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Beyond the Scarlet "A":
Hawthorne and the Matter of Racism

By

Richard Klayman

Nathaniel Hawthorne was the quintessential man from Massachusetts. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, just north of Boston, a long winding dirt road meandered through small towns and villages that abutted the coastline. There was little to suggest that one of those towns, the port of Salem, would be home to an extraordinary individual, whose imagination and craftsmanship would make his name synonymous with American letters. Hawthorne's novels and stories expose unarticulated quandaries about love and sexuality, the struggles of the individual versus the greater community, the contours of consciousness and fantasy, the heart of disappointment, reflections upon evil versus goodness, and dilemmas of romance in early America and, in truth, for every generation that has followed. His collected works, *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne,* comprise 23 volumes, published by the Ohio State University Press. Were they to stand alone, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) possess literary prescience and historical significance for which the author's reputation would be guaranteed. His collected works bear witness to Hawthorne's extraordinary talent, but within these letters and notes are expressions of something far less ennobling: undisguised and unambiguous racism.

"I have not, as you suggest, the slightest sympathy for the slaves; or, at least, not half as much as for the laboring whites, who, I believe, are

ten times worse off than the Southern negroes."[1] Dated June 15, 1851, Nathaniel Hawthorne's letter to a Salem friend written from a broken down, red farmhouse in the Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts saddens and perplexes the reader, including Philip McFarland, author of a sensitive and often eloquent inquiry entitled, *Hawthorne in Concord.* McFarland writes: "We would prefer that those we admire be admirable in every way."[2] McFarland is among the more recent of a legion of gifted biographers that struggle with the sharp language, demeaning remarks and unkind observations of the great Hawthorne pertaining to the African American. All seek to come to grips with this racism and, failing to plumb an otherwise remarkable man's wrong-headedness, instead, gauge the prevalent racist attitudes of the times, review the biblical justifications on behalf of slavery, and suggest that the sectional nature of slavery fostered a general ignorance and indifference about the shame that was slavery.[3]

Unsurprisingly, after all the explanations have been rendered, the enigma remains: Hawthorne's racism was and is shocking. Astonishment aside, this article seeks to unravel some of the personal sources of Hawthorne's racism and, also, place in perspective those specific historic and economic circumstances impacting his life that could possibly have contributed to a racist mentality. Ultimately, Hawthorne's readers, and all who seek to understand American life, need to determine if knowing more about the matter of racism does or does

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[1] "I have not, as you suggest," Hawthorne to Zachariah Burchmore, June 15, 1851, in William Charvat, et. al., eds., *Centenary Edition of the Works 0f Nathaniel Hawthorne,* XVI (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 1962-1997), XVI, 456.

[2] Philip McFarland, *Hawthorne in Concord* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 157-163. McFarland's book is a sensitive account of Hawthorne's marriage and career.

[3] Ibid. Also see Jean Fagan Yellin, "Hawthorne and the Slavery Question," in Larry Reynolds, ed., *A Historical Guide to Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 135-164; Brenda Wineapple, *Hawthorne: A Life* (New York: Alfted A. Knopf), 2003, 187-189, 262-264, 349-350. Wineapple's book does an extraordinary job of examining the historical context of Hawthorne's life.

not offer added insight, unconcealed by his reputation, about the life and mind of Hawthorne. Especially because he lived and worked in the years leading up to the Civil War, Hawthorne's prejudices illuminate the nation's greatest historical affliction, what many termed the "sin" of slavery in the battle for the Union. Hawthorne was both a propagator and a victim of the slave system.

To Hawthorne, the intense partisanship over the issue of slavery was a challenge to several deeply personal concerns. Many of his lifelong friends were loyal Democrats, as was Hawthorne, all of whom were linked by ideology, patronage and a view of America that rejected the elevation of slavery as an issue weighty or worthy of testing the bonds of Union. These friends did not own slaves but they sustained the existence of slavery through an acceptance of racist presumptions, shared with Hawthorne, chiefly, that being white was and would remain a defining attribute of participating in American life. In this perspective, tampering with slavery was as politically unjustified as it was philosophically flawed: race defined participation in America, political or otherwise, and it was contrary to reason to believe or even consider the likelihood of any change to this condition.

Hawthorne subscribed to such a view and his politics, intertwined within his friendships, made the matter of race tantamount to a culture war. Unhappily and unwise as it may be, according to Hawthorne, the Civil War would through great pain and suffering resolve the politics of slavery. However, Hawthorne questioned what would follow on the heels of the Civil War for the freed slaves, especially doubting that a full and equal participation in American life could or would be attained.

