FROM CLASS TO RACE IN EARLY AMERICA: NORTHERN POST-EMANCIPATION RACIAL RECONSTRUCTION

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The American Revolution created an immediate break from England's political and economic control. It also marked the beginning of internal evolutionary changes in America. The Revolution began the abolition of slavery in the North, transforming the operation and meaning of class and race. Gradual emancipation strategies preserved unfree black labor just when indentures for European-American workers were disappearing, and this had important consequences for the relationship between poor blacks and poor whites. They were less likely thereafter to share a common condition and, from the perspective of white workers, were more likely to be in competition. Racial tensions were undoubtedly exacerbated as the nation moved toward its first labor surplus in the 1820s with many northern blacks occupying a middle ground of labor, neither slave nor free. A growing racial divide at the bottom of society can be traced through the institution of racially defined political statuses, violent racial conflicts, labor competition, the systematic exclusion of blacks from certain occupations, and the development of an ideology of racial inferiority. Analysis of these changes can deepen our understanding of the role of race and racism in the early republic and of the transformation of race and class.

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Part of the postrevolution story of race is well known. With abolition measures in the North and slavery's retention in the South, the country was split, and that fracture would lead to civil war. The complicated social, political, and economic changes that marked the evolution from a slaveholding to a free society in the North are less familiar. Indeed, it is only with a growing literature on northern black thought and activism, and with recent works on the phenomenon of race and color, that we have begun to understand these changes.[1] From the earliest European settlement in America, both race and class were important organizing principles. In fact, racial differentiation was the hallmark of American slavery. Typically, Native Americans and Africans were enslaved while white Europeans served defined terms as indentured servants. Additionally, colonial officials instituted policies designed to maintain racial lines. In 1656, Massachusetts removed Indians and Africans from the militia and by 1707 required them to perform alternative service. In the mid-1600s and early 1700s, Maryland, Virginia, and Massachusetts banned interracial sexual relations and marriage. Under a 1726 Pennsylvania law, a free black person could be sold into slavery for marrying a white person, while no punishment was provided for the white partner.[2]

Laws separating the races demonstrate official perceptions and concerns, but the perceived necessity for them also indicates the multiracial character of early America and the prevalence of the relationships they regulated. As historian Edmund Morgan concluded for colonial Virginia, it was not unusual for "servants and slaves to run away together, steal hogs

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[1] See, for example, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York, 1997); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York, 1991); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995); Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780-1860* (Ithaca, 1998); Harry Reed, *Platform for Change: The Foundations of the Northern Free Black Community, 1775-1865* (East Lansing, MI, 1994); Sterling Stuckey, *Going Through the Storm: The Influence of African American Art in History* (New York, 1994); and Rita Jean Roberts, "In Quest of Autonomy: Northern Black Activism Between the Revolution and Civil War" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1988).

[2] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968); Nathaniel B. Shurtleff, ed., *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay* (5 vols., Boston, 1854), III, 397; *Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston, 1869), I, 606-07, 578-79; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 39; P. Bradley Nutting, "Racial Boundary Formation in Colonial Massachusetts, 1638-1707: The Origins of Statutory Discrimination," unpublished paper in possession of author; A. Leon Higginbotham, Jr., *In the Matter of Color: Race & the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York, 1978), 286.

together, get drunk together . . . [and] not uncommon for them to make love together." Material conditions created common bonds, as the every-day lives and working conditions of unfree workers were similar, especially in the urban North. Slaves and indentured servants generally received similar food and clothing. The disdain of the privileged classes, who characterized them as "mean and vile" or the "lower sort," also united them. In this elite view, God placed poor whites and blacks at the bottom of the social order, "Ordain[ing] different degrees and orders of men, some to be high and Honorable, some to be Low and Despicable." In colonial eighteenth-century New York City, weekly auctions sold both black slaves and the indentures of white servants. There were crucial differences, since slavery was without term, and owners also confiscated a slave's children. But both slaves and indentured servants stood on the auction block, and indentured servants often perceived themselves to be in comparable circumstances. Soul drivers carried unsold white indentured servants into the countryside in search of buyers, according to one servant, "exposing [them] for sale in all public fairs and markets as brute beasts." Another reported to correspondents in Britain that the servant in America was sold "for a slave at public sale."[3]

Plantation agriculture, North and South, and especially the more common household slavery in the North, brought black workers and white workers together in shared tasks and commonly experienced punishments. Such other occupations as seafaring and work as craftsmen and artisans brought blacks and whites together on a relatively equal footing. Work at sea was difficult and dangerous, and the status and working conditions of common sailors were only marginally better than those of plantation slaves. In fact, most black mariners in the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century were slaves. All sailors suffered confinement, poor diet, and harsh punishments including whipping, but black sailors were likely to find a greater measure of geographical and social freedom at sea than on shore. By the early nineteenth century, African Americans constituted about twenty percent of American sailors, with much higher proportions working in river and coastal shipping. Black sailors faced racism in job assignments and in general treatment, but facing the isolation and dangers of the sea

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[3] Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery and American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 327; Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), 7; Bernard Bailyn and Barbara DeWolfe, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1986), 346; Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, NY, 1973); Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*.

together fostered a camaraderie that carried over into interracial associations in integrated boarding houses, bars, and other shoreside facilities and activities.[4]

