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**“Though It Blasts Their Eyes”: Slavery and Citizenship in New York  
City, 1790-1821**

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**“Though It Blasts Their Eyes”: Slavery and Citizenship in New York  
City, 1790-1821**

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

For my dad, who always taught me about citizenship

## **Abstract**

### **“Thought It Blasts Their Eyes”: Slavery and Citizenship in New York City, 1790-1821**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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Between 1790 and 1821, New York City underwent a dramatic transformation as slavery slowly died. Throughout the 1790s, a massive influx of runaways from the hinterland and black refugees from the Caribbean led to the rapid expansion of the city's free black population. At the same time, white agitation for abolition reached a fever pitch. The legislature's decision in 1799 to enact a program of gradual emancipation set off a wave of arranged manumissions that filled city streets with black bodies at all stages of transition from slavery to freedom. As blacks began to organize politically and develop a distinct social, economic and cultural life, they both conformed to and defied white expectations of republican citizenship. Over time, the emerging climate of social indistinction proved too much for white elites, who turned to new ideologies of race to enact the massive disfranchisement of black voters.

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## **Introduction: The Rise and Fall of Black Citizenship in New York**

On April 19, 1814, Thomas Jennings and Samuel Hardenburgh climbed the wide, stone steps of City Hall in lower Manhattan. Just two stories tall and relatively shallow, the building was hardly the city's largest, and yet, less than two years after its formal dedication, it stood as the most majestic structure in New York. A seamless blend of foreign and indigenous architectural modes, it had cost an extravagant \$500,000 to complete.<sup>1</sup> High, vertical archways lifted the carefully gridded façade in a nod to the French Renaissance, while the portico's stately Corinthian columns guarded the entrance to a soaring, Georgian rotunda. There, a magnificent marble staircase spiraled upward toward an elegantly coffered dome, before depositing visitors at the second-floor entrance to the Mayor's Courtroom.<sup>2</sup>

The two black men had come with high hopes and great fears. It had been more than ten years since the state legislature had moved to abolish slavery, and in that time, Hardenburgh and Jennings had enjoyed the benefits of free citizenship in a rapidly emancipating city. Now, in response to a new state law requiring all black voters to obtain municipal proof of freedom, they were set to appear in the Mayor's Courtroom before Jonas Mapes, a prominent Federalist and city alderman. Hardenburgh hoped to prove that he had been born free in upstate New York, and that he met the legal requirements for the franchise. Jennings, a prominent inventor, had come to serve as his witness.<sup>3</sup>

Where the men had come from is hard to say. Perhaps they had arrived from the neighborhood around Banker Street, just northeast of City Hall, or maybe from the place to the northwest, where Chapel intersected with Anthony and an emergent black enclave had begun to sprout.<sup>4</sup> Unless they had come from Hardenburgh's home in the Second Ward, they would have approached City Hall from the rear, where its polished façade of Massachusetts marble gave way to coarse Pennsylvania brownstone.<sup>5</sup> The Common Council had insisted on the move eleven years earlier as a cost-saving measure. The project was too expensive, they had argued, and the city was unlikely to expand beyond it anyway.<sup>6</sup>

In reality, New York's population was exploding. Between 1780 and 1810, the city had grown by more than 350 percent to include nearly 100,000 people.<sup>7</sup> This swell of new residents led to dramatic crowding in Manhattan's oldest, most established neighborhoods. As the city pushed gradually higher up the island's slim terrain, its rapidly expanding free black community moved further and further north.<sup>8</sup>

In 1814, free blacks made up nearly a tenth of New York City's population, outnumbering slaves by more than five to one.<sup>9</sup> In freedom, they worked to construct a dynamic civic space where the politics of emancipation fused with the lived experience of being free to create relevant and engaged black social and cultural institutions. Close to 9,000 free black New Yorkers frequented churches and schools, bars and dance halls. In their shops, benevolent societies and theater companies, they developed distinctive fashions for extravagant balls and staged everything from Shakespeare to their own new and pioneering productions.<sup>10</sup>



These cultural displays gave meaning to the life of the community, but they also distinguished that community from the mass of enslaved blacks who still lived and worked in the white homes south of Chambers St. In 1799, after two failed attempts, the state legislature had initiated a long process of gradual emancipation designed to phase out slavery in stages. The law made no mention of slaves born prior to its passage, but it did address the status of slaves born after July of 1799. These New Yorkers would remain enslaved through their most productive years—long enough for their masters to recoup their “investments”—but then they would be officially manumitted by the state, men at age 28 and women at age 25.<sup>11</sup> In this transitional era of emancipation, to be black and free was implicitly political. Every black cultural expression asserted and performed the political identities of freedom, which gestured always to the lingering presence of bondage.

The legislature’s actions had untethered slavery from any rational timeline, creating an elastically defined *emancipation generation*. In theory, the law’s first beneficiaries would be the group of black women who would exit slavery in 1824. But many slaveholders elected to smuggle their slaves out of state, rather than give them up to freedom for nothing. Add to this the slavecatchers who prowled the streets in search of runaways— real and alleged— and even free blacks could not be sure what words like “freedom” were coming to mean in New York. These individuals inhabited a uniquely liminal moment in the city’s history—a moment when a long-held binary conception of slavery and freedom began to refashion itself as a drawn out and distended spectrum of shifting identities. Indeed, that moment did not last long. In 1821, the state legislature

would vote to dramatically expand white suffrage while effectively stripping blacks of the franchise altogether. After more than twenty years of rapidly expanding freedom, free black New Yorkers like Samuel Hardenburgh would find themselves suddenly and incomprehensibly written out of citizenship.

In evaluating this progression from slavery to abolition to what David Quigley and David Gellman have termed, “Jim Crow New York,” scholars have typically adopted one of three perspectives.<sup>12</sup> The earliest students of the question tended to view the black freedom struggle in New York largely as a contest between two static parties, the first represented by a cohort of radical Federalists newly awakened to the values of the American Revolution and the second by the ardent defenders of slavery in the state’s rural countryside. According to this model, these two sides engaged in a series of authentic and hard-fought battles over emancipation and black civil rights, resulting in a historic oscillation between the expansion of black social and political freedoms and their sudden and sharp contraction. Proponents of this view, most notably Edgar McManus in his early effort, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, take slavery’s defenders and its detractors at face value and attribute their conflict to a genuine clash of ideals precipitated by independence.<sup>13</sup>

A second view has been advanced by scholars like David Gellman and Shane White, perhaps the most prolific student of slavery and freedom in New York City. White’s examination of predominantly Federalist organizations like the New York Manumission Society, which McManus once labeled “the most effective agency for antislavery” and whose members slavery scholar Leslie M. Harris has termed “blacks’

best hope,” has led him to conclude that the city’s earliest abolitionists were also its biggest hypocrites.<sup>14</sup> From this perspective, the end of slavery came to New York in 1799 *in spite* of the efforts of white organizers, not because of them, and the subsequent backlash was always to be expected. Not surprisingly, the proponents of this view generally afford the greatest political agency to blacks themselves for having successfully pressured white elites into granting their freedom.

More recently, scholars like Patrick Rael and Leslie Alexander have traced contemporary evolutions in both black and white political views of race, freedom and citizenship, arguing that genuine ideological shifts among both groups interacted to produce changes in strategy and policy over time.<sup>15</sup> This view is by far the most sophisticated of the three. Not only does it effectively interrogate the wide range of division and disagreement that characterized both black and white communities over how best to address the issue of slavery, it also appropriately acknowledges the era’s key players as real people capable of changing their opinions and changing them back in response to evolving circumstances and the actions of others.

And yet even this third view paints a troublingly one-dimensional portrait of early national New York City and its inhabitants. By attempting to identify an underlying coherence to the history of slavery and freedom, all three perspectives miss the opportunity to evaluate the often-untidy overlap of shifting ideologies of race, class and republican citizenship in this period. These terms did not function as static categories with fixed meanings over time. Rather, they underwent profound and often

interconnected processes of transition. Especially in New York City, these processes tended to play themselves out on black bodies in public space.

The Revolution did necessitate a critical reevaluation of slavery in New York, and many whites undertook this process in the ideological context of republicanism. As such, their commitments were not merely to black freedom, but to a particular kind of republican liberty into which blacks would be carefully and intentionally transitioned over time. Free blacks embraced this process by developing an autonomous social and cultural life that they hoped would demonstrate their fitness for citizenship, but in a cruel twist, the city's rapidly shifting political, economic and demographic landscapes conspired to render such autonomies deeply threatening, even to the most ardent white opponents of slavery. This process coincided with a general hardening of new racial ideologies taking place across the young republic. Eventually, republican concerns that whites had once associated with the condition of slavery instead attached themselves to the newly cemented, pseudoscientific logic of race.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Hagan Hall and American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society., *An Appeal for the Preservation of City Hall Park, New York : With a Brief History of the Park* (New York: American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1910), 16.

<sup>2</sup> NYC Department of Administrative Services, "Dcas Managed Public Buildings- City Hall," NYC Department of Administrative Services,  
[http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcas/html/resources/man\\_cityhall.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcas/html/resources/man_cityhall.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Jonas Mapes, "Certificate of Freedom for Samuel Hardenburgh," in *Slavery and Abolition* (Austin: Briscoe Center for American History, 1814).

<sup>4</sup> Shane White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 35.

<sup>5</sup> Graham Russell Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 194.

<sup>6</sup> Services, "Dcas Managed Public Buildings- City Hall."

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<sup>7</sup> Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 24.

<sup>8</sup> On population, see: Rocellus Sheridan Guernsey, *New York City and Vicinity During the War of 1812-15, Being a Military, Civic and Financial Local History of That Period, with Incidents and Anecdotes Thereof, and a Description of the Forts, Fortifications, Arsenals, Defences and Camps in and About New York City and Harbor*, 2 vols. (New York: C. L. Woodward, 1889), 29.; On black relocation, see: White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York*, 35.; and Elizabeth Blackmar, *Manhattan for Rent, 1785-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 99.; For a useful map, see: Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, Historical Studies of Urban America (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 75.

<sup>9</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 72-74.

<sup>11</sup> Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 1st paperback ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 175.

<sup>12</sup> David Nathaniel Gellman and David Quigley, *Jim Crow New York : A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 3-4.

<sup>13</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 168; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 64.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Patrick Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York: New Press, 2005); Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

## **Chapter 1: Slavery and Freedom in Republican New York**

Hardenburgh and Jennings inhabited a fledgling world of freedom in a city scarred by a legacy of bondage. In the years leading up to their effort at City Hall, slavery in New York City remained a physical presence— quite literally an embodied reality for tens of thousands of people. Throughout the 1700s, no city or region in the North was more dependent on slave labor than Manhattan, and at mid-century, slaves made up more than one fifth of the island's 13,000 residents.<sup>1</sup> Traveling through New York in 1794, Englishman William Strickland wrote of a black population in the midst of dramatic growth. “[There is a] greater number of Blacks particularly women and children in the streets who may be seen of all shades till the stain is entirely worn out,” Strickland remarked in his diary.<sup>2</sup>

At the time of Strickland's visit, New York City's black population was entering a period of rapid expansion that would result in its near tripling less than two decades later.<sup>3</sup> Over the course of the 1790s, the number of slaves increased by more than 20 percent and the number of slaveholders grew by an even greater 33 percent.<sup>4</sup> Even as the state careened toward emancipation, the institution continued to operate in one out of every five white households in the city, and slaveholders could be found living on every one of its streets, without exception.<sup>5</sup> When the state legislature enacted gradual abolition in 1799, only Charleston and New Orleans could claim to have possessed a higher concentration of slaves than New York City.<sup>6</sup>

Slavery was even heavier in the city's hinterlands, where a greater proportion of households held slaves than in the entirety of any southern state.<sup>7</sup> These blacks routinely visited the city on holidays and weekends, contributing to an urban concentration of slaves as substantial as any place in the country.<sup>8</sup> Many rural slaves chose to run away to the city, where they attempted to pass as free.<sup>9</sup> Even after 80 percent of Manhattan's blacks had obtained their freedom, slavery still would remain deeply entrenched in the city's rural surrounds.<sup>10</sup>

Unlike its southern counterpart slaveholding in New York City was a broadly distributed phenomenon. By cross-referencing the city's 1789 tax records with data from the 1790 census, historian Shane White has detailed the economic demographics of the practice. Among the wealthiest 10 percent of the population in 1790, more than half owned at least one slave. More than 30 percent of all slaveholders came from this decile, averaging three slaves per household. Still, while the bottom half of earners controlled just 6.6 percent of the city's wealth, its members held a disproportionate 12 percent of its slaves. Nearly 18 percent of all slaveholders came from this group. Among them, the average number of slaves per household fell only modestly to two.<sup>11</sup>

White's calculations suggest that slaveholding was as evenly distributed across New York's class strata as it was across its physical landscape. But apart from its breadth, the phenomenon was also shallow. At the close of the 1780s, a full 75 percent of the city's slaveholding households claimed just two slaves or less, and one half of all slaves lived as the only slave in their household or with just one other.<sup>12</sup> Among the entire population, only 76 households could claim more than five slaves, including the

household of staunch abolitionist John Jay.<sup>13</sup> The largest slaveholding group was not wealthy merchants or professionals, but artisans, one eighth of whom held slaves at the time of the census.<sup>14</sup> Artisanal slaves typified a large class of skilled black laborers who could be hired out at lower cost than free wage laborers.<sup>15</sup> They also belonged to a considerable subset of slaves who lived and worked alongside their owners in white homes that doubled as workshops and sites of commerce.<sup>16</sup>

### **BROKEN BINARIES**

In 1790, the city was still small, extending little higher than Houston Street. Even in this constrained environment, blacks comprised roughly 12 percent of a total population of about 30,000 people.<sup>17</sup> Whites and blacks lived and worked alongside one another in crowded neighborhoods that left little room for the creation of exclusive spaces. In the absence of hard physical boundaries, whites relied on abstract geographies of power to police the harsh binaries of slavery and difference on which the city's social, political and economic regimes rested.

Whites worked daily to materialize and renew these geographies through constant efforts to regulate New York's public and domestic landscapes. In 1784, following the British occupation of the city, Mayor James Duane had undertaken the reinstating of the colonial slave codes as his first and most important order of business.<sup>18</sup> The rigid collection of codes was meant to restrict the movements and activities of slaves while holding their owners accountable for potential threats to an already tenuous social order.<sup>19</sup> Under these laws, slaves were forbidden from purchasing alcohol, selling in the city's public markets, and congregating together in large numbers after dark. They were also



ordered to carry lanterns at night in an effort to prevent them from running away or meeting to plot rebellion.<sup>20</sup>

In reality, slaves routinely violated these rules, often gathering in public spaces to engage in interracial commerce and perform music, group dancing and other African-influenced cultural activities. In fact, it is even more telling that the slave codes placed nearly as many restrictions on members of the city's white population.<sup>21</sup> Slaves may have been prohibited from buying liquor, but the Common Council had also seen fit to forbid white establishments explicitly from furnishing it to them. Whites were also forbidden from hiring or trading with any slave without first securing the express permission of his or her owner, a prohibition that appears to have been violated as routinely as it was honored. Perhaps most interestingly, the most serious code violation appears to have involved stealing the slave of another slaveholder, which may help to explain the city's continued and informal tolerance of southern kidnappers long after New York had provided for emancipation.<sup>22</sup>

The boundaries of slavery and freedom also found expression in the residential architecture of the city. Many slaveholders lived in small, one- or two-story houses with separate basement quarters for their slaves. The entrances to these quarters, typically sunken doorways nested beneath the curvature of elevated outdoor stairwells, were separate from the main entrance and usually opened directly to the streets. These damp, minimally maintained "slave cellars" were frequent breeding grounds for illness, especially during the outbreaks of yellow fever in 1795 and 1798 that killed upwards of 2,000 people.<sup>23</sup> As Graham Hodges has noted, they also often lacked any interior access

to the master's quarters above them, leading to at least one case in which an entire household of slaves succumbed to yellow fever without a single member of the white family that owned them contracting the disease.<sup>24</sup>

Slave cellars were intended to separate slave life from free white domestic spaces while still allowing slaveholders the perception of proximity. In theory, this allowed them to keep a close watch on slave activity while maintaining paternalistic fantasies of the “happy slave” in the home. In reality, however, slave cellars also facilitated high degrees of autonomy and community among slaves and often assisted their efforts to skirt house rules. Overblown concerns about slave contagion ensured that few slaveholders elected to enter their slave cellars, enabling slaves to host family, friends and love interests in the heart of their masters' property. The ability to exit directly to the street also allowed slaves the option of coming and going from a house apart from their masters' knowledge or control.<sup>25</sup> Inasmuch as it enabled public and private forms of slave sociality, this simple architectural quirk did as much to facilitate a collective black cultural life under slavery as any other element of the city's physical organization.

