"We are the friends of reform; but that is not reform": The Conflicting Ideologies of Abolitionism and the Labor Movement in the Antebellum United States

By

Kristoffer R. Standish

Senior Seminar: HST 499
Professor Benedict Lowe
Western Oregon University

Readers
Professor Melinda Jetté
Professor Dean Braa

Interpretations of antebellum slavery have always resonated with repugnance of its violent oppression and racist domination. Moral abolitionists who actively pursued the destruction of southern slavery during the 1830s and 1840s have been hailed as moral champions of the darkest era in American history. Simultaneously, the growth of urban areas and wage labor in the North created a new, harsh reality for the common worker. Poor wages, long hours, and the threat of hunger lead many labor advocated to seek reform. However, interaction between 1830s and 1840s abolitionism and the labor movement largely resulted in hostility. The obvious contradictions between slavery and free labor require little attention. Nonetheless, the conflict between the goals of abolitionism and those of the labor movement created a paradox: How did the two movements, with the similar goal of improving the economic and social conditions for workers (slave or free), tend to challenge each other? Why did evangelical abolitionists and labor advocates fail to create a cohesive social program to criticize the hostile relationship between capital and labor? In order to understand this conflict, this essay will establish evangelical abolitionism and labor as viable social movements, highlight the historical context of their ideologies, and examine their rhetoric of freedom, social ills, and race.

Republicanism in the Revolutionary Era

"We have it in our power to begin the world over again, the birthday of a new world is at hand," declared Tom Paine in his 1776 pamphlet *Common Sense*. Although the pamphlet's "radical" concepts had been discussed on many occasions prior to its publication, *Common Sense* marked a new fervor for American independence. John Adams, criticizing the 150,000 copies sold in the months following the publication of the tract, insisted its content was "a tolerable summary of the arguments which I had been repeating again and again in Congress for nine

months."[1] It was not the ideas expressed that made *Common Sense* so vital—the uniqueness of America separate from Europe, the innocence of a new beginning, and the absurdity of monarchy and hereditary privilege—but rather, Paine's brilliant eloquence that appealed to many Americans.[2]

The publication of *Common Sense* coincided with a dramatic politicization of American society. Before the Revolutionary Era, widespread participation in politics was rare: until the 1760s, politics were largely personal contests between members of leading families.[3] But with stricter imperial regulations, including the Sugar Act and the Currency Act in 1764, the Stamp Act in 1765, and the Townshend Acts in 1767—all of which were passed in British Parliament without colonial representation—laypeople were increasingly feeling the effects of colonial powerlessness. Business owners began feeling the effects of imperial subordination: heavier tax burdens began infringing their profits, creating a desire to separate from Great Britain. Popular electioneering began displacing the dominant politicians of pre-Revolutionary zeal, as artisans, merchants, and intellectuals began realizing their personal stake in politics. "A singular political language bound Americans together," Sean Wilentz writes of the politicization of artisans and merchants, which led to "an extraordinary manifestation of apparent unity when set against the continental and British experience [in] the age of revolution."[4]

The causes of the American Revolution need not be recited here. More pertinent to this study, however, is what Eric Foner has called "one of the most fundamental political changes of

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[1] L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams* (4 vols.: Cambridge, 1961), III, 333; quoted in Eric Foner, *Tom Paine & Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 79.
[2] Foner, *Tom Paine*, 79-80..
[3] Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic: A History of the American People* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co, 1977), 272-273.
[4] Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 61.

the revolutionary generation": the politicization of the artisan community.[5] Increased imperial pressure on business interests fostered increased political participation. What was this new, ambiguous ideology that had empowered such a large community of artisans and merchants? What separated the burgeoning American nation from its British ruler by the 1780s?

The ideology of Republicanism can be traced to two of the original "detached" intellectuals: Thomas Paine (1737-1809) and Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826). Paine wrote that competitive individualism in a classless society was the foundation of a virtuous republic. Like many political leaders of the era, Paine saw class and party conflicts as divisive special interests opposed to the common good. "Public good," Paine wrote, "is not a term opposed to the good of the individual. On the contrary, it is the good of every individual collected."[6] It was this social and political egalitarianism, coupled with hostility to monarchy and hereditary privilege, that formed the basis of Paine's republicanism. Antimonarchism was one of the strongest rallying calls behind appeals for American independence in the 1770s. For Paine, an individual's financial and social degradation was political, not economic: poverty implied that government structures were ill equipped to support a prosperous society. This belief was central to Paine's criticism of European monarchies: "When we survey the wretched conditions of man under the monarchial and hereditary systems of government…it becomes evident that those systems are bad and that a general revolution in the principles and construction of government is necessary."[7] This antimonarchism simultaneously lent itself to principles laissez faire capitalism: "Oppression is often the *consequence*, but seldom or never the *means* of riches."[8] Therefore, wealth created in a republic was always just since hereditary privilege was non-existent. It was

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[5] Foner, *Tom Paine*, 61.
[6] Paul W. Conner, *Poor Richard's Politicks* (New York, 1965), 12-15; quoted in Foner, *Tom Paine*, 89.
[7] Philip Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (2 vols.: New York, 1945), I, 404-05, 341; quoted in Foner, *Tom Paine*, 94.
[8] Foner, *Complete Writings*, I, 9, 618-20; II, 580; quoted in Foner, *Tom Paine*, 94.

Paine's value of commerce as a natural force fostering mutuality between men, as well as progressing industrial and agrarian production to raise society from the small-town to the cosmopolitan that separated his "urban" brand of Republicanism from Jefferson's agrarian emphasis.

For Thomas Jefferson, a virtuous republic could only thrive under an agricultural society in which families tilled their own land. Social change, especially that engendered by commercial advancement, was an indicator of communal corruption. The fraction of citizens engaged in nonagricultural endeavors "is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption."[9] Although Jefferson's unique brand of republicanism seems to differ significantly from Paine's, there is a core principle to be recognized in both: they were overlapping ideologies that exalted productive persons and reproached non-producers. Jefferson's agrarian republicanism, as Eric Foner describes, "was essentially nostalgic, placing primary value on independence and equality, but [Jefferson] believed that the only way these virtues could be preserved was by resisting economic growth and capitalist development."[10]

The Revolutionary Era's loose definitions of republicanism—both urban and agrarian focuses—were evident in evolving interpretations of independence: Politically, revolutionary Americans sought an ideal construction of popular government. Economically, revolutionary Americans sought to define the ideal form of commerce: business ownership, farm ownership, or an emerging wage labor market. However, rapid industrialization during the early-nineteenth century began to transform society. By the 1820s, "A complex process was underway," in the United States, by which "masters and journeymen…began to invent opposing interpretations of

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[9] Thomas Jefferson quoted in Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 46.
[10] Foner, *Tom Paine*, 105.

the artisan republican legacy."[11] How did the Early Republic grapple with the new social tensions created by industrialization while maintaining revolutionary ideals of republicanism?

Labor as Property, Whiteness as Virtue: Republicanism Transformed in Antebellum America

As early as 1827, journeymen mechanics of Philadelphia began criticizing the principles of laissez faire capitalism. "It is in vain," the craft workers' manifesto declared, "that scientific power shall pour fourth its inexhaustible treasures of wealth…its products will be amassed to glut the over-flowing storehouses, and useless hoards of its insatiable monopolizers."[12] Until the 1820s, colonial models largely organized manufacturing: most goods, including food, candles, soap, tools and as much as two-thirds of all clothing worn in the United States was produced in the home, by the family and for the family.[13] Although industrial urban areas employed and housed a minority of American citizens until the late 1850s (wage earners did not outnumber self-employed until 1860), news of Europe's rapid urban and manufacture growth was enough evidence for investors, wage earners, and politicians to recognize industrialization as the direction America was approaching.[14] The emergence of canals, steamboats, and railroads, coupled with rapidly increasing populations fostered the development of a market economy. New York City obtained harbor access to Lake Erie through the Erie Canal in 1825, and by 1860, railroad networks covered most of the United States west of the Mississippi River. From 1825 to 1850, New York City's population increased three-fold, from 166,086 to 515.547.[15] Moreover, between 1809 and 1839, national manufacturing output rose 59 percent per decade,

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[11] Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 63.
[12] "A Craft Workers' Manifesto, 1827" in *Major Problems in the Early Republic, 1787-1848*, ed. Sean Wilentz (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co, 1992), 342.
[13] Stuart Bruchey, "The Early American Industrial Revolution," in Wilentz, *Major Problems,* 213.
[14] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xv-xvi.
[15] Watson, 26; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*,110.

