

Forgetting Freedom: White Anxiety, Black Presence, and Gradual Abolition in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, 1780–1838

SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, in 1801, newly appointed state supreme court judge Hugh Henry Brackenridge sat down to finish the sequel to his lengthy and peripatetic satire on the dangers of popular democracy, *Modern Chivalry*. As in the work's earlier installments, it followed the quixotic adventures of the educated and virtuous Captain John Farrago and his naïve “bog-trotting” servant, Teague O'Regan—the former symbolic of thoughtful republican citizenship, the latter of the recently enfranchised, unlettered voter who elected unqualified men to high station. Yet Brackenridge offered more than a lesson on republican citizenship. As John Wood Sweet, Matthew Frye Jacobson, and others have shown, *Modern Chivalry* had a much broader ambit. Had they the opportunity to read it, Brackenridge's Cumberland County neighbors might have found neatly summarized in the text's later pages their own struggle to define citizenship in the age of emancipation.¹

Like Brackenridge, rural citizens were living amid one of the Revolution's most profound and flawed legacies: abolition. In Pennsylvania, full-scale emancipation began in 1780, when the state

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¹ Hugh Henry Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, ed. Claude M. Newlin (New York, 1968); John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Philadelphia, 2007), 309–11; Matthew Frye Jacobson, “‘Free White Persons’ in the Republic, 1790–1840,” chap. 1 in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

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assembly passed An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery.² Uncomfortable with immediate emancipation, Pennsylvania's assembly provided freedom to the children of slaves, but only after twenty-eight years of indenture, or term slavery, that enabled rural masters to recoup their original investment and even profit from the slow end of slavery. Though the act succeeded in delaying black freedom, it fell far short of allaying white worries over the social and material costs of that freedom and actually helped to highlight the deeper political and economic anxieties of postrevolutionary society. Forced to radically reimagine the composition of the body politic, whites across Pennsylvania soon began to ponder how and whether freedpeople would be woven into the new republic. At the same time, emancipation forced rural whites, especially those impacted by postrevolutionary economic depression and the emergence of capitalist social relations, to question their own place in the politics and economy of the new republic.

Keenly, albeit obliquely, Brackenridge revealed how abolition was a site of struggle in rural Pennsylvania and the early republican North. By the closing chapters, Farrago, Teague, and a ragtag group of settlers, in the midst of building a new society in the wild frontier, become embroiled in a debate over suffrage and citizenship: "should the suffrage be universal, or with a qualification of property?"³ As the debate ensues, questions of voting rights rapidly devolve into "admitting beasts to a vote in elections." Even after failed attempts at teaching algebra to squirrels, establishing a monkey as the clerk of courts, and admitting a hound to the bar, the situation remains tense.⁴ Then, Farrago offers some clarity: "if we should admit the beasts to the rights of citizenship, we should have to set them

² On gradual emancipation in Pennsylvania see Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania and Its Aftermath* (New York, 1991); and Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967), 124–37. For slavery and emancipation in the postrevolutionary North see Sweet, *Bodies Politic*; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, NY, 2000); Graham Russell Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613–1863* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1999); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700–1860* (New York, 1998); Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860* (Chicago, 1961); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, NY, 1975); Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 2006); and Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, NY, 1996).

³ Brackenridge, *Modern Chivalry*, 644.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 646–52, 661–64, 680–719.

free as we have the Negroes.” “The very right of suffrage,” he suggests, “would be a manumission.” Farrago reminds settlers that extending “equal privileges” to animals would mean they could no longer “treat them as beasts of burden, or use them for the draught . . . nor even ride a horse, but on condition of taking turns, and letting him sometimes ride us.” With that, Farrago’s hyperbole makes clear the link between emancipation and inclusion. Urging settlers to consider the psychic and material benefits gained from domination, Farrago reveals that the extension of rights to animals is problematic, just like the extension of such privileges to African Americans. Troubled by the implications of animal suffrage, the settlers in *Modern Chivalry* choose to forget the idea.⁵

The same could be said of Brackenridge’s Cumberland County neighbors: anxious about impending freedom for slaves, they simply chose to forget freedom. Borrowing from Joanne Pope Melish, this essay argues that rural whites, faced with the uncertainties of gradual emancipation, economy, and citizenship, developed a twofold amnesia about slavery and emancipation. On the one hand, rural actors chose to forget the “ontological condition” of freedom implicit in the idea of term slavery; they continued to treat post-nati slave children as property. On the other hand, and encouraged by the seemingly degraded condition of free blacks and early national racial discourse, rural whites chose to ignore former enslavement as a causative factor in the persistent disadvantage of freed-people. An exploration of emancipation and its discontents in Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, allows for an investigation into the ways in which white anxiety over the black presence in the decades following gradual emancipation collided with anxieties over citizenship and economic inequality to limit freedom, solidify racial difference, and mark free blacks as unfit for inclusion in the body politic. Such an investigation not only broadens and deepens our understanding of rural emancipation by contributing to a growing literature on slavery and abolition outside of Philadelphia but also enhances our understanding of the reshaping of racial attitudes and African American lives during the early years of the republic.⁶

⁵ Ibid., 712.

⁶ On slavery and abolition outside of Philadelphia, especially at the rural county and town level, see Nash and Soderlund’s work on Chester County in *Freedom by Degrees*; John Alosi, *Shadow of Freedom: Slavery in Post-Revolutionary Cumberland County, 1780–1810* (Shippensburg, PA, 2001); Willis L. Shirk Jr., “Testing the Limits of Tolerance: Blacks and the Social Order in Columbia, Pennsylvania, 1800–1851,” *Pennsylvania History* 60 (1993): 35–50; Christopher M. Osborne,

For some in Cumberland County, including Roger B. Taney and the other young men who made up the Belles Lettres Society of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Enlightenment-era science and the natural histories of racial groups offered ready answers to the questions gradual abolition provoked. When in 1795 the society held a debate on the “origins of the races of mankind,” they brought to the rural world a question of considerable currency among enlightened scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. Influenced as much by Christian theology as by emergent ethnology, the debate over whether human differentiation was explained by multiple creations (polygenesis) or whether man descended from a “common original” (monogenesis) encouraged Taney and his fellow students to undertake an exploration of the (un)naturalness of racial equality.⁷

In the theory of polygenism, members of the Belles Lettres Society found an account of separate, distinct, and hierarchical creations that presented racial difference as innate and unchangeable. First broached in Isaac La Peyrère’s *Praeadamitae* (1655), polygenism had gained considerable influence around the Atlantic world and found a number of supporters—whether in the patent racism of Edward Long’s *History of Jamaica* (1774), the strange rereading of the second chapter of the Book of Genesis offered by Scottish philosopher Henry Home, Lord Kames, or Thomas Jefferson’s quasi-polygenism in *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785). Though not a fully committed polygenist, Jefferson floated in the *Notes* a particularly negative supposition about black citizenship; blacks, “whether originally a distinct race,” a “separate species,” or made different by time and environment, “are inferior to the whites in the endowments of both body and mind.”⁸

“Invisible Hands: Slaves, Bound Laborers, and the Development of Western Pennsylvania, 1780–1820,” *Pennsylvania History* 72 (2005): 77–99; Steven B. Burg, “The North Queen Street Cemetery and the African-American Experience in Shippensburg, Pennsylvania,” *Pennsylvania History* 77 (2010): 1–36.

⁷ Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York, 1963), 41; Colin Kidd, *The Forging of Races: Race and Scripture in the Protestant Atlantic World, 1600–2000* (Cambridge, 2006), 109–10.

⁸ Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (London, 1787), 239–40; Peter Kitson, “‘Candid Reflections’: The Idea of Race in the Debate over the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century,” in *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and Its Colonies, 1760–1838*, ed. Brycchan Carey et al. (New York, 2004), 11–25; Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge, 1987), 17, 27–28; Kidd, *Forging of Races*, 62–66; Nicholas Hudson, “From ‘Nation’ to ‘Race’: The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1996): 247–64.

Polygenist thought raised important questions for white citizens tackling the issue of black inclusion in the young American republic. That members of the Belles Lettres Society would ultimately ignore polygenism in favor of the then-dominant monogenist strain of racialist thought does not obscure the fact that the future leaders' concern for racial origins was rooted in the question of whether blacks were capable of becoming equal citizens. Monogenists answered in the affirmative—so long as free blacks could become culturally and physically white. Convinced though they might have been of the universality of mankind, monogenist thinkers nevertheless neatly supported Caucasian cultural superiority—and, by extension, racial superiority and imperial authority.

