

## Reconsidering the First Emancipation: Evidence from the Pennsylvania Abolition Society Correspondence, 1785-1810

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In December 1810, a frontier lawyer, identifying himself as "H.M. attorney at Law," wrote to Warner Mifflin, Jr., son of the Quaker abolitionist, regarding a young black man named Elijah Morris he had just interviewed in the Clarksville, Tennessee jail. Although unable to describe the youth's appearance, "for I only saw him thro' the grate," the correspondent related Morris's persuasive story of unlawful bondage which had forced him from an indenture in Delaware to a slave coffle on the Cumberland River, bound for Natchez and New Orleans. Morris and two others had escaped from the boat on which they were being transported, then captured and brought to Clarksville. From here, the attorney had been told, they would be taken to Natchez and sold. Appealing to the fame of his father, "Old Warner Mifflin of Pennsylvania," H.M. urged Mifflin to act quickly to spare Elijah permanent enslavement. An inquiry directed to the slave traders' agents or the Philadelphia merchants at Natchez, or to two other contacts, "like myself Members of the hated & slandered profession of lawyers," might determine the servant's ultimate destination. The attorney concluded hurriedly, "Farewell and in the cause of virtue may you always prosper."<sup>1</sup>

The tale of Elijah Morris was not an uncommon one. We know that Morris was well connected among abolition circles. He identified himself as the son of Sampson Morris who had been freed by Warner Mifflin, Sr., a prominent figure in the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and a founder of the Delaware Abolition Society. Sampson and his wife Polly, and presumably their son in his boyhood, lived in Dover, a hotbed of Methodist as well as Quaker abolitionism. As a teenager, Morris was indentured by Warner Mifflin, Jr.. His route to a slave train began when Mifflin sold his indenture, a common practice, to one Charles Hazzard, the commander of a small coasting vessel on the Delaware Bay. Hazzard sold Morris's time to another master, who drastically changed the terms of the youth's employment by selling him to the Maryland agent of Virginia slave trader Eliot Hackley.<sup>2</sup> Forced to go to Fredericksburg for shipment west, Morris identified himself as a free man to a local official who contacted the Mifflin family. Another sympathizer from Baltimore prepared to send for Morris's freedom papers. With these in hand, the city magistrate could then sue for Morris's freedom. By the time the Mifflins acted, however, one of the Hackleys, known as "a punctual man ... equal to the Business he is in," was already on route to Nashville, depot for markets further south, with seventy slaves in tow, Morris among them. It was under these

circumstances that the young man whom H.M. met in the Clarksville jail and his companions made their abortive escape.<sup>3</sup> Despite freedom at birth, powerful abolition connections, and "lighting-out" initiative that would have put Huckleberry Finn to shame, Elijah Morris, barely twenty years old in 1810, faced the prospect of spending the remainder of his life in illegal bondage.

Elijah Morris's narrative is one among many in the correspondence of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) recorded during the first twenty-five years of its antislavery advocacy from 1785 to 1810. This documentary record forms just one small part of a much larger evidential base. Many of the subjects that have recently concerned historians regarding the beginning of the end of northern slavery — the economic bases for slavery's decline, the role of free blacks and free black associations and churches, the persistence of racism — are not always illuminated by its contents. Nevertheless, the PAS correspondence opens to view the complex geographical, procedural, and cultural matrix that sustained and impeded the first antislavery movement and some of the reasons for its successes and failures. Comprised of nearly four hundred items, and composed by individuals in and outside the abolition movement, including Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, and African Methodists, slaveholders, slaves, freemen and women, northerners, southerners, and westerners, famous and not so famous figures, politicians, activists, and accidental actors in the antislavery drama, the PAS correspondence collectively suggests both the geographical expanse of the first emancipation movement and the extraordinary array of Americans drawn into its orbit.<sup>4</sup>

Several fresh observations regarding the geographical significance, activist legacy, and contextual ironies of the First Emancipation may be made from the letters to and from the PAS, beginning with the problem implicit in Elijah Morris's trajectory from the former "lower counties" of Pennsylvania to the new slavery frontier on the Mississippi River. First, the correspondence suggests the extent to which the First Emancipation was affected by regional exigencies. In a conventional sense, this observation is self-evident. Even before James Madison articulated to the assembled company in the Federal Convention in 1787 that the real division among the states was "not by their difference of size ... but principally from the effects of their having or not having slaves," the competing sectional interests that would result in the Civil War were in place as formative features of the American narrative.<sup>5</sup> Various historians of emancipation, furthermore, have studied the geographical variations that characterized the rise of abolitionism and the eventual demise of the slave trade and slavery in the Americas. David Brion Davis's life-work on the first expansion of antislavery is comparative by design, with trenchant analyses of abolitionists and the origins of their thought from London and Paris to Philadelphia, the West Indies, and Brazil.<sup>6</sup> The key issue of how antislavery was

implicated in the rise of industrial capitalism has also been given sharp comparative treatment by Seymour Drescher, one of Davis's critics, in a recent issue of the *American Historical Review*.<sup>7</sup>

Regional imperatives, however, did not derive their power simply from the varying geographical conditions that characterized antislavery, or solely from the fact that some areas in the United States were more obviously dependent on slave labor than others. They resulted as well from what a contemporary called the "contiguity" of free and slave states, or what one scholar calls the "bonds of interactivity" within colonial (and early national) regions.<sup>8</sup> The importance of regionalism is evident in the greater Middle Atlantic—encompassing the farms, towns, and hinterlands of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the counties of northern Maryland, from the Atlantic coastline to the headwaters of the Ohio River Valley—which provided the context of much of the PAS correspondence. Here substantial white and black populations lived and labored side by side, and a substantial free black population first came together, providing critical raw material for historical interpretation of both the limits and the accomplishments of the First Emancipation, in effect the process by which emancipation was shaped.<sup>9</sup> Richard Dunn's revelatory and wide-ranging explorations into the rise, decline, and persistence of slavery in the Caribbean and Chesapeake underscore the importance of the proximity of slave and free states for the mixed legacy of slavery in the greater Middle Atlantic. As Dunn writes, in the years 1776-1810, "a crucial transition period in Chesapeake black life," slavery fell into a steady decline in the Maryland counties just south of the Mason-Dixon line. At the same time, "[d]espite the military, religious, ideological, and economic pressures upon them, the Virginia and Maryland statesmen of the Revolutionary era made few legal and institutional changes in their slave system."<sup>10</sup>

