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The Land of Steady Habits: Anti-Abolition and the Preservation of Slavery in Connecticut

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Griffin Watson

The Land of Steady Habits: Anti-Abolition and the Preservation of Slavery in Connecticut

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Dr. Arndt

On March 3, 1790 James Mars was born into slavery. He was not, as many Americans might imagine, born on a cotton plantation south of the Mason-Dixon Line. Instead, he was born on a Connecticut farm belonging to a Congregational minister. Until it was abolished by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1848, slavery was a small but perpetual institution in the Constitution State. Connecticut was one of the last northern states to grant slaves full emancipation and while many northern states had enfranchised black men before the ratification of the fifteenth amendment, Connecticut refused to do so. Slave narratives show that while the treatment of slaves varied from master to master, it was often no different than the common images of abuse. Public documents also show the animosity many Connecticut citizens showed towards abolition. Connecticut leaders—and much of the public—did view slavery as immoral. This seeming hypocrisy only furthers the confusion surrounding Connecticut slavery.

This aspect of Connecticut history has, however, been almost entirely erased from the American historic memory. The words “Connecticut” and “Slavery” often conjure up visions of militant abolitionists sending “Beecher’s Bibles” to Kansas. Despite the lack of historic memory, slave narratives and legal documents clearly show that not only did slavery exist in Connecticut, but it was deeply entrenched. Newspaper articles and public announcements show that abolition was seen as disorderly means of uprooting the preexisting social structure. The people of Connecticut were not supportive of slavery but also were not supportive of abolition. They saw abolition as the worse of the two evils, and thus favored gradual emancipation. Despite the view of slavery as immoral, it persisted in Connecticut as a means of preserving social order.¹

¹ The best sources for general history of Connecticut are: Alfred Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip’s War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections* (New Haven, CT: Durrie and Peck and J.W. Barber, 1849); Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition: 1775-1818* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1963). The best sources for

Slavery was originally introduced to Connecticut as a means of warfare. When a New Englander thinks of early colonial wars, two usually come to mind. Those are the Pequot War and King Philip's War. The Pequot War was fought mostly in southern New England between 1636 and 1637. The war started when New England soldiers attacked a village on the Mystic River as retaliation for the murder of some colonists. The Mohegans and Narragansetts helped the colonists defeat the Pequots. After the war, the colonial governments banned the use of the Pequot name.² King Philip's War started when Metacom—or King Philip as he was called by the colonists—attacked Swansea, Massachusetts. Metacom was the sachem of the Wampanoag people who resided in Southern New England. As with the Pequot War, the Mohegans sided with the colonists which turned the war in their favor.³ James Noyes of Stonington, Connecticut records his request for Native slaves in a letter he wrote to John Allin, a Secretary of the Colony in 1676, "The Honored Worshipful John Mason knowing something of my constant pains and charge, was more forward to suit me than I think I was to mind myself, I desired, a young man and woman he ordered me a young girl of fourteen years of age, and an old woman then sick her mother, and her child of five years of age or there about, another of her children a girl, and from

slavery in Connecticut are Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); Kenneth P. Minkema, "Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Oct. 1997): 825, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2953884>; Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011). The best sources for African American society in the north are James Brewer Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870," *The New England Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (September 2003): 323, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559806>; Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). The best primary sources are Boyrereau Brinch, *The Blind African Slave, or Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, Nick-named Jeffrey Brace* (St. Albans, VT: Harry Whitney, 1810); James Mars, *Life of James Mars, a Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut. Written by Himself*. (Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood, 1868); James Noyes, letter to John Allin, Stonington, CT, October 1676, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:1018040>; Noah Webster, *Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry* (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1793).

² Alfred Cave, *The Pequot War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 1-2.

³ Daniel R. Mandell, *King Philip's War: Colonial Expansion, Native Resistance, and the End of Indian Sovereignty* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 3-4.