Although labor provided the most continuous interracial contacts in colonial America, there were many other occasions when people joined across racial lines. Local festivals and celebrations often had an interracial character. The Dutch-initiated spring holiday of Pinkster in New York and New Jersey was identified as an African-American celebration by the late eighteenth century, but people of all races and ethnicities participated. Music and dance of African origin dominated festivities that included performers, animals, Native-American craft vendors, and booths selling food and drink. At Pinkster celebrations in Albany, New York, in the early nineteenth century, "King Charles," an elderly colorfully-costumed Angolan, presided over the multitudes. Astride his horse, Charles led the procession and collected a monetary tribute from each booth. Africans and African Americans, Native Americans, European indentured servants, and other whites also congregated for such festive occasions in colonial America as general election days and local militia muster days. In 1760, one poet described election day participants:

> Of black and white, and every sort
> of high, low, rich and poor;
> Squaws, negroes, deputies in scores . . .
> A motley crew
> Of Whites & Blacks & Indians too.[5]

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[4] W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 6; Whittington B. Johnson, "Negro Laboring Classes in Early America, 1750-1820" (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1970).

[5] Samuel E. Morison, "A Poem on Election Day in Massachusetts about 1760," *Proceedings of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 18 (Feb. 1915), 54-61 (quotation at 60-61); Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens, GA, 1991); David Steven Cohen, "In Search of Carolus Africanus Rex: Afro-Dutch Folklore in New York and New Jersey," *Journal of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society*, 5 (Fall and Winter 1984), 149-62. The relationship between Native Americans and African Americans is an important and complicating part of the issue of race in America. See, for example, Daniel R. Mandell, "Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity: Indian-Black Intermarriage in Southern New England, 1760-1880," *Journal of American History*, 85 (Sept. 1998), 466-501. For European perspectives, see Jon Gjerde, "'Here in America there is neither king nor tyrant': European Encounters with Race, 'Freedom,' and Their European Pasts," and James P. Ronda, "'We Have a Country': Race, Geography, and the Invention of Indian Territory," in this volume.

Not all broadly inclusive gatherings were raucous occasions. As religious enthusiasm caught fire after 1730 in the Great Awakening, thousands of ordinary people were swept up in the call for spiritual rebirth. South and North, urban and rural, bound and free, black, white and Indian, men and women participated as worshippers and as preachers. In emotional services of song and exhortation, they espoused an evangelical gospel of personal liberty with intonations of equality that many of the elite believed threatened public order. African Americans' religious sensibilities and musical styles brought a thrilling fervor to these multiracial gatherings. In the North, ministers like Rhode Island's Samuel Hopkins, inspired by the groundswell of religious sentiment, used the revival's broad participation as an object lesson. Revivalists made the social and political message explicit by creating a religiously based antislavery doctrine.[6]

Other racially integrated activities were for less laudatory purposes. In New York City, poor whites and free blacks ran informal unregulated drinking establishments in their homes, much to the consternation of officials who believed them "destructive to the morals of servants and slaves." In fact, saloons in the mid-eighteenth century were often sites for prostitution, the exchange or sale of stolen goods, and gambling. Two of the most notorious saloons in colonial New York were run by white business partners, John Romme and John Hughson, who handled stolen goods. Romme and Hughson had ties to black gangs and plans to develop interracial gangs, hoping eventually to organize and control vice throughout the city.[7]

Hughson's establishment was a popular gathering place for Sunday dinner, and many slaves came there after church for goose, mutton, and fresh-baked bread, as well as for the music and dancing. However, neither this more respectable cover nor the secret oaths and rituals of their criminal underground protected Hughson, Romme, or their conspirators from discovery and arrest. In 1741, authorities suspected that a series of fires was connected to a rebellion by the blacks and whites who met at Hughson's saloon. After a swift trial, the punishment meted out was severe: thirteen blacks were burned at the stake, sixteen were hanged, and

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[6] Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1978); Alan Gallay, "Planters and Slaves in the Great Awakening," in John B. Boles, ed., *Masters & Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the American South, 1740-1870* (Lexington, 1988), 19-36; David S. Lovejoy, "Samuel Hopkins: Religion, Slavery, and the Revolution," *The New England Quarterly,* 40 (June 1967), 227-43.

[7] Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse, 1966), 87; Daniel Horsmanden, *The New York Conspiracy*, ed. Thomas J. Davis (Boston, 1971).

over seventy were banished from Britain's colonies; four whites, including Hughson, were hanged, and seven were banished.[8]

Harsh punishment may have been influenced by memories of a slave/servant revolt about a generation earlier during which conspirators had also burned several buildings. In 1712, blacks, whites, and Indians seeking revenge against their masters had ambushed fire fighters. They wounded six people and killed nine before local citizens routed them. Six of the leaders committed suicide, but the militia eventually apprehended the escaped rebels. Authorities arrested seventy blacks in a general sweep of the region and put nineteen to death. The torture and execution of blacks and Native Americans included death by breaking on the wheel, starvation, burning at the stake, and hanging.[9]

Throughout the colonial period, there were interracial actions with even more directly political purposes. Many were led by sailors protesting British impressment. There were impressment riots in Boston in 1745 and 1747 and in New York, Newport, Rhode Island, Casco Bay, Maine, and Norfolk, Virginia, in the 1760s. Several thousand people attacked the governor's house in Boston after troops attempted to quell one such mob action there in the 1740s. In 1765, five hundred men and boys rioted after five weeks of impressments in Newport. One investigation made clear that participants represented a dangerous combination, accusing them of being a "riotous, tumultuous assembly of foreign seamen, servants, Negroes and other persons of mean and vile condition."[10]

In the colonies, political participation by nonelite unpropertied colonists was in the informal public sphere of outdoor politics. Mob actions were quasi-legitimate expressions of public discontent that exerted pressure on the government; when they escalated to full-scale riots, they were put down by military force. Thus, for example, during the late 1730s

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[8] Thomas J. Davis, *Rumor of Revolt: The Great Negro Conspiracy in Colonial New York* (New York, 1985).

