

**THE PRIMUS PROJECT
FALL 2023**

BICENTENNIAL RESEARCH REPORT

**THE ECONOMIC, RELIGIOUS, AND POLITICAL
CONTEXT OF THE FOUNDING OF
WASHINGTON COLLEGE**

**PART 3 OF 3:
POLITICS**



THE PRIMUS PROJECT IS AN ONGOING RESEARCH ENDEAVOR DEDICATED TO A FULLER UNDERSTANDING OF TRINITY COLLEGE'S HISTORY AS IT RELATES TO SLAVERY, WHITE SUPREMACY, AND QUESTIONS OF RACIAL JUSTICE. ON THE OCCASION OF THE BICENTENNIAL, THE PRIMUS PROJECT OFFERS THIS THREE-PART REPORT ON ITS RESEARCH TO DATE, FOCUSING ON THE CONTEXT OF TRINITY'S 1823 FOUNDING AS WASHINGTON COLLEGE. THIS RESEARCH IS ALSO THE SUBJECT OF A FORTHCOMING PODCAST SERIES AND AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CONVERSATION DURING THE COLLEGE-WIDE SYMPOSIUM ON MEMORY, PRESENCE, AND POSSIBILITY ON NOVEMBER 14, 2023.

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THE FOUNDING OF TRINITY COLLEGE PART 3: POLITICS

PREPARED BY:
THE PRIMUS PROJECT

POLITICS



Parts 1 and 2 of the Primus Project’s Bicentennial research report detailed the economic and religious contexts for the founding of Washington College: the role the slave economy played in creating the wealth that created and sustained the college, and the ways the college served the interests of an Episcopal Church that was both directly and indirectly supporting slavery and White supremacy. In this final report, we examine the political context for the college’s founding: the ideas, trends, and concrete legislative actions that made the college possible and influenced the people who steered its course. Although

this brings to a close the Primus Project’s presentation of findings on the occasion of Trinity’s Bicentennial, it merely sets the stage for further research on how the economic, religious, and political contexts of the founding moment reverberated through the college community’s development, operation, and later life.

THE GRANTING OF THE COLLEGE CHARTER IN A POLITICAL CONTEXT

At the time of Washington College’s founding, there were still thousands of living veterans of the Revolutionary War. The American experiment in republican government had proven itself in several elections and peaceful transfers of power; it had withstood another


war with Great Britain, in 1812-1815; and by the late 1810s many could tout the James Monroe(1758-1831) administration as an “era of good feelings,” in which national unity prevailed over political partisanship.

But at the same time, it was increasingly clear that such views and so-called “good feelings” obscured important, divisive trends. Increasingly, White American leaders secured military and civil posts for White men alone. The 1792 Militia Act, for example, mandated the race of militiamen for the first time when declaring that “each and every free able-bodied white male citizen” between the ages of eighteen and forty-five must serve. And, in 1802, Congress made work in the federal postal service the province of White men. While many White leaders in Revolutionary New England had imagined a fuller (but not full) participation of Black men in political and civil society, by the early nineteenth century such imaginings gave way to a repressive White supremacy. At the same time, enslaved Blacks challenged the system of American slavery when more than 3,000 escaped to the British in the War of 1812. Indeed, after the war, the Russian czar was called in to arbitrate the dispute between American slaveholders and the British over this loss of enslaved “property.” In the opening decades of the nineteenth century, the US was still young, with many crucial political questions unresolved—not least, questions about the future of slavery and the role of White supremacy. [1]

The politics of slavery came front-and-center in 1820, when northerners and southerners in Congress clashed over whether slavery could be prohibited in the new state of Missouri. From


the distant perch of his retirement at Monticello, 79-year-old Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) called the Missouri controversy a “fire bell in the night” and “the knell of the Union.” The specter of a deepening divide between North and South provoked from Jefferson a despondent prognostication: “I am now to die in the belief, that the useless sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776, to acquire self-government and happiness to their country, is to be thrown away by the unwise and unworthy passions of their sons.” The only way forward, Jefferson believed, would be “a general emancipation and expatriation”—that is, to free all those enslaved and remove them from the US—but he doubted that was possible. “We have the wolf by the ears,” he said of the South (“we”) and slavery (“him”): “we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go.” In fact, what Jefferson called a “firebell in the night” had been tolling at least softly for some time, and the idea of “emancipation and expatriation” was not original with him. It was the principal mission of the American Colonization Society, formed four years earlier, whose efforts to remove Black Americans to Africa served, in part, to palliate the tensions surrounding race and slavery in national politics. The founders of Washington College were keenly attuned to these ideas and this context, as we shall see. [2]

In Connecticut, the “era of good feelings ” was a particularly tumultuous one. Much of what had engendered the state’s reputation as a “land of steady habits” was being overturned. The state’s merchant class depended significantly on trade with the West Indies, which was decimated by the British blockade during the War of 1812. The state’s powerful interests (overwhelmingly Federalists) were so fiercely opposed to the war—and still so angry over the Jefferson administration’s Embargo Act several years earlier, which had also



stymied the lucrative West Indies trade—that they convened a secret meeting in Hartford, comprising delegates from several New England states, to draft a formal protest. Rumors swirled that the Hartford Convention was plotting to negotiate a separate peace with Great Britain, or even secede from the Union, and President Madison repositioned federal troops to stand ready to enter southern New England. A political cartoon at the time depicted King George III (1738-1820) enticing Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island with promises of “plenty molasses”—produced by slave labor in the West Indies—if they would “leap” from the Union.

