

“Freedom in Their Hands is a Deadly Poison”:

Print Culture, Legal Movements, and Slaveholding Resistance on the Eastern
Shore of Maryland, 1850-61

Masters Thesis

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On February 25, 1860, the *Easton Gazette* of Talbot County, Maryland published an article decrying recent “extreme bills” that were before the Maryland Legislature. “There has scarcely been a bill,” the article read, so “impregnated with the free negro mania which has... occupied the brain of some of the members.”¹ The bills had been introduced by Curtis Jacobs of Worcester County, Maryland. The language of the text called for banning free black meetings, intercepting “incendiary” abolitionist publications, expelling free blacks from the state, re-enslaving those who do not leave voluntarily, and establishing a “vigilant police.”² In essence, their design was to harshly curtail the rights of free black persons who resided on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Why did a bill embodying “free negro mania” take center stage during the 1860 term of the Maryland Legislature? And why, on the cusp of a civil war about *slaveholding* rights, were certain Marylanders so concerned about the free black question?

The answer to these questions, and others, lie in the geographical region of Maryland known as the Eastern Shore. Though slavery existed throughout the state of Maryland, the highest proportion of black slaves-to-white males was on the Eastern Shore.³ During the Revolutionary period and the early Republic, the Shore was home to large tobacco plantations which relied heavily on slave labor. However, over the course of the Antebellum period, many farm owners became dependent on free black labor as Eastern Shore agricultural production shifted towards wheat and corn, and away from tobacco. The population of free blacks on the Eastern Shore steadily grew during the Antebellum period, and in certain counties such as Kent and Caroline, the population of free blacks not only outpaced the population of slaves, it also

¹ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, February, 25, 1860, 2.

² Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, February 11, 1860, 1.

³ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, (Baltimore: Maryland State Colonization Society, 1856), 246.

grew rather close to the number of white males in each county.⁴ Nonslaveholding whites became heavily dependent on this new labor force, and were successful at managing black freedom to benefit themselves. This set up contentious debates between slaveholders and nonslaveholders. Which labor force was the Eastern Shore to depend on: slaves, free blacks, or both?

Throughout most of the Antebellum period, slaveholders had been able to easily influence Maryland's General Assembly to pass laws that regulated free black mobility, while simultaneously solidifying slavery as an institution. However, in 1851 Maryland adopted a new state Constitution which effectively stripped the Eastern Shore of influence and power. With Maryland slaveholders at a loss, Eastern Shore newspaper contributors and editors throughout the 1850s began to ramp up their attacks on free black labor while emphatically endorsing slavery as the only reliable labor system. Eastern Shore newspapers repeatedly characterized free blacks in one of four ways: they absconded at high rates, helped slaves escape bondage, were violent, and were a burden on the body politic. Slaveholders, rather than relinquishing their power, began to seize on these arguments, and organize politically. Slaveholders devised both legal and extralegal movements designed to terrorize the free black population, as well as reconstitute slavery as the Eastern Shore's primary labor system. In each of these cases slaveholders sought to regain their authority as determiners of who was free and who was not. Sometimes they succeeded, most of the time they failed, but as each year passed they became more determined and organized.

The goal of this thesis is twofold: to explain the rise of slaveholding anxiety in relation to the growing free black question, as well as to articulate how slaveholders sought to regain

⁴ Ibid.

their power. I argue that slaveholders on the Eastern Shore politically organized around ideas and concepts produced in newspapers. Slaveholders utilized new ideas about race and the law to organize, and call upon the General Assembly to enact tougher sanctions on free black mobility. Newspapers are not only a means by which to quote mine, but they are also living, breathing, cultural organisms. They both reflect slaveholding anxieties, as well as play into them. They both record local news events, as well as conspicuously pair those local stories with similar stories from other counties, states, and nations. As Jeffrey Pasley argued in *The Tyranny of Printers*, newspapers and editors during the Antebellum period were “purposeful actors in the political process... pursuing specific political goals.”⁵ As such, newspapers and editors play an important role in the story I wish to tell.

It is important to note that this paper primarily uses two newspapers, the *Easton Gazette* and *The Kent News*. These two newspapers are interesting for a multitude of reasons. For one, they are two of a select number of Eastern Shore newspapers that have almost completely survived from the Antebellum period. Second, they stand out as purely local newspapers, whereas other Shore papers such as the *Cecil Whig* contained mostly reprinted articles from around the country.

The Eastern Shore also did not exist in a vacuum. At the same time as slaveholders politically organized on the Shore, national events played out that ultimately led to the Civil War. The Compromise of 1850, the passage of the federal Fugitive Slave Act, the Christiana Riot, the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Bleeding Kansas, and the raid on Harper’s Ferry were all major events that drove the national political discourse. It is the goal of this paper to

⁵ Jeffrey Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers: Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 3.

explain the ways in which local actions were interwoven with these larger events. In what ways did they influence slaveholders on the Eastern Shore? In what ways was the Eastern Shore unique when it came to slaveholding political organization?

This thesis builds off of the work done by historians in developing the “middle ground” thesis of Maryland, such as Barbara Fields, Carol Wilson, T. Stephen Whitman, Robert Brugger, and Ira Berlin. However, rather than treat Maryland as a singular unit, I instead focus on the Eastern Shore as being unique when it comes to slaveholding organization and resistance. In this effort, local studies of the region have played a major factor, such as Max Grivno’s *Gleanings of Freedom* and Jennifer Dorsey’s *Hirelings*. My thesis also attempts to contribute to the historiography of legal ideas and movements. Historians such as James Kettner and Ellen Eslinger do a good job of explaining the tenuous legal position free blacks found themselves in, and the long, arduous struggle for political bodies to try and regulate free blacks. I add to this ongoing discussion by demonstrating how slaveholders formed political organizations to enact legal change in regards to the free black population. Finally, and most importantly, this thesis reshapes how historians view print culture. Newspapers were not only producing ideas on the Eastern Shore, but they also carefully influenced and promoted societal, cultural, and political action.

Chapter I

The eastern region of Maryland, known colloquially as the Eastern Shore, was constituted by eight counties up until 1867: Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne’s, Caroline, Talbot, Dorchester,

Somerset, and Worcester.⁶ The name Eastern Shore originated as the result of it being separated geographically from the mainland of Maryland by the Chesapeake Bay. Throughout the Antebellum period the Eastern Shore experienced a great shift in terms of their traditional agricultural production. During colonial times and the early Republic, Eastern Shore farmers mostly relied on tobacco cultivation. However, tobacco was not only labor intensive, it also decimated the land. These two factors led many Eastern Shoremen over the course of the Antebellum period to convert their fields to less labor intensive, and more seasonal crops, such as wheat, corn, and soybeans.⁷

The original growth of tobacco on the Eastern Shore was brought about by the use of slaves. This meant that a large number of slaveholders also resided on the Shore. Tobacco cultivation required long hours over an extended period of months, and skilled hands to perform the harsh labor. Slavery maximized tobacco production. However, the decline of tobacco and the rise of seasonal crops led many slaveholders to sell their slave property in Southern markets through the interstate slave trade. Simultaneously, the growth of seasonal crops in Maryland required less skilled (and therefore cheaper) labor over shorter periods of time.⁸ Newly freed slaves as well as black emigrants and fugitives from the South were hired on Maryland's Eastern Shore to fill this labor void. This group of laborers constituted a new class on the Eastern Shore: free blacks.

⁶ Wicomico County was formed in 1867, taking parts from Somerset and Worcester counties.

⁷ Jennifer Dorsey, *Hirelings: African American Workers and Free Labor in Early Maryland* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2011), 8-10; also see Robert Brugger, *Maryland, A Middle Temperament: 1634-1980* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), Chapter 2, 240-241.

⁸ Max Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom: Free and Slave Labor along the Mason-Dixon Line, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 93.

The number of free blacks on the Eastern Shore gradually increased decade by decade throughout the Antebellum period while the population of slaves decreased. In Queen Anne's and Somerset counties, the slave population dropped by a third between 1790 and 1850. In Cecil and Caroline counties during the same time period, the slave population dropped by three-fourths. Meanwhile, in Kent County, the free black population grew from 655 to 3,143, whereas the white population of the county actually declined from 6,748 to 5,616. A similar trend occurred in the other Eastern Shore counties as well.⁹ Slaveholders on the Eastern Shore were greatly concerned with these demographic trends. The loss of slave property necessarily meant the loss slaveholding power, distinction, and influence. Even some former slaveholders who had sold their slaves during the tobacco decline now became concerned that their actions had given rise to free black labor. Reconstituting tobacco as the Eastern Shore's main agricultural product was out of the question, but there were other ways to regain slaveholding power.

The main avenue for this struggle was the Maryland General Assembly. Slaveholders pressured the Assembly to pass a variety of laws throughout the Antebellum period that simultaneously kept the institution of slavery alive, while also harshly regulating the growing free black population. For example, in regards to the slave population, the legislature passed a law in 1833 that required fugitive slaves who were caught running away to serve longer terms in bondage than previously proscribed. In terms of the free black population, a law was passed in 1825 by the legislature which fined "free negroes" for "idle [behavior] without any means of maintenance." If they could not pay the fine they had to challenge the case in court or leave the

⁹ *Maryland Colonization Journal* (Baltimore: Maryland State Colonization Society, 1852), 246.

state within fifteen days.¹⁰ The movement towards strict laws concerning free blacks and slaves coincides with a broader Antebellum trend. As historian Ira Berlin notes, laws and customs during the Antebellum period “reinforced the identification of black with slavery and white with freedom.”¹¹

Slaveholders were successful throughout the Antebellum period at getting laws enacted through the General Assembly. Enforcement however was another concern entirely. For example, after Nat Turner’s uprising in Virginia in 1831, the General Assembly passed a law ordering “the expulsion of slaves therefore freed.” Free blacks were banned from entering the state, and from being employed. Both free blacks and slaves were banned from navigating ships, carrying weapons, assembling, and selling goods.¹² However, the law passed in 1831 lacked the proper enforcement mechanisms.¹³ This in part confirms the thesis articulated by historian Ellen Eslinger in her article “Free Black Residency in Two Antebellum Virginia Counties,” which argued that Antebellum laws, in practice, “deviated significantly from statute text.”¹⁴ Even if it was the case that some laws had a “chilling effect on free blacks’ mobility and by extension their employability,” the *perception* of slaveholders was that enforcement mechanisms were lax at best.¹⁵

¹⁰ Clement Dorsey, *The general public statutory law and public local law of the State of Maryland: from the year 1692 to 1839*, Volume 141 (Baltimore: Printed by John B. Toy, 1840), 1121, 837.

¹¹ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 37.

¹² *Laws Made and Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Maryland*, Volume 213 (Annapolis: J. Hughes, 1832), 445-451.

¹³ Charles Lewis Wagandt, *Mighty Revolution: Negro Emancipation in Maryland: 1862-1864* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1964), 6.

¹⁴ Ellen Eslinger, “Free Black Residency in Two Antebellum Virginia Counties: How the Laws Functioned,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 79, no. 2 (2013), 297.

¹⁵ Grivno, *Gleanings of Freedom*, 184.

The 1831 law was not an aberration, but rather a cycle in which slaveholders found themselves trapped. Every time a crisis emerged involving free blacks or slaves, slaveholders successfully passed legislation through the General Assembly, only for the law not to be enforced. One slaveholder was quoted in the *Baltimore Sun* as saying that if something were not done there would be “few slaves remaining on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in a few years.”¹⁶ Without some enforcement mechanism slavery would erode away leaving free blacks as the only viable labor force on the Eastern Shore. More importantly, slaveholders would lose their property, and their power.

Organizing a solution to this problem was harder than it looked. Throughout the Antebellum period, national politics enveloped Eastern Shore political society. Slaveholders, just as nonslaveholders, were driven apart ideologically. In the northern part of the Eastern Shore, a strong contingent of Whigs resided. The region’s proximity to the North, as well as its geography, necessarily meant their politics was mired in discussions of railroads and canals. The southern part of the Shore leaned more towards the Democratic Party as a result of its proximity to the South, and its geographical isolation from urbanization and internal improvements. While these sectional differences were broadly true, the Eastern Shore was not populated by cookie-cutter counties. The Whig Party as well as the Democratic Party was highly active in every county. Newspapers in each county battled each other through their respective editorial pages: the *Easton Star* versus the *Easton Gazette*, the *Chestertown Transcript* versus *The Kent News*, and the *Cambridge Herald* versus the *Cambridge Democrat* were but a few examples of political divisions within Eastern Shore print culture.¹⁷

¹⁶ “Wholesale Absconding of Slaves from Maryland,” *Baltimore Sun*, Oct. 26, 1849.

¹⁷ Brugger, *Maryland, A Middle Temperament*, 226-229.

Though this strife had lasted since the advent of the two-party system, a moment in 1850 provided the groundwork for potential Eastern Shore unification, and therefore the reclamation of slaveholding power. Beginning in 1848, there were rumors throughout the state that a constitutional convention was being planned to rewrite the Maryland State Constitution. The original state Constitution, written and adopted in 1776, apportioned delegates to the General Assembly based on the number of white males above the age of twenty-one, who also owned at least fifty acres of property. However, the growth of Baltimore City and the Western Shore more generally in the seventy years since had led many to question the traditional apportionment of delegates which so clearly benefited the less populated Eastern Shore. The original Constitution also contained within it a special provision that required a two-thirds vote of two *successive* General Assemblies in order to address anything concerning the Eastern Shore.¹⁸

These designs to reform the state Constitution were particularly alarming to slaveholders on the Eastern Shore. Not only were they unable to get the General Assembly to enforce laws related to free blacks and slaves, but now their power to simply get laws passed was being threatened. Upon hearing that “Representation according to population” was the ultimate goal of the convention, the residents on the Eastern Shore pushed their political differences aside and began to unite in opposition. The first meetings held to discuss rewriting the Maryland Constitution were boycotted by almost the entirety of the Eastern Shore. Editorials in Eastern Shore newspapers such as *The Kent News* began to highlight the potential effects a new Constitution would have on the Eastern Shore as a whole. The “landed interest” on the Eastern Shore, according to one editorial, would be reduced to a “mere cipher.” Another editorial stated

¹⁸ Maryland Constitution, 1776, Article 2, Article 59.

that the Eastern Shore would be “the lamb at the mercy of the wolf,” the wolf being Baltimore City.¹⁹

In the face of a potential onslaught what was the Eastern Shore to do? One article entitled “Constitutional Reform No. 5” called for the “separation” of the Eastern Shore from the state if “representation according to population” were present in the new Constitution. In order to prevent this from happening, the author called for preliminary action:

To prevent such a catastrophe, let the people of the Eastern Shore lay aside, all minor difference, and rally, as a band of brothers around our rights and Interest... let us - and let the friends of the landed and agricultural interests in the State, on both shores, forget, all differences of opinion on other subjects, and united with hearts and voices, and actuated by a single purpose, come to the rescue of the Eastern Shore...²⁰

While the author of this piece did not necessarily want the Eastern Shore to separate from the rest of Maryland, others were more forceful on the issue. Future Governor of Maryland Thomas Holliday Hicks of Dorchester County proposed an amendment to the new Constitution that reserved the right for the Eastern Shore to secede at any time in the future.²¹ Although secession was never a realistic goal, the use of secessionist language in regards to the constitutional convention is important. It implied that the Eastern Shore was united, rather than divided. This would set the tone for the rest of the decade: only through unity could Eastern Shore slaveholders achieve their goals.²²

The results of the constitutional convention were what Eastern Shore slaveholders feared the most. While the Senate in the General Assembly remained basically the same (one senator per county, one for Baltimore City), the House of Delegates, for the first time in the history of

¹⁹ Untitled, *The Kent News*, Sept. 1, 1849, 2; Untitled, *The Kent News*, Sept. 8, 1849, 2.

²⁰ Untitled, *The Kent News*, Sept. 29, 1849, 1.

²¹ Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, 20.

²² For a detailed discussion of the secession movement on the Eastern Shore, see Dickson Preston, *Newspapers of Maryland's Eastern Shore* (Maryland: Tidewater Publishers, 1986), 59-62.

Maryland, based its delegate count on total aggregate population (all whites, free blacks, and slaves).²³ Even though the number of free blacks on the Eastern Shore had grown throughout the Antebellum period, it was nowhere near the population of free blacks on the Western Shore. The number of slaves on the Eastern Shore had dramatically declined, and in some counties, the white population had as well. All in all, the Eastern Shore was relegated to second class status. Their ability to pass laws without threat from an opposition was eroded as their number of delegates was significantly reduced.