Second, the PAS correspondence confirms that enforcement of the First Emancipation was carried out by a cadre of dedicated activists, white and black, long after manumission was legalized in the south and emancipation laws were passed by the northern states. The importance of court cases to early antislavery is stressed in Arthur Zilversmit's pioneering work, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North*, the only comprehensive study of the legislative end of northern slavery. It is also important in Paul Finkelman's superb treatment of federalism and the collapse of comity (the legal recognition of the laws of one state by another) regarding slavery in the decades before the Civil War, a study which further underscores the impact of interstate and intraregional relations in the era of the First Emancipation.<sup>11</sup> In *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*, Gary Nash has brilliantly profiled the emergence of a free black community in post-war Philadelphia, the result of the first major migrations of blacks from south to north in United States history, and this community's struggles in a "City of

Refuge” soon to be transformed by industrialization and the rising tide of nineteenth-century racism. As Nash suggests in a further study, *Race and Revolution*, these were struggles that white legislators and other men with access to legislative and constitutional power largely failed to support. Similarly, in *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath*, Nash and Jean Soderlund have traced the “tug of war between ideological commitments and economic interests” that simultaneously drove and inhibited emancipation in Pennsylvania, including the critical role of a socially diverse PAS in the years following the passage of Pennsylvania’s gradual emancipation law of 1780.<sup>12</sup>

Overwhelmingly, however, students of American antislavery have focused on the era of radical abolitionism, beginning with the publication of William Lloyd Garrison’s *the Liberator* in 1831, rather than on the early years of the republic when an emancipationist strategy was first devised. The later antislavery vanguard — Garrison, Douglass, Phillips, the Tappans, Grimké, and Stantons, Mott and Kelley — have left a vivid impression on the historical landscape through their own writings and those of their biographers and chroniclers.<sup>13</sup> By contrast, the white activists of the First Emancipation — including in Philadelphia, for example, James and John Pemberton, Isaac T. Hopper, Miers Fisher, and Thomas Harrison — are in danger of being caricatured as “industrial apologists,” as have been a number of the first British abolitionists.<sup>14</sup> Yet, with the widespread breaking of abolition laws, the uncertainty of public opinion regarding slavery, and the absence of Congressional action, they and their black counterparts — James Forten, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and other early members of the Free African Society — faced as great an uphill battle as their antebellum counterparts. The success of emancipation frequently depended, as Nash and Soderlund write, on “a small band of reformers who used their legal skills and political savvy to win piecemeal concessions for former slaves from a largely unsympathetic society.”<sup>15</sup>

The main goal of the first abolitionists was to enforce the state manumission and emancipation laws, beginning with Pennsylvania’s gradual emancipation act of 1780. Tench Coxe, Secretary of the Society, wrote regarding the origins of the PAS and the Pennsylvania law: “[M]any persons of nice feelings & humane sentiments had taken up a plan of opposing the encrease & promoting the gradual abolition of Slavery in america before the late War.” He continued:

The frequent sincere & earnest assertions & discussion of the natural rights of mankind which took place during that time led the friends of the Revolution to interest themselves in the plan, & a law was obtained in their state for the safe & regular effecting of this Desirable purpose. A Society has been formed to assist the operation of

the law, & particularly to secure such blacks as are really free, that Liberty, which from the want of money or abilities, they might not successfully assert.<sup>16</sup>

Activists responded to cases brought to them by servants and slaves, or aggressively sought out likely clients, winning freedom suits and other forms of arbitration by their attention to the quotidian detail of judicial proceedings and labor negotiations.<sup>17</sup> One comes away from the PAS correspondence with a renewed appreciation of the degree to which the First Emancipation was a daily struggle, and, like the much later Civil Rights Movement, dependent on the audacity and courage of civil rights claimants (in this case slaves, servants, and free people) and their advocates, including (in the attorney H.M.'s words) "the hated & slandered profession of lawyers."

The greater part of Coxe's statement on the origins of the Abolition Society brings into focus as well a third observation that may be made regarding the end of greater Middle Atlantic slavery: its complex relationship to the Revolutionary movement. Numerous passages in the PAS correspondence confirm that the early abolitionists, including those like the Pembertons who had suffered as religious dissenters during the war, envisioned themselves as upholders of the Revolution's libertarian claims. As James Pemberton, head of the PAS's Committee of Correspondence and later President of the Society, wrote to the Marquis de Lafayette in 1788: "The present age has been distinguished by a remarkable revolution. The human mind has felt the effects of it. Mankind begin at last to consider themselves as members of one family...."<sup>18</sup> Archibald McClean in Alexandria, Virginia, boldly asserted that the contradictions between the egalitarian rhetoric of the Revolution and the social reality of slavery would force a "disposition" against slavery "to pervade not only this whole State, but every other Aristocratical Republican State of the union, where men make pompous declamations in favour of Liberty & Equality, whilst they hold in abject & degraded bondage multitudes of their unhappy fellow Creatures, for no other reason than that they differ from them in Colour."<sup>19</sup> Thirty-four years after the Revolutionary war, the attorney H.M. in Clarksville could still salute the son of Warner Mifflin with the republican salvo, "in the cause of virtue may you always prosper." Whether emerging from religious, republican, or liberal roots, or the peculiarly American combination of all three, the first abolitionists shared what Joyce Appleby has called "the original passion of liberal reformers" of the Revolutionary generation.<sup>20</sup>

But the connections between the first antislavery movement and the Revolutionary movement were by no means straightforward. Coxe's statement cited above includes at least several ironies. First, although the PAS was a largely Quaker organization, Coxe stresses instead the political origins of the Society, emanating from the "nice feelings & humane sentiments" and "sin-