[9] Davis, ed., *New York Conspiracy*, xii; McManus, *Slavery in New York*, 128-29; Kenneth Scott, "The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712," *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 45 (Jan. 1961), 43-74. Historian Timothy Lockley found similar concerns about illegal interracial activities reflected in laws and criminal prosecutions in low country Georgia during the era of the Revolution and early republic. From these records, he concluded that an extensive trade existed between slaves and white shopkeepers. Timothy J. Lockley, "Partners in Crime: African Americans and Non-slaveholding Whites in Antebellum Georgia," in Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, eds., *White Trash: Race and Class in America* (New York, 1997), 57-72.

[10] Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (1980; rev. ed., New York, 1995), 51; Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 25 (July 1968), 371-407.

in Boston, inflation and high unemployment sparked riots by "young People, Servants and Negroes," riots that eventually forced changes in the way goods were marketed. Similarly, economic depression following the French and Indian War in 1763 brought mobs of laborers and sailors to the streets to protest such British regulations as the Stamp Act. Even more established workers and a few prosperous people joined to express these complaints against the crown. Revolutionary leaders recognized the power and usefulness of the interracial mobs. A tavern in New York City run by a West Indian mulatto called Black Sam Fraunces served as headquarters for violent opposition to the Stamp Act. By 1770, another Boston interracial mob action expressing revolutionary discontent became enshrined as the "Boston Massacre." John Adams, expressing no surprise, identified Crispus Attucks, a sailor and fugitive from slavery in Massachusetts, as the leader. Attucks, one of the three Americans killed, became celebrated as the first martyr in the struggle for independence.[11]

As revolutionary actions moved from urban disorder to armed confrontation, blacks and whites continued to stand together. Among the minutemen who faced the British in Lexington in April 1775 was Peter Salem, freed from slavery to serve in the militia. A number of other African Americans in that battle included those whose names, Pompy, Prince, and Cato, indicated their former enslavement. Other blacks were among those who engaged the British at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and one, Salem Poor, was recognized for his heroism. Southerners, however, objected to the inclusion of African-American soldiers in the Continental army, believing their participation expressed a dangerous equality. Equally ominous, no doubt, was the prospect of an organized interracial military force in areas with large numbers of slaves. Efforts to discharge blacks already serving failed, but initially, southern protestations managed to prevent enlisting any others.[12]

Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, understood southerners' views and believed that a defeat by black troops would humiliate them, and so he began recruiting blacks in 1775. His promise of freedom to slaves and servants willing to fight with the British Ethiopian Regiment was highly successful. It also encouraged many women and children to seek refuge with British forces, depriving the South of thousands of laborers. Historians have estimated that as many as 100,000 left southern plantations

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[11] Benjamin Colman to Mr. Samuel Holden, May 8, 1737, quoted in Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 46, 53; Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763-1834* (Chapel Hill, 1987).

[12] Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 59.

for British protection, but most did not obtain their freedom. Over 1,000 blacks served the British army, and the approximately 800 African Americans who fought in Dunmore's regiment earned their freedom.[13]

Difficulties recruiting troops, short-term militia enlistments for white soldiers, the length of the war, and Dunmore's embarrassing strategy combined to force the Continental Congress to reconsider African-American recruitment. In 1776, New York slaveowners began to place slaves in the state militia to serve in their stead. Attempting to fill quotas, other states soon followed. Jack Anthony, a slave in Connecticut, enlisted in 1777 and earned his freedom by serving for the duration of the war in the place of his owner Nathan Dibble and his son Eli. London Hazard, a slave from Rhode Island, served for his owner and several of his owner's relatives. Rhode Island's William Wanton earned his freedom by serving from 1777 until the end of the war, replacing a number of white townsmen.[14]

Except for South Carolina and Georgia, even southern states enlisted African Americans. Throughout the Continental army, however, blacks were more likely to be placed as laborers, servants, cooks, wagon drivers, or drummers. Like southerners, many northern officers were disturbed by black soldiers and white soldiers serving together in apparent equality. Yet, there were many accounts of black soldiers and sailors serving with bravery and distinction. They served mainly in integrated units but also in three black regiments commanded by white officers. More than 5,000 African Americans fought with the Continental army and navy during the Revolution. Some gained freedom by agreements with masters, some in return for extended service, and some as an initial condition of their service. Ironically, a few black veterans returned to slavery after helping win America's freedom.[15]

African Americans believed that service in the Revolution had earned them the right to freedom in the new nation. They also felt entitled to equal citizenship under the principles of liberty and natural rights that formed the nation's philosophical foundation. Blacks, they argued, had been invaluable to America's development, were part of its cultural and religious life, and had worked side-by-side with whites. Though profoundly handicapped by enslavement, many had achieved freedom and had proven themselves to be productive workers. Most remained in a subordinate status, but their ranks included a few of remarkable achievement: success-

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[13] *Ibid.*, 60, 62, 71.
[14] *Ibid.*, 64-65.
[15] *Ibid.*, 65, 71.

ful entrepreneurs, preachers of great spiritual gifts, musicians of recognized ability, a published poet, a noted mathematician and astronomer. As they had agitated for political change before the war, they began to petition the new government for slavery's abolition and for full citizenship rights.

