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THE CHRISTIANA RIOT: AN EVALUATION OF ITS NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

*An account of the Christiana Riot as
interpreted throughout the nation by
newspaper editorial writers.*

A heavy fog shrouded Chester Valley in the early morning of September 11, 1851. In the semi-darkness before dawn a group of eight white men trudged silently along the Valley Road and turned into a narrow lane to the south. At a shallow creek that threaded its way through the Valley, they paused to check the priming of their firearms.

As the men continued along the lane, a two-story stone house loomed up in the darkness. One pointed to it and departed; the seven others walked on, more slowly than before. Suddenly a Negro appeared at the mouth of a shorter lane that led to the stone house. One of the members of the approaching party cried, "There he is. Catch him!", and broke into a run. The Negro bolted back toward the house. His shouts of "Kidnappers! Kidnappers!" awakened the sleeping residents of the valley.

Thus began, a little more than two miles from the village of Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the Christiana Riot. It resulted in violent death for one of the seven whites; indictment on charges of treason against the United States for thirty-eight residents of Lancaster County; and an extraordinary degree of excitement throughout the nation.

The riot excited widespread interest. In tiny weekly newspapers of hamlets in New Hampshire and South Carolina, and in large dailies of New York and Baltimore, editors reported and discussed the riot in terms suggesting that the apparently minor clash represented larger and graver conflicts which involved the entire nation. Many Americans felt the Christiana Riot tested crucial matters: the sanctity of law; the existence of peace and order; the ethical course of the country; and the very existence of the union.

When Edward Gorsuch of Baltimore County, Maryland, came to Lancaster County in search of his fugitive slaves, he was acting under authority given him by law. On September 18, 1850, President Millard Fillmore signed a law that climaxed over sixty years of difficulty in regard to fugitive slaves.¹ The Second Fugitive Slave Law, a part of the Compromise of 1850, established a system that theoretically guaranteed the return of a fugitive slave to its owner. Armed with the new legislation, Edward Gorsuch left his prosperous farm on September 8, 1851, in the hope of reclaiming his runaway slaves.

Gorsuch was fifty-seven years old at the time of the Christiana Riot. He was a Whig in politics and an active member of the Methodist Episcopal Church.² Gorsuch was known to be a kind master who was in the habit of freeing his most faithful slaves. Nevertheless, in November, 1849, four Negroes escaped from his farm to Pennsylvania.³

William M. Padgett of Penningtonville, Pennsylvania, in August, 1851, wrote Edward Gorsuch important news concerning his runaway slaves. They were living in Lancaster County, Padgett said, and could easily be captured.⁴

Promptly Gorsuch went to Philadelphia where, on September 9, he obtained warrants to seize his slaves from the United States commissioner. The commissioner, in turn, directed Deputy United States Marshall Henry H. Kline to arrest Nelson Ford and three other Negroes belonging to Gorsuch.⁵ On September 10 Edward Gorsuch's son, Dickinson; his cousin, Joshua; his nephew, Thomas Pearce; and his neighbors, Nicholas Hutchings and Nathan Nelson joined him. Along with Marshal Kline these men made up the party who participated in the Christiana Riot.

The next morning the Gorsuch party went by rail to Gap. There William Padgett appeared to guide them. Padgett led the men through a locality whose residents had little sympathy for slavecatchers. Lancaster County was close enough to the slave states to have had considerable experience with the methods of fugitive slave hunting. In fact, slaves fleeing from the Upper South made Lancaster County one of their principal routes of escape.⁶

Many escaping Negroes went no farther than Lancaster County. A large population of blacks lived in the vicinity of Christiana. The collective strength of these Negroes was increased because they found in William Parker a remarkable leader. Parker led his people in many heroic rescues of fugitives whom slavecatchers sought to carry back to slavery. His stone house was a center for Negro resistance. It was to this house

that the black spied by the Gorsuch party fled. Without William Parker's presence the Negroes would have lacked the courage to stand up to the slavecatchers, and the Christiana Riot would not have occurred.⁷

Many white residents of Lancaster County made no secret of their disapproval of the recent law respecting fugitive slaves. On October 11, 1850, at a meeting in the town of Bart, a few miles from Christiana, a group of white residents expressed their dislike of the Second Fugitive Slave Law. They resolved that the "highest principles of justice and humanity" and the "fundamental principles of Christianity" made it impossible for them to aid in the process of returning a fugitive slave. They further resolved that no person has the right to enslave any other person and that "we will harbor, clothe, feed and aid the escape of fugitive slaves in opposition to the law."⁸

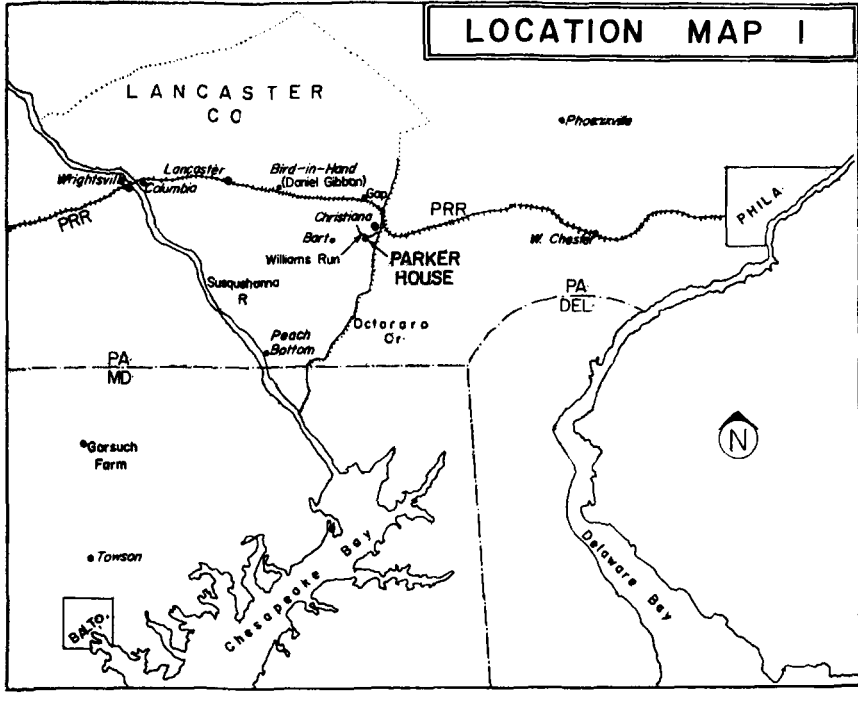
There were some residents of the Lancaster area, however, who made a business out of seizing Negroes and carrying them South to slavery. Frequently these gangs of "kidnappers," as they were called locally, took little time to decide whether a particular Negro was a fugitive slave or a freedman. It was their practice to knock a black unconscious, carry him to Maryland by wagon, collect their pay and return to Pennsylvania.⁹ As a result of the operations of the "kidnappers" and the retaliation of the blacks in defense of their freedom, tension mounted in the countryside around Christiana. Barred doors and loaded rifles greeted any after-dark visitor.

The Vigilance Committee of the Underground Railroad in Philadelphia was alert. When word reached its members that a stranger had been seen talking with Commissioner Ingraham about some fugitives in the vicinity of Christiana, they immediately dispatched Samuel Williams to Lancaster County. William Still, a Negro leader of the Vigilance Committee in Philadelphia, recalled that Williams was instructed "to put all persons supposed to be in danger on their guard."¹⁰ As a result of Williams' mission, William Parker and the fugitives were prepared for the arrival of the Marylanders.

When the Negro sentry saw the Gorsuch party coming down the long lane, he ran to Parker's house. The black reached the house before the white men and dashed up to the second floor where William Parker and some friends had spent the night. Marshal Kline was the first white man to reach the house. He attempted to climb the stairs but was forced back by an axe or fish gig thrown down the stairwell.¹¹ At about the same time Thomas Pearce was struck above the right eye by a stick of wood thrown from a window. The whites hesitated. Neither Kline nor any member of the Gorsuch party dared to climb the stairs.

Edward Gorsuch attempted to persuade his slave, Nelson Ford, to give up. "Come down, Nelson, I know your voice, I know you," he called. "If you come down and go home with me without trouble I will look over the past." One of the Negroes retorted: "If you take one of us, you must take him over our dead bodies."¹²

To impress the Negroes with his authority, Kline read his warrants



around a number of times and shammed sending Nicholas Hutchings for one hundred men to enforce them.¹³ As Hutchings left, someone inside the house fired a shot at Edward Gorsuch. Marshal Kline drew his revolver and returned the fire through an open window.

