Anti-Abolitionist and Anti-Black Violence in the Antebellum North, 1840-1849

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Mom, Dad, and Grandpa, this project is dedicated to you.

Abbreviations

Archives:

AA	Accessible Archives, Inc.
MA	Massachusetts Archives
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society

Organizations:

AASS	American Anti-Slavery Society
MASS	Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society
NEASS	New England Anti-Slavery Society

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Abstract

This thesis examines an important aspect of a previously overlooked, yet crucial, decade in American history by documenting the struggles of—and violence against—northern-based abolitionists and African Americans during the period 1840-1849. The thesis has three principal objectives. First, it argues that the consistency and qualitative similarities between Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian violence complicates historiographical narratives that racial and political violence significantly waned after 1840. Second, this thesis analyzes the causal reasons for the persistence and extent of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence in the context of the 1840s. This exploration will add additional complexity to traditional binaries of 'pro-slavery' and 'anti-slavery' states during the antebellum period, indicating that conventional categories such as 'anti-abolitionist' and 'anti-Black' prove similarly problematic within the context of the post-Jacksonian North. Third, the thesis examines the role of nineteenth century newspapers in the construction of sectional narratives of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence by partisan press reports. Doing so treats antebellum print culture not just as primary sources of information but as actors in the culmination of sectional crisis and ultimately the American Civil War (1861-1865). Finally, with a particular emphasis on the white violent instigators of New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Middle West, my work illustrates both the contingencies and impermanence of African American 'freedom' in an antebellum context, and shows how the abolitionist movement faced, at various stages, even greater threats and challenges to its advocacy and organization than previously acknowledged or understood.

Introduction

On the Fourth of July 1845, John Tucker, a former slave and longtime resident of Indiana, was chased, beaten, and viciously murdered in the streets of Indianapolis in broad daylight in the presence of a large crowd of white bystanders.[1] While Tucker reportedly attempted to defuse the situation and reason with his white pursuers, after they spotted and targeted him from a local tavern, escape proved impossible. He courageously stood his ground and died defending himself. Cornered and outnumbered, his three principal attackers, fueled by strong drink and deep-seated anti-Black predilections, bludgeoned him to death as several members of the crowd allegedly cheered. While abolitionist reports remain unreliable and often contradictory, Tucker reportedly exhibited a 'quiet and inoffensive disposition' and was 'a very peacible [sic]' man.[2] Newspapers also reported that the chief culprit, one Nicholas Wood, delivered the *coup de grace*—or perhaps a series of blows—after several bystanders screamed 'kill the damned negro' and a few others tried to stop him.[3] While Wood was arrested and ultimately put on trial—an unusual occurrence in the antebellum Middle West—the other two perpetrators absconded, and were never brought to justice.

But racial violence in the antebellum Middle West was hardly confined to singular incidents of homicidal rage. Several years earlier, in September 1841, the city of Cincinnati nearly burned to the ground after a 'quarrel' between a small band of Irish whites and Black residents escalated into a series of multi-day riots.[4] News traveled quickly. Within hours, a mob of perhaps 'fifteen hundred' pro-slavery southerners from Kentucky crossed the border after being reportedly recruited into the city, waging physical and psychological warfare against the city's Black residents and white abolitionist sympathizers.[5] Many Black-owned businesses, homes, and churches were ransacked or entirely destroyed, and the city's anti-slavery printing

[1] 'Marion Circuit Court: Criminal Cases', *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 14 August 1854.
[2] 'Horrible Outrage', *The Liberator*, 1 August 1845.
[3] *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 13 August 1845; Calvin Fletcher, *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, Volume 3: 1844-1847 (Indiana, 1974), p. 164.
[4] 'Riot and Mobs, Confusion and Bloodshed', *The Liberator*, 17 September 1841.
[5] *Ibid*.

press was stolen, demolished, and tossed into the Ohio River. While precise casualty figures are lost to history, newspapers reported that scores of residents were killed in the melee.[6] For multiple days, civil authorities and law enforcement attempted to stem the cascading violence and destruction to no avail. While newspapers offered varying explanations as to why a cessation in hostilities took multiple days to achieve, only after 72 hours of round-the-clock, mobocratic violence did Cincinnati's '*reign of terror'*, as one newspaper termed it, finally come to an end.[7]

Roughly a year later, nearly a thousand miles to the east, on the secluded island of Nantucket, anti-abolitionists descended upon the Second Annual Anti-Slavery Convention, hosted at the local Athenaeum. The event was pre-planned months in advance, and a year earlier, during the first convention, no violence was reported. Allegedly provoked by Stephen S. Foster's 'Brotherhood of Thieves' speech in August 1842, during which the New Hampshire-born radical insulted local politicians and accused northern clergymen of defending and condoning slavery, the participants were besieged by multiple mobs and rioters throughout the week. The instigators hurled rotten eggs, stones, missiles, and brickbats at the participants, and famous abolitionists such as Charles Lennox Remond, Frederick Douglass, and William Lloyd Garrison were targeted. The convention organizers were ultimately forced to prematurely conclude several of their sessions and relocate multiple times. In the end, after repeated mob attacks and their final venue, the local Town Hall, was violently assailed and interrupted, the abolitionists ended the convention and withdrew from the island, battered, blood-stained, and humiliated.[8]

Then, in the summer of 1846, in Palmyra, New York, a 'gang of rowdies' unlawfully entered the residence of a white man after sunset, rumored to have 'a mulatto wife', and

[6] 'Mobbing in Cincinnati', *The Vermont Telegraph*, 22 September 1841, p. 3; 'Riot at Cincinnati', *The Liberator*, 17 September 1841.
[7] 'Meeting of the Colored Citizens of Buffalo', *The Colored American*, 13 November 1841.
[8] 'Communications: Anti-Slavery Convention at Nantucket', *The Liberator*, 2 September 1842; 'Disgraceful Scenes in New-Bedford and Nantucket', *The Liberator*, 19 August 1842; 'From the Nantucket Islander: Mob Law—Freedom of Speech Destroyed', *The Liberator*, 26 August 1842.

desecrated and destroyed everything in sight. The furniture was toppled, the doors and windows smashed to pieces, the kitchen ransacked. Afterwards, the victim was dragged from his bed, stripped naked, and repeatedly submerged in a local waterway. While the number of participants remains unknown, the victim was clearly overpowered by multiple white invaders, who subscribed to and were actuated by anti-Black prejudices. Moreover, the atrocities did not end there. *The Liberator* reported that 'similar outrages were committed against the woman and a small child, a year or two old' living in the residence.[9] While the facts of the case remain unverifiable, the incident suggests via newspaper sources the dangers faced by interracial couples residing in northern states, and the ever-present threat of white mobocratic violence and abuse during the post-Jacksonian period. At the same time, the impact of reporting such incidents, regardless of veracity, proved a clever strategy used by abolitionists throughout the period to sensationalize unverified events, intrigue readers, and ultimately sell more newspaper subscriptions.

These reports of terroristic violence across disparate, geographical areas—the Middle West, New England, and the Mid-Atlantic—illustrate a major theme of this study: the scope and persistence of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black persecution across northern states during the post-Jacksonian period. Investigating and understanding these atrocities is a major aim of this project. Indeed, until historians fully come to terms with the mobocratic rioting, racial injustice, and persecution of the 1840s, our understanding of the challenges faced by the antebellum abolitionist movement (1831-1861) will remain fragmentary. While an enormous scholarly literature exists surveying and assessing the mobocratic violence of the Jacksonian period—not to mention the sanguinary period of the 1850s—the turmoil of the early 1840s receives far less attention. Indeed, some historians outright dismiss the widely reported mobocracy and violence that devastated myriad northern communities during the 1840s.[10] Thus, one of the main objectives of this project is to bridge the gap in this artificial periodization, showcasing how the

[9] 'Scene in a Free State', *The Liberator*, 26 June 1846.
[10] See forthcoming Literature Review.

violence that began during Jackson's presidency continued, with varying peaks and valleys, through the decade of the 1840s and until the American Civil War. While this study does not claim that violence increased or remained consistent throughout the decade under scrutiny, it does suggest, using quantitative and qualitative data, that anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the 1840s continued to a much greater extent than many historians have recognized or acknowledged. This unrelenting violence took a major (if widely overlooked) toll over time, engendering a cumulative impact on abolitionists and African Americans that greatly impacted northern freedom, safety, and political activism. Moreover, through continued aggregation, via antebellum newspapers, these partisan reports also fed into sectional animosities over a multi-decade time frame.

Scope of Project and Terminologies

My research focuses on the period 1840 to 1849 across thirteen, antebellum northern states. The chronology was chosen after consulting the vast literature on antebellum political and anti-Black violence. Beginning with Leonard L. Richards, who first comprehensively documented the extent and typologies of mob rioting during the Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian periods more than fifty years ago, this study serves as a belated follow-up to his pioneering work. My intention is to examine and test his findings from the 1840s. Since many historians, including Richards himself, have overlooked the violent episodes of the post-Jacksonian period in favor of narratives that emphasize preceding and succeeding antebellum decades, this project develops extant historical scholarship by considering the cumulative impact of reports from across the North. On the latter point, related to geographical scope and sequencing, this project initially began as a deep quantitative and qualitative dive into anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence in the state of Massachusetts. In the final analysis, however, a broader geographical investigation was warranted, offering more compelling and relevant historiographical interventions related to the politics of nineteenth century slavery and anti-slavery, antebellum

race relations, rising sectional tensions, and Black 'freedom' outside the slave South. To that end, while there were fifteen northern antebellum states that achieved U.S. recognition by the end of the 1840s, Iowa and Wisconsin were territories for most of those years. As such, for the purposes of constancy and cross-referencing, these states were excluded from the scope of this project.

Methods of Observed Violence, 1840-1849

After conducting online research through digitized archives and newspapers, reports of 238 anti-abolitionist and anti-Black incidents of civil unrest and violence were identified across thirteen northern antebellum states during the period 1840-1849. This figure is considerably higher than other historians have identified.[11] However, the adoption of an experimental methodological framework and the differing coverage of newspapers within digitized databases make it difficult compare violence between states. This is why Data Set One includes a subset of states that utilize identical keyword search terms, and the study has been careful in adopting precise language and ensuring that all digital hits were opened, read, and if relevant, catalogued. Nonetheless, the following general overview of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the period 1840-1849, which found that Massachusetts boasted 60 total observed violent incidents, does retain some important consistencies across all thirteen states. For example, all sources were consulted through the Accessible Archives, Inc. database, which includes, among other things, a compilation of nearly 150 national, state, and local African American, anti-slavery, and abolitionist newspapers—including *The Liberator*, *The North Star*, *The Anti-Slavery Standard*, and *The National Era*.[12] Second, keyword searches were specifically narrowed between the following dates: 1 January 1840 to 1 January 1850. This ensured that any possible anti-abolitionist or anti-Black civil unrest or violence recorded in these newspapers

[11] Leonard L. Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing': Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (London and New York, 1970), p. 12; David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York, 1998), pp. 34-37.

[12] As multiple years have elapsed since conducting this preliminary research and submitting the thesis, the Accessible Archives, Inc. database is now defunct after its acquisition by Coherent Digital LLC on 15 July 2023. These collections have now been subsumed into the *History Commons* online platform.

would be flagged from the period. Finally, the two 'primary' search terms—'mob' and 'riot'—were utilized in all thirteen states, and collectively, produced the most number of relevant search hits.

While five of the states initially researched—Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Ohio—varied in the keywords chosen and time spent researching each geography, eight states—Maine, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and New York, and Vermont—adopted more measurable and uniform methods. For the state of New York, for instance, the primary search terms used were 'mob' and 'riot' and the secondary search terms were 'mobocratic', 'murder', 'outrage', 'disgraceful', 'hiss', 'anti-abolitionist', 'pro-slavery', 'abolition and abolitionist', 'violence', 'amalgamation', 'kidnapping', 'anarchy', 'missile', 'colorphobia', 'Albany', 'Utica', and 'Syracuse'. The only variability within these eight states, however, were the three specific cities selected in each respective state for more in-depth research. These cities were arbitrarily chosen after combining two important factors: high population density and reputation for anti-slavery activism.

All data collected from the following states shown in Figure 1.1 below utilized the above keyword searches. While there was some degree of variability in newspaper perusal (as headlines were arbitrarily selected to be read based on their perceived likelihood of yielding relevant results), the first 200 headlines were consulted from the primary and secondary keyword searches. Unlike the first subset of states, however, three urban areas were also added to the mix to increase the likelihood of finding relevant incidents. And again, these were selected consciously by mixing population densities (the higher the better) with known hostility towards abolitionism and anti-slavery agitation. As the data set above demonstrates, Albany, Utica, and Syracuse were the preferred cities chosen to investigate at the municipal level in New York State.

Keyword Search Terms

Reviewing the keywords and terminological choices selected for this study is crucial.

There were three key terms utilized repeatedly throughout this study that merit explanation: 'anti-abolitionist violence', 'pro-slavery violence', and 'anti-Black violence'. To begin with, 'anti-abolitionist violence' refers to typologies of verbal or physical assaults carried out principally by northern or southern whites against white northerners. These victims in every instance were either directly or indirectly affiliated with local, state, or national anti-slavery efforts—or sympathetic to the larger freedom cause. This often included violence against white anti-slavery politicians, protestors, speakers, lecture circuit attendees, journalists, Underground Railroad operators, and female activists. This categorization is best defined as encompassing white abolitionists exclusively targeted for their anti-slavery views, although there is some degree of overlap with anti-Black violence. After all, famous African American abolitionists, especially Frederick Douglass, were repeatedly targeted. Finally, while the term 'pro-slavery' violence is not used as its own separate categorization for quantitative cataloguing purposes, it is used intermittently throughout these pages—principally to denote a classification of brutality where a known southerner or northerner, operating on northern soil, perpetrated either anti-abolitionist or anti-Black violence.

By contrast, 'anti-Black violence' encompassed a categorization of verbal and physical assaults that exclusively affected northern residents of color. It is important to point out, however, that African American victims need not necessarily have been associated with the anti-slavery or abolitionist movements—although many undoubtedly were. While instances of violence oftentimes affected famous African Americans as part of their abolitionist duties, such as Frederick Douglass, James McCune Smith, and Charles Lenox Remond, these atrocities similarly impacted ordinary and anonymous northern residents as well, including emancipated slaves, fugitives, and free-people—not to mention victims of kidnapping, home invasions, and individual targetings. Crucially, instances when an abolitionist of African descent, for instance, was attacked or otherwise suffered violence, the incident was tallied and catalogued under the category of 'both'. For instance, any and all large-scale riots that lasted multiple days and

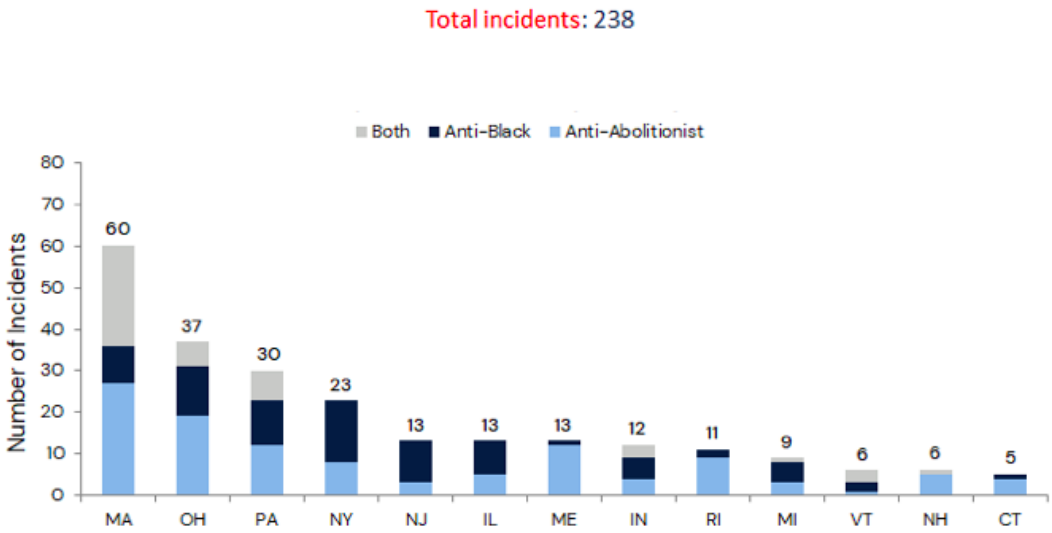
involved both white and Black victims—including the Lombard Street Riots (Chapter I), the Nantucket Athenaeum Riots (Chapter II), and the Cincinnati Riots (Chapter IV) to name a few—were automatically designated as 'both' and were not double-counted. Additionally, oftentimes riots happened repeatedly, during multi-day conventions or events—and across multiple venues. To resolve this complexity, newspapers that recounted multiple riots during a single event were added and tallied individually. This is why, for instance, the Brotherhood of Thieves' riots on Nantucket experienced five 'total incidents' of violence during the week 10-15 August 1842.

Enumerating Violence Across the Northern States, 1840-1849

A key questions, however, remains: Why is the 238 headline figure considerably higher than what other historians have reported?[13] While different factors explain this discrepancy—including the wide-scale digitization of historical newspapers after the dawn of the internet, the consultation of newspapers stored on micro film, and the use of subjective methodologies—the strategies of research employed within this thesis yield a significantly higher number of quantitative keyword search hits. Indeed, as many as 60 incidents were reported in Massachusetts; as few as six and five, respectively, in New Hampshire and Connecticut. The following chart, therefore, serves as a general overview of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black unrest and violence observed in antebellum newspapers during the period 1840-1849:

[13] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing*', p. 12; Grimsted, *American Mobbing*, pp. 34-37.

Figure 1.1: Separate Incidents Reported By State



Having identified 238 total incidents of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the period 1840 to 1849, a brief note on the provisional nature of these results is necessary. First and foremost, the top-line number could be significantly altered due to a number of different factors, including partisan newspaper reports, the digitization of previously-overlooked historical sources, and the subjective and qualitative search techniques chosen by the author. Indeed, because the coverage of the databases and the keyword searches were necessarily subjective and do not allow for a state-by-state comparison. It is important to emphasize that the total number of newspaper articles scoured for information varied considerably across states and the search terms refined.[14] Nevertheless, all incidents observed and catalogued were confirmed by local, state, or national newspapers—and sometimes all three—thereby offering a baseline of the number of distinct incidents reported. It was not uncommon for the same incident to be reported or reprinted in numerous newspapers. Thus, each reported incident was independently verified as having 'happened' whenever possible—although divergent facts and meanings were often manifest due to the lack of independent fact checking, unverified newspaper reprintings,

[14] This is in part attributed to unidentified and non-established methods early in the research process. These methodological limitations, however, are addressed and corrected in Data Set Two.

and the complex nature of nineteenth century print culture.

The Five Classifications: Types of Antebellum Civil Unrest and Violence

There were five classifications utilized for reaching the 238 overall total incidents figure. The first and most salient of incidents observed involved physical violence against abolitionists or African Americans. These attacks were, by definition, violent in nature, and included, among other things, the harming, maiming, beating, torture, or murder of individuals residing in the antebellum North. The extralegal public lynching of freeman John Tucker in Indianapolis, Indiana is a case in point that will be further analyzed in Chapter III. In brief, there were 73 physically violent assaults against abolitionists across the antebellum northern states during the period 1840-1849, and 30 total incidents perpetrated against African Americans. In both instances, Massachusetts experienced the highest percentage of physical violence, 25 percent and 43 percent, respectively—and there are obvious historical and qualitative reasons to suspect this observation did reflect higher incidence, even if that data cannot provide quantitative proof.[15]

The second classification denotes the recorded interference (or subsequent break up) of public events. These include the infamous mob disruptions on the island of Nantucket in the summer of 1842 and the kidnapping of one Joseph Belt in New York City in late 1848. These incidents will be further investigated and analyzed in Chapters II and Chapters VI, respectively. While seemingly unrelated typologies of violence, the lack of confirmed *bodily* harm or injury in either classification of violence merited separate categorization. Nevertheless, 75 percent of all total events (178/238) that were interrupted led to permanent disruptions—including anti-slavery conventions, meetings, speeches, protests, and marches.

The third categorization includes the illegal seizure of Black Americans, either confirmed or attempted. As an illustrative example of the routinely imprecise newspaper

[15] Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven and London, 2016), pp. 233-239; Peter P. Hinks, '"Frequently Plunged into Slavery": Free Blacks and Kidnapping in Antebellum Boston', *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 20, No 1 (1992), pp. 18-31; Stephen Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom: Fighting for Black Citizenship in a White Republic, 1829-1889* (New York, 2012), pp. 26-27 and 66-83.

reporting related to antebellum kidnappings, *The North Star* reported in the spring of 1848 in not atypically vague language that 'a black man was kidnapped in Rochester and sold off into slavery'.[16] Because these kinds of reports do not explicitly mention or confirm that physical harm actually took place—although physical violence is normally a prerequisite for an illegal abduction—observed kidnappings unearthed in antebellum newspapers have been disaggregated and reported separately from episodes of physical violence. While kidnapping is *itself* is a form of physical violence, I have decided to classify it separately from other typologies of physical violence since it involves abduction and removal as a motive and consequence distinct from other cases categorized here. Finally, while not all observed kidnappings resulted in confirmed abductions, such illegal seizures occurred so frequently—particularly in the Middle West—that the data will later be isolated and disaggregated in Data Set Two.

The fourth classification of typology of violence denotes incidents that became materially destructive—namely, the burning of churches, lecture halls, assembly areas, or Quaker meeting houses to name a few; the destruction of podiums, stages, or lecterns; or the torching of abolitionist homes or entire Black neighborhoods. The wholesale destruction and burning of Philadelphia's Black residences during the Lombard Street Riots of August 1842 is a prime example—and therefore is chosen as the first case study (Chapter I) for analysis in this study. Such destructiveness frequently included the obliteration of living and worship spaces and led occasionally to direct physical violence. While destruction of property only affected roughly 30 percent of all observed incidents (71/238), such violence disproportionately affected Black neighborhoods generally and African Americans more specifically.

Finally, the fifth classification is defined as 'verbal abuse', which often (but did not necessarily) overlap with other typologies of observed violence. Eighty-seven percent of all total incidents (208/238) can be described very simply as involving some forms of documented shouting, whistling, stomping, heckling, hissing, and other auditory noises. These incidents

[16] *The North Star*, 21 April 1848, p. 1.

were all too common at public events and abolitionist meetings throughout the antebellum North, and deeply associated with the political activism of Stephen S. Foster, Frederick Douglass, Lucy Stone, Parker Pillsbury, and William Lloyd Garrison, among others—who were key targets for derision and verbal assault throughout the period 1840 to 1849. These disruptive episodes sometimes lead to physical violence, or temporary intrusions, or the destruction of property; in many instances, they engendered abolitionist gathering interruptions, or even wholesale disruptions of public events. As a result, these incidents were often double-counted purely as a means of understanding the total percentage of observed incidents that involved some semblance of verbal shouting and harassment.

The widespread preservation and digitization of historical newspapers, coupled with the ability to search key terms, provides contemporary historians with new methodological insights unavailable to previous generations of historians. The ease of narrowly searching historical newspaper titles in specific geographical areas—using precise language—has unlocked new and important ways of finding and rediscovering sources.[17] It is certainly the case that my research has unearthed previously neglected (or perhaps overlooked) incidents of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence by specialists in the field. Despite these research-based changes and innovations, the search results are only as true or accurate as the underlying newspaper reporting.

Notable Examples of Excluded Incidents

While many violent incidents observed across the thirteen northern antebellum states did not meet the criteria for inclusion, it is important to emphasize that these methodological decisions actually strengthen my primary claim. The data accordingly represents a relatively minimum, or base case projection, of the total number of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black

[17] See Howard J. Fuller, 'Historical Research in the "Digital Era": Techniques, and the More Obvious Pros and Cons', *Journal for Maritime Research*, 5, No. 1 (2003); Amina Marzouk Chouchene, 'Historical Research in the Digital Age', *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 6, No. 2 (2019); Lincoln Mullen, 'A Braided Narrative for Digital History', cited in Matthew K. Gold and Lauren F. Klein (eds.) *Debates in the Digital Humanities 2019* (Minneapolis, 2019), pp. 382–88; Mats Fridlund, 'Digital History 1.5: A Middle Way between Normal and Paradigmatic Digital Historical Research', cited in Mats Fridlund, Mila Oiva, and Petri Paju (eds.) *Digital Histories: Emergent Approaches within the New Digital History* (Helsinki, 2020), pp. 69–88.

episodes observed in newspapers in antebellum northern states during the period 1840-1849. For instance, any violence committed in Iowa or Wisconsin—due to each respective state's late admission to the Union—meant automatic omission from the two data sets. This decision, while certainly a defensible one, has the unanticipated consequence of reducing the total number of observed incidents recorded in this chapter.[18]

Second, while historians have long observed how *The Liberator* provided the world's best compendium of racist violence in the antebellum U.S., and therefore influenced other contemporary newspapers in the process, the most salient difficulty was finding detailed reporting and specific information that allowed me to include anti-abolitionist and anti-Black incidents *with certainty* in one or more data sets.[19] Three types of episodes help illustrate this point. As it happened, a recurring issue often involved the difficult task of determining and pinpointing the exact state in which an incident occurred. While an incident could be reported in *The Liberator*, for instance, this hardly confirmed that the event actually happened in Massachusetts. In fact, it was quite common for national newspapers to reprint editorials from local or state newspapers from across the antebellum North—and not cite or provide any information as to where the event actually took place. *The Liberator*'s 3 December 1841 editorial, for example, recounts abolitionist lecturer Stephen S. Foster haranguing 'the church and ministry' of northern states for their complicity in slavery.[20] He was surrounded by a mob that his supporters 'could not approach him' for nearly 'three-fourths of an hour'.[21] While he was not seriously injured by the 'hands of his assailants', the incident was determined to be a

[18] Robert H. Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence in Antebellum America* (Cambridge, 2020), p. 6; Michael J. McManus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840-1861* (Kent, Ohio, 1998).
[19] Denis Brennan, *The Making of an Abolitionist: William Lloyd Garrison's Path to Publishing* The Liberator (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2014) p. 2; Augusta Rohrbach, '"Truth Stranger and Stronger than Fiction": Reexamining William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator'*, cited in *Truth Stranger Than Fiction: Race, Realism, and the U.S. Literary Market Place* (New York, 2002), pp. 1-27; Robert A. Fanuzzi, '"The Organ of an Individual": William Lloyd Garrison and the *Liberator', Prospects* (1998), pp. 107-127; Henry Mayer, 'William Lloyd Garrison: The Undisputed Master of the Cause of Negro Liberation', *The Journal of Blacks In Higher Education*, No. 23 (1999), pp. 105-109; Sandeep Soni et al., 'Abolitionist Networks: Modeling Language Change in Nineteenth-Century Activist Newspapers', *The Journal of Cultural Analytics* (2021), p. 10.
[20] 'Another Mob.', *The Liberator*, 3 December 1841.
[21] *Ibid*.

'disgraceful outrage'.[22] However, as no documentary evidence exists explaining what state this event took place, the incident was deliberately excluded from this data set.[23] While a separate categorization labeled anti-Black violence in 'unverified' or 'uncertain' locations may prove instructive, this study is only concerned with confirmed violence in specific states as observed by antebellum newspapers. To that end, a similar attack, where a Black servant was 'assaulted by a gang of rowdies and knocked down three times' in the middle of the street in August 1843, was also omitted.[24] *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, which brought attention to the incident, did not see fit to record in what city or state the incident occurred.[25] While inferences can be drawn, such conjectures are shaky at best and cannot be deemed conclusive. This is why the incident was ultimately excluded from the following data set. Finally, the same is true of an anti-slavery event in which abolitionists Stephen and Abby Foster Kelley delivered a lecture in which 'the speakers barely escaped with their lives' afterwards.[26] As no indication was given to where the event took place, except at one 'National Hall'[27]—of which there were countless institutions so-called throughout the nation—the incident was removed from this study.[28]

The second justification for exclusion was overly vague newspaper reporting. This was extremely common. If the basic details of what occurred could not be discerned or explicated, such incidents were summarily jettisoned. Several key examples are illustrative. For instance, abolitionists asserting that a series of consecutive mob attacks occurred 'six times' in the state of Rhode Island, or that an individual was mobbed by 'rabble' forces 'five times' in various Connecticut towns, while on an extended lecture tour, did not meet the threshold for inclusion.[29] No information was offered as to where, when, how, or why these incidents occurred. As such, while these assertions could add eleven total incidents in nominal terms to the aforementioned

[22] *Ibid*.
[23] My attempt to corroborate this incident in competing local and state anti-slavery newspapers proved unavailing.
[24] 'Brutal Outrage', *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 17 August 1843.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] 'Without Concealment—Without Compromise', *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 5 July 1849.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] I am almost certain that this event occurred in New York State. But as I cannot prove this with historical evidence, I have chosen to err on the side of caution.
[29] 'The Civil War in Rhode Island', *The Liberator*, 19 August 1842; 'Selections'; *The Liberator*, 13 November 1840.

'238' overall figure, such nondescript and vague statements do not offer conclusive evidence as to civil unrest or mob violence happenings. Similarly, identifying the skin color and political leanings of victims (or perpetrators) sometimes proved elusive as well. Newspapers frequently did not disclose the race of homicide victims, as a reported lynching in Peoria, Illinois illustrates.[30] In short, an adult male was brutally murdered by a white mob, but could not be included given the absence of the most elemental of details related to the victim.[31] In summary, the lack of sufficient information and evidence confirming that an incident occurred against a white abolitionist or Black victim was grounds for automatic disqualification—irrespective of the fact that these events almost certainly did happen, and the victims were very probably Black.

A third basis for omission was civil unrest and violence that occurred against northerners *outside* the thirteen northern states. These developments were not uncommon and widely reported in contemporaneous newspapers. For instance, John L. Brown, 'a free citizen of Maine', was imprisoned in Fairfield, District, South Carolina, in late 1843, 'for attempting to aid a female slave to gain her liberty'.[32] The trial and subsequent sentencing garnered international attention—and the abolitionist-led, transatlantic movement declared total victory when Brown's legal troubles ended prematurely in a pardon.[33] Given the complexity of the case, however, as well as the fact that Brown's mistreatment did not occur on northern soil, the incident was omitted from the overall figure. Similarly, there were a number of incidents that occurred outside the jurisdiction of the United States or on international waters. One incident in particular, involving Frederick Douglass, is quite noteworthy. After having left Boston for Ireland aboard the *Cambria* following the publication of his first autobiography, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* in 1845, the burgeoning writer and activist reported 'a real, American, republican, democratic, Christian mob' on the high seas. [34] In brief, after the famed

[30] 'More Lynching', *The Peoria Register*, cited in *The Liberator*, 10 September 1841.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] 'Case of John L. Brown', *The Liberator*, 19 April 1844.
[33] W. Caleb McDaniel, 'The Case of John L. Brown: Slavery, Sex, South Carolina, and the Whispering Gallery of Transatlantic Abolitionism', *American Nineteenth Century History*, 14, No. 2 (2011), pp. 148-149.
[34] 'Letters from Fredericr [*sic*] Douglass and James N. Buffum', *The Liberator*, 26 September 1845.

writer was invited by the captain to deliver a lecture on anti-slavery, Douglass witnessed 'the most daring and disgraceful [and] wicked exhibition of depravity' when a cabal of 'slaveholders' on board threatened to 'throw him overboard'.[35] As the incident occurred outside the bounds of northern soil, however, the episode could not defensibly be included in the present data set—despite the fact that the ship left a northern port, the perpetrators were almost certainly anti-abolitionists from New England, and a case could be made that the violence stemmed from northern, anti-Black prejudices and antipathies.

Finally, contested court ordered executions were instantly rejected from inclusion. While extrajudicial killings have been included in the study when identified, the omission of the Washington Goode case, in Massachusetts, proved noteworthy but outside the scope of this project.[36] Tried and eventually hanged for the murder of one Thomas Harden, Goode, a free Black man living in the city of Boston, was executed in the spring of 1849.[37] While the judge and jury assessed his guilt as beyond a reasonable doubt, abolitionists strongly opposed his execution on anti-capital punishments grounds, coupled with the fact that the evidence presented in court according to partisan newspapers was 'purely circumstantial'.[38] Nevertheless, Goode was executed, despite rising opposition to capital punishment in the state generally and the accused's possible innocence specifically.[39] While it is impossible to know whether or not Goode was in fact guilty of the crime for which he was hanged, he was sentenced to death by an all-white jury of his peers and a prejudicial 'hanging judge'.[40] Racism had a major role to play in this case. Nevertheless, as Goode legally received a court hearing and no extrajudicial killing can strictly speaking be said to have taken place, the incident was ultimately disregarded.[41]

All in all, there were dozens of incidents that were excluded from the '238' figure that

[35] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[36] 'The hanging in Boston, and who went to see it', *The North Star*, 8 June 1849.
[37] 'No Commutation', *The Liberator*, 4 May 1849.
[38] 'Neck-Breaking', *The Hartford Republican*, cited in *The Liberator*, 4 May 1849.
[39] Norman B. Leventhal Map Room, Boston Public Library, accessed 9 December 2021.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] 'Hanging of Washington Goode', *The Boston Pilot*, 2 June 1849.

another historian might reasonably have included with proper explanation. For the reasons I have outlined, however, I have chosen to err on the side of caution, thereby only including incidents that were detailed, easily identifiable, and methodologically defensible. This means that the total number of disruptive and violent incidents in the antebellum North during the 1840s were irrefutably higher than what has been presented here. In the end, this enhances (rather than challenges) my principle claim that northern civil unrest and violence against abolitionists and Blacks was more routinized, pervasive, and common than previous scholars in the field have acknowledged.

General Overview: Data Set One

Data Set One exclusively appraises physical assaults in three northern states: Massachusetts, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. I have chosen to include this comparative data set in this study because my preliminary research findings identified high numbers number of incidents in these three states. While Leonard Richards recorded just 64 total incidents of physical violence during the entire period 1840-1849 across the entire antebellum North, this study observes 50 total incidents in just these three states.[42] As the first major study on this topic, Richards reached these conclusions after mining data from *The Niles' Register*.[43] While Richards clarifies that these findings were provisional and meant only to be suggestive, this does not stop him from making sweeping claims in the final chapter of his study. His argument, for instance, that by the late 1830s, 'the day of the anti-abolitionist mob had largely disappeared' is not necessarily or entirely supported by his methodological approach.[44] Nevertheless, Richards recorded his findings during the 1960s, well before the dawn of the internet, and his investigations prove important and instructive. Since that time, however, no scholar has systematically or thoroughly investigated such developments using digitized

[42] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Standing and Property',* p. 12.
[43] *Ibid,* p. 11.
[44] *Ibid,* p. 156.

archives until David Grimsted during the 1990s.[45] My results are surprising in the sense that even when methodological considerations are placed aside (for reasons explained above), my research demonstrates there were no fewer than 146 physically violent incidents across the antebellum North—more than double the number of incidents observed by Richards. Given that all data identified from researching the states of Iowa and Wisconsin were also excluded, the total numbers were surely (and perhaps even drastically) higher. Moreover, removing anti-Black violence from the equation still yields surprising results. There were at least 82 violent incidents against white abolitionists during the decade of the 1840s, across the 13 northern antebellum states studied. This amounts to a roughly 22 percent higher rate of violence than previously understood.

This data set, however, stands on firmer methodological grounds than the '238' total overview figure, providing more precise insights into the extent and frequency of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black physical violence in the antebellum North. The study adopts a consistent methodological framework for analysis. These states were chosen, among other reasons, for their diverse geographical locations—New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the Middle West—and the high number of incidents initially discovered relevant to adjacent northern states as outlined in the previous section. Adopting a uniform number of keyword searches—and meticulously reading and categorizing every violent incident observed in *The Liberator* newspaper between the years 1840 and 1849—fashioned no identifiable methodological inconsistencies. It is important to note, however, that the general overview figure only examined physical violence as prompted by abolitionist activists. All things being equal, my research suggests that Massachusetts experienced the highest *per capita* rates of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black physical violence across the entire antebellum North. This section argues that it is not the disproportionate number of abolitionists and Black Americans living in the Commonwealth, but rather the fact that Massachusetts was the citadel of anti-slavery

[45] Grimsted, *American Mobbing*.

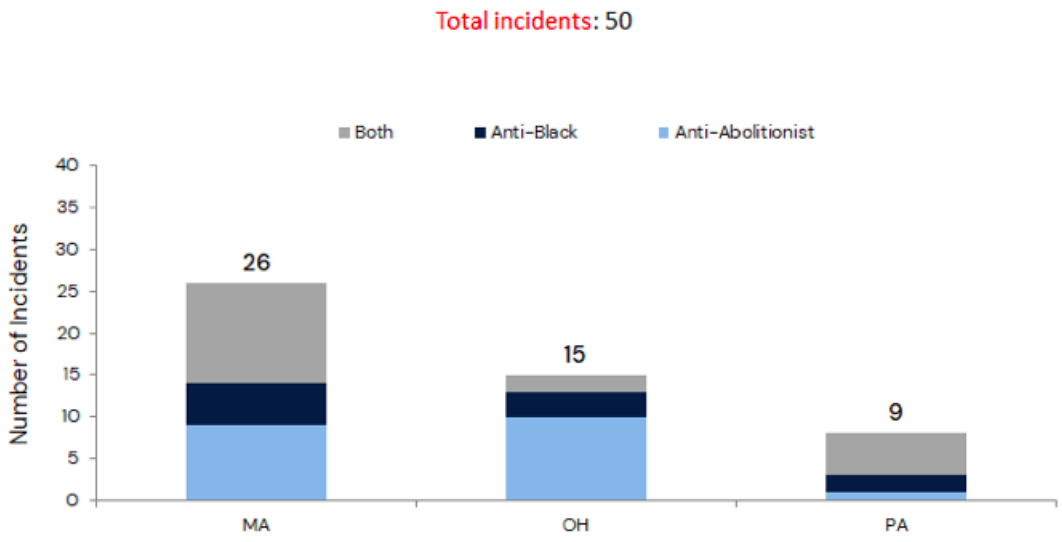
condemnation and agitation during the antebellum period.

Methods

The following are three methodological decisions worth bearing in mind. First, Data Set One only examined newspaper articles published in *The Liberator*. Second, every search hit returned was read and (if applicable) properly catalogued. Third, consistent search terms were deployed and utilized across all three northern states. The first line of the search bar included the chosen state, followed by the following keyword search terms: '(Mob OR Riot OR violence Or kidnapping) AND (black OR abolition OR colorphobia OR disgraceful OR missile OR hiss'.

This resulted in a grand total of 113 total search hits for Pennsylvania, 135 total search hits for Ohio, and 732 search hits for Massachusetts using the Accessible Archives, Inc. database. In the final analysis, 50 incidents were uncovered across all three northern states. There were nine total incidents in Pennsylvania, 15 total incidents in Ohio, and 26 total incidents in Massachusetts. Most significantly, these results were in keeping with the overview figure drawn from the previous section. Forty-two percent of incidents targeted white abolitionists (21 total), 20 percent of incidents targeted exclusively Black Americans (10 total), and 38 percent of incidents targeted both groups (19 total). Below is a visual breakdown of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black civil unrest and violence within each respective state:

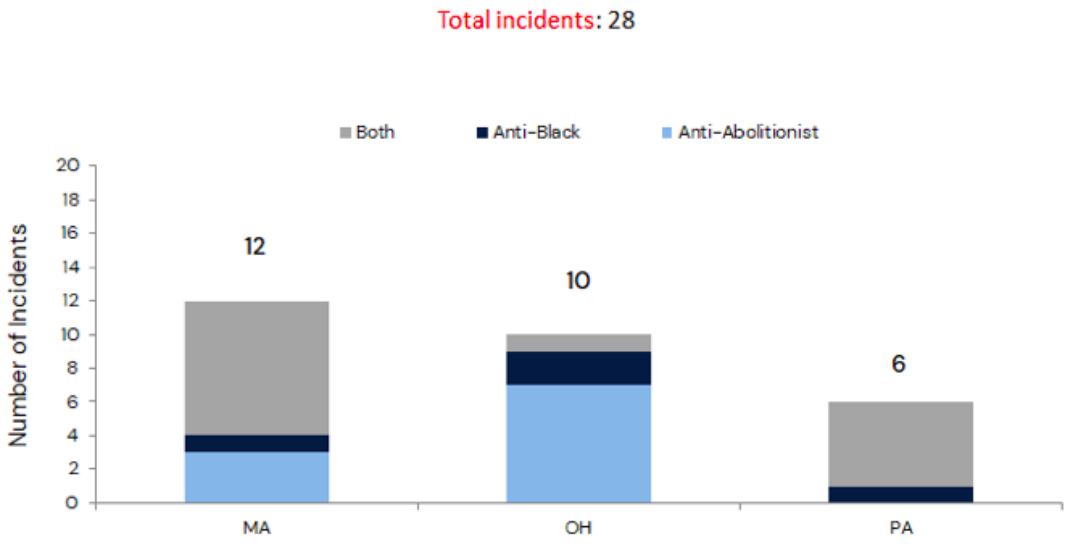
Figure 1.2: Anti-Abolitionist and Anti-Black Violence in Massachusetts, Ohio, and Pennsylvania



Criterion for Inclusion

The metrics for inclusion in Data Set One required at least one of the following developments: verbal/oral abuse, physical assault/actual injury, destruction of property, disruption of proceedings, or violation of freedom. This snapshot of data above gives one a sense of the extent and place of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black activities and violence as reported by *The Liberator*. Meanwhile, the requirements for inclusion in Figure 1.2 boil down to three related components: political motivation, physical violence, and historical confirmation:

Figure 1.3: Politically-Motivated Anti-Abolitionist and Anti-Black Violence in Massachusetts, Ohio, and Pennsylvania



By political motivation, I mean that the violence that ensued must have been precipitated by one (or more) of the following developments: known abolitionist or anti-slavery agitation, political involvement (such as voting or campaigning), attending abolitionist or anti-slavery political events, lectures, or meeting houses; or finally, the publication (or dissemination) of abolitionist or anti-slavery propaganda. Meanwhile, anti-Black violence includes the same framework as above—i.e., violence perpetrated as a consequence of political activism, electioneering, or known association with abolitionists, yet several key caveats remain. Isolated and non-politically motivated events—that is, incidents that fall outside explicitly anti-slavery activities, such as murder, rape, racial profiling, anti-interracial or anti-'amalgamation' attacks, as well as kidnapping—were omitted from the data set altogether. While these incidents were common, random, and widely documented by abolitionists at the time, the lack of evidence suggesting they were politically motivated rendered their inclusion beyond the scope of this investigation. Kidnappings, in particular, will be further explored and disaggregated in Chapter VI.

The best framework for understanding this phenomenon is what historians Christopher and Ira Leonard describe as 'group political violence'.[46] This means physical violence perpetrated by more than one individual and usually 'against perceived enemies'—in this case, abolitionists and Black Americans.[47] The most common types of group political violence identified in this study are as follows: pushing, punching, choking, manhandling, kicking, object throwing, and the utilization of weaponry, including blunt objects, knives, and firearms.

Finally, all incidents included in the present data set were reported and documented in at least one antebellum newspaper report. While certain incidents of violence were contemporaneously corroborated by numerous newspapers—or by the same newspaper on a previous or subsequent date—such corroboration is not necessary to meet the bare minimum threshold for inclusion. In fact, so long as the event was documented in *The Liberator*—and some clarity of detail was provided—the incidents have been catalogued as part of this study. Indeed, as *The Liberator* reported on anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence in all thirteen northern antebellum states—and Garrison himself was especially active during the period 1840-1849—the newspaper proves the gold standard for data collection and analysis.

Massachusetts, Ohio, and Pennsylvania: Physical Assault as a Percentage of Total Number of Incidents

As noted above, physical assaults accounted for roughly one-half of all observed incidents within these three states (50 total). Seventy-eight percent of all anti-abolitionist and anti-Black activities in Pennsylvania were physically violent, compared with 80 percent in Ohio and 54 percent in Massachusetts. Most interestingly, 100 percent of all anti-abolitionist physical violence in Pennsylvania involved at least one Black victim. This stands in stark contrast to the other two states, Ohio (42 percent) and Massachusetts (78 percent).

[46] Ira M. and Christopher C. Leonard, 'The Historiography of American Violence', *Homicide Studies*, 7, No. 21 (2003), p. 106.
[47] *Ibid*.

This may be partially attributed to population. According to 1840 federal census records, there were 35,841 Black Americans living in Pennsylvania, 17,350 living in Ohio, and 8,669 living in Massachusetts. These figures prove quite disparate, suggesting that because Pennsylvania had a significantly higher Black population than Ohio and Massachusetts (roughly two percent of the population), it stands to reasons that white-on-Black physical assaults would be correspondingly higher. At the same time, 58 percent of all violent incidents in Ohio were directed exclusively at white abolitionists, whereas 0 percent in Pennsylvania and 21 percent in Massachusetts were recorded. These discrepancies offer a number of insights into anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence—namely how they developed, where they occurred, and how they changed over time. But first, a general overview of discrepancies in data is necessary.

Discrepancies in Data

One of the central challenges of the overview figure and Data Set One is reconciling the inconsistencies between observed physically violent incidents found in *The Liberator*, versus the scores of newspapers utilized within a broader press. On the one hand, that a plethora of newspapers would be more readily available to identify and record violent incidents than a single, national newspaper is self-evident. But *The Liberator* was not averse to reprinting editorials from newspapers across the antebellum North, not unlike many, if not most, newspapers of the era, particularly if these periodicals recorded violence or disturbances against abolitionists or Black Americans.

What, then, explains this disparity? First, the keyword searches were drastically different. Whereas the initial 238 figure utilized at least 20 keyword searches, Data Set One only adopted eleven. This wider and more expansive methodological search explains why the former investigation yielded much higher hit returns and relevant data. Second, the first chart exhibited the added benefit of explicitly searching for anti-abolitionist and anti-Black civil unrest and violence at the city (and therefore local) level. Searching for incidents using more

targeted and specific search terms yielded better results. Finally, violent incidents that did not meet the established criteria for inclusion in Data Set One—i.e., political motivation, physical violence, and historical defensibility—were disregarded. In sum, these three reasons explain why a surprising number of violent events observed by competing presses at the local, state, and national level went seemingly unreported by *The Liberator*.

Conclusion

The results from Data Set One offer evidence that violent incidents persisted across the antebellum North during the period 1840-1849. All in all, we can infer from the violence observed that the total number of violent incidents across the antebellum North almost certainly exceeded Richards' previously identified 64 total events, and probably by a much larger margin. What's more, these conjectures are very much in keeping with the asymmetrical state-by-state conclusions presented in my initial investigations into antebellum anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence. The fact is, newly unearthed digitized newspaper sources—taken from microfilm and uploaded by archivists to online search engines—offers new insights to previous historiography by showing how scholars were technologically unable to comprehensively and more systematically survey the depth and persistence of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the 1840s. This technological gap left a key period immediately preceding the sectional crisis under-examined and underemphasized.[48] My findings add complexity to this consensus and raises new and important methodological questions.

A second conclusion that can be drawn from my investigations is the importance of Massachusetts as a stronghold and center of anti-abolitionism. An in-depth look into physical violence in Massachusetts, Ohio, and Pennsylvania illustrates that explicit abolitionist activity and activism engendered greater physical violence, as a percentage of total violence, in the former state. This finding aligns with the conclusions introduced in Data Set One. Seventy-five percent of all physical assaults documented in Massachusetts were anti-abolitionist driven. This

[48] See this dissertation's introduction for further explanation.

stands in stark contrast to similar developments in Pennsylvania (33 percent) and Ohio (60 percent). Thus, not only were the total number of physical assaults higher in Massachusetts, overall, than these two populous northern states, but a significantly higher percentage were prompted by—and grew directly in response to—abolitionist activities. This suggests that a major factor in higher rates of physical violence in Massachusetts, in comparison to neighboring northern states, was the organization, visibility, and the growing influence of the anti-slavery movement in the commonwealth of Massachusetts. That being said, my case studies investigating anti-Black violence, particularly in the cities of Indianapolis (Chapter IV) and New York (Chapter VI), help rebalance historians' collective understanding of sectional trends.

The third conclusion of Data Set One is that the violence that occurred throughout the antebellum North against Black people and whites was not strictly intermittent. While there is surely an argument to be made that the violence was episodic, occurring randomly and at different times, my research reveals the cumulative impact of sectional violence. My data indicate that across the entire antebellum North—and especially in states like Massachusetts—civil unrest and violence remained consistent against white and Black abolitionists throughout the entire decade of the 1840s. My research reshapes the way historians should understand the violence of the post-Jacksonian period. While there has been a great deal of scholarship published emphasizing the bloodshed and violence in the Middle Western states during the 1850s—particularly in Kansas and Nebraska, as well as the state of California—the violence in New England and other northern areas during the 1840s cannot be categorized as sporadic or ruptured. It continued, albeit with ebbs and flows, for the entirety of the decade, and in some instances, with marked brutality.

In closing, historians have overlooked many of these developments and chosen instead to focus on the 1830s and 1850s as seminal decades during the pre-Civil War era. This could be due to a multitude of factors, such as the absence of relatively few climatic episodes such as the murder of Elijah Lovejoy in 1837, and the extended violence of 'Bleeding Kansas' across the

antebellum Middle West. Another possibility is that partisan newspapers were preoccupied and deeply concerned to a greater extent than other decades with controversial national and international events—not local ones. Texas annexation, the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), the extension of slavery, and the California Gold rush were major, nation-changing developments that threatened to undermine and even dissolve the Union. This change in focus—that is, the shift in abolitionist newspaper reporting throughout the decade—may correspondingly explain why the persistent mobocratic rioting of the 1840s has been overlooked. Whatever the case may be, researchers of this period have minimized the 1840s and its attendant activism via newspaper reporting—which significantly laid the groundwork for (and ultimately brought about) the sectional crisis. The prolific violence of the 1850s was a consequence of the continued and widely reported violence of the 1840s by the abolitionist press. The events of the 1850s did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, the violence clearly spilled from the northern, easterly states into the new territories and beyond. Second, an observation borrowed from the scholarship of Manisha Sinha reminds us that neglecting the violence of the 1840s in some quarters belittles the abolitionists and their cause, many of whom worked tirelessly during the 1840s at great personal cost—as the grassroots-driven 'One Hundred Conventions' lecture tour demonstrates—to bring about irrevocable and lasting changes to the nation.[49] The 1840s was not a lost decade of division and disorganization in abolitionist activism, as some historians have suggested.[50] The opposite is true: it was a period of sustained anti-slavery activism, education, and awareness, which in turn provoked hostile anti-abolitionist and anti-Black responses as demonstrated in this data set. While there is no shortage of scholarship articulating how political and social developments during the 1850s became major Civil War catalysts, the more prosaic, daily sacrifices of Black and white abolitionists during the 1840s, many of whom remain anonymous and unknown to the present day, ensured that

[49] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, pp. 1-2; historical records shows that the 1843 lecture tour lasted many months and included stops in New York and across various mid-western states.
[50] See literature review.

sectional tensions would never cool while slavery existed and expanded into the West.

Literature Review

The historiography of mob violence in Jacksonian America originated during Reconstruction, with J.T. Headley's first published work in 1873.[51] Headley argued that the rise of mob violence, which erupted across the antebellum North during the 1830s, was largely attributed to the outcry and activism of abolitionists themselves.[52] He wrote that a 'peaceable solution' to the issue of slavery was 'rendered impossible' by the attitude and vehemence anti-slavery reformers and activists.[53] It was those individuals, he argued, who ultimately brought the country over the precipice and into the fiery cauldron of civil war. 'The Abolitionists were considered by all as enemies to the Union', he wrote, 'whom the lower classes felt should be put down, if necessary, by violence'.[54] By contrast, while this study does engage in the kind of victim blaming *de rigueur* during the Reconstruction era, it does demonstrate how the abolitionist press, through partisan reporting, interpreted their mistreatment as a means of challenging racial violence and northern indifference to the institution of slavery during the 1840s. In other words, while this study does not posit that abolitionists themselves were responsible for the violence that they experienced and witnessed, it does argue, through the power of the antebellum printing press, that organs such as *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, *The New Era*, and *The North Star*, and especially *The Liberator* construed meaning to their experiences and in so doing strengthened northern suspicions of an ascendant southern 'slave power'.

Anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence did not always happen spontaneously. For instance, at the Chatham Street Chapel in New York City on October, 2, 1833, a violent mob of anti-abolitionist residents were incited to interrupt an anti-slavery meeting reportedly presided

[51] J.T. Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712 to 1873, including a Full and Complete account of the Four Days' Draft Riot of 1863* (New York, 1873), E-book, p. 80, cited in Alicia J. Rivera, 'Fear of Miscegenation in the Antebellum Riots of New York 1834, Boston 1835, and Philadelphia 1838' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of California Santa Barbara, 2014), pp. 8-9.
[52] Headley, *The Great Riots of New York*, p. 80.
[53] *Ibid*, p. 80.
[54] *Ibid*, cited in Rivera. "Fear of Miscegenation' p. 18.

over by Lewis Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison, and other prominent abolitionists. According to Headley, 'the most respectable men in New York' had posted a bulletin on the door at Clinton Hall (where, at the time, the organizers believed the meeting would be convene), urging 'citizens who may feel disposed to manifest the *true* feeling of the State on this subject, are requested to attend'.[55] When the mob finally dispersed (after learning the true location of the meeting), and the ranks of anti-abolitionist protestors swelled to the 'thousands', the mob attempted to 'rout' the gathering, without success.[56] The abolitionists, as it turned out, had vacated the premises by the time the mob assembled.

This firsthand account of attempted anti-abolitionist violence is significant not only for its harrowing details, but its contemporaneous, detailed analysis of anti-abolitionist agitation and rioting in Jacksonian America. This anti-abolitionist impulse, however, stemmed not only from ordinary people and the grassroots, according to Headley, but from New York's social, political, and religious elites. A generation later, historian Adelaide Avery Lyons added to this analysis in the early 1900s by offering insight into the origins and development of anti-abolitionist violence in antebellum America.[57] While Lyons maintained that in the early 1800s, established churches of all denominations 'were more or less positively anti-slavery', there was a marked shift in opinion among organized religion as the century progressed, and the abolitionist movement gained momentum.[58] Lyons attributes this reversal exclusively to 'Garrisonian abolition', as the man himself, and his acolytes, were perceived to be, among church elites, 'heretics and madmen'.[59] This is a perspective corroborated and later observable in Chapter II, as one of the main talking points of abolitionist circuit speakers at the Second Annual Anti-Slavery Convention on Nantucket Island was the pro-slavery sympathies of northern church leaders. In fact, as scholars have long noted, one of the main reasons for the

[55] *Ibid*, pp. 81-82.
[56] *Ibid*, pp. 82-83.
[57] Cited in', *"Gentlemen of Property and Standing*', pp. 3-4.
[58] Adelaide Avery Lyons, 'Religious Defense of Slavery in the North', *Trinity College Historical Society*, Series VIII (Durham, 1919), E-book, p. 5, cited in, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing',* pp. 3-4.
[59] *Ibid*, p. 5.

violence and rioting that erupted after Stephen S. Foster's 'Brotherhood of Thieves' speech in August 1842 was the radical abolitionist's venomous and ad hominem attacks on pro-slavery priests and clergy.

While Christian congregations at the beginning of the century nominally opposed slavery in principle, over time, many church leaders—especially members of the Methodist Church—increasingly found abolitionist tactics and methods dangerous. Headley and Lyons are hence in agreement that antebellum churches harbored anti-abolitionist impulses, but the difference between them is stark. Whereas Headley maintains that secular social elites were predominately responsible for organizing anti-abolitionist protests and mob protests in places like New York City, Lyons argues that organized religion—particularly the Church—was primarily responsible for anti-abolitionism and its myriad facets. Ultimately, Headley argues that wealthy elites were the greatest advocates of anti-abolitionism, whereas Lyons argues these sentiments emanated most powerfully from clergy and church leaders. This study, however, attempts to reconcile these varying perspectives, rejecting binary arguments in favor of a much more complex and nuanced understanding of causal developments. This study complicates these early works by demonstrating how many observed incidents of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black mob violence were spontaneous, uncoordinated, and carried out by the working poor and non-elites during the 1840s.

This perspective of Jacksonian violence from 'above' was fully endorsed by historian Leonard L. Richards nearly fifty years later, whose aformentioned work, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing': Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, published in 1970, is a landmark in the field. His scholarly investigations have done much to transform the way historians understand how anti-abolitionist mobs came to fruition and were organized. As his title suggests, Richards argues that northern elites generally were fully responsible for the political activities of anti-abolitionism, in part because they 'had so little fear of indictment or

public censure'.[60] The ringleaders of 'planning and organization', he wrote, were predominately 'doctors and lawyers, merchants and bankers, judges and Congressmen'.[61] This 'high status' perspective of anti-abolitionist agitation is echoed by David Grimsted in his 1998 classic, *American Mobbing, 1828-1860*—although Grimsted also draws attention to the fact that, in some instances, the reports of those arrested hailed almost exclusively from the lower classes, or proved entirely 'inconclusive'.[62] This study therefore attempts to bridges the gap between these clashing perspectives and impart greater complexity within these historiographical debates, documenting how the ringleaders of such violence varied considerably by incident and geography. For example, while the Cincinnati Riots (Chapter IV) were reportedly exacerbated after northern white men of high station recruited southern slaveholders into the city, the targeting of John Tucker (Chapter III) proved entirely contingent, perpetrated exclusively by lower-class Irish workingmen in front of a largely assembled mob.

Still, Richards provides ample evidence that northern mobs dominated American civil and political life during the 1830s, and were predominately orchestrated by upper class elites. Richards's work, however, is rather narrow in the sense that it focuses almost exclusively on anti-abolitionist violence in the northern areas of Utica, Cincinnati, and New York City, and is principally confined to the 1830s.[63] It does not analyze in extensive detail anti-abolitionist trends and developments outside of this decade.[64] By contrast, the following chapters, while taking into account Richards's arguments and methods, will extend the study into the 1840s, focusing exclusively on anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the post-Jacksonian period. This thesis serves as a necessary and belated follow-up to Richards' transformative and field-redefining research during the 1970s.

