BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE

The Destruction of Pennsylvania Hall, the Construction of Identity,
And the Crisis of Abolition in Antebellum Philadelphia

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ABSTRACT

In 1838, Pennsylvania Hall was constructed on the corner of Sixth Street and Race Street in Philadelphia. The managers of Pennsylvania Hall, the Pennsylvania Hall Association, intended for the building to serve as a testament to "the principles of Pennsylvania: 'Virtue, Liberty, and Independence.'" They believed that Pennsylvania Hall would facilitate free discussion of slavery and other issues "not of an immoral character." Pennsylvania Hall opened to the public on May 14, 1838 with lyceums, abolitionists, and temperance groups scheduled to use the Hall as a forum for dialogue throughout the week. Three days later, a mob burned Pennsylvania Hall to the ground.

The destruction of Pennsylvania Hall decisively changed how antebellum Philadelphians thought about slavery and abolition. Philadelphians used retellings of the events of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction to create and perform their own identities, incorporating the notion of slavery as an intrinsic part of their sense of self. Examining how members of the mob that destroyed Pennsylvania Hall, the Pennsylvania Hall Association, the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, and officers of Philadelphia's municipal government used Pennsylvania Hall's story to advance their interests forms the basis of this project. Each group refracted Pennsylvania Hall's story through a lens of their own interests and biases, thus creating many different interpretations of the singular events of the Hall's destruction and establishing their own understandings of the contentious and unstable categories of race, class, gender, and citizenship. The wide variety of appropriations made of the events of the Hall's destruction reveals the complex and numerous attitudes towards slavery that coexisted in the city.

Philadelphians who would become leading decision makers on both the local and national level during the Civil War grew up in Philadelphia under the shadow of the ruins of Pennsylvania Hall. The discourses about Pennsylvania Hall that filled Philadelphia after its destruction were a testimony to the inflammatory nature of questions about who should have a voice in American society and what freedom meant in the Early Republic. The undeniable physical presence of the Hall's ruins extended the building's impact far beyond its four day existence. Pennsylvania Hall's ruins lingered in a central part of the city for at least two years after a mob attacked the building, an untouched reminder of the strong reactions provoked by abolition and slavery in Philadelphia, the Southernmost Northern city in the United States.
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This rendering depicts a map of Philadelphia in 1840 that was commissioned by London's Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. The highlighted area demarcates the central area of the city, within which stood the buildings discussed in this paper.
INTRODUCTION

In 1838, Pennsylvania Hall was constructed on the corner of Sixth Street and Haines Street in Philadelphia. The Hall was the newest entry in a central neighborhood of the city already occupied by the Clarkson School House, the Arch Street Theater, and an Eye and Ear Infirmary, all located only two blocks north of the Pennsylvania Statehouse and the Philadelphia Mayor's office. The Hall was a stately and imposing building, "sixty-two feet front by one hundred feet deep; and forty-two feet from the ground to the eaves." Its grand exterior was designed in a neo-classical style, with columns decorating the sides of the building. The Hall's interior was both glamorous and functional, filled with ornate woodwork, rich silk paneling, and the latest gas-light fixtures, all of which combined to create, "one of the most substantial and best arranged buildings in the city."

The supervisors of Pennsylvania Hall, the Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Hall Association, intended for the building to serve as a testament to "the Principles of Pennsylvania: 'Virtue, Liberty, and Independence.'" After being turned away from every other meeting place in the city, even those run by Quakers, the Pennsylvania Hall Association decided to erect their own building, in which they could facilitate free discussion of slavery and other issues "not of an immoral character." Pennsylvania Hall opened to the public on May 14, 1838 with lyceums, abolitionists, and temperance groups scheduled to use the Hall as a forum for dialogue throughout the week. Three days later, a mob burned Pennsylvania Hall to the ground.

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5 Ibid., 6.
Although Pennsylvania Hall only stood for a short period, its specter continued to haunt Philadelphians for years. The ruins of the Hall stood until at least 1840, and the legal battle over the Pennsylvania Hall Association's reparations from the city government dragged on until 1864, a continual reminder of the city's tortured relationship with slavery. The destruction of Pennsylvania Hall decisively changed how residents of Philadelphia, the Southernmost Northern city with the nation's largest free black population, thought about slavery and abolition. Philadelphians used retellings of the events of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction to create and perform their own identities, incorporating the notion of slavery as an intrinsic part of their sense of self. Members of the mob that destroyed Pennsylvania Hall, the Pennsylvania Hall Association, the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, and officers of Philadelphia's municipal government all used Pennsylvania Hall's story to advance their interests by establishing their own understandings of the contentious and unstable categories of race, class, gender, and citizenship. Each group refracted Pennsylvania Hall's story through a lens of their own interests and biases, thus creating many different interpretations of the singular events of the Hall's destruction.

The variety of interpretations of the events during the Hall's destruction reveals the complex and numerous attitudes towards slavery that coexisted in the city. Before the opening of Pennsylvania Hall, a nuanced politics of abolition had developed in the localized world of Philadelphia, a city in which an anti-abolitionist was not necessarily pro-slavery and in which not all anti-slavery advocates were abolitionists. The construction and destruction of Pennsylvania Hall escalated and highlighted the tensions that existed between these views. In the immediate

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aftermath of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, many Philadelphians turned away from abolition by adopting alternate approaches to slavery. All of the re-appropriations made of Pennsylvania Hall's story were continually challenged by the lingering and undeniable presence of the Hall's ruins, which remained a physical testament to the complicated yet deeply intimate relation that Philadelphia had with slavery and abolition.

Philadelphians' views about slavery had ramifications on the national scale. The city had a history of involvement with abolitionist causes, as its residents were among the first in North America to openly agitate against slavery by passing an abolition act. Early and sustained discussion about slavery by both black and white reformers in the city allowed Philadelphians to begin struggling with "the broader issues of black freedom earlier and more consistently than perhaps anyone else in American culture." In spite of this, slavery existed in Philadelphia until 1808 and many Philadelphians were decidedly unsympathetic to abolitionist and other antislavery efforts. While no consensus existed amongst Philadelphians about the issues of slavery and abolition, the continued ideological struggles pervaded Philadelphians' consciousness to the point where slavery became an intrinsic part of the antebellum city.

Throughout the antebellum period, Philadelphia continued to exist in what Richard Newman and James Mueller have termed the "abolitionist borderlands." Antebellum Philadelphia was torn between its economic and social ties to the South and its traditions of abolition and independence. Debates about slavery on the national level were replicated on a small scale by Philadelphians, who successfully encompassed a range of opinions about slavery and abolition. The events of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction exposed the varied opinions that

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9 Ibid., 2.
10 Ibid., 2.
11 Ibid., 4.
existed in the city while also revealing how deeply rooted the issue of slavery had become in the identities of Philadelphians.

Pennsylvania Hall has been addressed using many different historical approaches primarily because of the localized and intersecting concerns that Pennsylvania Hall illuminated in the lives of Philadelphians. Histories of the Hall typically highlight only one aspect of its story, limiting their focus to sporadic points of the Hall's existence that are relevant to the author's larger subject of interest. Authors of texts about the role of gender in the anti-slavery movement, for example, mention Pennsylvania Hall as a meeting place of the second Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. They discuss the Hall as a building in which abolitionist women spoke before "promiscuous" audiences made up of both men and women and as an extraordinary example of the violent opposition to women's involvement in the anti-slavery movement.12 Histories chronicling the increase of violent mob action in the Jacksonian period include the case of Pennsylvania Hall as an example of Northern anti-abolition rioting and to demonstrate the growing tendency amongst disempowered segments of American society to make their opinions known through physical expressions of violence.13 General histories of Philadelphia also contain accounts of the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall, mentioning it as a formative event in the history of antebellum Philadelphia.14

Little intellectual overlap exists between these accounts, however, because Pennsylvania Hall has rarely been the sole subject of study of historians. Recounting Pennsylvania Hall's story through the lens of a narrow interest in history allows only for interpretation of antebellum Philadelphians' accounts of the Hall's story at a surface level, thus creating an incomplete picture of the Hall and its relevance. Emphasizing instead the contingency of the opinions expressed in sources written about Pennsylvania Hall reflects a larger conversation occurring in the city and thus generates a fuller understanding of the impact of the Hall. This paper brings together different interpretations of Pennsylvania Hall's role in Philadelphia's history while adding a new dimension to the Hall's story. Examining the intersections between the diverse visions Philadelphians had of Pennsylvania Hall creates a richer and more comprehensive understanding of the role of slavery in antebellum Philadelphia history. Using different methods of inquiry to address the Hall generates a more accurate picture of the spectrum of multivalent opinions about slavery and citizenship that existed in antebellum Philadelphia, and thus makes a more relevant case about the importance of slavery in Philadelphia.

Many publicly and privately produced sources facilitate the study of Pennsylvania Hall. Extensive archival records about Pennsylvania Hall exist in the Philadelphia area. The manuscript sources that this study primarily draws upon are letters and diaries written by Philadelphians who witnessed the Hall's destruction, letters and diaries produced by abolitionists and members of the Pennsylvania Hall Association, and the minute book and records of the

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Pennsylvania Hall Association. The printed materials used include reports published by female abolitionist groups, Philadelphia city directories, published governmental edicts and reports, court records, lithographs of the Hall, and a book written by the Pennsylvania Hall Association. This paper also consults newspaper articles written about Pennsylvania Hall drawn from newspapers across the country, ranging from papers based in Maine and Virginia, to those from Ohio and Louisiana. The majority of these accounts come, however, from newspapers based in Philadelphia. By examining this wide range of sources simultaneously, this paper is able to draw out the connections and highlight the disparities between the sources. The influence of publicly printed sources on the privately produced letters and diaries, and vice versa, becomes quite clear as the opinions expressed in both types of source change over time. The variety of documents consulted for this paper recreates the diversity of views coursing through Philadelphia about slavery, allowing for further examination of how these varied attitudes informed the retellings made of Pennsylvania Hall's story.

This paper will explore the interactions with and retellings of the events of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction made by four different groups. The first section tells the story of Pennsylvania Hall and its destruction from the mob's perspective. The physical actions of the mob members are read as an expression of their opinions, which often are omitted from the historical record due to a general lack of written records left by this segment of the population. This section explores the possible make-up of the mob. It also addresses the existing social and economic conditions in Philadelphia that made the Hall's continued existence so untenable to mob members, especially the race and gender relations that fueled the mob's activity. This section delineates racial categories that members of the mob likely used. African Americans are identified as members of Philadelphia's free black community, which encompassed a spectrum of
different economic statuses and cultural experiences under one racial category. Members of Philadelphia's free black community were cast by mob members as a distinct other to the white majority in the city. This white majority included the Irish, who arrived in Philadelphia in increasing numbers in the first half of the nineteenth century. The Irish continually attempted to assert themselves as members of the white race, particularly through violent mob action like the riot at Pennsylvania Hall. Although the "whiteness" of the Irish was undetermined in antebellum America, this paper will use a broad definition of "white" because the attack on Pennsylvania Hall was, in a sense, a moment in the creation of a new understanding of whiteness.

The second section of this paper focuses on the Pennsylvania Hall Association's retrospective attempts to control how Philadelphians remembered Pennsylvania Hall. The Association's retellings of the events of the Hall's destruction reveal their concerns about masculinity, class, and citizenship. This section explores how the Pennsylvania Hall Association appropriated the events of the Hall's destruction in order to vindicate themselves and their building. While examining the Association's understandings of gender in the context of this paper, gender is taken to be a social construct, entirely different from the biological determinant of sex. Defining gender could be a political act for members of antebellum Philadelphia society, as two different definitions of masculinity fought for prominence. The vision of masculinity accepted by the Pennsylvania Hall Association and other proponents of immediate abolition promoted the Enlightenment virtues of restraint and reason and was the ideological inheritance of the Founding Fathers. Supporters of a new definition of masculinity, in which men were seen

18 Ibid., 133.
as bold, active, logical decision makers, frequently challenged these elite ideals. These men critiqued the abolitionists' interpretation of manliness as overly feminized. Femininity was constructed in antebellum society as a passive domestic other to the active public male. Although some women, particularly female abolitionists, challenged this definition, the majority of women generally accepted and conformed to its ideals. Philadelphians manipulated the malleability of these definitions of gender in their attempts to lay claim to citizenship.

The third section of this paper will discuss the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women and how they appropriated Pennsylvania Hall's story in an attempt to validate their participation in the wider abolition movement by espousing and promoting a distinctly middle-class, female morality. The women that participated in this convention were often from mid-range or well-to-do families economically, but all were united in their promotion of a moral code generated by the perceived values of the middle class. In this context, class does not necessarily directly link to economic status. While many members of the middle class were near the middle of the spectrum of household wealth, the middle class is defined here by a common set of cultural practices. The urban middle class, in particular, emerged during the beginning of the nineteenth century, and was often united by a common critique of the luxuries and indulgences of both the upper and lower classes.

The fourth section of this paper will be devoted to an exploration of the changes in how the Mayor and Sheriff of Philadelphia explained their actions during the events of the Hall's destruction reveal the changing tide of public opinion about the Hall. The diversity of the

19 Bruce Dorsey, Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City (Ithaca: Cornell UP) 143.
20 Ibid., 186.
21 Ibid., 166.
22 Beth Salerno, Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America (DeKalb: Northern Illinois UP) 16.
23 Dorsey, Reforming Men and Women, 34 - 35.
responses to the Hall's destruction shows the lack of any clear-cut response available to
municipal government members as they addressed the complicated intersection of abolition, mob
violence, personal interest, and civic responsibility revealed by the destruction of the Hall. The
term municipal government will designate all people in elected or appointed offices who
participate in the managing of the city. This includes the Mayor and various committees who
made the day to day decisions concerning the governing of the city, as well as men like the
Sheriff, members of the police force, city judges, and clerks. This broad interpretation of the
meaning of municipal government allows for a more inclusive vision of the role of politics in
Philadelphia society.

The construction and destruction of Pennsylvania Hall played a critical role in shaping
how Philadelphians thought about abolition and slavery throughout the antebellum period.
Philadelphians who would become leading decision makers on both the local and national level
during the Civil War grew up in Philadelphia under the shadow of the ruins of Pennsylvania
Hall. The discourses about Pennsylvania Hall that filled Philadelphia were a testimony to the
inflammatory nature of questions about who should have a voice in American society and what
freedom meant in the Early Republic. The undeniable physical presence of the Hall's ruins
extended the building's impact far beyond its four day existence. They lingered in a central part
of the city for at least two years after the riots at the Hall, an untouched reminder of the strong
reactions provoked by abolition and slavery. The presence of these ruins strongly influenced how
Philadelphians engaged with the issue of slavery, as well as the questions of race, gender,
citizenship and class that permeated the discourses created about Pennsylvania Hall.
I. THE MOB

As the sun rose on Tuesday, May 15, the day after Pennsylvania Hall's opening, Philadelphians woke to find placards hung throughout their city. The authors of the placards made their intentions clear, using eye-catching and inflammatory language in an effort to provoke Philadelphians and attract people to their cause by stating:

Whereas a convention for the avowed purpose of effecting the immediate abolition of slavery throughout the United States is at this time holding its session in Philadelphia, it behooves all citizens who entertain a proper regard for the right of property and the preservation of the Constitution of this Union to interfere forcibly if they must, and prevent the violation of those pledges heretofore held sacred. We therefore propose that all persons so disposed meet at Pennsylvania Hall on 6th st. between Arch and Race to-morrow, Wednesday May 16th and demand the immediate dispersion of said Convention;

Several Citizens

Throughout the placard's text, the authors were careful to identify themselves as citizens. They signed the placard as such, and limited their call for assistance to those Philadelphians who were citizens and who "entertain[ed] a proper regard for the right of property." Members of the mob that gathered and eventually destroyed Pennsylvania Hall, as requested by these placards, identified with a particular vision of American citizenship. They used the destruction of the Hall to articulate their idea of an exclusively white and exclusively male citizenry, extending and limiting citizens' rights only to people like themselves. Their vision of citizenship was constructed in opposition to the notion of slavery. Because the Pennsylvania Hall Association allowed free discussion of slavery by both women and men in their Hall, they challenged mob members' notion of an all white, all male body of citizens by highlighting the possibility of alternative definitions of citizenship. The possible access to political power and voice granted to African Americans and women within Pennsylvania Hall was seen as a direct threat to mob members' white masculinity, upon which they based their claims to citizenship. The strength of

the mob's response demonstrated the very real threat that many white men believed abolition
posed to their livelihoods. For poor whites in particular, who had few avenues through which
they could express their opinions, physical violence became an appropriate form of expression.
The mob violently asserted their white masculinity by destroying Pennsylvania Hall, thus
establishing their own claim to citizenship while removing the possibility of free discussion of
alternative visions of citizenship.25

The mob's destructive act did not stand alone in the American consciousness, as the
violent expression of political sentiments grew increasingly common after the turn of the
nineteenth century. The Jacksonian era saw a general rise in mob violence and rioting,
particularly after 1835 when abolitionists led by William Lloyd Garrison took a more radical
tone in their writings.26 These mobs assembled in large groups throughout urban America to
"enforce their will immediately, by threatening or perpetrating injury to people or property
outside of legal procedures but without intending to challenge the general structure of society."
27 For those who felt marginalized within the democratic system, mob violence acted as an
effective way to project their political opinions through physical violence.

