

Certainty, Crisis, Compromise: The  
Abolitionists of the *Liberator* Circle, 1860-1863

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the abolitionist community that corresponded through the weekly abolitionist periodical *The Liberator*, organised into four different circles of the *Liberator* Circle, over the years 1860-1863. Chief editor William Lloyd Garrison, notable agitator Wendell Phillips, editor Charles Whipple, and their coadjutors in the *Liberator* Circle, believed that political abolition was impossible because the entire political system was founded on the proslavery compromise of the Constitution. Furthermore, it was impossible to take an uncompromising moral stand as a politician, for achieving consensus within any given party, as well as with the opposition, required compromise, as defined by George Santayana in *Character and Opinion in the United States*. Garrison and his coadjutors in the *Liberator* Circle fervently refused to compromise over the evil of slavery, and demanded immediate abolition through the anti-political means of northern disunion. This thesis argues that from 1860 to 1863 Garrison and the majority of the *Liberator* Circle compromised their ideal means of anti-political abolition and accepted the political abolition of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Circle's process of accepting political means was not immediate, as revisionist and post-revisionist historiography suggests. Rather, it occurred over three distinct periods: Certainty, from 1860 to Abraham Lincoln's election on November Eighth, Crisis, from Lincoln's election to the bombardment of Fort Sumter on April Fourteenth 1861, and Compromise, from Fort Sumter to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, January First 1863. Each of these periods align with a change in the masthead slogan of the *Liberator*, and represent different challenges to the identity of the *Liberator* Circle. This thesis analyses Garrison and his coadjutors' path to compromise and what effect it had on the activist community of the *Liberator* Circle

## Introduction

1860 to 1863 was a time of immense change for the United States. The election of Abraham Lincoln as the first antislavery president prompted the secession of eleven Southern States and led to a Civil War where 650,000 Americans lost their lives. Yet it also led to the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, which declared all slaves in the rebellious states free and signalled the end of the peculiar institution. William Lloyd Garrison, founder and chief editor of abolitionist periodical *The Liberator*, believed that the Proclamation would 'if energetically and uncompromisingly enforced, inflict a staggering blow upon that fearfully oppressive system.'<sup>1</sup> Garrison was supportive of the Proclamation, as long as Lincoln and the Republican Government that enacted it followed it to the letter and truly ended slavery. This response was undoubtedly muted and critical. But the fact that Garrison was willing to accept any form of political abolition at all was a remarkable change from the anti-political agitation he had championed in *The Liberator* for nearly two decades.<sup>2</sup> Over the course of 1860 to 1863, Garrison and the individual abolitionist agitators who corresponded through *The Liberator*, henceforth termed the *Liberator* Circle, went through a process of personal compromise that saw them shift away from demanding immediate, unconditional abolition through the repudiation of the Constitution and towards accepting the limited, political emancipation of the Proclamation. This compromise towards political means was not universal nor

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<sup>1</sup> William Lloyd Garrison, 'National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Advertisement]' *The Liberator*, Vol. 32 No. 50, 12/12/1862. In the interest of brevity, all further references to *The Liberator* will omit the publication title, but include the author, article title, volume and issue number, and publication date.

<sup>2</sup> Aileen S. Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics: 1834-1850*, (Pantheon Books: New York, 1969), p. 202

immediate amongst the Circle. But it did fundamentally alter the Circle's activist community and challenged the hitherto concrete definitions of what it meant to be a Garrisonian abolitionist.

Unlike other contemporary abolitionist societies, the *Liberator* Circle did not have any formal hierarchy. Although Garrison was the de-facto leader, he had no official title to this regard; he was an equal agitator along with every member of the Circle.<sup>3</sup> Some form of an organizational structure can be ascribed to the four main groups of the Circle, however, by historical importance and amount of correspondence within the *Liberator*.<sup>4</sup> Garrison, abolitionist agent Wendell Phillips, and co-editor Charles Whipple form the primary, or Inner Circle. Notable agitators like Henry Wright, Parker Pillsbury, and Lydia Child (who generally have published biographies) form the secondary circle, or Outer Circle. Regular correspondents form the tertiary circle, and the wider readership make up the quaternary circle, both of which fall under the Wider Circle. Only the tertiary circle prove problematic in terms of methodology. Essentially, they were anonymous; even though some signed with their full names, the majority choose to go by their initials, or a moniker such as 'JUSTITIA' or even 'Yale College.'<sup>5</sup> Because of this anonymity, it is impossible to identify these correspondents and ascertain the importance of their views in a historiographical sense. The tertiary circle cannot be ignored, however. Unlike the quaternary circle, the tertiary circle consisted of readers who were moved enough by the *Liberator* that they felt they had to actively engaged in correspondence, and were

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence J. Freidman, *Gregarious Saints: Self and Community in Antebellum American Abolitionism*, (Cambridge University Press: 1982), p. 48

<sup>4</sup> See Frontispiece: The *Liberator* Circle for a complete list of the *Liberator* Circle members referenced in this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> JUSTITIA wrote four pieces of correspondence over 1860-1863: 'What is Abolitionism? Who are the Abolitionists?', Vol. 30 No. 4, 27/01/1860, 'A Gratifying Testimonial', Vol. 30 No. 13, 30/03/1860, 'It Has Had some of the Bacon', Vol. 32 No. 22 30/05/1862, 'The Cause', Vol. 32 No. 31 01/08/1862; Yale College, 'Not a War for Liberty', Vol. 31 No. 19 10/05/1861

considered to be equal agitators alongside Garrison. Therefore, their views are of equal importance in examining the concerns of the Circle as a whole.

The masthead slogan of the *Liberator* changed twice over the period of Certainty, Crisis, and Compromise. The changes in the masthead slogan align with the *Liberator* Circle's overall unity and ideal means of abolition. 'NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS' held pride of place from 1845 to 1861.<sup>6</sup> A bold, unambiguous statement, this slogan represented the fundamental demand that united the abolitionist readership of the *Liberator*: the complete, unconditional abolition of slavery through the repudiation of the Constitution and the creation of a republic that truly represented the ideals of its citizens. The only way to repudiate the Constitution was through the dissolution of the Union, a revolutionary process that was legitimized by the Declaration of Independence. Garrison formulated northern disunion in 1843 and championed it as the only morally acceptable means of abolition.<sup>7</sup> Attempting abolition through politics was a futile endeavour, because to gain any form of progress in Congress antislavery Congressmen had to reach some form of compromise with their moderate and proslavery counterparts. Such was the case in 1820 with the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850. Garrison demanded immediate, universal abolition, not the gradual half-measures of politicians.

The first slogan change occurred in January 1861 in response to the Secession Crisis. Garrison chose a slogan that did not deviate from northern disunion: 'The United States Constitution is a "covenant with death, and an

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<sup>6</sup> Garrison, 'Masthead', from Vol. 15 No. 1, 3/01/1845 to Vol. 30 No. 53, 31/12/1860

<sup>7</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. 202

agreement with hell.”<sup>8</sup> Instead, it reflected the next step in the *Liberator* Circle’s ideal means of abolition: the repudiation of the Constitution. For the slaveholders had removed themselves from the Union through secession. Although the Union had been broken by an unrepentant populace, Garrison and the Circle welcomed secession as a step in the right direction. Without the slaveholder’s influence on Congress, the only things stopping the North from repudiating the Constitution were obstructionist politicians and a moderate, non-abolitionist citizenry. Therefore, the object of the Circle’s moral suasion remained the same: convincing the North of the moral necessity of disunion. Garrison and the wider Circle had no need to reconsider their ideological certainties of disunion and immediatism. As such, the Circle experienced the greatest level of unity that their community had ever seen.

The second and final change in the masthead came in December 1861, and represented a far greater deviation of policy than the first.<sup>9</sup> The new slogan, ‘Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land, and to all the inhabitants thereof,’ was generic in comparison to the strict disunionism of the previous two. It still called for universal abolition, but did not demand the dissolution of the Union or the Constitution. On the contrary, the slogan reflected Garrison’s shift away from anti-political action and acceptance of the Constitutional method of abolition known as the war power theory. Formulated by former President and antislavery advocate John Quincy Adams, the war power theory stated that in times of war the President and Congress had the Constitutional power to adopt any means that could help the prosecution of the war, including the abolition of slavery.<sup>10</sup> Alongside the new slogan,

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<sup>8</sup> Garrison, ‘Masthead’, Vol. 31 No. 1, 04/01/1861

<sup>9</sup> Garrison, ‘Masthead’, Vol. 31 No. 50 13/12/1861

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



Garrison included an excerpt from Adams' war power speech to Congress which summarized the war power theory:

'From the instant that the slaveholding States become theatres of war, CIVIL, servile, or foreign, from that instant the war powers of Congress extend to interference with the institution of slavery, IN EVERY WAY IT CAN BE INTERFERED WITH, from a claim of indemnity for slaves taken or destroyed, to the cession of States, burdened with slavery, to a foreign power . . .'<sup>11</sup>

It appears that Garrison had simply shifted the radical, challenging tones of the disunionist slogans to Adams' speech. Yet Garrison's choice of less inflammatory abolitionist language reflected the compromise of anti-political principle that he had embarked on at the start of the Civil War. Adams' speech provided context to Garrison's repeated assertions in favour of the war power theory.

The changes in the masthead of the *Liberator* align with the three distinct periods of unity and division the *Liberator* Circle faced over 1860-1863. The period of Certainty from 1860 to Abraham Lincoln's election saw the Circle united as immediate abolitionists, a distinct minority of individuals who believed in the righteousness of abolition and the necessity of repudiating the Constitution. Garrison and his contemporaries all campaigned in a manner that aligned with their own morality, regardless of the intellectual differences in their abolitionist theories. For their various efforts were all directed towards the immediate repudiation of the proslavery constitution through northern disunion. Anti-political northern disunion was the practical means of abolition that bound together the various modes of personal agitation each coadjutor adhered to. An idealistic, preferably bloodless,

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<sup>11</sup> John Quincy Adams, 'Quote in Masthead', Vol. 31 No. 50, 13/12/1861

democratic revolution of enlightened, abolitionist American citizens against a compromising, tyrannical government was a future that all abolitionists of the *Liberator* could work towards. Even though northern disunion was extremely unpopular with moderate Northerners and vilified as intolerable extremism by proslavery Southerners, the *Liberator* Circle was content to campaign for a brand of abolition that they knew was completely in line with their moral core.

The period of Crisis encompassed the Secession Winter from November 1860 to the bombardment of Fort Sumter on April fourteenth 1861. Secession was not the ideal disunion that the Circle sought, but it could be rationalised as having the same outcome as disunion. Hence the slogan 'The United States Constitution is 'a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell.'<sup>12</sup> Secession might have been the greatest challenge the Union had ever faced, but for the Circle it was a step on the path to complete abolition. The Civil War, however, made disunion completely irrelevant. Instead of being united under the ideal means of disunion, the Circle was divided by questions of means, where to direct their agitation, and what purpose their society served.

From Fort Sumter to the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Garrison and the majority of the *Liberator* Circle chose to compromise their anti-political beliefs and work towards political abolition. They justified their deviation from disunion by championing abolition as war goal, made possible through Adams' war power theory.<sup>13</sup> Garrison's compromise was not immediate. It took time to develop into the acceptance of the Emancipation Proclamation. However, during this period of

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<sup>12</sup> Garrison, 'Masthead', Vol. 31 No. 1, 04/01/1861

<sup>13</sup> Adams, 'Quote in Masthead', Vol. 31 No. 50, 13/12/1861; for an explanation of Garrison's interpretation of Adams' war power theory see Garrison, 'The War Power', Vol. 31 No. 46, 15/11/1861

Compromise the *Liberator* Circle suffered a crisis of identity from which it never truly recovered. The Inner Circle of Garrison, Phillips, and Whipple chose to compromise their personal beliefs and left it up to the Outer and Wider Circle if they wanted to follow them. Garrison's compromise was an exercise of the individualism celebrated by the *Liberator* Circle. Yet because it revoked the fundamental Certainty of northern disunion, embraced a political mode of abolition, and did not come about after a period of inclusive debate and discussion, Garrison's compromise altered the way the Circle operated as an activist community. The *Liberator* Circle could no longer position themselves as radicals agitating outside of the Union. Instead, the majority of the Circle gradually came to accept to the limited abolition of the Emancipation Proclamation and in doing so rethought what it meant to be an American abolitionist.

Frontispiece: The *Liberator* Circle

All those in the *Liberator* Circle referenced in this thesis, in alphabetical order by last name.

Primary/Inner Circle

William Lloyd Garrison      Wendell Phillips      Charles K. Whipple

Secondary/Outer Circle

Charles Burleigh      Maria Chapman      Lydia Child  
David Child      Abbey Foster      Daniel Foster  
Stephen Foster      Beriah Green      Ezra Heywood  
Samuel May Junior      Parker Pillsbury      John Rock

Henry Wright

Tertiary/Wider Circle

An Old Line Abolitionist      J. P. B.      F. W. Bird  
George Boutwell      Yale College      James Freeman  
Clark      Moncure D. Conway      Charles G. Davis  
Emmet Densmore      J. T. Everett      J. H. Fowler  
Lizze de Garmo      D. S. Grandin      G.  
W. P. G.      Josephine S. Griffing      A. J. Grover  
D. H.      Thomas Haskell      Josiah Henshaw

A. Hogeboom	George Hoyt	Insurrectionist
Justitia	S. M. J.	L.
Alfred H. Love	M.	Sella Martin
Orson S. Murray	A Colored Man	George F.
Noyes	General Observer	God help THE
PEOPLE	The Boston Pionier	Frank Sanborn
Daniel Somes	George W. Stacy	H. G. Rollins
J. W.	Robert F. Wallcut	N. H. Whiting
B. G. Wright	**	

Quaternary/Wider Circle

All others who read the *Liberator*, but did not correspond directly.

## Historiography

The historiography of the Civil War can be broadly defined in three phases: traditionalism, revisionism, and post-revisionism. The traditionalist and revisionist phases align with the historiography of the abolitionists in the sense that abolitionism is dealt with as a secondary issue in the bigger picture of ascertaining the causes of the war. The post-revisionist phase however, which encompasses everything from the 1960's to the present, is unique in that it has a very clear focus on defining the abolitionists and determining their impact on history. As such, my main body of historiographical sources are drawn from this phase. Post-revisionist works are characterised by an element of strong reaction to the arguments of the previous phases, distinct individualism, and, beyond the 1970's, a repetitious cycle of building on past theories with limited original deviations. The works of current historians from the 1970's onwards represents a fourth phase of historiography. However, the historians in this phase, such as Henry Mayer and Manisha Sinha, were the students of the post-revisionists of the 1960's, and inherited their focus on defining the abolitionists. As such, modern abolitionist historians can be qualified as the children of the post-revisionists for their tendency to build on the Civil Rights era theses.

Historians prior to the 1960's viewed the role of the abolitionist as essentially binary and focused around the figurehead of Garrison. Thomas J. Pressly's excellent account of Civil War historiography prior to 1960, *Americans Interpret their Civil War*, analysed the works of Northern traditionalists John Burgess, William Schouler, and James Ford Rhodes, and found that Garrison was praised as a hero for his role as an uncompromising moral leader against slavery.<sup>14</sup> Rhodes in particular emphasised

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<sup>14</sup> Thomas J. Pressly, *Americans Interpret their Civil War*, (Princeton University Press: 1962), pp. 160-172

slavery as the sole cause of the war. The sectional tension over slavery's morality brought the United States into an irrepressible conflict, and the proslavery South was undoubtedly immoral and in the wrong.<sup>15</sup> The Northern traditionalists were focused on justifying their victorious war, and unequivocally hailed Garrison for his commitment to morality above all else and praised the role the abolitionists had in agitating for change.<sup>16</sup> Garrison and *The Liberator* were seen as representative of the entire abolitionist movement who worked in tandem with the Republican Party to bring about emancipation.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, the revisionist movement, which spans roughly from 1900 to 1950, is characterized by a revulsion of the abolitionists. This trend began with Frederick Jackson Turner and Charles Beard's move away from emphasizing slavery as the defining cause of the Civil War; if slavery was not a key issue, then the abolitionists become less relevant.<sup>18</sup> Beard and Turner still worked within the framework of the irreconcilable conflict theory, but instead of focusing on the triumph over slavery they sought to find an empirical, balanced answer to the causation of the war that incorporated economic, social, and cultural factors as well as political ones.<sup>19</sup>

Avery Craven, J. T. Randall, and Charles Ramsdell, three of the most prominent revisionists, adopted a more extreme theory, claiming that the abolitionists were religious fanatics who brought the abstract issue of slavery into the political realm and unnecessarily aggravated sectional tension.<sup>20</sup> Craven in particular dismisses the abolitionists as 'hypersensitive Northerners' who misguidedly directed

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 172-173

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160-172

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Merton L. Dillon, 'The Abolitionists: A Decade of Historiography, 1959-1969', *The Journal of Southern History*, p. 500

<sup>19</sup> Pressly, *Americans Interpret their Civil War*, pp. 208-213

<sup>20</sup> J. G. Randall, "The Civil War Restudied", *JSH*, VI (1940), pp. 446-452

their absolute desire to eradicate sin towards slavery in the abstract without considering the reality of the institution.<sup>21</sup> Randall and Ramsdell developed Craven's thesis further by arguing that slavery was not sustainable as an economic system and, had it not been the target of abolitionist agitation, would have eventually died out.<sup>22</sup> The introduction of an abstract concept of absolute morality into a political system that was designed to operate on mutual compromise transformed otherwise reconcilable sectional differences into unresolvable sources of conflict. In reducing slavery into an abstract concept, a mere talking point used by abolitionist radicals against the South, the revisionists downplay the fact that the *Liberator* Circle was agitation against the racism inherent in all Americans as well as the institutionalised racism of the Constitution. Regardless, the revisionists held that the abolitionists were a profoundly negative influence on a nation that would have avoided Civil War if it were not for their moral, but impractical, unfounded, and extreme, agitation.

The revisionists' outright dismissal of the abolitionists was not quite a complete consensus, however. During the first half of the twentieth century Gilbert H. Barnes, Dwight Lowell Dumond, and Whitney Cross formulated a thesis and methodological approach that would form the initial basis of abolitionist historiography. Barnes, Dumond, and Cross are united with Craven, Randall, and Ramsdell in the sense that they do not agree with the traditionalist's thesis regarding Garrison's primacy in the movement. Yet rather than discounting the abolitionists entirely or painting them as a destructive force, they argued that the true activists were not the *Liberator* circle's radical 'fanatics,' but the evangelical and political

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<sup>21</sup> Avery O. Craven, *Civil War in the Making*, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1959), pp. 18-20

<sup>22</sup> Randall, "The Civil War Restudied", p. 447; Charles Ramsdell, 'The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion', *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (1929), p. 111



abolitionists who consistently endorsed moral suasion as the ideal means of achieving abolition. In order to propagate this idea, they developed a methodology that focused on defining strict boundaries of abolitionist thought, organisation, and practical action. This approach, henceforth termed the definitions framework, facilitated the 'rescue' of marginalised abolitionists from the shadow of Garrison's radical disunionism.

Barnes' *The Anti-Slavery Impulse: 1830-1844* was one of the first monographs that utilized the definitions framework. Barnes traced the origins of political abolitionists such as James Birney, Joshua Giddings, and Gerrit Smith, and evangelical abolitionists Theodore Weld, Arthur Tappan, and Lewis Tappan, through the united moral suasion of 1830's until the second election that the abolitionist Liberty Party ran in. Barnes' short timeframe does not cover the entire lifespan of political abolitionism might appear to place limits on what he can authoritatively conclude. Yet within the context of the definitions framework it is entirely justified. Barnes identified the political abolitionists as the most effective group, asserting that their method of working towards abolition through representative, democratic change was superior to the anti-political agitation of the Garrisonians.<sup>23</sup> By the 1840's a significant amount of Northern Americans believed in abolition (or were at least partial to antislavery thought) thanks to the mass agency and moral suasion of the 1830's.<sup>24</sup> Barnes argued that influencing and working with politics was the best way to capitalize on the base of Northern antislavery opinion.<sup>25</sup> For Barnes, the factor that defined the political abolitionists as the most effective was their consistent, logical attempt to build on the moral suasion of the 1830's with the aim of achieving realistic

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164-167

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 194-196

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-190

progress towards abolition, even if it took until Lincoln's election for political antislavery to actually bear fruit.<sup>26</sup>

Dumond took Barne's pro-political antislavery argument to its logical conclusion with his monograph *Anti-Slavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America*. Building on Barnes' narrow approach, Dumond created a unified history of abolitionist thought up to the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, but highlighted the split of 1838 over methodology between political and radical Garrisonian abolitionists as the key moment in defining abolitionist factions.<sup>27</sup> Dumond argued that Garrison was central to the division of the abolitionists, for 'Garrison gloried in opposition, magnified it beyond reality, thought of himself as a potential martyr, and became insufferably arrogant . . . to the detriment of his cause.'<sup>28</sup> Garrison's anti-political, anti-Constitutional means showed ' . . . abysmal ignorance or complete disregard for of the fact that slavery was established and sustained by law, that legal protection of the civil rights of Negroes was desperately needed, and that the only actual gains against slavery had been by political action.'<sup>29</sup> Garrison and the *Liberator* Circle, whom Dumond considered one and the same, were nothing but disruptive radicals with 'distinctly narrow limitations amongst the giants of the antislavery movement' who served as 'obstacles to political action against slavery.'<sup>30</sup> The political abolitionists, despite falling prey to their own internal conflicts on means and principle, were still the 'true' representatives of the movement, however.<sup>31</sup> Dumond argued that the failures of the Liberty and Free Soil

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 190-197

<sup>27</sup> Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America*, (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1966), pp.286-290, p. 370

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174-179

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290

parties were irrelevant, as the conglomeration of Liberty men, antislavery Democrats, and conscience Whigs that formed the Free Soil party developed into the Republican Party in the 1850's.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, the Republican Party represented the culmination of the true trajectory of abolitionism. When Lincoln was elected, the triumphs of the Republicans (war against the slavepower, the Emancipation Proclamation, and finally the Thirteenth Amendment) became the triumphs of the abolitionists.<sup>33</sup> The political abolitionists were right to compromise their absolute principles in the name of working within the framework of the Constitution.<sup>34</sup>

Cross' *Burned Over District* utilized the definitions framework in a very different manner to Barnes and Dumond. Rather than defining and tracing the development of an abolitionist group in their entirety, Cross limited his study to Western upstate New York.<sup>35</sup> However, this district is notable for being settled by New Englanders and possessing a strong, revivalist, evangelical religion.<sup>36</sup> This distinctly Northern religiosity allowed abolitionism to prosper unlike anywhere else in America. Cross argued that the ideological force of Barnes' antislavery impulse travelled along the 'psychic highway' of DeWitt Clinton's canal to 'a people . . . particularly devoted to crusades aimed at the perfection of mankind and the attainment of millennial happiness.'<sup>37</sup> Although not directly related to *Liberator* clique or events beyond 1860, the microscopic method of *The Burned Over District* was unique amongst abolitionist historiography. Cross proved that extrapolating

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 286-299, p. 363

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 363

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 393

<sup>35</sup> Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*, (Cornell University Press: 1950), p. xi-x

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-17

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3

conclusions on the wider movement from a focused sample base was highly effective when dealing with the history of convoluted groups of activists.

The traditionalists and revisionists deal with the abolitionists in Manichean terms: they were either an undeniable benevolent force or the purveyors of harmful abstract moralism. Although not as binary as the Civil War revisionists, the abolitionist revisionists remain dogmatic in their denunciation of Garrison and emphasis on less radical abolitionists. The post-revisionists, however, engage in a multi-faceted argument over definitions, methods, and the influence of absolute moralism in the growth of sectional antagonism. Not unlike the *Liberator* Circle, an unusual combination of consensus and discordant individualism characterised the works of James Stewart, Aileen Kraditor, James McPherson, Ronald Walters, and Lawrence Freidman. They are loosely united in their use of the definitions framework; each historian grouped the abolitionists within broad political, evangelical, and radical Garrisonian spheres.

The post-revisionists draw their definitions from examining the splits in the movement that occurred after the unified, moral suasion based agitation of the 1830's. The first phase of organized abolitionism in the 1830's was characterized by postal campaigns, petitions to Congress, and mobile agents hijacking sermons to declare the corruption of slavery and the need for repentance at a national level.<sup>38</sup> If all Americans took part in the revelation that was the acceptance of abolitionism, then the slavepower dominated government would have no choice but enact policies that reflected the views of the masses. However, mass moral suasion failed to

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<sup>38</sup> Herbert Aptheker, *Abolitionism: A Revolutionary Movement*, (Twayne Publishers: Boston, 1989), pp. 52-57

provoke the mass conversion that the united abolitionists sought.<sup>39</sup> Focusing solely on affecting a change in the hearts and minds of the people created a strong (but by no means extensive) base of antislavery support in the North, but failed utterly in the South and had the adverse effect of mobilizing proslavery supporters into a violent 'mobocracy.'<sup>40</sup> Regardless of the success in the North, it was apparent that the abolitionists could not just sit back and let the tide of antislavery bear down upon Congress.

By 1840 it was clear that moral suasion alone was not enough to convince the majority of Americans that abolition was a righteous imperative. It had to be paired with some form of direct action on the abolitionists' part if there was to be any chance of realistically affecting change on the government. Disagreements over exactly what form this action should take resulted in the first schism of the movement in 1840, and would continue to divide and define the movement as a whole.<sup>41</sup> The experience of the 1830's dispelled the early idealism that being educated to the obvious evil of slavery and how it had perverted the Union would be enough to convince Americans of the need for change. Such education was still a vital part of abolitionism, and agitation would never cease to be defining aspect of what it meant to be an abolitionist. Yet where to direct this agitation towards and how to capitalize on the small, but vocal, base of antislavery supporters were issues of great contention within the movement. Gerrit Smith and the political abolitionists decided the best route was to work within the political system, capitalizing on the constituent

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<sup>39</sup> Robert William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery*, (W. W. Norton & Company: New York, 1989), pp. 271-274

<sup>40</sup> James Brewer Stewart, 'Reconsidering the Abolitionists in the Age of Fundamental Politics', *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (Spring, 2006), p.10

<sup>41</sup> Stewart, James Brewer, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation*, (Harlan Davidson Inc.: Illinois, 1992), pp. 116-119

base created by moral suasion by forming the Liberty Party on the sole platform of immediate abolition.<sup>42</sup> Lewis Tappan and the evangelical abolitionists believed that strict religious change was the ideal way forward.<sup>43</sup> For Garrison and the *Liberator* Circle, however, the only method that would have any chance of success was the thoroughly anti-political Northern disunion.

Kraditor, and Stewart offered more detailed and less dogmatic definitions than Dumond, yet they both agreed that there was a clear difference between political abolitionists and radical Garrisonians centred around means and compromise.<sup>44</sup> They attempted to show less of a bias towards a particular group than Dumond, yet still concerned themselves with evaluating the effectiveness of political means with disunionism. Kraditor in particular parsed up the abolitionists around the Garrisonian anti-Constitutional means, defining political abolitionists as anti-Garrison and evangelicals as conservatives.<sup>45</sup> McPherson focused equally on the Garrisonian, political, and evangelical abolitionists from Lincoln's election until the reconstruction of the South under Andrew Johnson.<sup>46</sup> McPherson also identified a third group of ' . . . all those who advocated the immediate, unconditional, and universal abolition of slavery, but who did not belong to any of formal abolitionist organizations. . . .'<sup>47</sup> McPherson did not expressly define this third group as being contributors to the *Liberator*, but it can be assumed that these individual agitators read and engaged with the *Liberator* as part of the Wider Circle.

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<sup>42</sup> Freidman, *Gregarious Saints*, p. 97, pp. 122-125

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95

<sup>44</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, pp. 8-9, p. 30; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, (Hill and Wang: New York, 1976), pp. 89-95.

<sup>45</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. 30

<sup>46</sup> James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction*, (Princeton University Press: 1964), pp. 3-8

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

Walters was one of the few post-revisionists who did not follow the definition methodology.<sup>48</sup> He made the accurate claim that the post-revisionist had to choose ‘. . . whether to trace the boundaries between groups or to deal with the larger debate in which they participated. By the latter way of going about things, abolitionists belong more with their contemporaries (even the ones who hated them) than with twentieth century reformers and radicals.’<sup>49</sup> Walters did not directly link the abolitionists to the activism of the 1950’s and 1960’s, rather, the post-revisionist ‘rediscovered’ the abolitionists in light of the Civil Rights movement.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, he did not focus on the ideological splits between the various movements and instead sought to create a ‘history of commonality and structure rather than of distinctiveness and movement.’<sup>51</sup> Even the radical Garrisonians fit in with Walter’s ‘common’ abolitionism, despite being of ‘divided mind’ in regards to political action and violent means ‘Garrison and the nonresistants [were] increasingly drawn to the Union cause, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation turned the war (however begrudgingly) into a struggle against slavery.’<sup>52</sup> Regardless of the many dissenting opinions on abolitionist means, Walters found that they were united in their abhorrence of ‘spiritual emptiness’ and ‘moral cowardice.’<sup>53</sup>

Freidman’s *Gregarious Saints* was published on the tail end of the Civil Rights inspired interest in the abolitionists that motivated the post-revisionists. Yet he still falls within the definitions framework, albeit taking an impartial approach to the traditional political, evangelical, and radical Garrisonian groupings. Freidman did

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<sup>48</sup> Ronald G. Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism After 1830*, (The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1976), pp. 146-147

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52

build on Walters' united movement thesis, holding that all abolitionists were united as immediatists, as opposed to antislavery gradualists:

' . . . immediatist abolitionists showed a decidedly different cast of mind and personality from that of antislavery gradualists. Immediatists refused to temporalize with evil. They craved a sense of inner grace and moral sincerity by conquering temptations towards selfish and calculating expediency. They sensed that by plying slow, calculating gradualist measures, such as African colonization and nonextensionism, in the hope of ending slavery eventually, one compromised with sin.'<sup>54</sup>

Despite being unified as immediatists, Freidman defined the *Liberator* Circle as expressly rejecting any form of gradualism that was perpetrated through government institutions.<sup>55</sup> The political and evangelical abolitionists, however, were willing to work within the constraints of the Union and move towards abolition gradually, so long as the process of abolition began immediately.<sup>56</sup>

Aside from the three main groups of political, evangelical, and radical Garrisonian abolitionists, the post-revisionists also examined the minority of abolitionist politicians within the Republican Party known as the radical republicans. Senators Charles Sumner, William Seward, Henry Wilson, and Representatives Joshua Giddings, Thaddeus Stevens, and Owen Lovejoy all pushed for more of a strict focus on the abolition of slavery in Republican policy.<sup>57</sup> Beyond the radicals' desire for a more definitive end to slavery, it is difficult to generalize exactly what role they served in the Republican Party. T. Harry Williams characterised the radicals as being 'scornful' of Lincoln, ' . . . but not primarily because they regarded him as an

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<sup>54</sup> Freidman, *Gregarious Saints*, p. 3

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95, pp. 122-125

<sup>57</sup> Hans L. Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans: Lincoln's Vanguard for Racial Justice*, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1968), pp. 5-15



inept leader or administrator. Rather, it was that he had no appreciation of doctrine, of moral theory. [The radicals] might unfortunately have to work with Lincoln . . . but they would never cease in their efforts to push and educate and remake him.<sup>58</sup>

Williams stressed that the radicals were the 'firmest of nationalists' who were driven by the moral urge of the antislavery movement.<sup>59</sup>

Whereas Williams asserted that the radicals were fundamentally immediatists, Hans Trefousse described the radicals as 'essentially free-soilers, rather than immediate abolitionists, opponents of the expansion of slavery who also favoured the extinction of the institution by constitutional means.'<sup>60</sup> Like the *Liberator* Circle, the radical republicans did not possess a completely uniform view on antislavery policy, and often debated amongst themselves as much as they did with the conservative republicans.<sup>61</sup> Still, Trefousse did not equate the antislavery of the radical republicans with the abolitionism of the *Liberator* Circle, the difference being 'a question of means and immediate goals.'<sup>62</sup> Because the radical republicans supported political antislavery through the Constitution, not outright immediate abolition, Sumner, Giddings *et al* could not be considered direct allies of Garrison and the Circle, but nor were they enemies. Rather, the Circle gave them space to work their radical politics and engaged in discourse and debate when necessary.