Writing several years later, historian Theodore M. Hammett endorsed Richards's main

[60] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing',* p. 5.
[61] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing',* p. 5.
[62] Grimsted, *American Mobbing*, p. 46.
[63] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing',* pp. 171-175.
[64] Richards narrows his area of focus exclusively to the decade of the 1830s, see Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing',* pp. 6-7.

conclusions after confining his research to the city of Boston. The upper classes generally incited anti-abolitionist sentiment, he averred, principally because they feared the radical transformation of antebellum social and gender norms.[65] Moreover, he reasoned, women participating outspokenly in abolitionist societies proved threatening to the patriarchal and urban conventions of antebellum Boston—and by extension, other northern cities.[66] Similarly, many Boston elites feared the radicalism of immediate abolitionism for its divisive, disunionist, and revolutionary language.[67] Hammett, however, explicitly takes issues with Richards' 'gentlemen of property and standing' thesis as overly generalized and lacking nuance. 'The very rich were strongly opposed to abolitionism', he argued, 'but so were many people of some property but little standing'.[68] He implies, citing an 1835 anti-abolition appeal as evidence, that there was a direct correlation between those owning any property and increased involvement in anti-abolitionist campaigns and activities.[69] It was therefore not just wealthy property owners who were inclined to facilitate and participate in anti-abolitionist mob violence during the antebellum period, but the middle and lower proprietary classes as well. This amorphous make-up of mob participants and perpetrators emerges as a major theme of this study exemplified in Chapters I-IV and Chapter VI.

These two historians broadly agree that anti-abolitionist mob violence did not erupt without some degree of incitement, or pre-planning, from landowners. In most instances, anti-abolitionist mobs were mobilized and thrust into action, whatever their reasons, by 'gentlemen' of some proprietary means and influence. Likewise, their works are similar in the sense that both historians emphasize how unskilled workers, and the urban poor, were receptive to anti-abolitionism messaging, and therefore frequently participated in mob protests and demonstrations in and across antebellum northern cities.

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[65] Theodore M. Hammett, 'Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston: Ideology and Interest', *The Journal of American History*, 62, No. 4. (1976), p. 861.
[66] Hammett, "Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston," p. 862.
[67] Hammett, "Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston," p. 862.
[68] Hammett, "Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston," p. 863.
[69] Hammett, "Two Mobs of Jacksonian Boston," pp. 863-864.

My research complements and bridges these points of disagreement by underscoring the complexity of antebellum political and racial violence, as forces from 'above' and 'below' oftentimes conspired to foment large-scale rioting and civil unrest. For instance, as will be discussed in Chapter IV, the violent conflagration in Cincinnati in the summer of 1841 was triggered by a 'quarrel' between a gang of Irish whites and several African Americans.[70] What followed—three full days of arson, homicides, rioting, and the complete breakdown of law and order—cannot be reasonably argued occurred due to the efforts of 'gentlemen of property and standing'. The triggering incident happened spontaneously without direct assistance from church and city leaders—although the incident did inflame the passions of working and lower class whites—providing a more nuanced causal explanation for the persistence and extent of mob rioting during the antebellum period.

Historian Michael S. Hindus does not dispute Richards' traditional interpretation, citing the famous and well-documented near-lynching of William Lloyd Garrison, on October 21, 1835, arguing that the lawlessness that ensued was organized 'and composed largely of men of wealth and influence'.[71] Yet he adds greater clarity to the debate by emphasizing how the city of Boston, as a veritable melting pot of 'ethnic tension', was uniquely preconditioned and receptive to anti-abolitionist tendencies.[72] Thus, what made these mobs so violent and incendiary in Boston, he points out, was not necessarily the planning and organization from upper class elites—although that was certainly part of it—but what Hindus calls the 'democratic factor'.[73] Given these social tensions, exacerbated by poverty, cramped conditions, and the unique urban layout of the city, violence directed at abolitionists in Boston was more vicious, widespread, and pronounced than in rural areas and smaller cities.[74] My research complicates this narrative of urban, anti-abolitionist ringleaders in Boston specifically by underscoring, in

[70] 'Riot and Mobs, Confusion and Bloodshed', *The Liberator,* 12 September 1841.
[71] Michael S. Hindus, 'A City of Mobocrats and Tyrants: Mob Violence in Boston, 1747-1863', *Issues in Criminology,* 6, No. 2 (1971), p. 73.
[72] *Ibid* p. 78.
[73] *Ibid* p. 78.
[74] *Ibid* p. 78.

Chapter V, the degree to which ordinary citizens in the city lobbied, fought, and protested the arrest and attempted reclamation of a fugitive slave seeking freedom during the fall of 1842. The terms 'anti-slavery' and 'anti-abolitionist' therefore were not binary terms that residents of the North could easily fit into. Many Bostonians could be both hostile to abolitionism as a political movement, while simultaneously outraged and averse to southern slaveholders crossing the border, flaunting states' rights, and demanding the return of their chattel 'property'.

Moreover, Hindus challenges Richards' conclusions in another crucial area.[75] While both scholars concur that anti-abolitionist violence significantly and sharply decreased after the year 1837, their explanations for this development vary considerably. While Richards principally contends that abolitionist coffers dried up after the Panic of 1837, thus affecting state and national organization efforts (leading in turn to fewer and fewer violent incidents perpetrated against abolitionists), Hindus emphasizes how the growth, training, and increased effectiveness of law enforcement and city police was a major deterrent to mob violence.[76] These mobilized forces, he argues, were better able to contain, control, and prevent violent anti-abolitionist mobs and crowds after 1837 in the antebellum North.[77] While this study does not entirely refute these arguments, it does reframe the debate using primary sources and archival research. Rather than focusing on the degree to which racial and political violence *declined* during the post-Jacksonian period, this thesis actually highlights the *persistence* and *continuity* of violence during the 1840s—a subtle but significant reframing overlooked in the secondary literature.[78] Indeed, this study emphasizes the far more interesting and cumulative impact of continued mob violence during pre-Civil War era, specifically how newspaper reporting and partisan editorializing contributed greatly to sectional tensions and fanned the flames of

[75] This difference of opinion is explained in detail by Michael S. Hindus, see *Ibid*, p. 73.
[76] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing',* pp. 157-159.
[77] Hindus, "A City of Mobocrats and Tyrants," p. 78.
[78] Richards, '*Gentlemen of Standing and Property'*, pp. 156-170; Richard B. Kielbowicz, "The Law and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers, 1833-1860," *Law and History Review*, 24, No. 3 (2006), pp. 572; Rivera, 'Fear of Miscegenation', p. 174; Hindus, 'A City of Mobocrats and Tyrants', p. 73; Norman Ratner, *Powder Keg: Northern Opposition to the Anti-Slavery Movement, 1831-1840* (New York, 1968), p. 141; Whitney Stewart, Jonathan A. Noyalas, Kevin R. C. Gutzman, and Nancy A. McCaslin, 'Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860', cited in Jame J. Wilson (ed.), *50 Events That Shaped African American History: An Encyclopedia of the American Mosaic* (Santa Barbara, California, 2019), p. 46.

disunionist sentiments.

Roughly a generation after the 1970s, there was an emphasis on analyzing and deciphering the underlying factors that made anti-abolitionist mob rule socially and legally permissible. Richard B. Kielbowicz's scholarship is one but example. While his analysis focuses broadly on mob violence across the antebellum United States, and in particular against abolitionist newspapers and periodicals, as this study also addresses, his conclusions helpfully explain why the instigators and perpetrators of anti-abolitionist mob violence went unprosecuted.

Ultimately, the permissibility of anti-abolitionism found its defense in what Kielbowicz calls 'legal principles'.[79] In short, using the mob violence directed at a Kentucky-based abolitionist newspaper as evidence (but whose arguments apply to the antebellum North) Kielbowicz argues that anti-abolitionist mobs used specious reasoning to silence those with whom they disagreed. These included the fear that granting free speech rights to the abolitionist printing press would ultimately lead to 'slave insurrections, spark responses that caused public disorder, and disrupt commercial and political relations'.[80] This is a point that Kielbowicz makes explicitly—namely, that southern states realistically feared the disruption and violence of slave insurrections and such civil unrest would harm regional economic ties and relationships. Clearly, the unshackling of the southern economy's unfree labor force had far reaching commercial and pecuniary implications throughout the antebellum northern states.[81]

Kielbowicz's analysis echoes that of historian Carleton Mabee, who published his seminal work, *Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists From 1830 Through the Civil War,* a generation earlier. Writing in 1970, Mabee emphasized that northern elites, 'including officials, merchants, editors, and preachers, often did not feel called upon to curb…violence"

[79] Richard B. Kielbowicz, "The Law and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers, 1833-1860," *Law and History Review,* 24, No. 3 (2006), p. 562.
[80] *Ibid,* p. 566.
[81] *Ibid,* p. 566.

for fear of straining regional relations.[82] In simple terms, he argues, '[many elites] did not want to offend the South, with which they had strong economic, political, and church ties'.[83] Not surprisingly, this connection, and affinity between North and South, he contends, became a major catalyst for anti-abolitionist rhetoric and mob action during this period. This proved particularly evident in Chapter IV of this study, where northern merchants, operating from the shoreline of the Ohio River in the borderlands, reportedly colluded with southerners to perpetrate anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence throughout Cincinnati during the so-called 'civil war' of 1841.

Despite Mabee's and Kielbowicz's groundbreaking contributions to the field, the latter does draw parallels with previous generations of historians. He is quick to note, for instance, that 'attacks on abolition editors typically involved calculated decisions, elaborate preparation, and public declarations'.[84] Taking this assertion to its logical conclusion, the planning and organization of anti-abolitionist campaigns could not in many instances have been carried out by the illiterate, uneducated northern white masses. For this reason, Kielbowicz does much to explain why the 'gentlemen of property and standing' thesis has endured for generations, and has not been seriously challenged or discredited. And yet, while this study does not seek to overturn this thesis, my research does add more nuance and shading to this perspective. Many instances of racial and political violence identified in this study proved reactionary, unplanned, and initiated by the white working poor or newly arrived Irish immigrants. Such examples will be further explored and analyzed in Chapters I, III, IV, and VI.

The most comprehensive recent work on the rise and expansion of American abolitionism and anti-abolitionism is Manisha Sinha's, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, published in 2016. The book offers new insights into the radicalism and biracialism

[82] Carleton Mabee, *Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 Through the Civil War* (Toronto, 1970), p. 27.
[83] *Ibid*, p. 27.
[84] *Ibid*, p 562.

of the transnational, abolitionist movement.[85] Sinha dedicates much time and attention to the decade of 1830s, documenting the myriad ways abolitionists were mistreated by their anti-abolitionist oppressors.[86] Not unlike her predecessors, however, after scouring myriad primary sources, Sinha concludes that according to 'contemporaries', those participating in mob violence were 'respectable' members of the community, 'made up of merchants, politicians, and local law enforcement'.[87] This conclusion clearly echoes in the scholarship of many published historians, specifically Kielbowicz, who noted, a decade earlier, the correlation between anti-abolitionist violence and the presence of local government officials and policemen. For her part, Sinha uses specific incidents to demonstrate how men of 'high standing' perpetrated anti-abolitionist violence in northern areas, thereby offering credence to the 'gentlemen of property and standing' thesis.[88] More crucially, however, Sinha breaks with Kielbowicz and her other scholarly predecessors by arguing that 'political anti-slavery reemerged with a vengeance in the free soil campaigns of the 1840s and 1850s', dismissing this 'supposedly neglected period' as absolutely indispensable and critical to the larger abolitionist cause.[89] This insight, which clearly included the continuation of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black reprisals as a response to these campaigns, is fully supported and defended by the arguments and quantitative data of this thesis.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth R. Varon and Alicia J. Rivera argue that the power of new technologies—particularly the printing press—was chiefly responsible for increases in anti-abolitionist mob violence across northern states during the 1830s. "In 1835 [alone]', Varon writes, 'the AASS [American Anti-Slavery Society] published over a million pieces of anti-slavery literature for distribution in the South as well as the North."[90] This is a point echoed and support by Rivera. Rivera attributes the influence of the press as an indispensable factor in understanding the formation of anti-abolitionist mobs in northern cities. Rivera agrees with

[85] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, pp. 1-5.
[86] *Ibid*, pp. 228-239.
[87] *Ibid*, pp. 233.
[88] This phrase is not original, nor does it belong to Sinha; it is attributable to a local witness, see *Ibid*, pp. 238.
[89] *Ibid*, p. 191.
[90] Elizabeth R Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill, 2008), p. 102.

Varon insofar as she recognizes that American periodicals and daily newspapers were instrumental in stoking racial tensions, and inciting anti-abolitionist mob violence during this period.

This study approaches this issue not from a place of causation, but consequence, showing how newspaper reports were less responsible for causing racial and political violence—and more impactful in ascribing meaning to these documented events. This consistently traced development across all case studies shows how newspapers were not merely chroniclers of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence, but shapers of public opinion against the institution of slavery and a southern 'slave power'. These cumulative reports of violence and interference contributed in subtle ways to the breakdown of regional harmony and exacerbated sectionalism over a multi-decade period.

According to Varon, however, this abolitionist push for reform via print culture, while well intentioned and infused with the moral urgency of their cause, had likely two unintended consequences. First, such literature was widely perceived, especially by southerners, to be purposefully trying to incite slave rebellions. And second, 'Northern elites' immediately began to distance themselves from the radicalism and disunionist language of their abolitionist neighbors.[91] Many northerners, Varon argues, regardless of their feelings towards slavery, felt that the proponents of immediatism in general, and the Garrisonians in particular, were instigating a 'dangerous perversion of the divinely ordained social order'—that is, making the moral arguments for universal emancipation, and in the process, the possibility of a veritable biracial society.[92] This radical departure from the widely codified social conventions of the time was deeply alarming in antebellum America, especially given the prevailing racism within and across northern states.[93] Nevertheless, as this thesis will show, Garrison consistently used the power of the printing press, through partisan editorializing, to demonstrate the immoral and

[91] Varon, *Disunion!*, p. 102.
[92] *Ibid*, p. 105.
[93] *Ibid*, p. 102.

corrupting influence of slavery across the northern states and in so doing sharpened sectional divisions between 'anti-slavery' northerners and 'pro-slavery' southerners.

In sum, Varon argues that northern men of 'property and standing' were less influential in stoking anti-abolitionism than the southern 'press and politicians', who urged sympathetic 'white Northerners', in response to widely disseminated abolitionist 'propaganda,' to punish those deemed a threat to the stability, social structure, and white supremacist values of the entire nation. Rivera, however, who cited fears of 'amalgamation' as largely driving antebellum anti-abolitionism, does not explore or analyze any incidents involving anti-abolitionist mobs after 1838.[94] This continued, multi-generational oversight provides further justification for new works of scholarship that focus exclusively on the latter antebellum period.

And yet, at the same time, historian Carl Lawrence Paulus takes issue with Rivera's main conclusions. While Paulus acknowledges the common, general aversion to interracial sexual relations and marriage throughout the antebellum North, the issue, he claims, does little to explain the causes of northern Jacksonian anti-abolitionism. In essence, he writes that northern whites greatly 'abhorred' the doctrine of 'political amalgamation' instead, because if African Americans were emancipated, and eventually granted suffrage rights, they 'would influence elections and head to Washington'.[95] And yet, as we shall see in Chapters I-IV, the fear of competition with Black workers, especially during times of prolonged economic slump and uncertainty, motivated racial resentments among the white working and laboring classes to a much greater extent than the perceived fear of a Black electorate.

Structure

There are a number of claims that will be presented in this study which shape its analytical structure. In addition to the aforementioned historiographical engagement with scholars who have generally overlooked the violence of the 1840s, this study (as mentioned

[94] Rivera, "Fear of Miscegenation', p. 16.

[95] Carl Lawrence Paulus, *The Slaveholding Crisis: Fear of Insurrection and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2017), p. 113.

above) will add significant complexity to the perception that northern antebellum mobocratic violence declined after Jackson's presidency using qualitative and quantitative data. The mass rioting as demonstrated in Philadelphia, and on the island of Nantucket, indicates that historians have discounted the prevalence and intensity of these riotous proceedings. Chapter I will investigate both the origins of the Lombard Street Riots in Philadelphia in the summer of 1842, and the ways that it devastated and injuriously affected the city's Black community. Chapter II, meanwhile, will explicate the Second Annual Abolitionist Convention on Nantucket Island, which was disrupted and ultimately disbanded that very same month. Qualitatively, these incidents demonstrate the brutality of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the decade of the 1840s, and the lengths to which northern, anti-abolitionist and anti-Black rioters would go to suppress free speech, disrupt meetings, and ultimately undermine anti-slavery radicalism after the Jacksonian period.

Chapters III and IV demonstrate that African Americans during the 1840s experienced a major 'turn' towards violent resistance and self-defense in the Middle West. Chapter III investigates the murder of freedman John Tucker in Indianapolis, alluded to in the introduction, and how his actions that day elucidated this development, whereas Chapter IV explores the 'civil war' in Cincinnati—where the city's free African American population successfully fought off and survived three days of mobocratic terror, looting, and arson. In both instances, African Americans violently resisted torment and persecution. Next, Chapters V and VI examine the extent to which the antebellum northern 'free states' provided safeguards and protections for African Americans. Researching such claims in the cities of Boston and New York, these chapters document the precariousness of Black freedom in the face of fugitive slave reclamations, kidnappings, and illegal home invasions during the decade of the 1840s. Directly related to this, Chapter V also weighs in and analyzes the existence of a so-called southern 'slave power' in the city of Boston, Massachusetts. While the chapter largely avoids semantic and historiographical debates as to whether the conspiracy actually existed, it does argue that

cumulative abolitionist newspaper reporting shaped northern reactions and understandings of the issue. Antebellum northerners were attuned to—and increasingly concerned about—southern incursions into the free states, and the abolitionist printing press proved highly effective in diagnosing and drawing attention to this problem, particularly among the city's non-abolitionist community.

Lastly, Chapter VII, which examines pro-slavery and anti-abolitionist violence in the rural township of Oberlin, Ohio—one of the most important non-urban abolitionist strongholds outside of New England—showcases the amorphous nature of anti-slavery and anti-abolitionism in the western borderlands. This chapter supports new works of scholarship that emphasize the challenges of conventional definitions such as 'anti-slavery' and 'anti-abolitionist' in an antebellum context, complicating the use of binary political characterizations when appraising the politics of slavery and anti-slavery during this period.

Overall, synthesizing these case studies, my research offers novel perspectives. First, it encourages historians to think differently about the nature of newspaper sources. Abolitionist newspapers serve not just as evidence for the overall argument, but were actual players and partisan participants in the unfolding drama. These newspapers greatly reported on racial and political violence during the 1840s, apportioning meaning to these sanguinary events and therefore contributing significantly to the perception of regional animosities.

To that end, the seven case studies that follow demonstrate the cumulative impact of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black incidents on the emergence of an acknowledged intensification of sectional tensions and violence after the Compromise of 1850. These events, as reported and reprinted in 'immediatist' newspapers such as *The Liberator*, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard,* and *The Philanthropist*, among others, were major contributors to the crisis of Union that later followed the Jackson and post-Jacksonian periods. The abolitionist press, therefore, through relentless diagnosing and reporting, had a cumulative role in the long gestation and

buildup to southern disunionism.[96]

For the purposes of this study, the 'abolitionist press' is defined as newspapers that explicitly espoused immediate abolitionism. By contrast, the 'anti-slavery' press embraced a more gradualist approach to the slavery issue, which included, but was not limited to, colonization, compensated emancipation, and/or opposition to slavery extension into the western territories. This study also employs the adjective 'partisan' repeatedly when explicitly referencing the abolitionist printing press. When invoking the term, my intention is not to unfairly criticize, or malign, historically marginalized actors. On the contrary, the adjective is used to draw attention to abolitionists' skills at both effective political organization and advocacy. Abolitionists excelled in articulating both their beliefs and frustrations by accumulating and presenting written evidence. While the abolitionist printing press never intended to be neutral or unbiased, this hardly means—or suggests—that these same journalists were deliberately engaged in public deception or deceit.

A further crucial finding of this thesis is the economic stressors that proved major structural causes of violence during the 1840s. The persistence of economic contexts for the observable violence is most evident in the first four chapters. Competition over living 'space' in diverse geographies, combined with economic competition and resentments between predominately white Irish workers and African Americans, proved salient structural points as evidenced in numerous case studies. While causality cannot be determined with absolute certainty when investigating and analyzing the origins of post-Jacksonian mob violence, the underlining economic strains that manifested in various 'spaces'—work, home, the public sphere—proved structurally relevant to the origins of violence observed in an 1840s antebellum

[96] Gregory A. Borchard, 'Introduction', cited in David A. Sachsman, Gregory A. Borchard, and Dea Lisica (eds), *The Antebellum Press: Setting the Stage for Civil War* (New York and London, 2019), pp. 4-5; Liz Watts, 'Lydia Maria Child: Editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1841-1843, *Journalism History*, 35, No.1 (2009), p. 17; Ford Risley, *Abolition and the Press: The Moral Struggle Against Slavery* (Evanston, 2008), p. ix; Brennan, *The Making of an Abolitionist*, p. 6; Deborah Logan, 'Fighting a War of Words: Harriet Martineau in the 'National Anti-Slavery Standard', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 37, No. 1(2004), p. 48; Stewart et al., 'Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860', p. 45.

context. Specifically, as evidenced in Chapters I, III, and IV, this thesis engages directly with the historiography on Irish-American immigration and settlement, emphasizing how urban job competition—and labor-related resentments—impacted spatial and economic contexts.

Lastly, a major intervention of this study is the degree to which *The Liberator*, under the visionary and executive editorial leadership of William Lloyd Garrison, used the power of the printing press to diagnose the rise of a southern 'slave power' operating within northern states.[97] While scholars have been historically preoccupied with debating the extent to which such a conspiracy existed in the antebellum North, this study argues that such a debate overlooks the immense role that northern newspapers played in documenting and advancing this narrative. The essential point is that *The Liberator* specifically used its ink and influence to diagnose and convince the northern public that such a cabal existed. Through incessant editorializing about southern partisans probing into northern affairs, *The Liberator* served as a political agent in brokering sectional tensions through print culture, thus achieving a continuous, cumulative impact throughout the antebellum period. This underemphasized effect of abolitionist journalistic practices, especially under the political leadership of William Lloyd Garrison, is one of the core conclusions of this study. These findings highlight the long gestation of sectionalism and disunionist sentiments that ultimately resulted in the outbreak of the American Civil War.

[97] For evidence of Garrison's outsized editorial control over *The Liberator*, see Brennan, *The Making of an Abolitionist*, p. 1; Laura Sawade, 'Editorial Habitus in *The Liberator*: The Interdependence of Abolitionist Activism and Periodical Editorship' (Unpublished Graduate Paper, Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany, 2018), p. 4.

Chapter I: 'The Lombard Street Riots: Anti-Abolitionist and Anti-Black Irish Workingmen in Antebellum Philadelphia'

On Monday, 1 August 1842, anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence erupted throughout the city of Philadelphia, ostensibly triggered by the fallout over a Black temperance parade. This processional, comprised of hundreds of Black citizens, came together to promote teetotalism as well as celebrate the eighth anniversary of West Indian Emancipation. This peaceful demonstration, however, was violently assaulted, and over the course of a three-day period, large swaths of Philadelphia's Black population were routed and driven from the city. Black houses of worship, communal spaces, personal property, and areas of commerce were targeted and vandalized. While newspaper reports provide an incomplete picture of the chaotic, complex situation, white rioters terrorized and targeted hundreds of Black families. *The Boston Daily Mail*, perhaps, summed up the riots best, arguing that 'this last Philadelphia mob was the most heartless and bloodthirsty, by all accounts, of all the popular outbreaks that ever disgraced the country'.[1] In contrast to those historians who argue that anti-abolitionist rioting significantly waned after the Jacksonian period, this chapter demonstrates not only the intensity and persistence of violence during the early 1840s, but how partisan newspapers, such as *The Liberator*, used the crisis to promote the abolitionist cause and ultimately bolster its subscription-paying readership.[2]

Anti-abolition and anti-Black mobs orchestrated a veritable campaign of terror and destruction throughout the city. During the Lombard Street Riots, white perpetrators targeted Black men, boys, and women indiscriminately, viciously murdering some of them, and forcing many African Americans to vacate the city entirely. Many families waited anxiously to no avail for ships to carry them across the Delaware River to refuge. Across the city, Black houses were ransacked, destroyed, and burned to the ground—as was Smith's Beneficial Hall, a meeting

[1] 'From the Boston Daily Mail', *The Liberator*, 12 August 1842, p. 2.
[2] Richards, '*Gentlemen of Standing and Property'*, pp. 156-170; Kielbowicz, 'The Law and Mob Law in Attacks on Antislavery Newspapers, 1833-1860', pp. 572; Rivera, 'Fear of Miscegenation', p. 174; Hindus, 'A City of Mobocrats and Tyrants', p. 73; Ratner, *Powder Keg*, p. 141; Stewart et al., 'Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860', p. 46.

place ‘erected for the purpose of abolition associations’.[3] Many African Americans, fleeing for their lives—and unable to find safe passage across the river—survived in the woods outside Philadelphia for multiple days without adequate food, water, clothing, or shelter. One newspaper summarized the swelling mobocratic ranks in the following terms: ‘Thousands and thousands assembled, [h]ow many were participant with crimes, we could not tell’.[4]

In the bloody aftermath, retrospective accounts of the violence grew increasingly politicized across the antebellum North and South. Northern and southern newspapers reports sought to control the narrative, providing agenda-driven news reporting to their respective constituencies. Northern newspapers, for example, advanced two consistent arguments. First, the Irish were entirely responsible for the bloodshed; and second, that Black residents were targeted because of the color of their skin—and completely blameless for the riots. On the morning of 2 August, the day after the initial riot, the city was still in a state of crisis, argued *The Liberator*, as a second mob formed ‘that were, almost to a man, strong, hard-looking men, and almost without exception, Irishmen’ wielding ‘shillelaghs and clubs’.[5] This emphasis on Irish vitriol, bloodlust, and intimidation was a major theme of partisan northern newspapers. At the same time, *The Philadelphia Ledger* initially reported (and *The Liberator* later reprinted in its 19 August edition) that the ‘wearing’ of a non-white ‘skin’ proved to be the most salient and transparent factor in the violence.[6] Indeed, northern newspapers, specifically *The Liberator*, *The Philadelphian*, *The Philadelphian U.S. Gazette*, *The Boston Daily Mail*, and *The Journal of Commerce* all echoed these perspectives, explicitly drawing attention to Irish initiation and aggression.[7] The fact that many of these newspapers were re-printed in *The Liberator*, as acknowledged in the introduction, demonstrates the lengths to which northern, anti-Irish journals would go to advance their preferred narrative.

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[3] ‘Riot and Bloodshed.’, *The Philadelphia U.S. Gazette*, cited in ‘The Philadelphia Riots: From the Philadelphia U.S. Gazette of Aug. 2.’, *The Liberator*, 12 August 1842, p. 2.
[4] ‘The Philadelphia Riots’, cited in ‘From the U.S. Gazette of Aug. 2’, *The Liberator*, 12 August 1842.
[5] ‘Terrible State of Affairs—Rioters and excitement on the Schuylkill’, *The Liberator*, 12 August 1842.
[6] ‘The Late Riots’, *The Philadelphia Ledger*, cited in ‘From the Philadelphia Ledger’, *The Liberator*, 19 August 1842.
[7] See *The Liberator*, 9 August 1842.

By contrast, southern newspapers to a much greater extent attempted to justify the actions of the white Irish mob. *The Cecil Whig*, of Elkton, Maryland, while acknowledging that 'every negro that could be attacked' ended up 'so badly beaten they were left for dead', insinuated that African Americans were not entirely innocent in perpetrating a citywide, anti-Black uprising.[8] 'One white man had his arm broken from a blow inflicted by a huge club in the hands of a black', the paper editorialized, while 'another white man was stabbed with a knife'.[9] Most curiously, the periodical highlighted the alleged misconduct of a handicapped Black person. 'The most desperate of the blacks was a deaf and dumb man, who did much mischief, and seriously injured several whites'.[10] These reports elide the fact of Irish provocation and aggression, attempting to exonerate the instigators while justifying the 'defensive' posturing of the Irish rioters.

Similarly, *The Boon's Lick Times* (Fayette, Missouri) explicitly blamed the city's marchers for the escalation of tensions. 'The first difficulty appears to have commenced at Shippen Street, where the procession was hooted by a number of boys and pelted with stones', but '[t]he negroes at length turned on the boys, and this brought on a general engagement'.[11] These young men, while undoubtedly Irish and charged with throwing stones, were supposedly faultless in fomenting the days-long riots that followed. Culpability fell not on the *instigators*, the newspaper implied, but on the marchers themselves—who reportedly 'turned on' their abusers. It is worth noting that both northern and southern newspapers reported on the extensiveness of the violence against the city's Black community. But southern newspapers to a much greater degree emphasized white victimhood, Black aggression, and the presence of incendiary 'Abolition inscriptions and devices' as a means of justifying the 'legitimate' violence that erupted throughout the city.[12]

Before this major disruption, however, hostile race relations and economic strain

[8] 'Liberty or Death.' *The Cecil Whig*, 6 August 1842, p. 2.
[9] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[10] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[11] 'Riot in Philadelphia', *Boon's Lick Times*, 27 August 1842, p. 1.
[12] *Ibid*, p. 1.

generally characterized life in antebellum Philadelphia. A detailed analysis of the 1840 national census provides insight into the social and economic makeup of the city of Philadelphia two years prior to the Lombard Street riots. There were 76,692 working age, 'free white persons' (defined for the purposes of this study as men between the ages of 10 and 60). These laborers accounted for approximately 92 percent of all male workers in the city. By contrast, there were 5,808 'free colored persons' of working age, meaning free African American men between the ages of 10 and 55. Hence, at the beginning of the decade, African American male workers approximated roughly 8 percent of all male wage earners in the city. In addition, there were no recorded working-age male slaves recorded in the census.[13] Nevertheless, as urban Black immigration increased throughout the post-Jacksonian period, increased job competition fueled anti-Black prejudice and worsened antebellum race relations.

At the same time, the decade of the 1840s proved a time of systemic change and disruption in labor market forces. As historian Carl E. Prince notes, it was during the post-Jacksonian era that the United States ultimately began to industrialize.[14] The most consequential of these changes was, as Bruce Laurie points out, the decline of immigrant small businesses in favor of an urban factory system.[15] One singular effect of the Panic of 1837, therefore, a financial panic that greatly impacted small businesses across the United States, was the closing of Irish stores, and the large-scale movement of workers into industrial means of employment. These developments devastated the city's Irish community, as economic autonomy, higher wages, and self-sustaining work evaporated for many after the economic crisis.[16] As historians Kathryn Wilson and Jennifer Coval have similarly observed, this integration of diverse peoples, often with competing interests in employment and status, led to mobocracy and civil unrest

[13] '1840 Census: Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States: Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina', p. 24-27; this is partly due to Pennsylvania's Gradual Abolition Act, see Michael Lawrence Dickinson, 'Having Become Free by the Law of 1780: Black Liberation and the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Archives', *The Black Scholar*, 53, No. 1 (2023), pp. 50-51.
[14] Carl E. Prince, 'The Great "Riot Year": Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 5, No. 1. (1985), p. 18.
[15] Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia 1800-1850* (Philadelphia, 1980), p. 28.
[16] Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia 1800-1850*, p. 28

during times of significant economic downturn.[17]

Bearing these contextual points, the following chapter makes several major interventions. First, this study considers and reappraises the causal reasons for the Lombard Street Riots. While historians have a tendency to emphasize singular causes, this chapter provides more nuanced understanding by arguing that the causes were multi-faceted and interrelated. Similarly, the next section attempts to identify and explain the reasons for the persistence and intensity of anti-abolitionism in Philadelphia specifically during the early 1840s. Next, this chapter enters the robust debate over 'critical whiteness studies', addressing the extent to which 'race' in an antebellum context is 'socially constructed' using the Lombard Street Riots as an illustrative case study. Finally, the chapter concludes by analyzing the complexities of antebellum print culture and the profound challenges faced by newspaper editors, many of whom were forced to navigate accuracy and truth with the necessity of selling newspaper subscriptions and weekly copies.

Analyses of the Lombard Street Riots differ on whether it is possible to identify a single, causal factor. Although W.E.B. Du Bois does not ascribe specific causes for the mob violence, he first flagged the incident in 1899.[18] Beginning in the 1960s, however, the vast majority of historians attributed the temperance parade itself as the primary source of civil unrest. Historians such as Elizabeth M. Geffen and Joseph A. Barome blamed the 'procession' and 'parading' generally as chief factors.[19] Continuing through the 1980s, Emma Jones Lepansky added to this scholarship, arguing that a 'black temperance parade' ultimately 'triggered the race riot of 1842'—although she emphasized that the optics of 'blackness' added to the intensity and

[17] Kathryn Wilson and Jennifer Coval, 'City of Unbrotherly Love: Violence in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia', *The Historical Society of Pennsylvania,* (2007), p. 2.
[18] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia, 1899), pp. 29-32.
[19] Elizabeth M. Geffen, 'Violence in Philadelphia in the 1840's and 1850's', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies,* 36, No 4 (1969), p. 387; Joseph A. Barone et al., 'The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (1968), p. 324.

extensiveness of the bloodshed.[20] Finally, in the modern era, historians such as Amanda Bey-Purvis, DoLen Marie Perkins, and C. Peter Ripley argue that the temperance aspect of the parade directly triggered the Lombard Street Riots, leaving little ambiguity as to why violence erupted on the first of August 1842.[21] As some Black activists argued in the days and weeks beforehand, it was perhaps a mistake that the marchers directed their processional into predominately Irish neighborhoods. Given the structural factors in place, as will be discussed in the next section, a direct assault on the parading temperance advocates and abolitionists proved highly possible. Irish reliance on the sale of alcohol for their livelihoods, including 'four hundred and fifty liquor sellers' who resided in the area, most assuredly inflamed economic and racial tensions.[22]

Some historians, however, offer a plausible challenge to this perspective, arguing that Irish rioters, triggered by the presence of a known abolitionist and Black community leader in the crowd, violently descended upon the peaceful protestors. Henry C. Silcox argues 'of particular interest to the white attackers was Robert Purvis', whose actions on behalf of Black Philadelphians 'made him the target of the mob'.[23] Purvis, one of the wealthiest African Americans in the city, proved an effective orator, political organizer, Underground Railroad conductor, and conspicuous member of the city's vigilance committee. Nilgun Anadolu Okur notes how during the violence, Purvis was 'forced to guard his own door against anti-abolition rioters', demonstrating the desire for retribution among Irish white assailants.[24] Ultimately, Purvis' disenchantment over the anti-Black violence, displacement of Black residents, and the burning of historical Black buildings drove him into self-imposed exile, effectively ending his

[20] Emma Jones Lepansky, '"Since They Got Those Separate Churches": Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia', *American Quarterly*, 32, No. 1 (1980), p. 72.
[21] Amanda Beyer-Purvis, 'The Philadelphia Bible Riots of 1844: Contest Over the Rights of Citizens', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, 83, No. 3 (2016), p. 368; DoLen Marie Perkins, 'Mob Stories: Race, Nation, and Narratives of Racial Violence' Unpublished PhD Thesis, George Washington University, 2003, pp. 49-50; C. Peter Ripley (ed.), *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. III: The United States, 1830-1846* (North Carolina, 1991), p. 391.
[22] *The Liberator*, 26 August, p. 2.
[23] Henry C. Silcox, 'Delay and Neglect: Negro Public Education in Antebellum Philadelphia, 1800-1860, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (1973), p. 460.
[24] Nilgun Anadolu Okur, 'Underground Railroad in Philadelphia, 1830-1860', *Journal of Black Studies* (1995), p. 548.

political career in city activism.[25] While Purvis' presence as a main trigger for mob violence is certainly plausible, it remains unclear whether the community leader actually participated in the processional, or to what extent. Writing to fellow abolitionist Henry Clarke Wright, on 22 August, Purvis lamented how 'the most ferocious and bloody spirited mobs' ravaged Philadelphia, recollecting how 'Press, Church, Magistrates, Clergymen and Devils are against us'.[26] Despite this first-hand account of the burning of the city, which was only a few paragraphs and dwelled despairingly on the city's endemic anti-Black racism, Purvis does not address his personal involvement in the temperance march, nor his experience defending his family and possessions from armed Irish invaders. This historical ambiguity in regards to Purvis' role and participation in the temperance parade therefore undermines the plausibility of this revisionist interpretation.

Applying new methods of inquiry offers a plausible new understanding of these events. According to Bruce Laurie, Andrew Crocco, and Margaret Hope Bacon, it was not the parade itself that triggered the riots, or Purvis's personal involvement in the processional, but more likely the temperance's advocate's display of a controversial flag that incited Irish onlookers.[27] While Laurie and Crocco do not support their main claims with any specific footnotes (or documentary evidence from available contemporaneous newspapers), a close examination of weekly *Liberator* editorials, published between August and November 1842, lends complexity to this theory. Three separate editorials published in the month of August made reference to 'a much talked about banner' as a likely trigger for the violence.[28] As it happens, however, *The Liberator* argued that the emblem did not cause the riots, as its contents were allegedly innocuous and unoffending. 'There were two banners, both of which are now in the hands of the Mayor', reported *The Liberator* on 19 August. 'Neither of them contained any thing calculated

[25] Barome et al., 'The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia', p. 327.
[26] 'Robert Purvis to Henry Clarke Wright', 22 August 1842, cited in C. Peter Ripley (ed.), *The Black Abolitionist Papers: Vol. III: The United States, 1830-1846* (North Carolina, 1991), p. 389.
[27] Bruce Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, pp. 124-125; Andrew Crocco, 'The Mobocratic City: Race, Space and Citizenship in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia', Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 2013, p. 144; Margaret Hope Bacon, *But One Race: The Life of Robert Purvis* (New York, 2007), p. 98.
[28] *The Liberator*, 19 August 1842.

to give offence to a just or reasonable mind.'[29] Similarly, the newspaper republished an article from *The Lowell Times* that made a similar argument: 'Yes, it seems that they had raised several banners, as white people do….But enough of this it is a mere excuse, paltry enough, for the crimes which followed'.[30]

Nevertheless, by the newspaper's own admission, seven days earlier *The Liberator* reported that the banner displayed 'the figure of an emancipated slave, pointing with one hand to the broken chains at his feet, and with the other to the word "Liberty," in gold letters over his head'.[31] Hence, the newspaper's reporting of the banner controversy—in which radical abolitionists argued that an image of an emancipated slave, freed by his own hand, would not cause Irish offense—belies the newspaper's own analysis. Given the politics of slavery and anti-slavery in the city of Philadelphia in 1842—not to mention the perennial issues of wage, job, and status competition between the antebellum Irish and free African Americans as urban immigration increased—it is not unreasonable to conclude that this image infuriated Democratic, pro-slavery, and anti-Black working class Irishmen—and therefore helped trigger the violence.

Regardless of what specific 'trigger' caused the riots, however, which is complex and multi-faceted, given the unreliability of competing accounts and testimonials, *The Liberator*'s reporting on these events demonstrates something far more interesting: Garrison's ambiguous relationship with the expediency of armed Black resistance. Historians have long shown how, despite Garrison's long adherence to pacifism and non-violence, *The Liberator* paradoxically served as an influential vehicle for promoting some of the most radical, Black voices in antebellum America.[32] According to Manisha Sinha, the newspaper's 'uncompromising style' and heterodoxy were clearly influenced by Black advocates of violent resistance, including

[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Ibid,* p. 2.
[31] *The Liberator*, 12 August.
[32] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, p. 9; Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York, 1998), p. 115; John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison* (Boston and Toronto, 1963), p. 131; William E. Cain (ed.), *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery*: *Selections from* The Liberator (Boston and New York, 1995) p. 9.

David Walker and Maria Steward.[33] These male and female advocates articulated a vision of Black nationalism and armed violent resistance to slavery that made *The Liberator* subject to widespread derision and political attacks, particularly in the Deep South after Nat Turner's Rebellion (1831) and other widely-reported southern slave insurrections.[34]

And yet Garrison, for his part, granted considerable time, space, and attention to these voices of Black radicalism in his weekly periodical. By bringing readers' attention to 'the pacific character' of an objectively offensive banner among certain white groups—after all, descriptions of the banner suggest defiance and self-emancipation—Garrison indirectly promoted violent Black resistance as plainly desirable.[35] The newspaper, therefore, wholly endorsed this radical display of freedom, which ultimately proved 'emblematical of the dawn of freedom'—a view he clearly championed.[36] While historians often focus on the 'racial paternalism' shown by Garrison towards his Black colleagues, particularly Frederick Douglass, his newspaper reporting, in this instance, underscores *The Liberator*'s prime function as an organ of radical abolitionism that both promoted Black voices and celebrated the violent overthrow of slavery by any means necessary.[37] In so doing, he insinuated that revolts and insurrections were necessary for the complete and total extirpation of the 'peculiar institution' in the United States. In the final analysis, this incident underscores not only Garrison's deepening radicalism during the 1840s, but complicates a popular historiographical perspective that Garrison adopted, without qualification, 'non-violence' as a philosophical and moral outlook

[33] Manisha Sinha, 'An Alternative Tradition of Radicalism', cited in Manisha Sinha and Penny Von Eschen (eds.), *Contested Democracy, Freedom, Race, and Power in American History* (New York, 2007), p. 17.
[34] Christina Henderson, 'Sympathetic Violence: Maria Stewart's Antebellum Vision of African American Resistance', *MELUS*, 38, No. 4, (2013), pp. 1-3; Risley, *Abolition and the Press*, pp. 24-28; Clint C. Wilson II, *Whither the Black Press? Glorious Past, Uncertain Future* (2014), p. 41.
[35] Rosalyn Narayan, 'Slavery in Print: Slaveholding Ideology and Anxiety in Antebellum Southern Newspapers, 1830-1861' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2020), p. 2; David B. Sachsman and Gregory A. Borchard (eds.), *The Antebellum Press: Setting the Stage for Civil War* (New York, 2019), pp. 1-13.
[36] *The Liberator*, 12 August, p. 2.
[37] Daniel A. Morris, 'Liberated From the Liberator: Frederick Douglass and Garrisonian Political Theology', *Political Theology*, 18, No. 5 (2017), p. 423. See also Bruce Laurie, 'Putting Politics Back In: Rethinking the Problem of Political Abolitionism', cited in (ed.) James Brewer Stewart, *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred* (New Haven, 2008), p. 79.

until the American Civil War.[38]

Historians consistently identify that during the antebellum period, Irish-American immigrants overwhelmingly adopted anti-abolitionist and anti-Black attitudes—although scholars have sought to explain this development in varying ways. Several historians have suggested that Irish anti-abolitionism can be traced back to long-entrenched customs and beliefs originating in Ireland, a combination of both Catholic mistrust for Protestant-led abolitionist radicalism and growing fears that attacking southern slavery would 'jeopardize' U.S. support for Irish independence.[39] While these arguments appear compelling, they better describe the anti-abolitionist sentiments of Irish political leaders and nationalists rather than the emigrating, lower-middle classes. Irish immigrants to an extent were certainly attuned to events across the Atlantic—some scholars even suggest that these immigrants were more interested in Irish issues than the American slavery question—but their racial views were most likely impacted by their experiences in the United States than reported domestic affairs and controversies in Ireland.[40]

Another posited reason for deeply established anti-Black Irish immigrant views is the perennial threat African Americans posed to Irish jobs and wages.[41] According to historian Jay Rubin, many Irish workers were 'told repeatedly by their political leaders that emancipation would send hundreds of thousands of former slaves northward in search of employment'.[42] While certain historians refute this thesis, such demagoguery—combined with the hypothetical, looming threat of an increasingly competitive economic landscape—clearly shaped anti-abolitionist and anti-Black views during this period. Over time, perceptions that Blacks were

[38] Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 115; Thomas, *The Liberator*, pp. 133-134.
[39] Ian Delahanty, 'The Transatlantic Roots of Irish American Anti-Abolitionism, 1843-1859', *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 6. No. 2 (2016), p. 165; Ian Delahanty, *Embracing Emancipation: A Transatlantic History of Irish Americans, Slavery, and the American Union, 1840-1865* (New York, 2024), see introduction; Bill Rolston, "'Ireland of the Welcomes?": Racism and Anti-Racism in Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *Patterns of Justice*, 38, No. 4 (2004), pp. 364-365.
[40] David T. Gleeson, 'Failing to "Unite With the Abolitionists": the Irish Nationalist Press and U.S. Emancipation', *Slavery & Abolition*, 37, No. 3 (2016), p. 264.
[41] Kevin Kenny, 'Three Philadelphia Stories', *American Journal of Irish Studies*, 15, (2019), p. 19; Dennis Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia: Ten Generations of Urban Experience* (Philadelphia, 1973), p. 34.
[42] Jay Rubin, 'Black Nativism: The European Immigrant in Negro Thought, 1830-1860, *Phylon*, 39, No. 3 (1978), p. 197.

'stealing' jobs from Irish day laborers almost certainly stiffened anti-Black antebellum racist attitudes.[43] *The Liberator*'s lament that the Irish were directing the Lombard Street mob towards Black homes and communities, in part because the residents were reportedly 'living just like white folks', proved a culmination of these tensions.[44] At the same time, *The Christian Secretary* argued that 'there is a deep-seated jealousy between the lower order of white mechanics [Irish] in our cities and the people of color, [as] the former fear the loss of some part of their employments'.[45]

Nevertheless, while this argument certainly contributed to racial tensions within the city, alleged Black 'job stealers' did not seriously threaten Irish employment opportunities in practice.[46] Census records and immigration patterns prove this was a statistical impossibility as African American men were only 8 percent of the city's male labor force.[47] Robert Nowatzki argues that these intense violent outbreaks against African Americans were directly related to the desire to obtain and maintain 'skin privileges'—that is, adopting methods of violence to align themselves politically with native-born Americans.[48] That said, while the perception of increased job competition and economic factors certainly increased racial tensions, these factors were not the most significant reason for citywide Irish mob violence.

White Irish rioters were driven to violence during the Lombard Street Riots for two important reasons: to more closely align themselves with the Democratic politics of native-born whites and to distance themselves socially from African Americans. Using the Lombard Street Riots as a window into Irish behavior during this incident, political and religious ties to the Democratic Party—and especially the Catholic Church—support a reappraisal as to why Irish

[43] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York, 1991), pp. 146-147.
[44] 'Account of the Riots.', *The Liberator*, 2 September 1842, p. 2.
[45] 'Philadelphia Riot', *The Christian Secretary*, 16 August 1842, p. 3.
[46] '1840 Census: Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the Unites States', United States Census Bureau.
[47] 'The Murderous City', *The Liberator*, 2 September 1842, p. 3.
[48] Robert Nowatzki, 'Blurring the Color Line: Black Freedom, Passing, Abolitionism, and Irish Ethnicity in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*', *Studies in American Fiction*, 33. No. 1 (2005), pp. 44-45.

Philadelphians generally adopted anti-abolitionist and anti-Black attitudes.[49] Historians have long noted how these deep-seated affiliations influenced Irish behavior and political allegiances in various contexts.[50] Bruce Nelson argues that many newly arrived Irish 'were quickly absorbed into the Democratic Party' and thus adopted 'its intense Negrophobia' and 'reflexive hostility to the "mad and fanatical abolitionists"'.[51] Dennis Clark notes how Irish immigrants brought with them 'a love of liberty and a dedication to democratic principles'.[52] Indeed, as celebrated abolitionist and nativist Theodore Parker wrote in the 1850s, 'The Paddy is a genuine *democrat* dyed in the wool'.[53] In support of Nelson, Angela F. Murphy similarly notes how Irish immigrants hoped to 'prove they were loyal citizens as well as align their position with that of both the Democratic Party and the Catholic Church' over time.[54] John F. Quinn agrees in that the 'influence of the American Catholic Bishops', and their generalized sympathy with anti-abolitionism, was a major factor in Irish Americans' wide-scale rejection of abolitionist overtures to join their movement.[55] Finally, W. Caleb McDaniel suggests that generalized Irish-American antipathy for abolitionists continued as a response to abolitionists' anti-Catholicism and their 'barely concealed anti-Catholic prejudices'.[56] Thus, in the case of the Lombard Street Riots, as abolitionists garnered a well-earned reputation for advocating disunionist principles and stoking sectional tensions—and the Irish themselves were always 'regarded with suspicion'—violence during the Lombard Street Riots became an opportunity for Irish whites to pledge fealty to native-born 'whiteness' and to silence the most vocal arbiters of radical

4949 Angela F. Murphy, 'Race, Labor, and Slavery in Irish America', cited in Cian T. McMahon and Kathleen P. Costello-Sullivan (eds.), *The Routledge History of Irish America* (New York and London, 2024), p. 7; John F. Quinn, 'Expecting the Impossible? Abolitionist Appeals to the Irish in Antebellum America', *The New England Quarterly*, 82, No. 4 (2009), p. 668.

[50] Richard Jensen, '"No Irish Need Apply": A Myth of Victimization', *Journal of Social Science*, 36, No. 2 (2002), p. 407; Eric Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historians' *Imagination', International Labor and Working-Class History* (2001), 60, p. 20; Bruce Nelson, '"Come Out of Such a Land, You Irishmen": Daniel O'Connell, American Slavery, and the Making of the "Irish Race"', *Eire-Ireland*, 42, No.1&2, (2007), pp. 66-67.

[51] *Ibid*, pp. 66-67.

[52] Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia*, p. 36.

[53] *The Theodore Parker Papers*, MHS, Volume 3, p. 175.

[54] Murphy, *Race, Labor, and Slavery in Irish America*, p. 79.

[55] Quinn, 'Expecting the Impossible?', p. 668.

[56] W. Caleb McDaniel, 'Repealing Unions: American Abolitionists, Irish Repeal, and the Origins of Garrisonian Disunionism', *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, No. 2 (2008), p. 264.

abolitionism.[57] According to Murphy, many Americans believed 'Catholicism and republicanism were incompatible' and that Irish immigrants would extend 'their loyalties to the pope above those to the Unites States'.[58] Put another way, when a major temperance parade of Black radicals, reformers, and abolitionists marched through Philadelphia's predominately Irish neighborhoods, it proved an historic opportunity. The Irish white masses likely adopted methods of violence for social and political purposes: not only to publicly exhibit their patriotism and devotion to the nation, but to showcase their unbreakable loyalty to the anti-abolitionist and anti-Black Democratic Party. In so doing, they promoted their Catholic-inspired, wholesale rejection of immediate abolitionism, disunionism, and race equality.

A review of various *Liberator* newspaper reports, published throughout the late summer and early fall of 1842, supports an important historiographical perspective—that is, cultural and religious ideologies, rather than the issues of temperance or controversial banners, emerged as the prevailing structural factor in fomenting anti-abolitionism and anti-Black violence during the antebellum period. Support for this interpretation is seen clearly and most powerfully in the context of the Lombard Street Riots. In reminding readers that the temperance march was almost exclusively 'assailed by a body of Irish laborers', *The Liberator* blamed Catholicism itself—and Catholic leaders—for the extent of the violence. 'Let the heaviest weight of indignation fall on the priests, levites, and Pharisees, who have taught these poor, degraded emigrants to hate a more unfortunate class than themselves without a cause'.[59] The Garrisonians clearly believed that Catholic inspired, anti-Black racism stemmed at least in part from the city's religious-affiliated hierarchical leadership. Moreover, while *The Liberator* did not absolve Presbyterian church leaders, such as Albert Barnes, or 'the mayor, aldermen, constables, magistrates', or 'judges of the city' for their complicity in the violence, the newspaper nevertheless argued that it was imperative to 'place the responsibility where it belongs…first on

[57] Murphy, *Race, Labor, and Slavery in Irish America*, p. 79.
[58] Angela F. Murphy, *American Slavery, Irish Freedom: Abolition, Immigrant Citizenship, and the Transatlantic Movement for Irish Repeal* (Baton Rouge, 2010), p. 11.
[59] 'The Murderous City', *The Liberator*, 2 September 1842, p. 3.

the clergy' and the 'priest and people' who carried out three days of atrocities.[60] A first-hand witness of the riots, later published in *The Liberator*, also argued that of the 'two hundred church organizations in that city, not one….has rebuked the mob, or aided to relieve the sufferers'.[61] This insinuation clearly indicted the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, another editorialist declared: 'all this hatred to the colored people is sanctioned by the clergy, churches, courts, and magistrates of the city'.[62] In sum, these partisan condemnations of Philadelphia's religious institutions were strongly directed at Catholic bishops, priests, and politicians whose unequivocal opposition to radical abolitionism and Black equality created a set of structural conditions that made the Lombard Street Riots possible.

Notwithstanding the inherent biases and partisanship of these newspaper reports, the Catholic hierarchy played a pivotal role in creating a culture of anti-abolitionism and anti-Black sentiments during the antebellum period.[63] Historians Christopher J. Kellerman shows that the Catholic Church's teachings and position on the slavery question throughout history is not clear, uniform, or straightforward. 'It is a history not of one choice,' he argues, 'but countless choices made by countless Catholics'.[64] Invariably, this meant that many church leaders opposed slavery in northern states as an institution and on moral grounds, but were equally wary of radical abolitionism. Thus, as the vast majority of Irish Philadelphians were generally Catholic and 'Jacksonian Democrats', these political and religious affiliations and the Church's ambiguous teachings clearly shaped their involvement and behavior.[65] While certainly other factors played non-trivial roles in the violence—racial antagonism, economic competition, hostility to abolitionism, perceptions of Black social advancement, and the politics of temperance—an analysis of under-scrutinized *Liberator* editorials clearly demonstrates that radical abolitionists

[60] 'Afflictions of Our Colored Population.', *The Liberator*, 9 September 1842, p. 2; 'The Philadelphia Mob of August 1st, 1842: Who Headed it?' *The Liberator,* 19 August 1842, p. 2.
[61] 'Afflictions of Our Colored Population.', p. 2.
[62] 'The Philadelphia Mob of Aug. 1st, 1842', p. 2.
[63] Delahanty, 'The Transatlantic Roots of Irish American Anti-Abolitionism'; Christopher J. Kellerman, *All Oppression Shall Cease: A History of Slavery, Abolitionism, and the Catholic Church* (New York, 2022).
[64] *Ibid,* p. ix.
[65] Harry C. Wilcox, 'William McMullen, Nineteenth-Century Political Boss', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography,* 110, No. 3 (1986), p. 391.

themselves believed that Irish-espoused political and religious prejudices significantly influenced the mob's mentality. Generally-espoused, anti-Black Irish perceptions fueled by equivocal and contradictory Catholic teachings on slavery and anti-slavery, then, clearly emerge as a dominating structural factor. This historiographical insight furthers historians' understanding of how an Irish-dominated assault, on an all-Black temperance processional parading through Irish neighborhoods, could ultimately trigger three days of unmitigated violence.

Lastly, in contrast to Richards, these riotous proceedings were not necessarily orchestrated by 'Gentlemen of Property and Standing'—or even wealthy or political elites.[66] The facilitators and participants involved in the Lombard Street Riots hailed from a mostly lower class, Irish demographic. While there was perhaps some indirect influence from social elites within the Catholic Church, there is no evidence to suggest that these riots were pre-planned or carried out by leaders of political or religious institutions. The outbreak in violence clearly emanated from 'below', after an argument broke out between lower class Irish whites and African Americans, on a crowded street in urban Philadelphia in an Irish neighborhood. These events proved spontaneous in nature, and yet exacerbated and intensified by numerous structural factors already bubbling below the surface. In conclusion, this insight adds greater complexity to longstanding scholarly debates surrounding the very nature of antebellum mob violence. This case study strongly suggests that urban rioting during the early 1840s did not, in all instances, remain qualitatively similar to the mob uprisings observed and identified by Leonard Richards, and others, during the period 1830-1839.

One of the most contested historiographical debates involving the study of nineteenth century Irish-Americans is grounded in the field of critical whiteness studies. While a landscape of opinions continues to dominate—judging by the vast, multidisciplinary engagement in this

[66] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Standing and Property'*, p. 5.

ever-growing historiographical space—the central question among historians is to what extent 'race' among diverse groups has been socially constructed over time. The debate gained momentum among historians of Irish emigration to the U.S. in the early 1990s after the publication of David Roediger's, *The Wages of Whiteness*, which argued, among other things, that antebellum white immigrants appropriated whiteness as a means of distancing themselves from Black Americans and aligning themselves with a 'superior' race. Noel Ignatiev, who argues in *How The Irish Became White* that 'to enter the white race was a strategy to secure an advantage in a competitive society', best supports this conceptualization of race construction, using antebellum case studies.[67] Ignatiev implies that upon arrival, Irish immigrants were significantly hindered, perceived as racially inferior, and only after a tortured period of multiple decades finally became 'white'. In a similar vein, Neil Foley and Karen Brodkin argue, respectively, that this turn towards 'whiteness' only occurred after the Irish either embraced white supremacy or gained acceptance through the capriciousness of Whig and Democratic Party leaders.[68]

Few scholars have refuted the purveyors of a 'whiteness thesis' more critically than Eric Arnesen.[69] While Arnesen agrees that the Irish adopted a propensity for anti-Black racism, he also notes that Roediger and others have adopted faulty reasoning by mischaracterizing Irish immigrants' adoption of white supremacy as evidence that they eventually appropriated whiteness. His position is that many scholars ignore, or downplay, the fact that the Democratic Party, a major American institution, resoundingly embraced the Irish as both 'white' and political supporters for generations. This argument convincingly undermines Roediger's chief claim. 'By manipulating definitions and putting words into historical subjects' mouths', Arnesen argues, 'the Irish became white because historians, not their contemporaries, first made them

[67] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995), p. 3.
[68] Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkley, 1997), p. 8; Karen Brodkin, *How the Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, 1998), p. 65, cited in Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historians; Imagination', p. 15.
[69] *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.

"nonwhite" before making them "white"'.[70] A litany of historians, including Kevin Kenny, Frank Towers, Deirdre Moloney, David A. Wilson, among others—have come to embrace this revisionist interpretation.[71] Moloney, however, notes how Arnesen's failure to mention Roediger's 'lack of attention to gender' is a missed opportunity and 'a major weakness in [his] approach', whereas Wilson maintains that the social constructionists have too often relied upon 'the minority of Irish Catholics who lived in the eastern seaboard cities' to bolster their claims.[72] This methodological overreliance on a mere subset of 'Irish' immigrants therefore weakens the overarching thesis and historical impact of the social constructionists.