Quaquotog sent me a man.”⁴ James Noyes was requesting slaves as compensation for his service in King Philip’s War. During the wars, Native allies of the Colonists also sold captured Natives to the colonists. An indenture document from 1676 records such a sale,

“Here unto especially moving: have given granted bargained sold assigned set over and confirmed and do by these presents fully clearly and absolutely give grant bargain sell assign set over and confirm the said James Treat his heirs executors and assigns forever an Indian captive man child about four years old to have and to hold the said Indian captive man child the son of Jomee unto the said James Treat his heirs executors.”⁵

It was not long after the introduction of slavery in Connecticut that New England merchants started their own slave trade. On June 13, 1676 a bill was drawn in England’s House of Commons regarding this new trade,

“The house after some debate, finding it needful to make some explanation of the late act concerning Negroes, and to prevent the bringing of Indian Slaves, and as well to send away, and transport those already brought to this Island from New England, and the adjacent colonies, being thought a people, of too subtle bloody and dangerous nature and inclination, to be and remain, here ordered a bill to be drawn, which being done and read, it was.”⁶

⁴ James Noyes, letter to John Allin, Stonington, CT, October 1676, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:1018040>

⁵ Mohegan Tribe, Sachem of the Mohegan, *Indenture of a Captive Indian Boy from Owaneco and Jomee to James Treat*, Sachem Owaneco of Mohegan, January 9, 1676, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:1018047>

⁶ House of Commons, *Vote on an Act of Explanation to Prohibit the Bringing of Indian Slaves to this Island*, June 13, 1676, 16 Charles II, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://findit.library.yale.edu/catalog/digcoll:1018505>

This bill shows that New Englanders were importing slaves to England as early as 1676. The historian Joanne Pope Melish asserts that slavery started even earlier, during the Pequot War. She states that in 1638 captured Pequots were traded for African slaves in the West Indies.⁷ The Colony of Connecticut was founded a mere three years earlier in 1635. One possible explanation for Connecticut's heavier involvement in the slave trade—as compared to other parts of New England—is its early involvement in slavery. Both the Pequot War and King Philip's War were fought extensively on Connecticut soil. This would result in the capture of Connecticut Natives who would most likely be sold to Connecticut colonists, such as James Noyes and James Treat. Rhode Island was also a center of New England slavery, and it was also exposed to slavery earlier than the other regions of New England through the Pequot War and King Philip's War.

Slavery in New England would increase as trade with the West Indies increased. By the mid-eighteenth century, New England already had a vibrant triangle trade. New England merchants would pick up slaves in Africa and take them to the West Indies. In the West Indies they would be exchanged for molasses. The molasses would be brought to New England where it was distilled into rum. The rum was then brought to Africa and the cycle would continue. Connecticut also traded extensively with the South. Historian Richard Purcell reports that Connecticut would export many food stuffs and manufactured goods to southern ports.⁸ This may account for the occasional marriages between people from Connecticut and people from the South, which was another means by which slaves arrived in Connecticut. Reverend Thompson, the minister of Canaan, married a woman from Virginia who brought slaves with her. James

⁷ Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 17-18.

⁸ Richard J. Purcell, *Connecticut in Transition: 1775-1818* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1963), 113.

Mars recounts the event in 1864, “The minister of North Canaan, whose name was Thompson, went to Virginia for a wife, or she came to him; in some way they got together; so that they became man and wife. He removed her to Canaan and she brought her slaves with her, and my mother was one of them. I think there was two of my mother’s brothers also.”⁹ John Warner Barber records a similar situation in 1849, “It was erected before the Revolutionary war, by Mr. Godfrey Malbone, a gentleman from Rhode Island, who had been educated at Oxford, England. He married a lady from the South, who for part of her patrimony brought 50 or 60 slaves on to the large estate on which he resided in this town.”¹⁰ An interesting aspect of these two accounts is that neither of them occur in major trading areas. Rev. Thompson is from the town of Canaan in Litchfield County. Godfrey Malbone is from Brooklyn in Windham County. Both of these towns are in the extreme northern reaches of Connecticut. If there are two accounts of Connecticut-Southern marriages which brought slaves to the far interior of Connecticut, one can imagine that this phenomena was likely to be even more common in the port cities which frequently traded with the South. Much like southern New England’s early exposure to slavery, southern New Englanders’ involvement in trade can explain the prevalence of slavery in Rhode Island and Connecticut.