The constitutional convention of 1850 was the end of one era in Maryland, and the beginning of another. Slaveholders' ability to influence policy and enforcement at the state level had been temporarily stymied. The federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, passed in the same year as the convention was held, did promise greater protections for slaveholders. However, decision making as it related to the appointment of marshals and deputies to arrest fugitive slaves was left up to federal courts and commissioners.²⁴ The slave population would continue to decline, and the free black population would continue to expand. Eastern Shore slaveholders did not take this fact lightly. As Barbara Fields states in *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, slavery was dealt a "defensive strain" in Maryland, and as a result, slaveholders were "overbearing, arbitrary, and vindictive."²⁵ Over the course of the following decade, slaveholders began to pursue more active means in order to reclaim slave property as well as to halt the growth of the free black population. National events in the 1850's, such as Bleeding Kansas and the Dred

²³ James Warner Harry, *The Maryland Constitution of 1851* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1902), 101.

²⁴ Milt Diggins, *Stealing Freedom along the Mason-Dixon Line: Thomas McCreary, the Notorious Slave Catcher from Maryland* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2015), 59-61.

²⁵ Barbara Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 1985), 39.

Scott decision, likely enticed slaveholders to act urgently, but it was the efforts of Eastern Shore print culture to stoke and promote slaveholding anxiety that primarily affected change.

Chapter II

Eastern Shore newspapers, and print culture more generally, actively participated in promoting anxiety amongst slaveholders. As historian Dickson Preston points out, Eastern Shore papers were “county newspapers, pure and simple.” They were published largely by “homebred, homegrown owner-editors whose viewpoints... were those of the communities in which they had their roots.”²⁶ This meant that what editors chose to print was at least partially reflective of preexisting sentiments within Eastern Shore society. However, because editors had a local background, they were able to use their knowledge to exploit and intensify slaveholding angst going into the future. Their motives for doing so were likely rooted in capitalistic impulses: to sell more newspapers.

An unintended consequence of this effort was that slaveholders would seize arguments in newspapers to actively challenge free black mobility, and argue for the reconstitution of slavery. With their influence in the General Assembly limited by the new Constitution, slaveholders needed new arguments, and new channels to achieve their goals. Eastern Shore newspapers amplified slaveholders’ angst through two means: literature and news. The first promoted *ideas* about free blacks and slavery as an institution. The latter then reinforced the ideas implied in the literature sections.

²⁶ Preston, *Newspapers of Maryland’s Eastern Shore*, Preface, xiii.

Literature itself can be broken down into three categories: black minstrelsy, stories using the term “nigger,” and scientific racism. Black minstrelsy during the 1850’s, although written down, was not unlike latter incarnations performed on stage by actors using blackface. The supposed design of black minstrelsy was to provide entertainment to the reader while simultaneously promoting a moral lesson. In reality, these stories reflected the biases and anxieties of slaveholders, as well as enhanced them. William Mahar, in his article “Black English in Early Blackface Minstrelsy,” argued that Antebellum literary minstrelsy acted as a “photographer’s negative.” According to Mahar, black minstrelsy was not only about perpetuating white prejudice, but it was also reflective of the “differences between American life and its social or cultural ideals.”²⁷ In effect, black minstrelsy tells us less about black people, and more about mastery, and slave ownership.

Although Eastern Shore newspapers certainly deployed black minstrelsy, that is not to say that they were the only papers in the country to do so. By the 1850s, black minstrelsy and other forms of racial and cultural minstrelsy were prevalent in American popular culture. Minstrel halls were prevalent in cities where theatrical shows were performed in blackface. Show tunes from those plays were converted into sheet music and joke books. The publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 expanded the reach of black minstrelsy outside of the minstrel halls in cities to the broader countryside.²⁸ By using black minstrelsy, Eastern Shore newspapers were engaging with an expansive popular culture, while simultaneously deploying stereotypes for their own self-interest. Editors wanted to sell more newspapers, so using familiar minstrel

²⁷ William Mahar, “Black English in Early Blackface Minstrelsy: A New Interpretation of the Sources of Minstrel Show Dialect,” *American Quarterly*, 37, no. 2 (Summer, 1985), 284.

²⁸ Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850’s* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 2005), 23.

characters in storytelling made sense. However, by printing these stories editors of Shore newspapers, wittingly or not, were engaged in a project that stoked fear and angst in the hearts and minds of slaveholders.

A stereotypical example of literary black minstrelsy was printed in the *Easton Gazette* in 1858. The entirety of the story was written in dialogue. “Where is the hoe, Sambo?” asked the white master to the black slave. “Wid de rake, Massa.” the slave replied. “Well, where is the rake?” the master inquired. “Wid de hoe.” the slave answered shortly. “But where are both?” the master exclaimed. The slave responded: “Why, ‘bof togeder, massa you ‘pears to be berry ‘ticular dis morning.”²⁹ What initially comes across as simple bickering between master and slave is actually a story which emphasizes certain characteristics about black people, and slaves in particular. “Sambo” was one of many recurring characters in literary black minstrelsy. They were typically portrayed as lazy, but also extremely cunning.³⁰ Slaveholders who read this story would not have come away with a flattering picture of black people's’ ability to respond to simple inquiries. The author of the story showcased the calculated elusiveness and sarcasm of the minstrel character, thereby reveling in and heightening slaveholders’ angsts.

An article published in *The Kent News* in 1849 deployed a similar form of black minstrelsy. The story began by setting the scene: “We often hear of Irish gallantry, but Africa is equal to Ireland.” Of course, slaveholders would not have thought this the case, and that is why it is so striking. The author was playing off of slaveholders’ fears that maybe tomorrow, or in the near future, Africa would be seen in the same light as Western Europe. The anecdote goes on

²⁹ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, June 26, 1858, 1.

³⁰ Frances Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-bellum Slave Narratives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 72. My discussion of “Sambo” is focused on the *perception* of the literary character by slaveholders, not whether “Sambo” is representative of actual black behavior (see Elkins, Blassingame).

to describe a “negro driver of a coach in Texas” who stopped to get some water for the white ladies in the carriage. When asked what he was doing, the driver responded, “I am watering my flowers!” The article proclaimed that “A more delicate comment could not have been made.”³¹ A black man flirting with white women would have certainly struck slaveholders the wrong way. The quick witted response of the black driver is also characteristic of black minstrelsy. Black characters in these stories were very bright, and ingenious at getting out of trouble, while whites often fell victim to black people’s verbal gymnastics.

Similar to literary black minstrelsy was that of fictionalized news stories. Black characters were taken out of the sometimes nondescript world of minstrelsy and instead placed in real life circumstances. One prominent example of this was an 1849 *Kent News* article entitled “Fidelity of a Negro Boy.” In this short-story the author described a black man named Cuffy who was put in charge of two white infant children on a ship. Unfortunately, a storm capsized the ship and the one available lifeboat had room for only two passengers. The “faithful negro” placed the two infant children on the boat, and told the children to “Tell Massa that cuffy done his duty.” According to the author, Queen Charlotte, impressed by this tale, asked famous poet Hannah Moore to write a poem extolling the black man’s “devoted and heroic conduct,” but Moore declined, remarking, “That no art could embellish an act so noble!”³² On its face, this story extols the loyalty of a black man to his master’s family. On a deeper level, it speaks to slaveholders’ assumptions about what black servants or slaves were supposed to do. Black people were to sacrifice themselves for the continuation of white family lineage. This minstrel character embodied the supposed natural order in the minds of slaveholders.

³¹ Untitled, *The Kent News*, July 28, 1849, 1.

³² “Fidelity of a Negro Boy,” *The Kent News*, April 21, 1849, 1.

Fictionalized news stories were also vehicles for comedy. In 1859, an article which had originally appeared in the *Ouchita Herald* (La.) was reprinted in the *Easton Gazette*. At a circus, a black man came across an elephant and noticed “the colossal proportions of the animal.” He became terribly frightened at the sight of the animal, and made “a herculean effort” to escape. While running away, the man tripped, fell, and began to cry out loud. Unable to rise, he was taken up and carried to his house where he later died, “the doctors say from no other cause than fright.” The author of the story argued that this should not be considered “elephantcide,” but instead “negroicide,” as it was the black man, not the elephant, that was scared to death.³³ Black characters in this story and others were sometimes easily frightened, a common trope that was understood by slaveholders. Only black minstrels could die of fright, unlike their white counterparts in fictionalized news stories. The use of the term “negroicide” emphasized the humour of the story, and suggested that readers should take this man’s death lightly. After all, a black man dying of fright was hardly something slaveholders should worry themselves over.

Minstrels, whether in surreal or realistic universes, represented what slaveholders’ expected of black people, as well as what they feared about them. Some stories emphasized the cunning and deceit of black minstrels, while others emphasized nobility and humour. The underlying sentiment of these stories was that only through proper mastery could black people be controlled. Black minstrels were black people that needed to be “turned from unruly subjects into perfect symbols of their owner’s will.”³⁴ In effect, by using black minstrelsy, Eastern Shore newspapers were actively engaged in promoting slavery as the mechanism to control black

³³ “A Negro Scared to Death by an Elephant,” *Easton Gazette*, June 11, 1859, 2.

³⁴ Walter Johnson, *Soul By Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 107.

behavior.³⁵ Most of the time, these types of stories littered the front pages of Eastern Shore newspapers. These stories acted as an entrance to the rest of the paper: only those who emotionally and intellectually engaged with these characters were advised to read further. While not a physical barrier to entry, it was a barrier nonetheless.

Also found in the literature sections of Eastern Shore newspapers were stories which actively deployed the use of the term “nigger.” Some stories that used “nigger” also contained minstrel characters, but the use of such terminology clearly distinguished them. According to historian Elizabeth Pryor, the term “nigger” was originally interchangeable with the word slave. However, over the course of the Antebellum period, as some black people gained their freedom, the term “nigger” began to be associated almost entirely with free blacks. The word “captured the magnitude of anti-black feeling,” and latched onto free blacks “like a shackle.” “Nigger” branded free black people as “foul smelling, unproductive, licentious, and unfit for self-rule.”³⁶

For example, one story in *The Kent News* detailed an event that involved “negro servant Tony” who served at the hand of Old Captain Stick. The Captain used racialized language throughout the story when referring to Tony, such as “nigger,” “rascal,” and “black scamp.” The crazed Captain was about to give Tony lashes when the servant convinced Stick to stop. Tony ended the short-story by yelling, “Bress God, nigger mus’ KEEP OUT DE OLD STABLE, or I

³⁵ For more examples of literary black minstrelsy in Eastern Shore newspapers see: Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, June 12, 1858, 1; Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, June 19, 1858, 1; “Big Feet,” *Easton Gazette*, January 8, 1859, 1; Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, July 16, 1859, 2; Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, February 12, 1859, 4; “A Negro With the Blues,” *Easton Gazette*, January 15, 1859, 3; “Long Disputed Point Fully Settled,” *Easton Gazette*, April 23, 1859, 1; “Negro Philosophy,” *The Kent News*, March 10, 1849, 4; Untitled, *The Kent News*, August 25, 1849, 1; “Negroes in Desert,” *The Kent News*, November 3, 1849, 2; Untitled, *The Kent News*, July 7, 1849, 1; Untitled, *The Kent News*, August 25 1849, 1; Untitled, *The Kent News*, June 21, 1856, 1; “A Good Joke,” *The Kent News*, August 23, 1856, 1.

³⁶ Elizabeth Pryor, “The Etymology of Nigger: Resistance, Language, and the Politics of Freedom in the Antebellum North,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 36, no. 2 (Summer 2016), 205.

tell you what, dat judgmen' for coss make de back feel mighty warm for true!.”³⁷ Although Tony is not entirely free in this story, he is also not a slave. Like many free blacks in Antebellum America, his status existed somewhere in between the two poles of slave and free. The use of the term “nigger” by Captain Stick was designed to “obstruct independent black movement,” thereby keeping Tony from straying too close to freedom. It is also important to note Tony’s use of the term “nigger.” If this story were true, it is likely that Tony would have used the term “nigger” as a way to escape punishment, and maintain his status as a free person, however limited that status might be. Because this story is fictional, it is necessary to probe the author’s motives. It is much more likely that the author was showcasing “African American backwardness,” rather than Tony’s ability to carefully maneuver and maintain his social position.

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A semi-fictionalized story published in the *Easton Gazette* 1858 described a “certain ‘nigger’ who was keen-witted enough” to outsmart the High Constable of Baltimore. The jailed black man bargained with the constable: if the constable were to bail him out of jail, he would point out a house where “notorious thieves resorted, and where a large quantity - “whole lots” - of stolen goods could be found.” The constable agreed to this deal, and took the black man with him to point out the house. “The nigger” told the constable that “you and dese two gemmen stay out here and I’ll go into de house, and when I whistle den you run in dere quick, and you cotch em nice.” After waiting a while, the black man did not whistle, and the constable entered the house. What he discovered certainly surprised him: “The ‘shrewd cid’ darkey was gone, and the Warden was debtor to the State of Maryland in the amount of the bail bond.”³⁹

³⁷ “A Judgement for Costs,” *The Kent News*, May 12, 1849, 1.

³⁸ Pryor, “The Etymology of Nigger,” 242, 227.

³⁹ “The Independent Candidate and the Whistling Nigger,” *Easton Gazette*, October 2, 1858, 2.

Like Tony in the previous story, this black man also existed somewhere between slave and free. The character exhibited similar characteristics to literary black minstrels in that he was both elusive and cunning. The white constable did not stand a chance against the verbal gymnastics deployed by the jailed man. This would have been a great worry to slaveholders. Even when free blacks were jailed, like the man in this story, their deceit in pursuit of freedom never ended. The use of the term “nigger” by the author is not simply a derogatory term, but a critique of black freedom writ large: if restraints around black mobility were not maintained, black people would most assuredly run rampant.⁴⁰

Literary black minstrelsy and the term “nigger” defined the boundaries of slavery and freedom in mostly fictional, yet familiar worlds. Black minstrelsy argued for the necessity of slavery as an institution, while “nigger” castigated free black mobility. What underwrote both of these ideas was a uniform notion of blackness as articulated by pseudoscientific racism. Historian Stephanie Camp wrote in her article “Black Is Beautiful: An American History” that during the Antebellum period, “Black writers agreed that slavery was the source from which sprang the widespread contempt for black bodies.”⁴¹ However, slaveholders at the time suggested the opposite. Slaveholders argued that black bodies were naturally degraded, and that slavery was solely responsible for the advancement of black people out of their naturalistic state.

This particular argument by slaveholders squared nicely with the radical shift that occurred amongst the scientific community during the nineteenth century. Michel Foucault

⁴⁰ For more stories in Eastern Shore newspapers using the term “nigger” see: “A Discovery,” *Easton Gazette*, August 2, 1851, 2; “Dan Marble’s Monkey,” *Easton Gazette*, November 29, 1851, 1; “Negro Philosophy,” *The Kent News*, March 10, 1849, 4; “A Good Joke,” *The Kent News*, August 23, 1856, 1.

⁴¹ Stephanie Camp, “Black Is Beautiful: An American History,” *Journal of Southern History*, 81, no. 3 (2015), 683; also see Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

argued in *The Order of Things* that natural science during this period went from focusing on the grammar of naturalistic classification to instead focusing on how the “analysis of comparative anatomy” informed such classifications. The classification no longer described the natural order, but rather the natural order, the “elements most hidden from view,” informed the classification.⁴² In terms of race, this meant that “white” and “black” were no longer simply labels describing skin color. Instead, “white” and “black” were terms that embodied certain inherent characteristics and behaviors. This new way of thinking was hardly relegated to certain portions of the Western European scientific community. American scientists such as Samuel George Morton actively promoted this new science, sometimes by publishing, and at other times by touring Antebellum America in roadshow fashion in order to teach and inform the broader public. Even when scientific studies were published in Europe, their reach was “thoroughly transatlantic.”⁴³ Eastern Shore newspapers were quick to publicize this scientific revolution, not only because it attracted readers, but also because it informed, expanded, and enhanced the slaveholders’ worldview.

