evidence of manumissions exists in local town records throughout the state, it is too sparse to indicate that the practice was prevalent. As Joanne Melish concludes, the lack of surviving manumissions would imply that slavery was still a prevalent part of New England society.100 With the Revolutionary War as a stimulus, the last twenty-five years of the eighteenth century saw a rapid decline in slaves and a similar increase in free blacks within Connecticut. By 1790, only 2,759 slaves were recorded in Connecticut, down from the 6,562 recorded in 1774. Equally surprising is the 2,801 free blacks

residing within the state. For the first time, free blacks outnumbered slaves within the state.

While it would be convenient to suggest that the principles of liberty, equality, and freedom that infused the propaganda of the American Revolution convinced Connecticut’s citizens to free their slaves, the true reasons are less enlightened. Prior to the Revolutionary War, a 1702 law, “An Act for Negro and Malatta Servants to be maintained by their Masters,” stipulated that any manumitted slaves were to be supported by their previous owners until death. The act required that, “if afterward such servant or slave shall come to want, every such servant shall be relieved at the only cost and charge of the person in whose service he or she was last reteined.” With the requirement of financial support mandated by the legislature, the vast majority of Connecticut’s citizens found no incentive to liberate their slaves. In 1777, the Connecticut Assembly enacted an “Addition to and Alteration of” the 1702 law. The new law required a hearing by local selectmen to “enquire into the age, abilities, circumstances, and character of such servant or slave.” If the selectmen believed that the slave would be able to support himself, the manumission was granted and the master absolved of any financial responsibility. While the Assembly designed the law to allow selectmen to judge if a slave was too old or infirm to be independent, its vague language allowed for its true nature to be exploited. While the law was designed to encourage the manumissions of healthy slaves, slaves long past their prime years and unable to support themselves were manumitted by selectmen sympathetic to the financial concerns of slaveholders. This loophole would remain open

until 1792 when the Assembly revised the law to prevent manumissions of any slaves over the age of forty-five.

The 1777 decision to remove financial responsibility from former slaveholders provided practical motivation for Connecticut slaveholders to manumit their slaves before they became too old or infirm, but the stimulus behind the law was not purely financial. With little military success outside of the Battle of Trenton in the war, Connecticut faced chronic shortages in military recruitment. In May 1778, the Assembly enacted a law allowing for substitutes to be sent to serve in the Continental Army. In doing so, the Assembly stipulated that the replacement had to be “an able-bodied soldier or recruit.”

By not specifying race, the legislature effectively allowed manumitted blacks to serve as substitutes in the Connecticut regiments of the Continental Army. There is evidence that this practice throughout the Revolutionary War was prevalent in affluent families who could afford to send a slave. In Wethersfield, David Griswold manumitted his slave Caesar under the stipulation that Caesar serve for three years in his place. At least two other Wethersfield men, William Warner and Elias Williams, manumitted their slaves with the requirement of military service. In Litchfield, Colonel Marsh brought his slave Cash Africa, with him to war, where he was among those listed on Litchfield’s military Honor Roll. Anecdotal evidence suggests that hundreds of slaves served in the Continental Army, with at least forty-eight serving in Connecticut’s Fifth Regiment.

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The wartime manumissions also suggest that the economic importance of slaves in Connecticut was diminishing by the 1780s. In 1777, 1779, and 1780, emancipation laws were presented before the General Assembly and summarily rejected on the basis of their radical position. In 1784, proponents of emancipation shifted their tactics and included a gradual emancipation provision within a larger law. Originally designed to codify the various slave laws dating back to 1702, “An Act Concerning Indian, Molatto, and Negro Servants and Slaves” effectively began the legal decline of slavery. It did not, however, free any existing slaves. Included in the law was the decree:

No Negro or Molatto Child, that shall, after the first Day of March, One thousand seven hundred and eighty-four, be born within this State, shall be held in Servitude, longer than until they arrive to the Age of twenty-five Years, notwithstanding the Mother or Parent of such Child was held in Servitude at the Time of its Birth; but such Child, at the Age aforesaid, shall be free; any Law, Usage or Custom to the contrary notwithstanding.\(^\text{108}\)

Because it had no effect on slavery in its current state, the statute passed both houses of the General assembly. It did not provide that current slaves would be emancipated, allowing for current slaveholders to maintain their property while planning for the future.

This is not to say that early abolitionists within the state had tricked the legislature into freeing Connecticut’s slaves with the antebellum equivalent of a legislative rider. Rather, the emancipation law was accepted due to a growing economic trend within the state. As the population continued to rise in Connecticut at the close of the eighteenth century, black slaves were in direct competition with white laborers. Slaves had typically worked alongside day laborers and indentured servants throughout the eighteenth century and did not fulfill a specific economic need as in the South. After the Revolutionary

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War, it was no longer considered profitable to possess a slave past his prime years and the 1777 law concerning slaves had given masters greater incentive to free their slaves before they became a financial burden. By imposing a gradual emancipation law, the assembly allowed slaveholders to maintain the status quo with their current labor force while getting rid of their slaves when they were past their prime as workers. As it stood in 1784, a white indentured servant worked typically until age twenty-one, while under the new law, a slave would work until age twenty-five.109

The economic factors behind gradual emancipation were reinforced by an increasing sense of moral responsibility. On March 31, 1777, the town of Enfield delivered a memorial to the Connecticut Assembly resolving to “pray that the Negroes in this State be released from their Slavery and Bondage.”110 In 1778, Phineas Andrews of Wethersfield emancipated his slave Prince Nauqui after “being convinced of the injustice of the general practice of this country, in holding of Negroes slaves, during life, without their consent.”111 Similarly, Abijah Holbrook of Torrington manumitted Jacob Prince and his wife Ginne, “they being now in the prime and vigor of life,” after “being influenced by motives of humanity and benevolence, believing that all mankind by nature are entitled to equal liberty and freedom.”112

These individual and localized professions of equality were related to a larger cause originating in New Haven. In 1790, a group of eighteen Connecticut elites founded

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109 In order to bring the two labor forces closer in line, a May 1797 bill amended the law, mandating that all slaves born after August 1, 1797, would be emancipated at twenty-one years of age.
111 Adams, The History of Ancient Wethersfield, 101. It is questionable how “benevolent” Andrews was in releasing Prince unconditionally. At the age of forty-seven, Prince was long past his prime years, and may not have lived much longer.
the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and for the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage. Consisting of both secular and religious leaders, the Society committed itself to “promoting the abolition of slavery” from its New Haven base. The Society, in its brief Constitution, declared that it had undertaken the cause of abolition, “having with grief and abhorrence long beheld a considerable number of our fellow men groaning under the iron hand of slavery.”

The work of the Connecticut Society, later renamed the African Society, was spearheaded by one of New Haven’s leading theologians. Ezra Stiles, as the residing President of Yale College since 1778, was a powerful moral force within New Haven. Born in North Haven in 1727, Stiles was ordained to the ministry by Yale in 1749. After a brief stint as a lawyer, Stiles became pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Newport, Rhode Island. Here, Stiles made his mark on Congregationalist theology and political issues. He encountered slave life through Rhode Island’s bustling slave trade on a daily basis. Stiles’s first public opposition towards the slave trade was in 1773, when he and Samuel Hopkins issued the appeal, “To the Public,” to various congregations throughout New England. Written primarily to request funds for the education of two black converts who would be sent to Africa as missionaries, it also included a condemnation of the slave trade:

It is humbly proposed to those who are convinced of the iniquity of the slave trade; and are sensible of the great inhumanity and cruelty of enslaving so many thousands of our fellow men every year, with all the dreadful and horrid attendants; and are ready to bear testimony against it in all proper ways, and do their utmost to put a stop to it…whether this is not the best compensation we are able to make the poor Africans, for the

injuries they are constantly receiving by this unrighteous practice, and all its attendants.\textsuperscript{114}

Ironically, even as Stiles pushed for the elimination of the slave trade, he himself was in possession of an African slave. Newport, twenty-five at the time of Stiles’s appeal, was Stiles’s primary domestic laborer and servant. It is clear, however, as Stiles made plans to move to New Haven, his opinions on slavery had changed. On June 9, 1778, two days before leaving for Yale, Stiles manumitted Newport.\textsuperscript{115}

Various members of Connecticut’s elite citizens joined Ezra Stiles in his opposition to slavery. Simeon Baldwin, a local New Haven lawyer and Congressman, would later help form the state’s first Colonization Society and influence his son and Amistad trial lawyer, Roger S. Baldwin. Elizur Goodrich, who worked on the Society’s Committee of Correspondence, served in Congress and was elected Mayor of New Haven for the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Benjamin Trumbull, Henry Channing, and Charles Backus advanced religious and moral thought in the state as active preachers and theologians. As a cross section of Yale’s alumni at the close of the eighteenth century, this collection of men would suggest that the College instilled a strong sense of moral responsibility in its graduates.

As important as the Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and for the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage was in establishing early ideas of anti-slavery within Connecticut, its actual impact was negligible. The Society in its Constitution declared that its main objective would be:

\textsuperscript{114} Samuel Hopkins and Ezra Stiles, “To the Public,” 31 August 1773, in Bruns, \textit{Am I Not A Man and A Brother}, 292.

To enquire whether any persons are illegally holden in bondage—also whether the other laws of this State relative to the gradual abolition of slavery are duly observed—and to look into the character and conduct of free Negroes and Mulattoes with respect to morality, industry and economy, and report to the society or their standing committee.  

While it appears the Society wished to work within the legal boundaries of the state’s policies on slavery, there is little tangible evidence to suggest its members directly affected the lives of slaves. Henry Channing, within two months of the Society’s establishment, wrote Simeon Baldwin that “it does not appear that the Society is of much importance as it respects its influence in this State, as there is here scarcely a claim for exertions.”

In the subsequent years after its founding, the Connecticut Society was able to stimulate discussion within the state through a series of orations. These lectures were designed to highlight the origins of American slavery, discuss the treatment of African slaves, and convince the listener to support abolition. As the lectures grew more popular within the state, the Connecticut Society employed increasingly more influential Connecticut citizens to give them. In this way, the Connecticut Society attempted to guarantee heightened attention would be placed on the slavery issue.

On September 9, 1790, the same day as the founding of the Connecticut Society, Reverend James Dana delivered “The African Slave Trade” before the Society’s members. As the Old Light minister of New Haven’s First Congregational Church, Dana stressed the moral evils of slavery. He began by underlining the importance of Christianity as a guiding moral principle:

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117 Henry Channing to Simeon Baldwin, 22 November 1790, Baldwin Family Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
Christianity is a *reasonable service*, and founded in personal persuasion. It permits us to “call no man master; for one is our master, even Christ,” to whom alone every one must stand or fall. His religion alone is friendly to free enquiry: It directs us to “prove all things”—to claim the liberty of grounding our faith, not on the wisdom of man, but the power of God; and to allow others the same…Christianity should be a stumbling block to uninformed minds.\(^{118}\)

In formulating Christianity in this way, Dana was attempting to demonstrate that the Bible could not be used to justify the perpetual condition of Africans in slavery. Dana condemned the argument that slavery was beneficial in exposing “heathen” Africans to Christianity. Refuting this reasoning, he echoed the opinion put forth by Ebenezer Baldwin and Jonathan Edwards Jr. nearly twenty years earlier:

> Had African slaves the means of Christian instruction, had they been treated with humanity, still the making slaves of them hath been no more than *doing evil that good may come*. Christianity and humanity would rather have dictated the sending books and teachers into Africa, and endeavors for their civilization. Have they been treated as children of the same family with ourselves? As having the same Father, whose *tender mercies are over all his works*? As having the same natural prerogatives with other nations? Or have they been treated as outcasts from humanity?\(^{119}\)

In expressing the evil of the slave trade, Dana also alluded to his central argument in freeing the slaves: equality. Following the logic of Jonathan Edwards earlier in the century, Dana believed that there was no inherent difference between whites and blacks. Dana defended this position by appealing to the infallibility of the Bible:

> If we admit the Mosaic account, we cannot suppose that the Africans are of a different species from us: If we reject it, we have no account whence there or we sprang…And, according to the principles of our religion, they are *children of the free-woman as well as we*. This instructs us, that *God is no respecter of persons, or of nations—hath put no difference between Jew and Greek, barbarian and Scythian.*\(^{120}\)

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\(^{119}\) Ibid., 25.

\(^{120}\) Ibid., 29.
By appealing to the Creation story of the Bible, Dana knew his argument would have to be accepted by the inhabitants of the almost exclusively Congregationalist state. He then asked his audience:

Why then should we treat our African brethren as the elder son in the parable treated the younger, offended at the compassion of their common parent towards him? Why place them in a situation incapable of recovery from their lost state? Their state of moral death?...Is this doing to others, as he hath commanded, whatsoever we would that they should do to us? Is it to love our neighbor as ourselves?121

While the bulk of Dana’s argument consisted of moral and religious responsibility, he also appealed to his audience’s sense of patriotism. Throughout his speech, Dana referenced the newly founded nation that “was expressly founded on such principles as these: ‘All men are created equal: They are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’”122 The hypocritical nature of the Declaration of Independence juxtaposed with the institution of slavery was not lost on Dana and it was an argument that would be launched repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century. Rather than stressing the point, Dana simply stated, “those who profess to understand and regard the principles of liberty should cheerfully unite to abolish slavery.”

Reverend Dana’s “entertaining and instructive sermon,”123 one of the first major discourses on slavery to be published in Connecticut, was widely advertised in Connecticut newspapers and appeared in pamphlet form that November. Drawing attention to the plight of slaves, Reverend Dana highlighted the moral responsibility of

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122 Ibid., 28.
123 Connecticut Gazette, 1 October 1790, 1.
Connecticut’s citizens for opposing slavery. The new antislavery society achieved a
great deal of press attention with this first address.

The Connecticut Society held its next meeting in Hartford at the North Meeting
House. In contrast to the religious influence of James Dana, the Society chose Zephaniah
Swift to deliver the oration. Swift, a Yale graduate and successful Connecticut lawyer,
was rapidly developing into a popular politician and would serve in Congress in 1792. In
formulating his argument, Swift began by highlighting the body of work that had been
written concerning slavery:

The Divine, the Philosopher, and the Poet, have united in reprobating the
impiety, demonstrating the immorality, and describing the cruelty of this
practice. No writer of genius and sensibility, has ever avowed the
doctrine, and attempted its justification and support. Yet avarice has
continued the practice in defiance of the clearest dictates of reason, and
the most vigorous efforts of learning and humanity. The liberty, and
happiness, of a large portion of the human race, are sacrificed at the shrine
of pride, ambition, and cruelty.\(^\text{124}\)

Swift relied upon the eighteenth-century Enlightenment principles of logic and reason in
order to reinforce his position. After establishing his position on slavery, Swift traced the
history of enslavement from the Greeks to modern times. Upon reaching the Spanish
discovery of America, Swift revealed his interpretation of the origin of African slavery:

Las Casas approved of the expedient in supplying the place of the
Americans whom he wished to emancipate, by the importation of African
slaves. This scheme was adopted, not with a view to relieve the
Americans, but to recruit the country depopulated by rigor and cruelty,
with a race of slaves, who by their strength of body and vigor of
constitution should be capable of performing that hard service which had
proved so fatal to the feeble savages of America...For in America only
has the African been deemed an article of property, and adjudged to have
forfeited his natural rights, on account of the blackness of his complexion,
and the inferiority of his intellectual capacity.\(^\text{125}\)

\(^\text{125}\) Ibid., 10.
In explaining the historical origins of the institution, Swift was attempting to eliminate any justification of slavery based on moral principles. He continued to attack the typical defenses of pro-slavery by criticizing the belief in African inferiority:

Dissimilarity of complexion and inferiority of mind are arguments so far from justifying this conduct, that they serve to evince that the extreme baseness of the persons who advance them can only be exceeded by those who carry them into practice, by taking an unfair advantage of the weak and defenceless state of their fellow creatures, and doubling those misfortunes which it is pretended they have inherited as their portion from the God of nature.  