The alleged disloyalty of the Hartford Conventioneers was probably exaggerated, but it embarrassed the Federalist party so badly that it never regained its political relevance. What was known as Connecticut’s “Standing Order”—the entrenched leadership class that had held sway since the earliest days of the colony—became newly vulnerable. John Adams (1735-1826) had remarked in 1808 that “half a dozen or, at most, a dozen families ” formed an “aristocracy ” that effectively controlled Connecticut, and the members of this aristocracy were overwhelmingly Yale-educated, Congregationalist, and Federalist. As the established church of the state, the Congregational Church enjoyed the mandatory financial support of all taxpayers, regardless of their own religious affiliations. Episcopalians, who had long rankled under this regime—not least because it had repeatedly thwarted their efforts to create an Episcopal alternative to Yale College —therefore proved sympathetic allies with the political opponents of the Federalists. Making common cause with the Democratic-Republican Party, they overthrew the Standing Order by



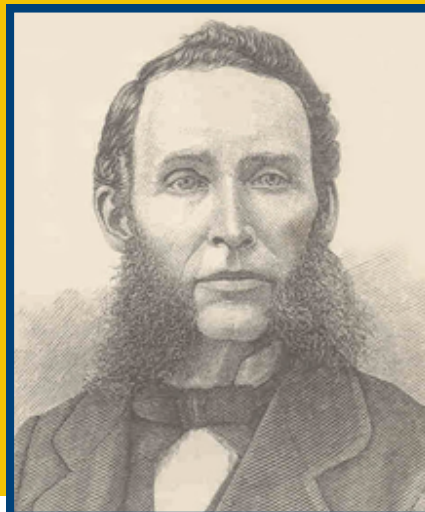
forming the Toleration Party, which soundly defeated the Federalists in elections for governor and both houses of the state legislature. The stage was now set for a new state constitution and a new effort to found an Episcopal college. Indeed, as an Episcopal priest would recall many years later, “the first fruit of this Union”—the alliance of Episcopalians with Democratic-Republicans—“was the Charter of Trinity College, Hartford.” [3]

When delegates gathered for a constitutional convention in the late summer of 1818, the majority Tolerationists’ top priority was to disestablish the Congregational Church, and they did. The Constitution of 1818 declared that “No preference shall be given by law to any Christian sect or mode of worship” and that “no person shall by law be compelled to join or support, or be classed with or associated to any congregation, church, or religious association.” It also reaffirmed the 1792 charter of Yale College. A provision explicitly empowering the legislature to incorporate additional colleges was not adopted for the final draft, but the fact that it was discussed signaled that a door may have opened for the long-aggrieved Episcopalians to renew their bid. [4]

Bishop Thomas Church Brownell (1779-1865) and his fellow petitioners were careful to make the most of their moment. As discussed in Part 2, the protections for religious freedom expressed in the college charter, which have become a central part of Trinity’s identity, sometimes conceal just how much the founding was driven by the concerns of the Episcopal Church. In 1823 that aspect of the charter represented, at least as much and probably more, a nod to the new state Constitution and a toeing of the party line in the

Connecticut General Assembly. The Toleration Party, which had spearheaded the constitutional convention, continued to hold a solid legislative majority at the time the Washington College charter was brought forward for the Assembly's approval. Although the petition needed to be crafted prudently (opting for the name Washington College, for instance, over Seabury College), there were causes for optimism. [5]

Part of how the Toleration Party had initially brought Episcopalians into the fold in 1816 was by nominating for lieutenant governor Judge Jonathan Ingersoll (1747-1823), a prominent Episcopalian and Senior Trustee of the Bishop's Fund (a financial mechanism behind the longstanding effort to start an Episcopal college). Now the judge's son, Ralph Isaacs Ingersoll (1789-1872), was one of the most powerful members of the General Assembly, soon to become its speaker. Ralph Ingersoll would sign on as one of the initial subscribers (donors) and ultimately send his son to Washington College (Colin Ingersoll graduated in the Class of 1839). Ralph Ingersoll was not only a key political ally and a direct supporter of Washington College. He was also, as we will explore below, a defender of White supremacy. [6]



RALPH ISAACS INGERSOLL

ANTI-BLACK RACISM IN CONNECTICUT

Another provision of the new 1818 constitution was a definition of voting qualifications: Article 6, Section 2, stated that “every white male citizen of the United States who shall have gained a settlement in this state, attained the age of twenty-one years, and resided in the town in which he may offer himself [...] at least six months preceding, and have a freehold estate of the yearly value of seven dollars in this state” shall be allowed to vote in Connecticut. The importance of the change was clear. As the Black, Hartford activist S. M. Africanus observed, “Now the words, ‘white male citizen’ imply that there are male citizens who are not white.” And these non-White male citizens could no longer vote in the state. For this reason, Africanus argued that the Constitution of Connecticut, “degraded” Black men. With fellow Black activists Henry Nott of Hartford and Henry A. Thompson of Middletown, Africanus noted that for 150 years in Colonial Connecticut “under the Charter of a King,” Black freemen had the right to vote. But after 1818 in Connecticut, “the authority of the State” disenfranchised Black men. Black disenfranchisement, he wrote, “is a monster that multiplies itself upon us in each new form increasingly repulsive, obtruding our very path of enterprise, knowledge, Virtue and Religion.” [7]

What Africanus and others failed to highlight, however, was that by disenfranchising its free Black population—more than 1500 men in 1820—Connecticut followed a national trend. In 1790, only three states (South Carolina, Georgia, and Virginia) had excluded voters on the basis of race; by 1855, there were only five states that didn’t. Here, Connecticut was an outlier in New England: the five states that did not

