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A Legacy Transformed: The Christiana Riot in Historical Memory

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A Legacy Transformed: The Christiana Riot in Historical Memory

by

Anthony Rice

A Dissertation

Presented to the Graduate and Research Committee

of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

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On the morning of September 11, 1851, a slaveholder laid dead at the hands of fugitive slaves outside a small Pennsylvanian farming community in Christiana, Lancaster County. This slave resistance to a southern posse shocked Americans, precipitated a show trial, and embarrassed locals who just wanted the story to disappear. But as years passed, history merged with memory to transform the Christiana Riot from an incident forgotten to one of continual reinterpretation in the historical and local community.

This dissertation traces the legacy of the Christiana Riot and how its narrative changed over time in relation to historical memory, changing racial attitudes in the United States, and the influence of a new social history on issues of race. From 1851-2001 the Christiana Riot would come full circle as a result of the dynamic nature of memory between two distinct racial groups in Lancaster County. Throughout these years the Christiana Riot's legacy would have as much to do with race as it did with history as black memory clashed with white sentimentality over the riot's historical significance. During its three public commemorations in 1911, 1951, and 2001, the riot's meaning was transformed to suit current political circumstances both locally and nationally. The 1911 ceremony was affected by Civil War memory and Jim Crow policies whereby whites became the heroes of the riot as African-Americans were pushed to the background. The

1951 commemoration mixed white courage with black agency during a transitional period in the riot's historical memory that mirrored the civil rights movement then beginning in the country. In 2001, progressive racial attitudes mixed with a new social history sensitive to previously underrepresented groups to create a public celebration of the riot focused on black historical contributions and self-emancipation. The transformation of the Christiana Riot's legacy revealed the adaptive power of memory and its fluid relationship with what we consider important in history. This continual struggle between fact and fiction became as central to the riot story as it is to our personal understanding of the past—a past filled with Christiana Riots and unearthing the truth behind the memory.

Introduction

On February 15, 1851, Frederick Jenkins could only reminisce about the freedom he so briefly enjoyed before his capture as a fugitive slave. Finding himself in the defendant's chair of a Boston court was not the fate he envisioned during his escape from Virginia nine months earlier. As the judge ordered a continuance of the trial, all hope appeared lost for the accused man known as Shadrach. Suddenly, the courtroom doors burst open and a large crowd of black men pushed their way to the side of Jenkins. With a simple nod of agreement, the fugitive was lifted from his seat and rushed from the courthouse by his racial brethren. Disappearing into the city, Jenkins would eventually reach the safety of Canada where United States law could no longer touch him. Eight men were later arrested and tried for the Shadrach rescue, but each was found innocent of the charges. The failure to achieve a single conviction made this first major test of the newly minted Fugitive Slave Act a bitter disappointment to southern sensibilities.

Prompted by fears of sectional discord, President Millard Fillmore condemned the rescue and exhorted citizens to respect the law for sake of the Union. Although the President's overtures achieved a peaceful interlude, it was merely an ephemeral pause as the issue of slavery sparked another resistance seven months later. This time the national spotlight did not shine upon another metropole the likes of Boston. Instead, it focused upon a violent clash that erupted two miles outside a small town in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, when a group of fugitive slaves clashed with a southern posse resulting in the death of a slaveholder. The riot occurred on the outskirts of Christiana on September 11, 1851, effectively making it the second test of the controversial fugitive slave law.

Although occurring in a central Pennsylvanian farming community roughly fifty miles west of Philadelphia and twenty miles north of the Maryland border, the incident inflamed nationwide controversy by ending in bloodshed that resulted in the largest number of individuals being charged with treason at one time in American history.¹ The Christiana Riot and its aftermath was such a blow to southern sentiments of pride and justice that Lancaster Countians soon found themselves inexorably linked with a series of events that ultimately plunged America into Civil War a decade later.

This study traces the historical memory of the Christiana Riot from its controversial beginning in a Pennsylvania field to its celebration in 2001. Over the course of those 150 years, the riot underwent a dramatic reappraisal in the memories of Lancaster County residents as reflected through its public commemorations in 1911, 1951, and 2001. Initially perceived locally as an incident best forgotten, the riot was transformed into a symbol of sectional reconciliation in 1911, a cautionary tale of legal defiance and racial inequality forty years later, and a triumphant example of black agency in 2001. Each commemoration was shaped by mainstream historical and societal trends regarding race, Civil War memory, African-American history, the civil rights movement, and social history. That the riot celebrations each presented different themes was no accident. As American society transformed, so too did the riot's historical memory in accordance with that transformation. What was for many years a contentious memory between black and white over the riot and its meaning slowly aligned itself into one of racial consensus over

¹ Stanley W. Campbell, *The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), pp. 148-151; "'He Died For Law,' in Christiana Riot," *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 1955; Jonathan Katz, *Resistance at Christiana: The Fugitive Slave Rebellion, Christiana, Pennsylvania, September 11, 1851, A Documentary Account* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1974), p. 4.

a century later. How and why this historical understanding occurred composes the bulk of this study, illustrating a Christiana Riot legacy shaped more by public memory than historical fact.

Previous studies by David Blight and others have rightly argued the fluidity of historical memory over time and its relationship with public celebrations. Being a social construct, memory is not set in stone. It is intimately tied to personal psychology and perceived through a malleable lens of raw emotion that both changes and degrades over time. An individual's memories help them make sense of the world around them, yet structural forces and societal hierarchies are influential in determining what is remembered or forgotten. Such manipulation by outside forces causes memories to comprise various characteristics ranging from fleeting, inaccurate, self-serving, repressed, or outright lies that have less to do with historical accuracy and more to do with personal subjectivity. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs found that people remember the past to suit their own needs. As an individual reflects on the past, they reconstruct it by arranging relevant recollections and eliminating the irrelevant in relation to where society currently finds itself. This makes memory a collective function, one that Halbwachs argued was exemplified by two aspects of social thought: "on the one hand a memory, that is, a framework made out of notions that serve as landmarks for us and that refer exclusively to the past; on the other hand a rational activity that takes its point of departure in the conditions in which the society at the moment finds itself, in other words, in the present." English psychologist Frederic Bartlett similarly stated that memories are arranged under the auspices of subjectivity whereby what one remembers is "far more

decisively an affair of construction rather than one of mere reproduction.”² The Christiana Riot was continuously affected by such constructed and collective memories be it from southern segregationists, northern whites, African-Americans, or historical societies. By conceiving the riot through their own political spectrums, these groups altered not only commemorative themes, but also the historical narrative itself as their societal perceptions manipulated the riot’s historical significance.

Recognizing this connection between memory and history is crucial in understanding the Christiana Riot’s propensity for social adaptation. Paul Shackel observed, “as present conditions change socially, politically, and ideologically, the collective memory of the past will also change.” The riot’s legacy was no different as over the span of 150 years it was reinterpreted directly in relation to two major factors: an unwavering black counter-memory of the Civil War and an ever-improving racial climate in the United States. The increasingly liberal nature of each successive riot commemoration paralleled social history’s progressive influence on liberation historiography and a growing American acceptance of racial equality that slowly discarded bigoted notions of miscegenation and segregation. In this manner, riot ceremonies were influenced more by contemporary racial matters than historical precision. Roy Rosenzweig maintained “the most powerful

² The study of historical memory is a growing field. For notable contemporary authors who have discussed the flexibility of historical memory, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: MA, Harvard University Press, 2001); Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Knopf, 1991); John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 3; Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. & trans., Lewis A. Coser, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 182-183; Frederic Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1932; reprint, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 205-209.

meanings of the past come out of the dialogue between the past and the present, out of the ways the past can be used to answer pressing current-day questions about relationships, identity, immortality, and agency.”³ Riot ceremonies manifested this dialogue by reflecting the evolving American mindset regarding the issue of race. The commemorations continually made Americans rethink their views on race and its associative meanings inherent to the Christiana Riot. With each passing generation a deeper understanding of the riot’s significance emerged as modern perspectives continually enriched and even modified earlier conceptions of the story. By the early twenty-first century, the riot narrative of heroes, villains, motivations, and mythologies were almost entirely rearranged from its original antebellum perceptions. The riot’s fundamental story as a conflict between black and white therefore elucidated various stages in which both Lancaster Countians, and the country as a whole, came to process the issue of race relations in the ongoing civil rights struggle.

As social history and public opinion have transformed the Christiana Riot story, the issue of interpretation becomes of paramount importance in studying its legacy. Author Freeman Tilden defined interpretation as “an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”

Interpreting history in such a manner essentially allows one to realize their sense of place and connect the past with the present through interactive means. But the Christiana Riot is unique because it lacks any of the physical artifacts or material remains Tilden

³ Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2003), p. 11; Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 178.

described in which to ground its story. Today, the site of the riot is an overgrown field offering no indication of what happened there in 1851. This lack of physical remains and interactivity has made the riot story largely dependent upon an oral history tradition subject to the malleability of constructed memory. There were a few books written on the riot, but each received limited exposure to the reading public. The only first-hand account, *The Freedman's Story*, was published fifteen years later and of questionable authorship.⁴ With no structural foundation in which to root the riot story, it underwent continual reinterpretations having more in common with present circumstances than established facts. The riot's legacy therefore became a blank slate ripe for competing memories between black and white over a century and a half of disagreement.

In the *Presence of the Past*, Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen observed how individuals study the past to create their own truths and serve their own needs in shaping personal identities. "Everyone uses the past for similar and fundamentally human purposes," Thelen argued. "People use the past to imagine how they might change and be changed by other people and by circumstances. And they use the past critically, creatively, and actively, in making and testing narratives of change and continuity." Competing memories between black and white over the riot's historical significance and its relationship with an emancipationist conception of the Civil War continuously refashioned the riot story to suit such personal identities. At each Christiana Riot commemoration the volatile nature of collective memory pulled the riot narrative in multiple directions for self-serving purposes with the ceremonies becoming testing

⁴ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 3d. ed. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), p. 8; William Parker, "The Freedman's Story," *Atlantic Monthly* 17 (Feb.-Mar. 1866). Someone named "E.K." edited "The Freedman's Story" and there are questions as to Parker's literacy at the time his account was published.

grounds for new interpretations based more on color than historical accuracy. As the commemorations were all sponsored by local historical societies, these collections of like-minded individuals used the riot to serve their own political agendas and personal biases. John Gillis referred to commemorations as “the coordination of individual and group memories” where what appears consensual is actually “the product of processes of intense conquest, struggle, and, in some instances, annihilation.”⁵ The riot commemorations illustrated this contested nature of history as white perceptions clashed with black viewpoints of the incident, thereby reinforcing the instability of collective memory in interpreting historical events. The Lancaster County Historical Society (1911, 1951) and the Christiana Historical Society (2001) both used the riot as a historical focal point for their specific ideological aims as elements of the story were highlighted, reimagined, or ignored depending upon political necessity.

As promulgators of the riot’s public memory, the Societies became the interpretive decision-makers as to its meaning and historical significance. It was their conception of the riot that was presented as fact to audiences that, by and large, reflected their same mores and worldview. For commemoration organizers the purpose of history was to reinforce cultural values and promote ideological beliefs. The ceremonies were their opportunities to “own” the riot or, at the very least, temporarily control its memory to publicize their particular interpretation. This attempt at owning the riot raised larger questions of historical authenticity as to who has the authority to interpret the past especially in regards to minority peoples. For over a century whites monopolized the historical memory of the Civil War and the riot to tell a white-centered narrative that

⁵ Rosenzweig and Thelen, pp. 96, 102, 205; Gillis, p. 5.

placed African-Americans in the background. Whites interpreted the history of abolitionism and emancipation as movements carried out primarily by whites for the sake of blacks. Placed into roles as unwitting beneficiaries of white largess, African-Americans balked at their submissive characterization by white scholars and attempted to assert their historical contributions to the abolishment of slavery. Again and again the riot's legacy would tell two different stories as to what happened outside Christiana on that early morning in 1851. The Christiana Riot essentially became a racial conflict both literally and figuratively as white and black struggled over interpretive control of the riot's memory in local and national history. This struggle not only highlighted the riot's controversial history, but also the manipulative processes behind presenting that history. A history that had very different purposes depending upon the color of the observer.

The Christiana Riot was historically significant because it showed Americans in 1851 that those opposed to the institution of slavery could not be forced to uphold its tenets. The death of a slaveholder at the hands of fugitives struck a distinctly personal vein to white southerners who demanded justice from their northern counterparts, yet ultimately found it lacking. Slavery had simply become too divisive in the antebellum United States and possibilities for some kind of agreement on the issue continued to narrow until it was finally decided by war. But unlike the Civil War itself, the riot has faded into relative obscurity, as its significance to the history of black liberation and its role in contributing to a national conflict have been ignored by many in the historical community. Prior to the 1970s, only four published works concentrated specifically on the Christiana Riot. In 1852, W. Arthur Jackson's *History of the Trial of Castner Hanway and Others for*

Treason at Philadelphia in November, 1851 related the political background of the riot and depended upon trial testimony to reconstruct the story. William Parker's narrative of the incident, *The Freedman's Story*, provided his personal interpretation of events as the leader of the fugitives and was not published until a year after the Civil War in 1866. Taking into account questions pertaining to the clarity of memories fifteen years after the riot and the dubiousness of his personal authorship, Parker's work was of vital historical significance as it was a first-hand account that furnished a voice for the black rioters. *The Freedman's Story* provided a window into the soul of antebellum blacks and its greatest impact comes from relating their hopes, dreams, and fears regarding the ambiguous relationship between African-Americans and the issue of liberty. Thirty years later, David R. Forbes' drew upon documentary accounts for his 1898 study *A True Story of the Christiana Riot*. However, his work was attacked as being "tinged with sectional prejudice" and was released in such small numbers that it was probably read by little more than friends and family. In conjunction with the 1911 Christiana Riot commemoration, William Hensel provided a more balanced interpretation in *The Christiana Riot and the Treason Trials of 1851*. Hensel utilized a wide range of sources and provided a succinct overview of the riot, but his eagerness in maintaining an objective viewpoint belied attempts to sufficiently denounce the pro-slavery agenda. Other than the above works, the riot was typically mentioned in passing as part of larger histories concerning slavery or collections of writings and biographies of specific individuals.⁶

⁶ Thomas P. Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. xii; W. U. Hensel, *The Christiana Riot and The Treason Trials of 1851: An Historical Sketch*, 2d ed. (Lancaster, PA: The New Era Printing Company, 1911), p. 3;

After 1911, the Christiana Riot essentially disappeared from historical memory until Jonathan Katz published *Resistance at Christiana* in 1974. Influenced by the new social history of the sixties, Katz provided little actual analysis to his study, preferring instead to provide a “documentary account” of events that relied upon quotations from antebellum historical figures. The riot would again vanish until 1991 when it was finally given a proper interpretative study in the form of Thomas Slaughter’s *Bloody Dawn*. Slaughter exhaustively researched the riot and its aftermath using events at Christiana as a springboard into a larger examination of racial violence throughout the North. Ella Forbes followed in 1998 with her *But We Have No Country: The 1851 Christiana, Pennsylvania Resistance*. While not as comprehensive as *Bloody Dawn*, Forbes’ offered a refreshing perspective on the riot by focusing on the themes of black agency and liberation, two issues that were inferred in previous studies yet not specifically identified and elaborated upon.⁷

Similar to the riot itself, its public commemorations have received only a fleeting analysis from authors. Historians Thomas Slaughter and Ella Forbes have been the only writers to scrutinize the ceremonies in any detail. Both appeared uninterested in the 1911 and 1951 commemorations by encapsulating the events in only a few pages where they scathingly criticized the organizers for promoting a white-centered story of the riot. Their comments are in a similar vein to arguments proposed by authors such as David Blight, Paul Shackel, and Kirk Savage who chided Civil War semicentennials for

Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, eds., *African American Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 651-652; William Parker, “The Freedman’s Story,” *Atlantic Monthly* 17 (Feb.-Mar. 1866); David Forbes, *A True Story of the Christiana Riot* (Quarryville, PA: The Sun Printing House, 1898). Forbes’ “prejudice” was a northern anti-slavery bias; past classifications of the riot as a part of general histories is argued by Hensel on pp. 2-3.

⁷ Ella Forbes, *But We Have No Country: The 1851 Christiana, Pennsylvania Resistance* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, 1998).

ignoring black agency in self-emancipation in an effort to foster white reconciliation between North and South. For Slaughter and Forbes the commemorations are straightforward examples of whites co-opting the riot's public memory for their own personal and political ends, but the Christiana Riot's public memory should not simply be cast aside as a series of myths presented for ideological purposes. Slaughter and Forbes criticized the commemorations with contentions that only a cursory investigation could provide.⁸ However, investigating the commemorations more closely reveals hidden meanings and symbols that illustrate an interconnected story of racial liberation slowly working its way to the surface. This historical development took decades as the riot's emancipationist message struggled against a white-racist mentality that attempted to ignore it. The Christiana Riot's historical memory was thus a long-term transformation that cannot be told in a few pages, but requires a detailed treatment to afford it the necessary justice.

Thomas Slaughter asked why a "tragedy" such as the Christiana Riot should even be remembered. To this he posits one answer: "we have yet to learn any number of lessons taught by this story.... Perhaps we all can someday acknowledge the continuing injustices that lead to such violence." While it is true that racial and political inequities gave birth to the riot, his query can be taken a step further. As well as an incident being remembered, it is just as significant to investigate how that incident has been remembered. The Christiana Riot commemorations are major signposts in this regard

⁸ For their brief discussions on the Christiana Riot commemorations, see Slaughter, pp. 184-186 and E. Forbes, pp. 255-261; For more detailed studies of Civil War memory see Blight, *Race and Reunion*; Paul Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 2003); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

because their public nature and interpretive biases illustrated the shared beliefs of each respective era. John Bodnar described commemorations as containing “powerful symbolic expressions—metaphors, signs, and rituals—that give meaning to competing interpretations of past and present reality.” The riot commemorations were no different, each was rife with symbolism tracing the lethargic progress of two races bridging a chasm four centuries wide that incorporated a slumber in 1911, a stir in 1951, and an awakening in 2001. This process of historical cultivation did not occur in a vacuum. Riot interpretations were profoundly affected by a progressive social history and the evolution of race relations throughout the country. Analyzing the riot’s historical memory through its commemorations provides a fascinating look into the social, political, and even racial mindset of those who came before and the environment in which they lived. What each ceremony chose to remember about the riot and, more importantly, what each chose to ignore, downplay, or deny provides clues into achieving a better understanding of our past. Lessons gained from analyzing such forms of public memory go beyond a simple foray into rudimentary human psychology that invokes abstract scientific concepts which prove difficult in their application to reality. Instead, they tell us about who we are and where we came from. David Thelen argued that the study of memory “can illuminate how individuals, ethnic groups, political parties, and cultures shape and reshape their identities—as know to themselves and to others.”⁹ Connecting the Christiana Riot’s history with its memory not only helps us come to terms with a symbolic event in American history, but also helps us better understand something more important—ourselves.

⁹ Slaughter, p. 186; Bodnar, p. 16; David Thelen, “Memory and American History,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989), p. 1118.

Chapter one of this study concentrates on the historical background that triggered the Christiana Riot in 1851. The riot's relationships with the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 are critical in discerning why a group of fugitive slaves deemed it necessary to take the law into their own hands. The fugitive laws were a result of a national consensus that saw northern indifference acquiesce to southern demands in strengthening the institution of slavery. Tracing the consensus that led to the Compromise of 1850 is addressed in this chapter along with the abolitionist and African-American reactions to a Fugitive Slave Act that ostensibly made every American a slave catcher. Pennsylvania's refusal to assist in enforcing the 1793 act, especially concerning the case of *Prigg vs. Pennsylvania* in 1842, and begrudging acceptance of its 1850 iteration illustrated the divisive nature of slavery even in a state that no longer contained slaves. The fugitive laws were particularly divisive in Lancaster County where the area's German and Scots-Irish populations contended with their abolitionist, Quaker, and free black neighbors over issues of race and white identity. This ongoing rivalry developed into a dangerous contest of local slave catchers versus a determined black community and its white sympathizers. The extralegal battles between these two factions contributed to the racially tense environment then existing in the county that ultimately culminated in the death of a slaveholder during the Christiana Riot.

The riot itself and what actually happened in the early morning of September 11, 1851 is discussed in chapter two. The battle between black fugitive William Parker and southern slaveholder Edward Gorsuch was as much a contest of wills as it was of physical force. These two men were more than mere combatants, as they represented a microcosm of the greater slavery debate then raging in the country. Parker's stand was

an ideological struggle of black liberation in the face of white oppression. Gorsuch was a product of southern tradition that accepted slavery as an economic and cultural necessity. For Parker, the clash was a matter of life and death: the republican notion to live free or die in the attempt. With the law on his side, Gorsuch could not fathom why Parker was so resistant to its will nor could he understand the stakes involved. The appearance of white abolitionists at the scene did little to abate the inevitable violence between two men who were unmovable in their beliefs when it came to servitude or the law. Their fight outside Christiana would foreshadow what occurred a decade later when slavery's incompatibility with liberty resulted in a larger, yet similar conflict.

The public reaction to the Christiana Riot and its relation to the nation's ongoing struggle over slavery is analyzed in chapter three. The death of a slaveholder in attempting to recapture his human chattel placed the small town of Christiana in newspaper headlines across the country. Reaction to the incident was swift and passionate in both North and South, but not necessarily in disagreement. While the South was understandably hostile to the riot's outcome, there were those in the North who were similarly outraged by such lawlessness. Northerners tended to blame abolitionism for deluding African-Americans into believing that violence against the slave system was justifiable and righteous. White abolitionists were mythologized as the spiritual leaders of black resistance and inaccurately portrayed as leading a riot in which they had limited participation. Furthermore, abolitionists themselves were divided over the use of violence enacted at Christiana. Rather than uniting behind the rioters, abolitionists effectively split into two camps and became embroiled in arguments with each other over the efficacy of violent versus non-violent resistance to their cause. This divide even

amongst those sympathetic to the rioters, illustrated the fractious nature of any issue concerning black versus white in antebellum America and turned the Christiana Riot into an examination of the proper means for African-Americans to gain an otherwise denied freedom.

Chapter four describes the treason trials that followed the apprehension of those involved in the riot. The insistence of federal officials in charging the rioters with treason owed more to the political volatility of the case rather than any real attempt by the defendants to overthrow the government. Like many in the media, prosecutors were similarly convinced of a white abolitionist conspiracy behind the riot. The arrests of Castner Hanway and four other white men made the trial a story of Quaker martyrdom instead of black self-emancipation. The white antebellum mindset considered African-Americans as incapable of organizing anything amounting to the resistance offered at Christiana. Black roles thus became diminished behind a legal fight between Hanway's defense team that included Thaddeus Stevens—Lancaster County congressional representative and foremost abolitionist—against a prosecutorial team that included Maryland's Attorney General. The trial caught the country's imagination in late 1851, turning into a political and philosophical spectacle. The courtroom battle became a proxy war, a legal debate over slavery and abolitionism disguised as the prosecution of a single individual. Weeks of testimony and legal argument led to an unsurprising verdict whereby the riot would once again irritate southern onlookers by persistently symbolizing the failures of legal coercion.

Chapter five concerns the spirit of white reconciliation that spread throughout the country in the decades following the Civil War. After an initial postwar period of

sectional rivalry, white Americans increasingly disregarded wartime differences from the 1870s onward and reunited along non-ideological lines. Through Decoration Day ceremonies, a southern Lost Cause, Civil War reminiscences, veterans' reunions, and public monuments, whites in both North and South forgot the emancipationist lessons of the war. Gone was any mention of slavery as a reason for why the war was fought, replaced by a martial fraternalism that celebrated the heroism of both sides. Previous historians such as David Blight have discussed the ignoring of black roles in self-emancipation for the sake of white reconciliation finding that Americans were undergoing a historical amnesia during this period. By relegating African-Americans to the background, white Americans could publicly reunite without the awkward issue of race interfering in their renewed brotherhood. But the emancipationist conception of the war would not die, as blacks took it upon themselves to keep emancipation alive. Acting as guardians of a precious piece of Civil War memory, African-Americans would patiently wait for decades until society was willing to give emancipation its just due.

The 1911 Christiana Riot commemoration is described in chapter six. This first observance transpired during an era when segregation, Jim Crow, and lynchings made any public examination of race relations a very heated topic. The Lancaster County Historical Society's decision to hold a "neutral" commemoration in 1911 unfortunately caused it to tell a white-centered story of the riot that had more to do with healing postwar fissures among whites rather than focusing on black agency. The controversial nature of racial issues at this period in American history was brought to the forefront by the lynching of Zachariah Walker in nearby Coatesville a short time before the commemoration took place. Such a grisly incident so close to home served as proof to

organizers that the event must be impartial to assure the attendance of Gorsuch descendants and to defend the Society from any accusations of attempting to reopen old wounds. White fraternalism was the primary theme of festivities, but there were elements that focused upon black agency in both covert and implied tones. The riot's survival as a story of black self-emancipation was indebted to these hidden symbols that maintained a black-centered perspective throughout the century and foreshadowed the themes of later commemorations.

Chapter seven recounts the 1951 Christiana Riot commemoration as well as the changing nature of race in America since the 1911 ceremony. White Americans were still beholden to the consensual orthodoxy of the Civil War as a white conflict bereft of an emancipationist rationale. White scholars interpreted the Reconstruction that followed the conflict as a failed experiment because of black lethargy and incompetence. African-American intellectuals would struggle to maintain the black counter-memory of the war in the face of such racist scholarship, promoting black historical contributions and self-emancipation as justifications for racial equality. The 1951 riot commemoration found itself in the midst of this intellectual battle while it strained under the same fears of angering sectional sensibilities like its predecessor. The ceremony discussed the riot in general terms concerning issues of law and its significance in Civil War history, but permitted black agency a voice with a speech given by Lincoln University President Dr. Horace Mann Bond who called the black rioters heroes. His speech paralleled the beginnings of change in U.S. race relations as the civil rights movement was just emerging. Bond fought to sustain the riot's memory as one of black agency whereby the heroes of the story were African-Americans seeking self-emancipation. His presence at

the celebration presented a different memory than that publicly depicted before, illustrating how African-Americans maintained a distinct counter-memory of the riot that opposed white efforts to take the incident as their own.

The growth of a new social history appearing in the 1960s shaped the 2001 Christiana Riot commemoration discussed in chapter eight. Spurred by a new generation of intellectuals and increasing numbers of women and minorities in institutional positions, the field of history underwent a profound shift from the traditional study of white elites to a more pluralistic focus on the historical contributions of previously underrepresented groups. Comparisons between the Civil War centennial with the country's bicentennial contrasted this changing interpretation as government sponsored commemorations based on white reconciliation consented to more localized, vernacular celebrations of cultural heritage. The 2001 commemoration was directly influenced by this rise of social history as black agency in self-emancipation and black contributions to American history took center stage in celebrating the riot. But the observance's emphasis on a reconciliation between black and white created conflicts regarding the promulgation, ownership, and accuracy of that memory between the Christiana Historical Society, a local African-American clergyman, and the Ku Klux Klan. This conflict over the riot's memory created larger questions as to the role of history in the late twentieth century and its relationship with historical authenticity. Banners hang all over Christiana reading "Where Freedom Began," yet to some observers, not all town residents deserve to share in that legacy.

Chapter I

Prelude to Conflict

In November 1849, four desperate men made a decision that changed their lives and forever made them a part of history. Slaves Noah Buley, Nelson Ford, along with George and Joshua Hammond stole grain from the barn of their owner in Baltimore County, Maryland. The men, each around twenty years of age, further compounded their crime by escaping from their master's "Retreat Farm" and fleeing northward into Pennsylvania. That his slaves would undertake such a hasty action surprised their fifty-six year old owner, Edward Gorsuch. He had developed a personal relationship with his bondsmen and, like most slave owners, considered himself a benevolent master. Gorsuch was a class leader in the Methodist Church, described as a "dignified and courtly gentleman in his manners, a just and accurate man in his business dealings, a kind-hearted master and employer and a man of forceful and determined temperament." Whereas owners of large southern plantations hired an army of overseers and were largely absentee landlords, this was not the case on the smaller Retreat Farm. Gorsuch labored alongside his human chattel developing a paternalistic relationship common to the antebellum era where he considered his slaves inferior members of his household rather than simple African "savages." He took a personal interest in their lives and saw it as his responsibility to care for their common welfare, at one point even taking Nelson Ford out of the fields and making him a teamster because of his small stature. These were all self-serving emotions no doubt, a master's method for rationalizing the necessity of enslaving others and assuaging the guilt that process entailed, but to Gorsuch these feelings were very real in

constructing a self-image of the kindly master watching over his loyal slaves.¹ Weaned on a southern culture that regarded the practice of enslaving others as symbolic of a gentleman's wealth and status, Gorsuch considered the escape of his slaves a disgraceful insult. It was a personal betrayal, an impudent act that embarrassed him in the eyes of the community and stained his personal honor.

Gorsuch could not believe his slaves would repay his kindness with the dire decision to become fugitives. By running away, his slaves had now become outlaws living in a constant state of anxiety. Always on the run with little to eat, living in squalid caves and swamps, continually haunted by the distant sound of bloodhounds, and the ever present fear of slave catchers waiting around the next bend, made the life of a runaway one of chilling desperation. Like most slaveholders, it was unfathomable to Gorsuch that his chattel would choose the life of a fugitive rather than the one he had given them. They must have been confused or ignorantly led astray by abolitionist propaganda. Gorsuch thought that if he could find his runaways and just talk to them he could convince them to return peacefully. Utilizing an intelligence network, he inquired for nearly two years about the locations of his four slaves. His persistence eventually paid off when an informant named William Padgett wrote the slaveholder stating that the fugitives had been discovered living forty-five miles to the north in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Gorsuch immediately made preparations to depart, assembling a small posse of family members and neighbors to assist in the recapture. He was meticulous and calculating, his actions were not that of a hasty mob leader charging northward in search of his property.

¹ Slaughter, pp. 3-5, 11; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), pp. 111-112; "Christiana Riot, 100 Years Ago, Forerunner of Bloody Civil War," *Intelligencer Journal*, September 3, 1951; "He Died for Law, in Christiana Riot," *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 1955.

Gorsuch had a keen understanding of the new Fugitive Slave Law and followed all of its tenets to ensure his trip would be successful and, more importantly, legally binding. On September 8, he went alone by train to Philadelphia and the next day secured four warrants for the recapture of his runaways. The federal commissioner appointed U.S. Deputy Marshal Henry Kline to accompany Gorsuch for the purpose of arresting the fugitives. The men agreed to rendezvous at a tavern in Gap, Lancaster County with the slave owner taking the train while the marshal went by train until Parkesburg where he planned to travel by wagon the rest of the way.²

The two men traveled separately to avoid suspicion because they were well aware of the abolitionist sympathies among some Lancaster County residents. Since the 1820s, its population had numerous conflicts with Maryland slave catchers over the recapture of runaways. Legal and extralegal incidents ranging from Pennsylvanians' unwillingness to aid in recapturing fugitives to providing them blatant assistance strained relations with their southern neighbors. In 1822, after two Marylanders were killed in Pennsylvania by the fugitive they were attempting to recapture, Maryland's legislature appealed to Congress for additional legislation "to prevent the inconvenience from the ready protection given to escaping slaves in Pennsylvania and the difficulty thrown in the way of the recovery of slaves." Aware of such anti-slavery leanings, Padgett recommended that Gorsuch come dressed "as a hunter, disguised" with a posse of about twelve so the force could divide "and take them [fugitives] all within half an hour." Speed and surprise were thus essential to the mission's success. The posse hoped to use the cover of

² Slaughter, pp. 18-19, 52-54.

darkness to capture the fugitives and withdraw before anyone knew what happened. If all went well, Gorsuch's two-year investigation would take just under an hour to complete.³

As the Gorsuch fugitives fled north, their escape was not the first nor would it be the last for a race that had been enslaved for some two hundred years in a country that professed an eternal belief in liberty. When the United States Constitution was ratified in 1789, the acceptance of slavery as an institution became a monumental example of pragmatism surmounting morality. Putting aside the astonishing irony that a republic founded upon principles of freedom and independence legally sanctioned human bondage, the slavery dilemma caused many of America's "founding fathers" to compromise their personal beliefs for the sake of political convenience. Any attempt at eliminating slavery would have destroyed any possibility of creating a new nation as human enslavement was an entrenched way of life below the Mason-Dixon Line. Representatives of southern states refused to budge on the slavery issue; it was a vital cog in the machinery of both their economy and culture that could not be abolished. Drafting a constitution without resolving the great slave question, however, was one of the greatest missteps in the process of America's founding. It was akin to naively kicking a volatile powder keg down the road for the sake of political expediency. No matter how much the founding fathers willed it, the controversy over human enslavement would not quietly go away. "The white man's happiness cannot be purchased by the black man's misery,"

³ "The Christiana Riot—Where Freedom Began," *Lancaster County Magazine*, May 2001; "Columbia's Claim to Underground Railroad," *Lancaster New Era*, February 5, 2009; "'He Died For Law' In Christiana Riot," *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 1955; William R. Leslie, "The Pennsylvania Fugitive Slave Act of 1826," *The Journal of Southern History* 18, no. 4 (November 1952), pp. 433-435; Hugh Douglass, "The Christiana Riot – September, 1851," *Octorara Area Historical Society Papers* 3, no. 11 (1971), p. 1.

wrote black abolitionist Frederick Douglass. “Virtue cannot prevail among the white people, by its destruction among the black people, who form a part of the whole community. It is evident that the white and black ‘must fall or flourish together’.” During the first seventy years of America’s history, its citizenry slowly came to this realization as slavery confounded national pride and reminded them of the innate inconsistencies contained in their narrow definition of freedom. The issue of human bondage became an enduring cancer eating away at the body politic. It slowly devoured political consensus, consumed national union, and psychologically divided North from South. Yet pro-slavery advocates still held out hope during the early days of the republic that slavery could endure in a free society. Perhaps, with proper legal mechanisms, North and South could remain united politically if not morally. Whether legislation could surmount idealism would be tested by the most fundamental yearning of all captive peoples—escape.⁴

Few issues better exemplified the contradiction between slavery and American ideals than the fugitive slave dilemma. Although classifying slaves as “property” offered southerners political ammunition because it made the slavery debate one of property rights rather than human rights, slaves—unlike furniture or farming implements—had a tendency to flee from their masters in pursuit of a better life. Escaped slaves were not something new for the republic, the practice dated back to the earliest days of American colonization, but the direction runaways fled became a fundamental concern at the turn of the nineteenth century. So long as a runaway remained in the South, his or her recapture had little political consequence. A slaveholder would hire professional slave catchers or

⁴ Frederick Douglass, “The Destiny of Colored Americans,” *The North Star*, November 16, 1849.

form a posse usually consisting of friends, neighbors, and possibly a local lawman or two, the escapee was tracked sometimes across county and state lines, and like-minded southerners would assist in the recapture with little national press coverage recording their all too common feat. But when slaves escaped across the Mason-Dixon Line into northern states where anti-slavery sentiment was more widespread, the confrontation between legality and morality continually fractured the national consciousness.

When slave catchers pursued an escapee into the North, their slave culture was met head-on by apathy, ambivalence, and hostility. This is not to overstate, however, that the North was a bastion of anti-slavery sentiment. In the late eighteenth century, northern racial animosities persisted between black and white with probably the best illustration of Massachusetts being the only state to immediately free its slaves in 1783. Pennsylvania became the first to implement a gradual abolition of slavery three years earlier (other northern states followed thereafter), but it was not retroactive and thus did little for enslaved peoples already in the region at the time of its passage. Those who were enslaved before March 1, 1780 could be registered by their masters as slaves for life; this amounted to roughly 6,500 blacks living in the state at the time. Slave children born after that date were slightly better off as they were placed into indentured servitude until the age of twenty-eight. The act benefited free blacks immediately by abolishing the restrictive laws they lived under—such as movement, occupations, and residency requirements—and granting them all the rights of whites save for voting and state militia service.⁵

⁵ “An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery,” Sections 3-4, Avalon Project http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pennst01.asp (accessed November 16, 2011); Faith Mitchell,

While the North might not have been a racial utopia, fugitive slaves that crossed the Mason-Dixon saw their odds for never returning to a life of bondage greatly improve as northern sentiment aided them both directly and indirectly. Sometimes runaways were surreptitiously assisted by empathetic whites and free blacks who were part of the Underground Railroad which consisted of a series of waystations or hideouts that fugitive slaves utilized as they fled further North. Other times, slavery's lack of cultural significance or economic viability in the North incidentally helped runaways with northerners turning a blind eye to fugitives in their community because of either ethical objections, religious beliefs, or simple disinterest in a largely southern practice. Such attitudes towards slavery made it difficult for slave catchers to receive the necessary cooperation they expected when pursuing runaways into northern states. Rather than being supported by their countrymen, southerners received antipathy from northerners unsympathetic to their dilemma. Article IV of the Constitution sought to provide slave owners with a provision that legally mandated assistance by stating "No person held to service or labor in one state, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due." But the article proved unable to force northern acquiescence because it proposed no legal apparatus for how runaways were to be remanded. Specific questions regarding how to prove an African-American was an escaped slave and who decided upon the issue became major sticking points for southerners in the face of a growing northern antagonism towards slavery and its adherents.

"Growing Up Free and Black in Mid-Nineteenth Century Lancaster County," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 113, no. 2-3, (Summer/Fall 2011), p. 104.

In 1793, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act to furnish slave owners with the legal underpinnings to claim runaways across state lines. The act provided escaped slaves with no legal rights, as the law placed the burden of proof squarely on them. Any black seized by slave catchers as a suspected runaway needed to prove his or her free status but was neither permitted to testify in their own defense, given legal counsel, nor accorded a trial by jury. This legal obstacle made cases of mistaken identity commonplace as free blacks were misidentified as runaways or simply kidnapped in the place of a missing escapee. The act alleviated southern concerns to a point, yet neglected to induce the necessary compliance. The failure came from runaways being brought before any judge in the locale they were captured to determine their free status. In this regard, geography became a vital issue as northern states had abolished slavery whereas their southern counterparts had not. A court in Connecticut was not typically as stalwart a defender of human bondage as one practicing in Maryland. Local abolitionist attitudes began trumping the federal act as northern states granted fugitives jury trials and even afforded them legal representation. In 1826, the Pennsylvania legislature went a step further by passing its own Fugitive Slave Act that made it a felony for any person or persons to capture a suspected runaway within the state. Such actions on the part of state governments directly contradicted not only the 1793 law, but also the supremacy clause of the Constitution which held that federal law overrode state or local legislation. When Maryland slave catcher Edward Prigg entered Pennsylvania in 1837, abducted a black woman and her children, and subsequently found himself arrested and convicted by state officials for doing so, the U.S. Supreme Court stepped in by agreeing to hear the case.⁶

⁶ “Compromise of 1850,” Milestone Documents,

In 1842, the Supreme Court ruled 8-1 that Pennsylvania's law regarding the recapture of fugitives was unconstitutional and overturned Prigg's conviction by citing the supremacy clause, Article IV of the U.S. Constitution, and the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. But what made the decision in *Prigg vs. Pennsylvania* strange was that the court's ruling, rather than bringing a sense of closure to the issue, actually created an opening for further state interference. While understanding that "a difference of opinion has existed" regarding the authority of state magistrates in handling fugitive slave cases, the court entertained no doubt "that state magistrates may, if they choose, exercise that authority, unless prohibited by state legislation." This last phrase "unless prohibited by state legislation," ushered in a new round of laws with northern states arguing that they were not required to prosecute fugitive slave cases and that such cases were the responsibility of federal authorities. Individual states such as Massachusetts (1843), Vermont (1843), Pennsylvania (1847), and Rhode Island (1848) each passed "personal liberty laws" forbidding their officials from enforcing the 1793 Fugitive Slave Act. This placed the burden of processing fugitive slave applications solely onto federal magistrates whose small numbers could not keep pace with the growing number of cases. The overturning of Prigg's conviction thus became a hollow victory for slavery advocates as they now faced an increasingly difficult task in legally recapturing slaves who fled north.⁷

http://www.milestonedocuments.com/document_detail.php?id=110&more=fulltext (accessed February 17, 2009); "Fugitive Slave Act of 1793," Michigan Department of Natural Resources, http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463_18670_44390-160655--,00.html (accessed November 3, 2011); Leslie, pp., 442-444; Slaughter, pp. x-xi; "The Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act," Africans in America, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p2951.html> (accessed February 17, 2009); Law Library, "Prigg v. Pennsylvania," <http://law.jrank.org/pages/9372/Prigg-v-Pennsylvania.html> (accessed November 7, 2011).

⁷ "Prigg vs. Pennsylvania," Law Library, <http://law.jrank.org/pages/9372/Prigg-v-Pennsylvania.html> (accessed November 7, 2011); Thomas Morris, *Free Men All: The Personal Liberty Laws of the North, 1780-1861* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 125.

Eight years after the Prigg decision, the U.S. Congress passed five bills to create the Compromise of 1850. The measures addressed the controversy over slavery's expansion into newly constituted territories and preserved an equal number of free and slave states. While Henry Clay's brainchild temporarily saved the Union, his legislation included a second Fugitive Slave Act meant to both strengthen its predecessor of 1793 and streamline the chaotic process for remanding fugitives. The 1850 law circumvented local interference by making the capture of runaway slaves a strictly federal affair. Circuit court judges now appointed federal commissioners to handle all aspects of fugitive slave cases from the issuing of warrants, the hearing of affidavits, to their ultimate ruling on the evidence. The accused were denied the legal rights northern states had previously attempted to bestow. The defendant gave no testimony nor was a jury present. For all intents and purposes, the case was ruled upon *in absentia* with the fugitive physically present to the gallery but legally invisible to the court. Warrants against an accused runaway were now processed by federal marshals thereby further taking law enforcement powers out of the hands of state and local authorities. Commissioners were awarded a fee of ten dollars when they decided for the slaveholder and five dollars when they ruled for the defendant. The rationale behind the difference in fees came from there being more paperwork for the court to complete if it ruled to remit a fugitive back to his or her master. However, financially motivated commissioners could and did take advantage of this stipulation for their own personal gain by rarely finding for the accused and then only in cases involving overwhelming supporting evidence of their free status.⁸

⁸ "Compromise of 1850," Milestone Documents, http://www.milestonedocuments.com/document_detail.php?id=110&more=fulltext (accessed February 17,

The 1850 Fugitive Slave Law also included an astonishing stipulation regarding an expanded definition of *posse comitatus* in the arrest of runaways. Under the previous act of 1793, citizens in both North and South could decide whether they wanted to assist a slave owner in recapturing his human chattel. If a local man was invited to join a slave catching posse, he was not legally obligated to comply. While there might be social implications for such a refusal, especially in the South, his reluctance could not lead to an arrest. The law only stipulated a five hundred dollar fine for anyone, “who shall knowingly and willingly obstruct or hinder such claimant, his agent or attorney in so seizing or arresting such fugitive from labour, or shall rescue such fugitive from such claimant, his agent or attorney when so arrested pursuant to the authority herein given or declared; or shall harbor or conceal such person after notice that he or she was a fugitive from labour.” The 1850 law appended this provision by not only increasing the penalties for obstructing a capture to one thousand dollars and six months imprisonment, but also made public assistance in the apprehension of runaways mandatory. Upon a federal marshal’s request, “all good citizens are hereby commanded to aid and assist in the prompt and efficient execution of this law, whenever their services may be required.” Any male over the age of fifteen in the vicinity of a fugitive’s capture, technically risked arrest if he declined to participate in the apprehension of said fugitive. In the words of Lancaster historian Thomas Whitson, after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act “every citizen was at once made a slave catcher.”⁹

2009). The Compromise was composed of five separate bills, the final one being passed on September 20, 1850.

⁹ “Fugitive Slave Act of 1793,” Michigan Department of Natural Resources, http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-54463_18670_44390-160655--,00.html (accessed November 3, 2011); “Compromise of 1850,” Milestone Documents,

Southern opinion was, obviously enough, favorable to the Fugitive Slave Law, as the law greatly benefited slaveholders. Northern sentiment, however, consisted of a majority more concerned with regional economics and national unity versus a minority of abolitionists and blacks more interested in liberty. Although most in the North were opposed to slavery, abolitionism was not a very popular movement. It existed in pockets scattered throughout the north, typically limited to communities that had a history of abolitionist fervor. Yet, most northern whites lacked abolitionist sentiments, as slavery did not directly affect them. The issue of human bondage thus became such a minor matter in the daily lives of many northerners that their interest bordered on general indifference. By 1850, the gradual emancipations instituted by northern states had stifled slavery to the point that it was virtually nonexistent above the Mason-Dixon. Rather than this legislative success fostering an abolitionist zeal to ban slavery nationwide, it had the unintended consequence of making slavery a distinctly southern concern and a non-issue for white northerners who now focused on their own local matters. Human bondage had essentially become a foreign concept in the North, a peculiar institution concentrated miles away in a largely rural region that seemed almost alien to industrialized northerners. Slavery continued to weather the storm with republican principles and regional economics dictating northern compliance. Any attempts to universally abolish human bondage continually met stiff resistance from southern slaveholders who claimed states' rights and threatened secession. For most northerners the costs of imposing an abolition of slavery on the South were too high. Strained regional relations threatened

http://www.milestonedocuments.com/document_detail.php?id=110&more=fulltext (accessed February 17, 2009); Richard Grau, "The Christiana Riot of 1851: A Reappraisal," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 68 (1964), p. 147; Thomas Whitson, "William Parker, The Hero of the Christiana Riot," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 1, no. 1 (June 5, 1896), p. 29.

northern industries that needed southern markets while devastation wrought by a potential civil war could destroy the nation. Amidst these fears, the North came to accept slavery in the South—blacks were simply not worth it.¹⁰

Most in the North generally focused on the larger picture of the compromise measures rather than the moral conundrum existing within particular parts of its composition. National unity and compliance to the Constitution was the key no matter the legislative consequences to fugitive slaves or blacks in general. Michigan's Senator and 1848 Democratic presidential candidate Lewis Cass defended his vote in favor of the compromise claiming, "I would have voted for twenty Fugitive Slave Laws, if I had believed the safety of the Union depended upon my doing so." Democratic congressman Clement Vallandigham assured a Dayton, Ohio audience that the compromise was the best that could be achieved under the circumstances; proudly adding "the Union, the Constitution, and the laws must and shall be maintained." At a meeting in Greencastle, Indiana, a nationalist justification of the states' rights argument triumphed when it was resolved: "That we regard all sectional agitation as prejudicial to our interest and dangerous to the perpetuation of our free institutions and we therefore appeal to the north as well as the south to respect ... the interests and rights of all, and to abandon now and forever all agitation and interference by the citizens of one state with the institutions of another and hush the cry of disunion and the thought of treason from the halls of congress." A resolution in New York received ten thousand signatures supporting the compromise and approving its constitutionality. In Vermont, the Constitution trumped any benevolence that might have been held towards fugitives. Although the *Vermont*

¹⁰ Campbell, p. 55; Edward Raymond Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (Washington: American Historical Association, 1911), pp. 225-226; Hensel, p. 51.

Journal considered the Compromise “unpalatable,” it conceded, “the letter and purport of the Constitution in this regard are plain and imperative. As citizens of a free and enlightened Government we have no escape from obedience to the authority of this high instrument.” Whig opinion diverged greatly on the compromise measures, but was generally summed up by Illinois’ *Alton Telegraph & Democrat Review*. “The law in question may be defective...its operation may, in a few cases, prove oppressive, perhaps unjust,” the newspaper admitted in November 1850, “But, so long as it shall remain on the Statute book of the United States, it will be the bounden duty of every good citizen to interpose no resistance to its execution.”¹¹

Abolitionists firmly rejected the Fugitive Slave Law becoming some of the loudest dissidents from the jingoistic glad-handing that was consuming much of the North. White abolitionists were appalled over the measure, criticizing it with scathing indictments that mixed the religious ardor of the antebellum era with appeals for civil disobedience. In a sermon given in New York, Reverend Charles Beecher characterized the new fugitive slave law as “an unexampled climax of sin.” His discourse was immersed in the harshest denunciations, referring to the act as “the monster iniquity of the present age,” that will forever stand “as the vilest monument of infamy of the nineteenth century.” Philadelphia clergyman William Henry Furness condemned the fugitive slave law in similar religious overtones characterizing the act as “a fountain of deadly poison, blinding our understandings, hardening our hearts, searing our

¹¹ *Congressional Globe* 32nd Cong., 1st sess., December 1851-August 1852, p. 1124; *National Intelligencer*, October 26, 1850; Charles H. Money, “The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 in Indiana,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 17 (June 1921), pp. 169-170; *New York Tribune*, October 30, 1850; *National Intelligencer*, November 16, 1850; Ameda Ruth King, “The Last Years of the Whig Party in Illinois, 1847-1856,” *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society* 32 (1925), p. 138.

consciences, falsifying our religious professions, and perilling the salvation of our souls.” Senator Charles Sumner claimed the fugitive law “sets at naught the best principles of the Constitution and the very laws of God.” Sumner assured a Boston gathering that he thought it improbable the fugitive law would be enforced in Massachusetts and argued that a strategy of moral suasion would affect its nullification. “I counsel no violence. There is another power, stronger than any individual arm, which I invoke; I mean that irresistible public opinion inspired by love of God and man which...gently...makes and unmakes laws. Let this public opinion be felt in its might, and the Fugitive Slave bill will become everywhere among us a dead letter.” Some white abolitionists went further than Sumner by publicly advocating citizens to defy the new act. A meeting in Syracuse, New York resolved to make everyone aware of the law’s “diabolical spirit and cruel ingenuity” urging them “to oppose legally all attempts to enforce it.” The *New York Tribune* found the Fugitive Slave Law unconstitutional and argued that although northerners would not forcibly resist it; they would actively obstruct it. “They will not indeed resist it by violence, they will not rise in arms to nullify it, they will not bluster about dissolving the Union on account of it; but they will burden its execution with all possible legal difficulties, and they will help slaves to escape all the more zealously.” In Lawrence County, Pennsylvania, a gathering of residents found the Fugitive Slave Law “abhorrent to our sense of right and justice” claiming that they would use every legal means to “make war upon that infamous law....” One white abolitionist went beyond the legal obstructionism of his colleagues by promoting extralegal means to undercut the newly passed act. John Brown created a black self-defense organization in Springfield,

Massachusetts and encouraged his African-American friends to “trust in God and keep their powder dry.”¹²

The Fugitive Slave Law was felt the most severely by those directly in its crosshairs—African Americans. The act struck terror into not only fugitive slaves, but also free blacks as its language placed the onus of proving one’s free status squarely on freedmen and not the slaveholder. Without the right to testify in their own defense, freedmen were placed at a severe legal disadvantage that ran the risk of being remanded to a condition of servitude from which there was no return. The Fugitive Slave Law might have been an immoral piece of paper to white abolitionists, yet it represented much more to both fugitive and free African-Americans. The act infected many black minds with a constant state of apprehension that a slave catcher was potentially lurking around every corner. The trepidation became too much for some as the fugitive law created a mass black exodus from northern cities to the safety of Canada. Shortly after the passage of the Compromise, the *Liberator*—the country’s foremost abolitionist newspaper—reported that in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania some three hundred black waiters had fled into Canada. “They went in large bodies, armed with pistols and bowie knives, determined to die rather than be captured.” A similar emigration was witnessed in Utica, New York where sixteen fugitive slaves passed through the city on their way further north. Like their Pittsburgh brethren, they “were well-armed, and determined to fight to the last.” Some northern black churches experienced dramatic declines in their membership as

¹² Charles Beecher, *The Duty of Disobedience to Wicked Laws. A Sermon on the Fugitive Slave Law* (New York: J.A. Gray, 1851), p. 13. Beecher was the brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, the author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; Henry Wilson, *History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, vol. 2, 8th ed. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1874), pp. 308-310; *New York Tribune*, October 12, 1850; April 5, 1851; *New York Weekly Tribune*, July 12, 1851; *New York Tribune*, October 5, 1850; Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown: A Biography, 1800-1859* (New York: Doubleday, 1910), pp. 50-53.

parishioners escaped to Canada. Boston's three black churches saw over one hundred members flee north. The Colored Baptist Church of Rochester, New York was nearly decimated, losing 102 of its 114 worshippers. Buffalo, New York was similarly affected as 130 members of the Baptist Colored Church also made a hasty flight to Canada. For the black community in Columbia, Pennsylvania, fear over the new act—combined with their proximity to the Maryland border—caused over one-half of the population to desperately head north. By the end of 1850, an estimated three thousand fugitive slaves had crossed into Canada since the passage of the compromise in September.¹³

Those blacks who decided to remain in America found the Fugitive Slave Law contemptuous and were unabashedly militant in their reaction to its passage. That their responses were stated publicly speaks highly of their courage as they were without the pale skin that usually protected white abolitionists from retribution. For many black leaders who had patiently hoped appeals to the nation's conscience would peacefully undermine slavery thereby making it an archaic institution, the Compromise marked the final straw. The fugitive law was a repudiation of these hopes in stark terms of black and white, as much literally as figuratively. The act was a legislative betrayal that gave rise to an impassioned voice calling for violent resistance from frustrated black leaders with nowhere else to turn. Martin Delaney assured an audience in Allegheny, Pennsylvania that no slave catcher would take him without a fight. "Sir, my house is my castle... If any man approaches that house in search of a slave,—I care not who he may be, whether

¹³ E. Forbes, pp. 112-113; *The Liberator*, October 4, 1850; Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans: From the Compromise of 1850 to the End of the Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 17; American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *The Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at New York, May 6, 1851* (New York: William Harned, 1851), p. 31; Fred Landon, "The Negro Migration to Canada After Passing of the Fugitive Slave Act," *Journal of Negro History* 5, no. 1 (January 1920), pp. 26-27.

constable or sheriff, magistrate or even judge of the Supreme Court,” the black physician promised, “if he crosses the threshold of my door, and I do not lay him a lifeless corpses at my feet, I hope the grave may refuse my body a resting place, and righteous Heaven my spirit a home.” Speaking at a meeting outside Philadelphia, black abolitionist Robert Purvis warned, “Should any wretch enter my dwelling to execute this law, I’ll seek his life, I’ll shed his blood.” Pastor and fugitive slave Jermain Loguen brazenly proclaimed in Syracuse that he would violently obstruct the Fugitive Slave Law. “I don’t respect this law—I don’t fear it—I won’t obey it...if force is used to re-enslave me, I shall make preparations to meet the crisis as becomes a man.” Addressing the Free Soil Convention in Pittsburgh, black abolitionist Frederick Douglass—a fugitive slave himself—posited a simple solution to prompt the demise of the fugitive law. “A half dozen or more dead kidnapers carried down South would cool the ardor of southern gentlemen, and keep their rapacity in check.” The aggressive language from black leaders illustrated the raised stakes African-Americans now faced after the Compromise of 1850. They had lost the intellectual debate over slavery and were left with little choice. If the government would not protect them, blacks would take it upon themselves.¹⁴

In 1850, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania was similar to other northern communities in its bipolar reception towards slavery, fugitive slaves, and abolitionism. White reaction to the increasing numbers of blacks settling in the area ranged from outright hate, a

¹⁴ William Loren Katz, *Eyewitness: The Negro in American History* (New York: Pitman Publishing Company, 1967), p. 189; Dorothy Sterling, *The Making of an Afro-American: Martin Robison Delaney, 1812-1885* (New York: Doubleday, 1971; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), pp. 119-121; J. W. Loguen, *The Rev. J. W. Loguen, As a Slave and as a Freeman* (Syracuse, NY: J. G. K. Truair & Company, 1859), pp. 392-393; Philip Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, vol. 2 (New York: International Publishers, 1950-1955), p. 207.

begrudging toleration, or an acknowledged acceptance. On one hand, bigotry was a way of life for the roughly 3,600 free blacks that called Lancaster County their home.¹⁵ White fears concerning racial amalgamation and economic competition relegated African-Americans to a subservient status in the community where legal restrictions limited their social mobility. Cultural background blended with a white-racist mentality to promote the removal of blacks, as well as kidnapping fugitive slaves and returning them South. For some white residents, blackness had become an odious presence that was simply not welcome. Yet on the other hand, a passionate abolitionist zeal also existed in the county that abided racial amalgamation. Numerous whites were directed by their conscience to resist the Fugitive Slave Law and participate in the Underground Railroad. A spirit of racial harmony found itself based largely in religious communities where Christian piety outweighed legal compliance. The divided nature of the Lancaster County's white population on matters of race significantly affected not only their reaction to the 1850 Compromise, but also the environment for newly arriving fugitive slaves.

When Edward Gorsuch's slaves crossed into Lancaster County they found themselves in a world, similar in many ways, to the one they had left. Although African-Americans numbered less than 4 percent of the county's population, they faced considerable racial discrimination far disproportionate to their small numbers. Historian Thomas Slaughter correctly posited that "race rather than status or class fixed the quality of life for Lancaster's black residents." White perceptions of society being structured according to hierarchies of character traits continued to direct cultural stereotypes as slavery's two hundred year legacy fostered images of black indolence and incompetence. For decades,

¹⁵ *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Armstrong, 1853), p. 157.

the Lancaster press was awash with negative characterizations of African-Americans. Local media depictions of blacks as cowards, criminals, and drunkards outnumbered positive portrayals by a 13:1 margin. In 1838, the *Lancaster Intelligencer* printed a series of articles arguing that blacks were genetically inferior to whites. “It is well known,” the writer argued, “that Africans, in their own country...have not, in a long course of ages, made one single step in intelligence, industry or enterprize; one single progressive movement in refinement or any of the arts.” The writer continued by maintaining that his essay was not written out of prejudice, but to show the folly of “Abolitionists elevating them [blacks] to an equality with the whites. They are not only mentally but physically incapable of enjoying such privileges.” This type of biological determinism came from popular ethnological studies of the antebellum era, or a new “science” of race, that classified African-Americans much akin to livestock in intellectual capability and thereby only suited to hard labor. The popular minstrel shows then sweeping the country, with white actors in blackface, depicted African-Americans as careless, absentminded, buffoons who were socially and politically incompetent. Frederick Douglass perceived minstrel groups for what they were—greedy, unscrupulous, race-baiters. He roundly criticized the performers as “the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens.” Douglass’ criticisms, however, were to little avail. The immense popularity of blackface minstrelsy throughout the antebellum north only served to validate the preconceived notions of white northerners, including Lancastrians, that African-Americans were a “clownish” race unfit for equal rights.¹⁶

¹⁶ *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Armstrong, 1853), p. 157; Slaughter, pp.

Further fueling local white's racial antipathy was the economic threat posed by the increasing growth of the African-American population during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Free blacks combined with those African-Americans migrating from the South—both fugitives and recently manumitted slaves—produced alarming numbers that started to endanger white livelihoods. Black unskilled laborers became increasingly employed in local industries earning a living as farm laborers or working in mills, foundries, or mines. Other African-Americans were more successful economically, giving rise to the formation of a small black upper and middle class. According to historian Carl Oblinger, the black professionals and skilled workers in Columbia and Lancaster City, “appear to have had some education and much business acumen.” He noted how the census listed none of these successful African-Americans as illiterate with most owning property or “at least their own house and lot.” The city of Columbia (eleven miles from Lancaster in the far western portion of the county) was home to black lumber magnate William Whipper, one of the richest African-Americans in the country. Columbia Borough also had one of the highest concentrations of free black population in the county at 21 percent by 1850, which allowed newly arrived fugitives to simply disappear into the community.¹⁷

20, 24; Patrick Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 160; Slaughter, pp. 208, 29; *Lancaster Intelligencer*, February 20, 1838; March 6, 1838; March 20, 1838; April 3, 1838; May 22, 1838; Cynthia Griffin Wolff, “Masculinity in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” *American Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (December 1995), pp. 596-597; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 99; *The North Star*, October 27, 1848.

¹⁷ Slaughter, p. 28; E. Forbes, pp. 32-33, 56; Carl D. Oblinger, “In Recognition of Their Prominence: A Case Study of the Economic and Social Backgrounds of an Antebellum Negro Business and Farming Class in Lancaster County,” *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 72 (Easter, 1968), pp. 68-69; *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Armstrong, 1853), p. 171.

This increase in the county's black workforce and the financial success of some African-Americans, however, was a threat to white identity. During the antebellum period, black economic competition fomented racial hostility among white Countians particularly in Columbia where the black community was experiencing some measure of economic and social mobility. In August 1834, a white mob in Columbia vandalized a number of black homes over the course of four nights. Windows were broken, insults were shouted, and guns were fired in celebration by a white crowd bent on reasserting their social status. Two months later, Columbia's black middle-class became a particular target when the town's council appointed an association to purchase all black property in the borough. Almost simultaneous to the council's actions, working-class whites began damaging black dwellings when they heard of a local marriage between a black man and a white woman. The *Columbia Spy* reported how the marriage "rekindled the smouldering ashes of former popular madness and afforded an opportunity to evil-disposed individuals to reenact past occurrences of disorder and destruction." Fears of racial miscegenation resulted in the destruction of four black middle-class homes and a black school at the hands of enraged whites. A carpentry shop was also set ablaze that was likely owned by an African-American (the records are unclear) and was burned to the ground. Nine white men were indicted for leading the mobs including a defendant identified as a "gentleman," which revealed a degree of class solidarity among white residents. Racial violence was something the upper and lower classes could apparently agree upon. All of those arrested were later acquitted with the county, rather than the defendants, paying the court costs. In February 1835, Stephen Smith, one of Columbia's

most affluent African-American property owners, received a threatening letter warning him to leave town:

You have again assembled yourself amongst the white people to bid up property as you have been in the habit of doing for a number of years back. You must know that your presence is not agreeable and the less you appear in the assembly of the whites the better it will be for you black hide, as there are a great many in this place that would think your absence from it a benefit, as you are considered an injury to the real value of property in Columbia. You had better take the hint and save—MANY.

The following month, another act of racial violence occurred in Columbia when a group of white laborers destroyed the farm of African-American Daniel Reed and threatened to tear his house down with Reed and his family still inside. Four white men were arrested for the incident, but they were also acquitted with the county again paying the court costs.¹⁸

The Columbia Race Riots of 1834-1835 illustrated the apprehension many white Countians held towards any form of black agency that challenged the status quo. These fears of black economic prosperity resulted in a racist backlash that relegated most of the county's African-American population to perpetually inhabiting and remaining at the lowest rung of the financial ladder. The majority of black families were forced to live in squalid conditions for which they met additional white criticism as irresponsible individuals incapable of finding and maintaining proper dwellings. Blacks faced further discrimination by being segregated in church services and cemeteries, prohibited from voting, and restricted from joining the state militia. For many whites, African-Americans

¹⁸ Slaughter, pp. 24-28, 170-179; *Columbia Spy*, October 4, 1834; Commonwealth v. John Lightner and others, Lancaster County Court of Quarter Sessions case papers, November 1834; Slaughter, p. 178; *Columbia Spy*, March 7, 1835; Commonwealth v. Stephen Witt and others, Lancaster County Court of Quarter Sessions case papers, April 1835.

were considered an irresponsible race of foreigners that needed to be removed. White Lancastrians joined neighboring counties in petitioning the state legislature to halt southern African-Americans from migrating north. The removal of blacks was so widely held in local liberal and intellectual circles that many whites supported a colonization movement to repatriate blacks back to Africa, a proposal designed less for humanitarian purposes and more to purge blackness from the country. For white Countians their relationship with African-Americans was thus founded upon a white-racist mentality. So long as black numbers in the county remained small, their presence was tolerated as they had insufficient power to enact change in the community. But as the black population continued to grow, they appeared to threaten all that the whites of Lancaster County held dear.¹⁹

This white-racist mindset was present in the local press coverage of the 1850 Compromise. Lancaster County's two major newspapers echoed the overwhelming sentiment that made preserving the Union paramount to any qualms over black mistreatment. According to the county's Democratic organ, the Lancaster *Intelligencer*, northerners were jubilant over the Compromise because it preserved the Union. "The hopes and wishes of the true friends of the Republic...have been happily fulfilled," the paper wrote. The "Union is saved...and, from hence forward, the country can go forward in an unbroken career of prosperity." The Whig *Examiner & Herald* was of two minds on the Compromise. On one hand, its nationalist impulse applauded the legislation, writing in a similar vein to its counterpart, "Patriotism has at last triumphed in Congress over sectionalism—reason and truth over folly and fanaticism...May the odious word,

¹⁹ Slaughter, pp. 24-28, 36-37, 208-209; Mitchell, p. 104; Turner, pp. 165-168.

‘Disunion’ no more be heard!” But the *Examiner* was dismayed by the perpetuation of slavery and the strengthened law regarding runaways. In the newspaper’s opinion, it was anti-slavery zealots that were ironically responsible for the compromise measures that strengthened the cause of human bondage. “What the Abolitionists have done it has already been demonstrated beyond the possibility of contradiction, that the opposition of the Abolitionists in Congress to the Compromise bill resulted in the transfer of nearly forty thousand square miles of territory from Freedom to Slavery,” the *Examiner*’s editor wrote. “This was the first great exploit of our over-zealous Abolitionists. The next was the passage of the Fugitive Slave law, which would never have been passed had not the course of the Abolitionists rendered it necessary.”²⁰

As the legacy of human bondage persisted in predisposing white Countians towards their black counterparts, slavery’s perpetuation in the South also played a factor. Lancaster County’s five-mile long southern border with Maryland had become a primary avenue of freedom for thousands of fugitive slaves fleeing northwards. The persistence of these new black faces appearing in the county divided residents over how to handle this disheveled band of immigrants. While Lancaster City was largely Democratic, with articles in the *Intelligencer* attesting to their negative perceptions of African-Americans, the racial attitudes of those living in the surrounding countryside were considerably more diverse.²¹

²⁰ Slaughter, p. xi; “The Great Result,” Lancaster *Intelligencer*, September 17, 1850; *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, September 18, 1850; November 6, 1850.

²¹ Hans L. Trefousse, *Thaddeus Stevens: Nineteenth-Century Egalitarian* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 95-96; Slaughter, p. 29; *Lancaster Intelligencer*, February 20, 1838; March 6, 1838; March 20, 1838.

The northern section of Lancaster County was composed largely of Pennsylvania Germans, the single largest ethnic group in the county, who were apathetic to the slavery question and antagonistic to those blacks living among them. One local historian described this German community as generally having, “little fellowship with the negro race, little interest in or sympathy with its cause and very slight personal contact with its members.” The poor relationship between the county’s German constituency and African-Americans can be traced back to the Revolutionary era. Although Germans rarely owned slaves, from 1779-1780 they held only ten percent of all slaves in Pennsylvania, Lutheran and Reformed Germans were the most vigorous (70 percent) in voting against abolition. Owen Ireland argued that Pennsylvania’s German population was undergoing a “personal crisis” in the late eighteenth century, one directly affected by their standing as ethnic minorities during a period of social change. “Uncertain of their own role and deeply concerned with defining themselves and their relations with an essentially non-German society,” he wrote, “they [Germans] found the additional responsibility of defining the role of free Negroes in that society and of defining their own relationship to these free Negroes an unbearable burden.” Ireland argued that Lutheran and Reformed German resistance to abolition was “a negative response to the prospect of further primary level, face-to-face social change” during a tumultuous time that complicated the “difficult task of defining status and position in a newly independent and predominately English-speaking American nation.” A half-century later, German Countians’ minority status continued to influence their antiabolitionist tendencies, yet this only partially identifies their animosity towards African-Americans in the antebellum era. While providing a sociological explanation, Ireland failed to account for another

motivation behind the German opposition to abolition—economics. A workforce saturated by free blacks was a direct threat to German livelihoods as they would find themselves competing with African-Americans for many of the same occupations. Pennsylvania's gradual emancipation only exacerbated German resentment in the county as each year more and more black unskilled laborers entered the domains of the German worker especially in the area of agriculture. By 1850, the increasing free black population combined with scores of southern freedman and fugitives journeying north to become an economic impediment for Lancaster County's German population, a situation that afforded African-Americans few friends in the northern portion of the county.²²

The southern portion of the county was home to Scots-Irish Presbyterians and Quakers who maintained a fractious relationship because of their differing views on society and government. During the late eighteenth century, the Scots-Irish population of Pennsylvania was the state's foremost ethnic group in owning slaves, holding roughly two-thirds of all human chattel in the commonwealth. Although Pennsylvania's gradual emancipation forced the Scots-Irish to free their slaves, it did little to remove their white-supremacist mindset as economics again played a part. Like the county's German constituency, the Scots-Irish faced a similar economic threat from free blacks who were competing with them for many of the same unskilled positions. This provided them with little sympathy for fugitive slaves even going so far as to form posses to hunt them down. The Gap Gang was one such band of amateur kidnappers that operated in Lancaster and Chester Counties. Based in the Gap Hills three miles north of Christiana, the gang was

²² Hensel, pp. 13-17; Turner, pp. 68-69; Martha Clark, "Lancaster County's Relation to Slavery," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 15 (1911), pp. 43-61; Owen S. Ireland, "Germans Against Abolition: A Minority's View of Slavery in Revolutionary Pennsylvania," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 4 (Spring 1973), pp. 690, 705; E. Forbes, p. 32; Slaughter, p. 28.

composed of working-class Scots-Irish whites whose terrorist tactics elicited fear from both fugitive and free blacks alike. These men were not known for their painstaking efforts in accurately identifying runaways as they were notorious for kidnapping freedmen and handing them over to southerners slaveholders who dubiously “claimed” them as their escaped chattel. Kidnapping became a prosperous sideline for the Gap Gang and others of their ilk, conveniently justified as racial reciprocation for financial losses entailed from the employment of African-Americans in local industries. In many ways kidnappers became precursors of the KKK, similarly resorting to violence to reassert white dominance and maintain a racial hierarchy. The Gap Gang was just that, Lancaster County’s white avengers who spread panic among the area’s black population by elucidating their version of the proper social structure.²³

This is not to say that all Germans and Presbyterians in Lancaster County were racially prejudiced. It was more a general sentiment with numerous exceptions as the southern portion of the county was home to various pockets of abolitionism. The town of Quarryville (ten miles southwest of Christiana) was composed of a German and Scots-Irish population that tolerated intermarriage between the races. Also, historian William Hensel acknowledged the outspoken abolitionism of local Presbyterian ministers Lindley Rutter and William Easton. The Quaker community living in the Christiana area constituted another exception. They held an empathetic view of fugitive slaves, aiding them in their desperate journey with such things as food and shelter, which placed them at odds with their Presbyterian neighbors to the north. The Quaker religion had not always been known for professing racial equality. Until the 1750s they tolerated the

²³ Hensel, pp. 13-17; “The Christiana Riot—Where Freedom Began,” *Lancaster County Magazine*, May 2001; Slaughter, pp. 44-46.

religious contradiction that their membership owned slaves while simultaneously professing Christian virtues. In the 1820s, the Friends faced an ethical quandary over the controversial abolitionist teachings of a traveling Quaker preacher named Elias Hicks. Originally from New York, Hicks found slavery antithetical to Quaker beliefs and passionately urged his fellow parishioners to boycott products of slave labor. His preaching caused such a stir among Pennsylvania Quakers that it created a schism at the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1827. This spiritual fissure spread to other Meetings throughout the country prompting Friends to decide between their conservative “Orthodox” tradition, which took a more laissez-faire approach to slavery, or the “worldly” progressive abolitionism of the “Hicksites.”²⁴

Within the Christiana area, sixty-five percent of the roughly seven hundred local Quakers chose to become Hicksites, preferring a more direct approach to countering the institution of human bondage. A year before Gorsuch’s slaves fled north, Christiana’s Sadsbury Monthly Meeting distributed an abolitionist address to other Quaker churches requesting support in actively opposing the “sin of slavery.” The Sadsbury Friends reminded their religious brethren that they could no longer close themselves off from the world, residing within “sealed houses” satisfied that they had accomplished their spiritual duty in simply abolishing slavery from their faith. The address pleaded with Quakers to realize that as they lived “under the blighting influence of this great injustice [slavery],

²⁴ Hensel, pp. 13-17; The secretive nature of the Underground Railroad and the tendency of later generations to exaggerate their ancestors’ contributions, makes it difficult to discern accurate numbers of its participants, see “Columbia’s Claim to Underground Railroad,” *Lancaster New Era*, February 5, 2009 and “Whitemarsh’s Antislavery History,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 18, 2004; Jean Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 87, 54; For more information on Elias Hicks and the Hicksite/Orthodox schism, see H. Larry Ingle, *Quakers in Conflict: The Hicksite Reformation* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Nancy Plumley, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA.

our moral vision has been measurably obscured, our sensibilities blunted, and our prejudices increased; so that we do not see the depth of the enormity of this wickedness.” The “blood, and sweat, and tears” of the enslaved “are calling to us,” the Sadsbury Meeting declared, “to arise in the might of the great principle of truth, and labor for the immediate and unconditional overthrow of this system.” Two years later, local Hicksites found the Fugitive Slave Law inconsistent with their religious principles and simply chose to ignore its legal authority. A public meeting held in Bart Township, the western neighbor of Sadsbury Township, confirmed this sentiment while also serving as an inkling of future events. Led by Quakers from Sadsbury Meeting, citizens of the Bart area determined that the principles of justice, humanity, and Christianity “require that we should not assist in the recapture and return of a fugitive from slavery,” and that any law in opposition to these principles “we cannot for a moment hesitate to say we will obey no such law.” They considered the Fugitive Slave Law an “imposition upon all northern free citizens,” and were resolved “that we will harbor, clothe, feed, and aid the escape of fugitive slaves in opposition to the law.” While their faith prohibited them from violently opposing kidnappers, the Hicksites reputedly asked few questions of newly arrived African-Americans, even hiring and renting properties to those who chose to settle in the area.²⁵

²⁵ Plumley, e-mail message to author, July 16, 2012; Rodney Gilbert, *A History of Bart Meeting* (Lancaster, PA: privately printed, 1939), p. 14. Gilbert’s work was presented at a Hicksite reunion meeting on May 14, 1939; Raymond L. Dunlap, ed., *Churches of Today and Yesterday in Southern Lancaster County* (Lancaster, PA: Fellowship of Solanco Churches, 1968), p. 159; Hensel, pp. 13-18; “Sadsbury Monthly Meeting,” January 5, 1848, *Chesterfield Monthly Meeting Records*, Miscellaneous Records 1689-1877, RG2/Ph/C47, 8.3 (Swarthmore, PA: Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College); “Law Empowered Slave Catchers; Underground Railroad Thrived,” *Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era*, March, 29, 2011; “Public Meeting,” *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, October 23, 1850; For Quakers hiring and renting to African-Americans, see Parker, pp. 160-164.

After passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, the Lancaster *Examiner & Herald* perceptively argued that “we do not believe this act will amount to much in practice,” because most northerners feel that slaves seeking their freedom should not be caught and, “we don’t see how any law is to remedy this.” The newspaper properly characterized the abolitionists in Lancaster County where the Hicksites comprised a fraction of those who were steadfastly against slavery and actively helped runaways in their quest for freedom. The county’s location just miles from the Maryland border made it a popular refuge for fugitives fleeing north via the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad network spread throughout the county with stations usually ten miles apart. The Gap/Christiana area alone contained twenty-four stations with numerous local residents serving as conductors hiding runaways in their attics, cellars, and barns. Thaddeus Stevens, the county’s Congressional Representative, was also a participant in this covert organization, surreptitiously hiding fugitive slaves in a modified water cistern on his property in Lancaster City. After ushering a group of fugitives further north, Stevens asked a friend to help them avoid the numerous slave-catching spies in the area. “Will you see that they flee to an immediate city of refuge,” he requested. “They should not stop short of Canada. There is a regular chain of agents and spies of the slaveholders in this and all adjoining counties. I have a spy on the spies and thus ascertain the facts.... These are the eighth set of slaves I have warned within a week.”²⁶

²⁶ “Slave Catching,” *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, September 18, 1850; Hensel, p. 16; “The Christiana Riot—Where Freedom Began,” *Lancaster County Magazine*, May 2001; “Columbia’s Claim to Underground Railroad,” *Lancaster New Era*, February 5, 2009; “‘He Died For Law’ In Christiana Riot,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 1955; “Excavation of Christiana Riot House Site Locates Front Gate,” *Lancaster New Era*, July 8, 2008; Robert C. Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster: PA, 1883), pp. 30-34; “Columbia’s Claim to Underground Railroad,” *Lancaster New Era*, February 5, 2009; “Law Empowered Slave Catchers; Underground Railroad Thrived,” *Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era*, March, 29, 2011; Charles D.