In December of 1855, *The Kent News* published Johann Friedrich Blumenbach’s “The Races of Men.” Blumenbach was a famous German anthropologist, naturalist, and physiologist. Like his contemporaries Georges-Louis Leclerc and Comte de Buffon, Blumenbach espoused the degenerative hypothesis: that Adam and Eve were caucasian while other races were degraded due to environmental factors. The “Caucasian Race,” according to “The Races of Men,” was “the leading branch of the human family,” having developed both “personal beauty, and

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Reprint (New York: Routledge, 2005), 292.

⁴³ Britt Rusert, “The Science of Freedom: Counterarchives of Racial Science on the Antebellum Stage,” *African American Review*, 45, no. 3 (Fall 2012), 293.

intellectual superiority.” Its progress in literature, the arts, and science had “left all the other races far behind.” The “Caucasian Race” sharply contrasted with the “Ethiopic Race” which was “easy, indolent, cheerful, sympathetic, confiding... fond of sensual pleasure and gaudy attire, and exceedingly improvident.” A majority of the “Ethiopic Race” ranked “very low” in intellect, while a few “exceptional individuals have occasionally exhibited a good deal of talent.” This article espousing Blumenbach’s ideas brought together free blacks and slaves under the blanket of blackness.⁴⁴

Another article, “Dow, Jr., on Negroes,” also expressed a universal notion of blackness. Published in *The Kent News* in May of 1857, the piece was likely written by Elbridge Paige, a magazine essayist who went by the pseudonym “Dow Jr.”⁴⁵ Paige began the article by stating his argument: “the nigger was made for the climate.” The piece detailed how black people had “adapted” to a hot environment. This included developing a “downy fleece,” a “[flattened] nose,” and “an upper lip capable of seating out-side a tobacco quid.” Paige went on to argue that black people had been enslaved for a reason:

The brush of nature has painted him black - the prevailing color of all animals that inhabit the torrid zone ... of a truth, nigger can stand heat almost equal to a salamander, and it is this that renders him so useful a [biped], in the burning field of the South where a white skin if put to hard labor, would find little of nothing left of him to take home to supper at the close of the first day.⁴⁶

“The brush of nature,” according to Paige, made a diverse group of people singularly black.

Although black people came from various tribes, villages, countries, and continents, the color of their skin united them as a whole. This is not unlike Johann Blumenbach’s physiologist

⁴⁴ “The Races of Men,” *The Kent News*, December 15, 1855, 1. For a larger discussion of Blumenbach’s theories, see Naomi Zach, *Philosophy of Science and Race* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 29-35.

⁴⁵ John Bryant, *Melville and Repose: The Rhetoric of Humor in the American Renaissance*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 127.

⁴⁶ “Dow, Jr. On Negroes,” *The Kent News*, May 16, 1857, 1.

argument, that all black people were defined by certain characteristics. The fact that the editors of *The Kent News* published Paige's and Blumenbach's articles suggest that both they and their readers were interested and engaged with the supposed scientific linkage between blackness and certain behaviors.

Similarly, the *Easton Gazette* also related 'scientific' ideas about blackness. For example, in 1859, the newspaper published an article about the discovery of a new primate. In the article, the author discussed some of his supposed observations in the field: "...Sometimes when a negro is passing unawares under a tree, in which a Gorilla is seated, it will reach down its arms and snatch the man up by the throat and hold him till he is strangled."⁴⁷ This sentence in particular promoted the idea that all black people were similar, and that a gorilla could easily mistake a black person for one of their own species.⁴⁸ Within the context of purportedly scientific article, this sentence is transformed from an author's quip to observable fact. More importantly, when placed in a 'naturalistic' environment, black people, no matter free or enslaved, would move backwards in evolutionary time. According to this logic, slavery was not a barrier to black people's advancement, but rather the guardian of black freedom and achievement. If not for the forced migration slavery brought about, black people would be stuck in Africa, and separated from the achievements of Western civilization.

Articles in Eastern Shore newspapers linking science and blackness together were essentially creating a narrative: black people's development as both humans and citizens was inherently limited. Shackled by race, black people would never be able to achieve the status of white men. More importantly, without slavery keeping black people in check, they would revert

⁴⁷ "The New Man Monkey," *Easton Gazette*, April 30, 1859, 1.

⁴⁸ For another example of biological construction of race, see "A Negro Turning White," *Easton Gazette*, July 10, 1858, 2.

back to naturalistic impulses. The horridness of slavery that abolitionists spoke of was instead portrayed by Shore print culture as a societal advancement, and therefore a necessity. Slavery propelled black people forward, freedom cast black people back into Africa's dark den.

The literature sections of Eastern Shore newspapers used "scientific" ideas about race to bolster their claims that slavery was a necessity and that black freedom was an oxymoron. These ideas were a gateway into the actual news articles that populated the bulk of Shore papers. They brought like minded readers in, enhanced their racist thoughts, and then propelled readers to continue reading and observe these ideas in action. What readers found on those next few pages of Eastern Shore newspapers were a plethora of articles utilizing and repackaging racial ideas into "news." The news articles tended to exhibit a single purpose: stoke, amplify, and exploit slaveholding angst. Newspapers published stories that described slaves and free blacks escaping jail, breaking labor contracts, engaging in criminal activity, and much more. It is no surprise that newspaper editors sought to publish outlandish articles in order to sell more newspapers. However, the result of that effort on the Eastern Shore was in effect an ideological gift to slaveholders, one which both confirmed the supposed necessity of slavery as a labor system, as well as derided the non-slaveholding labor system of hiring free blacks.

Black mobility was a primary focus of Eastern Shore newspaper editors as they sought to amplify and exploit slaveholding angst. If slaveholders were no longer the arbiters of where, when, and how black bodies moved through space and time, their power in society was effectively gone. One aspect of black mobility that particularly frightened slaveholders was the ability of free black people to quit their jobs and seek to be hired elsewhere. Slaveholders were used to year round, forced, always available labor, and yet what proliferated in Eastern Shore

newspapers was a cacophony of stories about “negro men” who voluntarily left their term of service. For instance, in 1850 the *Easton Gazette* published an article about a “negro” named Adam Gibson who escaped the service of William Knight in Cecil County.⁴⁹ Another article in *The Kent News* warned its readers that “Abe Brown, negro man” had escaped from the premises of Samuel S. Chambers.⁵⁰

As the 1850’s wore on, Eastern Shore newspapers made it seem as if black absconsion was drastically increasing. Between 1857-1858, the *Easton Gazette* published three separate instances of “Negro Stampedes” which plagued the Eastern Shore.⁵¹ Elsewhere, stories detailed the growing extent of vagrancy. For instance, a large article titled “More Runaways” relayed that “Fifteen negroes” had escaped three different persons. The article went on to describe an apparent trend: “This makes about forty, says the Cambridge Democrat, that have left this immediate neighborhood in the past three weeks.”⁵² It is almost impossible to discern whether or not the number of black vagrants increased throughout the 1850’s. However, what we can draw from these sources is that Eastern Shore newspapers were actively engaged in constructing a narrative about the supposed surge in black flight. Even though Maryland’s government during the Antebellum period participated in the “application of labor controls for the benefit of the employers,” Shore papers presented a much different story.⁵³

⁴⁹ “Another Arrest,” *Easton Gazette*, December 28, 1850, 2.

⁵⁰ “To All Whom It May Concern,” *The Kent News*, June 21, 1856, 2. However, these were rare articles, as oftentimes the names of the alleged vagrants were not mentioned. See: “Caught,” *Easton Gazette*, August 30, 1851, 2; “Runaway,” *Easton Gazette*, February 1, 1851, 2; “Runaways,” *Easton Gazette*, September 27, 1851, 2.

⁵¹ “Stampede,” *Easton Gazette*, October 24, 1857, 2; “Negro Stampede,” July 10, 1858, *Easton Gazette*, 2; “Negro Stampede,” *Easton Gazette*, July 31, 1858, 2; “More Runaways from Dorchester,” *Easton Gazette*, January 9, 1858, 2; also see “Runaway Negroes and Their Capture,” *Easton Gazette*, August 28, 1858, 2.

⁵² “More Runaways,” *Easton Gazette*, October 31, 1857, 2.

⁵³ Richard Morris, “Labor Controls in Maryland in the Nineteenth Century,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 14, no. 3 (1948), 400.

In *The Kent News*, there were multiple stories written about free black absconsion from the perspective of hirers. One concern was voiced by a farmer who wrote in 1850 that “We have never known laborers so scarce as they are at the present time.” Why was this the case? The farmer had an answer: “this in a great measure, is owing to free negroes who have been in the habit of hiring out, now refuses to do so.”⁵⁴ This same idea was embodied in an editorial published in 1852 which stated that a number of “free negroes” had “left their employers, in the midst of pitching an important crop.” The editorial went on to propose a remedy to this crisis: pass a law that demands the arrest of “free negroes” who break labor contracts. The law would also make the “free negroes” liable to “pay cost of arrest, imprisonment and trial.”⁵⁵ The ability of black people to quit and sell their skills elsewhere was being linked by *The Kent News* to the destruction of the agricultural economy on the Eastern Shore. Of course this was not the case, as many farmers had successfully transitioned over the Antebellum period not only from long-term to seasonal agriculture, but also from slavery to the hiring of free blacks. *The Kent News* presented a narrative slaveholders would have found more recognizable, if less truthful. More importantly, the author of the latter article suggested criminal punishment when it came to hiring free blacks, a subject which will be addressed in Chapter III.

While slaveholders were certainly fearful of free black movement among the Eastern Shore labor market, what scared them even more was that free blacks were actively engaged in helping fugitive slaves escape. Not only was slavery experiencing a decline on the Eastern Shore, but free blacks were aiding its demise. For example, in 1851, Isaac Gibson, a “free negro,” was convicted in Caroline County of “enticing a servant belonging to Mr. D. Knoths to

⁵⁴ “Laborers,” *The Kent News*, January 12, 1850, 2.

⁵⁵ “Hired Servants,” *The Kent News*, May 15, 1852, 2.

run away.”⁵⁶ A year later a black man named Moses was confined to the Denton jail “for enticing away a slave belonging to James H. Fountain.”⁵⁷ A most fascinating story appeared in the *Easton Gazette* in 1853, which described the escape of slaves near Kent Island. In the article, the writer described how the slaves might have accomplished such a feat: “There is a suspicion that they were induced to run off by a colored man, who recently appeared on the island, and stated he had been landed from a packet running between Baltimore and Annapolis.”⁵⁸ Not only did slaveholders have to combat local free blacks enticing slaves to runaway, but also free blacks who traveled from the Western Shore.

Elsewhere, Eastern Shore newspapers were quick to highlight the interconnectedness between abolitionist thoughts and ideas (and therefore fugitive slave activity) to the presence of free blacks in society. Samuel Greene, a free black pastor, was arrested in 1857 on account of owning a copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Charles Dixon was arrested in 1859 “on the charge of circulating abolition documents and papers seditious and incendiary in their character.”⁵⁹ These stories alone would have served the editors’ purpose, but when paired with other local news stories about the underground railroad and runaway slaves, these became all the more frightening. For instance, one article claimed that a “general stampede of negroes from Dover, Delaware, [escaped] by the underground railroad. Capt. Hugh Martin, Mr. John Chipman, Mr. Phillips, and Mr. Horsey have each lost valuable negro men...”⁶⁰ The close geographical proximity of Philadelphia to Delaware, and therefore the Eastern Shore, made the entire

⁵⁶ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, March 22, 1851, 3.

⁵⁷ “Escape From Jail,” *Easton Gazette*, April 3, 1852, 2.

⁵⁸ “Escape and Recapture of Slaves,” *Easton Gazette*, May 28, 1853, 2.

⁵⁹ “Arrested,” *Easton Gazette*, December 10, 1859, 2.

⁶⁰ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, September 5, 1857, 2.

Delmarva region susceptible to fugitive slave activity.⁶¹ The evidence presented itself everyday in Eastern Shore print culture as newspapers filled up their back page advertisement space with runaway slave ads. Free blacks were not simply engaged with abolitionist thought, but they in fact succeeded in helping many slaves escape bondage. Slave property being highly valuable, it would not have been lost on slaveholders that free blacks were engaged in highly organized theft.

Another area in which black mobility supposedly threatened slaveholders was the massive amounts of alleged crimes free blacks and fugitive slaves committed. For instance, Eastern Shore newspaper editors made sure to exploit the fear that white women were being raped at high rates by black males. The *Easton Gazette* published an article in 1851 that described the execution of “negro” Amon Green for having committed an “atrocious crime upon the person of Mrs. Josephine Peepe.”⁶² Later that same year, the *Gazette* published the gruesome details of a widow in Denton, Maryland who was supposedly raped by a “free negro”: “he followed after, overtook her, grasped her violently by the throat and accomplished his hellish purpose.”⁶³ The stories of rape were reinforced with similar stories reprinted in the Eastern Shore newspapers from states such as Mississippi and Delaware.⁶⁴ These articles no doubt bothered slaveholders because, like slaves, female sexuality was “property that they owned.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ Two great studies of Delaware during the Antebellum period are: Patience Essah, *A House Divided: Slavery and Emancipation in Delaware, 1638-1865* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996); and William H. Williams, *Slavery and Freedom in Delaware, 1639-1865* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996).

⁶² “Execution for Rape,” *Easton Gazette*, April 12, 1851, 3.

⁶³ “Infamous Outrage,” *Easton Gazette*, August 9, 1851, 2.

⁶⁴ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, July 31, 1858, 2; “Broke Jail,” *Easton Gazette*, December 1, 1860, 1; “Hanged,” *The Kent News*, February 10, 1849, 2.

⁶⁵ Peter Bardaglio, “Rape and the Law in the Old South: ‘Calculated to excite Indignation in every heart,’” *The Journal of Southern History*, 60, no. 4 (1994), 754. For a broader discussion of women as “property” see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Anything that interfered with this propertied relationship was something to be angry about, and to be acted against.

News articles detailing the rape of white women by black males are particularly notable because they countered Antebellum assumptions about femininity, gender, and rape. Before Emancipation, rape and “blackness” were not inextricably linked terms. Historian Peter Bardaglio argued in “Rape and the Law in the Old South” that Southern courts were actually more favorable to slaves and free blacks when they were accused of rape than when they were accused of other crimes. The gendered assumption, that in order to substantiate a charge of rape women had to “exhibit overt resistance to the violent behavior” of the attacker, was very much a prevalent idea in Antebellum America.⁶⁶ Similarly, historian Diane Somerville in her book *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth Century South* challenged the assumption long held by many historians that “white southerners throughout their entire history have been preoccupied... with rape.” Somerville acutely labeled this the “rape myth.”⁶⁷

With this in mind, news reports about the rape of white women by black males read differently. For example, an article in *The Kent News* entitled “Daring Outrage” claimed that “free negro Isaiah Hawkins” insulted a white girl named Elizabeth Piper while she was attempting to get water from a well. Piper responded by throwing a bucket of water on Hawkins, who himself then proceeded to knock her down, gag her, and pursue a “hellish design.”⁶⁸ The added detail that Piper resisted Hawkins is critical, because without it, slaveholders would not have necessarily assumed that Piper did not welcome Hawkins’ advances. Newspaper editors

⁶⁶ Ibid., 769.

⁶⁷ Diane Somerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth Century South* (N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 3.

⁶⁸ “Daring Outrage,” *The Kent News*, February 2, 1856, 2; “Court,” *The Kent News*, April 26, 1856, 2; “State vs. Isaiah Hawkins fn.,” *The Kent News*, May 10, 1856, 2.

most assuredly knew this. They also knew that only one article describing the rape of a white woman was not going to be perceived as an epidemic. The only way to create the latter was to publish articles detailing similar stories, which they did frequently throughout the 1850's. The gendered structure of Antebellum society was not easily overcome, but it was something Eastern Shore newspapers tried to act against. Their primary objective was to speak to slaveholders on the most pressing issue in their minds: the survival of slavery in the wake of the rise of free black labor.

Stories about free blacks engaged in theft also filled up Eastern Shore newspaper columns. One article stated that "A Negro... with a companion, concluded to take a stolen ride... they harnessed Mr. H's horse to his carriage and started off..."⁶⁹ Another printed the court proceedings of the trial of "negro Andrew John," who was convicted for stealing chickens, and "sentenced to be sold for three years... was disposed of at public sale... for \$200."⁷⁰ Other articles presented editorial comments on the entire class of free blacks and their supposed tendency to steal. "Those free ones," a column began, "who have been permitted to live, probably a dozen in a small hut, all crammed in a ten by twelve room, depending on pilfering from their neighbors for a livelihood."⁷¹ A separate editorial argued that "negroes cannot be induced to work so long as they can support themselves by their midnight visits to the meat-houses, granaries and chicken roosts of the farmers."⁷² News reports of free blacks stealing paired with editorials turned individual criminal acts into an crime wave. Their freedom from slavery unleashed a wave of alleged criminal activity that could hardly be contained.

