

George Henry Evans and the Intersection of Labor and Anti-Slavery

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By

Evan Gonzalez

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Faculty Advisor: Amy Dru Stanley
Preceptor: Alexander Hofmann

The relationship between the American abolitionist movement and the nascent northern labor movement of the nineteenth century is a topic that has long divided scholars. The question of why these movements, that clearly recognized the systematic oppressions that ailed the US, never formed a stronger coalition is at the center of most pieces of scholarship on this subject. At the center of much of this scholarship is George Henry Evans. Evans, a printer born in England, started the first American labor newspaper in 1829 as a voice for the newly formed Working Men's Party in New York. From his first issues of the paper, he was clear that while northern laborers were his main concern he was also concerned with the ending of chattel slavery.

Evans was clearly influenced by enlightenment ideals as he tied himself to no religion and saw the issue of both slavery and labor as not a lack of personal freedom but as an oppression on the basis of wages and lack of material gains.¹ However, authors have argued that as time progressed he came to view slavery as a secondary issue to the struggles of northern industrial laborers. This re-prioritization drew much ire from abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison.² However, Evans' relationship with slavery and abolition was more complicated than that of a mere acknowledgement of slavery as an issue. By the 1840's Evans advocacy had shifted from a series of issues ranging from education to opposition to imprisonment for debt, to centering "the monopoly of the land" as his key concern. In this period Evans actively engaged with abolitionists such as Gerrit Smith urging them to the cause of land reform as the solution to both the issues of the working man and the chattel slave. Smith even granted land to Evans in 1850 and would go on to grant land to formerly enslaved families. This act authors have

¹Eric Foner. *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press, 1980), 79.

²David Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness* (Verso, 1991), 79.

contended was inspired by his conversations with Evans.³ Though he was critical of Smith's Liberty Party, by the end of the decade Evans would support Smith for the Free Soil Party's bid for presidential nomination.

Through the perspective of George Henry Evans and his newspaper that ran from 1829-1849, we can see that at least for the Northern Labor movement, their relationship with anti-slavery was complex with leaders of each movement engaging in discussion with one another. While Evans retired from newspaper editing by 1849 and passed away in 1856, we can see in his support of the Free Soil Party near the end of his life a merger of the issues of labor and antislavery, united under the banner of Free Soil. Through looking at Evans and the evolution of his views on labor and anti-slavery we can reexamine the relationship of labor and anti-slavery as not being a failure or as oppositional, but as being a critical moment in the development of the labor movement that strengthened the wake of the Civil War.

Older scholarship on the matter saw a clear divide between the movements that caused friction, while more recent scholarship has offered a re-evaluation and argued that the movements had much overlap. The latter asks us to consider those figures who recognized the injustices caused by both chattel slavery and the wage system, often using Evan and his interactions with Smith as evidence of a more complex relationship between the two movements.

Eric Foner wrote about the conflict between labor and abolition, not as one of guilt of one party or the other but rather as a mutual failure in understanding and communication between the two parties. On the part of labor, Foner noted that the early labor movement was explicitly anti-slavery specifically with figures such as Evans who advocated for labor reform and the end of slavery. However, Foner argued that after the depression of 1837-42, Evans and other labor

³Gunther Peck. "Labor Abolition and the Politics of White Victimhood: Rethinking the History of Working-Class Racism." *Journal of the Early Republic* 39, no. 1 (2019): 95. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26905410>.

reformists such as Horace Greeley, increasingly saw land reform as the most pressing issue and slavery as a secondary issue that could be cured with the equal distribution of land.⁴ On the part of abolition, Foner argued that their movement was not able to identify with the issues of free laborers due to the ideology of anti-slavery being inherently capitalist, hindering their ability to sympathize with a laborer that they saw as part of a just system.⁵ Foner's depiction of labor and anti-slavery, while missing a discussion of the role that race played in straining the relationship between the two, showed a nuanced discussion of their relationship recognizing both parties' faults in not supporting the other, while also portraying a gap between the movements.

In *Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger introduced a key aspect that had been left out of previous discussions of the interactions between labor advocates and abolitionists, the concept of race. Roediger perhaps showed the most pessimism on the relationship between the early labor movement and abolition, arguing that white workers were unable to identify with the plight of the black slave.⁶ Roediger wrote that Evans' views drew ire from William Lloyd Garrison, causing the abolitionist to publish Evans' views in his 'Refuge of Oppression' column, one reserved for pro-slavery advocates. Roediger also portrayed the trajectory of Evans' career as moving from a position of anti-slavery and anti-racism to a more race-neutral stance.⁷

While not the first author to discuss Evans, David Roediger made him the central figure for his discussion of the term "white slavery" and the complexities of the uses of that term. For Roediger, Evans moved from a place of progressive anti-slavery and anti-racist opinions to a place where he prioritized the sufferings of the white worker over that of the enslaved person.⁸

Gunther Peck would push back against this characterization arguing that what Roediger saw as a

⁴Eric Foner, "Workers and Slavery." In *Working for Democracy: American Workers from the Revolution to the Present*, ed. Paul Buhle and Alan Dawley (University of Illinois Press, 1985), 24.

⁵Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press 1980), 76.

⁶Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 31.

⁷Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 79.

⁸Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 78.

fall from grace was actually just a result of the inconsistencies apparent in Evans' writing.⁹ He specifically cited Evans' support of indigenous people while also being an avowed supporter of Andrew Jackson, who infamously enacted harsh policies of removal of indigenous people, as an example of this inconsistency.¹⁰ Roediger's work was a key moment in this literature, one that countered the view of abolitionists as the sole opponent to creating a faction with labor and also considered the important aspect that race played in creating a divide between these reformers.

Bruce Laurie in his work, *Beyond Garrison* sought to examine the work of abolitionists working outside the scope of William Lloyd Garrison and his aversion to political abolition and the labor movement. Bruce Laurie would respond to Roediger's work arguing that to characterize the working class movement as understanding themselves as being of a single race was an inaccurate portrayal.¹¹ So while Roediger's conception of whiteness is an essential part in understanding the complex relationship between labor and abolition, for Laurie it proved limiting in portraying the nuances of the period.

Laurie instead saw individual abolitionists as being supporters of the labor movement, specifically activists such as Elizur Wright and John Orvis, saying of Wright that his support of the labor movement, indicated that abolitionism had progressed beyond its apolitical origins.¹² Laurie's framing of divergent sects of abolition that on one side opposed any acceptance of the complaints of the wage laborer and on the other saw that they were facing a valid issue that required addressing, showed that past framings of abolition and labor may have smoothed over a more complex landscape.

⁹Gunther Peck,"White Slavery and Whiteness: A Transnational View of the Sources of Working-Class Radicalism and Racism." *Labor:Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 1, no. 2 (2004): 43, https://read.dukeupress.edu/labor/article-pdf/1/2/41/313417/lab001-02-05-peck_fpp.pdf.

¹⁰Peck,"White Slavery and Whiteness: A Transnational View of the Sources of Working-Class Radicalism and Racism.," 44.

¹¹Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 85.

¹²Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 71.

Jonathan Earle's work *Jacksonian Antislavery* showed that there was more complexity in the relationship between the two movements, and that Evans was a key figure to understanding that complexity.¹³ Earle argued that Evans coined the term "free soil" as a term for land reform, with the term later coming to represent Jacksonian Antislavery.¹⁴ Earle gives us the most complete and thorough understanding of Evans' antislavery politics and also made clear that despite Roediger's assertions that Evans grew more conservative in his anti slavery opinions, Evans had always prioritized the suffering of the white laborer over the chattel slave.¹⁵ Though Earle's work on Evans' discussion of slavery is thorough, he did not consider Evans' explicit remarks on abolition and how that affected his relationship to that movement.

Manisha Sinha in her work *The Slave's Cause* gives us the most expansive account of the history of American abolition. Though the relationship between labor and abolition was not the main focus of her argument, her discussions of the relationship follow Laurie's model of optimism. For Sinha, the working class and abolitionists engaged in a "discourse of oppression."¹⁶ While there may have been tensions between the two movements in the early part of the century, as time went on abolitionists specifically began to identify more with the cause of the northern labor movement, bringing issues of labor up in anti-slavery meetings¹⁷ After the Civil War, she specifically sees the cause of labor and abolition as directly related, arguing that labor movements saw themselves as picking up where the abolitionist movement had left off.¹⁸ Sinha's work gives us the most complete and optimistic view of the relationship between the two movements, yet there is a complexity to labor reformers' relationship to anti-slavery that goes

¹³Jonathan H Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil 1824-54* (The University of North Carolina Press,) 2004, 13.

¹⁴Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil 1824-54*, 13.

¹⁵Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil 1824-54*, 30.

¹⁶Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause* (Yale University Press, 2016), 347.

¹⁷Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 358.

¹⁸Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 358.

beyond a mere seeking of solidarity. Though Sinha's work is to date the most thorough, to see Evans and other reformers as fully supportive of the political wing of abolition, as she does, does not portray the complexity of opinions that many labor abolitionists had.

Most of the authorship, as indicated, tended to focus on the lack of solidarity between these two groups being a result of a single factor. For some racism and a resulting inability to sympathize with enslaved people was endemic to the labor movement, for others, there was a severe lack of communication between the two movements that caused tension. While authorship has turned towards a more optimistic view of the relationship between the two movements, they have not considered Evans as being a key for understanding not only anti-slavery politics but the relationship between labor and abolition. By examining Evans' own views on not only slavery but on abolitionists we can better understand what allowed advocates of labor to both sympathize with and criticize abolition, giving us a greater insight into the relationship between these movements in the antebellum period.

1829-1831 The Early Years of the Advocate

In the early years of Evans' newspaper, he sought to address the issues he saw as directly affecting the working man while also making clear his opposition to slavery. In these issues we can begin to see that for Evans while opposition to chattel slavery was a cause worthy of support and one he was interested in engaging with conversation, it was not the key cause for the working man.

