ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH, EAST AND WEST: THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA, 1780-1865
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This dissertation examines the making of free soil and black freedom, as well as the abolitionist movement in southwestern Pennsylvania. I frame the region as a borderland between the free North and the slave South, where the status of African Americans was somewhere between slavery and freedom, as well as a crossroads between the abolitionist movement in the East and the Old Northwest. By doing so, I hope to understand how geography (physical and political) influenced ideas about race and the types of strategies abolitionists favored in their fight against slavery and for black rights. I argue that the roots of free labor ideology—a belief that emerged in the 1850s that slavery (and, for some whites, free blacks) should be prohibited from western territories in order to allow free white men to earn a living wage—can be traced to the 1780s when southwestern Pennsylvania was one of the first territories opened to westward expansion and where the place of black people in American society remained uncertain.

Alongside this nascent idea of free labor emerged an oppositional culture created by African Americans and their white antislavery allies that was shaped by their geographic location, worksites, institutions, and living conditions. This led to the formation of counter ideas about free soil, the west, black freedom, race, and citizenship. Many white southwestern Pennsylvanians adamantly opposed these ideas fearing that interracial social relations, labor competition, and the possible migration of blacks into the region would degrade the economic independence of these households, turning whites into a dependent and degraded class.

BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH, EAST AND WEST: THE ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA, 1780-1865

by

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Introduction

In June 1832, Charles Brown, an enslaved man, made his way to Pittsburgh after fleeing his owner, William C. Drury, a merchant in Hagerstown, Maryland. Roughly three years later, in January 1835, while walking through the city's streets, Brown was recognized by Edward Fitzpatrick, Drury's former business partner. Fitzpatrick alerted local authorities of the presence of a fugitive slave and within days two Pittsburgh constables found Brown and brought him before Dennis S. Scully, the city's recorder. When Drury learned that Brown had been captured, he notified Pittsburgh officials that he was too infirm to travel to Pennsylvania to reclaim his bondsman. He instead designated Fitzpatrick to act on his behalf. When Fitzpatrick arrived in court, he produced a certificate certifying him as Drury's power of attorney.[1]

When the city's antislavery activists heard of Brown's capture, two attorneys rushed to his defense in court. The lawyers argued that the alleged fugitive slave should be freed for several reasons. First, they questioned the validity of Fitzpatrick's certificate, noting that he, rather than Drury, had completed the form. Second, the lawyers pointed out that the certificate described Fitzpatrick as a resident of Washington County, Maryland, when in fact, he was a resident of Pittsburgh. Finally, they argued that the affidavit that the slaveholder and his agent needed to claim Brown as Drury's property did not conform to Pennsylvania's 1826 personal liberty

1. *Report of the Case of Charles Brown, A Fugitive Slave, Owing Labour and Service to Wm. C. Drury, of Washington County, Maryland. Decided by The Recorder of Pittsburgh, February 7th, 1835* (Pittsburgh: Alexander Jaynes, 1835), 3-5; 14.

law as it did not designate the enslaver's title to Brown's services. Though Scully was sympathetic to the alleged fugitive slave's freedom claim, he disagreed with the antislavery lawyers' arguments. The recorder found that Drury and Fitzpatrick had sufficiently complied with Pennsylvania law and reminded court observers that the Keystone State was bound to honor enslavers' property rights. Scully then granted Fitzpatrick a certificate of removal to return Brown to bondage in Maryland.[2]

The Charles Brown case is significant, not just for the attention it received among Pittsburghers and across greater southwestern Pennsylvania, but because it offers an opportunity for historians to broaden our understanding about free soil and antislavery activism in this part of the North. Examining Southwestern Pennsylvanians' fight against slavery and for black freedom allows us to see how African American and white abolitionists created their own protest tradition, while also illuminating how these people understood race, freedom, and black citizenship. The fight against black bondage and for African American rights had important political consequences that extended beyond the region.

This dissertation examines the making of free soil and black freedom, as well as the abolitionist movement in southwestern Pennsylvania. This region encompasses the present-day counties of Allegheny, Beaver, Bedford, Blair Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Somerset, Washington, Westmoreland, and portions of Armstrong and Butler counties. Southwestern Pennsylvania is broadly defined for several reasons. First, I take into account the continued westward push of the state's boundary as white and African American settlement expanded across the Appalachian

2. Ibid., 43-55.

Mountains. Second, abolitionists groups such as the Western Pennsylvania Antislavery Society considered themselves as representing a distinct region. However, I limit my study to the southwestern portion of the state because it was settled by white and African Americans earlier than the northwestern portion of the state. The communities of southwestern Pennsylvania were connected by the Allegheny, Monongahela, and Ohio Rivers, roads, canals, and railroads, with Pittsburgh being the region's central commercial hub.

In this study, I frame Southwestern Pennsylvania as a borderland between the free North and the slave South, where the status of African Americans was somewhere between slavery and freedom, as well as a crossroads between the abolitionist movement in the East and the Old Northwest. By doing so, I hope to understand how geography (physical and political) influenced ideas about race and the types of strategies abolitionists favored in their fight against slavery and for black rights.

In this dissertation I place Pittsburgh and greater southwestern Pennsylvania at the center of our understanding of slavery, black freedom, and the abolitionist movement in the Keystone State. In doing so I argue that the roots of free labor ideology—a belief that emerged in the 1850s that slavery (and, for some whites, free blacks) should be prohibited from western territories in order to allow free white men to earn a living wage—can be traced to the 1780s when southwestern Pennsylvania was one of the first territories opened to westward expansion and where the place of black people in American society remained uncertain.

Alongside this nascent idea of free labor emerged an oppositional culture created by African Americans and their white antislavery allies that was shaped by their geographic location, worksites, institutions, and living conditions. This led to the formation of counter ideas about free soil, the west, black freedom, race, and citizenship. Many white southwestern Pennsylvanians adamantly opposed these ideas fearing that interracial social relations, labor competition, and the possible migration of blacks into the region would degrade the economic independence of these households, turning whites into a dependent and degraded class.

SLAVERY, FREE SOIL, AND THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT IN THE SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA BORDERLAND

On March 1, 1780, Pennsylvania became the first state to state to adopt a gradual abolition law. It mandated that all slaves born after this date would be freed at the age of twenty-eight. Slaveholders were required to register their slaves, providing their name, gender, age, and date of birth. Alongside this information, the law stipulated that slaveowners provide their name, occupation, and the county and township of their residence. The Pennsylvania gradual abolition law was significant because it sought to turn the state into free territory where slavery would be eradicated. However, the boundary separating free Pennsylvania from neighboring slave states was not as fixed as one might assume.

Borderlands history provides a model in thinking about slavery and freedom in southwestern Pennsylvania. For many scholars, a borderland is conceptualized as a

space where contrasting ideologies, legal cultures, economic, and political forces compete, interact, and clash against each other for supremacy within a territory in creating a regional or national identity. A number of historians have applied a borderlands framework in understanding the creation of a free north and explaining the growing sectional conflict between North and South.[3]

In *Border War,* Stanley Harrold argues that within the north-south borderland, stretching from the Atlantic coast to the Kansas plains, the seemingly sporadic clashes that occurred over the recapture of fugitive slaves and kidnapping of free blacks by enslavers and slavecatchers were part of a larger border war. This long war began in 1780 with Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law, the first site of conflict between free and slave states. Overtime, this border war intensified as the economies, cultures, moralities, and views over slavery diverged among residents in both the lower North and border South. At the center of this war were African Americans (free and enslaved), who led violent confrontations against kidnappers and slavecatchers, using force to either flee from bondage or assist enslaved people escape. In the eyes of many slaveholders in the border South, free blacks presented a viable threat to slavery. Harrold claims that slaveholders in the border South turned to the federal government to protect slavery with the passage of a new fugitive slave law in 1850. He contends that slaveholders' dependence on the federal government to keep

3. This definition of borderlands is taken from Richard S. Newman, "'Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania': Free Soil, Fugitive Slaves, and the Making of Pennsylvania's Anti-Slavery Borderland," *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (September 2011): 413-430.

African Americans in bondage explains why enslavers in the border south hesitated in seceding from the Union during the winter of 1860.[4]

Not all historians have viewed the northern borderland as a site of conflict. Michael Baud and Willem Van Schendel argue that a borderland can be a place of cross-border cultural and economic ties, or a space between two very different societies.[5] One place that represented this definition of the borderland was the Ohio River borderland, a region that consisted of the Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio counties that bordered the Ohio River. In Matthew Salafia's *Slavery's Borderland*, he notes that a distinct characteristic of this part of the northern borderland was that these slave and free states shared access to the Ohio River, a crucial commercial waterway to the markets of the deep South. Salafia argues that rather than a constant source of conflict, many whites sought to make this part of the borderland a site of accommodation between slavery and freedom. Residents in this part of the northern borderland believed it was necessary to seek common ground. Their desire for social stability was motivated because of their shared use of the Ohio River, which was central to the local economy on both sides of the river.[6]

4. Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting over Slavery Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: Univesrity of North Carolina Press, 2010), xii-xiii; 2, 10, 13-15, 212-214. For additional studies that depict the North-South borderland as a site of constant conflict see for example, Keith P. Griffler, *Font Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014); 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); Robert H. Churchill, "Fugitive Slave Rescues in the North: Toward a Geography of Antislavery Violence," *Ohio Valley History* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2014): 51-75.

5. Michael Baud and Willem Van Schendel, "Toward a Comparative History of Borderlands," *Journal of World History* 8 (Fall 1997): 211-242.

6. Matthew Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland: Freedom and Bondage Along the Ohio River* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 3-4, 9; For additional insight into how these

At the center of this north-south borderland politics was the contested meaning of free soil. Richard Newman argues that Pennsylvania was the first battleground. African Americans and their allies used their broad interpretation of the gradual abolition law to persuade justices of the peace, courts, and lawyers that blacks were entitled to broader legal protections of their personal liberty in an effort to curtail slaveholders' power and influence. For instance, African Americans and their white abolitionist allies initiated court cases, seeking legal protections for kidnapped free blacks and fugitive slaves as well as automatic freedom for enslaved people brought into the state by slaveholders. African Americans also asserted their free status in cultural spaces, such as print culture and public rallies and celebrations, in order to defend and advance their free soil claims that could extend beyond the northern borderland. In post-emancipation Pennsylvania, and across the north-south borderland, free soil remained a contentious issue. Central to this struggle was the meaning of citizenship. As historians Andrew K. Diemer and Martha S. Jones have shown, African Americans in Philadelphia and Baltimore advanced claims to certain rights which they believed they were entitled to as American citizens. However, the political environment of these places influenced why African Americans prioritized securing certain rights over others.[7]

compromises between slave and free state white residents in this part of the northern borderland shaped antislavery activism see, Christopher Phillips, *The River Ran Backwards: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 49-113.

7. Newman, "'Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania,'" 417,425-426; Andrew K. Diemer, Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Andrew K. Diemer, *The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

African Americans and their white abolitionist allies in the borderland of southwestern Pennsylvania faced a series of challenges in establishing free soil in this part of the North. Before 1780, Virginia had claimed a portion of the region. When Virginians finally ceded their claims to this territory, Pennsylvania legislators made concessions to these slaveholders in April 1782, in order to secure their loyalty and out of respect for their property rights, undermining abolitionists' free soil vision for the region. However, slaveholders remained unwilling to release from bondage the children—and in some cases the grandchildren—of enslaved people. Many enslavers went to great lengths to subvert or evade the law.

After emancipation, free soil in southwestern Pennsylvania continued to be challenged by slaveholders seeking to travel freely through the region with their bondspeople and slave-catchers. Kidnappers too operated with impunity. African Americans adopted a variety of strategies in order to implement what I refer to as their free soil principles. For black southwestern Pennsylvanians this entailed not just the absence of slavery and automatic freedom for enslaved people who entered the state, but included citizenship rights.[8] In addition, African Americans did not associate free soil with territory. Many enslavers who sought to avoid compliance with Pennsylvania's antislavery laws moved with their bondspeople to places where slavery was protected. These enslaved people argued that they were free because they

8. In addition to studies on the northern borderland, my definition of free soil is shaped by scholars who examine free soil in a wider Atlantic context. See for example, Ada Ferrer, "Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (February 2012): 40-66; Sue Peabody, *"There are no Slaves in France,": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancié Regime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sue Peabody and Keila Ginberg eds. *Free Soil in the Atlantic World* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Miranda Frances Spieler, "The Destruction of Liberty in French Guiana: Law, Identity and the Meaning of Legal Space, 1794-1830," *Social History* 32, no. 3 (October 2011): 260-279.

were either born or at one time had resided on Pennsylvania free soil. Those black southwestern Pennsylvanians who labored on the Ohio River and found themselves enslaved also established their freedom claims based on this principle. These principles of free soil were African American because, black activists were the originators and at the forefront in promoting and defending this broader notion of free soil which was later supported by white abolitionists.[9]

The northern borderland of southwestern Pennsylvania was both a site of intense confrontation and accommodation over free soil. As previously noted, Dennis S. Scully, the Pittsburgh recorder, felt obligated to return Charles Brown, a fugitive slave, back to bondage, though he agonized over the decision given his uneasiness with slavery. In southwestern Pennsylvania, there were those who were willing to disregard black free soil principles for cooperation with slaveholders for the sake of national unity, economic interests, or because the law protected enslavers property claims to black bodies. Other southwestern Pennsylvanians were not so willing to compromise Pennsylvania free soil in order to placate slaveholders' property claims. For instance, in 1848, a group of Pittsburgh abolitionists thwarted a scheme by a slaveholder to capture his escaped bondswoman. The crowd severely beat a black man who was found to have assisted in the attempted abduction of the woman.[10]

9. The conceptualization of free soil used by African Americans in their freedom claims is also disused in Edlie L. Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Kelly M. Kennington, *In the Shadow of Dred Scott: St. Louis Freedom Suits and the Legal Culture of Slavery in Antebellum America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017); Lea Vandervelde, *Redemption Songs: Suing for Freedom Before Dred Scott* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Anne Twitty, *Before Dred Scott: Slavery and Legal Culture in the American Confluence, 1787-1857* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

10. "Attempt to Kidnap," *North Star*, June 23, 1848.

By framing southwestern Pennsylvania as a borderland, this dissertation illuminates an oppositional culture and the formation of a black political identity surrounding free soil. It shows that black freedom was just as precarious as in the East as well as the wide reach of slavery's influence. I also show that this early notion of free soil predates the more conservative notion of free territory espoused by many white antislavery activists. This group of antislavery activists, known as free soilers, called for the exclusion of slavery (and in some cases free blacks) from the western territories that the United States acquired after 1848 in its war with Mexico. This struggle in support of and in defense of free soil was an important goal of abolitionists.

Studies on slavery and black freedom in Pennsylvania tend to place Philadelphia and its environs at the center of our understanding of the antislavery movement within the Keystone State.[11] Greater inclusion of southwestern Pennsylvania in this narrative can advance our understanding of the antislavery movement in several areas.[12] Recent histories of the antislavery movement in the Old

11. See for instance, Gary Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Richard S. Newman, "Freedom's Grand Lab: Abolition, Race, and Black Freedom Struggles in Recent Pennsylvania Historiography," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 82, no. 3 (Summer 2015): 357-372; Richard Newman and James Mueller eds., *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011); Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008).

12. I define abolitionists as "those who sought to end slavery within their colony, state, nation, or religious denomination," while antislavery was "a broad category of slavery's opponents, including abolitionists as well as those dedicated only to halting the territorial expansion of slavery." When using these terms, I specify the methods each group employed. At times I use the terms interchangeably but specify the types of methods each group of activists preferred in challenging black bondage. My definitions of "abolitionist" and "antislavery" are taken from and shaped by Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionists* (New York: Longman, 2001); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution: 1770-1823* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), 21-22.

Northwest have challenged the declension narrative that states that by 1840 the antislavery movement had splintered as members of William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society disagreed over the direction of the movement. Some antislavery activists believed that fighting slavery required not only moral and emotional appeals to the heart but involvement in party politics as well.[13] Many members of the American Anti-Slavery Society became uneasy with Garrison's support for women's rights and pacifism, and his controversial statements on American churches. These historians have questioned the extent of these divisions in eastern communities, such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York. Even in cities and towns such as those in Massachusetts, some historians have argued that opponents of slavery were not rigid ideologues only adhering to a particular strategy based on faction and region.[14]

This dissertation moves beyond the conventional narrative that depicts the fight against slavery as two distinct movements, one in the East and one in the Old-Northwest. This approach is too broad and ignores the obstacles facing abolitionists in particular places. Southwestern Pennsylvania abolitionists established ties with antislavery activists in both regions. Similar to recent studies on the abolitionist

13. Stacey M. Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2010); J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolition: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2014); Dana Elizabeth Weiner, *Race and Rights: Fighting Slavery and Prejudice in the Old Northwest, 1830-1870* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois university press, 2013.

14. See for example, Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

movement, this dissertation shows that opponents of slavery did not strictly adhere to certain categories of abolitionism according to place.

An investigation of the fight against slavery in this part of Pennsylvania can explain the challenges facing African Americans and their white allies in building a statewide movement as well as how the political, social, and geographic environment shapes the nature of a reform movement in a specific location. For instance, travel and communication between eastern and western Pennsylvania abolitionists proved difficult because of the Appalachian and Allegheny mountains. Mobility and the spread of news on waterways proved much easier than overland routes. The Ohio River, which linked southwestern Pennsylvania to the Old Northwest, allowed for the circulation of ideas in fighting against black bondage and for African American freedom as well as collaboration between abolitionists in these two regions. The free black population of southwestern Pennsylvania was much smaller than Philadelphia. For African Americans in this part of Pennsylvania, the fluid racial environment as well as these white Pennsylvanians' willingness to acknowledge and protect certain black rights, allowed African Americans to adopting certain strategies or political approaches that were not available to the counterparts in eastern Pennsylvania. Alongside this struggle to abolish slavery was a movement among antislavery activists to implement a free labor society.

BLACK FREE LABOR PRINCIPLES IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Free labor was a set of ideas that first emerged in the 1750s when Americans began to rethink the moral and economic value surrounding different forms of work and their relationship to ideas of liberty and independence. For example, in his 1751 essay, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind," Benjamin Franklin viewed free labor not as a system but as a kind of work that was culturally superior to slave labor because it supported frugality, industry, and represented an honorable pursuit.[15] According to Franklin, free labor encouraged efficiency and greater production of goods among men, while slaveholding promoted luxury which diminished the masculine fortitude and virility of enslavers. Franklin also couched free labor's superiority in terms of westward expansion, personal liberty, and republicanism, arguing that as long as land was available in the west, there would be no cheap labor supply for manufacturers in urban centers which he feared would create a large proletariat that would be fatal to American democracy. Franklin was one of the most avid proponents for expansion in the trans-Allegheny West. Advocates of free labor believed that this kind of work was important in undergirding a republican society in which a rough economic equality would keep power from being concentrated in the hands of aristocrats, allowing citizens to equally participate in the affairs of governing.[16]

15. Eva Sheppard Wolf, "Early Free-Labor Thought and the Contest over Slavery in the Early Republic," in *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation*, ed. John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 33-36.

16. James H. Hutson, "Benjamin Franklin and the West," *Western Historical Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (October 1973), 423, 427; Benjamin Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c." (1755; repr., New York: William Abbatt,1918), 3-8; Wolf, "Early Free-Labor Thought," 35-36.

The presence of slavery and other forms of bound labor in southwestern Pennsylvania presented a challenge to Franklin and others seeking to implement a free labor society. Despite the region's small slave population, slaves and other bound laborers were important to the region's economy providing labor in the iron industry and skilled trades where there was a shortage of these laborers. Bound black laborers (either slaves or servants) also engaged in subsistence production, laboring on farms and doing domestic work. The attempt to rid slavery from the region was, for many southwestern Pennsylvanians, the first step in implementing a free labor society. [17]

After the War of 1812, many northern communities, including those in southwestern Pennsylvania, became integrated into larger regional, national, and Atlantic markets. This process, known to historians as the market revolution, produced changes in the patterns of work which undermined the economic independence of many journeymen and independent craftsmen, as they could no longer meet the increased scale of production in response to an intensifying capitalist market. Many of these white laborers became dependent on wage labor for family survival. This new working class challenged the eighteenth-century understanding of labor which claimed that individuals who labored for wages were a dependent class, incapable of exercising their own will and independence and therefore should be excluded from any role in public affairs. Some argued that wage labor was not degrading but a pathway towards achieving economic independence by owning their own capital in the form of a business, farm, or shop. This vision of free labor could be

17. Christopher M. Osborne, "Invisible Hands: Slaves, Bound Laborers, and the Development of Western Pennsylvania, 1780-1820," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 72, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 88-89.

achieved through hard work, frugality, self improvement, and discipline. Before the 1850s, this vision of free labor seemed possible to achieve as the household was the predominant form of labor as families could still control the extent to which they participated in the market for wages.[18]

Most African Americans faced considerable obstacles in realizing this free labor vision, however. The discriminatory practices of white craftsmen, employers, and customers prohibited free blacks from entry into skilled trades. For some black tradesmen, these racist practices resulted in economic downward mobility. White wage workers sought to distinguish themselves from black laborers in numerous ways, by placing themselves in comparison to enslaved people, and by highlighting their freedom and dignity as workers as reasons for full citizenship rights. African Americans in response created what I call black free labor principles: a belief that free blacks, through hard work, education, and frugality could achieve economic independence by becoming owning their own business, farm, or shop, allowing them to establish a claim for full citizenship. Another component of this black free labor ideology was that ownership of one's self, labor, and ability to contract was also a condition for citizenship. By situating African American voices at the center of these discussions of free labor—which are confined to the periphery in historian Eric Foner's *Free Labor, Free Soil, Free Men*—this dissertation illuminates a notion of

18. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (1970; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xii-xvi, 23, 16-17; For a comprehensive overview of ideas of free labor in the late eighteenth century and into the antebellum period see, Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

free labor espoused by African Americans that later became central to free labor arguments in the post-Civil War north.[19]

For African Americans, free soil and free labor were intertwined. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians recognized that the failure of local and state authorities as well as the African American community to protect and enforce black free soil values would undermine black free labor ideology. Without the legal protections and rights that black free soil principles afforded to blacks, African Americans could easily be deprived of the fruits of their labor by unscrupulous slavecatchers and slaveholders who claimed free blacks as runaway slaves or kidnapped them. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians recognized that for them to realize their free labor principles, they not only had to work to defend and advance their notion of free soil, but also labor for the complete end of black bondage in the United States.

INTERPRETING BLACK FREE SOIL AND FREE LABOR IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

My analysis relies on the methods of social history to interpret a variety of primary sources. Newspapers (antislavery, African American, and the general press) provide information about African Americans' activities in Pittsburgh and across the region. They also contain the minutes and proceedings of antislavery groups and

19. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, xxviii; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), 47-60.

viewpoints from individuals on slavery, race, and black citizenship. Many antislavery activists from the region also wrote to newspapers across the North articulating a free soil ideology distinct from the one that came to the political forefront in the late 1840s and 1850s. Letters, diaries, and speeches by antislavery activists from southwestern Pennsylvania and abolitionists who visited the region can be used to understand the politics and political culture of ordinary southwestern Pennsylvanians as well as their efforts to secure and maintain black freedom in this region and their implications statewide and nationally. These sources also help explain why black leaders from southwestern Pennsylvania supported certain strategies for rights and freedom over others and how their social background influenced black politics in the region.

This dissertation is also influenced by recent political history and interpretative frameworks found in cultural-legal history. It intertwines the "high" politics—writings by and debates between government—and "low" politics—the actions and writing of historically marginalized groups such as African Americans—into a single narrative.[20] In doing so I move beyond understanding black politics and political activity through voting and office-holding, especially since African Americans in southwestern Pennsylvania lost their suffrage rights in 1838. In the past few years, scholars have focused on how subordinated and disenfranchised people (such as African Americans and women) engaged with the law and devised their own

20. This approach in writing political history is inspired by is inspired by Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005).

legal culture.[21] Trial records are valuable in understanding the laws of ordinary people and how they viewed their society. Manumission suits are one way that enslaved African Americans attempted to influence their legal status in holding their master to account for their promises of freedom by indirectly influencing judges.

CHAPTER OVERVIEWS

The dissertation is organized chronologically and thematically, spanning the period from 1780 to 1865. Adopting this long timeframe allows readers to see the continuities and changes between the two periods of the antislavery movement (pre- and post-1830), the changes in black life in relation to the economic, political, and social developments that occurred in southwestern Pennsylvania, and the consequences of collaboration among antislavery activists (both black and white), communities, and organizations in the East and Old Northwest against black bondage and for African American free soil and free labor principles. By adopting this longer timeframe, this dissertation forces scholars to rethink the conventional narrative of black bondage and antislavery in Pennsylvania.

Chapter 1 begins on the eve of gradual abolition. After the English seized possession of southwestern Pennsylvania from the French after the Seven Year's War in 1763, white colonists from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland migrated to the

21. See for example, Laura F. 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; Ariel Gross, "Beyond Black and White: Cultural Approaches to Race and Slavery," *Columbia Law Review* 100 (April 2001): 640-689; Kimberly Welch, "Black Litigiousness and White Accountability: Free Blacks and the Rhetoric of Reputation in the Antebellum Natchez District," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 5 (September 2015): 372-398.

region. In the first decades of the nineteenth century many of these backcountry settlements were transformed into small-scale industrial towns. I argue that black bondage and other forms of African American unfree labor were central to the region's economic development. Enslaved African Americans who were unwilling to endure years in bondage took their owners to court to sue for their freedom. Others sought the assistance of local white antislavery activists who were sympathetic to their freedom claims. Many bondspeople secured their own freedom through self-emancipation by running away from their owners. Some African Americans collaborated with unfree whites who also sought freedom. This collaboration between blacks and whites illustrates the fluid and uncertain racial boundaries in the region because of the unfree status experienced by many individuals in both groups. In their challenges to slavery in southwestern Pennsylvania, African Americans strived to make free soil in this part of the state genuine.

In Chapter 2, I examine the challenges that African Americans faced in their transition from bondage and servitude to freedom during a period when southwestern Pennsylvania witnessed an intensification of market exchange and urban growth. Southwestern Pennsylvania became integrated into larger regional, national, and Atlantic markets, thanks in part to improvements in transportation and communication. From the market revolution also emerged a new middle class of white collar professionals and independent producers who espoused the values of discipline, hard work, frugality, temperance, self-control, and self improvement (such as education) as central in achieving success and economic independence in order to achieve success in the market-place.

The material standards that defined this new middle class cannot be applied to African Americans. They faced constant discrimination in employment and were therefore denied the ability to enter these professions. Rather, the black middle class was defined by the amount of education they obtained and their participation in reform movements and efforts to support racial uplift. In this chapter I argue that the African American middle class, and those aspiring to enter its ranks, articulated an expanded and more racially inclusive notion of free labor ideology that was shaped by black southwestern Pennsylvanians' material conditions and ties to the west. In order to realize this free labor vision, African Americans worked to expand the notion of free soil in the region and beyond its borders.

Chapter 3 examines the growth of a new wave of abolitionist activism that swept across the region after 1833. Unlike previous activists and groups, these antislavery advocates called for the immediate end to black bondage, rather than through gradual abolition or colonization of free people. Proponents of immediate abolition envisioned a free soil society that included African Americans. I focus on four particular threads of antislavery activism in southwestern Pennsylvania: Garrisonian, evangelicalism, antislavery partisan politics, and black abolition. I argue that abolitionists in this part of Pennsylvania crafted their own approach to fighting slavery and achieve their free soil and free labor vision that was shaped by their unique geographic location and the region's political environment. Those approaches included: moral suasion, church based activism, electoral politics, racial uplift, and assistance to fugitive slaves.

Chapter 4 charts the growing conflict over southwestern Pennsylvania free soil between the end of the United States-Mexico War and the eve of the Civil War. During this period, free soil and free labor became ascendant in northern politics at a time when these ideologies faced increasing attacks from slaveholders and their allies in the north. For northern free blacks, their freedom became even more precarious when the United States government instituted a new fugitive slave act in 1850. African Americans recognized that without these legal protections, which were a central component of free soil, African Americans could easily be deprived of the fruits of their labor by slavecatchers and slaveholders who claimed them as runaway slaves or sought to kidnap them into bondage. I argue that black southwestern Pennsylvanians sought to defend and advance a broader notion of free soil and black free labor principles in a multitude of ways. The methods these African Americans used included: appeals to local officials, participation in political conventions, engaging in public celebrations of emancipation in the British West Indies, as well as undertaking direct action to assist runaway slaves and liberate African Americans who were either kidnapped by slavecatchers or were brought to the region as bondspeople by their owners traveling through southwestern Pennsylvania.

Chapter 5 begins in 1852, when African Americans faced an uncertain future in the United States as the power and influence of slaveholders seemed insurmountable. During the 1850s a growing number of African Americans considered emigration to Central America, Canada, and West Africa in order to realize their free soil and free labor vision. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians were at the forefront of this black emigration movement, led by Pittsburgh abolitionist

Martin Delany. Other African Americans sought to emigrate to Africa under the auspices of the white-led American Colonization Society. Most blacks, however, rejected colonization, and were determined to remain in the United States.

The Civil War is an important turning point in this chapter, and serves as the dissertation's endpoint. The conflict provided black southwestern Pennsylvanians new opportunities to remake society based on their expansive vision of free soil and free labor. However, these attempts were met by fierce resistance among many whites. Towards the end of the war, the destruction of slavery opened a new front over the meaning of free soil between northern blacks and whites as well as between freedpeople, their former enslavers, and free blacks from the north who sought to implement their vision of a free soil society.

Chapter 1

Race, Labor, and Black Freedom: Imagining the Pennsylvania Trans-Appalachian West, 1780-1830

In 1830, census marshals for a southwestern Pennsylvania district reported shocking news to the state legislature. During the 1820s, the number of slaves in their part of the state had almost doubled. Though small, this increase was concerning enough for members of the Pennsylvania Senate that they formed a special committee to investigate. In 1833, the committee reported its findings. They concluded that most African Americans were being improperly held as slaves and that only sixty persons were being held in bondage lawfully. The rest—the grandchildren of slaves as well as servants brought into Pennsylvania from neighboring states—were being held unlawfully by enslavers eager to keep their black laborers in a state of unfreedom, a status somewhere between slave and free. The report made clear that there were many in the state unwilling to bring an immediate end to black servitude and that African American bound labor still held an important economic value in southwestern Pennsylvania.[1]

1. *Report of the Committee Appointed in the Senate of Pennsylvania to Investigate the Cause of An Increased Number of Slaves: Being Returned that Commonwealth, By the Census of 1830, over that of 1820, Read in Senate, February 25, 1833*. (Harrisburg, PA: Henry Welsh, 1833), 1,6-7; My understanding of unfreedom is influenced Jared Ross Hardesty's study of slavery in eighteenth century Boston. Hardesty moves beyond using a conventional dichotomy of slavery and freedom, examining black bondage alongside other types of bound labor which include indenture servitude, apprenticeship, pauper apprenticeship, and other forms. Hardesty examines the interactions between bound and poor white and black laborers by using this framework. He shows how marginalized people sought to find a place for themselves in eighteenth century Boston. See, Jared Ross Hardesty, *Unfreedom: Slavery and Dependence in Eighteenth-Century Boston* (New York: New York University Press, 2016).

In recent years scholars have studied the slow death of slavery in the North in depth.[2] The most comprehensive study of slavery and emancipation in Pennsylvania is Gary Nash and Jean R. Soderlund's *Freedom by Degrees*, published in 1991. Similar to the conclusions drawn by other historians who have examined the end of slavery in other northern states, Nash and Soderlund argue that the egalitarian rhetoric unleashed by the American Revolution was insufficient on its own to destroy slavery and that slaveowners' economic self-interests informed the form and timing of what became known as gradual abolition.[3] Aa a result, the path to ending slavery was slow and winding.[4]

2. Emancipation in Pennsylvania and throughout the North was more complicated than previous scholars had assumed, attributing abolition in Pennsylvania and throughout the North to Revolutionary and humanitarian sentiment of the late eighteenth century. Two studies that emphasize these two factors see Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967); Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery, Servitude, Freedom, 1639-1861* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1911). During the past few years, scholars have revisited the subject of northern slavery and emancipation. These studies have shown just how profitable black bondage was and the arduous path of ending slavery in this part of the country. See for example For Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); James J. Gigantino II, *The Ragged Road to Abolition: Slavery and Freedom in New Jersey, 1775-1865* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); M. Scott Heerman, *The Alchemy of Slavery: Human Bondage and Emancipation in the Illinois Country, 1730-1865* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Graham Russel Hodges, *Root & Branch: African Americans in New York and east Jersey, 1613-1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Stanley I. Kutler, "Pennsylvania Courts, The Abolition act, and Negro Rights," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 30 no. 1 (January 1963): 14-27; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Christy Clark-Pujara, *Dark Work: The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island* (New York: New York University Press, 2016); Wendy Warren, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2016).

3. Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, xii, xvi.

4. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degress*, 111; For the ways in which northern slaveowners sought to shift the economic cost of emancipation onto the non-slaveholding public and African Americans, free and enslaved, see Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman,

Nash and Soderlund place Philadelphia and its environs at the center of their narrative, paying scant attention to southwestern Pennsylvania. I contend that inserting southwestern Pennsylvania into the narrative of black bondage and antislavery activism in the Keystone State is revealing. It shows the limited reach of The Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully held in Bondage, also referred to as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), the Philadelphia-based antislavery group that sought to force enslavers to abide by the provisions of the state's 1780 gradual abolition law. Aside from a local auxiliary of the group situated in Washington County, just south and west of Pittsburgh, most PAS operations were centered upon eastern Pennsylvania. Attention to the other forms taken by antislavery activity in southwestern Pennsylvania shows that black bondage and other forms of servitude continued to be profitable in the West, whereas in the East it was on the decline in the late eighteenth and into the first decades of the nineteenth century.

Inserting southwestern Pennsylvania into the familiar story of slavery's slow death in the North raises a number of questions. First, why and how were enslavers able to flout the law for such a long period of time? Second, how did the presence of whites held in other forms of temporary servitude (often directly alongside black slaves and servants), shape the experience of black bondage in the region? Third, how were African Americans in this part of the state able to secure their freedom and protect their rights? Finally, how did black and white abolitionists bring an end to

"Philanthropy at Bargain prices: Notes on the Economics of Gradual Emancipation," *Journal of Legal Studies* 3, no. 2 (June 1974): 377-401.

African American slavery and servitude in the region and attempt to implement their own free soil visions?

THE BLACK PRESENCE IN EARLY SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The first African Americans arrived in southwestern Pennsylvania around 1755, traveling alongside British and Virginia military expeditions that ventured into the Ohio Country to wrestle control of the region away from French colonists and Native Americans. To many English settlers, southwestern Pennsylvania represented a gateway to the greater Ohio Valley where immense profits could be made in trade and agriculture. African Americans, the vast majority of whom were enslaved, served as teamsters, waggoners, drovers, laborers, soldiers and servants for the British Army and colonial militias. Though their numbers were small, African Americans provided much needed labor in building military campsites, clearing farmland, and providing domestic work for frontier forts.[5]

Spearheading theses incursions into southwestern Pennsylvania and greater Ohio Valley were many Virginia slaveholders. Over the next half century, these slaveholding migrants (and their descendants) sought to recreate the slave societies of eastern Virginia and Maryland in southwestern Pennsylvania. They imagined the region as a place where black bondage would be central to the cultivation of a

5. Maria Alessandra Bollettino, "Slavery, War, and Britain's Atlantic Empire: Black Soldiers. Sailors, and Rebels in the Seven Years' War" (PhD. diss, University of Texas at Austin, 2009), 54-58; Paul E. Kopperman, *Braddock at the Monongahela* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 138, 237; Laurence A. Glasco, ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004), 35-37.

commodity such as tobacco. Ann Murphy, the owner of a tobacco plantation between Baltimore and Harper's Ferry, moved west to Uniontown, brining several of her slaves to the region.[6] So too did many others like her. In one venture, George Washington and Gilbert Simpson even partnered to establish a plantation near present-day Perryopolis, though Washington only ever sent a small number of his slaves to labor on these lands.

In this prospective slave society slaveholders envisioned themselves as the ruling class, replicating the symbols of power found in eastern Maryland and Virginia to demonstrate their elite status. For instance, John Neville, a Virginia General and veteran of both the French and Indian and Revolutionary Wars, came into possession of a significant portion of land. In the early 1780s, Neville began construction of a home he called Woodville Plantation, the centerpiece of an estate he hoped would one day be as grand as George Washington's Mount Vernon. By 1790, Neville was one of the largest slaveholders in the region and held eighteen people in bondage.[7]

Over time, slaveholders achieved considerable political influence in southwestern Pennsylvania. Neville himself held a number of leadership positions: representative on the Pennsylvania supreme executive council and state assembly, delegate to the state constitution convention, and inspector of revenue. Consider two

6. Franklin Ellis, ed., *History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania: With Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts, 1882), 322-323.

7. *Memoirs of Allegheny County Pennsylvania: Personal and Genealogical with Portraits.* Volume I (Madison, WI: Northwestern Association, 1904), 355-356; J. Bernard Hogg, "Presley Neville," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 19 no. 1 (March 1936): 18; Franklin Toker, *Buildings of Pittsburgh* (Chicago: Society of Architectural Historians, 2007):170-171; Cecil E. Goode, "Gilbert Simpson: Washington's Partner in Settling His Western Pennsylvania Lands," *Western Pennsylvania History Magazine* 62, no. 2 (April 1979): 149, 155-157, 162.

other examples. In 1772, Edward Cook purchased acreage near the Youghiogheny and Monongahela Rivers where he relied on the labor of several slaves. Cook later became a justice of the peace and judge. Likewise, sometime after the American Revolution, William Boyd arrived in what later became Fayette County with his bondspeople. He could soon be found serving as Fayette County's justice of the peace, while in neighboring Washington County, slaveholders began running for (and winning) races in county elections. This growing influence of enslavers on local and regional politics had important consequences in statewide debates over abolition, over the interpretation and enforcement of Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law, and over the fate of African Americans, freedom suits before local courts.[8]

However, despite the considerable influence enslavers wielded, they failed to establish a slave society in southwestern Pennsylvania. What emerged in the region instead was a society with slaves; a mixed economy in which slavery was just one among many forms of unfree labor used in the productive process. Slaveholders were, according to historian Ira Berlin, "one portion of the propertied elite."[9] There are

8. Russell J. Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1938), 28-29, 42, 113-114; Franklin Ellis, ed. *History of Fayette County, Pennsylvania: With Biographical Sketches of Many of its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: L. H. Everts, 1882), 488; W. Thomas Mainwaring, *Abandoned Tracks: The Underground Railroad in Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 23; Slaveholders' positions in the justice system had important implications regarding how Pennsylvania antislavery laws were interpreted when African Americans brought their freedom claims to court. These understandings were the product of what some scholars refer to as "localized law." See for example, Richard S. Newman, "'Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania': Free Soil, Fugitive Slaves and the Making of Pennsylvania's Anti-Slavery Borderland," *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (September 2011): 422-423; Laura F. 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), 3-4.

9. These definitions of slave societies and societies with slaves are from Ira Berlin's history of the first two centuries of slavery in the United States. See, Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7-10.

numerous explanations as to why a more hegemonic slave society failed to take root in southwestern Pennsylvania. For one thing, despite their best efforts, slaveholders were never able to successfully cultivate a cash crop like tobacco as they had done in the Chesapeake. Instead, African Americans in southwestern Pennsylvania were more likely to labor as domestics, in small workshops as skilled tradesmen, or on farms engaged in all aspects of the agricultural industry. As a result, slave-owning was only ever on a small-scale. Slaveholders in Fayette and Washington counties, for instance, held on average between one and three persons in bondage in the 1780s and 1790s.[10] The continued presence of Native Americans also destabilized the slave system.[11] Finally, the presence of unfree whites complicated the attempt to import a racial hierarchy from eastern Virginia and Maryland as blackness could not necessarily be equated with unfree status.

BLACK UNFREEDOM IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVNAIA

Though a slave society failed to take root in southwestern Pennsylvania, enslavers did create a society with slaves in which black bondage and servitude were among many forms of unfree labor. Black servants and slaves on the region's farms performed a variety of tasks cultivating wheat, corn, oats, and grass. Western

10. Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone*, 181-182; Christopher M. Osborne, "Invisible Hands: Slaves, Bound Laborers, and the Development of Western Pennsylvania, 1780-1820," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 72, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 87-89.

11. Washington's ventures in southwestern Pennsylvania faced setbacks in part due to conflict between Native Americans and white settlers. For additional insight surrounding the difficulties European colonial officials faced in establishing their authority over southwestern Pennsylvania and greater Ohio Valley in the face of Native American opposition see, Rob Harper, *Unsettling the West: Violence and State Building in the Ohio Valley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

Pennsylvania farmers also raised cattle and hogs for local use and for the Philadelphia market. They also devoted acres of farmland to establishing apple orchards, providing fresh and dried fruit, cider, or feed for livestock. Some farmers operated gristmills to grind grains into flour. One of the first was built by James Ewing in Collier Township, Allegheny County. Ewing had his bondspeople clear the land, make improvements to the farm and establish his gristmill. Unfree black laborers were also among the skilled laborers working on farms. For instance, a slaveholder at Redstone Old Fort owned a bondsman named Jerry who was a blacksmith.[12]

Between the late eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth century, black unfree labor served an important role in southwestern Pennsylvania's transformation from backcountry settlements into small-scale industrial towns with growing artisan populations.[13] Unfree black laborers worked for backcountry families and were important assets for individuals seeking to expand their landholdings, extend their engagement in commercial activists, or keep their households from sinking further into debt. In a notice in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* in the spring of 1782, Colonel John

12. Thomas Cushing, *History of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, Including Its Early Settlement and Progress to the Present Time . . . Portraits of Some of its Prominent Men, and Biographies of Many of its Representative Citizen* (Chicago: A Warner, 1889), 26; Stevenson Whitcomb Fletcher, *Pennsylvania Agriculture and Country Life, 1640-1840* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1971), 143-163, 178, 188, 209, 323-326; Reginald Horsman, *The Frontier in the Formative Years, 1785-1815* (New York: Holt, Riehart, and Winston, 1970), 148; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, December 14, 1793.

13. Too few scholars have recognized this. In his study of the western Pennsylvania frontier, R. Eugene Harper considers slavery a marginal institution in decline beginning in the late eighteenth century, as two few farmers (in his view) relied on black bound labor. Harper argues that slaves in the region were instead used mainly for domestic service or served as status symbols. He attributes the relatively fast transformation of western Pennsylvania society to the presence of wealthy men who were able to supply the capital and entrepreneurship for different industries, R. Eugene Harper, *The Transformation of Western Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), xi, 55, 173.

Gibson, stationed at Fort Pitt, advertised the sale of an enslaved woman who he described as "an excellent cook, and can do any kind of work in or out of doors."[14] Likewise, in a notice in the *Greensburg Gazette*, George Armstrong, an attorney and slave dealer, offered an enslaved man for sale who was "well acquainted with farming."[15] Indeed, slaves were often put up for sale precisely because they were so valuable. In November 1805, a notice appeared in *The Commonwealth* of a sheriff's sale of the estate of Dr. Absalom Baird who had died that October. At the time of his death, Baird was heavily in debt. Among the possessions slated for sale was "one negro wench and children."[16] African American servants and slaves were viewed by eighteenth century southwestern Pennsylvanians as important assets for providing or supplementing labor.

Some southwestern Pennsylvania slaveholders were also lawyers, merchants, iron masters, inn keepers, millers, surveyors, doctors, yeomen, masons, ministers, and widows.[17] This too was a facet of their slaveholding. As Joanne Pope Melish notes in her study of slavery and emancipation in New England, enslaved people were valuable in that their labor "released white males to engage in new professional,

14. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, May 26, 1787.

15. Benjamin Franklin Vogle, *History of Greensburg (Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania) and Greensburg Schools. One Hundred and Seventy Local Illustrations* (Greensburg, PA: Volge and Winsheimer, 1899), 39.

16. "Sheriff's Sale," *The Commonwealth*, November 13, 1805;

17. The occupations of southwestern Pennsylvania slaveholders can be found in Records of the County Governments, Bedford County, Prothonotary Records of Negro and Mulatto Slaves, 1780, 1798, Records of Negro and Mulatto Children, 1821-1825, 1828, Returns of Negro and mulatto Children and Miscellaneous Slave Records LR278; Fayette County, Prothonotary, Birth Records for Negroes and Mulattoes, 1788-1826, LR77; Washington County, Recorder of Deeds, Negro Register, 1782-1851, LR 60; RG-47, Records of the County Governments, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA and various county histories.

artisan, and entrepreneurial activists, thus increasing productivity and easing the transition from a household-based to a market-based economy."[18] In 1796, Samuel Power and his wife moved to Chewton, Beaver County, bringing with them an enslaved man named "Old Kit" and his wife and four children, whose labor freed Power from farming to become a merchandiser.[19] Or consider Thomas Endsely, who left Maryland for Somerset County, Pennsylvania, in December 1823. Endsely purchased a farm and tavern located near the national road, a highway that ran through southwestern Pennsylvania linking East and West. He brought with him eight slaves whose labor allowed him to devote his energies to participating in a local militia company while also serving as a commissioner for the national road charged with the erection of toll gates and ensuring the road's maintenance. As these examples illustrate, slavery freed white men from household labor, allowing them to engage in other professional occupations to achieve greater economic independence and accelerating economic development in the region.[20]

Bound labor was important to the expansion of southwestern Pennsylvania's iron industry as well. In the years after the American Revolution, iron production grew rapidly as ironmasters opened more furnaces and forges. During this period, Pennsylvania was a leader in iron production, with operations in the central and

18. Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8.

19. Joseph H. Bausman, *History of Beaver County, Pennsylvania: And its Centennial Celebration,* Vol. 1 (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1904), 227.

20. Howard E. Blackburn and William H. Welfley, *History of Bedford and Somerset Counties Pennsylvania: With Genealogical and Personal History* (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1906), 392.

western portions of the state. John Bezís-Selfia estimates that nearly half of the furnaces and forges established in Pennsylvania during this period were west of the Susquehanna River in the Juniata and Ohio Valleys. Slave labor made this possible. Laboring in the iron industry was demanding, exacting a physical toll. An 1804 fugitive slave notice that appeared in Pittsburgh *Commonwealth of Liberty* vividly depicts these conditions. In the spring of 1808, Jack Robinson had fled from the Rock Iron Works in nearby Centre County. He was described as having burns on his hands and feet from his time working as a fireman in the forge. In a region where capital and labor was scarce, iron masters relied extensively on indentured and slave labor.[21]

One of the wealthiest ironmasters in southwestern Pennsylvania was Isaac Meason of Dunbar Township in Fayette County. Meason had arrived in this section of the backcountry in his early twenties from Virginia. In 1791 he invested in a 323-acre tract of land on which he established the Union Furnace. Meason's ironworks specialized in producing iron sugar kettles that traveled down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers for Louisiana and salt kettles and Dutch ovens for families migrating to the far west. The operation's profitability made Meason one of the region's most prominent and influential political figures and he served as a member of Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council and an associate judge for Fayette County.[22] Meason held a number of enslaved men who labored in his iron works as

21. "Twenty Dollars Reward," *The Commonwealth*, June 15, 1808; John Bezís-Selfa, *Forging America: Ironworkers, Adventurers, and the Industrious Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 22-27; Paul F. Paskoff, *Industrial Evolution: Organization, Structure, and Growth of the Pennsylvania Iron Industry, 1750-1860* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 13-14.

