

Reexamining the *Examiner*:
Louisville's Regional, Unitarian, Antislavery Newspaper
1847-1850

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From June 1847 to September 1850, five white men – John C. Vaughan, Fortunatus Cosby, Jr., Thomas H. Shreve, John Healy Heywood, and Noble Butler – edited the antislavery newspaper the *Examiner* in Louisville, Kentucky. The five editors sought a regional audience of white people, slaveholders and non-slaveholders, to extend antislavery opinion in Kentucky and to argue for a gradual emancipation plank in the 1849 revision of the state constitution. In contrast, from December 1847 to April 1851, former slave Frederick Douglass edited the antislavery newspaper the *North Star* in Rochester, New York. Douglass sought a national readership of blacks and whites to “demand redress for the evils of slavery” and to aim “an impartial blow at slavery and prejudice.”¹ While the *North Star* still shines in antebellum history, and rightly so, the *Examiner* has fallen into obscurity as the losing voice in a failed regional effort to include gradual emancipation in the revised state constitution. This essay retrieves the *Examiner* from the historical dustbin as a source of information about Louisville's growing ties to the North and the Union from 1847-1850 and as an indicator of the antislavery strategies employed by civic-minded white men in a border state. Northern abolitionists followed the *Examiner's* development closely, hoping that Kentucky might be the first southern state to end slavery. The same possibility evoked the scrutiny and potential wrath of proslavery southern perpetualists, who fought vehemently for slavery to last in perpetuity. While recognizing the tugs, and sometimes thugs, of these two extremes, the five editors encouraged Kentuckians to think for themselves about what was best for their region. In contrast to a righteous anger that demanded redress and aimed impartial blows, the editors sought to establish a safe and calm forum for reasonable discussion by white citizens of the upper south.

The Louisville *Examiner* began in the early fall of 1846 when lawyer and editor John C. Vaughan of Cincinnati found himself at the helm of a floundering antislavery newspaper, the *True American*, founded by Cassius M. Clay of Lexington, Kentucky in 1845. Clay's belligerent antislavery style offended nearly all his readers – the Bluegrass area slaveholders, whom he threatened with slave insurrection; his Northern abolitionist readers, who cancelled their subscriptions when Clay attempted to restore his southern credibility by enlisting in the Mexican War; and antislavery activists in Kentucky who feared that his angry rhetoric forestalled discussion and invited a proslavery backlash. With the *True American* failing from the censure of northern and southern readers and from the Clay family's discontinued financial support, Vaughan and his fellow Cincinnati antislavery activist Salmon P. Chase sought another venue for an antislavery newspaper in Kentucky. Vaughan, a dedicated Unitarian, looked downriver to Louisville for emancipationist allies. The men Vaughan recruited as newspaper co-editors all worshipped at the First Unitarian Church and shared his commitment to gradual emancipation, universal education, and Whig politics.²

In 1847, Louisville's First Unitarian Church was seventeen years old, the only Unitarian church in Kentucky, and one of six Unitarian churches in slaveholding territory. The church formed in Louisville in 1830 as the outreach of the new American Unitarian Association, which had a mission to bring practical and rational religion to the American West. Financed at its beginning by wealthy Bostonians and by Louisvillians who had moved from New England or who had attended eastern colleges, the church remained a connecting point between Louisville and a New England value system that promoted education and economic progress. The congregation included Frederick A. Kaye, the current mayor of Louisville, and the founders of the University of Louisville schools of medicine and law, as well as the Kentucky Historical

Society. Church members operated turnpike companies, invested in railroads, built steamboats, ran ironworks, and worked as doctors, lawyers, judges, and teachers. The church's ministers and several of its members worked as developers and overseers of the public schools. The church's demographics mirrored the education levels and social status of New England Unitarians, called Boston Brahmins, except that in Louisville, many of the brahmins owned slaves.³

In reaching out to Louisville Unitarians, Vaughan reactivated a prior Cincinnati-Louisville publishing connection. From 1835-1841 three Unitarian ministers – Ephraim Peabody and William Henry Channing of Cincinnati, and James Freeman Clarke of Louisville – rotated the editorship of the *Western Messenger*, a monthly Unitarian magazine dedicated to religion and literature, whose publishing base moved from Cincinnati to Louisville and back to Cincinnati. All three young ministers eventually grew discontented with their western employment and returned to the East to pursue their careers, but Vaughan and two other laymen who wrote for the *Western Messenger* made their homes in Cincinnati and Louisville. In 1846, these three laymen – John C. Vaughan, Thomas H. Shreve, and Fortunatus Cosby, Jr. - agreed to renew their publishing ties to produce the Louisville antislavery newspaper. Reverend John Healy Heywood, the minister of the First Unitarian Church, and educator Noble Butler also committed to the project.

The five editors shared more than a Unitarian faith commitment. All five had crossed regional boundaries to spend parts of their lives in the U.S. South, North, and what was then the West. All five belonged to the white political, economic, educational, and publishing elite. The editors were not one-issue people, but committed to regional development as well as antislavery. They perceived slavery as the nexus of a set of social problems that included incivility,

educational deprivation, slow population growth among whites, harm to the white working class, inefficient agriculture, and loss of manufacturing investment in the south.

John Champion Vaughan (1806-1892), the lead editor, was raised on a Camden, South Carolina plantation by a father who had emigrated from Virginia and a mother who was British and a Quaker. Vaughan attended a Moravian School in Manchester, England, before returning to South Carolina for a law degree from the Citadel at Charleston. Vaughan and his mother emancipated the family's slaves after his father's death in 1820. In 1837 Vaughan moved to Cincinnati, Ohio to become a law partner of Unitarian Christopher Cranch. An active member of Cincinnati's Unitarian congregation, Vaughan wrote for the predecessor, Unitarian magazine the *Western Messenger* in its final year, 1841, contributing articles on Thomas Carlyle and British Chartism that pulled the magazine in a political direction.⁴ In 1845 he became co-editor of Clay's *True American*, writing economic analyses of the detrimental effects of slavery on the prosperity of white people. In 1847 when he moved to Louisville to become the chief editor of the *Examiner*, Vaughan became the only *Examiner* editor to pursue antislavery activism as a full-time career. Historian Stanley Harrold identifies Vaughan as one of six "southern emancipators" whom northern abolitionists feted for having the courage and influence to confront slavery on southern soil.⁵ After initiating the *Examiner* in Louisville, Vaughan worked at the paper for only one year, leaving it in the hands of the four Louisville editors who worked as volunteers.