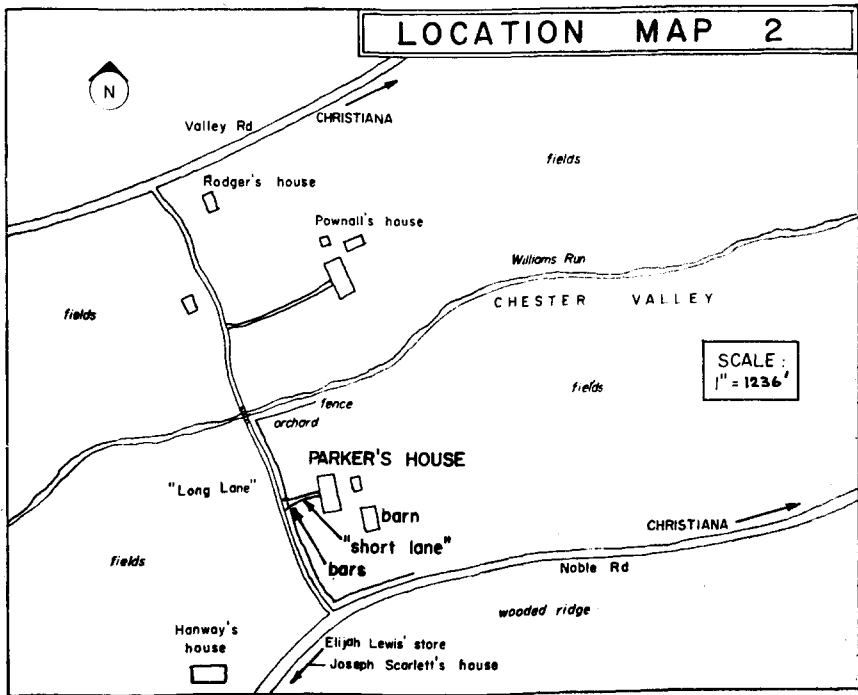
No sooner had the sound of gunfire died away than a blast from a big dinner horn shattered the early morning stillness. Parker's wife blew the horn from a second floor window. The men surrounding the house opened fire on her, but she ducked below the sill and blew her horn more vigorously.¹⁴ The sounding of the horn was a signal used by the Negroes in case of emergency. In response to it blacks armed with guns, swords, corn cutters and scythes began to gather. From Parker's house, which was located high on the southern side of the mile-wide Chester Valley, the participants in the Riot could clearly see bands of Negroes spilling out of the woods on the ridges and running across the fields.

Another means spread news of the trouble at Parker's. Isaiah Clarkson, an aged Negro, who passed down the long lane shortly after the Gorsuch party arrived, hurried on to Elijah Lewis's store in Cooperville and told its white proprietor that Parker's place was "surrounded by kidnapers, who had broken into the house and were about to take him away."¹⁵ In view of the local distrust of "kidnapers," Lewis assumed that one of

the gangs was up to no good and hurried to the scene of the trouble. On his way Lewis passed the mill of Castner Hanway, also white. Lewis told Hanway what he knew, and the miller saddled his horse and rode the mile to Parker's house. Hanway arrived some twenty minutes after the first shots were fired. Lewis, walking rapidly, arrived a few minutes later.

Hanway's arrival encouraged the besieged Negroes as well as those gathered around the house. Nathan Nelson noted that when Hanway rode up the Negroes "seemed to rejoice at it. They made a great jumping and a great noise." Nicholas Hutchings thought that they appeared to be "in great spirits — all of them hallooing and shouting and singing."¹⁶

Hanway was not involved with the Negroes in their plan for concerted defense against "kidnappers." Neither was he in active sympathy with the Underground Railroad in Lancaster County, nor had he participated in any of the meetings that resolved to defy the fugitive slave law.¹⁷ In fact, Hanway had resided in the Christiana area only since the spring of 1851.¹⁸ His motives for going to Parker's were similar to Lewis's. He simply wanted to know whether legal authority was on the scene, or



if a gang of hoodlums was illegally attempting to kidnap innocent Negroes. Regardless of his personal views on slavery, it was far from Hanway's purpose to prevent the recovery of fugitives by lawful means. Nevertheless, the Negroes felt he was sympathetic to their cause, and they cheered his appearance.

When Edward Gorsuch saw Castner Hanway on his horse at the bars across the short lane, he asked Marshal Kline to speak to him.¹⁹ Kline approached Hanway; greeted him; showed him the warrants; and asked him to assist under the provisions of the fugitive slave law. Hanway refused.²⁰

While Kline and Hanway were conversing, Lewis looked at the warrants and was satisfied they were legal. He prepared to leave. Marshal Kline declared he would hold Hanway and Lewis responsible for the value of Gorsuch's slaves under the provisions of the Second Fugitive Slave Law.

Negroes continued to gather around Parker's house. Marshal Kline, who was becoming increasingly apprehensive, begged for a retreat. Some of the whites began to leave the area, but Edward Gorsuch lingered in front of the house, loath to depart without his property. Kline again pleaded with Gorsuch to retreat. Then he jumped a fence and hid in a cornfield.²¹

Seeing the elderly slaveholder standing alone, the Negroes gained courage. The group that was clustered in the short lane moved in on the slaveholder. The Negroes in the house emerged and advanced toward him. Suddenly, the blacks rushed Gorsuch. They struck him down and, when he tried to rise, shot him in the chest. Edward Gorsuch slumped to the ground — dead. Dickinson Gorsuch, in a frantic effort to save his father, ran back down the short lane and attempted to fire his revolver into the milling Negroes. It was knocked from his hand. Then Dickinson received a blast of squirrel shot from close range that sent him sprawling in the dirt — coughing blood.²²

When the Negroes mobbed the Gorsuches the rest of the white men fled. Nicholas Hutchings and Nathan Nelson raced down the long lane toward the Valley Road. William Parker paid them the dubious tribute of being able to "outrun any men I ever saw."²³ Joshua Gorsuch was caught by the mob and beaten, but his thick fur hat saved him from serious injury. Thomas Pearce escaped to a nearby farmhouse. The Negroes panicked at the result of their violence and disbanded. The Christiana Riot was over.

The aftermath of the Christiana Riot received as much attention from newspaper editors as the Riot itself. Castner Hanway and Elijah Lewis voluntarily turned themselves over to authorities in the city of Lancaster the day following the murder. By the evening of September 11, most of the Negroes who had been present at Parker's, including William Parker himself, were well on their way to Canada.²⁴ Nevertheless, on September 13, a force of forty-five United States Marines and a large civil posse from Philadelphia arrived in Lancaster County. Another group was present under District Attorney John L. Thompson. Together these



Sketch of the Riot House, home of William Parker. This stone building fell into ruins early this century.

men scoured the neighborhood around Christiana and managed to take a few dozen prisoners.

Legal hearings began September 23 before Alderman J. Franklin Reigart in the Lancaster County Courthouse. A local lawyer named Thaddeus Stevens defended the prisoners. In spite of his efforts, the result of the hearing was the preliminary indictment of Hanway, Lewis and eleven Negroes on charges of treason against the United States. These men, who were later joined by twenty-seven others, were sent to Philadelphia's Moyamensing Prison to await trial before the United States Circuit Court.²⁵

On September 29, 1851, John K. Kane, United States District Judge, delivered a charge on the law of treason to the Grand Jury of Pennsylvania's Eastern District. After briefly reviewing the case, Kane defined treason as it is defined in the Constitution: ". . . levying war against them [the United States], or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort." Judge Kane drew a connection between the Christiana Riot

and the crime of treason by pointing out that the words "levying war" had been interpreted as meaning "any combination forcibly to prevent or oppose the execution or enforcement of a provision of the Constitution or a public statute. . . ." Kane added, however, that the combination must be directed against the law itself and must not be merely a violation of it. At the conclusion of the charge, Kane left no doubt that in his opinion an indictment of treason was warranted.²⁶

In response to Kane's charge, the Grand Jury returned bills indicting thirty-eight persons on charges of treason. The prosecuting attorneys of the United States decided to use Castner Hanway as a test case upon whose trial would depend the fate of the other prisoners. The specific charge against Hanway was that he "wickedly and traitorously did intend to levy war against the . . . United States . . . [by a] combination to oppose, resist and prevent the execution of the fugitive slave laws of 1793 and 1850."²⁷