22. Evelyn Abraham, "Isaac Meason, The First Ironmaster West of the Alleghenies," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 20, no. 1 (March 1937): 41-45; James M. Swank, *Progressive Pennsylvania: A Record of the Remarkable Industrial Development of the Keystone State, with Some Accounts of its Early and its Later Transportation Systems, Its Early Settlers, and Its Prominent Men*

well as bondswomen whose labor could be used for household production, further increasing Meason's wealth.[23] These slaves provided skilled labor in a place where it was desperately needed.[24]

THE RISE OF ANTISLAVERY ACTIVISM AND FREE LABOR AND FREE SOIL THOUGHT

Despite black unfree labor's importance to the household economy, commercialization, economic diversification, and industrialization of southwestern Pennsylvania, slavery was not uncontroversial. The Enlightenment, Protestant evangelicalism, revolutionary ideology, and the actions of enslaved people were important sources that fostered antislavery sentiment in the region in the second half of the eighteenth century.

The earliest legislative effort to abolish slavery was in 1776, when voters elected a "group of Philadelphia radicals and democratic backcountry Scots-Irish Presbyterians" to create a new state constitution. The document they created was one of the most radical produced by a state assembly anywhere in the new nation. The Pennsylvania state constitution's first article was couched in the language of universal rights and the equality of all men, which antislavery activists soon began to use in

(Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908), 191-193; George W. Hughes, "The Pioneer Iron Industry in Western Pennsylvania," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 14, no. 3 (July 1931): 210-211.

23. Fayette County, Prothonotary, Birth Records for Negroes and Mulattoes, 1788-1826, RG-47, Records of the County Governments, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

24. Osborne, "Invisible Hands," 86.

their legal arguments against the continuation of slavery in Pennsylvania. However, the state constitution did not explicitly outlaw black bondage. A gradual abolition bill was introduced in the assembly, two years later, in 1778, but was tabled shortly thereafter, demonstrating that a significant number of legislators were opposed to abolition. It was not until March 1, 1780, that the state assembly passed a gradual abolition act. Opposition to that bill came primarily from residents in the backcountry who couched their opposition in religious and economic terms and from state assemblymen who represented significant and influential slaveholding constituencies. Both of Westmoreland County's representatives, for instance, voted against the bill.[25]

As enacted, the law stipulated that all "negroes and mulattoes" born in the state after March 1, 1780, were no longer to be deemed slaves or servants for life. These children were to be bound to their mother's enslaver until they reached age twenty-eight. Under the new law, slaveholders were required to record the name, age, sex, of "any negro or mulatto slave or servant for life or till the age of thirty-one years" in a registry held by the clerk of the peace or county court of record. Alongside this information, slaveholders were to provide their name, occupation, and the county and township of their residence. The purpose of a slave registry was so that local officials could distinguish between lifelong slaves and these new temporary servants. The gradual abolition law was a postnati abolition program that did not immediately free any of the enslaved, so as to mollify slave-owners, allowing then to profit from the labor of the offspring of their slaves. George William Van Cleve estimates that

25. Nash and Soderlund, *Degrees of Freedom*, 100-110; Robert L. Brunhouse, *The Counter-Revolution in Pennsylvania, 1776-1790* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1971), 53, 80-81.

depriving these children of their freedom until the age of twenty-eight robbed African American laborers of approximately fifty million dollars of income (2010 figures).[26]

The gradual abolition law was an important step in establishing Pennsylvania as a free soil state, but it had numerous shortcomings. The law lacked penalties against those who violated its terms. There were also several misconceptions surrounding the interpretation of the gradual abolition law among Pennsylvanians. So, in 1788, legislators passed an additional, clarifcatory act. It made clear that when enslavers traveled through the state with their bondspeople, their arrival in Pennsylvania did not automatically guarantee freedom to their enslaved workforce. So long as slaveholders did not intend to settle and reside in the state, their bondspeople would not be considered or deemed free. The law also prohibited Pennsylvania's slaveholders from removing the indentured children of enslaved parents from the state for the purpose of making them slaves for life and barred the sales of their parents out of state as well. The 1788 law also placed removal restrictions on pregnant slaves and servants and reiterated that the children of enslaved parents were to serve until the age of twenty-eight and that they had to be registered with the county clerk either by April 1, 1789, or six months after the child was born. Finally, the 1788 act included penalties which punished violators of the law

26. "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," in *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania, From 1682-1801, Vol. 10, 1779-1781* (Harrisburg, PA: State Printer, 1904), 67-73; Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 68-71; George William Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 64-64.

with fines and sentences to hard labor, though it stopped short of providing state funds to support enforcement efforts.[27]

Enforcement thus fell to private groups, notably the PAS, the lawyerly organization established in Philadelphia in 1775. PAS officers sent countless petitions to state officials requesting their intervention each time the law was flouted and also provided legal assistance to African Americans who were kidnapped or illegally held in bondage and fugitive slaves.[28]

Though African Americans were themselves excluded from the PAS, they quickly became crucial partners in the organization's antislavery efforts, interpreting and extending Pennsylvania's free soil principles. For instance, in 1815, PAS lawyers provided legal aid to Kitty, a self-emancipated woman from Virginia, in a freedom suit in Pennsylvania courts. Kitty and her children won their freedom suit when the PAS successfully argued that "Pennsylvania had, over time, become a 'free' state." African Americans could therefore claim freedom as long as they were within Pennsylvania, a decidedly broad interpretation of the state's free soil principles.

As Pennsylvania slowly developed a reputation as the headquarters of the American antislavery movement, it became a magnet for black migration. African Americans from neighboring slave states and from the countryside came to Philadelphia especially seeking employment, protection from enslavement, and aid

27. "An Act to Explain and Amend an Act Entitled "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," in *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania, From 1682-1801, Vol. 13, 1787-1790* (Harrisburg, PA: State Printer, 1908), 52-56.

28. Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4-6.

from black institutions. The rapid growth of the city's free African American community led to increasing labor competition and racial tensions, and violence. As a result, several antislavery activists began to imagine the resettlement of free blacks west of the Appalachian Mountains as a means to fulfill a free labor vision for African Americans.[29]

In a 1794 letter to the president of the PAS, Benjamin Rush, a local physician and PAS member, offered the PAS a substantial portion of land in Bedford County, on the edge of southwestern Pennsylvania to build a settlement where free black people could resettle. Prospective black farmers could purchase up to fifty acres of land (if more was needed for a family, the PAS was authorized to exceed that amount). Rush's plan also reserved a tract in the settlement for schools and for places of worship—institutions that would elevate African Americans to the same status as whites, challenging justifications for black enslavement based on their perceived ignorance and immorality by whites.[30] In his letter to other PAS leaders, Rush conceded that his plan faced considerable logistical and financial challenges, but he was optimistic. He noted that his plan for a free African American settlement based on free labor could serve as a national model, and while the ambitious black settlement plan never came to fruition, its conception shows that Rush (and likely

29. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 77-78; Richard S. Newman, "'Lucky to be born in Pennsylvania,'424-425; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 134-138, 141-142, 173-174, 184.

30. Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro 1550-1812*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 281-283; Benjamin Rush to the President of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, [1794?], in *Letters of Benjamin Rush, Volume II 1793-1813*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 754-756.

other antislavery activists too) envisioned southwestern Pennsylvania as a space for free black labor.[31]

A LEGAL BATTLEGROUND BETWEEN SLAVERY AND FREE SOIL

One factor complicating the execution and enforcement of gradual abolition and the vision of a free labor west was the fact that a portion of the region—an area comprising the present-day counties of Greene, Fayette, and Washington, and a portion of Beaver and Allegheny county—had long been claimed by both Virginia and Pennsylvania.[32]

In 1768, Pennsylvania purchased territory from the Six Nations which included lands claimed by Virginia. In 1772, officials in the two colonies had begun a series of negotiations to resolve the boundary dispute, though it took until 1780 until a final agreement was reached in which most of Yohogania and a portion of Ohio and Monongalia were recognized as Pennsylvania territory.[33]

The resolution of the boundary dispute produced a new problem for those hoping to carry out gradual abolition in this part of the state. While Pennsylvania and

31. Benjamin Rush to the President of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, [1794?], in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 756-757.

32. John E. Potter, "The Pennsylvania and Virginia Boundary Controversy," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 38, no. 4 (1914): 412-413; Peter S. Onuf, *The Origins of the Federal Republic: Jurisdictional Controversies in the United States, 1775-1787* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 77.

33. Potter, "The Pennsylvania and Virginia Boundary Controversy," 410-411, 416-418; Patrick Spero, *Frontier Country: The Politics of War in Early Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 197-199, 242-243.

Virginia were negotiating the fate of this region, many slaveholders from Virginia established homes there, bringing with them their slaves in what became Washington and Westmoreland counties. Many of these migrating slaveholders were initially uncertain whether they lived under the jurisdiction of Pennsylvania or Virginia. These enslavers therefore had not registered their slaves as required under Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law.[34]

In April 1782, Pennsylvania legislators extended the deadline (until 1 January 1783) for slaveholders in Westmoreland and Washington county to register their slaves, in an obvious attempt to assert their own legal authority in this dispute region.[35] Still, despite this extension, many enslavers were not willing to abide by Pennsylvania's antislavery slavery statutes.

In 1797, Cassandra and Lydia brought freedom suits before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. Both women claimed to be illegally held in bondage by Aberilla Blackmore, the widow of slaveowner Samuel Blackmore. The suits claimed that Samuel Blackmore had not been a lawful resident of Westmorland County before September 23, 1780, and thus by subsequently entering Pennsylvania with the two enslaved women, Blackmore had relinquished his ownership of these women. In court, his widow Aberilla conceded that her late husband had not registered the two

34. *Minutes of the First Session of the Fourteenth General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Which Commenced at Philadelphia, on Monday, the Twenty-Sixth Day of October, in the Year of our Lord One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-Nine* (Philadelphia: Hall & Sellers, 1789), 83, 103.

35. "An Act to Redress Certain Grievances, Within the Counties of Westmoreland and Washington," in *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801, Vol. 10 1779-1781*(Harrisburg, PA: State Printer, 1904): 462-464; A. Leon Higginbotham Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process, The Colonial Period* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 303-304.

women with the clerk of Washington until December 19, 1782, months after the first deadline had passed. But she testified that her husband had traveled to Westmoreland County in March 1780 from their home in Maryland to purchase a tract of land. Blackmore's attorneys argued that though he had not occupied that land immediately, his purchase had thus qualified him as a legal resident.[36]

The suits also turned on a second question: whether or not the registration Blackmore had belatedly completed for his slaves was valid. The document correctly listed the ages of the enslaved women but recorded their names as Cass and Liddy. It also omitted the name of the township where Samuel Blackmore resided, his profession, and the sex of slaves. The PAS argued that this was ambiguous because recording Cassandra's name as Cass (along with omitting her sex) made it difficult to ascertain if this person was male or female. Cass might actually be an abbreviated name for Cassius one PAS lawyer asserted in court.[37]

The justices of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court made their decision the following day. The court ignored PAS lawyers' claims about recording irregularities but nonetheless concluded that Samuel Blackmore had not been inhabitant of Westmoreland or Washington counties before March 1, 1780, the date when

36. *Pennsylvania v. Blackmore*, Addison 284 (PA Ct. App, 1796); *Republica v. Aberilla Blackmore*, 2 Yates 234 (1797); Washington County Pennsylvania vs. Aberilla Blackmore, *Habeas Corpus* 1795, Manumissions, Indentures and other Legal Papers, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Series IV, Reel 24, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Paul Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 61.

37. *Pennsylvania v. Blackmore*, Addison 284 (PA Ct. App,1796); *Republica v. Aberilla Blackmore*, 2 Yates 234 (1797); Washington County Pennsylvania vs. Aberilla Blackmore, *Habeas Corpus* 1795, Manumissions, Indentures and other Legal Papers, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Series IV, Reel 24, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Pennsylvania adopted a gradual abolition law. Blackmore had also not resided in the state when slaveholders in these two counties were granted more time to register their slaves under the April 1782 law. The court also noted that both women had not been physically present in the disputed territory before these laws were adopted. The court therefore declared Cassandra and Lydia free.[38]

Two years later, another African American, aided by PAS lawyers, brought a similar case before the Pennsylvanian courts, when John, an enslaved man, brought a freedom suit against his owner. John was born in Maryland and brought to Westmoreland County in October 1782 and registered as a slave on December 30, 1782. The court determined that even though John was properly registered before the January 1, 1783 deadline, neither he nor his enslaver were inhabitants of Westmoreland County prior to September 23, 1780, the date when the boundary dispute between Pennsylvania and Virginia was settled.[39]

African Americans, with the help of the PAS and of sympathetic lawyers continued to press similar cases in the following years. In 1787 Herbert Wallace a resident of Washington County sold his sixteen-year-old bondswoman, Beck, and her child to James Campbell, a farmer. Shortly thereafter, Campbell left for neighboring Brook County, Virginia, where Beck continued to be enslaved. After more than ten

38. *Pennsylvania v. Blackmore*, Addison 284 (PA Ct. App,1796); *Republica v. Aberilla Blackmore*, 2 Yates 234 (1797); Washington County Pennsylvania vs. Aberilla Blackmore, *Habeas Corpus* 1795, Manumissions, Indentures and other Legal Papers, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Series IV, Reel 24, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union*, 61.

39. *John a negro man, v. Benoni Dawson*, 2 Yates 449 (1797); Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union*, 61-62.

years in bondage, Beck left her owner taking her five children to the northwest territory on the pretense that she was not registered as a slave in Pennsylvania. Yet when Campbell consulted the registration docket for December 1782 the name "Beck" was nowhere to be found. In court, Campbell's counsel argued that since Beck was not accounted for in the slave register, she was a free woman and the agreement between him and Wallace was void. Campbell sued Wallace for the return of his money.[40]

In October 1803, this case made its way to the Circuit Court in Washington, Pennsylvania. Wallace's attorney claimed that his client had employed his cousin to make the return for his slaves, recording the name "Bectz," instead of Beck. The apparently misspelled name was attributed to his cousin's handwriting. The return was later presented to the clerk of the peace before the registration deadline and in all other ways adhered to the exact instructions set forth by the state legislature in submitting a slave return. Campbell's lawyer, however, called for Wallace's testimony to be omitted, citing it as parol evidence—evidence that would have contradicted, modified, or varied the terms of a contract after a written agreement had been reached by all parties, in this case the slave return and agreement between Wallace and Campbell. According to the latter's lawyer, there was no way to misconstrue the legal procedures for registering a slave in Pennsylvania. Accepting this evidence would all but destroy the purpose of the slave registry system.[41]

40. *Campbell v. Wallace*, 3 Yeates 572 (1803).

41. *Campbell v. Wallace*, 3 Yeates 572 (1803).

The defense countered that Wallace's testimony was not intended to contradict the registry but instead to prove that a simple human mistake had been made in transcribing the name and that such an error should not deprive a slaveholder of their property. According to his lawyer, Wallace had correctly followed the state's registration law and was therefore within his rights to sell off his bondswoman. The defense attorney warned that holding slaveholders accountable for a mistake made by a clerk of the peace could have dire consequences. What if, he wondered aloud, a clerk "in an outrageous fit of mistaken zeal for humanity, should refuse 'to enter particulars, in a book to be provided for that purpose," of any return brought to him, will this manumit all the slaves in the county?"

After considering the circumstances surrounding the registry, Justice Thomas Smith concurred with the defense that this testimony was admissible, but with reservation. He recognized the "mischief" that parol evidence could cause regarding writing records and contractual agreements. Justice Smith also noted that "it has been often ruled that if the substantial part of registering slaves is complied with, it is sufficient." With the evidence now deemed admissible and legal arguments concluded, the jury issued a verdict in favor of the defendant Herbert Wallace.[42]

Despite state officials' extension of the deadline for slaveholders in Washington and Westmoreland counties to register their bondspeople, some enslavers failed to comply in a timely manner. Some slaveholders resorted to fraud in registering their slaves and servants in order to maintain their ownership over the valuable labor of unfree African Americans. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians

42. *Campbell v. Wallace*, 3 Yeates 572 (1803).

turned to the courts to challenge slaveholders' fraudulent claims and force their compliance with the law.

One such case was heard by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1799. In Washington County an enslaved man named Giles brought a freedom suit against Joshua Meeks, claiming that his owner had fraudulently registered him as a slave. In court testimony, Giles' previous owner, a man named Hull, produced a sealed certificate from the clerk of sessions as evidence that Giles had been registered as a slave on December 19, 1782. Meeks had purchased Giles from Hull and in court Giles claimed that Meeks' certificate was a fraud and produced evidence of his own showing that Hull had actually registered him after the deadline of January 1, 1783. The jury disagreed and found in favor of Meeks. The verdict suggests that when the legitimacy of slaveholders' claims was called into question, some juries decided in favor of freedom. Free soil therefore meant that black rights to self-ownership overrode the property interests of slaveholders when even the most minor accusation placed those claims over black bodies in doubt.[43]

Disputes over the proper registration of the enslaved and servants was not the only means African Americans and their white antislavery allies sought to precipitate an end to black bondage in the region. Legal disputes over the status of the grandchildren of slaves and children of servants were also brought before southwestern courts. For instance, in 1821, Susannah Stokely, a slaveholder, was brought before the Court of Common Pleas of Westmoreland County by her former

43. *Giles, a negro man, v. Joshua Meeks*, Addison 384 (1799).

bondswoman Milley. The woman accused Stokely of illegally keeping her daughter Nance as a servant. In a lower court case, Milley's lawyer argued that her owner had not properly registered her as a slave according to Pennsylvania law. Stokely argued that this was irrelevant because, since Milley was previously a slave, she was entitled to the labor of her daughter until she turned twenty-eight. The judge reaffirmed the lower court's decision, ruling in Milley's favor. He dismissed Stokely's claims because the evidence showed that Milley was a free woman when she had given birth to Nance.[44]

In another case, this time before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1826, John Miller, a Washington County slaveholder, claimed Alfred Dwilling as a servant until he reached the age of twenty-eight. Miller believed that because Dwilling's mother was his servant for twenty-eight years under Pennsylvania law, the same status applied to her son. Miller also believed he was within his right to hold the boy as a servant in order to extract compensation for the lost labor of the pregnant mother and care of her child. According to Miller's lawyer, the gradual abolition law only pertained to slavery, but did not touch temporary servitude. His servant's attorney countered, arguing that holding his client's son for a provisional period of servitude violated the gradual abolition law. The authors of the act intended to put an end to black servitude by stipulating that only the children of slaves who were registered would be bound as servants for a certain period of time. The law made no mention about the grandchildren of slaves. If Miller were allowed to keep Dwilling in a state

44. *Alexander v. Stokely*, 7 Sergeant 298 (1821).

of hereditary servitude for twenty-eight years, slavery in Pennsylvania would continue to exist, albeit in a temporary form.

The judge employed a close reading of the act's provisions and determined that temporary servitude applied only to the children of slaves, not every "negro or mulatto child" born after 1780. Thus, even though Miller's servant had given birth to Dwilling, he was not entitled to compensation because the father (not the enslaver) was required to support the child. If he could not, then the child was to be given to the overseers of the poor. Arthur Dwilling was therefore born free.[45]

Unfortunately, not all freedom claims brought before southwestern Pennsylvania courts were successful. In 1780, an enslaved woman named Peggy brought a suit against John Decamp and Nehemiah Stokely of Westmoreland County. She was registered in Westmoreland County but argued that because her name appeared under the date November 10, 1780, she was free because her owner had missed the deadline by nine days (November 1). A lower court had ruled in favor of Peggy but her owners appealed to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court. In 1815, that body reversed the decision of the lower court. According to the justices, Peggy's claim that she was free because her enslavers had missed the November 1 deadline was immaterial due to the passage of the April 1782 law. According to the court, provided that her owners registered her before January 1, 1783—which they did—Peggy remained enslaved: two lines in the court's decision are worth closer examination. In his reasoning for returning Peggy to bondage he stated that "by

45. *Miller v. Dwilling*, 14 Sergeant 442 (1826).

straining the law we might say that the plaintiff is free," and "that freedom is to be favoured, but we have no right to favour it at the expense of property." For the judge in this case, it was possible to make a legal justification for Peggy's freedom, while maintaining that black free soil principles must remain subordinate to the interests of slaveholders. It also illustrates how tenuous freedom was for free black southwestern Pennsylvanians. Even when lower courts might find in favor of unfree African Americans, enslavers could still appeal such decisions and ultimately return blacks to bondage.[46]

DEFENDING FREE SOIL IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Some slaveholders in southwestern Pennsylvania were unwilling to submit to Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law. Instead of seeking legal loopholes, crafting legal arguments to undermine the act, or exact concessions from the Pennsylvania legislature that compromised the state's free soil status, some enslavers left the region for other slave states that would better protect their property claims over African Americans. However, their black laborers resisted and employed the help of white southwestern Pennsylvanians sympathetic to black freedom and willing to defend the state's free soil principles.

Around 1783 Charles Williams, a slaveholder, came to Fayette County where he resided for three or four years. Under the gradual abolition law, his bondspeople

46. *Marchand v. Negro Peggy*, 2 Sergeant 18 (1815).

were freed, probably due to Williams' failure to register his slaves. However, instead of abiding by the act, Williams sold one of his slaves to Richard Stephens who also resided in the county. Stephens was warned by Samuel Jackson, a county resident, not to purchase Williams' bondsman, given that he could lose his claim to them. But Stephens ignored Jackson's advice and in 1783 Stephens made plans to leave southwestern Pennsylvania for Kentucky, taking one of his bondsmen with him. He was stopped by Jackson who knew that such action violated Pennsylvania law and that the enslaved man was for all intents and purposes free. When Stephens returned to Fayette County he did not seek redress in the courts to reestablish a claim of ownership to the former slave, knowing that he would lose his case and likely be charged with attempted kidnapping.[47]

All the while, Williams remained in southwestern Pennsylvania with his two slaves until 1787 when he absconded from his creditors, leaving behind his wife and two bondspeople, a man and woman. When the Fayette County sheriff seized Williams property, he hesitated in taking the two enslaved individuals, knowing that they were free. The bondsman and bondswoman continued to labor for Williams' wife. About a year later, Williams' wife sought to join her husband. Where exactly he fled is not clear, but from the testimony of two Pennsylvania legislators it was most likely to Kentucky, a slave state. She attempted to entice the man and woman who labored for her to travel with her on a boat headed westward. The woman refused, but the man came aboard and was carried off into slavery in violation of Pennsylvania

47. Albert Gallantin and Joseph Torrence to Thomas Mifflin, February 6, 1792, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection 0250A Case 2 Box 16, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

law. The Williams' did not try to claim the woman as their missing property as they knew she was a free woman. The fate of the enslaved man remains unknown.[48]

In 1787, the Fayette County Sheriff received a freedom writ, notifying him that a black woman and her child were unlawfully held in bondage by Thomas Shain. Shain claimed that the mother and child belonged to Samuel Bailey, a man who lived in Kentucky. The alleged slaves were placed in the custody of Ress Cadwallder, a reputable community member, to prevent them from being taken outside the county to be sold. As the mother and child awaited the court to hear their freedom suit, Bailey returned to southwestern Pennsylvania. When he discovered that the woman and her child were in the custody of Cadwallder, Bailey rushed to his home where he assaulted Cadwallder and sought to take the alleged slaves with him. He failed and after the scuffle he was brought before a magistrate for breaching the peace but soon after left Pennsylvania.[49]

These examples, which all appeared in a letter written by Albert Gallatin and Joseph Torrence in 1792, provide a number of insights regarding free soil in Pennsylvania.[50] First, they demonstrate that even though antislavery slavery activism

48. Albert Gallatin and Joseph Torrence to Thomas Mifflin, February 6, 1792, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection 0250A Case 2 Box 16, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

49. Albert Gallatin and Joseph Torrence to Thomas Mifflin, February 6, 1792, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection 0250A Case 2 Box 16, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

50. In the 1790s, a number of Kentuckians accused southwestern Pennsylvanians of harassing slaveholding emigrants traveling through the region en route to their state. White Pennsylvanians had allegedly formed a "negro club" that attempted to rescue African Americans from bondage as they were being taken westward. In February 1792, Albert Gallatin and Joseph Terrance, both members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly representing Fayette County, were moved to respond to Kentuckians' accusations in a letter to Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Mifflin trying to disprove these accusations by migrant enslavers. See, Edward Baptist, *This Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 14; Albert Gallatin and Joseph Torrence to Thomas Mifflin, February 6, 1792.

was not as vibrant compared to that in the eastern portion of Pennsylvania, a few white southwestern Pennsylvanians were sympathetic to black freedom claims and were not willing to allow slaveholding migrants to Kentucky to take African Americans whom they held in bondage. Second, they illuminate the lengths to which enslavers were willing to go to disregard Pennsylvania free soil, even using force or violating Pennsylvania law in order to recover what they considered to be their rightful property claims. Kentucky slaveholders were evidently willing to create a national controversy in order to influence local and state officials in Pennsylvania to act more favorably in their interests.

Another significant aspect of Gallatin's and Torrence's letter is the limited notion of free soil they espoused, a sentiment shared by many whites. Both men mentioned that under the gradual abolition law, enslaved men, women, and children were entitled to freedom and had the right to bring freedom suits to court. But the authors did not elaborate on any other rights and downplayed African American resistance to Kentuckians who sought to undermine gradual abolition and Pennsylvania's free soil status.

BLACK FREEDOM CLAIMS AND FREE SOIL IN THE SLAVE SOUTH

Many African Americans who were sent to Kentucky sued or petitioned for their freedom based on their interpretation of Pennsylvania free soil and the state's laws upholding that principle. In 1834, for instance, Winney, Julian, and Henry, the children of Dinah Barrington, a black servant, brought an appeal to a Kentucky court

claiming that they were free. The Barringtons based their freedom claim on the fact that their mother had been born in Pennsylvania in 1800 and brought into Kentucky years later where she had given birth to them. At issue was whether their mother was enslaved or free when they were born. The court determined that under Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law, Barrington, though a servant, was born free and never a slave. The court reasoned that even though Winney, Julian, and Henry were born in Kentucky, this fact should not "prejudice their natural and legal rights" which dictated that the freedom status of children should be determined by the status of the mother when she had given birth. Because Dinah Barrington had been a servant at that time in her life, she could not be considered a slave and was therefore free as well as her children.[51]

A year after the Barrington case, Polly McMinnis, a formerly enslaved woman, was brought before a Kentucky court by her former owner who sought to appeal a lower court's decision that had granted McMinnis freedom. In the lower court case it had been established that Polly McMinnis was born in Pennsylvania after March 1, 1780, and taken to Kentucky in 1797 or 1798, before she reached the age of twenty-eight and had then been freed under Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law. In 1804 she was sold as a slave. The slaveholder's lawyer believed the court's findings were erroneous. First, the deposition provided by a witness implied that McMinnis was born in Pennsylvania, either as a freewoman or a servant under Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law, was inadmissible in that the statement was not definitive.

51. *Barringtons (colored persons) v. Logan's Administrators*, 32 Dana 432 (1834).

Second, the judge did not allow the duration of McMinnis' servitude to have an influence in the case, which could lead the jury to presume that she was a slave. The judge concluded that though McMinnis' mother was a slave and gave birth to her after March 1, 1780, in Pennsylvania, she was merely a servant entitled to freedom at a future date. Finally, the court of appeals was not willing to mandate that the jury presume that McMinnis was a slave on the basis of her skin color in light of evidence offered that could attest to her free status. In the end, the appeals court upheld McMinnis' freedom claim.[52]

Together, these two Kentucky cases show that many black southwestern Pennsylvanians and their descendants who were taken westward into bondage were familiar with or had their own interpretations of Pennsylvania law and free soil. They sought to have neighboring slave states not only recognize Pennsylvania's antislavery law but also the broader notion of free soil. Servitude under the terms of the 1780 Gradual Abolition Act was not the same thing as enslavement and travel to a slave state during that period of service did not negate that status. Pennsylvania free soil, they argued, superseded the claims of slaveholders in a territory of unfreedom.

How black southwestern Pennsylvanians and their offspring interpreted Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law and used it to conceptualize a broader meaning of free soil is also found in petitions. Black petitioners used the court to request that persons who claimed them as their property be prohibited from taking them out of state unlawfully. For example, in the fall of 1807, an enslaved woman named Mary

52. *Gentry v. Polly McMinnis* 3 Dana 382 (1835); Loren Schweninger, *Appealing for Liberty: Freedom Suits in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018),118.

filed a freedom suit in a Kentucky court claiming that she was born in Pennsylvania and therefore entitled to freedom after fulfilling her legal obligation to spend years in servitude. But that term of service had been tumultuous. As she told the court, she had been initially indentured to Samuel Mills of Pennsylvania who had died before her term of service concluded. She had then been sold to another Pennsylvanian, Roswell Fenton, who left for Jefferson County, Kentucky, taking her with him in violation of Pennsylvania law. Fenton died shortly thereafter and his son, Jacob, claimed Mary as his slave for life. Mary now feared that Jacob intended to sell her to another slaveholder much further south, placing her far beyond the reach of any documents she could access that could establish her claim to freedom. She argued that because Roswell Fenton had removed her from Pennsylvania in violation of state law, she was entitled to freedom. To raise the stakes still further, while Mary awaited the court's decision, she had given birth to a child (the name and sex of which are not recorded) and she asked the court that "any order or decree" made in her favor also be applied to the child. However, her petition was dismissed on the basis that Fenton did not represent a hindrance to Mary's attempt to initiate and have the court hear her freedom claim.[53]

In March 1832, Charlotte, another black mother, sent a petition to the Jefferson Circuit Court in Kentucky declaring that she and her daughter were free. Charlotte was born in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, to enslaved parents in 1787 and filed her freedom suit against Robert Ball and Richard Oldham who kept

53. Petition of Mary "a woman of color" to the Circuit Court of Jefferson County, Kentucky, November 26, 1807, in Race, Slavery, and Free Blacks, Petitions to Southern County Courts, Series 2, Part C: Virginia (1775-1867) and Kentucky (1790-1864), ProQuest History Vault https://hv.proquest.com/historyvault/hv.jsp?pageid=home

her and her daughter, Emily, in bondage. In her petition, Charlotte pleaded with the court to prohibit her enslavers from removing her and her daughter from the jurisdiction of the court until it had ruled in her case, fearing that they both would be sold further south into slavery. Charlotte asked that she and her daughter be placed in the custody of the county sheriff or that her alleged owner post bond to dissuade him from taking them beyond the reach of the court where they could be sold. In this case, the judge agreed to Charlotte's petition, placing her and her child into custody until Charlotte's freedom suit was decided in court.[54]

Neither of the petitions filed by Mary or Charlotte convey the final outcome of their freedom suits but they do shed light on how these women interpreted free soil. For Mary, her removal from Pennsylvania was a clear violation of the gradual abolition law which terminated her servitude. She expressed a vision of free soil that transcended the property claims of slaveholders in a slave state. For Charlotte too, free soil meant that the protections that applied to black Pennsylvanians followed them when they traveled to slave states. These petitions also illustrate that black women were important actors in articulating black free soil principles in territories very hostile to black freedom.

SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLANIA ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISTS WORKING IN DEFENSE OF BLACK FREEDOM CLAIMS AND FREE SOIL

54. Petition of Charlotte [Lotty] and Emily to the Circuit Court of Jefferson County, Kentucky, March 23, 1832, in Race, Slavery, and Free Blacks, Petitions to Southern County Courts, Series 2, Part C: Virginia (1775-1867) and Kentucky (1790-1864), ProQuest History Vault https://hv.proquest.com/historyvault/hv.jsp?pageid=home

In 1795, David Redrick, a Washington County attorney, informed the PAS that many African Americans in the region continued to be sold to slaveholders outside Pennsylvania in violation of state law. He noted that enslavers were aided by the region's close proximity to Virginia and by access to the Ohio River. Such correspondences between southwestern Pennsylvania antislavery activists and PAS headquarters is significant for a number of reasons. First it shows that the Washington Pennsylvania Abolition Society (WPAS), the local auxiliary of the PAS established in February 1789 in the town of Washington, had limited resources in protecting black freedom in the region, as abolitionists relied on Philadelphia members. It also shows the unique challenges facing antislavery activists in this part of the state. Southwestern Pennsylvania witnessed a vibrant and illegal domestic slave trade in which enslaved and free African Americans were sold by slaveholders and slave-traders to the slave markets of the upper and lower south.[55]

Black southwestern Pennsylvanians who were carried into the slave states of the west used the state's gradual abolition law to justify their release from bondage. To do so they often turned for assistance to the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), which became an important ally, and organized with other sympathetic individuals and groups in protecting black freedom claims and free soil principles.

55. Dee E. Andrews, "Reconsidering the First Emancipation: Evidence from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Correspondence, 1785-1810," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 64 no. 2 (Summer 1997): 237; David Redick to James Pemberton, May 24, 1795, Correspondence, Committee of Correspondence: Letterbooks, 1789-1809, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Series 2, Reel 11, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Writing in a letter to PAS headquarters in Philadelphia, soon thereafter, Thomas Scott, the first president of the WPAS, described the precarious state of Pennsylvania free soil, noting that there was considerable "traffic in Negroes" and "abuse of them." In this section of the state he and other antislavery activists had witnessed enslavers violate Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law "with impunity." Scott noted that he and others were hesitant to speak out due to the influence slaveholders had over the region. But he was also optimistic that the auxiliary could soon overcome such fear and apathy and, indeed, over time, the WPAS and other antislavery activists did begin to coordinate their action with the more powerful and better resourced PAS.[56]

Two years later, in 1791 Philip Shute, a Uniontown slaveholder, was headed to Kentucky when it was discovered by antislavery activists that he planned to take two enslaved southwestern Pennsylvanians with him. These local residents persuaded Patt, Shute's bondswoman, to enter into an agreement with her owner in which he promised Patt her freedom after a certain period of servitude. The arrangement also stipulated that if Shute died ten years before Patt was to be freed, she was to be bound to Shute's heirs until she fulfilled that period of service. The deal between the two parties was finalized before Fayette County court officials and a copy of the agreement was sent to the PAS for safe-keeping. By ensuring that a copy of this legal

56. Frederick W. Pfister, "In the Cause of Freedom: American Abolition Societies, 1775-1808" (PhD diss., Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, 1980), 47-48; Thomas Scott to Pennsylvania Abolition Society, February 7, 1789, Correspondence, Committee of Correspondence: Letterbooks, 1789-1809, Papers of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, Series 2, Reel 11, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

arragment was in safe hands, this group of concerned residents ensured that Shute could be held accountable if he reneged on his promise to Patt when they left Pennsylvania. Some abolitionists might have been less willing to compromise by allowing Shute to leave Pennsylvania with Patt as his bondswoman.[57]

The WPAS and other antislavery activists were also active in trying to prevent free blacks in southwestern Pennsylvania from being kidnapped into slavery. In 1790, Quakers in Fayette County reported to PAS President James Pemberton that enslavers had recently sent as many as one hundred enslaved men and women to Kentucky and slave markets of New Orleans. The Quakers complained that local officials had done too little to stop this illegal trade.[58] Free blacks in the region were constantly harassed by armed men. One unfortunate free black woman was declared by an enslaver as his property. News of the woman's kidnapping spread among the free black community who sought the assistance of local abolitionist and judge Alexander Addison who issued a warrant for the arrest of the kidnapper and released the woman from captivity.[59] Likewise in 1804, antislavery activists in Uniontown sent news to the PAS of a woman named Patsy held in bondage and taken to Nashville where she was sold. In their letter they contended that Patsy was entitled to freedom as she was

57. Documents Concerning Court Cases in Which Slaves Were Awarded their Freedom 1790-1805, Manumissions, Indentures and other Legal Papers, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Series IV, Reel 23, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

58. Andrews, "Reconsidering the First Emancipation,"237; James Crawford, Nathan Heaild, and John Townsend, to James Pemberton, July 22, 1790, Correspondence, Committee of Correspondence: Letterbooks, 1789-1809, Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, Series 2, Reel 11, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

59. Andrews, "Reconsidering the First Emancipation," 237; David Redick to James Pemberton, May 24, 1795.

"brought up by Philadelphia" likely meaning that she was born on Pennsylvania soil, possibly after March 1, 1780, which did not make her a slave for life.[60]

In many instances, kidnappings went unchallenged. However, one particular case had important implications for black free soil principles that could be felt among abolitionists across the nation. In the spring of 1790, the WPAS sent a letter to PAS headquarters in Philadelphia to complain that the PAS was inattentive to resolving the case of John Davis, a kidnapped free black from Washington. Davis and his owner had arrived in southwestern Pennsylvania from Maryland sometime before 1780. Davis was never registered as a slave and therefore free under Pennsylvania law. However, in 1788, Davis's owner took him to Virginia where he was hired out to a Mr. Miller. In May 1788, a group of white townspeople from Washington encountered the enslaved Davis. The men brought Davis back to Pennsylvania. When Miller discovered that Davis had escaped, he hired three Virginians—Francis McGuire, Baldwin Parsons, and Absolom Wells—to find Davis. The men succeeded in returning Davis to Virginia, where he was then sold to a planter in eastern Virginia.[61]

60. Alexander McLean to Silas Dimmore, June 1804, Documents Concerning Court Cases in Which Slaves Were Awarded their Freedom 1790-1805, Manumissions, Indentures and other Legal Papers, Papers of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, Series IV, Reel 24, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

61. Andrew Delbanco, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 101-102; Paul Finkelman, "The Kidnapping of John Davis and the Adoption of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793," *Journal of Southern History* 56 no. 3 (August 1990): 400-403; Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 105-108; Whitfield J. Bell, "Washington County, Pennsylvania, in the Eighteenth Century Antislavery Movement," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 25, no. 3-4 (September-December 1942), 136-137; General Meeting Minutes Minute Book Vol. 1, 1787-1800, pp. 84, 154-157, Papers of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, Series 1, Reel 1, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; Alexander Addison to Pennsylvania Abolition Society, December 6, 1790, Committee of

WPAS attention focused upon brining Davis' kidnappers to justice. In November 1788, McGuire, Parsons, and Wells were indicted for kidnapping Davis, transporting him beyond the borders of Pennsylvania, and intending to sell him into slavery. But the men refused to return to Washington County to face these charges. Two years passed. Then, in December 1790, the WPAS appealed to the PAS for assistance securing the extradition of these men back to Pennsylvania. The PAS finally acted in May 1791, sending a petition to Pennsylvania Governor Thomas Mifflin requesting that he ask Virginia Governor Beverley Randolph to extradite the three men accused of kidnapping Davis to Pennsylvania to stand trial. The PAS justified this request on the basis that the Constitution stipulated that any person charged in any state of a crime who fled to another state, be returned to that state "having jurisdiction of the crime." Mifflin agreed to write to Randolph to request their extradition.[62]

However, Mifflin's inquiry soon became bogged down in a dispute over interstate rendition between the two states. Randolph sent the rendition request to Virginia's Attorney General James Innes, who rejected it on procedural grounds. Dismayed by the intransigence of Innes and Randolph, Mifflin appealed to President George Washington to resolve the dispute. Yet instead of directly intervening, the

Correspondence: Letterbooks, 1789-1809, Vol. 1, p. 72, Papers of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, Series 2, Reel 11, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

62. Delbanco, *The War Before the* War, 102; Finkelman, "The Kidnapping of John Davis and the Adoption of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1793," 403; General Meeting Minutes Minute Book Vol. 1, 1787-1800, pp. 84, 154-157, Papers of the Pennsylvania Society for the Abolition of Slavery, Series 1, Reel 1, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

President asked the House of Representatives to clarify what was entailed in the mutual obligations of states in the rendition of fugitives.[63]

Congress responded by adopting a new, clarificatory Fugitive Slave Act of 1793. According to this law, if an enslaved person fled to another state or territory, a slaveholder (or their agent) could arrest an alleged runaway slave and would have to take him or her before a judge or local magistrate in the jurisdiction where the seizure had occurred. The enslaver would then have to provide oral testimony or a sworn affidavit taken before and certified by a magistrate, that the accused was indeed a runaway slave. If the judge or magistrate believed the evidence constituted satisfactory proof, the official could issue a "certificate of removal" sending the alleged slave into bondage by turning them over to the slaveholder.

This 1793 act had a number of provisions that placed black free soil at risk throughout the north. For instance, it did not punish enslavers for making false claims against African Americans or disregarding proper legal procedures. Black abolitionists and their white antislavery allies used the courts and worked with state legislators to protect free soil from the threats posed by the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. In southwestern Pennsylvania and greater backcountry of Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia the new law did not strengthen the institution of slavery as many enslaved African Americans simply fled from bondage when given the opportunity.[64]

63. Delbanco, *The War Before the* War, 102-103; Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders*, 107-108; Governor Beverly Randolph to Attorney-General James Innes, June 14, 1791, in William P. Palmer and Sherwin McRae, eds. *Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts* Vol. 5 (1790-1792): 326; Attorney General James Innes to Governor Beverley Randolph, n.d. in *Calendar of Virginia State Papers*, 326-328.

64. An Act respecting fugitives from justice and persons escaping from the service of their masters (1793), *US Statutes at Large* 1 (1845): 302-305; H. Robert Baker, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania:*

BLACK SLAVERY AND UNFREEDOM, A FRAGILE INSTITUTION AND THE UNCERTAIN MEANING OF RACE

Between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, southwestern Pennsylvania was still sparsely settled and portions of the region resembled a backcountry outpost, providing bound laborers a number of routes to escape servitude. The pages of the Pittsburgh press, along with other regional newspapers, were filled with advertisements describing runaway persons who fled from service, a fact that attested to the fragility of the institution of slavery in southwestern Pennsylvania. African Americans at times escaped from enslavement and servitude alongside unfree whites. In many instances, free blacks and whites established intimate relationships. These escapes represent not only black opposition to enslavement and servitude, but also testify to their vision of freedom. They also attest to the fluid boundaries between and contested meanings of race in southwestern Pennsylvania.

When opportunities presented themselves, enslaved African Americans seized their freedom by fleeing from bondage. In a 1793 notice, Thomas Clare, of George's Creek, Fayette County, warned readers of the *Pittsburgh Gazette* that his escaped slave, a man named Dick, might, through some means, obtain a pass as he was "an artful fellow."[65] Some slaves were able to take advantage of other opportunities to

Slavery, the Supreme Court, and the Ambivalent Constitution (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 48; Berlin, *The Long Emancipation*, 79.

65. "Eight Dollars Reward," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 23, 1793.

escape. In August 1824, Saul was able to escape from his owner Samuel Black, a resident of Monongahela, while both were attending a Protestant religious service, near Williamsport.[66] Some enslaved people were also able to rely on the assistance of other African Americans. For instance, John Cooper of Fallowfield Township in Washington County suspected that his slave Anne was hidden by "her negro man," Thomas Faris, who was most likely her husband.[67]

Many slave escapes occurred under the cover of darkness to avoid detection by their owners or neighbors. During the fall of 1815, a group of enslaved men, women, and children, some of whom were close blood relations, fled from their owner while he was asleep at a tavern one mile from the town of Washington. Their owner had been transporting them through southwestern Pennsylvania en route to the West, most likely to be sold. For these slaves, southwestern Pennsylvania free soil presented a prime opportunity to escape; the place where they could most likely expect local assistance and protection from the prospect of being sent southward, and having their families broken apart.[68]

Southwestern Pennsylvania also attracted many runaway slaves from central Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and elsewhere. In 1789, for example, Charles Prather of Charlestown, Virginia, suspected that his slave Nicholas had fled to neighboring Washington County, Pennsylvania, a place Nicholas had previously

66. "Reward, Six Cents!!" *The Reporter*, September 6, 1824.

67. *Washington Reporter*, January 17, 1814.

68. *Washington Reporter*, November 6, 1815.

visited with his owner on several occasions.[69] Some skilled slaves evidently fled to the region because they were in search for work. Hezekiah Conn said as much as he speculated as to why Gim, his enslaved blacksmith, might have fled towards Pennsylvania or Ohio.[70] Likewise, Thomas Burwell of Winchester, Virginia, believed that his enslaved blacksmith Daniel had attempted to make his way to Bedford, Pennsylvania, in order to find work.[71] Even slaveholders from much farther afield believed that their slaves commonly absconded to this region. In 1815, James Devers of Lexington, Kentucky, notified Pittsburghers that two bondsmen, David and Charles, might make their way to the city.[72]

For some escaped slaves, arriving at a particular town in southwestern Pennsylvania was not a final destination. During the winter of 1813, Samuel Bray of Brooke County sent a notice across the state line to Washington that his escaped slave Andrew was traveling through southwestern Pennsylvania towards the Eastern Shore of Maryland.[73] In late spring 1822, John Wells and George Tyler escaped from bondage in Wheeling, Virginia. Their owner, William M. Perry, notified southwestern Pennsylvanians that the two men were headed east through the region,

69. *Herald of Liberty*, August 20, 1798.

70. *Washington Reporter*, April 1, 1816.

71. "$150 Reward," *Bedford Gazette*, April 18, 1828.

72. *Washington Reporter*, November 16, 1815. If the men were indeed headed to Pittsburgh, they would probably find it difficult to vanish into the ranks of the city's free black community which in 1820 only totaled 284 people out of a total population of 7,248. The city's African American population was miniscule when compared with Philadelphia which was home to roughly 11,884 free blacks. See, Clarence Rollo Turner, "Black Pittsburgh: A Social History, 1790-1840" (paper presented at Urban Historians Group, Department of History, University of Pittsburgh, March 1974), 1-2.

73. *Washington Reporter*, December 27, 1813.

most likely towards Richmond, Virginia, the city where he had originally purchased them.[74] These escaped slaves were likely seeking to reunite with family and friends as distance made it difficult to maintain kinship ties.

Within southwestern Pennsylvania slaves sought to escape from their owners to other towns in the region. Joseph Pentecost supposed that his bondsman Bob fled his home near Canonsburgh for Greensburg where he was raised as a child and where his family and friends still resided.[75] James Body, a mixed race servant in McKeesport, was believed by William Irwin, his owner, to be en route to a justice of the peace or attorney in order to establish a freedom claim after fleeing to a neighboring town where he believed he might receive legal assistance.[76]

Wherever they went, bondspeople often attempted to pass as free people. In 1793, Benjamin Reed alerted Pittsburghers that his escaped bondsman might attempt to portray himself as a free man by using the names 'Thomas Dover' or 'Reuben' and by using a forged pass.[77] In Fayette County, a runaway enslaved man named Dick believed that his chances of passing for a freeman improved not only by stealing a set of "good clothes" but also by stealing a pass showing that he had his owner's permission to travel the countryside.[78] When an enslaved man named Bob fled from his owner in neighboring Virginia in 1812, the enslaver warned Washington County

74. *Washington Reporter*, June 17, 1822.