Vaughan's primary *Western Messenger* contact in Louisville at the start-up of the antislavery newspaper was Thomas Hopkins Shreve (1808-1853). Shreve was born to a Quaker family in Alexandria Virginia, thus giving him claim to be a Virginian, but moved with his widowed father to New Jersey from 1815-1829. New Jersey was then a slaveholding state in the process of gradual emancipation. After moving once more with his family to Cincinnati, Ohio,

Shreve, a writer and poet, went into publishing. In 1835, Shreve was essential to the former Unitarian magazine in Cincinnati as its initial publisher. Three years later Shreve moved to Louisville at the invitation of his brother-in-law Joshua Bowles to work as a merchant. Bowles was a co-founder and in 1847 the president of the Bank of Louisville. Shreve resigned from his brother-in-law's mercantile interests to return to journalism when George D. Prentice hired him as associate editor of the Louisville *Journal*. Shreve's name did not appear on the *Examiner's* masthead to prevent conflicts of interest with the editorial positions of the *Journal*. Shreve explained his "off the record" involvement with the *Examiner* in a letter to his cousin, Samuel M. Janney, a Quaker minister and antislavery activist in Loudon County, Virginia. Because there was no Society of Friends in Louisville, Shreve explained to his cousin that he worshipped on Sunday evenings at the First Unitarian Church, where he found the minister, John Healy Heywood, to be "a pure-hearted Christian, who in all essentials is a Friend."⁶

The third *Western Messenger* alumnus who committed to the *Examiner* antislavery effort, poet Fortunatus Cosby, Jr. (1801-1871), was the only native of Louisville among the five editors and one of the founders of the Unitarian Church in 1830. Cosby was the son of circuit judge Fortunatus Cosby, one of Louisville's earliest pioneers and most respected citizens. His mother, Mary Ann Fontaine Cosby, was the oldest daughter of the seventeen children of Aaron Fontaine from Virginia, a prominent west end land owner. Through his mother's family, Cosby was related to prominent Louisville citizens (and often millionaires) named Fontaine, Prather, Jacob, Pope, Bullock, Vernon, Floyd, Grimes, and Sanders. Cosby attended Yale University in Connecticut before graduating from Transylvania College in Lexington, Kentucky when the school was under the Unitarian leadership of President Horace Holley of Boston. Trained as a

lawyer, Cosby preferred work as a private schoolmaster and as superintendent of the public schools.

Unitarian minister John Healy Heywood (1818-1902) did not write for the *Western Messenger* but succeeded its editor James Freeman Clarke as minister at the First Unitarian Church in 1840. While a literary and religious magazine suited Clarke's scholarly style of ministry, an antislavery newspaper was more in keeping with Heywood's priorities as a minister who focused on the welfare of the community as well as the church. Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, Heywood lived with his parents in Hackensack, New Jersey from 1824-1829, exposing him to slave culture and gradual emancipation while still a child. A graduate of Harvard's undergraduate program and its divinity school, Heywood's ministry stressed social activism; his spiritual and moral leadership articulated the values that motivated his fellow editors. His ministry particularly created a church climate where like-minded men and women worked together on civic projects as supportive friends. Beginning in 1842, Heywood worked as an overseer of the public schools, and in 1847 was the secretary of a committee that developed a plan for providing relief to the city's poor. In 1845, Heywood was the only minister among the one hundred and seventy Unitarian ministers who signed a protest against slavery who ministered to a congregation that included slaveholders. He was unique among Unitarian ministers in his emphatic public protest against slavery while living on slave soil.

Heywood and the fifth *Examiner* editor, Noble Butler (1811-1882), began working for the *Examiner* as "counsel and pens," becoming named, volunteer co-editors in May 1848 after Vaughan left the paper. Noble Butler, the son of Quaker parents from Pennsylvania and Maryland, immigrated as a child with his parents to Hanover, Indiana, where he graduated from Hanover College in 1836. In 1839 he moved to Louisville to teach at Jefferson College, a

precursor of the University of Louisville, with his brother-in-law John Harney, who was the college president. Harney later changed careers and in 1847 was the owner and editor of the *Louisville Democrat*. In joining the Unitarian Church, Butler became close friends with Heywood, who encouraged him to pursue a Master's degree in divinity at Harvard in 1845. Butler decided to remain a teacher and textbook publisher rather than to become a minister and was conducting a private school for young ladies while volunteering for the *Examiner* from 1847-1850.

The *Examiner* editors did not remark in the newspaper on their shared Unitarian/Quaker faith heritages, although the publication showed strong signs of Unitarian influence. Their choice of *Examiner* as its name echoed the name of the weekly Boston, Unitarian publication the *Christian Examiner*. In 1835, the magazine editors proposed *Western Examiner* as the original name for the *Western Messenger*, only to discover a Baptist periodical in St. Louis had taken that name. After returning to the choice of the name *Examiner* for the 1847 newspaper, the editors designed a masthead that featured this scriptural watchword: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Well versed Unitarians readers recognized this passage from I Thessalonians as the scriptural text for William Ellery Channing's 1819 Baltimore sermon that founded the Unitarian denomination in the United States. The injunction to "prove all things" underscored the Unitarian emphasis on reasoned inquiry into all religious and political matters to arrive at a faithful understanding of the good. The *Examiner* repeated the editorial policy of the earlier *Western Messenger* in providing a forum to compare and contrast many views rather than to pronounce a party line.

Shortly after Vaughan approached Louisville emancipationists about publishing a paper, the Kentucky legislature voted to revise the state constitution. The 1792 constitution had

become inadequate in many ways and did not permit amendment. Even the constitutional revision process had serious drawbacks. It provided for two statewide votes a year apart to approve a state constitutional convention, followed the next year by the election of delegates to the convention. The constitution contained no provision for voter ratification of the elected constitutional convention's work. Thus, a vote in favor of a new constitutional convention entrusted its delegates with reinventing the government from scratch with no assurance that their work would come before the voters for approval. Since 1792, Kentuckians had twice voted against opening up the constitutional revision process. The legislature voted to take the first poll of the people in August of 1847 to convene a state constitutional convention in 1849. Opinions differed as to how a new constitution might affect the future of slavery in Kentucky. Few people thought an immediate end to slavery possible, but many sought a gradual emancipation plank in the new constitution. Others thought that proslavery men would rewrite the constitution to entrench slavery even more firmly in Kentucky law. The coincidence of the legislature's decision to open the constitutional revision process and the start-up of the *Examiner* gave it a *raison d'être*, an urgency, and an eventual spotlight in the national debate over slavery. Since 1832, no slaveholding state had considered the future of slavery on a statewide basis.

In the six-month period before the first edition of the *Examiner* on June 19, 1847, the Louisville editors and their supporters, particularly British-born stonemason Edgar Needham, strategized carefully to design a newspaper to build a broad base of voter support for gradual emancipation. Their planning focused on several issues: tone, money, region, safety, respect, discussion, alliance-building, neutrality in regard to political parties, and education to associate slavery with poverty, ignorance, and violence that affected whites and blacks alike.

In accepting Vaughan's offer to take over the *True American's* subscription list, the editors insisted on a complete change in the paper's name and tone. Clay's "True American" was a contentious title; it implied that Clay's views and attitude were correct and that all other views were un-American. In contrast, "The Examiner" invited citizens to examine a shared problem so that people of good will could arrive together at a solution. The Louisville editors avoided belligerence, posturing, and defense of manly honor as editorial policies, instead embracing rationality, civility, and the development of Christian character.

The financial status of the project also worried the new editors, and they worked with Vaughan and his associate Salmon P. Chase in Cincinnati to fundraise among Northern abolitionists to launch the *Examiner* on a secure financial basis. Vaughan made a fundraising trip to New York and Boston, meeting with abolitionists Charles Sumner, Lewis Tappan, and Gerrit Smith, who contributed to the paper and extended contacts for him. Historian Harold Tallant highlights the openness with which the Louisville emancipationists fundraised among northern abolitionists and collaborated with other Kentucky abolitionists such as John G. Fee. Though novel, the paper's cooperation with northern supporters stemmed directly from the editors' strong, Unitarian connections to Cincinnati, Boston, and New York. Charles Sumner was Unitarian, as were his Whig contacts in Boston. Lewis Tappan spent seven years as a Unitarian before returning to his Presbyterian roots. Boston support for the Louisville paper in 1847 echoed Boston support for the founding of Louisville's Unitarian Church in 1830, just as the publication of the *Examiner* in 1847 echoed the publication of the *Western Messenger* from 1835-1841.

