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## The Negroes of New York in the Emancipation Movement

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## THE NEGROES OF NEW YORK IN THE EMANCIPATION MOVEMENT\*

The Negroes of New York have an historical background which is rich in worthy tradition and achievement. Wherever the student of this subject turns he finds that there were in this state Negroes who were engaged in some worthy activity. Notable were these achievements in the organization of religion, education, economic life and every sphere of civic endeavor. At an early period in the nineteenth century, there were Negro citizens of the state who were in the vanguard of the Negro's cultural progress, manifesting extraordinary ability and active on the frontier between freedom and oppression.

Negroes were interested in the emancipation movement. This included the abolition of slavery and of civil restrictions. They participated in both endeavors and militantly advanced the cause of freedom. In the face of the denial of practically all of the economic and political privileges which are enjoyed today, they protested in their conventions and as individuals and organizations attacked these disabilities. They fought for economic opportunity, the right to make a living, to live in respectable sections of the city, to ride without discrimination on the railroads and the street cars—in short, they struggled valiantly for the recognition which other racial elements had in this country.

Actual revolution has not been common to enslaved peoples in any historical period—whatever their race. This is as true of Anglo-Saxon slaves in Rome as of so-called Aryan slaves in Germany. The love of liberty knows no color. It is as foolish and illogical to say that black men in slavery were satisfied with bondage and persecution as

\* A paper read at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, New York City, November 12, 1938. Acknowledgment is made of a grant-in-aid from the Social Science Research Council which made possible the collection of some of the materials presented in the following pages.

it is to say that white men were satisfied when they were enslaved.

In spite of the generally lowered economic conditions of the Negro masses, as early as 1818 and 1819, there were one hundred Negro families in New York City who were reported with a capital of at least ten thousand dollars a family. It was also said that in 1821 there were over one hundred Negro families in New York who could pay the tax of \$250 placed upon the Negro voters.<sup>1</sup> The New York African Free School, organized by the Manumission Society in 1787, had given impetus to the advancement of the Negro's educational status. Hundreds of free Negroes had been educated by this school.<sup>2</sup> The rise of the independent Negro churches, the organization of the Free African Society for Mutual Relief in 1808, of literary societies and of the first African Theater in 1821 were additional indications of the progress of the New York Negro population.

The opinion which has prevailed for years that Negroes, in spite of their individual and group progress, contributed nothing of importance towards the abolition movement and the accomplishment of their own freedom is not corroborated by historical facts. The Negroes of New York were represented by active participants in the emancipation movement. They were allied with the anti-slavery organizations and in many instances initiated independent activities for the freedom and relief of the Negro population. They devoted their lives as courageously and unselfishly to the cause of freedom as did the white abolitionists. They were active in the amelioration of the condition of the slaves. They helped to finance the abolition movement. They subscribed to and supported anti-slavery newspapers with subsidies and conducted newspapers of their own. They assisted in paying the salaries of anti-

<sup>1</sup> *Rights of All*, No. 1, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> C. C. Andrews, *The History of the New York African Free Schools*. N. Y., 1830, pp. 28 ff; C. G. Woodson, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*, pp. 97-99.

slavery lecturers. They organized societies with abolition purposes, and they joined with movements for freedom in their local communities.

It is of interest to observe that the spirit of freedom had been present in the state of New York prior to the rise of Garrisonian abolition. The New York Abolition Society, formed under the name of "A Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves and Protecting such of them as have been or may be liberated," was established in 1785 with John Jay as President. This society was formed for the purpose of "mitigating the evils of slavery, to defend the rights of the blacks and especially to give them the elements of education." Its work was confined primarily to the drafting of memorials to Congress and the state legislatures and the extension of relief to free Negroes. In 1793, the New York Manumission Society made the proposal for a convention at Philadelphia of the delegates of all of the abolition societies in order to prepare a memorial to Congress. The following year representatives from nine abolition societies assembled and drew up memorials to Congress and the state legislatures.<sup>3</sup> The efforts of these societies were directed mainly in the early years to the restriction of the foreign slave trade.<sup>4</sup> Efforts were made to prevent the rise of antagonism to the society's purposes and to direct appeals to reason and conscience. Although the convention declared that it hoped that the labors of the societies would not cease "while there exists a single slave in the United States," it also declared that it had no intention of violating the "nominal rights of property."<sup>5</sup> In this respect the program of these abolition societies of the eighteenth century differed from that

<sup>3</sup> *American Convention of Abolition Societies. Minutes of the Proceedings of a Convention of Delegates from the Abolition Societies established in different parts of the United States, assembled at Philadelphia on the first day of January, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-four.* Philadelphia, 1794.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Address to the People of the United States, American Convention of Abolition Societies, 1804*, p. 7.

of the abolition societies of the nineteenth century. The anti-slavery movement prior to 1831 was tempered by caution and expediency.

A significant part of the work of these early societies was the presentation of memorials to the legislature. Several ameliorating laws were passed by the legislature following the receipt of memorials from the New York Manumission Society. In 1808 the legislature increased the penalties against the kidnapping of slaves. In 1810 the importation of slaves by residents of New York was prohibited. In 1814 two regiments of colored soldiers with white commissioned officers were authorized by the legislature. The slaves were to be enlisted with the consent of their masters and discharged after their manumission.<sup>6</sup> A gradual emancipation act was passed by the assembly in 1799 and was amended in 1817 by an abolition act providing that on July 4, 1827, "every Negro, mulatto or mustee within this state, born before the fourth of July, 1790, be free," and that "all Negroes, mulattoes and mustees born after July 4, 1790, shall be free—males at the age of 28 years and females at the age of 25 years." An additional act was passed in 1828 referring to all slaves and providing that all persons born in the state, white or colored, were free and that those brought into the state as slaves were also to be freed.<sup>7</sup> New York thus became a free state and ten thousand former slaves became physically free in 1828.

This achievement in the march towards freedom was aided by the Negroes themselves. They associated themselves with the whites who were advocates of freedom and also showed gratitude for the efforts of their friends. These relationships dated from the period of the agitation for the abolition of the slave trade. Early in 1806, Peter Williams, Jr., addressed a letter under date of January 6, 1806, to the abolition societies expressing gratitude to them

<sup>6</sup> J. C. Hurd, *The Law of Freedom and Bondage*, Vol. II, pp. 54-55.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

for their "indefatigable zeal . . . in liberating from bondage an oppressed people."<sup>8</sup> After the slave trade was abolished in 1807, he delivered an oration thereupon in the African Church in New York City, January 1, 1808. This address was printed and carried the following dedication:

"To the Different Societies for the Abolition of Slavery, this oration is humbly inscribed as a tribute of sincere gratitude for their assiduous, energetic and benevolent exertions in the cause of injured humanity."<sup>9</sup>

This dedication is an early nineteenth century indication of the Negro's interest in the work of emancipation. There were similar evidences of such activity in the years between 1808 and 1828.

The census of 1820 reported in New York 10,088 slaves, 29,279 free Negroes of a total of 39,367 Negroes, and 1,333,445 whites. By 1830 there were only 75 slaves, the free Negro class had increased to 44,945 and the white population was 1,873,663.<sup>10</sup> New York City had a free Negro population of 14,083 in 1830, Philadelphia had 9,796 and Boston, 1,875. Although free, the status of these Negroes was that of persons who were only half citizens.<sup>11</sup> Special restrictions were placed upon their exercise of suffrage by laws in 1813 and 1815. They had the right to engage in labor and trade and to own property. Accepting the opportunities which came to them and making use of them, there were Negroes who carved out economic security for themselves. The occupations represented among

<sup>8</sup> *Minutes of the Convention of Abolition Societies*. 11th Ses., January 13-15, 1806. Appendix, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Williams, *An Oration on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, delivered in the African Church in the City of New York*. January 1, 1808, New York, 1808.