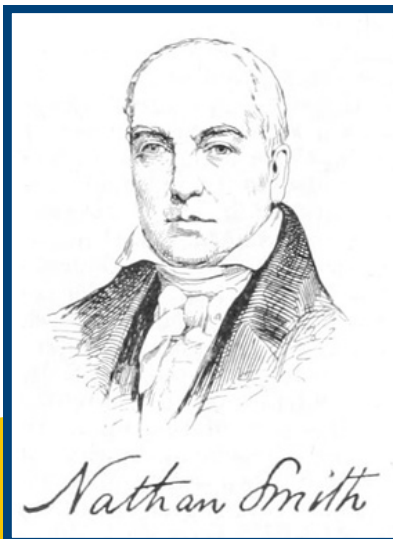
restrict Black suffrage in the 1850s were Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and Rhode Island. [8]

Racial exclusion was becoming salient in Connecticut largely because the state's population of free Blacks was growing—partly due to new arrivals, but also partly because enslaved Black men and women were being emancipated. As many northern states had, Connecticut moved to abolish slavery in the wake of the American Revolution—but only gradually and conditionally. A law passed in 1784 provided that children born into slavery after March 1, 1784, would become free when they reached age 25. (In other words, Connecticut allowed for no enslaved person to become free sooner than 1809, and for none alive at the time of the law's passage ever to become free. A decade later, the legislature defeated a proposal to abolish slavery immediately, and there were still people enslaved in Connecticut as late as 1848, after slavery had been fully abolished in all other northern states besides New Jersey.) In 1790, there had been 2,764 slaves in Connecticut and 2,808 non-white “free persons”; by 1820, there were only 97 slaves and 7,870 “free colored persons.” In the intervening decades, some enslaved people had been liberated under the terms of the 1784 law; others, like Venture Smith, had worked to purchase their freedom or otherwise been manumitted by their enslavers; and still others seized freedom by running away. [9]

Although less than 3% of the state's total population in the early nineteenth century, free African Americans were becoming more visible, and their potential claims on civil rights sparked White anxiety. The historian Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor has traced an increase in the usage of the n-word by White northerners as one,

hateful response to the increasing visibility of free Black individuals. Another was the increasingly disproportionate number of Black persons incarcerated in Newgate, the state prison in Granby. In 1828, “one out of thirty-four of the whole [Connecticut] population are blacks,” noted one source, “and one out of three of the convicts, are blacks.” Earlier, in 1820, the Black population of the prison stood at around one in four. [10]

Connecticut’s opposition to Black voting rights was settled with the help of Washington College supporters such as Ralph Ingersoll and Nathan Smith (1770-1835), a delegate to the 1818 convention who also served on the subcommittee that actually drafted the Constitution. Though a longtime Federalist, Smith was an Episcopalian, and five years later he would be one of the petitioners to the Connecticut General Assembly for the Washington College charter and served on the college’s board of trustees. Over the next two decades, opposition to Black education would become clear as well, with Ralph Ingersoll and the founders of Washington College playing prominent roles in the interrelated movements to *promote* education for Black missionaries to Africa and *obstruct* racial equality in the US. [11]



THE COLONIZATION MOVEMENT AND THE AFRICAN MISSION SCHOOL

Thomas Jefferson was not alone in seeing “expatriation” as the sole antidote to the poison of sectional conflict. As the nineteenth century progressed, there appeared to be almost nothing northerners and southerners could agree on, but the idea of colonization—sending Black people out of the United States, usually to Africa—was the rare issue for which political support “crossed party and sectional lines.” Colonizationists (the term used for leaders of the movement) paired with Black removal a belief that “the same blacks whom whites thought too degraded to ever form part of the American nation would civilize other peoples, thanks, ironically,” states the historian Sebastian Page, “to the American influences they had imbued.” While the idea of colonization existed prior to the formation of the American Colonization Society, the society’s formation in 1816 marks the institutional drive to see such ideals come to fruition in the United States. At this moment, the colonization movement thus proposed to chart a temperate middle way between pro-slavery and abolitionist extremes, which was an obvious attraction to Episcopal leaders, who saw political entanglements as a danger to the Church. (“Thousands of professors of religion have made shipwreck of their faith and a good conscience,” an Episcopal newspaper cautioned in 1831, “during the tempests of political agitation.”) Further, colonization represented a framework to which the Church’s missionary efforts were readily adaptable. [12]

Few movements outside of African colonization better captured the transformation of early American political culture away from a society arguably bolstered by the civic participation of “all men” to one based on ethnic and racial (and, of course, a continuing gendered) exclusion. The national political action to remove Black individuals outside of the US, however, often reflected local and state measures that enacted similarly repressive and exclusionary practices. In 1822, for example, in response to the plot to overthrow slavery in South Carolina planned by the free Black man Denmark Vesey (1767-1822), White leaders in the state mandated that free Black men older than fifteen secure a White guardian or else be sold into slavery. In addition, the Act of 1822 forbade free Black South Carolinians to return to the state should they leave. [13]

While southern states may have put in place some of the starkest prohibitions on free Black communities, they did not monopolize them. Ohio, Missouri, and Iowa incorporated clauses in their constitutional drafts that would have banned free Blacks from their states. (These clauses were dropped for a variety of reasons to achieve statehood: 1803 for Ohio, 1821 for Missouri, and 1846 for Iowa.) Florida and Oregon did exclude free Black people in their territory upon statehood in 1845 and 1859 while White voters in Indiana and Illinois overwhelmingly voted in favor of laws that banned free Blacks from their states in the 1850s. Slavery may have divided northern and southern White communities, but White supremacy was something on which many White people in the United States at the time could agree. [14]


