

Grating the Nutmeg: Slavery and Racism in Connecticut from the Colonial Era to the Civil War

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A little more than a decade ago, readers of the New York Times were shocked to read that chattel slavery had existed in New England: “With the exception of architectural style, a traveler to the slave-era farms of New England would have found them virtually indistinguishable from the slaveholding regions of the rural South.”¹ The tidal wave of media and public attention that greeted the publication in 2001 by the Amistad Committee of “Yale, Slavery and Abolition” represented a kind of collective “Aha!,” provoking astonishment in some quarters, vindication in others, and no doubt a modicum of Schadenfreude among some of Yale’s peer institutions.² The publication also sparked a set of questions: Was New Haven and Connecticut’s experience with slavery typical? Was it exceptional? What does it tell us about the past of our state and nation, and more importantly, what can it tell us about the present? This essay is an attempt to outline some of the more important issues, and to make a case that the story does, indeed, have a lot to teach us.

To begin with, we should recognize that Connecticut is not South Carolina. In reality, a traveler would have found little in common between the family farms of Connecticut and the rice, indigo, and tobacco plantations of the Chesapeake or Carolina low country; and by the time the cotton regime that typified Southern slavery took hold, the “slave era” of Connecticut was virtually at an end. But in almost every corner of the state, a traveler would have encountered enslaved Africans and their descendants living and working in intimate proximity with their owners and other whites. While it is technically true that the United States in 1776

¹ Brent Staples, “Wrestling with the Legacy of Slavery at Yale,” New York Times, August 14, 2001, p. 16.

² Antony Dugdale, J. J. Fueser, J. Celso de Castro Alves, Yale, Slavery and Abolition (New Haven: Amistad Committee, 2001). Other universities have investigated their ties to slavery, either at their own instigation or at the urging of other groups. Notably, the president of Brown University, founded by a merchant family with extensive involvement in the slave trade, convened a task force in 2003 that culminated in the creation of a Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice (the committee report can be found at <http://brown.edu/Research/Slavery_Justice/documents/SlaveryAndJustice.pdf>). Harvard history professor Sven Beckert and his students prepared a history of slavery and Harvard in 2011 <<http://www.harvardandslavery.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Harvard-Slavery-Book-111110.pdf>>. In the interim, many other institutions have explored this dimension of their past.

was a confederacy of thirteen slave states, in Connecticut, unlike northern New England, slavery was a lived reality, not just a technicality.

More important still, a traveler to early Connecticut would have found a society whose interests—in a thousand ways, some obvious, some obscure—dovetailed with those of the plantation regimes of the West Indies, the Chesapeake, and the Carolinas. What is most significant about the story of slavery and Connecticut is not how much Connecticut resembled the South, but how tightly intertwined both were within the system of Atlantic slavery.

In every discussion of Connecticut's character, however, one has to say, "But on the other hand, . . ." After fully digesting the striking interpenetration of slavery into the fabric of Connecticut's economy and culture, the strength and sincerity of its antislavery commitment stands out as even more remarkable. Antislavery, it might be argued, is a principle, while slavery is an interest. As a rule, it is easier to mobilize a constituency to defend an interest than it is to marshal one to promote a principle. Moreover, in a society so proverbially wedded to order, property, and pragmatism, the fact that liberty ultimately trumped slavery here is significant. Sectional conflict was not preordained by geography or history, and there are good reasons to be surprised by the strength in this state of sectionalism, of the Connecticut people's sense of identity as Northerners. Understanding the dynamics of sectionalism in Connecticut should help us to move beyond the oversimplified portraits we have of Johnny Reb and Billy Yank, of Northern industry and Southern agrarianism.

Also intriguing is Connecticut's tenacious ambivalence regarding race. At no time in its early history were Connecticut's white citizens willing to extend unqualified recognition to blacks as equals or as fully participating members of civil society. By the same token, however, they refused, chiefly on religious grounds, to embrace completely a view of blacks as a race apart, uneducable and unsusceptible of progress.

The experience of Venture Smith is suggestive regarding the status of blacks in colonial Connecticut. Enslaved and brought to New England in 1739, Venture purchased his freedom in 1765 and went on to become a successful farmer and merchant. Historians and critics make much of his response to being cheated by a wealthy trader:

Such a proceeding as this, committed on a defenceless stranger, . . . would in my native country have been branded as a crime equal to highway robbery. But Captain Hart was a white gentleman, and I a poor African, therefore it was all right, and good enough for the black dog.

Scholars do not always bear in mind, however, that Smith had become a successful businessman and significant landowner, and that black and white pallbearers laid him to rest with pride of place in the section of the churchyard closest to the First

Congregational Church of East Haddam, his grave marked by an elaborate headstone by one of the region's most celebrated carvers.³

At the time of the Revolution, there were approximately 6000 blacks in Connecticut, almost all of them enslaved, representing about three per cent of population.⁴ Connecticut slavery, while small in scale compared to the South, was significant: perhaps one-fourth of property owners in 1776 were slaveholders, usually owning just one or two slaves, although several owned more than twenty. In its demographics and way of life, Connecticut was every bit as much a "border state" as Delaware, although Connecticut's willingness to legislate an end to slavery marked it as ultimately a different entity.⁵

While the province's actual involvement in the slave trade was vanishingly small, in contrast to Rhode Island as the dominant player on the continent, the African presence in Connecticut was widespread, and its economic and cultural impact was significant, as Joanne Melish has shown.⁶ The labor and talent of Adam Jackson, the slave of New London stonecutter and farmer Joshua Hempstead, enabled his master to "pursue an increasingly diverse set of professional and artisan occupations that ultimately left him a rich man."⁷ There is no reason to regard the experience of Hempstead and Jackson as unusual. The fact that clergymen, attorneys and other professionals turn up disproportionately in Connecticut on the rolls of slaveholders has led historians to infer that ownership of slaves constituted a token of honor or status. But in some cases this may put the cart before the horse: the labor supplied by slaves may have provided masters such as Hempstead with the increased leisure and productivity—a modicum of relief from the drudgery of farmwork—to enable them to advance to positions of honor and privilege.

³ [Venture Smith], *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Venture, a Native of Africa: But Resident above Sixty Years in the United States of America. Related by Himself* (New London: Bee, 1798), 30; Chandler B. Saint and George A. Krinsky, *Making Freedom: The Extraordinary Life of Venture Smith* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 91-94.

⁴ Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, 14:483-491; see also Bruce Stark, "Slavery in Connecticut: a Re-Examination," *Connecticut Review* 9 (Nov. 1975): 75-81.

⁵ Assessing the North's policies of gradual emancipation, James Oakes observes that "Although there were variations from state to state in each case, freedom was promised to the children of slaves once they served an apprenticeship." *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), 10. Thus the principle of gradualism had more to do with a tenacious regard for property rights than with racism or fear of free blacks per se. See also John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730-1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

⁶ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 11-50 passim.

⁷ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 23. For a detailed study of the relationship between Hempstead and Jackson and its larger meaning, see Allegra di Bonaventura, *For Adam's Sake: A Family Saga in Colonial New England* (New York: Liveright, 2013).

Thus the irony traced by Edmund Morgan's masterful *American Slavery, American Freedom*, that the rise of democracy in Virginia was intimately tied to the expansion of slavery, may have its echoes in Connecticut as well.⁸ The domestic scale of slavery in Connecticut appears to have been comparable to that of early Republican Athens, where, as Donald Kagan pointed out, the labor of slaves seems to have provided the margin of leisure to their Athenian owners that enabled to engage in public life. Future research may indicate that human bondage played a similar role in the development of Connecticut's republican government.⁹

What is already clear is that colonial and early national Connecticut presented its inhabitants with a fundamental contradiction. The province that viewed itself as most perfectly resembling John Jay's idealized portrait in *Federalist* No. 2 of "one united people . . . descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs,"¹⁰ was in reality a varied, multiracial society in which Africans, Native Americans, Britons and a diverse maritime population lived and worked in intimate proximity. The state whose inhabitants lived under "one of the most free and happy constitutions of government which mankind have ever adopted," as its first historian effused, relied to a troubling degree on slave labor.¹¹ Thus, the presence of slaves of African descent in the colony constituted a double contradiction of its cherished self-image and its vaunted principles. In this particular, of course, the Connecticut paradox is simply the larger American paradox, underscored for emphasis.

Like Edgar Allan Poe's purloined letter, the secret of Connecticut has been hidden in plain sight, embedded in its very nickname. The term "Nutmeg State" comes from a rather slanderous tale by the Canadian vernacular humorist Thomas Haliburton, writing in the persona of the Connecticut clockmaker Sam Slick, who tells of a Yankee captain who unloaded a cargo of wooden nutmegs in Charleston "so like the real thing, no soul could tell the difference until he bit one with his teeth. . . it's been a standing joke with them southerners agin us ever since."¹² But

⁸ Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975).

⁹ Donald Kagan, "Slavery and Athenian Democracy," lecture to the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, Yale University, October 6, 1999.

¹⁰ The *Federalist Papers*, No. 2: "Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence" [John Jay].

¹¹ Benjamin Trumbull, *A Complete History of Connecticut, Civil and Ecclesiastical, from the Emigration of Its First Planters, from England, in the Year 1630, to the Year 1764; and to the Close of the Indian Wars*, 2 vols (New Haven: Maltby, Goldsworth & Co. and Samuel Wadsworth, 1818), 1:103.

¹² Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Clockmaker; or, the Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick of Slickville* (Philadelphia, 1838), 36. Haliburton had his unscrupulous Yankee trader, "Captain John Allspice," come, in fact, from Nahant in Massachusetts; the shift of the identification to Connecticut underscores the strength of the state's West Indian connection in the popular mind.

the Slick story merely begs the question: why nutmegs, wooden or otherwise? The reason becomes immediately clear when one examines the records of Connecticut commerce. Throughout the colonial era and well into the period of the republic, Connecticut engaged in extensive trade between the West Indies and the mainland seaboard settlements.¹³ In rhetorical terms, “nutmeg” in the “Nutmeg State” is really an example of metonymy, the metaphorical substitution of a one thing for another based on their association or proximity, with the nutmeg standing in for molasses. Of course, to call Connecticut the “Molasses State” would have been to give away the game.

Geography, while not precisely destiny, is certainly predisposition. A talented geographer, armed only with a detailed map of the western Atlantic world and a working knowledge of commodity production, could perhaps infer the origin of Connecticut’s moniker. Connecticut rested at a dumping point of glacial moraine, the debris deposited at the end of the last ice age, ensuring that the state’s most plentiful crop would be rocks. As the colonial adage had it, “Buy land, get stone; buy meat, get bone.”¹⁴

At the same time, the state’s south-facing coastline is striated with more than sixty navigable rivers and streams, the chief of which, the Connecticut, in the center of the state, can be traversed by a large boat nearly to the Massachusetts border. Thus the state seems ideally designed by nature to serve as a maritime hub and transshipment center for the produce of its more fertile but land-locked neighbors and the sparser surpluses of its own agricultural hinterlands, as well as the manufactured goods for which it early became famous. Connecticut’s easy access to the colonies of the southern mainland and the Caribbean perfectly suited it for its role as a major player in the colonial coastal carrying trade.

