BLACK INSURGENCY: THE BLACK CONVENTION MOVEMENT
IN THE ANTEBELLUM UNITED STATES, 1830 – 1865

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ABSTRACT

During the antebellum era, black activists organized themselves into insurgent networks, with the goal of achieving political and racial equality for all black inhabitants of the United States. The Negro Convention Movement, herein referred to as the Black Convention Movement, functioned on state and national levels, as the chief black insurgent network. As radical black rights groups continue to rise in the contemporary era, it is necessary to mine the historical origins that influence these bodies, and provide contexts for understanding their social critiques. This dissertation centers on the agency of the participants, and reveals a black insurgent network seeking its own narrative of liberation through tactics and rhetorical weapons. This study follows in the footing of Dr. Howard Holman Bell, who produced bodies of work detailing the antebellum Negro conventions published in the 1950s and 1960s. Additionally, this work inserts itself into the historiography of black radicals, protest movements, and racial debates of antebellum America, arguing for a successful interpretation of black insurgent action. Class, race, gender, religion, and politics, all combine within this study as potent framing devices. Together, the elements within this effort, illustrates the Black Convention Movement as the era’s premier activist organization that inadvertently pushed the American nation toward civil war, and the destruction of institutionalized slavery.
DEDICATION

For my beloved father, Charles Howard. His unconditional love eased the darkness in my life. I miss him and I pray that he is at peace, and sleeping among our ancestors. I love you, Pop.

My cousin, Kamau Sababu Kambui, taught me about Black History and slavery at a tender age. He always asked me what I wanted to be, and I would reply “An English professor!” I guess History is close enough. He has been gone for many years, but remains a constant memory for those that still love him.
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In part, this dissertation validates the faith placed in me by the History Departments of The Ohio State University at Mansfield and Main Campus, the Youngstown State University, and the University of Akron. I have endeavored to do them all proud; however, all errors within these pages are mine alone. Thank you.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the antebellum United States, the Black Convention Movement functioned as the chief black insurgent network that inadvertently pushed the nation toward civil war. Here, insurgency, more specifically the *black insurgent network*, refers to interconnected, organized state and national black activists who engaged in a concerted effort to confront and dismantle the American system of racial discrimination and enslavement. This study’s core focus is to reclaim agency and liberate antebellum Black Americans as actors essential to their own attempts to achieve abolition and political equality.¹

The overwhelming majority of antebellum era blacks were loyal to the founding principles of the United States. The United States built a narrative that presented itself to the world as a standard-bearer of freedom of religion, free speech, assembly and association, in addition to suffrage, and a host of positive rights. However, accessing these rights required that blacks be insurgents against the noxious racism embedded in the American system. Blacks needed to insert themselves into the national narrative that largely ignored them as free-willed beings. To this end, the black insurgent network utilized persuasion and coercion to deploy an array of tools against racism.²

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within the movement existed pitting moderates against radicals in debates on how to mobilize public opinion. However, these camps “shared fundamental goals and values.”\(^1\) Debates on using rhetoric publicly that promoted Christian coexistence or threatened civil disorder, characterized some of the issues delineating both factions.

It is fair to question the necessity of studying antebellum black activism; much less, any perceived successes of a black insurgency, given the dire conditions of Reconstruction and Jim Crow for black people. This study argues that it is not constructive or useful to paint the black insurgent network in terms of ‘powerless failures’ given that their strategies of resistance in class, race, gender, and legal arenas yielded tangible returns still felt in the contemporary era. The actors in this study were not powerless individuals, but active participants in an insurgent agenda of equality and racial liberation.

The Black Convention provides a credible venue for studying the activist lives of black Americans as insurgent reactions to United States history. Subsequent periods of black activism owe much to the individuals that labored for liberation in the antebellum period. The insurgents functioned on state and national levels by networking and organizing activists through annual conventions. At these conventions, they agitated for federal and state policies compatible with an agenda of abolition and suffrage. This energy represented a strong black cultural response, driven by opposition to slavery and oppression, which functioned in the United States with the intent of dismantling the racism of the white majority status quo. Changing this status quo called for tactics designed to acquire full political citizenship (gain suffrage, property, civic accessibility

\(^1\) Ibid., 23.
for northern blacks) and freedom from slavery for southern backs.

In the antebellum era, debates on various issues advanced. The national conversation questioned the place of women, blacks, Native Americans, and non-Protestant religious groups: should these groups “have unrestricted access to [the dominant white Protestant] society’s rewards?”2 In a nation still relatively young, the United States experienced huge growth in its capitalist markets. The expanding interconnectedness with other parts of the world, the growing influx of religious diversity, and challenges toward social mores, resulted in cultural doors opening to new ideas in an ever growing marketplace of voices. The antebellum United States found itself bound in an “often tense interaction among advocates of diverse ideals.”3 Black activism intersected with the social changes to mold the conversation about human bondage. In the mid-1800s, individual blacks responded to the political oppression of mainstream white culture. This sense of activism laid foundations that extended beyond the antebellum period.4 However, as an organized response, the black insurgent network served as the most potent force in pushing the voice of equality forward in the antebellum public landscape with insurgent strategies constructed to contest the racism that black Americans encountered in the nation.

The Black Convention as a networking vehicle served as a chief response to black suffering during a time when issues of moral uplift and social reform were paramount in a soul-searching nation. Black activists began organizing against the injustices of slavery

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3 Ibid., xxiii.
and inequality by constructing their own discourses of liberation. Despite the absence of physical enslavement by the beginnings of the 1830s, racism, and social and economic hardships characterized the experience of blacks in the North. A number of blacks turned toward activism as a response in the northern states of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania. By the 1830s, white mob violence in the North against blacks, along with the fear stirred by the fright resulting from the Nat Turner 1831 Virginian rebellion, heightened already difficult conditions for northern blacks.

The Black Convention was vigorous at the dawn of the 1830s. However, toward the end of the decade, its momentum became fragile and fragmented. Suffering from the impulse of attempting to be all things to all activists, the organization found itself in a state of dysfunction. Moderates had successfully co-opted the organization from the radicals. These moderates supplanted the Convention proper with the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS). Through the AMRS, they plied the Christian doctrine of moral suasion and pleas of benign political assimilation rather than themes of separation and revolution.

The Black Convention’s return to vitality came with the implementation of smaller networks at state level conventions in New York and Ohio in the 1840s and the leadership ascendancy of Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet. The infusion of so-called elite Black leadership proved important to the movement. This leadership

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7 Pease and Pease, *They Who Would be Free*, 122.
9 Pease and Pease, *They Who Would be Free*, 122.
shifted toward radicalism in response to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 that threatened all blacks, free and enslaved. Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court *Dred Scott* decision of 1857 that stripped all pretenses of citizenship for black Americans solidified the active radicalism that intensified into the war period with varying results.\(^{10}\) The Black Convention Movement found itself in deep contention against the racist paradigm that emitted from southern-influenced Slave Power sympathies.

Theories and Background: Historiography, Sources, Methodology

A core mission of this dissertation is to bring the Black Convention Movement to the forefront of historiographies on black agency in abolition and view it as an insurgent response to the United States. The Black Convention represents a complex set of ideas, agendas, mores, and individuals that contributed to the American Civil War and the end of human bondage in the nation. I saw a narrative of antebellum blacks that discounted racist stereotypes that characterized them as buffoonish sloths. Therefore, I needed a mix of sources to design this study. The historiographic sources engaged within should be familiar to devotees of this study’s subject matter, but require explanation for the casual reader.

The nucleus for this study began in 2003, when I became aware of the Ohio Compromise of 1849, better known as the ‘partial repeal.’ The partial repeal revealed the grassroots mechanisms that struck down a large portion of the racist restricting Black Laws of Ohio. I was fascinated with the role that black activists played in achieving this

result, and that Frederick Douglass joined a host of other blacks in the effort. At the time, I possessed no knowledge of these other blacks. However, I began wondering if the civil rights activists of the 1950s & 1960s knew of these antebellum era black activists. The answer was yes and no. Yes, scholars had written about these activists and organized documentation of their activities. However, their narratives downplayed the importance of black activists aside from the better-known Douglass. Instead of acknowledgement as active agents of change against the racism of a white majority culture, the struggles of these activists turned into “a bedtime story rather than a call to action.” This led me to question the roles and tactics of black activists such as Douglass, Garnet, and the organizations through which they and other blacks launched social protests.

While this work is not a heavily theory-based one, theories are useful tools for framing and analyzing history. To begin such an undertaking, I looked for tools and theories that would allow me to build a framework for this study. One such tool is ‘cultural capital,’ a theory that made it possible to frame the black activists present herein as elites. Intuitively, ‘Black Elite’ rings as an oxymoron in an era where majorities of blacks were enslaved, or could find themselves thrown into slavery at any time. This study struggled with reconciling antebellum blacks within a framework of elitism. Here, cultural capital made the difference.

Blacks possessed cultural capital within their groups that made them elite, but not within the legal structures of the white-dominated antebellum society. To blacks, the weight of cultural capital depended on charisma, social background, education, and financial happenstance. What separates a freeborn Frances Ellen Watkins Harper from a

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slave-born Douglass is a measure of chance and quantity of time for the acquisition of self-improvement, and generating cultural capital in social circles. Additional factors depended upon the interagency of complexity, mobilization, and capital whether economic, familial or symbolic.

Thus, this study focuses on black elites inserting themselves into debates, disseminating anti-slavery rhetoric through a cultural black insurgency, in ways that white culture could not successfully mute. This is akin to Benedict Anderson's ‘imagined community’ and Jürgen Habermas' ‘structural transformation of the public sphere.’ Cultural capital enabled blacks to develop their community, and participate in the bourgeois sphere of public “critical debate [that] took place in principle without regard to all preexisting social and political rank and in accord with universal rules.” Additionally, cultural capital opened doors allowing for engagement in domestic and international arenas, and the fomenting of black people as a defined grouping in the United States. I do not discount blacks with less cultural capital as lesser actors. Participants of the conventions, and all blacks in general, participated in an organic agenda through a ‘bottom up’ process instead of the ‘top down’ process that others argue. The organic agenda evolved out of the desires of blacks for full political equality in a nation built upon pillars of racial stratification. Cultural capital allowed

13 Ibid., 51.
16 Patrick Rael, Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Rael argues for a ‘top down’ process where black elites dominate non-elites through language, thereby positioning themselves as public leaders with the blessing of said subordinates.
blacks to develop tactics and an agenda to confront the racism their communities experienced.

I turned to the ‘Double Consciousness Theory’ of W.E.B DuBois to frame the discussion on how black activists positioned themselves to confront racialized antebellum America. In a legal system sanctioning second-class citizenship (if any at all), black activists had to subvert standing hierarchical mores to forward their agenda. Black women used double consciousness to attack expected gender roles and further manipulate the whites that they met to the benefit of the insurgency. The mobility of double consciousness enabled blacks to gain entry into a debate over Christianity with their white counterparts. This debate provided a crucial tool for framing equality issues.

Black activists utilized their interpretations of Old Testament biblical teachings to inspire their supporters. In doing so, they contested the discriminatory practices of their white Christian counterparts. Examining the politically-tinged language of the black gospel constructed through insurgency, the “social wages of slavery is bloody social war,” helped me gain insight into the agenda-setting function of a black-styled Christianity in activist terms. Here, in seeking to understand the formation of a black interpretation of Christianity, I turned to Willie J. Harrell, Jr.’s thoughts on the ‘African American Jeremiad’ to communicate the deep feeling of indignation that black Christianity felt toward the system of slavery and racial inequality.17 I also reviewed

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David Howard-Pitney’s thoughts on the function and origins of the jeremiad tradition as a tool for black Christian activism.¹⁸

I consulted George M. Fredrickson’s work, to help me understand the problems faced by early white settlers when conversion of their slaves meant freedom from human bondage, and how they had to refashion their meaning of Christian freedom.¹⁹ Lois and James Horton, along with Gayraud S. Wilmore, provided insight into African religious memory.²⁰ I began thinking about the black experience of Christianity in terms of acceptance and appropriation. Blacks accepted Christianity and wanted to be in communion with their fellow white Christians. Blacks expected consideration as religious equals to whites. By forming their own congregations in response to racism, blacks began an appropriation process of white Christianity, molding it to serve their needs and expressions. The black appropriation of Christianity enabled me to place another plank in the discussion that will position the reader to think of black Christianity in Old Testament terms.

Lastly, with my community of activists firmly established, I needed to understand the absence of the exploits of black insurgents in popular public discourses. Why do people think *Gone With the Wind*, *The Birth of a Nation*, or minstrel shows, when

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antebellum and post-bellum issues of black communities arise? What noises of denial are drowning out the deeper narrative? Here, I turned to Joyce DeGruy-Leary’s application of cognitive dissonance toward black history to provide a theoretical framework for working through such questions.21 I looked to the ‘Dixieland mystique’ argued by James Gregory in terms of southern migration memory seeded throughout post-reconstruction South.22 I layered this thinking with Grace Elizabeth Hale’s ‘segregation as culture’ thesis, constructing an explanation how southern mores resulted in a dearth of celebratory monographs and media lacking focus on the Black Convention Movement.23 These frameworks served as a mental backdrop in constructing this study’s narratives.

There are texts chief among the sources consulted for this study. I am indebted to Howard Holman Bell’s 1953 dissertation, later released in book form in 1969, A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830 – 1861 and Bella Gross’s Clarion Call: The History and Development of the Negro People’s Convention Movement in the United States from 1817 – 1840, for the insights they provide on the national conventions.24 Bell argued the conventions served as a utilitarian means of indoctrinating the public on a spectrum of issues germane to its reformist agendas.25 Racial tensions increased in antebellum American city centers spurred by economic competition, a growing black

25 Bell, A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 3.
population in the North, European immigration, and standing prejudices.²⁶ Intent on creating vehicles for ‘self-expression’, the convention movement organized itself to address social problems that specifically targeted blacks.²⁷ This study firmly places itself within Bell’s effort to champion the conventions. Furthermore, it moves beyond the mere organization of the conventions, by applying layers of analysis on rhetoric, gender, religion, and legal efforts that take Bell’s intentions beyond ‘growing militancy’ with emigration tendencies, to a growing insurgency intent on social upheaval.²⁸ John W. Cromwell’s piece, *The Early Negro Convention Movement*, provides an introductory overview of the national conventions early debates on black emigration to other shores to escape the racism of the United States. Cromwell argued for a strong pushback against the emigration argument, promoting instead that all blacks should make their stand in the nation on permanent means.²⁹ This study gains its black insurgent sense in part from this opposition and call for a doubling down toward equality on American soil.

This study places itself in critical contention to secondary works on the functions and results of the convention. *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks’ Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* by Jane and William Pease, shows the tensions between moderates and radicals, as well as white and black attitudes toward the issue of slavery and equality. The Peases reveal that the Black Convention impetus on suffrage drew protests from white abolitionists who incredulously “denounced these conventions as racist separatism within the antislavery movement.”³⁰ The Peases argue that this was a result of

²⁶ Ibid., 6.
²⁷ Ibid., 7-8.
²⁸ Ibid., 111.
developing schisms between white and black abolitionists. Black activists became less enamored with their white peers by the mid-1850s, seeing them as “more remote and abstract while [black] needs were immediate, concrete, and personal.”31 The Peases concluded Convention efforts as a failure, noting that although activists captured some success, that ultimately blacks were powerless to take their due.32 This study stands as a rejection of the Peases’ conclusion.

My analysis complements the findings of Judith Ann Blodgett Luckett. Luckett’s study, *Protest, Advancement and Identity: Organizational Strategies of Northern Free Blacks, 1830 to 1860*, meshes with this present study in arguing that strategies of blacks in Pennsylvania, Ohio and New York, were precursors of civil rights gains into the following centuries.33 Luckett argues that blacks organized “themselves into a series of connected and cognizant communities.”34 This study concurs with and complements Luckett’s findings, while casting a wider lens upon the strategies of religion, gender, and additional northern bases of operation.

This study also connects with the findings in *John Mercer Langston and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1829-65* by William and Amiee Lee Cheek. The Cheeks utilize the younger brother of Black Convention steward, Charles Mercer Langston, to reveal “the determined efforts of some leaders of the northern black community to confront the overweening forces arrayed against them.”35 While the present study promotes an insurgent network with a national scope, the Cheeks use Langston and his home base of

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31 Ibid., 16.
32 Ibid., 296-297.
34 Ibid., 288.
Ohio to show the existence of “a secret black military organization that by 1858 was known as the Liberators.”36 In the Liberators, the Cheeks show a militant body, maintaining groups from Cleveland to Oberlin and Sandusky, serving Underground Railroad routes stretching from New York to Michigan and into parts of the South.37

Patrick Rael’s Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North, also shaped the thinking about rhetoric that went into this study. Rael’s work covers similar matters presented in this current study, but with a theoretical focus regarding meaning. Rael argues that historians should consider approaching such activist wordings by removing “those words from their contexts.”38 That is, Rael’s statement appears to warn against taking the words of activists at their literal meaning. Rael posits that historians can unleash the actual intent of activist language by freeing antislavery rhetoric from “their immediate contexts and reveals more than mere rhetorical experience.”39 Here I strongly differ with Rael. This study approaches the words of black activists as forming literal agendas that they fully intended to carry out to the best of their abilities. I view pro-southern Slave Power rhetoric as a tangible agenda of literal thinking of a majority intent on continuing and profiting from the antebellum status quo human bondage and racial inequality. Therefore, black insurgent rhetoric should not be divorced from the effort to expose and disrupt the Slave Power discourse. I stand encamped with James L. Golden and Richard D. Rieke and treat insurgent rhetoric as literal words infused with literal intent throughout this study.40

36 Ibid., 351.
37 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 James L. Golden and Richard D. Rieke, The Rhetoric of Black Americans (Columbus, OH: C.E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1971), 2. Golden and Rieke argue that black activists infused their cause with
Along with the appropriate secondary sources, the bulk of this dissertation comes from the published primary records of the Black Convention Movement. Combing various digital databases, I gained access to thousands of pages of antebellum era newspapers and scholarly articles on topics of this study.\textsuperscript{41} My primary focus was toward the publications published by or closely associated with the black activists put forth in this study. The creation of databases of Black Convention attendees proved useful in fleshing out the discussion herein. These databases span the years of activity that this study is concerned with, focusing on northern states, and more importantly, providing a sense of the longevity and interconnectivity of the participants of these conventions. This data greatly eased the burden of attempting to see who was active across state lines, who held a proclivity for offices within the conventions, and where familial and fraternal lines intersected. Furthermore, these databases granted me a vantage point for thinking through the primary sources that needed reconciling as this study progressed. From the data, I gained greater clarity to rethink how convention participation firmed up the matters of religion, gender, class, and political activism addressed herein.

A key resource among the primary sources collected were the black newspapers selected for this study. I wanted to know from what states these papers operated, if their orientation was radical or moderate-slanted, and how these publications intersected with the growth of a black insurgent network. The majority of these black owned newspapers

struggled financially to stay afloat. This led to looking at these publications from the
vantage point of longevity and cohesiveness. How did these newspapers break through
the noise of Slave Power supporters, and what was the effect upon the national debate on
slavery? Inflammatory rhetoric proved a powerful tool, and I turned to works to help
me focus my thinking on the matter. What I teased out of these newspapers enabled me
to create a useful framework on two fronts. First, I could connect these publications to an
organized insurgent network. Ironically, in spite of stunting financial struggles, I instead
saw this as forcing these publications to develop an unyielding mode of insurgent
journalism. Secondly, I saw the opportunity to show these newspapers in their insurgent
function, relying on such to construct arguments regarding Ohio as a flashpoint of
rebellion leading to the Civil War. These print sources, convention records, and
secondary sources, enabled me to reveal the thrust of insurgency in print. Additionally,
these print sources provided invaluable records that influenced my approach to rethinking
the insurgent use of religion as a liberation vehicle.

42 Timothy Shortell, “The Rhetoric of Black Abolitionism: An Exploratory Analysis of Antislavery
article is Political Science-based in nature, and looks at the coding of particular themes across five Black
Convention associated newspapers, which I found useful in constructing this chapter and Chapter III.
43 Armistead S. Pride, “A Register and History of Negro Newspapers in the United States, 1827-1950”
(PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1950), 189. Armistead argues that black newspapers of the era, bereft
of tangible means, harnessed stern rhetorical messages. Additional texts that aided in building a rhetorical
insurgent framework for this study includes: David Paul Nord, et al. A History of the Book in America,
Volume 5, The Enduring Book Print Culture in Postwar America (Chapel Hill: University of North
Carolina Press, 2009), John Ernest, Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the
Timothy Patrick McCarthy, “To Plead Our Own Cause”: Black Print Culture and the Origins of American
Abolitionism,” in Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John Stauffer, eds., Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering
Black Resistance in the Antebellum Era, 1830 to 1860,” Journal of Black Studies No. 28 (1998), and
Frankie Hutton, The Early Black Press in America, 1827 to 1860 (Westport, CN and London: Greenwood
Press, 1993).
I believe that the Black Church radicalized when moderates and radicals parted company in 1835. This occurred because the AMRS co-opted the national Black Convention movement as previously mentioned. Blacks already had begun forming their own congregations as protests to racism they encountered from white congregations. The AMRS used a brand of Christian thought called moral suasion, which encouraged Christians to inspire each other to behave rightly in all matters, including slavery and racial equality. This led me to think about the fluid formation of an insurgent notion of the Christianity emitting from black activists.\footnote{James H. Cone, “Integrationism and Nationalism in African-American Intellectual History,” in Cornel West and Eddie S. Claude, eds. African American Religious Thought: An Anthology (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), proved useful as I sought to understand the fluid nature of integrationists to nationalists from a religious foundation.} From this point, I looked at my source materials and realized that the Christian themes that black activists were forming infused itself into every arena targeted for equality. I used Cornel West’s and Eddie S. Claude’s volume, African American Religious Thought: An Anthology, to gain a sense of the various themes debated within black circles regarding mores toward Christian practice.\footnote{Cornel West and Eddie S. Claude, eds. African American Religious Thought: An Anthology (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), xii-xiii. West and Claude argue the phrase “black religion” as a device to decode black mores in various aspects as they relate to their personal experiences. I marry “black religion” with insurgency to produce Chapter III of this study. I draw additional insight in this volume from Benjamin Elijah Mays, Joseph William Nicholson, E. Franklin Frazier, C. Eric Lincoln, Eugene Genovese, Clara Peterson, and James H. Cone.} I also turned to the literal records preserved in the various proceedings of state and national conventions as bound together by Howard Holman Bell, Philip Foner, and George Walker. I combed over the newspapers of the era, related scholarly articles, and other works, focusing on clues revealing the insurgent deployment of a black Christianity. In the end, this enquiry allowed me to argue that a particular black
expression of Christianity informed the insurgent agenda, and competed on a national
stage against pro-Slave Power interests.

This study includes the role of women and gender in the black insurgency. I
obviously had to wrestle with the function of gender. In finding the Sister Insurgent of
the movement, I combed through a trove of sources to weave together a narrative that
showed the vital necessity of the black female activist. The sources included newspapers
and scholarly articles, along with recorded convention proceedings. I wanted to show
how black women inserted themselves and their issues into the insurgent agenda.

However, I also needed to work through matters of class mobility, kinship and bridge
functions, and show how these all resulted in the powerful insurgent feminine figure of
this study. I primarily looked to Emma Lapsansky, Clara L. Peterson, Michael D.
Pierson, Shirley J. Yee, James Oliver Horton, and Kathryn Sklar, to help me build layers
upon the framework that my other sources enabled me to construct.46 This chapter shows

46 Emma Jones Lapsansky. “Feminism, Freedom, and Community: Charlotte Forten and Women Activists
in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia.” The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. 113,
No. 1 (January 1989), 3-24. Lapsansky argues that an elite caste developed in antebellum Philadelphia that
allowed for a social mobility that granted blacks high levels of control over their own destinies. Her work
also gives clues about how this situation empowered black women who would go on to prominence in the
activist community. Clara L. Peterson, Doers of the Word: African-American Women Speakers and
analysis on black women activists builds upon “four social spheres . . . the domestic, ethnic community,
ethnic public, and national public spheres.” Michael D. Pierson. Free Hearts, Free Homes: Gender and

Pierson’s text is one of the best vehicles for gleaning the cultural political framework that contributed to the
layering home and female mores of the antebellum period. Shirley Yee, Black Women Abolitionists: A
Study in Activism, 1828-1860 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 2-3. I join with Yee in
filling gaps regarding the work of black women in the abolition period. I specifically hold to her statement
that “for black women abolitionist, race, sex, and class together created a complex experience within the
his analysis of the role of ‘gender expectations’, Horton’s piece was a vital facet in helping me tease out my
thinking on black women employing a double ruse that enabled them to be invaluable to various elements
of the insurgent network. Kathryn Kish Sklar, ed., Women’s Rights Emerges within the Antislavery
Movement, 1830-1870, A Brief History with Documents (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s,
2000). Kish Sklar’s text of primary sourced material and essays guided my thoughts regarding the kinship-
bridge functions of activists black women.
how black women activists furthered the Movement's agenda and carved out positions of influence within it and in the greater society.

Given that Ohio’s Black Laws were among the strictest in the nation, the deconstructing of them by Black Convention efforts is unique for arguing long-range consequences. Hence, my effort here is not so much theoretical, as it is practical in its result. I use the Ohio Compromise of 1849 as evidence of the success of the anti-Black Codes campaign that fanned fears among the southern Slave Power and its allies. This success inadvertently helped to place the nation on the road toward civil war. I put serious thought into questions of the campaign’s impact and result in constructing my narrative to highlight how blacks influenced the legislative process. I relied heavily upon newspapers to aid me in the analysis, and the works of Stephen Middleton and Betty Culpepper as guiding lights.47 I realized that I could utilize the Ohio Compromise to present an example of the insurgent networks, combining the input of its elite white allies, its use of religious rhetoric, and the resulting effect on public opinion.

Ultimately, the aforementioned approaches to the available source materials enabled me to reveal the depth of the insurgent zeal for liberation and political participation. The sources show that the strength of the insurgency lay in social and political agitations, ultimately highlighting the system of mandated racial discrimination that constrained black Americans. By exploiting these sources and frameworks, I shed a

new important light on the Black Convention Movement. I show the Convention as an insurgent network that played a significant role in the sectional crisis, culminating in the American Civil War. This is important because it helps us appreciate the calamity that the Civil War did to the narrative that the Convention constructed about blacks in the nation and contextualize the African Diaspora of disbursement in insurgent terms.

Chapter Overviews

Chapter Two, “The Black Press: Insurgency in Print” explores the efforts of the domestic Black Press. This chapters shows that a number activist owned newspapers organically disseminated print insurgency throughout the antebellum period. The Black Press brought the black insurgent voice to the national conversation on abolition and racial equality, building networks among themselves. The regular flow of these black publications provided “essential institution[s] for facilitating the development of Black Nationalism.”48 The phenomenon of Black Journalism during the antebellum era highlighted “the need for self-definition, for self-determination and, most important, the need to speak for themselves.”49 Consequently, these black journalists forced their readers to maintain the nation’s gaze upon the ills and hopes of the nation, to the ultimate benefit of all citizens, by standing against slavery and the unjust system of racial discrimination.50

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50 Ibid., 293.
Chapter Three, “Old Testament Soldiers: Black Church Foundations, Political Liberation” shows how the Black Convention’s specific brand of insurgent political radicalism derived religious rhetoric from a black expression of Christianity to inspire its insurgent networks. Black activists utilized this rhetoric to contest hegemonic white Christianity and the institution of slavery, and win the struggle for the franchise and full citizenship. In this section, the power of the *African American Jeremiad* reverberates through “warnings issued by blacks to whites, concerning the judgment that was to come from the sin of slavery.”

The Jeremiad function of sounding divine judgment on earth is a key feature of the insurgency. The idea of the African American Jeremiad grew out of the religious agency of black Christians who migrated from white churches in disgust to create their own congregations. From the antebellum period into the modern era, blacks harnessed the tool of the African American Jeremiad to “legitimate [their] goals . . . raise guilt among white Americans, and demand social change.” Important to this chapter, black activists actively argued against white efforts to “provoke blacks to think of freedom apart from white people and to define themselves not by [white hegemonic order] standards but by the laws of God.”

Chapter Four, “Sister Insurgents: the Rise of Womanhood in the Black Insurgency” profiles various women of the black insurgency, and addresses their

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52 E. Franklin Frazier and C. Eric Lincoln, *The Negro Church in America: The Black Church Since Frazier* (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), 33. The fomenting trend of blacks establishing churches for themselves grew in part from the difference of opinions between Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, the founders of the Free African Society, regarding which models of the Methodist or the Episcopal churches could be the most pliable for the needs of black Christians.
53 Ibid., 217.
activities and contributions toward the goal of black equality. This chapter highlights the agency of black female activists associated with the Convention and explores how these women provided cohesive social and political support to the goals of the insurgency. Kinship ties, regional geographies, along with bridge building functions, act as key weapons that black female activists utilized. This section shows that the white male-dominated society ironically positioned black women for insurgency. This argues for a clandestine presentation of black women to the white public in the motif of a *Cult of Black Womanhood*; a double-headed ruse, allowing for the positing of so-called proper gender roles, while participating as radical equals to their male counterparts.

Chapter Five, “The Ohio Compromise of 1849: Flashpoint of Rebellion” argues for the importance of a forgotten campaign against the Black Codes of Ohio as a contributing factor in the ignition of the American Civil War. Through custom and legal means, white legislators had designed laws to suppress and oppress the numbers of blacks in their states, by passing laws denying citizenship, voting eligibility, and restricting employment opportunities. This chapter shows black activists, along with white allies, combating these social and politically restrictive laws. Herein is also blowback from southern Slave Power interests that erupted with the Compromise of 1850 and its accompanying Fugitive Slave Law. The legislative pushback from pro-slavery elements spiked throughout the 1850s, dangerously fanning emotions on all sides at various junctures. This anti-abolition response provides grounding for this chapter’s argument that the Black Convention Movement’s activities inadvertently helped to push the nation toward civil war.\footnote{Stephen Middleton, *The Black Laws: Race and the Legal Process in Early Ohio* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 156. Middleton references the result as a Compromise rather than Partial Repeal.}
Chapter Six, “The Black Insurgency Continues” shows that the insurgent agenda did not wane by war’s end; rather, it flourished due to concerns about the implementation of Reconstruction policies. At the end of the American Civil War, the Black Convention gathered nationwide to assess gains and discuss how best to solidify them through its networks. The Black Convention was not a singular anomaly, but a continuing movement contextualized “as a single persuasive campaign.” This chapter discusses geographic zones of engagement against Slave Power interests, showing the utility of the insurgent campaign on domestic and international fronts. Finally, it attempts to ferret out why, given contemporary race based struggles, knowledge of the organized insurgent legacy appears to be missing from the public sphere.

Loyal to the United States, yet at war with the racism of the American system, the Black Convention deployed tactics designed to defeat the discrimination and enslavement of the period. By understanding these antebellum antislavery campaigns, readers find themselves “in a much better position to understand, evaluate, and appreciate the efforts of black and white spokesmen for radical justice today.” Through its fight for freedom and equality, the Black Convention provides a prototype for contemporary patterns of liberation networks that have ultimately changed American culture profoundly in areas of gender, sex, race, and politics. The account herein wrestles with the idea of how the nation wanted to view its relationship with its black inhabitants. This study is an attempt to flesh out the insurgent network narrative as a point of reference in United States

History. The following chapters of this study show the reality of the Black Convention Movement as the era’s chief black insurgent network.
CHAPTER II
THE BLACK PRESS: INSURGENCY IN PRINT

In 1827, John Russwurm articulated the mission of *Freedom’s Journal*, the first black newspaper in the United States: “We wish to plead our own cause. Too long have others spoken for us. Too long has the public been deceived by misrepresentations.”¹ Russwurm and the paper’s founder, the Rev. Samuel Cornish, ignited a vital facet of the black insurgency in the form of Black Journalism. The creation of *Freedom’s Journal* came about to contest the pro-slavery narratives emanating from the anti-abolitionist press. The paper also poised to counter *The African Repository and Colonial Journal*, founded by the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1825 in order to propagate its pro-colonization views.² The ACS signaled its intent to put whites at the forefront of the American narrative bereft of the growing black population. Black activists responded to this attempt at refashioning the nation, with organized resistance.

This chapter explores the efforts of a domestic Black Press that organically disseminated print insurgency throughout the antebellum period. Capable insurgent network members produced over thirty publications over the period of 1827 to 1870. These papers spanned New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania in the northern states, Southwest to

Louisiana, to California, and included operations in Canada. Even if considered ephemeral in a political landscape where blacks possessed little if any tangible political and civil power, the rhetoric in these publications remained vital. As the chief insurgent network contesting the injustices of the American system through various tactics, the tactic of Black Journalism assaulted societal racism in its attempt to dismantle discrimination and enslavement. Cadres of black activists, many associated with the Black Convention and the insurgency network, joined together to bring the black voice to the national conversation regarding abolition and racial equality. Through this effort, they offered support and facilitated involvement at various levels, building networks among themselves. A flood of black publications aimed at the blacks and whites of the nation resulted, which would seed the black insurgency throughout and provide “essential institution[s] for facilitating the development of Black Nationalism.”

This study locates these black publications within a long-term program of print guerrilla warfare. Many of these publications were short-lived due to financial struggles. Founded and staffed by leaders and participants of the various black conventions, all weathered anti-abolitionist storms. The reality is that nearly all of these publications failed to sustain themselves, but that is just one facet of the picture. The role and fate of these American black-oriented publications were key to the goals of abolition and civil rights. For any publication to succeed, it required voluntary contributions from supporters or committed subscribers, but many subscribers failed to keep their

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1 Armistead S. Pride, “A Register and History of Negro Newspapers in the United States, 1827-1950” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1950), 189.
subscriptions current.\textsuperscript{3} Thus, financial problems dogged these publications and doomed many of them before they could reach their prime, inviting the view on its surface, that these newspapers were largely failures.

The focus on rhetoric, from the concepts presented to the emotional reactions hoped for, indicates black newspapers understood that the contexts of their rhetoric mattered and that “tactical paring . . . was necessary to accomplish the specific goals of the movement.”\textsuperscript{4} The rhetorical themes of the black press covered topics from women’s behavior to a man’s role to high society. From justice, liberty, uplift, and God, the pages of black newspapers discussed labor, politics, law, and rights.\textsuperscript{5}

By bundling the discussion of race wrongs and clashes along with race progress and individual achievement, despite the simple normality presented in its pages, there was “enough of minority insurgency about it . . . to render its degree of success surprising.”\textsuperscript{6} This made it possible for the black insurgent networks to scream in print about slavery and suffering as often as possible to the dominant culture, and demand nothing less than full abolition and racial equality. Advocacy strengthened the vantage point of the Black Press, and the very ideas it presented, enabling the insurgent network to speak truth to the Slave Power, drawing a “heated response from a public opposed to abolitionist agitation.”\textsuperscript{7} The following reveals how the insurgent network constructed

\begin{itemize}
\item Ibid., 98.
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counter arguments to the American system of racism through the tactic of Black
Journalism toward the goal of dismantling discrimination and enslavement.