The rigid binaries that whites hoped to police with tools like the slave codes and segregated architecture were fundamental to sustaining New York City's social order at the turn of the nineteenth century. As the central structures of social identity, they founded crucial conceptions of propriety, security and citizenship. And yet, these binaries were also highly imagined and often proved incongruous with a political and economic apparatus in transition. What it meant to be slave or free in New York was changing rapidly in the wake of American independence— an “emancipation experience” in its

own right that had only recently drawn heavily on the rhetoric of slavery and freedom. Those who now organized for abolition did so out of a deep commitment to republican ideals and a paternalistic desire to rehabilitate a black population degraded by slavery.<sup>26</sup> Those who opposed such efforts struggled to articulate a clear rationale, often stumbling over nebulous and ill-defined conceptions of race.

The economic landscape was also shifting as a growing financial sphere displaced skilled labor as the city's dominant industry. The resulting consolidation of wealth and property altered the physical and social landscape of the city by displacing white tradesmen and shifting the locus of slavery to the emerging neighborhoods of a new white financial elite. The resulting social transformations made abolition both more and less likely in the context of rising black unrest and a conflicted republican ideology. Ultimately, slavery's dying decade in New York revealed a series of profound ambivalences on the part of both pro- and anti-slavery whites struggling to make sense of the black bodies in their midst.

#### **SLAVERY AND REPUBLICAN IDEOLOGY**

"Republicanism," writes Gordon Wood, "meant more for Americans than simply the elimination of a king and the institution of an elective system. It added a moral dimension, a utopian depth, to the political separation from England."<sup>27</sup> Indeed, for the young Americans, the Revolution ushered in a new sense of peoplehood, not merely the freedom to live peacefully as their old selves, but the historic obligation of each individual to contribute to the perfecting of a new society. Unlike the corrupt monarchies of Europe, the American states would rely on the fitness of a free citizenry for self-

governance. “The people would no longer have an external authority...to restrain their passions and deny them luxury,” notes Ronald Takaki. “They would instead have to control themselves.”<sup>28</sup> The spiritual strength of the new republic would reside in the independence and moral fortitude of its citizens. This would enable the sacrifice of individual interests to the common good.<sup>29</sup>

Such idealism was robust in the new nation, where “no phrase except ‘liberty’ was invoked more often...than ‘the public good.’”<sup>30</sup> But the vaunted language of republicanism also betrayed a deep irony. Even as it codified republican values in the new federal Constitution, America looked little like the new society it heralded. “Remember, we assumed these forms of government in a hurry, before we were prepared for them,” disclaimed Benjamin Rush at the American Museum in Philadelphia in 1787. “We have changed our forms of government, but it remains yet to effect a revolution in our principles, opinions and manners.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, as they acclaimed the birth of a new republican utopia, Americans found themselves saddled with debt, rife with individual striving, and daily subjected to partisan divisions of the deepest and bitterest kind.

For historians, the most striking inconsistency is the persistence of chattel slavery, which continued in independence for the vast majority of American blacks. Throughout the Revolution, leading colonists had drawn attention to the degraded condition of the black bodies in their midst to articulate the stakes of independence from England. “[W]e won’t be their negroes,” wrote a pseudonymous John Adams in 1765. “Providence never designed us for negroes...and therefore never intended us as slaves.”<sup>32</sup> As Edmund

Morgan has noted, Revolutionary discourse figured the insuperable bondage of black slaves as the antithesis of the virtuous and un beholden republican citizen.<sup>33</sup>

New Yorkers, too, had made the widespread comparison to bondage. “Non-importation and non-exportation are the only peaceable means in our power to save ourselves from the most dreadful state of slavery,” insisted Alexander Hamilton in the lead-up to war.<sup>34</sup> And in 1774, writing on behalf of the Continental Congress, John Jay had argued, “When a nation, led to greatness by the hand of liberty...turns advocate for slavery and oppression, there is reason to suspect she has either ceased to be virtuous, or been extremely negligent in the appointment of her rulers.”<sup>35</sup> For Hamilton and Jay’s generation, the Revolution was the moment when Americans “resolv[ed] to be free...rejecting, with disdain, the fetters of slavery.”<sup>36</sup> At the heart of this choice lay a strong belief in republican liberty as an essential precondition for republican citizenship.

Despite this pervasive republican anxiety over slavery, few states emancipated slaves in the wake of the Revolution. In 1777, while the British still occupied New York City, delegates to New York’s state constitutional convention had debated the issue vigorously. Over the course of the event, many had objected to the institution on the grounds of Revolutionary ideals. Gouverneur Morris, himself the son of one of the state’s largest slaveholders, lamented the state of black bondage as deeply inconsistent with republican ideology. For Morris, slavery smacked of the aristocratic privilege of the Old World (and perhaps his own family). Rather than safeguard the opportunity of individuals to prove their own virtue, it granted benefits to some and restricted them for others solely on the merits of birth. “The rights of human nature and the principles of our holy religion

loudly call upon us to dispense the blessings of freedom to all mankind,” read one of Morris’ proposed provisions.<sup>37</sup>

But just as republican ideology led Morris to condemn the injustice of slavery, it also furnished him with serious doubts about the fitness of New York’s slaves for free citizenship. Immediate abolition, he argued, would be “productive of great dangers” to the fledgling state. Instead, the new constitution should include an appeal to future legislatures to “take the most effective measures consistent with the public safety, and the private property of individuals, for abolishing domestic slavery.”<sup>38</sup> It was one thing to say that slaves deserved the “blessings of freedom”, but it was quite another to suggest that they were ready to steward them, or that slaveholders could afford the economic blow that abolition would deal to their self-sufficiency.

Not even Morris’ modest language would appear in the final version of New York’s constitution, but in many northern states, slaves had better luck. The same year that Morris warned of the dangers of immediate abolition, Vermont wrote such a measure directly into its state constitution. As it did so, it became the first state in the new republic to end slavery. On the heels of its famously radical 1777 constitution, Pennsylvania embraced the first program of gradual abolition in 1780, providing for the emancipation of slaves over time. In 1783, the high court in Massachusetts ruled slavery inconsistent with the state constitution of 1780, resulting in the immediate freeing of the state’s slave population. Soon, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Rhode Island enacted programs modeled on Pennsylvania’s law, leaving New York and New Jersey as the only northern states where slavery remained intact. In 1785, perhaps in response to this wave of

antislavery legislation, New York's state legislature came astonishingly close to passing a gradual emancipation law. The bill's ultimate demise offers the best illustration of the strange interaction of slaveholding, Revolutionary ideals, and republican ideology that dominated New York public opinion between independence and the turn of the century.

### **1785 AND THE FAILURE OF GRADUAL EMANCIPATION**

The failure of gradual emancipation in 1785 illustrates the bizarre ambivalence surrounding slavery in early national New York, as well as the widespread primacy of republicanism over race among the state's elites. In fact, the logic of republicanism worked against the implementation of race-based policies in the legislative debate over emancipation. What is clear is that enough legislators viewed slavery as inconsistent with Revolutionary ideals to put the option of abolition on the table. Ultimately, however, a sloppy and ill-defined logic of race would prevent even a modest expansion of black rights under the law. Patrick Rael has written of 1785 as a moment when, "Northern emancipation...tested Americans' commitment to national founding principles."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, David Gellman has suggested that, in Albany, "the nation's highest ideals had run ahead of [its] will."<sup>40</sup> These readings make caricatures out of individuals and reduce the Revolution to simple freedom at the expense of liberty.\* In their place, we might more productively interpret 1785 as a moment when New York's elected officials struggled to square the intuitive demands of equality with the Revolution's republican soul as they understood it. In the midst of this process, amorphous racial notions proved a

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\* By freedom, I mean only freedom from bondage. By liberty, however, I mean the particular republican sense of virtue, self-sufficiency, and fitness for citizenship.

complicating factor, not a clarifying one. By insisting on a harsh opposition between slavery and Revolutionary ideology, Rael, Gellman and others lose the opportunity to consider race and its rapidly changing significance in relation to republicanism.

Immediate abolition was a non-starter in the state assembly, though that did not keep a young Aaron Burr from proposing it. After a cursory floor debate, the bill was defeated 33 votes to 13, with several pro-slavery legislators apparently voting “yes” in jest. The chamber quickly moved on to a more modest proposal, the central plank of which laid out a relatively straightforward process of gradual emancipation. This bill did not address slaves born prior to 1785— they were to remain in bondage for life— but it did reclassify the status of slaves born after its hypothetical passage into law. These black New Yorkers would still be born into slavery, but they would remain enslaved only for a defined period of time. Male slaves would be emancipated at age 25 and women at age 22.<sup>41</sup> The legislature accounted for this distinction on the grounds that male slaves were often skilled laborers and were therefore worth more than females. It also sought to relieve slaveholders of the financial burdens associated with any children born to prior to the emancipation of their mothers.<sup>42</sup>

By emancipating slaves in early adulthood, the legislature aimed to limit direct financial losses to slaveholders. Twenty-five years was a substantial amount of time for slaveholders to recoup their investments in human property. At the same time, legislators hoped the period would prove short enough to limit any compulsion that slaves might feel to revolt or flee their captivity. But apart from mitigating slaveholder losses, the framers of the 1785 measure also had more lofty goals for gradual emancipation.



Members of the assembly viewed slaveholders as having two obligations under any emancipation regime. The first was a Revolutionary obligation to grant slaves their freedom. The second was a republican obligation to prepare them for life after slavery. If the first responsibility was directly to slaves, the second was to the broader community.<sup>43</sup> For one thing, legislators feared that emancipated blacks that lacked proper training would fall quickly into poverty, creating new financial burdens for communities across the state. In fact, since the 1740s, the state had required any masters wishing to manumit a slave to post a \$200 bond to ensure that free blacks would not become a drain on public alms coffers.<sup>44</sup>

These widespread concerns over black indigence were superseded in the legislature by still a higher set of concerns over the effects of slavery on black moral fitness. Republican ideology held out the slave as the direct opposite of the virtuous citizen.<sup>45</sup> Permanently occupying a state of forced dependence, he had no claim to liberty or self-sufficiency. He was excluded from the foundational republican value of property holding, and even worse, he himself *was* property. (In New York City, where many people invested in slaves rather than farmland, this often had the bizarre effect of making slaves the basis for their masters' civil eligibility.<sup>46</sup>) Slavery was further presumed to relieve the slave of any responsibility for intelligent decision making, atrophying his critical faculties and leaving him incapable of rational restraint. While the virtue of the republican citizen was believed to lie in his high-minded capacity for self-control, the slave possessed no such quality. Ever caught between his own unthinking desires and the paternalistic discipline of his master, he was impressionable, vice-ridden, and thoroughly

unprepared for the burden of self-governance. Unaccounted for, he represented a threat to the moral order of the republic.<sup>47</sup>

Their belief in the value of gradualism represented legislators' belief that slaves could be educated, directed and morally developed over time. Still, by reserving emancipation exclusively for a yet unborn generation of slaves, they implicitly acknowledged the perceived limits of this civilizing process when slaves were not subjected to it from birth. As a final hedge against the dangers of their experiment, the assembly added two final provisions to the bill— first, a total prohibition on blacks and people of mixed race serving on juries or holding elective office, and second, a complete restriction of the franchise to white citizens. If emancipation constituted admission to the “republican temple”, the ballot was the Holy of Holies.<sup>48</sup> Deeply skeptical of former slaves' capacity for citizenship, the assembly sought to minimize the potential fallout of freedom.

The largely Federalist senate proposed eliminating the officeholding and jury restrictions, which the assembly agreed to do. It also proposed eliminating black voting restrictions, a request the assembly overwhelmingly refused.<sup>49</sup> The bill then went to the state's Council of Revision, a panel that included the governor and two justices from the state's highest courts, where it was vetoed and ultimately died. Curiously, the Council's veto came not in an effort to save the institution of slavery, but as a rebuke of the assembly's efforts to restrict the franchise to white voters.

While accepting the assembly's concern for the moral order, the Council argued that legislators had established the wrong mechanism to address it. By advocating a

*racial* remedy to a *republican* problem, the assembly had codified a slippage between slavery and blackness that the Council's members could not abide. The state constitution afforded voting rights to any free, adult male who possessed sufficient property holdings. In a republican worldview, the aftereffects of slavery seemed reasonably and negatively correlated with these criteria. Race alone, however, did not. A restriction based solely on race, the Council reasoned, might eventually result in the broad disqualification of a large population of free, educated, property-holding men. That outcome risked the creation of "an aristocracy of the most dangerous and malignant kind."<sup>50</sup>

The Council's logic took a surprising turn when it called into the question the very stability of race as a social category. "If only one thousandth of one part of the blacks inhabitants now in the State, should intermarry with the white," supposed the Council's veto message, "their posterity will amount to so many millions, that it will be difficult to suppose a fiftieth of the people born within this State [would retain voting rights]."<sup>51</sup> By consolidating the franchise in the hands of fewer individuals than would otherwise be eligible to exercise it, legislators were setting the state on a regressive path toward oligarchy and perhaps even tyranny. The unstable logic of race was inconsistent with the ideals of the Revolution not because it curtailed the spread of equality, but because it restricted the most essential component of a healthy republic, namely the broad distribution of power. This textbook republican reasoning rejected the language of race but endorsed the goals of moral and social uplift embodied in gradual emancipation. The best way to safeguard the blessings of republican citizenship, it argued, was to ensure that

the largest possible number of New Yorkers, black or white, would be fit to exercise them.