75. "Thirty Dollars Reward," *The Farmers Register*, June 30, 1809.

76. "Three Dollar Reward," *The Farmers Register*, September 10, 1803.

77. "Sixteen Dollars Reward," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, August 13, 1793.

78. "Eight Dollars Reward," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 23, 1793.

residents that Bob "has a good deal of assurance when in company with white people" probably meaning that his bondsman had no problem convincing unsuspecting whites of his free status.[79] Similarly, when James Ross fled from bondage in 1814, his owner described him as a liar.[80] Forged passes and stories were a tool that people fleeing from slavery and servitude used to attest to their free status or enable their mobility to escape. These acts required confidence, poise, and creative thinking on the part of the enslaved. In some instances, these deceptions worked, which explains why slaveholders constantly warned locals not to trust the stories their bondspeople provided if detained.[81]

Nevertheless, some blacks found it risky to attempt to assume a free status through performance and sought, instead, to collaborate with others in order to seize their freedom. In an 1816 fugitive slave advertisement, William Rice, a slaveholder from Rockingham County, Virginia, declared that his black bondsman Caleb escaped with a white woman named Betsey Smith. According to Rice, Smith left her several mixed-race children in Rockingham County. The pair were last seen near Harper's Ferry. Rice cautioned readers that Caleb might try to pass as Smith's servant or slave. He also believed that his bondsman may use the name Levy or Casear, two names

79. *Washington Reporter*, February 10, 1812.

80. *Washington Reporter*, May 2, 1814.

81. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 133, 136, 225-226, 230-231. Though their study focuses on the South, the methods enslaved people used for escape were also employed by African Americans in the North.

that were common among free blacks in the area. Rice suspected that the couple might travel towards Pennsylvania where Smith had previously lived.[82]

Caleb and Betsey are evidence of the presence of intimate relationships between white and black unfree laborers in a place and time where racial demarcations were not fixed. Still, it's not clear how widespread these relationships were in southwestern Pennsylvania, though the few sources we have suggest that such liaisons were not completely unheard of. In 1788, Benjamin Parkinson sent a petition to the Washington County Court of Quarter Session requesting an extension of the term of service of his indentured servant Elizabeth Morrow because she had given birth to a biracial child during her period of servitude.[83] In his *Travels of 1788*, French abolitionist Brissot de Warville mentioned a marriage between a black man and French indentured servant woman during his visit to Pittsburgh. The couple's biracial daughter later married a French surgeon.[84]

Not all communities in southwestern Pennsylvania were tolerant of these relationships. On a Saturday afternoon in April 1820 in a town two miles east of Uniontown, a group of white men led by John Johnson, a blacksmith, gathered to plan the demolition of a cabin owned by Hannah Wharton. The men had learned that Wharton, a white woman, had had "frequent illicit intercourse" with a black man named Charles Kerns, a servant to an inn-keeper. Kerns was convalescing from an illness at

82. "To all Editors in the U. States," *The Reporter*, April 15, 1816.

83. Benjamin Parker Petition, Washington County Clerk of Courts, Reel 1, Criminal Files Quarter Session January Term 1782-April 1798.

84. Carter G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration* (Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1918), 12.

Wharton's home. Around eight or nine o'clock that evening, Johnson and the men made their way to Wharton's home, climbed atop the cabin and began to tear apart the roof. Kerns, alarmed by the noise and scene of rioting men, went out the front door in shirt and blanket yelling, "Boys, don't kill me." As Kerns attempted to flee, he was struck in the head. Wharton was captured and tarred.[85]

Kerns died of his injuries soon after and Johnson and his men were forced to stand trial for his murder. Johnson was ultimately acquitted, however two of the other men involved were found guilty of involuntary manslaughter and were sentenced to pay a fine of two hundred dollars and imprisoned for three months. Four other members of the mob pled guilty to rioting and were sentenced to pay a fifty-dollar fine and three months' imprisonment. The Kerns case illustrates that interracial couples who resided in the region had to be cognizant of local communities' willingness to tolerate certain relationships and racial boundaries that were not completely fixed throughout the region.[86]

CONCLUSION

When marshals for the 1830 census reported that the enslaved population in a southwestern Pennsylvania district had increased over the previous ten years, state legislators were aghast, especially since the state had adopted a gradual abolition law, fifty years earlier, which was supposed to have placed black bondage on the slow

85. "Murder," *Genius of Liberty*, April 25, 1820; *Genius of Liberty*, June 13, 1820; "Murder," *Washington Review and Examiner*, May 1, 1820.

86. *Genius of Liberty*, June 13, 1820; *Washington Review and Examiner*, July 19, 1820.

path to extinction. They should not have been so surprised. Between 1780 and 1830, enslavers in southwestern Pennsylvania went to great lengths to maintain their property claims over African Americans for as long as possible. Their actions undermined the free soil vision for the region touted by abolitionists. In Westmoreland and Washington counties, in particular, slaveholders were successful in appealing to lawmakers for additional time to register their slaves and servants. They also employed their own interpretation of Pennsylvania law to protect and defend their property claims. A few slaveholders even resorted to fraud or outright defiance of the law.

In opposition to slaveholders' efforts, African Americans in the region worked hard to turn it into genuinely free soil. They challenged their owners' claims to their bodies by taking them to court to sue for their freedom. They also collaborated with white antislavery activists and others sympathetic to black freedom claims. Through petitions and court testimony, African Americans envisioned an expanded notion of free soil and argued that the protections granted to them under Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law could not be annulled when enslavers carried them to another state. Whenever possible, African Americans also acted upon numerous opportunities to seize their freedom through escape.

Chapter 2

Envisioning Black Freedom and Race in Southwestern Pennsylvania and the Greater Borderlands: 1810s-1850s

On March 28, 1847, Reverend Fayette Davis, a widely admired Pittsburgh minister in the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, died at the age of thirty-nine. Davis was born in Virginia in 1808 to free-born parents, a devout Methodist mother and African-born father. Shortly thereafter, his family migrated to Kentucky where his father found work as a farmer while Davis, denied the opportunity to attend school or learn a trade, found work as a servant to a wealthy white Kentuckian. In his early adulthood, as Davis traveled alongside his employer on his frequent excursions through the South, Davis witnessed the horrors of slavery firsthand. These experiences lay the foundation for his desire and determination to become something more than a servant. Around the age of eighteen, he converted to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Over the years, Davis labored intensely to teach himself to read while preaching throughout Kentucky and neighboring slave states.[1]

Sometime between 1830 and 1831, Davis learned of the existence of the AME Church and was enamored by the church's program of racial uplift. He joined the AME Church and became a minister in 1837. Once ordained, the congregation appointed Davis to a post in Pittsburgh. Over the course of his Pittsburgh pastorate, Davis supported efforts to improve and elevate the lives of black residents. He joined the St. Cyprian Lodge, a mutual aid society, and also encouraged African Americans

1. Daniel Alexander Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, ed. Charles Spencer Smith (Nashville, TN: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1892), 214; Martin R. Delany, "Eulogy on the Life and Character of the Rev. Fayette Davis," in *Martin R. Delany: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Robert S. Levine (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 40-43.

to improve themselves through learning and becoming property owners. He did not simply preach moralist ideals, but lived the improvement he wished to see in his congregants. For example, he used the proceeds of his labor to purchase a parcel of land in Ohio for his parents. Though few sources about Davis have survived, his life provides a lens in understanding black life in southwestern Pennsylvania in the first decades of the nineteenth century.[2]

African Americans emerged from bondage and other forms of unfreedom during a period of intensified commercial exchange and industrialization, as southwestern Pennsylvania established greater economic ties to markets in the west and south. A consequence of this intensification of capitalist production was the rise of a new white middle class who articulated a free labor vision espousing hard work, frugality, temperance, and self improvement as central in achieving success in the market economy. To some in the middle class, attaining economic independence was evidence of one's fitness for citizenship. However, a white working class who labored for wages challenged the perception that they were dependents and therefore should be excluded from full participation in political affairs.

Free blacks faced several obstacles in achieving the same middle class status, facing discrimination in employment and hostility from working class whites in certain trades. African Americans who aspired to enter the ranks of the middle class also championed the free labor values of the white middle class. However, many African Americans also argued that free labor, and the citizenship rights associated with it, also included the ability to freely labor. This more inclusive vision of free

2. Martin R. Delany, "Eulogy on the Life and Character of the Rev. Fayette Davis," 43-48.

labor expanded the meaning of free soil. African Americans sought to achieve this free labor status by establishing churches, mutual aid and benevolent societies, newspapers, schools, political conventions, and social groups. African Americans created these institutions in response to white prejudice and exclusion and the economic, political, and social challenges they faced years after emancipation. Similar to other communities across the North, black southwestern Pennsylvanians undertook their own program of racial uplift and engaged in debates over the best course of action to adopt in the black freedom struggle. Pittsburgh, the region's major urban and commercial center, and home to southwestern Pennsylvania's largest free black community, was a central site where a rich discussion on these issues among African Americans took place.

FREE BLACK COMMUNITIES, THE MARKET REVOLUTION, AND CLASS FORMATION IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLANIA

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, free black communities began to take root in a number of towns and cities in southwestern Pennsylvania. However, in the early years of freedom, African Americans struggled with poverty, establishing independent households, and securing autonomy from white control. These were just some of the challenges facing the newly freed and freedom's first generation of African Americans in southwestern Pennsylvania and throughout the North.

Some free blacks were brought to the region as enslaved children or indentured servants held in unfreedom until they reached the age of twenty-eight. In

December 1825, Thomas Wood, an enslaver from neighboring Ohio County, Virginia, sold his six-year old bondwoman Sally as an indentured servant to John McKee, who worked as a hatter in Pittsburgh. Under the terms of the indenture, the orphan girl was to be taught by McKee and his heirs, "the art and mystery of a house servant and cook." Sally would not acquire her freedom until 1847.[3] In 1828, William Croghan, a slaveholder from Louisville, Kentucky, made Matilda Richardson an enslaved girl his indentured servant when they arrived in Pittsburgh. Richardson, like most indentured girls, was trained as a housekeeper.[4] Some enslavers were not hesitant to indenture their older bondspeople. When William Croghan arrived in Pittsburgh, he also brought with him his bondsman, Charles Gouldman, who at age forty-eight became an indentured servant who would not realize freedom until after seven years of service.[5] Though a few enslavers unconditionally manumitted their bondspeople based on revolutionary and moral sentiment, there were others who were not willing to lose an important source of labor or endure a substantial financial loss by immediately releasing African Americans from bondage.

Additional challenges facing newly freedpeople included establishing independent households and autonomy from white control. Some African Americans

3. Deed Book Volume 2G-32, p. 395, Box 1, Folder 2, Allegheny County (PA) Recorder of Deeds, Manumission and Indenture Records, 1792-1857, MSS0494, Thomas and Katherine Detre Library and Archives, Pittsburgh, PA.

4. Deed Book Volume 2K-35, p. 372, Box 1 Folder 3, Allegheny County (PA) Recorder of Deeds, Manumission and Indenture Records, 1792-1857, MSS0494, Thomas and Katherine Detre Library and Archives, Pittsburgh, PA.

5. Deed Book Volume 2K-35, p. 373, Box 1 Folder 3, Allegheny County (PA) Recorder of Deeds, Manumission and Indenture Records, 1792-1857, MSS0494, Thomas and Katherine Detre Library and Archives, Pittsburgh, PA.

voluntarily entered indentured contracts. One of those individuals was Deemer, a black woman who bound herself to Melcher Beltzhoover, an Allegheny County farmer, for six years as his servant. Beltzhoover was to provide Deemer with sufficient food, shelter, and clothing.[6] Deemer's actions raise a question: why did some African Americans enter into a state of unfreedom? Historian Gary Nash notes that in Philadelphia some black parents had their children apprenticed to whites either because they struggled to provide for their off-spring or so that their sons and daughters could learn a trade. In addition, many young and unmarried free blacks who struggled to find work and establish their own independent households entered into indenture contracts in order to work towards a better future for themselves.[7]

Despite providing years of profitable labor to their enslavers, newly freed African Americans received little in terms of compensation for work done as servants. In some indenture agreements, enslavers provided African Americans with freedom dues upon completion of their service. John McKee promised to award two sets of clothing to his servant girl Sally, whereas William Croghan promised Matilda Richardson "customary freedom dues"—though the amount was not specified.[8] For many African Americans, freedom dues and the period of apprenticeship provided little compensation. As Manisha Sinha notes, enslaved African Americans and black

6. Deed Book Volume 3-C, p. 364, Box 1, Folder 7, Allegheny County (PA) Recorder of Deeds, Manumission and Indenture Records, 1792-1857, MSS0494, Thomas and Katherine Detre Library and Archives, Pittsburgh, PA.

7. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 76-79.

8. Deed Book Volume 2K-35, p. 372, Box 1 Folder 3; Deed Book Volume 2G-32, p. 395, Box 1, Folder 2, Allegheny County (PA) Recorder of Deeds, Manumission and Indenture Records, 1792-1857, MSS0494, Thomas and Katherine Detre Library and Archives, Pittsburgh, PA.

servants received minimal education and some training as apprentices in skilled trades which failed to inadequately compensate them for their labor and that of previous generations.[9] Warner Mifflin, a Philadelphia Quaker abolitionist, recognized that what freedpeople needed was restitution rather than freedom dues, as the former would represent a recognition of the unjustness of slavery by whites. He believed that this injustice could only be rectified by fair compensation for their labor.[10]

For African Americans, freedom arrived at a time when many northerners experienced profound change, known to historians as the market revolution. Northern interior communities became integrated into larger regional, national, and Atlantic markets. What spurred this intensification of market exchange were improvements in communications, transportation, and legal developments. An important social consequence of the market revolution was the formation of a new middle class, comprised of individuals who worked in the white collar professions as clerks, salesmen, book keepers, businessmen, farmers, craftsmen, and artisans. Underpinning this new middle class was a set of values which stressed the importance of hard work, frugality, temperance, self-control, and self improvement as central in achieving success and economic independence in the increasingly competitive marketplace.[11]

9. Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 85.

10. Gary B. Nash, *Warner Mifflin: Unflinching Quaker Abolitionist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 102.

11. Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 237; John Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139.

African Americans throughout the north faced constant discrimination from employers and were therefore barred from the profession identified with the middle class. In her study of black life in New York City, Leslie M. Harris defines the black middle class not by their economic wealth, but by the amount of education they obtained and by their participation in moral reform causes (such as temperance, abolitionism, and participation in mutual relief groups). Harris does note that, in the years when African Americans began to slowly emerge from bondage, some blacks were "straddling the line between the working class and the middle class." A few of these individuals, through their frugality, business acumen, and determination, were able to establish a middle class status, but these cases were rare in New York City and elsewhere throughout the North.[12]

In some ways the antebellum black middle class of Pittsburgh mirrored that of New York City. Some of the city's most prominent members of the black middle class were part of the entrepreneurial elite—barbers, cooks, caterers and others who had white clientele. John B. Vashon a "master barber," was mixed-raced, having been born to a white father and black mother in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1792. Vashon was a veteran of the War of 1812, having served aboard a warship that was captured by the English. After the war Vashon returned to Virginia, residing first in Dumfries and later Leesburg. In 1822 Vashon and his family left for Carlisle, Pennsylvania where he became a saloon owner. In Carlisle, Vashon founded a mutual improvement association to help support the town's free black community. In 1829, the Vashon

12. Leslie M. Harris, *In The Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 119-121.

family left Carlisle for Pittsburgh, where he became one of the community's most respected members. Vashon established the city's first public baths and promoted a number of reform efforts from antislavery, to temperance societies, and schools.[13]

John Peck was another member of Pittsburgh's black entrepreneurial elite. Born in Hagerstown, Maryland, and educated in Northern Virginia, Peck, like Vashon, left for Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1821, and moved to Pittsburgh in approximately 1837. There he opened a barbershop, and held the status of the city's leading wig maker. He was also a minister at the Wylie Street AME church and a proprietor of several other businesses, including an oyster house and clothing store. Peck's wealth allowed him to provide for the education of his children and support a variety of philanthropic causes in the service of racial uplift. He also helped runaway slaves secure their freedom through the Underground Railroad.[14]

Though Pittsburgh's black entrepreneurial elite were the city's wealthiest African American residents, most of the black middle class in the city and surrounding community were relegated to occupations on the lower rungs of Pittsburgh's economic ladder. Many of them worked in the service industry (comprised of servants, waiters, and laundry workers), the maritime trade along the city's rivers (stevedores, roustabouts, stewards, and deckhands), and as common

13. Douglas Walter Bristol Jr., *Knights of the Razor: Black Barbers in Slavery and Freedom* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 97; William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution: With Sketches of Several Distinguished Colored Persons: To Which is Added a Brief Survey of the Condition and Prospects of Colored Americans* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855), 181-184; Catherine M. Hanchett, "George Boyer Vashon, 1824-1878: Black Educator, Poet, Fighter for Equal Rights, Part One," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 68, no. 3 (July 1985): 205-206. Joe William Trotter, *River Jordan: African American Urban Life in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), 39-40.

14. C. Peter Ripley, et. al., eds. *The Black Abolitionist Papers Volume IV: The United States, 1847-1858* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 161n6.

laborers (porters, draymen, janitors, and day laborers).[15] Regardless of their socio-economic status, many of these individuals subscribed to the values of the black middle class and sought to enter its ranks. For instance, in March 1846, Pittsburgher Alfred Norris Freeman wrote to Henry Cowles, a professor at Oberlin College, one of the few schools that accepted black students, seeking admission. Unable to pay, yet prizing education as "a prize of the greatest value," Freeman offered to work on the school grounds in return for his tuition.[16]

BLACK INSTITUTIONS AND THE MAKING OF BLACK FREE LABOR IDEOLOGY

An important consequence of the intensification of market exchange was the growth of industrialization and economic modernization. These forces produced changing patterns of work and labor exchange. As a result, free labor came to increasingly define the relationship between employer and worker. Under a free labor system, workers labored for an agreed upon number of hours and days whereupon they would receive a wage. Employers could not impose serious penalties upon those who chose to quit nor could they use physical coercion to instill labor disciple or

15. Fidel M. Campet, "Black Pittsburgh's Struggle to Maintain Citizenship Rights, 1790-1838," *Western Pennsylvania History* 95, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 36; Laurence Glasco, "Double Burden: The Black Experience in Pittsburgh," in *City at the Point: Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh*, ed. Samuel P. Hays (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 70-71.

16. Alfred [Norris] Freeman to Henry Cowles, March 4, 1846, Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 5, Frame 174. Not all African Americans subscribed to black middle class values, of course. Black laborers and those working on the rivers of the Ohio Valley who visited or lived in the bustling city of Pittsburgh were exposed to the many vices of urban life. Gambling houses were popular (and illegal) amusements in Pittsburgh. See for example, Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America, 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); "Gambling House Broken Up," *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, January 25, 1859.

control on their employees. Free laborers were men who could claim ownership of their labor, who were able to enter the market on their own volition, and who, as Steven Hahn notes, "had some skills, who had established local residency, of some duration, who had achieved civil and political standing, and who consequently could appeal to community standards for justice, bring grievances to court, and register their sentiments at the ballot box." Free labor was therefore not only a social relationship that governed labor relations but a political relationship between propertyless men.[17]

Free labor in the antebellum north is characterized by a number of complexities and contradictions. At many worksites laborers were still subjected to physical coercion and punishment if they failed to keep up with their workload, sought to quit, or to compel working people to labor. Notions of dependency and gender excluded female free laborers from participation in formal politics and placed restrictions on their earning abilities. Courts allowed employers to deny wages to employees on the grounds that work that was not completed or in cases where the worker quit during their period of service.

Most important was the relationship between race and free labor. Some white craftsmen and other skilled laborers fought to keep black workers from entering these trades, or at least, to keep them confined to the lowest rungs of wage-earners in the labor market. Many white employers refused to employ African Americans and white customers refused to employ the services of black tradesmen. These obstacles

17. Steven Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders: The United States and its World in an Age of Civil Wars, 1830-1910* (New York: Viking, 2016), 93; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (1970; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xxiii.

hindered free blacks' attempts to become property owners, landholders, employers, and independent producers, and by, extension, their ability to achieve citizenship. In American society, these statuses were a marker of economic independence that could be used to assert one's claims to citizenship. Despite these racial barriers, blacks in southwestern Pennsylvania and across the north devised their own solutions to achieve this free labor vision.[18]

Beginning in the early republic, African Americans across the north established their own churches, schools, mutual aid societies, and other social clubs as a means to assert their independence from white control and achieve upward mobility. These institutions were created in response to growing racial exclusion and hostility from whites. The source of white northern racism can be traced to the growing crime and poverty in African American communities. Many whites concluded that free blacks could never be integrated into society as virtuous and productive citizens, failing to take into account discriminatory policies and social practices. Andrew Diemer rightfully contends that such institution building undertaken by African Americans should not be seen as their withdrawal from the nation's broader political life, but rather their engagement with it—that is, as a means to advance their claims to American citizenship. The free black institutions they built were also a means to fulfill and advance what could be considered a black free labor ideology that could be used to claim political rights.[19]

18. Hahn, *A Nation Without Borders*, 94-95; Foner, *Free Soil*, xvi-xvii, xxviii; Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 70, 127-128.

19. Andrew K. Diemer, *The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863* (Athens: University Georgia Press, 2016), 50.

At a national black convention held in Philadelphia in 1833, delegates from across the north endorsed establishing manual labor schools for black youth in Pennsylvania, New York, and New England. To abolitionists (both black and white), a manual labor school which combined physical labor on farms and in workshops with academics was a means for African Americans to achieve their free labor vision. According to historian Paul Goodman, abolitionists believed that manual labor schools would allow African Americans to advance "by earning the respect of whites, disproving the racist canards of inherent incapacity, and acquiring the skills and personal virtues required for upward mobility."[20] However, many whites were hostile towards the prospect of black manual labor schools and other educational and social efforts to advance a black free labor ideology. In 1831, residents of New Haven, Connecticut, prevented the establishment of a manual labor college for black men in their town. Three years later, in Canterbury, Connecticut, residents destroyed a female academy that educated white and black girls alongside each other. The hostility that whites exhibited to manual labor schools, and to black educational and citizenship endeavors as a whole, illustrate the threat that black free labor values posed to entrenched racial hierarchies.[21]

20. Paul Goodman, "The Manual Labor Movement and the Origins of Abolitionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 13 no. 3 (Autumn, 1993): 362, 367; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (1976; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 136; "Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention, for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in these United States . . . 1833," in *Minutes and Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Howard Holman Bell (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 29, 34.

21. Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 10; Kyle G. Volk, *Moral Minorities and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 116-117.

Still black activists persisted. By 1837, black residents of Pittsburgh boasted of a number of institutions established to support racial uplift and self improvement in a statistical report submitted to delegates at the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention. The purpose of the report was to convince delegates that African Americans should not be disenfranchised as they had proved themselves responsible citizens. The report noted that black Pittsburghers had their own AME church constructed of brick and "newly enlarged and repaired and furnished with comfortable pews, Venetian window blinds, and opaque lamps, and is valued at ten thousand dollars." Black Pittsburghers had by then also established their own Sunday School which recorded ninety-seven students and fifteen teachers. There was also a common day school that enrolled eighty-five students and employed a black university graduate as of 1837. The local community owned the building itself which was valued at two-thousand dollars. Black Pittsburghers also established a temperance society, moral reform, and literary society.[22]

One of the most significant challenges facing free blacks in Pittsburgh was the unemployment of skilled artisans. Black tradesmen faced competition from immigrant workers who came to the United States in massive numbers in the decades before the Civil War. The children of black laborers faced substantial barriers in

22. Colored People of Pittsburg, Report of the Condition of the Colored People of Pittsburg, submitted to the State Convention," *National Enquirer*, August 3, 1837, Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 2, Frame 131 "Statistical Account of the Colored Population of Pittsburg," 218-219, Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 2, Frame 82-83. Excluded from Pittsburgh schools, African Americans established the African Education Society to advance their racial uplift and free labor efforts. They also formed temperance, moral reform, and literacy societies in order to realize their free labor vision. See, *Liberator*, February 25, 1832, Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 1, Frame 148;
"To the Citizens of Pittsburgh and the Public Generally," *Liberator*, January 12, 1833, Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 1 Frame, 238.

learning a skilled trade and thus achieving social mobility. The new manufacturing firms of the period that were prominent in Pittsburgh excluded black workers as employers favored white labor. Historian Joe William Trotter estimates that by the middle of the century only four percent of blacks in Pittsburgh worked in skilled occupations and that fully seventy percent were employed in menial positions as coachmen, laborers, waiters, and in households.[23]

EXTENDING THE BOUNDARIES OF BLACK FREE SOIL

Many black Pittsburghers also found work as stevedores, roustabouts, stewards, and deckhands on steamboats that traveled on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.[24] It was dangerous work. Black steamboat workers were subject to white abuse, and sometimes murder, as the steamships traveled down the Ohio River into the heart of the south's slave society. Despite these hardships, the free black river workers were central in advancing the black free soil principles that underpinned black free labor ideology.

In his narrative, former slave William Wells Brown recalled a grisly scene on board the steamboat *Flora* in which Francis McIntosh, a free black from Pittsburgh, serving as the boat's cook, was taken ashore in St. Louis, Missouri, and burned at the stake. He endured eighteen minutes of gruesome pain as the flames burned his flesh.

23. Joe William Trotter Jr., *Workers on Arrival: Black Labor in the Making of America* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 16-17.

24. Campet, "Black Pittsburgh's Struggle," 36.

McIntosh had become the victim to a local mob seeking to avenge the death of a St. Louis constable. It was imperative that black southwestern Pennsylvanians working on the riverboats of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers remain vigilant. Not only for fear of white mobs, but also the prospect of kidnapping.[25]

In late spring 1838, Samuel Devall, a black seventeen year old from Brownsville, Pennsylvania, was working on the Ohio River when his mother and father received word that he had been taken in bondage. Devall was traveling on board the steamer *London* en route to Pittsburgh to visit his parents. When the *London* docked in Cincinnati, the captain of the ship demanded to see Devall's free papers, which were not in his possession at the time. The ship's steward, a Mr. Armstrong, and a second cook on the ship declared that Devall was a free man and citizen of Pittsburgh. The captain, however, refused to believe them, and docked the boat on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River. A clerk and two firemen took Devall ashore where he was held in prison until he could prove his free status or be sold into slavery. When news of his imprisonment reached Pittsburgh, local abolitionists sent his free papers down the Ohio River to the editor of the *Philanthropist*, an antislavery newspaper in Cincinnati. Antislavery activists hoped that these documents would reach Devall in time so that he could be released and that the ship's captain's conduct could be investigated. It's not clear in the Pennsylvania press what became of Devall or Patterson, but the Devall incident illuminates that a network of black and white antislavery activists stretched from Pittsburgh seeking to make the nation's

25. William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown: A Fugitive Slave* (Boston: Antislavery Office, 1847), 27; Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi*, 44.

waterways a protected space for free black labor and the rights and privileges that it entailed.

Black southwestern Pennsylvanians who found themselves ensnared in slavery's web, looked to the courts to secure their freedom and advance their free soil principles along the vital waterway of the Ohio River. In 1837, Frank Irvine filed a petition in the Third District Court of New Orleans declaring that he was a free man who had been kidnapped and illegally held in bondage by Thomas Powell, a Louisiana slaveholder. Irvine claimed that he was born in Pittsburgh and had moved to Cincinnati at age twenty-one where he was kidnapped by a man named Harris (or Harrison) who dragged him into Kentucky and after years of abuse, and sold him to Powell. The court agreed to hear Irvine's case, and carried out his request—made on his behalf by his attorney James Bradford—that he be sequestered in the West Feliciana Parish jail. This request was made in order to protect Irvine from Powell's cruel treatment and from being taken by his alleged owner outside the jurisdiction of the court and sold.[26]

Judge Thomas Morgan ultimately ruled that Irwin was a free man and should be released from bondage. He based this argument on Irvine's 1809 birth in Pennsylvania because "an individual born in a country in which slavery is not authorized by law is free & consequently that no act of an individual, or his being came into a state or country where slavery is recognized by law can make him a

26. *Frank v. Powell*, 11, St. Paul West 232-235 (1838); Louisiana, Supreme Court, New Orleans: Frank, free person of colour v Powell, February 1838, in Louisiana and Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk

slave." Morgan also reasoned that because Taylor had taken Irvine west with the intention to permanently reside in Ohio along with members of his family and had bought property in the state, he along with his mother were free according to Ohio law.[27]

Despite the court's ruling, the free status of black southwestern Pennsylvanians working along the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers was continuously under attack. George Johnson, a free black from the town of Brownsville (south of Pittsburgh in Fayette County), labored as a fireman aboard a steamboat. On an 1852 trip west on the Ohio River, Johnson was wrongly identified by Reuben Bartlett, a Missouri slaveholder, as his escaped bondsman and held in bondage. Johnson appeared before the St. Louis Circuit Court to challenge Bartlett's claim and sue for his freedom. Johnson argued that he was born to free black parents who were citizens of Pennsylvania which made him a free man. The case began that November.[28]

The court recorded depositions from several witnesses who attested to Johnson's freedom claims. The first was Willian Conley of Bridgeport, Pennsylvania, who had employed Johnson as a fireman on his boat. Conley claimed to have known Johnson for seven years, first meeting him in Brownsville and ended his deposition by proclaiming that he had "never knew him to be any other than a free man & by general reputation he passed as a free man in a free state." William Boyd, a resident

27. *Frank v. Powell*, 11, St. Paul West 232-235 (1838); Louisiana, Supreme Court, New Orleans: Frank, free person of colour v Powell, February 1838, , in Louisiana and Special Collections Department, Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans, Slavery, Abolition & Social Justice www.slavery.amdigital.co.uk

28. *George Johnson, a man of color v. Henry Moore*, April 1852, Case No. 36, SLCCR in St. Louis Circuit Court Historical Records Project Files http://www.stlcourtrecords.wustl.edu

of Birmingham in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, testified that he met Johnson in Brownsville, working alongside him in a brickyard. Boyd claimed that he knew Johnson's mother was free because she lived in a free state and no one to his knowledge claimed her as their property. Boyd was not fully certain that the woman in question was Johnson's mother but assumed that she had taken care of him as her own child. Boyd regarded Johnson as a free man. Andy B. Lewis, a resident of St. Louis, also provided a statement attesting that he knew Johnson to be a free black from Brownsville, Pennsylvania.[29]

Reuben Bartlett, of course, refused to relinquish his claim to Johnson. In his deposition, Bartlett admitted he did not know when and where Johnson was born nor who his parents were or their birthplace. However, Bartlett described receiving a bill of sale dated September 7, 1852, for the purchase of Johnson from a slave dealer named McKee, but confessed to have lost the document and had no other copy to provide as evidence. Whether Johnson was able to obtain his freedom is not known as the case records contain only the deposition taken and court testimony.[30] Nevertheless, there is enough information that illustrates the significant role of black southwestern Pennsylvanians acting in defense of and spreading black free soil principles in this and the Irvine Case.[31]

29. *George Johnson, a man of color v. Henry Moore*, April 1852, Case No. 36, SLCCR in St. Louis Circuit Court Historical Records Project Files http://www.stlcourtrecords.wustl.edu; Kelly M. Kennington, *In the Shadow of Dred Scott: St. Louis Freedom Suits and the Legal Culture of Slavery in Antebellum America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 136-137.

30. *George Johnson, a man of color v. Henry Moore*, April 1852, Case No. 36, SLCCR in St. Louis Circuit Court Historical Records Project Files http://www.stlcourtrecords.wustl.edu

31. The Irvine and Johnson cases raise an important question: why would St. Louis courts go to such lengths to investigate the freedom claims of African Americans? For insight into how free blacks were able to access the courts in this part of the upper south see, Lea Vandervelde, *Redemption*

As black rivermen expanded free soil principles westward in order to protect their freedom, at home partisan political campaigns and state politics forced Pennsylvanians to address the meaning of free soil.

Antislavery activists and state legislators recognized that black freedom was still vulnerable in the northern borderland stretching from Philadelphia to the state's western border. In 1819, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court had ruled that accused runaway slaves could not seek redress before a state jury known as a writ *de homine replegiando* as it hindered enslavers' right to recover their property, violating the 1793 federal fugitive slave act. Pennsylvanians across the state including Pittsburgh business leader William Wilkins denounced the court's ruling. The following year the Pennsylvania legislature responded by adopting an anti-kidnapping measure with more stringent penalties. The most controversial provision of the law prohibited Pennsylvania officials from enforcing the fugitive slave act, as implementation of the law was the responsibility of the federal government.[32]

Songs: Suing for Freedom before Dred Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). Kimberly Welch documents the experiences of black litigants in the Natchez District of Mississippi and Louisiana. Though rare, black southwestern Pennsylvanians could find themselves in the courts of this part of the south. See, Kimberly Welch, *Black Litigants in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

32. Thomas D. Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780-1861* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 42-43, 45-46; William R. Leslie, "The Pennsylvania Fugitive Slave Act of 1826," *Journal of Southern History* 18, no. 4 (November 1952): 432-433; For the 1819 Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruling see, *Wright v. Deacon* (1819), 5 Sergeant and Rawle, 62; For the 1820 anti-kidnapping law Pennsylvania legislators established in the wake of *Wright* see, "An Act to Prevent Kidnapping," in *A Digest of the Laws of Pennsylvania: From the Year*

The difficulties in recovering escaped slaves soon became apparent, especially among Maryland enslavers. After years failing to seek redress from Congress, Maryland legislators lobbied Pennsylvania for new legislation resolving the obstacles they faced in the recovery and return of escaped slaves. In response, Reverend Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia and black community leader, traveled to Harrisburg to oppose the idea. He and other black Philadelphians were concerned about the threat these Marylanders and pro-slavery state lawmakers posed to black freedom. However, Allen failed to arrive at the state capital in time before the legislature adopted a personal library law.

The new 1826 law that emerged as a result of that Maryland lobbying effort struck a balance between protecting black freedom and the property rights of enslavers. Pennsylvania agreed to recognize its responsibility in the rendition of escaped slaves and the act established a procedure for fugitive slave rendition where alleged runaways were granted a hearing to determine their status. If an enslaver was successful in their case they would be granted a certificate of removal, allowing them to return home with their property. However, the law prohibited certain state officials from issuing certificates of removal and raised the threshold for admissible evidence that slaveholders could provide, compared to the 1793 fugitive slave act.[33]

One Thousand Seven Hundred, to the Sixteenth Day of June, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Thirty-Six ed. John W. Purdon, (Philadelphia: M'Carty, 1831), 652-654.

33. Andrew K. Diemer, *The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 1-3; H. Robert Baker, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania: Slavery, The Supreme Court, and the Ambivalent Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 80-81; William R. Leslie, "The Pennsylvania Fugitive Slave Act," 435-436, 444-445; "An Act to Give Effect to the Provisions of the Constitution of the United States, relative to fugitives from Labour, for the Protection of free People of Colour, and to prevent Kidnapping," in *A Digest of the Laws of Pennsylvania*, 654-657

During the 1828 presidential election black free soil principles in southwestern Pennsylvania were tested again. Between late September and October 1828, the *Democratic Eagle,* a pro-Jackson newspaper in the town of Washington, published an exposé accusing Secretary of State Henry Clay, a supporter of Jackson's opponent, incumbent President John Quincy Adams, of holding in bondage a free-born black man from Washington named Jerry.

The press first learned that Jerry was kidnapped into bondage from a relative who sought the *Democratic Eagle's* assistance in rescuing his kinsman. The witness' claims were supported by testimony from respectable members of the local community, prompting the *Democratic Eagle* to investigate. Its agents discovered that Clay continued to hold Jerry even after he learned that the enslaved man was in fact born free. Thomas McGiffin, a local lawyer and supporter of Clay, defended the Secretary of State by providing copies of a registry that included Jerry's name and a certificate that purported to record his mother Anna as a servant in Fayette County. Upon closer inspection the *Democratic Eagle* found that the registry did not identify Jerry as enslaved; thus, as the son of a black servant under Pennsylvania's gradual abolition law, he was considered free.[34]

McGiffin also produced an affidavit from a Ralph St. John who met Jerry when he settled on a farm in Washington County. St. John recalled that Jerry had asked him to persuade his enslaver, Mrs. Carter, to sell him to someone in a larger

34. Let Him Answer! The Freemen of Pennsylvania Against Henry Clay, Jury. The Electors of the United States," *Democratic Eagle*, September 29, 1828; "Mr. Clay and the Freeborn Jerry, Again!" *Democratic Eagle,* October 6, 1828.

free black community because he was unhappy and isolated in this rural town. At first St. John brushed off Jerry's request, but after continued intransigence, Mrs. Carter agreed to send Jerry to Wheeling, Virginia, where he could be sold. Charles Wheeler, president of the Washington Abolition Society (WAS) bolstered St. John's testimony. He recalled that no member of the WAS had investigated Jerry's status because it was not disputed. Wheeler noted that when he heard Jerry was sold against his will, he enquired of those familiar with the sale as to the circumstances of the man's sale. He was told that Jerry had voluntarily agreed to be sold, and so had determined to make no further investigation. The *Democratic Eagle* accused McGiffin of taking advantage of "a poor ignorant descent of Africa" by knowing full well, as he was a lawyer, that Jerry was born free. The *Democratic Eagle* was convinced that Clay had purchased and kept in bondage a free man and vowed to not rest or succumb to intimidation until Jerry was freed.[35]

The *Democratic Eagle* never reported whether Jerry remained in bondage for the rest of his life, but the exposé provides insights surrounding white and black southwestern Pennsylvanians' notions of free soil. African Americans' freedom in this part of the state remained precarious, as slavecatchers and kidnappers sought to make a quick profit by selling free blacks from the region into the slave markets of the Deep South where there was a growing demand for enslaved labor. African Americans were willing to seek the assistance of Jacksonian Democrats in defense of

35. "Let Him Answer! The Freemen of Pennsylvania Against Henry Clay, Jury. The Electors of the United States," *Democratic Eagle*, September 29, 1828; "Mr. Clay and the Freeborn Jerry, Again!" *Democratic Eagle*, October 6, 1828; *Democratic Eagle*, October 13, 1828; *Democratic Eagle*, October 22, 1828.

their free soil principles. Though some members of this political party in southwestern Pennsylvania were willing to curtail black rights such as suffrage, they did recognize that African Americans had certain protections.[36] Their actions illustrate that regardless of whether Jerry had voluntarily or not agreed to be sold to an enslaver outside of the state, such an action violated Pennsylvania free soil as enshrined in the state's antislavery laws. Writers for the *Democratic Eagle* depicted Jerry's sale in paternalistic and condescending terms as they suggested that he had no knowledge of not only his rights but the meaning of free soil, noting that "let it not escape observation that we hear of no explanation being given to Jerry of the difference in point of rights, and condition of negroes in Kentucky and Pennsylvania."[37]

The politics of free soil was not only limited to kidnapping and the sale of African Americans outside the state's borders. During the 1838 gubernatorial campaign it was alleged that years ago as a young bachelor, Democratic candidate David Porter engaged in an intimate relationship with Rebecca Beatty, resulting in the birth of a son and daughter. Porter, according to his political opponents, abandoned the mother and his two children. In need of support, Beatty married James Mason, a

36. Many of these Jacksonians later joined the free soil movement that emerged in 1848. For insight surrounding the relationship between Jacksonians and free soil and antislavery see, Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and The Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

37. "Mr. Clay and the Freeborn Jerry, Again!" *Democratic Eagle*, October 6, 1828; *Democratic Eagle*, October 13, 1828; *Democratic Eagle*, October 22, 1828; *Democratic Eagle*, October 27, 1828.

black man, who made his home near Lewistown, in Mifflin County in central Pennsylvania.[38]

Supporters of Porter dismissed the accusations. In August, a large crowd of white men assembled at the Bedford County courthouse where they launched a political offensive against Porter's opponent and current governor, Joseph Ritner. The gathering began by declaring that Pennsylvania was a government for white people and though they were opposed to slavery and supported "a safe and gradual emancipation," Ritner represented a threat to the status of whites. The men charged Ritner as being an abolitionist intent on turning "loose upon our country hordes of negro slaves, unprepared for the change, and unable to support themselves." They continued by accusing Ritner of forcing them "to make daily associates with the negro, both at our board and our bed— marrying and giving in marriage, thereby giving breaking up and polluting the fountains of morality—increasing pauperism and crime—glutting the poor house, the jail, and penitentiary, and the gallows or fanning into a blaze a servile war in the South" threating their independent status as free men.[39]

It's not clear how salient these accusations against Porter and Ritner were for voters when they cast their ballots, though the rumor offers pungent insight regarding white-held notions of the propriety of inter-racial marriage. When Pennsylvania had

38. *Lives of David R. Porter and Joseph Ritner, The Two Candidates for the Office of Governor of Pennsylvania, Compiled from the Authentic Sources and Contrasted* (1838), 8, 24; *Bedford Gazette*, August 24, 1838.

39. "Great Meeting of the People," *Bedford Gazette*, August 31, 1838; "Is Joseph Ritner an Abolitionist?" *Bedford Gazette*, August 31, 1838.

adopted gradual abolition in 1780, the state had also repealed its colonial-era law banning interracial marriage. Despite this repeal, some southwestern Pennsylvanians obviously remained anxious about intimate relationships across racial lines. The charge against Porter was made when whites in many states viewed interracial marriages as a slippery slope towards social equality and extending equal rights across racial lines.[40]

In rural communities such as Cumberland County in south-central Pennsylvania, the charge against Porter came at a time of anxiety among whites about the uncertain future of a post-emancipation society and the status of free white men. Historian Michael B. McCoy argues that these Pennsylvanians sought to undermine gradual abolition in order to establish a society that sanctioned racial difference, inferiority, and political exclusion. Given that many enslavers in southwestern Pennsylvania continually sought to subvert gradual abolition and their position in the northern borderland, it's not improbable that they exhibited these same fears and racial attitudes as these whites in Cumberland County. The accusations against Porter and Ritner also suggest that some of their political opponents viewed rural

40. "Murder," *Genius of Liberty*, April 25, 1820; *Genius of Liberty*, July 13, 1820; "Murder," *Washington Review and Examiner*, May 1, 1820; Amber Moulton, *The Fight for Interracial Marriage Rights in Antebellum Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 6, 10; Peggy Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally: Miscegenation Law and the Making of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 21; Peter Wallenstein, *Tell the Court I Love My Wife: Race, Marriage, and Law: An American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 40-41. A fact also exhibited by the gruesome murder of Charles Kerns, in April 1820 when it was discovered that he was engaging in an illicit affair with Hannah Wharton, a white woman, in Uniontown.

Pennsylvania as a site where promiscuous behavior could take root, diminishing the status of white men.[41]

Alongside the gubernatorial campaign, Pennsylvanians had to decide on the adoption of a new state constitution, debated and drafted between 1837 and 1838, which would have important implications for black rights across the state, specifically voting rights for African American men. Among southwestern Pennsylvanians, there was no consensus among white political leaders on the subject of black suffrage. Daniel Agnew, a Beaver County Whig, believed that African American men were denied suffrage under the 1790 Pennsylvania Constitution and that the terms "citizen" and "freemen" in the 1790 constitution did not apply to black men. However, John Dickey, his fellow Beaver Countian and Anti-Mason, believed that the convention did have the right to disenfranchise black men but considered such an action to be unjust, as black men born on Pennsylvania soil were entitled to the right to vote. He dismissed fears that if African Americans were enfranchised and their population swelled, they would eventually take control of Pennsylvania's government. For Dickey, black disenfranchisement would greatly restrict the political rights of free blacks in the state, even more than in some southern states. [42]

41. Michael B. McCoy, "Forgetting Freedom: White Anxiety, Black Presence, and Gradual Abolition in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, 1780-1838," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 136 no. 2 (April 2012), 143, 151,154-155,163.

42. Robert Mittrick, "A History of Negro Voting in Pennsylvania During the Nineteenth Century" (PhD diss., Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, 1985), 30, 32; *Proceedings and Debates of the Constitution Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, To Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced at Harrisburg, May 2, 1837*, vol. 9 (Harrisburg: Packer, 1838), 369; *Proceedings and Debates*, vol. 10, 62-63, 66-67.

More sympathetic to black voting rights was Walter Forward, a Jacksonian Democrat from Pittsburgh, home to the largest free black population in the region. Forward expressed support for black suffrage. He noted that many African Americans were property owners, morally responsible, and industrious, and that it would be hypocritical to require blacks to obey state laws when they did not have a part in deciding their enactment. He described blacks as patriotic people capable of exhibiting virtue and intelligence. Forward was sympathetic to black suffrage, though he was neither an abolitionist or egalitarian. He was a strong supporter of colonization, the belief that free blacks should emigrate to Africa, due to the intractable prejudice, discrimination, and violence directed at them by whites. Despite Forward's support, and that of a few other delegates, the disenfranchisement provision explicitly reserving the right to vote to white men was adopted by a margin of 77-45 votes.[43]

In his study on African American suffrage in the antebellum North, Christopher Malone explains that the disenfranchisement of black Pennsylvanians was inspired by three conditions. First, by 1838 there was a shift from racial paternalism to exclusion among state leaders as they believed that no amount of uplift could raise African Americans to the status of virtuous citizen. Proponents of exclusion based their actions on the growing presence of an impoverished free black population, though failed to mention that the source of destitution among many

43. Frank B. Sessa, "Walter Forward in the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837-1838," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 20 no. 2 (June 1937): 118-119; Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage: Race, Party, and Voting Rights in the Antebellum North* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 96-97; *Proceedings and Debates*, vol. 10, 7-13.

African Americans was racial discrimination. Second, significant social and economic changes had taken place in the state that fostered white hostility towards black rights. Finally, by the 1830s Pennsylvania had witnessed renewed partisan rivalry, this time between Democrats and Whigs. Malone's analysis centers on Philadelphia, but given the concerns and racial ideologies expressed by southwestern Pennsylvania delegates, it's clear that these factors drove some whites to support black disenfranchisement. Many whites believed that though African Americans were few in number, free blacks could, in the future, undermine their political power if Pennsylvania witnessed an influx and growth of its African American population. However, there were voices such as Forward's and longtime representative Albert Gallatin who supported black suffrage or considered blacks as voting citizens as they could prove themselves as free laborers.[44]

MOBS, VIGILANTES, AND BLACK FREE SOIL IN URBAN AND RURAL SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

Despite some white southwestern Pennsylvanians' willingness to protect black free soil claims the region was not immune to the racial violence which plagued northern cities during the antebellum period. African Americans used these skirmishes as an opportunity to assert their free soil and free labor principles.

44. Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage*, 78-79, 96, 98-99.

An important by-product of the market revolution was the growth of northern urban centers which often produced a sense of dislocation and growth in crime and violence. Especially troubling to many Americans was the willingness of urban residents to partake in vigilante justice in the form of mobs. During the 1830s and 1840s, African American communities across the urban north experienced growing anti-black violence by white mobs.