Northern support for the *Examiner* was one of three antislavery publishing initiatives the abolitionists sponsored in 1847. Beginning in December 1847, Frederick Douglass published the

North Star from Rochester, New York, contributing an African American voice to the struggle. Along with extensive work in helping to establish the *Examiner* in Louisville, Salmon P. Chase, who later became Abraham Lincoln's secretary of the treasury, helped to move James G. Birney's *Herald Philanthropist* from Cincinnati to Washington D.C. as the *National Era*. Gamaliel Bailey, the editor of the *National Era*, worked to influence the nation's legislators and to end slavery in the nation's capitol. Vaughan and the four Louisville volunteers sought legislative change in Kentucky.

While accepting northern aid, the Louisville emancipationists had no intention of repeating northern abolitionist demands to end slavery now or to castigate slaveholders as evil people. The editors determined to respect slaveholders who had inherited slaves and who worked to extricate Kentucky from a slave-based economy and culture. The *Examiner* encouraged the participation of these slaveholders in their antislavery discussion, recognizing that slaveholders' agreement and votes were essential to gradual emancipation legislation. Likewise, the editors respected white fear of antislavery rhetoric that might stir up slave rebellion. As a safety measure, the editors made no attempt to address African Americans or to include them as participants in the antislavery discussion. The *Examiner* went to press as a paper written by whites, for whites, and in the interest of whites as well as blacks. In the attempt to build the broadest possible white antislavery coalition, the editors set aside their Whig politics to keep the paper politically neutral in regard to party. They also published antislavery views with which they did not agree, particularly the views of Kentucky colonization society members who supported gradual emancipation accompanied by deporting all blacks to Liberia. The editors gathered facts and figures about the detrimental effect of slavery on Kentucky's economic progress, public education, and social mores, believing that voters presented with the truth about

slavery would vote against it. Their chief goals were to make antislavery dialogue respectable in Kentucky, to educate as many people as possible about slavery's harmful effects, and to build a coalition to vote for a gradual emancipation from slavery in the revised constitution. As the *Examiner* editors saw it, white people and the entire Kentucky social and economic system stood in need of emancipation, not just the slaves.

With finances, goals, strategies, name, and even a defining scripture in place, the Louisvillians published the premiere issue on June 17, 1847. John Vaughan moved to Louisville to work as chief editor. The former publisher of the *True American*, Paul Seymour, also moved to Louisville to handle the paper's finances and to oversee the mechanics of its publication. The editors arranged for the actual printing of the *Examiner* on the new steam press owned by Walter Haldeman at the *Louisville Courier*. This gave the *Examiner* a close tie with the three major Louisville papers – it was printed at the *Courier*, Shreve worked with Prentice at the *Journal*, and Butler was brother-in-law to Harney at the *Democrat*.

The publishing team turned out a four-page newspaper once a week on Saturdays. The first page carried articles about antislavery, mostly written by southerners, with many arguments extended as serials over several weeks. The second page featured editorials commenting on the publication of the paper and the editors' views on slavery. The fourth page, edited by Cosby, featured short stories, poetry, and science and education articles reprinted from other publications to broaden the *Examiner's* appeal. The *Examiner* printed regular features on "Religious Intelligence," the "Prices of Commodities," and "Steamboat Schedules" to make the paper useful to a broad audience, and followed the nineteenth century practice of reprinting news articles from many other sources to fill space on pages one to three.

The first issue of the *Examiner* established clearly the paper's regional identity and mission. In the opening editorial, Vaughan deplored the violence and rude anger of northern abolitionist speech that "has left no allowance for the education and feelings of a slaveholding community." Likewise, he condemned the ultraism of the proslavery perpetualists and charged that they provoked the abolitionists: "They [the perpetualists] have done as much to extend abolitionism by their excess, as has been done by any instrumentality." Vaughan also argued that the proslavery activists had made public opinion more polarized and arrested the freedom of the press. Vaughan maintained that discussion was a great good, especially when proceeding from the assumption that "slavery is a domestic institution." By "domestic" Vaughan meant "state." He once more underscored that the *Examiner* intended to conduct a Kentucky discussion of emancipation. Kentuckians alone decided what was good for Kentucky, not northern or southern extremists.⁷

The *Examiner's* speech, however, did not extend to slaves. The paper in no way addressed the black man. "That being is a demon, and fit for the blackest infamy, who would seek, in any manner, to arm man against master. No more fiend-like conduct can be imagined" Vaughan wrote, acknowledging the southern fear that antislavery rhetoric might incite slaves to harmful rebellion against whites.⁸ Vaughan then presented in abbreviated form the three arguments that formed the basis of the *Examiner's* critique of slavery. While slavery endured, no Kentuckian, adult or child, could be truly blessed (the moral argument); labor itself must be degraded (the free labor argument); and the State must lag behind sister states in prosperity and power (the economic development argument).⁹ Of the three arguments, the *Examiner* and the Louisville emancipation movement developed the free labor and economic development arguments at length while deemphasizing the moral argument. The editors understood the

wrongs and horrors that white slaveholders perpetrated against enslaved African Americans, but judged that arguments that detailed the economic and moral damage that slavery caused white people were more acceptable and effective protest strategies in a slaveholding state.

The front page of the first edition, intended as an open forum for antislavery discussion, led off with the first of a three part series on colonization by Louisville judge William F. Bullock. Bullock's remarks were a reprint of an address he delivered to the Kentucky Colonization Society. In Judge Bullock's opinion, blacks were oppressed in Kentucky and could not flourish there. Only returning to Africa would allow the God given nature of blacks to expand. Bullock acknowledged that blacks could progress as well as any other class under genial circumstances, but that "The public mind is radically opposed to the social equality of the two races. It is the principle which so stirs the depths of society, and renders it impossible that equal rights shall ever be extended to the colored race." Judge Bullock did not challenge white racism, but instead proposed removing the African Americans who bore its brunt. His address ended with the stirring prediction that "The time will come when the proud vessel of our Republic, freighted with the last cargo of American slavery, shall spread her canvass for the shores of Liberia."¹⁰

The fourth page of the first edition, edited by Cosby, indicated the high quality of the writers whose work he included. An article by Horace Greely counseled young men about developing character, and a report by Charles Darwin described corals from his journey on the *Beagle*. Subsequent editions included works by John James Audubon, Lydia Marie Childs, Washington Irving, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Alfred Lord Tennyson, among others.

In the third edition of the paper on July , the editors celebrated their welcome from the local press. The paper received censure from only one Kentucky publication, a Baptist newspaper that complained that chief editor John Vaughan was an outsider to the state. Press approval was important in an era when many border region newspapers condoned proslavery violence. In 1835, threats of violence prompted abolitionist James G. Birney to move from Kentucky to publish his antislavery *Herald* in Cincinnati. Even in Cincinnati, a mob threw Birney's press into the river and burned the homes of free blacks in two days of anti-abolitionist rioting in 1836. In 1837, Presbyterian minister Elijah Lovejoy and his supporters took up arms against a mob of thirty to forty men at Alton, Illinois who attempted to throw his press into the river for the fourth time. In the ensuing gun battle, one proslavery attacker was killed, as was Lovejoy when he attempted to stop the mob from setting fire to the roof of the building. In 1845, in Lexington, Kentucky, a committee of sixty citizens sanctioned by a judge's ruling dismantled Clay's *True American* press and shipped it to Cincinnati. Clay suffered no violence, but rioters vented racist anger by attacking the town's free blacks. Attacks against free blacks underscored the racist motivations of proslavery vigilantes, who violently demonstrated their opposition to the antislavery press and the free black population that would result if the antislavery newspapers were successful.