⁶⁹ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, December 20, 1851, 2.

⁷⁰ "Sold," *Easton Gazette*, July 3, 1858, 2.

⁷¹ "The News Again," *Easton Gazette*, July 24, 1858, 2.

⁷² "A Voice from Maryland," *Easton Gazette*, May 7, 1859, 1.

While rape and theft by black people were highlighted by Eastern Shore newspapers, no crime was propagated more than murder. Not only did papers simply report murders committed by black people, they also made sure to include all the gruesome details. One story described an attack by “Four negro men” on a Mr. Harrison, “a most respectable and worthy citizen.” They attacked him “with sticks and beat and margled him in such a manner that he was left as dead before his door.”⁷³ In another instance, a black man named Samuel Ward was arrested for stealing. After his arrest, the *Easton Gazette* reported that he “managed to free his hands, which were tied, and instantly plunged a Spanish dirk knife in the shoulder of Mr. Davidson, which he followed up with another stab, which severed the arteries and sinews of the left arm.”⁷⁴

A most horrific murder was recounted in the *Easton Gazette*, committed by a “desperate, dangerous negro.” Attempting to pass himself off as partially deranged, he encountered a white woman “whom he attacked, cut open her bowels, strewed them by the roadside, and otherwise mutilated the body. He also cut off the right hand, at the wrist, which has been found.”⁷⁵ There has been a large body of historical research into conceptions of the black body. However, in Eastern Shore newspapers, much of the focus was on portraying white bodies being disemboweled, maimed, sliced, and torn apart at the hands of mobile free blacks. Similarly, a story was reported in *The Kent News* that four “negro men” went to the house of N. Connelly Harrison where they “beat and mangled him in such a manner that he was left as dead.” The article went on to describe the “15 or 16 violent gashes on his skull” as a result of the stick or

⁷³ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, August 16, 1851, 2.

⁷⁴ “Murder of an Officer in Delaware,” *Easton Gazette*, May 15, 1852, 2.

⁷⁵ “Horrible Murder,” *Easton Gazette*, October 17, 1857, 2.

club used by the four black men.⁷⁶ The perception in Eastern Shore newspapers was that white bodies were being torn apart, mangled, and destroyed at the hands of free black men.

Editors of these newspapers made sure to specifically amplify the murders of hirers, police officers, and high profile community members. One article detailed the murder of hirer Samuel Martin by the “negro named John Horsey.” Horsey was helping Martin kill hogs, when a quarrel arose as to when the hired man would be paid. When Martin ordered Horsey out of his house, Horsey “snatched [Martin’s] gun and inflicted several blows upon the head of Martin, from the effects of which he died in a few hours.”⁷⁷ Slaveholders who read this piece would have been confronted with a staggering assertion: free black labor negotiations lead to cold-blooded murder. Elsewhere, slaveholders might have read another story which detailed the murder of a police officer for simply trying to arrest “some Negroes...for the purpose of gambling, drinking, &c.”⁷⁸ Or they might have seen the article that described the murder of a grocery store owner who was killed while sleeping in his chair.⁷⁹ These stories not only detailed well-known white community members getting murdered at the hands of free blacks, they also suggested that it was impossible for free blacks to engage with white people without becoming violent.

In the latter part of the 1850’s, particularly around the time of the raid at Harpers Ferry, Eastern Shore newspapers began to print stories relating the threat of free blacks to entire white population, rather than just individual white citizens. One article titled “Negro Insurrections” stated that “the Negro population is beginning to plot schemes of insurrection and murder of the

⁷⁶ “Cowardly Assault by Four Negroes,” *The Kent News*, August 23, 1851, 1.

⁷⁷ “A White Man Killed by a Free Negro,” *Easton Gazette*, December 24, 1859, 2.

⁷⁸ “Unfortunate Affair,” *Easton Gazette*, July 17, 1852, 2.

⁷⁹ “Murder,” *Easton Gazette*, February 6, 1858, 2.

whites... These schemes and conspiracies are supposed to be instigated and formed by designing and unprincipled abolitionists from the North, or by some like monster in their own midst.”⁸⁰ In late 1859, the *Easton Gazette* reported that in Snow Hill, Maryland, Mrs. Dennis, a large slaveholder, received an anonymous letter “informing her that the negroes of the Eastern Shore of Maryland and Virginia had fixed upon this (Friday) night for a general rising against the whites.”⁸¹ Free blacks’ mobility to organize would have already frightened slaveholders, but now their supposed violence was targeted at every white person on the Eastern Shore.

These schemes of local insurrection were then paired with stories from other states and nations that seemingly confirmed the breadth of the problem. For instance, one piece detailed the “Horrible butchery of the whites” in Venezuela.⁸² The *Easton Gazette* also published a story out of Detroit, Michigan, where a “gang of negroes” supposedly “took possession of the school houses... and refused to allow the white teachers to enter.” The black persons who took control of the school demanded that entry to the school “should be open to them, [and] that they should be allowed to participate in their management.”⁸³ White people everywhere, not just on the Eastern Shore, were supposedly being threatened by free black people. They threatened institutions, and used violence as a means of political, social, and economic ends. Eastern Shore newspapers transformed random stories into a larger narrative of free black violence.⁸⁴

Even when violence occurred, there was not always a guarantee that the perpetrators would be kept securely in jail. Repeatedly, Eastern Shore newspapers made sure to print stories

⁸⁰ “Negro Insurrections,” *Easton Gazette*, December 13, 1856, 2.

⁸¹ “Another Excited Rumor,” *Easton Gazette*, December 3, 1859, 2.

⁸² “Negro Insurrection in Venezuela,” *Easton Gazette*, July 23, 1859, 2.

⁸³ “The Negro Outrages in Canada West,” *Easton Gazette*, January 28, 1860, 2.

⁸⁴ For a larger discussion of the rumors of black insurrection after the raid on Harper’s Ferry, see James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 207-209.

of black people escaping their jail cells. The most detailed story of this type described the escape of Charles Bromwell, a “free negro,” and four others from the Easton jail. The article reported that Bromwell escaped using a canoe he had stolen, and made his way to St. Michaels. There he sold the canoe and hired himself to one of the bay schooners. Whilst working, a Mr. Edward Hubbard, “who knew the darkey, and was aware that he was a fugitive from justice... arrested him” and took him to the nearby jail.⁸⁵ Even when free blacks were confined in jail cells, there was no guarantee they would stay secured.

Sometimes, rather than directly associating black people with violence, absconsion, or fugitive slave activity, Eastern Shore newspapers printed articles that simply argued black people were a burden on society.⁸⁶ A noteworthy example of this is a story printed in 1851, detailing an incident where a “negro girl” died as a result of her clothes accidentally catching fire. Rather than sympathize with the girl, the story instead leveled a scathing rebuke of her decisions in the moment: “Her imprudence in rushing into the street after discovering the accident, no doubt hastened its fatal termination, as it tended to spread the fire more rapidly than one would otherwise have been the case, had she remained in the house - she was presently enveloped in flames.”⁸⁷ A woman, in a life or death moment, was being criticized by the local paper for rushing out of the house, probably looking for help. This article was analyzing her decision as both a danger to herself as well as a danger to the surrounding community. Free blacks, left to their own devices, not only harmed themselves with ill-decision making, but their decisions were a potential burden upon the entire society.

⁸⁵ “A Fugitive Captured,” *Easton Gazette*, October 9, 1858, 2; Also see: “Escaped,” *Easton Gazette*, November 19, 1853, 2; “Negro Convicts,” *Easton Gazette*, April 30, 1859, 1.

⁸⁶ Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, Chapter Five.

⁸⁷ “Horrible Death,” *Easton Gazette*, April 12, 1851, 2.

Other articles, rather than aiming their ire at individual black persons, instead turned their focus to the presence of blacks in society more generally. In 1857, “twenty-five hundred” free black people showed up on the shores of Kent County in the steamers *Georgia*, *Express*, and *Champion*. It was reported in *The Kent News* that the newly arrived visitors “gave to our beautiful little town rather a dark appearance.” These “negro excursions” were objectionable to the writer, who hoped that the citizens of Kent would take some steps to “prevent them landing in the future.”⁸⁸ A year later, the same thing happened again. This time, “1,500 negroes... en-route for the camp meeting” arrived at Chestertown in Kent County. *The Kent News* described these people as “nuisances” and called upon the authorities to put a stop to a “like invasion in the future.”⁸⁹ The “negroes,” according to each of these articles, were up to no good. Their presence in Kent County, and particularly their “excursions,” were unwanted. The articles also embody Elbridge Paige’s aforementioned “paintbrush” thesis: just as black people were “painted” black, so too could the arrival of black people “paint” a white town. In these instances, the presence of black bodies within society was a problem promulgated by newspaper editors. Black people were a burden on society simply because they existed within society.

It is clear then that print culture on the Eastern Shore was actively engaged in constructing a certain idea about free black people. According to newspapers, free black people absconded at high rates, engaged in criminal activity, helped to free slaves, and were a burden on society. However, these articles were not only about portraying black people in a particular way, but also stoking the fear that slaveholders already had about the rise in the free black population. The rise in number of the free black population necessarily meant the loss of slaveholders’

⁸⁸ “Excursions,” *The Kent News*, August 30, 1856, 2.

⁸⁹ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, September 5, 1857, 2.

power, distinction, control, and self-worth. Indeed, as Stephanie Camp argues in *Closer to Freedom*, the closer enslaved people got to freedom, “the further removed some of their owners felt from their own liberty.”⁹⁰ Even with this leveling against the free black population, newspapers still had to contend with the other labor system: slavery. Slaveholders would have certainly welcomed free black labor being ridiculed, but was free labor really worse than slavery? As it will become clear, Eastern Shore newspapers were very creative in response to this question. Hoping to appeal to slaveholding subscribers, editors crafted a defense of slavery that both justified the system of labor as well as promoted it.

In 1858, a newspaper challenged the editorial board of the *Easton Gazette* to answer one simple question: “Is human slavery as it exists on this Peninsula a divine institution?” What was important about their response was that they defined slavery and free labor as polar opposites. Slaves had been “trained to industry,” while free blacks relied on “pilfering from their neighbors.” Slaves were doing “twice as well as the free negroes” because they were “under the exclusive control of a white master,” while free blacks were “lazy, roguish,” and repeatedly came within the scope of the vagrant law.⁹¹ Slavery and free labor were not distant cousins of one another, but rather directly counter to one another. At least, this was the vision the *Easton Gazette* sought to propagate.

A similar idea was promoted in an article published in 1859 in the *Easton Gazette*. The author began the piece by stating that Maryland “contains from 80,000 to 90,000 free colored people... A very great difference when we compare the states. Can anything bear stronger evidence of the good treatment they receive there than these facts.” The idea that free blacks

⁹⁰ Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 127.

⁹¹ “The News Again,” *Easton Gazette*, July 24, 1858, 2.

were treated well as evidenced by the large population of free blacks in the state is hardly convincing. A large number of free blacks resided in Maryland as a result of many black persons escaping from the South. Maryland was less a permanent home and more a passageway to the North. Elsewhere, the author characterized free blacks as “idle, ignorant, and criminal in the extreme.” Farmers on the Eastern Shore were “compelled to procure laborers from the cities at enormous expense of time and money; for these negroes cannot be induced to work.” Free blacks also committed “another injury suffered by farmers,” which was that they interfered “with the domestic relations of master and servant.”⁹² By chastising black freedom, the author was inherently making the case for freedom’s opposite: slavery. If all blacks were enslaved, they could be forced to work. If all blacks were enslaved, the number of fugitives from slavery would most assuredly decline. If all blacks were enslaved, black people would no longer live in “degradation and misery.”

The author went on to sympathize with the struggles of Marylanders in their dealings with free blacks. They were “burdened by very heavy taxes to support almshouses and prisons, which, for the most part, are filled by this class of people.” No state, according to the author, “has done more for negroes of all classes than Maryland.” The author was essentially arguing that free blacks should be grateful they lived in Maryland. Free blacks were lazy, violent, and roguish, even though they were ‘graciously’ treated by Marylanders. According to the author, “if this free colored population did not live so easy at home, they would quickly embrace the chance to flee from oppression if oppression there was.”⁹³ This stark contrast between the way free blacks were treated and the way they supposedly behaved promoted the idea that slavery

⁹² “A Voice From Maryland,” *Easton Gazette*, May 7, 1859, 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

was a preferable labor institution. Marylanders treated free blacks kindly, and all they received in return was horrific behavior. At least with slavery, slaveholders thought, there was a significant return on investment.

Elsewhere, newspaper columns were dedicated solely to defending slavery as an institution on the Eastern Shore, no matter how many lies needed to be told. For instance, one article in 1852 began by declaring that “the labor in this section of the state is mostly performed by slaves.” This was, at best, stretching the truth. In Caroline, Cecil, and Kent counties, the number of free blacks was far greater than the number of slaves, according to the 1850 Census. In Dorchester and Worcester counties, the ratio of free blacks to slaves was about 50:50. Only in four of the Eastern Shore’s nine counties, Queen Anne’s, Saint Mary’s, Somerset, and Talbot, did the number of slaves outpace the number of free blacks in the 1850 Census.

The author of this article went on to describe the system of slavery on the Eastern Shore in intimate detail. According to the author, a slave was usually given ten to fifteen dollars to “secure his assent,” but, “if he refuses to do so he is not compelled to go.” This mutual exchange induced a slave to “be profitable to his employer as well as useful to himself.” The author finished by proclaiming that slaves were able to “accumulate considerable property,” and are lucky enough to enjoy Christmas and Easter off. They were thus enabled to “secure many little comforts for themselves and families.”⁹⁴ This is a rather different idea of slavery than most would recognize. While many black people on the Eastern Shore were able to obtain property, most of them were free from bondage, not slaves. One such free person, James Jones, accumulated \$5,000 in real estate, and sold it to forty-four black men during the Civil War so

⁹⁴ “Agriculture, Eastern Shore of Maryland,” *Easton Gazette*, December 18, 1852, 1.

that they could meet Chestertown's (Kent County) land qualification in order to vote. The idea that some black people "were not compelled to go" into slavery is simply counterfactual. One great example of this was when Sheriff John Poole of Cecil County in 1857 lured a free black man out of jail and sold him into slavery. This happened repeatedly throughout the 1850's. And while some slaves might have had Christmas and Easter off, it is not a credit to Eastern Shore slavery.

Though this defense of slavery is hardly credible, that did not matter to the editors of Eastern Shore newspapers. They were in business to sell newspapers to a slaveholding clientele. In fact, print culture went further than simply defining slavery in a positive light. Editors sought out critics of slavery on the Eastern Shore and shamed them publicly in their newspapers. Attacking abolitionist books and pamphlets was not unique to the Eastern Shore. When *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was initially published, almost every Southern newspaper contained critiques of the book ranging from simple fact-checking, to furious condemnation and contempt.⁹⁵ However, in Eastern Shore newspapers, most book reviews focused on local abolitionist publications that had specifically critiqued Shore slaveholding. The most prominent example of this was when a book was published by John Long in 1857 entitled *Pictures of Slavery in Church and State*. The book was both a critique of Eastern Shore slavery, as well as a condemnation of the Methodist Episcopal Church's involvement with the slave trade. This did not sit well with slaveholders, and newspapers made sure to exploit their aggravations.

One review of the book charged that while Long was visiting plantations in order to write his book "he was eating and wearing the product of slave labor, and making a dyspeptic of

⁹⁵ Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, Chapter Three.

himself by enjoying too fully the hospitality of slave-holders.” In fact, the review went on to accuse Long of never actually observing a slave on his entire trek. Long’s final product, *Pictures of Slavery*, was a mere representation of “the hobgoblins he is trying to fight, [that] exist only in an addled intellect.”⁹⁶ Similar criticisms were leveled against Long in another review, which argued that while slaveholders were gracious enough to let Long visit their plantations, Long was busy “secretly stabbing those benevolents to the very heart.” While Long was “living off of these slaveholders meat and bread” he was busy writing a book which described those people “as being cruel, hard-hearted, and brutish.” The review went so far as to say that the slaveholders Long made mention of “reared their slaves to such a higher degree of honor that Mr. Long ever did, or ever can attain to...”⁹⁷ While these criticisms certainly focused on Long as a documentarian, they were more pointedly focused on defending slavery as an institution on the Eastern Shore. The authors made sure to both promote the supposed hospitality of slaveholders as well as the industriousness of slaves raised “by their master’s hands.”