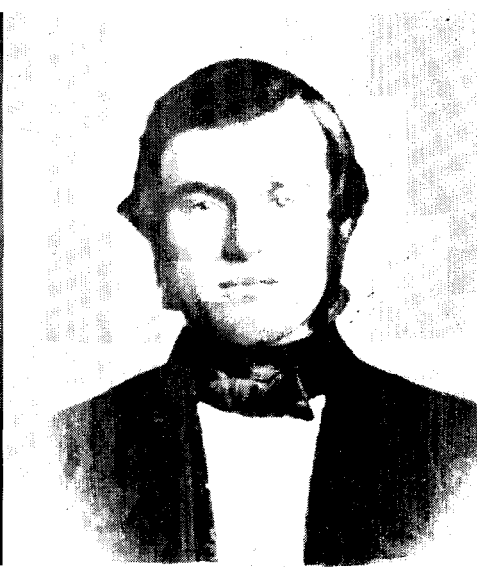
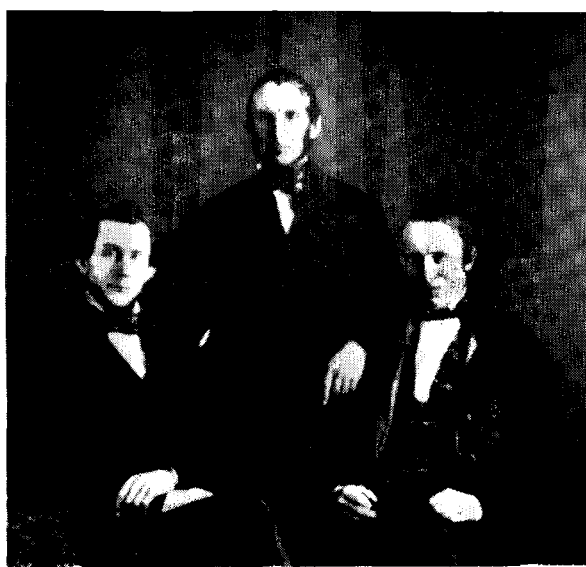
The case of **United States v. Hanway** opened on November 24, 1851, in the second story room of Independence Hall in Philadelphia. The courtroom was jammed with an excited crowd. The presentation of evidence and examination of witnesses began on November 28. It did not take long for the prosecution to realize that its case was not tenable. The only man who might have been convicted was William Parker, and he was in Canada. In Castner Hanway's case, the evidence did not substantiate the charge. Theodore A. Cuyler phrased the argument in these words:

Sir—Did you hear it? That three harmless non-resisting Quakers, and eight and thirty wretched, miserable, penniless Negroes, armed with corn-cutters, clubs, and a few muskets, and headed by a miller, in a felt hat, without a coat, without arms, and mounted on a sorrel nag, levied war against the United States.²⁸

The courtroom burst into laughter. Cuyler's attempt to ridicule the enormity of the charge against Hanway was effective.

On December 11 Judge Robert C. Grier delivered his controversial charge to the jury. Grier made it plain that while the court supported the recent Fugitive Slave Law, it did not feel that Hanway's resistance to the law rose to the dignity of treason. Concluding his charge, Judge Grier pointed out the grave dangers that lay in the doctrine of constructive treason. He added that the persons involved in the Christiana Riot had no intention of making a "general and public" resistance to a United States law and were only interested in protecting one another from kidnapers.²⁹

In accordance with Grier's charge, the jury found Castner Hanway not guilty after only a few minutes deliberation. In view of this decision, John W. Ashmead declared that the United States would proceed no further in its action against Hanway and the other prisoners. Hanway was still subject to prosecution in Lancaster County courts, but the charges were waived.



(Left) Three of the accused men charged with treason. In left to right order, Castner Hanway, Elijah Lewis and Joseph Scarlet. (Right) Dickinson Gorsuch, who was seriously wounded in the riot.

Newspaper editors and their readers felt the Christiana Riot was significant for a variety of reasons. The Compromise of 1850 had been in effect less than a year. Throughout the country men wondered if it would really solve the disturbing sectional disagreements. In the minds of many Americans the riot was regarded as an important test of the recent compromise.

Congressional debates were meaningless to many citizens. The Christiana Riot gave concrete meaning to abstract issues such as the sanctity of property, the role of the Northern citizen in the capture of fugitive slaves and the right of a slave to his freedom. Using the riot as exhibit "A", newspaper editors expressed their hopes and fears in hard-hitting editorials.

The riot was significant to Southerners and Northerners alike because of the geographical proximity of Lancaster County to the major population centers of the United States. The average citizen was not concerned with the status of slavery in California or the Utah-New Mexico Territories. But now a man in pursuit of his fugitive slaves had been murdered only forty miles from Philadelphia! If it happened in Lancaster County, editors reasoned, it might happen anywhere in the North and to any Southern slaveholder or his agent.

Finally, underlying everything, was the question of the existence of the Union. Many Americans saw in the Christiana Riot an indication of the future of their country.

THE RIOT AND THE SOUTH

The Nashville Convention of June, 1850, disappointed Southern secessionists. Only a few months before their hopes had been encouraged by widespread secession sentiment in the South, but before the convention met, Henry Clay introduced in Congress a series of compromise measures promised to settle the sectional difficulties over slavery. By the time the delegates gathered in Nashville, Daniel Webster had given his support to Clay's proposals. In September the laws comprising the compromise went into effect. The forces of secession received a setback.

Southern acceptance of the Compromise was conditional. In Georgia a state Democratic convention declared that the continued existence of the United States as one nation, and Georgia's membership in the union, depended on the full and faithful execution of the new fugitive slave law. The editor of the Raleigh [North Carolina] **Standard** warned the Free States to obey the law. "If not," he added, "WE LEAVE YOU! Before God and man . . . if you fail in this simple act of justice, **THE BONDS WILL BE DISSOLVED!**"³⁰

In the atmosphere of watchful waiting that existed in the South in 1851, the Christiana Riot assumed an extraordinary significance. It was the first defiance of the crucial fugitive slave law in which blood was shed. Throughout the South, editors took up their pens in anger and excitement.

The first reaction of many Southern editors was one of shock. The **Baltimore Clipper's** editor alleged that after the compromise the sectional hostility was subsiding and the fugitive slave law was operating successfully. In fact, he added, "people generally were beginning to look forward to the restoration of entire good feeling between the North and South." At this stage of affairs the Christiana Riot "produced such an excitement — such a feeling of indignation in Maryland — . . . as has seldom been witnessed."³¹

From deeper in the South the **Mobile Daily Register's** editor echoed the lament of his Baltimore colleague:

Our country has been upon the verge of a revolution. The elements of discord have scarcely subsided into sullen calm, — the grieved and injured Southern States have barely yielded to the importunities and assurances of their own patriotic citizens, that the hand of aggression would be stayed, and that the 'Compromise' would be observed in good faith, — when all this diabolical tragedy is enacted with all its vile and insulting circumstances.³²

This editor sensed the disruptive nature of the Christiana Riot. It was not only insulting, but proof that the settlement would not be final in any way. The conditions set by the South for acquiescence had not been met.

Some editors were furious. A writer for the **Augusta [Georgia] Constitutionalist** angrily told his readers that "Respectable citizens of the South are shot down like wild beasts, and a wagon and horses could not be procured to pursue the murderers."³³ Elsewhere in the South editors

reacted to the Christiana Riot with such adjectives as “dreadful,” “horrible,” and “atrocious.”

Many journalists picked out the defiance of the law and the Constitution as the most significant aspect of the riot. The editor of the paper with the largest circulation in Maryland, the *Baltimore Sun*, cried:

The law of the land — the very statute upon which hangs our destiny as an Union — has been wantonly and openly violated and the death of one, if not more of the best citizens of Maryland, has been the consequence.³⁴

For the Charleston [South Carolina] *Southern Standard* of September 20 the Christiana Riot was a “spectacle of citizens slaughtered in the prosecution of their lawful purposes.” The *Augusta Chronicle and Sentinel* felt that “The body of the murdered man calls not more loudly for vengeance, than do the faith of the Government, and the provisions of the law.”³⁵

The editor of the *Baltimore Clipper* agreed that the South must have vengeance. “It is certain,” he argued,

that a most foul and damning outrage has been perpetrated upon the highly respected citizens of the Commonwealth, whilst honestly and lawfully endeavoring to repossess themselves of their property, and the circumstances call loudly for some prompt retributive justice upon the heads of the wretches who have instigated and committed the bloody deed.³⁶

These editors all emphasized that Edward Gorsuch had been “lawfully” engaged in reclaiming his property when he was shot. They understood that property was sacred in the American creed. Negroes were valuable property; if “stolen,” they must be returned. The law was clear on this point. Southern editors wondered why the North could not understand this “simple act of justice.”