<sup>10</sup> *Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915*. p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> See also, Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man; the Status of the Negro in New York*, N. Y., 1911; A. H. Payne, "The Negro in New York Prior to 1860," Master's thesis, Howard University, *The Howard Review*, June, 1923; James Weldon Johnson, *Black Manhattan*, N. Y., 1930.

them were blacksmiths, barbers, brick-makers, bricklayers, coopers, cabinet-makers, millers, plasterers, confectioners, bakers, cooks, fishermen, pilots, seamstresses, household servants, preachers, teachers and physicians. In spite of these evidences of advancement, there were many Negroes who were shiftless, lazy and improvident. Fleeing from slavery in Southern sections, in which they were subject to forced labor, and arriving in cities where Negroes were free, they easily drifted into idleness. These persons, however, constituted only a small proportion of the entire Negro population. Some observers who saw these members of the Negro population concluded that this was the typical condition of all free Negroes.<sup>12</sup>

A group consciousness had been slowly developing among the free Negroes of New York, and particularly among those who lived in the urban centers. Churches and schools assisted in this development. The spirit of freedom was actively present among them. This spirit ran all the way from protest and organization to open revolt and insurrection.<sup>13</sup>

One of the first evidences of this activity was the publication in New York in 1827 of *Freedom's Journal*. It was the first periodical published by Negroes in the United States. The first issue appeared on March 16, 1827, and continued for approximately two years.<sup>14</sup> It was published every Friday from No. 5 Varick Street. The *Journal* was a newspaper and a magazine combined. News, special

<sup>12</sup> Cf. George E. Haynes, *The Negro at Work in New York City*, New York, 1912; A. G. Lindsay, "The Economic Condition of the Negroes in New York Prior to 1861," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. III.

<sup>13</sup> The Negro Insurrection of 1712 is described in *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Vol. V, p. 341 ff., and the insurrection of 1741 in Daniel Horsmandan, *The New York Conspiracy*; or *A History of the Negro Plot, with the journal of the Proceedings against the conspirators at New York in the years 1741-42*. New York, 1810.

<sup>14</sup> *Freedom's Journal*, March 30, 1827. For a full discussion of this journal see Bella Gross: "Freedom's Journal and the Rights of All," *Journal of Negro History*, July, 1932, Vol. XVII, No. 3, pp. 241-286.

articles and correspondence were scattered through its pages. The editors were two young Negroes, Samuel E. Cornish, as senior editor, and John B. Russwurm as junior editor. The Prospectus stated that the object of the publication was not to raise controversy but to endeavor to be a champion in defense of oppressed humanity. It declared, "Daily slandered, we think that there ought to be some channel of communion between us and the public through which a single voice may be heard in defense of five hundred thousand free people of colour." After the first issue the paper turned its attention to colonization. Cornish, the editor, stated in the March 30th issue concerning the Colonization Society, "I do not believe that our southern brethren in general intend to do anything more than to provide a sort of safety valve by this Society to serve as an outlet for their free blacks and supernumeraries."

*Freedom's Journal* was the beginning of a race conscious movement which culminated in the Negro Conventions and laid the basis for the abolition movement. It made its appearance nearly four years prior to *The Liberator*. Societies and clubs were organized to support the paper. The Free African Schools had given the opportunity to hundreds to obtain an education. Many of them were artisans and middle class folk who were able to maintain a paper. Agents for the paper were located in Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, North Carolina, Upper Canada, England and Hayti.

When *Freedom's Journal* suspended publication in 1829, Samuel Cornish launched in New York City another paper, *The Rights of All*, on May 29, 1829. Only six issues of this paper have been discovered. Cornish undertook to use the new paper as a weapon against colonization and to fight prejudice which he regarded as "not against color but against condition." In this respect, Cornish, although trained for the ministry, was the first of the Negro leaders of the nineteenth century to regard the economic approach



rather than the sentimental or the religious approaches as basic in the attitudes toward the Negro population. *Freedom's Journal* and *The Rights of All* were the precursors of the Abolition Movement among Negroes. They were the first public evidences that there were Negroes who were dissatisfied with slavery, colonization and color prejudice.

The publication of these papers, the traveling agents who were sent among the free Negroes and the correspondence between the Negro societies led to the development of a group consciousness which represented a new era in Negro life and laid the basis for the American Abolition Movement. Among the supporters of these papers and later ones were the members of the literary societies.<sup>15</sup> The principal ones were the New York Philomathean Society, organized in 1830 under the leadership of Peter Ogden, which later became the Lodge of Odd Fellows, and the Phoenix Society, organized in 1833, which was organized "to promote the improvement of the coloured people in morals, literature, and the mechanical arts."<sup>16</sup> Other societies were organized for literary purposes and the mutual advancement of their members.

This new era in Negro life may be divided into three periods: (1) "The Early Convention Period;" (2) "The Negro Abolitionists and their Activities;" and (3) "The Struggle for Political Emancipation."

#### THE EARLY CONVENTION PERIOD

The first general convention of Negroes in the United States met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September

<sup>15</sup> Dorothy B. Porter, "The Organized Educational Activities of Negro Literary Societies, 1828-1846," *Journal of Negro Education*, October, 1936, pp. 555-576.

<sup>16</sup> *Colored American*, July 8, 1837; Charles B. Wilson, *The Official Manual and History of the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows in America*, p. 17, Philadelphia, 1894; *Constitution and By-Laws of the Phoenix Society of New York*, New York, 1835.

15, 1840. The New York delegates were Austin Steward, James W. C. Pennington and a Mr. Adams of Brooklyn.<sup>17</sup> These New Yorkers had been active in the origination of the convention idea. It was mainly the leadership and prior activity of Richard Allen, who lived in Philadelphia, which caused the selection of this city for this meeting.<sup>18</sup> A printed circular proposing a convention in New York City, signed by Peter Williams, Peter Volgelsang and Thomas L. Jennings, of this city, was shown to Richard Allen, who acted quickly and issued the call for Philadelphia, prior to action by the New Yorkers. This Convention protested against the program of the American Colonization Society. Resolutions were passed dealing with education, industry and agriculture. A permanent organization, the American Society for Free Persons of Colour, was established for improving the condition of Negroes and for the establishment of a Negro settlement in Upper Canada.<sup>19</sup>

The next convention met in Philadelphia on the first Monday in June 1831, with delegates from New York again present. The most important item in the discussions of the convention, aside from the resolutions concerning slavery and freedom, was the plan to establish a college for Negroes on the manual labor plan. The Annual Convention of Colored People met for the next year at Philadelphia, June 4-15, 1832, with eight states represented by thirty delegates. Five of these delegates were from the state of New York. The following year another convention assembled from June 3 to 13 in Philadelphia in 1833 with

<sup>17</sup> *The Liberator*, October 23, 1831; "First Colored Convention," *Anglo-African Magazine*, Vol. I, No. 10, October, 1859, pp. 305-310.

<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Wesley, *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>19</sup> *Anglo-African Magazine*, op. cit.; John Cromwell, *Early Negro Convention Movement in America*, p. 8; Occasional Papers, No. 9, Negro Academy, Washington, 1921; *The Liberator*, April 1, 1833; *The Emancipator*, June 8, 1833; Harriette R. Short, *Negro Conventions Prior to 1860* (unpublished Master's thesis, Howard University, 1936); Thaddenia O. House, *Anti-Slavery Activities of Negroes in New York, 1830-1860* (unpublished Master's thesis, Howard University, 1936).

fifteen delegates from New York present. John G. Stewart, of Albany, was second vice-president; Ransom F. Wake, of New York City, was secretary; and Henry Ogden, of New York City, assistant secretary. During these four years, 1830 to 1833, the convention deliberations were dominated by the Philadelphians. However, a local convention met in New York City in 1833. Thomas L. Jennings was chairman. The main objective of the convention was declared to be the immediate emancipation of the slaves and the moral and intellectual improvement of the free Negroes. This convention also endorsed the mission of William Lloyd Garrison to England in order to set forth "the real condition of the colored man in the United States and to counteract the insidious and false representations of Mr. Elliot Cresson, agent of the American Colonization Society."<sup>20</sup> These conventions under Negro leadership antedated the anti-slavery conventions and the organization of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

The next convention assembled in New York in 1834.<sup>21</sup> This convention was under the leadership of the New Yorkers. Henry Sipkins, of New York, was elected president; William Hamilton, of New York, was chosen one of the vice-presidents and Benjamin F. Hughes, also of New York, secretary. The cause of abolition received major attention at this convention. The resolution on this subject stated that since slavery was regarded as contrary to the precepts of Christianity and dangerous to the liberties of the country it should be abolished immediately. It was agreed that all means sanctioned by law, humanity and religion should be used to abolish slavery, to improve the character of the free Negroes and to secure for them "equal civil and political rights and privileges with the

<sup>20</sup> *Minutes and Proceedings of the Third Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color*, Philadelphia, 1833; *Minutes of the Fourth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Color*, New York, 1834.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1834.

whites." Cooperation was urged with the anti-slavery societies.<sup>22</sup> Addresses were delivered and resolutions were adopted urging support for the Prudence Crandall School, the appointment of a day of prayer for the welfare of the Negroes, the establishment of societies for moral reform and temperance, the organization of Phoenix societies, the patronage of those conveyances and establishments which granted the Negroes equal privileges for the money they expended, and opposition to the objects of the American Colonization Society. It was declared that slavery should be immediately abolished and approval and cooperation were voted for the work of the New England Anti-Slavery Society.

