Introduction

On the morning of Tuesday, August 1, 1854, two steamships, the *Enoch Dean* and *Island City*, left the busy fishing inlet of Manhattan's Fulton Market on the East River heading for Long Island City in nearby Queens. The *New York Times* reported the ships were crowded with members of the New York Anti-Slavery Society, who advocated for the immediate emancipation of the nation's enslaved. The passengers – black and white, men and women – disembarked at St. Ronan's Well, a wooded grove popular for picnics, church revivals, and military drills. But this was no religious festivity or celebration of nationalism. The gathering intended to observe the anniversary of British Emancipation, which in 1834 had freed some 800,000 enslaved people by proclamation, most of whom lived in the British Caribbean. The annual commemoration, by then some twenty years old, was popularly known as August First, or West India Day.[1]

Shortly after 12 o'clock, the black Baptist Minister Willis Hodges opened the day with prayer. Thirteen years prior, Hodges had organized a similar gathering attended by over a thousand. He and his brother William had helped found mutual aid societies in the black Williamsburg community of New York and a short-lived newspaper, the *Ram's Horn* – through which he befriended the radical abolitionist John Brown. Hodges's name also appeared on an 1841 petition to Congress protesting attempts to impede debate over abolition. Now, on

[1] *New York Times*, August 2, 1854. Information on St. Ronan's Well in the mid-nineteenth century is documented in *Historical and Statistical Gazetteer of the State of New York*, ed. John Horner French (New York: Pearsall Smith, 1860), 549.

August 1, 1854, he had come to commemorate British Emancipation, tying it to the agitation by free African Americans for emancipation, liberty, and equality in the United States.[2]

The next speaker was Horace Greeley, the reformist, champion of free labor, and editor of the *New York Tribune*, who merged his moderate antislavery politics with a new national party, the Republicans. Following the singing of a "Jubilee Song," Greeley was introduced to the crowd and launched into a speech attacking slavery as an unjust enterprise that debilitated American economic life. In contrast he pointed to England, which had "sinned" through slavery but "repented" with emancipation, growing prosperous by the deed. Greeley had visited London in 1851 to view the famed Crystal Palace, built to house the Great Exhibition on industry. He hailed the construction a triumph of ingenuity and progress, stressing that for America to match such achievements, it must abandon the inefficient system of slave labor. "You can whip the slave to plant cotton – but can't whip men to build bridges and Crystal Palaces," he articulated in terms of moral capitalism. "Genius is not helped by whips."[3]

Greeley was succeeded by the Unitarian Minister Samuel J. May, a supporter of the New England abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, editor of the antislavery newspaper the *Liberator*. Three years prior, May had helped orchestrate the extralegal rescue of William "Jerry" Henry from a courthouse in Syracuse, New York, in open defiance of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. He spoke for nearly two hours, hailing British Emancipation as "the most worthy and encouraging" event in recent history, reflecting the "best hopes of social progress and Enlightenment," even more, in his estimation, than the Declaration of Independence. May cited evidence for this in the "improved" education, social status, and condition of former West Indian slaves. The same could take place in America, he told the crowd; it was their duty to use "concerted action" to see it brought about.[4]

[2] Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., *Free Man of Color: The Autobiography of Willis Augustus Hodges* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982); *Colored American*, August 14, 1841.

[3] *New York Times*, August 2, 1854. A New York Crystal Palace modeled on the British original was constructed in 1853, on which Greeley wrote extensively: Horace Greeley, *Art and Industry as Represented in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, New York 1853–4* (New York: Redfield, 1853).

[4] *New York Times*, August 2, 1854.