Slavery was not as widespread in Connecticut as it was in the South. For New England, however, the number of slaves was remarkable. The first federal census of the United States was conducted in 1790. According to the census, there were 3,886 slaves in New England.¹¹

Connecticut had 2,764 slaves in the census, thus making up more than two thirds of the New

⁹ James Mars, *Life of James Mars, a Slave born and sold in Connecticut. Written by Himself.* (Hartford, CT: Press of Case, Lockwood and Company, 1868), 5-6.

¹⁰ John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections* (New Haven, CT: Durrie and Peck and J.W. Barber, 1849), 416.

¹¹ There were actually 3,870. Sixteen slaves were listed in Vermont in the published census. In the original census documents they were listed as free people of color.

England slave population. The three counties with the most slaves were Fairfield with 795, New London with 586 and New Haven with 433. The town with the most slaves was Fairfield with 203.¹² These statistics reflect the association of slaves with trade. These statistics also seem to indicate that slavery was not associated with the highly profitable tobacco industry of the upper Connecticut River Valley, around Hartford. Fairfield, New Haven and New London counties were all major centers of trade with extensive coastlines. Likewise, the Town of Fairfield was a major shipping port between Boston and New York. There also appears to be a north and south divide in the state as all of the southern counties had more slaves than freemen, while all of the northern counties had more freemen than slaves. This is also most likely a result of the southern counties' access to trade.

The conditions of slavery in Connecticut differed from master to master. In 1868 James Mars described the maltreatment he and his family suffered at the hands of their first master Rev. Thompson of Canaan,

“Mr. Thompson used to come up from Virginia and talk about our going South; he would pat me on the head and tell me what a fine boy I was. Once when he was in Canaan, he asked me if I would not like to go with him and drive the carriage for my mistress. He said if I would go he would give me twenty-five cents, or as it was then called, twenty-five coppers. I told him I wanted the money first; he gave me a quarter and then I would not agree to go, and he put me in the oven; that I did not like, and when I got out I would not give him the money, but his business I did not yet know.”¹³

¹² First U.S. Congress, First Census of the United States, 1790, accessed November 4, 2015. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>

¹³ James Mars, *Life of James Mars*, 7

Reverend Thompson and his wife would also threaten violence, “The minister's wife told my father if she only had him South, where she could have at her call a half dozen men, she would have him stripped and flogged until he was cut in strings, and see if he would do as she bid him. She told him, You mind boy, I will have you there yet, and you will get your pay for all that you have done.”¹⁴ James Mars states that a later master named Mr. Munger never struck him and after he was emancipated, “Mr. Munger and family always treated me with attention whenever I met them. They made me welcome to their house and to their table.”¹⁵

Boyrereau Brinch, a slave from the West Indies who was sold to masters in Connecticut, likewise had a varied experience. He describes one master named Mr. Gibbs as particularly horrible, saying that he was whipped approximately four times a day.¹⁶ His last master however, Mrs. Stiles of Woodbury, he describes as caring. Mrs. Stiles sent him to school so that he could learn to read and write, however, the teacher whipped him for not pronouncing “W” correctly.

“Thus I became a child again; I went into the nursery and shed tears, where I sat about an hour. At length I went in and Mrs. Stiles asked me what they had done to me, and how I liked going to school. She was questioning me as her grand children had told her what happened. I felt some compunction, although not guilty of any intentional wrong. She questioned me for sometime with all the humanity of a saint, then generously told me I should not be whipped at school, for she would learn me to read herself. Accordingly she

¹⁴ Mars, *Life of James Mars*, 6

¹⁵ Mars, *Life of James Mars*, 33

¹⁶ Boyrereau Brinch, *The Blind African Slave, or Memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, Nick-named Jeffrey Brace* (St. Albans, VT: Harry Whitney, 1810)

with intentions as good and pure as virtue itself, taught me to read and speak the English language.”¹⁷

The accounts of Connecticut slaves show that the treatment of slaves in Connecticut was no different than elsewhere.