#### **THE NEW YORK MANUMISSION SOCIETY AND REPUBLICAN STEWARDSHIP**

If the Council of Revision had endorsed the republican goals of gradual emancipation, at least one group in New York City hoped to be the instrument of their implementation. Founded just as the assembly took up slavery in 1785, the New York Manumissions Society hoped to contribute to the institution's eventual retirement and to the orderly transition of its victims to liberty. In Albany and at City Hall, it advocated the adoption of gradualist measures and legislation. In the private sphere, it appealed to slaveholders to recognize the barbarity of slavery and worked to facilitate the manumission of their slaves. The Manumission Society also engaged directly with black New Yorkers, helping a considerable number escape southern slave catchers and bring suit against unlawful kidnappers. It also worked to organize and unite free blacks in support of Federalist causes.<sup>52</sup>

The society drew its membership predominantly from Anglicans and Quaker circles, though owing to the lingering resentment over Quaker pacifism during the Revolution, it's Anglican members generally filled its most public roles.<sup>53</sup> These included some of Manhattan's wealthiest and most influential white residents, including prominent Revolutionary figures like Alexander Hamilton, the society's secretary, and John Jay, who served as its first president.<sup>54</sup> Perhaps most surprising was the fact that many of these men continued to hold substantial numbers of slaves throughout and despite their involvement with the group. Indeed, when Hamilton advocated that individuals be

required to manumit their slaves as a condition of membership, his proposal was roundly rejected.<sup>55</sup> Had the society adopted this proposal in 1790, it would have emancipated over ten percent of the city's slaves.<sup>56</sup> Instead, members viewed such demands as "inexpedient", reasoning that white New Yorkers "may decline entering into a society the rules of which they may consider as too severely affecting their present Interest." They further feared that such provisions would lead to the withdrawal of existing slaveholding members, a group so considerable in size that its departure was expected to render the society of little use.<sup>57</sup>

This incongruity has proven particularly vexing to historians, who have taken a variety of views on the topic. Citing the high number of merchants, bankers and lawyers among its membership, David Brion Davis wondered if the Manumission Society intended itself as anything more than a networking association for Manhattan's Federalist elite.<sup>58</sup> Shane White has argued that the society was interested only in reforming the slave system and offering charity to free blacks.<sup>59</sup> Still, Rob Weston has urged scholars not to confuse the society's admittedly gradualist methods with a lack of commitment to its cause.<sup>60</sup> Graham Hodges echoes this perspective, pointing out that much of the society's activism on behalf of fugitive slaves placed it in clear violation of federal law following the eventual passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1793.<sup>61</sup>

Sorely lacking in these scholarly treatments is any extended effort to consider the society's efforts against the backdrop of republicanism. The Manumission Society was quintessentially committed to republican outcomes in its efforts to overturn slavery. Members viewed slavery as a cruel arrangement, but they also expressed a deep faith in

white paternalism and an abiding responsibility for the trajectory of former slaves once they had secured freedom. “Till America comes into [gradual emancipation],” John Jay had written privately in 1780, “her prayers to Heaven for liberty will be impious.”<sup>62</sup> By liberty, of course, Jay meant not simply freedom from England but that particular notion of *republican* liberty that qualified one for citizenship. Just as Americans could not attain such liberty as slaves of the crown, neither could they safeguard it as slaveholders; the potential for corruption was too great.

For this reason, Jay and his fellow Manumission Society members took it upon themselves to prepare slaves for the moral rigors of citizenship. It was necessary, the society noted, to “keep a watchful eye over the conduct of such Negroes as have been or may be liberated...to prevent them from running into immorality or sinking into idleness.” Instead, former slaves had to be “kept from vicious courses and...qualified for usefulness in life.”<sup>63</sup> Paradoxically, the society also believed that slavery could function as an appropriate training ground for individuals who had not yet attained to strict republican criteria of virtue and self-sufficiency.<sup>64</sup>

The society made its strongest commitment to republican values in 1787 with the founding of the African Free School. By creating an educational institution for free blacks, members aimed to contribute to the financial independence and moral rectitude of former slaves who had presumably been degraded by their bondage. They expected that the “cultivation of [blacks’] minds would lead to mental emancipation” and ultimately, a fitness for citizenship.<sup>65</sup> They also hoped that the school would help soften the transition from slavery to the free labor market.<sup>66</sup>

The African School embodied the staggering condescension that animated the Manumission's Society's paternalism. Representatives of the school made frequent visits to students' homes to observe the conduct of their families and advocate white standards of propriety.<sup>67</sup> The society itself withheld charity and legal help from students who failed to display accepted standards of decency and respect for the law, even if in cases of kidnapping and violence.<sup>68</sup> In many ways, the school represented the society's contradictory faith in the robust potential of blacks for republican citizenship and what David Gellman has termed, "the cultural authority of white philanthropists."<sup>69</sup> Because members of the Manumission Society held many of the most influential positions in the city, students who resisted the school's values often found themselves legally, financially and even physically exposed. Likewise, those who embraced the school's program, whether in earnest or otherwise, tended to turn up in the ranks of a black civic leadership structure that would surface in the late 1790s and throughout the early 1800s.<sup>70</sup>

If an extreme brand of republicanism inclined the Manumission Society to appalling paternalistic overreach, it also sharply differentiated the society's philosophy from the clear-cut racial ideologies debated only recently in Albany. The society diagnosed what it viewed as widespread degeneracy among the city's black population, but it refused to link this behavior with race inextricably. Instead, in the republican tradition, it argued that slavery itself was to blame for blacks' susceptibility to vice, owing to their prolonged condition of forced dependence and abuse.<sup>71</sup> Black New Yorkers may have occupied the lowest rungs of the social order, but they ought not be "considered as a race of beings of inferior rank in the order of Creation."<sup>72</sup> Society

members hoped that the education provided by the African Free School would prove blacks' humanity and their capacity for free and independent citizenship.<sup>73</sup> As Benjamin Rush had suggested, whites were already adjusting to their newfound freedom in an environment of republicanism. So too would blacks develop civic virtue when given the opportunity.<sup>74</sup>

The Manumission Society exhibited a "genteel racism," in which an idealistic commitment to republican principles prompted a dual impulse toward moral uplift and social control.<sup>75</sup> This outlook was central to the society's efforts not only to end slavery, but also to see blacks emancipated *into* a particular kind of republican lifestyle, a lifestyle the society's members earnestly believed could be taught. In fact, following the successful passage of gradual emancipation in 1799, the society would shift its efforts exclusively to the goal of shaping the conduct of the free black community. At that time, a combination of shifting class dynamics, political tensions, world events and black's own efforts and expectations would lead many of its members to abandon republicanism in favor of far less optimistic social philosophies.

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<sup>1</sup>White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, xx; Jill Lepore, "The Slow Tightening of the Vise," in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York: New Press, 2005), 63.

<sup>2</sup> William Strickland, *Journal of a Tour in the United States of America, 1794-1795*, The New-York Historical Society Collections, 1950 (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1971), 228-30.

<sup>3</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 26.

<sup>4</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 127; White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 27.



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- <sup>5</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 5, 14; *ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 12.
- <sup>7</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 16.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.
- <sup>9</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 186.
- <sup>10</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 50, 151.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.
- <sup>15</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 48.
- <sup>16</sup> B. Blackmar, "Re-Walking the" Walking City": Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780-1840," *Radical History Review* 1979, no. 21 (1979): 131-48.
- <sup>17</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 200.
- <sup>18</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 162.
- <sup>19</sup> David Nathaniel Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, Antislavery, Abolition, and the Atlantic World (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 46.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.
- <sup>21</sup> This is similar to slave code situations across the South. In Virginia, Edmund Morgan has argued that slave codes indeed restricted blacks but also served to temper the unpredictable effects of white freedom. See: Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom : The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 1975).
- <sup>22</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 82-84.
- <sup>23</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 76; White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 30-31.
- <sup>24</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 196.
- <sup>25</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 92.
- <sup>26</sup> Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom : The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 381.

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- <sup>27</sup> Gordon S. Wood and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture at Williamsburg, Va., by the University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 47.
- <sup>28</sup> Ronald T. Takaki, *Iron Cages : Race and Culture in 19th-Century America*, Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 8.
- <sup>29</sup> Wood and Institute of Early American History and Culture (Williamsburg Va.), *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, 50, 53.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.
- <sup>31</sup> Benjamin Rush and L. H. Butterfield, *Letters*, 2 vols., vol. 1, Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society, (Princeton: Published for the American Philosophical Society by Princeton University Press, 1951), 388.
- <sup>32</sup> John Adams et al., *Papers of John Adams*, The Adams Papers : Series Iii, General Correspondence and Other Papers of the Adams Statesmen (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 147.
- <sup>33</sup> Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom : The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia*, 381.
- <sup>34</sup> Alexander Hamilton and Library of America (Firm), *Writings*, The Library of America (New York: Library of America : Distributed to the trade in the United States by Penguin Putnam, 2001), 31.
- <sup>35</sup> John Jay and Henry Phelps Johnston, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, 4 vols., vol. 1 (New York, London,: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1890), 18.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.
- <sup>37</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 33-34.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>39</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 113.
- <sup>40</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 42.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.
- <sup>42</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 57.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>44</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 143-45.
- <sup>45</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness : Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, The Haymarket Series (London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 35.
- <sup>46</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 13.
- <sup>47</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 58.

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<sup>48</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 50.

<sup>49</sup> Even before the abolition of slavery in New York, free blacks voted overwhelmingly for the Federalist Party. The senate, being comprised largely of Federalists, may have had more to lose than the mixed assembly from a restriction of the franchise to whites.

<sup>50</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 50-51.

<sup>51</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 51.

<sup>52</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 166.

<sup>53</sup> See , *New York Packet*, April 4 1785.

<sup>54</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 58.

<sup>55</sup> Anna Mae Duane and Thomas Thurston, "Race and Antebellum New York City: The New York Manumission Society," New York Historical Society, <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/history/manumission-society.html>.

<sup>56</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 86.

<sup>57</sup> Cited in *ibid.*, 81.

<sup>58</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975), 239-40.

<sup>59</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 85.

<sup>60</sup> Rob Weston, "Alexander Hamilton and the Abolition of Slavery in New York," in *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Afro-American Historical Association of the Niagara Frontier, 1994), 31-45.

<sup>61</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 66.

<sup>62</sup> Jay and Johnston, *The Correspondence and Public Papers of John Jay*, 406-7.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 62.

<sup>65</sup> Carla Peterson, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating an Elite Culture," in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York: New Press, 2005), 187.

<sup>66</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 173.

<sup>67</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 65.

<sup>68</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 75.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>70</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 181. See also: Peterson, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating an Elite Culture."

<sup>71</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 73.

<sup>72</sup> New York Manumission Society, "Minutes," in *Papers of the New York Manumission Society* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1788).

<sup>73</sup> Peterson, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating an Elite Culture," 187.

<sup>74</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 75.

<sup>75</sup> Peterson, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating an Elite Culture," 189.

## **Chapter 2: Economic Transformation and the Rise of “Modern New York”**

Members of the New York Manumission Society and likeminded organizations hoped to expand the boundaries of republican citizenship, but the Republic itself was also changing at the end of the eighteenth century. The 1790s witnessed a massive economic transformation in New York City that had major implications for the institution of middle class slaveholding. The consolidation of wealth and the transformation of labor heavily impacted the social relationships between black and white workers. This laid the groundwork for the strong racial antagonisms that would strip Hardenburgh and others of the rights of republican citizenship in the coming years.

As the rapid opening of the city's ports to international trade facilitated the development of an emerging capitalist class, it shifted control of the city's robust trades-based economy into fewer and fewer hands. Over time, this made slaveholding more and more costly for typical white workers, turning slaves into a luxury that only New York's financial elite could afford. In turn, this changed the nature of slave labor in the city, as more and more slaves were sold out of skilled labor settings and into the domestic service of wealthy financiers. As whites increasingly viewed blacks as economic competition, they developed a growing resentment of black freedom that would send political and economic ripples across the state.

### **SLAVEHOLDING IN THE PRE-CAPITALIST CITY**

By 1790, the population of New York City had grown to include more than 31,000 people. Roughly 10 percent of these were black. Among the city's black population, approximately one third were free, leaving an enslaved black population of just over 2,000 people.<sup>1</sup> Some of these slaves were domestic hands in the homes of New York's wealthy Federalist elite. Many, however, worked as skilled laborers in the shops of the city's artisans and craftsmen.

Sean Wilentz has noted that very few artisans held slaves, and this is true enough, but artisan slaveholding was still sizeable and should not be overlooked.<sup>2</sup> At least one eighth of the artisan population listed slaves on the 1790 census, and at least a few listed two or three.<sup>3</sup> In fact, despite the small proportions that Wilentz has identified, the considerable size of the trades-based economy still meant that artisans composed the largest group of slaveholders in New York. At the opening of the decade, more of the city's slaves worked in the shops of skilled craftsmen than anywhere else.

Artisans who did hold slaves possessed notably distinct social and economic characteristics. For one thing, they were far more likely to be active in the civic and political life of the city. Of the craftsmen who claimed membership in the well-organized General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen in 1790, at least four in ten were slaveholders.<sup>4</sup> Many also stood for and held public office, for which they would have qualified at least partially on the basis of their holdings in slave property. Slavery distinguished these men as wealthier and more established than their colleagues, who

typically owned little or no taxable property.<sup>5</sup> It also made them essential links in the hiring economy of skilled labor.

Artisans who needed help on specific orders or projects tended to hire additional help from outside workshops. Given the choice, they frequently turned to their slaveholding colleagues, many of who were content to hire out their slaves for additional income. Artisanal slaves could be procured at far cheaper rates than skilled white labor, making them a smart financial option for those looking to maximize profit.<sup>6</sup> They were also widely regarded positively for both the speed and quality of their work, which was thought to rival the handiwork of even the best white craftsmen in the city.<sup>7</sup> Among the economically ambitious, this often made slaveholding a preferable investment to land or real estate.<sup>8</sup>

#### **COMMERCIAL GROWTH AND ‘METROPOLITAN INDUSTRIALIZATION’**

The 1790s began what would prove to be a significant turning point for New York’s trades-based economy. As tensions with England cooled to a simmer, Americans eagerly pursued the expansion of transatlantic commerce. As circuitous trade routes opened new markets for American goods in Europe, Africa and the West Indies, Manhattan’s superior harbor and inland waterways quickly made it the dominant port city on the eastern seaboard.<sup>9</sup> Over the course of the decade, the value of the city’s total exports would jump nearly 750 percent.<sup>10</sup>

If maritime expansion generated increased demand for New York’s locally crafted artisanal wares, it also had negative impacts on the trades-based community. Owing to its new position at the center of the American commercial world, the city saw a dramatic

uptick in new residents. From 1790 to 1800, the total population grew by over 80 percent, due in part to an influx of immigration from Europe and the Caribbean. This rapid growth led to a dramatic swell in Manhattan's available labor supply, spiking living costs explosively while driving down wages.<sup>11</sup> For well-positioned tradesmen, this rapidly changing social landscape offered unprecedented financial opportunities. Prominent artisans seized the chance to expand their shops, adding additional laborers and staking out key positions in transnational trade networks. But most tradesmen lacked critical access to capital, and they soon found themselves unprepared to contend with the growing operations of their colleagues. Many were forced to forfeit their occupational autonomy and attempt to compete with cheaper immigrant labor to fill the new hiring demands of a rising class of artisan capitalists.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, the city began to take its historic place as a booming center of business and finance. By 1795, New York had witnessed the founding of the New York Stock Exchange and the Bank of New York, as well as a corresponding surge in the number of bankers, stockbrokers and financial attorneys.<sup>13</sup> These individuals reaped windfall profits through speculation and by trading shares in the emerging mercantile empires of America's early tycoons.<sup>14</sup> This was not the factory or the mills of Lowell, but with each baby step, this new capitalist class distinguished itself more and more from the day-to-day experience of production. The result was the early subordination of wage labor to capital, laying the foundation for what Wilentz has identified as "metropolitan industrialization."<sup>15</sup>



This transformation had major effects on the shape of the slave system in New York. As artisans increasingly lost control of their own labor, few could afford the secondary costs associated with holding slaves.<sup>16</sup> A slave might provide free labor once his initial buying price had been recouped, but he still required food, shelter, and incidentals like medical care. These costs were unrelated to the amount he produced or the demand for his services. In a downturn, slaveholding was a costly obligation. Wage labor, however, remained solely responsible for its own needs and could be dismissed when business was poor.<sup>17</sup> As a result, artisans in the 1790s began to jettison their slaves. Those who could afford it retained cheaper immigrant labor. The rest competed with those immigrants for work. By 1800, the city's artisans had experienced a profound loss of property and status. After only ten years, just six percent continued to hold slaves.<sup>18</sup>

By contrast, slaveholding increased rapidly among New York's rising financial elite.<sup>19</sup> Among the Bank of New York's stockholders, a full 46 percent owned slaves.<sup>20</sup> "In an ironic twist," writes Shane White, "the very groups that celebrated and exploited the free market turned to slavery, a form of bound labor, to provide them with servants."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the rise of financial capitalism in New York rested on the hidden labor of slaves in wealthy households. Perhaps most cruelly, many of those who had only recently performed skilled artisanal tasks in the city's workshops now found themselves working as domestics in the budding crop of mansions being constructed on Manhattan's Lower West Side.<sup>22</sup> Within the incestuous and increasingly cutthroat social scene of the new capitalist class, slaveholding quickly began to serve as an extravagant display of luxury and status.<sup>23</sup>