It was natural, then, for Connecticut to develop its own triangle trade in miniature—providing foodstuffs and manufactures to West Indian sugar plantations in exchange for molasses, the raw material of a thriving distilling industry in the colony that outstripped New York’s, though not those of Newport or Boston. Hartford, New Haven, New London, Norwich, Middletown, and Wethersfield all boasted rum manufactories.¹⁵

In most cases, the owners of Connecticut distilleries were merchants, often with

¹³ See Joseph Avitable, “The Atlantic World Economy and Colonial Connecticut,” Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 2009, 97-175.

¹⁴ Cited in Bruce Fraser, *The Land of Steady Habits: A Brief History of Connecticut* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1988), 14. It is only fair to note, however, that Connecticut agricultural commodities, while short in quantity, were celebrated for their quality.

¹⁵ John J. McCusker, “The Rum Trade and the Balance of Payments of the Thirteen Continental Colonies, 1650-1775” (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1970), 441; John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 290-291.

substantial West Indian holdings of their own. Many of these were migrants from other states, attracted by Connecticut's natural advantages, though sometimes inconvenienced by the manners of its inhabitants. Massachusetts native Samuel Browne founded the largest Connecticut plantation, in New Salem, where he also operated a distillery. Never comfortable with Connecticut republicanism, Browne abandoned it for Bermuda after the Stamp Act crisis of 1765, there to assume the post of royal governor.¹⁶ In 1766, Godfrey Malbone, a slave-trading Tory from Rhode Island, moved to Brooklyn, Connecticut with several dozen slaves after a fire destroyed his Newport mansion. He remained locked in contention with his patriot Congregationalist neighbors for a generation, but religion appears to have been more the cause of conflict than any qualms about his extensive holdings in human capital.¹⁷

The most successful New England transplant with deep involvement in slavery was Gurdon Saltonstall, a Harvard graduate from a family with extensive West Indian interests who would later take a Charlestonian wife. He relocated to New London in 1687 and, while serving as a Congregational minister there, became the secretary and power behind the throne of Governor Fitz-John Winthrop. When Winthrop died in 1707, Saltonstall succeeded him as governor, the only clergyman ever to serve in that position, and held the post for forty-four years until his death in 1724.¹⁸

During his interminable tenure as governor, Gurdon Saltonstall came to seem almost a living parody of the rigidity of the Standing Order, testing and frequently overstepping the limits of benevolent Congregational despotism. His ostentatious display of command over his slaves did not help.¹⁹ He also issued one of the crucial decisions in the development of slavery in the American provinces, when he overruled a county court decision that had freed a mulatto slave whose father was an Englishman. "According to the laws and constant practice of this Colony, and all other plantations," Saltonstall asserted, "such persons as are born of negro bondwomen are themselves in like condition, that is born in servitude." The law, he argued, "undeniably shows and declares an approbation of such servitude, and that mulattos may be held as slaves within this government."²⁰

In the colonial period, Connecticut remained the New England province that

¹⁶ Joel Lang, "The Plantation Next Door: How Salem Slaves, Wethersfield Onions and West Indies Sugar made Connecticut Rich," *Complicity: How Connecticut Chained Itself to Slavery* (special issue of *Northeast Magazine*, *The Hartford Courant*, Sept. 29, 2002), 6-13.

¹⁷ Ellen D. Larned, *History of Windham County* (Pomfret, CT, 2000 [1st ed. 1880], 2:5-12.

¹⁸ On Saltonstall, see J.M. Poteet, "The Lordly Prelate: Gurdon Saltonstall Against His Times," *The New England Quarterly* 53 (December 1980), 483-507.

¹⁹ David E. Philips, *Legendary Connecticut* (Willimantic, CT, 1992), 49.

²⁰ Frederick Calvin Norton, "Negro Slavery in Connecticut," *Connecticut Magazine* 5 (June 1899), 320.

most closely approximated a Calvinist theocracy. Not for nothing was the colony called the “land of steady habits.” While Massachusetts experienced a gradual thawing of religious rigor, Connecticut established Yale to provide a haven of orthodoxy from Harvard’s creeping Arminian infidelity. Once again, geography lent a hand. Instead of the divisive east-west or north-south divisions that rent states such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia or the Carolinas, pitting older eastern seaboard communities against younger, ruder, under-represented backcountries, Connecticut, established in checkerboard fashion with a long southern seaboard and relatively well-connected hinterlands, evinced a pervasive localism but avoided serious regional conflicts. “No one of the states has preserved a more decided and distinctly marked character than Connecticut,” acknowledged Boston’s *North American Review*.

There has therefore prevailed among the common people of Connecticut, more than of any other state, a sentiment, that whatever belongs to them is better than the like thing belonging to any other people—that the usages with which they are conversant, are the standard of what is proper—and that whatever exists among them cannot be mended by looking abroad for models.²¹

What is lost in the description of Connecticut as a Calvinist theocracy is the degree to which the representatives of Connecticut’s Standing Order thought of themselves as open, broad-minded and forward-looking. And by many measures they were. Most importantly for our purposes, their implicit faith in the Bible, read as they did through the lens of Scottish Common Sense philosophy and English natural philosophy, ensured their adherence to the Biblical principle that God has “made all nations of one blood”²² and assured them that liberty (well-ordered and within bounds, of course) was the natural and proper state of mankind. It was entirely in character, then, that the state’s leaders would move to end slavery by passing a gradual emancipation law in 1784, and equally in character that the process they set in motion would require another fifty-four years to complete.

The state’s unusually stable and cohesive political structure, as well as a clear and realistic set of objectives, gave Connecticut lawmakers disproportionate influence in national councils. Equally important, the state’s pragmatic delegates to the Constitution Convention, Roger Sherman, William Johnson and Oliver Ellsworth (the latter two slaveholders) could speak to both Northern and Southern delegates in their own languages. Sherman’s central role in negotiating an acceptable scheme of congressional representation between large and small states—the so-called Connecticut Compromise—appears in every American history textbook. But not so well known—indeed, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that historians

²¹ [Edward Everett], “Trumbull’s History of Connecticut,” *North American Review* 8 (1818): 74.

²² Acts 17:26.

uncovered the details—was Sherman’s pivotal role in brokering a deal with South Carolina’s delegates by which Connecticut and New England would support the Deep South’s positions on the slave trade and exports in exchange for those states’ endorsement of Connecticut’s land claims to Ohio’s Western Reserve.²³

However Sherman, Ellsworth, and Johnson viewed their role in structuring the Constitution, there is little doubt that other Connecticut leaders believed that the steps taken at the Convention, imperfect though they might be, had put slavery on the road to extinction. James Dana, addressing the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom and Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage in 1790, confidently predicted that slavery would soon come to an end, and discussed his expectations for the freedpeople, whom he assumed as a matter of course would become part of the American polity.²⁴ The Upper South’s shift from tobacco to wheat, as well as Yale graduate Eli Whitney’s ingenious engine (or “gin”) for extracting seeds from cotton, and the emergence of a national party under the leadership of the Virginia political elite, would make that outcome far less likely.

Federalist Connecticut viewed the accession of the Republicans in 1801 in apocalyptic terms. Jedidiah Morse, the dean of Connecticut Congregationalism, viewed Thomas Jefferson as a debauched unbeliever and his party as the vanguard of the Bavarian Illuminati, a diabolical global conspiracy with its headquarters in Europe.²⁵ The fact that the leaders of the Republican Party were Virginians and slaveholders was of a piece with their goal to enslave their countrymen to the atheistic doctrines that had inflamed France.²⁶

²³ See, e.g., Forrest McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum: the Formation of the American Republic, 1776-1790* (Boston, 1965), 290-94, and Christopher Collier and James Collier, *Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787* (New York, 1986), 145-48.

²⁴ James Dana, *The African Slave Trade: A Discourse Delivered in the City of New-Haven, September 9, 1790, Before the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom . . .* (New Haven: T. and S. Green, 1791), 30-33. See also Jonathan Edwards Jr., *The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of the Slavery of the Africans: Illustrated in a Sermon Preached Before the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom. . .* ([New Haven]: T. and S. Green, 1791); Zephaniah Swift, *An Oration on Domestic Slavery. Delivered at the North Meeting-House in Hartford, on the 12th day of May, A.D. 1791. At the Meeting of the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and the Relief of Person Unlawfully Holden in Bondage* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1791). Also see Peter Hinks, “Gradual Emancipation Reflected the Struggle of Some to Envision Black Freedom.” <<http://connecticuthistory.org/gradual-emancipation-reflected-the-struggle-of-some-to-envision-black-freedom/#sthash.WCQn6Er4.dpuf>>, accessed July 24, 2013, and Hinks, “Timothy Dwight, Congregationalism, and Early Antislavery,” in *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform*, ed. Stephen Mintz and John Stauffer (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 148-161.

²⁵ This did not, however, prevent Morse from printing dozens of pages from Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* in his own *American Geography: or, a View of the Present Situation of the United States of America* (London, 1792).

²⁶ Jedidiah Morse, *A Sermon, Delivered in the New North Church in Boston, in the Morning, and*

A more practical Federalist fear of Southern influence within the Republican Party stemmed from the mundane political considerations of representation and power. The shift in the center of national gravity to the South and West, already clearly visible in Washington's administration, instilled a fear in the New England establishment that they would soon be superseded in politics and commerce. Writing in 1796 in the *Connecticut Courant*, one "Pelham" urged his fellows to consider the costs of union with Southerners—brutes who treated their slaves as cattle and would, "if they were good for food," surely use them as such. Union would be desirable if the Southern states "were possessed of the same political ideas" as Connecticut, "Pelham" argued. "But when it becomes a serious question, whether we shall give up our government, or part with the states south of the Potomac, no man north of that river, whose heart is not thoroughly democratic, can hesitate what decision to make."²⁷ [Emphasis added.] In other words, only a fanatical democrat—still a term of opprobrium in Federalist Connecticut—would oppose New England's secession from the Southern-dominated Union.

Attitudes such as Pelham's did much to undermine ties to the southern branch of the Federalist Party, chiefly active in Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina. Slavery had already demonstrated its ability to eradicate party differences in the Deep South as early as 1790, when Georgia's most ardent Anti-Federalist senators, James Jackson and Aedanus Burke, joined forces with South Carolina's most extreme Federalist, William Loughton Smith, in violent opposition to a Quaker petition against the slave trade.²⁸ This set the pattern for future decades.