Not only did Swift deny the weakness of Africans, he also revealed an inherent flaw in this logic. If Africans were truly inferior to whites, then masters were exposing their immorality and wickedness in enslaving them. The strong were supposed to protect the weak. In attacking the moral standards of slaveholders, Swift foreshadowed the future tactics of radical abolitionists:

To denigrate the persons who pursue this commerce, and brand them with some public mark of infamy, may reach offenders in certain cases which are beyond the animadversion of law—and there are but few so hardened as to brave that universal reproach and contempt which in a short time the general voice of mankind will denounce against those who engage in this iniquitous branch of business.

While Swift’s discourse centered on a harsh condemnation of all slaveholders past and present, he attempted to moderate his tone in closing. Swift believed that the United States’ foundation of democracy and liberty would eventually lead to the complete abolition of despotism and slavery. He asked his audience to pray “that all people may be restored to the safe and peaceable enjoyment of their natural rights and privileges.”

127 Ibid., 19.
128 Ibid., 23.
Swift’s use of logic in proving the equality of whites and Africans would be fully developed by Jonathan Edwards Jr. in the Society’s third oration.

Jonathan Edwards Jr. issued his sermon on “The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade” in New Haven on September 15, 1791. A graduate of Princeton and son of the United States’ leading eighteenth-century theologian, Edwards served as the pastor of White Haven Congregational Church. Following in the footsteps of his father, Edwards deployed his keen sense of logic and reason in order to further religious doctrine. His sermon before the Connecticut Society was a culmination of both religious and secular arguments and can be seen as representative of the central beliefs of Connecticut’s early abolitionists.

While Noah Webster and Theodore Dwight would succeed him in issuing speeches in 1793 and 1795, each would only add their personal formulations to existing points of contention. Noah Webster, in his “Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry,” argued that that the apparent inferiority and baseness of Africans was not innate, but a product of their position in bondage. He also believed that placing slaveholders in a position of power led them to be “hardened by the exercise of cruelty, and equally insensible to the sufferings of their fellow men.”129 Webster was also one of the first to voice his opposition to early colonization efforts, questioning the practical nature and the chances of success of such an endeavor. He also believed that it was “not certain that the slaves themselves would be willing to risk such a change of situation; as most of them are born in this country and are total strangers to Africa and its inhabitants.”130 This argument would reappear throughout the early nineteenth century as radical abolitionists

130 Ibid., 35.
condemned the removal of blacks to West African colonies. Timothy Dwight, in his 1794 oration, compared the argument of taxation without representation to the condition of American slaves:

Slaves then, having never really, nor impliedly agreed to any social compact, and never being heard, either personally, or representatively in the legislature, form no part of the social body; and therefore cannot justly be the object of laws.  

Dwight continued Webster’s logic in stating that slaveholders, both men and women, “indulge themselves in paroxysms of rage” due to the violence inherent in slavery. Dwight also stressed the necessity for action rather than ambivalence in Connecticut, proclaiming, “the inhabitants of the state, as it respects this great subject, must be divided into two classes—those, who justify slavery in the abstract—and those, who condemn it.”

But the arguments put forth by Webster and Dwight were primarily elaborations of those previously established by Jonathan Edwards. As a product of the Enlightenment, his 1791 oration set the standard for anti-slavery arguments among Connecticut’s intellectuals. Edwards began his sermon by first quoting from the Gospel of Matthew, stating, “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that Men should do to you, do ye even to them.” Establishing this policy of equal treatment, he then posed a series of questions to his audience:

Should we be willing, that the Africans or any other nation should purchase us, our wives and children, transport us into Africa, and there sell us into perpetual and absolute slavery?...Yet why is it not as right for them to treat us in this manner, as it is for us to treat them in the same manner?

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131 Theodore Dwight, An Oration (Harford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1794), 12.
132 Ibid., 21.
133 Jonathan Edwards Jr., The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of the Slavery of the Africans, Illustrated in A Sermon (Providence: John Carter, 1792), 3.
In establishing this position, Edwards was implicitly stating, as other members of the Society had before him, that Africans were in no way inferior to whites. His Connecticut audience was enjoined to assume that black slaves had the same feelings and values as whites and apply the Golden Rule to them. While relying on biblical arguments to prove his point early in his sermon, he would return to this principle later in the oration during his thorough denunciation of proslavery justifications.

Reverend Edwards continued by highlighting the ways in which the slave trade was inherently evil. He began by reinforcing the principle that “all men are born equally free.” Knowing that his patriotic audience would support this notion, Edwards then followed it to its logical conclusion:

If this be true, the Africans are by nature equally entitled to freedom as we are; and therefore we have no more right to enslave, or to afford aid to enslave them, than they have to do the same with us. They have the same right to their freedom, which they have to their property or to their lives. Therefore to enslave them is as really and in the same sense wrong, as to steal from them, to rob, or to murder them.

Edwards repeatedly returned to the idea of slavery as an inherently evil practice throughout his sermon, going as far as to compare it to principles prohibited in the Ten Commandments. He believed that this in itself was truth enough to persuade any “who has any regard to justice or humanity” that slavery should be abolished. He was, however, aware of the extent of the slave trade in bringing fifty thousand slaves per year into the United States. He therefore embarked on an extensive critique of the primary arguments used to defend slavery.

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134 Edwards Jr., The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, 5.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., 6.
He began this critique by first addressing the biblical passages used to defend slavery. Concerning the story of the sin of Ham and the curse on Canaan, he cited the lack of connection to Africans and Africa stating, “we have no ground to believe, that this curse respected any others, than the posterity of Canaan, who lived in the land of Canaan, which is well known to be remote from Africa.” He also dismissed the argument that since God granted the Israelites permission to possess slaves, that Americans were sanctioned as well. Edwards found no logical reason why this permission would apply only to Americans and Africans:

If this be at all to the purpose, it is a permission to every nation under heaven to buy slaves of the nations round about them; to us, to buy of our Indian neighbours; to them, to buy of us; to the French, to buy of the English, and to the English to buy of the French; and so through the world….Thus according to this construction, we have an institution of an universal slave-trade, by which every man may not only become a merchant, but may rightfully become the merchandize itself of this trade, and may be bought and sold like a beast.

Edwards’s strategy throughout the sermon was to draw each argument presented by the advocates of slavery to its ultimate conclusion. By offering only absolutes, Edwards hoped to eliminate any ambivalence towards the issue his listeners may have felt.

Edwards did not, however, limit himself to biblical logic as Reverend Dana had. Like Swift, he addressed many of the secular arguments put forth by slavery supporters. Again, Edwards exaggerated each premise in order to prove its malevolence. Concerning the defense that to prohibit the slave trade would hurt national commerce, Edwards responded “it is sufficient to ask; whether on the supposition that it were advantageous to the commerce of Great Britain to send her ships to these states and transport us into

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138 Ibid., 17.
perpetual slavery in the West Indies; it would be right that she should go into that
trade.” Similarly, Edwards addressed the belief that if Americans did not engage in the
slave trade, other nations would continue to do so. To this Edwards replied simply, “so
others will rob, steal and murder, if we do not.” His response to the business aspect of
the slave trade was straightforward: no matter who else engages in the trade, it does not
stop slavery from being evil.

Finally, Edwards appealed to his audience’s sense of patriotism and the American
Revolution. Responding to the rhetoric used to rally colonists to the Patriot cause,
Edwards challenged his listeners to put the war’s conditions in perspective:

Suppose that in the late war we had been subdued by Great Britain; we
should have been taxed without our consent. But these taxes would have
amounted to but a small part of our property. Whereas the Negroes are
deprived of all their property; no part of their earnings is their own…So
that Great Britain in her late attempt to enslave America, committed a very
small crime indeed, in comparison with the crime of those who enslave the
Africans.

While Edwards was walking a thin line downplaying the seriousness of the Revolutionary
War, he did so as an appeal to reason. Edwards believed that if he demonstrated the
importance of abolishing slavery and the slave trade relative to the American Revolution,
his listeners would have no choice but to support the anti-slavery cause.

In closing, Edwards attempted to relay a sense of hope for the future of
abolitionism. He noted:

Thirty years ago scarcely a man in this country thought either the slave
trade or the slavery of Negroes to be wrong. But now how many and able
advocates in private life, in our legislatures, in Congress, have appeared

140 Ibid., 22.
141 Ibid., 24.
and have openly and irrefragably pleaded the rights of humanity in this as well as other instances?\textsuperscript{142}

Edwards overestimated what he believed would be the ultimate conclusion of anti-slavery. Looking at past trends, he estimated “within fifty years from this time, it will be as shameful for a man to hold a Negro slave, as to be guilty of common robbery or theft.”\textsuperscript{143} Although perhaps somewhat revealing of his lack of knowledge of the South, Edwards’s closing statement demonstrates the perceived power of the growing abolitionist movement. The Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom believed that they were facilitating a social movement whose moral influence could not be denied. As members of Connecticut’s intellectual elite, it was logical to believe that by countering the arguments of slavery advocates, the state’s citizens would be morally compelled to aid in ending African slavery. As Connecticut moved into the nineteenth century, divisions would appear amidst the anti-slavery ranks, and both sides would be vastly unprepared for the emotional response against an uplift of Connecticut’s black residents.

\textsuperscript{142} Edwards Jr., \textit{The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade}, 29. 
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 30.
By 1800, after sponsoring speeches and raising awareness of the horrors of slavery throughout the state, the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and for the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage had essentially ceased to exist. While the orations issued by prominent Connecticut citizens such as Jonathan Edwards Jr. and Noah Webster had fostered discussion of anti-slavery principles and produced sympathy towards slaves, no tangible accomplishments were made. Slavery, though coming to an end through gradual emancipation, remained a present albeit diminishing issue in Connecticut. At the opening of the nineteenth century, a new cause began to grow in popularity. Fearing the rising population of free blacks within the state, Connecticut’s citizens embraced colonization as a way to resolve their ambivalence towards racial equality.

This is not to say that the lessons put forth from the Connecticut Society had been completely discarded. In 1804, David Humphreys, a Revolutionary War colonel most famously known for receiving the British flag after the Battle of Yorktown, issued a valedictory oration to the Connecticut Society of Cincinnatus. His speech echoed many of the sentiments heard in the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom’s
speeches. The language utilized, however, was decidedly more inflammatory than that which had come before, an early sign that the divide between northern and southern states was growing:

Is slavery less slavery in a Christian than in a Mahometan country? I entreat your attention, while I plead the general cause of humanity. In such a cause it is right to appeal to your sensibility as well as your reason. It is now no longer time to flatter petty tyrants, by acknowledging that colour constitutes a legitimate title, for holding men in abject and perpetual bondage.  

While Humphreys was more than willing to condemn the expansion of slavery into the territory acquired from the Louisiana Purchase and morally oppose slavery as an institution, he equivocated when it came to the actual manumission of slaves:

Societies for promoting the abolition of negro-slavery must act with great wisdom and caution, or they will be in danger of doing more mischief than good. They are engaged in opening a passage hedged on every side with thorns and obstructed by almost insurmountable obstacles…I own, I am no friend to sudden manumission—because it would be doing much injury to the proprietors—and because of the condition of the slaves, destitute of forethought, industry, and a sense of moral obligations, would perhaps be but little mended. And the community could not fail to suffer, for a while, by their idleness, penury, and vice.

In examining the rhetoric Humphreys used to describe the difficulty of freeing the slaves, he exhibits many of the arguments that would later appear to support colonization. Although he condemned slavery and the slave trade, Humphreys feared what a large population of free blacks would do to white society. Instead of proclaiming the need for immediate emancipation, Humphreys wanted gradual manumission that “would have prepared the blacks by degrees, for tasting the cup of liberty, without intoxication.”

Humphreys, like many of Connecticut’s inhabitants, feared that a free black population

145 Ibid., 30.
146 Ibid., 31.
among whites would lead to a sharp increase in “idleness, penury, and vice” within the community.

In 1800, 951 slaves remained in Connecticut. More importantly, 5,330 free blacks now resided within the state. From 1790 to 1800, this population had nearly doubled. While the number of free blacks would remain less than one percent of the total state population for much of the nineteenth century, Connecticut’s citizens increasingly worried about their presence. In 1818, Connecticut ratified its first Constitution after operating under the governmental regulations put forth by its early colonial charter. Thirty-four years after the gradual emancipation statute, Connecticut’s politicians had an opportunity to insure egalitarian principles would govern the state. Connecticut’s 1818 Constitution began with a Declaration of Rights, stating: “That all men when they form a social compact, are equal in rights; and that no man, or set of men are entitled to exclusive public emoluments or privileges from the community.” While the state’s framers were willing to expound equality as a central principle in their government, they were quick to qualify who “all men” truly were. In Article Six, “Of the Qualifications of Electors,” the Constitution was explicit in who would be able to vote within the state:

Every white male citizen of the United States, who shall have gained a settlement in this state, attained the age of twenty-one years, and resided in the town in which he may offer himself to be admitted to the privilege of an elector, at least six months preceding, and have a freehold estate of the yearly value of seven dollars in this state; or having been enrolled in the militia, shall have performed military duty therein for the term of one year next preceding the time he shall offer himself for admission, or being liable thereto, shall have been, by authority of law, excused therefrom; or shall have paid a state tax within the year next preceding the time he shall present himself for such admission; and shall sustain a good moral

147 Steiner, History of Slavery in Connecticut, 84.
148 The Constitution of Connecticut (1818), Article First, Sec. 1.
character; shall, on his taking such oath as may be prescribed by law, be an elector.\textsuperscript{149}

The Connecticut Constitution was explicit in denying black inhabitants suffrage. This principle would continue to be upheld in various Connecticut revisions and referendums as late as 1865, when a law granting blacks the rights to vote failed by over 3,000 votes.\textsuperscript{150}

One argument put forth by Horatio T. Strother attempts to rationalize the subjugation of free blacks as second-class citizens. In 1818, Connecticut was home to sixty-seven textile mills that relied heavily on southern cotton.\textsuperscript{151} By 1845, this number had expanded to 136. Connecticut mill owners required strong connections to southern plantations in order to expand the state’s economic strength. By denying black suffrage, Connecticut was effectively reinforcing their commitment to southern trade.