Most rioters sought not to overthrow any government or societal system, but instead to
enforce "justice within the bonds of society"; addressing and removing threats to their way of life
by means of violent processes.28 The spreading cultural acceptance of violence in Jacksonian
America made the use of rioting an acceptable path to achieving social and moral reform. The
growing concentration of young men in cities also fueled the increasing number of riots in this

26 Leonard Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York:
365.
28 Ibid., 365.
period. For the first time in American history, young men were moving away from their families' rural farms and into the urban landscape, hoping to make it on their own. Yet, the development of industrialization and lack of universal schooling in the antebellum period meant that these young men were often left unemployed and unsupervised in the overwhelming world of the city. This in turn led to the emergence of "a distinct youth culture that found expression in gang warfare, fire company riots, and rowdy misbehavior that was often fueled by alcohol and could break out on any night." The growing concentration of unemployed and restless young people who often felt as if they had no way of expressing their voice other than resorting to violent action led to the increase in rioting in the Jacksonian period.

Philadelphia was not immune to this rise in mob violence, with racially charged riots erupting in the city in both 1834 and 1835 before Pennsylvania Hall's destruction in 1838. In 1834, rioting broke out when some black Philadelphians won a fight against a group of white Philadelphians, who subsequently returned with clubs and attacked the black individuals and their property before turning to assault other black residents. The white rioters then attacked the First African Presbyterian Church and a tavern known to be frequented by black and white people, as well as destroying another black church in Southwark, at least thirty homes, and much property. Major riots sparked by race also occurred in New York and Cincinnati before the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall. All of these riots illustrate the prevalence of unrest in America during this period and allow the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall to be understood not as an

30 Paul Gilje, Rioting in America, 73.
anomaly, but as an event in which fit into the developing pattern of violence which pervaded Jacksonian America.

May 15

The placards that appeared throughout Philadelphia on the morning of May 15 were written in order to appeal to a specific segment of the Philadelphia population, namely the poor white workers and rich white merchants who were most threatened by abolition. The crowd drawn to the Hall was apparently quite diverse, for no consensus existed between the accounts written by newspapers and diarists about the size and make-up of the crowd. Newspapers such as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* identified the "chief actors in the scene... [as] a party of thirty or forty men and boys," and later further specified that "As to the immediate actors in this scene, it is almost impossible to give any thing like a definite account. They were doubtless few in number, and confined principally, we presume, to ages between 17 and 21."³² The *Inquirer* also makes the important distinction of noting that "Several citizens pushed into the Hall," thus validating the mob's violent establishment of claims to citizenship.³³ The *National Gazette* did not make a distinction between the active rioters and the larger crowd watching the Hall, stating, "The crowd around the Pennsylvania Hall at the time of the destruction of the building, must have comprised from twenty-five to thirty thousand men, generally respectable and well dressed."³⁴ General Augustus James Pleasonton reported in his diary that he had heard a rumor that "a large mob of near 2,000 persons assaulted the Abolition Hall, as it is termed, in North 6th street, broke the

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³³ Ibid., n.p.
windows, and pommelled the negros as they came out of it."35 Sidney Fisher, in contrast, reported in his diary that Pennsylvania Hall "was deliberately opened & burnt, in broad day, by a mob of well-dressed persons."36

Little shared ground exists between these accounts with regards to the mob's size or constituents. Uncertainty as to exactly what happened during the riot allowed for many different interpretations of the night's events to be made. Because no authoritative voice existed which could describe the mob, every version of the Hall's destruction published could claim to have ultimate factual authority. Philadelphian authors were able to project their own visions onto the mob, and thus create a mob that fit their own interests. The inability to determine exactly who had been in the mob also gave a degree of protection to the instigators of the fire, who remained cloaked in anonymity throughout the aftermath of the Hall's destruction.

While few common threads emerge from descriptions of the mob, one conclusion that can be drawn is that the crowd around the Hall must have been almost exclusively white. Because none of the accounts specified the race of the mob members, save for General Pleasonton's mention of "pommelled negros," one can surmise that the authors assumed the mob members would be read as white. Another observation common to several of the accounts was the distinction between the thousands of people who watched the Hall's destruction and the few who took part in the act of destruction itself. This smaller, active group, the true mob, was ultimately responsible for the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall. Based upon the descriptions given above, accounts written by other Philadelphians, and the patterns of participation in Jacksonian mob violence, one can speculate that the active members of the mob were likely poor

white young men and boys. This smaller group was perhaps egged on by the rich, "respectable," "well dressed" white men in the crowd, who joined with the poorer men to create an economically diverse performance of an exclusively white, male, citizenship. It is critical to attempt to unravel the lives of these men and boys in order to understand how Pennsylvania Hall came to be seen as something so threatening to the mob members' lives that it had to be destroyed.

A principal concern Pennsylvania Hall raised amongst these men was the threat that these men believed abolition posed to their livelihood. Rich Philadelphians worried about the economic effects of challenging the South, particularly as Philadelphia had by the 1830s shifted from an international trading port to a primarily domestic one in constant exchange with the South. 37 Poorer members of the mob were threatened by abolition as well, for competition for jobs at the low end of the economic spectrum was at a premium in the antebellum period. The bank wars between Andrew Jackson and Nicholas Biddle took their toll on the Philadelphia economy in particular, the home of the American banking industry. 38 When Jackson finally successfully closed the Second Bank of the United States, it generated a period of runaway inflation that eventually crashed in the Panic of 1837. 39 This panic resulted in five years of national economic depression and raised levels of unemployment. The economic uncertainty of the period increased the fears of working-class white Philadelphians that they would not be able to maintain employment and provide for their families. 40

38 Bruce Laurie, Working People of Philadelphia, 303 - 304
39 Ibid., 280.
These fears were easily manipulated by anti-abolitionist advocates, who warned Philadelphians that if abolitionists were successful, then slaves would come to the North and take the few jobs available. Intense rivalry between poor whites and blacks over the few available jobs "at the bottom of the occupational ladder" was exacerbated by the growing population of the city, driven especially by the large numbers of Irish immigrants arriving in the city. Many of the Irish held anti-abolitionist views because they feared the consequences of freeing slaves. Irish immigrants already felt they "could not gain access [to jobs] without dislodging the blacks," so they naturally dreaded the increased competition that would result from a new large population of African Americans entering the job market if slaves were freed.

The tensions between poor blacks and whites were exacerbated even further by the presence of a prominent and diverse free black community in Philadelphia, which by the 1840s, had swelled to a size of 48,000. Not only was the free black community large, but "by the second quarter of the nineteenth century, a distinctly multi-tiered black society had emerged ... [featuring] the crystallizing of a black upper class and the increasing stratification within the black community." Philadelphia's black upper class, determined by virtue of personal wealth and social status, increasingly tried to institute the black community as a legitimate part of Philadelphia society. Black leadership attempted to both promote the adoption of respectable behavior, by advocating temperance and adhering to white standards of gentility, and to create separate, safe spaces for the black community in the form of black churches and schools. White Philadelphians generally reacted with scorn to all attempts made by African Americans to establish a place for themselves in Philadelphia society. "The era in which church membership

43 Gary Nash, Forging Freedom, 248.
and education among blacks grew impressively… was also the era in which race relations reached new lows, as if every black accomplishment only intensified white resentment and hostility. The presence of a visible and vocal black upper class intensified the animosity felt by poor whites towards all economic levels of the free black community. The resentment felt by this class fueled the racist and anti-abolitionist sentiments which abounded in Philadelphia during this period.

Poor whites responded to the threat of losing their employment to African Americans by uniting with upper-class whites over their shared "whiteness," rather than uniting with poor blacks who shared their economic station. For some Philadelphian workers, particularly those who were Irish immigrants, this "whiteness" could not be taken for granted. Irish immigrants had to work to prove that they were in fact, white, and thus entitled to partake in the benefits of citizenship. The members of the mob that destroyed Pennsylvania Hall demonstrated their refusal to give African Americans a public forum in which to express their political voice, as well as their refusal to accept the possibility of freeing African-Americans who they believed would flood into the already oversaturated Philadelphia job market.

Poor whites hoped to unite with the rich white community of Philadelphia in their shared refusal to allow the possibility of ending slavery. These economically disparate groups established social and political ties by joining together in the mob to physically express their common opinions. Poor whites created their own definition of "whiteness" by establishing blacks as a distinct and separate other. Destroying Pennsylvania Hall thus allowed poor whites both to access citizenship by establishing their own whiteness and to attempt to deny citizenship to

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44 Ibid., 272.
African Americans by refusing to allow a forum for abolitionist debate. Because the dialogues promoted within Pennsylvania Hall threatened the racial distinctions created by poor whites in order to establish their citizenship, mob members felt moved to destroy the Hall.

**May 16**

Throughout the morning and afternoon of May 16, Philadelphians followed the instructions left to them on the placard by "Several Citizens." A crowd began to gather at Pennsylvania Hall in the morning, and lingered around the Hall, "examining gas-pipes and talking in an 'incendiary' manner." The mob grew in size throughout the day, hassling those who went in and out of the Hall until the sun set. That evening, the large room of the Hall had been commissioned by a series of abolitionist speakers, including William Lloyd Garrison, Angelina Grimké Weld, Maria Weston Chapman, Lucretia Mott, and Abby Kelly. During the speeches, the mob outside grew increasingly rowdy, yelling over the speakers and throwing projectiles at the Hall and through its windows. The rioters did not begin to physically attack the Hall in earnest until women began to speak. When the speeches in the Hall ended, "the company [inside] retired amid the cries and groans of the mob, who blocked up the street on every side," yet let the audience exit Pennsylvania Hall unharmed.

The presence of female abolitionists speaking in front of "promiscuous", or mixed gender, and racially diverse audiences outraged the crowd outside of Pennsylvania Hall, as evidenced by the violent shift in their behavior when women took the stage. By providing a venue in which women could openly discuss issues including abolition, Pennsylvania Hall further challenged the vision of an exclusively white, male citizenry. Abolitionist women laid

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47 Ibid., 118.
claim to a political voice by speaking to the public in Pennsylvania Hall, a venue that permitted women to challenge gendered stereotypes by speaking in front of "promiscuous" audiences. Mob members attacked Pennsylvania Hall in part because the building threatened their own vision of citizenship by allowing women to dispute gender norms. Women displayed public authority and political voice in their speeches at Pennsylvania Hall, eroding mob members' claims to a selective citizenship based on whiteness and masculinity. Rather than accept a broader, inclusive vision of citizenship, mob members used violence in an attempt to silence women and keep them in a position of non-citizenship.

The female abolitionists in Pennsylvania Hall were particularly inflammatory to mob members because by speaking before "promiscuous" audiences, they violated gendered societal norms. By the 1830s, Americans had developed a distinct ideology about gender, centered on the concepts of "separate spheres" and the cult of domesticity. In the social world defined by "separate spheres," both men and women were expected to demarcate their identity within the "sphere" that best suited their natural abilities according to gender.49 Local worlds were conceptually divided into distinct male and female realms, where "women were understood to have an important influence over the home, family, and moral decisions, while men controlled the more immoral chaotic arenas of politics, the economy, and public life."50 Ideally, men occupied the wider public world while women retreated to the private domestic realm of the "home."

This distance from the corrupting influence of the world actually strengthened women's early involvement with abolition. Women used this gendered concept to highlight their supreme moral ideology, an avenue for political access that was unavailable to men whose morals had

50 Beth Salerno, Sister Societies, 5.
necessarily been distorted by involvement in the wicked world. Women who moved beyond attempting to use their morality to influence the end of slavery, however, they brought censure upon themselves. When the female abolitionists took the stage in Pennsylvania Hall, they were placing themselves in the public sphere, a traditionally male arena. The mob's violent reaction to these women "resulted both from the women's abolitionist activity and their supposed violation of the separate spheres that relegated women to the home while reserving public meetings for men." The notion of a distinctly gendered world shaped the mob's understanding of Pennsylvania Hall and their reaction to female abolitionist speakers.

The mob's maligning of female speakers was not unprecedented. By 1838, there was an established and growing tradition of slandering abolitionist women who challenged gendered standards. Much of this distaste for female speakers came from the quarter of conservative ministers, powerful brokers of social capital in Jacksonian America. Ministers condemned women who spoke in public, especially those who did so before promiscuous audiences, for abandoning their domestic responsibilities and for challenging the societal status quo. Ministers' strong censure of female abolitionists might also have been prompted by their fear that if women devoted their attention to abolitionist causes, they would abandon ecclesiastical fundraising efforts and cause churches to lose money. Sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimké, who both attended the events at Pennsylvania Hall, had previous experience drawing the ire of ministers. During their speaking tour of New England, they were essentially forbidden from speaking in any churches by ministers in Massachusetts. An increasing rhetoric of anti-

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52 Beth Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 42.
54 Beth Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 69.
clericalism promoted by abolitionists like the Grimkés did not help calm the tensions between these groups. The negative assessment of female speakers made by powerful social figures like ministers informed how Philadelphians understood the activities within Pennsylvania Hall.

Though the mob's actions must be understood within the frame of larger societal critiques, important distinctions exist between the reactions of most detractors of female speakers and those of mob members. Ministers, newspaper editors, and even some abolitionists offered stinging rebukes to the women who violated gender standards, but these rebukes never moved beyond the realm of the written or spoken word. Mob members, while expressing the same sentiment as others reacting to perceived gender transgressions, instead communicated their critique through violent action. The poorer members of the mob had few methods of expression, and thus made their opinions known through violent, physical attacks.

The poor members of the mob based their tenuous and as yet uncertain claims to citizenship upon the existence of a gendered dichotomy between men and women. Rioters' demands for political rights were based on a masculine identity that was distinctly "not female." When women uprooted the gender dichotomy by taking on the male characteristic of speaking in the public sphere, they challenged male claims to citizenship. Women who adopted male features and entered the public sphere confused understandings of exactly what it meant to be a man. This social uncertainty was especially unwelcome to working-class men still working to establish an authority which would give them access to citizenship and a political voice. Female abolitionist speakers offered a challenge to societal standards about gender by voicing their own opinions about slavery in front of a promiscuous and racially mixed audience on the evening of May 16.

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57 Ibid., 3.
Members of the crowd outside of Pennsylvania Hall reacted strongly and violently to these
gendered transgressions, as these women challenged the crowd's idealized vision of citizenship.

May 17

Philadelphians gathered around the Hall on the morning of May 17 with thoughts of the
previous night's outrages on their minds, remembering the violations of decency that they
believed Pennsylvania Hall was perpetuating in Philadelphia. The simmering resentment felt by
many Philadelphians towards the Hall and its occupants manifested in aggressive outbursts,
beginning with a single rock thrown at the Hall on May 14, and building up to the violent riot
that shook the Hall throughout the evening of May 16. The mob's anger did not come to a head,
however, until the evening of the 17th. Thousands crowded around the Hall over the course of
the day as tension built up throughout the city. As rumors raced through the city that
Pennsylvania Hall was promoting amalgamation, the mob reached its boiling point. After a
speech from the mayor intended to pacify the crowd served to incite them instead, a group of
around 40 young men broke through the locked doors of the Hall, tore the interior fixtures down,
and used the gas lights to set the Hall alight. Jacob Elfreth, a Philadelphia diarist, described the
scene of the Hall's destruction:

About 9 o'clock we heard the cry of fire. The state house bell was rung, and soon
after the flames were seen ascending and the whole building was completely on
fire. I sat on the steps in my backyard and if I could have forgotten the
wickedness of the cause, should have enjoyed the spectacle that presented itself. It
was a warm evening, almost calm, but what little wind there was... brought the
fragments of burning shingles across the Franklin Square, which after being
carried to a great height in the air fell around us like shooting stars or rockets.

60 Jacob Elfreth, Chronicle, Haverford College Special Collections, 99-100.
Fire companies quickly arrived at the scene but sprayed only neighboring buildings, doing nothing to douse the flames consuming Hall.\textsuperscript{61} As the night drew to a close, all that was left at the corner of Sixth and Race streets was a haze surrounding the still smoking ruins of the Hall.