African Americans had few illusions about their prospects. Despite revolutionary rhetoric, they knew that opinion among America's leaders was divided. In 1765, Bostonian James Otis had argued that all colonists, "black and white, born here, are free born British Subjects, and entitled to all the essential civil rights of such." Thomas Jefferson, on the other hand, expressed doubts about blacks' capabilities, feared their vengeance, and believed, if freed, they could not be settled in America. Blacks remembered years of slave petitions that had met with no response. In 1773, Peter Bestes, Sambo Freeman, Felix Holbrook, and Chester Joie, representing Massachusetts slaves, modestly proposed that they be allowed one day a week to work to earn money to purchase their own freedom. They had noted that even the Spanish, who lacked the Americans' lofty principles, allowed their slaves this privilege. These petitioners even accepted the idea of special regulations applying only to freed slaves until they were able to leave the country, but they received no satisfaction. In 1774, another group of petitioners had called upon the principles of the Revolution in a "free and christian country," declared their religious convictions, and appealed to the authorities' reverence for marriage and family. Prince Whipple, who had fought alongside General George Washington in 1776, joined eighteen others in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1779 to petition for freedom "for the sake of justice, humanity, and the rights of mankind." They eloquently declared that "the God of nature gave them life and freedom, upon the terms of the most perfect equality with other men; That freedom is an inherent right of the human species, not to be surrendered but by consent."[16]

There was some reason for optimism. Not only was the rhetoric of the patriots replete with condemnations of slavery and assertions of natural God-given rights, but wartime actions in northern states seemed to promise slavery's demise. Vermont's 1777 constitution stated the conviction that "all men [were] born equally free and independent," outlawed slavery, and prohibited servitude past the age of twenty-one for males and eighteen for females. Legislatures in Massachusetts in 1777, New Jersey in 1778, and Rhode Island in 1779 discussed abolition. According to early constitutions

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[16] James Otis, *The Rights of British Colonies Asserted and Proved* (Boston, 1764), 37; Sidney Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution, 1770-1800* (Greenwich, CT, 1973), 13, 27.

in northern states, black men who met the property requirements could vote on an equal basis with white men. The ranks of free blacks grew as people gained freedom legally in exchange for military service, effectively as a result of war's dislocations, or privately as masters fighting for liberty heeded their consciences. Quok Walker sued for his freedom, and in 1783 the chief justice of the Massachusetts supreme court declared that slavery was not consistent with the state's constitution. The bill of rights in Massachusetts's 1780 constitution surpassed the Declaration of Independence by declaring that "all men are born free and equal," and assured them "the right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberty." Discussions at the Constitutional Congress indicated that sentiment against slavery even extended to such southern plantation states as Virginia.[17]

African Americans' hopes and fears both were vindicated as it became clear that there would be no clear-cut national victory over slavery. Compromise left the institution's future to state actions while protecting slaveholders' rights to human property. The Congress debated banning slave importations, but they ended by protecting the trade for another twenty years. Yet, northern white artisans, strongly influenced by black craftsmen, generally supported abolition.[18]

Responding to black actions, petitions, and efforts by white abolitionists, freedom marched unsteadily across the North. Although Vermont's constitution had explicitly abolished slavery, and the courts had declared slavery unconstitutional in Massachusetts, there remained uncertainty. As historian Joanne Pope Melish has noted, the status and condition of freed slaves in Massachusetts likely depended on the self-assertion of the former slave and the goodwill of the master for some time after the courts' declaration. By the first census in 1790, however, Massachusetts reported no slaves. In New Hampshire, there was some disagreement about whether or not the state's Declaration of Rights of 1788 outlawed slavery. The number of people recorded as slaves there quickly dwindled from about 150 in 1790 to 8 in 1800.[19]

In other states with larger numbers of slaves, abolition represented a potentially greater economic dislocation, slaveholders wielded greater political power, and freedom was even more ambiguous.

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[17] Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 71; McManus, *Black Bondage*, 164.

[18] Particularly high numbers of African Americans worked in urban crafts in the early years of the Republic, about fourteen percent of black males in Philadelphia and thirty-eight percent of free black male household heads in New York, for example. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 25; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*.

[19] Gary B. Nash, *Race and Revolution* (Madison, WI, 1990); Melish, *Disowning Slavery*; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 72.

Table 1
Slave Populations in the North

	1775	1790	1800	1810
New York	15,000	21,193	20,903	15,017
Pennsylvania	10,000	3,707	1,706	795
Delaware	9,000	8,887	6,153	4,177
New Jersey	7,600	11,423	12,422	10,851
Connecticut	5,000	2,648	951	310
Rhode Island	4,373	958	380	108
Massachusetts	3,500	0	0	0
New Hampshire	629	157	8	0
Vermont	NA	0	0	0
Total	55,102	48,973	42,523	31,258

Source: Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 81; *Negro Population in the United States*, 57.