In the succeeding years from 1830 to 1837 these annual national conventions were continued. The Convention of 1837 was the last of the series. After that period up to the Civil War, the conventions were irregular. But scarcely a year passed without some convention assembling. Some of these were local and others were national. Through these inter-state conventions, the Negro leaders were manifesting interest and activity in the anti-slavery struggle and in the improvement of the status of the free Negro population.<sup>23</sup> These conventions were addressed and visited by distinguished leaders in the anti-slavery movement. Among these were William Lloyd Garrison, S. S. Jocelyn, Arthur Tappan and Lewis Tappan and others who were active participants in the struggle against slavery.

In the meantime, during the meeting of these independent Negro conventions, were assembling anti-slavery conventions in which Negroes were active participants. When the American Anti-Slavery Society was established in Philadelphia, its constitution stated that the organization was not only to combat slavery but also "to elevate

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel R. Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, p. 44.

the character and condition of the people of color by encouraging their intellectual, moral and religious improvement, and by removing public prejudice, that thus they may, according to their intellectual and moral worth, share an equality with the whites of civil and religious privileges." These sentiments appealed to the Negro population and they responded with their membership and their activity in the movement. A Declaration of Sentiment was issued by this first meeting in 1833. It was signed by sixty-two persons and among these were three Negroes.

The subscription list of *The Liberator* showed many Negroes. They were contributors to the very first issue. Garrison featured in this issue an appeal to the "Free Colored Brethren" in which he expressed the opinion that "some patronage may be given" to *The Liberator*. This expectation was realized in the first year of the existence of the paper, for Garrison stated that there were 50 white subscribers and 400 Negro subscribers.<sup>24</sup> He reported, in 1833, that there were one thousand Negro subscribers to *The Liberator*, and that they were "more punctual in their payments than any five hundred white subscribers whose names were placed indiscriminately in my subscription book."<sup>25</sup> In the same year a group of Negroes in New York City resolved that they would use every effort to procure subscriptions for *The Liberator*.

When Garrison was planning his trip to England, he appealed to the New England Anti-Slavery Society and to his Negro subscribers to *The Liberator*. His mission was approved and money was contributed by the Society and by the Negroes for the payment of his fare one way to England.<sup>26</sup> When the time came for him to leave England,

<sup>24</sup> *Liberator*, January 3, 1835; March 7, 1835; "Shall the Liberator Die?" (circular), 1837.

<sup>25</sup> *Speeches Delivered at the Anti-Colonization Meeting in Exeter Hall, London*, July 13, 1833, p. 11, Boston, 1833.

<sup>26</sup> *The Liberator*, Vol. III, p. 179.

having no funds for the expense of his passage, he borrowed two hundred dollars from the Rev. Nathaniel Paul, a Negro clergyman of Albany, New York.<sup>27</sup>

The agents of *The Liberator* were active in New York City which stood second on the list of subscribers by cities. In 1835, Garrison gratefully acknowledged in *The Liberator* the receipt of seventeen dollars from David Ruggles as a donation to the paper from "an association of ladies in New York." Mrs. Hester Lane and Mrs. Elizabeth Wright acted for the association.

The support of Garrison and *The Liberator* by the free Negroes of New York was paralleled by their continued activity in the Anti-Slavery Movement. The First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1834 lists four Negroes from New York as members of the Board of Managers. They were Samuel E. Cornish, Theodore S. Wright, Christopher Rush and Peter Williams.<sup>28</sup> The names of three of these, Samuel E. Cornish, Peter Williams and Theodore S. Wright, were placed upon the Executive Committee of twelve, of which Arthur Tappan was the chairman.

When the second annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society took place in New York, May 12, 1835, the roll of delegates included several Negro delegates. From New York City, there came Theodore S. Wright, Peter Williams, Christopher Rush and Samuel E. Cornish. An address to the auxiliaries and friends issued by the Executive Committee of this Society was signed by two Negroes among the list of ten names. These

<sup>27</sup> *The Liberator*, Vol. II, No. 2, December 31, 1832; Vol. III, p. 179; Gilbert Barnes, *Anti-Slavery Impulse* (p. 24), quotes from a letter, Garrison to Lewis Tappan, which states, "It was exceedingly kind and truly reasonable in Brother Paul to lend the money to me so that I could return home without begging."

<sup>28</sup> *First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, May 6, 1834, pp. 35-36.

two were Samuel Cornish and Theodore S. Wright.<sup>29</sup> The former was selected as one of the five delegates to the New England Anti-Slavery Society.

At the next annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, May 10, 1836, Wright, Rush, Cornish and William Allen were again present and were members of the Board of Managers of the Society. Associated with these men were Thomas Van Rensselaer. Wright made a motion during the session that the auxiliary societies of the organization appoint standing committees for the purpose of introducing the free colored people to the "useful arts" and especially those who were desirous of learning and becoming apprentices.<sup>30</sup> He was appointed as one of eight delegates to the New England Anti-Slavery Convention. In the same year, an appeal was addressed by the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society to the People of the United States concerning the Right of Petition, then under discussion in the Congress of the United States. This appeal was signed by the Executive Committee, twelve in number, and among these signers were Samuel E. Cornish and Theodore S. Wright.<sup>31</sup> These two persons with William Johnston were members of the Executive Committee of the Evangelical Union Anti-Slavery Society. William Johnston was the treasurer of the Society.<sup>32</sup> At the fourth annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the Negroes who were present were Theodore S. Wright, William P. Johnston, Philip A. Bell and Thomas Van Rensselaer. Wright and Cornish were again members of the Executive Committee of Twelve. Dr. James McCune Smith, a Negro physician of New York City, was one of the two auditors

<sup>29</sup> *The Emancipator-Extra*, June 16, 1835; *Second Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 1835, pp. 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 1836. p. 27.

<sup>31</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Examiner*, August, 1836, Vol. I, No. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Address, *The Evangelical Union Anti-Slavery Society of New York to the Churches of Jesus Christ*, p. 51.

of the books of the Treasurer of the fifth annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>33</sup>

Local and state-wide anti-slavery organizations were supported by Negroes during this period. In Rochester and New York City there were Female Anti-Slavery Societies organized by Negro women. Geneva and Albany listed Negro anti-slavery societies as auxiliaries of the American Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>34</sup> The United Anti-Slavery Society of New York City, not only passed the usual resolutions and listened to addresses but also sent delegates to the fourth anniversary of the American Anti-Slavery Society. These delegates were John Avin, Philip A. Bell, Thomas Van Rensselaer, Henry Graves and James Fields. Meetings were held also to oppose colonization as well as to encourage the abolition of slavery. Such a meeting was held at Catskill, New York, in 1833 with Robert Jackson as chairman and Morton Cross as secretary. The colonization plan was defined and denounced as "one of the wildest schemes ever devised by human beings or patronized by a body of enlightened men."<sup>35</sup> Other societies also opposed colonization. Individuals wrote letters to *The Liberator* and to newspapers revealing antagonistic attitudes towards the objectives of the Colonization Society. The Negroes of Rochester held a meeting with Rev. John P. Thompson, chairman, and Reuben Malvin, secretary, and expressed their views upon slavery and also upon civic matters.<sup>36</sup>

The activities of these Negro leaders, the competition which developed between the workers of the two races and the rise of opposition to abolition led to efforts to break up

<sup>33</sup> *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 1836, pp. 94-95; *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 1837, pp. 18, 19, 28; *Fifth Annual Report of the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 1838, pp. 24, 44.