This historical intervention, in which the events of the Lombard Street Riots demonstrate the 'whiteness' of the antebellum Irish-American population, is made possible in part by a full reappraisal of historical evidence. Arnesen, in challenging the notion that the antebellum Irish through cultural construction 'became white', undermines the 'line of reasoning' advanced by the social constructionists.[73] Arnesen contends that the evidence presented by these historians is not grounded in archival source materials. Roediger, he argues, fails to consult essential testimonies, such as those of antebellum immigrant groups, nativists, and newly arrived Irish to defend his thesis. Instead, he relies upon the conceptualization and perception that Irish immigrants were 'niggers'—perpetually disparaged through 'simian imagery' and anti-'Celtic' propaganda.[74] This logical leap and conflation of historical processes, he argues—namely, that anti-Irish rhetoric presumed that Irish Americans were categorically 'un-white'—is a point well taken and best expressed by Kevin Kenny. 'Irish workers were certainly exploited', he argues,

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[70] *Ibid*, pp. 20-21.
[71] Kevin Kenny, 'Twenty Years of Irish Historiography', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 28, No. 4 (2009), p. 72; Frank Towers, 'Projecting Whiteness: Race and the Unconscious in the History of 19th-century American Workers', *The Journal of American Culture*, 21, No. 2 (1998), p. 50, cited in Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historians; Imagination', p. 31; Deirdre Moloney, 'Who's Irish? Ethnic Identity and Recent Trends in Irish American History, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 28, No. 4 (2009), p. 104, cited in Valdemar Horndalsveen Birch, 'The Turn to Whiteness: Norwegian and Irish American Historiography c. 1900-2024' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Oslo, 2024), p. 7; David A. Wilson, 'Comment: Whiteness and Irish Experience in North America', *Journal of British Studies*, 44, No. 1 (2005), p. 155.
[72] Moloney, 'Who's Irish?', p. 104; Wilson, 'Comment: Whiteness and Irish Experience in North America', p. 155.
[73] Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination', p. 13.
[74] *Ibid*, p. 10, 14.

'but they did not suffer from racism'.[75] While this exploitative, derisive treatment is well documented, Americans of Irish heritage were hardly viewed as racially 'un-white' by native-born citizens. As Danielle Phillips-Cunningham compellingly argues in a new collection of essays edited by Cian T. McMahon and Kathleen P. Costello-Sullivan, 'Irish Catholics were thereby always white, yet they were characterized as not only beneath WASPs, but among the least evolved and civilized white people'.[76]

The wide-scale participation of Irish Philadelphians, coupled with an analysis of contemporaneous newspaper reporting after the Lombard Street Riots, provides a new and informative perspective into this debate. While Noel Ignatiev clearly sees the extent of anti-Black racism as evidence that Irish Philadelphians 'displayed the highest degree of white race consciousness' during the riots, Dale Knobel's formulation provides a much more plausible explanation for Irish behavior.[77] Knobel argues that the Irish did not 'become white' but were instead marked for 'special hostility' given the proliferation of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic stereotypes that multiplied as a result of large-scale immigration during the nineteenth century.[78] This perception of the Irish working classes as poverty-stricken, besotted by drink, inherently violent, lowly wage workers, and exotically Catholic—and therefore anti-American—were only some of the reasons why Irish immigrants were derisively and uniformly singled out.[79] Thus, the events of the Lombard Street Riots, wherein economic issues became a salient trigger point for the violence, proved a massive opportunity for Irish Americans to turn their ire against the city's Black community. In sum, the Irish engaged in widespread anti-abolitionist and anti-Black mobocratic actions during the Lombard Street Riots so as to culturally align themselves with

[75] Kenny, 'Twenty Years of Irish American Historiography', p. 72.
[76] Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, 'Race, Gender, and Irish Labor in U.S. Northeastern Cities', cited in Cian T. McMahon and Kathleen P. Costello-Sullivan (eds.), *The Routledge History of Irish America* (New York and London, 2024), p. 219.
[77] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, p. 160; Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America*, (Middletown, 1986), p. 103, cited in Wilson, 'Comment: Whiteness and Irish Experience in North America', p. 156.
[78] Knobel, *Paddy and the* Republic, p. 103, cited in Wilson, 'Comment: Whiteness and Irish Experience in North America', p. 156; Murphy, 'Race, Labor, and Slavery in Antebellum Irish America', p. 71.
[79] Murphy, 'Race, Labor, and Slavery in Antebellum Irish America', p. 72; Kenny, *The American Irish: A History*, pp. 66-71.

native-born whites, and demonstrate that their economic frustrations were genuine, and widely shared among, the city's immigrant and non-immigrant white populations.

In particular, the southern newspapers consulted for this case study uniformly argued that the Irish 'victims' of the riots were white. As referenced earlier, *The Cecil Whig* in reporting on Black resistance, lamented how 'one white man had his arm broken from a blow inflicted by a huge club in the hands of a black', while 'another white man was stabbed with a knife'.[80] Similarly, the *Boon's Lick Times* (Missouri) reported on 'a riot Philadelphia between the whites and blacks'.[81] Categorically, *The Nashville Banner* argued that the riots were 'between the whites and blacks' whereas *The Sentinel of the Valley* (Virginia) reported 'that when the procession reached Fourth and Plumb streets in the districts of Southwark, it was attacked by a volley of stones, thrown by the whites'.[82] In addition, *The Woodville Republican*, *The Richmond Enquirer*, and *The North-Carolina Standard* all reprinted editorials from northern newspapers, which universally referred to the Irish participants as 'white'.[83] Even the commemorative memorial erected to mark the historic Lombard Street Riots describes the perpetrators as 'an angry mob of whites'.[84] Considering that antebellum northern newspapers and leading historians in the field largely agree that the perpetrators were overwhelmingly Irish, it is it clear from this case study that the prevailing, contemporaneous consensus was that Philadelphia's Irish working classes were indeed 'white'.[85]

Nevertheless, an analysis of northern newspapers during and after the Lombard Street riots bolsters the claims of the social constructionist viewpoint in that Irish Philadelphians were often caricatured as uncivilized and inherently violent. *The Liberator*'s disdainful recounting of

[80] 'Disgraceful Riot in Philadelphia', *The Cecil Whig*, 6 August 1842, p. 2.
[81] 'Riot in Philadelphia.', p. 1.
[82] 'Riot and Bloodshed in Philadelphia', *The Nashville Banner*, cited in *The Southern Argus* (Columbus, Miss.), 16 August 1842, p. 1.; 'Riot and Loss of Life and Property in Philadelphia', *The Sentinel of the Valley* (Woodstock, VA), 11 August 1942, p. 2.
[83] 'Riots—Bloodshed—Conflagration—and Tremendous Excitement', *Woodville Republican* (Woodville, Miss.), 20 August 1842, p. 2; 'Riot in Philadelphia', *The Richmond Enquirer*, 5 August 1842, p. 3; 'Riot in Philadelphia', *The North-Carolina Standard*, 17 August 1842, p. 3.
[84] Don Morfe, 'Lombard Street Riot Marker', 11 March 2015, cited in *The Historical Marker Database*.
[85] See *The Liberator*, 12 August, p. 2; 'Messrs. Editors', *The New-York Daily Tribune*, 3 August 1842, p. 2; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, p. 159; Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia*, 1800-1850, p.125.

how the 'Celtic' mob's perpetrators were fully armed with 'clubs and shillelaghs' hinted at the stereotypical, inextricable ties of Irish immigrants with aberrant, violent behavior.[86] More caustically, *The Age and Lancaster and Chester County Weekly Gazette* referred to the perpetrators as 'semi-savages'.[87] *The Philadelphia U.S. Gazette*, in reference to the widely reported armed invasions of Black homes, buildings, and businesses, noted, 'We have never seen—and our experience reaches to many years back—so great destruction in so little time' by an ethnically white minority group.[88] The violence proved utterly barbaric and unprecedented, according to numerous northern newspaper reports. 'We certainly never saw men so ferocious as were those who beset the blacks', editorialized *The New York Tribune*.[89] *The Philadelphia North American,* meanwhile, raised awareness about singular acts of violence. The newspaper observed that one hapless Black victim was thrown through a 'garret window' during the melee—and another 'was dragged out through the front door into the street, and beaten by not less than fifty with clubs, until, exhausted and overcome, he fell in the gutter in a state of insensibility'.[90] *The U.S. Gazette* argued that these types of incidents were 'but one among thousands', during the three-day riots'.[91] In summary, as the mob was reported to be almost entirely composed of 'Irish' participants—*The Liberator* reported that 'the assaults on the persons, property and lives of the colored person were nearly all committed by the Irish residents'—these descriptions underline the unvarnished anti-Irish impulses of many northern newspapers.[92] And while these observed and analyzed newspaper reports lacked explicit language branding Irish immigrants as racially 'Black' or 'non-white', Irish-Americans were nevertheless caricatured as uniquely violent and less 'civilized' than their non-Irish, white counterparts during the Lombard Street Riots.

[86] Padhraig Higgins, 'Paddies Evermore: Stereotypes and Irish National Identity in the Late Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, 33, No. 1 (2018), p. 63; Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia*, p. 34; Hidetaka Hirota, 'Anti-Irish Nativism in the Mid-Nineteenth Century', cited in Cian T. McMahon and Kathleen P. Costello-Sullivan (eds.), *The Routledge History of Irish America* (New York and London, 2024), pp. 140-148.
[87] 'Riot in Philadelphia.', *The Age and Lancaster and Chester County Weekly Gazette*, 6 August, p. 1.
[88] *The Liberator*, 12 August 1842.
[89] *The Liberator*, 12 August, p. 2.
[90] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[91] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[92] 'The Murderous City', p. 3.

By contrast, antebellum southern newspapers took a rather different editorial approach. They did so by omitting deprecating and offensive anti-Irish language as means of advancing a pro-slavery agenda. In fact, Irish Philadelphians were not portrayed by southern newspapers as barbaric murders or marauders, but as situationally—and plainly—'white'. While antebellum newspapers were well known to engage in and disseminate anti-Irish and anti-Catholic biases—as observed by many specialists in the field—a closer examination of these observed newspapers during the riots reveals scant reference to 'Irishness' or caricatures long associated with the Irish working classes.[93] Put simply, the perpetrators were simply not characterized as 'lazy', 'poverty-stricken', 'inebriates', 'papists', 'Celts', or 'Simian', whereas in other time periods and contexts, these were racial slurs liberally applied the Irish by both northern and southern newspapers. This linguistic omission of common, anti-Catholic stereotypes speak to the extreme anti-Black biases and capriciousness of antebellum southern newspapers. Such editorializing also demonstrates a strong proclivity to temporarily downplay any deep-seated anti-Irish prejudices in favor of confronting a far more sinister threat to regional harmony: radical Black abolitionists, social reformers, and political 'agitators' in the city of Philadelphia.

This bias reflects a southern worldview that considered conspicuous acts of Black radicalism—and in this case, Black emancipation—as existential threats to American democracy. This is clearly evident in the way that observed southern newspapers placed greater emphasis on 'white' gunshot victims—and injured persons—than the maiming of Black victims and the destruction of entire Black communities.[94] The language of these newspapers also impart a false equivalency that 'many persons were hurt' and 'victims' emerged 'on both sides'—a deceptive turn of phrase that neglects the fact that the victims were overwhelming Black. Unlike northern newspapers, even the southern newspapers that reported on the anti-Black violence made no mention of the attackers by name, race, or skin color, thereby burying

[93] Jensen, "'No Irish Need Apply"', pp. 405-429; Kenny, 'Three Philadelphia Stories', p. 19; Clark, *The Irish in Philadelphia,* p. 34.
[94] 'Riot in Philadelphia', *The Richmond Enquirer,* p. 3.

the lead and obscuring the necessary facts regarding who attacked whom.[95] Thus, the southern refrain that euphemistically reported 'a considerable number of persons together' committed these urban atrocities—a rather roundabout way of absolving the Philadelphia 'Irish' of any wrongdoing—reflects the vacillating biases and agenda-driven nature of nineteenth century southern newspapers.[96] In this instance, southern periodicals viewed radical Black activists and protestors as incomparably more threatening to American democracy and regional harmony than their white Irish counterparts. For this reason, Irish Philadelphians became ironically 'white' by the very same newspapers that routinely derided drink-sodden, unskilled, and impoverished Irish immigrants in other contexts.

The Lombard Street Riots illustrate the perennial struggle antebellum editors faced in commercializing their abolitionist newspapers and the lengths they would go to increase their subscriber base.[97] In the case of *The Liberator,* financial stresses and fears of insolvency weighed heavily on Garrison throughout his journalistic career. The early years were particularly stressful, as his labors never amounted to anything resembling consistent profits or solvency. William E. Cain notes that the Liberator 'never met expenses, and its maximum number of subscribers never exceeded the 2,500-3,000 range'.[98] Nevertheless, historians recognize that Garrison relied on several key strategies to reach his predominately northern Black audiences. These included charitable giving from sympathetic donors, distributing copies to 'reading rooms and barbershops', and the promotion of newspaper 'exchanges'—that is, the

[95] 'Riot and Bloodshed in Philadelphia', *The Nashville Banner*, p. 1.
[96] 'Riot in Philadelphia', *The Boon's Lick Times*, 27 August 1842, p. 1.
[97] Jane Rhodes, 'Race, Money, Politics and the Antebellum Black Press', *Journalism History*, 20, No. 3-4 (2019), p. 100; Timothy Shortell, 'The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery Newspapers in New York State', *Social Science History*, 28, No. 1 (2004), p. 83; Cain, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight against Slavery,* p. 9; Donald M. Jacobs, 'William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator and Boston's Blacks, 1830-1865', *The New England Quarterly*, 44, No. 2 (1971), p. 261; Charles G. Steffen, 'Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic, *The Journal of the Early Republic*, 23, No. 3 (2003), p. 386.
[98] Cain, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight against Slavery*, p. 9.

republication of *Liberator* editorials in other like-minded newspapers.[99] Through these tactics, *The Liberator* reached a much greater audience than could ever have hoped to be achieved through mere sales and distribution alone. At the same time, such methods helped solidify Garrison's reputation for intransigence, incendiarism, and extremism, as his editorials were often republished in southern newspapers as examples of the dangers and radicalism of immediate abolitionism.[100]

Incendiary newspaper coverage of the Lombard Street Riots therefore served as a perfect opportunity for Garrison and his fellow radical abolitionists to bolster subscription sales and motivate *The Liberator*'s partisan base. Given that historians largely agree that northern free African Americans comprised roughly 75 percent of *The Liberator*'s readership, Garrison tailored his coverage to appeal especially to his estimated 300 readers residing in the city of Philadelphia.[101] While no reports of the riots appeared in the 5 August edition (probably due the slow-moving nature of news cycles during the middle-nineteenth century), the 12 August edition is rife with newspaper coverage of the temperance parade assault and subsequent violence.[102] Not only did Garrison republish some twelve editorials from largely Pennsylvania, New York, and Massachusetts-based newspapers that expressed outrage over the violence, but his own commentaries were deftly written to motivate his base and dramatize the violence in order to meet his bottom line.

In his first original editorial, which appears on page two in the 9 August edition, Garrison relayed the harrowing story of two anonymous Black victims, who were savagely assaulted merely for 'exhibiting themselves, which was the signal for the attack'. Both men were assailed and nearly murdered, he reported. 'They were horribly beaten and cut, and 'doubtless would have been killed' if not for the intervention of a local shopkeeper, the

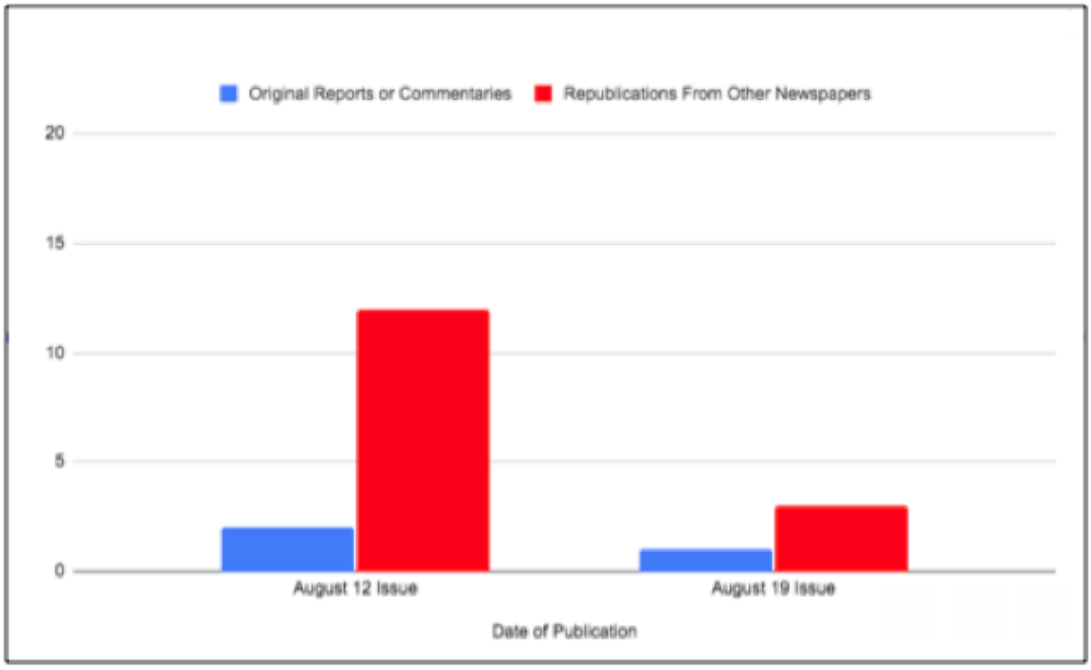
[99] Mayor, *All on Fire*, p. 116; Thomas, *The Liberator*, p. 134.
[100] Mayor, *All on Fire*, p. 117.
[101] Jacobs, 'William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator and Boston's Blacks, 1830-1865', p. 261.
[102] *The Liberator*, 12 August 1842, p. 2.

newspaper declared.[103] Later in the issue, Garrison strenuously argued for 'the strong hand of the law' to intervene on behalf of Philadelphia's Black victims. 'With such turbulent material, the slightest pretext is a cause of an outbreak; and therefore, justice should be speedy in overtaking the guilty, and terrible in the examples she makes'.[104] Garrison's explicit call for justice under the law doubtless would have resonated deeply with his loyal Black readership, as Garrison was one of the few voices in antebellum America explicitly calling for the arrest and prosecution of the Irish, anti-Black rioters. His coverage of these events, meanwhile, solidified *The Liberator*'s reputation for in-depth reporting, colorful language, and the promotion of Black rights, thus justifying the newspaper's '$2.50 per annum' subscription fees and reminding readers why continued patronage was a moral necessity.[105] Few antebellum newspapers, it seemed, would be willing to dedicate twelve entire editorials to the mistreatment and displacement of African Americans in one single issue. Lastly, Garrison deftly contrasted the 'outrageous' assaults in Philadelphia with the relatively uneventful 'West Indian Independence' celebrations that occurred in Hingham, West Brookfield, and Boston, Massachusetts.[106] Thus, Garrison's newspaper coverage underscores the practically and mechanics of anti-slavery newspaper reporting, demonstrating the importance of maintaining standard journalistic practices with the far more practical objective of riling up the base to increase circulation and sales.

Finally, a quantitative investigation into *The Liberator*'s coverage of the Lombard Street Riots demonstrates that the newspaper published some eighteen commentaries, letters to the editor, opinion pieces, and reprinted editorials in the weeks following the bloodshed in Philadelphia. All of these journalistic pieces, however, appeared in just two issues—the 12 August and 19 August editions—before attention to these events was abruptly halted:

[103] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[104] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[105] *Ibid*, p. 1.
[106] *Ibid*, p. 2-3.

Figure 2.1: Lombard Street Riots Original and Reprinted Editorials in The Liberator



While these newspaper reports continue to be viewed as partisan, ephemeral records of events, this abrupt discontinuation of the Philadelphia riots underscores the transient, commercial, and moneymaking elements of nineteenth-century abolitionist newspapers. In the final analysis, after a few weeks, reality set in: the Lombard Street Riots ultimately proved old news. Just two weeks later, anti-abolitionist and anti-Black rioters assailed and interrupted the Second Annual Anti-Slavery Convention on Nantucket Island—as shown and analyzed in the following case study—thus ending the assembly prematurely and threatening the lives of many famous abolitionist luminaries. Thus, the decision to report on other, seemingly more current matters took precedence, proving as much an editorial decision as a financial one. Given the imperfect and changing market forces of the antebellum newspaper business, *The Liberator* regularly adjusted its coverage to report on the most recent national outrage in order to sell the most

newspapers. While such editorial decisions were always in keeping with the newspaper's anti-slavery agenda, they were also influenced by other, more quotidian considerations, such as paying the rent, hiring subscription agents, maintaining the printing press, and above all, circulating new, weekly editions.[107]

Anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence was common enough during the 1840s that Garrison likely could only devote several issues to each respective incident, no matter how heinous, before a new episode broke out. Thus, because the news cycle of anti-abolitionist violence moved rapidly in the 1840s, barbarous events—even those that threatened the safety and security of entire northern cities—were often put aside in favor of the latest and most headline-grabbing reports of northern mob uprisings. In fact, one likely reason for Garrison's swift and abrupt halting of coverage of the Lombard Street Riots in *The Liberator* was that within two weeks, Garrison himself experienced violence and repeated assaults firsthand at an anti-slavery convention on the island of Nantucket. Garrison's on-the-ground encounters with anti-abolitionists and anti-Black mobocrats clearly influenced his forthcoming editorial decisions. As such, this incident will be further explored and discussed in much greater detail in the following chapter.

[107] Frederick Douglass was perhaps the most famous subscription agent for the *Liberator*, see Matthew Peeples, 'Creating Political Authority: The Role of the Antebellum Black Press in the Political Mobilization and Empowerment of African Americans', *Journalism History*, 34, Vol. 2 (2008), p. 77.

Chapter II: 'The Brotherhood of Thieves' Riot: Five Days of Mobocracy on Nantucket Island

In the summer of 1842, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (MASS) made the strategic decision to host its second annual convention on the island of Nantucket after the success and non-violent atmosphere of the first.[1] On the first night of the meeting, 10 August, Stephen S. Foster took the podium at the Nantucket Athenaeum, and adopting language that surprised even his abolitionist colleagues, excoriated members of the island's clergy and political leaders. The local *Nantucket Inquirer* recalled the 'grossly insulting and personally abusive language which was' reportedly 'employed [by] some of the speakers at the convention'.[2] Even the sympathetic *Liberator* conceded that the language 'was very strong'—a surprising editorial judgment suggesting that Garrison and his editorial team sought to distance themselves from the convention's most radical speakers while at the same time conceding that the victims were not entirely blameless for the atrocities that followed. *The Nantucket Inquirer* subsequently reported that anti-abolitionist demonstrators in the crowd grew more apoplectic as the speech continued and took on an increasingly reproving tone—many of these same spectators assailing the convention with violence two days later. 'On Friday evening,' the *Inquirer* stated, 'noisy and riotous persons assembled near and at the Athenaeum Hall, where the Anti-Slavery Convention meetings were held, and disturbed the speakers by hooting, screeching, and other noises. Rotten eggs and other missiles were thrown', including 'a brickbat which hit a lady in the face'.[3] For several days afterwards, anti-abolitionism reigned on Nantucket until the end of the conference, disrupting numerous events and forcing the abolitionists to change venues multiple times. They were ultimately driven from the island. Some scholars suggest that the riots may not have commenced at all if Foster had refrained from

[1] An anti-slavery convention was held the previous year in 1841, see Caitlin Kelley, 'The Athenaeum Celebrates Nantucket's Anti-Slavery Movement and Local Abolitionists' (Nantucket, 2017), p. 1.
[2] 'Riotous Outbreaks—Freedom of Speech—Anti-Slavery Convention', *The Nantucket Inquirer*, cited in *The Liberator*, 26 August 1842, cited in Susan F. Beegel, 'The Brotherhood of Thieves Riot 1842', *Historic Nantucket: African-American History on Nantucket*, 40, No. 3 (1992), p. 47; Troy Duncan and Chris Dixon, 'Denouncing the Brotherhood of Thieves: Stephen Symonds Foster's Critique of the Anti-Abolitionist Clergy', *Civil War History*, 47, No. 2 (2001), p. 109; Holly Jackson, *American Radicals: How Nineteenth-Century Protest Shaped the Nation* (New York, 2009), p. 92.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 2.

delivering his 'Brotherhood of Thieves' speech, or at least modified his remarks.[4]

One of the crucial findings of this chapter is that by studying history through the lens of space and place, new insights emerge into the ways local and national politics differed. Historian Leif Jerram defines 'space' as everyday objects that interrelate, interact, and connect; hence 'space' can, among other things, be as disparate as man-made structures and the natural environment.[5] In brief, 'space' refers to the physical and geographical, whereas 'place' often signifies cultural meaning. Causation is thus part and parcel of these two interwoven concepts—namely, that a geographical layout of a space, or the cultural meaning of a place, can influence the causation of localized events. As Kristina Navickas argues, spaces in which protests unfold matter deeply, as all places have a 'militant particularism' to them—a term originally coined by British Marxist historian Raymond Williams.[6] Thus, while a run-of-the-mill abolitionist convention—and a fiery orator unafraid of publicly criticizing local leaders—seemingly spurred on these riots, Nantucket's unique spatial geography contributed in subtle ways to the escalating violence.

The following chapter advances two major claims. First, a new interpretation revises one historical perspective that Stephen S. Foster's infamous oration ignited the multi-day, anti-abolitionist waves of violence across Nantucket. Partisan reporting from on and off-island source reflect the conflicting political agendas of these various newspapers. Second, Nantucket's remote, offshore location shaped race relations in unique ways. Applying a space and place lens to Nantucket's localized violence allows historians to recognize that 'spatial geography' radically increased anti-abolitionist fears and tensions over time, contributing in important ways to the full-scale riots that ultimately followed.

[4] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[5] Leif Jerram, 'Space: A useless category for historical analysis?' *History and Theory*, 52, No. 3 (2013), p. 403.
[6] Katrina Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place, 1789-1848* (Manchester, 2016), pp. 18-19.

Part I: The Particularities of the Abolitionist Movement that Stoked Tensions

The following section addresses the complexity of ascribing singular or overarching causes to the Nantucket Riots. Scholars have suggested two main theories. First, historians maintain that Stephen S. Foster himself caused the rioting through personal insults and inflammatory political speech. The second is that widespread school de-segregation efforts throughout the island proved a major trigger of the violence. These explanations, however, remain ultimately insufficient. Not only have historians supported their claims with incomplete evidence, but the very nature of antebellum newspaper reporting makes such claims very difficult to defend. That said, as making sensible inductions from partisan evidence is a traditional practice for ascribing historical causation, the following section does propose a novel and plausible 'trigger' for the storm of violence that later followed. In the final analysis, however, partisan newspaper reports indicate that the causes of the riots were deeply complex, multi-faceted, and impossible to identify with pin-point precision.

Transatlantic unity and public agitation against slavery were Garrisonians' strongest, most potent weapons against an entrenched northern pro-slavery impulse.[7] While transatlantic abolitionist organizations were not always in sync nor did they frequently see eye to eye on methods and tactics, after 1840, a marked shift took place in the United States wherein Garrisonians increasingly stressed the importance of garnering, in historian W. Caleb McDaniels' words, 'international public opinion to their side'.[8] Garrison and his supporters believed that international cooperation—not domestic agitation—held the key to a nationwide abolitionist victory. Garrisonians recognized that if the international community joined their crusade, tolerance for slavery would correspondingly erode in the United States as it did in Great Britain.[9] Abolitionists sought to depict abolitionism not as distant, divided sects, but as an

[7] W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 2013), pp. 66-85.
[8] *Ibid*, p. 85.
[9] *Ibid*, p. 85.

international movement that supported Anglo-American reconciliation, transatlantic fellowship, and internationally themed abolitionist fairs and fundraisers.[10] As McDaniels argues, along with repeated and indispensable 'face to face meetings', influencing public opinion was the singular goal of Garrisonianism during the post-Jacksonian period.[11] Less understood by historians, however, is the way that the Garrisonians used *The Liberator* to influence domestic events. To that end, it became a top-line agenda item of William Lloyd Garrison, throughout his antebellum journalistic career, as editor-in-chief of *The Liberator*, to print and reprint newspaper accounts that framed violence in the 1840s as deeply persistent. Over time, as evidenced by this case study, the cumulative effect of relentless publishing helped diagnose that a 'southern slave power' was genuine and real—and therefore exerted undue influence over northern geographies. This in turn slowly shaped public opinion decidedly against the supporters and defenders of slavery extension. While the 'slave power' conspiracy is hardly agreed upon by scholars, for the reasons outlined above, *The Liberator* played a seminal role in expediting the coming sectional crisis. Historians have long overlooked the fact that the newspaper served not just as an observer and chronicler of political events, but as an active participant in them through partisan editorializing, cumulative reporting, and the incessant reprinting of borrowed material. Abolitionist newspapers, therefore, both as political organs and agents, fomented sectionalism in overt but less understood ways. The cumulative impact of relentless coverage of events during the 1840s is supremely important; it is causally connected to the sectional crisis that emerged during the early 1850s.

Bearing this political agenda in mind, Garrisonian activists were committed to exposing the hypocrisy and pro-slavery biases of northern clergymen. In both regions, Drew Faust argues that the Bible was the chief text in promoting 'pro-slavery mainstream' arguments during the antebellum period.[12] John Patrick Daly, however, points out that the 'three Evangelical churches

[10] *Ibid*, pp.76-78 and pp. 82-42.
[11] *Ibid*, p. 78.
[12] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1981), p. 10.

had split by 1846 into separate northern and southern organizations'.[13] 'Southern identity, southern unity, southern belligerence', he argues, fueled this separation, and ultimately, the American Civil War.[14] Despite such rigid ecclesiastical divisions across regions, abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and most famously on the island of Nantucket, Stephen Symonds Foster, assailed northern evangelicals through invective and incisive language. While conceding that most northern clergy held no 'property' in slaves, Foster forcefully argued that these pulpit leaders were instrumental in perpetuating the institution of slavery as the nation's premier 'apologists and supporters of the system'.[15] In essence, he argued that northern clergy were guilty of 'theft, adultery, man-stealing, piracy, and murder' for the following reasons: they opposed personal liberty laws, impeded abolitionist radicalism, and supported slaveholders under the auspices of 'preserving the Union'.[16] Garrisonian opposition to slavery was rooted in a protracted campaign across northern states to discredit northern clergy members for their longstanding defense of the 'peculiar institution'.

Notwithstanding this Garrisonian penchant for incendiary language, reliance on certain sources has skewed the conclusions of what actually caused the Nantucket riots. Since the original speech itself does not survive, different interpretations loom through the presentation of insufficient evidence.[17] Susan F. Beegel, for instance, declares that there was 'little doubt that [Foster's] speech was responsible for firing the Nantucket riot'[18]—quoting Foster himself as the primary evidence to bolster her claims.[19] Self-referential sources, however, leave open the possibility for alternative perspectives. And while she does reference the editor of *The Nantucket Enquirer's* angry and public screed against Foster's remarks—suggesting that white Nantucketers were angry enough to form distinct, multi-day mobs—this single editorial does

[13] John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Kentucky, 2002), p. 4.
[14] *Ibid*, p. 4.
[15] Stephen Symonds Foster, 'The Brotherhood of Thieves, Or, a True Picture of the American Church and Clergy: A Letter to Nathaniel Barney, of Nantucket' (1843), p. 14.
[16] *Ibid*, p. 8 and 14.
[17] I contacted the Nantucket Athenaeum, and the archivists confirmed that the speech has been lost to history.
[18] Beegel, 'The Brotherhood of Thieves Riot 1842', p. 47.
[19] *Ibid*, p. 47.

not credibly link (or causally connect) the speech itself to the rioting that later ensued.

Indeed, several chroniclers of the Nantucket Riots have overstated the importance of Foster's speech in causing widespread violence and mobocracy on the island. This can be attributed to the overreliance on a comparatively small number of sources. For instance, Pearlie Peters argues that Foster's speech 'inflamed Nantucket locals by attacking local clergy by name in a scathing diatribe against the church'.[20] 'Mobs formed when Foster called the clergy a brotherhood of thieves and pimps of satan', she argues.[21] However, Peters' single footnote citation (a *Liberator* editorial published on 2 September 1842) calls into question the persuasiveness of her contention.[22] As discussed, nineteenth century newspaper reports were notoriously unreliable and often second-hand. Similarly, Frances Ruley Karttunen notes that growing 'opposition to a three-day anti-slavery meeting taking place at the Athenaeum in August 1842 turned riotous on the first day'—implying Foster's presence (and caustic words) initially drew out the mobocrats.[23] Karttunen does not, however, provide any evidence for this assertion. Instead, she ends the paragraph with a solitary footnote that is only tangentially related to her principle claim.[24] Finally, John T. Crawmer's unpublished thesis relies upon the scholarship of Peters to link 'the fiery oration of Stephen S. Foster' to the 'riot'—as well as Karttunen's work to advance the claim that 'racial tensions boiled over' in large part due to Foster's speech'.[25] While Peters, Karttunen, and Crawmer argue that the speech was central to the violence that followed, this reliance on 'best fit' causal explanations is speculative at best. The truth is that the causal origins of the Nantucket Riots were complex and multi-faceted, and therefore the lack of surviving original documents—coupled with partisan and contradictory newspaper coverage—suggests that historians should exercise greater caution or offer clear

[20] Pearlie Peters, 'Frederick Douglass: The Nantucket Convention', p. 121, cited in Robert Johnson, Jr, *Nantucket's People of Color: Essays on History, Politics, and Community* (Oxford, 2006).
[21] *Ibid*, p. 121.
[22] *Ibid*, p. 122
[23] Frances Ruley Karttunen, *The Other Islanders: People Who Pulled Nantucket's Oars* (New Bedford, 2005), p. 79.
[24] *Ibid*, p. 79.
[25] John T. Crawmer, 'Spirits and Spirituality: Temperance and Racial Uplift in Nineteenth-Century Nantucket, MA (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Massachusetts, Boston, 2023), p. 78; *Ibid*, pp. 77-78.

qualifiers when attributing singular causes to multifarious events.

A reinterpretation of available primary source evidence indicates that Foster's speech did not solely cause the riots. Retracing Foster's movements and lecture circuit schedule, it is an interesting fact that he returned to the island precisely ten months later to deliver a materially similar oration.[26] No mobs, however, were observed or recorded.[27] This suggests that inflammatory words do not, in and of themselves, produce violent responses and reprisals. The sentiments expressed were characteristically anti-clerical—condemning the island's ministers and church leaders for their hypocrisy and cowardice over the slavery issue.[28] This observation suggests that the combination of factors was far more combustible for whatever reason on Nantucket island in 1842 than a year later, and that if the 'Brotherhood of Thieves' oration solely caused the riots, Foster's return would almost certainly have spurred more anti-abolitionist mobs. This proved not to be the case.

A reappraisal of available newspaper sources adds complexity to this long-established causal narrative.[29] While these aforementioned interpretations are certainly plausible, in making this case that Foster emerged as the prime cause of the riots, these historians preclude the possibility of contingencies and the rich interplay of factors that likely made Nantucket an ideal place for racial conflict by 1842. Of the three observed *Liberator* editorials that reported on the violence consulted for this chapter, none of the sources made explicit mention of Stephen S. Foster's speech as a possible cause of the bloodshed. Only one referenced the anti-clerical rhetoric disseminated by abolitionist circuit speakers in general—whilst the others focused on the wide-scale damage and aftermath of the riots. At the same time, none of these sources pontificated on its ringleaders or instigators. It is highly likely, then, that following the Lombard Street Riots in Philadelphia two weeks earlier, under the leadership and direction of William Lloyd Garrison, *The Liberator* sought to keep these violent events in the news, provoke its

[26] Caitlin Kelley, 'The Atheneum Celebrates Nantucket's Anti-Slavery Movement and Local Abolitionists', p. 1.
[27] *Ibid*, p. 1.
[28] *Ibid*, p. 1.
[29] 'Anti-Slavery Convention at Nantucket', *The Liberator*, 2 September 1842, 'Disgraceful Scenes in New-Bedford and Nantucket', *The Liberator*, 19 August 1842, 'Mobocracy in Nantucket', *The Liberator*, 26 August 1842.

readership, and ultimately sell more newspapers by emphasizing the very real damage and bloodshed. Thus, such varied, dissimilar reporting (from the same newspaper) further complicates an established historical narrative of what transpired, weakening the causal link between Stephen S. Foster's rhetoric and the wide-scale damage and destruction that ultimately occurred.[30]

Fears of School Integration: A Possible Cause of the Riot?

The decade of the 1840s marked a major turning point in the American abolitionist movement. In addition to advocating disunion, anti-clericalism, and the moral imperative of universal emancipation, Garrison also wanted to make 'integration the theme of a civil rights campaign', according to historian Arthur O. White.[31] This helps explain why the island of Nantucket was chosen for the second year in a row for an anti-slavery convention.[32] Bubbling beneath the surface for nearly two years prior was a protracted struggle—identified by abolitionists and integrationists on Nantucket—to de-segregate the island's public high school. While an African American female student, Eunice Ross, qualified for admission in 1840, she was denied entry due to her skin color—prompting two years of rallies, petition drives, and boycott campaigns across the island.[33] Thus, when the anti-slavery convention opened its doors in the summer of 1842, anti-abolitionist fears were understandably heightened on the island—and tensions already brewing.

Notwithstanding this controversy, there is considerable disagreement among historians as to the role fears of school integration played in stoking the violence. While the aforementioned historian Frances Ruley Karttunen maintains that '[Foster's speech] was too

[30] *Ibid*.
[31] Arthur O. White, 'Antebellum School Reform in Boston: Integrationists and Separatists, *Phylon*, 34, No. 2. (1973), p. 203.
[32] An anti-slavery convention was held the previous year in 1841, see Kelley, 'The Atheneum Celebrates Nantucket's Anti-Slavery Movement and Local Abolitionists', p. 1.
[33] Robert and Karen E. Hayden, *African Americans on Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket: A History of People, Places, and Events* (Boston, 1999), p. 268 and Kabria Baumgartner, *In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America* (New York, 2019), p. 129.

much for Nantucketers, already inflamed by the school integration debate'—suggesting, in the final analysis, that the oration ultimately tipped the scales—other leading scholars put greater emphasis on internal issues and looming fears of de-segregation as the chief culprit for the violence. [34] Susan F. Beegel notes that, 'The local struggles had a great deal to do with the impact of Foster's oration, for....[when] Foster denounced the clergy as a 'Brotherhood of Thieves', he named specific Nantucket ministers who practiced segregation or kept fellowship with slave-holding Southerners'.[35] In other words, once given the *names* of pro-slavery religious islanders, his remarks took on a more personal, targeted aspect.[36]

Historian Barbara White, however, cites evidence to suggest that the riots were entirely caused by de-segregation efforts. 'Three eyewitnesses took issue with the conventional view that the Brotherhood of Thieves speech was to blame', she argues, after analyzing newfound primary source documents. 'They claimed that Foster's inflammatory speech had conveniently provided them with an excuse [to] keep Eunice Ross and other black children from integrating the school system'.[37] Hence, the rise of the mob had less to do with one man's broadsides and more to do with the threat abolitionists themselves posed to Nantucket's all-white academic institutions. Mobbing was therefore a tactic used by anti-integrationists to intimidate radical outsiders from interfering with local politics—an approach that ultimately, and evidently, failed.[38]

And yet, analyses that attribute the riots solely to de-segregation efforts lack the requisite historical context surrounding these developments. It is worth re-emphasizing that the anti-slavery convention, held the previous summer, was, by all accounts, entirely peaceful.[39] The Eunice Ross controversy was in full swing when Frederick Douglass delivered his first, full-

[34] Frances Ruley Karttunen, *Law and Disorder in Old Nantucket* (Charleston, South Carolina, 2007), p. 120.
[35] Beegel, 'The Brotherhood of Thieves Riot 1842', p. 48.
[36] Beegel, 'The Brotherhood of Thieves Riot 1842', p. 47.
[37] Barbara White, 'What Was the Brotherhood of Thieves Riot?', *Nantucket Historical Association*, p. 1.
[38] It failed for two reasons: First, many of the abolitionists present—including Stephen S. Foster—returned the following year for a third anti-slavery conference. Second, the schools were desegregated within five years, see Hayden and Hayden, *African-Americans on Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket*, pp. 268-271.
[39] Kelley, 'The Atheneum Celebrates Nantucket's Anti-Slavery Movement and Local Abolitionists', p. 1.

length address and William Lloyd Garrison explicitly criticized the church for its pro-slavery associations in 1841.[40] The language utilized was classic Garrison.[41] At the same time, the first convention was, as historian Caitlin Kelly points out, 'one of the first mixed-race, anti-slavery assemblies in the country'.[42] Why, then, did the mob not descend upon this biracial gathering of radical abolitionists and integrationists a year earlier? Surely, given the occasion, the convention was fertile grounds for an uprising: The mixed-race lecturers, the anti-clericalism, and the non-island attendees were reasons enough for violent antagonism in other settings and at other times.

In a similar vein, the timetable of events adds nuance to White's analysis as well. The convention began on Wednesday, 10 August 1842, and no 'riotous proceedings' of any significance commenced until the following evening.[43] Put simply, abolitionists and those sympathetic to their cause attended *at least* four abolitionist rallies, over a 24-hour period, before the mobs seriously mobilized and began 'hooting, screeching, throwing brickbats and other missiles'.[44] As a result, the question remains: If a politically and personally offensive speech and de-segregation efforts were the leading culprits for anti-abolitionist unrest, why then did the riots not occur on the first day of the convention? That is, why did the mobocrats not arrive, in full force, until the evening of 11 August, fully 24 hours after the 'Brotherhood of Thieves' speech?

It was not as if the island's anti-integrationists were blinded-sided by the arrival of William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and other outlander abolitionists during the late summer of 1842. The convention was advertised in *The Liberator* multiple times, and at least a month in advance of its proceedings.[45] And even if prejudiced Nantucketers, by and large, did not subscribe to Garrison's newspaper—as was almost certainly the case—they could hardly have missed local advertisements. The convention was promoted in *The Nantucket Inquirer*, a

[40] Kelley, 'The Atheneum Celebrates Nantucket's Anti-Slavery Movement and Local Abolitionists', p. 1.
[41] See David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom* (New York, 2018), p. 99.
[42] Kelley, 'The Atheneum Celebrates Nantucket's Anti-Slavery Movement and Local Abolitionists', p. 1.
[43] 'Anti-Slavery Convention at Nantucket.', p. 1.
[44] 'Anti-Slavery Convention at Nantucket.', p. 1.
[45] See two different issues of *The Liberator*, 29 July 1842 and 5 August 1842.

local periodical, four days before the convention began; simultaneously, the convention was the second in what was to be known as a three-part annual lecture series.[46] Thus, its proceedings and activities would have been well known to the anti-abolitionist community on Nantucket.

In short, a possible trigger for the island's violent and explosive white supremacy—previously overlooked by historians, and which only emerged after carefully reexamining contemporaneous newspaper sources—is the convention's unequivocal condemnation of anti-abolitionist mobs in the city of Philadelphia earlier that month. In reviewing the facts of the case, Stephen S. Foster delivered his 'Brotherhood of Thieves' speech on the first night of the convention, 10 August; and according to *The Liberator*, while the rioting officially commenced the following day, 11 August, the proceedings ultimately concluded that evening 'without material interruption'.[47] In summary, the first two days of the convention were ultimately uninterrupted, despite some 200 protesters, on Thursday evening, who gathered outside the venue to demonstrate.[48] It was only on Friday, 12 August, that the lecturers were completely drowned out by the mob, and prevented from speaking.[49] Abolitionist George A. Gardner recorded in his diary that 'Regular mob, would not let them [the abolitionists] speak….Garrison and Foster undertook to speak but could not be heard'.[50] He also noted that several windows were smashed open and projectiles—including eggs and beans—were thrown at the speakers'.[51] In the end, the mob was so disruptive, and the fear of property damage so acute, that the stewards of the Athenaeum asked the abolitionists to move the convention to a different location, which the organizers reluctantly did.[52] This delayed change in the mob's behavior, therefore, may be explained by taking a closer looker at the Friday morning proceedings and resolutions. According to *The Liberator,* the following resolutions were adopted on 12 August:

> Resolved. That in view of the many pro-slavery riots which have disgraced and cursed

[46] 'Anti-Slavery Convention', *The Nantucket Inquirer*, 6 August 1842, p 3.
[47] 'Anti-Slavery Convention at Nantucket.', p. 1.
[48] Karttunen, *Law and Disorder on Old Nantucket*, p. 120.
[49] Karttunen, *Law and Disorder on Old Nantucket*, p. 120.
[50] As quoted in Karttunen, *Law and Disorder on Old Nantucket*, p. 120.
[51] Karttunen, *Law and Disorder on Old Nantucket*, p. 120.
[52] Karttunen, *Law and Disorder on Old Nantucket*, p. 120.

> Philadelphia, its proper designation is, 'the city of fiendish malevolence,' instead of 'the city of brotherly love.'
>
> Resolved. That we most deeply sympathize with our colored brethren in that city, in the recent frightful ontrages [sic] and afflictions to which they have been subjected by a ferocious mob, excited in view of their grateful and appropriate public observance of the anniversary of West India emancipation.
>
> Resolved. That as the late ferocious assault upon the colored population of Philadelphia grew out of hatred and contempt of a colored skin, it follows that all those who cherish that hatred and contempt, whether at the North or the South, are responsible for, and participated in that assault.[53]

While Stephen S. Foster's fiery speech and de-segregation controversies loom large in the works of local historians attempting to ascribe causation of these events, these public remarks underscore two points: not only did Garrison and his supporters express solidarity with the African Americans affected by the Lombard Street Riots in Philadelphia, earlier in the month, but they excoriated and blamed *all* northern whites for the violence who prescribed to and support the ideology of 'colorphobia'. This would include, by extension, anti-abolitionists and anti-integrationists on Nantucket. What this illustrates, then, is that reappraising the primary source evidence and the timing of the violence, a new causal trigger emerges: the convention's guilt-by-association proclamation that plausibly offended white Nantucketers Friday morning. It is possible that this proclamation directly led to and culminated in the largest gathering of violent, anti-abolitionists in the island's history.

Ultimately, however, historians cannot ascribe causality to these events with absolute certainty. Even the very newspaper that carried the convention's meeting minutes is not an original document—and no sources survive indicating that there exists a direct connection between the Philadelphia declaration and the wide-scale, hours-later violence. What the primary sources agree upon, however, is that a confluence of factors led to the most disruptive and violent anti-abolitionist mob events in Nantucket's island history. While historians are left to draw their own conclusions by grappling with a frustratingly incomplete record of the past, two broad conclusions can be drawn. First, the consensus view that the 'Brotherhood of Thieves' oration caused the Nantucket violence requires a more nuanced interpretation. And second, the

[53] 'Anti-Slavery Convention at Nantucket.', p. 1.

resultant violence is reflective of Nantucket's unique geographical location and spatial make-up. For this reason, applying a space and place lens to these events can help foster deeper meaning and understanding of what actually occurred. This is a perspective that will be further explored in Part II.

Part II: Space and Place

The philosopher Edward S. Casey in the introduction to his famous work, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*, reminds readers about the supremacy and inescapability of place. 'Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have', he writes.[54] And yet, place is frequently 'deemed not worthy of separate treatment', as it 'is so much with us, and we with it'.[55] For this reason, and our perennial proximity to space, human beings often take for granted the spatiality in which they reside. But space is constant, unavoidable, everywhere at once.[56] Space emphasizes the physical over the metaphysical. Leif Jerram defines space as, 'The proximate physical disposition of things in relation to one another and to humans—such as walls, streets, motorways, telephones, air-vents, mountains'[57] Interactions with such places are not incidental, however; their interplay can (and frequently does) influence events—impacting human interactions. As one researcher has argued, seemingly 'peaceful' spatial geographies can oftentimes foment and breed violence.[58] Thus, applying a space and place lens to the 'Brotherhood of Thieves' riots elucidates an important point: the very geography of Nantucket should be seen as an 'actor' in the unfolding summer race riots of 1842.

[54] Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkley and Los Angeles, 1997), p. ix, cited in Alessandro Calvin Rollino, 'Place and Space: A Philosophical History', *Rethinking Space and Place*, 12 September 2019.
[55] *Ibid*, p. x.
[56] *Ibid*, p. ix.
[57] Jerram, 'Space', p. 403.
[58] Susan Forde, 'The Violence of Space and Spaces of Violence: Peace as Violence in Unequal and Divided Spaces', *Political Geography*, 93, (2022), pp. 1-9.

Nantucket's offshore location shaped racial relations in unique ways. Colloquially referred to as the 'the faraway island' during the seventeenth century—a Wampanoag phrase that referenced the island's geographical isolation and distinctness from the continent—its offshore location and coastal waters proved a hub of the whaling industry, attracting both white and Black seafarers to its wharves.[59] In so doing, its unique spaces and places created social avenues of advancement available to African Americans not possible in other locations in the United States. Historian Mary Malloy argues no economic sphere of life provided greater opportunities for Blacks seafarers than the 'maritime industries'—particularly whaling—offering a more lucrative and adventurous life for 'thousands of African Americans' before the American Civil War (1861-1865).[60] Whaling was part and parcel of Nantucket's distinct cultural identity, and Black mariners—and fugitives alike—were attracted to its shores in droves after the island's 1770 declaration of universal freedom.[61] White and Black locals participated eagerly in whaling ventures. Visiting the island in 1854, Nathaniel Hawthorne recounted in his diary a story retold by one Edward W. Gardiner, a Nantucket sea captain. 'Gardiner said you must have been a-whaling there before you could be married, and must have struck a whale before you could dance'.[62] This sentiment held equally true for African Americans, who served in various capacities as the whaling industry's 'employees, investors, or owners'.[63] The most famous of all Black whaling captains was the Nantucket-born Absalom Boston, who worked his way up the ranks to become, among other things, the skipper of an exclusively-Black whaling outfit, a real estate mogul, and the richest African American on the island during the antebellum period.[64] Peter Green and Paul Cuffee found similar successes as Black captains, circumventing

[59] James Everett Grieder and Georgen Charnes, *Images of America Nantucket* (Charleston, SC, 2012), p. 7.
[60] Mary Molloy, 'African Americans in the Maritime Trades: A Guide to Resources in New England', Kendall Whaling Museum Monograph Series (Sharon, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 3 and 5.
[61] Mary C. Beaudry and Ellen P. Berkland, 'Archeology of the African Meeting House on Nantucket', cited in Akinwumi Ogundiran and Toyin Falola (eds.), *Archeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora* (Indiana, 2007), p. 397.
[62] Bradford Torrey (ed.), *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau Journal*, Vol. XI (Boston and New York, 1906), p. 92.
[63] Molloy, 'African Americans in the Martime Trades', p. 3 and 5.
[64] Hayden, *African-Americans on Martha's Vineyard & Nantucket*, 243-244.

the island's entrenched racial and discriminatory practices'.[65] In sum, Black mariners found seafaring opportunities in New England port authorities and harbors, and these niche jobs were reflected in Nantucket's unique coastal geography and further shaped by the island's desperation for sailors, off-coast location, proximity to whaling populations, and accessibility to the open ocean. Conceptualized in this way, local Black advancement was inextricably bounded to the land and wharves and whaling industry of Nantucket itself. Through this lens, historians gain a better understanding of how space and place impacted Black advancement in remote areas of the United States, and correspondingly, shaped race relations in unique ways.

As in other parts of the antebellum North, African Americans ensconced in Nantucket understandably also experienced inequality and widespread racism. According to one observer, many Blacks bemoaned the rank favoritism exhibited by whaling captains for white mariners, and the commonplace mistreatment of African Americans aboard and during whaling ventures.[66] One Black mariner described whaling captains as tantamount to 'Negro drivers'—a reference to their brutal, exploitative, and unfair approach to working Black deckhands harder than their white counterparts.[67] These racial tensions were perennially bubbling below the surface; no doubt the rise of Black captains such as the aforementioned Boston, Green, and Cuffee engendered further resentment among white dockworkers and deckhands. While 'job competition' has long been associated with rising antebellum racial tensions and anti-abolitionist violence in an urban context, this phenomenon manifested itself rather differently on the island of Nantucket. The unique market for mariners—i.e., non-factory and seafaring laborers—of all races stoked racial tensions over time, setting the stage for the 'Brotherhood of Thieves' riots that erupted in 1842. Spatial geography therefore was inseparable from rising racial tensions on Nantucket during the nineteenth century. The lack of urban factories, maritime labor shortages, and worldwide demand for spermaceti oil directly changed and

[65] James Farr. 'A Slow Boat to Nowhere: The Multi-Racial Crews of the American Whaling Industry.' *The Journal of Negro History* 68, no. 2 (1983), pp. 166-167.
[66] Nathaniel Philbrick, *Away Off Shore: Nantucket Island and Its People, 1602-1890* (New York, 2011), p. 214.
[67] Philbrick, *Away Off Shore*, p. 214.

shaped Nantucket itself. This unique local flavor of 'militant particularism' proved markedly different and distinct from other northern areas.[68] Over time, these dynamics promoted anti-abolitionist ideology and activism that helps contextualize and explain the origins of the 1842 riots.

To a large extent physical spaces reinforced and fostered white supremacy on the island. David Samuel Torres-Rouff, in his landmark study on Los Angeles, contends that 'Contests over the meaning of…racial categories…played out in a variety of spatial contexts, including the shape of roads and waterways [and] the kind of buildings that dotted particular neighborhoods'.[69] Applied to the island of Nantucket, one of the more peculiar spectacles on the island was impossible to miss—namely, the roughly 125 captain homes that lined Orange Street during the nineteenth century.[70] These opulent mansions, while often left vacant for years, provided visual cues and reminders of white wealth and privilege. In fact, according to one chronicler, the island's Black community, in Newtown, 'was both gated and separated by pasture land from Nantucket's white residents'—a visible racial barrier segregating African Americans from 'the rest of the predominately white island' despite such close proximity.[71] That said, the Boston-Higginbotham House, now an historic landmark, located only one block from Orange Street and purchased by Absalom Boston's parents, underscores through archeological excavation the independent-living and experiences of wealthier African Americans residing on the island.[72] Visible paragons of white status and achievement, however, reinforced a subtle cultural phenomenon: wealth and power flowed mostly through whiteness, cementing the fact that Black subservience—despite the island's seafaring demand, which offered unusual social mobility to historically marginalized groups—was inseparable from the

[68] Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, p. 18.
[69] David Samuel Torres-Rouff, *Before L.A.: Race, Space, and Municipal Power in Los Angeles, 1781-1894* (New Haven, 2013), p. 14.
[70] Robert Gambee, *Nantucket* (New York and London, 1993), p. 20.
[71] Carolyn Horlacher, 'Measured Resistance: A Black Feminist Perspective on the Domestic Reform Movement' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Massachusetts Boston, 2016), p. 5.
[72] Nedra K. Lee, 'Boarding: Black Women in Nantucket Generating Income and Building Community', *Transforming Anthropology*, 27, No. 2 (2019), pp. 93-94.

culture.

Such aesthetics shaped whites' general hostility towards Blacks over time, not only within the island's established anti-abolitionist community, but its Quaker population as well. Indeed, one historian argues that Nantucket Quakers—supposedly hostile to slavery and more egalitarian in their views on island race relations—'showed little interest in addressing the [racial] problems in their own backyard'.[73] This contention is plausible for two reasons. First, no observed documentary evidence indicates that Quakers sought to protect or shelter attendees of the abolitionist convention in 1842. And second, Quakers turned their backs on the abolitionist radicals as they were driven from the island. Stephen S. Foster, for instance, was unceremoniously removed from a Quaker meeting the Sunday following his 'Brotherhood of Thieves' oration due to his perceived radicalism.[74] These developments therefore underscore the systemic and widespread reach of white supremacy on the island, culturally reinforced and promulgated through the spaces and places that made Nantucket distinct.

Many white residents of Nantucket likely saw violence as necessary and appropriate given the changing demographics of the island. By the mid-1840s, 40,000 Americans were employed in the whaling industry, a sector of the economy worth some $40,000,000 in the United States alone.[75] A close reading of the 1840 Massachusetts census, however, provides greater insights into the demographic dynamics at play during the late antebellum period. In 1840, for example, the total population of the island was 9,012.[76] More specifically, Nantucket was comprised of some 8,433 white residents and 579 African Americans.[77] While the 1840 federal census recorded no slaves on the island (or in the state of Massachusetts, for that matter), African Americans only comprised roughly 7 percent of the entire population.[78] Compare this to

[73] Philbrick, *Away Off Shore*, p. 214-215.
[74] Karttunen, *Law and Disorder on Old Nantucket*, p. 121.
[75] 'Decline of the Whaling Industry', *Science Service*: *The Scientific Monthly*, 46, No. 6. (1938), p. 2.
[76] '1840 Census: Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, New York, New Jersey', p. 8-11.
[77] *Ibid*, p. 8-11.
[78] *Ibid*, p. 8-11.

the 1790 federal census—wherein only 2.3 percent of the population included free Blacks'.[79] Hence, these demographic changes—the tripling of the free Black population during a fifty-year period—suggest that competition for plum positions on whaling vessels only increased over time after the American Revolution.

Related to this, intensifying and racialized perceptions of diminishing 'space' within the town likely impacted social relations and increased racial tensions in the summer of 1842. As Nantucket proved a relatively and geographically small community, as compared to major urban areas with vast living spaces, residential blocks were often in short supply. For this reason, many white mariners likely viewed Black seamen as threats not only to their jobs and economic security, but to their residential aspirations as well. Thus, the perceived lack of 'space' on Nantucket contributed in discursive if powerful ways to growing cynicism and rising racial tensions on the island.

Neil Foley demonstrates, however, that rigid racial categorizations can be difficult to delineate. In post-bellum Texas, for instance, 'binary' racial categories did not exist at all, he argues, in part due to the racial diversity of the state's residents.[80] 'Not all whites, in other words, were equally white', he writes, given the diversity of the state.[81] Such imprecise and nebulous racial classifications directly apply to the island of Nantucket, given its maritime transience, and, as one anthropologist put, 'home to many intermarried couples'.[82] This comparison therefore suggests that the 'free colored' population on Nantucket was almost certainly higher than what federal census could or did indicate. This extant diversity sheds light on the latent racial tensions and jealousies that made the violence of 1842 possible.