For a brief time, fear of the French Revolution, with its ominous echoes of servile rebellion, reinforced the ties of Southern Federalists to their New England fellow partisans. It might be imagined that the epic racial violence of the Haitian Revolution would also have knit together Federalists in both sections. Instead, while it may have prompted a frisson of horror with many individual Northern Federalists, most seemed to regard the slaughter of St. Domingue slaveholders and the French troops sent to recapture the island with philosophical equanimity as an instructive example of God's Providence, not to mention a commercial boon to New England merchants. "It is not to be supposed, that the American government will be

in the Afternoon at Charlestown, May 9th, 1798, being the Day Recommended by John Adams, President of the United States of America, for Solemn Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer (Boston, 1798), 20-26.

²⁷ Cited in Mathew Carey, *The Olive Branch* (Philadelphia, 1814), 255. It might be worth noting that the *New Haven Chronicle* reported a few years later an actual example, from Cuba, of the conversion of waylaid slaves into meat pies, in the manner of Sweeney Todd (*New Haven Chronicle*, 19 May 1827).

²⁸ See Robert G. Parkinson, "'Manifest Signs of Passion': The First Federal Congress, Antislavery, and the Legacies of the Revolutionary War," in John Craig Hammond and Matthew Mason (eds), *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 50-52; also see Howard A. Ohline, "Slavery, Economics and Congressional Politics, 1790," *Journal of Southern History* 46 (August 1980): 335-360.

backward in acknowledging the independence of St. Domingo,” intoned the Connecticut Courant, “for however we may incline to avoid dabbling in revolutionary matters, this is a case in which our interest is so deeply involved, that secondary considerations ought to be disregarded.” Displaying a sanguine mock concern for slaveholders, the writer continued, “It might be worthwhile, however, to bestow some consideration on the question how far the attention bestowed on those people [Haiti’s black revolutionaries], might embolden the black citizens of our southern states to attempt erecting a democratical republic after the model of Mr. Jefferson, and other friends to the Rights of Negro Men.”²⁹

Connecticut Wits Richard Alsop and Theodore Dwight went further, plainly prophesying Virginia’s ruin in the wake of Gabriel’s foiled slave revolt:

... remember ere too late,
The tale of St. Domingo’s fate,
Though Gabriel dies, a host remain
Oppress’d with slavery’s galling chain,
And soon or late the hour will come,
Mark’d with Virginia’s dreadful doom.³⁰

The New Englanders’ attitude of calm detachment at best, and sanguine anticipation at worst, drove a stake through the heart of intersectional conservative cooperation.

Jefferson’s election constituted a body blow to New England’s influence in the Union. Connecticut Federalists fought back with the tools at hand, including their favorite form, mock-Augustan satire, in which James Callender’s salacious accusations of presidential cohabitation with “Black Sal” played a leading role. Neither were they above answering Republican arguments with taunting retorts in negro dialect.³¹ While the “negro president” was in office, Federalists easily matched Republicans in racist rhetoric.

²⁹ Connecticut Courant, 10 December 1798, p. 3.

³⁰ [Richard Alsop and Theodore Dwight,] “Triumph of Democracy,” *The Echo: With Other Poems* (New York, 1807), 274. In a similar vein, see also “ST. DOMINGO,” *Windham Herald*, April 5, 1804. This article was immediately followed by a description of “the largest and fattest three year old heifer that we have ever seen.” Among dozens of such articles, see also “FRAGMENT OF A PROCLAMATION—By DESSALINES,” *Litchfield Monitor*, 28 March 1804; “LIBERTY OR DEATH,” [Norwich] *Connecticut Centinel*, 4 April 1804; and see Garry Wills, “Negro President”: Jefferson and the Slave Power (Boston, 2003), 37–41. The Republican *Litchfield Witness* reprinted with disgust an article from the *Boston Gazette* urging the defrauded victims of the Yazoo land fraud to rise up in “insurrection and rebellion” against the insultingly meager compensation offered by the “Georgia tyrants”: “The negroes of St. Domingo have spurned a despotism not more degrading than thisDEFY THEIR DESPOTISM.” The *Witness* described this outburst as “by far the most extravagant piece we have ever known tolerated under a civilized government.” The *Witness*, 21 May 1806.

³¹ [Alsop and Dwight], *The Echo*, 301; “Specimen of Federal Argument,” [Litchfield] *Witness*, 25 Sept. 1805.

Nor was it a given in this early stage of the nation that all blacks were Federalists. “A WHITE FREEMAN” reported in the *Federalist Connecticut Courant* in 1803 that “in the town of Wallingford there are two citizens of colour, both democrats,” recognized by local officials as qualified voters. If they should “obtain a clear majority of votes to represent said town,” he petulantly inquired, “would they be admitted to seats in the house of the Representatives of this State?”³² Within a few years, however, a black Republican would be reckoned a rare anomaly, eccentric if not perverse.

Whatever remained of the fragile North-South coalition of Federalists was finally demolished by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. As Jed Shugerman has shown, South Carolina’s leaders of both parties put aside their political differences when word of the successful negotiations for Louisiana reached Charleston. Instantaneously and in perfect harmony, they sold the South Carolina electorate on the importance of the purchase and the expediency of reopening the African slave trade to meet this new market. As Shugerman explains, South Carolina planters saw in the vast western lands of Louisiana an unparalleled opportunity to extend the realm of slaveholding and thus to expand the pool of the American electorate who shared South Carolina’s interest in defending its peculiar institution.³³

New England Federalist leaders, with the conspicuous exception of John Quincy Adams and a few others, almost as quickly mobilized to reject the Louisiana Purchase. When this failed, Connecticut’s Senator James Hillhouse sought to limit the growth of slavery in Orleans Territory, later the state of Louisiana, the first territory to be organized out of the vast new possessions. For Hillhouse, the dictates of political interest and morality meshed seamlessly in his campaign to bar slavery from the new western lands. Unfortunately, two of his three limiting amendments were rejected; the third, to prohibit the domestic slave trade into the territory, was removed within the year. Nonetheless, according to the historian Don Fehrenbacher, Hillhouse’s amendments constituted “the strongest antislavery restriction imposed on any portion of the Deep South between 1733 and 1865.”³⁴

Hillhouse recognized that the failure of his legislative effort to stem the growth of slavery in the west meant that the unfolding future development of the continent would not only undermine the political influence of New England, but permanently place the nation under the sway of a political system based not on virtue but on interests, of which slavery was or would soon become the strongest. In 1808, he introduced a set of quixotic constitutional amendments that, among other unorthodox

³² *Connecticut Courant*, 9 Sept. 1803.

³³ Jed Handelsman Shugerman, “The Louisiana Purchase and the Reopening of the South Carolina Slave Trade in 1803,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 22 (Summer 2002): 263-90.

³⁴ Don H. Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case* (New York, 1978), 92-97. See also John Craig Hammond, “They are Very Much Interested in Obtaining an Unlimited Slavery,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 23 (Fall 2003): 353-380.

provisions, would have reduced the term of the president to one year and selected him by lot from among the senators.³⁵ Presumably this provision was designed as an appeal to lawmakers to substitute their private judgment and virtue for the dictation of national political parties. But such a vision of the republic was totally fanciful, as Hillhouse himself no doubt recognized.

Federalists' anxiety for New England's future under Southern Republican domination flourished with the resumption of war between England and France. Republican-imposed trade restrictions devastated northeastern maritime interests, including Connecticut's.³⁶ The state's lack of cooperation in the War of 1812 bordered on the treasonous, and as the war dragged on, Federalist leaders increasingly entertained schemes of secession, a northern confederacy, and a separate peace with Great Britain. However, the infamous Hartford Convention of 1814 was not a Connecticut production, despite its location.³⁷ Massachusetts leaders, attempting to mobilize a common New England front against the federal government, chose to hold the meeting in Hartford for the same reason South Carolina fire-eaters would pick Memphis, Montgomery or Vicksburg for the Southern commercial conventions of the 1850s: to give an impression of sectional solidarity, however unwarranted. With a few exceptions, Federalist leaders from the Land of Steady Habits tended to demonstrate a greater level of prudence on sectional as well as other matters than their neighbors to the north.

Thus the electoral earthquake that displaced the Connecticut Federalist regime in 1817 had less to do with national issues and backlash against the Hartford Convention than with the internal shortcomings of the establishment itself. The Standing Order, having never experienced an effective challenge to what it considered its organic right to govern the state, had no idea how to bend in order to keep from breaking, nor had it developed the invaluable art of playing one set of enemies off against another. Instead, Governor John Cotton Smith (seeming at times a caricature of his Puritan ancestor Cotton Mather) and his council attempted to put down the growing Republican insurgency by increasingly intolerant measures, driving moderates and even fair-minded conservatives into the ranks of the enemy. In 1816, Republicans and Episcopalians united to form the Toleration Party. Its

³⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 10th Congress, 1st Session, cols. 332-358.

³⁶ It is perhaps not incidental that the Republican policy of embargo wreaked disproportionate havoc on the African American population of New England, since maritime work constituted the most important source of income and respectability for northern free blacks. See W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 158-90, and Bolster, "The Impact of Jefferson's Embargo on Coastal Commerce," *The Log of Mystic Seaport* 37 (Winter 1986): 111-123.

³⁷ James M. Banner, *To the Hartford Convention: the Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 312-315. This point was also stressed in appeals to sectional harmony in the Republican press; see "The Virginian in Connecticut. Letter I. Village," *Hartford Times*, 1 Jan. 1817.

standard bearer, the eminently tolerable Oliver Wolcott, Jr., a scion of the Standing Order, led his followers to victory the second time out, in 1817. While Wolcott offered an attractive alternative, there is no doubt that the rigidity, sanctimony, and arrogance of the Standing Order played the most significant role in its downfall.³⁸

Once again, however, we must recognize the complicating factor of slavery and race in party politics, a particularly salient point when considering the relationship of Connecticut's parties to national issues. One of the most damaging charges laid against the grandees of the Standing Order, for example, was their scandalous refusal, as the Republicans saw it, to acknowledge the subordinate position of blacks. This charge comes as something of a surprise, because it could hardly be argued that members of the Federalist establishment, many of them former slaveholders themselves, were likely to engage with blacks on terms of anything like equality. The problem was that neither did they regard the "lesser sort" of whites as their equals nor did they make strong qualitative distinctions between the two sorts of lesser sorts. Either sort could vote if they met the fifty-shilling property requirement and a variety of subjective tests of rectitude and fitness. If in practice these impediments disfranchised all but a handful of prosperous yet respectful blacks, that was as it should be, and no further disabilities need be imposed to distinguish them from similarly situated whites. Indeed, in many ways, Federalist grandees tended to prefer blacks to the lesser sort of whites, because the former tended to know and accept their place better than the latter—and to display a proper sense of deference to their betters.