Historians have provided numerous explanations as to the sources of this embrace of violent repression. For instance, many elite whites grew concerned that the growing public presence of an interracial abolitionist movement, which called for an immediate end to slavery and black rights, was disrupting the racial hierarchy of the North. Some northerners were concerned that tolerating abolitionists would harm their financial interests by alienating southern slaveholders, fraying economic ties between both regions. In certain places within northern cites, African Americans and whites freely socialized. Integrated spaces, especially those used by abolitionists, were used by opponents of antislavery to discredit these activists and justify the use of violence. Labor competition between working-class whites and blacks was also a source of tension that could lead to interracial violence. Anti-black anger in the labor force was not confined to competition surrounding employment, as mobs targeted African Americans who employed or derived their income from poor whites. The growth of free black communities, institutions, organizational life, and the emergence of a black elite drew the ire of poor whites. Though rare, there were a few recorded

instances of large-scale anti-black violence that erupted in Pittsburgh, home to the region's largest free black community.[45]

In 1834, anti-black sentiment erupted when a white mob attacked black residents of Pittsburgh's Hayti neighborhood, attacking black businesses and homes of prominent leaders. Mayor Samuel Pettigrew sent a local white militia to quell the violence. In April 1839, another incident occurred. On a Saturday afternoon, a fight ensued between a white man and a group of black men in Hayti. Later that day, black residents learned that the man, along with a group of friends he recruited, planned to return to the neighborhood that evening, seeking to exact revenge. African Americans prepared for a riot that night. John Vashon prepared for the worst, distributing arms among the community members. Martin Delany and a delegation of black leaders spoke with Judge Amos Pentland, demanding that as respectable members of Pittsburgh's community, the city protect them from this threat of white violence. For Delany and others, the city had provided too few police officers to defend Hayti from white mobs. The men warned Pentland that if city officials failed to provide adequate protection, then African Americans would defend themselves.[46]

45. Leonard P. Curry, *The Free Black in Urban America 1800-1850: The Shadow of the Dream* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 96-98; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 164-166; Emma Jones Lapsansky,"'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 61-62, 64-65 ;Leonard L. Richards, *"Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 5; James Brewer Stewart, "Modernizing 'Difference': The Political Meaning of Color in the Free States, 1776-1840," in *Race and the Early Republic: Racial Consciousness and Nation-Building in the Early Republic*, eds. Michael A. Morrison and James Brewer Stewart (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), 119-120.

46. Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 29-30; Frank A. Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (Boston: Less and Shepard, 1883), 43-44; Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robinson Delany, 1812-1885* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 58; Wilmoth, *Pittsburgh and the Blacks*, 23.

Hours after they issued their warning to Pentland, Mayor McClintock met with Delany and other black leaders to devise a plan to avert a riot and protect their neighborhood. Under his emergency powers as mayor, McClintock appointed a special police force composed of African Americans and whites. The men would patrol the neighborhood in pairs to ensure order. As an additional safety measure, McClintock promised the black delegation that he and Duquesne Grays would also be on the scene as a deterrent to white mob violence. That evening, a crowd of hundreds of white men assembled on Hayti's streets. Together, black and white police officers acted quickly, arresting the ringleaders and dispersing the mob. After a night of battle, a black Pittsburgh neighbor sustained minimal damage as two homes were set ablaze. The leaders of the mob were brought before Judge Pentland and swiftly punished.[47]

In mid-May 1843, another riot erupted, this time in the neighboring city of Allegheny where the celebrated black composer and musician Frank Johnson and his band performed for several days at the Washingtonian Ark. The first night of Johnson's concert was marred by violence as a large mob of men and boys circled the hall "hooting and yelling" and drowning out the musicians. It was likely that African Americans and whites sat together in the audience, as Johnson's band performed only before interracial audiences, further enraging the crowd outside the Washingtonian Ark. When the concerted ended, the mob followed Johnson and his band yelling "n—" and other epithets while throwing "brick-bats, stones, and rotten eggs." One of the musicians was severely wounded when struck in the head by a projectile. Many local

47. Ullman, *Martin R. Delany*, 30-31; Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*, 43-44.

residents were outraged by the riot. The following day, the Allegheny City Council adopted a resolution directing the mayor to offer a fifty-dollar reward for information leading to the conviction of any persons who took part in the rioting. In order to deter mob violence, the council authorized the mayor to provide additional police to protect Frank Johnson and his band as well as concert goers.[48]

Outside northern urban centers, free black communities in smaller towns and villages were not immune to white mob violence, which took on a different form. On an August evening in Greene County near the town of Greensburg, William Munroe, a free black man, was found by local townspeople knocked to the ground having suffered a substantial blow to the side of the head. Munroe was unable to identify his assailants. An hour after the attack, the noise of firing guns and pistols emanated through the town. Nothing about these sounds aroused suspicion among the townspeople until news arrived that a party of white men from Dotyburg met a crowd of black men on their return home. The encounter escalated into violence when they fired upon the crowd. African Americans retaliated by murdering Seely Zimmerman, most likely a member of the mob, shooting him in the left eye and beating him to death with a club later found at the scene. A jury was soon impaneled to learn the facts of the case. The press noted that the confrontation was part of a larger feud

48. "A Mob," *Spirt of Liberty*, May 20, 1843; "Riot near Pittsburgh, Frank Johnson's Band Mobbed," *The Liberator*, June 9, 1843; Allegheny (Pa.) Select and Common Council Minutes, Vol. 1, 1840-1907, p. 182, Allegheny (Pa.) Select and Common Council, Thomas and Katherine Detre Library and Archives, John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh.

between African Americans and whites, however the cause of this quarrel was never mentioned.[49]

Part of those tensions and interests centered around what free soil meant in terms of citizenship for African Americans. In many instances, these mobs in northern cities were not spontaneous, but well planned and sanctioned by the elite. As David Grimsted notes, these mobs were part of the "ongoing process of democratic accommodation, compromise, and uncompromisable tension between groups with different interests." Though Pittsburgh was marked by fewer anti-black riots compared to other northern cites, blacks used the specter of white mob violence to make certain citizenship claims. These incidents are also revealing regarding how some white southwestern Pennsylvanians understood free soil in this part of the northern borderland. In some northern communities such as Allegheny, city officials were willing to acceded to African Americans' free soil principles, providing not only protection against white mob violence but viewing them as citizens.[50]

BLACK FREE SOIL, AGARANISM, AND FREE LABOR IN THE WEST

In response to mob violence and other challenges of African American urban life, black leadership advocated a notion of black agrarianism. Black agrarianism provided a vision of free labor that included African Americans engagement in agricultural science. By establishing black agricultural communities throughout the

49. "Murder in Greene Co.," *Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch*, September 1, 1859.

50. David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), viii.

West, African Americans could achieve their own economic independence, demonstrate their own virtue and responsibility, and perform the responsibilities of republican citizenship.

One of the foremost proponents of establishing black rural communities and towns was black Pittsburgher Lewis Woodson. Woodson, a fugitive slave from Virginia born in 1806, relocated to Chillicothe, Ohio, with his family in 1820. There, he, became active in local antislavery, education and reform efforts, working as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, teaching African Americans students in numerous towns in Ohio and founding a black school and benevolent society. In 1828, Woodson became an ordained minister in the AME Church; he also worked as a barber and businessman. By the time Woodson had moved to Pittsburgh in 1831, he had a wealth of experiences in institution building.[51]

Woodson's letters in the black press under the pseudonym "Augustine," established Pittsburgh as a center of black agrarian thought.[52] Woodson, believed that black landownership was an avenue through which African Americans could escape the precarious and impoverished living conditions in the cities to achieve household comfort and independence by "becoming the owners and cultivators of the soil."

51. C. Peter Ripley, et. al., eds. *The Black Abolitionist Papers Volume 3: The United States, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 259n3.

52. Historian Floyd Miller convincingly argues that "Augustine" was most likely Lewis Woodson of Pittsburgh as both expressed similar positions on the necessity for black clergy to be properly trained and the convening of a state convention to address African Americans' disfranchisement in Pennsylvania. The letters also provide details of the author's background similar to Woodson's own personal life: born in the South, resided in Ohio for twenty years (at one-point residing in Columbus), a father who lived in Jackson County, Ohio, and in 1836 traveled to Philadelphia and New York. For a biographical account of Woodson see, Floyd J. Miller, "'The Father of Black Nationalism': Another Contender," *Civil War History* 17, no. 4 (December 1971): 310-319.

Woodson noted that African American farmers could achieve comfort and wealth for themselves and their families. Despite his support for establishing black rural settlements, he did not advocate for mass migration of African Americans from the urban centers to the countryside.

Woodson believed that successful mechanics, tradesmen, and other business in the cities, should not immediately abandoned their homes and professions to become farmers in a black rural community. He warned that achievement in one form of business did not automatically guarantee success in agricultural pursuits as it required advance skill and intensive study of best agricultural practices and subscribing to agricultural newspapers and reading books on the subject. Well-off African Americans who had no knowledge of farming faced the risk of reducing themselves to poverty. For Woodson, these rural black communities would be settled by those African Americans in cities who had no trades, barely subsisting as temporary laborers, selling their labor in a precarious market. Woodson also argued that the children of these black workers would also benefit from living in black rural settlements as they would find useful employment and be removed from vice, crime, and other nefarious influences found in urban areas. For those African Americans already living in rural towns who faced prejudice from whites, black settlements could provide their children with schools and other institutions that would support their communities.[53]

53. Augustine, "For the Colored American," *Colored American*, February 17, 1838. One of the most glaring weaknesses of Woodson's black agrarian and free labor vision was that it was rooted in the belief that African Americans could overcome their exclusion in American society if they worked to elevate themselves as the chief source of prejudice was condition, rather than race.

This Pittsburgher's ties to the Old Northwest made him well versed to speak of the political realities and challenges in establishing black western settlements and the best site for establishing these communities. Woodson was uncertain whether Ohio was the best place for black agrarianism. Though there were a number of successful free black rural communities, the state had a series of "black laws" adopted in 1804 and 1807 which curtailed the rights of African Americans. He also questioned whether African Americans should establish their own rural community in the United States. Woodson was concerned that if these free black settlements acquired too much wealth and power, the federal government and states might seek to undermine them. For Woodson, the United States' efforts to thwart the success of Haiti and Mexico, two republics established by free people of color, and American policy towards Native American communities were cautionary tales regarding the possible opposition that a successful free black settlement might face in the United States. For Woodson, a black free soil settlement in Canada or the British West Indies was a possibility. He argued that men had the right to seek economic independence beyond the boundaries of the United States, so long as that migration was voluntary, and that this emigration did not mean an abandonment of the abolitionist cause, as free blacks could continue to work effectively for emancipation and self improvement for the enslaved remotely.

Woodson's ideas of black agrarianism received criticism in the black press. His detractors agreed that African Americans in eastern cities should consider migrating to western rural communities, but were against all-black settlements. They believed that African Americans could easily integrate into rural towns and villages

as whites were far less prejudiced in the countryside compared to the city. Woodson disagreed. He noted that Pittsburgh officials created a school for black children, as they were barred from learning alongside whites. Outside the city, in western Pennsylvania, black children were denied entrance into white schools in certain places. In neighboring Ohio, African American parents received no funding from the state in support of their children's education and were excluded from the white public school system.[54] Despite this debate over how black agrarianism should be carried out, the editors of the *Colored American* were largely supportive of establishing a black agrarian community in the west. They proclaimed that "this very measure would be the salvation of our people. And without some such measure, nothing can ever be made of the mast masses which crowd our large cities."[55]

Among activists at an August 1841 black convention in Pittsburgh, delegates discussed black agrarianism at length. Convention attendees, drawn mostly from the western portion of the state, endorsed a resolution calling for African Americans who were not successful mechanics in the cities to become independent farmers in the countryside. The delegates considered farming as a solution to black overcrowding in the large cities and towns where it was impossible for many to "find honorable or profitable employment." Black agrarianism would also allow parents to raise their children to become free and independent laborers and escape from "degrading drudgery" that delegates believed was "fatal to their health and their morals." They

54. "For the Colored American," *Colored American*, July 28, 1838; Augustine, "The West-No. V," *Colored American*, June 15, 1839.

55. "Husbandry," *Colored American*, February 17, 1838.

noted too that black womanhood was especially harmed by conditions in antebellum cities as women in domestic work were regularly exposed to "insults and miseries" which was "enough to extinguish every delicate and virtuous feeling peculiar to the sex."[56]

BETWEEN SLAVERY AND FREEDOM: THE SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA BORDERLAND

As black southwestern Pennsylvanians debated the nature of black settlement in the Old Northwest, their region became increasingly tied to the South through transportation and communication improvements. During the first decades of the nineteenth century, the federal government and the states undertook extensive road building campaigns in order to link far flung communities to major urban centers and markets. In 1806, Congress established one of the most significant road projects of the period and in 1818 completed the first section of the national highway between western Maryland, southwestern Pennsylvania, and Wheeling in western Virginia. The towns along the National Road in southwestern Pennsylvania did not grow into large urban centers on the scale of places such as Pittsburgh. However, the new roads placed rural residents into closer contact with free and enslaved African Americans and the institution of black bondage. In later reminiscences, Thomas B. Searight, a

56. *Proceedings of the State Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania, Held in Pittsburgh, on the 23rd, 24th, and 25th, of August, 1841, For the Purpose of Considering Their Condition and The Means of Its Improvement* (Pittsburgh: Matthew M. Grant, 1841), 8, 14-15; Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 40-41, 51-52.

lifelong resident of Uniontown where a portion of the national road traversed, recalled seeing enslaved men and women driven in pairs westward, "fastened to a long, thick rope or cable, like horses."[57] John Deets, a Uniontown waggoner, recalled hearing stories from older Uniontown residents of enslaved people being marched to Virginia.[58]

Some southwestern Pennsylvanians sought to convince enslavers traveling through the region to release these men, women, and children from bondage or to assist those seeking to escape from slavery. Matthew McKeever of West Middletown sometimes walked alongside the coffles trudging westward in order to tell the enslavers "how wicked, they were; that they would certainly lose their souls if they did not repent of this great sin." McKeever risking his life doing so, as enslavers threatened to shoot him if he "would not let them alone, and mind his own business." But he kept talking. Such activism was not uncommon. When Charles Garlick made his escape from bondage near Stinston, Western Virginia, northward toward Uniontown, he was assisted by locals who helped him reach the national road and who then guided him northward to Pittsburgh. Escape along this national highway proved a risky endeavor as a number of slavecatchers operated in this area. [59]

57. Thomas B. Searight, *The Old Pike: A History of the National Road, with Incidents, Accidents, and Anecdotes Thereon* (Uniontown, PA: Author, 1894), 13, 109.

58. Searight, *The Old Pike*, 120-121.

59. "Letter from The Editor—No. 5.," *Spirit of Liberty*, June 18, 1842; Charles A. Garlick, *Life, Including His Escape and Struggle for Liberty of Charles A. Garlick, Born a Slave in Old Virginia, Who Secured His Freedom by Running Away from His Master's Farm in 1843* (Jefferson, OH: J. A. Howells, 1902), 5-6.

Some enslaved people traveling along on the National Road sought freedom for themselves, even resorting to violence. In February 1828, an enslaved man named Christian Sharp (also referred to as Kit) murdered his enslaver Robert Carlisle. The Kentucky slaveholder had purchased Sharp and a number of other enslaved persons in Maryland, taking them westward to his estate. As some point during this journey, Sharp made his attempted escape, fleeing into the mountains, but was captured and jailed by local authorities. Upon hearing this news, Carlisle made his way to the jail, reclaimed his fugitive property, and shortly thereafter set out with Sharp to Kentucky. As night fell, Carlisle, with his bondsman in tow, stopped at a southwestern Pennsylvania tavern. The next day the pair continued their journey on foot. As Sharp walked behind Carlisle, he found a large hickory club, which he used to strike a number of lethal blows to the enslaver's head. Sharp fled the scene and was taken in by David Spriggs, who lived close to the national road. In order to dispel any suspicion, Sharp told Spriggs that two strangers had assaulted his enslaver. But that story soon fell apart when investigators inspected the crime scene.[60]

Sharp was brought before a Washington County Court where a jury was set to decide not only his fate but the meaning of free soil. The defense argued that Sharp's action should not be considered murder but manslaughter. At the time the act was committed, his lawyers contended, Sharp was lawfully a free man who had been "illegally restrained of this liberty" and "manacled and bound and driven through the country like a beast of burden." His defense team argued that Sharp's violent actions

60. *Democratic Eagle*, July 5, 1828.

were a reasonable response to the violation and denial of his right to personal liberty. But the members of the jury disagreed and found him guilty. A judge later sentenced him to execution. He went to the scaffold unrepentant about murdering his enslaver.[61]

The Sharp case illustrates that despite Pennsylvania's free soil status, some southwestern Pennsylvanians did not believe that enslaved African Americans' arrival into the Keystone State automatically granted them freedom. They also were unequivocal that bondspeople had no right to use violence to secure their freedom. For many southwestern Pennsylvanians living along the national road, there was an unwillingness to completely accept as legitimate the use of violence as a means by which African Americans could escape from bondage.[62]

CONCLUSION

At the time of Reverend Fayette Davis' death in 1847, African American life in Pittsburgh and in urban centers across the North were undergoing significant change. Many cities and towns were now well integrated into larger regional and national markets as a result of transportation and technological advances, not to mention changes in American law and new legal precedents that promoted greater capitalist exchange. Northern cities were now home to a growing working class of wage earners and to a growing free black population.

61. *Democratic Eagle*, July 5, 1828; "The Execution," *Democratic Eagle*, November 24, 1828.

62. *Democratic Eagle*, July 5, 1828.

As black slavery and servitude declined across southwestern Pennsylvania and the North, African Americans experienced challenges in their transition to freedom. Free blacks faced growing hostility from whites who became disillusioned about the possibility of African Americans becoming integrated into society as virtuous and productive citizens, leading to exclusionary or marginalizing practices in schools, voting rights, churches and other areas of public life. It was under these conditions that an African-American entrepreneurial elite and an aspirational black middle class emerged to articulate a black free labor ideology.

Black notions of free labor offered a radical vision of the west shaped by their own experience. Adherents of this ideology envisioned African Americans as farmers, independent producers, and successful wage-earning business people whose successes demonstrated that they were capable of exercising the responsibilities of citizenship. The means by which to achieve this end, however, aroused considerable debate among blacks, with Pittsburgh serving a leading role in these discussions.

Black southwestern Pennsylvanians who labored on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers sought to expand free soil via those waterways, by defending their right to work and travel along these rivers as free people, and demanding that states recognize them as free Pennsylvanians with all the rights and protections granted to residents of the Keystone State. At home, southwestern Pennsylvanians were also rigorously debating the meaning of free soil. Race, notions about property rights, and the region's ties to the west and south served an important role in how southwestern Pennsylvanians interpreted free soil and whether to expand its reach not only westward but southward in this part of the north-south borderland.

Chapter 3

Between East and West, North and South: Approaches to Antislavery and Black Politics in Southwestern Pennsylvania, 1816-1848

In late January 1837, abolitionists from across Pennsylvania gathered in Harrisburg to establish the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (PASS). The society's members called for the immediate end to black bondage and for equal rights. The PASS was the state auxiliary of the national American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), established in 1833 and led by Bostonian abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. The AASS and PASS represented a new wave of antislavery activism, known as Garrisonian or immediate abolition, named for the society's nationally renowned leader. Garrisonian abolitionism was inspired by black opposition to slavery which rejected earlier calls for gradual abolition. This new wave of abolitionism first flourished in Massachusetts, which became the center of immediate abolition, and later spreading across the north. By the early 1840s, the AASS was plagued by factionalism as ideological divisions emerged surrounding the role of women within the antislavery movement, participation in party-politics, non-resistance, and anti-clericalism.[1]

This chapter examines five threads within the antislavery movement in southwestern Pennsylvania: Garrisonianism, evangelicalism, antislavery party politics, black abolitionism, and assistance to fugitive slaves. At the center of these different segments of antislavery activism was the issue of free soil, which was at risk

1. Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, *Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Convention, Assembled to Organized a State Anti-Slavery Society at Harrisburg, on the 31st of January and 1st, 2d and 3d of February 1837* (Philadelphia: Merrihew, 1837), 93-94.

of being undermined by slaveholders and which, for African Americans, was yet to be fully realized. The boundaries between different antislavery factions in southwestern Pennsylvania were never concrete.[2] In this part of Pennsylvania, activists had ties to abolitionists in the East and West, collaborating and exchanging ideas with these antislavery advocates. A closer examination of abolitionism in southwestern Pennsylvania illuminates how a counter-culture of opposition against slavery's influence and in favor of free soil was shaped by the region's geography and political environment through abolitionist activism. Abolitionists in this part of Pennsylvania, as in many parts of the north, crafted their own approach to fighting slavery and for free soil which included moral suasion, church-based activism, electoral politics, racial uplift, and assistance to fugitive slaves. This new wave of abolitionism intensified the struggle over free soil, as this new generation of abolitionists were willing to disregard enslavers' property claims to help escape slaves.

A CONTESTED ANTISLAVERY BATTLEGROUND: COLONIZATION AND IMMEDIATE ABOLITION IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

2. My framing of the abolitionist movement in southwestern Pennsylvania is influenced by a body of recent scholarship which has shown that the divisions among antislavery activists were not as sharp as an earlier generation of historians have shown. These studies have made us reconsider our attempts at identifying a particular region with a specific antislavery faction. See for example, J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin: Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Stacey M. Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Milton C. Sernett, *North Star Country: Upstate New York and the Crusade for African American Freedom* (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002); W. Caleb McDaniel, "The Bonds and Boundaries of Antislavery," 4 no. 1 *Journal of the Civil War Era* (March 2014): 84-105.

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, a growing number of white antislavery activists and political and religious leaders from both the North and Upper South supported the colonization of free people of color to Africa. In 1816, a group of colonization advocates met in Washington D. C. where they established the American Colonization Society (ACS). White support for the ACS stemmed from a number of sources. For some, colonization could place slavery onto the slow path to extinction in parts of the Upper South by encouraging slaveholders to manumit their bondspeople. Others cited humanitarian reasons, noting that colonization would benefit both free blacks and Africans as educated free blacks would Christianize the continent allowing Africans to receive the benefits of "civilization." Colonization would also provide former slaves a place where they could fully enjoy their freedom, at a time when northern whites were becoming increasingly hostile towards free blacks. Another group of colonizationists, who also included slaveholders, were apprehensive about the possibility of a large-scale uprising by enslaved people. These fears were not unfounded, as the United States witnessed a series of slave revolts in the first decades on the nineteenth century.[3]

Beginning in July 1826, the ACS turned its attention to canvassing western Pennsylvania for support. In early fall 1826, the ACS sent Benjamin Orrs Peers, its

3. Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 106-111; Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005), 9-11; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (1976; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 28-30; Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 81-82; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Towards the Negro, 1550-1812* (1968; repr., Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 549-550, 552.

agent for the west, to build support for colonization among residents by promoting the principles and goals of the movement. The ACS hoped that Peers' visit would culminate in the creation of local auxiliaries and find subscribers to its publication the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*.[4]

At the start of his tour through southwestern Pennsylvania, Peers believed that his success in persuading residents to support colonization hinged on prominent Pittsburghers endorsing the ACS. In September 1826, Peers wrote to Ralph Randolph Gurley, ACS secretary and administrator, that if he could persuade the city's residents to sign memorials to convince Congress to act in support of colonization, then neighboring communities of Washington; Wheeling, Virginia; and Steubenville, Ohio, would soon follow given the city's regional influence. Pittsburgh was an important recruiting site for Peers as the Pennsylvania Supreme Court devoted a portion of its session to sitting in the city, allowing Peers to speak with a number of influential and respectable lawyers from across Western Pennsylvania.[5]

Between late September and October of 1826, Peers described his initial efforts to ACS officials in southwestern Pennsylvania as successful. He noted that at a Pittsburgh meeting one evening, a large crowd gathered where "a thousand voices unanimously" voted aye to the proposal of forming an auxiliary of the colonization society. The local chapter also gained support from Pittsburgh's most elite men. Peers predicted that upwards of 200 locals would join the chapter. From Pittsburgh, Peers

4. P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement: 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 136-137.

5. B. O. Peers to R. R. Gurley, September 20, 1826, Incoming Correspondence, 1819-1917, ser. 1 vol. 1., Reel 1, American Colonization Society Records, 1792-1964, Library of Congress.

went to Washington, Pennsylvania, where the town's leading men organized the Washington Colonization Society (WCS). He speculated that the WCS would grow to 500 members given the popularity of colonization in the town and throughout the county. At Brownsville, Peers succeed in establishing four local chapters. Even among southwestern Pennsylvania's small Quaker community, a few of its leaders became colonizationists and Peers predicted more of them would follow.[6]

By 1826, there was widespread support for colonization among white southwestern Pennsylvanians. The ACS had established local auxiliaries in Pittsburgh, Washington, Brownsville, Bridgeport, and Waynesburg. That same year, Pennsylvania colonizationists established the Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS) in Philadelphia, which was to serve as the state auxiliary of the ACS and coordinate colonization efforts among local chapters. However, when the PCS and local colonization societies attempted to appeal to African Americans for support, they encountered considerable opposition.[7]

In late August 1831, a group of black Pittsburghers assembled at the city's African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church to discuss colonization. The assembly unanimously rejected colonization, describing it as scheme to remove "the better informed part of the colored people out of these United States" in order to strengthen slavery. Black Pittsburghers declared themselves just as American as whites, no less

6. B. O. Peers to R. R. Gurley, September 26, 1826; B. O. Peers to R. R. Gurley, October 4, 1826, Incoming Correspondence, 1819-1917, ser. 1 vol. 1., Reel 1, American Colonization Society Records, 1792-1964, Library of Congress; Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement*, 138.

7. Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 54.

entitled to freely exercise their right to vote and receive equal protection from the federal government than any other citizen. They empathically dismissed emigration to Upper Canada or Haiti, resolving to "mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor, not to support a colony" and declaring to never leave their homes and resolving to die on American soil. These resolutions were more than just a deceleration of American nationality and a claim to citizenship rights, but a rejection of free soil notions rooted in "race-based environmental essentialism" espoused by many white colonizationists. These activists envisioned the nation as a space for whites, as blacks could only realize their full freedom in tropical climates. For many white Americans, colonization was part of a larger project to create a racially demarcated Atlantic.[8]

The black congregation at Pittsburgh's AME Church was part of a new wave of antislavery activism known as immediate abolition (immediatism). These abolitionists rejected the goals and tactics of earlier antislavery groups such as Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS), who advocated attacking slavery within the political and legal system. These earlier activists believed that the antislavery movement was to be led by educated, wealthy, and elite white men. On the other hand, second wave abolitionists sought an immediate end to slavery and racism, believing that slaveholding and racial prejudice were sinful. Immediate abolitionists sought to change the hearts of northerners indifferent or sympathetic to slavery through moral suasion by illustrating the true horrors surrounding black bondage.

8. "A Voice from the West," *Liberator*, September 17, 1831; Ikuko Asaka, *Tropical Freedom: Climate, Settler Colonialism, and Black Exclusion in the Age of Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 2-3, 40-45.

They did so by placing the testimony of former slaves before white audiences, using print culture (such as newspapers, pamphlets, almanacs), and lecturers to persuade their audiences to support immediate abolition.[9]

Immediate abolition first flourished in Massachusetts, where it became the center of this new wave of antislavery activism. In 1832, Massachusetts abolitionists created the regional New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS) and a year later, the national American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) to advance the cause of immediate emancipation. Both groups welcomed blacks and women among its members. William Lloyd Garrison, a Boston abolitionist, became immediate abolitionism's most prominent promoter through his newspaper *The Liberator* and as a founder of the AASS. This new wave of abolitionism had its roots in the slave rebellions and African American militancy of the 1820s, which pushed for immediate abolition and rejected colonization. Garrison, who was initially a colonizationist, was swayed by black abolitionists to join this new movement.[10]

In its formative years, African Americans provided critical support for Garrison's early abolitionist endeavors. For instance, the AASS relied heavily on black financial support and agents across the North, including Pittsburgh, home of southwestern Pennsylvania's largest free black community. In November 1833, John B. Vashon, the African American barber and businessman, sent $60 to the AASS, in

9. Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 5-8, 12-13.

10. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 120-129; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 195-196; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 14-19; Robert H. Abzug, "The Influence of Garrisonian Abolitionists' Fears of Slave Violence on the antislavery Argument, 1829-1840," *Journal of Negro History* 55, no. 1 (January 1970): 23-24.

addition to a loan he had previously provided at a time when, according to Garrison, the AASS was "struggling with great embarrassments." Vashon also distributed Garrison's writings among Pittsburgh's clergymen, seeking to persuade them to support immediate abolition. The city's black women engaged in antislavery activities too, establishing a female auxiliary of the AASS, raising funds, and disseminating antislavery tracts. In October 1833, black and white Pittsburgh abolitionists co-founded the Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society, an auxiliary of the AASS whose purpose was to bring about the immediate end to slavery and to procure equal rights for all Americans. The Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society also represented the free labor aspirations of African Americans, citing as one of its goals the creation of a manual labor school for black youth. The Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society hoped to bring congregations across all denominations into the abolitionist movement. The Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society was unique compared to other abolitionists groups because it included the city's black leaders and an AME minister among its board members. In southwestern Pennsylvania and throughout the state, membership in antislavery auxiliaries grew due to the work of its antislavery lecturers and local societies. By 1837, Pittsburghers joined with abolitionists from across the state in Harrisburg to establish the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (PASS).[11]

11. William Lloyd Garrison to John B. Vashon, November 5, 1833, Black Abolitionist Papers, Reel 11, Frame 341-342; William Lloyd Garrison, "Letters of William Lloyd Garrison to John B. Vashon," *Journal of Negro History* 12 no. 1 (January 1927): 34; Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 57-58; *Constitution of the Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society, Adopted October 4, 1833*. Folder 5, McClelland Family Papers Series II, First Generation 1821-1871, Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA. For an overview of women's role in the abolitionist movement see, Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

As the ranks of immediate abolitionists grew, a few southwestern Pennsylvania activists were confident enough to directly challenge the PCS and its local auxiliaries to a series of debates. In early January 1837, the Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society extended an invitation to colonization proponents. The PCS accepted, but suggested that the debate occur outside the region, either in Nashville, St. Louis, or Vicksburg, in order to attract a greater audience. Such a proposition suggests colonizationists' weak standing in many parts of southwestern Pennsylvania by the mid-1830s. In early May 1838, a pro-colonization advocate in Canonsburg noted that immediate abolitionists canvased the town with great zeal. He noted that southwestern Pennsylvania's abolitionists "were ready at all times and in every place, to disseminate their views" and that "the readiness with which abolitionists always act on the subject might put to the blush many of our nominal colonizationists." During the 1830s a series of debates did take place across the region between abolitionists and colonizationists which were publicized in the local press.[12]

In May 1838, Julius LeMoyne, a Washington County immediate abolitionist and PASS president, and John B. Pinney, a Pittsburgh minister and lecturer for the PCS, participated in a series of debates in Canonsburg. Southwestern Pennsylvania newspapers did not record what was said, but the antislavery organizations they were affiliated with suggest what they might have argued about and how they understood free soil. Pinney was a member of the Pittsburgh Colonization Society. At their meeting in May 1838, the society pledged to redouble its efforts to convince black

12. "Abolition in Pittsburgh," *Colonization Herald*, January 21, 1837; "From the Pittsburg Christian Herald--Colonization and Abolition," *Colonization Herald and General Register*, May 9, 1838.

southwestern Pennsylvanians of the "wisdom and beneficence of the Colonization scheme, and of the advantage to them becoming partakers of its certain and manifold advantages." One of those advantages mentioned by the Pittsburgh Colonization Society was the absence of racial barriers that hindered African Americans' ability for self improvement. LeMoyne disagreed. In an address to black Pennsylvanians at the PASS's annual meeting, in 1837, LeMoyne told his African American audience that he believed they could achieve equal rights. He advised African Americans to work towards their social and economic improvement by becoming mechanics and landowners, and by exhibiting thrift and respectable behavior. He discouraged black emigration, telling his African American audience that the United States was their country too. For LeMoyne and the PASS, colonization meant abandoning their quest to realize their free soil vision. Pinney and LeMoyne and the antislavery factions they represented provided two distinct visions of free soil for southwestern Pennsylvania regarding whether African Americans could achieve self improvement, becoming free laborers and citizens of Pennsylvania.[13]

Despite the PASS's growth, the society increasingly diverged along regional lines. The PASS recognized that the immense size of the state and the mountain barrier separating the eastern and western portion of the state made it difficult to coordinate antislavery action under one statewide abolitionist society. They responded by creating the Western Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society (WPASS)

13. "From the Pittsburg Christian Herald--Colonization and Abolition," *Colonization Herald and General Register*, May 9, 1838; "Colonization Society of Pittsburgh and Vicinity," *Colonization Herald and General Register*, June 6, 1838; Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, *Address to the Coloured People of the State of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Merrihew, 1837), 4-7.

which was subordinate to the PASS. However, problems soon emerged as abolitionists in the west found it difficult to obtain antislavery lecturers from the PASS in the East. In April 1838, the WPASS, frustrated by the inability to secure abolitionist lecturers from Philadelphia leaders, turned to Ohioans to fulfill their need. The WPASS acted increasingly independently from the PASS. In 1842, Ohio abolitionists established the Western Anti-Slavery Society, which sought to organize abolitionists across the entire Old Northwest. Shortly thereafter, western Pennsylvanians joined the society.[14]

Southwestern Pennsylvanians collaborated closely with abolitionists in the Old Northwest in advancing their free soil principles. For instance, at an August 1848 meeting of the Western Anti-Slavery Society, Benjamin Bown, a Pittsburgh abolitionist and society member, informed the audience of a recent rescue that occurred in the city. Months ago, Bown and a groups of Pittsburgh abolitionists learned that a young woman was owned by a minister in Martinsburg, Virginia. When they discovered that the young woman and her enslaver had arrived in the city, they liberated the young woman. At that same convention, the Western Anti-Slavery Society appointed Bown as one of its vice presidents, coordinating abolitionist activity in the organization. The selection of Bown is evidence of the close ties between southwestern Pennsylvania and abolitionists in the Old Northwest. The

14. *Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society Western District Minutes, 1837-1838*, October 13, 1837; April 7 1838; Thomas & Katherine Detre Library & Archives, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA; Ann Greenwood Wilmoth, "Pittsburgh and the Blacks: A Short History, 1780-1875" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1975), 78-79; David G. Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom: The Fugitive Slave Issue in South Central Pennsylvania, 1820-1870* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 83; Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse: 1830-1844* (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1957), 84; Robert S. Hochrieter, "The Pennsylvania Freeman, 1836-1854" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1980), 76-79.

affiliation southwestern Pennsylvanians established with abolitionists in the Old Northwest would have important consequences in other areas of antislavery activism.[15]

EVANGELICAL ABOLITION IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

The rise of evangelical abolitionism had its roots in the religious revivals of the 1820s and 1830s in a region of upstate New York known as the burned-over district. Like many Garrisonian abolitionists, evangelical abolitionists' calls for immediate abolition centered on the notion of "perfectionism," the belief that people were capable of living without sin. By persuading individuals to reject slavery and refusing to accommodate the wishes of enslavers, they could redeem the nation from sin, creating a perfected society hastening the millennium. However, unlike most Garrisonians, evangelical abolitionists concentrated their efforts upon pressuring churches to turn against slavery and assist fugitive slaves. Many evangelical abolitionists were troubled by Garrison's controversial polemics against ministers and support for radical social doctrines and causes such as women's rights. By the early 1830s, many Protestant evangelicals sought to bring their movement of revival and national regeneration to the west, a place they believed the nation's spiritual destiny was to be decided.[16]

15. Western Anti-Slavery Society Minute Book, June 1845-September 1857, August 17, 1848, Papers of the Western Anti-Slavery Society, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Wilmoth, "Pittsburgh and the Blacks," 89.

16. Merton L. Dillon, *The Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 28-29; J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism:*

Theodore Dwight Weld was one of the most prominent evangelical abolitionists in the west. Weld, who remained affiliated with Garrisonian abolitionists, recruited students at Oberlin College, a center of evangelical abolitionism, to join the AASS. Weld also sought adherents for the abolitionist cause in Ohio and eastern churches. In early June 1835, Weld traveled to Pittsburgh to attend a General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, a gathering that included southwestern Pennsylvania churches. Weld held two antislavery meetings to convince Presbyterians to support immediate abolition. In a letter to Elizur Wright, a New England abolitionist and member of the American and Foreign Antislavery Society, Weld remarked that 48 commissioners in the Presbyterian General Assembly now supported evangelical abolition, compared to just 2 ministers a year earlier. Weld noted a significant shift in antislavery activists's support—from colonization to immediate abolition. He made several additional visits to greater Pittsburg during the 1830s. One account from the *Pittsburgh Times* described Weld as a great orator whose logic and arguments were insightful and presented in a powerful and convincing manner. During one of his visits, Weld successfully persuaded a Pittsburgh congregation to dedicate themselves to the cause of immediate abolition.

College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 20; Walters, *The Anti-Slavery Appeal*, 11; Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionism: Its Direct Political Impact from Colonial Times into Reconstruction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 4, 52; Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University press, 1976), 10-12; Donald M. Scott, "Abolition as a Sacred Vocation," in *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspective on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 58-59, 67-68

Many of these evangelical abolitionists in southwestern Pennsylvania only worked to rid slavery's influence from within their churches.[17]

In Southwestern Pennsylvania, many Methodist congregations, one of the largest Protestant denominations in the region, were members of a synod or conference of churches that stretched into the south and westward into Virginia and Ohio. In order to preserve denominational unity in the wake of rising abolitionist sentiment, many Methodists supported colonization and other conservative measures, such as sponsoring missionary work among enslaved people, to appease abolitionists. However, many evangelical abolitionists grew unsatisfied with these antislavery-half measures, as well as the church's continued refusal to expel slaveholders from the church, support racial equality within the church, and receive antislavery petitions. In late May 1838, the General Conference of the Methodist Church gathered in Pittsburgh, where the issue of slavery was brought before the session by one church member. After hours of debate, one reverend presented a resolution that resolved the impasse. The General Conference of the Methodist Church endorsed the position that slavery was a moral sin, but believed that it could not be immediately abolished. The Conference decided that individual congregations should decide what actions its members should take against slavery.[18] By November 1842, a group of Methodists

17. Theodore Weld to Elizur Wright Jr., June 6, 1835, in *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina* Grimké Weld, and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844, vol. 1, ed. Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (New York: D. Appleton, 1934), 224-225; John L. Myers, "The Early Antislavery Agency System in Pennsylvania, 1833-1837," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 31, no. 1 (January 1964): 68-70; Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse*, 94; Owen W. Muelder, *Theodore Dwight Weld and the American Anti-Slavery Society* (Jefferson, NC: MacFarland, 2011), 58-59.

18. "Methodist Protestant Church," *Colonization Herald*, July 11, 1838.

frustrated with the church's unwillingness to embrace the abolitionist movement established their own antislavery sect: The Wesleyan Methodist Church.[19]

In the Pittsburgh Conference of the Methodist Church, which included Methodists in southwestern Pennsylvania, eastern Ohio, and northwestern Virginia, there was some support for abolitionism. In July 1841, a group of evangelical abolitionists gathered in Pittsburgh to establish the Preacher's Anti-Slavery Society. The society hoped to increase abolitionist sentiment among Methodists as well as enforce a prohibition on slaveholding among its members. These evangelical abolitionists recognized that ridding slavery and its influence from the Methodist Church would be an immense challenge, noting that slaveholders had a stranglehold over the influence of Methodist clergy and parishioners. In May 1842, the Pittsburgh Conference nominated two ministers as representatives to the Methodist General Conference who, according to abolitionist Reverend John Clark, "would betray the cause of right, their church and the slave for the sake of Methodist Unity." The Pittsburgh Conference also defrocked ministers who refused to compromise their abolitionist principles. In July 1841, Edward Smith, a Methodist preacher, was put on trial by the Pittsburgh Conference, charged with slandering the church and refusing to accept a post at a Virginia church that included slaveholding members.[20]

19. John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Pro-Slavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), 84-85.

20. *Spirit of Liberty*, August 20, 1842; "Methodist Protestant General Conference," *Spirt of Liberty*, May 21, 1842; Wilmoth, "Pittsburgh and the Blacks," 68; For The entire trial of Reverend Edward Smith see, Edward Smith, *Trial of the Rev. Edward Smith, Before the Pittsburgh Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, At the Conference of July, 1841: With the Sermon on Which the Principal Charge was Mainly predicated by Himself.* (Pittsburgh: Matthew M. Grant, 1841).

For these evangelical abolitionists, breaking the Methodist Church's ties to slavery was just one step towards realizing their free soil vision of racial equality. In some rural communities African Americans were too few in number to establish their own churches. Many worshiped with whites but were relegated to separate pews. In August 1843, a correspondent for the Pittsburgh abolitionist newspaper *Spirit of Liberty* arrived at a Methodist Church service in Saltsburg, Pennsylvania. During the service, he observed a black woman refuse to sit in the black-designated section of the church, or the "negro pew," behind the door of the sanctuary when ordered to do so by a white parishioner. Instead, she continued to sit behind her white friends. Suddenly, a white man dragged the woman by the arm to the black section of the church. As a member of the Methodist Church the woman was outraged and complained to her local minister. When news spread among other local Methodists, many members (both black and white) sought to secede from the Methodist Conference. Methodist churches were not the only Protestant denomination where the church's ties to slavery became a divisive issue and threatened Pennsylvania free soil.[21]

By the 1830s a growing number of Presbyterians in southwestern Pennsylvanians were troubled by their church's ties to slavery and its unwillingness to take forceful action against black bondage. Dissatisfied with the Presbyterian Church's moderate antislavery stance of colonization, a group of evangelical abolitionists gathered in Chillicothe, Ohio, in 1845 to establish their own

21. *Spirit of Liberty*, August 5, 1843.

ecclesiastical body, the Free Presbyterian Church. In southwestern Pennsylvania, many Presbyterians who were hostile to abolition denied evangelical abolitionists the use of their churches. When the Free Presbytery of Beaver, Pennsylvania, was formed in 1847, for instance, its members were forced to erect their own houses of worship where they could put their free soil principles into practice. Some evangelical abolitionists collaborated with churches outside the region in assisting fugitive slaves. In May 1847, LeMoyne, who was a member of a Presbyterian Church in Washington, Pennsylvania, received word from Thomas Lee, a fellow Presbyterian from Cadiz, Ohio, that an enslaved woman was making her way towards his part of Pennsylvania and that he should make arrangements for her arrival.[22]

Presbyterian and Methodist congregations of Southwestern Pennsylvania were members of a synod, or conference of churches, that stretched beyond the region into western Virginia and eastern Ohio. As part of the northern borderland, parishioners in these churches could not easily ignore slavery's influence within their communities and attempts to erode free soil. Many southwestern Pennsylvanians believed that evangelical abolitionists had to dedicate their attention to fostering immediate abolitionist sentiment within their congregations and throughout the denominations. Though not affiliated with many of these churches, black southwestern Pennsylvania abolitionists found many reasons to support the work of evangelical abolitionists.

22. Andrew E. Murray, *Presbyterians and the Negro: A History* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1966), 75-76, 93; Thomas Lee to F. J. LeMoyne, May 8, 1847, Box 24A, Folder 1, LeMoyne Collection, Washington County Historical Society, Washington, PA; Rev. A. Bradford to F. J. LeMoyne, August 3 1847, Box24A, Folder 1, LeMoyne Collection, Washington County Historical Society, Washington, PA

Black southwestern Pennsylvanians viewed the work of evangelical abolitionists as important towards realizing not only their free soil principles but also fulling their free labor vision. Oberlin Institute was central to this effort. Founded in December 1833 by evangelical abolitionists in Oberlin, Ohio, the school was one of the few open to African Americans and women. Educational opportunities for black Pittsburghers were limited as the city provided inadequate resources. In 1832, John B. Vashon and Lewis Woodson established a school for black children, the African Education Society, supported by the city's black community and white abolitionists. The school provided black students with a rudimentary education. Ambitious black students, such as George B. Vashon (son of John B. Vashon), seeking to further their education turned to the Oberlin Institute, where Vashon enrolled in 1840. Oberlin included manual labor as part of its curriculum. Many antislavery activists embraced manual labor schools believing that it would eliminate the belief among many whites that manual labor represented a degraded status. Proponents of these schools reasoned that by having white and black students learn and toil alongside each other, divisions along race and class lines would erode.[23]

Upon graduation, George B. Vashon returned to Pittsburgh to study law under city attorney Walter Forward. After completing his studies Vashon found himself

23. "Colored Children," *Liberator*, February 25, 1832; Pamela Annette Smoot, "Self Help and Institution Building in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1830-1945" (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 1999), 24-32; Paul N. D. Thornell, "The Absent Ones and the Providers: A Biography of the Vashons," *Journal of Negro History* 83, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 289-290; Catherine M. Hanchett, "George Boyer Vashon, 1824-1878: Black Educator, Poet, Fighter for Equal Rights-Part One," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 68 no. 3 (July 1985): 206-207; Gary J. Kornblith and Carol Lasser, *Elusive Utopia: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Oberlin, Ohio* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2018), 15, 33; Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1998), 83-84.

unable to practice law in Pennsylvania because of his race. In the eyes of many black southwestern Pennsylvanians, Oberlin provided African Americans a route to achieving a free labor status that could be used as a claim for equal rights. However, as Vashon and many black southwestern Pennsylvanians discovered, fulfilling this free labor vision could not be realized as long as free soil was limited to the absence of slavery and not full and equal citizenship.[24]

Though many churches in southwestern Pennsylvanians joined evangelical and Garrisonian abolitionists, most remained hostile to immediate abolition and abolitionist free soil principles. For instance, when Garrison and Douglass arrived in Pittsburgh in early August 1847 as part of their antislavery tour through the west, many of the city's churches prohibited them from giving their antislavery lectures before their congregations. After their stay in Pittsburgh, the two men, along with a group of black Pittsburgh abolitionists, traveled to Beaver and New Brighton by steamship. Upon reaching those two towns they found that local churches had closed their doors to abolitionist meetings.[25]

BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: ANTISLAVERY PARTY POLITICS IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

24. Thornell, "The Absent Ones and the Providers," 290-291; Hanchett, "George Boyer Vashon, 1824-1878," 208.

25. Frederick Douglass to Sydney H. Gay, Pittsburgh, Pa, August 13, 1847, in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series Three, Correspondence, Volume 1: 1842-1852*, ed. John R. McKivigan (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 227-231; Frederick Douglass, "Western Tour," September 9, 1847, *Pennsylvania Freeman*; Ira V. Brown, "An Antislavery Journey: Garrison and Douglass in Pennsylvania, 1847," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 4 (2000): 543-544, 546; Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1998), 366.

By the late 1830s a growing number of abolitionists had become frustrated with the direction of the AASS. Many Garrisonian and evangelical abolitionists complained about the limited progress made by the AASS in bringing slavery to an end. Some of these abolitionists turned to third-party politics as a means of achieving an end to slavery.