All in all, the project of Eastern Shore newspapers was twofold: change the perception of free blacks so that they were seen as violent criminals while simultaneously defending and promoting slavery. However, these two goals were not necessarily unique to Shore print culture. For instance, Andrew Diemer argued in *The Politics of Black Citizenship* that the legal status of African Americans in Philadelphia and Baltimore was highly contested. Debates surrounding their legal status “played out in books, pamphlets, and newspapers and were reprinted in publications across the nation and beyond.”⁹⁸ Similarly, historians Harold Tallant and Lynda

⁹⁶ “The Rev. John D. Long,” *Easton Gazette*, June 20, 1857, 2.

⁹⁷ “The Peninsula News and Jno. D. Long,” *Easton Gazette*, July 10, 1858, 2.

⁹⁸ Andrew Diemer, *The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 5.

Morgan have written about the larger border region, Kentucky and Virginia respectively.

Though these states had a higher ratio of slaves-to-free blacks than the Eastern Shore, they were still home to fierce debates regarding the concept of black citizen.⁹⁹ Even in non-border states, print culture was the vehicle in which people made arguments as to whether slavery or free black labor was the better labor system.

While there are similarities to the broader Antebellum print culture, the Eastern Shore was unique in two ways. One, there was remarkable consistency among Shore newspapers as to the advantages of slavery and the dangers of free black labor. Though newspapers throughout the region engaged in fierce political debates, the question of labor had a more uniform answer. Second, unlike in other border states, slaveholders on the Eastern Shore actually used arguments in print culture to politically organize on a large scale.

During a time period when transportation and communication were limited, it makes sense that newspapers (specifically articles reprinted) aided the consolidation of pro-slavery hostility. Newspapers propagated negative stereotypes about free blacks that most assuredly inflamed the attitudes of slaveholders from Cecil to Worcester. Slaveholders in the one part of the Eastern Shore would have thought their “free black problem” was merely a local one, but with the aid of newspapers ideas were able to spread rapidly. A slaveholder in the northern part of the Eastern Shore would have viewed himself as in a similar circumstance to that of a slaveholder in the southern part. So too did newspapers aid in the spread of pro-slavery ideology throughout the Eastern Shore, at a time when slavery was appearing to die a slow death.

Newspapers on the Eastern Shore did not set out to organize slaveholders, but in an effort to

⁹⁹ Harold Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); Lynda Morgan, *Emancipation in Virginia's Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1992).

appeal to their audience these papers in fact united previously disparate parties. Slaveholders up and down the Eastern Shore now had the ideological tools to combat free black labor as well as to promote slavery.

So if print culture was indeed effective in convincing slaveholders that free blacks were a threat to society and that slavery should be reimposed, what did slaveholders do with these newfound ideas? The short way of answering this question is that slaveholders began to engage in politics in a way they had not before the 1850's. Slaveholders started to organize locally, on-the-ground, to effect change and achieve their desired goals. At certain times slaveholders sought to effect change extralegally, at other times legally. As was often the case, slaveholders operated somewhere between these two extreme poles. No matter the means, the end desire was to reimpose slavery on the Eastern Shore, and eradicate the free black population.

Chapter III

The intellectual ideas about race and the law that were created and promoted in Eastern Shore newspapers were not isolated from the national political scene. The events of the 1850's that ultimately led to the Civil War were actively reported on in Shore print culture. For instance, the Compromise of 1850 made headlines in the state of Maryland for two of its major components: the ending of the D.C. slave trade, as well as the Fugitive Slave Act. In regards to the first, Maryland had always maintained the position that D.C. had been ceded to the United States government under terms that still leant Maryland some control where their interests were concerned. The death of the slave trade in D.C. particularly riled slaveholders who viewed the

move as an encroachment of abolitionism, and ultimately the death of slavery in Maryland.¹⁰⁰

The Fugitive Slave Act was also worrisome to slaveholders because it placed enforcement mechanisms in the hands of federal marshals, rather than state governments. Slaveholders already had a problem getting their local and state governments to enforce the law, better yet the federal government.

The effectiveness of the Fugitive Slave Act was initially tested soon after the law's passage. During the mid-Antebellum period William Parker, a slave from Maryland, escaped across the Mason-Dixon line into Pennsylvania and made his way to Christiana. It was there that he resided for many years on a farm which served as a passageway on the Underground Railroad. In 1851, the Maryland slaveholder Edward Gorsuch made his way to Christiana, accompanied by federal marshals and other slaveholders to retrieve their fugitive slaves. When Gorsuch and his men arrived at the Parker farm they were shot at. Gorsuch was killed in the incident and other members of the party were wounded. Parker managed to escape through the Underground Railroad into Canada, while the others who fired upon Gorsuch were not so lucky. Thirty-two people were indicted, while only one man, Castner Hanway was actually brought to trial on charges of treason.

This created a firestorm in both Pennsylvania and Maryland. Riots broke out in Christiana where pro and antislavery activists targeted one another. Thaddeus Stevens was brought in to craft a defense for the murderer, while other national political figures and reporters flooded to the scene of the trial. Newspaper columns on the Eastern Shore were filled with

¹⁰⁰ "Maryland Resolutions on SLAVERY," *The Kent News*, January 26, 1850, page 2.

lengthy discussions of both the trial and the riots. Eventually, the murderer was acquitted of all charges. This stoked anger amongst slaveholders even more.¹⁰¹

Similar to the Christiana incident were multiple reports in 1851 in Eastern Shore newspapers that seemed to confirm the limits of the Fugitive Slave Act. For example, in Cecil County a slave named Emory Rice escaped from the farm owned by William Knight and made his way to Pennsylvania. It was there that federal marshals caught Rice, and the fugitive slave was subsequently sent back to Knight's farm. When Knight looked upon the fugitive, he declared "this is not my slave." It turns out that the federal marshals had misidentified Rice, and instead had arrested a free black man named Adam Gibson.¹⁰² In February of 1851, *The Kent News* reported on another case out of Pennsylvania where a "negro woman" named Tamor Williams, claimed as the slave of W. J. Purnell, was brought before Judge Kane. The judge decided that the testimony on behalf of the claimant as it related to the identity of the alleged fugitive was insufficient, so Kane ordered the prisoner to be discharged.¹⁰³ These high profile incidents that showcased the failures of the Fugitive Slave Act were paired with stories emanating out of Boston where "hundreds of negroes... were armed to the teeth" in a coordinated effort to resist the enforcement of the Act at all costs.¹⁰⁴ The new Fugitive Slave Act, for all its political salience, appeared to be dead on arrival.

Against this national political backdrop, and armed with new racial ideas, it is no wonder that some slaveholders and like-minded citizens on the Eastern Shore began to take the law into

¹⁰¹ For an excellent documentary history of the Christiana Riot and subsequent trial, see: W. U. Hensel, *The Christiana Riot and the Treason Trials of 1851: An Historical Sketch* (Lancaster, Pa.: The New Era Printing Company, 1911).

¹⁰² "Fugitive Slave Case," *The Kent News*, December 28, 1850, page 2.

¹⁰³ "Discharged," *The Kent News*, February 18, 1851, page 3.

¹⁰⁴ "The Boston Press on the Fugitive Mob," *The Kent News*, February 15, 1851, page 2.

their own hands. For instance, in 1851, a slave escaped bondage in Easton, Maryland. Upon learning this fact a deputy and a marshall in Easton accompanied the slaveholder to recover the fugitive. They stopped in front of a household occupied by free blacks they thought were harboring the fugitive and pretended that their vehicle was broken down. The two officers then “roused the inmates by asking for a light to mend the traces of their vehicle.” When a black woman opened the door, the officers “rushed into the house and commenced the search.” According to the article reporting on this incident, “the owner recognized his slave, but the other colored persons in the house interfered, and, arming themselves with axes and firearms, succeeded in enabling the fugitive to escape.” They then began to assault the officers, when, “in self defence,” the officers were “forced to use their pistols, and it is believed several of the colored persons were wounded.”¹⁰⁵

The marshall in this case was likely a federal marshall enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act. However, the details of the story are important to note. This was not simply a case of retrieval. This was instead a case of manipulation, intrusion, and police brutality. The deputy and the marshall, rather than weighing the facts of the case, apparently sided wholly with the slaveholder and proceeded to escort him on a recovery mission. Instead of simply asking the free blacks in the household whether or not they could search the house for the fugitive, the officers instead decided to play a trick, and bust into the house the second the door was opened. This fact in particular gives the impression that the officers were not acting under legal authority, but rather out of retribution on behalf of the slaveholder. To the modern eye, the free blacks in the house had a right to defend themselves against this intrusion, but instead, the officers responded to this

¹⁰⁵ “Conflict with Fugitive Slaves,” *Easton Gazette*, January 4, 1851, 2.

reaction by shooting several of the black people inside of the building. All in all, two officers “of the law” aided a slaveholder to recover a fugitive slave, engaged in deceit, broke into a building, and shot several free black persons. This was an act of terror.

Another instance of extrajudicial behavior was carefully executed in 1857 by the Sheriff of Cecil County, John Poole. A free black man had been charged and lodged in the county jail. Poole lured the black man out of jail with a bargain: help the Sheriff find a fugitive slave, and in return, the black man would be free to go. The man agreed to this deal. However, unbeknownst to him, the Sheriff was actually leading the man down to Virginia, where he would be sold as a slave. The Sheriff was eventually caught by the police and charged with kidnapping, thereby landing himself in jail. Poole’s term in jail did not last long however, for in 1858, with possible help from the outside, Poole successfully escaped.¹⁰⁶

Poole’s behavior in this instance can be linked to the ideas promoted in Eastern Shore newspapers. Print culture emphasized negative stereotypes about free blacks, while simultaneously promoting slavery. Maryland laws that supposedly restricted free black mobility and strengthened slavery were not being enforced. Against this backdrop, it is no wonder what propelled Poole to take the law into his own hands. Even though he was an officer of the law, nothing gave Poole the right to kidnap a free black person, and yet that is what he did. The officer was determined to see that the former prisoner was forced into slavery, where, according to Eastern Shore print culture, free blacks rightfully belonged. Poole’s actions were the

¹⁰⁶ “The Negro Stolen From Cecil County,” *Easton Gazette*, September 5, 1857, 2; “Escape,” *Easton Gazette*, June 19, 1858, 2; “Charge of Kidnapping,” *The Kent News*, August 29, 1857, 2; “Anti-Slavery Reporter Vol. VII, Third Series,” *Wilmington Republican*, 1859, 24.

manifestation of ideas propagated in newspapers, whether they were directly responsible for this specific incident or not. This was extrajudicial behavior at its most cruel and violent.¹⁰⁷

Elsewhere, mob rule took hold of Eastern Shore society. For example in 1857, Robert Lucas, and a “mob at Centreville Md.” attempted to get ahold of and lynch Dave Seeney, a free black prisoner.¹⁰⁸ This type of activity was at least tangentially attributable to print culture, specifically the ways in which newspapers emphasized the violence of free blacks, as well as their tendency to escape jail. Newspapers legitimized these extralegal actions by printing similar stories from other areas of the country. For instance, *The Kent News* printed a story regarding a free black man named John H. Cannon, who “killed and outraged the person Miss Sarah Griffith, near Dover, Del.” However, Cannon did not remain in jail for long, as he was “forcibly taken from the jail at the place, and lynched by an outraged community till life was extinct.”¹⁰⁹ These stories of nearby extralegal activity, similar to that on the Eastern Shore, helped to legitimize the latter. By casting these actions as regional, rather than local, newspapers transformed extralegal local lynchings into legal behavior.

There were also a number of abolitionist pamphlets and books that were spread around the Eastern Shore that caused slaveholders to take action. For instance, Reverend Joseph Lane published an abolitionist book entitled “Maryland Slavery and Maryland Chivalry.” In the book, Lane described the brutality of slavery on the Eastern Shore:

The American is the worst system of slavery that ever saw the sun; and with our eye fixed on the fires of the last judgment, we aver that such shocking abomination, grinding oppression, cruel barbarities, unrelenting despotism, and foul impurities, are practised on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, as would have disgraced Earth’s most barbarous age and nation.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Poole was most certainly not the only person to kidnap free blacks and sell them into slavery, see “The Alleged Attempt to Sell a Free Colored Person,” *Easton Gazette*, July 3, 1858, 2.

¹⁰⁸ “Guilty,” *Easton Gazette*, August 1, 1857, 2.

¹⁰⁹ “Lynch Law in Delaware,” *Easton Gazette*, September 1, 1860, 2.

¹¹⁰ Joseph Lane, *Maryland Slavery and Maryland Chivalry* (Philadelphia: Collins, Printer, 1858), 6.

Many on the Eastern Shore were afraid that these stark descriptions of slavery, like Lane's and Long's, would spread across the region. These ideas were dangerous because they encouraged whites to join the abolitionist cause, and promote black movement Northward. As abolitionist ideas began to spread across the Eastern Shore and gain popularity, so too ensued a crackdown on those ideas.

In 1855, J. W. Corey was accused of being an abolitionist. He took to *The Kent News* to publicly defend himself. In the editorial, Corey stated unequivocally that he pleads “*not guilty!*” to the charge of being an abolitionist. He had been accused of associating with abolitionist James Bowers, to which Corey rebutted that he only went to see Bowers to collect money “which had been due me from him for nearly a year.” Corey stated that his personal views of the slavery issue were of “no business” to the public, but that they were “not materially at variance with those entertained by slave-holders generally of this county.”¹¹¹ The fact that Corey had to so viscerally defend himself in *The Kent News* speaks to the fear he likely felt. Being labeled an abolitionist was a serious charge on the Eastern Shore during the mid 1850's and brought the threat of physical harm to the accused. If you did not publicly defend yourself, you could face physical harm.

Eastern Shore newspapers gave individuals the ideological justification they needed to engage in extralegal activity. Slaveholders and like minded citizens took the law into their own hands. However, these types of isolated illegal actions did not necessarily represent the majority of slaveholders or Eastern Shoremen. In fact, if anything, these extralegal events conducted periodically by individuals were but the foundation for a more organized body politic.

¹¹¹ Untitled, *The Kent News*, December 22, 1855, 2.

Slaveholders, rather than operate independently, came to understand that they were more effective when united. Throughout the 1850's, many slaveholders on the Eastern Shore began to *organize* their terror in ways unseen in prior decades. Due to the success of "runaway slave conductors," slaveholders were "compelled to pledge to each other 'their lives, their fortunes and sacred honor,' in police vigilance." The *Easton Gazette* remarked that such meetings demonstrated the "determination of the citizens en mass 'to do or die' in defence of their slaves and firesides." Fugitive slaves and nefarious free blacks would be "hunted to the utmost confines of the Union" and forced into service for the State "breaking stone or picking oakum."

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The best example of extralegal organization was the case of James Bowers in Kent County, Maryland. Bowers, a white man, was a known abolitionist in Chestertown in the 1850's. Throughout the decade, a number of slaveholders had brought charges against Bowers in court, claiming that he had aided fugitive slaves. For instance, in 1851, a bill of indictment was found against Bowers for "giving pass to and enticing one of Dr. Davidson's slaves to run away."¹¹³ However, due to laws restricting the use of black people's' testimony in court, evidence could rarely be established against Bowers, and he walked free several times.¹¹⁴ In 1853, Bowers was finally tried in court for having assisted a fugitive slave, "but for want of sufficient evidence was acquitted." Ever since the trial, Bowers' neighborhood had experienced a great "loss of this kind of property [slaves]," which was assumed to be Bowers' responsibility.

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¹¹² "Another Excitement at Chestertown," *Easton Gazette*, October 23, 1858, 2.

¹¹³ "Arrest in Kent," *Easton Gazette*, June 7, 1851, 3.

¹¹⁴ "Honorably Acquitted," *Easton Gazette*, June 21, 1851, 2.

¹¹⁵ "Mob Law In Maryland," *The Liberator*, November 19, 1858, 1.