The *Working Man's Advocate* began as the party newspaper of the Working Man's Party, a New York reform party led by reformer Thomas Skidmore.¹⁹ The party and its paper focused

¹⁹Jeffrey J Pilz. *The Life, Work and Times of George Henry Evans, Newspaperman, Activist and Reformer* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 22.

on the issues that were most relevant to the working class. Issues addressed ranged from imprisonment for debt, temperance, and education to a reform of the Militia System, with a resolution from the Working Man's Party stating that "Universal Education, the abolishment of imprisonment for debt, a revision of the Militia System the abolishment of Banking and all other monopolies... are the main objects for which we contend."²⁰ It is the final issue that Evans often centered as being the most important in many of his papers, including an article calling for the working man to "attain, or rather recover, that station which superior education has given to those who rank before us."²¹ These initiatives were meant to address the issues most prescient to the working man and defined the articles contained within the paper.

Despite this, Evans was not ignorant of the issue of chattel slavery. He would re-publish articles from the abolitionist newspaper *The Genius of Universal Emancipation* (*The Genius*), a paper run by Benjamin Lundy with his then protegee William Lloyd Garrison. The first instances of these inclusions were calls from *The Genius*, calling for colonization efforts, wherein formerly enslaved people would be relocated to different parts of Africa. One specific article signed by Garrison and Lundy inquired about enslaved people who wanted to emigrate and promised "constant employment, and liberal wages, in a healthy and pleasant section of the country."²² While Evans himself did not provide explicit commentary on these calls for colonization, his repeated inclusion of them across multiple issues showed that he saw them as relevant to the cause of the working man.

It also is in these early re-publications that the similarities these movements had in their infancy becomes evident. An article from *The Genius*, critiqued the militia system as Evans had

²⁰Evans, George Henry, "Eighth Ward," *New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate*, 6/26/1830, 1.

²¹Evans, "The Working Men" *WMA*, 4/24/1830, 1.

²²Evans. "Emigration to Hayti," *WMA*, 12/12/1829, 4.

done, describing it as that “worn out, crazy old thing.”²³ Another article from *The Genius* also included critiques of the debt system with one article even describing the victims of that system as “a slave, sold for a debt of a few dollars-- sentenced to a more intolerable servitude than even the African endures.”²⁴ These early comparisons drawn between the situation of the working poor and the enslaved person, while not apt, certainly informed Evans worldview and his eventual use of the term “white slavery.”

Evans followed this paper closely and even specifically included a notice for when the paper went from weekly to monthly, lamenting that “that worth and talent in the newspaper press, is not properly appreciated.”²⁵ Clearly Evans saw that not only was the newspaper aligned with his own personal views on reforming the social ills of the United States but that the cause it was advocating for was one he supported. It should be noted that though *The Genius* was a radical paper in this period, it did not hold the fiery rhetoric calling for immediate abolition that would characterize Garrison’s later paper *The Liberator*. This suggests that perhaps it was this less radical version of anti-slavery that appealed to Evans and made him feel that it was aligned with the cause of the Working Man’s Party.

For a brief period from 1830-1831 Evans merged with another working man’s paper called the *New York Daily Sentinel* and stepped down as the main editor of the paper assuring readers that “I unite with the present editors and proprietor, in full confidence that they will continue to sustain the cause of the working men.”²⁶ Though it is not entirely clear how much input Evans had as editor, the fact that discussions of slavery waned in the subsequent issues showed that Evans had a greater input in addressing the issue of chattel slavery than other

²³ Evans, “Untitled,” *WMA*, 1/30/1830, 1.

²⁴ Evans, “Popular Bombast,” *WMA*, 12/12/1829, 4.

²⁵ Evans, “The Genius of Universal Emancipation,” *WMA*, 3/27/1830, 3.

²⁶ Evans, “To the Public,” *WMA*, 6/5/1830, 3.

working men. There are sparing mentions of the issue of slavery or anti-slavery, within these issues with most being dedicated to international events such as the French Revolution of 1830 and the French invasion of Algiers.²⁷ It is unclear why the editors that took over from Evans decided to lessen the prominence of discussions of slavery, perhaps it was merely that there was nothing newsworthy to discuss regarding enslavement and the editors decided to focus on other events that they found would be more pertinent to educating the working man. Despite this the issue did not entirely disappear from the pages of the paper when Evans merged with *The Sentinel*.

There were some articles contained within the Evans-less issues that do discuss slavery, although with a different focus and tone than Evans'. One article merely entitled "Slave Traders" depicted slave traders who would attempt to buy free or enslaved black people in order to enslave them. The article detested the traders describing them as "a class of men that ought to be regarded with universal and unminged detestation."²⁸ However while clearly opposing the slave trade, the editor did have some concessions to the slaveholder saying that they were "entitled to our most charitable considerations" if one had come to own slaves through "his patrimonial inheritance" and "who treats them kind."²⁹ This depiction of the benign slaveholder ran contrary to Evans own opinions on slavery and was much more in line with propaganda depicting the slave-owner as a sort of benevolent figure. The one mention of anti-slavery within this series of papers is an advertisement for a new newspaper to be published by William Lloyd Garrison called *The Liberator* a paper described as "devoted to the abolition of negro slavery, and the improvement of the colored people."³⁰ While the inclusion of an article showing

²⁷Unknown, "France-Anecdotes" *New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate*, 9/18/1830, 3.

²⁸Unknown, "Slave Traders," *New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate*, 8/28/1830, 3.

²⁹Unknown, "Slave Traders."

³⁰Unknown, "William Lloyd Garrison," *New York Sentinel and Working Man's Advocate*. 8/28/1830, 2.

sympathy to slaveholders did not change the nature of the *Advocate* to a pro-slavery paper, it showed that in some way it had been Evans' own influence that had allowed for the inclusion of discussions of slavery and abolitionist papers.

While it is unclear when exactly Evans returned to printing, on June 4th 1831 a small piece stating that Evans had opened a new print shop is a strong clue that he had resumed his role as editor. Contained within the same issue was the inclusion of an article characterizing the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* as "conducted with much spirit and talent."³¹ This is further evidence that Evans had returned to his editorial position. On *The Genius*, he continued to recommend the paper to readers of the *Advocate* who "are fortunate enough to be enabled to aid the good cause which it is designed to advance."³² For Evans anti-slavery was not only a just cause, but also one worthy of support by the working man, and his fondness of the paper belied a greater sympathy with the early abolitionist movement than many would characterize the labor movement as having.

It is within this period after his return to editorship that Evans continued to make his anti-slavery stance clear. In an article published entitled "Celebration of the Colored People" Evans recorded an event commemorating the abolition of slavery in New York, adding that he hoped there would come a time when black people throughout the US "will be enabled to celebrate their emancipation from a thralldom even more degrading to the white population than it is to them."³³ Evans clearly believed in true freedom for all people regardless of color, and while these articles were only small parts of grander attacks against the oppressions of the working man, they still show a desire to address both systems of oppression. It would be easy to see these sentiments from Evans as merely hollow-words, taking a stance against slavery before

³¹Evans, "The Genius of Universal Emancipation," *WMA*, 6/4/1831, 2.

³²Evans, "The Genius of Universal Emancipation," *WMA*, 6/4/1831, 2.

³³Evans, "Celebration of the Colored People," *WMA*, 7/9/1831, 1.

the issue truly came to the forefront of the American consciousness as it would in the 1850s and 1860s. However one event would force him to truly reconcile how important the issue of slavery was to him, this event was Nat Turner's Rebellion.

1831 Evans Response to Nat Turner's Rebellion

It was in the wake of Nat Turner's rebellion that Evans truly took a radical stance against slavery, one that some authorship has regarded as being "for a time more uncompromising than the articles by William Lloyd Garrison that Evans also reprinted."³⁴ In the wake of Turner's rebellion wherein he and a band of other enslaved people killed not only their slaveholders but other white families in the area of Southampton, it would have been easy for Evans to condemn these actions and fall into Southern rhetoric of the necessity for enslavement. However Evans portrayed this event to his audience as an "unsuccessful attempt to emancipate themselves."³⁵ In doing so Evans characterized the revolt as one for a fight for freedom rather than as a violent massacre.

Evans would admit that he lamented the violence that had taken place but that he felt a need to "speak truth in relation to what had taken place" even if it might be received as "unpalatable."³⁶ Evans depicted the violence taken as a sort of desperate measure by a people who felt that "their only hope of doing so was to put to death, indiscriminately the whole race of those who held them in bondage."³⁷ That the participants of the revolt were "deluded" did not affect Evans' opinion as he would describe their actions as "just."³⁸ This portrayal of the rebellion was far more radical than one would expect from a white Northern laborer, yet was also inline with Evans' early support of anti-slavery.³⁹ Evans clearly had a deep investment in seeing that

³⁴Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 78.

³⁵Evans, "Daring Outrage of Virginia Slaveites," *WMA*, 9/17/1831,1.

³⁶Evans, "Daring Outrage of Virginia Slaveites."

³⁷Evans, "Daring Outrage of Virginia Slaveites."

³⁸Evans, "Daring Outrage of Virginia Slaveites."

³⁹Evans, "Daring Outrage of Virginia Slaveites."

slavery was abolished and would always side with the oppressed, even if their actions resulted in violence.

This was further evidenced in his approval of international violent uprisings of the oppressed against their oppressors. When discussing a slave rebellion in Jamaica, Evans commented on the seeming commonness of revolutions that “it is not to be wondered that the long and grievously oppressed colored race are catching the spirit of the times.” He concluded with the statement “May all their insurrections end revolutions, say we.”⁴⁰ While it would be incorrect to characterize Evans as an abolitionist he clearly harbored similar attitudes as them. His support of violent uprisings even being perhaps more radical than the opinions espoused by the moral sect of abolition.