Free blacks in Connecticut, as in much of the South, frequently relied upon strategically deferential relationships with powerful white patrons to smooth their way in the world; they mediated for them with other white authority figures, assisted them in acquiring an education, provided bonds and sureties, held their property in safekeeping, and served at a distance as mentors of a paternalistic strain. It was a role that gratified these paternalists' sense of benevolence, of status, above all perhaps, of indispensability—in a wider white society in which their chosen role as counselor and protector of the weak was coming to seem increasingly superfluous, outdated, and offensive. "The haughty, ambitious, and tyrannical, all who are eager to assume the character of a master, do very naturally prefer the coloured servant to the white freeman," one newspaper commentator noted bitterly. In short, the insecurity of free blacks enabled powerful whites to engage them in an ego-enhancing patron-client relationship that was no longer possible with the "lesser sort" of whites, because such whites no longer viewed themselves nor cared to be viewed by anyone else as the "lesser sort." At the same time, resentful whites saw elite patronage of blacks as a direct economic threat:

³⁸ See Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1918), 332-49.

That a secret, but deadly influence is exerted in favour of the coloured, to the prejudice of white labourers, is a truth much oftener felt by the latter, than even suspected by our wealthy and benevolent citizens. The miser has a much better prospect of cheapening the services of the black, than of the white man—he prefers him therefore.³⁹

This complex relationship of blacks to the Connecticut Establishment helps to explain the surprisingly important role that anti-black sentiment and policy played in the Republican (and later Jacksonian Democratic) agenda, which made the limitation of the franchise to whites a key part of its platform. It is worth examining the facets of this phenomenon in some detail, since in their broad outlines they applied as well to other states, constituting a significant electoral dynamic that today's political alignments have tended to obscure.

Several factors predisposed insurgent Republicans to oppose the rights of free blacks. The first and most uncomplicated of these was purely electoral. The few qualified black voters who would be barred from the polls by the General Assembly in 1814 and permanently disfranchised by the 1818 Constitution were almost without exception Federalists. While this factor was negligible in Connecticut, it was significant in several of other states in the same period, encouraging Republicans to restrict black voting. The Republican Hartford Mercury asserted in 1813 that at least 1200 blacks had voted in the previous year's gubernatorial election, which the Federalist candidate, Caleb Strong, won by about 600 votes. Since "all the negroes in Massachusetts, are federalists, and voted for Caleb Strong[,] . . . the Negroes put in the Governor of Massachusetts in 1812."⁴⁰ In New York City as well, blacks had on at least one occasion tilted elections to the Federalists, leading Republicans in 1816 to institute a poll tax on black voters.⁴¹ Statewide in New York, blacks were making their impact felt as an organized political bloc by 1820, one year before their effective disenfranchisement by the new constitution.⁴² Likewise, blacks could and did vote in Tennessee until 1834 and in North Carolina until 1835, predictably for candidates from the conservative white elites who offered them a measure of patronage and protection. Just as predictably, their political opponents stripped blacks of the vote when they obtained the power to revise the states' constitutions.⁴³

³⁹ "Aristides," New Haven Chronicle, 21 April 1827. On the broader phenomenon on a national scale, see Robert Pierce Forbes, "'The Cause of This Blackness': The Early American Republic and the Construction of Race," *American Nineteenth Century History* 13 (March 2012): 83-84.

⁴⁰ "From the Boston Patriot. Boreas," Hartford American Mercury, 13 January 1813, p. 3 (emphasis in original).

⁴¹ "The Constitution vindicated," New-York Courier, 1 May 1816.

⁴² [Frances Wright], *Views of society and manners in America*; in a series of letters from that country to a friend in England, during the years 1818, 1819, and 1820 (London, 1821), 45-57.

⁴³ State constitutions adopting white manhood suffrage include Delaware (1791), Kentucky (1799), Ohio (1803), Indiana (1816), Illinois (1818), Alabama (1819), Tennessee (1834), North Carolina (1835), Michigan (1835), Pennsylvania (1838), New Jersey (1844), and Iowa (1846). New York's constitution

A second and related source of Republican hostility toward blacks, as suggested by Aristides's complaints above, targeted them in their capacity as proxies for their elite white patrons. Once again, this was a familiar phenomenon in the South as well. On an individual level, attacking a man of substance and power carried serious dangers. Attacking his black clients—or, in a Southern context, his slaves—could be done with relative impunity, while his efforts to defend them could inflict further social harm by providing additional evidence of his arrogance and racial disloyalty. What worked against individuals worked equally well against classes and parties; Connecticut Federalists soon went on the defensive as targets of this kind of proxy attack.⁴⁴

A third factor was religious—or, if you will, ethnocultural. If the Federalists as a party could be tarred by their association with the pariah class of blacks, so too could Calvinist orthodoxy. Like infant damnation and total depravity, the doctrine of black equality with whites had, by the early 19th century, come to seem insupportable to most non-orthodox Christians and more than faintly embarrassing to many Calvinists, although few Connecticut Christians would deny it in principle. It is difficult today to make sense of the fact that anti-black prejudice could be viewed as politically advanced and up-to-date, while a belief in black equality was regarded as outdated. The paradox begins to clear, however, when we recognize that the doctrine of blacks' spiritual equality was linked to a theological outlook that expected neither blacks nor whites to assert temporal equality with the ruling classes. In other words, if blacks were expected to sit in the balcony of the Congregational church, it went without saying that the families on the main floor would be rank-ordered on the basis of social importance. With the radically new premises of the post-Federalist American Republic, the stakes of inclusion in politics and society were far higher than ever before, and equality took on the appearance of a zero-sum game. Increasingly, how God viewed Africans seemed less important than how one's neighbors viewed Africans, and what their view of Africans said about how they regarded their white neighbors.

The founding of the Hartford Times in 1817 by printer F.D. Bolles and Republican attorney John Milton Niles marked perhaps the most politically sophisticated deployment of this "ethnocultural" line of attack on the fading Federalist Standing Order. According to historian Jeffrey L. Pasley, "Newspaper

(1821) imposed a stiff property requirement for blacks while abolishing the property qualification for whites.

⁴⁴ This dynamic is perhaps most notable in the rise and fall of William Lanson of New Haven, an ex-slave contractor, hostler, real estate speculator and entrepreneur who enjoyed the patronage of Yale's president Timothy Dwight and other members of New Haven's Federalist establishment. See Peter Hinks, "The Successes and Struggles of New Haven Entrepreneur William Lanson," <<http://connecticuthistory.org/successes-and-struggles-of-new-haven-entrepreneur-william-lanson/#sthash.NIomwBVN.dpuf>>, accessed 9 Aug 2013.

politics in Connecticut achieved a new level of intensity and maturity with the rise of Niles and the Times.”⁴⁵ Its principles, the editors announced in its debut issue, were “those of REPUBLICANISM”; its objects, “the support of Republican principles of the constitution, and of the constituted authorities of the nation”—in other words, support for the Republican party and the Virginia-led national government. The editors sought to banish “that spirit of bigotry and intolerance,” and to encourage in its place “the great principles of Republicanism and Toleration,” a reform that “will give to our citizens just and equal civil and religious privileges,” and, more pointedly, “restore to the State . . . our just weight in the national councils,” including its fair share of patronage and preferment.⁴⁶

Surely no one could wish to maintain “unworthy prejudices” and “bigotry and intolerance,” nor oppose “liberal and enlarged principles.” But what sort of “prejudices” stood in the way of Connecticut’s exercising its “just weight in the national councils” and what kind of “enlargement” did its principles require to assume its rightful role in national affairs? The beginning of an answer appeared in a series of epistolary articles entitled “The Virginian in Connecticut,” a sort of New England version of Montesquieu’s satirical Persian Letters. Through the observations of “Henry*****” to his fellow Virginian “George,” the paper’s readers could contemplate the foibles and idiosyncrasies of Connecticut’s “local and peculiar institutions,” and see themselves as others saw them.

For the most part, the “Virginian’s” views about blacks were implicit, not overt. Republicans deployed anti-black rhetoric in subtle and allusive fashion during the “Era of Good Feelings,” roughly 1817 to 1824, for example portraying the failure to draw sharp lines between white and black as a Federalist foible akin to their irrational and bigoted theological views. The “Virginian in Connecticut’s” fifth letter archly described the ideal library of the typical Nutmegger: “Newspapers, Pamphlets, Election Sermons, and New England Fathers, NATIONAL HISTORY; Phillis Wheatley’s Poems; . . .Higginson’s Confessions of Faith and Covenant, Mrs. Hutchinson’s Errors, Cambridge Platform, Saybrook Platform, the Connecticut Evangelical Magazine, ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY; . . .Missionary Journals, foreign and domestic, MISCELLANY. Now such a Library, would be thought by its proprietor fit to supply the Athenaeum,” the Virginian mocked, “and what liberal minded scholar would disturb him in his opinion?”⁴⁷ The association of Wheatley, still at this time a highly popular, frequently anthologized author, with orthodox and sententious religious literature, continued the attitude of contempt launched by Jefferson in his Notes on the State of Virginia: “Religion indeed has produced a

⁴⁵ Pasley, “The Tyranny of Printers:” Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 378.

⁴⁶ Hartford Times, 1 Jan. 1817.

⁴⁷ “The Virginian in Connecticut. Letter V.” Hartford Times, 24 Jan. 1817.

Phyllis Whately[sic], but it could not produce a poet.”⁴⁸ The “Virginian’s” depiction of the Nutmegger’s bookshelf has a substantial ring of truth. It is likely that many readers would have felt some shock, perhaps some shame, at seeing themselves in this sly lampoon.

In case the import of this series was not clear, the editors offered a clarifying commentary:

That the writer is a Virginian, is not more apparent from his style, which seems to have a Southern brilliancy, than from his sentiments, which are national, and free from those local and sectional prejudices with relation to the New-England States, which we are in the habit of attributing to our Southern neighbors. It is not a matter of surprise, that, in this enlightened age, some of our quaint and peculiar notions, the relics of the puritanical fanaticism of the early part of the seventeenth century, and which our system of “steady habits” has prevented from being extinguished in the resplendent blaze of progressive improvements, should be a subject of pleasantry with our southern neighbors, who have kept pace with the progress and refinement of the times. . . . the sentiments of our correspondent are an addition to the evidence which we have . . . that the citizens of the southern states, are more national in their sentiments. . . . May we not indulge the hope, that the time is not far distant, when physical and geographical distinctions will interpose no barriers to the progress and uniformity of national feeling, and the establishment of national character?⁴⁹

It may seem strange to see the slaveholding aristocracy of the Old Dominion described as more attuned to “the progress and refinement of the times” and freer from “local and sectional prejudices” than the denizens of the Nutmeg State. Indeed it is—as we will see, editor Niles would ultimately learn this fact himself. But such a characterization tells us less about Connecticut and Virginia and more about the consolidation of national Republican Party hegemony in the era of “amalgamation,” the absorption of the remnants of the Federalists into the victorious Republican fold. From the vantage point of the Times’s owner and editor, getting right with the General Government meant aligning its readership with the viewpoint of a national political organization centered in Virginia and unwaveringly committed to Virginia’s interests. From the perspective of the party, the purpose of the Hartford Times was to conduct a “mopping-up operation,” the pacification of one of Federalism’s last bastions.