The beginning of the end of slavery in Connecticut was the Nonimportation Act of 1774 which dictated that slaves could no longer be imported into the Connecticut Colony. Despite this first step, Connecticut utterly refused to abolish slavery outright. Three different bills went before the General Assembly in 1777, 1779 and 1780 asking for immediate abolition, each were rejected. In 1784, the General Assembly finally agreed to a gradual abolition. The Gradual Abolition Act of 1784 stated that children of slaves born after March 1, 1784 would be emancipated upon turning twenty-five.¹⁸ This effectively abolished hereditary slavery. Connecticut still denied free people of color the right to vote. In 1818, the Connecticut Constitution was written as an updated version of the colonial Connecticut Charter. Article VIII specifically denies women and African Americans the right to vote, stating, “Every white male citizen of the United States, who shall have attained the age of twenty-one years, who shall have resided in this state for a term of one year next preceding, and in the town in which he may offer himself to be admitted to the privileges of an elector, at least six months next preceding the time he may so offer himself, and shall sustain a good moral character, shall, on his taking such oath as may be prescribed by law, be an elector.”¹⁹ Slavery was eventually abolished in 1848.

¹⁷ Boyrereau Brinch, *The Blind African Slave*, 154

¹⁸ Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 11

¹⁹ General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, *The Constitution of Connecticut, 1818, Amendments Article VIII*, accessed November 4, 2015. <https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/Content/constitutions/1818Constitution.htm>

Slavery was never seen as a moral institution in Connecticut. While elsewhere in the United States slavery was viewed as a Christian institution defended by the Bible, in Connecticut it was considered a necessary evil.²⁰ In 1793, Noah Webster argued that slavery corrupted the character of the enslaved,

“ANOTHER effect of slavery upon its miserable subjects is to make them cruel, deceitful, perfidious, and knavish; in short, to deprive them of all the noble and amiable affections of the human heart. This fatal and necessary consequence of oppression upon the moral character of man, though often noticed by the historian, the divine and philosopher, has either escaped the reflection of tyrants, or its admonitions have been hushed by the more commanding calls of a mistaken selfish policy. But proofs of this truth are scattered over almost every page of history. We can scarcely open a volume without finding some fact to convince us that oppression is the mother of crimes.”²¹

Webster, a Federalist and known supporter of gradual emancipation, openly accused slavery of un-civilizing the slave. Webster also stated that slavery was to blame for the supposed laziness of slaves.

“IN America the laziness of slaves has become proverbial: indeed the blacks are so remarkable for their inaction, their want of foresight and their disinclination to improvement, as to create very great doubts in the minds of some men of a philosophical cast, whether they are not a distinct and inferior race of beings. But on examining this subject, and comparing the blacks of this country, with the slaves of other countries, who

²⁰ Larry R. Morrison, “The Religious Defense of American Slavery Before 1830,” *Journal of Religious Thought* 37, no. 2 (fall 1980/winter 1981): 16-29, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/4975255/religious-defense-american-slavery-before-1830>

²¹ Noah Webster, *Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry* (Hartford, CT: Hudson and Goodwin, 1793), 8

are confessedly of the same race with the most improved European nation, it will probably be found that, making the usual allowances for the effects of their native climate, all the peculiar features in the character of the African race in America, may justly be ascribed to their depressed condition.”²²

In 1791, Jonathan Edwards, jr. a New Haven clergyman, gave a sermon on slavery.²³ He denounced the slave trade as an immoral industry, “As to the slave-trade, I conceive it to be unjust in itself—abominable on account of the cruel manner in which it is conducted—and totally wrong on account of the impolicy of it, or its destructive tendency to the moral and political interests of any country.”²⁴ What makes Edwards’ sermon so interesting is that he grew up with slaves himself. Jonathan Edwards sr. owned four slaves named Joseph, Lee, Venus and Titus.²⁵ Edwards, sr. held interesting, although not wholly unique views on slavery. He believed that slavery was a moral practice if the master treated the slave with respect and made an effort to Christianize them. He viewed other forms of slavery, such as the transatlantic slave trade as inhumane as it enslaved people who were previously free.²⁶

With such prominent members of the political and ecclesiastic elite denouncing slavery as immoral, one might wonder why it was not abolished in Connecticut sooner. The answer is simple, in the “Land of Steady Habits” one thing was feared more than immorality; social upheaval. The issue of slavery did not truly become controversial in Connecticut until large

²² Noah Webster, *Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry*, 6

²³ The son of the prominent theologian, Jonathan Edwards.

