National Remedies for National Evils: The Problem of Universal Reform and Race in the American Moral Reform Society, 1835-1841

Kristina Elizabeth Poznan

Fairfield, Connecticut

B.A., Vassar College, 2008

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of History

The College of William and Mary
May 2011

APPROVAL PAGE

This Thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Kristina Poznan

Kristina Elizabeth Poznan

Approved by the Committee, March, 2011

Committee Chair
Professor Carol Sheriff, History
The College of William and Mary

Professor Scott Reynolds Nelson
The College of William and Mary

Assistant Professor Kathrin Levitan
The College of William and Mary

ABSTRACT PAGE

The American Moral Reform Society was among the most expansive in vision and least successful in execution of the national reform societies in antebellum America. The AMRS was founded by free black leaders in 1835 to achieve "Education, Temperance, Economy, and Universal Liberty" on a national scale. Purposely surmounting demarcations of color, geography, moral issue, and method, the Society endeavored to end both American slavery and American prejudice. Drawing from the Society's records and newspapers, this thesis argues that universal reform was a viable ideological imperative at the AMRS's founding, but that the Society's insistence on racial inclusivity became a liability. Plagued by factionalism within the free black community, an over-extended agenda, and an inability to mobilize for action, the AMRS failed to become a representative organization for free black moral reform in the late 1830s. The press, instead, became the arbiter of free black public opinion, and separatism the model for reform efforts after the Society's demise in 1841.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The American Moral Reform Society was among the most expansive in vision and least successful in execution of the national reform societies in antebellum America. An abundance of organizations existed from the local level all the way up to the national level, particularly in Northern cities. There were antislavery societies, temperance societies, prison reform committees, library companies, and other similar organizations, all part of an evangelical crusade to perfect humanity. Some were more focused on the members themselves, while others advocated for the needs or addressed the faults of others. Most were white, some were black, and a few crossed the color line of the time to found mixed reform organizations. Founded in 1835 by free black delegates at the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in the United States, held in Philadelphia, the American Moral Reform Society attempted to bring multiple causes under one organizational umbrella by expanding the goals of the Negro Convention Movement to a broader platform of moral reform and combining it with the mission of the mostly white antislavery societies. Through this concerted action, the Society endeavored to cure "the great cancer that is eating out the heart of this nation, . . . *American slavery* and *American prejudice*."[1] The Society was founded to advocate, in particular, the principles of "Education, Temperance, Economy, and Universal Liberty" on a national scale.[2] While the subject of the first three reform goals was primarily the free black community, the Society steadfastly argued against racial distinctions and addressed both slavery and prejudice in its fight for "universal liberty." The AMRS sought but failed to become the clearinghouse for all reform causes, black and white.

---

[1] *National Reformer*, Oct. 1839, 130.
[2] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention for the Improvement of The Free People of Colour in the United States...* (Philadelphia: William P. Gibbons, 1835), 31.

The reform movement's "spirit of revolution," predicted founding member William Whipper, would one day "furnish a fruitful theme . . . for the pen of the historian."[3] The AMRS serves as a useful example for considering the structure, priorities, and difficulties that antebellum reform organizations faced, as many struggled to properly define their identity, audience, goals, and means. One well-known element of this struggle is the debate between moral suasion and political action in achieving reform. Other factors that reformers had to consider in establishing their organizations were racial inclusivity, geographic coverage, and how many and which social evils to address in their platforms. In creating a generalized, national anti-vice society with a commitment to abolishing racial distinctions, the AMRS sought to forge a truly universal moral reform organization. Its struggles shed light on the ideological advantages and practical disadvantages of its expansive vision.

Antebellum evangelicals were inclined to describe social problems in religious terms, and to seek solutions in the same way. The nation was sinful and so, like other moral reform societies at the time, the AMRS set out to "resuscitat[e] her from moral degeneracy."[4] The Society would lead the cause in her "redemption" through "vigilant prosecution of the holy cause of Moral Reform."[5] The opening editorial of the Society's newspaper, the *National Reformer*, thundered that "we are now in the incipient stage of a great moral revolution" in which the AMRS would play a prominent role.[6] According to

[3] *National Reformer,* Dec. 1838, 49.
[4] *National Reformer*, Sept. 1838, 2.
[5] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 31.
[6] *National Reformer*, Sep. 1838, 1.

popular ideas of Christian millennialism, the moral revolution would have to be universal in scope as widespread social ills were delaying the Second Coming of Christ.[7]

And so the AMRS assigned itself the task of reforming the morality of *all* Americans, "of *all sects, creeds*, and *complexions*."[8] At the 1835 Convention for the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in the United States, the body voted, on the motion of Augustus Prince of Washington D.C., to found an "association to be known by the name of the *American Moral Reform Society*, for improving the condition of mankind."[9] The Negro Convention Movement had brought together delegates from free black communities annually since 1830, and the AMRS was to be the permanent successor to those yearly meetings.[10] Over the course of a week, the delegates discussed all manner of issues pertaining to enslaved and free blacks, emphasizing the new AMRS's four main principles: Education, Temperance, Economy, and Universal Liberty. The free black leaders who emerged at the Convention – Philadelphians James Forten Sr., James Forten Jr., Robert Purvis, and particularly William Whipper – would remain the most influential members of the Society throughout its existence. Also active and present were some of the men, particularly New Yorkers, who would, in due course, become the Society's greatest critics.

---

[7] For the most significant recent scholarship on evangelical reform, see Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), and Douglas M.Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999). Although the Society employed the term "universal" in describing its moral vision, it was unrelated to the religious movement of Universalism. While millennial theology certainly influenced the AMRS, its leaders were moderate in their millennial views and the Society had no formal ties to millennial religious organizations.

[8] *National Reformer*, Dec. 1839, 177.

[9] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 4.

[10] Classic interpretations on the Negro Convention Movement come from Howard Homan Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830-1860* (New York: Arno Press, 1969), and the work of Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease.

Purposely surmounting demarcations of color, geography, moral issue, and method, the Society attempted to lay the foundation for what it hoped would be a potent universality of purpose. Following the law of "universal love," the founders explained, "we have buried in the bosom of Christian benevolence all those national distinctions, complexional variations, geographic lines, and sectional bounds that have hitherto marked the history, character and operations of men."[11] Reflecting three years later on the Society's founding, Whipper boasted that they had "formed a structure . . . sufficiently comprehensive to embrace every man, woman, and child in the United States. There is none, of whatever rank, rich, poor, old, young, black, or white, but may be benefited."[12]

The sources from which to divine the AMRS's history are rich but limited to just a few sets of documents. The founding Convention expounded its principles in a public Declaration of Sentiment, a letter to the American people describing its agenda, and a constitution for the Society. The Society published its yearly meeting minutes and annual reports. At its very first meeting, the organization passed a resolution to "establish as soon as possible a press, to be the organ through which the principles of our institution shall be made known to the world."[13] Apart from yearly meetings, the press was envisioned as the most important form of communication, both within the Society and in disseminating its principles among the American public. "It is only through the instrumentality of that most potent reformer of public sentiment," the founding delegates argued, ". . . that any certain, speedy and radical change will be effected."[14] In the same

---

[11] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 27.
[12] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 33.
[13] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 10.
[14] Ibid., 6.

line of reasoning, the board of directors periodically ordered that minutes, proceedings, and speeches made before the Society "be printed and disseminated" for the public good.[15] The organization's internal records have not survived, and none of the prominent members seems to have extant personal papers. Thus, apart from its founding documents, historians are left to piece the AMRS's story together primarily from the press and published minutes.

The AMRS did not begin the *National Reformer* until September of 1838, over three years after the press resolution. Until then, the Society used the pages of Philadelphia's *National Enquirer* – an anti-slavery weekly founded by Quaker abolitionist Benjamin Lundy in 1836, later called the *Pennsylvania Freeman* – to keep members and readers apprised of its activities. The Society also recommended to its followers a number of organs of the abolitionist and nascent black press, such as Samuel Cornish's *Colored American,* William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator,* and David Ruggles's *Mirror of Liberty*, all out of New York, and papers from other reform organizations like the *Temperance Recorder*. These and other papers, they believed, were succeeding in "conquering, and subduing, every opposing element, by the gigantic efforts of intellectual power."[16] But as free black leaders began to disagree more forcefully over how to best improve their situation, the need for the AMRS to have its own newspaper became great. "For the want of an organ, devoted exclusively to the support of the doctrines we maintain," the paper's editor, William Whipper, lamented, "our objects have been grossly

[15] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 16.
[16] *National Reformer*, Dec. 1838, 50.

misunderstood."[17] The Society needed its own outlet to better communicate with its members and increasingly to defend its principles of universal reform.

As the needs for its own paper suggests, the Society was constantly forced to explain its relationship to other ally groups and rival groups and to justify the breadth and the universality of its vision. The grandness of the enterprise was, the organizers believed, its primary strength, but would also become its most significant liability. Also problematic was how a Philadelphia-based organization, with only a limited number of auxiliary organizations concentrated in the mid-Atlantic states, could speak for the interests of all free blacks and benevolently improve the morals of the entire nation. Emerging ideological differences within the free black community, the changing context of American race relations and the political culture of reform, and the sheer impracticality of mobilizing for such a large, universal goal would prevent the Society from fulfilling its intended role as the premier nondiscriminatory national reform organization of its time, a role no single society ever managed to fill.