cere & earnest assertions & discussion of the natural rights of mankind" that accompanied the war, rather than the Society's religious beginnings. In this way, Coxe implies, the plan for gradual emancipation was brought to the attention of "the friends of the Revolution" and thence to successful legislative fruition. Writing to English Quaker David Barclay around the same time, Coxe refers more liberally to the PAS's religious origins, helping to establish the historical myth that the Society of Friends had always opposed slavery. Coxe suggests again, however, that since "the friends of the revolution" maintained "that the blessings of freedom were the rightful inheritance of the whole human species," the condition of slaves were brought "more immediately into public view," and the Gradual Emancipation Law of 1780 was passed, "to the great satisfaction of her citizens, and to the lasting honor of her Legislature."<sup>21</sup> The PAS, that is, recognized that transition to free social relations in a democratic republic required the adoption of the language of a Revolution that many of their members had earlier rejected and the cultivation of public opinion to which they had been relatively indifferent during the war.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, although the Revolutionaries in and outside Pennsylvania espoused the unalienable natural rights of mankind, under the new law, "An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery," passed by the legislature on March 1, 1780, some blacks were "really free," to use Coxe's phrase, others were not, and still others were somewhere in between. As Nash and Soderlund write: "The law freed not a single slave."<sup>23</sup> Under its provisions, the act outlawed the enslavement of "Negroes and Mulattoes" born after the date of its passage, required the registration of all slaves without which an individual automatically was deemed free, and prohibited the binding out of black servants twenty-one years of age or older for any "personal servitude or apprenticeship" longer than seven years. But the children of slave mothers born after the passage of the act paid most of the expense of their liberation by working as indentured servants to age twenty-eight, and the rights of those blacks remaining enslaved under the law (those born before its passage), particularly the right to testify against whites, were not enhanced. In "An Act to Explain and Amend" the 1780 law, passed in 1788, weaknesses in the protection of slaves were counteracted, particularly those relating to the crossing of state boundaries. Among its measures the new law strengthened the provision that slaves brought permanently into the state were "deemed and taken to be free," and provided for the further punishment of slave traders and kidnapers. It also prohibited the involuntary removal or sale of slaves or servants out of state and the involuntary separation of husbands, wives, and children four years of age or younger at a distance of more than ten miles.<sup>24</sup> But Pennsylvania's concern for relations with its southern neighbors — the problem of comity prompted at least in part by contiguity — remained in the provisions of the 1780 law that protected for up to six months the property rights of slaveholders traveling through

Pennsylvania and of members of Congress and out-of-state and foreign office-holders. The act, furthermore, guaranteed the return of runaways to their masters, in or out of state: the first fugitive slave clause in American law.<sup>25</sup>

The first emancipationists were aware that the formal system of gradual emancipation protected the property rights of slaveowners. It is likely that the majority of activists in fact favored this stance. Others, furthermore, were less than friendly to the presence of black people in what they perceived as a white nation. In the words of Jacob Cooke, biographer of Tench Coxe, the PAS spokesman cited above, whatever Coxe's antislavery enthusiasm and ideological eloquence, he was an "unwitting Negrophobe" throughout his life.<sup>26</sup> But from the correspondence of the PAS it is also apparent that an influential number of early abolitionists chose to interpret the law in favor of the freedom rights of black people rather than property rights of whites. So complained Peter Duplessis in July 1794, who cited the support of the rights of slaves over slaveholders by members of the PAS as his reason for resigning from the Society: "whatever may be the private Sentiments & wishes of Individuals, an entire & equal justice, as well to the Masters as to the Slaves, was contemplated by the Legislature & is generally intended by the Society." New Jersey Quaker William Newbold likewise reprimanded a member of the PAS for antislavery strategies "tack'd to the abolition System," particularly those favoring runaway slaves, which he believed were contrary to the provisions of the 1780 law. The law, Newbold concluded without apparent irony, was "more consistant with mutual justice both to the oppressed & oppressors."<sup>27</sup>

Thus, while property had the law on its side, a bias which many northerners were loathe to change, other activist abolitionists were inspired by a larger and less conventional vision of human rights — one that converged more closely with the worldview of African Americans who had also adopted the language of "equal & universal liberty." In this respect the Revolution appears to have produced a remarkable meeting of minds among abolitionists and African Americans regarding the meaning and possibilities of human freedom, charged by religious and political convictions, as well as an increased awareness of the importance of shaping white popular opinion.<sup>28</sup>

Evidence relating to each of these observations — the relevance of a regional perspective, the significance of the first abolitionists and their approach to emancipation, and the complex relationship of emancipation to the Revolution — is replete in the numerous letters written to and from the PAS in the first years of its operation.

Beginning with the case of Dinah Nevil and her children, the *cause célèbre* that marked the founding of the first version of the Abolition Society in 1775 — in which an Indian woman from New Jersey protested her and her children's sale to a slaveholder in Virginia<sup>29</sup> — the PAS became a clearing house for reports of kidnaping and illegal sale or transport of slaves across state bound-

aries. From one of a number of areas in western Pennsylvania troubled by illegal slave trading, the Washington County Abolition Society reported in 1789 that the state's laws were "violated with impunity, & that humane & merciful scheme [of gradual emancipation] in many instances defeated."<sup>30</sup> The following year three Fayette County Quakers contacted James Pemberton regarding the numbers of slaves, recently as many as one hundred, sent down river to Kentucky and some to New Orleans. Relaying the difficulties of the task they had taken on, the correspondents complained of the lack of public support and widespread corruption in their county government: "we have the prejudice of the people, the Disapprobation of the Majestrates[,] fals Records, and corrupt officers to contend with."<sup>31</sup> In 1795, David Redick, an attorney in Washington, Pennsylvania reported to Pemberton that despite the outlawing of the sale of blacks out of state, their oppression continued due to the "contiguity" of Virginia, where slavery and the domestic slave trade were legal, and especially of the Ohio River, the major commercial conduit to the territories. Several blacks in the area were brazenly harassed in daylight hours by bands of armed men, and two free people had recently been seized: a man who managed to escape, and a woman, taken in irons into Indian country. She was released only after several "Negroe People" identified the perpetrators, among them soldiers from the occupying Federal forces, and reported the incident to Alexander Addison, president of the County Court. Addison, an abolitionist, issued a warrant for the claimant's arrest and the woman was released, although abused and still threatened with capture.<sup>32</sup>

Nor were illegal seizures carried out by physical force alone. A number of cases reported or brought to the PAS had begun with a legal transaction, but ended with vital information withheld regarding the eventuality or timing of the slave's emancipation, or the financial condition of the master, especially when the slave or servant was claimed as an asset by creditors or heirs. John Kensey of Wilmington, Delaware sought out an advocate when the executors of his former master William Cummings's estate threatened to sell him and his wife for debts, even though, as the correspondent to the PAS remarked, Cummings was thought to be in "tolerable circumstances" when he bought Kensey and his wife's time.<sup>33</sup> The young slave Dinah, daughter of Indian and black parents, was manumitted — promised freedom — at age eighteen by John Pritchard of Newark, Delaware in his will, and sent to work for his daughter. She was sold to two traders before she came of age, however, and fled to Philadelphia, where she lived temporarily with Thomas Harrison, the long-time member of the PAS's Acting Committee. This interlude ended when she was seized by one of the traders again and taken directly to Natchez.<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, considering the increasing value of slave labor in the southwestern states where servants like Dinah were headed, the problem of unlawful enslavement and kidnapping only worsened with time. By 1809, the PAS's



Acting Committee, according to the chairman of the Committee of Correspondence, was spending much of its energies on cases where blacks from free states had been forced by one means or another into the slave states.<sup>35</sup>

Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania / Pennsylvania Abolition Society