²⁴ Jonathan Edwards, “The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of the Slavery of the Africans” (sermon, Connecticut Society for the Promotion of Freedom, and for the Relief of Persons Unlawfully Holden in Bondage, New Haven, CT, September 15, 1791).

²⁵ Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 4 (Oct. 1997): 825, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2953884>.

²⁶ Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards on Slavery and the Slave Trade,” 825.

numbers of slaves were freed after the revolution. The Gradual Abolition Act came into being in 1784, a year after the Treaty of Paris was signed signaling an end of the American Revolution. One can see the influence the Revolution had on the rhetoric of abolitionists in Jonathan Edwards Jr.'s sermon, "It is a principle, the truth of which hath in this country been generally, if not universally acknowledged, ever since the commencement of the late war, that all men are born equally free. If this be true, the Africans are by nature equally entitled to freedom as we are; and therefore we have no more right to enslave, or to afford aid to enslave them, than they have to do the same to us."²⁷ Boyrereau Brinch was emancipated after serving in the Revolution, "At last we returned to West point and were discharged; as the war was over.--Thus was I, a slave for five years fighting for liberty.--After we were disbanded, I returned to my old master at Woodbury, with whom I lived one year; my services in the American war, having emancipated me from further slavery, and from being bartered or sold.--My master consented that I might go where I pleased and seek my fortune."²⁸ The Gradual Abolition Act and the American Revolution had a large impact on Connecticut society. While there were 2,764 slaves in Connecticut in 1790, a mere ten years later there were only 931.²⁹ As slaves were emancipated they formed a new free black community in Connecticut. This sudden growth of the free black community concerned much of the Connecticut public, as can be seen in their opposition to black education and animosity towards abolitionists.

During the antebellum era, black elites in the North tried to shape African American identity in order to achieve political and social equality with the white community. One of the ways in which they tried to shape their identity was by embodying the values and characteristics

²⁷ Jonathan Edwards, "The Injustice and Impolicy of the Slave Trade, and of the Slavery of the Africans"

²⁸ Boyrereau Brinch, *The Blind African Slave*, 169

²⁹ Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War*, 12

of the white middle class. They dressed in styles popular amongst the middle class and encouraged moral behavior such as temperance. Historian Patrick Rael argues that this was reflected in the rhetoric of Black elites. He says that they used words such as respectability, modesty, sobriety, intelligence and social elevation. Rael also argues that the Black leaders encouraged African Americans to frequent national holidays and celebrations. They encourages the ideals of nationalism to help build an identity as well.³⁰

Education would be a key part of the elites' plans for the African American community. These black elites would meet at conventions to discuss issues. It was at one such convention in 1831 that a proposal would be made to establish a university for African American men in New Haven, Connecticut. Simeon Jocelyn, the white minister of a black Congregational church in New Haven, proposed the idea. He chose New Haven partially for its status as a port and partially as it was the location of Yale, which he hoped would support the proposal. The Negro College—as it was to be called—would educate African American men in agricultural and mechanical work while also providing an education in classical studies.³¹ However, Simeon Jocelyn's vision never came to fruition. When he proposed the College to the City of New Haven there was an uproar. A town meeting was held in which the New Haven government vowed to prevent the Negro College from forming.³² An article from the New Haven *Palladium* shows the reaction of many of the citizens of New Haven,

³⁰ Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002)

³¹ James Brewer Stewart, "The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870," *The New England Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (September 2003): 323, accessed November 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1559806>.

³² Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War*, 20.