Monogenism emphasized the universal origins of mankind established by the Mosaic account of creation. This idea was developed and expanded upon by Continental natural philosophers and by American thinkers such as Philadelphia's Benjamin Rush and Princeton's Samuel Stanhope Smith with increasingly complex—and arguably misguided—explanations for human racial variety. Monogenists argued for a process of degeneration that began after the fall from Eden. It was, to be sure, an uneven process, for most natural historians argued that some races had degenerated more than others—in particular, Africans more than Europeans. As such, when natural historians pondered the causes of degradation, they often explained human difference through social and environmental forces that Smith and Rush thought to be reversible. By the close of the eighteenth century, Scottish philosophy led them to see blackness not as a sign of permanent difference and degeneracy but as a condition. Rush's earliest denunciations of slavery attacked the perceived inferiority of black folks by arguing that degeneracy was the consequence of enslavement. The Rush of later years was more "scientific" in that he expended much of his intellectual energy in locating the cause of blackness, which, he suggested, was "a disease in the skin of the leprous kind." Blended together over a thirty-year period, these views amounted to a hopeful vision of a more inclusive future in which educated and employed African Americans could gain the same "privileges of free-born" whites.⁹ Likewise convinced

⁹ On Rush's monogenism see Rush, *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America upon Slave-Keeping* (Philadelphia, 1773), in *American Political Writing during the Founding Era: 1760–1805*, ed. Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz (Indianapolis, 1983), 1:217–30; Rush to Thomas Jefferson, Feb. 4, 1797, in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Lyman H. Butterfield (Princeton, NJ, 1951), 2:786; Rush, "Observations intended to favour a supposition that

of blacks' ability to become physically and culturally white, Smith offered in his *Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species* (1788) a convoluted explanation for corporeal difference: the compounding effect of climate and savagism upon the human skin. Inhabitants of torrid climes and savage states gained their "deep bilious tinge" from long-term exposure to the sun, "extreme heat . . . putrid animal, or vegetable exhalations," and the "injurious effects" of uncivilized social, political, and economic formations. Together, change in geography and the opportunity to attain the advanced mode of living displayed by white society, Smith believed, would wash African Americans of their more "barbarous" features. For evidence, Smith turned to the story of the "Great Curiosity," Henry Moss: a Virginia-born African American whose color changed "from a deep black, to a clear and healthy white." Moss and his whitening body provided physical proof for Smith that people of color could be woven into the republic, that seemingly degraded and different folks might metamorphose into respectable (white) citizens.¹⁰

And such ideas seemed to have an impact upon rural areas, where by the last decade of the eighteenth century a once-certain institution was being scrutinized and, in some cases, satirized. During the first two decades of emancipation, the *Carlisle Gazette* ran a series of humorous though telling anecdotes in which cheeky slaves posed their masters—and those reading the paper—profound questions about race. Deploying stock African American characters and dialect, such tales might have supported longstanding notions about racial inferiority, but they also, through the language of morality, turned to questions of equality. The story of Cato is a good example. Approaching his dying master's bedside, Cato is surprised by his master's desire to "do [Cato] a very great honour before he died." Cato is elated, expecting real recompense for his life of service. He is troubled, however, to discover that his master's gift is to bury him in the "family vault." For Cato this represents "neither honor or profit," for he fears that when "the devil come looking for massa in the dark, he might

the Black Color (as it is called) of the Negroes is derived from the Leprosy," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 4 (1799): 289–97.

¹⁰ Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Essay on the Causes of the Variety of Complexion and Figure in the Human Species*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia, 1810), 51, 151; Bruce R. Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA, 2002), 25–26, 38–39. For Henry Moss see Smith, *Essay*, 83, 92–95; Charles D. Martin, *The White African American Body: A Cultural and Literary Exploration* (Piscataway, NJ, 2002), 34–41; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 275–86; and Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 140–50.

take away the poor negar man by mistake.”¹¹ Interrogations about the devil are equally reflexive. “Asked what colour he believed the devil was,” a slave responds, wryly, “the white men paint him black, we say he is white; but from his great age . . . I should suppose him grey.”¹² Such anecdotes—and there were a number of them—undermined slavery by highlighting the immorality of white masters and reflected monogenist notions of shared creation by making sin neither exclusively black nor white.

Still, in rural Pennsylvania, the humor of such maxims and the power of enlightened monogenism would have faded quickly. Beyond the walls of Dickinson College there was little debate on the natural history of race, the subject of racial equality, or the morality of slave keeping. In large part, views on slavery and equality were a product of geography. Located near the Maryland border, Cumberland residents might well have seen slavery as more acceptable than their neighbors elsewhere in Pennsylvania.¹³ Moreover, the institution’s acceptability was strengthened by the absence of abolitionists and by religious institutions that did not immediately call slavery into question. Indeed, as Steven Burg’s recent work on Shippensburg has shown, abolitionist sentiment in Cumberland County was always quite limited, in large part because so few Quakers lived in the region and because the county’s predominately Presbyterian slaveowners did not encounter “pressure” from the pulpit to end slavery or manumit slaves.¹⁴ Finally, rural residents, if they turned to the institution of slavery later than their urban counterparts, nevertheless understood the critical role slavery played in the development of personal and regional economies.¹⁵ Thus, the breakdown of slavery did not immediately prompt rural masters to consider questions of racial equality and origins. Rather, it prompted them first to register their slaves and post-nati children with John Agnew, clerk of the Court of Session for Cumberland County, and, second, to ponder the implications of emancipation.

Agnew did not have an enviable job. Following the enactment of gradual abolition in 1780, which required masters to register their slaves, and amendments passed in 1788 that required the registration of term-slave

¹¹ *Carlisle Gazette, and the Western Repository of Knowledge*, Aug. 2, 1786.

¹² *Ibid.*, July 15, 1789.

¹³ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 4–5, 82–85.

¹⁴ Burg, “North Queen Street Cemetery,” 3–4.

¹⁵ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 82–85; Burg, “North Queen Street Cemetery,” 5.

children, the clerk of sessions was visited by nearly four hundred of his neighbors, many of whom grumbled at the very idea of recording their human property. While we are not privy to the conversations that went on between the clerk and his neighbors, some of them, like Carlisle attorney George Stevenson and Shippensburg merchant Francis Campbell, did us the favor of writing down their reactions to the Gradual Abolition Act. On October 7, 1780, just like other registrants, Stevenson dutifully recorded the names and ages of his three adult slaves, Dick, Phil, and Mills. Then, at the bottom of his registration document, he wrote a short but incisive attack on the clerk and Pennsylvania's General Assembly. First, Stevenson chided his representatives for creating such "an useless Act." Then, he complained about the costs of registration, attacking Agnew at the same time for profiting from the act, since the clerk would be able to "pay his tax" with the fees collected from registration. Eight years later, Francis Campbell echoed Stevenson's sentiment when he registered five-year-old Dave and three-year-old Agee. "Excuse My Freedom," begged Campbell, but it is "Surprising" that the assembly's self-described "Gentlemen" would "load the Inhabitants with Expenses in making their frivolous Laws." Together, Stevenson and Campbell probably said what many of their slaveholding neighbors were thinking: that as property owners, the very public that the General Assembly represented, they paid for legislation they did not want in the first place. Yet beneath Stevenson's and Campbell's candor and disgruntlement lay the deeper worry that a profitable and once-permanent institution was ending, bringing about troubles economic, social, and, eventually, political.¹⁶

Understanding these troubles begins with a consideration of Cumberland County's slave and post-nati servant populations in the decades surrounding emancipation. Slaves had been present in the county since its creation in 1751, though the slave population remained quite low during the prerevolutionary years—representing, for instance, less than 2 percent of the population in Carlisle during the mid-1760s.¹⁷ Reliant, scholars tell us, upon a mix of family labor, wage labor, and indentured

¹⁶ Slave Returns, 1780–1841, Clerk of Courts Record Group, Cumberland County Historical Society, Carlisle, PA, online at Cumberland County Archives at <http://ccweb.ccpa.net/archives/inventory.aspx?PSID=541>. On George Stevenson and Francis Campbell see nos. 1780.050 and 1788.001.