<sup>34</sup> *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 1837, pp. 130-133.

<sup>35</sup> *The Emancipator*, November 2, 1833, p. 106.

<sup>36</sup> *The Liberator*, Vol. IV, No. 2, January 11, 1834.



the abolition meetings and to commit acts of violence upon Negroes and their white friends. An Anti-abolition riot occurred in New York City in 1833 and at Utica in 1834. In this year there were several riots in New York City. The homes of whites and Negroes were demolished. The office of David Ruggles, an outstanding Negro leader, was fired.<sup>37</sup> On July 4, 1834, an anti-slavery meeting was announced for this date. A mob assembled and dispersed the meeting. A second meeting was interrupted by a mob, but T. L. Jennings directed a missile at the leader of the mob. Others offered resistance. Ward and others, however, were arrested and put in jail. While spending the night of July 7, 1834, in jail, Ward states that he made an "oath of allegiance to the anti-slavery cause."<sup>38</sup>

This early convention period was the training ground for the rise and development of an abolition leadership. Several of these leaders were unusual personalities of more than average abilities.

#### NEGRO ABOLITIONISTS AND THEIR WORK

There were Negroes in New York who took leading parts in the Abolition Movement, as it developed more and more of the militant spirit after 1830. The first in point of time was Peter Williams, Jr. His father, Peter Williams, Sr., had occupied an important place in Methodism among the Negroes of New York. Peter Williams, Jr., entered the Protestant Episcopal Church, was ordained to the priesthood and became rector of St. Phillips Protestant Episcopal Church in New York City. He served as rector of this church for twenty years. *His Oration on the Slave Trade*, previously mentioned, had the flavor of popular eloquence, but it was hoped by the committee which sponsored its publication that it might be "a means

<sup>37</sup> *The Liberator*, July 4, 1835. Samuel R. Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, p. 46.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46-53.

of enlightening the minds of some and of promoting the great work of emancipation, as it relates to the African race in general, who are still held in bondage in the United States, and in other parts of the world." In later years his failure to speak unequivocally on the subject of African Colonization led to a decline in his popularity as a leader of the Negroes of New York. His action, however, was due to an admonition from Bishop Onderdonk, who requested him to desist from his anti-colonization activities.<sup>39</sup> His connection, however, with the anti-slavery societies showed that he was still of the anti-slavery point of view.

Another character was Nathaniel Paul, who was the pastor of the Hamilton Street Baptist Church in Albany, New York. He became interested in the Negro colony of Wilberforce in Canada and decided to aid in the establishment of a school there. His first important public manifestation of interest in the anti-slavery movement was the publication in 1827 of an address on the celebration of the Abolition of Slavery in New York.<sup>40</sup> He went to England in 1831 in order to raise funds for his proposed school. His contacts with William Lloyd Garrison led to his continued interest in abolition. During the address of Garrison at Exeter Hall, London, he referred to Paul as "a gentleman with whom the proudest or best man on earth need not blush to associate."<sup>41</sup> Paul was also a member of the Glasgow Emancipation Society.<sup>42</sup> He gave evidence before a Parliamentary Committee which was investigating slavery in 1832. The funds loaned to Garrison by Paul were to be repaid by Garrison to Lewis Tappan,

<sup>39</sup> *Colored American*, March 4, 1837; William C. Nell, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, pp. 320-322.

<sup>40</sup> Nathaniel Paul, *An Address Delivered on the Celebration of the Abolition of Slavery in the State of New York*, New York, 1827; *Freedom's Journal*, August 10, 1827.

<sup>41</sup> Garrison, *Story of His Life*, Vol. I, p. 375.

<sup>42</sup> "Britain and America, United in the Cause of Universal Freedom," *Third Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society*, 1837, p. 7.

but correspondence seems to indicate that this debt was not paid, at least with any immediacy.<sup>43</sup> Paul married an Englishwoman. Her experiences in the United States were not pleasant, according to her own accounts.<sup>44</sup> This situation, when considered in connection with Paul's earlier interest in the plan for Canadian colonization, may account for his departure from Albany for the Wilberforce Colony in Canada. He later returned to Albany and died there in 1839.

The anti-colonization movement as well as the anti-slavery movement among Negroes gave opportunity to the leadership of Samuel Cornish, the senior editor of *Freedom's Journal*. He was born in Sussex County, Delaware, in 1795. He came to Philadelphia when he was about twenty years of age. His early education was pursued in the Free African Schools. He became interested in the Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia and was presented as a candidate for the ministry.<sup>45</sup> His examination showed that he had been instructed in literary and theological subjects.<sup>46</sup> He came to New York in 1821 and organized the first Negro Presbyterian Congregation in January, 1822, with twenty-four members.<sup>47</sup> This congregation was located on New Demeter Street.<sup>48</sup> He continued as minister of this church until 1827, when he was succeeded by Rev. Theodore S. Wright.

During 1826, Cornish wrote articles to the New York City newspapers concerning the Negro population. He replied to the criticism of the Negroes published in some of

<sup>43</sup> Austin Stewart, *Twenty-two Years a Slave and Forty Years a Freeman*, p. 263.

<sup>44</sup> *The Liberator*, October 15, 1841; March 17, 1853; Austin Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>45</sup> William Catto, *A Semi-Centennial Discourse on the First African Church of Philadelphia*, p. 39; See H. N. Christian, *Samuel Cornish, Pioneer Negro Journalist* (unpublished Master's thesis, Howard University, 1936).

<sup>46</sup> *Minutes and Proceedings, Philadelphia Presbytery*, 1817-1820, p. 259.

<sup>47</sup> Greenleaf, *History of the Churches of New York*, pp. 152 ff.

<sup>48</sup> Records of the New York Presbytery, Vol. III, pp. 6-21.

the local newspapers. He stated that the conduct of some of the lower class of whites was worse than that of the same class of blacks and that there were many colored men "of education and refinement and of independent means, who deplored the acts of the masses."<sup>49</sup> He contended that the evils of Negro behavior were due to slavery and not to emancipation.

Two weeks after the first issue of *Freedom's Journal*, Cornish began to express doubt about the practicability of African Colonization and the motives of the Colonization Society.<sup>50</sup> Cornish retired from his position as editor on September 14, 1827, and left the paper in charge of Russwurm, who was graduated from Bowdoin College in 1826 and was the first Negro college graduate in the United States of whom we have record.<sup>51</sup> Cornish, however, accepted appointment as general agent. He was also agent for the African Free Schools in 1827 and 1828. Russwurm then turned to the support of Colonization. He resigned as editor in March, 1829, and sailed for Liberia. Cornish returned as editor, but in May he began the publication of "*Rights of All.*" In the meantime, Russwurm went to Liberia and started there in 1831, *The Liberia Herald*. His influence thereafter was lost to the anti-slavery movement in the United States.

On the contrary, Cornish began to be more active in this movement. He attended the Negro conventions. He was interested in the plan for the Negro Manual Labor College and was agent for the Phoenix Society. Late in 1836, another publication appeared, *The Weekly Advocate*, which appeared in January and February, 1837.<sup>52</sup> It was said that Cornish was interested in writing the editorials, although Philip Bell was the proprietor.

<sup>49</sup> Alice D. Adams, *The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America*, p. 92.

<sup>50</sup> *Freedom's Journal*, March 30, 1827.

<sup>51</sup> W. M. Brewer, "John Russwurm," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. XIII, No. 4, October, 1928, pp. 413-422.

<sup>52</sup> *Weekly Advocate*, February 18, 1837.