A Methodist paper in Nashville summarized the opinion of those who saw the defiance of “the constituted authorities of the government” as the real significance of the Christiana Riot. It was, said the irate editor, “a determined purpose to resist the law of the land,” in fact, “the cool and determined purpose to maltreat and murder, aye, butcher, in the most savage, barbarous and cold-blooded manner, those who were seeking their constitutional rights . . .” Such an offense must not go unrebuked. “A crisis has come,” he continued, “This affair will test the matter.” Either the laws of Congress would be maintained, Southern rights respected, and the “cold-blooded murder punished,” or the rights of Southern citizens be “trampled under foot, and their blood cry in vain for justice.”³⁷

Governor E. Louis Lowe of Maryland felt the murder of Edward Gorsuch was a general insult and threat to the citizens of the South. In a letter dated September 15, 1851, to President Millard Fillmore, Lowe emphasized Maryland’s loyalty to the union. But he added that his state would not remain in it “*one day*” if the federal government could not uphold “the rights, liberties and lives of our citizens . . .” I do not know of

a single incident that has occurred since the passage of the Compromise measures," Governor Lowe concluded, "which tends more to weaken the bonds of union, and arouse dark thoughts in the minds of men, than this late tragedy."³⁸

In Southern editorials which were written about the Christiana Riot two opinions emerged — opinions that differed radically on the significance of the disturbance in Lancaster County.

Many Southern editors yearned for the restoration of peace between the sections. They hoped the Free States would uphold the fugitive slave law. In the first days after the Christiana Riot these Southerners expressed optimism. The murder of Edward Gorsuch, thought moderate men, would arouse the North to a perception of the wickedness of anti-slavery fanaticism. The Christiana Riot would not be repeated elsewhere. Conservative Northerners who loved peace, law and union would see to that. The South could take hope from the horror manifested by Northern people at the news of the riot.

These Southern moderates were not spineless. The North must show the "right" spirit. On September 17 the editor of the New Orleans **Picayune** predicted:

If it shall not be proved clearly that the deed of blood is regarded with horror, and its perpetrators visited with the sternest infliction of public justice, the incident will be a perpetual blot on the character of [Pennsylvania], and of fatal augury to the peace of the Republic.

The success of the Compromise of 1850, believed many Southern journalists, depended on the response of the North to the riot. A North Carolina editor wrote that unless the rioters were punished the "compromise will be a 'rope of sand'" which the North would obey only when it suited their convenience. In this case, he added, "the law may as well be burnt up."³⁹ The editor of the Richmond **Dispatch** drew the logical conclusion. The South was loyal to the Union but its people would not continue to live under it "if its laws may be set aside at defiance and with impunity."⁴⁰

But these moderate Southern editors also believed this last step would not be necessary. They felt the Northern people would rise as one to denounce the results of the Christiana Riot and to punish those responsible for it. The editor of the Memphis [Tennessee] **Enquirer** expected the North to vindicate itself:

The sober-minded people of Pennsylvania, are not prepared to submit to such shameful and disgraceful violations of the law of the land in their own State, by a band of vagabond negroes and degraded white people who unfortunately reside amongst them.

This case has aroused our Northern friends to a sense of their own folly, and the Southern people have to thank them for the prompt energy which they have displayed on the occasion.⁴¹

The **Enquirer's** editor was impressed by the three forces that converged on Lancaster County to arrest the murderers on September 13 and 14. For him, and for many of his colleagues, this was evidence of Northern concern for Southern rights. On September 26 the editor of the Milledge-

ville [Georgia] **Southern Recorder** declared he was pleased to see "Federal and State authorities, as well as the people of Pennsylvania" willing and able" to do their duty to the utmost . . ." ⁴²

The same high opinion of the citizens of Lancaster County and Pennsylvania was held by the editor of the Greensborough [North Carolina] **Patriot**. He noted that they "seem to be alive to the enormity of the outrage" and have called "numerous public meetings" to denounce it.⁴³ The New Orleans **Picayune**, whose editor had warned Pennsylvania to uphold the law, also joined in predicting that the riot would:

rouse that sober and conservative spirit for which she has been distinguished throughout all these controversies, into a resolute action to crush within her borders the desperate faction whose teachings have produced and encouraged these lawless acts.⁴⁴

If the people of Pennsylvania were really "alive" to the seriousness of the Christiana Riot and would "crush" the Abolitionists, felt the moderates the Compromise of 1850 would stand.

Because the reaction in the North to the riot was so crucial, many editors south of the Mason-Dixon line printed extracts from Northern journals. The editor of the Richmond **Whig** surveyed Northern press opinion on the Christiana Riot and concluded that they showed "almost unanimous abhorrence of these natural results of fanatical teaching."⁴⁵

A similar technique was used by the editors of the Augusta **Chronicle and Sentinel** and the Alexandria [Virginia] **Gazette**. They printed extracts from the Philadelphia **Ledger** and the New York **Express** that fiercely denounced the Abolitionists. The Mobile **Advertiser** based one of its editorials on a remark made in the New York **Express** by Horace Greeley, the New York **Tribune's** editor who exonerated the Negroes responsible for Gorsuch's death. The **Express** declared that Greeley "speaks only for himself and for some little mad coterie, and without any authority whatsoever from any respectable number of persons in any part of the country."⁴⁶ The Mobile **Advertiser's** editor and his moderate colleagues rejoiced on receiving these reports from the North.

For the moderates the principal importance of the Christiana Riot was its disruption of the peace established by the Compromise of 1850. The editor of the Baltimore **Patriot**, weary over chronic debate of the riot, plead for settlement:

Let us have peace. Let the Compromise measures which the last Congress wisely passed, be upheld and supported, and those who would renew the agitation by attempting to alter or repeal them, be discarded by the good men of all parties, and we shall have peace, and take a new lease for the prosperity and perpetuity of the Union.⁴⁷

The **Patriot's** editor hoped the Christiana Riot had aroused the Free States to a realization of the need for strict enforcement of the Compromise measures and the peaceful harmony such enforcement would make possible.

A smaller number of Southern editors felt the Christiana Riot had an entirely different significance. In their opinion it showed that the Compromise was a farce. The North only scoffed at Southern rights. These radical Southerners saw the Christiana Riot as a legitimate reason for immediate secession.

Radical editors felt the South must be united in its opposition to the North. Secession had to be unanimous. On September 25, 1851, the editor of the Nashville [Tennessee] **American** exhorted his readers to "Read the Christiana tragedy, take it home to yourself, and see if you cannot see in it a lesson which should teach us to be united against aggression . . ." The Charleston **Southern Standard's** editor agreed. Then he posed a question:

Suppose a citizen of South Carolina was now in the place of those from Maryland and suffering as they did, would not the prompt action of our state, in the holy purpose of protecting inviolable the life and property of that citizen?

The **Southern Standard's** editor was actually sorry a South Carolinian had not been killed in the Riot. He felt that Maryland was of too moderate a temperament to "rally" the rest of the South. Nevertheless, the radicals believed the Christiana Riot would give an impetus to the cause of Southern union.

The murder of Edward Gorsuch gave radical editors the chance to say, "I told you so!" After reading the terrible news from Lancaster County, could anyone doubt that the moderates had deluded the South into accepting an ineffective compromise? The editor of the **Augusta Constitutionalist** did not think so:

Our opponents are always pointing to the Fugitive Slave Law. We point you, people of Georgia, to the mangled corpses of your fellow citizens of the South We have been fearing just such a result as this The law will hereafter be a perfectly dead letter. *

Such is the Compromise which some of our opponents tell the people is fair, liberal, and just. We have lost all our territory and got a Fugitive Slave Law, the recovery under which of our slaves, costs us more than they are worth, and the blood of our people besides.⁴⁸

While the moderates felt anti-slavery fanatics were an insignificant minority in the North, the radicals believed they preponderated. In contrast to the **Mobile Advertiser**, the **Southern Press** of Washington, D.C. reported that Horace Greeley and his **New York Tribune** "represents the actual sentiment on the subject of the Northern masses."⁴⁹ The editor of the **Southern Press** reasoned that the exorbitant treason charge on Castner Hanway was a deliberate Northern trick that would allow him to escape punishment.⁵⁰

The ultimate significance of the Christiana Riot for radical editors was the opportunity it gave them to back their denunciations of the Compromise with incontrovertible fact. The fugitive slave law had not worked, and a Southern slaveholder was dead! Now the Southern moderates *must* see the necessity of disunion. The editor of the **Little Rock**

State Gazette and Democrat believed the Christiana Riot had forced the South to "the last extremity of an injured and insulted people."⁵¹ For the editor of the Jacksonville [Florida] **Floridian and Journal** the issue was clear-cut. "Is such guilt to be tolerated — are such assassinations to be repeated?" he asked. If so, "the sword of Civil War is already unsheathed."⁵²

Going all the way in the fire-eating tradition was the editor of the tiny **Fairfield** [South Carolina] **Herald**. He predicted the South would quietly accept the "high-handed aggression" that had taken place in Lancaster County. Then he cried:

'Tis thus the people of the South have become suppliant and fawning God forbid Carolinians to submit or suffer their pile of grievances to be increased. Let us, while we yet claim some of the rights of freemen, throw off the accursed yoke which is galling us, at the risk of our fortunes, our tombs and our lives.⁵³

Southern opinion differed as to the specific significance of the Christiana Riot, but most Southerners were agreed on one point: as a test case the riot was of vital concern to the South.