¹⁷ Judith Ridner, *A Town In-Between: Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and the Early Mid-Atlantic Interior* (Philadelphia, 2010), 53–54, 230n37.

servitude, Cumberland County residents eschewed slavery for other labor forms, in large part because slavery was at odds with traditional modes of household or extensive production employed by most rural agriculturalists.¹⁸ Yet as the county and its economy grew, the expanding demand for labor led rural residents and producers to organize and deploy slaves on a greater scale.

Examining the body of records to which Stevenson's and Campbell's begrudging registrations were added not only illuminates countywide slave populations but also reveals the degree to which Cumberland residents had come to rely on slave labor. In 1780 alone, 322 registrants claimed ownership of 775 enslaved men and women. During 1788–89, the years in which masters were first required to register the children of slaves, 74 owners registered 149 term slaves. And between 1790 and 1820, another 283 registrants would visit the clerk of sessions in order to maintain legal rights to the labor of 287 post-nati servants. The importance and meaning of these numbers, especially slave ownership, is amplified when the county is placed within a state-level context. By the close of the eighteenth century, the majority of Pennsylvania slaves lived and worked in the central and western parts of the state. By 1800, there were but 228 slaves in Cumberland, up only slightly from 223 a decade earlier. Yet compared to state-level trends, slave ownership was alive and well in rural Pennsylvania. Some owners, like Alex Bryan, did manumit their slaves; others, however, chose to hold onto their property.¹⁹ And even at a moment when slavery was rapidly disappearing, slave ownership among Cumberland residents grew relative to the rest of the state. In 1790, when the total number of slaves in Pennsylvania stood at 3,000, Cumberland owners claimed only 7.43 percent of the state's enslaved men and women. By 1800, when the statewide slave population dropped to 1,706, more than 14 percent of slaves resided in the county. Within another decade, almost 39 percent of all Pennsylvania slaves resided in Cumberland County, demonstrating the continuing importance of the institution to rural residents and the rural economy, an economy into which slavery was intricately woven and vitally important.²⁰

¹⁸ Darold Wax, "The Demand for Slave Labor in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History* 34 (1967): 333–34; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 8, 15, 32.

¹⁹ Slave Returns, 1780–1841.

²⁰ Federal Census, 1790, 1800, 1810; Burg, "North Queen Street Cemetery," 3.

For Francis Campbell—a Shippensburg-area merchant, innkeeper, and gentleman farmer assessed for more than six hundred acres of land in 1782—the labor of the seven slaves he claimed in 1780 and the six post-nati servants he registered between 1788 and 1802 was irreplaceable.²¹ But Campbell was just one among many masters in the county. In 1780, and for a forty-year period between 1780 and 1820, the majority of slaves and servants registered by the clerk of sessions belonged to farmers—seemingly in spite of the fact that, according to Darold Wax, the “labor requirements” of most farms “did not greatly exceed that which the farm owner and his family could themselves provide.”²² Of the 775 slaves registered in 1780, just over 65 percent were claimed by farmers.²³ Such figures point to an important fact about slavery in rural Pennsylvania. While never deployed “in large numbers,” slaves were nevertheless crucial to colonial and postcolonial agricultural development, for “agriculture probably employed more slaves than” other sectors of the colonial and early national economies.²⁴ Thus, while the nature of Pennsylvania agriculture was such that gang-labor production was inappropriate, inefficient, or cost prohibitive, rural agriculturalists found ample ways to use the labor of slaves. Assessed for more than two hundred acres of farmland in 1780, Fannett Township “cropper” John Holliday had five slaves, according to registration documents. Those slaves, four of them likely under the age of twelve, were vital to the daily and commercial operations of his farmstead. Still, few rural masters owned as many slaves as Holliday; most farmers, in fact, had between one and four slaves. Such was the case with another Fannett Township resident, Robert Anderson, whose slave, an eight-year-old boy named Tom, helped to manage Anderson’s 129-acre farm and sizeable livestock population. Slavery was not merely confined to the county’s agricultural sector, however. Since the county’s founding, and even in the midst of gradual emancipation, slavery was a critical labor source for the region’s ironmasters, innkeepers, millers, heelmakers, watchmakers, and blacksmiths who deployed slaves in the day-to-day operations of their homes and businesses.²⁵

²¹ On Campbell’s property holdings see “State and Supply Transcripts County of Cumberland for the Years 1778, 1779, 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1785,” *Pennsylvania Archives*, 3rd ser. (Harrisburg, 1897), 20:171, 212, 306, 432, 588, 724, 755.

²² Wax, “Demand for Slave Labor,” 333.

²³ Data on profession and slave ownership compiled from Slave Returns, 1780–1840.

²⁴ Wax, “Demand for Slave Labor,” 334.

²⁵ For Holliday see “State and Supply Transcripts,” 570; and Slave Returns, 1780–1841, no.

The centrality of slavery, though, went far beyond economy. Just as important as slavery's place in rural agriculture and industry was its role in shaping the asymmetrical relations of race and power from which white residents benefited. If masters like Holliday came to see the benefits of slave labor late in the eighteenth century, they likely learned quite quickly of the power that came from the ownership of black slaves. Colonial attitudes forged a clear racial divide that made slaves "alien to the white man's culture, in every respect," while at the same time ensuring that masters such as Holliday gained some social status in a community that increasingly divided along economic lines.²⁶ Slavery, too, enabled those without property, but possessing whiteness, to gain and keep certain legal rights and powers, even as their material conditions often marked them as marginal or kept them from direct participation in the society and polity. In short, slavery helped to level white society, to disavow and push to the margins of thought the growing class divisions of rural communities. Nevertheless, emancipation and emergent environmentalist discourse opened new avenues for the achievement of black freedom and equality that threatened to rend not only individual economies but, in the midst of postrevolutionary economic and political uncertainty, the very fabric of rural America as well.

By the last decade of the eighteenth century, Cumberland County was a region marked by deep class divisions, economic insecurities, and, in the midst of the Constitution's ratification, profound questions about its inhabitants' inclusion in the postrevolutionary polity. Cumberland County's "chimney sweeps," "ragamuffins," and farmers alike faced the frustrating realities of a liberalizing economy and a new system of government that promised, as one vocal citizen announced, to "raise the fortunes and respectability of the *well born few*, and oppress the plebeians."²⁷ Emancipation only heightened these anxieties.

Though rural economic instability and the political uncertainty to which it was wedded were not direct products of emancipation, the threat

1780.258. For Anderson see "State and Supply Transcripts," 568; and Slave Returns, 1780–1841, no. 1780.245.

²⁶ Wax, "Demand for Slave Labor," 343.

²⁷ William Petrikin, "The Scourge," *Carlisle Gazette, and the Western Repository of Knowledge*, Jan. 23, 1788. On Petrikin see Saul Cornell, "Aristocracy Assailed: The Ideology of Backcountry Anti-Federalism," *Journal of American History* 76 (1990): 1,148–72; and Michael McCoy, "The Margins of Enlightenment: Benjamin Rush, Rural Farmers, and Sociability in Post-Revolutionary Pennsylvania," in *Sociability and Cosmopolitanism: Social Bonds on the Fringes of the Enlightenment*, ed. Scott Breuninger and David Burrow (London, 2012), 141–62, esp. 157–60.

of black freedom deepened these anxieties and left many to ponder the meaning of independence and citizenship. For rural whites, the declining opportunities of the postrevolutionary era were bad enough, but emancipated slaves added another layer of social and economic competition to a world of limited possibilities. Many rural citizens witnessed downward economic mobility, which in turn left their place in the early republican body politic in doubt.

Well before the Revolution, land speculation, population growth, and increased land prices made Cumberland County a site of diminishing opportunities. cursory examination of land warrants reveals that regional notables, such as John Armstrong and George Croghan, sought warrants on several thousand acres, while John Baynton and Samuel Wharton of the Philadelphia-based firm Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan sought warrants on more than eight thousand acres between June 1766 and March 1767.²⁸ Such speculative activities helped to drive up land prices, but so too did the influx of new settlers ensure that the coeval “reduction in the number of local opportunities and the increased value of land” left many Cumberland residents landless.²⁹ Nationally, landlessness was the norm for roughly 10 to 40 percent of the rural population. Locally, the “natural” transition of the county from borderland to hinterland ensured not only that Cumberland County would be woven into “a geographically extended cash and credit market” but that more residents would find themselves among the ranks of the county’s waged laborers, impoverished renters, and depressed tenants.³⁰ Merged with the economic uncertainty of the postrevolutionary years, emancipation unhinged what Melish describes as the once “neat configuration of citizenship, virtue, and economic success.”³¹

In short, the political and economic conditions of the county’s middling and meaner sorts cannot be abstracted from emancipation. No matter how slow the process, the demise of slavery proved quite disconcerting to

²⁸ Baynton and Wharton warrants, Records of the Land Office: Warrant Registers, 1733–1957, ser. 17.88, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, PA.