Two likely reasons that the *Examiner* escaped attack were its respect for slaveholders and its publication by well connected members of Louisville's educated elite. The moderate tone that deflected proslavery violence did not render the *Examiner* unimportant. On the contrary, the extent of its writers' connections and the community's acceptance of the paper were more challenging to the slaveholding status quo than any rants from northern abolitionists. The *Examiner* was local, and its honest inquiry into the best choices for the future of the state won it

an audience. The absence of violence against the paper is a measure of the willingness of the region to consider antislavery as an option for the state's future.

In August of 1847, a 67.7 % majority of Kentuckians voted to begin the process toward a constitutional convention in 1849, giving the paper a two-year window to teach the desirability of gradual emancipation in the state. The strategy that the editors most often employed to oppose slavery was to argue by facts and figures that slavery was bad for the state's and the South's economic development. A cautionary editorial entitled "This is our tale. Who will list to it?" warned that in the last decade the South's sales of slave-produced staple crops showed a marked decline in value, with the combined prices of cotton, tobacco, rice, and indigo falling from \$85.2 million in 1835 to \$62.7 million in 1845. The editorial argued that the refusal to diversify from a slave-based economy threatened the South's economic future. "With exhaustless resources, this exhausting drain [slavery] is rapidly sucking away our life, and will, unless removed, leave us hopelessly poor and weak."¹¹ The editors believed that among the slave states, Kentucky was in an especially weak position because her climate did not support the production of slave-produced staples. As a slave state, Kentucky was caught in a bind. Tennessee to the South benefited more from slavery, while Ohio and Indiana to the north eclipsed Kentucky in prosperity as free states with increasing populations and a wealth of manufactures. "In 1800, Kentucky had a population of 220,000. Ohio 45,000 and Indiana 4,800. In 1840, Kentucky had only 780,000, whilst Ohio had 1,520,000, and Indiana 680,000. Kentucky tolerates slavery and those States do not."¹² *Examiner* editors concluded that slavery created an exodus from Kentucky of nonslaveholding whites, and that white men of ambition spurned Kentucky's slave soil, preferring states to the north that were prosperous and free.

The *Examiner* repeatedly argued that slavery degraded the labor, inhibited the careers, and damaged the character of young, white men. All thinking southern men know that “slavery makes labor a badge of dishonor.” Even negroes “mock ‘poor trash’ working whites.” In an emotional, first person account of the harm slavery does to whites, Vaughan reported that of twelve poor, white boys who were his childhood friends in South Carolina, only one remained alive and well. “If labor had been respected, probably every one of them would have learned a trade, and been good citizens. But slavery made that a badge of dishonor, and stamped them with a social degradation, and they fell.”¹³ “When we strip men, especially the young men of our land, of honor and character, we leave them without hope – without energy, to sink down into the tide of corruption; and become the prey of groveling passions, and sordid vice.”¹⁴

Among the editors, Vaughan and Noble Butler especially emphasized the connections they saw between slavery and white lawlessness, violence, and vice. In an article entitled “The Late John Jenkins, Esq.,” Noble Butler spoke against dueling in the slave states in reporting the death of a Hanover classmate in Vicksburg, Mississippi. His former classmate Jenkins first became a lawyer and then a newspaper editor of the *Vicksburg Sentinel*. Butler reported that Jenkins was “killed in a street fight.” “All over the States where slavery rules, Human Life is lightly esteemed, and sacrificed without scruple and without loss of character, to the passion, the interest, or the whim of the moment. Professional men, reputable farmers and merchants, fathers of families in the free States, do not take each other’s lives in the streets, or resort to the laws of honorable murder, for insults, real or imaginary.” Butler’s expressed fear that “a man’s life in Kentucky is at the mercy of any desperado of reputable connexions, who may chose [sic] to take it, for a jury of noble-hearted Kentuckians would never think of sending a gentleman to the gallows or the penitentiary.” Butler's words came true five years later in 1853 when wealthy

slaveholder Matthew Ward shot and killed his brother W.H. Butler at point blank range in a classroom. A Hardin County jury did not convict Ward of the murder.¹⁵

Four of the editors – Vaughan, Cosby, Heywood, and Butler – worked hard to advance public education in Cincinnati and Louisville and criticized the slave states as proffering a dearth of education that resulted in pauperism and crime. The *Examiner* reported frequently on the Louisville public school system, which offered eighteen primary schools in 1849, three grammar schools (through eighth grade) for boys, and two grammar schools for girls, but no high schools. The educators spoke of poor school attendance, lack of parental support, the dilapidated condition of school buildings, low teacher salaries, and the absence of public high schools. Reports did not take into account the absence of public education for free or enslaved black children.¹⁶ The editors recognized an intimate connection between antislavery and education and worked hard for both causes. In their view, slavery accompanied educational backwardness. In promoting universal education, the men helped to build a society where slavery could not flourish.

While the editors' chief strategy was to emphasize the detrimental effects of slavery, they also employed arguments that challenged slavery's political and religious status. A series of articles anticipated the arguments that later informed Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglass's 1856 debates on the antislavery intent of the Founders. A six-part series reprinted the arguments of the Reverend David Rice against including slavery in the 1792 Kentucky Constitution, an effort that failed by a twenty-six to sixteen vote. The editors refuted arguments that the Bible sanctioned slavery by publishing articles that detailed how Biblical (called Mosaic) slavery differed from contemporary U.S. slavery. The Reverend James Madison Pendelton, a Baptist minister from Bowling Green, Kentucky, who wrote for the *Examiner* under the

pseudonym “A Southern Kentuckian,” claimed that “The two systems are so dissimilar that it defies the ingenuity of man to identify them.”¹⁷ Pendleton noted that Mosaic slavery did not make money, nor was there a Biblical slave trade. Instead, people became enslaved as captives of war and never became commodities that were bought and sold. An article signed C.E.S. pointed out that both masters and slaves in the Old Testament shared Semitic backgrounds. Biblical slavery did not depend on color or caste, and the text instructed masters to remember that they had been bondsmen in Egypt and to treat their captive slaves with compassion. C.E.S. worried that racial slavery introduced an alarming new capacity for evil into the world. The writer implied that slavery created or exacerbated racism, rather than the other way round.¹⁸

Examiner articles ran the gamut from detailed Biblical exegesis to the wide forum of reprinted congressional debates. As antislavery opponents of the Mexican War, the editors chose to reprint the challenge that first term Illinois representative Abraham Lincoln issued to President James K. Polk. Lincoln introduced resolutions that called on the president to inform the Congress “whether the spot on which first blood was shed in the beginning of the war was U.S. territory.”¹⁹ The editors also reprinted a congressional speech made by Massachusetts first term representative John G. Palfrey, a Whig and a Unitarian who had been Heywood’s Bible professor at Harvard. Palfrey pointed out that three hundred thousand slaveholders, by possessing the bulk of property in the slave states and exercising a monopoly on education, formed a powerful oligarchy that dominated national elected office and protected slave interests even though nonslaveholding Americans outnumbered slaveholders by fourteen and a half million to three hundred thousand, a ratio of nearly 21 to 1. Palfrey documented the benefit the South gained in representation by the Constitution’s three-fifths clause, and called slavery the great political question of the century.²⁰