The tension that had developed amongst the crowds outside of Pennsylvania Hall since the building opened on May 14 exploded in a spectacular display of violence on May 17 because of rumors that amalgamation, or sex between two people of different races, was being promoted in the Hall. Allegations spread throughout the city that black men and white women and white men and black women were seen walking in and out of the Hall. Philadelphia diarist Sidney Fisher noted that "There was great provocation [for the mob's action]. The cause itself is unpopular & justly so... Black & white men & women sat promiscuously together, & walked about arm in arm," while Jacob Elfreth, a Quaker diarist, observed that "the intemperate zeal of the Anti-Slavery Society, and the indiscriminate mixture of blacks and whites, male and female, at their meetings, have given such offence that many of the respectable part of the community speak harshly of them."\textsuperscript{62} Another Philadelphian, General Augustus James Pleasonton, made similar observations in his diary, stating:

Many think highly exciting and inflammatory [the] proceedings of the abolitionists... and the disgusting habits, of indiscriminate intercourse between the whites and blacks, so repugnant to all the prejudices of our education, which they not only have recommended, but are in the habit of practicing in this very Abolition Hall.\textsuperscript{63}

The Pennsylvania Hall Association denied that any such mixing ever occurred, though black and white members of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women admitted to walking out of

\textsuperscript{62} Sidney Fisher, Diary, 49 and Jacob Elfreth, Chronicle, 99.
\textsuperscript{63} General Augustus James Pleasonton, Diary, 106.
the Hall together arm in arm. Mob members identified the Hall as both a space for abolition and as a potential site for amalgamation. They found the rumors of amalgamation to be so believable that they acted as though amalgamation had already occurred in the Hall. Diarists' recognition of the general societal disapproval of racial mixing identifies amalgamation as the primary, and perhaps even permissible, cause of the mob's violence.

Members of the crowd were especially sensitive to any talk of upended gender and racial mores after their previous encounters with visitors to Pennsylvania Hall. As women took on the male role of speaking in public space, their feminine morals and virtues were called into question. The act of a woman speaking in front of a promiscuous audience generated the perception that the speaker herself was promiscuous. These sexual fears were exacerbated even further by the presence of African American men and women in Pennsylvania Hall. Anne M. Boylan notes that "When white female abolitionists engaged in public agitation and figuratively embraced free black women, their opponents conceived images of racial 'amalgamation' and presumed their loss of all claims to feminine virtue." Thus, sexualized, racial, and gendered fears fed off of each other to build up a general panic in the minds of members of the mob.

The concept of amalgamation was especially threatening to mob members' view of citizenship. It offered a possibility through which white women and African American men and women could collaborate, and thus pose a legitimate threat to the exclusively white and masculine citizenry. This threat of possibility, not any "actual instances of interracial sex between blacks and whites, but rather mythical relationships between black and white

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abolitionists" which lead working-class whites to use "the charge of amalgamation [as] a means to discredit the ways in which abolitionists demanded inclusion of blacks in the political sphere." 67 Philadelphians of markedly different social backgrounds, from members of the mob to diarists who wrote about these riots, viewed Pennsylvania Hall as a building which promoted amalgamation by providing abolitionists the opportunity to interact in a "promiscuous" mixed-race setting. The physical space of the building thus became so provocative to members of the mob that they were driven to destroy the Hall in order to protect their claims to a white and masculine citizenship from the threat posed by the promiscuous abolitionist amalgamators.

By tearing down a visible, physical threat to the hegemonic rule of white men, poor men cemented their right to have a public and political voice because of their white masculinity. In so doing, they also denied this voice to African Americans and women precisely because they were not white and male. The mob performed their effective declaration of citizenship in front of a crowd of thousands, counter-intuitively breaking the law in order to establish their right to be citizens. Each crowd member bore witness to the mob's claim to public voice by memorializing the display of citizenship in the rumors that spread around the city or in accounts written about the event. These literary records interpret the mob's sentiments through their retellings of the affair. The feelings that the working-class mob members could only express through their physical actions were thus transposed to a written medium by witnesses in the crowd around the Hall, who came from a range of economic backgrounds.

The violence wrought on the body of the Hall by the mob members thus wrote their message for all Philadelphians to see, demonstrating "what they are thinking... by the actions they take and by the objects they attack." 68 This act of aggressive writing was subsequently

67 Leslie M. Harris, "From Abolitionist Amalgamators," 195.
68 Paul Gilje, Rioting in America, 6.
preserved by witnesses' translation of mob members' opinions in diaries and newspapers. In antebellum Philadelphia, "those without authority, including nonwhites, women, and the poor generally, could not be trusted to speak honorably, and (circularly) those without honor could not speak authoritatively." Thus, if poor white men wanted to speak authoritatively and by extension have a political voice as a citizen, they had to actively dissociate themselves from other unvoiced groups. Attacking Pennsylvania Hall allowed mob members to distance themselves from the disempowered groups of women and African Americans. The mob was able to effectively perform the establishment of their white male citizenship for the audience of thousands of Philadelphians who gathered around Pennsylvania Hall.

The mob was ultimately successful in establishing their vision of citizenship, as their violent attack on the Hall prefigured a legislative attack on the rights of Pennsylvania's free black community. The Pennsylvania legislature eventually passed a new constitution in 1838, after the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall, which granted the vote to "every white freeman of the age of twenty-one years, having resided in this state one year." This law allowed many more poor white men to vote and disenfranchised free blacks who had previously been able to vote. Clearly, the vision of an exclusively white, male citizenry constructed by the mob's attack on Pennsylvania Hall was convincing to both Philadelphians and Pennsylvanians. By eliminating Pennsylvania Hall from the Philadelphia landscape, the rich and poor white men who made up the mob were able to construct a vision of citizenship that empowered white males like themselves, while simultaneously removing African Americans and women from positions of public and social authority.

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69 Dell Upton, Another City, 76.
70 Dell Upton, Another City, 86.
II. THE PENNSYLVANIA HALL ASSOCIATION

As the members of the Pennsylvania Hall Association (PAHA) watched flames consume their beloved Hall, they saw their dreams for a "sacred temple of free discussion" drift into the sky along with the ashes and smoke of the building. Amazed by the antipathy and hatred of the crowd surrounding the Hall, the PAHA quickly started trying to make sense of what had happened to themselves and to their building. Pennsylvania Hall, a physical expression of the PAHA's desire for a space which would allow free discussion of slavery, had been destroyed by a mob attempting to violently project their opinions about slavery and citizenship onto the building. Rumors quickly spread throughout the city about the PAHA's choice to not defend the Hall from the crowds as well as allegations that they had promoted doctrines of amalgamation within the Hall.

In an attempt to redeem both their own reputations and the reputation of their Hall, members of the PAHA used newspapers and publications to respond to their detractors and to tell their side of the Hall's story. The PAHA gradually changed the content of these retellings as time passed in an attempt to control the public memory of Pennsylvania Hall. The Board of Managers of the Pennsylvania Hall Association used their retellings of the Hall's destruction to create a vision of themselves as abolitionists which was derived from their views of citizenship, a class-based and racial authority, and the subscription to Enlightenment ideals of masculinity. The PAHA created this identity in response to the views about slavery projected by the mob during the riots at Pennsylvania Hall. The Pennsylvania Hall Association used the self-identity honed in their retellings of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction to differentiate between abolition and other approaches to slavery and to demonstrate why they believed abolition was the only proper response.

72 Daniel Neall, Letter, May 21, 1838, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.
The destruction of Pennsylvania Hall occurred during a period of conflict over the
definition of masculinity. Two ideals of what it meant to be a man fought for predominance
throughout the antebellum period. Middle and upper-class white men, including the Board of
Managers of the PAHA, were the inheritors of the Enlightenment-based definitions of
masculinity and citizenship established by the prior early national generation. This earlier group
of men made their opinions about manhood clear in their private writings and in public
documents like the Declaration of Independence and Constitution. They believed that in order to
be a man, one must "discipline passions, check impulses... establish independence... fit into
civil society, and practice citizenship."73 An emphasis was placed on using reason to better
oneself, one's family, and one's society. Definitions of masculinity and citizenship were deeply
intertwined and exclusive, as it was impossible to be one without also being the other. The
selective nature of this definition led to an easy distinction in Revolutionary Americans' minds
between the masculine and the men who "did not measure up to manhood, [who] acted on
passion, impulse, and avarice, and used liberty as an excuse for engaging in disorderly
conduct."74 These "un-masculine" men misused the privileges of citizenship, and thus, were not
fit to be citizens. This powerful gendered viewpoint held sway for much of the early republic, as
the figures of the Founders cast a long shadow into the nineteenth century.

The election of Andrew Jackson, however, crystallized a new definition of masculinity
that emerged from those dissatisfied with the existing system of gender relations. Andrew
Jackson was a very different President than all of his predecessors and ushered in a new era of
political thought as "Jacksonian ideologists proclaimed their abiding faith in the wisdom of
common folk and their distrust of formal institutions, written law, and legal procedures.\textsuperscript{75} Jacksonian men also viewed masculinity and citizenship as closely intertwined, though they had very different definitions of the terms than the abolitionists. Jacksonians embraced a masculinity based in passionate action, celebrating many of the qualities repressed and carefully controlled by men of the Enlightenment. Similarly, the Jacksonian view of citizenship was based on participation in a political majority that enforced swift justice, encouraging the growth in mob violence in the period. The discourse between the Jacksonian and Enlightenment visions of manhood shaped reactions amongst Philadelphians to Pennsylvania Hall.\textsuperscript{76}

The growing popularity of the American Colonization Society also influenced the PAHA’s self-presentation after the destruction of the Hall. The body of texts produced by the PAHA must be understood in dialogue with the ideals promoted by the American Colonization Society. The American Colonization Society, founded in 1816, was a popular group of reformers who hoped to end the problems of slavery and racism in America by removing all Africans and African Americans from the country and sending them to Africa.\textsuperscript{77}

A critical focus of the American Colonization Society’s literature was an emphasis on the masculinity of members of the society. As Bruce Dorsey notes, “Colonization reform assumed a masculine character from its inception and framed its solution to the slavery problem in political terms.”\textsuperscript{78} The political tenor of the colonizationist message identified the colonization movement as masculine. Because colonizationists’ solution to anti-slavery was based in involvement in the political sphere, the movement was not a welcoming place for women, who by societal standards were expected to remain outside of politics. Thus, the notions of colonization and masculinity

\textsuperscript{75} Michael Feldberg, \textit{The Turbulent Era: Riot & Disorder in Jacksonian America} (New York, Oxford UP, 1980) 96.
\textsuperscript{76} Bruce Dorsey, \textit{Reforming Men and Women}, 6.
\textsuperscript{77} Gary Nash, \textit{Forging Freedom}, 234.
\textsuperscript{78} Bruce Dorsey, \textit{Reforming Men and Women}, 139.
became so intertwined that they were "inseparable elements of a comprehensive gender system that sustained antebellum movements designed to resolve the dilemmas of slavery, race, and the place of free African Americans in that society." As colonizationists continued to promote their solution to racial issues in America, they simultaneously advanced their vision for American masculinity. The PAHA had to combat the American Colonization Society for the reputation as a masculine response to slavery.

The Colonizationist movement became increasingly popular in Philadelphia in part because of the more strident, vocal tone taken by abolitionist leaders like William Lloyd Garrison in the 1830s. The Colonization movement began to attract even Quakers away from abolition, particularly after a split in the Quaker religion into the Hicksite and Orthodox sects in the 1820s. Quakers generally took positions on abolition based upon their sect's views. The Hicksites adopted the militant, Garrisonian abolitionist approach, while the Orthodox Quakers flocked to Colonization. Divisions in attitudes towards anti-slavery involved many more Philadelphians than just Quakers, however. Because of Philadelphia’s unique position "as the southernmost northern city, [it] possessed the largest and most influential free black community and experienced the most intense competition between colonizationist and abolitionist reformers." Philadelphia's free black community was actively involved in the fight between abolition and colonization, doing their utmost to deter the spread of colonization's popularity. Yet, despite (or perhaps because of) the efforts of the free black community and abolitionist organizations in Philadelphia, abolition came to be seen as a much more radical response to slavery than colonization and its popularity amongst white Philadelphians waned in the 1830s.

79 Ibid., 139.
80 For more information on the Quaker split and slavery, see Jean R. Soderlund, Quakers and Slavery: A Divided Spirit (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988).
81 Gary Nash, First City, 190.
82 Dorsey, Reforming Men and Women, 139.
As a result, abolitionist groups struggled to find places in Philadelphia where they could hold their meetings and discussions. Even the traditionally anti-slavery Quakers turned abolitionists out of their meetinghouses in the 1830s as abolition became an increasingly polarizing issue.

The PAHA formed in response to this lack of meeting space for free discussion in Philadelphia. Many of its members were abolitionists concerned about the lack of space in the city devoted to open dialogue. The Association described themselves as “a number of individuals of all sects, and those of no sect, -of all parties, and those of no party.” The group claimed they built the Hall because they wanted a space "wherein the principles of Liberty, and Equality of Civil Rights, could be freely discussed, and the evils of slavery fearlessly portrayed." The Association elected a board of managers and sold two thousand stocks, each costing twenty dollars, to members of the community to finance the construction of Pennsylvania Hall.

Although abolitionists had become too radical to find meeting rooms in Philadelphia, the movement was still popular enough to allow the PAHA to collect $40,000 for their Hall. The PAHA described the majority of stockholders as “mechanics, or working men, and, (as is the case in almost every other good work,) a number are females.” Many members of Philadelphia’s free black community also purchased stocks. The economic, gendered, and racial diversity of the stockholders, however, was not replicated amongst the members of the PAHA’s Board of Managers, all of whom were white males presumably from the middle and upper classes. At the first meeting of the PAHA Board of Managers on March 13, 1837, the members elected Daniel Neall, a Philadelphia dentist and abolitionist, to be their president. The minutes

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84 Ibid., 6.
85 Ibid., 6.
86 Based on the amount of time and financial commitment required of board members, it seems unlikely that a working class Philadelphian would be able to be a member.
from this meeting discussed possible locations and uses of the Hall, making no reference to the masculinity, citizenship, and discontent that would color their later publications.

The Pennsylvania Freeman

After a mob of Philadelphians had destroyed Pennsylvania Hall in front of a large, complacent crowd, there was no way to deny that a strong anti-abolitionist sentiment existed in Philadelphia. Members of the PAHA quickly went on the defensive in an attempt to redeem the Hall's image, refuting the notion that Pennsylvania Hall had been an abomination that needed to be destroyed. They retold the story of Pennsylvania Hall from their own perspective almost immediately after the Hall's destruction through accounts published in newspapers. In their retelling of the Hall's story, the mob became a violent mass of reasonless humanity that attacked Pennsylvania Hall without cause. A critical part of the Association's interpretation of the Hall's story was their focus upon a class-based notion of masculinity. The PAHA highlighted their commitment to a vision of masculinity based on the ideals of the Founding Fathers by contrasting their own actions with those of the unruly mob.

After Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, the PAHA began to quickly commemorate the building in various public forums, particularly by using the newspaper The Pennsylvania Freeman. The Freeman acted as a mouthpiece for the abolitionist cause of its publishers, the Eastern District Executive Committee of the Anti-Slavery Society of Pennsylvania, and its editor, the abolitionist Quaker poet John Whittier. The offices of the newspaper were briefly located in the ground floor of Pennsylvania Hall, and the paper continually displayed very favorable attitudes towards both abolitionists and the Hall. The Freeman was published only once a week, on Fridays, and usually reported on abolition related news items from across the


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country. An issue was published on May 18, 1838; the day after Pennsylvania Hall was destroyed. This issue discussed the opening ceremonies and riots during the speeches on the evening of May 16 at length, already beginning to condemn the men in the mob. The people standing outside of the Hall were described as, "rude fellows of the baser sort" and "base, bloody, and lawless," directly contrasted with the audience within the Hall that was "calm, self-collected, and lifted above fear" despite the crowd's unruly presence. The *Freeman* criticized the mob's primal and animalistic qualities while emphasizing the reason and refinement of the male and female abolitionists in the Hall, basing the claims of their critique upon their understandings of masculinity.

The same copy of the *Freeman* had a hastily added final article entitled, "POSTSCRIPT! ATROCIOUS OUTRAGE! BURNING OF PENNSYLVANIA HALL!" Whittier added this short piece reporting the Hall's destruction after having donned a disguise to pass through the crowd at the Hall, enter the building, and save the documents of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society from being consumed by the fire that destroyed the Hall. He noted that he had "only time to give a hasty sketch of the horrible proceedings of the night," but still includes a description of the crowd as "a body of ill-disposed persons," setting the stage for characterizations of the crowd that would continue in the next issue of the *Freeman*.