In reducing free blacks to second-class citizenship, the state’s leaders were implicitly discouraging blacks from remaining in Connecticut. This political movement coincided with a growing acceptance of colonization that first manifested itself within the state in New Haven. New Haven, primarily due to the liberal influence of Yale, was the center of Connecticut’s moral uplift and reform movements in the early nineteenth century. Growing out of the anti-slavery views held by the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, colonization supported the abolition of slavery and the subsequent removal of former slaves from the United States to colonies established on the western coast of Africa. In 1820, Simeon Baldwin, father of Amistad trial lawyer

\textsuperscript{149} The Constitution of Connecticut (1818), Article Sixth, Sec. 2.
\textsuperscript{151} Strother, \textit{The Underground Railroad in Connecticut}, 86.
Roger S. Baldwin, established the New Haven Colonization Society, a local branch of the national American Colonization Society which had been founded in 1816.\textsuperscript{152} Although small at its outset, the New Haven branch quickly grew into a state authority, raising funds and awareness for the cause. Central to the group’s effectiveness was Leonard Bacon, the pastor of New Haven’s First Congregational Church. In 1825, Bacon delivered “A Plea for Africa,” in which he expounded upon the need to support colonization. He began, however, with a creative interpretation of the history of slavery within Connecticut:

I plead for the whole race; and my argument with you in their behalf is, that wherever they are found they are partakers in the misery of one common degradation. To establish this, I need not carry you out of the streets and lanes of our own city. You would scorn the imputation, and justly, if I should suggest that there is any thing here which subjects the African to peculiar disadvantages. On the contrary, it would seem far other wise; inasmuch as slavery never existed here to any considerable extent, and for years it has been a thing unknown. Yet when you look over this city, what do you find to be the actual state and character of its coloured population? How many of the privileges which belong to other classes of society do they enjoy? How much of the happiness in which you are now rejoicing is theirs?\textsuperscript{153}

In this interpretation, Bacon seemed to conveniently ignore the ninety-seven blacks still held in slavery within the state. It also would appear that Bacon did not consider denial of suffrage to be a “peculiar disadvantage” to free blacks. These omissions aside, Bacon stressed the inequality between blacks and whites and the need for moral uplift. He reinforced the notion that Africans were enslaved because of their perceived inferiority and proposed a method in which the slave trade could be stopped:

There is a scorn which follows the very name of an African. He is hunted down by a contempt which he can never escape. He is treated---whatever

\textsuperscript{152} Warner, \textit{New Haven Negroes}, 42.
\textsuperscript{153} Leonard Bacon, \textit{A Plea for Africa: Delivered in New Haven, July 4\textsuperscript{th} 1825} (New Haven, T.G. Woodward and Co., 1825), 12.
may be your opinion about his native character, he is in fact treated as an inferior being. He is one of that people who have been meted out and trodden down, plundered and sold, persecuted and oppressed from the beginning of time. And the consciousness, which he cannot evade, that he is despised by others, teaches him, at length, to despise himself, and robs him of the dignity of human character. Now let there be erected one Christian African republic—powerful, enlightened, and happy, like ours—whose flag shall wave in the breezes of every ocean, whose commerce shall carry wealth to every port, whose ambassadors shall demand respect in every capital, whose patriots and sages, whose poets and artists, shall share the admiration of every people; and this reproach, degrading as crime, and cruel as the grave, will cease. The negro exulting in the consciousness of manhood, will stretch out his hand unto him who hath made of one blood all nations, to dwell on the face of the earth.¹⁵⁴

Bacon proposed the establishment of a free African nation that would be able to resist the slave trade as an equal. He believed that if this African nation were able to produce the same goods as the southern states in direct competition, the South would be forced to employ free white labor as an inexpensive alternative to slaves.¹⁵⁵ Bacon suggested that the only way this free African empire would come about was through the colonization of freed slaves:

If ever Africa is to be civilized, it must be by the return of her exiled children. And those exiles are even now beginning to return…In the land of the slave trade, they have set up the banner of freedom, and where they are building their homes and cultivating their fields, the wilderness echoes to their songs, and the Sabbath smiles on their devotions. Now in what way can you more powerfully or more directly promote the civilization of Africa, than by enlarging the views and elevating the character of her children here, and thus making them at once more anxious to enjoy and more able to improve the advantages which their country is offering them?¹⁵⁶

Bacon believed that free blacks were the ultimate solution for ending both the slave trade and eventually all of American slavery. He stressed that once educated, free blacks

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 17.
¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 18.
would overwhelmingly agree to colonize Africa in order to assist their ancestral brethren. Through education and colonization, slavery would end due to the “noblest and most efficient benefactors of Africa.”

The New Haven branch was instrumental in rallying Connecticut to colonization and was later assimilated into a state society in 1827. While its influence only began to diminish in Connecticut in the mid-1830s, the Society maintained a presence within the state with an agenda that was frequently referred to as a “non-contentious” approach to ending slavery. Throughout its lifespan however, the Colonization Society was never able to produce results that matched its message. In 1828, upon the death of colonizationist agent Jehudi Ashmun in Liberia from fever, Bacon may have exaggerated the success he saw in the future of colonization:

I see thousands of the oppressed and wretched, fleeing from lands where at the best they can have nothing but the name and forms of freedom, to this new republic, and finding there a refuge from their degradation. I see the accursed slave trade, which for so many ages past, has poured desolation along twelve hundred miles of the African coast, utterly suppressed, and remembered only as an illustration of what human wickedness can be.

In regards to free blacks “fleeing” from Connecticut, only ten black families agreed to relocate from Connecticut to Liberia between 1830 and 1850. In some ways,}

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159 Leonard Bacon, *A Discourse Preached in the Center Church, in New Haven, August 27, 1828, at the funeral of Jehudi Ashmun, Esq. Colonial Agent of the American Colony of Liberia* (New Haven: Hezekial Howe, 1828).
colonization’s implicit goal of removing all free blacks from the state was enough for some white citizens to continue supporting the cause.\textsuperscript{161}

Concurrent with the cause of colonization was an attempt by some Connecticut citizens to alleviate the conditions of free blacks that remained in the state. The Second Great Awakening, whose effects in Connecticut were felt after 1810 when Lyman Beecher moved to Litchfield, convinced many of the state’s inhabitants of the necessity of moral uplift movements. As seen earlier, the religious message expounded by Beecher convinced individuals such as Benjamin Tallmadge of the moral evil behind slavery. During Beecher’s visit to New Haven, he was credited with bringing in 180 additional converts through an “outpouring of faith.”\textsuperscript{162}

With slavery no longer an urgent issue in the state, people seeking to improve society began to look at the status of free blacks. In 1811 and later in 1825, New Haven established its first “colored schools” for the children of free blacks. Although the schools found little success and support, they received state funds as part of a charitable effort towards New Haven’s black communities.\textsuperscript{163} In July 1826, two new improvement societies formed in New Haven, the Antislavery Association and the African Improvement Society. Consisting of both white and black members, the groups built a black church, school, and meetinghouse for societal functions.\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{161} In Litchfield, a notoriously conservative stronghold within the state, I came across a letter between members of the Sheldon family. The children of Henry Sheldon, who died in 1868, had discovered that Henry Sheldon left $10,000 to the American Colonization Society. They had found in 1866, Sheldon wrote a letter to his sister telling her to remove this section from the will, but it was never updated. Even after the Civil War, the idea of colonization remained within certain areas of Connecticut.


\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 229.

\textsuperscript{164} Warner, \textit{New Haven Negroes}, 46.
Instrumental in the success of the African Improvement Society was Simeon S. Jocelyn. A Yale graduate, Jocelyn established the city’s first black church in 1820 after observing the discrimination present through New Haven’s congregations. First only able to meet in a decrepit building, the congregation later purchased the Temple Street Meetinghouse from a group of Methodists in 1824. Jocelyn would remain the pastor of the Temple Street Church until 1834.

At first, Simeon S. Jocelyn considered himself a colonizationist. In conjunction with Leonard Bacon, Jocelyn believed improving Africa with free black missionaries was the key to abolishing slavery. In fact, Leonard Bacon, in his “Plea for Africa” speech, referenced Jocelyn when he described men striving for free black education:

> The means of elementary instruction and the apparatus of moral and religious culture, which are employed on our coloured population, lie at the foundation of all African improvement. The societies for the abolition of slavery are continually urging the claims of these unfortunates with a zeal which scorns to be weary, and which gathers impulse from discouragement. The scheme of an African seminary for liberal education which has been as yet only slightly discussed, will not be forgotten; for there are men engaged in its behalf, who will never rest while God spares them to the world, till the chasm which they now lament shall have been filled up, and the school which they have projected shall be sending forth its pupils to become throughout the earth the noblest and most efficient benefactors of Africa.

Throughout the 1820s, Bacon and Jocelyn had discussed a potential New Haven school that would educate black missionaries to spread religion through Liberia. The two split ways, however, when Jocelyn decided that such a school should cater to those free blacks remaining in the United States.

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In 1828, with the assistance of abolitionists Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Jocelyn purchased land in southern New Haven for the purpose of a “Negro college.” Working with funds from the Tappans, Jocelyn attempted to garner support from groups who would be friendly to the cause in New York and Boston. In May 1831, Jocelyn wrote to William Lloyd Garrison, requesting his support in fundraising and advertising for the school. Rather than a purely paternalistic effort, Jocelyn and Tappan wished to include blacks and whites in its establishment:

When this subject was suggested to Arthur Tappan Esq. more than eighteen months ago his generous mind embraced it as a noble and most desirable object. He then offered to be one of ten persons who should each give $1000 dollars to establish such an institution suggesting that the whites should raise ten thousand and the colored people ten thousand more. Some circumstances have delayed the early commencement of the institutions, but it has been a subject of deep interest—and of frequent conversation to this moment.  

By including African-Americans in his plan, Jocelyn hoped to raise additional funds and create an institution that would be racially inclusive. He also expanded upon the simple seminary that Bacon had proposed. Jocelyn and others like him felt that instead of preparing free blacks exclusively for missionary work, a black college should serve a much more advanced purpose:

Several persons who are deeply afflicted with the condition of the people of Color in this country have for a considerable length of time felt the importance of an Institution of learning to educated colored young men, who should become well qualified to fill important stations in society; who would have by means of intelligence and science, combined with piety and power to elevate and strengthen their brethren to remove the prejudices of the whites, and to lead on to the sure and triumphant conflicts which are at hand with error and oppression.

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167 Simeon S. Jocelyn to William Lloyd Garrison, 28 May 1831, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts.  
168 Ibid.  
169 Ibid.
In laying out his lofty goals for the Negro College, Jocelyn imagined a time in which free blacks would no longer be considered inferior on the basis of intellectual prowess. If only whites would allow blacks a place in which they could be truly educated, they would be more accepting of free blacks in society.

But as Jocelyn would discover, his colleagues in New Haven were less than willing to accept a black center for education within the city. On September 7, 1831, Jocelyn announced his plan for a black college in New Haven at the Center Church. Three days later, New Haven’s leaders called a town meeting in opposition to the college being placed in the city. If the commentary added to the meeting’s notice in the *New Haven Palladium* was any indication, Jocelyn faced significant resistance:

"One word more—if it is necessary to have an African College, in Connecticut, may not the projectors of it, on mature consideration, conclude to locate it in the town of Cornwall, and there occupy the buildings prepared to their hands by the friends of the Indian Colleges, who flourished, in these parts, a few years ago? Cornwall possesses many advantages for such an institution, over other places; and it is not among the least of them, that the ladies of that town readily give themselves, better for worse, and worse for better, to the colored gentlemen. This and other considerations may have a strong tendency to draw the proposed College to that town. We hope, therefore, that our citizens will act with coolness, on this subject."\(^{170}\)

The newspaper was referring to an incident in the 1820s in which a school for educating Native Americans was closed after two of the women married attending students. In opposing the Negro College, New Haven’s populace resorted to disparaging stereotypes, racial and regional alike.

To prevent the Negro College in New Haven, the opposition laid out a resolution condemning the presence of such an institution. The town committee first opposed the plan on the basis that it would disrupt relations with the South:

That in as much as slavery does not exist in Connecticut, and wherever permitted in other States depends on the municipal laws of the State which allows it, and over which neither any other State, nor the Congress of the United States has any control, that the propagation of sentiments favorable to the immediate emancipation of slaves in disregard of the civil institutions of the States in which they belong, and as auxiliary thereto the contemporaneous founding of the Colleges for educating colored people, is an unwarrantable and dangerous interference with the internal concerns of other States, and ought to be discouraged.\footnote{171}

This position coincided with economic principles Connecticut’s politicians had employed in withholding suffrage from free blacks. Connecticut’s citizens continued to fear that any public stance against slavery in any form would result in a reduction in southern trade. The committee’s second resolution, however, is consistent only with racist beliefs:

And whereas in the opinion of this meeting, Yale College, the institutions for the education of females, and the other schools, already existing in this city, are important to the community and the general interests of science, and as such have been deservedly patronized by the public, and the establishment of a College in the same place to educate the colored population is incompatible with the prosperity, if not the existence of the present institutions of learning, and will be destructive of the best interests of the city: And believing as we do, that if the establishment of such a College in any part of the country were deemed expedient, it should never be imposed on any community without their consent.\footnote{172}

In proposing this resolution, the committee was acknowledging that white educational institutions were beneficial to New Haven, and a black educational institution would be detrimental. New Haven’s elite believed having a large black presence in the city could only be “destructive” to its prosperity.

\footnote{171}{Simeon Jocelyn, \textit{College for Colored Youth: An Account of the New Haven City Meeting and Resolutions: with recommendations of the College, and Strictures Upon the Doings of New Haven} (New York: Published by the Committee, 1831), 4.}
\footnote{172}{Ibid., 5.}
Jocelyn defended himself by stressing New Haven as an ideal location for the college:

The mild atmosphere of New Haven, and its healthy climate, rendered it desirable for the location of such an institution. It combines the country with the city, and while it is easy to secure land for agricultural purposes, the variety of manufacturing business pursued promised the means of instruction in almost every department, when the workshops should be erected. The advantages arising from viewing every species of art, as may be seen in such a place, are great—such advantages are not often obtained in country villages.\textsuperscript{173}

In describing the advantages of New Haven, Jocelyn believed that the academic presence of Yale would be beneficial to the college’s development. Such access to morally uplifting art and literature could not be found in such rural locations as Cornwall. The people of New Haven were quick to oppose any connection the college could have with Yale. On September 9, the \textit{Connecticut Journal} voiced its opinion on what the Negro College would do to New Haven:

The location of a college of blacks here would be totally ruinous to the city ... whose certain effect will be to lower the town's public morals-to drive from our city its female schools-its throngs of summer visitors-and to stop the vital stream of the city, the influx of young men to Yale College.\textsuperscript{174}

New Haven’s citizens not only feared an influx of free blacks from around the country, but also the prospect of losing potential Yale students. In attempting to placate his opposition, Jocelyn even resorted to racial stereotypes by reinforcing the notion that “colored youth, would from the nature of their circumstances and through principle, be docile and respectful in their conduct” towards Yale students.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{173} Jocelyn, \textit{College for Colored Youth}, 8.
\textsuperscript{175} Jocelyn, \textit{College for Colored Youth}, 10.
After Jocelyn attempted to defend his position, the townspeople present voted on the resolutions. By a vote of seven hundred to four, the resolutions passed and the Negro College plan was defeated. In the words of the *Litchfield Enquirer*, “[Jocelyn] may be an amiable, good man, but it is evident he is too visionary ever to be much service to anybody.”