²⁹ Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, NJ, 1965), 18, 46, 61, 62. On Cumberland County see James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man’s Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1972), 128; and Ridner, *Town In-Between*, 179–80.

³⁰ Lucy Simler, “Tenancy in Colonial Pennsylvania: The Case of Chester County,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 43 (1986): 542–69, quote 546; Ridner, *Town In-Between*, 180–83.

³¹ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 134.

rural whites. For those with slaves, abolition signaled a crisis in production; no longer was their hold on or access to slave labor permanent and unquestioned. For those without slaves, emancipation proved equally troubling. While many rural slaveowners weathered the postrevolutionary years unscathed, the economic crisis that followed the War for Independence further diminished the opportunities for gaining land and ensured that even those who had land were hard-pressed to keep it. Between 1787 and 1795, state monetary policies that limited the supply of paper money, creditor-friendly legislation, and the diligent collection of debts, back taxes, and new taxes led to “mass property foreclosure throughout the state” that unsettled “both the perception and the reality of rural independence.” Exasperated farmers complained that “merciless, rapacious creditors” took farm and field, home and business from “good people” and that elite policies drove hardworking folk “from a state of competency to beggary.” Of course, farmers were not alone in their plight and penury; rural towns such as Carlisle also witnessed the impact of capitalist transformation and postwar economic insecurity. As Ridner has shown, rural townspeople, too, witnessed “a widening chasm between the economic haves and have-nots.”³² By the close of the eighteenth century, Carlisle possessed a growing body of wage and day laborers whose economic position was every bit as precarious as that of their Philadelphia counterparts. By 1798, the bottom 50 percent of taxpayers could claim only 15.5 percent of all the housing value and but 12.8 percent of all taxable wealth in the town. Carlisle was a town where some men’s kitchens were larger and more stately than the residence rented by Joshua Jones on Pomfret Street—a crude home measuring some 15 by 15 feet—or John Walker, “who lived with his wife and six young children in a tiny house measuring a scant 16 × 16 feet . . . that he rented from Robert Blaine.”³³ Set against the backdrop of economic downturn and the closure of opportunities, emancipation read not only as an attack on property rights but on rural folks’ liberty and independence as well.

Emancipation merely added to a context already thick with apprehension because it raised two interrelated questions: what color was the early

³² Terry Bouton, “A Road Closed: Rural Insurgency in Post-Independence Pennsylvania,” *Journal of American History* 87 (2000): 855–87; Ridner, *Town In-Between*, 153.

³³ US Direct Tax, Carlisle, 1798; Judith Ridner, “‘A Handsomely Improved Place’: Economic, Social, and Gender-Role Development in a Backcountry Town, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1750–1810” (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1994), 373–77, 379–80.

American citizen, and did poor whites qualify as citizens? As Melish has suggested, “the disassociation of ‘slave’ and ‘negro’ in the course of emancipation inevitably wrenched apart the previously unchallenged association of ‘free’ and ‘white’ as well.”³⁴ Moreover, emancipation and the prospect of black enfranchisement made manifest the deep gulf that lay between revolutionary ideals of equality and the rural socioeconomic realities that disenfranchised many free white men. As Sarah Knott, Colleen Terrell, and Gordon Wood have shown, the revolutionary vanguard aimed to transform atomistic men into a single “body politic.”³⁵ Yet if the revolutionary vanguard envisioned a homogenous and sociable “body politic,” the creation of that collective republican identity was built not on universal democracy but upon the interwoven ideals of virtue and independence. “Virtue” was, as Wood reminds us, “found only in a republic of . . . independent citizens.” Liberated from “dependence,” citizens were “autonomous individuals.”³⁶ These foundations of citizenship mirrored the problems faced by rural folks at the end of the eighteenth century. Viewed against the backdrop of economic decline and shaky autonomy, emancipation made citizenship even more suspect.

With the advent of emancipation, cottagers, laborers, and farmers, already troubled by political and economic changes, witnessed the reconfiguration of previously unquestioned—and psychologically beneficial—hierarchies. Not only did poorer whites face questions about their place in the new republican schema, but they also had to contend with the fact that their longstanding racial superiority over a degraded and enslaved population was trending toward an uncomfortable equality. Indeed, even if freedpeople would increasingly be defined as racially inferior, they were equal to Cumberland County’s poorer whites in two respects. First, they were competing for work in a wage labor economy in which black presence might threaten to lower wages and heighten competition.³⁷ Second, as the political presence of freedpeople grew, especially those men who met the property requirements for voting, it was quite possible that poor

³⁴ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 138.

³⁵ Colleen Terrell, “‘Republican Machines’: Franklin, Rush, and the Manufacture of Civic Virtue in the Early American Republic,” *Early American Studies* 1, no. 2 (2003): 100–32; Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992).

³⁶ Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 104.

³⁷ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 9.

whites could be written out of the body politic while previously inferior African Americans were written into it.

By forgetting freedom, rural masters and their nonslaveholding neighbors could forestall and foreclose the disruptive future that emancipation offered. Indeed, if the Revolution and gradual abolition seemingly undermined the social and political positions of free whites already marginalized by their declining material conditions, woven into the very fabric of gradual abolition (and located in the processes by which masters negotiated the act) were mechanisms for forestalling the threat posed by impending black freedom. Taken together, gradual abolition and the direct and indirect actions of rural whites created the conditions in which the ontological status of freedom implicit in the status of term slave could be forgotten.

Even as the radical strains of the Revolution offered to widen the body politic, the very document that made such radicalism possible was contradictory enough to create the foundations on which rural communities could construct barriers to black freedom and equality. From the start, Pennsylvania's well-meaning legislators ensured that freedom was limited to a certain segment of the slave population—those whom reformers such as Benjamin Rush thought least tainted by the evil institution—and that the long and “complicated” process of freedom failed to redefine the status of term slaves or prevent rural masters from passing term-slave status on to the free children of term slaves. First, Pennsylvania's conservative brand of abolition did not change slaveowner outlooks, for, as Nash and Soderlund point out, even after emancipation, “owners viewed their bound servants . . . in much the same way as masters of servants and slaves before the Revolution—as laborers owing years of service in return for the price of purchase.”³⁸ And for masters such as Thomas Fisher, a return on his investment often meant an extension of service. In November 1806, Fisher petitioned the Court of Quarter Sessions to extend the length of servitude for Lett, a female term slave who had “abandoned” the service of her master. A month earlier, Lett had taken flight with her fourteen-month-old child and a slave for life named Harry Collins. Fisher quickly found the family, but he had been “put to great expenses and troubles in the process.” Hoping to recoup nearly fifty dollars in reward and advertisement costs, Fisher thought an additional six months beyond Lett's

³⁸ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, xv, 186.

twenty-eighth birthday a fair trade.³⁹ Second, while gradual abolition was never intended to create a form of servitude that “continued,” in Pennsylvania’s Justice William Tilghman’s words, “from generation to generation to the end of the world,” cases such as *Stiles v. Nelly* (1823) reveal how the law’s ambiguity helped Cumberland masters to forge “an indefinite chain of limited servitude” to encompass the free grandchildren of slaves.⁴⁰ In the *Stiles* case, Nelly, a term slave claimed by Edward Stiles, sought to use errors in her mother’s registration documents to claim her freedom. Closer inspection of those documents reveals more than a faulty registration. Nelly’s mother, Rachael, was born in November 1780 and registered as a servant to age twenty-eight by Carlisle merchant John Duncan in 1789. Nelly was born six years later, in 1795. Evidently, Duncan’s widow, Sarah, considered Nelly a term slave, for she sold the remainder of Nelly’s time to Stiles, who “claimed Nelly as his servant till 28.”⁴¹ Finding that the “defects” in Rachael’s registration were ultimately corrected in the clerk of courts’ official records, the supreme court ruled in Stiles’s favor and ignored completely the fact that Nelly’s servitude was wholly illegal. Not until *Miller v. Dwilling* (1826) were masters and jurists forced to concede that children born to post-nati servants were not term slaves but perfectly free individuals.⁴²

Yet if state law, by ensuring a slow demise of slavery, proved a useful tool for rural masters hoping to overcome the anxieties raised by abolition, it still fell upon slaveowners to fully forget that term slavery and permanent bondage were not the same. Such obfuscation began and ended with amnesia about freedom. Two cases—Eanus’s struggle to keep his son and the experience of a post-nati woman named Chloe—instructively reveal how masters and their communities overcame their anxieties about emancipation.⁴³

³⁹ Petition of Thomas Fisher, Nov. 5, 1806, Clerk of Courts, Indentured Servant and Apprentice Matters Record Group, Cumberland County Archives, online at <http://ccweb.ccpa.net/archives/Inventory.aspx?PSID=578>, record no. 1806.01.