Strong postwar abolitionist sentiment in the 1780s and 1790s forced consideration of the question. Where slaveholders were strongest, debate centered on the issues of compensation for the loss of slave property, the problems of postemancipation dependence, particularly for elderly ex-slaves, potential economic disruption, and threats to the social order. Legislatures refused direct compensation, but Pennsylvania in 1780, Connecticut and Rhode Island in 1784, New York in 1799, and New Jersey in 1804 all developed gradual emancipation plans. These plans minimized disruption to the labor system and did provide a kind of compensation to slaveholders. The laws assured slaveholders the lifetime labor of slaves in their possession. They also guaranteed slaveowners the uncompensated labor of children born to those slaves from the time of the law's effect until their adulthood or beyond. The children's indentures, actually a kind of limited-term slavery, lasted until the age of majority in Rhode Island, age twenty-five in Connecticut, age twenty-eight in Pennsylvania, and age

twenty-five for females and twenty-eight for males in New York and New Jersey.[20]

Slaveholders argued that they needed this unpaid labor to allow them to recoup the cost of caring for children born to their slaves. Maintaining slavery for the older slaves, others asserted, would save towns from supporting a large indigent freed slave population. Thus, economic safeguards for slaveowners and their communities allowed northern states to become "free states" while preserving slavery and black unfree labor far into the future. For example, barring any other action (or the Civil War), people born into slavery just before the emancipation laws could have reached age seventy, still in slavery, between 1849 and 1874. Assuming that enslaved women were capable of childbearing up to age fifty, these laws would have assured slaveowners unpaid laborers until 1845 in Rhode Island, 1857 in New York, 1858 in Pennsylvania, 1859 in Connecticut, and 1883 in New Jersey. As historians Gary Nash and Jean Sonderlund observed, such indentures made freedom more like a "limited form of slavery."[21]

As many as one-half to two-thirds of European immigrants to colonial America had come as indentured servants for limited terms, making many white workers part of the unfree colonial labor force. By the period of the

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[20] Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Generations of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA, 1998). These statutes were based on the same fear of free-black dependency as the harsh colonial Pennsylvania laws of 1726 that required the children of all free blacks to be indentured until age twenty-one for females and age twenty-four for males. Higginbotham, *Matter of Color*, 285.

[21] Higginbotham, *Matter of Color*; Gary B. Nash and Jean R. Soderlund, *Freedom By Degrees: Emancipation in Pennsylvania & Its Aftermath* (New York, 1991), 176. It is difficult to know what to call the labor arrangement of northern gradual emancipation. Since there were no individual contracts (governed instead by state laws), they were not entered into voluntarily, and the period of unfree labor was much longer than was customary for European indentures, it could be considered a kind of state-sponsored slavery. Labor conditions were similar to slavery, but the crucial differences of applying only to one generation and having a time limit seem to make it qualitatively different from slavery. Similar gradual emancipation arrangements later in the British West Indies, though of much shorter duration, were also without individual contracts and are referred to as apprenticeships or indentures (followed by imported contract laborers). For lack of a better term and to emphasize their standing between slavery and freedom, I have opted to call them indentures. For Caribbean black indentures, see Arthur L. Stinchcombe, *Sugar Island Slavery in the Age of Enlightenment: The Political Economy of the Caribbean World* (Princeton, 1995), 269-74; David Brion Davis, *Slavery and Human Progress* (New York, 1984), 122-24; and Claude Levy, *Emancipation, Sugar, and Federalism: Barbados and the West Indies, 1833-1876* (Gainesville, FL, 1980).

Revolution, however, indentured servitude for whites was rare; shortly thereafter long-term African-American indentures were introduced. Thus, in the North during the early republic, free white labor competed with free black labor, slave labor, and black indentured labor. In New York State, for example, in 1800 African Americans constituted less than six percent of the population; but they were concentrated in semiskilled and unskilled jobs, and two-thirds of the black workers competing mainly with lower-level white workers were slaves. By 1820, only 10,088 slaves were listed in the state's population, but many of the nearly 30,000 "free blacks" would have been unfree laborers old enough to compete with wage workers. (By then, they would have been as old as 21 years, the age at which an 1814 law freed both males and females from indentures.) In Pennsylvania, the number of slaves dwindled fairly rapidly, from about 10,000 before emancipation to 3,700 in 1790, 1,700 in 1800, fewer than 800 in 1810, and just over 200 by 1820. Yet, the more than 30,000 free blacks in 1820 would also have included many unpaid servants competing with free wage labor.[22]

Such competition with unpaid labor undoubtedly depressed all workers' wages, and there is some indication that the prospects for advancement for white workers were also adversely affected, at least initially. Although most black indentured workers were engaged in domestic work and manual labor, the proportion of African Americans in urban crafts was highest during and immediately after the Revolution. Historian Shane White traced the reliance of certain occupational groups in New York City on black live-in labor. Although it is impossible to distinguish between indentured servants and others in the "free black" census category, White's figures give some indication of the continued reliance of artisan households in particular on unfree labor. Some would have been domestic servants, but white laborers with ambitions as artisans were likely to have perceived slaves or black indentured servants in artisan households as unfair competition. Thus, it is not surprising that early trade organizations barred blacks from participation, or that the Philadelphia Abolition Society reported that one-third of the black male "mechanics and tradesmen" in that city were not able to work at their trades by 1838.[23]

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[22] Russell R. Menard, "Indentured Servitude," in Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, eds., *The Reader's Companion to American History* (Boston, 1991), 542-43; *Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915* (New York, 1968), 57; Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, 212.

[23] Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; White, *Somewhat More Independent*; Ignatiev, *Irish Became White*, 100.

Table 2

Slaves and Free Blacks in White Households in New York City, by Occupation of Male Head of Household

	Merchants			Artisans			Retailers		
	slave	free	total	slave	free	total	slave	free	total
1790	449	82	531	426	61	487	295	25	320
1800	724	398	1122	339	128	467	202	59	261
1810	301	438	739	215	307	522	125	151	276

Source: Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 7, 33, 39.