As the 1790s drew to a close, the city's wealth per capita had risen by roughly 60 percent, but that wealth was consolidated in fewer hands than ever.<sup>24</sup> Whereas work and residential life had once taken place in the same physical spaces, they now began to diverge sharply. At the start of the decade, artisans, laborers and slaves had often lived and worked together side by side. Now, they increasingly lived separately from one another in rapidly, if informally, segregating urban neighborhoods across Manhattan. Slaves and wealthy whites inhabited the island's western and southernmost zones. Meanwhile, artisans and immigrant wage laborers dominated newly established residential areas like the famous Five Points slum.<sup>25</sup>

Finally, a growing population of free blacks began to split itself between poor white areas and nascent black enclaves that had begun to sprout just North of the city limit.<sup>26</sup> This removed many former slaves from their masters and nourished the roots of an autonomous black community. It also began slowly to chip away at the foundations of white paternalism by placing considerable distance between black behavior and the physical realm of white social control for the first time in the city's history. To be clear, New York had not yet developed the stark industrial geographies of race and class that would overwhelm it in the coming century, but its landscape had undergone dramatic changes since the colonial period.<sup>27</sup> At the very least, as Patrick Rael notes, "Modern New York—stratified by class and work, race and place—was being born."<sup>28</sup>

### **RACIAL TENSION AND THE DAWN OF ABOLITION**

The simultaneous creation and disempowerment of the white working class yielded seismic shifts in race relations in New York, though the exact reason for this

remains the subject of considerable debate. Sean Wilentz has theorized the development of a distinctly artisanal republicanism, in which the trades community formed a microcosmic republic in which the autonomous master craftsman stood in for the independent landowner against the tyranny of the capitalist class. In this view, the city's tradesmen imagined themselves as a virtuous middling sort and began to view blacks—owing to the taint of slavery— as quintessential anti-republican slaves, fully dependent and subject to the manipulations of an unvirtuous elite.<sup>29</sup> David Roediger has made the more straightforward claim that white tradesmen simply did not feel that blacks were improving under the republican experiment. “From such a stance,” he notes, “it was not difficult to move toward the proposition that Black oppression was the result of ‘slavishness’ rather than slavery.”<sup>30</sup> Politics was surely also to blame as white artisans, long a demographic stronghold for the Federalists, increasingly deserted to the ascendant Democratic-Republicans.<sup>31</sup> Blacks remained allied with the Manumission Society and Federalist mercantile elites over the issue of slavery, which certainly did not endear them to working class whites.

Whatever the reason, white workers soon took to violently antagonizing members of the city's free blacks population and mobilizing to exclude them from participation in the trades.<sup>32</sup> As they did so, in 1799, the Federalist-dominated state legislature finally provided for the gradual abolition of slavery. Passage of the bill shored up support for the Federalists by declining to place new restrictions on black voting, but the Democratic-Republicans responded in kind.<sup>33</sup> To ensure that non-property-owning whites would be able to cast ballots in the upcoming elections, the party devised a clever method of

registering multiple voters as joint owners of a shared piece of property. One year later, despite a Federalist ticket that included a ship chandler, a potter, a shoemaker and two masons, New York City's white tradesmen delivered every one of its assembly seats to the Democratic-Republicans.<sup>34</sup> The victory gave the party control of the state legislature for the first time in its young history. It also flipped the state's electors to Thomas Jefferson, providing just enough votes to carry him into the White House.

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<sup>1</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 36.

<sup>3</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 28.

<sup>6</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 48.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>8</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 13.

<sup>9</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 127.

<sup>11</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> T.C. Cochran, "The Business Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 79, no. 5 (1974).

<sup>14</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 173.

<sup>17</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 127.

<sup>18</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 36.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 43; McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 46.

<sup>24</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 25.

<sup>25</sup> Blackmar, "Re-Walking the" Walking City": Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780-1840."

<sup>26</sup> White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York*, 35.

<sup>27</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 41.

<sup>28</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 128.

<sup>29</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 61-103.

<sup>30</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness : Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic : New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850*, 67-68.

<sup>32</sup> Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness : Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 35; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 80.

<sup>33</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 188.

<sup>34</sup> Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham : A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 328.

### Chapter 3: Transitional Bodies in the Emancipation Era

Gradual emancipation distended the politically useful binaries of slave and free, twisting them and hanging them out across an elongated spectrum of racial and civic identities. Such distension was common in Latin America, the Caribbean, and American cities like New Orleans, but in New York, the labor economy had traditionally rested on a rigid dichotomization of bodies into just two legal categories. Blacks were slaves and whites were free; free blacks had traditionally been a minor factor in a city where black bondage had always helped to define white autonomy. But that began to change around 1800 as more and more black bodies, which had always been contained by slavery, became or *began becoming* free in the wake of the new gradual emancipation law. In New York's new, upside-down metropolitan industrial environment, white workers who had once counted on specialized skills to distinguish themselves now sought new markers of social identity. Similarly, a black population that whites had defined exclusively by slavery expanded and fragmented into an array of people in process— neither slave nor free, but an infinite number of spaces in between. As the clear-cut distinctions that had once founded the social, economic and political orders of the city crumbled into indistinction, they filled the streets of Manhattan with transitional bodies, both black and white.

These black and white New Yorkers occupied shared spaces and performed similar work, but they seldom did so comfortably. As an assertive new sense of black legitimacy gave unmistakable physical form to the legal and political trajectories of

emancipation, whites scrambled to anchor their own state of becoming in something lasting. Slavery was exiting the scene, like a creature or an animal scuttling southward into the night, but it remained to be seen just what form of social relations would take its place. It was not long before a new battle was joined between blacks and whites over public citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

### **HASTENING FREEDOM IN BLACK NEW YORK**

Over the course of the 1790s, New York City's free black population had risen steadily, but it finally exploded at the turn of the century. Despite the details of its drawn out timeframe, the state's gradual abolition law unexpectedly hastened the arrival of freedom for many slaves. This development was due not primarily to ideological opposition to slavery, but rather to evolving economic conditions that made increased anxieties around slavery among the slaveholding elite. Enslaved blacks helped to expedite freedom's arrival, sometimes assuaging these anxieties but often by inflaming them. Through a combination of accommodation and resistance, they played upon the profound ambivalence of many slaveholding whites at a moment of bewildering social change.

Manumission was rare in both colonial and Revolutionary New York. At various times since its founding, the state had enacted measures intended to discourage the practice by making it both costly and time-consuming. From 1712-1785, the law had required slaveholders to make a steep bond payment that few could reasonably afford. It had also mandated that freed slaves under a certain age be boarded at the slaveholder's expense until a state agent could certify their self-sufficiency.<sup>2</sup> From 1783 to 1800, New

York City slaveholders used their wills to manumit just 76 slaves.<sup>3</sup> Of the 300 living manumissions recorded between 1783 and 1801, just 40 took place before the final year of the century.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, the passage of gradual emancipation in 1799 coincided with a surge of black freedom in New York City. Beginning in the 1790s, the city's newspapers began to display a sharp uptick in advertisements for runaway slaves. There is even reason to suspect that Samuel Hardenburgh, who ultimately succeeded in his effort to prove that he had been born free, was in fact a runaway from the same Ulster County plantation from which Sojourner Truth would flee in 1799.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the common practice of absenting oneself for a week at a time, these blacks, mostly from the hinterlands, appeared to have abandoned their masters permanently for the city.<sup>6</sup> By the time runaway activity peaked in 1799, the black population had decreased measurably in every surrounding county except Kings.<sup>7</sup> In Manhattan, it had increased by 45 percent.<sup>8</sup>

Less than half of city blacks that gained their freedom in the 1790s did so by way of an arrangement with whites. Instead, the faces of expansion among the city's free black population tended to be fugitive slaves from the country.<sup>9</sup> Shane White has conducted an exhaustive analysis of runaway slave advertisements at this time, which, while not without their methodological limitations, reveal a striking picture of the runaway population. Slaveholders listed approximately one third of all runaways as having been born in the West Indies or Africa. A full three quarters were presumed to be under the age of 26. An overwhelming 80 percent of runaways were male, and one in six was capable of skilled labor or trade work. Of all the characteristics White has



considered, runaways were most often identified as highly acculturated mulattoes or as recent arrivals from Africa or the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup>

Slaveholders most frequently expected their slaves to flee to Manhattan. A full 75 percent of advertisements suggested that the slave in question would attempt to pass as free in the city.<sup>11</sup> This assumption compares favorably to contemporary census data, which shows both a dramatic rise in the city's black population and a dramatic decline in slaves as a portion of the whole. In 1790, the census listed 3,092 blacks in Manhattan, 66.5 percent of which were slaves. By 1800, the city held nearly 6,000 blacks, less than half of whom lived in slavery. By 1810, more than 8,900 blacks lived on the island, but just 16.2 percent of them were slaves.<sup>12</sup> As the city's free black population underwent this rapid growth, it developed as an epicenter of black social and cultural activity. Each new black resident that arrived contributed to the city's growing appeal in the eyes of rural slaves contemplating the paradoxical prospect of passing as free.

For many of these slaves, running away was an unnecessary path to freedom. Challenging economic times in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century placed new financial strains on slaveholders and decreased slavery's profitability throughout the state. As major economic events like the Embargo of 1807 made voluntary manumissions more practical, slaves revisited a longstanding tradition of bargaining for their release. Many slaveholders embraced this tradition as a chance to win large financial payments from their slaves while also addressing long-term budget gaps.<sup>13</sup>

Running away was among the strongest weapons in a slave's arsenal precisely because it threatened to precipitate a financial loss at this moment of economic transition.

Aware that slavery was dying, most slaveholders hoped to protect their investments by spreading out the shift to wage labor over time. A mass slave departure could prompt a sudden, more violent rupture in the mode of production. Some slaveholders were so desperate to avoid this outcome that they took out newspaper advertisements offering formal manumission terms in exchange for the return of runaways.<sup>14</sup> Manumission thus emerged as a paradoxical form of social control in which slaveholders agreed to forfeit their property in exchange for the right to dictate terms.<sup>15</sup>

Slaveholders also sought to control the more dire consequences of a restive slave population. Especially in New York City, slaves often agitated for freedom by raising the threat of revolt. Slaveholders believed that the distance between a displeased slave and a truly disgruntled one was short, every instance of the latter seemed to increase fears surrounding slave violence.<sup>16</sup> A fugitive slave could deprive a slaveholder of property, but full-scale insurrection had far more lasting consequences. Aware of the power that lay in such fears, slaves frequently resurrected the historical symbols of revolt in an effort to signal their displeasure and push whites toward the brink.

Arson was widely known as the implement of choice for those wishing to stir up the specter of slave violence. Next to theft, it was the most frequently prosecuted slave violation.<sup>17</sup> In his 1793 study of capital punishment, William Bradford had branded arson, “the crime of slaves and children.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, slaves had wielded fire in New York City’s dense, wooden environs to assert their autonomy and galvanize revolt.<sup>19</sup> The memory of arson outbreaks in 1712 and 1741 still provoked immense fear in the hearts of white New Yorkers. After the fires of 1741, New York’s

Chief Justice Daniel Horsmanden had wondered if slavery could ever yield anything but danger for the city.<sup>20</sup> As a fresh rash of fires erupted through the 1790s and early 1800s, many New Yorkers wondered the same thing when a fresh rash of.<sup>21</sup> “The existence of *slavery* in a republic...must always be productive of similar acts,” opined the city’s *Register of the Times*.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, continuing waves of arson and slave violence strengthened slaves’ hands as they sought to leverage white anxiety to gain their freedom.<sup>23</sup> “With turbulent transients, too many disreputable taverns, and large numbers of Negro slaves,” notes one scholar, “the town was a social powder keg.”<sup>24</sup>

Gradual emancipation stamped each slave’s labor with an expiration date. As always, slaves could pursue their freedom by running away early or revolting, but they could also use the *threat* of flight or insurrection to secure better treatment or more favorable manumission terms with less risk.<sup>25</sup> As slavery declined, “manumission was the price that the master class paid for the efficient operation of the slave system.”<sup>26</sup> While the slaveholder could still employ violence or appeal to a slave’s dream of freedom, the slave could threaten revolt and exact premature financial costs by stealing the investment that his body represented before it had come to term.

Of course, the state legislature had specifically intended the period of gradual emancipation to serve as a time of republican training for slaves, and one final group of slaveholders negotiated manumission with their slaves in a similar fashion. By granting freedom with specific strings attached, these slaveholders employed unique methods of republican social control in an attempt to ensure that their slaves would embrace associations and behaviors befitting of virtuous citizens. In particular, slaveholders who

provided for the manumission of slaves in their wills often conditioned these agreements on those slaves' demonstrated behavioral fitness over a period of time.<sup>27</sup> For example, the owner of a New York City slave named Yat attached clear conditions to his manumission. The master agreed to convert Yat's slavery to an indenture if Yat agreed to attend regular church services and abide by specific restrictions on his personal leisure time over the indenture's term. This paternalistic agreement ensured that Yat would exit slavery considerably sooner than the law dictated while also reassuring his master that he would avoid vice and prepare himself for the assumed rigors of free life.<sup>28</sup>

Most slaves negotiated their freedom well before they reached the age of mandatory manumission, commonly resulting in former slaves remaining in the homes of their former owners as indentured servants.<sup>29</sup> Slaves who embraced this approach delayed personal freedom for an up-front guarantee of legal independence.<sup>30</sup> Hoping to incentivize republican citizenship, the Manumission Society frequently helped slaves negotiate such indentures.<sup>31</sup> As a result, the number of white households employing free blacks rose proportionally as the rate of slavery in the city declined. Between 1800 and 1810, as Manhattan's free black population rose to nearly 8,000, the practice of slaveholding fell by more than 25 percent.<sup>32</sup> At the same time, however, the portion of white households employing at least one free black jumped to 67 percent.<sup>33</sup> This meant that hundreds of transitional black bodies lived and worked alongside slaves, performing similar kinds of domestic functions.<sup>34</sup> Those who hired these individuals in their homes were socially and economically identical to the city's slaveholding population.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the decade, free or indentured blacks had overtaken slaves as the dominant form of

labor in the city's white households.<sup>36</sup> The once clear distinction between slavery and freedom was now hazier than ever before.

### **BLACK ENCLAVES, EMPLOYMENT, AND ZONES OF INDISTINCTION**

Gradual emancipation facilitated the emergence of new social and economic identities by teasing out intermediate layers in the slave system. Once the end of slavery had been written clearly into the law, even the institution's most staunch defenders often preferred to free their slaves on their own terms. The slave system had always depended on a sharply dichotomous construction of slavery and freedom, but as new political and economic realities interacted with continuums of age and value, New York saw the emergence of a complex spectrum of slave arrangements in which these categories became shot through with contingency. "The ability of slaves to bargain effectively with their masters modified slavery over the years," writes Edgar McManus of the period. "In everyday practice, the system had little resemblance to the master-slave relationship described in the regulatory statutes...Instead there were so many degrees of freedom within slavery that the latter lost much of its meaning as an absolute."<sup>37</sup>

The resulting flood of transitional bodies at various stages of emancipation posed major challenges to a social order centered on clear distinctions. For most of the city's history, white New Yorkers had comfortably associated blacks with slavery and identified slaves on the basis of phenotypical features. Most people did not explicitly consider the relationship between blackness and slavery to be causal or innate, but whites relied upon their strong social correlation to enable the swift, binary categorization of individuals and the policing of social space. These acts of categorization and spatial

policing were intimately linked. Through the day-to-day identification and classification of various elements of the city's landscape (including human beings), whites established their ongoing dominance over it. As the effects of gradual emancipation and metropolitan industrialization removed or invalidated traditional markers of status and social identity, black bodies—in their record numbers— began to seem unintelligible, and therefore uncontrollable.