All of the post-revisionists agree that the abolitionists were worth taking seriously in analysing the Civil War. Whereas the revisionists reduced the impact of race and racism in their abstraction theory, the post-revisionists viewed race as a

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<sup>58</sup> T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals*, (The University of Wisconsin Press: Madison and Milwaukee, 1965), p. xiii

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans*, p. 16

<sup>61</sup> Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals*, p. xiii; Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans*, pp. 28-33

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

critical aspect of the cause of the Civil War and saw the abolitionists as one of the precursors to the Civil Rights movement of the 1950's. Kenneth Stampp, who could be best described as a transitional historian between revisionists post-revisionists, had a slight beginning with his 1964 monograph *Peculiar Institution*, where he emphasized slavery and race as central to Civil War historiography.<sup>63</sup>

The idea that moral suasion based agitation was, in of itself, enough to influence politics to change for the better is a major point of consensus amongst post-revisionists scholars. When taken in the context of wider abolitionist historiography, this conclusion, while difficult to refute entirely, is weak and suffers from over generalization. This weakness stems from the methods and motivations of the first phase of post-revisionists. Writing in the 1960's and 70's, the post-revisionists were motivated in part to trace the development of American activism back to the abolitionists.<sup>64</sup> Analysing the practical methods the various abolitionists engaged in, the effectiveness of moral suasion based agitation, and what progress (if any) they made towards resolving the issue of racial discrimination became extremely important in an era of popular demand for political change. Although the NAACP, SNCC, and CORE were hardly as anti-political as the *Liberator* circle, the fact that they were dealing with similar issues over what methods to adopt beyond simple agitation made it valuable to examine the failures and successes of their progenitors. As the driving factor behind Stewart, Kraditor, and McPherson's work, Civil Rights activism had a strong influence on their methodology and that of the post-revisionists.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, (Alfred A. Knopf Inc.: New York, 1956), pp. vii-viii

<sup>64</sup> Dillon, 'The Abolitionists: A Decade of Historiography, 1959-1969', p. 500

<sup>65</sup> Manisha Sinha, 'Did the Abolitionists Cause the Civil War?' in Andrew Delblanco *The Abolitionist Imagination*, (Harvard University Press: 2012), p. 86

The post-revisionists' desire to draw a connection between the activists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries led to a watering down of actual analysis and highlights the critical failures of the definitions framework. Unlike Barnes and Dumond, Stewart and Kraditor were not so much concerned with identifying the 'true' abolitionists as providing a relatively impartial analysis of the practical success of the movement as a whole. They recognized the differences between the political, evangelical, and radical Garrisonian abolitionists, yet concluded that the separate forms of abolitionism remained united under the broad banner of moral suasion. Both shared a strong emphasis on the disagreements of practice and principle that split that movement. From this basis they tracked the development of the movement to what they define as its apex. Stewart ended his monograph *Holy Warriors* with the ambivalent conclusion that the abolitionists (particularly Garrison) gradually shifted towards 'mundane practicality' of traditional, conservative moral suasion.<sup>66</sup> Kraditor agreed, stating that radical and conservative abolitionists were not on opposite ends of an exclusive continuum, but simply had different ideas on what consequences abolition would have for American society.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, ' . . . their [radicals and conservatives] differences were not quantitative but qualitative; to one faction abolition would preserve and strengthen the social order, and to the other it would be a step toward the subversion of that social order and its replacement by a new one.'<sup>68</sup> In essence, the main source of contention between the abolitionist sects was differences over the particulars of means, not of fundamental principle. After all, the movement had been unified in the 1830's in the initially successful moral suasion, the most simplistic form of agitation that focused solely on promoting immediate

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<sup>66</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 193

<sup>67</sup> Kraditor, p. 9

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

abolition.<sup>69</sup> The later conflicts over practical methods were ultimately irrelevant so long as abolition was achieved. Regardless of the many internecine quarrels between the abolitionists over politics, principle, and practice, Stewart and Kraditor concluded that because the abolitionists *did* agitate unceasingly for change had no slight effect on antebellum society.<sup>70</sup>

Kraditor, Stewart, Walters, and McPherson believed that the Circle's commitment to radical, anti-political agitation was necessary in of itself, serving as an alternative viewpoint to the huckstering compromises of politicians. Kraditor in particular argued that the Circle's extremism helped the moderate antislavery of the Republican Party appear less reformist, and paved the way for political abolition through the Emancipation Proclamation: ' . . . the more extreme the demand of the agitator makes the politician's demand seem acceptable and perhaps desirable in the sense that the adversary may prefer to give up half a loaf rather than the whole. Also, the agitator helps define the value, the principle, for which the politician bargains.'<sup>71</sup> Walters agreed: 'Abolitionism's contribution was to provide the Northern public with a way of interpreting events that became more and more credible in the 1840s and 1850s as the South increased its demands. Phrases and insights from the antislavery movement . . . passed into the Free Soil and Republican parties, and from there into political relevance.'<sup>72</sup> McPherson shared a similar notion: ' . . . [the abolitionists] served as the conscience of the radical Republicans. They provided an idealistic-moral-humanitarian justification for the policies of the Republican party – policies which were undertaken primarily for military or political reasons.'<sup>73</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>69</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 30

<sup>70</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. 276; Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 193

<sup>71</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. 28

<sup>72</sup> Walters, *The Antislavery Appeal*, p. xvi

<sup>73</sup> McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, p. viii

the post-revisionists reached a consensus that the anti-political agitator, while not engaging directly in politics, ultimately aimed to influence the government into adopting their principles, ideally in whole, but realistically in part. The theory that the *Liberator* Circle inadvertently served as the Union's conscience has merits, and ensures that Garrison and his cohort take a well-deserved place in history in advancing the nation towards emancipation. Yet it conveniently ignores the Circle's initial aversion to political and personal compromise, as well as the crisis of identity they faced that led them to accept a modified form of abolition under the Constitution that they had reviled for three decades.

The post-revisionists reached a consensus that politics, in of itself, was far too partisan to be the ideal means of practical abolition. However, when tempered by the moral based activism of a dedicated minority, it is capable of enacting major moral reform. Essentially, all abolitionists, regardless of their preferred practical mode of abolition, fell back on moral agitation in the wake of the Civil War and the failure of the explicit political abolition of the Liberty and Free Soil parties. Radical disunionist agitation was rendered irrelevant in the face of a treasonous, secessionist South, therefore, the focus shifted to that of the 1830's: the broad, yet singular, goal of immediate emancipation. The Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment would represent the culmination of this goal. However, they would not solve the issues of racism and racial and inequality. Stewart recognized this flaw in the abolitionists serving as the Republican's 'conscience,' yet concludes that emancipation itself was enough of a success to validate moral suasion as method.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, pp. 189-193

There is another factor that can be regarded as a deficiency in post-revisionist scholarship: their treatment of the period beyond 1860. In regards to 1860-63 the general consensus is that the methodological divide between radical and conservative abolitionists was rendered irrelevant by Lincoln's election and the outbreak of the Civil War. The movement is either seen as rallying behind the Republicans until the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 or continuing to agitate for emancipation much as they did before 1860.<sup>75</sup> Stewart roughly followed Dumond's time constraint, although not Dumond's theory. Kraditor limited her study to 1830-1850, as she believed that Of the early post-revisionists, only McPherson in his monograph *The Struggle for Equality* presents a different, detailed analysis of the abolitionists from 1860, and while he shows that the movement was still far from united and did not necessarily align with the Republicans, he still reached the conclusion that agitation along the lines of moral suasion proved to be the most influence they asserted on events.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, despite their differences in definition, Kraditor and Stewart also reached the conclusion that, regardless of their quarrels over methodology, by continuing to agitate against the majority the abolitionists indirectly, but effectively, worked towards the end of slavery.<sup>77</sup>

The first proponents of the definition framework, formulated by Barnes and refined by Dumond, and adopted by John Thomas in his biography of Garrison, argued that the political abolitionists were the true representatives of abolitionism;

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<sup>75</sup> Dumond, *Antislavery origins of the Civil War in the United States*, (Ann Arbor Paperback: Michigan, 1959), p. 123; Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, pp. 164-175; Voss-Hubbard, Mark, 'The Political Culture of Emancipation: Morality, Politics, and the State in Garrisonian Abolitionism, 1854-1863', *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, (Aug., 1995), p. 162; Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, (Cambridge University Press: 2005), pp. 47-48

<sup>76</sup> McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, pp. vii-viii; for his conclusion of moral agitation, see p. 45

<sup>77</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism*, pp. 212-216; Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 148, Stewart, 'Reconsidering the Abolitionists in the Age of Fundamental Politics', *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 26, No. 1, (Spring, 2006), p. 23

they were right to work within the Constitution to secure real antislavery progress rather than denounce the Union as inherently stained by proslavery compromise.<sup>78</sup> This interpretation is focused on rescuing the political abolitionists from Garrison's shadow, and had a tendency to place less of an emphasis on abolitionist activity beyond the collapse of the Free Soil Party in 1850.<sup>79</sup> Because the revisionists saw the Republican Party as the apex of abolitionist trajectory, Garrison became little more than an irrelevant fringe radical, and as such the abolitionists of *The Liberator* and their internal conflict over compromise did not play an important role before or after 1860.<sup>80</sup> The more impartial post-revisionists who utilize the definition framework also reach this conclusion. Stewart held that by 1859 the differences between radical and moderate abolitionists had become meaningless, both groups saw the benefit in abolition by 'the ballot or the bullet.'<sup>81</sup> Kraditor argued that '. . . most of the major tactical problems that arose in the entire history of the abolitionist movement were thrashed out within those seventeen years [1834-1850].'<sup>82</sup> Both are accurate in the claim that the abolitionist movement as a whole became less divisive by 1860. However, in responding to Dumond and Thomas' militant disregard of Garrison by presenting more balanced definitions, Stewart and Kraditor failed to recognize the critical moments of self-introspection regarding tactics evident in *The Liberator* from 1860-1863. And McPherson's theory of the abolitionist's as agitators, while well-founded, ignores the underlying conflict within *The Liberator* that kept the movement paralyzed in their traditional role of the activist. The bulk of current post-revisionist historiography still focuses on the boundaries and definitions, rediscovering or

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<sup>78</sup> John L. Thomas, *The Liberator: William Lloyd Garrison, A Biography*, (Little, Brown & Company: Boston, 1963), pp. 3-5

<sup>79</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 148

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173

<sup>81</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 172

<sup>82</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. viii

responding to the scholarship of the 1950's and 1960's.<sup>83</sup> The visceral fight for equal rights that dominated this era made abolitionist research relevant, and accounts for the proliferation of works during this time and the comparative lack of works in the last two decades.

The need to justify (or in some cases, rescue from the shadow of Garrisonian dominance) the actions of one group or individual over the rest within this agitation has created a pattern of reaction in historiography that has yet to be broken, with each new generation of historians either reacting to or attempting to rediscover the theses of the 1960's. Such is the case with current historiography, the children of the post-revisionists. Henry Mayer's biography of Garrison, *All on Fire*, maintains the definitions framework while chiefly responding to and refuting Thomas' revisionist biography, which unambiguously criticised Garrison as a radical saboteur of the abolitionist movement.<sup>84</sup> Mayer also utilized a unique methodological approach to *The Liberator* as a source: ' . . . I have regarded *The Liberator* not simply as a source, but as a rightful character in the story, taking my cue from the editor's sons, who observed that "to an extent seldom witnessed in journalism, *The Liberator* involves at once the biography and autobiography of its editor."<sup>85</sup> This thesis takes Mayer's method one step further, treating *The Liberator* as a biography of the entire Circle rather than just Garrison. Bruce Laurie's monograph *Beyond Garrison* sought to rectify the post-revisionists focus on Garrison by examining the growth of the political

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<sup>83</sup> Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform*, (Cambridge University Press: 2005), p. 1; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*, (Oxford University Press: 2006), p. 4; W. Caleb McDaniel, 'Repealing Unions: American Abolitionists, Irish Repeal, and the Origins of Garrisonian Disunionism', *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 28, No. 2, (Summer, 2008), pp. 243-269

<sup>84</sup> Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery*, (W. W. Norton & Company: New York, 1998), pp. xiii-xvii

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii



abolitionists and their eventual merging of their ideals with the Republican Party.<sup>86</sup> Manisha Sinha, in examining whether or not the abolitionists caused the Civil War, could not entirely depart from the definitions framework, particularly in relation to defining the rest of the movement against the *Liberator* Circle.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, Sinha continues to assert the importance of race when analysing the abolitionists, because what distinguished them ‘. . . from their opponents was not moral rigidity or religious enthusiasm but a principled commitment to black equality.’<sup>88</sup> The general conclusion that it ultimately did not matter whether the abolitionists compromised their principles or not still stands. Slavery was eventually abolished through Constitutional reform, therefore, according to the post-revisionists the end goal of abolitionism was achieved. The fact that true equality, both in law and in the hearts and minds of all Americans, was not achieved, is lamented but not investigated. While most studies of the abolitionist look to 1860, it is the great challenge of secession and war that begs for exploration in all aspects of the United States polity, not in the least the *Liberator* Circle.

There is a dominant trend in abolitionist historiography, spearheaded by Stewart, Kraditor, McPherson, and Mayer, that argues that all abolitionists, not just the *Liberator* Circle, abandoned any and all anti-political agitation in the wake of the Civil War and accepted the realities of Republican antislavery. ‘By April 1861,’ Stewart writes, ‘whatever non-resistance, disunionism, and “antipolitics” were left within abolitionism vanished almost entirely as nearly everyone in the movement accepted the realities of civil war . . . as the troops began to march, most abolitionists were discarding the last vestiges of their romantic radicalism for the hard world of

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<sup>86</sup> Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, pp. 1-6

<sup>87</sup> Sinha, ‘Did the Abolitionists Cause the Civil War?’, p. 95, p. 102, p. 108

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95

power politics.<sup>89</sup> Revisionists on the whole dismiss the Circle as irrelevant in achieving abolition and place the success of emancipation firmly at the hands of the Republicans.<sup>90</sup> Dumond in particular believed Garrison's fanaticism hampered the cause by seeking a solution outside of American democracy.<sup>91</sup> Neither revisionist nor post-revisionist are completely right. Both ignore the critical period of certainty, crisis, and compromise that the *Liberator* Circle went through from 1860-1863. Kraditor went as far as to argue that the Circle, but particularly Garrison, fell in lockstep with the Republican Party's political abolition rapidly after the start of the Civil War.<sup>92</sup> This is not a sound enough appraisal of the *Liberator* Circle's effect on history. It is broad in scope, and neglects the process of personal compromise that Garrison and the majority of the Circle went through in recanting anti-political disunion and accepting political emancipation. Examining how and why Garrison and the Circle came to engage in compromise, the element of American liberty they had rejected for decades, is critical to understanding the broader conclusion that the post-revisionists and their children have made.

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<sup>89</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 177

<sup>90</sup> Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, pp. 164-167

<sup>91</sup> Dumond, *Antislavery*, pp. 173-179

<sup>92</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, pp. 12-18

## Chapter One: Certainty

For nearly three decades, the activists of the *Liberator* Circle fervently believed that there could be no compromise over slavery, either in politics or personal principle. 'NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!', the first of three masthead slogans the *Liberator* had over 1860-1863, had been in place since 1845.<sup>93</sup> Its longevity shows that the fundamental principles of the *Liberator* Circle did not change from 1845 to the Secession Crisis. The undeniable evil of slavery and the necessity of immediate abolition through northern disunion were the principles that all abolitionists of the Circle agreed on. Northern disunion, a means of abolition that entailed the repudiation of the proslavery Constitution and the establishment of a Northern republic free of slavery, was the only morally acceptable way of achieving abolition for the Circle. 'NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!' was what separated the *Liberator* Circle from their political and evangelical contemporaries who were willing to accept gradual means of abolition under the Constitution. The principles of immediatism, anti-political agitation, and northern disunion that had been formulated fifteen years before were still as central and as relevant as ever to the Circle. The Circle's anti-Constitutional view of the history of the United States justified and defined disunion as their ideal means of abolition. Therefore, the *Liberator* Circle operated on an intellectual continuity from 1845 right up until the Secession Crisis. The majority of 1860 was a period of certainty for the activist community, where Garrison and his fellow abolitionists remained confident and comfortable in their position as radical, anti-political agitators.

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<sup>93</sup> Garrison, 'Masthead', Vol. 15 No. 1, 3/01/1845

The Circle detested the Constitution so much that Garrison symbolically burned the Constitution in 1854 during a public meeting, decrying it as a 'covenant with death' and 'agreement with hell.'<sup>94</sup> He interpreted the Constitution as a thoroughly proslavery document, by virtue of several clauses that did not explicitly mention slavery, but perpetuated it, most notably the three-fifths clause and fugitive slave laws that rendered certain humans as property.<sup>95</sup> These clauses were part of a compromise the Founding Fathers made in order to secure the ratification of the Constitution.<sup>96</sup> Garrison fervently believed that through the Founder's compromise 'the deadly venom of slavery was infused into the Constitution of freedom.'<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the Constitution should never have been adopted, and the Founders were blind to believe in gradual emancipation.<sup>98</sup> Although the Founders recognized the incongruity of allowing slavery to exist in a nation devoted to liberty, they thought slavery to be expedient in the context of securing the Union.<sup>99</sup> For a radical abolitionist such as Garrison, however, slavery was not and never could be expedient, as expressed by tertiary circle member James Clark: 'Compromises are good when they surrender what is expedient only, giving up a part of a good thing to save the rest; but not good when they surrender justice and right.'<sup>100</sup> The Union was not a good thing for the *Liberator* Circle. The entire political system of the United States was sabotaged by the proslavery compromise of the Constitution.

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<sup>94</sup> James Brewer Stewart, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation*, (Harlan Davidson Inc.: Illinois, 1992) pp. 164-165

<sup>95</sup> Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 327

<sup>96</sup> Dwight Lowell Dumond, *The Crusade for Freedom in America*, (W.W. Norton & Company: New York, 1966), p. 38

<sup>97</sup> Garrison, 'The Time for National Deliverance', Vol. 31 No. 41, 11/10/1861

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, pp. 26-28

<sup>100</sup> James Freeman Clark, 'What Ought the North to Concede? Extract from a pamphlet titled 'Secession, Concession, or Self-Possession, Which?', Vol. 31 No. 6, 08/02/1861

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams *et al* knew that slavery was evil. But they compromised their own beliefs and left slavery ambiguous in the Constitution so that the United States could be created. Current constitutional historian David Waldstreicher argues that despite favouring abolition, the Founders ingrained slavery in the United States:

[The founders] wanted the wealth and power that slavery brought without the moral responsibility that . . . they also knew came with slavery. Silence, compromise, and artful design characterised their solutions. The silences are not absences: they had meanings that were understood and debated.<sup>101</sup>

Waldstreicher maintains that these ‘silences’ over slavery in the Constitution were necessary in order to resolve the ‘basic issues’ that led to the Revolution: debates over taxation and representation.<sup>102</sup> Slaves were counted in representation as three-fifths not because they were three-fifths of a person nor because they ‘. . . deserved three-fifths of a vote . . . Rather, their presence was being acknowledged as a source of power and wealth, *for their owners* [Waldstreicher’s italics].<sup>103</sup> Waldstreicher believes that antislavery framer’s such as John Adams compromised away any explicit antislavery measure in the Constitution because ‘Silence about slavery would emphasize what the Americans had in common, such as a desire for equitable taxation grounded in the consent of the people.’<sup>104</sup> Despite their desire for sectional unity, by compromising over slavery the Founders created a precedent that allowed it to always be an expediency and placed it at the centre of the Union’s democratic government.<sup>105</sup> In the words of Dumond ‘Slavery had suddenly become

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<sup>101</sup> David Waldstreicher, *Slavery’s Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification*, (Hill and Wang: New York, 2009), p. 19

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114

than an economic and social system, more than a system of racial adjustment – it was the foundation of political power.’<sup>106</sup> That is why the Circle believed that slavery could never be abolished through political means; it was far too engrained in the representative democracy of the United States.<sup>107</sup> Abolition could only be achieved through the repudiation of the Constitution and the separation of the Free States from the Slave States through Northern disunion, on this there could be no compromise.

From the perspective of the *Liberator* Circle, compromise was a mistake. Yet for the majority of Americans, compromise was the essential genius of their democracy. The act of political compromise at a Congressional level was and is essential for the American government to operate at any level resembling efficiency whilst still remaining a representative democracy; the same can be said for a willingness to accept compromise on a personal level, as an individual citizen. American philosopher George Santayana defined compromise as a ‘requisite for feeling free under American liberty.’<sup>108</sup> Citizens and Congressmen alike must be willing to ‘be moulded by example and by prevalent opinion . . . find the majority right enough to live with, give up lost causes, [and] be willing to put your favourite notions to sleep in the cradle of family convention.’<sup>109</sup> In other words, in American democracy it is your right to hold absolute beliefs, elect representatives that subscribe to those beliefs, and to have a government that reflects your beliefs. However, you cannot expect everyone to conform to your views. What you might see as an unequivocal

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<sup>106</sup> Dumond, *Antislavery*, p. 45

<sup>107</sup> The idea of the ‘slavepower’ dominating politics was cited as a major justification by the Circle for anti-political action, particularly in: Frank B. Sanborn, ‘Speech of Frank B. Sanborn [at Framingham, 04/07/1860]’, Vol. 30 No. 28, 13/07/1860; N. H. Whiting, ‘Speech of Hon. N. H. Whiting [at Abingdon, 01/08/1860]’, Vol. 30 No. 33, 17/08/1860; Parker Pillsbury, ‘Convention at Cummington’, Vol. 30 No. 38, 21/09/1860; GWS, ‘John Brown Meeting at Tremont Temple’, Vol. 30 No. 50, 14/12/1860

<sup>108</sup> George Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, p. 122

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

truth might be seen as debatable by the majority and outright wrong by other minorities. While the elected representatives of your faction might share your fervent belief, the practice of democracy requires some level of compromise between the majority and minority factions.

Therefore, a willingness to engage in compromise is the key component of managing factionalism. The ideal of the 'American' compromise, defined by Santayana as ' . . . meet[ing] in a genuine spirit of consultation, eager to persuade but ready to be persuaded . . . [and agreeing] in every case, that disputed questions shall be put to a vote, and that the minority will loyally acquiesce in the decision of the majority and build henceforth upon it, without a thought of ever retracting it,' is the lynchpin that prevents the government from being dominated by the tyranny of the majority and the minority.<sup>110</sup> By definition this compromise will not fulfil the exact wishes of any faction. But because it is grounded in what Santayana calls the 'cradle of family convention' that all Americans agree to be the heart of the Union, the 'fundamental unanimity' of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, this compromise will be agreeable to all parties, maintain freedom for all individuals, and ensure that the government is able to function to progress the nation.<sup>111</sup> Of course, before the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, the American compromise only applied to white Americans. Indeed, the blatant exclusivity of compromise based on race was one of the key reasons why Garrison and the Circle detested politics and the Constitution.

By compromising over slavery, the Founders engaged in the genius of American democracy: resolving a disputed issue in a manner acceptable to all

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<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110; p. 115

parties that will ultimately benefit the nation, but not realizing the exclusive goals of either. Indeed, the Constitution of 1787 was the first compromise made under the unique form of American liberty:

‘The practice of liberty presupposes two things: that all concerned are fundamentally unanimous, and that each has a plastic nature, which he is willing to modify. If fundamental unanimity is lacking and all are not making in the same general direction, there can be no honest co-operation, no satisfying compromise. Every concession, under such circumstances, would be a temporary one . . . it would amount to a mutilation of one’s essential nature, a partial surrender of life, liberty, and happiness, tolerable for a time, perhaps, as the lesser of two evils, but involving a perpetual sullen opposition and hatred.’<sup>112</sup>

Although the Founding Fathers objected to the immorality of slavery, they were all committed to the ‘general direction’ of forming a nation. Therefore, the delegates of the Constitutional Convention were willing to be ‘plastic’ in regards to slavery. Of course, the Founders’ fundamental unanimity was that slavery was evil and had no place in a Union based on liberty. Yet they had no federal power in 1787 that allowed them to abolish it. The purpose of the Constitutional Convention was to establish a system of federal government that was agreeable to all of the Thirteen Colonies. Instead of taking the absolute paths of condemning or condoning slavery, they left its status ambiguous within the Constitution. This ambiguity became central to the ‘fundamental unanimity’ at the heart of American democracy as defined by the Constitution. The workings of American government, specifically the make-up of Congress, was also skewed in favour of the Slave States through the three-fifths clause.

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<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115



For Garrison and the *Liberator* Circle, there could be no expedience in regards to slavery. The Circle believed that by compromising over slavery, the Founding Father's skewed the American political process in favour of the slave states and betrayed the ideals of the Declaration of Independence. It was an obvious, absolute evil that had no place in any government, much less a democracy. Santayana's American compromise was entirely irreconcilable with the *Liberator* Circle. Garrison could not accept any political compromise because the proslavery Constitution directly contradicted his belief in the immorality of slavery. 'And as for the Union,' Garrison exclaimed in June 1860, 'we say that it was based upon certain compromises, everywhere understood, everywhere conceded, whereby slavery was rendered secure, and the slaveholders had extraordinary power put into their hands . . . it is sinful to uphold it; and we therefore exclaim, 'No Union with Slaveholders!'<sup>113</sup> Indeed, 'NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!' was a statement of the Circle's goal and a call to all Americans to recognize the truth that repudiating the Constitution was an absolute necessity on the path to abolition. As a slogan of the Circle, it unequivocally called for disunion, and dismissed any notion that slavery could ever be a part of the United States. Rather, the Constitution had to be revoked and a new Union of Northern, free states be created, without slavery and truly representative of the Declaration of Independence.

Garrison undoubtedly wanted enough Northerners to accept disunion and bring about a democratic revolution. But he would not modify his principles to make them more palatable to moderate Americans. Garrison believed that ' . . . [the abolitionists of the *Liberator* are] the only class in America who are true to the

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<sup>113</sup> Garrison, 'Speech of Garrison [Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Cooper Union, 08/05/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 22, 1/06/1860

principles they profess, and cannot be induced to compromise them to avoid danger on one hand, or gain applause on the other.’<sup>114</sup> Popularity, either in politics or amongst the populace, was not a concern for the Circle. For

‘[Abolition] is incapable of intimidation; it disregards all threats and assaults; it laughs and scorns at projects of “conciliation” and “compromise;” whether resisted or let alone, its growth is vigorous and its course onward; its elements are justice, mercy, goodness and truth; its object is freedom for all who are deprived of its inestimable blessings; it is divinely inspired and sustained; no weapon against it can prosper; it will assuredly succeed.’<sup>115</sup>

Garrison spoke with nothing but confidence in his cause, as long as it was not hampered by compromise. He did not seek to be ‘persuaded’ by proslavery or even antislavery factions, and he certainly did not want to support a Union that allowed slavery in any form. Therefore, the abolitionists of the *Liberator* did not fit into the mould of Santayana’s acquiescent minority. They would not compromise their personal principles to conform with the majority, or even accept a modified, universally agreeable course of action.

The *Liberator* Circle’s dismissal of the American compromise did not make them undemocratic anarchists, however. Indeed, the Circle complies with the majority of Santayana’s conditions for American liberty. Garrison and his coadjutors were certainly ‘eager to persuade’ through abolitionist publications, meetings, travelling agents, and the various means of moral suasion.<sup>116</sup> They were also in favour of democratic process, the *Liberator* served as their forum for public debate

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<sup>114</sup> Garrison, ‘The Legislature and Free Speech’, Vol. 31 No. 6, 08/02/1861

<sup>115</sup> Garrison, ‘The Anti-Slavery Struggle’, Vol. 31 No. 7, 15/02/1861

<sup>116</sup> Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, p. 122; Garrison, *Declaration of Sentiments of the American Antislavery Society*, Philadelphia, 06/12/1833, accessed online at <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abeswlgct.html>, last accessed 13/02/2017

and decision making within their community. Yet the democracy of the Circle was removed from the democracy of the United States. And because the Circle was so small a minority, they were able to operate as an ideal democracy where every individual's opinion could be expressed and responded to, without being diluted by vagaries of party policy making. So long as one believed in the immediate end of slavery through Northern disunion and the Declaration of Independence, the Circle's own fundamental unanimity, they could be a part of the Circle's democracy.

One of the defining principles of the *Liberator* Circle was its refusal to engage in both political and personal compromise. By 1860, all political compromises over slavery had been proven by history to be abject failures: the initial Constitutional compromise of 1787, the Compromise of 1821, and the Compromise of 1850 were all political compromises that were intended to resolve sectional tension over slavery once and for all.<sup>117</sup> The former established the boundary as below the 36° 30' parallel (inclusive of Missouri) and the latter extended that line to the Pacific.<sup>118</sup> Despite being far too proslavery for the Circle, both 1820 and 1850 can be described as true compromises in line with Santayana and the Founders' original compromise of 1787. The compromises of 1820 and 1850 succeeded in obtaining resolution for a time, but they were ultimately skewed towards the Slave States and entirely unsatisfactory for antislavery Northerners.<sup>119</sup> Most importantly for the Circle, no political compromise ever had any pretensions towards immediate abolition.<sup>120</sup> All political antislavery measures were exercises in gradualism, designed not to end

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<sup>117</sup> Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, p. 88

<sup>118</sup> David M. Potter *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher, (Harper & Row: New York, 1976), pp 56-57

<sup>119</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men, The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, (Oxford University Press: 1995), p. 100

<sup>120</sup> Whipple, 'To Yield or Not to Yield', Vol. 30 No. 53, 31/12/1860

slavery, but to keep it within the boundaries defined by the Constitution. Because the Constitution ultimately sanctioned slavery, the Circle believed there was no point in restricting the institution under its clauses.

The *Liberator* Circle more than opposed political compromise, however. Personal compromise, having to give up a portion of your individual principles to conform with the nation as a whole was regarded as worse than any political failure. One of the main reasons why immediatism through disunion was asserted as a qualifying certainty of the Circle was that it eliminated any possibility of being persuaded to compromise by outside forces, whether they be politicians, fire-eating secessionists, or antislavery moderates. Stewart encapsulates the Circle's rejection of personal compromise: 'Practicality thus dictated compromise, and abolitionists rejected it in all forms . . . All such discussion . . . deflected attention from society's fundamental problems – white racism and Negro enslavement. Until whites had accepted blacks as equals, digressions on practical alternatives to immediatism would only reinforce prejudice and encourage complacency.'<sup>121</sup> Here, Stewart highlighted the Circle's commitment to more than just abolishing slavery. Eliminating racism, on an institutional and a social level, was the ultimate goal of the *Liberator* Circle.