153 percent in the 1840s, and 60 percent in the 1850s.[16] These two processes—increased capital expenditures on public works projects and growing urban areas—dramatically altered common interpretations of republicanism in antebellum America: the nation's economic and political directions were moving towards manufactures, and popular perceptions of economic independence now accepted wage earning.

One of the most critical developments of the post-Revolutionary era was the gradual development of white male suffrage. Before the early 1800s, state laws had legislated minimum property restrictions for voting rights. However, following Maryland and South Carolina's adoption of residency restrictions—not property requirements—in 1802 and 1812, as well as suffrage amendments in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois' new constitutions, white male suffrage became commonplace throughout the Union during the 1810s and 1820s.[17] There were three distinct dynamics in white male enfranchisement, as Harry Watson has pointed out: First, perceptions of "virtuous" property were evolving from landed property to include property in labor. Second, in maintaining revolutionary rhetoric, many statesmen sought to "democratize" government institutions by increasing the number of elective offices at the state level. White male suffrage "reform did not supplant republicanism in American political thinking," Watson notes, "but significantly shifted its emphasis toward [white male] majoritarian democracy."[18] Third—and most significant to this study—by extending the right to vote to all white men regardless of property holding, reformers were able to restrict political opportunities for blacks and women by organizing society along racial and gender lines. Antebellum republican rhetoric interpreted the white male as the only one capable of intelligence, hard work, thrift, self-control, and virtue; women and blacks were incapable. Viewing wealth and hereditary privilege as

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[16] Bruchey, 215.
[17] Bailyn, 397.
[18] Watson, 51.

subversive to egalitarianism, antebellum reformers removed economic barriers for political enfranchisement, but strengthened racial and sexual divisions. [19]

Debate over the virtuous character of the developing nation dominated politics during the late 1820s and 1830s. Advocates of Jefferson's agrarian republicanism saw the yeoman farmer, cultivating his own land independently, to be the foundation of the new nation. Wealth and urban development, according to Jeffersonian republicans, were fatal signs of corruption, fostering inequality and dependency and posed a viable threat to the republic. Corporate contracts for infrastructure construction and bank charters stunned Jeffersonians, as they saw the contracts as abuses of political power creating private wealth. Hamiltonian republicans, on the other hand, saw commercialization as an integral sector to a prosperous economy. Following the War of 1812 with Great Britain, many advocates of modern commerce, such as Henry Clay, saw industrialization and corporate contracting for public works as progressive and protective: America had to become self-reliant to fully protect itself. National banking and government- and private-sponsored infrastructure projects would support the interests of a bustling economy and the republic as a whole.[20]

The political battles between opposing interpretations of a "virtuous" republic—traditional versus modern, agrarian versus urban, farming versus manufacturing—are not especially needed for this research. What is important to note is that reformers and politicians in the 1830s and 1840s were grappling with an ideological conflict between nostalgic yeomanry and threatening urbanization. The "nostalgic" vision of Jeffersonian republicans was an idealized version of a society that was seemingly moving towards the harsh European model that was responsible for great inequality and ugliness. Industrialization in the 1830s was quickly

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[19] Ibid, 50-53.
[20] Watson, 58-59; Bailyn, 369.

becoming a reality. As a result, an evolving brand of individualism (the "self-made man") emerged during the early 1800s.

By 1820, 12 percent of the nation's labor force was employed in manufacturing and construction, and 28 percent were working nonagricultural jobs. Moreover, nearly every farmhouse was supplementing their incomes by spinning marketable cloth. As the manufacturing labor force grew, labor began to be valued as a legitimate form of property (for white men) and a means towards economic independence. White indentured servitude, live-in servants, and working for food or rent was nearly extinct nationwide by 1830.[21] In place of these labor schemes, wage labor was perceived as a temporary period of dependency: factory workers could obtain economic independence through wage earning, frugality, and intelligence. Eventually, the wage earner would be able to purchase a farm or business to become entirely independent.[22] Indeed, the United States was expanding westward: Ohio, Louisiana, Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois Alabama, and Missouri were admitted into the Union by 1821, many of which had already experienced rapid population growth. Alexis de Tocqueville described this incredible westward hustle in 1835, observing that the migrant "clutches everything, he holds nothing fast, but soon loosens his grasp to pursue fresh gratifications.... He who has set his heart exclusively upon the pursuit of worldly welfare is always in a hurry."[23] As the nation expanded—towards the West and towards industrial commerce—the northeastern wage earner and migrant had become the embodiment of the nation's identity struggle: hesitantly moving towards a society that was shedding its revolutionary generation, its eighteenth century commerce, and its old borders.

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[21] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1999), 46.
[22] James L. Huston, "Property Rights in Slavery and the Coming of the Civil War," *Journal of Southern History* 65:2 (1999): 266.
[23] Bailyn, 370-371, 391; Alexis de Tocqueville, "Pursuit of Wealth, 1835" in Wilentz, *Major Problems,* 193.

A Brief History of the United States Labor Movement, 1770s-1840

The rhetoric of the early American labor movement was based largely on the nation's Constitution. The Bill of Rights assured the right to assemble, petition, speak freely, obtain due process and counsel, and to utilize free press. Moreover, Thomas Jefferson's Land Ordinance of 1785 and Northwest Ordinance of 1787 marked increased labor advantages: the ordinances expressed Jefferson's desire to outlaw slavery in new territories, to fund public education by land sales, and to admit new states to the Union on an equal basis to prevent politically inferior populations.[24]

The effect of racial slavery on the labor movement—one of the central themes to be discussed below—cannot be ignored in this brief history. Black slavery, which had been steadily increasing before the American Revolution because of labor shortages and declining white indentured servitude, was present in every state: black slaves composed as much as 60 percent of the population in South Carolina and as little as two percent of the population in Massachusetts. However, in the years following the Revolution, the northern states initiated various processes for the abolition of slavery within their jurisdictions. Vermont banned slavery in its 1777 Constitution, while Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Rhode Island passed 'post-nati' bills in the mid-1780s outlawing enslavement of anyone born after stipulated dates. New York and New Jersey abolished slavery twenty years later. During the 1780s, a national antislavery policy enshrined in the Constitution might have been disastrous, since the delegates' "republican experiment" needed to secure economic recovery, promote prosperity, cope with threats from abroad, reestablish the public credit, and restrain the states from interfering with property

[24] Philip Yale Nicholson, *Labor's Story in the United States.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 42.

rights.[25] Trying to avoid the scenario that would lead to the Civil War 70 years later, the delegates of the Constitutional Convention in 1778 strategically avoided the protection *and* destruction of slavery (following the federal ban of the international slave trade in 1808), even avoiding the words 'slavery' or 'slave' in any part of the Constitution.

The gradual abolition of slavery in the North as a whole (Pennsylvania's slave population was cut from 13 to 6.4 percent of the total population in just 10 years), as well as the elimination of imprisonment for debt were significant steps in promoting the interests of an emerging working class. However, increased production and wage gains resulting from the Revolutionary War were quickly lost in the postwar period. In 1785 Philadelphia witnessed the first-ever organized strikes in the United States when the city's shoemakers struck to protest significant wage cuts.[26]

In developing federal programs to stabilize the young nation, the first secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, proposed pro-industry policies in the early 1790s that sought to transform the nation from a mercantile society into an industrialized manufacturing order. Hamilton's proposals were largely based on the necessary self-sufficiency of industry coupled with a strong private sector of investors. By relying upon private investors to finance the national debt, Hamilton sought to harness "good faith, which is the basis of public credit…to justify and preserve…confidence…[and] respectability of the American name; to restore landed property to its due value; to furnish new resources both to agriculture and commerce."[27] In order to streamline industrialization, Hamilton also proposed a series of protective tariffs. Rather than relying on an ambiguous Revolutionary "virtue" of egalitarianism through private interest, Hamilton sough to harness this self-interest and channel it through effective legislature. His

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[25] Donald G. Nieman, "Slavery and the Constitution," in Wilentz, *Major Problems,* 49-51.
[26] Nicholson, 37-39.
[27] Alexander Hamilton, "Report on Public Credit, 1790," in Wilentz, *Major Problems,* 33.