A native of Vermont, Stevens was born into poverty on April 4, 1792 to an alcoholic father and a devoted mother. This lack of financial resources and being handicapped with a clubfoot contributed to his concern for the poor and underprivileged from a young age. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1814 and then proceeded to open a law practice in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. While in Gettysburg, Stevens purchased an iron works and served one term in the state legislature from 1833 to 1835. He moved to Lancaster in 1842 making a name for himself nationally when he was elected to the U. S. House of Representatives six years later. Nicknamed the “Great Commoner,” Stevens was a stalwart defender of equal rights not only for blacks, but all races, religions, and ethnicities. His support of public education was popular in the county with his particular anti-Masonic views winning him votes among Germans while his abolitionism garnered support from sectarians. He was of the hardened anti-slavery wing of the Whigs mockingly described as “Woolly Heads” by political opponents. Upon his arrival in the halls of Congress, Stevens took little time in attacking pro-slavery advocates for what he viewed as their conspiratorial attempt to overtake the federal government and deny the cause of liberty. During a debate on the House floor regarding the proposed Compromise of 1850, he stated his abhorrence to the “word ‘compromise’ when applied to human rights and constitutional rights.” When the Compromise passed three months later, Stevens was so incensed he asked, “Can the free North stand this? Can Pennsylvania stand it? Great God! Can New England endure it?” He even desperately tried to introduce his own bill repealing the Fugitive Slave Law a week later, but could not garner the necessary support. Later that year, Stevens was re-elected by a wide margin—9,565

Spott, “The Pilgrim’s Pathway: The Underground Railroad in Lancaster County,” *Community History Annual* 5 (1966), pp. 42-43.

votes to 5,464—demonstrating both his popularity as a candidate and that his abolitionist views did have a following in the county.²⁷

The Christiana population was, for the most part, similarly empathetic to fugitive slaves. Most of town's fourteen hundred white residents apparently turned a blind eye to the masses of new African-Americans continuously arriving in the area. There were roughly 150 free blacks living in and around Christiana, most living on Zion Hill one mile east of Christiana just over the Chester County line. This small black community sprang up around the Mt. Zion A. M. E. Church upon its establishment in 1822. The church provided a sense of unity to the area's black population as African-Americans came from miles around to attend its services. Zion Hill became a natural destination for runaways where they could literally hide in the open among their free brethren.

Christiana's rural countryside also offered plenty of opportunities for work on local farms so long as employers were willing to ignore the obvious question of slave or free status.

This silence became a major risk to the area's inhabitants not only legally, but also financially as the Fugitive Slave Law levied a one thousand dollar fine for anyone assisting a runaway. Such a steep fine was an enormous sum in 1850 America, amounting to 3-4 years' wages. That whites in the region were willing to break the fugitive law illustrated just how steadfast abolitionism was in the area. According to census figures, more than one half of the county's free black population lived in its southeastern portion which included Christiana's Sadsbury Township. The Gap Gang's

²⁷ Trefousse, pp. 1-7, 39-46, 95-96; "Thaddeus Stevens Served County, Country, 'Colored'," *Lancaster Intelligencer Journal*, April 19, 2011; J. Katz, p. 180. The term "Woolly Heads" was a racist invective leveled against white abolitionists that referred to African-Americans' hair texture. The later term "Buffalo Soldier" similarly referenced the hair texture of black troops in the late nineteenth century; Hensel, pp. 51-52; Whitson, p. 29; *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, September 25, 1850.

sinister presence notwithstanding, the area's racial composition and accommodating environment offered enough security for runaways to increasingly settle in the locale, working and residing alongside their white neighbors for many years.²⁸ This accommodation would soon play a major role as Edward Gorsuch and a group of Maryland slave catchers came north in search of his fugitives.

²⁸ *Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D.C.: Armstrong, 1853), pp. 171-172; Darlene Colon, President Christiana Historical Society, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA; Sara Ruth, interview by author, July 12, 2012, Coatesville, PA; "The Christiana Riot—Where Freedom Began," *Lancaster County Magazine*, May 2001; Its difficult to believe that Christiana's white population did not suspect that some of the blacks both residing in and passing through their community were fugitive slaves, see Parker, pp. 160-164; Hensel, p. 18; "Columbia's Claim to Underground Railroad," *Lancaster New Era*, February 5, 2009.

Chapter II

A Clash of Ideologies

As the Gorsuch posse entered Lancaster County on the night of September 10, 1851, they were unaware that their meticulously constructed plan for recapturing the four runaways had been discovered the previous day. A small anti-slavery group called “The Special Secret Committee” had established an intelligence network that stretched southward from Philadelphia to Richmond, Virginia. The Committee resented the Fugitive Slave Law on moral grounds, warned fugitives of slave catching activities, and served as conductors on the Underground Railroad. Samuel Williams, a black innkeeper who was one of the Committee’s agents in Philadelphia, received information that Gorsuch was speaking at length with Kline about recapturing runaways. As Kline— notorious for slave catching —abruptly left the city soon thereafter, Williams trailed after him endeavoring to discover the marshal’s destination. When Kline exited the train at Penningtonville, Williams did the same, surreptitiously tailing the marshal as he departed by wagon for the second leg of his journey. The marshal did not go far as his wagon broke down forcing him to walk back and hire another. The delay caused him to miss the appointed rendezvous with Gorsuch, and Kline now found himself subsequently wandering the back roads of Lancaster County. He stopped at various watering holes to ask after the Marylanders under the ruse that they were horse thieves he was pursuing. As Kline entered one such establishment, Williams—who had successfully shadowed the marshal during his itinerant search—followed him through the door. When the marshal again asked about horse thieves, Williams could no longer contain himself and warned, “I

know the kind of horse thieves you are after. They are all gone; and you had better not go after them.” Kline ignored the warning, continuing on his roundabout journey seeking information at other saloons. It was during these inquiries that Williams ascertained the marshal’s destination. It is unclear how Williams came by this knowledge, but Kline’s conspicuous manner in the taverns likely facilitated its deduction. Williams quickly surpassed the marshal by riding through the countryside reaching Christiana in time to spread word throughout the area that kidnappers were in the vicinity.¹

Kline finally reached the rendezvous with Gorsuch, oblivious to how his tardiness and lack of subtlety had suddenly endangered the party, as they no longer had the element of surprise. Although the marshal had put them behind schedule, the seven-man party consisting of Edward Gorsuch, Kline, Gorsuch’s son Dickinson, nephew Dr. Thomas Pearce, cousin Joshua, and two neighbors—Nicholas Hutchins and Nathan Nelson set off from Gap at 1 a.m. on September 11 by foot. Padgett’s information had provided Gorsuch with two locations where his fugitives were hiding and, being unfamiliar with the area, the slave owner hired a guide to direct the party. Whether the guide was actually Padgett is unknown, he was only identified as a white man with a straw hat and wearing a bandana to hide his face from any locals that might recognize him and thereby infer the party’s designs. He led the party to the first location, a simple farmhouse where one of the fugitives resided. Gorsuch sought to split the posse, sending half the men to the next location to save time. Kline disagreed arguing that every man would be needed to capture the other runaways. The slaveholder finally assented, likely succumbing to the misapprehension that his chattel had escaped because of ignorance rather than a yearning

¹ Parker, pp. 281-282; Slaughter, pp. 53-55; James Robbins, *Report on the Trial of Castner Hanway for Treason* (1852; reprint, Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), p. 57; J. Katz, p. 77.

to live as free men. If he could only speak with his slaves, Gorsuch was confident his force of will could do the rest. He reasoned that since the slave's wife still lived in Maryland he could be coerced into peacefully returning. The party continued on their journey assuming they would pick up the first fugitive on the return trip. The guide directed them along a rather circuitous route for roughly eight miles coming to the outskirts of Christiana hours later. Whether the guide's actions were meant to avoid the main roads for fear of detection or he was in actuality an abolitionist sympathizer purposely delaying the southerners is unclear, but what was becoming clear was the party itself as daybreak slowly began erasing the night. As the men realized they were losing the darkness that afforded them a level of concealment, the party quickened its pace. They soon arrived at the second location where Padgett's intelligence placed two of the fugitives. The guide pointed to a small two-story house made of stone with a shingle roof, a rickety overhang above the front door, and four windows equally spaced, two on the ground floor and two on the second floor on each of the house's northern and southern sides. His job finished, the guide departed, leaving the posse as they followed a lane that ran up to the home's small fence that surrounded the property.²

Nelson Ford was astonished by what he saw coming in his direction. It had been two years since he last saw his former master. Like many fugitives, Ford had changed his

² Slaughter, pp. 6-19, 52-57; There is some confusion as to how many were in the Gorsuch party. W. U. Hensel lists five of the above southerners, but omits Joshua, (24). However, he later cites the testimony of Joshua as an eyewitness (32). This must simply be an error on Hensel's part. Slaughter states that there were seven, the six southerners above and Kline, but in his notes (215) refers to the party as "the six-man posse." This is either an error or it might be that Slaughter is distinguishing between Kline and the men from Maryland by only counting the southerners as members of the "posse." Parker's account (280) accurately described that the six southerners and Kline composed the Gorsuch party when the riot erupted; Slaughter, pp. 52-57; William Padgett traveled the county repairing clocks. He reportedly used this guise to enter homes and search for concealed locations that might harbor runaways. Its very possible Padgett was the guide because he was very knowledgeable of the back roads of Christiana from his days "gathering sumac tops for the dyeing of morocco," see D. Forbes, p. 9.

name after escaping from bondage. Living under the alias Joshua Kite not only served a practical purpose in helping Ford allude authorities, but it was also psychological—a symbolic expression of a new beginning. As Edward Gorsuch marched toward him, Ford was surely consumed with a flood of horrific memories. The prospect of returning to his former life so panicked the black man that he raced into a nearby house in full view of the southerners who recognized him instantly. Could it be divine Providence that Ford fled into the very residence where Padgett’s information placed another of the fugitives? The sight surely delighted Gorsuch, his intelligence had proven correct, and his surreptitious tactics had achieved the desired result. Gorsuch and Kline chased after Ford while the remainder of the party quickly surrounded the house to prevent any possible escape.³ Running into the yard Gorsuch already believed he had won the day; he would have his slaves back in a few minutes. Two years of investigating and planning would soon culminate in the recapture of those who betrayed his trust and tarnished his reputation.

Ford’s sudden entrance into the house startled William Parker from his bed. Parker was a tall, well-built, twenty-nine year old fugitive slave from Maryland who had lived in Lancaster County for the past twelve years. He was renting the small stone house from neighboring Quaker farmer Levi Pownall who was well acquainted with the black man’s passionate belief in helping his racial brethren. Parker was an intelligent man, possessed with a courageous spirit and a willingness to die for what he thought was right. Local blacks referred to him as “the preacher” for both the character he exhibited and his natural leadership qualities. Parker “could have commanded an army had he been educated,” wrote a local historian, “and he challenged the universal respect of all of them

³ Slaughter, pp. 57-62; Parker, p. 283.

who did not have occasion to fear him.” Parker was not one to be trifled with when it came to issues of black servitude. His belligerence towards the Fugitive Slave Law and slave catching in general was well known throughout the area. Parker openly discussed his willingness to violently oppose the fugitive act with Pownall’s wife Sarah. Should slave catchers come to Christiana, the Quaker woman urged Parker to flee for Canada rather than lead his fellow blacks in resisting the act. Parker argued that if the law protected blacks as it did whites he would not fight, but “the laws for personal protection are not made for us, and we are not bound to obey them. If a fight occurs I want the whites to keep away. They have a country and may obey the laws. But we have no country.” Although Parker’s fugitive status caused him to live in a state of constant watchfulness lest he be kidnapped back to Maryland, the uneasiness was worth it simply to be free. He wanted other slaves to flee northwards and was readily willing to assist in their plight:

I thought of my fellow-servants left behind, bound in the chains of slavery,—and I was free! I thought that, if I had the power, they should soon be as free as I was; and I formed a resolution that I would assist in liberating every one within my reach at the risk of my life, and that I would devise some plan for their entire liberation.⁴

Parker’s “plan” hinged on protecting free blacks and aiding runaways from both local and southern slave catchers. During the antebellum era, capturing fugitives was a profitable business for those who either refused or failed to perceive slavery in moralistic terms. The Fugitive Slave Act provided slave hunters with legal protections and

⁴ Slaughter, p. 47; Whitson, pp. 32; Smedley, p. 115; Levi Pownall’s wife Sarah writes in her journal as if Parker was a freeman. However, the journal also speaks of fugitives that Parker helped. It seems incomprehensible that Christiana’s white population did not deduce that some of the blacks in their community were actually fugitive slaves, see “Pownall Journal,” Moores Memorial Library Collection, Christiana, Pennsylvania and E. Forbes, pp. 39, 36; Parker, pp. 160-164.

promised sizeable bounties for remanded runaways. Slave catchers were usually aided by spies, such as William Padgett, and it was not uncommon for even free blacks to act as informers. Slave catchers could be either professionals who made it their livelihood or amateurs who simply saw it as a method of supplementing their income. Padgett was reputedly a member of the Gap Gang, one such group of amateur slave catchers, although the secrecy of the organization makes this difficult to confirm. Based less than three miles from Christiana, the Gap Gang was very active in Lancaster and Chester Counties with their proximity making them a constant threat to Parker and his black neighbors. Just a year before Edward Gorsuch arrived in William Parker's front yard, professional slave catchers seized a free black Christiana man who was never seen by his family since. A few months later another incident occurred in the same neighborhood when a black man was "tied, gagged, and carried away, marking the road along which he was dragged with his blood," never to be heard from again. In 1851, sisters Elizabeth and Rachel Parker were abducted by slave catchers from neighboring Chester County. It made no difference that the women were actually free blacks. When the eldest girl's employer attempted to pursue the kidnapers he was found a few days later hanging from a tree on the outskirts of Baltimore.⁵

For William Parker and his racial brethren, kidnapping incidents were so frequent that they lived in a constant state of anxiety. "We would hear of slaveholders or kidnapers every two or three weeks," Parker wrote, "sometimes a party of white men would break

⁵ "Riot Recalled," *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 9, 2001; Slaughter, pp. 44-47; D. Forbes, p. 4; Hensel, pp. 15-16; "Resistance at Christiana," *Central PA Magazine*, February 2002, p. 30; "Monument Will Mark the Spot of Christiana Riot," *New York Times*, August 27, 1911; Parker, pp. 279, 161; "Slave Act Brought Bounty-Hunt Waves," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 24, 2002. The Parker sisters were not related to William Parker.

into a house and take a man away, no one knew where; again a whole family might be carried off. There was no power to protect them, nor prevent it.” Operating under the Fugitive Slave Law, slave catchers essentially used their own set of rules when kidnapping blacks now that they were backed with federal powers. There were no rights of *habeus corpus*, protections from illegal seizure, or needs for probable cause. According to Parker, this was especially the case when southern slave catchers crossed into Pennsylvania, “they did not hesitate to break open doors, and to enter, without ceremony, the houses of colored men; and when refused admission, or when a manly and determined spirit was shown, they would present pistols, an[d] strike and knock down men and women indiscriminately.” In response to the rash of kidnappings, Parker organized a mutual protection association to resist the Gap Gang and others of its ilk. Members of this grassroots organization tracked slave catchers in the area and successfully rescued numerous abductees before they were taken south. Upon hearing that a Chester County girl was being kidnapped, Parker and his men chased after the slave catchers. They overtook the kidnappers at Gap Hill where they subsequently rescued the girl and beat her abductors so brutally that two later died of their injuries. On another occasion, several kidnappers abducted a black man and were followed by Parker and his men to a Chester County tavern. When the landlord refused to let the black men inside, Parker battered the door down and was subsequently shot in the ankle. The ensuing gunfight frightened the kidnappers, causing them to flee out a backdoor leaving their quarry behind.⁶

⁶ Parker, pp. 162-166, 284; E. Forbes, p. 33. By the time of the riot, Parker’s mutual protection association had been in operation for a decade; Slaughter, p. 47.

The mutual-protection association was also not against punishing blacks who betrayed the trust of fugitives. After hearing that a black man named Carter had betrayed a fugitive, Parker and his followers tracked him down and severely beat him until they heard someone approaching and fled. “If we had not been interrupted,” Parker maintained, “death would have been his fate.” When Parker and his men heard of a local freedman luring fugitives to his home and then informing their former masters, they set the man’s house alight in retribution to which Parker delightfully described, “the house burned beautifully.” By September 11, 1851, the self-defense organization had become an experienced entity with its only weakness being the time it took to rally its members to a particular location. When Edward Gorsuch spotted Nelson Ford and chased him to the threshold of Parker’s home that morning, he was oblivious to the monumental error he had just committed. The posse had unwittingly stumbled into the very heart of Lancaster County’s resistance movement.⁷

When Parker heard about Samuel Williams’ warning hours before, he considered it little more than rumor. Dire forebodings regarding slavecatchers tended to be tinged with passion and exaggeration after all. Parker was so unconcerned that he was in bed when Ford burst through his front door alerting all inside as to who was coming up the lane. But Parker was not an unwitting participant in the events that placed slave catchers on his front step. He was knowingly harboring both Ford and one of the other Gorsuch runaways—Joshua Hammond, who was currently living under the alias Samuel Thompson. On the night the posse arrived, the household consisted of Parker, Ford, and Hammond, along with Parker’s wife Eliza who was a fugitive as well; Eliza’s sister

⁷ “History: The North’s Role in Slavery, Laid Out in Black and White,” *The Hartford Courant*, October 3, 2005; Slaughter, pp. 51-52.

Hannah and her husband Alexander Pinckney, and a fugitive slave from Cecil County, Maryland named Abraham Johnson. Upon Ford's warnings, the inhabitants of the house fled upstairs as the second floor afforded a height advantage and made the staircase a natural chokepoint should the Gorsuch party attempt to rush inside the home. They armed themselves with the firearms and makeshift-fighting implements Parker had on hand and anxiously awaited the southerners' next move.⁸

After their cohorts secured the perimeter, Gorsuch and Kline carefully entered the first floor calling out to Parker that he obey the law and hand over the runaways. Kline read aloud the warrants expecting the black man to surrender once he heard they had legal authority for being there. Parker cared nothing about warrants, was not about to surrender the runaways, and dared Kline to come get him.⁹ As day began to dawn, haste was becoming a factor for the posse who likely wanted to get in and out of Christiana before the town awoke. Gorsuch was becoming impatient with the proceedings not to mention the impertinence of Parker. Like most slave catchers, Gorsuch thought federal law would subdue all objections and impel compliance. In southern culture slavery was a wholly legal institution that demanded obedience and left no room for negotiation. It was inconceivable to the slaveholder how anyone could fail to see this logic, not to mention openly defy the U.S. government. The fact that a black man was instigating this resistance made it all the more galling to Gorsuch's southern sense of pride. It was if he had suddenly ventured into a strange universe where everything he understood had

⁸ Slaughter, p. 47, 57-62. Although both Ford and Hammond were living under the assumed names Joshua Kite and Samuel Thompson at the time of the riot, for sake of clarity they will be referred to by their original names throughout this work; Parker, p. 283.

⁹ Slaughter, pp. 57-62; Parker, pp. 283-284.

suddenly been turned upside down. He was only forty-five miles from his home, but Edward Gorsuch now found himself in a very foreign place.

Gorsuch turned to the marshal, “Come, Mr. Kline, let's go up stairs and take them. We can take them. Come, follow me, I'll go up and get my property. What's in the way? The law is in my favor, and the people are in my favor.” The men slowly ascended the stairs when suddenly a metal fishing spear was hurled at them from the second floor. The object missed, but sufficiently startled them both to oblige a retreat back outside. The slaveholder looked to the upstairs windows and shouted a demand for his property to be returned. Parker responded with a sardonic declaration that exemplified their different antebellum mindsets concerning slavery. “Go in the room down there, and see if there is anything there belonging to you,” Parker retorted, “There are beds and a bureau, chairs, and other things. Then go out to the barn; there you will find a cow and some hogs. See if any of them are yours.” The two men parleyed for a few minutes with negotiations ultimately proving futile. Parker’s obstinance in continually refusing to surrender the fugitives so angered Kline that he threatened to set the home on fire. Parker held his ground exclaiming, “Burn us up and welcome...None but a coward would say the like. You can burn us, but you can’t take us; before I give up, you will see my ashes scattered on the earth.” As the men argued, Parker’s wife Eliza ran beneath an upstairs window, slowly raised her head above the sill, and sounded a tin fish horn into the early morning darkness. The sudden din startled the Gorsuch party who promptly fired upon her. Ducking just in time, Eliza kept her head safely below the window, rested the horn on the sill and continued to sound the instrument. Her actions mystified the posse, leaving them to wonder why anyone would decide to blow an instrument during a period of tense

negotiations. But the sounding of the horn was a pre-arranged signal put in place to alert the mutual-protection association. Those in the house now only had to inhibit their opponents rather than trying to defeat them.¹⁰

After the posse fired at Eliza, the home's defenders promptly reciprocated by firing back at their adversaries. The next few minutes witnessed exchanges of gunfire that ended in a stalemate with no casualties on either side. Kline and Gorsuch again attempted negotiations with Parker for a peaceful surrender of the slaves. One by one, Parker presented himself, Pinckney, and Johnson at a second floor window asking the slaveholder if any was his fugitive. Gorsuch responded with "no" each time then became embroiled with Parker in a protracted theological debate over slavery. "Does not the Bible say, 'Servants obey your masters'," Gorsuch questioned. Parker agreed, but countered that the Bible also read, "Give unto your servants that which is just and equal." The two men argued some minor religious issues until Parker decided to turn the tables on the slaveholder with an inquiry of his own, "Where do you see it in Scripture, that a man should traffic in his brother's blood?" Gorsuch found the question insulting, "Do you call a nigger my brother?" the slave owner retorted. When Parker answered in the affirmative, Gorsuch became enraged screaming, "my property I will have, or I'll breakfast in hell" and stormed back into the house. The slaveholder was halfway up the stairs when his eyes met the besieged blacks and the weapons they trained on him. Dickinson, a young man in his mid-twenties, ran to his father and convinced him to come back outside, likely saving his life in the process. The men slowly descended the

¹⁰ Slaughter, pp. 57-62, 47; Parker, pp. 283-284.

staircase and re-entered the yard, but not before the elder Gorsuch defiantly proclaimed, “I want my property, and I will have it.”¹¹

While it is rather odd that Parker and Gorsuch would choose such a heated moment to become embroiled in a theological debate, their argument was instructive in illustrating the different worlds in which the two men inhabited and encapsulated the similar sociological struggle between North and South. Like most slaveholders, Gorsuch was well-versed in employing Scripture to justify the institution of slavery. Biblical references such as the curse of Ham—where God made blacks eternally subservient—or the tenth commandment, which speaks of not coveting they neighbor’s man-servant or maid-servant, became powerful tools for southerners seeking to defend their consciences from abolitionist defamations. That Gorsuch would employ such rhetoric to validate his actions is unsurprising in the acutely religious atmosphere of the nineteenth century. It was a common practice, one he was keenly aware of growing up in Maryland under southern mores. In this way Gorsuch was no different from other slaveholders; he saw nothing incongruous between Christian virtue and slave ownership. For him a slave was not a human being, it was somehow subhuman, property to be bought and sold as its master saw fit. This is why Parker’s reference to black brotherhood angered the slave owner so deeply. For Gorsuch, the term blackness had come to be defined with ignorance, savagery, immorality, and most of all slavery. Bigoted ethnological evidence bolstered his belief with pseudo-science arguing similarly that blacks were biologically subservient to whites. The proud slaveholder was particularly insulted by Parker’s inferior characterization of him because it came from the lips of a black man. In the

¹¹ Parker, pp. 284-285.

world of Edward Gorsuch, his was a chosen race superior to blackness and buttressed by Holy Scripture. His ego would concede nothing less.¹²

Although Parker and Gorsuch were interpreting the same Bible, the former's religious views were polar opposites from those of his rival. Parker was likely familiar with Christianity from his days in bondage as religious instruction was one of the few luxuries most slaveholders allowed their slaves on Sundays. Owners provided services that were largely self-serving, concentrating on passages that reinforced the master-slave relationship hopeful that the power of divine mandate would create more tractable servants. But fugitives like Parker, who escaped their bonds and the religious propaganda of their masters, were free to interpret the Bible in their own way making use of intellectual sources denied them in their former life. Parker reportedly attended anti-slavery meetings where abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass espoused issues of liberty and equality. The latter's frank and stirring words surprised Parker, as he was familiar with Douglass from their days as Maryland slaves, yet unaware of how far his acquaintance had progressed intellectually:

I was therefore not prepared for the progress he then showed, neither for his free-spoken and manly language against slavery. I listened with the intense satisfaction that only a refugee could feel, when hearing, embodied in earnest, well-chosen, and strong speech, his own crude ideas of freedom, and his own hearty censure of the man-stealer. I believed, I knew, every word he said was true. It was the whole truth,--nothing kept back,--no trifling with human rights, no trading in the blood of the slave extenuated, nothing against the slaveholder said in malice. I have never listened to words from the lips of mortal man which were more acceptable to me; and although privileged since then to hear many able and good men speak on slavery, no doctrine has seemed to me so pure, so unworldly, as his.

¹² Kolchin, pp. 191-193; Letter from Thornton Stringfellow to "Brother" Sands, "A Brief Examination of Scripture Testimony on the Institution of Slavery," *Religious Herald* (Washington: Congressional Globe Office, 1850); Kolchin, p. 193; Wolff, pp. 596-597.

When Parker fused these abolitionist beliefs with scripture he created a personal worldview where slaves—and by extension all blacks—were human beings deserving of the same rights and privileges as whites. Parker’s question to Gorsuch regarding the spilling of a brother’s blood was a foreign concept to the slaveholder, but completely understandable to Parker. For the former slave, brotherhood referred to all races standing equitably in the eyes of God. There was no differentiation between black and white. Although Gorsuch now stood in his front yard as an adversary, Parker considered him—from a religious point of view—his brother.¹³

Parker appeared to believe that he won the theological debate with Gorsuch. For most, the victor of such an intellectual discourse would seem inconsequential compared to the larger engagement surrounding it. Yet Parker spoke glowingly of this episode, describing Gorsuch as hanging his head in frustration. This likely owes to Parker’s personal gratification that a fugitive had stymied a slaveholder both intellectually and martially in an effort to recapture runaways. For former slaves, such defiance became an overwhelming emotion when dealing with “superior” southern gentlemen. Male slaves typically had their manhood stripped from them by masters bent on humiliating their human chattel into a state of acquiescence. Brutal beatings and the inability to protect bondwomen from white lechery slowly chipped away at any sense of manliness male slaves might entertain. The opportunity for Parker and other ex-slaves to assert their humanity against those who would deny it was a powerful temptation that empowered a

¹³ Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), pp. 349-351; Parker, p. 158-161; William E. Montgomery, “African-American Churches,” Texas State Historical Association, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/pkatz> (accessed December 5, 2011).

dormant masculinity long absent from their former lives. As Cynthia Griffin Wolff explained, “For many [slaves]...the personal satisfaction of being able to respond with violence to the violence of a white man’s tyranny was a deeply cherished hope...and relinquishing even the possibility of asserting aggression as a way of proving manhood was difficult.”¹⁴

Bravado was not the only reason Parker was resisting Gorsuch so boldly, his compassion for the fugitives was undeniable, but it certainly played a part in the religious dialogue, as well as, the overall confrontation. Was the opportunity to give a slaveholder his comeuppance the sole rationale for this religious interlude? At this time Parker’s household was under siege, fighting a strictly defensive action that, on its own, had little chance of success. Any attempt to rush the posse or escape out the back would see a number of the black defenders shot down in the process and likely lead to the capture of the rest. Even if one or two were able to escape in the confusion, the cost of such an action in human blood was simply too high. Yet there was possibly an ulterior motive behind Parker’s theological foray in that it wasted time, a dwindling resource that was most precious to the posse. The black leader was keenly aware of his situation knowing that the longer he delayed the closer help was to arriving. It was now about six o’clock and each passing minute afforded the house’s occupants a better tactical situation. Not only was there increased daylight to see their opponents, but also additional time for whom they anxiously awaited—the mutual protection association.¹⁵

¹⁴ Wolff, pp. 603-604.

¹⁵ Slaughter, pp. 62-63; Parker, p. 284-287. In Parker’s account he appears to take great pride in winning the theological debate with Gorsuch (285). Thomas Slaughter, on the other hand, believes that, “Those in the house were just stalling for time until friends could respond to the summons of the horn” (63).

After Dickinson escorted his father back into the yard, Edward began quietly discussing with Kline as to what they could possibly do next. The Marshal's authority had been ignored by those in the house, threats were proving insufficient, shooting at the defenders had yielded little, and an outright assault was suicidal. The posse was now in an unenviable position, embroiled in a prolonged stalemate behind enemy lines. But there was a twinkling of hope for the Gorsuch party that came from the second floor window. Gorsuch's dash up the stairs a few minutes prior had shaken the nerve of Pinckney who turned to Parker and said, "We had better give up." Kline heard the statement, which must have sounded like music to the ears of the nervous Marshal, and quickly seized the opportunity to sow dissension, "Yes, give up like men," he shouted to Parker, "The rest would give up if it were not for you." Pinckney insisted to Parker that he was not afraid, "but where is the sense in fighting against so many men, and only five of us?" Parker's resolve was unwavering in the face of this potential desertion. The black leader threatened to shoot Pinckney should he make any effort to capitulate, then tried to reinvigorate his disheartened spirit by evoking a sense of manliness. "Don't believe, that any living man can take you," Parker pleaded to his brother-in-law, "Don't give up to any slaveholder." Eliza reinforced her husband's warning by raising a corn-cutter and affirming that she would cut off the head of anyone who attempted to surrender. Pinckney backed down and remained in his position by a second floor window. Whether his backpedaling owed to the threats from those in the house or from a sense of emasculation is difficult to say. That Eliza—a woman Pinckney had discounted as one of their number just seconds ago—was so determined to fight to the end while he was willing to yield, had to weigh heavily on his manhood. This likely played a factor in

Pinckney remaining more out of embarrassment than any belief in a victorious outcome. His decision to remain would ultimately prove fortuitous because just at that moment silhouettes began appearing on the horizon. Numerous black figures were swiftly coming into view; help had finally arrived.¹⁶

There are differing accounts as to the number of African-Americans who raced to Parker's house that morning. Thomas Slaughter cited witnesses testifying to between 50 and 150, but thinks that 75-100 seems a reasonable approximation. He claimed warnings of the Gorsuch party's approach had put the black community on high alert with some determined resisters even sleeping in the fields around Parker's home. "It is possible that a large proportion of the African-American community of Lancaster County," Slaughter argued, "perhaps a majority of adults, participated in the riot." This seems rather high as Parker's own account states that not more than one hundred black men lived within four miles of his house, "and it would have been almost impossible to get together even thirty at an hour's notice." Local historian Hugh Douglass posits a more reasonable estimate of thirty to fifty, while Jonathan Katz is the lowest citing fifteen to twenty-five blacks. William Hensel skirted the specific number of blacks at the scene by writing that there were far more present "than the upstairs of that little cabin [Parker's] could have held." Whichever estimate one chooses to believe, it was most assuredly enough individuals to make the Gorsuch party visibly nervous. The posse numbered only seven men on foot and even the lowest estimate of fifteen blacks, when added to those in the house, would outnumber the white men by a three to one margin. The southerners who had undertaken such pains to quietly steal into Christiana hoping to surprise their quarry and escape the

¹⁶ Parker, pp. 285-286.

area before anyone was the wiser, now found themselves vastly outnumbered and surrounded by an angry crowd armed with guns, farming implements, and even rocks.¹⁷

Events outside that small stone house were beginning to spiral out of control. The throng of blacks was getting impatient while the posse was close to panicking. Just as tempers were about to boil over, a neighboring white miller came galloping down the lane, followed by another white man on foot. Castner Hanway and shopkeeper Elijah Lewis, a Quaker, received word of what was supposedly a kidnapping in progress and came to see what was happening. Kline informed the two men that he was a United States marshal and, after showing them the warrants, the two were satisfied that all was legal. The frightened marshal implored Hanway and Lewis to aid in the arrest of the fugitives, but each refused. Kline explained to Hanway that he was breaking the statutes of the Fugitive Slave Law, but the miller was unmoved. Both Hanway and Lewis adamantly refused the marshal insisting they would have no part in recapturing runaway slaves. The two local whites instead tried to persuade the assembled blacks to disperse, but none attempted to leave. Bolstered by the reinforcements, Parker and his men walked downstairs and into the front yard to watch a thoroughly frustrated Edward Gorsuch seethe over what was transpiring. This was supposed to have been a simple legal matter and it had grown into an embarrassing spectacle for him and his son. Kline and some of the others in the posse tried to convince the elder Gorsuch to retire, but he refused their entreaties. The slaveowner's pride got the better of him; he stalked back towards Parker

¹⁷ Slaughter, p. 216, 63; Parker, p. 279; H. Douglass, p. 4; J. Katz, pp. 94-95; Hensel, p. 31.

and once again commanded the return of his human chattel.¹⁸ This walk would mark the end of Edward Gorsuch and the beginning of the Christiana Riot.

The bloody events of the next few minutes are unclear because they rely upon conflicting testimony. Parker maintained that it was Dickinson Gorsuch who started the final battle by shooting at him for insulting his father. Parker once again refused to surrender the fugitives to the elder Gorsuch prompting Dickinson to fire at the black leader. The bullet barely missed Parker, instead passing through his hat mere inches from an unexpected martyrdom. Parker responded by quickly rushing the youth, knocking the pistol from his hand. Young Gorsuch became unnerved and attempted to flee. He managed only a few steps before he was hit by two shotgun blasts from Parker's brother-in-law, Alexander Pinckney. Critically wounded, Dickinson crawled to a fence corner laying there for the remainder of the fighting. Parker's version then claims that Joshua Hammond confronted his former master and told him to go home. When Gorsuch retorted that Hammond had better return to Maryland with him, the fugitive pistol-whipped the southerner with a revolver. After falling to his knees, Gorsuch rose and signaled to his men, prompting his former slave to club him again. Upon seeing the signal and witnessing Hammond's actions, the southerners opened fire, were accosted by the host of blacks, and hastily ran away.¹⁹

¹⁸ Slaughter, pp. 63-69.

¹⁹ Parker, pp. 286-287; Slaughter, p. 58, 63, 69; J. Katz, p. 101. There is some confusion in the sources as to the identity of Samuel Thompson because fugitives usually lived under an alias to escape capture. It appears likely that "Samuel Thompson" was the new name of Joshua Hammond. Parker stated the fugitives in his house to be Joshua Kite and Samuel Thompson, and that it was Kite who was spotted by the posse (283). Slaughter claimed that Gorsuch recognized Nelson Ford as the man outside when the party arrived (58) thus making Ford to be Kite. Kline testified that the posse asked for Josh and Nelson to be turned over, see J. Franklin Reigart, *A Full and Correct Report of the Christiana Tragedy...* (Lancaster, PA: 1851), p. 6. Since the Gorsuch party would refer to their slave names, this made Joshua Hammond the man Parker referred to as Samuel Thompson.

This version of events seems difficult to believe. After Dickinson was shot, would not the elder Gorsuch rush to the aid of his son rather than hold a conversation with Hammond? The two things might have happened simultaneously, but that would need perfect timing because whichever of the Gorsuches was attacked first, the other would try to intervene. The two episodes might very well have occurred simultaneously, but Parker does not report the events in that fashion. He writes of his run-in with Dickinson first and then the elder Gorsuch's confrontation with Hammond rather than the two events coinciding with one another.²⁰

The rendition of events given by Edward Gorsuch's cousin Joshua appears more reliable as to what happened in the yard. Edward Gorsuch's cousin Joshua testified that as the elder Gorsuch strode towards the house one final time to reclaim his "property" he was savagely beaten with clubs. Although there are slight differences, historian Thomas Slaughter's reconstruction of events fits more in line with Joshua's story and seems the most accurate. Slaughter believed that the incident's bloody conclusion came when the slave owner approached Parker's home and argued with Hammond. After the fugitive clubbed his former master to his knees, Gorsuch tried to get back up and was promptly pistol-whipped again. After Gorsuch was clubbed the second time, Hammond shot him once. This act sent the crowd of blacks into a frenzy, beating the slaveholder's body and riddling it with bullets. It is most likely at this moment that Dickinson ran to his father's aid and was met by the two shotgun blasts from Pinckney.²¹

The remainder of Gorsuch's party could do little more than flee for their lives after witnessing what happened to the slaveholder and his son. The initial confusion saved

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Hensel, p. 32; Slaughter, p. 69.

some of the posse as the rioters were focused on their central antagonist Edward Gorsuch. By the time they turned on Kline and Gorsuch's neighbors, Hutchins and Nelson, the three men were already beyond the lane and running into some nearby woods making it impossible for the rioters to catch them. While his cousin was being killed, Joshua Gorsuch was hit over the head and became the only one of the southerners to get a shot off when he responded by wildly firing his pistol. Hanway used his horse to shield Thomas Pearce and Joshua from the rioters' weapons, but panicked and rode off after being warned to move by the crowd. Left with no other options, Pearce and Joshua fled as quickly as they could, endeavoring to catch up with the rest of their comrades. Whether dazed by his injuries or simply not very fleet of foot, Joshua was overcome by some of the blacks and seriously beaten. He managed to somehow get away probably owing to the tight confines of the lane and the now broken weaponry of the rioters. "While in close quarters with the whites, we could load and fire but two or three times," Parker stated, "Our guns got bent and out of order. So damaged did they become, that we could shoot with but two or three of them. Samuel Thompson bent his gun on old Mr. Gorsuch so badly, that it was of no use to us."²² After the smoke cleared that morning, Edward Gorsuch lay dead, both Dickinson and Joshua were wounded, and the rest of the party was high-tailing it through the dew-laden fields of Lancaster County.

After the rest of the southerners made their hasty retreat only one living member of the Gorsuch party remained on the field that day. Dickinson had been pelted by over seventy shot and was near death before either Joseph Scarlett or Levi Pownall found him. Scarlett's participation in the riot had little to do with actually taking part in the incident

²² Parker, p. 287; Slaughter, pp. 70-73.

itself. Hearing Samuel Williams' advanced warning that slave catchers were coming, Scarlett was one of those who rushed about the area warning blacks of the impending danger. According to authorities, this act proved sufficient to later arrest him as an accomplice to the rioters. Dickinson later testified that it was Scarlett who helped him, yet Parker claims it was Pownall who tended to the young man. Under the circumstances, it was probably Pownall as Dickinson was in no shape to make accurate identifications while bleeding beneath a fencepost that morning. The Pownall family brought Dickinson into their home and slowly nursed him back to health over the next few months. He eventually returned to Maryland, living another thirty-one years before dying in 1882. When preparing him for burial, the undertaker described Dickinson's body as being "pitted like a sponge" by the legacy of the Christiana Riot.²³

After the riot that morning, the Gorsuch fugitives, Buley, Ford, and the Hammonds, immediately fled the scene. They split up to avoid detection and traveled north eventually making it to Canada—the historical record is lacking as to how they actually accomplished this. As for Parker, Pinckney, and Johnson, their escape took a different path as their familial roots made them hesitant to initiate a hasty getaway. The men hid at the Pownall farm the remainder of the day concealing themselves from the continuous stream of local whites arriving to check on Dickinson's condition. When the visitors left at nightfall, Parker and his men inquired as to the young man's health. The Pownall's told them the young man was near death and warned that they should flee the area before authorities arrived in force. It was at this moment when the black men grasped the

²³ It is questionable whether Dickinson was found by Scarlett or Levi Pownall, see Slaughter pp. 57, 69-70 and Parker pp. 287-288; LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, *A Charge of Treason or A Fight For Freedom* (Christiana, PA: Moores Memorial Library, 2000), pp. 19-20; Hensel, pp. 35-36, 32.

gravity of the situation they now faced. Their actions went beyond anything the mutual protection association had done in the past. This was not a case of beating up a few slave catchers and disappearing mysteriously into the night. Parker and his compatriots had blood on their hands; they were fugitive slaves who killed a respected slaveholder and gravely wounded his son before dozens of witnesses. Black had conquered white in a country that knew only the opposite and would demand its just recompense. Although they could claim self-defense, their resistance was so charged with political implications that receiving an impartial trial seemed remote. The black men soon came to the realization that one of two things awaited them in Pennsylvania—a prison cell or the gallows. They reluctantly decided to leave their friends and families behind in order to flee north and hopefully cross into Canada. The Pownall's provided Parker and his men with supplies for the journey and they departed at nine o'clock on the night of the riot for yet another dangerous flight to freedom.²⁴

That the Pownall family would ironically assist the principal rioters while Dickinson lay convalescing in the next room further illustrated the two worlds in which the Quaker community inhabited. They were sympathetic to the plight of fugitive slaves even while simultaneously tending to one who would return fugitives to slavery. The Pownalls even went to the riot house before authorities arrived and burned letters that could have incriminated their neighbors for assisting runaways. The Quaker faith's humanitarian

²⁴ Slaughter, p. 77-79; Hensel, p. 36; Parker, p. 288. Parker states that he, Pinckney, and Johnson stayed at a "friends" house the rest of day. It is likely that Parker's "friend" was Levi Pownall, but he didn't want to publicly implicate his Quaker landlord. See Margaret Hope Bacon, *Rebellion at Christiana* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975), pp. 119-121; "Pownall Journal," Moores Memorial Library, Christiana, Pennsylvania.

impulse knew no bounds in Christiana with faith rather than law directing the actions of its followers.²⁵

Parker, Pinckney, and Johnson escaped north both by foot, train, and carriage some five hundred miles before reaching Rochester, New York two days later. Exhausted from their trek, the trio collapsed on the doorstep of Frederick Douglass who unhesitatingly welcomed them into his home. Long a stationmaster on the Underground Railroad, Douglass realized he was committing a crime by harboring three fugitives from justice, but his devotion to the anti-slavery cause had long since trumped any self-preservationist doubts. “I could not look upon them as murderers. To me, they were heroic defenders of the just right of man against manstealers and murderers,” he maintained, “What they had already done at Christiana, and the cool determination which showed very plainly especially in Parker, left no doubt on my mind that their courage was genuine and that their deeds would equal their words.” Although news had already reached Rochester of the riot, Douglass silently hoped it was he alone who knew where the ringleaders were hiding. But word of their arrival had already spread, and the fugitives were inundated with admirers wanting to hear of their heroic deeds in the reputed Christiana Riot. After their supporters’ curiosity had been satiated, Parker and his men got some much needed sleep while Douglass made the necessary arrangements for the crossing into Canada. It was with trepidation that Douglass had accepted the callers, fearful that the unnecessary attention placed both himself and the rioters at risk of capture. “The work of getting these men safely into Canada was a delicate one,” he admitted, “They were not only fugitives from slavery but charged with murder, and officers were in pursuit of them....

²⁵ Hensel, pp. 36-37.

The hours they spent at my house were therefore hours of anxiety as well as activity.” Douglass accompanied the three rioters on a swift carriage ride to the Genesee River docks where he successfully secured their passage on a steamer bound for Toronto. In appreciation, Parker presented Douglass with Edward Gorsuch’s revolver for all the abolitionist had done for him and his companions.²⁶

Eliza Parker had a much more difficult time escaping than her husband. She initially planned on fleeing to Canada with her and William’s three children, traveling by night while hiding in haystacks, barns, or any other concealed location during the day. However, Eliza never had the opportunity to put this plan into action. She and Hannah Pinckney were captured twice, with federal authorities threatening Eliza with stories that her former master was coming north to reclaim her. After the women were not forthcoming with information as to the whereabouts of their husbands, government prosecutors released them on both occasions. This seems a rather odd decision in light of not only the murder and conspiracy charges that could have been brought against the two women, but they were also runaways and thereby punishable under the Fugitive Slave Act. They were the only of the house’s occupants to be captured and the posse had positively identified Eliza as the one blowing the horn, yet it is unclear why authorities inexplicably set them free. Was it possible that antebellum conceptions of race and gender paradoxically paid dividends for the black women? White officials likely considered Eliza and Hannah as naïve followers who lacked the mental faculties to distinguish right from wrong and, even if they did, were helpless to resist the patriarchal

²⁶ Slaughter, pp. 76-79; “African-American Perspective,” Millersville University, <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~ugrr/christiana/african.html>, (accessed February 4, 2009); Parker, p. 290; Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: Written by Himself* (1892; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1962), p. 281.

authority of their husbands. Perhaps the prosecution of two black women would simply be insufficient in satiating a southern thirst for vengeance that demanded equal justice for the death of a white slaveholder. Or maybe their captors were sympathetic to the plight of two mothers who had seemingly lost everything. Whatever reason for their liberation, Eliza and Hannah did not wait around to question their good fortune. Each fled north, this time without incident, eventually reaching Canada and a reunion with their respective husbands. The families would settle in Buxton, Ontario where they lived the remainder of their days free of the law that enslaved them only a few miles away.²⁷

William's story of his wife's escape is sketchy, but the threats of remission to her former master were so horrifying to Eliza that she made her hasty flight north without their children. They remained behind with their grandmother, Cassandra Harris, a woman fearful for her family and distraught by the sudden isolation in which she found herself. Harris' familial link with Parker would subject her to ruthless threats by lawmen desperate for information on the whereabouts of her kin. Whether she had any knowledge of their plans or not, Harris never divulged the location of her relatives. Parker's children eventually reunited with their parents in Canada a short time later, the actual timeline and process being rather vague, but Harris did not share the same happy fate. The strain over the riot and the exodus of her family would eventually be too much for the old woman. Years before, she had been a slave in Maryland, banished after her children surreptitiously escaped. Now alone, despondent, and with no resources, Harris did the unthinkable—she requested a return to servitude. Harris turned herself in to

²⁷ Slaughter, p. 80, 92-93; Parker, p. 292; Hensel, p. 45.

Philadelphia commissioners and was later returned to her former master. She lived the rest of her life in bondage, never to see her children or grandchildren ever again.²⁸

On September 12, authorities combed the Christiana area searching for those responsible for the riot. The town was abuzz with activity as federal warrants were issued and carried out by local police, constables, and both deputized and non-deputized individuals. The posses comprised some fifty Lancaster Countians supplemented by gangs of men who came north from Baltimore. The following day a contingent of forty-five marines was dispatched and even police officers from as far away as Philadelphia arrived to assist in the manhunt. The frenzied nature of the search and the overarching political imperative to mete out justice produced a rather uneven observance of legal rights that all but instituted martial law in the town. In their haste to scour the locale for rioters, county officials deputized any willing white male regardless of their law enforcement experience. This included men of the basest character who happily took advantage of their newfound power while others used the roundup as a ruse to capture fugitive slaves. These newly minted “deputies” made little effort to investigate subjects or gather evidence, on many occasions simply arresting any black man they encountered. When the marines were asked what they were doing in Christiana, one soldier proudly announced, “We are going to arrest every nigger and damned abolitionist.” The posses kicked in doors, threatened residents, trashed homes, and roughed up locals in a reign of terror against both black and white. There “never went unhung a gang of more depraved wretches and desperate scoundrels,” wrote a local historian, “than some of the men employed as ‘officers of the law’ to ravage this country and ransack private houses in the

²⁸ Parker, p. 292; Slaughter, pp. 80-85.

man-hunt which followed the affray.” Some of the deputies had prison records and one Irish railroad worker, after being sworn and handed a pistol, commented that he would shoot “the first black thing” he saw, even if it was a cow.²⁹

Lancaster authorities apprehended numerous individuals during their manhunt, but owing to a lack of evidence and the indiscriminate nature of the arrests, all but thirty-eight men were released. The remaining defendants were detained for their roles in subverting the laws of the Constitution and attacking a representative of the federal government. They were accused of treason for both aiding and abetting in the murder of Edward Gorsuch, along with 117 counts of “levying war” against the United States government. It marked the largest number of individuals ever charged with treason at one time in American history. Notables among those in custody included: Castner Hanway, Elijah Lewis, Joseph Scarlett, and Samuel Williams, along with two black riot participants—Peter Woods and Ezekiel Thompson. The defendants were arraigned in Lancaster and given a preliminary inquest where sufficient evidence was found to necessitate a trial. Because the charge of treason was a federal offense, it would be prosecuted in Philadelphia before the other indictments. The accused were thereby transferred to Moyamensing prison, Joseph Scarlett and many of the black prisoners going by cattle car, to anxiously await their court date in late November.³⁰

²⁹ Rettew, p. 18; Slaughter, pp. 85-87; Hensel, pp. 40-41, 136-137; D. Forbes, p. 36.

³⁰ Hensel, p. 45, 58-59; Slaughter, pp. ix-x; J. Katz, pp. 169-170; Rettew, p. 19; Whitson, p. 31.

Chapter III

A House Divided

Few previous incidents successfully laid bare the nation's divided conscience over human enslavement better than the Christiana Riot. It reopened wounds the Compromise of 1850 supposedly healed, focusing Americans on their differences rather than their similarities. Reaction to the incident was swift and impassioned, undoubtedly serving as a microcosm for the greater slavery debate then raging in the United States. Southerners were horrified by the riot with descriptions of Edward Gorsuch's grisly demise sparking demands for vengeance and punishment to resonate throughout the region. Northern newspapers were split over the incident with calls for justice, patience, and/or celebration placing the region's opinion in a firm state of ambiguity. Indeed the North possessed such a nuanced perspective of the riot that even abolitionists, although sympathetic to the fugitives, were split over Parker's methods and failed in forming a consensus. Again the issue of slave versus free dominated headlines, the ever-present specter of human bondage looming over the country. The national response to the riot rekindled a vitriolic debate on black servitude that was so uncompromising it led to one inevitable conclusion. The slavery issue had simply become too complex for a divided populace to maintain, with the discord caused by the Christiana Riot serving as a harbinger of Civil War.

When news of Gorsuch's death reached southern ears, reaction was one of anger and hostility with many individuals outraged that the rule of law had been trampled underfoot. The *Delaware Gazette* argued, "In this country, the supremacy of the law

must be sustained—this is our only safeguard and security. We sincerely hope the murderers of Gorsuch may have the full measure of justice dealt out to them.” South Carolina’s *Fairfield Herald* dramatically urged southerners to stand up for themselves and prevent the North from violating their rights: “Let us, while we yet claim so of the rights of freemen, throw off the accused yoke which is galling us, at the risk of our fortunes, our tombs and our lives.” Virginia’s *Richmond Dispatch* had a more foreboding tone: “The body of the Southern people are loyal to the Union.... But they will not consent to live under it, if its laws may be set at defiance with impunity.”¹

Maryland’s Democratic Governor E. Louis Lowe demanded retribution upon the rioters, hinting that any failure by Pennsylvania juries to convict the perpetrators could result in the dissolution of the nation. “I do not know of a single incident that has occurred since the passage of the Compromise measures, which tends more to weaken the bonds of union...than this late tragedy,” he contended, “Nor will its influence and effects be limited within the narrow borders of our State. They will penetrate the soul of the South. They will silence the confident promise of the Union men and give force to the appeals of the Secessionists.” The Governor penned a warning to President Millard Fillmore requesting him to ensure justice would be swift and proper. Any failure on the President’s part could cause the citizens of Maryland to contemplate secession:

It would be terribly, indeed, if she [Maryland] should...be driven to place herself at the head of the column of secession.... It is proper that you should be frankly assured that nothing can, or will, or ought, to satisfy them [Marylanders] but the most prompt, thorough, and severe retribution upon the perpetrators of the murderous treason recommitted in Pennsylvania.

¹ *Delaware Gazette*, September 16, 1851; *The Fairfield Herald*, as quoted in the *Boston Liberator* September 21, 1851; *Richmond Dispatch*, as quoted in the article “The Reign of Blood,” *The National Era*, October 23, 1851.

In response, Acting Secretary for the State Department, W. S. Derrick, tried to calm Maryland's executive reassuring him that "the President regards this violation of the rights of the peaceful citizens of Maryland, with deep abhorrence...he will not fail to exert all his constitutional powers to bring the offenders to merited punishment, and to prevent similar outrages in future."²

Southern opinion also tended to blame abolitionists for the incident rather than the rioters. Most southerners condemned abolitionism for instructing how personal morality or a "Higher Law"—laws of liberty and freedom or Biblical laws such as "love thy neighbor as thyself"—were superseded by civil legislation. The South believed such misguided teachings were liable for causing the death of Edward Gorsuch and injuring others in his party. For many white Americans the targeting of abolitionists as being responsible for the incident seemed justified because of a common belief in the deficiencies of black aptitude. To a white supremacist mindset, it was unthinkable that black farmers and laborers possessed the necessary intelligence to establish and operate what was essentially a neighborhood defense organization. For them to successfully institute such a ploy, the rioters must have been assisted by whites sympathetic to their cause. This "white myth," the belief that abolitionists were responsible for the riot thereby denying black agency in self-emancipation, demonstrates why three whites were arrested in the first place. Why else would men like Hanway, Lewis, and Scarlett be at the scene were it not to provide organization and leadership to the black assemblage? Even though accounts of the riot illustrated this to be untrue, pre-existing opinions rooted in theology and pseudo-biology overruled the facts of the case. Edward Gorsuch was not

² Hensel, pp. 150-151; W.S. Derrick to E. Louis Lowe, *New York Times*, September 19, 1851.

alone in his white supremacist racist viewpoints as many narcissistic whites, in both North and South, were convinced of their own natural superiority to blacks. Flimsy scriptural arguments merged with pseudo-science to create a legend where Christiana's blacks were mindless automatons following the whims of their abolitionist masters.³ This racist attitude made it incumbent upon Pennsylvanians to not only punish the rioters, but also their white instigators whose deceitful teachings precipitated the incident.

Demanding satisfaction, southerners took advantage of the riot to viciously denounce their most dire enemies—anti-slavery advocates. A “leading and influential Democrat of Southern Virginia,” was incensed over the “outrageous doings of the Abolition Party of Pennsylvania, in regard to the ‘Christiana Tragedy’,” which he characterized as an “eternal stain upon the escutcheon of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.” Should the rhetoric “of the Abolitionists prevail, you may yet see your grain fields fertilized with carnage, and banners bathed in blood,” the Virginian warned appealing once again to the threat of secession. “Let them persist in their Northern Abolitionism, sever the Union, and you very soon will see that the day of vengeance will be at hand, and the waves of the mighty commotion will soon be dashing upon every shore.” The capitol’s *Washington Republic* instructed authorities to make an example of the rioters, “we trust that the laws will be so enforced upon the guilty in this case as to prove an effectual warning to all others.” Tennessee’s *Memphis Enquirer* was more optimistic, believing Pennsylvanians were, “not prepared to submit to such shameful and disgraceful violations

³ George E. Baker, ed., *The Works of William Seward*, vol. 1 (New York: Redfield, 1853), pp. 70-93. During senatorial debates on the 1850 Compromise, New York Senator William H. Seward argued against the constitutional protection of slavery and its expansion into free territories by declaring “there is a higher law than the Constitution” bestowed upon mankind by “the Creator of the universe.” The speech made the freshman senator an instant celebrity in the abolitionist community and a bane to southern critics who unceasingly derided him as “Higher Law” Seward; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877*, 1st rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), pp. 192-193.

of the law...in their own State, by a band of vagabond negroes and degraded white people who unfortunately reside amongst them.” Wilmington’s *Delaware State Journal* wanted to see “impartial justice done” regarding the Christiana riot case, yet appeared disheartened in speculating how the law could reach “other fanatics in this city and elsewhere, whose teaching to the negroes has been of the most sanguinary description?” The *Picayune* of New Orleans sounded more confident, believing the riot would awaken Pennsylvania’s “sober and conservative spirit...into a resolute action to crush...the desperate faction [abolitionists] whose teachings have produced and encouraged these lawless acts.” Abolitionists themselves were perhaps the most harshly maligned in Edward Gorsuch’s home state. During a rally in Baltimore, Marylanders were so aggravated by the riot and anti-slavery advocates that they called for a severing of all economic ties with the North, as well as a recall of all southerners studying in states above the Mason-Dixon. “The North should be made to feel that she can no longer violate our rights with impunity,” they resolved, “she has grown rich from the wealth of the South...it is legal, it is constitutional, that the South should import for herself, should manufacture for herself, and should no longer send her sons and daughters to be educated in a community where abolitionists and traitors are permitted to influence public opinion.”⁴

⁴ Letter from “a leading and influential Democrat of Southern Virginia,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, October 7, 1851; *Washington Republic*, as quoted in the *New York Times*, September 20, 1851; *Memphis Enquirer*, as quoted in the *Nashville American*, September 25, 1851; Roderick W. Nash, “The Christiana Riot: An Evaluation of Its National Significance,” *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 65 (1961), p. 76; *Delaware State Journal*, September 26, 1851; *The Picayune*, September 17, 1851; *The Pennsylvanian*, September 17, 1851.

Northern opinion was not supportive of the riot simply because the gradual abolition acts had almost extinguished slavery in the region. Many in the North also denounced the riot as a blatant act of murder and demanded that justice be carried out against the guilty parties. Under the headline “The Christiana Outrage,” the *New York Times* admitted that although the rioters had a good reason, their actions were nonetheless “an offence against law, and must be punished as such.” Many Pennsylvanians were incensed not only over the riot, but the South’s continual denunciations inferring northern culpability for the incident. The populace of Christiana was shocked by their treatment in the national media as the townspeople felt their reputations were being tarnished by sensationalist editors bent on blaming them for the riot. The newspapers were casting “an odium of an unpleasant character” upon the people of Christiana, one resident complained. “We know humanity was outraged—life cruelly sported with and destroyed—our laws set at defiance and resisted,” he pleaded, but “let us assure you, we had neither heart nor hand in this matter.” The Christiana man assured the press that his neighbors were cooperating with officers of the law “in carrying out the grand object—the bringing to justice of these man-defying, law-breaking insurgents.” Other northerners were not interested in due process and simply wanted all “treasonous” heads to roll. New Yorker Charles Edwards Lester, a former minister no less, epitomized this vengeful reaction by articulating one of the most scathing indictments of the rioters and anyone who defied the law:

We may as well come to it first as last – this nation can have no secure repose or confidence in the stability of its institutions, until the supreme authority of the country proclaims all forcible opposition to Federal law to be Treason, and the miscreants or

madmen who perpetrate it are hanged, shot or beheaded.⁵

Like most in the southern press, northern journalists likewise entertained the “white myth” by branding abolitionists as the scapegoats for Edward Gorsuch’s death. Waterbury, Connecticut’s *Weekly American* identified the abolitionists as “‘higher law’ agitationists,” and argued that they “are morally responsible for encouraging and inviting such resistance to the laws, and as such must account to God and their country.” The *New York Times* alleged the riot was a conspiracy “not confined to the negroes, but was apparently under the guidance and control of whites.” The newspaper trusted that all whites connected with the atrocity would be punished to the fullest extent and considered any religious justifications preposterous “No plea of conscience, or regard for divine law, will be made by the perpetrators of this outrage,” the Times contended, “a man would have to be adjudged insane who should seriously claim that God’s law required him to murder men charged with the execution of the laws of the land.” The *Boston Journal* characterized the black rioters as naive patsies ignorantly following white puppet masters, “the abolitionists thirsted for the blood of the Southerners. They urged their innocent dupes, the colored mob, to defy the law, and aided and abetted them in the commission of a most foul murder.” The *New York Express* made a similar argument that bordered on white supremacy by proclaiming, “these men [abolitionists] are the real murderers and the poor, ignorant, deluded negroes their murdering victims.” The *Philadelphia News* blamed the riot on the deceitful speeches of abolitionist charlatans. “The recent tragedy at Christiana is but the natural consequence of the doctrines of the

⁵ Hensel, p. 145; “The Christiana Outrage,” *New York Times*, September 19, 1851; Letter to the editor, *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, September 24, 1851; *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* [Rochester, NY], January 8, 1852.

higher law promulgated by canting hypocrites and arch demagogues,” the paper contended, “the negroes were but too ready to obey the suggestions of those who set them on to the commission of treason and murder.”⁶

Lancaster’s two major newspapers combined a similar anti-abolitionist sentiment with racist rhetoric as the dominant theme guiding their riot coverage. The Whig *Lancaster Examiner & Herald* ran headlines labeling the incident: the “Dreadful Tragedy,” “The Sadsbury Murder,” and “The Sadsbury Outrage.” The paper called the riot a “deplorable” occurrence, but was happy to find that those in the county had achieved a “soundness of opinion” towards the incident: “On every hand do we hear the most earnest wishes expressed for the speedy and condign punishment of not only the poor misled blacks who committed the murder, but of those in white skins whose teachings resulted in the crime.” Headlines in Lancaster’s Democratic organ—the *Intelligencer*—referred to the riot as: the “Horrible Murder,” “The Christiana Tragedy,” and “The Christiana Outrage”. Furthermore, the *Intelligencer* echoed its counterpart referring to those “whose teachings resulted in the crime” as the reason many thought the blacks of Christiana took the law into their own hands.⁷

But the *Intelligencer* did not stop with making abolitionists the scapegoats for the riot; it went even further by exploiting the incident for political purposes. That the riot coincided with an election year was a fortunate coincidence especially for Pennsylvania

⁶ *Weekly American*, September 19, 1851; A. K. Hostetter, “The Newspapers and the Christiana Riot,” *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 15, no. 10 (1911), p. 299; Grau, p. 166; *New York Times*, September 20, 1851; *Boston Journal* as quoted in “African-American Perspective,” Millersville University, <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~ugrr/christiana/african.html> (accessed February 12, 2009); *New York Express*, September 20, 1851; *Philadelphia News*, as quoted in “A Hard Hit at Stevens and Johnston!” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 23, 1851.

⁷ *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, September 17, 1851; “The Fruits of Johnston’s Policy,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 23, 1851.

Democrats seeking to capture local, state, and congressional seats. As the election was less than a month away, Democrats were afforded a unique opportunity to connect the riot with candidates from the Whigs' anti-slavery wing despite lacking the necessary evidence to support such an unsettling accusation. The quest for political power overrode any moral compunctions on the part of the *Intelligencer's* Democratic bias as the newspaper squarely laid culpability for "the horrible tragedy enacted at Christiana," as being, "the legitimate fruit of the policy pursued by Governor Johnston and Thaddeus Stevens in reference to the Slavery question." The newspaper argued that because Johnston and Stevens continually condemned the Fugitive Slave Law, blacks were deluded into thinking resistance was an acceptable political alternative:

It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that we find a band of eighty or one hundred negroes, regularly organized and armed, in our own county, to resist the execution of the law, when the Governor of the Commonwealth, and the Whig member of Congress from this district, are constantly inflaming the minds of the ignorant colored race by agitating a repeal of the law in all their speeches.

The Democratic criticisms of Thaddeus Stevens were to be expected; his strident opposition to slavery was well known both locally and nationally. One *Intelligencer* reporter attending a Stevens speech found the congressman's anti-slavery platitudes so tiresome he considered it pointless to provide any commentary from the address. "It is useless to give an outline of his [Stevens] speech—as that can be imagined by everyone who knows him," the annoyed journalist wrote, "Abolitionism!—the advancement of the treasonable doctrines, the finale of which are such sad and lamentable events as the most

foul and murderous Christiana Tragedy, and the like!”⁸ To link Stevens and his anti-slavery rhetoric with the riot was a rather effortless partisan attack that had come to be expected by the congressman. Associating the riot with Johnston, however, was a trickier proposition that required political missteps on the part of the Governor, to which he unfortunately complied.

A district attorney from Westmoreland County, William Johnston was formerly a Democrat who switched parties in 1847 to run for the Pennsylvania Senate. He was elevated to Senate Speaker in 1848; attaining the governorship that same year after the illness induced resignation of Governor Francis Shunk. Johnston was a moderate Whig aligned with his party’s Free Soil faction that opposed the spread of slavery into western territories. His concern with slavery centered more upon economics than morality, as he feared the low labor costs of slave states would place Pennsylvania at a financial disadvantage. While not as zealous as Stevens, the Governor was an opponent of the fugitive slave law, hoping it would be amended to permit fugitives a trial by jury. For Johnston, however, arresting fugitive slaves was not his jurisdiction and—therefore—not his problem. He would abide by the law, but the Prigg decision made the recapture of fugitives a federal concern and not a matter for state officials to involve themselves. In his first annual message to the Pennsylvania Assembly, Johnston accepted his duty to enforce the fugitive slave law in the most minimalist of terms while also issuing a veiled warning to the South. While acknowledging, “the compromises of the Constitution should be maintained in good faith towards our Southern brethren,” Johnston cautioned

⁸ “The Fruits of Johnston’s Policy,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 23, 1851; “Inklings by the Wayside,” *Ibid.*, September 23, 1851.

“it is our duty to see that they are preserved with equal fidelity to ourselves. No encroachments, however sanctioned by use, should be acknowledged as precedents for further wrongs against the interest, prosperity, and happiness of the non-slave-holding States of the Union.” The governor continued with an indictment of slavery that combined both his free soil sentiments and economic views that, while not directly calling for the demise of the institution, did propose some rather surreal conditions for its limitation:

If slavery be, in itself, an infraction of human rights—if it be directly opposed to the enlightened spirit of our free institutions—if it destroy the equality of power in the general Government, by enlarging, where it exists, the constitutional representation—if it possess a direct or indirect influence against Northern and Western policy and interests, by promoting a system of laws destructive to domestic industry, and vitally affecting free labor—if it retard the natural growth of population and improvement, by the appropriation of large tracts of land for the benefit of the few to the injury of the many—if it be in open defiance of the spirit of the age, the march of rational truth, and the enlightened policy of mankind—it is time to arrest its further progress.

The governor’s begrudging enforcement of the fugitive slave law and his spiritual arguments against slavery stirred Democratic suspicions of an executive more concerned with abolitionism than the compromise measures. These suspicions were seemingly realized when Johnston made a campaign promise to veto any attempt at repealing the enforcement clause of the state’s anti-kidnapping law. For Democrats, the Governor had finally shown his true colors. They now considered him firmly in league with Stevens and his nefarious “Wooly-Heads.”⁹

⁹ William C. Armor, *Lives of the Governors of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1872), pp. 403-412; Slaughter, 98-99; William Johnston, “Annual Message to the Assembly 1849,” *Pennsylvania Archives*, ser. 4, vol. 7 (Harrisburg, 1902), p. 336.

When news of the riot broke, it became Democratic fodder for political attacks on Johnston while he traveled the state during his re-election campaign. A number of Philadelphia Democrats and businessmen sent an open letter to the Governor in which they criticized his indecisiveness for not immediately sending troops to Christiana. They attested to “citizens of a neighboring state” being “cruelly assassinated by a band of armed outlaws,” yet “your memorialists are not aware that any military force has been sent to the scene of the insurrection, or that the civil authority has been strengthened by the adoption of any measures suited to the momentous crisis.” Johnston responded on September 14 with a private letter to the anxious businessmen that was reprinted in newspapers throughout the north. Yet in an attempt to defuse the situation, the Governor exposed his uncertainty as to what was truly happening in Christiana. He oddly reported “more than two hours before the receipt of your letter, the parties implicated have been...arrested, and are now in prison, awaiting an inquiry into their reported guilt.” While it was true that local authorities had arrested some of the rioters, the main culprits—namely Parker and the Gorsuch fugitives—were hardly sitting in a prison cell. He continued his letter with a grandiose political statement to allay further concerns:

The cruel murder of a citizen of a neighboring state, accompanied by a gross outrage on the laws of the United States, in the resistance of its process, has been committed; and you may be assured that so soon as the guilty agents are ascertained, they will be punished in its severest penalty by the law of Pennsylvania.

That the Governor uttered this phrase in light of his earlier announcement seems rather strange. He had just assured that the guilty parties were arrested, yet now contradictorily claims “so soon as the guilty agents are ascertained, they will be punished in its severest penalty by the law of Pennsylvania.” Lastly, Johnston defended his decision not to send

the state militia into Christiana: “There is no insurrectionary movement in Lancaster County, and there would be no occasion to march a military force there, as you seem to desire, and inflame the public mind by any such strange exaggeration.” With the exception of his final statement, its evident the riot was causing a great deal of confusion for the Governor and his staff. Johnston was either not receiving accurate information, trying to placate both sides, or simply not all that interested in the case from the outset. The latter explanation certainly jibed with his minimalist stance on enforcing the fugitive slave law and his jurisdictional agreement with the Prigg decision. Fugitive slaves were a federal prerogative and since local authorities—as Johnston understood it—had everything under control, there was no need for state intervention. There was also the matter of the riot’s connection with the controversial fugitive slave law for the Governor to consider. If Johnston involved himself too deeply, the politically charged nature of the riot could explode in his face damaging his reputation in the eyes of his constituents. Each of these factors likely weighed heavily on a state executive desperate to distance himself from the Christiana Riot.¹⁰

The same Philadelphia businessmen answered the governor’s correspondence with a second open letter where they rebuked him for his tardiness in getting personally involved and alleged that his hesitation would encourage further lawlessness. “We believe that those enemies of the United States, whose acts you so charitably deny to be treasonable or insurrectionary, threaten and intend to re-enact them if a like occasion should arrive.” It took four days before Johnston issued a public statement on the riot where he offered his condolences along with a proclamation offering a one thousand

¹⁰ “Fugitive Slave Riot in Lancaster Co., Pa,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1851; Hensel, pp. 145-150; Jackson, pp. 40-42.

dollar reward for the guilty parties. On September 16, political necessity impelled Johnston to make a mundane speech before Independence Hall where he reiterated his faith in the Constitution and pledged continued enforcement of the fugitive slave law, but it made barely a ripple in the electoral current. The Democratic Party's political fortunes in Pennsylvania had become suddenly enriched, as they appeared to be on to something. They had fortuitously stumbled upon a political bogeyman in the Governor's closet and they could not restrain their enthusiasm. Other party members quickly joined the fray by viewing Johnston's mishandling of the riot as evidence that he was no mere moderate Whig, but secretly a militant abolitionist. The *Pennsylvanian* accused Johnston of waiting so long to act because he "was afraid to arouse the ire of the abolitionists, his friends." A Democratic gathering in Philadelphia labeled Johnston a "bloody instructor" for his abolitionist teachings and resolved to "ferret out and punish the murderers thus guilty of the double crime of assaulting the Constitution, and of taking the lives of men in pursuit of their recognized and rightful property." Lancaster City Democrats considered "the fanaticism so prevalent upon the question of slavery" dangerous and repudiated "the past action of William F. Johnston and his abolition friends, and pronounce it as having been instrumental in over-exciting the public mind upon this vexed question and thus disturbing the public peace." At a Democratic meeting in Columbia, situated in the far-western portion of Lancaster County, it was resolved, "That the disgraceful and awful Christiana Tragedy, which resulted in the death of a respectable citizen of Maryland, whilst in the lawful pursuit of his property, was the result of the treasonable teachings and doctrines of the whig Abolitionists of Pennsylvania headed by Wm. F. Johnson [sic]."¹¹

¹¹ Hensel, pp. 145-150; Jackson, pp. 40-42; *North American*, September 16, 1851; Slaughter, p. 101;

Democrats also rebuked Johnston for campaigning at a time when he was desperately needed in Harrisburg to oversee the capture of the rioters and for not personally visiting the scene of the incident. This latter charge would come back to haunt the Governor because in a strange twist of fate his train had stopped in Christiana on the night of the riot. On a campaign trip from Harrisburg to Philadelphia, Johnston's train arrived for a prearranged stop mere yards away from the Zercher Hotel where Edward Gorsuch's body was being temporarily housed. A number of passengers disembarked to view the remains, but the Governor remained onboard. This was likely a calculated political move to distance himself from the riot and its connection with the fugitive slave law. Johnston must have been aware of the fight that took place earlier that day, else how would his fellow passengers know that Gorsuch's corpse was inside the hotel. Even if the Governor were truly ignorant as to what happened, the returning passengers would likely have informed him or his staff of the grisly display they had just witnessed. Did Johnston really think the simple formality of paying his respects to a slain slaveholder could outrage the abolitionist electorate to the point of costing him the election? For most voters the gesture would surely be more a matter of protocol than politics. The breach of etiquette combined with the delay in issuing a public proclamation backfired dreadfully on the Governor's campaign. It gave undue credibility to Democratic accusations that became all the more magnified when yet another Gorsuch entered the fray.¹²

Pennsylvanian, September 16, 1851; *Pennsylvanian* and *United States Gazette*, as quoted in the *National Intelligencer*, September 18, 1851; "Grand Rally of the Democracy!," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 30, 1851; "Democratic Meeting in Columbia," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 30, 1851.

¹² Hensel, pp. 148-150; J. Katz, p. 159; "The Christiana Outrage," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 18, 1851.

The Reverend John S. Gorsuch was the slaveholder's eldest son who was then serving as a minister in Washington D.C. A week after the riot, the Reverend penned an open letter to the Governor in which he made various indictments of the latter's incompetence in properly handling the riot and its aftermath. The first came from Johnston's simple failure to disembark the train at Christiana. "You, who ought, because of your station, to have been most interested, showed the least concern," Gorsuch reprimanded. "And this is not to be wondered at. It would seem natural that then you should have been rejoicing at this, the first fruits of your official and personal hostility to the rendition of fugitive slaves." The Reverend continued by impugning Johnston for not protecting his father during the attempt to recapture the fugitives by hinting that Marylanders had been suspicious of the Pennsylvania Governor's abolitionist tendencies for some time. "Did we not well know what you have done to render inoperative the law under whose protection my father entered your State to secure his property, in a manner strictly legal, some excuse might be found in our minds for your strange inactivity.—But we know your course." The Reverend agreed with the Philadelphia Democrats who chided the Governor for his dithering in capturing the murderers and why it took him so long to act:

Why did you not issue your proclamation when you reached Philadelphia? If it ought to have been done at all, were there not stronger reasons to have done it on the *first* day, when the murderers were at hand, than on the *fifth*, when most of them had escaped? You cannot plead ignorance of the riot, for it was well known to you. You will not pretend to say that it was more necessary when several prominent actors in that tragedy were arrested...than when every one that desired the punishment of these murderers and traitors was afraid to move; when the rioters—still wet with the blood of innocent and peaceable men—were triumphing in their victory, and their confederates congratulating themselves upon successful treason! Why, sir, did you not show your promptness then?