⁴⁰ Tilghman quoted in Robert Cover, *Justice Accused: Antislavery and the Judicial Process* (New Haven, CT, 1984), 66; quote in Cover, *Justice Accused*, 63. See also Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 195.

⁴¹ *Stiles v. Nelly* (1823), in *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania*, ed. Thomas Sergeant and William Rawle Jr., 17 vols. (Philadelphia, 1818–1829), 10:366–72.

⁴² Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery—Servitude—Freedom, 1639–1861* (Washington, DC, 1911), 100; *Miller v. Dwilling* (1826), in *Reports of Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania*, 14:442–46; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 195.

⁴³ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 101; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 186.

In April 1800, “Negro Eanus,” a slave of undetermined age, was indicted for “assault and battery on William Kilgore,” the brother of the man who owned Eanus’s young son and one of two men who attempted to break up Eanus’s family. More than a heartrending tale of a family torn apart by slavery in the age of abolition, the case reveals the ways in which the limits of gradual abolition merged with individual action to undermine and ignore black freedom. Eanus’s trouble with the law and his confrontation with the Kilgores began when his son, an unnamed, seemingly unregistered post-nati servant, ran away from Jesse Kilgore and arrived at the Southampton Township home of Eanus’s master, Robert Clark. The family reunion was short-lived. The Kilgores knew that they would find the boy in the presence of his father. Soon after arriving at the Clark home, the Kilgores found the boy and his father in the kitchen and proceeded to retrieve Jesse Kilgore’s rightful property. The Kilgores were, however, unprepared for the resistance they would encounter. When the boy protested, William Kilgore “took [the boy] by the shoulder and told him to come along.” At that, the boy’s father “cried” out, leapt to his feet, and grabbed his son’s other arm. After a brief tussle, the Kilgores gained control of the boy, “tied him up,” and attempted to leave. Yet just as the Kilgores attempted “to take the boy home,” Eanus appeared with a gun. Distraught at the idea of losing his son again, Eanus told the Kilgores, “if they didn’t leave the boy alone he would blow them up.” Eanus did no such thing; the tense situation was quickly diffused, Eanus was arrested, and Jesse Kilgore regained his property.⁴⁴

Kilgore’s rights to his property were suspect, and, ultimately, the story of Eanus’s encounter with the Kilgores and the courts is rife with the sort of loose ends that helped masters deny that slavery was ending. Unnamed in the indictment, Eanus’s son was reduced to pure property. His lack of a name was possibly a consequence of an even greater error on Kilgore’s part: his seeming refusal to register the young boy. The 1780 Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery required masters to register their slaves with the local clerk of courts, and amendments made in 1788 required masters to register the post-nati children of slaves within six months of their birth. When James McGufin and William Rippey registered their post-

⁴⁴ *Indictments—1750–1800, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania*, ed. Merri Lou Scribner Schaumann (Dover, PA, 1989), no. 2161; *Kalendar of Prisoners*, Apr. 1800, Commissioners Record Group, Cumberland County Archives, online at <http://ccweb.ccpa.net/archives/inventory.aspx?PSID=533>, no. 1800.01.

nati children, they made sure to list “negro wench Sall” and “Negro wench Rachel” as the mothers of Jack and Hannah.⁴⁵ Kilgore missed that detail, for (as far as can be ascertained) he took no pains to register his human property with the Cumberland County clerk of courts. Had he done so, he would have likely noted the boy’s parentage and provided the young boy with a name. More importantly, he would have offered Eanus’s son proof of his date of birth—a birth that likely occurred after the enactment of gradual abolition. Without evidence of his age—without proper registration—the unnamed boy became a slave for life who had emerged, as if by magic, into Kilgore’s service.

Chloe, it seems, also arrived into the world by sleight of hand; and her story, like that of Eanus, survives because the family drama of which she was a part wound its way through the Cumberland County legal system. In June 1801, Chloe was convicted for the murder of her master’s children. Five months earlier, on January 14, 1801, she had drowned Andrew Carothers’s youngest daughter, Lucetta. Seven days later, she did the same to six-year-old Polly Carothers. Soon after, the family’s grief turned to suspicion, and the Carotherses wrung a confession from their tight-lipped slave. After that, her path from the courtroom to scaffold was quick, and in the baking sun of a summer afternoon, Chloe swung.⁴⁶

Just before her execution, Chloe had the opportunity to confess her crime to James Smith, a local Methodist minister. Days later, Smith sent the confession to the local newspaper for publication: “I was born a slave to Mr. William Kelso, who died when I was young and willed me to his daughter, Rebecca, in whose service I lived four years and an half, at the expiration of which time, I was to sold to Mr. Oliver Pollock, with whom I lived about four years, who sold me to my late Master Mr. Andrew Carothers, with whom I lived until I committed that greatest of crimes.”⁴⁷ So begins and ends the story of Chloe’s life. Comprising less than one-quarter of a two-column article, Chloe’s biographical information is brief.

⁴⁵ Slave Returns, 1780–1814, nos. 1801.142 and 1791.013.

⁴⁶ *Kline’s Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, June 24, 1801, July 15, 1801, July 22, 1801.

⁴⁷ *Kline’s Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, July 22, 1801. For comparative purposes see *Confession of John Joyce, Alias Davis, Who Was Executed on Monday, the 14th of March, 1808 . . .* (Philadelphia, 1808), and *Confession of Peter Matthias, Alias Matthews, Who Was Executed on Monday, the 14th of March, 1808 . . .* (Philadelphia, 1808). These confessions, published by Richard Allen, offered much more biographical detail than did Smith. See also Richard S. Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York, 2008), 151–55.

And while Chloe's confession is temporally accurate, her place of birth, her family, several masters, and a sense of her impending freedom are all absent from the story. Such silences help pinpoint an important amnesia that shaped Chloe's life. Chloe's future should have progressed neatly from slavery to freedom. Instead, the two decades between her birth and execution represented a sometimes concerted, sometimes inadvertent, attempt to resolve important questions of race, place, and power in post-emancipation Pennsylvania.

For nearly two decades, legal documents and public discourse described Chloe as property. Chloe was one of three children likely belonging to two of Kelso's adult slaves, Will and Dinah. Will and Dinah, both slaves for life, worked initially on ferryman William Kelso's two-hundred-acre farm in Lancaster County and later at his East Pennsboro home opposite his ferry operation on the Susquehanna River. Of the three children, Chloe was the only one to benefit from Pennsylvania's conservative abolition; Peter and Sib were both registered in 1780 as slaves for life. Strictly semantic, though, was the difference between Chloe and her siblings. In theory, post-nati servitude was a temporary status, a steppingstone to freedom and some form of inclusion.⁴⁸ Ideally, twenty-eight years of servitude would prepare Chloe for freedom and encourage her masters to come to terms with the end of slavery, thus creating "a new set of relations" for dealing with "statutory slaves" and free blacks—or not. As Melish has shown, neither masters nor society created "new," inclusive definitions; rather, existing notions of property and power remained intact, even for post-nati slaves. However incongruous slavery and freedom were, masters "resolutely continued a set of practices that failed in every way to acknowledge the children's legal or ontological status as free persons."⁴⁹ By forgetting her status, Chloe's masters could avoid the intellectual and economic problems that arose with emancipation.

⁴⁸ Handwritten copy of the slave register for 1780, Manuscript Group 240, African American Records Collection, series 1, folder 17, Lancaster County Historical Society, Lancaster, PA; Slave Returns, 1780–1840, no. 1789.065. On Kelso see William H. Egle, *History of the County of Dauphin in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania: Biographical and Genealogical* (Philadelphia, 1883), 104; Egle, *Notes and Queries of Pennsylvania, 1700s–1800s*, 4th ser. (Philadelphia, 1898), 2:8; *History of Adams and Cumberland Counties, Pennsylvania* (Chicago, 1886), 275, 299; 1790 Federal Census, Cumberland County, Pennsylvania (microform), reel no. M637-9; F. Edward Wright, *Abstracts of Cumberland County, Pennsylvania: Wills, 1750–1825*, 2 vols. (Westminster, MD, 1999).