The condemnation of the Negro College plan was one of the first signs that Connecticut had not fully embraced the tenets of anti-slavery. While most citizens were willing to accept the moral evil of slavery, they were not willing to condemn the actual institution for fear of upsetting economic ties to the South. As Jocelyn pointed out in his subsequent pamphlet, the plan was widely accepted when it was deemed a school. As soon as it became a college, one with the potential for national prominence, New Haven’s leaders swiftly condemned it. The threat of an influx of free blacks residing in New Haven was enough for the town to vote almost unanimously against the plan. This response can also be seen as a coincidental case of bad timing. The Nat Turner Rebellion, which resulted in the deaths of fifty-five white Virginians, began on August 21. Descriptions of the revolt began to appear in Connecticut newspapers on September 1. While the Negro College plan was prevented through a series of resolutions, the continual fear of gathering free blacks in 1833 would drive another Connecticut town to violence and terrorism.

In January 1832, Prudence Crandall opened her “Female Boarding School” in Canterbury. Crandall, a twenty-eight-year-old Rhode Island Quaker, advertised the school as an institution that would teach such topics as “Reading, Writing, Natural and

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Moral Philosophy, Chemistry, Astronomy, together with the French Language.”\textsuperscript{178} She also noted that she had chosen Canterbury specifically, as “the location of the school possess many natural advantages, and is surrounded with good society.”\textsuperscript{179}

Crandall’s school operated successfully until the early months of 1833, when Crandall agreed to admit Sarah Harris, a local black girl, as a day student. Almost immediately, white families began to withdraw their daughters from the school in opposition to Harris’s presence. After traveling to Providence and Boston in February to gain the support of leading abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Crandall reopened her school on March 2, 1833, “for the reception of young ladies and little misses of color.”\textsuperscript{180} While steadfast in her beliefs that free blacks had a right to be educated, many interpreted the move as one solely orchestrated by William Lloyd Garrison. The \textit{Litchfield Enquirer}, a staunch defender of colonization throughout the nineteenth century, described its interpretation of the events:

In February last she visited Providence and Boston, and became acquainted with Mr. Garrison, Mr. Buffum, and others of the Anti-Slavery Society, who oppose the Colonization Society, and advocate the immediate abolition of slavery, the establishment of academies, \&c. to educate the blacks, the admission of blacks into society on terms of entire equality, the amalgamation of whites and blacks by intermarriages, \&c. She imbibed all their principles, and when she returned home to Canterbury, dismissed all the young ladies and announced her intention to convert her Female Seminary into a school for blacks.\textsuperscript{181}

On March 9, Canterbury held a town meeting in which to discuss the presence of the school. In following with the gender roles of women, Crandall believed she could not defend herself at the meeting, and requested Samuel J. May, an emphatic abolitionist and

\textsuperscript{178} “Canterbury Female Boarding School,” \textit{Norwich Courier}, 21 March 1832, 3.

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{181} “Miss Prudence Crandall,” \textit{Litchfield Enquirer}, 18 April 1833, 2.
Unitarian minister from nearby Brooklyn, and Arnold Buffum, an agent for the New England Anti-Slavery Society, to represent her. 182 Upon their arrival, May and Buffum were barred from defending Crandall on the basis that they were not Canterbury natives. 183 The committee began by putting forth a series of resolutions concerning the plan. But first, the committee established their opinion on the results of the proposed school:

The obvious tendency of which would be, to collect within the town of Canterbury, large numbers of persons from other States, whose characters and habits might be various and unknown to us, thereby rendering insecure the persons, property, and reputations of our own citizens. 184

The rhetoric used by the Canterburians echoes the sentiments of the New Haven town meeting two years prior. The townspeople feared an increased presence of free blacks would result in vice and upset the prosperity of the town. After speeches by prominent members of the town reinforced these fears, the meeting unanimously approved of the following resolutions:

*Thereupon Resolved*, That the localities of a school, for the people of color, at any place within the limits of this town, for the admission of persons from foreign jurisdictions, meets with our unqualified disapprobation, and it is to be understood, that the inhabitants of Canterbury protest against it, in the most earnest manner.  
*Resolved*, That a Committee be now appointed, to be composed of the Civil authority and Selectment, who shall make known to the person contemplating the establishment of said school, the sentiments, and objections entertained by this meeting, in reference to said school, point out to her the injurious effects, and the incalculable evils, resulting from

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182 Samuel J. May, *Letters to Andrew T. Judson, Esq. and others in Canterbury, Remonstrating with them on their unjust and unjustifiable procedure relative to Miss Crandall and her School for Colored Females* (Brooklyn: Advertiser Press, 1833), 7.
183 The Canterbury Committee claimed that “two of these foreign gentlemen presented to the moderator a request to speak in behalf of Miss Crandall. This was a proceeding so novel in Connecticut, that the moderator was obliged to say to those who thus interrupted the meeting, that it was not admissible.” *(Norwich Courier, 27 March 1833).*
184 “To the American Colonization Society,” *Norwich Courier*, 27 March 1833, 3.
such an establishment within this town, and persuade her if possible to abandon the project.\textsuperscript{185}

While the town’s resolutions are significant in exposing their racist beliefs about a potential black populace, they were not legally binding. At best, they could “persuade” Prudence Crandall to close her school. On March 14, an attempt was made to convince Crandall to sell the building and abandon the school project. Canterbury’s citizens believed if the school was allowed to exist, that “New England [would] become the Liberia of America!!”\textsuperscript{186} In spite of this opposition, Crandall refused to acquiesce to the town’s demands.

The people of Canterbury proceeded to resort to new tactics. First, they began a concerted effort of boycott and terrorism in an attempt to drive Crandall and her students away from the town. Local businesses refused to sell goods to the students, rocks shattered the building’s windows, and stagecoach drivers refused to bring additional students into town.\textsuperscript{187} These attacks continued well into the 1830s, as her home was pelted with stones and trash, her well was poisoned with animal waste,\textsuperscript{188} and her cat was killed and hanged on her fence.\textsuperscript{189}

As the people of Canterbury attempted to take justice into their own hands, they also made an appeal to the state legislature. Without legal authority, the school, legally purchased by Crandall in 1831, could remain open. This changed on May 24, 1833.

\textsuperscript{185} “To the American Colonization Society,” \textit{Norwich Courier}, 27 March 1833, 3.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{187} Anne Farrow, \textit{Complicity}, 158.
\textsuperscript{189} This incident led William Lloyd Garrison to express his rarely seen and morbid sense of humor. In a letter to George Benson written July 10, 1834, Garrison quipped: “The Canterburians lately killed a cat, cut her throat, and hung her by the neck to Prudence’s gate. We may say to the victim, Re-quires-cat in pace—and to the perpetrators of the murderous deed, ‘You have added another black cat to the long cat-ologue of your offences.’ The cat-astrophe will be duly chronicled, not dog-matically, but cat-egorically.”
when the Connecticut Assembly passed what would become know as the “Black Law.”

The Black Law began with a preamble that suggested the racial prejudices held by the people of New Haven and Canterbury were not unique:

Attempts have been made to establish literary institutions in this state, for the instruction of coloured persons belonging to other states and countries, which would tend to the great increase of the coloured population of the state, and thereby to the injury of the people…

The fear of an influx of free blacks into the state was not a localized notion, but a state belief. In order to prevent this from occurring, the Legislature explicitly prohibited the formation of any school that would attract blacks from outside the state into Connecticut without permission from a consenting town. Understanding the racial climate throughout Connecticut, the Assembly effectively banned any black “school, academy, or literary institution” that could potentially grow to national prominence.

With legal authority in hand, the people of Canterbury swiftly arrested Prudence Crandall. In August, her trial commenced to decide if she had indeed violated the Black Law. Crandall’s defense argued that the Black Law was unconstitutional, citing the fact that “blacks were, and had been recognized as citizens of the United States, by being allowed to maintain actions in the United States courts.” If blacks were in fact citizens, the defense asserted, then the Connecticut law violated the constitutional article, “which enacts that the citizens of each state shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several states.”

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191 Ibid.
192 “Trial of Miss Prudence Crandall,” Litchfield Enquirer, 5 September 18, 3.
193 Ibid.
Predictably, the court decided that the law was constitutional (and implicitly asserted its belief that free blacks were not full citizens). The Justices could not, however, agree on a verdict for Crandall. As a result of this and later trials, Crandall was free to operate her school during a legal deadlock that lasted long into 1834. But by September 1834, legal persuasion was no longer necessary. On September 9, after various acts of terrorism had driven Crandall closer to capitulation, vandals broke into the school and destroyed the lower rooms. The next day, Crandall decided to permanently close the school. By 1835, Crandall had left the state for Elk Falls, Kansas, where she died in 1890.194

The fates of the “African College” of New Haven and the “School for Colored Females” of Canterbury are representative of a strong undercurrent of racist ideology in early nineteenth-century Connecticut. Rather than opposing either school for a variety of social or economic reasons, the townspeople of New Haven and Canterbury condemned each plan on the basis of race. Samuel J. May recognized this position soon after the first town meeting in Canterbury:

A year or two since, some benevolent individuals proposed to erect an institution, at New Haven, for the education of colored young men. The design was defeated by violent opposition. If the citizens had opposed merely its location in that City, it may have escaped condemnation, for such a seminary there might have been very prejudicial to Yale College. But it was only too apparent, that their hostility to the institution was peculiarly embittered by their prejudices against the color of those, who were to be educated at it. So too in the case at Canterbury; no one pretends that there would have been any opposition to Miss Crandall’s school, if her pupils were to be white. The tincture of their skin then it is which has called out all men of influence in array against her; and has even procured from the freemen of the town an expression of their “unqualified disapprobation” of her plan.195

194 Anne Farrow, *Complicity*, 163.
Connecticut’s citizens feared the growing population of free blacks within the state and prevented any plan that would potentially enlarge it past its negligible status. In this way, it is clear why the state embraced colonization so readily. Educating and uplifting free blacks was acceptable as long as they did not become neighbors and community members. The end results of the failures in New Haven and Canterbury caused May to question the values Connecticut’s citizens believed in:

Yet have our colored brethren been twice angrily denied permission to seek this blessing, to the extent that they have desired. Will the people of Connecticut generally, countenance these violations of our civil and religious principles? If they will, let them no longer claim to be a republican, much less a Christian people!196

Connecticut, both on a local and state level, had repeatedly subjugated the status of free blacks in order to preserve the “prosperity” of their towns. As the state moved into the 1830s and 1840s, the racial prejudice exposed early in the nineteenth century would explode into violence against those who would promote egalitarian principles.

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196 May, letters to Andrew T. Judson, Esq. and others in Canterbury, 19.
Chapter Four
“At Hand with Error and Oppression”: Racism and Negrophobia in Connecticut

In February 1840, in the midst of rising sympathy for the *Amistad* captives, abolitionist agent Erasmus D. Hudson visited Willimantic in order to speak on the horrors of slavery. On this trip, Hudson encountered stiff resistance. In his diary, Hudson caustically noted, “Parson Atwood is belching forth denunciation versus Abolitionists, and nonresistants or peace principles—and Garrison! That ‘he had rather the small pox should be introduced into that town than abolition!’”

This hostile reaction came as no surprise to Hudson, as he had encountered such rhetoric frequently throughout the state. In the 1830s, abolitionists within Connecticut began organizing with the intent of spreading the politics of immediate emancipation throughout the state. Delivering an unpopular message, the Connecticut abolitionists encountered cool receptions and frequently violent opposition. Throughout the 1830s, Connecticut abolitionism remained unique within the movement’s national framework, both in its membership and in the opposition it faced.

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To Connecticut citizens like Parson Atwood, the plague seemed preferable to an infestation of Garrisonian abolitionists. After all, the state of Connecticut was slow to replace its gradual abolition statute with an outright emancipation law. Many of the state’s residents were deeply negrophobic, and their racism, more than any other factor, hindered their acceptance of abolition. Even northerners sympathetic to slaves were reluctant to embrace immediate emancipation. The prominent members of the state’s early anti-slavery societies were earlier present on the member rolls of local colonization societies. Even when these people did shift their support to immediate emancipation, the colonizationist principle of removing free blacks elsewhere remained a prevalent belief.

While some reformers readily embraced the cause of black uplift through the New Haven associations, little progress had been made in arousing anti-slavery sentiment. Pioneers such as Simeon Jocelyn and Prudence Crandall had attempted to establish institutions that would help free blacks. While these proposals found adamant supporters throughout the Northeast, they were greeted with hostile opposition in Connecticut. In the aftermath of the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, many Connecticut citizens feared the population of free blacks that was growing within the state. The Gradual Emancipation Act of 1784 had swelled the ranks of free African-Americans in Connecticut to almost 8,000 by 1820 and in the 1830s this number continued to grow. Even while the numbers continued to grow, free blacks were an almost inconsequential proportion of Connecticut. In 1820, the federal census recorded Connecticut’s population as

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275,248. At 8,000, free African Americans in Connecticut represented only 2.9% of the population.

White fears were grossly out of proportion to the perceived free black “threat.” White residents approved legislation such as the 1818 constitution and the 1833 Black Law that restricted free blacks socially, politically, and economically. In 1831, the Connecticut Herald had demonstrated Connecticut’s tentative support of black education when it wrote that African Americans had a right to education, but worried that this education “tended to amalgamation.” The racist rhetoric surrounding these laws was a frequent cause for concern for egalitarian observers. In a satirical letter published in the Connecticut Courant concerning the Black Law, the writer, exaggerating the state’s racist rhetoric, commented:

The law does not prohibit colored people coming into the State—this, you know, would be against the constitution of the United States; but it declares they shall not be instructed. And why should they be instructed? They are not white, and it is doubtful they have souls, or will exist in a future state. As well as I thought of the Legislature, composed as it was of true and fresh republicans, I was afraid they would hardly come up to the important point; but they have done it, and the new statute is an enduring monument of glory, at which our sister States and the old world too, will be amazed. Before the committee reported the bill to the legislature, they consulted a learned phrenologist in the City of Hartford; and had brought into their room several skulls of the African race; they were fully satisfied from the phrenological developments of the head, that blacks do not belong to the human species.

In limiting black education within the state, Connecticut citizens resorted to the scientific racism common in the South’s literature defending slavery. It is in the midst of this deep-seated negrophobia of the 1830s that Connecticut’s abolitionists began to organize.