“We will inform them that we mean, without any jesting, to say that there has been an attempt, a serious attempt, to get up an institution in this place for the education for colored men. The blacks for a few years have been treated with attention and kindness by the inhabitants of this city. Two or three of our citizens have devoted much time and money for bettering their condition, but the zeal of a few has constantly increased, until a project has been brought forward, which if carried into execution would ruin the prosperity of this city.”³³

In 1833 there was another attempt to establish a black school in Connecticut. This time it was in the quiet town of Canterbury, in the northeastern corner of the state. In 1831 Prudence Crandall arrived in Canterbury with a plan for a school. Crandall was inspired by the Quaker schools she attended as a child and the progressive learning style of Plainfield Academy, a prestigious private school in northeastern Connecticut. Her plans proved to be very popular with the townsfolk of Canterbury and on October 3, 1831 a group of prominent men from Canterbury sent a letter to Crandall encouraging her to open the Canterbury Female Seminary.³⁴ Things went smoothly at the Seminary which had become a respected school for the daughters of the Windham County elite, until Crandall was approached by Sarah Harris. Sarah Harris was the daughter of a local black farmer. She asked Crandall if she could enroll in the Seminary and Crandall agreed. While the other students of Crandall’s school had no issue with their new class mate, their parents did. As word spread of the new black student, many of the school’s patrons threatened to remove their children. Faced with having to dismiss Sarah or lose all of her pupils,

³³ Hezekiah Niles, “Negro College,” *Niles National Register*, October 1, 1831, 88. (originally published in *New Haven Palladium*)

³⁴ Donald E. Williams Jr., *Prudence Crandall’s Legacy: The Fight for Equality in the 1830s, Dred Scott, and Brown v. Board of Education* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 13-17.

Crandall came up with a revolutionary idea. In 1833 Crandall reestablished her school as a private institution for the education of African American women. An advertisement for the school ran in the *Liberator* an abolitionist newspaper owned by William Lloyd Garrison,

“Prudence Crandall, Principle of the Canterbury, (Conn.) Female Boarding School.

Returns her most sincere thanks to those who have patronized her school, and would give information that on the first Monday of April next, her school will be opened for the reception of young Ladies and little Misses of color. The branches taught are as follows:- Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, English Grammar, Geography, History, Natural and Moral Philosophy, Chemistry, Astronomy, Drawing and Painting, Music on the Piano, together with the French Language.”³⁵

Much like Simeon Jocelyn, Prudence Crandall faced incredible opposition. In 1849 John Warner Barber recorded the reaction of the people of Canterbury, “The people of Canterbury, considering that this school would have a tendency to draw a despised class of persons to their village, and possessing their share of the feelings so common against the race, endeavored to break up the school.”³⁶ The opposition was led by Andrew Judson, a local politician and one of the men who wrote the letter of encouragement.³⁷ The people of Canterbury seemed to not only be concerned with the race of the young women attending the school but were also concerned with the fact that some of them were not from Connecticut.³⁸ This aspect of the argument is especially interesting as it seems to underline the fear the people of Connecticut had for social upheaval. The town decided to attack Crandall’s school through the legal system. Barber records

³⁵ Prudence Crandall, Advertisement for Crandall’s Female Boarding School, *The Liberator*, March 2, 1833, accessed November 8, 2015, <http://connecticuthistory.org/prudence-crandall-fights-for-equal-access-to-education/>

³⁶ John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 422.

³⁷ Donald E. Williams Jr., *Prudence Crandall’s Legacy*, 58.

³⁸ Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War*, 20.

the action the people of Canterbury took, “At this period, there being no law in Connecticut to prevent the education of colored persons coming from other states, a petition was drawn up, signed by a considerable number of petitioners, and sent to the Legislature, who granted the prayer of the petitioners, by passing an act prohibiting the instruction of colored persons from other states in any schools except the common free schools and incorporated academies, without the consent of the town in which such schools should be situated. The passage of this law, (May, 1833,) was celebrated in Canterbury by ringing the bell and firing the canon.”³⁹ When this bill became a law it outlawed Prudence Crandall’s school.