Report on Credit (1790) and Report on Manufactures (1791) laid the foundation for an industrializing financed by private capitalists.[28]

Unforeseen by anyone was the evolution of production via increased technology and steam power, and more importantly, the development of an independent capitalist class. The evolution of labor practices in the Early Republic would slowly shed its journeymen, homestead production, and paternal organization after 1820. Moreover, the introduction of advanced technologies such as water and steam powered mills allowed for an expanded division of labor, reducing once skilled occupations into menial single-operation work, reducing most laborers to low pay, easy replacement, and employer subjugation. It would be foolish to admonish labor-saving technology and the rise of a capitalist class. However, while increasing production capabilities, new technology and capital simultaneously reduced the role of the laborer and pitted him or her against an impersonal wage system that was exploring new ways to maximize production and profits.

Before 1820, there was no real difference between the interests of journeymen and masters since production was small in scope: masters taught a small number of journeymen a skill in which production consisted of a long series of hand-operated processes. Moreover, prior to 1820 there were no organizations among the burgeoning labor classes to represent the 100,000 employees already working in textile mills and other factories. As the labor force grew after 1820 unionization began increasing. The first multi-craft union was established in Philadelphia in 1827, marking the beginning of a new rhetoric of labor value. The Mechanics' Union of Trade Association declared in their preamble "If a mass of people were enabled by their labour to procure for themselves and families a full and abundant supply" it would invariably lead to "establishing a just balance of power, mental, moral, political and scientific, between all the

[28] Bailyn, 344-348.

various classes."[29] For the first time, labor was being organized with a vision that society as a whole would benefit from labor reform.

The early labor movement was dealt several legal blows in the North. Striking workers in the antebellum period believed they were carrying the spirit of the Revolution in their demands, including fair pay to enjoy the "fruits of their labor." State legal systems prior to the Civil War were in transition from English common law. As early as 1806, a Philadelphia judge ruled against labor, declaring "a combination of workmen to raise their wages may be considered in a two-fold point of view: one is to benefit themselves…the other is to injure those who do not join their society. The rule of law condemns both."[30] Labor historian Philip Yale Nicholson discusses this as one of the most impeding obstacles of the labor movement, asserting that local "judges were the least democratically assailable government figures" of the antebellum period.[31] Judges' decisions were hidden from the voters' polls, and their decisions rarely became issues for public debate.

Due to the embargo on British goods between 1811 and 1815, a production boom raised the economic prosperity of American laborers in the years framing the War of 1812. Textile mills dramatically increased from few to 87 in a matter of months, iron production from 55,000 tons in 1810 to 180,000 tons in 1830, and sparked massive public works projects in roads and canals.[32] However, after Congress lifted British trade embargos, a postwar recession following 1815 saw massive closers in Northern textile mills and declining wages. In the decade following this recession, labor pressed for increased organization and political representation. The Mechanics Union of Trade Association in Philadelphia, established in 1822, pushed an agenda

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[29] Foster Rhea Dulles and Melvyn Dubofsky, *Labor In America: A History, Fourth Edition* (Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1984), 34.
[30] Ibid, 30.
[31] Nicholson, 47.
[32] Watson, 57.

that identified the exploitation of labor, economic inequality, and most importantly, the necessity of political power to address their problems. Local movements for ten-hour workdays mobilized and networked in the North. Multi-craft organizations advocated public education and political participation as most effective tools for labor's advancement. White male suffrage in the 1820s forced political parties to incorporate workingmen in their campaigns. The following decade witnessed the formation of America's two-party system, in which many labor voters joined Democrat or Whig alliances. Andrew Jackson's vigorous criticism of monopoly and special privilege appealed to many workers, who largely abandoned their own nominees to elect Jackson in 1832.[33] Following the 1820s, all political candidates included workingmen's issues in their campaigning (at least in rhetoric).

Labor's problems became more apparent following the Panic of 1837. Declining English markets coupled with overproduction precipitated the young nation's largest depression to date. Before the growth of the factory system, workers in the infant market economy could rely on family farms in times of business decline (especially since early factories only hired employees temporarily). However, increased land speculation and industrialization left many families city-bound and propertyless. Furthermore, the pre-1820 labor practice of housing and feeding apprentices had become virtually extinct in the blossoming economy. The growth of large cities led to overcrowding (especially following massive immigration in the late 1830s and 1840s), increasing unemployment, poverty, and sanitation problems.[34] The utilization of public works projects during the Panic of 1837 was virtually nonexistent, and most workers were forced to accept exploitative labor wages or starve. Union effectiveness disintegrated and most advantages the early labor movement had thus far acquired were rapidly lost to struggling (and

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[33] Nicholson, 50-5.
[34] Dulles and Dubofsky, 73.

often manipulative) employers. An alliance of employers was quick to attack to burgeoning labor movement by forming the Anti-Trades Union Association (1836) to resist union organization.[35] Their anti-labor rhetoric charged unionization as being arbitrary and mischievous, and they largely succeeded in temporarily dismantling many union organizations.

The radically changed means of production—from small workshops to large factories involving labor-saving technology and "de-skilling—as well as evolving notions of personal independence, sparked the proletarianization of antebellum wage earners. Early protests made by small shops' masters and journeymen, and eventually by entire factories of men and women, reflected their concerns as an economically vulnerable group. The 1830s saw the emergence of 68 journals and newspapers advocating reforms for the working class, as well as the highest union participation (relative to laboring population) in the United States: 300,000 active members.[36] Furthermore, political enfranchisement of white working men was one of the most fundamental changes in creating a labor movement in the United States. How did the northern labor movement respond to southern labor? As this essay will demonstrate, the institution of slavery—both in the South and its remnants in the North in the form of a perverse racism—would lead labor to react ambivalently to abolitionists' crusades.

Foundations of Garrisonian Abolition

Public opposition to chattel slavery was present in the United States prior to the abolition movement of the 1830s. In 1700, Puritan Samuel Sewall, one the most prominent citizens and jurists of Massachusetts Bay Colony, published *The Selling of Joseph*, in which he outlined biblical arguments promoting the equality of all races. In this tract, Sewell quotes Psalms 115.16 and Acts 17.26-29, passages that later became the most-cited verses of the antebellum

[35] Ibid, 57.
[36] Nicholson, 53.

antislavery movement: "God hath given the Earth…unto the Songs of Adam…and hath made of One Blood, all Nations of Men…That they should seek the lord. Forasmuch then as we are the Offspring of God."[37] Quakers of the mid-1700s similarly displayed distaste for slavery. John Woolman's account from 1747 argues that indeed, the black man seemed inferior, but those "who live the true Spirit of Charity, to sympathise with the Afflicted in the lowest Stations."[38]

In 1820, however, Massachusetts jurist and Associate Justice of the Supreme Court Joseph Story marked the beginning of antislavery's legal, moral and social movement. Two hundred years after the establishment of Plymouth Colony and weeks after Maine's entry into the Union, Story anchored his early criticism of chattel slavery in the preservation of the Union:

> "Nor let us indulge in the vain hope that we shall escape a like fate…if we grow indifferent to the progress of vice; if we silently wink at violations of the laws; if we habitually follow the current of public opinion without pausing to question its directions; if we cherish a sullen irreverent disregard of the constitution of government…the time is not far distant when we shall be separated into rival states…and ultimately become the prey of some unprincipled chieftain."[39]

Furthermore, his appeal to the Grand Jury of Maine, Story appealed to the court's morality: "The existence of Slavery under any shape is so repugnant to the natural rights of man and the dictates of justice… how can we justify ourselves or apologize for an indifference to this subject?"[40] His recounting of slave ships' passages further solidified his opposition on moral grounds.