A look at Connecticut from 1810 to 1840, shows a state and a White citizenry developing explicit policies to protect White supremacy in ways that supported an overall movement against free Black people in the nation. For example, in 1814 the state legislature changed the freeman statute, the law that defined who was entitled to full political rights, by inserting the word “white.” This effectively removed Black male voting rights in the state, four years before the new state constitution codified voting as a White male right. As noted before, this constitutional change was forged in part by men like Ralph Ingersoll and Nathan White, men who would help to found Washington College a few years later. [15]

Ingersoll and Thomas Church Brownell played a central role in another anti-Black effort in the state. The two helped found the Connecticut Colonization Society in 1827, one of the many state-based colonization organizations created to support the national efforts of the American Colonization Society. Ingersoll and Brownell were two of the managers who offered the *Address to the Public by the Managers of the Colonization Society of Connecticut* in 1828. In this statement, Brownell (at the time the President of Washington College and Bishop of Connecticut), Ingersoll (a US Congressman from Connecticut and Washington College supporter) and seven additional White state leaders offered that slavery in the United States directly opposed the “principles on which we rest our freedom.” With these words the managers highlighted their opposition to human slavery in the nation. But like most colonizationists, the managers soon made clear that their use of the words “we” and “our” did not summon a universal community of mankind, but rather a community limited to White men. And White men, they argued, had a responsibility to

gradually end American slavery and remove all free Black individuals from the nation. In an argument highlighting a belief in a divinely ordered or biological racism, the managers stated, “In every part of the United States there is a broad and impassable line of demarcation between every man who has one drop of African blood in his veins and every other class in the community.” [16]


The managers of the Connecticut Colonization Society doubled down on their racist theories. “The African in this country belongs by birth to the very lowest station in society; and from that station he can never rise, be his talents, his enterprise, his virtues, what they may. In consequence of this it is that they are what they are.” This rigid racial order upheld by the Connecticut managers thus justified the sole purpose of their national organization. “The simple object of the American Colonization Society,” they announced, “is to plant Colonies of free blacks from the United States upon the coast of Africa.” [17]

The call to remove free Black people from the US, led by the likes of Brownell and Ingersoll in Connecticut, responded to several important efforts in the 1810s and 1820s. The colonization movement extended the reach of the same White supremacist ideas that had led to the disenfranchisement of Black men in the state. Through colonization, the White leaders also addressed the transformative crusade launched by evangelical ministers in the US and Great Britain, a crusade mentioned in our second report on religion. In this critical national trend of the early nineteenth century, worshippers learned that by perfecting themselves and their society they would be closer to God and the Kingdom of Heaven. One result was a sudden rise in



the number of Black and White voices calling for an *immediate* abolition of slavery. Conservative clergymen, such as the High Church Episcopalians in charge of Washington College, pushed back against such teachings. “The rewards” of Christianity, said Bishop Brownell in 1829, “are not to be obtained by our own righteousness.” For men like Brownell, righteousness achieved by combatting slavery was dangerous, because immediate abolition, as the Connecticut colonizationists warned, would be followed by a violent Black retaliation for enslavement. It was thanks to their view that Black people were inherently degraded that these White leaders viewed immediate abolition with fear and horror. [18]

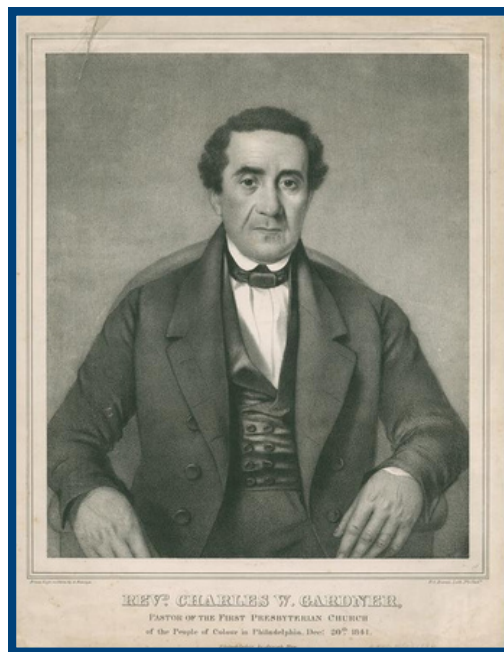
Indeed, the Connecticut Colonization Society argued that emancipation in the United States could only take place gradually as the result of state-led measures. Therefore, the society’s managers applauded a recent resolution approved by the Connecticut legislature: “*Resolved*, That the existence of slavery in the United States is a great national evil, and that the People and the States ought to participate in the burdens and duties of removing it by all just and prudent measures, which may be adopted with a due regard to their internal peace and mutual harmony; and that a system of colonization, under the patronage of the General Government, may reasonably be deemed conducive to so desirable an object.” Here, “prudent” indicated a gradual form of emancipation. “A due regard to internal peace and mutual harmony” referred, first and foremost, to the White imagined specter of Black retribution if emancipation took place quickly and, second, to the increasing discord among the northern and southern states over slavery. Lastly, “removing it” referenced a slow removal of slavery and Black persons through “a system of colonization.” [19]



