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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Bruce Laurie. *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xxi + 340 pp. $24.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-60517-5; $68.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-84408-6.

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Published on H-SHEAR (May, 2007)

Third-Party Antislavery Politics and Reform in Massachusetts

Historians are increasingly taking an appreciative view of antislavery leaders who led their movement down the political path in the 1840s and 1850s, thus rejecting the early abolitionist emphasis on avoiding politics.[1] Bruce Laurie's *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* is the first to take this approach on the state level, and hopefully will inspire more such studies. In choosing Massachusetts, the most significant state in the movement, he adds a significant element–the importance of economic and social issues, and shows how third-party leaders formed coalitions with workers and African Americans and labored effectively to achieve a wide spectrum of reforms.

Laurie, a professor of history at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, has previously written extensively about antebellum labor issues and is thus well qualified to look at the conjunction of such issues with antislavery reform. In doing so, he provides important insight and analysis on how social and political reform leaders in Massachusetts cooperated, although they often disagreed with each other over tactics in their attacks on slavery, the South, and what they perceived as economic and racial injustice at home.

After the initial chapters which portray the split with William Lloyd Garrison and his followers in the 1830s and early 1840s, Laurie says relatively little about Garrison and his philosophy. This is appropriate since Garrison's influence declined significantly through the 1840s and 1850s. Thus one might question Laurie's choice of a title which calls attention to the founder of the *Liberator*. Yet, as the title suggests, the study is after all what follows Garrison and, in fact, he cannot be forgotten in a history of reform in the Bay State. Garrison has been the subject of more study than any other abolitionist. While some historians are appreciative of his role and his efforts to denigrate the role of antislavery parties and their leaders, Laurie implicitly rejects that scholarship which describes him as more influential than antislavery politicians.[2]

Laurie's key achievement is not only in elevating the political approach to antislavery so long seen as having only a minimal impact, but of detailing its ties with statewide issues of reform. While not the first to emphasize the positive role of third-party antislavery leaders, he significantly adds to the evidence that the Liberty and Free Soil parties cannot be dismissed as ineffective and naïve; rather they participated effectively in the political "world of compromise and accommodation" (p. 5). Nor does he question Garrison's sincerity in opposing the political approach, but he does suggest that his methods had reached a dead end in terms of effectiveness and thus necessitated a change in tactics.

The Liberty and Free Soil leaders who Laurie studies were a varied lot. Some of the most prominent have been studied by recent historians, but many have been too long ignored. Leaders like Elizur Wright, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry Wilson have been the subject of scholarly biographies. Wright led the break with Garrison in the late thirties and took a more eclectic approach to reform, adding the concerns of working men and women and helped to bring a substantial number into Liberty and later Free Soil ranks. Whittier added an essential literary emphasis to third-party politics with his poems and essays, although he failed to persuade fellow intellectuals Ralph Waldorf Emerson and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to follow his lead. And Wilson engineered the Free Soil-Democratic coalition of the early1850s. But it was lesser-known figures like former Whig journalist Joseph Tinker Buckingham and Lowell labor reformer, Chauncey Langdon Knapp, who worked with Wright and other Liberty leaders to form an alliance on abolitionist and worker issues. Sarah G. Bagley added a female voice in comparing her own plight in a factory to that of a plantation slave. As the Liberty party joined the ten-hour movement it helped make significant inroads into the economic and political control exercised by Whig

leaders and mill operators. The brief portraits of Buckingham, Knapp, and Bagley and countless others along with their actual illustrations contribute significantly to our awareness of those who have too often been mere footnotes in Massachusetts political and labor history.