Black Convention: A Black Response is Required

Members of the Black Convention Movement realized that a reliable news vehicle
was required to reach the blacks, and argue their ideas before the white population.
Journalism enabled activists to influence the attitudes of blacks and whites toward a
desired goal of equality; or, if all else failed, a bloody resolution as the final resort. In
1835, the forces of the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS) solidified their coup
d’état of the national Black Convention Movement in order to moderate what was viewed
as socially threatening radical impulses. The AMRS promoted white abolitionist William
Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator*, a prominent antislavery newspaper founded in 1831,
declaring it “as eminently deserving of the support of every free coloured citizen in these
U. States.”8 The AMRS’s stance, combined with the anger of the so-called radical wings,
helped ignite a flood of rebuke and lead to the creation of many black newspapers,
predominately in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

As a standard practice, various black newspapers attempted to cover the regional
and state conventions in their area. At the 1840 New York state Black Convention,
Wesleyan University educated Charles B. Ray, then publisher and editor of the *Colored
American*, echoed an agenda for the many who hoped for equality, “We repeat what we
have already stated, that the talent, the improvement, the religion and the interest felt

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8 “Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the improvement of the Free People of Colour in the United
States, Held by Adjournments, in the Wesley Church, Philadelphia, from the first to the fifth of June,
inclusive, 1835,” in Howard Holman Bell, ed., *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro
among our people were represented at the Convention . . . to get the unbiased and uninfluenced embodied views, and feelings of our people before the community.” 9 Ray held officer level status in national conventions throughout the 1840s and 1850s as a delegate and secretary.

Ray’s important declaration held extreme immediacy for black activists in the radical wings, as they faced continual opposition from the weakened AMRS and its own newspaper organ, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, headed by Philadelphia-based black businessman William Whipper. Whipper made sure that the moderate leanings of the AMRS permeated the newspaper, positioning it against “any convention called by blacks for the exclusive purpose of advancing their rights, fearing that such distinct and separate meetings would merely confirm in the public mind the idea of black inferiority.” 10 The radical wings strongly opposed this line of thinking, knowing that they could not rely on the concept of peaceful black Christians courting peaceful white Christians in moral suasionist terms to grant blacks freedom and equality.

The 1841 Pennsylvania state Black Convention stressed the importance of a newspaper for blacks, arguing that “the utility of newspapers is two-fold: 1, to impart intelligence, and, 2, to unite.” 11 The gathering realized the importance of journalism for communicating black concerns, insisting “it is absolutely necessary, that we should have a press of our own. It is just as absurd to imagine, that we can become intelligent and

10 Ibid., 25.
enterprising, by others speaking and writing for us.”\textsuperscript{12} These issues became paramount as the radical wings ushered in the dominance of the renewed national Black Convention by 1843. With the Convention back in place, radical activists launched a wave of what some viewed as terrifying religious and inflammatory rhetoric.\textsuperscript{13}

At the 1843 convention, a Press Committee that included \textit{Colored American’s} Ray, reminded attendees “the slaveholding, in this country, finds now, as it ever has found, support and a grand means of defense, in the influence of the newspaper press.”\textsuperscript{14} The proslavery press, argued the committee, needed a united black press to counter the ongoing color prejudice that such newspapers pushed the public arena.\textsuperscript{15} The committee noted that a national black newspaper could benefit the blacks of the nation with a vehicle of improved, unified communication, and remind all blacks that “our cause and our interests are one and common.”\textsuperscript{16}

The struggle for nearly all black newspapers lay in the need to build a sizable subscriber base from which to draw financial support. The committee noted that a national black newspaper would require capital and at least two thousand committed subscribers.\textsuperscript{17} The committee promoted the assignment of state territories to appoint individuals toward the construction of a national news vehicle to reach blacks. These

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{13} Chapter III discusses the importance of this iconic 1843 convention.
\textsuperscript{14} “Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens held at Buffalo, on the 15\textsuperscript{th}, 16\textsuperscript{th}, 17\textsuperscript{th}, 18\textsuperscript{th} and 19\textsuperscript{th} of August, 1843, for the Purpose of Considering their Moral and Political Condition as American Citizens,” in Bell, \textit{Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865}, 27.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 28-9.
individuals also needed financial support and resources to organize a sizable number of potential subscribers, so that a national black newspaper could become a reality.\textsuperscript{18}

The question of self-sufficiency for a black national press continued into the 1847 national gathering of the Black Convention in Troy, New York, the home base of many of black radicals. The Rev. Henry Highland Garnet communicated the body’s seriousness regarding a national black press, declaring, “The establishment of a National Printing Press would send terror into the ranks of our enemies, and encourage all our friends.”\textsuperscript{19} Frederick Douglass, then still a loyal Garrisonian, expressed doubts that a national black newspaper would be sustainable, free of cliquish influence, and preferred to see then-established black papers already facilitated by various Black Convention participants supported by the national body instead.\textsuperscript{20}

The Convention agreed to recommend and encourage the nation’s blacks to support a number of newspapers operated by delegates and attendees, in order to provide timely coverage.\textsuperscript{21} The newspapers included, \textit{The Mystery}, operated by convention veteran and future Union Army officer, Martin R. Delany from Pennsylvania, and the \textit{Ram’s Horn} founded by Williamsburg-based Willis A. Hodges, a delegate to the 1847 national convention at Troy. Also included, the \textit{Nation’s Watchman}, a vehicle for William G. Allen and Henry H. Garnet, convention veterans based in Troy. The \textit{Disfranchised American}, founded in 1843 by Cincinnati-based national convention veteran A.M. Sumer, made the list, along with the \textit{Northern Star}, headed by New York-

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People, and Their Friends, Held in Troy, N., Y., on the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th October, 1847,” in Bell, \textit{Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865}, 6.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 17.
based veterans active at the national and New York state conventions, Stephen Myers, John G. Stewart, and Charles S. Morton. The Convention’s Committee on a National Press maintained that national presses were the best option, and that failing to create such a vehicle represented “a libel upon us as a free and thinking people.”

In the end, state territories were assigned by the committee to men that included a few who would go on to publish or edit newspapers in their own right, including Dr. James McCune Smith and Ray, who later would publish the New York-based Colored American with fellow convention veteran Phillip A. Bell. Alex Crummell and others rounded out the list, with the Rev. J. W. C. Pennington, who would issue the Ohio-based Alienated American, with convention veterans William Howard Day and Samuel Ringgold Ward handling foreign markets.

By January 1850, at the Ohio state gathering of the Black Convention in Columbus, some argued that an eastern-western divide existed among convention activists. A number of activists stated that Douglass’s New York-based North Star “was not the People’s paper, but strictly an Eastern paper.” Critics incorrectly argued that as the paper’s editor, Douglass, had erred in giving little editorial attention to the concerns of Ohio’s blacks. In fact, Douglass had helped champion a partial repeal of Ohio’s Black Laws in 1849.

In Ohio, the call for a national black newspaper had evolved into a call for a black newspaper germane to the state in order to assure proper representation; however, the

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22 Ibid., 20.
23 Ibid., 20-1.
24 “Minutes of the State Convention, of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, January 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12, 1850,” in Foner and Walker, Proceedings of the Black State Convention, 1840-1865, Vol. I, 244.
25 Ibid., 245.
matter hinged on issues of sustainability. A committee chosen to investigate the possibility recommended that convention members pledge individual support for a state black newspaper. Tentatively named *Voice of the Oppressed*, a chosen committee based in Columbus operated it under the editorship of future *Alienated American* publisher Day, along with future Oberlin-Wellington Rescue leader, Charles H. Langston. A similar report at the state gathering in 1851 urged the 25,000 blacks in the state to express willingness to subscribe to and support the effort for a statewide black newspaper, tentatively named *Clarion of Freedom*. Hopes remained strong in 1852, when the state gathering in Cincinnati called for a creation of $1,000 fund to organize a statewide black newspaper. The eventual result of this activity was the Cleveland-based *Alienated American*, which began in 1853, edited by Day.

Ongoing efforts included the 1851 New York state gathering at Albany that called for blacks to support Ward’s *Impartial Citizen*, the Boston-based *Telegraph* of Myers, and the eponymous *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. By the national gathering of 1853 in Rochester, the trend to support a handful of papers appeared the norm. The Convention considered *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* “a correct exponent of the condition of our people... we cheerfully recommend it as worthy of our hearty and untiring support.”

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26 Ibid., 253.
27 Ibid., 254.
30 Ibid., 256.
Alienated American also was welcomed “as a powerful auxiliary to our cause as an efficient lever for promoting our elevation; and that we pledge it that hearty support which [befits] its importance.” Abolition and equality were the desired goals of the Black Convention. These goals informed the rhetorical warfare of the black insurgent network and contributed to the eventual fall of the Slave Power. The following will show the reach and influence of the Convention-connected presses from New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, into California including various southern presses, and Canada.

The Black Press in New York

The radical hotbed of antebellum New York birthed black newspapers with solid internal ties to the Black Convention. Freedom’s Journal is the earliest example of the domestic Black Press on record. It heralded the intertwining of northern abolitionism and black agency in print culture, providing a starting point for “the relationship between the formation of racial identity and the rise of antislavery radicalism in nineteenth-century America.” In March of 1827, Delaware-born Presbyterian minister, the Rev. Samuel Cornish founded this small but influential New York-based newspaper. Cornish served as a convention delegate throughout the 1830s and 1840s. The desire to counter the racist views of New York Enquirer publisher Mordecai Manuel Noah also spurred the need for a vehicle such as Freedom’s Journal. Noah, known for being a playwright, Zionism advocate, and politically aligned with Tammany Hall and the Whig party, advocated for

33 Ibid.
35 Mooney, The Black Press, 12.
white supremacy. By the time John B. Russwurm, the newspaper’s last editor, relinquished its reins, Freedom’s Journal had circulated into locales from New York, to the nation’s capital, to North Carolina and Maryland, even as far as Louisiana, thus sowing southern apprehension toward abolitionists in the time before the first national gathering of the Black Convention in 1830.

Well known for his missionary efforts among slaves in Delaware, the Philadelphia educated Cornish co-founded the New York Haytian Emigration Society. Cornish recruited the Bowdoin College-educated Russwurm as the paper’s editor. Russwurm was notable as one of the first blacks to have received a college degree in the United States. However, the two differed on the issue of voluntary Negro colonization, which led to Cornish leaving the paper to Russwurm by September. Russwurm eventually ceased operations and immigrated to the African nation of Liberia, where he revived the Liberia Herald, founded by the late Boston, Massachusetts transplant Charles L. Force. Liberia Herald, founded in 1830 as the first Black newspaper in West Africa, spanned a three-decade run.

After Russwurm’s departure, Cornish revived Freedom’s Journal as The Rights of All and in 1831 joined forces with John G. Stewart to publish the little-known African

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36 For an in-depth study on Noah see: Michael Joseph Schuldiner, et. al., The Selected Writings of Mordecai Noah (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999).
"Sentinel and Journal of Liberty," a weekly based in Albany, New York. Stewart began the paper to fill the void left by the failure of *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All*, stating, “there should be at least one public journal, conducted by a colored man, and devoted to the interests of the colored population throughout this country.” During his tenure at the paper, Cornish targeted the revived *Freedom's Journal* toward a black audience. However, he also intended that it fall into the hands of white audiences for consumption due to assumed low literacy rates of the majority of northern blacks. There is some evidence that this view is plausible due to the paper’s strong push in the area of educational opportunities for blacks, calling the then existing system a “dissatisfied . . . irregular mode of education.” Cornish argued that black children needed the advantage of a sound education to participate fully in society. Along with agitating for education, Cornish maintained a strong anti-colonization stance, and in part, the American Colonization Society’s program of depopulating the nation of blacks sparked the urgency for black leaders to organize. Here Cornish warned that although no official laws forcing colonization of blacks existed, “who can foretell how soon before they may, without waiting for the period of a general emancipation in any of the slave holding states.”

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46 Ibid.
Deploying the insurgent tactic of Black Journalism in contesting discrimination and enslavement, *Freedom's Journal* would cross into purposefully worrisome territory at times. The paper lauded slave uprisings in Virginia. Russwurm supported and published David Walker’s frightening ‘Appeal’ pamphlet in 1829 that advocated violent Black Nationalism. The pamphlet in part ignited a race riot in Cincinnati during August 1829, leading to a large number of blacks in the community leaving the city for Canada. Many blacks in the city were organizing to leave due to a published notice in the June 30, 1829 edition of the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*. The white-dominated municipal government’s intent was to regulate the personal bond requirements in Ohio’s Black Laws by legislating a $500 bond of good conduct upon all blacks entering Ohio. Ironically, the idea for the creation of *Freedom’s Journal* was reportedly born in Walker’s home, where he and other black radical activists pledged to support the paper, provide content, and serve as authorized agents. Walker and Cornish held close ties in abolitionist circles, and while each was committed to abolitionism, Cornish “did not support Walker’s advocacy of slave rebellion, even as a last resort.”

As noted earlier, Cornish published *The Rights of All* after his split with Russwurm. Cornish secured backing for the paper and it debuted in May 1829, and presented itself as a bit more militant in content. The paper retained Cornish’s anti-

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colonization stance, and pledged to use his “power to remove the many abuses which exist among his brethren.”54 Cornish argued that the means for carrying out colonization were insufficient, and represented a costly fad that only debased black people and served as a poor balm to the horrors of slavery.55 Cornish also admonished the blacks of the state to exercise the few voting and citizenship rights that they possessed, and urged the importance of doing so as “an example for the whites, who are already, too many of them, politically half crazy.”56 The Rights of All lasted barely a year, suspending publication in 1830, but it marked the militant radical turn for Cornish that would become evident in his work during the decade and into the 1840s.57

The next sizable vehicle for Cornish’s talents to fill the void in black newspapers, appeared years later with the January 1837 debut of the New York-based Weekly Advocate. The paper maintained an anti-colonization stance, and focused on abolition, along with the goal of increasing “readership among northern blacks by writing about the issues that concerned the community.”58 Cornish solidified his shift into the brand of New York militancy with this project, and argued for immediate emancipation, unity among various black communities, and opposition to the insults and degradations visited upon blacks.59 Cornish also warned Slave Power interests against sending slave-catchers into the state, making it clear that “DEATH is too light a punishment for that wretch, (we

55 “Colonization” in The Rights of All, July 17, 1829.
allude now to every Kidnapper,) who should violate laws both natural and civil.”

Cornish argued that the oppressions the dominant culture waged upon blacks represented a hallowed war that would eventually end.

By March, the *Weekly Advocate*’s name changed to the *Colored American*. New York-based black abolitionist and journalist Phillip A. Bell became its proprietor, and Canadian-born Robert Sears signed on as its publisher, while Cornish retained the editorial reins. Under Cornish, the paper urged its black readers to peer into their diasporic past in order to typify religious greats such as Augustine and Origen, and also incorporated armed struggle in the guise of Hannibal, whose “honor and military prowess, some of our sons may [emulate.]” The *Colored American* argued that all able northern blacks should purchase a subscription to the paper, and hired Black Convention alumnus Charles B. Ray, who proved to be a key factor in keeping the paper in print longer. Unfortunately, the *Colored American* became victim to the repeating pattern of a dearth of committed black subscribers for the publication and not even Ray’s commendable fundraising efforts could halt the end.

The *Colored American* justified efforts to seek financial support, emphasizing the mission of combating the dominant racist society, arguing its potential as a unifying vehicle “because without such an organ, we never can enlist the sympathy of the nation in

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60 Ibid., 305.
61 Ibid., 123.
our behalf, and in the behalf of the slave."66 Colored American framed Slave Power interests as the enemy of civilization, with the argument that “our Southern Planters, in education and habits, are aristocrats of the worst kind . . . they have no respect whatever for northerners and are determined to trample on them and their rights.”67 However, the newspaper did not give free passes to white sympathizers either noting, “our white friends are deceived when they imagine they are free from prejudice against color, and yet are content with a lower standard of attainments for colored youth [and] . . . black men.”68 Heated rhetoric aside, Colored American valued its collaboration with abolitionists aimed at ‘throwing off the veil’ to revealed Slave Power sins.69

Dr. James McCune Smith, New York-born and educated at the University of Glasgow, joined the editorial staff in January 1839, but he would leave when Cornish retired from the paper in May.70 Financial issues regularly hamstrung efforts to keep the Colored American publishing. Cornish served without a salary. A libel suit strained available funds. These factors, combined with subscriber payment issues, eventually drove the paper into suspension at the end of 1839.71 Although dogged by its financial ills, the Colored American gained fame for the quality of its content and the wide range of topics covered in its pages from foreign, national, and regional news, along with analysis for the nation’s blacks.72

Cornish’s impact on the first years of the black press helped set a tone of active resistance that many would follow, although not uniformly. The Mirror of Liberty,

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68 “What must our People do?” in Colored American, November 4, 1837.
69 “Increase of Prejudice,” in Colored American, June 2, 1838.
70 Bryan, Negro Journalism in America Before Emancipation, 13.
71 Freeman, The Free Negro in New York City, 177-180.
72 Ibid., 177-181.
established in 1838 by Connecticut-born abolitionist David Ruggles, a co-founder of the New York Vigilance Society (NYVS), ran until 1840, often functioning as the official news vehicle for the NYVS. A convention regular, Ruggles had been an agent for anti-slavery newspapers such as the *Liberator* and the *Emancipator*. Ruggles suffered from bad health, which resulted in the suspension of *Mirror of Liberty* in 1840, but he continued his writing and activism, earning a reputation for himself as “one of the most radical and fearless advocates of Negro rights.” In Boston, Ruggles, active as an Underground Railroad operator, launched the *Genius of Freedom* in 1845, suspending publication in 1847. Eventually going blind due to the weight of his illnesses, Ruggles spent his final years in Massachusetts, where he died at the age of 39 in 1849.

*The National Watchman* appeared briefly in 1842, edited by William G. Allen, with the Delaware slave-born iconoclast Henry Highland Garnet assisting. Allen served as a professor at Central College, a white majority school, which New York-based philanthropist-abolitionist Gerrit Smith helped establish in the early 1840s. Tensions between Allen and Garnet led the latter to launch his own paper, *The Clarion*; however, this paper failed to garner financial support and suspended publication shortly thereafter. In 1843, Garnet would ignite great concerns when he essentially called for a

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75 Painter, *Black Journalism: The First Hundred Years*, 34.
bloody slave uprising at the national gathering of the Black Convention at Buffalo, New York, arguing that slaves should confront their masters “and tell them they wanted their liberty . . . and if the master refused it, to tell them, then we shall take it, let the consequence be what it may.” Despite financial failure, both papers did help to keep issues of abolition and racial equality in the public discussion.

Largely a staple of the New York state Black Convention, Stephen Myers was also active in the New York Vigilance Committee, a strong anti-colonization foe, and earned respect as a prolific newspaper editor-publisher. Myers spearheaded at least three newspaper efforts spanning the 1840s into the 1850s. His first known effort was the Troy-based The Elevator, established in 1842, which enjoyed abolitionist support, even attracting the backing of figures such as Smith and The New York Tribune’s Horace Greeley. Perhaps a first, Myers and his wife Harriet both worked on the paper, building a sizable circulation leading to The Elevator’s regard as a forceful vehicle that kept the issue of abolition and slave liberation before the reading public.

That same year, Myers began another newspaper, The Northern Star and Freeman’s Advocate, which appeared for most of 1842, with a final issue in January 1843. Simply named The Northern Star by its second issue, Myers brought in Charles S. Morton and John G. Stewart to edit it, although Myers retained publishing and managing duties until the paper’s suspension. This effort promoted issues important to

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81 “Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens held at Buffalo, on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th of August, 1843, for the Purpose of Considering their Moral and Political Condition as American Citizens,” in Bell, Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 13.
83 Gore, Negro Journalism, 6.
84 Bryan, Negro Journalism in America Before Emancipation, 15.
85 Ibid., 15-6.
86 Ibid., 16.
abolitionists, with a bit of a radical turn, stating “the first effort, then, which human
dictates, is an endeavor to induce government to exert every means in its power for the
purpose of putting a stop to the cruel separation of families . . . if this is not done . . .
revolution will but the sooner break out.” By the late 1850s, Myers was editing the
*Voice of Freedom*, which backed the 1858 New York governorship bid of Edwin D.
Morgan over Gerrit Smith; Myers’ reasoning being he “feared that Smith, who had no
chance of winning, would merely split the Negro vote and catapult a pro-slavery
Democrat into power.”

Colored American alumnus Thomas Hamilton established the New York-based
monthly *Anglo-African Magazine* in 1859. Previously in 1843, Hamilton had published
and suspended *The People’s Press*, assisted by John Dias. The *Anglo-African* soon
became *The Weekly Anglo-African* and was well received, even compared in quality to
Frederick Douglass’ *North Star*. Under the New York-born Hamilton, the *Anglo-
African Magazine* promoted the fears and revolutionary winds that John Brown’s failed
raid upon Harpers Ferry infused into the antislavery debate, and declared that history
would judge of Brown and his compatriots that “they were right.” Hamilton
championed active resistance while warning Slave Power sympathizers to choose the
right side.

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87 "*The Northern Star and Freeman’s Advocate*, Albany, N.Y., March 17, 1842,” quoted in Dann, *The
Black Press*, 72.
88 “*Proceedings of the State Convention of Colored People held at Albany, New-York, on the 22d, 23d and
76.
Due to declining health, Hamilton sold the paper to Scottish-born James Redpath in 1860. Redpath championed Haitian emigration, and would have a colorful life of his own, associating among the likes of P.T. Barnum, Mark Twain, and Frederick Douglass.93 This fit with the emigration mood that Hamilton had promoted in the paper. This very brief moment before the start of the American Civil War signified a time when some blacks had nearly lost hope that the agenda of abolition, and political and racial equality was possible, and *The Weekly Anglo-African* promoted emigration to Africa as a solution.94 Redpath also championed a John Brown abolitionist stance, which highlighted that in a nation that heaped scorn upon blacks, even blacks patriotically loyal to the North at the dawn of the Civil War, armed struggle or emigration presented the only reasonable paths that blacks could choose.95 Redpath changed the name of the paper to the *Pine and Palm* during 1861, but eventually gave up the paper in early 1862 to Hamilton’s brother, Robert, who changed the name back to *The Weekly Anglo-African*, and brought in Garnet to assist with editing.96 By April 1862, the paper suspended publication.97

Congregational minister, Rev. Samuel Ringgold Ward is connection to the first black female newspaper publisher, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and her publication *Provincial Freeman*. However, before Ward briefly edited the groundbreaking Canadian paper, he

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97 Ibid.
earned fame as a publisher-editor in his own right. Born a slave in Delaware, Ward benefited from Gerrit Smith’s financial support and received an education based in theology and the classics.\(^{98}\) Ward’s first effort was the Cortland, New York-based *True American*, which ran from 1846 to 1848.\(^{99}\) *The Impartial Citizen* followed in 1848, based in Syracuse, and later in Boston, where the convention activist earned complimentary notices as an editor on par with Douglass. Horace Greeley praised Ward’s publication as “an able and radical anti-slavery paper holding to the doctrine that the United States Constitution is an anti-slavery instrument.”\(^{100}\) Ward announced that his paper “desired to aid in the elevation of the Free Colored People, and to support and urge the doctrines of a Righteous Civil Government . . .”\(^{101}\) *The Impartial Citizen* ran until 1856 and was a combination of *True American*, and the *Colored Farmer and Northern Star*, an early little-known paper that Ward edited.\(^{102}\) Ward would leave the United States for Canada, and then continue on to England and eventually Jamaica, where he spent his final years. Ward’s prolific activity solidifies his place among the active black press convention members, and his activity highlighted the remarkable abilities found among many others.

*The Ram’s Horn*, a New York-based effort by free-born Virginian, Willis A. Hodges, is important not just for being among the ranks of black activist papers, nor for publishing John Brown’s famous anti-slavery *Sambo’s Mistakes* essay.\(^{103}\) The

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\(^{101}\) “To our readers and patrons,” in *Impartial Citizen*, June 27, 1849.


\(^{103}\) Davis and Krekorian, *The Black Press in Antebellum America*. 
newspaper is significant for being the starting point for Douglass’ newspaper career. Hodges teamed with New York-born fugitive slave Thomas Van Rensselaer to fill a void in the abolitionist press, and established The Ram’s Horn in late 1846, with its first publication in January 1847. At its height, the paper reached a circulation of over 2,500 readers before it suspended publication during the summer of 1848. Because of his biography and travels, Douglass became a popular figure, but at the time of The Ram’s Horn, he had yet to edit or publish a newspaper. In reality, Douglass performed little work for the paper, but due to his popularity, all parties concerned benefited and this positioned Douglass for his own publishing venture, the North Star.

The North Star set a clear tone regarding its agenda: “it has long been our anxious wish to see, in this slave-holding, slave-trading, and Negro-hating land, a printing press and paper, permanently established, under the complete control and direction of the immediate victims of slavery and oppression.” The slave-born Douglass had purchased his freedom after returning from lecturing and fundraising in England. With the benefit of his association with The Ram’s Horn, Douglass settled in Rochester, New York, and established his first paper, the North Star, in 1847. Assisting Douglass for a time were future editor of The Mystery and Civil War Union officer Martin R. Delany, and Boston-based black activist William C. Nell, a Garrison acolyte. As part of his effort in seeking the United States Presidency as the candidate of the Liberty Party, Gerrit Smith urged a merger of the North Star with John Thomas’ Syracuse-based Liberty Party

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105 Gore, Negro Journalism, 6.
106 Senna, The Black Press and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 34.
Paper in 1851.\textsuperscript{110} In truth, the Liberty Party Paper was a haphazard effort financed by Smith who “hoped that the merger would breathe life into the Liberty Party, and cement Douglass’s adherence to [Smith’s] brand of political abolition.”\textsuperscript{111} The newly christened \textit{Frederick Douglass’ Paper} maintained Douglass as its editor, and Thomas as assistant editor.\textsuperscript{112} Thomas would soon leave the paper due to differences with Douglass.\textsuperscript{113} Despite his popularity and his famous political and social affiliations, Douglass found that his paper grew mired in rising debts, and closed by 1860.\textsuperscript{114} In 1858 Douglass established a British friendly magazine that ran until 1863, \textit{Douglass’s Monthly}, which urged British support “financial and otherwise for the antislavery crusade in America.”\textsuperscript{115} Douglass returned to publishing in 1870, establishing the \textit{New National Era}, which highlighted many black luminaries and messages of racial reconciliation, until it ceased publication in 1872.\textsuperscript{116}

In other states where convention members attempted newspaper operations, the themes followed near those of New York, or, in the case of Pennsylvania, showed the radical versus moderate struggle for the soul of the black insurgency. The number of diverse publications that came from the New York and New England regions represented a tendency toward radicalism. This made sense, especially in New York, where slavery, without civil equality, had ended in 1799 with a “gradual emancipation law [that] freed no adult slaves and gave freedom to the children of slaves only after a lengthy

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\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 51.
\textsuperscript{111} L. Diane Barnes, \textit{Frederick Douglass: Reformer and Statesman} (New York: Routledge, 2012), 74.
\textsuperscript{112} Bryan, \textit{Negro Journalism in America Before Emancipation}, 22-3.
\textsuperscript{113} Barnes, \textit{Frederick Douglass}, 74.
\textsuperscript{114} Pride and Wilson, \textit{A History of the Black Press}, 51.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 52.
\end{flushright}
indenture.”117 These black newspapers harnessed a practicality showing their depth of realization that they were dealing with a nation made insane with race prejudice.

*The Black Press in Pennsylvania*

Pennsylvania is represented in this study through a handful of papers and personalities, with sometimes similar goals, and yet possessing different ways of expressing them. Not known as loud voices of radical thought, these newspapers still connected to the insurgent network of convention attendees. The Philadelphia-based *National Reformer* ran from 1838 into the mid-1840s. Rather than being a vehicle for the Black Convention Movement, it was instead the “official voice of the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS).”118 The AMRS had replaced the national Black Convention Movement in the mid-1830s, in order to transplant a broader moderate tone and outlook into the convention movement.119 The so-called moderate usurpers included wealthy and influential New England white backers, such as *Liberator* publisher William Lloyd Garrison. Garrison believed that the heated rhetoric from black radical wings was an unwelcomed hindrance to overall goals of unifying and integrating blacks into the American mainstream.120 However, the rhetoric was in keeping with insurgent tactical goals of contesting discrimination and enslavement.

Pennsylvania-born William Whipper, a wealthy black man in his own right, used the *National Reformer* to promote AMRS policies of moral suasion.121 Whipper differed on the flaming exhortations of Black Convention stalwarts who agitated for radical and

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118 Davis and Krekorian, *The Black Press in Antebellum America*.
120 Ibid., 36.
violent responses to slavery, colonization, and other ills confronting the nation’s blacks. He eschewed his radical black contemporaries and positioned *National Reformer* as “allied in purpose and audience with the white abolitionist journals [rather] than with the growing body of Negro-oriented journals serving as a voice for their readers.” While the *National Reformer* and the AMRS represented a moderate gradualist tone of sensibility for whites alarmed over fiery abolitionist rhetoric, stalwarts of the black insurgent network showed that they would not readily back down.

Virginia-born Martin Delany established *The Mystery*, a newspaper that ran from 1843 into 1848, as a Pittsburgh-based quarterly. *The Mystery* gained fame and popularity for naming names and pointing fingers at slavery and those who profited from it. In terms of Black Journalism, *The Mystery* proved itself among contemporaries as “probably ruthlessly truthful about the situation of Black people in America.” In the paper, Delany sought to inspire blacks to uplift themselves by focusing on “the prevailing middle-class values of the dominant society—hard work, thrift, and temperance.” The future Civil War Union officer lamented, criticized, and urged blacks to combat the degradation they faced in the nation, writing in 1846 that “unless we can be brought to see and feel and be made really sensible of our true condition, all that we may attempt toward the amelioration of our condition must fall as pearl cast among swine.”

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122 Ibid., 250.
125 Painter, “Black Journalism: The First Hundred Years,” 35.
126 Adeleke Tunde, *Without Regard to Race: The Other Martin Robison Delany* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 53.
Delany sustained the paper with his own funds for nearly nine months, until losing a libel suit that levied a heavy fine. Delany’s subscribers covered the cost of the fine, but soon after the Mystery discontinued publication in 1848, purchased by the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). This newspaper changed its name to The Christian Herald, and later to The Christian Recorder in 1852. What Delany began in 1843 remains in print as the official news vehicle of the AME Church, making it the longest-running vehicle begun by a Black Convention activist. Delany went on to co-edit the North Star with Douglass. During that time, the two highlighted their respectful yet differing views on “different forms of identity politics, and that rivalry and concomitant politics of representative leadership.”

Unlike Pennsylvania, the seedbed of radicalism better pronounced itself in neighboring Ohio. Ohio blacks produced just a handful of newspapers. However, the names attached to these efforts reveal that the Buckeye State made up for its dearth of publications with a cast of activist heavyweights.

**The Black Press in Ohio**

Ohio’s black newspapers revealed themselves as clear black insurgent network vehicles of the state’s radical leaning activists, readily accommodating the agenda of the national Black Convention throughout the 1850s. One such newspaper noted by Douglass was the Columbus-based Palladium of Liberty, “issued by a committee of

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Jenkins was a staple of the Ohio Black Convention. He led the formation of the paper as an ongoing response to the fall of the national convention to AMRS moderates in the mid-1830s.

Lasting a couple of years, the *Palladium of Liberty* was among the first of black newspapers attempted in the early 1840s in what was then the West, and it contained a strong abolitionist voice. The paper gained the support of Columbus, Ohio area blacks, who urged the paper to “persevere in the cause . . . be vigilant, be industrious, and . . . realize complete and certain success . . .” *Palladium of Liberty* also admonished black parents to steer their children into learning useful trade skills that would serve them for a lifetime. Ohio earned its abolitionist firebrand reputation throughout the 1840s, but it remained without a black newspaper until the state level Black Convention inspired the establishment of *Alienated American*, which appeared in 1853 under the editorship of Ohio-born William Howard Day. An 1849 Oberlin College graduate, Day previously published the *Excelsior*, in Michigan. *Alienated American* served as the organ of the Ohio Black Convention gathering in 1853. Day, generally remembered as a John Brown ally and participant in Brown’s technically treasonous Chatham secessionist convention in Canada, produced the Cleveland-based *Alienated American* until his temporary departure to England in 1856. Day announced that the purpose of the paper, in part, was to defend human rights and “aid the development, educational, mechanical

135 “Smith to David Jenkins,” in *Palladium of Liberty*, February 14, 1844.
136 “Editorial” in *Palladium of Liberty*, April 17, 1844.
and social [standing] of Colored Americans.”\textsuperscript{140} Known as one of the finest examples of black abolitionist press, the paper also benefited from the co-editor skills of convention activists, the Rev. Samuel Ringgold Ward and the Rev. James W. C. Pennington. Pennington lead an assault with the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet and Dr. James McCune Smith against the racist New York City streetcar system in 1853, which led to its desegregation in the postwar period.\textsuperscript{141} Pennington, violently attacked and ejected from a New York City streetcar, responded by creating another plank within the black insurgent network, the Legal Rights Association (LRA), to organize boycotts and initiate lawsuits against the city on behalf of blacks abused in conjunction with the system.\textsuperscript{142} The institution of the LRA, and its boycott/legal campaigns, preceded the radical-led response of the Montgomery Bus Boycott by just over a century.

Additional black newspapers appeared in the Buckeye State through the decade. In 1855, Cincinnati-based Peter Humphries Clark, a renowned educator, established the \textit{Herald of Freedom}. The newspaper remained in print for a year, until Clark joined Douglass’s publishing efforts in New York.\textsuperscript{143} There was also the \textit{Colored Citizen}, a continuation of the A.M. Sumer’s \textit{Disfranchised American}, which ran from 1861 to 1863, with Cincinnati activists the Rev. Thomas Woodson and William Henry Yancey.\textsuperscript{144} During the American Civil War, John P. Samson headed the paper and was an active

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{The Aliened American}, April 9, 1853.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
member in the state’s Black Convention. Samson noted that a result of the war was “for the first time, the black man has been officially acknowledged as an American citizen . . . that the black soldier is of equal value with the white . . .”\textsuperscript{145} The Ohio landscape proved fertile in keeping the goal of dismantling discrimination and enslavement in the forefront of the abolitionist debate through Black Journalism.

\textit{The Black Press in Canada}

Although based in a foreign nation, the Black Press in Canada maintained tight connections with its American cousins. More than a handful of Black Convention activists visited north to conduct meetings, conventions, and direct efforts important to the goals of the black insurgency. Canadian soil provided a measure of safety and proved important to the insurgent networks by giving it another hub from which to agitate through Black Journalism against racism and human bondage.

Henry Bibb, slave-born in Kentucky, served as an active delegate in the national and Michigan Black Convention during the mid-1840s. In the wake of the threat represented by the Federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to escaped slaves living outside of the Slave Power South, Bibb moved his family from Detroit to Windsor, Ontario. In 1851, along with his wife Mary, he established \textit{The Voice of the Fugitive}, a bi-monthly that “was long regarded as indispensable for every fugitive.”\textsuperscript{146} Through the newspaper, Bibb taunted Slave Power interests by noting the huge increase of fugitives that flowed into Canada in response to the Fugitive Slave Act’s passage.\textsuperscript{147} In Canada, Bibb

\textsuperscript{145} “What the War has done for the Negro,” in \textit{Colored Citizen}, November 7, 1863.
\textsuperscript{146} Bryan, \textit{Negro Journalism in America Before Emancipation}, 24.
\textsuperscript{147} Fred Landon, “The Negro Migration to Canada after the Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act,” \textit{The Journal of Negro History}, Vol. 5. (January 1920), pp. 27.
established his activist credentials as a co-founder of the Anti-Slavery Society of Canada, forming a colonization society to aid fugitive slaves and lobbying the Canadian government to provide land and other aid to such slaves. The *Voice of Freedom* acted as a major voice for the abolitionist circles in Canada focusing on abolition, emigration, and issues of “education, temperance, and moral reform.” Notably, Bibb connected with Mary Ann Shadd Cary, at an anti-slavery convention he had organized in Toronto, a convention also attended by Black Convention veterans Ward and Delany.

