

East Texas Historical Journal

Volume 53 | Issue 1

Article 7

3-10-2015

The Problems of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic Reform

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Recommended Citation

Bryant, Dino (2015) "The Problems of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic Reform," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 53: Iss. 1, Article 7.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol53/iss1/7>

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The Problem of Democracy in the age of Slavery, Garrisonian Abolitionists & Transatlantic Reform, by W. Caleb McDaniel. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge. 2013. Contents: Acknowledgments. Introduction. Part 1-3. Epilogue. Notes. Index. Pg. 333. Hardcover. \$43.20.

Caleb McDaniel in *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery* has offered a new approach to examining William Lloyd Garrison and those who followed him. For much of the book, McDaniel removed America's most prominent abolitionists from their confrontations with white Southerners and anti-abolitionist mobs. Instead, he studied them within the context of globalism and contemporary thought. McDaniel depicted Garrisonians as well informed and well read intellectuals. Rage alone did not fuel their stated purpose for abolition. According to McDaniel, Garrison's interest in abolition derives from his passion for democracy. Moreover, transatlantic connections colored Garrisonians' outlook on democracy as well as slavery.

McDaniel, in this undertaking, consulted a large variety of sources. He went through numerous books and pamphlets from Garrison and his contemporaries—in America and abroad. He accessed private papers and correspondences. Proceedings of several organizations comprised an important part of this study. Finally, it should come as no surprise that newspapers (especially *The Liberator*) played a central role in a book about abolitionists such as Garrison.

McDaniel argued that Garrison subscribed to the theology of non-resistance, a sect of Christianity that condemned violence. For Garrisonians, this denunciation extended to any government that sponsored violence—including the institution of slavery. Clearly this interpretation of non-resistance indicted the United States. Non-resistance, according to McDaniel, transcended into Garrison's call for disunion with slaveholding states and the rejection of nationalism. Moreover, they contended that anyone who participated in the political process of such a government was complicit in its actions.

This ideology, argued McDaniel, prevented many, though not all, Garrisonians from personally participating in the democratic experience—such as voting or running for office. As a result, Garrisonians attacked slavery by moral objection—not through politics. Non-resistance, however, did not prevent Garrisonians from expressing concern about national or international politics nor did it keep them from pushing for suffrage for women and blacks. Garrison continued to remain interested in politics—especially regarding reform.

While Garrisonians rejected nationalism, they often considered themselves citizens of the world. With this in mind, Garrisonians pursued connections with their transatlantic counterparts. McDaniel pointed to their encounters and correspondence with notable British and French reformers and thinkers. Garrisonians not only interacted with European abolitionists but they also associated with Chartists in Britain, proponents of Irish Repeal, and seasoned political radicals such as Marquis Lafayette.

The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery contained so many references to numerous thinkers, reformers, and schools of thought that it read like a much heavier tome than its 267 pages of text. McDaniel attempted to address many aspects of Garrisonian abolitionism and large European reform movements in such a small space, which could make the book appear dense to lower level undergraduates as well as general readers. With that being said, McDaniel authored an indispensable examination of American abolitionism and the Atlantic World.

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