Space and place greatly influenced the fluidity and reactionary nature of antebellum social reform movements. Kristina Navickas argues that 'Historians should…examine protests

[79] '1790 Census: Return of the Whole Number of Persons within the Several Districts of the United States', p. 31.
[80] Foley, *The White Scourge*, p. 5.
[81] *Ibid*, p. 5.
[82] Teresa Dujnic Bulger, 'Scrubbing the Whitewash from New England History: Citizenship, Race and Gender in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Nantucket (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, Berkley, 2013), p. 31.

within their multi-layered and changing spaces', as 'strategies of resistance were in part shaped by underlying spatial structures, buildings, streets and connections dominated by hegemonic elites'.[83] This observation applies to the conflagration that began at the Nantucket Athenaeum. As already mentioned, on the penultimate day of the convention, activists were driven to move meeting spaces—due to repeated assaults and feared destruction of this symbolic structure. This embodies how, in Navickas' words, 'spaces were never static and in struggling for power in those spaces, social movements created their own spaces and forms of spatial practice' in New England coastal communities'.[84] In the absence of a protected and sanctified meeting hall, abolitionist protest evolved in a kind of unscripted, *ad hoc* way—demonstrating the spontaneous nature of antebellum social reform movements. While abolitionist conventions and speaking circuits were often carefully scheduled and orchestrated (Frederick Douglass' 1843 'One Hundred Conventions' lecture series is a *tour de force* of planning, travel, and speaking engagements), reformers were often subjected to the whims of a cacophonous and rising violent anti-abolitionism.[85] In the case of Foster, he railed against the evils and hypocrisies of slavery in multiple locations throughout the convention: the Nantucket Athenaeum, Quaker meeting halls, and ultimately, the streets, wharves, and public spaces of the island. In the end, Nantucket abolitionists themselves ejected the Garrisonians from the Athenaeum for fear of destruction of their beloved institution—although Foster himself later blamed anti-abolitionists for his unceremonious banishment. Rioters, he later recalled, 'compelled me to leave your island, to prevent the shedding of human blood'.[86] Through the lens of space and place, however, the nature of abolitionist reform emerges infinitely clearer. Not only did the movement's activists meet and adapt to its most vocal and disruptive critics, abolitionist strategy was not entirely shaped by schedules and itineraries, but the very spaces and places that they inhabited and

[83] Navickas, *Protest and the Politics of Space and Place*, p. 19.
[84] *Ibid*, p. 19.
[85] Frederick Douglass, '"One Hundred Conventions" (1843), from *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881; 1892)', cited in *The Speeches of Frederick Douglass: A Critical Edition* edited by John R. McKivigan et al. (New Haven, 2018), p. 523.
[86] Foster, 'The Brotherhood of Thieves, Or, a True Picture of the American Church and Clergy', p. 8.

interacted with.

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates three core arguments of this thesis. First, anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence greatly persisted well past the presidency of Andrew Jackson and into the subsequent decade. As shown in this study, the mobocratic rioting on the island of Nantucket during the summer of 1842 continued for five full days; white and Black abolitionists were mercilessly targeted, harassed, abused, and assaulted. Ultimately, the abolitionist meetings could not continue due to the incessant rioting and interruptions, demonstrating a qualitatively similar series of riots to the 1830s during an overlooked decade. This observation leads into a subtly different yet equally important argument—namely, that mob actions on Nantucket underscored the intensity exhibited by many anti-abolitionists rioters in their desire to stifle peaceful protest and free speech. This is evidenced by the fact that the abolitionists gathered in attendance were forced, for safety reasons, to change venues or postpone their proceedings multiple times throughout the week. Lastly, the events of this chapter offer a new perspective on the politics of slavery and anti-slavery in Massachusetts outside the city of Boston. While the state garners a well-deserved reputation in extant historiography for its leading role in 'anti-slavery' reform during the pre-Civil War era, anti-abolitionism clearly co-existed with Garrisonian activism—and unquestionably undermined it—in the most remote corners of the commonwealth.[87] This case study, therefore, adds considerable shading to the preeminent perception, advanced by some scholars, that Massachusetts proved most influential in operating at the vanguard of antebellum abolitionist reform. As this case study has shown, anti-

[87] Roman J. Zorn, 'The New England Anti-Slavery Society: Pioneer Abolition Organization', *The Journal of Negro History*, 42, No. 3 (1957), p. 157; Stacey M. Robertson, *Parker Pillsbury: Radical Abolitionist, Male Feminist* (Ithaca, 2000), p. 70; William E. Gienapp, 'Abolitionism and the Nature of Antebellum Reform', cited in Donald M. Jacobs (ed.), *Courage and Conscience: Black and White Abolitionists in Boston* (Bloomington, 1993), p. 28; Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 357; Jerold Duquette and Erin O'Brien (ed.), *The Politics of Massachusetts Exceptionalism: Reputation Meets Reality* (Amherst, 2022), p. 6 and 71.

abolitionism endured—and even flourished—across the so-called 'cradle of liberty' well into the 1840s.

While this chapter focuses on anti-abolitionist and anti-Black rioting in a particular place during the early 1840s, qualitatively similar violence occurred throughout Massachusetts during this same period. From 1840 to 1849, while only 5/26 observed physical assaults occurred in Nantucket, fully 11/26 (42 percent) materialized within coastal Massachusetts communities—including the major whaling centers of New Bedford and Cape Cod—demonstrating that the violence observed in this chapter hardly proved aberrational. Port towns such as New Bedford, Harwich Port, Newburyport, Salem, and Boston were all mobbed, experiencing violent, intermittent anti-abolitionist rioting during this period. This also means that 52 percent of observed physical assaults in Massachusetts occurred in *non*-port communities—including Danvers, Lynn, Sharon, Millville, and East Randolph. Such data, therefore, provides at least three avenues of future research for those interested in antebellum anti-abolitionism in Massachusetts.

Investigations into anti-abolitionism in coastal port communities outside of Nantucket would make for useful comparative analysis, and deepen historians' understanding of local port violence in an antebellum context. Violence in New Bedford, for example, or on Cape Cod, would make for interesting case studies. Second, anti-abolitionist rioting in the state's urban areas outside Boston, Massachusetts stand well outside the scope of this project. Future projects analyzing the qualitative anti-abolitionism compared within and across the state's non-major urban centers—such as Lowell, Springfield, or Lawrence, to name a few—could yield interesting and surprising comparative results. Finally, a quantitative study of anti-abolitionist violence in Massachusetts during the period 1830-1839 (utilizing identical key search terms and methodologies as outlined in the introduction), could help historians better understand the extent to which anti-abolitionist violence increased or decreased in Massachusetts after 1840. While qualitative similarities have already been established, new quantitative data could challenge or

reaffirm the established view that anti-abolitionist violence starkly declined throughout the United States after Andrew Jackson's presidency.

Chapter III: 'Horrible Outrage': An Anti-Black Murder in Indianapolis, Indiana, 4 July 1845'

On 4 July 1845, John Tucker, a farmhand and father of two, was murdered in the presence of hundreds of white onlookers in the streets of Indianapolis, Indiana. Three heavy-drinking white men, after leaving a local tavern, pursued Tucker on foot after noticing his skin color from a distance. These assailants taunted, targeted, and screamed racial epithets at him. Compelled to defend himself, Tucker was ultimately subdued and overpowered by his attackers, beaten to death with brickbats, stones, and clubs.[1] Not a single witness in the crowd entered the fray to physically help or protect Tucker. Nor did any of the white bystanders intervene to prevent his public lynching.[2]

This chapter analyzes three distinct issues. Section one argues that a high degree of contingency resulted in the death of John Tucker. While his murder was the only observed atrocity of its kind in Indiana identified in this study during the period 1840-1849, the event speaks to a latent set of circumstances that became manifest in Indiana's capital city on the Fourth of July 1845. These contingent factors include holiday violence and the changing politics of violent Black resistance. In addition, section one establishes a qualitative link between the murder of John Tucker, and the anti-Black lynching long associated with the post-Reconstruction South. Section two explores three structural causes of Tucker's death: demographic changes, economic turmoil, and anti-slavery politics in the borderlands. Taken together, these contingent and structural factors provide important insights into this forgotten massacre and the history of violence in the antebellum Middle West.

Contingent Causes of John Tucker's Murder

The manner in which various racial and political groups celebrated the Fourth of July during the antebellum period created a set of circumstances that resulted in the murder of John

[1] 'Affray and Murder.' *The State Indiana Sentinel* (Indianapolis, Indiana), 10 July 1845; 'Gross Misrepresentation.', *The Indiana State Sentinel* (Indianapolis, Indiana), 19 July 1845, p. 2; 'Mob in Indiana', *The Liberator*, 8 August 1845; Calvin Fletcher, *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, Volume 3: 1844-1847 (Indiana, 1974), p. 164; 'Reverend H.W. Beecher---the Indianapolis Murder.' *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 31 July 1845, p. 2.
[2] Leon Bates, 'How the City of Indianapolis Came to Have African American Policemen and Firemen 80 years Before the Modern Civil Rights Movement' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Louisville, 2016), p. 16.

Tucker. Above all, the Fourth of July represented a specific time of year where white masculine notions of patriotism, fidelity, and citizenship were most keenly felt. Speeches, toasts, parades, and tavern gatherings marked the occasion nationwide for most whites, a genuine sense of revelry and drunken excitement filling the air.[3] While the Garrisonians and other interracial abolitionist groups condemned the holiday as an annual reminder of the nation's commitment to legalized slavery—as well as the occasion's long affiliation with inebriation, indecency, and carousing—free northern Black communities tended to ignore the holiday altogether.[4] W. Caleb McDaniel argues it was a 'day fraught with dangers' as free Blacks 'were more likely than whites to suffer violence and vituperation in the streets'.[5] McDaniel argues that free Black communities in northern states opted to celebrate 'other days' of the calendar year instead—landmark occasions which focused on African American history and state level legislation that prohibited slavery.[6] Given these discrepancies in celebratory traditions, any perceived threat of racial mixing, or interruptions to the traditional order of white pride and honor, even in northern states, could provoke violent reprisals. Thus, while John Tucker's murder was not solely attributable to the Fourth of July, as impromptu racially motivated assaults were not uncommon during the antebellum period, it was nonetheless a contributing factor. Oftentimes, increased drinking and frivolity, mixed with 'offensive' displays of Black freedom and citizenship (even if persons of color were clearly unassuming and non-provocative when in public), could engender unwanted attention and increased physical violence. For instance, one anonymous journalist lamented the timing of the event. The murder proved 'doubly horrible', he wrote, as it 'occurred on the Fourth of July, a day which above all others should be consecrated'.[7] As such, the Fourth of July was not and could not be universally recognized as a day of national harmony, as Frederick Douglass repeatedly argued, but in this instance, created the underlying contingent

[3] Kimberly R. Kellison, 'Men, Women, and the Marriage of the Union: Fourth of July Celebrations in Antebellum Goerigia, 1825-1860', *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 98, No. 3 (2014), p. 129.
[4] W. Caleb McDaniel, 'The Fourth and the First: Abolitionist Holidays, Respectability, and Radical Interracial Reform, *American Quarterly* (2025), pp. 137.
[5] *Ibid*, pp. 136-137.
[6] *Ibid*, p. 137.
[7] 'Horrible Outrage'.

conditions for an urban honor killing.[8] At the same time, it was an annual reminder, to northern free Black communities, that white supremacy and racial prejudice permeated all social relations and interactions in the antebellum North.

The assailants' emotional response to John Tucker's appearance in a 'white' area, along with Tucker's final recourse to stand his ground and fight back, underscores mid-westerners' own peculiar sense of white honor culture. While historians have traditionally associated honor culture with the antebellum South, new histories demonstrate that such traditions were not geographically limited or confined to southern states.[9] Robert H. Churchill argues that entrenched, southern cultural values of honor were brought north by 'slaveholders and slave catchers' into the borderlands.[10] At the same time, Douglas Montagna's research unearths how Methodist preachers throughout the antebellum Midwest—particularly in the Ohio River Valley—'idealized courage, resoluteness, physical bearing, and the willingness and ability to avenge even minor insults', and even sanctified lynchings in some cases.[11] These findings indicate that white honor culture transcended regional boundaries.[12] Challenging white supremacy by means of violence, even as a means of self-preservation, yielded swift, even gratuitous outrages. While such occurrences are often recognized as the preserve of the antebellum and Reconstructed South, the murder of John Tucker underscores a notable flashpoint for northern antebellum violence; that is, a marked propensity towards honor culture violence among white northerners in different geographies than traditionally recognized. According to partisan Democratic newspapers, which widely justified the violence, it mattered little that Tucker was a victim of racial violence or that he repeatedly tried to diffuse the

[8] Frederick Douglass, *Selected Speeches and Writings*: 'What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?' (Chicago, 1999), 188-206 (PDF excerpt, pp. 1-20).
[9] Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South, 25th Anniversary Edition* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 3-24 and Dickson D. Bruce, *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin and London, 1979), pp. 3-21.
[10] Churchill, *The Underground Railroad*, pp. 5-6.
[11] Douglas Montagna, 'Choked Him Til His Tongue Protruded: Violence, the Code of Honor, and Methodist Clergy in the Antebellum Ohio Valley', *The Filson Historical Society and Cincinnati Museum Center*, 7, No. 4 (2007), p. 27 and 30.
[12] *Ibid*, p. 27.

situation by running away and securing safe harbor with the local authorities.[13] It was perceived by the white mob and their partisan defenders that he adopted controversial methods of violence against his attackers and reportedly refused to back down—a clear, direct, and unforgivable challenge to northern notions of white honor and pride on a day when these values mattered most.[14] While none of the sources consulted for this chapter identify an explicit northern honor culture, the language adopted by newspapers conveys its latent existence. Phrases describing the event, such as 'bloody affray', 'horrible outrage', 'savage brutality', 'horrible spectacle', and 'dastardly' attack, speak to the extralegal and vigilante aspect of the atrocity.

Many witnesses testified at court that the mob's perception of Tucker's bravado infuriated and further enraged his assailants. Witness testimony from the trial of Nicholas Wood (the principal assailant), later reprinted in *The Indiana State Sentinel,* suggests that Tucker struck Wood purely in self-defense. Nevertheless, bleeding from his head and armed with a brick bat, Tucker reportedly turned to his assailants and shouted: 'I'll have the last drop of your blood, if it is blood you are after'.[15] Within five minutes, a mob numbering in the hundreds reportedly gathered at the corner of Washington and Illinois Streets, and, egging on Wood, shouted 'kill the damned negro'.[16] The directive did not go unheeded. A bystander later testified that Wood, after receiving a blow to the face, shouted 'he would not take that from a negro'—namely, the public shame, humiliation, and violent reprisals of a Black man.[17] Another newspaper reported that a participant in the crowd shouted: 'The niggers are gitting [sic] too cursed thick, and they ought to be thinned out'.[18] With the help of several white accomplices, and an overwhelmingly and tacitly consenting mob, Wood waited until Tucker was down and unconscious, after many blows, before witnesses reported he delivered the *coup de grace*.[19] This swift response to perceptions of Black self-defense proved a major catalyst and a major

[13] 'Marion Circuit Court. Criminal Cases', *The Indiana State Sentinel*, 13 August 1845, p. 2.
[14] *Ibid,* p. 2.
[15] 'Horrible Outrage'.
[16] *Ibid*.
[17] *Ibid*.
[18] 'Mob in Indiana', p.1.
[19] *Ibid,* p. 1.

contingent factor in John Tucker's public lynching.

Extralegal, anti-Black murders observed in newspapers were rare events in antebellum northern states. My research indicates that roughly only 1 in 20 reported physical assaults resulted in homicides—although it is worth mentioning that only the most serious assaults, or those with particular interests to reporters, would be published in newspapers. While some of these murders remain unsolved or attributable to other factors, it is clear that a 'perfect storm' of conditions materialized in the case of the lynching of John Tucker. In brief, when a Black man resisted a racist assault in front of hostile crowd, on the Fourth of July, it created a set of circumstances that proved not atypical for the time period, but rarely resulted in homicide.[20] These factors combined with racially charged atmosphere of the Fourth of July created the contingent conditions for a lynching.

The reason for the dearth of documented homicidal violence in an 1840s context is complex and open to different interpretations. Historians largely disagree about why so-called 'lynchings' or extreme forms of racially–motivated violence became relatively scarce by the 1840s. Ashraf H.A. Rushdy argues that the term 'lynching' first came into widespread existence during the 1830s, and therefore newspaper editors during the Jacksonian period were obsessed and preoccupied with 'finding lynchings where there were merely other forms of lawlessness'.[21] This linguistic novelty likely skewed quantitative data collected during the 1830s and in all probability waned by the end of the decade. Moreover, whereas Michael J. Pfeiffer concedes the rise of 'immediate abolitionism after 1830' proved a major cause of 'racial violence' during the antebellum period, Leonard Richards argues that abolitionist organizations were 'so hard pressed for money' after the Panic of 1837 that abolitionist activism precipitously declined by the turn of the decade.[22] Richards shows how drastically anti-abolitionist riots declined as anti-

[20] 'Mob at Indianapolis', p. 1.
[21] Ashraf H.A. Rushdy, *American Lynching* (New Haven, 2014), p. 32.
[22] Michael J. Pfeiffer, 'The Northern U.S. and the Genesis of Racial Lynching: The Lynchings of African Americans in the Civil War Era', *The Journal of American History*, 97, No. 3 (2010), p. 623; Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing'*, p. 158.

slavery organization became less coordinated, funded, and active.[23] It should be emphasized, however, that Richards' argument is somewhat unpersuasive, as while abolitionists campaigns and conventions did decrease across the antebellum North during the 1840s, violence clearly persisted.[24] Lastly, Michael Feldberg argues that the widespread implementation and systemization of urban law enforcement 'patrol' agencies towards the end of Jackson's presidency vastly curtailed extreme, racialized violence after 1840.[25] While Feldberg's scholarship has come under both gentle and extreme criticism, such a theory is not outside the realm of possibility.[26] Historians do not wholly reject the idea that this shifting change in antebellum police culture almost certainly acted as a deterrent against the most extreme and brutal forms of mob violence during the 1840s.[27]

Nevertheless, anti-lynching advocates and historians alike have struggled for more than a century to define and quantify what constitutes a racial 'lynching' in a post-bellum context.[28] Such ambiguity makes it exceedingly difficult to establish and borrow a clear term from a subsequent time period, and apply it to the 1840s. Christopher Waldrep argues that 'scholars have ignored the controversies' surrounding traditional and revisionist definitions, in part because agreed-upon definitions remain perennially elusive.[29] Some of these definitions, however, prove instructive when applied to the 1840s. Surveying the field of postbellum

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[23] Richards, *'Gentemen of Property and Standing'*, p. 159.
[24] See introduction.
[25] Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Order in Jacksonian America* (Oxford, 1980), pp. 118-119, cited in Jared Lobdell, 'Reviewed work(s): The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America by Michael Feldberg', *Journal of Social History* 15, No. 1 (1981), p. 150.
[26] Eric H. Monkkonen, 'General and Thematic—Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Order in Jacksonian America*' *Urban History*, 10 (1983), pp. 176-177; Gerald Sorin, 'Feldberg, Michael, 'The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America (Book Review), *The Historian*, 44, No. 3 (1982), pp. 403-404; Clarence Walker, 'Feldberg, The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America (Book Review)', *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 9, No. 1 (1981), pp. 117-119.
[27] *Ibid*.
[28] Christoper Waldrep, 'War of Words: The Controversy Over the Definition of Lynching, 1899-19840, *The Journal of Southern History*, 66, No. 1 (2000), p. 77; Rushdy, *American Lynching*, p. 1793; Jonathan Markovitz, *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory* (Minneapolis, 2004), p. 142. Lisa D. Cook et al, 'Racial Segregation and Southern Lynching', *National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper Series*, No. 23813 (Cambridge, 2017), pp. 9-14; Kathleen Belew, 'Lynching and Power in the United States: Southern, Western, and National Vigilante Violence', *History Compass*, 12, No. 1 (2014), pp. 84-99; Robert W. Thurston, *Lynching: American Mob Murder in Global Perspective* (Miami, Ohio, 2011), p. 1; David Grimsted, 'Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting', *The American Historical Review*, 77, No. 2 (1972), p. 365.
[29] Waldrep, 'War of Words', p. 99.

historians, Michael J. Pfeiffer proposes the most appropriate definition for this study by concluding that 'the phenomenon of lynching' is best understood as an 'informal group killing'.[30] This broad interpretation of lynching closely meets the definition of what happened to freedman John Tucker on 4 July 1845. This connection is apparent in three ways. First, the assault against Tucker occurred entirely outside of Indiana's established legal system. Observed newspaper testimonies corroborated the fact that inebriated whites (of Irish ancestry) left a local tavern on the Fourth of July, and after stalking Tucker, repeated assaults occurred on multiple streets, and across several neighborhoods, for a protracted length of time. Thus, the extra-judicial nature of the racist murder closely fits this widely agreed-upon definition of lynching. Second, hundreds of white Hoosiers participated in the mobbing, either directly or indirectly. While newspapers agree only several assailants physically assaulted Tucker (including one perpetrator who absconded and was never caught or brought to justice), many white witnesses blocked his escape, verbally incited the bloodshed, or watched indifferently as the mob fatally bludgeoned Tucker to death. This 'group' mentality is therefore strikingly similar to the types of violence observed during the postbellum period. In both cases, the mob was comprised of both active and inactive participants. Finally, documentary evidence observed and consulted suggests that Tucker was struck by numerous white assailants. While only one perpetrator served prison time, the reported bruises and wounds of the defendant were consistent with a mob or group attack. Thus, qualitatively, the murder of John Tucker establishes a clear link between antebellum northern violence and the widespread, terroristic anti-Black lynchings commonly associated with the postbellum South.

This targeted assault, however, was markedly different from the widespread mob violence of the Jacksonian period and the documented, multi-ethnic lynchings that occurred in mid-nineteenth century California. These assaults outside Indiana tended to be coordinated and organized 'from above' and usually in advance—that is, by local elites, clergy, and leaders.

[30] Michael J. Pfeifer, 'At the Hands of Parties Unknown? The State of the Field of Lynching Scholarship', *The Journal of American History*, 101, No. 3 (2014), p. 832.

Such preplanning had little qualitative similarities to the apparent randomness and contingent nature of the violent murder of 4 July 1845 in Indiana. Notwithstanding these qualitative differences, Tucker's lynching and the endemic mob violence of the pre and post-Civil War periods share an important commonality: the precariousness of Black freedom across the long nineteenth century. Whether anti-Black violence was pre-planned or not, African Americans living in northern and western states were besieged by mobs and their nominal 'freedom' was always threatened and subject to revocation through violence. While Leonard Richards offers several reasons why the Jacksonian mobs of the 1830s ultimately declined at the turn of the decade, the reality is that, at the local level outside of the slaveholding states, Black northerners were treated, in the words of one memorable character from Martin Delany's antebellum anti-slavery novel, more akin to 'slaves-at-large' than free citizens during both the antebellum and postbellum periods.[31]

Finally, the murder of John Tucker reveals the high degree of contingency causally associated with northern antebellum and Civil War-era lynch mobs. Case studies surveying violence in several northern communities during the war indicate that Irish Americans particularly targeted Blacks who violated their peculiar sense of white northern honor culture.[32] 'Irish American lynchers sought to vindicate Irish immigrant communities that viewed themselves as diminished by nativism', argues Michael J. Pfeiffer, 'and a racial egalitarianism that sought to elevate blacks'.[33] The most famous example of this phenomenon occurred in July 1863 during the infamous New York City draft riots. Historian Andrew Fleche notes that Lincoln's newly issued federal draft policy (which disproportionately relegated poor Irish immigrants into military service), coupled with African Americans ongoing 'demands for freedom and equality', fomented wide-scale murders and lynchings throughout the city during

[31] Richard Maxwell Brown, 'The Archives of Violence', *The American Archivist,* 41, No. 4 (1978), p. 433; the quotation from the novelist's character, Ballard, is taken from Steven Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge and London, 2009), p. 36.
[32] Michael J. Pfeifer, 'The Northern United States and the Genesis of Racial Lynching: The Lynching of African Americans in the Civil War Era', *The Journal of American History*, 97, No. 3, pp. 621-622.
[33] *Ibid,* p. 622.

the five days of rioting.[34] Extralegal hangings and posthumous atrocities were committed against African Americans as means of asserting white supremacy and Irish identity in the face of perceived Black social and economic advancement.[35] In brief, many Irish rioters were so offended by their newly perceived and codified racial equivalence to Black northerners that they targeted the most vulnerable African Americans they could find: unarmed men, the elderly, and the physically handicapped.[36]

Likewise, John Tucker found himself in a similarly hapless situation. The strongest evidence to support the escalation and lethal use of violence against him, however, was his forced decision to stand his ground after being cornered—and escape proved impossible. After the initial assault, he shouted at the mob as a last-ditch effort to save his life—reportedly insisting that he could 'whip' any white man. This prompted those in the crowd to shout, ''Kill the d ----- d nigger, kill him.'.[37] While these assertions were clearly made in self-defense—and while the vast majority of anti-Black assaults observed during the period 1840-1849 ended in violence, but rarely murder—it is undeniable that Wood felt affronted and enraged by Tucker's public pronouncements. Ultimately, he felt duty-bound to avenge his slighted Irish pride, as evidenced by the gratuitous, blunt-force trauma he enacted upon his victim before and after he succumbed to his wounds. This development therefore establishes a clear continuity between pre-Civil War and Civil War-era Irish lynch mobs, demonstrating how Black slights (or perceived slights) to Irish American honor, over a period of decades, provoked some of the most

[34] Andre Fleche, 'Irish and African Americans in the Civil War Era', p. 159, cited in Arthur H. Mitchell (ed.), *Fighting Irish in the American Civil War and the Invasion of Mexico: Essays* (Jefferson, North Carolina, 2017) p. 159.
[35] Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots: Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (Lincoln, 2010), p. 29; Toby Joyce, 'The New York Draft Riots of 1863: An Irish Civil War?', *History Ireland*, 2, No. 2 (2003), p. 24.
[36] *Ibid*, p. 25.
[37] 'Mob in Indiana.', *The Liberator*, 8 August 1845.

intense northern anti-Black violence and brutality of the nineteenth century.[38]

The murder of John Tucker can also be attributed to another contingent factor: the changing politics of northern Black abolitionist resistance during the antebellum period. That many scholars have divided abolitionists into opposing ideological or geographical camps is well documented.[39] These historians, however, unintentionally relegate Black activists and leaders towards non-starring roles in the nineteenth century freedom struggle. New scholarship challenges these histories by emphasizing how the increasing waves of anti-abolitionist violence over many antebellum decades drove African Americans away from Garrisonian 'moral suasion' and into the arms of Black armed resistance.[40] Indeed, this trend towards anti-Black violence—particularly in the borderlands—is well documented in Chapter IV. In Indiana alone, 75 percent (9/12) of observed physical assaults resulted in anti-Black violence during the 1840s, and during at least one of these incidents, numerous African Americans—including Frederick Douglass—reportedly jettisoned their 'Quaker' or 'non-resistance' principles and counter-attacked a pro-slavery mob.[41] Notwithstanding this largely overlooked incident, however, *The Liberator* reported that abolitionists and African Americans continued to

[38] Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck, *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynching* (Urbana and Chicago, 1995); Kidada E. Williams, *I Saw Death Coming: A History of Terror and Survival in the War Against Reconstruction* (New York, 2023); Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, 2019); Christopher Waldrep, *The Many Faces of Judge Lynching: Extra Legal Violence and Punishment in America* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 67-84; Robyn Wiegman, 'The Anatomy of Lynching', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 3, No. 3 (1993), pp. 445-467; Daniel B. Jones et al, 'Political Participation in a Violent Society: The Impact of Lynching on Voter Turnout in the post-Reconstruction South', *Journal of Development Economics*, 129 (2017), pp. 29-46; Michael J. Pfeifer, 'The Origins of Postbellum Lynching: Collective Violence in Reconstruction Louisiana', *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association*, 50, No. 2 (2009), pp. 189-201; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill, 2009).

[39] John R. McGivigan and Stanley Harrold (eds.), *Anti-Slavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville, 1999), pp. 15-17; David W. Blight, 'William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: His Radicalism and His Legacy of Our Time', cited in James Brewer Steward (ed.), *William Lloyd Garrison at Two Hundred: History, Legacy, and Memory* (New Haven and London, 2008), pp. 6-8.

[40] Kellie Carter Jackson, *Force and Freedom: Black Abolitionists and the Politics of Violence* (Philadelphia, 2019), pp. 7-9; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, p. 2; M. Scott Heerman, *The Alchemy of Slavery: Human Bondage and Emancipation in the Illinois Country, 1730-1865* (Philadelphia, 2018), p. 11; Shortell, 'The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism', p. 80.

[41] 'Communications. Letter From George Bradburn', *The Liberator*, 19 October 1843, p. 1.

courageously host conventions and processionals, deliver abolitionist speeches, and publish anti-slavery tracts throughout the state, notwithstanding the very real dangers such activities inevitably provoked.[42] Frederick Douglass' famous '100 conventions' tour in 1843, organized just two years earlier and conducted throughout the Middle West, is a clear example of this changing development. Despite repeated dangers, threats of violence, and mob interruptions, it is estimated that Douglass and his supporters addressed as many as 300,000 northerners about the evils of slavery over the course of the year.[43]

This overlooked Indianapolis episode is historiographically significant for two reasons. First, it advances the recent scholarship of Brent M.S. Kampnew, Manisha Sinha, Kellie Carter Jackson and others on a localized or micro level.[44] Tucker became a martyr in death for the freedom struggle in ways he could never have imagined whilst still alive. Reportedly known for his non-violent temperament before his untimely death, Tucker was driven to violent desperation to save his own life.[45] While he repeatedly tried to run away, resolve the situation, involve local authorities, and as a last resort, defend himself, none of these methods proved successful or capable of staving off the mob's increasingly murderous drive to publicly execute him. His experience, not unlike the experiences of countless Black residents across antebellum northern states as documented by these historians, broadcast the bankruptcy of moral suasion as a viable solution to the constant threat of violent white extremism. His murder signaled two inescapable realizations for Indiana's Black community: first, obtaining weapons and arms proved increasingly necessary and justified for self-preservation; and second, the contingent, ceaseless, and systemic nature of northern anti-abolitionist and anti-Black mob violence in the borderlands.

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[42] See the quantitative data compiled for the state of Indiana in the Introduction.
[43] Norman K. Risjord, *Representative Americans: The Civil War Generation* (New York, 2002), p. 39.
[44] Brent M.S. Kampnew, *Hostile Heartland: Racism, Repression, and Resistance in the Midwest* (Urbana, Chicago, Springfield, 2019), p. 2; Jackson, *Force and Freedom,* p. 9; Sinha , *The Slave's Cause,* p. 2.
[45] Fletcher, *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, p. 164.

Tucker's murder marked a documented continuity of Black violent resistance during the 1840s as observed by these aforementioned historians.[46] Numerous examples identified in antebellum newspapers support this perspective. To name just a few, from New England to the Middle West, African Americans boldly resisted segregation laws on public railways, defended their homes and communities from white mobocratic invaders, engaged in 'street fights' when targeted by prejudicial mobs, and used physical violence to ward of would-be slave catchers.[47] This 'turn' towards violence is clearly proven and evident in the antebellum newspaper reports consulted for this study. Equally important is the cumulative impact of continued, unceasing reporting of these incidents in major abolitionist journals, such as *The Liberator*, which fueled sectional animosities over time and helped establish the growing buildup to disunion. This crucial historiographical point is a major theme of this thesis and one less understood and expounded upon by historians.

Tucker's willingness to stand his ground, confront his enemies directly, and accept martyrdom draws inextricable qualitative parallels to the African American men and women in Cincinnati who defended their homes and communities from white invasive forces during the summer of 1841.[48] This major antebellum urban riot will be further explored in Chapter IV. Just like the Black victims in Cincinnati, Tucker defended himself to his last breath, underscoring, in death, the sacrifice and brutality antebellum African Americans routinely accepted in defending human dignity in a nation teeming with white supremacist, pro-slavery sympathies. The lynching of ordinary northern residents such as John Tucker, while largely overlooked by historians of antebellum Indiana until recently, serves as a clear example of non-passive, Black

[46] Kampnew, *Hostile Heartland*, p. 2; Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, p. 9; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, p. 2.
[47] See *The North Star*, 14 April 1848; *The Liberty Standard*, 1 September 1843; *The Cincinnati Gazette*, 17 and 24 September 1841; *The Liberator*, 29 July 1842.
[48] See Chapter IV.

resistance in the face of endemic white mobocratic violence.[49] It is one of the many self-defense incidents observed in this thesis during the 1840s that can be pointed to that, in retrospect, shows how widespread passivity and inaction against swelling ranks of rioting lynch mobs was not only imprudent and untenable during the antebellum period, but utterly rejected by African Americans.

Part II: Structural Causes of John Tucker's Murder

African American enclaves faced constant raids and ambushes due to changing demographics, thus making life for persons of color extremely precarious in northern free communities during the antebellum period.[50] At the same time, venturing outside of these enclaves proved dangerous, as the targeting of John Tucker illustrates. Safe harbor communities in northern states were ransacked, burned, and fired upon during the antebellum period. Black northerners vulnerability to white violence manifested itself in economic, cultural, and physical ways. Economically, while Black northerners commonly found work in white households during the Jacksonian period, by the end of the 1840s, Irish migrants increasingly displaced Black laborers and service workers. Due to the Great Irish Famine and immigration in general, these Irish migrants soon outnumbered Black people in the state of Indiana and other states to a staggering degree.[51] While precise findings remain discrepant or contested, historians estimate that somewhere between 122 and 195 total persons of color (roughly one percent of the entire urban population), resided in Indianapolis in 1840.[52] Nonetheless, rising economic tensions further increased racial resentments. The Philadelphia riots of 1842 and the Cincinnati riots of 1841, northern cities with similar demographic changes, speak to the numerous atrocities

[49] David Leander Williams, *African Americans in Indianapolis* (Bloomington, 2022), pp. 16-17; also, a memorial was only erected in Indianapolis for John Tucker in 2023.
[50] Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom,* p. 34.
[51] Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States 1790-1860* (Chicago and London, 1961), p. 166.
[52] 'Early Black Settlement by County: Marion County', Indiana Historical Society; M. Teresa Baer, *Indianapolis: A City of Immigrants* (Indianapolis, 2012), p. 21; U.S. Census Bureau, 'Table 29. Indiana – Race and Hispanic Origin: 1800 to 1990', 13 September (2002); Carl O. Rogers, 'Black and White in Indiana', *Indiana Business Review,* 80, No. 2 (2005), Table 2.

committed by white Irish immigrants against Black pedestrians and laborers—making life especially difficult for African Americans in major northern areas. Second, as Steven Hahn argues, a presumption of enslaved status towards Blacks manifested itself everywhere in the antebellum North, but particularly in the city of Indianapolis.[53] Local courthouses, authorities, and even neighborhoods operated under the assumption that Black northerners were not citizens living in freedom, but as referenced earlier, 'slaves-at-large'.[54] This meant that in secluded and ostensibly protected Black neighborhoods, even the most hermetic communities were subjected to kidnappings, assaults, and arson, even if murder remained rare.

Many settlers to Indiana and Illinois hailed from the upper regions of the American South, and accordingly, brought with them their attendant racial and paternalistic attitudes.[55] This influence shaped the pervasive, anti-Black sentiments and discriminatory laws that characterized Indiana, and the other mid-western states, during the decades before the American Civil War. And yet, at the same time, Quaker abolitionists first settled several Indiana communities—especially those permanently relocating from the Upper South.[56] This desire to journey north was in part facilitated by Indiana's lawful prohibition on slavery within its jurisdiction.[57] This anti-slavery impulse, however, coupled with rising southern state decrees urging newly emancipated slaves to vacate their homes 'within thirty days or face enslavement', were compelling motivations for African Americans and their Quaker allies to move West.[58] These migratory patterns led to Black 'pioneers' settling in Indiana and throughout the old

[53] Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*, p. 36.
[54] *Ibid*, p. 36.
[55] Heerman, *The Alchemy of* Slavery, pp. 11-12; Nicole Etcheson, 'First Cousins: The Civil War Impact on Midwestern Identity', cited in (eds.) John K. Lauck et al., *Finding a New Midwestern History* (Lincoln, 2018), p. 39.
[56] Ryan Jordan, 'The Indiana Separation of 1842 and the Limits of Quaker Anti-Slavery', *Quaker History*, 89, No. 1 (2000), pp. 1-27; Cheryl Janifer LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad*, (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield, 2014), p. 57.
[57] The original Indiana Constitution was adopted in 1816; in 1851 it was updated and rewritten, among other reasons, to exclude African Americans from migrating to the Hoosier State, see LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad,* p. 60. 'Full text of the 1816 Constitution', Indiana Archives and Records Administration, p. 1.
[58] LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad,* p. 57.

Northwest.[59]

Nevertheless, life for African Americans in Indiana proved increasingly difficult, given the politics of the state. Prejudicial laws and other anti-Black statutes disenfranchised and discriminated against African Americans during the antebellum period.[60] Indeed, some historians correctly argue that Indiana's discriminatory laws were harsher and more punitive than in any other northern area.[61] These inequitable statutes manifested themselves in myriad ways. African American rights were politically fragile and subject to wholesale revocation.[62] The free black populations were not granted access to public education opportunities or extended franchise rights.[63] Nor were they allowed, during the pre-Civil War era, to bring lawsuits against their neighbors 'to which whites were a party'.[64] This prevented Black Hoosiers from acquiring legal representation, thereby increasing the likelihood of abuse, murder, and kidnapping. Indiana state lawmakers also sought to halt all African Americans migrating to the state. One year after the Compromise of 1850, Indiana residents voted overwhelmingly for a new Constitution that decreed, among other things, 'No negro or mulatto shall come into or settle in the State', with 83 percent of populace voting in support.[65] Despite Indiana's nominal reputation as a citadel of freedom across the violent currents of the Ohio River, Indiana's long history of discriminatory practices, and anti-Black legislative initiatives, were universal across the state.

The public lynching of John Tucker thus contests new revisionists histories that reappraise antebellum vigilance committees (VCs) as inordinately active and impactful. These VCs existed, among other reasons, to aid, support, and defend fugitives and free persons of

[59] Anna-Lisa Cox, *The Bone and Sinew of the Land: America's Forgotten Black Pioneers and the Struggle for Equality* (New York, 2018), pp. 1-6.
[60] LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad,* p. 57.
[61] Richard F. Nation, 'Violence and the Rights of African Americans in Civil War-Era Indiana: The Case of James Hays', *Indiana Magazine of History*, 100, No. 3 (2004), p. 216.
[62] Nation, 'Violence and the Rights of African Americans in Civil War-Era Indiana', pp. 215-216.
[63] 'Being Black in Indiana', Indiana Historical Bureau, p. 1.
[64] Nation, 'Violence and the Rights of African Americans in Civil War-Era Indiana', p. 229; LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad,* p. 58.
[65] Nation, 'Violence and the Rights of African Americans in Civil War-Era Indiana', p. 216; LaRoche, *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad*, p. 60. For full description of the law, see Article I, Section XIII of the originally revised state Constitution (1851).

color living in northern states. The murder of John Tucker in Indianapolis demonstrates the limitations of these organizations in protecting African Americans and their families in the borderlands. Nevertheless, Kelly Ross, Robert Churchill, Eric Foner, and especially Jesse Olsavsky make important and compelling arguments that VCs and their allies greatly aided and abetted Black northerners during the post-Jacksonian period.[66] Olsavsky especially notes how 'their influence upon abolitionism has long been underestimated'.[67] VCs were often in collaboration and communication across vast, disparate networks in order to effectively aid Black fugitives and freed-peoples across multiple states and jurisdictions.[68] These new histories have therefore reshaped an entire field of historical scholarship, casting new light on the effectiveness, responsiveness, and political activities of these organizational networks. Yet, the murder of John Tucker speaks to a climate of uncertainty in the Middle West in how newly emancipated slaves experienced 'freedom' in the borderlands even when under ostensible protection—influenced by the larger number of southerners and southern sympathizers who immigrated north. Thus, Richard S. Newman, Gary L. Collision, and William C. Kashatus make a perennially relevant point when they draw explicit attention to the inevitable logistical and practical challenges VCs and Underground Railroad conductors faced in their operations in attempting to preserve Black sovereignty and freedom during the pre-Civil War era.[69]

Notwithstanding the significant contributions VC networks made to Black freedom in the eastern United States, these networks were far less organized and effective in states like

[66] Jesse Olsavsky, *The Most Absolute Abolition: Runaways, Vigilance Committees, and the Rise of Revolutionary Abolitionism, 1835-1861* (Baton Rouge, 2022), p. 4 & p. 51; Kelly Ross, 'Slavery: African American Vigilance in Slave Narratives of the 1820s and 1830s', pp. 161-165, cited in John D. Kerkering, *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Politics* (Cambridge, 2024); Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence*, pp. 51-139, cited in Olsavsky, p. 64; Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York and London, 2015), pp. 47-74 cited in Olsavsky, p. 51.
[67] Olsavsky, *The Most Absolute Abolition*, p. 5.
[68] *Ibid*.
[69] 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 (2011), p. 413-430; Gary L. Collision, 'The Boston Vigilance Committee', *Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, 12, No. 2 (1984), pp. 104-116; William C. Kashatus, *William Still: The Underground Railroad and the Angel at Philadelphia* (Notre Dame, 2021), p. 51; all aforementioned sources originally cited in Olsavsky p. 4 and p. 51.

Indiana—a point underemphasized by historians and one that had significant ramifications.[70] Persons of color in the borderlands were therefore always vulnerable to contingent and *ad hoc* physical assaults in the western United States. Indeed, as argued throughout this chapter, Tucker did not incite or provoke any of his initial assailants. He did not expressly advocate abolitionist principles, nor attempt to draw undue attention to himself on the Fourth of July. In fact, numerous witnesses testified that Tucker, on several occasions, sought to find safe harbor with the city's local magistrate, and no vigilance committee appeared active or availing. Only when Tucker found himself in mortal danger did he finally engage is self-defense and violent resistance, as all other options and protections were foreclosed to him. This decision ultimately cost him his life—and the brutality of his murder was widely reported in Democratic newspapers. *The State Indiana Sentinel* summarized the extent of Tucker's injuries:

> The principal wounds received by the negro were apparently those on his head. There was a severe one, perhaps the severest, over the right frontal region of the skull, probably made by a club, another on the back of the head; a large gash on the top of the front head a little to the left; a hole on the right cheek below the right corner of the eye, and the jaw bone fractured; a hole cut through the left ear and several smaller wounds.[71]

The apparent randomness of the assault coupled with the structural factors in place (namely, the changing demographics of Indiana throughout the antebellum period), speak to inherent uncertainty affiliated with northern networks of safety and support. Jennifer R. Harbour argues that especially in Indiana and Illinois, 'Midwestern blacks [sic] were dedicated to creating havens for themselves, their extended families, and their enslaved brethen'.[72] In practice, religious organizations such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, were similarly foundational in establishing what Harbour calls the 'physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual core' of midwestern African American communities.[73] These institutions served as major bulwarks against anti-Black lynchings, and may explain why such incidents were relatively rare in Indiana during the

[70] Dean J. Kotlowski, '"The Jordan is a Hard Road to Travel": Hoosier Responses to Fugitive Slave Cases, 1850-1860', *International Social Science Review*, 78, No. 3-4 (2003), p. 75.
[71] 'Affray and Murder', p. 1.
[72] Jennifer R. Harbour, *Organizing Freedom: Black Emancipation Activism in the Civil War Midwest* (Illinois, 2020), p. 7.
[73] *Ibid*, p. 7.

antebellum period. Nevertheless, the lynching of John Tucker adds greater complexity to ongoing historiographical debates surrounding the effectiveness and influence of VCs, as these organizations, particularly in the Middle West, sometimes proved inattentive or entirely absent when African Americans were most threatened.[74]

Continued economic sluggishness in 1839—and Indiana's subsequent declaration of bankruptcy—exacerbated race relations and proved a structural cause of John Tucker's murder. Precipitated by the Panic of 1837, Indiana defaulted on its debt multiple times in the early 1840s, largely due to overspending on internal improvement projects.[75] While this economic 'depression' officially ended in 1843, the ramifications were keenly felt for years afterwards; some historians have suggested that the crisis did not end until 1845.[76] By 1842, however, property taxes in the state rose by an astounding 800 percent over a six-year period while Indiana was constantly in search of funds to repay its creditors until the end of the decade.[77] By 1849, the economic crisis proved so traumatic and long-lasting that Schuyler Colfax, a future vice president during the Reconstruction era, expounded on the necessity of revising the state's charter to reign in wasteful government spending during the state's 1850-1851 constitutional convention. He declared, 'The past history of our State is the best argument in favor of this amendment…as we have suffered more than other States from the results of imprudent debt, which still hangs over us, impairing our prosperity, and impeding our progress and advancement as a State'.[78] Across disparate regions of the United States, as demonstrated in Chapters I-IV, devastating, anti-Black uprisings and riots occurred

[74] *Ibid*, pp. 36-37.
[75] John Joseph Wallis, 'The Depression of 1839 to 1843: States, Debts, and Banks', *HBER Historical Working Papers* (National Bureau of Academic Research), p. 2.
[76] *Ibid*, p. 2; Samantha Gibson, 'The Panic of 1837' (Digital Public Library of America), p. 1.
[77] Wallis, 'The Depression of 1839 to 1843', pp. 35-36.
[78] Quotation cited in James H. Madison and Lee Ann Sandweiss, *Hoosiers and the American Story* (Indianapolis, 2014), p. 77; Thomas D. Hamm, 'Church, State, Courts, and Law in Indiana to 1851, *Indiana Magazine of History*, 111, No. 1 (2015), p. 4.

throughout the early 1840s. Undoubtedly, these changing structural conditions created a situation where anti-Black assaults would prove more likely in an era of prolonged, economic slump.

This multi-year financial crisis exacerbated race relations in Indiana by growing the slave economy across the borderlands. In fact, conditions in Indiana proved so dire that underemployed whites turned to slave catching as a means of economic survival.[79] This domestic industry was lauded in the South for obvious reasons, but rife with controversy in a northern free state. The profession's reputation for violence, illegal kidnappings, shady business dealings, and contempt for personal liberty laws enraged and divided the northern populace. New scholarship shows that Thomas McCreary, perhaps the most infamous southern antebellum slave catcher of his day, hunted fugitives in large part due to financial necessity and chronic indebtedness.[80] Fugitive slave hunting attracted those desperate for quick money and lucrative contracts from both regions, creating perverse incentives for its practitioners. These incentives inexorably lead to anti-Black violence, clandestine kidnappings, slave pen robberies, and money laundering with unverified slave owners.[81] That unemployed Hoosiers were drawn to slave catching over other professions is more likely attributed to the dearth of plentiful jobs available to white workers during this economic crisis than an unequivocal love for and commitment to slavery.

At the same time, as historians have long observed, anti-Black violence was a tool of oppression used to enact social control—and reduce economic competition—between lower class Anglo-Americans and free persons of color. Scholars maintain that Black individuals entering the workforce threatened white middle class prospects, thus leading historians Stewart E. Tolnay and E.M. Beck to conclude that 'economic forces were clearly the most important

[79] Churchill, *The Underground Railroad*, p. 6.
[80] Milt Diggins, *Stealing Freedom Along the Mason-Dixon Line: Thomas McCreary, the Notorious Slave Catcher From Maryland* (Baltimore, 2016), p. 28.
[81] *Ibid*, p. 29-30.

undercurrent' in southern lynchings.[82] This development made Black southerners increasingly vulnerable to southern white reprisals. The targeting of John Tucker, therefore, fits this particular mold of postbellum extralegal violence; it was a means of reasserting white supremacy while simultaneously sending shock waves of fear and terror throughout Indianapolis's Black community.[83] While all evidence suggests that the main perpetrators did not recognize or know John Tucker, his reputation as an 'inoffensive' person was widely reported in newspapers after his death.[84] Abolitionist Calvin Fletcher recorded in his diary that Tucker was 'a very peacible [sic] colored man who…resided here for 15 or 20 years'.[85] Thus, even if the perpetrators viewed Tucker as a stranger, the murder hardly constituted an attack on a single individual; it was meant as a terroristic form of violent control over Indianapolis's entire Black community.

A culture of suspicion in the borderlands as a result of Underground Railroad activities—and the fugitive slave issue—fostered the structural conditions that made the murder of John Tucker possible. The historiographical landscape *vis-à-vis* the Underground Railroad is a long and contentious one, dating back to the early nineteenth century. Only recently, however, have historians begun to more closely scrutinize the inherent violence associated with fugitive slave resistance and reclamations in the region.[86] From seemingly disparate cities such as New York City to Indianapolis, Stanley Harrold argues that the very shape and geography of the borderlands created inevitable conflict between northerners and southerners—a genuine crisis over runaway slaves and repossession of 'property' decades before the American Civil War.[87] This

[82] Tolnay, *A Festival of Violence,* pp. 24-25 and p. 257.
[83] Emma Lou Thornbrough, 'The Negro in Indiana: A Study of a Minority' (Indianapolis, 1957), p. 130.
[84] 'Horrible Outrage'; 'Mob in Indiana'.
[85] Fletcher, *The Diary of Calvin Fletcher*, p. 164.
[86] Churchill, *The Underground* Railroad, p. 3; Stanley Harrold, *Border War: Fighting Over Slavery Before the Civil War* (North Carolina, 2010), pp. 15-16; Richard Blackett, 'The Underground Railroad and the Struggle Against Slavery', *History Workshop Journal*, 78, No. 1 (2014), p. 285.
[87] *Ibid,* pp.15-16.

view utterly rejects 'political party breakdown' as the central cause of the conflict.[88]

Other historians have since bolstered Harrold's claim, producing new histories that focus on disparate (and unexpected) regions of the antebellum North that became besieged by pro-slavery violence.[89] Indeed, stiff resistance to southern encroachments onto free soil territories often prompted violent altercations and reprisals from northerners, fomenting sectionalism and bringing the slavery question to the forefront of national politics. At the same time, reclaimed fugitives—who resisted re-enslavement and the edicts of slave catchers—faced physical abuse, torture, and even death. These developments ultimately sowed the seeds of discord for years to come, providing a crucial link between the decades of borderland antebellum violence and the lynching of John Tucker on 4 July 1845.

Put another way, Tucker's murder is inseparable from—and can be traced back to—the rising tide of violence in Indiana during the antebellum period. Violence in Indiana especially during the period 1840-1845 has a clear and verifiable track record as recorded in partisan newspapers. First, in February 1840, *The Liberator* reported that in Indianapolis, a mob broke into a multiracial household and kidnapped and sexually assaulted a white woman married to a Black man.[90] The perpetrators 'dragged the young woman from her bed in one of the coldest nights of this winter, put her on horseback nearly naked, and rode her about the town, as I was told, for three hours, during which they insulted and abused her'. Several years later, in Lawrenceburg, an 'outrage was committed' against two African American bystanders awaiting passage via steamboat to another part of the state.[91] While the details of their assault remain lost to history, impromptu attacks such as they have a known history during the years preceding John Tucker's murder. Finally, in the fall of 1843 alone, three separate abolitionist meetings

[88] *Ibid*, p. 16.
[89] Churchill, *The Underground Railroad,* p. 7.
[90] 'Indiana', *The Liberator*, 21 February 1840.
[91] 'Outrage', *The Liberator*, 21 July 1843.

and conventions held throughout the state were 'violently dispersed' by 'gangs of rowdies'.[92] While no one was reportedly killed, these types of incidents contributed to a culture of white violent extremism that made John Tucker's murder an unsurprising outcome and likely extension of continued antebellum mob violence in the borderlands during the 1840s.

And yet, a survey of observable Republican, Democratic, and abolitionist newspapers indicates that the murder of John Tucker was broadly condemned in periodicals across the political spectrum. Unlike during the 1842 mob violence on Nantucket, where Democratic newspapers played a seminal role in fomenting anti-abolitionist sentiment and violence leading up to the Athenaeum Convention, no evidence exists that any newspapers incited or condoned the murder of John Tucker in Indianapolis. On the contrary, the sources examined universally expressed outrage at the events that transpired, although they did so for different reasons. The *Democratic Indiana State Sentinel* and the abolitionist *Liberator* condemned the murder of John Tucker in equally strong language. Both expressed indignation at the fact that Tucker was lynched on the Fourth of July. But the similarities end there. *The Indiana State Sentinel* editorialized that the violence was unacceptable not because a person of color was murdered, but because the public lynching violated the spirit of the Fourth of July—'a day', the newspaper wrote, 'which of all others should be consecrated to purposes far different from a display of angry and vindictive passion and brutality'.[93] In other words, it was abominable for the Fourth of July to be marred by public displays of anti-Black violence precisely because it was customary to observe the holiday with reverence and dignity through non-violent public events, parades, and speeches.[94] Racial animosities had no place, especially in urban areas, when celebrating the solemnity of the occasion.

[92] 'Abolition Riots', *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 12 October 1842, p. 2.; 'The Hundred Conventions', *The Liberator*, 20 October 1843; 'Communications. Letter From George Bradburn', p. 1;
[93] 'Affray and Murder'.
[94] Kellison, 'Men, Women, and the Marriage of the Union', p. 129.

By contrast, *The Liberator* criticized the violence for entirely different reasons, emphasizing how white racists murdered 'an unoffending negro, *on the 4th of July*, to gratify the infernal prejudice which is cherished against those whose skin is of a sable hue'.[95] While this critique does draw attention to the anniversary of American independence, by implicitly linking the Fourth of July and the Declaration of Independence together, the abolitionist newspaper lambasted the hypocrisy of American founding principles with the institution of slavery and racial prejudice. This is a crucial distinction. Whereas the observed Democratic newspapers deprecated the violence for its unseemliness and interruption of city-wide celebrations—thus diminishing the spirit of the holiday—abolitionist newspapers excoriated the lynching for what it signified.

The Monoquet Kosciusko Republican, however, denounced the violence for two related, but altogether different, reasons. First, the newspaper lamented the fact that Tucker was slaughtered in front of a crowd of pusillanimous bystanders. 'It must be remembered, the murder was committed upon her side walks [sic], in broad day-light, in sight of a crowd of citizens, and not a friendly hand reached out for succor'.[96] Despite hundreds of spectators, who could have intervened to save Tucker's life, no evidence exists that anyone physically challenged the mob, or meaningfully sought to curtail the violence. Instead, the most common refrain from the crowd was 'kill the damned negro'. For this reason, the newspaper did not justify the mob or mince words in criticizing the entire, bloody spectacle. 'We are bold to say the annals of crime scarcely furnish a more cold-blooded murder', the newspaper wrote, 'these fiendish hounds…panted for the blood of this poor negro'—bringing shame and dishonor to a 'peaceable Capitol'. This type of language speaks to the lynch mob mentality of those assembled, not to mention the communal, voyeuristic nature of the event.

Second, *The Monoquet Kosciusko Republican* expressed outrage at the

[95] 'Horrible Outrage'.
[96] 'The Indianapolis Murder!', *The Monoquet Kosciusko Republican*, 3 September 1845, p. 1.

scandalously lenient sentences handed down by the state's anti-Black legal system. 'The miserable wretches who committed the foul deed have had their trial…', the newspaper complained. 'The one who knocked the negro down with the club, being sent to the Penitentiary for *three* years, instead of the gallows; the other, who beat his head to pieces with a brick-bat, has been discharged!'[97] And yet, that a white perpetrator, Nathaniel Wood, was actually placed on trial for the murder of a Black person, and sentenced to prison for three years, proved a striking anomaly for the time period.[98] Nevertheless, while *The Monoquet Kosciusko Republican* did not receive its preferred statutory outcome, such broad condemnation, across ideologically and politically opposing newspapers, sheds light on the aberrational nature of the trial.

The court system likely pursued legal action against the perpetrators for three reasons. First, the language utilized in various observed newspaper reports suggests that many whites deprecated the murder in large part because it occurred on the Fourth of July. Many whites were incensed over Wood's indiscretion and erratic behavior, even if they felt nothing or cared little about the public lynching of a Black man in the streets of a major northern city. Second, the attack against Tucker was perpetrated in broad daylight. The assailants eschewed anonymity and were widely identified by local witnesses. While mass lynchings associated with the postbellum South were usually furtively conducted, often spontaneously and under cover of darkness, the Indianapolis massacre interrupted all orderly celebrations in the middle of the day and the main participants were easily recognizable. This made an arrest and later prosecution decidedly more likely. Finally, the murder of John Tucker was markedly different from the 'gentlemen of property and standing' mobs of the Jacksonian era.[99] These 1830s mob assaults were often lead and orchestrated by leaders in the community: lawyers and

[97] *Ibid*, p. 1.
[98] Bates, 'How the City of Indianapolis came to have African American Policemen and Firemen 80 Years Before the Modern Civil Rights Movement', pp. 15-16.
[99] Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing'*, p. 5.

businessmen, elected officials, and wealthy elites. Given the fact that Wood was by all accounts a member of the Irish American lower classes—almost certainly a day laborer or unskilled worker—he did not have the political clout, or reputation, to circumvent a public trial. These three factors, then, explain why a white man was sentenced to a three-year prison sentence in 1845 for the murder of John Tucker.

In conclusion, the case proved aberrational, demonstrating that extralegal, anti-Black violence was not always ignored or condoned by local court systems and magistrates in the antebellum borderlands. The rule of law, in some instances, prevailed amidst the bloodshed and culture of violence endemic across the old Northwest, even if the punishment for the perpetrators, in this instance, hardly fit the crime.