Thus far I have not cited the fourth, and most frequently cited, cause for the hardening of racial attitudes in the early republic: a general increase in racism. I have avoided doing so because I believe that “racism” is too often applied in a reductionist fashion as a causative agent rather than a dependent variable influenced by other forces.⁵⁰ However, following James Brewer Stewart, Peter Hinks, and

⁴⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London: Stackpole, 1787), 234.

⁴⁹ Hartford Times, 5 Jan. 1817.

⁵⁰ For an insightful study of black disenfranchisement in Pennsylvania, which links the movement to southern political pressure rather than racism, see Nicholas Wood, “A Sacrifice on the Altar of

Joanne P. Melish, I do believe that the period we are discussing witnessed an increase in what can be described as racism, pure and simple. And this stance reveals a reason that may be the underlying cause of racial hatred in the United States: that the descendants of Africans, because of their history of enslavement and their continuing condition of oppression, constituted a living, breathing indictment of Americans' failure to live up to their own self-image.⁵¹

This failure stood out sharply in the Connecticut Constitution of 1818. While much has been written about its insertion of the term "white" in the qualifications for voters, the document posed an even more fundamental challenge to black citizenship in its very first provision. Section 1 of Article I, the Declaration of Rights, affirmed: "That all men when they form a social compact, are equal in rights; and that no man, or set of men are entitled to exclusive public emoluments or privileges from the community."⁵² This language, of course, was intended to do away with the special status enjoyed by the grandees of the Standing Order. But it also created a conundrum regarding the state's black population: if all men are equal in rights, then how could black men be prohibited from voting? Either the Constitution was in violation of its own Declaration of Rights, or blacks did not constitute part of society. If the former, the Constitution was a dead letter; if the latter, blacks were in effect declared to be outside of society, to be outlaws.

It is not entirely clear whether the delegates grasped the implications of Article 1, Section I, since the entire preamble and bill of rights were borrowed almost verbatim from the Mississippi constitution of 1817 and passed without debate—"not one of the convention's finest moments," as Wesley W. Horton observes.⁵³ The Mississippi Declaration of Rights, itself modeled on the Virginia constitution, declared that "all freemen, when they form a social compact, are equal in rights." As in Virginia, the Mississippi delegates adopted the Lockean language of "social compact" explicitly to

Slavery: 'Doughface Politics and Black Disenfranchisement in Pennsylvania, 1837-1838,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 31 (Spring 2011): 75-106.

⁵¹ See James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790-1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18 (Summer 1998): 181-217 and "'Modernizing Difference: The Political Meanings of Color in the Free States, 1776-1840,' *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (Winter 1999): 691-712; Peter Hinks, "'He was Capable of Great Things: William Lanson and the Vagaries of Early Free Black New Haven,'" talk delivered at the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, Yale University, 19 October 2000; and Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and 'Race' in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁵² Constitution of Connecticut, 1818.

⁵³ *Journal of the Proceedings of the Convention of Delegates, Convened at Hartford, August 26, 1818, for the Purpose of Forming a Constitution of Civil Government for the People of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford: Office of the Comptroller, 1901), 16-19; Wesley W. Horton, *The Connecticut State Constitution: A Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1993), 12.

evade attributing rights to slaves, who by law and custom were considered aliens.⁵⁴

The implications of Connecticut's Declaration of Rights, however, were considerably more troubling than the slave-state declarations, precisely because Connecticut was not a slave state. It was one thing to draw a distinction between slaves and freemen, as did the constitutions of Virginia and Mississippi (and of the United States). It was another to affirm "all men" under a "social compact" to be "equal in rights" and then to explicitly exclude free blacks. The implications of such an exclusion were fateful, and the consequences were to be far-reaching.

Given this background, the emergence of the movement to colonize free blacks in Africa came as a godsend to the governing classes of the nation, and nowhere more so than in Connecticut. Colonization seemed to solve all the difficulties of the state's would-be philanthropists at once: it enabled them to inveigh against slavery without proposing to expand the number of free blacks in the country, and without upsetting their Southern fellow-countrymen and customers. Colonization redeemed both the piety and the patriotism of elite leaders, since the freedpeople, trained up in the doctrines of Christianity and republicanism, would bring the light of faith and of democracy to their benighted brethren in Africa. Colonization restored the sacred sense of mission, the arc of New England history from the Puritans to the present, that gave the United States meaning as a beacon of freedom for the world's oppressed. Most importantly, perhaps, colonization enabled these self-described humanitarians to channel the rank ugliness of their fears and hatred for their black fellow-citizens into an undertaking that salved their consciences and salvaged their benevolent self-perceptions. Indeed, were it not for the facts that the colonization enterprise was vehemently and almost universally rejected by the people it was designed to benefit, and so logistically unrealistic as to be almost delusional, it would have been a truly Providential philanthropy, as its supporters proclaimed it.

It is perhaps not coincidental that the founding of the Toleration Party, the first effective challenge to Connecticut's Federalist Standing Order, took place in 1816, the same year as the founding of the American Colonization Society. The first Connecticut offshoot was the Hartford Colonization Society, established in 1819. Republican Supreme Court Justice John T. Peters served as its president, presiding over a roster of officers and managers encompassing the entire spectrum of political and religious opinion in the state, from intolerant Standing Order Calvinists to radical Baptists and ecclesiarchical Episcopalians.⁵⁵ Indeed, it is hard to conceive of any

⁵⁴ Winbourne M. Drake, "Mississippi's First Constitutional Convention," *Journal of Mississippi History* 18 (April 1956): 79-110; Drake, "The Framing of Mississippi's First Constitution," *Journal of Mississippi History* 28 (November 1967): 301. On the insertion of the Lockean "state of society" into the Virginia Declaration of Rights in order to exclude slaves from its affirmation of men's natural equality, see Kevin R.C. Gutzman, *Virginia's American Revolution: From Dominion to Republic, 1776-1840* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 27-28.

⁵⁵ Constitution of the Hartford Colonization Society: A List of Officers Chosen at the Organization of the Society; Together with an Address to the Public (Hartford: Lincoln and Stone, 1819), 6. See also

other enterprise that could have engendered such wide-ranging support.

The first major sectional test of the new Republican Tolerationist regime came with the Missouri controversy of 1819-20. In February of 1819, Representative James Tallmadge of New York introduced an amendment to the Missouri statehood bill that would have barred the introduction of new slaves into the state, and applied a provision for gradual emancipation to the children of slaves already in the territory. This was in effect the extension of the antislavery statute of the Northwest Ordinance to Missouri; it can also be viewed as an attempt to apply James Hillhouse's rejected Louisiana antislavery statute of eighteen years previous to the new state. Connecticut's congressional representatives, like most other Americans, had no inkling of the explosive impact the proposal would have on the nation, nor did they imagine the treacherous shoals they would have to navigate between the demands of their party leadership and the expectations of their constituents.

As the late Speaker of the House, Tip O'Neill, famously asserted, "all politics is local."⁵⁶ National politics is national, of course, but to succeed, it has to play at home. Having no instructions from their party leaders or constituents, the members of Connecticut's congressional delegation had to rely upon their own instincts to guide them through the thicket of votes in the final days of the 15th Congress. Connecticut's House members, lame-duck Federalists elected before the fall of the Standing Order, voted to restrict slavery in Missouri, but one of its Federalist senators, David Daggett, voted against restriction on several motions.⁵⁷ The representatives' call turned out to be the popular one. Although the implications of the Missouri controversy were initially overlooked by the public in North and South alike, that would soon change.

Theodore Dwight, editor of the New-York Daily Advertiser, brother of Yale's late president Timothy and the erstwhile secretary of the Hartford Convention, grasped the full moral and political significance of the issue almost immediately and turned his publication into an engine of Northern outrage. "[N]o subject has ever been brought into discussion before Congress, since the organization of this government, and probably never will be from henceforward, in which the states where slavery does not exist have had or can have so vital an interest," Dwight proclaimed, pointedly ignoring the fact that slavery continued to exist in both New York and Connecticut. If Congress should lose this opportunity to restrict the institution, "and the SIN OF SLAVERY be fastened . . . upon that boundless region which the United States possesses beyond the Mississippi," he continued apocalyptically and in bold

Donald M. Bishop, "The Colonizationist Movement in Connecticut, 1816-1840" M.A. thesis, Trinity College (Hartford, CT), 1967.

⁵⁶ Tip O'Neill and William Novak O'Neill, *Man of the House* (New York: Random House, 1987), 6 ff.

⁵⁷ Precisely why Daggett, a charter member of the Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom in the 1790s, alone among his delegation voted against restriction is not clear.

capitals, “THE DEATH-WARRANT OF THE POLITICAL STANDING AND INFLUENCE OF THE FREE STATES WILL IRREVOCABLY BE SEALED.”⁵⁸ In due time, most of the Northern press came to see the issue in similar terms and the public began assembling in mass meetings, among the largest political gatherings in the country up to that time, to instruct their representatives to draw the line against new slave states. Connecticut stood with other New England states, essentially unanimous against the admission of Missouri. On this issue, it seemed, there was no partisan division.

Elias Boudinot, the aging Federalist philanthropist who had helped to launch the crusade, marveled that the Missouri agitation “seems to have run like a flaming fire thro our middle states,” but noted that “it causes great anxiety. It is whispered about by the knowing ones, that there is a wheel within a wheel and that there is some bargaining taking place between the East & Southern Interests. I know not how this is,” Boudinot continued, “but . . . if it should take place there is an End to the happiness of the united States.”⁵⁹ As in 1787, the bargaining that Boudinot sensed seems almost certainly to have involved Connecticut.

Despite the intensity of support for slavery restriction among the Connecticut public, pragmatic Republican Party leaders and businessmen with Southern connections, two overlapping groups, regarded the interminable congressional debate over Missouri with skepticism and growing alarm. Newly elected representative Henry Waggaman Edwards sympathized with what he assumed to be the view at home that Congress had spent long enough on the subject. “Perhaps if I was not here I should think so too,” he acknowledged, but in fact “my impressions are far otherwise.” Although initially “disposed to consider” the Missouri controversy as inspired by “party or sinister views,” Edwards asserted that the question had “risen far above” such narrow concerns and “the only feelings, which are discoverable, are those which spring from the subject itself.”⁶⁰

What sorts of feelings would have been likely to spring from the subject of slavery extension in Connecticut? Conflicting feelings, one can only presume. Representative Samuel Foot had been directly involved in the West India trade. Representative Henry W. Edwards himself was enmeshed in family connections to slavery. One of Edwards’ uncle was Eli Whitney, inventor of the cotton gin; another was Jonathan Edwards, Jr., one of Connecticut’s most ardent abolitionists. An aunt married William Samuel Johnson, the slaveholding Stamford delegate to the Constitutional Convention who served as a key dealmaker with South Carolina in the twenty-year extension of the slave trade. Edwards himself supported the presidential

⁵⁸ New-York Daily Advertiser, 29 March 1819.