200 Warner, New Haven Negroes, 57.
In establishing Connecticut’s fledgling anti-slavery movement, New Haven once again led the way. In June 1833, Simeon and Nathaniel Jocelyn, in conjunction with former members of the African Improvement Society, established the city’s Anti-Slavery Society. This organization, with its basis in moral improvement, represented the more liberal arm of New Haven’s African American benevolent societies. In 1835, New Haven became home to a chapter of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race. While the Union promoted itself as an abolition society intent on helping African Americans, its members did not yet oppose colonization. In the Union’s 1835 *Exposition of the Objects and Plans of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of The Colored Race*, the executive committee stated:

> The American Colonization Society, with its Auxiliaries, is planting colonies of colored Americans in Africa. In this undertaking, if benevolently and wisely managed, we see nothing hostile to the relief and elevation of the Colored Race in this country; but on the contrary, much, if we mistake not, which tends to elevate their social and moral standing.\(^{202}\)

Significantly more conservative than the New Haven Anti-Slavery Society, the chapter consisted of active Connecticut colonizationists such as Leonard Bacon, Benjamin Silliman, and Roger Sherman.\(^{203}\) The New Haven chapter of the Union represented the typical way of thinking for whites in the state when confronted with slavery. In discussing the issue during Connecticut’s Tercentenary in 1935, Ralph Foster Weld accurately noted:

> It is apparent that sentiment in Connecticut during the first third of the nineteenth century was in general opposed to agitating the slavery issue; it was not favorable to the establishment of negro schools; but it was in sympathy with non-contentious expressions of good-will toward the

\(^{202}\) *Exposition of the Objects and Plans of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of The Colored Race* (Boston: Light and Horton, 1835), 7.

negro, such as the colonization idea. At the same time, the people of the state had no wish to perpetuate the system within their borders.\textsuperscript{204}

This opposition began to turn hostile just as local anti-slavery societies began to develop a presence within the state. The circumstances surrounding the Prudence Crandall School and the people of Canterbury had demonstrated the lengths to which ordinary and even prominent members would go to oppose an increase in the local black population. When these tactics failed, the townspeople attacked the school with crowbars and attempted to burn the building to the ground.\textsuperscript{205}

In 1834, a proslavery mob assaulted and forcibly drove the parson of the First Presbyterian Church of Norwich from town due to his abolitionist rhetoric.\textsuperscript{206} Henry Ludlow, a New York preacher and frequent target of anti-abolitionist violence, was assaulted when he was visiting Meriden in 1835. While he was lecturing in Meriden’s First Congregational Church, a large crowd gathered outside and began to throw stones at the building. Their appetite for violence still unquenched, the mob broke through the locked door of the church and hurled rotten eggs and refuse at the audience.\textsuperscript{207}

Connecticut residents did not stop at intimidating traveling lecturers. In January 1837, abolitionists in Litchfield County met in Wolcottville, now Torrington, with the intent of establishing a county anti-slavery society. After being barred from all churches and meeting halls in the area, the group met in a barn owned by a sympathetic neighbor. As the meeting progressed, a proslavery mob rumored to be “under the influence of spirits” formed and threatened the lives of the abolitionists. Forced to disband and needing to

\textsuperscript{205} Stewart, \textit{Holy Warriors}, 63.
\textsuperscript{206} Strother, \textit{The Underground Railroad in Connecticut}, 35.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid.
flee the town, the abolitionists found refuge in neighboring Torringford, which allowed the use of their meetinghouse.\textsuperscript{208} While Torrington would later lay claim to an abolitionist legacy due to its status as the birthplace of John Brown, its sentiment concerning abolitionism during the 1830s was distinctly against the movement.\textsuperscript{209}

Despite significant opposition, local societies continued to be established throughout the state. According to the American Anti-Slavery Society’s Fourth Annual Report issued in 1837, Connecticut was home to thirty-nine local societies with over 1600 active members.\textsuperscript{210} While the state’s population remained divided concerning the perpetuation of slavery, virtually all citizens possessed an underlying belief system concerning free African Americans. As will be seen, this universal ideology made Connecticut citizens, both ambivalent and abolitionist alike, distinct from their New England brethren.

Individual Connecticut citizens formulated their opinions on slavery for a variety of reasons. Chief among them was economics. Starting with the Gradual Emancipation law of 1784, policy concerning slaves and African Americans within the state was decided based upon money rather than moral reasoning. Emancipation in Connecticut was justified primarily in economic terms. Ralph Foster Weld argued:

\begin{quote}
It had begun to be realized that slaves were unprofitable and a threat to free white labor. The awakening to this economic truth was not peculiar
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{208} Orcutt, \textit{The History of Torrington}, 215. \\
\textsuperscript{209} It is interesting to note that it appears the residents of Torrington attempted to whitewash the incident immediately afterward. George Woodruff, a prominent Connecticut politician and Litchfield resident, wrote to his son Reuben, “A county abolition meeting was held at Wolcottville yesterday in a barn as they could procure no other place, from which as it was cold they adjourned to the Church in Torringford.” Connected as he was, Woodruff certainly would have heard the details coming out of the neighboring town only eight miles away. It appears either Woodruff chose to gloss over the incident, or the Wolcottville residents wished to downplay their involvement altogether. \\
\end{footnotes}
Connecticut lawmakers believed that in order to boost the state economy, free white labor needed a greater advantage over slave labor. By phasing out the institution within the state, ordinary white citizens would have a stronger role in the Connecticut economy. Gradual emancipation not only improved economic conditions for poor whites, but for elites as well. Connecticut slaveholders, like their counterparts in New York and New Jersey, viewed gradual emancipation as a final opportunity to turn a profit on their property. While Connecticut succeeded in passing a gradual emancipation law in 1784, it did not prevent slaveholders from leaving the state with their property. Residents living on the western border of the state recalled seeing wagons passing at night, bringing slaves out of the state to be sold elsewhere.

The temptation to sell slaves before they could be emancipated is highlighted in James Mars’s 1868 autobiography. Mars, born in 1790, recalled his master telling him that he was going to take his family South to be sold. Mars stated, “Mr. Thompson used to come up from Virginia and talk about our going South...He had come to sell his farm and to take us all South. My father said he would not go alive; the minister told him he must go; my father said he never would.”

Thompson’s attempt to move the Mars family to Virginia directly violated a law passed in 1792 that imposed a $334 dollar fine for each slave that was removed from the state. In attempting to do so, Thompson was hoping to maintain his investment in his slaves and circumvent the gradual emancipation law of Connecticut. While Mr. Thompson was identified specifically in James Mars’s

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biography by name, many slaveholders successfully left Connecticut to sell their slaves without repercussions.

As Connecticut began to industrialize in the 1820s, the state became increasingly reliant on southern raw materials, namely cotton and wool. By 1845, Connecticut had become the fifth largest producer of refined cotton in the United States.\(^{213}\) These mills, staffed by poor whites, relied upon southern cotton to turn massive profits. While Connecticut citizens may have opposed slavery within the state, their economy was inexorably tied to the peculiar institution in the South.

These economic ties to the South help explain the reluctance of many Connecticut citizens to embrace immediate emancipation. Moderate voices wished not to offend southerners and as a result opposed the tactics of the Garrisonian abolitionists. Horace Bushnell, a leading Congregationalist theologian in Connecticut, lent his voice to this notion in his 1839 speech, *A Discourse on the Slavery Question*. Bushnell declared:

> Here is the method in which the Anti-Slavery movement ought to have begun. Let one or two Christian gentlemen have gone South and conferred with the more candid and humane citizens, approaching them as gentlemen standing in a position of natural jealousy. Let them have taken the post of suggestion, inquiring whether it was possible to do nothing for the family state, nothing for the more adequate security of the slave’s person, nothing for the education of his mind and the salvation of his immortal being. There have always been many aching hearts, at the South, in reference to these more horrid features of slavery, and it would have been easy to draw them forward into greater courage and efficiency. In this way, beyond all question, a strong movement could have been begun, in which the South would have taken the lead themselves.\(^{214}\)

In explaining his plan for converting the South, Bushnell revealed his naivé about slavery. Bushnell, with his experience in the Connecticut Congregationalist revival in the

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1820s, wrongfully assumed that southerners would convert when faced with moral suasion. As Ezekiel Birdseye, a fellow Connecticut native and ardent abolitionist, found in his travels throughout Tennessee in the 1840s, most southerners found nothing wrong with the brutal treatment of slaves. Southern slaveholders could not empathize with their slaves because they viewed them as distinctly inferior entities, not equals. Francis Gillette, a prominent Connecticut politician who ran both as a Liberty Party and Free Soil candidate, wrote a scathing response to Bushnell’s speech shortly afterwards. Published as a pamphlet issued by Connecticut abolitionists, Gillette countered:

Let us then suppose that “one or two Christian Gentlemen” had started on this errand—what assurances would the author have had of its performance? He can doubtless recollect some instances, in which “Christian Gentlemen,” who have gone South and resided there a somewhat less time, that it would take “one or two” to traverse the whole slave region and “confer with the more candid and humane citizens,” returned with new views of slavery, and represented it as being not quite so bad, after all, as some people, who never saw it, imagine. Or he may be acquainted with some other cases, in which these “Christian Gentlemen” never returned at all; but took the “post of suggestion,” and conferred with some of the “more candid and humane,” and it may be added, wealthy “citizens,” about the gentle hands and rich dowries of their daughters. Instead of converting the South to liberty, they became converts to slavery. Like the messengers of old sent to spy out an adjacent country, they found it a land flowing with milk and honey; or if not literally with these, with certain other attractions quite as enticing and captivating to their hearts.

Gillette countered that slavery was an institution that southerners would not eliminate as a result of simple moral reasoning. Gillette realistically argued that moral suasion had failed in the past and would continue to fail as long as the South maintained the upper hand in the national slavery debate. Gillette instead argued that the only true solution

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215 Durwood Dunn, An Abolitionist in the Appalachian South (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).
was to continue to engage in Garrisonian rhetoric in order to spur the national population towards action.

As a prominent member of the Connecticut elite, Bushnell’s opinion would have echoed the sentiments of a large proportion of the state’s population. Both politically and economically, the majority of Connecticut citizens would not risk supporting immediate emancipation if it would harm their relations with the South.

Despite the intense opposition to abolitionism in the state, the movement gained enough members to establish a state society in 1838. On February 24, 1838, a notice was placed in The Emancipator declaring that a Connecticut Anti-Slavery Convention would convene in Hartford on the 28th. The ad was signed by almost 2000 people from throughout Connecticut who wished the abolition movement in the state “would be carried on with more energy.” The group’s constitution reflected the national voice of William Lloyd Garrison and the policy of immediate emancipation. In declaring the core values of the movement, the society stated:

Immediate abolition, on the part of the master, is the instant and practical recognition of his slaves as men, entitled equally with himself, to personal ownership, or to natural liberty, restrained only by just and impartial law; and on the part of the government, it is the immediate investment of the slave with the legal ownership of his own body and soul; with a title, in law, to his wife, to his children, to his labor, and to personal liberty. This, we believe, is the right of the slave, and the duty of the slaveholding powers…

In this way, the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society did not waver from the stance taken by the national organization. When considering the aftermath of emancipation, however, the Society departed from national views. Connecticut abolitionists desperately hoped the

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217 The Emancipator, Extra, 24 February 1838.
liberated former slaves would stay in the South and that laws restricting the freedmen’s mobility would control emancipation. The Society believed that if southerners were forced to free their slaves, instead of looking elsewhere for new employees, they would simply rehire the now freed black population. In explaining their reasoning, the abolitionist group resorted to the same language put forth by proslavery theorists. The Society wrote:

We doubt not they would choose, in preference to any other operatives which could be obtained from the old world or the new, those who have been trained among them, accustomed as slaves to subordination and prompt obedience, inured to the climate, versed in the agriculture, manufactures and mechanical arts of the country, and familiar with privations and hardships, eminently fitting them to produce larger crops than other laborers, and at lower wages.  

In supporting immediate emancipation, the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society attempted to reason with the South by using a proslavery argument. Since the current slaves were “accustomed to subordination and prompt obedience,” Connecticut abolitionists believed they would act as exemplary free laborers. By this logic, it is clear that Connecticut citizens, abolitionist or not, believed in the racist ideology prominent in the early nineteenth century. By sharing this racial ideology with the South, the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society also shared the South’s greatest fear.

When The Emancipator first published the notice of a convention, the advertisement listed a short declaration of abolitionist statements. In this declaration, two distinct references to racial revolution are present. In establishing the convention’s beliefs, the notice proclaimed, “we entertain no Utopian project of ‘letting loose’ all the slaves.” This concept of emancipation put the Society at odds with their brethren in

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Massachusetts who, under William Lloyd Garrison, believed “letting loose” the slaves without restrictions was the whole point. Later in the declaration, the convention planners declared, “We do not propose to the slave to arise, and vindicate his rights.”

The Connecticut abolitionists, in declaring the sentiments of the state’s anti-slavery movement, attempted to directly address one of the main arguments Connecticut citizens held against immediate emancipation. Not only was this done in their advertising, but it appeared in the Society’s *Address of the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Convention to the People of the State* as well. After listing the goals of the Society, the address went on to discuss the means of achieving complete abolition. As its strategy, the Society explained:

> We wish to accomplish this object peaceably. We dread a servile war, from a regard to the slave and his master, to the North and the South; and we shall, therefore, shape all our measures for its accomplishment with a view to avert so distressing a catastrophe. The most prominent means on which we rely, are, prayer, truth, a virtuous public sentiment, a humane and just treatment of our people of color, and Federal legislation.

The fear of a race war, so prominent in southern literature in 1831 after the Nat Turner Rebellion, was the same fear held by an overwhelming majority of Connecticut citizens. Simeon Jocelyn’s plan for a “Negro College” in 1831 was voted against by New Haven residents based on the fear of a large black population in the city. Seven years later, the state’s leading abolitionists were still panicked by the possibility of a racial uprising.

Following the creation of the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society, the *Charter Oak* began publication in March 1838 as its literary organ. Published as a monthly, the newspaper reported on the progress of local societies as well as its general agents operating throughout the state. The stories consisted primarily of reports issued by these

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220 *The Emancipator*, Extra, 24 February 1838.
general agents and how successful their lectures were in gaining new members and acquiring much-needed donations. Occasionally, letters written from state politicians as well as ordinary subscribers were published that highlighted major issues occurring within the state. In April 1839, a letter submitted by “T. of Sherman” addressed the inherent paradox in abolitionism on Connecticut. “T. of Sherman” began by calling attention to the racism held by those who called themselves abolitionists:

Yes, my brethren, to such an alarming and lamentable extent does prejudice against color exist in the minds of abolitionists, that in more than one or two instances have the opposers, both among Christian brethren and the world’s people, been heard to brand as hypocrites some of the first members of our Society, and distinguished in the Church for zeal and piety.

This criticism, a common criticism of abolitionists held by Southerners, was nothing out of the ordinary. Connecticut’s abolitionists fell victim to the same prejudices that were held by the majority of Connecticut. “T. of Sherman” continued, however, by highlighting a major issue that separated Connecticut abolitionists from their northern brethren:

What! Must a man, gifted, educated, and distinguished for eminent piety, if he succeeds in winning the affections of a white girl, and leads her to the hymenial altar, be sacrificed upon the gallows because God, his maker, gave him dark skin? And yet an abolitionist—one of the first to enlist in the cause, and a zealous advocate of its great principles, declared to me his wish that it was the law of the land to hang white or black, who should presume to offer his or her hand in marriage to one of a different color. Such exorbitant expressions are unqualifiedly detestable; they are not consistent with our profession, and ought never more to come from the mouth of an abolitionist.