In a similar way Laurie shows the alliance that antislavery politicians forged with black leaders. In the spectrum of northern race relations Massachusetts leaned toward paternalism and away from exclusionism. The author accurately portrays Liberty and Free Soil leaders as not nearly as racist as many recent historians have contended.[3] With Boston's much smaller African American population than New York or Philadelphia, black leaders like William Nell and John and Sarah Remond worked closely with white reformers in seeking racial equality along with an end to slavery. Garrison took much of the lead in the successful ending of the ban on interracial marriage, but Liberty leaders, black and white, were primarily responsible for the actual 1842 repeal legislation. Other aspects of the attack on segregation brought slower and more limited success, but Laurie is correct to emphasize that Bay State third parties were clearly advanced on racial issues for that time period. Still, as Laurie shows, white reformers rarely sought racial equality, preferring a paternalistic approach, and in the 1850s refused to go as far as the "forcible resistance" demanded by a younger generation of African Americans like Lewis Hayden, Leonard A. Grimes, and John Swett Rock, especially on fugitive slave rescue efforts.

Laurie does not emphasize the role of the Conscience Whigs in the Free Soil movement, not because leaders like Charles Sumner and Charles Francis Adams were insignificant but rather because they are not central to his account of labor and racial reform. Their concern was more directed to an attack on slavery and the Slave Power and they found state reform trivial and distracting from their national priorities. Yet the coalition forged by Free Soilers and Democrats which put Sumner in the Senate in 1851 is central to Laurie's account. The elitist Conscience Whigs were uncomfortable working with Democrats and the author shows effectively how the coalition unraveled in 1852 and 1853 with the defeat of the proposed new state constitution. Democratic resistance led by Caleb Cushing helped arouse working-class and rural Democratic racism and was an added factor, but the eclectic approach of the Free Soil party had nonetheless brought significant change for both workers and African Americans.

Laurie is also to be praised for his analysis of the Massachusetts Know Nothing movement of 1854-1856, especially as he describes how the new party outdid the Free Soilers on anti-southern and antislavery issues. The Nativist legislature of 1855, under the lead of Charles Wesley Slack, approved a new personal liberty law and implemented the desegregation of Boston schools, albeit with some definite nativistic motivation. Laurie rejects both historical camps on the Know Nothing controversy. Nativism was neither the dominant force which eclipsed sectional issues, nor an insignificant passing phenomenon in the inexorable drift toward civil war.[4] In Massachusetts, Nativists delayed the organization of the Republican party and achieved some of their own anti-foreign goals while surprisingly advancing the cause of antislavery.

Laurie concludes with a discussion of how unique the Massachusetts third-party experience was. Despite obvious paternalism it was the most progressive state on race relations. It had the largest and most effective antislavery movement yet was the most intolerant of immigrants. Here and elsewhere in the study readers might ask for some additional description and analysis of the evolution of Bay State politics, especially of the Liberty and Free Soil parties, even though such descriptions can be readily found elsewhere. In places, such information is needed to place the events Laurie describes in clearer historical perspective.

What Bruce Laurie has done is to add an important element to the growing literature on political antislavery. And in providing this well-researched and -documented account, one which includes effective historiographical analysis, he has described Massachusetts' unique role in advancing racial equality and the status of labor, while at the same time focusing on the state's central place in antislavery politics. We can hope that other historians will follow Laurie's lead and pursue similar studies in key states like Ohio and New York.

Notes

[1]. Among those recent studies which treat political antislavery leaders and third parties in a positive manner are Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); and Frederick J. Blue, *No Taint of Compromise: Crusaders in Antislavery Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).

[2]. Among the more appreciative studies of Garrison are Aileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics*

(New York: Pantheon Books, 1969); and Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

[3]. Among those historians who earlier portrayed many Free Soilers, such as David Wilmot, along with their party as racist were Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970); Frederick J. Blue, *The Free Soilers: Third Party Politics, 1848-54* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973); and Louis Filler, *The Crusade against Slavery, 1830-1860* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). These and many other historians have softened their views of Free Soil racism in more recent years.

[4]. The "New Political History" argues that social and cultural issues, including nativism, surpassed sectional questions in the 1850s in their appeal to northern voters. See especially Michael Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1978); and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Tyler Anbinder's *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) returns to the traditional emphasis on slavery and sectional issues to explain voter attitudes in the 1850s.

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Citation: Fred Blue. Review of Laurie, Bruce, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform.* H-SHEAR, H-Net Reviews. May, 2007.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13192

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