Chestertown July 13<sup>th</sup> 1832 6-7  
 Mr. Abraham Green is in Hagers town  
 Long time as a Slave. if you would be  
 so kind as to send a copy of his Manamission  
 to this Town by post to Mr. Mathew  
 Patton he will be at Liberty I beg you  
 will send it immediately at Receipt of this  
 Letter. Do not Neglect send soon  
 he was taken at Duck Creek Cross Roads  
 Last March was a year by Georgi men  
 and sold him to a man in Hagerstown  
 if you send the copy soon he will  
 get paid for what time has been  
 there No more but am yr. friend  
 and well wisher  
 Mathew Patton

Mathew Patton of Chestertown, Maryland writes to African American contacts in Philadelphia regarding the kidnaping of Abraham Green. Green has been seized at Duck Creek Cross Roads, Delaware by "Georgi(a) Men" – professional slave traders – and sold to "a man in H(a)gerstown." A copy of Green's "Manamission" paper will set him free and provide legal grounds for compensation for the time he has worked as a slave.

Reports of such cases, exacerbated by the promixity of free and slave states in the Middle Atlantic, came from a widespread network of activists willing and able to take on the demands incurred by legal prosecution and other forms of labor arbitration. In addition to the religious and political ideology shared by fellow activists, to which I will return in a moment, these antislavery advocates were tied together, as already suggested, by their under-

standing that the main task at hand was enforcement of laws already on the books. Their goal, as the Washington Society put it, was to unite “in a cause so interesting to humanity to carry the laws of nature & this Commonwealth, in every case that may come to our knowledge, into speedy & effectual execution.”<sup>36</sup>

How speedy an execution depended on the particularities of the case, but central to the process was the legal challenge, frequently sought by slaves or servants themselves. A representative case was that of Winney, the former servant of Joel Gustin, originally of Virginia. In 1794 Gustin, a physician, and Winney—judging by the later demand for her services, an accomplished nurse—moved to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. After six months, Gustin and a local justice of peace signed a certification stating that in accordance with the gradual emancipation laws of Pennsylvania, Winney was now a free person. Winney continued to live with Gustin for approximately two years. She then returned to a former master’s household in Culpepper County, Virginia on the promise of free employment by his family. Sometime afterwards, the promise was broken and Winney was sold as a slave within Virginia. In the early 1800s, she sued for her freedom in the Culpepper County Court, based on the 1794 certification.<sup>37</sup>

The key issues in Winney’s case were verification of her identity as Gustin’s servant and whether the certification which she now provided the court was a legal instrument in Pennsylvania. In 1806 and 1807, Winney’s court-appointed attorney, John W. Green, referring sympathetically to his client’s predicament in a state which had outlawed private assistance to blacks in their suits for freedom, wrote to the PAS asking if the certification operated a complete emancipation according to Pennsylvania’s laws, or whether it might be perfected so to operate.<sup>38</sup> In response, the PAS’s agent, Thomas Harrison, directed Green’s inquiries to one of the Society’s legal correspondents in Harrisburg. Since Winney’s certification did not follow the letter of the law as a manumission document, the correspondent doubted its validity, but he suggested that it might be used as a “written testimonial, that was to apperate as evidence of [Gustin’s] residence in the state, beyond the [limit] fixed by law, and consequently evidence of her freedom.” Winney’s identity, however, might be more difficult to verify. As the correspondent explained: “After a lapse of ten or twelve years, it will be extremely difficult to make proof of the age, statu[r]e, complexion, etc. of Winney, unless she was personally present.” He suggested that Harrison write to another antislavery supporter now living in Trenton, who had kept a record of the circumstances of every black person in Harrisburg for use in disputed cases of emancipation.<sup>39</sup> Despite these apparent drawbacks, the suit was resolved “with little difficulty” in Winney’s favor by the Culpepper County Court. The Court at the same time freed her son, born since his mother’s return to Virginia, and possibly the original inspiration for the suit.<sup>40</sup>

Several features of this case are worth highlighting. First, Winney's suit was brought by the servant herself who also provided the critical legal proof: the certification of her six months' residence in Pennsylvania. Second, Winney's personal history did not follow a straight-arrow transition from slavery to manumission to freedom, or even manumission to indenture to freedom; rather her re-enslavement followed several years' employment as a free woman for her former owner, and then what may have been as many years at the residence of her later employer before she was sold. Third, Winney's case was brought a number of years after the event, partly because of foot-dragging on the part of the Culpepper County Court, but possibly as well from Winney's own process of decision-making or the speed with which vital information, perhaps even the residence certification itself, traveled to her. Fourth, the prosecution of Winney's suit depended on an informed network of abolitionist supporters operating in the free and slave states alike; it appears, for example, that her Virginia counsel fit this description, working as he did for a client unlikely to win the sympathies of Virginia slaveholders. Fifth, the prosecution of the suit was characterized by fastidious attention to documentary verification, necessarily a part of successful claims, petitions, and suits for freedom, and based on freelance research undertaken by the plaintiff's supporters. Sixth, all these things accomplished, Winney and her offspring were freed.

Winney's experience illustrates the relatively numerous conditions and the critical legal gauntlet through which slaves and servants traveled before cases were likely to be resolved in their favor. Nevertheless, cases were won, perhaps fairly regularly through this period, and slaves' and servants' claims to freedom proliferated, possibly even boomed. Revealing examples appear in the PAS correspondence. A slave named Sharp living in Delaware, after a delay of nine years, "demanded his Liberty" based on provisions in his former master's will, a copy of which he had procured as proof.<sup>41</sup> Slaves in Easton, Maryland besieged a local attorney with repeated solicitations for freedom.<sup>42</sup> A group of free people in Accomack, Virginia, who had been tricked into slavery by a devious family lawyer, labored through three different suits to regain their former status.<sup>43</sup> A black couple sued for freedom in the Scott County Circuit Court in Kentucky based on their involuntary removal from Pennsylvania.<sup>44</sup>

Also proliferating was the labor of abolitionists: verifying documentation of manumissions and slave sales,<sup>45</sup> seeking back pay for manumitted servants held past their time,<sup>46</sup> distributing copies of the PAS Constitution, the Pennsylvania Gradual Emancipation Laws, and abolition literature,<sup>47</sup> and going to court for servant plaintiffs in cases they knew would form legal precedents.<sup>48</sup> A posture of legal strategizing was developed by some. The Quakers struggling with corruption in Fayette County were "concerned that Justice mite be delt out to all men and in this we are much stratened to know what to