Whittier and the others involved in producing the *Freeman* had ample time to reflect upon the destruction of the Hall during the week that elapsed before the publication of the next issue. Most of the articles in this issue focused upon the Pennsylvania Hall riot, emphasizing the superior masculine conduct of the PAHA. When discussing a senator who had expressed sympathy for the Hall's plight after its destruction, the *Freeman* praised his "manly bearing and

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noble sentiments," phrasing their admiration in terms of gender. Friends of the Hall were depicted as the true exemplars of the Founding Fathers' restrained and reasonable masculine civic virtue. This characterization continued as Whittier described the abolitionist desire to speak about the destruction of the Hall only "in a tone of calmness, to hold... aloof, as far as possible, from the present excitement to utter our abiding testimony, now dearer than ever to our hearts, not in the language of passion, but firmly and decidedly." Rather than sinking to the mob's level of violent and degraded masculinity, Whittier depicted the abolitionists as choosing to restrain their reaction and only respond to the attack with measured criticism, demonstrating a commitment to their masculine ideal. The initial reactions to Pennsylvania Hall's destruction published by abolitionists and the PAHA were shaped by the dichotomy between the depictions of mob members and that of abolitionists. The PAHA was anxious to prove their conduct was masculine and thus distinguish abolition as the most masculine response to slavery in the city.

The Public Address

In the aftermath of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, the Board of Managers reported their actions to the public by using spoken addresses as well as newspapers. These addresses were generally recorded as well as spoken, and often published afterwards. The Eastern District Executive Committee of the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society published one such address which continued to develop the differences between the PAHA and the crowd that destroyed Pennsylvania Hall. The Address was published both in the Freeman, the voice of the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society and in pamphlet form. Although the Executive Committee was a different entity than the Board of Managers of the PAHA, much overlap

91 Ibid., n.p.
existed between the two committees. Of the eleven members on the Executive Committee, five also served on the Board of Managers of the PAHA, and most of the rest were stockholders in the Hall. The PAHA published the Address of the Executive Committee alongside its own propaganda, and thus the Address can be read as an extension of the PAHA's views.

Throughout the text of the Address, the Executive Committee builds the same dichotic characterization as the PAHA, contrasting the abolitionists in the Hall with the crowd outside. The Address begins by retelling the Hall's brief period of existence with an initial focus upon the positive qualities of those meeting in the Hall. The audience within the Hall on the night of the 16th is described using words such as "reasonable," "calm and dispassionate," and "of the noblest minds."92 This positive designation was even extended to the women in attendance at the Hall, who were shown to be "capable of grasping, with prevailing strength, subjects of a magnitude and difficulty which masculine vigor would deem it an honor to master."93 Women who displayed the masculine traits valued by the PAHA were seen as more deserving of accolades and of the right to a public voice than men who were wild and passionate. This distinction also alluded to the racial and socioeconomic foundation of the abolitionist idea of masculinity, as the abolitionists meeting in the Hall were predominantly from the middle class and the PAHA constructed the mob as populated primarily by the poor. Throughout the report, the Executive Committee actively attempted to associate those in Pennsylvania Hall, both men and women, with the positive traits of masculinity and citizenship associated with the Founding Fathers.

As the Address' narrative continued, its focus shifted to emphasize the unruliness of the crowd outside of Pennsylvania Hall. The Executive Committee described the escalating unrest outside the Hall, stating:

93 Ibid., 147.
The crowd around the devoted building grew more dense and more excited; busy agents of mischief were passing from group to group, circulating falsehoods and calumnies against the abolitionists, and inflaming passions which even now needed allaying; citizens of other states, slaveholders actual and slaveholders expectant, mingled in the mass, to leaven it yet more thoroughly with a spirit of reckless desperation, and increase its already over-abundant fermentation and effervescence. 94

The Executive Committee identified the cause of the violence as lies spread by a few malicious rabble-rousers rather than as the possible result of the feelings of the masses outside of the Hall. They also make the claim that the chief perpetrators of this outrage were not Philadelphians, in an attempt to prove that the anti-abolitionist sentiments responsible for the Hall's destruction were not organic Philadelphia sentiments. The Executive Committee tried to simplify the nuanced position of abolition by directly tying the anti-abolitionist crowd that destroyed the Hall to pro-slavery advocates from the South, thus portraying all anti-abolitionists as pro-slavery advocates. By creating this simplified dichotomy between slavery and abolition, the Executive Committee attempted to draw support from non-abolitionist, anti-slavery groups like the American Colonization Society.

Although the Executive Committee identified the leaders of the mob as Southern, they did not entirely spare Philadelphians from their condemnation of the violence. They were especially critical of those who had power to stop the rioting and did nothing, calling into question both the response of the municipal government and of powerful and influential Philadelphians. This is made clear as the committee describes the actions of:

Men of standing and respectability, substantial merchants, and influential citizens, so far from expressing their decided and heart-felt abhorrence of the threatened outrage, and exerting their influence to calm the excitement, to maintain inviolate the rights of their fellow citizens, and preserve unsullied the reputation of their city, either looked on in cold indifference, or, as was in many instances the case,

94 Ibid., 149.
expressed both in language and action their unequivocal approbation and encouragement.  

The inaction, and perhaps even encouragement, of the rioters by these prominent individuals was particularly upsetting to members of the Executive Committee. While the Committee could condemn the members of the crowd that attacked the Hall as "passion-maddened, and doubtless rum-inflamed assailants," they expected that their economic, racial, and social equals would subscribe to the same ideal vision of masculine and civic virtue. Because the Executive Committee was attempting to use their identity as white, middle-class men to validate their participation in abolition, their argument was particularly threatened when men with the same identity either ignored or disliked abolition. The Executive Committee rejected the attempts of their rich, white, male peers to join together with poor, white men in the expression of a common view of an all-white, all-male citizenry. The Executive Committee made clear in this passage that all those in the crowd outside the Hall should be held accountable for the violence, regardless of their economic status.

The *Address* concluded by reiterating the strong moral convictions of the Executive Committee and by tying these convictions back to an idealized Enlightenment vision of masculinity. The authors state that they "acknowledge[e] in our practice, as well as our words, the universal brotherhood of man, and that we believe, what almost all profess, that 'all men are created equal' in rights, and that those rights are inalienable." This passage delineated the commitment of the Executive Committee and the PAHA to the righteous principles that formed the backbone of their claims about masculinity as well as their abhorrence for slavery, but goes still further. The italicization in this passage calls into question not only the actions of the mob,

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95 Ibid., 149.
96 Ibid., 150.
97 Ibid., 155.
but also the choices of those who were both supporters of anti-slavery movements and anti-abolitionists, such as the members of the Colonization Society. The abolitionists believed that they alone held the true solution to the problem of slavery, and that those who supported colonization did not truly believe in the universal brotherhood of man. The Executive Committee was thus able to emphasize their commitment to their ideals, demonstrate the virtues that they believed qualified them to be leaders, and distinguish abolition as the only truly anti-slavery movement.

The Board of Managers of the PAHA echoed the sentiments established in the Address in a speech they gave to a meeting of stockholders of the PAHA on May 30, 1838, called Report of the Board of Managers to Stockholders. During the Report, the Board of Managers both addressed the claims that had been made against them and vocalized their own interpretation of the Hall's destruction. The audience, all of whom had bought stock in Pennsylvania Hall, was friendly to the views of the PAHA. This responsive audience gave the PAHA the opportunity to finalize and solidify their version of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction before making their views official in a publication for the community.

The Board of Manager's Report built upon the characterizations established in the Executive Committee's Address and in the Pennsylvania Freeman. In the Report, the Board of Managers briefly reminded the stockholders of their reasons for building and funding the Hall before moving on to describe the destruction of the Hall. Again, the crowd outside the Hall was portrayed as everything that the Pennsylvania Hall Association was not: an uninhibited, reasonless collection under the control of strangers. Particular scorn was heaped upon these strangers in the PAHA's description of the attack "by an infuriated mob, apparently instigated by individuals from the South West; strangers to our city, strangers to our laws, strangers to our
rights, strangers to our principles and regardless of all that was due to us as men, as citizens, as country men.  The Association identified themselves as men, citizens, and countrymen, while categorizing the mob members as enemies of liberty and righteousness. The mob members were given the important designation of strangers. The geographic distance between the South and Philadelphia became symbolic for the distance between the violent values of the mob and the reason-based masculinity of the abolitionists. As the mob's ringleaders were from the South, they could not be expected to be familiar with the ideal of masculinity in Philadelphia that the abolitionists believed they epitomized. Creating a physical and social distance between the abolitionists and the mob served to reinforce the innate differences between these groups, allowing the PAHA to highlight what they believed to be their superiority as masculine citizens.

The PAHA believed that Southerners fomented unrest in Philadelphia because they did not subscribe to the vision of Enlightenment masculinity and civic virtue. The Board of Managers of the PAHA constructed distinct and opposing identities for themselves and the mob members, portraying themselves as the masculine inheritors of an Enlightenment tradition of citizenship and the mob as an uncontrolled group ruled by pro-slavery Southerners. This construction did not reflect the presence of rich Philadelphians in the mob or the working-class stockholders in the PAHA, simplifying the complicated reality of abolition's position in Philadelphia in order to support the PAHA's visions of masculinity and citizenship. The PAHA's beliefs solidified further in the coming months as they prepared another publication telling their side of Pennsylvania Hall's story.

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History of Pennsylvania Hall

The PAHA began to run advertisements in the Freeman for a book that they planned to publish shortly after the Hall was destroyed. Entitled the History of Pennsylvania Hall, which was destroyed on the 17th of May, 1838, the book was a published, official version of the PAHA's story of the destruction. The book was written so that "the cool, deliberate, reflecting portion of the community, may judge whether the Pennsylvania Hall Association did anything that ought to offend any reasonable person."99 History of Pennsylvania Hall was compiled by Samuel Webb, a member of the Board of Managers. In its pages, Webb included copies of all of the speeches given in the Hall, a listing of who had used the Hall and when, a description of the events leading up to and after the Hall's destruction, and an appendix with several entries concerning the aftermath of the Hall's destruction. Three engravings which illustrated Pennsylvania Hall as it stood at its opening, the Hall under attack, and the ruins of the Hall were also included. The voices of Webb and the PAHA emerge most fully in the section recounting the destruction of the mob. There, Webb gave a more detailed account of these events than was found in any other publically available publication compiled by the PAHA. This retelling of Pennsylvania Hall's story built off of those published in the Pennsylvania Freeman, the Executive Committee's Address, and the Report of the Board of Managers to create a vision of the riot that reflected very favorably upon the PAHA, their actions, and their ideals. The book acted as a literary resurrection of the Hall, allowing the PAHA to publicly express the abolitionist views that the mob had tried to silence.

Webb began his narrative of the destruction by exhibiting a conflict of interest between the masculine values of members of the Association and the public civic virtue which they attempted to cultivate. Webb stated, "It is with reluctance we come before the public with the

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story of our wrongs. Were we to consult our own feelings, we should draw a veil over the
disgraceful transactions we are about to disclose. But it is right that our fellow citizens should
know the true state of the case. The masculine characteristics of pride and modesty made the
members of the PAHA claim to be reluctant about bringing these events further into the public
eye. Yet, the duty to the public that was an even larger part of their vision of masculinity and
citizenship compelled them to take action. PAHA felt obligated to tell their side of the story
because they believed that exposing the injustices done to them would help prevent further
injustice in the future. Although members of the PAHA experienced conflict between their
desires to be both private and public men, their choice to act in the manner that they believed
best suited the public interest demonstrated why they should be citizens. By exposing their
experiences during the Hall's destruction, the PAHA was also able to portray themselves as
martyrs in an attempt to curry favor for their cause.

The PAHA not only made decisions based on what they thought would be best for the
city, they also believed that they knew the feelings of other Philadelphians even better than the
Philadelphians themselves. Despite the presence of a huge crowd that complacently watched a
smaller group burn down Pennsylvania Hall, the PAHA felt that they could assert that:

It is believed that the destruction of our Hall by a mob is not a true exponent of
the sentiments of the Citizens of Philadelphia; but that a large majority of the
legal voters think the Constitutional right to assemble together in a peaceable
manner and freely express our sentiments, should be maintained against all mobs,
whatever may be the subject under discussion.

In addition to tying the principles of the PAHA back to the Constitution and the beliefs of the
Founding Fathers, the PAHA made an important distinction as to who they thought should be
able to express political opinions. They carefully chose the words "large majority of legal voters"

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100 ibid., 136.
101 ibid., 136.
to describe who would approve of the beliefs promoted in Pennsylvania Hall. The PAHA demarcates the opinions of legal voters, citizens like themselves, as the ones that count, completely disregarding the support of disenfranchised women and African Americans who had been celebrated in earlier passages of the book. Disenfranchised poor whites did not have a consequential political opinion in the eyes of the PAHA, who dismissed the mob's attempted performance of citizenship.

Beginning with its detailed initial discussion of the mob's origin, History of Pennsylvania Hall included a more thorough version of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction than had appeared in any other publications made by the PAHA. Webb paid special attention to the placards hung around the city, noting that "The placards posted on the night of the 14th were no doubt decided upon (and probably written) before a word was said, or any act done at the dedication of the Hall." The serious charge that the attack upon Pennsylvania Hall was pre-meditated had not appeared in any previous publications, but would play an important part in the PAHA's message in History of Pennsylvania Hall. They used this conclusion to emphasize the role of Southerners in the destruction of the Hall. The PAHA drew a direct link between the language used in the placards and the pre-meditated attack on the Hall, using both as proof of Southern involvement in the destruction. The PAHA stated, "If this notice had been written by a Philadelphian, he would, in all probability, have said 'in this city,' instead of 'in Philadelphia.' But this is not the only evidence that the mob was managed chiefly by strangers from the South." The PAHA also identified several city officials present at the destruction of the Hall, who claimed they could not recognize "a single inhabitant of Philadelphia." The PAHA worked to actively identify the mob's leaders as Southern. The PAHA gave what they saw as incontrovertible evidence that the

102 Ibid., 143.
103 Ibid., 137.
104 Ibid., 142-143.
mobs' ringleaders were Southern, bolstering the claims they had made in previous publications. This construction of the mob as led by pro-slavery Southerners was crucial to PAHA's attempt to bolster support for abolition.

Figure 1: J.C. Wild, *Pennsylvania Hall*, Lithograph, 1838, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. (photo: author's own)

The messages expressed by Samuel Webb in the text of *History of Pennsylvania Hall* were reinforced by the images also included in the book. Members of the Pennsylvania Hall Association included three images of the Hall in their book because they knew that images of the Hall had an evocative quality that text could not match. The first image, Figure 1, appeared opposite the title page of the book and is a lithograph showing the Hall in all of its classical glory. The picture is dominated by the large, shining, white Hall, while passers-by on the sidewalk move about in orderly pairs. Pennsylvania Hall towers over the neighboring buildings
in the image, suggesting that the PAHA intended for the Hall to be both the visual and social focal point of this central Philadelphia neighborhood. The building is represented as the pictorial equivalent of the Pennsylvania Hall Association's definition of masculinity, an ordered, rational building in the heart of a calm neighborhood. By choosing a neo-classical style for their building, the PAHA automatically inserted the Hall into an existing architectural tradition of grandeur and gravitas. The Hall was built in much the same style as other "official" buildings in the city like banks and government offices, and thus came to embody a similar sense of dignity and splendor. The picture represents the possibility of the Hall, depicting what the Association believed the Hall could and should have been.

Figure 2: *Destruction of Pennsylvania Hall*, Lithograph, 1838, from Pennsylvania Hall Association, *History of Pennsylvania Hall, Which was Destroyed by a Mob on the 17th of May, 1838*. New York: Negro Universities, 1969.

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In the second image included in History of Pennsylvania Hall, Figure 2, the focus shifted away from the building itself. The Hall is still very much a presence in the image, as the flames pouring out of its sides illuminate the night sky around it, but much more emphasis is placed upon the men in the streets surrounding the building. The Hall is further back in the plane of the picture and only its front entrance is visible. A large crowd of men dominates the foreground of the image, while another smaller group appears in the background on the far side of the Hall. The crowd in the front is boisterous. Pairs are seen jumping about, climbing on neighboring structures, and running with dogs. The scene of destruction is represented as one of mass confusion, as firemen spray neighboring buildings, while leaving the Hall ablaze. The lack of restraint held by the individuals depicted around the Hall creates a stark contrast from the refined simplicity of the Hall as represented in Figure 1. By emphasizing the rowdy crowd and moving the burning Hall to the background, the creator of this image clearly indicated who he believed was responsible for the attack. The Pennsylvania Hall Association created a connection in the image between the rise of the Jacksonian masculinity embraced by the crowd outside the Hall and the violent mobocracy that was responsible for the Hall's destruction, illustrating the identity that the PAHA had created for mob members in the text of History of Pennsylvania Hall. By highlighting this correlation, the Pennsylvania Hall Association attempted to demonstrate how their Enlightenment-based vision of masculinity and citizenship, as shown in Figure 1, was superior to the wanton destruction of Figure 2.