In the first few years of its existence, the Connecticut Colonization Society collected monies from people throughout the state. In 1828, citizens in Hartford, Farmington, East Windsor, Manchester, Hebron, Vernon, Salisbury, Derby, Watertown, Franklin, Somers, Bolton, and Milford all contributed to the cause. In the following year, the organization held fundraising concerts in Hartford on July 4th and some contributions now secured individuals a lifetime membership in the society. Sarah A. Ely(1762-1842) in Lebanon, CT, for example, gave \$20 “by which she” was “constituted a member for life.” In 1832, Rev. Nathaniel Sheldon Wheaton (1792-1862), then the second President of Washington College, gave \$37.59 to the Connecticut Colonization Society from his parishioners at Christ Church in Hartford. This was the fifth highest amount amassed from among the seventy-six churches that donated on July 4, 1831. [20]

In the 1830s, as Ingersoll and Brownell continued as managers of the colonization society, the Reverend Wilbur Fisk (1792-1839), president of Wesleyan University, joined them. By this point, as the managers of the Connecticut Colonization Society stated, their cause stood as a target both for proslavery advocates, who hated it for its stance against slavery, and antislavery advocates who hated it because they believed that colonization would actually bolster slavery by removing free Black people and thus placing enslaved Blacks in an even more precarious position. This latter stance was forcefully stated by Charles Gardner (1782-1863), a Black Presbyterian pastor and activist in Philadelphia. “William Lloyd Garrison has been branded as the individual who turned people of color against the colonization scheme,” said Gardner, “But I can tell you, sir, that when William Lloyd

Garrison was a schoolboy, the people of color in different parts of the country were holding extensive meetings, which always agreed in declaring that they regarded the scheme as visionary [i.e., unrealistic] in itself, and calculated only to rivet the chains of those who remain in slavery.” He added, “The immediate emancipation of the colored people is morally right, and politically safe.” [21]



CHARLES GARDNER

Gardner was not alone in providing a Black voice against colonization. “Why should we leave this land, so dearly bought by the blood, groans and tears of our fathers?” asked Amos Beman(1812-1872), who, in 1830, had been denied admission to Wesleyan when the university president bowed to pressure from southern members on the Board of Trustees. “Truly this is our home: here let us live, and here let us die.” Beman would later add that Liberia, the colony in Africa created by the American Colonization Society, “is not the bright

paradise which the panders and hirelings of an insane [anti-Black] prejudice, would have the ignorant believe.” The widespread anti-colonization stance of Black individuals—that American soil represented their home and their nation—planted the seed of birthright citizenship later realized in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. [22]


Though there existed some Black support in favor of colonization in the early United States and slightly more support for Black-led emigration movements (such as the one proposing an African American move to Haiti), the available data on the movement of Black people from the United States to Africa and other places in the early nineteenth century leads to the conclusion of Gardner and Beman that an overwhelming number of Black individuals and families preferred to remain in the United States. Indeed, as the population of Black Americans (free and enslaved) grew by more than 3,500,000 between 1776 and 1861, only slightly more than 20,000 combined moved to sites in Africa, Haiti, and the West Indies. And the fact that most Black Americans did not wish to leave the United States proved a major hurdle for Bishop Brownell’s next effort that brought together the Episcopal Church, Washington College, and the Connecticut Colonization Society. [23]

In 1830, when the managers of the Connecticut Colonization Society announced that colonization would soon “ become instrumental in removing entirely this blot upon our national character,” it was clear that White leaders such as Brownell struggled mightily to distinguish slavery, a system of coerced, racialized labor in the United States, from the Black men and women who were forced to work in the slave system. Nevertheless, the managers of the society

explained that removing slavery and removing Black persons were one and the same for their project. “It is only to carry away each year, from among *the* [Black] *fathers and mothers*, a number greater than the annual accession to *this portion* of the whole slave population, and the approach becomes nearer and nearer to the desired result.” Remove just a touch more Black persons than the number who are born in the US each year, and the “desired result”—the end of slavery through the elimination of all Black persons from the US—would be realized. The managers of the society celebrated that “the nation has abundant resources within itself to accomplish this in half a century.” [24]


In 1830, at the same time the managers spoke confidently of their cause, they noted with excitement a recent effort launched by Bishop Brownell in support of it. “Forming an important part of the great plan of...[colonization is] the establishment, under the auspices of the Protestant Episcopal Church, of an African Mission School in Hartford. The institution expects to send three of its pupils this autumn to Africa; two as missionaries, and one as a catechist and school-master.” This was no doubt stirring news for the colonizationists as the school, which had been operating for two years, was about to fulfill its stated purpose of instructing “suitable persons of African extraction, with reference to their becoming Missionaries, Catechists and Schoolmasters in Africa.” [25]

The African Mission School (AMS) was founded in Hartford in 1828 by men with deep ties to Washington College. Bishop Brownell served as the president of the AMS and Wheaton as its first rector.



Professor George W. Doane (1799-1859) was an AMS director and executive committee member, while Professor Hector Humphreys (1797-1857) served on the executive committee. Washington College donors and trustees William H. Imlay (1781-1858), Charles Sigourney (1778-1854), and Samuel Tudor (1769-1862) were members of the AMS executive committee, too. These men believed that “educated and pious men of color must be sent to Africa, or that continent long continue covered by ignorance and superstition and crime.” They believed as well that Hartford was in many ways an ideal site to teach Black men about colonization and missionary work: “It is healthful—the means of living are cheap; and the vicinity of Washington College offers many facilities for education, which can be found only in the neighborhood of a college.” Indeed, the leaders of the AMS drew its teaching staff from Washington College students. The first AMS teacher was Henry Spencer from Derby, Connecticut, who in 1829 was a member of the sophomore class at the college; in 1830, Isaac Smith, also of Derby and a recent Washington College graduate, was hired at a yearly salary of forty dollars. [26]