Evans’ frustration with the slave power can in part be attributed to his more explicit beliefs in the Declaration of Independence as an anti-slavery document. He believed that the Declaration allowed slaves to use violence in response to their masters and those who would seek to re-enslave them.⁴¹ He would also argue that freedom for all men was something that “the immortal Jefferson” would want ensured, including through the freeing of slaves, showing that for him freedom was a right bestowed to all men.⁴² The other source of Evans anti-slavery opinions can be most likely attributed to the the growth of the domestic slave trade during this period. Though the Atlantic slave trade was outlawed in 1808, between the periods of 1820-1830 the number of slaves traded between states rose 85% with thirty thousand people being sold between states annually.⁴³ Articles condemning the domestic slave trade appeared in Evans trusted *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, and he was no doubt made aware of the

⁴⁰Evans. “Another Insurrection,” *WMA*, 6/4/1831, 1.

⁴¹Evans. “Assault,” *WMA*, 3/26/1831, 3.

⁴²Evans. “SLAVE INSURRECTION IN SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY VIRGINIA,” *WMA*, 10/15/1831, 1.

⁴³Joshua D Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain: How Domestic Slave Traders Shaped America*. (Basic Books, 2021), 102.

growing horrors of slavery.⁴⁴ These two factors combined certainly contributed to his strong support of Nat Turner's actions.

Though Evans prioritized the plight of the slave, he also addressed the repercussions faced by abolitionists in the wake of Turner's rebellion. In the months following the rebellion, death threats and bounties would be placed upon William Lloyd Garrison in response to the spread of his newspaper in the South. Evans would respond to these threats by commenting on the infringement that this had on constitutional rights saying "is it not time that something should be done? Or must the liberty of the press and the laws of protection be abolished to uphold slavery?"⁴⁵ In this same publication Evans reprinted an article from *The Liberator* describing a man being tarred and feathered by a group of slave owners for merely owning a copy of the newspaper. He would also make note of the now infamous bounty placed upon Garrison's head by the Georgia senate, remarking that Evans had read a dozen issues of Garrison's newspaper, and if the man that introduced the bill had done the same "he would not have made himself so silly."⁴⁶ That Evans read Garrison's newspaper showed a consistent interest in the cause of abolition, while never actually declaring himself to be a part of the movement. Evans did not offer any explicit opinion on Garrison yet his defense of him showed someone who was quick to jump to the aid of those he saw as facing oppressions.

Evans surely felt empathy for Garrison, a man who much like him was publishing a controversial newspaper that at times put him at odds with more powerful papers. Years later he would reflect on his relationship with Garrison that he had offered him a "helping hand" when the abolitionist had few allies.⁴⁷ He also recalled that he had been in admiration of Garrison's

⁴⁴Rothman, *The Ledger and the Chain*, 93.

⁴⁵Evans. "SLAVE INSURRECTION IN SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY VIRGINIA," *WMA*, 10/15/1831, 1.

⁴⁶Evans, "The Liberator," *WMA*, 12/17/1831, 3.

⁴⁷George Henry Evans, "'Q' In a Corner," In *Northern Labor and Antislavery: A Documentary History*, ed. by Philip S. Foner and Herbert Shapiro (Greenwood Press, 1994), 174.

“disinterested zeal and indomitable perseverance” showing that in the early years Evans was sympathetic to abolition and their cause.⁴⁸ Though the relationship between these two men would become more contentious later on, for now Evans would readily side with abolition.

It is also in these publications that Evans published some of his most powerful anti-racist pieces. One of the pieces included was attributed to “A Free Colored Floridian” wherein the author critiqued “the general prejudice or fashionable jealousy against complexion or difference of color, which seems singularly predominant in all our States...”⁴⁹ The author would lament this prejudice throughout the article before ultimately ending by making a call for free black people to move to Mexico, in order to “mitigate... the cruel system of persecution now carrying on against them, and which... threatens their very existence.”⁵⁰ These statements would seem to have been more at home in a publication of *The Liberator* and yet Evans clearly saw the freedom of black people as an important part in his efforts for reform. By publishing this perhaps he was trying to inform the working man of the greater issues affecting the country and in doing so advocating for a broader reform program. For now though, Evans would continue in his fight against slavery.

Evans would contend with articles advocating for slavery and promoting racist ideals. Though he never argued against slavery as a moral wrong, he always considered it a wrong based on depriving a person of their individual freedom. In an article from the *New York Courier* promoting slavery, the paper would allege that the brutality of the system of slavery had been “exaggerated.” Evans countered that it would be hard to believe that anyone would have to exaggerate the suffering of slaves, saying “It is enough to know that they are slaves--'slaves in a

⁴⁸Evans, "'Q' In a Corner," 174.

⁴⁹Evans, ‘Prejudice Against Color,’ *WMA*, 10/1/1831, 3.

⁵⁰Evans, ‘Prejudice Against Color.’

land of freedom!!”⁵¹ *The Courier* argued that enslaved people were being agitated to regard white people as their oppressors, Evans responded “If they are told so, they are told the truth. Shall the truth not be told?” Then, preying upon the racial fears of white citizens, *The Courier* argued that emancipation would lead to race mixing and “the sacrifice of the white man and his posterity.” Perhaps most shockingly, Evans denied that this would be the outcome of emancipation, but if that happened to be the outcome “we should still contend for equality.”⁵² These statements and the conclusion of Evans that “In relation to the question of slavery our kindred are mankind--our color is the color of freemen” depict a man who clearly held a deep conviction of slavery and racism as a wrong in the country of Jefferson. Though it was only in response to the controversy of Nat Turner that he could truly center slavery as an issue in his paper, he clearly saw it as a result of the failures of the United States to live up to its creed, that all men were created equal. His criticism against racism and slavery were as harsh as any published by Garrison up to this period and showed that Evans occupied a distinct space as being both an advocate for the working man but also the chattel slave.

Evans diatribes against slavery and slaveholders in these issues showed his dedication and attention paid to the system of slavery, however he also began to reflect on how he might aid in the cause of anti-slavery. Among comments critiquing the institution of slavery there was also a reflection on the role of the working man in helping to end that system. Evans remarked that “We might, however, have done more for the cause of emancipation than we have done” and that “we are now more convinced that our interest demands that we should do more.”⁵³ This statement concluded on a powerful critique of the United States with Evans saying “for EQUAL RIGHTS can never be enjoyed by those who are free, in a nation which contains slaveites

⁵¹Evans. “SLAVE INSURRECTION IN SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY VIRGINIA,” *WMA*, 10/15/1831, 1.

⁵²Evans, “SLAVE INSURRECTION IN SOUTHAMPTON COUNTY VIRGINIA.”

⁵³Evans “Negro Slavery,” *WMA*. 10/1/1831, 1.

enough to hold in bondage two millions of human beings, many of whom are the progeny of their enslavers!”⁵⁴ These statements showed a pivotal moment in Evans’ paper where slavery seems like it might have become one of the primary issues for his broad set of reformist ideas, yet while he continued to address the issue it never did.

While he could espouse strong anti-slavery opinions during this time, it was only in response to the controversy of the rebellion that Evans could truly address slavery as a key issue in his papers. The following years did not find Evans joining hands with Garrison and the Tappan brothers in the formation of a sort of proto Free Soil Party, and instead further demonstrated that the interests of the working man were always at the forefront of his plan for reform. This consistent prioritization of addressing the issues of the working man was no more evident than in Evans support of the re-election of Andrew Jackson.

1832: The Re-Election of Andrew Jackson

Andrew Jackson ran for re-election in 1832, in a campaign that centered the bank veto, an opposition to the rechartering of the Second National Bank, as the key issue he would address.⁵⁵ His bank veto message contained messaging that appealed to the working class criticizing the bank as a “tyrannical monopoly.”⁵⁶ Along with this the Democratic Party during this period further adopted the language of the working class, aiming to portray themselves as anti-monopolist and anti-aristocracy.⁵⁷ This along with Jackson’s own identification with Thomas Jefferson, a hero of Evans, led the reformer to support Old Hickory in 1832.

⁵⁴Evans “Negro Slavery,” *WMA*. 10/1/1831, 1.

⁵⁵Sean Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson* (Times Books, 2005), 89.

⁵⁶Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson*, 81.

⁵⁷Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil 1824-54*, 30.

The election of 1832 was the key issue that occupied the pages of the *Advocate* during this period. Each of his issues during the election cycle contained a header nominating Jackson for president and R.M. Johnson for vice president, containing a blurb from Johnson stating their principles as “Freedom of speech and of the press, the rights of conscience, the responsibility of political agents to the people, and universal education-main pillars which sustain the Temple of Liberty.”⁵⁸ These principles lined up fairly identically with those of the Working Man’s Party which had been included in the header of the papers up to this point. An article would also be included in this same paper only attributed to “BETA” entitled “REASONS WHY THE WORKINGMEN SUPPORT JACKSON FOR PRESIDENT.”⁵⁹ Contained within the article was the basic premise that Jackson upheld all the principles that the Working Man’s Party had stood for. Specifically they singled out Jackson’s actions as upholding the principles of “Universal Education--Abolishing Imprisonment for debt--No legislation on Religion--Abolition of licensed Monopolies.” The author also noted that despite the party not having supported Jackson in his first election there was no inconsistency in doing so as “We have now tried and proved him, and we find him the fast friend of our measures.”⁶⁰ An article by Evans was also published advertising a portrait of Jackson and Johnson priced so that “every Workingman may furnish himself with a copy of the likeness of this distinguished advocate of civil and religious liberty.”⁶¹ These pieces showed that Evans, while opposed to slavery, always had the working man centered at the heart of his interests and for him, Jackson was the best candidate to address these issues.