The third image included by the Pennsylvania Hall Association in History of Pennsylvania Hall, Figure 3, is an engraving of the ruins of Pennsylvania Hall. Again, the Hall dominates the image, occupying almost all of the space of the picture. The image was created using the same perspective as Figure 1, and also depicts individuals walking on the sidewalk.
outside of the Hall. The critical difference between the images, however, is the representation of the Hall. In Figure 3, Pennsylvania Hall appears as a ghost of its former glory. The roof, windows and doors are gone, leaving remains of the charred walls behind. While in Figure 1 the Hall's white walls shone, offering a gleaming hope for the future, by the time of Figure 3, the Hall has a haunting, spectral quality. The Hall is a victim of the mob's outrage. Its martyrdom lingers with viewers, as the image shows the risks inherent in the vision of citizenship espoused by the mob.

Figure 3: J.A. Woodside, Jr, *Ruins of Pennsylvania Hall*, Etching, 1838, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. (photo: author's own)

Throughout their publications, the PAHA consistently worked to silence the voice of the mob. The people who destroyed the Hall were constructed by PAHA as a voiceless mass controlled by mysterious Southern instigators. By refusing to acknowledge the possibilities that Philadelphians had participated, or would even want to participate, in the mob, the PAHA was able to preserve the idea that Philadelphians did not actively disagree with abolitionist principles.
Rather, the PAHA believed that the gullible crowd had just been swayed by the radical and incendiary language of the Southerners. This construction of the mob as alien to the PAHA emphasized the mob's refusal to subscribe to the social and political ideals of the PAHA. Because the PAHA did not believe poor mob members measured up to their class-based standards of masculinity, they also believed that these men did not meet the standards required to be a citizen and thus to have a political voice. They represent this in the text of *History of Pennsylvania Hall* by silencing the voice of the mob, whom the PAHA construct as a crowd of poor men. Opinions of the mob members had no place in the narrative created by PAHA, which reclaimed the memory of Pennsylvania Hall in an effort to enact the PAHA's opinions of citizenship and abolition.

In all of the publications created by the PAHA after the attack on their Hall, the PAHA worked to establish themselves as the inheritors to the revolutionary legacy of masculine citizenry. They actively cultivated this image by portraying themselves as righteous and reasonable fighters for justice who were the victims of the uncontrolled passions of a vicious mob under the influence of malice-filled Southerners. The crowd that destroyed Pennsylvania Hall was viewed by the PAHA as unmanly, and thus unworthy of the rights of citizenship. PAHA worked to marginalize the mob while simultaneously promoting their own right to express their political voice. By attributing any critiques of abolition to pro-slavery southerners and silencing the voices of the mob members, the PAHA created a world in which all anti-slavery advocates were abolitionists and thus attempted to broaden the appeal of abolition and demonstrate its superiority as an anti-slavery movement.
III. THE ANTI-SLAVERY CONVENTION OF AMERICAN WOMEN

On May 16th, 1838, female abolitionist Angelina Grimké prepared to take the stage in Pennsylvania Hall to speak in front of a "Hall [that] was thronged, [as] hundreds, if not thousands went away, unable to obtain access." She would be the first in a program of women giving speeches to the racially mixed, "promiscuous" audience of both men and women sitting in the Hall. Grimké and the other speakers, all members of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women (ASCAW), knew that the night of speeches would be highly provocative to many in Philadelphia, even other abolitionists.

The ASCAW had originally intended to host the event in Pennsylvania Hall on May 16th, including it in the program of the Convention. Because many of the women attending the convention objected to the idea of women speaking in front of promiscuous audiences, however, the event was instead hosted by a number of individuals rather than by the official entity of the ASCAW. One woman attending the convention objected to the Convention's refusal to host the event by expressing the "hope that such false notions of delicacy and propriety would not long obtain in this enlightened country." Her sentiments were overruled by more conservative members of the Convention who were outraged by the idea of women speaking in front of promiscuous audiences. Grimké and the other speakers knew that the widespread controversy amongst even the traditionally liberal abolitionists foreshadowed a larger outrage that would certainly emerge from the crowd outside the Hall when women took to the stage. Their premonitions proved increasingly accurate as the night of speeches continued. The crowd outside the Hall grew angrier and louder as each woman took the stage, reacting violently to the voices

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of these female abolitionists. Members of the ASCAW returned to meet in the Hall the next day, even after their harrowing experiences leaving the Hall amidst the violent hissing and jostling of the mob the night before. The ASCAW were the last group to leave the Hall on May 17, passing through its heavy doors mere hours before the building burned away.

When women like Angelina Grimké gave speeches in Pennsylvania Hall, they appropriated the space of the Hall for themselves, claiming access to a public voice to express their opinions about slavery. The attack on Pennsylvania Hall was also an attack upon women's right to this express their voices and opinions about abolition. Women used these retellings of the Hall's destruction to reify their distinct identities as female abolitionists. The public and private communications women made about the Hall's destruction provide their own distinct perspective on the violence. Women who participated in the ASCAW were especially connected to the story of Pennsylvania Hall and were the dominant female voice in discussions about the Hall. These women framed their accounts of the Hall's destruction by employing religious references, drawing on tropes of the American Revolution to link themselves with African Americans, and establishing a class-based moral authority. Rather than allowing the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall to extinguish their voices, leaders of the ASCAW used the Hall's destruction to construct their identity as female, middle-class abolitionists by speaking about the attack on the Hall. They published their own versions of the Hall's story in an attempt to validate their particular role, as women, in the larger abolition movement. The range of opinions about the proper role of women in abolition amongst both abolitionists and the general public reflects larger uncertainties about the position of slavery in antebellum Philadelphia.

The expectations that women had for the ASCAW meetings in Pennsylvania Hall shaped their reactions to the Hall's destruction. Understanding what drew them to meet in the building is
an essential part of understanding the identities they self-consciously created for themselves. The ASCAW was scheduled to meet in Pennsylvania Hall from May 15, 1838 to May 18, 1838.109 This was the second meeting of the ASCAW, the first convention having been held a year before in New York. Leaders of the ASCAW believed that the disjointed local efforts of female anti-slavery societies could be organized on a national level to effect greater change.110 These sentiments led women like Maria Weston Chapman, Juliana Tappan, the Grimké sisters and Lucretia Mott to bring together women, mainly from the Northeast, to the first ASCAW in 1837. The ASCAW drew together "the most active abolitionists, [who] tended to come from the middle class," in order to unite their efforts in abolition.111 After this convention was complete, members of the ASCAW published their resolutions, the last of which stated that members would reconvene one year later in Philadelphia.112

In May 1838, women from the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, and Midwest gathered in Philadelphia to celebrate the opening of Pennsylvania Hall, where they would be meeting as the ASCAW a few days later. The attendees of the ASCAW were an ideologically, geographically, and racially diverse group of women dedicated in various ways to the cause of abolition. Female anti-slavery societies from eleven states across the country arrived in Philadelphia ready to discuss anti-slavery tactics with other women. Some, like Lucretia Mott of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, came as a part of a group delegation. Mott, a Philadelphian and lifelong Quaker, was one of the founding members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS). Many of members of the PFASS attended the ASCAW together as a delegation, since the convention was being held in Philadelphia. The PFASS was a racially

110 Beth Salerno, Sister Societies, 55.  
111 Ibid., 16.  
112 Ibid., 61.
integrated group of women in Philadelphia dedicated to ending slavery in the United States, who were also active supporters of the Pennsylvania Hall Association who bought $603 worth of stocks during the year before the Hall's opening.\textsuperscript{113} They formed in 1833 in response to the formation of the American Anti-Slavery Society, an all-male and all-white organization. Female abolitionists quickly realized that they would not be welcome at the meetings of this group and consequently decided to form an all-female anti-slavery organization rather than get involved in the heated national debate over the existence of mixed gender abolition societies.\textsuperscript{114} Although organizers of the PFASS worked to recruit a racially and religiously diverse mixture of women to the society, little economic diversity existed among its members. The women of the PFASS, including its African American members, predominantly came from the middle or upper classes.\textsuperscript{115}

The PFASS was one of the few racially mixed anti-slavery organizations present at the ASCAW. While all abolitionists hoped to end slavery, not all were as committed to actually guaranteeing the integration of free African Americans into American society. One reformer who did prove dedicated to the equal social intercourse of African Americans was William Lloyd Garrison. While William Lloyd Garrison was not a direct participant in the ASCAW, he was a vocal supporter of their organization and of women's rights. Garrison gave a speech alongside the female members of the ASCAW at the event held in Pennsylvania Hall on the evening of May 16th. He was intimately connected with the goals and ideals of the ASCAW and described the events of PAH in a similar way as the female abolitionists.

\textsuperscript{113} Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Fourth Annual Report (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838); Dorsey, Reforming Men and Women, 183; Salerno Sister Societies, 32, 82.
\textsuperscript{114} Beth Salerno, Sister Societies, 26-27.
While abolitionists like Mott and Garrison arrived at the ASCAW already well-known for their work, most of the women attending were relatively unknown in national abolitionist circles. One such woman was Laura Lovell, who arrived at the ASCAW after making the long journey from her home in Fall River, Massachusetts to Philadelphia. She travelled to the Convention as the sole representative of the Fall River Female Anti-Slavery Society (FRFASS). In Philadelphia she joined like-minded women representing abolitionist groups from across the country, eager to take part in the inaugural activities in Pennsylvania Hall and seemingly ignorant of the outrage their conduct would generate.

The convention began on Tuesday, May 15th, when women met in a small lecture room, and continued meeting in Pennsylvania Hall until the managers of the Hall and the Mayor closed the building on the night of May 17th in a fruitless attempt to placate the mob. The destruction of the Hall that evening forced organizers of the ASCAW to find a new location for the last day of meetings of the convention. The intense attack on the building strongly affected the women who took part in this Convention, many of whom witnessed the Hall's destruction. The experiences of female abolitionists, both during and after the destruction of the Hall, tested their commitment to the abolitionist movement and crystallized a distinct sense of their identities as female abolitionists.

Participants in the ASCAW quickly began to incorporate Pennsylvania Hall into the identities they fashioned in their writings after the events of the Hall's destruction. News of the Hall's destruction spread throughout the American news media, reaching cities in Massachusetts,
Virginia, and Ohio just four days after the Hall's destruction. At the same time, members of the ASCAW, many of whom had witnessed the attacks on the Hall, still attempted to process what had happened. William Lloyd Garrison wrote to his mother on May 19, the day after the Hall was destroyed, to tell her that he had safely arrived in Boston after finding a way out of the inhospitable climate of the city on the Underground Railroad once the attack on the building had commenced. Lucretia Mott was from Philadelphia and thus did not have to write her friends and family about her safety, but she still reflected on the events of the Hall's destruction in a letter to her friend Edward M. Davis on June 18, 1838, written a month after the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall. Although Mott had lived through the race riots that had rocked in Philadelphia in both 1834 and 1835, she was still shocked by the violent attack upon Pennsylvania Hall. This riot was much more personally threatening to Mott than any of the previous violence, for the mob directly threatened both her home and family. The opinions about Pennsylvania Hall expressed by members of the ASCAW in their private letters attempted to unravel the events of the tumultuous convention and would come to characterize the official writings published by female abolitionist groups.

Female antislavery societies began to publish their own accounts of the events of the Hall's destruction after some time had passed and they had been able to reflect upon their experiences in Philadelphia. Groups used the opinions their members honed in their private letters to craft the official, published retellings of the events at Pennsylvania Hall. The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFASS), for example, published a report each year

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that summarized the group's activities throughout the year. The *Fifth Annual Report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society* discussed their activities during the year of 1838, though it was not published until January 10, 1839. The four days in May during which Pennsylvania Hall stood dominate the narrative of the *Report*. The PFASS framed all of their experiences in 1838 in terms of the Hall's destruction. For many of the members of the PFASS, this was the first instance in which they faced physical opposition to their abolitionist efforts. While female abolitionists were frequently censured and maligned by Philadelphians in person and in print, the riots that had previously erupted in Philadelphia were race based and primarily directed against working-class people, not the predominantly white, middle-class members of the PFASS. Thus, it was not surprising that such a violent incident that directly affected their lives left a strong imprint on the minds of these women. 120

The PFASS was not the only group of abolitionist women who offered a published version of the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall. At the conclusion of their convention, the ASCAW published a report containing a brief overview of the convention, the resolutions passed by the women, and letters of support from female anti-slavery societies across the country, entitled *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women*. Though their convention was directly affected by its destruction, the ASCAW minimized the role of the Hall. Pennsylvania Hall and the continuing threat of mob violence in Philadelphia were relegated to a footnote in the ASCAW's account of their convention, though some of the resolutions passed at the Convention referenced to the Hall. 121 The women of the ASCAW wrote and passed these resolutions in the heat of the moment the day after the Hall's destruction, and unsurprisingly

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120 Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 85.
could not take their minds off of the violent events. Their reactions to the Hall's destruction were quickly incorporated into the language and symbolism of the resolutions made at the Convention.

While groups like the PFASS and ASCAW could speak about their experiences as a collective, women like Laura Lovell, who attended the convention alone, were moved to publish their own personal reflections on the events of the ASCAW. When Lovell returned to Fall River, she addressed a report to the FRFASS of all that she had witnessed and experienced. This report encompassed much more than just the Convention. Lovell’s *Report of a Delegate to the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women*, which was published by the FRFASS in 1838, offered a very different perspective on the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall than those expressed by members of the Pennsylvania Hall Association and Philadelphia’s municipal government. Her writing illustrated the ideas expressed by other female abolitionists in their private writings and official publications. The publications created by individual abolitionists like Lovell, Garrison, and Mott, as well as those made by groups like the PFASS and ASCAW were tied together by the expression of the common themes of religion, revolutionary references, racial ties, and class judgments that would become an integral part of the white, middle-class identity of female abolitionists. This constructed identity would become an integral part of a larger debate amongst Philadelphians as to how best to respond to slavery. Tensions that emerged in the writings of abolitionist women reflect the nuanced position of abolition in the city.

**Religious References**

Religion played a large part in the discourses created by female abolitionists from the start of their involvement in the larger abolition movement. The lingering after-effects of the Second Great Awakening and the many different religious sects that grew immensely in
popularity during this period, such as the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, prompted many, especially women, to believe in the possibility of perfecting both their lives and society.\(^{122}\)

Women combined the language of the Second Great Awakening and the cult of domesticity, described earlier, to establish their own unique moral authority and duty to participate in the abolition movement. After the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall, authors used the tenets of their religious faith to explain the violence of the events and to demonstrate their continued commitment to the abolitionist cause. By emphasizing the religious and moral roots of their dedication to abolition, women proved that they could participate in the movement while still subscribing to female societal expectations.

William Lloyd Garrison began to invoke these religious references shortly after the Hall’s destruction, using almost biblical language in the letter he wrote to his mother to assure her of his own safety. He emphasized the physical destruction enacted by the mob throughout his letter, but concluded his discussion of the Hall by stating, "Awful as is this occurrence in Philadelphia, it will do incalculable good for our cause; for the wrath of man worketh out the righteousness of God."\(^{123}\) Garrison minimized the actions of the mob members in this passage. Rather than attributing the destruction to any feeling of discontent among Philadelphia’s populace, he instead suggested that it was in fact merely a part of God’s larger plan. By making divine influence the chief motivation behind the attacks, Garrison took agency away from mob members, who he represented as unknowingly acting out a small step towards an eventual vindication the abolitionist efforts. Garrison used his own voice to retell the story of Pennsylvania Hall’s destruction in a manner which removed agency from the crowd outside of Pennsylvania Hall. He thus eliminated the desired political message that the mob members hoped to send while

\(^{122}\) Gary Nash, *First City*, 179.

emphasizing his own commitment to abolition. Garrison's invocation of God's will posited the abolitionists to be in a position of moral righteousness.

The PFASS' *Annual Report* enacted Garrison's private sentiment on a public scale, continuing to diminish the role a discontented populace played in destroying Pennsylvania Hall. The PFASS concluded their *Report* by stating, "It is true that our beautiful house, which we hoped would long stand a monument to freedom, is burned with fire, and some of our bright hopes and pleasant anticipations are laid waste; yet we are not dismayed or confounded by these things." 124 They end their *Report* on a hopeful note, emphasizing their lasting dedication to the abolitionist cause. They omit any mention of the mob, using the passive voice to describe how the Hall "is burned with fire," as though the Hall had begun to spontaneously combust. The destruction was portrayed as seemingly inevitable, perhaps as if it was the will of God, as Garrison suggested. This apparent unavoidability removed agency from the mob while strengthening the resolve of female abolitionists. The crowd's desire to destroy the Hall went unacknowledged by the PFASS members as the PFASS attributed the Hall's destruction to the work of fate. The PFASS accepted the fate of the Hall in this passage and used its destruction as a moment in which they can demonstrate their own dedication to abolition by overlooking the opinions of the working class.