Although it is clear that New Yorkers' reliance on slave labor declined during these years, the extent to which they turned to free blacks as opposed to freed but indentured black workers is not. By 1817, New York State passed a law outlawing slavery altogether as of 1827. This meant, of course, that even the youngest of the 10,000 slaves freed by this measure had already reached age 28. Immediate, rather than gradual, emancipation also marked the end of forced indentures in the state. White also found a trend in New York City that was a portent for the future of black labor. In the gradual shift from slavery to freedom with metropolitan industrialization, employers and owners eventually relied on black workers less for skilled labor and more for unskilled labor and domestic work.[24]

[24] Zilversmit, *First Emancipation*, 213; White, *Somewhat More Independent*, 54. Since the law was retroactive, the last blacks to serve such indentures probably finished their service in 1838.

Important social and political changes also signaled a shift in the consequences of racial identity. Gordon Wood observed that social deference gave way to greater social equality during the revolutionary era. For African Americans, however, the transformation was somewhat different. The social deference that was the organizing principle of colonial society, and that often had operated to bring together blacks and whites at the bottom, gave way to stratification based more clearly on race as well as class. For northern blacks, the Revolution was a progressive force establishing their right to freedom, but the nature of that freedom and the issue of black social and political equality remained to be determined.[25]

Interracial mobs had advanced independence in colonial America, but when mobs continued their traditional political participation after the Revolution, the new authorities often saw them as a threat to order. Mobs continued to express popular opinion into the 1780s and 1790s, targeting, for example, grave-robbing doctors and medical students, houses of prostitution, financial speculators, and people kidnapping or failing to pay sailors. Authorities tolerated many such mob actions, but particularly violent disturbances or ones that directly challenged the government were likely to be put down with force. Authorities raised troops, for example, to quell the rebellion by Daniel Shays and his followers that threatened to shut down local courts in western Massachusetts in 1786. Interestingly, Bostonian and revolutionary war veteran Prince Hall offered the services of 700 black men to put down the angry mob of Massachusetts farmers, but the government declined their aid.

There were, however, some mobs that were different in both nature and function from the colonial mobs. As urban black communities grew, African Americans, their churches, and schools became targets for harassment and attack by white mobs. In the 1790s, Prince Hall decried attacks by ruffians and mobs of "shameless, low-lived envious spiteful persons" on black people who ventured onto the Boston Common. In 1807 in New York City, African Americans complained to city officials that young pranksters and white mobs repeatedly disrupted church services. Attacks on black street vendors and black churches were common in Philadelphia. In the early 1800s, a mob of about sixty young white butchers, ropemakers, carpenters, plasterers, and bakers disrupted a black

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[25] Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992).

church service in Philadelphia, physically attacking members of the congregation and forcing them to escape through the windows.[26]

White mob attacks on urban black community institutions were part of a new pattern of rioting apparent after 1812, described by historian Paul Gilje. These riots pitted members of the community against each other on the basis of differences in race, ethnicity, or religion, rather than uniting the community around common concerns as had colonial mobs. Attacks on black communities became even more common and larger in scale in the 1820s and 1830s. Joanne Pope Melish and James Stewart have placed this violence in context, greatly enhancing our understanding of its causes and consequences and drawing out its implications for racial identity and abolitionist strategies. Such riots occurred in Philadelphia and Cincinnati in 1829. The riot in Cincinnati reportedly drove hundreds of black people out of the city, many to Canada. There were at least nine race riots in Philadelphia between 1834 and 1838. In 1834, "several hundred young white men" invaded the black community, killed two African Americans, and destroyed two churches and twenty homes. An official report laid the riot to whites' fears that blacks were receiving favored treatment in hiring. Rioters often expressed antiabolitionist sentiments, but complaints that blacks were taking jobs away from whites were commonly voiced motivations for increasingly violent attacks on African Americans. Ironically, restrictions on black voting actually made it less likely that African Americans would get political patronage jobs.[27]

Urban authorities had been concerned, as historian David Roediger noted, that early interracial celebrations brought together lower-class blacks and whites for dissipation and "lewd and lascivious behavior." Yet by the nineteenth century, they promised a different kind of disorder. On July 4, 1804, some young black men in Philadelphia formed an "ad hoc military group," cursed and pushed whites, and threatened rebellion. The following year, white mobs drove blacks from the Independence Day celebrations. In 1811, the Albany Common Council forestalled disorder and interracial socializing by banning Pinkster celebrations. By the late

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[26] Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 163; William Otter, Sen., *History of My Own Time* in Richard B. Stott, ed., *History of My Own Time/William Otter* (Ithaca, 1995), 114-17; Emma Jones Lapsansky, "Since They Got Those Separate Churches: Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," *American Quarterly*, 32 (Spring 1980), 54-79.

[27] Ignatiev, *Irish Became White*, 125; Paul Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington, IN, 1996), 60-90; Joanne Pope Melish, "The 'Condition' Debate and Racial Discourse in the Antebellum North," and James Brewer Stewart, "The Political Meanings of Color in the Free States, 1776-1840," both in this issue; Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*.