More speeches were made that day. All extolled British Emancipation, emphasizing its relevance to the struggle against American slavery. A speaker from Indiana reckoned freedom in the English Caribbean second only to Christ's death. Black orators like Thomas Van Rennselaer, a former editor at the *Ram's Horn*, called for a black vanguard to take up renewed activism, proclaiming African Americans "the most efficient advocate of the slave." Willis Hodges also urged increased black protest, with what the *Times* noted as "great animation." As the crowd adjourned, they struck up a hymn by the English Moravian James Montgomery, heralding the 1834 emancipation and indicting slaveholders as despots under the sway of avarice and greed. "Slavery itself must pass away," they sang, "and be a tale of yesterday."[5]

The speeches at St. Ronan's Well that August 1, 1854 brought together a comingling of nineteenth-century reformists and antislavery activists who, despite differences in strategies and tactics, managed to find common cause in commemorating British Emancipation. For Willis Hodges and Thomas Van Rennselaer, the day represented an ongoing struggle for freedom, equality, and dignity that bound up African Americans and freed Afro-Caribbean people in a shared experience. Antislavery Republicans like Horace Greeley saw in Britain's Abolition Act a vision of free labor efficiency and progress. The abolitionist Samuel J. May evoked British Emancipation within the rhetoric of Garrisonian moral suasion, calling for a mobilized tide to see slavery undone in America. For the crowd who ended the day in song, it was affirmation that theirs was a spiritual struggle to redeem the soul of a nation.

But the significance of British Emancipation to nineteenth-century America involved more than an annual celebratory performance. The sentiments expressed that day were part of an ongoing discourse of which those gathered would have been familiar – promoted and circulated in debates, editorials, and speeches. This dialogue helped form a "moral cordon," a brick in the antislavery Atlantic wall. If freedom could work among some 800,000 recently liberated in England's colonies, advocates maintained it was a glimpse of Jubilee for millions of enslaved people yet languishing in America. The performances of that August 1, 1854, in

[5] Ibid. The song was taken from a poem titled "A Cry from South Africa," and written by Montgomery in 1828. A stanza was later turned into a hymn to celebrate abolition in 1834, and appeared often in antislavery literature throughout the Anglo-Atlantic.

Ronan's Well were part of a larger battle, waged almost daily within the context of a transatlantic antislavery movement.[6]

Jubilee's Experiment provides a detailed account of this exchange, demonstrating how the emancipated British Caribbean colonies entered into the debates over freedom and racial equality in the antebellum United States. It analyzes this discourse as both propaganda and rhetoric, created by abolitionists, black and white. Concurrently, it interweaves the lived experiences of freedpeople in the British West Indies – their daily acts of resistance and struggles for greater freedoms – which complicated this ongoing debate. This book argues that measuring the success of the "experiment of freedom" in the British West Indies became crucial in the struggle against slavery in America.

JUBILEE, EXPERIMENT, AND EMPIRE

In the Book of Leviticus, Jubilee took place every fifty years, during which land was returned to its original owners, debts were forgiven, and slaves were freed.[7] Early Anglo-Atlantic reformers took inspiration from Jubilee, part of a politics of deliverance wherein God rewarded the downtrodden and passed judgment upon tyrants. The antislavery Jubilee came to symbolize more than a cyclical occurrence. It was to be an end, now and forever, of the sin of chattel human bondage. The awaited Jubilee arrived on August 1, 1834, one year after Parliament passed an Act abolishing slavery throughout most of the British Empire.[8] In England, printed tracts announced the "Negroes' Jubilee" and medals were distributed to schoolchildren, engraved with the words, "This is the Lord's Doing." August 1, 1834, was heralded as an act of

[6] R. J. M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983). Blackett used the term "moral cordon" to describe the figurative antislavery wall nineteenth-century African American abolitionists created in their propagandizing of American slavery to the British public.

[7] Jon Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6–11, 88–89, 100–144.

[8] *An Act for the Abolition of Slavery throughout the British Colonies; for Promoting the Industry of the Manumitted Slaves; and for Compensating the Persons Hitherto Entitled to the Services of Such Slaves* ([London]: n.p., 1833). The Act did not include parts of British India under East India Company rule.

humanitarianism, progress, and the beneficence of empire, which would serve as a beacon for the world.[9]

Despite such triumphalism, the road to Jubilee had been hard fought. Since the mid-seventeenth century Britain had dominated the trans-Atlantic slave trade. British ships carried millions of Africans across the Atlantic to languish in forced labor, torture, and death in the Americas – generating wealth to sustain a global empire. The English writer Daniel Defoe provided a blunt assessment in 1713: "No African trade, no negroes; no negroes, no sugars, gingers, indigoes, etc; no sugar etc, no islands, no continent; no continent, no trade; that is to say, farewell to your American trade, your West Indian trade."[10] An established historiography has mapped the multifaceted ties between chattel slavery and English capitalism. Britain would abolish first the slave trade and then slavery, but only after making vast wealth through the trafficking and exploitation of human beings. The paradox has fueled an ongoing discourse on the origins of English antislavery and abolition.[11]