However, Stewart also states that 'practicality dictated compromise.'<sup>122</sup> Here Stewart referenced a problem the *Liberator* Circle faced as a result of their rejection of compromise: achieving practical progress towards abolition. Garrison knew how ideal abolition would be achieved: Northern disunion and repudiation of the Constitution. The men and women of the Circle were united behind the Declaration

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<sup>121</sup> Stewart, *Holy Warriors*, p. 55

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

of Independence and strived to make equality for all, regardless of ethnicity or gender, a reality in the United States.<sup>123</sup> All talks of compromising, gradual methods, such as restricting slavery's expansion into the territories, or 'colonizing' blacks in Liberia, were akin to heresy against the higher law, and only detracted from the greater crusade for true equality.<sup>124</sup> Yet compromise, personal and political, was the accepted method of progress in the United States, and if the abolitionists of the Circle were willing to meet antislavery moderates in compromise, it was highly likely that some form of practical advance towards abolition could be achieved.

For the *Liberator* Circle, however, a gradual advance towards abolition was less than pointless, as any and all progress would be limited by the proslavery Constitution.<sup>125</sup> Garrison staunchly believed in maintaining 'Personal integrity and [a] straight-forward regard for the right [that] can allow no temptation to swerve a hair's breadth from the line of duty; for [our commitment to justice is] of more consequence than all the compacts and constitutions ever made.'<sup>126</sup> The Circle strongly believed in abolition as a vocation, and taking up the mantle of immediatism was a critical step in moving towards personal and national redemption, as Donald Scott states: 'Immediatism was less a program of what to do about slavery than, in evangelical terms, a "disposition", a state of being in which the heart and will were set irrevocably against slavery . . .'<sup>127</sup> Although gradual abolition might allow for practical abolition, accepting it meant recognizing the Constitutional interpretation of slavery as something that could be tolerated, not as an unquestionable evil. Garrison and the

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<sup>123</sup> Garrison, *Declaration of Sentiments*

<sup>124</sup> Freidman, *Gregarious Saints*, p. 1

<sup>125</sup> Stewart, *William Lloyd Garrison and the Challenge of Emancipation*, p.58

<sup>126</sup> Garrison, 'Mr. Seward's Speech', Vol. 31 No. 3, 18/01/1861

<sup>127</sup> Donald M. Scott, 'Abolition as a Sacred Vocation', *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry, Michael Fellman, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1979), p. 72

Circle stood steadfast by their beliefs, and took pride in refusing personal compromise, even though their pride was taken for self-righteousness by antislavery Americans.<sup>128</sup>

Alongside the certainties of the evil of slavery, immediate abolition through northern disunion, and the rejection of compromise, a number of sub-principles characterised of the *Liberator* Circle until the onset of the Civil War. Anti-political agitation, non-violent resistance, and a commitment to individualism were predominant aspects of the Circle that distinguished them other abolitionists and Americans as a whole. A deep respect for the rights and of the individual citizen and their centrality to the democratic process is evident throughout the *Liberator*. Freidman, in *Gregarious Saints*, his seminal examination of the social aspects of the various abolitionist communities, described the Circle as ‘. . . freewheeling individualists who often argued among themselves, even over minor matters. At the same time, they demonstrated overwhelming concern with orderly, efficient, and socially harmonious collective effort.’<sup>129</sup> It was this push and pull between the opposite extremes of individualism and collectivism that made the *Liberator* Circle unique as an activist society. The Circle often engaged in tempestuous debates through the *Liberator*, but until the Civil War they never fractured as a society.

Although Garrison’s views loomed above the wider Circle, every member could hold views to the contrary and had the right to express them in an official context. Garrison, as the founder and chief editor of the *Liberator*, held a critical role within the Circle, yet he did not have the power to veto any democratic decision.

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<sup>128</sup> Ronald G. Walters, ‘The Boundaries of Abolitionism’, *Antislavery Reconsidered: New Perspectives on the Abolitionists*, ed. Lewis Perry, Michael Fellman, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1979), p. 18

<sup>129</sup> Freidman, *Gregarious Saints*, p. 63

Rather, Garrison's position as a leader stems from his role as arbiter of the social aspects of the *Liberator* Circle. Freidman described the circle members as being willing ' . . . to restrain themselves on certain particulars and to follow Garrison's directives.'<sup>130</sup> Social rituals [and] common allegiance to the vision of a Government of God taming exploitative human institutions was still another factor drawing Clique abolitionists into concerted action.'<sup>131</sup> This still allowed room for 'idiosyncratic thought' and 'uncompromised individual responsibility to God.' No one expect Garrison to have a veto, or any other equivalent 'presidential' power. Nor could Phillips or Whipple demand the adoption of any single principle or means. What made them the Inner Circle, then, was not any official or unofficial governmental powers, but a combination of rhetorical proclivity and enigmatic personality. Garrison and Whipple's status as editors did give them some authority over what articles got published. But it was their regular contributions in the form of editorials that defined their status within the Primary circle. Phillips in turn frequently gave lengthy speeches at the meetings of the various Anti-Slavery Societies subscribers to the *Liberator* attended, as well as on impromptu occasions at Tremont Temple.

Garrison was fervent, persuasive, and prolific with his rhetoric. However, in the context of the *Liberator* his views were not those of a leader, but another individual agitating for abolition. The same can be said of Phillips and Whipple, the other members of the primary circle, and even those in the secondary circle who held roles as agents and officiators such as Henry Wright, Stephen Foster, Lydia Child, and Parker Pillsbury. According to Freidman, 'There were no drab conformists in the group. Major ideological differences among Cliques members underscore their

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

strongly independent qualities.<sup>132</sup> There was nothing to stop any member or members of the Circle from forming their own abolitionist societies apart from the *Liberator*, if they felt that Garrison did not align with their views. Stewart agreed with Freidman, stating that 'Agitation reconfirmed the self-purifying discovery of evil and the lifetime duty to engage and subdue it. Garrisonian politics ultimately made a person into a sanctified and militant party of one.'<sup>133</sup> Stephen Foster attempted to form another political abolitionist party in 1860, and although Garrison openly disapproved he made no effort to prevent it.<sup>134</sup> Maria Chapman and Lydia Child held positions of authority within the Anti-Slavery Subscription Society (whose annual meetings were reported in the *Liberator*), and Pillsbury openly dissented with Garrison's shift away from Northern disunion as the Civil War progressed.<sup>135</sup> Regardless of how each activist might choose to agitate on a personal level and what amount of support this had garnered them, within the *Liberator* Circle their opinions were equal.

The universal equality of the Circle was possible because they operated as a small, ideal democracy, where every person was free to express their opinion and influence democratic discourse without fear of repercussion or any pressure to compromise their beliefs to fit a party line. Other than rejecting the 'covenant of

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<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 46-48

<sup>133</sup> James Brewer Stewart, *Wendell Phillips: Liberty's Hero*, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1986), p. 145

<sup>134</sup> Emmet Densmore, 'To Stephen S. Foster', Vol. 30, No. 8, 24/02/1860; Stephen S. Foster, 'Reply to Emmet Densmore', Vol. 30 No. 10, 09/03/1860

<sup>135</sup> Chapman and Child's advertisements and reports of the Subscription Society appear in: Maria Weston Chapman, 'The Twenty-Sixth National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary', Vol. 30 No. 6, 10/02/1860; Chapman, 'The Twenty-Seventh National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Advertisement]', Vol. 31 No. 3, 18/01/1861; Chapman, 'The Twenty-Seventh National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Report]', Vol. 31 No. 7, 15/02/1861; Lydia Maria Child, 'The Twenty-Eighth National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Advertisement]', Vol. 32 No. 3, 17/01/1862; Child, 'The Twenty-Eighth National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Report]', Vol. 32 No. 7, 14/02/1862; For Pillsbury's shift away from Garrisonian disunionism, see Chapter Three: Compromise.



death' that was the Constitution, members of the Circle were free to interpret their abolitionism how they saw fit within a core set of immediatist beliefs. Individual freedoms, particularly freedom of speech, were upheld to extreme degrees of idealism. This was reflected in the open, unmoderated debates on policy and principle within the *Liberator* and at the annual meetings of the American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS), New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEAS), and Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (MAS). Indeed, the *Liberator* was not designed to be an 'exclusively anti-slavery journal' or the 'organ of any society.'<sup>136</sup> It was intended to present evidence from all quarters and allow its readers to make informed decisions on any given topic. In this sense, the *Liberator* distinguished from other contemporary periodicals by not explicitly backing the view of any one organization.

This is not to say that the *Liberator* did not have a *modus operandi*. Garrison proclaimed that 'Its primary and paramount object was, indeed, the abolition of slavery; and to that it has adhered more strictly than any journal in the land . . .'<sup>137</sup> Therefore as a propagandistic periodical, it was undoubtedly a vehicle of immediatist agitation. Yet the *Liberator* also fulfilled the role of a forum for the core minority of agitators that formed its readership. These 'few who had the moral courage to enrol their names on its subscription list,' utilized this forum to discuss, compare, and debate their views with the *Liberator* Circle as a whole.<sup>138</sup> Through the act of correspondence, individual activism became relevant and acknowledged as part of the greater abolitionist crusade. Not only that, but any correspondent who disagreed with Garrison (or any other Circle member) could write in and engage in debate. The

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<sup>136</sup> Garrison, 'Reply of Mr. Haven', Vol. 31 No. 13, 29/03/1861

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>138</sup> Garrison, 'Concerning the *Liberator*', Vol. 32 No. 51, 19/12/1862

'Refuge of Oppression' and 'Selections' sections, which collected excerpts from Southern and Northern periodicals respectively, were designed to facilitate such correspondence. The inclusion of outside works, which often the subject of editorial pieces, gave readers an insight into Garrison's thought; they could essentially check his sources, and expect their opinions to be published 'thoroughly untrammelled,' even if they dissented.<sup>139</sup> In the interest of publication space, fairness to other correspondents, and, most importantly, the main purpose of agitation for unconditional abolition, Garrison and Whipple did state 'It is not our habit to prolong a personal discussion with any one.' However, this claim does not detract from Garrison 'Endeavouring at all times to state our sentiments in plain language, tersely and without circumlocution, [and] submit[ing] them to the good sense and honest judgement of our readers, without needless repetition.'<sup>140</sup> Garrison's editorial policy certainly lines up with this statement. In this particular editorial he was justifying his decision to end a prolonged discussion with a tertiary circle member who adamantly argued that disunion and secession were one and the same.<sup>141</sup>

As long as one believed in the necessity of immediate abolition through Northern disunion and rejected politics, they were welcomed within the Circle, and accepted as an equal agitator. Exactly what form this agitation would take was up to the individual, committed Circle member. In general practice, abolitionist agitation took the form of moral suasion. The Declaration of Sentiments of the AAS, written by Garrison in 1833, outlined the main practical forms that the Circle's moral suasion would take over three decades of agitation:

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Garrison, 'Secession and the War', Vol. 31 No. 34, 23/08/1861

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

'We shall send forth agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty, and of rebuke. We shall circulate, unsparingly and extensively, anti-slavery tracts and periodicals. We shall enlist the pulpit and the press in the cause of the suffering and the dumb. We shall aim at a purification of the churches from all participation in the guilt of slavery. We shall encourage the labor of freemen rather than that of slaves, by giving a preference to their productions: and We shall spare no exertions nor means to bring the whole nation to speedy repentance.'<sup>142</sup>

So the Circle encouraged an active form of agitation that, by 1844, had developed a clear aim in convincing enough Americans to accept Northern disunion. The only promise Garrison had not achieved by 1860 was bringing the whole nation to a 'speedy repentance.' This failure was not a cause for dejection. Although the Circle hoped to swiftly end slavery, they understood that it would take time to convince the entirety of the United States to cast off their compromising government and begin anew. Agitation through moral suasion, aiding the nation on their road to repentance, was the mainstay practice that the Circle engaged in before and after the Civil War. While the Circle could never fulfil Northern disunion on their own, they were unceasingly committed to convincing the nation that the repudiation of the Constitution was demanded by the higher law of justice.

The *Liberator* Circle's unwavering adherence to Northern disunion that distinguished them the most from other abolitionist societies. Quite simply, Northern disunion involved the removal of the Free States from the Slave, the repudiation of the proslavery Constitution, and the creation of a new government that was truly based on universal freedom. Tertiary correspondent S. M. J. (not to be confused with

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<sup>142</sup> Garrison, *Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, Philadelphia, 06/12/1833, accessed online at <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abeswlgct.html>, last accessed 13/02/2017

secondary circle member Samuel May Junior) succinctly outlined the intent behind Disunion: 'The work to be done is to construct a new and a NORTHERN REPUBLIC; and that Republic must omit, in all its basis papers, both the words *male* and *white*, else it will be a weak, rickety thing, and will "fall asunder like flax at the touch of fire."<sup>143</sup> S. M. J.'s insistence on omitting 'male' as well as 'white' emphasized the Circle's commitment to universal equality inclusive of women, not just abolitionism.<sup>144</sup> This commitment would be lost as part of the compromise accepting emancipation, and was a definite point of contention amongst the Circle.

Prior to the Civil War, disunion played a critical role in managing the diverse opinions of individual agitators and, like immediatism, was a reveille that called for an end to gradualism and compromise. Phillips wrote that 'Disunion startles a man to thought. It takes a lazy abolitionist by the throat, and thunders in its ear, "*Thou* art the slaveholder."<sup>145</sup> Disunion was the only legitimate way to get rid of the physical connection to slavery, and an important step on the road to personal and national redemption. Disunion could even regenerate the political system of the United States through the creation of a new Constitution, as argued by correspondent 'God help THE PEOPLE':

'Let the whole policy of government be openly and avowedly hostile to slavery, and let the people of the free states at once meet in Convention to wipe out every clause of the Constitution which has been, or can be, tainted with pro-slavery interpretation. This is the way, the only way, to set ourselves right-to be just, to be magnanimous, to be generous. Then, if civil war must come, let it come; then, if the

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<sup>143</sup> S. M. J., 'Address to the American People', Vol. 31 No. 15, 12/04/1861

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. 212

South must perish, let it perish – we shall be innocent, we shall be saved, yet so as by fire.’<sup>146</sup>

This piece was published near the end of the Secession Crisis when the Confederate States were a reality and the entirety *Liberator* Circle called to let the South go. God help THE PEOPLE’s vitriolic tone towards the South reflected the heightened tensions leading up to Fort Sumter, and called back to the fundamental principle of disunion whilst simultaneously embracing the possibility of redemption through fire as opposed to moral suasion. It is important to note that the Circle were not insurgents seeking to sabotage any part of the nation, Northern or Southern. Rather, they sought to bring about disunion as part of a democratic revolution legitimised by the Declaration of Independence. That is why disunion was the focus of all their agitation; if the majority of Northerners believed that the Constitution had to be repudiated, then they had every right to reform the government.

Instead of Constitution, the *Liberator* Circle held the Declaration of Independence as the foundation of their democratic community. The Declaration promoted ideals of individualism, equality, and the rights of the people as taking precedence over the government. The Constitution, however, presented a convoluted political process tainted by the three-fifths compromise. Garrison found legal justification for disunion with the Declaration, specifically ‘whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely

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<sup>146</sup> God help THE PEOPLE, ‘The Question’, Vol. 31 No. 11, 15/03/1861

to effect their Safety and Happiness.’<sup>147</sup> Of course ‘Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.’<sup>148</sup> Yet the abolition of slavery was far from a ‘transient cause,’ and the Circle argued that all Americans had undoubtedly suffered ‘a long train of abuses and usurpations’ by the Government in its continued failure to abolish slavery.<sup>149</sup> Therefore, it is every citizen’s right and duty ‘to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.’<sup>150</sup>

The Declaration was first and foremost a revolutionary document. It contained none checks and balances of political process outlined in the Constitution, and as such was entirely unsuited to be the basis of a government. Yet the *Liberator* Circle was not a government, but a minority faction agitating for radical change. In appealing to the Declaration, Garrison sought to enact a revolutionary right inherent to all American citizens. Garrison was steadfast in his belief that believing in disunion via the Declaration did not make him a fanatic or an anti-American traitor:

‘The people of this State profess to believe in the Declaration of Independence. That is my Abolitionism. Every man, therefore, who disdains Abolitionism, repudiates the Declaration of Independence. Does he not? “All men are created equal, and endowed by their creator with an inalienable right to liberty.” Gentlemen, that is my fanaticism – that is all my fanaticism. (Cheers). All I ask is that this declaration may be carried out everywhere in our country and throughout the world.’<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> *Declaration of Independence of the United States*, accessed online <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>, last accessed 17/02/2017; Garrison, ‘Southern Secessionists and Northern disunionists’, Vol. 31 No. 16, 19/04/1861

<sup>148</sup> *Declaration of Independence*

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*; Garrison, ‘Southern Secessionists and Northern disunionists’, Vol. 31 No. 16, 19/04/1861

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Garrison, ‘Mr. Garrison’s Speech at New York’, Vol. 32 No. 4, 24/01/1862

Disunion was the ideal, the critical end goal towards which all agitation, in a personal or organized capacity, was directed to. It did not matter that disunion was impossible for the Circle to achieve by themselves. What did matter was that they could agitate in the complete certainty that they were justified not only morally, but legally as well. Garrison was confident in his abolitionism, and more than willing to be patient in seeing its fulfilment: 'We shall be ridiculed as fools, scorned as visionaries, branded as disorganizers, reviled as madmen, threatened, and perhaps punished as traitors. But we shall bide our time . . . Our faith in God is rational and steadfast. We have exceeding great and precious promises on which to rely, that *we are in the right*.'<sup>152</sup> Tertiary correspondent J. P. B., writing early in 1860, echoed Garrison's faith in disunion:

' . . . [there is no method] more effectual and unobjectionable than that of a peaceful separation of the free from the slave states, by mutual consent . . . it is true, this would not be an abolition of slavery where it now exists; but it would be a removal of all fear from of it in the free States and the Territories; and they would have no complicity with it, or mortifying responsibility for it, than they now have for its existence in Asia or Africa; and it would be easy to show that such a separation must, in a few years, be followed by entire emancipation . . .'<sup>153</sup>

J. P. B. recognized that universal abolition would not immediately follow as a result of northern disunion. But it would 'remove all fear of it from the free States and the Territories,' effectively resolving all the section tensions that had paralyzed the Union under the grip of the slavepower.<sup>154</sup> J. P. B. believed that emancipation would

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<sup>152</sup> Stewart, *Garrison and Challenge*, p. 127

<sup>153</sup> J. P. B., 'Division of the States', Vol. 30 No. 3, 20/01/1860

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

soon follow disunion, however, as the South would be unable to hold their slaves for long without the federal support of the Union.<sup>155</sup>

Just because the Circle found justification for disunion in the Declaration did not mean that they supported secession. At first glance it is easy to equate the minority of the *Liberator* Circle to that of the Southern fire-eaters. Idealistically they are polar opposites, but in practice they are both advocating the dissolution of the Union through the revolutionary right of the Declaration. This similarity was not lost on contemporary Americans, and Garrison was called out several times by correspondents to clarify how the Circle's disunion differed from Southern Secession.<sup>156</sup> In April 1861, the final month of the Secession Winter, Garrison explicitly stated this difference:

'The right of a State to secede from the Union, ad libitum, "for no reason," is a doctrine never advocated by us, or by the Anti-Slavery society. We are disunionists on very different grounds . . . They [the Founding Fathers] did not make it [the Constitution] to be dissolved, but to be perpetuated. "The Constitution," says Mr. Webster, "does not provide for events which must be preceded by its own destruction. Secession, therefore, since it must bring these consequences with it, is REVOLUTIONARY." If, then, no State has a right to secede "without cause," has it a right to secede for any cause? The answer to this is – not a constitutional right, but a revolutionary right, for the cause set forth in the Declaration of Independence.'<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, Garrison shared J. P. B.'s belief: Garrison, 'Mr. Lincoln's Inaugural Address', Vol. 31 No. 10, 08/03/1861

<sup>156</sup> A particular, prolonged correspondence occurred in the lead up to Fort Sumter between B. G. Wright, Garrison, and members of the Wider Circle, beginning with: B. G. Wright, 'Treason.', Vol. 31 No. 14, 05/04/1861; Beriah Green, 'Thoughts on Treason', Vol. 31 No. 16, 19/04/1861; B. G. Wright, 'The Right to Secession', Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861; A. J. Grover, 'Southern Secession Indefensible', Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861; B. G. Wright, 'The Southern Right of Secession', Vol. 31 No. 21, 24/05/1861; B. G. Wright, 'Southern Secession and Northern disunion', Vol. 31 No. 27, 05/07/1861. Wright's chain of correspondence served as an example of Garrison allowing all opinions to be expressed and debated, even when he repeatedly disagreed and argued against them.

<sup>157</sup> Garrison, 'Southern Secessionists and Northern disunionists', Vol. 31 No. 16, 19/04/1861



Therefore, the key practical difference was that the secessionists were attempting to leave the Union as they pleased, in spite of the Constitution. The Confederate States might appeal to the revolutionary right of the Declaration, but their appeal could only be denied on the grounds of morality and, crucially, as a refusal to engage in democratic process. For as Wendell Phillips postulated in the wake of Fort Sumter:

'The right of a State to secede, as a revolutionary right, is undeniable; but it is the nation that is to recognize that; and the nation offered, in broad convention, at the suggestion of Kentucky, to meet the question. The offer was declined. The government and the nation therefore, are all right. They are right on constitutional law; they are right on the principles of the Declaration of Independence.'<sup>158</sup>

This speech marked the first time that Phillips acknowledged the government in any positive sense, and is a critical point in the Circle's transition towards compromising their principles and accepting political emancipation. In terms of defining secession, however, the key aspect is that the majority of the nation had to agree that invoking the right of revolution was absolutely necessary. The Confederate States ignored this point, while the disunionist *Liberator* Circle always acknowledged it. By Garrison's definition disunionists were distinguished by their ' . . . reverence for "higher law," as paramount to all human enactments and compacts,' and principles based on 'eternal justice and unswerving rectitude,' whereas secessionists sought nothing but the ' . . . utter subversion of free institutions, and the extension and perpetration of their monstrous slave system . . . '<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Wendell Phillips, 'Wendell Phillips on the War: Discourse of Wendell Phillips', Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861

<sup>159</sup> Garrison, 'Southern Secessionists and Northern disunionists', Vol. 31 No. 16, 19/04/1861

The Circle and southern secessionists both embraced the American revolution, but with different understandings. Secession was always distinguished from disunion on a moral and methodological level. An anonymous correspondent by the name of M. believed that 'To secede from injustice, oppression, wrong; is loyal, - a sacred duty; to secede or attempt secession away from the presence and sway of truth, justice, integrity, is rebellion and treason evermore.'<sup>160</sup> Although anti-political, the Circle was far from undemocratic. In contrast to the dictatorial demands of secession, disunion called for a democratic revolution. Though the masthead of the *Liberator* proclaimed 'NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!', the Circle advocated revolution only when the majority of Americans were enlightened to the evil of the Constitution through moral suasion. Indeed, even as the Circle began to rethink their place as agitators during the Civil War, they never refrained from chastising the Secessionists. Daniel Foster, a Secondary circle member who unusually chose to serve in the Union army as a medic, epitomized the Circle's denunciation of secession: 'What hissing scorn will then be sent forth against the men who trampled on the Declaration of our fathers as 'glittering generalities,' to be set aside and disregarded in the practice of the nation.'<sup>161</sup> Writing in 1862, Foster's commitment to the Declaration shows that opposition to secession remained strong long after disunion had been made irrelevant as a means of abolition.

The activists of the Circle were acutely aware that Northern disunion was an impossible task for them to achieve on their own. Its importance did not lie in its feasibility, however. Disunion served as the ideal goal towards which all individual agitation could be directed. Northern disunion allowed the Circle to continue their

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<sup>160</sup> M. 'Secession and Government', Vol. 31 No. 36, 06/09/1861

<sup>161</sup> Daniel Foster, 'Letter from the Thirty-Third Regiment', Vol. 32 No. 42, 17/10/1862

democratic community whilst still making moves towards abolition. 'We cannot make crises.' Phillips declared, 'We can only prepare for them [by employing the abolitionists'] only weapon . . . an appeal to the conscience against slavery as a sin.'<sup>162</sup> Garrison's theory of anti-political Northern disunion was far from popular and did not gain widespread support outside the minority of the Circle.<sup>163</sup> This lack of mainstream support allowed the Circle to exist as a democratic minority community, as well as an activist organization. Indeed, one of the catalysts for the *Liberator* Circle's crisis of identity in 1861 was the sudden turn of Northern opinion against the secessionist South. Prior to the Civil War the majority of the North held to moderate antislavery principles. Most Northerners recognized that slavery had no place in the land of free, yet they also respected the Constitution.<sup>164</sup> Slavery was a problem that had to be resolved, but not at the expense of the Union. Although the main goal of the Circle was to convince all Americans of the necessity of disunion, the fact that the majority of the population opposed this course of action allowed Garrison and his followers to distinguish themselves as a minority faction. With the Secession Winter and Civil War, however, Northern opinion shifted against the South. Although this shift was against the Confederate States and not strictly motivated by abolitionism, it was received by Garrison, Phillips, and many in the secondary circle in a positive light. When it seemed like the war would end in swift triumph for the North, the questions it posed about the certainty of Northern disunion and the nature of the Circle's community could be ignored in a wash of newfound patriotism. As it became apparent that the war would not be a short one, Garrison and the Circle as a whole

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<sup>162</sup> Stewart, *Wendell Phillips: Liberty's Hero*, p. 136

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143

<sup>164</sup> Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 314

had to ask themselves exactly what the nature of their agitation would be in a climate of conflict.

A similar issue regarding of what place, if any, violence had in the *Liberator's* crusade occurred after John Brown's ill-fated raid on Harper's Ferry, Virginia in October 1859. Brown and twenty-one abolitionist companions seized the federal arsenal with the intent of stealing arms and inciting a slave revolt. After a brief siege led by then United States' Colonel Robert Lee, Brown was captured, charged with treason, and executed on December second 1859.<sup>165</sup> Although Brown's attempt at forcing the end of slavery through insurrection was viewed by contemporary Americans as misguided at best and insanity at worst, the fact that he took direct action against the evil of slavery made him a hero to the *Liberator* Circle.<sup>166</sup> Outer Circle member Lizzie de Garmo reported of the favourable reception of a speech Pillsbury gave praising John Brown: 'It is a noticeable fact, and one worthy of remark, that the great Northern heart is everywhere beating with a more steady and healthy pulsation, since witnessing that noble and godlike sacrifice to principle, made by John Brown and his associates . . .'<sup>167</sup> Pillsbury continued, stating that Brown's 'lesson on armed resistance has been dearly learned, still it is not without its cheering results already; for it has shown us what manly courage, heroic fortitude, and true Christian love, such firm reliance on God *can give*, when the trying hour should come . . .'<sup>168</sup> Pillsbury acknowledged that Brown's rash, violent action failed and cost several lives, but also upheld the uncompromising abolitionist principles that motivated his raid. Garrison shared Pillsbury's opinion, exalting Brown not for his

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<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 495-499

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> Lizzie de Garmo, 'Convention at Poughkeepsie [Address of Mr. Pillsbury]', Vol. 30 No. 9, 02/02/1860

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*

violent means, but for his willingness to back up abolitionist dedication with practical action and for bringing abolition further into the 'public interest':

'For the last four months, John Brown and Harper's Ferry have been the absorbing objects of public interest and sympathy, so as to divert attention from any local struggle, (more or less,) though not from the tremendous question at issue before the country. Before the solemnity of that world-thrilling tragedy, everything else had to give way, for the time being. The result of it is to be seen in more efficient action of every kind, hereafter.'<sup>169</sup>

Garrison and Pillsbury's denunciation of Brown's violent means and praise for his practical action reflected the view of the Wider Circle. The resolutions of the annual meeting of MAS presented a finalized interpretation of Brown's raid:

'... to be a true abolitionist, it is necessary to be true to humanity, and therefore any measures which violate the great cause of human rights, though intended for the good of the slave, cannot be sound [yet] so long as the Anti-Slavery agitation is conducted on the principles of peace and goodwill, we can reasonably absolve ourselves from any violent measures adopted by others for the liberation of the oppressed.'<sup>170</sup>

The organisers of the MAS separated the actions of an extremist such as Brown from the non-violent moral suasion of the Circle. Therefore, they could accept the violent actions of others, so long as that violence actually achieved progress towards abolition.

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<sup>169</sup> Garrison, 'The Webster Statue', Vol. 30 No. 9, 02/02/1860

<sup>170</sup> George W. Stacey, Daniel Ricketson, 'Resolutions of the Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society', Vol. 30 No. 5, 02/02/1860

In March 1860, Garrison could confidently and unambiguously proclaim the ideal goal of the *Liberator* circle: 'Let there be a free, independent Northern Republic, and the speedy abolition of slavery will inevitably follow . . . *I am laboring to dissolve this blood-stained Union.* . . .'<sup>171</sup> There was no ambiguity, nor any space for compromise. Garrison and his coadjutors were proud individualists who often differed on exact matters of principle and practice, yet from 1843 onwards they were unified by the means of northern disunion.<sup>172</sup> It did not matter that this was a completely unachievable goal for a radical minority. In fact, its unrealistic idealism is precisely why it was such a strong means of abolition. The reality of agitating as an uncompromising, anti-political minority meant that realistic progress towards abolition was incredibly difficult to obtain. Northern disunion, by virtue of being idealistic and unfeasible, served as a blanket method that the Circle could agree on as the ultimate goal whilst debating amongst themselves the vagaries of more workable practical means. The infeasibility of northern disunion was crucial to the maintenance of the *Liberator* circle's society of free discourse, as it embodied everything that the individual agitators agreed upon.

Garrison, in February of the Secession Winter, firmly stated that ' . . . [the abolitionists of the *Liberator* Circle are] the only class in America who are true to the principles they profess, and cannot be induced to compromise them to avoid danger on one hand, or gain applause on the other.'<sup>173</sup> Although in this case he was referring directly to the prospect of yet another weak, conciliatory compromise to the Secessionists in return for peace (as the entirely redundant Peace Conference was

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<sup>171</sup> Garrison, 'Speech of William Lloyd Garrison [Anti-Slavery Celebration at Framingham, 04/07/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 29, 20/07/1860

<sup>172</sup> Aileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. 200

<sup>173</sup> Garrison, 'The Legislature and Free Speech', Vol. 31 No. 6, 08/02/1861

due to be held in Virginia), his words also ring true for the Circle's response to compromise as a whole.<sup>174</sup> Neither the threat of conflict nor the promise of popularity could sway Garrison to abandon immediatism for a political compromise. The most significant challenge that the *Liberator* Circle faced from 1860-1863 was compromising their ideal of absolute, anti-political abolition in return for the political abolition of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Strident opposition to political compromise was not only a logical, practical subset of immediatism, but a key principle of the *Liberator* Circle in of itself. Garrison was definitely not alone in his cry of no compromise. A correspondent by the name of W. aptly stated that ' . . . the truckling of principle to expediency, for a present or seeming good, can only end, sooner or later, by inevitable law, in bitter regret to ourselves . . .'<sup>175</sup> Ezra Heywood, known mostly as individualist anarchist, but also as a member of the secondary circle, confidently predicted in August 1860 that 'If the future thanks the abolitionists for anything, it will be that God gave them strength to look in the angry countenance of a compromising, huckstering age, and speak the truth.'<sup>176</sup> And Henry Wright, an extremely vocal Outer Circle member, proclaimed in October of the same year to 'Heed not constitutions, compacts, compromises, or creeds! Stamp them all beneath your feed, if they sustain slavery anywhere . . . Heed only the voice of the anti-slavery God in your own soul, who says – *Deliver the enslaved out of the hands of the enslavers!*'<sup>177</sup> There was no indecisive language here. Only an unwavering belief in the inefficacy of political compromise.