It is useful to search for diverse strands of his thought and to explore his most personal allegiances and friendships that shaped or otherwise revealed Hawthorne's African American antipathy. As a keen observer of his times and as one of the most respected writers of American literature by the 1850-1860 decade, what was Hawthorne saying in regard to matters of race?

First, Hawthorne's anti-black sentiments and rhetoric did not essentially change throughout his life. The inferiority of blacks was one of Hawthorne's presumptions that were indisputable to him just as, after several years of living abroad, he satisfactorily confirms and is comforted by an anti-Semitic "repugnance I have always felt

for...[this]race."[4] In one of his earliest published literary efforts, entitled "Old News" that appeared first in *New England Magazine* in 1835, Hawthorne reflects upon the harmony of slavery, "'performing their moderate share of the labors of life without being harassed by its cares.'" Writing in *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge* in 1836, Hawthorne notes unwaveringly that "negroes should suffer more, in proportion to their numbers, than whites, by all sorts of pestilence, and unwholesome smell."[5]

Here, earlier in his literary career but when he was over thirty years old, racism is employed by Hawthorne. A mixture of malice and certainty is communicated about the alleged positive good of slavery, a perception superfluous to debate or in need of explanation, except to individuals who were hopelessly deceiving themselves about change and perfectibility in the world. The voice of Hawthorne is that of the objective observer, the truth teller, the precocious and markedly honest intuitive who delineates what needs to be understood. The point is that a consistency existed regarding Hawthorne's racist remarks from the start of his writing career to the end of his life, consistent and unaltered.Secondly, Hawthorne's racism was seen at the time -- and certainly after 1851, after his two major publications -- as being exceedingly sharp and as an embarrassment to literary friends and neighbors, at this time during his residence in Concord. Intellectuals and social critics and even his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Peabody, were perplexed by his views or, seeking some ulterior motivation, attributed them to the influence of partisan Democratic Party friends and his pro-slavery political associations.[6]

Thirdly, Hawthorne's politics and, especially, his attainment of patronage positions were relentlessly pursued throughout his life. He

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[4] Edward Wagenknecht, *Nathaniel Hawthorne: Man and Writer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 75. Quote taken from *The Marble Faun.*

[5] Wineapple, 187-189, 428; Yellin, 152-153. See also Edwin Haviland Miller, *Salem is My Dwelling Place: A Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 382-383, 473. Also, see Margaret B. Moore, *The Salem World of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 135-144.

[6] Wineapple, 242, 262.

was keenly alert to matters of self-interest, and he was conscious and concerned about appearing at odds with any movement, political or social, that challenged the Democratic Party's affinity with slavery. With rare exception, Hawthorne's racism was supportive of those forces that preserved and maintained the slave system. Throughout his life Hawthorne's struggles attaining and retaining political patronage necessitated public visibility and a rather unremitting association with matters concerning race and slavery. Politics and issues that were enmeshed with the nature of racism became, in fact, a controversial and continually fractious leitmotif both in his life and in the mind of the nation, especially by the 1850s decade when sectional partisanship heightened and all efforts at some kind of manageable resolution proved futile.

Clearly, Hawthorne would have preferred a world without slavery. Yet, the institution did exist, and Hawthorne grew weary of New England intellectuals and social reformers as early as the 1840s and thereafter who, unlike himself, became agitated by America's slave system. Hawthorne's dismissal of the Concord icon Ralph Waldo Emerson as "that everlasting rejecter of all that is, and seeker for he knows not what" captures Hawthorne's distrust of fashionable ideals or ill-advised reforms.[7]

To Hawthorne, Andrew Jackson was the source and epitome of political insight and courage because he recognized and articulated the most meaningful issues confronting the nation and, also, sought to galvanize the long ignored and despised elective constituencies that deserved entitlement in American life. After the presidential election of 1828, America was in the throes of Andrew Jackson's rhetoric and public policies. Jackson was not shy in advancing divisive political issues imbedded within the context of social and economic class conflict. In the struggle between the prerogatives of the rich versus Jackson's tenacious if not postured symbolism of supporting the "common man," Jacksonian's charismatic promise was that, at its core, public policy in America was and would remain dedicated to the advancement of white people. Jackson's election marked a significant juncture as to with whom and how the office of the President, in particular, sought to

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[7] Megan Marshall, *The Peabody Sisters: Three Women Who Ignited American Romanticism* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005), 402.

identify with the needs of aspiring people. The era's great economic need became the basis for the bond between Jackson and America's poor whites, just as it was a source of Jackson's mythic appeal and magnetism.

