



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE

Humanities

DIVISION OF RESEARCH PROGRAMS

Narrative Section of a Successful Application

The attached document contains the grant narrative and selected portions of a previously funded grant application. It is not intended to serve as a model, but to give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. Every successful application is different, and each applicant is urged to prepare a proposal that reflects its unique project and aspirations. Prospective applicants should consult the Research Programs application guidelines at the appropriate resource page ([Awards for Faculty at Hispanic-Serving Institutions](#), [Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#), or [Awards for Faculty at Tribal Colleges and Universities](#)) for instructions. Applicants are also strongly encouraged to consult with the NEH Division of Research Programs staff well before a grant deadline.

Note: The attachment only contains the grant narrative and selected portions, not the entire funded application. In addition, certain portions may have been redacted to protect the privacy interests of an individual and/or to protect confidential commercial and financial information and/or to protect copyrighted materials.

Project Title: The Abolitionist Movement's Involvement in American Politics, 1750-1865

Institution: South Carolina State University

Project Director: Stanley Harrold

Grant Program: Awards for Faculty at Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Narrative

Persistent Impact *Abolitionist Influence on American Politics, 1750-1865*

An interracial movement to abolish slavery in America flourished during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. But our understanding of this reform movement's relationship with politics and government policy toward slavery is imprecise. The purpose of this project is to produce a book that clarifies the relationship. It will do so by focusing on *direct* abolitionist impact on individual politicians, political parties, and government. In writing the book, I shall combine recent scholarship on the abolitionist movement's internal dynamics with primary research into its relationship to politics. The result will be a synthesis that situates abolitionists more securely within the sectional struggle.

American abolitionists advocated general emancipation, first for individual British North American colonies, then for states in which they resided, and by the 1790s for the entire US. Until about 1970 historians inferred that a determining relationship existed between abolitionism, the rise of antislavery politics, and the American Civil War that ended slavery in the country. More recently historians argue that abolitionists had at best an indirect role in American politics, exerted through their influence on northern and southern public opinion. Rather than credit or blame abolitionists for increasing sectionalism, historians have for years emphasized more pervasive forces, including the white South's growing commitment to slavery, a northern free labor ideology, slavery expansion, and northern fear of a "Slave Power" conspiracy. In 1981 historian Lawrence J. Friedman declared, "Sectional conflict, Civil War, and legal emancipation would probably have occurred even if there had been no active abolition movement." In 2006 historian James Brewer Stewart wrote, "Our current . . . abolitionist scholarship has deeply illuminated the movement's . . . strategies, tactics, and cultural production. . . . but it has not explained how [abolitionist] interventions might actually have changed . . . politics."

In other words, historians have for several decades disengaged abolitionists from the sectional clash, while they have explored the movement's internal dynamics. We have learned a great deal about how gender and race (as well as religion, economics, and British influences) shaped the movement. I shall rely on these insightful understandings of abolitionism as I analyze the role of abolitionist *action* in shaping long-term political and sectional development. (Of particular importance are studies of women's role in abolitionist petitioning campaigns.)

Throughout the book I shall strive to place abolitionist efforts within broad frameworks of economic, cultural, and religious development. I do not deny that abolitionist propaganda had a political role. But I shall center on abolitionist *engagement* with the American political system. I shall, for example, show how specific abolitionist action (rather than vaguely understood economic forces) encouraged northern states, between 1780 and 1804, to end, or prepare to end, slavery within their borders. This decision

shaped the sectional character of the later struggle over slavery. I shall also document abolitionist influence on politicians between 1838 and 1865.

After many years of work in antebellum American history and three years of intermittent work on this project, I have a good command of the secondary literature and grasp of available primary documents. Of greatest importance among the latter are the records of abolitionist organizations, correspondence between abolitionists and politicians, the *Congressional Globe*, its predecessors, and a variety of newspapers. I provide a longer (but not complete) list of sources in this application's bibliography. My research method is to use these documents (many of which I have copied) to establish specific links among abolitionists, politicians, political parties, legislative debate, and government policies stretching over a period of more than 100 years. The book will cover the entire period, while concentrating on national politics during the years after 1830.

If I am fortunate enough to receive an Award for Faculty at HBCUs, I should like to utilize it full time from August 2013 through July 2014. I envision that the book will consist of an introduction, eight chapters, and a conclusion. At this point I have completed drafts of chapters 1 and 2, and am writing chapter 3. I expect to complete a draft of chapter 3 and begin working on chapter 4 before the grant period begins. I shall use the grant period to continue archival research and complete (or come close to completing) drafts of the remaining four chapters. I project that the chapters will be as follows:

Chapter 1 (*Deep Roots 1750-1815*) will describe the interactions between abolitionists and government from the mid-18th century through the Early National Period. It will emphasize abolitionist petitioning, lobbying, and personal contacts with politicians. The chapter will discuss the abolitionist role in northeastern state politics and abolitionist influence, beginning during the 1790s, on national government policy and sectionalism.

Chapter 2 (*Continuity 1815-1830*) will consider the abolitionist role in politics and government policy during what is often referred to as "the neglected period" of American abolitionism. It will focus on the heretofore overlooked abolitionist role in the Missouri Controversy, the better-known struggle over slavery in Illinois, and the widespread petitioning effort against slavery in the District of Columbia that gained momentum during the mid-1820s and reached a peak in Congress in 1829.