The AMRS fits uneasily into the standard timeline of African American reform efforts. Historian Donald Yacovone periodized black reform into three phases: Patronage, "reliance upon white support and a white reform agenda," until 1836; Isolation, defined by the "struggle against racism and benefiting the larger black community," from roughly 1836 to 1854; and an overlapping but distinct phase of Equality from around 1840 onward, in which blacks advocated for civil rights through more direct political action.[18] As an organization that prided itself on working against the isolationist trend that defined the era and hoped to benefit whites as well, the AMRS does not match up well with

[17] *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 1.
[18] Donald Yacovone, "Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement," *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (Autumn ,1988), 282.

Yacovone's second or third phase.[19] The Society might have done well to follow the lead of its peer institutions and move in a more isolationist direction, but, believing as it did in the universality of its principles, it held fast to the model of reconciling the white reform agenda as its own and wedding it to the priorities of the Negro Convention Movement.

The AMRS shared many similarities but also some significant differences with its premier peer institution, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). Historians have deemed the AMRS a thoroughly "Garrisonian" institution, a label that generally espoused the immediate abolition of slavery and techniques of "moral suasion" to achieve reform rather than engaging in politics, which Garrison and his followers believed irredeemably corrupt.[20] The AMRS established a committee at its inception to consider whether to "countenance, aid, and coöperate with the measures of the American Anti-Slavery Society," and in its Declaration of Sentiment came out firmly in favor of cooperation.[21] The AASS's inclusive model of institutional membership, commitment to immediate emancipation, and interest in the rights of free blacks and desegregation resonated with the AMRS's founders. Indeed, the Society sent an open letter to Garrison in 1837, which he then published in the *Liberator,* expressing its "unshaken confidence in your character as a christian, and our faith in your principles as the foremost of the advocates of our cause."[22] Yacovone echoes the argument of the AMRS's most prominent critic at the time, the *Colored American's* editor, Samuel Cornish, that this ideological affiliation numbered the organization's days from the outset, as Garrison became a more polarizing

---

[19] Yacovone's primary interest is in societies devoted to temperance, a reform goal that made up just one of the four pillars of the AMRS.
[20] See, for example, Tunde Adeleke, "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830's," *The Journal of Negro History* 83 (Spring, 1998): 127.
[21] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 4, 23.
[22] *Liberator*, 3 Nov. 1837, 45.

figure by the end of the decade.[23] The AMRS stopped short of endorsing of disunion as the AASS eventual did, and never matched the AASS's level of spiritual perfectionism. Although the AMRS never felt the need to formally disavow its support of the AASS, it did not follow the Garrisonians lock-step in their increasing extremism.

Historians have also struggled with how to interpret the political and social orientation of reform organizations like the AMRS along the traditional liberal versus conservative spectrum. Historian Robert E. Weems, Jr. has linked the AMRS explicitly with the origins of the "African American conservative tradition," in a problematic attempt to connect modern black conservatism to the past. The designation does not fit. "Organic black conservatives," he explains, blamed internal factors such as perceived 'immorality' in the black community over the external factor of white racism "as the primary impediment to racial progress."[24] While the Society's members were deeply interested in addressing black immorality, they were equally critical of white morality and desirous of reforming it as well, particularly the sin of racial prejudice. Societies labeled "moral reform" have become associated with ideas of conservatism, preservation of traditional values, and maintenance of a social status quo. But the AMRS defined both morality and reform more expansively than other organizations that used the same terms. Reforming morality was not limited to one's personal behavior; the organization was dedicated not just to the moral uplift of its own members but of *all* Americans. Its reformism was not an affirmation of the status quo or a return to a mythologized, more moral past, but a powerful critique of pervasive racism, even among Christians. My

---

[23] Yacovone, "Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement," 289.
[24] Robert E. Weems Jr., "The American Moral Reform Society and the Origins of Black Conservative Ideology," in *Dimensions of Black Conservativism in the United States: Made in America*, edited by Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randloph. New York: Palgrave, 2002), 32. See Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite,* 108.

analysis here diverges from historians like Weems who have labeled the Society too accomodationist and have deemphasized the Society's critiques of white racism. The AMRS was controversial in its firm ideological stance against racial distinctions and largely unresponsive to critics' calls for institutional reform within the Society itself, making it arguably conservative in the eyes of some of its more radical critics, but the magnitude of its vision of equality negates an ultimately conservative label.

The existing scholarship on the American Moral Reform Society is limited in the last three decades, but was frequently mentioned in earlier studies of northern free blacks. Broader studies of reform generally dismiss it as a short-lived failure, largely missing its significance. Yet scholars who have examined it more closely have not been so quick to write it off. Bella Gross gave the AMRS a prominent place in her 1947 study of the Negro Convention Movement.[25] Howard Bell's 1958 article on the Society outlined its purpose and struggles, and affirmed that the "the society held the center of the stage at a time when no other national Negro organization was to be found in a similar field."[26] More recently, Julie Winch has argued that although the AMRS was wedded from the outset to a "lost cause," it nevertheless "provided an effective forum for the views of both militants and moderates within the black community."[27] Winch's chapter in *Philadelphia's Black Elite* offers the most extensive account of the Society's proceedings to date and describes in detail the rivalry between the AMRS's Philadelphia leaders and New Yorkers looking to share in the leadership of the Northern free black community. In

---

[25] Bella Gross, *Clarion Call: The History of Development of the Negro People's Convention Movement in the United States from 1817 to 1840* (New York: Atwater Press, 1947).
[26] Howard Homan Bell, "The American Moral Reform Society, 1836-1841," *The Journal of Negro Education* 27 (Winter, 1958), 39.
[27] Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 108.

this work I defer to Winch's expertise on the AMRS's role in the convention movement and institutional maneuvering, examining instead the organization's priorities and aspirations and how its very foundational principles undermined its ability to achieve them.

Historians have generally suggested that the reason for the AMRS's failure was that it was an outdated cause from the start or that disagreements over racial terminology alienated its supporters. Broadening out to black reform in general, Yacovone argues that blacks, dissatisfied with conforming to a white reform agenda, declared independence from white reformers and abolitionists during the 1840s and 1850s,"[28] a step that the AMRS was unwilling to take. I argue that the American Moral Reform Society's strong ideological stance on achieving universal liberty through national biracial efforts was the most important element in undermining its eventual downfall, undermining its ability to act and opening it up to criticism and hardship on multiple fronts, including but not exclusively on the issue of racial inclusivity. The Society's broad agenda was sometimes commended but largely ignored by whites, rejected by rival black elites, and merely irrelevant to most northern free blacks as an institution that was too unwieldy to mobilize. The Society's moral platform alone was not enough to gain supporters or benefactors, and its leaders misjudged the pragmatic benefits of a national organization. Racial inclusivity was an ideological imperative for an organization devoted to erasing prejudice, but one that became increasingly contested as the climate of reform moved away from overtures at cooperation to racially segregated efforts for societal reform. Universal reform was a viable if risky ideal at the outset, but became a definite liability over the course of the late 1830s, as most free blacks sought more limited aims focused

[28] Yacovone, "Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement," 286.

on their own communities to produce faster and more tangible results, charting a new separatist course for free blacks.

CHAPTER 1: THE CRUSADE FOR UNIVERSAL MORAL REFORM

The AMRS put forward a broad platform encompassing a host of moral issues. The technique was not unique to the AMRS. The title of abolitionist William Goodell's paper, for example, rarely referenced by its full name, was the *The Emancipator, and Journal of Public Morals.* Historians disagree as to whether the idea of an organization dedicated generally to moral reform and not specifically to a single cause was outdated before the Society even began. At that auspicious founding convention, that certainly did not seem to be the case. I argue that, at its inception, this universal model was indeed a viable if unwieldy ideal for a permanent institution to take up the work of the Negro Convention Movement. This chapter will discuss in depth the goals, aspirations, and early work of the AMRS, examining its inclusive racial composition, national aspirations, broad platform, and flexible methods for bringing about moral reform and the end of slavery and prejudice.