Abolitionists desired to establish a third party for a number of reasons. First, by the late 1830s, many antislavery activists believed that their current political tactics such as petitioning and the questioning system, a process whereby abolitionists formally presented questions to candidates in order to gauge their position on certain antislavery issues, were largely ineffective. Second, there was a growing belief that slavery was not just a moral but also a political evil, requiring both a moral and political solution to rid the nation of black bondage. According to these abolitionists, if an antislavery third party received enough votes to influence the outcome of an election, one of the two major parties would be pressured into adopting an antislavery position. Finally, proponents of an antislavery third party were encouraged by the recent election to Congress in 1838 of abolitionists in Vermont, Massachusetts, New York, and Ohio.[26]

26. Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 10-13; Alan M. Kraut, "Partisanship and Principles: The Liberty Party in Antebellum Political Culture," in *Crusaders and Compromisers: Essays on the Relationship of the Anti-Slavery Struggle to the Antebellum Party System*, ed. Alan M. Kraut (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 73-74; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 47-48, 58.

On April 1, 1840, abolitionists gathered in upstate New York, a region where support for an antislavery third party was strongest among abolitionists, to establish the Liberty Party. However, among many immediate abolitionists, the formation of the Liberty Party proved controversial. Some immediate abolitionists rejected forming an antislavery third party, believing that embracing any political action was sinful as it required engaging with a government that sanctioned black bondage. Garrison was not opposed to individuals engaging in political activity and he believed that abolitionists had a right to establish a third party, especially if neither of the major parties were adequately antislavery. What Garrison and others opposed was having the AASS associated with a political party. Immediate abolitionists wanted to limit their position to declaring that slavery was sinful and that it should be immediately abolished. They believed that by adopting this broad stance, they could hold a diverse group of abolitionists together. They therefore rejected the notion that the AASS should become involved in party politics as some Liberty Party members wished.[27]

The Liberty Party found strong support among many southwestern Pennsylvania abolitionists. Given the history of the WPASS, this was no surprise because, unlike its eastern counterpart, immediate abolitionists were active in antislavery party politics. In statewide and local elections, the WPASS sought to interrogate candidates in order to determine their stance on certain antislavery issues. Some of these questions were related to free soil. For example, months before the

27. Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850* (1967; repr., Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1989), 118-119, 121-123, 136; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 46; Carleton Mabee, *Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 Through the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 244-246.

1838 gubernatorial election, the WPASS sought to learn if either candidate supported jury trials for persons accused of being fugitive slaves. Pittsburgh abolitionists questioned mayoral candidates, William W. Irvin and John Birmingham, to see whether they believed the city's mayor was required to protect the rights of all residents regardless of race. They also hoped to learn whether both men would abide by Pennsylvania's personal liberty laws which provided legal protection to alleged fugitive slaves.[28]

Despite the Liberty Party's growing popularity among immediate abolitionists, some members of the WPASS continue to express concerns about turning immediate abolition into a political enterprise. In December 1839, Francis J. LeMoyne wrote to James G. Birney, the Liberty Party's standard bearer in the upcoming presidential election, to express the view that creating an antislavery party was "inexpedient and premature." LeMoyne feared that associating immediate abolition with a political party would create division among antislavery activists and cause them to compromise their abolitionist principles in order to attract additional political support. He also believed such action lacked popular support among abolitionists, as most abolitionists considered their movement a religious enterprise. For LeMoyne, Liberty Party members were unprepared to mount a campaign as they were too few in number and it would be difficult to overcome the loyalty that many voters had to the two parties. However, LeMoyne was realistic, noting that, given the situation abolitionists faced, "the exigency may come" when they will likely have to

28. "Important Correspondence," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, January 9, 1840; Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society Western District Minutes, 1837-1838, March 22, 1838.

establish their own antislavery party. If and when that moment occurred, LeMoyne was adamant that abolitionists not abandon or compromise their demand for immediate abolition.[29]

After 1840, LeMoyne's reservations about joining an antislavery third party disappeared when it did better than expected in the elections that year. The party was able to make electoral strides while staying true to its moral purpose. In 1841, LeMoyne accepted the party's nomination for Pennsylvania governor. Though he was defeated that fall, LeMoyne and many southwestern Pennsylvanians continued to campaign tirelessly in support of the Liberty Party while working to ensure that the antislavery party remained true to its abolitionist principles.[30]

LeMoyne and other abolitionists were right to be concerned. Liberty Party members in the Old Northwest actively solicited western Pennsylvanians for their support. The Liberty Party leadership in the west was, for the most part, much more conservative than its eastern counterpart, given the greater intensity of white hostility towards African Americans. Many westerners such as Gamaliel Bailey, Thomas Morris, and Salmon P. Chase, sought to make more moderate appeals by seeking not to overthrow slavery everywhere it existed but simply to end slaveholder influence over the federal government. LeMoyne adamantly challenged moderate sentiments which suggested that under the Constitution, slaveholders could use the law to

29. Francis J. LeMoyne to James G. Birney, December 10, 1839, in *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, vol. 1, (1938; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966), 511-514; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 62.

30. Margaret C. McCulloch, *Fearless Advocate of the Right: The Life of Francis Julius, M.D., 1798-1879* (Boston: Christopher Publishing, 1941), 138-139.

recover an enslaved person who fled to a free state. To LeMoyne and others, such a ruling undermined free soil across the North. [31]

Like many white abolitionists, some black activists initially questioned whether the cause of immediate abolition should be associated with a political party. In November 1839, Lewis Woodson expressed his concern in a letter to the *Colored American* that abolitionists were allowing antislavery party politics to take precedence over moral suasion. He recognized that some abolitionists felt that since slavery was "sanctioned and regulated by law" political action was needed to repeal these laws that undergird black bondage. However, Woodson argued that abolitionists should dedicate their time to challenging "corrupt moral sentiment," as enslavers engaged in "physically bad deed[s]" to assert control over black bodies. By changing the moral behavior of slaveholders, they would reject the immoral actions predicated on violence that were a defining feature of the slave system, leading to its abolition. For Woodson, morally good men could not and would not engage in immoral acts that would allow slavery to survive.

Woodson believed that the best way to oppose this "corrupt moral sentiment" was to engage in challenging the nation's churches which gave sanction to slavery which hindered even modest antislavery efforts. Woodson argued that abolitionists could only be successful if they devoted their primary energies to moral rather than political action. He warned readers that it would be foolish if abolitionists continued

31. Lewis Tappan to Francis J. LeMoyne, February 10, 1847, LeMoyne Collection, Box A-24, Folder 1, Washington County Historical Society, Washington, PA; [unknown] to Francis J. LeMoyne, June 6, 1847, LeMoyne Collection, Box A-24, Forlder 1; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 88-95.

to bicker over which course of action to prioritize, warning that it would weaken the movement. Woodson's preference for moral action was not a complete rejection of politics.[32]

Over time, black skepticism about supporting an antislavery third party disappeared. Many black abolitionists came to view both Whig and Democratic parties as beholden to slaveholding and northern white racist interests. They also believed that if the Liberty Party was able to achieve some electoral success, the party could help restore African Americans' citizenship rights. Though disenfranchised in Pennsylvania, black abolitionists participated in Liberty Party meetings and campaigned extensively on behalf of the party. In 1841, Martin Delany traveled across the greater Pittsburgh area "distributing handbills, knocking on doors, urging people to turn out for rallies" in support of the Liberty Party's candidate for governor. In late August 1844, Lewis Woodson, now a supporter of the antislavery political party, addressed a Liberty Party meeting in Pittsburgh. The event was considered by observers to be one the city's largest antislavery gatherings.[33]

Black southwestern Pennsylvanians sought to ensure that Liberty Party members did not abandon their political stance on immediate abolition, in order to appeal to more moderate antislavery voters. In early July 1848, Martin Delany arrived in Sandusky, Ohio, on his way back from a Liberty Party Convention as a

32. "Essay by Lewis Woodson, 29 November 1839," in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Volume III, The United States, 1830-1846*, ed. C. Peter Ripley et., al (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 323-325.

33. *Christian Freeman*, September 5, 1844; Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848*, 247-248; Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robison Delany, 1812-1885* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 76.

correspondent for Frederick Douglass newspaper, *The North Star*. By 1848, many Liberty Party members were tempted to join the more moderate Free Soil Party which sought to prohibit slavery only in the western territories and which was largely silent on the issue of black rights. Delany advised Liberty Party voters not to abandon the party's platform for the complete and immediate abolition of black bondage. Delany warned that if they did so they would "cease to be the friends of the oppressed, and, like the other parties, stand as despots and tyrants, resting in very indifference, with their horrible weight upon crushed and outraged humanity." Delany implored Liberty Party members to continue to speak more about the plight of the enslaved and discrimination faced by free blacks. He suggested that if abolitionists were no longer willing to advance the cause of black freedom in electoral politics, they should disband the party.[34]

The leadership of the Pittsburgh Liberty Party also sought to ensure that its members did not forget their party's central purpose, advocating for the immediate end to slavery. They did so by ensuring that their meetings coincided with the city's First of August Celebrations. This event, also known as Emancipation Day, was an important day for northern free black communities. It was a time when African Americans gathered to commemorate the abolition of slavery in the British Caribbean which had taken place on August 1, 1834. Beyond selecting a slate of candidates for upcoming elections and addressing other official party business, Emancipation Day was an opportunity for Pittsburgh Liberty Party members to reach a wider abolitionist

34. *North Star*, July 1, 1848.

audience. For instance, at a First of August meeting in 1842, the city hosted two large abolitionist gatherings. Liberty Party members who attended these celebrations were reminded not to be distracted by other political issues. At an 1842 Emancipation Day celebration in Pittsburgh, a member of the local antislavery society told the audience that their work would never be done until the enslaved were free.[35]

Despite these attempts, Liberty Party members in southwestern Pennsylvania struggled to gain attention and support from potential voters. In December 1843, Joseph P. Gazzam, a Pittsburgh doctor and manager for the AASS, wrote to Birney that a few members of the old anti-Masonic Party in Allegheny County would refuse to support the Whigs if they nominated a slaveholding mason for president. These anti-Masons were primed to join the Liberty Party on one condition: they needed to know Birney's stance on masonry. Gazzam assured Birney that the party's current members were not concerned about his position on the issue, but advised the candidate that a response to this inquiry would greatly assist the party in the county. A year later, Reese Fleeson, a newspaper editor and another Pittsburgh abolitionist, also noted that most anti-masons across the region, especially in Allegheny County, were antislavery but their support was contingent upon whether the party's nominee supported their cause.[36]

Anti-masonry was not the only issue potential antislavery voters wanted the Liberty Party to address. Months before the 1844 elections, Russell Errett, the

35. "The First of August," *Spirit of Liberty*, August 6, 1842.

36. Joseph P. Gazzam to James G. Birney, December 27, 1843, in *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, ed. Dwight L. Dumond, vol. 2 (1938; repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966) 765-766; Reese C. Fleeson to James G. Birney, January 10, 1844, in *Letters of James Gillespie Birney* vol. 2, 773.

chairman of the Western Pennsylvania Liberty Party Committee, discovered that many abolitionists were open to supporting the Liberty Party. However, these abolitionists would not fully commit to voting for the Liberty ticket unless the party supported the tariff. Errett informed Birney that while canvassing for votes across the region, these potential members constantly wanted to discuss the tariff. However, some antislavery activists were unwilling to support the party if it meant abandoning the tariff. Walter Forward, a prominent Pittsburgh lawyer and proponent of colonization, refused to support the party.[37]

Though some southwestern Pennsylvanian voters harbored antislavery sympathies, their support for the Liberty Party was not guaranteed. As many party members discovered, these men were not single-issue voters. They discovered that taking a position on anti-masonry or the tariff could either alienate potential antislavery voters or overshadow or weaken the party's central platform: the immediate abolition of black bondage. However, some Liberty Party activists in southwestern Pennsylvania refused to abandon moral suasion, which underpinned immediate abolition, in their appeals for political support.

One of those abolitionists who effectively infused the moral rhetoric of immediate abolition with antislavery party politics was Jane Grey Swisshelm, a white Pittsburgh journalist and editor of the abolitionist newspaper, *Saturday Visiter*. Swisshelm was born in Pittsburgh in 1815. In 1836, she married James Swisshelm, a farmer. Two years later, the couple moved to Louisville, Kentucky, where James

37. Russell Errett to James G. Birney, August 27, 1844.

entered into an unsuccessful business venture with his brother, Samuel. It was in this slave society that Swisshelm directly witnessed the inhumanity of black bondage. In her 1880 autobiography, *Half a Century*, Swisshelm recalled that one day at the boarding house where she and her husband resided the white hostess had savagely flogged her bondswoman Martha for refusing to work because she was ill. After witnessing such brutality, Swisshelm resolved that she would work to bring "deliverance to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."[38]

In 1839, Swisshelm returned to Pittsburgh to care for her ailing mother who died in 1840. She bequeathed to Jane a small inheritance. Shortly thereafter, Swisshelm divorced her husband and began writing stories, poems, and essays for local Pittsburgh newspapers that promoted social reform, women's rights, and abolition. In 1847, she used the money from her mother's estate to purchase the *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*. Under her editorship the paper promoted both the Liberty Party and immediate abolition.[39]

Swisshelm's writings in the Pittsburgh press contained many themes found in immediate abolitionist and political antislavery discourses. For instance, she endorsed the notion of higher law, a belief espoused by abolitionists that they were not obligated to follow or uphold laws that defended black bondage, because they violated their moral conscience. Many of her writings also spoke of slavery

38. Jane Grey Swisshelm, *Half A Century* (Chicago: Jansen, 1880), 55-57; Sylvia D. Hoffert, *Jane Grey Swisshelm: An Unconventional Life, 1815-1884* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1-2.

39. Hoffert, *Jane Grey Swisshelm*, 106-107; Fredrick J. Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 138-139, 143-145.

corrupting the morals of southerners, an argument many antislavery politicians used in their speeches. Her melding of these two themes in antislavery discourse together can also be found in her commentary against the rendition of fugitive slaves. Swisshelm argued that returning runaway bondspeople was immoral because it tore free black households apart. By framing her argument in terms of the threat enslavers posed to the home and to women's domestic sphere, Swisshelm was able to employ a political and moral argument against slavery without transgressing traditional gender boundaries.[40]

Swisshelm not only sought to enlist men to support the antislavery cause, but also welcomed the voices of women and African Americans who worked to persuade others to support an abolitionist political party. In an 1848 letter to the *Saturday Visiter,* the wife of a subscriber to the newspaper encouraged readers that their commitment to human freedom should supersede loyalty to a political party. The woman was outraged that free soil Democrats abandoned their proposed proviso which prohibited slavery from any territory acquired by the United States after its war with Mexico. These Democrats succumbed to the demands of their pro-slavery leaders for party unity, who deemed the proviso a divisive issue. She called on free soil Democrats to cease being "slaves to party" and to support the proviso. Black Pittsburghers such as Martin Delany viewed Swisshelm as a personal friend and

40. Michael D. Pierson, "Between Antislavery and Abolition: The Politics and Rhetoric of Jane Grey Swisshelm," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 60, no. 3 (July 1993): 308-310; Blue, *No Taint of Compromise,* 145, 147.

important ally in bringing the abolitionists movement and African American notions of free soil and free labor to white audiences.[41]

Despite strong support for political antislavery among southwestern Pennsylvanians, the Liberty Party reached its peak in the state in 1844, during the gubernatorial and presidential elections that fall, capturing 0.8% and 1% of the vote respectively. Its support was concentrated in Allegheny and Indiana Counties. In the end, the Liberty Party in southwestern Pennsylvania failed to achieve widespread influence that would allow it to exact concessions from political parties in the state legislature. The party was also plagued by divisions between its eastern and western branches as both nominated antislavery candidates for political races. However, the rise of the Liberty Party in western Pennsylvania was significant because it represented a new form of antislavery politics that combined the moralism of immediate abolition with party politics. The antislavery party was an important force in compelling political candidates to state their position on slavery and free soil. For southwestern Pennsylvania's immediate abolitionists, the Liberty Party was a vehicle they used to protect and advance a more inclusive vision of free soil.[42]

41. "For the Saturday Visiter," *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*, February 26, 1848; *North Star*, January 14, 1848; *North Star*, January 24, 1848. Like many white abolitionists, Swisshelm at times failed to live up to African Americans' free soil vision. Swisshelm sought to disassociate the women's rights movement from the goals of black abolitionists who demanded an end to racial and gender discrimination. For Swisshelm, white women risked failure if they linked their cause to abolitionism for fear of losing popular support and exposure to charges of promoting racial amalgamation by their opponents. Swisshelm believed that securing white women's rights took priority over the interests of black women; Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), 125; Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 91-93.

42. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848*, 153-154, 309-310; "State Liberty Convention in Pennsylvania," *National Era*, April 29, 1847.

BLACK SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVNAIANS AND THE POLITICS OF MORAL REFORM AND BLACK NATIONALISM

Antebellum northern black politics was not just defined by the movement to abolish slavery and antislavery party politics, but the struggle for citizenship rights for all African Americans. By the time immediate abolitionists established the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) in 1833, several northern states had enacted racially discriminatory statutes.[43] As historian Patrick Rael notes, northern whites engaged in a "racial synecdoche" where they characterized the misdeeds of a few African Americans as representative of all blacks, providing a justification for enslavement and anti-black racism.[44] For many African Americans, racial uplift, or respectability politics, severed as a means by which they could undercut white racism while proving themselves capable of carrying out the responsibilities of citizenship.

In June 1835, black abolitionists primarily from the eastern cities gathered at Wesley Church in Philadelphia where they established the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS). The society's goal was to promote racial uplift through "education, temperance, economy, and universal liberty." The AMRS believed that, if African Americans achieved moral elevation and self improvement, blacks could achieve full

43. For an overview of the history of these anti-black laws and African American opposition against these statutes, see Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

44. Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 179-180.

citizenship rights as well as bring an end to black bondage. The leadership of the AMRS was comprised of black Philadelphians. Under their direction, the society sought the support and participation of all people in its affairs "without distinction of caste or complexion." The following year, Philadelphia's black leaders invited whites to participate as convention delegates at the AMRS meeting held in the city in early August. This action caused considerable debate among free blacks over whether the AMRS should be a racially integrated society dedicated to universal principles. It was an issue on which black southwestern Pennsylvanians differed from their Philadelphia counterparts.[45]

In late December 1836, black Pittsburghers met at the city's AME church where they established a local chapter of the AMRS. Members of the Pittsburgh Moral Reform Society expressed their support for the parent society's objective of promoting moral and intellectual improvement. However, the Pittsburgh auxiliary believed that the project of moral reform should be an African American enterprise, expressing their hope that the AMRS would "soon become the centre [sic.] of union for the whole colored population of our land." William Whipper, a wealthy black Philadelphia businessman and founder of the AMRS, was against concentrating the society's moral reform efforts to just African Americans. Whipper believed that by

45. *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color in the United States, Held by Adjournments, In the Wesley Church, Philadelphia . . . 1835* (Philadelphia: William P. Gibbons, 1835), 23-25, 28; Philos, "Definite Exertions for the Elevation of Colored Men," *Colored American*, February 10, 1838; Howard H. Bell, "The American Moral Reform Society, 1836-1841," *Journal of Negro History*, 27, no. 1 (Winter 1958): 34-35; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Black's Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York: Atheneum, 1974), 101-102; Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 109.

turning the AMRS into a racially exclusive movement, African Americans would expose themselves to charges of hypocrisy. He noted that blacks could not challenge white Americans' discriminatory practices and laws while also seeking to establish racially separate societies. Whipper believed that complete freedom for African Americans depended on a national moral transformation and improvement.[46]

Lewis Woodson, the Pittsburgh Moral Reform Society's corresponding secretary, defended the auxiliary's objective of dedicating moral reform efforts exclusively towards racial uplift. Woodson believed that African Americans were a distinct class of people because of their shared experience of being held in bondage for generations and the prejudice they continued to endure after servitude. This produced a unique set of challenges for free blacks in achieving moral, social, and economic elevation. He argued that free blacks should create their own schools, churches, and newspapers for their moral elevation and self improvement. He recognized that African Americans needed to act in collaboration with each other, acknowledging that free black communities were "scattered over a vast surface of country, and settled in small communities at a great distance from each other, knowing little of each other." Woodson noted that in many of these places, racial prejudice was too great to overcome without undertaking united and coordinated action across free black communities. [47]

46. "Moral Reform Society of Pittsburgh," *National Enquirer*, January 7, 1837; Rita Roberts, *Evangelicalism and the Politics of Reform in Northern Black Thought, 1776-1863* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 107; Rael, *Black Identity and Protest*, 49-50.

47. Augustine, "Moral Work for Colored Men," *Colored American*, December 2, 1837; Augustine, "Moral Work for Colored Men," *Colored American*, February 10, 1838; Floyd J. Miller, "'The Father of Black Nationalism': Another Contender," *Civil War History* 17, no. 4 (1971): 311-

Woodson's support for establishing the AMRS along racially exclusive lines was influenced by his belief in black nationalism. Adherents of this ideology believed that people of African-descent were a distinct people because of their shared heritage and therefore had a common destiny. Black nationalists such as Woodson believed that African Americans needed to establish their own racial uplift efforts amidst an anti-black society. Woodson's black nationalist thought was shaped by his experience in Ohio. It was here where, before he moved to Pittsburgh, he had witnessed African Americans in a number of small communities successfully adopt their own efforts of self improvement. The issue over whether the AMRS should be a racially based or integrated society was just one area of debate between black Philadelphians and Pittsburghers.

In 1837, the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention proposed a new state constitution disfranchising black men.[48] Across the state, African Americans held meetings to decide what course of action to take. In the state's two largest black communities, African Americans were divided over what measures they should adopt to reobtain suffrage. Black Philadelphians advocated petitioning the state legislature whereas Pittsburghers backed a statewide convention of African Americans.[49]

313; Gayle T. Tate, "Prophesy and Transformation: The Contours of Lewis Woodson's Nationalism," *Journal of Black Studies* 29, no. 2 (November 1998): 213-214.

48. A year later, white Pennsylvanians voted overwhelming in favor of the proposed constitution, stripping black men of their right to vote.

49. "Pennsylvania Convention," *Colored American,* July 1, 1837; *Augustine*, "The Right of Suffrage in Pennsylvania," *Colored American*, March 6, 1841.

Lewis Woodson provided three reasons as to why he and other blacks in southwestern Pennsylvania advocated a convention. First, he was skeptical that the state Constitution would be altered, because to do so they would require support from a majority of white Pennsylvanians. Second, despite meetings in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Allegheny, and Pitt Township, Woodson was concerned that many blacks had little interest in the campaign for voting rights. He believed that a state convention could arouse greater African American support for a movement to reobtain suffrage. Finally, a gathering of black Pennsylvanians would raise white awareness and support for black suffrage. Appealing to whites outside the state legislature was crucial as the new constitution was not yet submitted to Pennsylvanians for adoption.[50]

Disagreements between black Pittsburghers and Philadelphians over how to reobtain suffrage and the purpose of the AMRS were more than just ideological disputes over political strategy.[51] As literary scholar Robert Levine argues, disputes between black leaders during the antebellum period centered not on tactics but on

50. Augustine, "The Right of Suffrage in Pennsylvania," *Colored American*, March 6, 1841.

51. Recent scholars have shown that black leaders who advocated certain approaches to fighting slavery and for black rights cannot be easily placed into neat ideological binaries. As Erica Ball notes, racial uplift was just one among many political strategies African Americans employed alongside black nationalism, or other, more radical and aggressive forms of activism. Woodson was both an ardent black nationalist and proponent of respectability politics. Though black Pittsburghers favored a black convention as a first step in organizing against disenfranchisement, they did not reject petitioning the state legislature. In 1837 and 1841 black Pittsburghers sent memorials to the state legislature explaining why they should be enfranchised; Erica Ball, *To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Middle Class* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 4-7; Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 137-138; Eric Ledell Smith, "The Pittsburgh Memorial: A Forgotten Document of Pittsburgh History," *Pittsburgh History* 80, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 106; "Memorial of the Free Citizens of Color in Pittsburgh and its Vicinity Relative to the Right of Suffrage," Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention, Box 3, RG5-Records of the Constitutional Convention and the Council of Censors, 1837-1838.

black representational politics. Black leaders established the legitimacy of their leadership within their communities through a variety of means, such as their writings in the press and through their narratives of enslavement. Through these mediums aspiring black leaders sought to present themselves as their community's representatives. Black Philadelphia leaders, who had for so long dominated the abolitionist movement in Pennsylvania, were unable to establish their clout over black southwestern Pennsylvanians. For black Pittsburghers, leaders such as Woodson and others in the region, spoke to their experiences shaped by southwestern Pennsylvania's ties to the West.[52]

PENNSYLVANIA ABOLITIONISM AND THE GROWING CRISIS OF FREE SOIL

The growth of immediate abolitionism witnessed more abolitionists from across different antislavery factions increasingly assist fugitive slaves to freedom, sometimes in open defiance of the law, based on the immediate abolitionist principle of higher law. These abolitionists also attempted to ensure that those former bondspeople who decided to remain in this part of the northern borderland were protected from being re-enslaved. This sanctuary for escaped bondspeople, along with other havens for fugitive slaves across the lower North, was cause for concern among enslavers. Immediate abolitionists and escaped bondspeople brought greater public

52. Robert S. Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass and the Politics of Representative Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 5-6, 12-13.

attention to the issue of free soil, which would have important consequence for black freedom in southwestern Pennsylvania.

On an autumn night in 1837, a group of enslaved men, women, and children made their escape near Wheeling. Their owners speculated that the group was secreted by sympathetic residents into West Middleton, just a few miles across the Virginia-Pennsylvania border. They feared that once across the border they would continue onward to Canada either by way of Ohio or Pennsylvania, traveling through Beaver and Pittsburgh then probably towards Mercer. These Virginia enslavers were right to suspect that their bondspeople were receiving assistance from abolitionists in Washington County. For instance, J Heron Foster, a Pittsburgh journalist and editor of the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, received word from the former newspaper editor in Wheeling, Virginia, that a slavecatcher was on his way towards Washington to retrieve a runaway bondsperson. Foster alerted Francis LeMoyne of the man's arrival and that black townspeople should be vigilant.[53]

In another instance, just around dusk in April 1842, an abolitionist in New Brighton found a runaway slave at their doorstep. The fugitive slave, along with another enslaved man, made their escape not far from Wheeling, Virginia, for Canada. On their way towards Pennsylvania, their owner and his posse of slavecatchers caught up with them, striking the two men with clubs. For one of the enslaved men, the blow was so severe that he could not continue onward, finding himself bound by the enslavers and returned into bondage. The other enslaved man

53. "Don't Want to Be Free," *Liberator*, November 24, 1837.

successfully arrived at New Brighton at the home of a local abolitionist. The escaped slave told his host that "slavery could not possibly exist were it not for the aid of the North, and 'the men here were the slaveholder's *dogs*, set here to chase back into slavery those so lucky to escape.'" The abolitionist reassured his guest that abolitionist sentiment was rapidly growing throughout the North.[54]

Despite many southwestern Pennsylvanians' willingness to assist African Americans fleeing from bondage, this sentiment did not deter slaveholders and slavecatchers from entering the region in order to return these freedpeople to bondage. On a spring night, the black residents of Pittsburgh's fifth ward noticed a suspicious man lurking about their neighborhood. They soon discovered that the man was a slavecatcher from the South. The enslaver sought assistance from a city watchman, offering him $25 to help him capture the alleged runaway. The officer recused to "aid in any such dirty work." The lieutenant of Pittsburgh's night watch warned the slavecatcher that if he did not leave the city, he would be jailed. In many communities such as Pittsburgh, many local officials were willing to support African Americans and their white allies' free soil demands by refusing to assist enslavers recapture their escape property.[55]

Lewis Woodson went further than encouraging northerners refuse to assist slavecatchers, advocating for additional statutes that reflected abolitionist free soil principles. Woodson supported a law that prohibited the arrest of persons who assisted fugitive slaves and harsh penalties for those who violated it. Woodson's legal

54. "A Stranger," *Spirit of Liberty*, April 30, 1842,

55. "A Kidnapper," *Spirit of Liberty*, May 14, 1842.

reasoning was based on the notion of higher law, where "freedom is the natural inherent right of all men. No law or power under heaven can justly deprive the innocent and unoffending of this right. And when deprived of it, the law of nature, and the law of God, not only allow, but impel them to, the use of all just and fair means to obtain it…." For Woodson, legal barriers that hindered fugitive slave escapes or laws that permitted the arrest and return of runaway African Americans into bondage in free soil jurisdictions made them no better than the laws of slaveholding states and territory that upheld black enslavement. According to Woodson, this compromise of free soil principles for the sake of national union represented an "unrighteous" compact that he refused to support, prioritizing black free soil claims by assisting escaped slaves over the interests of enslavers.[56]

The free soil legal principles championed by Woodson and other abolitionists faced an uncertain future when further east, in south central Pennsylvania, an attempted rendition of an enslaved black woman touched off a court case that reached the Supreme Court which had important consequences for the future of northern free soil.

In 1832, Margaret Morgan, an enslaved woman, left Maryland to join her freeborn husband in Pennsylvania, where she had given birth to several children. John Ashmore, her owner, never formally emancipated Margaret's enslaved parents, instead allowing them to live virtually free. When Ashmore died in 1824, his widow, Margaret, claimed Morgan (and her children) as her property. Margaret sent Edward

56. *Colored American*, March 13, 1841.

Prigg, a slavecatcher, to York, Pennsylvania, with a warrant for the seizure and arrest of Morgan and her children. Prigg found and took the alleged bondswoman and her children back to Maryland. He did so in violation of Pennsylvania law, failing to secure a certificate of removal, which was needed for the rendition of a fugitive slave to another state. Prigg was charged with kidnapping under Pennsylvania's 1826 personal liberty law and convicted. Marylanders were outraged, believing that Prigg was well within his right to recapture an escaped slaved guaranteed under the Constitution's 1793 fugitive slave clause and that the Pennsylvania courts did not have jurisdiction in these cases. To ease tensions and resolve the legal impasse between the two states, Pennsylvania agree to Maryland's request to allow the Supreme Court settle the dispute.[57]

On March 1, 1842, Justice Joseph Story wrote the majority opinion of the Court. The justices agreed upon very little, except for the fact that Congress had exclusive power over fugitive slave law and that the 1793 fugitive slave act was constitutional. Yet, each justice wrote their own opinion explaining how they reached this conclusion. Story found Pennsylvania's 1826 personal liberty law unconstitutional. According to Story, states could not interfere with enforcement of the fugitive slave act, but were not obligated to cooperate with federal authorities. A few of Story's fellow justices disagreed. For Story, the Constitution guaranteed enslavers the right to seize their runaway bondsperson anywhere regardless of whether or not they had a warrant. Despite this blow to the antislavery cause,

57. H. Robert Baker, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania: Slavery, The Supreme Court, and the Ambivalent Constitution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 102-105, 108-109, 112.

abolitionists could take solace in the fact that the ruling stipulated that only the federal government had the power to enforce the fugitive slave act, and that Congress could not compel states to execute the law.[58]

To many northern abolitionists, the Supreme Court's ruling further eroded free soil. An editorial reprinted in *The Spirit of Liberty* captured the sentiments of the publishers of this newspaper. They claimed that the court's decision cast a dark shadow, threatening the rights and interests of northern states. The authors believed that the *Prigg* decision created a growing crisis where eventually it would become impossible for slavery and freedom to exist under one government. They were adamant that if black bondage was not abolished, the freedom of all northerners would be endangered. According to the editorial, the court's denial of habeas corpus now threatened the free status of anyone accused of being a "fugitive from labor or service." The *Prigg* decision dramatically increased slaveholder influence on northern soil as "every free citizen of the free States must feel that he has something to do with slavery, or at least that slavery has something to do with him and his rights." The editorial encouraged readers to take a stand or become subservient to slaveholding interests. The authors never specified what action northerners should take, but thought it would be unwise to be united with abolitionists, especially those calling for disunion. They feared that such an alliance would exposed opponents of the Prigg

58. Baker, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, 114; Andrew Delbanco, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018), 177-183; Smith, *On the Edge of Freedom*, 95-97.

decision to hostility from northerners who were ambivalent or hostile to antislavery activists.[59]

Many black southwestern Pennsylvanians did not fear the consequences of taking an abolitionist stance against *Prigg*, as many white northerners had already exhibited hostility toward them. *Prigg* represented the beginning of a series of political developments that made black free soil principles, which were already precarious, even more fragile in southwestern Pennsylvania and throughout the northern borderland. In the years that followed, African Americans redoubled their efforts, refusing to cede their free soil and free labor vision to enslavers and their allies.

CONCLUSION

Beginning in 1833, a new wave of antislavery activism emerged, known as immediate or Garrisonian abolitionism. Massachusetts was the center of this movement, led by Bostonian abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison. Immediate abolitionism soon took root in southwestern Pennsylvania. These abolitionists called for the immediate end to black bondage and full inclusion of free blacks in American society, believing that slavery and racial prejudice were sinful. Unlike colonizationists, these antislavery activists imagined a free soil nation that included African Americans. This wave of anti-slavery activism had its roots in the slave

59. "A Crisis Approaching," *Spirit of Liberty*, May 7, 1842.

rebellions and militancy of northern free blacks who called for the immediate end to black bondage during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

By the late 1830s, Garrisonian abolitionism displaced colonization as the dominant force within the antislavery movement. At the same time, factionalism and ideological division emerged among immediate abolitionists. Antislavery activists in southwestern Pennsylvania were not isolated from these controversies. Rather than identify with a particular faction or strategy to fight slavery and defend free soil, southwestern Pennsylvanians devised their own approaches to abolitionist activism that were shaped by the region's geography, political environment, and their ties to antislavery activists from different regions. This distinct counter-culture of opposition against slavery's influence can be found in the different threads of antislavery activism in the region: evangelicalism, political antislavery, and black abolitionism. Despite these differences among immediate abolitionists, their actions escalated clashes with enslavers which had important consequences for free soil in southwestern Pennsylvania and throughout the northern borderland.

Chapter 4

Free Soil, Fugitive Slaves, and Free Labor in the Crossroads and Borderland Communities of Southwestern Pennsylvania: 1848-1859

In the fall of 1854, William Horner, a slaveholder from Virginia, arrived at the Allegheny Hotel with a black woman and her four children. They were there to eat dinner as they awaited the departure of their train bound for the west. The presence of the woman and her children drew the attention of African Americans at the hotel. When a group of black men questioned her about her status and that of her children, the woman confided to them that she and her children were slaves and that Horner had told her that he was taking them west to set them free. A group of mostly African American abolitionists gathered at the hotel to discuss what course of action to take. Could Horner be believed? Should they allow Horner to travel west? Or should they try to liberate the enslaved women and her children then and there? After an hour of discussion, the group decided to liberate the woman and her children and rushed through the hotel carrying this enslaved family off to safety and sanctuary just before the train departed.[1]

An angry Horner told a crowd that had gathered at the train depot that the slaves traveling with him had been freed by his deceased sister a year earlier and that his only goal had been to take them west so they could enjoy their freedom. However, many in the crowd were skeptical that he was telling the truth. A white lawyer came forward and addressed those assembled, telling them that he was no "friend to slavery," but that the law supported the claims of the slaveholder, rendering criminal

1. "Another Rescue," *The Antislavery Bugle*, September 9, 1854.

any effort to free Horner's slaves useless. But the black men and women in the crowd shouted him down, arguing (correctly) that because the woman and her children had arrived on Pennsylvania's soil, they were automatically free by virtue of the state's 1847 personal liberty law. The lawyer shot back, declaring that "the most ignorant colored person present knew better." In reply, someone in the crowd shouted out that if he was a lawyer, that he "knew that he was lying as he could not utter such an untruth, without knowing it to be such." The lawyer departed in disgust. [2]

The confrontation with Horner and the lawyer illustrates that African Americans were not willing to compromise their free soil principles by allowing slaveholders to travel through southwestern Pennsylvania with their property. To these African Americans it did not matter what assurances slaveholders had given their bondspersons of freedom. For these black activists, allowing enslavers to travel through their state with their bondspeople would turn the region into a conduit for a westward slave trade that could ultimately risk the freedom and security of free blacks in southwestern Pennsylvania.

Beginning in the mid-1840s two new political ideologies, free soil and free labor, began to gain political ascendency in many northern communities, especially in southwestern Pennsylvania during the late 1840s and 1850s. The free soil movement emerged during the United States' war with Mexico as some northerners, most famously Pennsylvania Congressman David Wilmot through his proviso, demanded that slavery be outlawed in all territory in the far west acquired from Mexico after the

2. "Another Rescue," *The Antislavery Bugle*, September 9, 1854; Thomas D. Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780-1861* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 118-119.

war. To many white northerners, supporting political candidates who espoused free soil principles was a mean to attack the Slave Power—an oligarchy that sought to advance its economic and political interests at the expense of white labor.[3]

At the same time, support for free labor ideology was growing among many northerners. By the 1830s it became apparent to most northerners that for many workers, economic mobility was hindered with the appearance of financial panics and the growth of the factory system, leading to a permanent wage-earning class and an increasingly impoverished urban population. Many workingmen's organizations thus saw westward expansion as a solution to urban poverty. They believed that the migration of workers westward would reduce labor competition in the East, thereby raising wages and providing workers willing to move west with homesteads. For these adherents of free labor ideology, their success was dependent upon ensuring that free soil status of the western territories was protected, as the encroachment of slavery would impede economic and social mobility for workers. The far west was not the only battleground between slavery and free soil.

Free labor and free soil were central political issues in southwestern Pennsylvania between the mid-1840s and 1850s, especially among African Americans, and for obvious reasons. During this period, Pittsburgh, the region's

3. This chapter only explores one aspect of the Slave Power that was understood by a large number of northerners. For example, some proponents of the idea of a Slave Power also believed that slaveholders wielded a disproportionate amount of power and influence within the federal government, citing their domination of elected and appointed offices— such as the Presidency, the Congress, and the Supreme Court. As Leonard Richards convincingly argues, there was no singular view of the Slave Power. Northerners' understanding of a Slave Power varied based on their political past and heritage. For an overview of the long history of the Slave Power thesis see Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

urban center, continued to grow as a trading and travel hub between the north and west and as a gateway to the south. For many slaveholders, the city was a stopover on their travels to urban centers farther east or to northern resorts where they hoped to escape the South's oppressive summer weather. Slaveholders traveling through southwestern Pennsylvania with their slaves expected local residents to be respectful of their property rights. Yet local antislavery activists, many of whom were black, typically refused to oblige, staging one rescue attempt after another of transiting slaves, and by attacking decisively against slave catchers and kidnappers active in the region. [4]

The results was the elaboration of an expansive and inclusive vision of free soil principles and free labor ideology predicated on the notion that African Americans who entered southwestern Pennsylvania were automatically free and guaranteed certain rights and legal protections.[5] In the course of the 1840s and 1850s,

4. For an older account of Pittsburgh politics during this period see, Michael Fitzgibbon Holt, *Forging A Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969). Holt contends that interpretations of the rise of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh that focus exclusively on the region's hostility to slavery and economic issues—tariffs, internal improvements, and homesteads—are too simplistic. Holt does not totally discount the issue of slavery, noting that Whigs and Republicans made free-soil and anti-Southern appeals to voters. However, Holt notes that Pittsburgh politics did not revolve around these national issues over slavery. Instead, Pittsburghers were occupied by a host of local political controversies such as railroads, taxes, the influence of Catholicism in public life. By placing slavery and black politics at the center of southwestern Pennsylvania politics, I show that controversies over free soil and free labor in the region had the potential to drive regional, state, and national debates over black freedom rather than the opposite as claimed by Holt.

5. Sean Wilentz and Richard H. Sewall contend that it would be a mistake to assume that the rise of the free soil movement was a setback for the campaign for black elevation, equality, and emancipation supported by the abolitionist Liberty Party. Free Soilers expressed their support for prohibiting slavery in the western territories as an attack on the slave power, not against free blacks. Free Soilers believed that slaveholders' success in establishing legal protections for slavery in the western territories would result in the degradation and dishonor of white workers. However, as James Oakes notes, for many antislavery activists, many of whom join the Free Soil Party, sought to deprive slaveholders a foothold in this territory, believing this would be a first step in a long process of bringing about an end to black bondage. Nevertheless, free soilism was not, as Minisha Sinha argues, abolitionism. Political abolition she notes "continued to exist beyond the structures of state and party."

black southwestern Pennsylvania worked with their abolitionist counterparts in the East and West to create a legal and political culture in the region that could advance black free soil principles, at a time when they were becoming increasingly undermined by slaveholders and slave traders traveling through the region with impunity with African Americans they held in bondage. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians fought to ensure that local whites' adopted their vision of free labor by employing a variety of methods. These included appeals to officials, participation in political conventions, public demonstrations and commemorative celebrations of emancipation in the British West Indies, as well as direct action to assist runaway slaves and free blacks who had been kidnapped, and dramatic interventions to liberate enslaved African Americans traveling through the region alongside their owners.

PARTY POLITICS AND THE FUTURE OF FREE SOIL AND FREE LABOR

On the eve of the 1848 presidential election, members of the Liberty Party, an antislavery political party that sought to end black bondage through political means, were at an important crossroads. In the previous election the presidential nominees of both major parties (Whigs and Democrats) were slaveholders. The Liberty Party had

Rather than simply accepting the shortcomings of the Free Soil Party as Sewall notes, this chapter builds on Sinha's work to illustrate the expanded free soil and free labor vision that black southwestern Pennsylvanians created and the ways in which they sought to implement their interpretations of these ideologies as well as build political support and legitimacy from society and the state. See for instance, Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 594-601; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 156-201; James Oakes, *The Scorpion's Sting: Antislavery and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 461-499.

polled poorly in the 1844 election and in 1846 election the party's share of the vote had increased only slightly. Aside from Massachusetts and a few other New England states, Liberty Party candidates could find only small pockets of support throughout the North. By 1847, many Liberty men were considering moderating their political platform to try to make it more palatable to voters, retreating from nationwide abolition in favor of trying to limit the extension of slavery westward. Some Liberty Party members even imagined forming a broad coalition with disaffected antislavery Whigs and Democrats.[6]

In August 1848, Liberty men joined alienated Whigs and Democrats at a gathering in Buffalo, New York, to inaugurate a new political movement, the Free Soil Party. This political party represented a broad northern coalition, however three factions dominated that party. One segment consisted of pro-Wilmot Democrats who supported the Wilmot Proviso. Another segment of the party comprised former Liberty Men, particularly Ohioans, who believed that an antislavery political party should seek to rid slavery's nefarious influence over the federal government. The final faction included anti-slavery and anti-war Whigs who were angry that their party had nominated slaveholder and war-hero General Zachary Taylor for the presidency. What held this new Free Soil coalition together was their shared disgust that a Slave

6. Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 75, 92, 136; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), 107-116; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery* (1976; repr., New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 99-101.

Power controlled the federal government and defended slavery at the expense of free white laborers.[7]

The Free Soil Party platform agreed at that 1847 meeting in Buffalo contained a number of antislavery measures. It called for the federal government to use its constitutional authority to abolish slavery in places where it had the power to do so—namely in, the District of Columbia and the western territories. Yet the party remained non-committal on the political and legal issues surrounding fugitive slaves, the three-fifths clause, or racial discrimination. The silence among some Free Soilers on these questions represented a retreat from Liberty Party principles and was a symptom of internal division. Though some members believed that northern free blacks should be afforded certain rights and protections, many in the party harbored racist sentiments.[8]

7. Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 477-482; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 152-156; Swell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 152-156, 199-201; For a complete account of the 1848 Free Soil Party Convention see, *Oliver Dyer's Phonographic Report of the Proceedings of the National Free Soil Convention at Buffalo, N.Y. August 9th and 10th, 1848* (Buffalo, NY: G. H. Derby, 1848).

8. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 185-187; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 626-628; Dana Elizabeth Weiner, *Race and Rights: Fighting Slavery and Prejudice in the Old Northwest, 1830-1870* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2013), 71-74; Theodore Clarke Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest* (New York: Longmans, 1897), 167-169.

Despite the presence of such vocal factions, the Free Soil Party succeeded in gaining the support of many African Americans in southwestern and greater western Pennsylvania. In fact, while blacks in the eastern part of the state were famously disengaged from party politics, African Americans in and around Pittsburgh frequently spoke at political rallies and conventions. Reinhard O. Johnson attributes this distinction between the two sections of the state to preferences for certain political tactics. According to Johnson, westerners preferred involvement in politics, black conventions, and issuing "more harshly worded statements" while easterners were more inclined to send mild petitions to the state legislature. Black western Pennsylvanians' participation in party politics was more extensive than eastern counterparts most likely as a result of better political organization of the Liberty Party and white members welcomed black participation, speaking at rallies and canvasing for their candidates an approach that continued as members of the Free Soil Party. *Minutes of the State Convention of the Coloured Citizens of Pennsylvania, Convened at Harrisburg, December 13th and 14th, 1848*, (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson Printers, 1849), 17, 22; Dorothy Sterling, *The*

Days after the Free Soil Party Convention, African Americans from across the north met in Cleveland, Ohio, to discuss what course of action to take in the wake of recent political events. Black free soil principles, could be found in a declaration of sentiments adopted by the convention. In one resolution, convention delegates encouraged African Americans (especially those enfranchised) to support the free soil movement but made clear that white free soilism did not fully meet their expectations declaring, that they were "determined to maintain the higher standard and more liberal views which have heretofore characterized us as abolitionists." Black delegates envisioned free soil as a site where the "universal equality of man" was unhindered by "civil, political, social or religious" sources. This sentiment represented a vision for the wholesale remaking of northern society. Black delegates rejected colonization schemes which sought to send them to Africa, believing that black free soil principles could be achieved in the United States.[9]

The Cleveland Convention is also illustrative of how black free soil and free labor principles were intertwined. At the afternoon session of the convention, Allan Jones, a former slave from Ohio, spoke to delegates. He recalled that as a slave, he had earned $10,000 for his owners and scoffed at those who believed he would be unable to provide for himself as a free man. Following his remarks, convention delegates adopted a series of resolutions and an address to African Americans encouraging them to seek entrance into "the respectable industrial occupations as

Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robinson Delany, 1812-1885 (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971), 76-77; Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848*, 247-248, 250.

9. Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848, (Rochester, NY: North Star Office, 1848), 12, 14.

mechanical trades, farming, or agriculture, mercantile and professional business, wealth and education," in order demonstrate their ability to achieve economic independence. Clearly, then, the delegates viewed access to farmland as a means to escape menial labor.[10]

Black southwestern Pennsylvania not only expressed their support for a black free labor visions but were at the forefront in attempting to realize this quest. Two years after the Cleveland Convention, black leaders established the short-lived American League of Colored Laborers. The association's goal was to promote black free labor principles by encouraging young people to pursue an education in agriculture, mechanical arts, and commerce with the goal that every black mechanic become an independent laborer. To help black laborers become proprietors of businesses, the League of Colored Laborers proposed the creation of a fund to provide loans to enterprising and honest black men. The league believed that encouraging men to enter into "skillful, honorable, profitable labor" would not only help them achieve wealth but aid in the "development and perfection, both of body and mind." The ability to achieve free labor status would provide black workers with

10. Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848, (Rochester, NY: North Star Office, 1848), 4-6, 13, 20. Despite black consensus in support of these free soil and free labor principles, the Cleveland Convention was not without controversy. Pittsburgh abolitionist Martin Delany proposed a resolution declaring that menial occupations such as servants and domestics were degrading to African Americans. One delegate, J. D. Patterson, objected to Delany's resolution, arguing that it "cast slurs upon those, who were in such places from necessity." Patterson was motivated to speak against Delany's proposal when he heard that the Pittsburgher said that "he would rather receive a telegraphic dispatch that his wife and two children had fallen victim to a loathsome disease, than to hear that they had become the servants of any man." Delany clarified that his remarks were not meant to cast slights against any individual or group. John L. Watson, a Cleveland delegate, disagreed with Delany's argument that if blacks were mechanics rather than menial boot-blacks, whites would respect African Americans. A compromised resolution was adopted where delegates agreed that lowly positions such as domestics and servants were degrading, but blacks should work in these occupations only as a last resort to secure a livelihood.

an opportunity for self improvement through learning and temperance. The idea of an American League of Colored Laborers had its roots in the black nationalist and free labor thought of Pittsburgh abolitionist Lewis Woodson who, decades earlier, had advocated for collective action among African Americans in order to become farmers and tradesmen. When the league was established in 1850, Woodson served as one of its vice-presidents.[11]

The Free Soil Party proved to be a bust at the ballot box both in the election of 1848 and thereafter. Its electoral failures and internal divisions caused African Americans to abandon it in droves especially in the wake of the passage of the new fugitive slave law in 1850. Many African Americans expressed their disappointment and frustration with the Free Soil Party at an antislavery convention in August 1850, in Cazenovia, New York. In a petition, convention delegates agreed that instead of supporting a Free Soil Party "or any other sham abolition party, or of identifying themselves with any scheme whatever of 'Anti-Slavery made easy,' abolitionists are summoned by their thickening of the anti-Slavery battle . . . to put forth more and more emphatic and self-denying evidences of the sincerity and depth of their sense of the immeasurable and horrid wickedness of Slavery."[12] As this statement makes clear, African Americans' abandonment of the failing Free Soil Party did not mark a retreat

11. "American League of Colored Laborers," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 27, 1850; "American League of Colored Laborers," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, July 27, 1856; "American League of Colored Laborers," in *The Black Worker: A Documentary History from Colonial Times to the Present, Volume 1: The Black Worker to 1869*, eds. Philip S. Foner and Ronald L. Lewis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 245; Floyd J. Miller, "'The Father of Black Nationalism': Another Contender," *Civil War History* 17, no. 4 (December 1971), 314-315, 317-319.

12. "Cazenovia Fugitive Slave Law Convention, August 22, 1850," in *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865, Vol. 1*, ed. Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), 50.

from their free soil principles. On the contrary many African Americans, particularly black southwestern Pennsylvanians, simply went looking for new ways to protect and advance their notion of free soil principles outside the formal arenas of party politics and political conventions.

FRRE BLACKS, FUGITIVE SLAVES, AND THE POLITICS OF FREE SOIL

Pittsburgh's hotels were important sites where African Americans sought to defend and advance their free soil principles, undermining slavery's influence in the region. Some slaveholders traveled to the north on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers for business or to northern resorts to escape the oppressive southern summer humidity. Because of Pittsburgh's location at the end of Ohio River and its ties to the East, the city was a waystation for many slaveholders on their journeys either northward or to the east. Traveling alongside them were their slaves, people whom they might refer to as "servants" to escape any legal complications in the Keystone State. Slaveholders who sought a respite in Pittsburgh from their extended journey found lodging in a number of the city's hotels. Slavecatchers on extended searches for slaves who fled into southwestern Pennsylvania lodged in Pittsburgh hotels too. Slavecatchers, slaveholders, and bondsmen and women who stayed in these accommodations encountered a number of free blacks as the city's hotels employed a significant number of African Americans in menial positions such as waiters, servants, and laundresses.

These black workers were part of a coordinated and clandestine network that sought to liberate slaves traveling with their enslavers into Pittsburgh and which also interfered with slavecatchers seeking to recapture and rendition slaves to their owners. These everyday acts of resistance against the encroachment of the Slave Power across the north, represented a dissident political culture in the form of an alternative free soil ideology.[13] Historian Christopher Bonner calls such tactics "the politics of lawbreaking." He argues that by denouncing and resisting racially biased laws enacted by states and the federal government, African Americans sought to change a discriminatory legal system for one that would better align with their own notions of justice.[14]

The Monongahela House was the city's most famous hotel located in the heart of the city. On a spring morning in 1847, excitement filled Pittsburgh's streets as news spread throughout the city of an attempted rescue of a slave from that hotel. Daniel Lockhart, the bondsman of Lloyd Logan, a planter from Winchester, Virginia, had resided in the city for a number of weeks as a fugitive and had been working as a laborer. When Logan finally uncovered Lockhart's whereabouts he, along with two constables from Winchester, set out for Pittsburgh, arriving at the Monongahela House in the evening. At eleven o'clock the next morning, these three men lured the

13. Robin D. G. Kelly argues that reading these acts as political not only broadens our definition of politics beyond "elections, political parties, and African American participation in grass-roots social movements" but also helps us better understand black political culture and why some blacks were willing to participate in certain struggles and types of strategies they developed. Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 75-112.

14. Christopher Bonner, "Runaways, Rescuers, and the Politics of Breaking the Law," in *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition*, Keisha N. Blaine, Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer eds., (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 201-215.

runaway slave to the third story of the hotel to deliver a trunk. Lockhart found himself in the presence of his former owner. When the three men attempted to seize him, Lockhart cried out for help. His cries could be heard throughout the hotel, causing much excitement and alarm. All the while, a crowd of black Pittsburghers (many of them workers at the Monongahela House) gathered outside the hotel in hopes of seizing Lockhart from the grasp of his owner and the two Virginia constables. Just as the three men exited the Monongahela House and attempted to make their way to the city wharf to board a steamer back to the South, a crowd of African Americans rushed the three men. One constable was struck and the other was knocked to the ground and injured. The group then carried Lockhart off to safety and he later fled to Canada beyond the reach of his master.[15]

Logan and the two Virginia constables were subsequently arrested by local police and charged with attempted kidnapping and behaving "in a riotous, violent, tumultuous and unreasonable manner and so as to disturb and endanger the public peace." They later appeared before District Court Judge Walter Lowrie where attorneys for the three men sought to challenge the constitutionality of Pennsylvania's 1847 personal liberty law. According to that statute, Lowrie ruled that the men did not violate Pennsylvania law and were not guilty of breaching the peace. His decision was based on the principle of comity—that slaveholders had a right to enter free territory to recover their escaped property and that those property rights were to be

15. "Case of Kidnapping," *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette*, April 17, 1847; "The Slave Case," *Daily Morning Post* (Pittsburgh), April 17, 1847; Benjamin Drew, *A North-Side View of Slavery: The Refugee: Of the Narrative of Fugitive Slaves in Canada. Related by Themselves, With An Account of the History and Condition of the Colored Population of Canada* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856), 47-49; Blackett, "'. . . Freedom, Or the Martyr's Grave,"121.

recognized by northern states. Judge Lowrie contended that this principle was central to maintaining national unity and that Pennsylvanians were duty bound to honor it. Lowrie, a supporter of African Colonization, rejected abolitionists' arguments that comity surrounding fugitive slaves violated the spirt of Pennsylvania's 1780 gradual abolition law. Judge Lowrie also rejected the charge that the three men acted in a "riotous" manner. According to Lowrie, under common law and Pennsylvania's personal liberty law, slaveholders could not be held responsible for exercising their legal rights if doing so happened to breach the peace. Notably, the judge was not willing to address the constitutionality of the state's personal liberty law. However, his ruling illustrates the lengths that some white southwestern Pennsylvanians were willing to go to support national unity at the expense of black free soil principles.[16]

Despite this legal defeat, the Monongahela House continued to be a battleground where blacks fought to defend their notion of free soil. In the summer of 1850, James Crossan, the proprietor of the Monongahela House, became embroiled in a heated exchange with a slaveholding patron in the press. That July, John Drennen, a southwestern Pennsylvanian turned Arkansas businessman and planter, had stopped, along with his family, at the hotel on their way east. The purpose of this trip is not clear, but the brief sojourn in Pittsburgh was mostly likely to visit his siblings, who lived in the city. Traveling alongside Drennen's family was a young enslaved girl

16. "The Slave Case," *Daily Morning Post* (Pittsburgh), April 19, 1847; "Fugitive Slave Case, Decision of Judge Lowrie," *Daily Morning Post* (Pittsburgh), April 20, 1847; "Discussion in the Kidnapping Case," *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette*, April 20, 1847; "Decision in the Kidnapping Case," *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette*, April 20, 1847; R. J. M. Blackett, "'. . .Freedom, or The Martyr's Grave': Black Pittsburgh's Aid to the Fugitive Slave, *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 61, no. 2 (April 1978): 121-122.

who disappeared soon after their arrival. When he discovered she was missing, Drennen informed Crossan, the proprietor, who in turn alerted the police. But they too failed to locate her. Furious, Drennen fired off a letter that was first published in the Washington, D.C. press and later circulated and reprinted in a number of southern newspapers complaining about his stay at the Monongahela House and the failure of the proprietor to ensure that his property was secure. He warned his fellow southerners to avoid the place, or to risk losing their slave property.[17]

Fearing the financial harm of Drennen's letter to the Monongahela House, Crossan wrote a detailed defense of his actions which was published in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. His response is significant in that it shows how closely southwestern Pennsylvania businesses were tied to the slave south and the compromises and accommodations that some whites felt compelled to make with traveling slaveholders. For instance, Crossan noted in his letter that when southerners arrived at the Monongahela House with their slaves, the hotel's policy was to quickly inform them of the dangers of keeping slaves in the city. Crossan himself usually counseled prospective guests to not bring their slaves to Pittsburgh at all, and when slaveholders did arrive at the hotel, Crossan threatened black workers with dismissal if they were ever suspected of abducting or assisting a slave in fleeing from their owner.[18] Indeed, after Drennen's slave successfully escaped, Crossan dismissed a servant named

17. "The Monongahela House," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 7, 1850; "Bringing Slaves into Free States," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, January 23, 1851.

18. "A Slave Lost," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 29, 1850; "The Monongahela House," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 7, 1850; Blackett, "'. . .Freedom, or The Martyr's Grave,' 133-134.

"Wash" whom Drennen had accused of helping his bondwoman obtain freedom.[19] Crossan also flatly rejected the possibility that black workers at the Monongahela House had ever previously provided assistance to slaves seeking to escape.

That was not true. In Pittsburgh, black hotel workers were a small component of a larger clandestine network known as the Philanthropic Society. The organization was established in the late 1830s, serving as both a benevolent society and as a secret society dedicated to protecting blacks from being abducted into slavery by enslavers who came into the city.[20] Detailed minutes and lists of members from the Philanthropic Society have not survived. Many black hotel workers were likely involved in the organization as well as a number of blacks who worked on the rivers and canals and several common laborers who toiled along Pittsburgh's wharf. How members of this underground network assisted slaves staying at the Monongahela House in escaping is described by Thomas Brown, an employee at the hotel, in a detailed account recorded years after emancipation by his daughter Hallie Q. Brown.

On a spring evening, a slaveholder and his female slave, Lizette, arrived by carriage at the Monongahela House. Thomas Brown was working as a night porter and his duties included escorting the guests to their rooms. According to Brown, Lizette's owner "carefully scrutinized the room; tested the walls; opened and examined the closets; raised the window sash, looked out and down as if measuring the distance to the pavement below; shut and locked the windows." After a close

19. "A Slave Lost," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 29, 1850; "The Monongahela House," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 7, 1850.

20. Blackett, "'. . . Freedom, Or the Martyr's Grave," 118-119, 130; Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 27-28.

inspection and confident that escape was impossible, the slaveholder locked Lizette in her room. In the meantime, word had spread throughout the hotel of the presence of an enslaved woman in one of the upstairs bedrooms. Half a dozen black male employees and chambermaids, as well as Nancy Crossan (the proprietor's wife) held a brief meeting at which they devised a plan to liberate Lizette. They stationed themselves in the hotel's halls and stairways to surveil the slaveholders. The headwaiter also delayed serving dinner so that a closed carriage could be found to transport the enslaved woman to freedom.

The carriage arrived at nine that evening. Brown and a number of men went to Lizette's room. Unable to unlock the door, they helped Lizette escape the room through the transom above it. They then hurried her to the chambermaid's room where they disguised her as a man and escorted her past her owner, who was puffing on a pipe, to the waiting carriage. The planter was enraged when he discovered that Lizette had escaped and demanded the arrest of the Monongahela House's black watchmen. Just as they were about to be taken into custody, the employees demanded their wages, a sure signal that they intended to quit if their employer did not intervene. In response, Nancy Crossan implored them to stay and her husband, James, assured them that they had nothing to fear regarding the planter's demands of arrest. He then turned to the slaveholder, telling him, "I have a set of men whom I can trust." The planter left Monongahela House shortly thereafter for the South.[21]

21. Hallie Q. Brown, *Tales My Father Told and Other Stories*, (Wilberforce, OH: Homewood Cottage, 1925), 4-7.

Brown's recollection illustrates how black workers at the Monongahela House organized as a part of a large clandestine network that sought to defend African American free soil principles. Brown's story also represents the political importance of black collective action in evading legal punishment for helping slaves escape. By threatening to quit at a time when their labor was most needed, the men of the Monongahela House forced their employers to concede to their wishes. James Crossan may not have realized the extent of the Philanthropic Society's operations in his hotel. More likely, he refused to acknowledge its existence or effectiveness out of fear that it could damage his business.

Nancy Crossan seemed far more sympathetic and willing to assist in the antislavery fight. Brown recounts another instance in which she assisted in the escape of an enslaved girl named Dell. Before an attempt to liberate Dell from her owners was undertaken, the hotel workers and their allies held a secret meeting to debate her case. Once they resolved to act, they enlisted Crossan who distracted Dell's owners in conversation just long enough for Thomas Brown and a wealthy woman from a suburban town near Pittsburgh (referred to only as Mrs. B in Brown's account), to lead the enslaved child away to a waiting carriage.[22]

Of course, not all black Pittsburghers were quite so willing to fight in defense of black free soil principles. A tiny number of African Americans instead decided to collaborate with slaveholders, a decision that brought them into direct (often violent) conflict with black antislavery activists in and around the city. For instance, when a

22. Brown, *Tales My Father Told*, 9-11.

slaveholder from West Virginia succeeded in tracking one of his fugitive slaves, a man named Lee, to a free black community living just outside Pittsburgh in the summer of 1848, devised a rendition plan that drew on the help of a black resident. The black man was to establish a friendship with the escaped slave to gain his confidence, and was then to invite the fugitive to join him on a carriage ride. He found a willing conspirator and set the plan in motion, halting the carriage when it arrived in Pittsburgh. There a struggle ensued. Hearing the fugitive's cries for help, a crowd began to gather. The man's legal owner, or the henchman he hired to assist him, then presented the crowd a bill of sale for Lee to prove that he was a slave, but the assembled residents dismissed it and successfully fought off the two men, forcing them to flee the scene.[23]

The incident in Birmingham raises an important question: why would African Americans collaborate with slaveholders and slavecatchers in seizing fugitive slaves? In her study of the kidnapping of free blacks in the years before the Civil War, Carol Wilson speculates that money was a motivating factor for blacks to cooperate with white slavecatchers.[24] Certainly, they did so at extraordinary risk to their own physical safety. Blacks found to be collaborating with slaveholders and their agents risked the ire of other African Americans. For instance, black Pittsburghers appeared at the home of a black man named Smith, who they believed had been assisting

23. "An Attempt at Kidnapping," *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette*, July 8, 1848; "Another Slave Case," *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*, June 24, 1848; Ann Greenwood Wilmoth, "Pittsburgh and the Blacks: A Short History, 1780-1875" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1975), 103-104.

24. Carol Wilson, *Freedom at Risk: The Kidnapping of Free blacks in America, 1780-1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 37-38.

slavecatchers. The crowd took him outside and horse-whipped him and then tarred and feathered him.[25]

Some blacks accused of being kidnappers sometimes fought back against these allegations. In February 1846, Thomas "Fiddler" Johnson sued Martin Delany for libel when Delany named him as a slavecatcher in his newspaper *The Mystery*. When the case came before the Court of Common Session, an all-white jury found Delany guilty and forced him to pay a fine of $150 as well as court costs. Thankfully, Delany's supporters raised a collection and succeeded in petitioning Pennsylvania Governor Francis R. Shunk to reduce the fine.[26]

SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA AND THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

In addition to liberating slaves brought into southwestern Pennsylvania by their owners, many southwestern Pennsylvanians also assisted slaves fleeing from slavery to free soil through a network known as the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a system of various routes run by abolitionists who assisted runaway slaves escaping from bondage. These routes included homes, worksites, trains, steamboats and other sites. It has fascinated generations of Americans. From this popular interest emerged a number of myths, legends, and misconceptions about the Underground Railroad. Wilbur Henry Siebert, one of the first historians of the Underground Railroad, interviewed white participants, resulting

25. "Kidnapping," *North Star*, August 25, 1848.

26. Ullman, *Martin Delany*, 58-59; Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American*, 90-91.

in a study that portrayed the network as a secret and well-organized network with static escape routes, all the while depicting fugitive slaves as passive beneficiaries of white aid and excluding the role of free blacks altogether.[27] Decades later, Larry Gara challenged Siebert's conclusions, arguing that while an Underground Railroad did exist, Siebert had greatly exaggerated and romanticized the role of white abolitionists by minimizing the involvement of free blacks and fugitive slaves. According to Gara, the Underground Railroad was not a national network, but a haphazard system that helped far fewer slaves escape.[28]

Recent scholarship has focused on what the Underground Railroad looked like in particular places. These studies present a complex depiction of the Underground Railroad, showing that it was not an organized endeavor with defined escape routes but a series of impermanent local routes that changed overtime. Segments of the Underground Railroad were established by vigilance committees, a provisional group of abolitionists (both black and white) involved in rescuing and protecting fugitive slaves. Today we know a great deal about how these routes came into existence as well as the impact that vigilance committees and participants in the Underground Railroad had on local, state, and national politics. As a result, historians have begun to recognize the central role that free blacks (whose activities in many places preceded whites') played in creating and sustaining this network and the crucial

27. Wilbur Henry Siebert, *The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom* (1898; repr., New York: Russell & Russell, 1967).

28. Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1961).

actions of the fugitive slaves themselves. Without enslaved people's self-impetus to escape, an Underground Railroad would be nonexistent.[29]

Portions of the Underground Railroad in southwestern Pennsylvania witnessed considerable traffic.[30] Pittsburgh was a central hub. In an 1848 letter to Frederick Douglass, published in the *North Star,* Martin Delany observed that the operations of the Underground Railroad in the city were "doing a fair business." In fact, in the midst of writing to Douglass, Delany wrote that an escaped slave had just entered his room with another man seeking assistance and advice.[31] It was a slightly different picture in smaller towns such as Washington, of course. Abolitionists there experienced less traffic as they were farther from communities with considerable slave populations.[32] Still, despite differences in the scale of operations, the Underground Railroad was undeniably important because it threatened the moral

29. See for example, David Blight, ed., *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory* (Washington, Smithsonian Books, 2004); Fergus M. Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* (New York: Amistad, 2005); Keith P. Griffler, *Front Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010); Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013); R. J. M. Blackett, *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2015).

30. The directions of particular routes of the Underground Railroad in southwestern Pennsylvania are documented in William J. Switala, *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania*, 2nd ed. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2008); Charles Blockson, *The Underground Railroad in Pennsylvania* (Jacksonville, NC: flame International, 1981). W. Thomas Mainwaring provides a case study of how the operations of the Underground Railroad varied within Washington County regarding, for instance, where slaves were sent and why. See, W. Thomas Mainwaring, *Abandoned Tracks: The Underground Railroad in Washington County, Pennsylvania* (Notre Dame, IN: University Notre Dame Press, 2018).

31. *North Star*, February 19, 1848.

32. Mainwaring, *Abandoned Tracks*, 172.

legitimacy used by slaveholders to justify slavery as well as their perceived mastery over their property. As the historian David Brion Davis notes, by escaping to free soil, slaves were able to gain a sense of "rehumanization" by which they could "achieve human capacities that slaveholders attempted to destroy."[33] As such, the Underground Railroad should be seen as an important avenue for the promotion of black free soil and free labor principles that sought to turn enslave men into free laborers and to challenge slaveholders' ideological justifications for black bondage.

One illustrative case occurred in the town of Indiana, a center of antislavery activism north-east of Pittsburgh and a station along a route of the Underground Railroad. In November 1847, Dr. Robert Mitchell, a local abolitionist and participant in the Underground Railroad, was brought before the Circuit Court of the United States for the Western District of Pennsylvania. He stood accused by Garrett Van Metre, a Virginia slaveholder, of knowingly harboring and concealing his escaped slave, Jared. Van Metre's bondsman had arrived in Indiana about 1845. Mitchell directed Jared to his farm which stood nine miles out of town, where the runaway enslaved man now labored and hired himself out to work for neighboring residents. In court testimony, it was revealed that Indianans knew that Jared (as well as another alleged slave), resided and labored on Mitchell's farm. According to a summary of court testimony, when slaveholders appeared in town, residents conveyed this information using the phrase "there are 'Indians abroad," and held meetings to consider what course of action to take to maintain the safety and freedom of these

33. David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Knopf, 2014), 230-232.

escaped slaves. Mitchell was accused of participating in these gatherings and even hosting a meeting at his own home.

In the end, a jury found Mitchell guilty and ordered him to pay Van Metre $500 as a penalty under the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. However, Walter Forward, a Pittsburgh attorney and antislavery activist, and also Mitchell's lawyer in the case, assisted Mitchell in his financially costly appeal of the case and in 1853 another judge overturned the ruling.[34]

The Van Metre case offers a useful lens to understand the Underground Railroad and its relationship to black free soil and free labor principles. First, it is notable that not all slaves who traveled the Underground Railroad viewed Canada as a final destination.[35] Many escaped bondspeople, including this man Jared, settled in northern communities working as free laborers, saving their wages to continue their travel northward or as providers for the households that they would one-day establish, or to be close to family.[36] Second, as Richard Blackett contends, slave escapes and the network of assistance provided to runaway slaves by blacks and whites triggered important political ramifications in local communities and possibly beyond in the

34. *Van Metre v. Mitchell* (1847) in John A. Clark ed. *Pennsylvania Law Journal Reports, Containing Cases Decided by the Federal and State Courts of Pennsylvania*, Vol. IV (Philadelphia: John Campbell & Son, 1872), 115-124; *Van Metre v. Mitchell* (1853) in *The Federal Cases Comprising Cases Argued and Determined in the Circuit and District Courts of the United States*, (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Company, 1896): 1042-1044; Scrap Book of Jennie Mitchell, Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, Indiana, Pennsylvania; Clarence D. Stephenson, *The Impact of the Slavery Issue on Indiana County* (Marion Center, PA: Mahoning Mimeograph and Pamphlet Service, 1964), 87-95.

35. Jane Landers, "Southern Passage: the Forgotten Route to Freedom in Florida," in *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory,* David Blight, ed., (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2004), 117; Bordewich, *Bound for Canaan*, 177-178; Mainwaring, *Abandoned Tracks*, 102.

36. Gara, *The Liberty Line*, 62, 107; Mainwaring, *Abandoned Tracks*, 102-103.

halls of state legislatures and courtrooms, the federal government, and in international politics.[37] In this instance, Jared's employment by Mitchell and others in the town demonstrates the community's view that southwestern Pennsylvania was free soil.

The number of slaves who were able to escape bondage by traveling the Underground Railroad is not known, however the immediate financial and social impact of these escapes was enough for slaveholders to clamor for a new fugitive slave law, believing that their institution was under sieged by radical northern abolitionists and northern officials who refused to help slaveholders recapture their property.

THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT OF 1850 AND THE FUTURE OF SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA FREE SOIL

In September 1850, slaveowners' demands for a more stringent fugitive slave law were realized with the passage of a new law by Congress and signed by President Millard Fillmore. The 1850 Fugitive Slave Act greatly strengthened slaveholders' ability to recover their slaves who escaped into the north. Jurisdiction over fugitive slave cases was transferred from northern courts to a newly established group of federal commissioners. By moving fugitive slave cases from state courts, the authors of the new law eroded the due process protections and habeas corpus for accused runaways previously provided by a number of states. Alleged fugitive slaves no

37. R. J. M. Blackett, *Making Freedom: The Underground Railroad and the Politics of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

longer guaranteed a trial, could no longer testify on their own behalf, and slaveowners now only needed to send an affidavit to a federal marshal in their attempt to return their alleged escaped slaves into bondage. The new law also famously gave federal marshals the power to compel northern whites to assist in capturing escaped slaves. Failure to aid federal officials, providing shelter or aid to runaway slaves, or obstructing the rendition of slaves could result in fines and months of imprisonment.

Across southwestern Pennsylvania, white antislavery activists gathered in public meetings to express their opposition to the Fugitive Slave Law. One of the largest of these gatherings took place in Pittsburgh on the diamond, the city's public square in early October. The first speaker that Saturday was Charles Avery, a minister, antislavery activist, and founder and benefactor of the Allegheny Institute (a school for black children). Avery denounced the new law as unconstitutional and argued that it should not be enforced because it denied the accused the right to habeas corpus and trial by jury. He declared that it was time that Congress understood that northerners would not serve the interests of slaveholders by assisting in their "deeds of infamy," and should not be made to pay a fine or face imprisonment for refusing to enforce an immoral law. Avery ended by calling on the assembled crowd to join together to demand that Congress repeal the law. He also asked every Pennsylvanian to join him in non-cooperating with its enforcement, declaring that "every man who accepts a commission under it should be branded with the mark of infamy, and

shunned as though he were a leper." Avery's remarks were met with loud cheers from the crowd.[38]

Avery was then followed by a number of other prominent speakers. T.M. Howe, the Whig Party's Congressional candidate, rose to agree with Avery's sentiments asking how Congress could deny African Americans "their rights because their complexion was of a duskier hue than ours," or disregard northern laws that provided legal protections for blacks? According to Howe, the new law bound northerners to the will of slaveholders who sought to transform them from "*men* into *slavecatcher*." He vowed to resist. Subsequent speakers too decried the fugitive slave law as a violation of legal principles, morality, and as an encroachment on the rights of northerners (both whites and blacks). Before the meeting briefly adjourned (to later reconvene that evening at Allegheny Market), attendees adopted resolutions opposing the law based on moral and legal principles. They pledged to refuse support to any member of the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation who voted in support of the new law, and agreed to sanction anyone who accepted work as a commissioner by publishing the names of these individuals in the press with black lines around their names.[39]

White Pittsburghers who assembled on the city's diamond espoused a more limited notion of free soil in their opposition to the fugitive slave act. Most of the speakers did not mention social equality for African Americans, only noting that

38. "Meeting of Persons Opposed to the Fugitive Slave Law, *Pittsburgh Gazette*, October 30, 1850.

39. "Meeting of Persons Opposed to the Fugitive Slave Law, *Pittsburgh Gazette*, October 30, 1850.

accused runaway slaves were entitled to legal protections. Some antislavery activists cast their opposition to the law in paternalistic and narrow terms declaring that the best way to oppose the law would be to vote against those who supported the law. For instance, a report read by the chairman of the committee on resolutions declared that the Fugitive Slave Act favored the interests of powerful enslavers over the liberty of African Americans in reference to the discrepancies in fees that awarded a commissioner ten dollars if the accused was found to be a runaway slave and five dollars if they were deemed a freeperson.[40] The speakers and resolutions adopted at the meeting called for resistance to the law; however, it's not clear how far these activists were willing to go to oppose the law. Would they resort to violence? The continued arrival of fugitive slaves in the region and the ongoing apprehension of free blacks by slavecatchers who alleged that they were fugitive slaves tested how far white antislavery activists were willing to oppose the law and their commitment to upholding free soil principles. Attendees at the meeting recommended a petition campaign for repeal of the law. But such campaigns could take months or years and black southwestern Pennsylvanians believed that more immediate and direct action was needed as at any moment they could be ensnared into slavery by the new law.

Many black Pittsburghers were alarmed, fearful that the new law would return them into bondage. Some African Americans fled the city taking with them "rifles, revolvers, and bowie knives."[41] They feared that enslavers would follow them northward or encounter a northwestern Pennsylvanian willing to provide assistance to

40. "Meeting of Persons Opposed to the Fugitive Slave Law, *Pittsburgh Gazette*, October 30, 1850.

41. "Great Excitement," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, September 24, 1850.

slaveholders or slavecatchers.[42] Some African Americans consulted with a white Pittsburgh attorney to see if there were any legal provisions or technicalities that could be used to protect their freedom. They were disappointed by what he told them and soon after that consultation a group of seventeen black Pittsburghers left the city for an unknown destination, most likely Canada. In the days after the law was passed, it was reported in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* that upwards of one hundred fugitive slaves in the city had fled to Canada.[43]

Other black southwestern Pennsylvanians struck a more defiant tone. Despite the significant numbers of African Americans who fled to Canada or more northern communities in the immediate aftermath of passage of the new fugitive slave law, a number of blacks refused to leave their homes in southwestern Pennsylvania. At a mass meeting at the market house in Allegheny, Martin Delany spoke before a crowd of blacks and whites which included the city's mayor. In passionate remarks, Delany rejected as futile white abolitionists' petition campaign for the repeal of the law. He declared that he would defend his home through armed self-defense, proclaiming that if any man came to his home in search of a slave and forced his way inside he would

42. The fear among runaway slaves of being captured and returned to bondage as they traveled northward was not completely unfounded. Though it may have been more difficult to find, capture, and rendition runaway slaves backs to the south this far north, some slavecatchers did venture into the northwestern portion of the state even before the 1850 fugitive slave act. In some instances, slavecatchers could rely on the assistance of Pittsburgh constables who traveled alongside them and the cooperation of some townspeople. The potential risks to the safety of blacks venturing in this region are documented in the Pittsburgh abolitionist press. See for example, "Negro Hunting in Mercer County," *Spirit of Liberty*, October 9, 1841.

43. "Great Excitement," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, September 24, 1850; "Fugitive Slaves," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, September 30, 1850; M. Theophane Geary, "A History of Third Parties in Pennsylvania 1840-1860" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1938), 143.

"lay him a lifeless corpse" as "he cannot enter that house and we both live."[44] In Pittsburgh, many of the city's blacks carried guns, promising violence if any attempts were made to return them to slavery.[45]

FIRST OF AUGUST CELEBRATIONS: EXPRESSIONS OF BLACK FREE SOIL AND FREE LABOR PRINCIPLES

African Americans in Southwestern Pennsylvania also sought to declare their vision of free soil and free labor via Emancipation Day celebrations, sometimes referred to as the First of August or West India Day. These were important public displays of black political and cultural expression and a forum for mobilization against slavery. These events commemorated the end of slavery in the British Caribbean had taken place on August 1, 1834. These celebrations usually took place on or around that date. Between 1834 and 1842 most August First celebrations were held in black churches which were central to black political and social life. Central to these celebrations were abolitionist messages about universal liberty, as well as the promotion of the values associated with moral reform and with the black elite:

44. Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 159; Frank Rollin, A. *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany*, 74-76; Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American*, 119-120; Ullman, *Martin R. Delany*, 112-113.

45. Harding, *There is a River*, 161. In some neighboring counties, the black population actually increased between 1850 and 1860. W. Thomas Mainwaring speculates that in Washington County, the exodus of blacks was not as staggering compared to Allegheny and other counties in the region because of feelings of safety among African Americans as a result of the community's ability to establish collaborative efforts with whites to help protect black freedom; Mainwaring, *Abandoned Tracks*, 176.

temperance, moral improvement, self-help, and work ethic by clergymen. By the 1850s, most commemorations of August First took the form of public parades, meetings, and picnics, a change in format and venue that historian J. R. Kerr-Ritchie attributes to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act and to national tensions over its enforcement.[46]

August First celebrations, especially in large cities and towns, were covered extensively in the abolitionist and black press. Yet in southwestern Pennsylvania, the papers remained largely silent regarding these festivals. This could be due to the lack of a sustained black newspaper in the region, the ambivalence of some white newspaper editors about the newsworthiness of these events, or the possibility that the sheer volume of events taking place across the region made it difficult to detail every celebration. It is also possible that Emancipation Day commemorations in southwestern Pennsylvania were established later compared to the northern communities in the East.

The few events that did earn coverage in the region's press provide insight into the special meaning that Emancipation Day had for black southwestern Pennsylvanians and how these commemorations were used to mobilize in defense of black free soil principles and free labor ideology.[47]

46. J. R. Kerr-Ritchie, *Rites of August First: Emancipation Day in the Black Atlantic World* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 83-92; For additional insight regarding the changing nature and political dimensions of black antislavery celebration see also, Patrick Rael, *Black Identity, Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 54-85

47. Kerr-Ritchie also alludes to the theme of free labor ideology. For instance, he notes that an Emancipation Day speaker, J. H. Perkins, stressed the importance of education for black children so that they may strive to become mechanics, farmers, and producers. Black free labor ideology and free soil principles were central themes in Emancipation Day celebrations, which are confined to the periphery of Ritchie's analysis see, Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 103-105; Mitch Kachun also

In two Emancipation Day celebrations in Brownsville, one in 1859, the other in 1860, a public procession was made through the town's streets.[48] Multiple professional and mutual aid groups comprised the marchers who included "the colored Masons, Sisters of Protection, [and] Sons of Mutual Relief."[49] Their processions were public displays of black free labor principles in action as the presence of skilled independent laborers and mutual relief organizations depended on the thrift and temperance of their members.

Children also participated. At a Brownsville Emancipation Day celebration, young students at the Sabbath school in Bridgeport marched in the procession. The participation of children in August First celebrations was used by African Americans to foster what Kerr-Ritchie refers to as a "public expression of social politicalization."[50] The organizers of these commemorations sought to teach and instill within the younger generation the mores and values of the community in the

mentions the use of free labor themes in Emancipation Day Celebrations by black and white abolitionists as a means to appease white Americans' concerns surrounding the economic impact of immediate emancipation. See, Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 57-58.

48. Parades and public processions were an important feature of early American and African American political culture, allowing groups who were excluded from voting, elected office and other formal political spaces to engage in politics. See for example, Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Mitch Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*; Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: MD, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Shane White, "'It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (June 1994): 13-50.

49. "Negro Celebration," *Brownsville Times*, August 4, 1859; "Africans in the Woods," *Brownsville Times,* August 8, 1860.

50. Ritchie, *Rites of August First*, 103.

hope that they would aspire to become free laborers and raise their political consciousness.

African American men also used August First Celebrations as a means to demonstrate their fitness for American citizenship, not only as free laborers but as soldiers capable of defending their communities and the nation.[51] For example, at an 1856 Emancipation Day event in Pittsburgh, a black militia company made its debut in the parade.[52] The presence of black militia companies became a common sight in subsequent Emancipation Day celebrations. In 1859, the Hannibal Guards paraded through the streets of Allegheny.[53] Black militia men marching in these parades constructed a public image of black masculinity, demonstrating that African American men were worthy of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and that they were willing to defend their free soil principles.

Public assertions of these abolitionist principles could at times elicit violent hostility from whites, illustrating the risk that African Americans faced in public spaces. At an 1859 Emancipation Day celebration in Beaver, African Americans were

51. During the 1850s many African Americans began to equate military service with citizenship, seeking access to state militias. Both Susan G. Davis and Margot Minardi have noted that membership in an independent militia was an opportunity to prove one's citizenship as a good and valuable member of the republic as a citizen-soldier. For an overview of black popular sentiment for creating armed organized self-defense and the relationship between militia service as a means to obtain citizenship rights see Jeffrey R. Kerr-Ritchie, "Rehearsal for War: Black Militias in the Atlantic World," *A Journal of Slave and Post-Slave Studies*, 26, no. 1 (April 2005), 5-8; Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power*, 58; Margot Minardi, *Making Slavery History: Abolitionism and the Politics of Memory in Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 156.

52. William C. Nell, "First of August in Salem, Ohio," *Liberator*, August 15, 1856.

53. "Our Alleghany City Letter," *Weekly Anglo-African*, September 3, 1859.

harassed by a crowd of white men who sought to disrupt the proceedings and provoke a response from the black crowd.[54]

The political significance of Emancipation Day celebrations in southwestern Pennsylvania were further underscored when compared alongside public celebrations of other important civic events. Independence Day was, then as now, a widely popular celebration. However African Americans were mostly excluded from its commemoration. An Independence Day celebration in Buffalo Township, for instance, was marked with demonstrations by local white paramilitaries while African Americans were relegated to serving as the wait staff.[55] These celebrations also featured dinners at which toasts were delivered by distinguished guests in honor of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, the solders of the revolution and to other causes associated with American independence and nationality.[56] At a celebration in the town of Bedford, one white militia captain made a toast to the success of the American Colonization Society (ACS), an organization comprised of northern and southern whites who sought to send free blacks to Africa. The vast majority of Africans Americans opposed the ACS believing that it was a scheme by slaveholders to strengthen slavery by deporting free blacks.[57] August First celebrations thus allowed black abolitionists to offer a counter narrative that

54. "First of August Celebration in Beaver," *Daily Pittsburgh Dispatch,* August 3, 1859.

55. "Celebration," *Washington Reporter*, July 8, 1843.

56. "Fourth of July, Finley Township, Celebration of 4th of July," *Democratic Eagle*, July 26, 1828.

57. "Fourth July, 1828," *Bedford Gazette*, July 11, 1828.

challenged white hypocrisy over slavery, popular beliefs of black inferiority, and America's herrenvolk democracy.[58]

Emancipation Day celebrations in southwestern Pennsylvania were also sites for fostering collective action. In the town of Beaver, just north of Pittsburgh, a celebration was held by black residents on the town's fair grounds. African Americans from neighboring villages gathered to participate in the festivities. In attendance was George B. Vashon, a black lawyer and prominent Pittsburgh leader, who delivered an address. Many other Emancipation Day celebrations also brought together abolitionists and antislavery groups from across different communities, some of whom assisted fugitive slaves to freedom. In the town of Washington, a Reverend Underwood of Ohio and A. W. Skinner who represented the United Sons of Protection delivered August First addresses before the crowd.[59] Likewise, at an Emancipation Day celebration in Salem, Ohio, Thomas Brown of Pittsburgh presided over speeches given by the reverends Grafton H. Graham of Allegheny City and John Peck of Pittsburgh. Later that evening, William Jenkins, an abolitionist from New England, spoke of how he had been resisting the Fugitive Slave Law and how black free labor ideology could successfully transform former slaves into mechanics, businessmen, and landowners.[60] It is more than likely that a few southwestern Pennsylvanians were in the audience as we know that reverends Graham of and Peck

58. William C. Nell, "First of August in Salem, Ohio," *Liberator*, August 15, 1856; Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 69-70; Patrick Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University North Carolina Press, 2002), 76-77.

59. "Washington Co." *Daily Pittsburgh Dispatch*, August 4, 1859.

60. William C. Nell, "First of August in Salem Ohio. Oberlin Ohio, Aug 4, 1856," *Liberator*, August 15, 1856.

had attended the August First festivities earlier that day.[61] Emancipation Day celebrations were thus evidently sites where collaborative efforts for assisting runaway slaves could be established and where black activists found inspiration to continue to fight in defense of their free labor and free soil principles.

Black southwestern Pennsylvanians also used August First celebrations as the occasions to solicit financial contributions from the community to support institutions that were important in the black freedom struggle. At a Pittsburgh celebration, the women of the city held a levee, the proceeds of which went to support Martin Delany's struggling antislavery newspaper, *The Mystery*. Black newspapers were important forums where African Americans across the nation discussed and debated politics and contemporary events. The black press allowed blacks to disseminate their viewpoints to white audiences and to counter popular white political opinion. According to one person, without the support of these women, Delany's paper would have long ceased publication.[62]

DEFENDING BLACK FREE SOIL PRINCIPLES IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

Emancipation Day celebrations were not the only sites for the expression of black free soil and free labor principles. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians, with the

61. William C. Nell, "First of August in Salem Ohio. Oberlin Ohio, Aug 4, 1856," *Liberator*, August 15, 1856.

62. "The Christian Herald," *North Star*, August 21, 1848.

assistance of their white antislavery allies, undertook a legal campaign that challenged the notions of free soil advanced by the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and by whites who were sympathetic to slaveholders' demands.[63]

One of the first cases in southwestern Pennsylvania to be tried under the Fugitive Slave Law occurred in the fall of 1850. A slaveholder identified a man named Jones who worked at the market in Pittsburgh as his slave who had fled two years ago. Jones disputed the slaveholder's claims and called upon several friends in the city to testify on his behalf including the mayor and Samuel W. Black, a prominent lawyer and colonel. The jury determined that the slaveholder had perjured himself and the judge ordered Jones to be released. The Jones case shows that forging political and social relationships with local political leaders and elites was crucial in defense of black free soil principles. A week before the Jones case, two abolitionists lecturers, Henry C. Wright and Parker Pillsbury, expressed what was at risk if slaveholders and their agents were successful in remanding blacks to slavery: "the

63. There is an extensive literature on Northern fugitive slave rescues and trials. These studies provide a great deal of detail about the events and individuals surrounding these cases as well as how race, class, and gender shaped northern understandings of the law, the use of violence, and prevailing social relations among different groups. However, these studies do not frame these escapes in terms of competing ideas of free soil and free labor among antislavery activists. See for example, Gordon S. Barker, *The Imperfect Revolution: Anthony Burns and the Landscape of Race in Antebellum America* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010); Robert H. Baker, *The Rescue of Joshua Glover: A Fugitive Slave, the Constitution, and the Coming of the Civil War* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizens* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (Oxford University Press, 1991); Robert H. Baker, *Prigg v. Pennsylvania: Slavery, the Supreme Court, and the Ambivalent Constitution* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2012).

taking away of his right to liberty, happiness, and life itself." Free soil and free labor principles were part of those rights.[64]

In the spring of 1851, Lewis Woodson, a leader in Pittsburgh's black community had recently moved to the town of Beaver with his wife and two children, where he worked as a laborer and preacher in African Methodist Episcopal Church. He was accused by two Louisville slavecatchers, William Reed and Benjamin Rust, of being a runaway slave belonging to a Louisville slaveholder, Rhoda Byers. Receiving a warrant for Woodson's arrest from Judge Thomas Irwin in Pittsburgh, Reed and Rust apprehended Woodson in Rochester (located along the Beaver and Ohio Rivers). Woodson was taken to the United States Court where his fate was decided. Reed, who acted as a guardian for Byers, testified that he had known Woodson since he was a child, frequently hiring him out. Reed described Woodson as being of a light complexion. Reed claimed that Woodson had escaped two years ago. However, under cross-examination, he expressed doubt as to the exact timing of Woodson's escape, suggesting it might have been in June 1840.[65]

A number of black and white southwestern Pennsylvanians came forward to refute Reed's testimony. John Peck, a black Pittsburgher and abolitionist, recalled that he had first met the accused in the spring of 1848 in Pittsburgh, describing him as a laborer and preacher. Peck testified that the alleged runaway slave was actually a man

64. "A Fugitive Slave Case—First in Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*, October 12, 1850; Ann Greenwood Wilmoth, "Pittsburgh and the Blacks: A Short History, 1780-1875" (PhD. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1975), 110.

65. "Fugitive Slave Case," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, March 15, 1851; "A Preacher Sent For," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, April 5, 1851; Irene E. Williams, "The Operation of the Fugitive Slave Law in Western Pennsylvania, From 1850 to 1860," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 4, no. 3 (July 1921): 154-155.

named Paul Gardner—not Lewis Woodson. Another witness for the defense, a black Ohioan named Augustus Green, identified the accused runaway slave as Richard Gardner, describing him as a "very black man." John W. Biddle, a white southwestern Pennsylvanian, recalled first meeting Woodson in the town of Bridgewater in the spring of 1849 and that he had known him for two years. David Reed, counsel for Woodson, noted the central issue determining the validity of the accusations of the slavecatchers: whether the claims made by the two men were supported by "direct, positive, and clear testimony [as to] the identity, ownership and escape of the slave." Reed expressed doubts that the men had correctly identified the man who had fled.[66]

After hearing testimony in support of both sides, Judge Irwin made his ruling. He prefaced his remarks by praising those in the local community who, though they might oppose the fugitive slave law, had not acted to obstruct its enforcement. Irwin decided that it was beyond a doubt that Woodson belonged to Beyers. On his way to a steamship bound for Louisville, a crowd had assembled along the route to the dock, but the boat departed without any attempted rescue. Instead, Henry Sproul, Clerk of the Circuit Court of the United States Court, led an effort to raise funds for the purchase of Woodson's freedom. Eventually, Woodson's claimants accepted a payment of six hundred dollars.

The Woodson case is significant for a number of reasons. First it shows the considerable latitude that judges enjoyed in these cases and why African Americans

66. "Fugitive Slave Case," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, March 15, 1851; Ann Greenwood Wilmoth, "Pittsburgh and the Blacks," 111-112.

and antislavery activists found it so important to seek officials' support for and defending their free soil principles. Second, it illustrates some of the divisions among antislavery activists over certain tactics in defending free soil principles. Many abolitionists, both black and white, were uneasy about purchasing blacks kidnapped or renditioned into bondage by judges. The author of an editorial on the Woodson case remarked that such compromises not only diminished the funds of antislavery activists and encouraged slavecatchers to speculate in the traffic in black bodies but would eventually lead to "no end of such demands" by allowing a larger challenge to the fugitive slave act to go unopposed, thereby compromising free soil principles.[67]

The contest over free soil was also fought in the courtrooms in the towns outside Pittsburgh. In October 1853, a case was brought before a United States Commissioner in Uniontown by a lawyer regarding the legal status of a black family that resided in Fayette County. The case originated when an enslaved black family from Virginia had received permission from their owner to visit friends in Fayette County. When the family did not return to Virginia in a timely manner, the owner declared them to be runaway slaves. At trial, the defense argued that because the family had received permission from their owner to enter Pennsylvania, they were not escaped slaves under the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and therefore United States Commissioners had no right to decide their fate. The defense considered these types of escapes as constructive escapes—those in which slaves received permission from

67. "Fugitive Slave Case," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, March 15, 1851; "The Pittsburgh Fugitive Case," *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*, March 29, 1851; "The Northern Slave Trade," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 3, 1851; "Woodson Redeemed and Free," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 17, 1851; Irene E. Williams, "The Operation of the Fugitive Slave Law in Western Pennsylvania," 154-155; Ann Greenwood Wilmoth, "Pittsburgh and the Blacks," 113-114.

their owners to visit a free state on a temporary or permanent basis. The defense also cited Pennsylvania law which declared to be free those slaves who entered in the state with the consent of their owners. But, following legal precedent, the commissioner rejected the defense's argument on the basis that permission granted by slaveholders to slaves to visit friends and relatives in a free state did not guarantee those in bondage the right to reside permanently in that state. The family was therefore remitted back to their owner in Virginia.[68]

The Uniontown case is representative of the views of many slaveholders that their property claims superseded Pennsylvania's free soil claims. The case also illustrates divisions between black and white antislavery activists' ideas of free soil. The free African American community of Fayette County was most likely instrumental in preventing this black family's quick return to Virginia. It's not clear whether the family intended to return to Virginia or the extent of their familiarity with Pennsylvania law, but the free black community most likely informed them that by entering southwestern Pennsylvania, they were automatically free—a belief shared by some white antislavery activists. Where black and white antislavery activists differ is the legal argument surrounding slave escapes and constructive escapes. These white lawyers were willing to make these legal distinctions, however black southwestern Pennsylvanians and many African American communities throughout the North were not, believing that regardless of how enslaved blacks arrived onto free soil, they were entitled to certain legal protections and automatic freedom.