By 1858, slaveholders in Chestertown had had enough. They organized a local meeting, led by prominent judge Ezekiel Chambers. There they designed the plan they would later commit. The slaveholders organized a staged vehicle breakdown outside of Bowers' home. They proceeded to the door of the house, and pretended that they "required assistance to mend it." When a free black woman answered the knock, the slaveholders rushed in and grabbed both the woman and Bowers. Both of them were taken to the woods, where the slaveholders "stripped, tarred and feathered" them "for tampering with slaves."¹¹⁶ *The Planter's Advocate*, a pro-slavery newspaper on the Eastern Shore, argued that "the least possible violence was used," but this was clearly not the case.¹¹⁷

After being driven out of Chestertown, Bowers returned a few weeks later. About three hundred people assembled, captured Bowers in a carriage, and forcibly drove him to Middletown, Delaware, where he was shipped by train to Philadelphia. The whole event was one of "knock-downs, black eyes, and bloody noses, in every direction." A newspaper editorial in the *Easton Gazette* remarked on what had transpired:

As to the leaders of the party effecting so happy a riddance, it is enough to say that they were among the first men in the community - men of wealth and men of intelligence - who, after smarting for years under injuries inflicted by underground railroad agents, came to the wise conclusion, in Convention, sometime ago, to execute summary vengeance upon every trespasser.

¹¹⁸

It is certainly the case that this incident was extrajudicial, as it involved citizens, and even the local judge, "enacting summary vengeance" outside of the court system. As historian Laura Edwards notes in *The People and Their Peace*, throughout Antebellum society the difference

¹¹⁶ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, July 3, 1858, 2; "Row in Chestertown," *Easton Gazette*, July 10, 1858, 2; "Lynch Law in Maryland," *The Cecil Whig*, July 3, 1858, 2.

¹¹⁷ "Slaveholders Protecting Themselves," *The Planter's Advocate*, July 21, 1858, 2.

¹¹⁸ "Another Excitement at Chestertown," *Easton Gazette*, Oct. 23, 1858, 2.

between “sanctioned forms of community policing” and the actions that police officers actually engaged in were not so clear.¹¹⁹ However, what was different about this event was that it involved organization at the grassroots level. Unlike previous cases of isolated extrajudicial behavior, this involved intricate planning by slaveholders.

Similarly, political pressure from slaveholders was the impetus for an ordinance passed by the County Commissioners of Kent County in May 1856 to “provide and deploy a Special Police in Kent County.” If a person secured a “runaway or absconding slave” in the Kent County jail they would be entitled to “receive proceeds from the sale” of the slave at auction. The Commissioners asked that the ordinance’s text be printed in *The Kent News*, as well as the *Cecil Whig* and *Delaware Republican*, to encourage and incentivise people in the nearby area to become Special Police and make money in the process.¹²⁰ Following the passage of this ordinance, the number of notices in *The Kent News* relaying the number of fugitive slaves greatly increased. For instance, James Gale, a slaveholder, posted a fugitive slave bulletin in 1856:

\$500 Reward - Ranaway from the subscriber, in October 1850, a negro man named Joe Wright. Said negro is about 27 years of age, dark skin about 5 foot 4 or 6 inches high, well made and regularly featured. He is supposed to be now in Philadelphia. I will give the above reward for his apprehension, if lodged in Chester Town jail.

-James H. Gale¹²¹

The Joe Wright notice is particularly illuminating, not only because it directly followed the passage of the the Kent County ordinance, but also because Wright had ran away in 1850, six years prior to the law. James Gale did not print an advertisement in 1850 regarding Wright, and

¹¹⁹ Laura Edwards, *The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 74.

¹²⁰ Untitled, *The Kent News*, May 17, 1856, 2.

¹²¹ “\$500 Reward,” *The Kent News*, April 18, 1857, 3; Also see “\$600,” *The Kent News*, April 18, 1857, 3; “Caution!,” *The Kent News*, April 19, 1856, 2; “Caution,” *The Kent News*, July 19, 1856, 2; “Caution,” *The Kent News*, August 16, 1856, 2.

yet in 1856 he chose to do so. Thanks to the angst spurred by Eastern Shore print culture, slaveholders were reclaiming their voice that they thought had been lost forever after the Maryland Constitutional Convention.

However, just because this Special Police ordinance was passed by the County Commissioners does not necessarily mean that it would determine the shape of life on the Eastern Shore. This is because police forces on the Eastern Shore, like in most rural counties in America in the mid-nineteenth century, only had a sheriff and a few deputies. Three or four people were not enough to scour entire counties and regions looking for runaway slaves. This process required the help of other people in the county who would be incentivised by both money and notoriety. Many people on the Eastern Shore did in fact become Special Police. One of the most famous Special Police cases involved policemen George Vansant and George Clayton, who, in June of 1856, were “out on watch for negroes who had absconded from the county.” While on watch, “a negro passed by” carrying a hatchet, and “inflicted a blow... below V.’s ear, severing his head from his body.”¹²²

What is interesting about this case is that it likely confirmed many of the worst fears that white people held on the Eastern Shore: that free blacks were murderous criminals. The presence of Special Police to hunt down black people only encouraged blacks to react violently to protect themselves against capture, thereby creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. By viewing black people as inherently criminal, white people had effectively created a black criminal class. Black people were not going to “suffer in silence.” When nonviolence did not work, black people were okay with using force if necessary. William Parker, for example, was a fugitive

¹²² “Murder,” *The Kent News*, June 28, 1856, 2.

slave from Maryland who, upon relocation to nearby Christiana, Delaware, organized a large self-defence group composed of free blacks.¹²³ Similarly, abolitionists such as Eastern Shoreman Henry Highland Garnet, actively promoted violence in response to the terror perpetuated against slaves and free blacks. For instance in 1843, Garnet, speaking at the National Negro Convention in Albany, New York, told black people to “strike for your lives and liberties” rather than exist as slaves.¹²⁴ The purpose of the speech was, according to historian Kenneth Mann, to critique free black conventions which were of “little benefit in bringing about the abolition of slavery,” while simultaneously spreading “the philosophy of ‘militant crusading’ among the free elite.”¹²⁵ However, it is important to note that Garnet was not inclined to violence, but merely advocated it as an appropriate tool in reaction to terror perpetuated by slaveholders and their sympathizers.

The violence of the George Vansant murder gained widespread attention across the region, and as far away as Canada. Thomas Ligon, the Governor of Maryland at the time of the murder, posted a \$200 reward in multiple Eastern Shore newspapers for the “arrest and conviction of the murder of George Vansant.”¹²⁶ The news of the Vansant murder was also of interest to abolitionists; in particular, John Henry Hill, an escaped slave from Richmond, Virginia who in 1856, resided in Canada. In August of 1856, Hill wrote to the famed black abolitionist William Still, who at the time was living in Philadelphia:

¹²³ Carol Wilson, “Active Vigilance is the Price of Liberty: Black Self-Defense Against Fugitive Slave Recapture and Kidnapping of Free Blacks,” in *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America*, eds. John R. McKivigan, Stanley Harrold (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 108-127, quote found on 123.

¹²⁴ Quote found in Neil Hamilton, *American Social Leaders and Activists* (New York: Facts On File Publishing, 2002), 153. It is important to note that other black leaders, such as Douglass argued against this type of violence. Black self defense was not something advocated broadly.

¹²⁵ Kenneth Eugene Mann, “Nineteenth Century Black Militant: Henry Highland Garnet’s Address to the Slaves,” *Southern Speech Journal*, 36, no.1 (1970), 14-15. Quotes from Mann originally found in Diana Winkelman, “The Rhetoric of Henry Highland Garnet,” Master’s Thesis, Baylor University, 2007, 40.

¹²⁶ “Reward,” *The Kent News*, July 12, 1856, 2; also see “Proclamation by the Governor of Maryland,” *The Kent News*, July 12, 1856, 2.

Dear Friend: - I am very glad to hear that the Underground Railroad is doing such good business, but tell me in your next letter if you have seen the heroic fellow that cut off the head of the Patrol in Maryland. We want that fellow here, as John Bull has a great deal of fighting to do, and as there is a colored Captain in this city, I would seek to have that fellow Promoted, Provided he became a soldier.¹²⁷

The fact that this news story had spread so far speaks to both its gruesomeness, as well as the ideas it promoted. To abolitionists this man was a fierce fighter, and worthy of a higher calling. To non-abolitionist whites, this man confirmed that blackness and criminality were not only linked, but could manifest themselves in horrific ways that needed to be stopped.

Four black men, “James Blackiston alias Denby, Elijah Howard, Aaron Warner, and William Rasin,” were “Arrested on Suspicion” of having “brutally murdered” George Vansant.¹²⁸ One of the men captured, James Blackiston, appears in other records which suggest that he would have been a prime target for Special Police. Blackiston was likely a mixed race son of Joseph Blackiston, who had had an extramarital relationship with “negro Eliza Ann” during his life. Not only did James receive \$300 when Joseph died in 1850 (paid out \$30 annually), but Eliza Ann also received her Freedom Pass when Joseph’s wife died on June 24, 1856, about the same time of the Vansant murder.¹²⁹ Miscegenation was a primal fear of those who believed in and manufactured universal blackness and criminality.¹³⁰ In all likelihood, neither James nor the other three men had anything to do with the crime committed. This was for three reasons: one, the initial description of the murder case stated that the “Villain was not identified,” simply describing him as a “negro.”¹³¹ Second, the article describing the four arrested suspects still

¹²⁷ William Still, *Underground Railroad: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, etc.*, (Philadelphia, PA.: People’s Publishing Company, 1871), 191.

¹²⁸ “Arrested on Suspicion,” *The Kent News*, August 2, 1856, 2.

¹²⁹ Will of Joseph Blackiston, “Freedom pass granted to Eliza Ann June 24, 1856” written in the margin.

¹³⁰ For a detailed conversation about this topic, see Adrienne D. Davis, “The Private Law of Race and Sex: An Antebellum Perspective,” *Stanford Law Review*, 51:2 (Jan., 1999): 221-288.

¹³¹ “Murder,” *The Kent News*, June 28, 1856, 2.

stated that Vansant was murdered by “some malicious person or persons unknown.”¹³² Third, and most important, none of the four men would be charged, or convicted, of the aforementioned crime. The Special Police had simply rounded up a group of ‘the usual suspects’: a group of black males who were either in trouble with the law in the past, or who the police just wanted behind bars because they were black. Calls by slaveholders to increase the local police presence had led to a dire result: innocent black men, assumed to be criminals, were being hunted down.

The ‘real’ culprit in the Vansant murder case was said to be “negro Alfred Reed.” The Grand Jury of Kent County found a true bill against Reed in November 1856, and the case was later removed to the court system in Cecil County.¹³³ The case sat in limbo for four months, when finally the trial took place. However, due to “fatal errors in the indictment” (some stating that the murder had taken place in Cecil County, others where the the names Reed and Vansant had been inadvertently swapped), the jury returned with a verdict of “Not Guilty, because of the inefficiency of the indictment.” Reed was then remanded to jail, where he awaited a new indictment.¹³⁴ The case was sent back to the Grand Jury of Kent County where another true bill was found against Reed, only to then be sent back again to the Cecil County court system. By January of 1858, the case had been decided in Reed’s favor. The Judge ruled that the former indictment’s errors could not have been taken advantage of, and so the subsequent “Not Guilty” verdict stood.¹³⁵

¹³² “Arrested on Suspicion,” *The Kent News*, August 2, 1856, 2.

¹³³ “Court,” *The Kent News*, November 8, 1856, 2; “Court,” *The Kent News*, November 15, 1856, 2.

¹³⁴ “Murder Trial,” *The Kent News*, April 18, 1857, 2.

¹³⁵ “The Circuit Court,” *The Cecil Whig*, January 23, 1858, 2; also see Oliver Miller, *Maryland Reports Containing Cases Argued and Determined in the Court of Appeals of Maryland, Volume 12*, (Annapolis: Robert F. Bonsall, Printer, 1859), 263.

All told, a “Special Police” law designed to recover fugitive slaves incarcerated four free black men briefly, and another for a year and a half. Not only did the Vansant murder case propagate ideas about black criminality, it effectively labeled and incarcerated five innocent black men as criminals. The results were horrid, but they proved that slaveholding pressure and organization worked. Slaveholders had pressured officials to pass a Special Police ordinance, and free blacks as well as fugitive slaves were now being terrorized.

This transition into a more organized body politic did not only happen in Kent County. In Queen Anne’s County a “large meeting of citizens... comprising many of the most respectable farmers and slaveholders of that section” was organized to deliberate the case of William B. Harwood. The cause of this action was “alleged illegal trafficking with negroes... and general conduct in the premises that was thought to be incompatible with the interest of the community.” The collective body decided that Harwood was to be given “a notice to quit the neighborhood” which allowed him thirty days to leave Queen Anne’s County.¹³⁶ This was most certainly not legal behavior, but this incident did demonstrate an effort on behalf of Queen Anne’s County slaveholders to collectively organize and induce action. If the law could not effectively control free black mobility or guarantee “property” rights, slaveholders would do it themselves.

There was also an incident in Dorchester County which embodied this transitory period from extralegal to legal slaveholding action. Reverend Samuel Green was a black abolitionist preacher on the Eastern Shore. Green was born into slavery in East New Market, Maryland, in 1802. Eventually, Green bought his and his wife’s freedom. Green became a ‘licensed exhorter’ (only whites could become ‘preachers’) in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and even attended

¹³⁶ “Notice to Quit,” *Easton Gazette*, December 26, 1857, 2.

the Convention of Free Colored People in 1852.¹³⁷ His home served as a safehouse for many prominent abolitionists and fugitive slaves, including Harriet Tubman and William Stills.¹³⁸ In 1857, Green was set to move his family to Canada, when a group of Dorchester slaves known as the “Dover Eight” made a highly publicized escape from the area.¹³⁹ While this group was not connected with Green’s abolitionist activities, many in the area were convinced that Green’s role as an abolitionist helped prompt these slaves to escape. This gave Sheriff Robert Bell enough reasonable suspicion to search Green’s home. It was there that Bell discovered maps, “abolition pamphlets,” and at least one copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.¹⁴⁰

It was widely known for many years that Green’s home has been used for a safehouse, but it was only in 1857 that the police finally had caught him. Green was brought to trial in May of the same year, and subsequently convicted for owning materials that were “insurrectionary in intent.” The court sentenced him to ten years in the penitentiary. When petitions were sent to the Governor’s office asking for a pardon of Green, slaveholders in Dorchester County sent letters arguing for Green’s continued imprisonment. In the letters, the slaveholders documented that since the arrest of Green, “there has scarcely any negroes ran away At all.”¹⁴¹ When Thomas Holliday Hicks was elected as governor of Maryland in November 1857, he refused to issue the pardon as he was himself a slaveholder from Dorchester County, and was afraid doing so would result in him being mobbed.¹⁴² By lobbying the state government to strictly enforce laws

¹³⁷ Untitled, *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, June 28, 1862; “Colored Colonization Convention,” *Baltimore Sun*, July 27, 1852.

¹³⁸ William Still, Journal C, Station Number 2, 1853-1854, 99.

¹³⁹ Kate Larson, *Bound For The Promised Land: Harriet Tubman, Portrait of an American Hero*, (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2004), 140.

¹⁴⁰ Untitled, *The Kent News*, December 23, 1857, 2.

¹⁴¹ “Petition of Dorchester Slaveholders,” 1857, in *Governor Thomas Hicks (Miscellaneous Papers)*, Maryland State Archives, S, 1274-56.

¹⁴² “Speech of Rev. Samuel Green,” *Liberator*, August 15, 1862.

regarding abolitionism, slaveholders on the Eastern Shore were beginning to exercise their abilities as a unified body politic. Of course, very few people known to be abolitionists were actually charged, better yet convicted of the crimes Samuel Green was. Green's imprisonment was less about his supposed criminal activity, and more a terroristic symbol: slaveholders were warning abolitionists, free blacks and fugitive slaves that the continuity of the current system on the Eastern Shore was coming to an end.