"Complexional Prejudice": Overcoming the Color Line in Reform

The New England Anti-Slavery Society and the AASS had already moved in the direction of racially integrated societies by 1832.[29] But whereas antislavery societies were fighting primarily (although not exclusively) on the behalf of African Americans in slavery and Negro improvement societies for the benefit of free blacks, the AMRS combined them, acting equally in the interests of both slaves and free blacks, taking on the sins of both slavery and racial prejudice. AMRS implicated northern whites and free blacks in the institution of slavery and also accused both of racism, called "prejudice of caste" in Whipper's parlance. As sins were equally rampant among whites and blacks

[29] For the history of the early abolition movement, particularly on the issue of integration, see Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 120-130.

alike, solutions likewise had to cross the color line. The Society's Annual Meeting of 1836 invited the participation of white delegates, a clear departure from the practices of the Negro Convention Movement.[30]

The first published convention minutes described the Society as "the American Moral Reform Society of the free people of colour," but at that very meeting it voted later in the proceedings to discontinue the use of racial distinctions.[31] William Whipper proposed a motion that free blacks "abandon the use of the world 'colored,' . . . and especially to remove the title of African from their institutions." The body unanimously adopted the resolution the next day "after an animated and interesting discussion," but the matter would become a flashpoint for controversy in subsequent years.[32] Whipper's rationale, from beginning to end, was guided by a spirit of Christian unity: "Having descended from one common *parent* ["our MAKER"], we should consider ourselves as children of the same family. . . . in our reciprocal duties to each other, we should never be guided by national or complexional preferences."[33] Despite the Society's idealistic stance against racial distinctions and prejudice, experience would prove that an organization founded and lead by free blacks, while it might gain nominal white endorsement, would never obtain a significant white following. Furthermore, many free blacks increasingly decided over the course of the late 1830s that it was more effective to work directly for the benefit of free blacks, rather than to try to enlighten whites to join them in that cause.[34]

---

[30] Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 109.
[31] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 10.
[32] Ibid., 14-15.
[33] *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 2.
[34] Many early black moral reformers felt that blacks had to be morally uplifted before abolition could be justified. While some members of the AMRS were of this persuasion, the Society's clear attack on slavery and racism distanced them from this overall characterization. For the debate over moral uplift, see

Although the AMRS never defined itself as a colored organization, it did make the argument that, as African Americans, its leaders were particularly sympathetic to and equipped to advocate on the behalf of slaves. "We never will separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population in this country," the body declared in 1837. "They are our brethren by the ties of consanguinity."[35] To the objection that the Society's advocacy of universal liberty was redundant to the efforts of (mostly white) anti-slavery societies, Whipper responded: "who dare claim a better right than we in removing the wrongs from our brethren, the slaves[?]"[36] This right of free blacks to fight slavery was by no means at the exclusion of white reformers, but natural justification for their involvement.

Whipper rationalized that blacks, because of the degraded regard in which they were held by whites, were also more properly equipped to help the sinful. "Our lot has been cast among that portion of the oppressed Americans. . . . From our very situation, we are more intimately acquainted with their sentiments, habits, manners, and customs, than our [white] anti-slavery friends," as well as their "follies and vices."[37] Preemptively responding to whites claiming a moral high ground, Whipper argued that black perspectives were a vital complement to white reform efforts for reforming white and black moral behavior.

Still, racial distinction for the sake of distinction was wholly undesirable. Whipper lodged his vehement objection that the New York African Free Schools

---

Frederick Cooper "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders," *American Quarterly* 24 (Dec., 1972), 610.

[35] *Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society, held at Philadelphia...* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1837), in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, edited by Dorothy Porter (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 220.

[36] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 35. Whipper does not state who, in particular, he is responding to here.

[37] *National Reformer,* Feb. 1839, 84.

"solicited the public sympathy on account of their degraded condition, (not as out-cast and oppressed Americans,) but was 'descendents of the Africans race.'"[38] Children should not be educated under a "*banner of distinction,*" as this was an unwanted "bias on the minds of youth."[39] The purpose of education was to overcome degradation, caused by oppression, not inferiority caused by race. To appeal for sympathy on the grounds of color was a distortion of the issue, and actually perpetuated racial distinctions that education was supposed to help students overcome.

Whereas many northern whites and even some self-congratulatory abolitionists might have defined slavery as a Southern problem, the AMRS implicated all Americans, including Northern whites and even free blacks, in the institution, charging that all were "slaveholders indirectly."[40] "The sin of slavery, in this nation, is not wholly confined to any single grade or complexion," Whipper explained. "*[A]ll,* both *white* and *colored*, the nominally free, as well as the enslaved, are interwoven in the same network." [41] Whipper estimated that the free black population aided American slavery by two million dollars per day; "by partaking of its fruits, in our repast, we give nourishment to slavery."[42] Abolitionist organizations had already made the argument that northerners, too, were implicated in slavery; in placing the burden explicitly on the shoulder of free blacks as well, the AMRS was simultaneously proclaiming solidarity with enslaved blacks and abolitionists black and white.

In much the same way that all Americans were implicated in perpetuating slavery, they were just as guilty of that other sin against universal freedom, prejudice. "Prejudice

---

[38] Ibid., 82.
[39] *National Reformer,* Feb. 1839, 82.
[40] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 36.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

of caste," Whipper argued, "held a higher seat in the affections of the people of the United States than slavery itself."[43] A minority of white abolitionists had taken on the burden of enslaved and free blacks so personally that, "in the view of our enemies, the *men* that advocate our cause have become completely 'negroized.'" From the outset the founding convention passed a provision to "elect any abolitionist as an honorary member in the convention, being from any city or place where there are no delegates to represent the colored people."[44] Free blacks would "Labor with them . . . for the establishment of that undying principle, that '*all men are created equal.*'"[45] As the AMRS evolved into a permanent organization with multi-racial aspirations, this provision would extend to any person who ascribed to the Society's principles. But as sympathetic as some northern whites might be in lamenting the plight of slaves, they remained overwhelmingly racist, more devoted to racial hierarchy than to the lucrative benefits of legal slavery. Neither could free blacks take the moral high ground here, as "the whole[,] white and colored," were contaminated by prejudice.[46] This criticism demanded that free blacks cast the same critical lens on themselves. The Society's belief that prejudice was indeed a national sin demanded an ideology of racial inclusivity; free blacks would be exercising the same prejudice they were criticizing in excluding whites from reform organizations, and prejudice could never be eliminated without enlightening both whites and blacks to their guilt.

Churches should have been the greatest ally of racially cooperative universal reform, the AMRS argued, but they were among the most hypocritical practitioners of

---

[43] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 33.
[44] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835,* 6.
[45] *National Reformer,* Dec. 1838, 52.
[46] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 33.

such prejudice. White churches violated the principles of Christian brotherhood by excluding blacks from their congregations and leadership.[47] A committee tasked with assessing the matter of "associating with churches with the whites" called upon clergymen to lead their churches in extinguishing prejudice and to allow blacks the same rights and privileges of membership as whites.[48] Whipper argued that "erecting what are termed white and colored churches fosters the spirit of prejudice, and insults the spirit of true reform, by refusing to be associated in Christian fellowship with their brethren of a different complexion."[49] Black churches, too, had failed to use their existing institutions and influence to do more against slavery and for national reform, and the body called upon them "to exert themselves" on behalf of the cause of emancipation and reform.[50] One letter to the *National Reformer* in 1839 criticized individuals in "high stations" in black churches, "who instead of using all diligence in carrying out those lofty themes, they are sitting down in quite indifference."[51] Many white churches were actively barring blacks from full Christian communion, whereas most black churches were complacent with their separate institutions, but both were equally unhelpful in eroding prejudice and exhibiting Christian unity.

"One of the very fatal effects of the white man's prejudice against us [free blacks]," Whipper explained, "has been to implant the false ideas, that we were his *inferiors* . . . , and that we should receive his dictation with a tacit submission."[52] This submission was precisely what Whipper accused many black churches of, and the AMRS

---

[47] *National Enquirer*, 3 Dec. 1836.; Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*,109.
[48] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 14.
[49] "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 8.
[50] Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*,109; *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 12.
[51] *National Reformer,* Dec, 1839, 183.
[52] *National Reformer,* Dec. 1838, 51.

rejected charges of inferiority as an excuse for inaction. "The more we acknowledge its force and power," he warned, "the more it will affect us."[53] Able to work on an equal footing with whites with equal rights, they would "forg[e]t their 'degraded condition,' in the nobleness of their enterprise" and "enlist as *men*" in the" annihilation" of prejudice.[54] White and black reformers would have to work together as men to bring about universal moral uplift and social change.

A National Solution to National Maladies

The nationalism of evangelical sentiment and of reform organizations like the AASS, and the inter-state tradition of the Convention movement help explain why the 1835 Convention sought to found a national organization. As the United States was increasingly connected through internal improvements, people became more mobile, and the nation expanded westward, Americans began to think increasingly in national terms. With these changes came a perception that without the traditional local forces of authority, moral degeneracy was on the rise. Slavery, the greatest offender against universal liberty, was completely at odds with American principles. "As a nation our professions and practices are in juxtaposition."[55] "The founders of our Society were fully aware of the position they were taking before the world," Whipper explained retrospectively three years after the Society's founding. "In reviewing the condition of our common country, they saw her rocking in the cradle of moral death."[56]

Sociologist Michael P. Young has argued that antebellum reform featured the combination of individuals' "sense of intimate responsibility" for sin with "attention to

[53] *National Reformer,* Dec, 1838, 51.
[54] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 33.
[55] *National Reformer,* Dec. 1838, 49.
[56] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 33.

far-flung social problems," thereby nationalizing guilt.[57] As sin knew no geographic bounds, the United States needed a national antidote to "national maladies." Local church communities no longer held their former authority over societal virtue, and the federal government and national political parties failed to address popular moral reform issues like antislavery and temperance, leaving it to voluntary societies to take up the banner.[58] To do so nationally, alongside efforts in the local community, would more quickly bring about the nation's glorious destiny, and in the view of some evangelical denominations, the perfection of society and the Millennium.