⁴⁹ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 88, 89.

Chloe's registration offers an important point of inquiry. Kelso's signed and handwritten registration is straightforward in its purpose. Kelso, the self-nominated "farmer," "return[ed] Cloe a negro child Born in Decemb[er] 1782 to be registered according to Law." Though the registration appears at first to be a relatively unambiguous document, it nevertheless highlights important anxieties over emancipation. Dated "27th March 1789," Chloe's registration came a full seven years after her birth, and only after the Pennsylvania legislature amended and strengthened the original 1780 law. In other words, it was grudging acquiescence and possible forfeiture of Chloe that prompted Kelso to visit the clerk of courts in March 1789. Like his disgruntled neighbors, Kelso benefited from a loophole in the first emancipation act that was only closed in 1788.⁵⁰ And the seven years that separated Chloe's birth from her registration had other important consequences. Read as a direct transcription of her words, Chloe's confession announces quite early her status—that of slave. Why that description? While it is possible that Chloe lacked the proper words to describe her temporary enslavement, it is also likely that she, like her masters, defined herself as such. Indeed, if it was common for masters to accept gradual emancipation without accepting the end of slavery, so too was it common for masters to keep people like Chloe "in ignorance of their entitlement to freedom."⁵¹ Thus, if Kelso left Chloe without a clear sense of her potential freedom and without reference to her parents, he nevertheless did help her to materialize into service as his property—a status she tacitly accepted in her confession.

In 1794, Chloe was sold for the first time. On first read, the slave transfer records, like her registration document, accepted Chloe's statutorily limited servitude, "assign[ing] . . . unto the said John Harland his heirs and Assigns, the Residue of the time of Servitude for a negro Girl named Cloe." If the document is the site of numerous errors—recording her age as "sixteen years & five months" instead of twelve and noting her emancipation date as 1710 instead of 1810—the transfer from Rebecca Kelso to John Harland follows the letter of the law. Unlike many masters, Chloe's had made the transition to buying and selling time as opposed to buying and selling human property; still, Chloe remained an investment from which masters sought to recoup the purchase price and make a profit.

⁵⁰ Slave Returns, 1780–1814, no. 1789.065; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 105.

⁵¹ Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 91.

After passing briefly to an obscure Philadelphia owner, Chloe was sold in October 1794 to an influential Philadelphia merchant, Louis Martial Jacques Crousillat.⁵² No evidence exists for Chloe's time with Crousillat, nor does Chloe mention him in her confession. But it was the sale that mattered. Indeed, Chloe's bondage, rather than her eventual freedom, came to define her teenage years. By autumn 1795, Chloe was sold again—this time to Oliver Pollock, a slave dealer, Revolutionary War financier, and impoverished patriot with extensive business dealings in Philadelphia's "principal commercial houses" and financial and political ties to the young American government.⁵³ For the price of "118 Spanish Milled Dollars," Chloe became property, her period of indenture little more than an inconvenient but easily forgettable notation on an obscure record to which Chloe had no evident access.⁵⁴

Thus, in many ways, the transfer record also reflects the contradiction with which masters approached the end of slavery. Whatever her documented status, this successive chain of masters continued to treat Chloe as a slave. And if abolitionists believed that Pennsylvania's laws had "exterminated domestic slavery," Kelso and Chloe's subsequent masters proved otherwise.⁵⁵ Chloe remained with Pollock until November 1796, when she was once again sold, this time to the Carotherses, a young East Pennsboro family who lived and worked on a sizeable farm—measuring some 230 acres by 1790 and nearly 300 acres by 1798.⁵⁶ For four years, they tolerated one another. Chloe, by her account, endured the violent whippings of her mistress, and the Carotherses put up with Chloe's willfulness, until late December 1800, when Chloe decided "to bring all the misery [she] possibly could upon the family." "Twice" that month, Chloe

⁵² On Crousillat see Henry Simpson, *The Lives of Eminent Philadelphians, Now Deceased* (Philadelphia, 1859), 271–73; and John T. Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609–1884* (Philadelphia, 1884), 3:2212–13.

⁵³ On Pollock see James Alton James, *Oliver Pollock: The Life and Times of an Unknown Patriot* (New York, 1937), 54, 339, 269–346.

⁵⁴ Slave transfer from Rebeckah Kelso to John Harland, July 17, 1794, Philadelphia. Original document in the archives of the Cumberland County Historical Society, box 9, folder 15, available online at Afrolumens: <http://www.afrolumens.org/slavery/source3.html#123>; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 101.

⁵⁵ Benjamin Rush to Granville Sharp, Philadelphia, Aug. 1791, in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:608.

⁵⁶ US Direct Tax, East Pennsboro Township, 1798; Will of Andrew Carothers of East Pennsborough, will book H, 460, Cumberland County Historical Society.

“carried fire to the hog-house, next to the barn.” Unable to light it, she then turned her anger on the Carothers children.⁵⁷

Chloe’s crimes garnered nationwide attention but defied easy explanation.⁵⁸ Indeed, while nearly twenty newspapers covered the story, only the *Carlisle Gazette* and Rev. James Smith sought to explain Chloe’s actions. Unfortunately, Smith chose to do so via a text that at once situated Chloe within larger environmentalist arguments and strengthened her slave status as it forgot her freedom.⁵⁹ Part sermon on God’s “unbounded goodness” and part lecture on the duties owed by masters to their slaves, Smith’s transcription was a collision of eighteenth-century environmentalism, the patriarchal family, and Chloe. Chloe made a good vehicle for proving links between slavery and degeneracy, and her example highlighted the importance of moral and secular education in the early republic. Thus, Smith transformed Chloe’s crimes into a moral lesson, a critique of slavery in which bondage, rather than race and heredity, left folks ill-prepared for freedom. And he placed the blame squarely upon Chloe’s masters, who were duty bound to deliver the proper moral education to their dependents. But Chloe had never “received an education.” Until her sale to Oliver Pollock, Chloe claimed, “no pains were taken by any of my Owners, to instruct me in any duty I owed to God.” Chloe was twelve when she arrived in the Pollock household. Young and impressionable, she was ripe for “education in the principles of virtue.” And she did, for the first time, receive some instruction. Shamefully, however, the confession announced that the duty of her education had fallen not to Mr. Pollock but to his young daughter. The implications were obvious. The moral lessons that should have been given Chloe by her adult masters were left to a child, and as a result, Chloe’s prayers were “indifferent and cold,” and she led an unchristian life punctuated by “profane Swearing,” “high Passion,” and murder.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Kline’s *Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, June 24, 1801, July 15, 1801, July 22, 1801.

⁵⁸ Chloe’s crime and death made news in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

⁵⁹ See Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York, 1994), 30.

⁶⁰ Kline’s *Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, July 22, 1801; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 272. On patriarchy see Clare A. Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730–1830* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), 6, 12; Philip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1998), chap. 5; and E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1994), chap. 1.

Well-intentioned though it might have been, Smith's abolitionist endeavor tacitly accepted the various amnesias that shaped Chloe's life. As Chloe did for Kelso, so she did for Smith: she materialized into service. Through a polished and published biography, Smith situated Chloe in binary relationship to now one, now another, and finally a third male master—never mind that Chloe had at least six masters after 1794. Like Chloe's masters, Smith helped to "dissolve" the very clear difference between post-nati servitude and chattel slavery. Smith strengthened the idea that Chloe was property; his transcription ensured that Chloe was "born a slave" and that her last words were uttered in that selfsame condition.

As Eanus's and Chloe's cases demonstrate, whites troubled by the implications of impending black freedom could answer the problems of emancipation and citizenship by forgetting freedom, by producing fictions of slavery that "dissolved" post-nati folks into the ranks of slaves. Yet as slavery disappeared and the ranks of freedpeople grew, new questions required new answers. Going beyond attempting to forget freedom, rural whites, troubled by the growing presence—and, in some cases, social and political power—of free blacks sought to disavow the promise of revolutionary equality, forgetting revolutionary promises of inclusion and forging a discourse of enduring racial difference, inferiority, and unquestioned exclusion from the body politic.