The Reverend concluded that the actions Johnston did undertake were dictated simply by politics, compelled out of the necessity to demonstrate to the electorate that he was doing something. “With these facts, sire, before us, we cannot be charged with calumny in saying, that we do honestly believe that your proclamation would never have see the light, had you not feared that the activity of others would censure your own indifference.”¹³

The Governor never directly responded to John Gorsuch’s denunciations, only implying through intermediaries that the attacks were politically motivated. Why Johnston chose to remain silent over such malicious attacks on his character is difficult to fathom. Perhaps he felt a public squabble with one of Edward Gorsuch’s mourning relatives would appear disrespectful or maybe he feared any personal attention given to the story would only increase its publicity and veracity. As Johnston was in the homestretch of his gubernatorial campaign, concerns over not blundering so close to election day appeared to cloud his judgment. This would explain why he was making a concerted effort to remain detached from the riot and its uncomfortable relationship with slavery and the fugitive slave law, two controversial issues that could easily swing the election in favor of Johnston’s Democratic opponent William Bigler. Born in the backwoods of Pennsylvania, Bigler was a lumber magnate from Clearfield County whose rural background and passion for hunting fostered his image as the “everyman” candidate. Bigler was a two-term state senator and a strong candidate, but in the gubernatorial contest he resisted attacking Johnston on the riot issue. The Democratic

¹³ “The Christiana Outrage,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 18, 1851.

challenger probably recognized that the Governor's mishandling of the riot was damaging Whig prospects far more than any criticism he could muster.¹⁴

Johnston's unwillingness to proactively get out in front of the riot cost him, as the incident became the deciding factor in Pennsylvania's state elections on October 14, 1851. Although taking Lancaster County by an almost 2-1 margin, Johnston lost by a mere eight thousand ballots statewide as Bigler received 186,499 votes to his 178,034. Bigler's victory also aided Democratic candidates to the state supreme court who rode the Governor-elect's coattails in securing four of the five judgeships. Pennsylvania Democrats were ecstatic over the outcome, proving to the nation—particularly the South—that their state endorsed the compromise measures. “Whilst almost every other Northern state has been made to reel and totter under the blows inflicted by Abolitionism,” the *Intelligencer* boasted, “she [Pennsylvania] alone has stood proudly erect, and bared her breast in defence of the Constitution and laws of the country. Her giant form has been a bulwark of defence to the South, and her voice has always been to Northern fanaticism, ‘thus far thou may’st come, but no farther—and here shall thy desolating waves be stayed’.” The Democratic triumph also eventually aided one of Lancaster's favored sons—James Buchanan. Bigler's governorship would affect national politics, as he was a member of the Buchanan wing of the Democratic Party. He used his gubernatorial influence at the Democratic national convention to rally supporters behind Buchanan's nomination in 1856.¹⁵ Buchanan's victory in the presidential election later

¹⁴ [Lancaster] *Examiner & Herald*, October 1, 1851; Armor, pp. 415-419; Slaughter, pp. 103-104; Hensel, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵ Hensel, pp. 51-52; “Pennsylvania Election—Official—October 14, 1851,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, November 4, 1851; J. Katz, p. 161; “The Keystone State,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, November 4, 1851; Slaughter, p. 104.

that year would usher in four tempestuous years where his southern sympathies belied efforts to maintain peace between North and South. That the Christiana Riot was ironically a link in the chain of events that helped place Buchanan in the White House makes it all the more remarkable.

While sentiments condemning the rioters were publicly voiced in the Lancaster County, supporters of Parker and his men were largely silent throughout the area. This is not to say that there was little backing of the rioters within the community. It was more likely that sympathetic voices were muted by the chaotic manhunt that descended upon Christiana. Residents that championed the rioter's actions were frightened that any public statement of support would brand them as accomplices in the "conspiracy" that killed Edward Gorsuch. With overzealous local authorities ransacking Christiana for the faintest trace of guilt or blackness, these fears seemed quite justified. *The Saturday Express*, Lancaster's small temperance newspaper, offered the closest thing to a public defense of the rioters by reminding readers "that the neighborhood of the murder and riot has for several years been infested by kidnappers," which accounted, "for the blacks being armed on the late occasion."¹⁶ But beyond this nominal excuse the community was quiet. It would therefore be left to commentators outside the county to take up the rioters' banner, where they were free to openly venerate the affair from a comfortable distance.

The northern news coverage most favorable to the Christiana Riot appeared in the black and abolitionist press. Black and abolitionist editors throughout the North made no

¹⁶ "Civil War.—The First Blow Struck," *Lancaster Saturday Express*, September 20, 1851.

effort to disguise their jaundiced perspectives on the riot, portraying the fight at Christiana as a public declaration of black resistance to white oppression. They candidly celebrated the role reversal and black agency the riot demonstrated and how those involved were not ignorant outlaws brainwashed by sinister anti-slavery radicals, but heroes who made a courageous stand in defense of freedom and liberty. William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* turned the tables on slave owners by declaring their culpability for the riot, "So much for Slavery! So much for the accursed Fugitive Slave Law! They who are responsible for this bloody transaction are the upholders of that law and that foul system." The *National Anti-Slavery Standard* delightfully observed how, when attempting to apprehend escaped slaves, sometimes the hunter becomes the quarry. "It need surprise nobody that in the game of slave hunting...it should sometimes happen that the hunting party and not the hunted become the mark for bullets," the paper boasted, "and the law of self-preservation, and not the Fugitive Slave Law, be obeyed in triumph." For the *Standard's* editors, Gorsuch's death "seems to us the most natural thing in the world," because "colored flesh and blood...is very like that of a lighter shade, and shrinks from stripes and chains, and will be prompt to try a measure which even in its worse result is better than slavery." The *Worcester Spy*, a black newspaper, was not surprised by the "fatal affray," but wondered why more episodes like the riot "have not resulted from attempts to reduce our colored brethren to a condition, to which, we solemnly aver, no power under heaven would passively drag us." Julia Griffiths, Frederick Douglass's white assistant editor, regarded the rioters as "true heroes" whose actions were being condemned simply because of their race. "If they had been a little band of Hungarians or Poles, or Circassians fighting against a tyrant oppressor for their freedom...their plaudits

would have resounded from the shores of the Atlantic to the...Pacific,” she argued, “but the men of Christiana were poor negroes, whose very manhood is disputed, and whose right to fight for their freedom is denied them!”¹⁷

Abolitionists were unabashedly sympathetic to the rioters’ actions, but there was some concern among this community of social reformers as to the tactics used by Parker and his compatriots. Did the ends justify the means at Christiana? Anti-slavery advocates split over this question and its relationship with the larger debate over nonviolent vs. violent resistance. For years most abolitionists had appealed to the hearts and minds of Americans via principles espoused by their foremost member, William Lloyd Garrison. In the battle against slavery, Garrison argued that abolitionism could only maintain its humanitarian ideals through a strategy of nonviolent moral suasion. By publicly illustrating the immorality of slavery to the American conscience, he hoped popular opinion would effectively destroy the institution, thereby avoiding a violent dissolution. The riot, however, flew in the face of Garrisonian tactics, forcing abolitionists to question their very platform and how far their personal beliefs were willing to go in pursuit of slavery’s timely demise. There was essentially no middle ground on this issue. The conundrum stared Garrisonians directly in the face, demanding a choice between continuing a strategy of peaceful opposition or starting anew with a policy that supported violent resistance.¹⁸

Boston’s Unitarian Reverend Theodore Parker, Garrison’s pastor, was of a divided conscience over the events at Christiana. In a letter read before the Pennsylvania Anti-

¹⁷ *The Liberator*, September 19, 1851; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, September 18, 1851; “The Christiana Affray,” *Worcester Spy*, as quoted in *The Liberator*, September 26, 1851; Julia Griffiths to Mary Botham Howitt, October 7, 1851, “Letter No. XV,” *Frederick Douglass Paper*, October 9, 1851.

¹⁸ J. Katz, p. 142-148.

Slavery Society, Parker wrote of his gladness “some black men have been found at last, who dared to resist violence with powder and ball.” Amidst bursts of applause from those in attendance, Parker’s correspondence continued with his rejoicing that “a negro has shot a kidnapper; for now a black man may hold up his head before these haughty Caucasians, and say—‘You...see we can fight for our liberty; the monopoly is not altogether on your side’.” But the Reverend’s aggressive words were chided by political correctness as he immediately backtracked to a pacifistic appeal that subtly commended Garrisonian ideals. “But I deplore violence; let us do without it while we can, for ever if we can” Parker entreated, “I am no non-resistant; yet I am glad the leading anti-slavery men are so—that, great as is the right of liberty, they would not shed a drop of blood to achieve it for all mankind; for though I think their doctrines extreme, they are yet nearer right...than the common notions. Let us have firmness without fight, as long as possible.”¹⁹

Other more orthodox Garrisonians maintained their devotion to nonviolent protest irregardless the successful liberation at Christiana. Connecticut journalist Charles Burleigh urged the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society to rethink the use of force as it hindered the abolitionist cause politically. While “advocating a spiritual resistance” to the Fugitive Slave Act, Burleigh was nevertheless “opposed to physical violence and bloodshed, in all cases whatever.” Before the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, Oliver Johnson reasoned that only continued use of peaceful resistance would bring them success. He disagreed with the use of force exhibited not only in Christiana but also in Syracuse, New York, where the third violent resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law

¹⁹ Carleton Mabee, *Black Freedom: The Nonviolent Abolitionists from 1830 Through the Civil War* (Macmillan, 1970), p. 253; J. Katz, p. 144-146; *The Liberator*, November 1, 1851.

occurred. On October 1, several hundred white abolitionists stormed the city jail, rescued a fugitive slave named “Jerry,” and helped him subsequently escape to Canada. Johnson acknowledged how it was to be expected, “that men who believe in violence should act as they do at Christiana and Syracuse,” but, “our weapons are only the mild arms of truth and love, weapons mightier far than sword or bayonet. Perseverence [sic] in the use of these must bring us success.” A letter from an E. Tucker to Frederick Douglass spoke in a similar vein preferring the non-violent option. Tucker observed how, “There is, among abolitionists, an inclination to advise, and encourage, and applaud forcible resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law.” He granted “that the law is abominable,” however, “it seems by no means clear to my mind that force should be employed to prevent the execution of the law.”²⁰

Other anti-slavery supporters saw the strategy of violent resistance as proper and justified. This was not surprising for minorities since black activists such as David Walker and Henry Highland Garnet had preached black militancy for decades, but it also spread amongst white abolitionists as Christiana awakened a spirited enthusiasm for violent resistance. Ohio’s Whig Congressman Joshua Giddings exclaimed how, upon reading of the riot, he “could not but rejoice that the despised and hunted fugitives... had stood up manfully in defense of their God given rights and shot down the miscreants who had come with the desperate purpose of taking them again to the land of slavery.” Outspoken abolitionist Gerrit Smith praised the actions of William Parker and the abolitionists in Syracuse; a hardly surprising revelation considering Smith was legally

²⁰ J. Katz, pp. 142-152; *The Liberator*, October 24, 1851; November 1, 1851; November 14, 1851; “Anniversary of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society,” *New York Herald*, October 12, 1851; Campbell, pp. 154-157; “Letter from E. Tucker,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, May 20, 1852.

implicated in the “Jerry” rescue. He was exultant that blacks “hitherto patient, beyond all parallel, under the insults and outrages heaped upon them,” were finally showing signs that they were willing to challenge the slave power. “Among these signs are the manly resistance offered to the kidnapers at Christiana,” Smith proudly proclaimed, “and the brave...black men at Syracuse, who...periled their lives for the rescue of their abused brother. Heaven grant that all [blacks] may have the manliness and courage to ‘stand for their life.’”²¹

Speaking at a meeting of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, Reverend Samuel Aaron defended the use of force at Christiana by comparing the rioters to patriots of the American Revolution. “Those colored men were only following the example of Washington and the American heroes of ’76,” Aaron argued. “Their cause was righteous, if their means were not altogether right...Could we expect men so oppressed, so stripped of protection, when assailed by a band of armed kidnapers, to do better?” As abolitionist promoters of violent resistance argued with their dissenters, this linking of the rioters with American revolutionaries became a common theme as historical comparisons equating British tyranny with racial oppression were used to justify the riot. In antebellum America, as in our modern time, associating the rioters with the likes of George Washington and Patrick Henry was a powerful tool used to disarm opponents. To condemn William Parker and his men was to condemn the country’s beloved historical figures, a concept that was surely anathema to nationalist sensibilities. Those abolitionists who urged violent resistance used this comparison deftly as the similarities between the rioters and American Revolutionaries were difficult to deny. “I cordially

²¹ Wolff, pp. 603-604; *Lancaster Examiner and Herald*, November 12, 1851; Campbell, p. 101; Gerret Smith to the Liberty Party, “Infamous Letter,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, November 11, 1851.

approve the conduct of the negroes,” wrote a C.M.K Glen to Frederick Douglass, “I hold that...these men had as perfect a right to fight for their liberty as our revolutionary fathers did for theirs, and that any one who should join them in the struggle, should be placed side by side with Lafayette.” An anti-slavery newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, argued that since Americans proudly proclaim nationalist creeds such as “Liberty or death,” or “Resistance to tyrants is duty to God,” then “What wonder that the negro fugitives think it is no crime...to defend their liberties by the same means for using which the ‘Revolutionary heroes’ of our own and other countries are glorified?” Writing to Frederick Douglass, an Albo S. Brown equated the rioters with American patriots in a satirical diatribe against slaveholders and the hypocrisy of the federal government:

And if the fugitive thus pursued, should happen to feed a little of the patriotism and bravery that inspired the souls of our Revolutionary Fathers, in their struggle for freedom, and like them, should turn and shoot down their oppressors – oh! horrible to relate! – blood, treason, and murder!! would be the exclamations which would ring through the land...Ah, the naughty fellows! What business had they adopting and acting out the sentiments of Patrick Henry, who said, “give me liberty, or give me death?” Well, I suppose they were contaminated with the spirit of self-defense, and consequently, returned the compliment, and Gorsuch fell dead; and for thus fighting in defense of their lives...they are loaded with irons, and conveyed to a dungeon there to await a trial for treason, and if found guilty, must swing upon the gallows. Well, this is the patriotism, the philanthropy and justice of our nation, at the middle of the nineteenth century.²²

Frederick Douglass’ conversion to a more radical form of disobedience was a pivotal aspect of this split amongst abolitionists over nonviolent vs. violent resistance. The black leader had been a Garrisonian during his first ten years in the anti-slavery movement, but in the late 1840s he began losing faith in the peaceful moral suasion approach.

²² *The Liberator*, October 24, 1851; C.M.K. Glen to Frederick Douglass, *Liberator*, October 2, 1851; J. Katz, pp. 141-142, 146-148; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, n.d.; “Letter from Albo S. Brown,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, October 23, 1851.

Nonviolent resistance had been the staple of Garrisonian rhetoric for decades, yet Douglass failed to see many positive results from a strategy appealing solely to hearts and minds. Years of debates, lectures, and protests had made little progress in attracting a majority of Americans to the cause of abolition. Writing in his 1845 autobiography, Douglass hinted that the threat of violence could produce positive effects. If slave catchers were fearful of their personal safety while pursuing runaways, it would increase the success rate for all fugitives escaping along the Underground Railroad. Describing a scenario that sounded eerily similar to Parker's self-defense organization, Douglass desired a slave catcher to sense "himself surrounded by myriads of invisible tormentors, ever ready to snatch from his infernal grasp his trembling prey." The slave catcher should "feel that at every step he takes, in pursuit of the flying bondmen, he is running the frightful risk of having his hot brains dashed out by an invisible agency." Four years later, Douglass' frustration with non-violence publicly erupted on the pages of his aptly named newspaper *The North Star*, writing that slaveholders "have forfeited even the right to live, and if the slave should put every one of them to the sword to-morrow, who dare...say that the criminals deserved less than death at the hands of their long-abused chattels?" When the Fugitive Slave Law passed in 1850, Douglass' faith in moral suasion was shattered as slavery not only continued to weather the storm, but further strengthened itself against feeble Garrisonian gales. For Douglass and a growing number of other abolitionists, it was quickly becoming clear that another course of action was needed to dislodge slavery from its entrenched position as a legitimate institution.

Christiana would facilitate this purpose by becoming one of the most important events in his break with a pacifistic abolitionism.²³

When Parker, Pinckney, and Johnson arrived on his doorstep in Rochester, Douglass was so confident in the righteousness of their cause that he legally implicated himself by assisting in their escape to Canada. Writing in his own newspaper a few weeks later, Douglass editorialized the riot in jubilant terms under the headline, “Freedom’s Battle at Christiana.” As news of the incident spread, Douglass was astounded that southerners were surprised by the actions of the rioters. “Pro-slavery men especially are in a state of amazement at the strange affair,” he wrote. “That the hunted men should fight with the biped bloodhounds that had tracked them, even when the animals had a ‘paper’ authorizing them to hunt, is to them inexplicable audacity.” In biting sarcasm, Douglass denounced those who thought blacks would sheepishly surrender to a state of servitude because of the Fugitive Slave Law. Black resistance might “be explained in the light of the generally admitted principle ‘that self-preservation is the first law of nature,’ but, the rascals! they killed their pursuers, when they knew they had ‘papers’!” he mocked, “What could have got into these men of sable coating? Didn’t they know that slavery, not freedom, is their natural condition? Didn’t they know that their legs, arms, eyes, hands and heads, were the rightful property of the white men who claimed them?” To Douglass, Christiana plainly illustrated that “all negroes are not such fools and dastards as to cling to Life when it is coupled with chains and slavery.” In his opinion, the rioters had a human right to defend themselves because “he that taketh the sword shall perish by

²³ J. Katz, p. 148; Mabee, p. 271; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave: Written by Himself* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), pp. 101-102; *The North Star*, February 1849.

the sword. The man who rushes out...to strike down the rights of another, does by that act, divest himself of the right to live; if he be shot down, his punishment is just.” Less than three months after the riot, Douglass’ patience with peaceful resistance was at an end. He firmly broke with Garrisonian rhetoric, openly joining the militant wing of abolitionism with a derisive indictment of non-violence and its futile precepts:

I insist upon it, that the only way to meet the man-hunter successfully, is with cold steel and the nerve to use it. The wretch who engages in such a business is impervious to every consideration of truth, love and mercy, and nothing short of putting him in bodily danger can deter him. The colored people must defend their rights, if they would have their rights respected. To shape their muscles for the fetters, and to adjust their wrists for the handcuffs at the bidding of the slaveholder, is an example of non-resistance, quite as radical as any class of men in the country could wish, and while it might excite the sympathy of a few, it could not fail to bring down upon the whole race to which they belong, the scorn and contempt of every brave man. I have but one lesson for my people in the present trying hour; it is this: *“Count your lives utterly worthless, unless coupled with the inestimable blessing of liberty.”*²⁴

The Christiana Riot’s ability to produce such a wide range of responses demonstrated that national opinion was not simply split along sectional lines. Like the slave question itself, riot reaction was a mixed bag based more on issues of race, politics, and personal ideology than the simple observance of federal authority. While the South stood as a monolith of indignation towards the rioters and abolitionism, the North was quite the opposite. The riot cracked regional resolve resulting in northerners becoming a factionalized section united only in that they lived above the Mason-Dixon. Additionally, the abolitionists’ inability to come to grips with the rioters’ tactics further clouded the issue by creating internal tensions that divided the ranks of what had been a reasonably stable movement. Such divergent reactions to the riot illustrated how the country was

²⁴ “Freedom’s Battle at Christiana,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, September 25, 1851; November 20, 1851.

dangerously divided not just over *Christiana* but also the greater slavery debate. The Fugitive Slave Act failed to eliminate a sectional division based more on personal morality than a mere acquiescence to legal authority. As the North argued over its conscience, southern warnings of secession became increasingly louder. Would the United States be capable of maintaining its indissoluble bond considering the North had shown it would not respect southern institutions even when backed by federal law? A court in Philadelphia would have to decide.

Chapter IV

A Treasonous Self-Defense

The Christiana Treason Trials were held in Philadelphia's Independence Hall from November 24 to December 11, 1851 with Castner Hanway being the first of the riot offenders to be tried. The prosecutorial team consisted of seven men, including U.S. Attorney John Ashmead, Maryland Attorney General Robert J. Brent, Pennsylvania's Whig Senator James Cooper, Philadelphia lawyer James Ludlow, Ashmead's cousin attorney George Ashmead, Philadelphia City Recorder R.M. Lee, and Baltimore District Attorney Z. Collins Lee. Representing the defense were chief counsel Thaddeus Stevens, Philadelphia's John M. Read a Democrat and former Attorney General of Pennsylvania, J.J. Lewis of Chester County, Philadelphia attorney Theodore Cuyler, junior counsel W. Arthur Jackson, and abolitionist lawyer David Paul Brown.¹

After their arrest in September, the imprisoned rioters became celebrities in the eyes of their racial brethren for their determination and bravery. Blacks throughout the country provided both moral and financial support to the men who languished in prison for weeks nervously awaiting their trials. Various African-American churches and organizations in such cities as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and even as far away as San Francisco, honored the "victorious heroes at the battle of Christiana" while simultaneously collecting defense funds for the "Christiana patriots." In Moyamensing, the prisoners suffered from a poor heating system and insufficient ventilation while eating little more than the proverbial bread and water. The white prisoners received

¹ W. A. Jackson, *History of the Trial of Castner Hanway and Others for Treason...* (Philadelphia 1852), pp. 54-57; Robbins, p. 19.

regular visits from friends and family that not only raised their morale but also supplemented their mundane diet with homemade foodstuffs. Their African-American colleagues, on the other hand, had few visitors as their families lacked the financial resources necessary to afford the long journey from Lancaster County to Philadelphia. The black prisoners were essentially left to themselves, isolated from each other in separate individual cells. With the exception of guards and the rare visit from a sympathetic abolitionist, they had little human contact for two months. Ezekiel Thompson and Henry Sims, two of the imprisoned black rioters, frequently prayed so loudly that passersby outside the prison walls would stop and listen. Each day a crowd formed on the sidewalk representing a kind of silent vigil bearing witness to the lamentations of the accused.²

Hanway, Lewis, and Scarlett were segregated from the black prisoners and placed in one large cell during their stay in Moyamensing. They were joined by another white man named Joseph Townsend whose imprisonment was questionable at best. Thinking kidnapers were at the Parker house, Townsend's sole reason for being arrested was that he lent his gun to a black man named John Roberts. Although Roberts never arrived at Parker's nor was he even indicted as a rioter, the government saw fit to include Townsend in a conspiracy of which he was misinformed. An elderly Quaker named James Jackson was the only other white charged for treason, yet he never joined his comrades in their Philadelphia cell. Jackson's arrest was a testament to the chaos that ensued in Christiana during the days following the riot. The aged gentleman was out of

² For organizations that provided financial support and black references of rioters see *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, October 16, 1851; November 13, 1851; January 8, 1852; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, February 12, 1852; Hensel, p. 60; J. Katz, p. 134; *The New York Times*, as quoted in *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, November 12, 1851; Jackson, p. 58.

town when the fight at Parker's erupted, and he had no direct relation to its occurrence. His reputation alone, as a documented non-violent abolitionist, served as sufficient evidence for his inclusion in the conspiracy. The federal government was apparently now charging elderly Quakers to help build a conspiracy angle where abolitionist teachings and writings could be construed as inciting resistance. Although indicted for treason—the highest crime in the land— U.S. Marshal Anthony Roberts released Jackson on his own recognizance until his court date. Roberts, appointed by President Zachary Taylor through the patronage of Thaddeus Stevens, was apparently the only lawman to distinguish the minimal threat an aged Quaker posed to the community.³

When the news broke that the government was indicting the Christiana rioters for treason, it divided the country both regionally and ideologically. The treason charge was much like the riot itself in that it forced Americans to face uncomfortable questions not only concerning the authenticity of the Fugitive Slave Law but also the issue of civil rights. For the South's part, it asked few questions, standing as a monolith of support for the government bringing a treason charge against the defendants. The crime demanded federal punishment to both deter any further grassroots resistance and coerce northern states into enforcing the fugitive law. The symbolic death of Edward Gorsuch represented such a shocking affront to southern sensibilities that murder charges could not hope to contain the thirst for vengeance below the Mason-Dixon. What happened at Christiana was something worse than the murder; it was a crime committed not just against a single individual, but against the entire country. "It will not be enough, that

³ *The New York Daily Times*, as quoted in *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, November 12, 1851; J. Katz, p. 170; John Roberts testimony: Robbins, pp. 101-102; Hensel, pp. 58-59, 47, 45. In 1854, Stevens helped Roberts win Lancaster's congressional seat as a Know-Nothing candidate, see Trefousse, p. 89; William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia, 1872), p. 362.

these men be convicted and punished for murder and outrage..." Maryland's *Planter's Advocate* argued. "It is treason—and as traitors these bloody men must die—or we have no interest in their death—no advantage from their execution."⁴

Northerners, on the other hand, were divided over the government indicting the rioters for treason. Some echoed southern sentiments by finding the charge justified in meeting the gravity of the crime. "There is something more...than even a murderous riot in all this," wrote Philadelphia's Whig newspaper the *North American*. "It is an act of insurrection; we might, considering the peculiar class and condition of the guilty parties, almost call it a servile insurrection, if not also one of treason." But other northerners sensed an over-reaching federal government desperate to assuage southern indignation through an outrageous charge that infringed on American's civil rights. Lancaster's *Saturday Express* considered the riot "merely a case of personal defense," yet treason was brought against the defendants by a desperate government "lest it should encourage resistance to law, and in its consequences produce rebellion and civil war." During preliminary proceedings for Hanway's trial, one *New York Times* reporter used the simple act of a bird flying into the courtroom to metaphorically illustrate the ridiculousness of the government's treason charge:

The very room of the United States District Court, has been the scene of "resistance to the officers of the law," by a woodpecker, which flew into the window on Saturday. Marshal Roberts, District Attorney Ashmead, and others, talk of bringing in a bill against the fugitive, as if it had not bill enough already, because the bird, assuming the principles of the "higher law," would not suffer itself to be captured, without an effort to preserve its freedom. The offense not being general among the woodpeckers, the crime cannot be charged as treason.⁵

⁴ *Maryland Planter's Advocate*, October 1, 1851.

Blacks and white abolitionists were shocked by the treason indictment; fearful that the rioters were to be made examples of, political pawns sacrificed to promote sectional harmony. Could it be that in the federal government's desperation to assuage southern indignation, it would claim that the rioters were somehow traitors for defending their personal liberties? When he first learned of the charges, Frederick Douglass called it "the climax of American absurdity, to say nothing of American infamy." In his opinion, the "government has virtually made every colored man in the land an outlaw, one who may be hunted by any villa in who may think proper to do so, and if the hunted man, finding himself stript of all legal protection, shall lift his arms in his own defense, why, forsooth, he is arrested, arraigned, and tried for high treason, and found guilty, he must suffer death!" Rev. Theodore Parker was skeptical of the riot defendants receiving a fair trial and admonished federal officials for bringing such a fraudulent charge. "The law is against them, the constitution is against them, public opinion is against them," the Bostonian preacher lamented, "I suppose you will hang them for treason; I suppose all that the corruption of the American government can do will be done, to secure the condemnation of those men. I should not be surprised if some of them are hung." *The National Era*, an abolitionist newspaper in Washington D.C., sarcastically mocked the government's prosecution of treason in the case. "Fifty-seven respectable American Traitors! What a terrible rebellion to have yielded such fruits! The Government must have been in imminent danger! But where were the armies arrayed for its overthrow? Have we all been asleep? When did the President proclaim that an enemy was in the

⁵ *North American*, September 13, 1851: D. Forbes, p. 8; *United States Gazette*, as quoted in the *National Intelligencer*, September 18, 1851; "The State of the Country—The Fugitive Slave Law," *Lancaster Saturday Express*, October 25, 1851; *New York Times*, October 21, 1851.

field? Has there been civil war, without the country knowing it?" The *Era's* editor saw through the legal rhetoric and discovered what he believed was the real explanation behind the preposterous charge: "Now, what is it that is urging the country to this abyss of baseness and wickedness? The devilish demagoguism which is prostituting Northern independence before the Slave Power, to win its favor and alliance." An abolitionist convention in Syracuse, New York was steadfast in its opposition to the government's liberal interpretation of treason, choosing to publicly celebrate martyrs to the charge. "[S]hould the agents of the executive among us attempt to pervert the law of Treason to the use of domestic tyrants, we will...give aid and comfort to the victims of their persecution," the convention resolved, "should the ruthless tyrants who are seeking to enforce this treasonable slave law on us, succeed to cut short their existence, we will build statues to their memory, and gather about their names the love and veneration of great hearts, and the admiration of the world."⁶

In the weeks leading up to the trial, most Americans patiently waited for the law to take its course. Northerners maintained a quiet confidence that the Christiana defendants' fate would be decided by a justice system devoid of sectional animosities, while southerners anxiously awaited a ruling that would uphold their honor. Although leading Philadelphia Democrats expected a guilty verdict against the offenders, Governor Lowe of Maryland nevertheless attempted to stack the deck in his favor. Lowe volunteered the services of his Attorney General, Robert Brent, and Pennsylvania Senator James Cooper, a Maryland native, to the prosecutorial team through a private

⁶ "Freedom's Battle at Christiana," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, September 25, 1851; "Anniversary of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society," *New York Herald*, October 12, 1851; "The Reign of Blood," *The National Era*, October 23, 1851; "The Right Front At Syracuse," *Liberator*, October 24, 1851.

correspondence with President Fillmore. The governor wanted Brent to lead the prosecution along with the crucial task of making the closing arguments. Fillmore refused to make any public comment on the matter, instead ordering Secretary of State Daniel Webster to privately inform U.S. Attorney John Ashmead, the lead prosecutor in the case, to accept Maryland's assistance. A Philadelphia lawyer appointed to his position by President Taylor in 1849, Ashmead was incensed by the controversial move and protested any undercutting of his authority by making it clear Brent would have only a subordinate role. Brent was willing to concede Ashmead's official position of authority in the case, but was insulted that any preconditions be placed on his participation. Brent informed Lowe of the federal prosecutor's reluctance. The Maryland governor dashed off another letter to the president demanding that his legal representatives have an equal voice in the proceedings. Fillmore consented with Lowe's requests and commanded Ashmead to accept the additional members of the prosecution permitting them the option of making closing remarks to the jury. The U.S. Attorney dealt with this humbling setback to his professional pride in a gentlemanly manner by acknowledging the executive decree, issuing the necessary apologies, and proceeding forward with preparations for the case.⁷

Fillmore's prompt acquiescence to Lowe's requests illustrated the difficult predicament in which the federal government found itself when prosecuting the rioters. Caution was the order of the day for an executive desperately trying to appear impartial on a slavery issue that permeated the case. Fillmore did not have a strong political

⁷ "The Reign of Blood," *The National Era*, October 23, 1851; For letters concerning Lowe/Ashmead/Brent controversy see "Governor and Council Letterbook, 1845-1854," Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD; Slaughter, pp. 106-109.

mandate to rely upon when he took office; he was Zachary Taylor's vice-president assuming the presidency after the latter died sixteen months into his term. Without the necessary popular support, Fillmore did what he did best as a career politician—compromise. Although a Whig from upstate New York, Fillmore was ever the southern appeaser anxious to foster national unity. “The union must and shall be preserved...by a faithful and impartial administration of the laws...,” he rationalized, “God knows that I detest slavery, but it is an existing evil, and we must endure it, and give it such protection, as is guaranteed by the constitution, till we can get rid of it without destroying the last hope of free government in the world.” After the Mexican-American War in 1848, he argued to make the newly won southwest territories into slave states. Two years later, President Fillmore was an ardent supporter of the 1850 Compromise, considering it a triumph of bipartisan cooperation. For a man whose temperament was probably more attuned to the diplomatic service than the presidency, the *Christiana* case placed Fillmore in a very uncomfortable position. No matter the outcome of the treason trials, the resultant verdicts would have political repercussions in either the northern or southern parts of the country. Acquittals would appear legally permissible to most in the North, but stain southern pride and cause secessionist threats to reverberate throughout the region. By contrast, convictions and executions would please the South, but shock many in the North, leading to embarrassing questions regarding the administration's stance on civil rights. The government was facing a challenging public relations dilemma, trying to create a legal apparatus that combined judicious law enforcement with draconian practices for the sake of an overall appearance of neutrality. Further muddling the

picture, were reservations among federal officials over the feasibility of securing even a single conviction on the treason charge.⁸

Ashmead was one such skeptic of bringing the treason charge against the Christiana rioters, publicly confident yet privately doubting he could successfully win the case. Achieving a guilty verdict for murder was one thing, but he found himself boxed in by the prospect of successfully arguing that the rioters were attempting to overthrow the U.S. government. Upon being summoned to Washington, Ashmead met with the President, Daniel Webster, and Attorney General John J. Crittenden (a Kentucky native) to personally discuss the case. The four men conferred on the best method to prosecute the rioters with each concluding the impossibility of securing a guilty verdict. Ashmead argued against prosecuting the rioters for treason at all because he felt they would surely be acquitted. The difficulty in proving treason was that the prosecution had to show a broader intent on the part of the defendant. It was not enough to establish that the accused had committed a crime, but that the crime in question had the larger purpose of overthrowing the federal government. Convicting the rioters of murder and conspiracy in the death of Edward Gorsuch appeared simple enough, but to prove their actions bordered on insurrection was enormously difficult. Ashmead's opposition, however, was overruled. Fillmore, Webster, and Crittenden calmly explained to the concerned federal prosecutor that the charge must be brought in order to satisfy Maryland authorities and maintain the government's credibility. Even without a conviction, the administration

⁸ C. H. Van Tyne, ed., *The Letters of Daniel Webster* (New York: McClure, Phillips, and Co., 1902), pp. 436-437; Miller Center, "American President: Millard Fillmore (1800-1874)," University of Virginia, <http://millercenter.org/president/fillmore> (accessed January 9, 2012); For more information on Fillmore see Robert J. Scarry, *Millard Fillmore* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2001); Slaughter, p. 106.

hoped the personal and financial tolls a trial inflicted upon the defendants would serve as a sufficient deterrence to other potential resisters of the Fugitive Slave Law.⁹

Although pessimistic of success, Ashmead valiantly soldiered on, preparing legal arguments consistent with the government's stringent reading of the law. He approached the case from a perspective that utilized a liberal interpretation of treason that made fear its centerpiece. This line of reasoning was congruent with federal policy prior to the riot as government officials hoped the threat of capital punishment would effectively dissuade violators from breaking the Fugitive Slave Law, thus permitting the administration to maintain an ambiguous position on such a controversial matter. Months before the riot, Daniel Webster painted any illicit mob with the broad brush of treason while addressing an audience in Albany, New York:

If men get together and combine, and resolve that they will oppose a law of the government, not in any one case, but in all cases; if they resolve to resist the law, whoever may be attempted to be made the subject of it, and carry that purpose into effect, by resisting the application of the law in any one case, either by force of arms or force of numbers, that, Sir, is treason.¹⁰

In November, the formalities of the Treason Trials continued to slowly wind their way through the legal system and appeared about to begin at the end of the month. Yet the defense team suddenly found themselves in a bind because in the nation's eyes they were now representing an abolitionist extremist. In the weeks building up to the riot case, the media had transformed the actions of Hanway, Lewis, and Scarlett from that of simple peacemakers to fanatical rabble-rousers. While coverage in the non-abolitionist press

⁹ J. Katz, pp. 162-163; Slaughter, pp. 124-125; H.G. Ashmead to W.U. Hensel, August 20, 1911, William Uhler Hensel Collection (hereafter cited as "Hensel Collection"), 1870-1915, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, Lancaster County Historical Society (hereafter cited as LCHS).

¹⁰ Slaughter, pp. 106-107; Webster speech taken from, Daniel Webster, *The Works of Daniel Webster*, vol. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1853), pp. 577-578.

continued to mistakenly promote the “white myth”, there were some abolitionists who unintentionally fostered this same opinion by casting the three whites in the roles of martyrs while simultaneously overlooking black contributions. The riot was quickly growing into an abolitionist legend that discounted facts for the sake of a good story. That the three whites actually played a small role in the events that now placed them in a Philadelphia prison was unimportant, they were suddenly Quaker heroes waging a holy crusade in the name of freedom. Abolitionists’ mistaken belief in white heroism at Christiana not only revealed a prejudice on their part, but also revealed how perceptions—both real and imagined—shaped the slavery debate. The pre-conceived notions of both abolitionists and slaveholders regarding black character became the real rub in American race relations. “By altering, or at least filtering, reality through their racial expectations,” Thomas Slaughter argued, “the abolitionists no less than the advocates of slavery contributed to the legend of race relations in antebellum America.”¹¹ The problem was not black competence, but a white misunderstanding and underestimation of that competence. Failing to appreciate black proficiency, whites continued to confuse the issue of race by focusing on an imaginary blackness rather than a misguided whiteness. This confusion contributed to the strained state of race relations that would infect the country for many years to come.

The poem “For Righteousness’ Sake” fed into this riot legend of white heroism by venerating Hanway, Lewis, and Scarlett while they awaited trial in Moyamensing Prison. The piece written by John Greenleaf Whittier, Quaker editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, was “inscribed to Friends under arrest for treason against the slave power,”

¹¹ J. Katz, p. 178; Slaughter, pp. 110-111.

thereby illustrating Whittier's misassumption that all three men were Quakers and somehow anti-slavery zealots personally battling the forces of the South.

The age is dull and mean. Men creep,
Not walk; with blood too pale and tame
To pay the debt they owe to shame;
Buy cheap, sell dear; eat, drink, and sleep
Down-pillowed, deaf to moaning want;
Pay tithes for soul-insurance; keep
Six days to Mammon, one the Cant.

In such a time, give thanks to God,
That somewhat of the holy rage
With which the prophets in their age
On all its decent seemings trod,
Has set your feet upon the lie,
That man and ox and soul and clod
Are market stock to sell and buy!

The hot words from your lips, my own,
To caution trained, might not repeat;
But if some tares among the wheat
Of generous thought and deed were sown,
No common wrong provoked your zeal;
The silken gauntlet that is thrown
In such a quarrel rings like steel.

The brave old strife the fathers saw
For freedom calls for men again
Like those who battled not in vain
For England's Charter, Alfred's law;
And right of speech and trial just
Wage in your name their ancient war
With venal courts and perjured trust.

God's ways seem dark, but soon or late,
They touch the shining hills of day;
The evil cannot brook delay,
The good can well afford to wait.
Give ermined knaves their hour of crime,
Ye have the future grand and great,
The safe appeal of Truth to Time!¹²

¹² Slaughter, pp. 110-111; "Whittier Memorialized Christiana 'Riot' Defendants in Anniversary Poem," *Lancaster New Era*, February 21, 1997; "For Righteousness' Sake," appears in the 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS.

Ashmead's decision to begin with Hanway illustrated that even the prosecution was deluded by the "white myth" and an acquiescence to southern demands for equal justice. Black blood was simply insufficient for the death of a white slaveholder. Southerners demanded an equitable trade, a pound of white flesh to satisfy the loss of a Maryland gentleman. The prosecution believed there was a strong case against Hanway, but issued separate indictments because evidence against some of the other defendants was not as strong. They feared a jury might consider that sufficient reason to pronounce an acquittal for all the defendants. Unwilling to leave any stone unturned, Ashmead wrote to the State Department of his expectation that multiple indictments against the prisoners would "satisfy the country that every possible means of reaching the offenders has been resorted to, and that the officers of the law have left nothing undone to secure their punishment." His strategy to arraign the prisoners individually also took into account the psychology of northern juries regarding capital punishment. Issuing a verdict that convicted and hanged a single defendant was difficult for most jurors, but to order the death of over thirty human lives, even when it involved treason, was more than most Americans could stomach. Ashmead was hopeful that such dire charges against each of the accused would both satisfy southern honor and provide a conviction worthy of Edward Gorsuch.¹³

The case was a jury trial heard by a two-judge panel composed of U.S. Circuit Court Judge Robert C. Grier and U.S. District Judge John K. Kane. The defense team could not have been pleased to find themselves in front of these two jurists in a case that had slavery at its heart. Both judges were well known for their Democratic leanings and their

¹³ Slaughter, pp. 114-115, 92-93; John Ashmead to W.S. Derrick, September 26, 1851 and multiple State Department letters, November 1-December 31, 1851, M. 179, microfilm roll 128, National Archives, Washington D.C.

adherence to a strict rule of law devoid of human sentiment. Grier was a native Pennsylvanian appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1844 by President Zachary Taylor who, although a Whig, was notable for being the last president to hold slaves while in office. Described as a man of rather “large proportions; upwards of six feet high” and of a “sanguine temperament,” Grier considered himself a Jacksonian Democrat and was committed to enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act. Upon the passage of the act, Grier stated “As the Lord liveth and as my soul liveth,” he would enforce it, “till the last hour it remains on the books.” The judge would later achieve fame as being one of the two northern justices to side with the majority in the Dred Scott case of 1857. The decision denied civil rights to slaves, declared the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional, and ruled that Congress could not forbid slavery in the territories. It was rumored that Grier was influenced by his distant cousin Alexander Stephens the U.S. Representative from Georgia who later became Vice President of the Confederacy, but it was more likely fellow Pennsylvanian James Buchanan pulling the strings as he was in the early days of his presidency and wanted the territorial question settled.¹⁴

Judge John K. Kane had previously been a district attorney in Pennsylvania, later serving as the state’s Attorney General from 1845-1846 under Democratic Governor Francis Shunk. Kane’s presence as one of the jurists did not bode well for the defense. He too supported the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and roundly criticized Pennsylvania’s personal liberty laws of 1847 that used the Prigg decision to make the capture of fugitive slaves a federal concern. On September 29, 1851, during his instructions to a grand jury

¹⁴ Slaughter, p. 225; David Paul Brown, *The Forum: or Forty Years Full Practice at the Philadelphia Bar* (Philadelphia, 1856), pp. 100-101; Oyez Project, “Robert C. Grier,” Chicago-Kent College of Law, http://www.oyez.org/justices/robert_c_grier (accessed January 3, 2012); J. Katz, p. 181; James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 172-173.

that eventually found sufficient evidence to try Hanway for treason, his pro-Compromise sympathies came to the forefront by using the defendant as a proxy to personally attack radical abolitionism. In what were supposed to be simple directives to better define legal precepts for laymen jurors, Kane provided a liberal definition of treason, denounced abolitionists, and indirectly insulted the black rioters. “The expression ‘levying war’,” he instructed, “embraces...any combination forcibly to prevent or oppose the execution...of the Constitution.” The judge stated that proof of treason can be found from someone’s public pronouncements or “derived from the proceedings of meeting(s), in which he took part openly...or made effective by his countenance or sanction,--commending, counseling, and instigating forcible resistance to the law.” Nor was it necessary for the offender to be present when violence occurred. “Though he be absent at the time...yet if he directed the act, devised...the means for carrying it into effect, instigating others to perform it, he shares their guilt. In treason there are no accessories.” Kane continued his comments with the same bigoted opinion held by many in the press who denied black agency and placed the blame for Christiana on abolitionist teachings.

If it has been thought safe to counsel and instigate others to acts of forcible oppugnation to the provisions of a statute,--to inflame the minds of the ignorant by appeals to passion, and denunciations of the law as oppressive, unjust, revolting to the conscience, and not binding on the actions of men,--to represent the Constitution of the land as a compact of iniquity, which it were meritorious to violate or subvert,--the mistake has been a grievous one.

The judge then shifted his commentary into a veiled racial invective when he placed responsibility for the riot on a mentally deficient blackness incapable of citizenship rather than the state’s law-abiding white citizenry:

That there are men here...whom a misguided zeal impels to violations of law,--that there are others who are controlled

by false sympathies, and some who yield too readily and too fully to sympathies not always false, or, if false, yet pardonable, and become criminal by yielding,--that we have not only in our jails and alms-houses, but congregated here and there... ignorant men, many of them without political rights, degraded in social position, and instinctive of revolt,--all this is true.... But it should not be supposed, that any of these represent the sentiment of Pennsylvania, and it would be to wrong our people sorely, to include them in the same category of personal, social, or political morals.¹⁵

As preparations for Hanway's trial continued, two incidents occurred in November that raised the ire of southern observers, as even Moyamensing prison became the site of events that further increased the controversy surrounding the case. First, two black witnesses vanished from their rooms in a portion of the prison referred to as the Debtor's Apartments. The prosecution cried foul claiming that the two men were integral to its case. Maryland officials believed the disappearances to be politically motivated, noting how the lock was not broken and the men were being guarded by marshal Roberts. Throughout the treason trials Roberts' political affiliation with Stevens made him a target of Maryland Attorney General Brent who continually accused the marshal of misconduct, yet could never find sufficient proof. Next, a court clerk named Thomas Kane, son of the presiding judge, provided a Thanksgiving dinner for the white prisoners. In an ironic twist, Thomas Kane was a Philadelphia abolitionist who, unlike his father, disapproved of the fugitive slave law and sympathized with the rioters. Marshal Roberts, some of the guards, and a prison official joined the "traitors" in consuming six turkeys. Hanway's wife Martha acted as hostess for the meal and made up plates for the black prisoners to eat separately from their white counterparts. Brent was again quick to question the court's partiality in providing a dinner to men indicted for treason. When the court failed

¹⁵ Slaughter, p. 225; Hensel, p. 57; Robbins, pp. 268-269.

to act upon either of the prosecution's objections regarding the missing witnesses or the holiday meal, Maryland authorities were incensed, viewing the incidents as yet further slights against their receiving a fair verdict in a Pennsylvania courtroom.¹⁶

When the *United States versus Castner Hanway* finally began on November 24, weeks of press coverage had Americans anxious to catch their first glimpse of the white miller turned fanatical abolitionist traitor. The trial was the hottest ticket in town, with Philadelphia's Independence Hall packed with onlookers desperately trying to push their way into the small courtroom. The federal government foresaw this possibility and ordered additional security for the courthouse. The extra guards helped in maintaining order reasonably well as there were no reported distractions during the case although the crowd overflowed into the hallways, stairwells, and even the street. On this first day of the trial, the courtroom gallery was comprised entirely of white men, save Martha Hanway, and noticeably devoid of black spectators. During the trial's duration, the gender and racial compositions of the galleries would change dramatically. With each passing day, more and more women attended the trial, sitting alongside men in a fashion that shocked Victorian attitudes of the time. Bailiffs initially attempted to segregate spectators by gender, but eventually conceded defeat to the overwhelming throng of bodies. The famous abolitionist Lucretia Mott attended much of the trial, quietly knitting as she sat alongside the black prisoners. She reportedly looked up only when Hanway's name was mentioned before resuming her labors as the testimony continued. Other Quakers, recognizable by their distinct clothing, also crowded into the courtroom in

¹⁶ Hensel, p. 60; *The New York Times*, November 11, 1851; November 13, 1851; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, December 4, 1851; Still, p. 366; Slaughter, pp. 116-119; J. Katz, p. 172-173, 185-186.

greater numbers as did black onlookers ironically creating a significantly heterogeneous audience for a case as central to the Fugitive Slave Law as it was to treason.¹⁷

When Hanway entered the courtroom with his wife on his arm, the gallery was likely disappointed as the media blitz that preceded him hardly did the miller justice. He walked in calmly and earnestly presenting the image of an unassuming, mild-mannered gentleman. Hanway was in his mid-thirties possessing a lanky build and bearing an appearance that was “respectful and reserved.” He surprised the gallery by not being dressed as a Quaker, as his legend purported, but in the typical fashion of the day. “The impression has gone abroad, that the prisoner is a member of the Society of Friends,” one reporter corrected, “and many supposed that he appears in court arrayed in the peculiar dress of that sect. This is a great mistake.... He is dressed in a full suit of fashionable black clothes, with black silk neck handkerchief, and standing collar.” This was not the kind of man spectators lined up three hours early expecting to see. Where was the raving “higher-law agitationist” that “thirsted for the blood of the Southerners”? Was this really one of the “canting hypocrites and arch demagogues” whose subversive teachings made “poor, ignorant, deluded negroes their murdering victims”? Perhaps there was more to this man than it appeared or perhaps the government really was overreaching in this case. Observers would never answer the former as the miller did not take the stand in his own defense and said little during proceedings other than pleading “not guilty.” Hanway sat stoically at the defense table for the next two weeks, silently watching the trial that held his life in the balance.¹⁸

¹⁷ Jackson, pp. 50-53; Slaughter, p. 120-121; J. Katz, p. 178.

¹⁸ Hensel, p. 77; Slaughter, p. 121; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, November 27, 1851; *North American*, November 27, 1851; November 29, 1851; Slaughter, p. 120; *Weekly American*, September 19, 1851;

Judge Grier questioned Ashmead as to how many defendants had already been arraigned in an attempt to speed the case along. The U.S. Attorney responded that he proposed to arraign each defendant as they were called to trial. Grier appeared to balk at the response, however he reluctantly accepted Ashmead's course of action, adding his "extreme desire to be in Washington" in two weeks to preside over a U.S. Supreme Court case. Grier hoped to have at least Hanway's trial finished before then. The judge's indirect effort to accelerate the trial won praise from the defense who seized the opportunity to ridicule the prosecution. Ever the agitator, Stevens interrupted with one of his typical sarcastic asides to his opponents, "I hope it will not take that time to get through with one case—in our country, we hang a man in three days, and I hope these gentlemen will not take so long a time." The gibe found a willing target in Brent who angrily retorted, "This is a civilized country." It was an early outburst that served as a portent of what became a contentious battle between the prosecution and defense over not only Hanway's fate, but also the political consequences inherent to the eventual verdict. With so much riding on the case, temperaments were running high on each side. The legal proceedings ironically being held in Independence Hall were as much about the 1850 Compromise as it was about the life of Castner Hanway. The trial was essentially a test case that held the applicability of the fugitive slave law and the fate of a race in its

Boston Journal as quoted in "African-American Perspective," Millersville University, <http://muweb.millersville.edu/~ugrr/christiana/african.html> (accessed February 12, 2009); *Philadelphia News*, as quoted in "A Hard Hit at Stevens and Johnston!," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 23, 1851; *New York Express*, as quoted in *New York Times*, September 20, 1851.

hands. The eyes of country were on that Philadelphia courtroom, eager to discover what the future held for both fugitive slaves and those who aided them.¹⁹

From the outset of the trial, Ashmead and his team were clearly influenced by the “white myth” thesis where whites held the principal roles in the riot. The indictment read before the court was filled with ominous adjectives in its description of Hanway whereby the pacifistic miller was transformed into a fanatical mob leader that violently resisted the “lawful” actions of the Gorsuch party. Words such as “warlike,” “traitorously,” and “wickedly,” peppered the indictment for dramatic effect. In the government’s opinion, the defendants “did traitorously assemble and combine against the United States” through “force and arms” for the purpose of preventing “by means of intimidation and violence, the execution of the said laws of the United States.” That over one hundred rioters “did array and dispose themselves in a warlike and hostile manner” and “wickedly and traitorously did levy war against the United States.” And to prove a broader intent, the indictment maintained that the defendants wrote numerous traitorous tracts, “did then...publish and disperse...incitements, encouragements, and exhortations” to “move, induce, and persuade” fugitive slaves and others “to resist, oppose, and prevent, by violence and intimidation, the execution of the said laws...of the United States.” Nevermind that the whites involved were unarmed, that the estimate of rioters involved was preposterously embellished, or that most of the supposed seditious writers were illiterate. It made no difference to the government that this was quickly devolving into a show trial. Ashmead’s harsh portrayal of the defendants won muted praise from a delighted administration eager to show how it was competently fulfilling its law

¹⁹ Robbins, p. 12; Trefousse, p. 95. Stevens was renowned in Lancaster and neighboring counties for ridiculing courtroom opponents with his characteristic sarcasm; J. Katz, p. 182.

enforcement obligations. Whatever the outcome, government officials hoped the U.S. Attorney's courtroom performance would be strong enough to satisfy southern observers that the federal government had done its utmost to convict the rioters.²⁰

Like the trial itself, jury selection became a process that garnered its share of controversy as well. The jury pool was whittled down from a venire of eighty-one candidates to twelve in just under a day. A number of potential jurors complained that they were hard of hearing causing Judge Grier to comment on a sudden epidemic of deafness that was infecting his courtroom. Its possible these men were trying to be excused from the case because of its controversial nature or they were simply attempting to escape jury service like so many others that came before and would come after them. Counsel for both sides agreed on six questions to be asked of each potential juror. The first was whether the juror believed in capital punishment, the next four pertained to whether the candidate had formed an opinion on the case, and the last was his view on the Fugitive Slave Law. The *voir dire* process moved along rapidly as the defense made few challenges. In fact, the defense appeared so knowledgeable of the prospective jurors that members of the prosecution suspected something was amiss. Marshal Roberts' role in summoning the jurors to Philadelphia caused Brent to later protest to Lowe that the venire was composed of men "unfavorable to a conviction." When the *voir dire* concluded, the men finally chosen to rule on Hanway's fate were from a largely rural background possessing an average age of fifty-three years. They numbered five farmers,

²⁰ "Christiana Indictment," *The National Era*, November 27, 1851; Slaughter, pp. 115-116, 124, 107; J. Katz, p. 163.

two merchants, a carpenter, a surveyor, a blacksmith, and two individuals whose occupations were apparently that of “gentlemen.”²¹

The prosecution’s overall case leaned heavily on the testimony of U.S. Marshal Henry Kline and proving Hanway was part of a pre-existing conspiracy acting in concert with William Parker’s mutual protection association. Ashmead attempted to ensnare the rioters in legal technicalities by strongly emphasizing the federal constitution’s description of treason. It held that “Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying War against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort.” To secure Hanway’s guilt the prosecution needed to convince the jury that the constitutional axiom “levying war” referred to that which took place at Christiana. This was both a necessary and shrewd move on the part of Ashmead, but not one without its pitfalls. On one hand, Judge Kane’s earlier grand jury instructions had already revealed his feelings on the matter and the U.S. Attorney was certainly banking on the judge’s continuity paying dividends. On the other hand, the phrase “levying war” had such a nebulous definition that if the prosecution was not careful, the talented defense team seated across the courtroom could easily turn it against them. As Ashmead attempted to win over a jury of laymen to his interpretation of constitutional terminology, he did what all adept lawyers do when arguing legal technicalities, he introduced historical precedents.²²

Ashmead cited cases occurring a half-century earlier where participants in the Whiskey Rebellion and Fries’ Rebellion were convicted of treason. The Whiskey

²¹ J. Katz, pp. 181-185; Robbins, pp. 9-11; Hensel, pp. 59-60; Slaughter, pp. 121-122; *North American*, November 27, 1851.

²² Robbins, pp. 45-54, 18-19; Slaughter, p. 124.

Rebellion occurred in western Pennsylvania as a rebellion against a government imposed excise tax on whiskey. The act so infuriated farmers who distilled their own whiskey that a group of whiskey rebels ransacked the home of a tax collector in 1794. Fearing this revolt would spread to other states, the federal government dispatched a militia unit to the scene. By the time they arrived, the insurrection had already crumbled with the militia only managing to arrest two men who were later found guilty of treason. In 1799, John Fries was convicted for his role in leading a group of Pennsylvania Germans in resistance to the “House Tax” where colonial assessors determined tax rates by counting the number of windows on a dwelling. Fries formed a small armed force in eastern Pennsylvania that publicly denounced Congress and intimidated assessors from continuing their work. The federal government arrested Fries along with a number of his followers and secured a treason conviction under the Alien and Sedition acts.²³

Ashmead utilized these cases in conjunction with the Christiana Riot maintaining “any combination or conspiracy by force and intimidation to prevent the execution of an act of Congress, so as to render it inoperative and ineffective, is in legal estimation high treason.” Although conveniently failing to mention that those convicted in the Whiskey and Fries’ rebellions were eventually pardoned, Ashmead continued his argument by combining legal precedents with a broader intent. This entailed making Marshal Kline a stand-in for the federal government. Ashmead argued that Kline was a duly authorized representative of the U.S. government and that any opposition to his authority was thereby resistance to the government itself. The rioters’ assault on the Marshal not only represented a willingness to do him bodily harm, but was an effort to overthrow the laws

²³ Robbins, pp. 45-54; Slaughter, p. 124; Hensel, pp. 56-57.

of the land and, by extension, constituted a broader endeavor to topple the federal government.²⁴

In order to convict the remaining defendants, the prosecution also needed to create the appearance of a conspiracy behind the events that led to Edward Gorsuch's demise. This element came from both witness testimony and also found itself embodied, in all things, within Eliza Parker's fish horn. The prosecution began by transforming Castner Hanway into a devil to assure his conviction as a conspiratorial leader. The jurors needed to disregard his humble courtroom appearance and see him for who he really was—a belligerent abolitionist traitor. Members of the Gorsuch party took Alexander Pinckney's second thoughts as a sign that Parker and his compatriots were ready to submit. They testified that the mood emanating from the house was one of bleakness until Hanway's arrival rejuvenated black morale. Dr. Thomas Pearce claimed "the negroes seemed to give up," but when Hanway reached the scene, "seeing him they raised a yell, and became fully confirmed (in my opinion) to repel to the very last." To Dickinson's recollection "the negroes seemed as if they would have given up" then after the white miller appeared Dickinson's father turned to the youth and said "now they seem to be determined." Nathan Nelson maintained that when Hanway rode up the lane, "the negroes seemed to rejoice at it, they made a jumping and a great noise." Joshua Gorsuch remembered "the colored people in the house stated they felt like dying," but when the defendant came into view, "they appeared to be inspired, and I thought it made a material

²⁴ Robbins, pp., 45-54, 268-269; Slaughter, p. 124; Hensel, pp. 56-57. President John Adams pardoned the Fries rebels because they were "ignorant, misguided, and misinformed" of the law. Hanway's defense team would coincidentally make the same argument in defending the black rioters. For more information on the Fries case see W. W. H. Davis, *The Fries Rebellion, 1798-99* (Doylestown: PA, 1899); Robbins, pp. 18-19, 45-54.

change.” When pressed by the prosecution to explain the change, Joshua responded, “They appeared to rally.” That Hanway received such adulation when he arrived outside Parker’s house appeared a damning piece of testimony for the defense. Yet the prosecution failed to produce any witnesses testifying that Hanway directly incited the blacks. Ashmead could also not prove the defendant participated in abolitionist meetings and neglected to mention that Hanway’s appearance coincided with the first armed blacks emerging into view of those inside the house.²⁵ This latter incident would certainly induce cheers from the besieged blacks who were desperately awaiting reinforcement, having little to do with a white man on horseback they barely knew.

Ashmead next turned to the local self-defense organization by branding it as an entity with one purpose, defiance of the Fugitive Slave Law. Eliza’s sounding of the horn demonstrated premeditation on the part of the rioters and was all the proof prosecutors needed. Ashmead’s cousin George Ashmead presented the rioters as actors in a larger conspiratorial plot to overthrow Kline’s authority and thereby the government. “I need hardly say...that the outrage perpetrated at Christiana was...treason against the United States; and all who participated in it are guilty of that offence,” he contended, “It was a concerted and combined resistance, by force, of a statute of the United States, and was made with the declared intent...to render its provisions void, and to make the act altogether inoperative.”²⁶ Thus summed up the prosecution’s case in the Christiana Treason Trials. Whether legal precedents, a vague notion of Hanway’s abolitionist leadership, or the mutual protection association’s alleged assault on Congress sufficiently swayed the jury was difficult to tell. Perhaps missteps by the defense would play into the

²⁵ Robbins, pp. 75, 83, 86, 97-98; J. Katz, p. 93.

²⁶ Robbins, pp. 45-47, 18-19.

prosecution's hand and strengthen its case, or maybe a basic appeal to common sense would see Hanway free.

While the prosecution argued legal technicalities, the defense insisted on a common sense approach to debunk the treason and conspiracy charges. Hanway's lawyers now had the nation's ear, yet resisted the temptation to politicize the abolitionist cause. Using the national spotlight to argue against slavery or the Fugitive Slave Law might receive stinging rebukes from the bench that hurt their case in the eyes of the jury. Instead the defense focused on saving their client's life, as his acquittal would likely benefit the cause of abolitionism more than any courtroom debate on slavery. Hanway's attorneys employed a three-part plan for what they hoped would produce a favorable verdict. First, they needed to immediately neutralize the treason charge of its negative implications in the eyes of the jury by ridiculing the prosecution for making such a preposterous allegation. Next, to invalidate prosecutorial efforts to prove a conspiracy by illustrating that Parker's self-defense organization was created to protect against kidnappings and not to overthrow the government. Lastly, demonstrating that the prosecution was administering a show trial for an anxious government less concerned with treason and more worried about sectional politics. This third aspect also appeared to contain an amusing secondary feature. By accusing the government of trying Hanway only to alleviate southern angst, the defense hoped it would cause dissension between the prosecution's lawyers representing Pennsylvania and those representing Maryland

causing them to bicker amongst themselves. This possibility of a prosecutorial implosion was remote, yet it could only serve as an added bonus.²⁷

The overall strategy was fairly straightforward and likely fostered a great deal of confidence among those at the defense table. Hanway had an accomplished group of attorneys arguing against a prosecution that seemed to be grasping at straws. But the defense's approach did have a weakness in that it hinged upon jurists allowing them the necessary latitude to sufficiently deride the treason charge and disparage the federal government without being held in contempt of court. The patience of Judges Grier and Kane would surely be tested as they were not renowned for sympathizing with the plight of abolitionism or fugitive slaves.²⁸ There was also the jury to contend with who, although their composition was satisfactory to the defense, were always an intangible element that could swing against the defendant should his lawyers attain juridical disfavor. This case was by no means an easy victory; the defense would still have to do their utmost to keep Hanway from the gallows.

In his opening arguments, defense attorney Theodore Cuyler took little time in attacking the absurdity of the government's case. This was a shrewd maneuver as attorneys are effectively forbidden from making objections during their opponents opening or closing statements. Ashmead and his colleagues could only shift anxiously in their chairs as Cuyler told the jury of his "painful surprise, that a charge so grave has been founded upon evidence so weak." Hanway had been dragged "from his quiet home" and "compelled to spend so many sad and weary hours in the loneliness of his

²⁷ J. Katz, p. 180; The three-part defense strategy is implicit in Cuyler's opening statement, see Robbins, pp. 106-111.

²⁸ Jackson, pp. 54-57; Oyez Project, "Robert C. Grier," Chicago-Kent College of Law, http://www.oyez.org/justices/robert_c_grier (accessed January 3, 2012); Robbins, pp. 268-269.

cell,” Cuyler maintained, “awaiting an uncertain future, and a trial upon an almost unheard-of charge, to be supported by evidence of the nature of which he scarcely knew.” Cuyler immediately exposed the political nature of the case by referring to Brent’s presence among the prosecutors. “The State of Maryland is here to-day, in the person of her Attorney General.... Far be it from me to say, that she thirst for the blood of this man [Hanway]; and yet I have seen events occur upon the trial of this case, which might almost justify this remark.” He kept the spotlight on Brent while insulting Pennsylvanian’s state pride, an obvious attempt to arouse the jury’s—and Ashmead’s—resentment towards Maryland. The state of Maryland is represented on the prosecution because she “distrusts the justice of Pennsylvania,” Cuyler argued, and “she distrusts the faithfulness to their sworn duty of the officers of the General Government. She is here to-day by her own counsel, in what she regards as her own case.” As Cuyler neared the conclusion of his opening remarks, he dramatically called upon the common sense of the jurors by satirically rebuking the treason charge. Similar to an actor addressing his admiring audience, Cuyler inquired whether the jury understood the facts that were to sustain the charge of treason:

Did you hear it? That three harmless, non-resisting Quakers, and eight-and-thirty wretched, miserable, penniless negroes, armed with corn-cutters, clubs, and a few muskets, and headed by a miller, in a felt hat, without a coat, without arms, and mounted on a sorrel nag, levied war against the United States. Blessed be God that our Union has survived the shock.²⁹

As for the existence of a conspiracy, the defense countered that the mutual protection association was not explicitly created to counter the Fugitive Slave Law, but its establishment was to protect blacks from a rash of kidnappings. Thaddeus Stevens

²⁹ Robbins, pp. 107-109.

introduced the Gap Gang's infamous legacy into the proceedings describing them as a local group of "professional kidnapers" who had invaded houses on numerous occasions looking for black men, "seized and transported these men away, and they have never afterwards been seen or known of in those parts." He argued that the defendants were only seeking to preserve their liberty from well-known villains who violently apprehended both fugitive and free blacks. "It is well founded that these kidnapers were caught in the very act of dragging a man off in chains, never to be brought back," Stevens stated, "It is to show the reason why a whole neighborhood might be ready upon a notice given (upon the repetition of such a crime as that) to go to a place." He endeavored to call witnesses that could testify to the existence of the Gap Gang along with other kidnapers who had stalked the Christiana countryside in just the past year. The prosecution objected, countering that those considered "kidnapers" might very well have been masters legally recapturing their escaped slaves. Stevens maintained that the alleged "rioters" were only acting in self-defense with no intention of overthrowing the government. "The great question to be considered by this court...[is] what brought together these people, some armed and some unarmed," he declared. "For if they have come together with a lawful intent, and afterwards, even they who came with such intent, committed murder, it is not treason." Stevens argued that Hanway went to the scene because, "he was informed that there were kidnapers trying to kidnap Parker, whom it was supposed was the object of the attack." If given the necessary latitude by the court, Stevens was confident that the defense could differentiate illegal kidnappings from legal recaptures and it was the former that placed Christiana in a state of constant anxiety. The defense would show, "that if anybody should suspect in that neighborhood that there was

a covert term or a slang phrase used, and that kidnappers did not mean kidnappers,” Stevens assured, “to show that it did mean those who followed that business for a living.” The defense’s line of reasoning appeared to win the argument. Prosecutorial objections of irrelevance fell on deaf ears as even Judge Grier admitted to environment and psychology playing a factor in the case when he spoke metaphorically:

Suppose the sheriff came to my door, and I fired at him out of my window and killed him, under such circumstances you might infer I did it with the intention to murder an officer of the law. But suppose I could show, that a few nights, or even months ago, a person had broken into my house, and committed a robbery, would you not infer from that fact, that my mind was bent upon something else, and far from my intention to murder the sheriff? For that very same reason the same state of facts might justly apply to a case like this, and where a whole neighborhood might be ready to come together in a case of notice given that kidnappers were abroad, and not for the purpose of a conspiracy to resist the laws.³⁰

This was a crucial victory for the defense, but also one that exposed the bizarre rationalizations of the white antebellum mentality when it came to race. That so much time was even spent in a court of law arguing over the term “kidnappers” showed just how far slavery had gone in morally corrupting white reasoning. There was no such debate over illegal versus legal kidnappers in the black community. To Parker and his racial brethren, all slave catchers were kidnappers no matter the scrap of paper they held in their hand. In this regard, the defense brilliantly played on the racism of the prosecution by making it seem as if the black rioters were oblivious to the existence of the Fugitive Slave Law. This hurt the prosecution’s treason charge by making the riot a resistance against kidnappers and not against the federal government, which was represented by Kline. Ever willing to accept black ignorance, the prosecution focused on Hanway and neglected to show that Parker’s self-defense organization was, in fact, aware

³⁰ Robbins, pp. 109-114.

of the Fugitive Slave Law. Ashmead and his cohorts were again infected by the “white myth” surrounding the riot, as it was apparently unfathomable to them that blacks could understand the fugitive law, and then if that were possible, still break it. Grier’s admission became a crucial victory for the defense with white supremacy actually benefiting the black defendants. It precipitated numerous witnesses being called who testified of past kidnapping incidents and the terrified state of the black community. This allowed the defense to contend that there was no deliberate premeditation on the part of the rioters to violate the Fugitive Slave Law, as it was kidnappers who prompted the creation of the mutual protection association.³¹

The defense team next endeavored to show their client in the proper light. However, Hanway did not take the stand in his own defense, his lawyers unwilling to give the prosecution a potential opportunity of manipulating the defendant. Instead, the defense attempted to shed the “radical” moniker the prosecution had placed upon their client’s character by calling witnesses who attested to his conduct at the riot scene as well as his overall reputation. Elijah Lewis took the stand to rebut the Gorsuch posse’s testimony that Hanway had somehow encouraged the blacks rioters. Lewis described how after Hanway refused to help Marshal Kline arrest the fugitives, a number of black men closed in as if to shoot at the Gorsuch party. Lewis testified that Hanway turned to the black men and cried, “don’t shoot! don’t shoot! for God’s sake, don’t shoot!,” then told Kline to take his men and leave. When asked if he heard Hanway tell the Marshal “he cared nothing about the Act of Congress or any other law,” Lewis simply responded, “He did not, that I heard him.” Isaac Rogers, an onlooker during the riot, followed Lewis on the

³¹ Smedley, p. 115; For witnesses testifying of past kidnappings see Robbins, pp. 114-118.

stand. Rogers testified that after the shooting started, Hanway turned on his horse and yelled “don’t shoot, boys” several times to a group of black men chasing Dr. Pearce. The defense continued by calling thirteen character witnesses to the stand who referred to Hanway as a “quiet man” and spoke of his “peaceable and loyal” nature.³²

The defense closed with attorney J. J. Lewis arguing that the defendant was innocent of treason, and his actions outside the Parker home were that of a peacemaker. Lewis astutely proceeded to once again underscore the politically charged nature of the case in its relation with slavery. This took the spotlight off his client and threw it upon an administration desperate to satiate southern interests. He criticized the government’s knee-jerk reaction in even bringing a treason charge and again highlighted the presence of prosecuting attorneys representing the state of Maryland. Lewis condemned the government for yielding to public opinion in its hasty consecration to the memory of Edward Gorsuch. “Had passion been allowed to subside, and had the mock patriot and hero to whom this prosecution is indebted for its origin...been permitted to slide back in the slime of this filthy track, to his condition of insignificance and contempt,” he dramatically insisted to the jury, “you would never have had the duty which has fallen upon you now.” Focusing on his counterparts, Lewis claimed the prosecutors were deluded by a misapprehension that in Sadsbury Township, “there prevails an unwholesome and unpatriotic spirit...upon the subject of the Fugitive Slave Law, and that Castner Hanway is one of those who cherishes the bane of these opinions, and that therefore he was fitted to become a sacrifice to the spirit of concord.” He argued that the government would never have brought the case had it not been for the ulterior motives of

³² Robbins, pp. 120-121, 128-129, 144-146.

Maryland authorities. With one final parting shot, Lewis wondered, “Can it be that the State of Maryland has some peculiar object here in view, something to answer by this prosecution? Can it be that it is expected to terrify the people of the north, or the people of Pennsylvania, from looking on whenever any attempt is made to arrest blacks, whether fleeing from slavery, or expected to be fleeing from slavery—from looking on to see that no freeman is taken away, that they may have a free field to themselves?”³³

After both sides rested their cases on December 16, Judge Grier supplied the jury with final instructions before their deliberation. He gave a general explanation of the legal issues involved, asking the jury to decide whether Hanway committed the crimes for which he was accused and whether that involvement amounted to treason. Grier then took the opportunity to implicitly condemn abolitionism in a personal diatribe where he alluded to its adherents as “individuals of perverted intellect,” “infuriated fanatics,” and “unprincipled demagogues.” The judge echoed the views of much of the national press by arguing that abolitionists were those truly responsible for the riot. “The guilt of this foul murder rests not alone on the deluded individuals who were its immediate perpetrators, but the blood taints with even deeper dye the skirts of those who promulgated doctrines subversive of all morality and all government.” Yet in a surprising admission, Grier also added that he did not find sufficient evidence to convict Hanway on the charge of treason. There was no proof that the white miller had “any previous connection” with the rioters or that he was a member of any abolitionist organizations “who stimulate and exhort poor negroes to the perpetration of offences, which they know must bring them to the penitentiary or the gallows.” The judge found

³³ Robbins, pp. 179-190.

no proof of either a conspiracy to overthrow the government or that the rioters even knew they were breaking the Fugitive Slave Law when resisting who they thought were kidnappers. The crux of the matter came from Grier differing with his fellow jurist over the definition of “levying war.”³⁴

Two months earlier, Judge Kane had instructed a grand jury that “levying war” was defined by any action that “embraces...any combination forcibly to prevent or oppose the execution...of the Constitution.” Grier continued with his jury instructions by disagreeing with this assessment, arguing that there was a difference between private and public insurrection that ultimately relied on a broader intent—the very motive the prosecution ultimately failed to prove. To Grier, forcibly resisting a law without any broader intent beyond obstructing its execution was a private act and thereby not treasonous. For an insurrection to be legally defined as treason, he stressed that it must be of a “*public nature*” in its aspirations to overthrow the government. Without openly stating it, Grier provided an example that sounded suspiciously similar to the community of Christiana:

A number of fugitive slaves may infest a neighborhood, and may be encouraged by the neighbors in combining to resist the capture of any of their number; they may resist with force and arms, their master or the public officer, who may come to arrest them; they may murder and rob them; they are guilty of felony and liable to punishment, but not as traitors. Their insurrection is for a private object, and connected with no public purpose.

He considered it understandable that blacks would defend themselves from continual assaults by kidnappers, yet “the existence of such feelings is no evidence of a determination or conspiracy by the people to publicly resist any legislation of Congress,

³⁴ J. Katz, pp. 231-232; Robbins, pp. 241-248.

or levy war against the United States.” The judge was uncomfortable with the government’s constructive use of treason and implored jurors to avoid setting a precarious example for future cases. While Grier conceded the rioters were indeed guilty of “aggravated riot and murder,” these crimes were punishable in state courts and it “would be a dangerous precedent for the Court and jury in this case to extend the crime of treason by construction to doubtful cases.”³⁵

Following the judge’s instructions, the jury retired to the aptly named American House where they had resided throughout the trial. Before those in attendance even had a chance to properly stretch their legs the jury was already filing back into the courtroom. With Grier’s advice still fresh in their minds, it took the jury fifteen minutes to decide on a verdict of “not guilty.” The courtroom gallery received the news “in a becoming manner” as Grier’s comments foretold the outcome thus dissolving any sense of tension. Defense attorney John Read reported that some of the jurors later told him they were ready to acquit before the defense even opened. The failure of the government to secure a guilty verdict against Hanway subsequently led to federal charges being dropped for all the other defendants. The accused were taken back to Lancaster to be tried on lesser offenses, but all were eventually acquitted. The case had simply become too controversial, local officials were unwilling to risk their careers on a case the federal government could not even prove and where the principal rioters had escaped anyway. All told, the local and federal cases against the Christiana rioters cost taxpayers over fifty thousand dollars and ended without a single conviction on any charge.³⁶

³⁵ Robbins, pp. 268-269, 241-248

³⁶ Hensel, pp. 89-90; Douglass, p. 7; J. Katz, pp. 234-238; Jackson, p. 85; “Riot Recalled,” *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 9, 2001.

The acquittal of Hanway pleased northern audiences while incensing southern ones. Abolitionists were thrilled with the verdict not only for the release of Hanway, but also because the publicity of the controversial case had significantly increased their membership. J. Miller McKim of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society wrote to Garrison how, “the cause is in a very promising position just now.... These Treason Trials have been a great windfall.” Oliver Johnson informed Congressman Joshua Giddings, “The treason trials are making a great deal of talk here now, and thousands are ready to listen who have long been indifferent.” On December 18, Hanway and Lewis attended a raucous anti-slavery rally in Philadelphia where Giddings referred to the Fugitive Slave Law as “an outrage upon the Constitution” while maintaining that if he were a slave, he would fight for his liberty even if it meant walking “over the dead bodies of slaveholders all the way from the borders of Kentucky to the Canada line....” Upon hearing that two of the “Christiana Traitors” were present, the audience pleaded for them to come to the platform. Hanway and Lewis reluctantly stepped on stage amidst thunderous applause. Giddings stood between the two men, took each by the hand and stated to the crowd, “I declare to you, my friends, that I am far prouder in being able to grasp the hands of these brave men, than I should be to receive the applause of the mightiest prince that ever trod the footstool of the Almighty.” Others in the North were more restrained in their celebrations. New York Senator William Seward was elated over the verdict, yet empathized with Ashmead for the impossible position the administration had placed him. “While I cannot but rejoice in the result of that trial as a new assurance of the security of Popular Liberty,” Seward wrote the U. S. Attorney, “I am not unable to appreciate the ability with which you have maintained the untenable position which the

Government was made to assume.” The senator could only hope, “it may be the good fortune of the cause of truth and justice hereafter to enlist you on their side.”³⁷

Some northerners were less concerned with Hanway and more exultant that the government’s constructive use of the treason was struck down, fearing that if it was upheld, it could lead to nominal criminal acts becoming a capital offense. The Lancaster *Examiner and Herald* was relieved by the verdict, “If a latitudinarian construction of the law of treason were adopted, facts of minor criminality...could be forged into treason by the hammer and anvil of a violent interpretation, and safeguards of the Constitution annulled by judicial legislation.” The Whig newspaper congratulated Judge Grier for “his manly and explicit exposition of the law” in ruling that the rioters’ actions did not amount to treason and insisted that the “South as well as the North will recognize the impartial fidelity with which this trial was conducted and decided.” Lancaster’s *Saturday Express* knew Hanway would be acquitted of treason from the outset, yet confessed that perhaps there was a silver lining to Hanway being charged with a crime all but impossible to prove because it simultaneously secured his innocence while pacifying southern indignation. “From the evidence given in this city, we did not believe the offence amounted to the dignity of treason; but it is perhaps as well that it has been held as such, that the South may be convinced that there is every disposition on the part of the people of this State to see the Slave law maintained and executed.” Almost a year later, Hanway’s trial was still being discussed on the floor of Congress as Wisconsin’s Free-

³⁷ “J. Miller McKim to William Lloyd Garrison,” December 31, 1852, quoted in Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line: The Legend of the Underground Railroad* (University Press of Kentucky, 1961), pp. 134-135; O. Johnson to Joshua R. Giddings, “Giddings Papers,” microfilm 7, reel 3, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH; *Pennsylvania Freeman*, n.d.; *Liberator*, January 9, 1852; “William H. Seward to John W. Ashmead,” December 25, 1851, reprinted in Hensel, p. 94.