As such, Native Americans and African Americans were fundamentally excluded, even invisible, from any broad-based expectation that America's potential for racial tolerance would ever be tested. At this point of time in the life of the nation, the battle over social class co-opted any battle over race, and even those who advocated on behalf of a more diverse America found themselves preaching to like minded but, in effect, citizens out of the main stream. Hawthorne was an avid and early convert to the policies and symbolism associated with Jackson.

Hawthorne understood that slavery was "wrong," despite his wretched characterization of the institution as possessing "beautiful peculiarities." He viewed the slave system as a historic reality, however unfortunate in its origins, that neither politicians nor societal activists could or should alter, less some greater ignominy replace it.[8] The impetus for the end of slavery could only be ordained on the order of the heavenly or the primordial, something monumental in nature, doubtless after a long passage of time or at the behest of some earth shattering event.

As an artist whose design and command of an immense imaginary wellspring was his stock in trade, Hawthorne ascribed great weight to his recognition of the idealized from the real. To him, slavery and the racial suppositions that supported the institution were authorized, constitutionally-sanctioned and decidedly evidenced in the history of the world, regardless of the wishes of social critics or the inferences of intellectuals to the contrary.

As a political realist, Hawthorne would grant no political advantage to the opponents of slavery for whom he had disdain. In effect, Hawthorne was every inch a proponent of the racial status quo. It was Hawthorne the political partisan that delineated an ideological divide to which he was committed with this observation, "I have not, as you suggest, the slightest sympathy for the slaves…"

In this Age of Jackson, neither he nor many Americans were close

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[8] Wineapple, 187-189.

to being proponents of a plan or an inclination for some gradual freeing of the African-American population. This was not unusual among the population as a whole but it was, ever increasingly, contrary to an evolving tide of educated white Northerners who witnessed and were troubled by the violent intersection of race and politics. After the Compromise of 1850, after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act that, notably, even Hawthorne publicly abhorred to his potential political disadvantage, and when the horrors of the Kansas bloodbaths between advocates and adversaries of the spread of slavery collided, the nation looked at slavery with unrequited focus and concern.

Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852 awakened the nation such that the blood spilled by John Brown, both in 1855 and at Harper's Ferry in 1859, could not now extinguish what, a decade earlier, had been the most dangerous idea in the nation: African-American enslavement must be territorially restrained. The debates on the annexation of Texas and, later, an aggressive acquisition of territory under the guise of the 1846 Mexican-American War prepared the path. The expansion of slavery in the West threatened those whites determined to acquire their share of "free" land, and restrictions upon the growth of slave territory was new thinking that, in time, spewed bitter discord that, ultimately, brought about the end to all enslavement. Free land for whites did not suggest that any consensus existed in the matter of race, and Hawthorne feared that a change in the slave system was dangerously without precedent.

Hawthorne advanced ideological support on behalf of the Democratic Party's growing legion of urban working voters ("...the laboring whites...are ten times worse off than the southern negroes."). In a sense, Hawthorne remained tied to the Jacksonian model of promoting change for the economic and political realities of whites, the "wage slaves" of the nation. Black slavery was a completely different matter.

> "…here with faces as glossy as black satin, come two sable ladies and a sable gentleman, and close to his rear, the minister, who softens his severe visage, and bestows a kind word on each. Poor souls! To them, the most captivating picture of bliss in Heaven, is -- 'There we shall be white!'" [9]

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[9] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches* (New York: Library of America,

Hawthorne's vitriolic and dismissive tone, racist words and insensitivity regarding the humanity of African-American reveals his own uncompromising racial consciousness. Social reformers, political opportunists and posturing clergy were seen by Hawthorne as trying to foment social and political change for an ill-prepared, ill-suited or otherwise irrelevant constituency. In Hawthorne's view, there was little sense in advancing the interests of a population that, at best, was peripheral to America's white population.

Self-interest motivated Hawthorne. Hawthorne believed it was far more rationale and possible to justifiably recognize that a Jacksonian-inspired Democratic Party might help struggling poor whites, the large and diverse swath of American citizenry that emphatically included himself, especially in the years 1825-1837 when he was striving to learn his craft but at a loss to earn a livelihood. Jacksonian politics properly offered Hawthorne a reality check in both truth and necessity: the truth being that poor whites needed a hero and advocate, and that the necessity of earning a bit of bread through the patronage Jackson espoused was democratic and reasonable, especially in an era when wealth meant privilege and exclusivity.