The process by which equality was disavowed was complex; though, critically, such amnesia was a product of some rather circular reasoning. First, and thanks in part to the colonial legacies of race and to the economic and political struggles of the first decades after American independence, rural whites had historic justification and immediate reason for seeing blacks as inferior. Second, already armed with this belief, they failed to recognize that slavery and racial discrimination left freedpeople economically ill-prepared for freedom. As a result, former slaves were pushed into the swelling ranks of paupers and criminals, and the perceived increase in black crime and poverty became the foundation for notions of racial difference, danger, and inferiority.

Abolition did not breed equality. Not only did the historic experience of colonial slavery provide early republic citizens well-established notions of black alterity and inferiority, but the changing discourse of race offered new mechanisms for forgetting black equality, for "reconstituting racial oppression without slavery." Moreover, work by Roxann Wheeler and Bruce Dain, among others, reveals how the Enlightenment helped to

cement ideas of racial inferiority, marking the black body as the site not only of physical difference but of mental and cultural inferiority as well. As time wore on, even optimistic abolitionists grew circumspect, because “free blacks were not whitening and increasingly seemed little less degraded than slaves.”⁶¹

If ideas of black difference and inferiority persisted through the end of slavery, the same could not be said for the historic experience of slaves. Together, supporters and opponents of black freedom seemingly forgot former enslavement as a causative factor in the persistent disadvantage of free blacks and ignored the fact that emancipation left freedpeople dependent upon whites not only for their freedom but often for their lives after slavery.⁶² Rather, white Pennsylvanians soon came to fear black “dependency and disorder,” seemingly ignoring historic sources for blacks’ precarious social and economic condition; at the same time, they focused their concerns on the growing “problem” of black freedom. Slaves were generally ill-prepared for freedom, especially freedom in a world defined by emergent capitalist imperatives and the drive to keep many freedpeople in positions that looked suspiciously like slavery. Benjamin Rush argued that freedpeople’s “quality and quiet deportment” rendered them “universally preferred to white people of similar occupations.” White preference for black labor likely had little to do with comportment and more to do with masters’ ability to keep former slaves “in a state of semi-freedom.”⁶³

Semifreedom took many forms. Among Philadelphia’s freedpeople, it meant continued reliance upon or service to their former masters—and, even by 1800, more than half of the city’s free blacks remained in “white households.” In rural areas such as Chester County, Pennsylvania, the number of freedpeople residing in white households two decades after emancipation was well over 60 percent. For those who ventured into the urban and rural labor markets, the prospects were often dismal, and upward mobility was hard to come by; work by Gary Nash and Jean R.

⁶¹ Lyons, *Sex among the Rabble*, 4–5, 88–89, 225–32, 394–95; Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia, 2000); Dain, *Hideous Monster of the Mind*, 38. See also Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 101; Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 296; and Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 161.

⁶² Melish, *Disowning Slavery*, 158.

⁶³ Benjamin Rush to Granville Sharp, Philadelphia, Aug. 1791, in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:608; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 168.

Soderlund, Ira Berlin, and James and Lois Horton has shown that “many free blacks” encountered a “racially restricted system of employment that practically guaranteed” poverty and dependency. Free women found their way back into gendered and raced work as domestic servants and laundresses. Two-fifths of Philadelphia’s free black males worked as “laborers,” another 25 percent of black males turned to the sea for dangerous (though more reliable) employment, and only a handful of freedpeople rose into the professional classes in the four decades after 1780. Too often, freedpeople found infrequent work as day laborers or domestic servants.⁶⁴ Francis Smith understood that. A laboring “man of color” in early national Carlisle, Smith was driven to insolvency because there was simply no work to be found.⁶⁵

Exploring the words of some of the fourteen free blacks who filed for relief from their debts between 1800 and 1860, it becomes clear that even when they found steady work, Cumberland County’s free people of color faced the prospect that illness, injury, or the vicissitudes of a transforming economy could render them homeless, indebted, or imprisoned. Hard as he worked, George Fisher was “barely able to support and clothe himself from his wages.” The same was true for another “poor” laboring man named John Thomas. Though he had always “ma[de] use of industry to support his family,” Thomas could only find work during the “summer season.” Thus, in the winter of 1831–32, he opened an oyster house in Carlisle. When he and his family fell ill and the business faltered, he was unable to meet his obligations. Thomas was subsequently jailed and had his property sold to pay his creditors. A few months later, in January 1833, Thomas was back in court. Penniless and broken by “sickness,” Thomas had no illusions of moving up in the world; he had no property to take and little recourse but to rely upon the courts and, quite possibly, the county poorhouse. Though representing less than one percent of all insolvent petitions, the very public failures of freemen like Francis Smith, George Fisher, and John Thomas represented not only the moral failings of the poor but also the material and social costs of a dependent popula-

⁶⁴ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 167, 173, 182–83; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 110; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 246–51.

⁶⁵ Petition of Francis Smith, June 30, 1818, Insolvent Debtors Petitions, ser. 3, 1799–1860, Prothonotary Records Group, Prothonotary’s Office, Carlisle, PA, online at Cumberland County Archives at <http://ccweb.ccpa.net/archives/inventory.aspx?PSID=455>, no. 1818.0256.

tion. Few thought to consider how whites, consternated by black freedom, erected barriers that would force free blacks into the very ranks of paupers and criminals that they already saw blacks like Hope inhabiting.⁶⁶

Indeed, Hope embodied the material costs produced amid white abjuration of and anxiety over black freedom. A slave owned by Philip Baker of North Middleton Township, Hope was born twenty-one years before the enactment of gradual emancipation.⁶⁷ Upon Baker's death, Hope gained his freedom. Within a few years of freedom, however, the aging freedman found himself dependent upon handouts, and by 1818, justices declared him a pauper and remanded him to the custody of the local poorhouse. Hope's situation was by no means unusual. Countless residents, black and white, found themselves reliant upon the goodwill of community.⁶⁸ Yet, at another level, Hope's case was different. That Hope's story survives is less a testament to recordkeeping or to lucky research than to the developing amnesia about the region's history of slavery. Indeed, our knowledge of Hope's life and experience results from a telling but convoluted legal battle that hit the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 1824. By the mid-1820s, two counties, several townships, and the family of Hope's former master were in a pitched battle to determine who was liable for the care of an aging black pauper. Convinced that freedpeople like Hope were a drain on public resources, officials became less concerned with liberating slaves and more worried about what to do with blacks once they were free. Representative though he was of the "grinding poverty" that awaited so many freedpeople in the decades after emancipation, Hope was also symbolic of the growing culture of dependency born of limited opportunity and poverty and reified by whites unable or unwilling to see that reliance upon the almshouse was not the product of blacks' inborn inferiority but of whites' resistance to black material and political independence.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Petition of George Fisher, Aug 9, 1831; Petitions of John Thomas, Apr. 9, 1832, Jan. 14, 1833, Insolvent Debtors Petitions, ser. 3, 1799–1860, nos. 1831.1146, 1832.1171, and 1833.1253.

⁶⁷ Frederick Watts, ed., *Reports of Cases Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1835), 2:280–82.

⁶⁸ In 1814, for example, a 113-year-old African American was one of thirty-three aged and infirm men and women "supported" by the poorhouse. Poorhouse Directors' Statements, Apr. 1814, Clerk of Courts Record Group, Cumberland County Historical Society, online at Cumberland County Archives at <http://ccweb.ccpa.net/archives/inventory.aspx?PSID=469>.

⁶⁹ Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 191.

If freedpeople like Hope inspired for whites anxiety about black dependency, other rural blacks conjured a much more dangerous image—that of black crime. Again, it was a particularly circular brand of reasoning: black crime begat a racist “trope” of thievery in the “popular press,” thus making crime the focal point for urban and rural worries over “the state of race relations in the emerging republic.”⁷⁰ At one level, black crime was rooted in the precarious economic conditions in which freedpeople were left after slavery. Chloe made that manifest when she suggested that “people of her color [were] induced” to steal “on account of their necessities.”⁷¹ Studies of court records from both rural and urban Pennsylvania confirm Chloe’s assessment of black crime. Jack Marietta and G. S. Rowe have shown that 75 percent of all black crimes were property crimes, while Leslie Patrick Stamp instructively suggests that stolen property—consisting mainly of “clothing and fabric, bank notes and money, food and tools”—reveals “the relationship between race, poverty, and crimes against property.”⁷² And, of course, black crime was not confined to the city. Many African Americans graced the pages of the *Carlisle Gazette* or the cells of the local jail. Kelso’s slave Will wound up in the Carlisle jail after he “stole £23 from John Carver of York Co.” An ingenious slave named Cuffee stole two cows and sold them to laborer James Orr before stealing the purloined cows again.⁷³ And even if freed blacks were not paupers or criminals, white society increasingly saw them as such. In time, the Pennsylvania Abolition Society (PAS) would see black freedom through a similar lens. “Freed from the shackles,” suggested the PAS, “those victims of inhumanity thronged on our streets . . . only to swell the list of our criminals and augment the catalogue of our paupers.”⁷⁴ In the end, the growing number of rural Pennsylvania’s black pau-

⁷⁰ Sweet, *Bodies Politic*, 263, 276.