The primary harbinger of this development was the explosion of free black neighborhoods at the turn of the century. In 1790, roughly half of the city's free blacks had lived in a single ward. More than one third of those had lived on a single street.<sup>38</sup> As increasing numbers of blacks flooded into Manhattan in the wake of the gradual emancipation law, they took up residence in the young wards just north of the new City Hall site. By 1808, these wards— the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh— were booming with free black immigrants from the hinterlands, boasting the highest percentage of non-property owners in the city.<sup>39</sup> To meet the demand, these neighborhoods hosted a sizeable crop of black-owned boardinghouses, though many whites claimed they were brothels. In reality, several received substantial city funding on account of their crucial role in housing and caring for the poor.<sup>40</sup>

This social services role was crucial in the early 1800s as Governor George Clinton slashed state aid to local poverty programs.<sup>41</sup> National economic struggles had already contributed to a bleak employment outcome in the city, but as so many blacks emerged from slavery and became first-time job seekers, the city's labor market experienced outright saturation. White tradesmen, who had quietly supported abolition

only to dissolve blacks' fixed position in the economy, now actively shut them out of the city's workshops for fear they would depress wages.<sup>42</sup> Even many graduates of the African Free School could not find jobs in the city.<sup>43</sup>

The poor employment climate of the early 1800s played upon white society's worst republican fears. It also highlighted one of the great ironies of gradual emancipation. The legislature and the white business elite had embraced gradualism in part to ensure that blacks would not become a drain on the public purse. Now, as blacks began entering the workforce in earnest, those same institutions denied them access to jobs while cutting the social safety net from underneath them.<sup>44</sup>

To address this problem, Manumission Society members placed advertisements in the city's newspapers urging New Yorkers to hire black men in high-skill apprentice positions. Domestic jobs were more plentiful, but because whites tended to view black male domestics as dependent and feminized, few were interested in such positions.<sup>45</sup> By extending the aid of their own reputations, members of the Manumission Society hoped to rehabilitate the image of black, male laborers and help them secure republican opportunities. Unfortunately, few of them owned actual businesses that could hire black workers. Instead, most opted to employ black men as domestics after all, providing them with steady work, but also contributing to one of the negative perceptions they had hoped to address.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, black females dominated the domestic labor sphere, often living downtown in the homes of the families they served.<sup>47</sup> As free blacks working alongside slaves in white spaces, these women contributed to the growing climate of white anxiety over the wearing away of once-clear social distinctions.

One place black men did find work was in the city's expanding maritime sector. Prior to 1770, the city's docks had housed its primary slave markets. With so few free blacks in the city at that time, blacks at the docks or anywhere else could reasonably be presumed to be slaves. Around 1770, however, high import taxes and an increasingly militarized maritime environment had dramatically raised the cost of slave importation from Africa and the West Indies.<sup>48</sup> This temporarily halted the Slave Trade in New York Harbor and greatly diminished the black presence in the physical space of the docks.

The surge in the free black population in the 1790s, along with a wave of forced black immigration in the wake of the Haitian revolution, marked the dramatic reappearance of black bodies on New York's waterfront. As trade of all kinds resumed in the 25 years following the close of the Revolution, a full third of the country's commerce went through Manhattan.<sup>49</sup> This shipping boom created thousands of new jobs for free black men, who found themselves increasingly shut out of the craft trades. Between 1800 and 1825, free black men held 18 percent of crew jobs on private ships out of New York's harbor.<sup>50</sup> By 1810, mariners and dock laborers accounted for 40 percent of the total free black male population in New York City.<sup>51</sup> So central was maritime work to the livelihood of free blacks that Charles Andrews, the white director of the African Free School, made navigational skills a central piece of the school's curriculum.<sup>52</sup> As black men claimed the maritime sector as their own, the docks increasingly came to emblemize the climate of upheaval and indistinction that was already spreading rapidly throughout the city.



From the outset, the black population at the docks was in constant flux.<sup>53</sup> For one thing, the nature of maritime work meant that individual workers were carried away and returned to port sporadically. Black crewmembers from Africa, Europe and the Caribbean regularly mingled with the city's blacks in port, turning the docks into an international zone of indistinction. Additionally, Saturdays and Sundays saw a weekly influx of black visitors from other regions and other parts of New York State.<sup>54</sup>

A high percentage of runaway slaves also ended up at the docks, whether arriving as stowaways on southern ships or attempting to board departing ships to expedite their freedom.<sup>55</sup> In the Revolutionary era, the West Indies had been a commonly assumed destination for New York's runaway slave population.<sup>56</sup> During the emancipation period, however, slaveholders increasingly focused on policing the docks themselves. When a fifteen-year-old "Mulatto boy named Tom" ran away, his owner offered a fifteen-dollar reward before specifically warning "all masters of vessels" not to harbor him or "carry him off."<sup>57</sup> South Carolina Senator Jacob Read offered 100 dollars for the apprehension of "two Mulatto house servants", one of whom he hinted might board a ship by passing as white. "All persons are cautioned against harbouring, countenancing or concealing them," wrote Read, before adding, "and all Masters of vessels and others are warned against carrying them from the United States."<sup>58</sup>

One particularly interesting runaway notice warns of the possible port presence of "a little French Mulatto Boy, about 11 years old, by the name Toussaint."<sup>59</sup> This advertisement is especially fascinating in light of the docks' connection to Haiti, where the world's first successful slave revolution took place over the turn of the century. In the

1790s and the early years of the 1800s, a sizeable minority of white refugees from Haiti (then Saint Domingue) had arrived in New York's port to resettle. Almshouse records confirm that some had also carried black slaves with them, many of whom soon seized or negotiated their freedom.<sup>60</sup> Often referred to as "French," these Haitian blacks injected a new energy into the city's black population, spurring a renewal of African cultural forms that included clothing, music and dance.<sup>61</sup> The Haitian notion of a "black republic" deeply complicated the republican defense of slavery and anticipated violent attempts to seize the rights of a citizenship denied.<sup>62</sup> Whites viewed Haitian blacks as a rebellious political influence on American-born blacks, who they feared might become inspired to organize their own revolt.<sup>63</sup> "From the very first," writes Winthrop Jordan, "St. Domingo seemed a threat to American security."<sup>64</sup> The reality of Haitian slaves mixing on the docks with New York's black population thus exacerbated a sense of indistinction as the foundation for a loss of control. This disquieted the city's whites and reanimated fears of an unpredictable outbreak of black violence.

In this context, language mixing became another troubling reality of the city's waterfront for many whites. As David Gellman has shown, the "sameness of language" was a uniting tenet of republicanism in the early national period. Frequent portrayals of blacks as heavily accented in the city's newspapers drew whites together around "proper English" and gave voice to widespread anxieties over blacks' ability to assimilate in a presumably homogenous republic.<sup>65</sup> In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, 27 percent of runaway advertisements had attempted to identify specific slaves by noting that they spoke poor or broken English, but as Haitian refugees and black sailors from

around the world flooded the docks in the early 1800s, such descriptions became all but useless.<sup>66</sup> With French, Haitian Creole, and various African languages contributing to the rise of a “cosmopolitan patois” among New York’s blacks, remaining slaveholders now tried in vain to identify their slaves by language and dialect.<sup>67</sup>

A rapidly shifting population also made the docks a popular site for crime and vice. As a crowded space that afforded near anonymity, unemployed or cash-strapped blacks could engage in petty theft and confidence schemes without fear of detection. They could also take advantage of departing ships to unload stolen goods or make quick, definitive getaways.<sup>68</sup> The docks also served as a site of gambling, sport fighting, and social drinking, much of which working class whites came to join in or witness. “The ferry stairs and the wharf on Sundays were the scene of fighting, quarreling, and the most profane language expressed by gambl[ers],” writes Graham Hodges.<sup>69</sup> At the docks, he concludes, “blacks lived and played hard.”<sup>70</sup>

With a predominantly male workforce, the docks also offered steady business for the city’s prostitutes. “Women of every color can be found in the streets...soliciting men and proudly flaunting their licentiousness,” French traveler Moreau de St. Méry had written of New York in 1798.<sup>71</sup> By 1810, many of those women had clustered around the waterfront, where black and white maritime workers, who were paid a portion of their wages up-front, often sought their company before shipping out to seas.<sup>72</sup> The city’s whites frequently condemned dockside prostitution, but many also patronized it.<sup>73</sup> The resulting picture of the docks as a playground and proto-red light district exacerbated

anxieties over social indistinction by suggesting the literal mixing of blacks and whites that the state legislature had implied in its 1785 discussion of racial miscegenation.

The docks contributed to whites' growing discomfort with eroding social distinctions and surely sharpened the republican critique of a black population in need of guidance. They also carried an undeniable appeal for many whites as a space of cheap labor and titillating vice. The waterfront was a porous space of hybridity that emblemized the emerging cosmopolitanism for which New York would increasingly become known throughout the nineteenth century. It facilitated continuous interaction between white and black, slave and free, American and foreign, male and female, virtuous and depraved. On a weekend afternoon, one might enjoy a host of trade and leisure activities with interesting individuals from all over the world. At the same time, the docks threatened an assault on republican society through violence, crime and sexual temptation in the context of a pre-existing fear of trade dependency on Europe. In a city of transitional bodies and eroding social distinctions, this conflicting mix heightened collective white anxiety. It also gave new urgency to the white struggle to reestablish order in the midst of change— to name one thing and tell it clearly from another.

#### **AUTONOMY AND AFRICANITY IN PUBLIC LIFE**

As freedom came into its own throughout the emancipation period, New York City also saw the emergence of a rich black public life. Distinctively black social activities and civic institutions served as important and expectant expressions of republican autonomy. They also enabled the emergence of a black leadership structure that employed well-worn forms of republican social control over lower class blacks.

Through organized events that drew on their rights to public space, blacks placed the virtue of their community continually on display in hopes of demonstrating their fitness for citizenship. Ironically, the felt presence of so many autonomous black bodies provoked white anxiety and stoked an anti-black resentment that would have decisive physical, economic and political consequences.

Many historians have suggested that these consequences were the inevitable result of organized black efforts to contest white authority, but the battle lines were rarely this clear. Apart from limited episodes of violence, public displays of black autonomy were rarely confrontational. In fact, they frequently articulated a symbolism of deference toward white, republican values, along with expressions of Africanity and cultural independence. Organized black society thus became a conflicted example of whites' best hopes for integration and their worst fears of conflict and decline, raising concerns that the indistinction associated with transitional black bodies would ultimately result in a more fundamental instability of the republican social order. Ultimately, it was this dual tendency to assert social difference while yet claiming membership in the republican whole that eventually made explicit displays of black autonomy intolerable to white New Yorkers.

The seeming incompatibility of a homogenous republic with such overt displays of difference sharpened whites' anxieties as the same black bodies that they had once viewed as elements of public space became unmistakable agents within it. As free blacks occupied the sidewalks and paraded through the streets, they erased old social distinctions, mapping new geographies of power and meaning over the dying landscape

of slavery and rendering the city itself unintelligible and unrecognizable to white residents. The collapse of the old binary between slavery and freedom opened the door to a new doctrine of racial difference that promised to restore order to a city in the throes of social indistinction. The popularization of race-based thinking eventually left blacks with few allies among whites, making them vulnerable to new calls for colonization and political disfranchisement.

Organized black public life in freedom began with the proliferation of black churches in the early 1800s. As the emancipation period began, many whites held a shared belief that the transitional period from slavery to freedom should include renewed efforts to Christianize the black population. These whites perceived strong overlap between Christian values and the qualities necessary for virtuous citizenship. A widespread commitment to Christianity in the black community, they argued, would help to institutionalize traits like moral restraint among free blacks, easing the shift to liberty and the incorporation of black citizens into the republic.<sup>74</sup> Blacks, however, were eager to shed the bonds of white paternalism and practice religion outside of white guidance or control. They sought their own spaces to practice a brand of Christianity influenced by African and Caribbean traditions that reflected the city's increasingly diverse black population. In 1796, Peter Williams Sr. led a faction of blacks away from the white-dominated John Street Church to plant New York's first African Methodist Episcopal Church at the intersection of Church and Leonard. Within fifteen years, there were at least four independent black churches in Manhattan.<sup>75</sup>

Blacks successfully obtained city funds to construct their churches, often under the tacit expectation that whites would continue to guide and oversee the institutions. In practice, however, this rarely happened. Many black churches did preach a gospel of moral uplift similar to the teachings of the African Free School. Still, even the most accommodating congregations generally refused to appoint white leadership.<sup>76</sup> This led to considerable friction between black churches and members of the white religious elite, who began to fear the implications of independent black houses of worship that operated entirely apart from white eyes or influence. Whites seem especially to have feared the negative public relations potential that the perception of tense relations between black and white churches of the same denomination would lead to accusations of poor stewardship.<sup>77</sup>

Blacks also established a variety of mutual aid organizations at this time, most notably the African Society for Mutual Relief (ASMR). Founded in 1808, the ASMR was the flagship benevolent society of the city's black community, serving as a site for celebrations, social gatherings, political activities and strategy meetings of the black elite.<sup>78</sup> Like black churches, the society was intended as an autonomous community nerve center that would demonstrate to skeptical whites that blacks could look after a common interest and behave as virtuous citizens of a larger whole.<sup>79</sup> Members, many of whom were craftsmen and proprietors, also hoped to insulate one another from the potentially calamitous effects of white racism on black-owned businesses.

In 1810, a few years before Samuel Hardenburgh applied for formal recognition of his freedom, the society applied to the state legislature for an official grant of

incorporation. The legislature surprised many by unexpectedly granting this request, thereby endowing the group with formal rights to purchase property and collect dues from its members.<sup>80</sup> Over the next several years, the society made substantial investments in financial securities, gradually building an asset portfolio that could sustain its growing slate of fiscal commitments. By the end of the decade, that portfolio included more than 500 dollars in bank stock, as well as a large tract of land on Orange Street where a society-owned boarding house generated helped fund the construction of a new headquarters and public meetinghouse.<sup>81</sup>

The society's assets allowed it to play a vital support role as black businessmen sought to weather increasing antagonism from white competitors. Two of the ASMR's founders, William Hamilton and James Latham, were nearly forced to abandon their successful carpentry shop after local white artisans objected that it devalued their businesses and property.<sup>82</sup> This objection may have stood in for more realistic concerns over the competitiveness of black prices. After all, whites may not have hired black laborers, but in the difficult economic climate of the day, they remained all too happy to purchase black goods when it saved them money. Indeed, when whites took to the newspaper to demand a boycott of ASMR member George Downing's oyster house, they shamed his white clientele for awarding him so much business over the various white establishments nearby.<sup>83</sup>

In the face of this aggressive targeting, the ASMR embraced the republican ideal of collective sacrifice by attempting to provide its members with a degree of financial security. At the same time, the society's elite leadership sought to exercise a measure of



social control over the free black population, which it hoped to present as deserving of social equality. Each member was required to pay an initiation fee of 100 dollars upon his admission to the society, which could be used to defray the cost of any aid provided to him or other members in the future. Apart from this considerable sum of money, members also paid monthly dues of 25 cents.<sup>84</sup> Members in good standing gained access to a variety of benefit programs, including life insurance to provide for their widows and children and an elaborate worker's compensation insurance pool that remained solvent for many years.<sup>85</sup>

High financial barriers to entry helped ensure that the society drew its members exclusively from the reputable realms of the city's black elite and growing black middle class. Many of these individuals had also attended the African Free School, uniquely credentialing them in the eyes of white Federalists to serve as capable stewards of the moral, political and economic life of lower class blacks.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, the society required all applicants to sign and abide by its strict constitutional bylaws, which stipulated the immediate expulsion of any member caught drinking, gambling, or patronizing a prostitute.<sup>87</sup> Leaders justified such harsh measures by citing the need to elevate members above reproach. Any possibility of true social equality depended on avoiding even the smallest stain on the society's patina of republican respectability.