As early as 1838 in a trip to western Massachusetts, Hawthorne's notes convey observations that, at their core, were at the expense of blacks. He comments on the "foppery" of blacks and delineates "a negro's laugh," attesting to what has been termed Hawthorne's "stereotypical images of Blacks."

Hawthorne identifying himself "rather more of an abolitionist in feeling than in principle" after he meets a well-dressed black in a tavern, and then he "confessed to a queer feeling" in alluding to the "black as property...[because]the negro was really so human," and also Christian-like.[10] By being an "abolitionist in feeling," one can believe that he appreciated or, at the least, was sensitized to the humanity of the slave.

Yet it is the veneer or the image of the well-dressed black that attracts Hawthorne's notice. Hawthorne, the master of the interior life through whose imagination storytelling and history intersect,

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1996), 419.

[10] Moore, 134-135.

demonstrates no interest in the interior existence of this or any black man. Instead, Hawthorne, as though a stranger in an unknown place, observes and reflects upon the totality of a startling image, the picture of a well-dressed black, not exactly a Christian but in the model of a Christian. Little probing or reflection on the humanity of the well-dressed black occurs. Hawthorne has little inclination to venture beyond the veneer. He is essentially satisfied and will remain throughout his life most comfortable in observing blacks as a kind of "flora or fauna," and placing them well beyond individual consideration. In effect, race provided Hawthorne a paradigm that did not require what one insightful biographer has ascribed as either "consciousness or complexity."[11] Again, Hawthorne's is uncompromising in his rejection of black individuality or other aspects of humanity on the matter of race.

After all, American politics provided a constitutionally authorized and historically accepted context in regards to race: slavery existed in specified states; the right of states was protected; the Constitution made provisions for the representation of slaves ("three fifths of all other Persons") to be added to the white population of southern states; and that no constitutional provisions or congressional mandates called for a dismantling of slavery. Slavery was an accepted and protected condition of American life. William Lloyd Garrison, Boston's most ardent abolitionist advocate and newspaper editor, found himself assaulted on the Boston Commons by anti-abolitionists in 1834, evidencing the fervent unpopularity of his cause.[12] Doubtless, the majority of American whites looked upon the zeal of abolitionists as inflammatory in nature and poisonous to the domestic harmony of the nation. Long before there was the legal entity of the United States, the indisputable importance of slavery had been evident in agricultural productivity, land prices and valuations, and as an index of wealth in the valuation of slave capital itself. To be sure, opposition to slavery existed, too, including from individuals within the South who were appalled by its inhumanity. At its origin in America, however, it was the seamless grafting of slavery upon colonial trade and, especially upon colonial agricultural that exponentially advanced American wealth such that profit made way for

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[11] Wineapple, 349.

[12] Marshall, 526.

acceptance.

The authorization of the Constitution as well as the traditions and economic power underpinning slavery reigned supreme by the time of Jackson's tenure. Subscribing to the view that slavery was an unalterable reality, Hawthorne did not believe the slave issue to be in the forefront of the nation's ills and he even doubted designating slavery as the nation's great sin. That Hawthorne chose to have not the "slightest sympathy" for blacks is, in fact, corroboration of his uncompromising views on race and acceptance of the Jacksonian prescription of denying validity to the issue. Clearly, he certainly dismissed the most strident abolitionist agitation on the subject. From a practical and political perspective, Nathaniel Hawthorne's views on race and slavery can be attributed to his identification with the politics of marginalized whites who, for this and other reasons, were attracted to the ideology of Jacksonian Democrats.

As a political appointee not once but on three separate occasions between 1837 and 1857, Hawthorne was resourceful in prevailing upon local and national politicians of a Jacksonian persuasion to reward him for his party loyalty. Increasingly, the political issues of Jackson's nationalistic inspired tenure, issues including tariff rates or the propriety of re-chartering the Bank of the United States receded before more racially enveloping concerns: the territorial expansion into Texas and, after the Mexican-American War, slavery and governance of the American west. Regardless, Hawthorne's well-paid patronage assignments were due to an ideological alliance with slave tolerant, strict constructionist advocates among those northern, urban adherents of the Democratic Party. Self-interest worked to secure this patronage. Hawthorne's politics, including his racial views, were in full accord with the views of his Democratic sponsors. The point is that Hawthorne identified with race exclusive policies of the 1830s era that, later, transitioned into the more acrimonious race issues of the 1840s and 1850s. Hawthorne was unmoved to disassociate himself from all this and, instead, because of his bonds of friendship, grew closer to race-based politics.