Soil Representative Charles Durkee criticized the government for over-reaching with its treason charge:

The citizens of Christiana, for acting out their noblest instincts in self-defence...were charged by our Government with 'treason.' What an insult to the American people! Is it 'promoting the general welfare' to declare...a part of our population outlaws, without any disloyalty on their part, and then to charge them with treason for defending themselves against an attack of marauders and barbarians? Thank God, our courts have not quite come yet to the support of such an infamous doctrine as that of 'constructive treason'!³⁸

Below the Mason-Dixon, the verdict infuriated radicals with talk of secession again echoing throughout southern states. Maryland's General Assembly created a legislative committee to investigate the Christiana Riot. The committee determined that although the risk of chasing runaways was too high, personal pride and honor continued to dictate slaveholders' actions:

The cost of capturing a fugitive slave, even where the master may chance to be successful, is greater than his value, and yet masters have attempted to enforce their rights, even at a pecuniary loss and the risk of life, because they felt it their solemn duty to assert, at any cost and all hazard, their chartered rights, which had been ruthlessly invaded.

Governor Lowe was livid, calling the trial a "farce" that rendered the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter. A month after Hanway's acquittal, Lowe alluded to the ruling in his annual address to the General Assembly of Maryland. Fearful that the verdict would encourage abolitionists and lead to increased violence along the Mason-Dixon, he cautioned Pennsylvanians, "that, henceforth, words will give place to acts," warning, "Beware that your State does not become a mockery!" Lowe continued his aggressive tone by couching secessionist threats in foreign policy terms that were charged with highly

³⁸ "The Hanway Trial," *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, December 17, 1851; "The Christiana Cases," *Lancaster Saturday Express*, December 20, 1851; "The Fugitive Slave Law, &c.: Speech of Chs. Durkee, of Wisconsin," *The National Era*, August 26, 1852. Durkee switched to the Republican Party in 1854.

politicized rhetoric. He warned that it would indeed be a calamity to other nations if “domestic feuds” destroyed the United States. America was supposed to be an example to other nations:

And yet, when American blood is made to flow upon American soil, as a grateful libation to American fanaticism; when whole communities stand listlessly by, and a prostituted press and venal politicians are found...to glory in the human sacrifice; when the Law proclaims its own weakness from the Bench, and Treason stalks unpunished, through the halls of justice; the Nations can judge of the probable remoteness of that calamity.³⁹

Thomas Gorusuch, Edward’s youngest son, was similarly outraged by the verdict and the lack of justice his family received from a Pennsylvania court of law. He wrote of the riot to a close friend describing how a band of “nigger abolitionists” killed his father and were subsequently set free by a Yankee jury. In his friend’s mind, the Christiana Riot and the acquittal of the defendants were blatant injustices that demanded revenge. A few years later, Tom’s friend drafted a speech which revealed how the riot and the futility of northern authorities to provide “justice for the South” had a major impact on his feelings toward slavery and the impossibility of the South amicably remaining united with the North. The friend was an actor named John Wilkes Booth.⁴⁰

Governor Lowe’s secessionist threats failed to provoke any meaningful response. While disunion was intimated by southern agitationists, most Americans found it unlikely that the nation would actually be split asunder. By the 1850s, southern threats of secession had become such a familiar refrain that northerners had grown numb to their admonitions much like a parent dealing with a petulant child. Southerners spoke of

³⁹ “Committee Report,” Maryland State Documents, 1852, Document O, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD, p. 15; “Annual Message,” Maryland State Documents, 1852, Document A, Maryland State Archives, Annapolis, MD, p. 39; Hensel, p. 95.

⁴⁰ Rettew, p. 28; John Rhodehamel and Louise Taper, eds., “Right or Wrong, God Judge Me,” *The Writings of John Wilkes Booth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), pp. 49-64.

disunion over any northern affront, making Lowe's remarks appear as merely a typical response to another case of besmirched southern pride. A decade later, doubters would be shown the error of their ways as the southern aggravation produced by the riot failed to subside. It only worsened because of northern defiance of the Fugitive Slave Law, "Bloody" Kansas, John Brown's raid, the election of Abraham Lincoln, and finally the firing on Fort Sumter. Surprisingly, it was Lancaster's small temperance newspaper that accurately looked into its crystal ball when the Christiana Riot occurred. Nine days after the incident, *The Saturday Express* ran the headline "Civil War.—The First Blow Struck".⁴¹

⁴¹ "Civil War.—The First Blow Struck," *Lancaster Saturday Express*, September 20, 1851.

Chapter V

Reconciled by Color

Writing in 1887, northern novelist and Union veteran Albion Tourgee reflected on the American public's psychological need for forgetfulness after partaking in war.

“Immediately upon the conclusion of any great conflict,” he wrote, “there always comes a period when public interest in the causes and incidents of the strife may be said to lag. The soldier is glad to be at home and rest from ‘war’s alarms,’ and the noncombatant has heard more than enough about the struggle in which he had no part.” After homecoming celebrations for returning troops “the people turn away from the agony of strife and seek relief in lighter themes. The conquerors pall of triumph and the conquered shun whatever reminds them of defeat.” Tourgee considered such behavior “inevitable” in the initial phase of peace, but was particularly concerned with the nation’s revitalized interest in the Civil War some two decades after its culmination. He lamented the frequency with which northerners were disregarding the principles behind the war over apprehensions of upsetting their southern brethren. Because of a “morbid sentimentality,” the public was “ignoring the righteousness of the National cause and noble simplicity of motive which inspired its supporters, because of a silly fear that the feelings of those who fought on the other side might be injured by the assertion of these facts.” Tourgee believed that an overwhelming nationalist impulse for reconciliation was deluding Americans into a sense of moral relativism where neither the Union nor Confederate cause was considered right or wrong. “Inspired by an unparalleled benignity,” Americans were comparing Union and Confederate Generals, “from a purely military standpoint...as if the question of

loyalty to the Nation were a mere accident, for which the one class were entitled to no credit and the other deserving of no disparagement.” In Tourgee’s estimation, this selective use of historical memory had produced “a tendency to forget altogether the fact that a war could not be waged for the preservation of the Union unless some one was responsible for the attempt to destroy it.”¹

From the surrender at Appomattox through the second decade of the twentieth century, Civil War memory underwent a profound transformation in the minds of the American people. The blind nationalism Albion Tourgee so desperately warned against effectively subjugated the divisive issues of cause and consequence beneath a facade of reconciliation. This historical process of settling past differences for the good of the country is not uncommon to American sensibilities especially when it comes to moving beyond the politically distasteful. Historian Michael Kammen defined public memory as “a slowly shifting configuration of traditions” and found “a powerful tendency in the United States to depoliticize traditions for the sake of ‘reconciliation.’” He argued that the “politics of culture” create a “process of contestation” whereby reconciliation becomes the necessary byproduct for the nation to unite and move forward in common cause. “Memory is more likely to be activated by contestation, and amnesia is more likely to be induced by the desire for reconciliation.” For reconciliation to occur in the postwar decades, Americans conveniently underwent a historical amnesia to forget the underlying tenet of a war that resulted in over half a million deaths—slavery. To foster a spirit of reunion between North and South, the bothersome matter of race needed to be

¹ Albion Tourgee, “The Renaissance of Nationalism,” *North American Review* 144 (January 1887), pp. 1-6.

confronted or evaded. White Americans chose the latter, gradually ignoring black participation in a war that was partly fought to end slavery.²

In his accomplished book *Race and Reunion*, David Blight studied the theme of white reconciliation, identifying three forms of Civil War memory that “collided and combined over time.” What he termed “the reconciliationist vision”—Americans who wanted North and South to forgive and reunite, “the white supremacist vision”—Americans who wanted a Civil War legacy devoid of the race issue, and “the emancipationist vision”—Americans who recognized the war as liberating blacks, became locked in a struggle over how the war would be remembered. From the 1880s onward, the “reconciliationist” and “white supremacist” visions would unite to win this battle effectively excluding their “emancipationist” counterpart from national memory. The victory of white reconciliation was so complete that by the first decade of the twentieth century “varieties of reconciliationist and white supremacist memory fused into a potent force,” Blight stated, “while emancipationist memories were thrown on the defensive.”³ From 1865-1915, white reconciliation would become a cultural phenomenon, a supreme act of forgiveness to bridge a sectional divide. Instances of political oscillation, economic uncertainty, and cultural practices such as mourning rituals, martial brotherhood, Civil War reminiscences, southern literature, veteran encampments, and public memorials occurred simultaneously and slowly coalesced into an addictive opiate that caused white citizens in both the North and South to agree on a reunion devoid of the racial component that underlaid the war’s political rationale. A jingoistic fervor seized Civil War memory, with white reconciliation being perceived as a necessary nationalist prerogative. African-

² Kammen, p. 13.

³ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 64, 2, 354.

Americans attempted to circumvent this accord by toiling to maintain the war's emancipationist legacy, but they struggled against unrelenting structural forces. Over time, the cacophony of white voices calling for reunion effectively became too loud to sufficiently quell for a black minority paradoxically being stripped of its own civil rights during the era of Jim Crow. The Civil War had indeed extinguished slavery, yet by the early twentieth century it seemed African-Americans were the only individuals who remained cognizant of that fact. A memory they silently clung to while patiently waiting for whites to realize some semblance of racial equality and awaken from their historical amnesia.

In May 1866, Thaddeus Stevens, in his typical grandiose manner, rose to address the U.S. House concerning the readmission of former Confederate congressman: "Do not, I pray you, admit those who have slaughtered half a million of our countrymen until their clothes are dried, and until they are reclad," he proclaimed. "I do not wish to sit side by side with men whose garments smell of the blood of my kindred." Although Civil War hostilities officially ended a year earlier, the battle over beliefs, principles, and ideals had only just begun as radical Republicans such as Stevens argued with southern Democrats over the meaning of the war. Such harsh rhetoric became commonplace during the immediate postwar period as politicians battled to shape the future of a newly reunited nation. In vicious political battles that adhered clearly along sectional lines, both northern and southern politicians waved the bloody shirt to sustain wartime animosities that would help in securing their elections and the passage of legislation. Calls to remember the war, what it was fought for, and why so many had died reverberated

throughout the country as radical Republicans demanded an ideological revolution in terms of racial equality while southern Democrats directly challenged such a scheme by appealing to white solidarity. Union victory combined with weakened southern institutions to provide Republicans with both a mandate and the political power necessary to control postwar policy.⁴ The readmission of former Confederate states to the Union would come on decidedly Republican terms with Yankee retribution and African-American assistance being the guiding principle.

In the years immediately following the Civil War, radical Republican doctrine was based on an emancipationist mindset. It held that the war was fought to reinvent the republic and procure equal rights for blacks. Under the policy of Reconstruction, radical Republicans attempted to remake the South in the North's image to align it with their postwar vision. The ballot in the hands of ex-slaves would be the key to this regeneration with racial democracy as its cornerstone. Enforcement of black voting rights, the temporary disfranchisement of former Confederates, passage of the Fourteenth Amendment which guaranteed citizenship to all those born in the U.S. regardless of race, and the stationing of federal troops in the South, were all passed in an effort to compel southern states into recognizing a policy of racial egalitarianism with acceptance of these precepts being mandatory for readmission to the Union. In 1866, Radical Republicans renewed the Freedman's Bureau, a wartime government agency tasked with providing aid to freedpeople, and passed a civil rights act. The following year, the former Confederacy was divided into five military districts whereby black suffrage could be monitored and

⁴ For Stevens quote see *Congressional Globe*, May 8, 1866, 39th Congress, 1st session. After a six year hiatus, Thaddeus Stevens was once again elected as Lancaster County's Congressional Representative in 1858. He served until his death on August 11, 1868; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 98-103, 128-129.

enforced through force of arms if necessary. With begrudging acceptance, all ex-Confederate states would eventually rejoin the Union by 1870. The policy of Reconstruction not only gave radicals a newfound hope for a revitalized nation, it also provided them with increased political power as thousands of black voters became the core constituency of the Republican Party in the South.⁵

The auspices of an activist federal government might have secured the passage of radical Republican policies, but it could not overcome the resistance of a stubborn southern conscience. Perceptions of Reconstruction were markedly grim below the Mason-Dixon with southerners ascribing themselves as victims to a peculiar northern arrogance whereby Yankees were overstepping their bounds and imposing unjust dictates on a vulnerable people. Southern resistance stemmed largely from the granting of rights to some 4.5 million freedmen. While the passage of the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments legally mandated black civil rights, it had the unintended consequence of strengthening white supremacy in the South. Southern Democrats fanned the flames of white counter-revolution by citing black inferiority and appealing to fears of racial amalgamation. After Democrats won back control of many ex-Confederate states in the 1872 elections, blacks and their white Republican allies quickly became targets of a frustrated southern populace seeking the return of a status quo antebellum. Through both legal and extra-legal methods, Democrats segregated the races and discriminated against blacks while organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Knights of the White Camelia terrorized dissenters. According to historian Eric Foner, the KKK became one of the Democrats' most effective political means to "destroy the Republican Party's

⁵ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 2, 32, 55, 46-47.

infrastructure, undermine the Reconstruction state, reestablish control of the black labor force, and restore racial subordination in every aspect of southern life.”⁶

As the animus over Reconstruction grew, political reaction to Democratic tactics became increasingly muted as white and black Republicans struggle to maintain a united front. Inter-party squabbling over issues related to power sharing and the best method to counter Democrat strategies hindered the Republican Party from suitably reacting to the white supremacist threat. Further Reconstruction efforts would meet with discouraging results as the activism of radical Republicans gave way to the corrupt administration of President Ulysses S. Grant while federal officials struggled to deal with an uncooperative South. Adding to difficulties was the Panic of 1873 that distracted many northern Republicans from social issues in the South to more pressing economic needs back home. The fiscal crisis played on American apprehensions of a nation in societal chaos and illustrated the country’s desperate need for economic expansion. Fears over the devastating impact of social and financial disorder caused many Americans to clamor for sectional reconciliation as a means of gaining control over the sense of dislocation that was surrounding them. Such difficulties caused the creation of a “New South” to effectively become *persona non grata* in most Republican circles. The cumulative effects of southern resistance and the Panic of 1873 caused Republicans to negotiate away Reconstruction in the Compromise of 1877 whereby southern states were granted

⁶ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 98-103, 130; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 31-34; Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration & Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), pp. 101-102; Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction: 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), p. 184.

sovereignty over their governmental and racial issues in exchange for the installation of Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes as President.⁷

As blue and gray clashed on the battlefield in the latter years of the Civil War, Americans began struggling psychologically with the profound sense of loss the conflict was exacting. In attempting to cope with so many deaths, a sense of mourning enshrouded the nation as survivors struggled to “let go” in an effort to move forward or begin again. Sigmund Freud defined mourning as “the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal.” For many Americans the “ideal” responsible for over 600,000 war deaths required something more than the grieving of family and friends. It demanded proper recognition in the public sphere to not only memorialize the eternal sacrifices of those who perished, but why they perished. In this sense, the mourning of Civil War dead became less a personal experience for many Americans and more of a shared social ritual designed to openly grieve idealistic martyrdom. Public mourning allowed Americans to directly engage their trauma by offering an opportunity for personal and spiritual renewal, or what Dominick LaCapra characterized as “a reinvestment in, or recathexis of, life which allows one to begin again.”⁸

⁷ Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 98-102; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 123-129, 63, 138.

⁸ Peter Homans, ed. *Symbolic Loss: The Ambiguity of Mourning and Memory at Century's End* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 2000), pp. 2-3; Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), p. 243; David R. Counts and Dorothy A. Counts, *Coping with the Final Tragedy: Cultural Variation in Dying and Grieving* (Amityville: NY, Baywood Publishing Company, 1991), p. 7; Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 66.

Before the war had officially concluded, informal ceremonies of remembrance were already springing up throughout the country as citizens sought refuge in song, prayer, and solemn recollection to honor the fallen and their noble cause. In 1868 the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a Union veteran organization, consolidated these events into an observance named “Decoration Day.” Americans in both the North and South carried flowers to Civil War graves and monuments in somber rituals designed to foster patriotism and alleviate sorrow. In most communities, women became the primary organizers of Decoration Day as the loss of husbands, sons, and fathers weighed heavily on a female population desperately searching for a coping mechanism. Such exercises offered women a venue to publicly grieve, as well as, the opportunity to actively ensure the proper recognition for their fallen kin. Decoration Day activities led to the emergence of the northern Women’s Relief Corps, which totaled some ninety thousand female members devoted to memorializing the Union’s fallen heroes. In the South, local women’s groups, such as the Ladies Memorial Association of Charleston, were at the forefront of public commemoration organizing Decoration Day ceremonies in their respective cities. By the early 1870s, this day of mourning had evolved into a cultural pageant that included parades, speeches, concerts, picnics, and baseball games in what eventually become Memorial Day.⁹

Eric Hobsbawm referred to “invented tradition” as a ritualized set of practices designed to “inculcate certain values and norms of behavior” that used “history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion.” For millions of nineteenth-century

⁹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 64-71; Cecilia O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 75-83; Mary Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 42.

Americans, Decoration Day became a necessary “invented tradition,” one regarded as indispensable in dealing with an ever-changing society. As postwar northerners faced a growing sense of isolation and dislocation from waves of European immigrants, a changing urban landscape, and massive industrialization, the official nature of Decoration Day ceremonies encouraged societal harmony through public mourning and became a comforting reminder of a simpler time when traditional social patterns held sway. Early Decoration Day ceremonies above the Mason-Dixon united northerners by regularly heralding the war’s political causes and its emancipationist legacy. Speakers commonly referenced Union dead as patriotic sacrifices necessary for the endurance of the republic and the elimination of slavery. “Civilization is measured by the respect paid to its dead,” Cleveland prosecutor H. B. DeWolf argued before a Berea, Ohio audience. He compared Federal troops to the ancient Romans and Greeks asking, “have we less cause than they to speak of the heroism of those who in their country’s peril sprang to the breach, and bared their breasts to the assault upon liberty?” DeWolf approved of the gratitude shown Union dead and how, “all speak of the act of that great and good man who...changed the status of four millions of God’s humanity from the social condition of oxen to the standing of men.” Vermont’s wartime Governor J. Gregory Smith declared in his home state of how “the first gun fired at Fort Sumptor [sic] aroused all lovers of the union,” and expressed his pride in witnessing Union soldiers’ eagerness to fight no matter the dangers that potentially awaited them. “Not the chances of being slain on the field of battle, or of dying by disease, or of starvation in Southern prisons, could daunt their courage or hold them back from doing their duty when their county was in danger.” Speaking before a crowd in Gloucester, Massachusetts, General Benjamin Butler insisted that Union troops

willfully gave their lives not to preserve their own liberties, “but to save the outcast and the slave from a master’s whip...to restore him to that manhood of which head had been deprived, and raise him again erect in the image of God from the earth into which he had been crushed.”¹⁰

In 1869, a Decoration Day ceremony held in Arlington National Cemetery elicited controversy when a contingent of marines was stationed around the graves of Confederate dead preventing any efforts to adorn southern burial places. One gentleman slipped past the guards and placed roses on a Confederate soldier’s grave only to see them kicked aside by an alerted marine. The GAR defended the prohibition on decorating southern graves admitting that they were willing to forgive their former enemies, “but we will never consent by public national tribute to obliterate the wide gulf which lies between the objects, motives and principles for which we fought and our comrades died, and those for which the rebel armies banded together.” For the GAR, Confederates were traitors and, while brave, nonetheless fought for slavery and “despotic intentions.” Refusing to permit the decoration of southern graves represented the GAR’s, “undying hostility to the ideas for which they [Confederates] fought and died. To do less than keep this distinction fresh in the national mind is to undermine the republic itself.”¹¹

In the South, Decoration Day was used in a similar manner to cope emotionally with military conquest, a fractured infrastructure, and an enforced Reconstruction. Festivities not only united southerners in their grief, but also filled the societal void of defeat by

¹⁰ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-12, 307; *Cleveland Daily Herald*, May 31, 1869; “Decoration Day at Northfield,” *Watchman and Journal* [Vermont], June 7, 1871; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 31, 1869.

¹¹ “At the Monument to the Unkown,” *National Intelligencer*, May 31, 1869; “Why the Graves of Rebel Soldiers were not Decorated-A Statement from the Headquarters of the Grand Army of the Republic,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 15, 1869.

reinvigorating a sense of civic pride that came from remembering the prewar cultural and racial ideals inherent to the “Old South.” At southern Decoration Day ceremonies Confederate dead were considered heroes who gave their lives valiantly defending their homes and culture. They sacrificed themselves defending the Confederate flag, a particularly ubiquitous symbol at these events signifying the indefatigable sectional pride of a spiritually undefeated people. Any mention of slavery or rebellion was ignored in order to focus on the true heroes to the cause—those fallen defenders of southern sovereignty. The *Memphis Daily Argus* regarded Decoration Day as one of “sweet remembrance,” a day to “lay aside our usual vocations of life and devote to the memory of our friends, brothers, husbands and sons, who have fallen in our late struggle for Southern independence.” The *Atlanta Daily Sun* professed the day as “a God-given sentiment of the human heart,” one in which to rightly honor “the memory of our friends and kindred, who sacrificed their lives in a cause which they honestly believe to be right and cherished as sacred.” To the *Virginian*, Decoration Day demonstrated that, “true feelings of tender affection and sympathy are still felt for those fallen braves who so gallantly laid down their lives in the cause of State’s rights and local self-government.” The *Virginian*’s editor considered the remembrance proper tribute for those “who gave their lives as a sacrifice on the altar of liberty, and we trust that the same pure patriotic spirit may continue to warm the Southern heart.”¹²

Other southerners combined Decoration Day laudations that honored the past with political condemnations that decried the present. Ceremonies were frequently tinged with an underlying anti-Reconstruction rhetoric that implied southern victimhood at the hands

¹² Hobsbawm, pp. 1-12; *Arkansas Gazette*, May 25, 1875; “The Floral Ceremony,” *Memphis Daily Argus*, April 27, 1866; *Atlanta Daily Sun*, May 12, 1872; *Lynchburg Virginian*, May 19, 1873.

of Yankee oppression. Georgian Henry Capers described the day as a time for southerners to “look away from the gloom of political bondage and fix our vision upon a coming day of triumph, when principles, born of truth and baptized in the blood of our brothers, shall out live the persecution of a merciless enemy and the treachery of unhallowed ambition.” Southern writer Herbert Fielder published a Decoration Day poem that went beyond merely memorializing fallen Confederates with stanzas intimating that the war was never about slavery or cultural racism:

 Their column rose on the annals of Time
 As her fleeing years rolled by,
 And bore to the stars their deeds sublime,
 And recorded them On High.
The joyous relief to our dead hopes, and grief,
Is the monument of applause
That all ages will pay to soldier and chief
Who fell in Liberty’s cause.

 These flowers, all dewy, at dawn were gathered—
 They are fresh, and sweet, and gay:
 They know not that Liberty is smothered,
 That her flag is folded away—
That her sun was clouded and her brier shrouded
By the invader flushed with glory;
That her vigils still keep, who hopelessly weep
Around her deathbed, all gory.

 No stars or stripes, no eagle’s crest or wing,
 Or envious Blue, in flowers,
 No Rebel bars or gray, they sing—
 These gem’s of home’s sweet bowers.
The chain’s rude clank is hushed and still
As those we love, in death,
No dungeon’s damp, heart-murdering chill
Is on the flowers’ sweet breath
Of Enforcement’s chains, or Kuklux slain,
Speak not these graves of ours,
And Power itself grows pale with shame
To deny them fresh-grown flowers.¹³

¹³ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 78; Gaines Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 42; *Georgia Weekly Telegraph*, May 20, 1873.

In this manner, Decoration Day in the South served more than just the comforting of grieving widows and orphans. It also served social and political purposes that reawakened southern pride, reasserted white supremacy, and rediscovered civic patriotism in the continuing conflict that was Reconstruction.

As Americans made the solemn adorning of graves an annual custom, Decoration Day became a formalized example of public memory for honoring the dead. John Bodnar defined public memory as emerging “from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions.” The former is composed of cultural leaders such as politicians, businessmen, lawyers, government bureaucrats, clerics, teachers, or military officers who “share a common interest in social unity, the continuity of existing institutions, and loyalty to the status quo.” Vernacular culture includes ordinary people representing a vast array of specialized interests yet connected by a shared intent to defend their values and reiterate localized views “derived from firsthand experience in small-scale communities rather than the ‘imagined’ communities of a large nation.” Bodnar argued that official culture tends to both coexist and dominate its vernacular counterpart, a process that was particularly evident in Decoration Day celebrations beginning eight years after the war.¹⁴

Subsequent to economic difficulties striking in the autumn of 1873, Americans in both the North and South progressively began celebrating Decoration Day together to foster a spirit of reunion that also conveniently avoided the bitterness of Reconstruction. That same year, the New York state legislature became the first to institute Decoration Day as

¹⁴ Bodnar, pp. 13-20.

an official holiday on May 30 establishing a precedent that was soon followed by other northern states. The reunion impulse that ingratiated itself into Decoration Day observances was also further enhanced by the spirit of sectional cooperation springing from the Compromise of 1877 that avoided another potential partisan divide. Official culture seized on this opportunity to make Decoration Day as much a celebration of nationalism as it was to honor the dead. Although Decoration Day affairs were typically organized by vernacular culture such as local women's groups, it was cultural leaders who comprised the majority of the speakers at such events. With Reconstruction negotiated away, the emancipationist vision was now notably absent from speeches replaced by a non-ideological memory of the war. Bodnar found that cultural leaders typically used commemorative events to "calm anxiety about change or political events, eliminate citizen indifference...promote exemplary patterns of citizen behavior, and stress citizen duties over rights."¹⁵ After 1873 Decoration Day orations did just that, regularly blending Christian forgiveness with patriotic appeals for reconciliation that swept political and sectional differences under the rug of history. National reunion became official culture's salve to the social, political, and economic wounds of the turbulent postbellum era. Speeches and editorials increasingly played on the cult of the fallen soldier, pointing to the shared suffering and valor of those who perished on both sides, and urged Americans to unite in the righteous bonds of friendship and forgiveness.

In the North, a Decoration Day association in Chicago overwhelmingly resolved in 1874 "that there should be no distinction made in the selection of soldiers' and sailors graves" and that Confederate dead "should receive the same kind attention at our hands,

¹⁵ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 84-87, 157, 71; Bodnar, p. 15.

as having been brave soldiers.” Upon hearing that New York’s GAR posts had withdrawn from its earlier hostility by determining not to distinguish between decorating the gravesites of Union and Confederate dead, Chicago’s *Inter-Ocean* newspaper welcomed the decision. “The sentiment of the majority of our people,” its editor commented, “is in favor of letting all bitterness of feeling die out as speedily as possible.” Three months after the Compromise of 1877, the *New York Herald* similarly spoke of forgetting the past so as forge ahead into the future, “all the issues on which the war of the rebellion was fought seem dead, and the late effort to manufacture political sentiment out of them was a signal failure. American eyes have a characteristic tendency to look forward and let the past be with itself.” A year later, even Union General William Sherman, the man who burned Atlanta and Savannah, had warmed to the necessity of reconciling with his former enemies. “I now hope that all good men, south and north, will unite in real earnest to repair the mistakes and wrongs of the past,” he told a New York audience, “will persevere in the common effort to make this great land of ours to blossom as the garden of Eden; will so unite in effort that every part of it...will be made so safe to life and property that men may engage safely in every possible pursuit.” At Arlington National Cemetery in 1881, Judge C. C. Waters declared that Americans approached Decoration Day “free from all antagonisms, devoid of all bitterness.” The passage of time “softens the intense feeling of the days of actual strife,” he contended. Waters wondered aloud if reconciliation was in danger of obscuring “the real issues of principle which then existed,” but ultimately concluded, “Not at all. Those principles

appear brighter and clearer as the years pass by, and will continue to do so till the end of time.”¹⁶

Down South, Decoration Day events were similarly awash with nationalist amnesia by equally venerating the immortal sacrifices of Union and Confederate dead. In 1875, a Decoration Day parade held in Memphis stretched a mile long with thousands of Confederate and Union veterans participating in the event. General Nathan Bedford Forrest, whose infamous reputation was apparently disregarded in his home state, headed the Confederate column. One carriage in the procession had a federal and a Confederate flag alongside one another made entirely of flowers, “the latter partly furled, and the national flag flung to the breeze.” The following year, a Georgia editorial claimed that “the shield has two sides” when mourning fallen Civil War soldiers. Northerners needed to be reminded that there were “dead heroes beside their own, who died as bravely and nobly and conscientiously for what they deemed the right.” Only by respecting the valor of both sides could Americans hope to, “at last find the only true solution of their differences in mutual respect and good will, and a resolve to forget the past and glorify the future.” At a New Orleans Decoration Day event in 1888, the GAR stood alongside veterans from the Army of Tennessee and the Army of Northern Virginia in a somber salute to the fallen that caused the city’s newspaper to assert, “it is now recognized by all that it was love of country and the highest type of patriotism that led brave men on to death, as much on one side as on the other.” The social cohesion that Decoration Day provided inexorably led to a renewed sense of nationalism that united Americans under

¹⁶ “Decoration Day,” *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, April 29, 1874; May 14, 1874; *New York Herald*, May 29, 1877; “The Army and its Work,” *New York Daily News*, June 7, 1878; “Decoration Day,” *Arkansas Gazette*, May 31, 1881.

the aegis of a selective Civil War memory that downplayed sectional animosities. A day initially meant to do little more than publicly grieve the fallen soldier, was manipulated by official culture—with vernacular consent—into an invented tradition for its own political use adding credence to Hobsbawm’s argument that “the history which became part of the fund of knowledge or the ideology of nation, state or movement is not what has actually been preserved in popular memory, but what has been selected, written, pictured, popularized and institutionalized by those whose function it is to do so.”¹⁷

By the 1890s, focusing on the honorable military sacrifices of both sides had become the stock and trade of a segregated collective memory regarding the Civil War. The causes that motivated veterans to fight were less important than the act of fighting and doing one’s obligatory duty. Speaking on Decoration Day in 1895, Massachusetts Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. described the “Soldier’s Faith” to a Harvard University audience in terms that crystallized the nobility of a soldier’s service no matter the cause. His status as a Union veteran, reaching the temporary rank of lieutenant colonel, who was seriously wounded in three separate campaigns surely lent authority and authenticity to his words concerning honor and selflessness. To Holmes, for a soldier to be considered a gentleman depended on his “choice of honor rather than life.” A soldier’s willingness to “give one’s life rather than to suffer disgrace,” is what it meant to be an honorable gentleman. In his estimation, any attempt to claim honor “at

¹⁷ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 157, 87; *Arkansas Gazette*, May 25, 1875. General Forrest was involved in the massacre at Fort Pillow in 1864. Upon taking the fort, Forrest ordered the execution of white and black Union prisoners. See Richard L. Fuchs, *An Unerring Fire: The Massacre at Fort Pillow* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002); *Georgia Weekly Telegraph and Messenger*, June 6, 1876; “Confederate Decoration Day,” *New Orleans Picayune*, March 28, 1888; Hobsbawm, pp. 307, 13.

less cost than a splendid carelessness for life,” was “trying to steal the good will without the responsibilities.” Holmes did not proclaim to know the will of the universe, but declared there was one thing he did not doubt, “that the faith is true and adorable which leads a soldier to throw away his life in obedience to a blindly accepted duty, in a cause which he little understands, in a plan of campaign of which he has no notion, under tactics of which he does not see the use.” Holmes continued by painting a mental picture for his captivated audience of a soldier’s adherence to duty above all else that likely came from personal experience as he described how soldiers were willing to die for reasons unknown to themselves and their comrades:

If you have been in line...ordered simply to wait and to do nothing, and have watched the enemy bring their guns to bear upon you...have seen the puff of the firing, have felt the burst of the spherical case-shot as it came toward you, have heard and seen the shrieking fragments go tearing through your company, and have known that the next or the next shot carries your fate...if, in short, as some, I hope many, who hear me, have known, you have known the vicissitudes of terror and of triumph in war, you know that there is such a thing as the faith I spoke of. You know your own weakness and are modest; but you know that man has in him that unspeakable somewhat which makes him capable of miracle, able to lift himself by the might of his own soul, unaided, able to face annihilation for a blind belief.¹⁸

Judging from Holmes’ address, war was less about ideology and more about the common soldier, the thousands of anonymous faces in the battle line who fought and died simply because they were ordered to do so. A soldier’s faith in duty and obedience were thus the sole factors in judging his service honorable. Holmes would apparently have his audience believe that all soldiers were oblivious as to why they were fighting, the color of

¹⁸ Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., “The Soldier’s Faith,” address delivered on Memorial Day, May 30, 1895, at a meeting called by the graduating class of Harvard University, reprinted in Richard Posner, ed., *The Essential Holmes: Selections from the Letters, Speeches, Judicial Opinions, and Other Writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. ix-x, 87-93.

their uniform merely a cruel twist of fate. In this manner, Confederate soldiers were to be held in the same estimation as their Union counterparts. Southern troops were not defending their rights to enslave African-Americans, they were blindly following orders for a cause they did not understand. Holmes' opinion that Civil War soldiers were uninformed cogs in the machine of war grew into a popular misconception that elevated military honor above the disreputable nature of partisan politics thus providing all veterans with an aura of saintly virtue. In his *Cause and Comrades*, historian James McPherson illustrated the fallaciousness of this belief. "Research in the letters and diaries of Civil War soldiers will soon lead the attentive historian to a contrary conclusion," he maintained, "Ideological motifs almost leap from many pages of these documents. A large number of those men in blue and gray were intensely aware of the issues at stake and passionately concerned about them." McPherson's research indicated that northern and southern troops were very knowledgeable of the causes for which they were fighting with the former speaking of preserving the Union and freeing the slaves, while the latter indicated states' rights and defending their homes. "When they enlisted, many of them did so for patriotic and ideological reasons—to shoot as they had voted, so to speak," he argued. "These convictions did not disappear after they signed up. Recruits did not stop being citizens and voters when they became soldiers."¹⁹

For Holmes to make the war about the common soldier's blind faith in duty and honor was an effort to reconcile both soldiers and citizens along non-ideological terms. It placed Confederate soldiers on equal moral footing with their Yankee adversaries, thereby dispelling any guilt southerners might feel for starting the war or fighting against

¹⁹ James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 91-92.

black emancipation. Holmes can be forgiven for his flawed logic as most veterans look back on their enemies with a sense of respect focusing on their shared experiences as common soldiers, but it set a dangerous precedent that most Americans were all too eager to follow. This re-interpretation of the Civil War's cause and conscience became a necessary prerequisite in eliminating the race issue and reuniting the country on distinctly white terms. "The national reunion required a cessation of talk about causation and consequence, and therefore about race," Blight asserted, "the lifeblood of reunion was the mutuality of soldiers' sacrifice in a land where the rhetoric and reality of emancipation and racial equality occupied only the margins of society." Celebrating the men who fought rather than why they fought effectively obscured the war's meaning, becoming a crucial psychological act of repression for a nation desperately seeking to move beyond its past.²⁰

In postbellum literature, Civil War veterans would similarly succumb to the Holmesian perspective by ultimately promoting a sectional reconciliation based on a shared sense of duty. The former enemies served as a guiding light on the path to reunion as their published recollections went from fiercely partisan, during the immediate postwar years, to a more subdued rhetoric centered on healing and camaraderie just over a decade later. Soon after the surrender at Appomattox, most veterans were in what historian Gerald Linderman described as a "hibernation" phase regarding their memories of the war. Many former soldiers understandably had a "strong psychological propensity to suppress the painful" and needed a period of time to sort through their wartime trauma and personal loss. When officials from Gettysburg asked Robert E. Lee to participate in

²⁰ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 96, 191-192.

discussions regarding the erecting of battlefield memorials in 1869, he respectfully declined believing it better “not to keep open the sores of war, but to follow the examples of those nations who endeavored to obliterate the marks of civil strife and to commit to oblivion the feelings it engendered.” Lee was not yet ready to remember the war; he was still in the midst of his hibernation period. For him, the war was to be swiftly forgotten, a bitter experience to be put behind him so as to move forward with life.²¹

However not all veterans fit Linderman’s psychological profile, as some found an emotional period of healing unnecessary in dealing with their wartime memories. Blight argued that instead of hibernation there were veterans whose memories were more in a state of incubation, “stored and unsettled, more festering than sleeping, and growing into a cultural force.” During the immediate postwar years, these former Union and Confederate soldiers quickly transformed the Civil War into a contest of the pen as they quarreled over why they fought and which side truly won. Yankee veterans portrayed themselves as saviors of the nation who gallantly preserved the Union in all its glory. Ex-Confederates described their service as protecting the principle of states’ rights and defending their homes from northern aggression. These war recollections became such a popular phenomena they fueled the emergence of magazines such as the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Galaxy*, and the southern based *The Land We Love*, periodicals that regularly published both factual and fictional war stories authored by veterans. The Civil War tales written by former soldiers were filled with drama and high adventure, wartime grandeur in all its commercial appeal readily consumed by enthusiastic subscribers. By the early

²¹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 149; Gerald Linderman, *Embattled Courage: The Experience of Combat in the American Civil War* (New York, The Free Press, 1987), p. 266-271; Robert E. Lee to D. W. McConaughy, Lexington, Virginia, August 5, 1869, David McConaughy Collection, Gettysburg College Archives, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

1870s, circulation of the *Atlantic Monthly* peaked at fifty thousand while *Galaxy* and *The Land We Love* reached 23,000 and 12,000 subscribers respectively. According to Blight, the American public's insatiable craving for wartime romanticism showed just "how easily for some the horrible memory of combat and campaigning could be converted into purposeful nostalgia."²²

When the Panic of 1873 occurred, veteran reminiscences dramatically declined in the North as ex-soldiers became primarily concerned with protecting their personal finances rather than defending their wartime reputations. This void of northern sentiment opened the door for southern writers to reshape Civil War memory by promoting a Lost Cause mythology to memorialize the Confederate cause. Writers such as Edward Pollard, Thomas Nelson Page, and Jefferson Davis argued that the Confederacy was aware of its likely defeat by the North's numerical and industrial superiority, nonetheless the South gallantly fought the war as a lost cause to defend its independence and the democratic ideal. For these writers the war was not about slavery, but justified as an idyllic South filled with faithful slaves and benevolent masters valiantly struggling to defend their culture from a Yankee invasion. In this manner, the horrors of slavery were advantageously omitted from Civil War memory thereby removing the most villainous aspect of the conflict and alleviating any culpability that came from fighting against emancipation.²³

In citing such rationalizations, Lost Cause proponents suffered from what philosopher Karl Jaspers identified as a "defiant pride" in the face of Union victory. "The presence of guilt, together with defeat, adds a psychological complication," he argued, "Not only

²² Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 149-150, 189, 150-157.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 189, 258-260; Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 192-194; Shackel, pp. 31-36.

impotence but guilt must be accepted, and the transmutation which man would like to avoid must grow from both.” Any mentioning of the immorality of enslavement panged a guilty conscience, further stiffening southern resolve that the war was about states’ rights and northern aggression not the servile condition of African-Americans. The Lost Cause created a mythologized past that allowed southerners to proudly tout their bravery and sacrifice without accepting any responsibility for the war or its necessity. Jaspers wrote that such proud defiance comes from multiple, “points of view, of grandiloquences and edifying sentimentalities, to help itself to the delusion by which it can be maintained.” By omitting the horrors of slavery from their Civil War histories, Lost Cause ideologues psychologically absolved themselves from being villains in the story. Jaspers argued that such self-vindication is common among defeated peoples who, rather than admit their guilt or that they were in the wrong, use any number of excuses to justify their loss. “Fate decided against me; there was a senseless material superiority; my defeat was honorable; within myself I tend my loyalty and my heroism,” but he warned, “the way of such conduct merely augments the inner poison, in illusive thought and anticipating self-intoxication.”²⁴

Such defiant “self-intoxication” did not end in 1865 as Lost Cause writers extended their thesis to include the southern victory over Reconstruction. By standing firmly in defense of “home rule,” southerners portrayed themselves as undoing the harm of Union victory and reestablishing an orderly society congruent with their traditions. Lost Cause advocates further rehabilitated southern honor by portraying Reconstruction through a white-racialist prism depicting the prewar era as one characterized by faithful slaves who

²⁴ Karl Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt* (1947; reprint, trans. E. B. Ashton, New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), pp. 101-106.

were unhappy with their postwar emancipation and the dislocation it created. Blacks were considered better off under the paternalistic care of kind masters who controlled their primal urges and restrained them from becoming dangers to society. Such racist rhetoric complemented social Darwinism and the popular “science” of racial hierarchies that immutably placed blacks on the lowest rung of the evolutionary ladder.²⁵

Fears over subhuman, ignorant, and sexually rapacious freedmen roaming the American landscape were not only popular in the South; they also had a powerful effect on northern predilections. During the late nineteenth century, white nativists desperately sought to preserve their positions of authority as industrialization and an influx of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe wrought immense social changes. Fearful of societal chaos, many northern whites found the Lost Cause’s white supremacist component to be an attractive commonality they shared with their southern counterparts. Both portrayed themselves as struggling to retain control of traditional American values amidst the turmoil caused by “inferior” peoples. “In stories of happy slaves, lawless freedmen, and valiant soldiers-turned Klansmen, white southerners proposed a powerful rationale for lynching, segregation, and disenfranchisement,” Kathleen Ann Clark argued, “a rationale that northern whites, beset by their own worries about the integrity of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ identity, readily accepted.” The Lost Cause ideology became so popular in the South that it was treated as a civil religion where any disagreement was akin to blasphemy. “My father put it this way,” wrote Georgia native Katherine DuPre Lumpkin, “He would say of his own children... ‘Their mother teaches them their prayers. I teach

²⁵ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 264-266; Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 192-194.

them to love the Lost Cause.’ And surely his chosen family function in his eyes ranked but a little lower than the angels.”²⁶

The popularity of such sacrosanct revisionism met few objections from those living above the Mason-Dixon. With northern political principles yielding to desires for a white-controlled society and capitalists demands for economic growth through sectional reconciliation, this Confederate version of the war became required reading for southern students and gradually spread throughout the country. Black educator Joseph Price futilely warned of the Lost Cause’s persuasiveness in perpetuating Confederate ideals, “The South was more conquered than convinced, it was overpowered rather than fully persuaded. The Confederacy surrendered its sword at Appomattox, but did not there surrender its convictions.” But white northerners failed to heed the warnings. They were too infatuated by the orderly society described in stories of the “Old South” and the nobility of a rural ideal that hearkened to a simpler time. The noxious appeal of Lost Cause ideology greatly influenced unsuspecting northern audiences conveying a Civil War history on decidedly southern terms where “rebellion” never occurred and both sides fought for principles that were equally righteous.²⁷

Economic necessity also prompted the need for reconciliation as capitalists appealed to end Reconstruction for sake of reunion. Not only did northern businessmen desire southern markets, carpetbaggers had already begun relocating factories below the Mason-Dixon to take advantage of the southern industrial revolution and the region’s cheaper,

²⁶ Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 192-194; Linderman, pp. 278-279; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 258; Katherine DuPre Lumpkin, *The Making of a Southerner* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1946; reprint, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), p. 121.

²⁷ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 137-138, 222; Joseph C. Price, “The Race Problem Stated,” as quoted in Carter G. Woodson, ed., *Negro Orators and Their Orations* (1925; rpr. New York: Russell and Russell, 1969), p. 490.

non-union labor force. Southern industrialists, who had become the region's new aristocracy, were similarly eager to partake in northern capital and resume their dealings. Continued sectional antipathy between North and South was thus bad for business as capitalists increasingly urged an end to Reconstruction to revitalize southern industry. When the Panic of 1873 occurred, the economic need for sectional reconciliation became urgent from a financial standpoint fostering an alliance of northern industrialists with southern politicians and businessmen that hastened the demise of Reconstruction. What Albion Tourgee described as the "plaster of profit laid upon the sores of war," had indeed come true. Black civil rights suddenly ran a distant second to protecting net worth as economic necessity helped spur a fraternal impulse amongst former enemies. Such capitalist pleas to end sectional strife similarly affected Union veterans as their published recollections throughout the remainder of the decade focused less on ideology and more on the similar martial experiences they shared with ex-Confederates. This emphasis on fraternalism coincided with Linderman's second phase of war memory "revival" where veterans have had the necessary time to sort through their wartime experiences and realized that merely living through the horrid conflict served as a badge of honor. Linderman argued how, "Veterans experiencing some return of confidence told themselves that it could not have been mere chance, that they must have possessed certain worthy attributes or acted in certain meritorious ways that accounted for their survival."²⁸

Fifteen years after Appomattox, many of those former soldiers who previously remained silent were now ready to remember their past. They published their own

²⁸ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 129, 137-138, 149-168; Bodnar, p. 31; Albion Tourgee, *An Appeal to Caesar* (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1884), p. 58; Linderman, p. 277.

recollections and joined veterans' organizations in large numbers to reminisce with their fraternal brothers. During the 1880s, GAR membership blossomed six-fold reaching 400,000 by the close of the decade while its southern counterpart, the United Confederate Veterans, peaked at 160,000 men. The psychological needs of healing and moving forward that Lee professed years earlier became widespread as former soldiers abandoned partisan name-calling in favor of a shared martial brotherhood. Veterans from both sides increasingly came together in Blue-Gray reunions that centered upon themes of masculinity, honor, and sacrifice, rather than slavery, race, or emancipation. These reunions not only offered ex-soldiers the opportunity to memorialize their service, they were also good for business in the wake of the depression. Veterans' reunions helped local economies throughout the country by being major financial boons for most areas in which they were held. Encampments in both North and South attracted large crowds who sought nostalgic patriotism and clamored for an ever-growing market of Civil War souvenirs. In only a few decades, those who participated in a conflict that tore the country apart had become indistinguishable from one another. Former soldiers from both sides were similarly honored for their manhood and devotion to common soldierly virtues. Veterans had essentially become commercial commodities, marketed to an eager public in the name of sectional goodwill.²⁹

In 1882, Confederate veterans marched alongside their Union counterparts during festivities at the GAR's encampment in the former border state of Baltimore, the no man's land of sectional antagonism. Thirteen years later, the GAR came to another ex-

²⁹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 170-181, 157, 198-210; Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), pp. 84-93, 110; Shackel, p. 31-36.

border state when it assembled in Louisville, Kentucky. As the reconciliationist mantra infected veteran reunions, the need for healing and brotherhood effectively censored any mention of race. By the 1880s and 1890s the GAR had become a racially segregated organization, one that stood idle as black veterans were excluded from national soldier cemeteries. The very men who had proudly recalled their part in freeing the slaves years earlier, now withdrew both socially and politically from their black comrades. When the GAR did invite African-American veterans to their events they were hardly noticed, uncomfortable reminders of a fractured past. Black veterans were usually ordered to the periphery of encampments far from the main festivities, white veterans only realizing their presence when they heard the sound of “old plantation melodies” drifting through the evening air.³⁰

The rising popularity of veteran encampments paralleled a similar fascination in the construction of Civil War memorials. From 1870-1910 monuments were erected at a brisk pace in both northern and southern communities. Memorials consisted of two types: those honoring a group of people—like the Soldiers and Sailors’ Monument in Brooklyn—or a specific military unit—New York’s Seventh Regiment Memorial—and those paying homage to select individuals such as Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, or Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson. The building of memorials tended to be grassroots efforts with likeminded citizens organizing associations and fundraising for the construction of their chosen monument. The lack of government involvement made

³⁰ Linderman, p. 278; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 195; Savage, p. 188; Shackel, p. 33; Walter H. Blake, *Hand Grips: The Story of the Great Gettysburg Reunion, July 1913* (Vineland, New Jersey: G. E. Smith, 1913), p. 184.

monuments distinct in that they represented public memory in material form. Memorials could only be erected in public spaces with the proper enthusiasm and financial support of the general populace. Monuments thus represented widespread social and political views etched in stone, everlasting symbols reflecting the collective memory of the late nineteenth century. As the spirit of reconciliation infused itself into Decoration Day ceremonies, postwar literature, and veteran reunions, so to did Civil War monuments portray heroic white images absent any hint of wartime ideologies beyond honorable service and doing one's duty.³¹

Northern memorials focused on sacrifice and soldierly virtue while those in the South centered upon valor and a heroic defense of the Lost Cause. The first southern dedication of a statue to Stonewall Jackson took place in Richmond, Virginia on October 26, 1875. Almost fifty thousand people and one of the largest postwar gatherings of Confederate veterans attended the event's parade and ceremony. Thousands of black Richmonders petitioned to march alongside their white neighbors, but local officials—fearing racial mixing and the potential for a black co-opting of the celebration for political purposes—planned to position them at the rear of the parade. Upon learning of their inferior location, black militia companies refused to attend the event from a seeming recognition of their “place” both literally and figuratively in southern collective memory.³²

Virginia Governor, and former Confederate General, James Kemper served as the master of ceremonies and provided an oration infused with the same Lost Cause and anti-Reconstruction ideology then permeating southern Decoration Day festivities. He referred to Jackson's likeness as “a mute protest before the world against the rule of

³¹ Kammen, pp. 115-117; Savage, pp. 4-7.

³² Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 81-83.

tyrants which, wanting faith in the instincts of honor, would distrust and degrade a brave and proud but unfortunate people, which would bid them repent, in order to be forgiven, of such deeds and achievements as heroes rejoice to perform.” Kemper regarded the ceremony as the beginnings of a true reconciliation, yet it was a reunion in stark southern terms that recognized the “equal honor and equal liberties of each section.” As art historian Kirk Savage rightly argued, “public monuments were meant to yield resolution and consensus, not to prolong conflict.” For the sponsors of memorials, history “was supposed to be a chronicle of heroic accomplishments, not a series of messy disputes with unresolved outcomes.” Thus, the preponderance of Civil War monuments dotting the nation’s towns and battlefields during this period were inspired by the same reconciliationist impulse then spreading across America. The memorials to fallen Union and Confederate troops were somber reminders carved in stone of the Holmesian “Soldier’s Faith” that declared wartime honor worth remembering and the historically inconvenient simply forgotten.³³

Few Civil War memorials were dedicated to the black soldier who, of all participants in the conflict, was the one truly fighting for freedom and liberty. Black veteran George Washington Williams noted how “the surest way to teach national history is in monumental marble and brass.” Yet he could only lament the lack of recognition African-American soldiers were receiving at the hands of a memorialized public memory. “The deathless deeds of the white soldier’s valor are not only embalmed in song and story, but are carved in marble and bronze,” Williams observed, “but nowhere in all this free land is there a monument to brave Negro soldiers, 36,847 of whom gave up their

³³ Kammen, p. 111; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 80-84; John Esten Cooke, *Stonewall Jackson: A Military Biography* (New York: Appleton, 1876), pp. 545-547; Savage, p. 4.

lives in the struggle for national existence.” As of 1910, there were no monuments devoted to black military service in the South and only a handful in the North. The Shaw Memorial in Boston, dedicated to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and his black 54th Massachusetts regiment, was probably the most well known tribute to African-American wartime participation when it was erected in 1897. Sculpted by Augustus Saint-Gaudens, the memorial depicts Shaw on horseback gallantly marching alongside his men. The marching soldiers are clearly African-American, yet they are seemingly lost behind the three-dimensional figures of Shaw and his horse. Furthermore, Shaw being astride a horse while his men walk on foot was supposed to be indicative of his status as an officer, but it also represents a position of white dominance over his black charges.³⁴

Art historian Albert Boime referred to the Shaw memorial as visually promoting white hegemony in its “identification of troops and animal, who moved in obedience to Shaw’s command, further reinforced by his diagonally thrusting riding crop.” To Boime, the African-Americans in Saint-Gaudens’ rendering appeared “listless” and somewhat uncertain. Critic Charles Caffin made a similar criticism when he perceived the black troops as representing “varying characteristics of pathetic devotion” whose “doglike trustfulness is contrasted with the serene elevation of their white leader.” This image of white superiority was no accident. Saint-Gaudens personally believed in black inferiority and held the same racial prejudices as many in the white elite. His memoirs reflect a man whose opinions on race seem informed more by black minstrelsy than reality; offering stereotypical denunciations of African-Americans as irrational and deceitful, yet condescendingly enjoying their “simple” minds. Saint-Gaudens’ artistry was thus a

³⁴ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1887), p. 328; Savage, pp. 187-207; Shackel, pp. 132-133.

conscious choice befitting the Jim Crow era in which it was created. As racism and white reconciliation trumped emancipationist memories, black wartime contributions were relegated to secondary roles even when they were publicly memorialized. Instead, monuments to the faithful slave began springing up throughout the South, further strengthening Lost Cause mythology of the Civil War as a misunderstanding between white brothers in the foreground which had little to do with the black faces in the background.³⁵

By the end of the nineteenth century, the emancipationist legacy had become such a polarizing topic that its mere mention was seen as bad taste. The legacies of slavery and Reconstruction had become taboo anachronisms to a nation that desperately wanted to reunite behind veterans who served as beacons of manly reconciliation. When the country entered the Spanish-American War in 1898, the reconciliationist vision's effects were visibly apparent to onlookers as soldiers from North and South stood side by side on transports bound for Cuba and the Philippines. The jingoistic fervor from fighting a common foe helped in diminishing sectional antagonisms and strengthened the notion of white supremacy both domestically and internationally. After a swift victory over Spanish forces, President William McKinley declared to the Georgia State Legislature, "Sectional lines no longer mar the map of the United States. Sectional feeling no longer holds back the love we bear each other." McKinley maintained that "fraternity" was now the country's "national anthem" and appealed to a rekindled American nationalism by

³⁵ Albert Boime, *The Art of Exclusion: Representing Blacks in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), pp. 217, 209; Charles H. Caffin, *American Masters of Sculpture: Being Brief Appreciations of Some American Sculptors and of Some Phase of Sculpture in America* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913), p. 11; Savage, p. 201. Kirk Savage disagrees with the racist interpretations of the monument. Instead, he credits Saint-Gaudens for breaking "the mold of the standard soldier monument" by giving his black subjects "an individuality that African Americans had never before had in public sculpture," see Savage, pp. 201-204; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 344.

proudly trumpeting, “the Union is once more the common altar of our love and loyalty, our devotion and sacrifice.”³⁶

A decade later, the emphasis on martial brotherhood and soldierly virtue had become solidified as the distinguishing characteristics of a white Civil War memory. On July 21, 1911, ten thousand people assembled in Manassas, Virginia to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War’s first major battle. Entitled the National Jubilee of Peace, the event mixed reconciliation and reunion into a ceremony rife with nationalist sentimentalism. The battle itself was reenacted in a small way when 350 former Confederates lined themselves across the field from 125 Union veterans. The two sides marched toward one another, yet upon meeting in the middle they did so with laughter and handshakes beneath a small Virginia flag. The *Manassas Journal* was in awe over the spectacle noting how “adversaries of half a century ago,” now “greeted each other with assurances of good will and fellowship that would eliminate all future bitterness and animosity.” President William Howard Taft delivered the keynote speech in keeping with the occasion’s reconciliationist theme. He stated his deep regret over the tragic loss of life during the Civil War and idealistically wished for an end to all armed conflict. The President then took the opportunity to politicize his recent arbitration treaty with England and France saying, “this news I bring to the veterans of a real war because I know they will most appreciate permanent peace.” The irony that such treaties would inevitably lead to World War I notwithstanding, Taft concluded by thanking Virginians for their hospitality and the peaceful sentiment that inspired the commemoration. Those

³⁶ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 189, 291; Clark, *Defining Moments*, p. 194; William McKinley, *Speeches and Addresses of William McKinley, from March 1, 1897, to May 30, 1900* (New York: Doubleday and McLure, 1900), p. 158.

in attendance considered the Manassas semicentennial a great success in healing sectional differences hoping that Americans would continue to follow the examples of old soldiers. Union veteran George Carr Round, one of the primary organizers of the Jubilee, regarded the handshakes between former enemies as “absolutely unprecedented” and viewed the Manassas semicentennial as proof that the “hatred, resentments, misunderstandings and injustices” that led to war were “buried, forgotten and forever settled.”³⁷

Two years later, Gettysburg commemorated the semicentennial of its namesake battle in a celebration that dwarfed its Manassas predecessor. Similarly entitled a “Peace Jubilee,” the four-day event attracted over fifty thousand spectators. Sectional reconciliation was on full display as ex-Union and Confederate soldiers were invited from around the country to partake in the festivities. African-American GAR members were technically eligible to attend, but none were documented as participating. The event was a segregated affair with the only black faces among the sprawling crowds being the day laborers who constructed the sixty-five hundred tents that housed the 50,000 veterans in attendance. The Gettysburg anniversary was a Jim Crow reunion, the ultimate expression of a mythologized public ritual paradoxically memorializing a renewed spirit of white fraternalism that ignored the war’s emancipationist origins. “The veterans, as well as the gazing crowds, had come to commemorate a glorious fight,” Blight observed, “and in the end, everyone was right, no one was wrong, and something so transforming as the Civil War had been rendered a mutual victory of the Blue and the Gray...” Pickett’s Charge was reenacted as one of the central events of the celebration; only this time when

³⁷ Joan M. Zenzen, *Battling for Manassas: The Fifty-Year Preservation Struggle at Manassas National Battlefield Park* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), pp. 6-7; “Veterans Clasp Hands,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1911; “The Great Peace Jubilee,” *Manassas Journal*, July 28, 1911.

former Confederates reached their Union counterparts they did so not with rifles and bayonets, but with friendly expressions and handshakes. Reporters and photographers clustered around the scene jockeying for position with their media colleagues to document the newfound camaraderie between these men with long gray beards and mustaches. During the same summer in which he ordered the racial segregation of federal agencies, President Woodrow Wilson was a featured speaker at the Gettysburg event. The first president born in the South since Andrew Johnson, Wilson's speech was rife with white reconciliation that particularly addressed the symbolic importance elderly veterans represented to the country:

They have meant peace and union and vigor, and the maturity and might of a great nation. How wholesome and healing the peace has been! We have found one another again as brothers and comrades, in arms, enemies no longer, generous friends rather, our battles long past, the quarrel forgotten—except that we shall not forget the splendid valor, the manly devotion of the men then arrayed against one another, now grasping hands and smiling into each other's eyes.³⁸

For Wilson and other white Americans, the political disputes that caused the Civil War had become refashioned into a mistaken family quarrel. The war was a tragic misunderstanding that was best forgotten, yet not before honoring those who gallantly fought on each side. As one hundred thousand people converged on Gettysburg to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of a battle fought in 1863, not one mention was made of the Emancipation Proclamation which was issued that same year. White Civil War memory had been sanitized of any such racial matters, repackaged into a colorless

³⁸ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp., 8-12, 385-390; Edward Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, 2d ed., (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 95; John M. Haines, "The Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration of the Battle of Gettysburg," *Lincoln Herald* 55 (Winter 1953), pp. 40-41; "Address at the Gettysburg Battlefield," July 4, 1913, in Arthur S. Link, ed., *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson*, vol. 28 (Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 23-25.

narrative that preserved and sustained national reunion. The only individuals that seemed to notice this monochrome interpretation were those who had been conveniently overlooked—millions of African-Americans.³⁹

For newly emancipated slaves the initial postwar years gave them reason to be optimistic as Republicans took advantage of a weakened Democratic Party to provide racial justice via political liberalism. Throughout the South, black and white Republican representatives gained control of many state and local governments. They immediately began implementing social improvements such as public school systems, equal taxation, bargaining agreements between labor and capital, and sponsored racially integrated Union League meetings to foster economic development. This changed political landscape had such a galvanizing effect upon blacks that they took to the streets in annual holiday traditions to celebrate their newfound position in American society. Through Emancipation Day, July 4th, and “Juneteenth” festivities, black communities focused upon the history of Africans in America, civil rights policies, and their duty to keep the war’s emancipationist legacy alive. Southern freedmen were unsurprisingly the most enthusiastic and empowered participants in these ritualized commemorations. In celebrating Emancipation Day ceremonies, freedmen wrested control of public spaces away from southern whites who could only turn away in disgust. The pageantry of these affairs was an opportunity for blacks to not only celebrate freedom, but to illustrate their fitness for its privileges. It was not uncommon for parades to be led by armed black militias and skilled tradesmen while sermons addressed the virtues of black manhood and

³⁹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 385.

his worthiness for citizenship. The massive popularity of these events saw black families come from miles away in an ironic twist on prewar southern society. According to historian Kathleen Ann Clark:

The freedpeople's travels reflected a striking reversal: before the war, African American slaves frequently accompanied their owners when they journeyed long distances to daylong political rallies and celebrations on the Fourth of July. Now, former slaves strode independently through the countryside, to ceremonies of their own choosing—just as they traveled to freedmen's conventions, political meetings, and Republican rallies throughout the region.⁴⁰

As years passed and white memories faded, black Americans soon found themselves as lonely interpreters of a forgotten history. Because of the 1873 Panic, reconciliationist Memorial Day observances, Blue-Gray reunions, Lost Cause dogma, and KKK violence, Emancipation Day commemorations became exceptional in persistently espousing the war's racial cause. With the assistance of black veterans and spokesmen such as Frederick Douglass, blacks successfully kept the war's emancipationist memory in the public eye some twenty-five years after its culmination. At an 1887 reunion of three hundred black veterans held in Boston, they appealed to the American public for recognition while sarcastically condemning white comrades for a reconciliation that ignored their contributions, "Conciliation and peace with enemies are grand, when coupled with justice to faithful allies they are sublime." Upon learning of the proposed reunion at Gettysburg, the *Washington Bee*—an African-American newspaper—considered the phrase "reunion" a misnomer and questioned the intentions behind the event:

The occasion is to be called a Reunion! A Reunion of whom?

⁴⁰ Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 28-35, 56-59; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 55, 49; Kammen, pp. 123-124.

Only of the men who fought for the preservation of the Union and the extinction of human slavery? Is it to be an assemblage of those who fought to destroy the Union and perpetuate slavery, and who are now employing every artifice and argument known to deceit and sophistry to propagate a national sentiment in favor of their nefarious contention that emancipation, reconstruction and enfranchisement are dismal failures?

The *Bee* found it convenient that the Battle of Gettysburg was chosen for commemoration considering the contest “was one in which the colored soldier was peculiarly inconspicuous,” thus making the reunion not “altogether objectionable to the over-sensitive Southern white brother.” The newspaper assumed the Lost Cause would ingratiate itself into festivities with “the same malignant and audacious misrepresentation of the Negro and his friends,” before returning again as to why it was deemed fit to hold a reunion for a battle in which black soldiers did not participate. “Is the heroic valor displayed by the Negro,” the *Bee* wondered, “in his fight for freedom and the defense of the Union less virtuous, less meritorious, or less appreciated than that shown by those who fought for disunion and the perpetuation of the infamous blot of human slavery? God forbid!!” A day after the commemoration, Baltimore’s *Afro-American Ledger* hearkened to Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address wondering, “whether Mr. Lincoln had the slightest idea in his mind that the time would ever come when the people of this country would come to the conclusion that by the ‘People’ he meant only white people.” The *Ledger* argued further, “today the South is in the saddle,” gaining everything it fought for during the Civil War “by repression of the Negro within its borders” all because “the North has quietly allowed it to have its own way.”⁴¹ African-Americans

⁴¹ Kammen, p. 124; *Boston Globe*, August 1-3, 1887; *Boston Herald*, August 2, 1887; Nick Salvatore, *We All Got History: The Memory Books of Amos Webber* (New York: Times Books, 1996), pp. 290-291; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 194-195; “Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg,” *Washington Bee*, May 24, 1913; “A Government of the People,” *Baltimore Afro-American Ledger*, July 5, 1913.

recognized the Gettysburg Commemoration for what it was, a slap in the face to black Civil War participation and a white reunion devoid of racial justice. For African-Americans the signs were becoming all too clear, white reconciliation meant a nationalist celebration amidst black repression.

For Frederick Douglass, history was not something to be forgotten. As custodians of the past, all of mankind held a sacred duty to protect its history from being extinguished for any reason. “You will already have perceived that I am not of that school of thinkers which teaches us to let bygones be bygones; to let the dead past bury its dead,” Douglass told a Rochester audience on Emancipation Day 1883, adding “in my view there are no bygones in the world, and the past is not dead and cannot die.” The responsibility of remembering great historical events and reciting them to one’s children and grandchildren was, in his opinion, “implied in the mental and moral constitution of man.” As a reconciliationist spirit swept across the country bereft of the war’s moral lessons regarding race, Douglass became its foremost opponent in the late nineteenth century, refusing to acknowledge a sanitized interpretation of the conflict. No matter the charitable or patriotic impulses among those in the North preaching forgiveness, he was steadfast in his belief that “there was a right side and a wrong side in the late war which no sentiment ought to cause us to forget...it is no part of our duty to confound right with wrong, or loyalty with treason.” A clear delineation needed to be remembered between Union and Confederate that during the Civil War there was not one America but two, each fighting for its own beliefs and ideals. “I shall never forget the difference between those who fought for liberty and those who fought for slavery,” Douglass pledged, “between those who fought to save the Republic and those who fought to destroy it.” If

Americans forgot this lesson and accepted a reconciliationist vision, he argued that the country would “thus lose to after coming generations a vast motive power and inspiration to high and virtuous endeavor.” Perceiving northern whites’ increasing accommodation to Lost Cause mythology, Douglass ultimately relied on his racial brethren to safeguard the war’s true memory. He made sustaining the cause of emancipation a sacred duty for all black citizens, one to be handed down from one generation to the next for the purposes of a national regeneration. “Well the nation may forget, it may shut its eyes to the past, and frown upon any who may do otherwise,” Douglass declared, “but the colored people of this country are bound to keep the past in lively memory till justice shall be done them.”⁴² For Douglass and other African-Americans, preserving the war’s emancipationist legacy was thus a deeply personal responsibility that needed to be upheld until society provided it proper recognition. The importance of this responsibility came not only from the historical significance of black liberation, but also because of its relevance to the continued pursuit of equality by African-Americans. If the lessons of the war were so swiftly forgotten in the spirit of white fraternalism, could not the quest for black civil rights meet a similar fate? African-Americans needed to prepare themselves and defend their history from such an eventuality.

Yet societal structures at the turn of the twentieth century illustrated the difficulties incumbent upon African-Americans as they bore Douglass’ hallowed task of maintaining the presence of both emancipation and black participation in the Civil War narrative. The

⁴² Frederick Douglass, “Speech on Emancipation Day,” 1883, *Frederick Douglass Papers* (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.); Douglass, “There was a Right Side in the Late War,” May 30, 1878; Douglass, “Decoration Day,” 1894; Douglass, “Speech at the Thirty-Third Anniversary of the Jerry Rescue,” 1884; David Blight, “For Something Beyond the Battlefield: Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War,” (hereafter cited as “Something Beyond the Battlefield”) *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4, March 1989), p. 1175; Philip Foner, ed., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2000), pp. 714-715.

political and economic vulnerability of blacks provided them with little defense against the overwhelming tide of racial prejudice that washed over them. The statement by black activist and philosopher W. E. B. Dubois that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,” was readily apparent by even the most cursory glance at the nation’s race relations. White reconciliation had merged with white supremacy to become an unstoppable force of racial discrimination. Southern state legislatures systematically began stripping away black rights by passing Jim Crow laws that authorized segregation, proscription, and disfranchisement. Discrimination isolated African-Americans into crime-ridden slums where whites once again paradoxically held their living conditions against them just as they had done decades before. Black higher education was almost non-existent in the South save Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute that limited black ambition to technical occupations. White elites considered African-Americans an ignorant race unfit for the rights of citizenship and wholly disposed toward manual labor. “The negro race is essentially a race of peasant farmers and laborers,” Professor Paul Barringer informed the Southern Education Association in 1900, “as a source of cheap labor for a warm climate he is beyond competition; everywhere else he is a foreordained failure.” Biological determinism and social Darwinism continued to hold sway as to defining black capabilities. Such racial science was further compounded by America’s military escapades in Cuba and the Philippines, imperialist ambitions that were justified, in part, through appeals to a natural white superiority over darker and “inferior” peoples and the “white man’s burden” that dictated the strong civilizing the weak.⁴³

⁴³ W. E. B. Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; reprint, New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), p.

The institutional discrimination faced by African-Americans was also further buttressed by aggressive intimidation from a revived KKK and the omnipresent threat of lynching by even those whites not affiliated with the Klan. From 1865-1920, whites, in both northern and southern communities, were responsible for lynching at least 3,500 African-Americans. Blacks served as convenient scapegoats for problems stemming from an era of social change related to such diverse issues as Reconstruction, economic depression, urbanization, and industrialization. As they fought for equal rights and rose in prominence, African-Americans became visible threats to the white social structure making black labor organizers, political activists, or “troublemakers” likely targets of retribution. White fears regarding racial miscegenation also played a factor as it linked with racist stereotypes of black men as animalistic sexual predators to justify any accusation by a white female, or any occasion of black male assertiveness, as worthy of lynching.⁴⁴

Mere days after the dedication of St. Gaudens’ Shaw Memorial, a white mob descended upon a city jail in Urbana, Ohio in search of an African-American named Charles Mitchell. Convicted for assaulting a white woman, Mitchell was dragged from his cell with a rope around his neck. Despite the efforts of an Ohio National Guard unit, which killed two mob members and wounded a few others, Mitchell was hanged from a tree in the courthouse yard before hundreds of eyewitnesses. The *New York Times* noted

16; Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 354-355; Woodward, *Strange Career*, pp. 94-95; Paul B. Barringer, “Negro Education in the South,” *Educational Review* 21 (March 1901), pp. 231-43; Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 193-194; Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden: The United States & The Philippine Islands, 1899,” *McClure’s Magazine* (February 1899).

⁴⁴ Woodward, *Strange Career*, pp. 93-94; Randall M. Miller, “Lynching in America: Some Context and a Few Comments,” *Pennsylvania History* 72, no. 3 (Summer 2005), p. 275; “Lynching in America,” American Experience, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/peopleevents/e_lynch.html (accessed April 12, 2012); Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 137-138.

how the mob made no effort to conceal their identities. “The assemblage in the public square was as open as any public meeting that had ever been held in that place,” the paper reported. In 1899, a black man named Sam Hose met a similar fate when he was led to a stake in the middle of a dirt road in Palmetto, Georgia. Hose admitted to killing his white employer in self-defense, but was also wrongfully accused of sexually assaulting his manager’s wife. He was chained to the stake by a mob of two thousand angry whites who gleefully cut various appendages from his body before burning him alive. At one point Hose almost slipped his bonds causing executioners to douse the flames, retie their victim, and set him alight again. Shrieks of “Oh, my God! Oh, Jesus” emanated from the blaze until Hose finally succumbed to his horrid fate. After the fire was extinguished onlookers descended upon the charred corpse, not even waiting for the remains to cool, to collect Hose’s body parts as mementos. Pieces of his bones were later sold as souvenirs for twenty-five cents. No one was ever arrested for the lynching.⁴⁵

As the executions of Mitchell and Hose attest, lynchings were a spectacle in America comparable to KKK cross burnings as methods of eliciting racial terror. They served as macabre public rituals that were sometimes advertised in newspapers and attracted large crowds of white men, women, and children to their carnivalesque atmospheres.

Lynchings were so popular in the South that state and local political leaders, who valued their careers, rarely criticized the racial violence of their constituents. Local communities typically viewed such executions as righteous forms of extralegal justice that served the

⁴⁵ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 345; “Two Citizens Killed,” *New York Times*, June 5, 1897; *New York Tribune*, April 24, 1899; James W. Clarke, “Without Fear or Shame: Lynching, Capital Punishment and the Subculture of Violence in the American South,” *British Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 2 (April 1998), pp. 269-270, 277-279; *Atlanta Journal*, March 16, 1899; *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 18, 21, 1899; Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), pp. 281-302.

public will, making arrests a futile gesture as juries routinely acquitted lynchers. Authorities usually stood idly by either because they agreed with the victim's punishment or feared for their own safety should they attempt to intervene. This lack of law enforcement caused those who orchestrated or attended the incidents to feel little shame for their actions. At the Hose lynching, journalists reported that some of the most prominent citizens in the Palmetto area were among those in the crowd. Even in the North, those responsible would occasionally pose for pictures beside the corpse showing little concern for their identities being circulated. Rather than denounce lynchers, instead the public tended to congratulate them for meeting the obligations of white masculinity.⁴⁶

By the early twentieth century black life had become meaningless to many whites. One white Floridian dryly commented to a reporter, "The people of the South don't think any more of killing the black fellows than you would think of killing a flea." As he traveled Georgia in 1912, former Governor William Northen was shocked by the utter disregard so many whites had for black humanity. "I was amazed to find scores and hundreds of men who believed the Negro to be a brute, without responsibility to God," Northen remarked, "and his slaughter nothing more than the killing of a dog." In lynching whites found a grisly therapeutic device, collective violence against a legally powerless race for the sake of relieving social anxiety. Lynching thus became the ultimate expression of white hegemony; it reinforced white supremacy and reasserted social control by surreptitiously punishing any black defiance. It brooked no opposition

⁴⁶ "Lynching in America," American Experience, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/till/peoplevents/e_lynch.html (accessed April 12, 2012); Litwack, pp. 281-302.

by intimidating African-Americans into silent concession, as those who resisted became its next victims.⁴⁷

White audiences below the Mason-Dixon also reinforced their notions of white supremacy through racist literature such as Charles Carroll's *The Negro a Beast*; or, *In the Image of God* (1900), Thomas Dixon's *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905), and Robert Shufeldt's *The Negro, A Menace to American Civilization* (1907). Dixon's novel was the second work of his KKK trilogy that he immediately adapted into an immensely popular play that traveled across the country. *The Clansman* was steeped in the Lost Cause tradition portraying an idyllic "Old South" ravaged by Union wartime savagery and postwar Reconstruction. The protagonists were a southern white family valiantly struggling against corrupt black legislators and their Republican facilitators namely Thaddeus Stevens. Dixon argued for the continuation of racial segregation by creating stock black characters who fell somewhere between childish simpletons and insatiable rapists. In the climactic conclusion, a heroic KKK symbolically rides to the rescue just in time to narrowly prevent the devilish schemes of African-Americans and Radical Republicans to Africanize the South.⁴⁸

Although not specifically mentioned by name, the play's central villain, Congressman Austin Stoneman, had many similarities to Stevens. Dixon had Stoneman performing many of the same political acts as Stevens such as leading the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson and promoting "the Black Plague of Reconstruction" against the traitorous South. When Stoneman was referenced in the script as the "Great Commoner,"

⁴⁷ Litwack, pp. 281-302; *Crisis* 2 (May 1911), p. 32; *Crisis* 3 (January 1912), p. 108.