While “T. of Sherman” spoke of an instance in which one Connecticut abolitionist opposed interracial marriage, the objection was widespread throughout the state. Throughout the state’s history, Connecticut’s population vehemently opposed what was
then called “amalgamation.” In 1826, Cornwall’s Foreign Mission School for the education of Native Americans was closed after two students married women from the town.\textsuperscript{222} The fear of amalgamation was an ever-present one in Connecticut newspapers and interracial unions could not be fully accepted even by radical abolitionist ministers. James T. Dickinson, pastor of the Second Congregational Church in Norwich, issued a sermon on July 4, 1834, in which he ardently defended Garrisonian abolitionism. When addressing the objection that anti-slavery societies encouraged amalgamation, however, Dickinson equivocated. He explained that this was “a slander upon the Society. We do not desire to see such things take place, nor on the other hand do we think it is wise or proper to make laws against them. If, in here and there an instance, the two races shall intermarry, we shall consider them as persons of \textit{bad taste}, and there we shall leave the matter.”\textsuperscript{223}

Thus, in singling out one anonymous abolitionist, “T. of Sherman” was venting his frustration against a statewide phenomenon. He closed his rebuke with a powerful denunciation and explanation of the harmful nature of Connecticut’s racism:

Nor is this all, my brethren, about which I complain,—a number of you have been heard to utter feelings and make declarations like the following, viz: I don’t believe in their mixing together in society, and I am not going to have the colored man at my table, or at the fireside with my family, nor yet in my slip at church. Are these facts? They are; and why is it? Well now, my brethren I feel bound to reprove. We must be consistent, or all that we do, or all that we say, will be but as casting influence into the treasury of our opposers to help them build up a strong hold of Satan which we have been laboring to demolish. O! this prejudice, this prejudice! As Mr. Birney well said, the South will believe Northern Abolitionists to be hypocrites until they treat free colored men \textit{irrespective} of color.\textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{222} Orcutt, \textit{History of Torrington}, 215.
\textsuperscript{223} James T. Dickinson, \textit{Sermon, Delivered in the Second Congregational Church in Norwich, on the fourth of July, 1834} (Norwich: Published by the Anti-Slavery society, J. Dunham, Printer, 1834), 30.
\textsuperscript{224} “Hindrances to Our Progress,” \textit{Charter Oak} April 1839, 1.
Echoing Gillette, “T. of Sherman” wished for Connecticut citizens and especially abolitionists to unite against the racist ideology of the South. Connecticut abolitionists, while striving for immediate and universal emancipation, in reality feared racial integration within their own state. In working for the immediate abolition of slavery, most state abolitionists operated under a moral paradox. While they believed that slaves deserved equal freedom based on religious and political principles, they did not believe this entitled them to social equality as well. This racist ideology, so prevalent in southern proslavery rhetoric, was present even within Connecticut’s abolitionist organization.

While racism within Connecticut abolitionism was present throughout the 1830s and 1840s, there were notable exceptions. The primary source of articles in the *Charter Oak* continued to be reports from its agents throughout its lifespan. From 1838 to 1840, Dr. Erasmus Darwin Hudson acted as the Chief General Agent of both the *Charter Oak* and the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society. Hudson, a native of Torrington, was born in 1806 to Daniel Coe and Rhoda Fowler Hudson. From 1823 to 1827, Hudson studied medicine at the Berkshire Medical College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.\(^{225}\) Establishing himself in Connecticut in 1833, Hudson before 1837 was most known for his work as an accomplished surgeon. While Hudson took an interest in the temperance movement during this period, he was never truly active in moral reform societies until 1837. As an abolitionist, Hudson helped to arrange the violently welcomed meeting in Torrington to establish the Litchfield County Abolitionist Society. Hudson served as its treasurer from 1837 until 1839 when he became a General Agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society. During this period, Hudson understood the importance of radical abolitionism and

\(^{225}\) “Erasmus Darwin Hudson Sr., Biographical Note,” Hudson Family Papers, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts. Amherst, Massachusetts.
immediate emancipation. In particular, Hudson found Garrison to be a mobilizing force necessary to bring abolitionism into the national discourse. In his diary, Hudson gushed over Garrison, “What a friend! What a man! What a Christian! What a philanthropist and lover of all mankind! The great reformer!”

In 1838, as treasurer of the Litchfield County Anti-Slavery Society, Hudson attempted to invite Garrison to lecture at a meeting held on September 11, 1838. Hudson wished Garrison to visit Litchfield County due to his reputation as a “Notorious Infidel.” Hudson communicated:

> Many of the friends of the Slaves in this County would be exceedingly gratified if you could favor the Meeting with your presence and a Speech on that occasion. For a number of reasons, Some of the people in this region have… horrible ugly-ideas of yourself. That you are [a] sort of desperado—and therefore any cause…—if any way connected with such a “critter”—must be bad.

In inviting Garrison to the anti-slavery meeting, Hudson was attempting to counteract the harsh opposition to abolitionism in the northwest corner of the state. Hudson believed that if people saw Garrison, they would realize his demonic qualities had been greatly exaggerated. As Hudson continued to travel and lecture throughout Connecticut, he encountered a mixed reception to his message. While some towns embraced his message of emancipation, others shunned his presence and frequently resorted to violence. Depending on the town, Hudson received varying degrees of opposition. Most commonly, Hudson visited a town only to find no church would allow him to speak. Rather than making a stand in these circumstances, Hudson would accept an invitation to

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227 Erasmus D. Hudson to William Lloyd Garrison, 24 August 1838, William Lloyd Garrison Papers, Antislavery Manuscripts, Rare Books and Manuscripts, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts.
When Hudson was able to speak, he frequently was harassed by what he referred to as the “mobocracy.” These anti-abolitionist mobs frequently resorted to intimidation tactics and minor acts of terror. On a trip through southeast Connecticut, Hudson attempted to give a lecture in New Fairfield. In his diary, Hudson recounted the actions of the mob and their attempt to drive him from town:

I went to New Fairfield. Meeting house fastened up. Met in Bro. Taylor’s house. Mob gathered provided much disturbance blew trumpets. Threw pepper into house and trimmed Taylor’s horse (as mine, which was taken off as precaution). 2 great fellows painted their faces black and came in. I told them the blackness of their hearts had got onto their faces.

While these hostile attacks on Hudson’s gatherings clearly rattled him, he remained steadfast in rallying against slavery. Hudson frequently resorted to small jokes and turns of phrase in order to downplay the seriousness of the threats he faced. In describing a hostile mob in Brookfield, Hudson quipped, “The Brookfield people had their feathers to sleep afore and their Tar and Blacking, which they had lavishly offered to make me a coat.” Hudson also allowed himself a sense of satisfaction in overcoming hostile crowds and bringing small groups of people into the movement. At the end of the New Fairfield entry, Hudson wrote simply, “Organized a society.”

Not all of the attacks on Hudson remained small acts of intimidation. In its December issue, the *Charter Oak* reported on an attempt to terrorize or even assassinate Hudson in the town of Wilton. In a letter to the paper, Hudson described the event:

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228 Erasmus D. Hudson, Personal Journal, 21 October 1838, Hudson Family Papers, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts.
230 Erasmus D. Hudson, Personal Journal, 26 October 1838, Hudson Family Papers, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts.
I had continued the exercises about one hour and a half, when a dreadful explosion took place, directly under the windows. The glass rattled, and the audience were greatly terrified—40 panes of glass broken. The concussion was very great, and the report so loud that it was heard distinctly and shook a house six miles distant. The powder was confined in sacking-cloth, tarred, then wound with tarred rope and dipped in tar. It was set on fire with a slow match as was supposed.²³¹

This bomb, placed by townspeople hostile to the message of abolitionism, was not an isolated incident. In an October 31, 1838 entry, Hudson wrote only one line: “Baptist House—Blown up by the Mob.”²³²

Hudson’s diary entries describe encounters with a hostile populace in towns all throughout Connecticut. While unfriendly reactions to his presence were not out of character for ambivalent New Englanders, the acts of violence would not have been out of place in the Deep South. In this way, Connecticut’s population and even its abolitionists remained unique in the northern states. Afflicted with a Negrophobia that was reinforced with proslavery, racist ideology, the people of Connecticut remained opposed to complete abolitionism and racial equality. Ambivalent or abolitionist, Connecticut’s population remained divided on the issue of immediate emancipation and African-American rights until the Amistad trial put the state in the national spotlight.

This it not to say that Hudson did not find towns throughout Connecticut that welcomed the principles of radical abolitionism. In the process of lecturing throughout the state, Hudson encountered various “pockets” of both abolitionist rejection and support, sometimes even in adjacent towns. Hudson recorded the varying levels of acceptance throughout Connecticut in both his journal and letters to the Charter Oak.

²³¹ “Another Powder Plot!,” Charter Oak, December 1838, 3.
These entries help to reveal the stark divide among Connecticut’s populace and also demonstrate Hudson’s difficulty in finding places to stay during his frequent travels.

In correspondence to the Charter Oak, Hudson and other agents recalled each step of their tours throughout the state and the status of abolitionism in each town. As the Chief General Agent of the Charter Oak and of the Connecticut Anti-Slavery Society, Hudson’s reports reprinted in the paper were the main means of conveying the progress of Connecticut anti-slavery. His first report, appearing in the September 1838 issue, described in depth the gains and obstacles in Litchfield County. Hudson began his journey in Harwinton, one of the towns used as a central meeting place for the local Litchfield County Anti-Slavery Society. Concerning this meeting, Hudson noted, “the meeting was a triumphant one, and disclosed to our enemies that abolitionism was not sickly, ‘dead’, nor ‘dying’, in Litchfield County, but in good health and thriving.”233 The Litchfield County Anti-Slavery Society chose Harwinton as a central meeting site due to its receptiveness to abolitionism. In explaining why certain towns were accepting of the cause, Hudson frequently pointed towards the opinion of the local ministers. Hudson’s September report spoke highly of Harwinton’s minister:

The fearless, apostolic and Christian stand which their minister has taken, and so far in the strength and fear of God sustained, while clouds and darkness have hovered round about him, and loud thunders ‘roared’ in his ears, is a worthy example for all watchmen on the walls of Zion. Every body, yea, even enemies, must reverence such a man of God.234

Hudson did not frequently find ministers upon which he could shower such praise. In New Hartford, Hudson spoke of a division among the clergy. In his report, Hudson stated, “one of the clergy is a member of the Society, the other ‘unflinchingly’ opposed.”

233 “From Our Agent: The Cause In Litchfield County”, The Charter Oak, September 1838, 2.
234 Ibid.
Similarly, Hudson highlighted the difficulty in rallying support in Washington due to the “friends disheartened because of the opposition of their minister.” Overall, Hudson found a receptive audience in Litchfield County. Far removed from the influence of industries tied to southern cotton, the people of Litchfield County remained willing to act as “friends of the slaves.” Hudson did, however, speak of one significant exception to this trend:

And what shall I say of Litchfield? Not a hopeless place—we have many warm friends there who are diffusing light. Generally the people have ‘bowed the knee to the dark spirit of slavery.’ Their press is ready to barter away our liberties and its own, and shows its servility by publishing scurrilous stories about amalgamation…The people of Litchfield, I am informed, are very susceptible on the subject of slavery. They have too many southern friends and their ‘peculiar institutions’ to take care of to be any thing but pro-slavery.

As the county seat, Litchfield enjoyed a considerable amount of prosperity for a rural town during the early nineteenth century. During this time, Litchfield became home to a law school, a female academy, as well as various local trading industries. As the town grew more prosperous, it developed more ties to southern businessmen and lawyers in training. With strong connections the South, Litchfield found little necessity in embracing abolitionism.

In February 1839, the *Charter Oak* published a letter describing the tour of agent R.S. Rust through New Haven County. Throughout Connecticut’s history, New Haven County remained a center of industry and prosperity in the state, benefiting from trade on both the Connecticut River and the Long Island Sound. As Rust traveled through this

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235 “From Our Agent: The Cause In Litchfield County”, *The Charter Oak*, September 1838, 2.
236 Ibid.
economically prosperous region of Connecticut, he encountered a reception significantly different from the one Hudson received in Litchfield County. Rust began:

I commenced operations in Guilford. Brother Hudson left a lot of Anti-Slavery publications in this place, a short time since, which commenced the agitation of the delicate subject of slavery…I addressed them in the Town House upon the sin of slavery, and their duty in its removal. The audience were attentive and orderly, with the exception of a few boys, who left the house in a disorderly manner, and commenced an assault upon the building. After discharging a few volleys of pro-slavery arguments, that is, brick-bats and stones, they retreated. We have a small, yet increasing number of ardent friends in this place.237

While Rust attempted to portray his tour in a positive light, his description of each town spoke primarily of the “few ardent friends” he encountered. More frequently, Rust spoke of circumstances such as the one he found in Fair Haven:

I could not find much anti-slavery in Fair Haven; very little effort has been made there to arouse their attention to the evils of slavery, although much has been done by a few organs, to vilify and misrepresent the Anti-Slavery enterprise…It is impossible for a stranger to introduce the subject there now; there is no place that can be obtained to lecture in at present, but I trust there will be soon.238

Fair Haven’s hostility towards abolitionism can be seen as symptomatic of the greater attitudes of the region. While Rust noted that Fair Haven was home to a Methodist preacher who “is doing what he can to remove prejudice and disseminate truth,” most citizens remained ambivalent towards or even ignorant of the cause of abolitionism. In Prospect, Rust complained about the difficulty in reasoning with his audience. He wrote, “Occasionally the opposers made a remark, one of them contradicted me, when I stated that thirteen of the States were free, and thirteen slaveholding for, says he, ‘every body

237 "From Our Agents: Our Cause In New Haven County," The Charter Oak, February 1839, 3.
238 Ibid., 2.
knows that there are only twenty-four States in the Union.’ So much for pro-slavery intelligence.”

In his travels, Rust also was not exempt from the violence that befell other agents touring throughout the state. The vast majority of townspeople within New Haven County remained outwardly hostile towards anti-slavery and voiced their opposition by disrupting lectures and threatening the lives of anti-slavery agents. In Wolcott, Rust described the “boisterous time” he encountered:

My first lecture was given in the school house. When we commenced our meeting, by invoking the assistance and protection of Almighty God, the mob assailed the building with clubs and stones, and made such a hideous noise, that I began to think that there was a recess in hell. Violent opposition continued during the address. Finding that they could not rout us by their out door assaults, they entered the house, led on by a worthless fellow, who was emphatically drunk. There was a bottle of “liquid fire and distilled damnation” passed around among them, which was an important assistant in preparing them for action.

Rust found it important to highlight the inebriation of the mob not as an insult, but as a way to rally a growing constituency to the abolitionist cause. In the late 1830s, members of the temperance movement within Connecticut were beginning to accept anti-slavery in greater numbers. Prominent members of the cause such as Theodore Dwight Weld first became involved in moral uplift through the temperance movement. Rust described these people as “men who fought in the front rank in the temperance cause. They are staunch, undaunted friends of the oppressed.” Upon arriving in Danbury in April 1839, Hudson wrote that he was “kindly entertained at Brother Crofut’s Temperance House, the only one in Fairfield County. I hope the friends of the slave and temperance

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239 Ibid., 2.
241 Davis, Inhuman Bondage, 252.
will remember him when traveling that way.”\textsuperscript{243} The temperance movement was also an early movement in which both black and white leaders were willing to cooperate. James Brewer Stewart notes:

In temperance, black leaders found a national cause, also popular with white reformers, which held personal meaning and community promise. By the 1840’s, blacks had created statewide temperance societies in Connecticut and New York, as well as an additional organization which embraced these two states and Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{244}

Touring abolitionists understood that by describing the pro-slavery forces as abusers of alcohol, it provided a convenient method for recruiting significant numbers of former temperance activists.

After two relatively uneventful speeches at a private home, Rust reported the events surrounding his fourth and final lecture:

The opposers of free discussion, finding that they could not break up our meeting, or close our mouths, started on another hellish errand—a cropping campaign, the result of which was, the Rev. Mr. Chapman’s horse was sheared, and the leather top of his sleigh was cut up—completely destroyed. Other neighbor’s animals were assailed. They cut a deep gash in my horse, which has seriously injured him. This is pro-slavery vengeance!!...We were the objects of insult—the victims of an iron-hearted and soulless mobocracy. The rights and privileges, for which our fathers left their native soil, and breasted the chilled blasts of December, and for the defence of which they fought and bled, were wrested from us by the \textit{prettended} friends of liberty.\textsuperscript{245}

While Rust’s tour through New Haven County was markedly less optimistic than Hudson’s in Litchfield County, he did highlight signs of progress. In Waterbury, Middlebury, and especially Meriden, Rust noted that the individuals there were “powerful auxiliaries to our cause.”