This work does not retread those debates. However, it is guided by their examinations. It takes this contradiction – the push for human freedom on the one hand, and the economic and colonial necessities of empire on the other – as central in understanding how British emancipation unfolded. If Britain sought redemption for slavery, there was also

[9] Medal commemorating the abolition of slavery, 1834. Designed by Joseph Davis. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Michael Graham-Stewart Slavery Collection; Thomas Timpson, *The Negroes' Jubilee: A Memorial of Negro Emancipation, August 1, 1834: With a Brief History of the Slave Trade and Its Abolition, and the Extinction of British Colonial Slavery* (London: Ward, 1834).

[10] Defoe cited in Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 135.

[11] The foundation for this analysis is often traced to Eric Williams, *Slavery and Capitalism* (Richmond: William Byrd Press, 1944). The famed "Williams Thesis" would inspire later works looking at slavery's economic ties: Robert Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little Brown, 1974); Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery from the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (New York: Verso, 1997); Barbara Solow, *The Economic Consequences of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014); Edward E. Baptiste, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). For competing ideologies on the origins of British antislavery: Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

skepticism of what black freedom might look like. Upon introducing the abolition resolution to Parliament in 1833, the Colonial Secretary Edward Stanley described the impending transition as a "mighty experiment": a social venture whose outcome remained shrouded in hope, doubt, and uncertainty.[12] For British politicians debating emancipation, if black slavery demanded a structured apparatus of control, black freedom would require no less. Emancipation as an experiment was to be a trial: carried out under controlled conditions, to be observed and recorded to arrive at a conclusion of success or failure.

Stanley's "mighty experiment" has been defined by historians primarily through the lens of labor. In Britain's Caribbean colonies questions of whether the former slaves would work were certainly paramount. These concerns shaped the Abolition Act in Parliament, placing most freedpeople into an exploitative apprenticeship. This system retained the former slaves under the control of planters, strictly regulating their labor and limiting their mobility and independence. After four years of renewed agitation in both colony and metropole, full emancipation was finally enacted in 1838. On islands like Jamaica, children carried banners that first day of August to celebrate this *second* arrival of freedom as their true "day of Jubilee."[13]

Yet labor alone cannot account for the fears emancipation evoked. Nor does it fully explain the numerous laws passed by colonial legislatures to restrict the most quotidian aspects of freedpeople's lives. Fears abounded that chaos might take root with emancipation, leaving plantations in ruin and colonies rife with racial disorder. In an Anglo-Atlantic world where "slave" was the antithesis of "subject," white authorities

[12] William Cobbett and T. C. Hansard, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates: Forming a Continuation of the Work Entitled, "The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period of the Year 1803,"* Vol. 17 *Comprising the Period from the Second Day of April to the Twentieth Day of May 1833* (London: Hansard, 1833), 1184.

[13] Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 114. For works on the apprenticeship and slavery, see William L. Burn, *Emancipation and Apprenticeship in the British West Indies* (London: Cape, 1937); William A. Green, *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). For works on attempts to control the labor of freedpeople: Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Mary Turner, ed., *From Chattel Slaves to Wage Slaves: The Dynamics of Labour Bargaining in the Americas* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1995); Frederick Cooper, Thomas C. Holt, and Rebecca J. Scott, *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor, and Citizenship in Postemancipation Societies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Seymour Drescher, *The Mighty Experiment: Free Labor versus Slavery in British Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

questioned whether freed black people could be trusted with liberty. These racial anxieties were written into the 1833 Abolition Act, and continued to impact colonial and metropolitan policy for decades.[14]