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<sup>174</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, pp. 550-551

<sup>175</sup> W, 'Our War and its Meaning', Vol. 31 No. 24, 14/06/1861

<sup>176</sup> Ezra Harvey Heywood, 'Speech of E. H. Heywood [Celebration of British Emancipation at Abingdon, 01/08/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 30, 10/08/1860

<sup>177</sup> Henry Clark Wright, 'No! To the Rescue – All!', Vol. 30 No. 43, 26/10/1860

The 157 issues of the *Liberator* published between 1860 and 1863 show the intricacies of the Circle's path to compromise. Garrison did not accept abolition through politics and war immediately. He did realize, however, that the path of the Civil War was unpredictable and entirely out of the *Liberator* Circle's hands. The *Liberator* Circle abruptly transitioned from a world of certainty and inarguable principles to one of uncertainty and war in April 1861. 'We have praised our Union for seventy years,' Phillips proclaimed during the Secession Winter, 'This is the first time it is tested. Has it educated men who know their rights, and dare to maintain them? Can it bear the discussion of a great national sin, anchored deep in the prejudice of millions? If so, it deserves to live. If not, the sooner it vanishes out of the way, the better.'<sup>178</sup> Phillips' viewpoint was still fervently anti-political and disunionist, even as eleven Southern states began to secede. Their question of whether or not the Union can 'bear discussion of a great national sin' was one that weighed heavily on the nation. Of course, discussion turned to war. And while the Union would emerge from the Civil War united, the *Liberator* Circle's ideal activist community would not.

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<sup>178</sup> Phillips, 'Extraordinary Scenes for a New England Sabbath: Address of Mr. Phillips', Vol. 30 No. 51, 21/12/1860



## Chapter Two: Crisis

In January 1861, Garrison changed the masthead slogan of the *Liberator* to 'The United States Constitution is "a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell.'<sup>179</sup> While still in line with anti-political disunionism, the change from demanding separation from the slaveholders reflected the Circle's new priority as a result of the Secession Crisis: letting the South secede as an alternate means of repudiating the proslavery constitution. Accompanying the new slogan was a quote from former President and antislavery advocate John Quincy Adams. The quote, from Adams' war power speech, fervently denounced the Constitution as a proslavery compromise. Slavery was introduced into the Constitution under an 'equivocation . . . a representation of property under the name of persons.'<sup>180</sup> Furthermore, the members of the convention from the Free States could not have imagined nor foreseen 'what a sacrifice to Moloch was hidden under the mask of this concession.'<sup>181</sup> Although Garrison had changed the masthead, his choice of replacement shows that there was not a major rethink from the Circle's principles of anti-political, non-compromising anti-Constitutionalism.

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<sup>179</sup> Garrison, 'Masthead', Vol. 31 No. 1, 04/01/1861

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

In February 1860, Maria Chapman, former executive member of the AAS and editor of the antislavery journal *Non-Resistant*, wrote to the *Liberator* with a prediction of why the United States might erupt in Civil War:

'If ever our country become a battle-field, and the slaveholders and non-slaveholders two camps . . . it will be because men of leading positions and sufficient cultivation are too ignobly slow of heart to act seasonably in this all-comprehending Cause. It is to kindle among them, and all those they influence, the sacred fire of Truth, and Love, and Liberty, that we spend and are spent – not without success.'<sup>182</sup>

Chapman presented a prediction that is vague enough to be considered accurate in hindsight. It could be argued that if 'men of leading positions,' like Abraham Lincoln, the Republicans, and even Southern Democrats, embraced the revelation that slavery had to be abolished immediately, then war would not have torn the Union asunder. Yet such a dramatic turn of principle was entirely unlikely to happen, especially from politicians working under the 'compromise of 1787.' Chapman, a committed Garrisonian, was well aware of the impossibility of political abolition. All politicians had to compromise to gain office, first with their own party members, then with the opposition, and the proslavery nature of the Constitution made slavery an acceptable point of compromise.<sup>183</sup> Given this context, the prediction element of Chapman's correspondence becomes little more than a framing device. In actuality, she was both critiquing the failure of politicians to see reality that slavery cannot be compromised over, and suggesting that the moral suasion of the *Liberator* Circle should, in part, be directed towards bringing the 'sacred fire of Truth, and Love, and Liberty' of abolitionism to politicians.

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<sup>182</sup> Maria Weston Chapman, 'The Twenty-Sixth National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Report]', Vol. 30 No. 6, 10/02/1860

<sup>183</sup> Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, p. 17

Chapman was prophetic in her belief that the agitation of the Circle could advance abolitionism by targeting politicians as well as their constituents. Although it was highly unlikely that the Circle would convince any Southern, proslavery congressman of the righteousness of abolitionism, the antislavery elements of the Republican Party were a much more viable target of moral suasion. Yet exactly how to approach the political antislavery of the Republican Party was a point of contention within the Circle that changed from 1860-1863. From the Civil War to the Emancipation Proclamation, there was widespread debate within the *Liberator* over whether to criticize, rally behind, or outright resist the Republican administration. Indeed, a significant part of Garrison's own personal compromise involved setting aside his dogmatic refusal to accept political antislavery and endorsing the limited abolition of the Emancipation Proclamation. Garrison, Phillips, Henry Wright, and many others (but not all) within the Wider Circle came to realize over the course of the Civil War that compromising their own principles, and disrupting the ideal democracy of their Circle, in order to secure progress towards abolition was better than continuing their long standing role as obstinate agitators. Rejecting compromise, on a personal level and in the form of the 'covenant with death,' that Lincoln and the Republicans were committed to upholding, was so central to the *Liberator* Circle's identity that it could not be discarded lightly. Garrison and his coadjutors were so fervently against compromise that it would take the crisis of Civil War to provoke a change of opinion significant enough to endorse Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

In 1860, however, Garrison and the majority of the Circle believed that Lincoln represented nothing more than another antislavery gradualist 'too ignobly slow of

heart to act seasonably in this all-comprehending Cause.<sup>184</sup> It did not matter that the platform of the Republican Party contained the first hard-line antislavery policy in the form of restricting slavery from the Territories of Nebraska and New Mexico.<sup>185</sup> Because Abraham Lincoln and his fellow party members had not accepted immediatism, they were destined to amount to little more than another cabal of well-intentioned, but ultimately ineffective and compromising, politicians. There was an element of the tertiary circle that saw the Republican Party as the best chance of achieving abolition. For Garrison, however, the proof of the Republican failure as abolitionists lay within their antislavery platform. Not because it antislavery, but because it was very clearly designed as a compromise plea to the Southern States, a statement of what the Republicans were willing to accept in regards to slavery and what they were not.

The Republican platform of 1860 explicitly stated that the Founding Fathers believed 'the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of Freedom,' and that any theory that the Constitution safeguards the expansion of slavery was a 'dangerous political heresy, at variance with the explicit provisions of that instrument itself.'<sup>186</sup> Aside from ending the growth of slavery, however, the platform did not contain any overt abolitionist measures. On the contrary, it called for an end to sectionalism that had become endemic within politics and outlined what the Republicans viewed to be a true compromise over slavery.<sup>187</sup> In accordance with Santayana's definition of compromise, the Republican platform gave up a portion of

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<sup>184</sup> Chapman, 'The Twenty-Sixth National Anti-Slavery Subscription-Anniversary 1860 [Report]', Vol. 30 No. 6, 10/02/1860

<sup>185</sup> *Republican Party Platform of 1860*, 04/05/1860, accessed online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29620>, last accessed 19/02/2017

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

the national antislavery measures they desired in order to compromise with the South.<sup>188</sup> Furthermore, the proposed compromise was completely in line with the Constitution, the initial compromise over slavery and other sectional differences. In exchange for a total restriction of slavery from the Territories, the Republican administration would respect 'the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions,' and denounced 'the lawless invasion by armed force of the soil of any State or Territory, no matter under what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes.'<sup>189</sup> Slavery would be untouched by any federal power in states where it already exists. Yet it could not grow beyond those states anymore.

In the lead up to the election Garrison discounted the Republicans entirely for their willingness to compromise under the proslavery constitution:

'Our compromises keep the slaves in their chains. It is because we are content with something besides inexorable justice, that the millions are held in bondage. It looks plausible to choose between two corrupt and time-serving parasites, one being a great deal worse than the other; but I hold it to be unsound in moral philosophy. If we have a radical principle, we ought to stand by it, come what may; and, in standing by it, we shall do better than we can by any compromise thereof.'<sup>190</sup>

Garrison recognized the Republican platform for the compromise that it was, and continued to hold fast to immediatism rather than accept the 'unsound moral philosophy' of constitutional antislavery. He did not even consider the option of trying to reason with the Republicans through moral suasion as Chapman suggested.<sup>191</sup> A

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<sup>188</sup> Santayana, *Character and Opinion* p. 115

<sup>189</sup> *Republican Party Platform of 1860*

<sup>190</sup> Garrison, 'Speech of Garrison [Anti-Slavery Celebration at Framingham, 04/07/1860]', Vol. 30. No. 29, 20/07/1860

<sup>191</sup> Chapman, 'The Twenty-Sixth National Anti-Slavery Subscription-Anniversary 1860 [Report]', Vol. 30 No. 6, 10/02/1860

policy of restricting slavery in the Territories was certainly something other than 'inexorable justice,' and could not be accepted by an immediatist abolitionist.

The Circle did not expect any progress towards abolition or any real antislavery policies if the Republican Party secured the government. Rather, they believed that even if Lincoln did succeed, he would just be another compromising politician who put on airs of antislavery principles, but would ultimately sacrifice them to placate the South. Garrison did not support the Republican party, despite believing their antislavery was genuine, because ' . . . the greater includes the less, and the immediate abolition of slavery is a matter of incomparably greater concern than simply preventing its extension.'<sup>192</sup> Phillips, upon hearing of the Republican platform of 1860, declared that the ice of Northern anti-slavery sentiment was so thin that 'Mr. Lincoln, standing six feet and four inches, cannot afford to carry any principles with him on to it!'<sup>193</sup> Ezra Heywood believed that the Republican Party was 'Sworn upon the altar of slavery, [and] affects to fight the battles of freedom. Antislavery in sentiment, it is proslavery in principle.'<sup>194</sup> Clearly, the Circle were unimpressed by the Republicans. Antislavery gradualism and political compromise had consistently failed to advance abolitionism, and the Republican Party's adherence to both did not make them a revolutionary political party to the Circle. Because they failed to make a definitive stand for abolitionism, the Republicans, and particularly Lincoln, were, in the eyes of the Circle, nothing more than a rehash of complacent, compromising Whig antislavery.

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<sup>192</sup> Garrison, 'The Territorial Issue, the Republican Party', Vol. 30 No. 39, 28/09/1860

<sup>193</sup> Phillips, 'Speech of Wendell Phillips [New England Anti-Slavery Convention, 30/05/1860] Vol. 30 No. 23, 08/06/1860

<sup>194</sup> Heywood, 'Speech of E. H. Heywood [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon, 01/08/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 32, 10/08/1860

The Republican alignment of antislavery with the interests of the free soil movement certainly made antislavery more relevant to the predominately white, middle-class Northern Republican constituency.<sup>195</sup> For the Circle, however, it appeared to be little more than another example of politicians sacrificing principle for popular support, political consensus building, and, crucially, ignored the plight of millions of slaves. ‘Resolved,’ read the resolutions of an antislavery meeting at Worcester ‘we feel bound to declare that no one of the men . . . likely to be nominated for the next presidency is worthy of the confidence or the support of those who have, from principle, arrayed themselves on the side of freedom . . .’<sup>196</sup> Tertiary correspondent D. S. G. predicted that the Republicans would adhere to the ‘white-manism’ of free soil over antislavery as early as March 1860: ‘[For the Republicans] the Union must preserved for the benefit of the *white* men, and freedom must rule for the benefit of ‘white men.’<sup>197</sup> Pillsbury confirmed D. S. G.’s suspicions in October of the same year, having heard Republican Josuha Giddings admit at Jefferson, Ohio, that: ‘. . . the *published* declarations of Abraham Lincoln . . . and the general voice of the Republican press and politicians, *was in favor of keeping faith with all constitutional compromises for slavery ever claimed by Calhoun or conceded by Webster.*’<sup>198</sup> To Pillsbury, conceding to the proslavery constitution was more than enough to disqualify Lincoln from any abolitionist support.

A correspondent who signed his name as ‘A Colored Man,’ remained staunchly opposed to the racism of both major parties: ‘For me, there is not much difference between a Democrat and a Republican; they are both unsound. The

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38, p. 309

<sup>196</sup> Josiah Henshaw, ‘Meeting at Worcester [Annual Meeting of the Worcester County South Division Anti-Slavery Society, 02/04/1860]’, Vol 30. No 17, 27/04/1860

<sup>197</sup> D. S. G., ‘Speech of Mr. Seward’, Vol. 30 No. 12, 23/03/1860

<sup>198</sup> Pillsbury, ‘Letter from Mr. Pillsbury’, Vol. 30 No. 41, 12/10/1860

Republicans in this section are as much afraid of anything dark as a booby would be in passing through the woods.’<sup>199</sup> A Colored Man’s concerns over the racism of the Republican Party was not unfounded. Lincoln had declared in the Stephen Douglas debates that ‘I have no purpose to political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two which, in my judgement, will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality;’<sup>200</sup> Dr. John Rock, a free black and long-time member of the Secondary circle, criticised the Republican Party for having no idea how to treat the free black population of the North, as Lincoln was content to uphold the ruling of the ‘Supreme Ignoramuses’ that blacks had no rights a white man is bound to respect.<sup>201</sup> Rock was pleased that the Republican party was taking an antislavery stand, but it was obvious that they truly had the interests of whites at heart.<sup>202</sup>

Whereas Lincoln was called out for his racism, Garrison was chastised by Tertiary Correspondent David Wasson for ‘exalting the black and denigrating the white.’<sup>203</sup> Garrison fervently denied Wasson’s claim: ‘We are quite unaware of any thing said or done by abolitionists, indicative of a disposition or even a remotest tendency, to exalt unduly the African race, or to screen them from impartial criticism. . .’<sup>204</sup> The *Liberator* Circle campaigned for equality for all and a nation that truly reflected the universal liberty of the Declaration of Independence. Creating this new nation required penance from the whites who had upheld the ‘covenant with death’

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<sup>199</sup> A Colored Man, ‘Wendell Phillips – Democracy’, Vol. 30 No. 11, 16/03/1860

<sup>200</sup> Abraham Lincoln, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, ed. Edwin Earl Parks, (Hall & McCreary: Chicago, 1918), p. 30

<sup>201</sup> John Stewart Rock, ‘Speech of Dr. John S. Rock [Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Boston, 27/01/1860]’, Vol. 30 No 5, 03/02/1860

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> David A. Wasson, ‘Justice vs Admiration’, Vol. 30 No. 53, 31/12/1860

<sup>204</sup> Reply of Garrison to: Wasson, ‘Justice vs Admiration’, Vol. 30 No. 53, 31/12/1860



for decades in the form of accepting abolition and demanding the repudiation of the constitution, but the need for repentance did not place whites below blacks.

Wider Circle member S. E. W. argued that:

'Lincoln is more obnoxious than Garrison, because one represents merely incarnation of an idea, the other one, one of the practical results, however imperfect, of that idea. One is the flaming sword standing at the Garden of Eden, whose sacred precincts they never intended to approach near enough to feel his almighty power; the other is the scare-crow, which, if they had the courage to approach, they would find perfectly harmless.'<sup>205</sup>

Lincoln, by virtue of his white-centric antislavery, was nothing more than a harmless 'scare-crow', an 'incarnation' of abolitionism that twisted the idea of universal equality in order to gain political success. Garrison's northern disunion might be 'imperfect' due to its difficulty to enact in the first place and its unexpected realisation in the Secession Crisis. But for S. E. W., disunion represented a commitment to realistic, practical abolition, when Lincoln remained content with compromising antislavery. Tertiary circle member Josephine Griffing lamented the same paralyzing impact the Chicago Platform had on antislavery that S. E. W. spoke of, with its implied vilification of John Brown.<sup>206</sup> Pillsbury also cited Lincoln's failure to acknowledge the heroism of John Brown as one of many reasons not to support the Republicans.<sup>207</sup> And Lydia Child, although speaking in 1862, offered a key insight into why the Circle rejects the vagaries of political process and why Republican policy could not be anything other than white-centric antislavery: 'Politicians never

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<sup>205</sup> S. E. W., 'Boston and Mobs', Vol. 31 No. 7, 15/02/1861

<sup>206</sup> Josephine S. Griffing, 'Influence of the Republican Party', Vol. 30 No. 31, 03/08/1860

<sup>207</sup> Pillsbury, 'Speech of Pillsbury [Anti-Slavery Celebration at Framingham, 04/07/1860]', Vol. 30. No. 29, 20/07/1860

understand great impulses, and never have enough faith to make use of them. Instead of taking a wide, comprehensive view, they look downward to their own game, studying how to checkmate each other; and this they sometimes continue to do long after the concussions of an earthquake. . . .<sup>208</sup> Child highlighted why Republican policy could not be anything other than white-centric antislavery; Lincoln and his contemporaries had to compromise any desire for strict abolitionist measures in order to unite their party behind a single platform and appeal to the majority of white Northerners. Pursuing abolitionist measures would have removed any chance of achieving a consensus within the North as well as potentially with the South.

In September of 1860, Garrison wholeheartedly agreed with Child's uncompromising anti-political opinion: 'It is not the object of the abolition movement to put up or put down any political party as such; but, holding the scales of justice impartially, it is to create such a moral and religious sentiment against slavery as shall mould all parties and sects to effect its overthrow.'<sup>209</sup> Garrison's emphasis on all influencing *all* parties, rather than placing their faith in a single, albeit promising, one, indicated his continued belief that constitutional politics could not affect abolition. Therefore, in relation to the election, Garrison believed that '[the Circle] should keep their feet firmly planted on the rock of uncompromising principle.'<sup>210</sup>

Phillips agreed, and rallied behind tried and true anti-political agitation:

'[Abolitionists should] not allow our hopes to centre on the success of a certain political party or candidate. I have no objection, personally, to the success of Mr. Lincoln or Mr. Seward; but I would rather that Stephen A. Douglas should be president than either of them. We cannot afford yet to let Lincoln succeed, because, if he should, the

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<sup>208</sup> Child, 'A Letter from Mrs. Child', Vol. 31 No. 41, 11/10/1861

<sup>209</sup> Garrison, 'The Territorial Issue, the Republican Party', Vol. 30 No. 39, 28/09/1860

<sup>210</sup> Garrison, 'The Presidential Election', Vol. 30 No. 44, 02/11/1860

country will say, 'The North has got the helm, let us see what the North is ready to do – wait!' – and we shall have four more years of waiting, to see what Abe Lincoln won't do!'<sup>211</sup>

Despite not objecting to Lincoln or Seward succeeding on the political stage, Phillips pointed out that he placed no hope in any political party or candidate to further abolition. Phillips' preference of Stephen Douglas, the proslavery Democrat candidate who championed popular sovereignty in regards to slavery in the Territories, speaks volumes about his disillusionment with politics as a means of abolition. Phillips would have Douglas not because he would enact any abolitionist or even antislavery measure, but because a proslavery president would be far more likely to convince moderate Northerners to join the democratic revolution of Northern disunion. Lincoln, being the representative of the North, would not invoke the need for immediate change that another slave-power dominated government would bring. The North would be content with the compromise outlined in the Republican Platform and, provided the South accepts an antislavery president, all abolitionists 'shall have four more years of waiting, to see what Abe Lincoln won't do!'<sup>212</sup> Phillips' pessimistic view of the Republican administration would have probably come to pass, had it not been for Secession.

Garrison, Phillips, and the anti-political element of the Secondary circle dismissed Lincoln as a politician bound to compromise. Phillips furthered his admonition of Lincoln by denouncing as the 'Slave-Hound of Illinois,' due to his recognition of the Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>213</sup> Staunchly anti-political Pillsbury argued that

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<sup>211</sup> Phillips, 'Speech of Phillips [New England Anti-Slavery Convention, 30/05/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 23, 08/06/1860

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> Phillips, 'Speech of Wendell Phillips [Death of Theodore Parker Commemorative Meeting, Music Hall, 17/06/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 25, 22/06/1860; Lincoln, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, p. 149

despite being antislavery, ‘. . . the *published* declarations of Abraham Lincoln and the general voice of the Republican press and politicians, [are] *in favor of keeping faith with all constitutional compromises for slavery ever claimed by Calhoun or conceded by Webster*.<sup>214</sup> Former vice-president and proslavery advocate John Calhoun infamously championed South Carolina’s attempt at opposing a federal tariff in the Nullification Crisis of 1832.<sup>215</sup> Calhoun supported the theory that any state could declare a federal law null and void if that state deemed the law unconstitutional, an extreme state’s rights argument that justified the dismissal of any antislavery legislation.<sup>216</sup> Although the nullification theory was quashed by President Andrew Jackson, it did not stop the most extreme proslavery fire-eaters from claiming that state’s rights were above federal law.<sup>217</sup> Daniel Webster had a long career as a conservative Whig senator, but Pillsbury is specifically referencing his involvement in the Compromise of 1850.<sup>218</sup> Webster and his Whig contemporary, the ‘great compromiser’ Henry Clay, masterminded the compromise that narrowly reduced sectional tension, at the expense of granting the South the right to expand slavery further into New Mexico and Utah territory and passing a much more stringent Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>219</sup> By comparing Lincoln to Calhoun and Webster and referencing his past career as Whig, Garrison, Phillips, and Pillsbury called him out as nothing more than another timid political compromiser.

Lincoln’s past and present belief in upholding the laws of the ‘covenant with death’ had a major part in ensuring that his party received little more than an

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<sup>214</sup> Pillsbury, ‘Letter from Mr. Pillsbury’, Vol. 30 No. 41, 12/10/1860

<sup>215</sup> Merrill D. Peterson, *Olive Branch and Sword: The Compromise of 1833*, (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1982), p. 1

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-19

<sup>217</sup> Aptheker, *Abolition*, pp. 20-29

<sup>218</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, pp. 99-108; Pillsbury, ‘Letter from Mr. Pillsbury’, Vol. 30 No. 41, 12/10/1860

<sup>219</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, pp. 99-108

ambivalent reception in the *Liberator*. Contrary to Heywood, Lincoln did not consider the Constitution to be the 'altar of slavery.'<sup>220</sup> Rather, he believed it was the positive law interpretation of the Declaration of Independence. This is not say he gave it primacy over the Declaration. Lincoln wrote that the Declaration was an 'apple of gold' and 'the Union, and the Constitution, are the picture of silver, subsequently framed around it. The picture was made, not to conceal, or destroy the apple; but to adorn, and preserve it. The picture was made for the apple --- not the apple for the picture.'<sup>221</sup> Therefore, the law must be respected, but not at the expense of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'<sup>222</sup> Lincoln and Garrison had common ground in their belief that the fundamental principles of the Declaration cannot be usurped. But whereas Lincoln believed that all the laws of the Constitution should be upheld even if some allow for slavery, Garrison believed that all of its laws were irrevocably corrupted by the Three-Fifths Compromise and the other proslavery clauses.

The speeches of radical republicans Sumner, Seward, Lovejoy, and Giddings all appear in the *Liberator* under the 'Selections' section, as pieces of note and points of discussion. Very few radicals engaged directly with Circle, however, either through correspondence or attending meetings. Giddings wrote in twice and Sumner once in 1860, to clarify the position of leading radicals in relation to black suffrage, defend the past statements of Lincoln, and the merits of constitutional antislavery.<sup>223</sup> Giddings in particular attempted to convince the Circle that Lincoln's willingness to

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<sup>220</sup> Heywood, 'Speech of E. H. Heywood [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon, 01/08/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 32, 10/08/1860

<sup>221</sup> Abraham Lincoln, 'Fragment on the Constitution and the Union', *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln Vol. 4*, accessed online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln4/1:264?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>, last accessed 20/02/2017

<sup>222</sup> *Declaration of Independence*

<sup>223</sup> Giddings' letters: Joshua Reed Giddings, 'Joshua R. Giddings to Wendell Phillips', Vol. 30 No. 34, 24/08/1860; Giddings, 'Reply of Hon. J. R. Giddings', Vol. 30 No. 42, 19/10/1860; Charles Sumner, 'Letter from Charles Sumner', Vol. 30 No. 32, 10/08/1860

compromise, firstly in 1849 over the Fugitive Slave Law, and in the Republican Platform of 1860, was not only a good thing, but also necessary for any antislavery progress to be achieved at all.<sup>224</sup> Phillips responded that 'It is not because Lincoln compromised in 1849 that I blame; it is the *nature* [author's italics] of the compromise with which I find fault . . . Our [Founding] Fathers had no right to make a slave hunting compromise in 1789. Lincoln had a thousand times less to make one in 1849.'<sup>225</sup> Here Phillips remained firm in his commitment to the *Liberator* Circle's principle of no compromise over slavery. In the same correspondence he accused Lincoln of being a 'Constitutional Hound' kept firmly on his leash by the rest of his party, as any deviation from endorsing the proslavery elements of the constitution might result in the alienation of pro-Union Northerners.<sup>226</sup>

One of the few radical republicans who attempted to sway the *Liberator* Circle towards political abolition personally was Senator Henry Wilson. A former member of the Whig Party, Wilson became involved in political abolitionism through the Free-Soil Party in 1848, and, when that dissolved in the mid-1850's, helped organized the coalition of antislavery politicians that became the Republican Party.<sup>227</sup> Wilson stated that his brand of antislavery was for emancipation under the Constitution, 'for ours is a nation of laws,' therefore, he could not condone the attempted insurrection of John Brown.<sup>228</sup> Even though Wilson did not completely agree with Garrisonian principles, he still saw value in speaking in favour of the Republicans directly to the Circle at the annual gathering of the AAS at Framingham, Massachusetts:

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<sup>224</sup> Giddings, 'Joshua R. Giddings to Wendell Phillips', Vol. 30 No. 34, 24/08/1860

<sup>225</sup> Phillips, 'Answer to Mr. Giddings', Vol. 30 No. 34, 24/08/1860

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans*, p. 9

<sup>228</sup> Henry Wilson, 'Letter from Hon. Wilson', Vol. 30 No. 50, 14/12/1860

'The Republican party believes slavery to be a moral, political, and social evil. It has pronounced against human slavery everywhere. It recognises slavery as a local institution, which Congress may not touch in states where it exists; but claims the power to keep slavery out of the Territories, knowing that in time it will give us such an overwhelming power as to enable us to check slavery all over the continent. If it fails in 1860, it will be because the country is not ripe enough for it. If it succeeds, it will overthrow the influence of slavery in the government. The Republican Party leaves slavery in the South to be dealt with by the people of the South, whenever we can change the heart and judgement and conscience of the people of those States.'<sup>229</sup>

Wilson had effectively outlined a plan where Republican antislavery could be connected to the Circle's moral suasion. His argument was one of northern disunion without the sundering of the Union. If Lincoln succeeded in his bid for the presidency, then slavery will be legally contained to the South, and the Circle can focus their agitation there. Of course, the abolitionist movement had already attempted a campaign directed at the slave states during the 1830's, and that only served to inflame extreme proslavery elements against them.<sup>230</sup> The Circle also sought a sincere national repentance for slavery, not just a begrudging eventual realization by the South that slavery had to end.<sup>231</sup> It is not surprising, then, that very few within the Circle agreed with Wilson's theory of a political, Republican form of federal moral suasion. Phillips even suggested that the reverse of what Wilson proposed, the Republicans should fail so that promising agitators such as Lincoln and Sumner

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<sup>229</sup> Wilson, 'Speech of Hon. Henry Wilson [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1860]', Vol. 30. No. 28 13/07/1860

<sup>230</sup> Stewart, 'Reconsidering the Abolitionists in the Age of Fundamental Politics', p. 10

<sup>231</sup> Phillips, 'Speech of Wendell Phillips [Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 24/01/1861]', Vol. 31 No. 5, 01/02/1861; Garrison, 'Re-Statement of the Principles, Measures and Object of the American Anti-Slavery Society', Vol. 31 No. 40, 04/10/1861; Declaration of Sentiments

could fall in line with the Circle.<sup>232</sup> Regardless, he still thought Wilson and Sumner to be ‘the best Republican antislavery minds,’ if only they would cease to bring political antislavery to the ‘communion table.’<sup>233</sup>

Despite the shared desire of the Circle and the radical republicans to end slavery, the two groups do not align on principle and means. The beliefs that made Sumner, Wilson, and Giddings ‘radical’ in comparison to more moderate Republicans, namely, an antislavery-centric policy rather than strictly free soil, made them little more than compromising politicians in the eyes of the *Liberator* Circle. Williams’ definition of the radicals as ‘men of principle who, on the issue of slavery, would not compromise [and] who advocated an absolute solution,’ suggests a strong similarity with the *Liberator* Circle.<sup>234</sup> Yet the radical republicans still sought a solution within the boundaries of the constitution. Although Williams’ emphasis on the radical republicans’ refusal to compromise morality hints at their similarity with the Circle, Trefousse was more accurate in describing the difference between the radical republicans and the *Liberator* Circle as a ‘question of means and immediate goals.’<sup>235</sup> Even though Sumner had been subscribed to the *Liberator* since 1835, he had ‘never been satisfied with its tone. I have been openly opposed to the doctrines on the Union and the Constitution which it has advocated for several years. It has seemed to me often vindictive, bitter, and unchristian.’<sup>236</sup> Wilson denounced the Circle as ‘extremists,’ and wished that ‘some of them [Garrisonian disunionists] were ever more to keep silent.’<sup>237</sup> Lincoln, Wilson, Sumner *et al*/respected the Constitution

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<sup>232</sup> Phillips, ‘Speech of Wendell Phillips [New England Anti-Slavery Convention, 26/05/1860]’, Vol. 30 No. 23, 08/06/1860

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals*, p. xii

<sup>235</sup> Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans*, p. 16

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*



as law, and saw northern disunion as the method of madmen. Therefore, the radical republicans can be described as a minority faction similar to the *Liberator* Circle, but not directly allied with them. Still, the radical republicans were largely left alone by the Circle to work their own brand of abolition through politics, and did not draw the criticism that Lincoln and the moderate republicans did.