Part II

THE IMPACT ON THE NORTH

The first news of Lancaster County's Christiana Riot reached Philadelphia by word of mouth. A mob of Negroes had brutally murdered a Maryland slaveholder named Edward Gorsuch. The excitement in Philadelphia was intense. Soon after Gorsuch was killed on September 11, 1851, newspaper editors spread the news throughout the country. The bloody conflict between a slaveholder and his fugitives became a subject of primary importance.

Northerners realized immediately that the Christiana Riot defied the Second Fugitive Slave Law. Because the success or failure of the Compromise of 1850 depended on the effectiveness of this law, news of the Christiana Riot had an extraordinary impact on the North. Northern reaction to the riot depended on Northern opinion of the fugitive slave law.

Many citizens in the Free States had praised the compromise measures because they opened limitless vistas of peace and prosperity for America. These "solid citizens" sighed in relief at what they hoped would be a final settlement of the sectional controversy over slavery. In laudatory meetings held throughout the North they pledged their full support of the compromise.¹ If this faction had its way, the Second Fugitive Slave Law would be duly executed.

A second body of citizens in the Free States regarded the compromise with mixed emotions. They welcomed the settlement, but they did not feel its measures could be enforced. The rub was the fugitive slave law. In their opinion, it was contrary to Northern standards of justice and "right." To aid in the process of slave-catching was morally repugnant to many Northerners. These same citizens felt it unjust that a Negro who was suspected of being a fugitive was not given the right to defend himself before a jury.² But the fugitive slave law was, after all, the law of the land. It had been passed by a Congress that represented the will of the people. If democratic government was to continue to exist, it must be obeyed. Faced with this situation, thoughtful Northerners were deeply disturbed by the conflicting pulls of conscience and law.

Finally, there were a few men in the Free States who damned the fugitive slave law as a moral evil and defied federal authorities to enforce it. The Abolitionists, as their contemporaries called them, felt the Compromise was a pact with the devil and the Second Fugitive Slave Law a defiance of the "higher law" of God.

For each of these Northern groups the Christiana Riot had a different significance. Those who supported the compromise were horrified at its defiance. They blamed Gorsuch's death on Abolitionist fanaticism that defied the sanctity of the law. The Christiana Riot showed the necessity of stamping out the disturbing spirit of Abolitionism. It also showed the tenuousness of the compromise.

Those who were torn between obeying their consciences and obeying the law were disconcerted by the news of the riot. It dramatically showed the ultimate need of making a choice between the "right" and the legal course of action.

The Abolitionists cheered the results of the Christiana Riot. In their opinion it was the expected result of an evil law. They hoped the action of the Negroes at Christiana would arouse the rest of the North to a perception of the wickedness of the fugitive slave law and the institution it supported.

Newspaper editors representing each of these factions found the Christiana Riot ideal material for constructing powerful editorials.

The Northerners who praised the Compromise of 1850 as a final settlement of sectional difficulties strongly censured the Christiana Riot. The Philadelphia *Bulletin's* editor claimed that "Every citizen, except those crazed upon the subject of abolition, will, we feel convinced, unite in condemning this atrocity."³³ His colleague of the *Pennsylvania Inquirer* agreed. "Public opinion is perfectly sound upon the subject," he cried, "All deplore the tragedy — all denounce the culprits . . ."⁴

It was to the advantage of editors who supported the compromise to portray Edward Gorsuch as an upstanding and law-abiding citizen. Using this technique, they could make his murder all the more disgraceful. The editor of the Philadelphia *North American* described Edward Gorsuch as "a citizen of the highest respectability" and a humane and bene-

volent man" who was also a devout churchgoer.⁵ After referring to Gorsuch as "a respectable old gentleman," the **Pennsylvania Inquirer's** editor made it clear that he "had the necessary documents" from Commissioner Edward D. Ingraham so as to be entirely within the law.

The Christiana Riot was especially significant to many Northern editors because it could be used to discredit Abolitionism. By associating the Abolitionists with the death of Gorsuch, these editors showed the entire country the dangerous result of fanatical agitation against slavery.

The Philadelphia **North American** added an incriminating detail received, allegedly, from a conductor on the Pennsylvania Railroad. The colored people, said the **North American**, heard that a slaveholder and officers were coming to Christiana and held a meeting. They consulted "several leading abolitionists" who advised them to "stand their ground."⁶

A score of Northern journals took up this item as the truth and used it to attack the Abolitionists. Angrily the editor of the Boston **Journal** told his readers that "the abolitionists thirsted for the blood of the Southerners." They "urged their innocent dupes, the colored mob," to defy the law, "and aided and abetted them in the commission of a most foul murder."⁷ The editor of the New York **Express** declared that "The real murderers are the Abolitionists." Their theoretical "higher law", added the **Express**, is only "the musket and bullet" when used by "the ignorant negro."⁸

Northern editors hastened to emphasize that Lancaster County was not the only place a slaveholder could meet his fugitive slaves. The Second Fugitive Slave Law made the entire North subject to such a meeting. "What has been done in Pennsylvania . . .," declared the Boston **Daily Courier's** editor, "might, but for mere accident, have taken place at our own doors . . ."⁹ His colleague of the **Evening Traveller** believed that if the exhortations of the Boston Abolitionists had been heeded at the time of the arrest of Thomas M. Sims "we should have had an even more fearfully bloody story to have told about our city."¹⁰

The sanctity of the law was a vital necessity to the pro-compromise North. Peace, order and prosperity depended on it. The Christiana Riot was a blatant defiance of the law. Such outrages could not be tolerated if society and government were to exist. The editor of the Philadelphia **Ledger** felt:

. . . it is full time that the [Abolitionists] were taught that the laws of the United States are the supreme law in this country, and every citizen must either voluntarily submit to it, or seek some other country, where he can discharge his duties as a citizen without putting his conscience to so terrible a strain . . .¹¹

The New York **Courier and Enquirer** summarized the belief of Northerners who deprecated the Christiana Riot. "The question," asserted its editor, "is not what is the ethic of the matter, but what is the LAW of the matter."¹²

Many Northern editors affected to be stunned. They could not be-

lieve the Christiana Riot could have occurred right in Lancaster County. The editor of the Philadelphia **North American** thought that Gorsuch might have been murdered by "the atheistical crackbrains" of New England, but he was astonished that "there were any such fanatics of this class in Pennsylvania." He added that he "should never have looked for them in Lancaster County."¹³

After recovering from their surprise, editors had the task of vindicating Pennsylvania as a whole of Gorsuch's death and reassuring Southern unionists. The editor of the **Pennsylvania Inquirer** made an attempt:

Pennsylvania is a law abiding Commonwealth and her people are everywhere the friends of order and good government. The affair at Christiana was a sudden outbreak, not anticipated, and therefore could not have been guarded against. All that can now be done is to make the most vigorous efforts for the arrest and punishment of the accused. And this will be done! It is due alike to Pennsylvania and the Union.¹⁴

Edward C. Darlington of the Lancaster **Examiner and Herald** joined in the work of clearing Pennsylvania's name. On September 17 he acknowledged that there were in Lancaster County "a few fanatical monomaniacs who justify armed resistance to the law." But Darlington hastened to add that their numbers were so small as to "make the healthiness of public sentiment only the more striking by contrast."

But pro-Compromise Northern editors were not completely convinced by their own arguments. They worried that the Christiana Riot had strengthened the tide of disunion in the South. The New York **Express** felt the anti-slavery remarks on the Christiana Riot made by the New York **Tribune** were "atrocious" because "they were calculated to stir up and strengthen Disunion in the South and to dampen the ardor and power of such friends of the Union as [Maryland's] Governor E. Louis Lowe."¹⁵

The Boston **Journal's** editor was also sorry the Christiana Riot had occurred when it did. In an editorial of September 16 he put his finger on one of the principal significances of the riot to Northerners of his opinion:

The unhappy differences between the North and the South having been amicably adjusted, the people of both sections were beginning to return to their old relations of harmony and good fellowship. But this affair will probe anew the half-healed wound.