Cary, the daughter of the well-established Pennsylvania Black Convention member Abraham Shadd, came to Canada out of curiosity regarding emigration issues. Abraham Shadd was an active delegate and attendee of convention gatherings, having attended the very first one in 1830 and remaining active into the 1840s. Thanks to his business successes, his daughter was educated in private schools, and trained to be a teacher. Cary was no stranger to activism and had previously published in Douglass’ *North Star*. Cary stayed with Bibb and his wife, Mary, for a time, and eventually began work to organize a school in Windsor. There, she affiliated with the American Missionary Society (AMS) and garnered allies, black and white, to aid her mission of keeping her school operating. In time, Cary’s successes drew jealous eyes, and she

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149 Ibid., 33.
151 Ibid.
153 Ibid., 39.
found herself a target of criticism in the pages of the *Voice of the Fugitive*, which eventually drove her to close her school.\(^{156}\)

It was then that Cary realized the need to create a counter-voice for promoting other views, and in 1853, “she founded the *Provincial Freeman*, the newspaper which would soon become the most influential Black journal in Canada.”\(^ {157}\) The *Provincial Freeman* was a pro-emigration vehicle, encouraging blacks, free or fugitive, to immigrate to Canada. Going a step further by contesting the *Voice of the Fugitive*, the paper declared, “Black people in Canada should consider themselves British subjects, not temporary residents.”\(^ {158}\) Cary had consulted with Ward, who was associated with the *Alienated American* and the *Impartial Citizen*, regarding the demands required for the creation of a newspaper.\(^ {159}\)

Cary’s brother, Isaac, was a presence at the beginning of the *Provincial Freeman*.\(^ {160}\) Although Cary was the true force behind the paper, the paper listed Ward as its editor to avoid offending gender social mores of the time.\(^ {161}\) Regardless, the matter infuriated critics and only deepened the rift between her and *Voice of the Fugitive*. Ward left for England shortly after, lecturing and raising funds, and never returned to Canada, choosing to immigrate instead to Jamaica where he lived out the rest of his life.\(^ {162}\) This situation left Cary little choice but to aver what many had suspected, that she was the true editor of the *Provincial Freeman*, the first black woman to edit and publish a newspaper.

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\(^ {156}\) Ibid., 42.  
\(^ {158}\) Ibid., 54.  
\(^ {159}\) Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 71.  
\(^ {161}\) Rhodes, *Mary Ann Shadd Cary*, 74.  
\(^ {162}\) Dull, “The Life of Mary Ann Shadd Cary,” 58.
Cary, with the aid of Douglass, gained membership and participation within the Black Convention in 1855 at the national Philadelphia gathering, where she spoke on the issue of emigration to Canada.\textsuperscript{163} Ironically, she suspected Douglass’ true feelings on the issue of emigration, and was a bit miffed by his likening of emigrating to Canada as being on par with the American Colonization Society’s Liberia scheme.\textsuperscript{164} The economic issues facing most proprietors of black newspapers also dogged Cary, who had to bring in males to be the public editors of her efforts. Eventually her brother, Isaac Shadd, took the reins of the paper.\textsuperscript{165} Under this model, the \textit{Provincial Freeman} limped into the early 1860s, and joined others who took up the cause of the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{166}

The \textit{Provincial Freeman} is significant for a variety of reasons. The operation hosted a meeting for the infamous John Brown in 1858 at its editorial offices, and assigned a correspondent, Osborne Perry Anderson, to accompany Brown on his raid at Harpers Ferry.\textsuperscript{167} This activity shows the utility of the insurgent network in constructing tactics to counter the American system of discrimination and enslavement from any point on the continent. Cary’s brother, Isaac, was an avowed Brown loyalist, having served as a signing delegate at Brown’s Chatham Convention in that same year.\textsuperscript{168} The impact of the \textit{Provincial Freeman} and the legacy of the paper is sound, showing that a black

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\textsuperscript{163} “Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held in Franklin Hall, Sixth Street, Below Arch, Philadelphia, October 16\textsuperscript{th}, 17 and 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1855,” in Bell, \textit{Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865}, 10.
\textsuperscript{165} Dull, “The Life of Mary Ann Shadd Cary,” 82.
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 86.
\textsuperscript{167} Ibid., 82; and see, Osborne Perry Anderson, \textit{A voice from Harper's Ferry: A narrative of events at Harper's Ferry; with incidents prior and subsequent to its capture by Captain Brown and his men} (Chicago, IL: World View Forum, 2000).
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woman could capably publish and edit a vehicle for the voices of blacks, on par with any male, even outside the borders of antebellum America. With Bibbs’ passing in the mid-1850s, the Provincial Freeman played a key role as a channel of communication with Black Convention activists and similar organizations based in the United States.169 As a safe haven for escaped slaves and other blacks wishing to leave the United States, Canada provided a platform for Bibb’s Voice of the Fugitive, and Shad Carry’s Provincial Freeman, from which to inform and strengthen the insurgent network.

The Black Press in California

From coast to coast, the black insurgency network functioned from the revolutionary grounds of New England in the East, to California, pushing its agenda forward. At the December 1856 California state Black Convention gathering in Sacramento, the Committee on a State Press proposed the adoption of the San Francisco-based Mirror of the Times “as the State Organ of the colored people of California.”170 The committee wanted the newspaper under the direct control of the state body in matters of distribution, financing, branching throughout the state, and some editorial framing and decision making regarding editors and salaries.171

Associated with state convention members Mifflin W. Gibbs, James Townsend, and William H. Newby, the newspaper came into being in 1855. The Philadelphia-born Gibbs, who became one of the first elected black judges in Reconstruction era United

171 Ibid.
States, founded *Mirror of the Times* in 1855, contributing to its editorial content.\(^{172}\) Newby, active on the state’s *Publishing Committee*, acted as its main editor until Townsend, a transplanted New Yorker active in convention circles since the 1840s, stepped up as the main editing head in 1857.\(^{173}\)

The paper’s main mission consisted of being an activist vehicle, “as a beacon light shining brightly and clearly on the path by which we are to reach position . . . the equal enjoyment of those civil and political rights . . . and we will stand second to no class of people in the American Union.”\(^{174}\) Additionally, *Mirror of the Times* admonished the state’s blacks of the importance of unifying and developing a “general plan of operation for the good of the whole people . . . .”\(^{175}\) The newspaper had a seven-year record of publication until 1862. The publication reorganized into the newly created *Pacific Appeal*, headed by William H. Carter, who keenly hired *Weekly Advocate* alum and former *Colored American* publisher Phillip A. Bell to energize the paper editorially.\(^{176}\)

Under Bell, the *Pacific Appeal* geared its message toward “the service of humanity and to the special interest of colored people.”\(^{177}\) Bell argued that the paper gave voice to the state’s blacks, who felt they did not possess an organ that ensured “their grievances might be known.”\(^{178}\) In 1865, Bell collaborated with Fred G. Barbadoes to publish the *Elevator*.\(^{179}\) The paper functioned as a platform for the “Executive


\(^{173}\) Ibid., 25.


\(^{175}\) Dann, *The Black Press*, 335.


\(^{178}\) “Conclusion of Our Second Volume,” in *Pacific Appeal*, March 26, 1864.

\(^{179}\) Ibid.
Committee of the Colored Convention of California.”180 The Elevator pledged to “labor for the civil and political enfranchisement of the Colored people – not as a distinct and separate race, but as American citizens.”181 The dedicated skills that Bell set to the production of the Elevator successfully resulted in it being in print until 1900, outlasting Bell’s death in 1889.182 Not content to rest on the Union’s victory, Bell’s vision for his fellow blacks echoed, “We shall labor for the civil and political enfranchisement of the Colored people . . . as American citizens.”183 Bell warned of safeguarding the gains won by and for blacks during the war, and that they could prove fleeting, because they were “restored to [blacks] unwillingly, and not until we had proven our claim to them by our prowess on the bloody field, and our ability to enjoy them.”184 While few in number, the insurgent network-fueled newspapers of California acted as watchmen over hard won gains and insisted that the mission of equality would not fall out of public view.

_The Black Press in the South_

The hopes and expressions of blacks made themselves known in a handful of black newspapers that sprung up in the post-Civil War South. The range of these papers encompassed former Confederate states such as South Carolina, Virginia, and Louisiana, to border slave states such as Tennessee. In the Reconstruction South, newly freed blacks were poised to supplant the old Slave Power and take long-awaited freedom as equal citizens. These newspapers were ready to capitalize on this mood. The majority of these

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181 “Prospectus” in Elevator, April 7, 1865.
183 Gore, _Negro Journalism_, 10.
papers appeared in the post-Civil War era, staffed and directed by convention activists who, surprisingly, proved that southern geography was not a roadblock to their agenda.

One of the earliest efforts produced by blacks in Louisiana, *L’Union—The Union*, a bilingual paper, ran from fall 1862 to summer 1864.185 Replacing it, *The New Orleans Tribune* continued from summer 1864 to winter 1869, also known as *La Tribune de la Nouvelle-Orleans*; it was honored by the Louisiana state Black Convention during its January 1865 gathering. The paper advocated freedom for black workers, respect for black clergy, decency toward black women, and “the right of suffrage, and thereby the right of self-taxation and self-government.”186 The paper was honored by being made the official news vehicle of the state’s Black Convention and glowingly lauded for “contribut[ing] its share of labor in the great struggle for liberty and justice.”187

Another Louisiana effort, the New Orleans-based *Black Republican*, proved the most significant of Louisiana Black Convention-connected newspapers. Established by the Black Republican Newspaper Association in 1865, the newspaper remained in print until 1868.188 The paper supported the Republican Party, and revered Abraham Lincoln, declaring, “Now that the life of the nation is saved, the accursed slaveholder rebellion crushed, and the foul blot of slavery wiped from off the escutcheon of our beloved country . . . the loyal black population of the South are destined to become to some extent the owners of the soil in part, and almost exclusively the producers of the South.”189 An outgrowth of the 1865 State gathering, the *Black Republican* debuted just days after the

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surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox. 190 Black Convention members handled its various functions, Dr. S. W. Rogers as editor, A.J. Gordon and Captain C. C. Antoine as associate editors, and Captain J.B. Noble as publisher. 191 Both Antoine and Noble held leadership positions in the state convention, and both served in the Battle of New Orleans under Andrew Jackson. 192

In other states of the South, Black Convention members proved equally productive in promoting a post-war agenda. The South Carolina Leader, active from 1865 to 1868, appeared, with the Charleston Journal, active in 1866, representing the first efforts of black journalism in that state. 193 Black Convention member, the Rev. Benjamin Franklin Randolph, 194 was associated with both the Charleston Journal and The Charleston Advocate, serving as an editor for the two. 195 The multi-racial Advocate listed Randolph as its “colored associated editor.” 196 Ku Klux Klan members assassinated Randolph in October 1868, due to his efforts as a South Carolina state senator. 197 Randolph’s death represented the dangers that all blacks faced in an angry Reconstruction South, but not even the threat of violence put an end to the continued efforts to secure liberty for the nation’s blacks.

190 Bryan, Negro Journalism, 28.
191 Ibid.
192 Pride and Wilson, A History of the Black Press, 75.
196 Pride, “A Register and History of Negro Newspapers,” 145.
Tennessee also represented southern states with Black Convention newspaper connections. *The Colored Tennessean* put the nation on post-war notice: “Deal with us justly. . . All we want is the right of men. . . Give us that and we shall not molest you.”\(^{198}\) This short-lived Nashville-based paper operated from spring 1865 to summer 1867.\(^{199}\) William B. Scott Sr. and Jr. co-founded, edited and published the paper, which was the first black newspaper in the state.\(^{200}\) Ironically, *The Colored Tennessean* served as the Davidson County seat newspaper, with a majority of white subscribers.\(^{201}\) The elder Scott provided insight into this oddity. Invited to speak at the South Carolina convention gathering in 1865, Scott revealed that an ex-Confederate, Mississippi’s former governor and Senator, Henry S. Foote, and the anti-secessionist provisional Governor of Tennessee William Gannaway Brownlow, both had helped in the organization and promotion of the paper.\(^{202}\)

The Virginia-based *True Southerner* provides another example of whites and blacks in post-war journalism. The paper operated in the Hampton and Norfolk regions from spring 1865 into 1866. The *True Southerner* was not a *per se* Black Convention vehicle. Col. D. B. White, a white veteran of the 88th Regiment New York Volunteers, owned the paper.\(^{203}\) Col. Joseph T. Wilson, a Massachusetts-born black veteran of the Louisiana Native Guard Volunteers, edited the paper.\(^{204}\) This particular newspaper therefore represented an example of post-war Carpetbagger Journalism, but it deserves

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\(^{198}\) Dann, *The Black Press*, 143.


\(^{200}\) Pride, “A Register and History of Negro Newspapers in the United States,” 148.

\(^{201}\) Ibid., 149.


\(^{204}\) Ibid., 159.
notice nonetheless. Possessing over six thousand subscribers, the *True Southerner* reached a wide-ranging readership, which undoubtedly contributed to its demise in 1866 when an angry mob targeted the paper’s offices for destruction. Col. Wilson would lose another paper, the *Right Way*, in 1885, after offending white officials in Norfolk. It is unknown if Wilson ever participated in the Black Convention, but his history does indicate that he might have readily participated. It is fitting to place him within the insurgent model, along with many others, known and unknown.

In conclusion, by contesting the racist, stereotypic discourses of their era, the Black Press helped black activists declare their right to agency and engagement on their own behalves. This chapter shows that the Black Press wielded and disseminated the black insurgent network impulse for grassroots activism spread through many regions as shown in this chapter. In the face of a dominant racist culture, the Black Press agitated for and demanded the basic rights accorded to whites in the United States Constitution, and used its pages to harness and direct the energies of its readers. The rhetoric appearing in black newspapers frightened white America, particularly causing concern to proponents of slavery. In an era before the advent of television, radio, or social media, the Black Press, along with the Black Church, helped comprise the rhetorical social lifeblood of the insurgency.

Publishers connected with other publishers, exchanging news and strategies on how to better disseminate information to the nation and beyond. Black Journalism showed that activists of the insurgent networks could construct and deliver their arguments against the racism of the American system to the larger public. These

205 Ibid., 158.
206 Ibid.
publications printed and reprinted editorials and details key to their goals. In the pages of their newspapers, black activists articulated a defense and attack upon the ideological racism their people faced.\textsuperscript{207} Black activists thus created and influenced debates on racial inequality in America.\textsuperscript{208} This allowed these newspapers to force these debates upon a threatened white majority. In their debates, black activists forced narratives questioning the meaning of Christianity in regards to slavery. Publicly these activists questioned if Christianity was liberated, barbaric, or inhumane. This helped created an arena, whether some whites liked it or not, in which whites found themselves drawn into having to discuss and think about their justifications for maintaining a system of prejudice.

The majority of the black newspapers “never stooped to the vile attacks on character and slander that were characteristics of many of the partisan or status quo, white-owned newspapers of the time.”\textsuperscript{209} Yet participation in the Black Convention had heavily influenced the ideas that the various editors and publishers put forth in their newspapers. The hope was evident that racial acceptance would come in part due to these newspapers giving “sanction and espous[ing] the democratic teachings and ideals of the Revolution that were America’s foundation.”\textsuperscript{210} However, activists knew that it required more than words on the printed page to change the minds of the Slave Power and its supporters. Defiant resistance and purposeful action toward unsettling the American system of racism, demanded constant and methodical opposition.

\textsuperscript{207} Bay, \textit{The White Image in the Black Mind}, 15.
\textsuperscript{209} Frankie Hutton, \textit{The Early Black Press in America, 1827 to 1860} (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1993), xiii.
\textsuperscript{210} Ibid.
A monolithic Black Press never existed, due in part to its ephemeral nature and uneven ability to maintain financial support.\(^{211}\) Although struggling enterprises, the Black Press won the support of black activists, male and female, from all strata of society, in words, cash, and spirit, making it a fact of representation and “the active presence of people usually omitted from historical [narration].”\(^{212}\) White allies also supported the efforts of black publishers, providing funding, advice, and logistical encouragement. In spite of finances, the Black Press in the antebellum era proved that it served a vital function that seeded hotbeds of antislavery fervor, helping to put a stubborn nation on track toward civil war.

There existed at least thirty-four known newspapers possessing strong Black Convention ties operating inside the United States and Canada. Additional Convention-connected vehicles operated in southern territory as the Union progressed successfully in the Civil War. Undoubtedly, there are additional examples of black newspaper activity in the South in the post-war Reconstruction era. Identifying and reviewing such for Black Convention connections will shed further light and context on the post-war agenda and the rich enduring legacy of black insurgency via print media.\(^{213}\)

\(^{211}\) Ernest, *Liberation Historiography*, x.

\(^{212}\) Ibid., 293.

CHAPTER III
OLD TESTAMENT SOLDIERS:
BLACK CHURCH FOUNDATIONS, POLITICAL LIBERATION

The Negro church of today is the social centre of Negro life in the United States, and the most characteristic expression of African character . . . the Church often stands as a real conserver of morals, a strengthener of family life, and the final authority on what is Good and Right.¹ – W.E.B. DuBois, 1903

This chapter will show that a black expression of Christianity served the needs of nationalist and integrationist black activists alike, while feeding the insurgent energy that threatened the antebellum United States. This section reveals how the chief insurgent network constructed counter narratives to the American system of racism through the tactic of creating an expression of Christianity that could contest and dismantle discrimination and enslavement. The Black Convention’s specific brand of insurgent political radicalism derived religious rhetoric from the church to inspire its insurgent networks, contest hegemonic white Christianity, and challenge the institution of slavery. Black activists argued that when it concerned “relationships with the white community [the black church] has been for the most part a defensive and accommodating institution.”² Such activists sought to change that dynamic in part by using the organizations that they formed to confront the majority socio-economic order of White Supremacy. However, additional tactics would be required to address the mental

conditioning that blacks labored under. W.E.B. DuBois suggested that contemporary Black people originated through diasporic elements outside of the United States. DuBois claimed that these individuals developed in part by adapting African tribal memory, and pragmatic demands of survival. As the displaced African became the African American, or the Black individual, they realized that the dominant white Christianity could provide many opportunities for social agitation. Within this paradigm, diasporic Africans and their American descendants embarked on resistance strategies utilizing Christianity as a potent weapon.

DuBois noted that northern antebellum blacks remained mindful of slavery in a post-cotton gin world, and desired freedom for their enslaved brethren, but also “insisted that they themselves were freemen, and sought assimilation and amalgamation with the nation on the same terms with other men.”¹ DuBois was speaking to an industrialized post-slavery twentieth-century society that now found itself in the denigrating system of Jim Crow laws, and yet he articulated the pathways toward equality that black activists desired. To achieve their goal, blacks used the model of conventions, nursing a growing natural insurgent impulse to resist slavery and oppression. Historian James Cone argued that this changeability was subject to the declining or falling fortunes centered on “black expectations of equality in the United States.”² Nationalist impulses took the forefront in periods where the black insurgent network suffered setbacks, while integrationist impulses were at the forefront in periods when equality and realized citizenship appeared.

readily obtainable.\(^3\) The liquidity of Christianity to the insurgent network enhanced it as a constant undercurrent for critique.

Infused with the writings, orations, and gatherings of the period’s black activists, the function of an African American Jeremiad served as a potent rhetorical threat to southern-fueled Slave Power proponents of slavery. Here, the idea of the African American Jeremiad aids the reader in understanding the framework that black activists used in their rhetorical attacks against White Christianity. Derived from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, the African American Jeremiad mixed biblical and political messages together to: “(1) expose traditional white Christian convictions, (2) to emphasize the inhumaness of slavery and its effect on both the oppressed and the oppressors, and (3) to develop a socio-political consciousness among blacks that would be used to forge a unified black self.”\(^4\) Puritans brought the jeremiad concept to the American continent. Puritan Clergy used ‘self-reproach and exhortation’ to rebuke their society “for their sins and social misconduct”.\(^5\) This laid the foundations for eventual antislavery activists to harness the jeremiad model to threaten white Christian society with divine punishment if it did not end slavery and discrimination.\(^6\) By heeding jeremiad warnings, the United States could avoid the disaster that awaited from slavery by simply returning to the promises of Christianity and obedience to the deity.\(^7\)

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\(^3\) Ibid.


\(^6\) Ibid., 10-11.

\(^7\) Ibid., 12.
In the latter 1600s, only one-fifth of the slaves in New England were Christian. Slaveholders generally interpreted Christianity as ordained and sanctioned by the Christian deity. By the late eighteenth century “Protestant Christianity was presented to slaves as a defense of the status quo.”

However, before that, the Dutch in America had to wrestle with the questions of free status conferred upon converted slaves and moved to keep them enslaved despite conversion to Christianity.

Historian George M. Fredrickson noted that the mores of the Dutch period traditionally allowed for keeping slaves who had converted to Christianity in bondage; however, by the early modern era, many questioned the practice of “enslaving fellow Christians and the effect of conversion on the worldly status of heathen slaves [became] a debatable issue.” For the Dutch in America, the problem was the 1618 Synod of Dort ruling that appeared to imply that slaves who converted to Christianity were empowered with certain rights, such as the expectation of no further exchanges of ownership and “to enjoy the equal right of liberty with the other Christians.”

Frederickson argued that for the American Dutch this ruling appeared to concede that Christianized slaves were eligible for immediate emancipation. The American Dutch ignored the issue and moved to enforce a new custom of keeping such converted slaves firmly in bondage. The Puritans and Calvinists that built New England, being

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11 Ibid., 73.
12 Ibid.
mindful of the Dutch issues, did not compel the liberation of converted black Christians. Instead, New Englanders decided that black Christian slaves maintained the freedom to perform the duties associated with being Christians while remaining in bondage. In 1667, the Virginia colony passed legislation that Christian baptism did not equal freedom for the converting slave. In 1727, English clergy prefaced missionary efforts to colonial slaves with the caveat that “becoming converted and baptized would not alter slave status . . . souls would be free in Christ, but chains on bodies were unchanged.”

The successes of the First Great Awakening throughout colonial eighteenth century New England territories exposed blacks in the North to evangelical mutations of Christian fervor and led to mass conversions. Blacks appreciated the message of the Awakening leaders, not only because of the intimate nature between deity and worshipper, but also because it “echoed aspects of African religions.” African custom and tradition shaped the resultant character of the Christianity that these individuals embraced.

According to historians James and Lois Horton, the success of the Baptist and Methodist denominations among blacks was possible due to the democratic energy flowing from the nineteenth century Second Great Awakening. The less autocratic, personalized stripped-down structure of these two denominations attracted huge numbers

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13 Ibid., also see Merton L. Dillon. Slavery Attacked: Southern Slaves and Their Allies, 1619-1865 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1900), 4-6.
of blacks welcoming the less rigid demands and elitist attitudes found in these mainline denominations. The Hortons argued that the Baptist and Methodist sects were successful in growing their movements among blacks due to commitments “to racial equality and antislavery principles in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.”

Additionally, elements within both denominations easily connected with the various African worship mores that had remained among blacks, “. . . the shouting, physical gyrations, holy laughter, the dancing, and the singing that was common at camp meetings would have been familiar to the West African ancestors of the blacks who took part in this religious ritual.” This view also is supported by historian Gayraud S. Wilmore, who noted that “the first slaves to become Christian . . . held on to certain features of the religions that they or their foreparents had practiced in Africa.” These remembrances of folk African religion fared best in Catholic settings, where the “use of sacramentals (blessed objects), such as statues, pictures candles, incense, holy water . . . [and] Catholic rituals was more akin to the spirit of African piety than the sparseness of Puritan America, which held such objects to be idolatrous.”

All of these elements contributed to the formulation of a Christian, yet different Protestant Christianity among blacks, which connected them through cultural remnants of shared African memory. The mainstream Protestant system held contempt for such memories, and demanded an acceptance of obedience and separateness from blacks in terms of religion. Attempted suppression of African memory occurred through

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18 Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 133.
19 Ibid.
transatlantic transmissions and religious melding, thanks to English and Scottish evangelicals that spread the Awakenings throughout the nation touching blacks and whites.\textsuperscript{22}

Wilmore further bolsters the reality for a Black Church, noting that it had originated from over four hundred years of religious activities among single race interactions, which resulted in the formations of “certain characteristics of faith and life, belief and behavior, worship and work.”\textsuperscript{23} Preeminent among these characteristics, argued Wilmore, was the obsession of freedom from slavery.\textsuperscript{24} This facet contributed to slave insurrections, such as Gabriel Prosser’s planned rebellion in 1800 in Virginia. Prosser’s recruitment efforts during church services occurred in part because “the Bible was quoted freely by negroes to encourage the fight for liberty.”\textsuperscript{25}

By successfully opening the door to blacks, regardless of social station, and demystifying Christianity, Methodists and Baptists made it understandable. The introduction of black preachers coaxed blacks to flood into Christian membership in the two denominations.\textsuperscript{26} The result was a Black Christianity that according to historian Nathan O. Hatch, developed out of post-Revolutionary War efforts to Christianize blacks by “insurgent religious movements in the early republic and their ability to wed the gospel to popular culture.”\textsuperscript{27} What was to become the Black Church, although composed of differing sects, allowed blacks to retain African memory, incorporate democratic ideas, and speak power to themselves, and to their perceived allies and oppressors. Historian

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{23} Wilmore, \textit{Pragmatic Spirituality}, 90.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 93.
\textsuperscript{25} Newbell, \textit{The Negro Church in the United States}, 583.
\textsuperscript{26} Natan O. Hatch, \textit{The Democratization of American Christianity} (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), Ibid., 102-105.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 102.
Eugene Genovese suggested that the collective nature of Christianity, combined with the tribal traits remembered from Africa, provided a fresh field for planting.28 This synergy contributed to a cultural framework for blacks that would enable the Black Convention Movement to gain footing as a national entity among blacks in 1830.

The Formative 1830s

The creation of black congregations aided the eventual formation of the Black Convention Movement. Black insurgents constructed new ways to express Christianity that tactically co-opted it as a counter to pro-Slave Power arguments for discrimination and enslavement. The successes in attracting blacks to the Methodist, Baptist, and to a minor extent, the Presbyterian denominations, allowed for the inception of hierarchal structures that allowed activists with organizational ability to thrive. These independent black congregations also allowed budding insurgent activists to work from an established cover in the North and the South. Black congregations grew out of plantation congregations located in Virginia Colony in the mid-to-late 1700s, and included an outcropping of independent black congregations with their own black preachers or exhorters leading them.29 In the North, independent black congregations formed out of disgruntled groups of congregants who objected to segregated worship. Baltimore, New York City, and Philadelphia serve as examples of blacks disaffiliated with their host institutions and forming their own houses of worship. In Baltimore, many blacks left

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white churches over segregated seating and formed the Colored Methodist Society, which evolved into independent black Methodist churches in the 1780s, such as the Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In New York City, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church formed in 1796 under Bishop James Varick’s direction, followed by other black congregations such as Rev. Thomas Paul’s Abyssinian Baptist Church in 1801, and Rev. Peter Williams’s St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in 1800, among others. Convention figurehead, the Rev. Samuel E. Cornish, led the influential New York City-based Negro Presbyterian Church that formed in 1821.

The foundation for black congregations stretched back to the later 1700s. Bishop Richard Allen, a crucial founding figure of the Black Convention Movement helps illustrates this development. Allen purchased his freedom in 1777 and became active in the Methodist movement as a preacher. Allen was a member of the predominantly white St. George Methodist Church in Philadelphia, where he sometimes preached. Allen and fellow black preacher Absalom Jones eventually withdrew their membership over the matter of segregated pews, and resistance from white leaders over the formation of a church for blacks. Together, the two men helped form the non-ecclesiastic Free African Society. From that point forward, Allen formed the Bethel AME Church in 1787, and Jones allied with the Church of England and formed the St. Thomas African Protestant Episcopal Church.

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30 Ibid., 35.
34 Ibid., 188-189.
These events are important for one key reason; they allowed Allen and Jones to have bases in place from which to bring together blacks of differing denominations when the American Colonization Society (ACS) threatened to destroy free black communities in the North. Historian Benjamin Quarles argued that the ACS “originated abolitionism by arousing the free blacks and the opponents of slavery.”\(^{35}\) According to Quarles, antislavery groups spanned back to the revolutionary era when the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, the relief of Free Negroes unlawfully Held in Bondage, and for Improving the Condition of the African Race, formed in 1775. Concordantly, by the mid-1780s similar antislavery groups existed along the East Coast in the other former colonies, with all of them affiliating by 1794.\(^{36}\) This infrastructure allowed Allen to organize national opposition from within black communities to the ACS in 1817.

The ACS, which organized in December of 1816, included figures who possessed undeniable financial and political connections, such as Bushrod Washington (the nephew of President George Washington), Henry Clay, future president Andrew Jackson, Francis Scott Key, and Daniel Webster. Supported by newspapers nationwide, the ACS easily promoted the relocation of blacks back to Africa, as a key facet of modernizing the nation while simultaneously aiding supposedly backward blacks.\(^{37}\)

Allen and Jones boasted associations with many of the whites involved in the ACS, and on the surface, the group “seemed sincere in their concerns for the welfare of

\(^{36}\) Ibid., 9.
blacks and they couched those concerns in religious rather than political terms.”38

Regardless, Allen quickly organized a January 1817 protest gathering at Bethel Church with regional black leaders in attendance. The meeting denounced the concept of colonizing and declared fidelity to the slaves in the South. The protest followed up with an August gathering chaired by James Forten, Sr., whom Allen and Jones had worked with during the War of 1812 in organizing black civil defense projects.39

Through its activities, the ACS unintentionally inspired black activists to organize demonstrations in New York, Massachusetts, Maryland, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.40 From its formation, until the early 1830s, the ACS enjoyed its greatest support from the Slave Power and its allies, but “the growth of organized black protest kept pace with that of the Society, until it finally assumed a semi-permanent form” in the guise of the Black Convention Movement.41

The introduction of Christianity, the development of the Black Church, and antislavery sentiment combined to unleash the energy of an organized black insurgency dedicated to abolition and thus political equality. In Philadelphia, the American Society of Free Persons of Colour (ASFPC), formed as the first precursor Black Convention group in September 1830. In its constitution, it stated in regards to the plight of the nation’s blacks, “tell it not to barbarians, lest they refuse to be civilized, and eject our

38 Ibid., 128.
Christian missions from among them.” 42 The ASFPC illustrated the certainty that
convention members would come to hold regarding the hypocrisy of a nation that held up
Christianity as the ideal faith while backing discrimination.

For black activists involved in creating coalitions for change, the existing
conditions of racism were particularly dangerous for free blacks in the North. David
Walker’s frightening appeal appeared in September of 1829, and cried “. . . prepare the
way of the Lord – Resistance to Tyranny.” 43 Walker’s words contributed to the deadly
race riots that saw scared and angry whites unleashing violence upon blacks in their
communities. Cincinnati, Ohio, was the center of violence against blacks in August of
that year. In Ohio alone, an estimated ten thousand blacks fled from its borders as
violence continued and new legislation regulating the presence of blacks and mulattos
resulted. Free blacks left Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia to avoid violence, death,
and the risk of reinslavement. 44 Walker called upon blacks to confront the race
component of their oppression, and to combine militant action and Christianity to fight
“against the scourge of slavery and racial discrimination because submission to such evils
was tantamount to a sin against God.” 45 From Walker’s defiant stance, the Black
Convention used a rhetorical model to help deploy its agenda of liberation. In this
atmosphere, Bishop Allen called for and presided over the ASFPC meeting in 1830,
which met primarily to call for the establishment of a black settlement in Canada as a
response to the conditions facing blacks in the United States. Critics may charge that

42 “Constitution of the American Society of Free Persons of Colour,” in Howard Holman Bell, ed. Minutes
of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865 (New York: Arno Press and the New
43 Gross, Clarion Call, 9.
44 Ibid., 10.
45 Eddie S. Glaude, “Of the Black Church and the Making of a Black Public,” in African American
Religious Thought, 360.
running away from violence in the United States to perceived safety elsewhere hardly counts as resistance, yet those who left for safer ground remained participants in the black insurgency by surviving and retaining the ability to work for black liberation even if the locale was from Canada, Haiti, or the West Indies.

Not content to be a president of this convention, Bishop Allen served on committees and acted as a point man keeping focus on the issues of colonization and slavery.\textsuperscript{46} The ASFPC gathering saw sparse attendance from New York activists and even the Philadelphians that attended had mixed feelings about Allen and his dominance over the group.\textsuperscript{47} Arguably, Allen is rightfully the one figure “most responsible for transferring religion’s interest in moral reform from the church and sharing it with the world of organized political activity.”\textsuperscript{48} The numbers of black activists, who were also clergy and future newspaper publishers, would set the tone of future gatherings. Along with Allen, Cornish, J. W. C. Pennington, Hezekiah Grace, Phillip A. Bell, and other delegates struggled to create a mode of resistance and activism for the many threats facing the nation’s black population. Their goal centered on formally establishing an organized model for confronting the Christian Philanthropy of the ACS and its African colonizing scheme to deplete the United States of its free black population.\textsuperscript{49} Allen died in March of 1831 at the age of 70, but his influence upon future gatherings remained.

Elements were now in place for the collective harnessing of black interpretations of Christianity as a natural fuel source for the growing black insurgency. The subsequent

\textsuperscript{47} Winch, \textit{Philadelphia’s Black Elite}, 93.
\textsuperscript{48} George, \textit{Segregated Sabbaths}, 159.
\textsuperscript{49} Gross, \textit{Clarion Call}, 12.
ASFPC had the majority of its elected offices filled with Philadelphians, which would provide for their early dominance.50 At the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour, the first official national gathering of the Black Convention held in Philadelphia during June of 1831, members argued that “Education, Temperance, and Economy, are best calculated to promote the elevation of mankind [for conducting] duties enjoined on him by his Creator.”51 Convention attendees targeted the suffering of the nation’s blacks as enabled by Christian churches and denominations that complied with rampant racial discrimination. To this discrimination, they demanded, “Christians of every denomination firmly resist it.”52

Influential white allies of the Black Convention were present at this meeting. Among their number, businessman Arthur Tappan and Liberator publisher William Lloyd Garrison represented New York and New England interests, respectively. Together these allies joined blacks in opposing the ACS, which they all judged as “pursuing the direct road to perpetuate slavery, with all its unchristian like concomitants.”53 The insurgent community viewed Christianity as a sign of civilization. However, it also considered the legal nature of the harsh discrimination throughout the Christian nation as untenable. If being Christian meant acceptance of slavery, then the unchristian rightfully “looks noble, and prides himself because he bears not the name of a Christian.”54

50 Winch, Philadelphia’s Black Elite, 94.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 15.
54 Ibid., 12.
Using Christianity as a rhetorical device for civilized behavior worked for both black and white reformers alike, who harnessed the idea throughout the antebellum United States into the Civil War. Those friendly to the Slave Power melded the issue of Christianization with colonization, and offered it as a positive force to the troubles of both blacks and whites. They added that deported black Christians taking the religion to areas where it may not have existed were serving a higher calling. While the romanticism of the idea appealed to some blacks, the black insurgent networks largely rejected the idea. Participants of the Convention were called upon to set aside July 4, not as a day of independence, but as a “day of humiliation, fasting and prayer – and to beseech Almighty God to interpose . . . that the shackles of slavery may be broken, and our sacred rights obtained.” A steady melding of black styled Christianity and the goal of race liberation continued to inform the thinking and rhetoric of the Black Convention.

Further arguments for a freedom mandated by the Christian deity came at the Second Annual Convention for the improvement of the Free People of Color, held during June 1832 in Philadelphia. Convention members railed against ACS secretary, the Rev. R. R. Gurly, and called into question the sincerity of his claim that the advancement of blacks was innate “which no humanity, no legislation and no religion can control.” This gathering insisted that a moral strength would bring about final redemption from slavery, and right the litany of illegalities visited upon the nation’s blacks.

56 Ibid.
57 “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour,” in Bell, 10.
59 Ibid., 34.
swipes against colonizing agents came at the Philadelphia June 1833 Third Annual Convention for the improvement of the Free People of Color, where members pointed out that those colonizing efforts “presumed the greatest stretch of human reason [had] been employed to elucidate its repugnance to the precepts of the Gospel.” At this gathering, the theme of the address indicated a shifting toward a moral uplift stance. The Convention proposed to the nation’s blacks that they cooperate in the work conducted by white allies in improving areas of morality, religion, education; including practicing economical behavior and providing education for their children.