As a political appointee in the Boston Customs House (1837), the Salem Custom House (1846-1849) and, as the American Consul in Liverpool (1853-1857), Hawthorne enjoyed salaries that ranged from over $1100 a year to exceedingly hefty incomes of well over $3000 per year, positions that were entirely due to his friends in Democratic

administrations.[13] These jobs were critical in providing the financial support he could not achieve through his writings. Without the patronage Hawthorne was able to enjoy, Hawthorne the artist would probably have had a different, if not more problematic emergence.

In 1838, Hawthorne was thirty-four years old and the author of a collection of short stories published just a year earlier, *Twice Told Tales,* that earned him little money but enthusiastic critical notice. Hawthorne's first political appointment was mostly due to the efforts of his future sister-in-law, Elizabeth Peabody, who lobbied on his behalf the Worcester-born, Democratic-appointed Collector of the Port of Boston, George Bancroft, an already well-regarded historian.[14]

Perhaps, too, the collective support of politicos from Salem, as well as the relentless efforts of his former Bowdoin College classmates, may have helped confirm his Democratic credentials. Such patronage was well within the aegis of Andrew Jackson's political mission of distributing the fruits of office-holding to America's "common man." There in Salem, Hawthorne was a supporter and timely heir of this Jacksonian revolution and, despite his frequent criticisms aimed at all that is arbitrary and heartless about politics, politics alone provided him the only dependable financial rewards he desperately needed.

By 1850 and 1851 with the publications of, respectively, *The Scarlet Letter* and then *The House of the Seven Gables,* Hawthorne had made a resourceful use of government employment that provided him a reliable income and the invaluable luxury of time to ponder, if not work at his art. Earlier, in 1842, he joyously married Sophia Peabody and soon was to be the father of three children.[15] Financial necessities loomed ever larger. Politics advanced Hawthorne in many ways and political loyalty, like friendship itself, was a condition of existence that Hawthorne depended upon and respected.

Was Hawthorne as an artist merely opportunistic for patronage or

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[13] Miller, 169-171, 262, 392. Also, see Stephen Nissenbaum, "The Firing of Nathaniel Hawthorne," *Essex Institute Collections* 114 (April, 1978), 57-86 for an analysis of Hawthorne as a "less than active Democratic partisan."

[14] See McFarland, 184-185 for a touching portrait of Hawthorne's and Sophia's parenting.

[15] Miller, 473.

were his racial views indicative of a deeply held ideology? One distinguished biographer of Hawthorne chides him for being "needlessly provocative in his discussion of Blacks." Other biographers point out that Hawthorne, although opposed to the concept of slavery, was distanced from the increasing appeal of abolitionist's attitudes in the politically turbulent decade of the 1850s because of his government duties and travels in Europe. It is claimed that Hawthorne preferred to wait for the slave institution to merely "vanish" but not through "human contrivance."[16]

Hawthorne's expressed disdain for his own ancestor's acceptance of prejudice and intolerance in Salem's witch- trials did not alter his own intolerance. Without question, Hawthorne possessed an understanding and grasp of his own mind and identity: "Let them scorn me as they will, strong traits of their nature have intertwined themselves with mine."[17] Practicality was a critical quality of Hawthorne's perspective. His was not the kind of mind that accepted either self-delusion or the delusion of others.

In Salem, born in 1804 and orphaned at the age of four when his sea-captain father died on a voyage to Surinam, Hawthorne's early life was characterized by poor health and an unclear future. Despite testimony as to his preciousness as a youth there was little indication his literary imagination would, someday, be recognized. Equally clear, Hawthorne's life in Salem gave him little first-hand experience knowing the town's laboring black inhabitants in any meaningful way. Segregation existed in most spheres of life including churches and schools.

Doubtless, he observed the arduous existence of the town's blacks, mostly surviving as laborers and servants. Yet, hardship was well-known by all, evidenced in the life of his own widowed mother and two sisters. There was slight sympathy in making one's way in early America for anyone. There is little in the way of evidence suggesting a closer association of Hawthorne with the community of blacks in Salem. His future sister-in-law, Elizabeth Peabody, noted that "Hawthorne knew

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[16] Moore, 184.