The *Examiner's* forum also extended to antislavery activists in Virginia counties along the Ohio River that later seceded from Virginia and became West Virginia in 1863. In 1848, the editors reprinted Hugh Ruffner's five-part series that argued that counties rather than states should decide the future of slavery within their borders.²¹ This argument, a logical extension of states rights thinking to the rights of counties, did not appeal to northern abolitionists but had supporters in Kentucky. The *Examiner* welcomed the introduction of a new antislavery newspaper in Moundsville, Virginia in April 1848, *The Crisis*, and noted the intent of its editor Anson Berkshire to speak to and for Virginians just as the *Examiner* did for Kentucky: “We wish Kindred Spirits abroad, to keep hands off; just let Virginia attend to her misgivings, in her own way and time – any change, either for weal or wo, [sic] must be attended to by Virginia and Virginia alone!”²²

Constrained by their pledge and strategy not to print anything that might incite slaves to rebellion, the weekly *Examiner* rarely referred to black experience, enslaved or free. No articles analyzed the sale of Kentucky slaves downriver, or expressed outrage at slave mistreatment, or mourned the break-up of slave families by inheritance or sale. Blatant opposition to slavery based on its cruelty to human beings did not figure on the *Examiner's* pages, but a steady, understated stream of articles demonstrated respect for African Americans and indicated the editors' intent to defuse white racism. A February 19, 1848 editorial noted the legal definition of a slave in many southern states as “a person held as property, by legalized force, against natural right.” Given that slaves as human beings possessed natural rights, an antislavery correspondent to the paper asked, “Shall not civil liberty be enjoyed by all the tribes of babbling earth?” A September 11, 1847, editorial described the good society as “a means of unfolding whatever moral or mental worth the Creator has bestowed on each, a glorious and progressive reality, and

not a curse to the many who toil for it, and a mad mockery of our common origin, and the Common Father of all in heaven.” The editors called repeatedly for legalizing slave marriage and educating enslaved people as measures that respected their humanity and paved the way to emancipation. The *Examiner* also praised the efforts of Louisville churches in teaching slaves to read, especially its African American churches. “There are seven colored churches here; they are fully attended; they have Sunday schools, prayer meetings, every accompaniment of holy places; and, what is more, as excellent discourses as we will often hear in the country in most parts of the South.” A free black minister, the Rev. Mr. Adams, received special notice as “a man of remarkable caution, wisdom, purity, and force of character. He has a wide influence over the blacks, and, while beloved by them, is as much respected by the whites, as any man in Louisville.”

The newspaper covered Heywood’s work on a committee to set up city social services for the poor, and noted that the social services extended to free blacks as well as whites. In a rare instance when the *Examiner* quoted a black man, one of the editors, probably Heywood, reported on a meeting of African Americans to hear the report of a black man commissioned by the African American community to travel to Liberia to report on conditions there. One attendee, a black man who had resided in Liberia for three years but returned to the United States, spoke out forcibly.

In Liberia, you may be a man. You obey laws which you have assisted in making. But here you can never be a man. You can never be anything more than a boy. You are called *boy* when you are as grey as a rat – and you *are* a boy. I never felt the full force of that term till since my return to this country. Now, whenever the term is applied to me, I feel our degradation. Here we are *boys* – we are not *men*.”

Rather than extolling the virtues of Liberia, this sympathetic report conveyed the blackman's dismay with white racism. But the white editor missed the irony of extending the dignity of speech to a black man only when the black man spoke of the indignity that whites routinely inflicted on blacks. Later in the newspaper's run, the editors voiced their opposition to colonization, urging Kentuckians to regard African Americans "not as a nuisance to be got rid of, but as an object of friendship and care." Sadly, in this editorial position, the whites continued to regard blacks as objects of white attention rather than as subjects of their own lives and coworkers in the antislavery movement. But given the constraints the editors faced in framing an antislavery argument in a slaveholding state, their writings revealed a steady regard for African American personhood.

The Examiner – Hardships of the Second Year

A constellation of conditions – a national election, the approaching constitutional convention vote, increased opposition from proslavery forces, a cholera epidemic, and personal tragedies made the second year of the *Examiner's* publication a much more difficult year for the editors.

In late April 1848, Ellen M.J. Cosby, the wife of Associate Editor Fortunatus Cosby, Jr., died, leaving him a young widower with seven children. Despite his personal loss, Cosby agreed to take on the role of Chief Editor in May of 1848 when Vaughan resigned from the paper to move, with Salmon P. Chase's encouragement, into the editorship of a newspaper in Cleveland and into active involvement with national politics. The political choices that Vaughan and the four Louisville editors made in 1848 demonstrated the strains that the slavery controversy placed

on the two-party system. Vaughan became an organizer and speaker as antislavery factions splintered from the existing Whig and Democratic parties to form in succession the Liberty, the Free Soil, and the Republican Party. In June 1848, Vaughan was one of fifteen Whig delegates who protested the nomination of slaveholder Zachary Taylor as the Whig presidential candidate at the Whig convention in Philadelphia. Vaughan then attended a Liberty/Free Soil party convention in Columbus, Ohio with Chase, followed by the Buffalo, New York convention that established the Free Soil party and nominated Martin van Buren as the Free Soil candidate in 1848. Salmon P. Chase delivered a “Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men” speech at this convention that encapsulated themes sounded by his associate Vaughan in the *Louisville Examiner*. In July and August of 1848, Vaughan traveled through the Western Reserve of Ohio for six weeks with Chase to stump for Van Buren.

With Vaughan’s departure in quest of a national, antislavery party, Heywood and Butler emerged from their behind-the-scenes roles as “counsel and pens” to become named co-editors of the *Examiner*. Shreve remained actively involved as a silent editor because of his work at the *Louisville Journal*. In August of 1848, when Kentuckians voted for the second time in favor of an 1849 constitutional convention, the future of slavery in Kentucky became open to change. As a result, the *Examiner* editors became much more politically active locally in encouraging antislavery organization. In contrast to Vaughan’s approach, which was to become more party specific in relation to antislavery, the *Examiner* remained strictly apolitical in regard to party politics, wanting to alienate no potential antislavery voters in the then dominant Whig and Democrat two-party system. This earned the paper criticism from northern abolitionists who expected an antislavery newspaper to endorse Van Buren, for whom Vaughan campaigned. Though their strategies diverged, Vaughan’s national and the Louisville editors’ regional

political positions indicated that proslavery vs. antislavery had begun to supercede Whig vs Democratic as the most pressing political divide of the late 1840s.

Cosby, Butler, and Shreve carried the paper through the summer of 1848, when Heywood took six weeks off to travel to Boston and Providence to be married. In the fall, a new prospectus in the October 7, 1848 edition propelled the paper in a more forceful direction. In an accompanying editorial, the editors reported that people continually asked them if the *Examiner* intended to advocate a plan for emancipation. The writers agreed that after a year of discussion about the wisdom of emancipation, and with the upcoming constitutional convention in view, the time had come to form a plan for emancipation to take before the voters. The editors assigned the responsibility to develop that plan to the friends of emancipation throughout the state. The editors took the lead in calling for local meetings and a statewide conference to develop a plan, but used their editorial influence only to comment on two requirements that a plan must meet.

First,

Such a plan must rest on the foundation that slavery is an evil and a wrong, an evil to the whites, a wrong to the blacks, and that its removal, therefore, is demanded alike by right and expediency, by principle and policy.