1820s, blacks had been barred from militia days in New York, Philadelphia, and New England and from Independence Day celebrations and Christmas processions in Philadelphia. In the early 1830s, Massachusetts and Connecticut moved their election days to the winter to discourage ancillary interracial festivities. The ban on interracial festivals made racial rapprochement less likely in the era of increasing conflicts. Blacks were still represented, however, by the young working-class white men who performed in blackface at such occasions, playing on racial stereotypes and widening the gulf between themselves and the black working class.[28]

At the same time that African Americans faced exclusion from formerly interracial cultural activities, their prospects for political participation also diminished. In the late eighteenth century, urban workers began to transform their fraternal organizations into political action groups. As they expressed political opinions in this sometimes more decorous manner, legislatures lowered property requirements for voting and office holding, and the number of voters increased in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and New Jersey. Hoping to discourage the excesses of the political mob, American leaders drew more of the working class into elections. By the mid-1820s, the abolition of property requirements had extended the right to vote to virtually all adult males. The advance of democracy, however, often was racially restricted. As northern slavery ended, the freedom that replaced it ushered many blacks into a newly instituted second-class black citizenship. African Americans lost the vote in 1807 in New Jersey, in 1814 in Connecticut, in 1822 in Rhode Island, and in 1842 in Pennsylvania. In 1821, New York removed property qualifications for white males but maintained residence and property requirements for black men. The debates in New York were passionate, and the votes were close. Advocates of restricting the suffrage to whites won by a vote of 63 to 59 in the constitutional convention. Each time this issue was revisited in the 1840s and 1860s, the vote in New York City, where Tammany Hall held sway and where African Americans were concentrated, was overwhelmingly against equal suffrage. In 1837, the editor of *The Colored American*, observed in protest:

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[28] Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 103; David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 328; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, MA, 1988); Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theater in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1986); Paul A. Gilje and Howard B. Rock, "'Sweep O! Sweep O!': African-American Chimney Sweeps and Citizenship in the New Nation," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 51 (July 1994), 507-38.

> Foreigners and aliens to the government and laws—strangers to our institutions are permitted to flock to this land, and in a few years are endowed with all the privileges of citizens; but we, native born Americans, the children of the soil, are most of us shut out.[29]

Historian Eric Foner has observed that in the early nineteenth century, freedom and citizenship were considered incompatible with dependence. Politicians argued that African Americans, indentured, enslaved, or identified with slavery, were incapable of independence and therefore not entitled to full citizenship. In this regard, they were classed with women and children whose dependence disqualified them from citizenship and who were represented by husbands and fathers. Though women did vote in New Jersey after the Revolution, they lost this right along with black men in 1807. A 1790 law limited naturalized citizenship to whites, but federal law did not stipulate voter qualifications, and so each state made its own determination.[30]

Scholars of race and class have discussed the rise of minstrel performances that satirized and demeaned African Americans during the 1820s—the same period during which blacks were being excluded from many of the cultural activities of industrializing urban America and from the more democratic politics. Broadsides ridiculed black organizations and

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[29] *The Colored American*, Mar. 4, 1837; Wood, *American Revolution;* Horton and Horton, *In Hope of Liberty*, 167-69; David N. Gellman, "'Sins of the Fathers': Unraveling Freedom and Slavery in New York's Constitution of 1821," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early Republic, Lexington, KY, July 17, 1999; David Quigley, "The Jim Crow North: New York City and the Legacies of 1821," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early Republic, Lexington, KY, July 17, 1999. See also David Nathaniel Gellman, "Inescapable Discourse: The Rhetoric of Slavery and the Politics of Abolition in Early National New York" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1997). For a nuanced discussion of debates on free black rights within an entrenched slave system in the Jacksonian South, see Lacy K. Ford, Jr., "Making the 'White Man's' Country White: Race, Slavery, and State-Building in the Jacksonian South," in this issue. Black suffrage was also eliminated in North Carolina and Tennessee, and blacks were generally excluded from political participation in the new western states.

[30] Eric Foner, "Free Labor and Political Ideology," in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, & Religious Expressions, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville, 1996), 99-127; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston, 1980), 191-93; Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961), 31. Also see Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be a Lady: Women & the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York, 1998); and Rosemarie Zagarri, "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 55 (Apr. 1998), 203-30.

activities as inept imitations of white society. Such indications of growing racism and attempts to circumscribe the place of African Americans are striking examples of a shifting ideology that was already visible early in the postrevolutionary period. Thomas Jefferson wrote his influential *Notes on Virginia* in 1782 and first published it privately in France in 1785. In this work, he reached the conclusion that blacks were naturally inferior to white people. David Walker was so enraged that he devoted most of article one of his *Appeal*, published a few years after Jefferson's death, to a discussion of Jefferson's contentions. Walker exhorted his readers to "remember that we are men as well as [whites] . . . . We have just as much right, in the sight of God, to hold them and their children in slavery and wretchedness, as they have to hold us, and no more." In Jefferson's argument for blacks' natural inferiority we can see the beginning of "racial modernity," that racist ideology based on assumptions of biological inferiority, that James Stewart has argued was common by the late 1830s and to which abolitionists would have to respond. As it developed, the assumption of black dependence becomes part of this supposedly natural inferiority, as Joanne Melish has so expertly show in her analysis of the "effacement" of the memory of slavery in New England.[31]

Of course, some interracial associations at the bottom of the society remained. Blacks and whites joined together in crime, vice, and disreputable entertainments. Social relationships were common between racial groups limited by poverty to residences in less-desirable neighborhoods, and political alliances remained among sailors. By the 1830s, a different kind of relationship joined people across both racial and class lines in political and social action, as radical white middle-class and upper-class abolitionists joined with middle-class and lower-class blacks in the antislavery movement. As free blacks in the North lost ground occupationally and politically, however, the working classes that had previously

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[31] David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal*, with an introduction by Charles M. Wiltse, (1829; rep., New York, 1965), 11; Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth Century America* (London, UK, 1990); Eric Lott, *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York, 1993); Shane White, "'It Was A Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *Journal of American History,* 81 (June 1994), 13-50; Melish, *Disowning Slavery*; James Brewer Stewart, "The Emergence of Racial Modernity and the Rise of the White North, 1790-1840," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 18 (Spring 1998), 181-217. For an insightful analysis of black leaders' and white Garrisonians' responses to these changes, see Stewart, "The Political Meanings of Color," in this issue.

formed effective political and social alliances were more likely to be divided by race.