That Evans could vehemently write against the institution of slavery while also supporting a man who openly held a multitude of slaves has come across to some authors as an

⁵⁸Evans, “Working Men’s Nominations,” *WMA*, 8/18/1832, 1.

⁵⁹Evans, “REASONS WHY THE WORKINGMEN SUPPORT JACKSON FOR PRESIDENT,” *WMA*, 8/18/1832, 1.

⁶⁰Evans, “REASONS WHY THE WORKINGMEN SUPPORT JACKSON FOR PRESIDENT.”

⁶¹Evans, “Portrait of President Jackson,” *WMA*, 8/18/1832, 1.

inconsistency.⁶² However what Evans' support of Jackson showed is a man who always prioritized the interests of the working class, and though he would not have approved of Jackson's owning of slaves, it was a moral sacrifice needed to be made in order to address the growing direness of the situation of the New York working poor. Sean Wilentz argued that Jackson's political interest in protecting slavery was rooted in a desire to protect the Union.⁶³ His rhetoric therefore never reached the overt pro-slavery defenses that Evans contended against in the wake of Nat Turner's heroic rebellion. That Jackson sought to keep slavery out of national politics further evidenced that Evans probably never considered Jackson's owning of slaves to be a greater issue than his war against the bank.⁶⁴

Along with the election of 1832, Evans focused his headlines on the problems of the people around him and the issues facing them, specifically focusing on the cholera outbreak that began in 1832. In July of that year a cholera outbreak began in New York, as Evans first noted at the beginning of the epidemic "we believe the hubbub will be all over in a week or two."⁶⁵ However, as the sickness would spread it began to take extreme tolls on the working poor whom he described as "in want of the comforts and even necessities of life."⁶⁶ Evans would take aim at the infrastructure around him saying "charity holds too sparing a hand to be relied upon in a case of life and death. The evils caused by unequal distribution must be relieved by a distribution of accumulations."⁶⁷ Clearly for Evans the system had failed the people of New York. His recognition of the direness of the situation of the poor at this time suggested that for him the problems facing the people at home were becoming in immediate need of addressing.

⁶²Peck, "White Slavery and Whiteness: A Transnational View of the Sources of Working-Class Radicalism and Racism," 44.

⁶³Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson*, 121.

⁶⁴Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson*, 121.

⁶⁵Evans, "The Cholera," *WMA*, 7/14/1832, 1.

⁶⁶Evans, "The Cholera-Relief of the Poor," *WMA*, 7/28/1832, 1.

⁶⁷Evans, "The Cholera-Relief of the Poor."

In response to the cholera outbreak, churches argued that the outbreak had been the result of divine punishment and as a result some began calling for days of fasting.⁶⁸ In response to this Evans would criticize these groups as causing a greater spread of the Cholera rather than slowing the spread, ultimately leading to more deaths.⁶⁹ He also critiqued these groups for bringing these calls for fasts to the government, arguing that such calls amounted to an “encroachment” upon the separation of Church and State.⁷⁰ These statements represented Evans skepticism towards religion both organized and otherwise, and as the character of abolition became increasingly Evangelical, Evans would also grow more critical of that movement.

1833-1835: The Emergence of Organized Abolition

The period of 1833-1835 marked the growth of what we now think of as radical abolitionism. Spearheaded by figures such as William Lloyd Garrison in Boston and the Tappan brothers in New York, the movement became more organized and also more explicitly Christian, influenced by the Great Awakening.⁷¹ It is this increasing association with religion that would lead Evans to critique the character of the movement while still supporting the cause it promoted. This displayed both a continued interest in the movement while also foreshadowing many of the criticisms that Evans would offer in the latter half of the decade.

The years 1833-1835 found abolitionists becoming broadly known on the national stage, more specifically becoming targets of not just the vitriol of southern slaveholders but also those of the president. Preceding any of the incendiary events however was Evans' most overt statement on abolitionists and their tactics to this point. In a criticism of colonizationists Evans would compare them to abolitionists. He portrayed advocates for colonization as “actuated by a

⁶⁸Charles E Rosenberg. *The Cholera Years: The United States in 1832, 1849 and 1866* (The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 45.

⁶⁹Evans, “Fasting for the Cholera Morbus,” *WMA*, 76/23/1832, 2.

⁷⁰Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years*, 52.

⁷¹Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, 66.

FANATICAL enthusiasm, and are not the advocates of LIBERTY for its own sake.” However in contrast to the colonizationist Evans described abolitionists as “HONEST in their principles” and once again described their crusade as just.⁷² Once again aligning himself with support for abolition.

In 1834 as the result of inflammatory publications by the Tappan Brothers, prominent abolitionists associated with William Lloyd Garrison, anti-abolitionists riots broke out in New York, in which Arthur Tappan was targeted by rioters. Evans was critical of the riots and the rioters, portraying them as “southerners.. robbers and pickpockets, and, of course a large number of those dregs of society.”⁷³ He reiterated his defense of abolitionists, describing their cause as “honest in their principles and the measures they propose are just.”⁷⁴ He would return to his defense of their right to freedom of speech, arguing that even if one did not agree with their cause, “is that any reason why their meetings should be broken up by lawless mobs?”⁷⁵ However Evans also began adding another descriptor to his characterization of them, describing them as “overzealous and wrong in some of their measures.”⁷⁶

Though these sentiments do not reflect a change in his opposition to slavery, Evans clearly had reservations in fully supporting the burgeoning abolitionist movement spearheaded by Garrison’s Evangelicalism. An evangelicalism that Eric Foner has noted alienated many working men from the movement.⁷⁷ His skepticism towards organized abolition would continue in the following years as the movement would face its most prominent scandal as a result of a campaign spreading their newspapers in the South.

⁷²Evans, “Slavery,” *WMA*, 6/14/1834, 1.

⁷³Evans, “Further Colonization Riots,” *The Man*, 7/12/1834, 2.

⁷⁴Evans, “Further Colonization Riots.”

⁷⁵Evans, “The Colonization Riots,” *The Man*, 7/10/1834, 3.

⁷⁶Evans, “The Colonization Riots,” *The Man*, 7/10/1834, 3.

⁷⁷Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War*, 66.

In late 1835 the American Anti-Slavery Society began a campaign distributing abolitionist pamphlets throughout the South, causing outrage and once again putting Evans in a position to defend the movement. This campaign aroused furor from pro-slavery Southerners, with some papers accusing the abolitionists of attempting to cause disunion and specifically alleging that Garrison and Tappan were “throwing firebrands into the South.”⁷⁸ As a result Southerners would urge for a censorship to the circulation of these papers in the South. In an issue from the *Working Man’s Advocate* from August of 1835, an article was included from *The Richmond Enquirer* entitled “A Calm Appeal from the South to the North.” Contained within the article were scathing attacks against abolitionists marking them as fanatic and disingenuous, even describing Tappan’s allegiance to the movement only being a way to “acquire notoriety.”⁷⁹ The article, as the title suggested, urged Northerners to speak out against the abolitionists and to join with the South to suppress the abolitionist press so as not to affect disunion. Evans would include this article as a way to both show his audience a direct source of Southern rhetoric but also as a way to inject criticism against the South and its institutions.

While Evans did not explicitly respond to this article he did include a response from *The New York Evening Post* in some ways acting as a surrogate for Evans’ response, one that criticized the South and its threats of disunion. The author of *The Post* acknowledged the fanaticism of the abolitionists, and that though the North was glad to be rid of slavery it would never have attempted to interfere with the Southern institution. This however changed when the South demanded Northerners “change our legislation and alter our constitution for the purpose of propping up our domestic institutions with the fragments of our most sacred bulwarks...”⁸⁰ The author emphasized that anti-abolition meetings were being held in the North displaying “we

⁷⁸Evans, “A Calm Appeal from the South to the North,” *WMA*, 8/29/1835, 1.

⁷⁹Evans, “A Calm Appeal from the South to the North,”

⁸⁰Evans, “A Calm Appeal from the South to the North.”

wholly disapprove of the temper and manner in which the abolition discussion has been carried on...⁸¹ The author would end his piece saying that though they would resist the Southerners calls for changes to law and the mailing system it was not as a result of support for abolition but instead “a sacred reverence for the right of free and unlimited inquiry...that every barrier in the path of investigation is a stumbling block in the road to truth.”⁸² This discussion showed the rising tensions between the North and the South, with Northerners beginning to become more critical of abolition, as the movement began to threaten the Union between North and South. Despite this Evans once again rose to the defense of abolition in his response to the controversy.

Evans’ response to the Post-office scandal reflected the opinions he had espoused in response to the anti-abolitionist riot, offering sympathy for the cause but not full support. His first commentary on the subject came in the form of a transcript of a Northern anti-abolitionist meeting. In a reprint of the occurrences of this meeting, he added “There was no particular necessity for these meetings, their proceedings have generally amounted to little or nothing.”⁸³ Evans would characterize the attendees of these meetings as “a few sordid mercantile souls who feared their business with the South would be injured in consequence of the proceedings of the Abolitionists.”⁸⁴ In characterizing these meetings as such Evans was emphasizing the insincerity of anti-abolition sentiment, as being based in greed rather than in a true critique of the movement. That Evans consistently rose to the defense of abolitionists demonstrated sympathy with the cause of the movement.

Though he had not fully warmed to abolitionism, Evans still clearly had an interest in the goings on of the movement and informed the working man of those happenings. Evans would

⁸¹Evans, “A Calm Appeal from the South to the North.”

⁸²Evans, “A Calm Appeal from the South to the North.”

⁸³Evans, “Anti-Abolition Meetings,” *WMA*, 9/19/1835, 3.

⁸⁴Evans, “Anti-Abolition Meetings.”

include articles documenting the different activities of abolition, including an account of a meeting given by English abolitionist George Thompson.⁸⁵ Though Evans offered no commentary on the matter, his inclusion of such a publishing showed that he did have an interest in communicating the goings on of the abolitionists to the working class if only for them to decide for themselves the validity of the movement.