Despite Garrison and Phillips' dismissal of the Republicans as timid compromisers, not all of the Circle members were anti-Republican. In the months before the 1860 election, fifteen pieces of correspondence were published supporting the Republicans, although only three of these were exclusively positive. The rest recognized the many problems of Republican antislavery, but believed that the party was the best chance the United States had for making realistic progress towards abolition. Tertiary correspondent F. W. Bird upheld the radicals as the best hope for abolition outside of the Circle: 'I find that the radicalism of the extreme wing of the Republican party is necessary, and even that such men are in danger of becoming popular; and I find that whenever this danger becomes imminent, all they need to do is go to a Garrisonian meeting, and the danger is averted at once. (Laughter and applause).'<sup>238</sup> Although Bird's praise was tongue-in-cheek, and highlighted the problem of the radical Republicans being moderate when compared the Circle, it was praise nonetheless. Bird's correspondence also gives credence to the leftist, post-revisionist interpretation of the *Liberator* Circle as something akin to the Republican moral conscience at least in the sense that truly moderate antislavery Northerners could more willingly accept radical republican policy when it is

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<sup>238</sup> F. W. Bird, 'Remarks of F. W. Bird [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon, 01/08/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 32, 10/08/1860

contrasted with the radical abolitionism of the Circle.<sup>239</sup> Garrison and his coadjutors were quite happy to adopt the platform of unofficial moral advisors to Lincoln, the Republican Party, and the nation, particularly in 1862.<sup>240</sup> Yet to call the Circle the Republican moral conscience incorrectly suggests that all Republicans were amoral. Lincoln and Seward, Wilson and Giddings, and all of their contemporaries might have held an interpretation of antislavery that differed from the Circle's immediatism, but simply holding a different point of view did not make them amoral.

D. S. G., who opposed the Republicans on the basis of their 'white-manism' earlier in the same correspondence, expressed an uncharacteristic rejection of anti-political action when he suggests that ' . . . those who find no moral impediment to their voting under the Constitution can do no better in the coming contest than to vote the Republican ticket.'<sup>241</sup> George F. Noyes simply states 'I am a practical man; I want to do something.'<sup>242</sup> Charles G. Davis presents a similar argument, admitting that despite the Republicans' timid antislavery, a vote for them would be 'a practical step in the right direction.'<sup>243</sup> Even Phillips recognizes that the act of voting is the proper way for the individual citizen to seek the fulfilment of their opinion in democracy: 'The Saxon race, left to itself finds vent through the ballot-box; but close up the ballot-box, and it loads the rifle.'<sup>244</sup> Writing in February, Phillips and the Circle

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<sup>239</sup> Kraditor, *Means and Ends*, p. 216; Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, p. 136; McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, p. viii; Mayer, *All on Fire*, p. 491

<sup>240</sup> Garrison, 'Speech of William Lloyd Garrison [Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, [23/01/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 6, 07/02/1862; Robert F. Wallcut, 'Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society [Advertisement]', Vol. 32 No. 1, 03/01/1862; Child, 'The Twenty-Eighth Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Advertisement]', Vol. 32 No. 3, 17/01/1862; Thomas Haskell, 'Essex County Anti-Slavery Convention and Pic-Nic [Report, 06/07/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 30, 25/07/1862

<sup>241</sup> D. S. G., 'Speech of Mr. Seward', Vol. 30 No. 12, 23/03/1860

<sup>242</sup> George F. Noyes, 'Speech of Rev. George F. Noyes [Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Cooper Union, 08/05/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 22, 1/06/1860

<sup>243</sup> Charles G. Davis, 'Speech of Hon. Charles G. Davis [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon, 01/08/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 32, 10/08/1860

<sup>244</sup> Phillips, 'Speech of Wendell Phillips, Esq. [Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, Tremont Temple, 26/01/1860]', Vol. 30 No. 6, 10/02/1860

were still very much in the wake of John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. Frank Sanborn, although believing that another John Brown insurrection would create a 'Southern Republican Party,' was so disillusioned by the lack of progress that he was willing to accept Lincoln's antislavery over nothing at all: 'I hope that, after the inauguration of Lincoln on the fourth of March, we shall see the wheels of the Administration reversed in their course; that we shall see some stop put to our present lamentable decline.'<sup>245</sup> D. H. amusingly predicts that on Lincoln's election the capitol's statue of Washington will be replaced by John Brown, and the tomahawks replaced with gods and goddesses of peace.<sup>246</sup> Despite admitting they 'do not care for political parties,' D. H. saw enough potential in the Republican party for abolition that he was willing to equate a republican victory with the beacon of immediatist action himself.<sup>247</sup>

Garrison never went as far as to openly endorse the republican party, he did pen an editorial addressing the motivations behind secession and the high likelihood that the South would take drastic action if Lincoln was elected:

'She [the South] has not been aroused, and inflamed to madness, by a shadowy abstraction, but by the consciousness that, if she loses the Territories, her days of supremacy are numbered . . . She is alive to the fact that her system of slave labor soon exhausts the most fertile soil, and requires new lands by constant acquisition to prevent its final extinction.'<sup>248</sup>

Although Garrison did not mention secession in this extract, he was clearly aware of the desperate state the slave-owners would find themselves in if Lincoln

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<sup>245</sup> Frank B. Sanborn, 'Speech of Frank B. Sanborn [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1860]', Vol. 30. No. 28, 13/07/1860

<sup>246</sup> D. H. 'A Visit to Washington', Vol. 30 No. 45, 9/11/1860

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Garrison, 'The Territorial Issue, the Republican Party', Vol. 30 No. 39, 28/09/1860

was elected. Losing the ability to spread slavery into the Territories would not only signal the end of the slavepower's representative dominance in Congress, but it would also mean a slow decline in the profitability and sustainability of the slave-based economy.<sup>249</sup> Garrison believed that the political struggle surrounding the Territories was '... the product of the general moral agitation for the total and eternal abolition of chattel slavery in every part of the South.'<sup>250</sup> By connecting the previous agitation of the Circle to current events, Garrison argued that their actions had helped bring the nation to this decision point on slavery. Even though Lincoln only sought to take a stand on keeping slavery out of the Territories, not universal abolition, Garrison still hoped for his success, if only to secure a small victory against the slavepower.

One of the most pro-Republican articles comes from Daniel Somes, a Republican Representative from Maine most notable for his efforts in the Peace Convention of February 1861.<sup>251</sup> Somes only served in the Thirty-sixth Congress (March 4 1859 – March 3 1861) and is absent from Trefousse's radical republicans, most likely falling under his category of those who 'remained in Congress for too short a time to exert the influence to which their talents might have entitled them.'<sup>252</sup> His exact placement amongst the Circle is also hard to define. Clearly Somes was biased towards the Republicans, but felt strongly enough about the anti-Republican sentiment in the *Liberator* that he had to write in. This places him in the Tertiary circle, even though his status as a Congressmen put him well and truly outside the

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<sup>249</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, (Pantheon Books: New York, 1966), p. 56

<sup>250</sup> Garrison, 'The Territorial Issue, the Republican Party', Vol. 30 No. 39, 28/09/1860

<sup>251</sup> Somes, Daniel Eton, *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000678>, last accessed 21/02/2017

<sup>252</sup> Trefousse, *The Radical Republicans*, p. 15

realm of Garrisonian abolitionism. Regardless, Some exercises his right to criticize the mainstream, anti-Republican opinion of the Circle:

'You [abolitionists of the Circle] have fought a good fight and have fulfilled your mission. You struck out in the night of our history, and pushed forward through the dark wilderness of bigotry and prejudice, and with your engineering implements cleared the way for the great army of progress, and now, instead of sharing in the victory, you stand hacking away at the old stumps, and censuring the friends of human rights because they are not armed with the kind of weapons you expect them to carry.'<sup>253</sup>

Somes' correspondence is notable because he was among the first of the Circle to argue that their first mission on the road to abolition as was complete. The idea that Garrison's anti-political clique had fulfilled their purpose and should re-evaluate their methods and goals is one that was repeated by many in the secondary and tertiary circles during the Civil War.<sup>254</sup> Some, as a strident Republican, saw the possibility of a Republican president as enough of a ground-breaking event to promote a fundamental change in the abolitionist movement. Although the Republicans armed themselves with the 'weapons' of politics and gradual antislavery under the law of the Constitution, as opposed to the Circle's disunion and immediatism, the fact that an openly antislavery party had the potential to take office at all is a crowning achievement worthy of the abolitionist crusade. The Circle's decades of moral suasion represent the 'engineering implements' that shaped Northern opinion towards antislavery to such a degree that an antislavery party could be elected, despite the advantage in representation given to the slave states by the

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<sup>253</sup> Daniel Eton Some, 'Letter from Hon. Daniel E. Some to Hon. Gerrit Smith', Vol. 30 No. 40, 05/10/1860

<sup>254</sup> See Chapter Three: Compromise

Three-Fifths Compromise.<sup>255</sup> Some was prepared to acknowledge the Republicans' popularity as a victory for 'human rights,' because in all likelihood the next president would not be a proslavery Democrat or temporalizing Whig, but antislavery Abraham Lincoln.<sup>256</sup> Debating over the differences between antislavery and abolitionism is a pointless exercise. Instead, the Circle should rethink their policy of anti-political agitation and decide exactly what their role as activists should be under a Republican president.

Writing a month before Lincoln's election, Some was ahead of the curve in calling for a society-wide introspection within the *Liberator* Circle. Arguably, he was not in a position to demand such mass self-examination. As a member of the Tertiary circle he was certainly free to express his opinions. But as a politician he represented nothing but compromising, antislavery gradualism. At least Henry Wilson suggested Garrison redirect his moral suasion towards the South, rather than give it up entirely.<sup>257</sup> It would not be until after Fort Sumter that such a fundamental re-examination of purpose would take place, inspired by the outbreak of war and invalidation of Northern disunion.<sup>258</sup> Still, Some was prophetic in predicting that national events would soon force a change in how the ideal democracy of the *Liberator* Circle operates. He just did not, and could not, know that it would take Civil War to provoke a crisis of principle within the Circle.

The Republicans won the election of 1860. Their coalition of antislavery radicals, moderate former Whigs and Democrats, and Eastern manufacturers, united

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<sup>255</sup> Some, 'Letter from Hon. Daniel E. Some to Hon. Gerrit Smith', Vol. 30 No. 40, 05/10/1860; Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, pp. 3-4

<sup>256</sup> Some, 'Letter from Hon. Daniel E. Some to Hon. Gerrit Smith', Vol. 30 No. 40, 05/10/1860

<sup>257</sup> Wilson, 'Speech of Hon. Henry Wilson [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1860]', Vol. 30. No. 28, 13/07/1860

<sup>258</sup> Walters, *The Anti-Slavery Appeal*, p. 139

by a desire to secure the ideology of the free, white North, appealed to the varied Northern middle-class and became the first strictly Northern based government.<sup>259</sup> While Republican success was hailed as a triumph of consensus based democracy by the North and reviled by the Fire-Eaters as the death-knell of their slave-based society, the Circle felt that an antislavery president opened up the potential Phillips gave his uninterested opinion a week after the election:

‘It is the moral effect of this victory, not anything which his administration can or will probably do, that gives value to his success. Not an abolitionist, hardly an anti-slavery man, Mr. Lincoln consents to represent the anti-slavery ideal. A pawn on the political chessboard, his value is in his position; with fair effort, we may soon change him for Knight, Bishop or Queen, and sweep the board. (Applause).’<sup>260</sup>

To Phillips, the Republican victory was bought by ‘consenting’ to the antislavery of territorial restriction over more decisive action slavery where it already exists. Lincoln had no choice but to ‘consent’ to mere antislavery in order to maintain unity within his party and to appeal to as many Northerners as possible. In doing so he has become nothing more than a ‘pawn on [and, in adhering to compromise over personal principle, to] the political chessboard.’ Phillips did concede that Lincoln could be influenced towards abolition, but in practice this would amount to continuing the same agitation that the Circle had been pursuing for decades. In the immediate period after Lincoln’s election, however, Phillips has not diverted from his belief that proslavery democrat Stephen Douglas would have been the president most conducive to abolitionism. For Lincoln’s antislavery gradualism would only lead to inaction at best, and another proslavery compromise at worst.

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<sup>259</sup> Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals*, pp. 4-5

<sup>260</sup> Phillips, ‘Wendell Phillips upon the Presidential Election’, Vol. 30 No. 46, 16/11/1860

A secondary correspondent by the name of W, who contributed frequently to the *Liberator* over 1860-1863, emphasized the potential problem of the Republicans being pressured by the South into another unfavourable compromise:

‘The question most immediate to *us* is, how firm do these American voters, who have just chosen their standard bearer, mean to stand by the principles they profess to hold so dear? As business men, is any portion of them to be intimidated by threats of deluded men, and thus compelled to relinquish what they have already gained? Will they be driven to apology and concession? For what? For the sake of peace ‘when there is *no* peace?’<sup>261</sup>

W’s emphasis on ‘us’ tells of the divide that still exists between the *Liberator* Circle and ‘American voters.’ The North might have voted in Lincoln on a consensus platform that happened to include a single antislavery clause. But W does not know if the ‘business men’ of the Republican coalition will stand by the restriction of slavery in the Territories, or if they will jettison it in the face of the inevitable threats of secession from the South.

The Secession Crisis from Lincoln’s election on November sixth 1860 to the bombardment of Fort Sumter on the twelfth of April 1861 proved to be the test of Republican commitment to antislavery. The Republican platform, carefully constructed to create a Northern consensus whilst presenting a fair compromise to the South, instead provoked so much outrage from the fire-eaters that they immediately called to secede from the Union. Secession, like northern disunion, appealed to the Declaration of Independence for legitimacy, specifically the right of the people to alter or abolish a government that did not reflect the ideals of its citizens. The crucial difference between disunion and secession was that disunion

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<sup>261</sup> W., ‘Principle Versus the Spirit of Fear’, Vol. 30 No. 50, 14/12/1860



followed the Declaration of Independence completely in that it sought to convince the majority of Northerners (and, eventually, Americans) that the severing of the Union was the only way to repudiate the proslavery Constitution. Secession

Before the crisis of means of the Civil War, the *Liberator* Circle experienced a period of unprecedented unity. The Secession Crisis provided an unexpected step on the way to abolition. The severing of the Union was an unmitigated crisis for the majority of Northern Americans. Yet the entirety of the Circle rallied around secession as a means of positive progress towards abolition, even though it was a far cry from the democratic Northern disunion they had been agitating for. 'The North should recognize the fact that the Union is dissolved,' Whipple proclaimed in February 1861 'they should see, in the madness of the South, the hand of God, liberating them from 'a covenant with death and an agreement with hell," made in a time of terrible peril, and without a conception of its inevitable consequences . . .'<sup>262</sup> Whipple represented the most extreme response the Circle had to secession. He believed that secession resulted in the same outcome that the Circle had been agitating for three decades: the separation of the slave states from the free, and the invalidation of the proslavery Constitution.

The entirety of the Circle agreed with Whipple on the potentiality of secession as a stepping stone to abolition. Yet a few individuals in the tertiary circle questioned exactly what the separation of North and South would mean for the Circle's means, particularly in relation to the Constitution, the Republicans, and whether or not to engage in politics in general. Their questions did not make them detractors, however, simply a more forward-thinking element in an anti-political community that

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<sup>262</sup> Whipple, 'No Union with Slaveholders!', Vol. 31 No. 7, 15/02/1861

suddenly found itself directly involved in a political crisis. The Circle had always been seen as an extremist group in the eyes of moderate Northerners. But as Whipple and Phillips' clamouring for disunion became more than the cry of fanatics, public opinion turned against the Circle, to the extent that pro-Union mobs protested their meetings at Tremont Temple.<sup>263</sup> Such pro-Union reaction was a response to the increasing fervour of the Circle. Even as questions about future means began to surface, all amongst the Circle were inspired by the possibility of finally achieving their goal of disunion, and this possibility sparked a greater desire for action over agitation.

Garrison was stricken by bronchitis from November 1860 to February 1861, and is uncharacteristically silent as a result. With Garrison nursing his sickness, it fell to Phillips and Whipple to represent the Primary circle for the majority of the Secession Crisis. Phillips assumed the mantle of de-facto leader of the Circle, becoming the public face of the 'let them go' movement and revelling in the Circle's sudden increase in national recognition. The Circle's willingness to accept secession did not endear them to the North. Instead, it provoked widespread protests from pro-Union Northerners, who saw the Circle as un-American traitors. Whipple described the mobs as consisting of Democrat, Bell-Everett supporters, spouting proslavery resolutions, and inferred that they were being paid for by the 'cottonocracy.'<sup>264</sup> Phillips' was the target of two major mobs during the Secession Crisis, the first at a meeting in remembrance of John Brown at Tremont Temple and the second at a defiant meeting at the Music Hall.<sup>265</sup> Phillips was unafraid of 'mobocratic' tactics, proudly declaring that:

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<sup>263</sup> Irving H. Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips: Brahmin Radical*, (Beacon Press: Boston, 1961), pp. 225-239

<sup>264</sup> Whipple, 'Notes on the Tremont Temple Mob', Vol. 30 No. 50, 14/12/1860; Whipple, 'Another Bell-Everett Mob', Vol. 30 No. 51, 21/12/1860

<sup>265</sup> Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, p. 212-216

'The time to assert rights is when they are denied; the men to assert them are those to whom they are denied. The community which dares not protect its humblest and most hated member in the free utterance of his opinion, no matter how false or hateful, is only a gang of slaves.'<sup>266</sup>

Free speech would not be threatened by mob action. Phillips was determined to campaign for abolitionism, even if it meant he had to violate non-resistance by carrying a revolver at all times in self-defence. The abolitionists had been targeted by violent mobs before in the 1830's, most notably the mob of 1835 where Elijah Lovejoy was killed protecting his printing press.<sup>267</sup> In 1860 and 1861, as in 1835, the *Liberator* Circle did not let such tyrannical tactics dissuade them from moral suasion, and above all else retained their unwavering belief in the certainty of immediatism.<sup>268</sup>

Whipple was the staunchest advocate of separation, particularly as an alternative to the weak political antislavery of the Republicans: 'If the mess of Republicans do not distinguish which of their leaders in this crisis are *men*, and which are only scheming politicians, they will richly deserve both to fall into the hands of the latter, and to be again trodden under the Slave Power.' W. continues to assert the importance of antislavery Northerners and the Republicans remaining true to their principles during the Secession Crisis: 'Let the Republican party hold fast to the principles which elevated it to power, and which will send it forward to final triumph. A temporizing policy, now or hereafter, as touching the principle of liberty, will scatter it like the leaves of autumn.'<sup>269</sup> The limited Republican antislavery was nowhere close to W's abolitionist principles. If Lincoln did not hold on to that small

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<sup>266</sup> Phillips, 'Extraordinary Scenes for a New England Sabbath: Address of Mr. Phillips', Vol. 30 No. 51, 21/12/1860

<sup>267</sup> Aptheker, *Abolitionism*, pp. 46-49

<sup>268</sup> H. G. Rollins, 'Pro-Slavery Mobs', Vol. 30 No. 52 28/12/1860; D. S. Grandin, 'The Portland Mobs', Vol. 30 No. 52, 28/12/1860; Whipple, 'Freedom of Speech', Vol. 31 No. 4, 25/01/1861

<sup>269</sup> W., 'Our Duties in the Present Crisis', Vol. 31 No. 7, 15/02/1861

amount of 'liberty' within the Platform of 1860, the Republicans will be revealed as slaves to the maintenance of national consensus.<sup>270</sup> Unlike W., who consented to look towards the 'final triumph' of the Republican Party, Whipple chastised their lack of decisive action during the Secession Crisis. Whipple's 'scheming politicians' referred to both conservative Republicans and politicians in general.

Many in the Wider Circle saw positive progress towards abolition in secession. Of the forty-nine articles published from Lincoln's election to the bombardment of Fort Sumter supporting letting the slave states go, twenty-one pieces were from tertiary correspondents. Charles Burleigh, a regular contributor to the *Liberator* since 1835 and noted campaigner for woman's suffrage, remained firmly behind no compromise: '. . . if our concession and compromise, on terms involving a surrender of moral and religious principle, are necessary to the preservation of the Union, then let the Union go! (Loud applause and hisses.) If these are necessary for the preservation and peace of the country, then we are not the appointed conservators of the peace of the country.'<sup>271</sup> S. M. J. went as far to say that 'The dissolution of the American Union is the destruction of the slave system. This being so, every lover of his kind must rejoice that an event so desirable is at the door. Let it come – the sooner the better . . .' However, S. M. J. did concede that 'True union is desirable. Peace should be sought; but these great blessings are not to be placed above eternal justice. Justice must be done, let the cost be what it may.'<sup>272</sup> A commitment what is moral and just exists above positive law and any of its

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<sup>270</sup> Whipple, 'To Yield, or Not to Yield', Vol. 30 No. 53, 31/12/1860

<sup>271</sup> Charles Calistus Burleigh, 'Speech of Charles C. Burleigh [Massachusetts Anti-Slavery, Tremont Temple, 24/01/2017]', Vol. 31 No. 8, 22/02/1861

<sup>272</sup> S. M.J., 'Address to the American People', Vol. 31 No. 15, 12/04/1861

constructs, including the Union. Though S. M. J. desired Union, if separation meant the end of slavery, then he was willing to accept it.

J. P. B. saw a positive revolution in secession ' . . . when any of the slave states are bent upon secession, it should not be opposed by others, but permitted peaceably and cheerfully, as a happier revolution than that which delivered us from British dominion.'<sup>273</sup> J. P. B. accepted that secession was not the ideal, abolitionist inspired revolution the Circle had been campaigning for, but it was still a 'happier revolution', at least in comparison to the violent revolution of 1776. W. looked towards the future of the nation and abolitionism after letting the South go:

'That the South must suffer much, by and by, in her political and moral isolation, there can be no doubt; but if wisdom can only be born to some of folly and suffering, then it may not be a matter of regret to those who are to come after us, that disruption now ensue as preparatory to the reconstruction of a political edifice whose foundation shall be laid in the broadest liberty.'<sup>274</sup>

The 'wisdom' that W. wanted to be born out the South's suffering was, of course, abolition. For if the Southern States collapsed under the weight of 'political and moral isolation,' then the Free States could more easily reintegrate the slave states back into the Union without slavery.

Despite the widespread support for letting the South go, secession was certainly not the ideal disunion that the Circle sought. The free North was not separating from the slave states as the result of a widespread abolitionist awakening, the revelation of the 'sacred fire of truth, love, and liberty' that Chapman campaigned

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<sup>273</sup> J. P. B., 'Value of the Union', Vol. 30 No. 52, 28/12/1860

<sup>274</sup> W., 'Southern Aggression and Northern Forebearance', Vol. 31 No. 13, 29/03/1861

for.<sup>275</sup> Yet it functionally had the same result. Indeed, secession involved the same outcome that J. P. B. described in his argument for the benefits of disunion, published in January 1860:

‘ . . . [there is no means] more effectual and unobjectionable than that of a peaceful separation of the free from the slave states, by mutual consent . . . it is true, this would not be an abolition of slavery where it now exists; but it would be a removal of all fear from of it in the free States and the Territories; and they would have no complicity with it, or mortifying responsibility for it, than they now have for its existence in Asia or Africa; and it would be easy to show that such a separation must, in a few years, be followed by entire emancipation . . . ’<sup>276</sup>

J. P. B.’s argument shows the widespread belief that full emancipation would follow ‘in a few years’ after a separation of the slave states from the free. Like many of his contemporary agitators, he failed to explain exactly how emancipation would occur, or what role the Circle would have in securing it. This might seem to be a lack of foresight or planning in the Circle’s means. But in reality Garrison and disunion advocates saw disunion as a monumental long term goal, and were content to re-evaluate their direction as a community once it had been achieved. The most important factor to take from J. P. B.’s argument, however, is his emphasis on the positive outcome severing of the Free States from slavery.

The individualistic agitators of the *Liberator* Circle were able to rally behind the idea of letting the slave states go because it was an alternate form of northern disunion. Secession was acceptable despite its illegality because it allowed them to continue their fundamental refusal of political and personal compromise. Yet the

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<sup>275</sup> Chapman, ‘The Twenty-Sixth National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Report]’, Vol. 30 No. 6, 10/02/1860

<sup>276</sup> J. P. B., ‘Division of the States’, Vol. 30 No. 3, 20/01/1860

majority of Northerners were stridently pro-union. This desire to prevent secession and Senator John Crittenden of Kentucky and Representative Thomas Corwin drafted compromises designed to reach a middle ground with the South. Crittenden attempted to resolve the issue of slavery in the territories once and for all through a series of constitutional amendments protecting the right of expanding slavery anywhere below 36° 30' and explicitly preventing Congress from interfering with slavery where it already exists.<sup>277</sup> Corwin, and fellow republican representative Charles Francis Adams, son of former president John Quincy Adams, presented a less drastic plan that admitted New Mexico Territory immediately as a slave state, but did not give a final ruling on the issue of expansion.<sup>278</sup> Despite being legitimate attempts at creating a political consensus, neither Crittenden's nor Corwin's compromises made any realistic progress towards resolving the Secession Crisis. Lincoln and the Republicans had already outlined their idea of an acceptable compromise in the platform of 1860. The Crittenden compromise defied the platform by legitimising slavery in the Territories. The Corwin Compromise was far more moderate, yet was still met with animosity from the radical republicans and the few remaining Southern congressmen.<sup>279</sup>

Neither Crittenden's nor Corwin's compromises were anywhere near acceptable to the *Liberator* Circle. Another political compromise to resolve secession was the worst possible outcome. Phillips believed that a compromise to prevent secession would risk:

'insurrection . . . the worst door in which freedom can enter. Let universal suffrage have free sway, and the ballot supersedes the bullet. But let an arrogant and

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<sup>277</sup> Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, pp. 531-533

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 550-551

besotted minority curb the majority by tricks like these, and when you have compromised away Lincoln, you revive John Brown.’<sup>280</sup>

It appears at first that Phillips is referencing the possibility of a slave insurrection, a violent means of abolition that the Circle did not support. Yet his reference to the democratic process of the ‘ballot’ and the potential for reviving John Brown in the face of a government that goes against the citizens shows that he speaks of the possibility of a Northern, abolitionist insurrection. So essentially northern disunion, but through revolution. As terrible as insurrection is, Phillips preferred action over yet another political compromise favouring the slaveholders.

Whipple gave a charged call to arms in response to the possibility of compromise:

‘ . . . now, when the States that have so long outraged us are setting us free by taking themselves away, in God’s name, let us not interpose obstacles to their departure! Let us not offer protection to that villainous ‘institution’ which, having lived so far, because we have unjustifiably favored it, seems now to die! Let us not so absurdly uphold the continuance of slaveholding by Southern men, as to offer *ourselves* to be their slaves! If we have not manhood enough to act, to advance, in this emergency, let us at least stand still, and look at the enemy! Let us not retreat!’<sup>281</sup>

At last, after years of agitation, Whipple saw the potential to further the cause of abolition in the Secession Crisis. Compromises such as Crittenden’s, Corwin’s, and even the Republican platform, represented nothing more than ‘obstacles’ to the departure of the slave states. George Hoyt, a tertiary circle member who spoke at

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<sup>280</sup> Phillips, ‘Address of Wendell Phillips at the Music Hall on “Progress” [17/02/1861]’, Vol. 31 No. 8, 22/02/1861

<sup>281</sup> Whipple, ‘Address of Judge Shaw and Others to the Citizens of Massachusetts’, Vol. 30 No. 52, 28/12/1860



the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in 1861, favoured territorial restriction over another compromise to placate the save power.

'I have not, hitherto, understood that there was any inconsistency between a Republican, believing in political action as a remedy for the evils of slavery, and a conscientious abolitionist . . . I do not mean such Republicanism as represented by the recent Senatorial speech of William H. Seward; I do not mean such Republicanism as represented by the compromises of Tom Corwin; I do not mean such Republicanism *as is represented* by Charles Francis Adams, who proposes to admit New Mexico as a slave State. [*The rioters* – “Three cheers for Adams.”] I do not mean such Republicanism as is represented, for instance, by the Springfield *Republican* . . . I mean such Republicanism as would legislate eternal liberty into the Territories.'<sup>282</sup>

Hoyt gave this speech at the height of the pro-Union protesters, labelled as 'rioters' by Whipple, hence the “Three cheers for Adams' included in the transcript.<sup>283</sup> By denigrated Adams' conciliatory compromise and all conservative elements of the Republican Party, Hoyt is, in the eyes of pro-Union Northerners, just as much of an anti-American radical as Phillips and Whipple. Yet by recognizing the validity of Republican antislavery and professing that there is no 'inconsistency' between a Republican and 'conscientious abolitionist,' Hoyt departs from the traditional, anti-political Circle principle in a major way. Specifically, Hoyt accepts the possibility of abolition through amending the constitution without outright repudiating it.

Phillips, in contrast, remained committed to the immediatist tenets of the *Liberator* Circle. Like George Hoyt, Phillips' speech at the Massachusetts Anti-

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<sup>282</sup> George Hoyt, 'Speech of George H. Hoyt, Esq. [Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 24/02/1861]', Vol. 31 No. 5, 01/02/1861

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

Slavery Society was beset by pro-union hecklers. Unlike Hoyt, Phillips does not back down from the need for immediate repentance:

'I stand here to-day by the sacrifice of a life, to atone, as far as possible, for the sins of my father (applause and hisses,) and every man who loves his father is bound to be here to-day. (Applause.) [A Voice – “Three cheers for his father.” *Another* – “Three cheers for the Union.”] Well, we are here, friends, to make those cheers deserved. We are here to make the Union worthy of cheers within hearing of Faneuil Hall. (Applause and cries of “Good.”) We are here to wipe out the three-fifths slave basis, the slave cause of recapture, the pledge against insurrection, and every black stripe from the parchment of 1789; and when we have done it, we will go down to that old cradle of Liberty, and invoke Adams, and Otis, and Hancock to come and listen to our repentance, and to our jubilee together.'<sup>284</sup>

Although Phillips remained intransigent during the Secession Crisis, his focus on striking ‘every black stripe from the parchment of 1789’ signifies an early change in how the *Liberator* Circle would come to change their view of the Constitution. For the past three decades Garrison and Phillips’s only solution for the ‘covenant with death’ was outright repudiation, which could only legally be achieved through northern disunion. Secession, although utterly treasonous and separate from disunion, could easily be intellectualized into a method of abolition that aligned with the Circle’s principles of the last three decades. With the slave states gone the ‘agreement with hell’ was null and void. It had not been dissolved by an enlightened, abolitionist Northern populace, but the severance of the slave states created an

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<sup>284</sup> Phillips, ‘Speech of Wendell Phillips [Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 24/02/1861]’, Vol. 31 No. 5, 01/02/1861

alternate form of disunion that opened up the possibility for radical abolitionist change.

A tertiary correspondent signed as 'God help THE PEOPLE' goes a step further than Phillips, suggesting that the government capitalize on secession by swiftly amending the Constitution:

'Let the whole policy of government be openly and avowedly hostile to slavery, and let the people of the free states at once meet in Convention to wipe out every clause of the Constitution which has been, or can be, tainted with pro-slavery interpretation. This is the way, the only way, to set ourselves right-to be just, to be magnanimous, to be generous. Then, if civil war must come, let it come; then, if the South must perish, let it perish – we shall be innocent, we shall be saved, yet so as by fire.'<sup>285</sup>

The amendment of the constitution that God help THE PEOPLE suggested aligns with the methods approved by the radical republicans. Alongside Hoyt's support of Republican antislavery in the face of compromise, God help THE PEOPLE provides the first evidence of a small element of the Tertiary circle who are moving away from anti-political agitation and towards political abolition. The desire for progress towards abolition motivates them to contemplate a personal compromise, modifying their strident demands for disunion and immediatism and gradually becoming more open to alternate means of ending slavery. This move towards personal compromise occurred only on the fringe of the Circle during the Secession Crisis, and even God help THE PEOPLE would rather have war than a weak political compromise to keep the South in check. Of course, Civil War does come. With war between the Union and the Confederacy, all but ruling out disunion

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<sup>285</sup> God help THE PEOPLE, 'The Question', Vol. 31 No. 11 15/03/1861

as a realistic option, the *Liberator* Circle lost the principle that kept them in methodological unity. Questions of where to direct their agitation, what method of abolition to agitate for, and whether or not to move towards accepting politics, abounded between Fort Sumter and the Emancipation Proclamation. Garrison and his coadjutors were suddenly faced with the choice of compromising their anti-political immediatism, or remaining true to their foundational principles.

The Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter changed everything. Notable Charleston resident Mary Boykin Chesnut experienced the bombardment first hand. Her husband, former US Senator James Chesnut and then aide to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, had treated with Colonel Anderson, the Union commander of Sumter, earlier that evening. 'Anderson will not capitulate,' Chesnut wrote in her diary, and although her husband 'felt for Anderson,' everyone knew the ramifications of his refusal to surrender the Fort. Later on the night of the eleventh, Mary anxiously waited for news from James:

'I do not pretend to go to sleep. How can I? If Anderson does not accept terms at four, the orders are, he shall be fired upon. I count four, St. Michael's bells chime out and I begin to hope. At half-past four the heavy booming of a cannon. I sprang out of bed, and on my knees prostrate I prayed as I never prayed before.'<sup>286</sup>

Chesnut, as a member of the Southern, slaveholding aristocracy, could not have been further from the *Liberator* Circle in ideology. Her reaction to bombardment, shock, hope, and prayer, was the same as Garrison and Phillips. With the aggressive assault on Sumter all Americans, Northern and Southern, abolitionist

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<sup>286</sup> Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward, (Yale University Press: 1981), p. 46

and Fire-Eater, recognized that secession would not be resolved by compromise, but with conflict.

Garrison, Phillips, and the entirety of the *Liberator* Circle were challenged by Fort Sumter on an ideological and personal level. Their earlier problem of how to react to the violent abolitionism of John Brown hinted at the gaps in the Circle's certainty of principle, particularly in relation to non-resistance. The Civil War, however, was a moral crisis on a completely different level. Instead of grappling with the issue of whether individual violence was justified in the cause of freeing the slave, the Circle had to decide if outright war was acceptable along the path to liberty. This problem of means was further complicated by the immediate turn of Northern opinion against the South.

For the first time in the three decades that the Circle had been agitating for immediate abolition, the sentiment of the North was not hostile or indifferent towards the Circle. This turn of opinion was not indicative of a widespread acceptance of abolition. Rather, the Northern moderates Whipple

'Up to this time it has been the duty of the abolitionists to stimulate an indifferent people to interest and action. All at once . . . swayed by motives other than ours, and working by means other than ours, the Northern people are now united *in opposition to the power that upholds slavery*. For the first time in this contest, it has become *our* part to "stand still, and see the salvation of God." Our work is now doing by other hands faster than we can do it.'<sup>287</sup>

Although this sentiment was inspired by a desire to preserve the Union and lacked any abolitionist character, the fact that the majority of the North were willing to

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<sup>287</sup> Whipple, 'New Occasions teach New Duties', Vol. 31 No. 18, 03/05/1861

take action against the slaveholders was seen by Garrison and Phillips as a dramatic, positive change from the indifference of earlier years. Not all in the secondary or tertiary circle agreed with them. Lydia Child, Parker Pillsbury, and Stephen Foster felt that the pro-union prosecution of the war would limit any possibility for abolitionist action, or worse, result in a compromise to convince the Confederate States to re-join the Union. This element of dissent became more common as the war dragged on without progress. Yet in the days after Fort Sumter, the *Liberator* Circle was resoundly patriotic.

The first issue of the *Liberator* published after Fort Sumter came out of the nineteenth of April, a mere two days after the bombardment ended. Although Garrison was fond of writing his editorials at the last possible moment before publication, he did not mention Fort Sumter or Civil War at all in this issue. Instead, he continued to campaign for disunion. Garrison had just responded to a tertiary correspondent by the name of B. G. Wright who argued that secession was the same as disunion.<sup>288</sup> Wright would not back down from his opinion, however, and continued to debate with Garrison long into July when disunion was deemed to be an irrelevancy.<sup>289</sup> Yet it made sense that qualifying disunion was at the forefront of Garrison's mind just before Fort Sumter. Garrison was still an advocate of letting the South go in early April 1861, and as such displayed the same cautious optimism about Lincoln he had shown that past September:

'On the issue raised by the secessionists, they are wholly and fearfully in the wrong, while President Lincoln is indisputably in the right. On his side all the elements of freedom will coalesce, sympathetically and approvingly, as against their thoroughly

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<sup>288</sup> B. G. Wright and Garrison, see footnote 156, p. 57

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*

infernal spirit and purposes, and a thousand times over wish him success in the struggle. At the same time, as pertaining to continued union with the South, God grant that the North may speedily see the folly, danger, and iniquity of trying it any longer!<sup>290</sup>

When the full gravity of the war and the complete turn of public opinion became apparent, however, Garrison was filled with jubilation. Not at the tragedy of war, but at the majority of the North finally being allied against the slavepower:

‘Let nothing be done, at this solemn crisis, needlessly to check or divert the mighty current of popular feeling which is now sweeping southward with the strength and impetuosity of a thousand Niagaras, in direct conflict with that haughty and perfidious Slave Power which has long ruled the republic with a rod of iron for its own base and satanic purposes.’<sup>291</sup>

Indeed, Garrison felt that the war was of such gravity that he postponed the meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in light of the ‘unparalleled excitement now existing throughout the country.’<sup>292</sup> Garrison maintained and developed his support in his editorial for the first week of May. He acknowledged that ‘All this would have been spared if, at any antecedent period, liberty had been “proclaimed throughout the land to all the inhabitants.”’<sup>293</sup> However, he rejoiced because ‘Neutrality will not be tolerated. The change in Northern feeling since the capture of Fort Sumter is total, wonderful, indescribable – uniting the most discordant, and reconciling the most estranged.’<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Beriah Green, ‘Thoughts on Treason [Contains Garrison’s response to Green]’, Vol. 31 No. 16, 19/04/1861

<sup>291</sup> Garrison, ‘Annual Meeting Postponed’, Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> Garrison, ‘The Country in a Flame!’, Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*

Phillips was initially despondent after Fort Sumter fell. The Civil War had completed invalidated northern disunion as a method of abolition. The centrepiece of the Circle's ideology and the outcome Phillips had committed thirty years of his life to had suddenly become irrelevant. Whereas secession could have been accepted as a separation of the slave states from the free, war between the Union and the Confederacy created a host of new variables that could not be reconciled the disunion theory. For Phillips, supporting the war would ' . . . belie my pledges, disavow every profession of faith, bless those that I have cursed, start afresh with a new set of political principles, and admit that my life has been a mistake.'<sup>295</sup> It took Phillips a week of contemplation to work out how he would respond to the uncertainty of war, knowing that whatever his opinion he would be criticised for seemingly abandoning anti-political disunion.<sup>296</sup> At last, Phillips announced that he would address his views on the war at Tremont Temple on the twenty-first of April.

Phillips' first speech after Fort Sumter represents a major turning point in the history of the *Liberator* Circle. For Wendell Phillips, the notoriously hard-line, uncompromising, anti-political disunionist, had chosen to compromise his personal principles and endorse Lincoln and the Union in a positive light. Phillips' speech was not a short one. Indeed, it serves as one of the most crucial pieces of evidence for dramatic change in the Circle. Bartlett and Stewart are correct in asserting that Phillips showed a significant turn in personal opinion towards politics and violent means.<sup>297</sup> As the second most influential leader figure of the Circle, his views undoubtedly influenced many in the secondary and tertiary circle to move away from disunionism. Yet there was not a short, sharp, and permanent move within the Circle

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<sup>295</sup> Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, p. 219

<sup>296</sup> Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 236-239

<sup>297</sup> Bartlett, *Brahmin Radical*, pp. 238-239; Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 222-224



towards Republican antislavery. Although Phillips was sincere in his patriotic turn, he was careful not to recant anti-political action or immediatism entirely.

‘Civil war is a momentous evil. It needs the soundest, most solemn justification. I rejoice before God today for every word that I have spoken counselling peace; and I rejoice with an especially profound gratitude, that for the first time in my anti-slavery life, I speak under the stars and stripes, and welcome the tread of Massachusetts men marching to war. (Enthusiastic cheering.) No matter what the past has been or said; today the slave asks God for a sight of this banner and counts it the pledge of his redemption.’<sup>298</sup>

While it is true that Phillips made a bold Unionist statement by choosing to ‘speak under the stars and stripes and welcome the tread of Massachusetts men marching to war,’ he still acknowledged that Civil War ‘needs the soundest, most solemn justification.’ War could only be justified if it was in pursuit of ending slavery. Phillips rejoiced under the flag not because he was favour of a reconciliation with the South under the proslavery constitution, but because ‘the slave asks God for a sight of this banner and counts it the pledge of his redemption.’ Peaceful disunion would still have been the ideal means of abolition. But Phillips had begun to realize that the ideal means of abolition he had committed the past thirty years of his life to had been made irrelevant by the Civil War. Instead of championing disunion as the only means of abolition, Phillips had decided to ‘Acknowledge secession, or cannonade it, I care not which; but “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.” (Loud cheers.)’<sup>299</sup> So long as slavery was abolished as a result of war, Phillips had no problem in supporting it.

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<sup>298</sup> Phillips, ‘Wendell Phillips on the War [Tremont Temple, 21/04/1861]’, Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

Not one to leave anything ambiguous, Phillips further clarified his reasoning behind supporting the war:

‘ . . . the cannon shot against Fort Sumter has opened the only door out of this hour. There were but two. One was Compromise; the other was Battle. The integrity of the North closed the first; the generous forbearance of nineteen States closed the other. The South opened this with cannon shot, and LINCOLN shows himself at the door. (Prolonged and enthusiastic cheering.) The war, then, is not aggressive, but in self-defence, and Washington has become the Thermopylae of Liberty and Justice. (Applause.)’<sup>300</sup>

The first two sentences immediately show that Phillips has revised his thinking from the Secession Crisis. He stated that ‘There were but two [doors out of this hour]. One was Compromise; the other was Battle.’ At present, Fort Sumter had opened the door of battle. But throughout the Secession Crisis Phillips repeatedly suggested that there were *three* doors the United States could take: compromise, battle, and disunion. Of the three, Phillips campaigned wholeheartedly for disunion, with the backing of a united *Liberator* Circle. Phillips’ decision to omit northern disunion as an option shows that he recognized the Circle’s ideal method of abolition had been made irrelevant by Civil War. After April 1861 the United States was not divided by slave states that could be amicably ‘let go’ by the free, but by a Confederacy in open rebellion against the Union. The only answer to Confederate aggression that could maintain the ‘integrity of the North’ was a war of self-defence led by Lincoln at the door of battle.

The second change Phillips showed was that he did not find any fault with Lincoln’s response to the Confederacy. In fact, he gave a tacit endorsement to the

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<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

president and political party he had denigrated as political compromisers for the past year:

'I have always believed in the sincerity of Abraham Lincoln. You have heard me express my confidence in it every time I have spoken from this desk. I only doubted sometimes whether he was really the head of the government. To-day he is at any rate Commander-in-Chief. The delay in the action of government has doubtless been necessity, but policy also. Traitors within and without made it hesitate to move till it had tried the machine of government just given it. But delay was wise, as it matured a public opinion definite, decisive, and ready to keep step to the music of the Government march.'<sup>301</sup>

Phillips shied away from endorsing Lincoln as president, instead praising his role as Commander-in-Chief. Yet he had rescinded his earlier view of Lincoln as an compromising politician: one concerned only with maintaining consensus within his party. Phillips has decided that the Lincoln's lack of decisive action during the Secession Crisis was not due to timidity or ineptitude, but a determined governmental policy. For 'traitors, within and without,' in the form of Northern Democrats and the few remaining Southern Congressmen sought to take advantage of an untried Republican government.<sup>302</sup> Lincoln's decision to delay allowed the general Northern public, many of whom were pro-union and in favour of reconciliation with the South, to mature their opinion to be 'definitive, decisive, and ready to keep step to the music of the Government march.'<sup>303</sup> Therefore, Lincoln's inaction allowed the North to see the true intransigence of the secessionists and

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<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*

preventing any subversion of Buchanan's lame duck Congress by pro-Southern democrats.

By presenting Lincoln's patience as a tactic of moral suasion, Phillips made it palatable to himself and the Circle in hindsight. While the truth behind this theory is debatable, it at least shows how Phillips had rationalised his indifferent opinion of Lincoln during the Secession Crisis. Furthermore, it is evident that Phillips believed that convincing Lincoln and the Republican Party of the necessity of abolition was no longer an invalid tactic. Phillips had not yet formulated the practical means of emancipation that the government should be striving for. It would fall to Garrison to clarify the means of emancipation through the war power that Phillips and several within the Circle would campaign for. Regardless of the specifics, Phillips had indisputably decided that 'Nothing but victory will blot from history that sight of the Stars and Stripes giving place to the Palmetto. But without justice for inspiration, without God for our ally, we shall break the Union asunder; we shall be a confederacy, and so will they. This war means one of two things: emancipation or disunion. [Cheers.]'<sup>304</sup>

Phillips was careful not to sever his connection to the disunionism and immediatist principles completely. He left the option of disunion open as the only acceptable alternative to emancipation under the war power. Yet there is little doubt that war had challenged the nature of the *Liberator* Circle's agitation. Without the certainty of disunion to unify the disparate agitators under one means of abolition, every individual agitator had to question exactly how the community should proceed with their crusade. Garrison and Phillips began to lean towards influencing the

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<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

Republican Party immediately after Fort Sumter. Their respective compromises of principle for action would not be finalized until the Emancipation Proclamation. But they did have the cognizance to recognize that the Civil War was the best chance they had to enact abolition. Not all of the Circle agreed with them. And as events unfounded outside of their control, Garrison and Phillips often had dramatic turns of opinion against Lincoln and the war. Crucially, however, after Fort Sumter both the de-facto leaders of the *Liberator* Circle had accepted the possibility of abolition through politics, in contrast to the past thirty years of outright dismissal. One of the most important questions of the past year, whether or not to consider targeting moral suasion towards the Republican Party, had been resolved for Garrison and Phillips. In light of the Civil War, it was increasingly likely that it was worth pursuing political abolition through Lincoln's administration.

### Chapter Three: Compromise

In January 1862 Garrison unambiguously stated that he was 'with the Government,' a hugely significant change of opinion from the former figurehead of anti-political disunion:

'And when I said I would not sustain the Constitution, because it was "a covenant with death, and an agreement with hell," I had no idea I would live to see death and hell secede. (Prolonged applause and great laughter). Hence it is now that I am with the Government, to enable it to constitutionally stop the further ravages death, and extinguish the flames of hell forever. (Renewed applause).'<sup>305</sup>

Garrison emphasized secession was the primary motivator for such a radical change of opinion towards the Constitution. However, the war power theory, a political method of abolition that did not require the repudiation of the Constitution, was far more critical to Garrison's decision than secession alone. Formulated by former President and noted antislavery advocate John Quincy Adams, the war power theory stated that in the case of Civil War between the free and the slave states, Congress had the constitutional power to enact emancipation. Quincy referred to article 1, section 8, clause 11 of the Constitution, which states that 'Congress shall have the power to declare War, grant letters of Marque and Reprisal, and make rules concerning Captures on Land and Water';<sup>306</sup> Clause 11, the final clause of section 8, provides the keystone of the war power theory: 'Congress shall have the power to make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for the carrying into Execution

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<sup>305</sup> Garrison, 'Mr. Garrison's Speech at New York: The Abolitionists and their Relation to the War [Cooper Union, 14/01/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 4, 24/01/1862

<sup>306</sup> *Constitution of the United States*, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 11, accessed online at <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript>, last accessed 24/02/2017

the foregoing powers, and all other Powers vested by this Constitution of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof.<sup>307</sup> Simply put, Congress had the implied power to enact any laws that could be justified as necessary in the prosecution of war. Because slave labour was such a critical element of the Confederacy's economy and utilized in manual tasks such as constructing defences, Congress could easily claim emancipation as an impactful war measure. Therefore, for Garrison, the Civil War changed the relationship between political antislavery and the immediatist abolition of the *Liberator*. Prior to Fort Sumter, there was no political method of abolition that aligned with the Garrisonian ideology. After Fort Sumter, the war power theory allowed for abolition to occur without repudiating the constitution entirely.

The final change in the masthead slogan in December 1861 was directly related to Garrison's decision to campaign for Constitutional abolition. Instead of directly denouncing the Constitution as the second slogan did, Garrison opted for the more generic 'Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof.'<sup>308</sup> Alongside the new slogan was a different quote from Adams, this time from his speech to Congress that established the war power theory of abolition. The important elements of the quote can be condensed down to: 'I say that the military authority takes [during a war between the States] the place of all municipal institutions . . . [therefore] not only the President of the United States, but the Commander of the Army, has power to order the UNIVERSAL EMANCIPATION OF ALL THE SLAVES.'<sup>309</sup> The fact that Adams' argued that high ranking military commanders could enforce abolition was the source of much consternation for

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<sup>307</sup> *Constitution of the United States*, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 17

<sup>308</sup> Garrison, 'Masthead', Vol. 31 No. 50, 13/12/1861

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*

Garrison. Union Generals Fremont, Butler, and Hunter attempted to emancipate the 'contrabands' of slaves in their military jurisdictions, and Lincoln countermanded them all.<sup>310</sup> Regardless of the repeated troubles with Lincoln, it was clear that with this final masthead change, Garrison had made a personal change in abolitionist priority, moving away completely from disunion and anti-political action. Garrison had decided that the war power theory was the best means of achieving abolition, despite going against the *Liberator* Circle's fundamental principles of refusing any form of compromise and not engaging in political methods.

Accepting the possibility of abolition under the Constitution was the beginning of Garrison's personal compromise that would end with forgoing universal abolition in favour of the conditional emancipation of the Emancipation Proclamation. It could be argued that in choosing realistic, political abolition over the ideal of universal abolition, Garrison had betrayed the rigid morality with which he set out on his crusade. The Declaration of Sentiments makes it clear that 'Ours forbid the doing of evil that good may come, and lead us to reject, and to entreat the oppressed to reject, the use of all carnal weapons for deliverance from bondage; relying solely upon those which are spiritual, and mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.'<sup>311</sup> For thirty years Garrison had led a movement of individuals on the basis that the Constitution, politics, and all forms of violence were evil, 'carnal weapons.' Yet from 1861 onwards Garrison had no moral problem with justifying abolition through war as 'doing evil so that good may come.' He had come to accept the

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<sup>310</sup> For Fremont and Hunter see Thomas, *The Liberator*, pp. 413-420; For Butler see Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 248-249

<sup>311</sup> Garrison, *Declaration of Sentiments*



immoralities of war as tolerable, so long as it resulted in the end of slavery. Phillips agreed with Garrison, and believed that:

‘The age of discussion is over. We have had fifty years, more or less, of what is called agitation, discussion, and party divisions. Now, a new act has opened. It is the hour of fight – the age of bullets. . . it does not take as much time for a nation to fight itself clear as it does to talk itself clear, only it is necessary that the talk should precede such a fight. I think it has been.’<sup>312</sup>

Phillips’ fifty years of agitation refers to the entire career of organized American abolition, including the myriad of disagreements and divisions over means. He suggested that in light of the war all abolitionists should rethink the role of their activism in society, for ‘it does not take as much time for a nation to fight itself clear as it does to talk itself clear.’<sup>313</sup>

From Fort Sumter to the Emancipation Proclamation, the abolitionists of the *Liberator* fluctuated between broad, uneasy agreement and division over abolitionist means. The rapidly changing events of the Civil War gave the community no time to react, intellectualize, and reach a consensus beyond extremely general principles of abolitionism. The definitions between radical, Garrisonian, and political abolitionists became muddled as Garrison, Phillips, and many in the outer circles adopted the war power theory as the best means of achieving abolition. Not all in the Circle agreed with the sudden change towards working under the ‘covenant of death’ and with compromising, morally corrupt politicians, particularly Pillsbury and the Fosters. Regardless of the detractor’s dissent, the Circle no longer had the certainty of northern disunion to ground them as a society, and over the course of 1861 to 1863

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<sup>312</sup> Phillips, ‘Speech of Wendell Phillips [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1861]’, Vol. 31 No. 28, 12/07/1861

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*

it became clear that both Garrison and Phillips had shifted from their traditional roles as chief anti-political agitators and unifying leaders. The Civil War created the hitherto unacceptable possibility of achieving abolition without repudiating the constitution, and Garrison and Phillips were quick to adopt emancipation as a war measure as the best chance for progress, even if it was inherently political. They both reached personal compromises, modifying their stance on political abolition, giving up the stringent demands of immediate disunion, and eventually accepting the localized abolition of the Emancipation Proclamation over the national, complete legal abolition they set out to achieve in the Declaration of Sentiments. Whether or not the rest of the Circle agreed with them was, as always, their choice to make as individuals.

Exactly what it meant to be Garrisonian, radical, or political abolitionist became even more subjective over the war period. The loss of disunion as a grounding principle, the shift away from anti-political action, and the war power theory provoked a rethink in how the Circle should approach the Constitution. The majority of Circle members that followed the Inner Circle in accepting Adams' war power theory became the new, moderate Garrisonians. The minority that held onto disunion, most vocally represented by Pillsbury, became the new radicals, refusing to accept any compromise with politics that violated their moral cores. Then there were those in the middle, the individual correspondents of the Wider Circle who had their own opinions about the events of the war and the mission of the Circle who did not necessarily agree with Garrison or Pillsbury. The question of what role the Circle should take as agitators in light of the war, where to direct their moral suasion, and the extent in which the abolitionists of the Circle should involve themselves in politics were not resolved for any length of time nor any great satisfaction on a community

wide level. Garrison and Phillips often asserted that the unity of the Circle was the same as it had always been, and qualified their personal changes in opinion as being within the bounds of the Circle's ideology repeatedly. Yet the community as a whole was never truly in unison as it was during the period of Certainty during 1860.

The war power method helped the tertiary circle to resolve the issue of supporting violent means. For non-violent agitation, termed non-resistance by the Circle, was a defining principle of the *Liberator's* form of abolition. The Declaration of Sentiments of the American Anti-Slavery Society stated that Garrisonians would not engage in 'physical resistance' or the 'marshalling of arms,' instead seeking 'the overthrow of prejudice by the power of love – and the abolition of slavery by the spirit of repentance.'<sup>314</sup> Supporting war as a means of abolition meant compromising non-resistance, even if the men and women of the *Liberator* did not personally enlist in the army. Garrison justified his compromise of non-resistance by separating the organized body of the American Anti-Slavery Society from the individual agitator:

' . . . [the members of the American Anti-Slavery Society] pledged themselves at the outset not to encourage, *in their organized capacity, as an association,* any insurrectionary movement among the slaves, or any measures of violence on their part, in seeking the overthrow of slavery . . . But, as individuals, acting on their own responsibility, while largely imbued with the spirit of peace, they have never adopted the doctrine of non-resistance, with a few exceptional cases.'<sup>315</sup>

Garrison placed emphasis on individuals keeping in line with their own moral ideals, rather than following any organisations line. Another justification that Garrison would return to was that the Civil War was a symptom of the greater war of liberty

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<sup>314</sup> Garrison, *Declaration of Sentiments*

<sup>315</sup> Garrison, 'The Relation of the Anti-Slavery Cause to the War', Vol. 31 No. 19, 10/05/1861

versus slavery. 'For thirty years, the Abolitionists have been faithfully warning the nation that, unless the enslaved were set free, a just God would visit it with tribulation and woe proportional to its great iniquity.'<sup>316</sup> Garrison and the Circle had campaigned unceasingly through moral suasion to convince the nation of the necessity of abolition, to get all Americans to repent for their sin of allowing slavery to exist. Yet their words went unheeded, and the consequence of refusing to enact true liberty was war.

Abolition as a war goal unavoidably advanced violence, death, and all the immoralities of conflict. Yet for the majority of the secondary and tertiary circle the ends justified the means if universal abolition could be achieved. Whipple took this view in regards to the war power theory:

'War, which is ordinarily evil, and only evil, has for once created the opportunity of doing a good thing, by instruments in which peace had no such power. As John Quincy Adams has clearly shown, in time of war, either the President or Congress has the right to abolish slavery utterly, throughout the country, and any General, operating in a hostile State, has the right to proclaim its utter abolition there.'<sup>317</sup>

War was still unquestionable immoral. Yet without war the 'instrument' of abolition as a war measure would not be possible. A Tertiary correspondent who signed as 'Insurrectionist' took a more radical approach to the war, inspired by the violent means of John Brown:

'All is fair in war. Slavery is war. The South holds 4,000,000 prisoners of war. Who shall that any means, all means, are not honorable in accomplishing the right to

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<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> Whipple, 'Emancipation and the Slave Power', Vol. 32 No. 1, 03/01/1862

“life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” by these millions? Insurrection would make slavery a hot coal in the in the hands of the South, and she would soon drop it. A property accursed, she would fly to the North, and try to sell out at any price.’<sup>318</sup>

Although Insurrectionist advocated abolition as a war goal, they believed that a slave rebellion should follow in order to have the greatest impact on the South. Despite their radical method, Insurrectionist clarified that they ‘do *not* desire “revenge” on those who are in arms against the government, but we do desire *peace*, and hail with joy any instrumentality that will produce it for our common country.’<sup>319</sup> This addendum is much more in line with the moderate spirit of the war power theory. Emancipation might bring insurrection, but it would also bring peace.

The idea that abolition as a war measure would bring a swift end to the war was one that many in the secondary and tertiary circles could rally behind. An extension of this idea was the notion that the Circle supported the war of liberty against slavery, rather than a war between two nations. ‘The people of the North have no conflict with the people of the South,’ said Henry Wright, who wrote prolifically over 1861-1863, ‘but Liberty has a conflict with slavery. Every feeling and sympathy of my soul go with the *object* of this universal uprising of the masses – so far as that object is the abolition of slavery, and the ‘securing of liberty’ to ‘ourselves and our posterity,’ without regard to sex, sect, colour, clime or condition.’<sup>320</sup> While Phillips expressed his unbridled patriotism at Tremont Temple, Wright placed a criterion on his support of the war. The object of the war had to be universal abolition in its most literal sense. Wright was consistent in this belief throughout the war, even up to the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation: ‘Bullets will kill slaveholders, but

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<sup>318</sup> Insurrectionist, ‘Insurrection’, Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>320</sup> Wright, ‘The Real Spies and Traitors’, Vol. 31 No. 41, 11/10/1861

slavery must be killed by an idea. Justice must kill Injustice. Right must kill Wrong – Liberty, Slavery. The bullet which carries not liberty to the hearts of the living, will be of but little use to freedom and free institutions, though it carry death to the hearts of ten thousand tyrants.’<sup>321</sup> Not only had slavery had to be abolished, but discrimination of gender, religion, and race as well. Therefore, Wright had not deviated from the founding principles of the *Liberator*, set out in the Declaration of Sentiments. He was willing to compromise non-resistance and anti-political action, but not at the expense of creating a truly moral nation.

Heywood agreed with Wright, believing that ‘the war is no cure’ for slavery.<sup>322</sup> ‘We must rule the South, not by the weight of our fist, but by superior ideas, larger philanthropy, more beneficent civilization; for if this nation cannot come back to the basis of justice, God grant that it may sink forever from the sight of men!’<sup>323</sup> Again, justice was paramount. Heywood also looked beyond the war, predicting that military might alone could not inspire the South to become a ‘beneficent civilization.’ The sooner that the Union adopted universal liberty as its watchword the sooner the war would end, otherwise, the nation would perish. Garrison solidified the idea of the war as being part of a national repentance by quoting Jeremiah:

‘. . . nothing could more truthfully depict the cause of our national visitation than the words of the prophet: - “Thus saith the Lord: Ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, every man to his neighbour; behold, I proclaim a liberty for you, saith the Lord, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine.’<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Wright, ‘Letter from Henry C. Wright’, Vol. 32 No. 43, 24/10/1862

<sup>322</sup> Heywood, ‘Speech of E. H. Heywood [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1862]’, Vol. 32 No. 29, 18/07/1862

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>324</sup> Garrison, ‘The War – Its Cause and Cure’, Vol. 31 No. 18, 03/05/1861

Garrison utilized Jeremiah to emphasise the necessity of 'proclaiming liberty, every one to his brother, every man to his neighbour,' particularly now that it was a realistic possibility under the war power.<sup>325</sup>

Given that the war power theory was legitimised through the Constitution, the Circle had reconsider their vilification of the 'agreement with hell.' The spectre of the 'covenant with death' had been rendered irrelevant by war, just like northern disunion. This irrelevancy applied not only to Jefferson Davis and the leaders of the Confederacy, who relinquished 'Whatever claims they once had upon the Constitution . . . the first moment they declared themselves out of the Union, set up their hostile confederacy, and made war upon the Government.'<sup>326</sup> More importantly, it applied to the Republican led government. Through the war power theory, Lincoln had the opportunity to enact abolition within the bounds and in spite of the proslavery elements of the Constitution. Even though emancipation through the war power was political, it was also the most practical and potentially immediate means of freeing the slave. Therefore, Garrison, Phillips, and many in the secondary and tertiary circle were willing to compromise their anti-political core and work with the government to achieve some form of abolition.

By 1862, the inner Circle of Garrison, Phillips, and Whipple had thrown their weight behind the war power method. Yet just because the inner Circle had decided to accept a political mode of abolition did not mean that they had lost their moral core of immediatism and universal abolition. 'Tell the government that it shall commit a most heinous crime,' Garrison began his speech, 'if it shall allow any considerable

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<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>326</sup> Garrison, 'The Abolition of Slavery the Right and Duty of the Government', Vol. 32 No. 10, 7/03/1862

time to pass before proclaiming UNDER THE WAR POWER, freedom to all in bondage.<sup>327</sup> Although Garrison's ideal means of abolition had changed, he had not modified his ideology. The benefit of legal abolition as a war measure (and, more importantly, as an act of humanity) was so obvious that it would be criminal not to enact it. Whatever abolition Congress enacts must also 'provide freedom to all in bondage,' there could be no half-hearted gradualist measures for Garrison.<sup>328</sup> Whipple, in an earlier editorial, demanded the same complete abolition Garrison advocated: '. . . freedom and justice must be conspicuously and unmistakably incorporated into the Constitution of the United States, and reaffirmed in her laws and usages.'<sup>329</sup> Instead of calling for the repudiation of the 'agreement with hell' Whipple calls for drastic abolitionist amendment. Furthermore, all changes to the Constitution must extend to all laws of the United States, so as to put an end to racist laws such as the infamous black laws of Illinois.