This uplifting tone, slightly altered, combined with heated religious furor as the Fourth Annual Convention for the improvement of the Free People of Colour began in June 1834 in New York City. The year represented a key moment in time for abolition forces because “between 1831 and 1833, abolitionism had begun to make some gains.” Now, with an already present infrastructure of antislavery advocates, there grew such a focused opposition to the ACS, that by late 1833 the number of antislavery organizations “had expanded from four local societies in two states to forty-seven in ten states.” Black insurgents gained successes in the tactics they constructed, harnessing Christianity as a strong vehicle against arguments for discrimination and enslavement.

Infused with the radical-leaning sentiments of New York-based black activists, the 1834 Convention gathering particularly spoke clear and true to its goals of black liberation. However, in doing so the gathering presented a heated Christian rhetoric that

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61 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
frightened many and ignited the moderate versus radical spilt from the outset in an address delivered by *Freedom Journal* founder Rev. Samuel E. Cornish. Cornish roundly condemned the ACS as spirits of darkness dressed in angelic garb that “preaching continually . . . distilled into the minds of the community a desire to see [free blacks] removed.”64 In colorful biblical language, Cornish characterized the colonizing entity as the great Dagon, a demon that managed to convince the nation that free blacks would be more productive and fruitful among the African heathens.65 Speaking for the Convention, Cornish denounced American slavery as a Satanic Monster that all would soon see “chained and cast down into blackness and darkness forever.”66 Cornish warned of a future in which slavery, cast out into a dark pit, would herald divine judgment and retribution; foreshadowing the eventual civil conflict that would result in slavery’s end.67

This gathering further declared, “that Slavery is contrary to the precepts of Christianity, dangerous to the liberties of the country, and ought immediately to be abolished.”68 Convention members accepted that their cause was that of revolution, because only that possessed a chance for the overturning of discrimination. Not only would their weapons be political, civil, and cultural, but also grounded in a spiritual base “where struggle is not for blood, but for right.”69 In contrast to the somewhat measured tones that had emanated from the dominance of their Philadelphia peers, the New York clique made clear that in the struggle to eradicate slavery from the nation, bloodshed was

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 6.
67 Ibid., 7.
68 Ibid., 24.
69 Ibid., 25.
a possibility, and reliance on deity a certainty. Led by Cornish, Charles B. Ray, and Theodore Wright, ministers all, the New York clique were then “more inclined toward the limited nonviolence of Lewis Tappan, more willing to work through abolitionist political parties, and . . . they were more willing to work through separatist all-Negro organizations.”

This New York gathering intoned the reality of their choice to act as true patriots against oppression and injustice and proclaimed “our very sighs and groans, like the blood of martyrs, will prove to have been the seed of the church; for they will freight the air with their voluminous ejaculations, will be borne upwards by the power of virtue to the great Ruler of Israel, for deliverance from this yoke of merciless bondage.”

The developing Black Convention caused concern among whites worried about organized blacks. In New York, the Black Convention defined itself in language reckoning it as Old Testament Soldiers possessing a sacred determination to “remain on our soil, and see the salvation of God and the true principles of freedom.”

In the wake of the 1834 gathering, a number of race riots broke out in July and lasted through October in various parts of the nation. The majority of these riots were due to white fears regarding race mixing, black self-improvement, and anti-abolitionism. Abolitionists in general tended to view the perpetrators of such violence as comprising lower-class whites purposely looking for excuses to lash out. They cast these white laborers and mechanics

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72 Ibid., 31.


74 Ibid., 298.
as people who did not understand the issues at hand. As for the white elites of the North, who had incited and unleashed the emotionally charged masses upon blacks, activists labeled this as a move designed to preserve the white status quo and aid Slave Power financial interests.75

The impassioned rhetoric of the New York radicals and the spate of race riots that continued into 1835 did not escape the notice of the moderate Philadelphia leadership. This leadership called for the passing of a Moral Reform plan to guide the activities of the Convention. Heated religious verbiage gained attention amid the convention’s internal geographic divisions, but Philadelphia leaders and their white allies wanted an altered, less inflamed direction. June 1835’s Fifth Annual Convention for the improvement of the Free People of Colour took place in Philadelphia under moderate stewardship with toned-down rhetoric. Leadership passed a motion to form what would become the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS).76 Rather than revolution, AMRS rhetoric encouraged white Christian entities “in favour of Immediate Emancipation . . . to exert themselves equally to promote the cause of Moral Reform.”77 In addition to moral reform, this plank encouraged white Christians to root out race discrimination in their respective churches.78 A middle ground of self-regulation, Christian forbearance and cooperation with Christian philanthropists rather than bluster, would provide a “successful refutation of the pro-slavery arguments advanced.”79

77 Ibid., 12.
78 Ibid., 14.
79 Ibid., 19.
It appeared that moderates had usurped the New York radical threat, and that the AMRS, with its gentler use of Christianity, had become the national face of black abolition. However, the moderates had only temporarily halted the radical impulse of black insurgents. The retreat from the fiery inclinations of 1834 in New York had technically smothered the growing radical impulse within the convention, but not without consequence. The accommodationist AMRS found itself shunned by the New York-based clique. By the end of the decade, it became nothing more than a regional group of Garrisonian clients feebly encouraging “our [white Christian] brethren from using the products of slave labour, both as a moral and Christian duty, and as a means by which the slave system may be successfully abrogated.”

Cornish, the face of the New York radicals, declared that the AMRS was hardly a successor to the Black Convention proper; instead, the group was “mild, vague, indefinite, confused.”

Cornish’s condemnation angered Garrison, but riots connected to declining economic conditions in Philadelphia and in New York City during 1837 proved him correct. The AMRS leadership flayed about urging blacks to maintain a Christian character in response to the nationwide violence of white mobs seeking to release racial tensions by blaming abolitionism for the economic downturn.

The AMRS’s counter-insurgent campaign against the radicals revealed its innate weakness when black Pennsylvanians saw their voting rights stripped away in 1838 as a response to the ongoing financial panic that hit the nation and the state in 1837. A

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81 Gross, Clarion Call, 34.
82 Ibid., 35, 38.
83 Ibid., 38.
Democratic-Whig alliance voted seventy-seven to forty-five to approve Pennsylvania’s new constitution, which eliminated black suffrage.\textsuperscript{84} Many white political leaders viewed blacks as inferior beings that “no amount of moral and mental uplift could remove from their state of worthlessness.”\textsuperscript{85} Essentially, the blacks of Pennsylvania could expect no aid from the majority of either the white Pennsylvanians or the federal government until after the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{86}

In repositioning their Christian dialogue toward a New Testament setting rather than an Old Testament sensibility, the Garrisonian-influenced AMRS had aggravated alliances with fellow black activists, soon becoming a lesson in hindsight of little national consequence by 1840.\textsuperscript{87} Facing increased racial violence and oppression, audiences now paid more attention to black leaders who preached that blacks should be wary of responding to their enemies with meditations of “integra[tion], peace and love.”\textsuperscript{88} Once the national leader, now the AMRS was “seen as being out of step with the rest of the northern black community.”\textsuperscript{89} The Black Convention would soon retake the reins of public influence, and build a larger and stronger insurgent base.

\textit{The Vital 1840s}

The national and state level insurgents of the 1840s remained focused on rebuilding networks and advocating for racial equality having overcome the shock of AMRS treachery. The Black Convention proper returned to vitality with the

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Gross, \textit{Clarion Call}, 41.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 40.
\textsuperscript{89} Winch, \textit{Philadelphia’s Black Elite}, 95.
implementation of smaller state level conventions in New York and Ohio in the 1840s. These gatherings would fuel the ascendency of Frederick Douglass and Henry Highland Garnet as their most public and de facto leaders throughout the decade.\textsuperscript{90} Organized black abolitionists employed strategies designed to win allies, appeal to the morality of unaligned whites, and provoke a level of concern in the minds of the nation regarding racial inequality. By using Christianity for tactical advantage against institutions of racism and enslavement, the insurgent network, now unfettered by so-called moral suasion, laid foundations for radical action.

The Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York, in Albany during August 1840, proved one of the most influential of state convention meetings, where Christianity and liberation went hand-in-hand. Attendees believed that Christianity could “constitute a bond connecting and binding together the heart of universal humanity.”\textsuperscript{91} Convention members held in part that through this bond, they could obtain the identifiable instrument of citizenship; the vote. With blacks generally denied communion and basic ecclesiastical privileges in white churches, the gathering railed against discrimination in the “peaceful enjoyment of those rights with which the death of a common Saviour invested in us.”\textsuperscript{92}

Throughout New York, blacks maintained activity in some forty plus churches, containing over 15,000 members in Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist and other

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 19.
denominations. These congregations maintained salaried ministers responsible for promoting interaction throughout the black religious community. Convention members justified their anger regarding the treatment they received from their white Christian counterparts exclaiming, “Their God is our God.”

Convention members pointed fingers at their white Christian counterparts, and argued against their civic practices of obeying “modes, and forms, and operations . . . of the body politic.” This, they charged, compromised the true religious duty of whites. By practicing discrimination in their interpretations of Christianity, whites had “not found their purity of Christian feeling powerful and universal enough to treat man, aside from arbitrary distinctions, without respect to persons.” This contestation of white Christianity harnessed a discourse appealing to orthodox tenets of Christianity. By arguing that blacks concerned themselves with the Gospel of Jesus Christ as much as their discriminating white counterparts did, the Convention attendees staked their claims on “higher ground.”

The Convention record argued the rationality of the struggle against discrimination because “. . . it becomes them [white Christians] to participate, inasmuch as our ecclesiastical disabilities originate in political degradation, and because the clergy of the power-holding body are generally against us.” The members believed that Divine Will stood on their side in a way that their white counterparts could not claim, which assured the eventual triumph of their struggle for equality. The Convention also

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93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 14.
95 Ibid., 20.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid., 21.
98 Ibid., 17.
99 Ibid.
claimed that through prayer and appeals to human reason, discrimination could be
overcome and voting rights could be obtained, because the “principles of Christianity,
and the dictates of living and eternal right . . . [exerts power] over the thoughts, and
words, and actions of men.” On its surface, this thinking might appear to be an echo of
the AMRS. However, progressive religion, combined with advocacy, served as a tool of
social change for those active in the Convention, not only in New York of the 1840s, but
nationwide throughout the mid-1800s, as state gatherings sought to pushback against the
memory AMRS dominance.

The New York Convention of Colored Citizens meeting in Troy during August
1841, made the point that the equality the state body argued for represented no more of a
threat to the harmony of the state than that of other ethnic groups. This gathering insisted
that Jews, “down-trodden in every European nation, in our State enjoy political equality,
and yet maintain their separate social identity.” Here, they were indicating that as a
so-called different racial grouping, if granted the rights they were fighting for, it would
not be an open door to outright integration into the white community. Total assimilation
was not the goal, equality was.

The Pittsburgh Proceedings of the States Convention of the Colored Freemen of
Pennsylvania, in August 1841, revealed the mode surging throughout the activist
community. This energy dovetailed with not only social and economic concerns, but also
meshed religious sensibilities together with black activism. While meeting primarily to
discuss how best to secure voting rights, members argued that the ruling party of

100 Ibid., 20.
University Press, 1979), 29.
Pennsylvania, by denying blacks the franchise based on pigment, offered “insult and mockery to the Almighty Creator of all things and Judge of all men.” The Convention argued that blacks who expressed apathy in securing voting rights, would share in the fate that their white counterparts would face at divine judgment. This gathering suggested that blacks should not pay taxes unless the government of the state extended legal protections implied by the paying of such. The state convention, as it set about constructing arguments for socio-economic justice, remained defiant to white supremacy, yet humbled and inspired “before Jehovah’s awful throne.” Soon the black insurgent networks would shift to a national setting, capitalizing on the failure of the AMRS to capture the hearts and minds of the nation’s blacks.

The National Convention of the Colored Citizens met in Buffalo during August of 1843, soundly rejecting the AMRS tone of moderation and accommodation. This was the first national gathering of the Black Convention since the AMRS usurping at the direction of Philadelphian Garrisonians. Buffalo’s own Samuel H. Davis offered the opening address. From that point on, this meeting reminded those absent Philadelphians why they had chosen to reject the fiery religious rhetoric that characterized black abolition in New York circa 1834.

Davis warned that black activists “. . . must determine, in the strength of God, to do everything that will advance the great and holy cause of freedom, and nothing that will in the least retard its progress.” Here Davis issued a jeremiad warning that a divine

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103 Ibid., 112.
104 “Minutes of the State Convention of Colored Citizens: held at Buffalo, on the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th of August, 1843, for the purpose of considering their moral and political condition as American
judgment awaited the nation as long as it insisted on holding to laws of discrimination
and injustice. Davis insisted that blacks focus on the goal of persuading “by every means
in our power, strive to persuade the white people to act with more confidence in their
own principles of liberty – to make laws, just and equal for all the people.”[105] Citing
Greek and Polish resistance against the Ottoman Empire and Imperial Tsarist rulers
respectively, Davis declared that the very example of the United States’ own
revolutionaries against Great Britain provided divine justification “that heaven will ever
frown on the cause of injustice, and ultimately grant success to those who oppose it.”[106]
Davis argued that the mainstream white Christian churches were of little to no aid in
procuring the cause of abolition and equality. While an arguable overstatement, for many
of the members in attendance, these white churches were entities “made rich by the toil,
and sweat, and blood of slaves.”[107] The Convention, therefore, looked upon such
churches as hell bound and in the service of Slave Power interests and agents of
colonization.

A majority of those in attendance at Troy viewed the pro-slavery church as
beyond repair, and heatedly argued that all black persons who maintained membership
and association with them should withdraw from these congregations.[108] Those opposed
to this line of thought retorted that withdrawing such participation would also close the
door on the ability of blacks to influence those churches toward abolitionist notions.
However, the majority of members remained firm and approved the first four of many

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid., 6.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., 11.
resolutions heard by a majority vote. To paraphrase: 1) True churches opposed slavery, and those that did not were false churches, pro-slavery, and synagogues of Satan; 2) Pro-slavery ministers and churches were clear enemies of Jesus Christ; 3) Any blacks attending such churches were guilty of self-enslavement, turning their backs on their fellow blacks, free and enslaved; and, 4) It was the duty of all blacks to disassociate and withdraw from membership in such places immediately.\(^{109}\)

Nationally renewed, the Convention had claimed a divine sword of truth in the jeremiad tradition, with which to confront and withstand anti-abolition forces. However, a number of radical members wanted to increase the ideological stance of the insurgency. Strong opinions resulted in response to the heated controversy caused by an address offered by Henry Highland Garnet, a minister in his own right that utilized Old Testament terminology from the book of Exodus. To the horror of some in attendance, Garnet thundered that in the cause of abolition and equality, if one claimed to love God, that shedding blood was called for. Garnet likened the nation’s black people to those of Israel, but stressed that oppression awaited them not only within the United States, but also outside in other nations. Therefore, Garnet concluded that it was better to fight for freedom in the nation in which they were born. Garnet’s justification for his position lay in his belief that Christian piety and devotion impelled him and others to take up all means to accomplish the goal of liberation.\(^{110}\) Garnet’s address illustrated the refashioning of Christianity to combat discrimination and enslavement through tactical rhetoric constructed to counter proponents of racism.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 15.

Frederick Douglass, at that time still a close associate of Garrison, worked to block the popular Garnet from becoming the outright leader of the Convention. Douglass seized upon Garnet’s address and urged opposition to it, accusing Garnet of advocating violence and mass rebellion. Garnet reminded those in attendance of the degraded condition that slavery had rendered some blacks into and argued, “It is sinful in the extreme for you to make such voluntary submission . . . Therefore it is your solemn and imperative duty to use every means, moral, intellectual, and physical, that promises success.”

Garnet pleaded that death was better than enslavement and “if you must bleed, let it all come at once – rather die freemen, than live to be the slaves.” Garnet invoked the examples of Denmark Vesey’s failed 1822 resurrection plot in South Carolina and that of Nat Turner’s 1831 defeat in Virginia. The imagery of his words proved too much for some members. Douglass (correctly) argued that Garnet offered an outright call for slave insurrection. Cincinnati’s A. M. Sumner recalled his city’s history of deadly race riots, and feared that, if published; Garnet’s address would inflame fears and anger Cincinnati’s white population, causing a wave of racial violence nationwide. The mixture of religious justification and retribution was too harsh for many attendees, and by a slim margin of votes, the official minutes did not publish Garnet’s address.

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113 Ibid., 170.
114 “Minutes of the State Convention of Colored Citizens: held at Buffalo,” in Bell, 18.
Garnet spoke out in the black press, charging that New England agents, Douglass chief among them, had opposed the acceptance of his speech.\textsuperscript{115} However, supporters of Douglass countered that Garnet knew that others had joined the vote against him, and suggested that he had singled out Douglass in order to stress his ties to the American Anti-Slavery Society and color Douglass, a former slave, as “not the [friend] of the slave.”\textsuperscript{116} Although momentarily suppressed, Garnet’s words reverberated nationally within the black abolitionist community. In spite of the initial opposition, Garnet’s 1843 address still enjoys popularity into the contemporary era, as an important marker of religious-based Black Nationalist sentiment.\textsuperscript{117}

Years later, in October 1847, The National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends met again in Troy, New York. The long declining influence of the Philadelphia moderates was evident as only one delegate from Pennsylvania attended. New York-based black abolitionists came out in force, including Garnet and Douglass. This gathering was the last in which Douglass and other Garrisonian loyalists attempted to promote assimilationist relics of the AMRS. As was done in the 1843 national meeting in Buffalo, the gathering condemned slavery and stated “those sects (falsely called Christian Churches) who tolerate Caste, and practice Slave holding, are nothing more than synagogues of Satan.”\textsuperscript{118} A report concerning abolition criticized those who spoke of resorting to bloodshed to effect the goals of abolition and equality, and instead called for faith that God would have His way in the end. It argued that slavery “will cease to


\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{118} “Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People, and their friends, held in Troy, N.Y., on the 6\textsuperscript{th}, 7\textsuperscript{th}, 8\textsuperscript{th}, and 9\textsuperscript{th} October, 1847,” in Howard Holman Bell. ed. \textit{Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865} (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 16.
exist when it is made unpopular.”119 To combat slavery, the emphasis should shift to the slaveholder and as such, the report tendered the argument that such people “must be made disreputable . . . regarded as a moral leper . . . outlawed from Christian communion . . . [characterized] an enemy of God and man.”120 Absent from this report was language of revolution and physical confrontation, Douglass still under Garrison’s sway and a proponent of moral suasion, sat on the committee that had prepared it.

In the last national gatherings of the 1840s, a shift was evident. State conventions helped refocus and strengthen the moment’s liberation goals, while positioning Christianity as a marker of equality. The 1848 national gathering in Cleveland, Ohio finally marked an end to moderating tones. Convention members chose Douglass, still connected to the Garrison camp although he was soon to step out on his own, as its president. The absence of Garnet and the ascent of Douglass might have represented a potential opportunity for moderate voices to retake the national convention scene, but the unexpected occurred.

The national convention, held in September of 1848, predictably condemned mainstream Christian churches that supported slavery, called for an end to caste discrimination, and rallied for education and skills of means. Along with general calls for blacks and their allies to work toward universal suffrage and equality, the Convention condemned the institution of slavery as “the greatest curse ever inflicted on man . . . the legitimate offspring of the Devil, and we therefore pledge ourselves, individually, to use

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119 Ibid., 32.
120 Ibid.
all justifiable means for its speedy and immediate overthrow.”\textsuperscript{121} This radical statement was surprising due to Douglass’ ties with Garrison, and foreshadowed a coming of age. Therefore, the call for all justifiable means in opposing slavery, juxtaposed with closer ties to white allies, served as a marker for activists nationwide.

At the Harrisburg State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Pennsylvania, in December 1848, attendees invoked liberation struggles by Protestants against Catholics, and noted Quakers, Jews, and others who suffered “persecut[i]on on account of their faith.”\textsuperscript{122} Members criticized swarthy-skinned immigrants among those groups who had adapted to race prejudice against blacks, but made no apology for their own darker skin in the discriminatory system that characterized the United States. The 1848 Harrisburg convention did not hesitate to remind the nation’s white citizens of the moral duty they had to their fellow human beings, “those sects and parties . . . fresh from the fires of persecution.”\textsuperscript{123} Black activists viewed their own claims to political equality as being justified by having been born on American soil, questioning foreigners gaining citizenship based on their complexion.\textsuperscript{124} Convention rhetoric declared, “every human being according to Scripture, who hates his brother without a cause, is totally destitute of the spirit of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{125} This indicated the sophistication of black activists utilizing the power of Christianity in pricking the national consciousness. The state body reminded the white citizenry of Pennsylvania that “as Christians and republicans . . .

\textsuperscript{122} “Minutes of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Pennsylvania, Convened at Harrisburg, December 13\textsuperscript{th} and 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1848,” in Foner and Walker, 	extit{Proceedings of the Black State Convention, 1840-1865, Vol. 1}, 130.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 131.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 132.
apply the same principles and practice to us as your religion and republicanism dictates should belong to others who have not forfeited their rights by crime.”126 Such pleas were sincere, but also carried an undercurrent of potential rebellion. The gathering pointed out that the Protestant Reformation “had its foundations in the religious intolerance of the Catholics.”127 Therefore, it was paramount that anyone who called himself or herself a Christian was honor-bound to “battle with the demon of complexional INTOLERANCE FIRST.”128

State gatherings began making it clear that all Christian denominations – especially Baptists and Methodists – were suspect of supporting slavery, race discrimination, and maliciousness dressed in the face of the Biblical Nicodemus.129 In Columbus, Ohio, the January 1849 State Convention of the Colored Citizens stood as one of the most important Black Convention meetings, presiding over the eventual partial repeal of the state’s Black Laws. This convention meeting reinforced themes of liberation and religion. It also promoted public policy surrounding Ohio’s Black Laws. Declaring a love for Christianity, this state convention vowed to resist “by all the means which the God of Nations has placed in our power, every form of oppression or proscription attempted to be imposed upon us, in consequence of our condition or color.”130 The attendees warned that clergy who supported Slave Power interests and

126 Ibid., 124.
127 Ibid., 130.
128 Ibid., 132.
130 Ibid., 228.
associated injustices were “not unworthy only of the name of minister, but of the honored appellation, MAN.”

_The Fiery 1850s_

For, with the single exception of the Jews, under the whole heavens, there is not to be found a people pursued with a more relentless prejudice and persecution, than are the Free Colored people of the United States._132_ – 1853, Minutes of the State Convention, of the Colored Citizens of Ohio.

The black expression of a radical-based Christianity continued to be foremost among the tactical strategies used in the insurgent struggle for social and political liberation into the 1850s. The 1834 and 1843 national conventions had planted radical seeds, convincing many that righteous religion, grounded in constant political activism, could break the Slave Power influence and bring about abolition and political equality. Douglass began shifting toward a radical stance in contrast to his previous moderate tone. By 1850, Douglass had broken with the Garrisonian plank, and the radical tones that emerged during his stewardship at 1848’s national gathering came full circle. The Black Convention had matured on national, state, and municipal levels, with its leaders utilizing political coercion and religious rhetoric alike.

In the view of Ohio’s black abolitionists, the failure of Slave Power influence was looming, and they “hail[ed] the sign of the times, as clearly indicating the downfall of that monstrosity, and sum of all villainies, American Slavery.” _133_ In Ohio, at the January 1850 State Convention of the Colored Citizens, black activists targeted the Black

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131 Ibid., 230.
Methodist Conference (BMC) for criticism. The state convention argued that BMC’s newspaper, the Christian Herald, with its policy banning any discussion of slavery in its pages, signaled that the organization had “passed silently over the subject of American Slavery, and has by that means given sanction to an institution that tramples on the necks and liberties of three millions of human beings.” The state convention was not about to let up in pressuring religious bodies, especially ones that served blacks directly, that were suspected of providing social and political cover for slavery. Nationwide the Black Convention radiated confidence, most likely a side effect of the success of the partial repeal of Ohio’s Black Laws in 1849, discussed later in this study.

Following Ohio’s state convention that year, an August meeting at the Cazenovia (NY) Fugitive Slave Law Convention, issued warnings of slave insurrection and divine retribution, foreshadowing the passage of the Compromise of 1850. Douglass served as the president of this gathering. At this meeting, attended by white ally and Douglass confidant Gerrit Smith, members declared that “the callousness of American religion and American democracy has become glaring . . . when the insurrection of the Southern slaves shall take place . . . the great majority of the colored men of the North . . . will be found by [their] side.” Slaveholders and slave-catchers were put on notice that no hesitation to physical violence and bloodshed would be tendered: “The State motto of Virginia: “Death to Tyrants”; is as well the Black man’s, as the white man’s motto.”

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135 The story of the partial repeal is discussed in Chapter V.
137 Ibid.

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Blacks who dared attend churches indifferent to slavery were warned that it was “better that you sacrifice your lives.”\textsuperscript{138} Such sentiment became the standard for future gatherings of the insurgent movement.

Passed in September, the Compromise of 1850, implemented as part of a larger negotiation to settle the question of slave expansion in the western territories, required citizens to assist in the recapture of fugitives. The January 1851 Ohio State Convention of the Colored Citizens, held in Columbus, contested the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and insisted that no support for any Church would come from the black community “unless we are convinced that it is anti-slavery.”\textsuperscript{139} This convention further stressed that it would work to ensure that no “pro-slavery ministers [be] allowed to officiate in our [Ohio] churches.”\textsuperscript{140} Black Convention rhetoric had shifted toward heated contexts in the 1850s, as black activists became angrier and frustrated with what appeared an unending battle with white supremacy. At the 1851 Ohio convention, David Jenkins, former editor of the \textit{Palladium of Liberty}, expressed the sentiment that the Fugitive Slave Law “was not binding upon him as a man, and that he never would obey any law which conflicted with that higher law, that has its seat in the bosom of God.”\textsuperscript{141}

Charles H. Langston bolstered Jenkins’s stance, and professed that his God required him to “do anything that will effect [black liberation], however much it may differ from the precepts taught in the Bible . . . resistance to tyranny is obedience to God.”\textsuperscript{142} This state gathering highlighted unifying black opposition to fugitive slave

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{139} “Minutes of the State of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, January 15\textsuperscript{th}, 16\textsuperscript{th}, 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18\textsuperscript{th}, 1851,” in Philip Foner and George Walker. eds. \textit{Proceedings of the Black State Convention, 1840-1865, Vol. 1} (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1979), 260.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 261.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 262.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 263.
laws, and an undeniable opposition to supporters of the status quo. Members realized that their struggle also was against discriminatory public opinion, and the gathering acknowledged, “warfare lies in the field of thought. Glorious struggle! Godlike warfare!” The notion of preparing viable responses to the anti-black ideas that groups like the American Colonization Society fostered nationwide remained important, and the state gathering targeted the churches that supported such ideas as unprincipled and wicked.

To challenge the Fugitive Slave Law, black insurgent networks would threaten political, social, and religious action that bordered on dangerous civil confrontation. The New York State Convention of Colored People, held in Albany in July 1851, ratcheted up rhetoric on the Fugitive Slave Law, and its opinion toward the future of the Christian Church. This convention lambasted the Fugitive Slave Law as being “characterized with infamy sufficient to libel Christianity or sink a nation.” Members viewed the law as untenable. Attendees advocated combined resistance to it with a fiery Christianity that demanded blacks take up the “duty of preserving the Christian church from idolatry, and the entire people from infidelity, and the republic from destruction.” The Fugitive Slave Law represented tyranny standing at odds with Old Testament law that demanded moral treatment for escaped slaves. Insurgent activism and obedience to the Christian deity appeared as the only logical formula to escape a national disaster.

143 Ibid., 265.
144 Ibid., 269.
146 Ibid., 63.
147 Ibid., 72-73.
The January 1852 state Convention of the Colored Freemen of Ohio warned that if the nation continued to disregard the condition of its black population, “it will deserve, and must ultimately receive, an avenging retribution.”\textsuperscript{148} This Cincinnati gathering urged black churches to take a stand against slavery and its supporters, and in doing so, these churches could then illustrate their “striving for a pure Christianity.”\textsuperscript{149} This state body connected slavery to the system of political inequality for all black people. Calling for blacks worldwide to establish their own communities, convention rhetoric directed that such communities serve as missionary bases, where black missionaries would educate and facilitate a re-Christianizing upon “[white] heathenism in land[s] professed by [white] Christians.”\textsuperscript{150} Attendees warned that if the Slave Power wished to avoid destruction, slavery would have to cease or face a divine “awful certainty of doom.”\textsuperscript{151}

With the implementation of the Fugitive Slave Law, a nadir descended upon the mood the insurgency. However, this darkness did not bring despair; rather it brought heated rebuke and condemnation upon the system of slavery supported by what members considered indicative of an “American Babylon.”\textsuperscript{152} As far as the January 1852 Convention of the Colored Freemen of Ohio was concerned, the Fugitive Slave Law conflicted with God’s law. The gathering argued that it “our duty to obey God rather than man . . . and do all we can for the redemption of the slave.”\textsuperscript{153} The state convention


\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 281.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 288.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 289.


\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
believed that resistance was a divine duty that also included condemning discussion of
emigration and the ongoing efforts of the American Colonization Society to remove the
majority of blacks to Africa. Birth alone, argued the state gathering, conferred “our
rights as American citizens by all the moral and physical means which God has given
us.”\textsuperscript{154} Along the lines of other convention gatherings, this group also insisted that the
majority of the nation’s churches were friendly to Slave Power interests. The gathering
especially warned black churches that any “which will not do all in its power to
discountenance slave-holding and slave-holding apologists . . . deserves the disfellowship
of all good men.”\textsuperscript{155}

The Black Convention had created numerous alliances in white abolitionist circles
such as with Horace Mann, Charles Durkee, Norton S. Townshend, and Benjamin
Franklin Wade. These allies knew the mood of the nation regarding abolition and
slavery, and wrote to the state gathering of their concerns. Mann, a national education
steward and influential anti-slavery Whig politician, wrote of his firm belief that a mass
slave insurrection was nearing.\textsuperscript{156} Citing revolutionary efforts in Europe and even those
of the American Revolutionaries, Mann assured the gathering that “the very [atheistic]
declaration that slavery shall be eternal will give birth to the resolve that it shall not be
eternal . . . hence, inevitable collision.”\textsuperscript{157} Mann noted that Divine power would see the
cause of justice forward through the “example of God . . . for did not He secure the
emancipation of the children of Israel, by sinking their oppressors in the waters of the

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 279.
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 281.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid., 294.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., 289.
Red Sea?"\(^{158}\) U.S. House Representative for Wisconsin, Durkee wrote to the convention that slavery was “distressing and alarming.”\(^{159}\) Durkee encouraged black activists to be patient because slavery eventually would wane in the nation in order to save the Union and spare it from being “redeemed from worse than Jewish Pride”.\(^{160}\) Likening black abolitionists to Old Testament Hebrews, Townshend insisted the North itself would suffer along with the South because of slavery’s very nature of corruption that touched all and thereby should concern all.\(^{161}\) Wade, a U.S. Senator from Ohio, approved of the activists organizing themselves, and succinctly reminded the convention that “ultimate emancipation, must depend upon themselves.”\(^{162}\)

Held during July of 1853 in Rochester, the Colored National Convention was the first of the decade. The Convention focused on three items. First, members wanted black abolitionist anger surrounding the Fugitive Slave Law to remain strong. Second, they insisted that the Old Testament sentiment of the organization remained sound and strong. Finally, the Convention wanted to suppress the types of distractions that caused divisions between Black Convention proper and the functionally defunct AMRS. With old wounds healed, for the first time in decades, former AMRS moderates like William Whipper and Robert Purvis took their place beside the Convention radicals. Once again, the leaders of the black insurgent networks stood united against discrimination and enslavement.

The undercurrent of this rejoining was the understanding that without an end to slavery, and the reality of full equality, all blacks would have to rise up in violent

\(^{158}\) Ibid., 290.
\(^{159}\) Ibid.
\(^{160}\) Ibid.
\(^{161}\) Ibid., 292.
\(^{162}\) Ibid., 291.
resistance. This is why the insurgent strategy of harnessing Christianity remained important as a tactic for reminding the nation that discrimination and enslavement represented dangers to the American fabric. In an address intended for the nation, the national gathering invoked the memory of the American Revolutionaries, and insisted that although they stood by the tenet of resistance to tyrants, they only appealed for a fair and righteous judgment as they were Americans, created by God, and pleaded that blacks “should not be treated as enemies of America.”

The address pointed out the similarities of the nation’s blacks and whites – in language, and in presumed worship of the same Christian deity – and insisted, “we shall not be treated as barbarians.”

In fact, violence as a tool to accomplish the goals of the insurgency remained a viable option, and the gathering viewed this right as a religious duty “to use all and every means consistent with the just rights of our fellow men, and with the precepts of Christianity.”

As was custom, the Convention placed proslavery churches on notice and charged that they had sinned by supporting the discrimination and injustices visited upon blacks. United, Convention attendees expressed that “all truths in the whole universe of God are allied to our cause.”

This 1853 national gathering encouraged the traditional tools of petitioning, education, and industry, but wrapped itself up soundly in religious rhetorical armor in a unified front.

The Black Convention would not allow itself to take the role of a foil to further the spread of the discriminatory forms of Christianity that it regularly condemned. Still

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164 Ibid., 9.
165 Ibid., 10.
166 Ibid., 17.
167 Ibid., 18.
mindful of the ACS, the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of New York convened in January of 1855 in Albany, to make it clear that consequences awaited if the United States government acquiesced to colonizing schemes. The gathering warned that if such plots were executed, blacks sent to African shores would not be evangelists for Christianity, but would have “the best reason to hate [the] Christianity which sends them there.”

The pattern of condemning mainstream Christianity for its support of, or willingness to turn a blind eye to, the system of slavery remained a constant plank of Black Convention ideology. With the backdrop of the bloody conflict between proslavery and antislavery forces in Kansas and Missouri fresh in the imagination of the country, the September 1855 Colored Men’s State Convention of New York gathered in Troy. Douglass spoke for the convention in terms disheartening to any advocate of expanding slavery, colonization, or race discrimination. Douglass argued that Slave Power interests had fashioned its own interpretation of religion into “what may be termed a slaveholding religion - - a religion which can be practiced in conformity with . . . all the horrid, hellish paraphernalia of the slave system.”

Douglass castigated the North for acceding to the South’s demands in promoting laws like the Compromise of 1850 and its accompanying Fugitive Slave Law, and damned the South as the Slavery Party. However, he took matters a step further and declared that the Whigs and Democrats who worked in hand with the Slave Power

“consented to take upon themselves the ‘mark of the beast.’”\textsuperscript{170} Douglass warned, “there shall be no peace to the wicked, saith my God.”\textsuperscript{171} Douglass emphasized the insurgent position in jeremiad examples, all meant to inform the South that no peace could come to their region as long as one slave remained a slave with the Fugitive Slave Law serving to threaten the fate of every black person in the nation.\textsuperscript{172} Douglass recently had joined with Black Convention stalwart James McCune Smith to launch the Radical Abolitionist Party in June of that year. Funded by Smith, this New York-dominated group blended a mix of Bible politics and full support, albeit not entirely public, for Brown’s vigorous antislavery activities in Kansas.\textsuperscript{173}

At the first official Colored National Convention gathering held in Philadelphia since the 1830s, the 1855 Convention address imputed the nation “in behalf of the religion of Jesus Christ, brought into shame and disrepute by the evil constructions and worse practices fastened upon it by the American Church.”\textsuperscript{174} The Convention put the institution of slavery under fire and demanded that only the abolishment of slavery would stave off disruption to the general welfare of the nation.\textsuperscript{175} The theme of inviting divine disaster, continued prominently at the January 1851 State gathering in Columbus. This remained so in the discourse of the 1856 State Convention of Colored Men in Columbus. Convention attendee Sara G. Staley, of the Delaware Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society, raised

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\footnote{\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{171} Ibid., 95.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{174} “Proceedings of the Colored National convention, held in Franklin Hall, Sixth Street, Below Arch, Philadelphia, October 16\textsuperscript{th}, 17\textsuperscript{th} and 18th, 1855,” in Howard Holman Bell, ed. \textit{Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865} (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 30.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 31.}
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the tone for a war setting in the nation, and claimed the blessings of the divine “rational, mysterious and inexplicable soul.” Staley affirmed that the Almighty fiat, grounded in principles of American Republicanism, demanded black activists to continue their struggle for political justice and freedom for enslaved blacks. Staley displayed the frustration that the Black Convention held toward the United States by proclaiming “Genius of America! How art thou fallen, oh Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou fallen!” Such language illustrated the deep anger convention attendees harbored.