A week after this issue was published anti-abolitionist mobs would again strike in both Utica and Boston. Evans explicitly critiqued the mobs and argued in defense of abolitionists and their constitutional rights. On the attack in Utica, Evans noted that the abolitionist meeting was broken up, only to be allowed to continue in the Church owned by a wealthy man, whom Evans noted was not an abolitionist, the man was Gerrit Smith. On the Boston mob he added little commentary only that “Persecution always did and always will advance a cause, and if the treatment of Garrison by the Boston mob is not the height of persecution then we know not the meaning of the word.”⁸⁶ While it must be made clear that Evans was not expressly supporting abolition as he would not pass judgement on whether it was “a good or ... a bad cause” he clearly at least had sympathy for the discrimination being felt by members of the movement. This interest and sympathy continued in subsequent issues as Evans would include articles detailing Garrison’s arrest and freedom, as well as an article from the Boston editor detailing the attacks he experienced by the mob and lamenting the lack of freedom of speech in the US.⁸⁷ Though Evans’ responses were always based in Constitutional doctrine rather than an explicit approval of the movement, his consistent inclusion of the discrimination against abolitionists implied a position of sympathy for the activists. These articles hinted at Evans’ opinions on the

⁸⁵Evans, “Abolition Thompson,” *WMA*, 10/24/1835, 2.

⁸⁶Evans, “Lynch Law in the North: Utica and Boston Disgraced!,” *WMA*, 10/31/1835, 2.

⁸⁷Evans, “Garrison,” *WMA*, 11/7/1835, 2.

movement for emancipation but his most explicit statements on the movement came in two issues at the end of 1835.

In an ironic way Evans' paper would endure allegations of itself being an abolitionist paper, something he would clarify himself. The *ElizabethTown Freeman* would allege that *The Advocate* supported abolitionists specifically criticizing "the aid it extends to a set of fanatics, who would let loose upon this community a set of men who know not how to appreciate the blessings of liberty."⁸⁸ Evans clarified that his paper had never explicitly advocated for any particular form of emancipation and went on to counter *The Freeman's* claim that they aided abolition saying that the only aid they offered to them was "defending them from brutal persecution-- a duty owing to them, as we believe by every good citizen." He reinforced that his support of abolition was mainly due to the violence they had endured at the hands of the anti-abolitionists who "grossly infringed on their liberty of speech and of the press." For Evans, his defense was mounted in deference to the Constitution and the rights endowed within. This interaction displayed the strained political climate of the time where one felt that they needed to defend themselves against the accusation of being abolitionist.⁸⁹

It is not hard to imagine that allegations of being an abolitionist, especially in a time where that accusation could result in physical violence, would spur Evans to give a concise account of his view on abolition; this account would appear in the following issue. In an article entitled "VIEWS OF THE ABOLITIONISTS" Evans gave his most explicit views on the movement. Evans began by noting his own history and interest with the movement, specifically that he had been "in the practice of reading several of their publications, occasionally, from their commencement."⁹⁰ Evans would go on to cynically characterize many abolitionists as "actuated

⁸⁸Evans, "The (ElizabethTown) Freeman," *WMA*, 11/14/1835, 3.

⁸⁹Evans, "The (ElizabethTown) Freeman."

⁹⁰Evans, "Views of the Abolitionists," *WMA*, 11/21/1835, 3.

by a species of fanaticism.” This echoed statements he had made in response to the anti-abolitionist riots, but he expanded on this criticism arguing that abolitionists “are desirous of freeing the slaves, more for the purpose of adding them to a religious sect, than for a love of liberty and justice.”⁹¹ These sentiments specifically denote what sect of abolition Evans had an issue with, the brand of abolition espoused by Garrison and Tappan influenced by the Great Awakening. Despite this Evans still offered praise to the abolitionists and their tactics of moral suasion, believing it to be “a good and a just cause” that had only been advanced by “constitutional means.”⁹²

It is clear that it was the increasingly religious element within abolition that led Evans to describe abolitionists as “fanatics”. That abolitionists had fully adopted the rhetoric and style of Sabbatarian meetings, which Evans had previously regarded as a “mania,” further alienated Evans from organized abolition.⁹³ Evans had also never been a fan of the Tappan brothers, at times accusing the brothers as “aiding in a virtual union of Church and State.”⁹⁴ Evans' criticism of abolition was always aimed at the religious element associated with the movement, an element he saw as a minority within the movement, and was never intended to oppose the actual freeing of enslaved people. These statements are key to understanding the complexity of Evans. That he could offer up radically anti-slavery stances in the wake of Nat Turner, yet at the same time be cool to the abolitionist movement, show that for him while slavery was an issue needing a remedy, the abolitionists had perhaps gone too far in centering it at the heart of their Christian reform.

⁹¹Evans, “Views of the Abolitionists.”

⁹²Evans, “Views of the Abolitionists.”

⁹³Pilz, *The Life, Work and Times of George Henry Evans, Newspaperman, Activist and Reformer*, 76.

⁹⁴Evans, “A Temperance Lecturer and a Critic,” WMA, 7/2/1831, 1.

The following years would see the abolitionist movement grow and face a new set of controversies such as the murder of Elijah P. Lovejoy and the Amistad case; we have no commentary from Evans on those matters. By 1835 Evans had retired to his homestead in New Jersey to be with his family, and by the time The Depression of 1837 began Evans had long left the newspaper business behind. During his five years away he would till the land, growing various crops, and also reflect on the teachings of his heroes Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine.⁹⁵ However, his time away inspired a new set of reforms and a new solution that would find a renewed Evans seeking to enact radical change and form coalition with other reform movements.

1841: Evans Return to Newspapering and Land Reform

Foner noted that the labor movement was “devastated by the depression of 1837-42.”⁹⁶ In the wake of that depression and his time on his farm Evans would return to the newspaper business in 1841 with a new publication entitled *The Radical*. In the format of a monthly newspaper *The Radical*, each edition would address a new issue that Evans’ saw as being solved by his new panacea, land reform. These new issues saw Evans returning to many of the problems he had discussed in the *Advocate* but now being addressed by the solution of land reform. In these issues Evans would continue to address the issue of slavery while also injecting it with a critique of the abolitionist movement.

In the first issue of his newspaper Evans in no timid words stated the new slogan of his reform program, “the use of the LAND is the equal natural right of all the citizens of this and all future generations, and therefore that the land should not be a matter of traffic, gift or will.”⁹⁷

⁹⁵Pilz, *The Life, Work and Times of George Henry Evans, Newspaperman, Activist and Reformer*, 133.

⁹⁶Foner, “Workers and Slavery,” 23.

⁹⁷Evans, “Fellow Laborers,” *The Radical*, 1/1/1841, 2.

That every man had a right to the land and that the right had been deprived of them was the key to solving many of the issues he had identified in the 1830s. It seemed that Evans had been looking for one solution that could address all the reforms he had identified, specifically saying that enacting land reform was “a measure that would cause suffering to none” and “an easier measure than the abolition of some other monopolies.”⁹⁸ His time away had informed him that land reform was the uniting force to end all forms of oppression, including that of slavery.

Evans would return to his critique of slavery, however now using a term that would follow him for the rest of his career. In the third issue of this paper, Evans wrote an article entitled “White Slavery.”⁹⁹ Contained within the article was an assertion by Evans that there was no one “more sincerely desirous of abolishing slavery than myself.” Despite making this bold statement Evans would continue on, denying that he could ever be an abolitionist specifically due to their inability to recognize the “manifold and increasing oppressions of the white laborer.”¹⁰⁰ This inability concerned Evans, and led him to make the statement that a sort of hypocrisy could be recognized by Southern slaveholders, specifically that they could “raise the blush of shame on our cheeks by replying to our admonitions, ‘Look at home!’”¹⁰¹ Evans continued his discussion of the subject by reinforcing his belief of slavery “as disgrace to the republic, black slavery as well as white.” He would even spurned the racism of the South specifically refusing to “truckle to the southern slaveholder, by asserting that the negro is not a man, as some northern editors have done.”¹⁰² Evans ended his piece urging abolitionists to turn their heads to the North and set an example to slaveholders by “emancipating the white laborer, by restoring his natural right to the soil.”¹⁰³

⁹⁸Evans, “Fellow Laborers,” *The Radical*. 1/1/1841, 10.

⁹⁹Evans, “White Slavery,” *The Radical*. 4/1/1841, 1.

¹⁰⁰Evans, “White Slavery.”

¹⁰¹Evans, “White Slavery.”

¹⁰²Evans, “White Slavery.”

¹⁰³Evans, “White Slavery.”

In many ways Evans lived up to the name of his new paper, while in the 1830s he could offer radical statements on slavery and emancipation, they were few and far between; often only being in response to watershed moments that resounded across newspaper headlines, such as Nat Turner's Rebellion or the abolitionist pamphlet campaign. This new side from Evans was one that evidenced his desire to unite his beliefs and reforms. Through land Evans could argue for the rights of the white laborer as well as the black slave. Though white slavery could be used by pro-slavery advocates, clearly for Evans it was a way of understanding the class oppression faced by impoverished whites. Far from being a one off, Evans would continue to publish these opinions throughout the 1840s, and would even engage in a conversation with abolition in the hope of uniting their causes.

1844: Evans in conversation with Gerrit Smith

1844 saw Evans continued advancement of the principles of his new movement the National Reform Association (NRA), centered on his newfound belief of land reform as the central agent of change. Evans continued his assault on slavery of all forms, now emphasizing the need to eliminate "the lash of want" before the white northerner could turn to the plight of the chattel slave.¹⁰⁴ Evans' belief in the suffering of the working poor was so strong he asserted that "there is more mental and physical suffering among the laboring poor of the city of New York, every winter, than among the whole slave population of the whole Southern States."¹⁰⁵ While always continuing to oppose southern slavery, Evans' language was consistent with his preoccupation with the struggles of the working class and reinforcing the primacy of their suffering.