Although the editors had not belabored the moral wrong of slavery on the pages of the newspaper, this editorial clarified that opposition to slavery began from a moral principle. Their identification of slavery as an evil to the whites and a wrong to the blacks did not mean that slavery held worse earthly consequences for white people. It meant, rather, that whites were culpable for the sin of slavery and blacks were not. The editorial continued that, as a second condition, any feasible plan “must consult the welfare of the white and black population,” another reminder to the white community to treat blacks with fairness. In calling in the

prospectus for public meetings, the editors expressed their confidence that “when their fellow citizens have determined to rid themselves of slavery, they will find a way – a plan of emancipation, just, humane, and practicable, will be devised and agreed upon, and that sufficient courage and wisdom will be found in the beloved old Commonwealth to carry it out successfully.”

In the December 30, 1848 issue, the *Examiner* printed an article entitled “Slave Emancipation in Kentucky,” signed by eleven men, all of them either native born Kentuckians, slaveholders, or both, that reviewed the economic arguments against slaveholding and proposed a rudimentary plan of gradual emancipation. James Speed, one of the eleven signers, became the lead spokesperson for Louisville’s emancipation movement and campaigned for election to the constitutional convention. As the leader of the antislavery movement’s public outreach, he worked closely with the *Examiner*’s editors and became the sixth Unitarian closely aligned with the paper. Speed, the brother of Abraham Lincoln’s friend Joshua Speed, served from 1864-1866 as attorney general in the Lincoln and Andrew Johnson administrations. In turning his civic concern toward emancipation in 1848, Speed and the co-writers of “Slave Emancipation in Kentucky” reviewed the economic reasons for dismantling slavery, and then recommended this post nati plan: *All females born after a named day to be free at the age of twenty-one, and all the issue of such after born females to be free at their birth.* Depending on the date named to begin the twenty-one year waiting period for newly born black females to attain the age of freedom, this placed freedom for any blacks in Kentucky at least twenty one years into the future, allowing their owners ample time to recoup their investment in their slaves by selling them south. It offered no freedom at all to the current population of blacks, nor any freedom at all to black male children born in the next twenty-one years. A generation of black women would become free

while their male counterparts remained enslaved, providing black male slavery in Kentucky for as many as seventy or eighty more years. The article, printed later as a pamphlet, conceded that the current white/black population figures for Kentucky, given as 600,000 whites and 200,000 blacks, did not permit immediate emancipation because of the very heavy grievance to whites of such a large population of blacks. The emancipationists did not recommend the colonization of blacks to Liberia to reduce the ratio of blacks, but estimated that over fifty years, increased white immigration onto Kentucky's "free" soil and the sale of blacks to the south would result in a population of two million whites and two hundred thousand blacks. This would create no problem, since Indiana, Illinois, and Ohio could absorb some of Kentucky's free blacks, and a remaining population of one hundred thousand free blacks would meet the need for menial service, "such is the predilection among us for black servants." The pamphlet concluded by warning slaveholders that as the nation's antislavery opinion increased, this gradual emancipation compromise might be the best bargain they could make, as slaveholders obtained through it "a peaceable prolongation of the system for fifty years to come." The emancipation strategists were more concerned with making the best possible bargain to appease white slaveholders than any kind of bargain to relieve enslaved blacks. The emancipation compromise that these writers sought envisioned a future for blacks in Kentucky only as very small minority population of servants.

As a Unitarian minister, *Examiner* editor John Healy Heywood signed an 1845 Protest Against Slavery written by Unitarian clergy that began by recognizing the three millions of slaves as "our fellow-men and brethren." Surely Heywood and the other *Examiner* editors, who wrote with respect for the personhood of blacks, realized the racism and the stinginess that marred this antislavery proposal. The grip of slavery must have been deep and dire for

antislavery advocates to work so hard for changes that promised nothing in the way of immediate relief for blacks.

Despite the prospect of humanitarian gains long deferred, the possibility that an upper South state might detach itself from slavery propelled the *Examiner* editors into a flurry of activity. In January of 1849, they initiated a fundraising drive to circulate the newspaper and pamphlets more widely. In an appeal for funds sent to potential out-of-state donors, Shreve, Seymour, Cosby, Heywood, Noble Butler and his brother William argued that "This movement rises into a national importance and loses its local character as we regard it as the first great step towards the abolition of slavery in the United States." They saw Kentucky as a test case for a nonviolent resolution to slavery in a border state that might spread to Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, and Virginia. The Quaker editor Thomas Hopkins Shreve, whose name did not appear on the newspaper, led the list of signees on the fundraising letter, perhaps because as a Hopkins he was related to the wealthy Quaker Hopkins family of Baltimore, Maryland.

The February 1, 1849 issue of the *Examiner* contained the first report of meetings of the Louisville emancipationists at the Jefferson County Courthouse. This group convened almost weekly. Historian Harold Tallant numbered its membership at one hundred thirty-seven Louisville citizens, most of them members of Louisville's white governing and economic elite. This group appointed a nine-member Corresponding and Executive Committee on Emancipation. All but one of the nine had been an author of "Slave Emancipation in Kentucky." The Corresponding and Executive Committee produced two more pamphlets, an "Address to the People of the Kentucky" and "An Address to the Non-slaveholders of Kentucky" that repeated

Examiner arguments about the antislavery intent of the nation's founders, the false claim that the Bible approved slavery, and the detrimental effect of slavery on economic development and free labor. In February 1849, Henry Clay published a letter in favor of gradual emancipation in Kentucky when accompanied by a plan for colonization. Clay's position as Kentucky's foremost statesman gave a boost to the emancipation movement, especially because his conservative (and racist) approach mirrored the views of many constituents.

Meanwhile, Kentucky's proslavery forces made significant strides, officially organizing as the "Friends of the State Constitution." At the first meeting of this organization in Frankfort, also in February 1849, the Friends convinced the Kentucky House of Representative to pass the following resolution:

Resolved that we, the representatives of the people of Kentucky, are opposed to abolition or emancipation of slavery in any form or shape whatever, except as now provided for by the constitution and laws of the state.

The House vote of 93 to 0 in favor of the resolution distressed the *Examiner's* editors. The proslavery movement also succeeded that month in obtaining a repeal of the 1833 Kentucky law that prohibited importing slaves into Kentucky. The Nonimportation Law was the single achievement of the Kentucky emancipation movement in its nearly sixty years of Kentucky history. The *Examiner* editors rationalized that the regressive nature of the repeal might mobilize new opposition to slavery. Anti and pro slavery strategists were wary of the effect of their actions on their opponents, but the balance of power lay with the proslavery movement. Proslavery legislators pondered how repressive they could make a measure without provoking an

antislavery backlash. Antislavery strategists formulated proposals that were as conciliatory as possible to slaveholders' interests in the hope of gaining votes.

The *Examiner* developed a frosty relationship with the *Louisville Journal* in the spring of 1849, an interesting dynamic given that Shreve worked with George Prentice at the *Journal*. Prentice lobbied against the emancipationists' plan to run candidates for the constitutional convention, claiming that Kentucky was not ready to end slavery. Prentice recommended that antislavery supporters forego the attempt to elect their own delegates, voting instead for any candidate who pledged to draft a state constitution open to amendment.