Do with many of the pore unfortunate afracans that are amongst us Particularly with Regard to the manner or method of Recording them." Is it not the case, they asked the PAS, that "Every Exposition in the fift section for the gradual abolition of slavery should be complied with?" that is, regarding the proper registration of slaves. When the PAS responded that the register that the group had copied into one of their letters appeared to be correctly recorded, their correspondents wrote back angrily that they had been led to believe that "Every Expression of the Law should have been complied with," which the correspondents still believed was not the case, "otherwise [continued enslavement] was not lawful."<sup>49</sup>

In another case in which the PAS protested a petition to extend a servant's time, Thomas Harrison contacted a Marcus Hook official regarding the servant's circumstances: "The Situation of Negress Florah — now with William Burnes has Long Claimed the Sympathy of the Committee of the Abolition Society because She was an Entire Stranger until lately of her Situation as to Length of Time She was to remain in Possession of William Burnes." As Harrison explained further: "She was the Slave of Archebald Dick and as Sutch Registered by Derection of the Law of 1780 — Archebald Dick for a Valuable Consideration Transferrd her to Hannah Kerleng (now the wife of William Burnes) until She Should be 35 Years old *which is this Day[.]*" To the assertion now made by Florah's employers that the Court extend her service for the time she spent in Philadelphia pursuing legal advice, Harrison suggested ironically that it was unlikely "Damages or Servitude" could be levied on her "for misdemeaner or Pretended misdemeaner," since as "a Slave who is to Serve all the Days of his or her Life & is hired or Sold for a Limited time," which, up until this day, Florah was, she could not very well have her time extended.<sup>50</sup> The PAS, furthermore, were not the only activists laboring along these lines. If the actions of Richard Allen — the African Methodist and central figure in Philadelphia's free black community — are meaningful, by the 1800s innovative black abolitionists were hiring attorneys to consult on manumission cases and to keep plaintiffs informed of the provisions of the laws and their rights.<sup>51</sup>

Finally, the full complexity of the relationship between the rise of this antislavery activism to the fervor of the Revolution appears in the PAS correspondence after the war. While the abolitionists used the language of universal freedom to support the claims of slaves and servants to their liberation, the correspondence of religious adherents in the movement — Quakers, Presbyterians, Methodists, and African Methodists among others — suggests the power of religious conviction that lay behind the "conversion" to the antislavery cause among whites and blacks alike.<sup>52</sup>

Religious and political inspirations for antislavery, in fact, are difficult to separate in the correspondence. Invoking the missionary, millennial, and natural philosophical worldviews that went into the making of the antislavery *mentalité*,

Alexander Addison, the Washington County abolitionist, wrote to James Pemberton in 1793:

In Pennsylvania at least it will not be thought fanatical to protect man though black, and improve him though born in Africa. Those cruel prejudices which have so long given man a property in man seem to wear out faster than their friends could have supposed. And America, that has given such outrageous specimens to the world of national and domestick oppression seems desirous to make some atonement for her offence by being foremost in the example of restoring to individuals and to people the free influence of the rights of nature.<sup>53</sup>

In this one brief passage Addison seamlessly combines the major themes of late eighteenth-century antislavery thought: The call for human improvement and the overcoming of what enlightened Americans now defined as “prejudices”; the rejection of the principle of property in man; the identification of slavery with oppression; and the call for national atonement and restoration of natural rights wrongfully seized from black people.

It is also evident from Addison's letter that the first abolitionists were intensely politically aware. In this they were the direct heirs of the Revolutionary agitation and democratic aspirations. Hence, the remainder of Addison's letter addresses the practical problem of tapping into public opinion, with schemes for assisting slaves that were “congenial to the feelings and sentiments of the people of Pennsylvania.” “The voice of Pennsylvania,” Addison continues, “has already stamp'd a strong sanction” on the idea that slaveholders were beholden to “the general good” and liable to community censure for mistreatment of their slaves.<sup>54</sup>

Reflections on the voice of the people and the importance of public opinion run through the PAS correspondence.<sup>55</sup> As James Pemberton wrote to the *Société des Amis des Noirs* in Paris in 1791: “the Principles of Abolition are gaining ground rapidly in our country, & it is this happy change in the opinions of our fellow Citizens that we conceive to be the surest foundation for erecting in future times the glorious superstructure of just & equal liberty.” In Maryland, William Pinkney, a state legislator, perhaps more realistically identified changing the mind of the people as the single most difficult problem for the abolitionists and their clients. “The Progress of that liberal policy which has already distinguished Pennsylv<sup>a</sup>,” he wrote to Pemberton, “will be here slow & gradual.” The people, he continued, “must be led on by imperceptible Degrees to what they ought to do at once, and the public Mind must be taught by a Series of Legislative Interpositions in favour of Slaves” with the understanding that “they have Rights to which they ought to be restored.

Strange that this Lesson remains to be enforced at the Close of the seven-teenth Century.” Turning to the legacy of two hundred years of racism, Pinkney added:

I know of no Question attended with more Obstacles than that which relates to the Africans. It is difficult to conquer hereditary prejudices — to silence fears for the public Safety — to excite Compassion for those on whom we have been accustomed to look without it — to make men just where Iniquity has for years been fashionable and familiar — and to conquer the Struggles of Self-Interest by opposing to it a Sense of Duty or Motives of Pity — And yet before civil Slavery can be abolished all this must be done[.]<sup>56</sup>

We know that the first abolitionists failed to end slavery in the United States. Congress was initially unresponsive to the call for abolition of the slave trade, much less slavery, and the same representative bodies — state legislatures — that slowly instituted emancipation in the northern states, resisted it in the southern and new southwestern states.<sup>57</sup> For manumitted slaves, kidnaped free people, and illegally indentured servants, guarantee of their freedom depended on luck, good contacts, accident, rumor, and detective work within the limits of a system of gradual emancipation that varied from state to state but consistently favored property holders.