¹⁰⁴Evans, "Agrarian League," *WMA*. 6/1/1844, 1.

¹⁰⁵Evans, "Dialogue on Free and Slave Labor," *WMA*. 6/8/1844, 4.

His assertions would not go unchallenged though, as he would enter into a conversation with abolitionist, philanthropist and wealthy land-owner Gerrit Smith. It may seem odd for Evans to have reached out to a man of Smith's status, especially due to his ownership of grand stretches of land. However, it was these qualities and Smith's reputation of being a philanthropist that caused Evans to reach out, hoping to convince Smith of the principles of the NRA. In his first letter to Smith, the newspaperman began by defining what slavery meant to him, specifically that it was "being subject to the will of a master, or a master class, by a deprivation of natural rights."¹⁰⁶ Certainly this was a way to appeal to Smith's abolitionist sentiments, as a way to convince him that a form of slavery existed in the North as well as in the South. Due to Smith's ownership of large tracts of land Evans would accuse him of being "one of the greatest Slaveholders in this country!"¹⁰⁷ While this may seem a bold claim for Evans to have made in his first letter to someone he was hoping to become an acquaintance of, he was not intending to attack Smith only hoping to awaken a realization in him that he was complicit in the oppressions he opposed. Indeed Evans' one request was "that you lend your aid to prevent any further sale of the land that is how now unappropriated as private property." He then turned to the issue of slavery and what he saw as the very real existence of white slavery. Evans reassured Smith that "I am opposed to slavery in every form... the slavery of the lash and the slavery of poverty..." However, he reinforced that it would be "most proper to begin our abolition efforts with that form of slavery that is nearest home." These statements had become commonplace in the renewed *Working Man's Advocate*, and evinced Evans' desire to both address the suffering of the white worker, while also recruiting abolitionists to his cause. Yet the next section of this letter is perhaps the most interesting part of his correspondence with Smith.

¹⁰⁶Evans, "To Gerrit Smith," *WMA*. 7/6/1844, 3.

¹⁰⁷Evans, "To Gerrit Smith."

Evans characterized himself as having had a change of heart saying “I was formerly, like yourself, sir, a very warm advocate of the abolition of slavery. This was before I saw that there was white slavery.” This realization, he asserted, caused him to change the methods by which to abolish slavery. He continued that he believed that the freedman would be worse off being in the Northern system of slavery than he was being enslaved, due to the “surety of support in sickness and old age...”¹⁰⁸ It is peculiar that Evans would refer to himself as having been an abolitionist considering that he only seemed to have engaged in radical anti-slavery politics in the wake of Nat Turner’s rebellion. His discussion of abolition is relatively scarce before and following that point and even then he had never openly identified as being a part of that movement. It is easy to take this point on face value, using it as evidence of an admission of a radical transformation of Evans politics. However, from Evans earlier discussions of abolition, while he had always had an interest in following the movement and had been explicitly opposed to slavery from the outset of his paper, he had never truly identified himself as an abolitionist and was critical of the organized form of movement by the 1830s. Evans’ identification with abolition then was merely to reassure Smith that he was not supporting chattel slavery when he made use of the term white slavery, but that he was centering the necessity of addressing the more immediate suffering of the white laborer. Evidently Smith found the content of Evans’ letter warranting a response, as one was published a few weeks later.

Gerrit Smith would strongly challenge Evans on his use of the term white slavery, and his lackluster support of abolition while also showing openness to Evans’ agenda of land reform. Smith began his letter by acknowledging that government issuance of land was an agenda he was in support of, specifically the issuance of “fifty or a hundred acres of land to the actual

¹⁰⁸Evans, “To Gerrit Smith.”

occupant.”¹⁰⁹ Smith, while initially acknowledging this piece of Evans’ agenda as valid, would take him to task on his views of slavery. Smith issued strong critiques of Evans and his belief in white slavery lamenting “that you should justify the enslavement of your colored brother...when you say that poverty is as bad as slavery--nay is even identical with it.”¹¹⁰ Regardless of Evans intentions of trying to use the term slavery as a way to help the abolitionist understand the suffering of the poor worker the comparison had not proved apt in the eyes of Smith. Smith of course understood far better than Evans the reality of enslavement, as an abolitionist who held close ties with formerly enslaved people such as Frederick Douglass. It is this understanding and also distance from white working class poverty that caused Smith to issue such a strong critique of the term white slavery.

Smith also had a deep skepticism of the ability of the working poor to empathize with enslaved people, challenging newspapers to express support of abolition and “see whether their patrons will stand by such trueness to the human family and the impartial Father of that family; or whether they will not turn their backs in deep disgust at it.”¹¹¹ Smith ended his letter with a plea to Evans, “Give up then all your notions of a separate dwelling place for colored people, and of first looking after white slaves, and identify yourself with the whole human family...” In writing to Evans, Smith evinced a clear interest in the cause of the NRA and land reform, while also showing how a difference in priorities could create such a stark contrast between two reform movements. However the conversation between the two men did not end there, and they would enter another series of exchanges each continuing to challenge the other.

In Evans response to Smith, he would reinforce his belief of the laboring man as being in a statement of degradation equal to that of the enslaved person while also injecting some of his

¹⁰⁹Evans, “Gerrit Smith’s Reply,” *WMA*, 7/20/1844, 4.

¹¹⁰Evans, “Gerrit Smith’s Reply.”

¹¹¹Evans, “Gerrit Smith’s Reply.”

own personal experiences. It is worth noting that each man in their responses were extremely warm and cordial with each, Evans opened his response to Smith's reply "I know not when I have received more satisfaction by a single circumstance, than by the perusal of your letter." This emphasized that they were engaging in a conversation with each other rather than a sparring match. Evans continued though that the point of his original letter was merely to point out that men could not be free without access to land which had been stolen from them. Evans pointed out that Smith's wealth had precluded him from seeing the desperation that poverty brought about. With a rejoinder of "I have" Evans pointed out the experiences of being poor that Smith had known nothing of "You have not known what it was to be behind hand with your rent.. I have. You have not known what it was to have officers of the law seize upon your little stock of household goods, and threaten to sell them if the rent was not paid by a certain time: I have."¹¹² Evans acknowledged that it had been years since he had experienced such things but reminded him that "thousands in the cities are continually tortured by the same agonizing system." These sentiments reinforced that the plight of poor working people was always the main concern of Evans, and his prioritization of their struggles was also clearly shaped by his own experience of poverty.

The influence this class divide had on the worldview of the abolitionist and the laborman showed up throughout Evans' response. Evans would refer to the struggles of the working class as "an evil of the first magnitude" and one which black slaves had no experience of. In statements that displayed a fundamental misunderstanding of the reality of chattel slavery Evans boldly stated that "I am decidedly of opinion, sir, that there is more real suffering among the landless whites of the north, than among the blacks of the south...." While this might sound like the statements of a vehement pro-slavery advocate Evans followed this with a boldly anti-racist

¹¹²Evans, "Rejoinder to Gerrit Smith," *WMA*, 7/24/1844, 2.

statement saying “We believe that black has as good a right to be free as the white; that 'all men are created equal;' ...I harbor no prejudice against color...” These statements in conjunction craft an image of a man who occupied an extremely complex set of opinions, ones shaped by his own experience of poverty, while also being upheld by a strong moral code that sought to end all oppressions.

Evans ended this response saying that he harbored no ill towards the cause of abolition only that he believed they were wrong in their prioritization of a far away evil and that they must address an evil closer to home.¹¹³ These statements by Evans showed a man who was extremely progressive in many areas of his land reform, yet his own proximity to the suffering of impoverished white people informed his belief of the importance of eliminating their suffering first. While we can take Evans at his word on his disregard of prejudice due to his track record of espousing these opinions, there is an inability to fully sympathize with the suffering of black people that underlies these opinions.

In Smith’s response to Evans letter he emphasized the need for the reformer to extend a hand to abolitionists to bring them into the fold. Smith indeed aligned the treatment of both the agrarian and the abolitionist stating that they both “got frightful names: but they need not, therefore be afraid of each other.”¹¹⁴ Rather than being opposed to or working against each other Smith stated that Evans could teach the abolitionists of “the great truth, that men have a natural right to the soil” and in return Evans could learn from them. In engaging in conversations Smith argued that they would find “there are not a few points of affinity between them.” Smith highlighted that while there were key differences between the two movements there were also

¹¹³Evans, “Rejoinder to Gerrit Smith.”

¹¹⁴Evans, “Second Letter from Gerrit Smith,” *WMA*. 8/10/1844, 4.

significant similarities evidencing a desire to unite the movements in order to address the multitude of issues facing Americans.

Yet, while he acknowledged the potential for a union of these two movements, Smith continued to emphasize the need for Evans to reconsider his stance on the existence of white slavery. He urged Evans to hear a formerly enslaved person speak of their experience, believing that it “will suffice to make you ashamed that you could ever have believed that the horrors and essence of slavery were to be found in any... condition of a free-man.”¹¹⁵ So while recognizing the potential for solidarity between the two movements there were still major obstacles to overcome before the two groups could have ever achieved consensus.

In the final letter exchanged between the men that was printed in “The Working Man’s Advocate”, Evans responded to Smith’s claim of the ability of the two movements to join hands. Evans identified that the primary hurdle to any extant unity of the two groups first had to do with “not about the objects to be obtained; but about the order and means of attaining them.”¹¹⁶ The second and much more difficult obstacle to overcome was Smith’s refusal to acknowledge that there existed any form of slavery in the North. Evans firmly asserted that white slavery truly did exist in the North even if they were “not quite so degraded a slave as the black” the similarities between the two forms of oppression that it was not worth distinguishing. These sentiments echoed Smith’s that while the two groups could find much common ground in their goals there were also significant differences that halted them from firmly merging.