\textsuperscript{243} “Hindrances to Our Progress”, \textit{The Charter Oak}, April 1839, 3.
\textsuperscript{244} Stewart, \textit{Holy Warriors}, 126.
\textsuperscript{245} “From Our Agents: Our Cause In New Haven County,” \textit{The Charter Oak}, February 1839, 3.
The lecture tours of Hudson, Rush, and countless other agents reveal a significant division of thought throughout Connecticut. Abolitionism tended to be most welcome in economically isolated areas where leadership remained almost exclusively local. In more prosperous towns that possessed vested interests in industry and trade, anti-slavery was almost universally condemned. For example, Litchfield, with its law school, female academy, and county seat status, stubbornly resisted abolitionism up until the Civil War. Conversely, Harwinton, less than ten miles away, was host to the Litchfield County Anti-Slavery Society meetings due to its receptive audience. As a less economically significant town, Harwinton held no loyalty to southern interests.

Most importantly, the accounts of abolition tours throughout the state reveal a sharply divided populace. As late as 1840, no consensus had been reached concerning the abolition of slaves and the status of free blacks. As the state moved into the 1840s, one event drove the two sides closer together. In the *Amistad* trial, Connecticut’s leaders were forced to suspend their differences as the state’s abolitionist commitment was thrust into the national spotlight.
Chapter Five
“An Unrevealed Mystery of Iniquity”:
The Legacy of Abolitionism in Connecticut

As Connecticut moved into the 1840s, the question remained how successful the concerted abolitionist campaign of the 1830s had been. The efforts of Simeon S. Jocelyn and Prudence Crandall had been widely condemned by their respective towns and by the vast majority of Connecticut’s press. The anti-slavery tours of Erasmus Hudson, R.S. Rust, and countless other agents for the state and national abolition societies had met with resistance, ambivalence, and violence. Even as abolition societies gained additional adherents, vehement proslavery advocates could still be found within the state. In response to the radical demands of immediate abolitionists, W.P.N. Fitzgerald, a promising lawyer who earlier in life had been expelled from West Point, ardently defended slavery in his 1839 pamphlet, *A Scriptural View of Slavery and Abolition*. While claiming he was “not the champion of slavery,” Fitzgerald condemned any attempt at universally freeing slaves:

No consummation is so desirable, no institution so dear or so valuable, and no creed so sacred, as to be thought worthy of the *forms* of respect, if inconsistent with the grand purpose of granting immediate and unbridled liberty to the southern negroes—a liberty which would be better described

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as a reign of terror and anarchy, a despotism of nameless license, which no
beastliness of sensuality, no brutality of violence, could excel.\textsuperscript{247}

Fitzgerald, like a substantial number of Americans both northern and southern, feared
that the sudden emancipation of slaves would result in a violent race war. After
providing a detailed analysis of the Biblical arguments for slavery, Fitzgerald revealed
his true logic in writing the pamphlet:

Human rights in society, are relative, not absolute; and every living
creature should be intrusted with so much liberty as is for the general good
\textit{and no more}: and in determining whether slavery ought, or ought not to be
abolished, we should, or rather those who have a right to interfere with it,
should compare the results of that institution with the probable
consequence of its abolition, and choose between them, like men of sober
judgment, avoiding the madness of the fanatic on one hand, and the
dictates of barbarity on the other. Such a course would excuse our
northern abolitionists, from any further persecution of their officious
duties, and commit the subject to the wisdom of those who understand it,
instead of the ignorance of those who do not. I am not the champion of
slavery, nor would I willingly see it exist unnecessarily; \textit{but I will not be silent, and see the laws of God perverted, for the sole purpose of
destroying the Constitution of my country}.\textsuperscript{248}

Fitzgerald opposed immediate emancipation in response to the message broadcasted by
touring abolitionists he had most likely seen speak in New Haven. For many Connecticut
citizens unwilling to support abolitionism, the fear that radical abolitionists would
increase the number and rights of free blacks in the state had driven them further away
from the cause of emancipation.

While some citizens began to tire of radical abolitionism at the close of the 1830s,
those who supported abolition had no other options available. Colonization in
Connecticut still existed, but only as a vestige of an earlier movement. In 1840,
Connecticut’s citizens were given an additional choice when the American Anti-Slavery

\textsuperscript{247} W.P.N. Fitzgerald, \textit{A Scriptural View of Slavery and Abolition} (New Haven, 1839), 7.
\textsuperscript{248} Ibid., 23.
Society suffered from a division in its ranks. Beginning in 1838, conservative and radical wings in the American Society had begun to form. As James Brewer Stewart explains, the division occurred based upon an interpretation of American social order:

…Conservative abolitionists, as they have been called, felt strongly that abolition was progressing in a seriously flawed but basically healthy society….It would be a tactical disaster, they feared, to confuse abolitionism with causes like women’s rights and nonresistance. The new antislavery constituency, just taking form, would certainly recoil at such heresies. To conservative abolitionists, moral suasion was coming to mean arousing a mass of reachable Northerners, religious or not. In the meantime, Garrison and like-minded radicals had begun to espouse moral revolution on the totally opposite premise that the people’s majoritarian values were themselves the sources of chronic national disease.\textsuperscript{249}

The tension finally erupted at the July 1840 meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Abby Kelley, a prominent female abolitionist who had toured Connecticut in the 1830s, was elected to serve on the Society’s Executive committee by a vote of 557 to 451.\textsuperscript{250} Many members of the Society were unwilling to interweave women’s rights with abolitionism and they split with the American Anti-Slavery Society. Conservative abolitionist leaders such as Arthur and Lewis Tappan, Joshua Leavitt, and Amos Phelps subsequently established the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.\textsuperscript{251}

Surprisingly, Connecticut’s press did not immediately approve of the new conservative faction. In reporting upon the new developments, the \textit{Congregationalist}, a Hartford newspaper, opined:

We have some doubts whether it was expedient to organize a new society immediately after the secession…Thousands of minds have become imbued with anti slavery principles within a few years, without uniting with a society on account of the evils, which have now resulted in a division. Many of these persons have been led to look with suspicion on

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item James Brewer Stewart, \textit{Holy Warriors}, 93.
\item Ibid., 95.
\item \textit{Congregationalist}, 23 May 1840, 1.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the whole plan of organized action, and to believe, that some other more
efficient and less exceptionable system of operations may be devised.
These persons should be conciliated. They should at least be heard in
council; and something yielded, if the interest of the cause allow it, to their
views of expediency. We know nothing of the Constitution of the new
society—it may be the very thing that is wanted—but still it would
probably have been more acceptable, if it had been the result of more
deliberation.\textsuperscript{252}

While the paper referred to “thousands of minds,” the feeling can be accurately applied to
the majority of Connecticut’s citizens in particular. Traditionally conservative in the
realm of moral uplift and abolitionism, the state’s populace had been less than willing to
fully accept Garrisonian abolitionism. Within two weeks, the \textit{Congregationalist} had
become a full supporter of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. The
newspaper interpreted the position of the Garrisonians in critical terms:

They seem to think that measures directly fitted to destroy the churches of
Christ, and set every minister of the Gospel adrift, are to be preferred to
measures, which win by light and love the very enemies of truth. In one
word, they aim at abolishing slavery by destroying all human authority, in
which all unrightful authority is of course included.\textsuperscript{253}

Conversely, after analyzing the positions of the new society, the \textit{Congregationalist}
quoted from its first formal address in order to draw a direct comparison to the American
Society’s strategies:

We wish for the support of every good man, and we wish all to understand
distinctly, that it will be no part of our design to break up existing
organizations in church and state, but only to wake up and give impetus to
the usual forms of social action; and one special object will be, by light
and love, to secure appropriate church action in the several religious
connexions...It will also be our endeavor to promote the “equal security,
protection, and improvement of the people of color,” a duty that has been
greatly neglected—and which should be a leading object with every Anti-
Slavery Association.\textsuperscript{254}

\textsuperscript{252} \textit{Congregationalist}, 23 May 1840, 1.
\textsuperscript{253} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{254} \textit{Congregationalist}, 13 June 1840, 1.
As a state in which commitment to organized Congregationalism still reigned, the preservation of religious order was a significant distinction. Connecticut’s leaders wholeheartedly embraced Tappan’s American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society as the conservative alternative to radical Garrisonianism.

Of course, for radical Garrisonians, this was a problem. Their views no longer wholly accepted throughout the state, they were ostracized and in some cases, exiled. Shortly after the divide, E.D. Hudson went to Hartford to attend an anti-slavery meeting. In his journal he commented:

I am now proscribed for my private opinions and am to be—sacrificed to conciliate the pro-slavery clergy—this is decided.—I am willing to be for the slave’s sake but not for the sake of those who have never lifted a finger for the cause: But to oppose it.  

From that point onward, it appears Hudson was no longer welcome as a traveling lecturer in Connecticut. Still in the employ of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Hudson began to lecture outside the state, beginning in Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan in 1841. Upon his return to his home in Torringford, Hudson penned a six page letter to the Torringford Congregational Church, describing slavery as a sin in itself and refusing “to recognize the church as Christian; and to receive the letters of credence from it, until it should bear unequivocal testimony against the sum of all villianies, American slavery.” For his Garrisonian efforts, Hudson and his wife were excommunicated from the church.

Faced with the violent backlash of the 1830s and the rising conservatism in a divided party, Connecticut abolitionists were in disarray. While they had succeeded in

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257 Ibid., 512.
repealing the Black Law in 1838, popular opinion remained ambivalent if not hostile to the Garrisonian abolitionists. As fate would have it, a cause to galvanize the state would wash up on the state’s Long Island shores.

On August 25, 1839, the *Amistad*, a Spanish vessel, made anchor on Long Island. Adrift for two months at sea, the shore party was a cause for alarm among local residents. Instead of Spanish sailors, they were Africans. On July 2, the forty-three African slaves aboard the *Amistad* had revolted, killing all aboard except for two Spaniards who were spared to sail the ship.\(^{258}\) Instead of sailing towards Africa as ordered, the two Spaniards instead sailed the ship North towards the United States in an attempt to draw the attention of the American Navy. The Navy finally responded on August 26, when the *USS Washington* seized the vessel and escorted her to New London, where she arrived on August 27.

Historians speculate that the *Washington*’s captain, Lieutenant Gedney, brought the *Amistad* to New London instead of New York because slavery was still legal in Connecticut, but not in New York. In doing so, Meade would have a claim to them as property through maritime salvage laws and could potentially increase his personal wealth.\(^{259}\)

Almost immediately after the New York press published that the mutiny was the result of a slave uprising, conservative abolitionists formed the “*Amistad* Committee.” First consisting of Simeon S. Jocelyn, Joshua Leavitt, and Lewis Tappan, the Committee convened to “employ interpreters, able counsel, and take all the necessary means to


\(^{259}\) Ibid., 29.
secure the rights of the accused.” In the meantime, the *Amistad* captives were moved from New London to New Haven until the United States Circuit Court convened in Hartford in September. Interred in the city central to Connecticut’s moral uplift, the state’s abolitionists would be able to strengthen their cause.

The legal circumstances surrounding the *Amistad* were additional cause for concern and required a sympathetic lawyer. Upon arriving in New London, district judge Andrew T. Judson examined the *Amistad*’s papers and interviewed the two surviving Spaniards. In his interpretation, the captives were born legally as slaves in Havana and therefore were guilty of murder. This view of the facts was contradicted by others who were present on the ship. Dwight P. Janes, a New London abolitionist, learned from one of the Spaniards that the slaves were not truly from Havana. This story was confirmed by Marshal Norris Willcox, who noted that none of the captives answered to the Spanish names taken from the ship’s manifest. In ignoring such details, Judson may have revealed some of his past prejudices. In 1833, he was one of the citizens leading the condemnation of Prudence Crandall and her school for free black girls.

The *Amistad* Committee enlisted the support of Roger S. Baldwin in defense of the captives. Baldwin, a Yale graduate and grandson of Roger Sherman, had been active in New Haven abolition societies throughout his career. In 1831, he was one of the four people to vote in support of Simeon S. Jocelyn’s Negro College and in 1835 he became

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262 Ibid., 29.
263 Ibid., 35.
264 Ibid., 30.
an active member of New Haven’s branch of the American Union for the Relief and Improvement of the Colored Race.\textsuperscript{267}

Baldwin felt that in order to secure a fair trial, the Amistad captives needed to be able to defend themselves. With no one in New Haven able to speak their language, Josiah Gibbs, a Yale professor specializing in the origins of languages, found twenty-year-old James Covey. Covey was an African who at the age of twelve was kidnapped and sold to a Portuguese slave ship. Intercepted by a British warship, Covey was freed, learned English, and enlisted on the \textit{HMS Buzzard}.\textsuperscript{268} In New York in October while Gibbs was conducting his search, Covey could speak both English and Mende, the language of the captives. Covey’s skills as an interpreter were instrumental in both producing legal evidence and garnering support from Connecticut’s citizens. The ensuing testimony from the captives’ leader, Cinque, and other Africans made it abundantly clear to all following the story that they were not from Havana and were intimately familiar with Africa.

The subsequent story of the state and federal trials is well known. The case was eventually heard by the Supreme Court, where John Quincy Adams and Roger S. Baldwin successfully proved the African origin of the Amistad captives. On March 9, 1841, the Supreme Court decreed that they should be returned to Africa. Shortly after the trial, the Amistad Africans, or “Mendis” as they were referred to, were moved to Farmington, a town whose location and atmosphere was seen as safe. Approached from New Haven by canal and from Hartford by carriage, the town of two thousand people


\textsuperscript{268} John W. Barber, \textit{A History of the Amistad Captives Being a Circumstantial Account of the Capture of the Spanish Schooner Amistad, by the Africans on Board; Their Voyage, and Capture Near Long Island, New York; with Biographical Sketches of Each of the Surviving Africans} (New Haven: Published by E.L. and J.W. Barber, Hitchcock and Stafford Printers, 1840), 15.
could be easily reached by abolitionists in either city. \(^{269}\) The town itself was home to two antislavery societies, consisting of more than one hundred members. Leading the Farmington abolitionists were Samuel Deming and Austin F. Williams, who supported the Amistad Committee financially and housed the Mendis when they arrived. \(^{270}\) The Farmington abolitionists’ primary concern was to educate and Christianize the Mendis so that they could act as missionaries:

> I have a strong desire that all among the Africans that will not prefer to return immediately to their native land & homes if they can find them, should be put in a course of education, & that to an extent fully to qualify them as missionaries & teachers; then they can go to benighted Africa with a fair prospect under the guidance of providence of rendering essential service to their country. \(^{271}\)

In attempting to educate the Mendis, Williams proposed the “establishment for their education & the instruction of other such colored men in this land who might wish to avail themselves of an education free of expense.” \(^{272}\) In typical Connecticut fashion, the suggested school for free blacks never materialized. The Mendis were instead educated by S.M. Booth, who was hired by Lewis Tappan and arrived in Farmington with Cinque and the other Mendis on March 18, 1841. \(^{273}\) Booth had been their teacher in prison for the six months of their imprisonment and had made some strides in teaching them English. Booth also defended their progress in a March 27, 1841, letter to the Hartford Courant after a New Haven Herald article described the Mendis as “unwilling to work.