The horrors of racial slavery, although important to any antislavery discussion, do not need to be listed here. Instead, focusing on the political and social culture of leading abolitionist thinkers will prove more fruitful. Historian David Brion Davis writes that both the creation of

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[37] Samuel Sewall, "The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial, 1700" in *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader*, ed. Mason Lowance (New York: Penguin, 2000), 12.
[38] John Woolman, "Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes, 1754 and 1762" in Lowance, 22.
[39] Joseph Story, "Charge to the Grand Jury of Maine, May 8, 1820" in Lowance, 33.
[40] Ibid, 33.

slavery and its dismantling have been interpreted as forms of human progress: enslavement was the "white man's burden" to promote Christianity and civilization among barbarous peoples, and abolition was heightened awareness of human rights. Davis maintains that emancipation was the culmination of popular moral sentiment in which "theories of economic determinism cannot supply the answer" to the question of slavery's continued practice.[41] Similarly, Howard Templey has suggested that the American abolition movement of the 1800s—which was largely evangelical—advocated sweeping social change based on Christian doctrine, precisely because antislavery activists viewed slavery was a singular blemish corrupting society. "Whatever else the anti-slavery struggles may or may not have been," Temply suggests, "they were an attempt by the advocates of one set of beliefs to impose their values—which embraced much more than simply the way labour was organized and remunerated—on the exponents of another."[42]

This study will chiefly analyze William Lloyd Garrison's brand of immediate emancipation. Garrison's evangelicalism was founded on unconditional egalitarianism: the Quaker belief in equality between the races and sexes. In his 1853 speech at the Fourth National Women's Rights Convention in Cleveland, Garrison displayed his belief that no social norm or legislation had power over the human conscience or body: "That because a woman is a human being and man is no more, she has, by virtue of her constitutional nature, equal rights with man…[and] equal opportunity for the protection of those Rights."[43] Critical of man-made laws regarding the enslavement and reduction of certain "classes", Garrison often criticized the U.S. Constitution: "A sacred compact, forsooth! We pronounce it the most bloody and heaven-

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[41] David Brion Davis, "Slavery and 'Progress'" in *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey*, eds. Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (Hamden, CT: Dawson & Sons, 1980), 354.
[42] Howard Temply, "Anti-Slavery as Cultural Imperialism," in Bolt and Drescher, 337.
[43] William Lloyd Garrison, "Speech at the Fourth National Women's Rights Convention, 1853" in Lowance, 122-123.

daring arrangement ever made by men for the continuance and protection of a system of the most atrocious villainy ever exhibited on earth."[44]

Garrison's antislavery stems from this same belief that only God rules man—in body and mind. Reiterating the credo of his abolition crusade in 1854, declaring

> "the Abolitionism which I advocate is as absolute as the Law of God, and as unyielding as His throne. It admits of no compromise. Every slave is a stole man; every slaveholder is a man-stealer....No man is to be injured in his person, mind, or estate. He cannot be, with benefit to any other man, or to any state of society."[45]

Antebellum movements, such as colonization and gradual emancipation, harbored white supremacist principles in which African slaves, although immorally and dangerously enslaved, were inferior citizens that could pollute an economically and socially ordered white society. In 1831 Garrison asked supporters of the American Colonization Society" "To what purpose send three millions of our fellow countrymen into exile? Are they not as capable of being useful here as an equal number of whites? If they can be happy and respectable elsewhere, it only depends on ourselves to make them so here."[46] Garrison's unique and incendiary approach was vicious in its concern for emancipation on moral and religious grounds. "Whatever is to be done, must be done quickly," Garrison argued in 1835, coining the term "immediatism": "This comprehends everything...All other persons who may be favorable to a more slow and gentle process are treated with sneers and contempt,—the Colonization Society especially, who are...the greatest enemies of the African Race...I will not stop to debate the justifiableness of this end."[47]

Colonization and gradual emancipation did attack slavery, but from a position steeped in racism and white supremacy: both movements allowed emancipation for black slaves, but only so long

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[44] Garrison, "The Great [Constitutional] Crisis, 1832" in Lowance, 115.
[45] Garrison, "No Compromise with Slavery, 1854" in Lowance, 128-129.
[46] Garrison, "Walker's Appeal, No. 3, May 28, 1831" in Nelson, 26.
[47] Garrison, "Mr. Otis's Speech at Faneuil Hall, September 5, 1835" in Nelson, 82.

as the repercussions on a white society could be controlled. Garrison, on the other hand, led his followers to critique racial slavery as a social, economic, and political system from a Christian perspective. He led abolitionists to develop sociological critiques of social inequality, injustice, and power relations. No other figure was as provocative as William Lloyd Garrison, who unabashedly criticized slavery on religious-egalitarian terms. Truman Nelson's introductory biography best outlines Garrison's personality:

> "He demanded that all who called themselves Christians act like Christ. He wanted to convert them, to make them *say* they were sinning against their brothers. He imitated Jesus in stirring up strife, in evoking reaction and hostility and then putting it down with affirmations of all-encompassing love...his ministry and his prophecy was one of embarrassing reality in the real world of pain and wrong."[48]

The vehicle for William Lloyd Garrison's abolition was his Boston weekly periodical, *The Liberator*. In its first issue in 1831, Garrison vowed "I am in earnest, I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and *I will be heard.*"[49] Staying true to this opening statement, Garrison published *The Liberator* on a weekly basis from 1831 until the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. It was *The Liberator*, despite having a very modest audience (three-quarters of which were free blacks in the North), that most pointedly highlights the plethora of Garrison's reform agendas. *The Liberator*, primarily concerned with abolition, also published articles concerning universal education, temperance, women's rights, and charity.[50]

However, Garrison's brand of abolition—and social criticism—tended to ignore, if not rebuke, the antebellum labor movement. In *The Liberator*'s opening edition, Garrison appealed to his working class readers:

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[48] Nelson, xvi-xvii.
[49] William Lloyd Garrison, "Commencement" in *The Liberator,* January 1, 1831, col. 1, pg. 1.
[50] Nelson, xiv-xv.

> "An attempt has been made—it is still making—we regret to say, with considerable success—to inflame the minds of our working classes against the more opulent, and to persuade men that they are contemned and oppressed by a wealthy aristocracy. That public grievances exist, is unquestionably true; but they are not confined to any one class of society…It is the highest degree criminal…to exasperate our mechanics to deeds of violence…for it is not true, that, at any time, they have been the object of reproach…We are the friends of reform; but that is not reform, which, in curing one evil, threatens to inflict a thousand ones."[51]

Garrison's discontent with a labor movement can be identified in two distinct principles: First, he held abolition over any other cause. Second, he failed to see a dispute in between employee and employer. Evangelical abolitionism's failure to discern a social ill in many free labor situations will be further explored below.

Free Labor and *Herrenvolk* Republicanism

"The sin of slavery may be abominable there, but is it not equally so here? If they have black slaves, have we not white ones? Or how much better is the condition of some of our laborers here at the North, than the slaves of the South?" asked a New Hampshire labor newspaper in 1832.[52] As noted above, the growth of antebellum wage labor in Northern industries challenged republican notions that the United States ought to be a society comprised of independent citizens able to resist personal or economic coercion. Many labor advocates believed that the condition of most Northern workers was equivalent to, if not worse than, that of southern slaves. How did antebellum workers respond to an emerging wage system that seemingly attacked the republican notions they passionately embraced?

David R. Roediger's study of antebellum labor rhetoric, *The Wages of Whiteness*, casts significant light on the way in which white Northern workers criticized a burgeoning capitalist system while maintaining their racial superiority. Roediger highlights an 1807 account in which

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[51] William Lloyd Garrison, "Working Men" in *The Liberator*, January 1, 1831, col. 2, p. 1.
[52] Seth Luther, *Address to the Workingmen of New England* (Boston, 1832), 25; quoted in Eric Foner, "Abolitionism and the Labor movement in Antebellum America," in Bolt and Drescher, 256.

a British investor, upon visiting the home of an associate, asked the maid if her master was home. Indignantly, she replied "I am Mr. ___'s *help*...I am no *sarvant*; none but *negers* are *sarvants*."[53] Although universal white manhood suffrage was not fully achieved in the United States until the 1820s, it is clear in this account that an ideology separating white labor from black labor (both free and enslaved) had begun to emerge in the North by the early 1800s. In the 1830s, new phrases entered the lexicon of the American working class: "wage slavery" and "white slavery." These phrases illustrated workers' feelings that employers' respect for labor—and republicanism—was eroding: the loss of craftsmen's independence, the emergence of "European" styles of social stratification, and a presumed replication of slavery in the North vitalized the concept of "wage slavery." However, the implication of "slavery" in the rhetoric of Northern workers was not an act of solidarity with black slaves or criticism of slavery as a whole, but rather, a call to end oppressive practices within wage labor system.[54]

What ideologies marked this antipathy between struggling northern laborers and enslaved southerners during the antebellum period? We must look at popular antebellum interpretations of the African slave and the ideology of *Herrenvolk* Democracy. Racist stereotypes were prevalent at all levels of American society, from slaveholders to politicians to wage earners. Republicanism figured prominently in the racial ideas of the period: only strength, virtue and resolve guarded a citizen against economic, political, and social coercion. With this in mind, many white citizens interpreted the black man as incapable of republican virtues since, empirically speaking, he was always dominated either through slavery or second-class citizenship (the status of free blacks). In other words, black slaves were unfit for republicanism not because of their oppression and isolation from intellectual and economic improvement, but

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[53] Roediger, 47.
[54] Eric Foner, "Abolitionism," 255-256; Roediger, 68.

because an inherent character flaw that rendered them "naturally" inferior. If these slaves were allowed full political and legal rights, republican society would crumble because their so-called "natural" inferiority made them vulnerable to coercion—especially from wealthy, "tyrannical" men.