The colonizationist leaders of the AMS saw the school as a means of spreading Christianity and repaying a debt incurred for racialized slavery. They justified the school’s focus on Black students by espousing a climate theory of race and racism. “The constitution of the white man cannot long endure in that country [Africa],” said the members of the AMS executive committee. The committee, already set on Black removal, cloaked the racial cruelty behind their mission in words of benevolence. During the celebrations in honor of the formation of the AMS, the Rev. Jonathan Wainwright (1792-1854) explained that White complicity in slavery demanded Black removal and the Christian religion as a form of reparations. “If we can send



them [Black people] back [to Africa] with the Gospel of Christ, and thus give them, as a reward for their extorted labours and long continued sufferings, the pearl of great price [i.e., Christianity], our [White] guilt will be lessened and our [White] condemnation will be taken away.” To be clear, the founders and leaders of the AMS believed that sending Black American individuals to Africa as adherents of the Episcopal Church was an adequate form of compensation for the violence and oppression of the slave trade and enslavement. And they believed that, as a result, their own complicity in the slave system would be eradicated. [27]

In 1828, the Rev. Wainwright, though now at work in New York City, had deep ties to Hartford. In 1818, he had been ordained as a priest in the city’s Christ Church, where he also would serve as a rector. A vice-president of the AMS, Wainwright, whose family had been involved in the global tobacco business and thus deeply tied to slavery in the Atlantic World, was a major financial backer of the school as well. He contributed at least \$700 according to an accounting list for the AMS found in the Episcopal Archives in Meriden, Connecticut. Bishop Brownell helped the school financially, too, although he made a profit from it. Brownell’s loan of \$500 on June 10, 1828, to the school earned him \$26.56 by the time it was paid back in August 1829. [28]


Gaylord Jackson and William Johnson(?-1833), initially “tutored as pupils on trial” and then admitted, were the first students to receive instruction at the African Mission School, which officially opened its doors on October 6, 1828. In 1829, Edward Jones(1808-1865) started at the school in February, Gustavus Caesar(?-1834) in May, James Henry Franklin in August, and Henry Williams in October.



These six men appear to be the ones tallied in most reports about the school. However one important document states that “during the winter [1828-1829], a lad living in the vicinity of the school, was permitted to attend, and still continues, as a day scholar,--he is without expense to the Society.” This unnamed young, Black man from Hartford is not mentioned in further reports. While half of the men would graduate from the school and receive recommendations to the Episcopal Church’s missionary organization, the other half would not. The AMS executive committee dismissed Jackson in 1829 (he was “granted an indefinite leave”), Franklin in March 1830 (he was found “wanting in the qualities” needed for work in Africa), and Williams in October 1830 (the “consequence of the small progress in his studies”). [29]

Two Black female students also “received the benefit of the school.” One was married to AMS student Gustavus Caesar and the other was Elizabeth Mars(1807-1864), who would marry AMS student William Johnson in 1830. These two women were under the AMS auspices as well as those of the Hartford Female African Society, which was founded in 1829 by Lydia Sigourney(1791-1865) (whose husband Charles was a major contributor to Washington College and the AMS). [30]

The AMS required students to be at least eighteen years old, able to “read the English language with facility” as well as to write in it, and be prepared to demonstrate “some knowledge of the rules of common arithmetic.” In addition, a prospective student had to have in hand testimonials in favor of his (male students were the targets of the AMS) religious and intellectual character. Once admitted, students




received free room and board in exchange for “constant” church attendance at the daily morning and evening prayer sessions. “It is expected,” read the AMS by-laws on student behavior, “that their conduct will not only be orderly and decent on all occasions, but in an eminent degree exemplary, as become Christian disciples.” The students had to follow the instruction of their Teacher, a man who was to “reside and lodge in the same house with the pupils” but had “the privilege of taking his meals elsewhere.” The members of the executive committee had the right to dismiss any student due to a “want of piety or of intellectual endowments.” Given that the rules and regulations were written by the very men who were running Washington College, one last requirement stands out. The young Black men had to “labour at some mechanical or agricultural employment, at least two hours in the day, as the Committee shall direct.” Indeed, one of the early complaints from White leaders about using the Washington College neighborhood was that it could not furnish “the pupils that regular manual labor...which it is desirable should constitute a part of their instructions, with a view to their greater usefulness in the situation to which they are ultimately destined.” [31]

There is no doubt that the members of the executive committee for the AMS upheld biases that equated Black male bodies with “manual labor” rather than intellectual or moral achievement. Their presumptions that missionary and teaching work in Africa would mandate a physical prowess were troublesome too. (“Learned and accomplished theologians are not needed for this work,” read one AMS report that touted “agricultural and mechanical labor” as important “in aiding the native [African] tribes in their approaches to civilization, and in gaining a desirable influence over them.”)