On March 4, 1837, *The Colored American* was issued with Cornish as editor; Charles B. Ray, general agent, and Phillip A. Bell, proprietor. This journal constantly exposed the evils of slavery. The Prospectus of the paper stated:

“This paper is designed to be organ of Colored Americans, to be looked to as their own, and devoted to their interests, through which they can make known their views to the public, can communicate with each other and their friends, and their friends with them; and to maintain their well-known sentiments on the subject of Abolition and Colonization, viz.,—emancipation without expatriation—the extirpation of prejudice—the enactment of equal laws, and a full and free investiture of their rights as men and citizens.”<sup>53</sup>

That this work was well done is testified to by Arthur Tappan who said “It ably advocates the emancipation of the enslaved, and the elevation of the free colored people; and to this end it urged upon the whites the abolition of castes and on their own people a thorough education.”<sup>54</sup> The paper soon had a circulation of 1,250 copies weekly, a staff of three and thirty-six agents. The paper was continued under Charles B. Ray as editor after Cornish resigned April 18, 1838. It ceased publication in 1842. Cornish occupied an important place in the Abolition Movement and in the leadership of the Negro population. His greatest contribution to Negro life was in the field of journalism, although he could be listed as minister, educator and social worker as well as editor.

A co-worker with Cornish was Theodore S. Wright. He was the successor of Cornish as pastor of the First Colored Presbyterian Church, corner of William and Frankfort Streets, New York City. He was, prior to this, a student at Princeton Theological Seminary. While studying there, he said that *Freedom's Journal* appeared to the faculty and students “like a clap of thunder.”<sup>55</sup> After

<sup>53</sup> *The Colored American*, March 11, 1837.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur Tappan, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>55</sup> *The Liberator*, October 13, 1837.

coming to New York, he participated in Anti-Slavery Assemblies. He delivered an address before the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in 1836. His address before the New York State Anti-Slavery Society at Utica, New York, in 1837, was one of the high spots in his speaking career. His platform was the inalienable rights of man. He spoke against colonization, slavery and prejudice. He urged his hearers to destroy prejudice, "live and talk it down and consider the colored man in the church, on the stage, on the steamboat, in the public house and in all places. Then the death blow to slavery will be struck."<sup>56</sup> He spoke before the same society calling attention to the exclusion of Negroes from jobs, their lack of educational opportunities, their need for religious worship and their discomfort in travel. He was an agent for the New England Anti-Slavery Society and spent a great deal of his time in travel and in lecturing on slavery.<sup>57</sup> He was an active leader in Anti-Slavery activities within and outside of the state.

A contemporary of Cornish and Wright was Phillip A. Bell. He was the inspiration for *The Colored American*. Under his management the paper was ably conducted and continued for a longer period than any of its predecessors. He possessed fine powers of analysis and a vivid imagination. He left New York after retiring from the management of the paper. The convention meetings found him always present and active in the organization of abolition.

When Cornish retired as editor of *The Colored American* he was succeeded by Charles B. Ray. He was a well educated and a vigorous editor and was long identified with the work of abolition. National and state assemblies were impressed by his speeches and his active interest.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>56</sup> *The Liberator*, Vol. VII, October 13, 1837; *Colored American*, October 14, 1837.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, December 16, 1837.

<sup>58</sup> F. T. Ray, *Sketch of the Life of Rev. Charles B. Ray*, New York, 1887.

Ray rendered valuable service also as an agent of the underground railroad.

Of those who participated in the work of the early abolition campaign none stand higher than David Ruggles, who also resided in New York City. His main contribution to the work of abolition was his connection with the New York Committee of Vigilance. This organization grew out of a meeting of the Friends of Human Rights, white and colored, who met on November 20, 1835, in order to take measures to prevent the kidnapping of free Negroes in the city and their sale to the South as slaves. Robert Brown was selected as chairman and David Ruggles as secretary, and the committee was to be known as the New York Committee of Vigilance. Other members of the Committee were William Johnston, George B. Barker and J. W. Higgins. Their expressed objects were: (1) to protect unoffending, defenseless and endangered persons of color, by securing their rights as far as practicable; (2) by obtaining for them when arrested, under the pretext of being fugitive slaves, such protection as the law will allow.<sup>59</sup>

The Committee disclaimed any connection with the anti-slavery societies, but it was believed that the principles of the society could be brought into practice. They believed that they could in "individual spheres of action prove ourselves practical abolitionists."<sup>60</sup> The Committee devoted its attention during its first year of work to aid to persons arriving from the South, suspected persons on incoming and departing vessels, the proceedings of slave agents and kidnappers, the arrests of persons claimed as fugitive slaves, the recovery of persons detained in the South and the recovery of property due colored persons.

<sup>59</sup> *The First Annual Report of the New York Committee of Vigilance for the Year 1837*, p. 4, New York, 1831.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13; *The Colored American*, April 4, October 7, 1837.

The anniversary of the New York Vigilance Committee was held at the Presbyterian Church, Thompson and Houston Streets, January 16, 1837. Rev. Theodore S. Wright was chairman and David Ruggles was secretary. The Executive Committee appointed at this meeting was composed of J. W. Higgins, chairman, William Johnston, treasurer, David Ruggles, secretary, Theodore S. Wright, George R. Barker, Thomas Van Rensselaer, Robert Brown and Samuel E. Cornish. The Committee reported that there had been a total expenditure of \$1,228.71 and that this amount had been collected by subscriptions. The bulk of it was collected by the ladies from their friends at the rate of one penny a week. The number of persons "protected from slavery by the Committee of Vigilance to January 16, 1837, was three hundred and thirty-five.<sup>61</sup> The Committee made no advertisement of its work, for in their opinion, it was best "to make but little noise and to have our operations but little known or seen, yet by slaveholders to be greatly felt."<sup>62</sup> Ruggles continued as the secretary of the Committee until his health was impaired and he had become practically blind. It was said that through him over six hundred slaves escaped from southern states to Canada or to places of security this side of the St. Lawrence.<sup>63</sup> He was described as "one of the founders of the celebrated underground railroad."<sup>64</sup>

Ruggles was the most intrepid of this group of abolitionists. He had no patience with "prudence," "expediency," and "neutrality," for he regarded these as "the offspring of obedience and cowardice. He praised those who took "but one side of two opposing interests."<sup>65</sup> We

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

<sup>62</sup> *Report of the New York State Vigilance Committee*, 1853, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict*, p. 285.

<sup>64</sup> William Wells Brown, *The Rising Son, or The Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race*, p. 434. Boston, 1876.

<sup>65</sup> Ruggles "An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of New York and Elsewhere in Behalf of the Press," *The Emancipator and Journal of Public Morals*, Vol. III, No. 5, February 3, 1835.



know little of the ways in which he obtained his formal education, but he manifested a considerable educational equipment. He entered business and became a publisher and bookseller at 65 Lispenard Street, now Broadway. In 1834, he began the publication of pamphlets on the slavery questions. One of these was *The "Extinguisher" Extinguished, or David M. Reese, M. D. "used up" by David Ruggles, a man of color.* This pamphlet was a reply to Dr. David M. Reese's *A Brief Review of the First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, and to a pamphlet by Herman Howlett's *An Address on Slavery and against Immediate Emancipation*, published in 1834.

Ruggles' method was to refer to pages in Reese's pamphlet and to make remarks upon them. Ruggles stated that his zeal was "to promote the welfare of my brethren in bonds," and that he believed firmly in "the cause of immediate and universal emancipation." He answered every argument of the two pamphlets. He directed attention to the charge of the desire for amalgamation by the abolitionists, and while he asserted that he had no desire for it, he denied that "intermarriages between the whites and blacks are unnatural." He asks, "But why is it that it seems to you so repugnant to marry your sons, and daughters to colored persons?" and he replies, "Simply because public opinion is against it. Nature teaches no such repugnance, but experience has taught me that education only does. Do children feel and exercise that prejudice towards colored persons? Do not colored and white children play together promiscuously until the white is taught to despise the colored?"<sup>66</sup>

In 1838, Reese produced another attack upon the American Anti-Slavery Society. Ruggles issued another reply, "*Antidote for a poisonous combination recently prepared by a citizen of New York alias Dr. Reese, entitled 'An Appeal to reason and religion of American Christians,' also,*

<sup>66</sup> Ruggles, "*Extinguisher*" *Extinguished* —, pp. 12, 13, 14.

*David Meredith Reese's 'Humbugs' dissected.* This was a pamphlet of 32 pages in which sentences were quoted and, as Ruggles states, "dissected" by him. In referring to the Vigilance Committee, he stated, "the slaveholder has no legal right to any human being residing or sojourning temporarily or otherwise in the State of New York. The laws of our state do not recognize property in men, but consider every human being as the proprietor of his own person."<sup>67</sup> Sarcasm, invective and vituperative statements were used with effectiveness by Ruggles.