\(^{269}\) Strother, Underground Railroad in Connecticut, 78.

\(^{270}\) Ibid., 79.

\(^{271}\) Austin F. Williams to Lewis Tappan, 13 March 1841, Amistad Letters, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Inc., Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

\(^{272}\) Ibid.

\(^{273}\) S.M. Booth to Lewis Tappa, 18 March 1841, Amistad Letters, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Inc., Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
and divested of any moral principle.” In his defense, Booth not only stressed their strong work ethic, but their rapid acceptance of Western civilization as well:

They have for the first time adopted the customs of civilized life, all sitting down at a table and using knifes, forks, etc. the government, or its agents having been too poor to provide them with either, while they were under its paternal care…They take great delight in reading the Bible, and have a strong desire to understand what they read. They are very devout. Morning and night they have prayers in their room; in the absence of their teacher, sometimes one, and sometimes another lending in prayer. They listen with great eagerness to all that is said about God, eternity, future retribution, the Bible, and their personal relations to the world to come.

Booth found it necessary to defend the progress of the Mendis due to common racist beliefs surrounding Africans. As Winthrop Jordan asserts in his 1968 work, White Over Black, early attempts by Western civilization to categorize the natural world inevitably led them to describe Africans as inferior. For American colonists, “to be Christian was to be civilized rather than barbarous, English rather than African, white rather than black.” As Africans were brought into the United States and enslaved, their perceived inferiority seemed consistent and innate. In justifying their opposition to slave conversions, the 1699 Virginia House of Burgesses replied:

For Negroes Imported hither the Gross Barbarity and rudeness of their manners, the variety and Strangeness of their Languages and the weakness and Shallowness of their minds renders it in a manner impossible to attain to any Progress in their Conversion.

Although many abolitionists since the early 1750s had attested to the equality of Africans, these racist stereotypes persisted in American thought. Booth found it

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275 Ibid.
277 Ibid., 184.
necessary to affirm the Mendis’s academic and religious prowess in order to combat the concept of racial inferiority.

By May, the Amistad Committee began to concern itself with raising the funds necessary to return the Mendis to Sierra Leone and finance their subsequent mission. One such attempt to raise money was an exhibition in New York that displayed the Africans and their acquired education. With 2,500 people in attendance (and “at fifty cents a head”), sixteen of the twenty Mendis from Farmington displayed their new talents. The Africans read from the Bible, spelled words such as “immediately,” “husbandman,” and “commandments,” and sang hymns. To approving cheers, the exhibition closed with speeches from three of the Africans, including Cinque. From the tone of the New York Herald’s article, the exhibition succeeded in both demonstrating the academic ability of the Africans and garnering sympathetic public opinion.

As the summer progressed into autumn, the Africans continued their education in Farmington. They continued to learn English and Christianity, while supporting themselves through day labor for local farmers. While most of the residents were sympathetic to the Mendis’ plight, an incident in early September highlighted the divisions still present in the state. In a letter to the Amistad Committee, Austin F. Williams described the event:

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278 “Mendis Perform,” New York Herald, 15 May 1841. The Herald possibly hinted at the racist belief that Africans were naturally predisposed towards music. With a backhanded comment upon their previous lessons and the hymn, the Herald commented, “They kept perfect time, and sang the piece well. In fact, they would do well to sing all their lessons.”

279 The Herald reserved their negativity for S.M. Booth. The paper described him as “the teacher of the negroes, a sleek-looking, lofty personage, who rests his hopes to fame on his connection to Cinque and his associates…He professes to interpret for the negroes, but from his embarrassed manner, and incoherent style of talking, he was harder to be understood than some of the blacks.” (“Mendis Perform,” New York Herald, 15 May 1841.)

The Mendians were grossly insulted yesterday & last evening some six or eight men of the “baser sort” sure they would have satisfaction of these strangers, why, “because they wore a skin not colored like their own” & will not give them all the walk, at least not the inside of it. In the afternoon, three young fellows assaulted Kimbo, snubbed his nose, pushed upon him & shook him; notwithstanding all this he forced himself away without the least resistance. Next was an assault on Grabbeau. He went to C. Rowe’s store to procure some lamp oil. Four men met him and pushed or knocked him into the ditch covering him with the oil as he fell. He then escaped to the store.\textsuperscript{281}

While the incidents remained relatively minor in that no true harm came to any of the Africans, they reveal a degree of racism present in even one of the more sympathetic towns in the state. Even as celebrities with an increasing level of education, the Mendis were still seen as inferior “because they wore a skin not colored like their own.” In October, the Mendis began to voice their wish to return home.\textsuperscript{282} Ostensibly this was due to the approaching cold weather, but also may have been due to hostility they encountered in September. On November 27, 1841, the Amistad Africans set sail from New York, effectively marking the end of Connecticut’s direct role in the lives of the Mendis.\textsuperscript{283}

In Connecticut, the Amistad Africans served as a rallying cry around which abolitionists could galvanize the masses. While held in prison in New Haven, Nathaniel S. Jocelyn, Simeon Jocelyn’s brother, painted a portrait of Cinque that abolitionists used to humanize the struggle.\textsuperscript{284} The painting showed Cinque in a positive light, without the

\textsuperscript{281} Austin F. Williams to Leavitt, Jocelyn, and Tappan, 7 September 1841, Amistad Letters, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Inc., Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
\textsuperscript{282} William Raymond to Lewis Tappan, 11 October 1841, Amistad Letters, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Inc., Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
\textsuperscript{284} Osterweis, \textit{Three Centuries of New Haven}, 234.
exaggerated features typically attributed to Africans. Cinque remained a symbol of the Amistad Africans and was frequently portrayed in regal terms. In describing the exhibition in New York, the New York Herald described Cinque as “much superior to most of the others, in energy, force of character, and personal strength. He has acquired a great control over the rest.” Other paintings such as “The Massacre on Board the Amistad” by A. Hewins glorified the uprising and were put on display throughout Connecticut. Tappan and the New Haven abolitionists also succeeded in allowing the Amistad captives time to exercise on the New Haven green, a move that drew massive crowds. Quickly realizing their marketing potential, the Amistad Committee charged twelve and half cents for admission to see the Africans while imprisoned in New Haven and Hartford. After earning one thousand dollars in both cities, it was hoped that by touring in Boston, New York, and other major cities, more than 100,000 dollars could be collected.

The Amistad trial was the subject of constant interest within the state. Almost every newspaper reported the legal developments, while congregations throughout the state issued “Prayer for the Amistad Captives:”

In behalf of these unfortunate strangers, it is proposed, that in all our religious congregations, special prayer be offered to God on the two intervening Sabbaths, that righteousness and equity may characterize the judgment and final disposition of these our fellow men. God, we think, has thrown a peculiar responsibility upon his praying people in this State.

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285 This was not the only portrait Jocelyn attempted to use to benefit abolitionism. Unfortunately, it was his only successful one. In 1834, Jocelyn had William Lloyd Garrison sit for a portrait. Upon seeing the completed product, Garrison wrote “I am sorry to say that all who have seen it agree with me in the opinion that it is a total failure. I am truly surprised, that, familiar as he is with my features, he has erred so widely in his attempt to delineate them.”


288 Austin F. Williams to Lewis Tappan, 13 March 1841, Amistad Letters, American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Inc., Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.
Let us put our souls in their soul.’ Stand and pray for them as bound with them. We shall meet them ere long before a higher court; at the judgment seat of Christ. And O, may it be found, that while with us, we did for their temporal and eternal welfare what we could.289

Even the Congregationalist, which had openly embraced the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and prior had been slow to address abolitionism at all, praised “the unusual interest in the mind and heart of this nation, and especially of this State,” in concern for the Amistad slaves. In exposing (and exploiting) the story of the Amistad, Connecticut’s abolitionists found a cause that could galvanize the masses.

The Amistad trial also altered the dynamics of Connecticut abolitionism by opening up relations with the fledgling black abolitionist community. In Hartford, this group centered on the Talcott Street Church, also known as the “African Church.” Prior to the Amistad trial, it had been a focal point for racial hostility and the site of a riot in 1835. In June 1835, Hartford’s “colored people were again molested at the African church, by a number of white persons assembled in the vicinity, and after leaving the church the former were assaulted by the whites.”290 After one African American fired a gun at the white mob, the “whites mustered in considerable numbers and demolished his dwelling.”291 After additional buildings were destroyed the next day, the black community was put under the protection of Hartford’s police against the “wanton and unprovoked attacks.”292

The nature of the Talcott Street Church changed in 1840, when James W.C. Pennington became its pastor. An escaped slave from Maryland, Pennington first arrived

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289 “Public Prayer for the Amistad Captives,” Congregationalist, 13 February 1841, 1.
291 Ibid.
292 Ibid.
in Connecticut in 1835 to attend Yale Divinity School. Although he was not allowed to enroll at Yale, he listened to lectures from outside the classroom and assisted the pastor at the Temple Street Congregational Church, New Haven’s first African American Congregational church.293

When he arrived in Hartford in 1840, the state was embroiled in the *Amistad* trial. By 1841, when it was decreed the Mendis be returned to Africa, Pennington had become a vocal leader of Hartford’s black community. In contact with Lewis Tappan and the other members of the *Amistad* Committee, Pennington wished to involve his congregation in their Christian mission.294 On August 18, 1841, Pennington and other African American pastors founded the Union Missionary Society to facilitate “the enterprize of African Missions.”295 Adding to the significance of the event was Cinque and four other Mendis, who were present to enroll in the Society.296 As the state grew to accept abolitionism in the 1840s, black abolitionists such as James Pennington were gradually acknowledged for their anti-slavery work.

After the *Amistad* Africans departed for Sierra Leone, Connecticut’s abolitionist sentiment turned towards national issues. Connecticut’s politicians became vocal opponents of the Fugitive Slave Law, while as Horatio T. Strother’s demonstrated in his 1962 work, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*, the state played a vital role in ferrying escaped slaves northward to freedom through an extensive network. In 1848, the Connecticut Assembly utilized this new abolitionist impulse. On June 12, 1848, “An Act to Prevent Slavery” was enacted:

294 Ibid., 50.
296 Ibid.
All persons until this time held in Slavery, and all persons heretofore Slaves, who have been emancipated by their masters, if they are reduced to want, shall be supported by their former Masters, their heirs, executors, and administrators, and on their refusal, the Select-men of the town where such persons belong, shall provide for their support: and the town shall be entitled, in proportion on the case.\(^{297}\)

Sixty-four years after gradual emancipation, slavery was finally outlawed in the state of Connecticut. While it was more or less a symbolic gesture, it was the only law passed by the state that immediately freed slaves. In 1840, seventeen slaves were still in bondage. As a direct result of the law, the remaining living slaves, born before 1784, could finally claim freedom.\(^{298}\) In enacting this law, Connecticut was the last New England state to formally end slavery.

As the “land of steady habits,” Connecticut has a difficult history to live up to. It cannot completely lay claim to the belief that it was united with northern radical abolitionists in opposing slavery. At best, Connecticut’s citizens lagged behind on the ideas of race and equality that were necessary in fully accepting abolitionism. At worst, the state both implicitly and overtly supported southern slavery. It is clear that for even for the majority of those who called themselves abolitionists, the issue of black equality remained a difficult obstacle. Many of Connecticut’s citizens were willing to embrace the notion of freeing the slaves, as long as those slaves never wound up as neighbors or colleagues. Even as the state began to publicly denounce the Fugitive Slave Act, its citizens denied free blacks suffrage in 1857 and 1865 by wide margins. Connecticut was only willing to accept blacks as equals when the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments decreed that they had to.


\(^{298}\) Steiner, \textit{History of Slavery in Connecticut}, 84.
The story of slavery and abolitionism in Connecticut is a veiled one. Throughout the state, there is a stark lack of knowledge concerning the state’s role in slavery and the abolitionist movement leading up to the Civil War. This dearth of information is not a new one. As early as 1839, radical abolitionists looked for evidence that would reveal the North’s role in the preservation of slavery. In a letter to the American Anti-Slavery Society’s agents, Connecticut native Theodore Dwight Weld called upon his associates to provide the society with information tying the North to slavery. In his appeal, Weld poetically described a scarcity of information that rings true to this day:

After all that has been done, northern pro-slavery is still an unrevealed mystery of iniquity, plying its sorceries everywhere, and palsying all it touches. Its secret chambers must be explored and their abominations brought forth to the sun. For this purpose, facts are indispensable, and they like thick all over the free states; by gathering all within your reach, you will render to freedom invaluable services.  

Connecticut may not wish to promote its role in abolitionism due to the “abominations” that would be revealed. In 1868, James Mars commented upon the revisionism that had taken place in the state:

Some told me that they did not know that slavery was ever allowed in Connecticut, and some affirm that it never did exist in the State. What I have written of my own history, seems to satisfy the minds of those that read it, that the so called, favored state, the land of good morals and steady habits, was ever a slave state, and that slaves were driven through the streets tied or fastened together for market. This seems to surprise some that I meet, but it was true. I have it from reliable authority. Yes, this was done in Connecticut. 

In some ways, it would appear that Connecticut has acknowledged its deficiencies by publicly ignoring them. Instead, they have stressed every connection, substantial and

300 James Mars, Life of James Mars, 37.
tenuous, the state has to antislavery. Monuments and museums to the *Amistad* captives are present in New Haven, Hartford, and Mystic, and a reconstructed replica of the *Amistad* sails to various locales around the world stressing the importance of the event. New Haven and Yale have acknowledged individuals such as Simeon Jocelyn and Ezra Stiles for their importance in the abolitionist cause, but no concerted effort has been made to publicize the efforts of the state’s abolitionists. This is most likely due to a lack of awareness, but also maybe due to the less than stellar public record that would be revealed. Locally, Torrington honors John Brown at his birthplace for his efforts, but only as a native son. Even in John Brown’s memoirs, he recalls little of the town after leaving for Ohio early in his youth.

More curiously, Connecticut honors Prudence Crandall as the “state heroine.” A Rhode Island native, Connecticut’s only true rule in her abolitionist attempts was arresting her and forcing her removal to Kansas. The Harriet Beecher Stowe Center in Hartford, as well as a marker for her birthplace in Litchfield, commemorate her role in abolitionism. But like John Brown, her greatest achievements occurred while she lived elsewhere. She moved back to Hartford in 1873, long after the effects of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reverberated through the nation.

The disparity between the history that has been ignored and the history that has been advertised is symptomatic of the position Connecticut finds itself in. While select individuals fit easily into the national narrative of northern antislavery, the state as a whole remains anomalous. While the state eventually accepted abolitionism in the 1840s, it was only after it was compelled to do so after being thrust into the national spotlight. It is consistent then, that Connecticut was the last New England state to formally abolish
slavery. Due to social, economic, and racial reasons, the moral impetus to ban slavery materialized much later than in neighboring states. Traditionally conservative, Connecticut was unwilling to completely embrace the egalitarian principles required for immediate emancipation. Within the national context of slavery, it may come as no surprise that the “Constitution State” carries a legacy of racism and moral ambivalence. “Yes, this was done in Connecticut.” Connecticut’s role in slavery and abolitionism is inextricably bound to the nation’s original sin.
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