For many Northern citizens the Christiana Riot seemed a long step backward after painstaking gains that finally resulted in the enactment of the Compromise of 1850.

The best way to vindicate the North and satisfy men like Governor Lowe was to punish those responsible for Gorsuch's death. Many editors joined James G. Bennett of the New York **Herald** in calling for the capital punishment of Castner Hanway and the other prisoners. On September 14 Bennett cried: "Those stealthy traitors who, in counselling resistance to the laws, are richly deserving of the traitor's penalty." A day later the editor of the Washington, D.C. **Republic** called for the capital

punishment of "these pestilent agitators" responsible for the riot.¹⁶

In spite of this sentiment, the reaction of these editors to the acquittal of Hanway was subdued. Their desire for peace encouraged them to push from their minds and their editorials the disturbing Christiana Riot. Once the jury reached its decision, agitation only harmed their attempt to restore order. The riot dropped from the columns of pro-Compromise journals early in December, 1851.

But the Christiana Riot left its mark. The editor of the tiny Lancaster **Saturday Express** forthrightly declared what many of his Northern colleagues did not allow themselves to think:

CIVIL WAR—THE FIRST BLOW STRUCK

The fruits of slavery and of the excitement rashly gotten up by those who denigrate themselves the 'friends' of the Negroes, are beginning to ripen. The first murder fruit that has fallen in our Country from this tree of civil discord and evil, is one that has thrown the people into a fever heat of indignation; not so much at the Negroes as at those who instigated them to the deed. We have long foreseen such an issue; God grant that the future has nothing worse in store growing out of the same causes . . . but we have an ominous premonition that this is not the end, but only the beginning . . .¹⁷

In 1851 there were a considerable number of Northerners who found themselves torn between two ideals. They believed in freedom and felt human slavery was a moral wrong, but they also realized the need of obeying the laws of the land. One way out of this dilemma was to ignore the fugitive slave issue. But the Christiana Riot made this impossible. It dramatized the necessity of making a choice between the ethic and the law.

The editor of the Boston **Christian Register** was caught on the horns of this dilemma. First he cried that "All the natural rights and claims and apologies are on the fugitive's side. He only did what any white man would be applauded for doing." But then this editor reversed his opinion, claiming that violent resistance to the law was "bad, unlawful, impolitic and mischievous . . . and the offenders will have to suffer."¹⁸ Inconsistent as this position was, it represented the way many Northerners felt.

The editor of the New York **Christian Inquirer** offered an unrealistic solution to the dilemma. He acknowledged "the binding force of the obnoxious law" but felt that "Christian slaveholders" should not attempt to recover their runaway slaves.¹⁹ The South could not swallow this. Edward Gorsuch felt he had a legal right to his property, and he was determined to insist upon it.

In the minds of some editors the law apparently emerged victorious. The Boston **Transcript** recognized the evil of slavery but felt the law must be obeyed:

The doctrine of violent resistance to the laws . . . strikes at the very foundation of the republican and democratic principle However we may sympathize with a slave in his attempt to gain his liberty — however we may honor him for gaining it even at the expense of the life of his pursuer — we have no right to lift a hand against the law or its agents.²⁰

The **Transcript's** editor neglected to tell his readers what to do if their sympathies for the fugitives were so strong as to make meaningless the abstract issue of the law.

The **Pittsburgh Gazette** did no better in solving the dilemma. According to its editor, a legal protest was the only way to deal with an oppressive law. Until repeal could be secured legally, there was no alternative but to submit to its repulsive requirements.²¹ The **Philadelphia Friends Review**, a Quaker organ, concurred. Its editor declared that "righteous ends should always be sought by righteous means."²²

Another attempt to reach a solution was made by the editor of the **Montpelier [Vermont] Christian Messenger**. He attempted to separate the actual fugitives from the black and white bystanders. These sympathizers could be justly blamed for defying the law, but "no blame can . . . be cast upon those poor fugitives themselves. They fought for their own personal freedom — a boon to which they have an indefeasible right."²³

The **New York Evening Post** celebrated its fiftieth birthday on November 15, 1851. William Cullen Bryant had built the **Post** into one of the major newspapers of the United States. In 1851 Bryant, who had opposed the Compromise of 1850, was solidly free soil.²⁴ On October 9 he referred to the Fugitive Slave Law as one which "violates the moral instincts of the people." Americans, Bryant added, "feel it to be an impeachment of their manhood to be asked to assist in manacling, for the purpose of reducing to slavery . . . an industrious and honest citizen." But Bryant was not a lawless man. He deprecated the murder of Edward Gorsuch. His editorial concluded that "it is better for one or a dozen men to suffer, than that the moral supremacy of the laws should be shaken."²⁵

Horace Greeley's **New York Tribune** was the single most important American newspaper in the 1850's. Its impact on public opinion was tremendous.²⁶ The weekly edition of the **Tribune** was influential in many parts of the rural North and Middle West. With Midwestern farmers in mind, Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that Greeley did "all their thinking and theory at two dollars a year."²⁷ Actually, rather than giving his readers their opinions ready-formed, Greeley had a knack for sensing what they wanted to hear and putting their vague thoughts in forceful language.²⁸

On September 15 Greeley confessed he was "deeply shocked" by the **Christiana Riot**. However, he could not hold the Negroes guilty of murder because they had acted in defense of their personal liberty. "No act of Congress," Greeley declared, "can make it *right* for one man to convert another into his personal property, or *wrong* for that other to refuse to be so treated." Although the Negroes acted against one law at **Christiana**, they "had another on their side, and that a law august and divine in origin, namely, the law of Nature." Concluding this section of his editorial, Greeley asked: "Would it not, in truth, have been a worse murder had the negroes been shot down in defending their freedom?"

"We trust," continued Horace Greeley, "that this melancholy event

may not be without its use in fixing upon [the fugitive slave law] . . . the character that it bears in other civilized countries." But although Greeley felt the fugitive slave law was "shameful and inhuman," he believed the blacks "fell into a lamentable error. They ought to have followed the advice of their *friends* and escaped from the country . . ."

Horace Greeley wanted repeal of the fugitive slave law; not murder of the slaveholder. Like his colleague William Cullen Bryant he was not a lawless man, but he was opposed to human slavery. What should he do about a law that supported the institution of slavery? The question was at the heart of the dilemma that the Christiana Riot dramatically represented.

A Northern minority violently censured the institution of slavery and worked for its abolition. The Christiana Riot was highly significant to the Abolitionists. It showed America and the world the results of passing an evil law. The riot also showed that some men were not going to submit quietly to the hated fugitive slave law. The clash in Lancaster County portrayed the evils of slavecatching in a tangible and forceful manner.

Unlike their colleagues, Abolitionist editors were not shocked at news of the Christiana Riot. They expected such an event to occur. Sidney Howard Gay, editor of the New York **National Anti-Slavery Standard**, declared:

It need surprise nobody that in the game of slave-hunting . . . it should sometimes happen that the hunting party and not the hunted become the mark for bullets, and the law of self-preservation, and not the Fugitive Slave Law, be obeyed and triumph.²⁹

In another editorial Gay added that it seemed perfectly natural to him that "Gorsuch should have been shot down like a dog . . ." ³⁰

The Abolitionist press portrayed Edward Gorsuch in the worst possible light. The editor of the Worcester [Massachusetts] **Spy** told his readers that "Gorsuch and his son came with an armed band of men to seize upon peaceful, unoffending citizens of Pennsylvania . . ." ³¹ But William Lloyd Garrison of the Boston **Liberator** outdid the **Spy's** editor:

A man-stealer named Gorsuch, accompanied by his son and sundry abettors, recently came into Pennsylvania, and, lawlessly breaking into a private dwelling under the cover of darkness, attempted by stealth and violence to seize and make slaves of some of the occupants.³²

Garrison's interest in the riot was intense. The significance of the incident, Garrison thought, was the disrepute it cast on the fugitive slave law, the Compromise of 1850 and the institution of slavery. Other editors joined him in attacking the law respecting fugitives. "What is the Fugitive Act, then," asked the editor of the Salem [Ohio] **Anti-Slavery Bugle**, "but a monstrous incentive to violence and bloodshed, and an inhuman instrument of tyranny?" ³³ The Worcester **Spy's** editor agreed that the fugitive slave law was "pregnant with death, desolation and anarchy." ³⁴

In an effort to make anti-slavery capital out of the Christiana Riot, Abolitionist editors equated the action of the Negroes to American ideals and heroes. Garrison felt "the blacks are fully justified in what they did by the Declaration of Independence . . ." ³⁵ The editor of the Philadelphia *Pennsylvania Freeman* asked:

What right has the American nation to expect anything else from its own teachings and its own actions. Have they not proclaimed 'Liberty or death;' 'Resistance to tyrants is duty to God,' as their National creed? What wonder that the negro fugitives think it no crime . . . to defend their liberties by the same means, for using which the 'Revolutionary heroes' of our own and other countries are glorified? ³⁶

Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the Washington, D.C. *National Era*, not only equated the Christiana Riot with American ideals but with universal ethical standards. He declared that "at Christiana, as at Bunker Hill and the Garden of Gethsemane, oppression in the form of law, and with all the claims of established authority met the everlasting right in open conflict." ³⁷

Abolitionists felt the Christiana Riot was significant because it appeared as a dramatic instance of the "right" and the "wrong" in open conflict. Anti-slavery editors thought the "right" won. These Northerners hoped the riot would be the first step to eventual victory over slavery.