[17] See Miller, 264 for what he terms Hawthorne's "long withheld admission."

nothing about slavery -- He had never been at the South."[18]

What would the economic prospects be for a young bookish man in a declining port town? Earlier economic policies such as President Jefferson's 1808 Embargo Act hurt the port of Salem as did the maritime destruction in the War of 1812. As the economy of Massachusetts shifted both before and after the war toward a greater reliance upon domestic manufacturing, the importance of preserving the home market for America's manufactured goods worked against the interest of ports such as Salem.

High tariff policies from 1816 until 1854 were the norm. In addition, increased demand for American agricultural products abroad, despite price fluctuations, launched farm expansions, agricultural businesses, and increased demands for internal improvements. Intense interest in expanding America's domestic marketplace for all kind of goods proliferated, that is until the economic collapse of 1837. Despite frequently falling prices throughout the decade of the 1840s, as well as a shrinking money supply, the nation's economic energy flowed out of places such as Salem.

The breakthrough development of the Eire Canal, opened in 1825, diminished the economic preeminence of all New England ports as the port of New York skyrocketed ahead in its volume of trade. Manufacturing based in New York City could be transported by a waterway system connected now to America's hinterland in exchange for agricultural products that greatly supported the growing economic specializations of the times. Increased urbanization, enhanced manufacturing capabilities, and energized capitalization outflows into transportation and other industries all advanced because a waterway network was better linked to America's interior marketplace. Steamboats and the railroad, in time, would bring on other energized and effectives means of transportation.

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[18] Moore, 142.

Seeking to compete with the Eire Canal, a race to construct canals elsewhere absorbed the interest and energy of many states, including Massachusetts, demanding an extraordinary expenditure of resources while yielding a most unsatisfactory return on investment. Boston's Middlesex and Blackstone Canals certainly paled in significance to the Eire Canal. If the port of Boston suffered as a result of the preeminence of the Eire Canal, Salem's port was essentially in economic decline.[19]

This economic transformation echoed a greater degree of democratization in the politics of the nation, presaged by the already doomed Federalist Party. In an age of significant economic volatility and transformation, Jackson and his Democratic heirs possessed a firm hold on the allegiances of the rapidly multiplying electorate.

Poor, white America, without property but hungry for economic advancement, looked to Jackson for their salvation. In kind, Jackson's opponents would be vilified for their wealth and for their obstructionism and hostility to the capitalization of the "common man." The dream of owning one's own farm was as old as the Republic. For farmers or mechanics or laborers, every generation needed the necessary political support to make that dream a reality. First it was Jefferson who advocated on behalf of the independent farmer. Then, Jackson postured and preached on the importance of opportunity and economic justice for the greater working class, however embryonic or unstable might be the nation's agricultural, industrial or financial marketplaces.

Economically humble but aspiring urban working people also sought hope. The fact that the Hathorne's (altered by Nathaniel to "Hawthorne") had deep historical roots in Salem did not change the

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[19] Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Chapter 4. Holt's study is especially useful in examining the economic and political dilemmas of this turbulent era. Earlier works including Edward Pessen's *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1978) and Robert Remini's *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom* (New York: Harper &Row, 1981) remain classics in the voluminous study of Jackson. As regards the port of New York, the standard reference is that by Robert G. Albion, *The Rise of the Port of New York, 1815-1860* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939). See also Carol Sheriff, *the Eire Canal and the Paradox of Progress, 1817-1862* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996).

harsh reality of a tiny personal estate left behind by his father or the persistence of his mother's many illnesses. Along with sisters, Elizabeth and Marie Louisa, the economic prospects for a young man without family holdings were challenging, at best. Due to the financial assistance of his mother's family, Elizabeth Manning Hathorne and her children would be relieved of oppressive poverty but would, in effect, subsist in stable but humble surroundings and, rather ominously, in an unalterable dependency.

As with so many hopeful Americans yearning for personal independence and a hint of improved economic prospects, Hawthorne fashioned a kind of plan that merged diverse strains of his identity. First, he would attain recognition through his goal of being a writer, or so he dreamed. Concurrently, he was enamored by the politics and promises of Andrew Jackson who, he believed, beckoned to him, valued his support, and empowered the working classes of the nation, would be writers included. Jackson's presidency was predicated upon an end to the privilege of established economic interests that were indifferent to the dreams and aspirations of Americans, none more so than Hawthorne.