"We do not seek the reformation of our own immediate neighborhood only," Whipper declared, "or even of our state. Our aim is a mighty one; . . . embracing in our expansive benevolence the whole nation."[59] Defining slavery as a national problem rather than a sectional one meant that the South alone was not wholly responsible. The institution, "so erect in the Southern portion of our confederacy, . . . spreads its detestable branches over our whole Union."[60] In much the same way that the AMRS had implicated both blacks and whites in perpetuating slavery and prejudice, so it implicated Northerners and Southerners. "If the whole American people were to subscribe to our principles in sincerity," however, "neither slavery nor prejudice would live a single hour."[61]

The Negro Convention Movement already had some experience with national coordination, and had found it useful to knit together the interests of free northern blacks from different locations. It brought delegates together from places as distant as

---

[57] Michael P. Young, *Bearing Witness Against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Society Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 3.
[58] Ibid., 15, 77.
[59] *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 2.
[60] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 36.
[61] Ibid., 34.

Washington, D.C. and Maine, encompassing Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland, to share ideas and help free blacks work collectively for their own uplift. It is no surprise, then, that the permanent society the Convention founded would follow the same model.

A national organization also allowed free blacks to develop a national voice and presence and a body through which to express their Americanism. "We named it American," Whipper explained, "that we might express our national feelings and national attachments." [62] Patriotism was also consistent with the AMRS's disavowal of labeling free black organizations as "African." "While we bestow on Africa all the honor which is justly due . . . [,] we have been born and reared in America,—to her we owe every thing."[63]

The AMRS's American nationalism also led it to take a firm stance against the American Colonization Society (ACS) and the establishment of free black communities in Africa, pleading instead for "the elevation of the colored man in the land of his nativity."[64] Removal amounted to surrendering in the fight against prejudice. To that end, the AMRS resolved to work toward the abolition of the ACS, and to see to the condition of those who had been "deluded" by the ASC to remove to Liberia.[65] Not only was the practice "anti-republican," but if free blacks all fled for Africa there would be fewer souls to work for the abolition of slavery in the United States, and prejudice would increase with only degraded slaves for whites to base their racial estimations on.[66] African

---

[62] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 33-34.
[63] *National Reformer,* Feb. 1839, 82.
[64] "Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society, Held at Philadelphia . . .," in *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*, edited by Dorothy Porter (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 202. Hereafter cited as AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837.
[65] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 6, 12.
[66] Ibid., 23-24.

Americans were in the United States to stay and invested in helping to change American practices.

Related Virtues and Related Vices

The AMRS rationalized its broad reform agenda, encompassing a host of sins rather than just focusing on just one, on a firm belief in the close relationship between vices. Sin begat sin, and the combined malignity of "concomitant evils"[67] reinforced each other. "Ignorance, intemperance, luxury and slavery," William Whipper explained in the *National Reformer*, were evils "in connexion with others." "No people can relieve themselves of their influence," the Society reasoned, "without a united effort."[68] In founding a generalized anti-vice society for moral reform writ large, the AMRS believed that to bring about a virtuous revolution, society would have to address social ills collectively.

There was a strong relationship, in particular, between slavery and intemperance. Alcohol was seen as a prime enabler in the sin of slavery, and the Convention stated that the proliferation of temperance societies would have a direct result in "facilitat[ing] the cause of immediate and universal emancipation."[69] Alcohol was seen as an enabler of slavery because intemperance made masters violent against their slaves, because masters plied their slaves with gifts of liquor at Christmas to keep them compliant, and because the Atlantic trade in sugar and rum was dependent on slave labor. Belief in the strong relationship between slavery and intemperance did not die with the Society; as late as

---

[67] *Third Annual Report of the [New York] American Moral Reform Society...* (New York: Martin, Lambert & Co., 1838), 7. Hereafter cited as the *Third Annual Report of the New York AMRS.*
[68] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 43.
[69] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 8.

1851, African American Congregational minister Samuel Ringgold Ward identified "Rum and Negro hate" as the two greatest sins of the nation.[70]

Aside from being allied with slavery, intemperance was tied to various other vices and served as a barrier to the attainment of the Society's virtues. Intemperance, according to the AMRS, delivered "death-stings" against human honor and dignity, threatening all aspects of moral behavior.[71] In a speech before the Society in 1837, delegate John Francis Cook of Washington D.C., charged that intemperance was "the germinating source of a long train of pernicious diseases, horrible pains, and . . . destroys all incentives to the acquisition of knowledge," actively preventing moral education .[72] "Aside from its destroying reason, character, health, moral sensibility, virtue, the faculties of the mind, the affections of the heart," he continued, "it brings high and low, rich and poor, noble and ignoble, through scorn, contempt, disease, anguish and remorse, to a maniac's death, and then leads them from the frown of man, to the bar of a righteous and sin-avenging God."[73]

In the same way that the Society saw a close relationship between the sins it was fighting, it saw an equally close one between the virtues it was trying to promote. Education, Temperance, Economy, and Universal Liberty, simply put, built on and reinforced each other. All four were of sacred importance, and the principle of universal liberty was the ultimate goal toward which all the others worked. "Education will enlarge our faculties, temperance regulate their exercise, and *economy* preserve the materials; but

[70] Quoted in Yacovone, "Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement," 288.
[71] *National Reformer*, Oct. 1838, 26.
[72] Remarks of John Francis Cook, in AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 243-244.
[73] Ibid., 244.

the principle of *universal liberty* must give the *polish*."[74] To truly understand the platform of the AMRS, it is necessary to examine how and to what end it strove to encourage education, temperance, and economy among both free blacks and whites alike to attain universal liberty for all.

The AMRS defined temperance not in the strict definition of abstaining from alcohol, but all "intemperate habits and appetites" and as "control of . . . the passions,"[75] and powerfully tied temperance to uplift and the abolition of oppression. The fact of prejudice placed a particular burden on free blacks to practice temperance. "The most despicable advocate a bad cause ever had," he thundered, "is the colored man in the free states that supports *dram drinking*." "Are you not sufficiently downtrodden by oppression and prejudice," Whipper asked free blacks, to further degrade your condition by drinking? He taunted intemperate free blacks as the "winebibbing oracles" and "mint-julap [sic] dandies," charging them with "bringing down on us a mountain of degradation and oppression" through the morally degraded image of free blacks they perpetuated. Although the AMRS was principled against distinctions of race, the white world would not be so generous: "Think not that you will be allowed to escape without a complexional description." The burden of temperance, of course, by no means applied to blacks alone, but the sin was so great and the stakes too high to be moderate on the matter. Therefore, he pleaded, "NOW DO REPENT, and *abandon it*."[76]

Education was of critical importance to the AMRS, ideologically to educate whites and blacks on the consequences of sin and prejudice and practically to equip African Americans intellectually to support themselves and their families in spite of

---

[74] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, p.
[75] Cook, in AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 246, 243.
[76] *National Reformer*, Oct. 1838, 26-27.

continuing oppression. Tying the abolition of slavery to the abolition of ignorance, the *National Reformer* stated that "[i]t is not only bodily, but mental enslavement that is to be removed."[77] Up to that point, African Americans had been "educated under . . . a system that impairs the mental vigour."[78] "We have been proclaimed," James Forten Jr. lamented, "time after time, an inferior race, utterly incapable of ever rising to an equal footing with the white population, in the scale of moral and intellectual worth."[79] Forten did not deny the inferiority of blacks' education, but rejected their inability to achieve morality and intellectual achievement. Education would elevate "our people from ignorance and superstition, to light and knowledge" and transform them into a "thinking people.[80] They would "overcome prejudice by mental force."[81]

To that end, the AMRS encouraged the "propriety of forming and promoting societies for . . . improvement in moral and literary knowledge."[82] This would compensate for the formal education that many free blacks had never received. At the Society's founding meeting in 1835, delegates advocated for increased access for free black youth to both classical and manual education. Free northern blacks in the 1830s did not see these as the opposing models of academic versus industrial education that W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington would debate at the end of the century. African American secondary education was to be established simultaneously along both models. Toward the goal of academic education, the body authorized a study to explore whether any high schools accepted African American students and how to increase secondary

---

[77] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 35.
[78] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 25.
[79] Address of James Forten Jr., in AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 231.
[80] Ibid., 226, 227.
[81] Ibid., 230.
[82] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 9.

education opportunities.[83] To support manual education, a committee instructed the delegates "to enforce on the minds of their constituents the necessity of encouraging manual labor schools, where our youths may acquire the necessary arts" for establishing their own businesses.[84] The Society resolved at its founding meeting to collect funds and subscriptions for a "manual labor college."[85] This seems to have been among the most contentious proposals adopted, as it is the only one that names which individuals voted for and against the motion, with ten voting delegates in favor and nine against.[86] The Minutes offer no explanation of the debate, and although the college never materialized the founders were well aware of the opportunities that higher education could offer.

Education would, of course, have tangible benefits for the free black community. The "fruits of knowledge" would not only allow them to share in the "arts and sciences of civilized life," but more concretely to achieve "the favour of just and equitable laws." [87] Academics yielded "profitable information" and "sound practical lessons."[88] Economically, it would "enable us to make accurate and correct contracts in our business transactions, and will preserve us against the encroachments of the swindler, the deceitful, and rapacious."[89] Perhaps most importantly, it would assure "domestic happiness."[90]

Economy, the Society's third principle, was "the necessary operative" to make education and temperance useful.[91] Like knowledge and temperate behavior, economy

---

[83] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 11.
[84] Ibid., 16.
[85] Ibid., 10.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 25.
[88] Forten, in AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 227.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 42-43.

would "make some provision against this inequality of power" that "prohibit[ed] our prosperity."[92] Hard work was not only key to economic improvement but would help erode the stereotypes prejudiced whites held. "I will grant . . . that we labour under an intolerable burden," Forten conceded, but challenged free blacks to reject the excuse made by some that "there is so much prejudice against us that there is no use" of striving for improvement.[93] Again, AMRS leaders like Forten were not excusing white prejudice, but encouraging fellow free blacks to strive for more despite the impediments that prejudice posed.