Roediger suggest that popular interpretations of blacks characterized them as both noncitizens and *anticitizens*: "The more powerless they became, the greater their supposed potential to be used by the rich to make freemen unfree. Thus, it was necessary to watch for the smallest signs of power among Black, and, since Blacks were defenseless, it was easy to act on perceived threats."[55] Even many Republican Party leaders of the 1850s, despite some advocacy of black rights, saw little hope in the advancement of black slaves' fitness for republicanism. Cofounder of the Republican Party and New York Tribune editor Horace Greeley did in fact believe that African Americans could hardly obtain economic equality because of racial prejudice, but nevertheless wrote that they "ought to be more industrious, energetic, thrifty, independent, than a majority of them are."[56]

Racial prejudice in the North largely stemmed from this belief in the innate inferiority of African Americans. The French social theorist, Alexis de Tocqueville, who published two volumes of his travels through the United States in 1835 and 1840, expressed his astonishment with the prejudiced "free" states of the North: "Nowhere is intolerance greater than in states where servitude is unknown…In the North, pride silences even the most imperious of man's passions…Thus in the United States…inequality is enshrined in mores as it disappears from laws."[57] Even ex-slave Frederick Douglass uttered complete surprise at the popular protest

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[55] Roediger, 56-57.
[56] Foner, *Free Soil*, 297.
[57] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Library of America, 2004), 395-7.

against and relatively low audience turnout for his antislavery tour of Vermont. "Upon the whole," Douglass' wrote, "the several towns visit showed that Vermont was surprisingly under the influence of the slave power. Her proud boast that within her borders no slave had ever been delivered up to his master, did not hinder her hatred to anti-slavery."[58]

Northern labor's "wage slavery" rhetoric, racial prejudice and stereotyping, as well as continued racial oppression allowed for a new brand of labor republicanism that gave white workers the ability to dream of economic independence (since most believed wage labor to, hopefully, be a temporary passage) *and* measure themselves optimistically against black slaves and free blacks. Several historians have cited an ideology of *Herrenvolk* republicanism in describing the political culture of the antebellum United States, in which one group is cast aside for the *perceived* benefit of the next-lowest group. By legislating white male suffrage, as well as the social acceptance of white industriousness over black slavishness, *Herrenvolk* republicanism assured northern white citizens—regardless of class or intellect—that one could never lose his whiteness: something that had become synonymous with freedom.[59]

The Emergence of Sectionalism

Before 1819, northern anxiety over the issue of slavery was minimal: slavery had not posed a vital threat to northern interests, nor had abolitionists stirred antislavery sentiments. Congress passed fugitive slave laws in the 1790s with very little protest, mandating captured runaway blacks to be returned to their southern owners. Although slave importation had ceased in 1808 because of a Constitutional requirement, natural reproduction increased slave populations from 1.5 million in 1820 to over 2 million by 1830, and nearly 4 million by 1860. Moreover, the North remained largely isolated from the South until the construction of vast

[58] John M. Lovejoy, "Racism in Antebellum Vermont," *Vermont History* 69 (Supplement 2001): 61.
[59] Roediger, 59-60.

railroad networks connected the West and Northeast in the 1850s, opening a new discourse between slave and free regions.[60]

Beginning in 1820, however, slavery increasingly epitomized America's identity crises—geographically, constitutionally, culturally, and ideologically.[61] When the House of Representatives considered the acceptance of Missouri as a slave state in 1819, many Jeffersonian Republicans supported an amendment similar to the post-nati bill offered in New York state in the late-eighteenth century, which prohibited further introduction of slaves into Missouri and emancipation of present slaves after a certain age. Citing Jefferson's Northwest Ordinance of 1787, Jeffersonian politicians held strong to the belief that increased slavery posed a threat to the future of the nation. The proposal passed in the House, but failed in the Senate—both votes were decided by ominously sectional voting: rapid population growth in the North allowed free states 58 percent of the House, while the South controlled the Senate because of more slave states in the union. After heated debates throughout 1819 and 1820, both houses of Congress accepted the exclusion of slavery north of latitude 36°30', but allowed Missouri's admission as a slave state. What had emerged from the Missouri debates of 1820 was an evolving belief that the United States had split into two regions with distinct visions for the nation's economy and ideology. Northeners feared that the admission of additional slave states into the Union would debase the republic by creating an economically dependent population—black and white—under an "aristocracy" of slave owners. Texas Annexation (1845), The Compromise of 1850, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), all of which reinvigorated the issue of slavery's spread solidified northerners' concerns about a "Slave Power" in the South. During the 1850s, the leadership of the new Republican Party addressed these fears by focusing their

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[60] Bailyn, 452-453.
[61] Ibid, 548, 575.

national policies to eradicate the spread of southern culture and promote northern society nationwide.[62]

Eric Foner's seminal work, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, emphasizes the foundations of the Republican Party's opposition to Southern political culture: the southern ideology stressed aristocratic values and the virtues of an ordered, hierarchical society. For Republicans, aristocracy and hierarchy were abhorent: the existence, protection, and spread of slavery by southern "aristocrats" retarded economic development, social mobility, and political democracy.[63] As one of the strongest critics of Southern "aristocratic" society, Governor of New York William Seward declared in 1839, "The highest attainable equality is to be accomplished by education and internal improvement, as they distribute among the whole community the advantages of knowledge and wealth."[64] In order to understand the Republicans' criticism of southern society, this section will examine their advocacy of free labor, and in turn, their preference for a nation modeled after northern culture.

For the Republican Party, northern wage labor and the realistic possibility of social mobility were essential foundations for a prosperous society. Wage earning in Republican rhetoric was always a rite of passage: laborers who practiced industriousness and frugality could save money, purchase their own homes, and in time, acquire farming land or retail business space. Antebellum Americans measured their social importance by their economic success, especially when faced with modest means. Gideon Lee's brief biography from 1843 is a celebration of the "self-made man," who, despite humble beginnings, establishes a prosperous leatherworking business:

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[62] Ibid, 583-587; Foner, *Free Soil*, 89-91.
[63] Foner, *Free Soil*, 71.
[64] Frederick W. Seward, ed., *Seward* Works, I, 197-98, III, 289; quoted in Ibid, 65.

> "His punctuality…and the industry and fidelity with which he discharged the duties…won the confidence of the gentlemen who were the managers of the company, and contributed to give him credit and standing which otherwise might have taken years to obtain."[65]

Alexis de Tocqueville likewise commented on workers' constant pursuit of upward mobility, noting "the first thing that strikes one in the United States is the innumerable crowd of those striving to escape from their original social condition."[66] However, the reality behind Lee's celebration, Tocqueville's impressions, and Republicans' rhetoric was quite different: 60 percent of laborers were wage earners in 1860—not economically independent—and new agriculture machinery was reducing the potentiality of independent farming.[67] Nonetheless, the northern model of economic development, both in industrialization and individualism, were believed by northerners and Republicans to be drastically better than the society organized in the South. Largely ignoring the slave, Republicans criticized slavery for its degrading affect on the southern white laborer. "One of the peculiar effects of southern slavery," stated an Illinois newspaper, "is to…destroy the American sentiment of social equality" among the lower classes of white society in the South.[68] Republicans assessed that the ideal of free labor was seemingly ignored in the South: the situations of white laborers and black slaves were apparently similar.