As an undistinguished graduate of Bowdoin College in 1825, Hawthorne returned from Maine to Salem where for the next twelve years he worked, languished and contemplated the writer's craft, dependent upon his extended family for his existence. Hawthorne realistically perceived the nature of his peripheral existence in the life of Salem. Characteristically, he built friendships and bonds with like-minded individuals who sought their own economic advancement that politics offered.

Clearly, Andrew Jackson signaled a new dawn in America. Jackson championed the interests of underclass whites and, as their advocate, he promised a radical redistribution of the fruits of America. Aristocrats in banking, shipping and landholding had to reckon with a nation of common people and a President with a mission to uplift those people. Hawthorne's persistence in gaining some of the political patronage that became so identified with the Jackson political machine became a tangible manifestation that a new day was born. As an ardent Jacksonian, Hawthorne determinedly pursued government jobs, recognizing that patronage was constructed upon party loyalty, the power of the ballot-box, and the need for solidarity.

As such, politics offered Hawthorne hope, and patronage was the core of his hope. To Hawthorne, the mixture of democratic ideology and

the freedom to practice his art became inextricably bound. Politics also offered Hawthorne an association with a coterie of like-minded, essentially opportunistic Jackson supporters. Essentially, Salem Democrats were common people on the margins of Salem's economic life, but they were people seeking political leverage and economic relevance in a town dominated by a well established commercial, landowning and financial elite.

Individuals such as Zachariah Burchmore and William Pike were Salem Democrats from working-class families and both sought patronage, as did Hawthorne through the federal payroll of the Salem Custom's House. That both men would remain life-long friends of Hawthorne was a testament to their similar needs and, doubtless, the camaraderie of cigars, drinks and the political intrigue of navigating Democratic interests in a Whig town.

Friendship with both men was cherished and respected. Indeed, the friendship of Hawthorne's political friends would be a pillar of his identity. As late as 1852, Hawthorne writes the following to Pike: "There is no man whom I should like so much to have for a companion; and I never see anything interesting without thinking of you."[20] Hawthorne's sense of loyalty was immense, and the depth of his feelings reveal that he would never disown or disavow sentiments shared or otherwise fundamental to his friendship.

Clearly, control over the administration of the Salem port provided a degree of economic opportunity that was possible because of Jackson's support for rotating political offices. Having appealed to a nation of common men, Jackson expressed a faith in the increasingly democratization of politics and, as such, for a continued assault upon privilege. Jackson's legacy continued long after Jackson's tenure ended. Fortuitously, Jackson's legacy by 1846 helped sustain Hawthorne's literary efforts by providing him an adequate livelihood, now when he was over forty years of age and married. Patronage of the Salem Custom's House became essential to Hawthorne, and he was well aware of his paltry financial circumstances existent in Salem or elsewhere should patronage not be forthcoming. The fear of financial distress was deeply imbedded within him such that he could never remove the specter of poverty from his thoughts. Even when he achieved literary

[20] Miller, 262-263.

prominence and unimagined royalties, Hawthorne battled the fear of financial rum.

He was exceedingly fortunate to enjoy the allegiance of local Democratic boosters, just as he was enormously rewarded by his earlier friendship with his Bowdoin classmates. Horatio Bridge was especially interested in his creative mend, and Bridge played a pivotal role in getting Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales* into print in 1837. From Maine, Bridge's father was a judge and, before that, a politician. Bridge would serve in the navy in a number of capacities. While aboard the *USS Saratoga*, patrolling off the coast of Africa for American ships carrying slaves, he anonymously penned a *Journal of an African Cruiser, by an Officer of the United States Navy.* Later edited by Hawthorne, the *Journal* essentially calls for the colonization of blacks outside the United States since there was no likelihood of America accepting "colored men as brethren and equals." In effect, the *Journal* confirms the two men's shared perspective regarding the African as both alien and inferior, as well as agreeing upon the evil of the slave trade and of slavery itself.[21] Of Bridge, Hawthorne would definitively state that he was "the best friend I ever had or shall have."[22]

Bridge also kept fellow classmate Jonathan Cilley informed about Hawthorne's writings and his life. "What! Suffer twelve years to pass away, and no wife, no children, to soothe your care, make you happy, and call you blessed."[23] Commenting upon the twelve years of Hawthorne's life in Salem after returning from Bowdoin, Cilley's good-natured exasperation with his friend would be cut short in 1838 when, as a result of a duel fought while he was a member of Congress representing his state of Maine, Cilley's life ended. Doubtless, Cilley's passing made Hawthorne recognize and appreciate those remaining individuals that were truly important in his life. Bridge and, up until his death, Cilley had been eager to obtain a patronage position for their friend that, finally in 1839, culminated in Hawthorne's first appointment at the Boston Customs House. Cilley's early death etched in

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[21] Wineapple, 187-189.