Matters of economy addressed societal obstacles that prevented free blacks from gaining long-term financial stability. Young African American men were regularly excluded from acquiring proper knowledge at training in "mechanical arts," limiting their opportunities for financial stability.[94] They could be employed in less skilled trades such as carpentry, tailoring, and shoe-making, but were "wholly excluded" from "the most important, lucrative arts, . . . such as jewelers, watch makers, machinists, and many others."[95] The Society appealed to white mechanics who shared its abolitionist sentiments to defy the trend of exclusion of African American apprentices, teach them trades, and enable them to establish businesses.[96]

Blacks and whites alike were encouraged to practice frugality and shun excess. Luxury and fashion were denounced as "tyrannical gods,"[97] signs of the sin of covetousness and a waste of funds. According to Whipper, it would be impossible to

---

[92] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 44.
[93] Forten, AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 234.
[94] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 16.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 43.

"keep pace" with whites "while we imitate their vices, fashions, customs and habits."[98] Thus, leaders of the Society discouraged "*superficial* wants," "unnecessary" expenses, and "frivolous and unprofitable amusements."[99] Some of these were more minor points proposed by individual delegates, such as the denunciation of expensive mourning clothes and increasingly elaborate funeral parades and holiday "feasting."[100]

Concrete progress toward education, temperance, and economy among blacks and whites, the Society believed, would bring about universal liberty: the end of slavery and prejudice. A more moral, knowledgeable, enlightened, and moderate populace would break the economic and moral foundation on which slavery and racial oppression rested.

The Means of Reform: Moral Suasion and Politics

Most historians have labeled the AMRS a "moral suasion" organization, in contrast to those that advocated more direct political involvement.[101] Consistent with its inclusivity and breadth of vision, however, it took a more flexible approach. William Whipper was periodically uncomfortable with the increasingly political direction reform was moving, simply convinced that better morals would produce a better government and better country. Writing after the local and state election season of 1839, he hoped that "the public mind will again become settled, and that the great questions of moral duties will again receive their due attention."[102] Political solutions to moral problems were justified, but he cautioned that politics themselves must not distract attention from the urgent need for societal reform.

---

[98] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 44.
[99] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1838, 43; AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 222; Forten, in Ibid., 232.
[100] AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 222; "Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the American Moral Reform Society," printed in *National Reformer*, Sept. 1839, 142.
[101] For the debate specifically in the African American community, see Adelke, "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion," and Bell, "National Negro Conventions of the Middle 1840's: Moral Suasion vs. Political Action," *The Journal of Negro History* 42 (Oct., 1957): 247-260.
[102] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1839, 162-163.

Although the AMRS confined its methods primarily to appeals to individuals' consciences and personal behavior, nevertheless it allowed for broad interpretation of appropriate actions in fighting for liberty. A *National Reformer* article in 1839 responded to the call within the wider abolitionist community "to have the *moral* and *political* duties of anti-slavery defined" by leaving the matter to personal discretion. This was almost certainly in response to the split in the AASS between anti-political Garrisonians and dissenters who founded the Liberty Party to pursue abolition through party politics. This issue of means simply does not seem to have mattered as much to the AMRS: "We are perfectly willing that every one shall use such weapons as they deem best to complete the final overthrow of slavery, whether the same be religious, moral, or political influence."[103]

The Society's original letter to the public, drafted at the founding Convention, vowed to do its work in both the "moral and political world."[104] By 1839 political action had become a standard technique of many antislavery societies, and even disenfranchised blacks were actively participating in the political process. Where circumstances demanded it, the AMRS did not shy away from political action. The meetings discussed and the *National Reformer* reported news on court cases and legislation relevant to black Americans and their rights, and strongly encouraged the petitioning of local, state, and national legislatures "to be admitted to the rights and privileges of American citizens."[105] Under the heading "PETITIONS! PETITIONS!" the *National Reformer* announced the "season for legislation" and urged readers to send petitions to the state capital to obtain

[103] *National Reformer*, Nov. 1839, 162-163.
[104] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 27.
[105] Ibid., 9.

an amendment of the state constitution to extend the right of trial by jury to blacks.[106] It openly called for resistance to fugitive slave laws and the abolition of slavery in Washington DC, and it came out against the annexation of Texas as a slave state.[107]

The AMRS also supported oppositional measures such as the boycotting of products produced by slave labor and of businesses with racially prejudiced policies, and each issue of the *National Reformer* featured an advertisement for a "requited labor" grocery store.[108] The 1835 founding convention passed resolutions to patronize stagecoach and steamboat lines that did not make racial "distinction[s]" between passengers, and to research the viability of producing sugar from beets to break the slaveocracy's monopoly on the commodity.[109] The 1839 Annual Meeting resolved to cease supporting all publications printing advertisements for runaway slaves, singling out the *Public Ledger* for public condemnation.[110] Perhaps, as the outgrowth of the Convention movement, the Society should have become the main lobbying organization for Northern free blacks. While it never attained this level of political involvement, the AMRS's publications did encourage their readers to act on political matters, moving beyond the tactics of reform organizations that relied exclusively on moral suasion.

The Society also had to negotiate how to relate to other organizations dedicated to moral reform and abolition. Although envisioned as a comprehensive umbrella organization, it did not see its existence as redundant or a replacement for issue-specific or local societies. One reader writing in to the *National Reformer* stated that to the

---

[106] *National Reformer*, Feb. 1839, 84.
[107] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 18; *National Enquirer,* 28 Jan. 1837; AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 222.
[108] For antislavery fairs, see, for example, Deborah Van Broekhoven, (1998) "'Better than a Clay Club': The Organization of Anti-slavery Fairs, 1835-60," *Slavery & Abolition* 19 (Apr., 1998): 24- 45.
[109] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 14, 11-12
[110] *National Reformer*, Oct. 1839, 141.

question of "whether it was expedient for colored persons to join Anti-Slavery Societies, I recorded my vote in the affirmative," reasoning that his local anti-slavery society held good lectures and promoted "moral and intellectual improvement."[111] The1835 convention recommended the formation of more temperance societies, and the 1839 Annual Meeting recommended that "every lover of liberty" be a member of an anti-slavery society.[112]

The American Moral Reform Society's vision was undeniably grand, and in the view of its founders the magnitude of the challenge made it all the more noble. Noble as its inclusivity and expansive vision might be as an ideal, questions emerged in regard to whether the comprehensive scope of this admittedly "gigantic enterprise" was truly appropriate or practical.[113] "The design is so vast, and seems to require action on so large a scale, that many who approve our views, yet disheartened at the magnitude of the undertaking, and despairing of its success, decline to unite with us."[114] These concerns, doubts, and disagreements eroded the Society's legitimacy as the authentic representative of the free black population and limited its influence. Over the course of the late 1830s, the AMRS transformed from an umbrella organization for forging free black consensus and cording action for moral reform into a participant in the debate between free black leaders on how best to end racism and slavery.

---

[111] *National Reformer*, Mar. 1839, 104.
[112] *National Reformer*, Oct. 1839, 142.
[113] "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 2.
[114] Ibid., 3.

CHAPTER 2: RACE AND CHALLENGES TO UNIVERSAL REFORM

From the moment of its founding, the Society faced hardships and criticism due to the comprehensiveness of its vision. Sociologist Michael P. Young argues that "undifferentiated antivice societies represented the more settled interests of communities resisting social change." He marks the shift toward the greater popularity of "societies devoted exclusively to fighting a particular sin" as early as 1815.[115] But black reform seems to have followed a later timetable, not beginning its national general anti-vice association until 1835, and the AMRS was hardly an organization for maintaining the racial status quo. Nevertheless, its work was severely inhibited by a variety of factors, internal and external, all speaking to questions about the Society's universal reform agenda. Although adhered closely to its stated sentiments and principles, there was lasting confusion and disagreement over what exactly the organization's emphases were and should be. Furthermore, there was frustration that many of the AMRS's resolutions simply remained resolutions and never translated into action. The AMRS failed to live up to its national aspirations, functioning primarily as a Philadelphia organization and was plagued by a bitter rivalry with black New York reformers. Local auxiliaries might or might not keep strictly to the principles of the parent organization. Although hoping to unify reform efforts, Whipper and the AMRS instead became bogged down in newspaper wars, particularly over race, which further detracted from the organization's unity and support. But despite all of these feuds and the Society's disappearance by 1841, there was value to the AMRS's existence and even its conflicts, teaching free northern blacks important lessons about the pervasiveness of racial prejudice, raising crucial (if divisive) questions, and leaving important legacies for future action.

---

[115] Young, *Bearing Witness Against Sin*, 79.

An Overextended Agenda

As we have seen, the American Moral Reform Society chose its name and that of its newspaper, the *National Reformer*, very consciously. But friends and critics alike were full of suggestions on what the Society ought to call itself and how it could better define its purpose. "We have been accustomed to hear objections stating against our 'banner,' because it was too broad," Whipper wrote, but gleefully printed a letter in the *National Reformer* in which a reader not only embraced its comprehensive quartet of principles, "but requests that we append to it the 'Heaven derived cause of peace.'"[116] Another reader suggested that the world "'*moral*' could have been squeezed in somewhere" in the newspaper's title; "If the words, *'The Moral,'* were substituted for *'National,'*" he queried, "would it not embrace the world[?]"[117] Clearly, the Society's expansive vision had genuine supporters.