In his "*Appeal to the Colored Citizens of New York and elsewhere in behalf of the Press*" Ruggles vigorously urged that efforts be pressed to bring about "the universal emancipation of our enslaved brethren from the iron bonds of physical servitude, and our own emancipation from the shackles of ignorance and the scorn of prejudice. He was convinced that the hope for victory was in the power of the press. He directed a part of his appeal to aid the press to the women of the race. He wrote to them, "my hopes for sustenance of the press, for the triumphant success of our cause, is centered in you."<sup>68</sup>

In August, 1838, *The Mirror of Liberty*, a quarterly magazine edited by Ruggles, made its appearance. Only two numbers of this magazine were published. Its distinction lies in the fact that it was the first magazine edited by Negroes. In 1842, he gave up his work in New York and moved to Northampton, Massachusetts, where he became the proprietor of a water-cure establishment.<sup>69</sup> He continued to write occasional letters to anti-slavery papers until his death in 1849.

Another paper made its appearance in 1842, following the discontinuance of *The Colored American*. This paper

<sup>67</sup> Ruggles, *Antidote* —, p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> *The Emancipator and Journal of Public Morals*, February 10, 1835, Vol. III, Not. 6.

<sup>69</sup> *The Liberator*, September 29, 1847; December 21, 1849.

was known as *The National Watchman* and was published in Troy, New York. The editor was William G. Allen. Henry Highland Garnet was associated with him. Allen was a graduate of Oneida Institute and later studied law in Boston. After the suspension of the publication of *The National Watchman* in 1847, Allen was appointed one of the teachers at New York Central College, McGrawville, New York. *The Elevator*, *Ram's Horn* and *The Genius of Freedom* were also published by Negroes between 1845 and 1847. These papers used plain, direct language in espousing emancipation. Specific and personal applications were not as direct as those in *The Liberator*. The editorials were mild but courageous.

Several Negro artists were associated with the work of emancipation. Among these was Patrick Reason, an engraver. He was described as "a gentleman of ability and a fine artist who stands high as an engraver in New York City." Some of his engravings were used as colophons or frontispieces for the biographies of fugitive slaves and for anti-slavery publications. One of these engravings was used for the widely publicized narrative of the experiences of James Williams, a fugitive slave.

From many ranks and places there were Negro abolitionists who took the front rank among their people in the fight against slavery. They stood with their brothers of lighter hue for a free America. Beside Garrison, Phillips, Weld, the Tappans and others were Negroes whose contributions have been both neglected and forgotten. Their struggle was not only against slavery, for they themselves were only half-free. While carrying forward the work against slavery, they directed their attention also to local conditions which required change. Their special concern was also the civil and political disabilities which were placed upon them and prevented them from becoming free men and citizens of the republic.

## CIVIL AND POLITICAL EMANCIPATION

The struggle against slavery was paralleled by the effort to have the privileges of citizenship extended to Negroes.<sup>70</sup> The leaders of the first period, those of the thirties, gave way to those of another period, those of the forties and fifties. Wright, Bell, Paul, Williams, Ruggles were succeeded by Garnet, Ward, Douglass, Reason, Ray, and Smith. Emancipation was now to be pressed upon a new basis. The first constitution of the state of New York, adopted on April 20, 1777, made no reference to race, creed, color or previous condition. The vote was extended to all free persons who possessed property valued at forty pounds.<sup>71</sup> As a matter of practice Negro voters were frequently rejected at the polls. On April 9, 1811, proof of freedom was required of all Negroes seeking to vote.<sup>72</sup> In 1813 and in 1815 additional amendments were made to this law. As a result, many Negroes were prevented from voting.<sup>73</sup> In 1821, the Constitutional Convention enacted a provision of a property qualification of two hundred and fifty dollars for Negro voters.<sup>74</sup> The property qualification for whites was abolished in 1826. The required length of residence for whites was one year and for Negroes three years. These discriminations prevented many free Negroes from becoming real citizens of the state.

In spite of these obstacles, there were Negroes who en-

<sup>70</sup> See also Olbrich, Emil, *The Development of Sentiment on Negro Suffrage to 1860*, University of Wisconsin, 1912; Dixon Ryan Fox, "The Negro Vote in Old New York," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. XXXII, June, 1917; Leo H. Hirsch, Jr., "New York and the Negro from 1783 to 1865," *Journal of Negro History*, Vol. XVI; John G. Speed, "The Negro in New York," *Harper's Weekly*, December 22, 1900; Bernice C. Williams, *The Negro in Politics in New York* (unpublished Master's thesis, Howard University, 1937).

<sup>71</sup> *Laws of the State of New York, Comprising the Constitution and the Acts of the Legislature Since the Revolution*, Vol. I.

<sup>72</sup> *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York*, 1811, pp. 401-406; *New York Evening Post*, April 16, 1811.

<sup>73</sup> *New York Spectator*, April 19, 1815.

<sup>74</sup> *Debates and Proceedings*, 1821, p. 185.

deavored to exercise the functions of citizenship. Leaders and organizations encouraged this activity. An address by the Negro Convention in New York in 1834 to the colored people of the state urged them to purchase property so that they might qualify as voters. *The Colored American* in 1837 pointed out the admission of the "odiousness of the law which required of every colored American citizen, who shall enjoy the privilege of the right of suffrage, the possession of \$250 free hold estate." This paper would ever argue against its injustice and unconstitutionality and urge "our friends who do not possess that qualification to regard it as a right and continue to use it as such."<sup>75</sup>

In 1837, all except a small number of the 44,000 Negroes of the state were still disfranchised.<sup>76</sup> However, on March 4, Negroes of the state sent three petitions for the suffrage to the Legislature. The first, signed by 605 men and 271 women, was twenty-five feet in length. It requested that all vestiges of slavery should be abolished. The second was 23 feet in length and was signed by 489 men and 272 women. This petition demanded also the right of jury trial for Negroes suspected of being fugitive slaves. The third requested the amendment of the state constitution so that male citizens without distinction of color could vote. This petition was 20 feet in length and was signed by 620 men.<sup>77</sup> Agents of *The Colored American* traveled through the state of New York in the autumn of 1837 circulating petitions to the legislature for the signatures of the people.<sup>78</sup> These petitions and resolutions were received, but in no case were they approved by the legislature.<sup>79</sup>

Such action only served to stimulate the Negroes to

<sup>75</sup> *The Colored American*, April 29, 1837.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, March 11, 1837.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, August 1, 1837.

<sup>79</sup> *Journal of the Assembly of New York*, 1837, pp. 414-417.

redouble their efforts to gain the franchise. The Political Improvement Association of New York City was called to meet, by an order of the secretary, Charles L. Reason. Additional signatures upon petitions were to be sought and plans for a future campaign were to be made.<sup>80</sup> This meeting assembled on October 11, 1838, at Broadway Hall. Thomas L. Jennings presided and Reason served as secretary. Ward committees were appointed. After addresses, the following resolution was adopted:

“Resolved, that the laudable and increased exertions of our prescribed brethren of this state, and particularly of the City of New York, for the removal of unequal constitutional and legal disabilities, by which their dearer rights are infringed, is an increased proof that a people determined, shall be free.”<sup>81</sup>

A few days after this, on October 29, the Colored Freeholders of the City and County of New York held a meeting with Timothy Seamon as chairman. Resolutions were adopted. One directed attention to the condition of the Negro population resulting from the racial condition in the constitution. Another urged Negro voters to cast their votes for representatives who were in favor of “abolishing all distinctions in the constitutional rights of the citizens of the state.”<sup>82</sup> Committees had been appointed at the Utica meetings in September, 1838, to secure from candidates for governor and lieutenant governor their views upon changes in the constitution abolishing race distinctions. In the November elections Negroes were urged to vote for those men who favored such constitutional changes.<sup>83</sup> “The Political Association” which arose in 1838 was another organization for this purpose. It was planned to organize auxiliaries in every town and village in the state. In the meantime, Negroes were entreated by the editors of *The Colored American* to buy property

<sup>80</sup> *The Colored American*, September 29, 1838.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, October 20, November 3, 1838

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* November 17, 1838.