[22] Horatio Bridge, *Personal Recollections of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1893), 4.

[23] McFarland, 4.

Hawthorne's mind that the bonds of friendship possessed a unique importance in his life. In friendship, Hawthorne found acceptance and an appreciation of himself and his art that did not falter or waver.

Another pivotal individual who was unconditionally committed to Hawthorne was Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire, a fellow member of Bowdoin's Athenaeum Club, son of a prominent Jackson supporter and rising political star in his own right. Pierce was appointed a general in the Mexican-American War, and after 49 inconclusive ballots became the dark horse candidate of the Democratic Party, startlingly to be elected to the Presidency in 1852. Intellectual and literary mends wondered whether Hawthorne would support Pierce and, in effect, endorse the Southern-dominated political alliance that sustained the enslavement of four million African Americans? Yes, beyond any doubt. His faith in and support of Pierce was a test of friendship. Hawthorne authored his dear friend's biography for his presidential campaign, *Life of Franklin Pierce,* where he took great pains in explaining the candidate's pro-southern position on the matter of slavery. Hawthorne's sense of history, his political values and his political friendships provided him all the rationalizations he required to accept and advance the racial status quo.

Horace Mann, married to Mary Peabody and Hawthorne's brother-in-law, was not an admirer of Hawthorne' s politics, cigars or his fiction. When the fiercely anti-slavery Mann learned of Hawthorne's biography of Pierce, he allegedly quipped: "If he makes Pierce to be a great man or a brave man, it will be the greatest work of fiction he ever wrote."[24]

Upon Pierce's election, Hawthorne was designated US Consul in Liverpool, the patronage office he held from 1853-1857. The financial rewards of this office were considerable and, while Hawthorne was never psychologically freed from financial insecurities, his government tenure and the prodigious acclaim of his literary reputation brought him enormous public recognition. Again, his associations dating back to Bowdoin provided Hawthorne impressive political support, sustained upon the bedrock of friendship that endured for a lifetime.

Ideology provided a common framework or mindset that nurtured the friendship. As such, Hawthorne's persistent unwillingness to alter his views on the politics of American slavery echoed those of the candidate and, triumphantly, of duly-elected President Pierce. Pierce's

[24] Miller, 381.

refusal to press for federal restrictions upon slavery became the basis for his ability to keep the Democratic Party together. Seen as a pawn of the South's efforts to secure both security and legitimacy for slave institutions, Pierce's ill-fated administration failed to contain the bitterness and even bloodshed enveloping the nation.

Politically, the West offered new challenges to the nation, including skepticism about the slave system. Indeed, the viability of the Union itself would be tested because slavery demanded that it be accepted as an article of faith, the kind of article of faith that Pierce assumed must continue. Hawthorne's loyalty to Pierce and to the inherent racism sustaining the slave system operated within a vacuum, as though accepted but ever more suspect supremacist thinking of the times could not be modified or altered. Hawthorne's association with Democratic politics remained anchored within the loyalty and unwavering commitment of friendship, all within an unsustainable belief that the politics of race should not change.

Philosophy, politics and friendship were symbiotically entangled within Hawthorne's racism, as was his arrogance. His wife, Sophia, who witnessed first-hand the terror of slavery in Cuba for eighteen months in the years 1834-1835, whole-heartedly shared her husband's view that God and not man would proscribe an appropriate resolution.[25] On what would prove to be a final trip to New Hampshire, four years into the horror of a great Civil War, an ill and feeble Hawthorne accompanied by his friend Franklin Pierce, ambled about the hills and roadways of an all too familiar countryside. At the foot of the White Mountains, in the town of Plymouth, on May 19, 1864, Hawthorne died in his sleep and, prophetically, Pierce was by his side.[26]

Despite the chorus of people who were dismayed at Hawthorne's politics and how these politics sustained a pro-slavery aristocracy, he was secure and confident and uncompromising. Those who mattered most to him, he believed, understood his views because they shared them.

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[25] Marshall, 271-303.

[26] James R. Mellow, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1980), 577-578.