Laura Lovell utilized similar religious inflections throughout the pages of her published *Report of a Delegate*. The religious basis of her moral authority as an abolitionist became clear when Lovell claimed, in reference to the rioters, that the abolitionist women “must forgive them, for they know not what they do.” 125 Here, she incorporated an argument promoted by other

abolitionist authors that the rioters were merely acting under God's direction. Lovell employed a powerful reference to martyrdom by repeating words attributed to Jesus while he was crucified. Lovell not only paints the suffering of abolitionists during the riot on a biblical scale, but also likens the forgiveness and far-sightedness of abolitionists to that of Jesus. The moral authority generated by this reference became an intrinsic part of the female abolitionist identity.

Participants at the ASCAW continually invoked religious references in their explanations of the Hall's destruction. They thus framed their involvement with abolition by claiming an inoffensive morally-generated interest. Religion became an integral part of the rhetoric used by female abolitionists to validate their participation in the anti-slavery movement and to diffuse tensions that might arise at the sight of women meeting together and speaking in public.

A Second Revolution

Like the male abolitionists of the Pennsylvania Hall Association, members of the ASCAW drew upon the legacy of the revolution to build support for abolition. Many female abolitionists saw the goals of the revolution as unfinished while both women and African Americans were excluded from the public sphere. White abolitionist women aligned themselves with the plights of African American men and women, recognizing the barriers that prevented both groups from accessing political power or public voice. They thus made a strong case in many of their writings for the need for a second revolution to truly insure equality for all. In the PFASS' Annual Report, they included a resolution passed during the first meeting held after the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall which directly linked themselves with the fate of African Americans by mentioning Pennsylvania Hall, stating:

Resolved, That the state of public feeling, as manifested by the burning of Pennsylvania Hall by a mob, countenanced by a large number of citizens, and
unopposed by the civil authorities, because the principles of the 'Declaration of Independence' were there advocated and maintained, call upon us for redoubled efforts to awaken the public mind to a sense of ruin in which the enslavement of a part of our countrymen, threatens to involve the liberties of all.  

The language used by the PFASS to make this point critiqued the actions taken by other Philadelphians during the attack on the Hall, specifically calling into question the choices made by citizens and the civil authorities. The PFASS blamed the lack of action taken by the men supposedly responsible for the welfare of the city as well as the mob for the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall. By suggesting that these citizens were not capable of upholding the principles of the Declaration of Independence and protecting the liberty and safety of their fellow Philadelphians, the PFASS undermined the civil authorities' right to hold power. The PFASS interpreted the attack on the Hall as an attack on their vision of abolition. They demonstrated in this resolution that this was also a larger attack on the liberties of all, clearly showing how the plight of the slave directly affected the political liberty of women, free blacks, and even politically empowered white males. Members of the PFASS used their reaction to Pennsylvania Hall's destruction to shape their identities as fighters for equal rights by repudiating this physical and figurative attack on abolition. This resolution strengthened the PFASS' claim to the expression of political opinions by demonstrating the failure of current citizens and the anti-abolitionist mob to uphold the virtues delineated in the Declaration of Independence.

The resolutions published in the ASCAW's *Proceedings* display a similar tendency to link the fates of African Americans and women by using revolutionary language. One such resolution stated:

Resolved, that in the view of the manifestation of public sentiment, as recently exhibited in the outbursts of a lawless mob, resulting in the insult and abuse towards all abolitionists, and personal injury to some of our colored friends, the

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126 PFASS, *Fifth Annual Report*. 

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case of the latter be earnestly condemned to God, and prayer be offered that He will redress their wrongs, and protect them from dangers to which they may be in future exposed. 127

In this resolution, the ASCAW used the religious themes explored earlier to earnestly denounce the lawless mob members to be punished by God. The resolution draws attention to the "colored friends" of the ASCAW, demonstrating the social links between the groups that ASCAW members wished to translate into an alliance in order to develop political and social capital. By making reference to these "colored friends," the ASCAW classified African-Americans as a distinct other to themselves. Although there were black women who attended the convention, the ASCAW wrote with the voice of a white woman. They thus constructed a distinctively middle-class, white, female voice that became the standard in texts produced by abolitionist women.

The white, female voice of the ASCAW continued to develop the idea of a political alliance between themselves and Philadelphia's free black community in other resolutions passed at the Convention. The morning after the Hall's destruction, ASCAW members met and quickly began to memorialize their opinions about the violent episodes while also emphasizing the direct link between the disempowered groups of women and African Americans. The first resolution passed that day read:

Resolved, That we regard the insult and scorn, manifested on our leaving the Hall on the 16th instant, as identical with the spirit of slavery at the South, and the spirit exhibited by the Reform Convention, who have recommended that the people of Pennsylvania should wrest from the free people of color the right of suffrage. 128

The ASCAW eliminated the crowd outside of the Hall in this passage, instead creating a disembodied vision of "insult and scorn" that they identified as Southern in origin. While the

127 ASCAW, Proceedings.
128 ASCAW, Proceedings.
ASCAW did not go as far as the Pennsylvania Hall Association in stating that the ringleaders of the mob are Southern, they actively distanced the origin of Philadelphia's anti-abolitionist sentiment from the North. The resolution concluded by alluding to attempts underway to rewrite Pennsylvania's constitution to exclude African Americans from voting. Members of the ASCAW saw the attacks on themselves and their Hall and the attacks on free blacks' political rights as intrinsically linked, and thus tied them together in the same resolution. Both attacks threatened the freedoms guaranteed in the founding documents and directly hindered the abolitionist cause. By resolving that attacks on abolition were synonymous with pro-slavery sentiments, the ASCAW promoted abolition as the only proper response to slavery that women could take.

Drawing upon an existing revolutionary legacy and establishing ties between white women and African Americans played crucial roles in the distinct identity crafted by female abolitionists in their reactions to and retellings of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction. Efforts made to build links between these groups also demonstrated the differences that female abolitionists felt existed between them. Yet in order to develop a connection between these groups, abolitionist women and African Americans had to be cast as distinct and separate groups, thus ignoring the contributions of African American women to abolition and clearly showed just how contrived the white, female abolitionist identity was.

**Middle-Class Moral Authority**

The female abolitionists of the ASCAW participated in mixed race organizations, were women, and were not citizens, and thus had few avenues through which to develop social authority. Since female abolitionists came almost exclusively from the middle and upper classes, however, they could unite over their shared class status. When the mob attempted to silence women's access to public voice by destroying Pennsylvania Hall, abolitionist women fought back
by using notions of social status. They cast the mob as an economic "other" to themselves, only recognizing the constituents of the mob as poor and ignoring the rich members of the mob noted by other authors. In the writings created after Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, female abolitionists were careful to use their class as an important part of their identity and as a basis for their moral authority. These female authors belittled the members of the mob, continually depicting the poor as lacking agency and proper reasoning skills in an effort to bolster their own access to public voice. For example, in a letter Lucretia Mott wrote mere days after the Hall's destruction, Mott did her utmost to minimize the influence that mob members might have had in the city. She maintained that the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall had little effect on the meetings of the ASCAW, describing, "the deep interest manifested by those in attendance [at the Convention] to participate in the rich feast we had here & which was not seriously interrupted by the burning of the Hall." Mott described the destruction of the Pennsylvania Hall in passive voice, never acknowledging the people who did the actual act. She used the technique of removing voice and agency from the crowd outside the Hall to minimize the effect of their violence on the proceedings of the ASCAW, thus empowering the members of the ASCAW by depicting them as unaffected by the mob's actions. Rather than resorting to violence to make their voice heard, Mott claims that the ASCAW continued to calmly pass resolutions after the destruction of the Hall. Mott demonstrated why she believed abolitionist women should have the right to publicly express their feelings and participate in government by highlighting their unwavering and rational commitment to their cause.

A class-based moral authority was the foundation of the maternal tone that Laura Lovell uses throughout her Report of a Delegate, which features language that is both distinctly female and often condescending. Lovell refers to Pennsylvania Hall as "the house" several times in her

129 Lucretia Mott, Letters, 43.
Report of a Delegate. The use of the word house to refer to a place of entertainment or a place where one conducted business outside of the home was common in the 1830s. In spite of this general usage, however, the writers who most often described Pennsylvania Hall as a house were Lovell and the female members of the PFASS. Because of the ideal of domesticity so prevalent in antebellum society, this word choice gave Lovell's writing a strongly female connotation.

In order to successfully craft her middle-class female identity, Lovell also constructed the mob outside of the Hall as an "other." Lovell described the agitators principally responsible for the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall during her Report as boys. Though the authors of most accounts of Pennsylvania Hall’s destruction agreed that the mob members were fairly young and male, other authors describe the mob using words like “young men” and “ruffians.” Lovell is the only writer to identify the mob as exclusively made up of boys. She overlooks the range of age and economic status described by other commentators, limiting her representation of the mob to a group distinctly different from her own constructed female identity. Her decision to use the word boy reflected not only her assumptions about the men’s ages, but also her judgments about their economic and social status, judgments that emerge frequently throughout her text.

Lovell’s bias against lower classes of society becomes especially pronounced when she related a journey taken by members of the ASCAW through Philadelphia. After the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall, the ASCAW attempted to hold the last meeting of their convention at another large meeting space in the city, Temperance Hall. When they arrived at this Hall, however, they found that the manager had forbidden the ASCAW from meeting there due to the continuing threat of mob violence. One of the members of the PFASS and ASCAW, Sarah Pugh, offered the use of her schoolhouse to the convention. As the members of the ASCAW walked

131 Refer to Point 3 on Figure 2 (page 2) for the location of Sarah Pugh’s Schoolhouse relative to Pennsylvania Hall.
through Philadelphia to Miss Pugh's schoolhouse, they continued to feel unwelcome in the city.

Lovell recounts:

As we passed through some lanes, several low-looking women, who I should think fit companions for the leaders of the mob, actually came out of their huts to jeer at us; pointing the finger of scorn, distorting their faces to express contempt, and saying among other things which I could not understand, 'you had better stay at home, and mind your own business, than to come here making such a fuss.'

Lovell filled her anecdote with strong social markers that reveal her attitude towards the members of the lower class. She used linguistic symbols such as "low-looking," "huts," "jeer," "scorn," and "contempt" to indicate the poor economic station of these women. She also drew a careful distinction between the "huts" of the women and the female abolitionist "house" of Pennsylvania Hall. By using the word hut, Lovell indicated her refusal to grant these women their own domestic space. As domesticity was crucial to the socially accepted construction of womanhood at this time, Lovell excluded these women from her own realm of womanhood and marked them as a distinct societal other.

Lovell continued to deny members of lower classes agency in this passage by removing their voices. While she stated that these women jeered at the members of the ASCAW walking in their neighborhood, Lovell could only mention one thing the women said for she "could not understand" everything else said. She suggested here that members of this class were not able to make decisions, or in this case even speak, for themselves. These women are depicted as inarticulate and rude, resorting to facial and bodily gestures to make their points. Lovell made a marked a distinct difference between the measured words spoken by the female representatives at the ASCAW and the incoherent, "low-looking" Philadelphia women she met in the street, echoing the characterization of the mob created by the Pennsylvania Hall Association. The

language used by Lovell to relate this incident reveals her belief that her own economic status entitled her to the freedom to express her political opinions while simultaneously revealing the controversial nature of abolition and many attitudes towards slavery found in the city.

Laura Lovell’s Report of a Delegate relates much more than her experience at the ASCAW. The Report is an endorsement of the middle-class morality espoused by antebellum reform societies such as the FRFASS. Lovell betrayed her social leanings through her word choice, especially her use of the words boy and house, and through her representations of the poor. She takes a condescending tone throughout her text and perpetuated her belief that her class was an intrinsic part of her identity and entitled her, as a woman, to participate in the abolition movement. The FRFASS endorsed this belief when they chose to formally publish Lovell's Report in 1838. Writing about this incident allowed Lovell to demonstrate her ability to access public voice. Rather than succumbing to the attempts made by the "boys" in the mob and "low-looking women" to silence abolitionist women, Lovell used her writings to construct her own distinct identity as a middle-class, white, female abolitionist.

The official publications and private letters produced by abolitionist women (and one man) affected by the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall reveal the class judgments that were a crucial part of abolition, a distinctly middle-class reform movement. For female abolitionists, class took supremacy over race. Women of varying racial and religious backgrounds united in female abolition societies over their shared class status. Upper and middle-class women created a social role and public voice for themselves in their retellings of the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall. All of these female authors made an active effort to invoke religious references and revolutionary ideals as well as create class distinctions in their accounts of the Hall’s destruction. The identity that they constructed in these retellings, that of a middle-class, white, abolitionist
woman, could not mask the nuances and diverse opinions about slavery that existed within the abolition movement. This distinct identity did not reflect the experiences of the African American members of the PFASS or of allies like William Lloyd Garrison. The discord over the proper role of women found within documents produced by female abolitionists uncovered the many attitudes towards abolition and slavery that coexisted in antebellum Philadelphia.

Members of the ASCAW tried to create an inoffensive and generalized middle-class, female identity that would allow for their active participation in the abolition movement, yet they could not escape the controversy that accompanied involvement in such a public movement. The last resolution passed by the ASCAW revealed their cognizance of the controversial status of female abolitionists by adopting a more embittered tone about their experience in Philadelphia. While the resolution was couched in kind tones, a final adjective revealed the mixed opinions held by the female abolitionists during their time in Philadelphia. The ASCAW resolved "That this Convention tender their thanks to those friends in Philadelphia, whose kind hospitalities have been extended to them, on this deeply interesting occasion." The "interesting occasion" to which the ASCAW bore witness was the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall, an event that shaped the discourse adopted by female abolitionists. While the members of the ASCAW were certainly grateful for the friendliness of the PFASS and their other hosts, this phrase allowed the ASCAW to sarcastically draw attention to the ill-treatment they faced at the hands of Philadelphians.

The violence that the members of the ASCAW experienced and witnessed shaped their opinions as the decided product of middle-class, reforming women. Abolitionist women drew criticism from men within the abolition movement, as well as from general opponents of abolition in the larger public sphere. Members of the ASCAW had hoped to create a safe space

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133 ASCAW, Proceedings.
for women to be able to freely discuss slavery in Pennsylvania Hall, but were rudely reminded of their controversial position by the angry mobs that disrupted their meetings and eventually destroyed their "house," Pennsylvania Hall. Female abolitionists responded to this attack by committing to their cause with renewed vigor and by continuing to attempt to create a non-offensive persona that would allow them to take an active part in the complicated world of abolition.
IV. MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

On May 17th, after receiving repeated solicitations for protection from the Pennsylvania Hall Association, the Mayor and Sheriff of Philadelphia each walked two blocks north of their offices and arrived at Pennsylvania Hall for the first time. Both had declined to attend the opening ceremonies of the Hall, but were now drawn to the building to address the growing unrest developing outside of the building. A crowd had gathered around the Hall the night before, attacking the building and the men and women who met within, and over the course of the morning of the 17th another group had congregated around the building. The Sheriff had been unable to enlist any men to help him combat a mob and instead wandered throughout the crowd, making small attempts to deter people from the path of destruction.\footnote{John G. Watmough, \textit{Address}, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia PA.} The Mayor publicly took the keys to the Hall, preventing any further meetings from occurring in the Hall in an attempt to disperse the mob's anger. He then gave a short speech in front of the crowd, after which the mob gave him a cheer and promptly began to attack the Hall. Both Mayor and Sheriff were jostled by the men attempting to break into the building, and eventually joined the crowd of thousands who watched the building burn.\footnote{Committee on Police, \textit{Report}, Pennsylvania Hall Association, in \textit{History of Pennsylvania Hall}, 187.}

In the aftermath of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, Philadelphians were left to wonder who was responsible for allowing such violence to occur. They struggled to reconcile their imagined image of Philadelphia as a peaceful city, a city of brotherly love, with the reality of the violent events that shook the city. Blame was thrown from person to person as everyone who could possibly be held responsible for the attack attempted to rid themselves of any accountability for the damage. As many Philadelphians claimed that the Pennsylvania Hall Association (PAHA) had brought the destruction of their Hall upon themselves, the PAHA in
turn began to shift blame for the attack onto others, particularly the Mayor and Sheriff. The PAHA published their version of the Hall's destruction in their own publications and newspapers, highlighting the faults of the Mayor and Sheriff. In the weeks after the riots, other voices joined the PAHA in critiquing the choices of the government to the point where both the Sheriff and Mayor felt the need to respond to their detractors.