to qualify as voters and then to "call upon the legislature through the ballot box" for the desired change.<sup>84</sup>

Divisions developed among the abolition societies, concerning these political associations. The New York Anti-Slavery Society on September 20, 1837, adopted resolutions favoring the extension of the suffrage and proposing an investigation of "the legal disabilities and inequalities which the constitution and laws of this state attach to people of color."<sup>85</sup> On the contrary, the Broadway Tabernacle Anti-Slavery Society opposed political organization and expressed the desire to hold aloof from it.<sup>86</sup> This division was the beginning of the cleavage between the political and non-political factions of the abolitionists.<sup>87</sup>

Outstanding among those Negro leaders who were carrying forward this fight were the abolitionists previously named and several others. Among these was Henry Highland Garnet. He was born in Maryland, December 23, 1815. He was brought from there by his fugitive slave parents to New York in 1825, when Henry was only ten years old. He attended the New York African Free School, Canaan Academy, New Hampshire, and Oneida Institute, Whitesboro, New York. His first address in the anti-slavery cause was delivered at the meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1840. At this meeting, he presented a resolution "that all the rights and immunities of American citizens are justly due to the people of color, who have ever been, and still are willing to contribute their full share to enrich and defend our common country."<sup>88</sup> That same year he became the teacher of a colored district school at Troy, New York, and the editor of a

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, December 8, 15, 1838.

<sup>85</sup> *The Emancipator*, October 5, 1837.

<sup>86</sup> *Proceedings of the Broadway Tabernacle Anti-Slavery Society of New York*, December 21, 1838.

<sup>87</sup> See *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society, 1837*, "Political Action," p. 113 ff; *Speech of Gerrit Smith in the Pittsburgh Convention*, August 12, 1852.

<sup>88</sup> *The Liberator*, November 4, 1845.

weekly paper, *The Clarion*. This paper's objective was to aid the Negro in all aspects of his emancipation. He attended the Convention of the Liberty Party in Buffalo in 1843 and delivered an address. He became a zealous advocate of this new political organization.<sup>89</sup> The Liberty Party had been launched at Arcade, New York, in 1840. Gerrit Smith was one of its leaders, and James G. Birney was nominated by it that year for the presidency of the United States.

Another advocate of political activity was Samuel Ringold Ward. He was born in Maryland in 1817 and was brought from there by his fugitive slave parents to New York City. He attended Oneida Institute, which admitted Negro students. Between 1840 and 1850 he traveled extensively in the state of New York, lecturing and encouraging the Negro people in their fight for freedom. Frederick Douglass said of him, "In depth of thought, fluency of speech, readiness of wit, logical exactness and general intelligence, Ward has no successor in the race."<sup>90</sup> He joined the Liberty Party and cast his vote for it. He was active in this struggle and maintained always until he left the United States for Canada in 1851 that the political issue was a vital one.<sup>91</sup>

Charles L. Reason, Secretary of the Political Association, who was called later to a professorship of Mathematics and Belles-Lettres in New York Central College, McGrawville, New York, continued to be active in this cause. George B. Vashon and William G. Allen were also professors at this institution. A poem by Reason entitled "The Spirit Voice: or Liberty Calls to the Disfranchised" was regarded as of exceptional abolition value. A stanza was:

<sup>89</sup> Henry Highland Garnet, *A Memorial Discourse*, p. 33.

<sup>90</sup> Douglass, *Life and Times*, p. 345.

<sup>91</sup> Samuel Ringold Ward, *Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro*, pp. 44, 75, 77, 78.



“Come! rouse ye brothers, rouse! a peal now breaks,  
 From lowest island to our gallant lakes,  
 ’Tis summoning you, who long in bonds have lain,  
 To stand up manful on the battle plain,  
 Each as a warrior, with his armour bright,  
 Prepared to battle in a bloodless fight.”<sup>92</sup>

Meanwhile, J. W. Loguen in the western part of New York was leading the political fight. He was born a slave in Tennessee in 1813 and escaped to Rochester, New York. He attended one of the schools there and later entered Oneida Institute. In 1841 he went to Syracuse and opened a school. Soon he began to preach and lecture. He became interested in the Liberty and Free Soil parties and campaigned frequently for them.<sup>93</sup>

Other representative Negro leaders were interested and active in the work of emancipation. Among these should be mentioned James McCune Smith, a Negro physician, a graduate of the University of Glasgow, who wrote articles and pamphlets vindicating the rights of the Negro and participated in the conventions; Sojourner Truth, religionist and anti-slavery lecturer; Alexander Crummel, able speaker, minister, writer and traveler; James W. C. Pennington, minister and author, who received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from the University of Heidelberg; George B. Vashon, lawyer and professor of languages at New York Central College; George T. Downing, business man and acceptable speaker; Harriet Tubman, underground railroad operator, and hundreds of others who were identified with the struggle for freedom.

The influence of Frederick Douglass in New York state does not become significant until the late forties. Born a slave in Maryland in 1817, escaping to New York City and then with the aid of Ruggles and the Vigilance Committee to New Bedford, Massachusetts, he made his

<sup>92</sup> W. J. Simmons, *Men of Mark*, p. 1108.

<sup>93</sup> *The Rev. J. W. Loguen as a Slave and as a Freeman*, Syracuse, N. Y., 1858, pp. 372, 379.

first public appearances as an agent of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. In this capacity, he traveled in 1843 in New England, and shortly thereafter he made a trip to England. In 1847 he attended the National Convention of Colored People at Troy, New York. Douglass sponsored the following resolution:

“Resolved, that our only hope for peaceful Emancipation in this land is based on a firm, devoted and unceasing assertion of our rights and a full, free and determined exposure of our multiplied wrongs.

“Resolved, that, in the language of inspired wisdom, there shall be no peace to the wicked, and that this guilty nation shall have no peace, and that we will do all that we can to *agitate!* AGITATE!! AGITATE!!! till our rights are restored and our brethren are redeemed from their cruel chains.”<sup>94</sup>

This convention concerned itself not only with emancipation but with other important matters. Approval was given to a plan for the establishment of a college for Negroes. A resolution was passed expressing gratitude to Gerrit Smith for his donations of land to Negroes. A plan was also proposed for the organization of a Jamaican trading company.

During this period, Douglass was still placing his hopes in the non-political activities of the anti-slavery societies. He attended a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in January, 1842, in which the question of political action was raised. This sentiment for political activity was being pressed by such a growing minority that the Garrisonian majority presented a resolution opposing any third party or political action. Douglass said during this discussion, “The difficulty with the third party is that it disposes men to rely upon political and not moral action—my friend says that all that has been accomplished for this cause has been through the instrumentalities of polit-

<sup>94</sup> *Proceedings of the National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends Held in Troy, 1847*, p. 32; *The North Star*, Vol. 1, No. 1, December 3, 1847.

ical action. I do not believe it. I ask you, What this legislation has done? \* \* \* Was it political action that removed your prejudices and raised in your mind a holy zeal for human rights?"<sup>95</sup> Within a very few years, however, Douglass abandoned this position on realizing the value of political action and cast his lot with the abolitionists thus engaged.

In 1843, Douglass associated himself with Willis C. Hodges and Thomas Van Rensselaer in the publication of *The Ram's Horn*, a newspaper which was planned to express the views of the Negro population of the state. After eighteen months this paper went out of circulation. On December 3, 1847, *The North Star*, with Frederick Douglass as editor, made its appearance. The Prospectus stated that its object would be "to attack slavery in all of its forms and aspects; advocate Universal Emancipation; exact the standard of public morality; promote the moral and intellectual improvement of the colored people; and to hasten the day of freedom to our three million enslaved fellow-countrymen." It has been said that the most effective work of Douglass for emancipation was conducted through *The North Star*, which later changed its name to *Frederick Douglass' Paper*.<sup>96</sup>

While Douglass was liberal in his views, he did not sympathize with the radicalism of Garnet. In 1843, Garnet urged the Negro slaves to cease to work for those who would not pay them. Said he, "If a band of heathen men should attempt to enslave a race of Christians and to place their children under a false religion, surely Heaven would frown upon the men who would not resist such aggression, even to death." \* \* \* \* Again, he states, "Brethren, the time has come when you must act for yourselves. It is an old and true saying that 'if hereditary bondmen would be free, they must themselves strike the blow.'" "

<sup>95</sup> *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, February 24, 1842.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

He urged them, "Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour \* \* \* Rather die Freemen than live to be slaves."<sup>97</sup> In these sentiments Garnet takes rank with David Walker, Nat Turner and John Brown as "dangerous" revolutionaries.