Accordingly, it would be a travesty to conclude that the First Emancipation worked wonders for African Americans, the vast majority of whom remained enslaved until the passage of the 13th Amendment. As Richard Dunn has observed regarding the Chesapeake, “For some Chesapeake blacks, the Revolution was indeed the first big step toward freedom. For most, however, there was as yet no revolution at all.”<sup>58</sup> Similarly, Gary Nash concludes *Forging Freedom*: “Not until the second quarter of the twentieth century would black Philadelphians witness the beginning of a reversal of the segregationist and exclusionary forces set in motion in the early nineteenth.”<sup>59</sup>

As these historians have also skillfully shown, however, the Revolution, and the antislavery agitation that accompanied it, permanently altered the racial demography of the Middle Atlantic broadly defined. In the “border” state of Maryland, despite William Pinkney’s pessimism, thousands of blacks were freed by manumission in the years after the Revolutionary war. By 1810 free people formed a majority of the black population of the city of Baltimore. In Philadelphia and New York City and their hinterlands, the slave population plummeted and free blacks clustered in new, expanding communities, tied to intentionally “African” associations and Baptist and Methodist churches, under a new and vital black leadership.<sup>60</sup> As Kitty Lewis, a black Methodist

living near Haddonfield, New Jersey, wrote to her cousin further south in 1803: "I have never repented coming to this part [of] the cou[n]try."<sup>61</sup>

A rhetoric of freedom, finally, definitionally dependent on but oppositionally exclusive of the language of slavery, was making its mark on the way Americans, black and white, talked about their essential identity.<sup>62</sup> Two poignant examples, from individuals worlds apart, illustrate this point. In 1805, Hannah Groves, an elderly slave in Caldwell, New Jersey contacted her son Cato, "the fidler," in Philadelphia in hopes that he would purchase her time from an indifferent master. In her note Groves writes of her deepest aspirations. "I am a poor old servant[.] I long for freedom. ... If you have any love for your poor old Mother pray come or send to me."<sup>63</sup> To return to Elijah Morris, the Delaware servant with whose narrative this essay began: by January 1811, Morris was still in Tennessee, now moved to the Gallatin County jail. His jailer, a white man named Mathew Neate, wrote to Morris's former master Warner Mifflin urging him to act quickly to free Morris. "Delay not a minute if you wish him to be set at Liberty," Neate stresses. Like the other Americans involved with deconstructing or upholding the slave system after the Revolution, Neate knew exactly what he needed: the names of two or three Delaware magistrates to whom he could send depositions to verify Elijah's free status. Above all, he was familiar with the mutual dependency of the language of slavery and freedom. "[O]blige the boy Elijah Morres," Neate ends his letter, "as the thought of Slavery is Death to a free man."<sup>64</sup>

## Notes

The author gratefully thanks Gary Nash, Jean Soderlund, Leslie Patrick, and Steve Deyle for their thoughtful comments on this essay. Steve Whitman and Lynne Goodman provided last minute insights.

1. H.M., Attorney at Law, to Warner Mifflin, 15 December 1810, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Collection (microfilm publication), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1976, Reel 12 [hereafter cited by reel #].
2. H.M., Attorney at Law, to Warner Mifflin, 15 December 1810, and Mathew Neate to Warner Mifflin, 4 January 1810 [1811], Reel 12.
3. "I am sorry Justice can not be obtained," Christy wrote to Daniel Mifflin, 25 October 1810, Reel 12. The Tennessee correspondents refer to "Alexander" Hackley, likely a relation of Eliot Hackley, also in the slave trading business.
4. The formal title of the Society on its reorganization in 1787 was the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and the Relief of Free Negroes, Unlawfully Held in Bondage. The correspondence may be found in two letterbooks and loose correspondence on Reel #s 11, 12, and 15.
5. James Madison, *Notes of Debates in the Federal Convention of 1787* (1966; paperback ed., New York, 1969), 224.
6. The first two books of Davis's projected trilogy are: *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, 1966) and *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770-1823* (Ithaca, 1975).
7. Seymour Drescher, "The Long Goodbye: Dutch Capitalism and Antislavery in Comparative Perspective," *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 44-69. See also Stanley L. Engerman, "Slavery and Emancipation in Comparative Perspective: A Look At Some Recent Debates," *Journal of Economic History* 46 (1986): 317-39, essays by Thomas L. Haskell, John Ashworth, and Davis in Thomas Bender, ed., *The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation* (Berkeley, 1992); and Seymour Drescher, "Review Essay: The Antislavery Debate: Capitalism and Abolitionism as a Problem in Historical Interpretation,"

*History and Theory* 32 (1993): 311-29. Davis modified his argument in *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984).

8. David Redick to James Pemberton, President, PAS, 24 May 1795, Letterbook 2, Reel 11; Wayne Bodle, "The Fabricated Region: On the Insufficiency of the 'Colonies' for Understanding American Colonial History," Paper presented to the Seminar in Early American History, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, 29 June 1996, p. 27.

9. For an even broader definition of the Middle Atlantic, see D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, vol. 1, *Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (New Haven, 1986), 87-160. On regionalization, see Wayne Bodle, "The 'Myth of the Middle Colonies' Reconsidered: The Process of Regionalization in Early America," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 113 (1989): 527-48. On the regional expanse of the slave trade, see new work by Steven Deyle: "By farr the most profitable trade": Slave Trading in British Colonial North America," *Slavery and Abolition* 10 (1989): 107-25, "The Irony of Liberty: Origins of the Domestic Slave Trade," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12 (1992): 37-62, and "The Domestic Slave Trade in America" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1995).

10. Richard S. Dunn, "Black Society in the Chesapeake, 1776-1810," in *Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution*, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Urbana, 1983), 81. See also Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (1974; Oxford: 1981).

11. Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967); Paul Finkelman, *An Imperfect Union: Slavery, Federalism, and Comity* (Chapel Hill, 1981). See also Stanley I. Kutler, "Pennsylvania Courts, The Abolition Act, and Negro Rights," *Pennsylvania History* 30 (1963): 14-27, Thomas D. Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780-1861* (Baltimore, 1974), 1-41, and Robert M. Cover, *Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process* (New Haven, 1975).

12. Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The For-*



matation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840 (Cambridge, MA, 1988); idem, *Race and Revolution* (Madison, WI, 1990); idem and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and its Aftermath* (New York, 1991), xiv, 115-18. For Soderlund's definitive study of colonial Quakers, slavery, and antislavery, see *Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton, 1985). See also Gary B. Nash, "Forging Freedom: The Emancipation Experience in the Northern Seaport Cities, 1775-1820," in *Slavery and Freedom*, 3-48, Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia, 1988), and Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, GA, 1991).

13. A recent biography is William F. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York, 1991). For overviews, see James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Society* (New York, 1976) as well as essays in Lewis Perry and Michael Fellman, eds., *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists* (Baton Rouge, 1979) and Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca, 1994). The major documentary collection on the black movement is C. Peter Ripley, et al., eds., *The Black Abolitionist Papers* (Chapel Hill, 1985-92), vol. 3. Julie Saville provides insightful remarks on "the heterogeneous circumstances from which African-Americans who campaigned against slavery forged a sense of solidarity": "Scholarship and Passion: Reconsidering the Campaign Against Slavery," in *Common Knowledge* 2 (1993): 118-24.