Conclusion

Historians cannot determine with any degree of certainty or precision why John Tucker was murdered. Newspaper sources documenting the event are frustratingly biased, fragmentary, and often contradictory. However, a close reading of observable Republican, Democratic, and abolitionist newspapers indicates that the murder of John Tucker was broadly condemned in white periodicals across the political spectrum. In all likelihood, John Tucker was killed due to a combination of the contingent and structural factors mentioned above. His death, however, elucidates the many complex developments at play that made a public lynching possible in an antebellum context in the Middle West. While this particular episode proved the only observable murder within a pattern of persistent assaults, the cumulative impact appears of equal importance. This event established a multi-decade narrative of ongoing anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violent assaults that ultimately shaped future events. The lynching of John Tucker exists not as a solitary tragedy in the antebellum borderlands, but as an important piece of a much larger compendium of violent assaults and murders, reported on and kept relevant by abolitionist activists, which ultimately fed into the crises of the

1850s. In sum, abolitionist newspapers, such as *The Liberator,* were not just chroniclers of historical events, but movers and shakers in rattling the nation's conscience against slavery and discrimination over a multi-decade time frame. By reporting on and ascribing meaning to these continued acts of barbarism and anti-Black terrorism, abolitionists engaged forthrightly in the business of political journalism, using the power of the printing press to push the country one step closer towards civil war.

Chapter IV: 'Mob City of the West': Anti-Black Violence in Cincinnati'

Multiple newspapers referred to the burning of Cincinnati in the late summer of 1841 as 'a reign of terror'.[1] Over a six-day period—instigated after a small 'quarrel' broke out between Irish laborers and African Americans on Broadway and Sixth—the violence only grew increasingly destructive.[2] By Friday, 3 September, a small skirmish between a few individuals metastasized into a full-scale riot—culminating in mass violence, the wide-scale destruction of private property, and a complete breakdown of law and order.[3] Within forty-eight hours, the mob ransacked numerous Black areas, community centers, and businesses, and upended the offices of *The Philanthropist*—a white-owned, abolitionist newspaper—before seizing its printing press and tossing it into the Ohio River.[4] Some historians argue that these riots were 'the most severe urban outbreak against blacks [sic] in pre-Civil War America'.[5] *The Liberator* reported that the violence proved aberrational in three related respects.

Unlike any other case study explored in this thesis, reports of around-the-clock gun violence and cannon fire erupted throughout the city, resulting in a multitude of white and Black casualties. Second, the mob waged vicious assaults upon law enforcement as 'complete anarchy' descended upon the city; numerous police officers were injured in the melee. Finally, abolitionist newspapers boldly asserted that the violence was pre-planned, organized, and carried out by several thousand white agitators from the nearby slave state of Kentucky.[6] This case study illuminates the extent of cross-regional anti-Black violence in the Middle West

[1] 'Meeting of the Colored Citizens of Buffalo', *The Colored American*, 13 November 1841, p. 1; 'Reign of Terror Again in Cincinnati', *The Liberator*, 24 September 1841; William Jay, 'Bedford, N.Y. Oct. 26, 1841', *The Liberator*, 26 November 1841.
[2] 'Tremendous Mob at Cincinnati!', *The Anti-Slavery Standard*, 16 September 1841, p. 1.
[3] Newspaper reports varied considerably regarding the size of the mob, ranging from 'seven or eight hundred' to 'two or three thousand'. See 'Tremendous Mob at Cincinnati!'; 'Dreadful Riot and Loss of Life, *The Experiment* (Norwalk, Ohio), 15 September 1841, p. 3.; 'Awful Riot! Several Lives Lost!', *Cheraw Advertiser* (Charleston, South Carolina), 22 September 1841, p. 3; "Disgraceful Riot,' *The Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, 12, No. 38, 22 September 1841, p. 151; 'Riot at Cincinnati, *The Morning Star* (Limerick, ME), 16, No. 22, 22 September 1841, p. 86.
[4] 'Selections', *The Philanthropist*, 24 September 1841, p. 1.
[5] William and Aimee Cheek, *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom*, 1829-65 (Illinois, 1989), p. 65.
[6] From the Cincinnati Gazette', *The Liberator*, 17 September 1841.

during the 1840s, and complicates the assumed binary nature of slavery and anti-slavery politics in the antebellum borderlands.

This chapter is divided into two sections. Part I focuses on the question of causation and foregrounds rival explanations for the bloodshed in competing anti-slavery and Democratic-leaning newspapers. Part II advances four principal claims that emerge from newspaper reports of violence regarding the institution of slavery in the borderlands. First, the politics of slavery and anti-slavery in the Middle West operated under the assumption that the borderlands were strictly the preserve of Anglo-Americans. Second, anti-Black and anti-slavery impulses were closely aligned in the region. Third, the Cincinnati riots marked a major (if generally overlooked) turning point towards violence among African Americans in pursuit of human dignity and equal citizenship. And finally, the extended rioting across the city draws significant parallels to the sacking of Lawrence, Kansas in 1856, which presaged deepening, irreparable sectional tensions.

Part I: Causation of the Riots

Although historians have disagreed widely about the specific causes of the riots, many argue that its origins were ultimately economic in nature. As Bridget Ford contends, African Americans were deeply drawn to the city's 'flourishing river commerce', which inadvertently threatened white jobs across the Border South.[7] This persistence of economic competition is therefore a major structural theme across multiple case studies. For instance, Julie Mujic argues that 'economic desperation' reined for years in Cincinnati after the Panic of 1837—especially after interest rates spiked and real estate and consumer markets collapsed.[8] Hence the protracted, anti-Black violence was, according to these historians, partially rooted in rising economic concerns compounded by increasingly larger waves of European migration to the antebellum Midwest. In a similar vein, other scholars, including Pujic, note that the anti-

[7] Bridget Ford, *Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland* (Chapel Hill, 2016), p. 94
[8] Julie Mujic, 'A Border Community's Unfulfilled Appeals: The Rise and Fall of the 1840's Anti-Abolitionist Movement in Cincinnati', *Ohio Valley History,* 7, Vol. 2, 2007, pp. 54-55.

abolitionist and anti-Black violence stemmed principally from white Cincinnatians desire to preserve cross-regional commerce at all costs.[9] Given the city's reputation as 'the manufacturing center of the West', these financial ties to the slave South were indispensable to economic growth and prosperity.[10] Historians such as Nikki Taylor, Leonard L. Richards, and John Werner agree with Silas Niobeh Tsaba Crowfoot in that the bloodshed that followed was largely a response to, as Crowfoot put it, the 'wide-spread fear of the loss of southern trade'.[11] This historiographical perspective is well established in the secondary literature, providing a key insight into why anti-abolitionist violence erupted with such vehemence during the summer of 1841.[12]

Given Cincinnati's unique location in the western borderlands, the city proved a veritable melting pot of abolitionist thought leaders, fugitive slaves, and Underground Railroad conductors.[13] In addition to the employment issue, Crowfoot and numerous other historians argue that the mob grew increasingly murderous after learning that slaves were routinely disappearing from their masters.[14] Meanwhile, rumors that a contingent of runaway slaves, after finding safe harbor in the city, awaited an impending mass exodus to Canada only further fanned flames of white discontentment.[15] These well-coordinated escape routes from the Middle West and upper borderlands proved a major source of conflict not only between abolitionists

[9] Bridget Ford, 'American Heartland: The Sentimentalization of Religion and Race Relations in Cincinnati and Louisville, 1820-1860' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of California, Davis, 2002), p. 44; Haley Amanda Knuth, 'Who Controls the Narrative? Newspapers and Cincinnati's Anti-Black Riots of 1829, 1836, and 1841' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Miami University, 2022), p. 4; Silas Niobeh Tsaba Crowfoot, 'Community Development For a White City: Race Making, Improvementism, and the Cincinnati Race Riots and Anti-Abolition Riots of 1829, 1836, and 1841' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Portland State University, 2010), p. 23; Pujic, 'A Border Community's Unfulfilled Appeals', p. 52.

[10] Clinton Ward Terry. '"The Most Commercial of People": Cincinnati, the Civil War, and the Rise of Industrial Capitalism, 1861–1865' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cincinnati, 2002), p. 20.

[11] These historians' perspectives are summarized in Crowfoot, 'Community Development For a White City', p. 23

[12] *Ibid*, p. 23.

[13] Henry Louis Taylor and Vicky Dula, 'The Black Residential Experience and Community Formation in Antebellum Cincinnati', cited in Henry Louis Taylor, *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1870*, (1993), pp. 96-125; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York, 2010), pp. 4-7.

[14] For instance, see Patrick Allen Folk, '"The Queen City of Mobs": Riots and Community Reactions in Cincinnati, 1788-1848' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Toledo, 1978), p. 207; John M. Werner, *Reaping the Bloody Harvest: Race Riots in the United States during the Age of Jackson 1824-1849* (New York and London, 1986), pp. 74-75 and Richards, *'Gentlemen of Property and Standing'*, p. 124, all cited in Crowfoot, 'Community Development for a White City', p. 23.

[15] Crowfoot, 'Community Development for a White City', p. 23.

and anti-abolitionists during the antebellum period, but free and slave states as well.[16] Undoubtedly, threats to southern 'property' provide a key insight into why northern partisan newspapers howled that the rioters hailed and invaded from the slave state of Kentucky.

Lastly, some experts in the field argue that Black mobility, environmental problems, incendiary abolitionist newspapermen, and the *State vs. Farr* ruling, which established immediate emancipation for slaves entering the state of Ohio, proved major sources of white hostility and mass anger in the days and months preceding the violence. These frustrations in turn were channeled and directed at the city's free Black population.[17] Racial tensions therefore only continued to fester during the summer of 1841. For instance, Haley Amanda Knuth argues that Democratic-leaning newspapers lobbied heavily for more stringent Black Code compliance, especially as the tide of Black job seekers increased as the economy stagnated.[18] This growing sense of fleeting economic opportunities, an uptick in labor competition, a perceived increase in abolitionist activism, and threats to borderland business ventures set the stage for a massive anti-abolitionist and anti-Black riot during the summer of 1841.

Cincinnati's border location on the northern edges of the slave South forced many newly arrived residents to wrestle with a moral dilemma: pursue economic advancement at the expense of those in bondage, or follow strict anti-slavery principles. Julie Pujic perceptively notes how many newly arrived whites from abolitionist strongholds like New England felt conflicted between making money and following the dictates of their conscience. 'White citizens who moved to Cincinnati with anti-slavery beliefs', she argues', 'often had to choose between maintaining their ideological stance and increasing their economic livelihood'.[19] Unsurprisingly, many chose to take advantage of the economic and commercial benefits of southern

[16] Manisha Sinha, 'Architects of Their Own Liberation: African Americans, Emancipation, and the Civil War', *OAH Magazine of History*, 27, Issue 2 (2013), p. 5.
[17] Henry Louis Taylor, *Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1870*, (1993), pp. 44; Stephen Ellingson, 'Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action: Public Debate and Rioting in Antebellum Cincinnati', *American Journal of Sociology*, 101, No. 1 (1995), p. 114 and p. 134; Nikki M. Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati's Black Community 1802-1868* (Athens, Ohio, 2005), p. 118; Stanley Howard Zankel, 'Anti-Negro Sentiment in Cincinnati, 1829-1841' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1971), pp. 61-62.
[18] Knuth, 'Who Controls the Narrative?', pp. 4-5.
[19] Pujic, 'A Border Community's Unfulfilled Appeals', p. 54.

commerce—and those who did were perversely incentivized to view increased abolitionist activists and new Black job seekers entering the city as existential threats to their economic livelihoods. On the other hand, as a major hub of the Underground Railroad, Cincinnati's unique geographical location across the Ohio River served as an important—and symbolic—fulcrum for fugitive slaves seeking freedom to Canada. Thus, Cincinnati's divided position as both a major receiver of slavery produced goods, and the epicenter of Underground Railroad activities in the Border West, engendered racial tensions that in some ways proved unlike anywhere else in the antebellum United States.

As a result, historians should revisit and reconsider singular explanations and recognize that the burning of Cincinnati in 1841 was a 'perfect storm' event where a host of tensions—including financial panic, cooling markets, controversial Supreme Court decisions, and increased slavery agitation—came together to produce something truly extenuating and aberrational in terms of scale and duration. These points notwithstanding, applying new methods to these events can yield surprising and important insights into the politics of slavery and anti-slavery in the antebellum borderlands. In the following section, an investigation into partisan newspaper reporting will demonstrate not only the limitations of trying to identify 'singular' or 'overarching' causes of the violence, but underline the persistence of violence during the early 1840s, and how northern and southern newspaper engaged in rank partisanship in order to advance their respective political agendas.

Northern newspapers were ideologically divided in apportioning blame for the bloodshed, making it exceedingly difficult to identify the perpetrators actually responsible for the violence. On the other hand, Democratic-leaning newspapers blamed abolitionists in the area as the underlying cause of the rioting, due to their perceived and outsized influence over the politics of slavery in the region. In analyzing the Cincinnati riot of 1836 (when the offices of *The Philanthropist* were first stormed by an all-white mob), Stephen Ellingson underscored the

intellectual and financial freedom that the abolitionist editor, James G. Birney, long exercised.[20] Birney, an influential figure in the movement and who was born to slaveholders in Kentucky in 1792, gradually renounced his old pro-slavery views and became a leading voice in the freedom struggle—most famously rescinding public and financial support for the American Colonization Society.[21] Despite continued threats and break-ins, Birney continued to publish his newspaper in a hostile, deeply pro-slavery city. Due to the diverse means by which the newspaper earned its funding, Ellingson argues that Birney was utterly immune from political influence or financial pressures from the city's pro-slavery business community.[22] His silence could not be purchased, and given the cultural practice of 'sharing newspapers' among the city's local population, Birney's abolitionist sympathies were well known and widely disseminated to the public.[23]

Democratic newspapers insisted that *The Philanthropist* deserved to be violently robbed in 1841. *The Cincinnati Gazette* breathlessly proclaimed that '*abolitionists* and *negroes* had revolted against the laws of our common county, and your city—that they were committing depredations and murder, destroying life and property….and the city authorities had called on the citizens of *Kentucky* for aid'.[24] As we shall see, this saved-by-slaveholders contention is precisely the opposite of what anti-slavery newspapers would contend. Meanwhile, as *The Cincinnati Enquirer* thundered the day after the riots ended, 'The origin of the evil is not in the mob. Those who throw firebrands into society, must not complain when a conflagration takes place'.[25] This editorial was a transparent attempt to exonerate southern and northern white rioters of any wrongdoing—and to unfairly cast blame exclusively on radical abolitionists themselves, especially James G. Birney. Birney, who was repeatedly threatened with mob violence for years if he did not cease publication of his abolitionist newspaper, emerged as a

[20] Ellingson, 'Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action', p. 114.
[21] Ronald K. Huch, 'James Gillespie Birney and the New England Friends', *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 67, No. 4 (1969), pp. 350-353.
[22] Ellingson, 'Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action', p. 114.
[23] Ellingson, 'Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action', p. 114.
[24]'Selections From the Cincinnati Philanthropist, The Riot', *The Liberator*, 1 October 1841.
[25] 'Messrs. Brough', *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 7 September 1841, p. 2

major target of the all-white rioters.[26] The message of *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, however, remained unambiguous: The violence against *The Philanthropist* during the Cincinnati riots was self-inflicted—a direct, unavoidable consequence of slavery agitation. Indeed, a separate editorial from *The Cincinnati Enquirer* argued that white citizens 'excited no mob'—articulating, instead, that 'Abolitionist business' was the chief culprit.[27] At the same time, southern newspapers attempted to exclusively blame African Americans for these events. For instance, the burning of a Black church in Maysville, Kentucky several months later, reasoned one South Carolina newspaper, 'probably' occurred because 'outrages were previously committed by free blacks at Cincinnati, by which some white persons were killed'.[28] Democratic and southern newspapers therefore engaged in victim blaming during and after the riots to disseminate a clear and not-so-subtle message to its large readership: abolitionists and Black people were unwelcome in Middle West cities, and continued agitation would inevitably result in further violence against them.

By stark contrast, most northern and anti-slavery newspapers blamed anti-abolitionists in Ohio for engaging in the cross-regional recruitment of southern whites to foment violence and ultimately the destruction of the city. While these newspapers presented incomplete information, it is noteworthy that they achieved broad consensus in that they publicly proclaimed that the main participants hailed from Kentucky. *The Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter* testified that 'Kentuckian slave-holders have obviously been at the bottom of this affair', whereas *The Morning Star* (Limerick, Maine) agreed that the rioters were 'headed by slaveholders from Kentucky'.[29] *The Experiment* (Norwalk, Ohio) and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* were equally direct as well. They reported, respectively, that 'The leaders were from

[26] Ellingson, 'Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action', p. 118.
[27] 'The Late Riots', *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, 9 September 1841, p. 2.
[28] 'A Most Wanton Outrage', *Farmers' Gazette and Cheraw Advertiser*, 6 October 1841, p. 2.
[29] 'We have inserted in another column, from the Cincinnati Gazette, a detailed account of the lawless and ferocious outrage which has just been enacted there against the abolitionists and the people of color', *Anti-Slavery Monthly Reporter*, 6 October 1841, p. 211; 'Riot at Cincinnati', p. 86.

Kentucky' and that the riots were 'led on by persons' from that state.[30] This consensus, among northern newspapers, is hard to ignore, which is perhaps why *The Ohio Observer* concluded the following after the rioters dispersed: 'Cincinnati is, beyond any competitor, entitled to the appellation of *Mob City*'.[31] These excerpts demonstrate how transparently eager northern newspapers were to score political points against their enemies in the slave South.

Specifically, the northern abolitionist press blamed 'southern outsiders' recruited by Ohio anti-abolitionists in order to redirect culpability for the violence against radical abolitionists, and towards pro-slavery participants. Cincinnati, described by numerous historians as 'a Southern city on free soil', was a land rife with danger for Black northerners and fugitive slaves alike.[32] Williams Wells Brown, for example, during his protracted journey from slavery to freedom, famously declared that he 'could not travel, even in the state of Ohio, during the day, without danger of being arrested'.[33] This violence proved a perfect opportunity, then, in demonstrating how northerners felt slavery, in the words of one historian, 'corroded everything it touched'.[34] Thus, the agenda of these newspapers is evident and unmistakable: pro-slavery outsiders from Kentucky, *not* abolitionists, were responsible for the mob violence and rowdyism. In the final analysis these declarations served two subtle strategic purposes. First, they undermined the widespread notion common at the time that abolitionist agitation directly invited mobocratic uprisings. This argument indirectly absolved the opponents of slavery of any wrongdoing. Second, these partisan editorialists implied that increased sectionalism, and rising tensions, in the 1840s were directly attributable to southern provocateurs.

Despite continued partisan abolitionist newspaper reporting on the burning of Cincinnati, the sectional lines across the borderlands proved considerably more blurry and murky than the abolitionist press would have its readers believe. In fact, in the Middle Border

[30] 'Dreadful Riot and Loss of Life.', *The Experiment* (Norwalk, Ohio), 15 September 1841, p. 3; 'Tremendous Mob at Cincinnati!', p. 1.
[31] 'Another Mob in Cincinnati', *The Ohio Observer*, 20 January 1842, p. 11.
[32] Albert Bushnell Hart, *Salmon Portland Chase* (1889), p. 14; Thomas L. Hogan, 'The Rise of the Anti-Slavery Movement in Cincinnati (Chicago, 1957), p. 20.
[33] William Wells Brown, *Narrative of William W. Brown, a fugitive, written by himself* (Boston, 1848), p. 94.
[34] Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Boston, 1990), p. 371

states, white northerners and southerners often shared a violent aversion to radical abolitionism—particularly in the city of Cincinnati. While slavery in Ohio had been officially banned in 1803, Black conditions of 'unfreedom' abounded everywhere in the state. For instance, during the pre-Jacksonian period, indentured servants in Middle Western states were commonly held in states of servitude.[35] Adding more complexity, due to the convoluted issuance of 'gradual emancipation' laws throughout the antebellum period, M. Scott Heerman argues that 'the boundaries between slavery and freedom' were often 'blurred' beyond recognition in the state of Ohio.[36] These conditions reflected two factors: lack of clarity in state statutes, and Ohio lawmakers'—and residents'—inclination towards white supremacy and anti-Black racism. This continued violence in the borderlands, then, became an antebellum flashpoint, as anti-slavery newspapers sought to convince its readers that the scourge of anti-Black violence continued across Ohio for one overarching reason: southern outsiders continually meddled in state politics long after slavery was officially prohibited under state law. The truth of the matter, however, is far more complex. The violence at least partially stemmed from Ohio's long history of white supremacy, anti-Black prejudices, resistance to Black migration, and the absence of clear lines of demarcation between 'freedom' and 'unfreedom' within the state.

To that end, while contemporaries and historians alike have sought to explain principle causes for the riots, such reasoning overlooks the fact that the riots were clearly a mix of contingent and structural factors. Rather than view these developments as stand-alone affairs, wholly independent from each other, these events are deeply interconnected and inseparable. For example, the environmental and economic factors proved inextricably linked, as unforeseen summer heat waves and droughts impacted day-to-day commerce and employment on the Ohio River—contributing significantly to anti-abolitionist and anti-Black attitudes within the city in

[35] Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (Oxford, 2016), p. 32.
[36] M. Scott Heerman, 'In a State of Slavery: Black Servitude in Illinois, 1800-1830', *Early American Studies*, 14, No. 1 (2016), pp. 117-118.

the preceding months before the riots began.[37] Depressed water levels correspondingly produced higher river unemployment rates in the Ohio River Valley—which in turn provoked civil unrest and stoked racial tensions. Whether white abolitionist newspaper editors, Black public gatherings, or new legislation principally triggered rising anti-Black feelings, it is irrefutable that biracial fears grew more pronounced as economic uncertainty intensified. Thus, when the so-called 'quarrel' between white and Black residents broke out in the borderlands in the summer of 1841, a confluence of interrelated factors already existed, setting the stage for a 'powder keg' moment. This spark ultimately upended the city, resulting in extensive urban rioting, racial violence, and the suspension of law and order.

Part II: The Nature of Anti-Black Violence in the Antebellum Borderlands

The Cincinnati riots of 1841 marked a major flash point in the history of antebellum violence. Unique among observed riots during the period 1840-1849, no other event proved so anomalous in regards to the coordinated and cross-regional nature of the bloodshed, and the high number of southerners who partook in the city's destruction.[38]

The politics of slavery and anti-slavery in the Middle West operated under the assumption that the borderlands were strictly the preserve of Anglo-Americans. This meant that the lines between slave and free states remained perennially blurred. This observation is well established in the historiography of the western borderlands.[39] Historians Matthew Stanley and Edward L. Ayers best articulate this consensus. Whereas Stanley argues that Middle Western 'conservative Unionists' eventually '*endured* rather than embraced *emancipation*' during and

[37] Werner, *Reaping the Bloody* Harvest, p. 75.
[38] Of the 98 observed 'physical assaults' recorded in this thesis, this is the only border-crossing incident of its kind in terms of the number of participants. See Introduction.
[39] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, p. 2; Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward*, p. 27; Kabria Baumgartner, 'Building the Future: White Women, Black Education, and Civic Inclusion in Antebellum Ohio', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 37, No. 1 (2017), pp. 117-18; Jason E. Pierce, *Making the White Man's West: Whiteness and the Creation of the American West* (Colorado, 2016), pp. 123-124; Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge and London, 2003), p. 57; Marilyn Baily, 'From Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada: A Note on Antebellum Colonization', *Journal of Negro History*, 58, No. 4 (1973), p. 427; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 4.

after the American Civil War, given the region's long history of 'negrophobia', Ayers concludes that most western residents 'could not imagine an America where enslaved people became free'.[40] This predilection towards anti-Black prejudice and exclusion in the borderlands provides much-needed historical context for the violence observed in 1841. At the same time, these keen observations explicate why legislators across the North-South divide often worked closely together in shaping anti-Black policies, and passed mutually beneficial, cross-regional laws to disincentivize fugitives from entering the North or 'betraying' their masters in the South.[41] All in all, shaped by border state governments, Middle Western territories proved deeply inhospitable and unwelcoming to freed-persons and fugitive slaves alike.

While newspaper reporting proves highly partisan in the aftermath of the rioting, it is notable that both abolitionist and Democratic newspapers acknowledged the multitudes of Kentuckians who entered the state and became involved in the bloodshed irrespective of the newspaper's political leanings.[42] What makes this incident so significant is the ease with which these southerners could muster in large numbers, traverse the Mason-Dixon Line, and foment the complete breakdown of law and order in a mid-western city.[43] This finding deeply complements the extant scholarship of the antebellum borderlands, and demonstrates above all the amorphous and non-delineated 'sectional' lines that allegedly divided the slave and free states. Indeed, that such 'invasions' could happen at such short notice (although these sectional tensions had been brewing for some time), underscores the cogency of Stanley and Ayers' observations. Moreover, this finding further advances the scholarship of Eric Foner, who argues that the 'Ohio [River] did not mark a hard and fast dividing line between North and South,

[40] Matthew E. Stanley, *The Loyal West: Civil War and Reunion in Middle America* (Illinois, 2016), p. 4; Edward L. Ayers, *The Presence of Mine Enemies: War in the Heart of America, 1859-1863* (New York and London, 2003), pp. 7-9.
[41] Baily, 'From Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada', pp. 427-440.
[42] For abolitionist coverage of the riots see the 24 September, 1 October , and 12 November 1841 issues of *The Liberator*; for Democratic coverage, see, for instance, 'Riots: More Outrage Against the Negroes', *The Rutland Herald* (Vermont), 12 October, 1841, p. 2.
[43] 'From The Clermont Courier', *The Liberator*, 22 October, 1841, p. 1.

slavery and freedom'.[44] These lines of division were similarly neither marked by regional state boundaries nor gerrymandering, either. In truth, this perception of strict political 'borders' in the antebellum Middle West is entirely belied by the Cincinnati Riots of 1841.

Anti-Black and anti-slavery impulses were closely aligned in the antebellum borderlands. While this seemingly counter-intuitive conclusion requires some unpacking, historians have long noted how the western borderlands rejected monolithic political coalitions. In fact, scholars maintain that conservatives in the West, while 'anti-slavery' in outlook, were 'bitterly divided' over various political issues.[45] They warn against imposing 'binary' political definitions on individuals, reflecting what Adam I.P. Smith describes as a 'nuanced and shifting politics'.[46] State statues also reflected this complexity in the antebellum Middle West. While the Ohio state legislature prohibited slavery absolutely in 1803, and the *State vs. Farr* decision (1841) later decreed that slaves entering the state in custody of a slaveholder were to be summarily manumitted, equal measures were pursued after immediate statehood to maintain white supremacy, discourage Black immigration, and bar universal political participation.[47] As Ellen Eslinger argues, the state's 1804 and 1807 Black Laws, respectively, were exceedingly hostile to Black migrants, requiring non-whites to possess 'a certificate of freedom' upon entry and barring African Americans 'from giving court testimony in cases involving whites'.[48] At the

[44] Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 5.
[45] James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York and London, 2013), p. xx.
[46] Adam I. P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846-1865* (Chapel Hill, 2017), p. 19.
[47] Hyun Hur, 'Radical Antislavery and Personal Liberty Laws In Antebellum Ohio, 1803-1857' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012), p. 144; Patricia Hagler Minter, '"The State of Slavery": *Somerset, The Slave, Grace*, and the Rise of Pro-Slavery and Anti-Slavery Constitutionalism in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World', *Slavery & Abolition*, 36, Issue 4 (2015), pp. 603-617; John Craig Hammond, '"The Most Free of the Free States"': Politics, Slavery, Race, and Regional Identity in Early Ohio, 1790–1820', *Ohio History* 121 (2014), p. 57; Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana and Chicago, 1967), pp. 4-5; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, p. 56.
[48] Ellen Eslinger, 'The Evolution of Racial Politics in Early Ohio', cited in Andrew R. L. Clayton and Stuard D. Hobbs, *The Center of a Great Empire: The Ohio Country in the Early American Republic* (Athens, Georgia, 2005), pp. 86-87.

same time, employers caught hiring African Americans without the requisite documentation faced onerous financial penalties.[49] These clashing legislative enactments, thunderously cheered by southerners yet deeply disruptive to establishing equal rights in the state, created all kinds of loopholes for southern slaveholders to recognize and exploit.[50] Indeed, southern businessmen developed ingenious methods for circumventing the state's prohibition on slavery—including unlawfully extending domestic servant contracts, enslaving workers for shorter periods of time, and returning bonded day laborers to the slave South after nightfall so as to avoid detection.[51] Thus this complex, amorphous political landscape—mixed with an ambivalent, free-slave labor economy—created a longstanding precedent where slaveholders often traversed the border to challenge and exploit northern state laws and customs.

Nevertheless, a deluge of partisan newspaper reports inveighed against the alleged incompetence and ineffectiveness of Cincinnati's police force during the rioting. As the representatives of law and order, security patrols were ostensibly summoned to protect its residents, and enforce the rule of law after the rioting began. Recognizing this dereliction of duty, partisan newspapers accused police officers and military personnel of completely abdicating their core duties and responsibilities. 'It is now well understood by abolitionists in *Cincinnati*, that they can expect no protection from the police of the city', wrote *The Cincinnati Philanthropist*. 'There is absolutely no protection for them'.[52] *The Colored American* similarly noted how African Americans received scant police assistance as they were repeatedly subjected to 'gross assaults from a lawless mob'.[53] What's more, *The Clermont Courier* derided the military as 'inefficient and useless', lamenting how these security personnel proved 'too indulgent towards violence and crime' during the riots.[54] *The Philanthropist*, meanwhile, directed its wrath at specific city leaders and elected representatives. 'The Mayor and police are

[49] *Ibid*, p. 86.
[50] Baily, 'From Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada', p. 427.
[51] Hammond, '"The Most Free of the States"', p. 56.
[52] 'From the *Cincinnati Philanthropist'*, p. 1.
[53] 'Meeting of the Colored Citizens of Buffalo', p. 1.
[54] 'From the Clermont Courier', p. 1.

chargeable with neglecting to provide for the peace of the city', the paper editorialized, 'imbecility has marked their movements'.[55] Worse, a separate editorial by the same newspaper claimed that 'Mayor, police, sheriff, military' abandoned their obligations as 'the mischief was in progress' and watched approvingly 'until the *mob* had accomplished a large part of their business'.[56] In sum, northern newspapers essentially reached the same conclusion: law enforcement either proved incapable or unwilling to quell the violence. Multiple *Liberator* editorials, as already alluded to, labeled the multi-day rioting as a 'reign of terror' and designated Cincinnati as the 'mob city of the West'—exacerbated in large part by the absence of law and order and a responsive police force.[57] That said, the Democratic *Boston Post* argued that 'a stop was at last put to their riotous proceedings by the police'—clear evidence that this perspective was not shared universally by all northern newspapers.[58] And yet, as *The Vermont Telegraph* opined, 'we view with deep indignation, the conduct of the Mayor and city authorities and military companies, in permitting the grossest assaults on the colored people' of Cincinnati.[59]

Notwithstanding these partisan charges, and the fact that law enforcement maintained that '*abolitionists* and *negroes* had revolted against the laws of our common country', anti-slavery newspaper reports of violence illustrate the complexity of 'anti-slavery' politics in the antebellum borderlands. After all, state officials, whether elected or unelected, and irrespective of their political allegiances, operated under a state constitution that decreed 'slavery' and 'involuntary servitude' universally outlawed under its jurisdictions. Beyond the fact that fomenting civil unrest was unlawful, government officials surely looked upon a massive mob of pro-slavery and slaveholding southerners entering the city—and rioting with reckless abandon—as a violation of state sovereignty. This did not prove to be the case. Northern newspapers argued that the city's Whig mayor, Samuel Watts Davies (and law enforcement

[55] 'From the Philanthropist: *Reign of Terror* Again in *Cincinnati*', *The Liberator,* 24 September 1841, p. 1.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] See the 24 September, 8 October, and 26 November 1841 issues of *The Liberator*.
[58] Excerpt from *The Boston Post*, cited in 'Cincinnati Riots', *The Republican Herald,* 15 September 1841, p. 2.
[59] 'The Philanthropist', *The Vermont Telegraph*, 13 October 1841, pp. 2-3.

leaders more generally) viewed abolitionists and Black residents not as victims, but as the chief instigators of the violence—and hence moved forward with little sense of urgency or concern in responding to the civil unrest.[60] This perennial tension of 'anti-slavery' political outlook mixed with white supremacist values proved all too common in the Middle West. Indeed, in spite of Davies' long affiliation as an 'anti-slavery' Whig, his actions appear driven entirely by the retrograde (if prevailing) anti-Black racism of the time period.[61] This small example, therefore, elucidates how major urban leaders, and government officials, oftentimes harbored 'anti-slavery' and 'anti-Black' impulses simultaneously. This point further supports the historiographical insight of historian Adam I.P. Smith and others in declaring that 'binary' ideologies or political parties did not exist in any meaningful sense in the antebellum borderlands.[62]

The Cincinnati riots marked a major turning point towards violence amongst African Americans in their quest for acceptance and equal citizenship. Nevertheless, historians continue to disagree over the extent to which specialists have sufficiently acknowledged this antebellum paradigm shift. For example, Kellie Carter Jackson argues that historians have 'given little attention' to this 'shift towards violence' in northern antebellum Black communities.[63] Ella Forbes notes how 'European scholars' have unfairly derided antebellum African Americans as 'passive, docile, and accommodating'.[64] This critique, however, overlooks numerous works of historical scholarship. Many historians recognize the violent methods African Americans employed in pursuit of social justice during the antebellum period.[65] Jane H. Peace and William

[60] See, for instance, 'From the Philanthropist: *Reign of Terror* Again in *Cincinnati*', p. 1; Harry R. Stevens, 'Samuel Watts Davies and the Industrial Revolution in Cincinnati', *The Ohio Historical Quarterly*, 70, No. 2 (1961), p. 131.
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] Smith, *The Stormy Present,* p. 19.
[63] Kellie Carter Jackson, 'The Story of Violence in America', *Daedalus*, 151, No.1 (2022), p. 12.
[64] Ella Forbes, 'African American Resistance to Colonization', *Journal of Black Studies*, 21, No. 2 (1990), p. 210.
[65] See, for instance, Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, 'Black Power—The Debate in 1840', cited in (ed.) Patrick Rael, *African American Activism Before the Civil War: The Freedom Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York and London, 2008), p. 56; Gayle T. Tate, 'Free Black Resistance in the Antebellum Era, 1830 to 1860', *Journal of Black Studies*, 28, No. 6 (1998), p. 764.

H. Peace contend that by the 1840s, Henry Garland and others were publicly inciting violence across the North, whereas John Stauffer maintains that radical methods of violence proved so contentious and schismatic that the rejection of non-violent principles divided key movement leaders.[66] More specifically, Brent M.S. Campney argues that Blacks 'fought back vigorously' during the Cincinnati violence.[67] This contretemps notwithstanding, Cincinnati's explosive 'reign of terror' in 1841 is clear and unmistakable evidence of a violent flashpoint in antebellum race relations—a momentous event underemphasized by some historians.[68] Nikki Marie Taylor is a rare exception who contends otherwise, arguing that 1841 marked 'a watershed movement for this community' in its shift towards radical violent resistance.[69]

African Americans, in large numbers, were ready and willing to die or be arrested in protection of their families, neighbors, and community during these bloody events.[70] They resorted to methods of self-defense, resisted arrest, and challenged police brutality, as numerous partisan newspapers across the ideological divide noted. Many reported on these acts of heroism and resistance. *The Sunbury American and Shamoking Journal* (PA) recounted that 'a great number of blacks were assembled together, and fired from their houses upon some of the whites'.[71] During the melee, several perished defending their properties, homes, and families. The newspaper similarly contended that 'a number' of African Americans were 'killed and wounded', as white instigators fired at them with 'cannon' and 'other arms'. Similarly, *The Liberator* argued that 'several of the adjoining houses' attacked during the riots 'were occupied by negro families'—and when 'the violence increased' numerous individuals 'resisted' after 'guns and pistols' were reportedly 'discharged' from their protective coverings. This resulted in casualties 'on each side'.[72] Even *The New York Tribune*, which engaged in deeply biased victim

[66] Peace, 'Black Power', p. 54; John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (London, 2002), pp. 9-19.
[67] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, p. 20.
[68] Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, p. 9 and p. 126.
[69] Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, p. 9 and p. 126.
[70] Campney, *Hostile Heartland*, p. 20; Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom*, pp. 125-126.
[71] *The Sunbury American and Shamokin Journal*, 18 September 1841, p. 2.
[72] 'Riot at Cincinnati!' *The Liberator*, 17 September 1841, p. 2.

blaming—after all, the newspaper suggested that the murder of a 'German' two weeks earlier by 'two' African Americans precipitated and justified these white reprisals in Cincinnati—acknowledged that 'the negroes were apprised of their danger, and armed for self-defense'.[73] *The Tribune* conceded that 'the women and children were sent away for safety', and the men stood their ground and defended their homes and property. Most interestingly, in a concerned letter to the editor of *The New Era*, an anonymous writer unintentionally acknowledged the effectiveness of Black resistance fighters, imploring readers to consider the ramifications of Black coordination to organized white mobocracy. 'The negroes were the victors!', the writer declared. 'What will be the result of this? The negro victorious! Think of that!'.[74] All in all, a close reading of these sources indicates that, irrespective of political or ideological inclinations, many antebellum newspapers acknowledged the selfless heroism and efficacy of armed Black resistance.

While newspaper reports of the event were transparently speculative and contradictory (as some African Americans were reportedly *willingly* arrested for their own protection), many of these newspaper reached consensus by acknowledging the valor and fearlessness African Americans demonstrated throughout the rioting.[75] This incident thus marks a major flashpoint in antebellum Black history and strengths the argument that African Americans were, first and foremost, the architects of their own freedom. Hence, through violent resistance, in the words of Manisha Sinha, these anonymous actors 'accelerated sectional tensions between North and South' and in the process helped advance the cause of equal civil and political rights.[76]

While the state Ohio was rife with anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the antebellum period, historians have overlooked the explicit connection between pro-slavery and

[73] 'The Cincinnati Mob.', *The New York Tribune*, 21 September 1841, p. 2.
[74] 'Riot at Cincinnati!', p. 2.
[75] 'From the *Cincinnati* Philanthropist. CC Burleigh', *The Liberator*, 12 November 1841, p. 1; 'Meeting of the Colored Citizens of Buffalo', p. 1; 'Riots and Mobs, Confusion and Bloodshed', *The Liberator*, 17 September 1841, p. 1; 'The Cincinnati *Riot*', *The Colored American*, 18 September 1841, p. 1; 'Another Ohio Riot', *The Colored American*, 11 September 1841, p. 1.
[76] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, pp. 1-5; Jackson, 'The Story of Violence in America', p. 13.

anti-slavery violence in the antebellum borderlands and the fallout over 'Bleeding Kansas' a decade later. In truth, pro-slavery and anti-slavery forces in the Middle West were similarly engaged in a violent struggle for influence and supremacy.[77] While scholars have long acknowledged the lack of clear delineations between slave and free states in the region, the lawlessness that followed the amorphous nature of western politics foreshadowed increased regional conflict and sectionalism—and ultimately civil war. To that end, historians have overlooked the strong parallels between the burning of Cincinnati in the summer of 1841 and the sacking of Lawrence, Kansas during the spring of 1856. These major antebellum events, while often perceived as unrelated, distinct effusions in bloodshed, exhibit strong qualitative similarities that demonstrate the extent and duration of western mobocratic destruction during the antebellum period.

One of the major findings of this chapter were the eerie and surprising similarities between the burning of Cincinnati and the sacking of Lawrence during the pre-Civil War period. To begin with, contemporary newspapers referred to both incidents as either civil 'war' or 'reign of terror' events—memorable and politically charged language within the context of rising sectional and borderland tensions.[78] Indeed, while significantly more people were murdered in Lawrence than in Cincinnati, the widespread use of cannon fire by mobocratic rioters, in both instances, underscores the ferocity and extent of the violence.[79] Second, both cities were nearly razed to the ground after extended rioting, and in both settlements, pro-slavery southerners invaded and targeted apparent centers of anti-slavery radicalism.[80] While in Cincinnati the rioters hailed from Kentucky and in Lawrence from Missouri (although both states would end up on opposite ends of the fighting during the American Civil War), the anti-

[77] See Introduction.
[78] *The Ohio Democrat*, p. 2; 'Meeting of the Colored Citizens of Buffalo', *The Colored American*, 13 November 1841, p. 1; *The Liberator*, 26 November 1841, p. 1.
[79] Kristen T. Oertel, 'Bleeding Kansas: A Call To Arms', p. 42, cited in Lorien Foote and Earl J. Hess, *The Oxford Handbook of the American Civil War* (Oxford, 2023); Robert K. Sutton, *Stark Mad Abolitionists: Lawrence, Kansas, and the Battle Over Slavery in the Civil War Era* (New York, 2017), p. 91.
[80] Chris Post, 'Rejecting Violence on the Landscape of Lawrence, Kansas, *Geographical Review*, 99, Issue 2 (2010), p. 186.

slavery newspaper in both instances strongly argued that the instigators of the violence hailed from the slave South.[81] These partisan newspapers went to great lengths to prove that southern rioters initiated the violence by encroaching upon 'free' soil.[82] Finally, while a seemingly minor qualitative similarity, in both instances abolitionist printing presses were stolen, demolished, and tossed into local rivers.[83] These unlawful acts of vandalism and censorship highlight several important commonalities across antebellum decades related to mobocratic violence and rioting. These include the targeting of abolitionist newspaper editors and journalists for the sin of reporting and shaping the conflict, and hence becoming targets of radical anti-abolitionists, the uptick in violence within and across the antebellum borderlands, and the divisiveness of the slavery question in the American Middle West.

In conclusion, the rioting observed in this chapter marked a major turn towards sectionalism in U.S. antebellum history. It rivals any single incident (if not in murders, then in sheer number of participants), observed during the crisis over 'Bleeding Kansas' and in the western territories during the following decade.[84] This typifies one of the major themes of this thesis—namely, that the violent episodes of the 1840s directly influenced and contributed to rising sectional tensions to a much greater extent than historians have recognized or considered. 'The war between the abolitionists and anti-abolitionists has begun', thundered *The Ohio Democrat* when appraising the violence in September 1841—a clear nod to the political instability and dangers wrought by protracted antebellum violence in the borderlands prior to the sectional crisis.[85] Meanwhile, historians such as Bridget Ford describe the incident as a veritable 'race war', wherein victims and perpetrators alike were 'both armed to the teeth and

[81] See, for instance, *The Liberator*, 27 June 1856, p 2; *The Liberator*, 24 September 1841, pp. 1-4.
[82] *The Liberator*, 8 October 1841, p. 1.
[83] Sutton, *Stark Mad Abolitionists*, p. 84; John Doy, *The Narrative of John Doy: A Plain, Unvarnished Tale* (New York, 1860), p. 14.
[84] The most bloody and violent event of 'Bleeding Kansas' is the Pottawatomie Creek murders, see Kristen Tegtmeier Oertel, *Bleeding Borders: Race, Gender, And Violence in Pre-Civil War Kansas* (Baton Rouge, 2009), p. 104.
[85] *The Ohio Democrat*, 16 September 1841, p. 3.

prepared to kill each other'.[86] Thus, only by acknowledging 'Bleeding Cincinnati', and its destructive aftermath, can historians begin to rectify the comparative lack of scholarly attention paid to violence in Middle Western border cities during the 1840s and how such incidents contributed significantly to rising sectional tensions during the following decade. Indeed, James Birney, the editor of much-derided *Philanthropist*, argued in a letter to William Lloyd Garrison fully a decade before 'Bleeding Kansas' that 'eastern *mobs* are far less ferocious than our western ones'.[87] Birney was right to situate the epicenter of antebellum mob violence in the American West—and doubly correct in publicly giving voice to this violence at a time least recognized and acknowledged by historians. These deep-seated tensions that foreshadowed civil war were rooted in and exacerbated by earlier events, as this case study argues, and in many ways brought the nation one step closer to permanent, irreparable disunion and dissolution.

[86] Ford, *Bonds of Union*, p. 97.
[87] *The Liberator*, 8 October 1841.

Chapter V: 'Disgraceful Mob': George Latimer, the 'Slave Power', and Boston's Most Infamous Fugitive Slave Case

In autumn 1842 in Norfolk, Virginia, fugitive slave George Latimer, reported by the press as 'a very light, good-looking mulatto', and his wife, Rebecca, secretly boarded a Boston-bound vessel never to return to the slave South.[1] Their escape from bondage to freedom proved perilous and circuitous, but ultimately successful.[2] Not long after settling in Boston, however, James B. Gray, the couple's former owner, learned from an intermediary of the Latimer family's whereabouts, traveled to Boston, and initiated the process of reclamation.[3] State officials, responding to Gray's accusation of a 'larceny' charge, promptly arrested Latimer, who was subsequently detained and imprisoned.[4] The radicalized abolitionist press immediately sprang into action, reporting the apprehension not as a trivial dispute over an alleged theft of property, but a ruse to remand Latimer back to slavery.[5] *The Liberator* wasted no time in publicizing Latimer's arrest. 'Already the clank of chains is heard in our streets!' declared one editorial.[6] 'Even now, kidnappers infest our community!' decried another.[7] One abolitionist editorialist even declared that the Latimer affair was an '*invasion* of the rights of Massachusetts by the slave power'.[8] Eventually, the news story made national headlines, attracting great public interest and attention.[9] The controversy surrounding Latimer's status inflamed political debates between abolitionists and anti-abolitionists at the state and national levels, and arguably led to the most successful grassroots campaign for freedom during the entire antebellum period.[10]

Initially, Latimer's lawyers' attempt to free him proved unsuccessful. The state's Chief Justice Lemuel Shaw—despite harboring strong anti-slavery sympathies—argued against

[1] 'Case of George Latimer….', *The Liberator,* 28 October, 1842, p. 1.
[2] Cassandra L. Newby-Alexander, *Virginia Waterways and the Underground Railroad* (Charleston, 2017), pp. 105-106.
[3] *Ibid*, pp. 105-107.
[4] Excerpt from *The Boston Atlas*, cited in 'The Following Statement…', *The Liberator,* 25 November, 1842.
[5] *Ibid*, pp. 1-3.
[6] 'Spirit of Liberty in Lynn', *The Liberator*, 4 November 1842, p. 1.
[7] 'Mob in Boston! Meeting in Faneuil Hall', *The National Anti-Slavery Standard,* 10 November 1842, p. 1.
[8] 'The Latimer Case', *The National Anti-Slavery Standard,* 17 November 1842, p. 1.
[9] Newby-Alexander, *Virginia Waterways and the Underground Railroad*, pp. 105-108.
[10] Laurie, 'Putting Politics Back in', p. 83; Gac, 'Slave or Free?', p.73; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause,* pp. 392.

immediate release due to the recently issued *Prigg vs. United States* (1842) Supreme Court decision, which guaranteed that the Fugitive Slave Clause superseded all state statutes that protected or harbored runaway slaves.[11] Shaw's decision, despite its strict adherence to legal precedent, provoked outrage across the commonwealth—and spurred radicals to further action. As Frederick Douglass wrote, 'It is said by many residents, that New-Bedford has never been so favorably aroused to her anti-slavery responsibility as at present'.[12] *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* echoed this sentiment more broadly, claiming such feelings were universal across the state of Massachusetts.[13]

Tensions eventually came to a head on Sunday, 30 October. A 'Latimer' protest rally was organized at Faneuil Hall, led by multiple abolitionist luminaries. According to the Democratic *Boston Daily Bee*, numerous local speakers such as Francis Jackson, Edmund Quincy, and George S. Hillard were 'hissed down' and 'continually interrupted'.[14] Several African Americans were introduced to speak as well, yet were drowned out by racist epithets such as 'down with the darkey', 'sell the nigger', and 'take the nigger down'.[15] Radicals such as Wendell Phillips and Parker Pillsbury, however, were initially permitted to speak. They used the occasion to deliver withering criticisms of the Supreme Court, the U.S. Constitution, pro-slavery northerners, and most caustically, Boston's ineffectual law enforcement and court system. 'Our blood boiled in our veins', editorialized *The Boston Daily Bee*, and immediately following the remarks, 'the hall was in a complete uproar'.[16] Writing five years after the event, abolitionist William Cooper Nell praised the speakers' bravery during 'the Latimer war in Boston' by commending their courage when their lives were placed in mortal danger. 'No two men have been more zealous or effective in the anti-slavery field than Stephen S. Foster and Parker

[11] Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 318; Jeffrey M. Schmitt, 'The Antislavery Judge Reconsidered', *Law and History Review*, 29, Issue 3 (2011), p. 829.
[12] 'Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison', *The Liberator*, 18 November 1842, p. 1.
[13] *The Latimer Case*, p. 1.
[14] 'From the Boston Bee: The Abolitionist Meeting at Faneuil Hall', cited in *The Liberator*, 4 November 1842.
[15] *Ibid*.
[16] *Ibid*.

Pillsbury', he wrote.[17]

In an attempt to absolve themselves of any wrongdoing, abolitionists assailed white anti-abolitionist 'rowdies' as the true culprits of the hissing, shouting, and non-stop interruptions, describing the scene as the 'most disgraceful meeting for a Sabbath ever held in our city'.[18] In the end, unceasing political pressure from radicals eventually forced the slaver Gray to accept $400 in manumission fees and relinquish his claims on Latimer.[19] This seemed to have brought an end to the controversy. Yet, while the former slave and his family were safeguarded in Boston and Gray returned to the South, the case inaugurated important legislative changes during the antebellum period—namely, the so-called Latimer Law of 1843.[20] This controversial state statute inflamed sectional tensions. By both strengthening personal liberty laws and absolving state officials of any responsibility in helping southern slaveholders reclaim their 'property', Massachusetts drew a hard line in the sand against roving southern kidnappers and slave catchers operating within the commonwealth.[21]

The George Latimer case—and the attendant mobocratic rioting that followed—raises important historiographical issues. Most pressing among these is the extent to which a southern 'slave power' operated in northern states; the role of nineteenth century newspapers in advancing abolitionists' agenda and fomenting sectional tensions; the unexpected divisions wrought by Latimer's apprehension and incarceration; and the lack of an identifiable and authentic 'anti-slavery consensus' in the state of Massachusetts during the antebellum period. The following chapter will address and analyze these issues, reconciling newly collected data and research with existing historical scholarship.

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[17] William Cooper Nell, 'New England Anti-Slavery Convention', 23 June 1848, p. 200, cited in Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac (eds.), *William Cooper Nell: Nineteenth Century African American Abolitionist, Historian, Integrationist: Selected Writings 1832-1874* (Baltimore, 2002).
[18] 'From the Boston Bee', p. 1.
[19] 'From the Boston Courier: The Case of Latimer', cited in *The Liberator*, 9 December 1842, p. 1.
[20] Paul Finkelman, 'Slavery, the Constitution, and the Origins of the Civil War', *OAH Magazine of History*, 25, Issue 2 (2011), p. 15.
[21] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, p. 393.

Analyzing case studies such as these, which examine politically motivated newspaper reporting, helps us better understand the historiographical debate surrounding the extent and meaning of a southern 'slave power'. While Eric Foner dates the origination of the term to the 1830s—and Andrew L. Slap attributes its increased usage and prominence to the early 1840s—historians, more contentiously, continue to debate the expression's authenticity and salience.[22] According to the early twentieth century historian Chauncey B. Boucher, the slaveocracy was largely divided; hence, a 'slave power' conspiracy was not historically defensible. On an array of issues—the Missouri Compromise, the Wilmot Proviso, Texas Annexation, and the Compromise of 1850—Boucher argued that the slaveocracy did not approach federal issues in unison or with a cooperative front.[23] At the time his book was released, Leonard L. Richards argued that Boucher's scholarship delivered a 'knock out punch' to the purveyors of a 'slave power' conspiracy.[24] Boucher's influence on the issue later garnered scholarly backing from prominent historians such as Russel B. Nye.[25] Richards, however, ultimately went on to challenge Boucher's main contention, arguing that his analysis elided the fact that southerners overwhelmingly controlled and exerted undue influence over federal policy.[26] This is a point later emphasized by William E. Gienapp, Patrick Rael, Matthew Karp, Don E. Fehrenbacher, and Eric Foner.[27] Unlike Foner and Slap, however, Richards dates the 'slave power' conspiracy all the way back to the Constitutional Convention.[28] The term proved so enduring, Richards argued, that both President Abraham Lincoln and Secretary of State William Seward inveighed

[22] Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*: *The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970 & 1995) p. 101; Andrew L. Slap, *The Doom of Reconstruction: the Liberal Republicans in the Civil War Era* (New York, 2006), pp. 52-53.
[23] Chauncey S. Boucher, 'In Re That Aggressive Slaveocracy', *The Mississippi Valley Historical* Review, 8, Nos. 1-2 (1921), pp. 13-79.
[24] Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power Conspiracy: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge, 2009), p. 17.
[25] Russel B. Nye, *Fettered Freedom: Civil Liberties and the Slavery Controversy* (East Lansing, 1949), p. 249.
[26] Richards, *The Slave Power Conspiracy*, pp. 25-26.
[27] William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 76-77; Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777-1865* (Athens and London, 2015), p. 3; Matthew Karp, *This Vast Southern Empire: Slaveholders at the Helm of American Foreign Policy* (Boston, 2016), pp. 1-9; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (Oxford, 2002); Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men,* p. 101.
[28] Richards, *The Slave Power Conspiracy*, p. 25.

against conspiratorial southerners during and before their years in office.[29] Michael F. Holt, however, takes issue with Richards's analysis, arguing that Lincoln never explicitly used the term during his lifetime, further complicating this debate.[30]

Many scholars acknowledge the long reach of the 'slave power' beyond the American South. Michael Todd Landis argues rather convincingly that northern Democrats were active—and effective—enablers of the 'slave power' during the pre-Civil War era. He contends they were laser-focused on expelling any vestiges of anti-slavery sympathies from the Democratic Party—and were successful. This view is challenged, however, by Michael A. Morrison, who points out that not all Free Soil Democrats welcomed southern supremacy and influence in northern states with open arms.[31] In fact, as Morrison and Michael E. Woods posit, fears of a southern 'slave power' proved one of the most unifying developments in U.S. antebellum politics, leading directly to the creation of the Republican Party during the peak of the sectional crisis.[32]

David Brion Davis, Larry Gara, and Corey M. Brooks offer the most nuanced and compelling interpretation of the southern 'slave power' conspiracy.[33] They argue that abolitionists were undoubtedly the chief purveyors and political beneficiaries of this perennial dispute. My research, which includes an analysis of Boston's *Liberator* newspaper and other partisan abolitionist periodicals, strongly supports this consensus. These scholars suggest that the authentic existence of a southern 'slave power' is perhaps unknowable (and indeed less important) than the perception of one. In the final analysis, the crucial point is that the threat of

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[29] Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856*, pp. 52-77; Richards, *The Slave Power Conspiracy*, p. 19.
[30] Michael F. Holt, 'Lincoln Reconsidered', *The Journal of American History*, 96, Issue 2 (2009), p. 452.
[31] Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men With Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis* (Ithaca and London, 2014), p. 7; Michael F. Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London, 1997), p. 152 and p. 167
[32] Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, p 167; Michael E. Woods, *Emotional and Sectional Conflict in the Antebellum United States* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 18.
[33] David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge, 1969), p. 4; Larry Gara, 'Slavery and the Slave Power: A Crucial Distinction', *Civil War History*, 15, No. 1 (1969), p. 18; Corey M. Brooks, *Liberty Power: Antislavery Third Parties and the Transformation of American Politics* (Chicago, 2016), p. 3. John Ashworth also establishes that early antebellum abolitionists utilized the 'slave power' conspiracy for political ends, see John Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics, Volume I: Commerce and Compromise, 1820-1850* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 280.

a southern 'slave power', whether real or imagined, proved indispensable to the larger anti-slavery cause. This argument—which stressed slaveholders' outsized, behind-the-scenes influence over the free states—was properly diagnosed and most effectively articulated by the pens and presses of abolitionists themselves. While abolitionists were unambiguously politically focused, their newspaper reports gave voice and evidence to a rising fear that effectively advanced a very broad political agenda: uniting the free states against the maintenance, extension, and perpetuation of chattel slavery.

In Boston, radical abolitionists argued that the Latimer affair proved that a genuine southern 'slave power', ever-present and operating through intermediaries, threatened the rights and freedoms of white Massachusetts residents. Indeed, *The Liberator* explicitly argued, following the fugitive's arrest, that southern slaveholders were pulling the strings of the Massachusetts state government. The near-two hundred abolitionist editorials published between October and December 1842 reinforce this point.[34] 'Thus is Boston made the slavehunting ground of the South', declared *The Liberator* on 28 October 1842, adding weeks later that 'Massachusetts is, and of right out to be, a free and independent state; that she cannot allow her soil to be polluted by the footprint of slavery'.[35] Continuing in this vein, editorials published throughout November belabored these claims by drawing increased attention to citizens' growing discomfort and alarm with southern interference. 'Public meetings have been held in Lynn, Hingham, New Bedford, and Sherburne, to consider the invasion of the rights of Massachusetts by the slave power', *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* declared on 17 November 1842. 'Dare any one now deny that Massachusetts is a slaveholding State, or that slavery, instead of being merely a local institution, is sustained by the public sentiment?'[36] As if such commentaries were not enough, perhaps no editorial sought to explicitly unnerve the general public more than *The Liberator* column published on 23 December 1842. 'That the

[34] In keeping with the research methodology outlined in the Introduction, the singular keyword search 'Latimer' utilized between the dates 1 October and 31 December 1842 yielded 164 results.
[35] 'Case of George Latimer….', p. 2.
[36] 'The Latimer Case'.

recent proceedings with regard to George Latimer must convince every Massachusetts man that slavery has a foothold on our soil'.[37] *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* echoed this sentiment, asking rhetorically: 'Friends of the rights of man! [S]hall our soil be polluted by the footprints of slavery?'[38] Edmund Quincy, a Garrisonian abolitionist who spoke at one of the state's numerous 'Latimer Meetings'—and whose remarks were later reprinted in *The Liberator*—argued that the incarcerated former slave's arrest was explicitly initiated at 'the bidding of the slave-power', and that all northerners' 'rights' were threatened as never before.[39] 'When this man [Latimer] was seized by his pursuers, and fell gasping beneath their united assaults, then you, and I, and all of us fell down, and bloody treason triumphed over us,' he proclaimed.