⁵⁹ Robert P. Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 58.

⁶⁰ Forbes, *Missouri Compromise*, 92.

ambitions of his fellow graduate of Tapping Reeve's law school, the then-nationalist John C. Calhoun, and was a grammar-school classmate of Pennsylvania congressman Henry Baldwin, perhaps the Tallmadge Amendment's most zealous Northern opponent.⁶¹ On the other hand, Edwards was also close to William Hillhouse, son of the former senator, who was circulating a broadside against the admission of new slave states so blistering that Edwards feared it would cause a Southern explosion if it were to be seen in Washington.⁶² Other members of the delegation shared the typical background and outlook of the "middle ground" that typified Connecticut's elite. A clash of this magnitude between North and South affected them personally and pained them intensely.

The newly governing Tolerationists found themselves in a particularly tight spot. Hailing from a state so recently marked for its treasonous tendencies and its bitter hostility toward the South, they felt compelled to demonstrate their loyalty to the Union and their new Southern Republican allies. At the same time, they knew that their constituents would scrutinize their actions minutely for any evidence that they had sacrificed their independence and their state's interests to those same Southern Republicans. The Hartford Times' editor John Milton Niles walked the Northern Republican tightrope, initially supporting restriction but welcoming the ultimate compromise.⁶³ Connecticut's freshman Republican senator James Stevens breathed a sigh of relief when he was finally allowed to explain his position on the last day of debate, having attempted for six weeks to be recognized by the chair. He lamented the "sectional vaunting" that had marked the Missouri debates, asserting that "the deadliest enemy this country has" could have provided the script. "You hold your seats by the tenure of compromise," he instructed his colleagues. "The Constitution is a creature of compromise," he continued, "it originated in a compromise; and has existed ever since by a perpetual extension and exercise of that principle; and must continue to do so, as long as it lasts."⁶⁴ Whether Stevens knew, as Edwards almost certainly did, that Connecticut men had brokered the constitution's key sectional compromises, we cannot say.

When the clerk called the roll, the bill to admit Missouri with slavery passed, by

⁶¹ "Samuel Augustus Foot," The Ledger, Litchfield Historical Society <<http://www.litchfieldhistoricalsociety.org/ledger/students/939>>, accessed 18 August 2013; Frederick Calvin Norton, *The Governors of Connecticut* (Hartford: Connecticut Magazine, 1905), 173-74; Portland (ME) Weekly Eastern Argus, 28 October 1823; Catalogue of the Trustees, Records, Instructors and Alumni of the Hopkins Grammar School of New Haven, Connecticut (New Haven: Dorman Lithographing Company, 1902), 39.

⁶² [William Hillhouse,] *The Crisis*, No. 1 [and No. 2]. Or Thoughts on Slavery, Occasioned by the Missouri Question. (New Haven: A.H. Maltby & Co., 1820).

⁶³ Robert L. Reutenauer, "The Connecticut Democracy and the Public Life of John Milton Niles," M.A. thesis, Trinity College (Hartford, CT), 2005, 8.

⁶⁴ *Annals of Congress* 16-1, House of Representatives, 1583-84.

the razor-thin margin of 90 to 87, and the Connecticut delegation earned the dubious distinction of having provided the critical edge. Representatives James Stevens and Samuel Foot voted for it, and Henry Waggaman Edwards, for reasons that are unclear, was absent from the House chamber. James Lanman also provided one of the few Northern votes in that body to admit Missouri.⁶⁵

Connecticut's voters made their displeasure with these "doughfaces" known immediately. Senator Lanman was burned in effigy for his stand on Missouri, causing Republican complaints of a double standard since his Federalist predecessor, David Daggett, had received no such treatment for his anti-restriction vote. After serving as a state judge, Lanman's future political career would be limited to his native Norwich. Neither Foot nor Stevens received re-nomination. Notwithstanding his opportunity to present his case for compromise, Stevens' electoral career was over, though in typical fashion the party rewarded him for his services by appointing him to a judgeship. By frantic backtracking and taking the lead in the following session's battle to reject Missouri's proslavery constitution, Samuel Foot was able to salvage his political career and secure a seat in the state house of representatives; after a term as governor (defeating Henry W. Edwards, who in turn defeated him the following year), Foot won election to the U.S. Senate, where he became a loyal sponsor of pro-Northern measures, later gaining a measure of fame for introducing the resolution to restrict land sales that provoked the celebrated Webster-Hayne debates of 1830. Henry W. Edwards managed to convince his constituents that his failure to vote on Missouri resulted from hunger pangs, not proslavery proclivities; he was the only non-restrictionist to gain reelection.⁶⁶

The Missouri controversy clearly illustrated the profound difficulties of Connecticut's middle course. During most of the 1820s, however, the Land of Steady Habits successfully negotiated the treacherous shoals of sectional strife, the way eased by the studied gentility and moderation of President Monroe and satisfaction with his successor, John Quincy Adams, only the second New Englander to hold the office. During this period, Connecticut's Tolerationist path seemed to set the model for the era of good feeling and amalgamation of parties that preceded the election of Andrew Jackson and the resumption of partisan strife.

A vitriolic opinion piece in the *New Haven Chronicle* in 1827 offered a portent of the conflict to come. "Aristides" denounced the establishment of the African Improvement Society (AIS), a scheme to support schools, banks, and churches for New Haven's black population, as "chimerical and dangerous," a threat to the safety, economic security, and racial purity of the city's white population. Invoking what I have elsewhere called the mood of the "racial imperative," Aristides set out his basic assumptions about the founders of the AIS:

⁶⁵ Annals of Congress 16-1, House of Representatives, 1585-87, Senate, 468.

⁶⁶ Forbes, *Missouri Compromise*, 100.

It is presumed that they view slavery as an evil, deprecate its existence, and would cheerfully aid in suppressing it. It is presumed that they would admit that our coloured populations whose ignorance, vice, & wants, they so eloquently depict, are the fruits of—effects of slavery, that they consider their residence among us as an evil, and that it would meet their views and wishes—could justifiable measures be devised to cause them to abandon the place. These positions are so natural, that we shall assume them as facts.⁶⁷

This form of “contamination theory”—that slavery is an evil, that blacks are the effects of that evil, and that the evil of slavery is communicated by blacks—represented a far more common foundation for anti-black prejudice and action than “proslavery ideology,” although it served the interests of the slave system equally well.

Significantly, Aristides acknowledged that “The writer is aware that he is contending against fearful odds. The tenderest affections of our nature, are probably already enlisted on the side of the degraded sons and daughters of Africa.” Bearing him out, a supporter of the AIS responded soon afterward, summarizing Aristides’s program as “Let us oppress and degrade and trample down our coloured population, till they shall all flee to take refuge under the more tolerable miseries of southern slavery.” The writer rejected outright the premises of the earlier author:

Now if it happens to be the fact that the black native of New Haven has as good a right to live here, as the white native; and if it happens to be the fact that a black man has as good a right to come here from Virginia, as a white man has to come from Vermont; and if it happens to be the fact that the black man has as good a right to labour, and to receive wages for his labour, as the white man; this whole objection falls to the ground. And if we say to the black man who was born here, You shall not live here, you shall go into banishment, because you are black; . . . you shall have no employment and no livelihood, you shall starve, you shall find no resting place for the sole of your foot and no refuge from degradation or oppression we trample on the first principle of all religion and virtue, and we proclaim war against the first sentence of what we call the charter of our freedom.⁶⁸

Undoubtedly, Connecticut’s Republicans would classify these assertions as “quaint and peculiar notions,” and would charge the writer with “local and sectional prejudices.”

The 1830s proved to be a watershed decade of sectional and racial conflict, and Connecticut served as one of the principle battlefields. The story of Connecticut sectionalism in the 1830s is bookended by the Colored Manual Training School controversy of 1831 on one end and the Amistad incident of 1839 on the other, with the Prudence Crandall episode in the middle.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ “Aristedes,” *New Haven Chronicle*, 21 April 1827.

⁶⁸ “Clarkson,” “African Improvement Society,” *New Haven Chronicle*, 5 May 1827.

⁶⁹ The most complete account of the Colored Manual Training School incident is in Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 44-62; for the Amistad, see Marcus Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion*:

The choice of New Haven to host the first institution of higher education for blacks itself speaks volumes about the subject we are discussing. Why New Haven? First and foremost, because the organizers believed in the sincerity and good will of the local clergy and educational and civic leaders, whom they knew to be decent, honest, and on the side of the angels. Second, the proximity of Yale, with its libraries, facilities, and its earnest and dedicated students, would be an unparalleled asset. Third, New Haven's close commercial ties with the West Indies offered an invaluable set of connections to the Caribbean colonies' black and mulatto elites, who would be recruited to send their sons to the college and to provide financial support.⁷⁰

This proved to be an unfortunate miscalculation. David Daggett, now a state Supreme Court justice and a founding professor of the Yale Law School, Mayor Dennis Kimberly, outgoing mayor Ralph I. Ingersoll, and other New Haven officials reacted to the idea in horror. A public assembly called to discuss the school voted to oppose it by 700 to 4—closer to a mob than a meeting.⁷¹

In retrospect, given the resistance of white New Haveners to the notion of a black college in their midst, its supporters' belief that the town would welcome it seems utterly deluded, even unhinged. But these were the not the views of uninformed outside agitators but of knowledgeable residents on the ground like Simeon Jocelyn, who understood New Haven, the bad as well as the good, as well as anyone. In part, of course, the negative response stemmed from the bloody Nat Turner revolt that took place just weeks before the public meeting that routed the college plan, but it seems obvious that the opposition went deeper than that. Fundamental to racism, as to other mob-based prejudices, is the individual's fear of ostracism through contamination. "Many who profess themselves friendly, and with whom we are acquainted, dare hardly recognize us, assisting by their unmanly conduct to strengthen and encourage existing prejudices."⁷² I would argue that the abolitionists'

An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom (New York: Viking, 2012) and Howard Jones, *The Mutiny on the Amistad: The Saga of a Slave Revolt and its Impact on American Abolition, Law, and Diplomacy* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1987). A recent study of the Prudence Crandall episode is Diana Ross McCain, *To All on Equal Terms: The Life and Legacy of Prudence Crandall* (Hartford, CT: State of Connecticut, 2004). A succinct, largely first-hand account of the Crandall incident is found in Ellen D. Larned, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, 2 vols. (Worcester, MA, 1880), 2:490-502, 593; also see Susan Strane, *A Whole-Souled Woman: Prudence Crandall and the Education of Black Women* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990); and Andrea Johnson, "An Advocate for a Lost Cause: Prudence Crandall, African American Education and School Reform," in this issue.

⁷⁰ Samuel E. Cornish, "Anomaly in Nature," *Liberator*, 8 October 1831.