14. See Thomas C. Holt in "Of Human Progress and Intellectual Apostasy," *Reviews in American History* 15 (1987): 50-58, a review of *Slavery and Human Progress*, which supports Davis's earlier contention in *The Age of Revolution* that the first abolitionists were from a narrow stratum of Anglo-American society. Recent research has suggested that antislavery activists came from all levels of society, including Paineite radicals: see James Walvin, "The Rise of British Popular Sentiment for Abolition, 1787-1832," in *Anti-Slavery, Religion,*

*and Reform: Essays in Memory of Richard Anstey*, ed. Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (Folkestone, Kent, 1980), 149-62, and Eric Foner, "Abolitionism and the Labor Movement in Antebellum America," in *ibid.*, 254-71.

15. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 202.

16. Tench Coxe to Benjamin Yard, 28 December 1786, copy, Reel 15.

17. The Abolition societies, particularly the PAS, were known to be aggressively litigious; the PAS in particular argued "hundreds" of cases before the Civil War: Finkelman, *Imperfect Union*, 49-50, 62-63n.

18. [Comm. of Corr., PAS] to Marquis de Lafayette [c. 1788], draft, Reel 15.

19. Arch[ibal]d McClean to William Rogers, 23 February 1795, Letterbook 2, Reel 11.

20. Joyce Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 32.

21. Of the Quaker origins of antislavery Coxe writes: "In the early days of Pennsylvania, exceptions grounded in equity & good conscience, were taken by many, especially of the people called Quakers to the importation of Africans from their native country as well as to holding in slavery any colored people whatever." [Tench Coxe] to David Barclay, 6 March 1787, MS copy, Reel 15. We now know how much later the Quaker antislavery conviction developed: see Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*.

22. On the Pembertons, see Richard Bauman, *For the Reputation of Truth: Politics, Religion, and Conflict Among the Pennsylvania Quakers, 1750-1800* (Baltimore, 1971), 241-42. For an assessment of the PAS's attempts to shape public policy regarding the slave trade which makes use of the PAS correspondence, see William C. diGiacomantonio, "'For the Gratification of a Volunteering Society': Antislavery and Pressure Group Politics in the First Federal Congress," *Journal of the Early Republic* 15 (1995): 169-75.

23. Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 111.

24. Texts of the 1780 and 1788 laws, partially abstracted, are reprinted in Finkelman, *Law of Freedom and Bondage*, 42-49. A number of provocative commentaries exist on the 1780 and 1788 laws: see Silversmit, *First Emanci-*

pation, 124-37, Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, "Philanthropy at Bargain Prices: Notes on the Economics of Gradual Emancipation," *Journal of Legal Studies* 3 (1974): 377-401, Cover, *Justice Accused*, 62-67, Finkelman, *Imperfect Union*, 46-69, Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 60-65, Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 100-113, and Leslie Patrick, "Freedom Evaporated: The Nasty Contradiction in Pennsylvania's Emancipation Act," Paper presented to the Organization of American Historians, Chicago, IL, 29 March 1996.

25. Finkelman, *Imperfect Union*, 46-49, 48n.

26. On the withdrawal of wealthier supporters of the PAS in the 1790s, see Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, 130. See also White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 80-88, on the New York Manumission Society. On Coxe see Jacob E. Cooke, *Tench Coxe and the New Republic* (Chapel Hill, 1978), 512-516. The author thanks Leslie Patrick for this last reference.

27. Peter Le B. Duplessis to James Pemberton, President, PAS, 2 July 1794, Reel 11; William Newbold to Thomas Harrison, 1/6M/1802, Reel 12.

28. The phrase appears in John Hough, Robert Loller, Nath[anie]l Irwin, Directors, Union Library Company, Harborough, [PA] to James Pemberton, President, PAS, 30 March 1792, Reel 11. On African Americans' adoption of the rhetoric of the Revolution, see Ira Berlin, "The Revolution in Black Life," in *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb, IL, 1976), 349-82, Benjamin Quarles, "The Revolutionary War as a Black Declaration of Independence," in *Slavery and Freedom*, 283-301, Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 38-65, and idem, *Race and Revolution*, 57-87.

29. See reference to the case in Jeffrey Nordlinger Bumbrey, "Historical Sketch," in *A Guide to the Microfilm Publication of the Papers of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society* (Philadelphia, 1976), 7-8. Thomas Harrison elaborated sometime afterwards in "To the Committee appointed on my application to the Abolition Society," n.d., Reel 11: With corroborating evidence supporting Nevil's claim, the Mayor confined the family to the

city workhouse to await investigation and a jury trial. The trial was delayed for two years, and the PAS "finding that [Nevil] and her Children were much Emattiated by their Long Confinement in the workhouse and two of the Children were Dead," arranged to have Nevil and the two surviving children placed out to board. When the case at last came to trial, "by the Industry of B Bannerman and his Colleagues in Procuring Ex Parte Testimony, the Court and Jury Declared Dinah Nevil & her Children slaves." Nevil, however, was able to wait out the war, eventually moving into Harrison's household with her surviving children where she probably worked as a house servant. Harrison ultimately paid off the cost of Bannerman's bond.

30. Society for the Relief of Free Negroes and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage, Washington County, PA to PAS, 7 February 1789, Letterbook 1, Reel 11.

31. James Crawford, Nathan Heald, and John Townsend to James Pemberton, 22/7M/1790, Reel 11.

32. David Redick to James Pemberton, President, PAS, 24 May 1795.

33. John Yarnall to Thomas Harrison, 31/1M/1791, Reel 11.

34. Lyman Harding to Thomas Harrison, 8 September 1806, Reel 12.

35. James Milnor, Chair, Committee of Correspondence, PAS to Kentucky Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, 30 October 1809, Letterbook 2, Reel 11; see also John Rowan and Richard [M.] Johnson to Samuel McKean, Governor of Pennsylvania, 14 August 1806, Reel 12 on blacks taken from PA to KY.

36. Society for the Relief of Free Negroes and Others Unlawfully Held in Bondage, Washington County, PA to PAS, 7 February 1789. The border between western Pennsylvania and Virginia was not established until 1782; the requirements for registration of slaves had been extended for those living in the disputed areas in Pennsylvania until 1 January 1783, likely creating greater strife here on registration issues: see Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, 135-37, and Finkelman, *Imperfect Union*, 60-61.

37. The exact date of the suit is uncertain since the case was neglected by the Virginia court

for some time. John W. Green to President, PAS, 13 August 1806, John W. Green to Thomas Harrison, 22 January 1807, and George Fisher to Thomas Harrison, 20 February 1807, Reel 12. A copy of the certification appears in John W. Green to President, PAS, 13 August 1806.