A review of abolitionist editorials published during the fall of 1842 strongly underscores radicals' decision to use the Latimer controversy for a deliberate purpose: to diagnose and create discourse around a southern 'slave power' and to explain how it operated within northern states. This is evident in two ways. First, journalists cited Latimer's arrest and subsequent incarceration as proof of a functioning 'slave power' within their city. Their reporting therefore helped abolitionists drive a political wedge between northern conservatives and southern slavery enablers. Second, *The Liberator* and *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* argued in various newspaper editorials that the victims of an ascendant 'slave power' were not just abolitionists and fugitive slaves themselves, but 'every Massachusetts man' and 'Bostonian' who opposed unjustified 'invasion[s]' and violations of their 'natural rights'.[40] By sounding this alarm, which impacted not just African Americans but every white northerner resistant to southern incursions, abolitionists advanced a powerful line of reasoning—namely, that the threats from a southern 'slave power' proved less about the evils of chattel slavery, and more about its nefarious impact on white northerners and northern values. Through social agitation, radicals carefully identified the South's true victims as fugitives, abolitionists, *and* every white, free person residing in

[37] 'Latimer Meeting in Waltham', *The Liberator*, 23 December 1842.
[38] 'Mob in Boston! Meeting in Faneuil Hall'.
[39] 'Remarks of Edmund Quincy', *The Liberator,* 11 November 1842.
[40] 'Latimer Meeting in Waltham',; 'Read this Bostonians', *The Liberator,* 4 November 1842; 'Another Voice From Weymouth', *The Liberator,* 18 November, 1842; 'The Latimer Case'.

Massachusetts regardless of political affiliation. By carefully crafting a regional 'us versus them' narrative, the Garrisonians assailed slavery not only as an institution complicit in human rights violations, but a corrosive, cancerous manacle that threatened and harmed the individual sovereignty of white northerners. This rhetorical emphasis on invasion and despotism in newspaper reporting is a clear example of abolitionists' attempt to demonstrate and give name to a southern 'slave power' for political purposes.

Garrison and his acolytes expertly shaped this narrative by the sheer volume and extent of their newspaper coverage. My research indicates that no fewer than one hundred and sixty editorials were disseminated in *The Liberator* about the incident over a two-month period.[41] As well, politically like-minded newspapers covered the unfolding controversy with alacrity, while enterprising Boston-based abolitionists even established a new newspaper, *The Latimer Journal and North Star*.[42] This latter publication's singular commitment to covering Latimer's apprehension, treatment, and incarceration gave voice to the controversy as never before, forcing readers to confront what one historian described as slaveholders' increasing attempt to influence 'Northern [men] with Southern principles'.[43] Thus, the Latimer affair proved highly consequential. It did not so much evince the existence of a de facto 'slave power' in Massachusetts *per se*, but instead the value of pointing to one—a tactic that wrought two major outcomes: an abolitionist victory after Latimer's release and increasingly strained sectional tensions. On the latter point, abolitionists helped inculcate increasingly hardened anti-southern attitudes throughout the state, crafting a powerful narrative that declared the maintenance and extension of slavery threatened the self-determination and free institutions of the free states.

In Boston, the abolitionist press exploited the rise of a southern 'slave power' in another important way: by arguing that Christians in Massachusetts actually acquiesced and facilitated Latimer's arrest, thereby undermining the rights and freedoms of their northern compatriots. In

[41] Given the methodology employed, this figure is almost certainly an undercounting.
[42] Newby-Alexander, *Virginia Waterways and the Underground Railroad*, pp. 105-109.
[43] Landis, *Northern Men With Southern Loyalties*, p. 4.

this instance, abolitionists sought to prove this reality, and *The Liberator* spearheaded this effort by later reporting on a recent abolitionist meeting resolution. The newspaper declared, 'George Latimer, who has recently been kidnapped by the police of Boston, under the sanction of the clergy of that city, and who is now lying in Leverett-street jail, waiting the order of the court to consign him to interminable slavery'.[44] Here the newspaper delivered a subtle allegation: Boston's clergy members' silence on the issue, at the behest of southern slaveholders, suggested that religious institutions condoned Latimer's arrest. The newspaper's imputation went even further, arguing that Christian leaders' conspicuous disinterest emboldened and enticed law enforcement—and the court system—to engage in an illegal abduction of a free man. *The Liberator* sought to prove this claim by lamenting how none of the state's five professedly 'Christian' newspapers lobbied for Latimer's release. '[Clergy] have it in their power, unquestionably, to save *George Latimer* from the dreadful fate which now apparently awaits him!' the newspaper declared on 11 November 1842. 'Will they do it?'[45] One week later, the newspaper expressed profound disapproval when no serious efforts were made, among Christian journalists, to secure Latimer's freedom.[46] The diagnosis was clear: northern clergy members were taking political positions and indirect cues from the slave South, and Massachusetts residents were both unaware and helpless to stop them.

Parker Pillsbury and Frederick Douglass lambasted northern Christians in equally harsh terms, an overlooked moment strongly demonstrating the power and rising influence of nineteenth century abolitionist print culture. Here they accused ecclesiastical institutions of harboring unvarnished southern sympathies. In the context of the Latimer affair, Pillsbury argued, 'That the popular religion of this country sustains slavery; and whoever in this day of mid-noon light sustains or fellowships that religion in the Baptist, Free Will Baptist, Congregational; Methodist, Universalist, Quaker, or any other of the leading sects of the times,

[44] 'P.S. Since Writing the above, I have seen notice of the mob', *The Liberator*, 25 November 1842, p. 2.
[45] 'The Clergy of Boston', *The Liberator*, 11 November 1842, p. 1.
[46] 'Ye shall know them by their Fruits', *The Liberator*, 18 November 1842, pp. 1-2.

is a slaveholder, and has no claim to the name of Christian'.[47] Frederick Douglass took particular umbrage with the 'Christian' peoples of Boston: 'Henceforth we need not portray to the imagination of northern people, the flying slave marking his way through thick and dark woods of the South', he wrote, 'but refer to the streets of Boston, made dark and dense by crowds of professed Christians'.[48] From newspaper articles to public speeches, abolitionist radicals successfully demonstrated the corrosive and deleterious effect of slavery on northern society.

In the final analysis, abolitionists disseminated a powerful supposition: slaveholders—and their proxies—were undermining the laws and customs of the antebellum North. Their argument in particular suggested that all northern Christian denominations not explicitly in favor of Latimer's release were indirect enablers, or perhaps even worse, direct agents, of a southern 'slave power'. In some ways, the attention paid to the Latimer affair in abolitionist print culture impugned the motives of northern religious leaders as stewards of southern political interests to undermine their influence and attract the wider public to the banners of a rising, anti-slavery coalition in Massachusetts. This narrative reporting of a 'southern invasion' of Boston, then, to some extent, united northerners more firmly against the political interests of the slave South—a point underemphasized by specialists in the field. While historians have long implied fears of a southern 'slave power' steered northern voters towards an ascendant anti-slavery consensus in the free states, less attention is paid to how this political realignment occurred specifically in Boston.[49] Consequently, these political tactics unleashed a strong anti-slavery response in Massachusetts against a diagnosable, southern aggression, as evidenced by the sundry 'Latimer meetings' and mass petition drives that proliferated throughout the state in the fall of 1842, thereby further increasing sectional tensions. In the final analysis, the controversy in Boston firmly supports the notion that abolitionists' reporting on the

[47] 'Essex County Anti-Slavery Society', *The Liberator*, 9 December 1842.
[48] 'Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison', 8 November 1842, p.1, cited in *Frederick Douglass Papers Project*.
[49] Richards, *The Slave Power*, pp. 4-5; Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy*, pp. 30-31; Nye, *Fettered Freedom*, p. 121; for an important exception, see Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, pp. 52-58.

manifestation of a 'slave power' in northern society greatly increased political polarization and reshaped northern party politics.

In regard to another historiographical point, insofar as a southern 'slave power' existed in northern states, Chauncey B. Boucher first claimed over century ago that a monolithic coalition of northerners outright rejected this narrative. In his view, the 'slave power' thesis was a myth. Leonard Richards, however, in revisiting Boucher's argument years later, showed how his analysis lacked footnotes, evidence, and documentary evidence, and that 'a unified view' rejecting such conspiratorial forces in the antebellum North proved completely ahistorical.[50] My research, however, strongly suggests that this increasingly accepted southerners-in-control-of-Massachusetts ideation clearly took root and emerged more fully after a protracted grassroots political movement of persuasion, disseminated first and foremost by radicals themselves. Applying some shading to Boucher's contention, it is highly unlikely that the 'Latimer Petition', which demanded stronger safeguards and protections for fugitive slaves in the controversy's aftermath, would have garnered some sixty-four thousand statewide signatures if their campaign of explication had been ineffectual.[51] Considering two years earlier some 124,579 total statewide ballots were cast during the 1840 presidential election, it is an astonishing deduction that roughly half of the state's registered voters ultimately signed the petition.[52]

In addition, *The Liberator* was hardly the only outlet involved in helping to shape a new northern anti-slavery coalition by crafting an anti-southern narrative in the wake of Latimer's arrest. In the midst of the controversy, radicals united in solidarity to decry increasing southern dominance over northern laws and customs, and to raise awareness about the rioting at Faneuil Hall. 'It is not yet decided, but the general impression is that he [Latimer] will be delivered to his master and carried back to slavery,' wrote *The Christian Reflector* despairingly. 'A meeting of persons desiring to save him from such a fate, was called at Faneuil Hall on Sunday evening,

[50] Richard, *The Slave Power*, p. 21.
[51] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, p. 392.
[52] Michael J. Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860: The Official Results by County and State* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 2002), pp. 76-77.

30th. But a disgraceful mob had gathered, and we are sorry to say, effectually interrupted its proceedings'.[53] Abolitionist H.I. Bowditch, a founding member of *The Latimer Journal*, added in the wake of the 30 October violence, 'We are threatened by a mob at Faneuil Hall, lawyers bribe jailors to hold the slave, and the high sheriff and grand jury are deaf to our protestations'.[54] Most colorfully, Frederick Douglass argued that following such developments, southern partisans were ultimately in control of the state of Massachusetts. 'Slavery, our enemy, has landed in our very midst, and commenced its bloody work', he wrote. 'And all this is done in Boston—liberty loving, slavery-hating Boston—intellectual moral, and religious Boston'.[55] This ultimately became a key point for radical immediatists—after all, Boston was viewed as the main headquarters of abolitionism on the eastern seaboard, and even there, slaveholders and their proxies were able to operate successfully. Nonetheless, abolitionist reporting of the incident greatly impacted public opinion by arguing that a southern 'slave power' continued to infiltrate the state, and that consequently, the institutions of the 'free' North were under immediate duress. The harassment, interruptions, and scare tactics that drowned out the speakers and ended the Faneuil Hall event prematurely only provided additional fodder for their chief argument. In the aftermath of these events, there is little doubt that a coordinated, grassroots abolitionist political machine engaged in effective reporting to shock, scare, and mobilize the northern public into adopting increasingly anti-slavery and anti-southern attitudes.[56]

While this case study has sought to underscore radical partisans' reporting of a 'slave power' operating in Massachusetts, one of the major interventions of this chapter is illustrating the varied (and effective) rhetorical strategies abolitionists utilized to promote the antebellum freedom struggle. Considering the agency of the abolitionist printing press in applying meaning

[53] 'George Latimer', *The Christian Reflector*, 9 November 1842, p. 3.
[54] 'Proceedings of the Citizens of the Borough of Norfolk in the Case of the Runaway Slave George Latimer' (Norfolk, 1843), p. 19.
[55] 'Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison', pp. 650-651.
[56] *The Liberator* did produce evidence, however, that Latimer's jailer was offered payment by Gray to maintain his incarceration 'until removed by me according to law', see 'Read this, Bostonians', p. 1.

to a southern 'slave power' sheds greater light on the inner workings, and complexities, of abolitionist agitation during the 1840s. By interpreting such sources, scholars can begin to glimpse and better understand how abolitionists used the medium of the printing press for their own political ends. While scholars of the long nineteenth century have identified bias, misinformation, sensationalism, and partisanship as core features of historical mass print culture—and such sources certainly complicate the process of making sense of the past—focusing on the politics of the press demonstrates how newspapers like *The Liberator* crafted narratives that vilified southerners and sought to unite the 'anti-slavery' North by fomenting sectional tensions.[57] While these newspaper reports were often fragmentary, many northerners relied upon them for information and guidance in an increasingly complex and politically divisive world.[58] Thus for many northern readers, antebellum newspapers were trusted and interpreted as *factually true*. Consequently, the cumulative impact of using the printing press repeatedly to disseminate anti-southern messaging shaped ongoing debates surrounding slavery and anti-slavery during the 1840s. The aggregate impact proved consequential: such political activism, via newspaper reporting, ultimately seeped into and influenced events later during the period, facilitating and contributing to the crisis of Union during the 1850s.

Finally, this chapter strongly supports the scholarship of David Brion Davis, Larry Gara, and Corey Brooks in the narrow sense that, whether real or imagined, debates surrounding a southern 'slave power' in Boston were secondary to the perception that one existed among conservative, white northerners. Abolitionists therefore effectively crafted and created their own sectional realities. As a result, these sources tell us something new and original about the very nature of the abolitionist printing press and the way that it was utilized. That Latimer was

[57] Jeannine Marie DeLombard, *Slavery on Trial: Law, Abolitionism, and Print Culture*, (North Carolina, 2009), see introduction; John Nerone, 'Representing Public Opinion: US Newspapers and the News System in the Long Nineteenth Century, *History Compass*, 9, Issue 9 (2011), p. 747; Jeb Byrne, 'The Comparative Development of Newspapers in New Zealand and the United States in the Nineteenth Century', *American Studies International*, 37, No. 1 (1999), p. 55. Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*' (Madison, 1992), p. 7; Brennan, *The Making of an Abolitionist,* p. 2; Joseph Baumgartner, 'Newspapers as Historical Sources', *Philippine Quarterly of Culture and Society*, 9, No. 3 (1981), p. 256; Keith C. Barton, 'Primary Sources in History: Breaking through the Myths', *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 86, Issue 2 (June, 2005), p. 747.

[58] J. Matthew Gallman, *Defining Duty in the Civil War: Personal Choice, Popular Culture, and the Union Home Front* (Chapel Hill, 2015), pp. 4-7.

ultimately freed, and his former master thwarted in his reclamation attempts, provides ample evidence that abolitionist writers and printers proved rather effective in shaping a regional-turned-national crisis, and ultimately influencing the outcome of the case. Furthermore, the sheer number of periodicals produced by *The Liberator* during the fall of 1842 demonstrates the lengths to which Garrisonian radicals would go to shape sectional narratives and influence the politics of slavery and anti-slavery in a major northern urban area—and across the antebellum North as a whole. In conclusion, evidence that a 'slave power' existed in northern states mattered deeply to abolitionists at the time; these historical actors went to great length to diagnose, disseminate, and report on these developments. Yet to historians, the existence of the 'slave power' conspiracy perhaps matters less than the impact these debates had on northern perceptions and understandings during the time period. To scholars, the existence of a southern 'slave power' in all likelihood proves ancillary—and indeed irrelevant—to the larger point of how these debates shaped local activism and public opinions.

While many historians agree that the Latimer case and subsequent violence at Faneuil Hall and other areas proved a major watershed moment in uniting white and Black abolitionists in the city against an alleged southern 'slave power', the controversy sparked profound internal divisions and resentments.[59] To be sure, Latimer's arrest became a rallying cry for radical and political abolitionists—and the ensuing fallout eroded national harmony after a perceived southern incursion into the free states. As mentioned above, the controversy most assuredly drove non-abolitionists into the arms of a nascent northern 'anti-slavery consensus'—not away from it.[60] This analysis is difficult to dispute as scholars have cited multiple examples of how the incident shaped and increased sectional tensions. Nevertheless, the Latimer affair did not

[59] Gac, 'Slave or Free?', p. 73; Stephen Kantrowitz, 'Place for "Colored Patriots": Crispus Attucks among the Abolitionists, 1842-1863', *Massachusetts Historical Review (MHR)*, 18, (2016), p. 193; Margot Minardi, 'Review: Public and Private in Nineteenth Century Reform', *Massachusetts Historical Review*, 19, (2017), p. 162; Finkelman, 'Slavery, the Constitution, and the Origins of the Civil War', p. 15; Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, p. 392; Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 317.

[60] This original phrase is taken from Smith, *The Stormy Present*, p. 17.

unite abolitionists universally or on every major political point throughout the controversy. In truth, members of the 'anti-slavery consensus' were chiefly divided over three key issues: First, the thorny question of paying a recalcitrant southerner for an escaped slave's freedom; second, anti-slavery lawmakers' constitutional obligation to adhere to the recently issued *Prigg vs. United States* (1842) Supreme Court decision; and third, tactical differences between Black Bostonians and white radicals in how best and most expeditiously to free Latimer.

On the first point, Garrisonians balked at the effrontery of freeing Latimer by remittance. They argued that to pay for Latimer's freedom was to acknowledge and sanctify slavery as an institution, forcing abolitionists to negotiate with slaveholders, thereby denigrating Latimer's humanity and the righteousness of their cause. At a local 'Latimer Meeting', one newspaper reported a growing consensus against paying for Latimer's liberty. 'The subject of the payment of money to Grey [sic] was gradually and cautiously introduced', wrote *The Liberator*, 'at first with expression of doubt, and then with disapprobation, until at length it was openly and generally condemned'.[61] One abolitionist, H.I. Bowditch, publicly declared his intention to purchase Latimer as the lesser of two evils, as he 'feared that bloodshed would be the result' of a prolonged court battle.[62] As radicals, however, the Garrisonians had little interest in conceding to the demands of a southern slaveholder on free soil. Recognizing that northern radicals held the upper hand, particularly in the realm of northern public opinion, the Garrisonians argued vigorously against compensated emancipation. On the other hand, Samuel Edmund Sewell, Latimer's court lawyer, and other political abolitionists, argued against such ideological purity. They claimed that issuing the requested fee would most expeditiously solve (and ultimately end) the controversy. While both camps were committed to the politics of anti-slavery and desperately sought Latimer's freedom, the contretemps over compensating a southern slaveholder for the freedom of an enslaved human being underscored major rifts within the

[61] 'The Latimer Case. (From a Correspondent)', *The Liberator*, 20 November 1842, p. 1.
[62] Proceedings of the Citizens of the Borough of Norfolk in the Case of the Runaway Slave George Latimer', p. 19

larger northern 'anti-slavery consensus'.[63] This political disagreement had profound implications during the fall elections, in which the Liberty Party won keys seats against the efforts and wishes of the Garrisonians.[64] Moreover, that Sewell and his anti-slavery adherents ultimately triumphed and purchased Latimer's freedom for four hundred dollars proved telling.[65] First, it demonstrated the supreme importance of saving Latimer, at any cost, even if the methods proved objectionable to some; and second, the wide-scale rejection and unpopularity of purist Garrisonian principles within the conservative wing of the 'anti-slavery consensus'.

Second, Garrisonian abolitionists strongly urged Massachusetts' anti-slavery court judges, embroiled in the fallout over the Latimer affair, to ignore the *Prigg* decision. This Supreme Court ruling left no ambiguity as to the supremacy of the Fugitive Slave Clause: all states, declared the high court, must enforce the U.S. Constitution. Unsurprisingly, the Garrisonians waged war on the ruling, solidifying their unwavering contention that 'the compact of the northern States with the southern, to deliver up the flying fugitive who seeks shelter and refuge among us from the horrible slave prison, is a covenant with death'.[66] Yet, those who considered themselves 'anti-slavery' in outlook—especially Massachusetts court judges involved in adjudicating the case—did not subscribe to such black-and-white thinking. Instead, they felt duty-bound to enforce federal statues, as decreed by the Supreme Court of the United States.[67] Thus Frederick Douglass worried that the state judges, sympathetic to Latimer's plight and that of his family, would nonetheless remand him back to slavery: 'I say, turn your attention from all this cruelty abroad, look now at home–follow me to your courts of justice–mark him who sits upon the bench', he wrote. 'He may, or he may not–God grant he may not–tear George

[63] Laurie, 'Putting Politics Back In', p. 84.
[64] *Ibid*, p. 84.
[65] Varon, *Disunion!*, p. 162.
[66] 'A Voice from Old Braintree!' *The Liberator*, 13 January 1843, p. 1.
[67] Varon, *Disunion!*, p. 162; John T. Cumbler, *From Abolition to Rights For All: The Making of a Reform Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2008), p. 69.

Latimer from a beloved wife and tender infant'.[68] These disputes presaged major constitutional debates to come during the sectional crisis and inaugurated what Henry Mayer described as a 'reconsidered politics' of the antebellum period.[69] While anti-slavery northerners hoped to see—and largely agreed upon—the release and freedom of Latimer and his family, many other issues remained disputed and unresolved until the American Civil War and Reconstruction (1865-1877). These included the internecine debate over paying slaveholders for fugitives, the constitutionality of the Fugitive Slave Clause, and the legality of northern state court systems in remanding fugitives back to slavery.[70]

The creation of divisions between Black Bostonians and white abolitionists was the third and final way that the Latimer affair caused controversy within anti-slavery ranks. In the immediate aftermath of Latimer's arrest, some three hundred Black supporters pre-planned to storm Latimer's jail cell to free him extra-legally.[71] This, in the words of historian Robert H. Churchill, made 'bourgeois reformers' extremely uncomfortable.[72] Churchill argues that not only would participating in criminal behavior violate a core Garrisonian tenet of non-violence, but also increase the likelihood of reprisals against participating white abolitionists. This potentiality had a major calming effect on even the most radical white abolitionists desirous of freeing Latimer. Ultimately, however, *The Boston Atlas* reported that the Black mob's fears were soothed after a guarantee was made that Latimer would not be released to Gray's custody without judicial intervention. The near invasion of the Leavitt Street Jail—not to mention a later reported attempt to rescue Latimer upon his departure from a pre-planned court hearing—raised serious questions among radical abolitionists regarding the expedience of violence, vigilantism, and mob action.[73]

Lastly, while the Latimer affair is not centrally discussed in the context of the sectional

[68] 'Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison', pp. 651-652.
[69] Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 318.
[70] Paul Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity* (Chapel Hill, 1981), pp. 3-19.
[71] Cumbler, *From Abolition to Rights for All*, p. 69.
[72] Robert H. Churchill, 'When the Slave Catchers Came to Town: Cultures of Violence along the Underground Railroad', *The Journal of American History*, 105, No. 3 (2018), p. 529.
[73] 'The Following Statement', p. 1.; Cumbler, *From Abolition to Rights for All,* p. 69.

crisis, as it falls well outside the traditionally understood chronology of when the seeds of civil war were planted, the controversy proved a watershed moment during the antebellum period—and a harbinger of regional divisions to come.[74] The zeitgeist that characterized the stormy 1850s—such as increased abolitionist agitation and political activism, controversies surrounding the status of fugitive slaves, tensions between federal and state governments, and growing fears over the extension of slavery and a politically ascendant South—were all factors at play during the Latimer affair in Boston. That abolitionists were met with 'hisses and uproar', and even prevented from speaking in Faneuil Hall by white northerners for criticizing the U.S. Constitution and defending the freedom of an ex-slave, underscored the acrimonious landscape of American politics during a period of ostensible and temporary 'tranquility' between North and South.[75] While the Latimer affair remains consigned to a secondary event some two decades before the guns at Fort Sumter, the controversy and fallout over Latimer's arrest shows how deeply the seeds of disunion were planted and rooted as early as 1842.[76] This revisionist understanding should not only help historians better contextualize the events of the sanguinary 1850s, but provide compelling evidence that sectional tensions did not entirely cool off during the immediate post-Jacksonian period.

In a larger sense, the complexities of slavery and anti-slavery politics in Boston reverberated outside the state capital. Indeed, the absence of a strongly organized and united 'anti-slavery consensus' in the state of Massachusetts allowed for different groups to organize independently and foment intense violent backlash against abolitionists and Blacks. Abolitionist

[74] The Latimer affair is not mentioned in the following majors works of Civil War scholarship, see David M. Potter and (ed.) Don. E Fehrenbacher, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861* (New York, 1976); James. M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford, 1988); Bruce Levine, *The Fall of the House of Dixie: The Civil War and the Social Revolution That Transformed the South* (New York, 2013); William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (Oxford, 1992).
[75] George Lowell Austin, *The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips* (Boston, 1888), p. 110; 'From the Boston Daily Bee', p. 1.
[76] John Ashworth argues that the 'biggest sectional issue' of the early 1840s was the *Creole* slave uprising, see Ashworth, *Slavery, Capitalism, and Politics*, p. 360. Meanwhile, the Latimer affair is clearly culturally and historically overshadowed by the Hollywood movie adaptation of the *Amistad* rebellion, see Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York, 2012), pp. 4-5.

newspapers and editorialists covered many anti-abolitionist and anti-Black riots during the antebellum period. And while the details remain unsubstantiated, the documentary evidence indicates that, in aggregate, scattered, de-centralized acts of violence were perpetuated against the arbiters of anti-slavery throughout Massachusetts. According to my research, outlined in the introduction, anti-slavery newspapers observed nineteen 'physical assaults' in the state of Massachusetts between the years 1840 and 1849—and of these numerous attacks, roughly one-third each were directed against whites, Blacks, and both groups.[77]

To take four separate examples: it seems highly unlikely that a man of color 'insulted and abused by a rabble of men and boys' for walking with a white woman in the vicinity of Boston Harbor, or a Black doctor 'brutally assaulted' in Norton, Massachusetts by a train conductor, would have occurred in the presence of a overwhelmingly centralized, well established 'anti-slavery consensus'. This likely holds true for the kidnapping of a fugitive slave *after* the Latimer affair who was 'tied hand and foot' and remanded to slavery in violation of state law, as well as the attempted assault of white abolitionist Lucy Stone, in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, after 'a large prayer book' was thrown at her head.[78] Instead, these incidents illustrate the discordant, *ad hoc* nature of antebellum mob violence that occurred throughout Massachusetts during the period 1840-1849. While scholars agree that not all parties of the 'anti-slavery consensus' established 'unanimity' of opinion related to the politics of the 'peculiar institution', it is important to recognize the complexity of the movement and the mixed agendas of the 'anti-slavery' individuals that comprised its ranks.[79] After all, 61 total incidents of mob violence and rioting were observed in Massachusetts alone during this period—many of which were almost certainly started or facilitated by advocates harboring 'anti-slavery' political opinions.[80] Notwithstanding sectional narratives and a clear political agenda, abolitionist

[77] See Introduction.
[78] 'Colorphobia!' *The Liberator*, 19 June 1840, p. 1.; 'From the New-England Christian Advocate. Another Disgraceful Rail Road Outrage.', *The Liberator*, 12 November 1841, p. 1.; 'Kidnapping in Boston', T*he Liberator*, 18 September 1846, p. 1; 'Meeting at the Bridgewaters', *The Liberator*, 14 July 1848, p. 1.
[79] Smith, *The Stormy Present*, p. 245.
[80] See Introduction.

newspapers reported how the backgrounds of the perpetrators varied considerably, from individual actors, train conductors, anonymous 'rowdies', young men and boys, members of the Protestant clergy and laity, 'old political parties', and intoxicated working class laborers. Hence, if a generalized 'anti-slavery consensus' operated with coordination throughout Massachusetts, such haphazard, unrelated, and arbitrary violence would not likely have occurred to the same degree and with such vehemence. There is, however, little dispute that an 'anti-slavery consensus' emerged in northern states during the antebellum period—and ultimately helped bring about the American Civil War. But in Massachusetts at least, an important point of shading to consider is that anti-Black violence was entirely acceptable and compatible within this established consensus. These terms were not mutually exclusive, as a self-professed 'anti-slavery' political outlook never assumed, or implied, a commitment to racial equality. This observation underscores a subtle yet important point regarding the complex, non-binary nature of these historical terms.

Indeed, historians have long recognized the amorphous nature and intricacies of anti-slavery politics in northern states.[81] As one scholar memorably put it, 'A person in the antebellum decades could be firmly against the institution of slavery but be a racist at the same time, and definitely not an abolitionist'.[82] My research supports this consensus by firmly elucidating how northern white residents could be 'anti-slavery' in attitude and in electoral politics, but practice anti-abolitionism—and anti-Black prejudices—in everyday life. As numerous scholars have noted, Massachusetts emerged as a 'a Whig stronghold' during the antebellum period—especially during the presidential election of 1840.[83] For instance, none of the fourteen registered counties in Massachusetts voted in majority for Democratic candidate

[81] Smith, *The Stormy Present*, p. 17; Richards, *The Slave Power*, p. 21; Matthew Mason, *Apostle of the Union: A Political Biography of Edward Everett* (Chapel Hill, 2016), pp. 49-55; Matthew Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland: Freedom and Bondage Along the Ohio River* (Philadelphia, 2013), pp. 53-55; Russell McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession* (Chapel Hill, 2008), p. 27; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, pp. 103-115.

[82] Joseph Brent Morris, '"Be not conformed to this world": Oberlin and the Fight to End Slavery, 1833-1863' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Cornell University, 2010), p. 20.

[83] Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts', *The Journal of the Early Republic*, 17, No. 2 (1997), p. 278.

Martin Van Buren during the contest; all of the state's Electoral College votes went to the Whig candidate, William Henry Harrison, who ultimately became president. In fact, the state became increasingly more supportive of the Whig Party over time. Between the national elections of 1836 and 1840, a marked shift took place. Four of the state's fourteen counties about-faced, ultimately rebuffing Democratic, pro-slavery overtures by flipping party preferences from Democratic to Whig. This established both landslide and razor-thin victories for William Henry Harrison across every county in the state. This political realignment (in which 57.5 percent of the Massachusetts public voted for Harrison in 1840), proved highly significant. It demonstrated Massachusetts' commitment to northern Whig principles, which included, among other things, support for anti-slavery policies generally, and specifically a rejection of slavery expansion into the West.[84]

The state's commitment to northern Whiggery notwithstanding, hundreds, if not thousands, of white citizens across the state engaged in violence and physical assaults against their abolitionist and Black neighbors during the period 1840 to 1849. This reality exposes the complexity of placing antebellum, anti-slavery northerners into distinct, easily identifiable categories. In fact, this finding deeply complicates historians' generational tendency to place northerners into only three anti-slavery camps: 'Garrisonians, Evangelicals, and political abolitionists', a propensity first observed in the scholarship of Joseph Morris.[85] In reality, the political inclinations of anti-slavery northerners proved convoluted and often impossible to classify. Three examples identified in *The Liberator* illustrate this complicated political situation. Of the following counties that voted with supermajorities in 1840 for Whig candidate William Henry Harrison—Hampshire County (69.6 percent), Worcester County (62.5 percent), and Barnstable County (62.9 percent)—all witnessed observable, anti-abolitionist and anti-

[84] 'Abstract of the returns of Votes for Electors of President and Vice President of the United States for the 14th Term', Secretary of Commonwealth Returns of votes for presidential electors 1788-1956, Massachusetts State Archives; Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860,* pp. 65 and 76.
[85] Morris, '"Be not conformed to this world"', p. 31.

Black violence without exception in subsequent years.[86]

In other words, the counties in Massachusetts that rejected presidential Democratic candidates by the highest margins nonetheless continued to enact violence and abuse against their abolitionist and Black neighbors. According to *The Liberator*, in Northampton, Hampshire County, Reverend Abel Brown and a former slave barely 'escaped with their lives' after lecturing about anti-slavery; in Millville, Worcester County, Stephen S. Foster was threatened with a pistol for insulting 'the church and clergy'; and in Harwich, Barnstable County, numerous abolitionists, including Parker Pillsbury, 'were ferociously assailed by a *pro-slavery mob'* and nearly murdered.[87] In the latter 'dastardly proceeding', *The Liberator* reported, some of the organizers were even self-proclaimed abolitionists.[88] Thus, the newspaper reports of these events demonstrate that a general commitment to 'anti-slavery' principles in national electoral politics (as a logical inference is that at least some, if not most, of the perpetrators identified with the Whig Party), did not necessarily translate into outright support for Garrisonian radicalism, immediate or gradual abolition, antebellum equal rights, or even the dignity and safety of African Americans, in some cases. Nor did Massachusetts' voter preferences for Whig candidates serve as a safeguard or deterrent against political or racial violence. The complexity of antebellum 'anti-slavery' meant, as the violence in Massachusetts and especially Boston indicates, one could align and associate with the 'anti-slavery' movement generally while simultaneously harboring anti-abolitionist and anti-Black impulses. Moreover, while the lack of reporting makes it impossible to identify the perpetrators (as these individuals were often not named, and if they were, the very nature of antebellum newspapers precludes accuracy or impartiality), these reports nonetheless support extant historical scholarship. They demonstrate that the pre-Civil War, 'anti-slavery' movement proved as nebulous, confounding, and difficult to define in Massachusetts as in any of the other, northern antebellum free states.

[86] No violence, however, was observed in Franklin County, where a supermajority (60.8 percent) of voters cast ballots for the Whig ticket. See Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860*, p. 65.
[87] 'Abolition.' *The Liberator,* 31 March 1842; 'A Row in Millbury', *The Liberator,* 10 September 1841; 'Cape Cod Again', *The Liberator,* 29 December 1841.
[88] 'Cape Cod Again'.

Chapter VI: 'Contingent Freedom: Child Kidnappings, "Amalgamation," Anti-Black Assaults, and Maroon Societies in New York, 1840-1849'

In the winter of 1848, Joseph Belt, a reported 'mulatto' and free resident of New York City, was arrested by police officers and ostensibly detained under the Fugitive Slave Clause of 1793.[1] Immediately, partisan abolitionist newspapers reported on the controversy, criticizing the arrest as an act of racial injustice and warning readers that law enforcement apprehended Belt at the behest of the slave South. Indeed, Thomas Lee, a slaveholder and resident of Fredericksburg, Maryland, demanded Belt's immediate incarceration, arguing that the former 'slave' escaped from his custody. Operating under the assumption that Belt resided in New York City as a runaway, law enforcement cooperated with Lee's request. After his temporary imprisonment, northern officials summarily deported him to Gravesend Beach, Long Island, where a ship, docked at harbor, prepared for his imminent consignment to slavery. News of the arrest, however, spread quickly throughout the city, and a local court judge intervened on Belt's behalf. John W. Edmonds, sympathetic to Belt's plight, issued a writ of habeas corpus to determine the legitimacy and legality of Belt's detainment—and a trial ensued. Edmonds heard arguments from both sides, assessing both Belt's legal status and the legitimacy of Lee's claims. In the final analysis, as the court could not find sufficient evidence linking Belt to Lee's custody, the case was dismissed. As *The National Era* reported, 'the District Attorney told Belt he was discharged, and could be off'.[2] While the details of the case remain second-hand—as they emerge strictly from unreliable primary sources—antebellum newspapers insinuated that since 'another person belonging to Mr. L. left Baltimore at the same time Belt did', Lee's claims of reclamation proved highly suspect, illegitimate, and possibly even deceptive.[3]

While episodes of violence observed in previous chapters document the deliberative and performative aspects of political violence in an antebellum context, Joseph Belt's plight underscores a different but altogether pernicious typology. In brief, it highlights the nature and

[1] 'The New York Slave case', *The National Era*, 11 January 1849, p. 1.
[2] *Ibid*, p. 1.
[3] *Ibid*, p. 1.

typologies of anti-Black violence in major urban areas during the antebellum period, not to mention the inherent dangers faced by African Americans living in northern 'free' cities. Notwithstanding Belt's eventual release, his arrest and incarceration, maltreatment by law enforcement, and near-delivery to enslavement exposes the anti-abolitionist biases of local northern institutions—particularly the police—and the influence of an endemic slave system across both geographical regions. Indeed, while Belt barely escaped a terrible fate, many Black people, in port cities like New York City and other coastal areas, were not so fortunate. Many southern slave catchers and illegal kidnappers preyed upon the most vulnerable members of northern urban society, including Black children, gaining and profiting from such human rights abuses in perverse ways.

To that end, the chapter argues, firstly, that while a vast body of scholarship documents the prevalence of illegal kidnappings in northern states, historians have only now began seriously investigating the unlawful abductions—and the sudden disappearances—of northern Black children.[4] Nowhere in the North were children of color more vulnerable and subjected to human trafficking than New York City. This chapter emphasizes how the vague and contradictory nature of antebellum newspaper reports illuminates a perennial problem in historical scholarship: namely, the imprecision—and indeed impossibility—of quantitatively documenting the total number of antebellum Black child kidnappings in northern states. As this case study argues, conservative estimates related to this issue are almost certainly incorrect and likely much higher than previously recognized or understood. Second, the perpetrators of anti-Black violence during the 1840s followed a *de facto* 'script'—one that was adopted during the previous decade and ruthlessly reapplied against African Americans in the post-Jacksonian period. This qualitative similarity in anti-Black violence across antebellum decades is striking—and generally overlooked by historians investigating these issues in northern states. Third, the chapter investigates and analyzes how entrenched structural factors, such as New York City's

[4] Crystal Lynn Webster, *Beyond the Boundaries of Childhood: African American Children in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill, 2021), p. 4.

port geography and competitive economic landscape, created frictions that eventually gave rise to racial violence. These structural factors, however, when analyzed alongside specific contingent triggers such as the Panic of 1837, elucidate how racial violence persisted well past the traditionally understood Jacksonian period. Finally, by drawing attention to overlooked antebellum newspaper sources, this chapter concludes by advancing a controversial conceptualization—that is, that antebellum northern states operated not unlike maroon societies in underappreciated ways. Using episodes of violence identified in antebellum headlines and editorials, New York City also serves as an illuminating case study that demonstrate how far abolitionist newspapers would go to engender sympathy and support for Black victims through sensational reporting, the use of lurid editorializing, and the unintentional dissemination of misinformation.

New York City proved a center of destitution, gang violence, and brothel houses. While some historians have challenged this stereotypical characterization, contemporary observers—and specialists in the field—generally subscribe to this characterization. Charles Dickens, for instance, memorably referred to the Five Points region in colorful terms, describing it as beset by 'poverty, wretchedness, and vice'.[5] Indeed, the anthropologist Rebecca Yamin and her colleagues note that the famed British author found the area so debauched and dangerous that he 'refused to visit without a police escort' during his 1842 overseas visit.[6] On the other hand, Christina A. Carolus, Lisa Merrill, and Virginia Ferris point out that, notwithstanding the extreme poverty, crowded slums, and roving Irish gangs, white migrants and African

[5] Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation and Pictures From Italy* (London, 1913), p. 51, cited in Rebecca Yamin et al., *New York's Mythic Slum: Digging Lower Manhattan's Infamous Five Points* (Boston, 1997), p. 46.
[6] *Ibid*, p. 46.

Americans, in some instances, lived happily and hospitably as community members.[7] In fact, Ferris argues that African Americans and Irish immigrants resided 'together as neighbors and, in some cases, as families'.[8] This observation underscores the importance of new works of scholarship that challenge consensus views on antebellum northern race relations. Beyond these bustling, mixed communities, New York City also proved a refuge of opportunity and social mobility for African Americans. Many fugitives and free Blacks found work on the city's docks and shipyards, or as household domestic servants.[9] Due to these avenues of advancement, the city of New York, not unlike other northern urban areas, experienced episodic violence throughout the antebellum period, especially during the 1830s.

Perhaps the most destructive mob attack referenced by Jacksonian-period historians occurred in New York City in 1834. These 'anti-amalgamation' riots, as they later became known, occurred on the Fourth of July, lasted multiple days, and left many Black and abolitionist homes, businesses, and community centers vandalized after 'a mob attacked and broke up an interracial meeting at the Chatham Street Chapel' perceived to be orchestrated and hosted by the Tappan brothers.[10] Historians, when appraising these infamous riots, vary in their interpretations of what ultimately triggered them. While some scholars posit that general fears of 'amalgamation' stoked racial tensions, others indicate more specific causes.[11] Alicia J. Rivera argues that the riot was 'attributed to newspapers stoking racial tensions' over fears of

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[7] Christina M. Carolus, 'Health, Marginality, and Rhetoric in The Five Points of 19th Century Manhattan: A Historical and Archeological Look at Life in Two Marginalized Communities' (2020), p. 1; Lisa Merrill, 'Amalgamation, Moral Geography, and "Slum Tourism": Irish and African Americans Sharing Space on the Streets and Stages of antebellum New York', *Slavery and Abolition*, 37, No 3 (2016), p. 641; Virginia Ferris, '"Inside of the Family Circle": Irish and African American Interracial Marriage in New York City's Eighth War, 1870', *American Journal of Irish Studies*, 9, (2012), pp. 152-154.
[8] *Ibid*, p. 152.
[9] Shane White, 'Freedom's First Con: African Americans and Changing Notes in Antebellum New York City', *The Journal of the Early Republic*, 34, No. 3 (2014), p. 391; Sarah L. H. Gronningsater, '"On Behalf of His Race and the Lemmon Slaves": Louis Napoleon, Northern Black Legal Culture, and the Politics of Sectional Crisis', *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, 7, No. 2 (2017), pp. 210-211.
[10] Neil Smith and Don Mitchell, *Revolting New York: How 400 Years of Riot, Rebellion, Uprising, and Revolution Shaped a City* (Athens, Georgia, 2018), p. 66.
[11] Marco Antonio Pamplona, 'Riots, Republicanism and Citizenship: A Comparative Approach to Elite Attitudes and Responses on Riots in New York City and Rio de Janeiro City During the Consolidation of the Republican Order (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Columbia University, 1991), p. 226 and 231; Kyle G. Volk, 'Majority Rule, Minority Rights: The Christian Sabbath, Liquor, Racial Amalgamation, and Democracy in Antebellum America (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Chicago, 2008), p. 226; Grimsted, *American Mobbing*, p. 36.

'amalgamation'. Indeed, in keeping with one of the central arguments of this thesis, abolitionist newspapers' agency in publicizing and interpreting the meaning of these incidents shows the overlooked, persistent impact these political organs enacted on antebellum domestic affairs. In fact, as Rivera demonstrates, the cumulative impact of abolitionist newspaper reports exacerbating sectional animosities clearly dates back to the Jacksonian period, proving, when combined with my own research findings, the cumulative meaning—and long gestational origins—of the sectional crisis. Meanwhile, Linda K. Kerber maintains journalists utilized the words 'amalgamist' to rally white opposition to the Tappan brothers' perceived radical abolitionism, whereas Paul A. Gilje contends that the 'amalgamation' charge was merely invoked as a justification for expelling African Americans from the city.[12] These abolitionist reports ultimately became so-called 'facts', and hence motivated white racists to commit acts of violence and brutality. Neil Smith and Don Mitchell, however, argue that 'shifting racial geography of the city, where races mixed' most significantly contributed to this violence, especially as this perceived interracial abolitionist gathering proved 'a lightning rod' event.[13] Still others argue the causes were ultimately economic in nature. Either way, most historians agree that the optics of 'amalgamation' in some variation was used by white rioters and perpetrators to justify the days-long rioting and bloodshed.

What is striking, however, is that numerous atrocities observed in abolitionist newspapers during the 1840s followed a similar script—and therefore were qualitatively similar—to acts of violence perpetrated against African Americans during the 1834 'amalgamation' riots. And in consequence, partisan newspapers used their platforms to highlight and draw attention to how growing fears of 'amalgamation' often preceded racial violence. Three instances of episodic violence in New York observed in abolitionist newspapers during the post-Jacksonian period underscore this continuity. The first episode occurred in the

[12] Rivera, 'Fears of Miscegenation', p. 17; Linda K. Kerber, 'Abolitionists and Amalgamators: The New York City Race Riots of 1834', *New York History*, 48, No. 1 (1967), p. 30; Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill and London, 1987), pp. 166-167.
[13] Smith, *Revolting New York*, pp. 66-68.

spring of 1840 in the New York City's Five Points area. *The Liberator* reported that, whilst walking peacefully with his family, a 'well dressed man, a native of Richmond, Virginia', appeared to be 'a shade darker' than his 'white children, when some ruffian, thinking it an amalgamation case, assaulted the father in an outrageous and scandalous manner'.[14] This anonymous parent was singled out and repeatedly struck with physical blows. Afterwards, he was covered in flour presumably as an act of humiliation.[15] While the details of the incident remain typically vague—the name of the perpetrator is unknown, the precise location of the assault is unidentified, and the extent of the victim's injuries went unreported—the incident demonstrates how the mere *perception* of 'amalgamation' between whites and African Americans could drive white New Yorkers to extreme, public acts of anti-Black violence across both antebellum decades.

The prospect of interracial living could trigger nocturnal acts of mob violence during the 1840s. Indeed, one particularly egregious 'amalgamation' episode identified in abolitionist newspaper reports recalls the evening home invasion—and subsequent assault—of a man and his entire family. *The Liberator* reported that 'a gang of rowdies, in the night, entered the house of a white man, who has a mulatto wife', and 'dragged' him 'from the house, stripped and beat him, and then repeatedly immersed him in the canal'.[16] While the episode occurred outside New York City and the newspaper does not recount granular details of the violence, *The Liberator* hastened to add that 'similar outrages were committed upon the woman and a small child, a year or two old'.[17] The home invaders also reportedly murdered the family dog.[18] Unlike the previous incident in New York City, however, where innocent 'white' bystanders escaped the wrath of a violence-prone mob, this incident proves how perennially vulnerable 'mulatto' women and children could be to acts of barbarism and sadism from racist whites during the 1840s. As Crystal Webster argues, this susceptibility to violence has long been relegated to the

[14] 'An Outrage', *The Liberator*, 29 May 1840.
[15] *Ibid*, p. 1.
[16] 'Scene in a Free State', *The Liberator,* 26 June 1846, p. 4.
[17] *Ibid*, p. 4.
[18] *Ibid,* p. 4.

'extreme margins of historical recognition'—yet careful readings of antebellum newspapers help bring these neglected and forgotten occurrences to light and reveal the presence of violent threats even when physical harm did not explicitly occur.[19] These newspaper reports also fueled readiness efforts and heightened the ever-present dangers lurking in major urban settings like New York City. While the facts of the incident lack corroboration and confirmation, due to the unreliability of partisan newspapers, that a 'gang of rowdies' reportedly targeted and assaulted 'a small child' and his mother due to the family's living situation delineates an important observations related to the antebellum period: the inherent dangers of marrying and raising children in interracial households in 'free', northern states.

Perhaps the most famous example of 'amalgamation' harassment during the post-Jacksonian period occurred against the famed orator Frederick Douglass during the spring of 1847. Douglass, upon returning from Albany after speaking at an American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) meeting and attending a deliberative meeting of the state assembly, was explicitly accused of 'amalgamating' with a white woman during his travels.[20] On the two-night, round trip voyage from New York City to Albany, Democratic newspapers made three accusations against Douglass. First, that he clearly and surreptitiously engaged in sexual relations with a white woman. Second, that his female companion initiated the secret tryst, asking a chambermaid to move their rooms closer and adjacently; and third, that the adjoining chambers were connected by an entryway. Confronted by the ship's captain in New York City, on the final morning of the journey, Douglass experienced overt racism, unsubstantiated accusations, and racial epithets. 'Capt. Cruttenden discovered it in the morning', wrote the Democratic and anti-Black *Script* newspaper, 'and on their coming down told the nigger never to darken the saloon of any boat commanded by him again, and ordered him ashore'.[21]

[19] Webster, *Beyond the Boundaries of Childhood*, p. 6.
[20] 'Letter From Frederick Douglass', *The Liberator*, 11 June 1847, p. 1.
[21] 'Frederick Douglass to William Lloyd Garrison, June 7, 1847', *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 7 June 1847, p. 3.

In a letter to William Lloyd Garrison, Douglass vehemently denied any impropriety or wrongdoing. While conceding that he accepted his white female companion's assistance in securing accommodations, due to the 'brutal' mistreatment he received as a Black man aboard the steamer, the famed orator maintained his innocence.[22] He claimed that he 'neither saw nor heard my friend till next morning, when we landed in New York'. 'As to what is alleged to have been said by my friend to the chambermaid, it may or may not be true, and true or false, it is a small matter', he wrote. 'We needed neither bolts, bars, nor locks, to keep us in the path of virtue and rectitude'.[23] Instead, Douglass attributed the accusation solely to bigotry and racial prejudice. 'My color was the cause of his brutality', he declared.[24] He similarly confirmed his humiliation and mistreatment, informing Garrison that 'the Captain did utter some filthy remarks, calling me a "nigger"…and telling me never to take a state room on board his steamer again'.[25] In the end, the press battle for truth that followed and which played out in newspaper reports did more than attempt to vindicate and exonerate Douglass' actions. The public missive to Garrison, published in *The Liberator* as the headline article on page three of that week's issue, provided compelling 'amalgamation' content and scandalous material to both sell newspapers and provoke apoplectic reactions regarding Douglass' mistreatment. In fact, towards the end of the missive, Douglass' tone took on an increasingly defensive, outraged posture. 'This whole story, from beginning to end, in gross and scope, *in letter and spirit,* in principle and inference, is a foul, deliberate, unmixed, and malicious fabrication', he wrote, 'and none, but one over whom the sway of the devil is complete, could have *invented* and penned them'.[26] Naturally, many partisan readers of *The Liberator* would have been interested in the story about such a famous abolitionist, and therefore keen to purchase copy involving such salacious, eye-catching details.

Be that as it may, the details of what occurred turn out to be far less important than the

[22] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[23] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[24] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 3.
[26] *Ibid*, p. 3.

consequences of the incident—namely, the vehemence with which Douglass publicly defended himself against charges of sexual 'amalgamation'. As already mentioned, his letter was later republished in *The Liberator*—both to convey to Garrison's readers his mistreatment and publicly exonerate his conduct. That he felt compelled to defend himself at all—despite expressly declaring that the allegations against him were both defamatory and beneath dignifying—says much about his sensitivity to the charges and the dangers of crossing *de facto* societal boundaries in northern states. Since anti-abolitionists could not effectively refute his arguments against slavery and anti-Black discrimination, Democratic-leaning newspapers ostensibly attempted to discredit him through character assassination and sexual impropriety. As Douglass would routinely lament in his public letters, if he was a white man, charged with precisely the same transgression, a public letter defending his actions would hardly have been necessary.

This 'amalgamation' charge therefore was used in this instance as both a political cudgel and call to violence to undermine radical anti-slavery activism and convey the 'fanaticism' of abolitionists. This political playbook of instigating violence proved evident both against the Tappan brothers during the 1834 'anti-amalgamation' riots for coordinating abolitionists meetings in New York City, as earlier referenced—and later against anonymous Black individuals and famous orators like Frederick Douglass. As these incidents demonstrate, fears of 'amalgamation', as utilized by both anti-abolitionist and anti-Black agitators during the 1830s, were later repurposed with devastating and humiliating effects during the following decade. Anti-'amalgamation' rioters recognized that during the antebellum period they could build grassroots support among racist whites—and justify violence against abolitionists and Black radicals—if the perception of an entrenched social more had been violated. At the same time, newspaper editors never allowed these eruptions in violence to go undocumented. They used these incidents to both dramatize physical assaults during the antebellum period and show readers how fears of interracial 'mixing' proved a major threat to persons of color during both

the Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian periods. Radical abolitionists' coverage of these events—emphasizing not only the innocence of victims, the susceptibility of children, and gratuitous violence carried out against not only human beings but domestic animals—stoked outrage among radical audiences and proved an excellent marketing tool to sell and distribute newspapers and increase sales.

All that being said, some scholars argue that economic uncertainty and labor issues in New York City were major triggers of the aforementioned 'anti-amalgamation' riots of 1834. Notwithstanding the 'amalgamation' accusation as a clear cause and justification for the violence, Paul A. Gilje nevertheless notes how 'white concern with labor competition became most apparent on the second and third days of disorder'.[27] At the same time, Carl E. Prince and Linda K. Kerber flag 'disenchanted artisan voters' and 'labor troubles' as major contributing factors, respectively.[28] While Neil Smith and Don Mitchell argue that a large faction of New York City's business classes actually condemned the 1834 rioters—as they profited from and relied upon 'an economic order' where Africans Americans were 'hyper-exploited'—these historians make a compelling case that economic problems underpinned the violence, destruction, and anti-Black physical assaults witnessed in New York City in 1834.[29] As such, economic slump and competition over jobs and wages emerge as causally connected to the anti-abolitionism and anti-Black violence so well documented in longstanding, Jackson-period antebellum historiography.

This chapter contends that these tensions were clearly and directed exacerbated by the Panic of 1837. This is a crucial insight that helps explain the numerous examples of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence observed in abolitionist newspaper during the early 1840s.

[27] Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy*, p. 166.
[28] Carl E. Prince, 'The Great "Riot Years": Jacksonian Democracy and Patterns of Violence in 1834', *The Journal of the Early Republic*, 5, No. 1. (1985), p. 17; Kerber, 'Abolitionists and Amalgamators', p. 30.
[29] Smith, *Revolting New York*, pp. 68.

The Panic of 1837 ultimately proved ruinous in scope and duration. 'The economic downturn of 1837 devastated the economic life of New York City', argues Alasdair Roberts, 'everyone from bankers to businessmen were laid off or struggled to find gainful employment'.[30] Not surprisingly, however, the economic downturn of 1837 more severely devastated the middle, working, and lower classes. After 17 March, at the height of the Panic, historians of the period argue that hundreds of businesses went bust and bankrupt, thus triggering the collapse of the housing market, the railroad and manufacturing industries, and the banking sector.[31] Opportunities for employment in New York City dried up and grew increasing scarce, as even the poorest neighborhoods and boroughs faced accelerating poverty, homelessness, and overcrowding. As the Boston-based abolitionist and journalist Benjamin Drew memorably wrote in his diary, 'the Panic of 1837 reached every family, however economical and hardworking'.[32] Thus, the financial panic and depression-like conditions that resulted from the economic events of 1837 paved the way for increased racial tensions, ongoing cultural jealousies, and political violence.

The effects of the Panic of 1837 lasted many years after the initial financial collapse—a neglected fact by some historians—forever impacting and reshaping the economic and social landscape of New York City during the 1840s.[33] While the economy eventually recovered, America's 'first Great Depression' permanently increased white resentments and stoked racial tensions after 1837.[34] While Lee Hershkowitz names 'intolerance' as a major consequence of technological innovation and industrialization in New York City during the middle nineteenth century, growing racial prejudice was simultaneously fueled by the economic uncertainty

[30] Alasdair Roberts, *America's First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder After the Panic of 1837* (New York, 2012), pp. 17-18.
[31] Smith, *Revolting New York*, pp. 70.
[32] 'Autobiography of Benjamin Drew', cited in *Benjamin Drew Papers, 1743-1996*, p. 756, MHS Collections.
[33] Roberts, *America's First Great Depression*, p. 23; Jessica Lepler, '1837: Anatomy of a Panic' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Brandeis University, 2007), p. 335; Jessica Lepler, '"The News Flew Like Lightning": Spreading Panic in 1837', *The Journal of Cultural Economy*, 78, No. 4 (2012), p. 179; Ann Fabian, 'Speculations on Distress: The Popular Discourse of the Panics of 1837 and 1857', *The Yale Journalism of Criticism*, 3, Issue 1 (1989), p. 130.
[34] This phrase is borrowed from Alasdair Roberts, see Roberts, *America's First Great Depression*, pp. 1-18.

initiated by the Panic of 1837.[35] And while 'social tensions' certainly existed between native-born whites and newly arrived Irish immigrants, given the lingering ramifications over the financial crisis, historians have underemphasized the degree to which economic tensions specifically proved a major trigger point in underpinning racial violence across the Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian periods.

To take but one example, this argument is well supported by revisiting one of the violent physical attacks referenced in the previous section. To recap, this anti-Black assault occurred in the Five Points of New York City when an anonymous pedestrian, alleged to be 'a shade darker' than his 'white children', was nearly beaten to death by a mob of ruffians.[36] Attention to language here, however, is crucial to understanding the newspaper's interpretation of what actually occurred. While *The Liberator* clearly argued that the white perpetrators believed it was 'an amalgamation case' which ultimately prompted the violence, another key detail emerges upon closer reading of the sources. In fact, one of the first significant details from *The Liberator* editorial dated 29 May 1840 is that the victim was a 'respectable looking and well dressed man'.[37] While corroborating the specific details and facts of the incident proves impossible, it stands to reason that *The Liberator* believed the man was attacked at least in part due to his alleged engagement in 'racial mixing' as to his economic station and fashionable appearance. This incident, therefore, while one of the many thousands of anti-Black and anti-'mulatto' assaults documented in antebellum newspapers, demonstrates that economic-driven, racialized violence proved a major qualitative similarity between both antebellum decades.

These types of incidents were hardly aberrational or difficult to observe in abolitionist newspapers. In the summer of 1842, in New York City, 'the son of a very worthy and respectable colored citizen' was 'dogged the other day for several hours' by a 'Southerner' and

[35] Lee Hershkowitz, 'An Anatomy of Riot: Astor Place Opera House, 1849', *New York History*, 87, No. 3 (2006), p. 277.
[36] 'An Outrage'.
[37] *Ibid*.

nearly kidnapped.[38] The victim's pursuer, editorialized *The Liberator*, charged the gentlemen with being a runaway 'from Alabama' and demanded that 'he should be carried back'. To his credit, this 'free citizen of New-York' confronted his pursuer, 'knocked him flat on the pavement', and proclaimed his freedom before a very large crowd of white spectators. This proved a remarkably different outcome as to what occurred to John Tucker in Indiana in 1845, despite eerily similar circumstances.[39] These spectators—somewhat surprisingly—helped the victim escape 'notwithstanding the pro-slavery prejudices of the community'.[40] In addition, this economically motivated, racial profiling proved not dissimilar to an incident observed in Ripley, New York, during the spring 1841. *The Liberator* reported that 'two fellows, of the baser sort' targeted a Black pedestrian simply because they 'were moved with envy at seeing a colored man doing so well'.[41] This man 'gave the vile wretches no cause of offense', the newspaper reported, yet 'his skull was broken, and his head' brutalized and 'cruelly mangled'.[42] The newspaper later speculated that the individual's injuries were so severe and life-threatening that it was unlikely that he would survive.

In closing, these three relatively unknown vignettes of anti-Black mob assaults identified in abolitionist newspapers during the 1840s suggest the continuation of economically-motivated racial violence between the Jacksonian and post-Jacksonian periods. Whereas historians have long observed how economic downturns and financial panics have triggered racial violence across the decade of the 1830s, few have demonstrated—or made a direct connection—between the Panic of 1837 and racial violence in New York City lasting well until the mid-1840s. And yet in these instances, abolitionist newspapers ascribed *meaning* to ongoing acts of anti-Black violence and prejudice. In so doing, the editorial writers emerged as key actors of high agency in feeding into the perception that free Black northerners were perpetually 'under siege' due to

[38] 'The Kidnapper in Trouble', *The Liberator*, 29 July 1842.
[39] See Chapter III.
[40] 'The Kidnapper in Trouble'.
[41] 'Horrible Outrage', *The Liberator*, 14 May 1841, p. 3.
[42] *Ibid*, p. 2.

an increasingly powerful southern 'slave power'.[43] While individual editorials that reported on singular acts of violent incidents throughout the antebellum period were not necessarily novel in themselves, the collection and dissemination of such persistent violence, through the sheer volume of published newspaper reports, fed into sectional tensions and therefore the long buildup to southern disunion.