Both officials used newspapers and published reports to tell their side of the story. The Sheriff published a newspaper account and pamphlet in which he described his involvement with the Hall and explained why he made the choices that he made. The Mayor commissioned a Committee on Police to evaluate his conduct throughout the Hall's existence and subsequent destruction. This Committee published their findings, which were based almost exclusively upon testimony given by the Mayor, as a pamphlet. The responses to the Hall's destruction published by the Sheriff and the Committee on Police reveal the conflicted attitude of members of the municipal government towards Pennsylvania Hall. The documents uncover the complicated balance that municipal authorities tried to maintain between appealing to popular opinion and suppressing civil disobedience. As elected officials, they wavered between following the moral judgments attributed to the majority and upholding the rights of all citizens to free speech and to hold property. Both politicians, in an attempt to cater to public opinion, demonstrated mercurial views about Pennsylvania Hall and abolition in the documents they produced after the Hall's destruction. The shifts in content and style evident in the self-representations produced by the Mayor and Sheriff of Philadelphia reveal the changing tide of public opinion amongst Philadelphians about Pennsylvania Hall after its destruction. The conspicuous lack of any clear or consistent opinion about abolition and slavery made by municipal government members in
their publications after the events of the Hall's destruction reveals the multiplicity of attitudes towards abolition and slavery that existed in antebellum Philadelphia.

**High Sheriff John Watmough**

John G. Watmough was elected to the position of High Sheriff of Philadelphia in 1835 after a successful public career. Watmough had his start in the army, enlisting during the War of 1812 and serving until 1816, when he retired with the position of colonel. He entered public office once more in 1830 on the Democratic Whig ticket to represent the Third District of Philadelphia in Congress, a position he would hold until his election to the office of High Sheriff. The destruction of Pennsylvania Hall occurred during Watmough's term as Sheriff. The PAHA gave him a prominent role in their account of the Hall's destruction, criticizing him almost immediately for not doing enough to save their Hall. Watmough quickly responded to these accounts, claiming that they "mentioned Mr. Watmough under circumstances which he pronounce[d] erroneous." Watmough published a corrected version of his involvement with Pennsylvania Hall that appeared in several Philadelphia newspapers from May 26 to May 29, 1838.

Watmough asserted in his account that he had done everything possible in his limited power to assist the PAHA. He claimed to have been unaware of the unrest at the Hall until the members of the Board of Managers of the PAHA arrived in his office asking for assistance. His published account was corroborated by testimony in a letter written by his friend and legal adviser, H.J. Williams. Williams witnessed the encounter between Watmough and the members

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of the PAHA Board of Managers and wrote a letter to describe his take on the meeting, emphasizing the errors in the PAHA's account of the meeting. By writing as an observer, Williams was able to describe the position of the Sheriff objectively. He clearly created a distinct idea of exactly what the role of the Sheriff was, as well as the limitations of this role. In one passage of Williams' letter, he described the constraints faced by the Sheriff to the PAHA:

I told them the Sheriff had under his control but four or five deputies; that he had no public funds at his command to employ others; that his power was great when the feelings of the people were on his side, as he could call on every man to support him in executing his duty, and protecting either their persons or property; but I was apprehensive he would not find the citizens generally disposed to aid him, in consequence of the excitement which appeared to exist against the abolition society. 139

Williams directly linked the Sheriff's limited manpower to the nature of his position, which was dependent upon the goodwill of the populace. He claimed that Watmough had little power to stop the Hall's destruction because he could not find enough volunteers willing to go against the tide of popular opinion and uphold citizens' rights. This further displaced responsibility for the Hall's destruction from the Sheriff. Williams never stated in his letter as to whether or not Watmough wanted to aid the abolitionist PAHA. Rather, he merely explained that the nature of the Sheriff's position was such that he could not gather the men necessary to stop the mob, regardless of his personal opinions on abolition and slavery.

Williams further displaced blame from the Sheriff in his letter by presenting the Mayor as a scapegoat for the Hall's destruction. After describing the limits of the Sheriff's power, Williams carefully noted that "within the limits of the city, the Mayor was the officer peculiarly called upon to preserve the public peace, but that the Sheriff would afford every assistance in his power." 140 Williams drew attention to the Sheriff's efforts to maintain civil authority within the

139 Ibid., n.p.
140 Ibid., n.p.
limitations of his position while simultaneously highlighting the Mayor's conspicuous lack of aid. Williams asserted that the Mayor, unlike the Sheriff, had both the resources and the responsibility to successfully stop the actions of the mob, representing the Mayor as ultimately accountable for the decision to not stop the Hall's destruction. His harsh condemnation of the Mayor perhaps reflected political tension between the Sheriff, a Democratic Whig, and the Mayor, a Whig.

Watmough and Williams asserted in the newspaper accounts published shortly after the Hall's destruction that the limitations incumbent in the position of Sheriff stopped Watmough from preventing Pennsylvania Hall's destruction. They shifted the blame for the incident away from Watmough and onto the Pennsylvania Hall Association and the Mayor. Neither Williams' nor Watmough's account directly condemned the mob, however. Their accounts remain in a conspicuous middle ground; condemning an act of violence without actually condemning its perpetrators. Since the position of Sheriff was determined by popular vote, Watmough tried to appeal to as many voters as possible by not overtly supporting the abolitionists and by attempting to stop any more violence from occurring.

Watmough followed up these newspaper articles with another publication on October 20, 1838, entitled, *Address of John G. Watmough, High Sheriff, to his constituents, in reference to the disturbance which took place in the City and County of Philadelphia, during the summer of 1838*. Watmough wrote and published this account to explain the expenses that he incurred while hiring men to follow his command during the riots in the summer of 1838. The Sheriff explained in his *Address* that he had paid these men himself and hoped to be reimbursed by the city.

The *Address* began with a letter that Watmough wrote to the Governor of Pennsylvania, Joseph Ritner, about the Hall's destruction. Watmough claimed that "the communication to the
governor was written in haste, and under a deep sense of mortification at the failure of his efforts to resist the aggression of the mob."\textsuperscript{141} He adopted a much more humble writing style in this \textit{Address} than he had previously used in his newspaper accounts. Rather than saying that he had been unable to prevent the attacks because of his limited power as Sheriff, Watmough wrote that he felt embarrassed to have not done more. The change in Watmough's attitude throughout the \textit{Address} reflected a larger shift in public opinion about Pennsylvania Hall. In the five months that passed, feelings about the Hall had shifted enough that Watmough felt it was now politically expedient to appear humble rather than brash and self-congratulatory. This modification in self-representation continues throughout the \textit{Address}. Watmough stated that his letter to the Governor was written on May 22, 1838, four days before his writings were published in Philadelphia newspapers. His tone in the letter is so consistent with that of his \textit{Address} and so radically different from his newspaper articles, however, that it seems possible that he fabricated his letter to Governor Ritner to include after the fact. The dramatic shift in his writing style could also reflect his inability to take a singular, definite position on abolition. Watmough's refusal to take a stand as to his beliefs about slavery is manifest in the seemingly incompatible reflections he produced about the Hall.

In his letter to the governor, Watmough elaborated on many of the same issues he had addressed in his newspaper publication, but evaluated his conduct during the events very differently. After reminding the Governor of the limitations incumbent in the position of Sheriff, Watmough continued his \textit{Address} by describing in detail the destruction of the Hall and for the first time actively condemning members of the mob. He also directed some of his censure at the crowd of people who passively watched the Hall's destruction, stating, "I was shocked and grieved, as much at the apathy manifested by the large mass of citizens who calmly witnessed

\textsuperscript{141} John G. Watmough, \textit{Address}, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia PA.
such scenes, as at the conduct of the lawless mob who put all restraint, human and divine, at
defiance."142 His sentiments in this passage are strengthened by a change in his writing style, as
Watmough shifts from writing in third person about the general role and duties of a Sheriff to
writing in first person as he described his feelings and reactions to the Hall's destruction.
Watmough's attitude about who was responsible for the Hall's destruction changed completely in
this passage, reflecting a larger trend in opinions about Pennsylvania Hall. Philadelphians
remembering the destruction and violence of the Pennsylvania Hall riots began to generally
condemn mobocracy, shifting blame for the Hall's destruction away from the PAHA and onto the
mob members. Watmough carefully adopted a position which did not support the radical
doctrines of abolition but also condemned the lawlessness of mobocracy. As more
Philadelphians began to believe that mob violence was not an effective way of instigating
political change, Watmough condemned mob violence for the first time. Watmough's changing
opinion of the mob was politically expedient and reflected a general shift in public views about
the Hall, while still making no definitive claims about abolition.

Watmough used his description of the crowd surrounding the Hall to cast blame for the
attack onto the Mayor. He thus shifted responsibility for the Hall's destruction away from himself
without abandoning his politically neutral position on abolition. He repeatedly described the
people present at the Hall as "respectable citizens." During the afternoon before the Hall's
destruction, for example, Watmough delineated how he "proceeded to the Ground forthwith - I
found the Hall occupied - many respectable citizens, standing about the door in front, and
passing in and out - a few noisy boys in the street, and a large number of highly respectable
citizens occupying the opposite pavement."143 He also stated that the PAHA members he met

142 Ibid., n.p..
143 Ibid., n.p.
with were "truly respectable men," quite a departure from his earlier description of the PAHA Board of Managers as lying boasters who promised to provide men for the Hall's defense and then did no such thing. Watmough's attitude toward the crowd dramatically shifted after the Mayor gave a speech in front of Pennsylvania Hall and "an unruly crowd gathered about him." Watmough asserted that the Mayor's speech changed the makeup of the crowd from respectable citizens to an unruly group, thus identifying the Mayor as principally responsible for the Hall's destruction. Watmough wanted to insure that if a government official was going to be held responsible for the Hall's destruction, it would not be him.

Watmough began to take accountability for his actions shortly after this blatant attempt to pass responsibility for the attack onto the Mayor. He emphasized that he had been "taught a melancholy lesson at the expense of the purest principle in the theory of our institutions, [and he] was determined to profit by it." Watmough's understanding of his role as Sheriff and his responsibility to the people of Philadelphia changed as his Address progressed, illustrating his changing opinions in the aftermath of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction. His narrative of redemption continued by describing how the lessons he learned on the night of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction changed his conduct in the subsequent days. Riots continued in Philadelphia the night after Pennsylvania Hall was destroyed. The mob turned its attention to an orphanage for African American children, the offices of the newspaper *The Public Ledger*, homes of prominent abolitionists and Mother Bethel Church, attacking all of the buildings and destroying the orphanage. Watmough claimed to have gathered a trusted group of citizens, whom he paid using his own funds, to help stop the rioters. The continued rioting thus allowed Watmough and

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144 Ibid., n.p..
145 Ibid., n.p..
146 Ibid., n.p..
147 Refer to Points 4, 5, and 6 on Figure 2 (page 2) for the locations of the other buildings attacked by the mob during the subsequent nights of rioting.
his deputies to redeem themselves by taking an active part in stopping more violence. Yet, Watmough attributed his change of attitude to a desire to uphold law and order, not to any sympathy he felt for the abolitionists. He shifted the focus of his narrative to a story of his personal redemption and changed attitude towards civil order and responsibility, away from the contentious and divisive issues of slavery and abolition.

Watmough altered his stance about the events of the Hall's destruction, capitalizing on a larger change in the tide of public opinion against mob violence. He successfully stopped violence on the subsequent nights of rioting because other Philadelphians turned against the mob and actively assisted him in putting down the riot. Yet, Watmough characterized this shift in opinion as particularly related to himself. He harnessed a change in the attitudes of Philadelphians towards the Hall to highlight his successful fulfillment of his duties as Sheriff. He painted a picture of himself as a reformed and redeemed man who would continue to use the lessons he learned to prevent more violence in the future. Watmough's opinion of the Pennsylvania Hall Association, the mob, and his own civic responsibility changed drastically between his publications in May and his publication in October. He adopted what he felt to be the most politically expedient position at each juncture, shifting blame from the PAHA to the Mayor and ultimately onto himself in order to demonstrate the lessons he learned throughout the affair. His refusal to take a stance on slavery remained constant throughout his accounts, as he constructed a malleable identity for himself that did not address the complicated position of abolition and slavery in Philadelphia.

**Mayor John Swift**

By 1838, Mayor John Swift had gained a reputation throughout Philadelphia as a man quite familiar and adept at dealing with riots. Swift was originally trained as a lawyer, but a few
years after he passed the bar decided to enter government services instead, serving as the captain of the First Regiment Pennsylvania Artillery in the War of 1812. After he retired from military service, he continued to work for the government in the position of police inspector, where he "gained much credit by suppressing, almost unaided, the riot among the inmates of the old county prison." In 1832, Swift was elected as the Mayor of Philadelphia, running on a Whig platform. At the time of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, the select and common councils had continued to annually elect him to this position six times. His background in the armed services made him familiar with public disturbances, and while he held the office of mayor he was often found working in the streets alongside his constables and police force in attempts to quell mob violence.

The Pennsylvania Hall Association was especially surprised by the Mayor's decision to not actively suppress the destruction of the Hall because of his extensive and successful experiences with mobs in the past. Swift was particularly vilified in the PAHA's publication *History of Pennsylvania Hall*. This book emphasized the Mayor's inaction throughout the violent build-up to the mob's destruction. Much of the discord between the Mayor and the PAHA depicted in *History of Pennsylvania Hall* resulted of their differing views of civic responsibility.

When members of the Pennsylvania Hall Association called upon Mayor Swift on the morning of May 17th, seeking protection for themselves and their Hall after a crowd had harassed abolitionist women who had met in the Hall the night before, they found that the Mayor was hesitant to respond to their requests. Before he would agree to anything, he reportedly told the Association that he wished to "consult with [the Attorney General] about the law... in relation to

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the damages; he wanted to see whether the county was liable to pay the costs."  
Swift likely felt the need to confer with other city government officials because of an Act of Assembly passed on June 16, 1835, which allowed lawful owners of property within the city limits of Philadelphia destroyed by a mob or riot to appeal to the Mayor's court. If the court found the property owner to be blameless, then they would be compensated by the city treasury for the property damage.  
Although the Pennsylvania Hall Association came to the Mayor seeking protection for their building, Mayor Swift's response was to express concern about their potential to sue the city for damages in the future. Beyond any personal qualms about abolition, the Mayor's attitude towards the PAHA was shaped by his economic and legal concerns for Philadelphia.  
Swift was also worried about associating both himself and the city with the radical doctrines he believed the Pennsylvania Hall Association promoted. In response to their requests, the Mayor exclaimed, "There are always two sides to a question – it is public opinion makes mobs! And ninety-nine out of a hundred of those with whom I converse are against you!" instead invoked a general public disapproval of the PAHA's actions and their own accountability for inciting popular fury. Swift, like Watmough, minimized his role in denying protection in the Hall. He depicted the PAHA as antagonistic provocateurs who, as a result of their choices, had brought the wrath of the city upon themselves. Swift cited the power of the sentiments provoked by the PAHA as a force too powerful for him to challenge, thus shifting any responsibility for the Hall from himself to the PAHA. Instead of directly taking a stance about Pennsylvania Hall and abolition, Swift avoided the topic by claiming he could do little to stop the powerful anger incited by the Pennsylvania Hall Association.

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Although the Mayor clearly believed that the Association had fomented unrest in his city, he still agreed to visit the Hall in the evening and respond to the increasingly tense situation in the hopes of maintaining civil order. The Mayor, arriving at the swarming Hall on the night of May 17, publicly took the keys from members of the PAHA's Board of Managers and then addressed the gathered crowd, stating:

Fellow citizens: - I wish to address you a few moments. I am sorry to perceive these disturbances, but I must hope that nothing will be transacted contrary to order and peace. Our city has long held the enviable position of a peaceful city - a city of order. It must not lose its position. I truly hope that no one will do any thing of a disorderly nature; any thing of the kind would be followed by regret forever after. There will be no meeting here this evening. This house has been given up to me. The Managers had the right to hold their meeting; but as good citizens they have, at my request, suspended their meeting for the evening. We never call out the military here! We do not need such measures. Indeed, I would, fellow citizens, look upon you as my police! I look upon you as my police, and I trust you will abide by the laws, and keep order. I now bid you farewell for the night. ¹⁵⁴

The mob received the speech well and gave a large cheer for the Mayor at its conclusion. Though the Mayor did attempt to placate the crowd, his efforts proved to be ineffectual, as shortly after the speech’s conclusion the crowd began to attack Pennsylvania Hall in earnest. Yet, the same language Swift purportedly used to dispel the mob only served to egg them on. Swift specifically identified the members of the mob as his police, anointing them as his chosen enforcers of societal standards in the hope that they would maintain the peaceful reputation of the city. Swift assured the mob that he would never call out the military, in effect allowing the mob to know that they would have free reign over the city for the night. He empowered the crowd members to be the social and political guardians of the city, for better or worse, through the language he used in his speech. Swift never made any sort of statement about slavery or abolition in his speech, consciously avoiding the provocative issue that had drawn the crowd to the Hall. He conducted

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 140.
his speech in a politically and socially neutral fashion, implicitly recognizing the many views about slavery in the city by refusing to take a politically inexpedient stance that expressed an opinion on slavery or abolition.