Incidents of organization and community policing, even while producing extralegal ends, were an important step towards broader legal change brought about by the revitalized body politic of slaveholders. Alongside individual and collective acts of terror was an effort by slaveholders to push for structural change. Not only did slaveholders work with other slaveholders, but different slaveholding organizations from different counties began to work with one another as well. Much of this dramatic change in slaveholding organization is often referred to as the "re enslavement crisis" which occurred after the infamous *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1857. While the *Dred Scott* decision did not necessarily make many headlines on the Eastern Shore, it is important to note both its national impact, as well as how the case altered the ways in which black freedom was understood from a legal perspective. According to Ira Berlin in *The Long Emancipation*, the *Dred Scott* decision "opened the entire country... to slavery and barred people of African descent from membership in the larger American political community."¹⁴³ The decision delivered by Chief Justice Roger Taney sent shockwaves through the American political system: hot-blooded southerners cheered, abolitionist sympathizers protested, while those caught in between were forced to take a side.

¹⁴³ Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 154-155.

In the years following the decision several states, particularly those in the South, began to impose new restrictions on free blacks under the guise of new legal precedent. For instance in Louisiana, new laws were passed that both curtailed the mobility of free blacks, as well as discouraged free black visitors.¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere, in states such as Virginia and Kentucky, there were renewed efforts to rid themselves of the free black population entirely, through forced colonization, expulsion, and even re enslavement.¹⁴⁵ However, the Eastern Shore was unique during this post-*Dred Scott* period for two reasons. One, the Maryland General Assembly was less likely to react hastily in response to *Dred Scott*, as compared to other Southern states, because of the influence of Baltimore in the legislature, and the growing number of farmers who increasingly relied on free black labor. This meant that it was up to Eastern Shore slaveholders to create political pressure that demanded such change. Second, in the states where slavery still existed, most political power still resided with slaveholders, and their well connected families. Because of the new Maryland Constitution, Eastern Shore slaveholders needed to organize to even stand a chance at putting their desired goals into action.

It is hard to tell exactly where this movement began, but the most likely location is in Chestertown, the same place that had organized the ousting of James Bowers. Chestertown did have a history of supporting legal movements in the past. For instance, slaveholders in 1852 organized a meeting to call on Ezekiel Chambers, the local judge, to argue the *Lemmon* Case if it was to be heard at the Supreme Court.¹⁴⁶ However, this was less about creating a local body politic and more about supporting Chestertown's favorite judge. The movement in the latter part

¹⁴⁴ "Imperfect Equality: The Legal Status of Free People of Color in New Orleans, 1803-1860," in *A Law Unto Itself: Essays in the New Louisiana Legal History*, ed. Warren Billings, Mark Fernandez (Baton Rouge, La.: 2001), 201.

¹⁴⁵ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, Chapter 11.

¹⁴⁶ "The Lemmon Slaves," *Easton Gazette*, December 18, 1852, 2.

of the 1850's was instead about organizing slaveholders for a specific purpose: to change Maryland law. "Men of wealth and men of intelligence" would gather "in Convention," to decide the future of free labor and slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore.¹⁴⁷

Sometime in the middle of July 1858, Kent County slaveholders met in Chestertown where "stirring speeches were made by Judge Chambers, Senator Pearce, and Hon. J. B. Ricand."¹⁴⁸ At the meeting, the slaveholders drafted a set of resolutions designed to address their concerns that "some few evil disposed persons... have secretly and clandestinely operated to seduce our slaves to abscond, and in some instances to aid them in escaping." Therefore, as "citizens of the county in mass meeting assembled," they declared their "most unqualified condemnation," of those that had interfered with the slave population." Any person who sought to help slaves escape bondage should not "enjoy either the ordinary hospitality of our people, or the protection of the laws." The slaveholders ended the resolutions by exclaiming that "there can be no neutrality; he that is not for us must be regarded as against us..."¹⁴⁹ The fact that this group of slaveholders referred to their organization as a "mass meeting assembled" was illustrative of the power of the body politic. This statement carried with it a sense of formality, as well as one of importance. These resolutions also specifically argued that those who aided fugitive slaves should not receive the protection of law. Eastern Shore slaveholders were no longer going to seek vengeance, but rather a legal alternative to respond to the crisis.

A similar meeting of slaveholders was had in August 1858 in Dorchester County. The meeting took place in Cambridge, where addresses were delivered by the Hon. James A. Stewart, Hon. Daniel M. Henry and F. W. Thomas, Esqrs. However, what made this meeting different

¹⁴⁷ "Another Excitement at Chestertown," *Easton Gazette*, October 23, 1858, 2.

¹⁴⁸ "Slave Holders in Kent County," *Easton Gazette*, July 24, 1858, 2.

¹⁴⁹ "The Meeting At Chestertown," *Easton Gazette*, July 31, 1858, 1.

than the one in Chestertown is that these resolutions were principally written as a call for a “convention of the slave-holders of the Eastern Shore in order to adopt measures of protection.”

¹⁵⁰ The motion for an Eastern Shore slaveholders convention had been voiced by some newspaper writers, but had never been formalized until the Cambridge meeting. A month after these resolutions were adopted, an article in the *Easton Gazette* remarked that an Eastern Shore slaveholders convention “seems to be gaining general favor.” The article went on to describe the need for greater security of slave ‘property’ in “this exposed portion of Maryland.”¹⁵¹

The idea of an Eastern Shore slaveholders convention was a rather simple one: slaveholders from all parts of the Eastern Shore would meet in one place, craft resolutions in response to their perceived problems, and then turn them over to the General Assembly who would then consider different laws to enact. Because of the new Maryland Constitution, Eastern Shore slaveholders could no longer individually pressure the General Assembly to pass what ever bill they wanted. They now had to unite in order to put pressure on the political body. However, while it may appear simple, this plan required immense organization and tactics. Slaveholders from every county would first have to meet in order to choose which people to send to the convention. The people at the convention would then have to craft policy suggestions that could both pass muster in the General Assembly, as well as make a lasting impact. Even though this was an uphill battle, a newly revitalized body politic of slaveholders on the Eastern Shore was willing to give it a try. With Kent County already tacitly supporting such a plan, and Dorchester fully endorsing it, there were only six more counties left to have their voices heard (and only three more needed - a majority - to call such a convention).

¹⁵⁰ “Slave Holders Meeting at Cambridge,” *Easton Gazette*, August 14, 1858, 2.

¹⁵¹ “The Eastern Shore Convention,” *Easton Gazette*, September 18, 1858, 2.

Following the meeting in Cambridge, slaveholders of Worcester County met in September 1858 to discuss their grievances, as well as the newly conceived slaveholders convention. The *Snow Hill Shield* claimed that it “was one of the largest and most respectable ever had in the town,” and that “notwithstanding the great diversity of opinions upon the details of matters brought before the meeting,” they all agreed as to the “necessity of prompt, determined action in protecting our slave property.” At the meeting, the slaveholders of Worcester specifically endorsed the idea of an Eastern Shore convention, and suggested that it be held on November third, 1858, in Cambridge, Dorchester County.¹⁵²

With the convention in mind, the slaveholders in Worcester decided that their resolutions should best reflect what they wished would be the product of the Eastern Shore convention in November. The first resolution stated that the State of Maryland “has the power and owes to her citizens the duty, of protecting slave property within her limits against all adversaries of our laws and institutions.” It added that the laws should be made “more stringent on this subject,” and that civil officers, such as Zadok P. Henry, be authorized to capture “every white man, and... free negro” that breaks the law. What is critical about this resolution is that it deemed Maryland law as capable of solving slaveholders’ grievances. Slaveholders were no longer reacting violently, but rather looking for legal remedies. This resolution is also important because it is the first time in any set of resolutions passed that suggests the fugitive slave problem is linked to the broader “free black problem.” Just as Eastern Shore print culture defended slavery while simultaneously condemning supposed free black behavior, so too were slaveholders beginning to fuse the two together.¹⁵³

¹⁵² “Slaveholders Convention,” *Easton Gazette*, September 25, 1858, 2.

¹⁵³ “Resolutions of the Worcester Slaveholders’ Convention,” *Easton Gazette*, September 25, 1858, 2.

The other resolutions of the Worcester meeting went on to articulate some potential lawful solutions. For instance, the second resolution argued that slaves be banned from owning corn patches, banned from leaving home without a pass, and banned from selecting their own house (masters would do so for them). This resolution also called upon constables and magistrates to “break up woods-meetings and all unlawful gatherings of slaves and free negroes, and to enforce the patrol laws.” The fourth resolution requested that citizens make a record of the numbers, names, ages, of all slaves they knew to have absconded, and also that the General Assembly at its next session “appoint agents to ferret out said slaves, and reward by law such agents, a liberal bounty on all fugitive slaves reclaimed by them.” The fifth resolution, and perhaps the most chilling, recommended that authority be given to Postmasters in “to open and read all letters and other documents addressed to free negroes, or slaves; and whenever anything incendiary shall be found therein, to place them in the hands of proper officers for prosecution.”

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Once more, there were some familiar themes in the Worcester resolutions. The second resolution explicitly linked the free black problem with the fugitive slave problem. The fourth resolution specifically called upon the General Assembly of Maryland to take lawful action. Following the Worcester meeting, the Board of Trustees of the Agricultural Society for the Eastern Shore of Maryland met at Wye Cottage and demanded that the citizens of Talbot County be the next group “to deliberate in regard to the protection of property in slaves, and as to the propriety of sending delegates to the proposed Eastern shore Convention to be held on this subject at Cambridge...”¹⁵⁵ Slaveholders, and the like minded citizens of Talbot County,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ “Untitled,” *Easton Gazette*, October 16, 1858, 2.

responded by holding a meeting in Easton on the twenty-sixth of October. All in all, they drafted only one resolution of consequence: “the citizens of Talbot county in Convention assembled, feel a common interest with their brethren of the other counties of the Eastern Shore, in the proposed object of the Convention to be holden in Cambridge on the 3d of November proximo...”¹⁵⁶

In total, five counties sent delegates to the Eastern Shore Convention: Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, Somerset and Worcester. Although Kent did not end up sending official delegates, slaveholders from the county did attend. However, while the convention was attended by delegates from almost two-thirds of Eastern Shore counties, that did not necessarily mean that the convention was approved of by all. In Eastern Shore newspapers in particular, there was great concern raised as to the ultimate effects of such a convention. Some editorials simply stated that there were better ways to go about the “securement of slaves,” and that the convention would inadvertently produce a “disastrous effect... on the institution of slavery.” Another article called the convention “disadvantageous,” and that if the convention were to be called, “you do it without our co-operation.”¹⁵⁷ An editorial in the *Easton Gazette* argued that it was best if a “slaveholder may fix his own plan and devise his own means, rather than “slave-holders conferring together.”¹⁵⁸

While most criticisms of the convention were vague, a lengthy editorial printed in the *Easton Gazette* laid out the real reasons why some were skeptical of the convention, and it had to do with the free black question. As already mentioned, by the time the convention was set to begin, a few of the county resolutions had begun to link the free black question directly to the problem of slave fugitivity. This was scary, especially to the growing number of people on the

¹⁵⁶ “The Slaveholders’ Meeting,” *Easton Gazette*, October 30, 1858, 2.

¹⁵⁷ “Slaveholders Convention,” *Easton Gazette*, September 25, 1858, 2.

¹⁵⁸ “The Absconding of Slaves and It’s Remedy,” *Easton Gazette*, August 28, 1858, 2.

Eastern Shore who were “almost entirely dependent” on free black labor to work their crops, and would be economically hurt if restrictions on free black mobility were passed. The article began by claiming something which was rare to see in Eastern Shore print culture, that “the negro is a human being is not denied even by “hot blooded Southrons;” and, therefore, the question of interference with privileges he has enjoyed so long as to almost make them rights, necessarily compels a delicate handling.” While the author of the article did not “doubt of the power of the Legislature in the premises,” the author also doubted “the wisdom, the propriety, the humanity, of such extreme measures.”¹⁵⁹

The editorial went on to describe exactly how important free blacks were to the “political economy” of the Eastern Shore. Farm labor, “house services of non-slaveholders,” and a large portion of the “heavy, disagreeable,” labor was performed by free blacks. If free blacks were sold again into slavery who would replace them? The author suggests, only the “substitution of the most degraded of the swarms of foreigners that flock to our shores!” Although some free blacks were known to “steal... not work if they can live without it, [and] tamper with the slaves,” at least their status was “in a state of subordination.” When white hirers need free black labor, they receive “his services... without the innumerable and harassing evils incident to the employment of white labor.” Though the author of the piece was against banning free blacks or re enslaving them, the author also recognized that slaveholders had ‘legitimate’ grievances. To answer these concerns, the author proposed that legislation be set forth to distinguish between the “two classes of free negroes. Let the useful one stay here and continue to be useful. Let the

¹⁵⁹ “Slaveholders Convention,” *Easton Gazette*, December 11, 1858, 2.

other class be banished or sold.” Under this conceived law, free blacks would “give white security for his good conduct; in default of which he shall be banished or sold into slavery.”¹⁶⁰

The reason that this article is so important is that it reflects the dire concerns of Eastern Shore print culture. While editors had originally been complicit in exploiting the fears and anxieties of slaveholders in order to sell more newspapers, they now realized, too late, that their words could cause tremendous damage to the Eastern Shore economy. By promoting a free black archetype and defending slavery, these editors had inspired slaveholders to begin a process of legal reform. Now they sought to reel it back in. Free blacks, in the eyes of newspaper editors, were no longer bad actors, but rather desperately needed laborers in the Eastern Shore economy. ‘Bad’ free blacks and ‘good’ free blacks needed to be distinguished from one another, rather than lumped into one group.

However, no matter how hard the newspapers on the Eastern Shore tried, they could not stop a moving train. Their words had had a demonstrable effect. On the third of November 1858, the convention of Eastern Shore slaveholders assembled at Cambridge. It is important to note that the vice president of the convention was Curtis Jacobs from Easton, Maryland. Jacobs was a member of the General Assembly, and had previously been instrumental in crafting the Maryland Constitution, rewritten in 1850. Although the construction of the General Assembly was to the disadvantage of the Eastern Shore, Jacobs was successful at expanding the powers vested in the General Assembly: the power to regulate the free black population and see their removal from the state, the power to insist that free blacks register with the state’s government, the power to deny free blacks real estate, deeds, and wills, etc., and the power to ban free blacks

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. This particular law is actually similar to laws in Ohio during the Antebellum period. See Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Early Legal Process in Ohio* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 56.

from immigrating into the state.”¹⁶¹ He also chaired the notable, though ineffective, Committee on the Free Black Population established by the Assembly to address concerns about free black labor in the state. Jacobs, now vice president of the Eastern Shore convention, could use his influence to insist that the General Assembly use the powers he himself gave it.

The paper trail of Curtis Jacobs is one of the few surviving records of Eastern Shore slaveholders, and so it is important to explore his writings briefly. Although Jacobs had never been a fan of free black labor, it is clear that by the time of the Cambridge Convention his anger and frustration had boiled over as a result of Eastern Shore print culture. In his famed pamphlet *The Free Negro Question in Maryland*, Jacobs articulated arguments that newspapers like *The Kent News* and the *Easton Gazette* had propagated for the previous decade:

The history of Free Negroism in Maryland, is a history of indolence, vice and crime throughout, often stained with the blood of their fellows and frequently our white population is victimized to their hellish deeds. Freedom in their hands is a deadly poison, which they understand to mean cessation from labor, and full license to do as they please.... Serility with them is ingrain, natural, and coherent; it was planted their by God himself and cannot be eradicated by man. They make good slaves, because the principle of slavery is the predominant element in their nature; they abuse freedom, because they have no rational conception of its uses.¹⁶²

Similarly, Jacobs was known among business leaders as being one of the primary spokesmen against the growth of the free black population whose link to the “instability of the slave system was indisputable.”¹⁶³ Jacobs’ diary is also a rarity when it comes to archival sources. Most notably, in his diary, Jacobs recounted an incident where some of his slaves had conspired to poison him. However, instead of blaming the slaves, he instead turned his ire on “the evil influence” of free blacks who supposedly put them up to this plot.¹⁶⁴ Not only was Jacobs

¹⁶¹ “Maryland Reform Convention,” *Easton Gazette*, April 12, 1851, 1.

¹⁶² Curtis Jacobs, *The Free Negro Question in Maryland* (Baltimore: John W. Woods, Printer, 1859), 20.

¹⁶³ R. J. M. Blackett, *The Captive’s Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 325.

¹⁶⁴ Quote found in Willa Banks, “Curtis Washington Jacobs: Architect of Absolute Black Enslavement, 1850-1864,” *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 104, no. 2 (Summer, 2009), 124.

influenced by print culture, but his own experiences seemed to align and confirm the worst ideas promulgated by Eastern Shore newspapers. Jacobs' ideas were not only on full display at the Cambridge Convention, they were also instrumental in crafting the final resolutions.