A TRANS-ATLANTIC ANTISLAVERY

In the nineteenth-century US the experiment was observed with keen interest. For proslavery advocates, the emancipated British colonies presented an ominous threat. Three decades prior, slave rebellion in the French Caribbean had blossomed into a revolution: razing plantations and dispatching the would-be masters of men. The victorious slaves renamed their colony Haiti, founded on the promise and hope of black freedom. Now Southern slaveholders watched a new contagion of liberty taking root in the Anglo-Caribbean that might wash up onto American shores.[15] In contrast, for American reformers freedom in the British colonies coincided with a growing transformation in antislavery. Decades of moderate gradualist strategies were giving way to direct action campaigns and calls for immediate emancipation. Many American abolitionists now looked to the experiment to both validate their arguments and as a model for the nation. Historians have traced these networks of Anglo-Atlantic abolitionism dating back to the colonial era.[16]

[14] Here I define "subjecthood" as analogous to concepts of citizenship, where colonial subject citizens had expectations of rights and privileges due to them through loyalty to a sovereign. On this, see Christopher L. Brown, "From Slaves to Subjects: Envisioning an Empire without Slavery, 1772–1834," in *Black Experience and the Empire*, ed. Philip D. Morgan and Sean Hawkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–140; Hannah Weiss Muller, *Subjects and Sovereign: Bonds of Belonging in the Eighteenth-Century British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 155, 209.

[15] There is a significant historiography on the Haitian Revolution's impact on the United States and the broader Atlantic. Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1988); Mathew J. Calvin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Maddock Dillon and Michael Drexler, eds., *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States: Histories, Textualities, Geographies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016); Carl Lawrence Paulus, *The Slaveholding Crisis: Fear of Insurrection and the Coming of the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017); Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2018).

[16] Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation* (Urbana:

Yet the parameters of this relationship were never limited to New York or London. British Emancipation was to be a template for abolitionism and an example of the benefits of freedom. Central to this was the experiment unfolding in the West Indies, and its perceived success or failure. Taking this as a starting point, *Jubilee's Experiment* reframes the narrative of Anglo-Atlantic antislavery beyond connections between metropoles, illustrating how debates over the experiment made the Caribbean colonies – and its recently freed inhabitants – pivotal to this transatlantic moment.

Having taken to championing British Emancipation, American abolitionists became fully invested in the experiment's outcome. They focused on assessing two main criteria of success. The first was whether the former slaves in the Caribbean were now more industrious and productive as free workers: an outgrowth of antislavery arguments on free labor superiority. The second was whether emancipation had brought about moral, educational, and religious uplift, reflecting an era of social reform. Both measures were tied to nineteenth-century precepts on race, and the belief that slavery degraded its victims who required guidance on the responsibilities of liberty.

The inherent nature of an experiment rendered this assessment a contested landscape. While American abolitionists sought to prove emancipation a success, anti-abolitionists pronounced the experiment a failure. They charged that black freedom in the British Caribbean had led to ruin, barbarity, and discord, and warned of similar disaster if any such experiment were attempted in America. To counter these attacks, abolitionists mounted a vigorous defense, collecting data from English allies, missionaries, parliamentary notes, colonial reports, and more. Envoys were dispatched to investigate the colonies and report back their observations. A formidable volume of evidence filled antislavery newspapers, tracts, pamphlets, speeches, and more: persuasive testimony marshaled to convince a domestic audience of freedom's success. For over thirty years, debating the results of British Emancipation became part of antislavery political culture. As slavery moved to the center of national debates, the experiment followed, to be evoked by its supporters and detractors.

University of Illinois Press, 1972); Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*; Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2013).

For many free African Americans, the emancipation of hundreds of thousands of black West Indians mirrored their own political strivings. As historians have documented, black life in the early American republic was one of constant humiliations and struggle.[17] The successful adaptation of former slaves in the British colonies to freedom, it was hoped, would strike a blow to the supporters of racial slavery and provide evidence of a multiracial democracy where black people lived, interacted, and prospered. The success of this experiment of freedom would serve to both weaken slavery in America and bolster claims to equality and citizenship.