The AMSR's commitment to its stated moral philosophy was authentic and resolute. Nevertheless, the society also hoped its sterling reputation in the first decades of the nineteenth century would help secure the approval of white elites. If graduates of the African Free School had proven they could learn republican values, members of the

ASMR hope to show they could develop and apply them independently. Every action the society took had the direct aim of uplifting the black community in freedom as well as the indirect aim of convincing whites of that community's fitness for citizenship. Unfortunately, despite its impressive success in the realm of the former, its latter efforts often met with white anxiety and disapproval.

While free blacks viewed the complete autonomy of their institutions as critical to proving their fitness for independence, whites tended to worry more about the potential negative consequences of blacks meeting and organizing outside of their supervision. While most black institutions shared the ASMR's stated commitment to republican ideals, they also demonstrated elements of Africanity and cultural distinctiveness that many whites found unsettling. Black churches like St. Philip's\* and Abyssinian Baptist† chose names that highlighted the historical significance of African Christianity, while organizations like the Female African Benevolent Association invoked Africa to solidify an overriding sense of black unity.<sup>88</sup> Additionally, nearly all black aid societies modeled themselves on the descriptions of African secret societies that circulated heavily among blacks from Africa, Haiti and the West Indies.<sup>89</sup>

Black institutions claimed these expressly African identities to distinguish their efforts and emphasize the capacity of black people for successful citizenship. By linking their heritage to positive displays of achievement and moral uprightness in the present,

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\* In the Biblical book of Acts, Saint Philip preaches the Gospel to an Ethiopian eunuch, becoming the first person to bring Christianity to African peoples. (See: Acts 8:26-40)

† Abyssinia was an alternate name for the Ethiopian Empire, a largely Christian polity in and around present-day Ethiopia that was, at the time, among the oldest established states in the world.

they aimed to challenge republican assumptions about black degradation in the wake of slavery. As many scholars have noted, these institutions drew on their distinct Africanity to assert the rights of African-descended peoples to public participation and shared prosperity.<sup>90</sup> However, their appeals to Africa— a distant land, profoundly unknowable to most whites— also suggested the existence a private black sphere, far removed from white observation or control.

Anxious preoccupations with black private life had animated New York's social relations since at least 1702, when a colonial "Act for Regulateing of Slaves" had noted that slaves had "been found oftentimes guilty of confederating together in running away, or other ill practices."<sup>91</sup> Since then, the city's long history of coordinated arson, of which whites presumed blacks were always the cause, had imbued the notion of black conspiracy with such an overwhelming sense of plausibility that any private interaction between black residents—especially when foreign-born— was viewed as cause for serious concern.<sup>92</sup> As Jill Lepore notes, the infamous fires of 1741 had been sufficiently terrorizing to effectively end the importation of slaves from the Caribbean until after independence.<sup>93</sup> Since 1796, when a group of Haitian slaves had traversed the city hurling burning coals into open cellar doors, most white males had served on night watch crews aimed at detecting and halting organized black violence.<sup>94</sup> As in 1741, the punishment for black arson remained a public burning at the stake.<sup>95</sup>

In this climate of fear, the combination of Africanity with assertions of autonomy and organizational secrecy often rang suspiciously conspiratorial. Meanwhile, the fact that black aid societies required initiates to make a solemn vow to protect ancient secrets,

many of which were thought to date back to Africa, only made matters worse.<sup>96</sup> Inasmuch as black institutions emphasized themes of privacy and collective discretion, they served to inflame the fears of white New Yorkers rather than assuage them. Combined with the freshness of the Haitian Revolution and the well-publicized accumulation of capital by groups like the ASMR, such themes left whites worried that they had more to fear, and knew less about it, than ever.

This fear was compounded by a new sense that black individuals had become increasingly bold and violent since the passage of gradual emancipation. In 1798, on the cusp of abolition, an armed black man had threatened a white man with blows to the head if he insisted on entering a certain residence.<sup>97</sup> In 1801, when a woman was suspected of attempting to ship at least 20 blacks southward into perpetual slavery, a group of Haitian blacks had incited a riot and threatened to destroy her home.<sup>98</sup> Leslie Harris has found evidence that tensions between black domestics and their employers regularly led to arson in the first decade of the 1800s, and Graham Hodges notes that, as unemployment rose in the lead-up to the War of 1812, gangs of black youth took up the practice of surreptitiously setting white-owned stores on fire only to take advantage of the ensuing confusion by stealing goods.<sup>99</sup> During this time, a wave of anti-crime pamphlets stigmatized blacks as immoral, untrustworthy and prone to chaos.<sup>100</sup> All of this contributed to a growing apprehension among whites New York was becoming less safe and more unpredictable as greater numbers of blacks gained their freedom.

## **TRANSITIONAL BODIES AND THE POLITICS OF RENAMING**

More than economic competition, civic autonomy or the threat of street violence, white New Yorkers in the early 1800s became deeply resentful of black cultural autonomy. This took a variety of forms, beginning with the black individual and moving steadily outward. Assertions of cultural independence reinforced the ongoing diminution of white social authority. They also enhanced the feeling that traditional lines of deference were washing away as blacks developed a new life in freedom. As blacks adopted new identities, both personal and corporate, they undercut the structures of social and cultural distinction that had allowed whites to maintain order since the city's colonial years. One way blacks did this was through the legal modification of their names.

Historically, white New Yorkers had placed special emphasis on the Enlightenment project of naming and cataloguing the black bodies in their midst. In the colonial city, commercial newspapers had published detailed descriptions of each slave for sale at the docks, complete with names, ages, and physical characteristics. Lawyers and trade clerks also maintained registries of this information, both to ensure that slaves could be identified in the event of flight and to protect potential buyers against trickery and fraud.<sup>101</sup> From the beginning, this practice of registering slaves served as a form of social control, helping whites make sense of black bodies and guard against disorder.

Registries of black bodies persisted during the Revolution and throughout the years that followed. As British troops, having promised freedom to any slave who fought for the Crown, carried hundreds of blacks from New York Harbor in the 1780s, George Washington had insisted they keep a registry of all blacks on board their ships. This

registry, which ultimately became known as *The Book of Negroes*, listed each slave's name, birthplace, former owner, sex, occupation (if skilled), date of royal enlistment, and physical attributes to ensure that American slaveholders could one day recover compensation from the British government.<sup>102</sup> Shortly afterward, New York's Common Council had sought to develop a ward-by-ward listing of every black or racially mixed person in the city, including name, age, and place of residence.<sup>103</sup> In 1799, the legislature had required slaveholders to register all children born to slave mothers after the advent of gradual emancipation.<sup>104</sup> Even the Manumission Society had encouraged free blacks to leave their formal manumission papers, each containing a physical description, in a special, secure repository at the society's headquarters.<sup>105</sup>

By-name registries typified a common slaveholder obsession with defining black bodies before they could take action to define themselves. This became even more important in 1799, as the successful vote on gradual emancipation launched many of these bodies into a state of transition. Sensing that they had reached a critical inflection point, blacks began adopting new names almost immediately after the passage of the law. This complicated public and private efforts to keep track of individuals as blacks detached physical descriptions from the verbal signifiers to which they had once corresponded.

The choice of a new name symbolized independence and allowed blacks to sever their connection to former masters.<sup>106</sup> It also offered an avenue for embracing republicanism as whites understood it. In general, European and Biblical names proved quite popular while African names like Cato, Quaco and Mingo disappeared quickly.

More importantly, blacks also adopted surnames in staggering numbers. In 1790, the census listed surnames for a mere 15 percent of the city's black population. By 1800, that figure had risen to 94 percent.<sup>107</sup> Many blacks chose indistinct English surnames that erased any link to their personal histories in slavery.\* Unlike the naming of black institutions, these names rarely suggested any connection to Africa.<sup>108</sup>

Self-naming practices at the turn of the century rejected white efforts to categorize and label black bodies. They inhibited old forms of social control by making it more difficult for whites to take stock of the black population in any sort of organized way. As large numbers of blacks chose identical or similar new names, the time-honored tactic of registering the city's black population became nearly impossible. For example, by 1810, over five percent of free blacks in Manhattan were living under the indistinct English surname, "Johnson."<sup>109</sup>

### **BLACK DANDIES, STROLLERS, AND THE PINKSTER REVIVALS**

If black name changes contributed to white anxiety by expanding the climate of social indistinction, free blacks made themselves known by donning flamboyant clothing and assertively "strolling" through the city. Like naming, clothing had served as a means of social control prior to the passage of gradual emancipation. Edgar McManus suggests that the desire for additional clothing was responsible for so much theft under slavery that slaveholders often rewarded their slaves with new clothes in exchange for good behavior.<sup>110</sup> While slaveholders used clothing to police the boundary between slave and

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\* Paradoxically, the adoption of English surnames also linked blacks inextricably to slaveholding by marking them with the language of a white slaveholding culture.

free, slaves also used it to differentiate times of forced labor from their own autonomous leisure time. In this context, punishing a slave by stripping him of his clothes functioned as a symbolic act of castration, reinforcing the exclusive autonomy of the slaveholder.<sup>111</sup>

As blacks entered freedom, they no longer relied on slaveholders to provide their clothing or dictate their style of dress. Many took this opportunity to accrue broad, elaborate, and often-expensive wardrobes. On one hand, we might imagine how the habit of dressing nicely would please white observers by meeting public standards of propriety and respectability. In reality, whites quickly became horrified at the rise of flamboyant black clothing styles, which many saw as immodest at best and decidedly anti-republican at worst.<sup>112</sup> Every black New Yorker in extravagant dress raised a flag of white suspicion and the assumption of petty theft.<sup>113</sup> At the same time, poorly dressed blacks confirmed white assumptions about slavery, degradation, and the impossibility of virtuous black citizenship.

“If the look of ‘dandified’ blacks strolling on Broadway caused offense,” writes Shane White, “so too did the touch of the black body.”<sup>114</sup> But in the wake of emancipation, city streets filled with more black bodies than ever, leading to clashes between black and white residents over the function and meaning of public space. These conflicts were most prominent on weekends, when free blacks engaged in “the stroll” — a unique pastime that entailed little more than walking slowly and assertively through the streets in small groups.<sup>115</sup> One Sunday afternoon, a white observer reported seeing nearly 1500 “well drest” blacks walk past a fixed point in less than two hours — close to one fifth of the city’s total black residents!<sup>116</sup>



Still, the problem was not merely the increased presence of black bodies—indeed, Manhattan’s crowded streets had always been home to racial mixing in public space. Rather, the source of white anxiety was the newfound boldness with which many free blacks seemed to assert their dominance over the city’s pedestrian life. As they strolled their way through the city’s various neighborhoods, at least a handful of black New Yorkers refused to accommodate white passersby on public sidewalks. Whites contended that these blacks derived distinct pleasure from forcing “respectable citizens” into the road rather than break ranks to let them pass.<sup>117</sup>

Through their extravagant clothing and defiant claims to public space, free blacks precipitated a state of culture shock among New York’s white population. The black population had been high in slavery, but the perception of white authority had helped to contain it. In freedom, however, blacks would not be ignored, even as they incurred the increasing resentment of their white neighbors. As once-foundational social distinctions were trampled on the pavement, whites developed a nagging sense that their former slaves now relished the opportunity to irritate and defy them.<sup>118</sup> “There was a strange expectation,” writes White, “that newly freed blacks would behave in a way slaves never had— namely perfectly— and hence a very personal sense of betrayal ensued when this idealized standard was not met.”<sup>119</sup>

Amid the ever-expanding array of social inversions, a new influx of blacks from upstate soon contributed to the revival of Pinkster.<sup>120</sup> Originally brought to the state by the Dutch, Pinkster was a community festival that took as its ritual the whimsical reversal of power roles in society. In the mid-eighteenth century, Albany had seen lively, annual

Pinkster celebrations in which a black slave was elected “Governor” for a day and granted authority over city residents, including whites. Outwardly, these events were good for a laugh as whites cheerfully entertained the absurdity of being governed by an enslaved African. At its core, however, Pinkster reaffirmed the ironclad normalcy of the existing hierarchy, permitting the reversal of roles only to emphasize just how ridiculous such a notion must surely be.<sup>121</sup>

As whites watched blacks adopt English names, don extravagant outfits and gamely drive upper class whites from the sidewalks, they must have felt like Pinkster was occurring before their eyes. But unlike the original festival, whites in Manhattan were not witnessing a temporary ritual. Instead, the city was undergoing a full-scale rearrangement of the established social order. Old ways of assigning significance and distributing power now seemed increasingly irrelevant as free blacks at once laid claim to republican citizenship and unapologetically emphasized their cultural distinctiveness. Perhaps nothing displayed these tensions more clearly than the array of well-organized, institutional parades that saw free blacks march through the heart of many of Manhattan’s whitest and most influential neighborhoods in celebration of their own community.

#### **FREEDOM ON PARADE**

Prior to the War of 1812, black institutions like the ASMR regularly mounted parades to commemorate significant events in the black community.<sup>122</sup> These were often noisy and highly public events. As Shane White has noted, “[One] would have to have been stone deaf and blind to have missed these proud former slaves celebrating their freedom.”<sup>123</sup> Such parades were also fundamentally political, and organizers designed

them to be seen. On one hand, they offered inspiring displays of republican virtue, advertising the black community's fitness for citizenship.<sup>124</sup> They showed blacks to be both capable of self-sufficiency and attuned to a communitarian ethic of shared sacrifice and reminded whites that many blacks already viewed themselves as active citizens of the republic. On the other hand, parades displayed a distinct cultural autonomy that separated blacks from the white guardians of the city. This contradiction made such parades painful and confusing for white residents, already struggling to process a new climate of unprecedented ambiguity.

When the ASMR mounted an anniversary parade in 1809, Samuel Hardenburgh agreed to serve as its grand marshal. Leading the lengthy procession through the city on horseback, Hardenburgh snaked through the heart of white New York, winding his way from a black-run schoolhouse down Broadway and across Bowling Green before finally pausing in front of City Hall. The parade's final leg led participants back uptown to the African Zion Church for dinner and a stirring oration on slavery. There, the speaker urged the assembled free blacks not to forget their enslaved counterparts in New York and across the South.<sup>125</sup>

With sword drawn in full military dress, the image of Hardenburgh on his horse projected republican citizenship by invoking black participation in the American Revolution.<sup>126</sup> "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" asked the banner behind him pointedly, implicitly calling for expanded black access to the rights outlined in the Constitution.<sup>127</sup> A short way back, another processor likely carried the ASMR's dues collection box, symbolizing black economic independence along with a collective capacity for frugality

and restraint.<sup>128</sup> Each of these symbols offered a visual assertion of the society's ability to lead and provide for the black community.<sup>129</sup>

Hardenburgh's participation in the parade clearly embraced republican ideology and a commitment to the common good, but at a time when whites remained deeply ambivalent about the role of free blacks in public life, his choice of military symbolism must also have struck a strikingly assertive tone.<sup>130</sup> Perched high atop his battle steed, he drew attention to himself as a powerful black body in a decidedly white space. Passing directly in front of City Hall, he demanded to be seen not merely as an American, but as a black citizen and a full participant in the public life of the city.<sup>131</sup>

While embracing the city at large, such celebrations also expressed a distinctly separate black identity. Whites would not have missed the symbolism in the ASMR's decision to route its parade through the heart of the white city, starting at one autonomous black institution and ending at another.<sup>132</sup> They also would have noted the traditional African rhythms and dancing that accompanied parade participants on their way uptown, where William Hamilton would exhort them to join the effort of any freedom-seeking individual "so long as he is progenized from African parents."<sup>133</sup> Members of the Manumission Society worried openly that such open displays of difference would be off-putting to the majority of white observers. They further also feared that growing embrace of Africanity would undercut their own cultural authority over transitional black bodies.<sup>134</sup>

Black New Yorkers like James McCune Smith would remember black parades like the ASMR's 1809 celebration fondly in their writings, but for many whites, the

events contributed to a mounting attitude of fear and resentment toward free blacks that grew stronger and more pronounced throughout the emancipation period.<sup>135</sup> The loudness and frenzied commotion of black parades seemed to stand in for the loss of control that whites felt they were experiencing over their own environment. “Overall,” writes Shane White, “it was the clamorous way in which black people were occupying public space that whites had unthinkingly assumed was theirs alone that disconcerted blacks’ fellow citizens.”<sup>136</sup> These feelings extended throughout the state, but they bred a climate of particular hostility in the city, where interracial interaction was both frequent and inevitable. Indeed, many blacks recognized this growing hostility and merely chose to ignore it, as George Lawrence did when he defiantly declared that whites would bear witness to black prosperity in freedom, “though it blast their eyes.”<sup>137</sup> Amid these tense interactions, blacks increasingly asserted their fitness for and right to participate in public life. At the same time, white New Yorkers struggled with a painful sense of rupture and loss, as public space seemed to grow ever blacker. As black public life transformed the city, many whites reached the end of their tolerance for social ambiguity. Persistent and deep-seeded anxieties over slavery and citizenship finally gave way to harsh, new ideologies of racial difference, engendering a decisive political backlash that would undercut many of the gains black New Yorkers had achieved in the emancipation period.