The Columbus gathering was angry about many things. Slavery stood high upon the list of grievances, which included swipes at the defunct Whig Party, the Democratic Party, the Fugitive Slave Law, and the ACS. The Ohio gathering resolved that it should employ the fullest means to destroy slavery and discrimination in the nation and declared their assurance that “God is the God of the oppressed . . . He will bring about our deliverance with the same mighty hand with which he led forth the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage.” Members, overall, convinced of an eventual outcome in their favor, nonetheless knew of the opposition aligned against them; but the insurgent sense among them would strengthen itself and press back harder thorough the vehicle of public ideas, and through religious belief. Positive that a national conflict was not far off, this state convention declared, “the day of our deliverance steadily draws nigh. May the God of the oppressed hasten its glad and joyous consummation.”

177 Ibid., 314.
178 Ibid., 307.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid., 308.
In the months before the United States Supreme Court issued its dehumanizing *Dred Scott* decision, antislavery anger carried over into the Columbus January 1857 state convention of the Colored Men of the State of Ohio. The gathering had concluded the “utter impossibility of preaching the gospel of Christ in . . . most of the Southern States.” The state convention issued a stern condemnation of the southern mores that allowed slaveholders to believe that slavery accorded with Christian religion. To the Black Convention, political injustice was as responsible for slavery as was the pro-slavery version of Christianity they regularly lambasted. Regardless, attendees remained resolute and committed to their cause.

The *Dred Scott* decision, considered to be nothing short of a call to civil war for the nation’s black citizens, incited insurgent rage. By the gathering of the Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio in Cincinnati during November 1858, palpable anger oozed among convention attendees. It had been well over a year since the United States Supreme Court handed down the March 6, 1857, decision regarding *Dred Scott v. Sanford* that declared those of African descent, free or enslaved, to be devoid of rights under the United States Constitution. The gathering argued that if the decision truly represented the will of the majority culture, then all blacks were “absolved from all allegiance to [the] government.” Members turned toward the spirit of the American Revolutionaries, declaring that the nation’s injustices upon blacks “forfeit[ed] her claim

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to be called Christian or Republican.” Appreciation for the United States Constitution and founding documents of the nation did not mean blind compliance with the dictates of *Dred Scott* or the hated Fugitive Slave Law. This state convention pledged to imitate, at every opportunity, the example of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue, a slave rescue effort that occurred in September of that year.

Insurgent networks had harnessed social and political agitation against institutionalized racism by unleashing consternation upon the country through tools such as Black Journalism, a fiery interpretation of Christianity, and by inspiring legislation threatening the fabric of the South’s economic machine. From this point onward, having created strategies and themes that future generations of black activists would one day study and harness, the Black Convention Movement positioned itself for the coming American Civil War.

Although the conventions were on hiatus in the remaining years of the decade, black abolitionists continued to tour and urge people toward antislavery activism and obedience to God. Such a gathering in late 1859 saw convention stalwarts Douglass and Sojourner Truth speaking at an antislavery event in Salem, Ohio. Douglass cautioned attendees against expectations of success “in their stated policy of a peaceable and nonviolent resolution of the slavery issue.” Truth asked Douglass, “Is God dead?” Douglass firmly replied, “God is not dead, and because God is not dead, slavery can only end in blood.” The Black Convention had undertaken programs of political activism,

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184 Ibid., 334.
185 Ibid., 336.
186 Smith, *Conjuring Culture*, 171.
187 Ibid.
188 Ibid.
combined with strong antislavery rhetoric, and harnessed the power of influential white allies all throughout its then nearly thirty-year history; but in the end, even Douglass acknowledged that it would require unimaginable violence to ultimately settle the issue.

_Jehovah’s Chosen People_

_Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, Nobody knows my sorrow. Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen, Glory, Hallelujah!_189 – Negro spiritual

In conclusion, inspired by their Black Church roots, the Black Convention Movement had taken Jesus Christ from the New Testament and transposed him onto the face of the stern Old Testament Jehovah. Black activists were encouraged by their Christian faith, along with news of the various social struggles occurring elsewhere in the world during the antebellum period. The nature and reality of their organized struggle indeed suggested that many felt that if blacks continued their struggle “[freedom] must come and [would] come.”190 Historian James H. Cone wrote that in the wake of Nat Turner, the South suppressed black ministers, fearing that “black religious gatherings were often occasions for organizing resistance against the institution of slavery.”191 Cone placed the beginning of black insurgency at the first moment a “black person decided that death would be preferable to slavery.”192 Yet, by the end of the 1850s, many of the goals regarding citizenship and voting rights for blacks remained unresolved. However, the organizing mission of the Black Convention was an absolute vital necessity that would yield success, albeit at bloody cost.

192 Ibid.
The Convention used teachings from the Black Church to inspire its supporters and contest mainstream white Christian denominations. It confronted the overall discriminatory system of white hegemony, and agitated in an effort to secure full citizenship, and bring about the destruction of slavery in the United States. Nationally, reform as a rationale colored many movements of the era. Convention activists argued that persuasion was slow, coercion was faster, and “politics and morality, politics and righteousness, politics and reform were for many reformers one and the same.”

This sentiment represented itself among Black Convention participants, particularly those who had left the Garrisonian wing to bolster their religious rhetoric with organized political action. Positioning the Convention within the boundary of a proper antebellum reform organization made sense, and fit within then concurrent trends. The liberation designs of the Black Convention were national in scope; their operations also spanned municipal, state, national, and regional boundaries in the effort to further their goals. These activists were organized individuals who essentially operated as volunteers and agreed to act within a loose democratic structure. Lastly, like other groups, the Convention gleaned inspiration from liberation struggles foreign and domestic, be they the efforts of freedom fighters in Hungary, Greece, and Russia, or those of the American Revolutionaries themselves. That religion effused itself into their efforts was not out of the ordinary for the times.

It is also important to note that the Convention involved itself in the creation and utility of their Black Christianity against the White Christianity of their opponents. Religious historian Theophus Smith called this process ‘conjuring culture.’ Smith argued

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194 Ibid., 333-37.
that the religious view of the Convention’s incantatory use of biblical symbols and figures, grounded in a theological sense, were “employed in synergy with a Deity who cooperates in the concrete historical realization of such figures.”\textsuperscript{195} Cloaking themselves in the mantle of the biblical Hebrews, Black Church and Black Convention activists positioned their antislavery positions, theologically and rhetorically, in the Old Testament story of Exodus, thus making it literally “historical in the emancipation of the slaves in the 1860s.”\textsuperscript{196} Blacks harnessed the language of Christianity and molded it into a narrative that “shape[d] a new sense of the self that affirmed them as being sacred embodied selves in the sight of God.”\textsuperscript{197}

The Black Convention’s heyday foreshadowed tumultuous events for a nation at war with itself and in constant racial unease from post-war Reconstruction. Activists of the antebellum black insurgent networks viewed themselves and their people as the Children of Israel contesting bondage with success assured from a divine hand.\textsuperscript{198} Their craft was arguably a form of implied rhetorical terrorism against a resistant majority culture. As stated by Eugene Genovese, “He who wills liberation in a context that does not permit peaceful change wills revolutionary terror. No slave revolt that hesitated to invoke terror had a chance.”\textsuperscript{199}

Convention gatherings in the post-war period reflected on the events that had taken place. The January 1865 gathering of the Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio, in Xenia, remained confident in the Union’s victory over the Confederate states. This

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\textsuperscript{195} Smith, \textit{Conjuring Culture}, 254.
\textsuperscript{196} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{197} Riggins R. Earl, Jr., \textit{Dark Symbols, Obscure Signs: God, Self, and Community in the Slave Mind} (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), 69.
\textsuperscript{198} Cone, “Black Spirituals,” in \textit{African American Religious Thought}, 779.
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gathering prophesied that at the end of the conflict, that the “crime against god and humanity . . . that hell-born, heaven-defying institution, American Slavery . . . will cease to exist in the United States.”200 This statement showed that the blending of religious rhetoric practiced by the Convention for decades still stood at the forefront of their political assault upon the system of slavery, marking it a potent insurgent tool in their agenda.

Activists pressed for full suffrage rights at the February 1865 gathering of the State Equal Rights Convention of the Colored People of Pennsylvania, in Harrisburg. Attendees pointed out the results that compromising on slavery with the South had brought the nation. The gathering argued that caving to Slave Power threats tainted the principles of the nation “in forming and repealing the Missouri Compromise and in giving the Dred Scott decision, slavery had received what she demanded.”201 In the opinion of this convention, the barbarity of American slavery had brought about the pain and misery visited upon the nation in the guise of bloody civil war.202 Religion justified the outcome as evidenced by “the arm of God made bare in leading the nation through this sea of blood to a higher civilization and a more holy and god-approved religion.”203

The complex black expression of Christianity served the needs of northern black activists throughout the antebellum period in ways that it could not for those enslaved in

202 Ibid.
203 Ibid., 158.
the South. Here, historian Mark L. Chapman provides the question of Christianity’s liberation value for the insurgency, asking if it could indeed be a force for freedom or “an oppressive ideology that hinders black freedom.”\textsuperscript{204} In truth, blacks, free and enslaved, harnessed the scope and energy of the resistance, of self-agency, and a religious sense of being, that labored to crystallize a permanent narrative of liberation. The legacy of these blacks, North and South, these Old Testament Soldiers, continued into subsequent periods of civil rights activity. Their fight for liberation for all still holds memory, and serves as the linkage “to a movement of religious rebellion, peopled by a small but courageous minority . . . who had faith in the power of a few to make changes that would affect us all.”\textsuperscript{205}

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CHAPTER IV
SISTER INSURGENTS:
THE RISE OF WOMANHOOD IN THE BLACK INSURGENCY

We have always entertained a love for the country which gave us birth, despite the wrongs inflicted upon us, and have always been hopeful that the future would augur better things.¹ - From the Colored Women of Brooklyn

Much of the material written regarding the Black Convention Movement focuses on the dominant personalities and activities of its male leadership. Beyond the nod to Mary Ann Shadd Cary or Charlotte L. Forten, the stories of the black insurgent network’s lesser-known women garners fleeting attention. This chapter profiles various women of the black insurgency, and addresses questions regarding their activities and contribution toward the goal of black equality. What do the Convention records reveal about the organization’s views on the role and activities of its female cohorts? Many black women activists were associated with the Convention, either directly or tangentially. Given the number of cooperating rights groups within the black insurgent networks, and the preponderance of individuals holding multiple memberships in these organizations, female association with the state and national conventions potentially numbered in the hundreds.² What do the activities of these women reveal about the status of black women

² Known female registered participants of national conventions include Mary Ann Shad Cary, Rachel Cliff, and Elizabeth Armstrong (1855 Philadelphia national), Elisha Weaver and Francis Ellen Watkins Harper (1864 Syracuse national). Little to no information is available regarding Cliff’s, Armstrong’s, or Weaver’s further involvement.
in antebellum America? What do these women reveal about themselves through their actions? These framing questions serve to inject a measure of agency and definition into the cohesive supporting role of black women in the narrative of black liberation. As actors in the insurgent network, black women could harness themselves as tactical agents to assault the racism of the nation and support the goals of dismantling discrimination and enslavement.

Black women occupied a unique social status that provided them with the potential of more access within the dominant society than existed for black men, such as in the area of domestic employment. This allowed for greater social mobility that allowed black female activists to intersect their own sensibilities regarding women’s rights with the black insurgent goals confronting national inequality. Additionally, gender mores, which allowed these women to harness bridge functions with allied white communities, also enabled them to carve out positions of influence within the black insurgent networks.

Even in the free North, black women endured the expectation to conduct themselves by derivatives of the cult of true womanhood, and its accompanying characteristics of acceptable female domesticity, albeit with a twist. As black women, these female activists found it essentially impossible to be white “true women in the full nineteenth-century sense of that term.” However, where a white female might have an expectation of not having to work, her black counterparts were often “trained from

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childhood to become workers . . . whether they are married or single.”³ Here, the vulnerability of the submissive gender institutions accorded female insurgents opportunities in their various spheres of influence “in nineteenth-century America, [as] the experience and traditions of black women led them to depart from American gender expectations.”⁴ This evolving situation allowed black women to operate within dynamics that called for them to act not only as women, but also as a group constrained by markers of enslavement, suffering, struggle, sexuality, and silence.⁵

Slave uprisings and the black expression of Christianity provided grounding for the rise of black women activists.⁶ From the early days of slave resistance on the American continent, black women were found amid numerous slave uprisings and retaliations. Sources have noted the resistance actions of slave women dating as early as 1681. For slave revolts, punishments were bleak but equal, as black women suffered the same burnings at the stake, hangings, and imprisonment alongside their menfolk.⁷ When

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⁶ For an historical analysis of the struggle of black female women preachers, see: Bettye Collier-Thomas, Daughters of Thunder: Black Women Preachers and Their Sermons, 1850-1979 (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publisher, 1998).
⁷ See: Giddings, When and Where I Enter, 39-46, for a recounting of the uprisings and punishments suffered by slave women, along with emphasis on how the dominant culture visited harsher punishments on them for breaking gender conventions.
they resisted, black women’s resistance “paralleled black men’s, running the gamut from trickery and feigning illness, to escape and physical confrontation.”

Gender roles, while still patriarchal among black Americans, flexed just enough to allow less formalization within activist political arenas of the 1830s, which necessitated the participation of both men and women. In part, this was due to the growing notions toward gender within the Black Church that “expanded beyond religion to include the secular world in general and that of social action specifically.” Although religion could function as a stunting feature toward the elevation of women in general, a number of black women inherently sensed that Christianity represented “a resource for their struggles for gender equality and social justice.”

Male members of the Convention differed on the roles that black women should hold in society and in activism. In the early years of the Black Convention, the organization was under the influence of moderate whites. Most members sought to maintain the gendered northern-southern status quo. The assertive involvement of black women appeared threatening, as this tended to stand outside of the accepted gender order. In 1827, Samuel Cornish published items in his Freedom’s Journal that characterized prevailing proto-Victorian expectations regarding black women’s standing and behavior. This conventional thinking called for black women to adopt a southern-evolved idea casting white women in submissive roles of piety and domestic purity,

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8 Horton, Free People of Color, 94.
which sought to bind them to their homes under the ultimate control of their men. This was contested at the 1834 the national gathering in New York City, where the organization issued a resolution that affirmed the participation of women “in every way possible and [encouraging their] working through their local organizations.” Still in 1837, Convention members like Charles B. Ray believed that black women should accept the roles of wives and mothers and adopt mores similar to those of true womanhood.

The stakes were large for the emerging black female activist. The expectations were larger in that through their participation in the insurgent networks they began to experience an acceptance of their being “self-confident and out-spoken [and] highly esteemed by her community . . . as a “race woman” and role model for young people.” These role models operated across the insurgent spectrum because “the black community’s expectations of the ideal woman differed from those of the larger society.” Historian Shirley Carlson argued that thanks to the intermixing of radical politics and religious practice, the black female activist found herself with the ability to claim power and act in roles that touched on equal standing to her male counterparts.

**1830s: Vanguards**

Francis Maria W. Stewart heralded a strong role model for black women activists in the 1830s. A confidant of abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, the Connecticut-born Stewart was one of the first proto-feminist black journalists and lecturers. Stewart acted

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13 Horton, *Free People of Color*, 95.
15 Ibid.
as a vanguard in defining social, gender and activist roles; not just for her own sex, but also for the overall black community. Based in Boston, Stewart published political and religious pamphlets urging black women to maintain moral codes of behavior and to rise up. She angrily denounced the United States’ treatment of blacks, pointing out the positive transnational overtures made to the resisting white ethnic groups in Poland, Greece, Ireland, and France, while the efforts of black Haitians to achieve self-determination received national disdain.\textsuperscript{16} An early supporter of the Black Convention, Stewart acted as a fiery exhorter speaking boldly on issues that possessed a controversial air for their day, stating, “Possess the spirit of men, bold and enterprising, fearless and undaunted. Sue for your rights and privileges.”\textsuperscript{17} Using the available legal system to resist gender and racial conventions, Stewart sought to encourage women to escape the confines of patriarchy and engage in uplift activities for the betterment of their communities. In this sense, Stewart’s message “resonated with many free northern black women who were frustrated by their lack of control in their community and spiritual lives.”\textsuperscript{18}

Stewart argued three strategies as being chief among those in the quest for race progress: Moral-Frugality, Militancy, and Woman’s Rights.\textsuperscript{19} She called for black women to wield a moral guide that warded their behavior, while harnessing a frugal sense regarding cash expenditures. The militancy that Stewart advocated required unity among


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Liberator}, January 7, 1832. Although published in 1832, Stewart gave the larger part of this talk in October 1831 in Boston.


blacks in order to rise to political influence, which she argued, “was not only the right of African-Americans to protest – it was their patriotic duty.”20 This maxim, in effect, contributed to a female insurgency within the overall liberation movement that agitated for the rights denied all women at that time. For her arguments regarding equality of black females to their black men, Stewart earned criticism from some male circles, in which she was “publicly jeered . . . and . . . pelted with tomatoes.”21 Due to this treatment, Stewart relocated to New York City in 1833, leaving her journalistic activities, and began teaching, while continuing her writing. Stewart defended her actions by invoking the examples of “women of the ancient, Biblical, and medieval times who were learned and active in public life.”22 Into the 1830s, black males continued to dominate the tone of the convention meetings, but expressed support for women in various areas arguing that even in the racially segregated sphere of American Christianity, women had to struggle with being cast as “the weaker sex . . . [which] incapacitated [them] both physically and mentally.”23

At the Philadelphia national meeting in 1833, Prudence Crandall, founder of a school for black girls in Canterbury, Connecticut, received praise and support from the Convention, which viewed her school as a model for female uplift.24 Also praised was the development of societies for mental improvement and the mobility that such groups provided for black women.25 Convention members noted and cheered the educational

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20 Ibid., 53.
21 Ibid., 56.
23 Horton, Free People of Color, 95.
25 Ibid., 33.
institutions that served blacks of both genders, giving particular notice to a Philadelphia
educator identified as Miss Buffum. Of special note, the convention recognized the
force of the organized Female Anti-slavery Societies, lauding “their untiring exertions
and irresistible influence to be a most powerful auxiliary in the great cause of
emancipation.” The previous statement is indicative of the existing male bias at the
time, but it also revealed the fact that many female agents within the Convention had first
received their political training in such societies, which enabled them to build a social
bedrock for domestic insurgency and liberation.

Therefore, taking cues from female-led British antislavery societies, and the
urgings of Garrison, various female-led antislavery groups sprang up in northern
locations. Groups appeared in Salem, Providence, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia
during the early to mid-1830s with black women in leadership roles. Among these
organizations, black women held roles ranging from support to leadership. Key figures
included Bostonian Susan Paul, daughter of a local influential black minister, and Julia
Williams, the first wife of Henry Highland Garnet, who herself was educated in Prudence
Crandall’s school. However, the most important and influential group in Black
Convention terms was the Philadelphia-based Female Anti-Slavery Society, which
boasted key black female figures such as Sarah Mapps Douglass, and numerous members
of the Forten-Purvis family.

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26 “Minutes and Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention for the improvement of the Free People of
Color In the United States,” in Howard Holman Bell. ed. Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro
27 Ibid., 18.
28 Ira V. Brown, “Am I Not A Woman and A Sister?,” The Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women,
29 Brown, “Am I Not A Woman and A Sister?,” 3; also see Debra Gold Hansen, Strained Sisterhood:
Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts
Press, 1993), 77; Dannett, Profiles of Negro Womanhood, 257. Dannett includes a highlight on Sarah J. S.
Philadelphia served as a nexus for black abolitionists, with an active cadre of dedicated individuals to draw from. The Philadelphia connection helps illustrate a key facet of the Black Convention and the larger black insurgency networks, highlighting communal factors of “economic circumstances, kinship and friendship ties, marriage and education.”

Female members of the wealthy Forten clan and the well-to-do Purvis family associated with the women of the Douglass and Crummell families. This led to the formation of familial networks stretching from Pennsylvania to Massachusetts and New York, back to Ohio and into neighboring Canada.

Conventions illustrate the cooperation across racial lines that was possible for black and white female activists as they interacted on agreed-upon goals. A major highpoint for the validity of female activists was in the Anti-slavery Convention of American Women. This umbrella gathering of individual anti-slavery societies, held three meetings that took place in mid-May of 1837. This historic conclave gathered the influential white female activists of the day, figures such as Sarah Grimké, Lucretia Mott, and Lydia M. Child. This convention of women issued a series of resolutions dealing with religion, violence against women, and strategies for northern women in the fight against slavery. Sarah Forten composed the last resolution, in which she urged women to educate themselves on the topic of slavery so they would “be enabled to subdue that deep-rooted prejudice which is doing the work of oppression in the free states.”

Maria Stewart and Sarah Mapps Douglass also participated in the gathering, with the latter Garnet, the second wife of Garnet, who spent years as a teacher in New York state, later becoming the first black school principal in the Manhattan. She worked for equal rights for black women and founded the Equal Suffrage League further cementing her place as an activist.

serving as a part of Central Committee duties. Garrison’s newspaper *The Liberator* hailed the gathering as one that would “provoke the rage of freedom’s friends . . . with increased energy and high hope . . . for the relief of the suffering.” The significance of this convention provided effective activist skills and accessibility for black women to participate in larger white-dominated abolitionist groups. Additionally, as entry points of proto-feminism, these gatherings served as “steps to organized public action and the Woman Suffrage Movement per se.”

The training received at these conventions allowed for the development of useful skills by black females active in abolitionist struggles. The conventions also provided outlets for black females to hone their skills and build positions of power and influence for themselves in networks within and outside of the Black Convention. Additionally, these skills served black women activists in the wake of the major shift from an aggressive political confrontation of slavery to the Christian-based moral suasion preached by the American Moral Reform Society (AMRS), which caused the rift in 1835 dividing black abolitionist insurgent circles for half a decade between moderate and radical. The male-dominated leadership of the AMRS lauded activist females for their efforts in “the cause of humanity, and devoting their time, talents, and industry, to the cause of Universal Freedom.”

However, into the 1840s the AMRS’s benevolence work morphed into a rapidly sophisticated electoral machine, where “women became less prominent in a number of

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32 *The Liberator*, Boston, MA, June 02, 1837.
33 Brown, “Am I Not A Woman and A Sister?,” 16.
activities, such as petitioning.\textsuperscript{35} Generally considered a failed organization, the AMRS limped along in a weakened state promoting the moral suasion of Christianity into the 1840s. Defeated due to its conciliatory tenet, and the shift of Black Convention meetings to state and local levels, the AMRS found itself viewed as a poor vehicle for true social change. All too late, the AMRS reached out to activist females, and even granted “women full status in the organization.”\textsuperscript{36} Regardless, many came to realize that the AMRS’s tenet of moral suasion had proved a failed vehicle.

1840s: A new body

During the 1840s, black females maintained their own activist institutions in northern states, and focused on activities that spanned abolition, to temperance, to women’s rights, to fundraising.\textsuperscript{37} Activist women even lent their names to anti-war pledges issued nationwide to protest the Mexican-American War primarily out of concern that captured territory might transform into new slave-holding states.\textsuperscript{38} The rebirth of the national Black Convention to replace the Philadelphia moderates proved positive for the goals of numerous black women activists. The AMRS had attempted to curry favor, and followed the position of the Black Convention and supported higher education for women.\textsuperscript{39} However, the majority of black women activists supported the Black


\textsuperscript{37} See: \textit{The North Star}, Rochester, NY November 02, 1849, and \textit{The North Star}, April 12, 1850, for examples of black activist women organizing fundraising drives to support Frederick Douglass’ efforts with his newspaper.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{The Liberator}, Boston, MA, June 05, 1846, “wherein black female activists such as Caroline E. and Sarah Remond, are found among anti-war signatories next to William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips and William C. Nell, in addition to others.

\textsuperscript{39} Gross, \textit{Clarion Call}, 34.
Convention’s state level meetings and attended them.40 Charlotte Forten, Sarah Mapps Douglass, and Harriet Tubman, among others, urged for the formation of a new national body to replace the AMRS.41 The damage done to the early radical leaning black abolitionist movement by the AMRS vibrated across the abolition spectrum. The damage affected even the female-led Anti-Slavery Society, which had splintered in membership to the point where the once highly influential female-led society resembled the failed AMRS by the late 1840s.42

The all-black Women’s Association of Philadelphia, a Black Nationalism, pro-Frederick Douglass group, replaced the older body, with Sarah Mapps Douglass in the main organizing role.43 Mapps Douglass, a minister’s wife who formerly worked as a teacher in New York and Pennsylvania, was an active figure since the 1830s.44 Philadelphia-born, she formed part of the nexus that founded the Philadelphia Female Antislavery Society, which helped subsidize her local teaching school.45 Along with her mother, Grace Douglass, Mapps Douglass worked to keep some sort of uneasy peace at hand between Garrison and the antislavery wings who opposed to him, no doubt as a result of his backing of the AMRS over the Black Convention proper in the mid-1830s.46 A committed Quaker, Mapps Douglass joined in protests against bigotry within the

41 Gross, Clarion Call, 42.
43 Ibid., 94-5.
44 Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke,” 68.
45 Lerner, Black Women in White America, 85.
46 The Liberator, Boston, MA, June 21, 1839.
Quaker Church with abolitionist contemporaries Theodore Weld and Angelina Grimké.\textsuperscript{47} Mapps Douglass’s mother, Grace, in addition to abolitionist work with her daughter, also ran a home-based millinery store and was renowned for her frugal nature.\textsuperscript{48} The elder Douglass served as a vice-president in the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women and remained a fixture of the Philadelphia scene.\textsuperscript{49}

By 1848, as the national Black Convention fully revived and once again stepped into dominance, the attitudes toward activist women participation and standing within the organization had begun to change. A woman known as Mrs. Sanford addressed the Cleveland gathering and noted that support for women’s rights equally translated into support for the Black Convention’s goals.\textsuperscript{50} Frederick Douglass the presiding president urged the drafting of Resolution 33, which formally granted women in attendance status as delegates: “We hereby invite females hereafter to take part in our deliberations.”\textsuperscript{51} This measure saved face for the reformed national Convention. While some male participants insisted on limited status for women in the organization, Martin Delany and other male members along with Douglass pushed the matter of female inclusion.\textsuperscript{52} Some male members wanted to lessen the roles of female activists in the Convention. However, the national Convention prodded along by stronger male personalities, wisely instituted and promoted roles for its female participants. The following year these women angrily protested their lack of membership status at Ohio’s state gathering in

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\item Venet, \textit{Neither Ballots nor Bullets}, 12.
\item Ibid., 32.
\item “Report of the proceedings of the Colored National Convention, Held at Cleveland, Ohio, on Wednesday, September 6, 1848,” 11, in Bell, \textit{Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865}.
\item Ibid., 17.
\item Bell, \textit{Survey of National Negro Convention Movement}, 104.
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1849. In light of the women’s threats to stage a walkout, the male leaders “decided that the women could participate as full members.”\textsuperscript{53}

Marriage provided a solid foundation that aided the black insurgent network in the struggle for equality and black women understood their power in this sphere. As fellow activists, they also shared in the successes, the rewards, and the setbacks of their male counterparts. The marriages of activist couples could prove highly effective and enduring. However, a marriage to a committed abolitionist was not immune to destructive stresses. The marriage of Elizabeth Brown, the wife of Williams Wells Brown, best illustrates this negative outcome. The long abolitionist-related absences of her husband eventually sparked infidelities and drove the couple into divorce.\textsuperscript{54}

The Frederick Douglass marriage illustrates the opposite example. Anna Murray Douglass, little known due to her husband’s frontline activities, took the role of co-spousal head of the family, literally acting in a support role that allowed Douglass to act on a larger scale.\textsuperscript{55} According to her daughter, Rosetta, during her father’s journeys overseas in the mid-1840s the freeborn Murray Douglass’s duty was to provide for their children. Members of the Lucretia Mott family took charge of one child, while Murray Douglass kept the rest in the family’s Lynn, Massachusetts, home and engaged in a small enterprise of binding shoes to provide funds for the family.\textsuperscript{56} In this way, the freeborn Murray Douglass illustrated how spousal support was another form of activism. By caring for their children and home while her husband was away in Europe, Murray

\textsuperscript{53} Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke,” 64.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 66.
\textsuperscript{55} Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke,” 72.
\textsuperscript{56} Rosetta Douglass Sprague, “Anna Murray Douglass: My Mother as I Recall Her,” \textit{The Journal of Negro History}, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Jan., 1923), 95.
Douglass’s efforts allowed him to expand his work toward building antislavery alliances, which ultimately served the goals of insurgency. Additionally, her role, and that of other wives, eased the assault to dismantle discrimination and enslavement.

Thanks to her husband’s popular narrative, Murray Douglass joined a cadre of Boston and Lynn anti-slavery societies members who included her in gatherings and committee leadership functions, thus strengthening what her husband hailed as her executive ability. Murray Douglass also formed important activist relationships with key New England abolitionist figures and counted Wendell Phillips and William Lloyd Garrison as friends. The bridge function of the black female activist remained among her most vital and powerful weapons in the quest for racial equality. In this significant role, Murray Douglass cemented support for her husband that positioned him to assume leadership positions within the Radical Abolition Party and the national Black Convention. Murray Douglass also acted as a bridge figure preserving some sense of contact and civility with Garrison, after her husband dampened ties.

1850s: Turbulent rise

Thanks to the elevation of black women in black social culture, resistance to female assertiveness had no choice but to soften as the black insurgent network matured under male leaders by the dawn of the 1850s. The national Convention welcomed and encouraged black women to support Convention events as non-delegates, with some even granting women the courtesy of addressing its earliest gatherings. Politically, by the

57 Ibid., 96.
58 Ibid., 97.
1850s, the dominant Democratic Party supported a national platform that elevated the supremacy of the patriarchal in domestic spheres. Reacting to rise of the Free Soil Party and its position of advocacy for women, Democratic leaders feared the push for mainstream rights demanded by women’s rights groups. In response, they emphasized traditional familial and political ties. Black women, slave and free, found themselves also framed within these political patriarchal mores, but their perceived utility and sexualized roles allowed them a measure of greater interaction within white society.

The national compromise that created the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 changed things for the northern states, endangering blacks free or fugitive, and placed the overall abolitionist movement into a solid radical stance. With activist females insisting on and assuming wider roles in the Convention at national and state levels, the turbulent 1850s set the stage for the key contributions that these women would make to the larger insurgency. Roles for activist females fit the heated times of the 1850s, in which the black insurgent networks nationwide gauged the reactionary failings of Slave Power interests. Females attending the 1850 state gathering in Columbus insisted on supplying funds to aid with the costs of the meeting, thereby illustrating the seriousness of their stakes in the movement. The following year, the Ohio gathering expressed support for

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race and Public Policy, Volume 2 (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), specifically highlighting one “a lady most friendly to the attainment of the rights of the people of color,” who formally addressed the Black Convention gathering in 1832.


black women engaged in marketing enterprises to highlight the craftswoman and employment skills of those concerned.  

From New York to Ohio, black activist women donated their funds, their organizational abilities, and the presence of their bodies among their male counterparts in the black insurgency. The importance placed on commercial endeavors again echoed at 1853’s national gathering in Rochester that argued, “commerce leads to respectability . . . it is because we have not been found in this and similar avenues leading and directing, that we have been dependent and so little respected.” The 1855’s national gathering in Philadelphia recommended that black women strive to secure “places of profit and stores and in other places of business.” At the state level conventions, women gained in terms of participation in New Hampshire and Maine, but in 1855’s state gathering in New York, a woman identified as Miss Barbary Anna Stewart “was stricken out from the roll[s] . . . on the ground that [the gathering was not] a Woman’s rights Convention.” It appeared on the surface that this particular convention ejected Stewart for being a female. However, given the presence of known males who strongly supported the participation of black women activists, this is doubtful. Support for the Ohio state gathering in 1856 retained the financial support of black women and even presented female speakers, such

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63 “Minutes of the State Convention, of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, Jan. 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th, 1851,” in Foner and Walker, Proceedings of the Black State Convention, 1840-1865, Vol. 1, 268.

64 “Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th and 8th, 1853,” in Bell, Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865, 27.

65 “Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, held in Franklin Hall, Sixth Street, Below Arch, Philadelphia, October 16th, 17th and 18th, 1855,” in Bell, Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1865, 29.

as Sara G. Staley of the Delaware (OH) Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society.\(^{67}\) Ohio appeared to be the growing bulwark of open participation by women in its state meetings. In the 1858 gathering, a slew of women participated as delegates from ten counties.\(^ {68}\)

The 1850s presented numerous avenues for black women activists to contribute solidly to the spirit of insurgency among the Convention. Men stood as the traditional public face of the movement; however, black women operated in various capacities, which proved just as important. An array of these activist females illustrates the roles and methods employed within the black insurgent networks that contested discrimination and enslavement.

Sojourner “Bell” Truth served on multiple fronts in the abolitionist struggle. She operated in domestic speaking arenas, where she earned fame as an antislavery orator. Illiterate, she left a life of domestic work in New York City in 1843 and began operating as an itinerate preacher of a sort.\(^ {69}\) Black female speakers, or exhorters, could push social norms that defined female roles in ways that their white female counterparts could not; as a result, “many black women were recruited by men to become anti-slavery speakers.”\(^ {70}\) Truth experienced freedom in 1827 when the state of New York emancipated its remaining slaves.\(^ {71}\) As she began her anti-slavery work, Truth traveled through the North giving orations before the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the National


\(^{69}\) Lerner, *Black Women in White America*, 371.


Woman’s Rights Convention, and made friends with Lucretia Mott, Lyman Beecher, and his famous daughter Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of the important abolitionist novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin.*

In the American Civil War, Truth helped supply black troops in Michigan with food and clothing and “later serve[d] as a counselor for former slaves living in a Virginia refugee camp.” Truth is still revered for her often misquoted words given at the Akron Women’s Rights Convention in 1851 where she presented her famous ‘Ain’t I A Woman?’ speech, which reportedly in part stated “I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man . . . I am as strong as any man that is now.”

The Fugitive Slave Law brought the black insurgent networks new assets such as Harriet Tubman. Slave-born, Tubman escaped slavery in Maryland in 1849 and made her way to Philadelphia, which aside from being a stronghold of abolitionist fervor also harbored a large community of fugitive slaves. The Fugitive Slave Law represented a dire threat to fugitive slaves like Tubman, but in this malaise, she grew into her best-known role, that of an Underground Railroad conductor. So successful was she that bounties for Tubman’s capture were as high as $40,000, a fortune in the mid-1800s.

Tubman’s first rescue effort saw her making her way back into Maryland and successfully rescuing a group of slaves owned by the same family that technically still

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72 Dannett, *Profiles of Negro Womanhood,* 97.