⁴⁸ See Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1905).

it left little doubt as to whom Dixon was actually referring. The comparisons to Stevens were so blatant that it met immediate opposition before it even opened when it came to Lancaster in 1906. Ministers of the city's black churches blasted the proposed production from their pulpits not only because of its vilification of Stevens, but also over fears that the play would incite racial unrest. A gathering of 600 African-Americans sent a delegation of black representatives to Lancaster Mayor J. P. McCaskey urging him to use his influence to prevent the performance. McCaskey agreed, referring to Dixon's work as "one that embitters prejudice and offers insult to the memory of a great man whose services to the nation and to mankind have been of untold value." The mayor implored the local theater manager to withdraw the play over its misrepresentation of Stevens and its fostering of racial antagonism. "Public sentiment condemns the insult to the memory of Thaddeus Stevens at his home city," McCaskey proudly declared. The theater manager quickly complied by canceling the show claiming he was unaware of the production's "character."⁴⁹

Separated by only a few years, the Walker lynching and *Clansman* boycott illustrated the bipolarity of racial understanding in the area. On one hand, the citizenry initiated the murder of a black man, while on the other hand they defended a proponent of racial equality. A decade later, *The Clansman* was brought to life in 1915 on the new entertainment medium of moving pictures. Renamed *Birth of a Nation*, spectators packed theaters eager to witness this Lost Cause interpretation of Civil War history. The film famously quoted President Wilson's *A History of the American People* when he wrote of Reconstruction, "the white men were roused by a mere instinct of self preservation...

⁴⁹ "A Popular Protest," *Lancaster New Era*, November 12, 1906; "Stops the 'Clansman'," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, November 12, 1906.

until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan, a veritable empire of the South, to protect the Southern country.” The film’s southern bias and racist depictions of African-Americans were so abhorrent that Booker T. Washington and the fledgling NAACP tried to enact a nationwide boycott against the film similar to the protest initiated by Lancaster’s black community nine years earlier. This time, however, the crusade failed, as Dixon’s epic opened to rave reviews and became a box office sensation earning over ten million dollars.⁵⁰

By 1915, the Civil War’s historical legacy was radically altered by a concentrated focus on white reconciliation absent any mention of emancipation. Many Americans assumed a selective amnesia concerning a conflict that was waged largely to free African-Americans by remembering the war in distinctly white non-ideological terms through grave decoration, Lost Cause sentimentality, courageous war stories, veterans encampments, and Civil War memorials. For white Americans, the essence of postwar healing came from a renewed nationalism with veterans serving as beacons on the path to a reawakened brotherhood that disregarded past differences. Gone were the emancipationist ideals that gave Union soldiers a moral stature over their Confederate counterparts. Albion Tourgee’s warnings that “to dwell upon the hero’s sufferings and ignore the motive which inspired his acts is to degrade him to the level of the mercenary” were simply ignored in the name of pious reconciliation. Heroism and sacrifice replaced freeing the slaves as the lynchpins of a Civil War memory focused on those whites who

⁵⁰ Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People* 5 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1902), p. 58; Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 432-435.

gallantly served on both sides of the conflict. Union and Confederate now stood side by side at Decoration Day ceremonies, they marched alongside one another at veteran encampments, and they shook hands over the wall at Gettysburg. The war had become an egregious error, a simple political dispute between equally righteous cultures that was finally forgotten in the spirit of national reunion.⁵¹

For African-Americans, their political situation was hardly one of reconciliation as the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil War arrived. Blacks—left in the lurch by a failed Reconstruction and now enduring the nightmare that was Jim Crow—were vestiges of a divisive historic era, archaic reminders that were simply ignored in the name of white fraternalism. Facing such a whirlwind of discrimination, African-Americans were engaged in such a desperate struggle to assert their civil rights that sustaining the war’s emancipationist cause was the least of their concerns. Black “theories of self-emancipation had little historical grounding in the early twentieth century,” Blight argued, “and were of marginal value in wresting the right to vote back from white supremacists and Jim Crow ‘reformers’.”⁵² With little opposition, the “reconciliationist” and “white supremacist” visions freely commandeered the Civil War’s historical memory. White Americans, many who routinely passed black faces on city streets, were all too accommodating to a sectional reunion historically abridged of the divisive topic of slavery. Faced with more substantive social dilemmas, black Americans—the last beacons of hope for the message of emancipation—were in no position to publicly interfere. Blacks were forced on the defensive, patiently biding their time until the war’s

⁵¹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 389; Albion Tourgee, *The Veteran and his Pipe* (Chicago: Belford, Clarke, and Company, 1888), p. 71.

⁵² Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 369.

emancipationist legacy could be realized. As loyal guardians of Douglass' critical mission, African-Americans would preserve the Civil War's racial cause for decades waiting for white society to sufficiently evolve to the point it received proper historical recognition. The question was whether that day would ever come.

Chapter VI

Commemorating a Myth

In 1910, the Lancaster County Historical Society began planning a Christiana Riot Commemoration that would convene the following year. The festivities would become the Society's largest and most successful undertaking to date, yet their choice of a topic involving race was steeped in controversy.¹ As Societal organizers devised their initial preparations for the riot ceremony, they found themselves walking a political tightrope in memorializing an event so immersed in historical memory. Much had changed in sixty years regarding not only the politics of the Civil War, but the ensuing peace that failed to deliver on wartime ideologies. The issue of race continued to dominate the debate, dividing the American public over the meaning of a war that tore the nation apart. Postwar America would fall into a conflict of Civil War reinterpretation, one that originally pitted North against South before shifting to white versus black. White Americans took solace in a re-imagined past, one rife with romanticized conceptions of reconciliation that deemed black participation unnecessary. By looking back on the war in this manner, whites discovered an advantageous characteristic of public memory—its malleability.

Thomas Slaughter referred to the 1911 Christiana Riot Commemoration as “an opportunity to re-create myths about the courage of local people and the tragedy of the Civil War.” He argued that the ceremony’s “intended reconciliation was not between white and black residents of Lancaster County, the wounds that local historians hoped to

¹ “Christiana Celebration to be a Notable Affair,” (hereafter cited as “Notable Affair”), Special Announcement, *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 15, no. 6 (August 4, 1911).

heal were those still smarting among whites on either side of the Mason-Dixon Line.”

Rather than the commemoration honoring black resistance, Slaughter contended that “the 1911 version of the Christiana Riot was primarily a story told by, to, and about whites.”

As a bustling crowd descended upon Christiana on a rainy September day to memorialize the riot, Slaughter’s statements revealed a degree of truth and a degree of exaggeration.²

The 1911 Christiana Riot Commemoration was indeed about more than simply the Christiana Riot, it was also about the politics of reconciliation in the ongoing battle for historical memory. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the reconciliationist and white-supremacist conceptions of the war had successfully stifled the emancipationist message. Observances memorializing incidents from the Civil War era overflowed with emotional themes of healing, brotherhood, and forgiveness from a distinctly white viewpoint. The historical memory of the Christiana Riot was not immune to the same political forces that made national reunion the socially acceptable theme of the time. Much like the Manassas and Gettysburg Peace Jubilees, the 1911 riot commemoration would likewise be influenced by the appeal of a white sectional reconciliation absent the unpleasantness that divided the country decades before. The racial component that made the fight at Christiana so significant, rendered discussions of slavery or black agency too controversial for even a sympathetic historical society to risk public backlash. The desire by commemoration organizers to have descendants of the African-Americans, Quakers, and slaveholders in attendance only furthered the need for an equitable interpretation of riot history. The ceremony’s songs, banners, speakers, and monument would each

² Slaughter, p. 185.

display an unbiased reunion message that not only diminished black contributions, but even furnished whites with a heroic role in the riot.

Yet beneath the pageantry and rhetorical flourishes, historians have overlooked how the African-American interpretation of the riot was still present in minor ways. It was represented by a black preacher, an elderly riot participant, and a poetic consecration to those fugitives who fought for freedom. Each reminded spectators of how another race was involved in the incident whites were selfishly celebrating. This emancipationist conception of the riot was maintained during the ceremony through an understated recognition of black agency and African-American participation in self-liberation. This recognition might have been subtle in its attempt to penetrate white collective memories, but it was nevertheless present at the celebration. Although the emancipationist legacy may have been relegated to the margins of Civil War memory, a closer inspection of the 1911 Christiana Riot Commemoration reveals its continued survival within even those observances steeped in white fraternalism and sectional reunion.³

When the Lancaster County Historical Society began preparations for commemorating the Christiana Riot in 1910, William Parker's clash with Edward Gorsuch was still an incendiary historical topic accompanied by a great deal of political baggage. Even six decades later, commemorating such a controversial event could unleash a wrath of southern fury against all of Lancaster County if organizers were not careful as to how the event was portrayed. The reconciliationist and white supremacist visions then engulfing the country could easily find fault with commemorating an episode where black

³ David Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 354-355.

conquered white. That the Christiana Riot took so long to memorialize is telling regarding the incident's significance and its contentious nature in the public mind. Throughout the postbellum era nothing was done to recognize the riot in any meaningful way, appearing destined to be another of those historical events forgotten in time. The riot received little mention in the press and when discussed in historical works was briefly mentioned, as it was commonly a small part of larger histories pertaining to slavery. In 1858, William Lloyd Garrison passed through Christiana, stopping to view the location of the riot. He wrote of the site as "ever an object of curiosity to the passing traveler" and referred to its significance as "Bunker Hill and Lexington on a limited scale." But as war clouds gathered, they overshadowed any renewed interest Garrison's attention might have sparked. It was not until a year after the war that Parker's account of the riot, *The Freedman's Story*, was published. While seemingly refreshing the incident in the American imagination, the book failed to make any considerable impact towards publicly memorializing the riot. In 1896, local historian Thomas Whitson assumed that the Lancaster County Historical Society would someday erect a monument to memorialize the riot "to make one small niche in our tablet of heroes for ... William Parker," but nothing was carried out at the time. Two years later, David R. Forbes published *A True Story of the Christiana Riot* recounting events from a northern point of view. However, Forbes' book was released in such low quantities that it failed to ignite any substantial interest.⁴

⁴ W. U. Hensel, *The Christiana Riot and The Treason Trials of 1851: An Historical Sketch*, 2d ed. (Lancaster, PA: The New Era Printing Company, 1911), pp. 2-3; *Liberator*, October 15, 1858; Whitson, pp. 33-34; See David Forbes, *A True Story of the Christiana Riot* (Quarryville, PA: The Sun Printing House, 1898).

Lancaster County residents maintained a similar attitude to that of most nineteenth century historians regarding the riot. Part of this was because of the county's racial makeup. From 1850-1910, the county's white population had grown 58 percent to over 164,000 while African-American numbers decreased 36 percent to number less than twenty-three hundred residents. Christiana broke away from Sadsbury Township in 1894 becoming a borough amounting to roughly one thousand inhabitants by the time of the commemoration. Of this total, black residents numbered only 10 percent of the town's total population. This large disproportion of white to black in the county created a racial divide over the riot's significance to local history. Many white Countians considered the Christiana Riot insignificant as it had little relevance to their daily lives. Few local whites held the riot in the same high regard as their black neighbors who reveled in its historical connection with freedom and liberty. There were those who remembered the riot as a "black eye" to the county, an embarrassing occurrence that found its way into the headlines of newspapers nationwide that depicted the area as lawless and uncivilized. In 1856, the *Lancaster Intelligencer* continued to describe the riot in negative terms. The newspaper considered it as an incident that "resulted in the murder of Mr. Gorsuch, and disgraced our county and State." Even the *Christiana Ledger* attributed little attention to the riot in the decades following the clash outside Parker's home. Only when locals who were involved in the riot died did the newspaper briefly mention the incident as part of their obituary. Thus, for some white Lancastrians the riot painted the county in such a bad light that it was hardly worth remembering and best forgotten.⁵

⁵ *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), pp. 578, 544, 538; *Lancaster Examiner & Herald*, September 24, 1851; *Lancaster Intelligencer*, July 22, 1856; LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, July 11, 2012, Christiana, PA.

For local African-Americans, however, the riot was undoubtedly a profound historical moment as it spoke to both black agency and black liberation. There were certainly those living in the area who remembered the incident and had passed the story down to their children and grandchildren. Many black Countians held William Parker in high regard hailing him as a local hero. But their small numbers lessened the necessary emancipationist voice that would see the riot duly honored. When combined with the spirit of reunion and fraternalism infecting their white countrymen, silence from the county's African-American population was inevitable. The riot's most passionate supporters were thus muted, contributing to Parker's historic struggle with Gorsuch receiving no official tributes for sixty years.⁶

While many white Countians had either forgotten the riot or considered it insignificant, those of the Quaker faith and members of the white elite, such as the Lancaster County Historical Society, remembered it as a noteworthy piece of local history. The Society's journal publications typically denoted a northern perspective on the Civil War and held a sympathetic abolitionist viewpoint towards the actions of the rioters. Thomas Whitson, a Quaker and Societal patron, presented a paper before his fellow members in 1896 entitled "William Parker, The Hero of the Christiana Riot." Whitson claimed to have seen Parker when the former was a small boy, describing the fugitive as a man "possessed of resolution, courage, and action." Whitson wrote admirably of Parker's physical prowess and the feats he was capable of:

He could walk leisurely up to an ordinary post fence, leap over it without touching it with his hands, work hard all day, and travel from ten to fifteen miles during the night to organize his

⁶ *Intelligencer Journal*, May 18, 2001; Marie Congo, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA; Sara Ruth, interview by author, July 12, 2012, Coatesville, PA.

people into a society for their protection against the numerous kidnappers who were constantly committing depredations through the community, or rescue one of their number that had been captured, flog the villain who was carrying him away, and return to his labor in the morning with a bullet in his leg, apparently unfatigued and keep his secret well to himself.

Other Societal works followed Whitson's lead relating to the Underground Railroad, abolitionists, and slavery with each maintaining an anti-slavery perspective.⁷

This northern tilt was so amplified that a member of the Society's Executive Committee, a Maryland lawyer, attempted to offset this bias by illustrating how slaveholders viewed slavery and the riot. In his 1911 article "The Christiana Riot: Its Causes and Effects from a Southern Standpoint," D. F. Magee claimed that he was writing the piece because Society members have only heard one-side of the story, i.e. the northern side. "There was, of necessity, two sides to it [riot]," he argued. "My hearers of the Lancaster County Historical Society, in the main, have heard but one, or, if they have heard the other, it has been darkly and through glasses of long-standing contrary beliefs, so dark and thick that the full light could not enter." Magee assumed the role of a southerner beholden to the Lost Cause to provide juxtaposition for the Societal papers. He described an idyllic South replete with faithful slaves, some of whom followed Confederate officers into battle. Magee insisted that there were numerous instances of slaves carrying their wounded masters to safety, and, if the master fell, the slave would "reverently and tearfully" lay him to rest before hastening away "cherishing the last dying words, to carry them to a mourning mistress and family back home." He continued by providing the southern viewpoint of Edward Gorsuch, describing the slaveholder as a

⁷ Hostetter, p. 296; "Minutes of the March Meeting" (hereafter cited as "March Minutes"), *Papers of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 15, no. 3 (1911), p. 87; Whitson, pp. 31-32. Whitson was from one of the leading Quaker families in the county.

“kind and indulgent master” and an upright “law-abiding citizen and man of prominence in his own State.” Historian Ella Forbes later chastised Magee—and by extension the Society—for using “the same racist invective expressed by pro-slavery people in 1851,” yet this was his point all along. The article appears satirical in nature and Magee seems to be role-playing the part of a southern slaveholder rather than personally believing the things he wrote in an effort to provide contextual balance to a Societal journal that tilted drastically in favor of the North at the expense of understanding the southern mindset.⁸

Writers for the society—including Magee—were also especially conscious of their terminology when referring to the incident at Christiana. In describing the fight at Parker’s home, members usually omitted the word “riot” from the societal lexicon as the term portrayed a dark picture of disorder, one rife with images of violence and destruction. Instead the Society typically employed the more impartial “tragedy” rather than “riot.” To the Society the Christiana Riot was not a riot so much as it was a sad, unfortunate event that resulted in a death. Whether “tragedy” was defined by the actions of Parker’s compatriots or the institution of slavery itself that placed the black fugitives in that situation depended upon the particular member. While not going so far as using the term “resistance,” which conveys a more positive almost patriotic stand against oppression, the Society’s choice of “tragedy” is significant in that its members were sympathetic to the rioters, but not necessarily supportive of their actions. This distinction

⁸ D. F. Magee, “The Christiana Riot: Its Causes and Effects, from a Southern Standpoint,” *Papers of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 15, no. 6 (1911), p. 194, 202, 206; See E. Forbes, pp. 165-166 for her reference of Magee as being a “Maryland lawyer” and her criticisms of his article. Magee was also on the Executive Committee that planned the 1911 commemoration. If he truly believed the racist remarks he wrote, its difficult to comprehend why he would participate in the event.

would become crucial in understanding aspects of the Society's 1911 riot commemoration where a mythologized white memory trumped black historical reality.⁹

Southern historian C. Vann Woodward described mythology as “the twilight zone that lies between living memory and written history.” It’s where legends are born in a process “aided by the old prejudices, the deeply stirred emotions, and the sectional animosities that always distort history in any zone, however well illuminated by memory or research.” Commemoration organizers would fall into this twilight zone by interpreting the riot through the prism of a “white myth” that resurrected the old prejudices. The same racist mindset that infected newspapers sixty years earlier, whereby abolitionists became central characters in the incident, also influenced the Society in fashioning Castner Hanway, Elijah Lewis, and Joseph Scarlet into heroes. The white Quakers were the peacemakers in the riot story, as opposed to the southern villains or violent blacks, thus becoming the simple choice for the role of unsullied protagonists. For those local whites interested in the riot, the Quaker characters would become their humble role models in the riot narrative. This reflected a similar white-centered mythology concerning the Underground Railroad that was gaining popularity in the North during the Gilded Age.¹⁰

In 1898, Ohio State University instructor Wilbur Siebert collected hundreds of abolitionist recollections and published them in his highly popular book *The Underground Railroad*. The work consisted of countless tales recounting the heroic exploits of Quakers and other white anti-slavery proponents who secretly shepherded runaway slaves to freedom. While some of these recollections were truthful, others were

⁹ For Societal usage of “tragedy” see “March Minutes,” p. 88, Hostetter, p. 296, Magee, p. 193.

¹⁰ Woodward, *Strange Career*, p. xvi; E. Forbes, p. 252.

exaggerated and became self-serving eulogies written by descendants who sought to honor the supposed deeds of their ancestors and bask in what Blight described as “the moral glow of the old abolitionist generation.” This yearning by some whites to become part of a sentimentalized abolitionist history made the color of one’s skin the deciding factor in determining why different elements of the riot were emphasized, altered, or ignored in public memory. The riot story consequently became as much about the race of those looking back on the incident, as it was about the race of those actually involved.¹¹

The county’s divided mindset over the riot contributed to it receiving little public acknowledgement for some six decades after it transpired. Unlike members of the historical society, local whites considered the Christiana Riot insignificant as it had little relevance to their daily lives. Few whites held the riot in the same high regard as their black neighbors who reveled in its historical connection with freedom and liberty. There were those who remembered the riot as a “black eye” to the county, an embarrassing occurrence that found its way into the headlines of newspapers nationwide depicting the area as lawless and uncivilized.¹² Thus, to some Lancastrians the riot painted the county in such an unattractive light that it was hardly worth remembering and best forgotten. This mindset contributed to the riot receiving little public acknowledgement for some six decades after it transpired.

It was not until May 1910 that Christiana resident Charles Slokom wrote to William Hensel, an executive committee member of the Lancaster County Historical Society, to propose a question concerning a riot ceremony. Slokom was thinking of starting a

¹¹ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 231-233; “Whitemarsh’s Antislavery History,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 18, 2004; “Columbia’s Claim to Underground Railroad,” *Lancaster New Era*, February 5, 2009.

¹² *Lancaster Examiner and Herald*, September 24, 1851.

movement in Christiana of people interested in erecting some kind of “mark” at the sight of William Parker’s house. He thought it wise to ask Hensel if “the fuss [riot] which they had over in the valley is considered important enough outside this vicinity.” Slokom did not know if the plan would work considering the distance of Parker’s home from a road, but thought “it would be nice to have it finished [marker] and a little fuss made on the spot next Sept. 11th, the fifty-ninth anniversary of the event, conducted by the Lanc. County Historical Society.” Slokom’s use of the term “fuss” in referring to the riot illustrated the triviality some Americans felt towards Parker’s fight for freedom. Even an individual interested in local history, as Slokom apparently was, wondered whether anyone outside Christiana would even care about commemorating the riot. This corresponded with the lack of recognition historians had given the riot up until that time and the disinterest felt by some whites. There was no commemoration in 1910, but the plan must have struck a chord with Hensel as he decided to push it off a year when the more significant number of the riot’s sixtieth anniversary could be celebrated. The “little fuss” would be transformed into an affair far larger than Slokom had in mind, as the commemoration of 1911 would become one of the largest events the Society had held to that date.¹³

One would think a local historical society would be excited to memorialize its county’s past contributions to the causes of emancipation. However, the Christiana Riot’s racial legacy made celebrating the incident a thorny task for any organization to

¹³ C. S. Slokom to W. U. Hensel, May 13, 1910, Hensel Collection 1870-1915, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, Lancaster County Historical Society (hereafter cited as “LCHS”), Lancaster, PA. Judging by Slokom’s letter asking for Hensel’s advice, it is not a stretch to assume that Hensel was the one who decided to wait until 1911. He was the LCHS vice president the following year and the 1911 Commemoration’s Committee Chairman so it is more than likely he made this decision; “Notable Affair,” (August 4, 1911); Hensel, p. 133.

undertake in 1911 America and likely contributed to why a ceremony had not been attempted earlier. Sectional animosities and an institutional racism continued to infect national sentiment making any public remembrance of the riot, with its story of black versus white, a particularly hazardous affair fraught with political ramifications. The Society had to be wary not to present a commemoration sympathetic to the rioters or ideologically slanted towards a northern perspective for two reasons. First, this would assuredly lead to the organization and its members being publicly denounced by the South for opening old wounds. Second, no southerners would take part in the festivities for fear of being verbally berated by northerners who empathized with the rioter's cause. In an attempt to stem the divisiveness of any potential festivities, the Society determined to undertake an unbiased commemoration that focused on the riot solely as a historical episode rather than delving into the intricacies of the racial issue that seethed beneath its surface:

The sixty-year celebration is not intended to be a glorification of either party to the tragedy, nor to be a partisan memorial of the burning issue out of which it grew; but a popular historical study of a local event that attained national significance.

William Hensel, now vice president of the Society, advocated a similar politically correct position in the opening page of his riot history. Hensel declared that he was writing of the incident "without partiality, prejudice or apology, for or against any of those who participated."¹⁴

But Societal promises of an unbiased commemoration failed to allay the suspicions of some below the Mason-Dixon. When word of the planned commemoration reached John Crowther, a bank president from Towson, Maryland, he maintained reservations about

¹⁴ "March Minutes," p. 88; Hensel, p. 1.

the event, likely echoing the thoughts of more southerners than just himself. Crowther angrily chided Hensel and the Society, citing their insensitivity for even proposing a riot celebration. Crowther claimed he remembered the incident and was well acquainted with the Gorsuch family. “I know if they were living,” he said of the Gorsuches, “it would be very distasteful to them to have the memory of that disgraceful occurrence perpetuated.” Crowther’s objections illustrated the hypersensitive political climate that continued to fester some five decades after the country was plunged into civil war. Any memorializing of the riot was risked not only being considered a distasteful enterprise to the family of a murdered ancestor, but also a northern insult to southern sensibilities. If such hazardous ground was not tread carefully, Lancaster could easily be perceived as a disrespectful Yankee community dragging southern honor through the mud with reminders of slavery and rebellion. Hensel had foreseen the possibility of southern reluctance when commemoration organizers decided to invite special guests that had a personal stake in the riot. Invitations were dispatched to Peter Woods, a black riot participant, as well as descendants of Castner Hanway, Elijah Lewis, and Joseph Scarlet. A Civil War veteran, Woods lived in Bartville (seven miles southwest of Christiana) and was the last remaining survivor of those indicted for treason. All invitations were readily accepted, yet now came the Society’s most complicated task—convincing any Gorsuch descendants to attend.¹⁵

For the Gorsuch name, the riot was neither a simple historical episode nor reminiscent of the selfless stand for liberty that ancestors of Hanway, Lewis, or Scarlet could proudly proclaim. The riot was a traumatic event for the Gorsuches, one that rekindled memories

¹⁵ John Crowther to W. U. Hensel, March 23, 1911, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS, Lancaster, PA; Hensel, p. 126; “Notable Affair,” August 4, 1911.

of a slaughtered patrician, a wounded son, and even reached into the extended family affecting a nephew and cousin. Their willingness to tread the ground of a family tragedy would certainly be questionable and probably unlikely. Hensel made two visits to Rebecca Mitchell, Dickinson's daughter, in Maryland likely utilizing all of his personal charm and finesse in an effort to secure her attendance at the festivities. What he actually said is unknown, but apparently only after explaining the commemoration's neutral character did Mitchell agree to come along with her son Dorsey and two daughters Mary and Rebecca. Hensel wrote of his meeting, "the character [of] the celebration has been expressed to them [Gorsuches] and they are satisfied and sympathetic." Mitchell's acceptance is surprising given that she was taking the word of a man she never met and would be surrounded in Christiana by northerners sympathetic to the rioter cause notwithstanding the impartial theme. Furthermore, she was to be seated on stage a few feet from an African-American who was involved in the very riot that killed her grandfather. Perhaps she thought the ceremony would provide a sense of closure or maybe time had removed the emotional sting from the riot making attendance at the commemoration more a sating of historical curiosity. Nevertheless, Hensel's coup in having Gorsuch descendants present was a major accomplishment that permitted the Society to defend their commemoration from any further sectional questions regarding political motivations. In August 1911, a Societal announcement confirmed:

In order that the commemoration shall have no partisan nor sectional aspect, and to secure the attendance and interest of the friends and families of the Southerners killed and wounded, it is proposed to treat the incident as one purely of historic significance, and as illustrating the early stages of the great conflict between law and liberty which finally culminated in the

drama of the Civil War.¹⁶

The announcement continued by mentioning how “the family of Edward Gorsuch...have become very much interested in the commemoration, since they fully understand the spirit in which it is undertaken,” and beamed of how Pennsylvania Governor John Tener and Maryland Governor Austin Crothers, along with numerous other political dignitaries from both states, were to participate in the celebration. The society’s unbiased celebration was prepared to become the most significant event the organization had held to that date; hopefully its tone would satisfy any partisan reservations to promote an atmosphere suitable for sectional reconciliation and fraternalism amongst both North and South. But as the Society was in the final stages of preparations for its commemoration, organizers soon discovered that their celebration was tarnished from the outset by an event that was also affected by race—the brutal lynching of Zachariah Walker in nearby Coatesville, Pennsylvania.¹⁷

Coatesville was a steel town of approximately twelve thousand inhabitants located ten miles east of Christiana in neighboring Chester County. Its population had nearly doubled in the prior decade as a wave of immigrants (1,469) and southern blacks (1,520) settled in the borough. Like so many other African-Americans, Zachariah Walker migrated north from Virginia because of the availability of industrial jobs in Pennsylvania and to escape Jim Crow. By 1911, he had settled in a shack one mile

¹⁶ “Gorsuch-Mitchell Papers 1698-1921,” Maryland Historical Society (MS. 2733, Box 2); *Quarryville Sun*, September 5, 1911; John Crowther to W. U. Hensel, March 23, 1911, Hensel Collection, LCHS (MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15). Hensel describes Mitchell’s understanding of the commemoration’s neutral tone at the bottom of the Crowther letter; *Quarryville Sun*, September 5, 1911; “Notable Affair,” August 4, 1911.

¹⁷ “Notable Affair,” August 4, 1911.

outside Coatesville finding employment as a laborer for the town's Worth Brothers Steel Company. On August 12, Walker was in Coatesville celebrating the town's Harvest Home Festival where he spent most of the day drinking gin. As night fell he was now thoroughly intoxicated. Walker began staggering back to his home when he came across two Polish workers just beyond the Worth Brothers mill. The black man decided to jokingly harass the two immigrants by pulling a revolver from his trousers and firing several shots over their heads. The Polish men ran screaming down the road while a proud Walker laughed to himself, tucked his pistol away, and continued home.¹⁸

The shots startled Edgar Rice, a coal and iron policeman, who was on duty that night at the Worth Brothers mill where Walker had passed just a few minutes earlier. Rice hurried down the road, caught up with Walker just after 9:00 p.m., and began questioning the black man concerning the recent gunfire. Walker denied firing the shots, but Rice did not believe him. Although not seeing a gun or searching Walker, the white policeman nevertheless arrested the black man "for carrying concealed weapons" and started escorting him back to the guardhouse. Walker, the alcohol coursing through his veins, leaned on Rice which aggravated the policeman and caused him to draw his nightstick. Walker panicked at the sudden appearance of the club, perceiving he was about to be struck and the two began tussling. Walker ripped the nightstick from Rice's hands causing the policeman to instinctively reach for his revolver. However, Walker was quicker on the draw. The black man quickly pulled his gun from his trousers and shot

¹⁸ *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910*, vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), p. 597; Raymond M. Hyser and Dennis B. Downey, "'A Crooked Death': Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and the Lynching of Zachariah Walker," (hereafter cited as "A Crooked Death"), *Pennsylvania History* 54 (1987), p. 90; Dennis B. Downey and Raymond M. Hyser, *Coatesville and the Lynching of Zachariah Walker: Death in a Pennsylvania Steel Town* (hereafter cited as *Coatesville*), (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), pp. 15-20.

Rice point blank sending the policeman stumbling down a hill. Walker fired two more shots into Rice's back before taking the policeman's pistol and running home.¹⁹

By 1:00 a.m. on August 13, Rice's body had been discovered and search parties were scouring the area. Walker, still in a drunken stupor, went to a nearby farm and slept in a barn the rest of the night. He awoke in the early morning and walked down a country road when two unarmed men, who were searching a nearby field, spotted him. They tried to detain Walker, but the black man escaped to a wooded area and climbed a tree. It was now that Walker appeared to realize what he had done and the gravity of the situation he found himself. Feeling he was left with no other alternative, Walker placed the gun against his temple and fired. The shot gave away the black fugitive's location as nearby search parties immediately descended upon the scene. Police found Walker alive at the base of a tree, but unconscious and bleeding badly with a shattered jawbone. Walker was taken to the police station where Rice's revolver and his identification by the two Polish workers from the night before confirmed his guilt. A local doctor did not consider Walker's wounds life threatening, but police complied with the doctor's recommendation to transport the suspect to Coatesville Hospital. When Walker came out of surgery around 4:00 p.m. he was placed in a straitjacket and shackled to his bed by the police officer left behind to guard him.²⁰

Rice was a well-known figure in Coatesville; he was a member of the Brandywine Fire Company and in 1908 he barely lost an election for town constable. The slaying of such an upstanding citizen so outraged the white inhabitants of Coatesville that they decided to take justice into their own hands. Around 9:00 p.m. a number of groups

¹⁹ Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, pp. 20-23.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-27

converged to form a large mob of roughly two thousand men, women, and children outside the hospital. Anger and a thirst for vengeance soon pushed the crowd over the brink. They burst through the hospital doors and past the guard into Walker's room. The mob dismantled the bed and yanked Walker from the room, dragging him helplessly out into the street. He was taken to a nearby field just outside borough limits and draped over a fence rail as the crowd quickly started a bonfire. Walker realized what was going to happen, "For God's sake, give a man a chance! I killed Rice in self-defense," he begged, "don't give me no crooked death because I'm not white!" The mob was oblivious to his pleas, as an emotional frenzy had taken hold of their emotions. Walker was tossed into the flames eliciting cheers from the bloodthirsty crowd. Amazingly, Walker crawled from the fire on three separate attempts, only to be beaten and pushed back into the pyre each time. No one in the crowd made an effort to stop the lynching. Male spectators reportedly even stepped aside to permit women and children a better look at the burning African-American. One witness stated that Walker's cries of agony could be heard over a half mile away before he succumbed to the flames. After Walker's death, roughly 150 people waited for the ashes to cool so that they could take souvenirs of the fence railings and the most valued keepsake—his charred body.²¹

The next day some ten thousand people came from all over the county and as far away as Philadelphia to view the scene of the lynching. A wooden shoebox was placed at the site displaying Walker's charred hipbones and skull. "Men and women poked the ashes," the *New York Times* reported, "and a shout of glee would signal the finding of a

²¹ Ibid., pp. 30-33; Dennis B. Downey and Raymond M. Hyser, *No Crooked Death: Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and the Lynching of Zachariah Walker* (hereafter cited as *No Crooked Death*), (University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 31-39; Hyser and Downey, "A Crooked Death," p. 87; *Coatesville Record*, August 14, 1911; Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, pp. 43-44.

blackened tooth or mere portions of unrecognizable bones.” That same day children sold Walker’s remains on street corners to eager Coatesville residents. The *Times* noted that although the lynching visibly shocked Coatesville’s elderly Burgess Jesse Shallcross, other townspeople smiled “with a suspicion of satisfaction” as they spoke of the burning. Annie Rice, the policeman’s widow, was delighted by the result, stating that Walker “got just what he deserved.” Her only regret was that she could not be present for the execution. She begged to go with the mob, but several friends were adamant she stay home. “I was willing to set him on fire,” she declared, “I would have done anything to have got near him, but they would not let me.” When told of the lynching afterwards, Annie Rice was satisfied that her husband had been avenged.²²

The Walker lynching placed Coatesville in an unwelcome national spotlight much like the riot did to Christiana sixty years earlier. Newspapers throughout the North condemned Walker’s murder as affront to justice. The *New York Times* declared, “nowhere in the United States was a man ever lynched with less excuse or with an equal heaping up of horror on horror.” Walker was killed “not because he was a murderer,” the paper continued, “but because he was a negro murderer, and for the same reason they displayed in killing him a ferocity for which ‘inhuman’ is a word too mild and ‘brutal’ a slander on the beasts.” Northern editors overwhelmingly concurred with the *Outlook’s* characterization of the lynching as “A Blot on Civilization” caused by “the lust for blood that lies dormant behind race hatred.” African-American newspapers were similarly outraged echoing many of the same denunciations as their white counterparts. The black newspaper *New York Age* was in disbelief stating, “nothing in Central Africa could have

²² “More Mob Arrests Likely,” *New York Times*, August 21, 1911; “State Police Sent to Coatesville,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1911; Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, pp. 43-44.

equaled it. Nothing that has occurred in Haiti in its darkest days will compare with this atrocious and barbaric display.” For their part, Coatesville blacks were largely silent, likely frightened of instigating further racial violence and becoming another victim of a white mob. Southern editors said little of the incident, as the lynching of an African-American would hardly garner sympathy from that region of the country. The *Washington Post* actually used Walker’s death to taunt their northern counterparts: “It may seem a reversion of time honored methods but what is wrong with the suggestion that a few Southern missionaries be sent northward to teach their benighted brethren the principles of right-doing in the much mooted race question?”²³

The only periodical that defended the town’s reputation was its newspaper the *Coatesville Record*. The newspaper’s editor, William Long, was insulted by the national criticism and undertook a campaign to disassociate his neighbors from the lynching. The *Record* considered Rice’s murder the “most awful crime in the history of Coatesville,” yet did not ascribe such venom to the execution of Walker. The paper described the black man as a “floating negro” who killed Rice “in cold blood” without mentioning Walker’s assertion that he killed the policeman in self-defense. In its investigation of the incident, the *Record* did not identify one single eyewitness of a mob that numbered two thousand, instead claiming that the actual executioners all wore masks. The newspaper then spun the story as if it were outsiders who killed Walker by claiming that southerners had heard of Rice’s death and entered Coatesville bent on revenge: “It has been said on the streets that there were several Southern people, strangers in town last night, and there

²³ Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, pp. 45-50; “Atrocities All Outdone,” *New York Times*, August 15, 1911; “A Blot on Civilization,” *The Outlook*, August 26, 1911; *New York Age* as quoted in Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, p. 48; “Northern Pot and Southern Kettle,” *Washington Post*, August 15, 1911.

were strange faces in front of the mob who dragged the negro from the hospital.” And since the lynching technically occurred just over the borough line, the *Record* maintained that the townspeople could not be held responsible because “the general temper of the people of Coatesville is peace-loving and law-abiding.”²⁴

Fifteen men were eventually indicted for killing Zachariah Walker, including the police chief and the officer who guarded him in the hospital. All were acquitted by a jury of their peers. Despite the best efforts of prosecutors they could not surmount what one county judge described as a “conspiracy of silence.” Faced with continuous national criticism as the trials persisted into May 1912, Coatesville’s white residents turned inward displaying an arrogant civic pride in the face of outside disapproval. This solidarity against all outsiders, including the encroaching foreign and African-American populations, reinforced jurors’ notions that there was no need to send their neighbors to jail. To the town’s white population, Walker’s killing of Rice was a direct assault against the shared values of the community. A crime as socially charged as it was heinous, demanding punishment in its most draconian form. Thus, the lynching served the public will and could therefore be construed by whites as a justifiable act. Walker met his deserved fate serving as an example of what happens to those who run afoul of Coatesville’s white hegemony. That the local legal system failed to provide Zachariah Walker with any sense of justice meant little to the townspeople even as time passed and they had time to reflect on their actions. On the one-year anniversary of the lynching, white essayist John Jay Chapman visited Coatesville to hold a memorial service for

²⁴ *Coatesville Record*, August 14, 15, 1911; *New York Times*, August 16, 1911.

Walker, describing his death as “an American tragedy.” Less than a half dozen people attended the event.²⁵

Less than a month after the murder of Zachariah Walker, on Saturday, September 9, 1911 the first Christiana Riot commemoration was held from morning until mid-afternoon. Morning festivities consisted of the unveiling and dedication of a granite monument memorializing the riot participants interspersed with songs and prayers. An automobile trip was then taken to the site of Parker’s house and other important landmarks, including the former homes of Castner Hanway and Levi Pownall. After a luncheon, afternoon activities included a parade followed by literary exercises consisting of prayers, music, a commemoration address, and the presentation of Memorial Medals to Rebecca Mitchell, as well as Peter Woods.²⁶

To the Society’s chagrin, the commemoration did not go as planned. Numerous circumstances arose that had the potential to adversely affect the ceremony causing organizers to think fast so as not to have festivities completely disrupted. First, when the area’s black residents heard of the Walker lynching they were thrown into a state of fear and distrust. If a lynching could happen only a few miles away, could it not happen in Christiana? Apprehension gripped the town’s black population to the point where they were too frightened to join in the coming riot celebration. Christiana Burgess Charles Slokom made Hensel aware of the bad news. He wrote that “colored preacher” Reverend

²⁵ Hyser and Downey, “A Crooked Death,” pp. 88-89; For the results of the October 1911 and May 1912 trials see Downey and Hyser, *No Crooked Death*, pp. 88, 115; Robert W. Thurston, *Lynching: American Mob Murder in Global Perspective* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2011), p. 96; Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, p. 12.

²⁶ Initial itinerary of events found in 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS.

R. F. Wright, of Christiana's Zion A.M.E. Church informed organizers "that his people have all got cold feet since the Coatesville affair and will not take part." That the black populace was frightened was understandable, but was there another reason to avoid the commemoration? The unwillingness of Christiana's black residents to partake of the festivities might also have been some form of muted protest, a boycott expressing black solidarity. Although there is no evidence indicating this, it is not out of the realm of possibility owing to the news of Walker's lynching. Christiana blacks were in much the same position as their racial brethren in Coatesville where any public condemnation could meet violent reciprocation. Boycotting the commemoration was one of the few avenues open to safely protest the lynching and was therefore another likely reason Christiana blacks did not participate. The lack of black involvement in the festivities also provided a sense of the tense racial climate that continued to exist in Lancaster County. Although lynching was a rare phenomenon in Pennsylvania, the African-American absence at the commemoration denoted a genuine anxiety that white Countians were just as capable as their Chester County neighbors of committing such an atrocity. Ultimately, the Walker lynching diminished the ceremony throughout the day as the sheer irony of a commemoration celebrating liberty was overshadowed by the specter of racial inequality. At the bottom of Slokom's letter notifying Hensel that Christiana blacks would not be attending the festivities he unconsciously mentioned that a reconciliationist banner reading "Law-Liberty-Peace" would hang across the front of the dais where the afternoon's literary exercises were to be held.²⁷

²⁷ Sara Ruth, interview by author, July 12, 2012, Coatesville, PA; Slokom to Hensel, August 26, 1911, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS; Prior to the Walker lynching there were only two reported lynchings of African-Americans in Pennsylvania since the Civil War. See *The Lynching*

Secondly, Parker's house was razed in 1900, not only because the floors and roof had caved in, but also since the property owner was tired of curious passersby trampling his crops as they searched for the building. The "riot house" being gone, the Society erected a flagpole displaying an American flag to mark the site of the riot for those making the commemoration's automobile trip. Vandal(s) struck the night before the ceremony, unearthed the flagpole and stole the country's red, white, and blue symbol from off its mast. Societal organizers made no mention of the incident during the automobile trip and appeared to temporarily cover up the incident as it only appeared in newspapers two days later. Lancaster County and Christiana authorities treated the theft lightly because there was no evidence indicative of anything other than a juvenile prank, but whether this action was simply a practical joke or performed as an act of protest concerning the riot's relevance to race is unknown.²⁸

William Long, the editor for the *Coatesville Record* referred to the crime as a "cowardly act," appearing more disturbed by the flagpole prank and Civil War memory than the lynching in his own town. "The lynching of the negro murderer of the police officer, was an insult to a civilized community," Long maintained, "but the tearing down of that flag was an insult to the nation; to the thousands of men who struggled for five years to uphold it; and to the constitution of the United States about which the stars and stripes are wrapped." Long was in disbelief that Christiana investigators were not taking the crime very seriously calling the theft "an outrage on the name of this great State as was the lynching of Walker and other atrocities." Should the suspect be caught, Long

Calendar, <http://www.autopsis.org/foot/lynch.html> (accessed May 8, 2012); J. Katz, p. 294. Katz denoted the "inadvertent irony" behind Slokom's letter to Hensel.

²⁸ George P. Orr, "The Christiana Riot," *History Quarterly*, Tredeffrin Easttown Historical Society 5, no. 4 (Autumn 1943), p. 87; Rettew, p. 28; "Monument Arrives," *Coatesville Record*, September 14, 1911.

considered jail “too good for such a coward,” but it was the only form “of punishment meted out to such offenders in the absence of any more severe punishment, the man should be caught, and should be taught that the people will not tolerate any such thing as a common felon insulting the flag.” Long’s equating a theft of fabric with the lynching of a human being is telling regarding the issue of race in the area. Both incidents were outrages, yet an inanimate object holds more significance than an African-American. Long’s reasoning in this regard paralleled southern white conceptions of blacks as subhuman, inconsequential creatures fit to be lynched without any loss of moral conscience. Would that the editor’s crusade to find a prankster could have been turned to convicting lynchers, Zachariah Walker might have received the justice Long held in such high regard.²⁹

The next incident that hindered the commemoration concerned the dedication of the Christiana Riot monument—or the lack thereof. The Vermont firm hired to construct the monument mistakenly sent it to Christiana, Delaware. Dedication ceremonies were nonetheless held around its finished base, with spectators using their imagination to picture how the memorial might look. A local reporter indicated how the absence of the monument “was the only thing that marred the exercises.” The monument arrived two days later, allowing organizers to relive some embarrassment by publicizing its arrival on the exact riot anniversary of September 11.³⁰

²⁹ “Monument Arrives,” *Coatesville Record*, September 14, 1911; “American Flag Stolen From Shaft at Christiana,” *Coatesville Record*, September 11, 1911; “A Cowardly Act,” *Coatesville Record*, September 13, 1911; Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, pp. 45-47.

³⁰ “Anniversary of Christiana Riot,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 9, 1911; “The Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; “Anniversary of Christiana Riot,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 9, 1911; Hensel, p. 152.

Lastly, overcast skies unleashed a downpour of rain throughout the afternoon. The deluge washed out the parade and forced literary exercises to be reconvened inside a local church. For organizers, it was probably fortunate foul weather washed out the parade. It relieved Hensel and others from having to undertake the difficult task of explaining to uninformed out-of-town guests why no blacks were marching in the procession. Explaining a lynching would surely have been embarrassing for a Society that was going to be presenting a silver medallion representing “Liberty” to an African-American rioter later in the day.³¹

Although facing numerous obstacles that months of planning could not foresee, the commemoration went ahead undaunted. It was as if a national holiday was being celebrated in Christiana as roughly three thousand people attended the celebration. Businesses were closed and residents adorned their town with American flags and other red, white, and blue decorations. The town’s newspaper, the *Christiana Ledger*, published a general history of the riot and the resulting treason trials. This was likely for out of town guests to the festivities, but could also have been for locals who were either oblivious to the riot or had chosen to forget. Slokom’s earlier letter did reveal an uncertain sentiment whether white residents actually cared to remember the “little fuss” that happened sixty years ago. The *Ledger* also included a poem by Dr. Hugh Hamilton that spoke directly to the riot and its monument. Entitled “The Christiana Riot,” the poem reflected the same reunion message of the overall ceremony:

Christiana! Among rills and wild-wood,
Far from the World’s bustle and hustle;
Was once at strife, for Freedom’s Manhood!

³¹ “American Flag Stolen From Shaft at Christiana,” *Coatesville Record*, September 11, 1911; 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS.

In the hills, at peace; does nestle.

Near this place, History weaves
That Incident, into an Event;
Made by grand men, now in their graves,
For that Conflict, rears; this Monument.

From the blue baldric of the skies,
God speaks: "Peace on Earth, Good-
will to Men!"
There!—"E Pluribus Unum" flies;
A whole UNION shouts; aloud, Amen!

That when memory turns to this place,
Notes, the far-reaching Incident;
Remember their great Courage,—say Grace,
For them all, at this; Their Monument.³²

The very riot monument that Hamilton's verse addressed was the first item on the itinerary. The order of festivities included an invocation by Reverend Wright of Mt. Zion A. M. E. and a presentation of the monument by Commemoration Committee treasurer Benjamin C. Atlee. The latter's speech was succinct, asserting that the stone was the embodiment of national reunion. Atlee's words were in keeping both with the Society's conception of the riot and the commemoration theme. He implied that the country was flawed prior to emancipation by claiming the monument represented "an event in the development of the more perfect union of the states." A union that "came to its present strength" through "bloodshed and sacrifice." Atlee concluded with a thematic appeal to sectional reconciliation and continued peace between the states. "So long as this monument inspires us to thoughts of union and peace so long may it stand," he declared, but "the moment it inspires thoughts of sectional strife, that moment may this stone

³² "American Flag Stolen from Shaft at Christiana," *Coatesville Record*, September 11, 1911; "60th Anniversary," *Christiana Ledger*, September 16, 1911; "The Christiana Riot," *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; *Christiana Ledger*, September 9, 1911; C. S. Slokom to W. U. Hensel, May 13, 1910, Hensel Collection, 1870-1915, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS. It is difficult to believe that Christiana's black residents were not cognizant of the riot; *Christiana Ledger*, September 9, 1911.

crumble into dust and pass into that oblivion where belong such thoughts of discord.”

The ceremony continued with Charles Slokom accepting the monument on behalf of Christiana while Peter Woods was introduced as the last living survivor of those indicted for treason. Pennsylvania Governor John Tener stated he was happy to participate in the festivities and meet the area citizenry. A doxology of the hymn “Old Hundred” was sung and the dedication ceremony concluded with a benediction by Reverend A. T. Stewart. Also during the dedication, the songs “America,” “Star Spangled Banner,” and “Dixie” were played during intervals between the speeches. When the monument did arrive a few days later, it was an eleven-foot high granite obelisk, engraved on each of its four sides, and was paid for by the Society. Its inscriptions read:

East Face:

IN
COMMEMORATION
OF THE
“CHRISTIANA RIOT”
SEPTEMBER 11, 1851,
AND THE
TREASON TRIALS
SEPT. 29-DEC. 17, 1851

South Face:

KILLED:
EDWARD GORSUCH
HE DIED FOR LAW.
WOUNDED:
DICKINSON GORSUCH
FATHER AND SON
OF
BALTIMORE CO., MD.
JOSHUA GORSUCH.

West Face:

TRIED:
NOV. 24 – DEC. 11, 1851
CASTNER HANWAY.

NOT GUILTY.
HE SUFFERED FOR
FREEDOM.

North Face: The names of all thirty-eight men indicted for treason.³³

A closer examination of Atlee's speech and the monument text exposed another recurring theme of the 1911 commemoration beyond that of reconciliation. In her book *But We Have No Country*, Ella Forbes noted the absence of black participation in self-emancipation and chastised organizers for promulgating the "white myth" throughout the commemoration. Forbes considered the monument "testimony to the fact that the most prominent roles in the Resistance have been assigned to whites." She objected to the riot memorial devoting entire sides to the Gorsuch family and Castner Hanway, while William Parker is only listed as one of the thirty-eight men indicted for treason.³⁴

Forbes contention that the "white myth" blinded the Society to the central involvement of another race in the riot story is indeed correct. Societal papers designating the riot as a "tragedy" illustrated the divided conscience among even those whites sympathetic to Parker's actions. Given the context of the time, it is unsurprising the "white myth" was chronicled in granite as a permanent reminder of white abolitionism in securing freedom for blacks. Art historian Kirk Savage noted how any acknowledgement of slavery in public space exposed the hypocrisy of a liberty-professing society. "The abolition of slavery after the Civil War did not solve the problem but only intensified it," he argued. "Once abolished, slavery forced itself into

³³ "Anniversary of Christiana Riot," *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 9, 1911; "Report of Committee on the Commemoration of the Christiana Riot and Treason Trials of 1851" (hereafter cited as "Report"), *Papers of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 15, no. 8 (October 6, 1911), p. 239; "The Christiana Riot," *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; "Report," pp. 241-242; Hensel, p. 154; *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; E. Forbes, pp. 160-161.

³⁴ E. Forbes, p. 255.

the domain of memory, there to be reckoned with in one way or another—suppressed, integrated, romanticized.” The Society chose the latter option for its monument, romanticizing the fight at Christiana as one of Gorsuch versus Hanway, with Parker and his men present, yet pushed into the background. That white Quakers hastened slavery’s downfall at Christiana, made the Society believe their contributions deserving of being etched in stone as martyrs to the cause of black freedom. Atlee’s dedication exemplified this interpretation with the nation only becoming a “more perfect union” after slavery’s demise, achieved through the “bloodshed and sacrifice” of the Civil War. For the Society, the battle at Christiana thus mirrored the conflict it instigated ten years later, white sacrifice for the benefit of black liberation.³⁵

After the dedication ceremony was the automobile trip to a “flagless” riot spot, a luncheon, and then the appearance of a rain cloud that drenched the spectators. Although dampening the enthusiasm of onlookers, the rain did not stop people from continuing to flock into town. “So intense was the scramble to get into Christiana and help celebrate,” one reporter commented, “that people fought to get on the [trolley] cars and some even stood out in the rain on the ‘bumpers’.” The downpour forced organizers to utilize their backup plan, announcing that the principal literary exercises were to be moved inside Christiana’s Methodist Episcopal Church. Upon hearing this revelation, a crowd of some two thousand people dashed to the church and began packing into a building that normally seated a congregation of two hundred. “The old maids who were fortunate

³⁵ Emory E. Phillips, prod., *Celebrate Christiana: Sept. 8, 9 2001* (Christiana, PA: Moores Memorial Library Collection, 2001), videotape; E. Forbes, pp. 255, 162; Savage, p. 5; “Anniversary of Christiana Riot,” *Lancaster Intelligencer*, September 9, 1911.

enough to get inside got squeezed that time all right if they never had a beau,” the *Coatesville Record* playfully reported; “the fellow who managed to get out without a set of sore slats surrounding his anatomy was lucky.” Most could not get inside and were forced to stand outside in the rain, dodging umbrellas and straining to hear some measure of what was being said.³⁶

The afternoon portion of the commemoration began with an opening prayer, the playing and singing of “My Old Kentucky Home,” a short welcoming address, and the playing of “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean.” This was followed by Hensel’s introduction of the day’s guest orator, Reverend Dr. Henry J. Couden. A Union soldier during the Civil War, Couden lost his sight during a campaign and left the service. He learned to read braille, earned his theological degree, and held the post of Chaplain for the U. S. House of Representatives when he was invited to speak at the commemoration. Prior to the event, Hensel apprised Couden as to the impartial “spirit of the occasion.” The Reverend responded, “I trust what I shall say will be received by all concerned in the same spirit which I shall deliver it ‘with malice toward none and charity for all’.” Whether the Reverend would have said something different without Hensel’s explanation of the ceremony’s neutral tone is impossible to know. A man who was blinded in a war against the Confederacy might still maintain a degree of hostility towards those who took his sight. But Couden’s reply revealed a Christian forgiveness blended with the same reconciliationist emotions that were then sweeping the country. His speech would leave little doubt as to the power of forgetting for sake of reunion.³⁷

³⁶ “American Flag Stolen from Shaft at Christiana,” *Coatesville Record*, September 11, 1911.

³⁷ Henry J. Couden to W. U. Hensel, September 6, 1911, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS.

The Reverend's address was in keeping with the sentiments of the commemoration, sounding strikingly similar to the oratory commonly heard at Decoration Day ceremonies. His remarks were very general and danced around the controversial race issues inherent to the riot. Couden began with an underlying attack on slavery that blamed human servitude on a flawed past, arguing that man is increasingly trying to better himself and society:

We can not have perfect government until we have perfect laws.
We can not have a perfect world until we have perfect men.
Man is a strange mixture of good and evil. Sometimes the good is in the ascendancy; sometimes it is the evil predominates. In spite of the work of the muckraker and the pessimist, man is still moving onward to glory.

Whether Couden was specifically commenting on Gorsuch or the rioters as “a strange mixture of good and evil” is difficult to discern. If his Christian piety disavowed violent resistance, then the rioters are placed on par with Gorsuch as imperfect men in an imperfect world where sometimes “evil predominates.” Abolitionists and the Society faced the same difficulty in justifying the violent means of the rioters even for righteous ends. This dilemma over the ethics of violence made a white-centered commemoration the more politically agreeable given the historical circumstances.³⁸

The Reverend continued his speech stating that mankind was better off in 1911 than at any time in the past: “Never was man better housed and better clothed than today. Never was there a time when the effusion of knowledge was more widely scattered than today. Never was there a time when thought, speech and action is given more freedom than today.” This was a naïve statement of white self-adulation that rang hollow to Zachariah Walker's memory, Christiana's black populace hiding in their homes, or African-

³⁸ *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; *Christiana Ledger*, September 16, 1911.

Americans being systematically disenfranchised in the Jim Crow South. Couden's attempt to cast the early twentieth century as one of progressive enlightenment must have confused Peter Woods who was seated on stage during the entire afternoon ceremony. The black rioter likely wrinkled his brow in trying to reconcile the Reverend's assertion with what happened at Coatesville just weeks earlier.³⁹

Couden next venerated the South for the anguish it experienced during the Civil War, how "mothers and wives" of the "Sunny South suffered more than say." But then quickly turned to an optimistic tone adding that "the South now blooms as the rose and the sound of the hum of the manufacturing industries is heard." The Reverend's homage to the South was clearly directed at Rebecca Mitchell who, like Woods, was also seated on the platform. Although the seating arrangement was not documented, Mitchell was presumably placed across the stage from the African-American partly responsible for her grandfather's death. In Woods and Mitchell, the riot commemoration found its dialectical dilemma personified on the dais. Thesis and antithesis seated mere feet away, each representing divergent worldviews in the national debate on race and the historical memory of the riot. Rather than comment on the physical manifestation of the country's racial divide sitting behind him, Couden absconded into the same historical amnesia that asserted white reconciliation even in the face of racial inequality. "Now we again have one flag, one heart, one hand, one nation evermore. A whole lot of generosity is none too much. A little bit of hate is too much. A whole lot of love not too much," he maintained. The Reverend concluded with a reunion message that followed commemoration protocol:

In 1850 Congress enacted the iniquitous Fugitive Slave Law,
which caused the unfortunate circumstances near Christiana

³⁹ Ibid.

sixty years ago. It was only the beginning. What our statesmen could not settle by arbitration was settled by the sword. With slavery gone and the Union as one the nation has advanced to a nobler, grander and more Christian plane.⁴⁰

Following the Reverend's speech was the presentation of the Memorial Medals to Rebecca Mitchell and Peter Woods. The U. S. Mint of Philadelphia specifically created the circular silver pieces for the occasion, with both measuring three inches in diameter and a quarter of an inch thick. The first presentation was to Mrs. Mitchell and her medal represented the "Law" side of the celebration. The front bore the bust of President Millard Fillmore, on the reverse was engraved: "In memory of Edward Gorsuch. Commemoration of Christiana Riot and Treason Trials. 1851—September 11—1911." The medal presented to Peter Woods represented the "Liberty" aspect of the festivities. It bore the relief head of President Abraham Lincoln on the front while inscribed on the back was: "Peter Woods. Freeman, Soldier, Citizen. Sole survivor of the Christiana Riot and Treason Trials. 1851—September 11—1911." Lancaster County Controller H. Frank Eshleman, an executive committee member for the society and secretary for the Commemoration Committee, delivered the presentation addresses to each of the recipients. He was in an unenviable situation trying to remember the impartial spirit of the celebration while lauding the merits of "law" and "liberty." Edward Gorsuch and the rioters were adversaries sixty years earlier; there was no middle ground in their struggle between slavery and freedom. To praise one side in the riot implies criticism of the other, essentially boxing Eshleman, and by extension the Society, into a corner. This predicament produced two addresses filled with contradictions that illustrated the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

ambiguity Society members felt towards the rioters and their inability to truly fathom the plight for black equality.⁴¹

Eshleman began the “law” side of his speech with general platitudes on citizenship that implicitly referred to Edward Gorsuch as a martyr to his principles. Ignoring the central paradox that the law did not protect Gorsuch, Eshleman described how citizens must have both faith and trust in the law:

The good citizen not only obeys and upholds the law, but also accepts its guarantees and entrusts himself to its protection. Trust and confidence in the law and the free use of its benefits are as patriotic an attitude toward a government and as true a mark of allegiance as support of an obedience to the law. Faith and trust in law—confident reliance upon the law—are vastly greater security to a nation than mere cold obedience of law.

By epitomizing the “good citizen” as one who “obeys and upholds the law,” Eshleman immediately painted a negative picture of the rioters. In this interpretation of the riot narrative, William Parker and his compatriots were not “good citizens” because they fought to defend themselves against a law that refused to recognize their citizenship. Yet this fails to comprehend the situation fugitives faced in 1850. If the law protected blacks as it did whites, a black self-protection association would not have been necessary.

Parker contended “the laws for personal protection are not made for us, and we are not bound to obey them” meaning that if black rights were recognized, the fight at Christiana would not have occurred. Eshleman could not understand this concept when he implicated the rioters for not being “good citizens” essentially because they had the gall

⁴¹ 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS; Hensel, pp. 153-156.

to resist. That the fugitives felt they had little choice did not appear to affect Eshleman's perceptions regarding the rule of law and its indiscriminate nature.⁴²

As Eshleman continued with his complimentary allusions to Gorsuch, his speech suddenly veered into an unexpected area that did not correspond with the commemoration's neutral stand on the riot. In eulogizing the fallen slaveholder, Eshleman inferred that the rioters were terrorists for violently resisting the law:

So long as there be faith and trust in law, there can be no violation—no mob. Faith sweetens obedience. Though law be short, ineffectual, slow of remedy, faith in it, as it stands, is the citizen's immediate duty; patience and amendment, his line of action—not terrorism, violence and mob rule.

Whether this was an accident on Eshleman's part or indicative of a broader racial indictment is difficult to say. The intricate tap-dance needed to successfully convey an impartial riot speech would be a complex task for even the most distinguished orator. In preparing his comments, Eshleman was likely desperate to find something laudable to articulate concerning the character of a slaveholder. It's possible that in trying to paint a picture of Gorsuch's faith in the law, Eshleman's comparison with its opposite, "terrorism" and "mob-rule," unintentionally portrayed the rioters in a negative light.⁴³

Yet Eshleman's characterization of the rioters was also an accurate depiction reflecting the Society's tentativeness concerning the violence at Christiana. The Society, composed largely of a white elite membership, could simply not fathom the African-American predicament in the antebellum era. For Parker and his racial brethren, the law was not just "slow of remedy," but a form of institutionalized racism used against them

⁴² Hensel, pp. 153-156; "The Christiana Riot," *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; Pownall Journal, Moores Memorial Library Collection, Christiana, Pennsylvania.

⁴³ Hensel, pp. 153-156; "The Christiana Riot," *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911.

by manipulative whites. The law continually disregarded black civil rights and offered fugitive slaves none. When the law fails, individuals are left with two alternatives to protect themselves: submission or resistance. Parker chose the latter and was overlooked while the “white myth” made peaceful whites the central protagonists in the riot legend. Such high-minded principles encouraging “patience” and “trust in law” are honorable notions, yet have little worth in the face of enslavement. Few slaves savored the ethical superiority that came from patiently waiting for the law to be changed while seeing their wives and children in chains. Eshleman and the Society could not conceptualize this African-American mindset; they lacked the sense of role reversal necessary to appreciate a predicament distinct to subjugated minorities. This cultural divide influenced the Society in regarding the riot as a “tragedy” in its papers and disseminating the “white myth” during the commemoration. The motivations that led Parker and other black riot participants to violently resist, were simply too foreign for most whites’ historical conceptions.⁴⁴

Eshleman closed his remarks by classifying Gorsuch as a martyr to the law while including a disclaimer that disavowed Societal sponsorship:

Edward Gorsuch believed in the law—he believed in a law that was odious to two-thirds of our people—he tried to prove its promises. Disaster befell him. He died for the law sixty years ago near this spot. To his granddaughter...the Lancaster County Historical Society and its friends...presents this medal; not as a minute of our views upon his particular act, but as an expression of our approval of the principle his action exemplified, “willingness to die for the law.”

⁴⁴ Ibid.; For Societal descriptions of the riot as a “tragedy” see “March Minutes,” p. 88, Hostetter, p. 296, Magee, p. 193.

Whether Gorsuch was actually willing “to die for the law” was a dubious claim likely meant to placate his granddaughter sitting on stage. There was no indication Gorsuch expected to die that morning outside Parker’s home. Eshleman’s attempt at edifying a slaveholder that represented oppression and tyranny for millions of African-Americans illustrated just how far the reconciliationist impulse had infected Societal organizers. The commemoration’s quest to foster the spirit of national reunion caused them to legitimize a misbegotten law in order to rationalize slave catching. One could only guess what was going through the mind of Peter Woods as he sat on stage listening to the tribute being paid to Gorsuch. Its doubtful the elderly African-American remembered the slaveholder in the same high regard as a man of principle. Eshleman would have to act fast if he was to turn things around from his blatant catering to southern sensibilities. As a regimental band honored Mitchell with a performance of “Maryland, My Maryland,” the medal presentations were rapidly degenerating into the mythology of the Lost Cause.⁴⁵

Eshleman next turned to the black veteran seated on stage. Addressing his remarks to the “venerable Peter Woods and friends of liberty under the law,” Eshleman began with a strange thesis regarding the law and public sentiment:

Law is not always truly-reflected public opinion. Law is sometimes better and sometimes worse than public opinion. But law at its worst, in a popular government, is generally better than public opinion at its best. Sovereign rule must be reliable as well as righteous—firm as well as good. Law more nearly typifies these qualities than public opinion. Law is stable; popular fancy is variable—law is calm; the mood of the mass, emotional.

Eshleman’s argument that the law is virtuous because of its permanency and objectivity appeared to ignore history. Civil law is not a divine mandate and can be just as affected

⁴⁵ Hensel, pp. 153-156; “The Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911.

by the popular mood as any man-made tenet. Popular sentiment was what made the Compromise of 1850 necessary in the first place, as the Fugitive Slave Law was hardly a disinterested piece of legislation. The South had threatened secession if the previous fugitive law was not amended with more stringent language. Debate over the Compromise was filled with “popular fancy” as Whigs contended with Democrats over the expansion of slavery while abolitionists pushed for its eradication. The Fugitive Slave Law was not “stable” nor was it “calm” in the intransigent reactions it elicited from abolitionists and African-Americans who refused to abide by its “righteous” precepts. Moreover, Eshleman’s legal sentimentality that “law at its worst” is “generally better than public opinion at its best” overlooks the fact that the disposition of the citizenry determines the amending or termination of a law making it anything but stable. The strength of a democratic government comes from the popular sentiment that underpins its legal authority; the Lancaster County Controller appeared to believe the opposite was true.

Eshleman continued in his legal platitudes by again separating law from public sentiment. He alluded to the immorality of the Fugitive Slave Law while also making an underlying condemnation of the rioters’ actions that relied on a particularly racial conception of the rule of law:

As law is not always popular, neither is law always right, nor just. But law is always law.... The enacted law is a barrier against popular instability as well as a bulwark against tyranny. The law cannot be used to lend sanction to the fitful tides of popular emotion any more than the compass needle can be used for a weather vane.

Here again Eshleman could not fathom the African-American experience in 1850. Rather than serving as a “bulwark against tyranny,” laws supporting slavery, and the Fugitive Slave Law in particular, represented tyranny to millions of African-Americans. Nor did blacks simply succumb to “fitful tides of popular emotion” in resisting the fugitive law. William Parker and Peter Woods were instead fighting for their lives in a desperate struggle to assert their civil rights in a country that refused to recognize their humanity. Eshleman and the Society failed to comprehend this racial delineation in the rioters’ viewpoints concerning the legal justification for their resistance. Parker and his supporters were following a higher law than that of the United States, one that bespoke freedom and equality for all regardless of the color of their skin. In this manner the rioters were following a law, just not the law white Americans had in mind. Eshleman’s faith in the rule of law ultimately came from living under its protections as a white citizen, if he were without those protections, like so many blacks currently below the Mason-Dixon, his estimation of the legal system would have been markedly different.⁴⁶

As Eshleman reached the end of his oration, he began backtracking in an effort to finally show why Peter Woods was deserving of a medal. He reverted from his previous legal didacticism to a more practical understanding of the law’s limitations. Eshleman remarked on the malleability of the law and left little doubt as to his true feelings towards the Fugitive Slave Law that Woods resisted six decades ago:

But the law can be changed, improved, annulled. Liberty, the spirit and genius of all true law, can, in an orderly or in a revolutionary way upheave and overturn all wicked and ill-conceived enactments. It can shake continents to their centers—it can convulse a world to its core.

⁴⁶ Ibid.; Baker, pp. 70-93.

He concluded his address by presenting to “Peter Woods, aged representative of a liberated race,” the medal from “the Lancaster County Historical Society and its friends,” as a “public object lesson and as an opportunity to attest their approval of the motto to which your conduct sixty years ago on these acres, entitles you, “He Suffered For Liberty.” Eshleman’s speech to Woods revealed the Societal uncertainty in how to perceive the rioters. Only at the end of the presentation was Woods suddenly cast as a liberty-loving hero whose actions helped in abolishing the “wicked and ill-conceived” enactment that was the fugitive law. One wonders whether those in the crowd recognized this sudden shift in Eshleman’s thinking. Just seconds earlier, Eshleman had condemned the rioters for the very resistance that he now venerated as a patriotic revolution by those “who suffered for liberty.” This was a case of the Society trying to have it both ways in an impartial celebration. The Societal fear of offending southern sensibilities caused the medal presentations to become watered down in generalities regarding law and liberty. According to Eshleman, neither the Gorsuch party nor the rioters were necessarily in the wrong, making the riot a nebulous story of ethical ambiguity. In trying to appeal to all sides, the Society discovered the limitations inherent to commemorating a historical narrative with no heroes or villains, thereby cheapening the riot’s impact on the moral conscience of race relations.⁴⁷

After Woods received his medal, the song “Old Black Joe” was performed in his honor. Such musical interludes played an important role in demonstrating the Society’s broader political goals beyond the mere honoring of the riot. Performances of “America,” “Star Spangled Banner,” and “Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean” were meant

⁴⁷ Hensel, pp. 153-156; “The Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911.

to kindle a nationalist impulse for reunion amongst commemoration spectators. Other ballads such as “Dixie,” as well as Stephen Foster’s “My Old Kentucky Home,” “Old Black Joe,” and “Suane River” reflected organizers’ efforts to please the Gorsuch descendants, while also promoting sectional reconciliation by honoring southern culture. But while these latter melodies were some of the most popular of the time, their racial insensitivity belied the Society’s sense of historical understanding when it came to the black experience.⁴⁸

Ella Forbes noted the commemoration organizers’ bad taste in playing songs associated with the South at an event that was supposed to memorialize an act of black resistance. “These songs represent, for African Americans,” she argued, “exactly what fugitives fled from—enslavement. They are also characteristic of the mythologized history of the period of enslavement which too often passes as scholarship.” The ballad “Dixie” and its historical association with the Confederacy recalled a horrific period of black servitude and white barbarity. Stephen Foster’s tunes in particular were written specifically for minstrel shows during the height of their popularity in the 1850s. “My Old Kentucky Home” and “Suane River” were written in a racialized slave dialect replete with the phrase “darkeys” appearing throughout. Both songs stir chords of a Lost Cause sentimentality with loyal slaves “longing for de old plantation,” which typified the antebellum era’s racist caricatures of African-Americans as childlike simpletons. “Old Black Joe” was not written in dialect, yet still articulated a demeaning tale of black docility that author Ken Emerson believed “epitomizes Foster’s racial condescension.” For this melody to be chosen by commemoration organizers to honor Peter Woods, a man

⁴⁸ “Report,” pp. 239-240.

whose resistance sixty years earlier was anything but docile, revealed the Societal obliviousness to fully appreciating the racial significance behind the riot. The rioters were not helpless victims awaiting white salvation, but proactive agents for black self-emancipation. That the Society could not fathom this aspect of black agency was probably not lost on Woods when the band started playing. Long experienced in dealing with white insensitivity, the elderly black man ignored the patronizing tune, accepting his medal with grace and courtesy. More that can be said for a Society so consumed with national reunion that it blindly subscribed to music with racist overtones, unmindful of the paradox such racially divisive melodies created.⁴⁹

Following the medal presentation there was a playing of “Star Spangled Banner” followed by short addresses from government officials. The politicians who did attend the commemoration were Governor Tener, Congressman Marlin Olmstead of neighboring Dauphin County, Lancaster Mayor Frank McClain, State Senator William Sproul of Delaware County, and Francis Fisbee Kane who was a descendant of Judge John Kane (one of the jurists who presided over the treason trials). Governor Crothers of Maryland was not present at the ceremony. His staff sent Hensel a letter of regret describing how the governor had other engagements, but Crothers might have had another reason for refusing the invitation. The governor might very well have feared that attending the commemoration would imply his endorsement of the riot thereby opening

⁴⁹ E. Forbes, p. 255; For more information on Stephen Foster and his songs see Ken Emerson, *Doo-dah! Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1998).

him to the same political accusations that his constituent John Crowther unleashed on the Society months before.⁵⁰

The remarks of Governor Tener and Congressman Olmstead both concerned the event that loomed over the day's festivities as the issue of race continued to permeate riot memory. Since the ceremony was so consumed with law and liberty, the two legislators apparently felt it was politically incumbent upon them to publicly reference the Walker lynching to ease local minds. Society members were probably uneasy with the governor and congressman reminding attendees of a murder near the end of what was supposed to be a "celebration." Tener made a general statement assuring those gathered, "that everything is being done by the state to bring to justice those guilty of the most atrocious murder in the history of the state." Olmstead echoed these thoughts while also relating how the state was being assailed by southern charges of hypocrisy:

I am sorry to say that in a neighboring county the law has been violated in a way that makes a blot on the name of our state. In Washington we Pennsylvania representatives have it continually thrust upon us, especially by the southern representatives. This blot can only be wiped out in one way, and I hope it will be wiped out in that way. We have the law and we must permit it to take its course.

Later developments revealed the misplaced faith these legislators held in the law as a "conspiracy of silence" descended upon Coatesville. The law failed Walker just as it failed Gorsuch and Parker sixty years before, an ironic twist to a riot commemoration so reverently upholding the axioms of liberty and justice. Following the politically correct comments by the Governor and Congressman, Mayor McClain sang two songs, "Suane

⁵⁰ "American Flag Stolen From Shaft at Christiana," *Coatesville Record*, September 11, 1911; "The Christiana Riot," *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; "Report," pp. 240; 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS; Hensel, p. 57; John Crowther to W. U. Hensel, March 23, 1911, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS.

River” was performed, and the commemoration concluded with a benediction from Reverend Clifton Harris of the Atglen Baptist Church.⁵¹

Poetry was another aspect of the commemoration’s literary exercises. There is nothing said of any poems being read aloud for the event, but the commemoration program included three printed works. The poems offered three different perspectives on the riot—future martyrdom, reunion, and exultation. John Whittier’s *For Righteousness’ Sake* clearly perpetrates the error of the “white myth.” The commemoration program states the Whittier poem as being “originally ‘inscribed to Friends under arrest for treason against the slave power,’ and was directed especially to Hanway, Lewis and Scarlet.” The program specifically points to the final stanza as the most important:

God’s ways seem dark, but soon or late,
They touch the shining hills of day;
The evil cannot brook delay,
The good can well afford to wait.
Give ermined knaves their hour of crime,
Ye have the future grand and great,
The safe appeal of Truth to Time!

The Christiana Riot by F. Lyman Windolph supplied a different theme than that of Whittier’s call for the weathering of present difficulties to ascertain future glories. Instead, the composition Windolph prepared for the commemoration argued for forgetfulness and the necessity of reunion:

Out of the strident clash of hopes and fears
The times have builded music; where of late
Passion strode fierce, and wrath and white-lipped hate
Met bitterly in agony and tears,
Meet we in kindness. Cancelled are arrears
Of debt and credit. It were ill to prate
Of right and wrongs; may we commemorate

⁵¹ “American Flag Stolen From Shaft at Christiana,” *Coatesville Record*, September 11, 1911; Downey and Hyser, *Coatesville*, p. 45; 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS; Hensel, pp. 152-153.

More than the feuds of the forgotten years.
Great God! which one of us shall cast a stone
At bygone riot? Have we, too, not set
Our hands against thy laws? Is nought our own
That cries for pardon? Are no tear drops wet?
Judge of the Nations grant us to atone—
And of Thy mercy teach us to forget.