Chapter 3 (*Escalation 1831-1840*) will emphasize the interaction between the rise of a more evangelical and doctrinaire movement for *immediate* emancipation and the continuing abolitionist tactics of petitioning and lobbying. It will also describe ties between abolitionists and politicians during the Gag Rule debates. It will place all of these developments within the context of Nat Turner's 1831 slave revolt, rising numbers of slave escapes, and increasing white-southern defensiveness.

Chapter 4 (*Abolitionists and Independent Antislavery Politics 1837-1848*) will reconsider the abolitionist role in the origins and goals of the northern political effort against slavery expansion and the power of slaveholders in the U.S. government. Like previous chapters,

it will emphasize direct links between abolitionists, party politics, and government. It will do so in the context of the antislavery Liberty Party, the reappearance of politicians with abolitionist tendencies, and establishment of a semi-permanent abolition lobby in Washington.

Chapter 5 (*Abolitionists and Free Soil 1848-1854*) will continue the focus on the interaction between abolitionists and party politics. It will discuss how, through personal contacts and group participation, abolitionists helped shape the Free Soil Party. It will also analyze the abolitionist response to racism within the party, and the role of abolitionists in transforming the party by 1852.

Chapter 6 (*Abolitionists and Republicans 1854-1859*), in a much more specific manner than in existing studies, will evaluate the relationship between abolitionists and the Republican Party. It will describe the abolitionist role in forming the party and the impact of abolitionist criticism on the party. It will consider the personal relationships among Republican politicians and abolitionists. It will analyze how southern politicians and journalists understood the links between the two northern groups.

Chapter 7 (*John Brown and Secession 1859-1861*) will place Brown within the context of organized abolitionism, discuss the impact of his Harpers Ferry raid on the relationship between abolitionists and the Republican Party, and portray abolitionist efforts to shape Republican policies during the 1860 election campaign and the secession winter.

Chapter 8 (*Abolitionists, Civil War, and Emancipation 1861-1865*) is bound to owe a great debt to James M. McPherson's *Struggle for Equality* (1964) and Wendy Hammond Venet's *Neither Ballots nor Bullets* (1991). Based on the previous chapters, it will place the influence abolitionists exerted on Abraham Lincoln's administration and on Radical Republicans in Congress in a much broader context than either of these books.

This project is, I think, significant. There is no existing comprehensive study of the relationship between American abolitionists and politics. Just as important, the project's political focus makes it manageable, and I am well prepared to undertake it. I have a record of completing ambitious books on aspects of the antislavery movement in relatively brief periods of time. (Please see my resume included in this application.) An efficient interlibrary loan system and the availability of many antebellum sources either online or in microform will allow me to conduct most of my research at South Carolina State University and the University of South Carolina.

In regard to the project's impact on the humanities, I hope to reinvigorate research into the relationship between American abolitionism, politics, and major events. I should also like to influence the perennial debate over the relative degrees of success and failure among American reform movements. My intended audience includes people interested in abolitionism, the sectional conflict, the Civil War, reform movements, and American political history. I have good relationships with several university presses, but shall wait until I have a more complete draft before contacting them in regard to publication.

Selected Bibliography

Manuscripts

John Quincy Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA
Joshua R. Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, OH
William H. Seward Papers, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY
Gerrit Smith Papers, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY
Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
Salmon P. Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania and Library of Congress
Vaux Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia

Published Primary

American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. *Annual Reports*. 1840-1843.
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American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery. *Minutes . . . of Proceedings*. 1794-1837.
Annals of Congress, Register of Debates, and Congressional Globe, 1789-1865.
Blassingame, John W. and John R. McKivigan eds. *The Frederick Douglass Papers*. 9 vols. to date; New Haven, 1979-2009.
King, Charles R., ed. *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King*. 6 vols. New York, 1894-1900.
Merrill, Walter M., and Louis Ruchames, eds. *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*. 6 vols. Cambridge, Ma., 1971-1981.
Newspapers: A variety of 18th-19th century American newspapers.
Ripley, C. Peter. *The Black Abolitionist Papers*. 3 vols. Chapel Hill, 1991.

Secondary Materials (some of which are mentioned in my narrative)

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Higginson, Stephen A. "A Short History of the Right to Petition Government for the Redress of Grievances." *Yale Law Journal* 96 (1986): 142-66. Invaluable.
Johnson, Reinhard O. *The Liberty Party 1840-1848: Antislavery Third Party Politics in the United States*. Baton Rouge, 2009. A helpful study of the 1840s.
Miller, William Lee. *Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United State Congress*. New York, 1998. A very good political study.
Sewell, Richard H. *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States 1837-1860*. New York, 1976. The last comprehensive study to suggest a direct abolitionist impact on politics.
Stewart, James Brewer. *Abolitionist Politics and the Coming of the Civil War*. Amherst, 2008. Stewart does not attempt a comprehensive study of this issue.
Venet, Wendy Hammond. *Neither Ballots nor Bullets: Women Abolitionists and the Civil War*. Charlottesville, VA, 1991.