TROUBLING FREEDOM

Histories of the early Caribbean demonstrate that enslaved people were never merely spectators in the struggle against their captivity. Nor were they passive recipients of an emancipatory movement that flowed outward from the metropole. Through daily resistance and acts of insurrection, the revolutionary activities of enslaved people in the colonies had proved decisive for the passage of British Emancipation.[18] And many held

[17] Gary P. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720–1840* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988); Patrick Rael, *Black Identity and Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); Erica L. Ball, *To Live an Antislavery Life: Personal Politics and the Antebellum Middle Class* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[18] Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Hilary McD. Beckles, "The Slave-Driver's War: Bussa and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* 39 (December 1985): 85–110; Mavis Christine Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655–1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration & Betrayal* (Granby, MA: Bergin & Garvey, 1988); Richard Price, *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 2006); Claudius K. Fergus, *Revolutionary Emancipation: Slavery and Abolitionism in the British West Indies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Edward Rugemer, *Slave Law and the Politics of Resistance in the Early Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018); Vincent Brown, *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020); Jason T. Sharples, *The World That Fear Made Slave Revolts and Conspiracy Scares in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

expectations of the freedom they had helped engineer. These expectations did not necessarily align with antislavery reformers, or the imperial visions of metropolitan politicians. Freedpeople resisted imposition on their labor, demanding fair work contracts and abolishment of the cruel vestiges of slavery. They brought grievances before local magistrates and provided testimonies to English reformers. Others organized work strikes for better labor conditions, or abandoned plantations altogether. Missionaries and abolitionists attempting moral reform also found black men and women had their own codes of morality borne out of their lived experiences. Freedpeople demanded sovereignty on their individual, marital, familial lives, and religious lives, and frustrated attempts by missionaries to control their behavior or how they worshipped. If freedom was troubled by the limits placed upon their everyday lives, former slaves in turn troubled neat presumptions of how success would be defined in the experiment and what emancipation could, or should, mean.[19]

RECOVERING VOICES OF AN ANGLO-ATLANTIC ANTISLAVERY

The exchange over *Jubilee's Experiment* took place between various persons, institutions, organizations, and governments, within differing geographic locations, and across several decades. There is no one voice or individual that can convey the story of the experiment. As such, this work brings in *many* voices to tell multiple stories with multiple perspectives. What ties these seemingly disparate threads together is the experiment itself, and their roles in the debates surrounding it. These acts of recovery have involved a meticulous search through archival materials in the United States, Britain, and the former English Caribbean colonies.

Print has proved essential in this endeavor. In many ways, print was the lifeblood of the crusade against slavery, created by reformers and preachers, ex-slaves and missionaries, in letters, pamphlets, books, and more. This antislavery print culture was made up of individuals, groups, and communities who produced, circulated, and consumed a wide breadth of materials disseminated along networks that bridged London and New York, or Philadelphia and Bridgetown. The newspaper was the greatest vehicle of this literary activism, and in the United States

[19] Natasha Lightfoot, *Troubling Freedom: Antigua and the Aftermath of British Emancipation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Dawn P. Harris, *Punishing the Black Body: Marking Social and Racial Structures in Barbados and Jamaica* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017).

exchanges over the experiment often took the form of editorials, articles, and reprinted speeches. American newspapers cited in this study include antislavery newspapers, African American newspapers, and those from the mainstream press that covered the debate over British Emancipation.[20]

As a trans-Atlantic analysis, this study also draws on British newspapers. Though some are from the metropole, the majority are from the colonies. The voices and perspectives in these sources mostly privilege colonial authorities, planters, and government officials. However, even with such limitations, they offer invaluable insight into the British Caribbean during the period studied in this work. The papers cited favor the larger and established plantation colonies of Barbados and Jamaica, often cited in contemporary exchanges over the experiment. But not wanting to restrict my analysis to the "big islands," I also draw significantly from newspapers of smaller colonies like Antigua and Trinidad; infrequently, I include colonies like Grenada or Saint Christopher (St. Kitts) where relevant. This was in part a matter of accessibility. Still, this study strives to cast a broad net to gain a multifaceted sense of the post-emancipation period within the British imperial Caribbean.

Jubilee's Experiment also draws on a range of other archival materials, among them US Congressional papers, British Parliamentary papers, British Colonial Office documents, and other sources including pamphlets, personal correspondences, manuscripts, broadsides, political cartoons, antislavery literature, and more. This assemblage of seemingly incongruous materials helps piece together the transnational debate over the experiment, allowing for the excavation of evidence amassed by both its detractors and supporters.