Preserving northern society as an egalitarian, economically thriving society depended on the containment of slavery. The Free Soil Movement of the 1850s, fronted by the Republican Party, sought to exclude the spread of slavery to the West. The conspiracy of a "Slave Power" to downgrade *all* labor, retard economic growth, and establish an aristocracy that perverted republicanism prompted many to support a slave-free West. No one did more to solidify northern protest against slavery's expansion than Ohioan Salmon P. Chase. His 1849 "Appeal of

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[65] "A Sketch of the Life of Gideon Lee, 1843" in Wilentz, *Major Problems,* 192.
[66] Tocqueville, 552.
[67] Foner, *Free Soil*, 32.
[68] Ibid, 64.

the Independent Democrats"—often cited as one of the most effective pieces of political propaganda in United States history—convinced northerners of "Slave Power" aggression. Chase prophesized that slavery "be crippled, or freedom go to the wall": should slavery spread, Chase argued, northern political dominance would be trumped, along with free labor interests in the west—and eventually, nationally.[69] "We are all personally interested in this question…directly…and selfishly," said Indiana representative Oliver Morton in 1860.[70] The development of Chase's political antislavery in the 1850s would identify the Republicans with the interests of northern labor, a philosophical/theoretical orientation that went largely unaddressed by the moral abolitionists.

Political Antislavery: "Slave Power" and the North's White Supremacy

Until the late1850s, abolitionists largely relied on appeals to the emotions, morality, and religious piety of their audiences. Frederick Douglass' personal testimonials not only dramatically evoked the physical and mental torment of enslavement, but also chastised antebellum Americans' for their inaction on the issue: "What, am I to argue that it is wrong to…beat them with sticks, to flay their flesh with the lash, to load their limbs with irons, to hunt them like dogs…?…Must I argue that a system thus marked with blood, and stained with pollution, is wrong?"[71] Many abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, who founded their antislavery sentiment on religious terms, pushed biblical reform agenda: "We believe and affirm…[he] who retains a human being in involuntary bondage, is (according to Scripture) [sic] a MAN-STEALER;…being an audacious usurpation of the Divine prerogative, a daring

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[69] Ibid, 94-95.
[70] Ibid, 57.
[71] Frederick Douglas, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?, 1852," in Lowance, 41.

infringement on the law of nature."[72] Others, such as Wendell Phillips, were critical of the Constitution and its four "proslavery" concessions.

The Constitution recognized the power of Congress to suppress slave insurrections, prevented any ban on the international slave trade for twenty years, granted slaveholders increased representation with the "three-fifths" clause, and allowed fugitive slaves to be recognized as property in free states. According to Phillips, these provisions had polluted the Constitution to the point that "no abolitionist can consistently take office under it, or swear to support it....We dare not prolong the experiment, and...we repeat our demand upon every honest man to join...the American Anti-Slavery Society."[73] Although the appeals of Douglass, Garrison, and Phillips presented passionate and logical arguments, they all relied on one common belief: that their audiences would respond to arguments and consequences that did not immediately affect their lives. Although the abolition movement of the 1830s and 1840s succeeded in shattering the silence surrounding slavery, the movement's moral arguments did not appeal to the citizenry as did political antislavery in the 1850s.

Political antislavery and Free Soilism became, by the late-1850s, the dominant discourses of political and social culture in the United States. The movement's chief organizer, Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, interpreted the Constitution quite differently than Wendell Phillips: it was, in fact, a compact established to eradicate slavery. Chase utilized the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson's public and private criticism of slavery, and the private papers other Founding Fathers to draft his theory that while slavery was Constitutionally-sanctioned where it already existed, its spread (including through the use of fugitive slave laws) was unlawful. According to Chase, the Founding Fathers abhorred slavery but were apprehensive to legislate against it: they

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[72] William Lloyd Garrison, "Declaration of the National Antislavery Convention, 1833" in Lowance, 119-120.
[73] Wendell Phillips, "The Constitution, A Pro-Slavery Compact, 1845" in Lowance, 245.

did not want to disrupt the young nation over disputes of property rights infringements. Chase believed slaveholders sought to undermine these implied Constitutional restrictions by spreading slavery west to dominate Congress—and realign American political culture to fit their interests.[74] Political antislavery, largely based on Chase's interpretations of the Constitution and the motives of the Founding Fathers, was a movement inspired by northern fears of an antagonistic "Slave Power." Although northerners saw blacks as inferior, they viewed the potential effects of slavery in the West as infringing and hazardous to free labor.

The rhetoric of an intrusive "Slave Power" embodied two fears in the North in the 1850s. First, southern society appeared alien and European with its lavish plantation families and gentile social occasions. The cause of this apparently hierarchical society lay in the institution of slavery. Many antislavery advocates believed slavery retarded economic growth: the economic advantage of free labor and the crippling affect of slave labor were woven into all Republican electioneering in the North from 1854 to 1860. Northern free labor allowed the worker a significant measure of independence, Republicans argued, enabling future prosperity through savings and frugality. In the South, however, as Abraham Lincoln charged, the ideal laborer was "a blind horse upon a tread-mill."[75] Accounts of northerners traveling through the South depict hordes of poor whites, "depressed…degraded in caste, because labor is disgraceful."[76] In reality, however, slave labor in southern manufacturing accounted for only 5 percent of the total labor force between 1849 and 1861. Perhaps what was most appalling to northern workers was not the number of industrial slaves employed, but the way northerners could relate to poor wages and cumbersome work: plantation slaveholders leased their chattel to cotton mills, iron works,

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[74] Foner, *Free Soil*, 73-75, 85, 99.
[75] Roy F. Basler et al., eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (9 vols.: new Brunswick, 1953-55), IV, 479-80; quoted in Foner, *Free Soil*, 45.
[76] *Congressional Globe,* 34 Congress, 3 Session, Appendix, 53; quoted in Foner, *Free Soil*, 47.

tobacco manufacture, mining, and railroad construction, among others, for as little as $50 per year; often much less than their free labor counterparts in the North where standard minimum wage for a family of four was $600.[77]

Although most northerners despised southern culture and the infringement of slavery, they feared the South's desires to secede the moment their interests were fatally weakened. Jefferson expressed this concern during the Missouri crisis of 1820, fearing "a geographic line, coinciding with a marked principle, moral and political, once conceived...will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper."[78] Even Ohio moderate John Sherman believed southern men had "for years desired disunion; they have plotted for it."[79] There is no question that wealthy slave owners dominated the political power in the South, and threats of nullification and secession regarding slavery were proof that they were ready to react radically when their interests were threatened. This same militant protection of slave owners' class interests, Republican constantly warned, would motivate westward expansion of slavery.[80]

Political antislavery took on incredible importance to northerners when applied to the West. If slavery were established in the new states, free white labor would never migrate to an area dominated by the same principles that degraded labor in the South. In the eyes of the Republican Party, the West was a crucial safety valve for eastern labor, as well as the future of American commerce. Moreover, the absence of free labor opportunities in the West would eventually cause northeastern populations to overflow, increase job competition, and decrease wages. By attaching slavery concerns to labor incentives, the Republican Party was able to harness incredible popular support across class lines based on white supremacy and

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[77] Gloria Volmers, "Industrial Slavery in the United States: North Carolinan Turpentine Industry 1849-1861," *Accounting, Business and Financial History* 13:3 (2003): 372; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, 117.
[78] Letter from Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, 22 April 1820; quoted in Bailyn, 583.
[79] Rachel Sherman Thorndike, *The Sherman Letters* (New York, 1894), 86; quoted in Foner, *Free Soil*, 98.
[80] Foner, *Free Soil*, 97-100.

republicanism. Abraham Lincoln's past as a wage earner, "the child of labor," exemplified most northerners' political and economic interests.[81] However, by aligning itself to white working males, the Republican Party minimized the role of the slave in its antislavery campaign because of racist sentiments among their white male voting constituency.