The slaveholders convention at Cambridge lasted only two days. On the fifth of November, 1858, the people of the Eastern Shore, "in general convention assembled," resolved that "free negroism and slavery are incompatible with each other, and should not be permitted longer to exist in their present relations, side by side, within the limits of the State." In effect, by using such stark language, Eastern Shore slaveholders were taking a page out of print culture. Free blacks embodied "vicious habits," a "refusal to labor," and an "incapacity for self government." As Eastern Shore newspapers argued, free blacks were not similar to slaves, but in fact polar opposites. Slavery and free labor could not exist side-by-side. According to the resolutions adopted at the convention, Maryland law should offer free blacks two solutions: be reenslaved, or leave the state.¹⁶⁵

What was curious about the convention is that the delegates did not go straight to the General Assembly with their proposal. Instead, the convention proposed a state convention in Baltimore, similar to the one they were currently attending. Delegates to the Baltimore Convention would meet "not as slaveholders and non-slaveholders, but as citizens of the Commonwealth" in order to address "free-negroism in our midst." There, the delegates would devise "some system to be presented to the Legislature of Maryland" that better regulated the free black population. Slaveholders on the Eastern Shore hoped that they could sway enough delegates in Baltimore by printing their list of grievances "in the newspapers in every county,

¹⁶⁵ "Convention of Slaveholders," *Easton Gazette*, November 13, 1858, 2.

and the city of Baltimore.”¹⁶⁶ By transferring power over to the Baltimore convention, slaveholders were hoping to transform an Eastern Shore problem into statewide problem. General Assembly members would have no choice to act with the entire state backing a set of proposals.

A Baltimore slaveholders convention was not particularly new in Maryland. For instance, in 1842, southern slaveholders in Maryland organized a convention in Baltimore to propose new restrictions on black freedom, as well as to prevent runaways. Three years later, in 1845, slaveholders again organized to pressure the General Assembly to act in regards to these desired goals.¹⁶⁷ However, what made these early efforts at organizing different from those in the latter part of the 1850’s was that Eastern Shore slaveholders were hoping to present a united front in the face of traditional Baltimore opposition. No longer were these conventions simply collections of disgruntled slaveholders not getting their way. This was an organized political effort armed with serious ideas that was proposing specific solutions.

The slaveholders convention met in Baltimore in June of 1859, with Judge Chambers of Chestertown presiding. At the convention, there was boisterous debate from all sides. Most notably, it was Curtis Jacobs who brought up the question as to whether free blacks should be reenslaved and/or forced to leave the state. Jacobs argued in favor of the motion, stating that “lazy, degraded, and immoral” free blacks should be sold by the state as conscript slaves to nonslaveholders so that “citizens of limited means” could themselves become slaveholders. If nothing was done, free blacks would spread “like the locust clouds of Egypt... paralyzing our

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters*, 210-211.

energies, demoralizing our people, and devouring our substance.”¹⁶⁸ The Eastern Shore’s slaveholding body politic had risen up over the course of the 1850’s, and demanded legal remedies. Jacobs was now the voice of that legal movement.

Others that attended the convention vehemently disagreed with Jacobs and his approach. However, Judge J. Thompson Mason, while against the Jacobs’ proposal, complemented Jacobs for essentially raising the fundamental question: “Shall Maryland become a Free State or a Slave State?”¹⁶⁹ Ultimately, the resolutions adopted at the Baltimore Convention were “moderate and conservative,” reflecting the tradition of Maryland as being a middle ground state. The body as a whole designed three resolutions. The first stated that “the general removal of the free blacks from the State of Maryland is impolitic, inexpedient and uncalled for.” The second resolution argued that the free black population should still be regulated by laws so that they might be “orderly, industrious and productive.” The final resolution called upon the state legislature “to review and amend the laws relating to free negroes and to emancipation.”¹⁷⁰

All in all, these measures were not what the slaveholders on the Eastern Shore had desired. A newspaper editorial after the convention congratulated the delegates for not caving to the “extremists who are anxious to get up a negro issue in Maryland.” The convention had begun “big with the fate of Caesar and Rome.” By the end, the “young Solons and Ciceros” had seen “their labor, thought, and lofty aspirations... ingloriously thrown away.”¹⁷¹ The convention, from an Eastern Shore perspective, was a failure. No guarantee that the General Assembly would adopt reenslavement. No forced emigration of free blacks. The convention was,

¹⁶⁸ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, March 5, 1859, 1; also see William Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Volume II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 194-198.

¹⁶⁹ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 196.

¹⁷⁰ “Slave Holder’s Convention,” *Easton Gazette*, June 18, 1859, 2.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

however, not without its successes. It demonstrated that slaveholders did have the ability to politically organize locally, region wide, and statewide. The fact that the convention even came into existence showcased the power of Eastern Shore print culture. Words in newspapers propelled slaveholders to unite and take collective action.

The November following the convention, the raid on Harpers Ferry occurred. This caused a panic throughout the Eastern Shore, and the hysteria was once again propagated by newspapers. For instance, the *Easton Gazette* began to print articles relating the ‘incendiary’ nature of free blacks. It was reported that in Kent County that a “free negro man” encouraged a slave to burn his master’s barn down, along with “three horses and all his corn and provender.” Another free black man supposedly enticed a slave to burn his master’s stable as well as “his corn, fodder, and ten head of horses and mules.”¹⁷² Elsewhere, newspapers printed reports that letters of “insurrectionary character” were beginning to pop up along the Eastern Shore. One such letter arrived in St. Michaels, and “owing to the present state of affairs in Virginia,” slaveholders were necessarily frightened. The reaction to these news reports was “calm, but determined.” Slaveholders used the lessons of the 1850’s, and began to immediately organize. They set up a meeting at the local court house in order “to adopt the most effective means for the protection of citizens and property.” At the slaveholders meeting, “a committee from each district was appointed” to discuss possible remedies. The result was that they encouraged Curtis Jacobs, and other hardliners, to once more make a push in the legislature for tougher laws.¹⁷³

Jacobs took the cue, and pleaded with moderates in the Assembly to at least consider some legislation. After Jacobs threatened to resign if no such laws were passed, the General

¹⁷² “Incendiary Fires in Kent County,” *Easton Gazette*, January 28, 1860, 2.

¹⁷³ T. Stephen Whitman, *Challenging Slavery in the Chesapeake: Black and White Resistance to Human Bondage, 1775-1865* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 2007), 207.

Assembly adopted two measures that would be put up for public referendum. The first barred future manumission of slaves. The second authorized counties to set up a Board of Commissioners that would ensure free blacks remained employed.¹⁷⁴ However, even though Jacobs was finally able to get legislation introduced, and passed, the public referendum still needed to go through. At the coming presidential election the people of Baltimore, St. Mary's, Calvert, Howard, Kent, Worcester, Somerset, Talbot, Queen Anne's, Prince George's, and Charles counties, where the referendum made it onto the ballot, all rejected the initial manumission law. Only Somerset passed the Board of Commissioners law.¹⁷⁵ Although slaveholders had demonstrated their political abilities, they were unable to overcome nonslaveholding votes. As William Freehling says in his book *The Road to Disunion*, "Maryland would continue meandering up Delaware's northward path, with no swerve back Alabama's way."¹⁷⁶

Ultimately the growth of the free black population was too much for slaveholders to overcome. Slavery's demise on the Eastern Shore could not be easily reversed. However, that did not mean that slaveholders did not put forth effort in their attempts. They harnessed print culture, and used it towards creating a political movement on the Eastern Shore. While some slaveholders had engaged in extralegal activity on an individual and collective level, many instead chose to create legal, positivist action. Even after their considerable defeats, slaveholders used their newfound organizational tools to continuously push for change. One example of this shift was the trial of Reverend John Dixon Long.

¹⁷⁴ "An Act," *Easton Gazette*, September 29, 1860, 1; "The Colored Population - Important Bills Before the Maryland Legislature," *Easton Gazette*, February 11, 1860, 1.

¹⁷⁵ "A Negro Law," *Easton Gazette*, July 28, 1860, 2.

¹⁷⁶ Freehling, *The Road to Disunion*, 198.

The Reverend was a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church (M. E. Church) on the Eastern Shore. In 1844, the M. E. Church had split into two separate regions, North and South, over the issue of slavery. Every year since the split, the Church held an annual border conference at Philadelphia, which invited the Church's members in Delaware, the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and Southeast Pennsylvania to attend. The Church was unclear after the 1844 split how border region churches were to treat the issue of slavery, and oftentimes, these annual conferences became "the great battle-ground" where issues like slavery were hashed out.¹⁷⁷ John Long had been a minister with the M. E. Church on the Eastern Shore for many years, and was squarely against the institution slavery. In 1857, Long published an abolitionist book entitled "Pictures of Slavery," which decried the horrors of slavery, as well as the Church's unwillingness to stand squarely in opposition to the peculiar institution. Following the publication of Long's book, the Philadelphia Annual Conference was set to begin; it would be a Conference like no other.

At the Conference, Reverend Thomas Quigley, charged John Long with "Misrepresenting the people of Maryland and Delaware... Misrepresenting the ministers who have labored in Maryland and Delaware," and "Misrepresenting the colored people."¹⁷⁸ Quigley, who was then a minister serving in St. Michaels where Long had previously served from 1853-1855, sought to have Long excommunicated from the Church.¹⁷⁹ No longer would abolitionist literature, under the guise of religion, be looked over with a passive eye. However, the 'trial' of John Long ended rather calmly. The charges were ultimately dropped, as the members of the Conference

¹⁷⁷ James M. McCarter, *Border Methodism and Border Slavery*, (Philadelphia: Collins, Printer, 1858), 3. This book describes the famed 1858 Philadelphia Annual M E. Conference in detail.

¹⁷⁸ "Charges Preferred Against a Minister," *The Kent News*, August 15, 1857, 2.

¹⁷⁹ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, August 15, 1857, 2.

could not come to a consensus as to whether they should support Long's book, or denounce it. While the specific facts of the case are interesting enough, the impact and ramifications of the trial are more important. Though Quigley failed to get a conviction at the Conference, the trial served as a warning to others who might publish abolitionist pamphlets or books: if you printed abolitionist ideas, you were going to be charged, and perhaps excommunicated from the Church. Between the time Long's book was published, and the Philadelphia Conference, there had already been numerous Eastern Shore newspapers which had published articles decrying both Long, and abolitionism. This case epitomized Eastern Shore slaveholders' newfound plan of action: organize, and pressure institutions to act. However, as with their legal maneuvers in the General Assembly, the slaveholders failed at achieving their goals.¹⁸⁰

Slaveholders continued down this road when, in 1860, Kent and Millington circuits of the Methodist Episcopal Church assembled at the M. E. Church in Chestertown. The M.E. Church had formally condemned slavery in 1860 after a decades long battle between pro and antislavery forces. In reaction to this, two of the M.E. circuits met in convention in Chestertown in order to draft resolutions calling for a "New Chapter" of an M.E. Church on the Eastern Shore, one that would be pro slavery.¹⁸¹

Eastern Shore slaveholders also made significant efforts to actively promote colonization as a way of exporting free black laborers. The Maryland Colonization Society had long roots, dating back to the early Antebellum period. Like its national forbearer, the American Colonization Society, the Maryland Colonization Society repeatedly couched its arguments for black removal in logistical and spiritual arguments, as to avoid being perceived as a racist

¹⁸⁰ A great summary of the trial can be found in Hannah Bonner, "Abolitionist On Trial: Rev. John D. Long and the 1858 Philadelphia Conference," *Journal of the Historical Society of the EPA Conference* (2008).

¹⁸¹ Untitled, *Easton Gazette*, August 11, 1860, 2.

organization. However, during the 1850's the Society began to argue for black removal in more strident terms. In an 1852 issue of the *Maryland Colonization Journal* an author wrote, "That the presence of two races in Maryland, under such circumstances, can be advantageous to either, or promote the prosperity of the State, no one pretends."¹⁸² While embodying the idea of universal blackness, this argument also conveyed a sense of urgency found elsewhere in the *Colonization Journal*. When Reverend John Seys went to recruit potential candidates for colonization on the Eastern Shore, he received a sense of "apathy" amongst the "colored population." This fact was immediately followed in the *Journal* by the following passage: "The State has not yet renewed the annual donation to the Society, which expired by limitation at the end of the past year, and the public will bear in mind that the expenses of African emigration may hereafter have to be defrayed entirely by voluntary contributions."¹⁸³ It is clear in the *Journal* that members were increasingly worried that their funds would be cut off by the Maryland legislature, if more members were not recruited. This is similar to the modern private prison industry: in order to stay open, you need to keep your rooms (in this case boats) filled.

During the 1850's, this urgency made its way to the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Agents of the Maryland Colonization Society repeatedly preached to free blacks about the benefits of colonization, as well as solicited donations from prominent white slaveholders.¹⁸⁴ The latter was particularly important because it showed a change in the institutional framework of the organization. The Society, as previously mentioned, had tried to cast itself as a non-racist, and completely *voluntary* organization. However, the need to keep the Society running necessitated

¹⁸² *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 242.

¹⁸³ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 170.

¹⁸⁴ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 192. This is not the only example. Throughout the *Journal* during the 1850's, there are records of ministers going to collect donations from Eastern Shore slaveholders.

the recruitment of as many black emigrants as possible. This meant going to white slaveholders to promote a possible exchange. The Society needed black emigrants, and money in the form of donations. Slaveholders wished to see their slaves removed from the area when their terms of servitude had ended. This exchange meant that the Society was no longer strictly voluntary, but indeed coercive.¹⁸⁵ In 1857, their stated goals had clearly changed from earlier in the Antebellum period:

The Maryland State Colonization Society proposes to remove and establish on the Western Coast of Africa, such persons of color as may desire to emigrate thither; and also to aid in the removal and settlement of such persons as may be manumitted by their owners for that purpose.¹⁸⁶

Not only did slaveholders begin working with Colonization agents to export black people to Africa, they also continuously pressed the General Assembly to increase funding for the agency. The colonization project fit squarely with the larger project of Eastern Shore slaveholders: organize, and build institutions that could create the change they desired.

Eastern Shore slaveholders would also go on to be influential at the Southern Rights Convention of Maryland held in Baltimore in February of 1861. The Convention had been conceived as a response to the growing number of Southern states seceding from the Union. A number of familiar characters attended the Convention, including Kent County's James Pearce and Judge Chambers (who served as the president). The Convention agreed on two points, "that the secession of the seven slaveholding States...was induced by the aggression of the non-slaveholding States, in violation of the Constitution," and that Maryland should not be "made a highway for federal troops." However, beyond these two points, no agreement on the

¹⁸⁵ Also see: Beverly Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 121-122; Ousmane K. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 14.

¹⁸⁶ *Maryland Colonization Journal*, 343.

controversial issue of secession could be met. Although slaveholders on the Eastern Shore were armed with the ideas put forth in print culture, there was only so much leverage that they had in actuality. Maryland would remain in the Union, and not formally join in the South's uprising.

While the political actions of slaveholders had little actualized effects, what they did in the 1850's was truly remarkable. They harnessed the rhetoric and arguments presented in Eastern Shore print culture to curtail the demise of slavery, and the rise of free black labor in Maryland. Their new abilities to organize and unify constituted a revitalized body politic amongst Eastern Shore slaveholders, and solidified the presence and the power of slaveholding ideology on the Shore. Maryland's tenuous position in the Civil War was continuously prodded by slaveholders who refused, in the face of free black labor, to give in. Throughout the War, during Reconstruction, and still to this day, the Eastern Shore remains a bastion of conservatism. Shore political and cultural solidarity, although not strong enough to withstand national and global trends, has done a remarkable job at maintaining demographic homogeneity and propertied hegemony.

Though not exactly the same, in many ways this period on the Eastern Shore forecasted what was to come in both the black codes after the Civil War and Jim Crow laws during post-Reconstruction. Slaveholders would not simply accept that free black labor was the way of the future, especially if that meant the dilution of slaveholding power. With the help of print culture, slaveholders were able to make ideological arguments against free labor, and in support of slavery. The preponderance of particular articles in newspapers across the Eastern Shore spectrum helped unite slaveholders in their cause. While the ideas in Shore print culture were

not necessarily new, the utilization of such arguments by slaveholders in order to organize and enact legal change was unique and revolutionary.