Others, of course, were less generous. The most controversial choice in naming the Society, described in details below, was that it did not use the term "colored," but people also debated the propriety of the term "moral." An anonymous writer in the newspaper *Mirror of Liberty* wrote that "while we go for moral reform in theory and practice, we hope the word *moral* will be abrogated from the society."[118] Whipper vehemently disagreed, equating such a change to "suicide," and charged that without attention to this adjective, reform would be "destitute of *moral principle*."[119] It is unclear in this particular instance why the detractor found the term "moral" objectionable, but

---

[116] *National Reformer,* Mar. 1839, 103. Whipper informed readers that it had been considered for adoption as one of the founding principles but excluded because "it could not be agree[d] upon the principles on which it should be based." It was under consideration for future adoption. Ibid., 104.
[117] *National Reformer,* Dec. 1838, 60.
[118] *Mirror of Liberty*, Jan. 1839, quoted in *National Reformer,* Feb. 1839, 83.
[119] *National Reformer,* Feb. 1839, 83.

certain that Whipper unabashedly considered it central to the Society's identity. He also scoffed William Watkins's critique that the name of the Society was "too sweeping."[120] Watkin's recommendation to "narrow down" the Society's principles, Whipper believed, would degrade them to the "dimunitive [sic] standard of the detestible [sic] prejudice with which we are confronted."[121] Limiting the Society's vision would only limit its ability to overcome evil.

The actual name aside, the Society's large moral scope prevented any clarity of purpose. Samuel Cornish of the *Colored American* lambasted the Society's leaders as "visionary in the extreme," "vague, wild,? indefinite and confused in their views."[122] While the primary four principles were very clearly articulated, many of the resolutions that meetings passed merely tendered thanks to certain individuals, recommended matters to the attention of members, or stated auxiliary principles. High on rhetoric but low on action, the Society's board of directors, too, expressed a need for "some definite plan of operation."[123] Furthermore, lacking exposure and attention, the Society simply did not have the infrastructure, funding, or personnel to accomplish anything concrete, lamenting a "want of means and men to act."[124] "The newness and greatness of the enterprise," the First Annual Report noted, "does not as yet appear to be so fully comprehended by our people as we would wish." [125] As early as 1837, the board of directors had already replaced its proposals for action with apologies for inaction. In their second Annual Report, board members candidly and regretfully informed readers that they had "nothing

[120] *National Reformer,* Oct. 1838, 22.
[121] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 33.
[122] Cornish, quoted in Yacovone, "Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement," 289.
[123] "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 2-3.
[124] AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 211.
[125] Ibid.

very flattering or encouraging" to report and were able to fill an entire printed column with resolutions . not "acted upon " in the previous year, due to both "many obstacles" and "want of zeal and exertion on our part."[126]

While members of the Philadelphia leadership and particularly Whipper were surely generous in committing their time and efforts to the Society, action required go-betweens from the parent organization to local auxiliaries and free black communities. At the outset, the Board of Managers was to "appoint an agent, in every state, county, city, town, or village in the Union, wherever practicable, whose duty it shall be to form auxiliaries, and carry into effect all the objects of this Society."[127] The agent was to oversee moral reform efforts at the local level, and communicate with the national body. But for unstated reasons—likely a lack of finances—the matter of appointing local agents was "indefinitely postponed" at the 1838 annual meeting.[128]

Philadelphia and Local Auxiliaries

Grand national designs, however sincere, did not change the fact that the AMRS remained, throughout its history, primarily a Philadelphia organization. The city had its own local auxiliary, and the leadership of the national Society was heavily Philadelphia-based. At the 1835 Convention, the body elected only "citizens of Philadelphia as its officers," who were "unanimously received and adopted."[129] The committee on "ways and means" recommended that the Society's only paid agent "be, for the present, confined to this city," revealing its preference to concentrate its efforts in the vicinity of

---

[126] *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 6, 2.
[127] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 9; "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 6.
[128] "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 8.
[129] *Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention . . . 1835*, 13-14, Burr, Brown, Hinton, Roberts, Gloucester, Brown, Butler.

its headquarters rather than branching out.[130] While the AMRS's leaders sought to think nationally, it is clear that they struggled to see beyond the boundaries of their own community.

In actuality, most of the actual, rather than rhetorical, work that the AMRS achieved was probably through local auxiliaries to the parent organization, which were largely at liberty to function as they wished. The spread of these local auxiliaries was precisely what would make fulfillment of the AMRS's grand proposals possible. "We admit that our principles cover an infinity of space," Whipper explained, "but that proves no detriment to their local application."[131] The *National Reformer* reported on events at auxiliary societies, shared their constitutions as inspiration and models for new branches, and even printed full lectures and abridged meeting proceedings of those groups.

A handful of auxiliaries were established primarily in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, but also in other New England states and increasingly in the Midwest. While information on the members and activities of the local societies is extremely limited, articles in the *National Reformer* and the national organization's annual reports suggest that they frequently hosted lectures and classes, sent delegates to meetings, and supported local free black businesses and schools.[132] Members and local agents of the auxiliary societies also collected information on the free black community and organizations in their respective communities. The Society's 1837 annual report included a compilation of data on the numbers of churches, clergy, schools, teachers, and literary

[130] "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 6.
[131] *National Reformer,* Jan. 1839, 71.
[132] See, for example, Ibid., 71-72.

benevolence, and temperance societies in various towns, as reported by local agents to the AMRS, highlighting the organs of moral reform in each location.[133]

Some auxiliaries clung very much to the parent organization's priorities, while others strayed more to address particular interests of members in that locality. The Cranberry, New Jersey auxiliary, founded in 1837, for example, stated that its purpose was specifically for the moral reform of the "colored people" of the area, but admitted as its members "all persons" dedicated to the Society's principles.[134] The Philadelphia City Moral Reform Society, on the other hand, followed the parent organization in refusing to identify any "complexional variations" in the subjects to be reformed.[135] Despite its preferential relationship to the parent organization, even the Philadelphia auxiliary grew weary of the AMRS's inaction, and in 1839 considered establishing a basic educational and industrial school itself, given the national organization's inability to do so.[136]

But the impression of inaction, as we have seen, was a fact, indeed, and accompanied by a genuine lack of consensus on the utility of the Society's expansive vision for achieving moral reform. Nowhere did the objections to the Society's idealism become more evident than in the very arena that informed readers of the values and actions of the Society and its auxiliaries: the press.

The Newspaper Wars: Racial Inclusivity Debated

Racial inclusivity would become the flashpoint in the debate between the AMRS and its critics. Although the resolution against using racial language had passed unanimously at the founding meeting, some free blacks began to object that the Society

---

[133] AMRS Annual Meeting of 1837, 212-213.
[134] *National Reformer,* Jan. 1839, 71.
[135] Ibid., 72-73.
[136] *National Reformer,* Mar. 1839, 109.

should stay true to the purpose of the Convention that founded it, "the improvement of the free people of colour," and not spend precious funds and energy on trying to fix white morality as well. Open as it was to all friends of morality, the AMRS never developed into a biracial movement and outsiders, including an antislavery society in Scotland, continued to suspect it was "composed . . .exclusively of coloured persons."[137] Despite the attendance of a few delegates from white reform organizations and the support of some white philanthropists, most notably John Jay of New York, this was largely the case.

Whipper's increasing insistence on racial inclusivity among both the agents and subjects of moral reform would spark a spirited controversy and newspaper war, quickly alienating some of the Society's original supporters. The conflict was certainly exaggerated – one critic, William Watkins, even denounced some enemies of the Society as "hair-splitting hypercritics"[138] – but it was real. While it is easy to interpret this as solely a conflict of race, as many historians have, it was part of a larger debate about the propriety of the Society's scope more generally.