38. John W. Green to President, PAS, 13 August 1806; idem to Thomas Harrison, 22 January 1807.

39. George Fisher to Thomas Harrison, 21 November 1806, Reel 12, and idem to Thomas Harrison, 20 February 1807.

40. John W. Green to Thomas Harrison, 21 August 1808, Reel 12.

41. Robert Clendenon to a "Friend," 9/7M/1786, and Robert Johnson to Thomas Harrison, 15/4M/1787, Reel 11.

42. S. Sitgreaves to Miers Fisher, 27 May 1790, Reel 11.

43. Daniel Mifflin to [James Pemberton?], 3/3M/1793, Reel 11; see also letter by one of the slaves sold, Charles to Daniel Mifflin, 16 July 1792, Reel 11: "you cannot Imagine neither tongue express the Difficulties I have undergone since my departure."

44. John Rowan and Richard [M.] Johnson to Samuel McKean, Governor of Pennsylvania, 31 May 1806 and 15 August 1806, Reel 12.

45. For one of numerous examples of a master misplacing or withholding an indenture, see J[o]n[ath]n Woodside, Jr. to George Williams, 7 June 1806, Reel 12. In the case of Isaac Sadler, a manumitted slave in Salem, New Jersey, the PAS correspondent had examined the records at the Clerk's Office "but find not a scrawl concerning the Manumission, Certificate nor *Bill of Sale*"; he doubted, furthermore, that the record would be found since Sadler's former master "was at that time a drinking man and may be never took the papers into the office"; the bill of sale probably wore out in his pocket: Jacob Wood to Walter Franklin, 16/4M/1803, Reel 12.

46. In the case of Moses, a black man in Westchester County, New York, the New York Abolition Society planned to inform the claimant that the Abolition Society had the authority to demand Moses's immediate release, and that he was liable for Moses's wages for the

time the servant was unjustly held: Rich[ar]d R. Lawrence to Thomas Harrison, 8/6M/1793, and idem to Thomas Harrison, 8/7M/1793, Reel 11. In the case of Samuel Preston Moore's manumitted servant Suckey, wages of £5 per annum for six previous years of service had been a part of her contract for hiring out to Benjamin Gibbs; the PAS hoped to "recover the 30 Pounds & Entrest which was intended for the Poor woman of which no Part has been Paid—": Thomas Harrison to William Lewis, [c. 1788], draft, Reel 15.

47. See numerous examples through Letterbooks 1 and 2, Reel 11, and list of books in J[ames] P[emberton], PAS to Davis Red[ick], 7/12M/1789, Reel 15.

48. Joseph Townsend of the Baltimore Abolition Society reported that nearly fifty individual freedom cases were pending a precedent to be set by a suit then on trial in that city: Joseph Townsend to James Pemberton, 7/7M/1790, Reel 11.

49. James Crawford, Samuel Jackson, and Nathan Heald to James Pemberton, 15/8M/1790, and Samuel Jackson, James Crawford, Nathan Heald and John Townsend to James Pemberton, 23/11M/1790, Reel 11. The correspondents may have been familiar with precedent-setting case, *Respublica v. Betsey* (1789), in which the plaintiff, a slave, was declared free by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court based on her master's failure to register her: Kutler, "Pennsylvania Courts," 15-16.

50. [Thomas Harrison] to Richard Rieley, 10/6M/1808, draft, Reel 15. Rieley was probably a justice in Delaware County.

51. Richard Allen to John Hall, 24 February 1807, Reel 12: Allen hired an attorney to assist in the freedom case of John Hall, a black man now living in New York City; Allen assured Hall, "You may therefore Rest easy in your mind as the money was paid on the 18th of Febary"; the cost to Hall was £55, paid by the PAS's agent "after beating [Hall's former master] down" in price.

52. For discussions of religious sources of eighteenth-century antislavery, see Davis, *Western Culture*, 291-390, idem, *Age of Revolution*, 39-49, 213-32, 285-99, Soderlund, *Quakers and Slavery*, Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 100-33, idem, *Race and Revolution*, 57-87, idem and

Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees*, passim, and Dee E. Andrews, *Religion and the Revolution: The Rise of the Methodists in the Middle Atlantic, 1760-1800* (forthcoming), chapter 5. Barbara Taylor presents a compelling thesis on the relation of religious faith to radical conviction, in this instance Mary Wollstonecraft's, in "Religion, Radicalism, and Fantasy," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 39 (1995): 102-12.

53. Alexander Addison to James Pemberton, 1 January 1793, Reel 11.

54. *Ibid.*

55. [James Pemberton], PAS to the Society of the Friends of the Blacks at Paris, 29 August 1791, draft, Reel 15. More pointedly, a PAS correspondent wrote to the Fayette County Quakers: "a Conviction of the Evil of invading the natural & just Rights of the afflicted Blacks and making merchandize of their persons is evidently spreading among the People ... it is a sorrowful Reflection that in any part of this State which has been one of the fourmost in Contendg for Liberty, there should Still Subsist Instances of the detestable traffic in human flesh." Benjamin Bryan to James Crawford, Nathan Heald and John Townsend, 25/10M/1790, draft, Reel 15.

56. W[illia]m Pinkney to James Pemberton, 16 January 1790, Reel 11.

57. See diGiacomantonio, "For the Gratification of a Volunteering Society." From Kentucky, David Rice reported that few justified slavery in Mercer County from where he wrote,

and he believed the majority of poor freeholders were in favor of gradual emancipation, but the rich possessed the slaves and made the laws: "Interest, all powerful Interest, closes the eyes and hardens the heart to a great degree: it gives the least plausible pretence the force of the strongest arguments." Members of a Kentucky abolition society, he believed, would be in middling circumstances: David Rice to William Rogers, 4 November 1794, Letterbook 2, Reel 11. George Drinker wrote from Alexandria in 1804 that few men of influence in Virginia are "unpolluted by this debasing species of property." George Drinker to Joseph Bringhurst, 10 December 1804, Reel 12.

58. Dunn, "Black Society in the Chesapeake," 82.

59. Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 279.

60. Dunn, "Black Society in the Chesapeake," 74-80; Nash, "Forging Freedom," 3-8; *Forging Freedom*, passim; idem, *Race and Revolution*, 57-87.

61. Kitty Lewis to "Dear Cousin," 7 March 1803, Reel 12.

62. See Eric Foner, "The Meaning of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994), 437.

63. Hannah Groves [formerly Hannah Van Buskerk] to Cato Way or Cato Vanbuskerk, 3 June 1805, Reel 12.

64. Mathew Neate to Warner Mifflin, 4 January 1810 [1811], Reel 12.