While historians generally agree that New York City proved an epicenter of fugitive slave reclamations during the antebellum period, only in recent years have scholars effectively investigated the methods and tactics employed by slave traffickers in illegally abducting and enslaving Black children.[44] Richard Bell refers to New York City as a major center of the 'Reverse Underground Railroad'—that is, a pernicious hub of human trafficking where perverse 'market incentives' and duplicitous 'gangs' lured, abducted, and sold unsuspecting Black persons to the Deep South.[45] Unsurprisingly, given the huge number of fugitive slave families entering New York City during the antebellum period, Shane White notes how slave traffickers often targeted and preyed upon small children—the most innocent and defenseless of victims—when unattended or unchaperoned.[46] Leslie M. Harris flags the little known, but not atypical case of one Hannah Conyers, a young Black child who 'disappeared' after reportedly fetching water from a public fountain.[47] Harris argues that 'a more open street culture' left many impoverished and lower-income Black children susceptible to kidnapping.[48] Jonathan Daniel Wells observes that slave catchers and illegal profiteers ensnared young children using more nefarious tactics, such as enticing them with assurances of employment or 'the promise of a

[43] This phrase is borrowed from Steven Hahn, see Hahn, The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom, p. 34.
[44] Hinks, '"Frequently Plunged into Slavery", p. 17.
[45] Richard Bell, 'Counterfeit Kin: Kidnappers of Color, the Reverse Underground Railroad, and the Origins of Practical Abolition', *The Journal of the Early Republic*, 38, No. 2 (2018), pp. 201-202.
[46] Shane White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002), pp. 25-26.
[47] Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago and London, 2003), p. 209.
[48] *Ibid*, p. 209.

treat'.[49] This patent deception and targeting of children ultimately proved a reliable method for kidnappers and slave traffickers alike during the pre-Civil War era. Meanwhile, Bell also notes that child smugglers often used 'custom designed abduction techniques' in ways that specifically targeted 'children between six and sixteen years old'.[50] This suggests that kidnapping methods varied on a case-by-case basis, and were not uniform or invariable. Nevertheless, such broad-based, brazen methods demonstrate why kidnappings and attempted kidnappings were so common and ubiquitous in places like New York City. Even the leader of the city's vigilance committee, David Ruggles, was nearly abducted on several occasions.[51] At the same time, Wells and others argue that slave catchers were exceedingly shrewd and political in currying favor with New York City's 'police and judges'—utilizing these connections to secure the capture or re-enslavement of Black children.[52] While this tactic was certainly regularly employed, John Harris observes that many illegal child traffickers often knew they were operating under false pretenses.[53] For this reason, he argues, slave traffickers understood that a successful illegal kidnapping could only be possible by circumventing, bribing, or using 'intermediaries' to evade port authorities and custom officials.[54]

While varying tactics for abduction were utilized at different times in northern cities, this case study underscores the role of law enforcement and court judges in securing the incarceration or re-enslavement of Black children. Notwithstanding the fact these incidents took place before the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 mandated officers play a more active role in recapturing runaways, this chapter advances the scholarship of Jonathan Daniels Wells and others who emphasize the outsized role law enforcement played in consigning and returning

[49] Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Kidnapping Club: Wall Street, Slavery, and Resistance on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York, 2020), p. 18.
[50] Richard Bell, '"Principally Children: Kidnapping, Child Trafficking, and the Mission of Early National Anti-Slavery Activism', *Journal of American History*, 109, Issue 1 (2022), p. 47.
[51] Carol Wilson, *Freedom At Risk: The Kidnapping of Free Blacks in America, 1780-1865* (Kentucky, 1994), pp. 111-113.
[52] Wells, *The Kidnapping Club*, p. 18.
[53] John Harris, *The Last Slave Ships: New York and the End of the Middle Passage* (New Haven and London, 2020), p. 62.
[54] *Ibid*, p. 62.

Black children to slavery.[55] While the methods and keyword searches employed in this thesis yielded only a small number of child abductions, the illegal seizure and imprisonment of the aforementioned Joseph Belt underscores northern officialdom's complicity in perpetuating the enslavement of human beings. Again, law enforcement arrested Belt, a suspected 'mulatto' fugitive child, and attempted to remand him to slavery. 'A negro boy, whose name was Joseph Belt, who was claimed as a slave of Mr. Lee of Fredericks, M.d., was seized in the street, by a policeman', wrote *The Liberator* on 29 December 1848, 'and was conveyed' to Brooklyn 'where a vessel which was waiting a fair wind was to convey him south'.[56] Other newspapers, such as *The Daily Spy* and *The New York Saturday Post*, similarly reported on the case.[57] 'The man was arrested without any warrant from a magistrate or judge', wrote the latter newspaper, 'and brought to Long Island for the purpose of sending him back to his owner'.[58] While the aforementioned Judge Edmonds ultimately learned of the arrest and demanded Belt be granted a hearing, all observed newspaper reports agreed that the avowed slaveholder, Lee, utilized northern law enforcement and magistrates to secure and possibly re-slave an alleged Black child. Hence, while the factual details and circumstances of Belt's incarceration remain lost to history, and can only be maintained through unreliable nineteenth century newspaper reports, historians can be reasonably assured that abolitionist newspapers used the incident to convince its readership that the police had some role to play in securing the incarceration and near-enslavement of a Black youth. Once again, this overt politicization of Belt's arrest is further supported by the fact that, while Lee may have been convinced that Belt was his 'property', *The National Era* raised concerns and cast doubt about whether law enforcement actually apprehended the correct fugitive.[59] This possible mix-up suggests three important facts regarding this case. First, the reporting of abolitionist newspapers demonstrated activists' desire to seize the narrative and influence the outcome of Belt's incarceration. Second, New York City

[55] Wells, *The Kidnapping Club,* p. 18.
[56] 'Kidnapping', *The Liberator*, 29 December 1848, p. 3.
[57] *The Daily Spy*, 26 December 1848, p. 2.
[58] 'Decision of the Slave Case by Judge Edmonds.', *The Liberator,* 5 January 1849, p. 2.
[59] 'The New York Slave Case', p. 3.

police officers often served at the beck-and-call of southern slaveholders, arresting suspected fugitive slaves without proper investigation or due diligence. And third, southern slaveholders were happy to remand, if necessary, any Black person to slavery, regardless of age or free status, in order to secure their own selfish financial ends.

Nevertheless, as noted above, one of the key findings of this chapter is the relative dearth of observed child kidnappings in antebellum newspapers. This challenge can be attributable to several factors. First of all, the methods and keyword searches employed for this case study are, by definition, limited. It is simply impossible to search every online newspaper from the antebellum period, nor visit every brick-and-mortar archive that may have reported on Black child abductions in New York City. Second, as families who fell victim to child slave trafficking were oftentimes fugitives themselves, opportunities for legal recourse or local assistance proved few and far between—and potentially even dangerous. In pursuit of justice, fugitives often faced the dual risk of self-incrimination and watching their pleas go unaddressed, or even ignored. Entirely devoid of clear citizenship and civil rights in New York City, free African Americans were equally marginalized because judicial and law enforcement agencies, codified under federal law, forced local governments to cooperate with southern slaveholders in the reclamation of their alleged 'property'.[60] It is therefore entirely conceivable that African Americans recognized the futility of legal action, indicating that many incidents of child kidnappings went unreported or became actively suppressed. Third, Black families living in dirty, cramped, and impoverished neighborhoods like the Five Points did not have the social status or financial means to raise awareness about or bring significant attention to their understandable anguish. Lacking the extra income or social connections to launch private inquiries or mount serious media campaigns to find their stolen children, their powerlessness—and perceived inferiority—would have made reclamation attempts all but impossible. Most importantly, as Michael J. Douma notes, many New Yorkers themselves were active

[60] Wells, *The Kidnapping Club*, p. 18.

participants in the domestic slave trade.[61] This unholy alliance between northern business elites and southern slaveholders even after the death of slavery in New York State created a perverse incentive to downplay or obfuscate concerns regarding child slave trafficking. Taken together, these structural factors created a system of disempowerment where child kidnappings frequently went unreported by victims' families, ignored by law enforcement, or actively downplayed by the political and business-class establishments.

Finally, the overlooked and largely forgotten Joseph Belt case demonstrates the complexity and nebulousness of quantitative studies related to antebellum child kidnappings in northern states. While this incident proved the only episode of a documented child abduction in New York City observed in *The Liberator* for the purposes of this study, the circumstances and facts of the case remain unreliable and contradictory. For instance, separate editorials published within Garrison's own newspaper refer to Belt, at different times, as both a 'boy' and a 'man'.[62] This contradiction is difficult to reconcile, as the secondary literature consulted for this study does not weigh in on or address the controversy.[63] It could be that, customarily, Black males, despite their age, were often referred to as 'boys' in nineteenth century print culture. Nevertheless, these partisan, murky, and unverified facts in the press clearly deepened sectional tensions, especially as rumors swelled and northerners watched helplessly as slavery seemingly subsumed itself into New York State law. The absence of proven facts, coupled with increasing newspaper reports that slaveholders were trampling states' rights in the free states—a diagnosis disseminated by abolitionists in order to redirect southerners' favorite fetish against them—inexorably propelled the nation closer to sectional disharmony. And yet, in spite of historical documentation, court records, and historical scholarship related to the case, scholars face an inherently complicated dilemma when dealing with the unreliability of antebellum newspapers

[61] Michel J. Douma, *The Slow Death of Slavery in Dutch New York: A Cultural, Economic, and Demographic History, 1700-1827* (Cambridge, 2025), p. 3.
[62] See the aforementioned *Liberator* editorials on 29 December 1849 and 5 January 1849, respectively.
[63] Paul Finkelman, '*Prigg v. Pennsylvania* and Northern State Courts: Anti-Slavery Use of a Pro-Slavery Decision, *Civil War History*, 25, No. 1 (1979), p. 31; Zachary Aaron Kimmel, 'No Person Shall Be Deprived: Anti-Slavery Due Process in New York State Courts, 1840-1860' (Unpublished Undergraduate Thesis, Columbia University, 2021), p. 34; Gronningsater, '"On Behalf of His Race and Lemmon Slaves"', p. 215 & 237.

reports: deciding whether to include or not exclude Belt in any quantitative analysis that addresses Black child kidnappings in New York City. This decision is further complicated by the fact that it would be entirely predicated on discrepant and fragmentary evidence. This strongly suggests that these kinds of qualitative studies are highly subjective, prone to error, and possibly misleading.

This observation adds greater nuance to precise qualitative assertions, such as the contention that 'New York City alone averaged 30 stolen children yearly' during the pre-Civil War era.[64] While such a number is entirely possible, such exactitude ignores the subjectiveness and imprecision of lost, incomplete, and fragmentary nineteenth century primary sources. A safer approach might be to give a range of annual kidnappings that accounts for the omissions, vicissitudes, and contradictions that abound in primary sources that any qualitative study might be based on. At the same time, while the number of Black children trafficked in New York City could certainly be fewer than thirty per annum, it is exceedingly more likely that child kidnapping occurred in much greater numbers than historians currently recognize. As mentioned above, this is due in large part to the likelihood that many of these incidents went unreported by African Americans themselves, abolitionist newspapers were in many instances unaware of such episodes, and northern elites' were financially incentivized to actively downplay, or suppress, such allegations to maintain and protect their economic and business relationships with southern slaveholders. As a result, this illustrates how the priorities and knowledge of the antebellum northern press helped shape and precipitate the sectional crisis. It also explains why the Dred Scott Decision, issued roughly a decade later, seemed such a surprise to northern readers when it finally did become widely reported in the late 1850s.

Confirmed kidnappings emerged as a small but important theme in the primary source

[64] Carol Wilson and Calvin D. Wilson, 'White Slavery: An American Paradox', *Slavery and Abolition*, 19, Issue 1 (1998), p. 9.

literature of the 1840s, across all northern antebellum states. My preliminary research demonstrates that there were 19 total observed kidnappings identified in the thirteen antebellum northern states as uncovered in anti-slavery and abolitionist newspapers (four of which were 'attempted' and did not result in confirmed abductions), whereas there were eleven confirmed kidnappings in Maine, Rhode Island, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey. It is important to note, however, that the former number, unlike the latter, was not arrived at using precise methodologies. For this reason, six northern states—Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Vermont—were excluded from deeper analysis due to methodological inconsistencies. What remains is a uniform approach and investigation into anti-Black kidnappings in the seven chosen northern states.[65]

The perpetrators of anti-Black violence in an antebellum context would have employed various strategies to achieve their own political or personal ends. Kidnappings (as demonstrated in New York State and qualitatively different from the types of violence observed in previous chapters) were carried out covertly in order to avoid discovery and prosecution, whereas other types of anti-Black violence, especially the mobbing of abolitionist parades and conventions (Chapters I and II, respectively), were intended as spectacles, designed to publicly intimidate and humiliate activists and their Black allies. These different aims (clandestine vs. exhibition) would obviously have impacted how and whether these incidents were reported in the press.

And yet, while many instances of kidnapping went unreported for a variety of reasons

[65] The seven states chosen for this investigative research—Maine, Rhode Island, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, New York, and New Jersey—provide key insights into illegal abductions during the antebellum period. While there was some degree of arbitrariness in scanning headlines, sifting through articles, and cataloguing incidents on the Accessible Archives, Inc. digital website, all headlines, for the first 200 newspaper hits, were consulted and reviewed as possible avenues of inquiry. Second, the exact same primary and secondary search terms were used (with only slight variation) in all chosen states. And finally, incidents of violence were researched at the micro-level as well, specifically in three major metropolitan areas, with known ties to abolitionist activism an violence. In summary, for every state investigated, there were 18 total searches conducted, consisting of at least 200 newspaper articles. This means that there were at least 3,600 headlines read per state and 25,200 headlines read total. Furthermore, the keywords 'mob' and 'riot' were utilized as primary search terms across all seven states; there were thirteen secondary keywords applied universally; and three cities (or towns known for abolitionist activities) were added to each state. As an illustrative example, the following are the search terms used for the state of New York. Primary search terms: 'mob' and 'riot'; secondary terms: 'mobocratic', 'murder', 'outrage', 'disgraceful', 'hiss', 'anti-abolitionist', 'abolition/abolitionist', 'violence', 'amalgamation', 'kidnapping', 'anarchy', 'missile', 'colorphobia'; three cities: 'Albany', 'Utica', 'Syracuse'.

throughout the antebellum period, especially due to the clandestine nature of these abductions, the abolitionist press routinely used their influence to ascribe meaning and urgency to confirmed or attempted cases.[66] In the case of Joseph Belt, *The Liberator, The National Anti-Slavery Standard, The National Era,* and *The North Star* all reported on Joseph Belt's seizure and subsequent arrest and court case.[67] *The National Era*, however, went a step further, suggesting that Belt was illegally purchased, years earlier, by the same master who now demanded his apprehension. This proved a rather incendiary charge—one that could not be verified or proven. 'Supposing that he has been held as a slave by Lee, and has escaped from him, it does not follow that he was legally held', the newspaper declared. 'He may have been kidnapped from a free State, and reduced to slavery unjustly'.[68] Meanwhile, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* equated Belt's arrest to an outright illegal kidnapping. The newspaper reported that 'a carriage suddenly stopped' whilst Belt and a friend were walking on Duane Street, and 'two men jumped out, and with the assistance of the driver' suddenly 'seized and put them into a carriage'.[69] Whereas Belt's companion was immediately released—after his captors declared he 'ain't the man'—Belt was 'taken by the men to a house in New York, where he saw Mr. Lee, who [claimed] to be his master'.[70] *The National Anti-Slavery Standard* reported that Belt was never apprehended initially by police officers, but ultimately *saved* by them from the grips of two known slave catchers.[71] *The Liberator*, meanwhile, echoed the reporting of *The Standard,* declaring that Belt was ultimately 'seized in the street'.[72] *The North Star* similarly editorialized that 'two white rascals in the employ of Lee' apprehended Belt, referring to the slaveholder in colorful terms as a 'negro hunting villain'.[73] Put simply, the abolitionist press, by crafting careful narratives and engaging in widespread speculation, sought to impugn the motives of

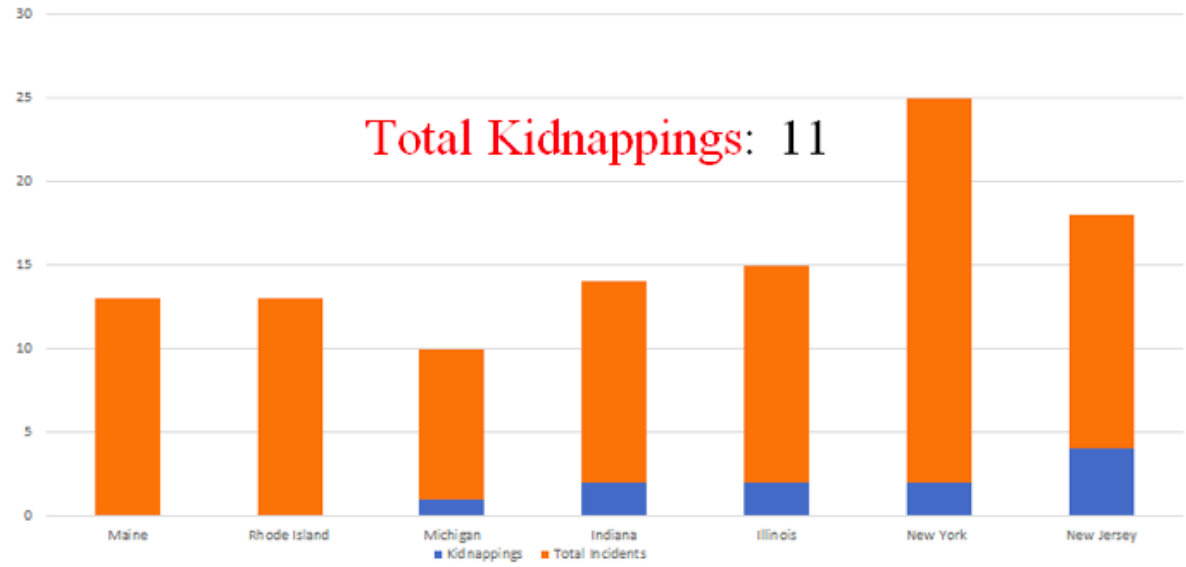
[66] David Fiske, *Solomon Northup's Kindred: The Kidnapping of Free Citizns before the Civil War* (Santa Barbara, 2016), p. 42.
[67] See *The Liberator*, 29 December 1848, p. 3; *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 28 December 1848, p. 3; *The National Era*, 11 January 1849; *The North Star*, 12 January 1849, p. 3.
[68] 'The New York Slave Case', *The National Era*, 11 January 1849.
[69] *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 28 December 1848, p. 3.
[70] *Ibid*.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] 'Kidnapping', *The Liberator*, 29 December 1848, p. 3.
[73] 'Communications', *The North Star*, 6 January 1848, p. 3.

southern slaveholders and draw attention to the ongoing 'man-stealing' issue affecting all northern states. That Joseph Belt's plight and court case was similarly picked up by more widely read mainstream newspapers, including *The New York Daily Herald* and *The New York Tribune,* showcased such outlets' strong desire to control the narrative over Joseph Belt's illegal abduction and exert undue influence over its northern readership.[74] Thus, over time, the cumulative impact of abolitionist activism via print culture fostered sectional disharmony between North and South, sowing the seeds of regional separatism throughout the antebellum period. While it proved impossible to verify whether Joseph Belt was born into slavery in the Upper South, the abolitionist press was not strictly speaking interested in the facts or minutia of the case. In this instance, multiple radical abolitionist newspapers sought to discredit claims on Belt's freedom by engaging in speculative newspaper reporting and utilizing the power of the press to shape how the northern reading public understood the facts of the case. This small but crucial example shows how abolitionist newspapers were not just mere chroniclers and reporters of antebellum violence—although they oftentimes were—but became shapers and influencers over the antebellum scandals that they covered and attempted to amplify.

Nevertheless, according to my research, several kidnappings were reported in abolitionist newspapers during the period 1840 to 1849. Specifically, four out of fourteen violent assaults observed in New Jersey were reported as confirmed kidnappings. By contrast, Indiana, Illinois, and New York—states with the next highest total number of incidents, at two apiece—experienced much lower kidnapping rates as a total percentage of physical violence and civil disruptions. Meanwhile, only one confirmed kidnapping was observed in the state of Michigan. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, of the seven states investigated for confirmed kidnappings using consistent methodologies, zero incidents occurred in Maine or Rhode Island. Notwithstanding the small sample size, such findings shed some insight into the extent and nature of violent kidnappings across northern states during this period.

[74] *The New York Daily Herald*, 24 December 1849, p. 1; *The New York Daily Herald*, 27 December 1848, p. 2; *The New York Tribune*, 25 December 1848, p. 1; *The New York Daily Tribune*, 26 December 1849, p. 2.

Figure 6.1: Confirmed Kidnappings in Northern States as a Percentage of Total Anti-Abolitionist and Anti-Black Incidents



What accounts, then, for the 50 percent higher rate of anti-Black kidnappings in New Jersey, as compared to neighboring, northern antebellum states? The answer is relevant to this case study and proves rather instructive in understanding the nature and development of anti-Black kidnappings in New York State. Certainly, the small sample size of the investigation could be a contributing factor. Nevertheless, a second plausible argument is the unique geographical location of New Jersey itself. Beyond the fact that the Delaware River was a major hub of the domestic slave trade during the eighteenth century, flowing south from New York and Pennsylvania along the eastern edges of New Jersey until finally emptying into the Atlantic Ocean, such a natural waterway proved advantageous to the early practitioners and beneficiaries of the region's domestic slave trade.[75] Over time, however, the buying and selling of 'chattel' proved less remunerative in the Delaware Valley. As gradual manumission laws were instituted and took hold, slaveholders looked instead, with increased yearning, to the vast profits that

[75] Darold D. Wax, 'Africans on the Delaware: The Pennsylvania Slave Trade, 1759–1765', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January, 1983), pp. 40-42.

could be obtained from selling New Jersey slaves to markets with rising demands.[76] This created a natural pipeline of chattel slaves from the Upper South to deepest Dixie and beyond—and therefore attempted and confirmed kidnappings rose proportionally in the state. And yet, far more important than slaveholder's commitment to nascent trans-continental markets, was New Jersey's natural borders to the Upper South—and the difficulty of pinpointing exact boundaries between slavery and freedom. This nebulous frontier hardly created hard-and-fast territorial designations between an industrialized, 'anti-slavery' North and a largely agricultural, 'pro-slavery' south. Edward L. Ayers, for instance, has shown convincingly that these disparate geographical lines were perennially blurred during the American Civil War period.[77] Indeed, the borders between Salem County, New Jersey and the First State proved somewhat amorphous and surprisingly close. Tracing state lines dating back to the seventeenth century, the proximity of New Jersey to Delaware and Maryland is a conspicuous difference between the (relative) chasm that existed between the Deep South and New England.

These factors proved equally germane to the abduction of Joseph Belt in New York City. Not only did New York State have the largest slave population in North America during the early colonial period—but Manhattan, made possible by the expansive Hudson River and its maritime connections to the slave South, emerged as a major center of northern and southern commerce.[78] While the African American population of New York City shrank steadily during the antebellum period, more than ten thousand African Americans still lived and worked in the city during the 1840s.[79] These developments—including Manhattan's relatively close proximity to the Border South and open ocean connections—made New York City an especially desirable

[76] James J. Gigantino II, 'Trading in Jersey Souls: New Jersey and the Interstate Slave Trade', *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 77, No. 3 (2010), p. 283.
[77] Edward L. Ayers, *The Thin Line of Freedom: The Civil War and Emancipation in the Heart of America* (New York and London, 2017), pp. 11-12, 19-20.
[78] Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, p. 12; Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, p. 8; Alan Singer, 'New York and Slavery: Complicity and Resistance', *New York and New Jersey State Councils for the Social Studies*, 50, No. 2 (2005), p. 3; Michael E. Groth, *Slavery and Freedom in the Mid-Hudson Valley* (Albany, 2017), p. xvii.
[79] Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, p. 3; '1840 Census: Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States: Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, New York, New Jersey', p. 17 and 21.

destination for fugitive slaves while simultaneously accessible to illegal abductors and kidnappers. While Belt was allegedly followed and hunted through the streets of Manhattan before his arrest, given New York's not-so-distant proximity to Maryland—and its historical, economic, and cultural draws for African American—it is unsurprising that Belt (and others in equally desperate situations) would seek asylum there.

Scholars have long noted how the state of New Jersey operated as one of many possible avenues from the slave South to freedom.[80] Salem County, New Jersey—the most western county of the state—sits just 40 miles from the most easterly county of Maryland, and only 17 miles from Delaware. This close proximity to freedom proved equally true of New York State; the upstate region became a major residence of fugitive slaves during the antebellum period.[81] This development may explain why Joseph Belt first felt compelled to reside in New York after his escape, a decision perhaps buoyed by the city's well known tradition of vigilance and resistance against anti-Black kidnappings.[82] And yet, these direct pathways from the very northern tips of slave country to nominal freedom ensured that slave catchers could come and go easily, and without hindrance. Not only would fugitive slaves be more inclined to make their escape north through New Jersey and New York State, but the inverse was similarly true: fugitive slave catchers and hired patrollers travelling through the Delaware and Hudson River Valleys would almost certainly enter these states first en route to New England and Lower Canada. This partially explains why anti-Black kidnapping—and the illegal abductions of free persons of color—proved more common in New Jersey and its neighboring mid-Atlantic states than other northern areas.

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[80] Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad* (New York and London, 2015); William J. Switala, *Underground Railroad in New York and New Jersey* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 2006); Ellen D. Alford, *Abolition and the Underground Railroad in South Jersey: Not Without a Fight* (Charleston, 2023); Dennis C. Rizzo, *Parallel Communities: The Underground Railroad in South New Jersey* (Charleston, 2008).
[81] Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, p. 7; Judith Wellman, 'This Side of the Border: Fugitives from Slavery in Three Central New York Communities', *New York History*, 79, No. 4 (1998), pp. 359-365; Jean Richardson, 'Buffalo's Antebellum African American Community and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History*, 27, No. 2 (2003), p. 30; Rebecca E. Zietlow, 'Fugitives From Slavery, Free Black Activists, and the Origins of Birthright Citizenship', *Mississippi Law Journal* (2024-2025), pp. 1432-1433; Churchill, *The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence in Antebellum America*, p. 124.
[82] Foner, *Gateway to Freedom*, pp. 2-3.

The primary reason for rising anti-Black abductions in New Jersey, however, was the fact that the mid-Atlantic operated in some ways as *de facto* slave states. As historian James J. Gigantino II writes, 'gradual abolition progressed [in New Jersey] even more slowly than in New England and was not complete until after the Civil War'.[83] This, in effect, meant that slavery was not officially abolished in New Jersey until its universal and national prohibition during Reconstruction. Children of slaves in New Jersey, as codified under the 1804 Gradual Abolition Act, were kept in legalized bondage for at least two decades after their birth, regardless of sex.[84] The system of apprenticeship so resembled 'the peculiar institution' that contemporary observers could not distinguish these so-called 'slaves for a term' from common bondspersons.[85] Given this culture of anti-abolitionism, it is not surprising that anti-Black kidnappings were correspondingly far more common in the mid-Atlantic (and indeed mid-western regions of the nation) than in New England due to its proximity to the slave South via shared land borders and waterways. States such as Maine and Rhode Island were increasingly opposed to an encroaching southern 'slave power' meddling in their state affairs—as evidenced by their continued passage of personal liberty laws and massive grassroots protests against slave catchers and hired 'man-stealers' during the period. New Jersey, on the other hand, maintained a sustained tradition of slavery protections—so much so that it was once derided by *The Liberator* as a veritable 'slave state!' in a headline published in 1845.[86] Thus, it is not surprising that anti-Black kidnappings were disproportionately highest in a state where its white residents, according to Gigantino, maintained deep ties to the slave South, opposed radical abolitionism in all its forms, and facilitated and promoted the return of runaway slaves through its court and penal systems.[87] These developments were similarly true in New York State where scholars have long documented how slavery endured well past the American Revolutionary War period,

[83] James J. Gigantino II, 'The Whole North Is Not Abolitionized': Slavery's Slow Death in New Jersey, 1830–1860', *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (Fall 2014), p. 412.
[84] *Ibid*, pp. 411-412.
[85] Christopher N. Matthews, 'The Black Freedom Struggle in Northern New Jersey, 1613-1860: A Review of the Literature', 2019, p. 37.
[86] 'New-Jersey a Slave State!', *The Liberator*, 25 July 1845.
[87] Gigantino, 'The Whole North is Not Abolitionized', p. 425.

and failed to abolish the institution decades after many of its northern neighbors.[88] This long-standing delay—roughly some 30 years after the state's gradual abolition law was enacted—could be attributable to the same factors that influenced antebellum New Jersey: endemic white supremacy, pro-slavery sympathies, and a commitment to upholding federal fugitive slave laws. While the Joseph Belt case proved a notable antebellum exception in U.S. jurisprudence—as Belt was ultimately released and summarily gained his freedom—scholars have demonstrated that New York's state court system oftentimes sided with the slaveholders during the pre-1850 period.[89] Likely without the support of a sympathetic judge, Joseph Belt's case could have turned out rather differently. That the slaveholder Lee allegedly pursued and recaptured Belt is attributable as much to his desire for recompense, as his assumed belief that the Empire State would be sympathetic and accommodating to his entreaties.

What, then, beyond the political persuasions of a state judge, explains this anomalous judicial outcome? In brief, abolitionist activism through editorial reporting and dramatization influenced Belt's release. As evidenced by these aforementioned newspaper reports, abolitionists were keen to make the *perception* of an illegal—and unjustified—anti-Black kidnapping *reality*.[90] These reporters used the fear of slaveholders entering northern cities to galvanize anti-slavery sentiments in the city and build support for the victim. It is perhaps no surprise that somewhere between '100 to 150 colored people' in the courtroom were prepared 'to rescue the prisoner' during his arraignment, and that when Belt finally earned his court-ordered release, massive crowds reportedly celebrated and cheered outside the courtroom.[91] The journalists of these newspapers therefore decidedly influenced these events, emphasizing through the power of the press how Lee and his accomplices acted illegally, and that Belt was

[88] Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, p. 12; David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge, 2006), p. 4.
[89] Steven Lubet, *Fugitive Justice: Runaways, Rescuers, and Slavery on Trial* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010), p. 24; H. Robert Baker, 'The Fugitive Slave Clause and the Antebellum Constitution', *Law and History Review*, 30, No. 4 (2012), pp, 1144-1145; Michael J. Zydney Mannheimer, 'Fugitives From Slavery and the Lost History of the Fourth Amendment', *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law*, 25, No. 3 (2023), p. 557.
[90] See *The Liberator*, 29 December 1848, p. 3; *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 28 December 1848, p. 3; *The National Era*, 11 January 1849; *The North Star*, 12 January 1849, p. 3.
[91] 'The Slave Case', *The New York Daily Herald*, 24 December 1848, p. 1; 'Supreme Court—The Slave Case', *The New York Tribune*, 29 December 1849, p. 2.

innocent of all charges. These reports also suggested through visceral language that civil society would ultimately break down if slaveholders got their way, not to mention set a dangerous precedent, affecting the safety and security of all white New Yorkers. Once again, the Joseph Belt episode demonstrates the lengths to which the abolitionist press would go to exert agency and construe meaning to the events that they covered. It proved one of the hundreds (if not thousands) of episodes that galvanized the abolitionist press into impassioned and targeted political action. Thus, the cumulative impact of these unceasing literary outputs took its toll over a multi-decade period, feeding into sectional hostilities over time, and expediting a crisis of Union during the following decade.

Finally, as outlined by numerous historians, chattel slavery was inseparable as an institution from nineteenth century white New Jersey.[92] Aristocratic and middle-class fortunes in New Jersey were built on the backs of slave labor, as they were in New York; thus, maintaining close commercial ties to the slave South and Europe, through interstate commerce and foreign trade, proved paramount.[93] Any attempts to impede the influence of chattel slavery in either state would only prove anathema to the business interests of elite northern whites. This cultural development, which predated the founding of the United States, proved impossible to suppress during the antebellum period, despite each state's nominal free state status. There was an unspoken recognition in the mid-Atlantic states that the domestic slave trade was fundamental to their way of life, and that the kidnapping and abductions of Black people that ensued as a consequence, free and unfree, was a foreseeable consequence given the state's proximity to the slave South, commercial alliance with southerners, and economic ties with more lucrative slave markets. Hence, the arrest and detention of Joseph Belt in a northern 'free' city likely resulted from these historical factors, and therefore reflected in the observed anti-Black episodes of violence and multi-state abductions documented in this section.

[92] Boyd, Kendra et al., 'Old Money: Rutgers University and the Political Economy of Slavery in New Jersey', cited in eds. Marisa J. Fuentes and Deborah Gray White, *Scarlet and Black: Slavery and Dispossession in Rutgers History* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 2016), p. 51.
[93] *Ibid*, p. 51.

A robust and growing literature on marronage societies demonstrates the commonalities between self-emancipated slave communities throughout the Atlantic world and northern antebellum cities. Beginning with Ira Berlin and extended through the scholarship of Steven Hahn, these historians argue that northern Black communities operated not unlike marronage enclaves.[94] These societies, as explained by Adam Bledsoe, were established in the western hemisphere as 'autonomous communities by runaway slaves'.[95] Living perennially under violent, discriminatory, and exploitative conditions, Hahn argues that Africans American 'residential clusterings' in northern urban and rural areas resembled traditional maroon communes in that they proved 'beacons' and 'refuges' for fugitive slaves and Black northerners alike.[96] These enclaves, or maroon-like communities, allowed tight-knit groups to form in order to protect themselves from violence, kidnapping, and enslavement. In this way, marronage societies in northern states effectively functioned as traditional maroon enslaves. Over time, a plurality of historians has come to embrace or at least acknowledge the merits of this unconventional perspective. Viola Mueller 'agrees with Hanh' in that, while 'running away alone' should not be the sole 'generic definition of marronage', a greater emphasis on 'resistance' is 'an important measurement to be included in the concept'.[97] Michael E. Groth similarly highlights the degree to which antebellum African Americans 'lived on society's margins'—and became 'largely excluded' from northern life—a key (if unintentional) insight and justification for applying the maroon designation to broader geographical areas.[98] In a real sense, this wide-scale, anti-Black exclusion in northern states made the formation of maroon-like 'clusterings' all the more salient and necessary for survival. Sylviane A. Diouf notes that

[94] Ira Berlin, 'North of Slavery: Black People in a Slaveholding Republic', Yale, New Haven, and American Slavery Conference (26-26 September 2002), cited in Viola Franziska Müller, 'Runaway Slaves in Antebellum Baltimore: An Urban Form of Marronage?', *International Review of Social History*, 65, No. S28 (2020), p. 171; Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 27-30.
[95] Adam Bledsoe, 'The Present Imperative of Marronage', *Afro-Hispanic Review*, 37, No. 2 (2018), p. 45.
[96] Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*, p. 31.
[97] Muller, 'Runaway Slaves in Antebellum Baltimore', p. 171.
[98] Groth, *Slavery and Freedom in the Mid-Hudson Valley*, p. xiv.

'American maroons' remain continually neglected by historians.[99] While not a direct endorsement of Hahn's novel theory, Diouf's scholarship is a tacit reminder that new conceptualizations are needed to better understand the 'free' Black experience in northern antebellum U.S. cities. At the same time, this demand for new conceptualizations is further evidenced by newspapers' reporting during the period 1840 to 1849, which continued to generate discursive uncertainty about how best to conceptualize and understand African Americans continued lack of freedoms in northern states.

On the whole, however, most scholars do not subscribe to Hanh's characterization and label the marronage designation as definitionally misplaced. Indeed, according to Marcus P. Nevius, 'historians vigorously argue the limits' of the conceptualization.[100] While Tim Lockley and David Doddington note that 'marronage in North America was on a far smaller scale' in comparison to the Caribbean islands and Latin American countries that long practiced chattel slavery, Ainsworth Leslie Tracey has shown convincingly that 'self-liberated sanctuaries', where Blacks engaged in 'guerilla warfare and statecraft', were most likely to be found in the antebellum South rather than northern states.[101] In sum, most historians view Hahn's conceptual framework as insightful and worth considering, but ultimately inconclusive and circumstantial. For instance, John Craig Hammond argues that Hanh's insights prove 'more compelling than convincing, more suggestive than definitive'; Peter Kolchin describes Hahn's work on the subject as 'angry', summarizing his conclusions as not 'especially apt'; and Mia Bay intimates that researching marronage societies in a northern antebellum context is 'somewhat

[99] Sylviane A. Diouf, *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons* (New York 2016), p. 4
[100] Marcus P. Nevius, 'New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America', History Compass, 18, Issue 5 (2020), p. 7.
[101] Tim Lockley and David Doddington, 'Maroon and Slave Communities in South Carolina Before 1865', *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 113, No. 2 (2012), p. 127; Ainsworth Leslie Tracey, 'A Quest for Freedom: The History of Marronage and Maroon Communities in the United States, 1513-1865' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, the University of Memphis, 2022), p. iii.

confusing'.[102] She argues that 'Northern free blacks as a group were predominately urban and not all that well hidden'—an important characterization of traditionally understood maroon communities.[103] Finally, and most significantly, Jamila Shabazz Braithwaite contends that the northern 'Maroon' conceptualization proves especially inappropriate when applied to the city of New York. 'Most often maroons operated in opposition to whites', she argues, and 'black [sic] vigilance organizations in New York' were able to effectively secure 'the support of some whites that believed in the cause'.[104] This lack of established Black sovereignty and independence, she argues, clashes with Hahn's and others' controversial 'maroon' designation as applied to northern states. My own research adds credence to this perspective. Indeed, partisan newspaper reports of violence in New York City illustrate the arbitrary, uncoordinated, and contingent violence that frequently manifested in northern states during the antebellum period. In some ways this is exceedingly different from the kinds of systematic and root-and-branch destruction traditional marronage enclaves faced in other contexts.[105]

Notwithstanding these compelling criticisms and points of disagreement, using New York City as an illustrative antebellum case study this chapter does support Hahn's new conceptualization in a limited, narrow sense. Put bluntly, it is clear that antebellum Black urban dwellers faced similar existential threats to their communities as traditional maroon societies during the long eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in other geographical locations. This observation is a crucial insight and new contribution to scholarship. Indeed, as Hahn convincingly indicates, free Blacks were viewed by antebellum whites as 'slaves-at-large'—most subscribing to the view that African Americans were racially inferior, and therefore

[102] John Craig Hammond, 'The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom. By Steven Hahn', *The Journal of American History*, 97, Issue 1 (2010), pp. 143; Peter Kolchin, 'The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom', *Slavery and Abolition*, 31, No. 2 (2010), p. 284, Mia Bay, 'Unsettling the History of Slavery and Freedom, by Steven Hahn', *Reviews in American History*, 38, No. 3 (2010), p. 450; all three aformentioned works cited in Nevius, 'New Histories of Marronage in the Anglo-Atlantic World and Early North America', p. 11.
[103] Bay, 'Unsettling the History of Slavery and Freedom, by Steven Hahn', p. 450.
[104] Jamila Shabazz Brathwaite, 'The Black Vigilance Movement in New York City' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, City College of New York, 2014), pp. 4-5.
[105] Timothy James Lockley, *Maroon Communities in South Carolina: A Documentary Record* (Columbia, South Carolina, 2009), pp. xi.

greeted at all times with a presumption of *non*-freedom.[106] This racialized presumption, Hahn and others note, applied to *all* Atlantic world marronage societies.[107] This is an essential point—and one that draws a major similarity between traditional, maroon enclaves and the scattered pockets of Black 'clusters' taking up residence in New York City during the 1840s. As Hahn memorably phrased it, 'northern blacks lived in constant fear, whatever their legal status, and, like maroons in the southern states or in other parts of the hemisphere, they and their communities had to be perpetually alert, perpetually on guard, perpetually self-protective'.[108] This enduring feeling of unease in many ways applied to free Black northerners everywhere, as African Americans in rural 'maroons' and congested urban enclaves alike eked out marginal lives of struggle and subsistence on the margins of white society. In both traditional and urban marronage communities, neither group experienced government protections, permanent safety, or assurances of survival. As Graham Hodges argues, 'Generally, New York City was unsafe for Blacks'—an experience shared with those living in rural, remote maroon communities such as the forests of rural Jamaica and the Great Dismal Swamp of Virginia and North Carolina.[109] Thus, the same apprehensions that cast long shadows over the lives of freed-peoples living in hiding and separation in inhospitable, desolate areas, similarly devastated 'free' Black communities attempting to survive, in plain sight, in densely populated antebellum centers like New York City. Additionally, African Americans in the urban North deliberately settled together for mutual protection and self-defense—a key element of maroon communities across disparate geographical areas.

Thus, while traditional marronage communities excluded whites and were established well outside major cities in remote areas, the maroon designation is especially useful when considering the degree to which Black communities and individuals in New York City were, in

[106] Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*, p. 36.
[107] *Ibid*, p. 34.
[108] *Ibid*, p. 36.
[109] Graham Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill, 2010), p. 35.

Hahn's words, 'under siege'.[110] Numerous anti-Black episodes identified in daily and abolitionist newspapers demonstrate how, not unlike traditional marronage enclaves, New York City's Black community faced constant discrimination and violence. For instance, on 3 February 1840, *The Morning Herald* reported that 'an inoffensive black man, named Othello, was murdered at the Park Theatre'.[111] While the newspaper acknowledged that the alleged killer, Louis F. Tasistro, murdered three other New Yorkers previously, including two whites, the manner in which 'Othello' died speaks volumes to the inherent dangers facing persons of color in antebellum northern cities.[112] 'When the last act was committed', reported the daily newspaper, 'there was 183 persons present, besides several police officers; yet the perpetrator was permitted to walk off quietly'.[113] For reasons unexplained but can be assumed, law enforcement was present at the murder, witnessed the atrocity, and failed to bring the perpetrator to justice when easily apprehendable. At the same time, nearly two hundred people were present and witnessed the public execution—and reportedly did nothing. While specific details surrounding the case prove somewhat limited, the lack of protection, justice, and public assistance afforded to free Blacks in New York City underscores their longstanding, irrevocable marginal status. These daily encounters, therefore, reported and linked to fears of apprehension in partisan newspapers, mirrored the uncertainty and precariousness of traditional maroon communities, whose inhabitants' lives were permanently imperiled through constant targeting and discovery. At the same time, these newspaper reports amplified and shaped the way that the public understood threats to African Americans in New York State. While such an atrocity could be witnessed and condoned by perhaps hundreds of local spectators, it became the job of northern newspapers to subscribe meaning and significance to these unlawful acts of mob violence. Through cumulative documentation and dissemination, these reports greatly impacted and influenced the political debates of the antebellum period.

[110] Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*, p. 34.
[111] 'Another Murder', *The Morning Herald*, 3 February 1840, p. 2.
[112] *Ibid*, p. 2.
[113] *Ibid*, p. 2.

African Americans were routinely targeted and brutalized due to their skin color in New York City during the antebellum period. On 28 September 1846, *The New York Herald* reported that 'a black man, by the name of Prince David, was found, on Saturday night, by one of the 6th Ward policemen, lying on the corner of Anthony and Elm street, in the gutter, bleeding profusely from a severe cut out the head, evidently done by some villain with intent to take his life'.[114] In truth, these types of incidents were commonplace. And while some reported African American deaths observed in abolitionist newspapers turned out to be false trails—for instance, the 8 January 1841 *Liberator* editorial alleging that a Black man was murdered 'on new years even in a cellar at the upper end of Grand Street' proved, upon further research, to be a confirmed work-related accident—there is a considerable evidence showing that Black men were relentlessly threatened, assaulted, and even murdered by white mobs.[115] Indeed, time and again *The North Star* and other anti-slavery newspapers reported to its readers the unceasing verbal and physical assaults committed against Black men for numerous perceived public transgressions. These included but were not limited to visiting the homes of white abolitionists, riding on public transit, attending interracial church services, and walking arm-and-arm with white women.[116] In essence, there is a compelling case to be made that the 'freedom' Black northerners experienced in New York City proved as contingent, non-permenant, and subject to abrogation as those living on the fringes and frontiers of slavery. Thus, while historians quibble with the 'maroon' designation when specifically applied to northern antebellum cities, Hahn and others make the impossible-to-dismiss point that African Americans, whether living in traditional marronage societies or in 'free' states, experienced threats to their lives, liberty, and property. This perspective is well supported across a voluminous record of anti-slavery and abolitionist newspapers—and applying the maroon designation, more broadly, leads inevitably

[114] 'Almost Another Murder', *The New York Herald*, 28 September 1846, p. 2.
[115] 'Horrid Murder', *The Liberator*, 8 January 1841, p. 3; 'To the Editor of the Evening Post', *The Evening Post*, 4 January 1841, p. 2.
[116] See, for instance, 'Anti-Slavery Meetings at West Walworth', *The North Star*, 14 September 1849, p. 1; 'Colorphobia on Steamboats', *The North Star*, 10 August 1849, p. 1; 'Colorphobia and the Church', *The North Star*, 30 November 1849, p. 1; 'Colorphobia in New York', *The North Star*, 25 May 1849, p. 1.

to greater historical insights. In closing, recharacterizing or reconsidering New York City not as a ‘free society’ but as a ‘maroon enclave’ engenders some definitional utility, helping scholars better understand the inherent dangers persons of color experienced on the outskirts of chattel slavery. This contingent—and impermanent—freedom proved not an aberration, but a feature of northern antebellum life.

Lastly, a final and counter-intuitive point to consider is that the perception of ongoing lawlessness and vulnerability established in (and reported on) by the press may have actually facilitated individual targettings and violence. After all, as evidenced by the 8 January 1840 editorial, wherein *The Liberator* perpetuated the untruth that a Black man was murdered on New Years Eve, the dissemination of uncorroborated reports clearly emerges as part of the problem. Not only did such reporting do very little to address the root causes of racial violence in an antebellum context, but such editorial liberties may have even antagonized potential—and past—perpetrators. For this reason, historians should consider and reassess the degree to which antebellum newspapers, despite their commitment to the abolitionist cause and abhorrence for anti-Black violence, worked as both actors and agents in inadvertently fomenting and increasing racial tensions.

Chapter VII: 'Oberlin, Ohio: The Complexity of Northern Anti-Slavery'

On the evening of 24 February 1841, in the small town of Oberlin, Ohio, three white men arrived at the home of known abolitionist Leonard Page in search of alleged fugitive slaves. Northern newspapers agreed that the men, wielding 'pistols and bowie knifes', demanded access to the premises. Pushing their way through the front door, the men brandished firearms, entered the parlor, and assaulted Page and his family. Whether apocryphal or not, the abolitionist press reported that Page's son was 'shot in the arm', and later institutionalized due to the traumatic nature of the invasion. Ultimately, the three gun-wielding men searched every room in the house. They claimed to possess a warrant and signed affidavit for the 'missing' fugitives (which local court officials later determined were fraudulent). The invaders caught a Black man named 'Johnson' attempting to escape through the window, and his wife was found hiding in the master bedroom. The two individuals were promptly seized, shackled, and taken into unlawful custody. Page and his family, as abolitionist newspapers were keen to emphasize, peacefully complied with their demands. One sympathetic publication reported that the kidnappers threatened to immediately remand the man and his wife back to slavery, shouting at them, 'You don't stop tonight'. White locals sounded an alarm throughout the town, and not long after, unnamed citizens halted the three accomplices, forced them into a local tavern, and sent for a magistrate during the night.

While local residents ultimately safeguarded the two apprehended persons, the court judge, hailing from Elyria, arrived and took immediate legal action against the assailants. Arresting the three 'man-stealers', he ordered their imprisonment and set bail at $500 per man. While these white individuals did not face serious consequences, or serve long-term prison sentences, the case is notable for the quick and astounding reaction time of Oberlin's unnamed vigilante committee, and the indictment and arrest of the 'slave catchers' by Ohio court

officials.[1]

The dearth of abolitionist newspaper reporting on this controversy raises important points, unlike incidents studied in previous chapters. First, it helps explain why the Leonard Page incident is so infrequently flagged and addressed in the rich field of antebellum Ohio studies.[2] In part due to the lack of extensive source material, specialists in the field may have understandably overlooked this incident. Second, while anti-slavery newspapers, as noted above, generally agreed upon certain facts, certain inconsistencies and contradictions abound.

In brief, within this relatively small sample size of analyzed newspaper sources, four major points of disagreement emerge. First and foremost was the unresolved issue regarding whether these captured 'fugitives' were, in fact, runaway slaves. No historical evidence exists corroborating their status, let alone their real names or identities. Whether these individuals were 'domiciled' free persons employed by Leonard Page—and illegally apprehended by slave-catchers—or runaway slaves, remains unknowable.[3] The fact that they were caught hiding in the house of a self-professed abolitionist, however, in a known Underground Railroad safe house, does suggest that they may have had reason to fear reclamation and re-enslavement.

Second, these observed abolitionist newspapers fail to reconcile the provenance of these three slave catchers—that is, whether they hailed from Kentucky or Ohio. This regional ambiguity adds to the complexity of the case by inviting disagreement as to whether these individuals were lawful southern bounty hunters, or illegal northern 'kidnappers by trade'.[4] In other words, discrepancies exist as to whether these armed invaders were of northern or southern origin. Third, while *The Ohio Observer* and *The Anti-Slavery Standard* maintain that

[1] 'From the Philanthropist'. Kidnapping at Oberlin', *The Liberator,* 21 May 184; *The Oberlin Evangelist*, 2 March 1841, pp. 38-39; 'Kidnapping at Oberlin', *The Philanthropist*, 27 February 1841, p. 1; 'Ohio', *The Emancipator,* 9 September 1841, p. 1.; 'General Intelligence. Slave Catchers Caught', *The National Anti-Slavery Standard,* 25 March 1841, p. 4; 'Kidnapping', *The Ohio Observer*, 18 March 1841, p. 42; 'Kidnapping in Ohio', *The Advocate of Freedom,* 8 April 1841.

[2] J. Brent Morris, *Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight For Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, 2014); Churchill, *The Underground Railroad*, pp. 51-112; Ellen N. Lawson and Marlene Merrill, 'The Antebellum "Talented Tenth": Black College Students at Oberlin Before the Civil War', *The Journal of Negro Education*, 52, No. 2 (1983); Dana Elizabeth Weiner, 'Racial Radicals: Antislavery Activism in the Old Northwest, 1830-1861 (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Northwestern University, 2007).

[3] 'General Intelligence. Slave Catchers Caught', p. 4.

[4] 'From the Philanthropist. Kidnapping at Oberlin', pp. 1-3.

the two arrested Black fugitives escaped during their incarceration, *The Philanthropist* and *The Advocate of Freedom* insist that the prisoners languished in prison for many months awaiting judicial processing.[5] Moreover, none of the observed newspapers reported to readers the date on which the incarcerated were eventually freed. Finally, while the newspapers consulted indicate that Oberlinites rallied and thwarted the attempted kidnapping, discrepancies emerge as to the precise number of individuals involved. Whether the amount of supporters for the two victims amounted to an entire 'committee', 'some thirty' persons, or just a few abolitionists and sympathetic townspeople, remains unclear.[6]

The Leonard Page home invasion and subsequent court hearings raise four crucial historiographical questions that will be examined in this chapter. First, the case study provides deeper insights into the degree to which northern states generally—and the state of Ohio in particular—enforced its Black Laws. Second, it addresses the longstanding historiographical controversy over whether a generalized 'racial consensus' existed in antebellum Ohio—that is, whether African Americans were granted some semblance of civil and political rights during the antebellum period.[7] Third, the Oberlin incident complicates the age-old dispute among specialists in the field as to whether the center of antebellum abolitionist reform emerged in 'the West' or 'the East' during the 1840s. This dispute in many ways brings into sharper relief the influence, significance, and legacy of Garrisonian activism during the pre-Civil War era. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this chapter seeks to advance a more nuanced understanding regarding the enforcement and adherence to state and federal fugitive slave laws in Ohio prior to the American Civil War (1861-1865).

Scholars deeply disagree over the extent to which the Black Laws in Ohio meaningfully impacted the lives of African Americans. These discriminatory laws included, but were not limited to: strict barriers to entry for Black migrants, prohibitions on government aid or support,

[5] 'Kidnapping', p. 42; 'General Intelligence. Slave Catchers Caught', p. 4; 'Kidnapping at Oberlin', p. 1; 'Kidnapping in Ohio'.
[6] From the Philanthropist. Kidnapping at Oberlin', p. 2; *The Oberlin Evangelist*, p. 38.
[7] Hammond, '"The Most Free of the Free States"', p. 36.

disenfranchisement and lack of democratic representation, banned access to the state's public education system, and an absolute bar on providing witness testimony in court.[8] Given the complexities and wide-ranging nature of these laws, this historiographical contretemps remains unsettled. This chapter therefore attempts to engage with these discordant elements and demonstrate how the incident in Oberlin directly adds a new perspective to the growing catalogue of antebellum historical scholarship.

A range of scholarly opinions exists in regard to the impact of Ohio's Black Laws. On the one hand, scholars such as Joshua Kevin Eli Wood argue that in the early nineteenth century, manumission records indicate that the laws were 'strictly enforced'.[9] Kabria Baumgartner adds credence to this interpretation by observing how whites strongly 'demanded strict enforcement of Ohio's Black Laws'.[10] In practice, this led inevitably to the creation of alternative schools for African Americans, as integration was banned and enforced. In a similar vein, while Stephen Middleton emphasizes the profound racist and discriminatory environment of antebellum Ohio, L. Diane Barnes argues that the laws were so oppressive and omnipresent, at least in the eyes of anti-slavery adherents, that repealing the state's Black Laws became a major objective of political abolitionists.[11] To that end, there is an argument to be made that these laws hardly needed repeal if they were never seriously implemented. On the other hand, historians and legal scholars such as Jill Rowe, Ellen Eslinger, Michael Les Benedict, Paul Finkelman, and Jonathan L. Entin argue that the laws were either unenforceable, or rarely enforced. Whether Ohio's state government, in most instances, felt ineffectual or disinterested

[8] Jill E. Rowe, 'Mixing It Up: Early African American Settlements in Northwestern Ohio', *The Journal of Black Studies*39, No. 6 (2009), p. 927; Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens, Ohio, 2005), pp. 1-6; p. 7; Michael Les Benedict, *The History of Ohio Law* (Athens, Ohio, 2004), p. 59;
[9] Joshua Kevin Eli Wood, 'In the Shadow of Freedom: Race and the Building of Community in Ross County, Ohio' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2018), p. 251.
[10] Baumgartner, 'Building the Future', p. 123.
[11] Middleton, *The Black Laws*, pp. 3-4; L. Diane Barnes, '"Only a Moral Power": African Americans, Reformers, and the Repeal of Ohio's Black Laws', O*hio History*, 124, No. 1 (2017), pp. 7-8.

in adjudicating its own Black Laws, remains unclear.[12] What is certain, however, is that no obvious consensus exists among historians regarding the impact of these statutes on the day-to-day lives and civil rights of antebellum African Americans living in Ohio.

Some historians offer a more nuanced interpretation regarding the degree to which Ohio's Black Laws were strictly enforced.[13] In particular, Roy E. Finkenbine perceptively notes that Ohio's northwestern counties 'remained a place apart'—suggesting that the enforcement of Ohio's Black Laws could vary greatly by county and region.[14] He argues that the proliferation of indigenous communities in northwest Ohio, for instance, which harbored sympathy for oppressed African Americans, often assisted Black fugitives on their perilous journey from slavery to freedom. This included lending humanitarian aid to runaway slaves—water, food, shelter, and clothing—and wholly rejecting state protocols in regard to mandatory fugitive slave directives. This flaunting of pro-southern statutes on northern soil was not likely, or even possible, in the southern regions of the state—where Native Americans were less likely to settle and southern-born whites tended to migrate and relocate. In other words, understanding the enforcement of Ohio's Blacks Laws across all 79 counties proves extraordinarily complex, defies easy answers, and cannot possibly be understood in binary terms. Put another way, this issue can be best understood and interpreted at the local level. According to these historians, there were no simple answers for the state as a whole—and therefore surveying each locality and its demographics could bring greater insights into Ohio's non-uniform enforcement of Black Laws. Nevertheless, historians do generally agree that passage of these Black Laws did effectually little to dissuade former slaves—and free African Americans—from temporarily

[12] Rowe, 'Mixing It Up', pp. 1-6; Eslinger, 'The Evolution of Racial Politics in Early Ohio', p. 91; Paul Finkelman, 'The Strange Career of Race Discrimination in Antebellum Ohio', *Case Western Reserve Law Review*, 55, Issue 2 (2004), p. 374; Jonathan L. Entin, 'An Ohio Dilemma: Race, Equal Protection, and the Unfulfilled Promise of a State Bill of Rights', *Case Legal Studies Research Paper No. 04-10* (2004), pp. 399-400.
[13] Stanley, *The Loyal West*, pp. 11-19; Roy E. Finkenbine, 'The Underground Railroad in "Indian Country": Northwest Ohio, 1795-1843', cited in Damian Alan Pargas (ed.), *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America* (Gainesville, 2018), pp. 86-89.
[14] Finkenbine, 'The Underground Railroad in "Indian Country"', p. 87.

settling or taking up permanent residence in the state.[15] This is evident by the fact that two 'fugitives' were clearly residing with Leonard Page and his family at the time of this incident, as well as by examining census records in the state of Ohio during the period 1800 and 1860. These figures demonstrate that Black emigration increased significantly every decade during the pre-Civil War era.[16]

At the same time, the Leonard Page affair adds to this complex historiographical tradition by obfuscating the divide between historians who argue that Ohio's Black Laws allowed for some semblance of racial harmony, and those that claim that debating the issue is frivolous and 'beneath analysis'.[17] My research advances Stanley and Finkinbine's findings, however, as several of these historians overlook the fact that Ohio was regionally and culturally diverse both across and within its various counties and townships. In regard to the slavery question, opinions varied greatly across county and town lines—and this complexity elucidates how anti-Black and anti-abolitionist state statutes could, at times, be selectively enforced in certain areas by certain individuals, and not in others.