Whipper's proposal at the 1835 Convention to discourage the use of the words "African" and "colored" in organizations and his objection to wording that resolved to establish exclusively "colored" schools for the improvement of the morals of youth in 1837 developed into an extended debate over not just terminology but also purpose. The controversy over the 1837 resolution was solved by replacing "colored" with the ambiguous "among our people," but the debate would surface again and again in a divisive battle between editor Samuel Cornish and contributors to the *Colored American*

---

[137] *Sixth Annual Report of the Glasgow Emancipation Society...* (Glasgow: Aird and Russell, 1840), 29.
[138] *National Reformer,* Oct. 1838, 21.

and Whipper, publishing first in the *National Enquirer* and later in the Society's new news organ, the *National Reformer.*

On the pages of these papers, black intellectuals debated the merits and deficiencies of racially distinguishing terms. Use of the term "colored" had its staunch supporters in the free black community, for reasons as varied as its convenience and its being better than any existing alternatives. Cornish charged in an editorial in the *Colored American* that it was "ludicrous" that Philadelphians in the AMRS were quarreling over the impropriety of racial disnctions while "their *FRIENDS* and *FOES* . . . call them nothing else but *NEGROES.*"[139] William Watkins, once a respected supporter of the Society, came out in defense "not [of] the word *African*, but the appropriate, and . . . endearing epithet, '*colored.*"[140] The term, he reasoned, was not inherently negative and was useful for crediting blacks for their noteworthy accomplishments. "While I am unfriendly to a prodigal use, or an unnecessary parade of the word," he explained, "I must say it is too convenient in practice to be dispensed with."[141]

Watkins was engaging Whipper in a battle of wits over the term colored, and both men toyed with language, priorities, and public sentiment. "Does it convey an idea of degradation?" Watkins asked rhetorically. "Does it cast odium upon those whom it designates? None, I presume, will affirm this."[142] Whipper rebutted that neither did it offer a connotation of "merit."[143] Still, Watkins had put Whipper in the position of having to prove that he was not ashamed of his race. "*Resolved,*" Whipper wrote, "That we see nothing to regret in the different complexions which it has pleased the Almighty to clothe

---

[139] *Colored American*, 15 March 1838.
[140] *National Reformer,* Oct. 1838, 21.
[141] Ibid., 21-22.
[142] Ibid., 21.
[143] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 33.

the human family."[144] Whipper's defense reaffirmed the Society's stance against terms of racial distinction as a matter of principle, despite the fact that most free blacks had come to believe that reality did not offer the luxury of this ideologically inclusive stance.

Responding to the *Colored American*'s proud announcement that all stages of the newspaper's publication process were now completed by "colored men," the *National Reformer* replied that as the paper was written for the benefit of colored men it indeed "ought to receive their support, *but* not because" of the fact that it was produced by colored men, "but because its object is the elevation of colored men to an equal standing with other American citizens."[145] For the AMRS, theoretical equality and a paper's commitment to moral virtues were more important than the racial identity of its contributors, editors, and printers. "For ourselves," Whipper boasted, speaking for of the *National Reformer*, "we solicit neither favor nor patronage on the ground of complexional merit," feigning bafflement at "why the different shades of the human form should inculcate in us feelings of glory or shame."[146]

The opposition's problem, of course, was not merely a matter of terminology, but the entire viability of a racially inclusive platform. Watkins charged that the Society had "virtually decided, that an organization for the *exclusive* benefit of the colored population of the country, is selfish, and totally at variance with the . . . principles of universal benevolence."[147] Watkins proposed a different model: "I concentrate all my energies in one vigorous effort to extricate him . . . who most needs help."[148] Plenty of reform organizations already existed to serve the white population, and so the efforts of

---

[144] "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 8.
[145] *National Reformer,* Apr. 1839, 115.
[146] *National Reformer,* Apr. 1839, 115.
[147] *National Reformer,* Oct. 1838, 22.
[148] Ibid.

the AMRS would be better spent in improving the condition and morals of African Americans. He proposed a resolution accordingly: "That the object of *this Society* is to improve the condition, mental and moral, of the colored population of our land' not because they are *colored*, but because, being *colored*, they are, for the most part, despised, neglected."[149] This was the same argument Whipper had made against "African"-titled schools, but used the same logic to reach the opposite conclusion.

To Watkins's critique that, by including whites, "*We* promote the spread of the principles of *'universal liberty'* among a people thoroughly indoctrinated in those principles,"[150] the *National Reformer* replied that, on the contrary, "the majority of the people of this nation, with regard to the subject of 'Universal Liberty,' are both blind and dumb."[151] Watkins argued that in fighting for universal liberty across racial lines African Americans would be working for liberties that whites already enjoyed. But Whipper's purpose was less to achieve liberty for whites than to make them realize that even non-slaveholding whites were implicated in the system of slavery and oppression. He hoped to thereby garner the support of a morally enlightened white populace to secure due liberties for blacks. The long-term goals were the same, but patience for Whipper's intermediary steps was running out among many northern free blacks.

The virulence of the debates caused some observers to criticize the level of controversy between "persons of their 'own complexion.'"[152] Some argued that it was "impolitic" that blacks "be divided in sentiment with regard to the means of our

---

[149] Ibid.
[150] *National Reformer,* Oct, 1838, 22.
[151] *National Reformer,* Nov. 1838, 34.
[152] *National Reformer,* Mar. 1839, 97.

elevation, while we are so oppressed."[153] The disadvantaged status of blacks, they reasoned, required unity to achieve anything. Whipper saw the matter differently. "From this doctrine we wholly dissent," he stated. "Our silence on vital subjects relating to our welfare, will not create in us unity in sentiment."[154] That unity could only be achieved after candid debate had resolved differences in opinion among members of the free black community.

Whipper naively believed that his arguments would prevail, and detractors only had to admit that he was theoretically correct in arguing that universal methods for reform were the optimal course.[155] The *Colored American*'s new editor, Charles B. Ray, on the other hand, considered it a "pity" that Whipper, "like some distant planet," could not let go of his insistence on nominally racially inclusive efforts.[156] Ray maintained that "*desperate necessity,*" not "the spirit of complexional cast," demanded separate institutions.[157] Steadfastness in matters of principle was essential, Whipper believed, for the Society to hold moral authority, but criticisms of the AMRS brought up in the newspaper wars show increasing impatience in the second half of the 1830s with the Society's insistence on racial inclusivity, which seemed to produce no tangible results. The controversy over race compounded deeper difficulties of finances and mobilization that the AMRS was facing, crippling the Society and calling for a new course in achieving black liberties.

---

[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid.
[155] *National Reformer,* Mar. 1839, 97.
[156] *Colored American,* 6 Feb. 1841, 2.
[157] *Colored American,* 30 Jan. 1841, 2.

The Fate of the Negro Convention Movement

At the national level, the Society had tried to use the momentum of the Negro Convention Movement to work in cooperation with whites for a broader platform of moral reform. Translating a yearly convention that moved from place to place into a permanent national organization, however, had proven no easy task, as delegates vied for influence. The Society's Philadelphia leaders maneuvered to hold its 1836 Annual Meeting in August again in Philadelphia, even though the Negro Convention of that year had previously been granted to New York to host.[158] Such Philadelphia-centricness did not sit well with leaders of the free black community in other cities, particularly boycotting New Yorkers. Winch argues that debates between the AMRS and its opponents, captured by rivalry between Philadelphians and New Yorkers, made clear the "need for the revival of the national convention movement," which leading free blacks would seek to revive outside the institution of the AMRS.[159]

In 1839 the *Colored American* printed a proposal for a "general Convention" along the model of the convention that had founded the Society in 1835. The AMRS was originally intended as a permanent organization to formalize, codify, and unite all of the principles of and delegates to the previous conventions, but by then it was clear that it had evolved into an additional group, rather than the overarching institution it aspired to be. In his editorial, Whipper emphasized the AMRS's agreement with the principles and purposes of the proposed convention, but informed readers that "SUCH A CONVENTION" was already planned: "It is no more nor less than the annual meeting of

[158] Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 109.
[159] Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 108.

the 'American Moral Reform Society.'"[160] His declaration was an insult to free black leaders hoping to reopen dialogue about priorities and means for obtaining their rights who had grown increasingly impatient with the AMRS's ineffectiveness.

Attendance at the 1839 Annual Meeting of the AMRS was disappointingly low, a factor that the *Reformer* blamed on "our notice not having been copied by our exchange papers," a stab at rival organs of the black press.[161] "There ought to have been 1000 delegates," Whipper complained, "composed of every complexion."[162] The *National Reformer* ceased publishing soon after, just over a year after it had begun. The Society's 1840 Annual Meeting received little notice outside of Philadelphia.[163]

Although the American Moral Reform Society officially survived for another two years, its existence was merely nominal. The paucity of documents on its final two years makes it difficult to know exactly why it formally ended when it did in 1841, but by the summer of 1839 it was abundantly clear from the newspaper wars that the AMRS could not claim to speak for all free blacks and was an unsuitable replacement for the Negro Convention Movement. The black press, instead, had become the premier venue in which matters of interest in the black community were debated and discussed.

Different proposals on how resurrect the Negro Convention Movement in 1840 reflected the arguments over universal reform that had waged in the newspapers in the preceding years and featured the solidification of what came to be called the "separatist" alternative to the Society's insistence on working with whites for moral reform. Competing conventions were planned for the summer of 1840: a separatist convention

---

[160] *National Reformer,* Feb. 1839, 81.
[161] *National Reformer,* Sep. 1839, 129.
[162] *National Reformer,* Oct. 1839, 130.
[163] *Pennsylvania Freeman,* 16 July 1840. 2. The *Freeman* was the successor to the Philadelphia *National Enquirer.*

supported by Charles B. Ray of the *Colored American* and minister Henry Highland Garnet to meet in Albany, and the New Haven Reform Convention, supported by New Yorker David Ruggles and Whipper, which still hoped for racial reconciliation in the reform movement. According to historians Jane and William Pease, this division was prompted by the AASS's split and refusal to take up the cause of black suffrage earlier that year, and inaugurated the debate over separatism in the black community.[164] We know, however, that the problem of competing conventions had already arisen the previous summer, and that the debate over separate black institutions had largely already been decided by the time it reached the pages of the AASS's *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and other organs of the white press.