While the Whittier poem spoke to white suffering during the trials and Windolph called for reconciliation and the forgetting of past errors, *The Christiana Riot*, prepared for the celebration by local black author Mary Robinson, pointed to a completely different emotion—rejoicing:

‘Twas here that first was heard the thrilly cry.
which pealed the knell of bondage thro’ the land;
‘Twas here that first our people took the stand
which claims us from the guilt of slavery—
Ye call it Riot! Lo! it made men free!
It was a trumpet call, clear, loud and grand.
And in good time, obeying its command
We heard our Union speak for Liberty.
Here slavery first died. The blood shed here
Destroyed the claims of every trembling slave;
It bound the nation with a link more dear
And took from us a stigma dark and grave.
So thus we mark this fair September morn,
Where bondage perished and free men were born.⁵²

Robinson’s work is an outright celebration of the riot and its black participants. It was at Christiana she writes: “that first was heard the thrilly cry which pealed the knell of bondage thro’ the land...that first our people took the stand which claims us from the guilt of slavery,” and “Where bondage perished and free men were born.” Robinson’s poem also sheds light on the different ways in which the two races viewed the Christiana Riot at the time of the 1911 celebration. For whites, the riot was yet another political

⁵² All poems are found in the 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS; Provided are excerpts from Robinson’s poem as it appears in Chapter II; Richard Grau, “The Christiana Riot of 1851: A Reappraisal,” *Papers of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 68 (1964), p. 168. Grau cites the Robinson poem and states that she recited it at the commemoration. However, I have been unable to find any evidence that Robinson read her poem aloud at the celebration.

episode and the beginning of a path that would lead to armed hostilities. Hence, whites were largely concerned with how the riot directly affected them vis-à-vis Civil War. For blacks, the incident had far more personal importance. The lines “Ye call it Riot! Lo! it made men free!” and, “The blood shed here [Christiana] Destroyed the claims of every trembling slave,” characterize the riot as a fight for self-emancipation and a battle against an evil institution, two themes white attendees were either afraid to admit or simply unable to process.⁵³

Organizers were pleased with how the occasion turned out despite the hardships of the monument not arriving, the afternoon rain, and the looming specter of the Coatesville lynching. Hensel called it a “successful popular and historical celebration at Christiana,” and all the attendees agreed. The celebration drew a large crowd from the area and the *Christiana Ledger* reported, “everyone voted the commemoration a great success.” Most importantly, the neutral tone of the event worked its magic in that no one reportedly saw the event as biased one way or the other. Of all those in attendance, the most likely to be offended would have been the relatives of Edward Gorsuch, but this was hardly the case. The Gorsuch descendants enjoyed the festivities immensely and thanked both Hensel and the Society for the wonderful occasion. Dorsey Mitchell enjoyed his visit stating how wonderful it was that “two formerly apparently irreconcilable sections again pledged brotherhood and friendship and verified that this nation is an indestructible union composed of indestructible states.” His sister Rebecca echoed the same sentiments when thanking the Society for the medal and the presentation address. She remarked, “one of

⁵³ 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, 1870-1915, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS. Provided are excerpts from Robinson’s poem as it appears in Chapter II.

the most beautiful features,” of the occasion, “was the desire to establish that universal principle of brotherhood and harmony, and your example is a light that cannot be hid.”⁵⁴

The local press concurred with the reconciliationist sentiments displayed by the Gorsuch descendants. “The sons and daughters of the abolitionists and the slaveholders remembered the event,” the *Quarryville Sun* reported, “but they forgot the feeling that prompted the riot and the war that followed.” The paper went on to state how, “instead of a riot Christiana made it a reunion.” The *Christiana Ledger* set aside an entire editorial to comment on the commemoration’s soothing effect on any lingering sectional animosity. “It remained for the commemoration by a later generation,” its editor wrote, “to demonstrate how faithfully the lessons of law and liberty have been learned and how loyally the settlement of their conflict has been accepted.” In the *Ledger’s* eyes, Christiana’s generosity and “profuse hospitality” to all its guests illustrated that “in celebrating historic events which involved sharp political, religious and racial antagonisms, it could forget all differences of party, creed or color.” The newspaper considered the riot monument “an object which shall be a witness to the ages,” yet appeared more interested in the obelisk’s economic practicality for increasing tourism. “The thoughtless may not see at once the economic advantages of perpetuating historical sentiments,” the *Ledger* stated, “but they who have traveled abroad, or who have been keenly alive to the shrewdness of our New England brethren, will cheerfully bear testimony that every locality is substantially enriched by every memorial of this kind.”

⁵⁴ For success of the event see: Hensel, p. 133; “Sixty Years After,” *Christiana Ledger*, September 16, 1911; F. Dorsey Mitchell to Hensel, September 14, 1911, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS; Rebecca F. Gorsuch Mitchell to Hensel, September 25, 1911, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS.

As a whole, the newspaper spoke complimentary volumes about the commemoration's success in remaining impartial regarding the riot and how time mends all wounds:

Some good but timid people who had apprehensions that the spirit of the occasion might be misconceived, and that either an undue glorification of lawlessness or a defense of an abandoned and discredited political institution would be undertaken, have had their misgivings dispelled. It has been shown how antagonisms of Law and Liberty are ever liable to occur and how they must be settled and reconciled even if the sword sometimes—but only temporarily—displaces the court; and how “time at last sets all things even” and Peace comes with healing on her wings.⁵⁵

While the commemoration was deemed a great success, an incident came to light in the following days that curbed some of the congratulatory feeling and again illustrated the effect Walker's lynching had on the area. During the night of the commemoration, two black men from Cimminbottom, a few miles west of Christiana, arrived in town hours after the celebration had “officially” ended. It being a Saturday night and a day of festivities, many of the locals in Christiana were by now intoxicated. The two African-Americans, furious over the murder of Walker, belligerently dared anyone in town to lynch them. There was no response to their taunts at the time, but a little later, in the early hours of Sunday morning, another act of racial violence almost did occur. As the two black men were waiting for the last trolley car west, an intoxicated group of young men recognized them as the ones making challenges earlier that evening. When the trolley arrived, some in the crowd tried to grab the men while others threw stones at them. The two African-Americans raced onboard the car and it pulled away just in time to elude the angered throng. The two black men, adrenaline now flowing through their veins, began talking excitedly about the fate they so narrowly escaped. Passengers soon

⁵⁵ “The Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911; “60th. Anniversary,” *Christiana Ledger*, September 16, 1911. For editorial, see “Sixty Years After,” *Christiana Ledger*, September 16, 1911.

became annoyed by their “boisterous” attitude and pushed them off the car just outside of town. A few minutes later, the trolley hit something on the rails and passengers feared the black men had phoned ahead to have their friends assault the car. All were relieved when it was just a bull that had been knocked from the track.⁵⁶ It is unknown if either of the black men were hurt during the entire affair. Had the car not been outside Christiana when they were suddenly evicted, there could easily have been two more lynching victims in less than a month. This would indeed have been an ironic conclusion to a day inundated by themes of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Society was successful in pulling off the commemoration even though it had the unfortunate luck of its celebration coming at the heels of the horrible episode in Coatesville. Six decades had passed, but the “little fuss” was finally recognized with an official commemoration for the role it played in the history of the country. The Society had memorialized a controversial piece of area history without making the celebration one-sided and, thus, upsetting anyone in the North or South. This fear of reopening old wounds caused the ceremony to focus on a white reconciliationist theme that downplayed the emancipationist conception of the war. The riot’s significance to the history of black liberation was a topic too politically volatile for organizers of a small historical society to publicly emphasize. Although present in the forms of Reverend Wright, Peter Woods, and the poetry of Mary Robinson, specifically highlighting black agency or emancipation was simply infeasible. Diminishing the emancipationist vision was thereby a price organizers paid in staging the event during an era of virulent racial animosity. A decision

⁵⁶ “Trouble Stirred Up By Negroes at Christiana,” *Coatesville Record*, September 18, 1911.

that has nonetheless opened the Lancaster County Historical Society to various denunciations from contemporary historians with quixotic expectations that neglect time and place.

Critics such as Thomas Slaughter and Ella Forbes estimated this price as too high and wholeheartedly condemned the 1911 Christiana Riot commemoration for omitting the roles African-Americans played in self-liberation. Slaughter chastised Societal organizers for succumbing to the “white myth” and the legend that whites held the primary roles in the riot. “The goal in 1911 was to rewrite the myth by eliminating the slave owning villain and romantic black victim,” Slaughter contended, “to cut Simon Legree and Uncle Tom out of the story.” Forbes criticized the ceremony for utilizing racially insensitive songs and concurred with Slaughter’s “white myth” assessment arguing that besides Reverend Wright and Peter Woods, blacks were not represented at the ceremony. “One is left with the impression, upon reading the commemoration program,” she wrote, “that whites carried out the activities at Christiana for the benefit of Africans.”⁵⁷ While their denunciations hold a degree of veracity, there are limitations to their arguments. Forbes is correct in citing the performance of racist songs as this was an inexcusable example of bad taste on the part of Societal organizers. Furthermore, although the Walker lynching played a factor, there was definitely a nominal black presence at the festivities. As for the “white myth,” the riot monument and the use of the Whittier poem in the commemoration program certainly promulgated it, but Slaughter and Forbes are not entirely correct in characterizing the celebration as a white-centered riot story. A closer examination of the commemoration reveals an understated emphasis

⁵⁷ Slaughter, p. 185; E. Forbes, p. 255.

on black agency and an astute political pragmatism on the part of the Lancaster County Historical Society.

While the reconciliationist vision and white fraternalism were indeed present at the 1911 commemoration, two aspects challenge the contentions by Slaughter and Forbes that the “white myth” composed the entire ceremony. First, is the presence of Mary Robinson’s poem in the commemoration program. Her work explicitly honors the black rioters and their actions in self-emancipation. While her composition certainly does not correspond with the neutral theme of the festivities, the fact that Societal organizers published it in the program illustrates that they were trying—albeit in a minor way—to promote the story of black participation in their own liberation.⁵⁸ Second, the descendants of Hanway, Lewis, and Scarlet were not presented with medals. If whites held the important roles in the riot, then the most significant actors in the fight would necessarily be Edward Gorsuch and one or all of the three aforementioned men. A Gorsuch descendant received a medal for her ancestor’s part in dying for “Law,” but the only other medal was given to Woods for his part in fighting for “Liberty.” Thus the Society was conscious of the necessity for a black presence in the celebration to better personalize the riot’s racial significance even if it was nonetheless a small part of the festivities. This reveals that although aspects of the ceremony were indeed guilty of perpetuating the “white myth,” the commemoration as a whole should not be generalized as a historical example of white narcissism that denied black recognition.

It was not unexpected for the 1911 Commemoration to ignore the role blacks played in the Christiana Riot story. Does that acquit the organizers for their failure to promote

⁵⁸ 1911 Commemoration Program, Hensel Collection, 1870-1915, MG-76, Box 1, Folder 10, LCHS. Provided are excerpts from Robinson’s poem as it appears in Chapter II.

black agency as a focal point in the ceremony? No, but they should not be castigated for it either. Doing so relegates the Society to a straw man that contemporary critics gleefully bludgeon so as to demonstrate their heightened sense of moralism regardless of the practical impossibility of what they ask. Although failing to properly comprehend the black struggle for equality, the 1911 Commemoration organizers were not purposely racist or racially unfeeling in how the day's festivities were created. The Society was sympathetic to the actions of the rioters, yet such a theme was politically impossible in an era of Jim Crow. Instead, they attempted to remember the riot without offending anyone over its controversial nature, were directed by a misguided belief in the "white myth," and saw an opportunity to further reconcile North and South. For these three reasons the reconciliationist vision became the primary theme of the commemoration, not because of racial animosity but more due to a rational understanding of political circumstances.

Even if the Society wanted to highlight black participation in the riot, it would have been hopeless given the strife that would have ensued. An angry South would have again made Lancaster County a repository for verbal abuse much akin to 1851. Highlighting black agency would have assuredly upset the Gorsuch descendants, not only because black actions resulted in the death of an ancestor, but also because this aspect would have been difficult for the slaveholder's progeny to swallow considering they came from a state that condoned segregation.⁵⁹ Had the Society been unable to secure the Gorsuch family's attendance, this failure would have destroyed one of the commemoration's major goals. The point of the celebration was to have descendants of those involved in the riot there at the event so that both a national and personal reconciliation could be

⁵⁹ Woodward, *Strange Career*, pp. 97, 100.

effected. Rather than being racist or insensitive the 1911 commemoration organizers were faithful to their era as race relations were not at a stage in American history for the controversial nature of the riot's black vs. white issue to be publicly voiced. That does not absolve the organizers for ignoring black participation, but they are not completely to blame. They, like most familiar with the riot, were blinded by the "white myth" and did not fathom the rioters' primary role in a battle that had larger racial and sociological contexts than simply being another conflict between abolitionist and pro-slavery whites. Even if Society members did realize black involvement, like Thomas Whitson for example, publicly honoring this aspect would have exposed the observance to southern attacks for its insensitivity in re-opening old wounds regarding slavery and the war. Such sectional condemnations would have prevented the commemoration from occurring, thus destroying the Society's reputation while the historical memory of the Christiana Riot was sacrificed on the altar of racial politics.

While an initial examination of the 1911 commemoration makes it appear misguided by its impartial tone, its mistaken belief in the "white myth," and an endeavor to heal postwar wounds, a deeper investigation shows that it did possess a message of black agency. The presence of Reverend Wright, the recognition afforded Peter Woods, and the poem by Mary Robinson all helped in carrying the emancipationist torch passed from Frederick Douglass years earlier. Although a small part of the ceremony, the emancipationist message was nevertheless there, providing a spark to keep the significance of black activity in self-emancipation alive. While overshadowed by the larger reconciliationist vision, black agency's mere presence in the 1911 commemoration was significant during such a turbulent era of racial strife. The inclusion of the

emancipationist vision sustained its spirit for successive generations where the actions of William Parker and his compatriots might be reinterpreted through a more racially equitable societal prism.

Chapter VII

A Time of Transition

As the Korean War raged half a world away, onlookers gathered once more to commemorate the Christiana Riot on September 9, 1951. Held at the Pownall farm, the event was again sponsored by the Lancaster County Historical Society. The Society was in another complicated situation holding the centennial celebration during a time of racial segregation and discrimination. At the time of the commemoration, the civil rights movement was in its infancy. Some strides had been made: lynchings were rare, the NAACP was bringing test cases before the U.S. Supreme Court in an effort to outlaw the “separate but equal” doctrine, and President Harry Truman had desegregated the military.¹ But although race relations in America were starting to shift, the regions above and below the Mason-Dixon Line were by no means in agreement on issues of race. From 1911-1951, Jim Crow remained incredibly resilient yet highly adaptable in its legal battles with the NAACP while Civil War and Reconstruction histories continued to be interpreted through a white lens that disregarded black contributions inherent to the emancipationist vision. For white historians, Reconstruction was an unmitigated failure inflicted on the South by vengeful Radical Republicans who wanted to punish traitors to the Union. African-Americans were deemed as culpable as their radical benefactors in Washington for draconian Reconstruction policies that profited a corrupt and ignorant black population. Segregationists would use this historical “evidence” of black

¹ E. Forbes, p. 259. Referenced for location of event; Jack Ward Wilson Loose, “The Christiana Riot Anniversary Exercises,” *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 55 (1951), pp. 181-185; Cook, p. 33; Woodward, *Strange Career*, pp. 136-147. Woodward cited the NAACP as stating in the early 1950’s that lynching had virtually disappeared.

incompetence to rationalize the necessity of Jim Crow, thereby further entrenching the policies of state-sponsored racial discrimination.

Black intellectuals like Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Dubois attempted to discredit the negative perceptions of African-Americans by promoting a black counter-memory rife with emancipationist ideals. Their scholarship was monumental in promoting a more comprehensive social history and advancing black history as a legitimate field of study. Yet their scholarship was largely overlooked by an academy devoted to a lilywhite interpretation of American history. This view filtered down to ordinary Americans and continued to color their perceptions of the Civil War as a dramatic internecine conflict. Even as African-Americans were increasingly becoming more overtly political in demanding civil rights, their white counterparts reveled in a consensual orthodoxy of the Civil War where both North and South were equally honored for their respective ideals. Commemorations in the 1930s illustrated the power of this reconciliationist message in bringing whites together while blacks were overlooked. Lost Cause orthodoxy so dominated Civil War memory that it became sanctified in yet another Hollywood blockbuster *Gone With the Wind* depicting a bucolic South filled with faithful slaves. Finding itself in the midst of this racial hypersensitivity, the 1951 Christiana Riot Commemoration would try to have it both ways by fostering a reconciliationist theme while perpetuating a riot story that offered a voice to black agency. This inclusiveness opened the door to an African-American memory of the riot that reinterpreted the incident along distinctly racial lines. The public articulation of this black counter-memory made the second riot commemoration extraordinary for its time, something that has gone unrecognized by the historical community.

During the Great Depression, the Civil War's historical memory among white Americans had undergone few changes since the 1911 Christiana Riot Commemoration. White scholars continued to romanticize the war as a sectional struggle between northern and southern brothers caught up in a political disagreement over states' rights and federal authority. Lost Cause ideology had sanitized the war of its racial significance, spreading its influence into Reconstruction interpretations that maligned radical Republicans for their draconian punishment of the defeated South. Much of these negative conceptions of Reconstruction originated with Columbia University professor William Archibald Dunning who believed that federal postwar policies, deceitful southern white scalawags, and ruthless northern carpetbaggers had ruined the South. Dunning was highly critical of universal manhood suffrage in the southern states as one of the greatest mistakes made by the federal government. Characterizing former slaves as easily exploitable because of their "poverty, ignorance, credulity, and general childishness," he argued that freedmen were simply unprepared for such a civic responsibility. Blacks were fooled into voting for political charlatans, many of them their racial brethren, whom Dunning described as those "which acquired and practiced the tricks and knavery rather than the useful arts of politics." Such political ineptitude confirmed to southern whites that African-Americans were incapable of self-government thereby necessitating the implementation of segregation and disfranchisement for the reestablishment of "home rule." The Dunningite School expanded rapidly as his acolytes denounced Reconstruction on a veritable state-by-state basis. Among studies that found nothing beneficial springing from the years of Reconstruction were James Garner's *Reconstruction in Mississippi*

(1901), Walter Fleming's *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (1905), and Thomas Staples' *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874* (1923). African-American achievements were virtually non-existent in these narratives, their contributions either ignored or relegated to insignificance.²

Progressive historians of the 1920s and 1930s shared the same indifference towards black experiences during the war and Reconstruction years. Charles and Mary Beard's two-volume work *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927) disregarded slavery as a cause for war entirely, instead focusing on economic self-interest. Explaining the Civil War as a clash between northern industrialists, southern planters, and midwestern farmers, the Beards viewed the advancement of northeastern business interests as the true motivating factor behind the conflict and radical Republicans' Reconstruction efforts. Vernon Louis Parrington also perpetuated an economic interpretation of the war in his three volume *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927). Like Frederick Jackson Turner, Parrington feared that the rise of an industrial culture and the corresponding decline of agrarianism would spell disaster for democracy in America. This led to his viewing the conflict between North and South as a battle of capitalists versus physiocrats or captains of industry against plantation masters. Parrington argued that the war's function was to eradicate the final obstacle to a consolidated financial system whereby a slave economy could no longer compete with a capitalist economy. This belief among the Beards and Parrington that economic determinism was the primary cause for Civil

² David Levering Lewis, introduction to *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, by W. E. B. Dubois (New York: The Free Press, 1998), pp. vii-ix; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. xvii-xviii; William A. Dunning, "The Undoing of Reconstruction," *Atlantic Monthly* 88, no. 528 (October 1901), pp. 438, 444. For more information on the Dunningite interpretation see William Archibald Dunning, *Reconstruction Political and Economic* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907).

War made it a callous conflict devoid of any racial empathy. Their interpretations, along with those of the Dunningites, would dominate historical scholarship for decades professing lilywhite Civil War and Reconstruction narratives where African-Americans played a negligible role in the story of emancipation.³

The Great Depression hit African-Americans hard especially since 80 percent dwelled in the Jim Crow South. Their lack of economic and political power made them vulnerable to the racist whims of white industrialists. As American businesses cut jobs in response to the sluggish economy, black workers were many times the first to join the unemployment line. This caused a frantic search among African-American men and women to find any work just to feed their families one more day. In attempting to simply survive the Depression amidst the racial and economic discrimination of the Jim Crow era, black disinterest in maintaining the Civil War's emancipationist legacy would be understandable. Few black veterans remained and there seemed to be more immediate social concerns than high-minded principles from seventy years ago.⁴

During the interwar years most African-Americans, especially those in the South, were impoverished and illiterate. State-sponsored disfranchisement and the ubiquitous threat of the KKK had further relegated blacks to the peripheries of society. Yet, the black counter-memory of the Civil War was anything but extinguished. Emancipation Day continued to be celebrated by African-Americans serving both a social and political purpose in not only commemorating liberation, but also in affirming black unanimity in

³ Cook, pp. 10-11; Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), pp. 302-304, 108-109, 389, 418-429. For more information on Progressive historians see Charles A. Beard and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York: Macmillan, 1927) and V. L. Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927); Foner, p. xviii; D. Lewis, introduction to *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Dubois, p. xi.

⁴ Cook, pp. 156-158.

the ongoing struggle for civil rights. In 1914, Reverend James Taylor stood before an Emancipation Day audience in Georgia and denounced white authors for stereotyping black wartime contributions. In Civil War histories “the Negro is represented as a coward and frightful,” Taylor stated, when in reality blacks had shown “prowess” and “bravery” throughout the nation’s history. This black counter-memory of the war would extend into the 1920s and 1930s as figures such as Frederick Douglass, John Brown, and Abraham Lincoln continued to be common honorees at Emancipation Day ceremonies. In 1938, African-American judge William Hueston gave an Emancipation Day address before two thousand of his racial brethren gathered in Harlem, New York. After providing a brief synopsis of black history, Hueston argued that blacks needed a second emancipation, one “which will enable us to build a life with which to control our destiny, economic, political and moral.” J. Finley Wilson, the national leader of the Negro Elks, followed Hueston on stage and lamented, “seventy-five years after emancipation we are still battling for our rights in the greatest republic in the world.” Attendees passed numerous resolutions at the commemoration including the nomination of a black candidate for Congress to represent Harlem and additional job opportunities for African-American workers.⁵

Memories of slave resistance, abolition, and radical Republicanism remained alive and well in the black community during the interwar years. Each were elements of a resilient oppositional narrative elucidated by Frederick Douglass years earlier and passed down through the oral tradition. The emancipationist torch would pass from Douglass to black historians such as Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Dubois who gave it historical

⁵ Ibid.; *Savannah Tribune*, January 10, 1914; Clark, *Defining Moments*, pp. 218-219; “Emancipation Day Marked in Harlem,” *New York Times*, January 3, 1938.

substantiation. Although not necessarily running in the same circles, these two intellectuals figured prominently in providing institutional credence to the black counter-memory of the Civil War. They sustained the emancipationist cause in academic circles by offering revisionist interpretations of the war and Reconstruction that ran counter to the lilywhite academic consensus. Woodson and Dubois would not only educate their fellow blacks in the linkage between emancipation and civil rights, but their accurate depictions of black history were so convincing they would persuade a new generation of liberal whites into becoming their allies.⁶

Originally from Virginia, Carter G. Woodson was a product of slave parents who spent his youth working as a rural laborer and coal miner. He attended Berea College in Kentucky, teaching school for a few years before gaining admission to graduate school at the University of Chicago. Woodson's historical training would eventually lead to Harvard where he received his doctorate in 1912. Three years later, he established the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) to further the cause of black history and the emancipationist vision. Based in Washington D.C., the ASNLH specifically challenged the Lost Cause and Dunningite perceptions of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Woodson's "searing awareness of the contradiction between the democratic creed and American racial practices" made him hopeful that the ASNLH could be used both as a counterweight to the war's white supremacist orthodoxy and for the advancement of equal rights. His conviction that scholarship should be disseminated to the masses led Woodson to the creation of a Negro History Week and the publication of the ASNLH's magazine, the *Negro History Bulletin*. Education thus became one of

⁶ Cook, pp. 156-159.

the primary vehicles for sustaining the black counter-memory that Woodson and his organization were promoting, a facet that was surprisingly helped by white supremacy. As segregationists had little interest in educating their racial “inferiors,” black schools received modest governmental funding and even less supervision. The ASNLH capitalized on this oversight by assisting the efforts of black teachers, ostensibly creating an army of “insurgent scholars” that took advantage of their racial isolation by highlighting the history of black perseverance in the face of white oppression. Through education and an unrelenting insistence on the revisionist interpretation of the Civil War and Reconstruction, Woodson was convinced that the ASNLH could cultivate a sense of black pride and dignity while also demonstrating to whites that African-Americans had participated in the national experience.⁷

During the 1920s and 1930s, black scholars such as Carter G. Woodson, David Houston, A. E. Perkins, and Mason Brewer all attempted to rebalance the historical debate by promoting the black counter-memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction years. Yet, with the possible exception of Woodson, none made an impact on the field of history as significant as W. E. B. Dubois.⁸

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois was born in Massachusetts on February 23, 1868, the same year Congress passed the fourteenth amendment guaranteeing black citizenship and civil rights. As a young man Dubois excelled in academics at his New England high school, even working for various newspapers such as the *New York Age* and the *Springfield Republican*. In 1884, he earned a scholarship to Fisk University in

⁷ Cook, pp. 156-158; August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 93; W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 178.

⁸ D. Lewis, introduction to *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Dubois, p. ix.

Tennessee, the country's foremost black college. Dubois took a summer job teaching in a local black Tennessee school district where he witnessed the extent of Jim Crow firsthand. This experience would shape Dubois for the rest of his life, as this encounter with discrimination would arouse his interest in furthering the cause of civil rights for subjugated peoples. Dubois gained admission to Harvard University, earning a second bachelor's degree in 1890 before beginning his graduate training in African-American history. He received his Master's in History in 1892 and then studied abroad in Europe. Dubois returned to America in 1894 becoming the first African-American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard a year later.⁹

Dubois held the fundamental belief that social science could be used to fix the race problem and end the social isolation of underrepresented groups. During the next few years, he held various teaching posts while also publishing numerous essays on civil rights and the black experience. In 1896 he published his doctoral thesis *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade* and finished the first sociological study on African-Americans, *The Philadelphia Negro*, three years later. However, these works would pale in comparison to the 1903 publication of his monumental *The Souls of Black Folk*, a book that nobly expressed the African-American condition in the early twentieth century and became the voice of a subjugated race. Dubois described African-Americans as being "born with a veil" into an unforgiving white society and living in a perpetual state of "double-consciousness" as they endeavor to be both black and American. Dubois argued that blacks lack self-confidence because they continually measure themselves through a

⁹ Farah Jasmine Griffin, introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W. E. B. Dubois (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2003), pp. v-xxi; Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Against Racism: Unpublished, Essays, Papers, Addresses, 1887-1961 by W. E. B. Dubois* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), p. xv.

white lens: “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.” After Emancipation, African-Americans were not given sufficient opportunities to prove their capabilities to whites. Few blacks had the educational or technical training to uplift a largely illiterate race in so short a time. Racial violence and government neglect undermined frenetic attempts by black leaders to demonstrate black capabilities in white eyes and cultivate a self-sustaining black community. These impediments led to vacillation and bewilderment among African-Americans, which contributed to the failure of racial equality promised by Reconstruction. Dubois described this as “the double-aimed struggle of the black artisan—on the one hand to escape white contempt for a nation of mere hewers of wood and drawers of water, and on the other hand to plough and nail and dig for a poverty-stricken horde—could only result in making him a poor craftsman, for he had but half a heart in either cause.” That millions of former slaves could not fashion a thriving African-American community in only a few years should have come as no surprise, but southern whites considered it sufficient evidence that blacks were incapable of the responsibilities of citizenship. This directly led to segregation, disfranchisement, and the growth of the KKK to control a seemingly ignorant black population.¹⁰

Dubois believed that only through affording blacks higher education, economic opportunity, and immediate equal rights could America’s race problem be solved. This standpoint placed him in direct contradiction with black educator Booker T. Washington who promoted a gradualist demand for civil rights and whose Tuskegee Institute focused

¹⁰ Aptheker, pp. 12-13; Griffin, introduction to *The Souls of Black Folk*, by W. E. B. Dubois, pp. v-xxi, 9-15.

solely on the industrial education of its African-American students. That whites recognized Washington as the national spokesman for his race exasperated Dubois because he perceived his counterpart's efforts as contradictory to the cause of black equality. He characterized Washington's accommodation to white supremacy as representing "the old attitude of adjustment and submission." Dubois argued that the "intensified prejudice" of the early twentieth century demanded the "Negro's tendency to self-assertion" in response to racial discrimination. While he and other black intellectuals did not "expect that the free right to vote, to enjoy civic rights, and to be educated, will come in a moment," they were convinced:

that the way for a people to gain their reasonable rights is not by voluntarily throwing them away and insisting that they do not want them; that the way for a people to gain respect is not by continually belittling and ridiculing themselves; that, on the contrary, Negroes must insist continually, in season and out of season, that voting is necessary to modern manhood, that color discrimination is barbarism, and that black boys need education as well as white boys.¹¹

Dubois's opinion that "the thinking classes of American Negroes," or what he would term the "talented tenth," were those responsible for voicing these demands was also illustrative of his determination to spread civil rights globally to all peoples suffering the indignities of oppression. The necessity of the franchise, higher education, and equal rights were a humanitarian requirement not only for African-Americans, but also for "the struggling masses" and "the darker races of men whose future depends so largely on this American experiment." In 1909, Dubois joined other blacks and liberal whites to form the NAACP where he used his new position as editor of the group's journal *The Crisis*, to condemn lynching, racism, and Washington's accommodationist arguments. Dubois

¹¹ Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 35-47.

placed a “heavy responsibility” on Washington “for the consummation of Negro disfranchisement, the decline of the Negro college and public school and the firmer establishment of color caste in this land.”¹² Unsurprisingly, the disagreement between the two men over the path to black equality placed them at odds for the rest of their lives.

Like Woodson, Dubois was also at the forefront of black intellectuals who promoted a black counter-memory of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Speaking at his Harvard graduation ceremony in 1890, Dubois seized the opportunity, even as a twenty-two year old student, to skillfully denounce an advocate of the Lost Cause—Jefferson Davis. Dubois utilized Davis as a metaphor for American civilization, describing him as a “typical Teutonic Hero” representing “individualism coupled with the rule of might.” This allegory aptly allowed Dubois to couch his criticisms of the country’s imperialism and racial inequalities. He depicted Davis as the embodiment of the Strong Man who, when judged by the standard of Teutonic civilization, was “something noble,” yet when “judged by every canon of human justice, there is something fundamentally incomplete about that standard.” It was such a civilization that “made a naturally brave and generous man, Jefferson Davis—now advancing civilization by murdering Indians, now hero of a national disgrace called by courtesy, the Mexican War; and finally, as the crowning absurdity, the peculiar champion of a people fighting to be free in order that another people should not be free.” Dubois referred to Davis as representative of “a system of human culture whose principle is the rise of one race on the ruins of another.” African-Americans were not part of that system Dubois argued; their effect on civilization was

¹² Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 35-47, xi; David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868–1919* (New York: Holt, 1993), pp. 252-278; “The Lynching Industry,” *The Crisis* 9, no. 4 (February 1915), pp. 196-198; *The Crisis* 11, no. 2 (December 1915), p. 82.

prosaic and unremarkable according to Teutonic standards. “Not as the muscular warrior came the Negro, but as the cringing slave,” Dubois contended. “The Teutonic met civilization and crushed it—the Negro met civilization and was crushed by it.” Dubois maintained that the black race was one “of submission apart from cowardice, laziness or stupidity” that both checked and complemented the Teutonic hero. African-Americans instead represented “the doctrine of the Submissive Man,” Dubois argued, “given to the world by strange coincidence, by the race of whose rights, Jefferson Davis had not heard.”¹³

Thirteen years later, Dubois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* of his disappointment in the growing fellowship between North and South that conveniently forgot the emancipationist cause of the Civil War. While admitting that “the growing spirit of kindness and reconciliation” between the sections was “a source of deep congratulation to all, and especially to those whose mistreatment cause the war,” he feared what white reconciliation might mean for African-Americans. Dubois was adamant that if “reconciliation is to be marked by the industrial slavery and civic death” of black men, “with permanent legislation into a position of inferiority, then those black men, if they are really men, are called upon by every consideration of patriotism and loyalty to oppose such a course by all civilized methods, even though such opposition involves disagreement with Mr. Booker T. Washington.”¹⁴

In 1909, Dubois continued promoting the black counter-memory when he presented an essay entitled “Reconstruction and its Benefits” before the American Historical

¹³ Aptheker, p. 15. “Jefferson Davis as a Representative of Civilization,” W. E. B. Dubois address at Harvard Commencement Day, June 25, 1890.

¹⁴ Dubois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, pp. 44-45.

Association in New York City. With none other than William Dunning sitting in the audience, Dubois publicly discounted his counterpart's interpretation by arguing that Reconstruction policies had actually been a boon to the South. Radical Republican efforts furnished the South with modern democratic state constitutions, progressive social legislation, and a public school system. Dubois acknowledged the corruption of African-American leaders and southern whites who had no interest in black suffrage succeeding, yet he did not blame ordinary blacks for the failure of Reconstruction:

The results in such case had to be evil but to charge the evil to negro suffrage is unfair. It may be charged to anger, poverty, venality, and ignorance; but the anger and poverty were the almost inevitable aftermath of war; the venality was much greater among whites than negroes, and while ignorance was the curse of the negroes, the fault was not theirs, and they took the initiative to correct it.

It was the federal government's inability to establish an effective Freedmen's Bureau to guarantee universal manhood suffrage that locked African-Americans into new forms of enslavement such as sharecropping and debt peonage. Dubois argued that a more permanent Freedmen's Bureau "established for ten, twenty or forty years with a careful distribution of land and capital and a system of education for the children, might have prevented such an extension of slavery." But the Freedmen's Bureau unpopularity in the white South and its "socialistic and over-paternal" image in the North, doomed any contemplation of its long-term protection of black civil rights. Dubois argued that it was not black suffrage that doomed Reconstruction, as the Dunningite interpretation believed, but the temporary nature of the Freedmen's Bureau combined with white society's disinterest in promoting racial egalitarianism. "[T]he arguments for universal negro suffrage from the start were strong and are still strong," Dubois maintained as if speaking

directly to Dunning, “and no one would question their strength were it not for the assumption that the experiment failed.”¹⁵

Dubois turned “Reconstruction and its Benefits” into a massive book published in 1935 entitled *Black Reconstruction in America*. Expanding on the central themes of his earlier essay that countered academic charges of African-American inferiority, Dubois utilized a Marxist interpretation of labor relations to voice the black counter-memory of slavery, Civil War, and Reconstruction. *Black Reconstruction* turned the Dunningite School on its head by focusing on African-American contributions in self-emancipation and their participation in southern state governments during Reconstruction. However, the most controversial facet of Dubois’ work was not necessarily his insistence on black agency, but his condemnation of the historical profession in a vitriolic conclusion that would cause *Time Magazine* to label him the “Ax-Grinder.”¹⁶

Dubois named the final chapter of *Black Reconstruction* “The Propaganda of History” where he criticized white historians for diminishing black capabilities and their contributions to the nation’s past. Dubois was “literally aghast” over the machinations of his white counterparts in allowing the field of history to be “devastated with passion and belief.” The lack of objectivity shown by the Dunningites and other white scholars to the black race was unfathomable in a field that was supposed to be based upon facts and scientific judgment. “One fact and one alone explains the attitude of most recent writers toward Reconstruction,” Dubois insisted, “they cannot conceive Negroes as men; in their minds the word ‘Negro’ connotes ‘inferiority’ and ‘stupidity’ lightened only by

¹⁵ D. Lewis, introduction to *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Dubois, pp. vii-viii; W. E. B. Dubois, “Reconstruction and its Benefits,” *American Historical Review* 15, no. 4 (July 1910), pp. 781-799.

¹⁶ D. Lewis, introduction to *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Dubois, pp. xvii; *Time Magazine*, June 23, 1935.

unreasoning gayety and humor.” Since emancipation, Dubois considered the white propaganda campaign against African-Americans to be “one of the most stupendous efforts the world ever saw to discredit human beings” one that involved “universities, history, science, social life and religion.” The danger of such racist attitudes among white intellectuals was that it was filtering down to their students, clouding the reasoning of the next generation thereby creating a cyclical pattern of historical misinformation as to why the Civil War was fought:

Grounded in such elementary and high school teaching, an American youth attending college today would learn from current textbooks of history that the Constitution recognized slavery; that the chance of getting rid of slavery by peaceful methods was ruined by the Abolitionists; that after the period of Andrew Jackson, the two sections of the United States “had become fully conscious of their conflicting interests. Two irreconcilable forms of civilization...in the North, the democratic...in the South, a more stationary and aristocratic civilization.” He would read that Harriet Beecher Stowe brought on the Civil War; that the assault on Charles Sumner was due to his “coarse invective” against a South Carolina Senator; and that Negroes were the only people to achieve emancipation with no effort on their part. That Reconstruction was a disgraceful attempt to subject white people to ignorant Negro rule; and that, according to a Harvard professor of history [Frederick Jackson Turner], “Legislative expenses were grotesquely extravagant; the colored members in some states engaging in a saturnalia of corrupt expenditure.”¹⁷

Dubois understood the postbellum desire for reconciliation after a horrific conflict and the psychological need for healing among white Americans, but warned that “reasons of courtesy and philanthropy” were insufficient in justifying a historical amnesia to the reality of African-American enslavement and other ignoble aspects of the past. If history is used for the purposes of “inflating our national ego” or providing “a false but

¹⁷ W. E. B. Dubois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (1935; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1998), pp. 711-729.

pleasurable sense of accomplishment” then it is no longer science, instead becoming a jingoistic fable of “lies agreed upon.” Dubois was astonished “in the study of history at the recurrence of the idea that evil must be forgotten, distorted, skimmed over.” The ignoring of the emancipationist conception of the war and the simultaneous rise of the Lost Cause’s idealization of states rights’ has left us “with no cause for the Civil War except the recent reiteration of statements” that portrayed northern leaders as “narrow, hypocritical fanatics and liars” while southerners “were extraordinary and unexampled for their beauty, unselfishness and fairness.” Such a selective understanding of the war and Reconstruction was responsible for fashioning a romanticized myth that painted “the South as a martyr to inescapable fate,” made “the North the magnanimous emancipator,” and ridiculed “the Negro as the impossible joke in the whole development.” By the 1930’s, Dubois argued that five decades of “libel, innuendo and silence” had “so completely misstated and obliterated the history of the Negro in America and his relation to its work and government that today it is almost unknown.”¹⁸

While critics nationwide were dubious of a thesis based on Marxist economics, those in the North largely praised Dubois for illuminating the otherwise overlooked black experience. New York’s *Herald Tribune* and *World-Telegram* concurred with *Times* reviewer John Chamberlain who found Dubois justified for his “rancorous onslaught on American historians of the Civil War period” and that the book skillfully presented a “stirring, bitterly eloquent brief for the part the American Negro played in the effort to create an egalitarian democracy of black and white alike in the post-Civil War South.” Avery Craven, of the University of Chicago, was less complimentary in an *American*

¹⁸ Ibid.

Journal of Sociology review, claiming Dubois used “abolition propaganda and the biased statements of partisan politicians” as source material. While maintaining that *Black Reconstruction*’s “temper is as bad as the sources,” Craven acknowledged how Dubois made “a real contribution when he placed the struggle over Reconstruction in the larger drive for democracy and larger social-economic justice.”¹⁹

Southern reaction was similar to Craven combining outright hostility with a begrudging acceptance. Duke University professor Robert Hilliard Woody blasted Dubois in the *North Carolina Historical Review* for his excessive partisanship while tepidly admitting that the black author’s facts were “fairly well buttressed.” Writing in the *Southern Review*, University of North Carolina professor Benjamin Kendrick denied that the Dunningites were as racist as Dubois implied. Kendrick did grant, however, that the debate between he and Dubois was more ideological than intellectual where in the “appeal to sources,” they could “both find support there for our respective contentions.” That the work received any critical praise was remarkable given the historical climate in which it was published. White Americans remained content with romanticized feelings of sectional reunion while ignoring the African-American side of the story. While *Black Reconstruction* temporarily lit a firestorm among scholars, it could not penetrate the entrenched Civil War sentimentalities of ordinary Americans. The book was a modest financial success selling two thousand copies by 1938 but found little interest from popular book clubs. It would fade from view just as quickly as it appeared, awaiting a

¹⁹ D. Lewis, introduction to *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Dubois, pp. xi-xvii; *New York Times*, June 13, 1935; Avery O. Craven, *American Journal of Sociology* 41 (January 1936), p. 535.

new generation that would take the torch of black counter-memory from Carter Woodson and W. E. B. Dubois just as they had taken it from Frederick Douglass.²⁰

As black scholars like Woodson and Dubois were lending academic credence to those willing to acknowledge the emancipationist vision, commemorations of Civil War events in the 1930s continued to placate white chauvinism. After nine decades the Lost Cause and desires for white reconciliation remained central to historical memories and clichéd nostalgic perceptions of a war where “brother fought against brother.” On October 10, 1931 these feelings were on full display when a crowd of approximately three hundred whites and one hundred blacks assembled in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia to dedicate a granite monument to the late Heyward Shepherd. A free black railroad porter, Shepherd was the first victim of John Brown’s Raid on the federal armory in 1859 when he was fatally shot by Brown’s men trying to escape. For years the South had politicized his death not only because of the irony that Shepherd was a victim of Brown’s abolitionist cause, but also because it promulgated Lost Cause orthodoxy. The 1931 ceremony to Shepherd was led by heritage organizations such as the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) and the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) who hailed the fallen black man in a manner similar to the folklore surrounding the faithful slave. Although not a slave, Shepherd was nonetheless celebrated as a black loyal to the southern cause who gave his life protecting the rights of his social and racial betters.²¹

²⁰ R. H. Woody, *North Carolina Historical Review* 13 (January 1936), pp. 91-95; Benjamin B. Kendrick, “History as a Curative,” *Southern Review* (January 1936), pp. 540-550; D. Lewis, introduction to *Black Reconstruction in America*, by W. E. B. Dubois, pp. xi-xvii.

²¹ Shackel, pp. 81-82, 94.

Henry McDonald, the white president of Harpers Ferry's historically black Storer College, provided the introductory remarks for the dedication. Ignoring warnings from the NAACP that his presence would only validate Lost Cause ideology, McDonald naively saw the event as an opportunity to foster goodwill between the races. He urged the audience that this should not be a day to "remember discord and a past, however memorable and glorious," but to look into the future with the same "spirit of peace" that the memorial encouraged. SCV member Matthew Page Andrews next related the story of Shepherd's death by using the public forum to attack John Brown and rationalize the institution of slavery. Andrews referred to Brown as being deluded by "some kind of warped psychosis or paranoia," then argued that Africans were better off in America than if they had remained in Africa. He extolled the virtuous care of southern masters, asking, "should not some measure of praise be granted" to those "who raised another race up from the lowest known scale more rapidly, perhaps, than any people had ever risen before?"²²

UDC leader Elizabeth Bashinsky followed with a speech that praised Shepherd for dying "in defense of his employer's property, and in memory of many others of his race who were loyal and true during a period that tried men's souls." She stridently maintained that the memorial "commemorates the loyalty, courage, and self-sacrifice of Heyward Shepherd and thousands of others of his race who would, like him, have suffered death rather than betray their masters or to be false to a trust." Bashinsky's

²² Mary Johnson, "An 'Ever Present Bone of Contention': The Heyward Shepherd Memorial," *West Virginia History*, 56 (1997), pp. 1-26; Shackel, pp. 94-97; Henry T. McDonald, "Remarks at the Unveiling of the Heyward Shepherd Marker, October 10, 1931," McDonald Collection (Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia); Matthew Page Andrews, *Heyward Shepherd: Victim of Violence* (Harpers Ferry, WV: Heyward Shepherd Memorial Association, 1931), pp. 20-25.

remarks were met with loud applause after which the Confederate flag covering the monument was lifted. The inscription read in part:

This boulder is erected...as a memorial to Heyward Shepherd, exemplifying the character and faithfulness of thousands of negroes who, under many temptations throughout subsequent years of war, so conducted themselves that no stain was left upon a record which is the peculiar heritage of the American people, and an everlasting tribute to the best in both races.

Exercises concluded with a choir performing a selection of songs and African-American clergyman George F. Bragg providing the benediction.²³

The dedication ceremony met instant criticism from African-Americans over southern whites using Heyward Shepherd to justify the Lost Cause. Max Barber, president of the John Brown Memorial Association, castigated McDonald for not being “shocked and disgusted” by the speeches and for even participating in an event organized by “a bunch of unregenerated rebels.” In Barber’s opinion, the ceremony verified his belief that white southerners “still hanker for the filthy institution of slavery.” Storer College graduate Edward Hill called McDonald’s participation “a colossal blunder” in light of Jim Crow discrimination and the lynchings of African-Americans. Hill referred to the monument as “a symbol of that inferiority complex which the slaves could not evade,” and blamed McDonald’s presence at the dedication for “creating an attitude of servility in the students’ minds.” The NAACP attempted to counter the Shepherd Memorial by proposing to affix their own tablet to John Brown’s Fort located on the campus of Storer College. The tablet’s inscription, written by W. E. B. Dubois, read:

Here / John Brown / Aimed at Human History / A Blow /
That woke a guilty nation / With him fought / Seven Slaves
and sons of slaves. / Over his crucified corpse / Marched

²³ “Heyward Shepherd,” *Confederate Veteran* 37 (November 1931), pp. 411-414; *Shepherdstown Register*, October 15, 1931; Shackel, pp 97-98.

200,000 black soldiers / and 4,000,000 freedmen / Singing /
“John Brown’s Body lies a mouldering in the grave / But his
Soul Goes marching on.”

McDonald rejected the text for not adhering to the college’s promotion of interracial goodwill and refused its placement on the fort. This rebuff led to a new round of attacks on McDonald and the college trustees. A *Washington Tribune* editorial branded them “white Judases” for snubbing the NAACP but catering to the UDC and SCV. “Their attitude condemns them of attempting to defend the institution of slavery, of justifying present day injustice, of feeding to black youth a vicious opiate of subservience and ‘Uncle Tomism’ under the false title of ‘education’,” the editorial bitterly proclaimed. The Baltimore *Afro-American* considered McDonald a white leader more dangerous than racist southern Senators, “the Bleases, Tillmans, or Heflins,” and found it preposterous how any “white man under the spell of the Daughters of the Confederacy can teach black boys and girls to be free.”²⁴

Despite the public criticism, McDonald would survive the controversy and preside over Storer for another decade. The saga of the Shepherd memorial served as another example of white reconciliation trumping the black counter-memory. African-Americans continued to face persistent political obstacles to public elucidation of the emancipationist vision made all the more disturbing by meeting resistance from black institutions themselves. By accommodating the UDC and SCV, supposed African-American allies such as Henry McDonald became willing accomplices in not only strengthening the southern hold on Civil War memory, but also revealing a pernicious element of Lost Cause mythology. That even when the South’s ideological cause was not

²⁴ *Pittsburgh Courier*, October 24, 1931; *Afro-American*, October 31, 1931; Shackel, pp. 99-103, 109; Johnson, pp. 1-26; *Washington Tribune*, May 27, 1932; *Afro-American*, May 28, 1932.

completely supported by the facts, as in Shepherd's free status and his fleeing from Brown's men, the Lost Cause was such a powerful opiate to southern nationalism that truth became secondary to legend.

Five years later, Manassas National Battlefield Park in Virginia offered southerners another opportunity to bask in the enduring mythology of Lost Cause ideology. Sponsored by the National Park Service (NPS), the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Civil War's first major engagement included a commemoration of the battle followed by a reenactment staged by 1,500 troops. The *Manassas Journal* reflected on the battlefield as a "spot sacred to the memory of the Southern cause" and admired the Confederate victory achieved there. "Had not the invading horde of what they contemptuously referred to as 'Lincoln's hireling band' been turned back in confusion and in disgrace?," the newspaper asked. "Was not this vindication of their prowess sufficient to strike terror into the hearts of those who sought to smother the soft handed southerners in their supposed ease of idleness?" The July 21, 1936, ceremony was attended by 31,000 spectators, some of whom sat in viewing stands constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps, grim reminders of the financial depression then taking place in the outside world. Reverend H. St. George Tucker opened the commemorative exercises with an invocation placing the battle in historical context and indicated the spot where "our beloved Stonewall Jackson" earned his fame. Tucker criticized the federal government for taking so long in officially recognizing the battlefield as a historic site (the NPS took control in 1935) and how the battlefield had fallen into disrepair. Manassas, he declared, "is one of the few great battlefields of this war that remains unmarked, neglected, and uncared for. We feel it is a disgrace to Virginia and the entire nation." Next, Wilbur C. Hall, chairman of the

Virginia State Commission on Conservation and Development, remarked briefly how the battlefield was not intended to glorify war. Instead, Manassas “is intended to commemorate permanently and fittingly the heroism of Americans who made the supreme sacrifice for causes they believed right.”²⁵

The battle reenactment was the highlight of the Manassas commemorative festivities. U.S. Marines dressed in blue denim to portray the Federals while U.S. Army troops donned gray denim to portray the Confederates. Major Stonewall Jackson, a descendant of his namesake, played the starring role by acting the part of his ancestor. As Confederate reenactors chased their Union counterparts from the field in a final climactic charge, the *Washington Post* reported a burst of enthusiasm erupting from the crowd. “A wild rebel yell arose from the grandstand as Jackson’s men, bayonets out, rushed down on the Federals in the last successful charge, and J. E. B. Stuart’s cavalry tore out of the woods to hasten their flight to Washington.” Cavalry and artillery drills followed the reenactment while Marine Corps aircraft concluded the ceremony by performing aerial stunts. Northerners questioned the appropriateness of reenacting the Battle of Manassas as part of the commemoration. Letters to the editor of the *Washington Post* revealed concerns that such “sham” battles romanticized the Civil War without recognizing the principles involved. One writer observed how Americans “have become a people that for some reason want entertainment which thrills, no matter how the thrills come or what are the results on moral principles.” Another letter described the Confederate cause as “an open rebellion against the United States Government” and maintained how “we as a people, regardless of section, cannot afford to put a stamp of approval on treason.” But

²⁵ Shackel, pp. 157-159; “Reenactment of First Manassas Battle, July 21,” *Manassas Journal*, July 16, 1936; “Thousands See Manassas Rites,” *Richmond News Leader*, July 21, 1936.

southerners were unfazed by such northern concerns. Those below the Mason-Dixon reveled in the opportunity to celebrate a great Confederate victory that reinforced their Lost Cause ideology. Manassas became the southern counterpoint to Gettysburg, representing a stubborn Confederate pride that refused to fade away.²⁶

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania was once again in national headlines during its own seventy-fifth anniversary from July 1-4 1938. The “Last Reunion of the Blue and the Gray” attracted 250,000 spectators and two thousand elderly Civil War veterans (averaging ninety-four years young) for a celebration devoted to reconciliation and sectional healing. The *Christian Science Monitor* hoped the reunion would foster the “disappearance of a remnant of sectionalism and the emergence of a wider sense of patriotism that forgives—and forgets—the separating bitterness of 1861-1865.” Opening ceremonies at Gettysburg College Stadium included an address by Secretary of War Harry H. Woodring. The Secretary made no distinction between Union and Confederate soldiers, defining their heroism as noble examples of “American courage and sacrifice.” The irony that Confederate troops were Americans fighting against the United States of America did not appear to enter Woodring’s mind. He marveled at the ease with which postwar reconciliation took hold, “never in the history of the world was a great civil war terminated with less permanent ill feelings,” and declared to the audience how “sons of

²⁶ Shackel, pp. 159-161; “40,000 Cheer Charging Troops in Restaging of Manassas Battle,” *Washington Post*, July 22, 1936; Mike O’Donnell, *At Manassas: Reunions, Reenactments, Maneuvers* (Mechanicsville, VA: Rapidan Press, 1986), pp. 24-25; “‘Sham Battle’ of Bull Run to Be July 21,” *Washington Post*, July 6, 1936; *Washington Post*, July 24, 1936; *Manassas Journal*, July 22, 1921.

the North and sons of the South have long been united in love of country and devotion to its flag.”²⁷

The highlight of the commemoration was the dedication of the Eternal Light Peace Memorial on July 3. The \$60,000 limestone memorial stood forty feet tall topped by a bronze urn holding a gas flame. It bore the inscription “Peace Eternal in a Nation United.” President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s dedication of the memorial was broadcast nationwide over the radio. The President was introduced by Pennsylvania Governor George Howard Earle who connected American isolationism with the peace monument behind them by describing armed conflict as “unnecessary, brutal and indefensible” in the modern age. Roosevelt’s speech characterized Gettysburg as memorializing the defense of “a people’s government for the people’s good.” He hearkened to Lincoln who understood “that when a challenge to constituted government is thrown down, the people must in self-defense take it up; that the fight must be fought through to a decision so clear that it is accepted as being beyond recall.” Sounding as if he was depicting the Confederacy as fighting against constitutional government, Roosevelt quickly retreated to the political sanctuary of reconciliation:

But Lincoln also understood that after such a decision, a democracy should seek peace through a new unity. For a democracy can keep alive only if the settlement of old difficulties clears the ground and transfers energies to face new responsibilities. Never can it have as much ability and purpose as it needs in that striving; the end of the battle does not end the infinity of those needs. That is why Lincoln—commander of a people as well as an army—asked that his battle end “with malice toward none, with charity for all.”²⁸

²⁷ Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 96; *Christian Science Monitor* quoted in Paul L. Roy, *The Last Reunion of the Blue and the Gray* (Gettysburg, PA: Bookmart, 1950), p. 23; “Blue, Gray Veterans Gather at Gettysburg for Reunion,” *Reading Eagle*, June 29, 1938; N. A. Meligakes, *The Spirit of Gettysburg: The Growth of a Nation* (Gettysburg, PA: Bookmart, 1950), pp. 221-223.

The celebration concluded the following day with parades, military demonstrations, and aerial stunts. No battle reenactments were staged so as to reinforce the themes of peace and harmony. One newspaper observed how the commanders of the GAR and the United Confederate Veterans “strode arm in arm” as they said farewells to comrades. The fraternalism displayed at the Gettysburg reunion made plain how the continued use of white reconciliation was tantamount to northern memories of the Civil War. As the outbreak of World War II approached, white northerners remained hesitant of contradicting southern conceptions of a conflict that boldly expressed their indomitable spirit. This unwillingness to counter Lost Cause orthodoxy permitted southern mythologies of the Civil War to persist unabated for the next two decades at the expense of the emancipationist vision.²⁹

One year after the Gettysburg anniversary, *Gone With the Wind* opened to rave reviews with its portrayal of an idyllic Old South that brought Depression-era Americans a sentimental four-hour diversion from their daily toils. Not since *Birth of a Nation* two decades earlier had the Lost Cause been so vividly personified on the silver screen. The film included all of the prerequisite Lost Cause themes: southerners valiantly defending their cultural values, the numerically and materially superior North, content and faithful slaves, the tranquility of plantation life, and marauding Yankee soldiers. Adapted from Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 Pulitzer Prize winning novel of the same name, *Gone with the Wind* was a hit in both North and South as captivated audiences readily consumed the

²⁸ “Flame Burning on Monument at Gettysburg,” *Dubuque Telegraph-Herald*, July 4, 1938; “Conflict Told by Roosevelt at Gettysburg,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 4, 1938.

²⁹ Linenthal, p. 97; “Yanks and Johnny Rebs,” *Cambridge City Tribune*, July 14, 1938; “Veterans Reunion at Gettysburg Closes Monday,” *Eugene Register-Guard*, July 5, 1938.

story of a Georgia white woman named Scarlett O'Hara who desperately struggles to survive in the midst of Civil War and Reconstruction. O'Hara's character was indicative of the slowly shifting gender roles then occurring in America, a perfect fusion of the traditional southern belle and the New Woman of the 1930s. She was charming, yet independent-minded and assertive, a marked change from the female docility of the past. Her indomitable spirit and perseverance in the face of adversity struck home to millions of Americans who faced similar tribulations in just trying to feed their families and find employment. *Gone with the Wind's* themes of determination and deliverance shine through by the end of the picture as O'Hara becomes a survivor who courageously endures even after losing everything. She thus became the embodiment of Lost Cause ideology and a metaphor for American perseverance during the depression, beaten but not defeated.³⁰

Gone with the Wind premiered in Atlanta on December 15, 1939 and would become the highest grossing film of all time. It went on to win ten Academy Awards including Best Supporting Actress which went to black performer Hattie McDaniel for her portrayal of Mammy. The "mammy" character was the most racially insensitive aspect of *Gone with the Wind*, an antebellum caricature that slaveholders used as proof their slaves were content. Mammies were typically stereotyped as obese black women who devotedly cared for their master's white children. Like the Sambo caricature, male slaves who were childlike simpletons, mammies were popular in American fiction at the turn of the twentieth century. They became part and parcel of the Lost Cause mythology written by Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris who fashioned them into the

³⁰ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, p. 393; Cook, p. 17.

quaint “old plantation Negro,” representative of an idealized past that white southerners increasingly yearned for as they suppressed black civil rights. As segregationists were continually haunted by fears of black domination or “Negrophobia” whereby any self-assured African-American threatened the white power structure, mammies and Sambos were anything but threatening. They were from the old slave generation dutifully accepting of their inferiority in southern society. In 1903, South Carolina Senator Ben “Pitchfork” Tillman praised the virtues of the “old Negro” while simultaneously cautioning his fellow whites of the dangers inherent to the social and political equality demanded by the New Negro. While the mammies and Sambos understood their place in the South’s social hierarchy, Tillman referred to the younger generation of blacks as “vagabonds” with a “smattering of education” who were liable for “all the devilment of which we read every day.” Speaking to constituents a decade later, Mississippi Senator James Vardaman similarly spoke glowingly of the “old negro mammy” that raised him with the “faithfulness and tender care of a mother.” But he warned, “this grand old type of the darky is passing...supplanted by the Afro-American, which means a good servant girl or a good farmhand spoiled.” *Gone with the Wind* played on these themes through romanticism, the preponderance of the Lost Cause, and by providing southern white audiences with the stock black characters they nostalgically remembered. Hattie McDaniel’s accomplishment in becoming the first black actor to win an Academy Award was thus tarnished by the humiliating role she was required to play. What should have become a significant moment for African-American advancement became little more than a historical reminder of black subordination. Ironically, the film’s sentimentalized depiction of the South and its racial contentment could not overcome Jim Crow realities.

Georgian segregation laws caused McDaniel and the rest of the black cast to be barred from attending the premiere of *Gone with the Wind*.³¹

In the shadow of public commemorations and silver screen renderings of loyal slaves and white fraternalism, the second Christiana Riot Commemoration took place on September 9, 1951. The ceremony was held on the front lawn of the former Pownall farmhouse overlooking the site where William Parker's house once stood. It served as an ideal location to accommodate the interracial crowd of nearly eight hundred people who attended the festivities. The event was smaller than its 1911 predecessor, consisting solely of literary exercises and musical interludes. The Lancaster County Historical Society again sponsored the commemoration via an intersectional interpretation that focused on forgiveness and reconciliation. By utilizing a nationalist approach, the Society hoped to both foster a spirit of intersectional camaraderie and also bring descendants of riot participants together in a spirit of peace and healing much like in 1911.³²

This reconciliationist approach to Civil War topics was widespread throughout the country as the issue of race remained largely anathema to historical commemorations. Although the African-American crusade for civil rights was beginning to gain momentum in 1951, the reconciliationist vision continued to survive as the popular interpretation of a

³¹ "Gone With the Wind is Top Grossing Film of All Time," Bloomberg.com, July 7, 2009, <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=newsarchive&sid=aLzh3gmCoWdo> (accessed June 21, 2012). As of 2009, the movie adaptation of *Gone with the Wind* has grossed over 1.45 billion dollars after adjusting for inflation; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), pp. 184-189; "The Ben Tillman Problem," *Tomorrow Magazine* 4, no. 2 (February 1908); *Washington Herald*, October 23, 1913; Warren G. Harris, *Clark Gable: A Biography* (New York: Harmony Books, 2002), p. 211.

³² E. Forbes, p. 259; Loose, pp. 181-185.

distinctly white Civil War memory. As has been shown, this was because of the white monopolization of Civil War and Reconstruction histories and a general unwillingness to anger southern sensibilities by presenting histories that placated Lost Cause orthodoxy. The riot commemoration in 1951 reflected such societal pressures. Organizers remained fearful that a ceremony replete with a northern perspective of the riot would insult southern pride and place the society in the crosshairs of segregationist critics. The controversial riot story and its battle between black and white could easily become political fodder for a South that was always prepared to play the victim at the hands of inconsiderate Yankees. Any lack of impartiality could very well spell disaster for securing the attendance of those living below the Mason-Dixon as a northern bias risked upsetting the Gorsuch descendants who might not attend or become aggravated during the festivities. Getting white southerners to stand together with African-Americans was no small task in 1951; an undertaking even further exacerbated by the latter's ancestral connection to the death of a family patriarch. But although the Society chose a theme of reconciliation, it was also more conscious of African-American participation in the riot story particularly that of William Parker. The question was how to recognize black agency given the racial tensions in the South and the reconciliationist memory of the Civil War then persisting in the minds of white Americans. Commemoration organizers would again need to tread carefully in commemorating a historical episode rife with racial overtones during an era when portions of the country continued to segregate black from white.

In 1951, the public memory of the conflict between William Parker and Edward Gorsuch had seemingly been forgotten. A few days prior to the commemoration, Joseph

Kingston, a correspondent for Lancaster's *Intelligencer Journal*, published a general history of the fight at Christiana to remind Countians of the event's historical significance as "the first open test, by extreme violence" of the Fugitive Slave Law that foreshadowed the Civil War. This reminder was necessary, Kingston argued, because "few people living within even a few miles of Christiana today could tell you exactly where the 'Riot House' stood, much less what the commotion was all about." Kingston noted how "bitterness persists" over the riot because people of the postwar generations fail to comprehend the social and political backdrop that led to the incident occurring in the first place. "Without this attempt to understand," he maintained, "the simple facts of the 'Riot' are meaningless, even ridiculous." The *Baltimore Sun* likewise commented on the state of ignorance in Gorsuch's home county regarding the riot a century later. "To the south of Christiana on the other side of the Mason-Dixon line in Baltimore county there are many people who have never heard of the Christiana Riot," the newspaper maintained.³³

Lancaster County's forgetfulness regarding the racial history in its own backyard was likely related to its perpetual disproportion in regards to race. While the countywide white population grew 40 percent since 1911, the number of African-Americans failed to keep pace, rising only 18 percent during the same time period. In 1951, black residents represented a mere one percent (2,807) of the county population with more than half of that number residing in Lancaster City. Christiana's white population did not follow the countywide trend, remaining relatively inert from 1911, hovering at just over one thousand. Census data for Christiana also indicated no African-Americans residing

³³ "Christiana Riot, 100 Years Ago, Forerunner of Bloody Civil War," *Intelligencer Journal*, September 3, 1951; "He Died For Law' in Christiana Riot," *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 1955.

inside the town limits. A small black community of approximately one hundred still remained on Zion Hill. As blacks were the most likely to remember the riot because of its racial relevance, its not surprising that their disproportionate countywide numbers failed to publicly keep William Parker's legacy alive in the minds of their white neighbors. Local African-Americans fondly remembered the riot as a source of racial pride, but just as in 1911 white Countians, for the most part, did not find the century old fight at Christiana germane to their daily lives or the area's history. The riot was largely an element of black history that, other than a few Quakers, received little notice from whites locally or nationally. In literary circles, the last book to specifically focus upon the riot was still William Hensel's companion work to the 1911 commemoration. No white or black scholars of the 1950s had yet attempted to reinterpret William Parker's example of black agency through the lens of the growing civil rights movement.³⁴

While Lancaster County's small black population contributed to local ignorance of the riot, racism also played a part in stifling its public memory. Marie Congo, an African-American resident of Zion Hill, recounted facing a great deal of racial discrimination from the local community in the 1930s. "She treated us like we were animals," Congo said of her white fifth grade teacher, "she would do all kinds of things to us." As one of the few black students, Congo remembered being physically abused both in the classroom and just walking down the streets of Christiana. "You got slapped, kicked, you got really hurt," she stated, "of course we got called names, but names never hurt

³⁴ *Seventeenth Census of the United States: 1950*, vol. 2, pt. 38 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1952), pp. 198, 115, 178, 113; LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, July 11, 2012, Christiana, PA; Marie Congo, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA. Congo is a descendant of black rioter Ezekiel Thompson; W. U. Hensel, *The Christiana Riot and The Treason Trials of 1851: An Historical Sketch*, 2d ed. (Lancaster, PA: The New Era Printing Company, 1911).

anybody, it was just when they hit you that hurt you.” Darlene Colon, an African-American descendant of Ezekiel Thompson, indicated that her mother and aunts faced similar discrimination growing up in Christiana as some of the few black students. “She recalls having stones thrown at them on the way to school and having their hair pulled,” Colon said of her mother. Thelma Thompson, an African-American from Atglen, also faced white hostility in the community. She described a similar example of racial intimidation each time she walked past a local factory. Upon seeing her, the white workers inside would tap on the glass and yell “nigger, nigger, nigger.” Such antagonism caused black memories of the riot to go underground over fears of racial retribution. “Oh they would never discuss it openly,” Congo declared. As a child, she remembers her parents and relatives discussing the riot in hushed tones around the dinner table. “We would try to hear but they would make us leave,” she remembers, “they would sit there and talk but you didn’t hear them, they talked so quiet because they were afraid.”³⁵

Contributing to black fears of publicly discussing the riot was the emergence of a KKK element in the area during the interwar years. Although the Klan of the Reconstruction era had ostensibly died out by 1900, it reemerged in the wake of American intervention in World War I. Wartime propaganda, paranoia, and jingoism quickly spread throughout the country helping swell KKK numbers. By the mid-1920s the Klan claimed some three million members nationwide that included roughly 200,000 Pennsylvanians and a segment of Lancaster countians. Attracted by the Klan’s endorsement of prohibition, immigration restriction, and Protestantism, many local

³⁵ Marie Congo, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA; Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA. Colon is the great-great-great granddaughter of Ezekiel Thompson; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, July 11, 2012, Christiana, PA. Rettew related Thelma Thompson’s story; *Intelligencer Journal*, May 18, 2001.

members joined because of white nativism and desires for reform. The KKK's ritualized and secretive nature offered a distinct sense of self-importance to working-class whites fearful of economic threats to their livelihoods from "foreign" races, religions, and ethnicities. Minorities threatened the status quo and could potentially upset the traditions of formerly homogenous neighborhoods. The Klan provided an organized means of resisting such challenges for many local members, a political force that could check the rapid technological and demographic changes that marked the 1920s as a period of cultural transformation.³⁶

On January 3, 1923, the first local editorial appeared in the Lancaster press regarding the Klan influence then spreading into the county. The *Intelligencer Journal* warned of the Klan's reputation for violence and intimidation while chiding readers for their selective obedience to the law. "Disrespect for and violation of law are initial steps to anarchy," the paper declared, "Outbreaks like those...of Ku Klux Klansmen shock the country by reason of their extremity, but the Eighteenth Amendment may be violated by hundreds of thousands and the Nation smiles." Two weeks later, the *Intelligencer* followed with another editorial demanding action: "Means should be provided for breaking and dissolving the organization [KKK]." A few days later, the newspaper broke the story of the first local Klan activity when it reported how a dozen letters written on

³⁶ Hiram W. Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *North American Review* 223 (March 1926), p. 36; "Historians say Ku Klux Klan Capitalized on Riot," *Tulsa World*, March 26, 2000; Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA; Andrew Kuhn, "The Ku Klux Klan in Lancaster County," *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 98, no. 3 (1996), pp. 106, 110-113, 118. Accurate KKK membership numbers are difficult to uncover because of the organization's secretive nature. Figures were many times exaggerated for intimidation value and recruitment efforts, see Kuhn, p. 120.

Klan stationary were sent to various Quarryville residents. KKK membership in Quarryville was claimed to number sixty at the time.³⁷

The Klan made its first public appearance in Lancaster County on October 9, 1923. During a harvest festival in Columbia, town residents were surprised to see crosses burning along the banks of the Susquehanna River. The Klansmen then proceeded to parade through the town uninvited causing locals to think they were part of the festivities. This initial Klan celebration was followed three weeks later with a large public demonstration at the Lancaster fairgrounds. Before ten thousand spectators, the Klan initiated seven hundred candidates from eastern Pennsylvania during an evening ceremony that included fireworks and the burning of four large crosses. The electric lights adorning the fairgrounds were conveniently turned off for the observance, adding a surrealistic glow to a demonstration described by the local press as “weird” and reminiscent “of ancient Druid ceremonies.” Klan speakers mixed patriotism and white nativism with Protestant overtones to add a sense of religious legitimacy to otherwise peculiar rationalizations. Onlookers were told how “Jesus Christ is a Klansman of the first criterion,” and “God made the white man white and the black man black. What God has divided shall not be united save over the dead body of the last member of the Ku Klux Klan. The only symbols of the Klan are the Cross and the American flag. What these stand for the Klan stands for.” After such divisive rhetoric, one speaker backtracked assuring Catholics, Jews, and blacks that they have nothing to fear individually from the Klan because it only fights them as “classes.” Upon leaving the

³⁷ *Intelligencer Journal*, January 3, 1923; January 16, 1923; January 19, 1923; Donald Crownover, “The Ku Klux Klan in Lancaster County: 1923-1924,” *Journal of the Lancaster County Historical Society* 68 (1964), p. 65.

hour-long ceremony, every man was given a card describing the KKK platform and a place for their name and address.³⁸

Local clerics criticized the fairgrounds demonstration for manipulating Christianity to justify white hegemony. Reverend George Brown of Middletown, located in the western portion of the county, objected to the Klan's depiction of Christ as a Klansman. "I find that Christ was a respecter of persons," the Reverend stated, "for He said, 'I come to do good to All men.' Does the Klan endorse that?" Brown noted how Christ "gave an express command to 'love your neighbor as yourself.' Does the Klan stand for this?" Aden MacIntosh, pastor of Lancaster's Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, warned, "We must keep out of this country the things that menace the nation, the organizations that may be regarded with suspicion, all organizations that do not come out in the open." Not all local clerics were outspoken opponents of the Klan. Some remained silent out of fear or because their churches received financial support from its members, but those ministers openly connected with the organization did face consequences. Reverend B. Monroe Posten was a Methodist minister in Lancaster who became a national spokesman for the KKK during the early 1920s. Posten's public ties with the Klan eventually cost him and his daughter their positions in the church as both were expelled by their congregants.³⁹

The fairgrounds ceremony did not elicit widespread condemnation from the county's black community. Numbering only two percent of the population, local African-Americans lacked the necessary political clout to engage in public controversies. Most held menial jobs and faced daily discrimination that could be multiplied should any

³⁸ *Lancaster New Era*, October 9, 1923; "Vast Throng Witnesses Klan Ceremony Here," *Lancaster New Era*, October 30, 1923.

³⁹ *Lancaster New Era*, November 24, 1923; *Intelligencer Journal*, November 12, 1923; Kuhn, pp. 113-114.

create a political furor over racial issues. Although a local NAACP chapter was not established in Lancaster until May 1924, county resident Marianna Brubaker, a member of the national NAACP, encapsulated private African-American concerns over the Klan rally in an open letter she composed to the owners of the fairgrounds. Brubaker held the proprietors responsible for bringing the “infamous Ku Klux Klan” to Lancaster by furnishing them with the necessary large space for their demonstration. Without the fairgrounds, she found it improbable that Klan members would have found a large enough facility near the city causing them to move the ceremony elsewhere. Although desiring to look charitably on the actions of her neighbors, Brubaker could not find any charity when it came to the KKK. “The whole history of this organization is written in blood,” she wrote. “It is the successor of the old post Civil War Ku Klux Klan of which General Sheridan reported that 3,500 negroes were killed or wounded by Klansmen...between 1865 and 1875.” Brubaker considered the Klan’s religious arguments a justification for “race riots and lynching” and an insult to the county’s minority groups. “Again these people [KKK] are engaged in stirring up hatred against Jews and Roman Catholics among whom are some of the most respectable of Lancaster’s population,” she declared. “To permit the Ku Klux to meet and hold ceremonies here was simply an insult to these groups.”⁴⁰

A month after the fairgrounds demonstration, Lancaster’s Armistice Day celebration on November 12, 1923 represented the beginning of the end for the local KKK as an overt organization in the county. As part of the Armistice Day memorial service held outside the courthouse, Klan members delivered a wreath to the courthouse steps early in

⁴⁰ Kuhn, p. 112, 123; *Lancaster New Era*, May 5, 1924; Marianna G. Brubaker, letter to the editor, *Lancaster New Era*, November 8, 1923;

the morning. When Lancaster's American Legion arrived for the ceremony, they discovered the Klan's floral tribute, a cross of red carnations bearing the initials "K. K. K." Major William Rehm, Legion member and Lancaster County's district attorney, took offense to the wreath and removed the Klan letters. "The Legion will not tolerate any such display at its memorial services," Rehm later stated. "The Ku Klux Klan is un-American and opposed to all the tenets of the Legion. As a citizen and as a Legionnaire I saw it was my duty to act as I did." The Klan balked at the Major's action, replaced the letters on the wreath, and surrounded their floral tribute with its members. The ceremony began without further incident, but during the festivities a group of veterans breached the circle of Klansmen and kicked over the wreath. World War I veteran Clarence Stein was arrested, charges were later dropped when Stein seemingly disappeared from the police station, and the Legion demanded the Klan remove their floral tribute altogether. Not wanting to cause any further incident, the KKK relented and relocated their wreath to the grave of General John Reynolds in Lancaster cemetery.⁴¹

The Klan responded to the controversy by claiming it "stands for and upholds true Americanism in its full sense." The local KKK believed they were only doing their civic duty in honoring fallen soldiers some of whom were members of their organization: "The K. K. K. had many members who were and of necessity had to be good American citizens, and as such citizens gave their lives for the cause we met...to honor." Legion post commander Walter Foust defended Rehm's defacement of the wreath as justified and questioned the ulterior motives behind a KKK presence at the ceremony. "I consider the Klan tribute...an insult to every American soldier killed and wounded in the service

⁴¹ Kuhn, p. 114; "Klan and Legion Clash Here," *Intelligencer Journal*, November 12, 1923; "Man Arrested But Charge is Soon Dropped," *Lancaster New Era*, November 12, 1923.

of his country,” Foust stated. “The Legionnaires went out there to pay tribute to the memory of all ex-service men, Catholic, Protestant, Jew and Negro alike. The Klan opposes three of those classifications. For what purpose then would members of the Ku Klux Klan offer floral tribute on such an occasion.”⁴²

A year after the Klan tussled with the American Legion on the courthouse steps, the KKK began slowly diminishing in Lancaster County. Although not completely disappearing, the Klan never achieved the same public presence locally as it had just months earlier. After the clash with the Legion, the local Klan split over financial irregularities, internal dissensions, and the handling of the Armistice Day controversy. The Columbia chapter was completely dissolved by KKK national headquarters over “indifference,” “lack of cooperation,” “disrespect” towards leadership, and “divulging of secrets.” A Reformed group was reinstated numbering roughly four hundred members, many of which were from the banished Columbia organization. The original KKK in Lancaster issued ten thousand invitations to hold the “largest Klan meeting ever held in eastern Pennsylvania” at the city’s Convention Hall on July 24, 1924. Only six hundred Klansmen attended the meeting.⁴³

The fissure among county members symbolized the KKK’s greatest weakness in its organizational structure—failing to create a loyal and stable membership. The Armistice Day incident succinctly revealed the ideological divide between the particular patriotism promoted by the KKK and that espoused by the American Legion. The controversy

⁴² “Local Klan Gives Side on Clash Over Floral Cross,” *Intelligencer Journal*, November 14, 1923; “Klan and Legion Clash Here,” *Intelligencer Journal*, November 12, 1923.