Popular antebellum beliefs that the intellectual capacity of black slaves was inherently minimal—not a result of slavery—was a significant roadblock for evangelical abolitionists in promoting white and black brotherhood. Antebellum Americans lived in a scientific age characterized by empiricism: scientists and scholars studied just what they saw, and tried to understand what things in nature actually were.[82] White males' racist sentiment was born from their minimal observance of the African-American. Fear of black equality was likewise mimicked in the rhetoric of the political parties in the 1850s. In promoting the exclusive interests of white labor in the West, in 1842 Republican Cassius Clay sought "the highest welfare of the white, whatever may be the consequences of liberation to the African."[83] In fact, it was politically dangerous to promote the welfare of black slaves. During the 1850s, Democrats constantly blasted the Republicans as "abolitionists" fighting for black equality. Following John C. Frémont's presidential loss in 1856, the Republican Party took steps to utilize *only* political attacks against slavery. By 1860, most conservative Republicans opposed to eschewing morality in their antislavery campaign had accepted the new radical approach.[84] Since slaveholders only comprised one percent of the southern population, political antislavery replicated "the old Jacksonian coalition, pitting the underprivileged against aristocrats, labor against capital."[85] By

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[81] Foner, *Free Soil*, 56-58, 16.
[82] Nicholson, 42.
[83] Letter From Cassius Clay to Salmon Chase, 27 December 1847; quoted in Foner, *Free Soil*, 63.
[84] Foner, *Free Soil*, 263, 131.
[85] Ibid, 63.

emphasizing the advantages of free labor and an egalitarian society (in the North), Republicans turned antislavery into a practical appeal that many people could answer.

Self-Ownership and "Fruits of Labor": Abolitionism and the Labor Movement in Antebellum America

Throughout *The Liberator*'s existence (1831-1865), laborers published editorials discussing the effects of slavery on wage labor. In many cases, William Lloyd Garrison and his staff responded sympathetically, even going as far as expressing anticapitalist sentiments. In "Appeal to the Rich" in 1831,*The Liberator* berated the extravagance of wealthy lifestyles, while in "the abodes of wretchedness in the suburbs of our city…every room contains a family…[who] have to earn a support for themselves and children…at the maximum of twenty-five cents per day."[86] Yet three weeks later, Garrison criticized class conflict as stemming from jealousy and misguided dissent:

> "There is a prevalent opinion, that wealth and aristocracy are indissolubly allied; and the poor and vulgar are taught to consider the opulent as their natural enemies….Those who inculcate this pernicious doctrine are the worst enemies of the people…It is a miserable characteristic of human nature to look with an envious eye upon those who are more fortunate in their pursuits, or more exalted in their station."[87]

Although the radical abolitionist expressed sympathy in response to the all-too-common effects of wage labor, he failed to recognize a remedy in labor's dissent. The previous citation provides a window into Garrison's evangelical ideology and how he perceived the value of labor. Garrison believed that immediate abolition dwarfed all other social issues in antebellum America. However, aside from Garrison's undeniable devotion to abolition, it appears that he not only disregarded the oppression resulting from the wage system but also failed to share the same "fruits of labor" ideology of many labor advocates. In the article quoted above, Garrison

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[86] M. Carey, "Appeal to the Rich," *The Liberator*, 8 January 1831, col. 3, p. 2.
[87] William Lloyd Garrison, "The Working Classes," *The Liberator*, 29 January 1831, col. 2, p. 1.

attributed wealth and poverty in the North to *individual characteristics* of intellect. The abuse of wealth, Garrison wrote, was "not found in their commercial enterprises, which...give employment to a useful and numerous class of men:...Perhaps it would be nearer the truth to affirm, that mechanics are more inimical to the success of each other, more unjust toward each other, than the rich towards them."[88] From an ideological perspective, why was Garrison able to condemn the oppressive conditions of the working poor, but criticize class conflict? By examining labor and abolitionism's opposing interpretations of social ills and freedom, the ideological gap between the two movements becomes apparent.

William Lloyd Garrison's unique brand of abolitionism was founded on religious piety and social criticism. Using the bible, Garrison pointedly criticized social ills resulting from slavery. According to Garrison, the slave's oppression was the zenith of man's evil; thus in his eyes, racial slavery was scarcely similar to northern poverty. The impoverished northern, according to Rev. O.B. Frothingham in 1853, was "an old fact resulting from man's ignorance, error, and general imperfection, and will be outgrown as man becomes more wise and powerful."[89] Slavery, on the other hand, was not the slave's fault, nor could the slave improve his/her character in bondage: "Enslave the body, and you take away every means of improvement, and destroy every thing that renders human existence desirable."[90] This optimistic view of poverty, as an empowering force fostering character improvement, was a key principle of antebellum evangelical Christianity. This egalitarian and romantic notion, based on the individual's determination, could not be practiced under slavery. Whether or not abolitionists

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[88] Ibid.
[89] O.B. Frothingham, "Pauperism and Slavery," *Liberty Bell,* XIII (1853), 167-70; quoted in Jonathan A. Glickstein, "'Poverty Is Not Slavery': American Abolitionists and the Competitive Labor Market," in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, eds. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 199.
[90] "Slavery Inexcusable," *The Liberator*, 14 July 1832, col. 3, pg. 1.

truly believed poverty was a motivating and "natural" occurrence, their ambivalence towards the topic may suggest that they did not believe it was prevalent in the United States. Many abolitionists shared Paine's belief that poverty was minimal under a republican government because hereditary privilege was extinct.

Garrison, too, shared this view, writing that "where hereditary distinctions are obsolete…the avenues of wealth, distinction and supremacy are open to all."[91] Similarly, many abolitionists believed wage labor was a "voluntary" endeavor. New York abolitionist William Jay epitomized this belief: "He is free, and his own master, and can ask for no more….labor is no longer the badge of his servitude and the consummation of his misery, for it is *voluntary*….he is party to a contract…[and] like all other vendible commodities, will be regulated by the supply and demand."[92] Contributors largely financially supported abolitionists and their societies until the 1850s when many donors turned to the Republican Party—hardly versed in the toils of the working class.[93] Jay, like other abolitionists, ignored the fact that hunger—like the lash—forced many workers to reluctantly accept the oppressive and economically coercive circumstances resulting from wage labor. The individualism they applied to workers' reactions to competition and poverty failed to analyze employers' self-interest. If the worker should rely on himself to promote his financial well-being, what prohibited the employer from exploiting labor for his own self-interest?

Abolitionists did in fact criticize northern capitalists, but their attacks excluded criticisms of labor relations. In 1834, the strong language in *The Liberator*'s "The Commercial Aristocracy of the North" placed the northern employer in alliance with the southern slaveholder. "Who opened the door to slavery in a republican system?…Who *alone* have profited from the impious

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[91] Garrison, "The Working Classes."
[92] Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal* (Baltimore, 1976), 121; quoted in Foner, "Abolitionism," 259.
[93] Foner, *Free Soil*, 303.

principle?" *The Liberator* asked. "The commercial aristocracy of the North," it answered. Abolitionists were always weary of northern capitalists because of their reliance on southern business—and in turn, the preservation of slavery. However, when northern workers used the rhetoric of "wage slavery" as a call to arms, abolitionists were critical of the terminology. Similar to Jay's sentiments noted above, Garrison blasted "wage slavery" rhetoric: "to say that it is worse for a man to be free, than to be a slave, worse to work for whom he pleases, when he pleases, and where he pleases…[is] an abuse of language."[94] Garrison and other abolitionists' interpretation of the ability to sell labor as a mark of liberty—since the slave could not—left them incapable of being critical of coercive and oppressive labor relations in a so-called "free" society.

The Liberator constantly ran advertisements and editorials encouraging their audience to refuse the purchase of goods manufactured by slaves. This boycott, like attacks against northern employers, was not intended to sponsor northern labor relations. Instead, *The Liberator*'s advocacy of "free produce" stemmed from an attempt to disrupt any economy that relied on the use of slave labor at any stage in the production process. In one such example from 1831, Garrison asked his audience "No man ought to be willing to purchase or consume stolen goods—or, in other words, the productions of slave labor. How can he knowingly do it, and be innocent?" Moreover, he charged northern consumers for "daily fastening new and heavier fetters upon the slaves…by consuming those articles which have been raised at the expense of the bodies and souls of two millions."[95] Although William Lloyd Garrison's far-reaching sociological analyses were the products of an incredible social thinker—linking the class interests of northern and southern capitalists and the potential effectiveness of a boycott—his

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[94] William Lloyd Garrison quoted in Foner, "Abolitionism," 264.
[95] William Lloyd Garrison, "Free and Slave Labor," *The Liberator*, 19 February 1831, col. 3, pg. 2.

ignorance (or, at least, ambivalence) towards labor relations is apparent in many of his essays and articles.