The two incidents at the Negro College and the Canterbury Female Seminary shed light on some interesting aspects of race relations in Connecticut. The first is that there was a fear of more black people entering the state. In both cases greatest concern was placed with African Americans who were not from Connecticut. The Black Law specifically outlawed educating African Americans from outside of Connecticut, but allowed for the education of those from Connecticut. These two incidences also show that the fear of a free black population was a statewide phenomenon. One would imagine that this fear would be especially prevalent in the major port cities such as New London and New Haven which had a historically higher slave and free black population. However, the story of Prudence Crandall shows that this fear was just as common amongst the small inland farming communities. The reaction of both the public and the elite to abolitionists is also very telling of the race relations in Connecticut.

While Connecticut was known for many prominent abolitionists such as the Beecher family and Simeon Jocelyn, the anti-slavery movement was relatively small. The historian

³⁹ John Warner Barber, *Connecticut Historical Collections*, 422.

Matthew Warshauer reports that between 1833 and 1837 there were approximately thirty-nine abolitionist societies in the state of Connecticut.⁴⁰ However, he also reports that during that same period there were forty-six anti-abolition societies in the state. The elite dominated these societies. Governor Henry Edwards, Noah Webster and Simeon Baldwin formed one such society in 1835.⁴¹ There are also numerous accounts of abolitionist meetings being broken up by anti-abolitionist mobs. It was in these mobs that the common public would show their opinions of slavery and the free black community. The nature of these mobs reflected the aversion Connecticut residents had for social upheaval. The historian James Brewer Stewart reports that the anti-abolition mob which opposed the forming of the Negro College was not as violent as mobs in New York and Cincinnati which occurred contemporaneously with it. He states that unlike other race rioters, the rioters at New Haven did not burn down buildings or kill anyone.⁴²

The people of Connecticut opposed the abolitionists because they encouraged immediate abolition which put the social order in jeopardy. In October 1835, the people of Hartford, Connecticut published a document showing their displeasure for abolitionists.

“This excitement has been occasioned by the rash and reckless measures and proceedings of the Abolitionists of the Middle and Northern states. We believe that these proceedings will result in no good, but much evil; that their direct and obvious tendency to agitate and alarm the people of the slave states; endanger their peace and security, if not expose them to the evils and horrors of insurrection, massacre and a servile war—to injure the slave population and subject them to restrictions and severities from which they have hitherto

⁴⁰ Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival*, 19

⁴¹ Matthew Warshauer, *Connecticut in the American Civil War: Slavery, Sacrifice, and Survival*, 22

⁴² James Brewer Stewart, “The New Haven Negro College and the Meanings of Race in New England, 1776-1870,” 333

been exempt, and greatly defer, if not wholly extinguish the hope of the final amelioration of their condition—that they tend to destroy that reciprocal harmony and confidence which should prevail among the people of different sections of the Union; to embarrass commercial and social intercourse among them, to alienate their minds and to ‘weaken those sacred ties which hold together its several parts.’”⁴³

Declarations like this show the way that the general populace felt about the actions of abolitionists. Abolitionists were thought to encourage the “evils and horrors of insurrection” and “embarrass commercial and social intercourse” between the states. This great fear of social upheaval mobilized the anti-abolition movement.

An announcement for a New London public meeting also shows the fear associated with abolitionists,

“The undersigned, citizens of New-London, having witnessed with regret the conduct of some imported travelling incendiaries, assisted in their attempts to create sectional jealousies by a few misguided native fanatics, and being anxious to prove that those individuals constitute but a very small portion of the community, to convince our Southern brethren that we are ever sincerely desirous to cultivate the most friendly and honorable discourse with them, to disclaim any interference with their constitutional rights, or the Slave question, and to assure them that this city is decidedly hostile to the movements of the abolition faction,”⁴⁴

⁴³ *A Declaration of the Sentiments of the People of Hartford, Regarding the Measures of the Abolitionists* (Hartford, CT: 1835), accessed November 23, 2015, <http://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/40002%3A20361>

⁴⁴ *Public Meeting*. (New London, CT: September 7, 1835), accessed November 23, 2015, <http://collections.ctdigitalarchive.org/islandora/object/40002%3A20081>

The people of New London, a center of slavery in Connecticut, expressed their fear of the abolition movement. They seem especially concerned with ruining economic and social relations with the south. They also describe the supporters of abolition with words that emphasize their disorderly conduct. They use words such as misguided, fanatics and sectional jealousies. Their description of imported travelling incendiaries also echoes the fear of “foreigners” in regards to Prudence Crandall’s School.