74 Kathryn Kish Sklar, ed., *Women’s Rights Emerges within the Antislavery Movement, 1830-1870, A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2000), 179; originally printed in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle,* Salem, Ohio, June 21, 1851, reprinted in Carleton Mabee, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 81. Her actual words never transcribed, and only uncorroborated quotes have been printed and cited from as Truth’s address.


owned her. Tubman reportedly agreed to recruit men and provide logistical support for John Brown’s planned uprising at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. In April of 1858, Tubman and Brown consulted with each other regarding appropriate routes, and Tubman even met with Brown supporter Wendell Phillips. However, when Federal forces at the U.S. Arsenal captured Brown and his companions, Tubman was unaware, reportedly ill in New Bedford and unable to travel. Some abolitionists were aware of Tubman’s proposed role in Brown’s plot, which indicated that perhaps she had attempted to follow through on her recruitment promise before she became ill. There is also speculation that Tubman was actually alive and well in Maryland, or that she had sided with Frederick Douglass who had pulled out of Brown’s raid, believing that the plan was ‘unworkable.’ Regardless, in the American Civil War, Tubman operated as a scout and spy for the Union.

Black women also utilized black newspapers in the push for equality. Mary Ann Shadd Cary, the first black female newspaper publisher, released the legendary antislavery newspaper in 1853, *The Provincial Freedmen*. The daughter of convention leader Abraham Shadd, Shadd Cary immigrated to Canada in protest of 1850’s Fugitive Slave Law, where she married businessman Thomas Cary, and earned money as a

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79 Clinton, *Harriet Tubman*, 128; Clinton notes that a Rev. Jermain Loguen from Syracuse had inquired Brown if Tubman had yet joined his party; Sterling and Logan, *Four Took Freedom*, 24; notes that Boston-based abolitionist Lewis Haydon attempted to rouse Tubman from her illness in order to carry out her part of Brown’s plan.
domestic speaker.\textsuperscript{83} In later life, she earned a law degree from Howard University in 1870 and practiced in Washington, D.C., dying in 1893.\textsuperscript{84} When Shadd Cary first arrived in Canada, she briefly lived with Henry and Mary Bibb, the founders of the popular black newspaper, the \textit{Voice of the Fugitive}. Bibb’s wife Mary was born in Rhode Island, and the pair married after meeting in Boston.\textsuperscript{85} In Canada, she was an activist, a teacher, and as a dressmaker up until her husband died in 1854.\textsuperscript{86} Ironically, Bibb became Mrs. Cary when she married Cary’s brother-in-law, Isaac N. Cary in 1856 even though there had been ‘ideological conflict’ at one time between both women regarding their competing newspapers.\textsuperscript{87} This marriage showed the fluidity of activist connections and familiarity. 

Due to their ability to bridge communities, women like Francis Ellen Watkins Harper were able to maintain a softer activist persona that endeared her to many and created great demand for her speeches in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.\textsuperscript{88} Orphaned early in life, the freeborn Watkins Harper developed a sensitivity, which set the tone for her talent in poetry and public speaking. Living in Ohio with her husband, Fenton, Watkins Harper served as a delegate and Petition Committee participant in the Ohio state convention in 1858, where her childhood teacher and uncle, the Rev. William Watkins, served as a group elder.\textsuperscript{89} Ironically, Reverend Watkins befriended William Lloyd Garrison in Baltimore, and convinced him to oppose the American Colonization

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{84} Lerner, \textit{Black Women in White America}, 324. See Chapter IV for more on Cary.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 47-48.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{88} Horton, “Freedom’s Yoke,” 63.
Society, and migrate to Boston where he started the *Liberator*. As a teacher in Pennsylvania, Watkins Harper developed an interest in the abolitionist cause, and contributed her speaking and writings talents to the effort. While she traveled through Canada on a speaking jaunt, Watkins Harper formed connections with the abolitionist circles there, and saw the *Provincial Freedman* publish her writings to a wider audience. Watkins Harper led the General Vigilance Committee, a group that inherited the mission of the previous Philadelphia Vigilance Committee in 1844; expanding networks and fundraising for fugitive slaves.

Speaking tours throughout Canada, New England, and other states enabled Watkins Harper to hone her effectiveness as an orator. Antislavery societies regularly sought after her to serve as their agent for lecturing and fundraising activities. In Delaware, Watkins Harper railed at the Fugitive Slave Law and criticized political efforts to quell the antislavery movement. Showing her effectiveness at oration, Watkins Harper warned proslavery opponents that it would be a simpler task for them to douse the “flames of Vesuvius with a flake of snow, or drive back the waves of the Atlantic with a raised hand, as to stop inquiry [into slavery] in this land.”

Another powerful female activist figure, Charlotte Forten Grimké, illustrates kinship activism by her very birth as a part of three generations of individuals grounded

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91 Dannett, *Profiles of Negro Womanhood*, 103.
92 Ibid., 105.
94 Ibid.
95 *The Liberator*, Boston, MA, December 19, 1856.
in the social and political activism of the Philadelphia abolition connection. Forten Grimké, a key figure in abolitionist circles, was born into the influential Forten-Purvis clan of Philadelphia. Forten Grimké began teaching in Salem, Massachusetts, while living with the Charles Lenox Remond family in the mid-1850s. In Salem, Forten Grimké was able to meet and interact with New England abolitionist giants such as Garrison, William Wells Brown, and Wendell Phillips. James Forten Sr., her grandfather, was a strong foe of the American Colonization Society, and her uncle, Robert Purvis, wielded power within the American Anti-Slavery Society and in the Vigilance Committee of Philadelphia. She added to her abolitionist credentials when she married the Rev. Francis Grimké, a mulatto nephew of famous abolitionist sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké.

Exposure to the cream of abolitionist royalty provided Forten Grimké with what scholars have termed ‘role modeling,’ key in “shaping [her] notions of what life-course would be possible and acceptable in her community.” Forten Grimké’s upbringing, combined with the connections she formed in various social circles, allowed her to see firsthand the struggle against slavery, which greatly affected her and helped mold her. Forten Grimké provides a further example of the kinship element of black abolitionist circles. Forten Grimké’s arrival in Salem to live with the Remonds was due to the bond that family friend Amy Matilda Cassey Remond forged with the Fortens when she lived

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97 Lerner, Black Women in White America, 95.
98 Dannett, Profiles of Negro Womanhood, 87.
99 Lerner, Black Women in White America, 365.
100 Dannett, Profiles of Negro Womanhood, 81.
in Philadelphia and was active in the Anti-Slavery Society serving as an agent for *The Liberator*.\(^{102}\)

The key value of these Philadelphia bonds showed that black activist women fully could operate in the frontlines of abolition insurgent leadership, while retaining “the role of reformer with the traditional responsibilities related to marriage and children rearing.”\(^{103}\) At one point in her life, Forten Grimké lived with Remond relative Caroline E. Putnam, sister to Sarah Parker Remond, a grocer’s wife, who held strong interests in politics and deep antislavery convictions.\(^{104}\) Forten Grimké’s aunts, Margareta, Sarah Louisa, and Harriet, were part of the tightly connected Philadelphia circles that participated in the national gatherings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of Women, and served in the American Anti-Slavery Society and the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, becoming reliable female stalwarts of the abolitionist community.\(^{105}\) Here, another kinship bond formed when Harriet Forten married Robert Purvis, a successful pairing in which the two used their ability in finances and social connections to turn their home into a center of abolitionism.\(^{106}\) Forten Grimké helps illustrate the intersections of Black Convention-connected women, as two of the drafters of the constitution governing the female-led antislavery body were Margareta Forten, daughter of James Forten, Sr.,

\(^{102}\) Gloria C. Oden, “The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten; The Salem-Philadelphia Years (1854-1862),” *The Essex Institute Historical Collections*, Vol. 119, No. 1 (1983), 126. This is a definitive piece on Forten, valuable in that Oden has knitted together key Black Convention kinship connections that also extended into other abolition and rights activist communities.


\(^{104}\) Dannett, *Profiles of Negro Womanhood*, 111.

\(^{105}\) Ibid., 82.

\(^{106}\) Ibid., 83.
and Sarah McCrummell, the wife of James McCrummell; both men with firm roots in the Convention.107

A member of an important black abolitionist family, Sarah Parker Remond’s skills as an orator garnered her great popularity on the anti-abolitionist circuits with her brother, Charles Lennox Remond, and influence in overseas areas where she drew lecturing invitations.108 As part of the tradition of black female abolitionists who agitated against slavery through oration, Parker Remond originated from a New England family background that included friendships with leading abolitionists of the day.109 A close confidant of Forten Grimké, Parker Remond was active in New England area antislavery societies, which the two often attended together.110

Parker Remond aided the insurgency by combating the harmful rhetoric of the ACS during the latter half of the 1850s; and by touring overseas where she spoke to welcoming abolitionist groups and members of the aristocracy in France, Germany, Scotland, and England.111 In Ireland, Parker Remond’s speech before the Dublin Ladies’ Anti-Slavery Society greatly angered proslavery forces. Here, Parker Remond skillfully defended herself from criticism by reminding her Irish audience of the American oppression and persecution that their fellows had experienced in the wake of the Potato Famine.112 Pro-slavery interests struck back at her by using the sword of 1857’s Dred Scott ruling, and argued that Parker Remond was not legally a citizen of the United

110 Ibid., 113.
111 Ibid.
States. Given this, these pro-slavery elements were able to delay a planned speaking tour that Parker Remond and her sister, Caroline Putnam, were readying for England.

Having the letter of United States law used against them in this fashion caused an international incident, which ironically gave the nation of France a chance to upstage their English rival and allow the sisters entry through their ports; English monarch Queen Victoria even took interest in the matter.\textsuperscript{113} Parker Remond had expressed concern about the welcome that might await her in England and in spite of the effect of the \textit{Dred Scott} ruling she noted, “I know that, no matter how I go [to England], the spirit of prejudice will meet me.”\textsuperscript{114} Parker Remond enjoyed a successful tour in abolitionist venues as she lectured in Liverpool, London, and Bristol and won praise from the London Emancipation Committee for her efforts.\textsuperscript{115}

Parker Remond’s most notable encounter occurred when the Howard Athenæum in Boston ejected her, her sister Caroline, and friend William C. Nell, from the theater. Able to pay for seats normally affordable only to upper class whites, the theater objected when the three arrived for a performance of \textit{Don Pasquale}.\textsuperscript{116} Indignant whites assaulted Parker Remond, injuring her. She sued the theater and won, with the judge ruling in part “they must stand by their contract and give to every ticket holder, of whatever nation, color or condition, the place which he has bought.”\textsuperscript{117} Parker Remond was among the few activist females that begrudgingly supported the Fourteenth and Fifteenth

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 142.
\textsuperscript{114} \textit{The Liberator}, Boston, MA, November 1858.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{The Liberator}, Boston, MA, July 01, 1859.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{The Liberator}, Boston, MA, May 13, 1853.
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{The Liberator}, Boston, MA, June 10, 1853.
Amendments, which meant “the enfranchisement of African-American men without the enfranchisement of any women.” 118

The Sister Insurgent

In conclusion, by their actions black women activists refuted claims that “significant limits were placed on their activities beyond the community level, in the ethnic public sphere of black national institutions dominated by men of the [black] elite.” 119 These women used various strategies to capture and expand their role in abolitionist circles. Kinship activism that connected various black abolitionist families, such as the Remonds, Fortens, and the two Douglass families, enabled these families to maximize familial and geographic resources within the groups they participated and trafficked in. These bonds kept an uneasy peace between Black Convention advocates and AMRS stalwarts, and pro-Garrisonian and black radical nationalist factions.

Historian Rosalyn Terborg-Penn noted that individuals place the majority of black women “outside of the organization framework of reformers and political activists of the time.” 120 However, the activities of black activist women clearly fall within various categories of activism. For example, frontline antislavery activism included the actions of black women, freeborn and enslaved, in models that represented physical resistance to southern slavery. Underground Railroad operations supported by black communities

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intuitively had to rely on the efforts of black women to provide food, medicine, and clothing for the fugitives in need.

One of the points stressed by the black insurgency was the improvement of the socio-economic condition of all blacks. The geographies grounded in the home space and in the public activist space persisted. However, in the case of the black activist woman, she navigated these rules by appearing to fit into the expected social norms, but dually defying these restrictive and gendered spheres. To this end, a black woman’s social class and community standing factored into her ability to act as a highly skilled activist. In part, a black woman’s effectiveness originated from the grassroots training propagated in abolitionist circles and other arenas of social-moral uplift. The other contributor lay in the level of education, social breeding, and influence of the family kinship connections for the person in question. These factors ultimately allow historians to explore the geographic spheres bound up in home and activist spheres, to expand and analyze the tools employed by movement-associated black women.

As the urgency of abolitionism spurred evolution within the northern black community, black women benefited from an expansion of “their social and political influence in community affairs.”\(^{121}\) The growth of antislavery societies provided training forums for women. Although black women took part in these societies, many made it a point to be mindful of their local communities and provide “for the growing numbers of runaway slaves seeking protection and aid.”\(^{122}\) The very existence of the various abolitionist groups and growth of the black insurgent network represented a strain on the

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resources of a contesting southern culture. The Slave Power pushback focused on retaining the institution of human bondage. Pro-slavery forces wanted to protect slavery from the onslaught of the domestic activism that promoted meetings, speeches, and other public spectacles designed to influence a national narrative on abolition and blacks.

From taking the array of potential ventures available to them, black women were able to utilize even so-called lowly occupations and “transform them into profit-making enterprises to provide for their own survival and that of their children.”123 A business activism also helped sustain blacks and the communities in which they lived, and Black Convention-connected women tended to seed this impulse. Nancy Lenox Remond, the mother of Sarah Parker Remond and John Remond, Jr., had success as a cake maker in Salem, and by her example encouraged several of her daughters to enter into business.124 Her daughter, Susan, opened her own bakery and operated an exclusive restaurant, gaining the reputation that “she controlled the trade of Salem in culinary productions.”125 Remond’s daughters, Cecilia, Maritcha, and Caroline, sold hair tonics, ran a successful wig factory and a hair salon; and maintained a mail-order enterprise.126 Other examples include Sarah Eddy Allen (daughter of Bishop Allen) who ran a dressmaking-millinery business; Grace Douglass’s millinery operation; and Martin Delany’s wife Catherine, who managed a seamstress-dressmaking business. Since 1833, the Black Convention had blessed the Free Produce Movement as an inroad for blacks to enter into some form of gainful enterprise free of slave labor connections.127

124 Ibid., 136.
125 Ibid., 149.
126 Ibid., 142.
127 Ibid., 137, 142, 149.
In overseas venues, specific women were able to turn public opinion against the likes of the American Colonization Society, by hampering proslavery sympathy. These women highlighted the condition of slavery in the United States by dovetailing print media activism and friendly foreign newspaper reports. Numerous women participated in domestic and overseas activism centered on oration and fundraising for the abolitionist cause. Domestically, a number of black women were able to speak on antislavery issues publicly in mixed-gender gatherings, thus stretching social customs that usually relegated women to non-speaking roles.

Black activist women publicly performed expected gender roles. However, they also used their vantage point to harness activist strategies to contest slavery and struggle for liberation. Because of the uniqueness of the black community with its ability to create alliances, strengthen networks, and encourage its evolving gender mores, activist women were able to operate within these spheres and within racial geographies. Thanks to their adeptness, these sister insurgents easily stepped beyond the restrictive social mores. They utilized the ruse of gender expectations to confront the strata that the dominant culture placed them in, and thereby furthered the black insurgency much to the chagrin of their opponents.
CHAPTER V

THE OHIO COMPROMISE OF 1849: FLASHPOINT OF REBELLION

The idea that two millions of white men require such monstrous legislation for their security against some eighteen thousand colored people, is so palpably absurd, that the people already have nullified most of these Black Laws.1-Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle

White citizens of the United States had come to accept Black Laws, a body of harsh restrictions designed to protect white hegemony, as a fact of daily existence in order to maintain the national status quo of white supremacy. However, the harshness of Black Laws concerned many and enraged black activists nationwide, particularly in Ohio. To the black insurgent networks, the Buckeye State represented the region where “prejudice against the Negro attains its rankest luxuriance, not in the swamps of Georgia, nor the sugar-field of Louisiana, but upon the prairies of Ohio.”2

This chapter argues that the passage of the Ohio Compromise of 1849 commonly referred to as the ‘partial repeal,’ impacted the nation on many levels, and emboldened black activists of the day, challenging the pro-slavery narrative. Significantly frightened by the passage of the Ohio Compromise, the proslavery southern states reacted to the law by using their majority influence in the Federal government to pushback against the perceived threat. This anti-abolition response provides grounding for the argument that the Black Convention Movement’s activities inadvertently helped to push the nation

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1 Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle, January 01, 1845
toward civil war.\textsuperscript{1} Herein is a focus on state and national events surrounding the 1849 rollback of Ohio’s Black Laws. Also noted is the implementation and varied contextualization of Ohio’s Black Laws. This chapter addresses the insurgent response and its strategies grounded in activism, public opinion, alliances with whites. The reality of the Black Convention Movement’s chief insurgent function displays itself keenly in the partial repeal. Its assault upon Ohio’s Black Laws display a series of tactics designed to defeat racism and discrimination.

\textit{The South’s Complaint}

This chapter argues that the Ohio Compromise of 1849, an event largely ignored, is a contributing factor to the onset of the American Civil War. The Compromise, or partial repeal, represented the growing influence of abolitionism in the northern states. Blacks had lost suffrage in Pennsylvania, held on to limited suffrage in New York, and still did not possess suffrage in Ohio at this time. The cases of Pennsylvania and New York demonstrated the rollback or obliteration of suffrage rights, while the Compromise represented a rollback of long-established racial policy in Ohio. As a potential barometer of softening northern attitudes toward blacks, the Ohio Compromise of 1849 stood as a viable threat to the status quo Slave Power. The Slave Power represented the alliances of sympathizers and proponents favorable to the systems of racism, discrimination, and slavery present in the American system. In response, Slave Power interests pursued a series of anti-abolitionist measures against the Compromise, and ironically placed the nation on a path toward sectional conflagration.

Passed in September, the Compromise of 1850, implemented as part of a larger national negotiation to settle the question of slave expansion, admitted California as a free state, and prohibited slave trading in Washington D.C. The act incorporated the Fugitive Slave Law, which required citizens to assist in the recapture of fugitives, and streamlined slave recovery. This enraged abolitionists nationwide, particularly blacks. Historian Stephen Middleton argued that with the “passage of the Compromise of 1850, the fugitive slave controversy in Ohio took on new meaning.”\(^2\) Southern states had long complained about turnkey treatment, a literal sanctuary road to freedom, received by runaway slaves in Ohio. Now, with the new Fugitive Slave Law, the South had a de facto response to the Ohio Compromise. Signed into law on September 18, 1850, by then Whig President Millard Fillmore, the Fugitive Slave Law took an immediate toll upon the Whig Party, which was condemned over it in various newspapers, although some venues suggested that the law originated in the Democratic Party and further stressed the divisions between proslavery and antislavery interests.\(^3\)

Offense to the Fugitive Slave Law ran deep, and opinion in Ohio opposed any implementation. The Ohio House of Representatives passed a resolution that urged the state’s representatives to the United States Congress to take action and use “all honorable means to obtain an immediate repeal of the [Fugitive Slave Law].”\(^4\) The *Cleveland Herald* blasted the law for being “directly opposed to what are considered in the North as sacred personal rights, and feeling this, the people of the North will not aid in carrying

\(^2\) Ibid., 201.
\(^3\) *The Cleveland Herald*, October 24, 1850. The paper pointed out that Democratic senators introduced and guided the bill through the U.S. Senate with little actual Whig support, and that Whigs called for its repeal after the fact.
\(^4\) *The Cleveland Herald*, December 16, 1850.
out the provisions of the law.””\(^5\) Middleton pointed out that supporters of the new slave provision, in hoping for the North to follow the rule of law, had “overestimated the number of northern citizens willing to subordinate their consciences to the will of a federal authority . . . protests erupted all over the North.””\(^6\) Rumors spread nationwide that President Fillmore had “ordered troops to Boston, with a view of enforcing the [law].””\(^7\) Perhaps those same Slave Power supporters calculated that threats of disunion would win the day, but this backfired and largely sympathetic citizenry “of all classes and parties [felt] indignant that the South by this law, [was] compelling them to become, as it were, \textit{particpes criminis} in the foul wrong in of slavery.””\(^8\) News of the measure convinced numbers of fugitive slaves in the North to leave for safety in Canada. Ironically, the \textit{Daily Scioto Gazette} reported that whites in the border provinces along Michigan and Canada feared the ‘rapid influx’ of these blacks and called for Authorities to act, otherwise “the province must soon be overwhelmed by our colored brethren.””\(^9\)

The progression of events placing the nation on a path toward civil conflict began in Ohio. From the state’s Northwest Ordinance origins, Ohio’s lawmakers envisioned the region as slave-free.\(^10\) These lawmakers also intended to keep the state homogeneously white. From 1803 through 1807, laws prohibited blacks from service in state military forces. These laws also functioned to suppress the numbers of blacks and Native Americans in Ohio. The result denied blacks voting rights, denied elected office, and

\(^5\) The Cleveland Herald, September 30, 1850.
\(^6\) Middleton, \textit{The Black Laws}, 203.
\(^7\) The Cleveland Herald, November 06, 1850.
\(^8\) The Cleveland Herald, September 30, 1850.
\(^9\) The Daily Scioto Gazette, November 04, 1850.
restricted employment. This brought a ‘quiet appreciation’ to the state’s white citizens that the state’s laws actually suppressed “the mass migration of Negroes [to Ohio].”

Between 1804 and 1807, the Ohio Legislature passed additional laws banning blacks from giving testimony against a white people. Much of the voting and debating during the legislative convention concerning the legal status of blacks was “controlled more by feeling than by reason.” Although a slave-free state, the economics of human bondage factored into the Ohio Legislature’s ingrained racial prejudices. The financial benefits of western expansion into the Northwest Territories “depended on assessments of the future direction of regional development.” To the southern states, it was a matter of market security to keep slavery out of Ohio, while encouraging its settlement by whites.

Critics warned that expansion of slavery would not result in anything other than economic downturns, while supporters promoted states’ rights and argued, “the authors of the [Northwest] Ordinance intended to promote the growth of the Territory’s population and economy.” Both sides, regardless of their position on the expansion of slavery, did not intend for the full free movement of blacks at all, thus spurring the creation of Black Laws in Ohio and states westward.

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14 Ibid. Strong resistance to the expansion of slavery also existed in Indiana and Illinois, and bids to expand it into these states were defeated.
15 Ibid., 131.
16 For an in-depth analysis of the perceived economic and social threat that blacks, free or otherwise, represented in the minds of whites in states such as Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and other Northwest Territory states, see: John Van Houten Dippel, Race to the Frontier: White Flight and Western Expansion (New York: Algora Publishing, 2005).
Black activists would not tolerate the dictates of Black Laws meekly, and began to organize constant campaigns of resistance to contest the dominant regime of white racism. Blacks in the North had organized since the late 1700s to agitate for equality and to provide social services for their communities. In 1780, for example, free blacks established a benevolent society in Providence. According to historian Elizabeth Rauh-Bethel, Cincinnati, the key border-state city along the Ohio River with Kentucky, helps illustrate the situation for blacks in the state. Rauh-Bethel argues that the application of the state’s Black Laws in Cincinnati was composed of social, geopolitical, and economic elements. These elements, argues Rauh-Bethel, spawned from the 1807 update of the state’s Black Laws, which established a “caste-like biracial social structure.” This caste structure reinforced itself through the harsh requirements mandated by the Black Laws. In addition to the bans on court testimony and jury duty, the laws demanded that blacks entering the state provide a $500 good behavior bond as proof of their free status. Blacks also faced roadblocks regarding state social services. Given the region’s infamous history of racial riots in the late 1820s, Rauh-Bethel argues that blacks found themselves the victims of their own growing population, economic job competition with the influx of German and Irish immigrants, and southern Ohio’s ties with southern plantation owners who opposed black equality and abolitionism.

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Long held racial prejudices that existed throughout the 1820s illustrated the political struggle that defined the social and political conditions of blacks, and the debates regarding how to address them. In 1821, Ohio Congressman John W. Campbell attacked the proposed practice of ejecting blacks convicted of crimes as unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{20} Ohio’s eighteenth governor, Mordecai Bartley, chided the state’s Black Laws as “too severe in their restrictions and abilities.”\textsuperscript{21} Black activists and their allies roused enough support to convince the Ohio House of Representatives to form a committee, which advised a repeal of the state’s Black Laws. This committee cited the Declaration of Independence, and the unjust nature of basing discriminatory laws on color, as justifications to oppose the state’s racial laws.\textsuperscript{22} Ohio’s twentieth governor, Seabury Ford, called for full repeal of the state’s Black Laws and argued that they were socially “detrimental to Negroes and whites alike.”\textsuperscript{23} Before then, schools for blacks in the state benefited mainly from white patronage.\textsuperscript{24} Due to Ford’s sentiments, the Ohio Legislature passed legislation granting blacks “the right to public education.”\textsuperscript{25} Despite the positive words and results, the remaining roadblocks to advancement against the status quo in Ohio for blacks continued as a marker of the caste existence of the state’s oppressed citizens.

As abolitionists organized to contest discriminatory laws head on, they developed ready cadres of blacks, in concert with white allies, both determined to confront the national dominance of Slave Power interests. Abolitionist icon William Lloyd Garrison editorialized in an 1835 issue of \textit{The Liberator} that Ohio’s blacks were “oppressed much

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid., 56.
\item Ibid., 57.
\item Ibid., 58.
\item Pease and Pease, \textit{They Who Would Be Free}, 147.
\item Culpepper, \textit{The Negro and the Black Laws of Ohio}, 59.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
more by opinion, than by law.”26 Garrison noted the reasons people that cited for keeping
the state’s Black Laws in place included the importance of its border state neighbors,
Kentucky and Virginia. The sentiment that existed between the three states originated
from a sense of kinship that stemmed from the Revolutionary War and the 1812 conflicts
with Great Britain, in addition to profitable economic commerce. Ties were deep due to
Ohio’s history as once being part of Virginia proper. Critics expressed concern that it
might not be “prudent, or wise . . . to destroy the harmony which has so long existed
between these powerful states?”27 Critics urged that Ohio should defer to its
slaveholding neighbors rather than give offence.

A number of Ohio whites expressed concerns about the growing numbers of
blacks that came to the state in the mid-1820s. Largely being former slaves, these blacks
had little means, and their numbers kept expanding in the state. Their presence added to
pressures in job competition with whites, especially in southern Ohio cities like
Cincinnati.28 Furthermore, the American Colonization Society had expanded into the
state by 1827, and warned whites that black refugees represented dangers to the tax base,
and potential civil unrest.29 The situation in Cincinnati highlighted the necessity for
active black resistance. The Queen City’s 1827 riots were a result, in part, of fearful
whites incited by David Walker’s pamphlet *Appeal in Four Articles*. Walker, freeborn in
Wilmington, North Carolina, completed work on his pamphlet in Boston, and it
immediately caused concern to Slave Power proponents and sympathizers.30

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26 *The Liberator*, April 04, 1835.
27 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
states banned Walker’s pamphlet swiftly before it could reach a saturation point. However, the situation inflicted a mental scar to Slave Power proponents, which kept the South on a constant reactionary footing to defend threats to its slave-based economic interests.31 In the North, the chaos created by Walker’s pamphlet resulted in the expulsion, voluntary and otherwise, of blacks due to the standard racial hatreds, and for ongoing issues of economic competition.32 By 1829, Cincinnati whites petitioned the City Council for “stricter enforcement of Ohio’s Black Laws.”33 Other whites focused on colonization as the solution to Cincinnati’s blacks.34

In August 1829, Black Convention member and publisher Samuel E. Cornish inadvertently ignited the pressures surrounding blacks and competing whites in Cincinnati, by publishing the statement in his paper *The Rights of All*; “do not remove one step from your native state and nether [sic] country, rather become martyrs to the injustice, you have but once to die.”35 The day afterward, deadly Cincinnati riots broke out. The violence drove hundreds of the city’s black residents to Canada, and led in part to the formation of the national Black Convention that met in Philadelphia in 1830. Cornish’s words contained meanings that did not exist in a vacuum. Whites viewed Cornish’s implied threat as closely bound to contexts that contained repercussions for their local status quo. In the larger extent, Cornish’s antislavery intent threatened the national system that functioned through slavery, racial, and gender inequality.

31 Ibid., xv.
33 Julie A. Mujic, “A Border Community’s Unfulfilled Appeals: The Rise and Fall of the 1840s Anti-Abolitionist Movement in Cincinnati,” *Ohio Valley History*, Volume 7, Number 2 (Summer 2007), 55.
34 Ibid., 58.
Historian John Warner argued that the Cincinnati riots also resulted from the successful ‘colored removal propaganda’ promoted by the American Colonization Society. The situation was further emboldened by the dearth of a strong abolitionist community in the Queen City.\textsuperscript{36} The intent of antislavery rhetorical contexts remained tangible realities to whites, evidenced by two additional riots in 1836 that aimed at settling old jealousies toward the rebuilt black community and a growing abolitionist presence.\textsuperscript{37} As the decade closed, a growing abolitionist sense measurably progressed throughout the state, attracting more individuals to its side. A Methodist minister wrote to Garrison “a goodly number of slaves are escaping every week . . . passing through Ohio to Canada, and, in spite of the law, [are] assisted by the abolitionists of Ohio.”\textsuperscript{38} It was this ongoing attitude toward slavery that worried Slave Power interests, and during the 1840s, abolitionist forces expanded insurgent networks to intensify their cause.

Tensions increased in 1841 when the pro-southern newspaper, the \textit{Cincinnati Enquirer}, warned that abolitionists used the city as a safe harbor for fugitive slaves.\textsuperscript{39} The paper cautioned that the situation was indicative of “what Cincinnati has to expect, and what she must lose by the madness of Abolition fanaticism.”\textsuperscript{40} The white citizenry feared abolition as a danger to the city and to commerce with a South angered by a recent Ohio Supreme Court ruling that “held that every slave brought into Ohio (even in transit) by his master became free automatically.”\textsuperscript{41} Southern newspapers reacted angrily, unleashing a torrent of condemnation against ‘Free Negroism’ in the North and the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[37] Ibid., 298.
\item[38] \textit{The Liberator}, August 23, 1839.
\item[39] Werner, \textit{Reaping the Bloody Harvest}, 73.
\item[40] Ibid., 75.
\item[41] Ibid., 74.
\end{footnotes}
insolence it fostered among the South’s blacks. The combination of prejudice and economic fear sparked riots that summer in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio. Future Ohio senator, governor, and Black Convention ally Salmon P. Chase received an eyewitness account of the racial turmoil in Cincinnati lamenting, “It is disgusting to hear the maledictions uttered agt [sic] the colored persons . . . the anti-negro spirit seems to be revived with all its former vindictiveness.” One result of this was that abolitionist groups sent numerous petitions to the Ohio House, demanding a repeal of the very Black Laws that white Cincinnatians wanted strengthened.

Through such petition campaigns, abolitionists continued to attract national press. Abolitionists kept the focus on repealing Ohio’s Black Laws out front, through petitions and pleas for the organization of a strong state body to coordinate efforts in education, industry, and self-reliance. This program for repeal also focused on tactically harnessing the progressive political sentiment of white elites. Ohio Whig Governor Mordecai Bartley used his Inaugural address in December 1844 to speak against the Black Laws, which he considered obsolete, arguing “it appears to me that a revision of those laws is now called for, and that reason, justice, and mercy, demand a mitigation of their penalties.” The Cleveland Herald agreed with Bartley and went further by pointing out the dangers the Black Laws represented to Ohio’s white population. The Herald noted that while most Ohioans actively ignored them, the Black Laws represented

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42 Ibid., 75.
43 Ibid., 298.
45 *Cleveland Daily Herald*, January 25, 1841.
46 *Cleveland Daily Herald*, August 26, 1843.
47 *The Cleveland Herald*, December 12, 1844.
a statewide threat. Generally championing an abolitionist position, the *Herald* called for an immediate repeal of all of Ohio’s Black Laws.\(^48\)

The latter half of the decade yielded firmer results as Ohio abolitionists increased their efforts against the state’s Black Laws. At the beginning of 1846, State Senator Simon Perkins submitted a bill in the state senate for consideration of repealing the Black Laws, a move that gained the support of abolitionist-friendly news press.\(^49\) Supporters cast this new effort to repeal the Black Laws as proof that liberal views were on the rise in Ohio. *The Cleveland Herald* editorialized the need to repeal at least some of the laws and argued “in a Christian country we would permit the Mahometan or the Hindoo to testify, but shut out the oath of intelligent Christian men . . . because they are black.”\(^50\) The paper further alluded that such a law was on par with semi-barbarism.

Some newspapers questioned the sincerity of the Whig-dominated Ohio government toward repealing the laws, arguing that the Whig leadership cared little for “white laborers if they can acquire political power, and create moneyed monopolies.”\(^51\) On this basis, the Columbus-based *Semi-weekly Ohio Statesman* lamented that the Whigs would carry repeal legislation to curry favor among the state’s abolitionist community. Furthermore, the *Statesman* characterized the effort as an “olive branch held out to all the floating Negroes in the Union to rush into our State.”\(^52\) The *Statesman* grudgingly held to its position that repeal of any part of the Black Laws represented dangers to white workers and was an attempt to curry political power, which represented “a selling out of

\(^{48}\) *The Cleveland Herald*, December 20, 1844.
\(^{49}\) *Cincinnati Herald*, quoted in *Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle*, January 01, 1845. Perkins would go on to be partners in John Brown’s business venture in Akron, Ohio.
\(^{50}\) *The Cleveland Herald*, January 03, 1845.
\(^{51}\) *Semi-Weekly Oho Statesman*, January 24, 1845.
\(^{52}\) *Semi-Weekly Oho Statesman*, February 18, 1845.
the white race at political auction.” The alarm of the Statesman undoubtedly struck public chords because in the spring of 1845 a vote of thirty to twenty-seven in the Ohio House “indefinitely postponed the bill to repeal the laws imposing disabilities on people of color.” For public consumption, political maneuvering in the Ohio Legislature had made it appear that a repeal was evident, but ultimately the Whig majority rejected it after the bill had been pared down into a mere repeal of the ban on black judicial testimony. Regardless, repeal efforts increased as abolitionists remained focused on achieving victory.

By fall, the Cleveland Herald announced that another Black Law repeal effort in the Ohio Legislature was underway, which it hoped would achieve success in the coming winter. The Herald argued that the disgraceful Black Laws needed stricken from Ohio’s books, and that its readers would do well to ignore the tactics of fear mongering terms such as “Abolition! Amalgamation! Negro emigration!” The Herald further argued that the Black Laws represented dishonor upon all of Ohio and alluded that the laws bore the weight of Egyptian oppression, a clear likening of blacks to Old Testament Hebrews. Yet, competing voices in the Weekly Ohio Statesman lampooned any notion that Ohio Democrats supported repeal. The Statesman charged that the Whigs bore total responsibility for such efforts, chastising voters “who want those laws repealed, and your children to sit side by side with the negroes in our common schools, vote the Whig ticket; this will undoubtedly be done, if the Whigs get a majority.” Petitions calling for repeal

53 Ibid.
54 The Cleveland Herald, March 01, 1845.
55 Emancipator and Weekly Chronicle, April 02, 1845.
56 The Cleveland Herald, September 25, 1845.
57 Ibid.
58 Weekly Ohio Statesman, October 15, 1845.
continued to arrive at the Ohio Legislature.\textsuperscript{59} Newspapers nationwide continued to point out the state’s Black Laws “concerning colored persons are more infamous, perhaps than those of any other free state in the Union.”\textsuperscript{60} Abolitionist voices continually fostered the theme that Ohio’s Black Laws represented horrible iniquity.\textsuperscript{61} Yet, there existed fears that, despite the regularity of petitions that the State Legislature received, Ohio’s citizenry needed further education in the matter. The \textit{Ohio Observer} warned that if the winter season did not bring about a repeal, “a judicious and thorough agitation of the subject, bringing it in its true light before the public mind, may effect the removal of these disgraceful laws.”\textsuperscript{62}

During the 1846 winter, the debate continued for and against repeal of Ohio’s Black Laws. The \textit{Xenia Torch Light} opined in reference to the efforts underway in the Legislature, “We do not believe that the repeal of all laws making distinction on account of color, would, or ought to be sustained.”\textsuperscript{63} However, a Select Committee in the Ohio House, upon consideration of the vast number of petitions before it, had “come to the conclusion that the request of the petitioners should be granted, and the recommendation of the Governor carried out, in the repeal of the laws in question.”\textsuperscript{64} The Select Committee rejected anti-abolitionists claims that repealing the laws could result in a growth of blacks in the state, citing that “there is no evidence at all that our black laws have ever kept one Negro out of the State.”\textsuperscript{65} The Committee also pointed out that neighboring Pennsylvania, with no Black Laws, possessed a small black population and

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{The Scioto Gazette}, December 16, 1845.  
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Rochester Democrat}, quoted in \textit{The Cleveland Herald}, December 22, 1845.  
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{The Liberator}, December 26, 1845.  
\textsuperscript{62} \textit{The Ohio Observer}, December 31, 1845.  
\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Xenia Torch Light}, quoted in \textit{The Scioto Gazette}, January 22, 1846.  
\textsuperscript{64} \textit{The Cleveland Herald}, January 26, 1846; Issue 184.  
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
offered the same opportunities for black refuges that proponents of Ohio’s Black Laws argued.66 For a moment, it appeared that the battle for repeal of the laws had won.