⁷¹ Kline’s *Carlisle Weekly Gazette*, July 22, 1801.

⁷² G. S. Rowe, “Black Offenders, Criminal Courts, and Philadelphia Society in the Late Eighteenth-Century,” *Journal of Social History* 22 (1989): 689; Nash and Soderlund, *Freedom by Degrees*, 191; Jack D. Marietta and G. S. Rowe, *Troubled Experiment: Crime and Justice in Pennsylvania, 1682–1800* (Philadelphia, 2006), 249; Leslie Patrick Stamp, “Numbers that Are Not New: African Americans in the Country’s First Prison, 1790–1835,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 119 (1995): 121–22.

⁷³ Schaumann, *Indictments, 1750–1800*, nos. 1368, 1531, 1552.

⁷⁴ Benjamin Rush to Granville Sharp, Philadelphia, Aug. 1791, in *Letters of Benjamin Rush*, 1:608; *Minutes of the Proceeding of the Twelfth American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race* (Philadelphia, 1809), 16.

pers and criminals whose destitution led them to the workhouse and whose crimes led them to the penitentiary or the gallows helped, at once, to heighten black difference and mark African Americans as inassimilable.⁷⁵

There was, of course, nothing new in all this. The idea that Pennsylvania's African American population was different was the product of a legal and cultural order established during the colonial era. During the first quarter of the eighteenth century, Pennsylvania's legislators not only established special courts and punishments for African Americans but, more importantly, marked the black body, free or slave, as different.⁷⁶ With the 1726 Act for the Better Regulation of Negroes in This Province, Pennsylvania whites forged a legal and cultural order that assumed free and enslaved blacks were dangerous, criminal, and shiftless. Indeed, while the initial lines of the act outlined compensation for masters whose slaves were executed for a capital crime, the brunt of the legislation worked to contain, constrain, and categorize the colony's black population by barring interracial marriage, preventing the hiring out of slaves, and, in viewing freedpeople as slothful burdens on the public coffers, creating strict regulations on masters seeking to free their slaves.⁷⁷ Together, these early slave codes ensured that, as Edward Turner suggested, "not only was the negro now subjected to special regulation because he was a slave, but whether slave or free he was now made subject to special restrictions because he was a negro."⁷⁸

These ideas and policies cast a long shadow over the postrevolutionary period and proved useful to whites attempting to disavow black freedom and equality. Indeed, in their effort to suture the wounds left by revolution and emancipation, some rural whites turned their pens and presses over to highlighting the difference and dangers posed by an unredeemable population. Public discourse, especially newspaper accounts of Chloe's crime, resonated with those very ideas and fears. In his accounts of Chloe's crime and trial, the editor of the *Carlisle Gazette*, George Kline, highlighted her degeneracy and corporeal difference. Whether summarizing the confession, published court documents, or execution notice,

⁷⁵ James Brewer Stewart, "Modernizing 'Difference': The Political Meanings of Color in the Free States, 1776–1840," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (1999): 693–94.

⁷⁶ An Act for the Trial of Negroes (1700, 1705–1706), in *The Statute at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682–1801*, comp. James T. Mitchell et al., 18 vols. ([Harrisburg], 1896–1915), 2:77–79.

⁷⁷ An Act for the Better Regulation of Negroes in This Province (1726), in *Statutes at Large*, 4:59–64.

⁷⁸ Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, 26.

Kline was always ready to describe Chloe's crimes as "inhuman," "unparalleled," or "unexampled in atrocity." And just like his slavekeeping neighbors, Kline defined Chloe as different, for her blackness was made integral to her crimes. To Kline, the court, and Mrs. Carothers, it mattered that Chloe was a "Negro Wench," "Negro Woman," or just plain "Negro." Backed by colonial foundations and an emergent racist discourse that "locat[ed] the source of a distinctive collective identity in the body,"⁷⁹ armed with mounting evidence of poverty and criminality, and blessed with the ability to forget that slavery—let alone the limited opportunities afforded to blacks in freedom—had placed African Americans in precarious socioeconomic positions, rural whites helped to slowly erode any chance that freedpeople might be woven into the American republic. Whether through forgetting the distinction between slave and servant or, in the face of freedpeople's degraded condition, ignoring the central role played by the history of slavery and emergent ideas of race in creating such conditions, rural Pennsylvanians forgot freedom.

Still, blacks would not fully be written out of Pennsylvania citizenry until the late 1830s. Even by that time, the possibility remained that blacks might achieve citizenship and that the amnesia about emancipation and slavery might be replaced with an enduring language of equality. Throughout Pennsylvania's rural counties, once-large slave populations gave way to large free populations that began to forge important and powerful religious and political blocs. Likewise, the prominent role of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church in Shippensburg as an organizing force against southern slavery and northern inequality and the direct participation of African Americans in Pennsylvania elections together revealed a powerful presence that made fully forgetting freedom impossible. Unable to forget freedom, whites chose instead to aggressively act against free blacks' calls for citizenship and inclusion.

Armed with scientific and folk notions about race, whites worked diligently to so marginalize freedpeople as to transform them into a subordinated, noncitizen other and thus erase from memory longstanding anxieties over slavery and freedom. By the second and third decades of the nineteenth century, and hastened by the forces of democratization, national party formation, and economic transformation, Pennsylvania politics began focusing on the still-unresolved issue of black citizenship.

⁷⁹ Joanne Pope Melish, "The 'Condition' Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North," *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (1999): 657–68, 660–64, 669.

Though the Gradual Abolition Act freed not a single slave, it “made,” Edward Price suggests, “no comment as to the political status of free blacks.”⁸⁰ Until voting rights for blacks were eliminated in the constitutional convention of 1837–38, the state’s ambiguous definition of a citizen as a taxpaying “freeman of the full age of twenty one years,” theoretically extended suffrage to free black males—who did vote in Cumberland and other rural counties. Thus, while African Americans met with increased barriers to social and economic equality, many could still participate directly in politics. Then, in January 1838, and in spite of passionate attempts to uphold the early national dream of democracy, Pennsylvania’s constitutional convention stripped free blacks of citizenship when it redefined voters as white male taxpayers.⁸¹ Convinced by their representatives that any effort “to place the black population on an equal footing with the white population, would prove ruinous to the black people” and disastrous to “the poor laboring white man,” Pennsylvanians high and low announced not merely that blacks were different and inassimilable, but, after decades of uncertainty, that the promise and anxieties of gradual abolition could be forgotten.⁸²

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⁸⁰ Edward Price, “The Black Voting Rights Issue in Pennsylvania, 1780–1900,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 100 (1976): 356.

⁸¹ On the end of black political participation see John Agg, ed., *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to Propose Amendments to the Constitution, Commenced and Held at Harrisburg, on the Second Day of May, 1837*, 14 vols. (Harrisburg, 1837–1839), 9:380; Price, “Black Voting Rights Issue,” 357; Eric Ledell Smith, “The End of Black Voting Rights in Pennsylvania: African Americans and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837–1838,” *Pennsylvania History* 65 (1998): 279–99; Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage: Race, Party, and Voting Rights in the Antebellum North* (New York, 2008); Roy Akagi, “The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1838,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 48 (1924): 301–33; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 106; Theodore Hershberg, “Free Blacks in Antebellum Philadelphia: A Study of Ex-Slaves, Freeborn, and Economic Decline,” in *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Perspectives*, ed. Joe William Trotter and Eric Ledell Smith (University Park, PA, 1997), 124–27; and Philip S. Klein, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1817–1832: A Game without Rules* (Philadelphia, 1974).

⁸² *Proceedings and Debates of the Convention of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*, 2:477.