In April 1849, twenty-eight emancipationists from Louisville attended a statewide meeting in Frankfort to develop a platform for emancipation candidates in the August 1849 election. Nearly one hundred and fifty men from twenty-four counties attended the meeting, most of them slaveholders. Even the *Frankfort Commonwealth*, a proslavery newspaper, marveled at the prestige of this gathering of citizens: "We have never seen, on any occasion, here or elsewhere, a more intelligent and respectable body of men." Twenty-one ministers attended the gathering, among them Heywood, the only Unitarian. The men deliberated for two days, but the meeting exposed a glaring weakness in emancipationist strategy: the attendees agreed that slavery retarded Kentucky's development, but they could not agree on how to dismantle slavery. Colonization appeared indispensable to some and impractical to others. Most men shared the colonizationist's view that whites and blacks could not coexist in American society unless whites enslaved blacks. In 1849, few people imagined, let alone supported, the vision of an integrated society of blacks and whites as free and equal. The absence of an agreed upon plan for the relocation of blacks stymied the planning process. The assembly could not agree on a matter as basic as including gradual emancipation in the new constitution, or designing a constitution open

to an amendment on slavery by a future legislature. As a result, the meeting adjourned with an ambiguous platform that supported a system of "gradual prospective emancipation" of slaves "in or under" the new constitution. The qualms of emancipation's best supporters about living in an integrated society did not bode well for the acceptance of emancipation by the white electorate. Historian Harold Tallant writes: "Ironically, the state's antislavery forces, with their inability to agree among themselves about which plan of emancipation was most practical, probably contributed to the popular perception that emancipation was impossible."²³

During the summer of 1849, antislavery candidates for the convention remained neutral in regard to political party, but proslavery delegates styled themselves as "fusion" candidates opposed to slavery and sought the support of both Whigs and Democrats. Statewide debates between proslavery and antislavery candidates for the conventions sometimes turned violent. Cassius Clay returned from the Mexican War and re-entered antislavery politics. In June 1849, in Madison County, an assailant stabbed him in the abdomen during a debate, but Clay retaliated by stabbing his attacker to death. In July, in Paducah, a proslavery candidate shot and killed his emancipationist rival.²⁴

In the heat of that summer, cholera came to Kentucky. James Speed continued to campaign as a convention candidate, even as his two brothers-in-law, James D. Breckinridge and Austin Peay, died in May and June and his widowed sisters required his assistance. Heywood buried Breckinridge and Peay before falling ill himself. In late July, still recovering from sickness, he left for six weeks of rest in Massachusetts, accompanied by his six-months pregnant wife. Once again, Butler, Shreve, and Seymour took responsibility for the paper.

Heywood was out-of-state when the proslavery forces prevailed by a landslide in the August election. By Harold Tallant's review of the election returns, the emancipationists tallied nearly fifteen thousand votes and elected two emancipationist candidates to the convention.²⁵ A violent election-day episode involving the publisher Paul Seymour added to the dismay at the *Examiner* office. After two years of publishing the paper without incident, Seymour was assaulted while observing the polls when he bent over to collect papers that fell from his hat. He attempted to run away, but his attackers pursued him. Usually, Seymour never carried a gun, but a friend at his boarding house had given him a gun that morning because of threats to the publisher's life. As Seymour ran, he turned to shoot an assailant. Both fell to the ground. Others attackers pounced on Seymour, beating him senseless. In the ensuing melee, A. J. Ballard saved Seymour's life by firing at a man who was beating him. Another man also fired a pistol and in the confusion a thirteen-year-old boy was shot. Fortunately, all the injured recovered, but the incident represented a significant setback for the paper and its cause. The editors assured their readers that they "entirely opposed ... the carrying of arms by private citizens, and they would have attempted to dissuade Mr. Seymour from doing so if they had had any knowledge of the matter."²⁶ The editors absorbed the triple blow of a resounding defeat, an outbreak of violence, and the embarrassment of Seymour's involvement in a street clash.

Still, the editorial voice of The *Examiner* held fast to the good and reassured its readers of eventual victory. "Not a defeat but a delay" headlined their report on the election loss. "No Emancipationist ought to be discouraged by the result of the late elections." They pointed out that only a few years ago slavery was a forbidden subject in Kentucky, barely spoken about. Now dependable men had taken on the emancipation cause "now, henceforth, and forever."

Kentucky had looked the beast of slavery in the face; it was only a matter of time before it would slink away.²⁷

In analyzing the result of the election, the editors argued that party politics contributed to the loss after both the Democratic and the Whig parties came out as proslavery. Kentucky at the time practiced verbal voting, which intimidated many voters and had the potential to turn an election into a rout, as was clear in the first ward where Seymour voted. The editors also claimed that the proslavery forces had spent thousands of dollars to buy votes, hire bullies, and buy liquor. The *Examiner* speculated that an election without corruption, intimidation, and by secret ballot might have had a different outcome.²⁸

The constitutional convention met for ten weeks from October through December 1849, with the *Examiner* continuing to cover its deliberations. The proslavery delegation developed a new constitution that protected slavery and white privilege more emphatically than its 1799 predecessor. The 1849 constitution added an amendment to the Kentucky Bill of Rights that proclaimed “The right of property is before and higher than any constitutional sanction; and the right of the owner of a slave to such slave, and its increase, is the same, and as inviolable as the right of the owner, of any property whatever.” The purpose of this declaration was to render any future post nati emancipation proposal prohibitively expensive. The new constitution prohibited free blacks from entering Kentucky; required legislative approval for any blacks emancipated by their owners, with the requirement that the newly freed blacks leave the state; permitted importation of slaves into Kentucky; retained the practice of vote by voice; and permitted no amendment of the constitution for the next eight years. Gradual emancipation supporters and abolitionists around the nation took note of the setback to emancipation hopes in Kentucky. Abraham Lincoln, on his way home from his 1847-1849 term in the U.S. House of

Representatives, spent two weeks near Frankfort while the constitutional convention met in Kentucky. In 1855 he wrote of the national significance of Kentucky's constitutional decisions: "There is no peaceful extinction of slavery in prospect for us. The signal failure of Henry Clay, and other good and great men, in 1849, to effect anything in favor of gradual emancipation in Kentucky, together with a thousand other signs, extinguishes that hope utterly."

As the convention members chiseled slavery more firmly into Kentucky law, Heywood, Shreve, and Butler continued to turn out a weekly *Examiner* through December 8, 1849, then replaced the weekly newspaper with a monthly publication, the *Louisville Examiner*, a 24-page magazine folio published from January through September 1850. Because the editors no longer needed to court emancipation votes in producing the monthly *Louisville Examiner*, they developed a more radical edge to their antislavery rhetoric and expressed their outrage at the mistreatment of slaves. The magazine *Examiner* contained articles on the success of the slave rebellion in Haiti, the separation of slave mothers and children by sale, and the sale of young women into prostitution in New Orleans, some of them nearly white. Such articles moved the *Examiner* into incendiary topics that in other cities provoked proslavery vigilantes to break up presses and shoot editors. The editors continued their antislavery campaign despite increasing personal hardships. Heywood's wife died in childbirth in October of 1849 as the constitutional convention met; the infant died at age eleven months in September 1850 as the magazine folded. In 1850 Shreve began to struggle with the tuberculosis that claimed his life in 1853. By September of 1850, with the Compromise of 1850 pending in the U.S. House of Representatives, and the new Kentucky constitution in place as of June, the editors ceased publication for lack of subscribers.

In their parting editorial, the editors spoke of their regret in giving up the publication. “Our convictions of the evils and wrongs of slavery deepen and strengthen daily. A wrong to the black man, a curse to the white man, its breath blights, its touch palsies, its life is death.” They raised a moral concern: “How can the standard of morality be high in a society which has in its midst an institution which puts morality at defiance – an institution which is, in itself, the very essence of injustice and wrong? And they expressed their ongoing confidence in the antislavery cause: “Notwithstanding the present inaction and many disheartening circumstances, we still hold fast to the persuasion that the cause must eventually triumph.”