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<sup>1</sup> Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York : A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 143-45.

<sup>3</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Rael, “The Long Death of Slavery,” 129.

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- <sup>5</sup> See unpublished paper: Jacob Maguire, "A Conspiracy at City Hall?," American Studies (Austin: University of Texas at Austin, 2009).
- <sup>6</sup> Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 236.
- <sup>7</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 174.
- <sup>8</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 126.
- <sup>9</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 186.
- <sup>10</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 139.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid., 127-28.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid., 26.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., 49, 111.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 125-26.
- <sup>15</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 141.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid., 121.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid., 85.
- <sup>18</sup> William Bradford et al., *An Enquiry How Far the Punishment of Death Is Necessary in Pennsylvania : With Notes and Illustrations* (Philadelphia: Printed by T. Dobson ... 1793), 31.
- <sup>19</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 37.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 45.
- <sup>21</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 145.
- <sup>22</sup> *Register of the Times*, December 13 1797.
- <sup>23</sup> Shane White, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Popular Culture," in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York: New Press, 2005), 154.
- <sup>24</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 122.
- <sup>25</sup> White, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Popular Culture," 154.
- <sup>26</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 192.
- <sup>27</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 28.
- <sup>28</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 129.
- <sup>29</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 111.
- <sup>30</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 175.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., 172.

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- <sup>32</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 153.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 38, 47.
- <sup>34</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 128.
- <sup>35</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, 233; White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 47-50.
- <sup>36</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 48.
- <sup>37</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 191.
- <sup>38</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 176.
- <sup>39</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 43.
- <sup>40</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 177.
- <sup>41</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 182.
- <sup>42</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 183.
- <sup>43</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 197.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., 182.
- <sup>45</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 99.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., 100.
- <sup>47</sup> Gary B. Nash, "Forging Freedom: The Emancipation Experience in the Northern Seaport Cities, 1775-1820," in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Urbana: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University of Illinois Press, 1986), 19.
- <sup>48</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 29-30.
- <sup>49</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 159.
- <sup>50</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 207.
- <sup>51</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 159.
- <sup>52</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 207.
- <sup>53</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 168.

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- <sup>54</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 211.
- <sup>55</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 122.
- <sup>56</sup> *Daily Advertiser*, August 15 1786.
- <sup>57</sup> "Fifteen Dollars Reward," *Commercial Advertiser*, January 21 1799.
- <sup>58</sup> "100 Dollars Reward," *Commercial Advertiser*, April 9 1799.
- <sup>59</sup> "Five Dollars Reward," *Commercial Advertiser*, November 7 1798.
- <sup>60</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 73.
- <sup>61</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 177.
- <sup>62</sup> Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 188.
- <sup>63</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York,: Oxford University Press, 1974), 148.
- <sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.
- <sup>65</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 104.
- <sup>66</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 122.
- <sup>67</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 177.
- <sup>68</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 181.
- <sup>69</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 207.
- <sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.
- <sup>71</sup> M. L. E. Moreau de Saint-Méry et al., *Moreau De St. Méry's American Journey <1793-1798>* (Garden City, N.Y.,: Doubleday & Company, inc., 1947), 156.
- <sup>72</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 209; White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 128.
- <sup>73</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 210.
- <sup>74</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 62.
- <sup>75</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 183-84.
- <sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.



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- <sup>77</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 158.
- <sup>78</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 188.
- <sup>79</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 91.
- <sup>80</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 46.
- <sup>81</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 188; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 88.
- <sup>82</sup> Craig Wilder, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Civic Culture," in *Slavery in New York*, ed. Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris (New York: New Press, 2005), 222.
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>84</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 15.
- <sup>85</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 86.
- <sup>86</sup> Peterson, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating an Elite Culture," 188.
- <sup>87</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 187-88.
- <sup>88</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 17; Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, 254-55.
- <sup>89</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 2, 7-8.
- <sup>90</sup> See: Wilder, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Civic Culture."; Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 22; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 89; S. White, "'It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994); Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York : A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*, 56.
- <sup>91</sup> Cited in Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint Co., 1977), 169.
- <sup>92</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 85.
- <sup>93</sup> Lepore, "The Slow Tightening of the Vise," 87-88.
- <sup>94</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 69.
- <sup>95</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 85.

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- <sup>96</sup> New York African Society for Mutual Relief. and John J. Zuille, *Historical Sketch* (New York, 1892), 55.
- <sup>97</sup> Cited in White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 144-5.
- <sup>98</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 92.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid., 81; Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 209.
- <sup>100</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 103-4.
- <sup>101</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 31-2.
- <sup>102</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 105-6.
- <sup>103</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 47.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid., 178.
- <sup>105</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 166.
- <sup>106</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, 239.
- <sup>107</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 193.
- <sup>108</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, 240.
- <sup>109</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 193.
- <sup>110</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 64.
- <sup>111</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 195, 205.
- <sup>112</sup> Ibid., 159.
- <sup>113</sup> Ibid., 199.
- <sup>114</sup> White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York*, 59.
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid., 52-53.
- <sup>116</sup> *New York Columbian*, August 23 1820.
- <sup>117</sup> White, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Popular Culture," 159-60.
- <sup>118</sup> Ibid., 162.
- <sup>119</sup> White, *Stories of Freedom in Black New York*, 42.
- <sup>120</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 136.
- <sup>121</sup> White, *Somewhat More Independent : The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810*, 70, 99.

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<sup>122</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 5.

<sup>123</sup> White, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Popular Culture," 163.

<sup>124</sup> White, "' It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," 34.

<sup>125</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 89.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Henry Highland Garnet and James McCune Smith, *A Memorial Discourse* (Philadelphia,: J. M. Wilson, 1865), 24.; Note also that in 1814, black New Yorkers would mount a parade on their way to aid in the City's fortification efforts during the War of 1812.

<sup>128</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 89.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>130</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 47.

<sup>131</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 88; Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York : A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*, 56.

<sup>132</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 22.

<sup>133</sup> William Hamilton, "An Address to the New York African Society, for Mutual Relief, Delivered in the Universalist Church, January 2, 1809," in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, ed. Dorothy Porter Wesley (Boston,: Beacon Press, 1971).

<sup>134</sup> Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York : A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*, 57.

<sup>135</sup> Garnet and Smith, *A Memorial Discourse*, 24.; Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 136.

<sup>136</sup> Shane White, "Black Life in Freedom: Creating a Popular Culture," *ibid.*, 164, 72.

<sup>137</sup> George Lawrence, "Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, Delivered on the First Day of January, 1813, in the African Methodist Episcopal Church," in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, ed. Dorothy Porter Wesley (Boston: Beacon, 1971), 380.

## **Chapter 4: Anti-Black Backlash**

As Patrick Rael has noted, the 1799 gradual emancipation law was “as rife with qualification and contradiction as was popular sentiment on race and slavery.”<sup>1</sup> Even so, several scholars have opted to read the law as a direct product of the Revolution. These scholars optimistically identify Independence as a watershed moment that forced New Yorkers to abandon racialized concerns surrounding citizenship.<sup>2</sup> To some extent, this is true, but only inasmuch as those concerns were temporarily displaced by the social rubric of republicanism. As the new nation worked out the character of its fledgling institutions in the uncertain economic and geopolitical climate of the early nineteenth century, it eventually found its way back to an unresolved conversation about race and citizenship.

### **LOSING FAITH IN MORAL UPLIFT**

In the period leading up to the War of 1812, the Manumission Society was less engaged as an institution than ever before.<sup>3</sup> So far, the society had succeeded in helping to secure black freedom, but it had done little to address widespread white anxieties over emancipation or to influence the arc of black citizenship. Increasingly, its members found themselves on the defensive as many white New Yorkers began to question the feasibility of their lofty republican goals. Similar sentiments were increasingly common throughout the state as whites took the forums like public newspapers to express a growing discomfort with black citizenship that seemed to transcend lines of class, industry and political affiliation.<sup>4</sup>

At the African Free School, the crown jewel of the Manumission Society uplift efforts, tensions were also running high. Upon the founding of the school, the Manumission Society had hired John Teasman, a socially respectable and well educated black man, to guide the effort as principal. But in 1809, Teasman, an active member of the ASMR, helped that organization organize the anniversary parade that had carried Samuel Hardenburgh throughout the city. In doing so, he had flouted the the advice of Manumission Society members, many of whom were uncomfortable with the growing influence of black aid societies on the free black population. Unable to countenance this willing dismissal on its cultural authority, the Manumission Society fired Teasman and replaced him with Charles Andrews, a white man and Manumission Society member who took charge of the school at roughly twice Teasman's salary.<sup>5</sup> The shake-up signaled an implicit concession to skeptical whites that even the most well-intentioned efforts might fail to succeed in sophisticating emancipated blacks. It also coincided with a broader loss of faith in the plausibility of black citizenship.

White displeasure at what many viewed as blacks' poor progress toward republican citizenship opened a space for new explanations of black behavior linked to race. Since the Revolution, New York's voting classes had subscribed to an Enlightenment model of race that viewed social difference as largely circumstantial. This "environmentalist" perspective maintained that all people started life the same, and that, in proper conditions, even the lowliest individuals could improve.<sup>6</sup> Environmentalist thinking had even found its way into the documents of the Revolution, most notably in Thomas Jefferson's assertion that "all men are created equal."<sup>7</sup> And yet, the founders had

not believed *only* that all men were equal; they had also believed in their own uniqueness as Englishmen. At Yorktown, they had severed their ties to the empire, and with them any lasting claims to Englishness. The early search for a new American character precipitated something of a national identity crisis.<sup>8</sup>

#### **WHITE NEW YORKERS AND THE RISE OF RACIAL SCIENCE**

In much of the country, the search for a national character had already come to center on whiteness. Even in New York, the foundations for this view had been laid. “Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country, to one united people,” John Jay had written in Federalist Number Two. “[It is] a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government...”<sup>9</sup> Statements like Jay’s beheld the implicitly racialized quality of Englishness and simply relocated it to America. As Winthrop Jordan has observed, “This thinking left Afro-Americans in an obvious place—out.”<sup>10</sup>

No one did more to contribute to the doctrines of racial inherency than Thomas Jefferson. The third president’s writings on black character were widely read throughout the country in the wake of the Revolution and may have enjoyed a wider readership than any competing view.<sup>11</sup> “Though for a century and a half we have had under our eyes the races of black and of red men,” Jefferson wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “they have never yet been viewed by us as subjects of natural history.”<sup>12</sup> Only the methods of science could determine if blacks were fit for republican citizenship.

In *Notes*, Jefferson claimed to have observed blacks methodically on a number of fronts. On the basis of these observations, he suggested that blacks required less sleep

than whites, possessed a higher tolerance for adventure and excitement, privileged sensuality over rational reflection, and suffered from a diminished moral sense.<sup>13</sup> “I advance it, therefore,” he wrote, “that blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.”<sup>14</sup> This conclusion led Jefferson to conclude that the boosters of emancipation would face significant challenges in preparing blacks for full independence, and indeed, that any such efforts in America would likely to fail.

Throughout the 1790s, many New Yorkers had evaluated Jeffersonian views on fundamental racial differences, but these ideas had generally failed to gain traction. In 1792, for example, the *New York Journal* had printed a satirical discussion between two farmers in which one suggested that John Jay, then governor, supported abolition to promote miscegenation. The farmer had fretted that black freedom would unleash a dangerous process of racial amalgamation that would “make the whole country bastards and outlaws.”<sup>15</sup> This claim combined a quasi-scientific ideology of race with widespread assumptions about black criminality. That same year, in a letter to the editor, “Africanus” invoked the emerging doctrine of physiognomy as proof that blacks were an “inferior race.”<sup>16</sup> But a week later, a response from “Americanus” had attacked such deterministic racial science as “ludicrous” and asserted the more common republican environmentalist position, attributing black degradation to the crippling condition of slavery.<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1800s, many New Yorkers began to reconsider the doctrine of innate racial difference. Whites argued that emancipation had not fostered a climate of black improvement as many had hoped. Instead, they suggested, it had enabled the total erasure

of the social distinctions that had helped maintain the social order throughout the city's history. Faced with dragging economic prospects and the looming threat of war with England, whites attributed their profound social anxieties to the most visible change to occur in their midst. Emancipation thus became the cause of the broad host of ills and uncertainties plaguing the city as blacks emerged as a unifying scapegoat for problems more typically related to tensions among whites.<sup>18</sup>

The new racism was defined by the practice of grouping all blacks into a single category of degradation. Where once whites had attributed this condition to slavery, they now began to connect it to innate deficiencies. Such generalization paid no mind to class, education, origin or religion. Instead, blackness alone became sufficient grounds for assuming inferiority.<sup>19</sup>

Revolutionary leaders like Benjamin Rush may have provided a link from the old logic of republicanism to the emerging scientific logic of race. Rush, a doctor, never technically diverged from his 1787 suggestion that successful republican citizens required training and growth. Instead, he appealed increasingly to the language of medicine to explain why lacks might constitute an exception. In a much-discussed conference paper in 1792, Rush had proposed that blacks might suffer from a special form of leprosy that both darkened their skin color and degraded their moral character. Over time, he hoped a cure could be developed, but in the meantime, it was best to restrict the rights of citizenship to white Americans.<sup>20</sup> Where groups like the Manumission Society had sought to submit black bodies to a brand of republican social control, Rush proposed to subject them to medical treatment.<sup>21</sup> Opinions like these contributed to an emerging emphasis on



skin color itself as the root of racial inferiority. By 1811, scientific racism had effectively displaced environmentalism among American intellectuals.<sup>22</sup>

### **THE POLITICS OF BLACK DISFRANCHISEMENT**

While concerns over free black citizenship escalated among New York's whites, Jeffersonian notions of racial difference began to surface in the law.<sup>23</sup> Slowly but surely, race replaced slavery as the central legal "marker of inferiority" as white elites increasingly abandoned hopes for black uplift.<sup>24</sup> In many ways, true racial egalitarianism had always been a doctrine for the rich, since most working class whites could not afford to leave the door open to black wage competition.<sup>25</sup> With Republicans now firmly entrenched in Albany as the party of the white worker, they actively employed race to stoke anti-Federalist sentiment among the electorate.<sup>26</sup>