The most challenging voices to recover were those of freedpeople. As the Caribbean historian Woodville K. Marshall has pointed out, the archives remain limited on evaluating black West Indian hopes after freedom. The architects of the experiment did not place primacy on such voices, which were only marginally recorded for posterity. Historians have thus been faced with a paucity of oral testimonies and narratives with which to make deductions. While those sources are examined within

[20] The decade marking the transformation in American abolitionism, also marked the onset of the commercial revolution in print in the United States. On this, see Edwin Emery, Nancy L. Roberts, and Michael Emery, *The Press and America: An Interpretive History of the Mass Media*, 9th ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997), 129–155; Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 14–28.

this work, I also rely on Marshall's methodologies to root out voices more challenging to unearth. As Marshall implored, to move beyond the gaps in the archives of the post-slavery period, we "must examine the actions and choices of people; we must consider the hopes, expectations which informed choices and responses."[21]

Newspapers, Parliamentary reports, abolitionist writings, missionary accounts, and more proved a substantial resource to implement Marshall's thesis. As documents written by, or in alliance with, colonial elites, they rarely offered the direct voices of enslaved or freedpeople. However, the experiment created a moment of unprecedented interest in the laboring population of the Anglo-Caribbean, whose lives and actions were regularly reported upon, providing plausible evidence reflecting freedpeople's feelings, reactions, and inner struggles. This was not an exact science, and required both reading against the grain, interrogating the archive, and, where necessary, offering reasonable speculation. Through these methods I sought to place freed black West Indians into the larger narrative of *Jubilee's Experiment*, which would be left incomplete without their voices.

PRESENTING JUBILEE'S EXPERIMENT

The language used to recount the history of slavery and its aftermath is continually evolving. While there is no consensus on this shifting nomenclature, ongoing conversations and personal preferences have shaped the terminologies used in this work. Both "slave" and "enslaved" appear frequently, referring to the legal status of chattel bondage. Except in direct quotes, "planter" or "slaveowner" takes the place of "master" or "mistress." In the British colonies, "freedpeople" identify the recent transition to freedom after August 1, 1834. This is distinct from "free people of color" used to identify those persons free prior to emancipation. Regional terms like "British Caribbean" and "Anglo-Caribbean" are used alongside the more antiquated "West Indies" and "West Indian," which continue to hold cultural relevance in the English speaking Caribbean.

Jubilee's Experiment is spread out across eight chapters. The first, "The Anxieties of Emancipation," traces debates on black freedom, in

[21] Woodville K. Marshall, "'We Be Wise to Many More Things': Blacks' Hopes and Expectations of Emancipation," in *Caribbean Freedom: Economy and Society from Emancipation to the Present*, ed. Hilary Beckles and Verene Shepherd (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1996), 12–20, 12–14.

both London and the West Indian colonies, in the years after the Slave Trade Act of 1807 and leading up to the passage of emancipation in 1833. Much of this was predicated on fears of slave rebellion, and the racial and social disorder believed inherent with emancipation. Rather than freedom, metropolitan authorities offered piecemeal alleviations of slavery's excess while working toward the institution's preservation. Dissatisfied with these half-measures, enslaved people helped stimulate a metropolitan movement to bring about slavery's eventual abolition. This chapter argues that this preeminent association of black freedom with disorder shaped the boundaries of emancipation and thus the parameters of the experiment.

Chapter 2, "Fears of British Emancipation in America," examines how the prospect of emancipation in the British West Indies stimulated a growing debate on its impact on the United States. This followed from a history of fears of foreign "moral contagion" on the issue of slavery, and similar domestic anxieties – including slave rebellion in Virginia and an emergent abolitionist movement with transnational ties. Highlighting anti-abolitionist riots in New York in 1833 and 1834, this chapter situates these events within trepidations of national and racial boundary crossings that I argue had important roots in anxieties over British Emancipation and its influence on America.