Sadly, the Scioto Gazette reported that the 1846 effort to repeal the state’s Black Laws had stalled in the House by a vote of thirty-five to twenty-seven with a Whig majority voting to halt the bill’s progress.67 This victory by anti-repeal interests was further emboldened in the Ohio Legislature when State Senator James H. Ewing and State House Representative Thomas J. Gallagher, both of Hamilton County, Ohio, successfully introduced and guided to passage, additional restrictions to Ohio’s Black Laws.68 The result of these roadblocks was the growing awareness among the state’s abolitionist community that the Ohio Whigs, long a state power, might be a hindrance to their cause rather than a help. Whig candidate William Bebb had captured the Governor’s Office in a close October 1846 battle against Democrat David Tod, a victory that ironically moved some Democrats to blame Ohio’s Black Laws, in part, for Tod’s defeat.69 The Cleveland Herald published an editorial meant to buoy abolitionist spirits. The Herald rationalized the issue of Whigs’ actions to repeal the laws as being a problem of politics “because public opinion in some portions of the State will not allow their representatives to vote for repeal, and public opinion there must undergo some change before the black laws can be repealed by any party.”70 If any political party was to achieve success in repealing Ohio’s Black Laws, the Herald assured its readers that it was Ohio’s Whigs, and further claimed that “the battle is almost won, only sustain us a

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66 Ibid.
67 The Scioto Gazette, February 19, 1846.
68 Cleveland American, quoted in The Liberator, February 20, 1846.
70 The Cleveland Herald, December 7, 1846.
l little while longer, and the thing will be done.”71 For the black insurgent network, the battle over Ohio’s Black Laws was indeed nearing a conclusion.

In December 1847, the start of a controversial new repeal effort in the Legislature commenced. Columbus-based Black Convention veteran David Jenkins noted that the new repeal bill suffered due to the current national presidential elections. Jenkins also pointed out that various members of the Ohio Legislature, Whig and Democrat, preferred to hedge their support until after the results; “one member declared, that if the black laws are to be repealed, he would leave the state.”72 However, the bill ended up assigned to a select committee for review. Frederick Douglass used his paper, The North Star, to run a series of features on Ohio’s Black Laws. Douglass pointed out their development, political implementation, and acquiescence to by Ohio politicians. Douglass also highlighted arguments for and against the Black Laws, and most importantly, celebrated that many ignored them in practice. Even though legal ramifications existed for those who ignored them, “the emigration of the colored persons is not affected either way by the existence of those laws. . . certificates of freedom are not often demanded . . . the question is seldom asked as to their being, or ever having been a slave.”73 Furthermore, whites regularly ignored fines and requirements in hiring blacks. Detractors of Ohio’s Black Laws continually presented them as obsolete and backwards.

In North Star, Douglass expressed the ongoing dissatisfaction blacks had with Ohio’s Black Laws. Echoing many, Douglass argued that “in no State of this Union are to be found laws more cruel, unjust and atrocious than those on the Statute Book of Ohio.

71 Ibid.
72 The North Star, January 21, 1848.
73 The North Star, May 05, 1848.
An assembly of devils could not have enacted laws more infernal, and better fitted to promote crime, than what are called the ‘black laws’ of that State.”74 During the battle to achieve the Ohio Compromise of 1849, it may have been preferable to battle against devils, rather than an institutional system of racial inequality. The southern paper *Louisville Examiner* condemned Ohio’s Black Laws, criticized the state Legislature, and pointed out that “not one of the members of that body would hesitate about denouncing slavery . . . condemn the South for holding on to the institution. Yet they deny justice to the Negro.”75 Pressure continued throughout the year, and the issue of the laws arose again at the national gathering of the Black Convention in Cleveland.

The national Convention met in September of 1848 to “devise plans for the melioration of the condition of the African race in the United States.”76 The battle had come to a crest, in which black insurgent activists of the Convention began shifting into concerted action to bring about a repeal of the state’s discriminatory laws. This key gathering showed the symbolic importance that Ohio represented within the overall Black Convention organization. Among those in attendance were Douglass, Charles H. Langston, William H. Day, and Martin R. Delany.

The agenda included discussion regarding the types of political candidates and parties that blacks should support.77 Convention participants recommended a benchmark for support from among blacks, their allies, and the abolition community: “equal rights

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75 *Louisville Examiner*, quoted in *The Liberator*, March 17, 1848.
76 *The Cleveland Herald*, September 07, 1848.
and privileges, without distinction of color, clime, or condition.”78 The group offered abundant support for the Free Soil Party, insisting that moral suasion could not be the means to thwart slavery or injustice, and pledged to “use all justifiable means in aiding our enslaved brethren in escaping from the Southern Prison House of Bondage.”79 While oppression of black Ohioans had eased in part due to constant black insurgent activism, Convention members remembered that they were still politically and socially “in many respects . . . slaves of the community.”80

Reflective of past efforts in the Ohio repeal struggle, Convention members recommended that blacks throughout the slave-free states “assemble in mass state conventions annually, and petition the Legislatures thereof to repeal the Black Laws, or all laws militating against the interests of colored people.”81 From this gathering, a new petition effort to repeal Ohio’s Black Laws launched later in the year.82 After the national U.S. presidential elections a new repeal bill prepared for submission in December to the Ohio Legislature boasted combined state Free Soil and Democrat support. Convention participants cheered the potential that existed for achieving their goals and noted that during “the last ten years [we] have witnessed a mighty change . . . both in this and other lands.”83 Citing the emancipation realities in England and France, the members declared, “our own country shakes with the agitation of our rights.”84 The insurgent-driven intent to dismantle the racist discrimination and enslavement present in the American system peaked.

78 Ibid., 13.
79 Ibid., 14.
80 Ibid., 18.
81 Ibid., 16.
82 New York Evangelist, quoted in The North Star, December 01, 1848.
83 “Report of the Proceedings of the Colored National Convention, held at Cleveland, Ohio,” Bell, 17.
84 Ibid., 18.
That December, the new repeal effort firmed up in the wake of the successful Whig presidential campaign of southern slave owner General Zachary Taylor to the White House.\(^{85}\) Ironically, by then a number of anti-slavery Whigs defected to the anti-slave expansion Free Soil Party, and this resulted in an equalization of Whig and Democratic power in the Ohio General Assembly. Division among Ohio’s Whigs existed long before Taylor’s election, with many of the state’s Whigs viewing the Mexican War hero as an agent for southern expansion of slavery.\(^{86}\) Early on, a majority of the state’s Whigs found Taylor an untenable presidential nominee because of his pro-slavery leanings.\(^{87}\) These Whigs demanded that the national Whig Party affirm support for legislation, such as the Wilmot Proviso, that blocked the expansion of slave labor into new territories.\(^{88}\) Thus, with Taylor’s victory to the Executive Office, Ohio Whigs began deserting their party in earnest.\(^{89}\) This situation created a key opportunity for opponents of Ohio’s Black Laws.

Inspired by anti-slavery presidential candidate Martin Van Buren, the Free Soil party in Ohio plotted to blot out the shameful Black Laws of the state. Two Free Soilers friendly to blacks, John Morse of Lake County and Norton S. Townshend of Lorain County, realized the voting advantage they held in the Lower House and they looked to Salmon P. Chase’s lead in a Democrat/Free Soil bargain to accomplish a possible partial repeal. To the opponents of abolition, “the end of slavery was a threat to the racial purity of northern society.”\(^{90}\) They could sympathize in spirit with black Southern slaves, but

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{88}\) Ibid., 88
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 106
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 7.
“even the suggestion of their immigration into the state brought angry words in defense of white homes, hearths, and jobs.”91 From their viewpoint, the Black Laws had to remain in force. The Whig party as a whole did not share the strong abolitionist feelings that a number of its members expressed and wanted to maintain the national status quo. A number of these Whigs began working with the now often overlooked Liberty Party. Eventually replaced by the Free Soil Party in 1848, the Liberty Party dominated in Ohio by Chase, attempted to abolish Black Laws requiring the $500 good conduct bond and the provision that kept blacks from testifying in courts against whites. Despite these few allies, the party establishment did not wish to see a sudden immigration of blacks to Ohio because they “preferred to live in a racially homogeneous state.”92 However, in the coming year great changes were to occur in Ohio, which would reverberate throughout the national debate on slavery.

At the January 1849 gathering of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio in Columbus, black insurgent participants arrived with a unified purpose, aware of what had occurred and of the work that still stood before them. Awareness heightened that the American Colonization Society lurked on the horizon, still representing a tangible threat to the safety of blacks and to the goals of repeal.93 Convention members blamed the colonization organization for influencing the Pennsylvania Legislature’s attack on the suffrage rights of that state’s black citizens in 1838. Even though it had occurred over a decade in the past, the memory remained fresh among convention members that the tragic loss of voting rights had occurred in part due to the American

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 17.
Moral Reform’s (AMRS) successful co-option of the national Convention movement in
1835. The AMRS argued that principles of moral suasion would bring whites to their
senses regarding slavery and equality. Many black activists railed at this move and broke
away to focus on building and strengthening insurgent networks at state and regional
levels, where convention gatherings begin shifting toward a radical stance. Hence,
mindful of what occurred in their state, on March 14, 1838, activists flocked to
Philadelphia and issued the fruitless *Appeal of Forty Thousand Citizens, Threatened with
Disfranchisement, to the People of Pennsylvania.* The subsequent failure of this appeal
haunted Ohio’s pro-repeal community. The possibility that further calamities awaited
them in their home state if they relented in their battle did not sit well with them, as Ohio
was a state where blacks did not possess suffrage rights.

By mid-January of 1849, the state convention gathered in Columbus to contest
and demand repeal of Ohio’s Black Laws. This meeting was the last before the actual
success of the partial repeal, but at that time, the matter at hand proved heated and gave
the attendees purpose. Among measures designed to press awareness on the state’s Black
Laws, the convention called for petitions to the Ohio Legislature for the repeal of the
laws and further for the United States Congress “to repeal all laws making distinction on
account of color.” Additionally, the state gathering foreshadowed the turn toward
rhetoric that would place radical elements of the black insurgent network at the head of
leadership and domination through the 1850s. Activists planned to print and distribute

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94 Bella Gross, *Clarion Call: The History and Development of the Negro People’s Convention Movement in
the United States from 1817 to 1840* (American Moral Reform Society, 1947), 37.
95 Minutes of the State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio, Convened at Columbus, January 10th,
11th, 12th, & 13th, 1849,” in Foner and Walker, *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865,
Vol. 1*, 228.
throughout the state copies of David Walker’s *Appeal* and Henry Highland Garnet’s controversial 1843 call for slave rebellion.  

In a statement to the citizens of the state, the gathering charged that, in addition to violating the spirit of the United States Constitution, Ohio’s Black Laws were defective for other reasons. The convention argued that the state’s blacks were unrepresented due to the actions of those who crafted Ohio’s constitution to allow suffrage for whites only, which effectively rendered blacks *persona non gratis* in the state’s elections. The gathering noted that due to the lack of suffrage, blacks suffered unfair taxation, and lacked equal access to the government services these taxes provided whites. Grievances remained deep regarding provisions that blocked blacks from enjoying the same court testimony and jury rights of their white peers. The state body decried any counterargument that they were unworthy elements of society. In a unified voice, the convention declared their request that ‘white’ be removed from Ohio’s constitution and stood on their demand “for equal privileges, not because we would consider it condescension on your part to grant them—but because we are MEN, and therefore entitled to all the privileges of other men in the same circumstances.”

Defying the colonization arguments of their opponents, the convention called for all blacks to work toward “Repeal, Repeal, Repeal, until that repeal is granted.”

At the height of the controversy, Chase, Townshend, and Morse finally constructed and executed the Compromise of 1849, rousing status quo anger throughout Ohio. Chase, famed for heading an antislavery platform and being a supporter of the

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96 Ibid., 229.
97 Ibid., 231, 232.
98 Ibid., 233.
99 Ibid., 234.
rights of black people, defended many fugitives against fugitive slave laws in the courts of Cincinnati. Chase had courted Ohio politicians to join him in a viable third party that possessed a strong anti-slavery focus that would become a part of the national Free Soil Party. The key was the Democrat/Free Soil alliance that he built and maintained against the Whigs with the aid of Townshend and Morse. The Democrats sensed that they could retain a beneficial measure of political power over their Whig rivals, and agreed to back Chase’s political ambitions if both parties involved also acquiesced to the convening of a state constitutional convention in the future. With the Democrats’ conditions satisfied, Chase composed a bill to provide for the education of black children, to pass the repeal measures, and he added an anti-kidnapping measure to combat the Fugitive Slave Law that he despised. The bill moved through committee, but in an amended form that denied blacks jury duty and poorhouse admittance, and abandoned the anti-kidnapping measure. Too late, stubborn Whigs helplessly watched the partial repeal bill pass through the Ohio House and Senate, and Chase’s eventual election to a seat in the United States Senate, as partial reward for his part in the effort.

The struggle for racial equality in Ohio showed that although the black insurgent network toiled tirelessly, white politicians such as Chase were important allies in the struggle. The situation for Ohio’s blacks changed in ways some thought would not come in their lifetime; and although there was more that could be done, the state benefited from a growing national antislavery reputation. Despite the improved antislavery image, political deficiencies remained for the blacks of Ohio. Blacks still could not sit on juries, political deficiencies remained for the blacks of Ohio. Blacks still could not sit on juries,

100 Maizlish, *The Triumph of Sectionalism*, 100-106.
102 Ibid., 128, 129, 137, 141.
“or gain a legal residence [as a citizen] in the state, go to court to testify for whites . . . or vote.”¹⁰⁴ That and other injustices demonstrated that the consummation of the Democrat/Free Soil agreement did not signal an end to the legacy of race prejudice.¹⁰⁵ Instead, the agreement merely highlighted that pro-repeal activists successfully harnessed antislavery sentiment among state progressives, while “the enemies of the Negroes were unorganized.”¹⁰⁶ Regardless, Black Laws that existed from 1804, 1807, and 1834 were now obsolete, but the Black Convention Movement and its networks remained intent on winning larger goals.

The Free Soil-Democratic alliance convened to form a new constitution for Ohio that would address various concerns on May 6, 1850 in a State Constitutional Convention. Schooling for black children received approval. The new constitution still denied militia service and voting rights to black men, however, they could now freely migrate with their families to Ohio and not fear the defunct prohibitive registration laws. This amended constitution was in force through 1873, when the Federal Government brought Ohio into line with Reconstruction laws which “occasioned by the Civil War made it necessary to again revise [them].”¹⁰⁷

Indicative of the shift in public opinion, a Cleveland Herald editorial celebrated the result and stated, “we rejoice that these laws, so long nearly a dead letter, and so long a disgrace to the State of Ohio, have at last been blotted out.”¹⁰⁸ The Herald placed blame for the longevity of the Black Laws upon the Locofocos, radical Democrats who

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¹⁰⁴ Quillin, The Color Line in Ohio, 37.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 43.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
¹⁰⁷ Hickok, The Negro in Ohio, 68.
¹⁰⁸ The Cleveland Herald, February 06, 1849.
continuously opposed the “repeal or even a modification of some of their most
unreasonable and obnoxious provisions.”109 Now, the Herald marveled at the change of
position exhibited by these Democrats who had joined with a few pro-repeal Whigs to
bring down the Black Laws. Cleveland blacks gathered for a banquet at Empire Hall,
where banners displayed in rejoicing “on account of the repeal of the Black Laws, for
which they as well as every citizen of the State have abundant cause.”110

The black insurgent network nationwide rejoiced in the success of Ohio. Blacks
in New York were still feeling the sting of restrictive suffrage laws passed in the early
1820s that allowed only a small propertied few of their number to exercise civic duties.111
These blacks lauded Townshend, Morse, and the Free Soil Party “for the noble stand they
took in the contest, believing the Black Laws would not have been repealed in the present
session of the Legislature without this co-operation.”112 The Ohio Observer connected
the Ohio Compromise of 1849 to actions in Washington, D.C. involving antislavery
moves. In early February, a bill to ban the slave trade in the District of Columbia
circulated through Congressional Committee, although it fizzled. However, the Observer
considered the very existence of the bill a good sign that, given the state of debate on
slavery from 1839 to 1849, and the fate of Ohio’s Black Laws, signaled “an indication
that our country at no distant day is to be indeed what it professes to be, a land of
liberty.”113

109 Ibid.
110 The Cleveland Herald, February 20, 1849.
111 Malone, Between Freedom and Bondage, 54-55.
112 The North Star, March 09, 1849.
113 The Ohio Observer, February 21, 1849.
Detractors made their voices known and the New England newspaper, *The Springfield Republican*, blasted Chase’s role in the Ohio Compromise, and criticized Free Soil efforts that positioned Chase for the United States Senate. *The Republican* joined with the *Cincinnati Chronicle* and stated, “we have no faith in Mr. Chase as a politician.”\(^ {114} \) A letter in the *Cleveland Herald* harshly charged that Chase “was certainly not the choice of the people, and was the first choice of only two members of the Legislature.”\(^ {115} \) Additionally the writer criticized Chase’s action in the early 1830s for having drawn “up a petition to Congress for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia . . . it created an unusual stir at the Capital.”\(^ {116} \) *The Scioto Gazette* reported on the less than unified feelings among radical Democrats, noting “there is a great tempest in the teapot of Locofocodom about the repeal of the Black Laws by the Locofoco abolitionists, or abolition Locofocos.”\(^ {117} \) *The Cincinnati Dispatch* condemned Townshend and Morse as “two of the smallest potatoes that ever vegetated on Free Soil.”\(^ {118} \)

Despite the ire heaped upon the players in the repeal battle, a sober mood washed over those affected by the success of the effort. *The Liberator* and *The North Star* both pointed out that what had occurred in actuality was a partial repeal of Ohio’s Black Laws. The two newspapers noted that while blacks benefited in the area of education, and some social services, it remained “that blacks under this law have not the right to sit on juries, or the benefit of the poor laws.”\(^ {119} \) Although successful in the partial repeal effort,

\(^ {114} \) *The Springfield Republican*, quoted in *The Scioto Gazette*, February 21, 1849.
\(^ {115} \) *The Cleveland Herald*, February 28, 1849.
\(^ {116} \) Ibid.
\(^ {117} \) *The Scioto Gazette*, March 07, 1849.
\(^ {118} \) *Cincinnati Dispatch*, quoted in *The Cleveland Herald*, May 29, 1849.
\(^ {119} \) *The Ohio State Journal*, quoted in *The Liberator*, February 23, 1849.
Douglass, like many others, argued that the repeal had not gone far enough and vowed to refocus the Black Convention toward work on a satisfactory resolution. Douglass cited *The New Concord Free Press*, which considered the accomplishments in Ohio a “great triumph, a victory of humanity over oppression, a victory worth all the efforts of the friends of freedom in Ohio . . . but it is, at best, but an insult to our colored friends.”

The Ohio Compromise represented something that, by the dawn of 1850, was an unthinkable event. The State Convention of the Colored Citizens of Ohio gathered in Columbus, nearly a year after the partial repeal of Ohio’s Black Laws, to count their blessings and peer into the future to discern the work that remained. One thing was clear; Slave Power interests had suffered a blow, and members boasted that “the signs of the times indicate, that slaveholder and their abettors, are determined at all hazards, to perpetuate forever, that monstrosity, the sum of all villainies, American slavery.” No one expected the southern states and their allies to sit idly by; considering what abolitionists had accomplished in Ohio, the threat to southern hegemony had heightened.

Although blacks still lacked statewide suffrage rights en masse, the Ohio Compromise of 1849 hinted at the direction of the discussion. A letter read at the gathering reminded participants “the repeal of the Black Laws has not removed all our oppressions; yet we must approve of what is done, and appreciate the privileges we have, by properly enjoying them, while we petition the Authorities for equal laws in every
Ohio's blacks still faced problems from discrimination in many areas, with education being a paramount concern.

The shockwaves that the Ohio Compromise of 1849 had created placed the nation on the path toward early stages of the War Between the States. The resolute bitterness among Ohioans who resented the passage of the law revealed itself in a failed nine to fifty-three vote on a House bill meant to repeal the law, in which supporters argued, “blacks have no right to those blessings, and the God of nature made them deficient in ability to enjoy them.” Despite the Compromise, many of Ohio’s whites still did not take seriously the schooling of blacks. The Cincinnati city government denied the school board tax revenues to finance schools for black children. A court eventually ruled that the city was in breach of contract, and had to compensate realtors owed payments associated with the action. The courts had rushed to the aid of the realtors involved, but the records did not indicate if any schools for black children ever materialized. This situation illustrated the tactics that hostile white communities were willing to employ. In keeping their notions of racial segregation alive, communities like Cincinnati labored to keep black children from enjoying the right to the separate but equal schooling that the partial repeal granted. The success of the Ohio Compromise signaled new battles awaiting in the 1850s. However, the insurgent network maintained a religious and resolute frame of mind that in their struggle for equality, the victory against discrimination and enslavement could be theirs.

122 Ibid., 255.
123 The Scioto Gazette, February 15, 1850.
The Fugitive Slave Law represented a striking parry against the Ohio Compromise. The black insurgent networks realized that this signaled the seriousness with which the proslavery South sought to protect its position. Slave Power interests intended that in as many political arenas as possible, blacks would not long remain inspired or benefited by the events that had occurred in Ohio. The Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Law spurred on the growing militancy of the Black Convention.125

With passage of the Federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, questions arose as to how to address the topic of fugitive slaves. Concerned about this issue, Convention members met in Columbus and “appointed a committee of five to prevent the seizure of any Negroes by marshals or slave-catchers,” making the matter central at later conventions.126 This rhetoric reinforced the anger that many black activists held against anyone seeking to enforce the details of the Fugitive Slave Act, and as a number of them began the shift toward radical responses.127 At the January 1851 state gathering, convention members did not attempt to hide their disgust with the Fugitive Slave Law and declared, “no enactment ever given birth to by the American Congress has created so much dissatisfaction and excitement.”128 This was not an overstatement. Convention member William Howard Day declared that while the Supreme Court of the United States appeared to function as an organ of Slave Power interests, the United States Constitution

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itself was not. Convention member Charles H. Langston invoked memories of Henry Highland Garnet’s fiery 1843 slave rebellion call at Troy, New York, and in defiance to slavery and the Fugitive Law he called “on every slave, from Maryland to Texas, to arise and assert their liberties, and cut their master’s throats if they attempt again to reduce them to slavery.”

Into the 1850s, the Fugitive Slave Law began to stand as a states’ rights issue in the minds of some. New York Governor William Henry Seward argued that the law was a play by the Federal Government to garner more power over the states by promoting the potential spread of slavery. Seward held that despite arguments the law was constitutional, “that the Congress of the United States [had] no jurisdiction of the subject.” The Toledo Blade condemned Seward’s argument as “one of the shallowest pieces of Sophistry we ever saw from the pen of a politician claiming the title of a statesman.”

In 1855, a successful bill passed in the Massachusetts Legislature to nullify the Fugitive Slave Law, with penalties for individuals who assisted in its implementation. The bill’s proposed punishments included fines, imprisonment, and a ban on holding State offices for authorities who assisted slave-catchers. Wisconsin’s Supreme Court went a step further in 1854 and declared the “Fugitive Slave Law unconstitutional . . . unanimously.” Adding to the fire, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled in 1856 in Anderson v. Poindexter “that a slave, other than a fugitive, automatically became free the moment he or she entered Ohio for any reason.” So it continued

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129 Ibid., 262.
130 Ibid., 263.
131 The Cleveland Herald, April 15, 1851.
132 The Toledo Blade, quoted in The Daily Scioto Gazette, April 28, 1851.
133 The Daily Cleveland Herald, May 16, 1855.
134 The Chicago Tribune, quoted in The Daily Cleveland Herald, July 24, 1854.
throughout the decade, heated opinions and passionate defenses of the fugitive laws. There were arguments that by pressuring the U.S. Congress to assume new powers, the South erred and positioned itself with little foundation to contest any Federal “precedent by which . . . it will be authorized to assume whatever right [that] may have no constitutional organ of enforcement.”\textsuperscript{136}

Since the passage of the Fugitive Slave law, a contentious mood appeared to cover the nation. The Black Convention and its surrogates kept pressure on their battle against the discrimination and enslavement prevalent in the nation. Southern states sensed that abolitionist furor remained on the rise as the issue of slavery “forced itself into public and prominent notice . . . controlling cabinets, influencing diplomacy, and determining the public choice for all the great offices of State.”\textsuperscript{137} It was not lost on observers that the estimated white population in slave-free states had surpassed that in slave states. The number of slaves in slave states stood at threatening levels of critical discomfort for those who worried of potential slave insurrections.\textsuperscript{138} This added another pressure point for a fearful South that perhaps they could lose control of the slavery debate through the very processes of democracy. Criticism poured in nationwide from newspapers to expose the Ohio fanatics who had gone so far as to introduce legislation “to prohibit the use of their jails to slave catchers; to prohibit officers from engaging in slave catching; to prohibit their citizens from voluntarily engaging in slave catching.”\textsuperscript{139}

\textit{The New York Journal of Commerce} mocked those who objected to the increasing influence of the Slave Power and pointed out that the numbers of federal representation

\textsuperscript{136} \textit{The Charleston Mercury}, quoted in \textit{The Daily Herald}, October 02, 1855.

\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Blackwood’s Magazine}, quoted in \textit{The Ohio Observer}, March 23, 1853.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{The Louisville Courier}, quoted in \textit{The Daily Scioto Gazette}, April 12, 1856.
between slave-free states to slave states showed elective majorities in free states. The Journal retorted that in light of these totals, by its reckoning, the Slave Power influence argument proved little more than the fantasies of ‘freedom shirkers.’ A letter to The New Advocate complained about blacks voting in state elections in Granville, and argued that the object of New Abolitionists was ‘nigger equality.’ This was telling of the opposition held against abolitionists, especially in the central Ohio county of Licking (adjacent to Franklin County) and the active convention chatter in Columbus. Despite the melancholy triumph of the Ohio Compromise, the letter, signed only as ‘White Voters,’ screamed “are you ready for the question, whether the niggers are to stand on the same social and political platform with yourselves, your sons, and your daughters, or apart by themselves as niggers always have in times past.” This vitriol indicated the reality that one could hardly characterize all of the state as pro-abolitionist or pro-equality, especially depending on the locale’s proximity to Cincinnati and the southern border.

Activist resistance continued to add to the pressures facing supporters of slavery. Abolitionists rallied nationwide to the forefront by blocking the efforts of anyone who pursued fugitive slaves into northern territory. Pennsylvania abolitionists developed the tactic of convincing sympathetic authorities to swear out warrants charging slave-catchers with the crimes of riot, and assault and battery in cases of successful capture of their quarry, capturing national attention, and no doubt inspiring similar moves beyond their borders. Some southerners questioned the true benefit of the Fugitive Slave Law. The

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141 Ibid.
142 Newark Advocate, October 29, 1856.
143 Ibid.
144 The Daily Cleveland Herald, October 10, 1853.
*Charleston Mercury* argued that “the South has gained nothing but a loss by this law . . . it was a stupid blunder on the part of Southern statement.”\(^{145}\) Furthermore, the paper pointed out the costly nature of hunting down fugitives and the unwelcomed effect of increasing opposition to slavery and thus to the southern states “at home and abroad.”\(^{146}\)

The Fugitive Slave Law inspired additional antislavery strategies among foes of the Slave Power, which some argued were too much for public sensibilities. *The Daily Cleveland Herald* condemned a ploy in New Bedford, Massachusetts, that called for kidnap victims to kill their slave-catcher assailants. Upon being arrested and put on trial, activists hoped that a verdict of manslaughter would serve as a shield that placed the fugitive in long-term custody until a national resolution of slavery had occurred.\(^{147}\) The *Herald* opposed this strategy as dangerous and declared that the best way to oppose the Fugitive Slave Law was to refuse aid to slave-catchers and the authorities aiding them.

The black insurgent networks nationwide scored a major victory in April 1855 when Ohio’s first black attorney, John Mercer Langston, backed by Independent Democrats, won the office of Clerk of Brownhelm Township, Ohio.\(^{148}\) The Oberlin graduate inspired headlines by becoming the first black elected official in the continental United States, although the southern paper *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel* characterized Langston’s accomplishment dourly with “a fugitive slave, has been elected Clerk of the Brownhelm Township, in Ohio.”\(^{149}\) The brother of Charles, the younger Langston held a solid leadership role in the state black convention, having represented the state’s black

\(^{145}\) *The Charleston Mercury*, quoted in *The Ohio Observer*, December 07, 1853.

\(^{146}\) Ibid.

\(^{147}\) *The Daily Cleveland Herald*, June 24, 1854.


\(^{149}\) *Daily Chronicle & Sentinel*, May 02, 1855.
citizens before the Ohio Legislature, when speaking on black suffrage rights in 1854. By winning election to the office of township clerk in the small Lorain County town, Langston had achieved a dream for hopeful blacks nationwide and a nightmare for southern hegemony fearful of growing abolitionism.

By mid-decade, the state convention insisted that slavery was a political and moral evil that all blacks had to be committed against as they advocated for their rights in Ohio. The delegates “rejoiced in the death of the Whig Party . . . and the waning influence of the [national] Democratic Party . . . and welcomed the inauguration of the Republican Party.” Convention members stoked white fears, and warned that unless Ohio mended her ways “she will contain within her limits a discontented population . . . ready to welcome any revolution or invasion as a relief, for they can lose nothing and gain much.” Gerrit Smith wrote to the gathering “for many years I have well-nigh despaired of the peaceful, bloodless abolition of American Slavery.” The insurgent community realized that perhaps a concerted turn toward violence and warfare represented the only viable tools for accomplishing their full agenda.

Relying on its majority representation in the highest national judicial body, Slave Power interests visited a great shock upon abolitionists and the nation with the release of the *Dred Scott v. Sandford* decision. *Dred Scott* had sued his owner for freedom citing that once he entered into a free-state territory, that he was no longer a slave. However, on March 6, 1857, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that Scott should remain in

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152 Ibid., 310-312.
153 Ibid., 315.
bondage, because he did not have the right to bring lawsuits in federal courts. The High Court ruled, “Negroes, whether slaves or free . . . are not citizens of the United States by the Constitution.” The ruling did little to lessen the notion that the Fugitive Slave Law represented undue Slave Power influence and served as a sullen alarm that “by [the] decision Slavery is made, National, and no longer the creature of local law . . . the right of carrying slaves into Free States and retaining them in bondage [was] legalized.

The decision rocked black insurgents nationwide, with a number wanting to give up the domestic struggle and leave the country. The New York Tribune warned that the decision could serve as a back door to reestablishing the Atlantic Slave Trade. Here, historian Paul Finkelman argues that the decision strongly affected the nation, politically aiding the Republican Party, and “it doubtless helped Lincoln win the presidential election in 1860.” From that point, South Carolina and a handful of southern states found themselves forming the Confederate States of America and fomenting the American Civil War.

Ironically, by its very dictate, the Dred Scott decision effectively nullified the Ohio Compromise and all laws and legal rulings concerning blacks in the nation. The Dred Scott decision captured the attention of Ohio’s lawmakers. Ohio legislators enacted special “personal liberty” legislation to thwart its affects in Ohio, effectively protesting the Supreme Court’s stance. A Senate joint resolution lambasted the ruling, lamenting, “that this general assembly has observed with regret . . . the case of Dred Scott against J.

154 Newark Advocate, March 11, 1857.
155 The Daily Cleveland Herald, March 23, 1857.
156 Quarles, Black Abolitionists, 230-232.
159 Ibid.
This was a timely move by the lawmakers, because when the Convention of the Colored Men of Ohio met in November of 1858 in Cincinnati, they acted with vitriol toward the High Court’s decision. The convention lambasted the case, affirming, “if the Dred Scott dictum be a true exposition of the law of the land . . . colored men are absolved from all allegiance to a government which withdraws all protection.” The black insurgent network had issued a challenge with no remorse or reservation. The battle against discrimination and enslavement grew. The insurgent community saw no options other than fiercer resistance to the racism of the nation.

The Ohio Oberlin-Wellington Rescue illustrates black and white collaboration in fierce resistance against slavery. The 1858 state convention saluted “the noble men of Lorain County who rescued John Price from the bloody hands of a heartless slaveholder . . . we will imitate their worthy example.” The state convention demonized the Democratic Party as a “foe to the colored man” and lauded the Republican Party for its efforts on behalf of black people. One of the first blacks enrolled at Oberlin College, convention mainstay Charles H. Langston, participated in the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue episode. Langston’s temperance and civil rights activities nearly resulted in his narrowly avoiding a lynching in 1848 in Marseilles, Ohio, where he encountered an angry white mob looking to capture pro-repeal activists during the battle against the Black Laws. Langston attracted attention for his major role in the Oberlin-Wellington rescue of 1858. Reacting to news of fugitive slave John Price’s seizure, Langston and others demanded

162 Ibid., 336.
“the village constable arrest John Price’s captors for kidnapping.”164 Langston and his allies thwarted Price’s captors, allowing him to escape to freedom in Canada. Despite the efforts of then Ohio Governor Chase to thwart prosecution, Langston and cohort Simeon M. Bushnell earned short prison sentences.165

The Oberlin affair inflamed national tensions. With the state of Ohio already at a boiling point due to the Dred Scott decision, Oberlin injected “new emotional fervor into the antislavery movement . . . critically affect[ing] the republican party’s evolution and standing in Ohio—and, by extension, in the North.”166 Stark County State senator James E. Chase added further to the ordeal by introducing a bill “designed to establish and enforce a uniform rule throughout Ohio in referent to Negro voting.”167 Mixed race mulatto blacks possessed voting rights in the state. Chase’s bill would prevent anyone “reputed to be in whole or in part of African descent from voting at any election in Ohio.”168 A Portage County courtroom considered Chases’ bill when a Locofoco lodged a complaint that Freeman H. Morris, a mulatto, had voted in Charlestown Township in April 1859.169 The Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas declared the law unconstitutional.170 The case hinged on the interpretation of Ohio’s old Constitution and its new Constitution; “under the old Constitution . . . all persons having more than half white blood were declared to be legally white . . . the new Constitution merely mentioned white persons, without defining what constitutes a white person.”171 The Court decided

164 Ibid., 318.
165 Newark Advocate, June 02, 1859.
166 Cheek and Cheek, John Mercer Langston, 320.
167 Newark Advocate, February 23, 1859.
168 The Liberator, April 29, 1859.
169 Ravenna Democrat, quoted in, The Daily Cleveland Herald, May 05, 1859.
170 The Daily Cleveland Herald, July 14, 1859.
171 Ibid.
the case by the old Constitution and held that “any law declaring a person having more than half white blood to be a negro must of necessity be unconstitutional.”\footnote{Ibid.} This case, an example of a repealed black law, ignited Slave Power chagrin, and was of great interest and significance to many parties and papers around the nation that cited the Cleveland Daily Herald report.\footnote{\textit{Daily National Intelligencer}, July 18, 1859; \textit{The New York Herald}, July 22, 1859; \textit{Vermont Chronicle}, July 26, 1859; \textit{Semi-weekly Mississippian}, August 12, 1859; and \textit{The Weekly Mississippian}, August 17, 1859.}

\textit{The Ohio Compromise, John Brown, and Civil War}

The Compromise of 1849 inflamed the southern states, their Slave Power supporters, and sympathizers. The Compromise also drew pointed responses that reverberated nationwide, from the Fugitive Slave Act, to the \textit{Dred Scott} decision, to the public furor toward the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. The Ohio Compromise of 1849 emboldened black activists nationwide. However, in Ohio it provided an immediate sense of accomplishment and codified the right of entitlement to at least the basic sense of legal equality. Therefore, the responses from the Convention to significant events such as the \textit{Dred Scott} decision and the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue illustrated how the black insurgent network strengthened its commitment to civil rights when threatened with systematic racism.