Reexamining the *Examiner* – Conclusions

From 1847-1850, five white, Unitarian/Quaker antislavery editors attempted to convince Kentucky voters and legislators to support gradual emancipation. They succeeded in increasing antislavery dialogue in Kentucky, but failed to make legislative change. Do we thus dismiss the *Examiner* as a losing, regional, and insignificant antislavery publishing effort?

No!

The depth of community acceptance for these educated men from liberal religious backgrounds indicated that Louisville not only tolerated but responded to appeals for higher education, rational discussion, and concern for human rights. The seventeen year presence of a thriving Unitarian Church provided an educational forum and a rallying point for an a growing circle of civic leaders.

In regard to the effectiveness of the editors’ antislavery publishing, it is important to note that no antislavery newspaper – not Douglass’s *North Star*, nor William Lloyd Garrison’s

Liberator, nor Gamaliel Bailey's *National Era* – succeeded in ending slavery in any state in the Union. Liberation for enslaved African Americans occurred in the seceding states only when Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863. Emancipation for slaves in the four Union slaveholding states (Kentucky, Maryland, Delaware, and Missouri) and the northern states still in the process of gradual emancipation (New York, New Jersey) did not occur until the passage of the thirteenth amendment in 1865.

The measure of any antislavery newspaper's significance cannot be its success in effecting emancipation, but the role the newspaper played in informing the opinions and characters of the men and women who played decisive roles in the pre-Civil War and Civil War eras. By this measure, the regional character of the *Examiner* was not its limitation, but its strength. The pages of the *Examiner* demonstrated that the five editors and their colleagues in the Kentucky emancipation movement formed a regional, Kentucky identity that did not conform to the perpetual slaveholding philosophy of the lower South. Furthermore, these leaders consciously worked toward a change in cultural ethos that championed public education, respected African-American personhood, and eschewed a rush-to-violence as the solution to personal and civil disputes. The editors' efforts did not bear fruit in 1849, but in 1861, when Kentucky leaders with a firm sense of Kentucky's independent identity chose not to secede from the Union but to pursue a neutral course in the Civil War. James Speed, who led the publicity effort for the 1849 gradual emancipation movement, was a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1861 and instrumental in the vote to keep the State neutral. Later, when the Confederate Army violated Kentucky's neutrality, the State declared for the Union. Kentucky's refusal to join the Confederacy relieved the fears of President Lincoln, who recognized the strategic importance of keeping the Ohio River within Union territory. "I think to lose Kentucky

is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland. These all against us, and the job on our hands is too large for us.”²⁹

In 1861, the Virginia counties along the Ohio in western Virginia, whose antislavery, pro-union opinions the *Examiner* supported, seceded from Virginia to join the Union as the free state of West Virginia in 1863. During the Civil War, and due in part to the efforts of antislavery leaders in Kentucky and West Virginia, the Ohio River did not mark the boundary between the North and South, but bound the states on both its northern and southern banks to the Union.

Many historians regard the Mexican War, waged from 1846-1848, as a training ground for politicians and soldiers such as Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis and Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, whose careers matured during the Civil War. The same dynamic held true in Kentucky for the veterans of the *Examiner* publishing effort. The Quaker Thomas Shreve succumbed to tuberculosis in 1853 and was buried by his friend John Heywood, but the surviving editors – Vaughan, Heywood, Butler, and Cosby – and the publicity leader Speed, remained politically active as founders of the Republican Party in the late 1850s. The widower John Healy Heywood became James Speed’s brother-in-law in 1853 when he married Margaret Cochran, sister of Jane Cochran Speed. Speed became Lincoln’s second attorney general in 1864, and Heywood served during the Civil War as the co-leader of the U.S. Sanitary Commission in Louisville. Heywood and Butler also kept up their efforts to oppose slavery by creating a nonviolent and educated community incompatible with slavery. The two friends attempted to contain the community’s anger when a Hardin County jury failed to convict Butler’s brother’s murderer in 1854, and in 1855-56 the two men published the *South West Journal of Schools*. As president of the Louisville school board, Heywood founded Male and Female High Schools in 1856. Fortunatus Cosby, Jr. worked for the U.S. Treasury in

Washington, D.C. in the 1850s; Lincoln appointed him Consul to Geneva in 1861. The *Examiner's* only professional activist and editor, John Vaughan, remained in the newspaper business. In 1856 he co-founded the *Chicago Tribune* with Joseph Medill. In 1858 he followed the antislavery controversy to Bloody Kansas, where he published and edited the *Leavenworth Times*. In 1861, Vaughan served with the Kansas Frontier Guard who protected the White House after the April 12 firing on Fort Sumter. Vaughan's unit slept in the East Room until the arrival of regiments from Massachusetts and New York increased security in the nation's capitol. Vaughan addressed Lincoln on behalf of the Frontier Guard: "It is the response of every man here, and I am instructed by them to say, so far as they are concerned, No compromise with, rebels."³⁰

Vaughan's defiance of deep south rebels dated back to his editorship at the Louisville *Examiner*. In 1847, in the midst of southern rumblings about secession, an editorial reassured each reader: "Never fear friend, about disunion. We of the mid-slave States will save that. We don't mean that the perpetualists shall have everything their own way."³¹ To the extent that the *Examiner* informed this regional difference, the paper served the Union. "Not a defeat, but a delay" the editors called the 1849 constitutional vote. Kentucky's Union loyalty in 1861-1865, though a hard won course, confirmed their earlier confidence and hard work.

¹ Frederick Douglass, *North Star* (Rochester, NY), Dec. 3, 1847.

² Harold D. Tallant, *Evil Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky* (Lexington: UKP, 2003), 121-126.

³ John Findling and Jennifer Lavery, *A History of the First Unitarian Church of Louisville, Kentucky, 1830-2005* (Louisville: First Unitarian Church, 2005).

⁴ Robert D. Habich, *Transcendentalism and the Western Messenger: A History of the Magazine and its Contributors, 1835-1841* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1985), 133, 141.

⁵ Stanley Harrold, *Abolitionists and the South, 1831-1861* (Lexington, KY: UKP, 1995).

⁶ Thomas H. Shreve to Samuel M. Janney, March 20, 1849. Swarthmore Archives.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Ex*, June 19, 1847.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *Ex*, June 27, 1847

¹¹ *Ex*, Oct. 30, 1847.

¹² S.. S. Nicholas, et al, "Slave Emancipation in Kentucky," pamphlet produced under the auspices of the *Examiner*, 1849.

¹³ *Ex*, Sept. 11, 1847.

¹⁴ *Ex*, Oct. 2 1847.

¹⁵ *Ex*, Oct 14, 1848.

¹⁶ *Ex*, Jan 15, 1848, Feb. 19, 1848, Mar. 18, 1848, Aug. 26, 1848, Mar. 10, 1849.

¹⁷ *Ex*, Mar. 25, 1848.

¹⁸ *Ex*, Oct. 23, 1847.

¹⁹ *Ex*, Jan.1, 1848.

²⁰ *Ex*, Feb. 19, 1848.

²¹ *Ex*, Nov. 6, 1847 through Dec. 18, 1847.

²² *Ex*, Apr. 29, 1848.

²³ Tallant, 151.

²⁴ Ibid., 147.

²⁵ Ibid., 149.

²⁶ *Ex*, Aug 25, 1849.

²⁷ *Ex*, Aug. 11, 1849.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Hon. O. H. Browning, Sept 22, 1861.

³⁰ Erich Langsdorf, "Jim Lane and the Frontier Guard," *Kansas Historical Quarterlies*, February, 1940, 13-25.

³¹ *Ex*, Oct. 2, 1847.