This address was considered war-like. At its close, Douglass said that there was "too much physical force both in the address and remarks of Garnet; that the address couldn't reach the slaves, and should the advice or the address be followed, while it might not lead the slaves to rise in insurrection for liberty, would nevertheless, and necessarily, be the occasion for insurrection, and that was what he wished in no way to have any agency in bringing about and what we were called upon to avoid."

Others supported the view of Douglass. On a vote to approve Garnet's view, the record was 18 for and 19 against. Garnet thus lost by one vote.<sup>98</sup> Douglass then read a resolution which referred to abolition by "moral suasion." Garnet moved that these words be stricken out, but this motion was lost and again the Douglass view prevailed.<sup>99</sup> From this time until the Civil War the majority opinion was on the side of Douglass. Garnet pursued his rebellious course, fearless and courageous. He was a popular speaker. He traveled and lectured in the United States and for three years in Europe. He accepted appointment as a missionary to Jamaica and was appointed in subsequent years United States Minister to Liberia, where he died.

The late forties witnessed the trend towards politics as

<sup>97</sup> Garnet, *A Memorial Discourse*, pp. 47, 48; Carter G. Woodson, *Negro Orators and Their Orations*, pp. 149-157. John W. Cromwell states that this address "deserves to be printed and preserved as a document of like character as Magna Charta and the Declaration of Independence." *The Negro in American History*, p. 127.

<sup>98</sup> *Minutes of the National Convention of Colored Citizens*, held at Buffalo, New York, 1843, pp. 18-19.

<sup>99</sup> W. M. Brewer, "Henry Highland Garnet," *Journal of Negro History*, January, 1928, Vol. XIII, No. 1, pp. 36-52.

a solution for the Negro's inequality. The decline of the Liberty Party was followed by the rise of the Free Soil Party. The convention of this party in Buffalo in 1848 was attended by Garnet, Ward, Charles L. Remond, Henry Bibb, Frederick Douglass. Moreover, scarcely a year passed without the Negroes of New York holding a convention in which abolition and politics were not the main topic of discussion. Many abolitionists had turned towards politics as a solution of the problem of slavery. Politicians were also interested in the Negro vote. William H. Seward, Governor of New York, wrote in 1845 a letter urging that the right of suffrage be extended equally to Negroes. He said, "Give them this right and their influence will be immediately felt in the national council and their votes will be cast in favor of those who uphold the cause of human liberty."<sup>100</sup>

Again and again prior to the Civil War efforts were made in the Legislature to change the constitutional amendment against Negro suffrage. In the meantime, the Negro abolitionists were growing more certain of the necessity for political action both for the improvement of the status of free Negroes as well as the freedom of the slaves. During a discussion in 1851 at the meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, in which Douglass and Garrison were on opposite sides, Douglass said that "his opinions had recently changed materially in relation to the duty of political action and intimated that he would no longer oppose it."<sup>101</sup> For this action, Douglass was variously criticized by the non-political abolitionists.

It seems clear in the light of his subsequent action that Douglass was sincere in his belief in the efficacy of political action.<sup>102</sup> In the campaign of 1852, the Free Democrat ticket was carried in large type in every issue of *Frederick*

<sup>100</sup> *The Liberator*, July 18, 1845.

<sup>101</sup> *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, May 31, 1851.

<sup>102</sup> See *Life and Times of W. L. Garrison*, Vol. III, pp. 329-330, and biographies of Douglass by Holland and Washington.

*Douglass' Paper.* At the National Colored Convention in Rochester, July 6-8, 1853, Frederick Douglass asserted in an address, "We ask that an unrestricted right of suffrage, which is essential to the dignity of the white man, be extended to the colored man also."<sup>103</sup> On September 12, 1855, the Liberty Party of New York State nominated Frederick Douglass for Secretary of State and Lewis Tappan as Comptroller of the State.<sup>104</sup> Douglass was one of the signers of an address in 1855 to the radical political Abolitionists of the country. This address called a convention to assemble in Syracuse June 26, 1855. Dr. James McCune Smith was elected president of the convention, after Gerrit Smith had acted as temporary chairman. Dr. Smith was later thanked by resolution for "the ability, urbanity and impartiality with which he presided over this convention." Frederick Douglass, J. W. Loguen, and Amos Dresser were active participants. The convention advocated support of the Free Soil Party.<sup>105</sup> By this time Douglass had accepted fully the view of political action. In this year, it is said, that the political Abolitionists nominated him for its vice-presidential candidate and Gerrit Smith for the presidency.<sup>106</sup> Douglass does not mention this event in his autobiographical writings, and the available evidence indicates doubt that he was nominated for this office. However, he became one of the outstanding politicians of New York State during the years prior to and after the Civil War.

<sup>103</sup> *Proceedings of the Colored National Convention held in Rochester, July 6th, 7th and 8th, 1853*, p. 9.

<sup>104</sup> Alexander, *Political History of New York*, Vol. II, p. 216; *The New York Herald*, September 17, 27, 1855.

<sup>105</sup> *Proceedings of the Convention of Radical Political Abolitionists held at Syracuse, N. Y., June 26, 27, 28, 1855*.

<sup>106</sup> James A. Woodburn, *Political Parties and Party Problems in the United States*, p. 139; J. F. Rhodes, *History of the United States since the Compromise of 1850*, Vol. II, p. 186; *The New York Morning Express*, May 30, 1856; *The New York Daily Times*, May 30, 1856; *The New York Herald*, May 29, 1856; *The New York Tribune*, June 21, 1856.

Finally, in 1860, an act was passed by the legislature to amend the constitution by popular vote so as to abolish the property qualification for Negro voters. On April 13, 1860, the assembly passed the bill and the senate also agreed. At the general election on November 6, 1860, the proposed amendment was rejected by a majority vote of the people of 140,429 votes.<sup>107</sup> The discrimination against the Negro vote was thus continued in New York State until after the Civil War. As late as 1869, the amendment for Negro suffrage was denied by popular vote with a majority against of 32,601.<sup>108</sup> The adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment March 30, 1870, and the repeal in April of the laws relating to election, gave the Negroes the right to vote as other citizens. Since 1822 the Negroes had exerted strenuous efforts, without apparent success, to break the political chains which bound them. They struggled valiantly both against legislative action and popular sentiment.

With the opening of the Civil War the Negroes of New York had reached a definite economic status. They had made remarkable strides in the accumulation of wealth and property. They owned taxable real estate in New York City equal to \$1,400,000. The Savings Bank of New York City was reported to have \$1,121,000 belonging to Negroes. The property in the hands of the Negroes of New York City and Brooklyn was reported to be valued at five million dollars. The business enterprises carried on by them represented \$836,100.<sup>109</sup> The Negroes representing such property holding and business could meet the suffrage qualification, but they were dissatisfied as long as the masses of their people were proscribed. It is

<sup>107</sup> Charles L. Lincoln, *Constitutional History of New York*, Vol. II, pp. 232-233; *Journal of the Assembly of the State of New York*, 1860, pp. 737, 1129.

<sup>108</sup> *Annual Cyclopaedia*, 1869, pp. 486-490.

<sup>109</sup> William C. Nell, *Property Qualification or No Property Qualification*, 1860, p. 23.

also quite probable that these property holdings were increased as a result of the fixed limitation for the suffrage. This may have served, in a sense, as an incentive to property accumulation.

The Negroes worked to improve their own status and to advance the cause of emancipation. These objectives were accomplished through conventions and public meetings, leadership in abolition enterprises, newspapers and lectures, the agents of the underground railroads and political activities. In the light of such historical facts no one may say with a truth that the Negroes of New York did nothing for the emancipation of themselves and the group to which they belonged. New York is historically one of the main centers of organization, economic advance and political activity in Negro life, from which influences for freedom have entered into our larger American life. May it continue to safeguard its heritage and build nobly its future.

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