Here, this study argues that John Brown’s failed Harpers Ferry Raid represented an additional important factor, one deriving from the empowerment of Black Convention activists that grew out of the Ohio Compromise. While there is no evidence that John Brown was a bona fide member of the Black Convention, his clear participation in the
black insurgent networks and his friendships and alliances with key black leaders presents a case that the raid at Harpers Ferry was a far-reaching outcome of the Ohio Compromise.

Gerrit Smith helped organize the Secret Six, a group of abolitionist minded white financiers who provided financial backing and support for John Brown’s raid. Smith possessed intimate ties with black insurgent network radicals, and he was an influential political figure who was a sometime presidential and gubernatorial candidate in the Free Soil Party and Liberty Party offshoots. Chase, Townshend, and Morse were all active Free Soilers who conspired to execute the Ohio Compromise of 1849, and all three maintained communication and written support with the Ohio black convention. Smith also maintained ties to the political leader Joshua Giddings, a hero among the Ohio convention.

According to historian Benjamin Quarles, Brown began formulating the possibility of an antislavery action just before he hosted Douglass in 1848, around the time that Frederick Douglass began shifting from the Garrison camp into the Smith camp. Smith sold Brown land in his North Elba settlement in upper New York State. Brown became the chair of the Radical Abolition Party at its 1855 Syracuse convention, a Liberty Party offshoot co-founded by Smith, Douglass, and fellow convention member James McCune-Smith. With Douglass’s aid, Brown constructed his ‘Provisional Constitution’ that he unveiled at the Chatham Convention in Ontario Canada in 1857. Black Convention members in attendance at Chatham included Martin R. Delany, Israel

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175 Ibid., 209.
Shadd, William Charles Monroe, Harriet Tubman, and James W. Purnell. William H. Day provided the print copies of Brown’s constitution for that convention.\footnote{Quarles, \textit{Black Abolitionists}, 19-51. Also see, Stauffer, \textit{The Black Hearts of Men}, for an intimate account of the connections with various Black Convention members and allies maintained by John Brown.}

John Brown, Jr., and Charles H. Langston recruited for Brown’s raid, and convinced Lewis Sheridan Leary and John A. Copeland, Jr., the son of Ohio convention member John A. Copeland, Sr., to join Brown on the raid.\footnote{Cheek and Cheek, \textit{John Mercer Langston}, 357.} Upon hearing of Brown’s capture, Douglass ensconced himself outside the continental United States, and instructed his son to secure and destroy any incriminating evidence of his connection to Brown and the raid.\footnote{Sernett, \textit{North Star Country}, 212.} Smith sent his son-in-law “to the home of Brown, Jr., in Ohio, to locate incriminating materials . . . to destroy every vestige of evidence . . . that could be made use of against him.”\footnote{Ibid., 213-214.}

In fact, a number of insurgent activists issued statements of their non-involvement with Brown’s plot. From the safety of Canada, Douglass wrote, “I therefore declare that there is no man living, and no man dead, who, if living, could truthfully say that I ever promised [Brown] . . . that I would be present in person at the Harpers Ferry insurrection.”\footnote{“To the Editor of the Rochester Democrat,” in \textit{Douglass’ Monthly}, November 1859.} Langston lauded Brown’s efforts, but stated, “I have a neck as dear as to me as Smith’s, Hale’s or Giddings’, and therefore I must like them publish a card of denial. So here it is.”\footnote{“Letter to the Editor,” in \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, November 18, 1859. Langston was referring to the published denials by Gerrit Smith, and others connected to Brown.}

The lack of documentation hampers efforts to concretely tying Brown to the Black Convention. Various elements informed Brown’s infamously known religious zeal. Brown was a studied and careful thinker who had invested much time in crafting
and securing financing for his Harpers Ferry raid.\textsuperscript{182} Despite his iconoclast image, Brown “did not often act impulsively . . . [and] was a thoughtful, often even circumspect doctrinaire.”\textsuperscript{183} Still, the passions that grew in response to the Ohio Compromise in 1849 touched Brown, who was already on his way into intimate fraternization with the black insurgent networks. This de facto point provides strong conjecture about Brown and the Black Convention that is worth historical consideration and additional exploration.

In conclusion, a significant strength of the Black Convention lay in its social and political agitation, and building of black insurgent networks, to combat the nation’s racism. The government of Ohio implemented Black Laws to oppress its black population, but an alliance of blacks and whites revealed a network of individuals doggedly holding to the goals of freedom and the right to political participation. The Ohio Compromise of 1849 foreshadowed tumultuous events, which would take place from Reconstruction through contemporary times.

Whites and blacks held a view that many racial ills that existed were social, political, and moral in nature. Individuals from both groups responded to these perceived failings with the goal of removing discrimination from society and legal statutes. The lack of equality for blacks created serious concerns. Assuredly, if not for the astuteness of Chase and his Free Soil allies, combined with the Ohio Democratic Party’s lust for power, it may have taken many additional years of activism for blacks to gain the sense of equity that came from the Ohio Compromise of 1849.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 9.
Ohio was, at least politically, an antislavery state from its formation. The irony that it also promoted anti-Black Laws must have escaped the 1802 Constitutional Delegates who constructed the state’s first laws. The order of the day was to give small appeasements, such as voting rights to mulattos, so that the entire black population would not rise up against the status quo that the Whig and Democrat parties wished to maintain. Blacks resorted to a cycle of networking and partnership building with parties who could help them attain their goals of suffrage and abolition. The black conventions prepared a generation of black activist leaders for engaging in civil rights activism through insurgent networks. By the end of the 1850s, goals regarding citizenship and voting rights lay unresolved, awaiting revisiting in the post-Civil War Reconstruction

The Ohio Compromise of 1849 is a marker that emboldened black insurgency, leading to the Compromise of 1850. From this came the Fugitive Slave Act, the *Dred Scott* Decision, and the Harpers Ferry Raid, amid other crucial events of the period. The Black Convention and its network of black activists kept the public’s gaze on the pernicious effects inherent in the Fugitive Slave Law. The Convention challenged the narrative regarding racial discrimination and slavery. This dissertation argues for the inadvertent effects that led to Civil War; but in achieving the Ohio Compromise, the process was very much advertent in function. By approaching it critically, this study elevates the Ohio Compromise of 1849 to a position among the major antislavery discourses, incorporating it into the flashpoints of rebellion that led to the American Civil War.
CHAPTER VI
THE BLACK INSURGENCY CONTINUES

The insurgent agenda remained constant by the end of the American Civil War. The insurgent networks stayed intact due to concerns about postwar policies, notably Reconstruction, as activists rightfully were concerned about northern and southern reconciliation to the detriment of blacks. The Black Convention Movement deployed tactics designed to defeat the narratives of racial discrimination and enslavement throughout the period. Demands for political equality formed a constant foundation at all convention gatherings.

During the American Civil War, the black insurgency shifted into northern support roles with few national convention gatherings. A number of state-level convention gatherings took place just before and after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Courthouse, Virginia, on April 9, 1865, followed by President Abraham Lincoln’s assassination days later. A rare national gathering occurred in October 1864 in Syracuse with Frederick Douglass presiding. Delegates from states far as north as Maine, to southwest Louisiana, the Midwest of Ohio, and southerners from Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida attended. Pro-Union at its onset, attendees voiced concerns about the upcoming presidential election between Lincoln and his Democratic Party rival,
George B. McClellan. The gathering characterized Lincoln as a representative for ‘Freedom and the Republic’ and cast McClellan for ‘Despotism and Slavery’.

Resolutions demanded the Union government’s protection of black troops from Confederate abuses, declared “unquestioned patriotism and loyalty . . . [and] our full confidence in the fundamental principles of this Government.” The Convention urged no compromises “to reconstruction of the Union with slavery.” This was a plea to Lincoln to avoid appearing open to the southern sympathies the campaign of McClellan presented.

The Syracuse gathering considered all blacks to be native-born Christian citizens entitled to the same rights granted to their white counterparts. They judged the Democratic Party as the party of slavery; and although the Convention held a favorable opinion of the Republican Party, it viewed that party as “largely under the power of prejudice against color.” Attendees feared that signals of compromise coming from the Republicans gave license to Democrats that their platform of peace and reconciliation would only “restore slavery to all its ancient power.” The Black Convention warned that the issue of slavery trumped any compromise with the Confederate states, and cautioned that resistance from soldiers and veterans of the war was likely. This gathering also cautioned that such a step would be foolhardy, because making such a peace “would

2 Ibid., 33.
3 Ibid., 34.
4 Ibid., 42.
5 Ibid., 49.
6 Ibid.
only be sowing the seeds of war; sure to bring at last a bitter harvest of blood!” The Convention noted that although the North would conquer the military might of the South, problems remained due to it being “another thing to conquer Southern hate.” In the view of participants, only the defeat of the old Slave Power was the way to ensure that after the conflict “the American people, now divided and hostile, [would] dwell together in power and unity.” From this gathering, state groups rebranded themselves along variations of an Equal Rights League.

A number of state-level convention meetings took place in 1865. With Lincoln’s re-election victory behind them, convention gatherings echoed themes from previous years’ meetings. In January’s state gathering of the Equal Rights League of Louisiana, the group planned strategies to secure voting rights, and ramp up petitioning campaigns. Signaling support for the northern war effort, attendees declared, “We place our confidence in the majority of the American people, who have reelected President Lincoln.” Meeting at the same time as their Louisiana counterparts, the state convention in Xenia, Ohio, heralded the coming victory of the North over southern slavery. Recasting itself as the Ohio Equal Rights League, this convention decried that despite 1849’s successful effort to roll back much of the state’s black codes, there still existed “laws unjustly making distinction on account of color . . . and demand of our

7 Ibid., 54.
8 Ibid., 61.
9 Ibid., 62.
11 Ibid., 251.
Legislature the laws be purified.”12 At the February gathering of the newly renamed Pennsylvania State Equal Rights’ Convention, legislative moves toward emancipation in border-states such as Tennessee, Missouri, Maryland, and the District of Columbia met with suspicion.13 The right of suffrage taken from Pennsylvania’s black population in the late 1830s, remained a painful memory. Attendees warned that opposition against these emancipation battles revealed sentiment that the Slave Power held a measure of support, and that black activists should remain vigilant. Support for the Union was strong, and sensing northern victory, this gathering resolved to take all legal avenues to gain the return of elective franchise in the state.14

Months after Confederate General Robert E. Lee’s surrender, the Equal Rights League of the State of New Jersey convened in Trenton during mid-July of 1865. Attendees memorialized the martyred Lincoln, and called on the state to “restore to us all the rights of Loyal Citizens.”15 The gathering argued for full citizenship and suffrage rights on behalf of the state’s black citizens, noting that during the time of war, “when called, we rallied to the rescue, and thereby gave our influence, our money and our lives, for the restoration of [the Union].”16

13 “Proceedings of the State Equal Right’s Convention, of the Colored People of Pennsylvania, Held in the City of Harrisburg, February 8th, 9th, and 10th, 1865, together with a few of the arguments presented suggesting the necessity for holding the Convention, and an Address of the Colored State Convention to the People of Pennsylvania,” in Foner and Walker, Proceedings of the Black State Convention, 1840-1865, Vol. 1, 147.
14 Ibid.
16 Ibid., 15.
Activists celebrated their successes nationwide. However, there was pushback in Virginia, where a pro-Union celebration met with displeasure from ex-Confederates. When the state’s convention members gathered in Alexandria in August 1865, tidings of white anger and resistance greeted them. A sinister message stated in part that blacks would “never to be on an equality with the whites . . . and many of you, will die soon if this Freedmen’s Convention . . . continues, particularly here in Virginia. So beware! The South must and shall be avenged!”17 Unfazed by such threats, attendees insisted that they were citizens of the state and the nation.18 Members expressed anger at the slow pace of the provisional Virginian government concerning race reforms.19 Participants also warned of resistance to the Reconstruction policies of Lincoln’s successor, Andrew Johnson, if fully implemented to the negative benefit of southern blacks.20 Thankful for the state of peace, participants were sympathetic to all whom suffered during the civil conflict, but nonetheless thankful for “all the results of the war.”21

This illustrated that activists of the insurgency, while willing to be at peace with whites, were not going to compromise the struggle that many had supported for decades. The warnings and criticisms revealed that there would be no stand down, and no risking of gains won. The September 1865 state gathering in Detroit, Michigan, criticized whites who had supported the cause of the war and antislavery sensibilities, but who now opposed national Reconstruction, harboring sympathies that favored the vanquished Slave Power. The convention pledged to counter such actions by maintaining full active

18 Ibid., 268.
19 Ibid., 270.
20 Ibid., 270-1.
21 Ibid., 273.
support to provide for newly freed blacks in the South. In mid-October of that year, a St. Louis, Missouri, gathering released a plea to the white citizens of the former border slave state, calling for suffrage rights for blacks. Attendees lauded the northern victory over the barbarism of slavery. The group also noted the need for political equality in order to secure its victories. Participants invoked the sacrifices of scores of colored troops and those very “heroic dead from Missouri’s colored troops . . . in the campaign against Mobile (AL).” The group further indicated a tone of seriousness, warning, “we shall not be mocked with palsied hands and made helpless in our own defense.” Attendees pointed out the leniency granted to the defeated Confederacy, expressing their expectation of “full rights, guarantees and privileges as those accorded to white treason, arrogance and indolence.” The body insisted that the state’s blacks were loyal to the nation, deserving of education, and financial opportunity. The group pledged to engage in all legal avenues available to them in gaining suffrage, but were willing to proceed slowly if the first steps had to include designations along castes and shades of skin complexion.

Later in October, a state gathering in Sacramento, California, observed that the nation was in a recovery “from the terrible stroke of a just retribution . . . we rejoice in the suppression of the war and overthrow of the rebellion in our land . . . we have a new

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24 Ibid., 280.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 281.
27 Ibid., 280-281.
love for the American Union.”

In line with convention views from other states, the California body expressed displeasure with the Reconstruction policies “pursued by the Government, (since our immortal and glorious Lincoln fell); respecting those issues of the country that most immediately affects the colored Americans.”

The group claimed the political rights of citizenship by birth and argued for legitimacy due to “our fealty to the Union by the arder with which we flew to arms at our country’s call.” Furthermore, they invoked the spirit of the American Revolution, noting “representation and taxation should accompany each other.”

A state gathering in Charleston, South Carolina, met in November to combat the false claims of white critics. White newspapers argued that the destruction visited upon the state was due to newly freed blacks, claims the Charleston gathering contested as unjust pointing out that any destruction “was brought about by the ravages of war of four years duration.”

The body charged bitter white South Carolinians as ungrateful considering those enslaved individuals who gave the blood and sweat for the financial gains whites enjoyed in unfettered fashion. The group indicated that they possessed no intention of returning to enslavement. They referenced their concern of the politicking surrounding Reconstruction policy within the state’s Legislature with, “our appeal is based on justice; but we do not rely solely upon that . . . and we feel assured that nothing

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29 Ibid., 176.
30 Ibid., 199.
31 Ibid.
32 “Proceedings of the Colored People’s Convention of the State of South Carolina, Held in Zion Church, Charleston, November, 1865, Together with the Declaration of Rights and Wrongs; An Address to the People; A Petition to the Legislature, and a Memorial to Congress,” in Foner and Walker, Proceedings of the Black State Convention, 1840-1865, Vol. 2, 300.
33 Ibid., 301.
is needed to render our future relations mutually beneficial but the bestowment of the rights we ask.”

As the year neared an end, cemented in northern victory, those who had participated in the insurgent mission for equality, made clear their intent to preserve the abolitionist gains won over the many decades of agitation. Activists placed the various states and the Federal Government on notice that a return to subjugation was unacceptable and likely to ignite further conflict. Activists demanded the full application of political citizenship, and reminded the nation that the work of freedom and liberty still required completion. Education, voting rights, and opportunity characterized the expanding agenda of the black insurgency. In fact, into the 1870s, black activists doubted the sincerity of the Republican Party regarding the implementation of black suffrage. Southern blacks faced threats of violence at the voting booth. At the height of the Reconstruction period, it became clear that the gains won by insurgent action met with deadly white resistance. Despite the bloody events of the Reconstruction Era for blacks in particular, the groundwork laid in the previous decades assured a contesting black voice in the public debate.

Black insurgents constructed powerful strategies that rhetorically and ideologically boxed in the South. In pre-war years, the insurgent networks successfully fashioned zones of freedom in their rhetorical battle with Slave Power interests. These zones comprised the states of New York, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, along with

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34 Ibid.
36 Ibid. Lewis’ article chronicles the perceived failures of the Republican Party and the criticisms and implications of it by Black Convention stalwarts such as Frederick Douglass, Martin Delany, and John Mercer Langston.
other northern states, and dotted southern and western outposts. These zones functioned as the central hub of the Black Convention liberation campaigns, allowing it to counter the South in public opinion. Within this zone lay the implications for the South’s loss of its legislative majorities and political influence by the dawn of the American Civil War.

The Black Convention promoted these zones of engagement to hobble the influence of the Slave Power. In his seminal text, *Building an Anti-Slavery Wall*, R.J.M. Blackett argues that activist blacks used abolitionist sentiment in Europe to erect “a moral cordon around America that would isolate it from the international community.”

Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, Charles and Sarah Remond, J.W.C. Pennington, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and many others used non-US venues to turn world opinion “by depicting America as a nation devoid of moral values . . . a nation that boasted of its freedom and continued to hold three million souls in slavery was a danger to all mankind.” The effectiveness of this strategy worked to place the United States and specifically the southern slave-holding states, outside of Christianity constructing a zone to contest religious bigotry, and keeping the focus on slavery in the United States.

Slave Power interests faced a committed band of black activists who took the black insurgent agenda international. They focused on Scotland, Ireland, Great Britain, and other receptive areas of Europe. In these arenas, black activists presented abolitionist rhetoric through oration, newspapers, and one-on-one meetings to “extend the active sympathy [particularly] of the whole British nation toward the cause of abolitionism in

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38 Ibid., 46.
Activists visited nations such as Germany, France, Haiti, and Canada, where they argued their cause and showed the depth of their knowledge regarding the revolutionary fevers burning through various areas such as Hungary and Tsarist Russia. This international tactic helped mold the views of Europeans, particularly among women, the working class, and the growing middle classes. These groups shifted toward a strong northern sympathy by the start of the conflict between the states, which resulted in viewpoints that assessed the validity of slavery. This resulted in influences on the international and diplomatic policies affecting the overall war effort. One result was Great Britain recognizing “the Confederacy as a belligerent though not as an independent nation.”

Domestically, black insurgents threatened political and social protests against the inhumanities of American slavery, demanding a better, more egalitarian American society. These were apt tools that proved their worth at home and abroad and remain potent weapons in the contemporary era. Insurgents built domestic zones of freedom to blunt the Slave Power. These activists successfully constructed a domestic wall of insurgent resistance that inspired fright among “conservative southern leaders, concerned about the threat to their economic and social structure.”

The challenge in the post-war period called for strengthening, preserving, and promoting the insurgent agenda and legacies. This challenge met with strong pushback.

42 Ibid., 144.
Post-Reconstruction America, argued W.E.B. Du Bois “not only subordinated the black experience but had rendered it virtually unknown.”\textsuperscript{45} This in effect resulted in a counter wall, a post-war Southern Embargo on Black America in the United States. Why is the legacy and public memory of the Black Convention missing from the general antebellum narratives? This study has shown that scholars are indeed mindful of the Black Convention. However, to a majority of non-academics, when discussing Douglass or Harriet Truman, connecting those two to the Black Convention does not usually occur. How did this happen? From the very beginnings of the Black Convention, participants defined themselves as equal to their fellow whites, and fashioned “foundations of contemporary race consciousness and racial unity around the crucial issue of civil rights.”\textsuperscript{46} This construct enabled them to combat assumptions of racial inferiority by fashioning ancestral African-based bonds “that transcended and preceded New World enslavement.”\textsuperscript{47} Tactics designed to dismantle discrimination and enslavement brought heavy costs to the nation. Still, the “New South” rallied and imposed a measure of revenge upon the successes of the black insurgency, driving the legacy of once proud activists into a historical nadir. Slave Power sympathizers promoted myths that literally changed history from that of illegal rebellion to that of an unwinnable and noble lost cause. Rejecting abolitionist claims of brutal slavery, the new narrative promoted “slavery [as] a benign, paternal system that was unfortunately incompatible with other American institutions.”\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} Rauh-Bethel, \textit{The Roots of African-American Identity}, 127.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 167.
The theory of ‘cognitive dissonance’ helps provide the theoretical framework for working through this issue. The argument at hand is that a cognitive dissonance toward the historical achievements of Black America exists, based in post-Reconstruction themes of “North-South reconciliation at the expense of blacks.”49 In certain films and media, these themes appear, such as the high profile stereotypic spectacles shown in Birth of a Nation, Gone with the Wind, and racial entertainments like minstrelsy. Historian Joy DeGruy Leary utilizes the theory to argue that the experience of slavery affected blacks and whites, creating a trauma that continued post-emancipation, resulting in northerners and southerners developing strategies that “adapted their attitudes and behaviors to simply survive.”50 That is, it is natural for human beings to attempt to reduce negative memories, personal or shared, and act to keep such from being constantly renewed. The cognitive dissonance of a reunified White America reduced the slavery-based traumas of its Civil War. However, in doing so, as Du Bois noted, post-Reconstruction American rendered the cost of slavery to blacks into an inert state that consequently suppressed the legacies of black abolitionists. What remained was a public celebration of the southern agrarian society eliding the negatives of slavery.

The Southern Diaspora that occurred in the late 1800s and early to mid-1900s seeded southern culture into northern, eastern, and western regions of the nation. This migration of white and black southerners yielded predictable results. These southern migrants competed for jobs and housing. They built political and social connections, and

49 Kirby, Media-Made Dixie, 10.
infused southern culture that “southernized America and Americanized Dixie.”

Through a cultural blockade targeting the legacy of black abolitionism, southern whites sought to contain the social and financial competition of blacks. The enslavement that set the nation on a war footing now refashioned as a southern Dixieland mystique of nostalgic, racial stratification spread nationwide. Black competition threatened their southern cultural hegemony, and these whites pushed back with the one tool that had survived Reconstruction, the racialized order of Jim Crow segregation.

From here, one could argue that the mission of the insurgency failed. However, this study rejects such narratives and insists that the insurgent network did not fail the nation’s blacks. As the chief insurgent network of the nation, the Black Convention Movement developed tactics that inadvertently contributed to the American Civil War. The nadir of Reconstruction does not negate the successful dismantling of enslavement that was a major insurgent goal. The freedoms won faced harsh subjugation in the advent of Jim Crow segregation that required new leaders to emerge from the black activist community. In the wake of Jim Crow, the black insurgency continued to resist the toxic racism of the nation, striving for a final victory against injustices that still eludes the nation’s black community.

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CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

In 1904, John W. Cromwell argued that the Black Convention Movement demonstrated "the ability of the Negro to construct a platform broad enough for a race to stand upon and to outline a policy alike far-sighted and statesmanlike."\(^1\) Cromwell noted that the Black Convention served as 'preparatory training' for the era's black activists. This dissertation argues in part that this training created a legacy that continues into the contemporary period.

The Black Convention successfully adapted to the role of the insurgent. Its black insurgent networks embraced the role of ‘the other,’ alien outcasts within a white-dominated society that benefited immensely from the labor of blacks. The strength of the Black Convention lay in its adaptation in the arenas of social and political agitation that challenged the narrative of institutionalized racism of the United States. Black activists engaged in domestic insurgency against the antebellum United States, helping to destroy physical enslavement.

The Black Convention Movement illuminates the history of race relations in the United States. The conflicts surrounding race in the nation are many, and sadly continue to erupt. Consider the controversial Ferguson shooting of 2014, in which a grand jury

acquitted the police officer that gunned down a black youth. This event echoes
Convention radicalism, spawning contemporary insurgencies like the radical civil rights
group, Black Lives Matter. There is also the removal of the Confederate battle flag from
the South Carolina State House in 2015. This resulted from weeks of social protests
classifying the flag as a symbol of hate that inspired the murders of nine black
parishioners by a white youth. “Race Relations Are at Lowest Point in Obama
Presidency, Poll Finds” ran a July 2016 New York Times piece on degrading race
relations in the nation. A Pew Research Center study highlighted the strength that then
2016 presidential candidate Donald Trump enjoyed among voters that garnered him
sizable majority support from white men and women alike. The Trump victory exposed
fears harbored by minority citizens regarding resurgent racism, and the unmet promise of
the American nation in terms of economic opportunity and equality. Public battle over
the representation of the American historical narrative reveals a growing contention

1 CBS News, “How a death in Ferguson sparked a movement in America”
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4 NPR, “The Outlook On Race After Trump Victory: Fear, Resignation and Déjà vu”
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fear-resignation-and-d-j-vu> (Accessed May 9, 2017); and CNN, “How Trump’s victory turns into another
regarding the removal of statues and monuments of Confederate generals in New Orleans.\(^5\) The Civil War resulted in the dominance of a national narrative that muted the history of black contributions in the United States. In this backlash against tributes to the Confederate States of America, it is fair to expect the trend to continue gaining support among segments of the nation. This is an important development because it can characterize the reality of the African diaspora and black Americans as an ongoing unavoidable insurgent experience that resists benign agrarian myths of the old South.

Present-day blacks endure levels of racism that is toxic, chronic, and insidiously infused into the national fabric. Historian Joel Kovel argues, "White racism in America is no aberration," in his text *White Racism: A Psychohistory.*\(^6\) Kovel posits that the discrimination and racism that characterized the nation delineates the fabric of White America, in that this racism serves as a ‘national stabilizer’. Antebellum blacks resisted this stabilizing racism. This study argues that blacks in the early nineteenth century clearly understood that the insurgency they engaged in was a reaction, a kind of warfare counter to injustices of the American system. This is a key point due to the outcomes of the Civil War that displaced blacks in the national antebellum narrative. The Black Convention worked to assert blacks as participatory agents of their own liberation. As white America resisted this, the tragic turn toward Civil War resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of whites. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments were ‘concessions’ to blacks made with the sacrifice of white lives. However, as a result,

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blacks found themselves living under a post-war narrative that held up white sacrifice as the price of black freedom, and demands of social obedience. Contemporary insurgencies continue to struggle against these issues, but are not willing to be obedient or accommodating of mores questioning their fight to obtain liberation through all available means. For many blacks, the abolishment of slavery was not enough.

This work revealed how the efforts of Black Journalism disseminated insurgency in print. Black activists utilized journalism to assault societal racism. This dissertation displays how members of the Black Convention published newspapers with the intent of inserting the black view into the national conversation regarding racism and enslavement. The publishing efforts of these black activists helped lessen the sting of black laws, and seeded a sense of Black Nationalism that put Slave Power proponents on notice that they faced organized opposition. Through their interconnected efforts, black activist newspapers distributed pages filled with print insurgency throughout the antebellum period. This ensured that the debate on race wrongs and demand for progress remained in the public forum to irritate Slave Power sympathizers.

Insurgent activists knew that it required more than the printed page to effect change, but they also signaled to the nation that they were on the edge of taking violent action to obtain change. This study showed the strength that the Black Press wielded enabled activists declare their right to agency and representation. The rhetoric of these newspapers threatened the antebellum status quo. This facet is important because it positions these newspapers in an insurgent context of defiant resistance and purposeful

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action intent on unsettling the American system of racism. Scholars can build further on this through exploration of antebellum to contemporary liberation rhetoric.

*In preaching now, as heretofore, I frequently speak of national sins. Of course, I mention slavery among them. I call upon the people to do all in their power at the ballot box and elsewhere for the removal of this sin, or to expect the severe judgements of God for its continuance.*

– Samuel R. Ward, Geneva, NY 1843

The above quote represented religious insurgent defiance against the Slave Power. This religious rebelliousness demanded that Christianity become a sword against white racism, the institution of slavery, and oppression nationwide. This work shows that black insurgents fashioned Christianity into a weapon that ‘God fearing’ America found troubling and dangerous at best. To black Christians, slavery sinned against humanity, and this simple belief unsettled the nation’s white Christian communities. Black clergy founded and filled the ranks of the Black Convention. These radical clergy harnessed the Christian scriptures to battle against racism and defied civic niceties. The Methodist and Baptist denominations made the religion understandable and desirable to blacks, who constructed a Christian expression that provided conviction of purpose for defying the system of white hegemony.

Insurgent networks utilized tactics in their battle against racism that tactically co-opted Christianity as an antagonist to pro-Slave Power designs. Divine righteousness fueled the beliefs of the black activist. Black Christianity compelled activists to rail against racism and enslavement. As activists moved away from so-called moral suasion, they transferred Jesus Christ from the New Testament and placed the face of the stern

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9 Ibid., 425.
Old Testament Jehovah on him. The malleable nature of Christianity enabled the insurgent network to amend teachings of love and peace into constant undercurrents for social critique.

Studying how Black Christians tapped into African memory is important because it opens routes to further exploration of religion as an insurgent experience within black communities. Throughout their existence in the Americas, African diasporic groups embraced varying traditions from Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and lesser-known faiths, as aids in assorted liberation efforts. Their experiences, contextualized through the lens of insurgency, reveals deeper agencies that scholars can unleash regarding social and political inequalities.

This study showed how the insurgency allowed for the rise of black women to participate as radical equals to black men. Participation in the insurgency positioned black women to destabilize the white male-dominated society. White men contended with the prospect of not just black men gaining legal and political equality, but with the discourse of all women potentially obtaining suffrage.

Due to gendered social norms, Black women benefited from customs that afforded them the potential of access to white arenas of activity that denied participation to black men. This allowed for greater social mobility that enabled black female activists to intersect their own sensibilities regarding women’s rights with the black insurgent goals confronting national inequality. The activist political arenas of the 1830s necessitated the participation of both men and women, and black female activists took advantage of the training and connections offered. In the 1840s, these women created
their own activist institutions in northern states as ancillaries to insurgency and as aids to
social uplift of the nation’s blacks into the post-war period.

Convention leadership encouraged a tactical clandestine presentation of black
women to the white public in the motif of a ‘Cult of Black Womanhood.’ This mimicked
the gendered norms their white female counterparts lived under, but further functioned as
a double-headed ruse that served various insurgent agendas. Combined, this activism
represented a situation that further destabilized the national statism regarding ordered
gender roles. This allowed these women to participate in newspaper publishing and
business entrepreneurship. These activists also used kinship ties and bridge functions to
help build alliances and expand the reach of insurgent networks from the United States,
to Canada, to parts of Europe. Studying how Black Convention associated women
harnessed their gender to accomplish activist goals benefiting themselves and the mission
of liberation is important. In locating black women in the insurgent experience, this adds
layers of inquiry that scholars can place these diasporic daughters in regarding a wide
range of topics. This study opens one door in terms of the insurgent antebellum
activities of black American women. This research will spark additional texts framing
these activists as radical actors pressing the dictates of gendered expectations as frontline
combatants.

This study argues for the consideration of the Ohio Compromise of 1849 – that
partially repealed a portion of Ohio’s Black Laws – as a direct event that began the
progression toward the American Civil War. The passage of the Ohio Compromise
disturbed Slave Power proponents to the point that they used their influence in Federal
government to bring about the Fugitive Slave Law. This proslavery pushback meant that
the resolution of human bondage would end in violence. With key white allies, the Black Convention’s attack on Ohio’s Black Laws was deliberate. However, the series of controversial events preceding from this event was inadvertent.

The trail of occurrences from the Ohio Compromise led to the Dred Scott decision and to the public outcry toward the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. Dred Scott stripped black Americans of all pretenses of citizenship. This only emboldened insurgent resistance to the American system of discrimination and slavery. The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue alarmed and thrilled abolitionists and proslavery supporters alike, as the nation debated the moral validity of an Ohio crowd that assaulted a slave-catcher while delivering his intended victim to freedom on Canadian soil. This study argues that these events and others gained the support of sympathetic white allies who offered support in different ways, be it political support of Salmon Chase and his cohorts that brought the Ohio Comprise about, or the extreme actions of John Brown at Harpers Ferry, Virginia.

Studying how the Ohio Compromise of 1849 affected the national debate regarding slavery and its relationship to the American Civil War is important. Situating the Ohio Compromise within the contexts of the black insurgent experience, will enable scholars to find additional interpretations of the nation’s pre-war origins. The Ohio Compromise highlights the importance of the divided debates regarding abolition in Ohio and shows its worthiness as a solid ancillary to war. Without the Ohio Compromise, would the Slave Power lobby for the Fugitive Slave Law? Would Dred Scott ignite deeper insurgent anger without the success of the Ohio Compromise? Could John Brown’s antislavery fervor even exist without his many years in Ohio and interaction
with a number of the state’s black activists that contested its black laws? This study shows that enmeshing the Ohio Compromise of 1849 into the American Civil War narrative is vital for scholars and researchers.

*We have no reason to think that the framers of the Declaration Of Independence, in setting forth the doctrines it contains, regarded them as dogmas or idle theories. We believe they put full faith in them as actual truths and living verities . . . manifested by an unswerving opposition to injustice and oppression.*

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11 Elizabeth Mancke (personal communication, May 1, 2017).
The Black Convention stood in defiant resistance to the American system of discrimination and racism. In reinterpreting the resistance of antebellum black activists as an insurgent experience, this study offers new avenues for thinking on black Americans. This study goes further than efforts that segment aspects of the insurgent experience into compact bundles of historical inquiry. There are offerings that focus on black newspapers, black women, the Black Church, and legal maneuverings as separate subject fields. This dissertation differs with those approaches by intuitively bundling and applying layers of analysis on rhetoric, gender, religion, and legal efforts as a whole. While the details are present at length on these topics, the whole of the forest – the black insurgent network – contextualizes itself as a synergetic operation throughout.

This synergy is this study’s chief contribution to scholarship on the antebellum civil rights activities of black Americans. Gender becomes a root that contributes to the whole of insurgency. Newspapers transform into branches disseminating unsettling rhetoric to the status quo. Christianity arises as a tree trunk emitting stinging embers of antislavery critique. The weight of the Ohio Compromise takes shape as a crucial Civil War origin point that demonstrates the Black Convention calling forth the dismantling of discrimination and racism in the nation. As a whole, the black insurgent network concept challenges existing historiography. It offers the appraisal that, when considered altogether – despite texts that casts the nadir of Reconstruction and Jim Crow as proof of black activist ineffectiveness and failure – the combined agency of Black Convention participants yielded tangible successes that inadvertently pushed the American nation toward civil war, and the destruction of institutionalized slavery.
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**SECONDARY SOURCES**

**Books**


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