68. "Slave Case at Uniontown," *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter*, September 10, 1853; "Slave Case at Uniontown," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, October 6, 1853.

A number of other cases were brought before the region's United States Commissioners and courts that laid bare these competing interpretations of free soil principles. In October 1858, George Shaw appeared before an Allegheny Court charged with attempting to kidnap George W. Ferris for the purpose of selling him into slavery. Ferris was born a slave in Alabama to a white father and enslaved mixed-race mother. It's not clear how he escaped but, based on an account in the abolitionist press describing Ferris' physical features, he was likely able to reach Pittsburgh because of his light complexion which allowed him to pass for a white man. He continued to conceal his racial identity once he reached the North. Soon after he arrived in the city, Ferris married a white woman, and had two children with her. Ferris was a skilled mechanic and found work as a bricklayer. He met George Shaw while working on Fifth Street. Shaw soon learned that Ferris was an escaped slave from Alabama and sent word of this to his former owner. A plan was soon devised and executed whereby Shaw lured Ferris to travel with him to Missouri. Upon arrival, Ferris was placed in the custody of his owner's slave driver Raglan (or Ruggles as reported) who returned him to his owner in Alabama. Afterwards, Shaw laid plans to kidnap Ferris's three-year old daughter but ultimately failed in his endeavor.[69]

Shaw was found guilty, but his lawyer filed a motion for arrest of judgement. At one point during the court's proceedings, a juror became violently ill and had to step aside. However, the trial continued. According to the court record, twelve jurors were sworn but the court clerk omitted the fact that only eleven of them rendered the

69. "Kidnappers in Pittsburgh," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, February 20, 1858.

verdict. A legal dispute followed in which counsels argued as to whether a criminal case could be lawfully decided by eleven jurors. In the end, the judge ruled that the court had acted improperly and that the court should have either compelled the man's attendance or dismissed him and empaneled another twelve-person jury to decide the case. As a result, the judge ruled that Shaw be returned to trial. It's not known if Shaw was found not guilty on charges of kidnapping in this second trial.

The opportunity for a retrial would have been significant for Shaw, allowing his attorneys to find a more sympathetic jury allowing him to continue to roam the streets of Pittsburgh attempting to kidnap African Americans and sell them into slavery. The Shaw case illustrates that the lawyers of slave-catchers were willing to use even the smallest legal detail to seek a new trial that could result in freedom for their client which could threaten black free soil principles.[70] The courtroom was just one space where African Americans and white antislavery activists sought government recognition and support for their interpretations of free soil and free labor.

FROM EAST TO WEST AND WEST TO EAST: THREATS TO FREE SOIL AND FREE LABOR PRINCIPLES

Some slave-traders who operated in the East traveled westward towards Pittsburgh with the African Americans they abducted. The city's location as a railroad

70. *Commonwealth v. George Shaw* (1858) in Boyd Crumrine, ed. *Pittsburgh Reports: Containing Cases Decided by the Federal and State Courts of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: John Campbell, 1872), 492-499.

hub between the East and West and at the head of the Ohio River, provided an efficient route where they could quickly reach the slave-markets of the South and make a substantial profit. On May 28, 1853, Pittsburgh officials received a telegraphic dispatch from a member of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in Philadelphia that a mixed-raced youth named Alexander Hendrickure from Jamaica was on board a train with Thomas J. Adams, a Tennessee farmer and slave-trader, and en route to the city. Adams had persuaded Hendrickure to travel with him to California, enticing the young man with the prospect of achieving great wealth in the west. When the train entered the depot in Pittsburgh that Saturday, a hastily assembled vigilance committee identified Hendrickure and attempted to take him to safety. But Adams cried out, "That boy belongs to me!" Ignoring Adams' claim, the vigilantes delivered Hendrickure into the custody of John Fox, a local police officer sympathetic to African American free soil claims. Fox took Hendrickure to the St. Clair hotel while the vigilance committee filed a writ of *habeas corpus*. They passed the writ to Robert Hague, Pittsburgh's High constable.[71]

The following Monday, the case came before Judge Thomas Williams. Adams failed to appear, having fled the city the previous evening, so Hendrickure was freed and sent to live with black Pittsburgh abolitionist John Peck and his family until the British Consul at Philadelphia could help arrange safe passage for his return to Jamaica. After the incident, the city's black leaders—Martin Delany, John Peck,

71. "Overhauling a Kidnapper," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, June 4, 1853; Martin R. Delany, John C. Peck, William Webb, and Thomas Burrows to Editor, Kingston *Morning Journal*, May 31, 1853, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Volume IV, The United States, 1847-1858*, ed. Roy E. Finkenbine et., al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 157-159.

William Webb, and Thomas Burrows—sent a letter to the editor of the Kingston *Morning Journal*, a Jamaican newspaper, warning black and mixed-race Jamaicans of the perils of traveling to the United States and declaring that "no colored person in the United States is really free; all are virtually and legally, if not abjectly, slaves." Their statement served as a testament that fulfilling black free soil and free labor vision in this part of Pennsylvania and nationwide still faced considerable obstacles.[72]

The number of slavetraders who travelled to Pittsburgh from the East on their way to the slave markets in the south to sell free blacks into bondage is not known. However, accounts in the press suggest that slaves traveling in railcars often passed into and through southwestern Pennsylvania. A writer for the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, an Ohio abolitionist newspaper, noted that the Ohio Pennsylvania railroad was an important means of transporting slaves to the South, especially during the winter months when the Ohio River became unnavigable. Many railroad employees went to great lengths to ensure that slaves were locked in train cars and guarded to prevent their escape or rescue by local abolitionists. Railroad companies were willing to cooperate with this overland slave trade, disregarding the free soil status of Pennsylvania and Ohio in order to collect fares for transporting African Americans into bondage.[73] In September 1854, abolitionists from Allegheny, just outside Pittsburgh, alerted the townspeople of nearby Salem, Ohio, that an enslaved girl was aboard an express train set to arrive at six o'clock. When the train arrived, the

72. Martin R. Delany, John C. Peck, William Webb, and Thomas Burrows to Editor, Kingston *Morning Journal*, 158-160.

73. "More Slaves in Transit Through Ohio," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 30, 1854.

abolitionists interrogated her owners who confessed that the girl was their slave. The crowd of antislavery activists then moved quickly to escort the child to safety and freedom. Soon after the rescue, a meeting was convened where a committee was established to find the child a home and to raise funds to provide for her support. The meeting concluded with the adoption of a resolution praising those who assisted in the successful rescue and sending greetings to "sister cities, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Boston."[74] The articles suggests that these cities were part of a larger network that sought to halt a slave-trading and kidnapping network overland and on waterways that threatened black free soil principles.

The previous year, in 1853, a Cincinnati newspaper reported that a steamboat was able to embark from Pittsburgh with three slaves that were purchased by two Mississippi slaveholders. When the ship stopped in Cincinnati en route to St. Louis, word spread (likely from a black crewman) that three bondspeople were aboard. As a result, a writ of habeas corpus was quickly filed. Cincinnati abolitionists lost this case and the three African Americans were sent into bondage. A portion of the judge's decision justifying the return of these three persons into slavery is especially revealing. He argued that slave-traders and slaveholders could transport bondspersons over the Ohio River because they had a right of navigation over the nation's waterways. Pittsburgh was a crucial barrier in defending not only regional but northern free soil principles, as abolitionists believed that slaves' and free blacks presence on northern soil and waterways guaranteed them to certain rights,

74. "An Application of Principles—A Case of Emancipation," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 2, 1854.

protections, and most importantly a free status. As a gateway to the west, Pittsburgh served a crucial position in a larger abolitionist network that sought to vanquish a slave-trading and kidnapping network that ran East to West and which threatened black free soil principles. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians traveling eastward through the towns and villages of the region to Philadelphia were fully aware of some whites (and even African Americans) seeking to profit from slavery by undermining free soil.[75]

Indeed, there were a number of kidnapping gangs operating throughout southwestern Pennsylvania. In the summer of 1851, Charles Wedley, a black resident of Pittsburgh, decided to take a visit to the east coast. Though a property owner in the city, Wedley was not wealthy enough to afford the entire trip and so planned to seek work on a steamboat only for a white man named Spear and a black man named Lindsay Lewis to offer to take him along their journey east. Wedley accepted and the three of them set off together. When they reached Licking Creek in Bedford County, a gang of kidnappers captured Wedley, accusing him of being an escaped slave from Wheeling, Virginia. The men shackled Wedley and transported him to Maryland to be sold. The gang soon found a prospective buyer, who engaged in a long conversation with the alleged slave. In his discussion with the slaveholder, Wedley described in great detail his neighborhood in Pittsburgh, the city's most prominent people and their businesses, as well as its current and former mayors. The slaveholder grew apprehensive that he had bought a free man and began to worry that Wedley would

75. "Another Slave Case," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, September 3, 1853.

not only escape but inspire the man's other slaves to flee. Sure enough, after three days in irons, Wedley was able to successfully escape back to Pittsburgh.[76]

Coordinated action with other communities and regions along with establishing connection to southwestern Pennsylvania, especially those in Pittsburgh, was crucial in African Americans' defense of southwestern Pennsylvania free soil. The Wedley case demonstrates the importance of free blacks' ability to convincingly prove their ties to their home communities. Though slavecatchers were willing to undermine black free soil principles, slaveholders were not automatically willing to take possession of African Americans who lived on free soil for fear that they would foment rebellion among their bondspeople.

THE SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVNAIA BATTLEGROUND BETWEEN SLAVERY AND FREE SOIL, FREE LABOR

The political developments of the 1850s emboldened slavecatchers and kidnappers operating in this part of the northern borderland, thus making the security of free black communities ever more precarious. Many fugitive slaves seeking sanctuary in this part of the North found themselves in a desperate situation and took to the use of violence to repel slave-catchers and kidnappers. A number of violent incidents against slavecatchers committed by antislavery activists and runaway slaves

76. "Freeman Kidnapped," *Pittsburgh Gazette*, June 14, 1851; Executive Committee Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, *Fourteenth Annual Report Presented to the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Committee, By its Executive Committee, October 7, 1851, With the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Thompson, 1851), 36.

continued to occur after the adoption of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. In the spring of 1858, a Virginia slaveholder, a United States Deputy Marshal from Uniontown, and a laborer from the South arrived in the quiet village of Blairsville to capture an escaped slave. The men learned of the fugitive's whereabouts and soon took him into custody. After providing a federal commissioner with enough evidence, the men began to make their way back to Virginia when they were ambushed by a crowd of "mudsills" (poor whites) and free blacks, who exchanged blows and gunfire with the slaveholder and his two companions. The crowd succeeded in liberating the alleged fugitive and transported him to safety. After the altercation, the slaveholder, marshal, and witness began a hasty departure from Blairsville to the railroad station, only to be followed by an angry crowd of African Americans who pelted them with projectiles until the train whisked them away.[77]

Other towns in southwestern Pennsylvania were also sites of violent conflict between escaping African Americans and slave-catchers seeking to return them to bondage. On a fall Sunday evening in 1857, an enslaved family made their way on horseback from Preston County, Virginia, into neighboring Fayette County. Shortly thereafter their owner, George Fairfax, discovered they had escaped. By Monday afternoon, Fairfax and a group of men set off in pursuit. About three miles north of the Pennsylvania-Virginia border the fugitive slaves abandoned their horses and hid in the woods. Later that evening, Fairfax and his men discovered them two miles south of Uniontown. The family fought Fairfax and his men with knives and hatchets

77. "A Fugitive Slave Case," *The Liberator*, April 23, 1858.

wounding one Pennsylvania slavecatcher but were captured and thrown in the Uniontown jail, except for two children who returned with their owner to Virginia.[78] The following year, a group of ten African Americans (three women, two children, and five men) belonging to Cornelius Runnels, Colonel E. J. Armstrong, and James W. Baston of Virginia escaped. The group got as far as Greene County, Pennsylvania, before Armstrong and a group of slave-catchers found them. Attempting to fend off their pursuers, one escaped slave struck Armstrong twice over the head with a corn cutter, resulting in a serious but non-fatal wound. Armstrong and his men retreated to the town of New Geneva where they solicited some white townsmen to assist in recapturing these slaves. However, the escaped slaves, with the assistance of local free blacks, successfully evaded capture.[79]

Years earlier, at West Pike Run in Washington County in April 1851, a skirmish erupted at West Pike Run in Washington County when a group of men attempted to kidnap a black man. One of the abductors shot twice at the victim but could not capture him. The kidnappers were soon arrested. The party of kidnappers were not in jail for long: six were released on bail, two were free, and another man was still at large. This same group of men had launched two previous attempts to kidnap free blacks near West Newton. The actions of these kidnappers in this part of southwestern Pennsylvania were significant because, according to David Griffith, a contemporary observer of local politics, they "tended to awaken the dormant sympathies of the people for the oppressed and trodden down fugitives, who are

78. "Negroes Runaway," *Brownsville Times*, November 29, 1857.

79. "Runaway Negroes," *Brownsville Times*, November 18, 1858.

flying for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, beyond the reach of Fillmore's puny arm."[80] Violent confrontations between free blacks, escaped slaves, and antislavery activists against slave-catchers and kidnappers that occurred in southwestern Pennsylvania were politically significant because, as Griffith noted, they raised public awareness of the antislavery struggle and sympathy for the plight of runaway slaves.

These acts of violent resistance against the fugitive slave act and growing abolitionists willingness to advocate the use of violence in the overthrow of slavery represented a political expression of free soil principles.[81] The actions of abolitionists, antislavery activists, and escaped slaves not only embodied a "politics of lawbreaking," but also had a moral dimension as they described their actions as being representative of a higher law. A growing number of abolitionists, both black and white, justified the use of violence in defiance to the Fugitive Slave Law on the basis that it was immoral for them to obey a law that violated Christian principles. These abolitionists increasingly endorsed open civil disobedience to the law, disobedience that often took violent forms. Indeed, during a November 1859 meeting at an AME

80. "Kidnapping in Western Pennsylvania," *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, April 12, 1851.

81. The debates among abolitionists over advocating for the use of violence amongst themselves and by slaves to bring an end to black bondage and the evolution of those discussions has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention by historians. See Friedman Goldstein, "Violence as an Instrument for Social Change: The Views of Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)." *Journal of Negro History* 61, no. 1 (January 1976): 61-72; Stanley Harrold, *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004); Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); Carleton Mabee, *Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 through the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 1970); John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold, eds., *Anti-Slavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999)

Church in Pittsburgh, African Americans from the surrounding area adopted a series of resolutions honoring John Brown, the white militant abolitionist who led a failed raid that October on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, and who had hoped his actions would foment a slave insurrection in order to end slavery. In one resolution the group declared that, "John Brown, in taking up arms to liberate the slaves, only acted upon the maxim that 'resistance to tyrants is obedience to God.'"[82] After 1850, more abolitionists were willing to justify the use of violence and open defiance of the law in order to strike against slavery's northern influence.

CONCLUSION

In 1848, debates over free soil came to the forefront in national politics as Americans debated whether territories acquired from the war with Mexico should be opened to slaveholders. Overshadowed by this national discussion is the contest over free soil in southwestern Pennsylvania which contributed to increasing sectional tensions as the decade progressed. When William Horner arrived with his bondswoman and her four enslaved children at the Allegheny Hotel in the fall of 1854, he was one of among many slaveholders and kidnappers who traversed through southwestern Pennsylvania. These enslavers believed that their property claims superseded Pennsylvania free soil. Slaveholders and kidnappers found some supporters in the region willing to act in defense of their perceived right to the own

82. "Meeting of Colored Citizens—Business to be suspended on Friday—A Meeting for the Relief of John Brown's Family," *Pittsburgh Daily Dispatch*, December 1, 1859.

and sale black bodies. Railroad companies and steamboat conductors also assisted in helping enslavers transport their bondspeople through the region. Southwestern Pennsylvania abolitionists recognized that failure to thwart these attempts at undermining the region's free soil status threatened black freedom and free labor. Antislavery activists believed that one only had to look at the less prosperous and economically stagnant southern portions of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Iowa which were settled by migrants from the slave south.

African Americans in southwestern Pennsylvania were at the forefront in defending what can be called black free soil principles. They interpreted free soil as not just the absence of slavery but the notion that enslaved blacks who entered the region were automatically free and free African Americans were guaranteed certain rights and legal protections. Blacks in this part of the northern borderland recognized that the failure of local and state authorities to protect and defend their free soil principles threatened not only their freedom but also black free labor ideology, as they could easily be deprived of the fruits of their labor by unscrupulous slavecatchers and kidnappers. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians employed a variety of methods to defend and advance their free soil and free labor principles. These strategies included participation in the Free Soil Party and activism in black conventions, engaging in subaltern acts of resistance through the assistance of runaway slaves and kidnapped free blacks, and liberating enslaved African Americans, undertaking coordinated action with abolitionists in the East and West, and finally using the courts.

Despite these efforts, some African American became disillusioned with remaining in the United States. Beginning in the mid-1850s, renewed emigrationist and colonizationist sentiment, the rise of a new antislavery political party, and war would transform black free soil politics a final time.

Chapter 5

The Civil War Era and the Transformation of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Borderland, 1852-1865

Black Pittsburghers crowded into the Wylie Street AME on January 2, 1865, to commemorate the second anniversary of President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Elisha Weaver, a reporter for the *Christian Recorder,* described the scene with the crowd being "anxious, yet hopeful and rejoicing hearts, they hailed this act of justice and mercy, as the dawning of a brighter future." The meeting featured a number of speeches. Reverend Samuel Watts, pastor of Brown's Chapel in Allegheny, gave an animated address recounting the destruction of slavery in the District of Columbia and its recent abolition in Maryland. Following him was Reverend Lewis Woodson who stressed the need for African Americans to become landowners. One of the evening's final speakers, Professor Samuel A. Neal, principal of the Allegheny City Colored Schools, encouraged the crowd to dedicate themselves to living a life of sobriety, morality, activity, and virtue.[1]

The gathering at the Wylie Street AME was an expression of optimism about a future for African Americans freed from bondage and from the constant threat of enslavement. It was also a celebration of the partial triumph of black free soil and free labor principles. But as Weaver reported, a sense of anxiousness pervaded those in attendance. No one in the crowd knew what the future would hold for them; the

1. "For the Christian Recorder, Letter From Pittsburgh," *Christian Recorder*, February 4, 1865.

prospects for equal citizenship rights for African Americans to allow them to freely pursue their free labor vision remained uncertain.

But it was not for lack of trying. The Civil War had provided African Americans in the region with new opportunities to remake their society according to their expansive vision of free soil and free labor. And the past decade had brought obvious advances, not least emancipation. However, black activists' work had continued to meet fierce resistance from fearful and angry whites, concerned that black freedom claims threatened their status and rights as freeholders. Unable to make sufficient gains, many African Americans had, over the ten years prior to 1865, began to embrace emigration and colonization schemes to realize their free soil vision.

COMPETING VISIONS OF REALIZING BLACK FREE SOIL: EMIGRATION AND COLONIZATION

After 1850, an increasing number of African Americans considered emigration to Canada, the Caribbean, West Africa, and other places outside the United States. This emigrationist sentiment was inspired by northern officials' continued enforcement of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, slavery's expansion westward, and the perceived lack of progress made by African Americans in their struggle for full freedom. Martin Delany, a Pittsburgh abolitionist and community leader, was at the forefront of this black-led emigration movement. Delany and his followers sought to establish a free-soil black republic outside the United States.

In 1852 Delany provided his case for black emigration in his book, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States*. Delany believed that the presence of black soldiers, farmers, businessmen, mechanics, doctors and other professionals was proof enough that African Americans were worthy of full citizenship rights. But he believed African Americans were still being denied their rights as citizens and that racial prejudice was still too deeply entrenched, even among white abolitionists, many of whom continued to deny black activists leadership roles within their antislavery organizations. The hostile racial climate made achieving full black freedom exceedingly prohibited. Delany considered emigration as the only option for free blacks.[2]

Delany considered Central or South America to be the best site for African American emigrants. He believed that blacks could never be free in Liberia, as it was not an independent republic. The Liberian president and other executive officers may have been black, but true political power still rested with the all-white Colonization Board of the American Colonization Society. On the other hand, in Central and South America, African Americans would be able to meaningfully participate in self-government as "there never have existed in the policy of any of the nations of Central or South America, an inequality on account of race or color, and any prohibition of rights, has generally been to the white, and not to the colored races."[3] Delany also

2. Martin R. Delany, *The Condition Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852; repr., Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1993), 26-27, 158.

3. Delany, *The Condition Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny*, 169-170, 178-181; Samuel W. Black, "Allegheny County and the National Emigration Convention of 1854," in *The Civil War in Pennsylvania: The African American Experience*, ed. Samuel W. Black (Pittsburgh: Senator John Heinz History Center, 2013), 164; Delany was not the only Pittsburgher interested in emigration to Central America. In 1852, David Peck, a Pittsburgh abolitionist emigrated to Nicaragua. At a political convention in the Central American country chaired by Peck, Delany was made mayor of the

believed Great Britain, because of its treaty obligations, would protect the nations of Central and South America from encroachment by the United States.[4]

Two years after *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny* appeared, black activists—from mostly the Old Northwest, western Pennsylvania, and Canada—gathered in Cleveland to discuss emigration. The August 1854 Cleveland Convention cemented southwestern Pennsylvania as the center of the black emigrationist movement. African Americans from the greater Pittsburgh area comprised the largest delegation. The convention also designated the city as the headquarters for the National Board of Emigration Commissioners. The board was to investigate the condition of African Americans across the nation and publicize their findings to promote emigration. The national board was dominated by Pittsburghers. Indeed, the absence of delegates from Boston, Philadelphia, and other eastern cities indicates that emigration had little appeal in the East.[5]

Nicaraguan city of Greytown. For Delany, Peck's venture to Nicaragua was further evidence that Central America was the best site for black emigrants.

4. Delany, *The Condition Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny*, 169, 174-179, 186, 189. Roughly around summer 1854, Delany rethought emigration to Central America in part due to political developments in the region as William Walker, a white southerner, sought to create a slave state in the region. By 1857, Delany's attitude towards black emigration to Africa became more favorable as he was convinced by white travel accounts that Africa represented a site where black free labor could thrive. In May 1859, Delany and a group of black Canadians and African Americans established the Niger Valley Exploring Party to survey a site for a black homeland in Africa. Delany returned to Canada in 1860, on the eve of the Civil War. Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robinson Delany, 1812-1885* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 160, 163-166; Victor Ullman, *Martin R. Delany: The Beginnings of Black Nationalism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 178-179; Frank A. Rollin, *Life and Public Services of Martin R. Delany* (1883; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1969), 83-84.

5. *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People; Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday the 24th, 25th and 26th of August 1854* (Pittsburgh: A. A. Anderson, 1854), 14-18; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Black's Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York: Athenaeum, 1974), 264-266.

For convention delegates, free soil entailed a set of rights, privileges, and opportunities which would be a marker of true freedom for African Americans. This included an end to the rendition of escaped slaves from free soil back into bondage and the ability to participate in self-government by being granted the elective franchise and serve in an elected position. Economic independence was also an important marker of freedom. The delegates proclaimed in their platform that "man cannot be independent without possessing the land on which he resides." The convention believed that whites would never recognize African Americans as equals unless they achieved attainments in industry, wealth, the arts, sciences, trades, agriculture, and other "respectable vocations." To achieve this free soil and free labor vision, the convention recommended emigration.[6]

The Cleveland Convention was distinct from previous black conventions in one important respect; a significant number of delegates were women. The convention adopted a series of resolutions that indicate a gendered notion of free soil and free labor. For instance, the delegates believed that the strength and respectability of a people "depends entirely upon the position of their women." It was therefore essential that black girls be educated "in all the arts and sciences pertaining to the highest civilization." For the delegates, domestic spaces such as boarding houses were also important free soil spaces because they provided accommodations to travelers regardless of race. The convention praised Julia A. Tilgham, Louisa Brown, and their husbands for providing a "free soil house" for black travelers in Cleveland

6. *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People*, 24-27.

and recommended black patronage of these boarding houses. Black women's noticeable presence at the convention illustrates that for many of them, emigration spoke to their own desires to realize a distinct notion of black free soil and free labor.[7]

Despite the enthusiasm for emigration among African Americans, most blacks were adamantly opposed to leaving the United States. George B. Vashon, a Pittsburgher who had previously emigrated to Haiti in the late 1840s but soon returned to the United States, ridiculed emigrationists. He described emigrationists as "political neophytes" seeking the prestige of leading a grand black exodus from the United States. Vashon criticized emigrationist leaders for forgetting the wisdom of the previous generation of black leaders who had rejected colonization and defiantly proclaimed that they would never leave the United States. In a letter to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, a Pittsburgher hoped that emigrationists would be opposed by the black community as he believed that they were "giving aid and comfort" to a resurgent white-led colonization movement which sought to remove all free blacks from the United States.[8]

Frederick Douglass was the most prominent opponent of emigration. He believed that African Americans should refuse to leave the United States as their identity and destiny were intertwined with the United States. For Douglass, black emigration legitimated white claims that both races could never coexist in the United States. He contended that African Americans should stay and battle for their rights,

7. *Proceedings of the National Emigration Convention of Colored People,* 21, 26-27.

8. *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 16, 1853; Floyd J. Miller, *The Search for a Black Nationality: Black Emigration and Colonization, 1787-1863* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 154-155.

just as they had done in the country's previous wars. Despite Douglass' fierce opposition to emigration, he was not against individual emigration for personal safety.

Beginning in the late 1840s, there was a resurgence of white support for the American Colonization Society (ACS) and in Pennsylvania, its state auxiliary, the Pennsylvania Colonization Society (PCS). There were many reasons for renewed colonizationist sentiment. Many poor and working class whites viewed colonization as a means to remove African American competition for jobs and access to western lands. Various religious denominations promoted colonization for humanitarian reasons. Some churches believed that northern free blacks were worse off than enslaved African Americans. A few churches saw colonization as a means to Christianize and "civilize" Africans under African-American guidance. Others supported colonization because they thought that racial barriers that African Americans faced were intractable. Finally, many whites viewed colonization as a political solution to the increasingly polarizing national issue of slavery.[9]

Among some black southwestern Pennsylvanians, there was support for colonization. Around late March 1852, Johnstown's black community met to discuss emigration to Liberia. Many black residents were inspired to emigrate because they believed they would never realize complete freedom in the United States. Some men saw colonization as an opportunity to escape racial discrimination, which made it

9. Power-Greene, *Against Wind and Tide*, 96-97, 99 127; Andrew K. Diemer, *The Politics of Black Citizenship: Free African Americans in the Mid-Atlantic Borderland, 1817-1863* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 153.

difficult for them to provide for their families.[10] The Johnstown gathering resolved to establish an organization to carry out their plans for colonization.[11] That November, Samuel Williams of Johnstown and Charles Deputie of Hollidaysburg traveled to Liberia to explore a possible site for black settlement. By late Spring 1853, both men returned home, convinced that colonization was the best solution for African Americans.[12]

In July 1853, black western Pennsylvanians gathered at Hollidaysburg to create the Liberian Enterprise Company (LEC) in order to assist African American emigration to Liberia. Once African Americans arrived, the LEC envisioned settlers laboring in "manufacturing, mercantile, and agricultural pursuits." The LEC leadership was comprised of black men from smaller towns: Charles Deputie from Hollidaysburg; Samuel Williams from Johnstown; Thomas Lillason from Blairsville; and John H.M. Harris from Greensburg. To cover the cost of travel and settlement, the LEC planned to sell stock in a lumber harvesting company and iron-ore extracting business in Liberia. The LEC hoped to spread free labor principles to Africans in order to improve their condition by "opening to them a means of honorable employment, and instructing them in the modes and sciences of civilized life." The LEC also hoped to spread Christianity across the continent. The PCS welcomed the creation of the LEC, commending the group for undertaking a noble mission that

10. This sentiment was part of a larger gender discourse among African Americans and whites surrounding colonization. See, Bruce Dorsey, "A Gendered History of African Colonization in the Antebellum United States," *Journal of Social History* 34 no. 1 (Autumn 2000): 77-103.

11. "Delegate from Johnstown Pennsylvania," *Colonization Herald*, May 1852.

12. "Steam for Liberia," *Colonization Herald*, June 1853.

sought to elevate not only themselves and their families but also native Africans in order to make Liberia and the rest of Africa a true home of freedom and civilization.[13]

Thomas Morris Chester, a Harrisburg abolitionist educated in Allegheny City, was another advocate for colonization. His interest in colonization was inspired by his time spent in greater Pittsburgh. Chester attended the Allegheny Institute (later Avery College), the city's first black college, shortly after it opened in 1849. The Allegheny Institute was founded by Pittsburgh philanthropist and antislavery activist, Charles Avery, a supporter of colonization. Avery hoped that its graduates would emigrate to Africa where they could achieve complete freedom and engage in racial uplift efforts. Chester arrived in Pittsburgh at a time when black residents were beginning to openly consider emigration or colonization after the adoption of a new federal fugitive slave law in 1850.[14]

In May 1854, Chester wrote to Martin H. Freeman, his former teacher at Allegheny Institute, to describe his recent visit to Liberia. In his letter, Chester depicted Liberia as a site where African Americans could not only secure for themselves rights and freedom but spread black free labor principles that could uplift all Africans. Chester predicted that African American emigrants to Liberia would

13. "Pennsylvania Enterprise for Liberia," *Colonization Herald*, September 1853; "The Liberian Enterprise Company," *Colonization Herald*, November 1853.

14. Pittsburgh provided separate schools for African Americans, but they were woefully inadequate compared to white schools; Henry Pisciotta, "The Avery Monument: The Elevation of Race in Public sculpture and the Republican Party," in *Making and Remaking Pennsylvania's Civil War*, ed. William Blair and William Pencak (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 107-108, 127, 129-130, 133; Thomas Morris Chester, *Thomas Morris Chester, Black Civil War Correspondent: His Dispatches from the Virginia Front*, ed. R. J. M. Blackett (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 4, 8-10; Stanton Belfour, "Charles Avery: Early Pittsburgh Philanthropist," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 43, no. 1 (March 1960): 20-21.

construct an empire "whose benignant influence and millions of Africa will be redeemed and regenerated from the polluting degradation of vice and immorality, in which they have been participating without a knowledge of the awful consequences." Chester envisioned Liberia not in terms of a republic but as the fountainhead of an empire in which African Americans would be at the center in spreading the free labor values.[15] Freeman was persuaded and ultimately emigrated to Liberia with help from white colonizationists, where he became a professor at Liberia College.[16]

Despite some black southwestern Pennsylvanians' interest and support for colonization, the number of black migrants who travel to Liberia under the auspices of the PCS remained small.[17] Black southwestern Pennsylvanians recognized the threat the ACS and PCS posed to their free soil principles. Indeed, black opponents of the PCS and ACS went to great lengths to denounce colonization. In 1850, John

15. "Liberia by a Pennsylvanian," *Colonization Herald*, September 1854.

16. "Liberia by a Pennsylvania," *Colonization Herald*, September 1854; Russell W. Irvine, "Martin H. Freeman of Rutland: America's First Black College Professor and Pioneering Black Social Activist," *Rutland Historical Quarterly* 26 no. 3 (1996): 81-83, 85; Samuel W. Black, "Allegheny County and the National Emigration Convention of 1854," in *The Civil War in Pennsylvania*, 167-168; Unlike her father, Amelia Freeman rejected colonization, emigrating to Chatham, Canada. She learned of Chatham's black community from Martin Delany. Freeman married Isaac Shadd, the brother of Mary Ann Shadd, a vociferous advocate of black emigration to Canada. Amelia Freeman Shadd taught at a Sabbath School in Chatham Canada for boys and girls irrespective of race. See, Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 14-15; "School for All," *Provincial Freeman*, June 13, 1857.

17. Accounts by the PCS suggest that the organization sent substantial numbers of African Americans to Liberia. In one issue of the *Colonization Herald* ("Survey of Efforts," *Colonization Herald*, June 1855) it was reported that in June 1855 thirty African Americans from the surrounding Johnstown area traveled with him to Liberia to emigrate. These numbers are significant for this part of Pennsylvania, overall the PCS efforts were ineffective. Historian Eric Burin estimates that between 1850 and 1855 that the ACS was able to send an average 61 northern free blacks to Liberia. Black emigration fell briefly after 1855 but rebounded in 1857 after the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Dred Scott* case. Burin approximates that between 1840 and 1860 the ACS sent a total of 649 northern free blacks to Africa. See, Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 30.

Vashon described colonization and slavery as "twin sisters" because "the main desire of the friends of Colonization is, to drain the free colored people out of these United States, so that the chain of slavery may be riveted more tightly upon its victims." At a Pittsburgh August First celebration in 1859, Lewis Woodson argued that Liberia was unfit for agricultural labor because of the lack of "horse, oxen, and other working animals." Woodson warned blacks who decided to go to Liberia that they would not find themselves engaged in farming, but "merely gardening." He also warned that African Americans risked death if they migrated to Liberia as one of his relatives had died due to the grueling voyage across the Atlantic and region's hostile climate. To such opponents of colonization, Liberia might be free soil, but it was not a place where black free labor could thrive or survive. [18]

White boosters for colonization pressed on regardless and in 1854 Pennsylvania moved towards sponsoring its own colonization scheme. It planners remained adamant that Liberia was the perfect site where free blacks could fulfill their free labor vision. The legislators described the colony as rich in fertile lands where rice, coffee, cotton, sugar and other valuable crops that could be cultivated and sold for the global market. African Americans could also obtain a livelihood from raising domesticate animals as well as hunting wild game which was plentiful. There was also a place for African Americans in skilled trades in Liberia, as the legislators noted that the country was rich in iron ore that could be used to produce knives, spears, and bracelets. The legislators were not concerned about the logistics of

18. *Daily Pittsburgh Dispatch*, August 3, 1859.

transporting African Americans to Liberia, speculating that with financial backing from the state the removal of black Pennsylvanians could be accomplished in less than twenty years. The committee believed that for African Americans, Liberia and not Pennsylvania was "the land of promise." The state legislature eventually provided $2,000 in support of black colonization, representing a setback for African American free soil across Pennsylvania.[19]

THE REPUBLICAN PARTY TRIMUMPH IN PENNSYLVANIA AND THE ROAD TO WAR

The same year the Pennsylvania House Committee released its report in support of colonization, a new antislavery political coalition began to take shape. The Republican Party was established in 1854, at a time when the issue of slavery in Kansas and the other western territories increasingly dominated northern politics. The party attracted support from antislavery and economic nationalist Whigs and Know-Nothings, Free Soilers, and a few immediate abolitionists. The party's broad coalition was united around a platform of non-extension, which called for the prohibition of slavery in the western territories. Republicans believed that slavery hindered the economic development of the west by discouraging small entrepreneurs and commercial farmers from settling in the region. Republicans also believed that allowing slavery to take root in new western territories would exacerbate poverty in

19. "Report of the Select Committee of the House of Representatives, on the Subject of Colonization," (Harrisburg, PA: State Printer, 1854), 7; "Emigration," *Colonization Herald*, February 1851; Diemer, *The Politics of Black Citizenship*, 153.

northern cities, as workers would no longer be able to become landowners in the west.[20]

Despite the antislavery sentiment among Republicans, numerous members of the party did not endorse African Americans' notions of free soil. Most antislavery Republicans were not racial egalitarians or abolitionists. At an 1856 Republican rally, Thomas Williams, a Pittsburgh orator and future congressman, declared that he was unconcerned about the plight of African Americans, caring only about whites who sought deliverance from the Slave Power.[21] Many Republicans promoted a free labor vision that had overtones of racism. They argued that the presence of African Americans in the western territories degraded the status of white laborers. Many Republicans also embraced colonization or refused to challenge slavery in the slave states.[22]

Despite all this, some African Americans did support the Republican Party. Many blacks found the party a preferable alternative to the pro-slavery and virulently anti-black Democratic Party. Despite racism among Republicans, some in the party were certainly open to supporting some limited black rights. For that reason, delegates at black state conventions in Ohio, New York, and New England pledged their support for the Republican Party. During the 1860 presidential campaign,

20. Allen C. Guelzo, *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84-85; Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 497; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988),144.

21. Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 189.

22. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (1970; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 266-268.

African Americans held parades and raised "Lincoln Liberty Trees" in cities across the North, including Pittsburgh.[23]

In southwestern Pennsylvania, support for the Republican Party was strongest in Pittsburgh. In the 1860 presidential election, the city gave Abraham Lincoln, the Republican candidate, the largest percentage of votes of any major city. Historian Michael Holt attributes the success of the party in Pittsburgh to its ability to appeal to voters on issues surrounding industrialization and immigration. Holt contends that Whigs and Republicans did not make free-soil and anti-Southern sentiment the centerpiece of their appeals to voters. However, black southwestern Pennsylvanians and their white allies worked to ensure that slavery and free soil remained at the center of local politics.[24]

The Republican Party's triumph in the Keystone State produced mixed reactions across southwestern Pennsylvania. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* declared Lincoln's election a "glorious victory," and encouraged readers to "rejoice and be glad."[25] In Bedford County, the mood was less celebratory. The *Bedford Gazette* begrudgingly acknowledged Lincoln's victory but predicted that the Republican Party would soon become too corrupt to maintain power. The editors reminded readers that, despite Lincoln's victory, most northern states had not succumbed to abolitionist

23. Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 336, 338; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 290.

24. Michael Fitzgibbon Holt, *Forging A Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 2-3, 6-10.

25. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, November 7, 1850.

sentiment. The *Bedford Gazette* hoped Lincoln would turn on his abolitionist supporters by rejecting "their dogmas of negro equality and higher law." However, political events took a dramatic turn when, on April 12, 1861, a group of southern secessionists, who were determined to establish their own slaveholding republic opened fire on the federal instillation in Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina.[26]

After the Union Army's surrender at Fort Sumter, President Lincoln called for volunteers to put down what he described as a rebellion in the southern states. Many African Americans across the North sought to enlist in the Union Army. On April 17, the Hannibal Guards, an independent black militia in Pittsburgh, sent a letter to General James S. Negley, the militia commander of Western Pennsylvania, offering to assist the federal government in its fight against the Slave Power.[27] In Altoona, African Americans had organized a military company. However, the *Altoona Tribune* reminded black townspeople that because they were not "legally recognized citizens," the state could not allow them to enlist. The *Tribune* suggested that black Pennsylvanians could best support the war effort by serving as artisans and workmen for the Union Army.[28]

Many northern blacks were inspired to fight for the Union cause because they viewed military service as a means to secure citizenship rights. To many Americans,

26. "Sectionalism Triumphant," *Bedford Gazette*, November 9, 1860; "Nice Opening for a Young Man," *Bedford Gazette*, November 9, 1860; "The Future of Republicanism," *Bedford Gazette*, November 9, 1860.

27. James McPherson, ed. *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union* (1965; repr., Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 19-20.

28. "Negro Volunteers," *Altoona Tribune*, April 25, 1861.

soldiering demonstrated one's virtue as a citizen-soldier who took up arms in the creation of the republic and in defense of the common good. Through their service, sacrifice, and restraint soldiers showed that they were capable of exercising civic responsibilities in a republican society. Military service was viewed by many Americans as the ideal masculine image, as men sacrificed the comforts of home in service to the republic. According to historian Ricardo A. Herrera, "soldiering reinforced a man's identity and membership within republican society by serving that society; hence the individual man's worth was measured by participation in the life of the republic." Many African Americans believed military service could be used to demonstrate their legitimacy, virtue, and manhood as full citizens and their fitness to participate in republican society.[29]

FREE SOIL'S FUTURE AFTER EMANCIPATION AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA BORDERLAND

29. Ricardo A. Herrera, *For Liberty and the Republic: The American Citizen as Soldier, 1775-1861* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 27, 44, 65-66; Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 4-7. Not all African Americans offered their support for the war in the conflict's first months, as some blacks were uncertain that black military service would guarantee citizenship. Samuel Watts, pastor of Pittsburgh's Wylie Street Church, believed that because African Americans' position in American society was still in doubt, the only means to improve their condition was through emigration, possibly to Haiti. However, for the time being, African Americans were denied the opportunity by the federal government to serve in the Union Army. "The People Moving in Earnest," *Pine and Palm*, November 16, 1861.

Debates among African Americans over whether to enlist in the Union Army are examined in great detail in Brian M. Taylor, "'To Make the Union What it Ought to Be': African Americans, Military Service, and the Drive to Make Black Civil War Service Count" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2015); J. Matthew Gallman, *Defining Duty in the Civil War: Personal Choice, Popular Culture, and the Union Home Front: Personal Choice, Popular Culture, and the Union Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 223-250.

Meanwhile, developments on and off the battlefield threatened slavery's continued existence. By the summer of 1862, enslaved people had fled to Union Army lines across the South in droves. Congress responded by adopting a Confiscation Act in July 1862. This statute freed all bondspeople owned by Confederate slaveholders who arrived in territory occupied by the Union Army, regardless of whether or not these bondspeople were being used to support the Confederate war effort. Lincoln signed the act but hoped that the slaveholding states that remained in the Union would voluntarily abolish black bondage. That summer, Lincoln considered issuing a proclamation emancipating at least some slaves. Not far from his mind was the political consequences of such an act and the future of these newly freed people in the United States.

In August 1862, President Lincoln held a meeting with a delegation of black Washingtonians to share his proposal for resettling African Americans outside the United States. Lincoln believed that colonization was the best means to convince the South to abolish slavery and rid the nation of its racial problems. He told the delegation, "we have between us a broader difference than exists between almost any other two races" and because of this "your race suffer[s] very greatly, many of them by living among us, while ours suffer from your presence. In a word we suffer on each side." The President favored Chiriqui, in present-day Panama, as a site for a free black colony, because it would be more affordable to send African Americans to Central America than to Liberia. Though the delegation opposed colonization to Chiriqui, several prominent AME ministers supported removal, or were at least willing to debate the possibility of emigration. The colonization debate among black

Washingtonians was so contentious that the delegation did not issue an official response to Lincoln's proposal.[30]

When George B. Vashon, one of Pittsburgh's most prominent black abolitionists and community leaders, learned about the meeting between the President and the Washington's black delegation in the press, he was determined to share his thoughts on the subject with the President. In September 1862, Vashon wrote an open letter in *Douglass' Monthly* to Lincoln, disgusted by his proposal to colonize free blacks. He explained to the President that it would be an injustice to forcibly remove African Americans from the United States. Vashon told Lincoln that African Americans' military service had helped secure American independence. Vashon asked President Lincoln whether it was wise to colonize freed African Americans, "when Denmark and France and England are looking with envious eyes upon our liberated slaves, and regarding them as important acquisitions to their West India possessions?" He closed his letter by contending that the removal of African Americans would not resolve the sectional conflict over slavery and free soil as they were not the source of these problems. Rather, he argued, it was "the wrongs inflicted upon him by the white man."[31] By rejecting Lincoln's colonization proposal, Vashon

30. Kate Masur, "The African American Delegation to Abraham Lincoln: A Reappraisal," *Civil War History* 56, no. 2 (June 2010): 118-119, 125 Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 108, 111, 115-117; Abraham Lincoln, "Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes," *Collected works of Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 5, ed. Roy P. Basler, et. al., (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 371.

31. George B. Vashon to Abraham Lincoln, September 1862, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Volume V: The United States, 1859-1865*, ed. C. Peter Ripley et., al., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 152-158; David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African Americans Self-Emancipation in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 105.

presented a vision of a free soil nation that would include African Americans at the end of the war. In so doing, he presented freedpeople as capable free laborers.

Questions surrounding the possible place and future of emancipated African Americans in the United States also weighed heavily on the minds of white southwestern Pennsylvanians, despite the region being exceedingly far from the slave societies of the deep South. In June 1862, the people of West Middleton gathered at a Wesleyan church to discuss a series of resolutions concerning the cause of the war, black enlistment, and African American freedom. In the first resolution, those gathered acknowledged slavery as the central cause of the war, noting that it was "slaveholders and their abettors that have taken up arms for the dismemberment of our Union, and the erection of a despotism on our Southern border." In order to maintain the Union and create a lasting peace, they called for the federal government and its military to end slavery throughout the land, allowing for those held in bondage to go free. The question was then raised over the fate of those released from slavery. The meeting endorsed the enlistment and arming of black soldiers, however, there was no mention of whether black servicemen would be granted citizenship rights. The attendees at the West Middleton church also endorsed reparations for formerly enslaved people. The believed that compensation was "due to those who have labored so long without wages," and for white southwestern Pennsylvanians' silence and complicity over the issue of black bondage.[32]

32. "West Middletown Meeting," *Washington Reporter*, June 26, 1862.

Other white southwestern Pennsylvanians became more anxious about emancipation and its impact on the region as Lincoln's preliminary Emancipation Proclamation became a reality in the wake of a Union Army victory at Antietam, Maryland.[33]

Weeks after Lincoln issued his Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, residents in Washington and Westmoreland counties sent a series of petitions to the state legislature demanding that freed people of color be prohibited from emigrating into Pennsylvania. In their petitions, white southwestern Pennsylvanians described southern blacks as indolent. The petitioners feared that if free blacks were allowed to reside in southwestern Pennsylvania, they would become a burden on public coffers and courts, noting that "the past proves that this class has largely increased not only the paupers in our poor houses but the criminal business of our courts." The petitioners erroneously claimed that Midwestern states prohibited "idle and thriftless" blacks from entering and suggested that these statutes could serve as a model for Pennsylvania. The petitioners believed that the arrival of African Americans would result in a calamity for whites living in the border counties. The petitioners doubted that freed blacks were capable of becoming free laborers and therefore entrusted with the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship.[34]

33. David Williams, *I Freed Myself: African American Self-Emancipation in the Civil War Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 102-104, 106. Lincoln's proclamation was a war measure designed to weaken the Confederate war effort by declaring that all slaveholders in areas that were currently in rebellion against the United States or not under Union control would be deemed disloyal and their slaves freed. However, enslavers would be given until January 1, 1863 to declare their loyalty in order to avoid losing their property before the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation went into effect.