The Mayor did not directly respond to detractors like the PAHA. Rather, he appointed a committee of government workers "for the purpose of putting an end to inquiry as to the causes which led to the late much regretted violation of the public peace, and [his] conduct on the occasion." The Committee on Police, as they were termed, was made up of six men whom the PAHA identified as the Mayor's "personal friends." They released a report of their findings on July 5, 1838. The Report of the Committee on Police was generated almost exclusively on the Mayor's testimony, which he gave "not as Mayor of the city, but as a citizen who had witnessed some of the circumstances... as had come under his notice." Though the Committee had been convened in part to assess his conduct as a Mayor, Swift chose to represent himself as a citizen. His reflections about the Hall's destruction were filtered through the voices of the Committee members, diluting his direct involvement with the Hall. Rather than overtly claiming that his conduct throughout the affair had been admirable, Swift used others to testify to his good judgment. Swift utilized the voice of the Committee on Police to recognize and validate his conduct, as they came to the conclusion that he had done nothing wrong throughout the events. He thus further distanced himself from the politically volatile issue of Pennsylvania Hall.

The committee's account of Swift's involvement with the riot was unable to completely erase his ideological tensions about abolition, however. While he never directly addressed the subject, it came through in his discussion of who was responsible for the civil unrest in the city. Swift was torn between denouncing the mob's lawless behavior and believing that the PAHA

156 Ibid., 179.
brought their problems upon themselves. The Report repeatedly condemned the violent action of mobs as a “source of mortifying recollections”\(^\text{157}\) to citizens of Philadelphia. They proclaimed that the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall “should be to all good citizens a solemn warning, never, on any account, and by any provocation, to permit the majesty of the law to be trampled under foot by violent and reckless individuals.”\(^\text{158}\) The committee distinctly rejected the violent actions taken by mobs to effect social change outside of the limits of the legal system.

In spite of this outright rejection of violence, however, the committee subtly condoned the actions of the mob. The committee included many disclaimers that mob violence must always be stopped “however excusable the excitement may appear to be,” essentially admitting that the mob violence was permissible by including such repudiation.\(^\text{159}\) They perpetuated the belief held by many in the city that the Pennsylvania Hall Association brought the destruction of their Hall upon themselves, stating “this excitement (heretofore unparalleled in our city) was occasioned by the determination of the owners of that building and of their friends, to persevere in openly promulgating and advocating in it doctrines repulsive to the moral sense of a large majority of our community.”\(^\text{160}\) Throughout the Report, the committee oscillated between subtly supporting the socially corrective violence of the mob and openly condemning the rioters’ lawless behavior. Swift decried the PAHA’s deviation from acceptable behavior and claimed that their choices made the mob’s response inevitable, yet, in the same document also condemned the mob for resorting to violence to silence the voices of abolitionists. The mayor could not resolve how to treat the complicated issue of abolition and instead decided it would be more politically expedient to directly support neither side of the issue, thus generating the tension present in the

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\(^\text{157}\) Ibid., 188.
\(^\text{158}\) Ibid., 188.
\(^\text{159}\) Ibid., 189.
\(^\text{160}\) Ibid., 180.
Report of the Committee on Police. Mayor John Swift emerges from the documents produced after Pennsylvania Hall's destruction as a complicated and astute political player. He carefully tailored his vision of civic responsibility to suit his political interests, creating a neutral stance on abolition by conspicuously refusing to address the subject in his statements.

Mayor Swift and Sheriff Watmough were each forced to respond to critiques of their response to the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall, but both attempted to use these responses as a chance to bolster political support. Each man represented himself in a way which he felt would appeal to the most people, attempting to capitalize on Philadelphians' rapidly changing understandings of the roles of corrective violence and abolition. Watmough and Swift walked a careful line between refusing to support the radical abolitionists meeting in Pennsylvania Hall and refusing to support outright mobocracy. Both the Pennsylvania Hall Association and the continued mobbing in Philadelphia threatened the government's power, and thus neither could be unequivocally endorsed by members of the municipal government. Unlike other groups in Philadelphia like members of the mob and the ASCAW, who had little political and social power to lose by taking a definitive stand on abolition or slavery, both the Mayor and Sheriff risked their livelihoods when they addressed these controversial subjects. This fear of losing power caused both men to refuse to adopt a clear position on slavery, choosing instead to take the seemingly neutral path of not addressing the topic. Yet, by refusing to take a stance, both officials let a mob run unchecked through Philadelphia, attacking abolitionists. The need to reinstate civil order caused the Mayor and Sheriff to condemn such civil unrest. While both eventually repudiated the violent social force of the mob, they still refused to address the volatile issue of slavery. The continued silence of municipal officials on the issue of abolition reflected the many different attitudes towards slavery that continued to exist amongst Philadelphians.
CONCLUSION

Two years after an eruption of flame consumed Pennsylvania Hall, Philadelphians had not forgotten the building's plight. The abolitionist newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Freeman*, commemorated the anniversary of the destruction by publishing a poem entitled "Satan's Holiday" that had originally been written days after the Hall burnt down. The editors prefaced the poem with a short statement, reminding readers of the continuing relevance of the Hall's story by emphasizing that "The ruins of this building... have now remained for two years (the damages being unpaid.)" The poem described the demolition of the Hall, emphasizing the plight of the abolitionist victims and the innate evil of the rioters. The poem concludes:

The Hall in beauty fell-
A gift to Slavery:
Which shall to after times reveal
This "Christian" Jubilee!-
And mark the seventeenth of May,
As being SATAN'S HOLIDAY!

The abolitionist readers of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* could truly remember the second commemoration of the Hall's destruction as Satan's Holiday. Despite the efforts abolitionists made to popularize their movement in the publications they produced after the Hall's destruction, the attack on the Hall had scared many away from this anti-slavery movement. "Satan's Holiday" was published again, two years after Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, because the Hall remained a relevant metaphor for Philadelphians. The Hall stayed in the collective conscious of the city and was used to discuss the position of abolition in Philadelphia. The publication of texts and images of the Hall as well as the enduring presence of the Hall's ruins at the corner of Sixth and


162 Ibid., n.p.
Race Streets were a testament to the strife that rocked the city on May 17, 1838, and that continued to shape the way Philadelphians understood citizenship.

In the aftermath of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction, some superficial changes occurred in Philadelphia. The political and social atmosphere in the city did not change drastically, however. The racism illuminated by the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall was enacted into law with the passing of a new Pennsylvania constitution in 1838. This constitution extended the vote to include all white men over age twenty-one, explicitly taking the vote away from Pennsylvania's free black population and continuing to exclude women from politics. Abolitionists and Philadelphia's free blacks attempted to protest this restrictive definition of citizenship by conducting a survey of Philadelphia's free black community, hoping to demonstrate to the public that these qualified persons deserved voting rights. Their efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, and only served to further antagonize the racial unrest in the city.

The newly enfranchised white, male citizens of Pennsylvania used their votes to remove from office all of those who had been involved with Pennsylvania Hall, before and after its destruction. After serving as High Sheriff of Philadelphia since 1835, John Watmough was replaced in this position by Daniel Fitler in 1839. The Philadelphia City Councils also rejected Mayor John Swift’s bid for re-election in 1838, choosing instead his challenger, Isaac Roach, with eighteen votes to Swift's fourteen. In 1840, Swift was the first Mayor to be elected by a popular vote instead of a vote by the city councils, and began the seventh of his eventual twelve terms as Mayor. Philadelphians censured Swift's conduct in the short term by not re-electing

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164 Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 177.
him in 1838, a choice that commentators attributed to abolitionists' vehement dislike of Swift. A Whig-affiliated newspaper from New York reported Swift's political upset, stating that:

this result was effected through the instrumentality of the abolitionists, who, for some alleged neglect of duty at the Pennsylvania Hall, by Mayor Swift, took umbrage, and forming themselves into a party against him, relaxed no exertion until they had supplanted him with him whom rumor with her hundred tongues say is a confirmed believer in the impracticable and mischievous doctrines of the abolitionists.\(^\text{167}\)

In the long term, however, Swift was welcomed back to the city government. Officials like Watmough, who censured the mob's radical actions in the documents they produced after the Hall's destruction, were remembered by voters as ineffective leaders and as a result did not successfully hold public office after the Pennsylvania Hall riots. Philadelphians had criticized Swift for not quickly stopping the mob but eventually rewarded his politically profitable decision to not support the abolitionists by re-electing him as Mayor.

The re-election of the anti-abolitionist Swift was symbolic of a larger trend throughout Philadelphia's municipal government and throughout the city's cultural atmosphere. Though the Pennsylvania Hall Association had hoped that the attack on their Hall would inspire other Philadelphians to fight for the protection of free speech in the city, if not the actual doctrines of abolition, no such reaction occurred. Not only did "Philadelphia abolitionists... never recover the momentum they had gained throughout the 1830s [but] two weeks after the burning of Pennsylvania Hall, the American Colonization Society held the largest colonization meeting ever reported in Philadelphia."\(^\text{168}\) The tide of opinion in the city remained anti-slavery in nature, but decidedly turned away from abolition towards colonization. Although abolitionists' numbers and public stances changed in the years following the Hall's destruction, the general feeling of anti-abolitionism that existed in Philadelphia before and during 1838 continued unabated after


\(^{168}\) Bruce Dorsey, \textit{Reforming Men and Women}, 154.
Pennsylvania Hall's destruction. Abolition was no longer a viable belief in the world of Philadelphia's popular politics.

This bias against abolitionists continued to haunt the Pennsylvania Hall Association even after the destruction of their Hall. The Association sued the city of Philadelphia, seeking reparations for the damages done to their Hall. This law suit dragged on until 1863, appearing before the Court of Quarter Sessions, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, and a Grand Jury led by Elliot Cresson, the leading activist of the Young Men's Colonization Society of Philadelphia.\(^{169}\) The visions of citizenship that emerged after the destruction of the Hall made it difficult for the Pennsylvania Hall Association to attempt to collect reparations for their building as the legal atmosphere was unfriendly to their abolitionist viewpoint. The Pennsylvania Hall Association eventually became so desperate for money with which they could pay back their stockholders and the construction workers who had built their Hall that they sold the ruins of the building at a Sheriff's sale.\(^{170}\)

The continued presence of Pennsylvania Hall in Philadelphia's cultural landscape shaped all of these outcomes. Voters and elected officials remembered the events of the riot and acted accordingly, treating the incident as revelatory of the true character of all involved. Though it only stood for four days, Pennsylvania Hall had an enduring impact that lasted for years. The Hall remained a fixture in the minds of Philadelphians because of the publications and images referencing the Hall that continued to be produced for years after the Hall's destruction and because of the presence of the Hall's ruins in the center of the city. The publications produced by groups like the Pennsylvania Hall Association, the Committee on Police, and the Anti-Slavery


Convention of American Women manipulated this lasting influence by re-telling the Hall's story in an effort to emphasize and promote their own viewpoints. The continuing publication of these texts kept Pennsylvania Hall in the collective consciousness of Philadelphia. In a somewhat circular process, Philadelphians continued to reference and publish accounts of the Hall's story because it was quickly integrated into the cultural vernacular; this in turn occurred because this reference was kept in the collective conscious by published accounts of the Hall. Publications which retold the story of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction shaped Philadelphians' collective memory of the incidents and continued to influence how Philadelphians understood abolition and slavery.

The texts published about Pennsylvania Hall played a critical role in the process of creating identity and establishing the position of abolition in Philadelphia, as explored in the previous sections of this thesis. Images of the Hall played a similarly important role in maintaining the position of the Hall in Philadelphians' collective memory. Antebellum Philadelphians were quite aware of the significant part images could play in triggering memories. A note on the last page of History of Pennsylvania Hall stated that all of the images included in the book were available for purchase in Philadelphia. Other publishers in Philadelphia felt that they could also capitalize on the image of the Hall as well, and produced additional images for distribution and sale to the public. John Caspar Wild, a well-known Philadelphia artist who also created the image in Figure 1, crafted a lithograph of the "Destruction by Fire of Pennsylvania Hall, on the night of the 17th May, 1838" (Figure 4). Wild's image has many of the same elements as Figure 2, depicting the Hall ablaze, a rowdy crowd of men and animals around it, and firemen spraying neighboring buildings. The principal difference between the two images of destruction is the placement of the Hall. In Figure 4, Pennsylvania Hall and the flames erupting...
from its windows and roof dominate the picture, creating a dramatic depiction of the violent event. Wild capitalized on the passions inherent in the Hall's burning to create an image that would resonate with the many interpretations of the Hall, departing from the realm of political commentary to create an image that depicted the raw emotional power that also fueled the Hall's destruction.

Figure 4: J.C. Wild, *Destruction of Pennsylvania Hall by Fire on the Night of May 17th*, Lithograph, 1838, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

Two images in particular demonstrate the continued salience of Pennsylvania Hall as a cultural reference. The first, produced in 1838, was another lithograph created by John Caspar Wild. This image, entitled "North" (Figure 5), was one of a four-part series, the "Panorama of Philadelphia from the Statehouse Steeple." Each image in the series featured a broad view of
Philadelphia, showing the buildings, streets, and natural landscape of the city. Wild helped to acclimatize the viewer to the image by identifying several key landmarks and labeling them in the image. In "North," the landmarks identified by Wild are St. Augustus Church, Girard College, Zion Church, Franklin Square, and Pennsylvania Hall. Pennsylvania Hall was an important enough landmark to be identified by Wild as one of the five most prominent and identifiable buildings in the northern part of Philadelphia.

Figure 5: J.C. Wild, View from Independence Hall: North, Lithograph, 1838, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. (photo: author's own)

Figure 6 offers a closer view of Wild's representation of Pennsylvania Hall. Wild labels the building with a small number 5. The building is also depicted without a roof, indicating that Wild produced the image after the attack on the Hall. Although the Hall had been destroyed and no
longer could be used as a public meeting space, its ruins were still relevant enough as a cultural marker to be identified as one of five principal landmarks in the Northern view of the city.

The image of Pennsylvania Hall continued to hold a relevant position in the minds of Philadelphians throughout the middle of the nineteenth century. Figure 7 shows the image “Abolition Hall. The Evening before the conflagration at the time more than 50,000 persons were glorifying in its destruction at Philadelphia May – 1838.” This image is a photograph taken in approximately 1850 of a lithograph made at an unknown date, purportedly by “Zip Coon.” The cartoon depicts Pennsylvania Hall as an interracial brothel, with white and black women hanging out of the windows and doors while mixed race couples walk in front of the Hall. The creator of the image depicts the black and white men and women frequenting the Hall very derogatorily, using gross caricatures to critique the threatening doctrines of amalgamation he believed were...
being promoted in "Abolition Hall." While the exact date of production of the cartoon is unknown, a photographer still felt that the image of Pennsylvania Hall was important enough to memorialize it in photographic form in 1850, twelve years after the Hall was destroyed. The image of the Hall retained a symbolic significance amongst its supporters and its detractors for years after its destruction.

Figure 7: [Zip Coon] Abolition Hall, Lithograph Cartoon, Library Company of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. (photo: author's own)

While individuals kept the Hall’s story alive by retelling it in publications and images, an even more tangible reminder of the building still existed in the city. The ruins of Pennsylvania Hall continued to loom over the corner of Sixth and Race streets for at least two years after the
Hall was attacked. While creators of texts and images could attempt to manipulate the Hall’s story and re-tell it in a way that suited their own purposes, the ruins remained an undisputable reminder of the violence that had wracked the city. For Philadelphians who passed by this central area of the city, the ruins were a daily reminder of the dangerous power of mobs and the controversial nature of abolition.

Pennsylvania Hall continued to haunt Philadelphia for years after its destruction, as its story endured in textual, visual, and physical form. The continual ideological presence of the Hall in the minds of Philadelphians made it a powerful symbol with which to discuss slavery. The issues of who had the right to freedom and to participate in the public world of politics were hotly contested throughout the Early Republic period and saturated retellings of the events of Pennsylvania Hall's destruction. Members of the mob that destroyed the Hall, the Pennsylvania Hall Association, the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, and of Philadelphia’s municipal government used their interactions with the story of Pennsylvania Hall to promote their own views of citizenship. The fact that so many different and seemingly contrasting viewpoints about slavery could be supported by manipulating the multivalent and salient story of the Hall reveals the uncertainty of who belonged in the Early Republic. Philadelphians imagined new possibilities for citizenship, race, class, and gender norms, which emerged through Pennsylvania Hall’s story. Examining retellings of the destruction of Pennsylvania Hall facilitates a more thorough understanding of the nuanced notions of abolition and slavery in antebellum Philadelphia. As the sun rose on May 18, 1838, it cast its light upon the still smoking ruins of Pennsylvania Hall, revealing a continually contentious and controversial building that had just begun to play its part in shaping antebellum Philadelphians' understandings of slavery and abolition.
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