The next three chapters provide a study on the importance of free labor ideology, which became the leading measure of the experiment. Chapter 3, "The Benefits of Free Labor," traces the adaptation of free labor in the antislavery Anglo-Atlantic movement and its inherent racial assumptions. While for English antislavery these strategies developed out of a need to show emancipation's imperial commercial advantages, in the United States they emerged from a burgeoning ideology that imbued labor with moral characteristics. I argue that by charting the industriousness of freed black West Indians, Atlantic reformers hoped to prove the fiscal and moral benefits of free labor. Chapter 4, "The Problems of Apprenticeship," considers the complications posed for the free labor argument by the system of indenture – which sought to maintain the structures of slavery. None understood this better than former slaves, who viewed the repression doled out by magistrates and planters as a subversion of both freedom and labor. Examining testimonies and acts of resistance, I illustrate how freedpeople forced an end to the apprenticeship even as American abolitionists sought to use their laboring potential as a defense of the experiment. Chapter 5, "The Experiment and Its Challenges," provides a transnational perspective on the free labor experiment in the post-apprenticeship, as

British Caribbean economies faltered in the 1840s and former slaves asserted their rights as working people. This chapter argues that in their pursuit of expanded liberty, black West Indians forced American antislavery to examine the limitations of free labor in assessing the experiment, as the issue of slavery moved to the center of national politics.

Chapter 6, "Reform and the Experiment," examines the other great measure of the experiment's success, moral reform: a project of missionaries, antislavery reformers, and the imperial state to assure social order in the colonies. Influenced by the Second Great Awakening, American abolitionists appealed to notions of individual and societal reformation – arguing that freedom had reshaped black West Indians within preferred social ideals of marriage, fidelity, piety, and gendered notions of morality. But as I argue, freedpeople had their own perceptions of moral behavior, challenging the expectations of reformers in both England and America.

Chapter 7, "African Americans and British Emancipation," asks the fundamental question, what interest did the experiment bear for African Americans? I argue, that far beyond their white allies, black Americans considered the experiment's implications for their own future prospects of liberty, equality, and citizenship rights. African Americans often sought to speak with their own voice on matters that concerned them. It was therefore important for this study to grant this perspective its own chapter, to illustrate autonomy and the specific meanings black people ascribed to British Emancipation. While not averse to free labor arguments, most were more interested in the moral reform of black West Indians – adapted as a similar strategy within their own communities. The success of black freedom in the British Caribbean mirrored their own strivings for dignity, self-identity, and democratic participation. But this narrative was complicated, most starkly in short-lived British West Indian emigration schemes, revealing both the possibilities and limits of a black transnational identity.

Chapter 8, "A West Indian Jubilee in America," explores the intersections and divergences of August First commemorations in the Anglo-Atlantic. In the Caribbean, it examines freedpeople's celebrations of emancipation and how this at times conflicted with the directives of missionary and colonial elites. In the United States, the chapter traces the development of August First and argues that these events arose out of attempts to shape public perceptions of the experiment's success. While commemorations in the West Indies and the United States occurred separately and took differing forms, I argue that both were engaged in similar cultural performances of freedom. August First enabled

abolitionists and African Americans to merge political and intellectual thoughts with the transnational triumph of British Emancipation toward a domestic antislavery strategy.

The study concludes with a brief Epilogue that looks at how debates over the experiment continued to reverberate during and after the Civil War. This time is also used to reflect on whether the arguments over the experiment's success or failure helped to bring about their intended effect, and asks readers to dwell on how multiple transnational actors and events helped shape the course of American antislavery.

Jubilee's Experiment examines how contestations over the success of the experiment in the British Caribbean instigated an intense comparative debate on slavery, emancipation, race, equality, and democratic participation in American society. It resituates the question of labor in the post-emancipation Anglo-Caribbean, often used to define the experiment, within the broader context on the uncertainty over black subjecthood in the English empire. The experiment was intended not only as a referendum on the efficacy of free labor, but also as a trial to delineate black freedom, in all its personal, political, and social meanings.

This was a dynamic and contentious exchange, as antislavery defenses of the experiment developed over time, reacted to detractors, adapted to the political moment, and were reshaped in response to shifting events. British Emancipation was part of a broader Atlantic occurrence, directly impacting American abolitionist strategies and African American political activism and identity. Central to this discourse were West Indian freedpeople, who in their daily strivings for greater liberty challenged the boundaries of the experiment: denying its inherent suppositions, subverting its imperial ambitions, and, when possible, forcing it in new directions. This work attempts to recover the roles of these black men and women not merely as specimens to be observed, but as participants in this vital exchange. The antislavery Atlantic brought together a variety of actors and participants – from the colonies and metropole, black and white, enslaved and free – bound up in the cause of freedom.