⁷¹ *College for Colored Youth: An Account of the New-Haven City Meeting and Resolutions, with Recommendations of the College, and Strictures upon the Doings of New-Haven* ([New Haven: n.p.], 1831), 5. Also see Hilary J. Moss, *Schooling Citizens: The Struggle for African American Education in Antebellum America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁷² [John Russwurm], "To the Senior Editor – No. 1," *Freedom's Journal*, 3 August 1827.

seemingly strange belief in New Haven's support for a college for blacks reveals the benevolent face of the New Haven establishment's split personality on race—the face they must have showed to blacks and antislavery whites like Jocelyn, but that we today, knowing how things turned out, can hardly imagine.⁷³

The principal evidence for this other face can be found in the Amistad episode of 1839-41, when a group of illegally enslaved West Africans seized control of a Cuban coastal schooner and ended up in New London harbor. This time, all the advantages the abolitionists claimed for New Haven would come to the fore: the benevolent, dedicated white civic leadership and clergy; the invaluable scholarly resources and faculty that made possible the deciphering of the Mende language; the dedicated, idealistic students who volunteered their time to tutor the Africans—exactly as the Negro College organizers had projected in 1831. The Amistad incident offers one of the most dramatic examples of the “On the other hand” syndrome so endemic to Connecticut history.

What accounts for the difference in the response of white New Haveners to the two episodes? The sublime drama of the Amistad story, the charismatic persona of Sengbe Pieh, the eloquence of the Africans' distinguished defenders, no doubt played a role. A changed national political environment, reflecting Northern anger at the congressional gag rule against discussion of slavery and the move to annex Texas surely had influence. The most basic difference, however, would seem to be the fact that the Amistad captives were Africans whose cherished dream was to return home, rather than African Americans seeking the knowledge and skills to enable them to prosper here in the United States.⁷⁴ This factor, above all, explains the breadth of the coalition.

It may be tempting to regard Connecticut whites' hostility toward blacks at home as revealing their true feelings about them, while dismissing their sympathy for Africans abroad as no more than hypocritical window dressing. It is useful, however, to take seriously the colonizationists' belief in their own idealism.⁷⁵ We should recognize the internal conflict with which Connecticut colonizationists wrestled when confronted with challenges that their philosophy of moderation could not contain.

⁷³ On the activists' shock at the resistance to the school for colored youth, see Paul Goodman, *Of One Blood: Abolitionism and the Origins of Racial Equality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 45-51.

⁷⁴ A perceptive account of this dual vision can be found in Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, especially chapter 5.

⁷⁵ Malaria and the other diseases endemic to Liberia made service there a virtual death sentence, a fact struck home to New Haveners whenever they passed Grove Street Cemetery—whose most prominent monument marked the grave of Jehudi Ashmun, the young Episcopalian minister whose heroism saved the infant colony, who buried his wife in Africa and died of disease shortly after returning to Connecticut in 1828. The esteem felt for Ashmun is illustrated in the moving obituary published in the avowedly anti-colonization newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, 12 September 1828.

The most dramatic of these was the episode of Prudence Crandall's school for "young ladies and little Misses of color" and the "Black Act" passed by the Connecticut legislature to close it. The Crandall story is well known, and I will not retell it here. Instead, I wish to focus on what light the episode sheds on the contradictory demands of local and national politics and their destructive effects on individuals and institutions.

The travails of Andrew T. Judson are a case in point. Paradoxically famous both as the persecutor of Prudence Crandall and the liberator of the Amistad Africans, Judson's seemingly contradictory actions can only be harmonized when his complex personal history is viewed in the context of national politics and sectional conflict.⁷⁶ As a young man, Judson adhered naturally to the Standing Order and accepted the ascendancy of Connecticut Federalism as a given. A patriotic and politically ambitious young man, he sought a military commission when the War of 1812 broke out, only to be rejected, he later recalled, because of his affiliation with what the general government considered a treasonous party. Chagrined and humiliated, Judson reinvented himself as a Republican, trading the security of the political status quo in heavily Federalist Canterbury for the approval of men he considered patriotic and honorable. Moreover, he considered the opportunities for career advancement presented by being one of the few politicians in the region available for positions of federal patronage, which soon visited upon him the position of State's Attorney for the county.

To offset the stigma of his unsavory Republican connections, in the eyes of his neighbors, Judson adopted all of the trappings of Standing Order gentility—a patrician manner, an aristocratic wife, a stately corner house in the center of town, a leading role in the town's bank and insurance company and in the county Colonization Society. Perhaps his greatest social coup, however, was his success in convincing a talented schoolteacher named Prudence Crandall to establish an academy for young ladies in Canterbury. The school, on a corner in the town center immediately opposite Judson, proved to be the ideal ornament to Canterbury's cultural life and cemented Judson's claims to civic leadership in Windham County. Indeed, his political and social achievements were so notable that he was "much talked of by the Democrats as soon to be governor."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ My chief sources for Judson are his own manuscript autobiography, "A Short Sketch of My Own Life," Andrew T. Judson Collection, Coll. 247, Manuscripts Collection, G. W. Blunt White

Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Inc. (available on-line <<http://library.mysticseaport.org/manuscripts/CPageImage.cfm?BibID=28635&Box=1&Folder=10>>, accessed on June 13, 2011) and the other manuscript documents in the Judson Collection; and Larned, *History of Windham County*, 2:423, 471-472, 489-498.

⁷⁷ "Colonization and Anti-Colonization," *Quarterly Christian Spectator* 7 (December 1835): 530-531; Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of our Antislavery Struggle* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co., 1869), 44.

It would be hard to conceive of a more thoroughgoing and comprehensive disaster for a man like Judson than the transformation of Prudence Crandall's academy into a school for colored girls from throughout New England. The cultural ornament that had been the jewel in the crown of his contributions to Canterbury's refinement and distinction converted into a haven for a pariah race; all his efforts to make Canterbury noted for genteel, unthreatening philanthropies replaced by notoriety as a hotbed of abolition and amalgamation; all his dexterous accomplishments in balancing his political allegiances to a Northern constituency and a Southern-led party, winning the confidence of both, smashed. Worst of all, Crandall and her Garrisonian allies denounced the cherished "middle path" of Judson and his allies, the African colonization scheme, as "a system of fraud from beginning to end."⁷⁸

Judson saw no other option for political survival than to go on the offensive against free blacks and to take the state with him. What this entailed was appealing to one side of the Connecticut mind-set toward blacks—its antipathy—and suppressing the other side—its philanthropy. "He vented himself in a strain of reckless hostility," Crandall's friend Samuel J. May reported of Judson's behavior in a Canterbury town meeting. "He twanged every chord that could stir the coarser passions of the human heart."⁷⁹ A few days later, Judson accosted May with what amounted to a statement of the fundamental principles of the Democracy toward free blacks, yet almost comically retaining a vestige of benevolent Colonizationist philanthropy in its most nakedly racist form:

We are not merely opposed to the establishment of that school in Canterbury, we mean that there shall not be such a school set up anywhere in our state. The colored people can never rise from their menial condition in our country; they ought not to be permitted to rise here. They are an inferior race of beings, and never can or ought to be recognized as the equals of the whites. Africa is the place for them. I am in favor of colonization. Let the niggers and their descendants be sent back to their fatherland; and there improve themselves as much as they can and civilize and Christianize the natives if they can.⁸⁰

Such an unbalanced attack—and one so out of keeping with the patrician style of self-presentation that Judson affected and that Connecticut voters expected—resulted from the psychic shock that he and other colonizationists sustained from the exposure of their essential mechanism to solve the conundrum of slavery as both unworkable and immoral.

Judson's unrestrained reaction was typical of colonizationists throughout the country at this time. Stung by the charges leveled by William Lloyd Garrison but even more enraged by the nearly unanimous denunciations pronounced upon them by

⁷⁸ Letter to editor signed by "Colonizationists," *Norwich Courier*, 27 March 1833.

⁷⁹ May, *Some Recollections*, 44.

⁸⁰ May, *Some Recollections*, 46.

British abolitionists led by the dying William Wilberforce—in the 19th-century popular mind the moral equivalent of Mother Teresa in the late 20th—colonizationists reeled from the psychic equivalent of a sucker punch. It was as if the Sierra Club were suddenly accused with great plausibility by Greenpeace of being complicit in the mass slaughter of baby seals.

Faced with such a condemnation from such a source, many colonizationists virtually short-circuited. In Connecticut, spurred by legislators from Windham County, the General Assembly passed (and Governor Henry W. Edwards signed) a law criminalizing the education of blacks from other states—a measure so out of keeping with Connecticut’s frequently proclaimed esteem for education as to raise eyebrows throughout the nation and beyond.⁸¹ Elsewhere, colonizationists took the lead in organizing anti-black and anti-abolitionist riots in Hartford, New York, Boston and other cities; they acquiesced in and even applauded Southern efforts to stifle congressional debate. Stalwart editorial champions of the restriction of slavery in Missouri in 1820 such as William Leete Stone and James Gordon Bennett became notorious instigators of mob violence against abolitionists in the 1830s, and those who had never been comfortable with the philanthropic side of the Connecticut equation felt themselves unshackled by the tilt toward intolerance.

One of these was David Daggett, a key figure in the movement two years earlier to quash the Negro College in New Haven. We have met Daggett before, when as a Senator he voted against the restriction of slavery in Missouri. One of the city’s most successful lawyers, he was appointed to the state supreme court in 1826, becoming its chief justice in 1832, and serving simultaneously as Mayor of New Haven in 1828.⁸² He also helped to found the Yale Law School and held its Kent Professorship from 1826 until 1848.

Although it was in his capacity as Chief Justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court of Errors that Daggett came to preside over the appeal of Prudence Crandall from her conviction under the “Black Law,” he clearly saw his role more broadly as the defender of the Connecticut Establishment against the dangers of abolition and amalgamation, and in that capacity he determined to thwart such dangers once and for all. Crandall’s attorneys, led by Oliver Ellsworth’s son William, argued that the Black Act, by barring black out-of-state residents from an education in Connecticut, violated Article IV, Section 2 of the federal constitution, which stipulated that “the citizens of each State shall be entitled to all the privileges and immunities of the

⁸¹ See, e.g., Strane, *A Whole-Souled Woman*, 103-05; May, *Some Recollections*, 52-57. The surprise occasioned nationally by the so-called “Black Act” might have been less had New Haveners’ reaction to the proposed colored college of 1831 been more widely publicized.

⁸² United States Congress, *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, 1774-1989* (United States G.P.O., 1989), 864; “Biographical Notice of the Hon. David Daggett, LL. D., Kent Prof. of Law in Yale College,” *The Yale Literary Magazine* 10 (April 1845), 245.

citizens in the several States.”⁸³ In charging the jury in the appeal, Daggett completely endorsed Judson’s prosecution argument that the statute was indeed constitutional because free blacks, since they labored under a variety of civil disabilities, were not and could not be citizens of the United States. The jury duly rendered a verdict of guilty.