34. House File, 87th Session—1, 1863, Folder 6, Box 18, RG7, Records of the General Assembly, House of Representatives, Pennsylvania Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; House File, 87th Session—1 1863, Folder 9, Box 19, RG 7, Records of the General Assembly, House of

The Pennsylvania Senate Committee on Federal Relations felt it imperative to address these concerns in a March 1863 report. After deliberation, a committee of three Republicans, Morrow B. Lowry, Henry Johnson, and John P. Penney, rejected the request by white Pennsylvanians for legislation prohibiting freed blacks from entering the state. They noted that a ban on African American migration into the state could disrupt the ongoing war effort. The committee explained that they, and most northerners, believed that the Union would achieve a quick victory. However, enslaved people provided a valuable source of labor to the Confederacy by cultivating crops, constructing military fortifications, providing manual labor for the war effort, and in some cases fight in battle.[35] The labor of enslaved people allowed Confederates to dedicate their manpower to the war, causing the Union Army to suffer a number of defeats. Federal officials were left with no other option than to

Representatives, Pennsylvania Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Many mid-western states did not outright prohibit African Americans from entering their territory, but they made it exceedingly difficult for free blacks to settle in the region. For instance, under Ohio's notorious "black laws" African Americans were discouraged from settling in the state by requiring black migrants to obtain a $500 surety bond. In 1854 and 1860 Minnesota lawmakers rejected bills blocking black migration into the state. Illinois and Indiana legislators limited black migration into their states in 1848 and 1851 respectively, while in 1851, the Iowa legislature banned African Americans outright from entering the state. Before and during the war, Wisconsinites and Minnesotans clamored their state governments to adopt a law similar to Iowa. For more details, surrounding northern state's restrictions of black migrations see, Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), 63, 74; Leslie A. Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora: Race and Reconstruction in the Upper Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 29-31; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 66-74; Silvana R. Siddali, *Frontier Democracy: Constitutional Conventions in the Old Northwest* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

35. Many enslavers brought their slaves with them on the battlefield. However, it was not the Confederacy's policy to enlist or have slaves take up arms, as they recognized the threat armed slaves could pose to the institution of slavery and also problems surrounding citizenship as the enslaved could establish claims to citizenship. For the Confederacy's policy and debates surrounding the arming of slaves see, Bruce C. Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arms Slaves During the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 36-50.

pursue emancipation and enlist black soldiers. The committee reminded white Pennsylvanians that African American support for the Union cause was not guaranteed. Officials would have to gain their "sympathy and confidence," which could only be done if the enslaved could receive liberty and freedom from the United States. The committee called for northerners to set aside their fears and prejudices.[36]

The committee attributed the petitioners' fears to rumors circulated by those seeking to disrupt the Union war effort. The state senators called attention to the fact that a large influx of African Americans never attempted to enter Pennsylvania. The committee noted that in the previous two years, freedpeople preferred to remain in the south rather than migrate to "the colder and more inhospitable climate of the north." They claimed that as long as African Americans' rights were secured and protected in the South, there was no reason to believe they planned to migrate to Pennsylvania. However, the committee advised these concerned citizens that if African Americans desired to migrate and establish homes in Pennsylvania, they would be well within their rights. To prohibit them from doing so would be a violation of natural rights and require the state to disregard the loyalty of African Americans to the Union cause. Some blacks, they feared, might rethink their support to fight in the United States Army.[37]

36. *Report of the Senate Committee Relative to the Immigration of Blacks and Mulattoes into the State of Pennsylvania: In the Senate of Pennsylvania, March 6, 1863* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania General Assembly, 1863), 1-2; In the original report John P. Penney's last name is misspelled Penny.

37. *Report of the Senate Committee Relative to the Immigration of Blacks and Mulattoes into the State of Pennsylvania: In the Senate of Pennsylvania, March 6, 1863* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania General Assembly, 1863), 2-3.

Emancipation transformed notions of free soil for many whites. Black military service forced these white legislators to concede that formerly enslaved African Americans had the right to seek refuge or reside on Pennsylvania soil. The senators, using their own racialist assumptions, downplayed the prospect of southern blacks migrating to the Keystone State, failing to mention that Pennsylvania had its own free black communities. Despite this recognition of freedpeople's right to establish homes in Pennsylvania, the state senators' notions of free soil were narrow, as they avoided the subject of what rights black migrants, and those who currently resided in the state, would be afforded.

MOBILIZING AND THE BLACK MILITARY EXPERIENCE

As the war continued, it presented northern free blacks with a new opportunity to advance their free soil claims by enlisting in the Union Army. By early 1863, white attitudes towards black enlistment began to shift. At this point during the war many northerners were weary of battle, leading to a decline in morale and enlistment and depleting the Union Army ranks. Many whites believed that if the war was now a struggle for black freedom, African Americans should share in the fighting. In the spring of 1863, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton authorized the governors of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut to begin recruitment for African

American regiments. Pennsylvania would follow the lead of these states that summer.[38]

In order to meet enlistment quotas, New Englanders traveled across the North seeking recruits. African Americans from across southwestern Pennsylvania flocked to joined these regiments. For instance, Augustus Larmer of Johnstown joined the 41st Regiment of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) in September 1863; Matthew Hamilton-Lucas of Brownsville enlisted in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry in January 1864; Bartten Tendly of Allegheny County joined the 45th Regiment of the USCT mustered out in Philadelphia. Among the ranks of black servicemen were the sons of Pittsburgh's black elite. Martin Delany's son Toussaint L'Ouverture Delany boarded a train in early 1863 for Boston to enlist in the 54th Regiment of the USCT.[39]

Prospective black soldiers relied on a recruitment network previously used to mobilize and coordinate antislavery activism. This network provided information about where they could enlist and under what terms. In order to coordinate enlistment efforts, Massachusetts Governor John Andrew created the Committee of Consultation—or "Black Committee"—and in Philadelphia, Republicans and antislavery members of the Union League created the Supervisory Committee for Recruiting Colored Troops.

38. Ira Berlin, et. al., *Slave No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 196-199.

39. Col. Robert G. Shaw Post No. 206 Pittsburgh, Pa. (Lower Hill District), *Personal War Sketches*, pp. 17, 24, 37, Grand Army of the Republic, Department of Pennsylvania, Reel 3, University of Pittsburgh, University Library System Archives and Special Collections; Douglas R. Egerton, *Thunder at the Gates: The Black Civil War Regiments that Redeemed America* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 79.

These committees were chaired by whites, but relied extensively on black recruiters who had influence within the African American community. Martin Delany, who had recently returned from exploring the possibility of a black free soil settlement in West Africa, assisted recruitment efforts by traveling to cities and towns in Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Ohio, all places he had once visited as an antislavery activist and correspondent for Frederick Douglass' newspaper *The North Star*.[40] In Pennsylvania, the Supervisory Committee turned to Frederick Douglass to persuade African Americans to enlist. The committee also hosted public meetings, created posters, and placed notices and letters in the abolitionist and black press, detailing the enlistment incentives to reluctant African Americans. In ten short months, northern states had organized ten black regiments.[41]

The success of black recruiters convinced Delany that African Americans should lead recruitment efforts in the South. In December 1863, he justified his suggestion to Secretary of War Stanton, writing that "because knowing and being of that people as a race, they can command such influence as is required to accomplish the object." Delany noted that his success as a recruiting agent for the Massachusetts 54th Regiment and Rhode Island Heavy Artillery had inspired Connecticut officials to seek his assistance in helping them recruit a black regiment. Delany also mentioned working with other black recruiters across the country such as John Jones, a Chicago

40. Egerton, *Thunder at the Gates*, 71; James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 205, 207; Rollin, *Life and Public Services*, 148.

41. Andrew T. Tremel, "The Union League, Black Leaders, and the Recruitment of Philadelphia's African American Civil War Regiments," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 80, no. 1 (Winter 2013), 20, 22, 26; McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 207.

abolitionist who was part of the city's black elite. Delany told Stanton that he and Jones had now associated themselves "permanently together" in order to establish a coordinated national effort in raising black companies. Delany closed his letter by attesting to the efficiency of this coordinated enlistment effort. He promised Stanton that when given permission from the War Department, this recruitment network could easily extend southward, raising a black regiment or brigade much quicker than if such a task were left to whites.[42]

The success of black recruitment efforts in the North led anti-war Democrats (also referred to as copperheads) to launch a campaign of intimidation and misinformation in order to restrict black involvement in the conflict. They understood that military service would allow African Americans to claim citizenship rights. George E. Stephens, a black Philadelphian abolitionist, detailed these efforts in a letter to the *Weekly Anglo-African* in order to warn black readers not to succumb to the scare tactics and intimidation of anti-war Democrats. Stephens noted that when copperheads approached prospective black enlistees, they sought to convince them that they would be foolish to fight, as any black soldier captured by the Confederates

42. Martin R. Delany to Edwin M. Stanton, December 15, 1863, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Volume V, The United States, 1859-1865*, ed. C. Peter Ripley et. al., (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 261-262; Charles A. Gliozzo, "John Jones: A Study of a Black Chicagoan," *Illinois Historical Journal* 80 no. 3 (Autumn 1987), 180-181, 183-184; *Reports of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio* (Rochester: John Dick, 1848), 12. Delany provided no details about how and when he and Jones first met. It's likely the two crossed paths at the 1848 national black convention in Cleveland. Both men were in attendance and Jones served on the National Central Committee with Pittsburgh abolitionist John Peck. In the wake of the Fugitive Slave Act, Jones hosted Delany's longtime newspaper publishing partner, Frederick Douglass, in his home and even accompanied Douglass on his antislavery tour through the mid-west. It's not definitive how this partnership between Delany and Jones was established, but it's likely this portion of the national black recruiting network had its roots in the abolitionist and black political movements of the antebellum period.

would either be hanged, "sent into the Indigo mines, or cut up into mincemeat, or quartered and pickled, or spitted," or worse. They advised prospective recruits that they would be better off staying home, away from such dangers. Some copperheads falsely told African American recruits headed for Massachusetts that it would be unwise to enlist, advising them to be patient as Pennsylvania would soon organize a black brigade. Stephens noted that some white recruiters were outright frauds as they had no authority to enlist African Americans. Sometimes opponents of black enlistment resorted to violence, in several cities and towns attacking African American recruitment drives.[43]

Copperheads also targeted Pittsburgh in their campaign to undermine black enlistment efforts. Stephens reported that George B. Vashon and a number of black Pittsburghers participated in what they believed was a war meeting sponsored by state officials for the purpose of raising an African American Pennsylvania regiment. Black Pittsburghers soon learned that for the time being Pennsylvania officials had no intention of recruiting black men. Vashon and the city's black leaders were misled by accounts from the Philadelphia press that made their way west. The hoax was intended by copperheads to prevent African Americans from traveling to New England in order to prevent these black regiments from reaching their needed quota of enlistees, but as Stephens noted this attempt failed.[44]

43. George E. Stephens to Robert Hamilton, April 2, 1863, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Volume V, The United States, 1859-1865*, ed. C. Peter Ripley et. al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 198-200.

44. George E. Stephens to Robert Hamilton, April 2, 1863, in *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Volume V*, C. Peter Ripley, et. al., 200-201.

White northerners carefully scrutinized the behavior of African American regiments when they stopped in their towns and cities to assess whether black men made good soldiers, and therefore citizens. In the fall of 1863, a black regiment made a brief stop in Pittsburgh on their way east, where they were hosted by the city's Subsistence Committee. The news of black soldiers in Pittsburgh attracted a number of onlookers to see how these men would behave. The city's copperheads arrived to watch for any unsightly behavior exhibited by any black soldier that they could use for political gain. However, a writer for the *Washington Reporter* observed that the comportment of the troops was exemplary and noted that "their conduct reflected the highest honor alike upon themselves and the cause they had enlisted to defend."[45]

In that same account, the journalist recalled the arrival of a white New Jersey regiment to Pittsburgh shortly after the black regiment left. The Subsistence Committee made arrangements to entertain the troops, but when these soldiers arrived, a colonel would not allow the men to leave the train. He claimed that the men had (allegedly) exhibited disorderly behavior and low morale and that it was unsafe for civilians if the soldiers were allowed to roam the city's streets. The *Washington Reporter* questioned the loyalty and patriotism of the men, noting that they had received large bounties for enlisting and that about one-third of them had deserted on the way to Pittsburgh. The journalist pondered what would happen if the actions of the black and white regiments were reversed, speculating that the copperhead

45. "Black and White," *Washington Reporter*, November 25, 1863.

newspapers would use the report of African American soldiers' disorderly behavior to discredit the federal policy of black enlistment.[46]

Many Pittsburghers did not need any further convincing that African American men made good soldiers, as city residents warmly received black regiments that stopped in Pittsburgh on their way to the battlefield. In the summer of 1864, William McCoslin, a first sergeant, was traveling with his company, the 29th United States Colored Infantry, from Bloomington, Illinois, to Petersburgh, Virginia. After a thirty-hour train ride from Chicago, the infantry arrived in Pittsburgh on a July morning, exhausted but in good spirits. The men then marched to the Soldiers' Rest for an impressive dinner where, according to McCoslin, "every kindness was shown" to him and his men. McCoslin described his treatment in Pittsburgh as "the same if not better than [that which] some of the white soldiers received." It was not until McCoslin and the 29th United States Colored Infantry reached Baltimore that they were greeted by an angry white mob as they marched through the city streets. The behavior of white Pittsburghers towards black soldiers who arrived in their city is evidence that they supported the arming of African American men.[47]

Shortly after the first black regiments arrived on the battlefield, African Americans quickly discovered that the Union Army did not believe black soldiers were equal citizens. Black recruits had assumed they would be paid the same as

46. "Black and White," *Washington Reporter*, November 25, 1863.

47. William McCoslin to *Christian Recorder*, July 26, 1864, in *A Grand Army of Black Men: Letters from African-American Soldiers in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 107-108.

whites. In late July 1863, a group of black enlistees from Pittsburgh expected to receive $13 a month and a $3.50 clothing allowance. However, the War Department decided earlier that month that all black soldiers (regardless of rank) would receive $10 a month with $3 deducted for clothing. War Department officials also refused to commission black officers as they were skeptical of African Americans' leadership capabilities and concerned about hostile white reaction against blacks appointed to a higher rank. The only African American commissioned officers were chaplains and surgeons (positions excluded from military chain of command). White officers harbored racial stereotypes of black men which influenced how they disciplined African American soldiers. For example, a few whites resorted to arbitrary actions or punishments similar to those that African Americans endured under slavery.[48]

Disputes between African Americans and the Union Army over unequal pay, commissioning of black officers, and discriminatory disciplinary practices illustrates that military service was not an automatic path for African Americans in obtaining citizenship rights. The Union Army became a site where blacks sought to recraft the meaning of citizenship. African Americans vehemently challenged the army's unequal polices. For instance, black soldiers went more than a year without pay to protest the unequal remuneration between white and African American soldiers. In late 1863, the 3rd South Carolina Infantry refused to perform any military service

48. Berlin et. al., *Slaves No More*, 212-214; Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire*, 55-56; Carole Emberton, "'Only Murder Makes Men': Reconsidering the Black Military Experience," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2 no. 3 (September 2012): 376, 379, 382; Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Manhood, Honor, and Violence in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 164; "Chairman of the Pennsylvania Committee for Recruiting Colored Regiments to the Secretary of War," in *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. 2, vol. 1, *The Black Military Experience*, ed. Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 371.

until they were granted equal pay. It was not until many black regiments were on the brink of mutiny that Congress intervened to pass an equal pay law. As black soldiers were fighting and dying on the battlefield for the Union cause and equal rights, African Americans on the northern home front mobilized in pursuit of full citizenship.[49]

REHERSALS FOR RECONSTRUCTION: THE FUTURE OF BLACK FREE SOIL AND FREE LABOR

Wartime emancipation and black enlistment transformed northern black politics, creating a resurgence of political activism as African Americans began to make plans to bring their vision of a free soil nation into reality.[50] In early October

49. African Americans did not limit their protests to unequal pay. Black opposition to the Union Army's other discriminatory policies are described in greater detail in Berlin, et. al., *Slaves No More*, 211-222; Christian G. Samito, *Becoming American Under Fire: Irish Americans, African Americans, and the Politics of Citizenship During the Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 55-64; Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers During the Civil War* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2002), 38-58; Black women also protested to military officials when they believed their sons and husband were treated unfairly. See for example Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom*, 179.

50. Most scholarship on black Reconstruction politics has focused extensively on the South. In recent years there has been a resurgence of work that has examined the northern black freedom struggle during wartime and into the post-Civil War period. These scholars have not only illuminated the consequences of emancipation, black military service, and wartime dislocations on northern society and the struggle for African American rights but illustrate the national scope of Reconstruction. See for example, Daniel R. Biddle and Murray Dubin, *Tasting Freedom: Octavius Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); Hugh Davis, *"We Will Be Satisfied with Nothing Less": The African American Struggle for Equal Rights in the North During Reconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011); Andrew Deimer, "Reconstruction Philadelphia: African Americans and Politics in the Post-Civil War North," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 133 no. 1 (January 2009): 29-58; David Miles Johnston, "Beyond Freedom: The Black North, 1863-1883" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2007); David Quigley, *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction and the Making of American Democracy* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004); Schwalm, *Emancipation's Diaspora.*

1864, African American leaders from across the North (and a few southern states) gathered at Syracuse, New York, for a national black convention. The purpose of the meeting was to decide what course of unified action they should take in order to obtain their full political and civil rights.

Attendees couched their claims to American citizenship in terms of their wartime patriotism and military service. When New Yorker Paschal Randolph rose to speak, he reminded the audience that "we are here to prove our right to manhood and justice, and to maintain these rights…by the divine right of brains, of will, of true patriotism, of manhood, of womanhood, of all that is great and noble and worth striving for in human character." Bostonian Reverend J. Sella Martin recalled that since the start of the war, African Americans had gone from digging ditches and performing other menial tasks for the Union Army to serving as soldiers. Because of their service, Martin was hopeful that the nation would extend rights to African Americans. At the end of the meeting, the delegates approved an address to the American people declaring that their military service entitled them to the "immunities and privileges of all other citizens and defenders of the nation's honor."[51]

For black delegates at the Syracuse convention, achieving full citizenship rights was an essential part in fulfilling their free labor vision. However, African Americans did not wait for the war to urge free blacks to work towards becoming free laborers. The convention aimed to encourage free blacks to "become more of a business-doing class, by forming themselves together in companies and entering into

51. "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men, Held in The City of Syracuse, N. Y., October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864," in *Minutes and Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Howard H. Bell, 14, 22, 41-42.

mercantile pursuits, the grocery business, stock in vessels and railroads, and participation in the trade with every foreign country." One resolution adopted by the Syracuse Convention encouraged all men to consider settling on public lands. This was similar to Lewis Woodson's proposal of black agrarianism in the late 1830s, when he had recommended that unemployed blacks in the cities become farmers and independent producers as a means of becoming free laborers and gaining citizenship rights.[52]

One of the most significant developments that emerged from the Syracuse Convention was the creation of the National Equal Rights League (NERL). The league was to coordinate national action among black communities in obtaining full citizenship rights as well as achieve African Americans' free labor vision. The league worked to secure African Americans' equal access to public schools and public spaces such as hotels and railroads as well as voting rights for men. The creators of the league believed that ending these racial barriers would allow African Americans the opportunity to achieve a free labor status, unhindered. The league encouraged "morality, education, temperance, frugality, industry, and promote everything that pertains to a well-ordered and dignified life," values that were central to black free labor ideology. The league believed that in order to realize these goals, they should

52. "National Convention of Colored Men," *Christian Recorder*, October 1, 1864; "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men, Held in The City of Syracuse, N. Y., October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864," in *Minutes and Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*, ed. Howard H. Bell, 34.

either issue "appeals to the minds and conscience" of whites or adopt a legal strategy.[53]

Shortly after the Syracuse Convention, in February 1865, black Pennsylvanians established the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights League (PSERL), an auxiliary to the national organization. Hugh Davis notes that the league was not an elite organization, counting "farmers, mechanics, factory workers, porters, waiters and maids" among its membership. Almost immediately after the PSERL was established, black leaders from southwestern Pennsylvanians made it clear that they were not willing to serve as junior partners or quietly accede to the decisions of their Philadelphia counterparts.[54] George B. Vashon and John Peck complained to John M. Langston, the president of the NERL, about Philadelphians announcing the formation of the PSERL without consulting all black Pennsylvanians. For Vashon and Peck, the most objectionable proposals made by Philadelphians revolved around the PSERL's organization and representation within the association. According to Vashon and Peck, black Philadelphians claimed that the league was "the only channel for local organizations to form a juncture with the National League." Both men believed that if this were true, then this action violated the National League's constitution of avoiding taking part in the internal affairs of outside organizations. Vashon and Peck also opposed the proposition that representation in the state league should be based on the

53. "Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored Men, Held in The City of Syracuse, N.Y., October 4, 5, 6, and 7, 1864" in *Minutes and Proceedings*, ed. Howard H. Bell, 36.

54. Davis, *"We Will Be Satisfied with Nothing Less,"* 28.

ability of communities to pay dues. They feared that this policy would give black Philadelphians a disproportionate role within the PSERL.[55]

Despite these tensions, a number of black communities across southwestern Pennsylvania sent delegates to attend the league's inaugural meeting at Harrisburg in February 1865. When delegates from the greater Pittsburgh area arrived at the league's first meeting, they found themselves outnumbered by Philadelphia delegates. However, representatives from southwestern Pennsylvania were not deterred from letting their thoughts be known on the subject of citizenship, free soil, and black free labor principles. George Vashon, at the request of the convention, delivered an extemporaneous address. Vashon declared that if the United States emerged as a great and powerful nation expanding across the continent, the hallmarks of American civilized life would reach across all of North America. Vashon warned that this power would be tenuous if all people did not enjoy "impartial liberty and equality before the law." He reminded the audience of the necessity of coming together until they were enfranchised. Vashon ended on an optimistic note believing that the time when African Americans would enjoy full citizenship rights would be soon upon them.[56]

League members knew that the support of state legislators from across Pennsylvania was crucial in their upcoming efforts to lobby Harrisburg for civil rights legislation. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians were crucial partners in Philadelphians' efforts in lobbying white politicians to support black rights. For

55. "National Equal Rights' League," *Christian Recorder*, February 4, 1865.

56. *Proceedings of the State Equal Rights' Convention of the Colored People of Pennsylvania, Held in the City of Harrisburg, February 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1865 . . . and an Address of the Colored State Convention to the People of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1865), 24-25.

instance, state senator and abolitionist James Graham of Allegheny County was one among many state legislators to speak at the PSERL meeting. Graham proclaimed to the audience that the work of reconstructing the nation along the lines of racial equality and black uplift had just begun. Graham believed that African Americans had an important role in realizing this vision, proclaiming to the crowd that "you the colored people, have it in your hands to shape your own destiny." [57]

Despite this concerted effort among black Pennsylvanians to obtain the support of state and federal officials, there were divisions among delegates. At the August 1865 meeting of the Pennsylvania Equal Rights League in Harrisburg, John Price, a delegate from Harrisburg, introduced a controversial resolution admonishing black businesses that refused to serve or provide equal treatment to black clientele. He considered African Americans who discriminated against their own community as faltering in their duty to support the cause of black rights. Many delegates feared the resolution would adversely impact barbers and restaurateurs, many of whom had to cater to the preferences of their white customers. Moses Brown of Hollidaysburg believed that the league overstepped its authority, arguing that it had no right to dictate how black businesses should operate. Joseph Nelson, a Philadelphian, countered that African Americans could not advocate for equal rights while discriminating against their fellow blacks. Brown fired back that the purpose of the

57. *Proceedings of the State Equal Rights' Convention of the Colored People of Pennsylvania, Held in the City of Harrisburg, February 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1865*, 22-23.

league was "to secure equality before the law" and that no organization "shall make rules for me," striking a defiant tone.[58]

Supporters of the resolution maintained that the league was not attempting to regulate the private affairs of African Americans. In defense of his resolution, Price asserted that "if we cannot make a living at barbering without proscribing colored men, we had better leave the business and enter upon some other." William Nesbit, an Altoona lawyer, interjected, warning that while he did not disagree with the spirit of the resolution, it was unrealistic to believe that racist attitudes would change overnight. Edward R. Parker, a delegate from the Pittsburgh area, did not outright oppose the resolution, arguing instead that it would have no impact on his community and throughout the West as barbers had shaved black and white men alongside each other and that restaurants accommodated both races. Despite this vocal opposition, the resolution was adopted by the league.[59]

The controversy surrounding Nelson's resolution illustrates that not all issues before the league ran along an East-West divide. African Americans in some rural communities and small towns believed that urban blacks' lofty ideas did not always consider the realities of their daily lives. Black barbers, restaurateurs, and other businesses realized that because the black population of these towns and villages was miniscule, they could not afford to alienate their white clientele. This directly

58. "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights' League, Held in the City of Harrisburg, August 9th and 10th, 1865," in *Proceedings of the Black National and State Conventions, 1865-1900*, ed. Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 144, 147.

59. "Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Pennsylvania State Equal Rights' League, Held in the City of Harrisburg, August 9th and 10th, 1865," ed. Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, 147-148.

influenced how they navigated the terrain of race-relations in these parts of Pennsylvania. This debate also shows a growing assertiveness among African American leaders from smaller communities as they were unwilling to let their concerns be overlooked by black Pittsburghers and Philadelphians.

The leadership of the PSERL and delegates at its conventions were dominated by men, however black women served an important role in assisting the organization's goals of racial uplift. In February 1865, the Pittsburgh chapter of the NERL established the Freemen and Soldier's Fair Association in order to assist former slaves' transition to freedom as well as provide aid and comfort to sick and wounded soldiers. Mary Peck, one of the city's prominent women, served as the group's president. To support its charitable endeavors, the association sponsored sewing-circles to sell hand-crafted items and sponsored concerts. In its first months the league met immediate success, raising $600 at a June 1865 fair at La Fayette Hall. The proceeds went to supporting soldiers and their families. The association solicited aid from communities throughout southwestern Pennsylvania and greater northern borderlands. By late summer 1865, the association had received donations from Brownsville and from as far away as Baltimore, Maryland, as well as clothing and school books for freedpeople from Monongahela City.[60]

Historians have noted that for black women on the homefront, wartime mobilization altered the northern political landscape, allowing them to challenge the gender and racial boundaries that previously existed. For instance, during the war,

60. "Letter from Pittsburgh," *Christian Recorder*, July 1, 1865.

black women increasingly traveled through cities on streetcars seeking to care for wounded soldiers and deliver supplies. Streetcar companies catered to their white patrons' racist sensibilities by either denying African Americans access or forcing black passengers to ride standing on an outdoor platform at the front or rear of the car. Black women undertook their own campaign to achieve equal access to streetcars. Scholars have shown that the war was important in reshaping black women's politics. However, the benevolent activity undertaken by the Freedmen and Solder's Fair Association echoed the work of antebellum women reformers, illustrating that the exigencies of war could empower women to challenge racial restrictions while also reinforcing gender boundaries.[61]

The creation of the NERL and the PSERL were central in advancing the campaign for full and equal black citizenship, the last yet crucial component of African Americans' free soil vision. In the Keystone State, the PSERL was a channel through which black leaders in many rural communities and small towns outside Harrisburg, Pittsburgh, and Philadelphia could voice their concerns and assert influence in the black freedom struggle. While black northerners were promoting a post-war vision that sought to reshape northern society, some African Americans traveled southward, seeking to institute a post-emancipation society there that ran according to northern black free labor principles.

61. Joseph P. Reidy, *Illusions of Emancipation: The Pursuit of Freedom and Equality in the Twilight of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 320; Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 95-96, 108-109, 117-119.

One black leader active in this effort was Martin Delany. In July 1865, Delany was appointed as an Assistant Commissioner for the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands (Freedmen's Bureau) for the South Carolina Lowcountry. The Freedmen's Bureau was a federal agency charged with assisting formerly enslaved people transition from slavery to freedom. When he arrived in Beaufort, Delany gave a lecture before a crowd of freedpeople at a church. He advised them as to how best to adapt to this new free labor society. Delany suggested that they work to acquire lands (either individually or polling their resources to together), dedicating a few acres to growing vegetables for home use while reserving the rest for cotton and rice that could be sold on the global market. He promised the audience northern assistance, an arrogant statement as the enslaved had labored their entire lives producing these crops. At that meeting, freedpeople's expectations in owning lands confiscated by the Union Army rose when Delany told that crowd their labor guaranteed them ownership of the Lowcountry lands.[62]

Delany's lecture elicited various responses among the crowd. One freedperson who was determined not to work for any man or woman exclaimed that "they would get rid of the Yankee employer." Another formerly enslaved person remarked, in reference to slaveholders, "now those men have to work themselves or starve or leave the country, we will not work for them any more [sic.]." But Edward M. Stoeber, a white army officer and Freedmen's Bureau Agent, was troubled by Delany's remarks.

62. Officer in a South Carolina Black Regiment to the Black Regiment to the Headquarters of the Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner for South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, July 24, 1865, in *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867*, ser. 3, vol. 1, *Land and Labor, 1865*, ed. Steven Hahn, Steven F. Miller, Susan E. O'Donovan, John C. Rodrigue, and Leslie S. Rowland (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 255-257.

In a letter to his superior, he noted that Delany openly opposed the government policy of encouraging freedpeople to enter into labor contracts with their former enslavers, believing that "it would be the old slavery over again." Stoeber believed that Delany's address might incite the freedpeople to "break the peace of society" by encouraging them not to labor for their former owners. Stoeber was also concerned that Delany's lecture elicited needless suspicion among the freedpeople towards northern whites, whom Delany suggested could not be trusted to act in their best interests. Delany's black free labor principles that he presented at Beaufort were rooted in his experiences in southwestern Pennsylvania and despite the Beaufort congregation's support for Delany's plan, not all freedepeople agreed with the free labor principles espoused by he and other northern blacks.[63]

In October 1865, the Committee of Freedmen of Edisto Island, South Carolina, expressed their disbelief to President Andrew Johnson that he had decided to return confiscated lands to ex-Confederates. The freedpeople of Edisto Island believed that these lands belonged to them, telling President Johnson that their labor made these plantations profitable and these lands were their home. The committee argued that they "were the only true and Loyal people" who were "always ready to strike for Liberty and humanity" taking up arms in defense of the union. As free people and good citizens they should not be dispossessed from these lands. In their petition, the committee presented their own vision of black free labor. They believed that failing to confiscate slaveholders' lands would concentrate this property in the

63. Officer in a South Carolina Black Regiment to the Black Regiment to the Headquarters of the Freedmen's Bureau Assistant Commissioner for South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, July 24, 1865, in *Land and Labor, 1865*, ed. Hahn et. al., 255-258.

hands of former enslavers, hindering their freedom. The committee believed that their condition would improve if the federal government secured for them homesteads. However, unlike Delany, the committee did not express a desire as landowners to enter into the market, wanting just a few acres for a homestead to support their families.[64]

The destruction of slavery marked the national triumph of free soil. Yet, in the wake of this momentous victory, a number of questions emerged. For example, what rights would African Americans (free and formerly enslaved) be afforded? In the South, black free labor not only faced resistance from former slaveholders but divisions among free-born and formerly enslaved African Americans over its meaning.

CONCLUSION

When black Pittsburghers gathered at the city's Wylie Street AME Church to commemorate Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in January 1865, the war was in its final months. The conflict upended and destroyed slavery in most parts of the South and in the greater southwestern Pennsylvania borderland. However, African Americans still faced an uncertain future. African Americans were determined to make emancipation the conflict's central goal. Blacks from across the north relied on

64. Committee of Freedmen on Edisto Island, South Carolina, to the President, October 28, 1865, in *Land and Labor, 1865,* ed. Hahn et. al., 442-444.

the organizational strategies and institutions they established before the war to work to realize their free soil and free labor vision.

When armed conflict over slavery finally arrived, wartime upheavals and political developments provided black northerners new avenues to establish citizenship claims. Through new institutions created during the Civil War, African Americans began the work of reconstructing the nation based on their vision of free soil and labor. The war forced whites in southwestern Pennsylvania and throughout the North and South to consider the place of African Americans in this free soil society. The war's conclusion resulted in the triumph of free soil over slavery, however the meaning of free soil remained contested not only among northern free blacks and whites, but also between the freedpeople and their former enslavers over the meaning of black citizenship, the next chapter in this struggle.

Conclusion

On January 13, 1878, Lewis Woodson, a longtime leader in Pittsburgh's black community died. Woodson represented the passing of a generation of black activists involved in the abolitionist movement and northern black freedom struggle. At his funeral at Wylie Street AME Church, the city's black and white leaders and ministers eulogized Woodson's life. They spoke of his work as a teacher, community leader, AME minister, and abolitionist. In his sermon, Professor John G. Mitchel recalled Woodson's role in assisting enslaved people in their quest for freedom as an agent for the Underground Railroad. Mitchel also noted Woodson's role in establishing institutions for the betterment of black Pittsburghers, including a temperance society. At the center of Woodson's and this generation of black activists' work was a movement to defend and advance their notion of free soil. For African Americans, free soil entailed not just the absence of slavery, but full citizenship rights. Black free soil principles ran counter to many white notions of free soil—which only meant the absence of slavery.[1]

Pennsylvania's adoption of a gradual abolition law in 1780 created one of the first northern borderlands between slavery and free soil. Despite southwestern Pennsylvania's small enslaved population, black bondage proved central to the region's economy, providing labor in the iron industry and skilled trades where there was a shortage of these laborers. Enslaved African Americans also engaged in subsistence production on farms and performed household labor. Enslavers went to

1. "Death of Rev. Lewis Woodson," *Christian Recorder*, February 7, 1878.

great lengths to keep African Americans in bondage or in a state of unfreedom. Some slaveholders sought to leave Pennsylvania with their bondspeople for another slave state. Unwilling to endure a lifetime of bondage, these enslaved people (and future free blacks) established their freedom claims based on their association with Pennsylvania free soil. Within southwestern Pennsylvania, African Americans and their white antislavery allies adopted a number of strategies to bring about an end to black bondage and other forms of unfreedom. For many white Pennsylvanians, the continued presence of slavery and black servitude hindered the growth of free labor in the region.

Free labor was a set of ideas that gained considerable attention among Americans in the late eighteenth century with the writings of Benjamin Franklin. His essay "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind" advocated free labor's cultural and economic superiority to slave labor. For instance, free labor prevented wealth and power from being concentrated in the hands of an elite, which posed a threat to republican society. After the war of 1812, an intensifying capitalist market created a new middle class. This segment of society espoused a free labor vision that was ascendant in American life. This ideology stressed hard work, frugality, self improvement, and discipline in order for wage laborers to achieve economic independence.

As black southwestern Pennsylvanians emerged from bondage, many faced a difficult transition to freedom. Free blacks faced discrimination in employment which prohibited them from entry into skilled trades. White wage workers sought to separate themselves from free blacks in order to challenge the eighteenth-century perception

that wage laborers were dependent, and thus incapable of exercising the responsibilities of citizenship. These white workers sought to create a *herrenvolk* republicanism in which whiteness served as a marker for full citizenship rights. African Americans responded by articulating their own broader notion of free labor ideology. Black free labor principles stressed some of the same values of the white middle class while also claiming that ownership of oneself, labor, and ability to enter the marketplace should guarantee citizenship rights. To achieve this free labor vision, African Americans established institutions such as schools and churches, while also advocating a form of black agrarianism. Though slavery and black servitude had all but disappeared in southwestern Pennsylvania by the mid-1830s, slaveholders continued to challenge Pennsylvania free soil.[2]

The rise of immediate abolitionism across the North brought greater national attention to black free soil principles. Unlike earlier antislavery activists, these abolitionists rejected gradual abolition and the colonization of free blacks. They instead favored an immediate end to black bondage and promoted African American citizenship. Southwestern Pennsylvania's position as a crossroads between the East and West allowed residents to collaborate with abolitionists from both regions who had their own distinctive approaches to fighting slavery and for black freedom. The rise of immediate abolition also resulted in a growing willingness among antislavery activists to flout the law in assisting enslaved people to escape. In southwestern Pennsylvania, antislavery activists in the region did not adhere to a single ideological

2. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991), 59-60.

approach, but rather found themselves creating an antislavery movement that was tailored to the political geography and concerns of those in the region. This explains why black Pittsburghers were unwilling to follow the decisions made by Philadelphia's black leaders who represented the state's largest free black community in a distinct space within in the northern borderland.

Between the mid-1840s and 1850s, free labor and free soil became central political issues across the nation. In southwestern Pennsylvania, slaveholders continued to travel along the Ohio River, railways, and roads that linked southwestern Pennsylvania to the East, West, and South, bringing with them their bondspeople. Abolitionists refused to allow slaveholders to keep African Americans in bondage when they traveled through the region. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians continually faced the prospect of being kidnapped into slavery or of being accused of being runaway slaves by slavecatchers and slaveholders. At times, these confrontations spilled over into violence. As the 1850s progressed, political developments convinced many southwestern Pennsylvanians that free soil principles could not be defended in the region or anywhere else in the United States. Black southwestern Pennsylvanians were at the forefront of an emigration movement to realize their free soil principles and free labor ideology beyond the nation's borders. However, many African Americans refused to support emigration or colonization, preferring instead to defend southwestern Pennsylvania free soil and promote their free labor principles through a number of means.

The Civil War created new avenues for black southwestern Pennsylvanians to lobby state and federal officials to embrace and protect their free soil and free labor

vision. During this period, they also relied on their previous methods of organizing before the war, using direct appeals to government officials and joining in coordinated action with antislavery activists in the East and Old Northwest. The war also forced white southwestern Pennsylvanians on the battlefield and at home to consider the place of African Americans in the region after emancipation.

This dissertation's focus on slavery, black freedom, and the antislavery movement in southwestern Pennsylvania borderland is thus revealing for a number of reasons. First, it uncovers an oppositional culture created by African Americans that emerged alongside narrow and exclusionary notions of free soil and free labor advance by many whites. This oppositional culture was shaped by African Americans' worksites, institutions, and living conditions, inspiring their own notions of freedom and citizenship. Second, it forces scholars to consider how physical and political geography influenced ideas about race and the types of strategies abolitionists favored in their fight against slavery and for black rights.

The inclusion of southwestern Pennsylvania in this narrative illuminates the work done by Woodson and others in defense of black free soil and free labor principles in a space where African American freedom remained fragile. This period of antislavery activism provided a foundation for the next generations of Pittsburgh's black leaders to continue the fight to realize their free soil and free labor vision.

Appendices

Figure 1. Pennsylvania Counties, 1850-1860, [Southwestern Pennsylvania]. Reprinted from William Thorndale and William Dollarhide, *Map Guide to the federal Censuses, 1790-1920* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1987), 295. The 1850-1860 county boundaries are in black, modern boundaries are in white.

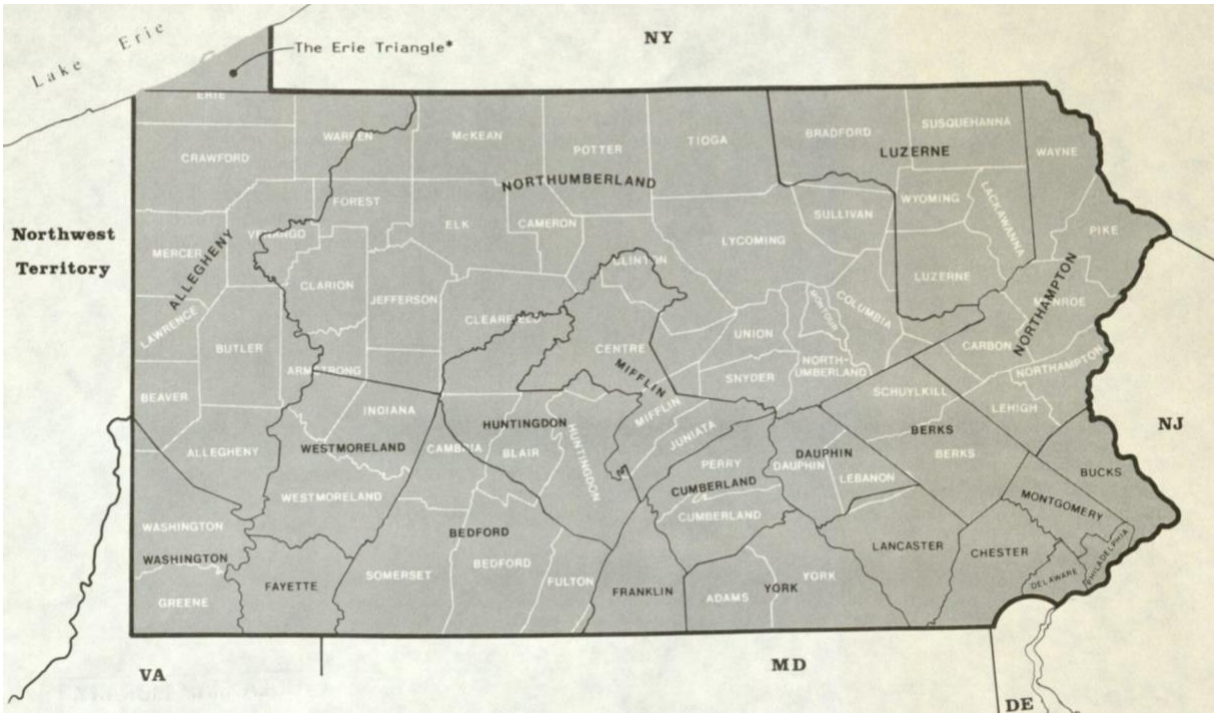

Figure 2. Pennsylvania, 1790. Reprinted from William Thorndale and William Dollarhide, *Map Guide to the federal Censuses, 1790-1920* (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing, 1987), 289. 1790 boundaries are in black, modern boundaries are in white.

Table 1. Slave Population of Southwestern Pennsylvania 1790-1840

County	1790	1800	1810	1820	1830	1840
Allegheny	159	79	24	1	27	0
Armstrong [a]		1	0	0	0	0
Beaver [b]		4	8	5	0	0
Bedford	46	5	1	5	1	0
Butler [c]		1	0	0	4	0
Cambria [d]			6	0	0	0
Fayette	282	92	58	41	99	1
Greene [e]		22	10	7	2	1
Indiana [f]			0	0	11	0
Somerset [g]		0	0	0	2	0
Washington	263	84	36	5	1	2
Westmoreland	123	136	20	5	1	1
Total	916	468	188	76	167	5

Source: Data from University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Center, "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu (accessed October 3, 2016).

a. Armstrong County was established in 1800 from parts of Allegheny, Westmoreland, and Lycomin Counties

b. Beaver County was established in 1800 from parts of Washington and Allegheny Counties

c. Butler County was established in 1800 from a part of Allegheny County

d. Cambria County was established in 1804 from parts of Huntingdon and Somerset Counties

e. Greene County was established in 1796. It was erected from parts of Washington County

f. Indiana County was established in 1803 from parts of Westmoreland and Lycoming Counties

g. Somerset County was established in 1795. It was erected from parts of Bedford County

Table 2. Free Black and Free White Population of Southwestern Pennsylvania, 1790 and 1800

	1790			1800		
County	Black	White	% Black	Black	White	% Black
Allegheny	12	10,032	0.11	256	14,752	1.70
Armstrong				0	2,398	0
Beaver				35	5,737	0.60
Bedford	34	13,052	0.25	24	12,010	0.19
Blair						
Butler				2	3,913	0.05
Cambria						
Fayette	46	12,990	0.35	327	19,740	1.62
Greene				58	8,525	0.67
Indiana						
Washington	12	23,617	0.05	340	27,874	1.20
Westmoreland	39	15,852	0.24	91	22,499	0.40
Total	143	75,543	0.18	1,133	117,448	0.95

Source: Data from University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Center, "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu (accessed October 27, 2016).

Table 3. Free Black and Free White Population of Southwestern Pennsylvania 1810 and 1820

	1810			1820		
County	Black	White	% Black	Black	White	% Black
Allegheny	414	24,879	1.63	694	34,226	1.98
Armstrong	4	6,139	0.06	42	10,282	0.40
Beaver	75	12,085	0.61	101	15,234	0.65
Bedford	120	15,625	0.76	341	19,902	1.68
Blair						
Butler	10	7,336	0.13	13	10,180	0.12
Cambria	33	2,078	1.56	20	3,267	0.60
Fayette	590	24,066	2.39	859	26,385	3.15
Greene	72	12,462	0.57	254	15,293	1.63
Indiana	14	6,200	0.22	61	8,821	0.68
Washington	570	35,683	1.57	742	39,291	1.85
Westmoreland	245	26,127	0.92	247	30,288	0.80
Total	2,147	172,689	1.22	3,374	213,169	1.55

Source: Data from University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Center, "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu (accessed October 27, 2016).

Table 4. Free Black and Free White Population of Southwestern Pennsylvania 1830 and 1840

	1830			1840		
County	Black	White	% Black	Black	White	% Black
Allegheny	1,169	49,356	2.31	2,118	79,117	2.60
Armstrong	96	17,605	0.54	112	28,253	0.39
Beaver	139	24,044	0.57	266	29,102	0.90
Bedford	425	24,076	1.73	470	28,865	1.60
Blair						
Butler	22	14,555	0.15	61	22,317	0.27
Cambria	62	7,014	0.87	98	11,158	0.87
Fayette	907	28,166	3.11	1,464	32,109	4.36
Greene	311	17,715	1.72	413	18,733	2.15
Indiana	97	14,144	0.68	155	20,627	0.74
Washington	852	41,931	1.99	1,113	40,164	2.69
Westmoreland	377	38,022	0.98	290	42,408	0.67

Total	4,457	276,628	1.58	6,560	352,853	1.82

Source: Data from University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Center, "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu (accessed October 27, 2016).

Table 5. Free Black and Free White Population of Southwestern Pennsylvania, 1850 and 1860

	1850			1860		
County	Black	White	% Black	Black	White	% Black
Allegheny	3,431	134,859	2.48	2,725	176,102	1.52
Armstrong	129	29,431	0.43	178	35,619	0.49
Beaver	245	26,444	0.91	274	28,866	0.94
Bedford	415	22,637	1.80	494	26,242	1.84
Blair	260	21,517	1.19	283	27,546	1.01
Butler	84	30,262	0.27	56	35,538	0.15
Cambria	128	17,645	0.72	115	29,040	0.39
Fayette	1,669	37,443	4.26	1,549	38,360	3.88
Greene	476	21,660	2.15	526	23,816	2.16
Indiana	254	26,916	0.93	186	33,501	0.55
Washington	1,559	43,380	3.46	1,726	45,079	3.82
Westmoreland	446	51,280	0.86	432	53,304	0.80
Total	9,096	463,474	1.92	8,544	553,013	1.52

Source: Data from University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Center, "Historical Census Browser," University of Virginia Library, http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu (accessed October 27, 2016).

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Western Anti-Slavery Society Papers

Pennsylvania State Archives (Harrisburg, PA)

Records of the County Governments, RG 47
Records of the Constitutional Convention and the Council of Censors, 1837-1838, RG 5
Records of the General Assembly, House of Representatives RG 7

ProQuest History Vault, Southern Life, Slavery, and the Civil War (https://hv.proquest.com/historyvault/hv.jsp?pageid=home)

Race Slavery, and Free Blacks Petitions to Southern County Courts.

St. Louis Circuit Court Records(http://www.stlcourtrecords.wustl.edu)

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