Southern and Northern editors used the Christiana Riot to point to basic conflicts in the United States. Southerners saw it as an example of Northern defiance of the law and an attack on property rights. While some were hopeful the incident would "arouse" the mass of people in the Free States to crush anti-slavery fanaticism, others felt secession was the only solution. Moderate Northerners deplored the murder of Edward Gorsuch, but some of them recognized it as the result of passing a law that did not accord with the moral precepts of many citizens. Abolitionists used the riot to hurl new defiances at the slave system.

The riot and the editorial reaction to it dramatized, as congressional debates could never do, the fundamental conflicts between divergent concepts of "law" and "moral right." When Edward Gorsuch confronted William Parker, he asserted "My property is in this house. I've come for it." Indignantly, Parker replied, "Go in the room down there, and see if there is anything there belonging to you. There are beds and a bureau, chairs and other things. Then go out to the barn; there you will find a cow and some hogs. See if any of them are yours." ³⁸ This interchange between the two principal figures in the Christiana Riot epitomized the conflicting ideas which were already threatening the unity of the nation.

PART INOTES

1. 9 Stat. 462-65.
2. William U. Hensel, **The Christiana Riot and Treason Trials of 1851** (Lancaster, 1911), 2nd ed., 21.
3. Hensel, "Aftermath Supplementary to the Christiana Riot," **Lancaster County Historical Society Papers**, XVI (1912), 133-34.
4. Padgett's letter is printed in David R. Forbes, **A True Story of the Christiana Riot** (Quarryville, Pa. 1898), 10-11.
5. James J. Robbins, **Report of the Trial of Castner Hanway for Treason in Resistance to the Fugitive Slave Law of September 1850** (Philadelphia, 1852), 54. This is the official stenographic report of the case of **United States v. Hanway** [2 Wallace Jr.'s **Reports**, 159 (1851)] and is hereafter referred to as **Trial**.
6. Wilbur H. Siebert, **The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom** (New York, 1898), 120-21. See also Siebert's map, 113.
7. See the author's "William Parker and the Christiana Riot," **Journal of Negro History**, XLVI (January, 1961), 24-31; William Parker, "The Freedman's Story" **Atlantic Monthly**, XVII (February-March, 1866), 151-66 and 276-95; Thomas Whitson, "The Hero of the Christiana Riot," **Lancaster County Historical Society Papers**, I, (1896-97), 27-35.
8. **Lancaster Examiner and Herald**, September 17, 1851.
9. **Trial**, 114-18; 147; 162.
10. William Still, **The Underground Railroad** (Philadelphia, 1872), 350.
11. **Trial**, 56.
12. Marshal Henry H. Kline's testimony at the hearing held in Lancaster on September 23, 1851, as printed in Forbes, **op. cit.**, 24; Parker, **op. cit.**, 283.
13. **Trial**, 24.
14. Parker, **op. cit.**, 284.
15. James J. Robbins, **A History of the Trial of Castner Hanway** (Philadelphia, 1852), 77.
16. **Trial**, 86, 75, 83.
17. **Trial**, 100.
18. Franklin Ellis and Samuel Evans, **History of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania** (Philadelphia, 1883), 77.
19. Under the Second Fugitive Slave Law Hanway could be commanded as a "by-stander" to assist a United States Marshal in the arrest of fugitive slaves.
20. **Trial**, 42.
21. **Trial**, 57.
22. Dickinson Gorsuch was taken to the nearby farm of Levi Pownall where he was nursed back to health in three weeks. See Joshua S. Gorsuch, "The History of the Christiana Riot," **Baltimore Daily Sun**, September 18, 1851. The manuscript of this account is in the possession of the Lancaster County Historical Society. The author, who was a son of Edward Gorsuch, should not be confused with the Joshua Gorsuch who was involved in the riot.
23. Parker, **op. cit.**, 287.
24. It is certain Parker left immediately and reached Kingston, Ontario, by September 21, 1851, from his own story, **op. cit.**, and from a manuscript account of the aftermath of the riot by Elizabeth Price Lewis, a great niece of Elijah Lewis, that is in the possession of the Lancaster County Historical Society. Frederick Douglass mentions that Parker stopped overnight at his home in Rochester, New York on his way to Canada in **Life and Times of Frederick Douglass**. (rev. ed., Boston, 1892), 349-350.
25. This is the largest number of persons ever charged at one time with treason against the United States. There is some evidence that the severity of the indictment was the result of a decision by federal authorities to allay public indignation at the murder of Edward Gorsuch: see the manuscript letter from H. G. Ashmead to William U. Hensel in the possession of the Lancaster County Historical Society.
26. Judge Kane's charge is printed in **Trial**, 268-69.

27. Trial, 18.
28. Trial, 109.
29. Trial, 241-48.
30. *Raleigh Standard*, November 13, 1850.
31. September 20, 1851.
32. *Mobile Daily Register* as quoted in the *New York National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 16, 1851.
33. September 16, 1851.
34. *Baltimore Weekly Sun*, September 13, 1851.
35. September 23, 1851.
36. September 13, 1851.
37. *Nashville Christian Advocate*, October 2, 1851.
38. Governor Lowe's letter is printed in the *Baltimore American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, September 20, 1851. The President's reply, written by W. S. Derrick, was dated September 16, 1851. It expressed "deep abhorrence" of the riot and assured Lowe that the offenders would be punished to the full extent of the law.
39. Milton [North Carolina] *Chronicle*, October 30, 1851.
40. *Richmond Dispatch* as quoted in the *Washington, D.C. National Era*, October 2, 1851.
41. *Memphis Enquirer* as quoted in the *Nashville American*, September 25, 1851. See also the *Nashville True Whig and Commercial Register*, September 26, 1851.
42. See also the *Columbus [Georgia] Enquirer*, October 21, 1851.
43. September 27, 1851.
44. September 17, 1851.
45. September 19, 1851.
46. *New York Express* as quoted in the *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, October 1, 1851.
47. October 4, 1851.
48. September 17, 1851. See also the *Savannah Daily Georgian*, September 23, 1851 and the *Little Rock Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat*, October 10, 1851.
49. September 19, 1851.
50. See also the *Port Gibson [Mississippi] Reville* as quoted in the *Boston Liberator*, November 28, 1851.
51. October 10, 1851.
52. September 18, 1851.
53. *Fairfield Herald* as quoted in the *Boston Liberator*, September 21, 1851.

PART II NOTES

1. Philip S. Foner, *Business and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1941), 40ff.
2. For a discussion of the reasons why some Northerners found the Fugitive Slave Law unjust and repugnant see Horace Greeley, *American Conflict* (Hartford, Conn., 1864-67), I, 212-13.
3. *Philadelphia Bulletin* as quoted in the *Boston Liberator*, September 26, 1851.
4. September 17, 1851.
5. September 13, 1851.
6. September 12, 1851.
7. September 16, 1851. The first issue of Henry J. Raymond's *New York Times* was published September 18, 1851. It contained a front-page editorial account of the Christiana Riot denouncing the Abolitionists and pleading for peace.
8. September 22, 1851. See also the *Philadelphia Pennsylvanian*, September 14, 1851; the *Waterbury [Connecticut] Weekly American*, September 19, 1851; and the *Pottsville [Pennsylvania] Miners Journal*, September 13, 1851. Two Lancaster papers, the *Examiner and Herald* of September 17 and the *Union and Tribune* as quoted in the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, September 29, contained similar opinion regarding the riot.
9. September 15, 1851.