The assertion that blacks could not be citizens was standard Democratic dogma and precisely the argument that a partisan such as Judson would be expected to make. It was more surprising that Daggett, still nominally a Federalist, defended it so staunchly, since it rejected the traditional Standing Order paradigm of an organic, hierarchical structure in which the “better sort” administered public functions for the rest of society without in any way abridging their rights as citizens. In effect, Daggett’s charge accepted the Democratic claim that the formal trappings of civic engagement such as the franchise, jury duty, and militia service constituted the true definition of citizenship.

Judson’s chilling argument, reinforced by Daggett’s great authority, would have a long and damaging life during the remaining years that the Union remained half slave and half free. It served as one of the cornerstones of the historical white supremacist argument that became the official dogma of the Democratic Party under Stephen A. Douglas, and that was used by Chief Justice Taney in his 1857 ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that invalidated the Missouri Compromise and opened the territories to slavery. Taney specifically referred to the *Crandall* case and Daggett’s holding in his notorious decision, explaining, plausibly but falsely:

We have made this particular examination into the legislative and judicial action of Connecticut, because, from the early hostility it displayed to the slave trade on the coast of Africa, we may expect to find the laws of that State as lenient and favorable to the subject race as those of any other State in the Union; and if we find that at the time the Constitution was adopted, they were not even there raised to the rank of citizens, but were still held and treated as property, and the laws relating to them passed with reference altogether to the interest and convenience of the white race, we shall hardly find them elevated to a higher rank anywhere else.⁸⁴

In time, ironically, the logical extension of the Judson-Daggett principle that citizenship was tied to the privileges of political agency would foster demands not only from blacks, but from women, minors, the disabled, and every other class of citizens to enjoy the full exercise of these rights, resulting in the egalitarian society

⁸³ This was the same argument that antislavery members of congress had made in 1820-1821 in calling for the rejection of the Missouri constitution and for barring the state from the union. See Forbes, *Missouri Compromise*, 109-115.

⁸⁴ *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 US 393 (1857). This subject has been explored by Wesley Horton in “Prudence Crandall’s Inadvertent Influence on the *Dred Scott* Case,” paper presented at “Law and Orders: Connecticut’s Legal And Political History,” Annual Spring Meeting of the Association for the Study of Connecticut History (ASCH), Hartford, Connecticut, 6 April 2013.

we live in today—one unimaginably far from the ideal of men such as Daggett, but the ineluctable result of their stance in the 1830s.

As might be expected, the draconian racial policies of Judson and Daggett strayed too far from the storied moderation of Connecticut's citizens to stand. Nine months after Crandall's conviction, the Connecticut Supreme Court of Errors overruled the decision on the grounds of "insufficiency of the information."⁸⁵ Shortly before, Judson's neighbors had rebuffed his bid for reelection to the state legislature; the larger audience of his congressional district sent him to Congress, but recalled him after one term. For his loyal service to the ideals of the Democracy, Judson was, in time-honored tradition, given a federal judgeship by President Andrew Jackson, an appointment with unexpected consequences, as we shall see. The issue of Texas statehood, like Louisiana before it, soon galvanized sectional feeling in Connecticut, exacerbated by the "gag act" that smothered Congressional discussion of slavery, and shifted the subject of debate in Connecticut from free blacks to free speech.

By the time Windham County's abolitionist native son Theodore Dwight Weld visited his home town of Hampton in the spring of 1837, he "[f]ound the most influential men in the town Abolitionist." Phillip Pearl, the chairman of the senate committee that reported the Black Law, now averred, "I could weep tears of blood for the part I took in that matter—I now regard that law as utterly abominable."⁸⁶ The following year, the legislature adopted Pearl's motion to repeal it. A still more remarkable about-face took place in 1839, when Judge Andrew T. Judson, to the consternation of his Democratic patrons in Washington, ruled in the strongest possible terms that the Amistad captives were free. Judson's ruling perhaps tells us less about his personal regeneration—a local paper once claimed that he "has been either in or a candidate for office ever since he was of age and he joins any party that will gratify his ambitions"⁸⁷—than it does about the acceptable limits of pro-Southern and anti-black politics in Connecticut.

As the sectional crisis deepened, the role of national political alignments in shaping Connecticut's racial policies became clearer. As the demands of the slaveholder class grew more strident, even more Connecticut politicians experienced their own versions of "Black Act" Phillip Pearl's turn to repentance. For some, such as Hartford Times editor John Milton Niles, the final straw was Van Buren's rejection as the nominee of the Democratic Party in 1844. "The south is not what it once was," then-U.S. Senator Niles asserted in 1846. "In the early period of parties, Mr. Jefferson and the great men of the south were defenders of northern democracy,"

⁸⁵ Larned, Windham County, 409.

⁸⁶ Gilbert H. Barnes & Dwight L. Dumond (eds), *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sara Grimké* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1965), 1:397.

⁸⁷ The Norwich Courier, 6 July 1836, cited in Strane, *A Whole-Souled Woman*, 169.

he expounded, “then struggling against powerful odds and dreadful prejudices at home.”⁸⁸ Niles had viewed as a true partnership what many Southern Democrats had regarded as a marriage of convenience.

For a time, the Connecticut Democracy became a mirror in miniature of the New York party’s division into spoils-driven “Hunkers” and antislavery “Barnburners,” driven from patronage by the vengeful national Democratic machine. Other Nutmeg Democrats broke with the party over Texas annexation or the issue of slavery in the territories, and many followed their Senator Niles into the Free Soil Party. Remarkably, Prudence Crandall’s erstwhile prosecutor, Chauncey F. Cleveland, became legal and political mentor to Crandall’s abolitionist stepson Calvin Philleo, Jr. in building the new party. Niles himself partnered with the immediate abolitionist William Burleigh, who had been a teacher at Prudence Crandall’s short-lived school and an agent of Garrison’s American Anti-Slavery Society, in making Burleigh’s abolitionist newspaper the *Charter Oak* the organ of the Connecticut Free Soil organization. “I feel ashamed of Niles on account of the company he keeps,” the *Times*’ new editor wrote a Democratic colleague. “He sits in Burleigh’s room most of the time. Niggers folding and setting type.”⁸⁹

William Cooper Nell, in his *Colored Patriots of the Revolution*, quoted an unnamed black writer’s description of an even more astonishing change of heart:

While the black laws of Connecticut were in force, Chief Justice Daggett decided that we were not citizens of the United States, and that the colored people there had no claims to the privileges of American citizens. But time rolled on; he had become acquainted with the intelligent and enterprising colored citizens of that State; he had finished his term and retired. But a few years ago, when the question was before the people of Connecticut—Shall the colored people of the State have the right to vote?—while his fellow-citizens were voting, three to one, in the negative, the old gentleman, from his retirement, stepped forth, in his white-topped boots, with his silver locks of eighty winters flowing beneath his venerable brim; leaning upon his staff, he walked to the polls, amid popular excitement, and voted in the affirmative.

Nell continued: “Not a few great men, on the bench, at the bar, or in the pulpit, have undergone similar changes.”⁹⁰

Nor were these changes of heart restricted to individuals. The Welsh abolitionist Ebenezer Davies noted in 1849 that blacks in Connecticut could now share public conveyances with whites, something that was not true “three or four years ago.”⁹¹

⁸⁸ Reutenauer, “Niles,” 209.

⁸⁹ Reutenauer, “Niles,” 210-215.

⁹⁰ William Cooper Nell, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcutt, 1855), 142.

⁹¹ Ebenezer Davies, *American Scenes and Christian Slavery: A Recent Tour of Four Thousand Miles in the United States* (London: John Snow, 1849), 268.

And in 1854, the General Assembly passed a sweeping personal liberty law, which sought to counter the draconian provisions of the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 by restoring due process to accused runaways and providing stiff criminal penalties for would-be kidnappers.⁹²

What do these conversions mean? Acquaintance with “intelligent and enterprising colored citizens” may well have played a role; the African American population of Connecticut increased markedly in prosperity and “respectability” during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is doubtful, however, that this factor was decisive. The principal change was political: Connecticut leaders who had thrown in their lot with the Southern-dominated national government, often at significant social cost to themselves, and who had espoused and endorsed views of blacks and of white Southerners congenial to the slave power, now felt betrayed and disgraced.⁹³ Other Connecticut whites, of course, only had their racism deepened by these defections. Yet as the sectional crisis intensified, the roster of the reawakened grew at an accelerating pace, the sense of betrayal and chagrin lending passion to their antipathy—a degree of passion that would, within a few years, prove commensurate with killing.

On one hand, the conversion of many of the governing elite of Connecticut to an acceptance of black citizenship could be seen as a positive evolution—as evidence of “progress.” On the other, however, it could suggest that their earlier racist rhetoric and policies had been purely formal and functional—not heartfelt, but deployed for political and personal advantage and effect. Certainly this is a familiar pattern from later Southern history—consider Georgia’s Tom Watson, a racially liberal populist who reinvented himself as an anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic white supremacist, or George Corley Wallace, who vowed after a 1958 election defeat that “no other son-of-a-bitch will ever out-nigger me again.”⁹⁴

Connecticut politicians never descended to such extremes. But New England racism exerted a disproportionate impact in antebellum American life, precisely because it did not seem overtly to be tied to slavery. In Chief Justice Taney’s formulation, still influential with historians and the public at large, Connecticut, the “land of steady habits,” of morality and piety, of equality before the law, should have represented the gold standard of legal treatment of Africans and their descendants.

⁹² “An Act for the Defense of Liberty in this State,” Supplement to the [Hartford] Courant, 29 July 1854.

⁹³ Senator Stephen A. Douglas’s Kansas-Nebraska Act, more than any other single factor, provoked this response; in repealing the Missouri Compromise, Southerners repudiated all of the concessions that their Northern allies had made over more than half a century.

⁹⁴ For Watson, see C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan, 1938; reprint, New York, Oxford University Press, 1963); for Wallace, see Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), quotation at 96.

Thus, “if we find . . . the laws relating to them passed with reference altogether to the interest and convenience of the white race, we shall hardly find them elevated to a higher rank anywhere else.”⁹⁵

Taney’s logic has proved more influential and enduring than his jurisprudence; but, as this essay has sought to demonstrate, it is no less flawed. Connecticut’s systematic abridgement of the rights of blacks did not stem from immemorial custom or instinctive antipathy. In the hands of those who deployed it, racism in antebellum Connecticut was principally a tactic and a tool—a means of appeasing southern commercial clients and political allies, and of leveraging national political power and mobilizing popular prejudices to break the grip of a regressive elite. As the Civil War approached, many of those who had put racism to work repudiated it, with greater or lesser expressions of remorse. But the structures of prejudice they built have long outlasted the purposes, however useful, that called them forth.

⁹⁵ Dred Scott v. Sandford, 60 U.S. 414.