In response to Smith’s assertion that Evans should educate himself on the suffering of the slave, he deflected, saying “I think I have a tolerably just appreciation of its evil, having been, as I have before informed you, a zealous abolitionist many years ago.”¹¹⁷ Evans flipped the

¹¹⁵Evans, “Second Letter from Gerrit Smith,” *WMA*. 8/10/1844, 4.

¹¹⁶Evans, “To Gerrit Smith,” *WMA*. 8/17/1844, 1.

¹¹⁷Evans, “To Gerrit Smith”

question to Smith, asserting that it was he who was unaware of the suffering of the free black people in New York, “If you could see these poor wretches in their dirty, crowded, comfortless dwellings, you would involuntarily exclaim that they would be better off even on a southern plantation...” Rather than this being a cry for slaves to be returned to their plantations Evans concluded this statement that instead of this “they ought to be on their own plantation.”¹¹⁸ Evans had finally found what he thought was the key to understanding all oppressions, the land, and these conversations with Gerrit Smith show him to be staunch in his belief of the need for land reform.

While these movements were fundamentally different in their outlooks and origins, they still sought out conversation with each other, and while Evans and Smith never communicated quite so publicly again it is clear this conversation influenced both men as their fight for each of their reforms continued. It also highlighted that despite the concerns that Evans had with chattel slavery and the sufferers of that system, he refused to prioritize ending their suffering over that of the “white slaves.” This underlies the complexity of understanding the relationship between antebellum abolition and labor reform, as the two movements had an interest in understanding the other and bringing the other over to their cause, yet were unable to compromise on the issues they saw as paramount to their movements.

The Factory System and “White Slavery”

In all these discussions with Smith there is a reoccurrence of a specific term, “white slavery” a term that has drawn much discussion from scholarship on its uses and meanings. As historian Gregory Peck noted, the varied uses of white slavery “pose interpretive challenges to historians.”¹¹⁹ Though others would use the term to promote slavery, Evans used the term to

¹¹⁸Evans, “To Gerrit Smith.”

¹¹⁹Peck, “White Slavery and Whiteness,” 45.

convey the reality of the increasing sufferings of Northern laborers due to industrialization and the factory system.

Within this revival of Evans' career there were increasing numbers of articles referring to the factory system and the sufferings of laborers within that system that highlighted his meaning of the term white slavery. By 1844, Evans was already providing accounts of the "horrible slavery of the factory system"¹²⁰ The descriptions of these conditions detailed the abuses of women and children, describing women giving birth within the factory and the flogging of children.¹²¹ The direness of the situation that young women and girls faced caused some authors to ask of their condition "Shall they be made to bow to worse than Southern Tyrants?"¹²² Articles even entitled "White Slavery" began to make their way into Evans' newspaper, many of which focused on the treatment of women and children and specifically the long hours they were required to work. One author challenged "What right, what justice, we ask is there in requiring of the operatives, and especially of the women and children, to be in the mills in the morning before it is light?"¹²³ Though these subtly make reference to the idea of northern labor being more oppressive than slave labor, more direct comparisons would follow.

In more explicit comparisons Evans would describe the factories as "ruled by a most despotic system of government...far viler is it than slavery."¹²⁴ The descriptions of the horrors of the factory system often used language that paralleled descriptions of plantations with scenes of "overseers, kick, strike, and flog children, till they are black, blue, and bruised..¹²⁵ It is also within these articles that we see Evans true ignorance regarding the conditions of enslaved people, describing slaveholders as caring for their slaves, though only so long as it benefits the

¹²⁰Evans, "Second Out Door Meeting," *WMA*, 6/15/1844, 3.

¹²¹Evans, "The Factory System," *WMA*, 8/10/1844, 1.

¹²²Evans, "The Tyranny of the Factories," *WMA*, 9/7/1844, 4.

¹²³Evans, "The Bastiles of New England-White Slavery," *WMA*, 9/8/144, 1.

¹²⁴Evans, "The Factory System," *WMA*, 11/9/1844,1.

¹²⁵Evans, "The Factory System."

owner, saying “It is his interest to prolong the life of the slave, so long as it will be to this advantage for him to live. It is not so with the factory owners.”¹²⁶ Within these descriptions we find Evans expressing little sympathy towards enslaved people and their own sufferings.

However, these opinions were consistent with the sentiments he expressed to Gerrit Smith, most importantly that while there was evil in both forms of slavery, the proximity of the sufferings of white laborers had a priority to be addressed by the redistribution of land.

There was also another element to the worry of the factory system, which was the increasing awareness of the suffering of laborers internationally. By 1845 Evans was recognizing the sufferings of white laborers in England, sparking a growing fear that such conditions were soon to grow in America. He warned “The Factory System can only become general when the labor here is reduced to level with that of England.”¹²⁷ He continued that the plight of the factory system was fast encroaching upon Americans, evidenced by “the fact that factories are fast springing up at various places in this country.”¹²⁸ Evans would caution these laborers that the factory system was “the very evil that you have to dread: it is the miserable goal to which capital is driving you.”¹²⁹ Evans was not the only reformer who had recognized the suffering of the British laborer, even William Lloyd Garrison recognized the oppression of the British laborer. However, he had equated that oppression due to the British monarchy rather than a system similar to that of enslavement.¹³⁰ While these movements had much in common and had shared many enemies it was always their priorities that held them from truly uniting.

In 1848, Evans saw the culmination of the fears that he had regarding wage slavery. In response to the Irish Potato famine Evans saw that “the wages and tenant system is carried to its

¹²⁶Evans, “The Factory System.”

¹²⁷Evans, “To the Working Women of New York,” *WMA*, 3/15/1845, 2.

¹²⁸Evans, “To the Working Women of New York.”

¹²⁹Evans, “To the Working Women of New York.”

¹³⁰Douglas B. A Ansdell. “William Lloyd Garrison’s Ambivalent Approach to Labour Reform,” *Journal of American Studies* 24, no. 3 (1990): 407.

legitimate end in Ireland.”¹³¹ For him the deaths of millions of poor whites was the ultimate goal of the land-stealing monopolist. He once again addressed abolitionists, hoping that the famine would cause them to become “enlightened in spite of their prejudices and made fully sensible of the sort coming of their plans.”¹³² Evans' writing on the matter pre-empt the sentiments of later writers such as Marx and Engels, showing a sort of prescience of the increasing evils of capitalism. However any discussion of the plight of the working man always had to be put into comparison with American slavery. Evans would write of the Irish Famine that it was “so much more heinous than the chattel system of the South as to almost defy comparison.”¹³³ These sentiments read as someone constantly trying to prove a point to abolitionists in the hopes of bringing them over to his cause. The Irish Famine had nothing to do with the cause of ending American chattel slavery but Evans made the decision to add a direct address to the “those well-meaning but mistaken enthusiasts.”¹³⁴ Though other figures, such as George Fitzhugh, would use the term white slavery to justify enslavement, Evans used the term as a way to attempt to convince abolitionists of the sufferings of white laborers. As a result he would continue his campaign of reaching out to these reformers throughout the twilight years of his paper.

Evans and Political Abolition

Through the last few years of his paper, Evans would continue his crusade to convince abolitionists and other reformers of the necessity to unite under the banner of Free Soil. The final few years of his paper find him including more discussions of Gerrit Smith's Liberty Party and the conditions of labor in the North. In these discussions and his eventual support of the Free Soil Party Evans showed that he always prioritized the cause of the working man but more

¹³¹Evans, “Results of the Famine,” *Young America!*, 3/28/1846, 2

¹³²Evans, “Results of the Famine.”

¹³³Evans, “Results of the Famine.”

¹³⁴Evans, “Results of the Famine.”

importantly wanted to address all forms of societal ills. This he eventually saw addressed in Gerrit Smith's agenda for the Free Soil Party

Evans included an excerpt from a working man's meeting in Massachusetts in which he described a formerly enslaved man delivering an account of his experience of slavery to the meeting, in an aside Evans included commentary that "he will not be much better off at the north without his own land... There are many colored men in the cities who are not as well off as many slaves at the South."¹³⁵ These words echoed many of the sentiments Evans expressed in his letters to Smith and reinforced his belief that ultimately true freedom was to be found in the ownership of land and not just the ownership of one self.

Contained within this same paper is a commentary on a publication from the Liberty Party papers that informed Evans that many of the highest positions in the Supreme Court as well as in the Navy were occupied by citizens from the "Black Slave States." This was despite the fact that many of the lower ranking members of the navy were from the "White Slave States." This implied that Southerners were given prioritized positions whereas Northerners were made to make up the rank and file. Evans clearly still had an interest in following the goings on of the Liberty Party as well as was able to find common ground in their complaints.¹³⁶

Despite the fact that Evans had been heavily critical of the moral sect of abolition, he still reinforced that whatever criticism one had of the movement was "no reason why their sins should be visited upon the blacks..."¹³⁷ In doing so Evans centered his complaints about abolition around the myopic scope of their reforms, rather than any criticism of anti-slavery politics, consistent with his earlier position of their cause as just. Indeed it was not merely that Evans prioritized the sufferings of white laborers at home, Evans advocated for land reform for

¹³⁵Evans, "Working Men's Movements Milford, Mass," *WMA*, 9/21/1844, 1.

¹³⁶Evans, "Working Men's Movements Milford, Mass," *WMA*, 9/21/1844, 3.