Labor, on the other hand, had difficulty accepting evangelical abolitionism. Some radical abolitionists did link southern slavery and northern exploitation to class conflict. In one such lecture, William Goodell, radical abolitionist and friend of Garrison, continually argued that the desire to enslave was the ultimate goal of northern employers. He cited slave mullatoization (the "whitening" of slaves via slaveholders' sexual domination) as an example of slavery's fading race distinctions. Although his arguments were more conspiratorial than anything, Goodell's 1834 appeal to New York City laborers nevertheless rallied support for abolition on class terms: "Are you quite certain that the producing classes of society are as much respected as they would be if there were no enslaved laborers in the republic? How are they respected in the slave states? Have you observed no unfavorable changes...at the north?"[96] He extended this principle, warning northern laborers to "*beware* how they [employers] sanction the doctrine of unrequited labor." Otherwise, Goodell suggested, their desire to exploit—which many evangelical abolitionists believed was inherent in man—might spread north. The desire to dominante, Goodell suggested, may have been more powerful than the desire to maximize profits.[97] In response to pro-labor abolition campaigns, some northern workers replied with contempt: "there is no chattel slavery in England, France Germany" remarked a New England labor newspaper. "Is the condition of the laborers there better than yours?"[98] Most laborers believed that labor conditions were not better in Europe as a result of emancipation.

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[96] William Goodel, "An Appeal in Behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society—Addressed to the People of the City of New-York," *The Emancipator*, 26 August 1834; quoted in Jonathan A. Glickstein, "The Chattelization of Northern Whites: An Evolving Abolitionist Warning," *American Nineteenth Century History*4:1 (2003): 37.
[97] Glickstein, "Chattelization," 30, 32.
[98] *The Condition of Labor: An Address to the Members of the Labor Reform League of New England, By One of the Members* (Boston: privately published, 1847); quoted in Glickstein, "Poverty is Not Slavery," 211.

In addition, northern antipathy to abolitionists often became violent during the antebellum period. Writing on the destruction of abolitionists' offices and printing presses in Boston in 1835, William Lloyd Garrison angrily replied "the causes which induced our revolutionary fathers…were as dust in the balance, compared with the anguish, outrage and peril, to which abolitionists are subjected."[99] However, abolitionists did differentiate between mobbers and respectable laborers. Abolitionists, knowing that many laborers supported antislavery and signed many of their petitions, saw their attackers as a "strange union of our aristocracy [northern united with southern] and the…thoughtless rabble of the cities and large towns."[100] In fact, many northern craft workers and native-born female textile workers supported antislavery causes throughout the 1830s and 1840s. But, as David Roediger suggests, "Down with all slavery!" positions were exceedingly difficult to maintain, as many northern laborers saw their own condition as equal or worse than the southern slave.[101]

Labor's hostility to abolition has often been interpreted as fear of job competition from ex-slaves. James Houston has suggested that antislavery's timing was inconvenient: it coinciding with an increase in transportation capabilities between the North and South, and increased population in the North. Easier northern migration of ex-slaves would result in even larger city populations resulting in less jobs and lower wages.[102] David Roediger refutes this claim, writing that only a minority of proslavery accounts cite job competition. Instead, Roediger theorizes that northern hostility to anti slavery was not "proslavery," but rather, a lesser evil than northern oppression.[103] Northerners were largely influenced by proslavery propaganda coming from the South. Northern workers believed that the condition of the southern slave was

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[99] William Lloyd Garrison, "Forbearance of the Abolitionists, September 5, 1835," in Nelson, 80.
[100] *Proceedings of the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Convention* (1836); quoted in Glickstein, "Chattelization," 33.
[101] Roediger, 77-78.
[102] Huston, 266-269.
[103] Roediger, 76.

actually *better* than their own. Indeed, the "lash of necessity" drove both forms of labor (a literal lash for the slave, and the lash of hunger for the northern worker). However, many believed the slave received a greater compensation for his toil. Rev. Richard Fuller's 1845 Christian defense of slavery mentions this "contradiction," saying the slave receives "compensation reasonable and certain, paid in…return best for the slave himself. The work assigned is confessedly very light—scarcely one half of that performed by a white laborer...When that is performed, the slaves (to use an expression common with them [wage earners]) are 'there own masters.'"[104] Furthermore, the slave was housed and fed, and, as was believed by many, his physical torment was equal to that of the wage earner: reasons why northern workers' rhetoric of "wage slavery" resonated so well among themselves. For northern laborers, slavery was simply a branch to the larger problem of labor inequality. Northern laborers feared an "Europeanization" of American labor conditions more than they feared a "slavocracy" of northern employers.[105]

Conclusion

Evangelical abolitionist invested their hope in the "moral suasion" and personal regeneration of every slaveholder to emancipate his slaves through a godly realization. Their arguments largely relied on scripture and biblical doctrine to persuade slaveholders and society at large to end slavery. Their approach maintained that a collective religious approach would not only end slavery, but also rejuvenate society with ethics of Christian love and brotherhood.[106] Abolitionists interpretations of northern poverty and oppressive labor relations followed this trend: human improvement was never economic, but rather, intellectual and spiritual. Wage labor in the eyes of the abolitionist was seen as a voluntary enterprise. They maintained a pre-

[104] Reverend Richard Fuller, "A Christian Defense of Slavery, 1845" in Jabour, 493.
[105] Glickstein, "Poverty is Not Slavery," 210-211.
[106] Ibid, 196.

industrial optimism that wage earning was temporary and social mobility was inevitable (through wise individual choices). Thus, evangelical abolitionists accepted the Paneite notion of republicanism in which class conflict was counterproductive because wealth accrued in the absence of hereditary privilege was nonexistent.

It is also worth noting, although quite uncertain, was that abolitionists' distaste for the market economy *and* slavery stretched back to colonial times. Abolitionists criticized slavery for its destruction of the slave *and* slaveholder families, in which "the master could buy and sell slaves at will…slaves could not legally marry…[and] the power the master had over his female slaves meant that the sanctity of his own family was in constant danger."[107] Abolitionists grew weary of laborers for many of the same reasons they despised slaveholders: 6-to-6 workdays, elimination of home production, and the extinction of homestead production was transforming the home sphere into little more than a rest stop. Workers willing to sell their labor were selling their "city upon the hill" society. Abolitionists' Christian tunnel vision—understanding society as individualistic, not stratified into classes—has led Eric Foner to conclude that "in the process of attempting to liberate the slave, the abolitionists did so much to promote a new and severely truncated definition of freedom for both blacks and whites." Abolitionists largely believed "the slaves and, to some extent, northern workers, were not downtrodden classes but suffering individuals."[108] This perception is even more clearly noted in the abolitionists' adoption of the temperance crusade. Christian societies—and to a lesser extent, workers themselves—during the 1830s and 1840s constantly berated working people with anti-alcohol doctrine, believing it to be the true oppressor and cause of poverty. A popular poem of the temperance campaign, "The Temperance Strike," was often quoted in Garrison's *Liberator*:

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[107] Glickstien, "Chattelization," 27.
[108] Foner, "Abolitionism," 260.

"And shall their sons be slaves to drink?
O never! never! Nor
Will Working Men like cowards shrink
.....
For time and cash we pledge our powers,
And strike for both for ever!
Then strike who will for "6 to 6,"
.....
For temperance and for Seventy-Six."[109]

Labor in the North identified their plight as an oppressive effect of the wage system at the hands of their employers. However, northern workers failed to identify the same class struggle among their enslaved counterparts in the South. David Roediger pointedly quotes Herman Melville in describing the racist sentiment of northern workers: "Abolitionism...expresses the fellow-feeling of slave for slave."[110] The majority of northern laborers did not want to have a fellow-feeling or commonality with any slave. They viewed their own oppression as equal or more than that experienced by the slave; to a lesser degree, they feared post-emancipation job competition. Northern labor's version of republicanism envisioned economic independence after a period of wage dependency, but its viability was bleak without the "fruits of labor." Moreover, northern labor's harbored notions of white supremacy from two distinct sources: white male solidarity enshrined in white manhood suffrage of the 1820s—allowing even the poorest of white men to identify himself as superior to a black slave of equal economic standing; and, a fear that the spread of southern culture to the West (or, in radical accounts, to the North) would subvert northern laborers already fragile economic situation. This duality of northern audacity and fear structured their uneasiness with slave emancipation.

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[109] "The Temperence Strike" in *American Labor: A Documentary Collection,* eds. Melvyn Dubofsky and Joseph A. McCartin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 50-51.
[110] Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (New York: 1857, 1971), 97; quoted in Roediger, 86.

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