Phillips stated his support for Constitutional amendment through the war power:

'I would claim of Congress – in the exact language of Adams, of the "*government*," – a solemn act abolishing slavery throughout the Union, securing compensation to loyal slaveholders. As the Constitution forbids the States to allow nobles, I would now, by equal authority, forbid them to make slaves or allow slaveholders.'<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> Garrison, 'Speech of William Lloyd Garrison [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1861], Vol. 31 No. 28, 12/07/1861

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> Whipple, 'The Work of the Abolitionists', Vol. 31 No. 24, 14/06/1861

<sup>330</sup> Phillips, 'The War: Lecture by Wendell Phillips, Esq., at the Cooper Institute', Vol. 31 No. 52, 27/12/1861



Again, Phillips calls for universal abolition. Slavery must be abolished 'throughout the Union,' even if it meant compensating the slaveholders of Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware. Here Phillips touches on a controversial point for the *Liberator* Circle as a whole: what to do about the 'loyal' slaveholders that stayed with the Union. Some in the Wider Circle equated compensating these slaveholders with tacitly endorsing slavery, for the government would be buying the slaves' freedom.<sup>331</sup> Indeed, the Declaration of Sentiments expressly forbids any form of compensation for slaveholders, because 'freeing the same is not depriving them [the slaveholder] of property . . . but righting the slave – restoring him to himself.'<sup>332</sup> For Phillips, however, compensating the slaveholders within the Union would help make abolition immediate, and therefore was a small compromise to make. Many small, personal moral compromises like accepting compensation were characteristic of the Inner Circle's acceptance of political emancipation.

The Circle proper and the wider readership responded favourably to the primary circle's new stance on the Constitution. Given that disunion was out of the question and the Union was fighting against the slavepower, several in the secondary circle agreed that the Constitution did not have to be a monolithic obstacle to abolition. Henry Wright came to the conclusion that 'While the Union meant slavery, God and the Constitution required us to alter or abolish it. Now that it means freedom, (as the slave-seceding tyrants assert,) it is our right and sacred duty to sustain it, so far as questions concerning liberty and slavery are concerned.'<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> J. H. Fowler, 'Compensation', Vol. 31 No. 46, 15/11/1861; General Observer, 'Confiscation of Slaves', Vol. 31 No. 50, 13/12/1861; The Boston Pionier, 'The President's Message', Vol. 32 No. 12, 21/03/1862; Rock, 'Speech of John S. Rock [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 29, 18/07/1862

<sup>332</sup> Garrison, *Declaration of Sentiments*

<sup>333</sup> Wright, 'Sold! Sold!! Sold!!!', Vol. 31 No. 46, 15/11/1861

The Confederacy separated from the Union in protest of a Constitutionally elected President, and can no longer exert their political influence to block any abolitionist attempts at amendment. There were still ‘questions considering liberty and slavery,’ the most pressing being convincing Lincoln to adopt abolition as a war goal.<sup>334</sup> But Wright believed that they could and should be resolved within the Union.

British abolitionist George Thompson also justified his support of the Constitution through the treason of the Confederacy:

‘ . . . the North is released forever from the Constitution of ’87. The despots of the South are *traitors in arms*. They have trampled the Constitution in the dust. . . they have reversed the Declaration of Independence: they have proclaimed the rightfulness of human slavery; they have proscribed on the cornerstone of the atheistical edifice they seek to rear “The black man is always, and forever, the property of the white man.”’<sup>335</sup>

Thompson transferred the demonization that used to be reserved for the Constitution to its Confederate counterpart. In comparison to the Confederate Constitution which enshrined slavery as its ‘cornerstone,’ the United States Constitution became a flawed, proslavery document, but not an insurmountable obstacle to abolition. The North was ‘released forever’ from the Constitution of 1787 as a result of secession.<sup>336</sup> Like Wright, Thompson could see how the Civil War had dramatically changed the nature of their abolitionist crusade relates to the Union, political methods, and the Constitution. W. summarized the change in the Circle’s relationship to the Constitution: ‘Let the “Union, the Constitution, and the Laws,” be as ever the watch-words of both soldier and citizen; but let the Union be one in

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<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> George Thompson Vol. 31 No. 26 28/06/1861

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*

reality, the Constitution with a free and not a slaveholders interpretation, and the Laws bear with equal justice.<sup>337</sup> Writing in June of 1862, W had had time to develop his opinion of how the Constitution should be treated by abolitionists. Constitutional amendment alone would not be acceptable. They call for a Constitution free of slaveholder's influence, laws that reflect and protect universal equality, and a Union that is unanimously dedicated to upholding those laws. W's sentiment echoes Whipple's and Phillips'. Those that compromised with political means did not give up their demand for the solidification of all citizen's rights under the law, without prejudice based on race or gender.

Gerrit Smith, a long-time political abolitionist who had been involved with the Liberty and Free Soil Parties, praised Garrison and Phillips for showing 'common sense and preeminent liberality' in their approach to the war, in particular their changed attitude towards the constitution.<sup>338</sup> Indeed, Smith believed that the Inner Circle's newfound acceptance of the Constitution was so important that he was willing to re-join the correspondence of the *Liberator* Circle. 'The Garrison and Phillips school of Abolitionists have wisely suspended their strictures on the Constitution, and I would that the other school might suspend their defences of it. Just now, there is not one minute, no, nor half a minute, to be spared to either school for presenting its view of the Constitution.'<sup>339</sup> Smith alluded to the long-standing debate between political abolitionists and Garrisonians about whether or not the Constitution was proslavery. Having worked to transform antislavery sentiment into voting power, Smith was firmly in favour of working under the Constitution.<sup>340</sup> The

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<sup>337</sup> W., 'Hope, Trust, and Patience', Vol. 32 No. 26, 27/06/1862

<sup>338</sup> Gerrit Smith, 'Letter of Gerrit Smith to Edwin Crosswell', Vol. 32 No. 49, 06/12/1861

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> Freidman, *Gregarious Saints*, pp. 97-125

urgency of the war and the potential it had for abolition convinced the Inner Circle to drop such differences of means and work for Constitution under the war power, therefore Smith felt he could reunite with the *Liberator* Circle.<sup>341</sup> By May 1862 Smith had collaborated with the Circle enough to give his own analysis on the change in the ‘Garrisonian abolitionist,’:

‘The people were infatuated enough to be pro-slavery, whatever might be the character of the Constitution; they will now, I trust, sacrifice slavery to save the nation. If they fell below the Constitution before, I trust they are willing, if need be, to rise above it . . . Hence, with all consistency, the “Garrisonian Abolitionist” is now a Unionist. There is a conversion. There is a change, but it is *around* him, and not him.’<sup>342</sup>

In Smith’s view, the people of the North had become more willing to accept abolition, regardless of the character of the Constitution. The choice for the Circle now was how they engaged with this newfound antislavery sentiment. Smith claimed that in supporting the Union, the Circle had remained consistent with their pre-war ideals. The Circle certainly stuck to their immediatism and the demand for universal abolition, at least until the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. But to be wholly consistent would have meant steadfastly calling for northern disunion and the repudiation of the Constitution. The Inner Circle and the majority of the Wider Circle abandoned disunion and revised their opinion on the Constitution, accepting the war power theory as their chosen method of abolition and gradually coming to the conclusion that ending slavery through Emancipation was enough, rather than seeking universal, unconditional abolition.

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<sup>341</sup> Smith, ‘Letter of Gerrit Smith to Edwin Crosswell’, Vol. 32 No. 49, 06/12/1861

<sup>342</sup> Smith, ‘Letter from Gerrit Smith’, Vol. 32 No. 19, 09/05/1862

Most of the *Liberator* Circle could rationalize their support of the Civil War as being in the name of the greater war of liberty versus slavery. Whether or not one chose to be a non-resistant was entirely up to the individual agitator. The vilification of the Constitution was now irrelevant in light of the war power theory. Provided that Lincoln and the Republican Administration made abolition the clear purpose of the war, those in the Circle that agreed with Garrison were willing to engage in political abolition. However, not everyone in the Circle rallied behind Garrison. From 1861 to the Emancipation Proclamation a radical group in the secondary circle remained staunchly anti-political. Stephen Foster, Abbey Foster, Parker Pillsbury, and Lydia Child made up the core of the new radical minority. Several in the tertiary circle did not acquiesce to Garrison's viewpoint, and others still continuously revised their opinion based on events of the war. Garrison utilized his editorial capacity to debate and disclaim opinions that run contrary to the war power theory. But he also emphasizes the right of each individual Circle to have their opinion and to express it. Simply because what it meant to be a Garrisonian had changed as a result of Garrison's compromise with political methods did not mean that the entirety of the Circle had to agree with him. Censorship or following a party line had never been a part of the *Liberator* community. Still, Garrison tirelessly advocated the war power theory as the best course of action, and called on the readers of the *Liberator* to do the same. The detractors slowly became a radical minority within a minority as the individuals of the Circle came to realize their new place as agitators within the Union, not extremists outside of it.

The new radicals of the Circle were the only Garrisonians that remained truly consistent in their principles during the war. Smith, therefore, was not entirely right in claiming that all Garrisonians had stayed true to their founding principles in the wake

of the Civil War. Disunion, anti-political action, and a refusal to compromise any of their morals defined these detractors, and they regretted that so many of their coadjutors had turned towards political abolition. 'It does seem to me that the infatuation of our government is only paralleled by that of those abolitionists who believe that our mission, as abolitionists, is ended,' Pillsbury lamented. 'To my apprehension, it would be far more rational to consider ourselves rather the prophets of the anti-slavery millennium, then its heroes, to wear its laurels, or be the theme of its songs.'<sup>343</sup> Abolitionists becoming unionists was bad enough, but the few individuals who thought that their time as agitators had finished were worse. Furthermore, Pillsbury implies that by compromising unconditional, anti-political beliefs and aligning with the government, the majority of the Circle had become dangerously enamoured with popularity, or, at the very least, not as concerned with agitating for radical change. He did not wish to be a 'hero' of incomplete abolition now, but the 'prophet' of a true abolitionist millennium.<sup>344</sup> Pillsbury was prescient in this sentiment, as the Emancipation Proclamation was nowhere near the universal equality that the Circle sought in the Declaration of Sentiments. Indeed, part of the Garrisonian's compromise was placing aside the demand for unconditional abolition in return for the progress of the Emancipation Proclamation. Pillsbury, however, could not compromise the moral core he had sustained and been agitating for for 'twenty years,':

'I do not wish to see this government prolonged another day in its present form. On the contrary, I have been for twenty years attempting to overthrow the present dynasty. I do not quite agree with some of my friends, that a change has taken place that releases me

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<sup>343</sup> Pillsbury, 'Not Well Posted', Vol. 31 No. 39 27/09/1861

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*

from my former course of action. If I do not misjudge the Constitution, whatever may have been its real character, it was never so much an engine of cruelty and of crime as it is at the present hour.<sup>345</sup>

Pillsbury admitted that his opinion was not monolithic. He did not claim to know the 'real character' of the Constitution, and admitted that he very well could have misjudged it entirely. Regardless, in his opinion the 'dynasty' of Constitutional politics had not changed enough to warrant giving up disunion.

Abbey Foster summarized the feeling of the radical Circle members towards the Administration. 'When we are ready to accept the lesser of two sinners, the serpent of compromise has crept into our midst.'<sup>346</sup> To the detractors, Lincoln, the Republicans, and all politicians were still compromisers unable to uphold moral principles. The Civil War, although momentous in directing Northern opinion against the slaveholder, did not change the fundamentally immoral nature of American politics. The first two years of war prosecution by the Government did not help to convince Foster or the other radicals that Congress had suddenly become abolitionists. The attempted military emancipations of Generals Fremont and Hunter were hailed as steps in the right direction by the Circle.<sup>347</sup> But Lincoln countermanded both of their orders, which again earned him criticism from Garrison and the Circle.<sup>348</sup> Stephen Foster argued that ' . . . the events of the past year have

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<sup>345</sup> Pillsbury, 'The Justice of God in our National Calamities', Vol. 32 No. 10, 7/03/1862

<sup>346</sup> Abbey Kelly Foster, 'Speech of Abbey Kelly Foster [New England Anti-Slavery Convention, 20/04/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 23, 06/06/1862

<sup>347</sup> L., 'The Decisive *Coup D'Etat* [sic]', Vol. 31 No. 38, 20/09/1861; G., 'Slavery and the Constitution', Vol. 31 No. 41, 11/10/1861; A. Hogeboom, 'Is there Hope?', Vol. 31 No. 42, 18/10/1861; Garrison, 'President Lincoln's Veto of Hunter's Emancipation Order', Vol. 32 No. 21, 23/05/1862; Sella Martin, 'Speech of Rev. Sella Martin [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon, 01/08/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 33, 15/08/1862

<sup>348</sup> Garrison, 'The Government Subverting Itself', Vol. 31 No. 38, 20/09/1861; Whipple, 'The President's Fast', Vol. 31 No. 39, 27/09/1861; David Lee Child, 'The President's Countermand of Fremont's Proclamation', Vol. 31 No. 40, 04/10/1861; M. D. Conway, 'Speech of Rev. M. D. Conway [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon, 01/08/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 32, 08/08/1862

made no essential change in the spirit or action of our national government . . . our position towards it is unchanged, and we renew our avowal of our purpose to have no lot or part in a Union which tolerates the presence of a single slave.'<sup>349</sup> Instead of a rethink, Foster called for a renewal of disunionist principles, even as late as June 1862.

One of the radical detractor's greatest criticisms of Garrison's decision to seek abolition through the Republican administration was that the North, while certainly anti-South, were far from abolitionist. 'The cry for the Union means, with three-fourths of all who shout for it, the same old Union that has been cemented by the blood of the slave for nearly three generations,' tertiary correspondent J. T. Everett proclaimed in the early months of the war.<sup>350</sup> They rightfully claimed that 'Mr. Lincoln has never expressed any intention or desire for the emancipation of the four millions of slaves.'<sup>351</sup> Everett had not forgotten the lack of abolitionist measures in Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, the racism the President displayed in the Douglas Debates, and his constant assertions of restoring the Union as it was under the present Constitution. Whipple agreed that Lincoln had ' . . . never shown any care or interest for the slaves; and . . . is [at this juncture] directly pledged to enforce enslavement of those whose masters are still faithful to the Constitution and the Union.'<sup>352</sup> For, to quote tertiary circle member Orson S. Murray: ' . . . while slavery is the immediate cause of the war, the remote cause is the Constitutional compromise that has prolonged slavery and made it potent . . . President Lincoln wants this fatal folly re-

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<sup>349</sup> Stephen Symonds Foster, 'Speech of Stephen S. Foster [New England Anti-Slavery Convention, 20/04/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 23, 06/06/1862

<sup>350</sup> J. T. Everett, 'What of the War?', Vol. 31 No. 22 31/05/1861

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>352</sup> Whipple., 'Who Will Carry the Proclamation', Vol. 31 No. 36, 06/09/1861



enacted . . .'<sup>353</sup> Whipple did show a hint of moderate Garrisonianism by acknowledging that war time emancipation would be a very effective measure in maintaining the Union, and as such Lincoln's goal of Constitutional restoration could work with some form of abolition.<sup>354</sup>

'True, there is a North, but a North only for white men,' a correspondent that signed as 'Yale College' declared in May 1861 in response to Phillips' Tremont Temple speech supporting the war.<sup>355</sup> Unlike the Inner Circle, the Yale collegiate had not departed from radical abolitionism, preferring the righteous violence of John Brown to Lincoln's war for reunification: 'True, the North are burning with hate for the South, but not with love for the slave. No John Brown is leader in this war.'<sup>356</sup> Furthermore, 'John Brown fought to destroy the Union. The Union to him meant slavery. Tell me wherein it has changed.'<sup>357</sup> The Union meant slavery, therefore the Union had to be destroyed. Whoever made up the 'Publius' of Yale College, they did not see any reason to drop disunion in light of the war. Yale College did not write to the *Liberator* again during the Compromise period, but it is clear from their single piece of correspondence that they remained firm members of the radical minority.

In contrast to Yale College's defence of disunion, Phillips argued his personal case for moving away from the old principle in December 1861:

'Well, I was a Disunionist, sincerely, for twenty years. I did hate the Union, when Union meant lies in the pulpit and mobs in the street, when Union meant making white men hypocrites and black men slaves. (Cheers). I did prefer purity to peace; I acknowledge it . . . I did prefer disunion to being the accomplice of tyrants.

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<sup>353</sup> Orson S. Murray, 'The President's Message', Vol. 32 No. 13, 28/03/1862

<sup>354</sup> Whipple, 'Who Will Carry the Proclamation', Vol. 31 No. 36, 06/09/1861

<sup>355</sup> Yale College, 'Not a War for Liberty', Vol. 31 No. 19, 10/05/1861; G Vol. 31 No. 18 03/05/1861

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.*

But now . . . when I see that you cannot have Union, without meaning justice . . . why should I object to it? (Loud applause).<sup>358</sup>

Here Phillips had unambiguously stated that forgoing disunion was a part of his personal compromise in accepting political abolition. For twenty years Phillips preferred '[moral] purity to peace . . . [and] disunion to being the accomplice of tyrants.'<sup>359</sup> Yet with the war the Union no longer had to cater towards the slaveholders nor uphold the proslavery clauses in the Constitution. And, through the war power method, the Constitution had the potential to end slavery once and for all. 'My policy,' Phillips proclaimed, 'therefore, is, give the administration generous sympathy; give it all the confidence for honesty of purpose you can. They mean now only the Union. . . but they are "willing" we should make them anything more we please.'<sup>360</sup> Even if it took some time for the North to realize the necessity of abolition, Phillips rejoiced in the belief that slavery could not survive the war.

Garrison, while disdaining from taking part in protracted debates with correspondents, increased his frequency of short replies to single letters in contrast to before the Civil War. These replies are almost exclusively in response to hard-line anti-political disunionists and those that rejected abolition under the constitution. This was the closest Garrison came to enforcing an editorial policy, at least in terms of ideological censorship. Although he refrained from outright censorship of opinions he did not agree with (other than favouring publishing certain articles and correspondence over others, citing a lack of space) he certainly became more

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<sup>358</sup> Phillips, 'The War: Lecture by Wendell Phillips, Esq., at the Cooper Institute', Vol. 31 No. 52. 27/12/1861

<sup>359</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>360</sup> Phillips, 'Speech of Wendell Phillips [Anti-Slavery Celebration, Framingham, 04/07/1861]', Vol. 31 No. 28, 12/07/1861

concerned with propagating his support of abolition as a war goal and differentiating dissidents from the wider Circle.<sup>361</sup>

The first two replies in this vein appear in response to the element in the *Liberator* who held on to the fringe methods of insurrection and disunion in the face of war. Garrison responded to Insurrectionist with a disclaimer reasserting the freedom of expression he gives to his correspondents and noting that neither he nor the wider *Liberator* Circle claimed responsibility for the particular views expressed by Insurrectionist.<sup>362</sup> ‘An Old Line Abolitionist’ argued against Phillips’ pro-Union speech of April 1861: ‘In these “trying times,” let every abolitionist be true to his cause, not forgetting “those in bonds as bound with them.” My motto is, and ever will be, “No Union with Slaveholders!”’<sup>363</sup> Garrison responded to this correspondence, clarifying that Phillips was defending the government in regards to its stance on secession, not declaring the constitution to be suddenly anti-slavery.<sup>364</sup> There were also a series of rejoinders to tertiary Correspondent J. W., who questioned if war was the best method of abolition ‘. . . so as not to destroy the body politic by one rude exit of the cancer, so long existing and firmly rooted,’ as slavery is sanctioned in the Bible.<sup>365</sup> Garrison’s last response to J. W., while not going into outright ‘exigesis,’ clarified that the Bible recognized slavery alongside other immoral acts, but did not sanction them.<sup>366</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Garrison, ‘Type Setting Machine’, Vol. 31 No. 26, 28/06/1861

<sup>362</sup> Insurrectionist, ‘Insurrection’, Vol. 31 No. 17, 26/04/1861; Garrison’s exact text: ‘The editor of the *Liberator* disclaims all responsibility for the sentiments presented by its correspondents, leaving them the largest freedom of expression while exercising the same for himself.’

<sup>363</sup> An Old Line Abolitionist, ‘Speech of Wendell Phillips at the Music Hall’, Vol. 31 No. 19, 10/05/1861

<sup>364</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>365</sup> J. W., ‘Still Another Rejoinder’, Vol. 31 No. 42, 18/10/1861

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

Alfred H. Love, a tertiary correspondent, represented the middle-ground between the consistent radicals and the moderate compromisers. He warned against becoming too supportive of the war, particularly at the cost of losing their position as moral exemplars to the rest of the nation:

'Abolitionists! Your title has been the synonym of purity, love and perfection. Liberty has been your watchword; and now beware lest you become the slaves of the sword! Not that the North will not be victorious in this struggle, for that is beyond doubt; but you have been regarded as occupying a stand-point high above war, revenge, and immorality. Take care that you do not become drift-wood! The rushing, swelling tide has overleaped its banks. Drift-wood won't dam it, won't control it, - rock masonry will!'<sup>367</sup>

Essentially, Love was warning against compromising too much principle in the name of progress. He did not condemn the war power theory or the moderate Garrisonians who had adopted it. But he did caution against being swept up by the tide of popular opinion, even if it was in the name of abolitionist progress. Garrison responded to Love, justifying his support of compromise in light of the momentous occasion of an anti-Southern North:

' . . . the uprising of the entire North, without distinction of party or sect . . . in defence of whatever freedom remains in the land, and in direct and deadly conflict with the slave power, [is] a hopeful sign of the times even for the sacred cause of peace, in comparison with that moral paralysis and compromising spirit which have so long held mastery over the minds of the people of the North.'<sup>368</sup>

Even though the Union was far from demanding universal abolition, their willingness to act against the slaveholders was to Garrison an important

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<sup>367</sup> Alfred H. Love, 'Remarks on the War', Vol. 31 No. 19, 10/05/1861

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

improvement in the nation's moral core, an improvement that could be capitalized on to fulfil true abolition. Just as Garrison celebrated the North's movement away from 'moral paralysis and compromising spirit,' he made a personal move from the moral stridency of disunion and accepted the compromise of abolition through war. For

'The blindest [of the North] are beginning to see that . . . the abolition of slavery is essential to the unity and safety of our republic. How that beneficent, all-reconciling measure shall be consummated, - whether directly under the war power by the government, or by some method of compensation as a peace offering, - there is yet considerable diversity of opinion; but, evidently the feeling is growing that . . . SLAVERY MUST BE ABOLISHED, before peace can be restored . . .'<sup>369</sup>

Whether he recognized it or not, Garrison's willingness to progress abolition through political means and belief that slavery must end before peace could be restored represented the core elements of a personal compromise of radical abolition and a transition towards moderate Garrisonianism.

The Civil War brought abolition into the forefront of Northern thought and made the *Liberator* Circle a relevant minority instead of a fanatical, fringe one. Despite the official purpose of the war being to preserve the Union under the constitution, slavery and all, it was becoming increasingly obvious to all Americans, not just abolitionists or fire-eater extremists, that the incongruity of slavery in the land of the free had to be resolved. A correspondent signed as '\*\*' flatly stated that '. . . it matters not a straw whether our soldier believes he is fighting for the flag, or for the Union, or as it may be, for the administration, or for self-preservation and home; the result must be partial or entire subjugation, dismemberment, compromise, or

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<sup>369</sup> Garrison, 'What Have They Gained by It?', Vol. 31 No. 23, 07/06/1861

extermination of slavery.<sup>370</sup> \*\* did not believe that the motivations of each soldier or even each politician mattered when it came to the greater course of the war. The place of slavery within the Union would be resolved regardless. \*\* represented the only true certainty that the *Liberator* Circle held in the period of Compromise: that slavery would, somehow, end as a result of the war.

For Garrison and the moderate Circle members that followed him, emancipation through the war power was the paramount issue. One of the greatest concerns the Wider Circle had about Garrison's focus on political means was the potential to get separated from the cause of changing the heart of the nation through repentance. The abolitionists of the *Liberator* agreed that they still had a role to play as agitators. Exactly what that role should be in aid of was a question that was never satisfactorily resolved. On the whole, individual correspondents followed Whipple's belief that:

' . . . the Anti-Slavery element should resume its prominence, and full activity, as soon as it can without dividing the force which is now opposing and weakening the rebellious States; as soon as the condition of things is so changed that a moral opposition as slaveholders will not check the existing physical opposition to them as rebels.'<sup>371</sup>

Whipple continued to believe that in spite of each individual's thoughts about abolition through war, all abolitionists should still work to advance abolition, even if they were not morally perfect:

'Whatever varied opinions existed on other topics, all agreed the antislavery work still requires assiduous and unflinching exertion of its friends. Whatever may be the providential advancement of our cause, however emancipation may come, more or less extensively, as a

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<sup>370</sup> \*\*, 'The Actual Issue', Vol. 31 No. 30, 26/07/1861

<sup>371</sup> Whipple, 'The Work of the Abolitionists', Vol. 31 No. 24, 14/06/1861

military necessity, or as a work of political expediency, *our* work is the preaching of righteousness in relation to it.<sup>372</sup>

Whipple called for 'prominence' and 'unflinching exertion' in the 'preaching of righteousness.' In other words, moral suasion should continue, whatever form abolition might come in. Whipple believed that emancipation would result from the war and that it would be a 'providential advancement.' Yet emancipation as a military necessity or political expediency would not instantly change the hearts of Americans away from racial prejudice. Therefore, the *Liberator* Circle still had a role in securing the true repentance of the nation.

Pillsbury spoke for the radical minority that did not accept political means, recognizing a change of circumstance but refusing to any involvement with the government:

'Our mission, from the beginning, has been one and the same – emancipation without conditions. A change of circumstance has come, it is true; there have always been changes: now, perhaps growing more and more marked. But I know of no conditions that could discharge me from my anti-slavery obligations. At present, we were no part of the government in peace, and not any more can we be in war.'<sup>373</sup>

'Emancipation without conditions,' remained a non-negotiable demand for Pillsbury. He had not strayed from the Declaration of Sentiments, and still believed that the Circle's mission as abolitionists should be focused on a nation-wide change of heart.

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<sup>372</sup> Whipple, 'The Convention', Vol. 32 No. 23, 06/06/1862

<sup>373</sup> Pillsbury, 'Speech of Parker Pillsbury [New England Anti-Slavery Convention, 28/05/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 23, 06/06/1862

Garrison represented the main discourse that moral suasion should be directed towards the administration to convince them to adopt the war power method. Furthermore, the *Liberator* Circle was the best group to pursue this moral suasion, due to their past status as anti-political activists:

'For more than a quarter of a century, we have stood aloof from all participation in the government . . . neither casting a ballot in any instance, nor endorsing any political party as such. Our mission has been to criticise and condemn, more or less, all parties, and every succeeding administration . . . [Therefore] we can render true judgement between the contending parties at the present time.'<sup>374</sup>

The Confederacy were unquestionably traitors. Therefore, the government of the Union was in the right, and, provided they seek abolition through war, they should be supported by the Circle.

Whipple also promoted the importance of Lincoln himself proclaiming emancipation:

'We ask *him* [Lincoln] to do this, because he is the only person who can do it, and because it would be most efficacious towards the accomplishment of *his* object, the reestablishment of the rightful authority of the general Government. If, in addition, the same movement will partially accomplish *our* object, crippling the Slave Power, and restoring a certain proportion of the slaves to freedom – so much the better.'<sup>375</sup>

Here Whipple has framed emancipation as a basic compromise between the Circle and the government. Proclaiming emancipation simply made sense as a war measure, and it would also assist in the Circle's object of abolition. Notably, Whipple stated that he did not mind if emancipation only 'partially accomplished' the Circle's

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<sup>374</sup> Garrison, 'Secession and the War', Vol. 31 No. 34, 23/08/1861

<sup>375</sup> Whipple, 'Who Will Carry the Proclamation?', Vol. 31 No. 36, 06/09/1861



goal of complete abolition.<sup>376</sup> As early as September 1861, Whipple had come to the conclusion that war time emancipation, though far from national abolition, was a realistic means of abolition and worth pursuing, particularly if it meant that the Circle only had to convince Lincoln of its necessity, not the entirety of the North.

There was a real concern amongst the Circle that Lincoln, instead of being the herald of emancipation, would lead the nation back into proslavery through a peace *status quo antebellum*. The Union had mixed success in prosecuting the war over 1861-1863. A succession of inept generals prevented any decisive military victory, and there a strong anti-war element grew as it became apparent that there would not be a swift Union victory.<sup>377</sup> Furthermore, Lincoln's decision to countermand the selective military emancipation of Generals' Fremont and Hunter sent the Circle into despair, and gave further cause to believe that Lincoln sought peace without abolition.<sup>378</sup> Restoring the Union as it was, slavery and all, represented the form of amoral, compromising politics that the Circle hated the most. Indeed, reuniting the Union under the Constitution would be a giant step backwards in the cause of abolition that would reinstate all the proslavery compromises of 1787, remove the virtuous means of the war power theory, and place the nation again at the mercy of an 'agreement with hell.' Undoubtedly such a compromise for peace would have provoked a third change in the *Liberator* masthead.

Lincoln ending the war with slavery intact was a worst case scenario for the *Liberator* Circle, but one that they took very seriously. Despite the adoption of constitutional means of ending slavery, the Circle had not discarded their

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<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>377</sup> Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips*, p. 246, pp. 251-252

<sup>378</sup> Thomas, *The Liberator*, pp. 413-420; For sources from the *Liberator* regarded Fremont and Hunter, see footnotes 347 and 348, p. 128

interpretation of American history. Wright succinctly restated the *Liberator* Circle's view of history regarding the Constitutional compromise:

'The people of the Eastern States, however reluctantly, recognize[d] the wrong [of the Constitution] and, for the sake of the Union, lent it their aid. The result has been, that, for seventy years, the slave oligarchy have controlled and wielded the power and resources of the nation, for their own selfish purposes, viz., "the preservation, extension and perpetuation of that wicked institution."<sup>379</sup>

Reuniting the Union without ending slavery would do nothing more than reinstate the 'slave oligarchy.' All of the promise that Lincoln had as an antislavery president would be cast aside as he revealed his true Whig colours. Orson S. Murray wrote to that effect: '. . . while slavery is the immediate cause of the war, the remote cause is the Constitutional compromise that has prolonged slavery and made it potent . . . President Lincoln wants this fatal folly re-enacted . . .'<sup>380</sup> Slavery, as the immediate cause of the war, had to be abolished immediately to secure a satisfactory peace. The 'remote cause' of the Constitution, at present, allowed for emancipation through the war power theory. But Murray did not simply discount the proslavery elements of the Constitution; they had to be resolved for abolition to be complete, and, most of all, they could not be reinstated in any form.

Whipple wasted no time in denouncing any form of political compromise over slavery in the name of peace:

'Against this [compromise for peace] . . . the voice of the Abolitionists must again be uplifted like a trumpet. That it may have more force then, let it rest in comparative quiet now.

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<sup>379</sup> Wright, 'President Lincoln and His Messages', Vol. 32 No. 27, 04/07/1862

<sup>380</sup> Orson S. Murray, 'The President's Message', Vol. 32 No. 13, 28/03/1862

The “reserve” is not the least important part of the army. But, that it may *be* a reserve, it must needs wait until some fighting has been done by the main body.<sup>381</sup>

Writing in May 1861, Whipple’s call to let the abolitionist voice ‘rest in comparative quiet’ reflected his desire not to adversely check the North’s desire to act against the slaveholder. He likened the *Liberator* Circle to the ‘reserve’ of the army, a regiment of moral agitators ready to support the war by ensuring that Lincoln and government does not stray from the cause of antislavery and into a premature, overtly conciliatory peace.