¹³⁷Evans, "What Will Congress Do!," *WMA*, 11/30/1844, 2.

its ability "to abolish all slavery in the most speedy and practical manner...".¹³⁸ Evans even maintained some of the more radical opinions he had espoused in the wake of Nat Turner's rebellion, stating that if enslaved people were to revolt for their freedom he "would not oppose them" even if he believed it to be less practical than liberation through peaceful means.¹³⁹ However Evans also offered criticism to abolition and specifically the moral form of abolition as he recognized that in effecting land reform it "can only be accomplished by political action."¹⁴⁰ This acknowledged that if abolitionists wanted to join his cause "their dilemma is obvious but not insurmountable."¹⁴¹ This commentary showed Evans to still have much in common with abolitionists and was still seeking to unite their movements, however he was still not afraid to critique the movement for what he saw as a narrowness of scope.

Evans blind spots in advocating racial progress were also displayed in these later issues, specifically in relation to the character of the slaveholder. He tended to represent slaveholders as misguided. He explicitly described them as having been "educated" to believe that it was right to own slaves and he could only find them worthy of blame "if they persist in the wrong after it is explained to them and refuse to adopt any means of putting an end to it..."¹⁴² These statements from Evans ignored the inherent cruelty and racism involved in owning slaves. Indeed the whole system of chattel slavery was based in a belief of white supremacy and black inferiority. This portrayal of slaveholders certainly would have won no friends within abolitionist circles as there was no question as to the guilt of slaveholders

Evans would further his critique of abolition, specifically around their advocating of slaves to escape. He argued that "If I met a slave running away, I would be the last to stop

¹³⁸Evans, "Rise of Price," *WMA*, 6/1/1844, 3.

¹³⁹Evans, "The Tribune on Rights," *WMA*, 12/28/1844, 3.

¹⁴⁰Evans, "Abolition at Home," *Young America!*, 4/26/1845, 2.

¹⁴¹Evans, "Abolition at Home."

¹⁴²Evans, "Abolition at Home."

him...” yet he reasoned that it would be bad policy to encourage enslaved people to jump “from one form of slavery for another.”¹⁴³ That sort of action would only be reasonable if he had endured a cruel master. These statements from Evans implied that there could be a benevolent master and also evinced a fundamental misunderstanding of the chattel slavery system. While Evans statements come across as moderate for someone who had termed his paper *The Radical*, at times he recognized the inherent problems that mere emancipation without support for freed black man could lead to. Evans pitied that abolitionists could be so delusional as to “imagine that, in a state where the slaves for a majority or even a large minority of the population, the whites will ever consent to emancipate and restore them to political rights in that State.” Evans in 1845 had recognized the fundamental issues that would arise in the Reconstruction Era, specifically that whites would not easily accept the freeing of enslaved people just because the federal government mandated it. In a way Evans was more realistic about the situation than some staunch abolitionists.

Within the year Evans would continue to follow the trajectory of the Liberty Party. He criticized the founding of a party “upon one idea” and argued that it could not experience more growth unless it “adopted more comprehensive measures than heretofore...”¹⁴⁴ Evans acknowledged that even Gerrit Smith had this opinion, stating that the abolitionist considered the Liberty Party “a temporary party...”¹⁴⁵ Evans also expressed skepticism over the ability of the leaders of the Liberty Party to convince its base of the existence of Northern slavery. It was clear that Evans’ criticism of the party was not based on a critique of their principles, with him stating that the NRA had “advocated every political principle broached in the Liberty Party address,

¹⁴³Evans, “Abolition at Home.”

¹⁴⁴Evans, “The Liberty Party,” *Young America!*, 7/12/1845, 2.

¹⁴⁵Evans, “The Liberty Party.”

besides some important ones not there touched upon...”¹⁴⁶ This was part of his tactic to try and convince abolitionists to join the NRA which we saw as addressing the true root of all evils, land reform.

If Evans had criticism for the myopic reforms of the Liberty Party, he aimed much more direct criticism at William Lloyd Garrison and *The Liberator*. In response to an article on the comparison of British Laborers with that of enslaved people, Evans quoted Garrison as remarking that it was “preposterous and an insult to the instinct and common sense of mankind” to make that comparison.¹⁴⁷ Evans responded, assuring Garrison “that there are many reformers as honest and sincere as himself who are of a directly contrary opinion...” Evans would continue to compare the sufferings of the enslaved person with the white laborer but would ultimately remark that “I do not seem that much is to be gained by a comparison of the two systems of slavery...”¹⁴⁸ While we must regard Evans' comparison of the systems with skepticism, it was clearly a response to the lack of acknowledgement from Garrison and the moral sect of abolition of the reality of white slavery that led to such comparisons. Garrison had at times shunned complaints about labor as aiming “to inflame the minds of our working class.”¹⁴⁹ This clearly alienated men like Evans as Garrison did not believe that labor reform was actually a reform. Evans would admit later on that such articles were meant to show “certain abolitionists” that it was foolish to believe the laboring classes would advocate for the abolition of chattel slavery while they were facing slavery at home.¹⁵⁰ Evans was always reaching out to abolition, yet Garrison’s refusal to acknowledge his reform program had become a sore spot.

¹⁴⁶Evans, “The Albany Patriot,” *Young America!*, 8/2/1845, 3.

¹⁴⁷Evans, “Slavery Both Kinds,” *Young America!*, 1/3/1846, 3.

¹⁴⁸Evans, “Slavery Both Kinds.”

¹⁴⁹William Lloyd Garrison, “Working Men,” In *William Lloyd Garrison and the Fight Against Slavery: Selections from The Liberator*, ed. William E. Cain (Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1995), 73.

¹⁵⁰Evans, “‘Q’ In a Corner,” 176.

While Evans and Garrison could not see eye to eye, Evans and Smith continued to build a coalition.

By the end of the decade Evans further pursued his goal of land reform, this time however through the endorsing of Gerrit Smith as the candidate for the Free Soil Party. In a statement published by Smith, alongside Evan's endorsement, he is quoted as saying

"But, Abolitionist though I am, I regard land monopoly-take the word together-as a far more abundant source of suffering and debasement, than is Slavery: and I add that whilst to abolish Chattel Slavery, is not to abolish Land Monopoly, to abolish Land monopoly is to abolish Chattel slavery."¹⁵¹

Evans had clearly swayed Smith towards his goal of universal emancipation and Smith had brought over Evans to his new party. Though Smith would lose the Free Soil Party nomination to Martin Van Buren, alienating Evans and many abolitionists, it is clear that by the end of his life Evans had seen the benefit in uniting the two reform movements.¹⁵²

Conclusion

Eric Foner, on the relationship between the Antebellum Labor movement and abolition, argued that "A failure of communication characterized relations between the two movements."¹⁵³ Though on the broad scale this may apply to the movements nationally, Evans and his newspaper present us with an alternative to that reality. Indeed even though Evans never came out with a broad call to the working men to join the cause of abolition, he clearly saw it as important that the working man be educated on the wrongs of chattel slavery and see it as a wrong, even if not the one most immediate to their concerns.

Evans' interest in abolitionism was also evident through his constant reference to them, whether in praise, defense or criticism of them. Though never explicitly stated, one can infer

¹⁵¹Evans, "Free Soil Nominations," *Young America!*, 9/23/1848, 2.

¹⁵²Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil 1824-54*, 168-9

¹⁵³Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford University Press 1980), 63.

that this interest in the cause of abolition and his desire to join their causes is in part why he reached out to Gerrit Smith; seeing that though Smith was a wealthy landowner he was also interested in the cause of reform. It seemed that the conversation between Smith and Evans had a significant impact on both men with each man trying to understand the goals of the others' movement in order to try to bring them closer together. In assessing the relationship with antebellum labor and abolition, Evans and Smith's writings to each other provide an optimistic lens to view these movements. Had Evans lived to see the increasingly chaotic political climate of the 1850s and 60s that would lead to the Civil War, perhaps he would have further aligned himself with the cause of abolition and anti-slavery.

Jeffrey Pilz, the sole biographer of Evans, wrote of Evans relative lack of success in achieving his own reform.

"That he was neither a great nor a successful man does not diminish the value of his ideas and his work as tools with which to gain insight into his world. That he was a true, well-disposed and uncompromising—that he was a good man—is reason enough to grant those ideas attention."¹⁵⁴

While I agree with this assessment and that success is not the sole reason to study someone, that Evans' name is not remembered in large publication history books is not an indication of his lack of success or importance. Indeed many authors have traced the idea of "Free Soil" to Evans' thinking. His convincing of Gerrit Smith to give away some of his land to freed black men and women, where John Brown would live for a time before his raid, indicated a greater influence than Pilz credited Evans with.¹⁵⁵ Evans is worthy of study precisely because he was unique within his own time and also a product of his own time.

Perhaps authors have been critical of Evans for being something he was not, for wanting more from him and not considering his actual life and beliefs. If you are looking for John Brown

¹⁵⁴Pilz, *The Life, Work and Times of George Henry Evans*, 230.

¹⁵⁵Gunther Peck, "Labor Abolition and the Politics of White Victimhood: Rethinking the History of Working-Class Racism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 39, no. 1 (2019): 95. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26905410>.

in every reformer and radical everyone would fall short. Evans was quite radical for his time though not the genius orator that Frederick Douglass was, or the wealthy influencer that Gerrit Smith, he was clearly interested in improving the condition of the United States for all. For a Northern labor activist to in a lifetime, praise Nat Turner, Andrew Jackson, and Thomas Jefferson, start his life as a Democrat and end his life aligning himself with the party of Frederick Douglass and Gerrit Smith is why Evans was studied and should continue to be studied. Though Evans was never an out and out abolitionist he still cared about the cause of anti-slavery and improving the conditions of black people. This unique intersection of opinions shows that we as historians need to continue to approach the antebellum period with an understanding of the inherent complexity of the time. Evans helps us understand the importance and nuance of antebellum labor movements and the uniqueness that characterized the encounters between labor and anti-slavery. The term “labor abolitionist” has been applied to Evans and this seems to be the best way to capture Evans and his complexity, someone who cared about the sufferings of both white and black laborers and was trying to understand and find a solution to solve both issues.

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