In colonial America and in the early republic, working-class alliances had offered African Americans opportunities for political expression, and free blacks had some promise of occupational advancement. During the nineteenth century, social, political, and economic changes made race an even more important divider and a major determinant of political and economic prospects. Southerners under increasing attack from northern abolitionists developed justifications for slavery that contended blacks were innately inferior and naturally dependent. Many northerners subscribed to these theories and feared that disorder and dependency would accompany emancipation. In some states, these fears, slaveowners' economic interests, and Jacksonian political strategies shaped a gradual and limited black freedom that increased economic competition between unfree black workers and white workers, depressing wages, and exacerbating racial antagonisms.[32]

In a perceptive and sophisticated recent study, cultural historian Kenan Malik traces changes in the meaning of race. He argues that its modern meaning developed from the contradiction between an ideology of equality and the persistence of inequalities. Malik links the contradiction to the inherent conflicts between enlightenment ideals and the imperatives of capitalism that inevitably preserved and created inequality. Under the ideology of equality in a democratic and theoretically classless society, structured inequalities, according to Malik's argument, are typically explained by positing innate differences between groups. Such contradictions between theory and reality clearly existed after the Revolution. Northern states moved closer to the ideal with emancipation and universal white male suffrage. But the economic consequences of slavery, and, in some states, limited black citizenship and a system of unpaid black labor somewhere between slavery and freedom, made it more likely that inequalities would be explained by racial differences believed to be part of a "natural order."[33]

Thus African Americans in the North endured a period of racial reconstruction that confined them to a lesser citizenship, limited and sometimes diminished their economic opportunities, and confronted them

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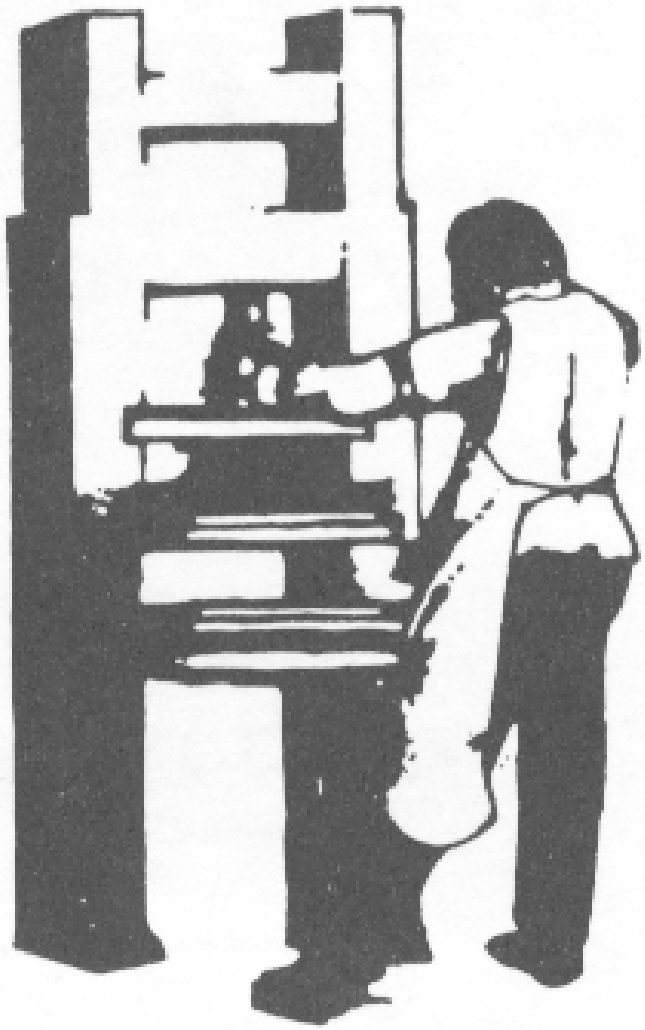
[32] The "effacement" of whites' memory of slavery in the North also contributed to the identification of blacks as a "naturally" dependent population. See Melish, "The 'Condition' Debate," in this volume.

[33] Kenan Malik, *The Meaning of Race: Race, History, and Culture in Western Society* (New York, 1996).

with theories contending their innate inferiority. They managed to make new alliances, but in interracial activities that crossed class lines they often endured the indignity of paternalistic treatment and were segregated even in some antislavery meetings. Northern free blacks knew that the enslavement of southern blacks affected their status, but they also knew that the dependent state of the northern African Americans still in slavery and long-term indentures bolstered arguments for excluding them from full citizenship. For them, the fight against slavery, actions to eliminate discrimination and racial distinctions, political organization, efforts for education and occupational training, and moral reform and racial uplift to combat racist ideologies were intertwined.



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