The AMS leadership thus upheld ideas about physical effort that reveal different expectations for Black students at the AMS and White students being trained for the ministry at Washington College. When the AMS leaders (who were, of course, also Washington College leaders) complained about the lack of adequate nearby land, they likewise communicated distinct understandings of race, labor, and intellectual ability. A lack of farming fields was not a problem for Washington College, because the White students were not expected to master forms of physical labor. [32]


AMS leaders claimed that they received much interest from Black students younger than the requisite age of eighteen. (This was not surprising as the first school for Black children was not started until 1840 in Hartford.) But among the adult Black community in Hartford and beyond, the AMS leadership loudly complained that they could not find enough “candidates for admission” from “our numerous African population” who were sufficiently “pious and intelligent.” Indeed, the AMS sent a recruiter to the South where he met no success. American enslavers were by and large uninterested in freeing a Black enslaved man to serve as an African missionary and, on the whole, most of the enslaved did not receive religious or academic instruction. To expect young, formerly enslaved Black men to have high levels of literacy, numeracy, and religiosity without ever having received such training was absurd—and the leaders who created and upheld these standards were clearly blinded by forms of Whiteness and economic privilege. In fact, at the same time that the AMS leaders complained about the inadequacy of their potential students, they decided to make some changes to the school curriculum. But instead of developing courses to



assist young Black men to meet the AMS academic and religious standards, the White leaders in August 1830 decided to double the manual labor requirement at the school to four hours a day. [33]

On Dec. 28, 1829, the African Education Society of the United States was created in Washington, D.C. The goal of this school was in part to prepare “persons of color, destined to Africa” for training at the AMS in Hartford. However, frustrations over the AMS standards soon boiled over: “coloured persons on the stage of education, which they require for admission,” said the staff at the education society, “can rarely be found.” Of course, there was another more important barrier to the recruitment of Black students for the AMS that had nothing to do with academic or religious preparation. Young Black men, said leaders of the African Education Society, were “prejudiced against emigration to Africa.” Lewis Woodson (1806-1878), a Black activist in Pittsburgh would agree. In a letter to the *Colored American*, Woodson wrote: “Colonization, from its very origin, has been a thorn in our sides. We have always regarded it with inexpressible horror, as a system of proscription and exile, gotten up and continued by appeals to the most narrow, selfish, and wicked feelings of the human heart. And if deprived of its missionary and benevolent features, and held up in its true colors, would be loathed and discarded by every follower of the meek and lowly Savior.” [34]

In the fall of 1830, the AMS was in session in Hartford. But the success of its first and only graduating class was now in ruins. Leaders of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Episcopal Church in New York City had judged the three students who were set to work in Africa as unprepared (two rejected as academically unfit and one rejected for refusing to support colonization). AMS graduate



Edward Jones, whom Brownell awarded an honorary Master of Arts degree from Washington College a few months earlier, was the candidate dismissed from the Episcopal Church's missionary efforts for his refusal to support colonization. Bishop Brownell soon expressed of his disappointment in Jones, "of whom he had high hopes." But while all three graduates were rejected by the Episcopal Church, Jones, Caesar, and Johnson, as well as Mrs. Caesar and Elizabeth Mars Johnson, would move to Africa under the support and guidance of other Christian denominations. [35]

The last AMS student was Henry Williams. Williams had recently signed a new pledge required of students that promised fidelity and honor to teachers and "to devote my services to the benefit of the African Colony of Liberia." Upon his one-year anniversary at the school in 1830, however, Williams was examined by the executive committee led by Nathaniel S. Wheaton. The committee decided "that in consequence of the small progress in his studies during the past year & the little prospect held out that Henry Williams will be enabled to prepare himself for the situation of schoolmaster in Liberia,-- the connexion between said Williams be, & it is hereby dissolved." The AMS leaders gave Williams a "certificate of good character" and five dollars for expenses. At the same time the committee agreed to notify Francis Demarest, who had been providing room and board to AMS students and teachers: "the Committee will no longer be responsible for the rent of the part of the house occupied by the Mission School." What appears to be the final recorded act of the executive committee of the AMS states: "John Moody having applied for admission into the school, & having been examined by the Rev. Mr. Wheaton, was found to be unfit for admission," wrote AMS secretary and Washington College professor John Smyth Rogers. [36]

WHITE SUPREMACY IN EDUCATION

The most important consequences of the AMS and the broader colonization movement in Connecticut were not the actual relocation of Black people beyond the borders of the US. Instead, these movements, which were led by members of the Washington College community, advanced the strength and power of anti-Black sentiment in the state. Such a thriving White supremacy in Connecticut soon undermined all forms of Black education in the state, including courses of instruction intended as a precursor for Black removal to Africa.

In 1831, at the First Annual Convention of the People of Color held in Philadelphia, Black men and their White allies met. On the first day, June 6, delegates approved of a plan to place a college for Black men in New Haven, Connecticut (an effort begun in part by Peter Williams of St. Philip's in New York). The college would teach a "Manual Labor System" intended to expose students to a "scientific education" that would prove "useful" in "Mechanical or Agricultural" professions. This Black-led effort thus differed significantly from the White-led colonizationist education of the AMS, focused as it did on Black graduates' self-empowerment rather than on their missionary pursuits in Africa. The delegates selected New Haven because, among other things, "Its laws are salutary and protecting to all, without regard to complexion." They failed to realize how quickly such legal protections can fail in the face of White supremacy. [37]

In August 1831, the enslaved man Nat Turner(1800-1831) attempted to overthrow slavery in Virginia through a Black-led military revolution. Though the Turner effort failed, Whites in the

North and South voiced deep alarm. When the plans for a New Haven college for Black men went public in September, they met a fierce wave of White opposition. Racist cries rang out: “A negro college by the side of Yale College!” and “The City of Elms disgraced for ever!” Almost immediately, the New Haven mayor and the city council issued a series of resolutions. One held that ideas in support of immediate emancipation and “as auxiliary thereto, the contemporaneous founding of Colleges for educating Colored People” both represented “unwarrantable and dangerous interference with the internal concerns of other States.” Another resolution read that “it [a Black college] should never be imposed on any community without their consent.” Ralph Ingersoll was one of four members of the White New Haven elite who proved instrumental in defeating the plan. A White supporter of the Black college, Samuel Jocelyn, surveyed the opposition: “We have touched the very *quick* of oppression simply by calling the institution a *College*. Our enemies all over the country start at the name. Why? Because it carries the assurance of equality with it.” [38]