10. September 15, 1851. Sims was a fugitive slave whose return in April, 1851 to Savannah, Georgia, almost caused a riot in Boston.
11. September 13, 1851.
12. September 17, 1851.
13. September 13, 1851.
14. September 15, 1851.
15. September 22, 1851.
16. Western newspapers joined in the call for punishment: Springfield [Illinois] **State Register**, September 25, 1851, printed a scathing attack on the Abolitionists who, the editorial claimed, were responsible for the Riot. See also the Madison [Wisconsin] **Statesman**; the **Daily Cincinnati Gazette**; the St. Louis **Daily Missouri Republican**; the Indianapolis **Indiana State Sentinel**; and the Grand Rapids [Michigan] **Enquirer**.
17. September 29, 1851
18. September 20, 1851.
19. September 20, 1851.
20. **Boston Transcript** as quoted in the Roxbury [Massachusetts] **Norfolk County Journal**, September 20, 1851.
21. **Pittsburgh Gazette**, December 13, 1851.
22. October 3, 1851.
23. September 24, 1851.
24. A discussion of Bryant and the **Evening Post** can be found in Frank Luther Mott, **American Journalism: a History of Newspapers in the United States through 200 years, 1690-1950** (New York, 1950), 257-59.
25. See also Bryant's editorial of October 23, 1851.
26. Allan Nevins, **American Press Opinion** (Boston, 1928), 112-13; James Ford Rhodes, "Newspapers as Historical Sources," **Atlantic Monthly**, 103 (May, 1909), 65-67.
27. Charles Eliot Norton, ed., **Correspondence between Thomas Carlyle and Ralph Waldo Emerson** (Boston, 1883), II, 226.
28. William H. Hale, **Horace Greeley, Voice of the People** (New York, 1950), especially 127-201.
29. September 18, 1851.
30. September 25, 1851.
31. September 17, 1851.
32. October 10, 1851.
33. September 20, 1851.
34. September 17, 1851. See also the Hartford [Connecticut] **Republican** and the Fall River [Massachusetts] **Weekly News** both as quoted in the **Boston Liberator**, September 19, 1851.
35. **Boston Liberator**, September 19, 1851.
36. **Philadelphia Pennsylvania Freeman** as quoted in David R. Forbes, **A True Story of the Christiana Riot** (Quarryville, Pa., 1898), 9.
37. October 2, 1851.
38. William Parker, "The Freedman's Story," **Atlantic Monthly**, XVII March (1866), 283.

A CRITICAL NOTE ON AUTHORITIES

Newspapers: In this study heavy reliance has been placed on the newspaper. Especially in the 1850's, when it was the only source of news for many Americans, the newspaper was both an expression and a mold of public opinion. Although the selection of newspaper editorials to be finally presented was made from a total of 137 different files, it does not represent exhaustive treatment. Instead an attempt was made to secure a typical selection of journals. Factors such as location, size and political affiliation have been considered in making the survey.

A total of 40 Southern, 75 Northern, 17 Western and 5 Washington, D.C. files were used in making this study. It was found to be fruitful to make a close

examination of press opinion in the larger publishing centers of 1851. Consequently, 5 Baltimore, 11 Philadelphia, 14 New York and 17 Boston newspapers were checked. All but a few papers contained at least a telegraphic notice of the Christiana Riot. Many extended their coverage to a complete report of the aftermath and trial. Editorials accompanied these reports.

Books and Articles: William Uhler Hensel, *The Christiana Riot and the Treason Trials of 1851* (Lancaster, 1911) is the standard source of information for the Christiana Riot. It was written for the sixtieth anniversary commemoration of the event. *A True Story of the Christiana Riot* (Quarryville, Pa., 1898) by David R. Forbes has a decided pro-Southern slant. James J. Robbins, *A History of the Trial of Castner Hanway and Others for Treason at Philadelphia in November, 1851* (Philadelphia, 1852) is a running account of the trial preceded by a brief history of the fugitive slave issue. Although told from the point of view of a fugitive slave, and written for the admittedly illiterate Parker by a sympathetic editor, William Parker's, "The Freedman's Story" in *Atlantic Monthly*, XVII, (February-March 1866), 152-166 and 270-295, is the only eye-witness account. Thomas Whitson, "The Hero of the Christiana Riot," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers*, I (1896-97), 27-35 is a brief account of William Parker and his role in the riot, which is supplemented by the author's "William Parker and the Christiana Riot," *Journal of Negro History*, XLVI (January, 1961), 24-31. David F. Magee "The Christiana Riot: Its Causes and Effects from a Southern Standpoint," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers*, XV (1911), 193-208, is suggestive. Albert K. Hostetter, "The Newspapers and the Christiana Riot," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers*, XV (1911), 296-308, quotes from ten newspapers but does not attempt an analysis. A follow-up to his book is William U. Hensel, "Aftermath Supplementary to the Christiana Riot," *Lancaster County Historical Society Papers*, XVI (1912), 133-34. An accurate account of the Riot was written by Joshua S. Gorsuch, the son of Edward, for the *Baltimore Sun*. It appeared in the *Sun* of September 18, 1851 under the title "The History of the Christiana Riot." An anonymous article entitled "Caspar [sic] Hanway and the Fugitive Slave Law" was published in the *Magazine of History*, XXI, (1915), 147-158. Of more recent vintage is Joseph T. Kingston's "The Christiana Riot, 100 Years Ago, Forerunner of Bloody Civil War," that appeared in the *Lancaster Intelligencer* and *Journal* of September 3, 1951.

Brief and inadequate references to the Christiana Riot can usually be found in books of the following nature: histories of Lancaster County and Pennsylvania, lives of Thaddeus Stevens, histories of the Negro race in America, works on the Underground Railroad and fugitive slaves, and United States histories — especially those that concentrate on the pre-Civil War period.

Documents: The best source of information on the Christiana Riot is the *Report of the Trial of Castner Hanway for Treason in Resistance of the Fugitive Slave Law of September 1850* (Philadelphia, 1852). This report was compiled by James J. Robbins from the official stenographic records of the trial. In 268 pages it contains all the testimony of living participants in the Riot as well as speeches by the defense and prosecution. Robert James Brent, a Marylander sent to observe the trial, recorded his impressions in a *Report to His Excellency Governor E. Louis Lowe in relation to the Christiana Treason Trial . . .* (Annapolis, 1852). Brent claims the Northern court employed trickery and dishonesty to acquit Hanway. An account of the trial may be found in Helen T. Catterall, ed., *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro* (Washington, 1936), IV, 310. Other references are: *United States v. Hanway* in 2 Wallace Jr. Reports 139-208; *United States v. Hanway* in 26 Federal Cases 105; 30 Federal Cases 1047; *American Law Journal* (Philadelphia, 1852), n.s. IV, 83. The report of the trial of Samuel Williams may be found in *United States v. Williams*, 28 Federal Cases 631 (1852).

Manuscripts: The only known collection of manuscripts on the Christiana Riot is in the possession of the Lancaster County Historical Society Library. Included in

the collection are clippings from various newspapers, the original copy of the coroner's inquest signed by Levi Pownall, a scrapbook kept by William U. Hensel when he prepared his book and arranged the celebration in 1911, a hand-written "Story of the Christiana Riot" as told by Elizabeth Price Lewis (a great niece of Elijah Lewis) to George P. Orr (a great grandson of Levi Pownall) and miscellaneous material.

Maps: The maps were compiled by the author and drawn by William A. Rose, Jr. Location Map Two is based on written accounts of the riot and on-the-spot sketches made by Sandra Leigh Jackson, December, 1959.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Roderick W. Nash was born in New York City in 1939. Upon completion of his preparatory education at the McBurney School, he majored in American history at Harvard University. In June, 1960, he received the A.B. degree **magna cum laude** from Harvard, the foregoing paper being his honours thesis. One year later, Mr. Nash received an M.A. degree in history from the University of Wisconsin. At present he is studying for the Ph.D. degree under Dr. Merle E. Curti for whom he is working as a part-time research assistant. Dr. Curti, one of the nation's leading historians, had as his teacher Dr. Frederick Jackson Turner who opened a new era in American historiography.

Mr. Nash has other works published, including an article in the **Journal of Negro History**, and another awaiting publication in the **Iowa Journal of History and Politics**. His Master's thesis — "The American Wilderness: A History of Its Preservation" — is scheduled for publication in book form in the Logmark Series of the Wisconsin State Historical Society and the University of Wisconsin's Department of History.