The people of Connecticut favored a gradual emancipation. Noah Webster stated his preference for gradual emancipation,

“But the obstacles that present themselves to the project of colonization, and to that of a general sudden abolition of slavery, appear to be equally insurmountable. The blacks in the southern States must, it is presumed, continue there, for a great number of years, perhaps forever; government at least will not undertake the herculean task of exporting them to a foreign country, and repopling five or six States with white inhabitants. What then can be done? What method can be devised for meliorating the condition of the blacks, without essentially injuring the slave, the master and the public. This is the great desideratum. There appears to me only one plan or expedient for effecting this desirable object, which, in its operation, will combine the three several interests which are to be consulted; this is, to raise the slaves, by gradual means, to the condition of free tenants.”⁴⁵

While immediate emancipation threatened the social structure by suddenly creating a class of free black people, gradual emancipation slowly integrated them into society. Noah Webster also believed that slavery caused the slave to be lazy and destroyed slaves morally. If immediate

⁴⁵ Noah Webster, *Effects of Slavery on Morals and Industry*, 36-37

abolition were to occur Webster would most likely believe that the slaves be unprepared to support themselves because of what slavery did to them.

A fear of social upheaval preserved the institution of slavery in Connecticut long after it had died out in other parts of the northeast. The people of Connecticut were afraid that a sudden rise in the free black population would disrupt the life which they were used to. As a result they favored a gradual emancipation of slaves and put restrictions on the free black community. In 1818, the General Assembly specifically enfranchised white men but not black men. In 1834, the General Assembly enacted the Black Law making it illegal for a black person from out of state to be educated in a Connecticut institution. It was under this fear that both the elites and the common public of Connecticut battled the abolitionist movement, not as a means of preserving slavery but as a means of preventing social chaos as they saw it. This unique view of slavery is best seen in prominent Connecticut leaders, such as Noah Webster, who saw slavery as immoral but also saw immediate abolition as impractical. This complicated, and often times confusing, relationship Connecticut has with slavery often contradicts the popular image of a free society of staunch abolitionists. In 2009 Connecticut's history with slavery came to a symbolic end when the General Assembly formally apologized for the state's role saying,

“NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Connecticut General Assembly issues its apology for the practices of slavery in Connecticut and expresses its profound contrition for the official acts that sanctioned and perpetuated the denial of basic human rights and dignity to fellow humans and vows to work for the elimination of residual structures of racism that continue to exist in our state; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Assembly urges schools, colleges, universities, religious and civic institutions, businesses and professional associations to do all within their

respective powers to acknowledge the transgressions of Connecticut's journey from a colony to a leading state in the abolition efforts and to learn the lessons of history in order to avoid repeating mistakes of the past and to promote racial equality and reconciliation; and BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the General Assembly calls on all Connecticut residents to recommit their state, their communities and themselves to the proclamation of their nation's Declaration of Independence that "all persons are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights" and to work daily to treat all persons with abiding respect for their humanity and to eliminate racial prejudices, injustices and discrimination from our society."⁴⁶

⁴⁶ General Assembly of Connecticut, House. RESOLUTION EXPRESSING THE PROFOUND REGRET OF THE CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY FOR THE HISTORY OF WRONGS INFLICTED UPON BLACK CITIZENS BY MEANS OF SLAVERY, EXPLOITATION AND LEGALIZED RACIAL SEGREGATION, AND CALLING ON ALL CITIZENS TO TAKE PART IN ACTS OF RACIAL RECONCILIATION. House Joint Resolution 1, File no. 632, (January 2009)

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