⁴³ Kuhn, pp. 114-117; Crownover, pp. 68-72; *Lancaster New Era*, June 4, 1924; June 21, 1924; July 24, 1924. Local historians based estimates of local KKK membership on attendance figures at Klan meetings. As all members rarely attend all meetings, this only offers a general approximation of the KKK element in the area.

served as a countywide wake-up call, forcing residents to confront the stark realities behind what the Klan truly represented. The KKK was not just another political party bent on prohibition or immigration restriction, but a systematic organization endorsing a highly restrictive and dogmatic worldview. This was not the patriotic organization portrayed in *Birth of a Nation* where the Klan acted as moral crusaders riding to the rescue of an imperiled America, but something far different than what the public and many misinformed members originally believed the KKK represented.⁴⁴

The cumulative effects of disunion and Armistice Day caused the Klan to implode from within becoming essentially defunct by 1925. Membership declined rapidly as those locals initially attracted by the Klan's promotion of traditional values began questioning the kind of values the KKK actually encouraged. Most Countians who joined the KKK appeared to have been ignorant of the organization's historical propensity for bigotry and vigilantism. Interviews conducted by local historian Donald Crownover reveal that many former Klan members in the county joined because they thought the KKK was "an anti-bootlegger movement." Once they discovered the true nature of the beast, they became disillusioned and left the organization. John Quinn, the American Legion's national commander during this period, admitted to being a member of the Klan "just long enough to find out what it was" before abruptly resigning. Historian Richard Wade argued that many joined the Klan because of motives far

⁴⁴ Kuhn, p. 116; Crownover, p. 68.

different from those of its leadership: “Many believed it to be a sincerely patriotic society and were unaware of the ugly prejudice that lay beneath the rhetoric.”⁴⁵

Although crumbling from within in the 1920s, Klan remnants refused to completely vanish in Lancaster County acting as a crude hobby rather than a functioning organization. For decades the white hooded society would remain a haunting reminder of white supremacy despite its modest numbers, conveniently appearing just as locals started to forget. The county was not the site of any major incidents of racial violence during the interwar years. This was symptomatic of the KKK’s unstable membership during the 1920s and its decline thereafter, but the Klan’s continued perseverance in the area hindered any discussion of the Christiana Riot or racial détente. “There was plenty of it,” Congo said of local KKK activity in the 1930s, “when I was young they burned crosses right on Zion Hill.” African-Americans in the area knew when the Klan was on the prowl, causing blacks to hide in their basements or stay elsewhere, and were even aware of those whites who were members. Congo relates a story from when her mother worked as a housekeeper for a local white family. Her mother kept noticing grass stains on the bottom of her employer’s white sheets, yet “she never got a pillowcase to wash,” Congo stated. Colon agreed, stating that her mother was conscious of a KKK presence while growing up in Christiana in the 1930s. “I’m sure she was,” Colon stated, “she doesn’t talk much about it, they were of the [mindset] if you don’t talk about it, its not there.” Bud Rettew, Treasurer of the Christiana Historical Society, believes that the Klan contributed to the lack of local knowledge among whites regarding the riot. “We did

⁴⁵ Crownover, pp. 74-75; Kuhn, pp. 118-119; “Legion May Ask for Quinn’s Views on Ku Klux Klan,” *Intelligencer Journal*, November 13, 1923; Richard C. Wade, preface to *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930*, by Kenneth J. Jackson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. ix.

have such an organization, shadowy, I could never quite figure on it, in this area,” he maintained, “and since we’re so close to Maryland I think there was some influence brought to bear on it.”⁴⁶

After World War II, few students in Lancaster County learned about the riot in school because of racial animosity both locally and nationally. It typically depended upon the individual teacher and whether they chose to personally introduce the riot history into their class. Taylor Lamborn, the great great-grandson of Elijah Lewis, recollected a Quaker teacher who spoke glowingly about the riot when he was a student in Quarryville, but did not recall hearing it discussed by any other instructors. African-Americans similarly did not remember the riot being part of the curriculum. Neither Marie Congo nor Sara Ruth, an African-American from the Gap area, remembers the riot being discussed in school. As one of the few black students, Ruth had to take it upon herself to better understand the fight between Parker and Gorsuch by reading old books she stumbled upon. Public school textbooks at mid-century hindered the promulgation of the riot story by ignoring African-American history either because black contributions were not considered relevant or for political purposes resulting from Jim Crow and the Cold War. Any emphasis publishers placed on black accomplishments risked the loss of southern markets as segregationists portrayed any challenge to the status quo as communist inspired. A 1947 study of social studies textbooks, conducted by the left-leaning journal *Common Ground*, discovered few references of African-Americans.

⁴⁶ Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA; Marie Congo, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA; Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, July 11, 2012, Christiana, PA.

After examining 40,000 pages of text, Aubrey Haan, the author of the study, found only seventy-five illustrations of blacks most of which were depicted in servile positions. Haan observed that “almost all the attention given to the Negro in the history texts is devoted to the slave era and the Reconstruction period,” finding “the most consistent distortion” to be “that of the Negro's role in the Reconstruction.”⁴⁷

The junior high school text *Story of the American People* (1931) instilled the Lost Cause at an early age by informing its young readers that during Reconstruction black lawmakers “had no idea of business” and “ran their states deeply into debt.” The student read how white “Southerners could endure the situation no longer,” they formed bands “one of which was the famous Ku Klux Klan” that “worked secretly, frightening the Negroes and warning them never again to vote or to hold office.” “Before long they succeeded in their purpose,” the text proudly proclaimed without mentioning the Klan’s tactics, “many Negroes on one excuse or another were kept from voting. White men gained control.” Reconstruction fared no better in *The United States of America, Our Developing Civilization* (1942). The text noted how after the Compromise of 1877, “the ‘tragic era’ of carpetbag government was at an end and home rule was restored.” Those few textbooks that did mention blacks tended to diminish or omit their contributions in favor of a condensed version of African-American history. The popular *Our Country: People in Time and Place* editions of textbooks used in the 1950s made no mention of the Christiana Riot, instead summarizing African-American resistance to slavery in three

⁴⁷ Taylor Lamborn, telephone interview by author, July 10, 2011, Reading, PA; Marie Congo, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA; Sara Ruth, interview by author, July 12, 2012, Coatesville, PA; Julia Mickenberg, “Civil Rights, History, and the Left: Inventing the Juvenile Black Biography,” 27, no. 2 (Summer 2002), pp. 66-67; Mary Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 117; Aubrey Haan, “Books Make Bigots,” *Common Ground* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1947), pp. 3-4.

pages largely devoted to the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman. After being denied an opportunity in Gap, Ruth entered a “whole new world” by teaching in Philadelphia to a largely black student body. There she used the “Our Country” series while having to personally include the riot as part of her lesson plan. Ruth would move back to the Lancaster County area in the early 1960s to work in the same district that denied her employment a few years earlier. When asked by the superintendent if she would have a problem teaching white students, Ruth declared “there’s no problem, because the same blood that run through your veins runs through mine.”⁴⁸

By 1951, public ignorance of the Christiana Riot, both local and nationally, meant its historical memory was a static legacy, undergoing few tangible changes over the prior forty years. The riot narrative was still hampered by a lilywhite conception of the incident that continued to rely upon the legend of courageous white abolitionism leading the cause of black liberation. In Kingston’s article announcing the coming commemoration, his general history of the riot lauded the racial equality promoted by Thaddeus Stevens, yet overlooked the Gap Gang when mentioning how the Congressman’s “official sentiment echoed the popular sentiment” of residents in the southern portion of the county. In Kingston’s account, Castner Hanway becomes the hero for “interposing himself (on horseback) between the Marylanders and their furious pursuers,” while the significance of African-American agency is summed up by the single word “defiance.” The *Quarryville Sun*’s announcement of the riot centennial

⁴⁸ *Story of the American People* (Oxford, UK: Ginn & Company, 1931); *The United States of America, Our Developing Civilization* (River Forest, IL: Laidlaw, 1942); Mickenberg, p. 66; *Our Country: People in Time and Place* (1949; reprint, Morristown, NJ: Silver, Burdett, and Ginn, 1991). This textbook’s original date of publication has been difficult to unearth. The reprint edition cites its earliest acknowledgement as 1949 and Sara Ruth claims to have used it in her classroom in the 1950s; Sara Ruth, interview by author, July 12, 2012, Coatesville, PA.

similarly hearkened to the “white myth” interpretation. The newspaper tactfully cited its former editor, David Forbes, for dedicating his 1898 work “The Christiana Riot” to “the Society of Friends whose sympathies and assistance were always tendered to the persecuted.” The *Sun* regarded Hanway as playing “an important part in preventing more bloodshed” during the riot, yet referenced Parker simply as a “colored man” who “resided in the stone house where the riot occurred.” The *Baltimore Sun* recounted white heroism from the opposite perspective by maintaining a sectional riot story portraying Edward Gorsuch as a martyr to black vengeance. In 1955, the newspaper described him as “one of Baltimore county’s most respected citizens” who bravely stood his ground against “menacing” African-Americans.⁴⁹

While the “white myth” fable and sectional partisanship contributed to the Lancaster County Historical Society’s desire for sectional reconciliation in promoting an overall neutral riot narrative, there were signs at the commemoration of a growing social acceptance towards the violence utilized by the rioters. The Society’s list of commemoration speakers illustrated an attempt to tell a more comprehensive riot story. Organizers chose to invite orators that reflected various aspects of riot history: a Quaker clergyman called for forgiveness, a district judge represented legal detachment, a white historian introduced the “white myth,” and an African-American college president provided a voice of black protest. The first three orators would tow the evenhanded line with unbiased speeches regarding the riot’s historical significance, the final speaker would turn the ceremony on its head by directly introducing the black counter-memory into the proceedings. This surprising public declaration of the emancipationist vision

⁴⁹ “‘Christiana Riot,’ 100 Years Ago, Forerunner of Bloody Civil War,” *Intelligencer Journal*, September 3, 1951; “The Christiana Riot Events to be Recited,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 7, 1951

would make the riot centennial exceptional compared to the selective memory of racial exclusion then pervading Civil War interpretations. The Society likely thought it could escape southern criticism by having an African-American voice the black perspective of the riot. In this they were correct, as the ceremony would receive no published outrage from those below the Mason-Dixon.⁵⁰

The commemoration included dignitaries such as U.S. District Court Judge Guy Bard, Dr. Horace Mann Bond the President of Lincoln University in Chester County, Paul Dague the U.S. Congressman for Lancaster and Chester counties, along with numerous descendants of both the rioters and the Gorsuch party. The ceremony consisted of an opening invocation, four speeches, and a closing benediction separated once again by musical interludes. Patriotic songs such as “Star Spangled Banner” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic” imparted a nationalistic tone to the festivities while southern melodies “Suane River,” “Old Black Joe,” “My Old Kentucky Home,” “Oh Susanna,” and “Carry Me Back to Old Virginia” conveyed the commemoration’s reunion theme.⁵¹ Although the omission of “Dixie” and its political baggage was a significant change from 1911 because of the melody’s relationship with the Confederacy and slavery, the playing of the same southern ballads in 1951 was just as racially insensitive as it was forty years earlier. While these songs were likely the only selections from the antebellum period that 1950s audiences were familiar, they nonetheless perpetuated an inaccurate representation of southern history. Stephen Foster’s works hearkened back to the nostalgic vision of an idyllic South where the specter of Lost Cause mythology made its lair. The Society’s

⁵⁰ Loose, pp. 181-185. The 1951 Christiana Riot Commemoration received little national coverage beyond the Lancaster County press.

⁵¹ “Centennial of the Christiana Riot,” Program, Lancaster County Historical Society, September 9, 1951.

insistence on the utilization of plantation melodies was a blatant endeavor to satisfy southern attendees and illustrated how far the reconciliationist vision continued to permeate the riot's memory.⁵²

Reverend Gordon Jones, a Quaker from the Representative Committee of the Philadelphia Meeting of Friends, opened the ceremony with an invocation that naturally echoed his nonviolent ideals. Jones began with an introduction that entreated God for forgiveness and made the riot a grave mistake. "Father we come to this historic spot today, not with hearts filled with pride," Jones argued, "but with humility as we realize the errors of Thy children in their efforts to obtain freedom." Here, the Reverend's pacifistic perception of the riot shined through much as it did a century before when abolitionists found themselves divided over the employment of violence at Christiana. For Jones, the riot offered little of which to be proud, it was not an incident that should be exalted or celebrated. The riot was an "error," a tragic blunder that all in attendance should readily acknowledge. This was hardly the opinion of William Parker or the black rioters who considered their resistance to Gorsuch a noble act of black self-emancipation. The Reverend continued by condemning the rioters when he tried to justify their actions to God, "Our efforts to obtain human freedom continue to be futile...because we use methods contrary to Thy laws of love and sympathy and understanding." For a Quaker preacher to condemn all acts of violence, even violence for a righteous cause, was unsurprising, but his generalization of the "efforts to obtain human freedom" ironically confers guilt on those resisting enslavement. By focusing on the violent actions of the rioters, Jones essentially gave a free pass to their foils—the slaveholders. The Gorsuch

⁵² Loose, pp. 181-185; E. Forbes, p. 259.

party was also armed and shooting at the black fugitives inside the house, including the specific targeting of a woman, Eliza Parker, for sounding the horn, yet their use of violence is overlooked in Jones' moralistic analysis. The slaveholders can easily be held culpable for initiating the violence that ensued by attempting to forcibly return the fugitives to a state of bondage. But in the Reverend's conception of the riot story this is not the case. Slavery's evils and the actions of those who obeyed its principles thereby became secondary to the sins of black resistance at Christiana.⁵³

Jones concluded with a final statement of peace and reconciliation that denied the riot as a source of black pride. He entreated God to provide mankind with the vision and strength to understand "that love will overcome hatred, trust will replace suspicion, good judgment will calm hysteria, tolerance will uproot intolerance, and a sense of Christian brotherhood will leave no room in our hearts for self-satisfaction." Jones ultimately made the riot a tragic historical example of human fallibility, one that neither black nor white should find any sense of "self-satisfaction." This echoed the Society's ambiguity towards the violence of the rioters that seeped into the commemoration four decades earlier whereby Quakers became the unblemished protagonists. Whites still envisioned the riot in political or religious terms and could not fathom the desperate life or death struggle it represented to Parker and his compatriots. The choices were fight or surrender—the rioters chose the former and were excoriated for lacking "sympathy and understanding." Pacifism is an admirable virtue indeed, but not one that would have saved the fugitives from returning to a life of enslavement a century ago.⁵⁴

⁵³ Loose, pp. 181-185.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

The next two speakers provided a measure of historical background to the riot, yet also found themselves reintroducing the “white myth” in the process. This notion of white participation being integral to the riot continued to influence the history of the fight at Christiana. For some, the actions of Castner Hanway, Elijah Lewis, and the overall Quaker mystique still overshadowed any concept of black agency. “Once again, the myth of the valiant white hero,” Ella Forbes noted, “is validated at the expense of black courage.” Judge Guy Bard remarked on the conflicting politics and beliefs of the 1850’s that resulted in the fight at Christiana. He explained the legal aspects of the riot and how citizens ascribing to the pro-slavery perspective and those of the opposing viewpoint both considered themselves on the side of “right.” The Gorsuch party thought it “right” to defend their property, while abolitionists believed they were “right” in defending liberty and freedom. Bard next spoke of the Underground Railroad activities of the “freedom-loving” peoples of Chester, York, and Lancaster Counties and their aiding of blacks on the path to freedom. He also catered to the Quaker descendants in the audience by stating how the Friends “suffered no pangs of conscience in harboring slaves.”⁵⁵

Here Bard was skirting the racial issue inherent to the riot’s historical memory. In trying to placate both sides, he placed the ideals of slaveholders on par with abolitionists and made no attempt to illustrate the black agency involved during the fight at Christiana. Bard’s insistent praising of abolitionism in the area deduced a white involvement in the riot and perpetuated the “white myth” riot narrative. The failure to mention African-Americans made his speech more representative of the white triumphalism pervading

⁵⁵ E. Forbes, p. 259; Loose, pp. 181-185; “Centennial of the Famed Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 11, 1951; “Historic ‘Riot’ Story Retold at Centennial,” *Intelligencer Journal*, September 10, 1951.

Civil War histories where white abolitionists fought for racial justice on behalf of blacks. Concepts of emancipation and agency thus become the tenets of white chauvinism with blacks passively awaiting their liberation by conscientious whites. Like Jones, Bard finished with an appeal for reconciliation and finding nonviolent remedies to resolve disputes. “The lesson we have learned from the Christiana riot,” the judge declared, “is that where there is unrighteousness in the world, it shall permeate the bloodstream of the human race. In another 100 years we may reach the stage where the sword shall not be drawn in an attempt to solve problems. They may be solved in the spirit of human brotherhood.”⁵⁶

Next, Pennsylvania’s State Historian, Dr. S. K. Stevens, offered a general commentary on the riot’s significance in state and national affairs prior to the Civil War. He maintained how the advance of human liberty is present throughout all of Pennsylvania’s historical events. Stevens then shifted into a reassertion of the “white myth” by paying homage to Quaker idealism. “A few years ago we celebrated 300 years of the birth of William Penn,” he stated. “He built-in great principles of human freedom. The Quakers were among those who challenged the rights of human freedom against property rights.” But Pennsylvania’s State Historian was mistaken on the Quaker relationship with slavery, an achievement all the more incongruous owing to his official title. As historian Jean Soderlund has shown, Friends tolerated slavery within their membership until the 1750s because of the economic need for cheap labor. It was only after 1780 that the “gradualist, segregationist, and paternalistic approach” of the Quakers “set the tone for the white antislavery movement in America.” Even their philanthropy towards blacks usually had

⁵⁶ Ibid.

strings attached as Friends placed preconditions on African-Americans that stripped them of their personal independence. Soderlund argued that when blacks accepted assistance from Quakers:

The Friends also expected the blacks to conform to white Christian...standards of morality, attend special Friends meetings held for blacks (but conducted by whites), and send their children to special schools set up for blacks (but again controlled by white Quakers). Blacks benefited from the Friends' system of mutual aid and endured, with varying degrees of patience, their paternalistic concern. Nor permitted to join the [Quaker] Society until the 1790s, Afro-Americans formed a separate (and unequal) segment of the Quaker community.

Stevens' misreading of Quaker history extended to his failure to comprehend that the true champions of the riot were black instead of white. That the State Historian also perceived of the Christiana Riot through the "white myth" illustrated just how deeply ingrained the legend had become. That African-Americans would take it upon themselves to improve their social condition still remained incomprehensible or uncomfortable to white sensibilities in the 1950s. The civil rights movement would reaffirm this racial misapprehension. Stevens closed his rather mundane congratulatory remarks by touting the county's rich history and complimenting the Society for helping to preserve and perpetuate it.⁵⁷

Lincoln University President, Dr. Horace Mann Bond, closed out the literary exercises with a speech that overshadowed the statements of his fellow speakers. A leading African-American in the fight for racial equality, Bond was friends with W. E. B. Dubois and black actor/activist Paul Robeson. He was the father of fiery civil rights leader Julian Bond and it could be said that Julian owed his understanding of racial justice to his

⁵⁷ Loose, pp. 181-185; "Historic 'Riot' Story Retold at Centennial," *Intelligencer Journal*, September 10, 1951; "Centennial of the Famed Christiana Riot," *Quarryville Sun*, September 11, 1951; Jean Soderlund, *Quakers & Slavery: A Divided Spirit* (Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 54, 184-185.

father. Bond's presence at the commemoration was a defining moment in the Christiana Riot's evolving memory. At the celebration forty years before, the only speaking part given to African-Americans was a short prayer by Reverend R. F. Wright. Now they were featured in the final address of the day, as Bond became the first commemoration speaker to truly articulate the black perspective on the riot. His speech "Freedom Precedes Peace" related as much to the 1950s as it did to the 1850s.⁵⁸ The title inferred what whites failed to comprehend, that only racial equality would bring about a true cessation of the political hostility between the two sections. For the past ninety years whites had deluded themselves into thinking the Confederate surrender at Appomattox marked the end of the war. But without a national commitment to civil rights for all Americans in keeping with the war's emancipationist rationale, the conflict would continue to fester—just as it did in the Jim Crow South and the segregated communities of the North.

Bond began his speech with a militant tone strikingly dissimilar from the speakers that preceded him. He condemned American society for perpetuating the racial inequality that made such incidents as the Christiana Riot necessary. "We are celebrating today the centennial of an American tragedy," he proclaimed. The "tragedy" of humanity's shortcomings in a world devoid of love, where violence appears the only alternative to suffering the lack of human equality. Bond referred to the recent case of Army Sergeant John Rice who was killed in Korea a year earlier. Rice was refused burial in an Iowa

⁵⁸ E. Forbes, p. 261. In the 1960s, Bond's son Julian led student protests in Georgia and was a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He later served terms in the Georgia State House and Senate before eventually becoming chairman of the NAACP. For more information see John Neary, *Julian Bond: Black Rebel* (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1971); Loose, pp. 181-185; "Historic 'Riot' Story Retold at Centennial," *Intelligencer Journal*, September 10, 1951.

cemetery because he was a Native American and “the blood he shed for his country had not been Caucasian,” Bond insisted. President Truman intervened in the Rice controversy and arranged for the Sergeant’s burial in Arlington National Cemetery. Rice was finally laid to rest with full military honors just a few days prior to the commemoration.⁵⁹

Next, Bond made a brief departure to tactfully honor the county’s local history. He thanked the Quakers of the area for helping to found black churches and named Thaddeus Stevens as “one of the outstanding men” for his contributions in the quest for human equality. He recounted Stevens’ unwavering dedication in forcing a bill onto the Pennsylvania Senate floor that chartered Ashmun Institute in 1854. Located fifteen miles south of Christiana in neighboring Chester County, the school later became Lincoln University in 1866. The college became the first institution in the world to provide a higher education to African-Americans. Bond recognized Stevens’ efforts as giving him the opportunity to speak for what was previously an otherwise muted race in American society. Bond was grateful that “two generations after the inarticulate enslaved generation,” he could now memorialize Stevens’ belief in “the equality of man before his creator.”⁶⁰

Bond suddenly shifted back into his militant rhetoric by focusing on the riot’s long overlooked black protagonist. “But I wish to speak principally of the man who... seems to me to be the symbol—the distilled essence—of the meaning of the Christiana Riot,”

⁵⁹ Loose, pp. 181-185; J. Katz, pp. 296-298. Katz reconstructed Bond’s speech from the Lincoln University President’s original notes he sent to Katz on July 28, 1969; William L Hewitt, “The Indian Who Never Got Home: The Burial of Sergeant John R. Rice,” *Nebraska History* 77 (1996), pp. 12-15. Rice was buried in Arlington National Cemetery on September 5, 1951; “Indian Hero is Buried in Arlington Ceremony After Being Refused Internment in Sioux City,” *New York Times*, September 6, 1951.

⁶⁰ “Centennial of the Famed Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 11, 1951; Loose, pp. 181-185; J. Katz, p. 296.

Bond contended. “To be, indeed, the symbol of all violence and bloodletting, and alternate hope and despair, in the world then, and now.... His name was William Parker.” At this those on the porch likely shifted anxiously in their seats. Up until this point, Bond’s oratory was fairly standard in the riot’s historical memory. The fight at Christiana was a “tragedy” of human imperfection and unrealized republican idealism. The Quakers were to be canonized for aiding the cause of black equality. But rarely was public acclaim specifically given to the black rioters owing largely to white uneasiness over the methods they utilized in resisting the Gorsuch party. At the 1911 commemoration, only after implying that the rioters were terrorists did Frank Eshleman finally admit that liberty could “in an orderly or in a revolutionary way upheave and overturn all wicked and ill-conceived enactments.” Beyond this minor statement of support, the rioters found little public acknowledgement that their actions were anything other than misguided. William Parker himself was hardly mentioned during the ceremony forty years earlier. Other than being listed on the obelisk as one of those indicted for treason and his name appearing in the book published for the celebration, Parker was completely omitted. With one simple remark, Bond changed all this by emphasizing Parker’s plight in a world of racial discrimination much like that of the 1950s. Parker is “the tragic symbol of our Centennial, of the troubles of his generation, and of our own,” Bond exclaimed. “This is the Centennial of the violence engendered by great passions and forces, but also by one man.”⁶¹

Bond continued by discerning the emancipationist message within the riot narrative, even connecting it with contemporary decolonization efforts then occurring in the world.

⁶¹ J. Katz, pp. 296-298; Hensel, pp. 153-156; “The Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911.

He described the riot as “the story of A Man Without A Country; it is the tragedy of William Parker; it is the tragedy of mankind everywhere who would be free, but must resort to violence to obtain their freedom.” In Bond’s telling, the black counter-memory of the riot begins to publicly emerge with Parker finally becoming the heroic centerpiece of the fight at Christiana. This was not a story of selfless white abolitionists, pious Quakers, or legally sanctioned slaveholders, but of a black man forced to take up arms to defend his racial brethren against a society and government that refused to recognize their natural human rights. Bond perceived Parker as “a man who loved Freedom passionately, and who used violence to get it for himself and for others.” Bond placed responsibility for the riot squarely on the lack of equal rights. Had the law been racially impartial, the need for violent resistance would have been unnecessary. He related the conversation between Parker and Sarah Pownall the evening before the riot to create a definitive parallel between the inequitable laws of 1851 with the “separate but equal” precepts of the mid-twentieth century. If kidnapers came to Christiana, Pownall urged Parker to flee north into Canada instead of leading local blacks in a violent resistance against those who would return them to bondage. Parker retorted that if the laws protected blacks as they did whites then he would appeal to the laws rather than fight. “But the laws for personal protection are not made for us,” Parker argued, “and we are not bound to obey them. If a fight occurs I want the whites to keep away. They have a country and may obey the laws. But we have no country.”⁶² Much the same concept of unequal protection went through the mind of the black soldier in 1951 who, upon

⁶² J. Katz, p. 298. Bond paraphrased the conversation between William Parker and Sarah Pownall from R. C. Smedley’s *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster: PA, 1883); Loose, pp. 181-185; “Historic ‘Riot’ Story Retold at Centennial,” *Intelligencer Journal*, September 10, 1951; “The Christiana Riot,” *Quarryville Sun*, September 12, 1911.

returning from service in the Korean War, was forced to ride in the “colored” section of the train as he traveled home to Mississippi.

Bond concluded with a message that stood in stark contrast to the speech given by Gordon Jones that sought forgiveness for the rioters. The Reverend’s absolution message necessarily implied that the rioters had done something wrong, for which they needed to be forgiven. The rioters, however, did not see it that way and neither did Bond. He instead directed culpability for the riot on the hypocrisy of American democracy: “Give men freedom in this world, and equality before their Creator, in life, and in death; give men the equal protection of all of the laws...everywhere in the world...[and] we shall have peace... brotherhood...love...and no Christiana Riots nor its multiplication in war’s violence.” Bond’s passionate conclusion also heralded a sense of warning to white listeners. So long as men have equal protection under the law, there is no need or motivation to use violence to secure their equality. From Bond’s statement it was logical to assume that since blacks did not have “equal protection” there was the possibility more “Christiana Riots” would occur because men had to “resort to violence to obtain their freedom.” This indirect warning served as a harbinger of what came a decade later when militancy gained a sense of legitimacy in the black community as a practical defense against racial injustice. Bond’s contention that inequalities of the 1850’s were connected with those a century later was realized with the rise of the Black Panthers and the Deacons for Defense and Justice, two groups who viewed themselves as not having “equal protection of all the laws” and saw a distinct need to “resort to violence to obtain their freedom.” Paul Dague, Lancaster’s Congressional Representative, followed Bond with a brief statement commending Countians in “their efforts to assure each individual,

regardless of color or creed, the rights and dignity to which he is lawfully entitled” and a benediction by local minister George Shea officially concluded the ceremony.⁶³

The Society considered its 1951 commemoration successful in promoting a public memory of the riot in nationalist and reconciliationist terms that also accepted the necessity of violent resistance. In this manner, the ceremony was an attempt by the Society to play both sides of a controversial issue—encouraging nationalist reunion while endorsing civil rights. Societal Secretary Jack Loose spoke glowingly of how the eight hundred spectators at the ceremony all enjoyed “equality of race, color and creed.” Whether the Gorsuch descendants held this same opinion is difficult to infer. They did pose for a picture with black descendants of the rioters, but this could have been mere politeness rather than an indication of racial solidarity. Loose praised the commemoration as an example of American exceptionalism and democratic inclusiveness. He noted how a large American flag flew over the riot site while declaring, “Americans of all colors and creeds were privileged to witness a ceremony still prohibited in many parts of the world where tyranny and collectivism exist.” Loose also openly acknowledged that the black rioters were indeed “fighting for freedom” and considered it “noteworthy so many eminent Negroes in the fields of education, law, medicine, theology, and the other professions have come from this area.” The

⁶³ Loose, pp. 181-185; J. Katz, pp. 296-298; E. Forbes, p. 261; The Black Panthers were a party of black militants formed in 1966 in Oakland, California. They called for a violent black revolution to achieve equality. For more information see Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 1995); The Deacons for Defense and Justice were organized in 1964 in the town of Bogalusa, Louisiana. They were composed of men from the local black community who utilized violence to defend themselves from the Ku Klux Klan. For more information see L. LaSimba Gray, *The Deacons for Defense and Justice: Defenders of the African American Community in Bogalusa, Louisiana During the 1960's* (Winter Park, FL: Four-G Publishers, 2000).

Intelligencer Journal recognized the riot's civil rights connection as well by accepting the Societal reinterpretation of black violence at Christiana. The newspaper's coverage of the commemoration described the riot as a "historic fight for freedom staged by runaway slaves" that was "retold in its twentieth century significance." The *Intelligencer* also placed quotation marks around the word "riot" implying that the violence at Christiana was something other than the irrational lawlessness of a ruthless mob of African-Americans.⁶⁴

The 1951 commemoration's theme of nationalism and sectional reconciliation echoed the sentiments wafting from Harpers Ferry, Manassas, and Gettysburg a decade earlier. But the nationalism espoused at the Christiana celebration was not necessarily in keeping with previous commemorative standards. Horace Mann Bond's associating of the riot with the ongoing struggle for civil rights highlighted the empty rhetoric of America's democratic ideals. The ceremony thus became the memorialization of the tragedy that was William Parker's struggle against a government and a society that discriminated against his race. This was not the same jingoistic cheerleading heralded by Henry McDonald, Wilbur Hall, or Franklin Roosevelt. Any mention of the Civil War's emancipationist cause inexorably led to introducing the race issue and dealing with an uncomfortable reality—the hypocrisy of a supposedly liberty-loving nation that condoned segregation. Earlier commemorations were not interested in anything remotely related to raising the specter of racial discrimination and harming the relationship between North and South.⁶⁵ The 1951 commemoration organizers, however, were not concerned with

⁶⁴ Loose, pp. 181-185; "Historic 'Riot' Story Retold at Centennial," *Intelligencer Journal*, September 10, 1951.

⁶⁵ Cook, p. 161

such reconciliationist aims. They payed homage to national reunion, but also had the courage to confront the more sinister side of the country's past during a transitional period in American race relations.

Yet not all historians are willing to concede the importance of the 1951 commemoration in evolving the riot narrative to include black heroism. Ella Forbes criticized the ceremony for playing southern melodies and found the promulgation of the "white myth" distasteful in assigning "the role of hero in the rebellion to whites." Forbes noted the significance of Bond's presence at the commemoration, which was a watershed moment for the riot's public memory, by simply crediting him for uttering his "words during a time when Africans still had not achieved equal rights in this country." Thomas Slaughter condemned the ceremony for making African-Americans the "villains in the story." He pointed to the misguided speech by Gordon Jones in asking forgiveness for the rioters and castigated Bond for mentioning Thaddeus Stevens. Slaughter considered these further examples of the "white myth" where whites were again cast as the principal characters. "The heroes as well as the victims were still white, even as African-American speakers recounted the story," Slaughter argued. He then misread the portion of Bond's speech pertaining to William Parker as "the story of a man without a country," describing Bond's meaning as if he was holding Parker responsible for the riot. "Laying the blame for the Christiana Riot on the head of one man is no more helpful a way out of our nation's cycle of violence than blaming God, alcohol, or 'them'—whoever 'they' might be," Slaughter stated. "Indeed, the search for scapegoats denies the historical and cultural dimensions of all such complex events; it ignores the social and political roots of violence

in which everyone is complicit. To see any participant in the Christiana Riot as simply a victim or a victimizer is to caricature the reality that we must comprehend.”⁶⁶

It is easy to accuse the Lancaster County Historical Society for not going far enough in promoting black agency without accounting for the “reality” in which they lived. The 1950s was a racially charged era of segregation and discrimination where white southerners could turn any perceived slight into a raucous political cause. The Society was not prepared, nor was it capable, of making a black counter-memory of the riot the central theme of its commemoration. Organizers still assumed white heroism in the riot story and recognized another opportunity to turn the commemoration into a therapeutic enterprise of sectional reconciliation. Although the “white myth” was present, the Society did distinguish another race of protagonists and sought to recognize the black rioters that had long been overlooked. Horace Mann Bond is key to illuminating this crucial facet of African-American participation in the riot and his presence should not be underestimated. He carried the emancipationist torch passed by Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. Dubois to directly highlight a historical example of the black liberation struggle in America. Bond’s thanking of Thaddeus Stevens was not a tacit endorsement of the “white myth” at the expense of black courage, but a tactful gesture for the congressman’s efforts in founding Lincoln University. He did not hold Parker culpable for the riot, but instead defended the black rioters as having no choice in a country that did not recognize their rights. In the process of defending Parker and his followers, Bond provided a distinct voice for the African-American perspective of the riot. His speech was a landmark event in the riot’s evolving historical memory, one that was further enhanced

⁶⁶ E. Forbes, pp. 259-261; Slaughter, pp. 185-186.

by his message of racial equality that surmounted the reconciliationist platitudes of previous speakers and other Civil War related commemorations.

Instead of denunciations, the Society should be congratulated for having the courage to add the black counter-memory to the commemoration. While other Civil War related celebrations continued to emphasize white fraternalism or reconciliation, the 1951 celebration was unique in that it integrated a distinct racially progressive message. Bond's presence at the celebration illuminated a contending memory when it came to riot interpretation. Blacks did not perceive the riot as symbolic of sectional reconciliation or requiring white forgiveness. Bond's speech attempted to wrest control of the riot story from the white manipulation that relegated African-Americans to the background. His focus on William Parker reversed the historical narrative by interpreting the riot as a necessary struggle for black self-emancipation. By permitting this African-American perspective to be articulated amidst a national atmosphere of racial hostility, the Society risked public ridicule at the hands of irritated segregationists for inciting sectional antagonism. Commemoration organizers were likely unaware beforehand of what Bond was going to say from the dais or the spirit in which it would be received. He certainly had a reputation when it came to racial topics, yet there is no evidence organizers attempted to preemptively edit his words like Reverend Henry Couden forty years earlier.⁶⁷

Bond's statements signified a dramatic shift in how commemorations had remembered the riot up until that point and the Society stood by them in an effort to convey a more

⁶⁷ Henry J. Couden to W. U. Hensel, September 6, 1911, Hensel Collection, MG-76, Box 2, Folder 15, LCHS.

comprehensive story. Inviting Bond to address the riot's legacy could be seen as a Societal attempt to create a dialogue between the races that would continue into the 1960s and beyond concerning equal rights. Signifying the importance of Parker's plight in his fight for freedom was an important aspect of this dialogue and a major accomplishment for the riot's historical memory. He facilitated the transition of the riot narrative from heroic white abolitionism in 1911 to that of heroic white and black abolitionism in 1951. This emphasis on black agency came during a period of growing intensity in the civil rights movement when African-Americans similarly took it upon themselves to assert their natural rights as citizens. The 1951 commemoration reflected a new riot narrative in how future ceremonies would remember Parker as a racial liberator rather than racially liberated. The historical revision of the Christiana Riot was slowly underway.

Chapter VIII

From Riot to Resistance

Over the five decades from 1951-2001, the historical memory of the Christiana Riot underwent another reinterpretation simultaneous to the emergence of social history and improved race relations. In five decades, the riot went from relative obscurity as an interracial abolitionist struggle to being celebrated as a solely African-American defense of freedom. But the celebration of William Parker's courageous stand in 2001 did not occur in a vacuum. It was part of a larger interpretive transformation that occurred in the later half of the twentieth century regarding the histories of previously underrepresented groups. As a result of the civil rights movement, American military intervention in Vietnam, and the Watergate scandal, the country underwent a profound culture shift in the 1960s and 1970s. Minorities and liberal whites took to the streets in vast numbers encouraging political activism against social injustice. This culture of protest included demands by ethnic and racial minorities for government acknowledgement of their rights and institutional recognition of their historical contributions. Those developments substantially changed the field of history from its primary focus on white male elites to a more pluralistic study that included ordinary people of different races, genders, and ethnicities. The historical contributions of the disfranchised were deemed just as significant as those of their social betters and, in some cases, minority accomplishments received more acclaim because of their marginalized status. This process started slowly, hampered initially by an orthodox Civil War centennial that denied the black counter-memory in favor of sectional reconciliation, but quickly gained momentum from the mid-

1960s onward. Universities, television, the federal government, the 1976 bicentennial, and museums responded to this emphasis on social history and social justice in various ways, creating an inclusive interpretive process that respected ethnic and racial heritage.¹

This contemporary focus on historical inclusiveness dramatically affected the 2001 Christiana Riot commemoration. The third stage of the riot's developing story looked and sounded significantly different than either of its predecessors, as black agency, an element downplayed in previous Civil War observances, was at the heart of the celebration. Black history was now central to the commemorative theme, one that included both the riot and African-American contributions in shaping the country. The 2001 celebration interpreted the fight at Christiana as a shining example of black defiance. Quaker exploits faded to the background, replaced by an emphasis on the heroism of William Parker and his racial brethren in taking a stand against slavery. The rioters became modern day freedom fighters, exemplars of black manhood in the struggle against racial discrimination. Yet this process of reinterpreting the riot was a gradual process, hindered by local ignorance of the riot story and a racial backlash days before the ceremony. Black suspicions over white intentions also shrouded festivities representing the cultural obstacles social historians face in presenting authentic histories respectful of racial heritage. The 2001 Christiana Riot Commemoration would indeed illustrate just how far the nation had come in its racial understanding, but it also showed how contested memories between black and white regarding African-American history were far from satisfied.

¹ Bodnar, pp. 13-20.

While the 1951 Christiana Riot Commemoration included a distinct black counter-memory, such sentiments did not necessarily make an impact on grassroots historical perceptions. For many Americans the Civil War remained a mythologized memory of political miscalculation and Lost Cause ideology. Only one or two veterans who fought in the conflict were still alive to maintain a physical link to the past or offer an alternative memory. Most Americans, especially those in the North, were so detached from their past by the effects of modernization, urbanization, and immigration that they lacked sufficient concern or knowledge to object. Only in the South did the war's political influence continue to endure in the exaltation of the Lost Cause and the physical manifestation of segregation. World War II contributed to a renewed interest in military history among some Americans who toured Civil War battlefields and joined roundtable groups in various cities around the country. But this curiosity was tempered by a dearth of literature evoking the war's emancipationist cause. Many writers agreed with C. Vann Woodward who appealed to his fellow historians that they maintain a "special obligation of sobriety and fidelity to the record" when writing Civil War histories. If the historian writes in the spirit of impartiality, "he will flatter the self-righteousness of neither side," Woodward observed:

He will not picture the North as burning for equality since 1863 with a hard, gem-like flame. He will not picture the South as fighting for the eternal verities. He will not paint a holy war that ennobled its participants. And he will try to keep in mind the humility that prevented the central figure in the drama [Lincoln] from ever falling in with the notion that he was the incarnation of the Archangel Michael.

Owing to Woodward and financial desires for an expansive readership, authors of popular fictional and non-fictional accounts of the Civil War offered works without

sectional bias. Books such as *The Civil War: A Narrative* (1958) by Shelby Foote, *Johnny Shiloh: A Novel of the Civil War* (1959) by James A. Rhodes and Dean Jauchius, the two volume *War for the Union* (1959, 1960) by Allan Nevins, and the multi-volume *Centennial History of the Civil War* (1961, 1963, 1965) by Bruce Catton, each portrayed the war as a lilywhite struggle reminiscent of the cult of the fallen soldier. These narratives focused largely on nationalism and the military aspects of both sides while relegating black agency to the background.²

This de-emphasizing of the emancipationist vision would play a significant part during the country's celebration of the Civil War centennial. In 1957, the same year President Dwight D. Eisenhower deployed the 101st Airborne Division to enforce desegregation at Little Rock Central High School, Congress created the Civil War Centennial Commission (CWCC) to oversee planning for the centennial. Eisenhower's proclamation for the coming centennial emphasized the "heroism and sacrifice by men and women of both sides, who valued principle above life itself and whose devotion to duty is a proud part of our national inheritance." He hoped the celebrations would enrich "our knowledge and appreciation of this great chapter in our Nation's history and of making this memorable period truly a Centennial for all Americans."³

² Cook, pp. 15-19, 238-255; Boyd B. Stutler, ed., "Notes and Queries," *Civil War History* 4 (1958), p. 199; C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), pp. 86-87; Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 3 vols. (New York: Random House, 1958-1974); James A. Rhodes and Dean Jauchius, *Johnny Shiloh: A Novel of the Civil War* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959); Alan Nevins, *The War for the Union*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959-1960); Bruce Catton, *The Centennial History of the Civil War*, 3 vols. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961-1965).

³ Cook, pp. 15, 31; Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Proclamation 3382 - Civil War Centennial," December 7, 1960, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=12029#ixzz1yPNBR7H3> (accessed June 21, 2012).

Like the President, the CWCC interpreted the war through an intersectional spectrum that praised military heroism in an internecine national conflict. Composed of businessmen, politicians, bureaucrats, and historians from around the country, the commission sought to extinguish sectional antipathy while promoting American nationalism. Commission member and historian Bell Wiley asserted the reconciliationist motivations of the CWCC by explaining its goal of commemorating “the greatness demonstrated by both sides in that momentous struggle. The Civil War was a time of supreme greatness for both North and South—and for the American nation.” But the commission apparently overlooked Eisenhower’s remark that it would be “a Centennial for *all* Americans,” as the CWCC did not consider the centennial an inter-racial affair. The commission was initially without any black members and marginalized African-Americans roles in the war for fear of further amplifying the sectional antipathy springing from the *Brown* decision.⁴

An example of the CWCC’s reluctance to involve itself in issues of race occurred two years later when the town of Harpers Ferry sponsored a celebration of John Brown’s abolitionist raid. Some sixty-five thousand spectators attended the four-day commemoration highlighted by a reenactment of the assault on the federal armory, a mock battle, performances of a play entitled “The Prophet,” and a cordial panel discussion of professional historians examining the raid “in a thoroughly objective and dispassionate manner,” according to press accounts. The festivities promoted a sense of social cohesion structured around sectional affinity rather than becoming mired in the Civil War’s political causes. The *New York Times* reported how “Confederate flags were

⁴ Cook, pp. 42-62; Kammen, p. 597.

give equal prominence with the Stars and Stripes on most houses” and that half the children wore the blue cap of the Union Army while “the others wore the gray cap of the Confederate soldier in the War Between the States.” The Harpers Ferry commemoration was very much in keeping with the CWCC’s impartial and reconciliationist guidelines, yet the commission refused to support the venture, citing an illusive explanation of “official” centennial events not starting until 1961. That commemorating an incident of militant abolitionism had nothing to do with the commission’s unwillingness to endorse the festivities seems unlikely given its historical significance in relation to the coming Civil War centennial. Even local townspeople recognized the political motivations lurking behind the CWCC’s aversion to their commemoration. “John Brown’s Raid was embarrassing and untimely when it occurred in 1859,” a Harpers Ferry resident observed, “and it apparently still is, today.”⁵

The CWCC’s coldness towards the Harpers Ferry commemoration stemmed from its underlying conception of the Civil War in distinctly white terms. For commission members the conflict was a lilywhite struggle of mutual sacrifice and martial brotherhood bereft of any emancipationist rationale. The CWCC dedicated its official centennial *Guide for the Observance* “to the memory of the Union and Confederate Soldiers and Sailors” and considered a painting entitled “Bygones,” depicting a Union and Confederate soldier standing together, as “the symbol of the forthcoming Centennial.” The commemorative *Civil War Centennial Handbook*, published in conjunction with the CWCC in 1961, also professed an impartial tone by omitting any mention of slavery from

⁵ Cook, p. 74; Boyd B. Stutler, ed., “Notes and Queries,” *Civil War History* 6 (1960), pp. 89-90; “Raid Re-enacted in Harpers Ferry,” *New York Times*, October 18, 1959; “John Brown Raids Again,” *New York Times*, October 4, 1959.

its seventy-three pages. Besides three sentences regarding the formation of African-American units and a photograph of black gravediggers, the black experience is notably absent from a conflict the *Handbook* described as the “supreme test of our Nation.” It provided no specific indication of the war’s racial foundation, instead shrouding wartime causes under esoteric “beliefs and political ideals” in a clichéd description of hostilities where “brother was cast against brother.” An uninformed reader would learn that Nathan Bedford Forrest was “one of the greatest of natural born leaders” and Robert E. Lee was “one of the supremely gifted men produced by our Nation” while completely oblivious to the underlying cause of human slavery for which they fought. The *Handbook* related the war as a shared national history devoid of any controversy. It told inspiring tales of the courageous soldiers on both sides, provided statistical breakdowns of wartime casualties, and offered numerous pictures of American industrialism at its finest.⁶ While African-Americans responded to racial discrimination by staging protests, lunch counter sit-ins, and freedom rides throughout the South, the *Handbook* could only deify white exceptionalism in a war supposedly fought for “political ideals.”

In late June 1963, the Columbia Civil War Centennial in Lancaster County told a similar story of shared martial valor. Two months before Martin Luther King’s famous “I Have a Dream” speech in Washington D.C., ten thousand Countians gathered to commemorate the burning of the Columbia-Wrightsville Bridge that prevented Confederate forces from invading Harrisburg and Lancaster County. The multi-day event featured a memorial service, battle re-enactments, and daily performances of a play entitled “The Drummer Boy of Shiloh.” The memorial service included a fraternal

⁶ “Civil War Centennial—Celebration or Desecration?,” *Jewish Currents*, January 1961; William H. Price, *The Civil War Centennial Handbook* (Arlington, VA: Prince Lithograph Co., 1961), pp. 11, 60, 2-3.

musical tribute that celebrated the heroism of the “soldier” or “uniformed men,” making no distinction between the causes for which each side fought. The centennial program referred to numerous antebellum ballads including “Tramp, Tramp, Tramp” as a “song of courage and hope for the men as they marched, rested, or camped.” Other songs such as “When Johnny Comes Marching Home” was described as an “unrestrained expression of gratitude...for the returning soldier boy,” while “Aura Lee” purportedly “gave soothing relief to both sides, relief from the drudgery and brutality of war.” The only mention of slavery in the centennial program regarded the playing of “Go Down Moses” and “Swing Low Sweet Chariot,” two plantation melodies that “carried the rich melodious voices of the slaves singing as they labored their songs of freedom, their bondage, and heavenly rewards.” An accompanying history of Civil War Columbia also failed to acknowledge slavery or the emancipationist cause one time within its seventy plus pages. The only distinctions between Union and Confederate came during a brief description of the town’s wartime patriotism by locals “hanging Jeff Davis in effigy” and in a single characterization of the conflict as a “War of the Rebellion.” Rather than reinterpreting the Civil War in accordance with the growing civil rights movement, Columbia’s festivities were in keeping with CWCC protocols by maintaining an intersectional nature. The commemoration revealed the rugged persistence of the Holmesian “Cult of the Fallen Soldier” that continued to make white sacrifice paramount to the Civil War’s historical memory.⁷

⁷ “500 Fight Sham Battle for Bridge,” *Lancaster New Era*, June 29, 1963; “Civil War Centennial Opens in Columbia,” *Lancaster New Era*, June 24, 1963; *Centennial Commemorative Observance of Columbia’s Role in the Civil War at Columbia, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (June 23-29, 1963), pp. 7, 12, 49.

But the CWCC had a larger purpose behind the centennial commemorations beyond simply exalting the mutual gallantry of North and South. In its *Civil War Centennial Handbook*, the commission made an odd inference by referencing the Civil War as a “cold war” that began in the 1830s. As Richard Fried has shown, besides sectional reconciliation centennial celebrations were also used as political pawns to provide a democratic counterpoint to the international communist threat posed by the USSR. He argued that no previous observance “triggered so many resonances with the nation’s global role or became so embroiled in politics, media and popular culture” than the Civil War anniversary. Robert Cook expanded on this argument by showing how the CWCC utilized the centennial as Cold War propaganda in the ideological struggle against communism. By linking the conflict between North and South with the geopolitical dispute between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the commission hoped to foster a sense of nationalist pride that would unite Americans and renew their civic efforts in winning the Cold War.⁸

When the CWCC unanimously chose General Ulysses S. Grant III—the aged grandson of the former president—to serve as chairman upon its inception in 1957, Grant’s famous name and staunch conservatism made him a natural choice for the commission’s political agenda. His right-wing views meshed nicely with the distressing precepts of McCarthyism—whereby the country was under perpetual threat of communist subversion. Grant denied the appointment of labor leader Walter Reuther to the CWCC advisory council because he demanded the commission “have no infiltration of Communists.” For Grant, the Civil War centennial could both publicize and honor

⁸ Price, p. 2; Richard Fried, *The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!: Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold-War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 122; Cook, pp. 2-5.

American exceptionalism at a time when it was so desperately needed. “What better lesson in patriotism and self-sacrifice for a cause can be given to our children of today and future generations,” Grant asked, “than to teach them what Americans did in those days of crisis and greatness? We today cannot do better than to emulate the patriotism and ready self-sacrifice of the men and women who fought that war.” CWCC member and Assistant Secretary of the Army Dewey Short echoed the chairman’s sentiments by declaring that communists were trying “to destroy the concept of freedom” and that there was “no act however vile, no risk however great, no course however repulsive that they are not willing to take in order to carry out their avowed intention to bury us.” He believed that an intersectional centennial illustrating the “great common sacrifice” of both Union and Confederate would intensify American commitment to defeating such a contemptible enemy. Short’s ethnocentric position quickly developed into a sort of CWCC mission statement for justifying an idealistic centennial program that would “commemorate the true lessons of the war” and relate them to the everyday lives of twentieth-century Americans.⁹

The major weakness of the CWCC, however, was its decentralized authority as an organizing body merely assisting individual states in preparing their commemorative exercises. This secured southern white support, but allowed state commissions considerable leeway in determining the thematic motifs of their celebrations. Segregationists took advantage of this opening by hijacking the centennial as a vehicle for white unity. White southerners connected 1960 with 1860, comparing the federal government’s enforcement of integration as another example of the trampling of states’

⁹ Kammen, pp. 592-597; Cook, pp. 31-33, 40-41.

rights that occurred a century before. Centennial celebrations in Alabama and Mississippi memorialized secession as a noble act for resisting federal authority and commemorated the inauguration of Jefferson Davis with parades, fireworks, and Confederate re-enactors that attracted spectators in the tens of thousands. “Today the South is facing many of the same problems it faced in 1861,” a Montgomery, Alabama reporter argued in 1961, “federal dictatorship is literally being stuffed down our throats.” He implored his fellow southerners to “stand up and fight as our forefathers did so we can lick this ever present battle with the federal government as it continues to usurp rights delegated to the states.” A Mississippi editor acknowledged, “local self-government in the form of national independence for the South is, of course, no longer an issue, but local self-government in the form of States’ Rights definitely is a burning issue today.” Centennial festivities in other southern states were not as politically charged, but did follow suit with thematically similar events that hearkened to the glory days of the Confederacy.¹⁰

Negative reactions to southern centennial celebrations were understandably strongest in the North among African-Americans and white liberals. The black newspaper *The Crusader* referred to southern commemorations as the “Centennial of Shame” and maintained that the Confederate version of the war was making a mockery of the country’s decolonization efforts. “At this time the entire Colored world can get a good look at the true attitude of the nation that is out to enforce this special brand of democracy on a world still struggling to cast off its chains of bondage,” the paper reported. Black labor leader A. Philip Randolph described the centennial as “a

¹⁰ Cook, pp. 41-62, 27, 70-86; *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 3, 1961; *Jackson Clarion-Ledger and Daily News*, March 26, 1961.

stupendous brain-washing exercise” in placing Confederate leaders on par with their Union counterparts that struck “a blow against men of color and human dignity.” Morris Schappes, the white editor of *Jewish Currents* magazine, warned, “although they lost the Civil War, the Old Confederates are determined to win the Centennial—at the expense of the Negro people and all democratic rights.” He was irate that in South Carolina “the Confederate flag is being waved furiously in a state in which not even a single Negro child has been able to practice its right to an unsegregated education.” In an article entitled “Did the South Win the Civil War?,” white author Howard Meyer was alarmed by southern centennials venerating the seditious act of secession while disregarding the issue of human bondage. “It does not serve America well, in the world of 1961,” he wrote, “to ignore the evil and iniquity of slavery in marking the Centennial of the conflict.” Internal questions regarding the pageantry of Civil War centennials caused a CWCC shakeup in 1962. After staff reshuffling instigated by the Kennedy administration, professional historians Allan Nevins and James Robertson took control of the commission turning the centennial into a more consensual scholarly exercise that toned down the Lost Cause and Jim Crow rhetoric. Although battle re-enactments were still popular, southerners increasingly became disenchanted with less partisan centennial commemorations that could not be exploited to defend their crumbling racial order.¹¹

Centennial celebrations in the North were less sectional and more in keeping with the CWCC’s attempts to build a Cold War consensus. By the 1950s, northerners had no

¹¹ Cook, pp. 166-168; Kammen, p. 599; *The Crusader*, March 4, 1961; “Celebration or Desecration,” *Jewish Currents*, January 1961; Howard N. Meyer, “Did the South Win the Civil War?,” *Negro Digest* 13 (1961); Cook, p. 168, 193, 203. Nevins was a Pulitzer Prize winning author and former history professor at Columbia University. Robertson was the editor of *Civil War History* and considered a southern moderate who wanted to end Jim Crow, see Cook, pp. 140-143.

tangible memory of the Civil War and were not as culturally attuned to the vestiges of slavery and Reconstruction that pervaded southern recollections. This lack of a personal connection to the politics and cultural baggage inherent to Jim Crow made the North more vulnerable to CWCC manipulation. By being reminded of the heroic roles played by their ancestors during the Civil War, northerners were stirred with a nationalist fervor that connected the century old conflict with the modern battle against communism. One year before the March on Washington, the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation was celebrated at the Lincoln Memorial before an audience of four thousand. The CWCC hoped President John F. Kennedy would attend to give the principal address, but fear of angering southern Democrats caused him to skip the ceremony. He did provide a videotaped address where he referenced slavery stating, “much remains to be done to eradicate the vestiges of discrimination and segregation.” The keynote address was instead given by then U. N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson whose speech was more in keeping with CWCC nationalist directives. Stevenson considered the Proclamation central to “the globe-circling spread of our spirit of national independence and individual freedom.” He alluded to discrimination in America, but argued that this should not be inferred as “faltering in the sacrifices which are necessary to ensure that the Western democracies and the unaligned peoples of the world have the shield against aggression that they need, and the aid necessary to uphold it.”¹²

African-Americans recognized the linkage between the black counter-memory of the war and their continuing efforts to achieve racial equality. Black leaders believed that by

¹² Cook, pp. 122-123; *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1962* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1963), pp. 702-703; “Call to a New Battle,” *The Progressive*, December 1962.

taking hold of African-American history, they could better direct their future. Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) president Charles Wesley sought to use the very chronology of the war against those relishing in Confederate nostalgia. From 1961 onward, he noted the southern “preoccupation with the glorification of the drama of the War...as it opened with Southern dominance and victories,” but patiently waited to see what would happen during later centennial ceremonies “when General Grant marches through the Wilderness and General Sherman marches to the sea!” The ASNLH promoted the emancipationist vision by sponsoring town meetings, study groups, museum exhibits, and the dedication of monuments to black historical achievements. African-Americans also looked forward to publicly commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation and using it to publicize the gap between its promise of equality and the reality in which they lived. But the CWCC was unwilling to go so far as sanctioning the black counter-memory of the war, deeming anything relating to civil rights as too “political” and therefore out of bounds. In attempting to commemorate the Civil War without antagonizing southern sensibilities, members of the CWCC were constrained to finding a white consensus on the conflict while ignoring the black struggle all around them.¹³

As the Civil War Centennial Commission stubbornly promoted its reconciliationist interpretation of the Civil War during the early 1960s, it refused to acknowledge an institutional counterculture that was simultaneously refuting its message. This counterculture consisted of a younger generation of black and liberal white historians

¹³ Cook, pp. 169, 161, 211-223; Charles H. Wesley, “The Civil War and the Negro-American,” *Journal of Negro History* 47 (1962), pp. 95, 78-79.

who were slowly chipping away at the war's consensual orthodoxy. Spurred by a wave of impassioned political activism stemming from the civil rights movement and in reaction to hostilities in Southeast Asia, this new generation of intellectuals was at the forefront of creating a "new social history" that shifted the historical focus from white elites to previously underrepresented social classes and ethnic groups. Discarded was the traditional "melting pot" theory of American history that relied on general patriotic themes of national harmony, replaced by a willingness to examine the controversial relationships of race, gender, and class inherent to the American story. "Black, feminist, Native American, and antiwar...activists began producing history in order to grasp the deep-rooted nature of the processes they were protesting against," Mike Wallace argued, "and to dismantle those readings of the past that provided powerful justifications for the status quo." Gone was the traditional paradigm of viewing the past from a hierarchical top-down perspective, replaced by a progressive "history from the bottom up" approach that conveyed a more thorough and inclusive chronicle of American society. Historians started becoming social scientists, making quantitative and demographic analyses of data from census and local registers to reveal the history of those previously relegated to the background. By the end of the decade, the histories of ordinary people had rapidly become just as important as the legacies of their social betters.¹⁴

Within this social history movement, Civil War historians followed in the footsteps of Carter Woodson and W. E. B. Dubois in attempting to properly recognize African-

¹⁴ Cook, p. 257; Barbara Franco, "In Urban History Museums and Historical Societies," in *Public History: Essays From the Field*, eds., James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (1999; reprint, Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 311, 316; Mike Wallace, *Mickey Mouse History: And Other Essays on American Memory* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), p. 21; Paul E. Johnson, "Looking Back at Social History," *Reviews in American History* 39, no. 2 (June 2011), pp. 379-380.

American contributions to American history. Books such as Kenneth Stampp's *Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956), John Hope Franklin's *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (1961), Benjamin Quarles' *Lincoln and the Negro* (1962), James McPherson's *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (1964), and Joel Williamson's *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (1965), each made the black counter-memory of the war central to studies that directly contradicted the Dunningite school by extolling the progressive policies of radical Republicanism and the liberal accomplishments of southern state governments during Reconstruction. This new crop of historians perceived their literary efforts as part of the contemporary freedom struggle that necessitated debunking the mythology of the past. Unlike the CWCC, they were willing to directly confront the specter of slavery in all its horror thereby imploding the genteel legends of the Old South and the Lost Cause. Their scholarship connected the racial discrimination of the antebellum era with the civil rights protests then occurring in the streets. As Americans sat glued to their televisions watching southern authorities violently attack peaceful black demonstrators in Birmingham and Selma, Alabama, the linking of Martin Luther King Jr. and his followers with their abolitionist forebears became inescapable as the consensual orthodoxy of the Civil War began wavering under a rising public acceptance of the black counter-memory. "Once the peculiar institution [slavery] had been shown to be brutal and exploitative and the civil rights movement had uncovered the historical durability of southern racism," Robert Cook reasoned, "it was

almost inevitable that the fanatical abolitionists of yesteryear would start to be reinterpreted as modern-day freedom riders.”¹⁵

During the 1960s and into the 1970s, the new social history movement spawned diverse specialties to study the social dynamics of the past. African-American history focused on the African diaspora and racial inequality in America, women’s studies concentrated on gender issues and domesticity, urban history examined the politics of cities and their social structures, public history offered a collaborative approach in presenting interpretive history to the general public, labor history dealt with unionism and workers, ethnic studies exposed immigrant life and the process of acculturation, and environmental history investigated the ecological relationships between man and nature. African-American history in particular attracted impassioned interest from black scholars and students on college campuses. Some were attracted because of the peaceful persistence of the civil rights movement, others by the more militant demands of activists like Malcolm X or organizations such as the Black Panthers. “In their insistence that they be accorded equal treatment in every respect, Afro-Americans summoned the history of the United States to their side,” John Hope Franklin observed. Blacks felt they “had done more than their share in making the country rich and great,” and since history was now

¹⁵ Cook, pp. 164-165, 256-260; Kenneth Stampp, *Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956); John Hope Franklin, *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961); Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962); James McPherson *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964); Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).

acknowledging these contributions “it was important that the entire nation should become familiar with the facts of Afro-American history.”¹⁶

The growing academic acceptance of African-American history as a reputable field also trickled down to the black community. The civil rights movement stimulated a sense of personal history in many black Americans who looked to past examples of black defiance as sources of empowerment. Historical figures such as Nat Turner, Paul Robeson, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, Frederick Douglass, David Walker, and William Parker served as exemplars of black manliness and pride for African-Americans seeking the same equal protections for which these men fought and advocated. In the cultural phenomenon that was Alex Haley’s *Roots*, published as a book in 1976 and watched by millions of Americans on television a year later, African-Americans found a source of inspiration in their continuing freedom struggle as they identified with the desperation of Haley’s enslaved characters. The popularity of the *Roots* miniseries fostered a previously unparalleled enthusiasm in black genealogy and oral history. It produced a public reflection on slavery and racial oppression by making white viewers come face to face with the sins of their forebears. With the history of slavery depicted on American televisions in all its cruelty and brutality, many whites found themselves forced to engage in the historical legacy of those marching just outside their windows.¹⁷

¹⁶ Constance B. Schulz, “Becoming a Public Historian,” in *Public History: Essays From the Field*, eds., James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (1999; reprint, Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2006), p. 32; Franklin, “On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History,” in *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*, ed., Darlene Clark Hine (Louisiana State University Press, 1986), pp. 18-19.

¹⁷ Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*, 8th ed. (Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1992), p. 26; Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. xiii-iv; Julia Mickenberg, “Civil Rights, History, and the Left: Inventing the Juvenile Black Biography,” *MELUS* (Vol. 27, No. 2, Summer 2002), pp. 82, 87-88; E.

President Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society," the culture of protest sparked by war in Vietnam, and the growth of a more racially diverse middle class contributed to social history expanding beyond the classroom to infiltrating the governmental and institutional realms. Rapid changes in American society resulted in more women, as well as, racial and ethnic minorities serving in political positions and holding elected offices. Their sensitivity to historical discrimination influenced governmental policy by not only acknowledging the history of the disfranchised, but also providing increased funding for such endeavors to museums, universities, libraries, and the National Park Service.¹⁸

In 1965, the National Endowment for the Humanities was established for just such a purpose. The federal agency offered millions in grants to cultural institutions for the promotion of preservation programs and historical scholarship that reflected the "nation's rich cultural heritage and to the fostering of mutual respect for the diverse beliefs and values of all persons and groups." Seven years later, Congress passed the Ethnic Heritage Studies Act to illustrate how "in a multi-ethnic society a greater understanding of the contributors of one's own heritage and those of one's fellow citizens can contribute to a more harmonious, patriotic, and committed populace." The act authorized the Commissioner of Education to offer grants and assistance to non-profit organizations in "planning, developing, establishing, and operating ethnic heritage studies programs." Four years later, black history received public recognition when Carter Woodson's Negro History Week was expanded into Black History Month. President Gerald Ford urged

Forbes, p. 187; Kammen, pp. 641-643; Paul D. Zimmerman, "In Search of a Heritage," *Newsweek* (September 27, 1976).

¹⁸ Charles F. Bryan Jr., "In State Historical Agencies, Museums, and Societies: A Constant State of Change," in *Public History: Essays From the Field*, eds., James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia (1999; reprint, Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2006), pp. 332-333.

Americans to celebrate Black History Month to “honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.” In 1978, the American Indian Religious Freedom Act acknowledged that previously underrepresented groups should have a voice in how their history is displayed. The legislation encouraged museums to cooperate with native communities when studying their history thus creating a government endorsed partnership between vernacular and official culture.¹⁹

Celebrations for the American Bicentennial in 1976 caused the federal government to distribute millions of dollars to state and local historical societies. Much of the funding was dependant upon commemorations being centered on pluralistic themes emphasizing the strength of American diversity. Reviving the “spirit of ‘76” became a collaborative effort with the federally-based American Revolution Bicentennial Administration (ARBA) working alongside local elected officials, businessmen, educators, museum professionals and grassroots community members—an alliance of official and vernacular cultures for the production of public pageantry. From a psychological standpoint, the festivities helped Americans restore a sense of patriotic self-esteem by serving as therapeutic buffers in the aftermath of Vietnam and the Watergate scandal. *Time Magazine* wrote that “after a long night of paralyzing self-doubt” Americans were proud of their country once again. The *Washington Post* observed that after tumultuous years of flag-burning protests, the American flag was “common property again, to be stapled

¹⁹ “National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act of 1965,” *United States Statutes at Large* 79, 89th Congress (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1965; Kammen, p. 616; *United States Statutes at Large* 86, 92nd Congress (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), pp. 346-348; Gerald R. Ford, “Message on the Observance of Black History Month,” February 10, 1976, American Presidency Project <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6288> (accessed August 6, 2012); Catherine M. Lewis, *The Changing Face of Public History: The Chicago Historical Society and the Transformation of an American Museum* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), pp. 100-101.

onto parade floats, stuck in hats, and hung from front porches.” National demonstrations included the “American Freedom Train,” a traveling exhibit of historical documents, memorabilia, and models recounting two hundred years of American history. An international fleet of tall-masted ships arrived in New York harbor offering a naval spectacle for land-based onlookers and five thousand spectator boats. “The Bicentennial Wagon Train Pilgrimage to Pennsylvania” attracted sixty thousand volunteer riders in a recreation of the wagon train experience in reverse, culminating in a vast encampment upon their arrival at Valley Forge on July 4, 1976. And the Smithsonian Institution presented the “Festival of American Folklife,” a summer-long exhibition along the National Mall that offered ethnic food, dance, and songs from a different region of the country each week.²⁰

Local bicentennial celebrations numbered some sixty-six thousand events throughout the country, most of which were categorized as heritage related projects, patriotic parades, fireworks displays, historical reenactments, or folklife festivals. Racial and ethnic themes dominated local commemorations in their attempts to “stimulate cultural self-awareness and inter-cultural understanding.” Officials in Atlanta presented “Georgians Creating a Culture,” an exhibit featuring the contributions of African-American, Jewish, Scots-Irish, and other ethnic groups to state history. Chicago hosted a lecture series on the black experience in America, displayed an exhibit at Jane Addams’ Hull House describing the ethnic settlement of the city’s west side, and presented a

²⁰ Bryan, pp. 334-335; American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, *The Bicentennial of the United States of America: Final Report to the People*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: American Revolution Bicentennial Administration, 1977), p. 51; Bodnar, pp. 226-233; “Sail Ho! Two Hundred Ships of the Past Will Salute Bicentennial Here,” *New York Times*, March 1, 1976; “Festival of American Folklife Opens Its Bicentennial Version,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1976.

Mexican-American art exhibition. And St. Louis held a celebration of American music that included African-American and Native American songs.²¹

Such tributes to the country's pluralistic past reinforced American patriotism not through official culture, but through vernacular achievements at the grassroots level. In this manner, bicentennial festivities differed from previous commemorations because they were not necessarily centered around consensus-based themes beholden to white hegemony. Much of this had to do with the contentiousness of the previous decade when American tradition and patriotism ran headlong into disillusionment and protest. John Bodnar observed that because of the 1960s, "national officials appeared to be more inclusive in their planning for the bicentennial and more tolerant of alternative forms of celebration." Unlike the CWCC, the ARBA was influenced by an advisory committee of ethnic and minority representatives who advocated for projects related to their history. This minority voice contributed to the bicentennial's fostering of civic pride by honoring the previously marginalized in conjunction with the country's founding fathers. Thus, the commemorative events were not entirely reflective of the traditional trickling down of nationalist sentiments from the cultural elites to the middling masses. Instead, the bicentennial was a public expression of social history, honoring national power through the celebration of ethnic and racial contributions to the country as a whole. It was history from the bottom-up, transmitting American patriotism from the local memory to the national consciousness.²²

²¹ Bryan, pp. 334-335; Bodnar, pp. 238-243; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post Civil-Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 54-55.

²² Bodnar, pp. 226-244.

The growing influence of social history was also reflected in the workplace as more women and minorities increasingly gained employment in politics, museums, and on institutional boards. This demographic shift contributed to social history becoming a staple of historical displays and presentations from the late-1960s onward, as curators grew tired of having the public view the past through the eyes of the upper crust. The histories of ordinary citizens or marginalized peoples were now central to exhibits that interpreted the United States as a pluralistic nation of symbiotic relationships.

Throughout the country, this revised vernacular narrative emerged in numerous cultural institutions as they recognized the contributions of middling whites, minorities, and women to the American story. In 1968 the University of North Carolina opened the Southern Folklife Collection as a repository for the history of traditional southern music and popular culture. The collection included oral histories, photographs, periodicals, and a diverse array of original recordings ranging from bluegrass and Cajun music to ceremonial Native American songs and Mexican-American conjuntos. The following year, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art became the first major art museum to examine African-American culture when it devised a gallery entitled *Harlem on My Mind*. The art show included jazz and blues recordings, speeches, and newspaper articles relating the story of the black experience in Harlem. That same year, the Oakland Museum expanded its galleries to include programs relating to African-American, Asian-American, and Native American history in the Bay Area. *Remember the Ladies: Women in America, 1750-1815* was a traveling exhibition that found a home in various museums

throughout the country during the 1970s. The display broadened the social context of the Revolutionary era by illustrating women's political engagement beyond domestic life.²³

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed a continued democratization of museum interpretation in conjunction with the rise of multiculturalism and an emphasis on diversity. The Black American West Museum in Denver highlighted African-American roles as cowboys, saloonkeepers, stagecoach drivers, and farmers in the taming of the West. By 1983 the museum had compiled eight hundred recorded interviews with black pioneers. The Smithsonian's National Museum of American History presented *A More Perfect Union: Japanese Americans and the United States Constitution* in 1987 to examine the constitutionality of placing Japanese-American citizens in internment camps during World War II. In Virginia, the Valentine Museum initiated the Richmond History Project in the mid-1980s to utilize the city as "a case study of American social history and interpreted within the context of urban history." The museum's "In Bondage and Freedom: Antebellum Black Life in Richmond, 1790-1860" received national attention in 1988 by arguing that African-American labor was central to Richmond's economic development. The following year, Valentine presented "Jim Crow: Racism and Reaction in the New South," which analyzed the origin and evolving nature of racism from the Civil War to 1940 and "Dressed for Work: Women in the Work Force 1900-1989," explored the history of women's employment through costume. In 1990, the Ellis Island Immigration Museum offered visitors a glimpse of immigrant contributions to American society and the discrimination they faced during the process of acculturation. The

²³ "Archie Green, 91, Union Activist and Folklorist, Dies," *New York Times*, March 28, 2009; For more information on the Southern Folklife Collection see Daniel W. Patterson, ed., *Sounds of the South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); Lewis, pp. 16, 103, 50.

National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis opened its doors a year later with exhibits that utilized photographs, newspaper articles, and three-dimensional displays to depict landmark events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, freedom rides, and the March on Washington. In 1994, the Jewish Museum in New York City presented *Bridges and Boundaries: African Americans and American Jews* which examined the often contentious relationship between black and Jews in twentieth century urban environments. And *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, a traveling exhibit sponsored by the New York Public Library the following year, became the city's first endeavor to analyze sexuality as a museum topic. By the time of the Christiana Riot's sesquicentennial, America's cultural institutions—the pantheons of public memory—had firmly shifted from elitist methodologies of national consensus to populist interpretations more reflective of the country's pluralistic composition.²⁴

By the close of the twentieth century, the political power of minority voting blocs had become so influential that government and cultural institutions became more responsive to ethnic and racial concerns. Complaints by minorities that their histories and traditions were not being properly respected caused a reversal of previously insensitive acts or interpretations so as not to offend. The Shaw Memorial in Boston underwent a reinterpretation when African-Americans observed how Robert Gould Shaw's likeness predominated the monument, thereby overshadowing the black soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. The memorial was rededicated in 1982 with a stone placed on

²⁴ Kammen, pp. 683-684, 638; Lewis, p. 45, 123; Lonnie Bunch, "Fueled by Passion: The Valentine Museum and Its Richmond History Project," in *Ideas and Images: Developing Interpretive History Exhibits*, eds. Kenneth Ames, et al. (1992; reprint, Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 1997), pp. 286-311; "Inside, Reliving the Immigrant's Experience," *New York Times*, September 7, 1990.

the back of the monument listing the names of the soldiers who fell during the assault on Fort Wagner. Listing the African-American volunteers who sacrificed their lives for the Union cause provided a counterbalance to the celebration of white heroism depicted on the front. It publicly ennobled black contributions in self-emancipation, placing the men of the 54th on a similar idealistic plane with that of their leader. Congress relented to mounting political protests from Native American tribes in 1990 with passage of the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act. This legislation required museums and state historical societies to return tens of thousands of Native American artifacts and human remains to their respective tribes. Although museum professionals balked, arguing that museums could better preserve the objects in question, the law's enforcement revealed how the rules governing preservation and interpretation had fundamentally changed. And from 1981-1995 the NPS found the Heyward Shepherd Memorial in Harpers Ferry so offensive that a plywood box was placed over the monument to protect against "vandalism." Amidst protests from the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans the memorial was uncovered in 1995, but now stands next to a wayside placing the monument's controversial nature in context. The wayside includes "Another Perspective," citing the very words Dubois inscribed six decades earlier that Storer College refused to affix on the John Brown Fort.²⁵

²⁵ Bryan, pp. 333-334; Stephen J. Whitfield, "Sacred in History and in Art": The Shaw Memorial," *New England Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (March 1987), pp. 3-4; "New York Returning Wampum Belts to Onondagas," *New York Times*, August 13, 1989; *New York Times*, January 5, 1990; Shackel, pp. 104-109.

Unlike other areas of the country, Lancaster County had no major incidents of racial violence during the turbulent decade of the 1960s. Much of this stemmed from the county's racial composition. Black residents of Lancaster County (5,365) composed only two percent of the population by 1970. Eighty percent of all black Countians lived in Lancaster City where they comprised seven percent of the city's total population (57,690). Lancaster's smaller ratio of blacks to whites did not elicit the same level of paranoia, or Negrophobia, from white residents who comfortably enjoyed their majority status. This disproportionate racial composition also continued to play a factor in local ignorance of the Christiana Riot. While the 1951 commemoration had successfully reinterpreted the riot narrative as representative of both black and white agency, it failed to generate any significant upsurge in local notoriety of William Parker's heroic stand. By the 1970s, the riot was still absent from local school curriculums making any knowledge of the incident dependent upon vernacular memory. Most white residents remained unaware of or uninterested in the riot's history. Unless they were Quakers, those local whites cognizant of the fight at Christiana did not feel a shared history with black resistance to slave catchers. White indifference likely emanated from uneasiness over racial violence, a sense of white guilt over African-American enslavement, or a simple obliviousness to white privilege. Feminist author Peggy McIntosh argued that white obliviousness of their privileged racial status is inculturated in the United States to foster the myth of meritocracy. "Keeping most people unaware that freedom of confident action is there for just a small number of people props up those in power, and serves to keep power in the hands of the same groups that have most of it already," she stated. For those whites without a Quaker background the riot thus became an uncomfortable

reminder of a repressive past or one they could not fathom had any historic racial significance; either way it was best left forgotten.²⁶

Black Countians were more likely to pass the riot story down from generation to generation as a source of racial pride. For blacks, William Parker exemplified African-American intelligence and humanity whose bravery served as an inspirational account of black resistance to white oppression. But the African-American community of Lancaster County was not monolithic in its appreciation of Parker and his exploits. Whereas some black residents heard of the riot as children, others had not and were similarly oblivious to its existence, much like their white neighbors. As each succeeding generation grew further apart from 1851, the riot became less influential in the daily lives of black Countians. The riot's oral history tradition waned as some black parents and grandparents stopped transmitting the story to their descendants. Either because those in the black community considered the past over or sought the therapeutic need to move on with their lives, the memory of the riot began disappearing even among African-Americans.²⁷

Christiana in the 1970s was no different from the rest of the county in failing to remember the riot. According to Bud Rettew, Treasurer of the Christiana Historical Society, many of the roughly one thousand townspeople living in Christiana were oblivious to the riot or what the granite obelisk symbolized. "Many people here didn't know anything about it [riot]," he stated. "If you would ask somebody what's the

²⁶ *Nineteenth Census of the United States: 1970*, vol. 6, pt. 40 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), pp. 243, 128, 130; Nancy Plumley, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA; Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," in *Race, Class and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study*, 7th ed., ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2007), p. 182.