Garrison too was early and unequivocal in his renewed condemnation of the proslavery elements of the Constitution. He still recognized that ‘. . . the deadly venom of slavery was infused into the Constitution of freedom,’ regardless of his current support for Constitutional emancipation.<sup>382</sup> Garrison was firm in his view that the Constitution never should have been adopted, the Founders were blind to believe in gradual emancipation, and the Civil War was part of God’s divine justice for the curse of slavery.<sup>383</sup> ‘No compromise can ever bring us into safe and permanent relations again,’ Phillips proclaimed in November 1862, ‘This revolution was not produced by Calhoun or Garrison; it was produced by the seventy years that precede Calhoun and Garrison.’<sup>384</sup> Like Murray and Garrison, Phillips called back to the first proslavery compromise of the Constitution. He maintained that the *Liberator* Circle’s view of history still applied during the Civil War:

‘This war really began when the disastrous compromise was made in 1787. What cripples McClellan today is, that his fathers, in 1787, bound one of his hands, and left him

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<sup>381</sup> Whipple, ‘New Occasions Teach New Duties’, Vol. 31 No. 18, 03/05/1861

<sup>382</sup> Garrison, ‘The Time for National Deliverance’, Vol. 31 No. 41, 11/10/1861

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> Phillips, ‘Lecture of Wendell Phillips [Music Hall, 19/11/1862]’, Vol. 32 No. 48, 28/11/1862

only one to fight with. What shows Fremont's courage and statesmanship at once is, that the first use he made of his sword was to cut his own hands loose for the conflict.<sup>385</sup>

Phillips referred to two Union Generals: McClellan, who was a northern democrat notorious for failing to capitalize on his victories and for overall inaction, and Fremont, a hero of the Circle who attempted to emancipate the slaves in his military governorship of Mississippi. Although McClellan was a Democrat, far from an antislavery figure, and held no popularity amongst the Circle, Phillips used him here as an example of what a true 'statesman' really was. McClellan remained cloistered in the Constitution by refusing to take an abolitionist stance and ignoring the war power theory. Fremont, and his fellow abolitionist general Hunter, did not wait for presidential approval, but acted immediately in emancipating all contraband slaves in their occupied districts.<sup>386</sup> They were unafraid to 'cut [their] own hands loose' with the 'sword' of Adams' war power theory, which allowed not only the President and Congress but also the 'Commander of the Army' to 'emancipate all the slaves in the invaded territory.'<sup>387</sup> Lincoln countermanded both Fremont and Hunter's orders of emancipation. The Circle decried the President's insistence on halting real abolitionist progress, and gave them all the more reason to believe that Lincoln wanted to end the war with a proslavery compromise. This anti-Lincoln sentiment was particularly common amongst the radicals: 'Until this Government makes atonement for the injustice done to the slave and his race,' Pillsbury declared, as staunch as ever in his refusal to compromise 'the injustice done to Fremont, the

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<sup>385</sup> Phillips, 'Address of Wendell Phillips at the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society [06/07/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 28, 11/07/1862

<sup>386</sup> Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 251-252

<sup>387</sup> Phillips, 'Address of Wendell Phillips at the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society [06/07/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 28, 11/07/1862; Garrison, 'Masthead' Vol. 31 No. 50, 13/12/1861

injustice done to the Anti-Slavery cause, I shall hold it to be the enemy of liberty, and of course the enemy of God.'<sup>388</sup>

Because of the looming threat of yet another proslavery compromise, the Inner Circle became primarily concerned with educating Lincoln and the Republican administration of the necessity of war time emancipation over 1861-1863. Garrison, Phillips, and Whipple did not cease their criticism of the government, particularly when Lincoln appeared to be moving further and further away from any sort of antislavery action. Garrison professed that the abolitionists, now that they were acting under the political means of the war power theory, were more 'loyal' to 'free government' than Lincoln:

'Yes, I maintain, that the Abolitionists are more loyal to free government and free institutions than President Lincoln himself; because, while I want to say everything good of him that I can, I must say that I think he is lacking somewhat in backbone, and is disposed, at least, to make some compromise with slavery, in order to bring back the old state of things . . . Still, we are both so bad that I suppose if we should go amicably together down to the South, we should never come back again. (Laughter and cheers).'<sup>389</sup>

Although admitting that Lincoln lacked 'backbone' Garrison did not harshly criticize the president for his desire to compromise with the South. For in the eyes of the slaveholders, Lincoln and Garrison were two sides of the same antislavery coin. Both posed a threat to slavery, therefore, both could not be tolerated.

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<sup>388</sup> Pillsbury, 'The Justice of God in our National Calamities: Remarks of Parker Pillsbury', Vol. 32 No. 10, 7/03/1862

<sup>389</sup> Garrison, 'Mr. Garrison's Speech at New York: The Abolitionists and their Relations to the War [14/01/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 4, 24/01/1862

Phillips accepted that Lincoln was unquestionably fighting a political war but ‘. . . the only question is, in service of which political idea shall the war be waged – in the service of saving the Union as it was, or the Union as it ought to be? Mr. Lincoln dare not choose between the two phrases.’<sup>390</sup> Lincoln’s inability to decide between the two was the main point of criticism for the radicals of the Circle and source of frustration for the Garrisonians who rallied behind the war power theory. Indeed, Phillips and Outer Circle member Reverend Moncure Conway spoke at the 1862 meeting at Abingdon against Lincoln in a fatalistic fashion. Conway believed that:

‘Mr. Lincoln will never save this country . . . if we can succeed . . . in keeping the ship together for a year or so, then either we will elect a Democratic president who will put us under the heel of Jeff Davis, or we shall have Fremont in the presidential chair, and Gen. Hunter will be Secretary of War. (Loud Applause).’<sup>391</sup>

Lincoln had already proven to be a moral failure as president. As such, Conway looked forward to the election of 1864, where he intended to campaign for true abolitionists Fremont and Hunter. Fremont would attempt and fail to be the Republican nominee, despite being supported by Phillips in this endeavour.<sup>392</sup> Despite Conway’s dismissal of Lincoln, his endorsement of Fremont shows that he counted himself amongst the individuals of the Circle who had accepted political means.

Phillips was as disapproving of Lincoln as Conway was at Abingdon:

‘I have no hope . . . that the intelligent purpose of our Government will ever find us a way out of this war. I think, if we are to find any way out of it, we are to

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<sup>390</sup> Phillips, ‘Speech of Wendell Phillips [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon 01/08/1862]’, Vol. 32 No. 32, 08/08/1862

<sup>391</sup> Moncure D. Conway, ‘Speech of Rev. M. D. Conway [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon, 01/08/1862]’, Vol. 32 No. 32 08/08/1862

<sup>392</sup> Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 251-254

stumble out by the gradual education of the people, making their own way as, a great mass, without leaders. I do not think that anything we call the *Government* has any *purpose* to get rid of slavery. On the contrary . . . I believe Mr. Lincoln is conducting this war, at present, with the purpose of saving slavery.<sup>393</sup>

It might appear that Phillips was moving back towards an anti-political stance here. He was certainly highly critical of the present Government and its leaders. But in this harsh criticism Phillips was fulfilling the role of the agitator, calling out the failings of the Government in order to educate and inspire the people to demand emancipation. By referring to the problems of the present Government, Phillips also kept open the option for future governments, such as one headed by Fremont, to end the war through abolition.

The main issue with Lincoln's Administration for Phillips was that they were too cautious in acting on the righteous means of the war power theory. Phillips had adopted this position of moral suasion a month before Abingdon, believing that the Circle should act as a moral translator for the 'masses':

' . . . [the Circle must] approach the servants of the people with some intimation of the real sentiments of the masses. I do not believe the majority of the North are ready at this moment to demand emancipation as the policy which is to guide the nation out of this war; but I believe Abraham Lincoln has secured that amount of confidence and admiration, that if he were to announce anything, the millions of the North would say "Amen!"<sup>394</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> Phillips, 'Speech of Wendell Phillips [Celebration of British Emancipation, Abingdon 01/08/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 32, 08/08/1862

<sup>394</sup> Phillips, 'Address of Wendell Phillips at the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society [06/07/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 28, 11/07/1862

Garrison shared Phillips' exasperation at Lincoln's lack of abolitionist pace, but was also willing to give the president some leeway because of the vagaries of his political position: 'I am willing to believe that something of this feeling weighs in the minds of the President and the Cabinet, and that *there is some ground for hesitancy, as a matter of mere political expediency*.'<sup>395</sup> The disunionist Garrison of 1860 would never have used the phrase 'political expediency,' much less use it as a justification for 'hesitancy' in the cause of abolition. By June 1862 Garrison believed that 'The president hesitates, not so much from pro-slavery feeling as from timidity and excessive caution. He fails to realize the extent of public sentiment in favour of the total abolition of slavery.'<sup>396</sup> Unlike Phillips, who did not think that the North was ready to accept abolition, Garrison thought that the public either had or could rally around political emancipation in the name of prosecuting the war.

First and foremost, Lincoln had a war to fight and a union to restore. Hence Phillips criticized Lincoln as a 'second-rate man,' a follower, not a leader.<sup>397</sup> While not ready to personally campaign for emancipation, Phillips believed that the 'majority of the North' had enough faith in Lincoln that they would accept emancipation if he proclaimed it.<sup>398</sup> Of course, Lincoln did not share Phillips' view of the Northern populace. As President, he felt he had to balance two conflicting views regarding the war: the abolitionist and the moderate. Lincoln explained as much to the Chicago Delegation in Favour of National Emancipation that met with him on the Thirteenth of September:

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<sup>395</sup> Garrison, 'Speech of William Lloyd Garrison [Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 23/01/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 6, 07/02/1862

<sup>396</sup> Garrison, 'Speech of William Lloyd Garrison [New England Anti-Slavery Convention, 28/05/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 23, 06/06/1862

<sup>397</sup> Phillips, 'Address of Wendell Phillips at the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society [06/07/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 28, 11/07/1862

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*



'I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and that by religious men, who are equally certain they represent the Divine Will. I am sure that either one or the other class is mistaken in that belief, and that, perhaps in some respects, both . . . it is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter. *And if I can learn what it is, I will do it!* These are not, however, the days of miracles . . . I must study the plain, physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible, and learn what appears to be wise and right.'<sup>399</sup>

Lincoln had a duty to all Americans, Northern and Southern, abolitionist or unionist. Therefore, he could not just enact an executive order ending slavery wherever it existed, even if he desired it, as Phillips believed. As for emancipation, the only definitive answer Lincoln could give to the Circle was that

*'I have not decided against a proclamation of liberty to the slaves, but hold the matter under advertisement. And I can assure you that the subject is on my mind, day and night, more than any other. Whatever shall appear to be God's will, I shall do.'*<sup>400</sup>

A diplomatic answer that outright pleased no one, but hinted at the potential for a favourable outcome. For 'God's will' was ambiguous, and held different definitions for the Circle and anti-war Northerners. Lincoln was in the process of studying 'the plain, physical facts, ascertain[ing] what is possible, and learn[ing] what appears to wise and right.'<sup>401</sup>

Despite the need to educate Lincoln to the level of abolitionist morality, and the threat of a compromise that reverted the Union to operating under the 'covenant

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<sup>399</sup> Lincoln, quoted in WM. W. Patton, John Dempster, 'Interview with the President [13/09/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 40, 03/10/1862

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*

with death,' Garrison was certain that Adams' interpretation of the Constitution was worth following, worth living under, and would become a reality before the war was through. Furthermore, he was adamant that in accepting Constitutional means of abolition the *Liberator* Circle had not strayed from their original mission:

'Our mission is the same now that it was thirty years ago. Through many and strange changes, we have slowly but steadily advanced towards its fulfilment; but there are many inclinations that our work is not yet in a state to be safely left in other hands. We have been, and must still be, a fire to warm the atmosphere of public opinion. More than a quarter of a century ago, the fire was kindled with generous zeal . . . not all the cold water that politicians, merchants, and ecclesiastical bodies could throw upon it has sufficed to extinguish the flame, or even to prevent it from spreading. The moral thermometer can never again fall to the old freezing point.'<sup>402</sup>

Pillsbury and the radical detractors of the Circle disagreed with Garrison's interpretation of their mission. Yet despite their criticisms, Garrison did not relent from his belief that compromising and accepting political means was the best course of action for all abolitionists. The Circle's abolitionist fire had thrived in the face of resistance from the majority of Americans who decried them as fanatics. Secession and Civil War challenged the Circle and forced them to first modify and then outright change their ideal means of abolition from anti-political disunion to constitutional war power. But the Civil War also motivated the majority of the North against the slaveholder. The soldiers of the Union were not all fighting to end slavery. But they were certainly more open to antislavery sentiment, especially if Lincoln himself proclaimed emancipation. Therefore, Garrison believed that the 'moral thermometer' of the Union could never fall to the low of compromise over slavery. Rather, provided

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<sup>402</sup> Garrison, 'The Twenty-Eighth National Anti-Slavery Subscription Anniversary [Advertisement]', Vol. 31 No. 45, 08/11/1861

that the *Liberator* Circle could continue to be a 'fire to warm the atmosphere of public [and political] opinion,' the Union would be made whole again without slavery.<sup>403</sup>

Until Lincoln made a conscious practical effort in the name of war time emancipation, all of the *Liberator* Circle, Garrisonian compromisers and disunionist radicals, had no choice but to sit and wait, unsure of what would become of their decades long activism. 'Trust in God is best shown by doing God's work, acting on his principles,' Whipple wrote in September 1862, 'Trust in God calls our timid, procrastinating President to neutralize slavery and rebellion together in a proclamation of universal freedom.'<sup>404</sup> Whipple would only have to wait three more days for the Government to move towards abolition at last. Lincoln's 'timid and procrastinating nature,' the Circle's greatest criticism of the Commander-in-Chief, would be resolved with Lincoln's first practical commitment to abolitionist progress: the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Issued in the wake of a Union victory at Antietam, the preliminary proclamation gave the rebellious states until the first of January 1863 to surrender and return to the Union, otherwise all of the slaves within their borders would be declared free.<sup>405</sup> It was far from the universal abolition that the Circle claimed in the Declaration of Sentiments. Nor did it immediately emancipate all American slaves: the loyal slaveholders of Kentucky and Maryland were not affected, and if the Confederate States accepted Lincoln's peace ultimatum, slavery would continue to exist. Despite these discrepancies, the Inner Circle and those in the Outer Circles that followed their personal compromise accepted the

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<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> Whipple, 'Trust in God', Vol. 32 No. 38, 19/09/1862

<sup>405</sup> Bartlett, *Wendell Phillips*, p. 254

Emancipation Proclamation as a momentous step forward in abolitionism: Adams' Constitution would serve as the foundation for the United States.

Garrison's initial reaction to the Proclamation was tempered, rational, yet positive. He described it as 'not at all the exigency of the times . . . [yet] still it is an important step in the right direction, and an act of immense historical consequence, and justifies almost universal gladness of expression and warm congratulation . . .' <sup>406</sup> Garrison continued to praise Lincoln for dispelling the positive pro-slavery stance he impelled by remaining silent on abolition and endorsing the war as one simply to restore the Union. <sup>407</sup> He saw the Proclamation as an 'Ithuriel spear' transforming 'pseudo-loyal' Northerners from 'half-rebels' into antislavery advocates. <sup>408</sup> Unlike the premature celebration the Circle had in response to the North finally fighting against the South, the Proclamation was truly abolitionist, and at last designated the purpose of the war as fighting slavery.

Whipple shared Garrison's positive response to the Proclamation:

'Let us stand by the President in enforcing this edict of emancipation. And let all good citizens plainly show their conviction that this is our right and indispensable policy, that if events shall show Mr. Lincoln the need of consummating this great movement *before* the first of January, he may feel that in doing so, he will be heartily approved and sustained by the Northern people.' <sup>409</sup>

For Garrison and Whipple, the earlier dilemma of the Northern populace and Lincoln both waiting on the other to commit to emancipation had been resolved by the Proclamation. Now that Lincoln had made a positive turn towards abolition, it was

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<sup>406</sup> Garrison, 'Proclamation of Emancipation', Vol. 32 No. 39, 26/09/1862

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>408</sup> Garrison, 'President Lincoln', Vol. 32 No. 40, 03/10/1862

<sup>409</sup> Whipple, 'The Cause and the Cure', Vol. 32 No. 42, 17/10/1862

up to 'all good citizens' to support him. Whipple's only criticism was that emancipation was not immediate. But three months was hardly a long time to wait, especially after three decades of agitation.

Phillips was pleased that the Proclamation confirmed Adams' interpretation of the Constitution, proclaiming confidently that 'We are the Constitution and the patriots, everything else is treason.'<sup>410</sup> 'I am not going to criticize the President.' Phillips stated in November, 'I believe that to-day he has turned the corner, and recognizes the fact, not simply the slave of rebels, but that *slaves* must be freed. (Applause).'<sup>411</sup> Unlike Garrison and Whipple, Phillips looked to the future, and claimed of the President three things: '. . . a Cabinet, a General, and a Confiscation that shall open up the Southern States to Yankee civilization, and give the loyalists of the South an opportunity to co-operate with us.'<sup>412</sup> Phillips would go on to become actively involved in politics supporting Fremont's campaign for the Presidency in 1864.<sup>413</sup> His demand for an abolitionist administration, not just an antislavery president, shows that his compromise with politics had taken on a different character to Garrison's. The two most vocal and influential members of the Circle would eventually feud over Phillips' political actions and whether or not the *Liberator* Circle should be disbanded after the war, as Garrison thought.<sup>414</sup> Therefore, the community aspect of the Circle continued to devolve from the unity of 1860 as Garrison and Phillips increasingly developed opposing ideas of individual agitation.

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<sup>410</sup> Phillips, 'Public Educators', Vol. 32 No. 46, 14/11/1862

<sup>411</sup> Phillips, 'Lecture of Wendell Phillips [Music Hall, 19/11/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 48, 28/11/1862

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>413</sup> Stewart, *Wendell Phillips*, pp. 251-254

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 254-256, p. 265

Reverend Daniel Foster, a secondary circle member who had enlisted in the army as a medic, detailed the positive effect the Proclamation had on the soldiers:

*'The proclamation has infused new life into the army. The soldiers all bless Abraham Lincoln for it. At length, we know what we are fighting for. At length, we renew the pledge of the old Revolution, and mutually put life, property and honor all in the issue for a free and united Fatherland. We begin to hope for a country built on Justice and Liberty, and protection under Constitution and Law for all classes and conditions of men. We can thank God for the prospect of leaving to our children a country, all free, united, blessed, worthy of the fondest affection of all noble souls, 'example and the hope of the world.'*<sup>415</sup>

'At length, we know what we are fighting for. At length, we renew the pledge of the old Revolution.' Foster was overjoyed to proclaim that the Union army now fought for the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the application of Adams' antislavery Constitution. There was now a direct connection with the Revolution of 1776 amongst the army; at last, they could defeat the political tyranny of the slaveholders and the moral tyranny of slavery.<sup>416</sup> Foster saw in the Emancipation Proclamation a chance to modify the Constitution and the Law to truly protect the rights of 'all classes and conditions of men.'<sup>417</sup> Although the Proclamation was not confirmation of Constitutional amendment, Foster was confident that abolitionist reformation would soon come now that the army was a mobilized force of emancipation.

Unlike Whipple, tertiary correspondent W. P. G. was not concerned with the three months Lincoln allowed for the Confederacy to accept peace:

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<sup>415</sup> Daniel Foster, 'Letter from Rev. Daniel Foster', Vol. 32 No. 43, 24/10/1862

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*

'The President has not stepped backward, on the whole, but forward. We trusted Jefferson Davis to make good the deficiencies of Abraham Lincoln. He would see it that the rebellion *should* last till January first; the Northern capital, rushing upon the heels of our victorious armies, should demand the retention of labor on the soil where it is indispensable. God himself, final, would ensure the rejection of the chance of reunion under the old conditions. Our instincts thus far have not been deceived. Shall we quarrel with that measure which has become the test of the loyalty of the North?'<sup>418</sup>

At first it appears that W. P. G. was advocating continued slavery 'on the soil where it is indispensable.' However, they wished slavery to continue only until January First, when the Emancipation Proclamation would strike it from the South. W. P. G. trusted in the Union army to achieve many rapid victories before 1863, and hoped that the South would not be compelled to surrender before Lincoln's emancipation ultimatum ran out. Of course, W. P. G. was not too concerned, as God 'would ensure the rejection of the chance of reunion under the old conditions.'<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, the Proclamation was the 'test of the loyalty of the North,' a measure that prompted a choice between liberty and slavery for the Northern populace that was far more effective and immediate than the Circle's moral suasion.<sup>420</sup> W. P. G., therefore, viewed the Proclamation as a major step forward towards abolition.

Henry Wright took W. P. G.'s view of the Proclamation as a moral choice for the North to a strict, binary conclusion: 'Neutrality and compromise are no longer possible about here. Are you for freedom or slavery – for free labor or slave labor – for free institutions or slave institutions – for a government based on freedom to the

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<sup>418</sup> W. P. G., 'Our Position', Vol. 32 No. 43, 24/10/1862

<sup>419</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*

laborer, or on slavery to the laborer? These are the only questions.<sup>421</sup> The debate over slavery was no longer about the possibility antislavery gradualism or reaching a compromise with the South, but about what system would be dominant in the United States.

In the same letter, Wright gave his appraisal of the Circle's abolitionist campaign in light of the Proclamation:

'You, dear friend, with your coadjutors, have labored, in a war of ideas, by appeals to reason and conscience, to get the nation to swallow the needed does. The nation has made up terrible faces at you and your medicine. Nevertheless, its mouth is open, and it has begun to swallow the medicine . . . A few years ago . . . Abolition was more dreaded more than the virus of their oldest and deadliest rattlesnakes by all. Now, they are eager to swallow the largest does of Abolitionism that the most radical Garrisonian Abolitionist can administer to them!<sup>422</sup>

The radical detractors still advocated disunion, the very same medicine that Americans had been making 'terrible faces' at for decades. Regardless, Wright's positive metaphor is not entirely unjustified. The Garrisonian compromisers of the Circle saw the Proclamation as a changing point, one laden with finality that heralded the end of a proslavery Union.

Pillsbury, representing the disunionists, remained as adamant as ever in the face of the Proclamation. He believed the nation needed to be born again, without the Constitutional taint of slavery, and emancipation had to come about as part of a national repentance and true justice, not a military necessity:

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<sup>421</sup> Wright, 'Letter from Henry C. Wright', Vol. 32 No. 44, 31/10/1862

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*



'For eighty years, our guilt has been festering like electricity in tropical skies; and now the thunder-bolts are descending, "red with uncommon wrath," and no thatched roofs of "military necessity," no pious *lightning rods* of "prayer and fasting," will avail to shield us, until we repent and "*do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly*" before the God we now defy, even in the midst of his fierce judgements.'<sup>423</sup>

Pillsbury's apocalyptic metaphor was a provocative critique of the compromisers of the Circle. He agreed with Garrison that the war was a form of judgement for allowing slavery to exist and prosper, manifested in thunder-bolts of 'uncommon wrath.' Yet the 'thatched roof' of military necessity would not protect the Union from righteous judgement, nor would it immediately provoke an abolitionist turn. True, universal abolition would only be achieved when all Americans recognized the evil of slavery and racial prejudice, repented for their sins, and demanded abolition because it was morally right, not because it would help win the war.

In a rare moment of agreeance with Pillsbury, Gerrit Smith believed that simply ending slavery in the rebellious states would not provoke moral repentance:

'The nation can be saved and become really one only by conquering the South through the heart of the South. It is true that slavery will soon cease. But unless it shall cease through penitence, and through pity and love for the black man, the nation will continue to be two nations in spirit.'<sup>424</sup>

Although he wrote the above before the Proclamation, Smith turned out to be prophetic. Institutionalized enslavement ceased in the United States through war time emancipation. But racist values persisted. There was no 'penitence' on the part

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<sup>423</sup> Pillsbury, 'Letter of Parker Pillsbury', Vol. 32 No. 50, 12/12/1862

<sup>424</sup> Smith, 'Speech of the Hon. Gerrit Smith on the Country [Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society, Music Hall, 15/06/1862]', Vol. 32 No. 28, 11/07/1862

of the North or the South. The Garrisonian's focus on achieving the practical goal of swift emancipation through the war power had the consequence of submerging the deeper problems of racial inequality. To quote Sinha, 'Abolitionists and their antislavery allies in the North may have won the war, but former slaveholders and their conservative allies won the peace.'<sup>425</sup> Still, despite his misgivings about the greater moral cause of abolition, Smith saw the Emancipation Proclamation as a step in the right direction:

'There is at last hope, good hope, for our deeply endangered country. The President, who is both an able and honest man, is doing his duty. He will do his whole duty . . . The people must encourage him to multiply his bold and righteous steps by sustaining him in those he has already taken.'<sup>426</sup>

There was hope for abolition in the Proclamation. Not certainty, as northern disunion had. But hope. And to the Garrisonian compromisers, that hope, combined with the practical end of slavery in the Union, was a major achievement. Issues surrounding loyal slaveholders aside, as the Union army advanced all slaves would be freed. What place free blacks would have in the Union, whether their rights as citizens would be upheld, and whether they would be treated as true equals, was up to the people. Unconditional, universal abolition, however, gave way to the limited emancipation of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments did not stop racial discrimination in the law or in the hearts of American citizens. Apart from the remaining disunionists, everyone in the *Liberator* Circle, regardless of their individual opinions, recognized that Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was a welcome advancement of abolitionism. Whether it was as a

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<sup>425</sup> Sinha, 'Did the Abolitionists Cause the Civil War?', p. 85

<sup>426</sup> Smith, 'Address of Gerrit Smith', Vol. 32 No. 44, 31/10/1862

worthy step on the road to complete abolition, or as the end result of decades of agitation, the Proclamation represented a firm abolitionist commitment from the government. Garrison accepted this commitment as the final confirmation of his personal compromise towards political means.

Garrison's decision to deviate from anti-political disunion and towards war as an acceptable method of abolition marked the beginning of a personal compromise that would reach maturity by the Emancipation Proclamation and culminate with the termination of the *Liberator* in 1865. Garrison was certainly in line with the individualist culture of the *Liberator* Circle in making this compromise. Yet by giving primacy to his personal compromise over maintaining the means that unified the Circle as a whole, Garrison, consciously or unconsciously, changed the function and formation that the *Liberator* Circle held for the past three decades. For Garrison chose to pursue a constitutional, political mode of abolition completely on his own accord. He did not spend weeks convening with the Circle, comparing individual opinions and debating the practical merits and moral disadvantages of abandoning anti-political disunion. Instead, Garrison made a personal decision as to what he thought best served the cause, and advocated it in his editorials. The rest of the Circle were free to accept, reject, and debate Garrison's shift in means as always. But Garrison stuck by his opinion, even as Pillsbury, Stephen and Abbey Foster, and Lydia Child challenged his compromise of anti-political principle. Rather than continuing his role as the de-facto leader of the Circle, the second unifying beacon of the society alongside northern disunion, Garrison chose to assert his place as an individual agitator amongst equals.

In the last of issue of the *Liberator* of 1862, days away from the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Garrison's editorial was hopeful and reflective:

'When the *Liberator* commenced . . . there was no agitation, no discussion of [slavery] in any quarter. Every thing has since been "made manifest in the light." The rod of Aaron has swallowed up the rod of the Egyptian magicians. Abolitionism is now the question of questions, eliciting more inquiry, thought, feeling, debate, than all others combined, and moving onward with an earthquake tread.'<sup>427</sup>

Garrison's idea of what abolitionism was trying to achieve had evidently changed. He had moved away from the concise, strict demands of the Declaration of Sentiments and had accepted the prominence of abolitionist discussion in a nation that had eschewed abolitionists as fanatics for decades as a change worth of being deemed a success. Furthermore, this discussion was accompanied by the practical progress of the Emancipation Proclamation, a move that was not in line with ideal, universal abolition, but, crucially, represented a commitment by the Government towards ending slavery and amending the immorality of the 'covenant with death.' The abolition that had been brought to the forefront of Northern discussion was not the immediate, universal abolition that the *Liberator* Circle set out to achieve. But it was a dramatic change, and, provided it allowed for practical abolitionist measures to move on 'with an earthquake tread,' Garrison could view it as a victory for the movement.

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<sup>427</sup> Garrison, 'Concerning the *Liberator*', Vol. 32 No. 51 19/12/1862

## Conclusion

The *Liberator* Circle was vehemently against political means from January 1860 to the eve of the Civil War. From the bombardment of Fort Sumter to the Emancipation Proclamation, Garrison, Phillips, Whipple, and the individual agitators of the Wider Circle that followed them compromised their ideal, anti-political means of abolition and accepted political emancipation under Adams' war power theory. Garrison and his coadjutors still achieved their initial masthead goal of 'NO UNION WITH SLAVEHOLDERS!'. 'Proclaiming liberty throughout the land' just occurred as the result of political action, rather than an abolitionist revolution. In accepting political action over absolute morality, the Garrisonians had engaged in Santayana's process of accepting 'feeling free under American liberty':

'A certain vagueness of soul, together with a great gregariousness and tendency to be moulded by example and by prevalent opinion, is requisite for feeling free under American liberty. You must find the majority right enough to live with; you must give up lost causes; you must be willing to put your favourite notions to sleep in the family cradle of convention.'<sup>428</sup>

Before the Civil War, the *Liberator* Circle believed the 'family cradle' of the Union, the Constitution, was an unacceptable basis for any sort of compromise. Over 1861 to 1863, Garrison and those in the Circle who agreed with him saw the potential of the Adams' element in the Constitution to end slavery, and felt that it was worth it to accept imperfect abolition under the Constitution over no abolition at all.

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<sup>428</sup> Santayana, *Character and Opinion*, p. 122

Of course, the abolitionists of the Circle were not politicians, and did not make a direct political compromise with Lincoln. Rather, they made a personal compromise, separate from any formal political act and purely on an individual level. 'You must have a certain vagueness of soul,' and be willing to modify your opinion in order to feel free, without it:

'. . . there can be no honest co-operation, no satisfying compromise. Every concession, under such circumstances, would be a temporary one . . . it would amount to a mutilation of one's essential nature, a partial surrender of life, liberty, and happiness, tolerable for a time, perhaps, as the lesser of two evils, but involving a perpetual sullen opposition and hatred.'<sup>429</sup>

During the decades of disunionist certainty, the Circle prided themselves on being everything but vague, and refusing any concession of means to be a 'mutilation of [their] essential nature.'<sup>430</sup> Justice, and a Union that truly reflected the liberty expressed in the Declaration of Independence, were their demands, and nothing was acceptable aside from the repudiation of the Constitution and the abolition of all injustice based on prejudice. Garrison and his coadjutors were free to espouse their moral principles through moral suasion, but they did not achieve any realistic progress towards abolition, because any means other than disunion was immoral and involved personal compromise, the 'partial surrender of life, liberty, and happiness.'<sup>431</sup> Regardless of what political compromise took place in Congress, if the individual citizen was not willing to make a personal compromise of principle in order to align with it, then it would be intolerable and invoke 'perpetual sullen opposition and hatred.' It is this critical interaction between personal and political compromise

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<sup>429</sup> Santayana Character p. 115

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*

that has been overlooked in the examination of Garrison and the *Liberator* Circle from 1860 to 1863. Garrison, Phillips, Whipple, and the majority of the *Liberator* Circle engaged in a personal compromise and went along the path from anti-political agitators to accepting emancipation by political means. For in relaxing their demands for universal equality and compromising their moral core in the name of the practical abolition of the Proclamation, the radical anti-political agitators of the *Liberator* Circle forfeited their separate, ideal community in favour of creating abolitionist change in the imperfect, but functional, American democratic society.

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