This political reality directly and negatively impacted Leonard Page and his family. While Oberlin, in Loraine County, resides in the most northern region of the state, it is a curious fact that, even here—a remote place that served as a bastion of abolitionism and where the college, in particular, served at the vanguard of progressive racial politics—Page was indicted under the state's Black Laws for his alleged role in helping African Americans preserve or secure their freedom.[18] While he was pronounced not guilty of harboring fugitive slaves and cleared of all charges, this curious public spectacle—in an abolitionist community, no less—complicates historians' conceptualized framework for understanding how Ohio's Black Laws influenced the lives of African Americans and by extension their white supporters. Above all, it underscores the arbitrariness of Black Law enforcement in ostensibly 'anti-slavery' townships.

[15] Rowe, 'Mixing It Up', pp. 927-928; Marilyn Baily, 'From Cincinnati, Ohio to Wilberforce, Canada', pp. 427-428.
[16] See 'United States Census Bureau' [https://www.census.gov/en.html].
[17] Barnes, 'Only a Moral Power', pp. 7-8.
[18] 'Ohio', p.1.

Second, it shows the potentially serious consequences for whites if caught aiding and abetting fugitive slaves, even before the passage of the Compromise of 1850. And third, it demonstrates the fickleness of state statutes that were, oftentimes, capriciously applied.

Similarly, while sympathetic whites did rescue the two alleged fugitives—and after their abduction, they were extended some civil protections and granted a 'fair' trial by the standards of antebellum Ohio to determine their status—both individuals were prohibited from delivering testimony in their own defense. Thus, while historians tend to disagree about the extent to which Ohio's Black Laws established limited civil and political freedoms, the more central finding of this chapter is that the state—given its huge land mass and biracial and multicultural settlements—defies easy monolithic categorizations. This case study demonstrates a somewhat unlikely finding: even abolitionist communities felt compelled, at certain times, to arbitrarily enforce certain provisions of codified and unpopular Black Laws. To take but one example, these accused fugitives were reportedly barred from testifying in their own defense yet summarily freed even after failing to produce free papers—an especially unlikely outcome after those seeking reclamation furnished indictment documents as required and stipulated explicitly under state and federal law.[19] This unpredictable and inconsistent application of adjudicating state and federal directives does not bring greater clarity, but merely complicates historians' current understandings of racial harmony and notions of Black freedom in antebellum Ohio. In brief, the Leonard Page incident underscores the complexity and arbitrary nature of court hearings for antebellum African Americans in northern states and adds greater nuance to historiographical debates regarding Black Law enforcement in the state of Ohio.

Finally, state election results from the 1840 presidential contest may help explain why Ohio's Black laws were arbitrarily administered. In short, these election results demonstrate just how politically divided Ohio voters were during the 1840s, and therefore underscore the

[19] 'Ohio Black Codes', 1804, Section I-II [https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1804-ohio-black-codes/#:~:text=no%20black%20or%20mulatto%20person,thereof%20annexed%20thereto%2C%20by%20said]; 'U.S. Constitution, Fugitive Slave Clause, Article IV, Section II, Clause III' [https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/full-text].

convolution of implementing uniform public policies that would be enforced across various counties or precincts within the state. Indeed, one of Ohio's most southern counties, Lawrence County, voted 71 percent *Whig* in the 1840 presidential election—a somewhat surprising development given its proximity to the slave South.[20] One might therefore expect that non-Democratic elected officials would take a softer line on Black Law enforcement—a consensus that is not easily proven and utterly rejected in the aforementioned historiography. By contrast, in Lorain County, where Oberlin is based, 40 percent of the electorate voted Democrat. Meanwhile, Hamilton County, where Cincinnati is located, the electorate voted 50 percent Whig and 49.7 percent Democrat—a veritable split.[21] These election results, therefore, indicate that Ohio's politics were hardly homogenous, either by township, city, or region. Fundamentally, across the Buckeye State, local officials did not have pre-determined or agreed-upon policies in regards to Black Law enforcement. Oftentimes, as this case study suggests, these laws were arbitrarily applied and subjected to the whims, inclinations, and prejudices of local power-brokers, court bureaucrats, and elected and non-elected officials.

Historians strongly disagree regarding the extent to which a 'racial consensus'— that is, a place 'for free whites alone', as one scholar put it—existed in antebellum Ohio.[22] 'The Buckeye State offered little hope for freedom', writes James G. Gigantino II categorically, a consensus, he argues, that was first established following the passage of the Northwest Ordinance in 1787.[23] This perspective is further supported by the scholarship of Leon F. Litwack, Eugene H. Berwanger, and more recently, Joshua Kevin Eli Wood.[24] These historians provide ample evidence that anti-Black attitudes—and profound racism—dominated Ohioan

[20] Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788*-1860, p. 79. This point notwithstanding, there was broad support for Whigs in parts of the South, see Charles Grier Sellers, 'Who Were the Southern Wigs?', *The American Historical Review*, 59, No. 2 (1954).
[21] *Ibid*, p. 79.
[22] Hammond, '"The Most Free of the Free states"', p. 36.
[23] James J. Gigantino II, 'The Flexibility of Freedom: Slavery and Servitude in Early Ohio', *Ohio History*, 119 (2012), p. 93, cited in Hammond, '"The Most Free of the Free States"', p. 37.
[24] Litwack, *North of Slavery*, pp. 72-73; Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery*, pp. 1-12; Wood, 'In the Shadow of Freedom', pp. 250-254.

society and therefore were seemingly ineradicable from the state. In the words of William McKee Evans, 'The racial consensus of the antebellum republic lay heavily upon the land', and was 'virtually without challenge'.[25] Donald Ratcliffe and James Oakes, however, acknowledge the merits of this consensus, but offer a more qualified interpretation. Whereas Ratcliffe contends that anti-Black racism also co-existed with a deep commitment to political anti-slavery among some white northerners, Oakes argues that anti-Black racism was usually latent—that is, triggered only by external developments or events.[26] By contrast, some historians are less convinced of this aforementioned perspective. While in disagreement about the extent and pervasiveness of white northern racism, Thomas L. Franzman and Paul J. Polgar both acknowledge that anti-slavery whites in Ohio exhibited more pro-Black voting records, and less outward hostility towards African Americans, than their northern pro-slavery and Democratic counterparts.[27] This observation is logical and self-evident, yet exceedingly important: it undermines the purveyors of a generalized 'racial consensus' by conceding that a continuum of thought existed among a subset of northern white citizens. Indeed, the 'racial consensus' theory is less compelling when one concedes that, contrary to William McKean Evans' contention, some white northerners did challenge anti-Black racism. To that end, Van Gosse and John Craig Hammond strenuously argue against a generalized and entrenched 'racial consensus'.[28] They cite compelling evidence that 'white Ohioans' not only welcomed Black migrants and protected fugitives from re-enslavement, but even tolerated—and extended—suffrage rights to 'mix-raced' residents during the antebellum period.[29] As Gosse argues, this extension of localized,

[25] William McKee Evans, *Open Wound: The Long View of Race in America* (Illinois, 2009), pp. 158 and p. 117.
[26] Donald J. Ratcliffe, 'The Decline of Antislavery Politics', cited in John Craig Hammond and Matt Mason (eds.), *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville, 2011), p. 284; James Oakes, 'Conflict vs. Racial Consensus in the History of Anti-Slavery Politics', p. 302, cited in Hammond, *Contesting Slavery*, p. 302.
[27] Thomas L. Franzmann, 'The Politics of Race in a Free and a Slave Society: Free Black Issues in the Legislatures of Antebellum Ohio and Tennessee' (Unpublished Master's Thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2010), pp. 400-401; Paul J. Polgar, *Standard-Bearers of Equality: America's First Abolition Movement* (North Carolina, 2019), p. 13.
[28] Van Gosse, 'Patchwork Nation: Racial Orders and Disorder in the United States, 1790-1860', *The Journal of the Early Republic*, 40, No. 4 (2020), p. 57, 62; Hammond, '"The Most Free of the Free States"', pp. 38-39.
[29] *Ibid*.

qualified Black freedom was not true in other antebellum northern states.[30] This historical fact therefore complicates the aforementioned perspective that Black people were generally unwelcome in Ohio, bereft of white allies, or largely disenfranchised. As one can see, the historiography surrounding 'racial consensus' views in Ohio is rife with disagreement and a landscape of opinions.

An analysis of the Leonard Page home invasion suggests that, as a rural town with a reputation for both radical abolitionism and an integrated college, Oberlin did not in any meaningful sense subscribe to a 'racial consensus' within its borders. Unlike the purveyors of this generalized and abiding conceptualization, the events of 24 February 1841 showcase two important historiographical points that qualify this theory. First, in Van Gosse's formulation, Ohio existed as part and parcel of the 'patchwork nation'—that is, an area of the United States that proved anything but monolithic in terms of its politics or social relations.[31] Gosse argues that 'given the number of jurisdictions involved, the United States comprised *many* patchworks', and hence Oberlin, it can argued, represented one of innumerable northern patchwork communities.[32] The reality is that in some ways, the township of Oberlin operated very differently from other areas of the state, particularly when compared to the southern counties and border towns along the Ohio River. Oberlin College, approaching the southern shores of Lake Erie, began admitting students of color as early as 1835, solidifying the area's reputation for bi-racialism, equality of opportunity, and anti-slavery thought.[33] Moreover, during the Page invasion, the town's vigilance committee not only prevented the illegal seize of a husband and wife from captivity and enslavement, but the suspects were promptly arrested and imprisoned. Hence, if an enduring 'racial consensus' persisted throughout Ohio, as some historians have suggested, Oberlin was conspicuously and—insofar as the Leonard Page

[30] Gosse, 'Patchwork Nation', p. 62.
[31] *Ibid,* p. 46.
[32] *Ibid,* p. 46.
[33] W.E. Bigglestone, 'Oberlin College and the Negro Student, 1865-1940', *The Journal of Negro History*, 56, No. 3 (1971), p. 198; Chris Padgett, 'Comeouterism and Antislavery Violence in Ohio's Western Reserve', cited in John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold (eds.), *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville, 1999), pp. 200-201.

incident illustrates—somewhat removed from it. In this northeastern region, a kaleidoscope of opinions dominated, including a general proclivity towards avowed anti-slavery, informed by the state's geography, immigration patterns, and proximity to the free nation of Canada.

To that end, John Craig Hammond, Van Gosse, and Matthew E. Stanley stand on firmer historical ground when they acknowledge the regional differences of northern states and the complexity of white Ohioans' social interactions and perceptions of African Americans.[34] While a profound racism existed in the state of Ohio—a fact virtually no historian disagrees with—in places like Oberlin, white townspeople were hardly universally oblivious, indifferent, or complicit in the illegal seizure and capture of African Americans from slave catchers or nefarious bounty hunters. As mentioned earlier, while historical records make it impossible to identify the number of white citizens who intervened on the behalf of the victims of this case study, certain protocols—and safeguards—were clearly in place in Oberlin that protected African Americans from illegal searches and seizures. These protective safeguards, after all, were clearly observable during the Leonard Page incident. Moreover, in the aftermath of the invasion, the three 'man-stealers' were intercepted, confined to local quarters, put on trial, and temporarily imprisoned. At the same time, the two Black victims, who were nearly sold into slavery, were physically freed from their captors, offered citizen protection, and conferred legal counsel from a white lawyer. In other words, the events that unfolded convey an existing approach and response to alleged pro-slavery incursions into the region, a development that belies Ohio's reputation as a generalized 'racial consensus' state.

Be that as it may, it is important to concede that the 'racial consensus' theory is not entirely without merit. As outlined in the introductory chapter, profound acts of violence were perpetrated against abolitionists and Black residents throughout the state during the period 1840-1849, such as the repeated disruptions of anti-slavery meetings, the destruction of

[34] *Ibid*; Stanley, *The Loyal* West, pp. 1-9.

abolitionist printing presses, and the violent invasions of mixed and multi-racial households.[35] Thus, the presence of anti-slavery adherents and abolitionists scattered throughout the state in some ways may have inflamed pro-slavery agitators, and could never (or sufficiently) stem the tide of kidnappings, physical violence, or acts of destruction perpetuated by northern white racists. It should also be emphasized that the Leonard Page incident occurred in Oberlin itself, a fact that, as expanded upon in the final section of this chapter, lends credence to the argument that Africans Americans were never entirely safe from anti-Black threats, kidnappings, or bodily injury.[36]

Scholars strongly disagree regarding the extent to which the West emerged as the focal point of radical and political anti-slavery during the 1840s. Traditionalists, such as Roman J. Zorn, Stacey M. Robertson, William E. Gienapp, Henry Mayer, Jerold Duquette and Erin O'Brien maintain that Massachusetts and the East (and the city of Boston in particular) emerged as symbolic and literal hubs of radical anti-slavery during the pre-Civil War era.[37] Stephen Kantrowitz maintains that the efforts of Boston's 'colored citizens'—and the attendant rise of radical 'interracial anti-slavery' during the 1830s—ultimately sparked the Civil War and therefore laid the political groundwork for all forthcoming legislative successes to come.[38] Jacqueline Jones, while keenly observant of Boston's profound anti-Black employment practices and complicity with Jim Crow segregation, nevertheless acknowledges Massachusetts' understandable and deserved reputation for liberty. This recognition is due in large part to Boston's halcyon role in initiating and expanding the national anti-slavery movement.[39]

And yet, in recent years, a new wave of scholars have provided compelling evidence that

[35] See, for instance, 'Dayton Rioters', *The Liberator*, 19 February 1841; 'Selections', *The Liberator,* 24 September 1841; '*Mob* at Cleveland', *The Liberator,* 19 March 1841.
[36] Wood, 'In the Shadow of Freedom', pp. 250-254.
[37] Zorn, 'The New England Anti-Slavery Society: Pioneer Abolition Organization', p. 157; Robertson, *Parker Pillsbury*, p. 70; Gienapp, 'Abolitionism and the Nature of Antebellum Reform', p. 28; Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 357; Duquette O'Brien (ed.), *The Politics of Massachusetts Exceptionalism: Reputation Meets Reality*, p. 6 and 71.
[38] Kantrowitz, *More Than* Freedom, pp. 8-9 and 50.
[39] Jacqueline Jones, *No Right to an Honest Living: The Struggles of Boston's Black Workers in the Civil War Era* (New York, 2023), pp. 1-26.

the West—and in particular, antebellum Ohio—proved equally if not more significant than New England or any of the other eastern states in promoting the Black freedom struggle.[40] While numerous historians generally acknowledge Ohio's growing importance in promoting political anti-slavery, others provide specific reasons why the West overtook the East in importance post-1840.[41] Most compellingly, Joseph Brent Morris argues that divisions wrought by the 1840 abolitionist schism ultimately pushed the movement westward.[42] Due to political infighting and the waning influence of the Garrisonians over time, the seat of national anti-slavery took up residence not in New England, but in the western states of the antebellum Union. Meanwhile, Stanley Harrold argues that religious revivalists, politically active and deeply committed to the abolitionist cause, chose Oberlin College, not eastern institutions, as the American Missionary Association's (AMA) 'intellectual and spiritual home'—a major draw for migrating abolitionist radicals.[43] These migrants filled the West's need for anti-slavery adherents and re-energized the movement after fractious, divisive rancor impeded the ascendency of Garrisonian abolitionism after 1840. Similarly, Kabria Baumgartner explains how sympathetic white women found social advancement and job opportunities in the West, increasing the area's female abolitionist ranks and contributing to a culture of growing anti-slavery and political participation outside the major eastern cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.[44]

Despite compelling evidence on both sides, historians cannot definitively say that one region of the nation during the 1840s contributed more significantly to the anti-slavery cause than another. Synthesizing these arguments, one plausible conclusion is that both regions, despite their geographical, cultural, and political differences, were equally important in the

[40] Russel B. Nye, 'Civil Liberties and the Antislavery Controversy', *Science & Society*, 9, No. 2 (1945), pp. 144-145; Eslinger, 'The Evolution of Racial Politics in Early Ohio', p. 82.
[41] William L. Barney, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Civil War* (Oxford, 2011), p. 47; James Oliver Horton, 'Race and Region: Ohio, America's Middle Ground', cited in Geoffrey Parker et al., *Ohio and the World, 1753-2053: Essays Toward a New History of Ohio* (Athens, 2004), p. 60.
[42] Joseph Brent Morris, '"Be not conformed to this world": Oberlin and the Fight to End Slavery, 1833-1863' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Cornell University, 2010), pp. 15. This work was later published as a monograph, see J. Brent Morris, *Oberlin, Hotbed of Abolitionism: College, Community, and the Fight for Freedom and Equality in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, 2014).
[43] Stanley Harrold, *The Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington, 1999), p. 90.
[44] Baumgartner, 'Building the Future', p. 124.

centuries-long struggle to end chattel slavery in the United States. Indeed, despite the merits of the revisionists, the rise of Ohio, as an epicenter of antebellum thought and activism—an argument that is difficult to refute—was only made possible through the laborious efforts of the Garrisonians and their adherents beginning in earnest in 1831. While the abolitionist cause may have faltered after the famous 1840 schism, Oberlin owes its storied reputation, at least in part, to eastern radical anti-slavery activists—and the east coast migrants who ultimately moved into the Old Northwest territories. On the other hand, the West offered something new and altogether reinvigorating: a political revival and reawakening of slavery agitation and radicalism that recruited new followers, undermined slavery extension, and linked eastern and western states under the banner of a national anti-slavery movement.

The Leonard Page incident illustrates the ways in which western states proved equally as important as eastern states in advancing a sweeping anti-slavery agenda during the antebellum period. Western abolitionists fomented and facilitated the beginnings of a multi-regional radical crusade through various means, including the establishment of responsive vigilance committees, the protection of fugitives, and the prosecution of alleged slave catchers—all developments evident during the Leonard Page incident—stretching from the harbors of Boston all the way to the western shores of the Ohio River Valley. In both Boston and Oberlin, as different as these communities were, these channels safeguarded African Americans from violence, slave catchers, and re-enslavement. In a sense, these regional movements worked independently but also in tandem, helping to shape a national coalition of anti-slavery activists which ultimately united East and West against the increasing influence and ascendancy of the slave South.

Moreover, the West offered a more direct and alternative route to freedom for many fugitive slaves. Given Ohio's location in the Border West, and the town of Oberlin's proximity to the Great Lakes and Canada, the growing network of Underground Railroad safe houses (of which Leonard Page's residence proved one of many) offered pathways to freedom beyond the eastern shoreline. As observed in Chapter V, George Latimer and his wife recognized the

potential for escape through Boston, and the New England states. But as the West increasingly became another important hub for anti-slavery advocacy, a national network of underground safe havens helped thousands of ex-slaves journey to freedom. These fugitives, including those allegedly seeking shelter with Leonard Page and his family in their flight from slavery through Ohio, underscore the importance of the West in undermining and challenging federal protections for the institution of slavery. Finally, as Kabria Baumgartner and Stanley Harrold suggest, the West offered abundant opportunities for young men and women to join the abolitionist ranks through the process of western migration. These migration patterns shaped abolitionist political involvement and engagement in places like Oberlin, helping foster a culture of activism and participation in the fight to end unlawful kidnappings and re-enslavements. Once again, while New England and New York *established* the antebellum, anti-slavery movement in the early nineteenth century, a burgeoning, national anti-slavery movement would not have been possible without abolitionists moving west, the expansion of Underground Railroad networks, and activist institutions like Oberlin College (and abolitionist activists like Leonard Page) that publicly challenged the institution of slavery and its western expansion.

Finally, scholars of the antebellum period remain divided over the extent to which the state of Ohio and the West generally enforced and adhered to fugitive slave laws in the decade leading up to the Compromise of 1850. Historians insist that these anti-Black statutes were generally ignored or lacked enforcement during the 1840s.[45] In fact, some historians defend this development by emphasizing how states only began enforcing fugitive slave laws after the passage of the Compromise of 1850.[46] This perceived disregard for general enforcement is attributed to many factors, including continued unlawful kidnappings, strong opposition to slavery-abetting laws in the North, hostility towards bounty hunters roving the free states, and a

[45] Emmett D. Preston, 'The Fugitive Slave Acts in Ohio', *The Journal of Negro History*, 28, No. 4 (1943), pp. 427-428; R.J.M Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York, 2018), p. 6; Wilson, *Freedom at* Risk, p. 73; Finkelman, 'The Strange Career of Race Discrimination in Antebellum Ohio', p. 375.
[46] Middleton, *The Black* Laws, p. 175.

judicial system that established a presumption of freedom for all Black residents in the West.[47]

Not all historians, however, find these arguments historically defensible. Matthew Salafia challenges this latter point especially, arguing that 'Whites questioned and even jailed black [sic] Americans traveling without papers in Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky on the suspicion that they were runaways'.[48] Moreover, Hyun Hur argues 'the fugitive slave clauses were the most rigorously enforced of any of the Black Laws' in Ohio.[49] And while Stephen Middleton notes that the state's fugitive slave law was only lawful between 1839-1843, he contends it was nevertheless strictly enforced during this four-year period.[50] Scholars do generally agree, however, that kidnappings were commonplace in the antebellum Border West, difficult to prevent anywhere in the North, and well documented especially in the state of Ohio.[51] Consequently, M. Scott Heerman argues that these western abductions, particularly in Illinois, helped shape and contribute to a growing anti-slavery consensus in northern states.[52] Nevertheless, even the most northern counties of the free North were not impervious to the influx of illegal kidnappers and slave catchers who operated with seeming impunity on free soil and within free jurisdictions.

Despite this ostensible binary understanding of fugitive slave law enforcement, in which scholars contest the extent to which 'Ohio', as a singular entity, enforced these statutes, another cadre of revisionists offer a more subtle and compelling understanding of these issues. For example, Stanley W. Campbell, Jonathan Daniel Wells, and H. Robert Baker recognize that a certain messiness and imprecision existed in regards to fugitive slave law enforcement in the

[47] See Preston, 'The Fugitive Slave Acts in Ohio', pp. 427; Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom*, p. 6; Finkelman, 'The Strange Career of Race Discrimination in Antebellum Ohio', p. 375; and Wilson, *Freedom at Risk*, p. 73, respectively.
[48] Matthew Salafia, 'Searching for Slavery: Fugitive Slaves in the Ohio River Valley Borderlands, 1830-1860', *Ohio Valley History*, 8. No. 4 (2008), pp. 42-43.
[49] Hur, 'Radical Antislavery and Personal Liberty Laws In Antebellum Ohio, 1803-1857', p. 44.
[50] Middleton, *The Black Laws*, p. 175.
[51] Richard Bell, *Stolen: Five Free Boys Kidnapped Into Slavery and their Astonishing Odyssey Home* (New York, 2019), p. 209; M. Scott Heerman, '"Reducing Free Men to Slavery": Black Kidnapping, the "Slave Power," and the Politics of Abolition in Antebellum Illinois, 1830-1860, *The Journal of the Early Republic*, 38, No. 2 (2018), p. 262.
[52] *Ibid*.

state of Ohio.[53] As argued previously in this chapter, Ohio's politics and opinions on slavery and anti-slavery varied widely, especially across all 79 counties, and were anything but simple, rigid, or comprehensible. H. Robert Baker, for his part, best elucidates the complexity of Ohio state politics. 'During the antebellum period', he argues, 'the state of Ohio both repealed its personal liberty law *and* challenged the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 at its highest levels of state government'.[54] This inherent contradiction over time is fully explicable only when one realizes the following: enforcement of fugitive statutes in Ohio frequently varied considerably by region, county, township, and time period—as illustrated in the Leonard Page incident—and would ultimately be determined by those, in changing and specific moments of time, wielded state and local power. In brief, because the judge overseeing fugitive slave cases in the town of Oberlin in February 1841 hailed from Elyria—near the Canadian border—and clearly sympathized with the plight of the accused, the victims received a favorable judicial ruling. In a different region of the state, however, or in a hostile courtroom—or indeed under a different magistrate—this outcome could have been vastly different. The Leonard Page incident therefore underscores the arbitrary nature of fugitive slave case rulings in the state of Ohio.

The fallout over the Leonard Page invasion advances the scholarship of Campbell and others by demonstrating the highly contingent and uncertain enforcement of antebellum fugitive slave laws across the state. This is in direct contrast to historians who contend that enforcement generally did or did not occur in Ohio. This is a subtle but important distinction. Oftentimes, the decision to enforce a fugitive slave law proved capricious—subjected and reviewed on a case-by-case basis and devoid of any systematic or agreed-upon operating procedures. In regards to the Leonard Page affair, abolitionist newspapers reported that this was the first time a cabal of white men were arrested for 'man-stealing' in northern Ohio—a direct violation of state law and well outside the confines of permissible behavior sanctioned by fugitive slave statutes. At

[53] Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill, 2011), p. 57; Wells, *The Kidnapping Club*, pp. 177-179; Baker, 'The Fugitive Slave Clause and the Antebellum Constitution', p. 1160 & 1168.
[54] Baker, 'The Fugitive Slave Clause and the Antebellum Constitution', 1160 & 1168.

various times southern invaders entered Oberlin, and other northern townships, and operated outside the rule of law on different occasions. This development furthers the claim that a large degree of inconsistency applied to fugitive slave law enforcement and the protection of African Americans, reiterating and advancing the scholarship of these revisionist historians.

To argue that northern states mostly enforced or ignored federal edicts regarding the fugitive slave clause misses the central point. The historiography debate therefore is too narrowly focused on the overall landscape of observance (or evasion) of such laws—presumably as a means of attempting to judge or identify a pattern—whereas the really essential point is the arbitrariness and partisan decisions continually made by *individuals*. Hence, depending on the political biases or sympathies of these elected or judicial office holders, the enforcement of federal policy could vary greatly by region, precinct, or principality. This realization complicates historians' understanding of the politics of slavery and anti-slavery in the Border West, as well as the way that fugitive slave laws fundamentally operated in practice in Ohio and other northern states. The nebulous nature of law enforcement in Ohio, as evidenced by the Leonard Page affair, created a major conundrum for African Americans. While freed-persons and fugitive slaves could on occasion—indeed rarely—find support by local residents and governments in prosecuting violators of established fugitive slave laws, as they did in Oberlin in 1841, these protections were hardly reliable, unalterable, or consistently enforced. As a result, African Americans were never truly safe in 'free' states, as historians have long acknowledged—a point this case study strongly advances and supports.[55] In the final analysis, Black northerners' experience during the antebellum period was perennially marked by fears of kidnapping, legal status ambiguity, and the distinct possibility of unlawful capture or re-enslavement

[55] Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*, p. 34; Kantrowitz, *More Than Freedom*, pp. 37-38; Wood, 'In the Shadow of Freedom', p. 253; Richard Bell, '"Principally Children"', pp. 46-47; Carol Wilson, 'Active Vigilance Is the Price of Liberty: Black Self-Defense against Fugitive Slave Recapture and Kidnapping of Free Blacks', cited in John R. McKivigan and Stanley Harrold (eds.), *Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America* (Knoxville, 1999), p. 108.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to advance a number of arguments about the meaning of violence in the antebellum northern states. First, through qualitative and quantitative analyses, it has aimed to document the persistence and continuance of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the period 1840-1849. Across the selected thirteen northern antebellum states, numerous abolitionist, anti-slavery, Whig, and Democratic newspapers reported on various typologies of violence, including mass mob uprisings, illegal home invasions, unlawful kidnappings, and singular acts of homicide. These observed incidents, when considered in the collective, demonstrate the scope and scale of persistent violence in a heretofore, overlooked antebellum decade. Second, this thesis set out to make a broader point about conventional definitional terms, such as 'anti-abolitionist' and 'anti-Black', as they relate to mob rioting and the ways in which race-related violence impacted the antebellum anti-slavery movement, thus underscoring the fluidity of northern antebellum politics in general and political violence in particular. White northerners cannot in any practical sense be grouped into binary political categories; anti-slavery and anti-abolitionist politics existed on a continuum, where one could be both anti-slavery *and* anti-abolitionist, or indeed neither, or perhaps in certain situations, some combination of the two. This finding broadly aligns with the scholarship of Rachel A. Shelden and Eric B. Alexander, Stanley Harrold, Eugene H. Berwanger, Corey M. Brooks, Matthew Salafia, Robert H. Churchill, and Adam I.P. Smith.[1] This messiness regarding antebellum political life should continue to reshape how historians conceptualize and interpret slavery and freedom in the antebellum North. Furthermore, this complicated landscape of political factions blurs the lines between perpetrators and bystanders—and sometimes even victims—when attempting to assess and analyze racial and political violence during the nineteenth century.

[1] Rachel A. Shelden and Eric B. Alexander, 'Dismantling the Party System: Party Fluidity and the Mechanisms of Nineteenth-Century U.S. Politics, *Journal of American History*, 110, No. 3 (2023), pp. 419-448; Stanley Harrold, *American Abolitionism: Its Direct Political Impact from Colonial Times into Reconstruction* (Charlottesville, Virginia, 2019, see introduction; Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery*, pp. 1-6; Corey M. Brooks, *Liberty Power*, pp. 4-5; Salafia, *Slavery's Borderland*, pp. 162-163; Churchill, The Underground Railroad and the Geography of Violence in Antebellum America, p. 3; Smith, *The Stormy Present,* p. 19.

Furthermore, while historians have long documented the contingent freedoms African American northerners experienced during the pre-Civil War era, this study has shown, through seven geographically diverse case studies, the ways in which persons of color experienced harassment, displacement, and terroristic violence in an antebellum context. These findings, unearthed in obscure nineteenth century newspaper articles, and in some cases, explored in detail for the first time, prove the persistence of mob violence across multiple antebellum decades and how the vast majority of residents in northern states subscribed to—and were deeply influenced by—the politics of white supremacy and anti-abolitionism.

The following sections draw together a number of concluding observations. The first section will explore the major findings of my research and posit retrospective connections between several of the included case studies. The second will analyze and summarize the intellectual stakes of the project. Finally, the epilogue will demonstrate how my research complements and challenges extant historical scholarship in my chosen area of expertise.

Findings

The first major argument of this project is that it is as much about the role and influence of nineteenth century newspapers as it is about racial and political violence. Abolitionist newspapers were hardly passive chroniclers of contemporary events or impartial recorders of ongoing mobocratic violence. On the contrary, these newspapers—particularly William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*—were major players and agents in the unfolding drama. To take but one example, in Chapter II, the newspaper very clearly advertised—in advance—the arrival of radical abolitionists to the island for the impending second annual MASS Convention.[2] These luminaries included William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Lucy Stone, and Stephen S. Foster. These editorials reports were politically calculated and did not sugarcoat the incendiary and *ad hominem* verbal attacks made against Democratic politicians and clergy members on the

[2] 'Convention at Nantucket', *The Liberator*, 5 August 1842.

island. *The Liberator*, for instance, used its platform for both public awareness and to invite like-minded islanders and 'the friends of emancipation' to their meetings—a political tactic that increased tensions and concerns among Nantucket's entrenched anti-abolitionists and Democratic lawmakers.[3] Meanwhile, after the convention, *The Liberator* used its columns to both reprint the content of the major speaker's speeches and to criticize the 'pro-slavery' mobs and rioters that interrupted multiple sessions.[4] Similarly, in Chapter VI, it is clear that the abolitionist press played an outsized role in securing the release of the alleged fugitive slave, Joseph Belt. Partisan newspaper reports, across both New York-based and national organs, vigorously crafted a narrative that assured Belt's innocence, while simultaneously painted the slaveholder Lee as capricious, rapacious, and unfounded in his reclamation attempts.[5] Hundreds of African Americans protested Belt's incarceration through mass mobilization, threating to set him free him extra-legally—no doubt actuated by the reporting of abolitionist newspapers. Once again, the cumulative impact of these episodes proved salient: such events, and others like them, contributed to the crisis of Union that engulfed the nation during the 1850s. The power of the abolitionist press became an extremely important political device for anti-slavery agitation as shown in these case studies.

Abolitionist newspapers oftentimes used their reporting and editorial pages as important vehicles for political action and social change. As we have seen, these reports were known for defending radicals' actions, condemning northern 'pro-slavery' clergymen and politicians, excoriating slaveholders, and diagnosing a southern 'slave power' in northern states. Such uncompromising reporting, utilized in order to advance the freedom struggle and sell more newspaper subscriptions, reveals an important and unexpected conclusion from this study—one that is only visible in hindsight. Namely, this thesis's contribution highlights not merely the

[3] *Ibid.*
[4] 'Anti-Slavery Convention at Nantucket.' *The Liberator*, 2 September 1842.
[5] See *The Liberator*, 29 December 1848, p. 3; *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 28 December 1848, p. 3; *The National Era*, 11 January 1849; *The North Star*, 12 January 1849, p. 3.

history of slavery and anti-slavery during the pre-Civil War era, as important as these topics are, but also the role, agency, and political influence of antebellum print culture.

This study also argues that the persistence of violence observed during the 1840s was not only well documented, but crucially important. There are two points to be made here. While historians have acknowledged the continuance of violence in Jacksonian American in the literature of the 1830s, far fewer have considered how these developments played out during the subsequent decade. The lawless, mobocratic violence of the 1840s in some ways completely upended and destroyed civil society—similar to what occurred during the 1830s. Civil unrest proved a defining characteristic of both antebellum decades—and individuals, communities, and state economies were deeply impacted. Whereas numerous scholars of the Jacksonian era argue that the widespread establishment of law enforcement in urban areas corresponded to a waning of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence during the 1840s, this study underscores a more complex reality. As shown in Chapters I and IV, within the cities of Philadelphia and Cincinnati, law enforcement proved utterly feckless—or indeed unwilling—to address the cascade of violence and destruction that upended these major urban areas over a multi-day period. These outcomes, as some scholars have pointed out, led directly to increased calls for establishing professionalized police forces in antebellum cities as a means of bringing greater stability and civil order to areas decimated by mobocratic lawlessness.[6] But these developments seemingly came much later, after the events of this study. In some ways, the fallout over antebellum rioting during the period 1830 to 1849 directly resulted in the belated establishment of government-funded law enforcement agencies and precincts by mid-century.

Moreover, the fugitive slave issue combined with subsequent courtroom custody battles—particularly in major cities like Boston and New York—temporarily stunned the public and created civil unrest. As both the George Latimer and Joseph Belt fugitive slave cases illustrate, as analyzed in Chapters V and VI, southern slaveholders entered northern states

[6] See Footnote 82 in Grimsted, 'Rioting in Its Jacksonian Setting', p. 395.

demanding their 'fugitive' slaves be returned to them. And while these cases have garnered far less attention than, say, the Dred Scott Decision of 1857—which was issued on the brink of the American Civil War—these episodes demonstrate the polarizing nature of the slavery issue years before the sectional crisis upended and dissolved the Union. These antebellum events also presaged further regional tensions and the political realignments to come during the following decades.

Another major theme of this thesis is the importance of vigilance committees in protecting and safeguarding fugitive slaves and Black northerners. This was an unexpected conclusion observable in Chapters V, VI, and VII. While the Indianapolis vigilance committee (Chapter III) grossly failed to protect John Tucker before his public lynching in Indianapolis, other antebellum cities on this front were much more responsive and better organized. In Boston, New York City, and Oberlin, cities and townships with well-established networks, vigilance committees played outsized roles in protecting Black runaways and freed-peoples from capture and re-enslavement. Indeed, community members in Oberlin and New York intervened so quickly that the Black victims assaulted and apprehended in these cases were rescued before slaveholders could remand them to bondage. Meanwhile, in Boston, after Latimer's arrest, some 'three hundred' Black residents 'gathered around the Court House' to monitor and protect George Latimer from smugglers.[7] Some Black Bostonians even reportedly attempted to facilitate a prison break before the hearing commenced.[8] Nevertheless, while the vigilance committee of Indianapolis admittedly failed to save Tucker's life, the chief perpetrator and murderer was subsequently arrested, put on trial, and sentenced to three years in prison. While this verdict came too little too late—and served as poor compensation to Tucker's surviving loved ones—it does show the power and unity of Indiana's politically mobilized, local grassroots movement.

[7] 'To the Public', *The Liberator*, 25 November 1842.
[8] Cumbler, *From Abolition to Rights for All*, p. 69.

At the same time, three case studies—Boston, New York City, and Oberlin—add greater complexity to historians' understanding of the very nature and day-to-day operations of northern vigilance committees. Historically, vigilance committees were viewed as 'quasi-formal associations' with a 'founding charter' and could be counted upon to boast official memberships.[9] They often boasted bureaucratic underpinnings and hierarchies of leadership based on social and economic status.[10] But these incidents observed in this study demonstrate that these networks did not operate in systematic or straightforward ways. Instead, they often came together during the early and mid-1840s by word of mouth, the sound of an alarm, or reports of an impending kidnapping. This insight demonstrates that vigilance committees were reactive and responsive by nature, oftentimes loosely formulated at the spur of the moment, comprised of local residents, and more fluid and mutable than traditionally understood.

Another major finding of this study is the overlooked role that *The Liberator* specifically played as an accumulator and aggregator of news reports during the 1840s. While scholars have emphasized how the newspaper's top priority was to inform and proselytize the public towards the tenets of immediate abolitionism, and to engage African Americans as subscribers and encourage them to participate in its editorial content, this study shows how *The Liberator* was most effective at ascribing meaning and impact to these documented episodes of violence.[11] This journalistic strategy worked to a much greater extent than historians have recognized; it served as an impactful if understudied political tool in the abolitionist arsenal to promote the causes of universal emancipation and civil rights. Despite its apparent limited reach, *The Liberator*—by emphasizing non-stop anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence, the dangers of an ascendant 'slave power', coordinated, southern-led incursions in northern states, and the

[9] Jonathan Obert and Eleonora Mattiacci, 'Keeping Vigil: The Emergence of Vigilance Committees in Pre-Civil War America', *Perspectives on Politics*, 16, No. 3 (2018), p. 601.
[10] Richard Maxwell Brown, *The American Vigilante Tradition*, p. 132, cited in Hugh Davis Green and Ted Robert Gurr, *Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives, Vol. I* (Washington D.C., 1969).
[11] Jacobs, 'William Lloyd Garrison's Liberator and Boston's Blacks, 1830-1865', p. 261; Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African American Newspaper* (New York, 2007), p. 267; David Paul Nord, 'Tocqueville, Garrison, and the Perfection of Journalism', *Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication* (Corballis, OR, 1983), pp. 10-11; Brennan, *The Making of an Abolitionist*, p. 2.

inherent dangers of fugitive slave reclamations—played an outsized role in amplifing and codifying regional and sectional divisions. Such abolitionist editorializing is most evident in Chapters I, II, IV, and V of this study. During the Lombard Street Riots (Chapter I), the Nantucket Riots (Chapter II), the Cincinnati Riots (Chapter IV), and the controversies surrounding George Latimer's free status in Boston (Chapter V), *The Liberator* served as a veritable catalogue of original newspaper reporting, reprinted newspaper clippings, and solicited—and unsolicited—writings from interested parties and first-hand witnesses. The ultimate goal of these writings was to move the tide of public opinion in favor of immediatism and freedom. The sheer breadth of newspaper reporting as observed in *The Liberator* specifically—and the truthful language utilized at the orchestration of Garrison to radicalize northerners against slavery and slavery extension—had a cumulative effect with long-lasting implications in the pre-Civil War era. Historians have regrettably focused too often on *The Liberator* as an incendiary and sensationalist organ of immediate abolitionism, and less on its agency—and political activism—in exposing the dangers and human rights abuses of the institution and its deleterious effects on American democracy. Garrison's vision, consistency of output, and careful compiling of slavery's ill effects via print culture on northern communities over multiple decades—beginning in 1831, at the founding of *The Liberator*, through the 1840s and until the American Civil War—is a major finding of this study demonstrable across multiple case studies.

Crucially, this study provides additional nuance to the longstanding 'gentlemen of property and standing' thesis as it relates to the origins of Jacksonian mob violence. While such a theory is well supported in the primary and secondary source literature, this study documents the outsized role that Irish laborers and migrants played in instigating racial and political violence during the 1840s. In Chapters I, III, and IV, the abolitionist printing press were largely in agreement that Irish Americans instigated the violence and rioting that followed. In Philadelphia, Irish whites assaulted African Americans as they marched peacefully, brandishing

banners and flags, through Irish neighborhoods in a temperance parade; in Chapter III, three Irish whites followed, harassed, and ultimately murdered a free person of color in front of lawless mob on the Fourth of July; and in Chapter IV, the urban rioting in Cincinnati reportedly stemmed after a 'quarrel' broke our between Irish whites and African Americans. Indeed, given the highly contingent triggers for these events, it cannot necessarily be argued that the violence stemmed from the planning and organization of propertied, wealthy elites. White Irish immigrants from the lower or working classes initiated these chance encounters. Thus, while this finding does not invalidate the research and importance of Leonard Richards' groundbreaking scholarship, it does provide greater complexity and more variance to the ways in which violence manifested during the immediate, post-Jacksonian period.

Finally, the seven case studies that comprise this thesis offer new insights into the origins and impact of antebellum mob violence as reported by antebellum newspapers. Whereas Chapters I, II, and IV demonstrate how the abolitionist print press emphasized the scale, scope, and destructive capabilities of white urban rioters in order to shake northern readers from their longstanding apathy over the slavery question, Chapters V, VI, and VII appear divergent and contradictory.[12] In the former chapters, while a blend of contingent and structural factors provoked widespread violence, antebellum newspapers were quick to emphasize the innocence and blamelessness of the abolitionist and African American victims in question. These partisan newspapers elided the structural economic stressors that proved fundamental to the scale and scope of the violence observed in this study—particularly in Chapters I and IV. Nevertheless, the abolitionist printing press created meaning out of these atrocities by cumulatively illustrating the extensive and nefarious effects of slavery on the free states. Implicit and sometimes explicit in newspaper reporting of these atrocities was the insinuation that, in the final analysis, slavery was the root cause of anti-abolitionism and anti-Black terrorism during the pre-Civil War era.

[12] These anti-abolitionist and anti-Black incidents observed during the 1840s proved qualiatively similar to many of the incidents observed by historians during the 1830s. See Literature Review.

By contrast, Chapters V, VI, and VII illustrate a different typology of violence altogether via newspaper reporting—namely, the ever-present threat of slaveholders entering northern states and attempting, through violence and extralegal methods, to kidnap and enslave African Americans. While kidnappings amounted to a small percentage of total violent incidents observed in this study, newspapers consistently amplified these reports using the power of the printing press to document incessant 'man-stealing' in northern states.[13] This helped drive a major wedge between white 'anti-slavery' northerners skeptical of southern slaveholders entering their home states, and the planter class of the American South. Put another way, whereas the newspaper reports observed in Chapters I, II, and IV routinely emphasized the 'horrible', 'bloody', 'outrageous' and 'civil war'-like attacks on abolitionists and African Americans during the 1840s to engender sympathy and indignation among northerners, the latter case studies intensified and sought to properly diagnose an ascendant southern 'slave power'—one that besieged and undermined state sovereignty in the antebellum North. In both instances, the power of the printing press shaped the way northerners read, interpreted, and understood these events.[14] All six case studies, however, underscore an important historiographical point related to this period: scholars have long overlooked the degree to which the abolitionist press established and crafted cumulative meaning when reporting on these sanguinary events and, through explicit agency and unceasing writing and publishing, promoted the cause of immediate abolitionism during the pre-Civil War era.

Lastly, as an outlier case study, Chapter III is the only incident that documents and analyzes a public lynching. Such events in northern states were rarely reported in abolitionist newspapers during the 1840s.[15] And yet, the murder of John Tucker proved not only qualitatively similar to the types of atrocities that occurred during the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction periods—establishing a clear link between the pre and post-Civil War years—

[13] See Chapter VI.
[14] Interestingly, Chapter IV (Cincinnati) also emerged as the only case study in which abolitionist newspapers amplified *both* sets of fears—gratutious violence and southern meddling in northern affairs—to influence readers and sensationalize what happened in order to promote sectional disunity.
[15] See introduction.

but demonstrate how *The Liberator*, under the leadership of William Lloyd Garrison, attempted to memorialize Tucker's death for the promotion and advancement of the antebellum freedom struggle. Through his own unique writing style and editorial processes, Garrison, in reporting on this public lynching, showed how the sin of slavery exacerbated racism across the Middle West, encouraged extralegal violence in the non-slaveholding states, and made ordinary northerners complicit or indifferent to the humiliation and murder of innocents.

Intellectual Stakes: The Agency of Black and White Abolitionists

Above all, this study has posited a new interpretation and understanding of radical activism and influence during the antebellum period through analysis of the abolitionist printing press. While recent studies have finally redressed and restored the essential role that African Americans played in nineteenth century abolitionist reform, this thesis complements these findings, underscoring the agency, political planning, and highly effective editorializing utilized by both white and Black abolitionists to foment social change during the age of slavery.[16] In sum, newspapers during the 1840s impacted grassroots organization across disparate northern geographies, reshaped party politics and affiliations, and construed meaning to everyday scenes of racial and political violence, as meticulously documented and analyzed in this study's introductory chapter.

The political impact of chiefly abolitionist newspaper reports in documenting the violence in both Cincinnati and Boston exposed rising concerns of an ascendant southern 'slave power'. In the former city, abolitionist writers relentlessly reported on the heroics of armed African Americans, many of whom defended their neighborhoods, homes, and families from southern terrorists and invaders. This reporting inaugurated a political realignment particularly in northern states. Not only did African Americans recognize the growing imperative for establishing defense mechanisms and protocols—as well as community-based networks—in the face of unmistakable southern encroachments, but abolitionists themselves belabored new

[16] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, p. 2; Jackson, *Force and Freedom*, p. 10.

narratives that warned northern whites about the very real dangers of southern slaveholders in their midst. This diagnosis of southern threats within and across abolitionist print culture is further evidenced in the city of Boston. *The Liberator*, perhaps more effectively than any other radical organ, exposed a perennial problem in their aggregated, journalistic outputs: southerners were routinely circumventing northern judicial systems and institutions in order to defend their right to 'property' in human beings. This journalistic exposure of southern meddling and overreach sharpened ideological divides as white northerners—at the behest of abolitionists—were forced to reconcile and reconsider their relationship to the institution of slavery and the power and influence of the slave South. In doing so, abolitionist editorializing construed meaning to events long overshadowed in historical scholarship by the looming crises of the following decade, including the Fugitive Slave Act, 'Bleeding Kansas', and *Dred Scott vs. Sandford* (1857).

Specifically, abolitionist print culture proved instrumental in stoking sympathy and outrage among its predominately Black readership after the apprehension and incarceration of fugitives. This development proved a noteworthy flashpoint during the decade of the 1840s: abolitionist newspapers served not only as recorders and chroniclers of fugitive arrests, but through persuasive reporting, skillful movers and shakers in partisan politics. While Joseph Belt of New York City faced incarceration without bail for an extended period of time, increased abolitionist attention to his detention—and reporting of his mistreatment and the undeniable pro-slavery biases of the U.S. legal system—prompted outrage and political action among local abolitionists and African Americans. His trial proved satisfactory to the supporters of freedom and universal emancipation in large part due to the cumulative editorializing and extensive newspaper coverage of his predicament. By the same token, a similar outcome attributable to abolitionist activities can be traced to the release of George Latimer in Boston in 1842. The spread and proliferation of untold 'Latimer Meetings' across the commonwealth radicalized the public as abolitionists pushed their fellow northerners, white and Black, to increasingly

scrutinize and reconsider the injustices of the case. In sum, through extensive reporting, abolitionists shaped the way that the public understood these arrests and trials and southern violations, thus making meaningful contributions to the widely celebrated outcomes of these controversial events.

Moreover, abolitionist press reports deeply shaped the way northerners understood political factions in northern contexts. One of the essential findings of this study is how racial identities within the larger abolitionist movement appeared utterly dissolved well before the American Civil War (1861-1865). As most evident in Chapter VI and VII—and in the context of the persistent violence of this period—abolitionist editorialists clearly shaped and reconstructed events to signify how violent, lawless mobs and perpetrators rarely distinguished between white abolitionists and Black Americans when engaging in mob rule. Through news reporting, abolitionists emphasized how, within the context of the 1840s, racial divisions and binary factions utterly disappeared. In the township of Oberlin, Ohio, for example, *The Liberator* made no distinction between how the white abolitionist Leonard Page—and the alleged fugitive slaves previously protected in his Underground Railroad safe house—were treated. Both parties, according to *The Liberator*, were placed on trial for circumventing legislative statutes, faced serious sentencing, and were equally vilified by southern slaveholders. Similarly, both groups were tried as criminals under state or federal law. Through ongoing newspaper reporting, readers were invited to consider how the perpetrators of anti-Black and anti-abolitionist violence rarely differentiated between color or creed. At the same time, in places like New York State, the causes of violent assaults perpetrated against ‘colored’ and ‘mulatto’ citizens were hardly clear or straightforward. Newspaper reports routinely emphasized how violent criminals cared little for the political affiliation or race of their chosen victims. This blending together of anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence, and the fluidity with which such assaults took place, is one of the essential findings of this study.

Another major observation overlooked by historians is how abolitionist strategies and tactics helped the radical press frame sectional narratives. On the island of Nantucket, for instance, abolitionists made the decisive, tactically impactful decision to challenge slavery in a deeply hostile island community—one that was especially resistant to the tenets of abolitionism and race equality. Not only have specialists in the field largely ignored the extensiveness of the racial and political violence that ensued during this incident, but they have not fully considered the clearly deliberate and high agency tactics employed by abolitionists to reshape debates over slavery and anti-slavery in a northern community. When Stephen S. Foster accosted pro-slavery religious and political leaders in harsh, vitriolic language, his decision was not haphazard or random. It was a calculated decision, issued without the explicit support of movement leaders, to provoke his adversaries and local anti-abolitionists into violence. And the strategy clearly worked: in retrospective newspaper reporting, *The Liberator* somewhat de-emphasized the inflammatory and offensive rhetoric of abolitionist circuit speakers themselves, and instead played up the hostility and lawlessness of their attackers. Furthermore, the violence that followed ultimately proved instructive, vindicating the righteousness of the abolitionist cause, as islanders were incapable of contesting Foster's arguments with reasoned debate or political discourse. They instead resorted to heckling, shouting, object throwing, and even physical violence. Such reporting therefore likely increased sympathy for the abolitionist cause on the whole—as the conduct, and tactics, of Nantucket's anti-abolitionist community likely shocked and outraged readers of widely disseminated anti-slavery and radical abolitionist newspapers.

In a similar vein, the release of George Latimer would likely not have occurred without partisan newspaper reporting. By emphasizing Boston's metamorphosis into a 'slave hunting ground'—and law enforcement's continued complicity in slave reclamations—*The Liberator* not only documented the details of the Latimer case, but shaped its outcome.[17] As mentioned above, a close reading of partisan newspaper sources unquestionably demonstrates how

[17] 'Habeau Corpus—In the Matter of Geo. Latimer', *The Liberator*, 28 October 1842.

abolitionists marshaled local Black abolitionists to their cause through the agency and power of the antebellum printing press. While *The Liberator* asserted, not untruthfully, that the Latimer affair 'excited very deep interest among the colored denizens of the city', it would be fairer to say that the newspaper actively persuaded—and recruited—African Americans to protest and intervene on his behalf.[18] In this instance, we have unmistakable evidence that abolitionist newspapers did not exclusively report on local controversies or events as part of their political strategies, but actively sought to impact and shape them.

Lastly, the high agency and cumulative impact of newspapers reporting on ordinary African Americans contesting racial discrimination and slavery is a final conclusion of this thesis. While the lynching of John Tucker has certainly been written about in other contexts, few historians have underscored how the lionization and martyrdom of Tucker, within the pages abolitionist newspapers, shaped northern attitudes. This narrative of violent resistance to mob violence and anti-Black racism proved an important observation within nineteenth century print culture, and serves as a powerful testament to the high degree of agency and impassivity that ordinary African Americans exhibited in northern states. *The Liberator*, as the chief aggregator of the grisly details surrounding Tucker's public lynching, compellingly reported about how the former slave heroically stood his ground, resisted a lynch mob, and defended his right to life and liberty until he was brutally murdered by three intoxicated racists. At no point in its editorial coverage did *The Liberator* suggest that the chief protagonist willingly or powerlessly accepted his fate; instead, the newspapers accurately reported on an increasingly important development in northern antebellum history: African Americans were, as Manisha Sinha has compellingly argued, the chief architects and defenders of their own civil and political rights.[19] In addition, the relentless reporting regarding 'peaceful' Black temperance marchers prior to and after the Lombard Street Riots underscored the commendable agency of ordinary free persons of color in contesting racial discrimination and chattel slavery in northern geographies. In this instance, the

[18] *Ibid*.
[19] Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, pp. 1-2.

attention and meaning ascribed to ordinary African Americans, who were willing to suffer violence and displacement for a righteous cause, proved an important cumulative point and emphasis in nineteenth century abolitionist print culture. While these peaceful protests were met with violent reprisals, the long gestational impact of non-violent demonstrations such as these—and especially the reports of Black heroics in the face of ongoing terroristic violence—is a crucial yet underemphasized point in historical scholarship. Throughout the 1840s, ordinary free persons of color often assembled, organized, and marched in solidarity to pursue equal rights and justice under the obvious shadow of a ubiquitous 'slave power'. This point is made explicit and unambiguous in antebellum newspaper reporting by the chroniclers of abolitionist activism and resistance.

Epilogue

Established in 2023 and located just mere blocks from the Indiana State Capitol Building, stands the simple and affecting 'Lynching of John Tucker' historical placard.[20] The two-sided marker—written in gold-lettering on black canvas—summarizes in just a few sentences the life story and tragic fate of Indiana resident John Tucker. Murdered by three white perpetrators on the Fourth of July 1845, as analyzed in Chapter III, the memorial serves as a haunting reminder of the entrenched, anti-Black racism that pervaded all northern states during the pre-Civil War era. Even in the antebellum Middle West, far from the cotton fields and planter class of the Deep South, Black people faced unimaginable discrimination and terroristic violence. Indeed, while the so-called free states passed legislation outlawing slavery as a social and economic institution, northern state governments did precious little to establish free, fair, and multi-racial societies within their own borders and jurisdictions.

While it took nearly two centuries to bring this long-forgotten incident out of obscurity and into the public consciousness, this development is—and remains—an important and

[20] Lynching of John Tucker', Indiana Historical Bureau [https://www.in.gov/history/state-historical-markers/find-a-marker/find-historical-markers-by-county/indiana-historical-markers-by-county/lynching-of-john-tucker/].

symbolic act of commemoration. Yet much is still missing from the historical record. After all, who was John Tucker, exactly? And what motivated him to reside in Indianapolis after emancipation, work as a farmer, and raise two children in a seemingly hostile land? What ambitions did he have for his life, and what hopes, if any, did he have for his children outside the shadow of slavery? Did Tucker always fear for his life and safety in the supposedly 'free' state of Indiana? These questions—and many others—remain unanswerable. Nonetheless, while the memorial commemorates a martyred hero who bravely confronted anti-Black racists in front of a complicit, lawless lynch mob, the placard raises another, deeply uncomfortable question: How many other African American northerners faced similar acts of violence and brutality, yet their stories remain lost, forgotten, or overlooked?

In this study, I have sought to research and bring to light some of these underemphasized stories from the silences of the past. And these incidents prove significant, offering new insights and perspectives into the tortured history of race relations in pre-Civil War America. The lynching of John Tucker, for instance—and the city's subsequent public recognition of his life nearly two centuries later—shatters the notion that the 'free states' served as oases of freedom for the safety and protection of Black people. The concept of 'northern freedom' in an antebellum context is deeply problematic. In the antebellum North, only a veneer of safety and protection existed for fugitives, emancipated slaves, and freed-peoples alike as best exemplified in Chapters IV and IV. This historiographical contribution bolsters the works of historians who have recently emphasized the precariousness and impermanence of antebellum Black 'freedom' in northern contexts.[21]

While historians have ably demonstrated that slavery was indeed a national institution—recent works of scholarship continue to prove that the manacles of the 'peculiar institution' extended deep into the West and Far West of the nation—the United States' long coexistence

[21] Wells, *The Kidnapping Club*, p. 18; Bell, 'Principally Children', pp. 47; Hahn, *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom*, p. 36.

with slavery never stopped at regional borders.[22] It continued to shape and influence both race relations and public policy well outside the geographies from where it was both legalized and protected. As this study has meticulously documented, this culture of violence continued to move and seep across state lines: kidnappings, home invasions, sexual violence, and spur-of-the-moment racial targetings were persistent occurrences in northern states during the period 1840 to 1849. This is an overlooked development in the scholarly literature. Although these trends are documented by some historians in the vast scholarship pertaining to the historiography of antebellum political violence, fewer still have sought to weave a broader tapestry of terror and injustice that transcended both the Jacksonian period and traditionally understood antebellum geographies.

To that end, scholars have frequently pointed to the western territories and the crisis over 'Bleeding Kansas' as the tipping point that ultimately sowed the seeds of disunion and political dissolution.[23] These analyses are compelling and add greatly to the scholarship on nineteenth century sectionalism. Nevertheless, I have sought to widen this geographical and chronological scope, and in so doing, add greater shading to this established narrative—showing how anti-abolitionist and anti-Black violence exploded not just in the new western territories, but persisted throughout the period 1840-1849 in northern states as well. By reconsidering the continuance of northern racial and political violence during the 1840s, which led to increased sectional tensions during the 1850s, a fuller, more nuanced portrait emerges that illuminates the increasingly fractured road to southern secession and the American Civil War.

[22] Kevin Waite, *West of Slavery: The Southern Dream of a Transcontinental Empire* (Chapel Hill, 2021).
[23] Veron, *Disunion!*, pp. 266-268; Jonathan Earle and Diane Mutti Burke (eds.), *Bleeding Kansas, Bleeding Missouri: The Long Civil War on the Border* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2013); Nicole Etcheson, *Bleeding Kansas: Contested Liberty in the Civil War Era* (Lawrence, Kansas, 2004); Jonathan Earle, 'The Political Origins of the Civil War,' *OAH Magazine of History*, 25, No. 2 (2011); Chad G. Marzen, 'Law, Popular Legal Culture and the Case of Kansas, 1854-1856', *Wyoming Law Review*, 14, No. 1 (2014); Roy Bird, *Civil War in Kansas* (Gretna, Louisiana, 2004).

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