As whites shifted from viewing blacks sympathetically as victims of slavery to resenting them as the source of social disorder, many no longer saw any reason to use public resources to train or educate them. Instead, most began to favor the cheaper option of denying blacks voting and citizenship rights.<sup>27</sup> This fit nicely with Republican political efforts to weaken the Federalists, who generally dominated the free black vote.<sup>28</sup> In 1811, the Republican-controlled state legislature forced through a blatant voter suppression law requiring all free blacks to procure a government-issued certificate of freedom before attempting to cast a ballot.<sup>29</sup>

The law's partisan structure was staggering, as outlined in an article in the *New York Evening Post*. First, an individual would be required to appear in County Court or the Mayor's Court with written proof of his freedom. To do this alone, the *Post*

suggested, would require the costly aid of a lawyer. Next, he would have to pay the presiding judge a fee of twenty-five cents to consider his case. If the judge found in his favor, he would pay another shilling to procure an official certificate, listing his name, age, physical attributes, place of birth and personal means of freedom. This certificate would also require the testimony and signature of a witness. Next, the individual would be required to go to the County Clerk's office, where he would pay two fees: one to file his personal, written proof of freedom, and a second to file the judge's signed certificate. The clerk would then charge one final fee to pen a copy of the certificate, which the individual could bring to the polls to vote.<sup>30</sup>

It is unclear how many blacks managed to register under this new system, but a fair amount must have found a way, for in 1813, lifted by a swell of black votes, the Federalists retook the lower house of the legislature and brought a brief panic to Albany. Buoyed by its opposition to the War of 1812, the Party hoped to continue its resurgence by retaking the state senate in 1814. Instead, the Republicans reasserted themselves, reclaiming the state assembly and driving New York's Federalists into oblivion as their national star faded.<sup>31</sup> Following this victory, assembly Republicans agreed to a grand bargain with Governor Daniel Tompkins. In 1815, they modified the 1811 disenfranchisement law, tightening its provisions to targeting New York City's free black population explicitly.<sup>32</sup> In exchange, they permitted a bill by Tompkins that would specify a cut-off point for gradual emancipation, finally ending slavery forever on July 4, 1827. These debates over black voting fell at the mercy of ongoing partisan political

shifts in Albany. Even so, they also indicated “the coming of age of race as a central factor in formal party politics in New York.”<sup>33</sup>

### **BLACK AUTONOMY AND WHITE RESISTANCE**

As Jeffersonian lines of race hardened and fundamental black political rights came under assault, blacks sought refuge in unity and collective autonomy. Celebrations of Africanity took on new importance as blacks looked for ways to distinguish themselves and assert a group identity.<sup>34</sup> Leslie Alexander has suggested that New York City blacks may have embraced a limited form of Black Nationalism, viewing themselves as a distinct group of people with a common history and shared political interests. Either way, appeals to African culture afforded the black community with a sense of collective history and purpose, even in the face of overwhelming hostility.<sup>35</sup>

Black institutions and mutual aid societies also helped blacks forge a powerful “racial consciousness” under pressure.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps even more importantly, they gave blacks a forum to articulate and come to terms with the rising tide of race-based oppression. In 1811, as the Republican voter suppression law wound its way through the legislature, the ASMR selected John Teasman, the recently fired headmaster of the African Free School, as the keynote speaker at its Emancipation Day parade. “Notwithstanding all that you have done by the light of your daystar,” Teasman thundered, “still it is asserted that your genius is inferior.”<sup>37</sup> Teasman’s words suggest a painful awareness of racial inherency doctrines within the black community. Such a speech demonstrates how hardening ideologies of race crystallized not only as white worldviews, but also as experienced

categories of oppression among free blacks. In this context, organizations like the ASMR became important centers of moral support for black New Yorkers.

They also held the black community together in the face of disproportionate economic strain. Upon learning of his former slave's struggle to find work, one white said, "The laws set him free and he left me—now let the laws take care of him."<sup>38</sup> But more commonly, it was the established network of black churches and aid societies that took care of down and out blacks. Even after the laws of 1811 and 1815, these organizations continued to solidify their standing by investing in assets and property.<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, the more assertive and united blacks became, the more they alienated once-trusted white allies. In 1818, the trustees of the African Free School became so exasperated with a perceived lack of deference for whites among black children that they scheduled a public meeting for students' families. At the meeting, the trustees delivered a pedantic presentation in which they angrily suggested that black parents could not be relied upon to raise their own children. In their place, the school proposed a new, expanded family structure whereby its teachers and trustees would assume all major parental responsibilities.<sup>40</sup> For most free blacks, the trustee address was beyond the pale. In the event's wake, attendance at the school declined precipitously as even the most prominent families opted to send their children to one of the various autonomous black schools that had sprung up throughout the city.<sup>41</sup> Wealthy whites also began to express anger toward the African Free School, circulating petitions demanding the organization be denied its bid for a new piece of property, lest black schoolchildren

should be made to walk too close to white places of residence.<sup>42</sup> The old republican coalition of free blacks and white elites was officially in dissolution.

Meanwhile, working class whites increasingly turned to violence and aggression in response to the success of free black institutions. Especially in the wake of Governor's Tompkin's law, which officially ended slavery, anti-black violence reached new, unprecedented heights. As Leslie Alexander notes, "Racism in New York City soon became so virulent that Black institutions were constantly threatened by violence. In fact, any Black success during this period seemed to incite white rage."<sup>43</sup> As interracial violence spiraled out of control, white elites began looking for solutions outside of the traditional strategy of republican uplift.

#### **COLONIZATION AND THE LAST HOPE OF WHITE ELITES**

The colonization movement marked the final effort of white elites to preserve the illusion of their own paternalism. Thomas Jefferson had planted the movement's seeds when he had written, "When freed, he [the former slave] is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture."<sup>44</sup> Jefferson could not envision a way for blacks and whites to live together in the same communities, arguing that such attempts would result in the extinction of one group or the other.<sup>45</sup> In 1817, in the midst of mounting racial tensions and skyrocketing violence, many white New Yorkers would have understood Jefferson's fear that a continued black presence would provoke a "civil and servile war."<sup>46</sup>

That year, the same year that the Tompkins bill officially became law, saw the formal establishment of the American Colonization Society (ACS). The ACS began in Washington, DC, but it quickly found deep support in New York City. For many white

elites, the society's aim to relocate blacks to the western coast of Africa "deftly captured the hardening logic of race in the age of emancipation."<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the ACS' development in New York is the broad support it attracted from across the political spectrum.<sup>48</sup> This included the support and active membership of a number of Manumission Society members, including John Jay and African Free School Director Charles Andrews. Despite Jay's enthusiastic 1788 exclamation that, "Manumissions daily become more common among us," he now endorsed the ACS, along with its statement claiming that, "of all the blessings we may be permitted to bequeath to our descendants, [the removal of American blacks] will receive the richest tribute of their thanks and veneration."<sup>49</sup> Like many of his colleagues, Jay's faith in moral uplift was fast expiring.

Even many of New York's most ardently pro-slavery leaders succumbed to the strange allure of the ACS. As the "anti-abolition" gave way to "anti-equality", whites of all orientations "coalesced around a new center, best represented by the ACS' Janus-faced concern—with black redemption on the one hand, and black removal on the other."<sup>50</sup> Neither defenders of free blacks nor their antagonists could deny that the emancipation period had precipitated a massive shift in the city's social relations marked by an uncomfortable climate of indistinction and the disintegration of old lines between the respectable and the undesirable. To restore order, many whites felt that blacks would have to be either re-subjugated or physically removed. By 1820, when the ACS finally began to draw notice on the national political stage, only 10,000 New Yorkers remained in slavery, and 95 percent of New York City's black population was free.<sup>51</sup> As they

traveled north to the state constitutional convention, the city's political elites determined that they could not wait for black removal any longer.

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<sup>1</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 125.

<sup>2</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, 135.

<sup>4</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 128.

<sup>5</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 102-03.

<sup>6</sup> Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, 119.

<sup>7</sup> United States., Thomas Jefferson, and Sam Fink, *The Declaration of Independence* (New York: Scholastic Reference, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, 130-33.

<sup>9</sup> John Jay, "No. 2: Concerning Dangers from Foreign Force and Influence," in *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Clinton Rossiter (New York, N.Y.: Mentor, 1961), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, 133.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia," in *Basic Writings* (Old Saybrook: Konecky & Konecky), 148.

<sup>13</sup> Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, 170-73.

<sup>14</sup> Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia," 148.

<sup>15</sup> *New York Journal*, April 21 1792.

<sup>16</sup> "Africanus," *New York Journal*, February 4 1792.

<sup>17</sup> "Americanus," *New York Journal*, February 11 1792.

<sup>18</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 143-44.

<sup>20</sup> Takaki, *Iron Cages : Race and Culture in 19th-Century America*, 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, 201-03.

<sup>23</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 206.

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- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., 190.
- <sup>25</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 123.
- <sup>26</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 187.
- <sup>27</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 137-38.
- <sup>28</sup> "Freedom of Election," *New York Evening Post*, April 16 1811.
- <sup>29</sup> New York (State). Governor. [from old catalog] and Charles Z. Lincoln, *State of New York. Messages from the Governors*, 11 vols. (Albany,: J. B. Lyon company, state printers, 1909), 686.
- <sup>30</sup> "Freedom of Election."
- <sup>31</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 131; For more on the national Federalist demise, see: Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy : Jefferson to Lincoln*, 1st ed. (New York: Norton, 2005), 176-77.
- <sup>32</sup> James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty : Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 168.
- <sup>33</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 131-33.
- <sup>34</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 189.
- <sup>35</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, xvi.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid., xvii.
- <sup>37</sup> John Teasman, *An Address Delivered in the African Episcopal Church, on the 25th of March, 1811, before the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, Being the First Anniversary of Its Incorporation* (New York: J. Low, 1811), 6.
- <sup>38</sup> Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Book; a History of the Public Markets of the City of New York*, Library of Early American Business and Industry, (New York,: A.M. Kelley, 1970), 345.
- <sup>39</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 84.
- <sup>40</sup> New York Manumission Society, *An Address to the Parents and Guardians of the Children Belonging to the New York African Free School by the Trustees of the Institutions* (New York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1818), 21-23.
- <sup>41</sup> Alexander, *African or American? : Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, 45.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., 31.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid., 32.
- <sup>44</sup> Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia," 149.
- <sup>45</sup> Jordan, *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*, 179.
- <sup>46</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 216.



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<sup>47</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 137.

<sup>48</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 215.

<sup>49</sup> William Jay, *The Life of John Jay: With Selections from His Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), 231; W. Jones John Mason, E. B. Caldwell, and Francis Scott Key, "American Colonization Society: A Memorial to the United States Congress," [http://voyager.dvc.edu/~mpowell/afam/ps\\_ACS.htm](http://voyager.dvc.edu/~mpowell/afam/ps_ACS.htm).

<sup>50</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 138-39.

<sup>51</sup> Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone : The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*, 237; Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 139.

## **Conclusion: The Slow Birth and Sudden Death of Freedom**

Delegates to New York's 1821 constitutional convention imagined themselves as the modernizers of the state's outmoded, aristocratic and anti-democratic founding document. Still, many came with the secondary hope of quietly denying blacks the political franchise.<sup>1</sup> The tumult of the emancipation period had left many whites with the distinct impression that black moral uplift had been a failure. The Manumission Society's once-bold experiment in black republicanism was now in retreat, and challenging economic times fed into the white delusion of an intractable black criminality. What's more, whites now feared that blacks were incapable of change. Where once they had hoped that removal from slavery would result in social betterment, many now viewed blacks as members of a hopelessly inferior race. Suspicion of black moral character had never been higher, but faith in the potential for a turnaround had reached new lows.

Whites' specific reasons for aiming to disfranchise black voters varied widely. For the most partisan republicans, the move was simply an effort to further diminish the Federalist vote. For Manhattan's urban whites, fears tended to cluster around black institutional autonomy, miscegenation and social mixing.<sup>2</sup> One pervasive concern had to do with the fear that blacks had plans to sell their votes to the highest bidders in election season.<sup>3</sup> Whatever their reasoning, the majority of white delegates seemed to agree that black political power needed to be addressed.

Some of these individuals, like Erastus Root, had been key proponents of emancipation in the floor debates of 1799. Now, in 1821, Root warned of the dangers of

black voting and urged those present to strip free blacks of the franchise.<sup>4</sup> “Let us never fail to remember” the election of 1813, Root implored his fellow delegates, “when the votes of 300 Negroes...in the city of New York, decided the election in favor of the Federal party, and also decided the political character of the legislature of this state.”<sup>5</sup> Another delegate, speaking more frankly, stated simply, “The minds of blacks are not competent to vote.”<sup>6</sup>

White reporting surrounding the convention sounded a similar theme. “[Blacks] now assemble in groups,” wrote the famously venomous columnist, Mordecai Noah, “and since they have crept in favour with the convention, they are determined to have balls and quadrille parties, establish forum, solicit a seat in the assembly and outvote the whites. Our colored population increases daily...their votes in time will become formidable...and if they are organized and led by designing persons, they will give us great trouble.”<sup>7</sup> Noah’s warning matched a host of similar cautions he had previously issued about the free black population, including a column written the same week in which he had admonishingly blamed the increasing assertiveness of the city’s blacks on, “high wages, high living, and the elective franchise.”<sup>8</sup>

In the end, after living in a tense environment of gradual emancipation for more than 20 years, Republicans sponsored a successful provision that effectively eliminated the franchise for free blacks. To avoid an outright prohibition, which none could square with the ideals of the Revolution, delegates instead voted to increase the property requirements for black voters dramatically to 250 dollars.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, they eliminated all property requirements for whites. The new price

of the ballot proved so extravagant that, in the final analysis, fewer than 250 free blacks throughout the entire state remained eligible to vote under the new constitution. The event marked a decisive shift from republican ideology to a new strategy that aimed to disqualify voters on the explicit grounds of race.<sup>10</sup> It had taken four attempts for New York's government to successfully abolish slavery, but it took just one vote for the convention to virtually eliminate the rights of political citizenship for all but the wealthiest black New Yorkers. After more than 20 years of freedom, blacks found themselves mastered once again.

In the end, 2800 black New Yorkers would remain in bondage until slavery's very last day in New York.<sup>11</sup> The vast majority would remain shut out of the franchise for at least 50 more years. Even after the passage of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, many blacks would not be granted straightforward voting privileges in the state. Instead, their future would mirror the past as whites engaged in constant oscillation between the truest ideals of the Revolution and the deep anxieties that came with loosening the racial order. "White New Yorkers had not erased hierarchy," writes Patrick Rael of the 1821 Constitution. "They had merely downplayed old divisions of class and ethnicity among whites by asserting the new primacy of race."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, such misdirection and reconfiguration had happened before, and it would happen many more times in the wake of black disfranchisement.<sup>13</sup>

The slow birth and sudden death of freedom in New York testify that historical actors often appear to behave erratically. But as these episodes also make

clear, this instability often occurs not because individuals fail to think coherently, but precisely because coherent thinking may expose deep turns of complexity and ambiguity. The political maneuverings of black and white New Yorkers at the turn of the 19th century are as poorly viewed through the lens of ideological purity as through the lens of hypocrisy. Instead, we must view them through the lenses that New Yorkers themselves provide: lenses of uncertainty, anxiety and profound ambivalence. Doing so reveals elaborate constellations of identities caught in the crossfire of overlying interests at a moment of profound transition and deep ideological change.

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<sup>1</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery : African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863*, 117.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>5</sup> D.R. Fox, "The Negro Vote in Old New York," *Political Science Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (1917): 257.

<sup>6</sup> Gellman and Quigley, *Jim Crow New York : A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877*, 125.

<sup>7</sup> *National Advocate*, September 25 1821.

<sup>8</sup> "Mordecai Noah," *National Advocate*, September 24 1821.

<sup>9</sup> McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York*, 187.

<sup>10</sup> Gellman, *Emancipating New York : The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, 207.

<sup>11</sup> Hodges, *Root & Branch : African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, 224.

<sup>12</sup> Rael, "The Long Death of Slavery," 144.

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