What had primarily been a debate about the ideology and efficacy of the AMRS to achieve universal moral reform and the end of slavery evolved into a debate that emphasized, instead, questions about the ideology of separatism and how to achieve more pressing changes in the lives of northern free blacks, a phase of the debate in which the AMRS was no longer relevant. Whipper wrote three final letters to the *Colored American* in 1841 defending the moral necessity of ideologically inclusive efforts and the AMRS's ability to serve as the institution to represent free blacks, but to no avail.[165] The AMRS ceased to exist in August of 1841, and Whipper would not concede to the necessity for racial separatism for a few more years.[166]

---

[164] Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, "Black Power – The Debate in 1840," *Phylon* 29 (1968), 22.
[165] "Letter from William Whipper to Charles B. Ray," *Colored American*, 30 Jan. 1841, 6 Feb. 1841, and 20 Feb. 1841.
[166] C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 3: United States, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), n. 129.

CONCLUSION

By the time the American Moral Reform Society officially ceased to exist in 1841, societies that went by the name "moral reform" came to be associated primarily with women, none of which were affiliated with the AMRS.[167] Women's organizations like the Women's Moral Reform Society, New York Female Reform Society, and others were slowly transforming "moral reform" into a euphemism for reforming licentiousness and sexual sin. The AMRS had extended membership to women at its 1839 Annual Meeting, and at the same meeting passed its first resolution against licentiousness, but its priorities did not match the new connotation of the term in popular parlance. [168] Financially, the organization was never able to become a philanthropic funnel for improvement projects. The Board of Directors lamented from beginning to end that "aid in this patriotic and philanthropic cause" was not forthcoming and that individual members were tardy in paying their minimal dues.[169] The AMRS, like many reform organizations, fared poorly under these new economic constraints following the Panic of 1837, and never recovered.

According to Yacovone, "The AMRS's demise in 1841 marked the death knell of black commitment to white priorities and reflected the widespread desire for a practical reform agenda responsive to the black community's needs."[170] But the factors leading to the Society's end, as we have seen, were about more than supposedly "white" priorities. The newspaper wars revealed that the AMRS had not become the true successor to the

---

[167] For women and moral reform, see Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) and *Women in Antebellum Reform* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2000) and Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).
[168] *National Reformer,* Oct.1839, 142.
[169] "Second Annual Report of the American Moral Reform Society," in *National Reformer,* Sept. 1838, 3.
[170] Yacovone, "Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement,"290. He cites Bell, "American Moral Reform Society," 34-37, and Cooper "Elevating the Race," 610.

Negro Convention Movement that it was founded to be, either as an ideological arena for bringing together the views of free blacks or as a functioning agency. Instead, the black press was the new forum for matters of interest in the black community. The AMRS, in the role of a defendant rather than the arbiter in the court of black public opinion, was unable to apply the lessons from the early newspaper debates to strengthen the Society itself. Its inability to forge a consensus was accompanied by the more practical failures of being unable to prioritize between its goals and translate ideology into action. Universal reform, the Society's leaders believed early on, would unite black and white Americans in a broad project for their collective moral uplift, but the undertaking proved to be both impractical and too idealistic in the prejudiced climate of the Early Republic, regardless of the Society's best intentions.

But as historian Howard Bell argues, though conflicts in ideology did indeed create "disharmony" and contributed to the Society's demise, the controversies that the AMRS's universalism had sparked encouraged discussion, exchange, articulation and crystallization of ideals, and critical evaluation for future action by black reformers.[171] No institution thereafter tried to fill the expansive role the AMRS had set out for itself, but smaller-scale organizations and an increasingly developed black press continued to work toward many of the Society's original goals. The Society, however short-lived, was the first significant attempt at a permanent, national black organization devoted to politics and social welfare. From its struggles and failure, leaders of the free black community learned that practical improvements and local concerns trumped national unity. At the same time, white prejudice was still too powerful for anything practical to be gained from a racially inclusive institution, demonstrated by whites' failure to join the AMRS in any

[171] Bell, "American Moral Reform Society," 39-40.

sizable numbers and the AASS's failure to support black suffrage in New York. The revived Negro Convention Movement was able to proceed accordingly in the direction of separate black institutions to improve their own welfare.[172]

Still, elements of the AMRS's exceptional melding of reform causes and universalist ideals would persist for years to come. The antislavery and temperance movements, in particular, continued to have a close relationship. On his lecture tour of Europe in 1846, Frederick Douglass boldly declared "I am a temperance man because I am an anti-slavery man; and I am an anti-slavery man because I love my fellow men."[173] In this powerful statement, Douglass illustrated the relationship between virtues and the significance of the spirit of cooperation and universal love for mankind.

[172] Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, "Black Power – The Debate in 1840," *Phylon* 29 (1968), 21-22.
[173] Frederick Douglass, "Temperance and Anti-Slavery: An Address Delivered in Paisley, Scotland on March 30, 1826," *Renfrewshire Advertiser*, 11 April 1846, reprinted in John Blassingame et. al. eds. *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One – Speeches, Debates, and Interviews,* vol. 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 205.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Colored American
Liberator
National Enquirer
National Reformer
New York Evangelist
Pennsylvania Freeman

Bell, Howard Holman, ed. *Minutes and Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions, 1830-1864*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.

Minutes of the Fifth Annual Convention of the Improvement of the Free People of Colour in the United Stated... Philadelphia: William P. Gibbons, 1835.

Sterling, Dorothy, ed. *Speak Out in Thunder Tones: Letters and Other Writings by Black Northerners, 1787-1865*. New York: De Capo Press, 1998 [1973].

Porter, Dorothy, ed. *Early Negro Writing, 1760-1837*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1971.

Ripley, C. Peter, ed. *The Black Abolitionist Papers, Vol. 3: United States, 1830-1846.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.

Secondary Sources

Adeleke, Tunde. "Afro-Americans and Moral Suasion: The Debate in the 1830's." *The Journal of Negro History* 83 (Spring, 1998): 127-142.

Bell, Howard Homan. *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830-1861*. New York: Arno Press, 1969.

_____. "The American Moral Reform Society, 1836-1841." *The Journal of Negro Education* 27 (Winter, 1958): 33-40.

Cooper, Frederick. "Elevating the Race: The Social Thought of Black Leaders, 1827-50."*American Quarterly* 24 (Dec., 1972), 604-625.

Dorsey, Bruce. *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002.

Friedman, Lawrence J. *Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in American Abolitionism, 1830-1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Ginzberg, Lori D. *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

_____. *Women in Antebellum Reform*. Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2000.

Griffin, Clifford S. *The Ferment of Reform: 1830-1860*. New York: Crowell Press, 1967.

_____. *Their Brothers' Keepers: Moral Stewardship in the United States, 1800 to 1865*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983 [1960].

Gross, Bella. *Clarion Call: The History and Development of the Negro People's Convention Movement in the United States from 1817 to 1840*. New York: Atwater Press, 1947.

Gusfield, Joseph R. *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1963.

Hatch, Nathan O., *Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Herd, Denise. "The Paradox of Temperance: Blacks and the Alcohol Question in Nineteenth-Century America." In *Drinking: Behavior and Belief in Modern History* ed. Susannah Barrows and Robin Room. Berkeley, CA: 1991.

Jeffrey, Julie Roy. *Abolitionists Remember: Antislavery Autobiographies and the Unfinished Work of Emancipation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

_____. *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Kraditor, Aileen S., *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics, 1834-1850*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1969.

Madgol, Edward.*The Antislavery Rank and File: A Social Profile of the Abolitionists' Constituency*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Martin, Scott C. *Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-class Ideology, 1800-1860*. DeKalb: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

McKivigan, John R. *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984.

Monroe, James A. *Hellfire Nation: The Politics of Sin in American History*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Nash, Gary B. *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Newman, Richard S. *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

Pease, Jane H. and William H. Pease. "Black Power – The Debate in 1840." *Phylon* 29 (1968): 19-26.

Quarles, Benjamin. *The Black Abolitionists*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1969.

Quist, John W. *Restless Visionaries: The Social Roots of Antebellum Reform in Alabama and Michigan*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998.

Roberts, M.J.D. *Making English Morals: Voluntary Associations and Moral Reform in England, 1787-1886*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Ryan, Mary P. *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Strong, Douglas M. *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1999.

Thomas, John L. "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," *American Quarterly* 17 (winter 1965): 656-681.

Walters, Ronald G. *American Reformers*, 1815-1860. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978.

_____. *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Weems, Robert E., Jr. "The American Moral Reform Society and the Origins of Black Conservative Ideology." In *Dimensions of Black Conservativism in the United States: Made in America*, edited by Gayle T. Tate and Lewis A. Randloph. New York: Palgrave, 2002. 31-41

Winch, Julie. *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.

Yacovone, Donald. "Transformation of the Black Temperance Movement." *Journal of the Early Republic* 8 (Autumn 1988): 281-297.

Young, Michael P. *Bearing Witness Against Sin: The Evangelical Birth of the American Society Movement*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.

VITA

Kristina Poznan was raised in Fairfield, CT. She received her B.A. in 2008 from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY, where she completed a major in History and a teaching certificate in social studies. After finishing her M.A. coursework at William & Mary, she spent the 2009-2010 academic year as a Fulbright fellow in Hungary. There she taught courses in American history and culture at the Károli Gáspár Reformed University in Budapest. Kristina has previously worked with the Mid-Hudson Antislavery History Project, the Lewis & Clark Experience, the Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, and the National Institute of American History & Democracy's Pre-Collegiate Summer Program.