²⁷ Marie Congo, interview by author, July 10, 2012, Christiana, PA; Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA.

monument down on the corner for, they wouldn't have any idea." Knowledge of the riot even among ancestors of those involved was haphazard at best. In 1971 descendants were interviewed for an audio program entitled *Two Man War At Christiana, 1851*. When asked about William Parker, a female descendant of Samuel Hopkins did not remember hearing the name before. A male ancestor of Ezekiel Thompson was similarly puzzled when asked the same question. "No, I never heard of William Parker," he responded, "never heard his name till you mentioned it here. Was he a Quaker?" A female descendant of Levi Pownall, Parker's Quaker landlord, claimed, "The family never talked about the Christiana Riot." She did not remember any special "emphasis" placed on the Pownall relationship with Parker or the family's role in nursing Dickinson Gorsuch back to health. The Gorsuch family fared little better when asked by interviewers for their memories of the riot. A male ancestor of Dickinson revealed that there were no family pictures of Edward Gorsuch and was surprised that an incident involving the shooting of two family members was not more widely discussed by his grandmother. "I'm just astounded," he stated. "If she were twenty-two years old when her brother-in-law was shot and his father killed why that was something that was not talked about in the family. Why, my father didn't know much more about it. His brothers and sisters didn't know anything about it. It just was not talked about."²⁸

Although local knowledge of the Christiana Riot was wanting in the 1970s, nationally black history, and the riot in particular, were gaining prominence because of the Civil Rights Movement and the new institutional emphasis on social history. Surveys of

²⁸ LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, July 11, 2012, Christiana, PA; *Nineteenth Census of the United States: 1970*, vol. 6, pt. 40 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), p. 210; E. Forbes, pp. 249-250; Myles Jackson, producer, *Two Man War At Christiana, 1851* (New York: Random House, 1971), audiotape.

popular secondary school textbooks revealed a growing emphasis on the historical contributions of minorities. In 1968, the survey discovered no minorities being adequately covered, but by 1974 nine out of the eighteen textbooks received “good” or better ratings for their racial inclusiveness. Following this trend, the riot finally received its first specific literary recognition after six decades when Jonathan Katz published *Resistance at Christiana: The Fugitive Slave Rebellion, Christiana, Pennsylvania, September 11, 1851, A Documentary Account*, in 1974. Katz’s work focused on the riot and its ensuing treason trials as a fight for liberty that served “as a microcosm of the present conflict between black people and white.” The following year Margaret Hope Bacon published *Rebellion at Christiana*, a juvenile novel that placed Parker’s boldness in the context of self-emancipation and black agency. The Katz and Bacon works not only transformed the black rioters into heroic protagonists, but they also revealed changing societal perceptions by redefining how the riot was identified. The term “riot” is notably absent from their titles, replaced by the more accurate and politically amenable phrases of “resistance” and “rebellion.” By removing the word “riot,” each author liberated Parker’s stand against Edward Gorsuch from any pejorative depictions of chaos or lawlessness thereby presenting the incident as an act of righteousness. The fight at Christiana thus became a historical example of racial defiance readily usable as a source of empowerment for contemporary resisters in the Civil Rights Movement.²⁹

As part of the bicentennial festivities, there was a small remembrance of the Christiana Riot performed in Lancaster County during the summer of 1976. The

²⁹ “New U.S. History Textbooks Putting Stress on Minorities Contribution to Nation Building,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1974; J. Katz, p. 5; Margaret Hope Bacon, *Rebellion at Christiana* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975).

Quarryville Chamber of Commerce asked local groups to create short presentations of different historical events that occurred in the southern portion of the county. For its presentation, the Lancaster County Historical Society produced *Bloody Dawn*, a play written by Society president John Loose. The play itself touched on the moral and ethical issues of the riot, as well as the political atmosphere in which it was born. The performance was brief due to time constraints and did not go in depth on any individual aspect of the riot instead making an ambitious attempt to illustrate an overall theme of moral relativism regarding slavery and the use of violent resistance. The first scene was set outside the Christiana General Store on the afternoon of the riot where two white characters are discussing the excitement over at the Pownall farm. The white characters relate a story of Parker's men shooting and hacking Gorsuch to death "in cold blood," while delving into how slavery is a southern issue and the "law's got to be obeyed." A black Quaker interrupts their conversation, stating that the rioters "were free men fighting to stay free." He counters his white counterparts that "human slavery is immoral and unchristian," arguing that Gorsuch got what he deserved because "he who lives by the sword must die by the sword." In trying to hide fugitive slaves, local Quakers are characterized as foolish for getting involved. One white character describes them as too "nosey" stating, "That's what happens when people get too close to a fight. None of their business, I'd say. Serves 'em right."³⁰

The second and final scene related a similar tale of ethical ambiguity concerning the riot. Outside Independence Hall in Philadelphia during the treason trials, two white characters briefly discussed the case. The Quakers are described as some of the area's

³⁰ Jack Ward Wilson Loose, "Bloody Dawn," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers* 83, no. 4 (1979), pp. 212-217.

“finest citizens” who are held in “the highest regard.” The two characters disagree over the charge of treason with one man defending Hanway’s defiance while his counterpart argued that if “decent, law-abiding citizens” disobey the law then “we will have war.” The play concluded with a brief soliloquy on personal morality that connected the riot with the Civil War. One character asks:

Shall we remain a nation of laws that some refuse to obey
because they believe certain laws are immoral? Or shall we
become a nation of personal viewpoints, of various
conflicting moral principles, none with the sanction of law?
Human liberty or private property—can’t we have both
without bloodshed? Or must we have war to ensure the
existence of both?

The bicentennial performance successfully recognized the riot as a piece of both local and national history. It was an ambitious undertaking that illustrated the ethical ambiguity whites held towards slavery and the violence at Christiana. Like the 1951 commemoration, a black voice was utilized to defend the rioters as “free men fighting to stay free,” while also placing the defiant actions of Quakers on par with those of local African-Americans. Although William Parker was never mentioned and Quaker disobedience received more substance than that of the black rioters, the play did not succumb to a white-centered perspective of the riot that depicted white courage while disregarding black agency. Twenty-five years after the 1951 commemoration, the riot continued to be interpreted as a story of white, and black, abolitionist resistance.³¹

After the bicentennial performance the riot again received scant attention until the 1990s when several works highlighted its historical significance: Thomas Slaughter’s

³¹ Ibid.

Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North (1991), John Rosenberg's juvenile novel *William Parker: Rebel Without Rights* (1996), Ella Forbes' *But We Have No Country: The 1851 Christiana, Pennsylvania Resistance* (1998), and Harry Kendall's historical novel *Truth Crushed to Earth: The Legacy of Will Parker, a Black American Revolutionary* (1999). Each author followed the example of Katz and Bacon in making the riot a story of black agency and self-emancipation. Unlike the bicentennial play, the focus of the books is clearly on the African-American participants with Quaker contributions placed squarely in the background. Also notable was a pattern emerging that the Christiana Riot was historically not what it seemed. In the title of each work, with the exception of *Slaughter*, the authors took it upon themselves to redefine the incident as directly opposite of a riot. Words like "resistance" and a focus on Parker himself as a "rebel," or "revolutionary," have reaffirmed the fight at Christiana as a virtuous defense of black rights against governmental subjugation.³²

Although blacks comprised only three percent of Lancaster County's population by 2000, with Christiana and Zion Hill seeing little change from their demographics in the 1970s, this pattern of recognizing the riot's significance and questioning its historical designation emerged at the local level as well. In 1998, Bud Rettew, Christiana's Borough Manager, appealed to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) for a state marker honoring the Christiana Riot. Unbeknownst to Rettew, the commission's panel of historians had already been discussing a marker dedicated to the

³² Thomas Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); John Rosenberg, *William Parker: Rebel Without Rights* (Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 1996); Ella Forbes, *But We Have No Country: The 1851 Christiana, Pennsylvania Resistance* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, 1998); Harry Kendall, *Truth Crushed to Earth: The Legacy of Will Parker, a Black American Revolutionary* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 1999).

riot so Rettew and the panel agreed to pool their resources. This collaborative approach of museum professionals, historians, and community members working together developed in the 1970s as an outgrowth of social history. In response to political activism, demographic changes, and increased competition many curators, traditionally the sole arbiters of interpretive authority, introduced community outreach programs to allow local residents a voice in exhibitions and public programs. What public historian Catherine Lewis referred to as “the era of collaboration” cultivated a cooperative relationship between museums and local constituencies that provided communities, especially minorities, with a feeling of ownership over their history. This latter issue would become a divisive topic during the marker deliberations in Harrisburg as conflicting memories between black and white again played a factor in memorializing the Christiana Riot.³³

The PHMC utilizes a five-member panel of historians from across the state to sift through the numerous nominations it receives for historical markers. Each February the panel holds a meeting to determine whether a nominee is of sufficient historical significance to recommend its approval to the PHMC. The meeting in 1998 became rather heated over two issues concerning the Christiana Riot marker. First, was the issue of the marker’s wording: should it be called a “riot” or a “resistance?” Second, Reverend Edward Bailey of Lancaster’s Bethel A. M. E. Church was in attendance and raised objections to the marker. He argued with members of the panel that whites were attempting to co-opt the riot’s memory for their own purposes as had been the case in

³³ *Twenty-second Census of the United States: 2000*, PHC-1, pt. 40 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2002), pp. 179-181, 159; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, July 11, 2012, Christiana, PA; Lewis, pp. 6-8, 100-101.

1911 and to a lesser extent in 1951. Bailey's concern stemmed from a personal belief that only the African-American community should benefit, both culturally and financially, from black history sites. The question essentially revolved around who "owned" the Christiana Riot.³⁴

This question of ownership was not exceptional to the riot, as cultural struggles over historical memory have increasingly become commonplace. As social history blossomed in the 1960s, likewise has the political influence of minority and ethnic groups in demanding a voice in the interpretation of their heritage. In response, historians and museum professionals have attempted to decentralize the interpretive process by working in conjunction with local ethnic and minority communities when presenting their history. But this collaborative approach of decentralizing interpretation has also presented historians and museum professionals with numerous difficulties ranging from conflicting ideologies with local constituencies, inconsistent public participation, language barriers, and suspicion from marginalized communities who distrust white institutions presenting their history. What historian Mercedes Quintos called the "dilemma of representation," became an issue for the Christiana Historical Society in its celebration and continues to pose a particular institutional challenge for museums and government bodies. Public expectations of an interpretive role in history have created a daunting task for those organizing any historical presentation requiring not only thorough scholarship to counter

³⁴ Dennis B. Downey, interviews with author, April 11 & 15, 2003, Millersville, PA. Downey was on the PHMC panel of historians and provided his impression on Rev. Bailey's concerns. Rev. Bailey did not respond to a request for an interview.

questions of representation, but also negotiating the various forms of social and political baggage that shape public opinion.³⁵

Publicized disputes regarding interpretive authenticity and historical ownership have become commonplace over the past few decades. Heated disagreements between Mexican-Americans and their Anglo-American counterparts over the Battle of the Alamo, as well as Native Americans and the National Park Service over the Battle of the Little Bighorn have illustrated the intense ethnic and racial tensions institutions face when interpreting the heritage of a people. In the 1990s, Colonial Williamsburg's attempts at presenting African-American history by reconstructing slave quarters and recreating a slave auction met a vicious backlash from black organizations such as the NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, who protested the exhibits as trivializing slavery for entertainment purposes. These groups preferred that the museum present the positive contributions blacks had made in America by focusing on individuals such as Frederick Douglass or Harriet Tubman. Historians at Colonial Williamsburg disagreed, citing that studying the painful issues of the past is an essential aspect of comprehending present-day race relations. This battle over historical authority, or who has the right to represent a group's heritage, was at the heart of Bailey's concerns regarding the riot commemoration. His suspicions of white manipulation did have a foundation when considering previous riot commemorations and their downplaying of black self-emancipation. The question was whether the commission would see it that

³⁵ Lewis, pp. 100-109; Mercedes J. Quintos, "Museum Presentations of Slavery: The Problems of Evidence and the Challenge of Representation," 1999, George Washington University, <http://www.gwu.edu/~mstd/Publications/1999/mercedes%20quintos.pdf> (accessed on October 13, 2012), pp. 8-13.

way when deciding if the riot marker was indeed an authentic representation of Lancaster County's racial history.³⁶

The PHMC decision in Harrisburg concerning the riot marker was ultimately one of historical consistency rather than one of public sentiment. The panel decided that the marker would read "The Christiana Riot" because that is how the incident has been historically known. To conclude otherwise would have set a dangerous precedent whereby ideology trumps historical continuity. Human designations are not perfect, the Christiana Riot was indeed hardly a riot, but any attempt to rename the riot a "resistance" enters a murky world of postmodern relativism devoid of coherent historical connections. As for Bailey's insistence on black ownership of the riot's history, the PHMC panel was unmoved by his apprehension. To empower one social group through its history, as Bailey's assertion suggested, consequently disempowers others who shared in that history. This outlook is ironically reminiscent of the Lost Cause and white supremacist rhetoric. The marker was intended to be an inclusive indicator of a common local and national history. The panel believed that both blacks and whites of the Christiana community would gain from state recognition.³⁷

On April 25, 1998, the marker was installed off Lower Valley Road in Christiana as the culminating event of a three-day black history conference held at nearby Millersville University. A brief ceremony took place to honor the occasion before a crowd of roughly one hundred onlookers, some of whom were descendants of riot participants. Reverend

³⁶ Edward Tabor Linenthal, *Sacred Ground: Americans and Their Battlefields*, 2d ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 58-78, 131-163; *Houston Chronicle*, October 12, 1988; *Billings Gazette*, June 24, 1976; "Activists' Plaque at Little Bighorn Honors 'Patriots' Who Beat Custer," *Los Angeles Times*, July 4, 1988; "Battle Over Little Bighorn Still Raging," *Orange County Register*, August 18, 2002; Quintos, pp. 3-13; "Williamsburg Slave Auction Riles Virginia NAACP," *Washington Post*, October 8, 1994.

³⁷ Lewis, p. 111.

LeRoy Patrick, an African-American commissioner on the PHMC, offered short remarks where he urged those in attendance to continue fighting against racial inequality. “The problem is still here,” he stated, but so is the solution. “I appreciate you being here today because that means you are on the side of angels.” The marker was unveiled with text that read:

THE CHRISTIANA RIOT

The 1850 federal Fugitive Slave Act strengthened the position of slave-owners seeking to capture runaways. Pursuing four escaped slaves, Maryland farmer Edward Gorsuch arrived Sept. 11, 1851, at the Christiana home of William Parker, an African American who was giving them refuge. Neighbors gathered, fighting ensued, and Gorsuch was killed. This incident did much to polarize the national debate over the slavery issue.

While the marker was vague regarding the actual fighting that comprised the riot, it proved a counterbalance to the 1911 memorial by denoting William Parker as a central figure in the struggle. Castner Hanway’s “heroism” is nowhere to be found, replaced by a stubborn black agency that opposed the Fugitive Slave Act and those who sought to enforce it.³⁸

Two years after the state marker was dedicated, the Christiana Historical Society was formed to organize and sponsor the Christiana Riot’s 2001 Commemoration. Composed of a multi-racial membership, the Society saw its goals as not only preserving the heritage of Christiana, but also to correct past interpretations by memorializing “the legacy of William Parker and the strength of the human spirit.” It placed special emphasis on illuminating the area’s rich history and providing “opportunities to interpret the true experience and life of William Parker and other African Americans who played

³⁸ Dennis B. Downey, interviews by author, April 11 & 15, 2003, Millersville, PA; “A Page in County History is Marked,” *Lancaster Sunday News*, April 26, 1998; E. Forbes, p. 266.

integral roles in the African American's pursuit of freedom through the Underground Railroad." The Society also declared a long-term goal of establishing a museum devoted to the "legacy of William Parker and those who fought for liberty."³⁹

The Society's interpretation of the episode at Christiana coincided with late twentieth century literature on the riot. The Society defined the fight as a "resistance" rather than a "riot," only citing this latter term when referring to how historians identified the incident. The incident was a "fight for freedom," according to Treasurer Bud Rettew, "it wasn't a case of people fighting in the streets...it [riot] was a misnomer by the newspapers who wanted to sensationalize it." President Darlene Colon, an African-American descendant of rioter Ezekiel Thompson, concurred, "I like to look at it not as the riot, but as the resistance," she stated. "It was planned to resist, a riot is sort of off the cuff, it just happens. I think the whole valley or community was aware that this resistance was planned." Members consider it their responsibility to "reeducate" the public that what occurred at Christiana was not spontaneous lawlessness, but a premeditated act of self-defense. All of the Society's published literature identifies the episode as a "resistance" and its website refers to the riot as either the "Christiana Resistance" or the "Fugitive Slave Rebellion." The Society emphasizes Frederick Douglass' characterization of the riot as "the battle for liberty at Christiana," a place, according to the black abolitionist, where freedom began. The description of Christiana as the site "Where Freedom Began"

³⁹ LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, March 18, 2003, Christiana, PA; E. Forbes, p. 262; CHS Societal pamphlet, 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS.

has nurtured a special sense of pride for today's residents with banners bearing the inscription currently adorning utility poles throughout the town.⁴⁰

Before the Society could begin making concrete preparations for the 2001 commemoration, however, the emphasis on a multicultural celebration became of primary importance. Members desired community involvement in the commemoration from both black and white residents of Christiana; the observance would either be an integrated affair or there would be no celebration. The Society feared that Edward Bailey's hostility toward white involvement in commemorating African-American history reached beyond his Lancaster parish and into Christiana. Society members approached black pastor Reverend George Beachum of the local Mt. Zion A. M. E. Church for his impressions on a riot commemoration. The Reverend was very favorable to the idea, finding no racial insensitivity springing from white participation in the celebration. Beachum's approval met a stinging rebuke from Bailey who again voiced his concerns over how black history would be celebrated during the 2001 Commemoration. Bailey denounced the planned commemoration from the pulpit and sent an angry letter to Beachum telling the Mt. Zion pastor that he would do everything possible to throw roadblocks in the celebration's path. Bailey thought the commemoration would both exploit the black community and infringe on black history.

⁴⁰ LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, March 24, 2003, Christiana, PA, telephone interview; Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA; "Scenes of Christiana, September 11, 1851." Diorama display by a Lancaster Chapter member of the National Historic Railway Society for 2001 anniversary, 2001 Commemoration Collection (hereafter cited as "2001 Collection"), Christiana Historical Society (hereafter cited as "CHS"). See Railway Society's conclusion for the list of scenes; "Centennial," CHS, http://home.epix.net/~chrlib/chs_files/frame.htm (accessed March 21, 2003); "Celebrate Christiana! Celebrating freedom and our antebellum heritage, 150th Anniversary Celebration, 1851-2001" (hereafter cited as "Celebrate Christiana!"), 2001 Collection, CHS. This document was a Society prospectus for what members wanted to focus upon, accomplish, and organize for the 2001 Commemoration; "The Christiana Riot – Where Freedom Began," *Lancaster County Magazine*, May, 2001.

Beachum stood firm, however, and urged his parishioners to support the Society's venture. Thus, with an endorsement from many of Christiana's black residents, plans for the festivities moved forward.⁴¹

For the Christiana Historical Society it was as if only half the story had been told by previous commemorations. The public had to be made aware of the riot's full narrative and to do this William Parker and the message of black agency in self-emancipation would take center stage. The 2001 Christiana Riot Commemoration would overflow with examples of not only black agency during the riot, but also black contributions to U.S. history in general. Entitled "Celebrate Christiana!" the festivities covered two major themes—William Parker and the "resistance," and the history of Christiana and neighboring communities during America's antebellum period. The overall Societal intention behind commemoration activities was "to unite our community in celebrating our heritage by integrating intergenerational and multicultural involvement with support from various community segments." Goals for the celebration included: honoring William Parker's legacy, raising funds for a museum, involving local residents and schools, recognizing contributions made by Quakers in the anti-slavery movement, and generating a sense of community pride. As preparations for the commemoration commenced, so many events were being added that the Society decided to stage two separate observances. Each program had the riot as its central pivot, a celebration in May would concentrate on the history of Christiana and Lancaster County, while the affair in

⁴¹ LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, March 18, 2003, Christiana, PA.

September would focus specifically on the riot story. What the Society put together for those two weekends in 2001 would be the largest Christiana Riot commemoration yet.⁴²

The May 18-20 celebration was to be both a prelude to the festivities in September and a chance to celebrate the heritage of Christiana and Lancaster County. The observances in May mainly consisted of walking tours, exhibits, re-enactors, a parade, and concerts. There were no “official” literary exercises, but the symbolism concerning black agency was striking to the estimated one thousand in attendance. The black experience was no longer pushed into the background for sake of good manners or fears of offending attendees. It was now on display throughout the celebration venue making it impossible to overlook or misinterpret the organizers’ objectives. Black contributions in art, the military, the abolitionist cause, and the Underground Railroad each depicted the influence blacks had on American history. Costumed re-enactors also spoke with the public to provide a more interpersonal glimpse into what life was like for African-American men and women in the past.⁴³

Black re-enactors portraying Union soldiers and Buffalo Soldiers of the Ninth and Tenth Horse Cavalries began festivities on Friday evening (May 18) by holding an encampment and telling campfire stories. This highlighting of African-American military service was a significant diversion from previous riot commemorations. In 1911,

⁴² Ibid.; “Celebrate Christiana!,” 2001 Collection, CHS. See introduction and “Event Goals”; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, March 18, 2003, Christiana, PA; “Historical Society to Celebrate ‘Resistance at Christiana’,” *West Chester Daily Local News*, May 19, 2001; “A Place Where Freedom and Forgiveness Began” (hereafter cited as “Freedom and Forgiveness”), *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 2001; CHS Newsletter expressing thanks from Societal board to Commemoration volunteers, 2001 Collection, CHS.

⁴³ “Schedule of Events: May 2001,” CHS website, http://www.christianalibrary.org/chs_files/frame.htm (accessed on October 15, 2012); Commemoration Program, May 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS; Colon e-mail message to author, September 13, 2012.

Peter Woods' veteran status was only briefly mentioned as part of his medal presentation. Ninety years later, the encampment of black soldiers was a popular attraction with commemoration attendees, bringing attention to the roles Christiana blacks, and African-Americans in general, played in the Civil War. It included no Confederate representation and made no effort to equate the two armies as was common in previous all white commemorations. The encampment ostensibly became a living-history exhibit of powerful images chronicling the black counter-memory and how 180,000 blacks fought in Union armies. Local blacks were part of the Union's Third Infantry Regiment which trained at Camp William Penn in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. Rather than fighting in the Civil War for romanticized notions, the black soldiers communicated a practical rationale to the public for serving the Union cause. "We had a different motivation," said re-enactor Al Ward. "We saw a chance for freedom." Joseph Lee, another re-enactor, was glad more black men were enrolling in their company because, "the more people get involved, the more truth comes out." The Buffalo Soldier encampment had a mobile museum for patrons to tour and the re-enactors continued the encampment into Saturday, followed by their marching in the day's parade.⁴⁴

The morning festivities for Saturday (May 19) had several features. The Christiana Lions Club sponsored a Historic Walking Tour of local historical sites, including where the riot took place. Along the way, those touring came across other re-enactors portraying such individuals as Edward "Ned" Hector and Frederick Douglass. Noah Lewis, a descendant of Ned Hector, portrayed the black Revolutionary War patriot and

⁴⁴ Ibid.; "History in Black and White," *Lancaster Sunday News*, May 20, 2001. At the height of their numbers, African-American soldiers composed ten percent of all federal troops during the latter years of the Civil War.

helped to highlight the role blacks played in the Continental Army. Frederick Douglass IV role-played his namesake, along with his wife B. J. who portrayed Douglass' wife Anna Murray Douglass, revealed to attendees how blacks as well as whites had a hand in the abolitionist movement. The overall effect of the re-enactors on the commemoration was to educate the public about black history in both Christiana and the area in general. Other morning activities included: a diorama of Christiana as it looked in 1851, an exhibit depicting the journey of the Underground Railroad; an African-American art collection by Lee Carter; and book signings by recent riot authors such as Margaret Hope Bacon, Ella Forbes, Harry Kendall, and John Rosenberg.⁴⁵

Saturday afternoon's parade was the largest activity for the spring commemoration. The Heritage Parade had as its theme "Freedom" and emphasized both Christiana and Lancaster County history. Participants included the re-enactors, Christiana's Octorara High School Band, the American Legion Color Guard, local politicians, Quakers, Masonic Lodges, descendants of the rioters, area fire companies, and local police and churches. The parade was comprised of various floats representing such scenes as slavery and emancipation and one bearing the sign "Christiana—Where Freedom Began".⁴⁶

A concert at Lancaster's American Music Theatre concluded the May events on Sunday evening before an audience of three hundred spectators. The presentation

⁴⁵ "History in Black and White," *Lancaster Sunday News*, May 20, 2001; "Christiana Plans Gala Weekend To Celebrate Its Heritage" (hereafter cited as "Gala Weekend"), *Gap/Oxford Community Courier*, May 16, 2001; Commemoration Program, May, 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS.

⁴⁶ LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew to Sadsbury Friends Meeting, 2001 Collection, CHS. Correspondence inviting Friends to participate in parade; Commemoration Program, May 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS; "Gala Weekend," *Gap/Oxford Community Courier*, May 16, 2001; *A Celebration of Freedom*, prod. Emory E. Phillips, 2001, Moores Memorial Library Collection (hereafter cited as "MML Collection"), Christiana, PA, videotape; "Christiana Heritage Parade Recalls Where Fight for Freedom Began," *Parkesburg Post Ledger*, May 24-30, 2001.

entitled “The Sounds of Freedom” featured Kim and Reggie Harris, Leslie McCurdy, the Mt. Zion A. M. E. Church choir, and the McCaskey [Lancaster] High School Gospel Chorus. The Imani Dancers, a local dance troupe, were also scheduled to perform, but withdrew at the last minute. Commemoration organizers suspected that the sudden cancellation stemmed from members of the troupe belonging to Reverend Bailey’s congregation. Kim and Reggie Harris performed songs from their album “Steal Away: Songs of the Underground Railroad.” The production by McCurdy was a one woman play entitled “In the Spirit of Harriet Tubman,” with McCurdy portraying the black Underground Railroad conductor and relating the story of her amazing accomplishments. The two choirs concluded the evening with several song selections before the concert came to a close marking the end of the May festivities.⁴⁷

The Society and all in attendance deemed the spring portion of the commemoration a proud achievement as the area’s past was successfully brought to life. The Heritage Parade went over well and spectators were particularly impressed by the procession. The biggest accomplishment for the Society was that the commemoration allowed for both the recognition of the riot and the healing of old wounds for local descendants. County resident Beverly Robinson—a descendant of rioter Ezekial Thompson—commented, “I’m very proud of the fact that I’m related to him,” and that the riot’s history is “something that needs to be brought out.” Marie Congo was pleased the riot was finally gaining recognition as an important piece of history. “I’m going to be thinking how happy my grandfather would be, and my father and mother,” she remarked. Bonnie

⁴⁷ Commemoration Program, May 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS; Colon e-mail message to author, September 13, 2012; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew e-mail message to author, June, 2003; “Gala Weekend,” *Gap/Oxford Community Courier*, May 16, 2001.

Dickinson, another Thompson descendant, commented how she was making scrapbooks for her children to remember their ancestor's heroics. "I went to Octorara High School and it [riot] was never mentioned," she remembered, "a lot of the history is lost." Nancy Hess, commemoration events coordinator, described the impact of May's festivities: "No matter how ugly it is, we owe it to those who have paid dearly for the freedom we enjoy to take an honest look at the past or we will never move beyond it," she stated. "Some will find healing through this and some already have."⁴⁸

With the May festivities behind them, the Christiana Historical Society prepared to focus on the "Resistance at Christiana" for the September portion of the 2001 Commemoration. Weekend festivities for September 8-9 would center on the antebellum period with the riot being the main focal point. For the Society, special emphasis was again placed on highlighting the contributions of black Americans. "It is important to the Christiana Historical Society that our community recognize the significant role African Americans have played in shaping American history," said Nancy Hess. Saturday's events included tours, a diorama, an art exhibition, and a Living History Village in the morning and early afternoon. At mid-afternoon literary exercises were planned to re-dedicate the Christiana Riot Monument and the first day would close with the performance of a play depicting the riot at the local high school. Sunday festivities would include various church services and end with a private dinner for all riot descendants. Organizers hoped the weekend would inspire an overall sense of racial

⁴⁸ "Christiana Set for Commemoration of Riot" (hereafter cited as "Christiana Set"), *Post Ledger*, September 6-12, 2001; LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, March 18, 2003, Christiana, PA; "On Anniversary of 1851 Riot, Christiana to Honor Its Heroes," *Lancaster New Era*, May 17, 2001.

unity whereby injustices could be left to the past. “While slavery has been abolished in this country, racial tensions still exist in some neighboring communities,” Hess commented. “It is our hope that by taking an honest look at the past, some will be able to move past the pain.”⁴⁹

In the weeks leading up to the commemoration, the irony of Hess’ statement concerning racial tensions became apparent as a ghost of America’s racialized past endeavored to haunt any ceremonial attempts to unite county residents. Although its membership had diminished to the point of negligibility, the Ku Klux Klan continued to survive as a national organization in 2001. Insistent on its legitimacy, the Klan particularly enjoys stoking its legacy of terror for both onlookers and media outlets in an ongoing effort for attention and relevancy. When word reached Lancaster residents that a KKK rally was being planned outside the courthouse in downtown Lancaster on September eighth, most wondered why the Klan chose that particular weekend to march. But a Klan visit on the very day of the Christiana Riot Commemoration was no mere coincidence. The events in May received a good deal of publicity and plans for the September remembrance had been in the works for months. It is likely that press announcements proclaiming the commemoration of a historical incident still rife with racial issues was too much for the Klan to resist. Commemoration organizers assumed this was the case because the May and September celebrations required a multi-racial effort to accomplish their goals. The community responded by adamantly refusing to suspend festivities. “They’re trying to overshadow us by having a rally for themselves, hoping ours might not be successful,” Pastor Beachum asserted. “But this is God’s day

⁴⁹ “Christiana Set,” *Post Ledger*, September 6-12, 2001; “September 2001,” CHS website, http://www.christianalibrary.org/chs_files/frame.htm (accessed on October 15, 2012).

in Christiana, and we will not be overshadowed.” Should Klan members make an unscheduled stop in Christiana, the town was determined to proceed with the commemoration. “We’re just going to do what we’re going to do, with smiles, and if something happens we’ll have to deal with it then,” said Darlene Colon. “If they come, the whites would stand behind the blacks like it used to be [during the riot],” reasoned Diane Howell, a friend of William Parker’s great-grandson Frank, “we wouldn’t allow anything to happen.”⁵⁰

As the day of the Klan’s arrival came closer, Lancastrians quickly made arrangements to stage numerous events throughout the city in a sign of racial solidarity. A local synagogue held a Jewish forgiveness service, Millersville University sponsored a symposium on sociology and race, and Franklin and Marshall College offered a Unity Day celebration on campus to serve as alternatives to what would be taking place downtown. Not satisfied with simply ignoring the KKK, some black leaders wanted to directly protest the rally by staging a silent protest at the same location. “We are asking the men to stand on the courthouse steps in suits,” Rev. Edward Bailey stated. “We’re asking women to meet at our churches, not only to pray but to discuss and dialogue on where we go from here.” The two divergent paths of protest illustrated the differences between Lancaster’s racial communities when it came to the Klan. Whites were intent to ignore the rally and avoid any unnecessary violence by being elsewhere, while blacks wanted to face it down with a nonviolent approach reminiscent of their Civil Rights era

⁵⁰ *Celebrate Christiana: Sept. 8, 9 2001* (hereafter cited as “September Video”), prod. Emory E. Phillips, 2001, MML Collection, Christiana, PA, videotape; “Gala Weekend,” *Community Courier*, May 16, 2001; “Klan Threat or Not, Lancaster County Celebration To Go On” (hereafter cited as “Klan Threat”), *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 8, 2001; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, March 18, 2003, Christiana, PA; “Several Gather To Rededicate Monument Commemorating Riot” (hereafter cited as “Several Gather”), *Daily Local News*, September 10, 2001.

forbears. Local whites feared the silent protest would devolve into a violent confrontation. With the backing of the local NAACP, whites implored city residents to attend the Unity Day festivities to draw attention away from the Klan. “I hope there is no violence [at the courthouse]. That is what I fear.” Unity Coalition organizer Laura Montgomery Rutt asserted. “I fear people will go downtown to gawk. That is something the Unity Day Celebration is trying to get away from.” Bailey and the other organizers of the silent protest sensed distrust in the statements made by those opposed to their method of dissent. “People question the African American leadership as if we don’t know how to behave,” Bailey argued at a press conference. “The white community has such the fear that black people will go off, that we can’t handle conflict. I think part of the unity rally is that they have no trust in the leadership in the city and saying to us go over here because they are afraid we will do something. We wish people would have the [sic] trust of us.” Reporters noted paradoxically how the preparation of events promoting unity appeared to spotlight a sense of division.⁵¹

As September eighth neared, there was a sense of confusion over whether hooded figures would actually be parading past the county courthouse. Two days prior to the event, national Klan leaders informed Lancaster Mayor Charlie Smithgall that the proposed rally had been cancelled. The KKK was intent on coming to Lancaster in the future, but not on the Saturday in question. Roy Frankhauser, a Klan leader from Reading, Pennsylvania, was determined to do otherwise. He met with the mayor the following day and maintained that the Klan would indeed be holding a rally. “We the members of the Church of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan,” Frankhauser

⁵¹ “Strange Day for a KKK Visit,” *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 2, 2001; “Leaders Vow Anti-KKK Unity,” *Lancaster New Era*, September 4, 2001.

declared in a press statement, “will be expressing our rights as American citizens by gathering somewhere in the Lancaster area on September 8.” When the fateful day arrived, the Klan failed to appear in the city. A multi-racial group of men gathered on the courthouse steps to witness groups of Philadelphia anarchists and communists from the Progressive Labor Party gather across the street to shout anti-Klan messages.

Nevertheless, organizers of the silent protest claimed victory and were elated with the heterogeneous racial composition of those who participated. “The idea was to fill the steps to leave the Klan no room for a message,” City Council President Nelson Polite commented. Polite, an African-American, was delighted by the turnout, “It is a real cross section of people. After this, we’ll start doing things together. This is a symbolic day.” Bailey was similarly thrilled, “any time the devil blinks you know you have the victory.”⁵²

As the resistance displayed in Lancaster likely prevented a Klan appearance, the same could not be said of the nearby town of Quarryville whose residents were more than surprised when Frankhauser and ten Klansmen did surface. Claiming five carloads of his colleagues were assaulted by anarchists and prohibited from parking in Lancaster by police, Frankhauser decided to hold a twenty-five minute rally in the small municipality instead. The meager event appeared independent of any larger organization and was probably Frankhauser’s feeble attempt at making good on his promise to have a rally “somewhere in the Lancaster area.” Just before the Klansmen tumbled into their cars to depart, they vowed the KKK would come to Lancaster in the future. But what

⁵² “No Rally by KKK, Mayor Says,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 8, 2001; “We Can Come Together,” *Lancaster New Era*, September 8, 2001; “Courthouse Vigil Ends With Hymn... Victory,” *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 9, 2001.

Frankhauser and his associates failed to realize was how the 2001 Klan visit ultimately contradicted itself by bringing races together rather than pushing them apart. The KKK provided a mutual enemy against which white and black could readily ally. This alliance created a feeling of empowerment that made both races optimistic about working together in the future.⁵³ The ways in which Countians handled the proposed rally signified the power of collective public memory as well as how far race relations had improved in America. While the KKK was not the powerful entity it had been in the past, the objections of both white and black Lancasterians to what the KKK represented was more significant than anything the Klan could have actually done at its rally. A century and a half earlier, Christiana witnessed black and white standing against one another. In 2001, black and white were now standing shoulder to shoulder on the courthouse steps. The silent protest symbolized a growing racial solidarity in the community, yet the Klan's continued existence was a glaring reminder of how far the country still had to go. "We have come a long way," said Lucy Stewart, an African-American resident of Christiana, "but this shows that there's always going to be somebody white out there who doesn't want us to go any further."⁵⁴

On September eighth, the commemoration went on as planned amidst the events occurring in Lancaster and Quarryville. Even though the Klan did not appear in Christiana, the roughly 2,500 visitors in attendance were reminded of the controversy by

⁵³ "Klan Puts on Robes for Media," *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 9, 2001; "No Rally by KKK, Mayor Says," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 8, 2001; "We Can Come Together," *Lancaster New Era*, September 8, 2001.

⁵⁴ "No Rally By KKK, Mayor Says," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 8, 2001; "Several Gather," *DLN*, September 10, 2001; "Klan Puts On Robes For Media," *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 9, 2001; "Klan Threat," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 8, 2001. Lucy Stewart was a descendant of four rioters.

the presence of four state troopers while a police helicopter hovered above the festivities. Morning and early afternoon happenings comprised some of the same events that took place back in May. They again included a walking tour, sponsored by the Christiana Lions Club, to where the riot occurred and other local sites. The diorama of how Christiana appeared in 1851 was still on display and there was another exhibit of Underground Railroad paintings by Coatesville resident Lee Carter. Re-enactors were again on hand, but this time they were part of a larger Living History Village filled with exhibits and demonstrations of what life was like during the antebellum period. Notable re-enactors included black Union soldiers of the Civil War, Noah Lewis again role-played his ancestor Edward “Ned” Hector, and Frederick Douglass IV and his wife B.J. once more portrayed his namesake and Anna Murray Douglass.⁵⁵

At mid-afternoon, the riot monument was re-dedicated with a ceremony attended by three hundred onlookers, numerous descendants, and local politicians. In May the stone obelisk erected in 1911 was moved across the street to a site in front of the old Zercher Hotel, the place where Edward Gorsuch’s body was taken after the fight. After an invocation by Reverend James Garrett, a descendant of Elijah Lewis, and a welcoming of the other descendants, literary exercises were held to formally re-dedicate the monument.⁵⁶ The speeches emphasized a general riot story that recognized the courage of

⁵⁵ “Riot Recalled,” *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 9, 2001; “Several Gather to Rededicate Monument Commemorating Riot,” *West Chester Daily Local News*, September 10, 2001; “Christiana Set,” *Parkesburg Post Ledger*, September 6-12, 2001; “September 2001,” CHS website, http://www.christianalibrary.org/chs_files/frame.htm (accessed on October 15, 2012); September Commemoration flyer, 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS.

⁵⁶ “Christiana Riot Monument Gets New Home,” *Parkesburg Post Ledger*, May 17-23, 2001; “Riot Recalled,” *Lancaster Sunday News*, September 9, 2001; Phillips, “September Video” (2001), videotape, MML Collection, Christiana: PA; “Re-dedication of the Christiana Resistance Monument” (hereafter cited as “Re-dedication”) Program, September 8, 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS.

those who fought for freedom, reconciliation amongst descendants, appeals to brotherhood, and the riot as a cause of the Civil War.

Tom Ryan of the Lancaster County Historical Society spoke first, addressing the theme of reconciliation between descendants. He observed how the American conscience had dramatically changed since 1851 and how there was no longer enmity between descendants of those involved in the riot. “Much has changed in 150 years,” Ryan declared, “the law of the land has changed. The hearts and the minds of many people have changed over the years...and tomorrow, the Parker and Gorsuch families will break bread and continue to build friendships.” Ryan then focused on how some things have not changed by being the only speaker to touch on the proposed Klan visit to Lancaster:

As we pause to remember what occurred in Christiana 150 years ago, we do so under the stark reminder that hatred is not snuffed out yet. It is on the courthouse steps and if we look closely we may even find traces in the recesses of our own hearts. We know we must look beyond such small mindedness.

In closing, he stated how Americans “must take courage from the example and the lives of those who stood fast for freedom, for liberty, and for love,” at Christiana. Because the “love of freedom” can overcome the “petty hatreds of people,” Ryan encouraged the audience to “never forget what happened at Christiana and may that memory inspire us to be better people.”⁵⁷

Joseph Pitts, the county’s congressional representative, followed with a speech that avoided the controversial Klan issue by focusing specifically on what the riot meant to people in the 1850s and what it means to us today. “Before Christiana, people who suggested that African Americans had rights were considered radicals,” he maintained,

⁵⁷ Phillips, “September Video” (2001), videotape, MML Collection, Christiana: PA.

“but after the riot at Christiana, many Americans including a future president, named Abraham Lincoln, put slavery on the nation’s agenda.” Pitts argued that the Civil War forced Americans to examine their conscience concerning racism and slavery. “The opening of the conscience largely happened right here,” which made the Christiana Riot a monumental event that “should always be remembered.” He concluded with an appeal to never forget the message the monument inspires:

So we should all re-dedicate, redouble our own efforts...to extend equal dignity to all men and women of every race as we dedicate this monument today. The lesson that Americans learned from the violence that happened here a century and a half ago is as valuable today as ever before.⁵⁸

Frederick Douglass IV, acting the role of his namesake, next took the podium. Upon his introduction Douglass touched the monument and said a silent prayer before stating “This is no ordinary piece of stone. It is invested with the spirits of those who were part of the resistance.... It is truly a treasure for all of us.” He asked those in attendance to not only listen to the speeches, but to touch the monument because there is more to it than merely granite. “This stone embodies the spirit of Christiana. It embodies those who were part of the resistance. It embodies those who were early fighters for freedom.” Douglass finished by stating the monument’s universal appeal, “It is mine, it is yours, it is Christiana’s, and it belongs to the world.”⁵⁹

The tone of the speeches was illustrative of how antiquated the monument was in 2001. During a commemoration where black contributions to American history were to be highlighted, it became difficult to even discuss a stone that had little to do with such a theme. The obelisk was a quaint reminder of a bygone era in riot memory where a white

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

slaveholder faced off against white Quakers while the threat of black violence lingered in the background. Grasping for something to say, each speaker could only mention general observations of the riot while standing in the monument's shadow. The topics of bravery, reconciliation between descendants, the cause of brotherhood, the riot's relation to the Civil War, and a call for racial equity were relevant to the general riot story but were hardly specific to the commemoration's overriding theme of black agency. No remarks were made concerning the monument's naive focus on the white actors, its diminishing of William Parker to just another obscure participant, and the tone of sectional reunion that was so pertinent ninety years earlier. Discussing the monument's reconciliationist message would have afforded an opportunity to "fill in the blanks" of history and show how much the riot story has changed in just under a century. It would have permitted a contemporary telling of the riot with Parker and his compatriots in the spotlight where their actions could be shown as integral contributions to the cause of freedom, the Civil War, and the end of slavery. Yet, the speakers barely mentioned Parker and even when discussing the courage of those who resisted, the characters of Hanway, Lewis, and Scarlett become lumped in with the black rioters. Whether the speakers were not completely familiar with the riot story or feared publicly defending an act of racial violence, their words elucidated a crucial point—even upon re-dedicating the 1911 monument, the riot story depicted by the stone memorial remained unchanged.

After the first three speeches, Douglass' wife sang two melodies, the "Freedom Song" and "Ordinary People." Thelma Thompson followed by reading two poems written by her sister the late Margaret Baynard. The selections entitled "Yesteryear's Reflections" and "Just Reminiscing..." both centered on Christiana, with the latter work being the

most relevant because in its reflections on runaway slaves and abolitionists whereas the former provides a glimpse into Mt. Zion church history of the 1930s and 40s.⁶⁰ Baynard's *Just Reminiscing* also diverged from the general tone of the speeches to impart a specific perspective on the riot itself. The work celebrated the actions of Parker and the other black rioters, crediting them with resisting Gorsuch and operating the Underground Railroad, while Quaker contributions are mentioned solely as assisting in the latter effort.

The most significant stanza read:

In Christiana, there stands a marker.
Listing names of Peter Woods, many others including Parker.
For these hard working and fearless men, Freedom was their goal
For every living soul.
In my mind, I can see—the hacks –
of the man, whose head was split open with an axe.
Those folks bore a heavy load
While running – “The Underground Railroad”
Thanks to the Bushongs, Lewis, Smiths, Whitsons
And some Quakers way back,
For helping our ancestors --- walk –
That railroad – with no track.

Society Treasurer Bud Rettew followed with a formal re-dedication of the monument to those who fought for freedom at Christiana and how it was the duty of all citizens to make sure nothing like it would ever need be necessary again. Pastor Beachum offered the benediction to conclude the ceremony and the monument's new home became official.⁶¹

Saturday's final event was a play performed that evening before a packed house of nine hundred at Octorara High School. Entitled “The Resistance at Christiana,” the piece

⁶⁰ Ibid.; “Re-dedication” Program, 2001 Collection, CHS.

⁶¹ Phillips, “September Video” (2001), videotape, MML Collection, Christiana: PA. Thelma Thompson read an abridged version of Baynard's *Just Reminiscing...* for the Re-dedication Ceremony; “Re-dedication” Program, 2001 Collection, CHS; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, March 24, 2003, Christiana, PA, telephone interview.

was written by African-American author Harry Kendall and performed by members of Lancaster's Theatre of the Seventh Sister. Unlike the 1976 bicentennial presentation, this play was a fuller version of the riot's history. Just before the curtain rose, a sudden addition was made to the program. Fearing there were some in attendance who did not have some basic knowledge of the riot, the play's emcee scrambled to make sure the audience knew the contextual backstory of what was about to be reenacted on stage. The emcee persuaded Bud Rettew to provide a history lesson on the riot, which was supposed to last a few minutes, yet ended up lasting forty. Rettew's speech was indicative of the perpetual lack of awareness of the riot story even in Christiana. "We find that a lot," Darlene Colon lamented, "we really feared that without that little overview that they probably would have been lost, which is sad."⁶²

The play was supportive of the rioters and had much in common with William Parker's *The Freedman's Story* of 1866. The performance treated the violence as a fight for freedom rather than an act of murder or illegality. Although Kendall tried to present both sides of the slavery issue, his sympathies overshadowed any attempt at impartial characterizations. Parker is portrayed as a reasonable, logical, and calm man while his slaveholding antagonist is an irrational, raving zealot. Depicting Gorsuch in this manner was a misassumption likely springing from an uninitiated script or the need to simplify the expansive slavery debate for modern audiences. Like thousands of other antebellum slaveholders, Gorsuch believed he was in the right and, from a strictly legal standpoint, he was in demanding his property be returned. After discovering the location of his

⁶² Colon e-mail message to author, September 13, 2012; "September 2001," CHS website, http://www.christianalibrary.org/chs_files/frame.htm (accessed on October 15, 2012); LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, March 24, 2003, Christiana, PA, telephone interview; Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA.

slaves, Gorsuch did not recklessly charge north with guns blazing. His journey to Philadelphia for the necessary paperwork and legal backing of a U. S. Marshall was indicative of a shrewd, calculating mind that was attentive to the procedural process of the Fugitive Slave Law. Gorsuch's dispute with Parker was a war of ideologies and worldviews. It was a conflict more intellectual than physical, serving as a microcosm of the slavery debate then embroiling the country. But this aspect of Gorsuch's story is sadly lacking in a script that could have highlighted the socio-political complexities of North and South, white and black, or slave and free. The writing instead succumbs to a rudimentary story of hero versus villain, with Edward portrayed as the late twentieth-century caricature of the crazed, irrational slave owner. This was most apparent during an unusual introduction when the two men addressed each other in a surreal afterlife scene:

Parker: Oh! Hello there Edward.

Gorsuch: Don't hello me, you narcissistic scoundrel. And stop crying to these good folk. It is not in their power to exonerate you for killing me.

And later:

Parker: Guilty or not guilty, stealing can be no greater sin than chaining another human being in bondage. And that raises a much greater issue...Between you and I are some dreadfully differing perspectives on the Scriptures. You really believe, rich white men were pre-ordained by God as masters of black people. If that were the case, all slaves would have fared better denouncing Christianity. Well, among the host, only a few did. But...

Gorsuch: Enough! Only a naïve, hypocriting blasphemer would equate the laws of this great empire to a sin against the Ten Commandments.⁶³

⁶³ Harry W. Kendall, "Resistance at Christiana: A Reenactment," 2001 Collection, CHS.

Descendants of the rioters and Quakers involved in the 1851 incident attended the play as well as members of the local community. “One thing the audience will see from the play,” Kendall stated, “is that healing is absolutely essential for the descendants of those involved in the Resistance at Christiana.” Kendall’s statement proved ironic when one set of those descendants was missing from the audience—the Gorsuch family. The slaveholder’s descendants were not in attendance because they did not want to watch the re-enactment of an ancestor’s death. The family’s reluctance to witness the death of a relative they never knew illustrated that there was still a familial connection between the slaveholder and his descendants. A connection strong enough whereby the family found it painful to sit through a performance depicting a member of their kin being killed on stage. The Gorsuch family’s aversion to attending the play could also have come from the feelings of awkwardness that would arise from seeing an ignominious chapter of their lineage on display. Descendants of the rioters could take satisfaction in the heroism they were witnessing on stage from their ancestors. The Gorusch family could have no such familial pride in watching their ancestor’s quest to recapture his human chattel. Thoughts of sitting among other descendants watching attempts at re-enslavement were simply too embarrassing for them to attend.⁶⁴

Activities for Sunday, September ninth focused on bringing the community and the descendants together under an overall theme entitled “On Freedom and Forgiveness.” Morning festivities consisted of a community church service taking place in Christiana Lion’s Club Park with a number of local congregations participating. With the premise

⁶⁴ “A Place Where Freedom and Forgiveness Began” (hereafter cited as “Freedom and Forgiveness”), *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 2001; “Actors to Relive Christiana Riot,” *Intelligencer Journal*, August 25, 2001; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, March 24, 2003, Christiana, PA, telephone interview.

“One Nation Under God,” the service sought “to worship God in the context of remembering the Christiana Resistance,” recognize the riot’s role in abolishing slavery, and remain mindful that oppression and prejudice continue to plague the world. Rev. Beachum provided the sermon and the Mt. Zion choir both performed and led the singing. Each of the area churches participating provided short prayers during the service around specific themes related to the riot:

Common Clay: “We are thankful that we are ‘One Nation Under God’.”

Living Truth Fellowship: “We are thankful that resistance to slavery finally resulted in its abolition.”

Sadsbury Friends Meeting: “We are sorry that there is still oppression in our nation and world.”

Freedom Life Christiana Center: “We are sorry that prejudice still plagues us.”

Christiana UMC: “We dedicate ourselves as followers of Jesus and the Creator to justice for all.”

Rev. Bailey’s Bethel A. M. E. Church refused to participate. Later in the day, the Living Truth Fellowship Church and the Mt. Zion choir capped off the commemoration by performing a concert for the community that effectively concluded festivities for most attendees. But commemoration planners and descendants still had one more activity planned to culminate the celebration.⁶⁵

A “Forgiveness Dinner,” held on Sunday evening for festivity organizers and riot descendants, constituted the final aspect of the 2001 Commemoration. The 150 in

⁶⁵ “September 2001,” CHS website, http://www.christianalibrary.org/chs_files/frame.htm (accessed on October 15, 2012); Church Service Program, September 9, 2001, 2001 Collection, CHS; “Christiana Set,” *Parkessburg Post Ledger*, September 6-12, 2001; “Local Churches Gearing Up For ‘Resistance at Christiana’,” *Parkessburg Post Ledger*, August 30-September 5, 2001.

attendance included descendants of William Parker and Abraham Johnson who came from Buxton, Ontario, Canada, those related to Ezekiel Thompson and the Quakers involved were from the local and surrounding areas, and the Gorsuch families came from Maryland and Ohio. The dinner was an attempt by organizers to illustrate shared brotherhood in an unfortunate historical event and was the first riot commemoration to make any attempt at bringing descendants together for more than mere pleasantries. In 1911, there is no evidence of any personal contact between the Gorsuch family and Peter Woods or the progeny of the whites involved. Descendants assembled for a picture in 1951, but there was likewise no record of them having any interpersonal contact.⁶⁶

Organizers viewed the dinner as central to one of the major themes of the commemoration—the promotion of reconciliation between descendants. “For me this was always a spiritual thing,” Nancy Hess said of the commemoration, “I saw it as an opportunity for healing and forgiveness.” The dinner was a laudable effort to bring both sides together, but its ambiguous title led to a degree of uncertainty amongst the guests. Using the phrase “Forgiveness Dinner” necessarily implied that there was something to forgive. That one party had somehow wronged another and was seeking penance. Hess defended the dinner’s title as an “opportunity to take an honest look at the past, to learn from it, and to move from this point on.” But this assumed that descendants had failed to move beyond events that occurred a century and half before. Descendants were not partaking in a Hatfield versus McCoy style feud for the past five generations thereby

⁶⁶ Colon e-mail message to author, September 13, 2012; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, March 24, 2003, Christiana, PA, telephone interview; E. Forbes, p. 260.

making the term “forgiveness” appropriate by providing a sense of closure to a longstanding grudge.⁶⁷

“Forgiveness” also begged the question of who exactly was to be forgiven? Were the Gorsuch descendants to be exculpated for their ancestor’s owning of slaves and his attempt to retrieve them? Or, were the descendants of William Parker and his followers to be exonerated for killing a Gorsuch ancestor? The politics of 2001 would infer the former, with the rioters being rightfully vindicated in their efforts to avoid a return to servitude. This opinion thereby implicated the Gorsuches as those who needed to be forgiven, an inference the family contemplated when deciding to attend the commemoration. Karen Riddlebaugh Hunter of Ohio, a descendant of Edward Gorsuch, was unable to convince her brothers or daughter to attend the festivities. “They didn’t know what they’d be getting into because we are descendants of slave owners, and we’d be there with descendants of slaves,” she stated. When stories of slavery and the riot were brought up at family gatherings, Hunter said the issues were touchy subjects. Her family members

weren’t proud that some were slaveowners. They made sure we knew they treated their slaves well. When Edward came north to get his slaves, he made sure he dotted his i’s and crossed his t’s. He operated within the law. When my family told the story, it was told that he’d been caught in history. It was a big deal then.

Hunter remarked how she was conflicted over Edward Gorsuch and how he should be remembered. “This is a relative that was murdered, but he was still a slave owner and so there are bad feelings about that,” she said. “It’s difficult, you go there [Christiana] and

⁶⁷ “Remembering the Christiana Riot,” *Parkesburg Post Ledger*, September 13-19, 2001; Phillips, “September Video” (2001), MML Collection, Christiana: PA, videotape.

you're curious, but you also feel...you know...." Helen Mayo, Hunter's cousin from Maryland, did not feel any sense of guilt or inner struggle about her slaveholding ancestor. Mayo was puzzled why the final occasion was even called a "Forgiveness Dinner" because she felt no need to be forgiven for anything. "I don't feel guilty. I had no hand in this," she stated, "God's not going to ask me what my ancestors did 150 years ago."⁶⁸

Once the dinner began, descendants from all the families involved exchanged pleasantries and began speaking with one another in an atmosphere of cordiality. There was no sense of hostility between those in attendance, no lifelong grudges needing to be exorcised. "When the descendants of the Gorsuch family were introduced to descendants of the escaped slaves that were involved in the resistance fight," remarked Bud Rettew, "there was handshaking and hugging and from that point on everybody got along as well as friends could possibly get along." There were no hard feelings. Descendants of the various families took pictures, joked with one another, and had a wonderful time conversing. It was a "Forgiveness Dinner" noticeably bereft of absolution or acts of contrition making the banquet's title a misnomer. In actuality, the phrase "forgiveness" appeared to serve the emotional needs of the organizers rather than the descendants. Believing a historical conflict between two factions must thereby engender long-standing hatred between their ancestors, banquet planners created a rivalry where none existed in order to provide a sense of closure. Psychologists have referred to such assumptions as "projection" or the "false consensus effect" defined as "overestimating the percentage of other people who share one's traits, opinions, preferences, or motivations." The

⁶⁸ "Resistance at Christiana" (hereafter cited as "Resistance"), *Central PA Magazine*, February 2002; "Freedom and Forgiveness," *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 2001.

“Forgiveness Dinner” was an example of organizers projecting their own presumptions onto the descendants. The banquet was intended to poignantly conclude the commemoration by reuniting two opposing peoples in dramatic and heartfelt reconciliation. In reality, the event became a friendly dinner party indistinguishable from ordinary social occasions.⁶⁹

Rather than basking in the glow of the occasion, William Parker’s great-grandson Frank found it difficult being the center of attention. He felt uneasy over all the interest he was receiving from everyone wanting to meet him. The Buxton resident was modest when talking about the actions of his great-grandfather 150 years ago. “William didn’t do anything that any good man wouldn’t have done,” Frank Parker stated. “It was nothing out of the usual. I don’t see him as being a hero. I just see him as being a good man.” Parker knew little of his great-grandfather’s exploits until he visited a museum near Buxton a few years before. After discovering the role his ancestor played in the riot, Frank thought a little more about it. “He seemed to be the kind of guy who’d stand up for what he believes in,” he said, “I hope to be that way. I’d rather be hurt than hurt someone else. I see that in him. I see that in my dad.” Throughout the dinner, Frank was reluctant to discuss the part his ancestor had played. In this he was much like William Parker and his compatriots in that they never spoke of the riot for fear of being discovered by U.S. lawmen. Although Frank remarked that he would not tell the story of the riot to his

⁶⁹ LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, March 24, 2003, Christiana, PA, telephone interview; Roy F. Baumeister, Karen Dale, and Kristin L. Sommer, “Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Social Psychology,” *Journal of Personality* 66:6 (December 1998), p. 1090.

children, he said his wife Darlene would take care of that. As for him, “The way I carry it on is by my lifestyle.”⁷⁰

After dinner there were various speeches given by those in attendance. Supporting the theme of reconciliation, Nancy Hess considered the descendants to have now formed an unbreakable bond by stating, “A three-strand cord is not easily broken, with the Gorsuch family, the Quaker families, and the slave families. There’s something more complete in freedom that comes through forgiveness.” During his comments, Frederick Douglass IV identified the riot as a “confluence of forces” with white and black coming together in the forms of the Quakers and the fugitive slaves. He also recited a quote from his great-grandfather that made him think of Christiana:

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.

A few descendants of the rioters spoke as well with a speech by Doreen Johnston Shadd, a descendant of Abraham Johnson, encapsulating the spirit of the dinner, “How can you have a dislike for someone you don’t even know,” she observed, “as far as I’m concerned we’re all God’s children no matter what our color is.” When the opportunity came to make a statement, representatives of the Gorsuch family remained silent. Organizers were made aware of the Gorsuch family’s reluctance to speak before the dinner. Mrs. Mayo said “she really didn’t have anything to forgive or be forgiven for,” Bud Rettew stated, “She wasn’t there [at the riot], and she holds no grudge against anyone.... They didn’t feel that there was anything that needed to be said.” Although organizers did not

⁷⁰ “Resistance,” *Central PA Magazine*, February 2002.

view the Gorsuch family's aversion to making a speech in having anything to do with their ancestor and the ideology he represented, this fact must have been weighing on the family's minds.⁷¹ They had nothing to say because their situation permitted nothing to articulate. Surrounded by descendants of slaves must have caused a distinct hesitation on the part of the Gorsuch family to make any kind of statement whatsoever. While rioter descendants could take pride in the actions of their ancestors, the Gorsuch descendants were afforded no such luxury. Edward Gorusch's deeds were not considered courageous, nor could his descendants celebrate his connection with history. Gorsuch was no longer the martyr who "died for law" as he had been ninety years before. In 2001 he was a relic of history, an uncomfortable reminder of American immorality. His descendants could surely not escape feelings of shared guilt especially amid those with familial links to victims of bondage.

The dinner and the commemoration as a whole were considered a great success for the Society. There was talk amongst the organizers and the descendants of having another reunion in the near future. Darlene Colon, another descendant of Ezekial Thompson, put it simply, "We cannot let this die." For the Society's part, they were not only able to publicly expound the story of William Parker and the riot, but the community of Christiana was brought together like never before. In the past, the blacks and whites of the area had been like two separate neighborhoods. After the commemoration, however, local residents observed a revitalized sense of racial unity. "Mt. Zion church was always at the top of the hill and Christiana always at the bottom," said organizer Jim Groff, "but

⁷¹ Phillips, "September Video" (2001), MML Collection, Christiana: PA, videotape; "Resistance," *Central PA Magazine*, February 2002. The "t" in Ms. Johnston Shadd's name was added in later generations; LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, March 24, 2003, Christiana, PA, telephone interview.

through this we came together.” Bud Rettew agreed with this assessment, “We feel that the greatest success was the breaking down of the wall between the African Americans and the whites of the community.” In 2001 a brotherhood was formed in Christiana by an event that had split the country asunder a century and a half before. Tom Ryan’s speech at the re-dedication ceremony indeed proved correct “much has changed in 150 years.”⁷²

⁷² Phillips, “September Video” (2001), MML Collection, Christiana: PA, videotape; LaVerne D. “Bud” Rettew, interview by author, March 18, 2003, Christiana, PA; “Freedom and Forgiveness,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 11, 2001; “Local Residents Bring 1851 Uprising Into 21st Century,” *Parkesburg Post Ledger*, September 13-19, 2001.

Epilogue

The legacy of the Christiana Riot is a legacy of warring memories between black and white over the historical meaning of William Parker's stand against Edward Gorsuch. What initially began as two diametrically opposed viewpoints over what happened outside Christiana on September 11, 1851, slowly merged together a century and a half later. Throughout this lethargic process of racial reconciliation it was not the African-American memory of the riot that made concessions. Black perspectives of the riot remained constant remembering Parker as a hero and celebrating his defiance of the slave power. Instead it was white conceptions of the riot that evolved over time, gradually aligning to link with the memories of their African-American counterparts. Each riot commemoration produced new interpretations that contributed to white memories gaining a greater appreciation of the riot's emancipationist meaning to the black community. By 2001, Lancaster County's black and white residents had made the Christiana Riot their own to the point of renaming the incident as a "resistance" to more accurately reflect their historical perspective.

Such reinterpretations can indeed enrich our understanding of a historical event by broadening its context or unearthing new evidence. But, like memory, history is an ever-changing narrative just as connected to the present as it is to the past. History's malleability thus becomes its greatest strength, as well as its greatest weakness. As Civil War and Christiana Riot commemorations reflected, questions of bias, authenticity, and representation permeated their public interpretations and divided the American public along racial lines. Over 150 years, the riot's historical memory was both variable and

volatile in its causal relationship with social and political forces. It became a story that interchanged villainy with heroism and violence with righteousness based upon a shifting American culture. The history of the riot was just that, a history of transitions responding to the fluid nature of memory. An evolution marked by historical reinterpretations and a shifting pattern of societal preconceptions. The riot's legacy is a reminder that history, far from being set in stone, is also a social construct beholden to the inherent prejudice of personal and collective memories. What is remembered has little to do with historical evidence, but more to do with human choices as to the veracity of that evidence. That the riot lacked physical remains to ground its story made it susceptible to any positive or negative interpretation be it from southern segregationists, northern abolitionists, African-Americans, or historical societies. Each group interpreted the riot story through their own social and political spectrums to use the incident for their own purposes. In this sense, the purpose of history was to foster cultural unity through an ideological assessment of the riot's meaning.

The basic facts of the Christiana Riot will never change. A Maryland slaveholder was killed and his son seriously wounded by an assemblage of blacks. But over a century and a half, the meaning behind these facts became a contested ideological battleground wrapped in the issue of race. That black could trump white in a society that historically demonstrated the opposite, made the riot unique in the American consciousness. Whites struggled in coming to grips with Parker's defiance, yet they nonetheless arrived at an emancipationist understanding of the riot similar to African-Americans. This process of white reinterpretation grew directly in proportion with social and political trends in the twentieth century. While the facts of the riot story did not change, what changed was the

riot's meaning in relation to the values that underpinned American society. Riot interpretations formed a processive partnership with the glacial pace of American race relations in determining what was significant about the fight at Christiana. As the relationships between white and black changed over time, so too did the riot's historical memory in reflecting that transformation over four subsequent stages. Initially condemned in 1851, the riot was reinterpreted in 1911, 1951, and 2001 with each stage representing the racial understanding of its era. The commemorations refashioned the riot narrative, emphasizing different themes to correspond with social and political expectations. The 1911 ceremony reflected the white reconciliationist impulse of other commemorations in the country and their downplaying of black emancipation. Festivities in 1951 combined the theme of sectional reunion, apparent during the Civil War centennial, with the issue of black agency inherent to the growing civil rights movement. The 2001 celebration emphasized black historical contributions and self-emancipation in accordance with a new social history and a more progressive understanding on matters of race. Differences within each commemoration revealed a riot story that was inconsistent beyond the most basic facts. The riot's legacy was thus an unstable public memory having much in common with society itself in that it was continuously in a state of flux.¹

The Christiana Riot commemorations act as important cultural signposts in illustrating this changing nature of public memory. Each ceremony was a microcosm of American society's contentious relationship with race at a particular period in its history. John Bodnar described public memory as a "communicative and cognitive process" less concerned with the past than "serious matters in the present such as the nature of power

¹ Cook, p. 3.

and the question of loyalty to both official and vernacular cultures.”² The riot commemorations were no different, reflecting the politics of their respective eras through the lens of the riot and its racial meaning. Organizers of the ceremonies in 1911, 1951, and 2001 reshaped the riot to suit their own needs. Their thematic choices of what to highlight or disregard afford a glimpse into the minds of our predecessors as to what they valued, understood, and deemed significant in relation to the riot and the world around them.

This symbolic element of commemorations also permits exploration of the central controversy at the riot’s core—race. The riot is not a study of black or white, but black versus white. It is a story of racial conflict both literally and figuratively. The riot’s public memory affords a unique opportunity to illustrate American sensibilities in dealing with a historical reminder of racial violence. How each commemoration chose to examine this uncomfortable theme provides a pathway for understanding how past Americans conceptualized the relationship between black and white as well as the emancipationist ideals that influenced such violence. Analyzing such themes also offers racial lessons just as applicable to the future as they are to the past. David Thelen noted how the past is “a reservoir of alternatives to the present,” arguing that different historical interpretations can broaden present and future perspectives on a wide range of moral and political issues. “By recovering things from the past or by looking at experience differently, we can see how to think and act differently in the future,” he maintained. “The past can challenge us with eloquent, brilliant, troubling material that widens our present experience and wisdom. It provides perspectives to engage, accounts to cross-

² Bodnar, p. 15.

examine, and opportunities to hone skills of empathy, compassion, and reflection.”³

Studying the Christiana Riot’s legacy of the “white myth,” racial discrimination, and white reconciliation thus affords an opportunity to learn from past mistakes so as to avoid their reiteration. It heightens historical sensitivity when dealing with future racial topics in an increasingly heterogeneous American population of various colors and creeds all demanding equal rights.

The three riot commemorations varied greatly in their thematic interpretations of the clash between William Parker and Edward Gorsuch. Festivities in 1911 possessed an overall motif of regional reunion with a corresponding emphasis on the “white myth” during a time of Jim Crow when many whites found it acceptable to relegate African-Americans to the fringes of American society. The riot ceremony differed from popular literature and other commemorations of the era, however, by providing a measured recognition of an emancipationist conception of the Civil War. Black participation in the form of Reverend R. F. Wright’s invocation, Peter Woods’ medal ceremony, and Mary Robinson’s poem represented embers of a black counter-memory that had not yet been extinguished. Festivities in 1951 served to transition the riot story from the “white myth” to a more racially inclusive message during the early days of the Civil Rights Movement. The commemoration again sought sectional reconciliation, yet not at the expense of black participation. Unlike many white academics and Civil War commemorations, the 1951 ceremony offered a voice of black resistance through the impassioned rhetoric of Horace Mann Bond. His speech transformed the ways in which African-American agency had been indirectly acknowledged in 1911 by publicly bringing black self-emancipation to

³ Rosenzweig and Thelen, p. 205, 178.

the forefront of the riot story. The 2001 commemoration made William Parker the hero of the riot story and highlighted black historical contributions as a result of civil rights successes and an institutional emphasis on social history. Gone were concerns over regional reunion as whites were barely mentioned. The most recent riot anniversary became an opportunity for local as well as national reflection on race relations and the significant role minorities played in shaping the country.

A defining characteristic of the Christiana Riot festivities in 1911 and 1951 was that they differed from other public ceremonies memorializing Civil War related topics. Unlike the Manassas, Harpers Ferry, or Gettysburg commemorations, each riot ceremony contained a black counterpoint to white reconciliation. The 1911 celebration awarded a medal to a black rioter and included emancipationist poetry by an African-American author. The ceremony would have had even more of an African-American presence had not fears over the Zachariah Walker lynching stymied a larger black participation. Festivities in 1951 allowed Horace Mann Bond the opportunity to attribute a voice to the black counter-memory of the riot and racial discrimination. Bond's speech publicly recognizing the heroism of William Parker was a watershed moment for the riot's historical memory. Bond's acknowledgment of black agency in self-emancipation was a theme distinctly absent from Civil War commemorations a decade later. The Lancaster County Historical Society was responsible for both commemorations, yet their attempts at racial inclusion in 1911 and 1951 have gone unnoticed. Neither Thomas Slaughter nor Ella Forbes, the only two authors to offer any analysis of the ceremonies, credited the Society for its efforts in offering a black viewpoint to the riot. Instead, both authors criticized the Society for promoting sectional reconciliation and the "white myth" at the

expense of black agency. The fleeting analysis by Slaughter and Forbes diminished black participation at the ceremonies and offered no contextual comparison between the riot commemorations with other commemorations of the same era. A closer examination of the riot ceremonies in 1911 and 1951 reveals a distinct black counter-memory, admittedly secondary in 1911 yet nonetheless present, that in the context of Jim Crow's permeation of other commemorations was a significant accomplishment. Rather than condemnation, the Society should receive congratulation for having the courage to award a medal to a black man in 1911 and permit a civil rights leader to speak in 1951 within an atmosphere of racial segregation and "Negrophobia." From the perspective of its time, the Society was far more progressive than either Slaughter or Forbes realized.⁴

The presence of the emancipationist vision at each riot commemoration was the common link between the ceremonies. Although differing thematically, the commemorations perpetuated a stubborn black counter-memory that refused to disappear completely. This message survived because "so much of the emancipationist vision persisted in American culture during the early twentieth century, upheld by blacks and a fledgling neo-abolitionist tradition, that it never died a permanent death on the landscape of Civil War memory," insisted David Blight. "That persistence made the revival of the emancipationist memory of the war and the transformation of American society possible in the last third of the twentieth century."⁵ Although it had been lost in the earlier pages of white-centered history, the emancipationist viewpoint was still breathing in 2001 as the torch passed from generation to generation. The historical memory of the Christiana Riot was thus part and parcel of the black counter-memory's path to public recognition.

⁴ Slaughter, pp. 183-186; E. Forbes, pp. 158-159

⁵ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, pp. 2-3.

The emancipationist vision passed among Frederick Douglass, William Parker, W. E. B. Dubois, Peter Woods, Mary Robinson, Dr. Horace Mann Bond, and Margaret Baynard to produce an overt celebration of black agency at the 2001 commemoration. An incident condemned 150 years earlier as a white abolitionist insurrection, had become an African-American fight for freedom.

Over the years since the 2001 commemoration, the Christiana Historical Society has continued its efforts to publicize the riot. In 2006 the Society sponsored a smaller reunion of riot descendants. The reunion was a private affair consisting of a banquet and a speech by author Harry Kendall who implored the forty descendants in attendance to “not let the story die.” Three years later, the Society altered the public space around the riot monument to more accurately reflect William Parker’s courage. Feeling that Parker was “brushed under the rug” by the 1911 memorial, members installed a 12” x 10” brass plaque beside the monument honoring the black leader’s heroic stand. The plaque is affixed to a granite sleeper stone with an inscription that included an appellation Parker was given by Lindley Coates, a local Quaker stationmaster on the Underground Railroad:

Dedicated to the Memory of
WILLIAM PARKER
“Bold as a Lion”

A Leader in the Fight for the Freedom of his People.
September 11, 1851

Erected by the Rotary Club of Octorara and the Christiana Historical Society, the plaque serves as a counterpoint to the 1911 memorial where Parker is only mentioned as one of those indicted for treason. Passersby are now presented with two distinct

interpretations, one of white sacrifice alongside one of black defiance; a physical manifestation of the riot's evolving memory represented in stone and metal.⁶

The Society's lobbying efforts have successfully made the riot part of the curriculum at area schools. Local districts have invited members into the classroom as guest speakers to discuss the riot and the Underground Railroad before elementary students. However, utilizing guest lecturers rather than teachers to relate the riot story suggests a continued reluctance by school officials to examine racial violence even in emancipationist terms. Outside speakers serve as shields to potential parental complaints, with school officials using them as convenient scapegoats to deflect responsibility from district employees.⁷ Whether this is simply an example of community outreach or political camouflage, it illustrates hesitancy among educators even today over introducing the riot into the classroom.

The next logical Christiana Riot commemoration would occur in 2026. What the future holds for such an event's thematic focus is difficult to decipher. Over the course of ninety years the riot was reinterpreted on three separate occasions in relation to each ceremony's political atmosphere. Perhaps 2026 will provide yet another reinterpretation of the riot's historical memory. Maybe violence in society will no longer be necessary and the riot will be studied as an example of nineteenth century American primitivism. Or perhaps society will have degraded to the point that the rioters are condemned for not killing all of the Gorsuch party. Either way, the Christiana Riot will continue to survive

⁶ LaVerne D. "Bud" Rettew, interview by author, July 11, 2012, Christiana, PA; Darlene Colon, interview by author, July 17, 2012, Lancaster, PA; Rettew, e-mail message to author, September 13, 2012; Smedley, p. 113. Coates characterized Parker as "bold as a lion, the kindest of men, and the warmest and most steadfast of friends."

⁷ Ibid.

as a historical example of the human spirit's unquenchable desire for freedom. As long as we remember.

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Curriculum Vitae

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CAREER STATEMENT

A confident and self-motivated historian who combines a love of teaching with excellent multi-tasking and organizational skills. Possessing exceptional research and analytical abilities that assist in communicating complex historical information to students, faculty, and the general public. Fields of specialization include American History, Cultural History, Military History, and Public History. Now looking to further a solid academic record by finding a suitable position with an employer dedicated to educating its fellow citizens.

EDUCATION

Lehigh University
Ph.D., History, December 2012

Millersville University
M.A., American History, May 2003

Millersville University
B.A., History, December 2000

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Teaching Assistant – Undergraduate History Course, America 1865-1940
Lehigh University, January 2011 – May 2011 (Spring Semester)

Assisted in instructing survey course covering American History from the close of the Civil War until U.S. entry into World War II. Duties included lecture planning and implementation, research preparation, examination assessments, and evaluation of student progress.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND COMMUNITY WORK

Monitoring Technician
Triangle Refrigeration Company, October 1998 – Present

General administrative duties related to managing customer accounts for a refrigeration, heating, and air-conditioning service provider. Responsibilities include supervising refrigeration alarms, processing service requests, and maintaining day-to-day operations.

Assistant Baseball Coach

Conestoga Valley High School, December 2008 – June 2011

Assistant Baseball Coach

Conestoga Valley American Legion, May 2009 – July 2009

Volunteer Baseball Coach

Warwick Travel Baseball, August 2008 – October 2008

Board Member

Warwick Little League, August 2007 – July 2008

Volunteer Baseball Coach

Warwick Little League, March 2004 – July 2008

REFERENCES – Furnished upon request.