The same year, a white Quaker woman named Prudence Crandall (1803-1890) opened a boarding school for girls in Canterbury, Connecticut. Inspired in part by her reading of *The Liberator* newspaper, she decided in 1832 to admit a Black student. Amid the backlash to the first integrated school in American history, Crandall decided to close her school down and reopen it as one exclusively for Black children—to which White backlash was, if anything, even fiercer. The state legislature criminalized the school, and Crandall was jailed. By 1834, trials and appeals had reached Connecticut’s highest court, where Judge David Daggett—who was one of Ingersoll’s allies in defeating the proposal for a Black school

in New Haven—decided against Crandall in a ruling that would later inform the U.S. Supreme Court’s notorious *Dred Scott* decision: he upheld the new state law that Crandall had violated by maintaining that Black people could not be citizens. [39]

The closing of the African Mission School thus brought Washington College’s leadership in line with currents throughout the state of Connecticut. Not even for the demeaning and exclusionary purposes of colonization schemes would Black people gain access to education in Hartford. But it is important for the Trinity College community not to forget how Gustavus Caesar, Mrs. Caesar, James Henry Franklin, Gaylord Jackson, Elizabeth Mars Johnson, William Johnson, Edward Jones, Henry Williams, and the unnamed African American Hartford “lad” had gained entry into Washington College’s Episcopal world of Black education and physical labor. They did so in exchange for a promise to devote their “services to the benefit of the African Colony of Liberia.” To restate this crucial fact: through the AMS, Washington College and the Episcopal Church offered education to young Black adults only in exchange for a pledge that they would leave the United States.[40]

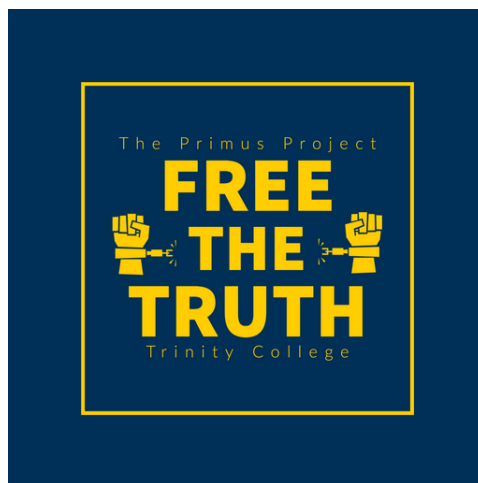
Of course, the diminishment and exclusion the Black students faced in Hartford could very well have served as encouragement to leave. White student Robert Tomes attended Washington College in the early 1830s and then left to study in Scotland. He noted that a Black student in Edinburgh had full and equal access to education despite being confronted with a constant racism (including that from Tomes himself). At Washington College, Tomes had witnessed a

different scene. He noted that Edward Jones seemed to appear only at night, coming out “from the back door and stairs of a house of one of the professors near by” and that he “never made his appearance in any of the classes.” Of course, that Jones did not attend college classes was by design. The AMS was not Washington College and the honorary degree Jones received in 1830 was not the result of his attendance in classrooms alongside White Washington College students.[41]

As all three parts of this Bicentennial research report have shown, the early Trinity College belonged to a broader context characterized by White supremacy. But it also stood apart, as an institution funded by the Hartford mercantile class’s profits from the slave economy; uniquely shaped by High-Church Episcopalians’ toleration of slavery; and founded and led by men deeply invested in conceptions of the United States and liberal education as White-only domains. These were not inevitable features of a new college in the early nineteenth century. At the same time that Washington College was taking shape, abolitionist ideals were spreading and experiments in racial equality were being tried. During just the six years of Nathaniel Wheaton’s presidency, numerous men and women of varied Christian religious affiliations, White and Black, came together to form the American Anti-Slavery Society; Great Britain emancipated hundreds of thousands of people enslaved across its empire; and Oberlin College formally admitted African American students.

Although Southern enslavers held inordinate political power in the US government; although the whole American economy drew strength from the forced labor of the enslaved, entangling many individuals and

and institutions in slavery's web; there were abundant models for resisting this potent system of oppression. Trinity College followed no such models. On the contrary, its founders leveraged the proceeds of that system; placated its defenders and beneficiaries; and fashioned an institution that was notably hospitable to slaveholding interests, even as New England was becoming the nation's abolitionist stronghold. America in the 1820s and 1830s was becoming unmistakably polarized, and that polarization would intensify as the nation approached civil war in 1861. Compared to political polarization in our own time, the fault lines of the antebellum period may seem neatly geographical: the North on one side, and the South on the other. But as the history of this particular northern college shows, the division was not so tidy. To any observer at the time of the increasing tensions over slavery and race, it would have been entirely obvious on which side of this pitched divide Trinity College stood.



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- [5] See Chad Lower, "The Political Ideology of Connecticut's Standing Order," doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, 2013.
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IMAGE CREDITS

Front Cover: [Trinity College Old Campus: Trinity College Chapel, Seabury Hall, Interior view](#), The executive committee of The African Mission School convened in this chapel on occasion.

Page 8: [Ralph Isaacs Ingersoll](#)

Page 11: [Senator Nathan Smith](#)

Page 18: [Revd. Charles W. Gardner](#)